1. (U) SUMMARY: THE TALIBAN MADE SIGNIFICANT ADVANCES NORTH OF THE HINDU KUSH MOUNTAINS DURING THE PAST YEAR, AND ARE IN POSITION TO MAINTAIN AND CONFIDENTIAL

INCREASE PRESSURE ON THE OPPOSITION WHEN FIGHTING RESUMES IN EARNEST, AS IT LIKELY WILL IN THE SPRING OF 2001. DESPITE THE TALIBAN'S IMPROVED MILITARY POSITION, THEY REMAIN UNABLE TO DELIVER A KNOCK-OUT BLOW. ON THE OTHER SIDE, THE OPPOSITION'S FUTURE IS INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO THE CONTINUED MILITARY LEADERSHIP OF AHMAD SHAH MASoud AND HIS ABILITY TO PROCURE THE MATERIEL THAT HE NEEDS TO CONTEND WITH THE SUPERIOR MANPOWER AND FIREPOWER OF THE TALIBAN. END SUMMARY.


THE SHOMALI FRONT

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3. *(SBU): THE FIRST HALF OF 2000 WITNESSED SPORADIC
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SKIRMISHING AROUND THE COUNTRY BETWEEN THE TALIBAN,
UNDER THE SUPREME LEADERSHIP OF MULLAH MOHAMMAD OMAR,
AND THE OPPOSITION, THE UNITED ISLAMIC FRONT FOR THE
SAVATION OF AFGHANISTAN (UIFSA, A.K.A. THE NORTHERN
ALLIANCE), WHICH IS NOMINALLY LED BY PRESIDENT
BURHANUDDIN RABBANI, BUT IN FACT IS RUN BY LOOSE
COALITION OF MILITARY LEADERS GROUPED AROUND AHMAD
SHAH MASOUD, RABBANI'S DEFENSE MINISTER. THIS INITIAL
FIGHTING WAS INCONSEQUENTIAL UNTIL EARLY JULY, WHEN
THE TALIBAN LAUNCHED THEIR FIRST MAJOR OFFENSIVE OF
THE YEAR, IN THE SHOMALI PLAIN REGION, JUST NORTH OF
KABUL, AS REPORTED IN REF A. IN A REPEAT OF THE
FAILED OFFENSIVES OF PREVIOUS SUMMERS, THE TALIBAN
SUFFERED HEAVY CASUALTIES AND TOOK LITTLE NEW GROUND,
AS NOTED IN REF B. BY LATE JULY, THE FIGHTING HAD
GROUNDED TO A STALEMATE, AND ESTABLISHED THE CURRENT
FRONT LINE IN THE REGION. AT PRESENT, THE FRONT LINE
STRETCHES FROM A POINT SEVERAL KILOMETERS SOUTH OF THE
TOWN OF MAHMUD-I RAQI, IN KAPISA PROVINCE, DUE WEST TO
THE INTERSECTION OF THE SPUR ROAD THAT CONNECTS THE

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     INR-00  IO-00  L-00  VCE-00  AC-01  NEA-00  NSAE-00
     NSCE-00  OIC-02  OMB-01  OPIC-01  PA-00  FM-00  PRS-00
     ACE-00  P-00  SCT-00  SP-00  IRM-00  TRSE-00  USIE-00
     ASDS-01  FMP-00  SNIS-00  NISC-00  PMB-00  DSCC-00  DRL-02
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FM AMCONSUL PESHAWAR
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AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY
INFO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY ALMATY
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY ANKARA

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PARIS FOR POL - HANSON; ROME FOR POL - QUESADA;
ISLAMABAD ALSO FOR LAHORE; ALMATY ALSO FOR DUSHANBE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/12/11
TAGS: MOPS, PGOV, ASEC, AF
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: MILITARY SITUATION REVIEWED

BAGRAM AIRFIELD WITH THE KABUL TO MAZAR-I SHARIF HIGHWAY. THE BAGRAM AIRFIELD IS CURRENTLY A NO-MAN'S-LAND, AND THUS THE TALIBAN ARE SPARED FROM MASOOD USING IT, AS HE HAS IN YEARS PAST, AS A LAUNCHING SITE FOR ROCKET ATTACKS ON KABUL, WHICH IS A MERE FIFTY KMS FROM THE FRONT. TALIBAN OPERATIONS IN THE SHOMALI APPEAR TO BE UNDER THE DIRECT CONTROL OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE IN KABUL, AND ARE STAGED FROM THEIR SUPPLY DEPOT AT SHAKAR DARA, JUST NORTH OF KABUL, AS WELL AS FROM OTHER STRATEGIC BASES IN GHORBAND, PARWAN PROVINCE, TO THE WEST OF THE SHOMALI, AND IN NIJRAB, KAPISA PROVINCE, TO THE EAST OF THE SHOMALI.

