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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO AMCONSUL PESHAWAR IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY RIYADH IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 220495

DECAPTIONED

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THE FOLLOWING ISLAMABAD 008803 DTD 28NOV 98 SENT ACTION
SECSTATE REPEATED FOR YOUR INFORMATION 28NOV98

QUOTE:

S E C R E T ISLAMABAD 008803

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/28/08
TAGS: PREL, PTER, AF
SUBJECT: OSAMA BIN LADEN: TALIBAN SPOKESMAN SEEKS NEW PROPOSAL
FOR RESOLVING BIN LADEN PROBLEM(U) CLASSIFIED BY ALAN W. EASTHAM, JR., CHARGE DAFFAIRES.
REASON: 1.5(D). DEPT MAY WISH TO SHARE THIS CABLE WITH
ADDITIONAL ADDRESSEES, PARTICULARLY PESHAWAR, RIYADH, AND CAIRO.1. (S) SUMMARY: IN A NOVEMBER 28 MEETING CALLED AT TALIBAN
REQUEST, SENIOR TALIBAN SPOKESMAN WAKIL AHMED TOLD CHARGE THAT
KANDAHAR DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THE BIN LADEN MATTER HAD BEEN
RESOLVED BY THE RECENT TALIBAN COURT RULING THAT INSUFFICIENT
EVIDENCE HAD BEEN SUBMITTED IMPLICATING BIN LADEN IN TERRORIST
ACTIVITIES. WAKIL SAID THAT ANY ATTEMPT TO EXPEL BIN LADEN

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WITHOUT COMPELLING PROOF TO PROVIDE LEGAL COVER OR AGREEMENT BY SCHOLARS TO PROVIDE RELIGIOUS COVER WOULD LEAD TO THE FALL OF THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT. HE URGED THE U.S. NOT TO BOMB AFGHANISTAN AGAIN AND ASKED INSTEAD FOR A NEW U.S. PROPOSAL AIMED AT RESOLVING THE MATTER. WHEN PRESSED, HE OPINED THAT SAUDI ARABIA HELD THE KEY TO ANY RESOLUTION, SUGGESTING THAT THE EARLIER JOINT TALIBAN-SAUDI ULEMA PROPOSAL COULD STILL PROVIDE THE COVER THE TALIBAN LEADERSHIP NEEDED TO PART WAYS WITH BIN LADEN. END SUMMARY.

2. (S) CHARGE (ACCOMPANIED BY POLCOUNS) MET WITH WAKIL AHMED EARLY ON SATURDAY MORNING AT THE RESIDENCE OF THE TALIBAN AFGHAN "AMBASSADOR" IN ISLAMABAD. WAKIL OPENED THE NINETY MINUTE (SOMEWHAT RAMBLING ON HIS PART) DISCUSSION BY REVIEWING THE EARLIER U.S.-TALIBAN THREE-PART--NARCOTICS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND SECRET

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TERRORISM--AGENDA. WITH RESPECT TO NARCOTICS, WAKIL SAID THIS WAS A MANAGEABLE PROBLEM. THE TALIBAN WOULD BAN THE GROWTH OF POPPIES ONCE IT GAINED RECOGNITION AND A WAY WAS FOUND TO COMPENSATE POPPY GROWERS FOR THEIR LOSSES.

3. (C) WITH RESPECT TO HUMAN RIGHTS, WAKIL SAID THAT TALIBAN PROBLEMS WITH THE WEST LARGELY RESULTED FROM CULTURAL DIFFERENCES. IN AFGHANISTAN, FOR EXAMPLE, IF A MURDERER WAS NOT EXECUTED, THIS WAS REGARDED AS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION. IN THE WEST, BY CONTRAST, IF A MURDERER WAS EXECUTED, THIS WAS REGARDED AS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION. HE SAID THAT SIMILARLY, DIFFERENCES EXIST OVER THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN. THE TALIBAN DID NOT OPPOSE EDUCATION FOR WOMEN, ONLY COEDUCATIONAL INSTRUCTION. THEY DID NOT OPPOSE WORK FOR WOMEN, THEY SIMPLY BELIEVED THAT WOMEN WERE NOT SUITED FOR CERTAIN KINDS OF WORK.

4. (S) TURNING TO TERRORISM, WAKIL BEGAN BY POINTING OUT THAT NO ONE WAS ACCUSING AFGHANS OF PARTICIPATION IN TERRORIST ACTS. RATHER, THE TALIBAN WERE ACCUSED OF PERMITTING TERRORISTS TO OPERATE ON THEIR SOIL. PREEMINENT AMONG THESE ALLEGED TERRORISTS WAS OSAMA BIN LADEN. THE TALIBAN UNDERSTOOD THAT THE U.S. IN PARTICULAR WANTED BIN LADEN EXPELLED FROM AFGHANISTAN AT ALL COSTS. AS WAKIL SAW IT, THE TALIBAN FACED FOUR ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES IN SEEING THE BIN LADEN SITUATION RESOLVED.

