

USIP - ADST

Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #24

Executive Summary

The interviewee was a USAID Field Program Officer (personal services contract), embedded with a PRT covering several provinces. He served in the PRT from May to November 2003.

The PRT's primary mission was stabilization. The bulk of its reconstruction work consisted of school construction. Interviewee joined the PRT soon after it was established. At that time he was the only civilian, with 60-70 US military and 10-15 Afghans for security and interpreting. The outreach elements of the PRT were CAT-A and C-MOC teams. Several weeks later a State Department political officer also joined the PRT. Interviewee and his State colleague worked closely together and often traveled together outside the headquarters town. They both sat at the PRT's leadership table. Interviewee had an excellent relationship with the PRT commander and a high opinion of the commander's leadership of the PRT. (There was no Afghan presence at the leadership table, but that was being considered when interviewee completed his tour with the PRT.)

ODACA funds available to the PRT for local projects were restricted. They could fund school construction but not construction of government buildings.

The biggest problem was coordination among various entities. The military was excellent at building things, but not at coordinating with other donor organizations or with the local Afghan community. UNAMA was set up to provide that coordination function, but with only limited success. The Afghan MRRD – Ministry of Rural Reconstruction [?] and Development – is designed to carry out that function in its sector, and may eventually be the answer. It should be noted that small donor organizations – both governmental and NGOs – also fail to coordinate with others working in the same area.

The USAID program officer in the PRT did not have authority to intervene with organizations whose projects were funded by USAID; they coordinated through Kabul. This limited the effectiveness of interviewee. Because he was required to follow the force protection rules, he seldom initiated travel, but went along with travel planned by the PRT command.

Interviewee believes the name PRT is misleading since they did very little 'reconstruction.' Their main function was stabilization. Even in that area it isn't clear that the security provided by the PRT extended much beyond its own perimeter, rather than creating an environment where true economic development can take place.

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #24

Interviewed by: Larry Lesser
Initial interview date: June 7th, 2005
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Q: Let's start if we may, with basic information. But can we have your job description when you were in Afghanistan?

A: My job description is Field Program Officer for USAID [United States Agency for International Development] embedded within the Konduz, PRT, that's the provincial reconstruction team responsible for the northern provinces of Konduz, Badakhshan, Takhar and Baghlan.

Q: Mm-hmm. And when were you there?

A: I was there from May 2002 until November 2002.

A: Correct.

Q: And what was your academic and professional background before that, just briefly?

A: My academic training was in public administration. I came out of the Kennedy School at Harvard. I have been as a chief of party, country representative for a variety of programs, anything from refugee relief, agriculture and village water supply.

Q: And by career, do you have a long term affiliation with USAID?

A: No. I worked as a private service contractor, PSC for USAID on occasion.

Q: That PSC was in connection with Afghanistan as well?

A: Correct.

Q: Okay, thanks. Now lets go in to the beginning of the details. Can you describe the location, history, physical structure, size, staffing and bureaucratic organization and the agencies of the U.S. and Afghan governments represented in the PRT, particularly the one in which you served. Kind of, situate us. What was the organization structure at the PRT, wherever you fit in.

A: The Konduz PRT located in the province of Konduz, capital city Konduz, was a former governor's estate approximately three to four acres in size. It housed between 60 and 70 military personnel: including 10-15 Afghan ANA -- Afghan National Army -- soldiers that served as our

primary guards and interpreters. The bulk of the soldiers were pulled from civil affairs units. This was a primarily civil affairs operation. The other units operating in the northern provinces were for the most part, stationed outside of our compound until later when they were melded together. This then brought ODA (PH) and some of the other operations into our compound.

As far as American civilians I was the only one there at that particular time with plans and excuse me ... When I first got there, upon a month in to my six month stay, a State Department officer was sent up as well to work with me. So it was primarily USAID, State Department and military. As far as the organization; it was military structure organization, however, there was heavy emphasis on the importance of the civilian personnel such as myself and my colleague from the State Department. We sat at the leadership table and were involved in all consultative processes except those that were outside of our "need to know," so to speak. Anything that had to do with relationships with Afghans, any on going projects that was the primary reason that the PRT was established there and what they did, their education, their construction and their health project, we were all invited and encouraged to participate and consult as well ... very freely.

Q: You said the military included the civilians, such as you and the State Department officer, were there any other civilians?

A: Not at that time. On occasion, other folks came in to visit. USDA came in after I was there. I guess I should have been more succinct to say that we were the only civilians in this PRT.

Q: Right. So when you sat at the leadership table, about how many people were sitting with you?

A: They had ... the PRT was structured such that of course the commander, and his CMOC was ... which is why I wanted to find out my ... we had a civil military operations center. Which is called CMOC. Their leadership, usually a major. We had the CAT-A which was the Civil Affairs Team Alpha. Which another was a major. We also had the military police and then ...

Q: Would you say they were mostly security?

A: Well, no, well military police. But other than that ... because they were involved in ...

Q: They also had projects.

A: Correct. Training of Afghan security forces. Not particularly ANA, but within the regional police stations there was a huge push to train local police officers and to get the core commanders on the same page of what the USG [United States Government] was trying to—what should I say—encourage within Afghanistan.

So the table was usually made up of—was always made up of—and then of course the operations personnel within the PRT, people that were involved with the everyday logistics and communications.

Q: Did you sometimes have Afghans sitting at the table as well?

A: No. It was all security ... the level of security would not allow that at the time. However, when I left, right before I left, there was a push to involve a Colonel from the Afghan National Army because they were beginning up in Konduz the first DDR which again I'm losing my acronyms but ...

Q: Yeah, I have no ...

A: Demobilization and ... !

Q: Reintegration ...

A: Reintegration. So there was a push to get demobilization, disarmament ... Disarmament! Demilitarization, reintegration. There was a push to involve more Afghans in the process and to let them know what we were ...

Q: But that was ...

A: That was kind of a transitional as I was leaving.

Q: Okay, you knew that was coming. I was going to ask you if you stayed close to the program since November of 2003.

A: On occasion. I'm always interested and I've worked with, as a matter of fact, some of the PRTs when I went back in to a different capacity last year.

Q: Okay. Lets go to the role and the mission. Could you describe the formal and actual role and mission of PRTs and in doing that, can you be as specific as possible. For example, instead of saying, promoted education, say, well we built six elementary schools. Get it down to what actually happened on the ground.