4. (SBU) THE TALIBAN HAVE EFFECTIVELY DENIED MUCH OF THE FERTILE SHOMALI TO THE UIFSA, BUT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT ADVANCES NORTH OF THE EXISTING FRONT LINE. IN PART, THE REASONS FOR THE
TALIBAN'S LACK OF SUCCESS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE
DIFFICULTIES OF THE TERRAIN: AS THEY MOVE NORTHWARDS
THROUGH THE SHOMALI, THEY ARE COMPELLED TO FIGHT
UPHILL AND IN AN EVER-NARROWING APPROACH TO THE SALANG
PASS. THE UIFSA FORCES HAVE THE CORRESPONDING
ADVANTAGES OF POSITIONS ABOVE THE ATTACKERS FROM WHICH
THEY CAN CONTROL THE ONLY AVENUES OF ATTACK.

Moreover, the UIFSA is taking no chances with losing
this strategic region, which guards the southern
entrance to the UIFSA stronghold in the Panjshir
valley. A number of key UIFSA commanders, including
Abdul-Rasul Sayyaf in Gul Bahar; General Baba Jan in
Charikar; and Haji Shir Alam near Nijrab, are leading
the UIFSA defense of the region. Given the Taliban's
history of failure and frustration in the Shomali,
their chances for success in the region in 2001 appear
to be slim, barring some dramatic deterioration in the
UIFSA's group cohesion or logistical situation.

EASTERN AFGHANISTAN

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5. (SBU) The past year also witnessed sporadic but
essentially insignificant fighting to the east of
Kabul in the provinces of Laghman and Kunar. The
recent killing of Abdullah Jan Wahidi, the UIFSA
commander who had defected to the Taliban only to
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REJOIN THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE A FEW MONTHS LATER, AS
REPORTED REF. C, LEFT UIFSA OPERATIONS IN LAGHMAN IN
THE HANDS OF HIS SUCCESSOR, MUALAM NABI, WHO IS
ALLIED WITH WAHIDI'S BROTHER, ABDULLAH HADI WAHIDI.
IN KUNAR PROVINCE, UIFSA ALLIES SUCH AS JAN DAD,
HAZRAT ALL, AND MALIK ZAREEN CONTINUED TO MOUNT
HARASSING OPERATIONS AGAINST THE TALIBAN FROM THEIR
MOUNTAIN STRONGHOLDS, BUT WITH LITTLE CONSEQUENCE.
THE THREAT OF THESE FORCES TO THE TALIBAN SEEMS TO BE
MORE APPARENT THAN REAL. ON THE TALIBAN SIDE,
MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE REGION ARE UNDER THE
IMMEDIATE DIRECTION OF MAULAVI ABDUL SALAM ROCKETI.
THE TALIBAN'S OVERALL ADMINISTRATION IN THE EASTERN
ZONE, HEADQUARTERED AT JALALABAD, IS RUN BY MAULAVI
ABDUL KABIR AND HIS DEPUTY, MAULAVI SADR-I AZAM.
LOGISTICS ARE OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE TO THE BALANCE
OF FORCES IN THE EASTERN ZONE. THE TALIBAN LINKS TO
KABUL, AND ALSO TO PAKISTAN, ARE ESPECIALLY STRONG
HERE. IN CONTRAST, THE UIFSA ALLIES, LARGELY CUT OFF
FROM THE MAIN UIFSA FORCES IN THE PANJSHIR VALLEY,
RELY ON A MIX OF SPORADIC HELICOPTER RE-SUPPLY FLIGHTS FROM THE NORTH AND OCCASIONAL CASH INFUSIONS. MASOUD APPEARS TO BE USING SUPPORT FOR HIS EASTERN ALLIES AS A WAY TO COMPEL THE TALIBAN TO COMMIT MILITARY RESOURCES AWAY FROM THE MAIN SHOMALI FRONT, BUT BASED ON THE MODEST EFFORTS THESE ALLIES HAVE MADE OVER THE PAST YEAR, IT'S NOT CLEAR THAT MASOUD IS GETTING GOOD VALUE FOR HIS MONEY.
6. (C) REGARDING THE SITUATION IN EASTERN
AFGHANISTAN, IN A MEETING WITH CONOFF ON 12/28/00,

