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DECL: 7/16/11

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U.S. Engagement with the Taliban on Usama Bin Laden

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Since the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996, the United States has consistently discussed with them peace, humanitarian assistance, drugs and human rights. However, we have made clear that Usama bin Laden (UBL) and terrorism is the preeminent issue between the U.S. and the Taliban.

- These concerns over bin Ladin preceded the 1998 bombings.
- For instance, Secretary Christopher wrote to the Taliban Foreign Minister in 1996 that "we wish to work with you to expel all terrorists and those who support terrorism..."

In our talks we have stressed that UBL has murdered Americans and continues to plan attacks against Americans and others and that we cannot ignore this threat.

- Have also emphasized that the international community shares this concern. In 1999 and in 2000, the UN Security Council passed resolutions demanding that UBL be expelled to a country where he can be brought to justice.
- Have told the Taliban that the terrorist problem is not confined to bin Laden and that the Taliban must take steps to shut down all terrorist activities.
- Have told them that the resolution of the bin Laden issue and steps to close the terrorist apparatus would enable us to discuss other issues in an improved atmosphere.
- Conversely, have stressed that if this terrorism issue is not addressed, there can be no improvement in relations.

These talks have been fruitless. The Taliban usually said that they want a solution but cannot comply with UNSCRs. Often the Taliban asked the U.S. to suggest a solution.

- In October 1999, the Taliban suggested several "solutions" including a UBL trial by a panel of Islamic scholars or monitoring of UBL Afghanistan by OIC or UN.
- Taliban consistently maintained that UBL's activities are restricted, despite all evidence to the contrary.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. O. 12958; 1.5 (b) and (d)

REVIEW AUTHORITY: SHARON E AHMAD

DATE/CASE ID: 08 SEP 2003 200103969

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SECRET NODIS

-2-

Often our discussions have been followed by Taliban declarations that no evidence exists against UBL and that he will not be expelled as demanded by the UN resolutions. Highlights of our talks with the Taliban follow.

Pre-Embassy Bombings

1996

- On September 18 meeting with Taliban Deputy Foreign Affairs Advisor Jalil, Embassy Islamabad Poloff, drawing on points provided by the Department, urged the Taliban to make UBL unwelcome. Jalil replied that the Taliban do not support terrorism and would not provide refuge to bin Ladin. (96 Islamabad 8055).
- On December 6, Embassy Islamabad DCM Holzman delivered a response on behalf of Secretary of State Christopher to Taliban acting Foreign Minister Ghaus's earlier letter. In this response, the U.S. expresses its wish to work with the Taliban to expel all terrorists from Afghan soil. The Taliban are told that harboring bin Laden and allowing him and his supporters to transit Afghan territory at will and to conduct uncontrolled activities greatly hurt prospects for Afghanistan rejoining the world community. SA A/S Raphel delivered the original letter from which Islamabad response was drawn to Taliban-designated UN representative Hamid Karzai on December 10. (96 State 254588)

1997

- In a January 16 meeting with Wakil Ahmed, then Political Adviser to Mullah Omar, Embassy Islamabad DCM Holzman proposed that a U.S. team visit militant training camps in eastern Afghanistan in late January. Ahmed replied that there is no problem with visiting the camps but he would check with Kandahar on the schedule. (97 Islamabad 0481)
- On January 20, Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Jalil told Embassy Islamabad poloff that the Taliban supported the U.S. on counterterrorism and counternarcotics issues. He suggested that the U.S. postpone its visits to the camps until after Ramadan in mid-February. (97 Islamabad 0481)

SECRET NODIS

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SECRET NODIS

-3-

- On January 21 SA Assistant Secretary Raphel told Taliban Political Advisor Wakil Ahmed that the Taliban have alienated the U.S. and the international community through their providing sanctuary to the UBL. (97 Islamabad 698)
- In a February 11 telephone call, Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Jalil told poloff that the U.S. should postpone its proposed visits to the militant camps "a couple of weeks" because of heavy snows in Nangarhar and Khost. (97 Islamabad 1113)
- On March 2 and 3, during a visit to Afghanistan, SA/PAB Deputy Director Camp was told by Taliban inner Shura member Ehsanullah Ehsan that expulsion of bin Laden was not a solution. At these meetings, U.S. officials reminded the Taliban that the U.S. was waiting for a Taliban response on the proposed U.S. visit to militant camps reportedly closed by the Taliban. (97 Islamabad 1750)
- In response to instructions from the Department, Islamabad Embassy DCM Holzman told Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan Mufti Afghani that the Taliban should immediately expel bin Laden from Taliban-controlled territory in light of his recent remarks threatening the U.S. Afghani promised a response from Kandahar. (97 Islamabad 1745)
- On April 1, Taliban Ambassador to Afghanistan Afghani told Islamabad Embassy DCM Holzman that the Taliban had rescinded their offer for the U.S. to visit militant training camps in Eastern Afghanistan. (97 Islamabad 2668)
- On December 8, two visiting Taliban ministers assured SA/PAB Director that UBL was being kept under restriction. (97 State 231842)

