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ACTION SA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	AID-00	ACQ-01	CIAE-00	DODE-00
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 FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7537
 INFO AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY
 AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY
 AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY
 AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
 AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
 AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
 AMEMBASSY LONDON
 AMEMBASSY PARIS
 AMCONSUL JEDDAH
 DIA WASHINGTON DC
 USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/CCJ3/CCJ5/POLAD//
 AMEMBASSY CAIRO
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 AMEMBASSY DHAKA

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AMCONSUL LAHORE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: ARCHIE M BOLSTER
 CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
 DECLASSIFY AFTER: 11 JUN 2013
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 004450

DEPT FOR SA/PAB AND S/CT; USIA FOR NEA LARSEN; LONDON FOR
POL/TUELLER; PARIS FOR POL/RAVELING; ABU DHABI PLEASE PASS TO DUBAI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/12/08

TAGS: PREL, PTER, KISL, ASEC, AF, SA

SUBJ: AFGHANISTAN: TALIBAN SAID TO LOOSEN GRIP ON BIN LADIN AS
THEY INCREASINGLY TURN TO HIM FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND ADVICE

REF: ISLAMABAD 4341, AND PREVIOUS

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

1. (C) SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO VARIOUS SOURCES, THE TALIBAN HAVE
INCREASINGLY TURNED TO SAUDI TERRORIST FINANCIER OSAMA BIN LADIN
FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT IN THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS. WHILE THERE IS
WIDESPREAD AGREEMENT THAT HIS INFLUENCE SHOULD NOT BE OVERSTATED,
THERE IS ALSO SPECULATION THAT SOME TALIBAN LEADERS SEEK OUT BIN
LADIN FOR ADVICE. IN LIGHT OF BIN LADIN'S MAY 26 PRESS CONFERENCE
AND RECENT ABC INTERVIEW, THERE IS A FEELING AMONG SOURCES THAT THE
TALIBAN MAY BE LOOSENING THEIR GRIP ON BIN LADIN, PERHAPS AS PART
OF A QUID PRO QUO FOR CONTINUED FINANCIAL SUPPORT. OTHER OBSERVERS
SPECULATE THAT BIN LADIN'S KEY SUPPORTERS IN THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT
HAVE BECOME MORE INFLUENTIAL IN RECENT MONTHS, AND HAVE
SUCCESSFULLY MADE THE CASE TO OTHER TALIBAN THAT BIN LADIN SHOULD
BE GIVEN MORE FREEDOM TO OPERATE. END SUMMARY

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TURNING TO BIN LADIN FOR SUPPORT

2. (C) A NUMBER OF SOURCES REPORT THAT THEY BELIEVE THAT THE
TALIBAN MOVEMENT IS INCREASINGLY TURNING TO SAUDI TERRORIST
FINANCIER OSAMA BIN LADIN FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT. IN A JUNE 12
MEETING, [REDACTED] TOLD
POLOFF THAT HE HAS HEARD NUMEROUS REPORTS THAT THE TALIBAN, IN
PREPARATION FOR THE 1998 WARM WEATHER FIGHTING SEASON, MADE

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NUMEROUS REQUESTS TO BIN LADIN TO PROVIDE FUNDS TO PURCHASE ARMS AND AMMUNITION FROM INTERNATIONAL GRAY ARMS MARKET SOURCES. BIN LADIN WAS ALSO ASKED TO HELP PAY THE SALARIES OF TALIBAN MILITARY FORCES. BIN LADIN REPORTEDLY OBLIGED AND PROVIDED THE TALIBAN WITH AN UNSPECIFIED AMOUNT OF FUNDS FOR THESE PURPOSES. [REDACTED] TOLD POLOFF THAT HIS SOURCES BELIEVE THAT THE AMOUNT OF FUNDS PROVIDED TO THE TALIBAN SO FAR IN 1998 WAS CONSIDERABLY LARGER THAN THE AMOUNT HE PROVIDED THE MOVEMENT DURING THE 1996-97 PERIOD. (NOTE: THE TALIBAN/BIN LADIN RELATIONSHIP DATES FROM SEPTEMBER 1996, WHEN THE TALIBAN CAPTURED NANGARHAR PROVINCE, WHERE BIN LADIN WAS LIVING AFTER FLEEING SUDAN IN MID-1996.)

