

WorldWatch

by David C. Grabbe

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Terrorism

A senior Israeli intelligence source says fugitive Saudi billionaire Osama Bin Laden has trained Palestinians in camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and they have relayed their expertise to Islamic and other Palestinian groups in the Palestinian Authority areas. The Palestinians have recently launched attacks that reflect Bin Laden's influence: They have become more deadly. Also, Bin Laden indeed has nuclear weapons, but how many is not known. Russian intelligence sources believe he has a handful of tactical nuclear weapons, and Arab sources say that number could be as high as 20. Bin Laden received his nuclear devices—and some nuclear scientists from the former Soviet Union—in exchange for helping the Chechen insurgents with money and volunteers. At least some of the components are thought to be hidden in Afghanistan.

Russia

U.S. expert Rensselaer Lee, a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, reports that the number of seized nuclear shipments from the former Soviet Union is only the beginning of troubles. A combination of corrupt officials and a drive for revenue by Russia's struggling nuclear industry almost guarantees widespread smuggling of nuclear material to countries such as Iran and Iraq and even terrorist organizations. "U.S. policymakers must contemplate the possibility that . . . what was seized is only a small fraction of what has been circulated through smuggling channels," Lee says.

Disease

According to the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the predicted size of the Mad Cow Disease epidemic may be underestimated. Based on work with mice, a recent study suggests only people with the shortest incubation periods for the disease are currently showing symptoms. Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) has an incubation period of up to 30 years. If the findings are confirmed, it means a second wave of cases will emerge within the not-too-distant future. Researchers do not know how many people have been exposed to BSE, or what proportion of these will develop the human form of the disease.

Japan

Okinawa's governor is pushing for a cut in U.S. military forces on the southern Japanese island. "We question why such extensive military bases must be stationed in Japan, and we have a very strong feeling toward the excessiveness of the military presence," says governor Keiichi Inamine. Occupied at the end of World War II, Okinawa is currently home to half of the 47,000 U.S. troops still stationed in Japan. Residents have long sought a reduction in U.S. presence. Simultaneously, new Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi proposes to change Japan's pacifist constitution, which prohibits the nation from having an army and commits it to renouncing war as a means of settling international disputes. Japan's armed forces, the "Self-Defense Forces," is one of the world's largest. The constitution has comforted many Japanese who see peace as the key to prosperity. Japan's neighbors in Asia see it as a safeguard against recurring Japanese militarism.

Germany

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer recently met with President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt to discuss the situation in the Middle East and a new Egyptian-Jordanian initiative to bring the Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table. During the meetings, Germany said it wants to do what it can to help bring peace to the Middle East, but it cannot take on the role of intermediary between the conflicting parties. Mubarak said he would be glad to see Schröder serve as an intermediary in the Middle East conflict and, more generally, to see Germany take a more prominent role in the war-ravaged region. While praising the Egyptian-Jordanian initiative and Egypt's positive involvement in the peace process, Schröder and Fischer made it clear that Germany is not going to serve as a mediator. Germany will make its contribution to Middle Eastern peace within the framework of the European Union, Fischer said. Germany's influence, he added, should not be overestimated.