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INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	INLB-01	AID-00	A-00	ACQ-01
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	DS-00	EB-00	EUR-01	FAAE-00	FBIE-00	FBO-01	IM-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-01	ADS-00	MMP-00
	M-00	NEA-01	DCP-01	NSAE-00	OCS-03	OIC-02	PM-00
	P-00	SP-00	SSO-00	TRSE-00	USSS-00	SA-01	ASDS-01
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 8/21/08

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TAGS: PGOV, ASEC, MOPS, PTER, AF
SUBJECT: TFXX01: AFGHANISTAN: REACTION TO U.S. STRIKES FOLLOWS
PREDICTABLE LINES: TALIBAN ANGRY, THEIR OPPONENTS SUPPORT U.S.

REF: ISLAMABAD 6329

(U) CLASSIFIED BY ALAN EASTHAM, DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION.
REASON 1.5(D).

1. (U) THIS MESSAGE WAS COORDINATED WITH CONSULATE PESHAWAR.

2. (S) SUMMARY: AFGHAN REACTIONS TO THE AUGUST 20 U.S. STRIKES AGAINST BIN LADIN'S TERRORIST NETWORK HAVE BASICALLY FOLLOWED PREDICTABLE LINES: TALIBAN LEADER MULLAH OMAR LASHED OUT AT THE U.S., ASSERTING THAT THE TALIBAN WILL CONTINUE TO PROVIDE A SAFE HAVEN TO BIN LADIN. OPPONENTS OF THE TALIBAN SUPPORTED THE U.S., UNDERSCORING THE POINT THAT THE STRIKE WAS NOT AIMED AT AFGHANS,

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BUT AT ERADICATING BIN LADIN'S TERRORIST INFRASTRUCTURE. BIN LADIN'S WHEREABOUTS ARE NOT KNOWN, BUT SOURCES SAY HE HAS BEEN FLUSHED OUT OF KHOST AND IS PROBABLY IN THE KANDAHAR AREA. OVERALL, AS OF THIS TIME, THERE ARE FEW SIGNS OF A NATIONALISTIC BACKLASH BY AFGHANS AGAINST THE U.S. END SUMMARY.

MULLAH OMAR LASHES OUT

3. (C) REACTION TO THE AUGUST 20 U.S. STRIKES AT USAMA BIN LADIN'S TERRORIST CAMPS IN TALIBAN-CONTROLLED KHOST PROVINCE HAVE THUS FAR FALLEN ALONG PREDICTABLE LINES. (NOTE: SEE REFTTEL, THE FIRST SITREP ON SITUATION IN PAKISTAN/AFGHANISTAN AFTER THE STRIKES. A SECOND AUGUST 21 SITREP WILL FOLLOW. END NOTE.) REPO THE TALIBAN -- WHO HAVE BEEN BIN LADIN'S PROTECTOR -- CRITICIZED THE U.S. ACTION, WHEREAS THE TALIBAN'S OPPONENTS WELCOMED IT. THE TALIBAN REACTION WAS NOT SLOW IN COMING: TALIBAN LEADER "AMIR AL-MUMININ" (COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL) MULLAH OMAR WAS QUOTED BY THE PAKISTANI-BASED AFGHAN ISLAMIC PRESS (AIP) AS LASHING OUT AT THE U.S. WITH THE FOLLOWING REMARKS:

-- "WE MOST STRONGLY DENOUNCE THE U.S. ATTACK. IT IS A BRAZEN MANIFESTATION OF ENMITY AGAINST THE AFGHAN NATION."

-- "IT IS NOT ONLY AN ATTACK AGAINST USAMA BIN LADIN BUT ALSO AN ATTACK AGAINST THE ENTIRE PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN."

-- "WE WILL NEVER HAND OVER BIN LADIN TO ANYONE AND (WILL)

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PROTECT HIM WITH OUR BLOOD AT ALL COST."

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-- "THE U.S. INTELLIGENCE AND INVESTIGATION AGENCIES FIND IT CONVENIENT TO BLAME USAMA TO COVER UP THEIR OWN FAILURE."

