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ACTION SCT-00

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	INLB-01	AID-00	A-00	ACQ-01
	CA-02	CCO-00	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	INL-01	DODE-00	DOEE-00
	SRPP-00	DS-00	EAP-01	EUR-01	FAAE-00	FBIE-00	IM-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-01	ADS-00	MMP-00	M-00
	NEA-01	DCP-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OCS-03	OIC-02	PM-00
	P-00	SP-00	SSO-00	TRSE-00	USSS-00	SA-01	ASDS-01
	FMP-00	SNIS-00	NISC-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	DRL-04	G-00
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O 281253Z SEP 98  
 FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0363  
 INFO AMEMBASSY RIYADH IMMEDIATE  
 AMCONSUL PESHAWAR IMMEDIATE  
 USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY  
 AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY  
 AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY  
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 AMEMBASSY BEIJING  
 USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/CCJ3/CCJ5/POLAD//  
 AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

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B1, 1.4(D)

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 AMCONSUL KARACHI  
 AMEMBASSY DOHA  
 AMEMBASSY CAIRO

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/28/08  
 TAGS: PREL, PTER, KISL, PGOV, SA, AF  
 SUBJ: AFGHANISTAN: TENSIONS REPORTEDLY MOUNT WITHIN TALIBAN AS TIES WITH SAUDI ARABIA DETERIORATE OVER BIN LADIN

REFS: (A) ISLAMABAD 7201

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: APPEALS REVIEW PANEL  
 APPEAL ACTION: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELEASED  
 REASON(S): B1, 1.4(D) Page: 1

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE DATE/CASE ID: 06 OCT 2004 200104186  
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: ARCHIE M BOLSTER  
 DATE/CASE ID: 25 MAR 2004 200104186

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- (B) ISLAMABAD 7156
- (C) RIYADH 3263 (NOTAL)

(U) CLASSIFIED BY JOHN R. SCHMIDT, POLITICAL COUNSELOR.  
REASONS: 1.5 (C) (D).

1. (U) THIS MESSAGE WAS COORDINATED WITH CONSULATE PESHAWAR.
2. (S) SUMMARY: FURTHER DETAILS ARE EMERGING CONCERNING SAG INTELLIGENCE CHIEF TURKI'S SEPTEMBER 19 MEETING WITH TALIBAN LEADER OMAR IN KANDAHAR. OMAR REPORTEDLY REJECTED TURKI'S REQUEST THAT THE TALIBAN EXPEL TERRORIST USAMA BIN LADIN TO SAUDI ARABIA AND THEN WENT ON TO CRITICIZE THE SAG FOR ALLOWING U.S. TROOPS TO BE STATIONED IN SAUDI ARABIA. AN ANGRY TURKI REPORTEDLY RETURNED TO RIYADH AND PUSHED THROUGH THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO DOWNGRADE TIES WITH THE TALIBAN. THE DOWNTURN IN RELATIONS ALSO

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REPORTEDLY ANGERED TALIBAN DEPUTY LEADER MULLAH RABBANI, WHO IS KNOWN FOR HIS PRO-SAUDI VIEWS, AND THERE ARE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT RABBANI MAY HAVE LAUNCHED A COUP ATTEMPT AGAINST OMAR ON SEPTEMBER 25. THERE ARE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT THE COUP FAILED AND RABBANI WAS ARRESTED. END SUMMARY.

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OMAR CRITICIZES SAG IN MEETING WITH TURKI  
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3. (S) FURTHER DETAILS ARE NOW EMERGING ABOUT SAG INTELLIGENCE CHIEF PRINCE TURKI AL-FAYSAL'S SEPTEMBER 19 VISIT TO KANDAHAR (SEE REF B). IN SEPARATE SEPTEMBER 28 MEETINGS WITH POLOFF, AHMAD MUWAFFAQ ZAYDAN, CORRESPONDENT FOR THE LONDON-BASED ARABIC LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER "AL HAYAH," [REDACTED] RELATED THAT "A SAUDI DIPLOMAT" (NOT FURTHER IDENTIFIED) HAD TOLD THEM THAT TURKI'S DISAGREEMENT WITH TALIBAN LEADER "AMIR AL-MUMININ" (COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL) MULLAH OMAR OVER TERRORIST USAMA BIN LADIN HAD SET THE STAGE FOR A SERIOUS DETERIORATION IN THE SAUDI/TALIBAN RELATIONSHIP. ZAYDAN [REDACTED] THEN PROVIDED SIMILAR OUTLINES OF WHAT THEY HAD HEARD TOOK PLACE DURING THE TURKI/OMAR MEETING:

-- THE MEETING BEGAN WITH A BRIEF DISCUSSION ABOUT TALIBAN/IRANIAN RELATIONS WITH TURKI ARGUING THAT THE TALIBAN SHOULD TAKE STEPS TO DEFUSE TENSIONS WITH IRAN.

