
Clinton Presidential Records

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Exchange Mail

DATE-TIME 11/17/99 7:00:32 PM
FROM Benjamin, Daniel (TNT)
CLASSIFICATION ~~SECRET~~
CLASSIFICATIONREASON 1.5(c)(d)(x1)
DATECLASSIFIEDON 11/12/1999
DECLASSIFYON 11/12/2024
SUBJECT RE: Taliban Discussion Paper ~~[SECRET]~~
TO Lieberson, Donna P. (TNT)
Roundtree, Beverly (TNT)
Robinson, Jack A. (TNT)

CARBON_COPY

TEXT_BODY Have heard from State and the NSC folks. Please check in with: Black, Sheridan & Honore, Reynolds and Rolince in the a.m. Most will not have comments, but we need to hear from them. thanks.

-----Original
Message-----
From: Benjamin, Daniel (TNT)
Sent: Friday, November
12, 1999 3:53 PM
To: Roundtree, Beverly (TNT); Robinson, Jack A.
(TNT)
Subject: Please circulate ~~[SECRET]~~
Importance: High

To:
CSG Principals, A/S Rick Inderfurth, DAS Ron Neumann, Bruce Riedel,
Mary McCarthy, Don Camp. For their comments and clearance by
November
17. Thanks.
<< File: Taliban Paper.doc >>

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Roger - not sure if you had
 seen this, but in case
 you
 hasn't it
 speaks to
 the Taliban/USA
 debate.

INR

Afghanistan: Bin Ladin for the Long Run (U)

A strong logic supports the argument that the fading military challenge from the opposition Northern Alliance has made Usama bin Ladin less valuable to the Taliban. But other considerations, including his potential contribution to wider Islamic victories and the country's reconstruction, will probably weigh more heavily in the Taliban calculus. (C)

CS.

■ Of diminished value

Logic would argue that Taliban leaders should soon be willing to reconsider the costs and benefits of providing sanctuary for bin Ladin. As the leaders become more determined to gain international recognition and material aid for reconstruction, **they are more likely to see bin Ladin's presence as a bargaining chip, along with their current encouragement of poppy cultivation.** (C)

The liabilities in resisting external pressures for bin Ladin's departure should weigh more heavily as his financial contribution to the military effort lessens in importance. Concern until now that militants fighting with the Taliban would view a policy reversal with dismay should become less of a factor. Those in the Taliban leadership who have long supported getting rid of the bin Ladin problem should have a more convincing case. Pakistan's heretofore mild pressure on the Taliban to resolve the bin Ladin issue also could carry greater weight. (C)

■ Probable countervailing factors

But a different, more plausible conclusion is reached by factoring in the following considerations:

- Bin Ladin may serve as fundraiser and financial contributor in a post-conflict effort to rebuild the Afghan infrastructure. **His previous experiences with construction firms would have obvious application, especially if international contributions of**

money and expertise are meager or slow in coming.

- **If, in the flush of victory, the Taliban decide to pursue unfinished business in the region, particularly in support of Islamic militants in Central Asia, bin Ladin will not be seen as expendable. He is already the principal backer of training camps in Afghanistan devoted to strengthening Islamic insurgencies elsewhere.**
- **Pakistan, specifically the powerful Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate, has a motive for wanting bin Ladin to remain in Afghanistan because he plays an important role in training Kashmiri fighters.**
- **Taliban leader Mullah Omar may continue to view bin Ladin as a "soul mate," whatever the circumstances on the ground. Unless seriously challenged by his cohorts, something that until now has not occurred, Omar will make the final decision on bin Ladin, as he does on everything else of importance.**
- **Present calculations that diminish bin Ladin's value, at least to the Taliban military posture, may be wrong or at least premature if the Northern Alliance is able to mount a serious counteroffensive against Taliban forces in the northeast, open a new front in the west, or carry out effective guerrilla operations from its Panjshir Valley redoubt or (if permitted) Tajikistan.** (C)

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