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ROME FOR POLHARE
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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: KISL, MOPS, SNAR, PINS, UN, SA, PK, AF
SUBJECT: FINALLY, A TALKATIVE TALIB: ORIGINS AND MEMBERSHIP
- OF THE RELIGIOUS STUDENTS' MOVEMENT

1. CONFIDENTIAL -- ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: A TALIBAN INSIDER SAYS THE MOVEMENT IS NOT
SUPPORTED BY FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS, BUT DOES HAVE CONNECTIONS TO
PASHTUNTS IN PAKISTAN AND, VIA MADRASAS, CONSERVATIVE PAKISTANI
RELIGIOUS PARTIES. THE TALIBAN, HE SAYS, DO NOT WISH TO
INTERFERE WITH THE SHI'A AND WILL PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF ETHNIC
MINORITIES. THE RELIGIOUS STUDENTS DO NOT APPEAR AVERSE TO
ELECTIONS, BUT ONLY IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ISLAMIC GOVERNMENT
RULING THROUGH SHARIAH LAW. ONCE THERE IS GREATER STABILITY IN
AFGHANISTAN AND REFUGEES HAVE BEEN REPATRIATED, A NATIONAL
SHURA AND PROVINCIAL SHURAS COULD BE ELECTED, WITH THE TALIBAN
SHURA DETERMINING WHO COULD RUN FOR OFFICE. THE TALIBAN DESIRE
GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. AND THE U.N., WHICH THEY PERCEIVE
AS UNBIASED, BUT DOUBT THE MOTIVATIONS OF SAUDI ARABIA AND THE
PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

MEETING CONFIDENTIAL

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F. POLOFF WAS CONTACTED FEBRUARY 16 BY

WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE A GOOD FRIEND AMONG THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP
OF THE TALIBAN. WHO SAID HE LIVED "JUST ACROSS THE

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BORDER® FROM THE TALIBAN OFFICIAL, _______ NOTED THAT _______ WAS VISITING ISLAMABAD, AND SUGGESTED A MEETING. _______ ADDED THAT _______ WAS TIPPED TO BECOME A "SENIOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIAL" FOR THE TALIBAN, AND WAS IN ISLAMABAD FOR INTRODUCTORY AND LOW-KEY CONTACTS WITH THE U.N. AND OTHER "FRIENDLY ELEMENTS" AND VERY MUCH DESIRED TO MEET REPRESENTATIVES OF THE U.S.

4. POLOFF MET WITH _______ AND _______ FEBRUARY 17. ALTHOUGH _______ SPOKE SOME ENGLISH, FOR MOST OF THE CONVERSATION HE RELIED ON _____ TO TRANSLATE HIS PASHTO. _______ BEGAN THE CONVERSATION BY ASKING THAT THE MEETING BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL. HE NOTED THAT PRESS REPORTS WERE SUGGESTING ERRONEOUSLY THAT THE TALIBAN WERE SUBJECT TO FOREIGN INFLUENCE AND THAT THESE ALLEGATIONS COULD HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE TALIBAN'S EFFORTS TO BRING PEACE TO AFGHANISTAN. THE TALIBAN LEADERSHIP HAD ISSUED STRICT INSTRUCTIONS THAT MEETINGS WITH FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVES -- WHICH EASILY COULD BE MISCONSTRUED AND PLAYED UP BY THE TALIBAN'S ENEMIES -- SHOULD BE AVOIDED, _______ SAID. HOWEVER, SINCE THE UNITED STATES WAS AN IMPORTANT AND UNBIASED FRIEND, _______ SAID HE HAD DECIDED TO MAKE INITIAL CONTACT.

ORIGINS OF THE TALIBAN

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5. _______ OUTLINED FOR POLOFF THE ORIGINS OF THE TALIBAN CONFIDENTIAL.

