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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Interview of Ambassador Phillip Wilcox Type of Event: Interview Date: November 17, 2003 Prepared by: Len Hawley Team Number: 3 Classification: SECRET-Location: 2100 K Street, Commission Conference Room Participants – Non-Commission: Phillip Wilcox Participants – Commission: Scott Allen, Len Hawley and Yoel Tobin

Overview

(U) This interview focused on the activities of S/CT during period of 24 Mar 1995 – 27 June 1997 during which Ambassador Wilcox served as State Department Coordinator. It examined the use of the diplomatic instrument and interagency CT policy coordination.

Policy Issues In Question

(U) How was the rise of AQ viewed in S/CT? What were the key elements of the diplomatic strategy in dealing with the AQ presence in Sudan and Afghanistan? What efforts were undertaken to win Pakistan's support against AQ? How did the interagency implement CT policy? What should be done in the future?

Background of the Briefer

(U) Wilcox served as a Foreign Service Officer for 32 years and retired from the State Department in October 97. His professional focus was the Middle East. In the 1980's he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian and Egyptian affairs. Then he was sent to Jerusalem as chief of mission and counsel general until 1991. From 1991-1994 Wilcox directed the INR Bureau as PDAS. Finally, he served as U.S. ambassador at large for counterterrorism (S/CT) from 1994-1997. In the fall of 1998 Wilcox was appointed to serve on the Accountability Review Board for the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi. He is now president for the Foundation for Middle East Peace here in Washington.

Interview Results

(U) S/CT Role and Terrorist Threats to the US in the mid-1990's

When I came to S/CT in 1994, it was clear that terrorism was one of the major foreign policy issues facing the Clinton administration. There had been a growth of international terrorism in the 1980's and 1990's, and it was a high priority for the administration. The role of S/CT office, by statute, was charged with coordinating the various counterterrorism activities conducted abroad by the many agencies of the government through the CSG. In the 1970's many people determined that US efforts against international terrorism were not well-coordinated, and so the S/CT was established to serve this function. Nonetheless, the role of the S/CT office either waxed or waned

depending on the priorities of each administration. Some periods were extremely active, others less so. Domestically, the FBI had the leading federal role in coordinating federal, state and local activities, especially law enforcement, against domestic terrorism.

(U) However by the mid-1990's, S/CT did not fulfill that role entirely because the White House empowered Richard Clarke to coordinate counterterrorism issues and take responsibility for the CSG. Under Clarke's leadership, the CSG became, in fact, the center of effort to coordinate international activities, although by statute, S/CT was nominally supposed to perform that function. Dick Clarke was the senior person responsible for counterterrorism in the government. He served a formal role, and he was experienced and professional. There was always some tension between the S/CT and the CSG, but that tension was never a serious issue because Dick Clarke's office had a small staff and had limited capacity to get things done. Nonetheless, I would recommend that the Commission better define the roles of the White House's counterterrorism office, the S/CT office and the CSG.

(U) PDD-39 was promulgated in June 1995 and it more or less formalized Dick Clarke's role, the CSG, and the lead agency role for the State Department in coordinating our international efforts. There was a congressional aspect to S/CT's role—the congress wanted the director of the S/CT office to be an ambassador and report directly to the Secretary of State, rather than to a lower ranking official in the Department.

(U) Initial Interagency Activities before PDD-39

The key members of the CSG were State, Defense, CIA, Justice, FBI, the FAA, among others such as Energy on nuclear issues. Things worked because there were talented people working counterterrorism issues in these agencies. The major weapon against terrorists in the early years of the Clinton administration was law enforcement. The rule of law accompanied by diplomatic efforts were seen at the time as the most effective weapon against terrorists. So the role of DOJ and the FBI were critical.

(U) DOD played an adjunct and supporting role providing support as needed to law enforcement. There was a lot of emphasis by DOD on contingency planning for terrorist incidents that involved the use of military force. They also sponsored table-top exercises in which the whole community participated. DOD also conducted joint counterterrorism exercises with foreign governments in which US Special Forces would work with foreign forces and State provided Foreign Service Officers to participate in these exercise.

(U) During my time at S/CT we never found the occasion to use military force, and it was not considered as the instrument of first choice. Although military capability was necessary in case we needed it, the military option was considered a last resort because of the difficulties in using force against terrorists. It wasn't until the embassy bombings in 1998 that we resumed military action—the last time before that was in the early 1980's when we bombed Tripoli in retaliation for the terrorist attacks against Americans in Berlin. The media can help make the military be a useful deterrent against terrorism. In Peru, for example, when a Peruvian terrorist group took some international hostages in Lima—when the terrorists learned that the US military had deployed its Delta Forces,

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they soon released all seven American hostages. It took several weeks to free the rest of hostages in Lima, and that was done eventually by the use of Peruvian military forces in a brilliantly successful rescue operation.

(U) Problems with Military Forces

By then, most in the policy people concluded that the biggest terrorist threat came for religious extremist groups, particularly the Islamist terrorists, and that the military option was not very effective against these groups. The judgment at that time was that we could not get terrorists using military forces because they were just too hard to find.

(8) Internal Information Sharing

We in SCT and INR did not receive intel reports on al Qaeda and bin Laden. Either DCI or the NSC advisor ruled that none of the intel on them could be shared below the level of Sec State. So we had not information on which to conduct our activities on the bin Laden threat. We complained repeatedly. It started in 1995. By that time CTC had been set up, but their information was not shared with SCT in State.

(U) Sharing Information on Bin Ladin

The indictment on bin Laden did not become available until after the embassy bombing. I was concerned that the information was not shared by Justice. The FBI should have been more forthcoming with the information they had. The rationale was that they could not afford leaks that could jeopardize the case in court.

(U) Roots of Terrorism

There is little effort being done to deal with the roots of terrorism. The use of military force is counterproductive. The effects of using military force are counterproductive in the region. It is exploited by the terrorists themselves. They welcome martyrdom. We have made an error is using force as a primary weapon against terrorism.

(U) State Sponsors of Terrorism

The law has been corrupted by domestic politics. Cuba is on the list, but it does not sponsor terrorism. Yet Pakistan has been providing support to terrorists in Kashmir. It is not a very effective tool of diplomacy. Unilateral sanctions do not work, except only with Libya when the UN put sanctions on that regime as well. Overall, they only deprive US companies a few business opportunities. Closing down our diplomatic missions is also not helpful in these cases. Unfortunately, the whole issue becomes a moral issue rather than an act of coercion.

(U) Warning Intelligence of Future Attacks

Accurate warning intelligence is rare. We tend to look backwards, rather than speculate on future attacks. Anticipation is key to success. The lack of information on a pending attack is not an intelligence failure. That is realistic. That is why diplomatic security is so important. What is a failure is the lack of coverage of key areas where terrorists reside.

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(U) PDD-39 / CSG Activities

The CSG gave more impetus to getting quality intelligence. The personality of Dick Clark was always abrasive. But he was tough and vigilant. He worked hard to satisfy the instructions of the President to counter terrorism.

The CSG would spring into action when intelligence indicated the need to take action against a terrorist cell abroad. It also dealt with potential attacks. We met repeatedly on these issues. These efforts were largely successful.

(U) Suggested Improvements

We should never stop pressuring for better interagency cooperation. A person in the White House should lead the effort. The person in the position has to be skillful because he relies on the CT offices in agencies. State plays a key role in working with other countries. The diplomatic element is critical to success against terrorists. Personalities really do matter.

END of INTERVIEW