A: I would categorize my PRT the one that I worked at Konduz as one that provided assistance in stabilization for the area. Assistance in the form of the construction of schools which was allowed by some very narrow funding window through their, what was that called, Odaka (PH) funding, which allowed for the military to only involve themselves within the construction of schools. They also had a smaller mandate to do some sort—every once in a while—some health education and health related activities. But the Odaka funding said that they will build schools and I believe they also had some areas where they might be able to do some road reconstruction and possibly bridge maintenance which was rather narrow considering the needs of the region. What this meant was that they were precluded from funding the construction of government buildings, rehabilitation of government buildings, ministries, anything that had to do with the ministries, anything outside of specific school construction, Odaka fundings would not fund.

Q: And that was the only kind of funding that you had access to?

A: At that time. Down the line came another ten million dollars, and now I've come back to find out that there are what they called the USCIRF [United States commission on International

Religious Freedom] funds, I have no idea what the whole acronym is ... but this is a pot load of money that is a result, I think, of some of the pressure that many of the commanders and folks like myself, I don't know if it's a genie out of the bottle ... but called for more discretionary funding for the commander so that they can do smaller and maybe more rapid start up projects. For example if they saw a village in the middle of nowhere that might need a well, that they would have some funding to say, let's go punch a well in and let's provide this and let's provide that.

Q: But you couldn't do that at the time?

A: No you could not do that. In fact the teams out there had very ... the CAT-A and the CMOC teams, the Civil Affairs Team Alpha and the CMOC which again, is Civil ... let's see what that one's called.

Q: You actually already told me. Civil Military Operation Center.

A: You got it.

Q: Command or center, okay.

A: Actually, those two teams, together, functioned as say any NGO [Non-Government Organization] concern in construction. The CAT-A would go out and identify and do a very loose demographic of an area. Talk about the number of children in a village where it's located, just basic background; who they're from, what do they do, what ethnicity of that particular tribe that's a majority, blah blah blah, within the village. The CMOC team, came in and they had basically a construction management operation which I'd be happy to have on any project anywhere. They were really, really sharp. I've got to say, I enjoyed working with them, the guys knew what they were doing, there was a rigorous oversight of everything that everyone did with that oversight and with the high quality of course ... some of the expenditures were a little higher. We can go into that later, I'm sure there are questions about some of the reasons going on. But basically, those two teams served as the major ... they were the bulk of the PRT as the provincial reconstruction team. That said, the other aspect went in to the stabilization, whether we had ODA and the military and some of the other military groups operating which provided security in the region. They had a different mandate.

Q: Now you mentioned that you had MPs [Military Police] sitting in. They had projects for training police, were they rehabilitating police stations and providing vehicles and communications equipment?

A: When they could. When they can pry that kind of funding out, yes. Again, with the advent of this USCIRF funding, indeed a lot more money is going toward the provision of equipment like communications equipment, uniforms, rehabilitation of police stations. Again, the Odaka funding stricture said nothing in that area, unless you were creative in what the labeling might be.

Q: Okay but then, how did they get to be sitting with the leaders, making plans at the early time, didn't have access to funds?

A: Because their primary activity was just training and essentially they went out and it was ... I would suggest it was more a PR program. Again, they went out on a lot of meet and greet missions for all the police commanders and police in villages throughout the region, met with them and said, we're with the PRT, we're the USG, we're military police, we'd like to see an assessment of your operations, how you go about crime solving and should you require or ask for—desire I should say—technical assistance in the form of a transfer of skills, essentially that took place. It wasn't until recently that much more money went in to it and that came primarily out of the Ministry of the Interior.

Q: Okay, in general, was the mission appropriate to the available resources or the other way around and the circumstances in which you had to operate. You've actually, sort of, begun to talk about that. What was your mission and did you have the resources to carry it out?

A: Did you mean the PRT or my mission as a USAID program officer?

Q: Well I'm a little disappointed to hear that there might be a distinction. Why wouldn't your program be identical to the PRT's program? At least on the reconstruction side?

A: Because I think that the civilian and military as much as in an area ... I mean it goes back to formal structure and informal structure and much of it is personality driven within the PRT. In my case I had no problems. Our mission was primarily the same. The commander of the PRT and myself being a civilian, we saw eye and eye on just about everything on what we wanted to do. He wholeheartedly encouraged anything that we could get out or any funds. At that time, USAID had very limited funding for ... or at least funding that wasn't already programmed. Essentially at the beginning of the PRT, remember this was in 2003, eight officers and I'm not convinced they're fully evolved in to program supervision and I think because of the way AID is set up they can not let us have funds. And that the over all country strategy and programming of funds, basically, is taken care of in Kabul.

People that worked in the PRTs really only get input and to say, this is what we think could be done out there. Which is a good thing at the onset or the beginning of the projects. Now that everything is going on, AID pretty much programs its money, so unfortunately program officers and this is what I thought our mission would be, would be oversight of AID programs in the regions using the PRT as a base. However, USAID programs that are being implemented by NGOs like OIM (PH) or Mercy Corps or DAI (PH) or Creative Associates, those people working in our regions are not required to report to the program officer at the PRT, in other words they basically just screwed around and they go directly to Kabul. So there's never really any required contact. I mean if they're nice people and they think that we might have information that they can use they might drop in and say hi. But it's not as though, I mean, and I think I'm maybe a more classic situation where you might have everything originating in Kabul but here you've got a regional representative that then is the eyes and ears and say, hey wait a minute, you know these people are telling you that this project is going on out there, I haven't seen anybody do anything and if they call that a building, that's not a building. That's a plot of land. There is no ... you have no oversight of projects going on out there.

Q: But it's important even before you ... whether you have oversight or not to be aware of what these organizations are doing because it's in the context of somebody's idea of a master plan.

A: I couldn't agree more.

Q: And you're going to be initiating projects that ought to fit in and not duplicate ...

A: ... not duplicative and complement and ...

At the beginning it was communication and awareness of activity awareness ... was dismal. People would come in and people were doing that maybe the field program officer has no idea they've been out there doing because Washington ... remember at the beginning and this is why I always step back and I have to kind of defend USAID, they've been very good to me. They were many of these programs by remote control from Washington. So I don't think the PRT ... I was one of the first, I was in one of the first four PRTs that was set up. It was really only a pilot program so I don't think that everybody was fully aware that, yes indeed, we've got a PRT, we've got a program officer out there, use him to do your work out there. I don't think that sunk in for the longest time until PRT started gaining a life of its own and then started saying, yes, we're going to do these everywhere. Now people are fully aware of who's based in them.