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MOVEMENT. _______ AND A RESIDENT OF THE MAROOF DISTRICT OF KANDAHAR, _______ SAID HE HAD BEEN IN AN EXCELLENT POSITION TO OBSERVE THE RISE OF THE TALIBAN. _______ AND WHILE _______ ADMITTED THAT HE WAS NOT AN ORIGINAL MEMBER OF THE TALIBAN, HE CLAIMED TO BE VERY FAMILIAR WITH ALL THE MAJOR PLAYERS.

6. _______ SAID THE TALIBAN BEGAN IN THE MEIWAND DISTRICT

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OF KANDAHAR, AT THE MADRASA OF A PROMINENT TRADER, HAJI BASHAR. HAJI BASHAR HAD BEEN A HIZB-I-ISLAMI (KHALIS) COMMANDER DURING THE JEHAD, AND ONE OF HIS SOLDIERS WAS A POOR MAN NAMED MOHAMMED OMAR FROM THE SMALL HOTAK SUB-CLAN (DESCENDED FROM THE MIRWAIS HOTAK WHO BRIEFLY RULED AFGHANISTAN BEFORE AHMED SHAH DURRANI). OMAR'S CLAN WAS SMALL AND UNDISTINGUISHED, OCCUPYING ONLY ONE HOUSE IN MEINAND. OMAR HIMSELF HAD RECEIVED AN ISLAMIC EDUCATION "ON A SMALL SCALE," ONLY BARELY ACHIEVING THE LEVEL OF MAULAVI. MULLAH OMAR HAD EARNED A REPUTATION FOR BRAVERY AND SOLDIERING DURING THE
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JEHAD, LOSING AN EYE IN THE PROCESS, AND AFTER THE WAR HAD
RETURNED TO THE MADRASA FUNDED BY HAJI BASHAR. THERE QMAR'S
REPUTATION FOR HONESTY AND SINCERITY GREW -- DESPITE HIS BEING
NEITHER PARTICULARLY CHARISMATIC NOR ARTICULATE.

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7. DURING THE SUMMER OF 1994, THE SITUATION IN KANDHAR CITY HAD BECOME VERY BAD, RELATED, REACHING A NEW LOW WHEN SEVERAL MADRASA STUDENTS WERE GANG-RAPIED BY A LOCAL COMMANDER. AT ABOUT THIS TIME, MULLAH OMAR WENT TO HAJI BASHAR AND RELATED A VISION IN WHICH THE PROPHET MOHAMMED HAD APPEARED TO HIM AND TOLD HIM OF THE NEED TO BRING PEACE TO AFGHANISTAN. HAJI BASHAR BELIEVED MULLAH OMAR, AND DRAWING UPON FAMILY RESOURCES AND LOCAL BUSINESS AND POLITICAL CONNECTIONS (INCLUDING THE BAZAARIS AND JAMIAT COMMANDER MULLAH NAQIBULLAH), RAISED 8 MILLION PAKISTANI RUPEES (USD 250,000) FOR THE CAUSE AND CONTRIBUTED SIX PICK-UP TRUCKS. ARMS AND AMMUNITION CAME INITIALLY FROM STOCKS LEFT OVER FROM THE JEHAD.

EARLY MILITARY ACTION

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9. OBSERVED THAT PAKISTAN HAD BEGUN TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE TALIBAN WHEN THE GROUP STOPPED THE CENTRAL ASIAN CONVOY AT BOLDAK. THE TALIBAN HAD OBJECTED TO PAKISTAN’S "HIGH-HEADEDNESS" IN NOT NOTIFYING AFGHAN AUTHORITIES IN KABUL ABOUT THE CONVOY, NOTED. HOWEVER, AFTER HOLDING THE CONVOY FOR SEVERAL DAYS, THE TALIBAN HAD BEEN CONVINced BY THE SENIOR PAKISTANI ESCORT, THAT