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3. (C) [REDACTED] OPERATIVE WHO MAINTAINS CLOSE LINKS WITH THE TALIBAN, REPEATED MANY OF [REDACTED] POINTS ABOUT BIN LADIN IN A JUNE 11 MEETING WITH POLOFF. [REDACTED] ADDED THAT HE HAS HEARD THAT THE TALIBAN, FACING SEVERE ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS, ALSO ASKED FOR FUNDS FROM BIN LADIN FOR THE PURCHASE OF COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT, INCLUDING SATELLITE PHONES AND RADIOS. THIS EQUIPMENT, WHICH BIN LADIN AGREED TO PURCHASE, IS BEING USED BY THE TALIBAN FOR MILITARY PURPOSES AND TO LINK TALIBAN MOVEMENT OFFICES AROUND THE COUNTRY WITH KANDAHAR, WHICH SERVES AS THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT'S HEADQUARTERS.

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ASKING FOR ADVICE

4. (C) SOURCES HAVE ALSO ASSERTED TO POLOFF THAT THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT LEADERSHIP IS ALSO TURNING TO BIN LADIN FOR GUIDANCE ON VARIOUS ISSUES. FOR EXAMPLE, [REDACTED] WHO MAINTAINS CLOSE LINKS TO THE PASHTUN TRIBES WHICH FORM THE TALIBAN'S MAIN BASE OF SUPPORT, TOLD POLOFF JUNE 11 THAT HE HAS HEARD MANY REPORTS THAT TALIBAN LEADERS SPEND A LARGE AMOUNT OF TIME MEETING WITH BIN LADIN, WHEN HE (BIN LADIN) IS IN KANDAHAR -- "KANDAHAR IS A VERY SMALL TOWN AND TALIBAN LEADERS ARE IN CONSTANT CONTACT WITH BIN LADIN." HIGH-LEVEL TALIBAN OFFICIALS, INCLUDING KANDAHAR REGIONAL GOVERNOR MULLAH HASSAN AND "DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER" JALIL, PURPORTEDLY USE THESE MEETINGS TO ASK BIN LADIN FOR ADVICE ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THE UN AND THE WEST, INCLUDING THE U.S. [REDACTED] TERSELY OBSERVED TO POLOFF THAT BIN LADIN'S ADVICE

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TO THE TALIBAN LEADERS WAS PROBABLY NOT MODERATE IN THRUST AND HE
ADDED: "I SOMETIMES WONDER IF THE TALIBAN'S HARD-LINE TONE ABOUT

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AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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AMCONSUL LAHORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 004450

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THE UN REFLECTS BIN LADIN'S INFLUENCE."

5. (C) HOWEVER, [REDACTED] AND OTHERS, INCLUDING [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] AGREED THAT BIN LADIN'S INFLUENCE ON THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT
SHOULD NOT BE OVERSTATED. AS NOTED BY [REDACTED]

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"THE TALIBAN MAY ASK BIN LADIN FOR GUIDANCE EVERY NOW AND
THEN, BUT THEY ARE SUSPICIOUS AND HE IS NOT TRUSTED THAT MUCH.
FOR EXAMPLE, HE IS NOT PART OF THEIR INNER CIRCLE, WHICH ONLY
CONSISTS OF AFGHANS."

LOOSENING THEIR GRIP

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6. (C) THAT SAID, POLOFF'S SOURCES ADDED THAT THERE APPEARS TO BE A QUID PRO QUO FOR BIN LADIN'S PROVISION OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO THE TALIBAN. [REDACTED] EXPLAINED IT THIS WAY: FIRST, IN EXCHANGE FOR
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HIS SUPPORT, BIN LADIN IS ALLOWED TO REMAIN IN AFGHANISTAN AS A "GUEST" OF THE TALIBAN. SECOND, THE TALIBAN ARE GIVING HIM MORE FREEDOM TO OPERATE IN RESPONSE TO THE INCREASED AMOUNT OF ASSISTANCE HE IS PROVIDING THE MOVEMENT. EXPANDING ON THIS LAST POINT, [REDACTED] SPECULATED THAT BIN LADIN'S RECENT ACTIVITIES -- THE MAY 26 PRESS CONFERENCE IN KHOST (REF A), HIS RECENT INTERVIEW WITH ABC NEWS, ETC. -- COULD BE TRACED TO A NEWFOUND WILLINGNESS ON THE PART OF THE TALIBAN TOWARD ALLOWING BIN LADIN FREE REIN TO TRAVEL INSIDE AFGHANISTAN AND TO MEET THE PRESS. [REDACTED] WENT SO FAR AS TO ASSERT THAT BIN LADIN ATTENDED A MAY MEETING OF THE TALIBAN "INNER SHURA" (THE MOVEMENT'S MAIN GOVERNING BODY) AND RECEIVED THE SHURA'S APPROVAL TO TRAVEL TO KHOST TO GIVE HIS PRESS CONFERENCE.

