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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3121
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY ALMATY
AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
AMCONSUL KARACHI
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
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USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PESHAWAR 01030

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: MOPS, PGOV, AF, PK, ZK
SUBJECT: NEW FIGHTING AND NEW FORCES IN KANDAHAR
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: SHARON E. AHMAD
DATE/CASE ID: 21 APR 2003 200103823

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REFS: A) KARACHI 5156 (NOTAL), B) ISLAMABAD 10272

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY. FIGHTING BROKE OUT EARLIER THIS WEEK IN KANDAHAR PROVINCE BETWEEN AN ALLIANCE OF ESTABLISHED HIG AND NIFA COMMANDERS AND A NEW MOVEMENT, THE TALIBAN ("SEEKERS"). JAMIAT COMMANDER NAQIB HAS REMAINED ALOOF SO FAR FROM THE FIGHTING, WHICH HAS STRANDED PAKISTAN'S MUCH PUBLICIZED TRUCK CARAVAN TO CENTRAL ASIA. WHILE SPECULATION IS RIFE ABOUT WHO THE TALIBAN ACTUALLY SUPPORT AND ARE BEING SUPPORTED BY, IT APPEARS THAT THE WELL-ARMED MOVEMENT -- LARGELY DRAWN FROM RELIGIOUS STUDENTS THAT DID NOT FIGHT IN THE JIHAD -- MAY REPRESENT A NEW PHENOMENON INDEPENDENT FROM PARTY POLITICS. END SUMMARY.

NEW FIGHTING IN KANDAHAR PROVINCE

3. ACCORDING TO MULTIPLE SOURCES, TROOPS BELONGING TO HEKMATYAR COMMANDER SAR KATEB ("HEAD CLERK"), GOVERNOR GUL AGHA (NOMINALLY NIFA), COMMANDER LALAI (ALSO NOMINALLY NIFA, BUT REPORTEDLY WITH SAYAAF CONTACTS), AND COMMANDER MANSUR (A FORMER KHALQI MILITIA LEADER FOR THE ACHIKZAI TRIBE, NOW FREE LANCE COMMANDER) ATTACKED ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, THE VILLAGE OF TAKHT-E PUL (3119N/06557E) ASTRIDE THE CHAMAN-KANDAHAR HIGHWAY AND HELD BY A NEW FACTOR IN THE AFGHAN EQUATION, THE NEW TALIBAN. ACCORDING TO SOURCES JUST RETURNED FROM KANDAHAR, THE TUESDAY ATTACK WAS REPULSED AS WAS A FOLLOW-UP ATTACK ON WEDNESDAY. NO NUMBERS OF FORCES COMMITTED ARE AVAILABLE. A SMALL FORCE (ESTIMATED AT 90 OR LESS) OF WELL-ARMED AND EXPERIENCED TROOPS UNDER MULLAH YAR MOHAMMED (A KHALIS
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 COMMANDER WHOSE TROOPS PREVIOUSLY FOUGHT UNDER THE NAME OF THE TALIBAN) HAVE REPORTEDLY LEFT THEIR STRONGHOLD IN ARGHISTAN DISTRICT SOUTH OF THE KANDAHAR AIRPORT TO SUPPORT THE BESIEGED TALIBAN BY ATTACKING THE COMMANDERS' ALLIANCE FROM THE REAR.

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4. NEW TALIBAN FORCES HAVE TOLD OUR SOURCES THAT ON THE AFTERNOON OF NOVEMBER 1 THEY ATTACKED AND TOOK TWO HILLTOP POSITIONS BELONGING TO HIG COMMANDER SAR KATEB NEAR BARA PUL (GEOCOORDS NOT AVAILABLE) WEST OF KANDAHAR CITY. SO FAR, IT IS REPORTED, THE TALIBAN FORCES HAVE NOT ADVANCED TOWARD SAR KATEB'S HEADQUARTERS, BUT OUR SOURCES SPECULATE THAT IF THEY DO -- AND LOOK AS IF THEY ARE GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL -- JAMIAT COMMANDER NAQIBULLAH MAY BREAK THE TRUCE IN EFFECT BETWEEN HIS FORCES AND SAR KATEB'S AND MOVE IN ON THE SIDE OF THE TALIBAN. TALIBAN FORCES ARE SAID, BY SOME JOURNALIST SOURCES, TO HAVE NOW "CLEANED UP" THE KANDAHAR-HERAT ROAD AS FAR AS THE EASTERN EDGE OF FARAH PROV NCE.

