

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

R

Event: Interview of **Walter Slocombe**

Type of Event: Interview

Date: December 19, 2003

Prepared by: Bonnie D. Jenkins

Reviewed by: Mike Hurley

Classification: Top Secret

Team Number: 3 (Counterterrorism Policy)

Location: 2100 K Street, NW

Participants – Non-Commission: Walter Slocombe

Participants – Commission: Chris Kojm, Bonnie Jenkins, Warren Bass

Background

(U) Slocombe began the interview conditioning his response on being able to have access to the taped recording. Chris Kojm informed Slocombe that if this is for his personal review, and if he would like to come to 2100 K Street to review the tape, that is consistent with Commission policy. Slocombe stated this policy was acceptable.

(U) Currently, Slocombe is a private citizen and is taking leave from the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad where he was most recently employed. He began in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) as a consultant to Secretary of Defense Aspen at the beginning of the Clinton administration and was later nominated and confirmed to be Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Policy, effective June 1, 1993. He was appointed Under Secretary for Policy in early September of 1994 and remained in that position until January 20, 2001.

(U) One of the three Assistant Secretaries of Defense (ASD) that reported to Slocombe was ASD for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (SO/LIC), which had the principal staff responsibility for OSD counterterrorism (CT) policy, activities, and operations. This ASD attended the Counterterrorism Support Group (CSG) meetings. If there was a Deputies Committee (DC) meeting on CT, Slocombe would normally attend. It was rare that he attended the Principals Committee (PC) meeting on a subject like CT, which would have been a subject of primary interest to DoD. He did attend a few PC meetings because the Secretary or Deputy was not available or the issue focused on an issue remote to DoD's interest.

(U) Slocombe worked closely with the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). His counterpart for DC meetings was the Vice-Chairman. On CT issues, his counterpart was most often the Director of Operations (J3) but he does not recall extensive interaction with the Combatant Commands.

(U) Part of the statutory function of the office of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USD/P) is to provide staff support for the Secretary on contingency planning. Over the years, that responsibility grew so that his office also provided support for the planning of actual operations. When an operation was contemplated, his office was involved. In general, all deployment orders (and all contingency operations involve deployment orders), went through Slocombe before they went to the Secretary for final approval. One important exception was during the attack on the African Embassies in 1998, which took place while Slocombe was on leave. At that time his Deputy, Jim Bodner, was directly involved on issues regarding the Embassy attack.

(U) Slocombe attended small group meetings, but he does not recall if those meetings focused on Usama Bin Laden (UBL). He was a member of many small groups and could not recall if any of the military options regarding Afghanistan were discussed in these meetings. It would have been very unusual for him to have sat in for Secretary Cohen in one of the CT small groups because his small groups were at a lower level.

The Role of the Military in CT efforts

(U) Secretary Cohen took seriously the fight against terrorism and for him it was a very high priority. CT was generally an issue of high priority in OSD and its priority increased over time. To the degree that the military could make a contribution to the overall CT effort, it was willing to do so.

A-Q and UBL

(U) Slocombe first heard the term "Usama bin Laden" sometime during the 1996-1997 time frame. He was aware that UBL was a person directly involved in terrorism. Slocombe does not recall the degree to which UBL was considered a financier or leader of terrorist activities at that time.

Khobar Towers (KT)

(U) As a result of Khobar Towers, force protection (FP) became an important issue for OSD. Everyone at OSD and DoD became aware of the need to protect U.S. troops overseas and that U.S. troops had become more of a target. However, force protection was not a mission in itself. He compared this to the importance of morale in the military. It is required for a successful military, but ensuring a high moral among the troops is not in itself an end state of the military.

(U) Furthermore, Slocombe does not believe that within OSD, FP became a competing interest as compared to CT. FP was a high priority, particularly because the Department began to realize there are no sanctuaries for U.S. troops. For example, Saudi Arabia was not considered a problem before the 1995 attacks against the US run Saudi National Guard Training center in Riyadh. Therefore, while having heard the charge that FP overshadowed CT priorities within DoD, Slocombe does not agree with the allegation.

