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CONTROLS

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DEPT FOR SA/PAB AND EUR/CEN; LONDON FOR POL/TUELLER; MBABANE FOR  
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COMBINE: COMPLETE

SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: GOP DENIES PAKISTANI INVOLVEMENT IN FIGHTING; TALIBAN REPORTEDLY ENLISTING SUPPORTERS IN FRONTIER AREAS

REFS: (A) PESHAWAR 540  
- (B) TASHKENT 2562 (NOTAL)  
- (C) FBIS LONDON 011327Z JUN 97  
- (D) FBIS LONDON 311106Z MAY 97  
- (E) PESHAWAR 539  
- (F) FBIS LONDON 301937Z MAY 97

CLASSIFIED BY THOMAS L. PRICE, POLITICAL COUNSELOR. REASON: 1.5  
(C) (D).

1. (U) THIS CABLE WAS COORDINATED WITH CONSULATE PESHAWAR.
2. (C) SUMMARY: IN A JUNE 2 CONVERSATION WITH POLOFF, NAEEM KHAN, THE PAKISTANI MFA AFGHAN DESK OFFICER, DENIED REPORTS THAT PAKISTANI MILITARY FORCES ARE FIGHTING IN AFGHANISTAN. WHILE ALSO DENYING GOP INVOLVEMENT, A TALIBAN EMBOFF TOLD POLOFF ON JUNE 2 THAT AFGHANS LIVING IN THE FRONTIER AREAS ARE VOLUNTEERING TO JOIN THE TALIBAN, BUT DENIED THAT THE TALIBAN ARE ENGAGED IN DIRECT RECRUITMENT. OBSERVERS DISAGREE, AND SAY THAT THE TALIBAN ARE ENGAGED IN A CAMPAIGN TO ENLIST VOLUNTEERS FROM FRONTIER TRIBAL GROUPS, MADRASSAHS, AND REFUGEE CAMPS BECAUSE OF RECENT BATTLEFIELD DEFEATS. END SUMMARY.

GOP DENIES PAKISTANI INVOLVEMENT IN FIGHTING  
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3. (C) IN A JUNE 2 MEETING WITH POLOFF, NAEEM KHAN, AFGHAN DESK OFFICER AT THE PAKISTANI MFA, VOCIFEROUSLY DENIED REPORTS THAT PAKISTANI SOLDIERS DRESSED IN THE GARB OF THE TALIBAN WERE CAPTURED BY ANTI-TALIBAN FORCES DURING THE RECENT FIGHTING IN THE NORTH. (REFS C, D, AND F). KHAN COMMENTED THAT THESE REPORTS ARE FICTION CREATED BY "IRAN AND OTHER MISCHIEF MAKERS" WHO WANT TO MAKE IT APPEAR THAT THE GOP IS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE AFGHAN CONFLICT, WHICH HE ASSERTED IS DEFINITELY NOT THE CASE -- "IT IS TRUE THAT WE PROVIDE THE TALIBAN DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT, BUT WE ARE NOT PROVIDING THEM ADVISERS, WEAPONS OR AMMUNITION." KHAN ALLOWED THAT SOME PAKISTANI NATIONALS OF PATHAN (PASHTUN) OR EVEN PUNJABI ETHNICITY MAY BE FIGHTING WITH THE TALIBAN, BUT HE ASSERTED THAT THIS WAS A VOLUNTARY DECISION BY THESE INDIVIDUALS AND DID NOT INVOLVE THE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT. POLOFF TOLD KHAN THAT THE UN EFFORT TO END THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN WOULD BE IMMEASURABLY HELPED IF ALL STATES WOULD CEASE PROVIDING ANY TYPE OF SUPPORT TO THE FACTIONS THAT SERVED TO FUEL THE FIGHTING.

