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ACTION SS-00

INFO LOG-00 ADS-00 SAS-00 /000W
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9988
INFO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMCONSUL PESHAWAR

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 006863

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DECAPTIONED

DEPT FOR P, SA, SA/PAB, AND S/CT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/14/08
TAGS: PTER, KISL, ASEC, PHUM, AF
SUBJ: AFGHANISTAN: DEMARCHE TO TALIBAN ON NEW BIN LADIN THREAT

REFS: (A) STATE 168559
- (B) SA/PAB-EMBASSY ISLAMABAD 9/13 TELCON
- (C) ISLAMABAD 6809

(U) CLASSIFIED BY ALAN EASTHAM, DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION.
REASONS: 1.5 (C) (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: IN A SEPTEMBER 13 MEETING WITH TALIBAN OFFICIAL
ABDUL HAKIM MUJAHID, DCM DEPLOYED REF A COUNTERTERRORISM TALKING
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POINTS IN THEIR ENTIRETY. MUJAHID REPLIED THAT THE U.S. SHOULD
EXERCISE "PATIENCE" ON THE BIN LADIN ISSUE. HE CLAIMED THAT
TALIBAN LEADER MULLAH OMAR IS THE KEY SUPPORTER OF HIS CONTINUED
PRESENCE IN THE COUNTRY, WHILE 80 PERCENT OF TALIBAN OFFICIALS
OPPOSE IT. THE TALIBAN WILL DEAL WITH THE ISSUE AFTER THE WAR IS
OVER. DCM RESPONDED THAT BIN LADIN HAS PUT THE TALIBAN AND THE
U.S. ON A COLLISION COURSE; IT IS TIME FOR THE TALIBAN TO DEAL WITH
HIM AND HIS NETWORK. MUJAHID SAID THE TALIBAN HAVE "SHORTCOMINGS"
AND THE WORLD SHOULD NOT EXPECT TOO MUCH FROM THEM. DCM, NOTING
REPORTS THAT THE TALIBAN HAVE SEIZED BAMIYAN, A SHI'A MAJORITY
AREA, URGED THE TALIBAN TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE OF THAT AREA FROM
HARM. END SUMMARY.

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MAKING U.S. POINTS

2. (C) DCM MET SEPTEMBER 13 WITH ABDUL HAKIM MUJAHID, THE TALIBAN DESIGNEE TO HEAD THEIR NEW YORK OFFICE AND FORMER "AMBASSADOR" TO PAKISTAN. DCM DEPLOYED REF A COUNTERTERRORISM TALKING POINTS IN THEIR ENTIRETY, EMPHASIZING THAT THE TALIBAN WOULD BE HELD DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY FURTHER TERRORIST ACTS INSTIGATED BY BIN LADIN. HE NOTED THAT THE SAME POINTS HAD BEEN USED EARLIER IN THE DAY IN A CONVERSATION BETWEEN DEPARTMENT AND MAULAWI WAKIL AHMED (REF B), A KEY ASSISTANT TO TALIBAN LEADER MULLAH OMAR. MUJAHID TOOK WRITTEN NOTES OF THE POINTS, PROMISING TO CONVEY THEM TO WAKIL AHMED IN KANDAHAR. (NOTE: MUJAHID CALLED EMBASSY ON SEPTEMBER 14 TO CONFIRM THAT HE HAD PROVIDED THE POINTS TO WAKIL.)

MUJAHID'S REMARKS

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3. (C) IN RESPONSE TO US. POINTS, MUJAHID MADE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS:

-- HE SAID HE HAD CHECKED EARLIER IN THE DAY WITH WAKIL AHMED, AND ALTHOUGH REPORTS THAT USAMA BIN LADIN HAD BEEN PLACED UNDER "HOUSE ARREST" WERE INACCURATE, THE TALIBAN HAVE WARNED HIM ONCE AGAIN NOT TO ENGAGE IN POLITICAL OR PRESS ACTIVITIES. IN ADDITION, THE TALIBAN HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL OF HIS "INSTRUMENTS OF COMMUNICATION." THE SOURCE OF PRESS REPORTS (SEE REF C) THAT BIN LADIN WAS UNDER "HOUSE ARREST" PROBABLY WERE BIN LADIN'S ALLIES WHO WERE TRYING TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE TALIBAN.

-- MUJAHID ADDED THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY URGED WAKIL AHMED TO ENSURE THAT THE TALIBAN FULLY CONTROL BIN LADIN'S ACTIVITIES.