-- FIRST OF ALL, THEY COULD COOPERATE WITH THE U.S. IN EXPELLING BIN LADEN, ALTHOUGH THIS COULD NOT BE FORMALLY DONE SINCE THE U.S. DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THE TALIBAN.

-- SECONDLY, THE TALIBAN COULD RECEIVE MORE U.S. CRUISE MISSILES, WITH THE SITUATION RESOLVED IN THIS WAY.

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-- THE THIRD ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE FOR THE U.S. TO KILL HIM, OR ARRANGE FOR BIN LADEN TO BE ASSASSINATED.

-- THE FOURTH AND LAST ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE TO REMOVE THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT.

5. (S) HE SAID THAT THE U.S., IF IT CHOSE TO DO SO, COULD ARRANGE TO HAVE BIN LADEN KILLED BY CRUISE MISSILES OR OTHER MEANS AND THERE WOULD BE LITTLE THE TALIBAN COULD DO TO PREVENT IT. HE NOTED THAT BIN LADEN HAD ONCE BEEN A TRAINED GUERRILLA SUPPORTED BY THE UNITED STATES. (CHARGE SAID THAT WHILE HE MAY HAVE FOUGHT WITH A RESISTANCE GROUP WHICH HAD RECEIVED U.S. SUPPORT, WE HAD NEVER HEARD HIS NAME DURING THAT PERIOD AND DID NOT SUPPORT HIM AT THAT TIME.) WAKIL WENT ON TO RECALL THAT HE HAD EARLIER TOLD AMBASSADOR MILAM THAT SOMETIMES A TERRORIST BECOMES A HERO AND SOMETIMES A HERO CAN BECOME A TERRORIST.

6. (S) THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF AFGHANISTAN WAS TO BE LEFT ALONE TO MANAGE ITS OWN AFFAIRS WITHOUT OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE. THE TALIBAN RECOGNIZED THAT IF THEY CHOSE TO BACK TERRORISM, THEY COULD EXPECT TO BE THE RECIPIENT OF TERRORISM IN RESPONSE. HE ADMITTED THAT HIS AUTHORITIES WERE NOW UNDER GREAT PRESSURE TO EXPEL BIN LADEN FROM FOUR DIFFERENT SOURCES--THE U.S., SAUDI ARABIA, PAKISTAN AND THE UN. HE SAID THAT IF THE COMMISSION OF TERRORIST ACTS BY BIN LADEN COULD BE PROVEN, THE CURRENT PROBLEMS COULD BE EASILY RESOLVED. THE TALIBAN UNDERSTOOD THAT TERRORISM WAS THE WORST POSSIBLE WAY TO FIGHT AGAINST ANYONE AND RAN COUNTER TO THE TENETS OF ISLAM. AFGHANISTAN HAD ITSELF BEEN VICTIMIZED BY TERRORISM AND WELL UNDERSTOOD THIS.

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7. (S) WAKIL THEN ASKED RHETORICALLY WHY, IN LIGHT OF THE ABOVE, THE TALIBAN STILL DID NOT EXPEL BIN LADEN. HE SAID IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS THAT THERE WAS AN INTERNAL OBSTACLE TO DOING SO, SINCE THE EASIEST WAY TO PROCEED WOULD BE TO RESPECT INTERNATIONAL LAWS AND NORMS. THAT SAID, HOWEVER, HE NOTED THAT U.S. DIFFICULTIES WENT BEYOND BIN LADEN. MANY MUSLIM GROUPS DID NOT LIKE THE

PRESENCE OF U.S. FORCES ON THE ARABIAN PENINSULA. WHILE THIS WAS A VIEW SHARED BY THE TALIBAN, THEY BELIEVED THAT TERRORISM WAS NOT THE ANSWER. WAKIL SAID THERE WERE OTHER ISSUES THE U.S. COULD BE CRITICIZED FOR, ALTHOUGH THE CONSTRUCTIVE U.S. ROLE IN THE RECENT PEACE AGREEMENT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS HAD BEEN NOTED AND APPRECIATED. WAKIL SAID THE TALIBAN ALSO APPRECIATED THE HELP THE U.S. HAD PROVIDED DURING THE STRUGGLE

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AGAINST THE SOVIET OCCUPATION. THEY WERE NOT HYPOCRITES AND THIS WOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN.