(NOTE: AIP IS GENERALLY RELIABLE. IT IS KNOWN TO MAINTAIN CLOSE TIES WITH THE TALIBAN AND AIP CORRESPONDENTS HAVE INTERVIEWED MULLAH OMAR BEFORE, SO THE ABOVE INTERVIEW IS PROBABLY ACCURATE.)

4. (C) ONLY ONE OTHER TALIBAN OFFICIAL HAS BEEN QUOTED AS CRITIZING THE U.S. MULLAH ABDUL HYE MUTMAIN, A KANDAHAR-BASED SPOKESMAN FOR THE TALIBAN "INFORMATION AND CULTURE MINISTRY," WAS QUOTED AS STATING THAT "WE (THE TALIBAN) CANNOT BE OVERAWED BY SUCH ATTACKS. WE KNOW HOW TO DEFEND OUR COUNTRY." MUTMAIN WAS ALSO THE TALIBAN'S SOURCE FOR FIGURES ON THE CASUALTY COUNT FROM THE U.S. STRIKE, WHICH HE PLACED AT 30 DEAD, 40 WOUNDED. (NOTE: CASUALTY COUNTS VARY, ESTIMATES RANGE ANYWHERE FROM 15 TO 65 KILLED.) MUTMAIN ALSO CLAIMED THAT THERE WERE "LARGE DEMONSTRATIONS IN KANDAHAR AND JALALABAD" AGAINST THE U.S., ALTHOUGH THIS COULD NOT BE INDEPENDENTLY CONFIRMED. OTHER TALIBAN LEADERS AND KEY MEMBERS OF THE GROUP'S "INNER SHURA" -- INCLUDING DEPUTY LEADER MULLAH RABBANI AND KANDAHAR GOVERNOR MULLAH HASSAN -- "DID NOT MAKE THEMSELVES AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT," A PAKISTANI JOURNALIST TOLD POLOFF.

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BIN LADIN SAID TO BE ON THE MOVE

5. (S) IN THE AIP REPORT, OMAR WAS NOT DIRECTLY QUOTED BUT IS SAID TO HAVE RELATED THAT BIN LADIN WAS SAFE AND HAD BEEN MOVED TO ANOTHER LOCATION. THERE IS NO FIRM INDICATION OF WHERE BIN LADIN IS AT THIS TIME. POLOFF'S SOURCES WITH CONNECTIONS TO KANDAHAR SAY THAT TALIBAN LEADERS THERE ARE MUM AND ARE NOT DISCUSSING THE WHEREABOUTS OF BIN LADIN. HAMID KARZAI, A FORMER DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER WHO LIVES IN QUETTA, TOLD POLOFF AUGUST 21 THAT HE HAD HEARD FROM SEVERAL TALIBAN SOURCES THAT BIN LADIN

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 "IS ON THE MOVE" FEARING ANOTHER U.S. STRIKE. IN ANOTHER AUGUST 21 CONVERSATION, AMIN MOJADDEDI, A RELIGIOUS LEADER WITH CLOSE LINKS TO THE TALIBAN, SAID ONE SOURCE AT THE TALIBAN'S ISLAMABAD EMBASSY HAD TOLD HIM THAT "IT IS NOT CLEAR WHERE BIN LADIN IS...HE IS PROBABLY NOT STAYING LONG AT ANY ONE LOCATION."

