

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: **Theodore H. Kattouf**

Type of Event: Interview

Date: April 21, 2004

Special Access Issues: ~~SECRET/NT~~

Additional note: This interview was recorded

Prepared by: Alexis Albion

Team Number: Three (Counterterrorism Policy)

Location: K Street

Participants – Commission: Alexis Albion, Scott Allan, Serena Wille, Philip Zelikow [portion]

This MFR provides a summary of the most important points covered in the interview.

Background

(U) Kattouf served as U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from November 1998 until August 2001. He then served as U.S. Ambassador to Syria until his retirement in August 2003. He has spent 31 years in the U.S. Foreign Service, including Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Iraq. He is currently president and CEO of Amideast, a non-profit NGO, specializing in education and training in the Middle East.

(U) The UAE is unique: it is a fairly loose federation of 7 statelets, with a ruling family in each state that guards its prerogatives jealously. The president of the federation is Shaykh Zayed—an octogenarian, who has been president since the founding of the UAE and, according to Kattouf, is very respected. His emirate, Abu Dhabi, is extremely wealthy, whereas other emirates generally are not. Kattouf said that the force and strength of Zayed's personality, the fact that he is a very benevolent and wise man despite a lack of formal education, and that he knows how to deploy resources strategically in order to bind the federation together, has led to a situation in which Abu Dhabi is certainly the first among equals. It is, however, a consensus-driven society. The UAE is also a traditional and tribal society, in which the emiratis are a minority in their own country—there are bigger groups of Pakistanis and Indians, for instance.

UAE Foreign Relations

(U) As a small and wealthy, and potentially vulnerable state, the UAE has looked for allies. According to Kattouf, among the Gulf States, the UAE for some time was not as close to the United States as others, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. For example, most of the UAE's arms purchases have come from France, and Shaykh Zayed had never paid an official visit of any sort to Washington—he had never asked to come to the White House. While friendly and maintaining a good relationship with the U.S., the UAE did not have the closeness on a personal basis that some others in the Gulf had. Besides being a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the UAE had generally good

relations with other Arab nations, and with Pakistan (to whom they had given aid), European State and so on.

(U) When Kattouf arrived in the UAE (in late 1998), there had been a "bit of a flap" between the outgoing ambassador and UAE government (he had made some public remarks about reform and so on, that raised some questions, then gave the interview to a newspaper and that set off a firestorm). One of the things he suggested to the UAE government before he left, however, was that they cut their relations with the Taliban and Afghanistan. There were some strains when Kattouf arrived, therefore, but not severe.

(U) There is a real passion among emiratis, especially within the royal family, to hunt with falcons (almost a national sport), especially using falcons to hunt the hubara, which follows a migratory path from Siberia down through South Asia. Many hubara come through Afghanistan. For many years, UAE shaykhs and others hunted the hubara in Afghanistan, regardless of who was in power.

The Taliban

(U) Kattouf recalled the subject of the Taliban coming up fairly often when he was ambassador in the UAE, and that it came up occasionally with senior officials. But the State Department had decided that the UAE was not prepared at that point to break relations with the Taliban, and that to just carp on that issue would undermine other things that the U.S. was trying to do. As Kattouf explained, even small countries guard their sovereignty jealously and do not like to be told by outsiders how to conduct their foreign relations.

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(U) According to Kattouf, the UAE had no ideological predilection toward the Taliban—"far from it." Zayed was pious, but a very tolerant man who followed a "live and let live" philosophy. But Zayed also liked to help Islamic countries in need.

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There was a representative in Dubai who represented Taliban officials. It was no secret that Mohammed Bin Rashid, Crown Prince of Dubai and UAE Defense Minister was going to Afghanistan for hunting (as did others).

(C) That being said, Kattouf did not believe there was collusion between the UAE leadership and UBL:

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He noted also having spoken to Khalifa at some point, and his reassuring Kattouf that the UAE was only giving aid to Afghanistan that would support the people (i.e. humanitarian aid).

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(C) There were occasional visits to the UAE by people like Clarke or Sheehan. There had been significant progress with the UAE on counterterrorism issues.

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U.S.-UAE Relations

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Clarke's Visit to the UAE, Early 1999

(S) In late January/early February 1999, Clarke came to the UAE with a delegation, which included State's Mike Sheehan. Their main

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Dick Clarke

(U) On Clarke, Kattouf noted, "the guy pushes the bureaucracy like nobody I've ever seen." In Kattouf's opinion, if you wanted to push something across the goal line within the bureaucracy, you wanted Clarke on your team. Clarke had a very good relationship

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The Desert Camp Incident

(U) Kattouf emphasized that did not have a recollection of this episode. He was aware that the U.S. was hunting for Bin Ladin (although he was not officially notified).

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Other Comments

General Zinni

(U) Among one of the first visitors Kattouf had was General Zinni. Kattouf was full of praise for Zinni, who he described as "a superb diplomat," and very respected by all of the Arab countries he dealt with in the region. "He was a real plus for our efforts," and actually listened to what other people had to say.

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(U) The UAE was more receptive to UN dictates than U.S. dictates. The UAE did not feel it had the necessary strong relationship with the U.S. to put its neck out to meet U.S. demands. The UN was viewed differently, however, because the UAE perceived the UN as assisting and protecting small countries like itself.

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Memorandum for the Record

Event: Interview of Ambassador Theodore Kattouf
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Prepared by: Serena Wille (Terrorist Financing only)
Team Number: 4, 3
Location: 9-11 Commission
Classification: ~~Secret~~ (Terrorist Financing only)
Participants: Kattouf, Wille, Albion, Allan, and Zelikow (for one hour of interview)

On April 21, 2004, we interviewed Ambassador Kattouf for approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes at the K Street office. This memorandum provides a summary of what we consider the most important points on terrorist financing covered in the interview, but is not a verbatim account. All information in this memorandum was provided by Kattouf during the interview unless explicitly stated or indicated otherwise. Team 3 will be preparing its own Memorandum for the Record.

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Money laundering and terrorist financing were dealt with together. Kattouf said that if the UAE did not have a good system in place it would be subject to all sorts of financial exploitation, including TF.

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