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RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.5(D), B6

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	OMB-01	PA-01	PM-00	PRS-01	P-01	SCT-00	SP-00
	SSO-00	SS-00	TRSE-00	T-00	USIE-00	SNIS-00	NISC-01
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5053
INFO AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JEDDAH
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
AMEMBASSY RIYADH

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: SHARON E. AHMAD
DATE/CASE ID: 22 APR 2003 200104007

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DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR NEA

E.O. 12356: DECL:09/18/05
 TAGS: MOPS, PINS, PREL, PK, IR, AF
 SUBJECT: EYEWITNESS TO THE FALL OF HERAT SAYS TALIBAN
 - ARE WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS -- FOR NOW

1. CONFIDENTIAL -- ENTIRE TEXT.
2. SUMMARY: AN AMCIT WHO WITNESSED THE FALL OF HERAT AND ITS AFTERMATH SAYS ISMAEL KHAN LOST THROUGH A COMBINATION OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY INEPTITUDE. THE TALIBAN, IN CONTRAST, WERE EXTREMELY WELL ORGANIZED, WELL-FINANCED, AND EXHIBITED STRONG DISCIPLINE. DESPITE VERY REAL CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES, THE THREE TO FOUR THOUSAND TALIBAN TROOPS IN HERAT ARE ENGAGED IN AN EFFORT TO WIN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF ITS CITIZENS, DOUBLING SALARIES OF PUBLIC SERVANTS AND PAYING FOR WHAT THEY TAKE; NOT ACTING AS OCCUPIERS AT ALL. THE CITY IS PEACEFUL AND HERATIS APPEAR CONTENT, FOR NOW, TO GIVE THE TALIBAN THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT -- IN PART BECAUSE THEY ARE SEEN AS BETTER THAN THE DISCREDITED ISMAEL KHAN REGIME, AND BECAUSE MANY HERATIS HOPE THE TALIBAN WILL RESTORE PEACE TO AFGHANISTAN, VIA ZAHIR SHAH. HOW SUCCESSFUL THE KABUL GOVERNMENT WILL BE IN EFFORTS TO RE-TAKE THE WESTERN PROVINCES WILL DEPEND IN LARGE MEASURE ON WHETHER THE HERATIS COME TO SEE THE TALIBAN AS TRUE NATIONALIST LIBERATORS OR ANOTHER PAKISTANI-BACKED GROUP COMPETING FOR CONTROL OF AFGHANISTAN. FOR NOW, AT LEAST, THE JURY IS STILL OUT. END SUMMARY.

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3. POLOFF MET SEPTEMBER 17 WITH [REDACTED] (PROTECT), WHO RETURNED FROM HERAT SEPTEMBER 16 (ON THE FIRST U.N. FLIGHT SINCE THE TALIBAN TAKE-OVER) HAVING WITNESSED THE TALIBAN OCCUPATION OF THAT CITY AND ITS AFTERMATH. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
 [REDACTED] WELL-EDUCATED AND ARTICULATE, [REDACTED] IS A CREDIBLE INTERLOCUTOR WHO IS VERY WELL INFORMED ABOUT POLITICAL EVENTS IN HERAT.

ISMAEL KHAN LOST THE SUPPORT OF HIS COMMANDERS

4. [REDACTED] BEGAN BY NOTING THAT THE FALL OF HERAT HAD MORE TO DO WITH ISMAEL KHAN'S LOSS OF SUPPORT AMONG HIS COMMANDERS THAN ANY PARTICULAR FIGHTING PROWESS BY THE TALIBAN. A KEY FACTOR, HE SAID, WAS THE UNWILLINGNESS OF THE HERAT GOVERNOR'S TOP LIEUTENANTS TO COMMIT THEMSELVES AND THEIR TROOPS TO FIGHTING THE TALIBAN -- PARTICULARLY ONCE IT BECAME CLEAR THAT THE TALIBAN WERE WINNING. AT GIRISHK, ISMAEL KHAN'S FORCES LARGELY HAD CONSISTED OF PASHTUN COMMANDERS (AMIR LALAI, KHAN MOHAMMED, GHAFFAR AKHUNDZADA AND OTHERS) AND MASOOD'S PANJSHIRI TAJIKS. [REDACTED] SAID THE MOST FAMOUS OF ISMAEL KHAN'S LOCAL COMMANDERS, ALIENATED FROM THE GOVERNOR BY HIS INCREASINGLY CAPRICIOUS BEHAVIOR (ALMOST RANDOM PROMOTING AND DEMOTING OF HIS CHIEFTAINS, "IDIOTIC" POLITICAL PRONOUNCEMENTS, CONTINUED VERBAL BATTLES WITH AHMED SHAH MASOOD, ETC.) STAYED IN HERAT, NOT AT THE FRONT.

