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----- 170155L JAN 02 DJB (TOTAL COPIES:014)

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----- 170629Z JAN 02 STePS (TOTAL COPIES:000)

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INFO LOG-00 CCOE-00 SAS-00 /000W
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
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NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000295

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FROM USLO KABUL #0050
FROM SPECIAL PRESIDENTIAL ENVOY ZAL KHALILZAD
SECSTATE FOR SECRETARY POWELL AND A/S ROCCA
NSC FOR NSA RICE AND HADLEY
SECDEF FOR RUMSFELD AND WOLFOWITZ

E.O. 12958: DECL:01/16/22
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, PROP, PTER, PINS, AF
SUBJECT: VISIT TO QANDAHAR: FOCUS ON DETAINEES

SECTION 01 OF 02 Islamabad 295

SUBJECT: USLO-KABUL #0050 QANDAHAR DETAINEES

Classified by Special Presidential Envoy Zal Khalilzad.
Reason 1.5 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (S) Accompanied by my delegation members, I called on
[redacted]
with a report on detainees as well as an assessment of the
ground situation. As a part of the briefing, I visited the
airport holding facility for the Cuba-bound al Qaida and
Taliban detainees. End Summary.

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OBJECTIVES

2. (S) [redacted] has three principal
objectives - to process and transport the detainees, to
clean up weapons and munitions caches and to support
Special Forces operations - tasks made all the more

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: WILLIAM E LANDFAIR
DATE/CASE ID: 19 OCT 2004 200303827

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difficult because of the estimated 19,000 Taliban and al Qaida soldiers in the hills surrounding Qandahar as well as in the city itself. While the Taliban pose a concern to the base - both because of the possibility of an attack on the U.S. military camp, either with a terrorist motive or in an attempt to free the captives - General Mattis told me that his primary concern relates to landmines and unexploded ordinance. He explained that the Taliban have re-mined areas that were marked as mine free. The General told me that several Marines and a number of local fighters had been seriously injured in land-mine incidents.

3. (C) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] With regard to access to detainees for interrogation purposes, cooperation is also excellent between USG and foreign agencies seeking information.

 DETAINEES

5. (S) There are currently 380 prisoners from a number of countries, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Some European detainees have told their interrogators that they joined the Taliban/al Qaida for the adventure. Others say hate for the U.S. led them to the Taliban. Most of the prisoners are between 20-30 years of age, but several appear to be in their sixties. The detainees are held in groups of twenty in razor wired pens. There is no privacy and even calls of nature are performed in public, a practice aimed at preventing suicide or escapes during the unsupervised periods. The only prisoners not held in open pens are those who are located in a small hangar, either for interrogation or because they are high-ranking and need to be separated from others for interrogation purposes. [REDACTED]

6. (S) Walking through the detention center, I observed the detainees, uniformly attired in blue coveralls, seated in pens and sleeping or reading the Koran, the only book they are allowed. Several detainees were carrying the honey buckets for disposal across the compound. Each prisoner had two blankets (purchased locally to boost the economy the General said).

7. (S) We also visited the field hospital where detainees

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are treated by the same military doctors who treat the American soldiers. The doctors explained that the detainees generally arrive with severe gastroenteritis complicated by malnutrition. A few have serious battle injuries, including some which require below the knee amputations. Respecting a policy of informed consent, the doctors said that no detainee has agreed to an amputation, preferring to rely on various temporary measures that will not save the limb but will prolong the situation. The doctors told me these detainees believe that their limbs will be repaired once they reach their next destination, perhaps the U.S. As a part of a delousing program, the

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military has had to shave off the beards of some of the Cuba-bound detainees, a practice the Red Cross has approved.

8. (S) Detainees eat MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) just like their captors although all pork products have been removed. The plastic spoons also are removed from the packets since the detainees might sharpen them and use the implements as weapons or a tool for suicide.

9. (S) Detainees are allowed to talk to residents in their own pen, but large groups are not allowed. They are not allowed to talk to prisoners in other pens. The General's assessment of the detainees is based on interaction with them over an extended period. He considers them hostile and dangerous. They shout epithets at their captors, including threats against the female relatives of the soldiers guarding them, knee Marines in the groin, and say that they will escape and kill "more Americans and Jews." The General is all business. There is a risk that the detainees may try to throw their blankets over the razor wire and make a run for it.

10. (S) The General does not consider the Taliban and al Qaida to be particularly devout and cites as an example the defiled mosque at the airport. Littered with garbage and piles of human excrement, the General said people who would desecrate their own religious sites in this way were hardly religious.

11. (C) Another part of the General's job is to clean up weapons and ammunition caches. The triage process involves sorting by category, removing those items which are of interest to the USG and shipping them back to the U.S., and destroying the rest. When I asked if we had considered turning these over to the Interim Authority, the General said that the items thus far were degraded to a point where they were no longer useful.

12. (C) Due to scheduling problems, I was unable to meet local officials but hope to return on January 18.
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