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TEXT
TAGS: MOPS, PINR, PREL, PGOV, AF, FK
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: A REPORT OF PAKISTANI MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THE TALIBAN

REF: PESHAWAR 239

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY: BRAD HANSON, PRINCIPAL OFFICER, AMCONSUL PESHAWAR. REASON: 1.5 (D).

2. (C) SUMMARY: SOME 2000 ALLEGED PAKISTANI FIGHTERS WERE TRANSPORTED TO KABUL AIRPORT BOUND FOR KUNDUZ TO ASSIST THE TALIBAN, ACCORDING TO AN AFGHAN POLITICAL CONTACT WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE TALKED TO ONE OF THE AFGHAN TRUCK DRIVERS INVOLVED IN THE OPERATION. POST CANNOT INDEPENDENTLY VERIFY THIS REPORT. END SUMMARY.

3. (C) DURING A DISCUSSION MARCH 20 (OTHER TOPICS REFTEL).

TOLD PO OF A RECENT INCIDENT OF ALLEGED PAKISTANI MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THE TALIBAN. SAID HE HAD SPOKEN TO ONE OF THE AFGHAN TRUCK DRIVERS INVOLVED IN THE OPERATION.

4. (C) ACCORDING TO THE TRUCK DRIVER, ABOUT 1½ DAYS BEFORE THE DISCUSSION (I.E., O/A MARCH 8), 25 LARGE MERCEDES BENZ TRUCKS WITH COVERED CARGO HAULS TRAVELED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT FROM JALALABAD TO KABUL. THE TRUCKS WERE TRANSPORTING PAKISTANI FIGHTERS TO KABUL AIRPORT, FOR PROBABLE TRANSPORT TO KUNDUZ TO ASSIST THE TALIBAN. THE TRUCK DRIVER ESTIMATED THE TOTAL NUMBER OF MEN AT 2000 (COMMENT: THIS SEEMS RATHER HIGH FOR 25 TRUCKS. END COMMENT.) HE DID NOT KNOW HOW THE PAKISTANS GOT TO JALALABAD. THE TRUCK DRIVER SAID THE DRIVERS HAD BEEN WARNED NOT TO DIVULGE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT THE OPERATION OR THEY WOULD BE KILLED. (COMMENT: IT WAS NOT CLEAR ON WHAT BASIS THE TRUCK DRIVER "KNOW" THE MEN WERE PAKISTANIS. END COMMENT.)

5. (C) DID NOT KNOW IF THE "PAKISTANIS" WERE PAKISTANI TALIBAN, I.E., GRADUATES OF PAKISTANI MADRASSAH, OR PAK MILITARY, BUT IMPLIED, THAT GIVEN THE SCALE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE TRANSPORT, THE OPERATION WAS ASSISTED BY SOME PART OF THE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT. USED THIS INCIDENT AND OTHERS TO ARGUE THAT OUTSIDE INTERFERANCE WAS THE GREATEST OBSTACLE TO AFGHANS FINDING A PEACEFUL WAY OUT OF THEIR CONFLICT.

6. (C) COMMENT: POST CANNOT INDEPENDENTLY VERIFY THIS REPORT. IT IS NO SECRET THAT HUNDREDS OF PAKISTANI TALIBAN HAVE JOINED THE TALIBAN TO FIGHT THEIR OPPONENTS; THERE WAS A PARTICULARLY LARGE INFLUX THE SUMMER OF 1997. ALSO, POST HAS REPORTED THE
OCCASIONAL ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE OF PAKISTANI MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS ADVISING THE TALIBAN INSIDE AFGHANISTAN. IT IS ALSO NO SECRET THAT THE TALIBAN HAVE LONG OPERATED AN AIR BRIDGE TO FERRY SUPPLIES AND MEN TO THEIR NORTHERN BEACHHEAD OF KUNDUZ. IF THIS INCIDENT IS TRUE, IT WOULD APPEAR TO BE A MAJOR ESCALATION IN PAKISTANI ASSISTANCE TO THE TALIBAN IN PREPARATION FOR A THIRD TALIBAN NORTHERN OFFENSIVE THIS SPRING.

HANSON

ADMIN

END OF MESSAGE

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