

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 1 of 2

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 1 of 2

<![endif]-->

From: Kofmehl, Scott
Sent: 1/19/2012 3:31:15 AM
To: svcSMARTBTSP08
Subject: PAKISTAN: PAKISTANI TALIBAN CLAIMS RESPONSIBILITY FOR VOICE OF AMERICA JOURNALIST'S DEATH
Attachments: Metadata.dat

UNCLASSIFIED
SBU



MRN: 12 ISLAMABAD 150
Date/DTG: Jan 19, 2012 / 190831Z JAN 12
From: AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
Action: SECSTATE WASHDCIMMEDIATE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, PTER, PHUM, KPAO, PK
Captions: SENSITIVE
Reference: ISL 94
Subject: PAKISTAN: PAKISTANI TALIBAN CLAIMS RESPONSIBILITY FOR VOICE OF AMERICA JOURNALIST'S DEATH

1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

2. (U) **SUMMARY:** Veteran reporter Mukarram Khan Aatif was assassinated by unidentified gunmen while attending evening prayers on January 17. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the killing and warned that several more journalists are on its "hit list." Aatif, a stringer for Voice of America's Pashto-language radio service, had recently re-located to Charsadda district, close to Peshawar, from his native Mohmand due to security concerns. Coming on the heels of last week's release of a judicial report on the murder of journalist Saleem Shahzad (reftel), Aatif's death is a grim reminder of the dangers Pakistani journalists report they face from both state and non-state actors. **END SUMMARY.**

Mukarram Khan Aatif

3. (U) Aatif was a veteran journalist who worked for several media organizations and served as the President of the Mohmand Agency Press Club. It was his work with Voice of America's Radio Deewa, however, that incurred the wrath of TTP. In a phone call to English daily *The News*, TTP spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan claimed Aatif had been murdered for "refusing to give coverage to the Taliban." According to *Express Tribune*, Ehsan told several Peshawar-based journalists, "We have been warning him to stop his propaganda against us in the foreign media. He did not include our version in his stories." Ehsan further noted that there are several more reporters on the Taliban's target list.

4. (U) In a press release, Voice of America paid tribute to Aatif's courage and called on the government to bring his killers to justice. The organization also revealed that Aatif had faced numerous threats over the course of his career, but chose to continue reporting on "militant attacks, military operations, and social issues." Noting that Aatif was gunned down during evening prayers, Radio Free Europe's Daud Khattak captured the tone of many commentators: "The violent death of Aatif

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Sharon Ahmad, Senior Reviewer

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 1 of 2

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 1 of 2

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 2 of 2

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 2 of 2

only serves to emphasize how precarious the profession of journalism is in Pakistan, where not even the sanctity of a mosque is enough to ensure one's safety."

5. (SBU) **COMMENT:** Aatif's January 17 assassination comes less than a week after the release of a judicial report on the May 2011 murder of Saleem Shahzad. The judicial report hints at the involvement of Pakistani intelligence agencies in Shahzad's death, but fails to name his killer. Aatif's demise offers a fresh reminder of Pakistan's status as the world's most deadly country for journalists, where reporters frequently report they are threatened by both violent extremists and government operatives. Unfortunately, the climate of fear often extends to those in government: Dunya TV reported that while Aatif's funeral was filled with his friends and journalism colleagues, not a single government official showed up. **END COMMENT.**

Signature: HOAGLAND

Drafted By: ISLAMABAD:Danis, Rebecca

Cleared By: Islamabad Stroh, Mark E

Islamabad:Prattipati, Anupama

Islamabad:Miller, Thomas S

Islamabad:Moss, Mitchell R

Approved By: Islamabad Hoagland, Richard E

Released By: ISLAMABAD:Kofmehl, Scott

Info:

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DCROUTINE ;

SECDEF WASHINGTON DC, NOTYPEROUTINE ; CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

ROUTINE ; JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DCROUTINE ; CIA WASHINGTON DCROUTINE ;

DIA WASHINGTON DCROUTINE ; BEIJING, AMEMBASSYROUTINE ;

MOSCOW, AMEMBASSYROUTINE ; RIYADH, AMEMBASSYROUTINE ;

TOKYO, AMEMBASSYROUTINE ; ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVEROUTINE

Action Post:

Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

UNCLASSIFIED
SBU

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 2 of 2

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 2 of 2