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Seized Afghan Files Show Intent, Not Plans

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 31 — President Bush and senior administration officials have ratcheted up warnings of terrorist attacks this week. But law enforcement and intelligence officials said that although the potential for attacks remained high, they had gotten no new credible warnings nor issued new alerts in recent days.

Mr. Bush, in outlining a continuing war on terrorism, said in his State of the Union address on Tuesday that "tens of thousands" of terrorists trained by Al Qaeda were roaming the world, unaccounted for. He spoke of the "madness of the destruction" that Al Qaeda envisioned for the United States and referred to documents found in Afghanistan that he said showed "our war against terror is only beginning."

Among the documents, Mr. Bush said, were diagrams of nuclear power plants and public water plants, detailed instructions for making chemical weapons and "surveillance maps of American cities and thorough descriptions of landmarks in America and throughout the world."

But counterterrorism officials said they did not know of any specific plans for another attack. Despite Mr. Bush's sober words, they said, no new warnings had been issued based on the documents found in Afghanistan. Some sites like nuclear plants have been subjects of previous warnings. Even before Sept. 11, they were deemed possible targets.

Intelligence officials acknowledge that the materials from Afghanistan could indicate a plot, but they say they have not been able to penetrate any such operation and have no information that any exists.

The documents "certainly show intent," one official said. "But were there any definite plans? That's where you need to get multiple sources and interview folks. So far, we haven't had enough to issue any new alerts."

Mr. Bush relied on the materials from Afghanistan to serve a larger political purpose, to reintroduce the war on terrorism to a public that may have begun to believe that the war had already been won.

Today, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld underscored the theme of the continuing threat in a speech to the National Defense University. Mr. Rumsfeld said terrorists might obtain weapons more fearsome than the airliners in the Sept. 11 attacks.

"And as they gain access to weapons of increasing power — and let there be no doubt but that they are — these attacks will grow vastly more deadly than those we suffered several months ago," he said.

Mr. Rumsfeld did not elaborate.

An unclassified study by the Central Intelligence Agency said on Wednesday that a design for an atomic weapon had been found in Afghanistan. The report said the United States had "uncovered rudimentary diagrams of nuclear weapons" at a suspected safe house for Al Qaeda in Kabul. The report said the diagrams described essential components like uranium and high explosives.

Meeting reporters at F.B.I. headquarters, the bureau's director, Robert S. Mueller III, warned that he could not rule out a possibility that Al Qaeda terrorists were at large in the United States. As a result, Mr. Mueller said, authorities remain on the highest alert because of the Super Bowl and Winter Olympics.

"We've moved heaven and earth to provide security, whether it be the Super Bowl or the Olympics," he said."



Some warnings proved to be a mistakes, like an alert for nuclear power plants based on a tip from a Qaeda agent that the terrorists planned to fly a plane into a nuclear reactor. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission issued an alert on Jan. 23 based on that information.

But today, officials said the alert was a mistake. They said the same information was evaluated and dismissed last fall. But when a report was received several weeks ago from a foreign government, experts regarded it as a new warning without realizing that it was based on the same old data. They learned of the error today, the officials said.

Law enforcement and intelligence officials said the documents and other materials from Al Qaeda safe houses and compounds were valuable, but had offered just a glimpse into the group's murky world. The officials said most of the materials could have been obtained from public sources and only showed an interest in American targets. The documents, photographs and other items have been found in buildings used by terrorists and indicate that Al Qaeda had an interest in certain sites and landmarks in the United States.

Among the materials was a photo of the Space Needle in Seattle and of Microsoft headquarters in Redmond, Wash. Gov. Gary Locke of Washington said federal officials had assured him that there was no credible evidence of a threat of an attack there.

"We've got pictures," one official said. "But there's nothing else to tell us what it means."

The officials said the documents indicated Al Qaeda's intentions to launch new attacks against the United States, but did not suggest that such plans were under way.

The sheer volume and variety of information from Al Qaeda compounds shows a deep interest in attacks against the United States. Information about nuclear power plants, dams and other public works has been found. But for the most part, the materials were readily available on the Internet.

In his comments, Mr. Mueller said officials were on a "very high state of alert" because of the Afghan materials that had helped identify and thwart terror operations that he would not describe. He said people trained by Al Qaeda had left Afghanistan.

"We're doing everything we can to identify those and to make certain those who have the potential for committing future terrorist acts are addressed," he said. "Can I say there are none in the United States? No, I will not say that. Do I know for sure there are some in the United States? I would say I believe there are, but I cannot say for sure."

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