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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5253
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AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY
AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
AMEMBASSY ALMATY
USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL
USCINCPC PAC HONOLULU HI//FPA JS//
AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
DIA WASHDC
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USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
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TAGS: PTER, PGOV, AF, SA, US
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: RAISING BIN LADIN WITH THE TALIBAN

REFS: A) STATE 36966;  
     B) FBIS 211126Z FEB 97 LD 2102112697;  
     C) ISLAMABAD 1113; D) ISLAMABAD 1745

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR THOMAS PRICE. REASON: 1.5(C) (D).

2. (C) SUMMARY: TALIBAN OFFICIALS GAVE MIXED SIGNALS ON BIN LADIN TO THE LATEST DELEGATION OF US OFFICIALS TO VISIT KANDAHAR AND KABUL MARCH 2 AND 3. A MEMBER OF THE TALIBAN INNER SHURA, MULLAH EHSANULLAH EHSAN, SAID EXPULSION OF BIN LADIN FROM AFGHANISTAN WAS CONFIDENTIAL.

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NOT THE SOLUTION; HE SEEMED TO WANT TO BARGAIN TALIBAN ACTION AGAINST BIN LADIN FOR U.S. ACTION ON RECOGNITION OF THE TALIBAN GOVERNMENT. DEPUTY FM STANAKZAI SUGGESTED THE TALIBAN AND SAUDIS WERE WORKING OUT A SOLUTION TO THE BIN LADIN "PROBLEM." ANY LIGHT EMBASSY RIYADH CAN SHED ON SAUDI/TALIBAN TALKS ON BIN LADIN WOULD BE APPRECIATED. TALIBAN FM WAS ALSO REMINDED THAT THE US WAITED A TALIBAN RESPONSE ON TIMING OF A VISIT TO CAMPS REPORTEDLY CLOSED BY THE TALIBAN. END SUMMARY.

3. (C) SA/PAB DEPUTY DIRECTOR CAMP, DRAWING ON REF A TALKING POINTS, RAISED OSAMA BIN LADIN WITH TALIBAN FM MULLAH MOHAMMAD GHAUS AND SHURA MEMBER/AFPGHANISTAN BANK CHAIRMAN MULLAH EHSANULLAH EHSAN IN KABUL MARCH 2 AND AGAIN WITH TALIBAN DEPUTY FM STANAKZAI IN KANDAHAR MARCH 3. WITH STANAKZAI, A FLUENT ENGLISH SPEAKER, CAMP ALSO LEFT A COPY OF REF FBIS TRANSLATION OF REPORT OF BIN LADIN'S CALL TO KILL AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN SAUDI ARABIA BROADCAST FEB 20 ON LONDON CHANNEL 4.

4. (C) GHAUS MADE NO COMMENT IN RESPONSE. EHSAN, REPORTEDLY ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE TALIBAN'S INNER SHURA, ASKED SOME CLARIFYING QUESTIONS. AT THE END OF THE THREE-HOUR MEETING WITH CAMP, ISLAMABAD POLCOUNS, AND PESHAWAR PO, EHSAN SINGLED OUT THE CASE OF BIN LADIN FOR A RESPONSE. EHSAN SAID IT WAS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND HOW BIN LADIN CAME TO AFGHANISTAN; HE WAS "INVITED TO
AFGHANISTAN BY THE ENEMIES OF THE TALIBAN" BEFORE THE TALIBAN
CONTROLLED THAT PART OF AFGHANISTAN. THE PRESENCE OF BIN LADIN IN
AFGHANISTAN DID NOT INDICATE TALIBAN SUPPORT FOR TERRORISM. EHSAN
ASKED RHECTORICALLY, "WHEN THE US SAYS BIN LADIN SHOULD BE EXPELLED
FROM AFGHANISTAN, TO WHERE AND HOW SHOULD HE BE EXPELLED? THE
PROBLEM CANNOT BE SOLVED BY EXPULSIONS. BIN LADIN WAS EXPELLED
FROM SAUDI ARABIA TO SUDAN AND FROM SUDAN TO AFGHANISTAN."

