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B1, 1.4(D), B6

CONFIDENTIAL PTQ2493

PAGE 01 ISLAMA 02685 01 OF 03 071410Z  
ACTION SA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	INLB-01	AID-00	ACQ-01	CIAE-00
	SMEC-00	INL-01	DINT-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	EUR-01	FBIE-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-01
	ADS-00	NEA-01	DCP-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01
	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	P-00	CIO-00	SP-00
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 FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5543  
 INFO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY  
 AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY  
 AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT  
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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 02685 01 OF 03 071410Z  
AMCONSUL KARACHI  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: ARCHIE M BOLSTER  
 CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)  
 DECLASSIFY AFTER: 6 APR 2018  
 DATE/CASE ID: 26 MAY 2006 200503489

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USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/CCJ3/CCJ5/POLAD//  
AMEMBASSY DHAKA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 002685

DEPT FOR SA/PAB, INR, AND EUR/CACEN; PARIS FOR POL/RAVELING; LONDON  
FOR POL/TUELLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/7/08

TAGS: PGOV, KISL, PINR, AF

SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: THE TALIBAN'S MULLAH RABBANI: CONTENDER  
FOR TALIBAN LEADERSHIP?

REFS: (A) 97 ISLAMABAD 11233; (B) 97 PESHAWAR 878

(U) CLASSIFIED BY MICHAEL ANDERSON, ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR.  
REASONS: 1.5 (C) (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: IN THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, MULLAH RABBANI, THE  
TALIBAN DEPUTY LEADER, HAS RAISED HIS PUBLIC PROFILE, SEEMINGLY  
OVERCOMING REPORTED EFFORTS BY TALIBAN LEADER MULLAH OMAR TO  
SIDELINE HIM. IN FACT, SOME OBSERVERS SPECULATE THAT "CLIQUE" OF  
RABBANI AND OMAR SUPPORTERS ARE CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN A FACE-OFF  
FOR INFLUENCE WITHIN THE MOVEMENT. HOWEVER, MOST OBSERVERS, NOTING  
TRADITIONAL TALIBAN SOLIDARITY, DOUBT THAT AN OPEN BREAK WILL OCCUR  
IN THE NEAR-TERM, IF AT ALL. AS EMBASSY HAS NOTED BEFORE,  
LEADERSHIP RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE TALIBAN ARE OPAQUE. THE MOST  
THAT CAN BE SAID AT THIS TIME IS THAT RABBANI'S REEMERGENCE COULD  
BE A NET PLUS IF -- AS SOME SPECULATE -- HE IS MORE WILLING THAN  
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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 02685 01 OF 03 071410Z  
OMAR TO CONSIDER NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE NORTH. END SUMMARY.

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TALIBAN DEPUTY LEADER RABBANI (RE)EMERGES

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2. (C) IN THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, TALIBAN DEPUTY LEADER MULLAH  
MOHAMMAD RABBANI HAS RAISED HIS PUBLIC PROFILE AS THE TALIBAN'S  
LEADING INTERLOCUTOR WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY BY ENGAGING  
IN DISCUSSIONS WITH PAKISTAN (THE TALIBAN'S CLOSEST ALLY), SAUDI

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ARABIA, AND THE UN. IN SOME WAYS THIS IS NOT SURPRISING: SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT IN LATE 1994, MULLAH RABBANI HAS BEEN WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED TO BE THE HIGHEST-RANKING TALIBAN OFFICIAL AFTER MULLAH OMAR, THE TALIBAN LEADER. INDEED, RABBANI'S OFFICIAL TITLES, "PRESIDENT OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN" AND HEAD OF THE TALIBAN'S "SUPREME RULING COUNCIL" (IN KABUL), INDICATE HIS HIGH RANK. HIGH-LEVEL REPRESENTATIONAL ROLES ARE ALSO NOT NEW FOR RABBANI, WHO REPRESENTED THE TALIBAN AT THE OIC "SPECIAL SUMMIT" IN ISLAMABAD IN MARCH 1997, AN EVENT WHICH EXPOSED HIM TO OVER 20 LEADERS OF ISLAMIC-MAJORITY COUNTRIES. (NOTE: FOR ADDITIONAL BIO-DATA ON RABBANI AND OMAR, SEE REF B, AND FOR A REVIEW OF THE TALIBAN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE, SEE REF A.)

