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Bush authorizes increased aid to Afghan rebels

by Steven Thomma
and Juan Tamayo
Knight Ridder Newspapers

President Bush has secretly authorized increased financial aid to Afghan rebels so that they can buy Russian military equipment to intensify their fight against the ruling Taliban regime, Knight Ridder has learned.

Senior administration officials said the President approved the stepped-up assistance last week but declined to specify how much money was involved.

The administration expects that the rebels of the United Front will assist an expanded CIA operation aimed at locating terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, whom the U.S. believes masterminded the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

The Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, Abdul Salam Zaeef, told reporters Sunday that bin Laden was in a secure and secret location in what the Taliban calls the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, and that the regime was awaiting U.S. evidence of bin Laden's involvement before opening negotiations.

"He is under our control," Zaeef told reporters in the Pakistan capital of Islamabad. "Wherever he is, he's in a secret place but that doesn't mean that he is out of the control of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. He's in a place which cannot be located by anyone."

The United Front has been asking for direct U.S. military aid since at least 1997 and has been receiving a small amount of non-lethal assistance, such as communications equipment since 1998.

A U.S. official who confirmed the expanded aid said it did not make sense to give the rebels U.S. weapons because they are now equipped and trained almost exclusively on military equipment from the former Soviet Union.

In addition to the increased financial aid, the President has authorized the CIA and other agencies to support a broad-based political opposition to the Taliban focused on former Afghan King Mohammed Zahir Shah, 86, who has been liv-

ing in exile in Rome.

One potential leader of the coalition, Gen. Amin Wardak, who fought Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, met Saturday with administration officials at the White House, then flew to Rome to confer with the King.

Wardak, who has a residence in Islamabad, is popular with the government of Pakistan, which the administration considers crucial to helping maintain stability in the region while trying to undermine the Taliban.

In yet a third line of attack on the Taliban, officials said Sunday night that the CIA has identified some 700 Afghan tribal chiefs to target with offers of money and food in exchange for breaking with the ruling regime.

After two years of famine and economic mismanagement in Afghanistan, analysts believe some of the chiefs could be willing to break with the Taliban for the right inducements.

Fewer than half a dozen of them are believed to be fully supportive of the Taliban alliance with bin Laden, a Saudi.

Finally, a senior official said, the CIA has been authorized to add 700 officers to support its counter-terrorism efforts.

U.S. officials on Sunday flatly rejected a call from the Taliban for negotiations over the fate of bin Laden.

"The president has said we're not negotiating," White House Chief of Staff Andy Card said during an appearance on the Fox News Sunday program.

"We've told the Taliban government what they should be doing. They've got to turn not only Osama bin Laden over but all of the operations of the al Qaida organization. They've got to stop being a haven where terrorists can train."

Card and other administration officials reacted to the assertion Sunday by the Taliban that it now knows where bin Laden is and that he is under Taliban "control."

A week ago, the Taliban said it could not locate bin Laden to deliver a request that he voluntarily leave the country. Sunday, Zaeef said bin Laden has not replied to the request, but that he wouldn't be forced into



PHOTOGRAPH BY DALE GULDAN/KRT CAMPUS
President George W. Bush speaks to a crowd gathered at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago.

U.S. hands either, at least not without proof of his complicity.

Noting U.S. threats to attack unless the Taliban meets its demands, Zaeef insisted the United States first present evidence. That "might change things," he said.

"They are thinking of direct attacks," he said. "We are thinking of negotiation. They have provided no evidence, but they want the man."

Zaeef's words raised hope among some. "If it's a serious offer, negotiations should not be rejected by the U.S. This should definitely be pursued - before the first bullet comes out," said Syed Kabier Ali Wasti, president of the moderate Pakistani Muslim League.

But the United States and allies

said the demand for evidence and negotiations was all talk.

"It was just a few days ago that they said they didn't know where he was," Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said on NBC's "Meet the Press" program. "So I have no reason to believe anything a Taliban representative would say."

Nearly three weeks after terrorists believed linked to bin Laden attacked the United States, Attorney General John Ashcroft warned that more could be coming.

"We believe there are others who may be in the country who would have plans," Ashcroft said on CBS's "Face The Nation."

"There is a very serious threat of additional problems now," Ashcroft

said.

Americans already appear prepared for the likelihood of further tragedy. In a new poll for Time magazine, 81 percent of Americans said they believed another terrorist attack is very likely or somewhat likely in the next year; 76 percent said they thought the likely vehicle of attack would be a car bomb or truck bomb.

