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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

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Interviewee Background

Dr. Weinbaum served from 1999-2003 as a State Department (INR) analyst for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Prior to working at State, Weinbaum spent 15 years as a professor at the University of Illinois and as a scholar at the U.S. Institute for Peace. He is currently a Scholar - in - Residence at the Middle East Institute. [U]

Origins of the Taliban

From its rise in the early 1990's through its ouster in 2001, the Taliban movement has been enigmatic and unpredictable. The attitudes of this movement, which drew its core membership from Saudi-funded madrassas in refugee camps and Pakistani towns along the Afghan-Pakistan border, arose "out of war" in the late 1980's/early 1990's. By 1994- when Westerners first heard of the movement- the Taliban was one of the relatively well-established militias fighting for power in post-Soviet Afghanistan. Though suffering some defeats in March 1995, the Taliban scored victories in Herat later that year. Eventually, they took Jalalabad and Kabul in 1996. [U]

Once consolidating power, they focused on bringing much-needed order to a chaotic region. They also vowed to tighten down on opium production and suggested that they might expel Kashmiri militants training in the country. [U]

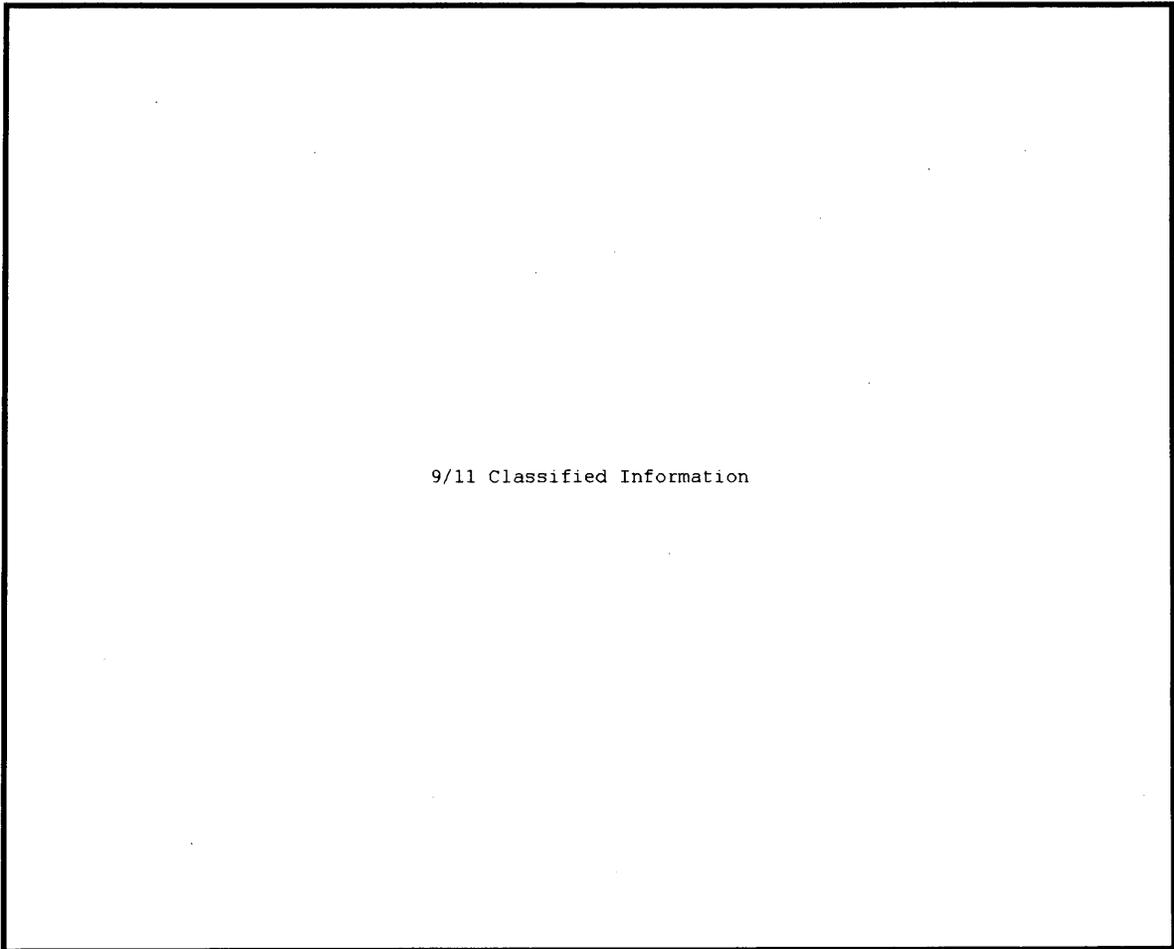
Pakistan's Role in Afghanistan

Pakistan kept a close eye on Afghanistan during the 1990's, fearing both instability on its western border and the risk of a return to the traditional pattern of an Afghan government aligned with India. In the long run, a stable Afghanistan also would afford access to Central Asian markets and natural resources. In the early 1990's, Pakistan "had a great dream to get to Central Asia and make money." [U]