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RUMORS OF FALLS FROM GRACE
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3. (C) NONETHELESS, THE EMERGENCE OF MULLAH RABBANI AS A KEY FIGURE FOR THE TALIBAN ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE HAS BEEN AN EVENT TO TAKE NOTE OF, ESPECIALLY SINCE THERE HAVE BEEN REPEATED RUMORS
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PAGE 04 ISLAMA 02685 01 OF 03 071410Z
SINCE SEPTEMBER 1996, WHEN THE TALIBAN CAPTURED KABUL, THAT RABBANI AND HIS NET OF SUPPORTERS HAVE BEEN "PURGED" FROM THE TALIBAN. FOR EXAMPLE, MOST RECENTLY IN FEBRUARY, [REDACTED] WERE TELLING U.S. DIPLOMATS THAT THEY HAD HEARD THAT "RABBANI HAD BEEN FORCED INTO EXILE BY MULLAH OMAR." SIMILAR RUMORS WERE HEARD IN THE FALL AND SUMMER OF 1997, AND IN OCTOBER 1996. TALIBAN OFFICIALS HAVE FREELY DISCUSSED THE RUMORS OF A FALL FROM GRACE. FOR EXAMPLE, TALIBAN "DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER" MULLAH JALIL, WHO IS CLOSE TO MULLAH OMAR, TOLD POLOFF IN MAY 1997 THAT MULLAH RABBANI HAS "MENTAL PROBLEMS" AND "CANNOT TAKE THE PRESSURE OF SENIOR POSITIONS SINCE HE CONSTANTLY NEEDS MEDICAL ATTENTION IN SAUDI ARABIA." ASSERTIONS OF THIS TYPE BY JALIL AND OTHER TALIBAN OFFICIALS WERE GIVEN SOME CREDENCE BY RABBANI'S CONTINUED VISITS TO SAUDI ARABIA WHERE HE STAYED FOR LONG PERIODS ON LARGELY UNKNOWN BUSINESS IN LATE 1996, 1997, AND AGAIN THIS YEAR.

B1, B6

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REPORTED FACE-OFF WITH MULLAH OMAR

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4. (C) WITH MULLAH RABBANI APPARENTLY IN THE ASCENT FOR NOW (HE WAS THE TALIBAN'S MAJOR INTERLOCUTOR WITH PAK PM NAWAZ SHARIF, UN SPECIAL ENVOY LAKHDAR BRAHIMI, AND UNICEF CHIEF CAROL BELLAMY IN

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 02685 02 OF 03 071411Z  
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THE PAST TWO WEEKS), OBSERVERS ARE SPECULATING ON RUMORS OF A  
WORSENING SPLIT IN THE TALIBAN RANKS BETWEEN RABBANI AND MULLAH  
OMAR. ACCORDING TO [REDACTED]  
WHO FREQUENTLY MEETS WITH THE TALIBAN, RABBANI HAS A "CLIQUE" OF  
TALIBAN OFFICIALS WHO STRONGLY SUPPORT HIM AGAINST OMAR. THESE  
OFFICIALS INCLUDE:

- MULLAH HASSAN AKHUND, THE "ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER."
- MULLAH GH AUS, MEMBER OF THE "INNER SHURA" AND FORMER "ACTING  
FOREIGN MINISTER."
- MULLAH YAR MOHAMMAD, THE TALIBAN "GOVERNOR" OF GHAZNI PROVINCE.
- MAULAWI JALALUDDIN HAQQANI, A MAJOR TALIBAN COMMANDER NORTH OF  
KABUL.
- MAULAWI NURUDDIN TURABI, THE "ACTING MINISTER OF JUSTICE."

B1, B6

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5. (C) [REDACTED] WENT ON TO ASSERT THAT RABBANI'S GROUP IS  
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B1, B6

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 02685 02 OF 03 071411Z  
INVOLVED IN A FACE-OFF WITH THOSE OFFICIALS WHO ARE KNOWN TO BE  
CLOSE TO MULLAH OMAR, WHO, HE SAID, INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

-- MAULAWI WAKIL AHMED, THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT SPOKESMAN.  
-- MULLAH HASSAN RAHMANI, THE TALIBAN "GOVERNOR" OF KANDAHAR.  
-- MULLAH JALIL, TALIBAN "DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER."  
-- MULLAH KHAIRULLAH KHAIRKHAH, THE "ACTING MINISTER OF INTERIOR."  
-- MULLAH ALLAH DAD, AN IMPORTANT TALIBAN MILITARY COMMANDER BASED  
IN KANDAHAR.

