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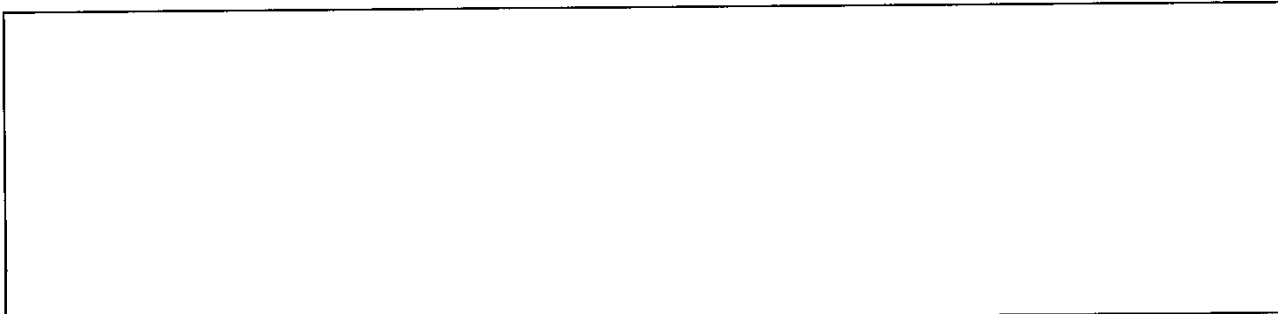
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TEXT
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, ECON, MOPS, PTER, PK, IR, UN, AF
COMBINE: COMPLETE

SUBJECT: A/S RAPHEL DISCUSSES AFGHANISTAN

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY THOMAS W. SIMONS, JR, AMBASSADOR.
REASON: 1.5 (D).

2. (C) SUMMARY: DISCUSSIONS WITH GOP, KABUL GOVERNMENT AND TALIBAN OFFICIALS SUGGEST THE DOOR IS NOT YET CLOSED FOR AN AFGHAN PEACE PROCESS -- BUT IT WILL TAKE HARD WORK TO KEEP IT OPEN, LET ALONE GO THROUGH IT. THE GOP HAS RECOGNIZED THAT ITS SUPPORT FOR THE TALIBAN HAS BACK-FIRED AND IS LOOKING FOR ALTERNATIVES, AND NEITHER THE TALIBAN NOR THE KABUL GOVERNMENT CAN BE SUFFICIENTLY SURE THAT THEY WILL WIN THE EXPECTED NEXT ROUND OF FIGHTING TO RULE OUT COMPLETELY NEGOTIATIONS. NONETHELESS, IT WILL TAKE SKILLFUL MANAGEMENT -- AND A BIT OF LUCK -- TO BREAK THROUGH THE RIGID POSITIONS ESPOUSED BY KABUL AND THE TALIBAN. AN ARMS EMBARGO (PERHAPS TO BE DISCUSSED VIA AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE) AND SUPPORT FOR AN ALL-PARTY AFGHAN CONFERENCE COULD BE USEFUL TOOLS TO BREAK THE CURRENT DEAD-LOCK. END SUMMARY.

3. (U) SOUTH ASIA A/S RAPHEL'S APRIL 19-20 VISIT TO AFGHANISTAN, AND HER MEETINGS IN ISLAMABAD WITH TOP GOP AND U.N. OFFICIALS, PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASSESS THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY ON THE AFGHAN PEACE PROCESS. IN AFGHANISTAN SHE MET WITH KABUL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS INCLUDING PRESIDENT RABBANI, DE FACTO DEFENSE MINISTER AHMED SHAH MASOOD, MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS NAJIBULLAH LAFRAIE AND ACTING DEFENSE MINISTER YUNIS QANUNI AS WELL AS TALIBAN LEADERS MAULAVI AMIR KHAN MOTTAQI (TALIBAN CHIEF FOR INFORMATION) AND FIVE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE TALIBAN INNER SHURA. IN PAKISTAN SHE CALLED ON, AMONG OTHERS, PM BHUTTO, COAS KARAMAT, INTERIOR MINISTER BABAR, FOREIGN MINISTER ASSEF ALI AND NAJMUDDIN SHAIKH.

