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O 221255Z DEC 98
 FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2461
 INFO AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY
 AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY
 AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY
 USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
 AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
 AMEMBASSY ALMATY
 AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
 AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
 AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
 AMEMBASSY LONDON
 AMEMBASSY PARIS
 DIA WASHINGTON DC
 AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
 USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/CCJ3/CCJ5/POLAD//
 AMCONSUL KARACHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 009338

DECAPTIONED

EXDIS

SA/PAB, NEA, AND EUR/CACEN; ALMATY ALSO FOR DUSHANBE; ABU DHABI
ALSO FOR DUBAI

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/22/08

QPREL, PTER, KISL, AF, SA

SUBJ: USAMA BIN LADIN: SAUDI GOVERNMENT REPORTEDLY TURNING THE
SCREWS ON THE TALIBAN ON VISAS; HAJ MAY BE AFFECTED

REFS: (A) ISLAMABAD 9020; (B) ISLAMABAD 7242

(U) CLASSIFIED BY CDA ALAN EASTHAM. REASONS: 1.5 (C) (D).

1. (U) THIS MESSAGE WAS COORDINATED WITH CONSULATE PESHAWAR.
2. (C) SUMMARY: THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT IS REPORTEDLY QUIETLY
RATCHETING UP THE PRESSURE ON THE TALIBAN OVER THE ISSUE OF

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: CHARLES L DARIS
 DATE/CASE ID: 10 MAR 2005 200403497

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TERRORIST USAMA BIN LADIN: ACCORDING TO VARIOUS SOURCES, THE SAG IS BALKING AT PROVIDING VISAS TO AFGHANS WHO HAVE BEEN REFERRED BY THE TALIBAN. THIS POLICY INCLUDES VISAS FOR UMRAH (NON-HAJ VISITS TO THE HOLY SITES). THE SAG IS ALSO SAID TO BE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING NOT ACCEPTING THE TALIBAN'S LIST OF AFGHANS WHO WANT TO GO ON HAJ. IN ADDITION, ARIANA FLIGHTS TO JEDDAH HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN TERMINATED. OVERALL, IF THE SAUDIS TURN THESE SCREWS TIGHT ENOUGH, THE TALIBAN'S ISOLATION WOULD HAVE BECOME THAT MUCH DEEPER -- AND THE PRESSURE ON THEM TO DEAL WITH BIN LADIN THAT MUCH GREATER. END SUMMARY.

SAG SAID TO IMPLEMENT TOUGH VISA POLICY ON TALIBAN

3. (C) THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT, UPSET WITH THE TALIBAN'S CONTINUED INTRANSIGENCE OVER TERRORIST USAMA BIN LADIN, IS REPORTEDLY WORKING
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QUIETLY TO PRESSURE THE TALIBAN BY USING VARIOUS TOOLS AT ITS DISPOSAL, INCLUDING THE ISSUANCE OF VISAS. FOR EXAMPLE, SEVERAL GOOD SOURCES HAVE TOLD POLOFF THAT THE SAG IS REFRAINING FROM ISSUING VISAS FOR VISITS TO SAUDI ARABIA BY THOSE AFGHANS RECOMMENDED BY THE TALIBAN. (NOTE: THIS POLICY INVOLVES SAUDI CONSULATES IN PAKISTAN; THE SAG CLOSED ITS EMBASSY IN KABUL IN SEPTEMBER WHEN THE SAG DOWNGRADED TIES WITH THE TALIBAN BECAUSE OF THE BIN LADIN ISSUE -- SEE REF B.)

4. (C) IN A DECEMBER 21 MEETING WITH POLOFF, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] B1
RECOUNTED THAT THE LOCAL TALIBAN ENVOY TO PAKISTAN, SYEDUR RAHMAN HAQQANI, HAD TOLD HIM ON DECEMBER 20 THAT THE SAG IS REFUSING TO ISSUE VISAS TO AFGHANS WHO COME RECOMMENDED BY THE TALIBAN. THIS INCLUDES UMRAH (VISITS TO THE ISLAMIC HOLY SITES OUTSIDE OF THE HAJ SEASON) VISAS FOR AFGHANS AND COMMERCIAL VISAS FOR TRADERS. HAQQANI, WHO SEEMED QUITE UPSET, REPORTEDLY TOLD [REDACTED] THAT THE TALIBAN HAVE COMPLAINED TO SAUDI AMBASSADOR TO PAKISTAN ASAD AL-ZUHAIR ABOUT THE SITUATION, BUT AL-ZUHAIR MADE NO PROMISES TO CORRECT IT, NOTING THAT THE SAG IS STILL UNHAPPY THAT THE TALIBAN ARE PERMITTING BIN LADIN SANCTUARY IN AFGHANISTAN. (NOTE: [REDACTED] SAID HE WAS NOT SURE FROM HIS CONVERSATION WITH HAQQANI ON HOW LONG THIS POLICY ON VISAS HAD BEEN IN PLACE, BUT IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT IT HAD BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS.)