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THE CONVOY WAS GOOD "FOR MUSLIMS." SAIID THE TALIBAN HAD BEEN PERSUADED BY ARGUMENT THAT PAKISTAN WAS A MUSLIM COUNTRY AND THAT THERE WAS ALSO A BROADER ISLAMIC DUTY TO ASSIST THE MUSLIM BROTHERS IN CENTRAL ASIA. THE TALIBAN THEN AGREED TO ESCORT THE CONVOY ACROSS KANDAHAR, NOTED. AS THE 30 PAKISTANI TRUCKS MOVED DOWN THE ROAD WITH THEIR TALIBAN ESCORT, SAIID THE RELIGIOUS STUDENTS BEGAN CUTTING THE CHAINS LAID ACROSS THE ROAD BY TOLL-HUNGRY COMMANDERS. "THERE WERE CHAINS ALMOST EVERY KILOMETER," COMMENTED, "BUT THERE WAS NO INITIAL RESISTANCE TO OUR

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ACTIONS." HE SAID THAT AS WORD SPREAD OF WHAT THE TALIBAN WERE DOING, THE PEOPLE OF KANDAHAR BEGAN ACTIVELY TO SUPPORT THEM, BRINGING THE RELIGIOUS STUDENTS FOOD AND WEAPONS.

10. SAIID NO ONE WAS MORE SURPRISED THAN THE TALIBAN BY HOW QUICKLY THE MOVEMENT CAUGHT ON. WHEN FACED BY ARMED OPPOSITION BY SOME OF THE MORE POWERFUL COMMANDERS IN KANDAHAR, COMMENTED THAT THE "MADRASA NETWORK" IN PAKISTAN'S NWFP AND BALUCHISTAN WAS ABLE TO PROVIDE WILLING RECRUITS IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME. MOST OF THE "THOUSANDS" OF AFGHANS (AND A FEW PAKISTANI PASHTUNS) WHO JOINED THE TALIBAN CAME FROM MADRASAS RUN BY THE PAKISTANIS COMMENTED. TO ASSIST IN TRAINING THE TALIBAN AND OPERATING SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS (INCLUDING AIRCRAFT, TANKS AND HELICOPTERS) THE MOVEMENT HAD RECRUITED FORMER REGIME PILOTS AND GENERALS, WHO WERE BEING PAID TWICE THE USUAL SALARY OF 20,000 AFGHANIS A MONTH. THE TALIBAN THEMSELVES, HOWEVER, WERE VOLUNTEERS, NOTED, WHO DEPENDED UPON SUPPORT FROM THE AFGHAN PEOPLE TO FEED THEMSELVES.
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STRUCTURE OF THE MOVEMENT

11. ASKED ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF THE MOVEMENT, [REDACTED] SAID
THERE IS A "HIGH COUNCIL" OF EIGHT AND A LOWER SHURA OF 22.
THE MEMBERS OF THE HIGH COUNCIL ARE: MOHAMMED OMAR, HAJI
BASHAR, MOHAMMED HASSAN (GOVERNOR OF KANDAHAR), BAZ MOHAMMAD,
AHMADULLAH, ABDUR-RAHMAN, QARI IHSANULLAH AND ABDUL-SALAM. THE
FIRST THREE NAMES ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT, [REDACTED] OBSERVED,
WITH MOHAMMED OMAR OCCASIONALLY CHANGING THE OTHER FIVE. ALL
ARE MAULAVIS EXCEPT FOR HAJI BASHAR, AND ALL FOUGHT DURING THE
JEHAD, HE NOTED. ALSO IMPORTANT IS THE TALIBAN MILITARY
COMMANDER, MULLAH BORJAN, WHO IS DIRECTING THE MOVEMENT'S
OPERATIONS AT KABUL. THE 22-MEMBER SHURA, OF WHICH [REDACTED]
SAID HE WAS A MEMBER, DEALS WITH MORE ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES
THAN POLICY MATTERS AND ALL ITS MEMBERS ARE "FROM THE BOTTOM TO
MIDDLE OF THE ULEMA."