TALIBAN DENY PAKISTANI ASSISTANCE...  
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4. (C) IN A JUNE 2 MEETING, POLOFF ASKED ABDUL WAHAB, FIRST SECRETARY AT THE TALIBAN-CONTROLLED AFGHAN EMBASSY IN ISLAMABAD, ABOUT THE REPORTS THAT PAKISTANI TROOPS WERE CAPTURED IN THE NORTH. ROLLING HIS EYES AND NOTING THAT MANY JOURNALISTS HAVE ASKED HIM

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THIS SAME QUESTION, WAHAB REPLIED THAT THE REPORTS WERE COMPLETELY UNFOUNDED -- "PAKISTAN IS A FRIENDLY COUNTRY, BUT WE HAVE NOT NEEDED AND DO NOT NOW NEED THE SUPPORT OF THEIR MILITARY IN AFGHANISTAN." WAHAB THEN REPEATED THE TALIBAN'S "FOR THE RECORD" COMMENT THAT THEY ARE NOT RECEIVING ANY SORT OF ASSISTANCE FROM PAKISTAN.

BUT SAY THEY ARE RECEIVING SUPPORT FROM THE FRONTIER  
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5. (C) POLOFF ALSO ASKED WAHAB ABOUT THE SWIRL OF RECENT REPORTS THAT THE TALIBAN ARE BUSY ENLISTING SUPPORTERS FROM FRONTIER TRIBAL GROUPS, AND FROM MADRASSAHS AND REFUGEE CAMPS IN THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE (NWFP) AND BALOCHISTAN. WAHAB RESPONDED THAT THE TALIBAN HAVE ALWAYS HAD A GREAT DEAL OF SUPPORT FROM AFGHANS LIVING IN THE PAKISTANI FRONTIER AREAS, SO IT SHOULD NOT SURPRISE ANYONE THAT INDIVIDUALS ARE VOLUNTEERING TO RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN. THE TALIBAN URGE PEOPLE TO FIGHT FOR ISLAM, BUT ARE NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN EFFORTS TO "RECRUIT" PEOPLE, AND ARE NOT TRYING TO "STIR UP THE TRIBES" ON THE BORDER, HE CLAIMED. ASKED IF THE TALIBAN WERE RECEIVING MORE RECRUITS SINCE THE LATEST ROUND OF FIGHTING BEGAN IN MID-MAY AS SOME REPORTS HAVE INDICATED (REF E), WAHAB OBSERVED THAT SUPPORT FOR THE TALIBAN IS "CONSTANT" -- "THESE REPORTS THAT HUNDREDS OF RECRUITS ARE TRAVELLING THROUGH CHAMAN (BALOCHISTAN) AND THE KHYBER PASS ARE DEFINITELY NOT TRUE."

TALIBAN REPORTEDLY WORKING AMONG THE TRIBES...  
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6. (C) WHO IS WELL-PLUGGED IN WITH THE TALIBAN, TOLD POLOFF ON JUNE 4 THAT HE HAD HEARD THAT THE TALIBAN ARE UNDERTAKING EFFORTS TO GAIN THE SUPPORT OF THE TRIBALS -- "THE TALIBAN'S RECENT DEFEATS IN THE NORTH HAVE FORCED THEM TO TAP INTO SOURCES OF SUPPORT ACROSS THE BORDER AND THEY ARE DEFINITELY TRYING TO IGNITE PAKISTANI PATHANS TO JOIN THEM IN THE WAR NORTH OF KABUL." SPECIFICALLY, THE TALIBAN ARE LOOKING FOR SUPPORT FROM THE SHINWARI, MOHMAND, AND AFRIDI TRIBES, WHICH LIVE IN EASTERN AFGHANISTAN AND ACROSS THE BORDER IN THE NWFP -- "THESE TRIBES ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR FIERCENESS IN WAR," ASKED WHETHER HE THOUGHT THE TALIBAN IS HAVING SUCCESS IN THESE EFFORTS, COMMENTED THAT HE IS NOT CERTAIN, BUT THOUGHT THAT MAYBE THEY ARE HAVING MORE SUCCESS WITH THESE TRIBES' MULLAHS THAN WITH THE TRIBAL LEADERS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS.