Q: Can you think of a specific case and describe a little bit what the costs were of lack of coordination or how you adjusted?

A: Well a specific case of this would be say the RAMP program which is the Revitalization of Afghanistan Agriculture Program which was given to Chemonics (PH), a huge 18-20 millions of ... I don't know how many millions of dollars. I spent months out with the PRT commander on field trips trying to identify and looking at ways that, avenues that USAID and the military might spend their money and get good value for their dollar in the region. Only to find out that in fact, the RAMP money that we thought that we would be able to say that, hey guys this is a great idea lets ... had already been fully programmed and Chemonics was already running around doing their own thing and no way what so ever coordinating with the FPO and the PRTs.

Q: And how effective were they? Working on their own, in effect, on their own?

A: I think Chemonics probably did just fine but they had a lot of problems. Again, maybe we ought to go back to the culture of the PRT because remember, as a civilian whether you're State Department as my colleague, my officer, State Department officer and myself, we were required to adhere to and follow the force protection rules which meant that when I went out, anytime I went outside of the PRT, I had two shooters, two guards, a translator and a driver. So my entourage took seven people.

Q: More than one vehicle.

A: And more than one vehicle. So while the commander was ever so accommodating, from what I wanted to do, in many cases I went rather than initiating the trips, I went with the trips to make

it easier on them to say, okay they're going up 250 miles north today, I'll go with you. I have no specifics that I want to do but I'll go out and we'll take a look out there and I'll ask questions and it makes it easier on everybody. So we were restricted in our travel by what the military could do because they also had to file what they used to call them Con-Ops (PH) days in advance before we went everywhere. It wasn't as though, an independent contractor like Chemonics waking up in the morning and saying, oh I think I'll go to Chaghcharan, and take a look at the irrigation system.

Q: So they were not obliged to follow the force protection rules.

A: No, no. Only U.S. government personnel.

Q: So they could react to developments as they occurred?

A: As they occurred.

Q: Did they encounter ... you said they had encountered problems, were any of those security related?

A: Not that I ... well recently you hear the horrible thing but I don't think they were Americans but they were developing alternatives, the livelihood projects for Chemonics personnel were pulled down in Helmand. I don't ... I wouldn't suggest that their issues were or their problems were security related. I think it was just the environment of doing business with Afghanistan. I think that there was possibly they might have been a bit optimistic on what they could accomplish in a short period of time. I think they overestimated capacity in the agricultural sector and that's where many of their problems arose.

Q: Were any of the problems related to the length of tour of duty in the ... It always strikes me that six months seems like a mighty short time when so much of what you intend to do depends on building relationships and being able to work with people who are going to live their entire lives there. You were there for six months, were the NGO people in general there for longer tours?

A: Yes. They generally signed up for about two years. Since they stay long, some become wild-eyed and hairy.

Q: They go native?

A: They go native. There are people who develop deep, deep, profound emotional attachments especially cause a lot of them are doing such great stuff. But most of the tours were much longer than say the six months for a field program officer. However that has now changed and they have recruited for a much longer period of time for the USAID program officers to be embedded in the PRTs. I know this because again I went back and they actively tried to recruit me to be the program manager of the PRTs there and it's run right now by a very capable and competent and just a wonderful guy.

Q: But whoever it is, is not going to stay there ...

A: No he's been there now for two years. So the whole issue with recruiting for PRTs and civilians is the security and getting security clearance.

Q: Security clearance? Not security on the ground?

A: No it's clearance! You've got people in the pipeline waiting and waiting and waiting for their security clearance and that's where operationally anybody that's working over there with the USG, that's where it all falls apart because they're backed up on the security clearance. I had one that they had ... the reason I was able to mobilize within my one month was I already had an active security clearance they reactivated. They said, okay, go.

Q: Do you think that bureaucratically in some ways it was counterproductive to ... it's obviously counterproductive to have people wait a very long time for security clearance but the substance of it in your experience, were we overly concerned with the need for security clearances and background investigations?

A: My experience was that ... I can say ... I have a secret but they allowed me to sit in on sensitive discussions.

Q: Secret refers to secret level of clearance?

A: Right.

Q: It sounds like, "I've got a secret deal to ..."

A: No, no no no. But I was introduced as having a higher ... [laughs]. In the course of everyday events there was no need to have what did they call it ... sensitive, but what did they call it or ... SUB or sensitive ... but classified ...

Q: Unclassified.

A: Or sensitive. Not classified but sensitive because the only time that things are going on is when there are military ops and you're not involved with those anyway. The only involvement is to know that you won't be going in to those areas until the operation is complete. I think that back to your question ... I think it's counterproductive for staffing to have such stringent security clearance required to get in as USAID employees. I think that, again ... But I don't want to set ... I can't second guess ...

Q: Sure. In any case, there's no dispute that it crimps the effectiveness of the program to have it down as a bottleneck for getting people in the field.

A: It's a bottleneck. I think that again, rules be rules, fine, I think that it's all there for a good ... it could be remedied bureaucratically by some way expediting or possibly devoting more resources for the security clearances and that might well be the answer, if they can or can not.

Q: Right.

A: So, again we kind of got off on a tangent.

Q: Yeah it's my fault.

A: Well no, it goes back to the fact that as an embedded civilian from the USG in a PRT you live in very isolated environment and you are also to this day, still dependent on the military for your every movement and the structures of the force protection, whatever it is ... I forget, the general order or whatever else.

Q: Now in practical terms did that mean that lots of days you did not leave the compound that you described?

A: No. Because again, the PRT itself is all personality driven and again I had a phenomenal commander. We didn't see eye to eye on very many things but it didn't matter. He was a bigger man than that and I can't say enough about him. He understood the mission and he understood what we were all doing and what was best for everyone involved and we moved forward from there. It was just a matter of the days that maybe people from Kabul called me up and said, we want you to look in to this, we want you to go out and identify that, he was absolutely willing, without a doubt, to accommodate any of my needs.

However, let me say my experience was different than many of my colleagues that were in environments that were a little bit more unstable. I think that down to the south in Gardiz and Kandahar ... Well Kandahar's a big ... that's a PRT seven, a huge base. But Gardiz, Mazar-e Sharif there's freedom of movement but the other ones, like I said, Gardiz sticks in my mind. They were thinking about putting them up all over. Those guys just sat and sat and sat because they were unable to move.

Q: In that case it sounds to me as though you're saying, that's not personality driven.

A: No.

Q: That wasn't a question of the relationship with the commander, it was a matter of what the assessment was of the level of risk on the ground.

