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ISLAMA 07665 01 OF 04 121147Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0781
INFO.AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY
AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CAIRO

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ISLAMABAD 007665

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/08
TAGS: PREL, PTER, KISL, AF, SA
SUBJ: USAMA BIN LADIN: HIGH-LEVEL TALIBAN OFFICIAL GIVES THE
STANDARD LINE ON BIN LADIN WITH A COUPLE OF NUANCES, IN OCTOBER 11
MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR

REFS: (A) ISLAMABAD 7620
- (B) ISLAMABAD 7553
- (C) STATE 183868
- (D) STATE 181837 (ALL NOTAL)

(U) CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR WILLIAM B. MILAM
SECRET

PAGE 02 ISLAMA 07665 01 OF 04 121147Z
REASONS: 1.5 (C) (D).

1. (S) SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR MILAM MET OCTOBER 11 WITH MAULAWI WAKIL AHMED, A CLOSE ASSISTANT TO TALIBAN LEADER MULLAH OMAR. THE MEETING FOCUSED LARGELY ON TERRORIST USAMA BIN LADIN AND WHAT THE TALIBAN PLANNED TO DO ABOUT HIM. OTHER ISSUES LIKE COUNTERNARCOTICS AND HUMAN RIGHTS WERE TOUCHED ON. THE AMBASSADOR STRESSED THAT BIN LADIN HAD TO BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE AND THE TALIBAN SHOULD EXPEL HIM SO THIS COULD HAPPEN. THE AMBASSADOR UNDERScoreD THAT THE TALIBAN HAD TO DO THIS IN THE VERY NEAR-TERM. IN HIS INITIAL COMMENTS IN RESPONSE, WAKIL MADE STANDARD TALIBAN POINTS, STRESSING THE SPECIOUS POINT THAT THE AFGHAN PEOPLE WOULD OVERTHROW THE TALIBAN IF BIN LADIN WAS EXPELLED. WAKIL ALSO REVIEWED TWO TALIBAN PROPOSALS THAT THEY MADE TO THE SAUDI ARABIAN

Current Class: SECRET

Page: 1

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: SHARON E AHMAD
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GOVERNMENT (SAG) INVOLVING WAYS TO BRING BIN LADIN TO TRIAL.

2. (S) SUMMARY (CONTINUED): AFTER THE AMBASSADOR REITERATED THE U.S. STANCE ON BIN LADIN, WAKIL TOOK A NEW TACK, ADDING SOME NEW NUANCES TO THE TALIBAN POSITION HE HAD REVIEWED EARLIER. FOR EXAMPLE, HE STRESSED THAT THE TALIBAN SEE BIN LADIN AS "A SERIOUS PROBLEM." HE ALSO ASKED SOME QUESTIONS AS TO HOW BIN LADIN WOULD BE TREATED SHOULD HE BE EXPELLED TO SAUDI ARABIA. BASED ON WAKIL'S COMMENTS, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE TALIBAN ARE WRESTLING WITH THE BIN LADIN ISSUE AND THAT THEIR HERETOFORE HARD-LINE STANCE ON THIS ISSUE MAY BE IN SOME SORT OF FLUX. END SUMMARY.

