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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Zalmay Khalilzad
Type of Event: Interview
Date: November 21, 2003
Special Access Issues: Treat as TOP SECRET
Additional notes: None
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Reviewed by: Mike Hurley
Team Numbers: Three (Counterterrorism Policy)
Location: 2100 K Street
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EOP Minder: Bryan Cunningham

Interviewee Background

Zalmay Khalilzad was confirmed last week as U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan and met us mere days before his departure for Kabul. In May 2001, he was appointed special assistant to the president and senior NSC director for the Persian Gulf and southwest Asia; Middle East and Maghreb issues were later added to his portfolio, which subsequently broadened to southwest Asian and Islamic affairs as he took on more responsibilities related to Iraq. Since December 2001, he has been the president's special envoy to Afghanistan. Before May 2001, he led the Bush-Cheney transition team for DOD and worked as a counselor to SecDef Rumsfeld. Before entering government, he spent eight years at RAND. (U)

At the NSC, Khalilzad handled Afghanistan; he shared the Pakistan account with Torkel Patterson of the Asia staff. Khalilzad was not responsible for Uzbekistan. He was deeply involved in policy reviews on both Iraq and Afghanistan and attended some CT meetings led by Dick Clarke. (Ø)

Early Views of Afghanistan

Khalilzad said APNSA Rice and Deputy APNSA Hadley hired him in part because of his expertise on Afghan issues. He said that he, Rice and Hadley had a "meeting of the minds" on his judgment that Afghanistan required more attention and a serious review of where we are and what we might do differently. Rice asked him for several short memos on the subject. Al-Qa'ida and the Taliban were "the critical element of our concern." Human rights, humanitarian suffering, the ongoing civil war, and regional stability were also lower-order concerns. (Ø)

At RAND, Khalilzad had argued that we underestimated the importance of Afghanistan to US interests. He urged that we close the gap between the stakes we had in Afghanistan and the instruments we were using. Al-Qa'ida was a grave threat to the US homeland and such allies as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and others.

9/11 Classified Information

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Khalilzad has written that we needed an offensive use of military force against terrorists before 9/11. He specifically noted in the interview that the lack of a robust use of the U.S. military as an instrument against al Qaida was one of the noticeable shortcomings in the interagency pre-9/11 strategy. (U)

He favors expanding a NATO-run ISAF beyond Kabul and notes that the restrictions limiting the peacekeepers to the capital have already been lifted. The long-term solution, Khalilzad argues, is Afghan institutions; the question is what to do during the transition. He had thought that Afghans would prove xenophobic and unwilling to host large numbers of foreign peacekeepers; he now admits that assessment was wrong. (U)