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ACTION NODS-00

RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(D)

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O 071343Z OCT 98
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0665
INFO AMEMBASSY RIYADH IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL PESHAWAR

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 007553

NODIS DECAPTIONED

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

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/7/08
TAGS: PREL, PTER, KISL, AF, PK
SUBJ: USAMA BIN LADIN: GOP OFFICIAL -- CLAIMING TALIBAN WANT TO
GET RID OF BIN LADIN -- REVIEWS THREE OPTIONS FOR DEALING WITH HIM

REFS: (A) ISLAMABAD 7510 (NOTAL)
- (B) STATE 182625
- (C) ISLAMABAD 7321

(U) CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR WILLIAM B. MILAM. REASONS: 1.5
(C) (D).

1. (U) THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST -- SEE PARA 12.
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2. (S) SUMMARY: [REDACTED] FOLD B1
THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE TALIBAN WANT TO RID THEMSELVES OF TERRORIST
USAMA BIN LADIN. [REDACTED] DESCRIBED THREE OPTIONS -- THE SECOND
OPTION WAS STRONGLY INTIMATED -- ON HOW TO HANDLE THE ISSUE: (1)
A TALIBAN PROPOSAL THAT A COMBINED AFGHAN/SAUDI COMMITTEE OF
CLERICS JUDGE BIN LADIN; (2) THE POSSIBILITY OF PAYING OFF THE
TALIBAN TO EXPEL BIN LADIN; AND (3) A TALIBAN COURT JUDGING BIN
LADIN BASED ON COMPLAINTS FROM PEOPLE WHO SUFFERED INJURY IN THE
KHOBAR TOWERS BOMBING. OF THESE OPTIONS, [REDACTED] FAVORED THE
FIRST, [REDACTED]

3. (S) SUMMARY (CONTINUED): IN ANOTHER MATTER ALMOST CERTAINLY

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RELATED TO BIN LADIN, THE TALIBAN-CONTROLLED EMBASSY HAS EXTENDED AN OFFER FROM ITS AUTHORITIES FOR A U.S. DELEGATION TO VISIT KANDAHAR TO DISCUSS "PENDING QUESTIONS." END SUMMARY.

 TALIBAN SAID TO WANT TO GET RID OF BIN LADIN

4. (S) THE AMBASSADOR MET OCTOBER 7 WITH [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED] AT THE LATTER'S REQUEST.
 NOTING HE WANTED TO DISCUSS "AN ISSUE IMPORTANT TO THE U.S."

[REDACTED]
 [REDACTED] ASSERTED THAT THE TALIBAN WANTED TO RID THEMSELVES OF BIN LADIN BECAUSE HE WAS A PROBLEM FOR THEM. INDEED, [REDACTED]
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 HAD BEEN PRESENT AT RECENT MEETINGS WHEN TALIBAN LEADER MULLAH OMAR AND "DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER" MULLAH JALIL HAD REFERRED TO BIN LADIN AS "AN ENEMY." HOWEVER, THE TALIBAN CANNOT SIMPLY GET RID OF BIN LADIN. THE PROBLEM IS THAT THEY ARE OPERATING UNDER THE PASHTUN TRIBAL SYSTEM WHICH REQUIRES THAT THEY OFFER "REFUGE" TO THOSE WHO SEEK IT. GIVEN THIS TRADITION, THE TALIBAN FEEL THAT THEY WOULD BE OVERTHROWN IF THEY EXPEL BIN LADIN!