PAKISTAN: LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT

4. (C) A CONSENSUS HAS EMERGED AMONG THE TOP LEADERSHIP OF THE GOP THAT PAKISTAN NEEDS TO BROADEN ITS AFGHAN POLICY. PM BHUTTO TOLD A/S RAPHEL THAT THE GOP IS PURSUING AN ENHANCED DIALOGUE WITH THE KABUL GOVERNMENT; FM ASSEF ALI SAID ISLAMABAD WOULD WELCOME A VISIT BY A RABBANI/MASOOD DELEGATION, WHICH WOULD BE RECIPROCATED, AND ALSO OFFERED TO MEET WITH KABUL REGIME MINSTATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS LAFRAIE ON THE MARGINS OF THE UPCOMING ASHGABAT ECO CONFERENCE. THE MOVE TO REPAIR

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RELATIONS IN KABUL IN LARGE PART DERIVES FROM GOP DISSATISFACTION WITH THE DIRECTION IN WHICH THE TALIBAN ARE MOVING; COAS KARAMAT WENT SO FAR AS TO REFER TO THE TALIBAN AS "A MILLSTONE AROUND OUR NECKS." FONSEC SHAIKH OUTLINED PAKISTAN'S REPEATED EFFORTS TO GET THE TALIBAN TO AGREE TO NEGOTIATIONS AND EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT THAT THE RECENT KANDAHAR ULEMA MAJLIS OPTED FOR HARD-LINE REJECTIONISM; FM ASSEF ALI SAID THE ONLY GOOD RESULT OF THAT GATHERING WAS THE POSSIBILITY THAT MAULAVI MOHAMMED OMAR'S ELEVATION TO "LEADER OF THE FAITHFUL" WOULD GIVE HIM MORE POWER TO MAKE DECISIONS. PM BHUTTO EMPHASIZED THAT PAKISTAN WAS NOT PROVIDING MILITARY SUPPORT TO THE TALIBAN AND INSISTED THAT ONLY MINIMAL, NON-LETHAL AID WAS BEING DELIVERED.

5. (C) HOW TO MOVE FORWARD FOR PAKISTAN, HOWEVER, IS STILL A MATTER OF SOME DEBATE WITHIN THE GOP'S TOP CIRCLES, BUT ISLAMABAD IS OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS. FEARING REGIONAL ISOLATION ON AFGHANISTAN POLICY, THE GOP IS REACHING OUT, AND WANTS TO ENGAGE WITH THE U.S. ON NEXT STEPS, FM ASSEF ALI OBSERVED. ENGAGING THE 'RIM STATES' ON AFGHANISTAN ALSO IS IMPORTANT, TOP GOP OFFICIALS AGREE, AND ISLAMABAD IS INCREASINGLY WILLING TO COOPERATE WITH TEHRAN, PERHAPS EVEN TO THE POINT OF HOSTING (AT IRANIAN URGING) AN AFGHAN CONFERENCE IN ISLAMABAD, AND TO ENGAGE THE ECO. IN ADDITION TO BEING LUCRATIVE FOR PAKISTAN, THE TRANS-AFGHAN PIPELINE IDEA IS STRONGLY SUPPORTED BECAUSE IT IS SEEN AS A WAY TO BRING POTENTIALLY HELPFUL ACTORS ONTO THE AFGHAN STAGE. THE PM MADE CLEAR PAKISTAN'S SUPPORT FOR THE U.N. MISSION'S PRIMACY AS THE LEAD ACTOR IN BROKERING A PEACE DEAL, BUT OTHERS OUTLINED ISLAMABAD'S DISSATISFACTION AND DISAPPOINTMENT OVER WHAT IS SEEN AS THE LACK OF ENERGY AND DIRECTION OF THE MESTIRI MISSION.