MEETING WITH WAKIL

3. (S) THE AMBASSADOR MET OCTOBER 11 WITH TALIBAN LEADER MULLAH
SECRET

PAGE 03 ISLAMA 07665 01 OF 04 121147Z
OMAR'S CLOSE ASSISTANT MAULAWI WAKIL AHMED, WHO WAS IN ISLAMABAD FOR DISCUSSIONS WITH UN SPECIAL ENVOY BRAHIMI. SYED RAHMAN HAQQANI, CHARGE OF THE TALIBAN-CONTROLLED AFGHAN EMBASSY, AND POLOFF (NOTETAKER) SAT IN ON THE MEETING. THE AMBASSADOR SAID THE U.S. FULLY SUPPORTED THE BRAHIMI MISSION AND DID NOT IN ANY WAY WANT TO INTERRUPT BRAHIMI'S TALKS. (NOTE: BRAHIMI ARRIVED IN PAKISTAN ON OCTOBER 8 FOR MEETINGS WITH THE GOP AND THE TALIBAN -- SEE REF A.) HOWEVER, IT WAS GOOD THAT THE TALIBAN HAD SPACE IN THEIR SCHEDULE FOR THIS FACE-TO-FACE MEETING. WAKIL NODDED ASSENT, COMMENTING THAT HE HAS BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE U.S. THROUGH PHONE CALLS AND BY FAX. NOTING PRIOR CONTACTS WITH AMBASSADORS RICHARDSON AND SIMONS, AND DCM ALAN EASTHAM, THE AMBASSADOR TOLD WAKIL THE U.S. WANTS TO CONTINUE THE DIALOGUE WITH THE TALIBAN. THE DIALOGUE IS IMPORTANT TO ENSURE THAT BOTH SIDES UNDERSTANDS THE OTHER'S VIEWS. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT BELIEVES THAT THE U.S. EMBASSY IN ISLAMABAD IS BEST PLACED FOR THESE CONTACTS, HE ADDED.

MAKING U.S. POINTS ON BIN LADIN

4. (S) CONTINUING, THE AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT THE U.S. HAS A NUMBER OF ITEMS IT WANTED TO RAISE IN THE MEETING. MANY OF THESE POINTS HAVE BEEN RAISED IN PREVIOUS CONTACTS. THE AMBASSADOR UNDERScoreD, HOWEVER, THAT AT THIS POINT, THE PRIMARY ISSUE FOR THE U.S. IS TERRORISM. DRAWING ON REF D POINTS, THE AMBASSADOR STATED THAT THE TALIBAN MUST UNDERSTAND THAT A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF BIN LADIN IS CRITICAL. THE U.S. REMAINED EXTREMELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN OF THIS TERRORIST CRIMINAL AND OTHER

TERRORISTS ASSOCIATED WITH HIS NETWORK. BIN LADIN HAS DECLARED WAR ON THE U.S.; NOT ONLY THAT, BUT HE HAS TAKEN ACTION ON THESE VIEWS.
SECRET

PAGE 04 ISLAMA 07665 01 OF 04 121147Z
THERE IS CONVINCING EVIDENCE OF HIS KEY ROLE IN MASTERMINDING THE CRIMES THAT TOOK PLACE IN AUGUST IN EAST AFRICA. BIN LADIN HAS ALSO BEEN CONNECTED TO MANY, MANY OTHER CRIMES. BECAUSE OF HIS CRIMINAL ACTS, MANY LIVES HAVE BEEN TAKEN, INCLUDING AMERICAN AND MUSLIM. IT IS THE U.S. VIEW THAT THE LONGER BIN LADIN STAYS IN AFGHANISTAN, THE MORE THE TALIBAN WILL BECOME ASSOCIATED WITH HIS CRIMES BECAUSE THEY ARE GIVING HIM REFUGE THERE. THE U.S. WOULD LIKE VERY MUCH TO HAVE A CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TALIBAN AND AFGHANISTAN AS A WHOLE. HOWEVER, THE ISSUE OF BIN LADIN MUST BE SOLVED. IT IS NOT A MATTER OF MONTHS OR WEEKS, BUT OF DAYS. THE TALIBAN MUST EXPEL BIN LADIN SO THAT HE CAN BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE.

WAKIL MAKES THE STANDARD TALIBAN POINTS...

5. (S) AMBASSADOR MILAM COVERED OTHER TOPICS OF CONTENTION WITH THE TALIBAN, INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THEIR POLICIES REGARDING

SECRET

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 07665 02 OF 04 121148Z
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S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 04 ISLAMABAD 007665

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Current Class: SECRET

Page: 3

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WOMEN AND GIRLS. HE MENTIONED PROMINENTLY THE ISSUE OF INCLUSION OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN ANY NEW AFGHAN GOVERNMENT. HE STRESSED THAT THE U.S. BELIEVED THAT TRUE PEACE AND STABILITY WILL COME TO AFGHANISTAN UNDER AN INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT THAT PROTECTS AND RESPECTS THE RIGHTS OF MINORITIES. (NOTE: SEE PARAS 13-4.)