CLOSING OFF THE HAJ?

5. (C) THE SAG REPORTEDLY HAS PLANS TO PRESSURE THE TALIBAN

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FURTHER ON THE IMPORTANT MATTER OF VISAS FOR HAJ VISITS. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
TOLD POLOFF DECEMBER 22 THAT HE HAD MET DECEMBER 20 WITH [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] IN ISLAMABAD, AT THE LATTER'S REQUEST. [REDACTED] ASKED [REDACTED] TO PREPARE A LIST OF 500 AFGHANS WHO WANTED TO GO ON HAJ THIS YEAR. THE SAG, [REDACTED] RELATED, WOULD LOOK ON ANYONE RECOMMENDED BY

[REDACTED] "VERY FAVORABLY." [REDACTED] AGREED TO DO SO, BUT QUERIED [REDACTED] ON WHY HE [REDACTED] WAS NOT GOING THROUGH THE TALIBAN AS THE SAG DID LAST YEAR. [REDACTED] REPLIED THAT THE SAG DOES NOT PLAN TO ACCEPT THE TALIBAN'S LIST OF HAJ PARTICIPANTS THIS YEAR, ALTHOUGH THE FINAL DECISION HAD NOT YET BEEN MADE ON THE MATTER. [REDACTED] WENT ON TO EXPLICITLY LINK THIS DECISION TO THE FAILURE OF THE TALIBAN TO ACT ON BIN LADIN.

6. (C) CONTINUING, [REDACTED] SAID [REDACTED] RECOUNTED THAT THE SAG HAD DISCUSSED THE ISSUE OF HAJ VISAS WQAMMAD MUSLIM HAQQANI, THE TALIBAN'S "ACTING MINISTER OF HAJ AND RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS" DURING

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A NOVEMBER VISIT BY HAQQANI TO SAUDI ARABIA. [] SAID HAQQANI HAD
ASKED FOR PERMISSION FOR THE TALIBAN TO SEND 8,000 AFGHANS FOR THE
NEXT HAJ (WHICH TAKES PLACE IN MARCH 1999). IN RESPONSE, THE SAUDI
GOVERNMENT TOLD HAQQANI THAT IT HAD NOT YET MADE A DECISION ON THE
ISSUE. HAQQANI WENT HOME EMPTY-HANDED.

7. (C) IF THE TALIBAN'S LIST FOR THE HAJ IS NOT ACCEPTED BY THE
SAG, IT WOULD BE A BIG DEAL IN AFGHANISTAN. [] NOTED THAT
LAST YEAR APPROXIMATELY 7,000 AFGHANS WENT ON HAJ FROM SITES IN
TALIBAN-CONTROLLED AFGHANISTAN. ALL OF THESE PILGRIMS WERE
APPROVED BY THE TALIBAN. IF VISAS ARE NOT ISSUED FOR AFGHANS WHO
LIVE IN TALIBAN-CONTROLLED AFGHANISTAN, MANY OF THESE AFGHANS WOULD
HAVE TO TRY TO TRAVEL TO PAKISTAN TO TRY TO GET VISAS. (NOTE:
LAST YEAR AN EQUAL AMOUNT -- ABOUT 7,000 AFGHANS -- TRAVELLED VIA
PAKISTAN TO SAUDI ARABIA FOR HAJ.) [] OBSERVED THAT THE END
RESULT OF ALL THIS WOULD BE THAT MANY AFGHANS PROBABLY WOULD NOT BE
ABLE TO TRAVEL FOR HAJ. THIS WOULD BE VERY UPSETTING FOR AFGHANS,
[] SAID. IN ADDITION, IT WOULD BE A GREAT EMBARRASSMENT FOR
THE TALIBAN, WHICH PRIDES ITSELF ON BEING "THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF
AFGHANISTAN" -- "THIS POLICY OF THE SAUDIS WOULD REALLY BE A SIGN
OF DISPLEASURE WITH THE TALIBAN IF IT IS CARRIED OUT," []
ASSERTED.