6. (C) AT HEART, PAKISTAN'S NEED TO PURSUE A PRO-PASHTUN POLICY FOR THE SAKE OF ITS OWN DOMESTIC POLITICAL AND SECURITY AGENDA REPRESENTS A HURDLE WHICH THE GOP ACKNOWLEDGES, BUT FEELS THE TAJIK-DOMINATED KABUL GOVERNMENT IS DOING LITTLE TO HELP OUT ON. EFFORTS TO RESUSCITATE RELATIONS WITH KABUL ARE HAMPERED, SHAIKH AND ASSEF ALI REMARKED, BY RABBANI AND MASOOD'S BICKERING OVER MODALITIES AND THEIR UNWILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE IN GOOD FAITH NEGOTIATIONS AIMED AT CREATING A BROAD-BASED GOVERNMENT. PAKISTAN APPEARS TO FOCUS MORE ON WAYS TO GET THE AFGHAN FACTIONS THEMSELVES TO PUT THEIR HOUSE IN ORDER, AND IS LESS FIXATED ON THE ISSUE OF CURBING OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE, THE LATTER BEING SEEN MORE AS A CONTRIBUTING -- RATHER THAN CAUSAL -- FACTOR. WHILE ACCEPTING THE NEED TO WORK BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TRACKS, THE GOP WOULD PREFER AN AFGHAN ALL-PARTY CONFERENCE IN JALALABAD TO AN INTERNATIONAL GATHERING, SENIOR OFFICIALS NOTED, SINCE ISLAMABAD BELIEVES THE KEY TO (AND THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR) A SOLUTION MUST LIE WITH THE AFGHAN FACTIONS THEMSELVES. THEY BELIEVE EITHER GATHERING WOULD REQUIRE CAREFUL PREPARATION AND A PRE-AGREED AGENDA.

KABUL GOVERNMENT: SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS MASKS DEEP INSECURITY

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7. (C) THE KABUL GOVERNMENT'S DIALOGUE WITH A/S RAPHEL EMPHASIZED RABBANI AND MASOOD'S PERCEPTION OF THEMSELVES AS THE LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN. THEY BLAMED PAKISTAN AND THE TALIBAN FOR ALMOST ALL OF THEIR PROBLEMS, WITH LAFRAIE AND MASOOD GOING SO FAR AS TO ALLEGE THAT "PAKISTAN IS AS MUCH TO BLAME FOR THE DESTRUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN AS THE SOVIETS;" A PERCEPTION WITH WHICH A/S RAPHEL STRONGLY TOOK ISSUE. A PRE-OCCUPATION WITH FIXING THE BLAME (ON THE TALIBAN AND PAKISTAN), RATHER THAN FIXING THE PROBLEM OF AFGHANISTAN, WAS A RECURRING THEME IN DISCUSSIONS WITH LAFRAIE, MASOOD AND RABBANI. LAFRAIE, IN PARTICULAR, TOOK A HARD-LINE, SUGGESTING THAT IT WAS FOR THOSE OPPOSED TO THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE PEACE OVERTURES; MASOOD OBSERVED THAT "WE ARE READY TO TALK TO ANYBODY AND HAVE SAID WE ARE PREPARED TO TRANSFER POWER, THAT IS ALL WE NEED TO DO."

8. (C) SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS WAS THE FIRST REACTION OF ALL OF THE KABUL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. LAFRAIE SAID AN ARMS EMBARGO WAS A GOOD IDEA, BUT INSISTED THAT "THE GOVERNMENT'S LEGITIMATE RIGHT" TO IMPORT WEAPONS SHOULD NOT BE AT ISSUE; RABBANI INDICATED THAT HE WOULD NOT LET AFGHANISTAN BECOME "ANOTHER BOSNIA." RABBANI SAID A TRANS-AFGHAN PIPELINE WAS A GOOD IDEA, AS LONG AS IT BENEFITTED AND STRENGTHENED THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT RATHER THAN ANY OTHER GROUP. WHEN ASKED HYPOTHETICALLY IF HE WOULD BE WILLING TO ATTEND AN ALL-PARTY PEACE CONFERENCE IN JALALABAD IF THE PRECONDITION FOR UNIVERSAL PARTICIPATION WAS THAT RABBANI NOT GO AS PRESIDENT BUT AS LEADER OF JAMIAT, HE RESPONDED BY NOTING THAT SUCH A CONDITION WOULD BRING INTO QUESTION THE SINCERITY OF THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS AND WOULD NOT BE IN THE INTEREST OF PEACE. SIMILARLY, WHEN ASKED WHAT CONCESSIONS COULD BE MADE TO THE TALIBAN AND DOSTAM FOR THEIR FUTURE ROLE IN AFGHAN SOCIETY, MASOOD SAID BOTH COULD FORM POLITICAL PARTIES TO CONTEST OPEN ELECTIONS AGAINST "THE GOVERNMENT." AS FOR A NEUTRAL SECURITY FORCE OR A NATIONAL ARMY, MASOOD ALLOWED THAT OTHER GROUPS WOULD BE WELCOME TO PARTICIPATE IN SUCH A FORCE, BUT WARNED THAT "THE GOVERNMENT" WOULD NOT TOLERATE "ILLEGITIMATE FACTIONS" RULING THEIR AREAS BY FORCE OF ARMS.