8. (S) TURNING TO THE SAUDIS, WAKIL SAID THAT TALIBAN RELATIONS WITH RIYADH HAD BECOME AWKWARD RECENTLY DUE TO THE BIN LADEN ISSUE. THEY HAD BEEN UNABLE TO ACHIEVE ANYTHING OF SUBSTANCE IN THEIR MEETINGS. HOWEVER, THE TALIBAN HAD ALSO NOTED THAT THE SAUDI INTERIOR MINISTER HAD RECENTLY BEEN QUOTED AS SAYING THAT BIN LADEN HAD NOT BEEN INVOLVED IN ANY TERRORIST ACTS IN SAUDI ARABIA. THIS STATEMENT HAD NOT CHANGED THE ATMOSPHERE, HOWEVER. RELATIONS WERE STILL IN A DEEP FREEZE. WAKIL SAID THAT KANDAHAR WAS STILL TRYING TO FIND A PROPER WAY TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE. IT HAD TRIED TO DO SO BY SOLICITING PROOF THAT COULD BE EXAMINED IN AN AFGHAN COURT, BUT THIS HAD NOT WORKED.

9. (S) WAKIL SAID THAT INSTEAD OF COOPERATING SERIOUSLY, THE
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U.S. HAD OFFERED A FIVE MILLION DOLLAR REWARD "TO ARREST OR KILL" BIN LADEN. (CHARGE CORRECTED HIM ON THIS POINT.) THE U.S. HAD ALSO UNDERTAKEN A NUMBER OF ANTI-TALIBAN INITIATIVES, INCLUDING GIVING "ASYLUM" TO GENERAL MALIK, WHO HAD BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF FIVE THOUSAND AFGHANS; MEETING WITH (PAKISTANI POLITICAL LEADER) KHAN ABDUL WALI KHAN; AND SENDING A U.S. DELEGATION INTO THE PANSHIR VALLEY. WAKIL THEN COMPLAINED ABOUT THE RECENT RUSSIAN-PROPOSED UNSC RESOLUTION, WHICH PROPOSED TO INVALIDATE TALIBAN-ISSUED PASSPORTS AND TO PREVENT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FOREIGN POLITICAL AND BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE TALIBAN GOVERNMENT (HE CONCEDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE U.S. HAD OPPOSED THE DRAFT RESOLUTION). DESPITE THESE AND OTHER ASSAULTS, AFGHANS WERE STILL LIVING.

10. (S) WAKIL SAID THAT WHILE THE TALIBAN DID NOT FORGET FRIENDSHIP, THEY ALSO DID NOT FORGET ANIMOSITY. HE SAID 22 AFGHANS HAD BEEN KILLED AND 55 GRAVELY WOUNDED IN THE AUGUST 20 CRUISE MISSILE ATTACK, WHICH HAD CONSTITUTED A VIOLATION OF THE AFGHAN HOMELAND. THE ATTACK HAD COME AT A VERY DIFFICULT TIME, SINCE THE TALIBAN WERE ALSO UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE FROM IRAN. DESPITE THIS, AT THE END OF THE DAY THE U.S. HAD ONLY SEEN FIT TO SUBMIT SOME PAPERS AND A VIDEO CASSETTE IN RESPONSE TO THEIR REQUEST FOR PROOF ON BIN LADEN. HE SAID THAT HE AND OTHER TALIBAN LEADERS HAD GATHERED TOGETHER WITH GREAT INTEREST TO WATCH THE VIDEO, EXPECTING THAT IT WOULD CONTAIN SOMETHING NEW. BUT IT DID NOT. AND THEREFORE THE LEADERSHIP HAD DECIDED NOT TO SUBMIT THE VIDEO TO THE COURT.

11. (S) LACKING EVIDENCE, THE SUPREME COURT HAD RULED THAT THE NO EVIDENCE HAD BEEN PRESENTED WHICH WARRANTED THE CONVICTION OF BIN LADEN. NONETHELESS, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT THIS EFFORT HAD NOT

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CONTRIBUTED TO SOLVING THE BIN LADEN PROBLEM IN ANY WAY. WAKIL SAID THE TALIBAN HOPED THAT THE SUPREME COURT DECISION DID NOT CREATE AN EVEN BIGGER PROBLEM FOR AFGHANISTAN. HE URGED THAT THE U.S. NOT LAUNCH ANY MORE CRUISE MISSILE ATTACKS AGAINST HIS COUNTRY OR SEEK TO ASSASSINATE BIN LADEN IN AFGHANISTAN, WHICH HE REPEATED HIS AUTHORITIES COULD NOT PREVENT. INSTEAD, HE ASKED CHARGE FOR A USEFUL PROPOSAL FROM THE U.S. THAT WOULD SERVE TO FINALLY RESOLVE THE PROBLEM.

