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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Interview of Michelle Sison, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs
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Participants – Non-Commission: Michelle Sison, John-Alex Romano, and Jamie Borek
Participants – Commission: Scott Allan and Warren Bass

Overview

(U) This interview focused on the South Asia Bureau's responsibilities for implementing national counterterrorism policy in the region, particularly with respect to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

(U) From 1994 to 1996 Michelle Sison served as political counselor in the U.S. mission in the Ivory Coast. From 1996 to 1999 she served as counsel general in India. From 1999 to 2002 she served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Islamabad. Since June 2002 she has served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs.

Policy Issues In Question

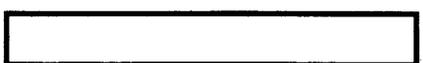
(U) What was the diplomatic strategy for pressuring the Taliban to expel UBL before 9/11? How did that strategy play out from 1999-2001 with Afghanistan and Pakistan? What were the driving issues at play in Pakistan?

INTERVIEW RESULTS

U.S. Policy Issues with Pakistan before 9/11

(U) I arrived in Islamabad on 4 July 1999. At the same time Sharif had just returned from Washington after the Kargil crisis. Terrorism was just one of many issues we had with Pakistan. The U.S. was working very hard to manage down the Kargil confrontation between Pakistan and India.

(U) Our relationship with Pakistan was not a pretty picture. Nonproliferation was the biggest issue at the time. We worked on counter-narcotics and HIV prevention. We had imposed sanctions and had cut all military assistance. We were precluded from providing development assistance. It was a very restricted bilateral picture.





(U) On Afghanistan, of course, we reported on the situation there and made official contacts with Taliban officials. We had a number of priorities: refugees, counter-narcotics, and counterterrorism. We confronted the Taliban on its policies regarding Bin Laden, terrorist training camps, and human rights. On terrorism issues  the FBI and the DEA took the lead on the country team and the U.S. ambassador oversaw their activities in Afghanistan. I worked the humanitarian, refugee, economic, counselor affairs and narcotics issues in Afghanistan.

Pakistan Policy to Afghanistan

(U) The Pakistanis wanted a quiet western border because of the threats from India along its eastern border. Pakistan was also concerned about the massive influx of Afghan refugees. The Pak-Afghan trade route into Central Asia was not a big issue at the time.

Pakistan's Concerns

(U) Bin Ladin was a top issue with us then, and the Paks knew it was important to us. But they wanted us to see the difference between the Taliban and al Qaeda. They also distinguished between the Afghan Arabs and the Afghans themselves. The Paks also impressed upon us that they did not want us to do anything that would exacerbate the horrible humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

(U) There may have been some Pakistani officials who believed we wanted Bin Ladin either dead or alive, but that was never expressed by them. Although the Taliban offered up some options other than handing over Bin Ladin to the U.S., the Pakistanis did not push them either way.

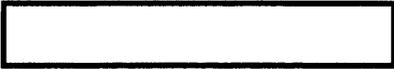
(U) Our sanctions weakened the bilateral relationship. Because we had nothing to put on the table with the Pakistanis, our diplomacy was largely moral persuasion. There were no carrots. So there were no sticks. No development assistance. No military training. No military sales. We had nothing to work with.

The Musharraf Coup

(U) We objected right away to the military coup. But we already knew Musharraf because he was the Army chief of staff, and we realized we had to deal with him. There was no other option. We thought that Musharraf would be a better manager (than Sharif) of the Indo-Pak relationship. This rivalry was very important because both countries had nuclear weapons—it was a very important issue for us.

(U) Our relationship with Pakistan was not cozy after the coup. So we did not see Musharraf unless we had something to say officially. For the first several months, we saw him only under instructions.





UNSC 1267—October 1999

(U) The Paks were always concerned about the impact of sanctions on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

The President's Visit in March 2000

(U) I was told that President Clinton and Musharraf discussed UBL in a private session with Sandy Berger there. I understand that Musharraf said that he would try to be helpful. However, I did not learn what that meant.

Pickering's Visit in May 2000

(U) Pickering met with the Taliban deputy foreign minister in which he pressed the Taliban official about bin Ladin, terrorist training camps, compliance with UNSC resolution 1267, human rights, humanitarian relief, treatment of women, and narcotics. Pickering made UBL and al Qaeda the primary issue. The Taliban did not give any credible response. But it was a long meeting. I don't remember whether Pickering issued threat to the Taliban at that meeting about any more attacks by al Qaeda against the United States.

Jalil Request for a U.S. Gesture in September 2000

(U) Jalil made a request for a gesture, but there were too many issues on the table. We did not respond.

Impact of UNSC 1333

(U) The financial assets and the Ariana Airline freeze had an impact on the Taliban. However, the borders were pretty open and uncontrollable so other provisions were not so directly important. The Taliban were a very insular group—they did not see the bigger picture that the sanctions brought with them.

Recognition of the Taliban

(U) Resolution 1333 required governments to close down diplomatic missions. I am not sure what we said to the Pakistanis regarding their recognition of the Taliban.

Bush Administration Priorities

(U) Dick Clarke was still the National Coordinator. We did not see anything new on the Taliban and Bin Ladin.

(U) Christine Rocca's memos in May and June of 2001 did not represent anything new regarding U.S. policy with Pakistan. As Brownback's staffer, she increased emphasis on





education. But overall, our priorities continued as before. There were some discussions on the adverse impact on our relationship that were caused by our sanctions.

The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in the Region

(U) Pakistan was becoming more Islamist. The economy was not doing well. Clerics were becoming more powerful. The military reflected the society—it was becoming more conservative.

(U) The ISI was not a rogue organization. It was part of the military and it followed the directions of the military leadership. The ISI was a secret organization, but it was not divorced from the military establishment.

(U) The destruction of the Buddha's by the Taliban caused real disgust on the part of most influential Pakistanis. But it did not change Pak policy with the Taliban.

Madrassas

(U) Musharraf declared early on his desire to mainstream the madrassas. He sought a moderate Islamic Pakistan. At the same time, he wanted to avoid upsetting his religious support.

(U) The ISI supported the madrassas because they produced young men to fight in Kashmir.

(U) However, there was not much money to fund other schools. Madrassas had sprung up all over Pakistan. Some madrassas did not teach basic skills. Others taught a radical ideology. The curriculum was not standardized, except for some basic religious teachings.

(U) Madrassas provided food and shelter. For poor people they were very important.

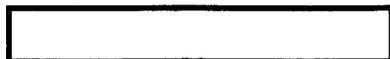
(U) They are supported by private contributions from inside Pakistan as well as the Saudis and other Gulf States.

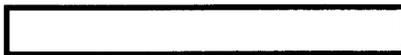
Approach to Afghanistan Today

(U) Our emphasis is on extending government control in key areas. The military, police, roads, basic services, relief, etc. Pakistan has been supportive of our efforts.

Relationship between SCT and the Embassy Islamabad

(U) The cooperation was very good. Our CT discussions with the Pakistanis were not only about UBL. There were the Pan Am 103 hijackers and some people were killed in Karachi. There were a number of other CT issues that we were working with Pakistan in addition to al Qaeda.





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9/11 Classified Information

9/11 Closed by Statute

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END of INTERVIEW

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