CLOBBERED AT GIRISHK

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5. QUOTING "PEOPLE FROM MY VILLAGE WHO WERE AT THE FRONT," [REDACTED] SAID ISMAEL KHAN'S FORCES, EMBOLDENED BY THEIR SUCCESS IN PUSHING THE TALIBAN BACK FROM DELARUM TO GIRISHK, HAD Poured INTO THE LATTER IN SEARCH OF LOOT. OVER-CONFIDENCE, POOR ORGANIZATION, AND THE RAPIDITY OF THE ADVANCE ALL LED ISMAEL KHAN TO IGNORE LOGISTICS AND TACTICS -- NO DEFENSIVE LINES WERE ESTABLISHED, AND COMMAND AND CONTROL WAS NON-EXISTENT. AS LARGE NUMBERS OF TROOPS FLOODED INTO GIRISHK, A PRO-ISMAEL KHAN NIFA COMMANDER WAS BRIBED BY THE TALIBAN INTO LETTING ENEMY

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FORCES COME IN BEHIND ISMAEL KHAN'S ARMY, THEREBY CUTTING THEM OFF INSIDE THE CITY. IN THE ENSUING CONFLICT, HUNDREDS OF ISMAEL KHAN'S TROOPS WERE KILLED, AND HUNDREDS MORE CAPTURED. THE REMAINING HERAT FORCES FLED IN DISARRAY. ACCORDING TO ONE TANK DRIVER [REDACTED] SPOKE WITH, THE DEMORALIZATION OF ISMAEL KHAN'S TROOPS WAS SO COMPLETE, THAT COMMANDERS ORDERED THEIR MEN TO PULL BACK AND NOT RESIST THE TALIBAN. "WE COULD HAVE FOUGHT THE TALIBAN," [REDACTED] REPORTED THE TANKER AS SAYING, "BUT OUR COMMANDERS TOLD US TO PULL BACK, SINCE THERE WAS NO POINT IN DYING FOR ISMAEL KHAN AND THE TALIBAN SEEMED INVINCIBLE." FURTHER CONTRIBUTING TO THE SENSE OF HOPELESSNESS ON THE PART OF THE HERATIS WAS THE REPEATED AERIAL BOMBING OF HERAT AIRPORT AND SEVERAL OTHER MILITARY TARGETS IN THE CITY.

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CHAOS REIGNS

6. [] OBSERVED THAT HERAT CITY ITSELF BECAME VERY TENSE
FOLLOWING THE NEWS OF THE DEFEAT AT GIRISHK. "WE HAD THOUGHT

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ISMAEL KHAN WOULD BE IN KANDAHAR CITY THE NEXT DAY, AND THEN LEARNED HE WAS RETREATING BACK TOWARDS HERAT," HE NOTED. AS ISMAEL KHAN WAS PUSHED BACK, CONFUSION AND RUMOR SWEEP THE CITY, WITH HERAT RADIO AND TELEVISION BROADCASTING CHILLING PICTURES OF ISMAEL KHAN AND HIS TOP COMMANDERS KISSING THE KORAN AND EMBRACING EACH OTHER BEFORE HEADING OUT TO DO BATTLE FOR THE STRATEGIC SHINDAND AIR BASE. THE ARRIVAL OF A "RECONCILIATION COMMITTEE" FROM KABUL TO TRY TO ORGANIZE DEFENSES AND PATCH UP POLITICAL SQUABBLES ONLY ADDED TO THE CHAOS, [] NOTED. "BUT SHINDAND FELL BEFORE ISMAEL KHAN COULD ORGANIZE ITS DEFENSE," HE STATED. AT THAT POINT, THE AMCIT COMMENTED, THINGS BEGAN MOVING VERY RAPIDLY. THE NIGHT OF THE FALL OF HERAT, ISMAEL KHAN EMPTIED OUT THE LOCAL BANK, AND DEPARTED ALONG WITH 1,000 OF HIS TROOPS AND SOME OF HIS HEAVY WEAPONS TO IRAN. "THAT ISMAEL KHAN AND HIS TOP COMMANDERS, INCLUDING AZIMI AND ALLAHUDDIN, ABANDONED THE HERATIS IS
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 SOMETHING THE LOCAL PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET -- THESE LEADERS ARE NOW FINISHED POLITICALLY," [] STATED, "AND THEY WILL NEED A LOT OF TIME BEFORE THEY CAN ORGANIZE A COUNTER-ATTACK FROM IRAN." [] ADDED THAT ONLY IF THE TALIBAN ALIENATED THE PEOPLE WOULD AN ISMAEL KHAN/ALLAHUDDIN/GENERAL AZIMI OPERATION HAVE ANY CHANCE OF SUCCESS.