ACCORDING TO [REDACTED] JOSTLING BETWEEN THESE CLIQUES HAS IN THE  
PAST HALF-YEAR LED TO THE "PURGES" BY MULLAH OMAR OF MULLAH GHAS  
AND MULLAH HASSAN FOR THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH RABBANI. (NOTE: IT  
IS TRUE THAT GHAS AND HASSAN APPEAR TO BE LESS POWERFUL THAN  
BEFORE. HOWEVER, SOME OBSERVERS SPECULATE THAT GHAS IS ON THE  
OUTS WITH MULLAH OMAR NOT BECAUSE OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH RABBANI,  
BUT BECAUSE HE FAILED TO SUBDUE, THROUGH FORCE OR BY NEGOTIATION,  
TALIBAN OPPONENTS IN MAZAR-I-SHARIF IN MAY 1997.)

B1, B6

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ISSUES THAT MAY DIVIDE NOT CLEAR

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6. (C) WHEN POLOFF HAS PRESSED [REDACTED] -- AND OTHER OBSERVERS  
WHO AGREE WITH HIS THESIS OF RABBANI/OMAR TENSIONS -- ABOUT THE  
ISSUES THAT MAY DIVIDE THE TWO TALIBAN LEADERS, THE ANSWERS ARE  
USUALLY LESS THAN CLEAR. [REDACTED] TOLD POLOFF THAT HE THOUGHT  
THAT RABBANI WAS MORE WILLING TO CONSIDER PEACE TALKS WITH THE  
NORTHERN ANTI-TALIBAN FACTIONS. AS PROOF OF THIS, IN AN APRIL 7  
CONVERSATION, [REDACTED] POINTED TO THE MORE CONCILIATORY APPROACH  
RABBANI TOOK IN HIS RECENT MEETING WITH BRAHIMI, COMPARED TO THE

B1, B6

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PAGE 04 ISLAMA 02685 02 OF 03 071411Z

MORE HARD-LINE APPROACH BRAHIMI EXPERIENCED IN AN EARLIER MEETING WITH WAKIL AHMED, MULLAH OMAR'S KEY ASSISTANT. ALONG THESE LINES,

[REDACTED]  
TOLD POLOFF THAT RABBANI SUPPORTS OMAR'S GOAL OF AN "ISLAMIC AFGHANISTAN" RULED ACCORDING TO THE TALIBAN PRECEPTS, BUT RABBANI IS WILLING TO USE NEGOTIATION TO ATTAIN THAT GOAL, AS OPPOSED TO OMAR'S "FIXATION ON A MILITARY SOLUTION."

B1, B6

7. (C) HOWEVER, OTHER OBSERVERS DO NOT SEE MUCH DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RABBANI AND OMAR ON POLICY. [REDACTED]

B1, B6

[REDACTED] AND LONGTIME EMBASSY CONTACT, TOLD POLOFF APRIL 7 THAT HE BELIEVES THAT RABBANI WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORTS OMAR'S POLICIES ON GENDER ISSUES AND ON PROVIDING "SAFE-HAVEN" TO SAUDI TERRORIST FINANCIER USAMA BIN LADIN. ON NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE NORTH, [REDACTED] SAID RABBANI MAY BE MARGINALLY MORE WILLING TO WORK WITH THE UN AND NEGOTIATE WITH THE NORTHERN COALITION, BUT THE DIFFERENCE IS MORE OF STYLE THAN REAL SUBSTANCE -- "LIKE MANY AFGHANS, RABBANI TRIES TO BE POLITE TO PEOPLE HE IS MEETING WITH. MULLAH OMAR AND WAKIL AHMED ARE WILLING TO BE MORE GRUFF AND TO-THE-POINT. HOWEVER, THE MESSAGE ALL THREE GIVE IS BASICALLY THE SAME." [REDACTED] ADDED THAT HE AGREES THAT OMAR AND RABBANI ARE INVOLVED IN A POWER-STRUGGLE, BUT HE UNDERLINED THAT THE "ISSUE IS POWER, NOT IDEAS."