12. THE TALIBAN'S IMMEDIATE AIM, [REDACTED] SAID, IS TO
DISARM ALL OF AFGHANISTAN AND ESTABLISH ONE MUSLIM GOVERNMENT
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FOR THE COUNTRY. ASKED ABOUT ELECTIONS,
SAID THE TALIBAN BELIEVE IN ELECTIONS, BUT WOULD WANT TO WAIT UNTIL ALL
THE REFUGEES RETURN TO THE COUNTRY AND THERE WAS A MORE
PEACEFUL ATMOSPHERE. SAID HE IMAGINED A
GOVERNMENTAL SET-UP IN WHICH THERE WOULD BE ONE NATIONAL SHURA
AND ALSO INDIVIDUAL PROVINCIAL SHURAS. HE SUGGESTED THAT THE
CURRENT TALIBAN SHURA WOULD DECIDE WHO COULD RUN IN THE
ELECTIONS. COMMENTING ON THE SUCCESS OF THE DISARMAMENT
CAMPAIGN IN KANDAHAR, JOKED THAT WHEN HIS SON HAD BEEN BORN A FEW DAYS PREVIOUSLY, THERE WERE NO GUNS IN THE
DISTRICT TO ANNOUNCE THE EVENT TO THE VILLAGE (TRADITIONALLY,
GUNS ARE FIRED INTO THE AIR TO SIGNAL THE BIRTH OF A SON).

NOT AGAINST THE SHI'A OR MINORITIES

13. ASKED ABOUT CONCERNS THAT THE PASHTUN, SUNNI TALIBAN WOULD
NOT BE ACCEPTED BY THE SHI'A AND ETHNIC MINORITIES, SAID PASHTUNS ARE 70 PERCENT OF AFGHANISTAN'S POPULATION, BUT
THAT THE TALIBAN THOUGHT IT MORE IMPORTANT TO MAKE THE
MINORITIES HAPPY. HE CLAIMED THERE WAS A LARGE SHI'A
POPULATION IN THE TALIBAN-CONTROLLED PROVINCE OF ORUZGAN, AND
SAID THERE HAD BEEN NO PROBLEMS. "THE SHI'A ARE MUSLIMS, WE
HAVE LIVED WITH THEM FOR 200 YEARS," DECLARED. "THEY HAVE IMAM BARAS AND WE HAVE MOSQUES, BUT WE WILL NOT
INTERFERE WITH THEM," HE ADDED. THE SHI'A HIZB-I-WAHDAT PARTY
IN KABUL HAD BEGUN NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE TALIBAN, SAID, AND BOTH SIDES WERE PLEASED WITH THE DISCUSSIONS.

14. ON THE ETHNIC ISSUE, SAID THE TALIBAN WOULD DO
"TOO MUCH" TO KEEP THE MINORITIES HAPPY. "WE WILL MAKE AN
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UZBEK GOVERNOR IN PATKIA AND A TAJIK GOVERNOR IN KANDAHAR," HE
COMMENTED, "ALL THIS TO KEEP THEM HAPPY." CITING THE EXAMPLE
OF DOSTAM AND FEARS THAT THE COUNTRY COULD BE DIVIDED, THE
SAID DOSTAM WILL BE FREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
POLITICAL PROCESS IN AFGHANISTAN, BUT MUST SURRENDER HIS
WEAPONS AND ABIDE BY THE SHARIAH LAW. "EVERYONE WILL BE
SUBJECT TO THE LAW," NOTED.

15. [REDACTED] SAID DOSTAM HAD RECENTLY SENT EMISSARIES TO
THE TALIBAN, PROMISING TO SURRENDER ONCE "CERTAIN CONDITIONS"
ARE MET. RABBANI HAD SENT SIMILAR MESSAGES, [REDACTED] NOTED,
BUT MASOOD "WANTS TO FIGHT." IN KABUL, HARAKAT'S COMMANDER
SIDIQULLAH IS READY TO DEFECT TO THE TALIBAN, AND [REDACTED]
SAID HE HAD ACCOMPANIED REPRESENTATIVES OF KHALIS, SAYYAF AND
MOHMMADI TO KANDAHAR WHERE THEY HAD PLEDGED TO SUPPORT THE
MOVEMENT. ASKED ABOUT ISMAEL KHAN'S RELATIONS WITH THE
TALIBAN, [REDACTED] SAID "ISMAEL KHAN IS A GOOD MAN, NOT THE
BEST, BUT GOOD." KHAN IS READY TO SURRENDER TO THE TALIBAN,
[REDACTED] JUDGED, AND COULD BE COUNTED ON TO OBEY THE
MOVEMENT. ISMAEL KHAN'S COMMANDERS AROUND SHINDAND AIR BASE
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AND IN HALF OF HERAT PROVINCE ALREADY HAD PLEDGED SUPPORT TO
THE TALIBAN, HE NOTED.