Administration officials also acknowledged Sunday that military retaliation for the terrorist attack Sept. 11 could have consequences in the United States and abroad.

"There are substantial risks of terrorism still in the United States, and as we as a nation respond to what's happened to us, those risks may in fact go up," Ashcroft said on CNN.

Rumsfeld said that in weighing how to react, U.S. officials must be careful not to foment unrest in Islamic countries that have pledged to assist the fight against terrorism, such as Pakistan and Jordan.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said the evidence against bin Laden is compelling. "I have seen absolutely powerful and incontrovertible evidence of his link to the events of the 11th of September," Blair said in a British television interview.

In Washington, about 3,000 to 4,000 largely peaceful protesters urged the United States not to engage in indiscriminate bombing of Afghanistan.

"I think all of us are quite sick of the idea of civilian deaths whether they're here or in Afghanistan," said Kit Bonson, an organizer with the Washington Peace Center, a local anti-war group that organized the rally.

"We're fighting what the United States is getting ready to inflict on other countries around the world," said protester Mary Lou Greenberg of New York City.

The protesters were met with counter-protests.

Vietnam-era veteran Lou Santucci carried a sign linking the protesters to terrorists: "Osama thanks Fellow Cowards for Their Support."

Nora Carroll yelled obscenities at the marchers, then explained that they were wrong comparing the war on terrorism with the war in Vietnam

a generation ago. "This is a whole different story," she said. "When we're attacked, we fight back."

In other developments Sunday:

- Exiled Afghan King Zahir Shah met with members of the United States Congress Sunday in Rome. Some officials hope he could serve as transitional leader if the Taliban is toppled. Shah has lived in Rome since 1973.

Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar warned the former king to stay away. "How dare you think you can return to Afghanistan backed by the United States," Omar said in a radio address.

Also, the Taliban said it arrested six people for distributing leaflets urging the king's return to power. The leaflets also said the United States is not an enemy, according to a report from the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press.

Government officials will review options Monday or Tuesday to reopen Washington's Reagan National Airport, the only airport in the country still closed.

"The president would like us to get National Airport, Ronald Reagan Airport, opened as quickly as we can. But we have to be sensitive to the security concerns," Card said.

Officials are concerned about its proximity to important government buildings - it is just seconds away from the Pentagon, the White House and Capitol.

"I'm optimistic that we can find the right balance between security and economic opportunity that is necessary to the opening of Ronald Reagan Airport," Card said. "I'm confident that we can address the challenge and that Ronald Reagan Airport will be open. The question is how quickly and under what circumstances."

- Ashcroft said the number of arrests in the investigation now tops 500. FBI field offices are operating on 12-hour shifts and sifting more than 225,000 tips. (Thomma reported from Washington. Tamayo of the Miami Herald reported from Islamabad. Also contributing: Lenny Savino, Tony Pugh, Drew Brown of the Macon Telegraph and Mark McDonald of the San Jose Mercury News.)

Foreign students coming under close scrutiny

by Dion Lefler

Knight Ridder Newspapers

Eyad Ismoil came to the United States in 1989 to attend Wichita State University. Four years later, he drove a truck bomb into the underground garage of the World Trade Center in New York, killing six people.

Nasser Hidmi studied English at Kansas State University in 1990 and 1991. In 1992, he was arrested by Israeli authorities in an attempted terrorist bombing. He told investigators he had learned revolutionary theory and war craft in clandestine meetings held in conjunction with religious conventions in Kansas City and weekend retreats outside Chicago.

Ismoil and Hidmi entered the United States on student visas, as do more than 1 million people every year. Officials say the vast majority of these students are what they appear to be: law-abiding people seeking an education that they can take home to make their lives and countries better.

But in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center and damaged the Pentagon, federal officials have increased their scrutiny of foreign students and plan to increase it more.

The FBI has already invoked a rarely used emergency power to search student records that are generally closed under federal privacy laws.

Officials are also rushing to fully implement a 1996 law -- passed in response to Ismoil's role in the 1993 Trade Center bombing -- that would require universities to keep tabs on foreign students and notify law-enforcement authorities if they drop out of school.

Some officials are proposing new laws to establish counterfeit-proof

identification cards that could be used to catch students or workers who violate the terms of their visas.

Ismoil, a Kuwaiti-born citizen of Jordan, entered Wichita State in 1989 to study engineering. After three semesters, he dropped out of sight.