9. (C) YET IF THE KABUL GOVERNMENT'S INITIAL IMPULSE ON ALMOST ALL QUESTIONS WAS TO STAND ON ITS (HIGHLY QUESTIONABLE) SOVEREIGNTY AND LEGITIMACY, CONCERTED PROBING REVEALED BOTH DEEP INSECURITY AND A WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER A WIDER RANGE OF OPTIONS. INSECURITY WAS CLEAR IN MASOOD AND RABBANI'S STRONG CRITICISM OF DOSTAM'S VISIT TO THE U.S., WHICH THEY SAID "GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT WRONG-DOERS WOULD BE REWARDED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR THEIR INCORRECT ACTIONS." BUT ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE, RABBANI (AFTER A LENGTHY DIATRIBE AGAINST THE EVILS PERPETRATED AGAINST KABUL BY ISLAMABAD) AGREED ULTIMATELY TO SEND A DELEGATION TO PAKISTAN IF THE GOP FIRST ISSUED A FORMAL INVITATION. SIMILARLY, RABBANI AND MASOOD SAID THEY WANTED TO TALK TO THE TALIBAN AND WOULD BE WILLING TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE OF A TRANSFER OF POWER IN THE CONTEXT OF AN INTER-AFGHAN DIALOGUE. AFGHANISTAN NEEDED A STRONGER U.N. MISSION AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO HELP BUILD TOWARDS A

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TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD DRAFT A CONSTITUTION AND THEN HOLD ELECTIONS, RABBANI STATED. MASOOD OUTLINED A VISION FOR A BOTTOM-UP DEMOCRACY IN WHICH LOCAL, DISTRICT AND PROVINCIAL SHURAS WOULD CREATE THE STRUCTURE FOR A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT.

10. (C) MISSING FROM THE KABUL GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH WAS A SENSE OF HOW TO GET FROM THE CURRENT STALEMATE TO THE ROSY, DEMOCRATIC FUTURE BOTH RABBANI AND MASOOD ENVISIONED. MASOOD SAID HE THOUGHT A JALALABAD CONFERENCE PROBABLY WOULD BE USEFUL ONLY IN GIVING THE "MINOR FACTIONS" OF GAILANI, MOJADDEDI, NABI MOHAMMEDI AND KHALIS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SIGN-ON WITH THE GOVERNMENT. KABUL-SCC DISCUSSIONS WERE SEPARATE FROM THE JALALABAD MOOT, MASOOD NOTED, AND THE DIFFICULTY FACING PROGRESS WITH THE TALIBAN AND DOSTAM WAS THEIR "ARROGANCE AND PURSUIT OF THEIR OWN INTERESTS AT THE EXPENSE OF AFGHANISTAN." IT WAS THE LATTER FACTOR, MASOOD ADDED, WHICH MADE THE KABUL GOVERNMENT RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT THE IDEA OF FEDERALISM, WHICH WOULD ONLY DIVIDE -- OR OBLITERATE -- THE NATION OF AFGHANISTAN.