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[REDACTED] SAID HE HAD EVEN RECEIVED INFORMATION THAT BIN LADIN HAD TRAVELLED TO KHOST FOR THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON A TALIBAN HELICOPTER. (NOTE: IN A MAY 29 CONVERSATION WITH POLOFF, TALIBAN ENVOY TO PAKISTAN ABDUL HAKIM MUJAHID DENIED THAT THE TALIBAN HAD PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF BIN LADIN'S PRESS CONFERENCE. MUJAHID LATER TOLD POLOFF THAT THE TALIBAN HAD "LECTURED BIN LADIN ABOUT THE PRESS CONFERENCE, DEMANDING THAT HE CLEAR ALL OF HIS ACTIVITIES WITH THE TALIBAN LEADERSHIP -- SEE REF A.)

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STRONG NETWORK OF SUPPORTERS

7. (C) IN A JUNE 10 MEETING WITH POLOFF, [REDACTED] COMMENTED THAT HE AGREED WITH THE VIEW THAT BIN LADIN APPEARS TO HAVE GAINED MORE AUTONOMY FROM TALIBAN CONTROL IN RECENT WEEKS. HOWEVER, [REDACTED] ATTRIBUTED THIS MORE TO WHAT HE CHARACTERIZED AS THE GROWING STRENGTH OF BIN LADIN'S SUPPORTERS WITHIN THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT THAN TO THE

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TALIBAN'S REPAYING BIN LADIN WITH FAVORS FOR HIS FINANCIAL SUPPORT.
ACCORDING TO [REDACTED] BIN LADIN IS BENEFITING FROM THE ENHANCED
STRENGTH WITHIN THE MOVEMENT OF SUCH MEN AS JALALUDDIN HAQQANI, A
WELL-KNOWN PRO-TALIBAN COMMANDER, AND SYED ABDULLAH (A.K.A. HAJI
AGHA), THE GOVERNOR OF KHOST PROVINCE (WHERE BIN LADIN HELD HIS MAY
26 PRESS CONFERENCE), AND ABDUL KABIR, THE DEPUTY HEAD OF THE
TALIBAN "CARETAKER COUNCIL" IN KABUL (AND A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF
HAQQANI). [REDACTED] CLAIMED THAT ALL THREE OF THESE MEN ARE KNOWN
TO HAVE GAINED INFLUENCE IN TALIBAN CIRCLES IN RECENT MONTHS.
IDEOLOGICALLY CLOSE TO BIN LADIN'S INTERNATIONALIST ISLAMIST
POSITIONS, THESE MEN HAVE SUCCESSFULLY ARGUED WITH OTHER TALIBAN IN
RECENT MONTHS TO REDUCE CONTROLS ON BIN LADIN, [REDACTED] RELATED.

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COMMENT

8. (C) ALTHOUGH LITTLE OF A PRECISE NATURE IS KNOWN ABOUT THE
TALIBAN/BIN LADIN RELATIONSHIP, THERE HAS BEEN THE ASSUMPTION THAT
THE TALIBAN HAVE LARGELY HELD BIN LADIN AT ARMS LENGTH: THAT IS TO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 004450

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SAY THEY ALLOWED HIM TO REMAIN IN AFGHANISTAN, BUT THEY DID NOT
NECESSARILY BUY INTO HIS INTERNATIONALIST ISLAMIST OBJECTIVES. FOR
VARIOUS REASONS, INCLUDING THE RECENT INTENSIFICATION IN BIN
LADIN'S ACTIVITIES, THE FEELING IS GROWING AMONG OBSERVERS THAT THE
TALIBAN/BIN LADIN RELATIONSHIP MAY NOT BE SO PAT, THAT IT MAY BE IN
FLUX, AND POSSIBLY BECOMING CONSIDERABLY CLOSER. REASONS THAT THE
RELATIONSHIP COULD BE DRAWING CLOSER INCLUDE THE TALIBAN'S
INCREASING NEED FOR BIN LADIN'S MONEY. IN ADDITION,
INTERNATIONALLY ISOLATED BECAUSE OF THEIR BRUTAL SOCIAL POLICIES
AND EXPOSED AS THEY ARE TO BIN LADIN'S EXTREMIST RHETORIC, THE
TALIBAN COULD BE FINDING THEMSELVES MORE IN TUNE WITH BIN LADIN'S
PERVERSE WORLD VIEW.

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