THE PECULIAR CASE OF KHOST

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7. (SBU) SOUTH OF JALALABAD, THE PAST FEW WINTERS
HAVE WITNESSED CHAFFING BY THE PASHTUN TRIBESMEN OF
KHOST PROVINCE, AND PARTIA TO A LESSEER DEGREE, AGAINST
THE TALIBAN ADMINISTRATION. UNLIKE MANY REGIONS OF
TALIBAN-OCUPIED AFGHANISTAN, THE KHOSR REGION HAS NOT
BEEN DISARMED, AND SO THIS RESTIVENESS GIVES THE
TALIBAN SOME CAUSE FOR WORRY. REPORTS PROVIDED BY
TRAVELERS RETURNING FROM THE AREA IN EARLY DECEMBER
2000 suggest that there has lately been a resurgence in tribal-based dissatisfaction with the Taliban, which resulted in some arrests of local leaders followed by public humiliations and punishments. Still, the Taliban have thus far controlled the situation in Khost through a mixture of oppression and concessions, such as when they replaced an unpopular governor in January 2000. In Khost, as in all Pashtun-dominated areas, the Taliban's occupation of the countryside has been assisted by the fact that however much Afghan Pashtuns dislike the Taliban, they are unlikely to ally themselves with the Tajik-dominated UIFSA in a manner that would seriously challenge the Taliban. Pashtun dissatisfaction with the Taliban in Khost thus begs an intriguing question: confidential

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What will it take for a viable Pashtun-based opposition to emerge as a challenge to the Taliban?

The Northeast: Baghlan, Kunduz, and Takhar

8. (C) The Taliban's most dramatic success in 2000 occurred north of the Hindu Kush Mountains during August and September in Baghlan, Kunduz, and Takhar provinces. It now seems clear that the July 2000 attack in the Shomali, described in Para 3 above, was merely a poorly planned, and costly effort to divert the attention of the UIFSA from the Taliban offensive in the northeast, the preparation for which had been long underway. Over the first half of 2000, the Taliban moved significant numbers of troops and supplies into position in the north, using Mazar-I-Sharif as a staging ground. The Taliban's northern advance, which culminated in the early September capture of Taloqan, the capital of Takhar, significantly increased pressure on the UIFSA supply routes connecting the UIFSA base in the Panjshir with supply depots in Tajikistan.
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AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RIYADH
AMEMBASSY ROME

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AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMCONSUL DUBAI
AMCONSUL FRANKFURT
AMCONSUL JEDDAH
AMCONSUL KARACHI
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THE FRONT LINE NORTH OF THE HINDU KUSH

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HELICOPTERS. IN TAKHAR, THE TALIBAN SEEM TO HAVE THEIR FOOT ON MASOUD'S THROAT. IT ALSO APPEARS AS IF THEY HAVE RESIGNED THEMSELVES TO WAITING TILL THE SPRING TO TRY TO DELIVER A CRUSHING BLOW. GIVEN THE CONFIDENTIAL IMPORTANCE OF THE SITUATION TO BOTH SIDES, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THEY WILL BE READY TO CONTINUE THEIR STRUGGLE IN THIS AREA AS SOON AS THE WEATHER PERMITS.

DARA-YE SUF
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2001 OPENS WITH FIGHTING IN BAMIYAN

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11. (SBU) AS REPORTED IN REF E, THE NEW YEAR GOT OFF TO VIOLENT START WHEN THE RETURN OF HIZB-I WAHDAT

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Leader Karim Khalili to Central Afghanistan from Iran
energized the Shia Hazara fighters in Bamiyan province. By January 9, however, the Taliban managed
to retake the ground they had lost in the Hazarajat.

WHAT'S UP WITH DOSTUM AND ISMAIL KHAN?

