

[REDACTED]

(07 December 2000) Masood still viable going into Afghan winter

UN and NGO officials are concerned that humanitarian workers might be held hostage in Afghanistan in the event of a US strike against Bin Ladin-related targets or of a new round of sanctions against the Taliban, [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Taliban leaders--who last week were convinced US strikes were imminent--temporarily suspended UN and NGO flights and now require foreigners to seek permission before leaving Afghanistan.

Commander Masood enters the winter lull in a reasonably secure position, even after losing the Northern Alliance's political headquarters at Taloqan. He has reversed some of the Taliban gains, but winter weather may prevent him from retaking Taloqan.

- [REDACTED] Masood's forces have encircled Taloqan from three sides and hold many of the surrounding heights--a good position for retaking the city next spring.

- The continued ability of the Alliance to fight, even after the Taliban cut its most direct supply route, shows Masood has successfully used more circuitous routes to the east for resupply.

By regrouping after the loss of Taloqan, Masood has helped reassure his key suppliers, [REDACTED] that he is still worth supporting. [REDACTED] doubted that Masood could prevent a Taliban victory, [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED] [REDACTED] have agreed to supply Masood with the capability to mount sustained offensive operations by the spring, and [REDACTED] some equipment--including tanks and ammunition--already is en route.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- Masood's backers will require him to make gains before they make further aid commitments.

[REDACTED]