1998

- In February 21-25 meetings in Kabul with Taliban deputy Foreign Minister Haqqani, Islamabad Embassy DCM Eastham emphasized that the U.S. wants to see Afghanistan fulfill its international obligations in a number of areas, including counterterrorism. (98 Islamabad 1489)

SECRET NODIS

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SECRET NODIS

-4-

- In a March 2 meeting with Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan Dilawar, Embassy Islamabad DCM Eastham expressed U.S. concerns over bin Laden's recent calls for attacks against U.S. targets and the reported presence of Egyptian militants in Taliban-controlled territory. (98 Islamabad 1573)
- In a March 3 meeting in New York, Taliban representative Abdul Mujahid told SA/PAB Director Malinowski that UBL was under restriction by the Taliban. (98 State 41115)
- In separate meetings with a U.S. team visiting Kandahar, March 22-24, Kandahar governor Hasan and Taliban deputy Foreign Minister Jalil denied that UBL had recently issued a fatwa against the U.S. and that he is under Taliban control and would not be allowed to engage in anti-U.S. activities. (98 Islamabad 2258)
- In a March 26 meeting with Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Haqqani, Islamabad Embassy Charge Eastham underscored U.S. concerns about the recent fatwa issued by bin Laden against the U.S. Haqqani denied bin Laden's involvement in the fatwa and assured that UBL was under Taliban restriction. Charge invited the Taliban to send a senior official to meet with U.S. UN Permrep Richardson during his visit to the region. (98 Islamabad 2291)
- On April 17, Ambassador Bill Richardson visited Afghanistan to persuade the warring parties to agree to negotiations. (98 Islamabad 2990)

Post Embassy Bombings

- On August 22, SA/PAB Director spoke on the telephone with Mullah Omar in which Omar expressed interest in a confidential dialogue with the U.S. through our respective embassies in Islamabad. (98 State 154712)
- On August 23, following the August 22 telephone conversation with Mullah Omar in which Omar indicated a willingness for dialogue, the Department instructed Embassy Islamabad to pass a formal message to the Taliban regarding the August 20 U.S. strikes against Khost, evidence against bin Laden, neutrality in the conflict,

SECRET NODIS

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SECRET NODIS

-5-

and interest in a dialogue with the Taliban. (98 State 154713)

- On August 23, Embassy Islamabad poloff delivered these points by telephone to Taliban Second Secretary Tayyab Husseini at the Taliban Islamabad Embassy. (98 Islamabad 6359)
- On August 25, Embassy Islamabad delivered State 154713 points in English and Pushtu to Taliban Islamabad embassy Charge Rahman Haqqani. Haqqani promises to send the text to Kandahar. (98 Islamabad 6425)
- On September 2, Taliban Second Secretary Husseini told Embassy Islamabad poloff by telephone that a Taliban response to U.S. dialogue proposals was being delayed by current tensions between Kandahar and Tehran. (98 Islamabad 6573)
- In September 13 discussion with new Taliban "Permrep" Mujahid, Islamabad Embassy DCM Eastham warned that the Taliban will be held directly responsible for any further terrorist acts instigated by bin Laden. (98 Islamabad 6863) Mujahid urged patience.
- On October 3, SA/PAB Director delivered U.S. concern over UBL's presence in Afghanistan to close Mullah Omar aide Wakil Ahmed via telephone. (98 State 183868)
- October 11, 1998 Ambassador Milam met with Wakil Ahmed, close assistant to Mullah Omar. He told the Taliban that the longer they shelter bin Laden, the more they will be associated with his crimes. (98 Islamabad 7665)
- On October 21, U/S Pickering and A/S Inderfurth told Taliban representative Mujahid that the U.S. would hold the Taliban responsible for acts committed by UBL against the U.S. Mujahid said that expelling UBL would violate Taliban rules of hospitality. (98 State 213222)
- At a November 11 meeting with Ambassador Milam, Taliban representative Haqqani said that bin Ladin had to be tried by the Taliban, since Afghanistan had no extradition treaty. (98 Islamadad 8410)