(U) Within a short time after KT, attention focused on UBL. Slocombe does not recall if it was called A-Q at that time.

The 1998 Embassy Bombings

(U) Slocombe was on leave when the bombing took place. His Deputy was fully authorized to act for Slocombe. After the bombing, he received a call from his Deputy and was informed that the U.S. would be launching cruise missile attacks in a few minutes in retaliation against the embassy attacks. The Secretary wanted Slocombe to be aware of the attacks but the Secretary did not believe it was appropriate to involve him in the decision making process because of the sensitivities of the issue. Slocombe is unaware of the process by which the decisions were made; however, he knows that both Cohen and his Deputy were involved. He knows they took extraordinary measures to keep the issue close hold.

(U) There were extensive discussions about which targets would be hit but as to the details, he has no information. He noted that the controversy was not why the U.S. did not hit more targets but why did the U.S. hit the targets that it did.

(U) The Pentagon view of the reaction to the TLAM strike was that the critics were setting up an unreasonable standard. The pharmaceutical strike was justified based on what was known at the time. His understanding is that there was direct evidence linking the facilities to the VX precursor and whatever one thinks of that evidence, the subsequent evidence is that the plant was in fact controlled by someone linked to UBL.

(U) With each terrorist event, including the 1998 attacks and 9-11 attack, people became more and more focused on the fact that the U.S. faced a very serious terrorism problem and it was a high priority. There was a learning process after each incident on how to respond and to try to prevent another attack through both passive and active measures.

Clinton and Lewinsky

(U) The Monica Lewinsky issue did not have any effect on operations that might have been pursued by the military after the TLAM strikes. Slocombe, however, did refer to Operation Desert Fox. There were many meetings in preparation for the Desert Fox operation. On the final day of preparations, there was a meeting early in the morning to give a go ahead for the count-down process for the attack to begin. The President came into the meeting, which was unusual. The briefing was done and the plan was explained to the President. He said, "well it is no secret that the house is planning to impeach me today. Is everybody agreed that we should go ahead with the attack?" The President went around the room and all the Principals agreed the attack should take place. Then the President said, "it is no secret that the Republican house is trying to impeach me today. Does anybody think that changes their decision one way or the other?" Everybody responded negatively at which time the President said, "There is nothing more to say." Slocombe believes the charge that the Lewinsky issue had an effect on

military plans and operations at that time, "is up there with the charge that the Jews are responsible for 9-11."

The Concern regarding DoD Casualties

(U) DoD is always conscious of the casualties that can result from a military operation. It does not want to insert troops into a country with little to no search and rescue or potential reinforcements. The Department was aware of the possibility of casualties and the measures that would have to be taken to reduce such casualties. If there is going to be a team on the ground, there must be a support capacity. They must be supplied and reinforced and later extracted. They also require a place to operate from and Afghanistan is one of the hardest places to get to. Whenever these projects were proposed, the lessons of Desert One were remembered, which is to be prepared for things to go wrong. However, the military is not afraid of casualties.

Military Options

(U) Slocombe was aware of the famous typical response given by the military when asked if it could engage in a larger conventional operation, which is that the military will require at least two army divisions. However, in fact, it would take two divisions to invade Afghanistan. One thing the military does right and for which it gets criticized for is planning for things to go wrong during campaigns in addition to planning for serious resistance to their actions. If a country is to be invaded, it takes two-three divisions and approximately \$10 billion.

(U) If there were a request for military options, those would be briefed by the JCS representative, which was the J3 (General Meyers). Slocombe recalled being briefed more than once on options but whether they were in an interagency context, he is unsure. Any paper trail would be in the JCS but there is going to be less of a paper trail on this issue than most, due to the sensitiveness of the issue and because of a need for speed.

