Home Global World **Business** Markets Industries Investing data & tool

Comment & analysis Culture & sports

In today's FT Site services

FT reports

Creative Business

FTfm FT-IT

World reports Special reports

Other FT sites

FT Investor

FT Yourmonev

FT Fund Ratings

FT CareerPoint

News in-depth

Iraq Deadly weapons Britain in Europe Vivendi

Reports

Creative business FT fund management FT-IT & FT Telecoms FT500 - annual report **Business education** European performanc

Discussions

Can we trust analysts What next for Turkey? Tory party future Diana's butler

Columnists

Martin Wolf Lucy Kellaway Philip Stephens Amity Shlaes Gerard Baker

Partner sites

Business.com <u>Hoover's Online</u> Les Echos FT Deutschland Recoletos Vedomosti CBS MarketWatch Investors Chronicle 1. "Nuclear salesmen may have conned al-Qaida 's bomb makers

new search | back to results | refine search

Nuclear salesmen may have conned al-Qaida 's bomb makers

The Guardian - United Kingdom; Feb 27, 2002 BY MATTHEW ENGEL IN WASHINGTON

Pentagon officials believe that al- Qaida's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons might have been thwarted in a manner that demonstrates a reassuringly human fallibility: they think the terrorists may have been duped.

After analysing suspect containers, computer discs and papers found in Afghanistan, intelligence officers found no trace of materials which could have been useful in constructing a nuclear bomb.

They did, however, discover various frightening-looking canisters which turned out to be harmless. The canisters were so crude that, had they been genuine, the sellers, couriers and terrorists would all have been exposed to dangerous levels of radiation.

The canisters, painted with skull and crossbones symbols, could have been dipped in medical waste by black-market salesmen so that a Geiger counter would pick up evidence of radioactivity, according to the New York Times.

After a search of at least 110 different sites, just three containers were found that were considered worrying enough to be sent back to the US for full analysis.

"We did not find any type of serious radiological material," an official told the newspaper. "The stuff we found in Afghanistan was not the real stuff. They were swindled, like a lot of other people."

General Tommy Franks, the US commander of the military operations across Afghanistan, said: "We have seen evidence that al-Qaida had a desire to weaponise chemical and biological capability, but we have not yet found evidence that indicates they were able to do so.'

Nuclear experts say a swindle would fit with previous experience of supposed arms-making equipment smuggled out of the former Soviet Union.

"There have been several similar cases in eastern Europe," one source said. "There is not a lot of consumer protection in this area. Unless you're a chemical engineer with proper testing facilities, it's impossible to tell whether you are getting what you're supposed to be getting.'

The Pentagon's findings do not prove that surviving al-Qaida units do not now have more serious bomb-making equipment. A report just issued to Congress by the National Intelligence Council has confirmed that undetected smuggling has almost certainly occurred from sites in Russia over the past 10 years.

The report said Russian nuclear sites were well protected against an external threat, but wide open to internal theft. Last August, an anonymous military officer speculated on Russian television that terrorists could seize a warhead, saying the sites were short-staffed, employees were badly paid, and alarm systems operated only half the time.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, said: "It's good news as far as it goes that they haven't found anything but this does not mean that al-Qaida have not taken stuff with them.

"The idea that al-Qaida have powerful nuclear weapons has always been farfetched. Even if they have a small quantity of plutonium and other material, there are still a lot of different engineering processes along the way before they could deliver anything. But there is still a possibility that they are looking to produce some kind of radiological weapon.

A radiological weapon - or dirty bomb - could be delivered through detonating an explosion in a car or lorry, which would cause immediate devastation and long-term radiological damage, but over a small area. It could conceivably force the evacuation of a city centre for months or years.

All Material Subject to Copyright

Need more business information? Ask our research team - click here

EMAIL THIS ac: PRINT THIS **MOST POPULAR**

Dear Wayback Machine Patrons:

We need your help to make sure the Internet Archive lasts forever. On November 9, we woke up to a new administration promising radical change. This is a firm reminder that the Internet Archive must also design for change. So we set a new

