

US, Europe face specter of Mumbai-style attack

WASHINGTON — A possible terror plot against European cities has confirmed longstanding fears among Western security services that Al-Qaeda and its allies could try to recreate the 2008 onslaught on Mumbai.

European and US security officials, citing recent intelligence, say that Al-Qaeda may be planning Mumbai-style attacks with heavily-armed gunmen, a tactic that inflicts mass carnage and terror without the risks associated with bomb-making.

"Compared to trying to smuggle explosives on to an airplane, this is much easier. You just drive to the target, get out and start acting," Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer, told AFP.

"It's a relatively simple idea. You get a handful of terrorists willing to commit mass murder and suicide and let them loose in an urban environment," said Riedel, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who has

advised President Barack Obama.

In the Mumbai assault, 10 militants from Al-Qaeda-linked Lashkar-e-Taiba mowed down unarmed civilians at targets across the Indian city after arriving by boat from Karachi, leaving 166 dead.

Inspired by the effect of Mumbai, Al-Qaeda came close to pulling off a similar attack in Denmark last year, targeting the offices of the newspaper Jyllands-Posten, which had run controversial cartoons several years ago of the Prophet Mohammed.

Details of the plan emerged in the trial of David Headley, an American of Pakistani descent, who pleaded guilty to casing targets in Mumbai for Lashkar-e-Taiba. In the Danish attack plan, Headley told prosecutors he pretended to be interested in buying ads in so he could carry out reconnaissance of the newspaper's Copenhagen offices.

He was arrested at Chicago's O'Hare airport last year as he was



on his way to deliver 13 surveillance videos for the Danish plot.

"I think there's prima facie evidence in the Copenhagen affair, that Al-Qaeda operatives are seriously considering the Mumbai exemplar as one they would like to reproduce," Riedel said.

Militants planned to enter the newspaper's office, murder the staff and then wage a fight to the

death with Danish police. Experts said would-be attackers would have some difficulty securing assault rifles in Europe, unlike South Asia or the United States where guns are more readily available.

Well-trained European special police squads also would likely be able to contain such an attack much faster than in Mumbai, where Indian police faced accusations of a slow response.

But even so, the effect would still be horrific, experts said. "Mumbai showed that the use of firearms lowers the barrier of entry for a terrorist attack," Gabriel Koehler-Derrick of the Combating Terrorism Center at the US military academy at West Point, New York. In a shooting rampage at Fort Hood in Texas last year, police arrived quickly and stopped the lone gunman within minutes.

Mrs Lee was a tower of strength for MM Lee, says SM Jayakumar



SINGAPORE : Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security, Professor S Jayakumar, has said it is very difficult to add to the many tributes and sentiments that have been pouring in for Mrs Lee Kuan Yew. He said she was clearly a tower of strength for Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and that theirs was a love story that was both touching and heart-warming. In his condolence remarks made on the sidelines of a book launch, he recalled how he met Mrs Lee as a student leader at the University of

Singapore. He had gone to seek her legal advice when he was facing a possible defamation suit for an article in a special tabloid edition by the Student's Union which he said had carelessly included an item that bordered on being defamatory. At Messrs Lee & Lee, the union's honorary legal advisers, Mrs Lee questioned the student leaders thoroughly before putting them at ease. She felt confident that there was no case against them.

Mrs Lee, however, had a parting shot for the student leaders, chiding them to be careful in the future. Professor Jayakumar also recalled a more recent incident in March 2008.

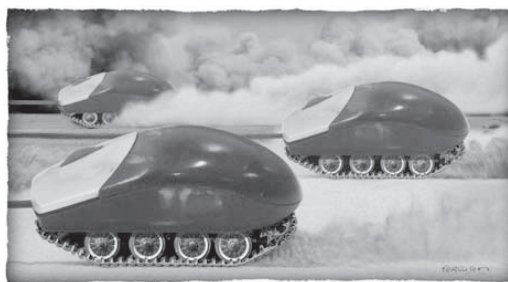
Satellite image shows activity at North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear site

Washington : North Korea continues to keep the experts guessing. Last week, it promoted the third son of its current leader, Kim Jong II, prompting speculation that he is on track to succeed his father. And now, apparently, it has commissioned construction activity at the site where it used to produce plutonium for its nuclear arsenal. An image taken last week by DigitalGlobe, a U.S.-based commercial satellite firm, shows new construction or excavation activity in an area surrounding a destroyed cooling tower at the Yongbyon site.

Experts said the construction appeared to be the first sign of genuine activity at Yongbyon since 2008, when the cooling tower was demolished as part of an agreement made during now-stalled negotiations over the North's nuclear program. The photograph shows heavy machinery tracks, trucks, and heavy construction or excavation equipment, along with two small new buildings, according to a report by the Institute for Science and International Security. What exactly all that activity means, said David Albright, who wrote the report, is unclear.

An undeclared war in cyberspace

In recent months, senior western officials have become discernibly more relaxed about the Iranian nuclear programme. It is not that they suddenly welcome the prospect of an Iranian bomb. It is just that, as one official put it recently: "We're having quite a lot of success, disrupting what they are doing." I thought of that comment last week, when reading the reports of a computer virus that has been playing havoc with industrial systems in Iran. The Iranian government complains that it has



been hit by "electronic warfare" complains in the form of the Stuxnet virus that has infected more than 30,000 computers in their country.

The impact of the virus on Iran's nuclear programme remains obscure.

But computer experts seem pretty sure that something as complex as Stuxnet could only have been designed by a state. Early speculation centred around Israel. But, in truth, there are several intelligence agencies that have the capacity and motive to make life difficult for Iran's nuclear scientists. This year, the US set up a Cyber Command to defend its networks and to plan attacks.