

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Interviewee: **Vice President Abdul Faheem Kahn**
Date: October 23, 2003
Location: Vice Presidential Palace, Kabul Afghanistan
Participants: Zelikow, Hurley, Scheid, and David Sedney (US Embassy Kabul)
Drafted by: Kevin Scheid
Reviewed by: Philip Zelikow
Additional Info: Conducted through an embassy provided interpreter.

Background: Vice President Faheem Kahn is also the Minister of Defense. He was Chief of Intelligence for the Northern Alliance leader, Massoud. Faheem is a Tajik Panjshiris and his ethnic group dominates his ministry. He has been thought to be a rival to President Hamid Karzai. As the overall commander of Afghan forces he must always be given consideration within the rest of the government.

The Vice President welcomed the delegation and began telling his story with the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1989. He referenced a Pakistani ISI Director General Hamid Gul, who had prepared a plan for Afghanistan. This Pakistani plan would have Pakistan replace the Soviets as the dominant power in the region. To do this they would have to gain control over Afghanistan. In order to influence events in Afghanistan, Pakistan invested in the leader of Hesbi e Islaami Gulbuddin, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG), by propping him up with financial and military support. In order to strengthen his fighters, the Pakistanis provided him Arab fighters. The ultimate purpose is for HIG to take over Afghanistan. This was their plan for Afghanistan.

When the Soviet propped up regime of Najibullah was falling, the Paks saw that the Northern Alliance was in a dominant position contrary to their plans for the HIG. The NA's successes got their attention and they directed the Arabs to attack in the north. During this period of fighting, roughly 1994, the Paks began to support the formation of the Taliban in Quetta. When the NA defeated the HIG they began to rely more on the Taliban as their surrogates in Afghanistan. It was about at this time that Usama bin Laden was in charge of the Arabs fighting in the north, just outside of Kabul.

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After the fall of Kabul, UBL knew he had found a country he could use to train his Arab following. UBL and his Al Qai'da forces supported the Taliban with funding and weapons. Faheem mentioned that this included conventional weapons from Ukraine. In these days it was clear to the Vice President that UBL wanted to use Afghanistan as a base of operations for his worldwide terrorism.

Now in the last days of the war, the fighting intensified with the Taliban and the Arabs. From his perspective, the assassination of Commander Massoud and the attack on the

United States was linked. VP Faheem remarked that he personally heard on the radio the Arabs talking about a big event coming up that would defeat the Northern Alliance. The strategy was to control the north and the Hindu Kush and block any chance of the US gaining ground inside Afghanistan if they tried to attack. Within 15 minutes of the assassination of Massoud, there were radioed messages passed as a cue to begin the offensive. The Taliban had already massed nearly 2,000 Arab fighters on the line with the NA. Faheem had two challenges - keeping the spirit of the troops up and preparing for the attack. He went to measures to conceal Massoud's death to the troops wouldn't know.

Do you think that the war on terrorism is on track in Afghanistan? The US and Afghan unity today is very good. Political propaganda in Pakistan is still involved, telling Americans the wrong information. We are comfortable with the US strategic purposes. The people of Afghanistan support America. The presence is going well, but the Americans need to make certain that they consult with the Afghans to pursue their ends.

Faheem indicated that he is very optimistic about the Constitutional process and the constitution. After 23 years of war the people of Afghanistan want stability and peace. Nonetheless, he expressed some concern that the former MuJahadin leaders may not fair well in the political process as the constitution is considered and the elections approach.