6. (S) TWO OF POLOFF'S SOURCES AGREED THAT BIN LADIN HAS PROBABLY BEEN FLUSHED OUT OF KHOST PROVINCE, THE TARGET AREA IN AFGHANISTAN OF THE U.S. STRIKES. MULLAH MALANG, A RESISTANCE COMMANDER WITH CLOSE TALIBAN CONTACTS (ALTHOUGH HE DOES NOT SUPPORT THE TALIBAN), TOLD POLOFF IN AN AUGUST 21 MEETING THAT BASED ON WHAT HE HAD SEEN ON TV MOST OF BIN LADIN'S BASES IN THE PROVINCE HAD BEEN HIT. MALANG THOUGHT THAT BIN LADIN WAS NOW IN THE KANDAHAR AREA MOVING AMONG THE FOLLOWING THREE SITES: THE BARRACKS NEAR THE AIRPORT; THE HOUSE HE BUILT IN KANDAHAR CITY FOR OMAR; OR A COMPLEX LOCATED NEAR THE TOWN OF DAHLA, WHICH IS APPROXIMATELY 30 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF KANDAHAR TOWN NEAR LAKE ARGHANDAB. HAJI MANGAL HUSSEIN, A PRO-TALIBAN SOURCE, AGREED THAT BIN LADIN WAS PROBABLY IN THE KANDAHAR AREA, NEAR TALIBAN HEADQUARTERS. HE SAID IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT BIN LADIN HAD ALSO RETURNED TO SOME BASES HE MAINTAINS IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE, BUT UNLIKELY.

 NORTHERN ALLIANCE JUBILANT

7. (C) REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ANTI-TALIBAN NORTHERN ALLIANCE -- WHICH HAS TAKEN IT ON THE CHIN IN RECENT FIGHTING WITH THE TALIBAN -- WERE ECSTATIC OVER THE NEWS OF THE U.S. STRIKES. ABDUL ZEKI, A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NATIONAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF

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 AFGHANISTAN (NIMA), SAID NIMA LEADER GENERAL DOSTAM HAD TELEPHONED HIM FROM BAMIYAN EARLY ON AUGUST 21 TO EXPRESS STRONG SUPPORT TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. DOSTAM SAID HIS MESSAGE OF SUPPORT SHOULD BE PROVIDED DIRECTLY TO THE U.S. BY ZEKI -- "TELL THE U.S. WE ARE ALLIES AGAINST THE TERRORISM THE TALIBAN ALLOW TO EXIST IN AFGHANISTAN," DOSTAM REPORTEDLY SAID. IN AN AUGUST 21 CONVERSATION WITH POLOFF, RAZA NAZ, A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SHI'A HEZB-I-WAHDAT WHO IS BASED IN QUETTA, NOTED THAT WAHDAT CHAIRMAN USTED KHALILI HAD NOT MADE A PUBLIC STATEMENT. HOWEVER, NAZ CONTINUED, WAHDAT'S REACTION WILL BE "UNIFORMLY IN FAVOR" OF THE STRIKES "AGAINST SUNNI TERRORISTS." THE REACTION OF JAMIAT-I-ISLAMI, THE OTHER MAJOR ANTI-TALIBAN FACTION, WAS ALSO EXTREMELY POSITIVE IN THRUST: JAMIAT ENVOY DAUD MIR WAS INTERVIEWED ON TV,

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EXPRESSING STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE U.S. ACTION.

INDEPENDENT PASHTUNS MOSTLY FAVORABLE

8. (C) AMONG POLOFF'S NON-TALIBAN PASHTUN CONTACTS THERE WAS HIGH PRAISE FOR THE U.S. ACTION AND ABSOLUTELY NO HINT OF A NATIONALISTIC REACTION AGAINST THE U.S. HAMID KARZAI SAID HE AND HIS FATHER, ELDER STATESMAN ABDUL AHAD KARZAI, WERE STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF THE U.S. STRIKES, WHICH HE CLAIMED SENT A STRONG MESSAGE AGAINST TERRORISM IN AFGHANISTAN. KARZAI ASSERTED THAT HE HAD