SECRET

PAGE 02 ISLAMA 07665 02 OF 04 121148Z

6. (S) WAKIL HAD BEEN LISTENING INTENTLY, WHILE HAQQANI TOOK CAREFUL NOTES OF THE AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS. WAKIL REPLIED THAT THE TALIBAN HAS MANY PROBLEMS WITH IRAN, SAUDI ARABIA, ETC. THEY DO NOT WANT THESE PROBLEMS OR THE CONFLICTS INVOLVED. THE TALIBAN WANT TO SEE ISSUES RESOLVED, BUT THE TALIBAN ARE COMING TO THE VIEW THAT MAYBE CONFLICT HAS TO BE MET BY CONFLICT (EVIDENTLY REPLYING TO THE POINT ABOUT FORMING AN INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT). THE TALIBAN AGREE WITH THE U.S. ON SOME ISSUES, BUT THE TALIBAN AND THE U.S. HOLD SOME POSITIONS THAT ARE CONTRADICTORY. WHILE THE TALIBAN UNDERSTAND THAT BIN LADIN IS IMPORTANT FOR THE U.S., HE IS ONE OF THE ISSUES ON WHICH THERE ARE PROBLEMS. THE TALIBAN DO NOT SUPPORT TERRORISM. WAKIL THEN LAUNCHED INTO A BRIEF REVIEW OF BIN LADIN'S INVOLVEMENT WITH AFGHANISTAN. HE RELATED THAT BIN LADIN WAS INVITED TO AFGHANISTAN BY THE PREVIOUS REGIME, NOT THE TALIBAN. (NOTE: BIN LADIN CAME TO AFGHANISTAN IN MID-1996, SETTLING IN AN AREA CONTROLLED BY THE BURHANUDDIN RABBANI REGIME.) WHEN THE TALIBAN CAPTURED (IN SEPTEMBER 1996) THE AREA WHERE BIN LADIN WAS BASED (IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE), THE TALIBAN CONTACTED SAUDI ARABIA. SAUDI ARABIA TOLD US TO "KEEP HIM THERE." SUBSEQUENTLY, THE TALIBAN (IN EARLY 1997) MOVED BIN LADIN TO KANDAHAR TO KEEP A BETTER WATCH ON HIM. BIN LADIN WENT ON TO BREAK TALIBAN RULES BY SPEAKING TO THE PRESS. THE SAUDIS THEN PRESSED THE TALIBAN TO EXTRADITE HIM. THE AMIR AL-MUMINEEN ("COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL"-- MULLAH OMAR'S OFFICIAL TITLE) TOLD THE SAUDIS THAT THE TALIBAN WOULD CONTROL HIM. BIN LADIN WAS UPSET AT THE TALIBAN'S EFFORTS TO CONTROL HIM. HE TOLD THE TALIBAN HE WOULD LEAVE AFGHANISTAN, BUT BIN LADIN WAS UNABLE TO FIND SOMEWHERE TO GO.

7. (S) WAKIL SAID THE TALIBAN TOOK SERIOUSLY SAUDI AND U.S. DEMANDS TO EXPEL BIN LADIN. HOWEVER, IT WAS NOT SO EASY FOR THE

SECRET

PAGE 03 ISLAMA 07665 02 OF 04 121148Z

Current Class: SECRET

Page: 4

TALIBAN TO EXPEL HIM. BIN LADIN WAS ADMIRER BY THE AFGHAN PEOPLE FOR HIS SUPPORT FOR THE RESISTANCE DURING THE JIHAD (ISLAMIC HOLY WAR) AGAINST THE SOVIETS. THERE WAS ALSO A CULTURAL AND ISLAMIC TRADITION OF GRANTING SANCTUARY TO THOSE WHO ASKED FOR IT. EVEN JEWS HAD BEEN GRANTED SUCH SANCTUARY IN AFGHANISTAN DURING WORLD WAR II. IF THE TALIBAN THROW HIM OUT, THE PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN WILL BECOME VERY ANGRY AND THEY WILL OVERTHROW THE TALIBAN. THE PEOPLE WILL ACCUSE THEM OF TAKING U.S. OR SAUDI MONEY IF BIN LADIN IS EXTRADITED. THE U.S. MISSILE STRIKES (ON AUGUST 20 ON THE KHOST TERRORIST CAMPS) FURTHER ALIENATED THE AFGHAN PEOPLE FROM THE U.S. NONETHELESS, EVEN IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE U.S. STRIKES, THE AMIR (MULLAH OMAR) TOLD BIN LADIN THAT THERE WAS NOT TWO GOVERNMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN AND THAT THE TALIBAN WOULD DEAL WITH THE U.S. THE TALIBAN DO NOT BELIEVE THAT BIN LADIN WAS INVOLVED IN THE EAST AFRICA BOMBINGS. BIN LADIN HAS ASSURED THEM OF THIS. IN ANY CASE, THE TALIBAN WANT U.S. TROOPS WITHDRAWN FROM THE GULF REGION. EVEN IF BIN LADIN WERE TO DIE, MANY MUSLIMS WOULD REMAIN CONCERNED THAT U.S. TROOPS WERE PRESENT IN THAT AREA.