(U) Slocombe was aware of the consideration of military options after the TLAM strikes of August 1998. UBL was considered a major terrorist target. The military kept naval assets with TLAMs within range of attacking targets in Afghanistan. There were frequent instances where the intelligence community believed they knew where UBL was located. The interagency would begin to focus on the issue but in the end the intelligence was not sufficient to justify an attack. That happened four or five times after the embassy bombings before 9/11. There were also efforts to increase the intelligence on UBL. However, there is no question that if there were satisfactory intelligence, there would have been another TLAM strike or other military action based on reasonable information as to where UBL was located. It took the shock of 9-11 to put the possibility of an invasion of Afghanistan forward as a practical option. There were simply no bases and it was hard to get Pakistani support or support from other Central Asian countries.

(U) Slocombe did not recall the statement made by Clinton to Shelton about the advantages of having "black ninjas repel out of helicopters into the middle of

their camp." Slocombe believes Shelton would have responded as follows: "someone is watching too many adventure movies." Slocombe noted that such a "ninja" proposal is the type of comment that upsets the professional military.

~~(TS)~~ There were discussions about putting Special Operations Forces (SOFs) on the ground in Afghanistan and the question was, what are they going to do and where are they going to go once they arrive in Afghanistan? They cannot simply wander around in the country. If someone had specified a target (for example, a camp, a building, a compound or a facility for making weapons), the military could have attacked with TLAMs or possibly with SOFs. In addition, once SOFs are inserted into a country, they have to be supplied and supported. SOFs are not inserted into a country just to look fierce. They are to conduct an operation, and these are normally very complex operations. The team may be small, but keeping the team properly supported is a much larger prospect. Also, where would the team be inserted? The choices were Iran, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, however, these all were problem countries at that time.

~~(S)~~ Slocombe does not recall the existence of military operations to go after UBL while UBL was living in Sudan in 1996. He notes there were various operations planned against individuals in Sudan but that was after 1996, and these operations were not operations against UBL.

The Targets

~~(S)~~ Generally the targets that existed against UBL and his infrastructure were not sufficiently high enough value to be worth a strike (not the money cost but the potential political costs). The training camps were not a high enough value target. Slocomb stressed that pre 9-11, there could be no military operation until there was reasonable confidence the USG could directly target individuals as opposed to just blowing up tents. The USG needed to locate the leadership. The one option not on the table was a ground invasion of Afghanistan. However, every other option was considered.

~~(S)~~ The targets that existed were old office buildings in Kabal, which could have been hit, but there was no assurance such a strike would have had a long-lasting positive effect on the overall effort. Those targets were, however, kept under review. There was a consideration of the use of Special Forces. However, the problem is that once the targets were located, the fastest way to get to the target was with a TLAM in a few hours. Every other option would have taken longer.

~~(S)~~ If UBL was located in a tent or there existed some other significant target, it would have made sense to attack. There was no certainty that if the camp was attacked, on the chance that UBL was at that site, that the operation would not simply kill many people who were not guilty of anything but having been at the camp at the time. What was required was a much clearer probability that the operation would kill UBL and his principal lieutenants. The sense was that while the USG did not need to have perfect information, there had to be reasonably

good intelligence that a possible target would not also result in a lot of collateral damage. However, almost all of the plans involved the chance of significant collateral damage. Also, the problem with the training camps was that there were only a few tents at the sites.

(U) It was important that the U.S. not be viewed as taking actions could result in a great deal of collateral damage, which would be illegal since it was not proportional. There would be resulting moral implications and practical costs. The US was engaged in efforts that required regional support and the US could not jeopardize that support mechanism, which might also have caused damage to the overall CT campaign.

(U) Slocombe concluded by stating that it is not the primary responsibility of the military to find the target. That responsibility lies with the intelligence agencies (the CIA and DIA).