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SPOKEN TO A NUMBER OF TALIBAN OFFICIALS WHO HAD ALSO EXPRESSED
STRONG DISPLEASURE OF MULLAH OMAR "FOR BRINGING THE U.S. AGAINST
AFGHANISTAN." HAMID GAILANI, SON OF POLITICAL/RELIGIOUS LEADER
PIR GAILANI, TOLD QHAT "99 PERCENT OF THE AFGHANS HE HAD
MET WITH WERE ANGERED THAT THE TALIBAN HAD FAILED TO DRIVE BIN
LADIN FROM THE COUNTRY." AMIN MOJADDEDI, A SUFI LEADER WITH MANY
TALIBAN CONTACTS, SAID THE TALIBAN HAD MADE "A GREAT MISTAKE BY
ALLOWING THEMSELVES TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH PEOPLE LIKE BIN LADIN
WHO CARE NOTHING FOR AFGHANISTAN AND WILL ONLY HURT IT."
MOJADDEDI ALLOWED THAT HE THOUGHT THAT THE U.S. SHOULD HAVE
WAITED LONGER AND BARGAINED WITH THE TALIBAN ABOUT BIN LADIN.

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POLOFF NOTED THE URGENCY OF THE U.S. ACTION, COMMENTING THAT THE
U.S. WOULD NOT BE PUT IN THE POSITION OF NEGOTIATING WITH THE
TALIBAN FOR A KNOWN INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST. THE TALIBAN HAVE TO
TAKE MEASURES TO STOP TERRORISM IN AFGHANISTAN NOW.

9. (C) THE REACTION AMONG INDEPENDENT AFGHANS IN THE NORTH-WEST
FRONTIER PROVINCE (NWFP) WAS DIFFERENT IN TONE THAN THOSE AFGHANS
POLOFF SPOKE TO IN ISLAMABAD OR QUETTA. FOR EXAMPLE, MOHAMMAD
HAKIM AYUBI, A LEADER OF A GROUP OF MODERATE AFGHANS, SAID HIS
GROUP HAD ISSUED A STATEMENT EXPRESSING SORROW OVER THE U.S.
ACTION. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT HIS GROUP HAD OFTEN EXPRESSED
CONCERN THAT AFGHANISTAN WAS BEING USED AS A BASE OF
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM. ZARGHUN SHAH SHINWARI OF THE AFGHAN
INFORMATION CENTER TOLD CONSULATE PESHAWAR THAT THE U.S. STRIKES

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COULD STIR ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT. (NOTE: CONSULATE PESHAWAR REPORTS THAT SEVERAL THOUSAND AFGHANS LIVING IN REFUGEE CAMPS IN THE NWFP DEMONSTRATED IN THE PESHAWAR AREA LATE ON AUGUST 21. THERE WERE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT THE DEMONSTRATION MAY HAVE TURNED VIOLENT.)

COMMENT

10. (S) AMONG OUR CONTACTS THE PRESENCE OF BIN LADIN IN AFGHANISTAN HAS NEVER BEEN POPULAR. EVEN MANY TALIBAN CONTACTS -- WHILE DEFENDING HIS RIGHTS AS A "GUEST" -- HAVE INDICATED THAT HIS PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN HAS BEEN MORE OF A BURDEN THAN A BLESSING. OBVIOUSLY, THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE -- WELCOMING AN ACTION PERCEIVED AS ANTI-TALIBAN IN THRUST -- WAS OPPOSED TO HIM SINCE HE WAS SUPPORTING THE TALIBAN FINANCIALLY. IN ADDITION,

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BASED ON WHAT WE HEAR, MANY ORDINARY AFGHANS -- WHO BASICALLY ONLY WANT PEACE -- ARE SHOCKED THAT THE U.S., THE FRIEND OF THE AFGHANS AGAINST THE SOVIETS, HAS FELT THAT IT HAD TO RESORT TO FORCE OF ARMS AGAINST TARGETS IN AFGHANISTAN. FOR THESE REASONS, THE U.S. STRIKES DO NOT SEEM TO BE CREATING A FIRESTORM OF ANTI-U.S. REACTION AND THERE HAVE BEEN FEW SIGNS -- BEYOND THE VERY SLIGHT GLIMMERS IN THE NWFP -- THAT THE STRIKES HAVE LED TO A NATIONALISTIC BACKLASH AGAINST THE U.S. WE WILL HAVE TO WATCH CLOSELY TO SEE WHETHER SUCH A REACTION BUILDS IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS.
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