12. (C) THE YEAR PAST ALSO WITNESSED EFFORTS BY ABDUL RASHID DOSTUM, THE ETHNIC UZBEK GENERAL AND SOME TIME UIFSA ALI WHO WAS EJECTED FROM MAZAR-SHARIF IN AUGUST 1998 BY THE TALIBAN TO RE-ENTER THE FIGHT IN SUPPORT OF MASOUD. DOSTUM'S MOTIVATIONS AND FOREIGN SUPPORT REMAIN UNCLEAR, AS HE HAS APPEARED TO HAVE HAD SUPPORT FROM IRAN, TURKEY, AND UZBEKISTAN AT DIFFERENT TIMES. HOWEVER, MASOUD'S ETHNIC UZBEK COMMANDERS HAVE URGED HIM TO RECONCILE WITH DOSTUM, WHO IS NOW LIVING IN TURKEY. OUR CONTACTS TELL US, HOWEVER, THAT EVEN THOUGH DOSTUM AND MASOUD ARE EAGER TO RE-FORGE THEIR ALLIANCE, THEY HAVE BEEN PREVENTED FROM DOING SO BY THE GOVERNMENT OF TAJIKISTAN'S PROHIBITION ON DOSTUM USING TAJIK TERRITORY AS A BASE FROM WHICH TO ASSIST MASOUD. OUR CONTACTS ALSO TELL US THAT DOSTUM AND HIS FIGHTERS WOULD BE SLAUGHTERED BY THE TALIBAN IF THEY ATTEMPTED TO CROSS INTO AFGHANISTAN FROM THE RELATIVE SAFETY OF UZBEKISTAN, SINCE THE TALIBAN COULD SUBJECT THE INVADERS TO A WITHERING FIRE WHEN THEY ATTEMPTED TO CROSS THE AMU DARYA (OXUS) RIVER INTO AFGHAN TERRITORY THAT IS FIRMLY CONTROLLED BY THE TALIBAN. DOSTUM'S ENTRY INTO AFGHANISTAN WOULD BE MUCH EASIER FROM TAJIKISTAN INTO THE UIFSA-CONTROLLED AREAS OF KUNDUZ AND/OR TAKHAR PROVINCE, BUT THE TAJIK GOVERNMENT'S FEAR THAT DOSTUM MIGHT SOMEHOW INCITE A REBELLION BY TAJIKISTAN'S UZBEK ETHNIC MINORITY HAS MADE THIS OPTION UNATTRACTIONAL.

THUS FAR LED THE TAJIK GOVERNMENT TO FORBID DOSTUM FROM JOINING MASOUD VIA TAJIKISTAN. WE HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT SOME OF THE UIFSA'S TAJIK COMMANDERS, WHO FEAR UZBEK DOMINATION OF THE UIFSA IF DOSTUM WERE TO
RETURN HAVE ALSO BEEN LESS THAN SUPPORTIVE OF
MASOUD'S EFFORT TO ENGINEER DOSTUM'S RETURN. WE
SUSPECT THAT COLLEAGUES IN DUSHANBE MAY BE ABLE TO
OFFER A BETTER-INFORMED ANALYSIS OF DOSTUM'S RELATIONS
WITH THE TAJIK GOVERNMENT.

13. (SBU) IF DOSTUM IS ONE NORTHERN ALLIANCE EXILE
FIGURE WHOSE RETURN HAS LONG BEEN RUMORED "TO BE JUST
AROUND THE CORNER," THEN THE CASE OF ISMAIL KHAN HAS
ENCOURAGED SIMILAR SPECULATION. AFTER ISMAIL KHAN'S
DRAMATIC ESCAPE FROM A QANDAHAR PRISON IN THE SPRING
OF 2000, AFGHAN WATCHERS, IN PESHAWAR AT LEAST, HAVE
BEEN WONDERING IF AND WHEN ISMAIL KHAN, WHO BY MOST
ACCOUNTS IS NOW BASED IN MASJAD, IRAN, WILL REJOIN THE
FRAY. ASIDE FROM VARIOUS UNSOURCED RUMORS, WE HAVE
HEARD NOTHING CONCRETE ABOUT ISMAIL KHAN'S PLANS.
ISMAIL KHAN AND DOSTUM SHARE THE SAME BASIC PROBLEM:
THE TALIBAN HAVE A STRONG HOLD ON THEIR RESPECTIVE
HOME REGIONS OF NORTHWEST AND NORTH-CENTRAL
AFGHANISTAN. AS A RESULT, ANY ATTEMPT BY EITHER OF
THESE ASPIRANTS TO ENTER AFGHANISTAN IN A MAJOR WAY
WOULD REQUIRE SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT FROM IRAN AND
UZBEKISTAN RESPECTIVELY. WHILE NEITHER OF THESE
COUNTRIES APPEARS TO HAVE ANY LOVE FOR THE TALIBAN, IT
IS ALSO THE CASE THAT NEITHER SEEMS WILLING TO RISK

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OPEN CONFRONTATION WITH THE TALIBAN BY GIVING EITHER ISMAIL KHAN OR DOSTUM THE KIND OF SUPPORT THEY WOULD NEED TO ENTER AFGHANISTAN IN FORCE.