COMMITMENT TO DRUG ERADICATION

16. RESPONDING TO A QUESTION CONCERNING THE TALIBAN'S
COMMITMENT TO DRUG ERADICATION, [ ] SAID HE COULD BEST
DESCRIBE DEVELOPMENTS IN HIS HOME DISTRICT OF MAROOF. THERE,
HE SAID, THE TALIBAN LEADER ABDUL-SAMAD HAD BEEN APPROACHED BY
POPPY FARMERS AND ASKED WHETHER THEY COULD CONTINUE TO GROW
THEIR CROP. ABDUL-SAMAD HAD CALLED TOGETHER 30 MEMBERS OF THE
ULEMA, WHO ISSUED A PUBLIC STATEMENT OPPOSING THE GROWING AND
TRADING OF NARCOTICS, AFTER WHICH THE FARMERS HAD BEEN TOLD
THAT THEY WOULD BE PUNISHED UNDER THE SHARIAH IF THEY CONTINUED
POPPY PRODUCTION. IN CONCLUSION, [ ] OBSERVED THAT "THE
TALIBAN BELIEVE NARCOTICS ARE BAD."

ATTITUDES TOWARDS OTHER COUNTRIES

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17. SINCE HE EXPECTED TO HAVE A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN FOREIGN
AFFAIRS ONCE THE TALIBAN SUCCEEDED IN REMOVING ALL THE
COMMANDERS FROM AFGHANISTAN, [ ] WAS EAGER TO TALK ABOUT
THE TALIBAN'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS OTHER COUNTRIES. HE SAID THE
MOVEMENT SOUGHT GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE ISLAMIC COUNTRIES, BUT
DID NOT LIKE SAUDI ARABIA'S EFFORTS TO INTERFERE IN AFGHAN
RELIGIOUS MATTERS. SIMILARLY, THE PAKISTAN GOVERNMENT'S DESIRE
TO INTERFERE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS, AND THE EFFORTS OF ISI TO TREAT AFGHANISTAN "LIKE ANOTHER PROVINCE" ARE NOT APPRECIATED, HE OBSERVED. SAYING THAT HE KNEW PERSONALLY


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19. AT THE CLOSE OF THE CONVERSATION, [ ] RAISED THE TOPIC OF PASHTUNISTAN. [ ] SAID THE DURAND ACCORD, LIKE THE LEASE OF HONG KONG, "WAS ABOUT TO EXPIRE." PAKISTAN HAD TRIED TO PRESSURE RABBANI INTO EXTENDING THE AGREEMENT, BUT HAD FAILED, [ ] CLAIMED. [ ] SAID THE ISSUE OF PASHTUNISTAN COULD BE ADDRESSED LATER, BUT NOTED THAT THE TALIBAN ARE NOW CAUGHT UP IN FIGHTING, TRYING TO BRING PEACE TO AFGHANISTAN.

20. COMMENT: [ ] APPEARED TO BE ABOUT YEARS OLD, SPOKE A LITTLE ENGLISH, AND CLEARLY WAS WELL DISPOSED TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES. HIS IN-DEPTH KNOWLEDGE OF TALIBAN EVENTS AND PERSONALITIES LENDS CREDENCE TO HIS CLAIM TO BE ONE OF THE
MOVEMENT'S INSIDERS. END COMMENT.

MONJO