A: That's true. However there were some cases where there were personality issues and I'm sure that you know that their request was shoved back in the line. So that's just the way it is. It's a small group when you get out there in the PRT.

Q: Right. We're already now on the subject of relationships so let me tell you what the question is as it is on my sheet. Describe the relationship and interaction of the PRT with OEF (PH) and ISAF (PH).

A: ISAF.

Q: ISAF and I don't recall what OEF stands for ... American and allied embassies, agencies and contractors, Afghan government ministries, Afghan warlords, the local officials, Afghan security forces, including police, NGOs and local citizens. Relationships ... and the idea is to start within your PRT and then work outward. Who did you have to know and what did you do in necessary relationships and the tricky stuff about them?

A: In our PRT of course being primarily focused on military operations they were very involved outside the walls with the local corps commanders. You call them warlords, they're usually called fifth corps commander or sixth corps commanders.

Q: But we're talking about Afghans?

A: We're talking about Afghans. The Afghan power brokers in the region and I have to say that my State Department colleague was a tremendous facilitator to at least open the door and to let ... he had to get in and work with these power brokers within the region. Generally it was the governor on down. The governor, which may or may not be as powerful as the corps commander and the corps commander who has the guns, blah blah blah. They're all there. We worked primarily with the corps commanders with the governors the local police chiefs and this all went back to the work within the military police and security and stabilization an DDR.

That was on the military side. And then local ... I just ... just local security whomever they might be.

[PAUSE]

Q: We're back on.

A: In Konduz was the UNOMA (PH) operations from the United Nations, which had a mandate for coordinating all of NGO activities and to facilitate within that cooperation within governmental operations as well. We had no contact with ISAF at that time because ISAF only dealt and worked within Kabul and the OEF. That relationship again, when I first arrived, was at one time tenuous then rocky and then non-existent. I've got to say that with the help of my PRT commander and myself -- pat myself on the back -- the good people at UNOMA. We brought the PRT to the coordinating table at UNOMA and began to integrate PRT programs in with the local NGOs and the other United Nations assistance programs, which at that point basically spun their wheels in different spheres. And in doing so, we were able to mitigate much of the rancor and animosity -- some of it deserved, much of it undeserved between what the PRTs' mission and what they were doing and why we were constructing with the confusion of the fact that they were invading the turf of all these other NGOs and other agencies who were working out there. And in doing so they had better coordinated their activity so that they were more complementary rather than duplicative.

Q: So things had to get bad before they could get better.

A: I think, you know, the history was that yeah. You know, you had people that basically had an organizational mandate to steer ten miles clear. It should have been 15 kilometers of anything that said military. So you had *Medecins Sans Frontieres* [Doctors Without Borders] pounding the walls and thumping their chests and walking out and doing the histrionics that, "we're not going to have anything to do with your people" and bringing their cadre and the rest of their like minded NGOs along with them to say, "you stay away" and if they're at that meeting, "we will not come to town." That influenced the thinking of some of the NGOs. Others, not so much. Whether valid or invalid I don't know. I have changing views on it, but the real success and the real accomplishment was that when we left they were all sitting at the table. So that at least they were engaged in the dialogue to say, "I am doing this for this reason." And they were saying, well you're doing that for whatever reason but we were going to do that school and the U.S. government PRT could say, "oh you're going to do that school, then we'll do this one over here. Show us another one you know." Up to that point that they were finding out that because of the wily nature—I shouldn't say wily, that's not it, that's pejorative -- because of the very clever nature of many of our Afghan counterparts, they would get three bids and contract three people, just to ensure that their school was built. So they might say to whoever was involved with Creative Associates in building schools, drop the plans and drop me this school. Not really confident that school ever got built and they come down to the PRT and say, drop the plans and build my schools. And they do it to other people and so all of a sudden you found out that five different organizations or five people are doing the same school by different means in the same village. So we got back to the essence and the reason that this UNOMA coordinating officer was set up so that we could actually coordinate and ensure that many of these projects were not duplicative.

Q: So would I be right in drawing from that the problem with the NGOs that were difficulty alone with ... had more to do with turf. With who was going to be responsible for what than with actual differences of opinion on what the programs and projects ought to be?

A: A combination of the two but essentially it was turf because there was a feeling of resentment that the PRTs were building schools and some of the other NGOs had already started building schools and they were completely unaware of the Odaka restrictions on the funds and they didn't fully understand that the CMOC teams and the CAT-A teams that came out to do the demographic and the surveys and come out to contract the schools could only build schools. And by lack of communication, by the lack of dialogue, they weren't looking for ways that they could complement their programs. Because once they started talking, they said, oh you're going to build that school well that's good, that frees up our money to supply materials or education or training programs or whatever it is. But because there was no dialogue there was no understanding of who was doing what so if that answered the question, I don't know, but I think there's a certain degree of turf. I think most of that is just not understanding the way many of these activities are funding and the restrictions that we do have on funding and sitting down and looking at ways, looking for better ways to complement where all this money is coming in.

Q: Don't you think that in some cases the NGOs resent the sheer bigness of the U.S. government coalition coming in and feel as though they are ignored, that you're going to build a school, well why didn't you ask around first to find out if somebody else ... ?

A: Absolutely. Absolutely. I don't ... Why the CAT-A and CMOC teams, like I said, were program management office that I would love to have on any project when it came to construction and engineering savvy and getting the job done it's fine, but as far as getting the word out of who they are and why they are doing it and their public relations capacity ...

[END TAPE SIDE]

Q: ... On side two of the Afghanistan experience project interview with A.

A: I thought I remembered ... But we were talking about the perception and the fact that the sheer largeness of the U.S. government initiatives ...

Q: You said that the PR capacity was not as good as the engineering and construction ability.

A: Correct. But that goes back to what you were saying there with the fact that the sheer size and the resources they draw upon dwarf many of the NGOs out there. And yes indeed there's resentment and there's resistance because as good as the folks I worked with were, I had many other encounters with U.S. military in Afghanistan where I walked away with the feeling as, yeah fine, fine, fine, that's what you guys think but we'll do it the way we want to do it and

it's that simple and that's the way it goes because we are us and it's too bad to be you.

Q: Now, taking that to another level because this came up in an earlier interview: Was there ever a comparable issue between the PRT programming people: yourself, and the Afghan authorities? For example, somebody told me that the PRT proposed to build a school in a village and an Afghan official said: Well, our plans are that the school that services the people in that village has got to be a village near by and you can build a building but we won't provide teachers.