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PAGE 01  
ACTION SA-01

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DOUBTS THAT THERE WILL BE AN OPEN BREAK  
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8. (C) ALL OF THE OBSERVERS THAT POLOFF HAS SPOKEN TO ON THIS SUBJECT HAVE EXPRESSED DOUBTS THAT THE PERCEIVED TENSIONS BETWEEN RABBANI AND OMAR WILL LEAD TO AN OPEN SPLIT, AT LEAST IN THE NEAR-TERM. FOR EXAMPLE, IN AN APRIL 4 CONVERSATION WITH POLOFF, [REDACTED] COMMENTED THAT THE TALIBAN ARE "LIKE BOLSHIEVIKS, WHO ARE FOCUSSED ON PARTY UNITY." EXPANDING ON THIS POINT, [REDACTED] SAID HE STRONGLY DOUBTED THAT MEMBERS OF THE TALIBAN LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE WOULD TURN ON EACH OTHER -- "ALL OF THE TALIBAN, INCLUDING RABBANI AND OMAR, HAVE KNOWN ONE ANOTHER FOR YEARS. THEY HAVE FOUGHT TOGETHER AND PRAYED TOGETHER. OVERALL, THE THINGS THAT UNITE THEM ARE MUCH STRONGER THAN THE THINGS THAT DIVIDE THEM AND THEY KNOW THAT FACTIONALIZATION COULD END THE MOVEMENT."

B1, B6

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 02685 03 OF 03 071411Z

9. (C) IN THE LONGER TERM, THERE IS A FEELING THAT EVENTS PERHAPS COULD LEAD TO AN OPEN OMAR/RABBANI SPLIT. UNDER THIS SCENARIO, A SERIES OF TALIBAN DEFEATS ON THE BATTLEFIELD COULD FORCE RABBANI'S HAND, AND GIVE HIM THE MORAL LICENSE WITHIN THE MOVEMENT TO REPLACE OMAR. RABBANI COULD BE ASSISTED IN HIS COUP ATTEMPT BY [REDACTED] WHICH, AFRAID FOR ITS INVESTMENT IN THE TALIBAN, MIGHT DECIDE TO TURN TO RABBANI TO SORT THINGS OUT. [REDACTED]

B1

B1, B6

[REDACTED] TOLD POLOFF IN JANUARY THAT HE THOUGHT RABBANI COULD UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES BENEFIT FROM THE SUPPORT OF THE PASHTUN TRIBAL LEADERSHIP "SINCE RABBANI IS KNOWN TO BE A MORE TRIBAL MAN THAN OMAR."

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COMMENT  
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10. (C) IN PREVIOUS MESSAGES, EMBASSY HAS NOTED THAT ANALYZING

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RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT -- WHICH IS COMPOSED  
PRIMARILY OF ISLAMIC CLERICS -- IS DIFFICULT: THE MOVEMENT IS  
OPAQUE AND IT IS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR A NON-TALIBAN TO FULLY  
COMPREHEND HOW THE TALIBAN RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER. ONE THING THAT  
CAN BE SAID AT THIS TIME IS THAT MULLAH RABBANI APPEARS TO HAVE  
REEMERGED TO A POSITION OF ENHANCED INFLUENCE IN THE MOVEMENT FOR  
THE TIME BEING. THIS COULD BE GOOD NEWS, IF -- AS SOME  
SPECULATE -- MULLAH RABBANI IS REALLY MORE WILLING TO CONTEMPLATE  
NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE NORTH. SIMULTANEOUSLY, AS HAS APPARENTLY  
HAPPENED IN THE PAST, IT IS A REAL POSSIBILITY THAT RABBANI WILL  
HAVE HIS WINGS CLIPPED BY MULLAH OMAR, WHO MAY RESENT RABBANI'S  
HIGHER PUBLIC PROFILE, PERHAPS SEEING THE CONTRAST TO HIS OWN  
(DECIDEDLY LOW-PROFILE) LEADERSHIP STYLE AS A CHALLENGE.

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PAGE 04  
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ISLAMA 02685 03 OF 03 071411Z

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