He resurfaced in 1993 as a prime suspect in the truck bombing. Ismoil was captured in Jordan and tried in the United States on charges that he loaded and drove the truck. At his trial, he maintained he was an unwitting participant who believed the truck was carrying ordinary freight goods. He was convicted of conspiracy and sentenced to 240 years in prison without possibility of parole.

Hidmi was a student in Kansas State's English as a Second Language program in 1990 and 1991. A Palestinian resident of Jerusalem, he had applied for membership in the terrorist organization Hamas while living in a refugee camp, according to congressional testimony in a hearing held last year.

Hidmi told Israeli investigators he was recruited for the militant wing of Hamas while he was at Kansas State. Along with about 20 others, he was taught bomb making at clandestine meetings organized around Islamic student conferences in Kansas City.

"They informed us that all the young men that were present and were chosen for the secret meetings were from the Occupied Territories, and were selected according to forms they filled out in the camps," Hidmi said in his statements to the Israeli authorities. "This was done in order that they will take part in activities that will support and strengthen the Intifadah (Palestinian uprising) within the framework of Hamas."

Azfar Kazmi, president of the Muslim students group at WSU, was astonished when he was told about

Ismoil's role in the 1993 bombing. "Somebody told me about that, but I thought they were joking," he said. And he and other members of his group said they had never been approached by anyone seeking to recruit them into underground activities.

U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, a longtime advocate of tighter immigration controls, wrote the 1996 law to track foreign students.

He said 15 of the 19 men who are believed to have hijacked four airliners Sept. 11 entered the country legally on work or student visas.

Officials of both Wichita State and Kansas State said all their foreign students are accounted for, and none is believed to have been involved with the attacks or terrorism in general.

WSU spokesman Joe Kleinsasser said authorities questioned one student shortly after the attack, but it was a case of mistaken identity. The FBI was given a few records as part of its national check on foreign students, but no further action was taken, he said.

Cheryl May, a spokeswoman for Kansas State, said the university is unaware of any of its students being contacted by authorities since the bombings.

Both universities reported that their campuses and communities have been supportive of the foreign students. Some incidents of harassment have been reported, but they have been rare and involved only verbal taunts, officials said.

Leaders and members of the Muslim Students Association at WSU said the atmosphere has been calm for them since the attacks, which they denounce as an atrocity against America and their religion.

"The things happening in New York are really terrifying," said Sayed Ali, a student from Pakistan. "A terrorist has no religion, period."

Foreign students are highly sought by U.S. universities for financial and educational reasons.

International students pay \$320 a credit hour at Wichita State, compared with \$94 for in-state students, Kleinsasser said.

About 1,476 WSU students are from another country, out of a student population of 14,854. K-State has about 1,100 out of a student population of 23,000.

But both officials said the educational benefits are even more important than the financial effects.

"You have a significant number of students here who may never have been out of Wichita or Kansas," Kleinsasser said. "They can learn about other cultures and other beliefs from interacting with the students here on campus."

Officials at all levels concede that it is practically impossible to track people like Ismoil who vanish from school.

Universities are supposed to notify the Immigration and Naturalization Service when international students enter their school and when they don't attend the programs they sign up for. But it's a paper system, and information often runs six months to a year behind, said Elaine Komis of the INS office in Washington.

The law Smith wrote in 1996 was designed to computerize the process so it could provide real-time information. In 1997, the INS launched a pilot program involving 21 schools in the Southeast.

But in 1999, when the INS published draft regulations to expand the program, it received 4,500 complaints from colleges and others, mostly about the law's requirement that the schools collect the \$95-per-student fee to pay for it.

Congress has twice asked the INS

to wait so it could tweak the system, Komis said. A complete nationwide system is not expected to be online until 2003, she said.

Even if the system were in place, there are other major obstacles to tracking students who come in on visas and drop out of sight in America, Komis said.

Almost 1 million students are among the 30 million non-immigrant aliens who enter the country on visas each year, Komis said, and the INS has only about 2,000 INS investigators.

In addition to keeping tabs on foreigners, they have to investigate illegal immigrants, immigrant smuggling and immigration fraud, she said.

Smith said he believes all non-im-

**Behrend's Student
Government Association will
be taking nominations for
(1) SGA Senator
and (1) Freshman Senator
at the SGA meeting on
Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2001
at 5:20 p.m. in Reed 114.
Anyone interested should
attend the meeting or call
SGA at
898-6220.**