A: "We won't staff it, we won't sustain this school." Well this is where the breakdown is on several levels. One, they've made tremendous strides of improving coordination with the Afghan government, rather than running this as a U.S. government initiative, to say, let's have this as an Afghan-led initiative and for your example, you at the Ministry of Education, what are your plans and what do you see out five, ten, fifteen years and what is your capacity, where do you want the schools built, what schools do you want built, because you have the resources to sustain, to pay salaries, to provide materials. They're making strides. They're making progress in that area. During my time, it was essentially, as you said, "we'll build a school because these people were very nice in this village and they asked us for it." And the local authorities or administrator said it was fine. It was kind of a bottom-up approach. We'll deal on a local level within our Konduz region with no regard to what the over all plan is at the Ministry of Education in Kabul and there was little understanding the way the government and the bureaucracy of the Afghan government worked. They didn't take this into consideration.

At the other level that it broke down, was at the developmental level. The army is pretty good at building things and pretty good at taking things down too. You know, it depends on who you're talking to. They do not have the development practitioner's eye to taking into consideration, just the things we're talking about: sustain-ability, what's the grand plan, what's this going to look like in five, ten years? You can build a building anywhere, but where will you get qualified teachers, where will you get the materials, who's going to pay the salaries, what are we looking at in demographics, what do you expect at this school in five, ten, fifteen years? What's it going to look like if we're going to have to build another woman's school ... are we looking towards this? You know, all the things the development practitioner might take into consideration, military is not going there. They are back to what we used to term 20 years ago, as turn-key projects. Get it up, get it on the ground, give them the key and get it out the door. It all looks good, it's great PR but it may not fit in to a grand developmental theme of things. This I think, is going to be among other things, it's going to be a very, very large issue with all this funding now with the SCRIF [?] funds. Because not only are they, with the best intentions, building some of these projects, I think that there's a tendency and I think that there's a real danger that because of the isolated nature of the PRTs and the fact that our military and our people are not exposed to the community at large because of the things, because of the security situation because of the force probe that we need to go on out.

As I tell people, who's going to say "no" to a 50 caliber machine gun? They're all going to say and wave, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's a great idea, go right ahead. But I don't think that you have full and frank dialogue with the locals to find out what the real needs are in these areas except on very, very ... on few occasions. It's not that it's impossible, but I think what you got when you go

out with the military on these things is that you get, you hear ... They tell you what you want to hear, you're hearing from a very select group of people and back to the danger is that now that all this money is available, that projects are now turned in for political favors. Projects are not identified to how they fit in to where this fits in to the Ministry of Water scheme, over all irrigation scheme, or where this village sits in the scheme of the local administration. It turns into, those guys out there told us that five people over there belong to the Taliban, lets drill them a well because they're nice guys. So what you get is quite part of the perception, by not only the NGOs but the local people that these are political favors now being given out there.

And I think that—not to say that it happens—but I think there's a real danger that it could happen.

Q: By implication of what you're saying, your role as field program officer is to bring greater awareness to the PRT of these additional factors and not to let them think simply of what can be done, but to see whether that's what ought to be done in the larger context.

A: Correct.

Q: And I think your State Department colleague, also brings a different set of considerations in to that planning process. So the question would be, how well does it work? Did you find that your counsel was taken very seriously or did you find often that you were regarded as somebody who can always give a reason not to move forward?

A: No. Again, it's back to personalities and I felt that my counsel was always taken with high regard. I saw many of the ideas and many of the discussions that I carried on with the commander, bore fruit, and I can see within two or three weeks he would go around making the changes and he would make discussions. For example, I told [chuckle] ... you're in a local ... You're in a small town in the middle of nowhere, you're in a hurry to go nowhere. There's nothing that's going to rile up the folks more than speeding through the alleys, whipping up dust, splashing through the puddles, running people off the road because they're in a Humvee. Show respect for the local populace, drive slow, drive safe and let everybody know because there was a huge issue with the UN agency vehicles because the guys drove like bats out of hell wherever they went! There was a lot of resentment and underground anger that turned in to bigger things that really didn't need to be because they were perceived to be arrogant people that rode through town like they owned the place.

Q: And in general the Americans were more respectful?

A: I thought they were, but sometimes they had to be pulled back on occasion and again, I know that they have convoy rules. Let's remember, they're in a dangerous situation and let's make sure that they're not confused with say, the other security contractors out there like Dyncorps who have, I don't know where they get their ... who controls them? I don't know. But it seems as though they write their own rules and there's a lot of resentment. The fact is, it would take a small reminder on my part to the commander to say, "you know, I think the guys are going a little fast, we're in no hurry, why don't you just have everybody slow down and let's remember why ... because we're engendering trust and good will with the locals."

You know, within a week that might be a little directive or mention at the table or something that said, let's do this. These are small, little things, but they're important because I knew I had the commander's ear and that this wasn't something that, as I said, "we're the military and we'll do it the way we want. You don't know what you're talking about."

Q: I believe that for security reasons, you'll often not want your convoy to be a slow-moving target.

A: Well, exactly. In open road that's one thing, out in the middle of nowhere is one thing. But when you're coming into town where you're driving and there's children and where there's people, I'm talking about doing your best not to make life miserable for people that have had a tremendously miserable existence. There are just little things like that ...

Q: Now, I presume that there must have been incidents where Humvees or APCs [Armored Personnel Carrier] or something created damage or injury or worse to people. How did the PRT, this may be a little bit beyond your area of responsibility, but how did the PRT respond when it was responsible for damage?

A: Fortunately in my stay, we had no incidents whatsoever.

Q: Well God bless you.

A: You know there would be guys ... and again, back to the commander I had? He ran a ... you can't run a tight ship out there in the middle of nowhere but whatever it was, it was a tight ship. We didn't have a ... We had very, very few problems and in fact, none come to mind that we had problems with any local incidents.

Q: Really, that's remarkable. When I was doing the interviewing with the Iraq returnees last year, at least two of my interviews spent quite a bit of time on how they adjudicated cases when people had claims against the Coalition Provisional Authority. But you didn't need to set up an office where people could come ...

A: No. No, no. Where as down in Kandahar and Gardiz and some of the other areas there were a lot of problems. But in ours, we didn't have those issues.

Q: How did you and your State Department colleague coordinate your roles which were different from one another's but would stand in considerable contrast to the military people who comprised the rest of the PRT?