-- TURNING TO THE MAIN TOPIC OF THE MEETING, TURKI THEN REQUESTED THAT THE TALIBAN SURRENDER TERRORIST USAMA BIN LADIN AND OTHER ARAB MILITANTS RESIDENT IN AFGHANISTAN TO THE SAG SINCE IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE TALIBAN COULD NOT CONTROL THEIR

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ACTIVITIES.

-- MULLAH OMAR REPLIED THAT THE TALIBAN HAD NO INTENTION OF SURRENDERING BIN LADIN OR ANY OTHER ARABS TO THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT.

-- OMAR CONTENDED THAT THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT WAS "ILLEGITIMATE" BECAUSE IT WAS ALLOWING U.S. TROOPS TO REMAIN IN THE COUNTRY. OMAR SAID HE HAD HEARD THAT THE SAG WAS PLANNING TO ALLOW U.S. TROOPS TO OCCUPY THE HOLY SITES OF MAKKAH AND MADINAH.

-- OMAR ADDED THAT THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT HAD NO BUSINESS INTERFERING IN AFGHAN MATTERS SINCE THE WHOLE MUSLIM "UMMAH" (INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY) WAS IN THE PROCESS OF RISING AGAINST IT (THE SAG) BECAUSE OF ITS FAILED STEWARDSHIP OF THE TWO HOLY SITES.

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KANDAHAR MEETING LEADS TO DECISION TO DOWNGRADE TIES  
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4. (S) [REDACTED] ZAYDAN AGREED THAT TURKI HAD BEEN SO ANGERED ABOUT WHAT HAD TRANSPIRED IN KANDAHAR THAT WHEN HE RETURNED TO RIYADH HE HAD MET WITH OTHER SAUDI OFFICIALS AND PUSHED THROUGH THE

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INFO AMEMBASSY RIYADH IMMEDIATE

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AMCONSUL PESHAWAR IMMEDIATE  
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DECISION TO DOWNGRADE SAUDI/TALIBAN TIES. (NOTE: AS NOTED IN REF  
 B, THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED ON SEPTEMBER 22 THAT IT WOULD  
 RECALL ITS CHARGE D'AFFAIRES IN KABUL AND THAT THE TALIBAN AFGHAN  
 CHARGE SHAHABUDDIN DILAWAR WOULD HAVE TO LEAVE SAUDI ARABIA.)  
 ZAYDAN TOLD POLOFF THAT HE HAD HEARD THAT DILAWAR HAD RETURNED TO  
 PAKISTAN ON SEPTEMBER 26 AND HAD BEEN HEARD TO COMPLAIN THAT HE HAD  
 BEEN FORCED TO LEAVE SAUDI ARABIA BECAUSE OF DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN  
 THE SAG AND THE TALIBAN OVER BIN LADIN. (NOTE: DILAWAR WAS ALSO  
 QUOTED IN THE PAKISTANI PRESS AS ASCRIBING HIS FORCED DEPARTURE  
 FROM SAUDI ARABIA TO DISAGREEMENTS OVER BIN LADIN.)

5. (S) POLOFF WAS TOLD SEPTEMBER 28 BY [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] THAT THE SAUDIS HAD  
 TAKEN ANOTHER STEP MEANT TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE TALIBAN: ACCORDING  
 TO [REDACTED] (OTHER SOURCES COULD NOT CONFIRM THIS), THE SAUDI  
 EMBASSY IN ISLAMABAD STOPPED ISSUING VISAS LAST WEEK TO AFGHANS WHO  
 WANTED TO TRAVEL TO SAUDI ARABIA FOR UMRAH (A VISIT TO THE HOLY

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SITES OUTSIDE OF THE HAJ SEASON) OR BUSINESS.

