HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES FORCES-AFGHANISTAN
KABUL, AFGHANISTAN
APO AE 09356

USFOR-A JENG

3 March 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR Commander, United States Forces – Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan

SUBJECT: In Progress Report for Army Regulation 15-6 Investigation (Allegation that U.S. Service Members Improperly Disposed of Islamic Religious Materials)

1. On 21 February 2012, you appointed me to conduct an investigation into the facts and circumstances surrounding an allegation of the improper disposal of Islamic religious materials at the Bagram Air Field burn pit on 20 February 2012. In accordance with your guidance, I partnered with senior leaders from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to conduct this investigation as a Joint Commission. Although that Commission found that religious materials were improperly disposed of, it concluded that these actions were not intended to be—and they were not—a deliberate attack on the Qur'an or the Islamic faith.

2. From 21 February 2012 through 1 March 2012, senior leaders from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, including representatives from the Ministries of Defense and Interior and the National Directorate of Security, jointly investigated the incident with me. In close cooperation with my Afghan partners and after considering several days' worth of testimony and other evidence, we produced a joint report in both English and Dari. In summary, we found the following:

a. For some time, reports indicated that detainees at the Detention Facility in Parwan were writing on or passing notes within library books as part of an effort to communicate within the facility. As a result of these reports, on 18 February 2012, U.S. Service Members began to conduct a security search of the library. During that three-day search, a linguist inaccurately identified many books as containing extremist material. Based on this information, 1,652 books were removed from the library's shelves. Included within these books were copies of the Qur'an and other religious texts.

b. At about 2130 hours on 20 February 2012, U.S. Service Members loaded these books onto a truck and drove them to Bagram Air Field's burn pit. At that site, U.S. Service Members began loading them into an active incinerator, which ultimately resulted in copies of the Qur'an, as well as other religious and non-religious books, being burned. A local-national employee saw that copies of the Qur'an and other religious books were being placed into the incinerator. Another employee extinguished the incinerator, and many employees helped remove several Qur'ans from the incinerator. Several U.S. Service Members and one linguist were directly involved in this incident.

c. Ultimately this tragic mistake resulted from an ignorance of the importance of the Qur'an to the Islamic faith and a lack of due care. An over reliance on one linguist's interpretation of

these books also contributed to this tragedy. Finally, DFIP policies, which in part are intended to prevent such incidents, were also not observed here by U.S. Service Members who were not fully supervised by their chain of command.

3. Relying heavily on the expertise of the Afghan partners, the Joint Commission developed a series of recommendations to help ensure that this incident is never repeated.

a. The Joint Commission recommends a comprehensive review of U.S. forces' policies regarding the handling of religious materials and that U.S. forces re-train on the precepts of the Islamic faith.

b. The Joint Commission understands that leadership commitment is necessary to the success of this effort, and leaders at all levels—both within and outside U.S. forces—should be personally involved in matters that relate to religious values.

c. As part of that leadership engagement, the Joint Commission recommends that leaders actively build relationships with their units' Afghan partners, utilizing their partners' cultural expertise to ensure that all Service Members understand and appreciate the unique role of the Qur'an and other religious texts in the Islamic faith.

d. The Qur'ans and Interpretations of the Qur'an (Tafseer Sharif) will be handed over to Afghan Government officials immediately. The remaining books that were recovered from the library will be respectfully stored at the joint Afghanistan and United States operated Justice Center in Parwan until such time as there is no further evidentiary need for them. At that point they will be given to officials of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

4. Finally, the Joint Commission recognizes that further investigation of this incident is necessary to fully understand the facts and circumstances of what occurred and to ensure that those U.S. persons who have violated our standards of conduct can be held accountable by U.S. authorities in accordance with the law. Using the work of the Joint Commission as the foundation for further inquiry, I will continue with the investigation to develop a complete understanding of what occurred, why it occurred, and what we can do to ensure that it never happens again.

5. The point of contact for this memorandum is the USFOR-A Office of the Staff Judge Advocate.

BRYAN G. WATSON
Brigadier General, USA
Investigating Officer