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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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TO: [unclear] -5 A7
May 1, 2000

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DECL: 05/01/10

TO: The Secretary
FROM: SA - Karl F. Inderfurth
SUBJECT: Taliban Under Pressure

*This is encouraging -
Let's discuss when
you come back -*

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SUMMARY

This is encouraging.
Let's discuss when you come
back. MKA 5/

The Taliban face growing domestic opposition, and their hold on power may be slipping. We will explore the implications of this during upcoming visits by officials of the Northern Alliance and representatives of the former King of Afghanistan, who is seeking to unite exiles opposed to the Taliban. I will also discuss the issue during a visit this month to Moscow and Ankara, both of which have expressed concern over continued Taliban rule.

DISCUSSION

Since January, a number of reports suggest the Taliban are facing growing political opposition in areas they occupy. Uprisings in Paktia and Herat Provinces (map attached) have been mounted by tribes angry at Taliban policies on property, its harsh version of Islam, security, conscription, and lack of administration. In Paktia, the Taliban fired several of their own officials, including the governor. In urban areas, the Taliban are frequently criticized for failing to stop an increase in burglaries and kidnappings.

Cracks are also developing in the ranks of the Taliban. In February, several Taliban aircraft were sabotaged in Kabul, presumably with the help of insiders. Taliban guards are believed to have assisted in the escape of former Herat governor and charismatic opposition leader Ismail Khan from jail in March. Reports persist of divisions within the Taliban leadership, though Mullah Omar appears to remain in control.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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On the economic front, Afghan traders/smugglers, once strong supporters of the Taliban, have been angered by UN Security Council Resolution 1267's shutdown of Ariana Airlines' lucrative Persian Gulf flights, which supplied consumer goods the traders smuggled to Afghanistan's neighbors. Thousands of civil servants reportedly have been fired because the Taliban cannot pay their salaries. Reports in Kabul that the UN is considering additional sanctions are fueling public unhappiness.

While the UN and non-governmental organizations plan relief efforts against a massive drought in western Afghanistan, the Taliban are preparing another military offensive. If the Taliban are unable to address the humanitarian crisis caused by the draught, this ineptitude will further alienate the Afghans.

Pressure from Outside

Although Pakistan's support for the Taliban remains firm, Russia and Iran are stepping up their opposition. Since March, both have pressed Northern Alliance Commander Masood to allow National Islamic Movement leader Abdul Rashid Dostam back into Afghanistan to organize ethnic Uzbek resistance to the Taliban. Russia, furious with the Taliban's support for Chechen separatists, is working with some success with the NIS countries bordering Afghanistan to form a common front against the Taliban. Turkey wants to play a greater role against the spread of extremism and narcotics from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

Encouraging an Alternative

As the Taliban's control deteriorates, other groups - primarily exiles - have appeared which could present an alternative to the warring parties. One option is the Rome initiative of former King Zahir Shah that seeks to convene a loya jirga, or great council, to develop a broad-based, representative government. We are actively encouraging similar initiatives, such as the Cyprus and Bonn groups, to cooperate with Rome. To assist Rome, we have issued public endorsements and sent observers when the group last met in December. We have also earmarked \$500,000 in ESF democracy funds to support the process. We hope to announce this during the upcoming visit of the Rome delegation or shortly thereafter.

Attachment: Map of Afghanistan

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Clear: SA: AEastham
SA/PAB: JLUNSTEAD - ok
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D: TCynkin - ok
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