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD GETS ROCKIER

5. CAUGHT UP IN THIS NEW CONFLICT IS THE MUCH PUBLICIZED FIRST PAKISTANI CONVOY OF AID SUPPLIES TO AFGHANISTAN AND THE NIS. THIS 30-PLUS VEHICLE CONVOY, A MANIFESTATION OF PAKISTANI INTERIOR MINISTER BABAR'S VISION OF OPENING UP TRADE BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES VIA CHAMAN, KANDAHAR, AND HERAT, WAS REPORTEDLY ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED TO ENTER AFGHANISTAN ON OCTOBER 15, BUT THE DEPARTURE WAS

[REDACTED] HELD UP BECAUSE OF

OBJECTIONS OF THE NEW TALIBAN HOLDING THE AFGHAN BORDER TOWN OF SPIN BOLDAK (3100N/06624E).

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6. [REDACTED] NEW TALIBAN SPOKESMAN MULLAH MOHAMMAD GHAUS HAD SET THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS TO ALLOW THE CONVOY TO ENTER AFGHANISTAN:

--FOR SOVEREIGNTY'S SAKE, THE CONVOY ARRANGEMENTS SHOULD BE VETTED BY GOVERNOR GUL AGHA RATHER THAN UNILATERALLY ESTABLISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN;

--THE CONVOY MUST INCLUDE AFGHAN TRANSPORTS, RATHER THAN JUST PAKISTANI VEHICLES;

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--PAKISTAN MUST AGREE TO RELEASE THE AFGHAN TRANSIT GOODS BEING HELD, SOME FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS, IN KARACHI; AND,

--PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN MUST COME TO A COMPREHENSIVE AGREEMENT REGARDING THE TRANSIT TRADE.

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AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY ALMATY

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AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
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 AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
 AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
 AMCONSUL KARACHI
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E.O. 12356

ATTACK WAS INDEPENDENT OF PAKISTANI INTERIOR MINISTER BABAR'S ANNOUNCED PLANS TO OPEN THE HIGHWAY TO CENTRAL ASIA. THE RECRUITING OF YOUNG TALIBAN MEMBERS FROM THE MADRASAS (RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS) OF QUETTA AND PESHAWAR WITH, ACCORDING TO SOME REPORTS, THE ASSISTANCE OF PAKISTAN'S FAZL REHMAN'S JUI PARTY, COUPLED WITH THE REPORTED ARMING OF THE TALIBAN WITH BRAND NEW WEAPONS ("STILL IN THEIR GREASE" ACCORDING TO SOME SOURCES) LED TO A SUSPICION IN MANY QUARTERS THAT THE NEW TALIBAN HAD FORMED WITH THE ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE GOP.

13. IN THEIR OWN DEFENSE, TALIBAN MEMBERS REPORTEDLY SAY THAT THEY ARE INDEPENDENT OF PAKISTAN, AND POINT TO THEIR DELAY OF THE CONVOY AS EVIDENCE. ACCORDING TO EMBASSY SOURCES IN THE PAKISTAN GOVERNMENT, THE TALIBAN ARE ACTING AS RABBANI OR SAYAAF SURROGATES -- ALTHOUGH WHY RABBANI WOULD NEED SURROGATES BEYOND POWERFUL COMMANDER NAQIB IS OPEN TO QUESTION.

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14. ACCORDING TO [REDACTED] WHO SAYS HE HAD BEEN "SUPPORTING" THE TALIBAN IN THEIR EARLY STAGES, THE ARMED OPPOSITION TO THE TALIBAN WAS ACTUALLY BEING STAGE-MANAGED BY SAYAAF WHO [REDACTED] SAYS DESPATCHED ITTEHAD MILITARY CHIEF CAPT MUSA TO THE AREA ON SUNDAY. [REDACTED] WENT ON TO NOTE THAT HE SUSPECTS SAYAAF WAS STILL STINGING OVER THE TALIBAN'S ANTI-WAHABI STANCE AND WAS TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE RESENTMENT THE PIOUS AND APPARENTLY AUSTERE TALIBAN HAD ALREADY ENGENDERED AMONG THE ESTABLISHED LEADERS.

