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FROM : Amembassy KABUL

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ANALYSIS BRANCH
DATE: May 29, 1972

SUBJECT : Merajuddin: Portrait of a Moslem Youth Extremist

REF :

Enclosed is an account of several meetings between the reporting officer and Merajuddin Zaheb, a 22-year-old self-styled leader of the Jamiat-e-Jawanan-e-Musulman, an organization of young Moslem students centered in Kabul University.

The material is largely biographical; but because of the unusual content of the conversations, it is submitted by airgram rather than as a separate biographical report.

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Enclosure:
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Page 1 of 3

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MERAJUDDIN: PORTRAIT OF A MOSLEM YOUTH EXTREMIST

I. Biographic Information

MERAJUDDIN ZAHEB (aka Faruq): b. 1949, Laghman province, son of a mullah (deceased). Two brothers, one studying at Habibia H.S.; other (older) is electrical engineer; neither connected with Moslem Youth group. Graduate of Afghan Institute of Technology, 1968. Studied two years at Soviet-supported Polytechnic Institute of Kabul University; dismissed in 1970 for agitation against Soviet professors. Helped found the Jamiat-e-Jawan-e-Musulman (Religious Youth Organization) at the University. Claims to have been jailed three months for fighting leftists. Writes occasional anti-communist articles. Said he helped organize mullah demonstrations against Lenin Centenary in May, 1970. Also claims to have helped instigate "Meterlam Incident" in fall, 1971, in which Parcham student killed. Carries an automatic pistol.

II. Background

Merajuddin first telephoned me in January, 1972, and asked if he could visit me some evening--alone and outside the Embassy. He described himself only as a "leader of the Moslem Youth" and said he had an important matter to discuss. I described the location of my house and proposed he come for tea the following evening. He accepted.

He introduced himself as "Merajuddin" (lit. "Zenith of God"), a pseudonym he adopted during his activities at the Polytechnic. Faruq is his given name. He was nervous at first, explaining that he had to be careful about coming to my home; gradually he began to relax. He said he got my name from an Afghan employee of the Embassy whom he would not identify.

After describing in some detail the anti-communist activities of his group, he came to the point: Would the United States, in recognition of the valuable services against the USSR and communism his group is rendering, consider financing a printing press? He explained that the group did not have enough money to finance a newspaper and that they normally were confined to distributing typed or mimeographed leaflets. He said the two religiously-oriented private weeklies (Gahiz and Neda-ye-Haq) might print an occasional article but neither were reliable allies of his group. To help finance his group's struggle against communism, he had been selling off some of his family's property. He concluded that the U.S. should cooperate with his group, since both true Moslems and Americans had a common interest in fighting an ideology so diametrically opposed to our way of life.

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Encl. to Kabul A-60

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Page 2 of 3

II. Background (Cont.)

I replied that it was difficult for a foreign government--especially the United States--to involve itself in such activities in Afghanistan. However, in order to appear forthcoming (and to have the chance to see him again), I asked him to give me a few days to check out his request. We agreed to meet again in a week.

As he was leaving the house, he said--seemingly in jest--that the Moslem Youth had the weapons to fight the Russians. As proof he pulled an automatic pistol (about 25 cal.) from his belt, smiled, and waved it for me to see. I asked if it was loaded; he said yes and that they had a lot more. Another smile. As he left he promised to bring me some "documents"--samples of the kind of literature he and his groups were circulating.

He returned as promised a week later. In the meantime, the Embassy had the opportunity to check his bona fides; he could have been a provocateur, but from Embassy files he appeared to be a genuine young fanatic. He was not the leader of the group, but a member of it. The "documents" Merajuddin brought with him were an article dated February 1, 1970, from Gahiz and a declaration of March 11, 1970, by Moslem students of Kabul University. The latter protested the "corrupt anti-religious" and "political" activities of Soviet professors at the Polytechnic and mentioned Merajuddin as one of the victims of the "mockery" and "threats" of these professors. It also said Merajuddin had been the victim of homosexual attacks at the school. Merajuddin said these incidents were the genesis of the Moslem Youth group in Afghanistan; he said as a result of the group's demands 18 Soviet professors (including the Chemistry Department head, Kusespin) were dismissed. (Comment: Embassy files confirm that there were difficulties between students and faculty at the Polytechnic during this period, but do not verify that any Soviet professors were dismissed for the reasons cited by Merajuddin.)

Regarding his request for financial assistance, I told Merajuddin that the USG's involvement in Afghanistan was limited to economic development and U.S.-sponsored cultural/information activities. I explained that regardless of whatever sympathy we might have for the aims of his group, we could not involve ourselves directly in his crusade. Our efforts to help Afghanistan develop economically, I concluded, would help to strengthen the country's independence and will to resist foreign influence or ideologies. Merajuddin said he was disappointed with our decision. He said he felt that communism could never be accommodated in Afghanistan without a decisive struggle in which Islam or communism would triumph. He added that he felt no reconciliation between the U.S. and either China or the USSR would ever be possible.

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Encl. to Kabul A-60

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Page 3 of 3

III. Comment

Merajuddin has dropped by my house several times since the first two meetings in January--always unannounced. The last time was in early April when he joined me for lunch. For no apparent reason he has never returned, though he might easily come by again any day as though nothing had happened. He occasionally drops in the same way to see John Griswold, head of the USAID contract team from Southern Illinois University that works with the Afghan Institute of Technology where Merajuddin was once a student.

Although he is an activist within his group, Merajuddin does not appear to be intellectually very well-equipped. He tends toward dogmatism in speech. He is one of the speakers during demonstrations of his group, none of whom are particularly outstanding orators or charismatic. Merajuddin is small in build (about 5'7") and soft-spoken in private. He dresses well--always coat and tie--and has no fanatical or bigoted bearing. He tends, however, to exaggerate in his claims about his group's "accomplishments.". For example, he said his group had killed four leftists in Meterlam last fall and that several also died in fighting at the University about the same time. He also said he had written the marathon anti-communist speech of Deputy Mohammad Nabi (Logar) during the 1971 Zahir Government confidence debate, a claim that would also be difficult to substantiate. His claim that his group perpetrated the Meterlam killing must also be taken with a grain of salt, since the incident was primarily the work of local religious leaders in Laghman, although his group could easily have helped stir up agitation in the up-tight religious atmosphere of that province.

Merajuddin, incidentally, said four mullahs are still in jail over the Meterlam incident. One includes Amirzadah, the Imam of the Meterlam Mosque. Merajuddin is confident that the government will release them soon and that they will not be brought to trial for "executing" a communist. He also said the government had recently passed the word to the religious leaders of Afghanistan's eastern provinces to downplay the issue of Pashtunistan. He said the reasoning is that pushing Pashtunistan is injurious to the "brotherly Islamic relations" between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Evidence of the past few months confirms that religious leaders and the religious press have discouraged activism on the issue.

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