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TENSIONS MOUNT WITHIN TALIBAN: POSSIBLE COUP ATTEMPT?  
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6. (S) DISCUSSING THE AFGHAN REACTION TO THE SAUDI DECISION TO DOWNGRADE TIES, A NUMBER OF POLOFF'S SOURCES COMMENTED THAT THE SAUDI ACTION HAS LEAD TO TENSIONS BETWEEN OMAR AND HIS SUPPORTERS, AND THOSE TALIBAN WHO WANT A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH SAUDI ARABIA. [REDACTED] A CONTACT WITH CLOSE LINKS TO THE TALIBAN, TOLD POLOFF SEPTEMBER 28 THAT HE HAD HEARD THAT TALIBAN DEPUTY LEADER MULLAH MOHAMMAD RABBANI WAS SO INCENSED BY OMAR'S TREATMENT OF TURKI THAT HE IMMEDIATELY BEGAN TO PLAN A MILITARY OPERATION TO REMOVE OMAR FROM POWER. POLOFF ASKED [REDACTED] ABOUT PAKISTANI PRESS REPORTS THAT THERE HAD BEEN SOME SORT OF COUP ATTEMPT BY "FORMER COMMUNISTS" IN KABUL ON SEPTEMBER 25. (NOTE: ACCORDING TO THE PRESS REPORTS, 50 TALIBAN MILITARY OFFICIALS WERE ARRESTED FOR TRYING TO OVERTHROW OMAR. THE TALIBAN HAVE DENIED THAT A COUP ATTEMPT TOOK PLACE.) [REDACTED] COMMENTING THAT HE DOUBTED THERE WERE ENOUGH "FORMER COMMUNISTS" IN TALIBAN RANKS TO LAUNCH A COUP, RESPONDED THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT THE PRESS REPORTS WERE REFERRING TO MILITARY MOVES BY RABBANI AND HIS SUPPORTERS. HE COULD NOT CONFIRM THAT SUCH MOVES HAD IN FACT BEEN MADE, BUT HE HAD HEARD "RUMORS" THAT RABBANI MAY HAVE LAUNCHED A COUP. THE RESULT OF THE COUP -- IF IT HAD INDEED HAPPENED -- WAS NOT YET KNOWN.

7. (S) ASKED ABOUT THE COUP REPORTS, [REDACTED] SAID HE HAD ALSO HEARD THAT RABBANI HAD BEEN ANGERED BY OMAR'S TREATMENT OF TURKI, ADDING THAT "IT HAS BEEN KNOWN A LONG TIME" THAT RABBANI WAS CLOSE TO THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT. HE COULD NOT CONFIRM WHETHER OR NOT

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THERE HAD BEEN ANY COUP ATTEMPT BY RABBANI, BUT HE SAID SOME OF HIS SOURCES WERE REPORTING THAT THERE HAD BEEN SUCH AN ATTEMPT AND RABBANI HAD BEEN ARRESTED AND TAKEN TO KANDAHAR. [REDACTED] SAID HE COULD NOT CONFIRM THIS. IN FACT, HE BELIEVED THAT RABBANI WAS IN KABUL AND NOT UNDER ARREST. THE MOST THAT COULD BE SAID AT THIS TIME WITH ANY CERTAINTY, [REDACTED] CONTINUED WAS THAT THE SITUATION WAS "MURKY." HOWEVER, HE BELIEVED THAT SOMETHING WAS GOING ON WITHIN THE TALIBAN LEADERSHIP, NOTING THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD THAT THE SITUATION IN KANDAHAR WAS TENSE. (NOTE: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] REPORTED [REDACTED] ON SEPTEMBER 28 THAT A RUMOR WAS SWEEPING KABUL THAT MULLAH RABBANI HAD EITHER LAUNCHED A COUP AGAINST OMAR OR WAS IN THE PROCESS OF LAUNCHING ONE.)

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REMOVAL OF OMAR SEEN AS DIFFICULT  
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8. (S) QUERIED ABOUT THE EFFICACY OF POSSIBLE ATTEMPTS BY MULLAH RABBANI OR OTHER TALIBAN LEADERS TO REMOVE OMAR, POLOFF'S CONTACTS AGREED THAT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT TO ACCOMPLISH. ZAYDAN SAID IT WAS KNOWN THAT OMAR MAINTAINED A STRONG FORCE OF PERSONAL GUARDS AS WELL AS THE PERSONAL LOYALTY OF THE HEAD OF THE KANDAHAR ARMY CORPS, ONE OF THE LARGEST TALIBAN ARMED UNITS. HE ADDED THAT OMAR

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AMEMBASSY DOHA  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO

