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**FOR RESPONSE TO QUERY
May 4, 2009**

**Background, RTQ and Talking Points for response to Al
Jazeera story on Bagram chaplains**

PA Posture: PASSIVE / RTQ (Correct the Record)

Background:

One year ago, in May 2008, a documentary filmmaker named Brian Hughes was allowed to film religious services on Bagram Airfield. The command's intent was to foster transparency and demonstrate the freedom of worship available to U.S. service members.

CENTCOM General Order Number 1, paragraph K, lists "Proselytizing of any religion, faith or practice" as a prohibited activity. However, service members are not forbidden to practice their religion while deployed.

Concerning a May 4 Al Jazeera web-based article and corresponding video story (attached) which uses last year's Hughes footage, there are several issues of contention:

- The footage and accompanying article misconstrue the meaning of a sermon, in which a CJTF-101 chaplain spoke on the Christian tenet of evangelism. This sermon was given in accordance with a given faith, as a doctrinal lesson for those who already belong to that faith. The chaplain, (b)(3), (b)(6), was not advocating the violation of CENTCOM General Order Number 1.
- The video story shows Bibles printed in Dari and Pashto at a Bible study group. These Bibles were not part of any DoD-sponsored

initiative; rather, they had been sent privately by a service member's home church. After the meeting, the chaplain at the scene (CPT (b)(3), (b)(6)) advised the service member of GO 1's prohibition and later confiscated the Bibles to ensure that they were not distributed.

Talking Points:

- 1) Chaplains provide religious support within the bounds of GO 1, and service members are permitted to practice their religion on base. Although he spoke of evangelism as a key tenet of the Christian faith, the chaplain (LTC (b)(3), (b)(6)) was not in fact advocating that service members go forth and violate General Order No. 1 in Afghanistan. He was teaching other members of his faith on Christian doctrine, not issuing orders to them as an officer.
- 2) No U.S./DoD funds were used to pay for the translated Bibles. They were shipped to a service member by a church in the United States, without the knowledge or endorsement of U.S. military officials. The Bibles shown in the footage were never distributed, but later removed by the chaplains.
- 3) Army Chaplains are required to respect all religious creeds and denominations; their mission is to provide religious support to all service members. The Army has chaplains from all major religions, to include Islam. We honor and respect religious diversity, as well as the laws and culture of Afghanistan.

Probable Q & A:

Q: Are service members trying to convert Afghans to Christianity?

A: No. All service members are prohibited by CENTCOM General Order 1 from any type of proselytizing. Service members may be subject to punishment for violation of a general order.

Q: What were translated Bibles doing in a military prayer group?

A: The Bibles shown in the footage were brought in by a service member who did not understand at the time that he was forbidden by General Order

No. 1 from distributing them to Afghans. They were sent to him by a church in the United States, and were not translated or paid for by the U.S. military. The service member was later informed of the rules, and the Bibles were confiscated, and not distributed as the story suggests.

For further information, contact the CJTF-101 Public Affairs Office.

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For more news and information about NATO's International Security Assistance Force - Afghanistan, please visit www.nato.int/isaf/

Posted May 4, 2009, Al Jazeera (English)

'Witness for Jesus' in Afghanistan

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2009/05/200953201315854832.html>

US soldiers have been encouraged to spread the message of their Christian faith among Afghanistan's predominantly Muslim population, video footage obtained by Al Jazeera appears to show.

Military chaplains stationed in the US air base at Bagram were also filmed with bibles printed in the country's main Pashto and Dari languages.

In one recorded sermon, Lieutenant-Colonel

(b)(3), (b)(6) the chief of the US military chaplains in Afghanistan, is seen telling soldiers that as followers of Jesus Christ, they all have a responsibility "to be witnesses for



Bagram has a thriving evangelical Christian community

him".

"The special forces guys - they hunt men basically. We do the same things as Christians, we hunt people for Jesus. We do, we hunt them down," he says.

"Get the hound of heaven after them, so we get them into the kingdom. That's what we do, that's our business."

Local language Bibles

The footage, shot about a year ago by Brian Hughes, a documentary maker and former member of the US military who spent several days in Bagram, was obtained by Al Jazeera's James Bays, who has covered Afghanistan extensively.

Bays also obtained from Hughes a Pashto-language copy of one of the books he picked up during a Bible study lesson he recorded at Bagram.

A Pashto speaker confirmed to Bays that it was a Bible.

In other footage captured at Bagram, Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) a soldier who is set to become a military chaplain, is seen giving thanks for the work that his church in the US did in getting Bibles printed and sent to Afghanistan.



"I also want to praise God because my church collected some money to get Bibles for Afghanistan. They came and sent the money out," he is heard saying during a Bible study class.

It is not clear that the Bibles were distributed to Afghans, but Hughes said that none of the people he recorded in a series of sermons and Bible study classes appeared to be able to speak Pashto or Dari.

"They weren't talking about learning how to speak Dari or Pashto, by reading the Bible and using that as the tool for language lessons," Hughes said.

"The only reason they would have these documents there was to distribute them to the Afghan people. And I knew it was wrong, and I knew that filming it ... documenting it would be important."

Pentagon officials have so far not responded to a copy of the footage provided to them, but the distribution of Bibles in a place as politically sensitive as Afghanistan is bound to cause deep concern in Washington, our correspondent says.

Guidelines

It is not clear if the presence of the Bibles and exhortations for soldiers to be "witnesses" for Jesus continues, but they were filmed a year ago despite regulations by the US military's Central Command that expressly forbid "proselytising of any religion, faith or practice".

But in another piece of footage taken by Hughes, the chaplains appear to have found a way around the regulation known as General Order Number One.

"Do we know what it means to proselytise?"
Captair (b)(3), (b)(6) a military chaplain, says to the gathering.

"It is General Order Number One," an unidentified soldier replies.

But (b)(3), (b)(6) says "you can't proselytise but you can give gifts".

The footage also suggests US soldiers gave out Bibles in Iraq.

In his address to a Bible study group at Bagram, Afghanistan, (b)(3), (b)(6) is recorded as saying: "I bought a carpet and then I gave the guy a Bible after I conducted my business.

"The Bible wasn't to be 'hey, I'll give you this and I'll give you a better deal because that would be wrong', [but] the expressions that I got from the people in Iraq [were] just phenomenal, they were hungry for the word."

The footage has surfaced as Barack Obama, the US president, prepares to host Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan's president, at a summit focusing on how to tackle al-Qaeda and Taliban bases dotted along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Asif Ali Zardari, Pakistan's president, will also take part in the talks in Washington, scheduled for May 5 and 6.



It is not clear any of the local language Bibles were distributed to Afghans