IMPROVED SITUATION FOR THE OTHER FACTIONS
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8. (C) PROBLEMS FOR THE TALIBAN ON VISAS APPARENTLY HAVE IMPROVED
THE SITUATION FOR THE OTHER FACTIONS. [] A REPRESENTATIVE
OF GENERAL DOSTAM'S NATIONAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF AFGHANISTAN
(NIMA), TOLD POLOFF DECEMBER 22 THAT HE RECENTLY MET WITH AN
OFFICIAL AT THE SAUDI EMBASSY IN ISLAMABAD WHO WAS QUITE OPEN TO

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APPLICATIONS FOR THE HAJ TO THOSE RECOMMENDED BY THE ANTI-TALIBAN FACTIONS. [] SAID THIS ATTITUDE WAS DIFFERENT FROM THE LAST HAJ (IN APRIL 1998) WHEN SAUDI OFFICIALS MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR THE ANTI-TALIBAN GROUPS' REFERRALS BY GENERALLY FAVORING THE TALIBAN'S LIST. SOME OF THOSE RECOMMENDED BY NIMA ULTIMATELY HAD RECEIVED VISAS, HOWEVER. [] ADDED THAT THE SAUDI EMBASSY OFFICIAL HE HAD SPOKEN TO HAD SHARPLY CRITICIZED THE TALIBAN, INCLUDING THEIR POLICY OF PROVIDING SANCTUARY TO BIN LADIN. (NOTE: [] COMMENTS FIT INTO A PATTERN WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE THE SAG TURNING A FRIENDLIER FACE TO THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE OF LATE: FOR EXAMPLE, NOMINAL NORTHERN ALLIANCE LEADER BURHANUDDIN RABBANI WAS ALLOWED TO VISIT SAUDI ARABIA RECENTLY, BUT MULLAH RABBANI, THE TALIBAN DEPUTY LEADER, WAS REPORTEDLY DENIED A VISA -- SEE REF A.)

HAVE ARIANA FLIGHTS BEEN STOPPED, TOO?

9. (C) THERE ARE ALSO REPORTS THAT SAUDI ARABIA HAS STOPPED ARIANA AFGHAN AIRLINES, WHICH IS NOW CONTROLLED BY THE TALIBAN, FROM FLYING TO JEDDAH. []

[] TOLD POLOFF DECEMBER 22 THAT HE HAD HEARD THAT THE SAG -- AGAIN ACTING TO ISOLATE THE TALIBAN BECAUSE OF ITS CONCERN ABOUT BIN LADIN -- HAD TOLD THE TALIBAN TO STOP THE FLIGHTS IN OCTOBER.

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(NOTE: ARIANA FLIGHTS FROM KABUL OR KANDAHAR TO JEDDAH HAD BEEN RUNNING ON AN IRREGULAR SCHEDULE, AVERAGING ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK.)

[] SAID AS FAR AS HE KNEW ARIANA WAS NOW ONLY FLYING TO DUBAI IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

COMMENT

10. (C) IF -- AS REPORTED ABOVE -- THE SAUDIS ARE USING THE MATTER OF VISAS AGAINST THE TALIBAN BECAUSE OF BIN LADIN, THEY KNOW EXACTLY WHERE TO HURT THEM. SAUDI ARABIA IS OBVIOUSLY VERY IMPORTANT FOR AFGHANS FOR RELIGIOUS REASONS. DENYING VISA REFERRALS BY THE TALIBAN FOR UMRAH AND PERHAPS EVEN FOR NEXT YEAR'S HAJ WOULD BE VERY EMBARRASSING FOR THE TALIBAN. AFGHANS -- WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES GOOD MUSLIMS BAR NONE -- MIGHT WONDER WHAT EXACTLY THE TALIBAN ARE GOOD FOR IF THEIR POLICIES STAND IN THE WAY

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OF VISITS TO THE HOLY SITES. MOREOVER, A RESTRICTIVE VISA POLICY
AND THE REPORTED HALT OF FLIGHTS TO JEDDAH WOULD ALSO INTERFERE
WITH THE LIVELIHOOD OF THE MANY AFGHAN TRADERS WHO DO BUSINESS IN
SAUDI ARABIA. OVERALL, IF THE SAUDIS ARE INDEED TURNING THESE
SCREWS, THE TALIBAN'S ISOLATION WOULD APPEAR TO BE THAT MUCH DEEPER
-- AND THE PRESSURE ON THEM TO DEAL WITH THE BIN LADIN MATTER THAT
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