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URANIUM IS CLUE TO NUKE BID

December 26, 2001 -- KANDAHAR, Afghanistan - Hundreds of bottles containing depleted uranium were found by anti-Taliban fighters in an area formerly controlled by the al Qaeda - raising the specter that Osama bin Laden was trying to build a dirty bomb.

The containers of radioactive material were discovered in sealed boxes in a huge tunnel complex in Kandahar, one of the last strongholds of Afghanistan's former hard-line ruling militia.

A tribal chieftain, Haji Gullalai, said that after finding the cache earlier this month, he showed the bottles and drums to U.S. officials and was then warned to keep away from the site.

"Remove your people from this place because this is very dangerous. It is uranium," he quoted an American military officer as telling him.


U.S. officials doubt al Qaeda has the expertise to develop a thermonuclear device.

But the discovery of uranium indicates bin Laden may have been trying to build a "dirty" bomb - one capable of spreading radiation over a large area without triggering a nuclear reaction.

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