THE TALIBAN ROLL IN

7. [] DESCRIBED THE TALIBAN OCCUPATION OF HERAT AS "EXTREMELY WELL-DISCIPLINED AND ORGANIZED." HE SAID THE FIRST ACTION OF THE TALIBAN WAS TO FAN OUT AND OCCUPY ALL THE GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY FACILITIES IN THE CITY AND TO SET UP CHECK POINTS. THEY THEN ISSUED A STATEMENT CALLING ON CITY RESIDENTS TO REMAIN CALM, ESTABLISHED A NIGHT-TIME CURFEW, AND BANNED VEHICULAR TRAFFIC ON THE HERAT-KANDAHAR ROAD FOR THREE DAYS. THE TALIBAN INSTALLED TRUSTED MEMBERS OF THEIR MOVEMENT IN THE TOP POSITIONS IN PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION, BUT DID NOT REPLACE ANY OF THE HERATI OFFICIALS, INSTEAD CREATING "SENIOR ADVISOR" SLOTS FOR THOSE DISPLACED. THE JAILS

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WERE OPENED AND ALL THE INMATES RELEASED, AND THE SALARIES OF PUBLIC SERVANTS WERE DOUBLED. [] COMMENTED THAT THE FIRST PRIORITY OF THE TALIBAN SEEMED TO BE TO DISARM THE POPULACE AND TO MOVE THE LARGE AMOUNTS OF WEAPONRY CAPTURED FROM ISMAEL KHAN (INCLUDING HEAVY WEAPONS) TO KANDAHAR. THIS, HE CLAIMED, WAS ACCOMPLISHED WITHIN THREE DAYS. [] INDICATED THAT HE HAD NOT SEEN MANY AIRCRAFT AT THE HERAT AIRPORT, SUGGESTING THAT THE TALIBAN HAD EITHER MOVED THEM TO KANDAHAR OR, MORE LIKELY, THAT THE AIRPLANES HAD BEEN FLOWN TO BAGHRAM OR KABUL. HE ADDED THAT, AFTER A FEW DAYS, THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT HAD RE-OPENED

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 BORDER POSTS CLOSED WHEN THE TALIBAN FIRST SEIZED HERAT AND THAT THE TURKMENISTAN BORDER ALSO WAS OPEN AT TORGHUNDI.

HERE TO STAY?

8. [] CHARACTERIZED THE TALIBAN TROOPS IN HERAT (HE ESTIMATED THEIR NUMBER AT BETWEEN 3,000-4,000) AS EXTREMELY WELL BEHAVED. THE TALIBAN APPEARED TO HAVE PLENTY OF MONEY, AND INSISTED ON PAYING FOR ALL THEIR PURCHASES -- WHICH WERE NOT LAVISH, MOSTLY GRAPES, WATERMELONS AND BREAD. THEY POLITELY REFUSED OFFERS OF HOSPITALITY FROM THE HERATI MERCHANTS, SAYING THEY HAD ORDERS TO TAKE ONLY WHAT THEY PAID FOR. [] NOTED THAT THE TALIBAN DID NOT ACT AS "OCCUPIERS" BUT BEHAVED IN A MODEST BUT DIGNIFIED FASHION. "THEY DON'T EVEN LOOK AT YOU OR CAUSE ANY PROBLEM," HE MARVELLED. [] SUGGESTED THAT PART OF THE TALIBAN DISCIPLINE DERIVED FROM DRACONIAN JUSTICE IMPOSED BY THEIR LEADERS. HE RELATED THAT HE SAW ONE TALIB CAUGHT OPENING THE DESK DRAWER OF THE BANK GOVERNOR (UNDER THE MISTAKEN IMPRESSION THAT THE OFFICE WAS THAT OF ISMAEL KHAN BECAUSE "THERE WERE SO MANY PICTURES OF ISMAEL KHAN ON THE WALL"). WHEN CHALLENGED BY A SUPERIOR, THE HAPLESS TALIB EXPLAINED THAT HE THOUGHT THERE MIGHT BE USEFUL

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O 181039Z SEP 95
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PAPERS IN THE DRAWER. APPARENTLY HIS BOSS FOUND THIS EXCUSE UNCONVINCING, FOR HE PROCEEDED TO ADMINISTER A SEVERE BEATING -- IN THE PRESENCE OF 10-15 HERATIS -- TO THE MAN. TALIBAN TROOPS WHO FIRED OFF ROCKETS IN CELEBRATION OF THE MISTAKEN BELIEF THAT KABUL HAD BEEN CAPTURED WERE ROUNDED UP AND JAILED, [] SAID. SO SENSITIVE WERE THE TALIBAN TO ISSUES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, HE ADDED, THAT WHEN SOME HERATIS WORRIED THAT SOME OF THE HIZB-I-ISLAMI (GULBUDDIN) COMMANDERS AND FORMER COMMUNIST MILITIAMEN IN THE TALIBAN RANKS COULD RESULT IN LOOTING AND OTHER MISBEHAVIOR, THE TALIBAN LEADERSHIP IMMEDIATELY MOVED THEM OUTSIDE THE CITY.