8. (S) TURNING TO RECENT SAUDI GOVERNMENT EFFORTS REGARDING BIN LADIN, WAKIL RELATED THAT

[REDACTED]

NONETHELESS, THE TALIBAN WANT GOOD RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA, AND CONCERNING BIN LADIN, THE TALIBAN HAD RECENTLY MADE TWO PROPOSALS TO THE SAUDIS. (NOTE: A GOP OFFICIAL REVIEWED THESE PROPOSALS IN AN OCTOBER 7 MEETING WITH THE AMBASSADOR -- SEE REF B.) BOTH OF THESE PROPOSALS WOULD PROVIDE

SECRET

PAGE 04 ISLAMA 07665 02 OF 04 121148Z
"RELIGIOUS REASONS" TO THE AFGHAN PEOPLE ON HOW THE TALIBAN WERE HANDLING THE BIN LADIN ISSUE. THE FIRST PROPOSAL INVOLVED THE FORMATION OF A JOINT SAUDI/AFGHAN GROUP OF ULEMA (RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS) THAT WOULD LOOK AT THE EVIDENCE OF BIN LADIN'S INVOLVEMENT IN TERRORISM. THE SECOND PROPOSAL WOULD ALLOW FAMILY MEMBERS OF ANY SAUDIS KILLED IN THE KHOBAR TOWERS EXPLOSION TO BRING THEIR CASES TO AN AFGHAN COURT.

[REDACTED]

9. (S) CONCLUDING HIS INITIAL COMMENTS ON BIN LADIN, WAKIL REPEATED WHAT HE SAID WAS A PASHTU PHRASE SAYING THAT "ON ONE SIDE WE HAVE A ROCK AND ON THE OTHER THERE IS A TIGER." THE BIN LADIN ISSUE, HE SAID, CAN BE DEALT WITH.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] BIN LADIN IS NOW VERY SCARED, HE ADDED.

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SECRET

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 07665 03 OF 04 121148Z
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SECRET SECTION 03 OF 04 ISLAMABAD 007665

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WITH SOME NUANCES

10. (S) THE AMBASSADOR [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] HE COMMENTED THAT IT WAS

B1

SECRET

PAGE 02 ISLAMA 07665 03 OF 04 121148Z
IMPORTANT FOR THE TALIBAN TO RECOGNIZE THAT BIN LADIN WAS A
CRIMINAL AND INVOLVED IN TERRORIST ACTIVITIES NO MATTER WHAT HE HAD
DONE IN THE PAST. THE TALIBAN MAY BELIEVE HE IS UNDER CONSTRAINTS
NOW, BUT HE IS NOT. HE IS ACTIVE. HIS NETWORK IS OPERATING. THE
AMBASSADOR OBSERVED THAT WAKIL'S MENTION OF THE TALIBAN'S PURPORTED