HOW SERIOUS IS MASOUD'S SITUATION?

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14. (C) REF E SUGGESTED THAT MASOUD'S SUPPLY LINES ARE INCREASINGLY THREATENED BY THE GROWING ACCOMMODATION BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND THE TALIBAN. IT DOES INDEED APPEAR THAT MASOUD MUST IMPROVE HIS SUPPLY SITUATION, AND BE READY TO DEFEND HIS SUPPLY LINES VIGOROUSLY WHEN FIGHTING RESUMES IN THE SPRING OF

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PAGE 03

PESHAW 00021 06 OF 07 121217Z 2001, IF HE HAS ANY HOPE OF CONTINUING TO CONFRONT THE TALIBAN. THE TALIBAN'S EFFORTS TO BLOCKADE UIFSA-CONTROLLED AREAS, IN DARA-YE SUF, KUNAR, AND ON THE SOUTHERN SIDE OF THE PANJSHIR, ALSO APPEAR TO BE EXACTING A TOLL. IN TAGHAB DISTRICT OF KAPISA PROVINCE, TALIBAN PRESSURE ON THE TRADE OF FOOD AND OTHER SUPPLIES WITH PANJSHIR, IN THE FORM OF HARSH JAIL SENTENCES FOR SMUGGLERS, HAS LED TO A TEN-FOLD INCREASE IN FOOD PRICES IN PANJSHIR AND RESULTANT SHORTAGES, ACCORDING TO A RELATIVE OF ONE OF OUR FSN'S WHO RECENTLY VISITED THE AREA. MASOUD IS GOING TO HAVE TO DIG DEEPLY INTO HIS EXTENSIVE MILITARY AND TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE, NOT TO MENTION HIS LUCK, IF HE IS TO CONTINUE HIS RESISTANCE TO THE TALIBAN. WE HAVE RECEIVED A RELIABLE REPORT THAT MASOUD, ON A RECENT VISIT TO FAIZABAD, BADAKHSHAN PROVINCE, ANGRILY BLAMED THE RUSSIANS FOR FAILING TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT SUPPLIES TO THE UIFSA. IN THE SAME SPEECH, MASOUD ALSO DECREED THAT LACK OF SUPPORT THAT THE UIFSA IS RECEIVING FROM THE POPULATION OF BADAKHSHAN.

15. (C) _______________ OBSERVED THAT, IN HIS VIEW, MASOUD MUST TURN THE TIDE IN THE NORTH BEFORE WINTER SNOWS CLOSE THE ROADS, OR HE MUST BE PREPARED TO DO SO IMMEDIATELY UPON THE SNOW MELT IN SPRING 2001. _______________ NOTED THAT OF THE TWO SIDES, MASOUD'S IS THE BETTER PREPARED FOR COLD-WEATHER COMBAT, THOUGH FIGHTERS ON BOTH SIDES ARE WOefully UNPREPARED FOR TRUE WINTER CONDITIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, BOTH SIDES LACK PROPER WINTER BOOTS. _______________ NOTED THAT HE THinks IT POSSIBLE THAT MASOUD MAY STILL TRY CONFIDENTIAL

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PESHAW 00021 06 OF 07 121217Z TO PUSH THE TALIBAN OUT OF TALOQAN IN EARLY 2001. AS OF LATE DECEMBER, RAIN AND WET SNOWS HAD RENDERED THE REGION A SEA OF MUD, BUT _______________ THOUGHT THAT A FEW DAYS OF SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURES, PRIOR TO ANY HEAVY SNOWFALLS, WOULD GIVE MASOUD AN OPPORTUNITY TO GO ON THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE TALIBAN OCCUPIERS OF TALOQAN, WHO ARE AT PRESENT SURROUNDED ON THREE SIDES BY THE UIFSA FORCES. _______________ ALSO NOTED THAT MASOUD HAD A HIGH INCENTIVE TO RETAKE TALOQAN, AND THE RELATIVELY COMFORTABLE RESIDENCES IN THE TOWN, BEFORE WINTER PROGRESSED ANY MORE, SINCE MANY OF MASOUD'S MEN ARE LIVING OUTSIDE OR IN TENTS.