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5. (C) EHSAN SUGGESTED BIN LADIN DID NOT HAVE THE MEANS OF
COMMUNICATION AT HIS DISPOSAL IN AFGHANISTAN TO COMMUNICATE HIS
VIEWS TO FOLLOWERS IN SAUDI ARABIA. EHSAN STATED THAT THE TALIBAN
DID NOT KNOW THE SPECIFICS OF EXACTLY WHERE BIN LADIN LIVED. "IF
HIS PRESENCE IS LOCATED IN AREAS UNDER OUR CONTROL, WE WILL
DEFINITELY IMPOSE A BAN ON HIS ACTIVITIES." EHSAN CONCLUDED BY
STATING THAT THE TALIBAN WANTED TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE U.S.
MAYBE THE TALIBAN COULD START TO ADDRESS U.S. CONCERNS. IF THE
U.S. DID NOT WANT EVERY AFGHAN TO BECOME A BIN LADIN, THE ISLAMIC
GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED AND THEN ALL OF
THESE PROBLEMS WOULD BE SOLVED.

6. (C) DEPUTY FM STANAKZAI IN KABUL THE NEXT DAY, MARCH 3, WAS A
BIT MORE FORTHCOMING. HE RESPONDED THAT THE TALIBAN DO NOT ALLOW
THEIR PEOPLE TO ENGAGE IN TERRORISM AND SO WOULD NEVER ALLOW
FOREIGNERS TO ENGAGE IN TERRORIST ACTS FROM AFGHAN TERRITORY. BIN
LADIN HAD HAD CLOSE CONTACT WITH HEKMATYAR, SAYYAF, AND RABBANI -
THE TALIBAN'S ENEMIES. "MAYBE THOSE LEADERS HAD HAD TERRORIST
CAMPS, BUT WITH ALLAH'S HELP WE ARE CLOSING DOWN THOSE CAMPS."
STANAKZAI IMPLIED THAT BIN LADIN, NOT ONLY WAS NOT SUPPLYING VAST
SUMS OF MONEY TO THE TALIBAN AS SOMETIMES ALLEGED, BUT WAS BEING
FED BY THE TALIBAN.

7. (C) POLCOUNS INTERJECTED THAT IF THE PROBLEM IN EXTRADITING BIN

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LADIN WAS MERELY LOGISTICS, THE U.S. COULD HELP. STANAKZAI REPLIED THAT THE TALIBAN WERE IN CONTACT WITH THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR IN KABUL. THE TALIBAN DID NOT WANT "TO SPOIL THEIR RECORD." THE TALIBAN "DON'T WANT A THIEF IN THEIR HOUSE," STANAKZAI CONCLUDED, AND DECLARED THAT "WE WILL SOLVE THIS PROBLEM."

8. (C) COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST: TALIBAN OFFICIALS PRESENTED MIXED SIGNALS ON BIN LADIN TO THE LATEST GROUP OF US OFFICIALS TO RAISE THIS ISSUE IN THEIR TERRITORY. WHILE BOTH EHSAN AND STANAKZAI MADE PERFUNCTORY REMARKS AGAINST TERRORISM, EHSAN STATED DIRECTLY THAT THE SOLUTION WAS NOT THE EXPULSION OF BIN LADIN FROM CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 01750 02 OF 02 041316Z AFGHANISTAN. HE SEEMED TO WANT TO BARGAIN ACTION ON BIN LADIN FOR ACTION FROM THE U.S. ON RECOGNITION OF THE TALIBAN GOVERNMENT. STANAKZAI, ON THE OTHER HAND, SUGGESTED THE TALIBAN WERE WORKING WITH THE SAUDIS ON A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF BIN LADIN. IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF EMBASSY RIYADH COULD ASCERTAIN FROM THE SAUDIS WHAT THEY AND THE TALIBAN MAY HAVE AGREED UPON IN CONNECTION WITH BIN LADIN. END COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST.

9. (C) ON THE TALIBAN OFFER TO ALLOW U.S. OFFICIALS TO VISIT THE CAMPS IN NANGARHAR AND KHOST PROVINCES REPORTEDLY CLOSED BY THE TALIBAN, PO REMINDED FM GAHAUS THAT THE U.S. SIDE WAS WAITING FOR A RESPONSE FROM KANDAHAR ON SUITABLE TIMING FOR THE TRIP, PROMISED BY DEPUTY FM ABDUL JALIL FOR "EARLY MARCH" (REF C). SIMONS

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