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ALSO BENEFITED FROM THE SUPPORT OF THE LARGE FORCE OF PAKISTANI EXTREMISTS FIGHTING WITH THE TALIBAN. (NOTE: ESTIMATES VARY, BUT IT IS BELIEVED THAT UP TO 40 PERCENT OF THE TALIBAN FIGHTING FORCE COULD BE MADE UP OF PAKISTANI NATIONALS.) ON THE OTHER HAND, ZAYDAN AND OTHER CONTACTS AGREED THAT THE SAG HAD MANY FRIENDS IN THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT WHO WERE BOUND -- LIKE RABBANI -- TO BE DEEPLY DISTURBED BY THE DETERIORATING SAUDI/TALIBAN RELATIONSHIP.

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TALIBAN TRY DAMAGE CONTROL  
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9. (S) IN LIGHT OF THE DOWNTURN IN TIES WITH SAUDI ARABIA, [REDACTED] SAID HE HAD HEARD THAT THE TALIBAN WERE TRYING TO REPAIR LINKS WITH THE SAG, WHILE ENSURING THAT TIES WITH OTHER COUNTRIES DID NOT DETERIORATE. EXPANDING ON THESE POINTS, [REDACTED] RELATED THAT HE HAD HEARD THAT THE TALIBAN HAD SENT  
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EMISSARIES TO PAKISTAN AND THE UAE. MULLAH JALIL, A KANDAHAR-BASED TALIBAN "DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER," HAD VISITED ISLAMABAD LATE LAST WEEK TO DISCUSS THE SAUDI/TALIBAN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT. [REDACTED] JALIL'S VISIT HAD FAILED WHEN IT BECAME CLEAR TO THE GOP THAT THE TALIBAN HAD NO PLANS TO APOLOGIZE TO TURKI FOR HIS TREATMENT IN KANDAHAR AND NO PLANS TO SURRENDER BIN LADIN. [REDACTED] THE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT HAD COMMUNICATED TO THE SAG THAT ITS EFFORTS TO MEDIATE THE DISPUTE WERE GOING NOWHERE. IN THE MEANTIME, [REDACTED] MAULAWI WAKIL AHMED, OMAR'S CLOSEST ADVISER, WAS CURRENTLY IN ABU DHABI TRYING TO ENSURE THAT THE UAE DID NOT DOWNGRADE TIES. [REDACTED] THAT THE UAE WOULD SOON DO SO BECAUSE OF PRESSURE FROM SAUDI ARABIA AND OTHER ARAB STATES, INCLUDING EGYPT.

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COMMENT  
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10. (S) THE WIDESPREAD VIEW AMONG AFGHAN WATCHERS HERE IS THAT THE TALIBAN HAVE MADE A SERIOUS MISTAKE IN ALIENATING SAUDI ARABIA. THE SAG MAINTAINS GREAT RESPECT AMONG AFGHANS BECAUSE OF ITS ROLE AS CUSTODIAN OF THE TWO ISLAMIC HOLY SITES. IN ADDITION, MOST AFGHANS DEEPLY APPRECIATE THE IMPORTANT ROLE THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT PLAYED IN FINANCING THE RESISTANCE AGAINST THE SOVIETS. FINALLY, IN A REGION WHERE PERSONAL LINKS COUNT FOR SO MUCH, PRINCE TURKI IS HIGHLY RESPECTED BY MANY AFGHANS FOR HIS ROLE AS CHIEF SAUDI POINT MAN IN THE YEARS OF THE RESISTANCE. THE REPORTS THAT OMAR CRITICIZED THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT TO TURKI'S FACE ARE BOUND TO REDOUND BADLY AGAINST THE TALIBAN AMONG HIS MANY FRIENDS. THAT SAID, WHETHER ANYTHING CAN BE DONE AGAINST OMAR IS QUESTIONABLE, GIVEN THE STRONG SUPPORT HE ENJOYS WITHIN THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT,

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ESPECIALLY AMONG THOSE WITH THE GUNS. HOWEVER, IF PAKISTAN -- THE TALIBAN'S CLOSEST INTERNATIONAL SUPPORTER -- THROWS IN ITS WEIGHT BEHIND SAUDI ARABIA ON THE BIN LADIN ISSUE, THE PRESSURE ON THE TALIBAN MAY BECOME UNBEARABLE. AS OF THIS TIME, PAKISTAN HAS NOT YET MADE ITS POSITION CLEAR.

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