Current Class: SECRET

Page: 6

PROBLEM WITH THE AFGHAN PEOPLE CONCERNING BIN LADIN WAS REALLY NOT A PROBLEM AT ALL: ALL THE TALIBAN HAD TO DO WAS TO TELL THE PEOPLE THAT THEY WERE EXPELLING BIN LADIN BECAUSE HE WAS A TERRORIST CRIMINAL. THAT WOULD CONVINCED THE PEOPLE IF THEY ARE REALLY SO CONCERNED. AS FOR WAKIL'S REFERENCE TO JEWS TAKING SHELTER IN AFGHANISTAN (SEE PARA SEVEN), HE SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT THE NAZI GERMANS WERE KILLING JEWS IN EUROPE WHO HAD NO CHANCE TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. THE SITUATION WITH BIN LADIN IS EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE: HE IS THE ONE DOING THE RANDOM KILLING. THE AMBASSADOR URGED WAKIL TO SPEAK TO HIS LEADERSHIP ON THE MATTER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THE TALIBAN MUST MOVE QUICKLY ON BIN LADIN.

11. (S) IN RESPONSE TO THE AMBASSADOR, WAKIL THEN MADE SOME INTERESTING COMMENTS THAT APPEARED TO ADD SOME NUANCES TO THE STANDARD TALIBAN POSITION ON BIN LADIN THAT HE HAD REPEATED EARLIER IN THE CONVERSATION. THIS SEQUENCE IN THE CONVERSATION BEGAN WITH WAKIL ASKING THE FOLLOWING QUESTION: "FOR MY PERSONAL INFORMATION, I WANT TO ASK IF THE TALIBAN HAND OVER BIN LADIN TO SAUDI ARABIA WOULD HE THEN BE SENT TO THE U.S.?" THE AMBASSADOR REPLIED THAT HE DID NOT THINK SO, BUT WOULD HAVE TO ASK HIS AUTHORITIES FOR INFORMATION ON THIS. WAKIL THEN ASKED: "WOULD HE (BIN LADIN) BE TREATED LIKE DR. NAJIB OR ABDUR RAHMAN IF HE WAS BROUGHT TO SAUDI ARABIA?" (NOTE: NAJIB WAS THE COMMUNIST-ERA LEADER THE TALIBAN SUMMARILY EXECUTED WHEN THEY ENTERED KABUL IN SEPTEMBER 1996; ABDUR RAHMAN IS THE EGYPTIAN CONVICTED FOR PLANNING THE WORLD TRADE CENTER BOMBING.) THE AMBASSADOR RESPONDED THAT THE BETTER MODEL

SECRET

PAGE 03 ISLAMA 07665 03 OF 04 121148Z

FOR THE TALIBAN TO CONSIDER HERE WAS WHAT HAPPENED TO ABDUR RAHMAN. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED THE FOLLOWING QUESTION: "WOULD IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE WHETHER BIN LADIN WAS SENT TO SAUDI ARABIA OR THE U.S.?" WAKIL REPLIED THAT HE SAW DIFFICULTIES IN BOTH VENUES. THAT IS WHY THE TALIBAN'S TWO PROPOSALS TO SAUDI ARABIA ON THE MATTER SHOULD BE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED. WAKIL THEN ASKED ABOUT PROOF OF BIN LADIN'S INVOLVEMENT IN TERRORIST ACTS. THE AMBASSADOR REPLIED THAT THERE WERE LARGE AMOUNTS OF PROOF; EVEN THE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT HAD PROOF OF HIS INVOLVEMENT IN THE EAST AFRICA BOMBINGS. WAKIL OBSERVED THAT BECAUSE PAKISTAN DOES NOT HAVE SHARI'A (ISLAMIC) LAW, ANY TRIAL OF BIN LADIN COULD NOT BE HELD THERE. SUCH A TRIAL COULD TAKE PLACE IN SAUDI ARABIA BECAUSE -- LIKE AFGHANISTAN -- IT WAS RULED BY THE SHARI'A. WAKIL THEN ASKED "WHY DO YOU THINK WE CONTINUE TO HOLD BIN LADIN AND NOT SURRENDER HIM TO THE U.S. OR SAUDI ARABIA?" THE AMBASSADOR RESPONDED THAT WE TOOK THE TALIBAN AT THEIR WORD THAT THEY WERE ACTING OUT OF THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF AFGHAN CULTURE AND THE RESPECT BIN LADIN ENGENDERED BECAUSE OF HIS ROLE IN THE RESISTANCE.