 FIRST OPTION: THE "ULEMA" ROUTE

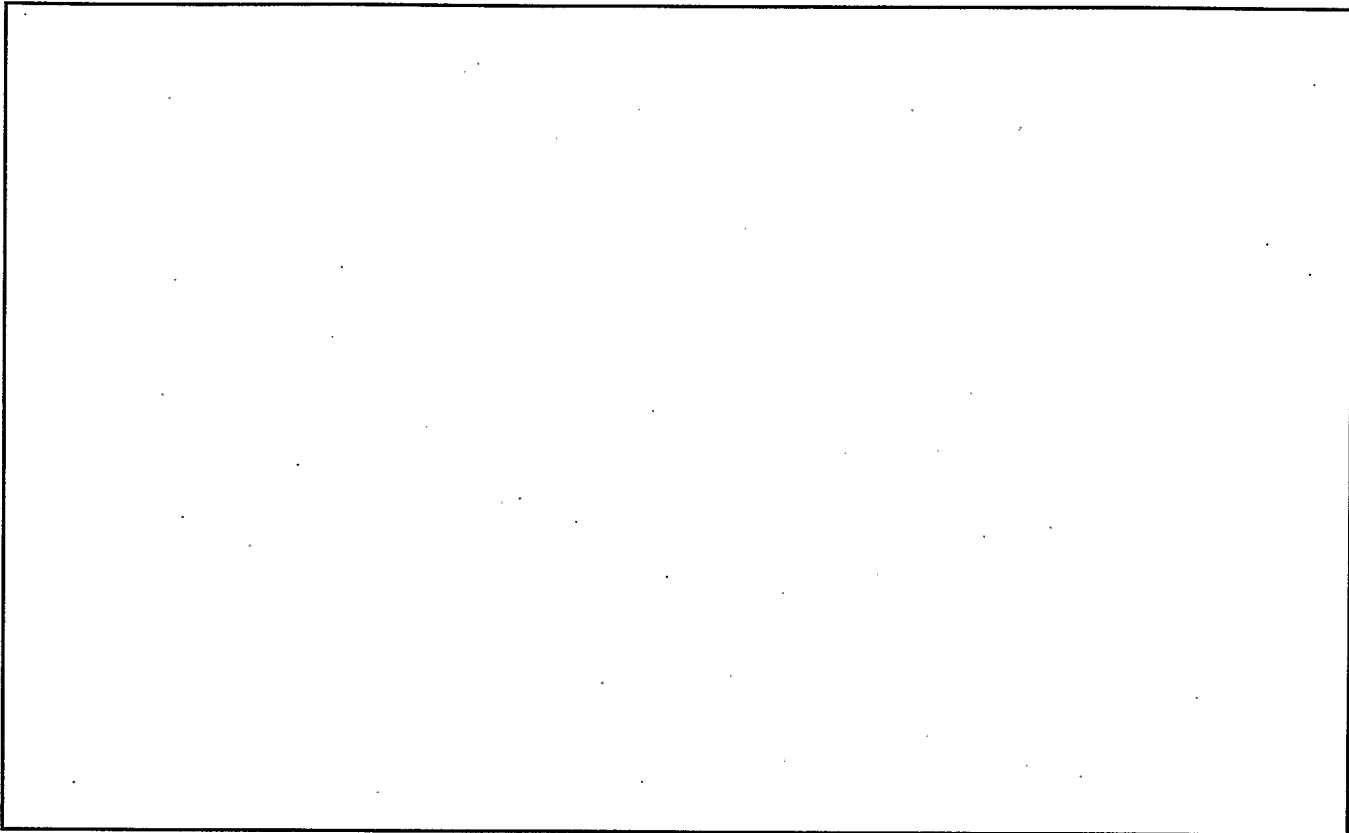
5. (S) [REDACTED] SAID THE TALIBAN HAD PROPOSED A WAY OUT OF THIS PROBLEM. IT INVOLVED THE FORMATION OF A ULEMA (RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS) COMMITTEE MADE UP OF A COMBINED GROUP OF AFGHAN AND SAUDI CLERICS (SEE REF C FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROPOSAL). THE TALIBAN DID NOT CARE HOW MANY CLERICS THE ULEMA COMMITTEE WAS MADE UP OF. THE IMPORTANT POINT FOR THEM WAS THAT THE FORMATION OF THE COMMITTEE WOULD PROVIDE THEM COVER TO EVENTUALLY RID THEMSELVES OF BIN LADIN.

[REDACTED] THE TALIBAN HAD EVEN OFFERED TO SEND A DELEGATION TO RIYADH TO DISCUSS THIS IDEA. THE DELEGATION WOULD BE HEADED BY "ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER" MULLAH HASSAN, AND WOULD INCLUDE "ACTING PLANNING MINISTER" QARI DIIN MOHAMMAD, AS WELL AS OTHER IMPORTANT TALIBAN.

[REDACTED]
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 SECOND OPTION: BUY HIM OUT

8. (S) NOTING THAT THE ULEMA COMMITTEE IDEA WAS THE FIRST OPTION,
 [REDACTED] SAID [REDACTED] HAD SUGGESTED IN A RECENT MEETING ANOTHER
 POSSIBLE WAY OUT.

[REDACTED] HAD TOLD THE STORY
 OF THE RUSSIAN AIR CREW WHICH HAD BEEN CAPTURED BY THE TALIBAN
 (FROM 1995-6). THE RUSSIANS HAD EVENTUALLY COME TO AN AGREEMENT
 SIMPLY TO BUY THE SEVEN MAN CREW OUT BY PAYING ONE MILLION DOLLARS
 EACH. (NOTE: IT HAS LONG BEEN SUSPECTED THAT THE RUSSIANS BOUGHT
 THE CREWS RELEASE; [REDACTED] WAS CONFIRMING IT.) [REDACTED] CONTENDED THAT
 THIS MODEL MAY BE APPROPRIATE FOR THE BIN LADIN PROBLEM. [REDACTED]
 -- WHO WAS STRONGLY INTIMATING THAT BIN LADIN MIGHT BE BOUGHT FROM
 THE TALIBAN -- COMMENTED THAT THIS IDEA SHOULD BE CAREFULLY
 CONSIDERED SINCE IT TO OFFERED A WAY OUT.