12. (S) CHARGE THANKED WAKIL FOR HIS PRESENTATION, WHICH HE SAID HAD PROVIDED ENOUGH MATERIAL FOR TWO DAYS OF CONVERSATION. HE SUGGESTED THAT THE TWO SET ASIDE THE NARCOTICS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES, WHICH THEY HAD DISCUSSED BEFORE IN KANDAHAR AND ISLAMABAD, FOR ANOTHER TIME AND CONCENTRATE INSTEAD ON BIN LADEN. HE BEGAN BY DENYING THAT THE U.S. HAD BORNE SPECIAL ANIMOSITY TOWARD THE TALIBAN PRIOR TO THE EAST AFRICA BOMBINGS. HE NOTED THAT EVER SINCE THE TALIBAN HAD TAKEN KABUL THE U.S. HAD ATTEMPTED TO WORK WITH THEM IN ADDRESSING IMPORTANT ISSUES, BUT WITHOUT A GREAT DEAL OF SUCCESS, AS WAKIL WELL KNEW. THE BOMBINGS IN EAST AFRICA LAST AUGUST HAD BROUGHT THE ISSUE OF THE PRESENCE OF OSAMA BIN LADEN ON AFGHAN SOIL TO THE FOREFRONT. MOST RECENTLY, WE HAD BEEN EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTED WITH THE DECISION OF THE TALIBAN SUPREME COURT WHICH SEEMED TO CHANGE THE STATUS OF THE TALIBAN FROM HIS HOST TO HIS PROTECTOR AND COLLABORATOR. WE HOPED THIS WAS NOT THE CASE.

13. (S) CHARGE NOTED THAT WAKIL HAD DISCUSSED FOUR POSSIBLE WAYS OF RESOLVING THE BIN LADEN PROBLEM ALL OF WHICH HE SEEMED TO REJECT FOR DIFFERENT REASONS. IN OUR VIEW, EXPELLING BIN LADEN WAS COMPLETELY UNDER TALIBAN CONTROL. WITH RESPECT TO MEETING WITH WALI KHAN AND GENERAL MALIK AND REPORTS OF U.S. "DELEGATION"

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VISITS TO THE PANSHIR VALLEY, THIS DID NOT CONSTITUTE A CONSPIRACY AGAINST THE TALIBAN. IT WAS BUSINESS AS USUAL FROM THE U.S. SIDE, MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH ALL THE AFGHANS AND WITH SIGNIFICANT PAKISTANI POLITICAL LEADERS. BUT IT IS DOUBTLESS TRUE THAT SUCH EVENTS LOOM LARGER TO THE TALIBAN IN THE AFTERMATH OF LAST AUGUST. THE TALIBAN COULD NOT EXPECT U.S. SYMPATHY OR UNDERSTANDING WHILE OSAMA BIN LADEN WAS IN AFGHANISTAN.

14. (S) CHARGE NOTED HE HAD PREVIOUSLY WORKED FOR THREE YEARS AT THE U.S. EMBASSY IN NAIROBI AND HAD LOST MANY AMERICAN AND KENYAN FRIENDS IN THE BOMBING. HE SAID IT WAS CLEAR TO THE U.S. THAT BIN LADEN WAS THE PERSON WHO GAVE LEADERSHIP AND GUIDANCE TO THE PEOPLE WHO HAD DONE THIS. WHILE WE PREFERRED TO RESOLVE THE

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ISSUE IN A MANNER THAT DOES NOT INCREASE ANIMOSITY BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE TALIBAN, WE COULD NOT PROMISE THAT WE WOULD NOT STRIKE AFGHANISTAN AGAIN IF THE PROBLEM WAS NOT RESOLVED. THIS WAS A REALITY THAT THE LEADERSHIP IN KANDAHAR NEEDED TO DEAL WITH.

