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Event: **MARK WONG**
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Interviewee Background:

In the summer of 1999 Wong transferred from the East Asia bureau to the office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (SCT). There he was working for Michael Sheehan as a director for regional affairs. When Sheehan left in December 2000, Wong became acting deputy Coordinator while Edmund Hull became the acting Coordinator. When Hull was named as ambassador to Yemen, Wong became acting Coordinator for about six weeks before Francis Taylor was confirmed as Coordinator. At this point Wong became a Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in SCT. (U)

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Sudan:

There was a period in late 1999/early 2000 when the USG did want to reestablish a diplomatic and [redacted] in Khartoum. Sudan was listed as a state sponsor of terrorism and it was important for State to have a presence there to test and engage the Sudanese. Wong said the premise for testing them was that Washington believed Khartoum made a strategic decision to reverse course on supporting terrorism. Wong said that "there was an opening and opportunity" and that State wanted to exploit this. (S)

Wong mentioned that there was interagency debate on whether to engage the Sudanese at that time. Some still felt that the Sudanese could not be trusted. But meetings with the Sudanese did eventually take place and the USG asked questions to test their intentions. At times the Sudanese did not provide us with information, but at other times they provided new and useful data. Wong said that by the summer of 2000 there had been a series of meetings (perhaps seven) in Khartoum. But there were still some in the USG who felt that Khartoum was still spewing rhetoric and not taking concrete action. (U)

Wong said the USG asked the Sudanese in these meetings for information on Al Qaeda. But he could not recall the specifics as to what the Sudanese did or did not provide – the

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[redacted] Generally, he said, getting cooperation from Sudan on sharing information "was like pulling teeth, but every once in a while a tooth would come out." (S)

South Asia:

The relationship with Pakistan was difficult he said. State's role was to press the diplomatic levers so as to get Islamabad's attention on Al Qaeda and to elicit a response. Wong said in a pre 9-11 world most people saw counterterrorism as a tactical law enforcement matter with some diplomatic elements fused into it. The South Asia bureau saw its relations with Pakistan as very broad and grew frustrated with Pakistan's lack of response to its continuing demarches on the Taliban issues. But Wong felt that State was really trying and noted that Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering had at least two meetings with high level Taliban officials. But the Taliban only offered to possibly prosecute UBL in an Afghan court, which Wong saw as a complete "sucker's screen." Wong, and others, felt that eventually diplomacy was not going to be successful; it would have to take other things to force the Taliban to hand over on UBL. (U)

Wong said State also pressured the Saudis and the UAE to address the UBL issue with the Taliban. Wong said that the two countries were reluctant to invest all they could to pressure the Taliban - "and why would they?" (U)

Sheehan always stressed taking the hard line in diplomatic meetings with the Saudis, Emiratis, Pakistanis and the Taliban on UBL. Sheehan believed that the rest of the State Department would defer to "managed engagement" with the Taliban and Pakistanis. Wong and Sheehan felt that diplomacy was reaching its limits and eventually "failed." Wong said that the USG didn't do anything preemptive to address the threat emanating out of Afghanistan. (U)

Wong said that SCT tried to get creative with diplomatic options. For example, SCT wanted to name Taliban-controlled Afghanistan as a state sponsor of terrorism but could not for legal reasons. Wong said that SCT always felt that the clock was running out. (U)

Wong saw the SCT-South Asia bureau relationship as a good one. He said Assistant Secretary Rick Inderfurth was helpful, especially with the demarches. Inderfurth and Sheehan tried to travel together to stress the importance of counterterrorism with the Taliban and the Pakistanis. Of course, he noted, Inderfurth had to look at the bigger picture, which contained a number of issues. But SCT's job was to push the counterterrorism issue "as hard as it could every day." (U)

A discussion about working with Taliban "moderates" did take place. This was based on intelligence in 2000. Wong said that the argument was that the Taliban were nationalists (they fought to kick the Soviets out) and probably were not happy with Arabs in the country. But Wong "didn't buy it." SCT had a growing sense that Mullah Omar was becoming more reliant on UBL and his fighters. There was also a similar ideological connection between UBL and Omar. Wong said that the USG did work on feeling out possible Taliban "moderates." Wong conceded that this was important because the only other alternative was a military one, which the USG wasn't willing to take on before 9-11. (U)

Pakistan would tell U.S. diplomats that the Taliban had to be treated as a "disabled child." Patience was urged. But Wong took issue with this because Pakistan was acting as an "enabler." And the Pakistanis would always deny having troops serving the Taliban. (U)

Pakistan was not listed as a state sponsor. This was because State believed it had to continue engagement – turning Pakistan into a failed state through additional sanctions was not a diplomat's default option he said. (U)

Sanctions were a definite problem in addressing the problems with Pakistan. However, Wong noted that Islamabad would take some steps such as assisting in a rendition effort when it served to better its relations with the U.S. (U)

Public Diplomacy Before 9-11:

The State Department's Patterns of Global Terrorism was one of its best public diplomacy tools in connection with terrorism. But Wong said public diplomacy in connection with counterterrorism before 9-11 was not a big priority for most in Washington. (U)

MISC:

Counterterrorism before 9-11 struggled against a lack of political will. (U)

Wong said that during the summer of 2001, threat reporting was "an 11 on a 10 point scale." But he said that the indicators were pointing to an attack in the Gulf region. The USG was reacting to this too; for example there were discussions on the Predator and working with the Northern Alliance, which "had been seen as drug running sons of bitches," as a force to pin down the Taliban. Wong felt that interagency discussions were getting more aggressive during that summer of 2001. (U)

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He was critical of the Pentagon – they were reluctant because they were a "big war fighting machine." Wong said that in the face of threat reporting, the diplomatic record had to show a response and thus diplomats would increase demarches. (U)

Wong stressed the importance of multilateral efforts to combat terrorism. "We need the world's help" he said. Wong opined that NATO did not become actively involved in counterterrorism until 9-11 and even after that its efforts have focused on force protection. (U)

In connection with addressing the "root causes" of counterterrorism, SCT saw this as one issue in a large strategy which included American aid and educational assistance at one end and Delta Force and Seal Team 6 on the other. Sheehan believed that a "military-

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only" strategy was self-defeating. Counterterrorism had to encompass "all the instruments of national power" Wong said. (U)

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