 THIRD OPTION: COMPLAINTS TO A TALIBAN COURT

9. (S) MOVING ON TO WHAT HE CHARACTERIZED AS THE THIRD OPTION,
 [REDACTED] RELATED THAT ANOTHER TRACK TO SOLVE THE BIN LADIN PROBLEM
 MIGHT INVOLVE COMPLAINTS BY PEOPLE WHO HAD SUFFERED SOME INJURY IN
 THE KHOBAR TOWERS TERRORIST INCIDENT. THESE COMPLAINTS WOULD BE
 TAKEN UP BY A TALIBAN COURT USING ISLAMIC LAW. THE U.S. AND SAUDIS
 MIGHT NOT APPROVE OF THIS TRACK BECAUSE BIN LADIN, IF CONVICTED,
 WOULD BE SUMMARILY EXECUTED. THUS, HE COULD NOT BE INTERROGATED.
 NONETHELESS, IT WAS AN OPTION TO CONSIDER, ALTHOUGH IT WAS A
 QUESTION WHETHER THIS METHOD COULD BE USED SINCE HE THOUGHT NONE OF
 THE VICTIMS OF THE KHOBAR BOMBING WERE MUSLIM.

 SUMMING UP

10. (S) [REDACTED] CONCLUDED BY COMMENTING THAT WHATEVER OPTION WAS
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 CHOSEN IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR THE SAUDIS "TO KEEP QUIET ABOUT IT,"

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ESPECIALLY IF THEY ULTIMATELY DID COME AROUND TO SUPPORT THE ULEMA COMMITTEE IDEA. THE U.S., THE SAG, AND PAKISTAN SHOULD ALL WORK TOGETHER IN TANDEM ON THIS ISSUE IN A QUIET WAY.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] SUMMING UP, [REDACTED] REITERATED AN EARLIER POINT: "THE BOTTOM-LINE IS THEY (THE TALIBAN) REALLY WANT TO GET RID OF BIN LADIN."

INVITATION TO KANDAHAR

11. (S) BEFORE THE MEETING WITH [REDACTED] POLOFF HAD RECEIVED A PHONE CALL FROM THE TALIBAN-CONTROLLED EMBASSY. [REDACTED] SAID HE HAD A MESSAGE FROM MULLAH JALIL TO THE U.S. IN RESPONSE TO THE U.S.' EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS TO TALK TO THE TALIBAN, JALIL SAID THE TALIBAN WOULD WELCOME THE VISIT BY A U.S. DELEGATION TO KANDAHAR FOR TALKS ON "PENDING QUESTIONS." JALIL WAS HOPING FOR A FAVORABLE RESPONSE TO THE U.S. TO THIS PROPOSAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, [REDACTED] THE AMBASSADOR RAISED THIS PHONE CALL WITH [REDACTED] WHO REPLIED THAT HE DOUBTED THAT THE U.S. WOULD SEND A TEAM TO KANDAHAR. OTHER THAN THIS, [REDACTED] HAD NO COMMENT, EXCEPT TO SAY THAT MAYBE QUETTA WAS AN OPTION AS A VENUE.

ACTION REQUEST

12. (S) EMBASSY REQUESTS DEPARTMENT GUIDANCE ON (1) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] AND (2) THE TALIBAN OFFER CONTAINED IN PARA 11 THAT A U.S. TEAM TALK TO THE TALIBAN IN KANDAHAR.

COMMENT

[REDACTED]

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14. (S) REGARDING THE SECOND ISSUE, THE U.S. HAS NOTED REPEATEDLY TO THE TALIBAN SINCE THE AUGUST 20 KHOST STRIKES THAT WE ARE OPEN

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TO TALKING TO THEM. JALIL'S OFFER FOR FACE-TO FACE TALKS IS THE
 FIRST TIME THE TALIBAN HAVE BEEN RESPONSIVE ON THIS SCORE AND WE
 THINK THE U.S. SHOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER THE TALIBAN OFFER. AS TO
 VENUE, SYMBOLICALLY AND POSSIBLY FOR SECURITY REASONS [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] IT WOULD NOT BE A GOOD IDEA TO SEND A U.S.
 TEAM TO KANDAHAR AT THIS TIME. POSSIBLE PAKISTANI VENUES COULD
 INCLUDE QUETTA, WHERE THE TALIBAN OFTEN TRAVEL, AND ISLAMABAD.
 ISLAMABAD MIGHT BE THE MOST LIKELY VENUE IF WE AGREE TO TALKS SINCE

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 IT IS POSSIBLE THAT A HIGH-LEVEL TALIBAN OFFICIAL, POSSIBLY JALIL
 HIMSELF, WILL BE COMING TO MEET UN SPECIAL ENVOY BRAHIMI HERE IN
 THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS.
 MILAM

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