-- VERY FEW AFGHANS ARE IN FAVOR OF BIN LADIN'S PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN. EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE TALIBAN LEADERSHIP OPPOSES HIS PRESENCE, INCLUDING TALIBAN DEPUTY LEADER MULLAH RABBANI, WAKIL AHMED, AND "ACTING MINISTER OF MINES" MULLAH JAN. MULLAH OMAR IS THE MAJOR SUPPORTER OF BIN LADIN. KANDAHAR "GOVERNOR" MULLAH HASSAN MAY ALSO SUPPORT BIN LADIN'S PRESENCE.

-- THE TALIBAN ARE MADE UP OF "10 SEPARATE GROUPS." THEY ARE ONLY UNITED BY THE DESIRE TO DEFEAT "THE WARLORDS" AND END "CHAOS." ONCE THIS TASK IS COMPLETED, AND THE WAR IS OVER, THE DIFFERENT TALIBAN GROUPS WILL FIGHT AMONG THEMSELVES, AND

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ISSUES LIKE BIN LADIN AND THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN WILL BE DEALT
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WITH IN A POSITIVE WAY. HE GAVE SEVERAL CITATIONS FROM THE
QURAN/SUNNA IN SUPPORT OF EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN.

-- IT IS A COMPLEX ISSUE; THE TALIBAN CANNOT SIMPLY PUSH BIN
LADIN OUT BECAUSE THEY WILL THEN FALL UNDER PRESSURE FROM
OTHER MUSLIMS. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO MUJAHID, THE END RESULT
WILL BE THAT BIN LADIN WILL ONE DAY LEAVE AFGHANISTAN.

-- THEREFORE, THE U.S. SHOULD BE "PATIENT" AND "ACT WISELY."
THE ISSUE OF BIN LADIN WILL BE DEALT WITH.

TALIBAN MUST ACT ON BIN LADIN ISSUE

4. (C) DCM REPLIED THAT AS LONG AS BIN LADIN REMAINED IN
AFGHANISTAN AND WAS THREATENING THE U.S., THE U.S. RESERVED THE
RIGHT TO ACT IN SELF-DEFENSE. THE U.S. IS NOT PICKING A FIGHT WITH
THE TALIBAN; OUR PROBLEM IS BIN LADIN AND HIS NETWORK. HOWEVER, IF

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THE TALIBAN CONTINUE TO OFFER BIN LADIN SANCTUARY, RELATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE TALIBAN WOULD CONTINUE TO SUFFER. THE TALIBAN SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT AS LONG AS BIN LADIN REMAINS IN AFGHANISTAN THEY WILL BE ASSOCIATED WITH HIS OBJECTIVES, WHICH INCLUDE AN EXPRESSED DESIRE TO KILL AMERICANS. U.S./TALIBAN RELATIONS ALREADY HAVE ENOUGH PROBLEMS THAT THE TALIBAN SHOULD DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES FROM MURDER. THE U.S. HAS REPEATEDLY URGED THE TALIBAN TO DEMONSTRATE THAT IT CAN ACT RESPONSIBLY. HOWEVER, ON COUNTERTERRORISM, COUNTERNARCOTICS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THE NEED

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FOR NEGOTIATIONS AMONG THE FACTIONS, THE TALIBAN HAVE MADE NO PROGRESS. AT THIS TIME, THE ISSUE OF BIN LADIN HAS PUT THE TALIBAN AND THE U.S. ON A COLLISION COURSE; IT IS TIME FOR THE TALIBAN TO DEAL WITH THE BIN LADIN ISSUE.

TALIBAN "SHORTCOMINGS"

5. (C) MUJAHID RESPONDED THAT IT WAS AN UNFORTUNATE FACT, BUT THE TALIBAN HAVE MANY "SHORTCOMINGS" AND WERE NOT USED TO GOVERNING. MANY ISSUES HAVE BEEN MISHANDLED, INCLUDING RELATIONS WITH IRAN. THE TALIBAN'S FOREIGN POLICY WAS A DISASTER. MUJAHID CLAIMED THAT HE HAS TRIED TO MEET WITH MULLAH OMAR TO DISCUSS THESE ISSUES, BUT OMAR WOULD NOT MEET HIM BECAUSE HE WAS ALWAYS BUSY WITH THE WAR EFFORT. NONETHELESS, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD NOT EXPECT THE TALIBAN TO BECOME A NORMAL GOVERNMENT TOO QUICKLY. IT WILL TAKE A LONG TIME. ALL THAT SAID, THE WEST SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT THE TALIBAN ARE A "TRADITIONALIST" MOVEMENT; THEY ARE NOT "REVOLUTIONARY" MUSLIMS. IN ADDITION, THE U.S. AND THE TALIBAN WILL BE INEVITABLY DRAWN TOGETHER BECAUSE OF REGIONAL FACTORS, INCLUDING A COMMON DISLIKE OF IRAN. THE BEST WAY FOR THE U.S. TO DEAL WITH THESE ISSUES IS TO MAKE "CONCESSIONS" TO THE TALIBAN AND KEEP IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH THEM. DCM RETORTED THAT WE HAVE BEEN TRYING FOR TWO YEARS TO POINT THE TALIBAN TOWARD STEPS IT COULD TAKE TO ELICIT POSITIVE GESTURES FROM THE U.S. WE ARE STILL WAITING.