COMMENT

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15. THE TALIBAN HAVE BEEN CHARACTERIZED AS BEING SIMULTANEOUSLY PAKISTANI TOOLS AND ANTI-PAKISTAN, AND PRO- AND ANTI-SAYAAF. ALL OBSERVERS AGREE THAT THEY APPEAR TO BE ANTI-HEKMATYAR. THERE ARE ELEMENTS TO SUPPORT ALL OF THESE VARIOUS CHARACTERIZATIONS, LEADING ONE TO BELIEVE THAT TALIBAN IS A SUI GENERIS PHENOMENON FUELED IN PART BY FRUSTRATION AT THE PARTY LEADERS' FAILURE TO ACHIEVE PEACE, DISGUST AT THE VENAL ACTIONS OF MANY OF THE VARIOUS PARTY COMMANDERS, AND POSSIBLY A SINCERE DESIRE TO ESTABLISH AN ISLAMIC PEACE. SINCE THEIR ELDERS HAD THEIR JIHAD, THE NEW TALIBAN MAY WISH TO SEEK GLORY BY PLAYING THEIR PART IN REFORMING AFGHANISTAN.

16. IT IS VERY POSSIBLE THAT THE TALIBAN HAVE RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM A NUMBER OF SOURCES, INCLUDING PAKISTAN, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, COMMANDER NAQIB, AND EVEN NOMINAL NIFA ELEMENTS. IF THE TALIBAN WAS CREATED BY SECULAR OR OUTSIDE FORCES, HOWEVER, IT IS VERY POSSIBLE THAT THEIR BACKERS MAY FIND THAT THEY HAVE CREATED A TIGER THAT IS MORE THAN WILLING TO TAKE INDEPENDENT ACTION AND NOT BE ANYONE'S TOOL.

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INFO AMEMBASSY ALMATY

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7. [REDACTED] MODESTLY NOTING HIS OWN ROLE AS A FACILITATOR, TOLD
US THAT THE TALIBAN AND PAKISTANI MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TEAMS HAD

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BEEN NEGOTIATING OVER THE PAST TWO WEEKS, AND HAD APPARENTLY REACHED SOME UNSPECIFIED COMPROMISE. ACCORDING TO EMBASSY SOURCES, TALIBAN MEMBERS ALONG WITH PAKISTAN'S CONSUL IN KANDAHAR, COL (RET'D) IMAN, JOINED THE CONVOY WHICH REPORTEDLY CLEARED THE BORDER AND PASSED THROUGH SPIN BOLDAK WITHOUT
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 INCIDENT ON OCTOBER 31. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, GENERALLY CONFIRMED BY [REDACTED] EMBASSY SOURCES, THE PRESENCE OF THE UPSTART TALIBAN IN THE CONVOY WAS TOO MUCH OF A PROVOCATION (AND THE RICHES OF THE CONVOY PERHAPS TOO MUCH OF A TEMPTATION) TO THE TROOPS OF GUL AGHA, LALAI, AND MANSUR WHO STOPPED THE CONVOY SOUTH OF KANDAHAR WITH DEMANDS THAT KANDAHAR'S SHARE OF THE SUPPLIES BE OFF-LOADED. [REDACTED] THE DRIVERS WERE "ROUGHED UP", BUT THERE WERE NO CASUALTIES AND THE TRUCKS REMAIN -- AT LEAST AS OF WEDNESDAY EVENING -- IN KANDAHAR.

8. THE CONFLICTS HAS CAUSED CANCELLATION OF SPECIAL ENVOY MESTIRI'S SCHEDULED VISIT TO KANDAHAR THIS WEEK. REPORTEDLY, KANDAHARI MEMBERS OF THE UN'S ADVISORY COUNCIL ARE TRAVELING TO KANDAHAR IN THEIR TRIBAL/RELIGIOUS LEADER CAPACITIES TO ATTEMPT TO STOP THE FIGHTING AND RESOLVE THE CARAVAN DISPUTE.