16. (C) WITHOUT ELABORATING ON HIS EVIDENCE, _______________ ALSO SAID HE BELIEVES THAT THE GOP IS
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WORKING FURIOUSLY TO ENSURE THAT THE TALIBAN HAVE
ADEQUATE MILITARY SUPPLIES IN ADVANCE OF THE
IMPOSITION OF UNSC RESOLUTION 1333 IN MID JANUARY.

DID NOT HAVE ANY COMMENTS ON THE DEGREE TO
WHICH INDIA, IRANIAN, AND/OR RUSSIAN SUPPLIES TO THE
NORTHERN ALLIANCE MAY HAVE INCREASED IN THE RECENT
PAST.

17. (C) COMMENT: USING THEIR SUPERIOR MANPOWER,
SUPPLIES, AND THEIR IDEOLOGICAL FERVOR, THE TALIBAN
HAVE USED THE PAST YEAR TO APPROACH THE BRINK OF A
COMPLETE MILITARY OCCUPATION OF AFGHANISTAN. INDEED,
THEY HAVE BEEN IN VARIATIONS ON THIS POSITION SINCE
1996. WHY CAN'T THEY SIMPLY FINISH THE JOB? EARLY

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INFO LOG-00 MFA-01 NP-00 AID-00 ACQ-00 CIAE-00 SMEC-00
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NSCE-00 OIC-02 OMB-01 OPIC-01 PA-00 PM-00 PRS-00
ACE-00 P-00 SCT-00 SP-00 IRM-00 TRSE-00 USIE-00
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USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY ALMATY
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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LAST SUMMER, JUST BEFORE THE TALIBAN LAUNCHED THEIR SHOMALI OFFENSIVE, WE HAD HEARD FROM [ ] WHO IS AMONG THE BEST-INFORMED AND BEST-CONNECTED AFGHAN WATCHERS IN PESHAWAR, THAT THE YEAR 2000 WAS GOING TO BE DIFFERENT. THE TALIBAN, HE SAID, HAD DECIDED TO TRY A NEW APPROACH. MINDFUL OF THEIR ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, INCLUDING THE DROUGHT, AND MINDFUL OF THEIR ABYSMAL INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION, THEY WERE GOING TO ADOPT A MORE SUBTLE STRATEGY TO WINNING THE ENTIRE COUNTRY. [ ] SAID THAT HIGH-LEVEL TALIBAN OFFICIALS HAD TOLD HIM THAT THEY WOULD FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT, IMPROVING ADMINISTRATION, AND CONVERTING OPPOSITION

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COMMANDERS THROUGH BRIBERY AND DIPLOMACY. [ ] HAD BARELY TOLD US OF THIS "NEW APPROACH" WHEN THE TALIBAN TOOK THE OFFENSIVE IN THE SHOMALI IN EARLY JULY. SO MUCH FOR THE NEW APPROACH.

18. (C) COMMENT, CONTINUED: AMONG THE TALIBAN'S WEAKNESSES IS THAT THEIR ONLY REAL SUCCESS HAS COME ON THE BATTLEFIELD. THEY HAVE ESTABLISHED SECURITY, AT LEAST RELATIVE TO THE ANARCHY THAT PRECEDED THEM, AND THEY HAVE MANAGED TO EXTEND THEIR MILITARY DOMINATION
ACROSS PERHAPS 95 PERCENT OF THE COUNTRY. THEY'VE
DONE PRECIOUS LITTLE ELSE, APPARENTLY BECAUSE THEY
LACK THE CAPACITY TO DO SO. THE TALIBAN ARE LIKE THE
PROVERBIAL CARPENTER WHOSE ONLY TOOL IS A HAMMER, AND
WHO THUS TREATS EVERY PROBLEM AS A NAIL. FIGHTING IS
ALL THEY REALLY KNOW HOW TO DO. THEIR MARTIAL
ABILITIES HAVE GOTTEN THEM THIS FAR, AND MAY
EVENTUALLY ENABLE THEM TO OCCUPY EVEN MORE OF THE
COUNTRY, BUT WE STILL SEE NO EVIDENCE THAT THEY CAN
BEGIN TO DO ANYTHING ELSE THAT REAL GOVERNMENTS DO.

KATZ

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