12. (S) CLOSING THIS PART OF THE CONVERSATION, WAKIL ADMITTED THAT

BIN LADIN IS "A SERIOUS PROBLEM" FOR THE TALIBAN. THE TALIBAN WANT TO SEE THE MATTER SOLVED, HE REITERATED. WAKIL SAID HE HAD HEARD THAT THE U.S. WAS CONSIDERING ANOTHER MISSILE STRIKE. THIS ANNOYED THE TALIBAN. WAKIL RELATED THAT HE WONDERED WHETHER HIS OWN HOME WAS BEING TARGETED.

OTHER ISSUES

13. (S) THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE MEETING DEALT WITH THE BIN LADIN
SECRET

PAGE 04 ISLAMA 07665 03 OF 04 121148Z
ISSUE. HOWEVER, OTHER ISSUES WERE BRIEFLY TOUCHED ON. THE AMBASSADOR UNDERScoreD DEEP U.S. RESPECT FOR THE SACRIFICES INCURRED BY THE AFGHANS DURING THE WAR AGAINST THE SOVIETS. HE SAID THE U.S. WANTED TO SEE THE TALIBAN WORK CLOSELY WITH THE BRAHIMI MISSION AND TO FULLY ACCEPT "THE POINTS OF COMMON UNDERSTANDING" WORKED OUT BY THE "SIX-PLUS-TWO" GROUP OF COUNTRIES. IT WAS ALSO IMPORTANT TO CALM THE SITUATION DOWN WITH IRAN. THE U.S. DID NOT WANT TO SEE THE REGION DESTABILIZED BY FIGHTING BETWEEN THE IRANIANS AND THE TALIBAN. THE U.S. HAD PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED OUR SUPPORT FOR THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF AFGHANISTAN. IT WAS ALSO IMPORTANT TO WORK WITH BRAHIMI ON THE ISSUE OF FORMING A BROAD-BASED GOVERNMENT. THERE WAS LITTLE CHANCE THE WAR WOULD END IF SUCH A GOVERNMENT WAS NOT FORMED, DESPITE TALIBAN EFFORTS TO IMPOSE A SOLUTION BY MILITARY FORCE. THE AMBASSADOR ALSO MENTIONED U.S. COUNTERNARCOTICS CONCERNS AS WELL AS U.S. CONCERNS ABOUT TALIBAN RULES SEVERELY HINDERING WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND GIRLS' EDUCATION.

14. (S) IN DISCUSSING THESE ISSUES, WAKIL DID NOT DEVIATE FROM

SECRET

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SECRET

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 07665 04 OF 04 121149Z
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Current Class: SECRET

Page: 8

AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CAIRO

S E C R E T SECTION 04 OF 04 ISLAMABAD 007665

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STANDARD TALIBAN TALKING POINTS. IN A REFERENCE TO THE
"RECOGNITION" ISSUE, HE CLAIMED THAT THE TALIBAN SHOULD BE TREATED
AS A GOVERNMENT, NOT A MOVEMENT. HE STRESSED AFGHAN APPRECIATION
FOR U.S. SUPPORT DURING THE RESISTANCE. HE ALLOWED THAT THE
PROBLEM WITH IRAN SHOULD BE SOLVED, BUT HE SPENT AN EQUAL AMOUNT OF
TIME CRITICIZING IRAN'S AND RUSSIA'S SUPPORT FOR THE ANTI-TALIBAN
SECRET

PAGE 02 ISLAMA 07665 04 OF 04 121149Z
OPPOSITION. HE ASSERTED THAT THE TALIBAN HAD BROUGHT PEACE AND
SECURITY TO AFGHANISTAN, AND HAD THE PEOPLE'S SUPPORT.
NEGOTIATIONS COULD NOT BE HELD WITH THE OTHER "CORRUPT" PARTIES.
THOSE PARTIES HAD HAD THEIR CHANCE TO RULE AFGHANISTAN AND FAILED.
IN ADDITION, THE TALIBAN THEMSELVES WERE MULTI-ETHNIC, SO A BROAD-
BASED GOVERNMENT WAS ALREADY IN PLACE. THE TALIBAN WANTED TO GET
RID OF NARCOTICS, BUT COULD NOT DO UNTIL THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY PROVIDED THEM ASSISTANCE TO DO SO. ON WOMEN'S ISSUES,
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAD TO UNDERSTAND THAT AFGHANISTAN HAD
ITS OWN ISLAMIC CUSTOMS. THERE WOULD BE SOME CHANGES IN THE FUTURE
ONCE THE WAR ENDED, BUT REGARDING WOMEN, THE TALIBAN WOULD STILL
HAVE TO ENFORCE THE SHARI'A, WHICH SERVED "TO PROTECT" WOMEN.