A: Fully complementary. Again, he worked on the political side and he allowed me to take a broader look at developmental-side things and we went out and we talked and decided, well let's go out and do this, let's talk about this let's bring these issues up, let's talk to the commander up in ... I think we want to go to Badakhshan and take a look and see what's up there. We've heard about the roads being bad up there, it's a huge poppy-growing area, maybe there's some ... We always worked together to go where we wanted to go.

Q: And it sounds like you very often traveled together?

A: Oh, all the time! Very much. There were some things I didn't want to do. So I said, you know, I don't want to go see that guy right there. But for the most part, we traveled together because where ever we went and we had questions and it gave us an opportunity to talk to different segments of the society and different levels of village administration. If the MPs were going out to talk to policemen, we'd say, let's go out because I want to talk to this commander. I want to go out and see if there's one of the AG reps out there. Or I just want to go out and take a look at the village and see what the market looks like.

Q: So the two of you would travel together but you had separate itineraries and be seeing different people and having separate conversations when you were there, but going together was for what reason? Because that simplified the logistical arrangements?

A: Simplified very much so. I mean around town it didn't matter because we had vehicles at our disposal but every time we had to put up a cot up [?] or to receive permission to travel out of the area it just simplified, it made everybody's life a lot easier.

Again, so little was known and there was so little information, no matter where either one of us went, there was always something of interest for either of us.

Q: And you were covering a rather large area weren't you?

A: Sure. And most of it was off limits.

Q: Completely off limits?

A: Badakhshan, we went up to Badakhshan, which was unheard of. We ended up going to Feyzabad along the yellow (PH) road and we talked him in to ... talked to the commander into giving us six vehicles and we went on up and we had a great trip. A productive trip, not only because it was the first time people had been up there.

Q: Did you have input in to any kinds of projects?

A: Well it helped with establish with the talks on the political officer's side about the depth and degree of the poppy problem, it helped with identify you know, some of the constraints to putting up some of this livelihood alternative program and the fact that some of the things that we heard about the area were true and some weren't. The one thing that we really wanted to get a grip on was what land, what the road situation was like. We finally drove that road to see the world bank and funded a project that never really got off the ground and we wanted to see what was going on so we went up and ...

Q: Funded the road construction ... ?

A: Well I think it was a rehabilitation and they kind of shied away from complete construction of the road because it's a monster getting up there. It's just as worse as it could be.

Q: Now you've mentioned poppy-growing a couple of times. When you described the kinds of projects in the stabilization of systems mission, you didn't talk about agriculture or crop substitution or the like. Did you get involved in agricultural projects and in finding ways to offer alternatives to poppy-growing?

A: In the Konduz region the poppy-growing was not a huge problem. It's only within the last year, year and a half our program in USAID and USG have put in the degree of importance that they have now on poppy eradication. It was there, we always looked at it, but what do you do in an agricultural sense, when you're talking to a farmer that's making a rational decision by saying, what am I going to do with my Jeda (PH) are we going to make four dollars or are we going to make four hundred dollars on it? And my experience in the agricultural area, you know these guys, are going to go for the four hundred! Am I going to grow cantaloupe or am I going to grow wheat? Well, the cantaloupes are doing so much better, I think I'll grow cantaloupes. It's the same with them, if the market is flooded with wheat, why would I want to grow wheat if I can grow poppy?

So I don't think we're going to make great in-roads in a rural farmer's mind in trying to dissuade him over what is a consummately rational decision on his part.

Q: Yeah. I implied that I understand that and that's what makes interdiction or the eradication or wherever you put your emphasis, exceedingly difficult.

A: You can eradicate crops but one of the consequences of that is if that's done and that's all that you do, is making poor farmers suffer and no particular good comes of it. The real problem is that, economic opportunity, value-added processing in the ag sector, takes a tremendous amount of investment and you've got to capture some part of the market. People are reluctant to get on in. The only thing that's going to help them out in some of these areas is to say, _____, come in and say, we'll take all your grape pulp and process that up. We're looking at a ten million dollar processing plant, and then they're going to have to figure out what they're going to do with it to actually employ people, meaningfully employ them, and have that they have something every year and look forward to and say, alright, I'm going to grow grapes because I can count on this to make that money. Tetrapak is going to give me this ... But that's not happening. It's absolutely silly. You've got these people coming out and these experts coming out and they're looking at this and they're looking at that but what are they taking the Af ... The Afghan businessmen has used up the entrepreneurial space. It's there. If there's a need for a cobbler or somebody to fix shoes, believe me there's somebody who's doing it. If there's somebody that needs to rework and ironsmith in a village or this, or a car mechanic or this and that. Believe me, it's being done. Unless you can create a greater opportunity out there, I think that they're not giving the Afghan folks the credit that they deserve out there because ... [phone rings]

[PAUSE]

A: So until real opportunity, you know, industry ... that's where many of these programs and projects have gotten into trouble. They have under ... overestimated the capacity, especially in the ag area. There's no value-added processing plants out there. There's nothing to do. There were several things run by Spinsor (PH), it was all a big kite scheme by the government, State subsidy by the government for the cotton, maybe they can pull out some cotton seed out of it but who knows? They also tried sugar beet down at the bottom. But until you get to that next level rather than that village ... and there's not even a huge cooperative movement out there so you don't have farmer associations to buy in bulk and to up their margins by saying, let's all get together and buy fertilizer or seed or what not. They don't even do that, that's the level that they're at. They're at the level of very small farming in many areas. Some are larger and there are some big concerns but by and far, I don't want to say it's ... No. It's sketchy at best and it's subsistence in many cases for these folks.

Q: And yet, for the illegal opium trade, they seem to get well enough organized to plant and harvest and process and market the final product?

A: The profit margin is so high on opium that it's drawing many of the skilled Afghan laborers, farm laborers into the opium deals, of course. We're looking at ... Why would anybody, these guys, the cutters to bleed the opium poppy, they're making outrageous wages in Afghan terms. The guys that are weeding and seeding and weeding the fields as well. So you've got a big issue with a lot of the agricultural labor being pulled out of regions like Baghlan, Konduz and Takhar up in the Badakhshan to primarily work opium fields. And I think what's happening is because everybody's saying, hey this is such a great idea and that there's not ... I can't speak with any authority because I don't know that this is not true but the fact is that maybe they're protected by larger concerns in the region. Maybe there's not a political will on the government's part to eradicate or to get rid of their or to penalize people for growing this poppy because let's face it, they're bringing a lot of money in to the country.

