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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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To: The Secretary

From: NEA - Joseph J. Sisco *js*

New Government in Afghanistan

King Mohammad Zahir accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Zahir on December 5, and on December 7 asked Foreign Minister Mohammad Moussa Shafiq to form a new government. Shafiq appeared before the Parliament on December 11 with a partial list of his Cabinet members, and, according to the Afghan Embassy, received a vote of confidence today.

Shafiq seems an outstanding choice for Prime Minister. You met him at the UN both this year and last, and I believe you will agree with Embassy Kabul that he is a bright, intelligent young man with a quick and agile mind that penetrates immediately to the core of issues before him. He has demonstrated a willingness to make decisions, which is unusual in Afghanistan. The new Prime Minister has an M.A. from Columbia, and speaks warmly of the special bond between Afghans and Americans which he feels is based on similar ideals and basic outlook. He has privately suggested closer cooperation between Afghanistan and the U.S. on international issues.

In his appearance before the Parliament December 11, Shafiq promised to continue Afghanistan's nonaligned foreign policy, to suppress opium production, and to press economic and political reforms.

Shafiq's Cabinet is young, liberal and technically well qualified. Notable among the selections are Mohammad Khan Jalalar, age 37, one of the ablest economists in the

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country, as Minister of Finance; Sahabuddin Kushkaki, 39 year old publisher of the only good independent newspaper in Afghanistan, as Minister of Information and Culture; and Dr. Abdul Wakil, the organizer and motivator of the outstanding drought relief activity with whom USAID and the Peace Corps have worked very closely during the past year, as Minister of Agriculture.

We expect the Shafiq Government to exercise stronger leadership on domestic issues and to pursue a more active and slightly more Western-oriented foreign policy. Shafiq's major problem will be the extent to which the King will allow him to govern.

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