9. [] NOTED THAT THE STRICTNESS OF THE KANDAHARI TALIBAN DID NOT MESH WELL WITH THE RELATIVE LIBERALITY OF HERAT. GIRLS' SCHOOLS WERE CLOSED BY THE TALIBAN AND WOMEN TOLD THEY COULD NO LONGER WORK. A DELEGATION OF SENIOR HERATI ULEMA HAD PROTESTED THESE DECISIONS, WITH THE TALIBAN RESPONDING THAT THEY WOULD RE-EXAMINE THE MATTER ONCE THE SITUATION SETTLED DOWN. THE IMPOSITION OF SHARI'A LAW HAD NOT BEEN A MAJOR BONE OF CONTENTION, [] NOTED, SINCE THE HERATIS "ALSO WANT CRIMINALS TO BE PUNISHED" HOWEVER, THE TALIBAN DID HAVE PROBLEMS IN HERAT WHICH WOULD GROW OVER TIME. MOST TALIBAN SPOKE PASHTU,

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 WHILE THE HERATIS SPOKE DARI (ALTHOUGH [] SAID THERE WERE
 QUITE A FEW TALIBAN WHO ONLY SPOKE URDU). MOHAMMED OMAR, THE
 SPIRITUAL LEADER OF THE TALIBAN HAD ADDRESSED THE DENIZENS OF
 THE CITY FOLLOWING FRIDAY PRAYERS AT HERAT'S MAIN MOSQUE, BUT
 HAD FAILED TO IMPRESS THE CITYFOLK. "HE HAD NO CHARISMA, WAS
 CLEARLY UNEDUCATED, AND SPOKE HORRIBLE PASHTU," THE AMCIT
 SAID. "PEOPLE ARE BEGINNING TO BELIEVE THAT THE ORGANIZATION
 AND MONEY OF THE TALIBAN CAN ONLY HAVE COME FROM OUTSIDE," HE
 OBSERVED.

10. ASKED ABOUT THE NEAR-TERM CHANCES OF THE TALIBAN AND THE
 HERATIS GETTING ALONG, [] SAID THE PEOPLE OF HERAT WERE
 DISGUSTED WITH ISMAEL KHAN, AND MANY OPENLY CURSED AHMED SHAH
 MASOOD FOR CAUSING ALL THE PROBLEMS. A FEW HERATIS STILL
 FAVORED MASOOD, HE ALLOWED, BUT MOST WERE WILLING TO GIVE THE
 TALIBAN THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT FOR NOW. YET THE REAL REASON
 FOR SUPPORTING THE TALIBAN WAS THE BELIEF THAT THEY MAY SUCCEED
 IN RESTORING PEACE TO AFGHANISTAN, THE AMCIT CONTINUED. "MOST
 HERATIS THINK THE U.S., THE U.N. AND THE INTERNATIONAL
 COMMUNITY ARE BEHIND THE TALIBAN -- THEY THINK ZAHIR SHAH WILL
 RETURN ONCE THE TALIBAN TAKE KABUL." THIS IDEA, WHICH HELD OUT
 THE PROMISE OF PEACE, WAS VERY ATTRACTIVE, HE NOTED. "BUT IF
 THE HERATIS BECOME CONVINCED THAT PAKISTAN IS REALLY IN CONTROL
 OF THE TALIBAN, AND THAT NO LASTING PEACE WILL COME OF TALIBAN
 EFFORTS, THEN THE WAY WILL BE CLEAR FOR THE KABUL GOVERNMENT
 SYMPATHIZERS TO RETURN TO THE CITY."

COMMENT:

11. [] OBSERVATIONS STRIKE US AS ACCURATE, AS IS HIS SENSE
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THAT THE BATTLE FOR CONTROL OF HERAT IS MORE POLITICAL AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL THAN MILITARY. EVENTUALLY, THE TALIBAN ARE
LIKELY TO ALIENATE THE HERATIS, BUT FOR NOW THERE APPEARS TO BE
LITTLE SUPPORT FOR THE RETURN OF THE OLD REGIME -- A FACTOR
LIKELY TO COMPLICATE ANY EFFORTS BY THE KABUL GOVERNMENT TO TRY
TO RETAKE THE WESTERN PROVINCES. END COMMENT. HOLZMAN

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