Now you've got people wherever you go, you look up in to Badakhshan and all the compounds have been re-muddled and there's new cars and you know, Hassan or Ali, I'll bet they're out there and thinking, I better make hay while the sun's shining. I'm putting the money in the bank now, somebody's going to come down and spray this field in the next two three years, I'll make my money right now, put it away, I'll buy my car, I'll buy my generator, I'll re-do my house. I'll get my kids their clothes and then if they want me to go back and grow melons, fine, but I might as well do it now.

Q: Okay, now in asking those questions, was I going far afield from the areas that you were concentrating on during that period that you were in the PRT?

A: Right. We did not deal ... Those are just observations within the _____ environment I worked. I had no specific mandate to work or to even look in to these things. However, my State Department colleague went out because he did, we looked at all this together.

Q: Your State Department colleague was both political and economic in his field of vision.

A: Correct. We went in and we complemented each other, it was a wonderful match.

Q: But whereas he's doing reporting and analysis, you're translating some of that into potential projects where U.S. government funds and technical assistance can make changes on the ground?

A: Correct. We worked ... our developmental outlook was ... The main thrust of what I saw, my recommendations revolved around the establishment of value-added processing plants and some sort of low-scale, low-tech industrial base. Put people to work, get them out in the fields. It goes along with the vocational training, many of the NGOs were working ... I mean these are, much of this is very complementary. And encourage them to try to bring more investors in to the areas that are stable. That goes back to what the PRTs are all about, a stabilizing factor in the region, to say, look at it ... You know and for example, not that ConAgra has any designs over there but, back to Tetrapak. If they wanted to make a packing plant, throw 20 million bucks into a place that they think it's going to blow up tomorrow? It's part of the entire picture of having a stabilizing entity within the region and that's PRT and hopefully the ANA soon and a trained police force, a security force out of the Ministry of Interior so that you know, entrepreneur and businessmen can operate in a safe and secure environment.

Q: Now in your time there, can you cite specific success stories of, for example, getting a value-added processing plant or outside investors?

A: No, I can not. They were working on it when I was there. Again, I've got to say, I didn't keep up with what was going on in many of the USAID projects.

Q: Now presumably the reason why it's slow getting started is because there are pre-conditions that have to be met and one is—as you just said—no investor wants to put their money in to a place that's going to blow up or a place that's going to lose its all raw materials to pilfering or whatever. So reconstruction is probably a very apt term for the 'R' (PH) in PRTs. You had to prepare the ground for the eventual growth of the economy.

A: Well, I think that's in a broad sense, reconstruction. I mean go back to the PRT as a name, I think it did no harm than good. This is another ... when they said Provincial Reconstruction Teams, what do you first think? That you've got teams going out and reconstructing things. So of course on the Afghan side, many, many people were ... the expectations were high that, oh great these guys are going to come and reconstruct my village, my admin building, my school, my health clinic, a hospital? Oh they're going to do all this stuff. That's not what they were there to do at all. They weren't there to reconstruct, they were there to provide stability for maybe reconstructions by NGOs by Afghan entrepreneurs. By other projects from say, USAID or other contractors. The PRT, I think there's an issue with that name as calling that Provincial Reconstruction Team because in fact, number one as I go back, the Odaka funds were very restrictive and nobody really reconstructed anything. They might have constructed schools, but that was it, that's all they could do at that time. But when we had requests from say a village in Takhar to come in and reconstruct their municipal building, they were flat turned down because their funds wouldn't cover it. Or if they said, we want our bridges to town of whatever, Alayabad (PH) we want this to Hanabad (PH) we want this to ... No we don't do that, we can't do that, so we don't reconstruct anything.

Q: So they should have been called stabilization teams?

A: I suggested that. I don't know, I think there's an issue with the name of the PRT. I just think that they could do a better job of integrating within the entire development community. Had it not said, reconstruction team because that goes back on the turf issue and that many people don't know what the PRT do.

Q: That's part of the reason of why we're doing this project.

A: They don't know what they do! Nobody knows. The military doesn't know what they do. I just went back out there, I was just there for six months in the Ministry of Interior in what's called the Afghanistan stabilization program, which was an effort to deconcentrate government from Kabul out to the district level. We then again, had other collaborative efforts with the PRTs and the U.S. military because some of these called in for police training and police training facilities or police facilities within these complexes for a district administration center. But again, they were ... As I found to begin with, the military did what it wanted to do and I think it just paid a lot of lip service to the fact that other people were out and already involved and engaged in these activities. It's a shame that they have so much to offer and I think what happens is that because of the divide between the military and everybody else that instead of being collaborative partners and complementary partners and development work and all the things that are going on out there, they ended up ... It's just like oil and water so the militaries continues to go what it's going to do, assuming that it's complementary in these other activities. I mean with their best efforts, sometimes they go in and they work within the ministries but in many cases they don't do a good job of engaging the grass roots and the down-home, NGO CSOs out there. And that's a real shame.

Q: I'm sorry, what does CSO stand for?

A: Civil service organization, or civil society organization.

Q: So these would be local, Afghan organizations?

A: Right, local Afghan organizations. If, again, if they set out exactly what they could and couldn't do, the misunderstandings would evaporate and everybody could go back to work. But I think again, back to the issue with the ... is it called CERP (PH) the CERP funding is going to be a hornet's nest of problems because now you've got unrestricted funds and you've got guys going out there and saying oh, well now lets do some medical stuff. Or you know, I've got a crack medicare [?] and his team over here, you know Captain so-and-so thinks they want to go on out and they're going to do a smallpox vaccinations for the village or the district of Kandahar, well, you know, they may or may not coordinate or they may coordinate with one office, let alone maybe the Swedish organizations have already done it, or plan on doing it. Not to say that it happens all the time but I think that it happens with regularity. It's not only occasionally, it occurs with regularity that there's this disconnect.

Q: Now the difficulty with the disconnect that you observed at the provincial level in Konduz, do you think there's a comparable disconnect in Kabul, was there anyone who was actively working on better coordination and having a clearing house of information so that people wouldn't be stepping on each other's toes?

A: You know, they're attempting. I give them high grades for the attempt. I don't know how effective that coordinating mechanism is, but they attempt. They came to the ASP where I was and attempted to coordinate ...

Q: What does ASP stand for?

A: The Afghan Stabilization Program which was an Afghan-led initiative. Through the efforts of the USAID, the PRT coordinator there, and the military they tried to embrace all of the actors, engaged with all of the actors to at least identify what they were doing and how they can complement. I think they *tried* to do that.