11. (C) ON BILATERAL CONCERNS, THE KABUL GOVERNMENT WAS WILLING TO BE COOPERATIVE. ALTHOUGH DESIROUS OF U.S. SUPPORT, BOTH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC, RABBANI AND MASOOD ACCEPTED THAT THE U.S. WAS A NEUTRAL PLAYER; ALTHOUGH BOTH THOUGHT WASHINGTON SHOULD LEAN MORE ON PAKISTAN TO STOP ITS AID TO THE TALIBAN. RABBANI AGREED TO COOPERATE ON COUNTER-NARCOTICS ISSUES, AND WHILE DENYING KABUL GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN TERRORISM, DID ADMIT THAT "AREAS OUTSIDE THE CONTROL" OF THE KABUL AUTHORITIES MAY BE BEING USED BY TERRORIST ELEMENTS. SAYYAF MAY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN THE PAST, RABBANI STATED, BUT NO LONGER HAD THE FUNDS TO SUPPORT SUCH ACTIVITIES.

THE TALIBAN: IMAGE CONSCIOUS BUT RELUCTANT TO CHANGE

12. (C) TALIBAN LEADERS ASKED A/S RAPHEL TO HELP IMPROVE THEIR IMAGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. THEY DENIED BEING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATORS AND CLAIMED TO HAVE OPENED MANY MORE SCHOOLS IN THE AREA UNDER THEIR CONTROL THAN HAD EXISTED PREVIOUSLY. DIFFERENCES OF CULTURE LAY AT THE HEART OF MUCH OF THE MISUNDERSTANDING, THEY ALLEGED; "IN FRANCE YOU CANNOT WEAR THE VEIL, BY LAW, AND HERE WOMEN HAVE TO, BY LAW" MAULAVI MOTAQI COMMENTED. THE TALIBAN CLAIMED IRAN AND RUSSIA ACCUSED THEM OF BEING TERRORISTS. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY NOTED, THE TALIBAN HAD WITHIN TWO YEARS BROUGHT PEACE AND SECURITY TO HALF OF AFGHANISTAN; SOON THE WHOLE COUNTRY WOULD BE SAFE AND AT PEACE, GOD WILLING.

13. (C) CONTRADICTIONS ABOUNDED IN THE TALIBAN DISCOURSE. RABBANI WAS A LIAR WHO ATTACKED WHEN HE PROMISED TO TALK, THEY SAID -- BUT THE TALIBAN ENCOURAGED THE U.N. MISSION TO CONTINUE ITS EFFORTS TO DEVELOP AN ACCEPTABLE PEACE PLAN TO WHICH "EVERYONE SHOULD AGREE. IF THE U.N. FAILS, THEN WE HAVE FAILED," MOTAQI INTONED. THE TALIBAN CLAIMED TO DESIRE PEACE, BUT DID NOT RULE OUT FIGHTING IF THAT WAS WHAT WAS NECESSARY TO

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DISARM THE KABUL REGIME. WHEN AARAPHEL MADE A FULL-COURT PRESS FOR THE RELEASE OF THE DETAINED RUSSIAN AIRCREW, EVEN OFFERING TO FLY THEM OUT VIA THE DAO C-12 ON THE SPOT AND NOTING PRESIDENT CLINTON'S LETTER REPLYING TO THE MISSIVE SENT BY THE WIVES OF THE CREW, MOTAQI RAILED AGAINST RUSSIAN AND IRANIAN INTERFERENCE AND DEMANDED TO KNOW WHY THE U.S. HAD NOT CONDEMNED AND/OR STOPPED THIS FOREIGN INTERVENTION. HOLDING THE RUSSIAN AIRCREW WAS NECESSARY BECAUSE OF THE INTENSE ENMITY OF THE AFGHAN PEOPLE AGAINST RUSSIA AND AS PROOF OF MOSCOW'S INTERFERENCE, THE TALIBAN SAID. YET LATER IN THE CONVERSATION, WHEN A/S RAPHEL EXPLAINED THE U.S. VIEW THAT THE TALIBAN'S ACTIONS TOWARDS THE PRISONERS WERE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE AND REPREHENSIBLE, MOTAQI SAID THE TALIBAN TREATED THE RUSSIAN AIRCREW AS WELL CARED FOR GUESTS, BUT THEY COULD NOT BE RELEASED UNTIL THE MISSING 60,000 AFGHANS IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION HAD BEEN ACCOUNTED FOR AND/OR THEIR FAMILIES ACROSS AFGHANISTAN HAD BEEN CONSULTED. (A/S RAPHEL MET WITH THE CREW FOR 15 MINUTES IN THE KANDAHAR GOVERNOR'S COMPOUND AND EXPRESSED TO THEM U.S. CONCERN AND EFFORTS TO SECURE THEIR RELEASE; THEY SEEMED GENERALLY HEALTHY AND WERE APPRECIATIVE OF USG EFFORTS ON THEIR BEHALF. PICTURES OF THE AIRCREW (WHOM THE TALIBAN HAD NOT ALLOWED TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED SINCE NOVEMBER, 1995) WILL BE PROVIDED TO THE GOR FOR DELIVERY TO FAMILY MEMBERS.)