SECRET NODIS

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SECRET NODIS

-6-

- On November 28, Taliban senior spokesman Wakil Ahmed told U.S. Embassy Islamabad Charge that any attempt to expel bin Laden would result in the downfall of the Taliban. (98 Islamabad 8803)
- On December 14, Taliban Islamabad Embassy Charge told visiting SA Deputy Assistant Secretary Lanpher that UBL is under restriction and accused the U.S. of coercing suspects in the embassy bombings to admit to links to UBL. (98 Islamabad 9128)
- On December 15, the Taliban-controlled Embassy in Islamabad sent a note to the U.S. Embassy in the name of Taliban Charge Haqqani. The letter maintained that UBL was restricted by the Taliban. (98 Islamabad 9134)
- On December 28, SA/PAB Director Malinowski raised in strong terms with Taliban New York representative Mujahid recent public threats against Americans issued by bin Laden. On December 30, Mujahid told Malinowski that the response from Mullah Omar aid Wakil Ahmed was that UBL issued his threats at the press conference due to "pressure from journalists." He added that the Taliban's position that bin Laden was a guest who would not be expelled still held. (98 State 238275)

1999

- Between February 3 and May 29, 1999, SA Assistant Secretary Inderfurth, S/CT coordinator Sheehan, and Ambassador Milam each meet once with Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Mullah Jalil in Islamabad to urge the Taliban to turn over UBL.
- On July 19 in Tashkent, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Karl Inderfurth told Taliban Information Minister Muttaqi that the U.S. would be forced to take further actions if bin Laden is not brought to justice. Muttaqi showed no willingness to turn over bin Laden. (99 Tashkent 3036)
- On October 25, Assistant Secretary Inderfurth met with Taliban representative Abdul Mujahid to hand over a letter from Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering replying to Mullah Omar's recent letter to the President. Inderfurth summarized the points of the letter: The U.S. was not opposed to Islam; bin Laden was in Afghanistan planning attacks on

SECRET NODIS

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SECRET NODIS

-7-

the U.S. and elsewhere; the UN Security Council had unanimously passed a resolution calling on the Taliban to hand bin Laden over to a country where he could be brought to justice; we were ready to discuss this issue and had in fact raised it over 20 times with Taliban officials. Mujahid made two proposals. The first was that the Taliban would confine UBL in Afghanistan under supervision of the OIC, NAM or the UN. Inderfurth rejected this proposal and noted that it did not meet UNSCR 1267's requirements. The second proposal was for a panel of Islamic scholars to decide UBL's future. One scholar would be from Afghanistan, one from Saudi Arabia, and one from a third country. Inderfurth noted that if this process took place, the U.S. hoped it would lead to extradition. The U.S. would not be bound by the panel's decision, however. The Security Council resolution would continue in place until UBL was brought to justice.

2000

- Assistant Secretary Inderfurth and S/CT Coordinator Sheehan discussed Taliban support for Usama bin Ladin with Taliban Director for Administration Muttaqi at a January 20 meeting in Islamabad. Muttaqi restated previous Taliban positions. (2000 Islamabad 567)
- On May 27, in Islamabad, Undersecretary Pickering gave Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Jalil a point-by-point outline of the information tying Usama bin Laden to the 1998 embassy bombings (2000 Islamabad 2899). The Taliban subsequently rejected this evidence.
- Undersecretary Pickering told Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Zahid on September 29 that the solution to the issue of Usama bin Laden is compliance with UNSCR 1267. There was no further response by the Taliban. (2000 State 191767)
- In October, Deputy Assistant Secretary Eastham met with Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Jalil in Frankfurt, Germany. He reiterated our concerns on terrorism, described new sanctions resolution being moved, and said a positive resolution of the UBL problem would change the situation. No Taliban response.

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SECRET NODIS

-8-

- On February 8, SA Deputy Secretary Eastham told Taliban representative Mujahid that, as a result of UNSCRs 1267 and 1333, the Taliban must close their office. Mujahid delivered a letter from Taliban Foreign Minister Muttawakil that repeated Taliban assertions that no evidence regarding UBL's terrorist activities has been presented. (State 28054)
- On March 19, Taliban envoy Ramatullah Hashimi told SA/PAB Director that he brought "nothing new" to offer on complying with UNSCRs 1267 and 1333. (State 50411)
- On July 2, Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Jalil told U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Milam that UBL has not been convicted and that the Taliban still consider him innocent. (Islamabad 3702)

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Draft: James Cole 76708 SAPAB 01 AFGHAN P-
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