MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Interviewee: Local leaders in Kandahar Province  
Date: October 21, 2003  
Location: Kandahar Airport Terminal  
Participants: About twelve local leaders, plus Commission staff and various US Army observers  
Drafted by: Zelikow

9/11 Classified Information

After introductions, [Redacted] welcomed the group. Ninety percent of the 9/11 story happened here in Afghanistan, he said. The fundamentalists had taken advantage of the war against the Russians. After the Russians pulled out the world forgot about Afghanistan. Neighbors took advantage of us. UBL came to Jalalabad. He came to Kandahar in late 96 or early 97 to meet Mullah Omar.

The Taliban were uneducated and only understood religion. They came from rural areas - Helmand, Zabol, Oruzgan provinces. AQ was well organized and educated. They could control the Taliban. They also took over much of the main fighting.

[Redacted] remembered coming with UNOCAL to the Kandahar airport in 1998. The airport was completely controlled by the Arabs. They arranged flights to Dubai, Kabul, and Jalalabad. They could go to stores in town and tell owners what products they should stock. People obeyed the Arabs, or they were punished. The Arabs built the cave complexes - it took three years. Even if Mullah Omar wanted to see his ministers, he went through Arabs to arrange it. Omar and UBL met weekly. [Redacted] was living in the area until 1997. Then he fled across the border.

[Redacted] welcomed us. He blamed America and the CIA for much of what had happened. They had fought the Russians with US help. They kicked them out and destroyed communism in Afghanistan. Then the Russians pulled and the US and Europeans left them alone.

ISI was responsible for what happened next. The Pakistanis brought the Taliban and AQ to Afghanistan. He remembered there was a UN envoy and an American deputy (Charlie Santos) trying to settle the conflict. Pakistan helped the Taliban attack. He was at a meeting in Balochistan when the Taliban attacked. He and his colleagues went to the UN envoy and said: They are attacking Kandahar while we are negotiating! They did nothing. President Karzai's father was there too. (Staff note: Pakistani/Taliban propaganda has been circulating a disinformation story linking UNOCAL and Charlie Santos with the CIA in a story blaming the US for Afghanistan's misfortunes.)

[Redacted] said that now we have a good government. Don't turn away and leave us. The US has promised. Please keep the promise.

Now the Pakistanis, he said, support the Taliban inside Pakistan. The Pakistanis are being tricky with the US. AQ is less on the border, he said, and more in the cities inside Pakistan. If the US abandons Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran will move.
spoke next. He went over the story of how AQ came, stressing the role of rich Arabs and the Saudi secret service in the 1980s. When the Russians were defeated the US and Europeans turned away from us. The economic situation was bad. There was no foundation for government. From the beginning the conspiracy was designed by ISI. They trained commanders, especially in the border area from Jalalabad to Nimroz. They exploited Afghan refugees in Pakistan. So there was a combination of a backward economy, IST planning, and Arab support for a long-term strategy. This had an effect. They had money. They helped poor pupils.

then spoke. The things we are discussing are deep, long stories and cannot be told quickly. The fundamentalists were like gangs. AQ would use anything. They used religion and the Palestinian cause. During the jihad there was much outside help, but 80% of it went to the radical groups! The ISI convinced the US to follow the ISI's policies. The Pakistanis convinced the world that only they could deal with the Afghans. After the Russians left, they had Afghanistan to themselves. We said this for seven to nine years, asking politicians to pay attention. No one was listening.

Before the Bonn process people just went to Pakistan if they were interested in Afghanistan. So we see the result now. Things are much better. You are dealing with Afghans! But Pakistan would never stop in Afghanistan because of the link to Kashmir. Jihad was their weapon for Kashmir. The madrassas are still active. We keep on complaining, but .... There are still high-level fundamentalists like Rabbani, Sayyaf, and Hekmatyar who want to get into Afghan politics. Pakistan is still playing a game with the us.

We need US support for peace and stability. Afghanistan will not survive without American help.

All the leaders were unequivocally positive about the presence of US troops and the way American soldiers behaved in their country. As one of them put it, “These US soldiers mean peace.”