Response to Clarke Piece from the JI

(U) Slocombe was shown a statement made by Clarke (he was told Clarke made the statement when he was interviewed by staff from the Joint Inquiry). The statement is as follows:

"After Khobar, Department of Defense saw terrorism primarily as a force protection issue, involving new procedures and training. Although they sat in the CSG (ASD/SOLIC was the representative), they did not see it as "their issue." In the August 1998 Embassy strikes they did work on target review and target selection. They also kept a follow-on strike capability off the coast of Pakistan for at least a year and had pre-surveyed targets programmed into the missiles.

However, whenever the White House asked for options involving "boots on the ground," they were told this was 'not a good idea.' DoD did offer plans involving cruise missiles or bombers (including for massive carpet bombing) but it consistently recommended against ground options and did not develop them. The DoD feared casualties and was concerned about a lack of a neighboring country from which to operate. They feared another Desert One."

(U) Slocombe noted that parts of the statement are true while others are not. It is true that after Khobar Towers, DoD realized it had to address the FP problem. There was a lot that had to be done on force protection and a great deal of money was then dedicated to that issue. However, that is not captured in the statement that, "DoD saw terrorism as mainly a force protection issue." Like every agency, DoD saw CT as a serious threat to the national security of the United States. However, the military did not view CT as its issue similar to how it saw psychological operations as its issue. CT was a very important mission and there were ways in which the military could and did contribute.

(U) If the White House asked for an option for boots on the ground because there was sufficient intelligence to support an attack, it would have been done.

However, again, the problem was intelligence. Almost under all conditions, the quickest way to hit A-Q and UBL targets in Afghanistan would have been with a TLAM. If someone had said there was a cave the U.S military should go into, not just hypothetically, one option would have been Special Forces to force the door. It would not have been possible to use a TLAM in that scenario.

(U) Slocombe was unfamiliar with the massive carpet bombing reference. However, what the military did have was what was thought to be the best target regarding UBL (training camps and facilities) and the best Taliban targets (the government) and again, if someone told the military to attack them, they would have been attacked.

Shelton's options

(U) Slocombe does not recall Chairman Shelton's 13 options developed in 20002 but does recall that Shelton did have military options. At the time, the USG knew the location of the suspect training camps and other facilities in Afghanistan and there was a question as to whether it was possible to strike at the Taliban leaders who gave sanctuary to UBL. The targets were reviewed again but the problem was the same as faced in Iraq and Kosovo, which is if a lot of office buildings are attacked, it will not do much good in the long run. Slocombe noted that the USG wanted to ensure that if there were a military response that it was effective and was seen to be effective, and that there was an affirmative reason not to do military responses that did not have a reasonably high pay-off.

Millennium Plot

(U) The USG was very active in trying to frustrate any plans for terrorist attacks against the U.S. late 1999. There were many meetings on this issue, many of which he attended. The agency worked hard and managed to frustrate the potential attacks. The threats included potentially hijacking airplanes and crossing the border.

(U) DoD's role was to be prepared to hit a target if one were assigned to be attacked. The military was on a high state of readiness to deal with potential problems. However, as he recalls, that was not the main thrust of what was being discussed. Instead, the focus was that it was an intelligence and law enforcement operation.

(U) Slocombe recalls contacts with the Pakistanis through General Zinni, trying to get them to lean on the Taliban, but he does not recall whether they were specifically connected to the Millennium Plot to obtain better intelligence with UBL inside Afghanistan or Pakistan. A great deal of dialogue with the Pakistani government after the coup in Pakistan was with the military lead by CENTCOM.

(U) While Slocombe does not recall the movement of destroyers at the time of the Millennium Plot, he does recall an interagency issue regarding the use of a dedicated airplane stationed at Andrews AFB to transport Federal Emergency Support Teams (FEST) to different sites when needed. Dedicated airplanes are

very expensive and the DoD position was that it can supply an airplane as soon as a team is ready to go and it would be the highest priority for the U.S. Transportation Command. However, OSD did not want an airplane parked at Andrews, AFB for 24 hours, which would also require a back-up airplane and back-up crews. This was an issue during the late 1999 time frame, though he is not sure it was directly related to the Millennium Plot.