15. (S) WAKIL SAID HE UNDERSTOOD, BUT ASKED WHY THE ONLY U.S. SOLUTION TO THE BIN LADEN PROBLEM WAS TO HAVE HIM EXPELLED. HE WANTED TO KNOW WHY AND TO WHERE. HE SAID THAT, WHILE THE U.S. BELIEVED THAT BIN LADEN WAS THE HEAD OF A TERRORIST NETWORK, THE TALIBAN COULD ONLY CHARGE HIM WITH TWO PARTICULARS: THE FIRST WAS AN UNAUTHORIZED NEWS CONFERENCE IN KHOST AND THE STATEMENT HE HAD MADE FOLLOWING THE AIRSTRIKES. THESE VIOLATED THE TALIBAN-IMPOSED PROHIBITION ON HIS SPEAKING OUT. WAKIL SAID THE BIN LADEN HAD BEEN WARNED THAT IF HE ACTIVELY SPONSORED TERRORIST ACTIVITIES WHILE PRESENT IN AFGHANISTAN HE WOULD BE PROSECUTED. BUT IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR THE TALIBAN LEADERSHIP TO FIRST TIGHTEN

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CONTROL OVER HIM AND THEN, WITHOUT EVIDENCE OF FURTHER WRONGDOING, SHIFT COURSE AND TURN HIM OVER TO THE U.S. THIS WOULD CAUSE INTERNAL PROBLEMS FOR THE TALIBAN WITHIN AFGHANISTAN THAT WOULD RESULT IN THEIR DEMISE.

16. (S) CHARGE SAID HE WANTED TO CLARIFY A MISPERCEPTION THAT THE TALIBAN MIGHT HAVE ABOUT THE SAUDI POSITION ON BIN LADEN. HE ASKED SPECIFICALLY WHETHER THE TALIBAN HAD SPOKEN AGAIN TO PRINCE TURKI BIN FAISAL FOLLOWING THE INTERIOR MINISTER'S PUBLIC STATEMENT. WAKIL SAID THEY HAD NOT.

[REDACTED]

WAKIL RESPONDED THAT THE SAUDIS DID NOT SEEM TO BE PREPARED TO TALK TO KANDAHAR AT PRESENT IN ANY EVENT. THIS WAS UNFORTUNATE BECAUSE THE TALIBAN HAD GIVEN THE SAUDIS AN AUTHENTIC PROPOSAL FOR RESOLVING THE BIN LADEN ISSUE. THE JOINT MEETING OF SAUDI AND AFGHAN ULEMAS COULD HAVE PRODUCED A SOLUTION THAT WOULD HAVE ENABLED THE TALIBAN TO EXPEL BIN LADEN IN A WAY THAT AVOIDED THE INTERNAL PROBLEMS THAT THE TALIBAN LEADERSHIP FEARED SUCH A PROPOSAL COULD STILL WORK; IT WAS ONLY SAUDI "PRIDE" THAT STOOD IN THE WAY.

17. (S) WAKIL SAID HE HAD EARLIER ASKED AMBASSADOR MILAM WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF BIN LADEN WERE TURNED OVER TO THE UNITED STATES. THE AMBASSADOR HAD REPLIED THAT HE WOULD BE TRIED, AND IF CONVICTED, PUNISHED. ASKED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF HE WAS TURNED OVER TO THE SAUDIS, THE AMBASSADOR OPINED THAT THE TREATMENT MIGHT BE HARSHER AND MORE RAPID. WAKIL SAID HIS AUTHORITIES HAD HEARD MANY TIMES THAT BIN LADEN WAS RICH, BUT TO THEM HE APPEARED

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TO HAVE LITTLE MORE THAN ENOUGH TO FEED HIS FAMILY. THE REST HAD
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BEEN SEIZED BY THE SAUDIS. HE SAID IT WAS CLEAR, AT ANY RATE,
THAT THE SAUDIS WOULD GIVE THEM A LOT MORE FOR TURNING OVER BIN
LADEN THAN THEY WOULD EVER GET FROM BIN LADEN HIMSELF.

18. (S) WAKIL REITERATED THAT THE TALIBAN WANTED A SOLUTION TO
THE BIN LADEN PROBLEM. THEY PERCEIVED THAT FAILURE TO RESOLVE
THE ISSUE WOULD RESULT EITHER IN THEIR TERMINATION OR IN THE END
OF BIN LADEN. HOWEVER, THEY BELIEVED THAT IF THEY BLINDLY HANDED
HIM OVER THIS WOULD CAUSE THEM INTERNAL PROBLEMS THAT WOULD BRING
THEM DOWN. THEY NEEDED ASSISTANCE IN SOLVING THE PROBLEM, SUCH
AS CONVINCING THE SAUDIS TO ACCEPT THE JOINT ULEMA IDEA, NOT
PRESSURE. HE NOTED THAT, IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE AUGUST STRIKES,
IF KANDAHAR COULD HAVE RETALIATED WITH SIMILAR STRIKES AGAINST
WASHINGTON, IT WOULD HAVE. BUT IT DID NOT WANT ANYMORE STRIKES
AGAINST ANYONE. THE TALIBAN WANTED A PEACEFUL SOLUTION.