TALIBAN - A NEW VARIABLE

9. DURING THE JIHAD, A GROUP OF FIGHTERS CALLING THEMSELVES THE TALIBAN ("SEEKERS", A TERM APPLIED TO RELIGIOUS STUDENTS) WERE ACTIVE IN THE KANDAHAR REGION UNDER KHALIS COMMANDER MULLAH YAR MOHAMMAD. IN EARLY SUMMER, HOWEVER, ANOTHER GROUP USING THE TALIBAN NAME SURFACED IN KANDAHAR PROVINCE UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF A MULLAH MOHAMMAD OMAR AND HIS DEPUTY, A MULLAH EHSANULLAH. THESE NEW TALIBAN ARE MAINLY MADE UP OF TEENAGE AND EARLY 20'S RELIGIOUS STUDENTS THAT DID NOT FIGHT IN THE JIHAD. THE MOVEMENT'S INITIAL GOAL, ACCORDING TO THEIR SPOKESMAN, WAS TO "CLEAN UP" THE CHAMAN-KANDAHAR HIGHWAY AND ONE OF THEIR FIRST ACTS WAS A SUMMARY SHARIAT TRIAL OF MULLAH FATAH MOHAMMAD, A FREE LANCE COMMANDER WHO HAD MAINTAINED A "TOLL BOOTH" IN ARGHISTAN DISTRICT, EXTRACTING ARBITRARY PAYMENTS (AND SELECTED
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MERCHANDISE) FROM TRUCKS EN ROUTE TO AND FROM KANDAHAR. FATAH MOHAMMAD HAD REPORTEDLY REFUSED THE TALIBAN'S ORDERS TO OPEN THE ROAD, SO AFTER A SHORT FIREFIGHT AND FATAH MOHAMMAD'S CAPTURE, HE WAS TRIED AND HANGED FOR BRIGANDAGE. INDEPENDENT TOLL STATIONS ALONG THE CHAMAN-KANDAHAR HIGHWAY REPORTEDLY DRASTICALLY REDUCED IN NUMBER FOLLOWING THIS EXAMPLE.

10. THESE INITIAL ACTIONS LED TO SOME SPECULATION THAT THE TALIBAN -- WHO [REDACTED] IN WHAT IS ALMOST CERTAINLY AN EXAGGERATION, SAYS NOW NUMBER IN THE LOW THOUSANDS-- WERE BEING SUPPORTED BY PAKISTANI AND AFGHAN BUSINESSMEN. IT ALSO LEAD TO SOME TENSION IN THE PROVINCE BETWEEN THIS NEW FORCE AND MOST OF THE ESTABLISHED COMMANDERS, PARTICULARLY LALAI AND SAR KATEB, WHO DERIVED SIGNIFICANT REVENUES FROM TOLL COLLECTIONS AND MAY HAVE FELT THREATENED BY THE EVOLUTION OF A NEW FORCE MOTIVATED BY SOMETHING OTHER THAN PARTY CONSIDERATIONS. MAIN JAMIAT COMMANDER IN KANDAHAR MULLAH NAQIB, HOWEVER, PUBLICLY SUPPORTED THE TALIBAN ACTIONS.

11. ON OCTOBER 13, THE TALIBAN OCCUPIED THE FORMERLY HIG-DOMINATED BORDER TOWN OF SPIN BOLDAK FOLLOWING A NIGHT ATTACK BEGUN ON OCTOBER 12 SUPPORTED BY, ACCORDING TO ONE GENERALLY RELIABLE SOURCE, ROCKET ARTILLERY FROM THE SOUTH. CASUALTIES ARE SAID TO HAVE INCLUDED FIVE HIG AND THREE TALIBAN DEAD. THE CAMPAIGN HAD STARTED ON OCTOBER 9, WITH TALIBAN CLEANING UP A NUMBER OF "FREE LANCE" CHECKPOSTS BETWEEN KANDAHAR AND THE BORDER IN AN EFFORT THAT REPORTEDLY ENJOYED THE INITIAL TACIT APPROVAL OF GOVERNOR GUL AGHA. IN AN OCTOBER 14/15 INTERVIEW WITH BBC, TALIBAN DEPUTY EHSANULLAH SAID THAT HIS GROUP HAD TAKEN THE ACTION TO:

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--ELIMINATE THE WAHABI AND SALIFI (ANOTHER TERM FOR CERTAIN
FUNDAMENTALISTS, USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH CERTAIN HEKMATYAR
SUPPORTERS) INFLUENCE FROM THE AREA; AND,

--OPEN THE HIGHWAY TO FREE TRAFFIC.

EHSANULLAH ALSO TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE INTERVIEW TO STATE
THAT THE TALIBAN SUPPORT THE MESTIRI PROCESS, AND BELIEVE IN A
LOYA JIRGA AS AN ESSENTIAL STEP IN SELECTING A GOVERNMENT.
EHSANULLAH ALSO REPORTEDLY BELITTLED THE DEFENDERS OF THE SPIN
BOLDAK, INCLUDING THE COMMANDER MOHAMMAD NABI WHO WAS ASSOCIATED
WITH THE EARLIER KIDNAPPING OF EUROPEAN DRUG ENFORCEMENT
PERSONNEL IN THE AREA.

12. FEW OBSERVERS THOUGHT THAT THE TIMING OF THE SPIN BOLDAK

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 PESHAWAR 01030

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (SECTION INFO 03 OF 03 VICE 02 OF 03

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COMMENT

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