URGING TALIBAN TO RESTRAIN THEMSELVES IN BAMIYAN

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6. (C) AT THE END OF THE CONVERSATION, DCM, NOTING REPORTS THAT BAMIYAN HAD FALLEN TO THE TALIBAN EARLIER IN THE DAY, TOLD MUJAHID

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THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR THE TALIBAN TO ENSURE THAT THE PEOPLE OF BAMIYAN, PARTICULARLY THE SHI'AS, WERE PROTECTED. MANY SHI'AS HAD REPORTEDLY BEQED BY THE TALIBAN WHEN MAZAR-I-SHARIF WAS TAKEN (ON AUGUST 8). IF THIS HAPPENED AGAIN, IT WOULD BE DISASTROUS FOR THE TALIBAN, DCM SAID. IRAN, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS CLOSELY WATCHING TALIBAN BEHAVIOR. IN ADDITION, IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT THE TALIBAN PROTECT THE BAMIYAN BUDDHA STATUES FROM HARM. SOME COMMANDERS HAVE THREATENED TO DESTROYED THESE STATUES. MUJAHID REPLIED THAT THE SHI'AS IN BAMIYAN WERE OPPOSING THE "NATIONAL" (TALIBAN) GOVERNMENT AND HAD TO BE DEFEATED. IN TERMS OF THE BUDDHA STATUES, MULLAH OMAR HAD ALREADY ORDERED THAT THEY WOULD BE PROTECTED.

COMMENT

7. (C) THOUGH HIS COMMENTS DURING THE HOUR-LONG CONVERSATION WERE OFTEN CONTRADICTORY AND SEEMED DESIGNED TO DISTANCE HIS ATTITUDES FROM THE TALIBAN, MUJAHID SEEMED TO HEAR OUR MESSAGE ON BIN LADIN. HOWEVER, IT HAS LONG BEEN KNOWN THAT MUJAHID -- A TALIBAN "MODERATE" -- WAS NOT CLOSE TO MULLAH OMAR, WHO CALLS THE TALIBAN'S SHOTS, AND THE CONVERSATION TENDED TO UNDERSCORE THE LIMITS OF MUJAHID'S INFLUENCE IN KANDAHAR. HIS REMARKS WERE FRANK AND DEFINITELY THE BEST GIVE-AND-TAKE WE HAVE HAD WITH ANY TALIBAN OFFICIAL ON BIN LADIN. MUJAHID APPEARED TO BELIEVE STRONGLY THAT OMAR IS BIN LADIN'S MAIN PROTECTOR AND THAT MOST OF THE TALIBAN LEADERSHIP DO NOT FAVOR HIS PRESENCE. (NOTE: IT HAS BEEN WELL-KNOWN THAT OMAR WAS STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF BIN LADIN'S PRESENCE; THE

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ATTITUDES OF OTHER TALIBAN LEADERS HAVE BEEN LESS CLEAR.) OTHER EMBASSY SOURCES HAVE ALSO MENTIONED MUJAHID'S POINT THAT OMAR WILL PROBABLY REMAIN IN POWER AT LEAST UNTIL THE WAR IS OVER, WHEN THE JOCKEYING FOR POWER WILL BEGIN. GIVEN OMAR'S STAYING POWER INTO THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, MUJAHID DID NOT SEEM TO HAVE MUCH CONFIDENCE THAT THE TALIBAN WILL DEAL WITH THEIR BIN LADIN PROBLEM IN THE NEAR-TERM, WHICH IS WHY HE COUNSELED THE U.S. TO EXERCISE "PATIENCE." WE WERE CAREFUL TO CONVEY IMPATIENCE.
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