19. (S) WAKIL ONCE AGAIN PRESSED CHARGE FOR A PROPOSAL THAT
WOULD RESOLVE THE SITUATION. CHARGE RESPONDED THAT WE HAD
ALREADY MADE SUCH A PROPOSAL, WHICH WAS TO EXPEL BIN LADEN.
WAKIL ASKED TO WHERE HE SHOULD BE EXPELLED. CHARGE SAID HE
SHOULD BE SENT TO A PLACE WHERE HE COULD BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE.
HE FACED CHARGES IN THE UNITED STATES, BUT SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPT
WERE ALSO POSSIBILITIES. WAKIL RESPONDED THAT THE AUTHORITIES IN
THESE COUNTRIES WOULD KILL HIM. CHARGE REPLIED THAT EVERY
SOLUTION PROPOSED BY THE U.S. SEEMED TO PRESENT DIFFICULTIES FOR
THE TALIBAN. WAKIL REPLIED THAT THERE APPEAR TO BE TWO WAYS TO
DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM. ONE WOULD BE TO EXPEL HIM BY FORCE, WHICH
WOULD CAUSE INTERNAL PROBLEMS FOR THE TALIBAN. THE OTHER WOULD
BE TO RESTRICT HIS ACTIVITIES IN SUCH A WAY THAT HE WOULD DECIDE
TO LEAVE OF HIS OWN VOLITION, AS WAS BEING DONE. THIS WAS WHAT
THE TALIBAN HOPED WOULD RESULT FROM THEIR CURRENT POLICY.

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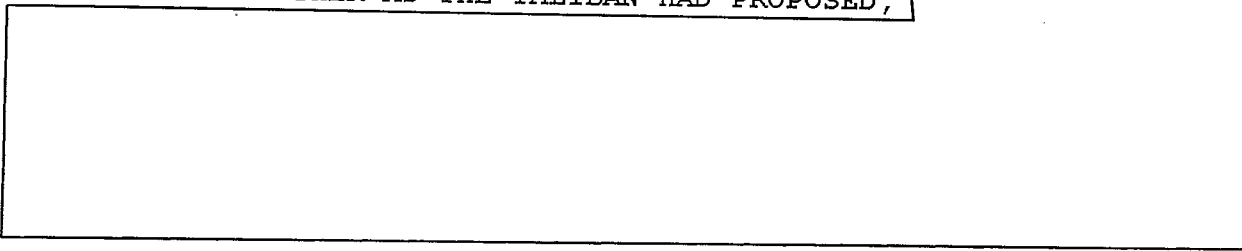
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20. (S) WAKIL SAID THAT PAKISTAN WAS ALSO UNDER PRESSURE.
CHARGE AGREED, POINTING OUT THAT PRESIDENT CLINTON WOULD BE
TALKING TO PAKISTANI PRIME MINISTER NAWAZ SHARIF ABOUT BIN LADEN
ON WEDNESDAY IN WASHINGTON AND WOULD CERTAINLY SEEK TO ENLIST HIS
HELP ON BIN LADEN. WAKIL SAID THAT THE PAKISTANIS COULD AVOID
HAVING TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM NOW BECAUSE BIN LADEN WAS NOT IN
THEIR COUNTRY. THE TALIBAN, HOWEVER, WERE CAUGHT BETWEEN "A ROCK
AND A HARD PLACE" SINCE, IF THEY EXPELLED HIM WITHOUT CAUSE THEY
WOULD HAVE INTERNAL PROBLEMS AND, IF THEY DID NOT, THEY WOULD
HAVE EXTERNAL ONES. THE UNITED STATES SHOULD HELP REMOVE THE

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ROCK.

21. (S) WAKIL SAID HE BELIEVED THAT THE SAUDIS HELD THE KEY TO RESOLVING THE PROBLEM. HE HOPED THEY WOULD CONSENT ONCE AGAIN TO TALK TO KANDAHAR. IN HIS JUDGMENT, IF THE JOINT ULEMA SCHOLARS COULD COME TOGETHER AS THE TALIBAN HAD PROPOSED,



22. (S) WAKIL SAID THAT THIS WOULD NOT BE A PROBLEM. IF THE SAUDIS WERE PREPARED TO SEND AN ULEMA DELEGATION TO KANDAHAR THE BIN LADEN MATTER COULD BE RESOLVED IN "MINUTES, NOT HOURS." THE PROBLEM WAS THAT THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT WAS TOO PROUD. THEY SIMPLY
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WANTED THE TALIBAN TO BIND THE HANDS OF BIN LADEN AND DELIVER HIM OVER. WAKIL SAID THAT THE TALIBAN WOULD ALSO BE DISCUSSING BIN LADEN WITH THE PAKISTANIS. HE WAS RETURNING TO KANDAHAR TODAY TO MEET WITH A PAKISTANI DELEGATION (WHO HE LATER SAID WOULD CONSIST OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM BOTH THE MFA AND ISI).