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Weinbaum says that to achieve these ends, Pakistan was willing to "back whoever would bring order". Pakistan backed a number of groups, including those led by Hekmatyar Gulbuddin (who had received the most aid from Pakistan during the Soviet war), Rabbani and General Dostum. But none delivered the peace and stability. [U]

Dr. Weinbaum did address whether Pakistan created the Taliban. Two schools of thought exist here, one being that the ISID aided the Taliban from the start (perhaps without Islamabad's approval). The other view, which he supports, sees the Taliban catching Pakistan's eye after a number of victories (i.e. Kandahar), leading to Pakistani assistance and an eventual end to Islamabad's support for the other groups. [U]



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Afghan Arabs and UBL

UBL and the Afghan Arabs did have a strong connection to Afghanistan dating from the Soviet war, but in the 1990's they were not popular with the average Afghan (Weinbaum discounts UBL's claims that the Arabs won the war against the Soviets, giving credit to the Afghans themselves). When UBL returned in 1996, he is not viewed as a hero; rather he is viewed as source of cash.

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(there was an

obvious language barrier and some Arabs were acting "out of line"). Eventually the Taliban became financially dependent on UBL and Mullah Omar developed a close personal relationship with him (possibly through the marriage of their children). These factors would eventually frustrate American efforts to force UBL's expulsion. [S]

U.S.G. Policy Towards Afghanistan

From 1989 to 1998, South Asia, and Afghanistan in particular, were low on the government's priority list. Once the Soviets departed and the Cold War ended, it was a "pretty quiet decade" for the U.S. in that area. There were some "minor" concerns such as opium production (by 1998, 75% of the world's crop was grown in Afghanistan) but this area was "not a great concern" to Washington especially from 1989 to 1995. [U]

As the Taliban emerged as major force in Afghanistan, a number of people in the State Department (such as Lee Coldren and Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Robin Raphel) were willing to "give the Taliban a chance". Initially, the Taliban seemed to offer some advantages. They were not yet highly radicalized and appeared sincere about eradicating the opium mess and reestablishing order in a country that needed it. The movement also seemed much less anti-American than other Afghan groups. They were anti-Iranian, which led Tehran to label them as American/Pakistani puppets. The Russians also viewed them skeptically and chose, as did the Iranians, to support the rival NA. [U] 9/11 Classified Information

This group hoped the Taliban would provide stability [redacted] [redacted] Unocal also was discussing the country with the Department, through former Ambassador Robert Oakley. Weinbaum opines that while Unocal was not a driving force in setting policy, the Department definitely heard them out. [S]

By 1997, the opinion at State began to shift. New arrivals Undersecretary Pickering and Assistant Secretary Inderfurth were more wary of the Taliban as they made little progress on the opium issue. The Taliban also showed some signs of radicalization and their human rights record was deteriorating. These were the priorities in a low priority region; UBL is even further down the list. Weinbaum says the U.S.G. was oblivious to the scale of UBL's operations in the region at this time. [U]

According to Weinbaum, it takes the nuclear tests and the E.Africa bombings to sharpen U.S. attention on the region. The expulsion of UBL was now our number one priority with the Taliban. [U]

In late 1998, Washington stepped up pressure on the Taliban to turn UBL over. State Department Coordinator for Counter Terrorism Michael Sheehan considered sanctions the solution. Weinbaum, who entered the Department shortly thereafter, argued against this instrument, which he felt was the only one being considered. Sanctions, he argued, drove Omar closer to the wealthy UBL (who was also acting "as a conduit for gulf money going to the Taliban" via NGOs based in Pakistan). Additionally, the Taliban saw the

sanctions as a "test of faith" that may have made them more resilient to Western pressure. Weinbaum recommended that Washington aggressively assist rebuilding efforts in the north in hopes of discrediting the Taliban and their claims of progress. With this strategy, the U.S.G. could then offer the Taliban the same help in order to cut their reliance on UBL and maybe marginalizing them out of the political arena. [S]

This advice was not followed, perhaps out of a reluctance to assist groups linked with Tehran.

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Engaging the Taliban directly on the UBL issue was not easy as the Taliban "baffled us most of the time." The more moderate wing of the Taliban (led by Mullah Rabbani and based in Kabul) could never deliver UBL as Omar (based in Kandahar) had the last word on this matter. Again, Omar depended on UBL, and there was a personal connection. He would never turn over UBL. Weinbaum doesn't even think Omar would have traded UBL to the U.S. in return for American recognition. We had very little leverage here. [U]

Washington also tried to pressure Pakistan to force UBL's expulsion. Since we had disengaged from the region and distanced ourselves from Islamabad after the nuclear test, we had little leverage over the Pakistanis. [U]

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Miscellaneous

Weinbaum feels that in the mid 1990's few U.S. "thinkers" and policymakers saw a stake in Afghanistan. He mentions the old adage, "We didn't have a dog in this fight." Part of the problem was that we had few people with Afghan expertise that could really understand what was going on. Weinbaum says that on 9/11, he was the only person in State who had lived in Afghanistan. [U]

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