

Taliban Will Hold Firm on Bin Ladin For Now

[REDACTED]

The Taliban leadership allows Bin Ladin to remain in Afghanistan despite UN sanctions aimed at persuading the group to give him up because it needs his money and fighters to wage its civil war and because it perceives a cultural obligation to shield a guest.

- Taliban leaders say they are beholden to an ethnic Pashtun tribal code requiring protection of guests.

Taliban leaders also [REDACTED] want us to offer diplomatic recognition to their regime. Only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

- **We judge that only after a Taliban victory would its leaders consider surrendering Bin Ladin [REDACTED] if they could plausibly deny that they had done so.** The Taliban would seek to avoid a backlash from its Afghan and Pakistani supporters and from Arabs sympathetic to Bin Ladin as well as to save face.

— [REDACTED]

Moderates such as the foreign minister may judge that a specific offer from us would strengthen their hand in internal debates after a victory.

- To protect the stature they perceive they have with fellow Muslim states, Taliban leaders are unlikely to accept additional conditions on the transfer that would create the appearance that it had succumbed to Western pressure or contravened its cultural obligations.