23. (S) CHARGE REITERATED THAT THE U.S. CONTINUED TO INSIST THAT BIN LADEN BE EXPELLED TO A PLACE WHERE HE COULD BE TRIED FOR HIS ACTIVITIES. HE HAD ALREADY MENTIONED THE POSSIBILITIES, TWO MUSLIM COUNTRIES AND THE UNITED STATES. THERE MIGHT BE OTHERS. HE REASSURED WAKIL THAT THERE WAS NO U.S. CONSPIRACY AGAINST THE TALIBAN. OUR FOCUS WAS ON GETTING BIN LADEN EXPELLED TO JUSTICE. THIS HAD BECOME A MAJOR NEW OBSTACLE IN TERMS OF OUR RECOGNIZING THE TALIBAN, PREVENTED US FROM PERMITTING ANY DEGREE OF NORMALIZATION TO TAKE PLACE, AND DOUBTLESS WOULD LEAD US TO SPEAK OUT AGAINST THE TALIBAN IF IT CONTINUED. ALTHOUGH THE EXPULSION OF BIN LADEN DID NOT MEAN THE END OF OUR DIFFERENCES, IT WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR US TO WORK TOGETHER TO ADDRESS A COMMON AGENDA.

24. (S) CHARGE STRESSED THAT BIN LADEN AND HIS NETWORK WERE STILL ACTIVE. JUST LAST WEEK WE HAD BEEN FORCED TO TEMPORARILY CLOSE OUR EMBASSY IN BANGKOK AND ISSUE A THREAT WARNING REGARDING VIENNA DUE TO INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION REGARDING POSSIBLE THREATS FROM BIN LADEN. HE WAS STILL ACTIVE, STILL IN TOUCH WITH HIS PEOPLE, STILL TRYING TO KILL AMERICANS. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, HE ASKED, HOW DO YOU EXPECT THE UNITED STATES TO BEHAVE?

25. (S) WAKIL SAID HE WONDERED WHETHER BIN LADEN WAS REALLY

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BEHIND EVERYTHING THAT WE SAID HE WAS. WAS IT NOT POSSIBLE THAT THERE WERE OTHERS WHOSE ACTIVITIES WERE BEING ATTRIBUTED TO BIN
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LADEN? CHARGE ASSURED HIM THAT WE HAVE DEMONSTRATED A CLEAR CONNECTION BETWEEN BIN LADEN, HIS NETWORK AND THESE EVENTS. HE ASKED WAKIL WHETHER ONE GRABS A SNAKE BY THE HEAD OR THE TAIL; WAKIL OBSERVED THAT WHEN DEALING WITH A SNAKE, ONE SHOULD LOOK IN ALL THE HOLES AROUND TO MAKE SURE IT DOESN'T HAVE ANY OFFSPRING. DROPPING THE METAPHORS, WAKIL SAID HE CONTINUED TO WONDER WHETHER THE ALLEGATIONS WERE REALLY TRUE, THEN OBSERVED THAT SADDAM HUSSEIN WAS THE ROOT CAUSE OF ALL THESE PROBLEMS.

26. (S) CHARGE SAID THAT HE WAS STILL UNSURE OF WHY THE TALIBAN WOULD HAVE INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES IF BIN LADEN WERE TO BE EXPELLED. NOR DID HE UNDERSTAND WHY THE MATERIAL WE HAD PASSED TO THE TALIBAN HAD FAILED TO PASS MUSTER. IT HAD BEEN HIGHLY DETAILED AND REPRESENTED THE MOST WE COULD DO SHORT OF CARRYING OUT AN ACTUAL TRIAL. WAKIL (ON FOURTH ASKING) FINALLY OFFERED AN EXPLANATION OF SORTS OF THE INTERNAL DYNAMIC: HE SAID THAT "THE PEOPLE" WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE TALIBAN HAD EXPELLED A MAN WHO WAS REGARDED AS A "GREAT MUJAHID" DURING THE WAR AGAINST THE SOVIETS. THEY WOULD REJECT THE TALIBAN IF THE TALIBAN TOOK THIS ACTION AGAINST BIN LADEN. CHARGE RESPONDED THAT THIS WENT TO THE HEART OF THE ISSUE: WE HAD BEEN URGING THE TALIBAN TO BEHAVE LIKE A GOVERNMENT FOR TWO YEARS. NOW WE WERE TOLD THEY WERE SO WEAK THAT THEIR CONTINUED CONTROL OVER AFGHANISTAN DEPENDED ON THE FATE OF THIS ONE MAN. IF THE TALIBAN SO DESIRED TO BE RECOGNIZED AND REGARDED AS THE GOVERNMENT IN AFGHANISTAN, THEY HAD TO RECOGNIZED THEMSELVES THAT THE ROLE OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IS TO SHAPE PUBLIC OPINION, NOT TO DECLINE TO ACT BECAUSE THEY THINK OPINION IS OTHERWISE.

