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Friday 28 December 2001

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Uranium and cyanide found in drums at bin Laden base
By Barbie Dutter in Kandahar and Ben Fenton
(Filed: 24/12/2001)

URANIUM has been found in an al-Qa'eda base outside Kandahar - the first evidence that Osama bin Laden had obtained materials for a nuclear arsenal, it was revealed yesterday.

The discovery gives some credibility to the [fear that he could unleash a weapon of mass destruction](#) as his dying act.

Anti-Taliban leaders in Kandahar revealed that the uranium and other materials, including cyanide, had been discovered in a tunnel complex beneath the former base near the city's airport. The find was confirmed by American officials.

It was also revealed that when tribal forces took the al-Qa'eda complex earlier this month they found hundreds of jars, drums and metal cases in an underground labyrinth at the desert compound where Arab fighters staged [a bloody last stand before Kandahar was surrendered](#) by the Taliban.

The cache included low-grade uranium 238, which [could be used to make a so-called "dirty bomb"](#) if wrapped around a conventional explosive. It would spread radiation over a large area.

Specialised equipment and facilities would be needed to turn uranium 238 into a fissile device like the Hiroshima bomb, and so it would not be suitable for building such a weapon.

American intelligence officials told Newsweek magazine that al-Qa'eda had enough of the material to make a "dirty bomb" and it seems certain that their knowledge is based on the discovery at Kandahar airport.

Haji Gullalai, now the interim intelligence chief for Kandahar province, told The Telegraph that immediately after capturing the airport area, his men had entered one tunnel and discovered the materials in a vast underground workshop.

The find was reported the same day to "international military personnel", thought to be American special forces, who sent experts wearing masks and protective clothing to examine the substances, Mr Gullalai said.

He added: "We knew we were not well equipped to deal with these things so we called in foreign experts who told us it was uranium.

"For our own safety we did not touch the bottles but from a distance we saw there were hundreds of different kinds of containers - small jars and big jars, sealed with metal lids and containing powders and liquids, white and yellowish in colour.

"There were big drums the size of petrol drums and metal boxes with sides seven or eight inches thick.

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The bottles were labelled in four different languages - Chinese, Russian, Arabic and English."

American officials said that Russia, the states of the former Soviet Union, China and Pakistan were all possible sources for the uranium.

It has been estimated that several hundred Arab al-Qa'eda fighters were killed in [the battle for the airport](#), led by Gul Agha - now Kandahar's new governor - with Mr Gullalai playing a senior commanding role.

The area where the tunnels were found is known locally as Turnak Farms. It is thought to have been the al-Qa'eda network's principal training and military base in southern Afghanistan and held up to 1,800 people.

Kandahar airport has now been taken over by around 1,500 US marines and coalition forces.

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