COMMENT

15. (S) THE ENTIRE MEETING WAS CONDUCTED IN A CORDIAL ATMOSPHERE.
HOWEVER, THE MOOD OF BOTH SIDES WAS VERY SERIOUS AND WAKIL THANKED
THE AMBASSADOR FOR HIS FRANK COMMENTS. BASICALLY, WAKIL STUCK TO
STANDARD TALIBAN POINTS ON BIN LADIN, INCLUDING THE CANARD THAT THE
TALIBAN CANNOT EXPEL HIM BECAUSE "THE PEOPLE" WILL BE ANGERED. HE
ALSO STRESSED TWO PROPOSALS ON HOW TO HANDLE THE BIN LADIN MATTER
THAT THE GOP HAS ALREADY MENTIONED TO US.

Current Class: SECRET

Page: 9

16. (S) COMMENT (CONTINUED): THAT SAID, SOME OF THE THREADS OF WAKIL'S COMMENTS APPEARED NEW TO US. FOR EXAMPLE, HE MADE A POINT OF NOTING THAT HE CONSIDERED BIN LADIN "A SERIOUS PROBLEM." HE ALSO APPEARED TO BE SHOPPING AROUND FOR ASSURANCES FROM THE U.S. AND THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT THAT BIN LADIN WOULD BE HANDLED IN A CERTAIN WAY IF HE WAS EXPELLED TO SAUDI ARABIA: WOULD HE BE SENT

SECRET

PAGE 03 ISLAMA 07665 04 OF 04 121149Z
ON TO THE U.S.?.; WOULD HE BE TREATED LIKE DR. NAJIB? BY ASKING SUCH QUESTIONS, WAKIL SEEMED TO BE OPEN TO AT LEAST THE THEORETICAL POSSIBILITY THAT BIN LADIN COULD BE EXPELLED FROM AFGHANISTAN TO SAUDI ARABIA, AT LEAST. IT IS LESS CLEAR WHETHER HE GRASPED THE U.S. POINT THAT THIS ISSUE MUST BE HANDLED EXPEDITIOUSLY, ALTHOUGH WE REITERATED THAT KEY POINT SEVERAL TIMES. HOWEVER, WHEN WAKIL MENTIONED THE POSSIBILITY OF ANOTHER U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTION, HE SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE U.S. IS TAKING THIS ISSUE VERY, VERY SERIOUSLY.

17. (S) COMMENT (CONTINUED): AS WE REFLECT ON THE MEETING, OUR FIRST WITH A MAJOR TALIBAN LEADER SINCE BEFORE AUGUST 20, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE TALIBAN ARE TRYING TO WRESTLE WITH THE BIN LADIN MATTER. ON THE ONE HAND, THEY RISK ALIENATING THEIR EXTREMIST ALLIES -- ARAB, PAKISTANI, AND AFGHAN -- IF THEY GIVE HIM UP. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY WILL FACE THE INFLUENCE AND POWER OF THE U.S. AND SAUDI ARABIA IF THEY DO NOT. IT IS POSSIBLE WAKIL WAS TRYING TO INDICATE A MODICUM OF TALIBAN FLEXIBILITY ON THIS ISSUE. OUR CONCLUSION IS THAT NOW IS THE TIME TO NOTCH UP THE DIPLOMATIC RPT DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE, OUR OWN, THE SAUDIS, PAKISTAN, WHOMEVER ELSE HAS INFLUENCE AND THE ATTENTION OF THE TALIBAN. A POLITICAL/DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION TO BIN LADIN'S EXPULSION FROM AFGHANISTAN MAY BE A MITE MORE POSSIBLE NOW. END COMMENT.
MILAM

SECRET

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