27. (S) CHARGE PROMISED TO REPORT BACK TO WASHINGTON ON THEIR CONVERSATION AND ASKED WAKIL IF HE HAD PLANS TO RETURN TO
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ISLAMABAD IN THE NEAR FUTURE. WAKIL REPLIED THAT HE HAD NO PLANS BUT COULD RETURN IF THE SITUATION WARRANTED.

28. (S) COMMENT: OUR SENSE OF THE DISCUSSION WAS THAT WAKIL WANTED VERY STRONGLY TO CONVEY THE MESSAGE THAT THE TALIBAN DID NOT CONSIDER THE BIN LADEN MATTER RESOLVED IN THE WAKE OF THE RECENT SUPREME COURT DECISION. SINCE WAKIL MENTIONED THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER AIRSTRIKES A NUMBER OF TIMES, THE TALIBAN MAY WELL FEAR THAT, ONCE WE DECIDE THE DIPLOMATIC TRACK HAS RUN ITS COURSE, WE WILL ONCE AGAIN PURSUE THE MILITARY OPTION. HE WAS GENTLY MENACING, IF SUCH A THING IS POSSIBLE, REGARDING

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TALIBAN ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO FURTHER MILITARY ACTION AGAINST BIN LADEN.

29. (S) OF COURSE, HIS COMMENTS ALSO SEEM TO REFLECT AN UNDERSTANDING THAT FOR US THE MATTER WILL ONLY BE RESOLVED ONCE BIN LADEN IS EXPELLED FROM AFGHANISTAN. HE WAS ALSO SEEMED TO BE FULLY AWARE OF THE DIPLOMATIC, ECONOMIC AND MILITARY PRICE THE TALIBAN WERE PAYING, AND WOULD CONTINUE TO PAY, FOR HARBORING BIN LADEN.

30. (S) IF WAKIL IS TO BE BELIEVED THERE REMAIN CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE TALIBAN WOULD EXPEL BIN LADEN, PARTICULARLY IF THE MOVE HAS RELIGIOUS COVER. ALTHOUGH IT TOOK HIM A WHILE TO GET AROUND TO THE POINT, HE APPEARS TO BELIEVE THAT THE JOINT SAUDI-TALIBAN ULEMA PROPOSAL STANDS THE BEST CHANCE OF SUCCESS. HIS EXPLANATION OF THE INTERNAL LIMITS ON THE EXPULSION OPTION IS NOT CREDIBLE. HE IS EITHER STRETCHING THE TRUTH OR, MORE LIKELY, REFLECTING SOME FUNDAMENTAL DISAGREEMENT WITHIN THE RANKS OF THE

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TALIBAN ON HOW TO DEAL WITH BIN LADEN THAT CAN ONLY BE RESOLVED BY RELIGIOUS TREATMENT. HE MAY BE TRYING TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM OF MULLAH OMAR'S VIEW.

31. (S) WHILE IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE TALIBAN ARE SIMPLY PLAYING FOR TIME IN SEEKING TO REINVIGORATE THE DIPLOMATIC TRACK, PERHAPS IN THE HOPE THAT WE WILL EVENTUALLY LOSE INTEREST IN THE MILITARY OPTION, IT IS AT LEAST POSSIBLE THAT THEY -- SOME OF THEM -- ARE SERIOUS ABOUT FINDING A PEACEFUL WAY OUT. THEY ARE CERTAINLY NERVOUS ABOUT THE ALTERNATIVE. UNFORTUNATELY, IN THE ABSENCE OF SOLID RELIABLE INTELLIGENCE ON THAT SUBJECT, THERE IS PROBABLY ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT. WE NOTED THE DEPARTMENT'S REQUEST OVER THE PAST WEEKEND TO RIYADH ON THE SUBJECT OF THE INTERIOR MINISTER'S STATEMENT; WE HAVE NOT SEEN A REPLY. END COMMENT.

EASTHAM
UNQUOTE: ALBRIGHT

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