(U) Slocombe was asked about a series of meetings that culminated in a PC meeting on March 10, 2000 that reviewed the Millennium threats. Slocombe did not recall what DoD was asked to do at the meeting.

USS Cole

(U) Regarding the *USS Cole*, Slocombe first noted that in retrospect, it is easy to determine what should not have been done. For example, if the *USS Cole* had not gone to the harbor to refuel, the incident would not have taken place. However, the fundamental issue is that the attack dramatized the point that the US must pay more attention to what seemed like remote possibilities. There was a sense of outrage and horror after the attack and the incident reconfirmed the recognition that American military forces were again in a place the US believed was safe.

(U) When asked his assessment why there was no military response to the Cole, Slocombe responded, "Against whom?" The reason for the missile strikes after 1998 was that the U.S. was striking at the leadership. However, after the *USS Cole* attack, there were no targets to attack.

(U) The USG was operating under the premise that any retaliation would be against those actually responsible for the action. It was important legally, morally, strategically and politically in the broader fight against terrorism that there be a sound case before there was a US response. The law enforcement response was to find out who was ultimately responsible. The problem, which continues today, is that the USG can take action and make a great deal of noise and kill many people without being effective.

(U) In late 2000 there were discussions on who was the perpetrator of the *USS Cole*. Slocombe noted the USG found out who was responsible quite quickly. He does not recall a specific briefing from the FBI or CIA in which they noted that UBL was responsible but he does recall many meetings on support to the FBI. By December 2000, it was understood that the attack was conducted by UBL and his operatives. The IC was able to construct links that tracked far up the chain of UBL's organization.

Other Instruments

(U) No one in the interagency was satisfied that the USG was doing all that could have been done to combat terrorism and there was an effort to find ways to improve the CT instruments. One instrument that was used quite often and had some success was renditions.

(U) Military force, even SOFs, is not the primary CT instrument. There are other instruments that work. If one considers the full spectrum of instruments, the military occupies a substantial but smaller part. A CT attack would be relatively limited in absolute scale and would be focused on particular targets.

Homeland Defense and the 1996 Olympics

(U) Slocombe does not recall discussions in 1999 on the development of a "CINC USA." He did recall many discussions on how to better organize against CT at home. He also referred to the Hart Rudman Commission that included a recommendation for emphasis on homeland defense as a military mission.

(U) A major effort to improve homeland defense and support by the military occurred during the preparations for the 1996 Olympics. There were contingency forces in place and one of the discussions revolved around the use of military personnel for activities that could have been done by civilians. However, these personnel were preferred because if anything went wrong, these were individuals who were trained to take on numerous tasks. There was also a lot of preplanning for how to respond to an emergency and many exercises conducted. There was an exercise dedicated to nuclear terrorism and Cincinnati was the notional location. Much of the homeland security work done was focused on consequence management, a contingency in which the military would have a large role.

(U) Regarding the issue of air defense during the Olympics, one of the possibilities discussed was the crashing of an airplane into a stadium. Another was the issue of the military providing air defense. The difficulty was that shooting down planes over Washington DC was not a good idea. It may be necessary but it is not something that comes quickly to mind as the wisest course.

PDD-62

(U) Slocombe was asked if he recalls the process of decision making that led to PDD-62, which established the lead and supporting agencies for USG CT efforts. Domestically, it was easy. The military is not looked upon to be the primary agency to deal with domestic problems. The military has a role in supporting other agencies. It is natural the lead role would be taken by a domestic agency.

(U) Similarly, for CT efforts outside the U.S., it was understood by the interagency that the DoS should take the lead. In fact, it would have been extraordinary for the military to take the lead on CT efforts outside the United States.

The CSG

(U) Brian Sheridan would speak with Slocombe after CSG meetings to discuss the conclusions reached. He had complete confidence in Allen Holmes and Brian Sheridan, former ASD SO/LICs, and often they would go directly to the Secretary on issues raised in the CSG while keeping Slocombe informed.