AND IN THE MADRASSAHS...  
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7. (C) ADDED THAT HE HEARD THAT THE TALIBAN'S EFFORTS TO GAIN SUPPORTERS FROM THE MADRASSAH'S IN THE NWFP AND BALOCHISTAN HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY SUCCESSFUL, PERHAPS BECAUSE OF A RECENT CALL BY TALIBAN LEADER OMAR FOR SUPPORT. (NOTE: MANY PEOPLE IN THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT REPORTEDLY SPENT YEARS STUDYING IN MADRASSAHS ON THE PAKISTANI SIDE OF THE BORDER.) IN FACT, HE SAID, HE HEARD THAT IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS THE MADRASSAHS IN THESE TWO PROVINCES HAVE

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BEEN "PRACTICALLY CLEANED OUT" BECAUSE ALL THE AFGHAN STUDENTS HAD LEFT TO FIGHT FOR THE TALIBAN.

TOLD POLOFF ON JUNE 3 THAT MANY OF THE MADRASSAHS IN NORTHERN BALUCHISTAN HAD CLOSED DOWN BECAUSE MOST OF THE STUDENTS HAD RECENTLY LEFT FOR AFGHANISTAN. IN A COMMENT THAT TENDS TO CONFIRM POINTS, AN

TOLD CONSULATE PESHAWAR THAT HE HAD SEEN A LARGE CROWD OF TALIBAN SUPPORTERS, MANY OF WHOM WERE POSSIBLY NEW RECRUITS, AT KANDAHAR AIRPORT ON JUNE 1 (REF A). (NOTE: DURING A RECENT DRIVE TO KANDAHAR VIA QUETTA, POLOFF PASSED SEVERAL MADRASSAHS THAT WERE BOARDED UP. AFGHANS SAID THESE MADRASSAHS WERE CLOSED BECAUSE ALL THE STUDENTS HAD RECENTLY CROSSED INTO AFGHANISTAN.)

AND THE REFUGEE CAMPS  
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8. (C) TOLD POLOFF ON JUNE 3 THAT HAD RECEIVED REPORTS THAT TALIBAN REPRESENTATIVES WERE SCOURING AFGHAN REFUGEE CAMPS IN PAKISTAN LOOKING FOR SUPPORTERS. SAID HE HAD ALSO HEARD THIS, SPECIFICALLY IN TERMS OF TALIBAN EFFORTS IN CAMPS NEAR PESHAWAR. WAS TOLD ON JUNE 2 BY

REPRESENTATIVES THAT THERE WAS A MAJOR TRAFFIC JAM IN HARIPUR REFUGEE CAMP AND CITY (LOCATED NEAR ISLAMABAD) ON JUNE 1 DUE TO A LARGE NUMBERS OF TRUCKS AND BUSES TAKING YOUNG MEN TO AFGHANISTAN. SAID THEY HAD HEARD THAT THESE MEN HAD RESPONDED TO A REQUEST FOR RECRUITS FROM TALIBAN REPRESENTATIVES, WHO HAD VISITED THE CAMP LAST WEEK. TOLD REFCOORD THAT THEY ESTIMATED THAT OVER 5,000 MEN HAD RECENTLY CROSSED INTO AFGHANISTAN FROM PAKISTAN.

COMMENT  
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9. (C) CRITICS HAVE LONG CHARGED THAT PAKISTAN IS PROVIDING THE TALIBAN WEAPONS, AMMUNITION AND MAYBE EVEN LIMITED AIR SUPPORT. WHILE THIS IS POSSIBLE, IT HAS YET TO BE PROVEN. BECAUSE PAKISTAN'S POSSIBLE GAINS WOULD APPEAR TO BE DRAMATICALLY OUTWEIGHED BY THE RISKS, WE TEND TO DOUBT REPORTS THAT PAKISTANI MILITARY UNITS ARE FIGHTING IN AFGHANISTAN. BASED ON WHAT WE ARE HEARING, IT APPEARS THAT THE TALIBAN ARE MAKING A FULL-COURT PRESS FOR SUPPORT IN THE FRONTIER AREAS, WHICH IS NOT SURPRISING GIVEN THE LOSSES THEY HAVE RECENTLY SUFFERED. MOST OBSERVERS DO NOT BELIEVE THE NEW RECRUITS WILL BE OF MUCH USE BECAUSE THEY DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE ANY MILITARY TRAINING.  
HOLZMAN

ADMIN  
END OF MESSAGE

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