14. (C) THE TALIBAN HAD FEW IDEAS TO PUT FORWARD ON WHAT THE FUTURE GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN SHOULD BE, OR HOW IT COULD BE ACHIEVED. MOTAQI SAID THE SHAPE OF THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE "DETERMINED BY THE PEOPLE" ONCE THE NATION WAS DISARMED AND PEACE RESTORED. MOTAQI DID EMBRACE THE IDEA OF AN ARMS EMBARGO, HOWEVER, SAYING THAT THE TALIBAN SUPPORTED THIS PROPOSAL AND INVITED THE U.S. TO JUDGE FOR ITSELF THE EVIDENCE ON WHO RECEIVED MORE OUTSIDE HELP: THE TALIBAN OR KABUL. WHEN PRESSED TO ENGAGE IN MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS, MOTAQI REPLIED SIMPLY THAT "WE ARE STUDENTS; WE WILL TAKE YOUR ADVICE TO OUR SHURA AND TRY TO IMPLEMENT IT." HOWEVER, WHILE THE BASIC TALIBAN MESSAGE WAS NIAVE, SIMPLISTIC AND RIGID, THEIR CONCERN ABOUT THEIR IMAGE AND REQUEST THAT A/S RAPHEL "TELL PRESIDENT CLINTON AND THE WEST THAT WE ARE NOT BAD PEOPLE" DEMONSTRATED A GROWING AWARENESS, PREVIOUSLY ABSENT, OF THEIR OWN LIMITATIONS -- WHICH MAY BE THE MODALITY THROUGH WHICH THEY CAN BE COAXED, OVER TIME, TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE.

COMMENT: FLEXIBILITY OR FIGHTING?

15. (C) A/S RAPHEL'S DISCUSSION TOOK PLACE AGAINST THE BACK-DROP OF GENERAL EXPECTATIONS THAT HEAVY FIGHTING BETWEEN THE KABUL REGIME AND THE TALIBAN WILL BE AN INEVITABILITY THIS SUMMER. YET ALL SIDES GENUINELY APPEAR TO DESIRE A WAY OUT -- AT LEAST IN PART BECAUSE NONE CAN BE CONFIDENT THAT THE FIGHTING WILL GO THEIR WAY. THAT INSECURITY HAS CREATED RENEWED OPPORTUNITIES FOR A REINVIGORATED U.N. MISSION TO MOVE FORWARD -- PARTICULARLY NOW THAT PAKISTAN APPEARS WILLING TO ENGAGE MORE POSITIVELY. AN ARMS EMBARGO (PERHAPS TO BE DISCUSSED VIA AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE), PLUS SUPPORT FOR AN

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ALL-PARTY AFGHAN CONFERENCE, COULD BE USEFUL TOOLS TO BREAK
PAST THE KNEE-JERK, RIGID POSITIONS OF THE AFGHAN FACTIONS AND
TO START COALESCING SUPPORT FOR A RESOLUTION TO THE CRISIS
THERE. THE BOTTOM-LINE IS THAT THERE STILL APPEARS TO BE
REASON FOR A LIMITED OPTIMISM THAT, PROPERLY MANAGED, THERE MAY
NOW BE OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE THE PEACE PROCESS FORWARD. END
COMMENT.

SIMONS

ADMIN
END OF MESSAGE

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