

Interviewee: Ahmed Rashid, journalist

Date: October 27, 2003

Location: Dinner at residence of Brooke Darby, Embassy narcotics affairs officer and control officer for the Commission's visit

Other Participants: Zelikow, Hurley, Darby, and another Embassy officer

Drafted by: Zelikow

This was the second dinner arranged for informal conversation with informed Pakistanis. The first, hosted by the charge, was with Talaat Masood. Though interesting, the material did not rate preparation of an MFR. Rashid's insights were more specific.

Rashid is one of the outstanding journalists covering Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. His book, *Taliban*, is the leading book on that subject. He is based in Lahore and flew to Islamabad for this dinner. For years he has been one of the informed people that policymakers talk with, so he also has some insights on the development of US policy.

Picking up themes from his book, but going beyond it, Rashid traced Pakistani support for the Taliban to the earlier days of the movement, while it was still building in Kandahar province and well before the capture of Kabul in September 1996. He felt that the significance of UBL and his anti-American agenda was not appreciated until 1998.

Bin Laden first settled in the Jalalabad area in the spring of 1996, coming from Sudan

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To put this in perspective, Rashid explained that the mid-1990s were the period in which Pakistan allowed the secular nationalist Kashmiri movement (exemplified by the JKLF, the Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front) to wither and die. It was replaced by the Islamic jihadis in groups such as Jaish-e-Muhammad, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Harakaat-ul-Mujahideen. These jihadis were being trained in Afghanistan and Bin Laden was helping organize the movement to do it. So the ISI would certainly have been aware of Bin Laden – in this context.

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In early 1998 UBL moved to Kandahar. Rashid viewed this as part of UBL's plan to solidify his relationship and eventually his control over the Taliban leadership and, through them, Afghanistan.

Asked about the years of diplomatic efforts to persuade Pakistan to persuade the Taliban to kick out UBL, Rashid's critique was this:

-- The Taliban and UBL were practically inseparable and, by early 2001, Rashid believes UBL was dominant, effectively in control of the state. To Rashid, the

destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas revealed the full extent of the foreign control, which welcomed the ostracism of the Taliban – increasing their dependence on UBL.

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But the US had no policy toward Pakistan that could have prompted Pakistan to make a decisive choice to confront the Taliban. The US had a policy on terrorism, focused only on what they wanted with Bin Laden. But the Americans did not present Pakistan, then under sanctions, either with carrots or with sticks. Clinton had snubbed Pakistan with the way he had handled his visit, favoring India, in March 2000. To present carrots and/or sticks would have required a real geopolitical strategy toward Pakistan, not just toward terrorism. Since there was no such strategy [redacted] the Pakistanis were never given a serious reason to reconsider their policy.

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Rashid and others who followed the Islamic “fundo grid” were very worried in 2001. They could see the buildup for the offensive to destroy the Northern Alliance. They felt sure UBL was now really in control. Rashid, and he remembered [redacted] [redacted] also feeling this way, were worried that something terrible was coming.

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Rashid thinks the critique of the older period may resonate today, in that a comprehensive geopolitical strategy toward Pakistan and Afghanistan together may be needed to deal with the current problem. [redacted]

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