Q: And you said this is Afghan-led?

A: The ASP supposedly is Afghan-led. I think that, you know, it would have been funded by the British, the DIFED (PH), USAID had some money in it and the World Bank but ...

Q: But in that case, you don't have the foreigners sitting around the table deciding what Afghan needs?

A: Well, ostensibly, they're supposed to.

Q: Anyway it's an effort to ...

A: Right. An effort to step back from the table. To guide from the side rather than just sit. But again, I mean, even with these efforts to engage, my sense is that the military is just so big and so monstrous and that it just gets going and it just creates this momentum, it's a juggernaut. I've sat in these meetings and I've sat with Colonels and you know, this is what we're doing and this money is already there and it's been procured, we're building this, and I think you've got some great ideas, but how can you do this? It was almost the glazed eyes and it's like, no, "this is what we're going to do." It's like, okay, but you know you'll be building the second floor on something we've already built! [chuckle] You're not really listening to what we're saying out there. I don't know what that's a function of. Again, I think that they get their orders and that's what they're going to do.

Q: Does this kind of difficulty in communication and listening skills translate at some point into the same discussion with the Afghan authorities?

A: I would ... No I couldn't say for sure but I would assume, yes. Again, I hold so many of these gentlemen in high regard. But my sense at the end of the day is that the American military is so isolated from the Afghan reality that they may be listening and trying their damn best to listen to

what these guys are saying but they just can't process it because it's not their experience, if that makes any sense.

Q: Well it does but I'm thinking also that the Afghans have limited experience with doing national planning, economic planning, taking into account all the social factors that are legitimate ...

A: Oh, now. That was an assumption many people made as well—I made. Even though they were under the socialist yoke for a long time, they're educated, there's a background, there's a robust civil service working. I think this is where the assumption lie and it's the difference between a development practitioner and a military guy, in many cases, I don't want to say all, I don't want to generalize. But when you walk into an office where there's a rickety old table and a chair with a broken leg, and the guy says this is the district administrator ... well, let me go talk to the governor. Where another guy says, well you know, the practitioner says, tell me a little bit about your job and in fact find out, that was the district administrator in the region for the last 25 years and knows everything, and may not have the means that we associate ... The toys or accoutrements that we associate with power and this and that but they're the man. I'm afraid that isolation in these military bases doesn't lend itself to the appreciation needed of the Afghans and their environment. Not to say that they run ... These guys are in for nine months. They eat steaks and they drink Gatorade everyday. They go out in their Humvees and they come back in the afternoon. Their only exposure to Afghans are maybe their interpreters, their guards or on occasion whatever meetings they have out, but again, _____ they're going to say no to these guys.

Q: Right, even in the questions I'm asking, I'm asking sort of outcome oriented. Well what did you accomplish, how many schools did you build at the end of the day when you went to Badakhshan. Did any projects come out of it? Well, sometimes, a good outcome isn't reflected in concrete terms. Sometimes concrete terms gives the illusion of a good outcome when in fact it's a waste.

A: Absolutely. When I was there, that construction office probably finished six, seven, eight schools? Class acts, nice schools. The construction was done, they've done some other things as well. They did some big vaccinations for the entire district. But the real outcomes, the real successes to me, was bringing the military, the PRTs and UNOMA and the NGOs around that table to discuss. Once again, once they happened up to that point, I served as the mediator and the liaison and the in-between to set this all up so that, you know, the projects that were on going and proposed and coordinated and needed to take place, took place in a forum where everyone, there was full disclosure and then everybody said, oh well I didn't know you were doing that out there. "Why don't we talk about this, that'd be a good idea, why not?" I think, although I didn't get to see it, but I've been really pushing for NGOs to rely more instead of holding that military and that PRT off at arms distance, to engage with them and dammit, to exploit their resources!

You've got ... 40, 60 young guys in there, full of energy just looking for something to do. It's just like kids. If you say it the right way, it sounds like a great experience and a wonderful adventure and a thing that they can't wait to do. You've got the military you've got all those ... Like I said, the resources of vehicles of gas of GPSs, of communications. You've got an NGO

community and a coordinating USAID and the Afghan government that are looking on a much higher level of where everything is at, where they need to be coordinated, I told everybody: "Get the military to go out on their GPS, look for where you're going to build the school, go up there, raise the flag, get it done and write the coordinates! So that then, that is registered in the big scheme with UNOMA and the Afghan government and USAID so that whatever the bad transliteration of that village name is, or whatever ... Everybody knows that, no we're not going to all Sargurel (PH) or Sagadel (PH) or duh duh duh or whatever you had were going to fifteen minutes north, three seconds _____ blah blah blah and that's the school.

Because that way, when the CAT-A teams go out, they have something to do. Many times, I saw a lot of busy work. Because ... that was in our area, not saying this was any place else. But I saw some busy work and I think that busy work could be turned to the benefit of everybody, *if* they sat down at the table and said, you know, while you're on your way out there, we're at Chemonics or we're at Creative Associates and we're going to build a school right here, can you guys go out there and take a reading out there and tell us where that's at? So that we can say, you know, where the ...

[END TAPE 1]

Q: ... two side A, which will be the final side of the Afghanistan Experience Project interview of A.

A: Because one of the largest complaints with government–Afghan government, U.S. government, USAID and the contractors coordinating, the big coordinating body within Kabul—is that they didn't know where the activities were going on. They did their best to remedy it, but why not pull the PRTs in to it. Why not use the resources of the military? These guys to go on out and take some (inaudible) for everybody?

Q: So the biggest single need, make the biggest difference, is a matter of coordinating and getting information, sharing information so that people can function more effectively?

A: I think well, they've talked about it and they talk about it and everybody talks about coordinating and coordinating and coordinating, but my time within the PRT? And then my time six months within the AFP? I saw everybody ... I heard the word coordinating and coordination and ad nauseam, yet I saw very little of it. I agree with them, absolutely 150 percent.

Q: It must be harder to do than it looks like.

A: Well, correct because you have a lot of people competing for resources; financial and political. You have let's face it, the U.S. military is not going to be beholden to anybody out there. So it does, as I said, it's the biggest gorilla in the room, it does what it wants to do. But I think, having said that, it does make a valiant effort to work especially in its special affairs side, to do the things necessary, we're discussing the coordination. But I think that it's restricted just by the nature of military hierarchy and what their protocols are. They can't coordinate quite at the level that we'd like them to. Believe me in saying that the blame doesn't fall squarely on the

military's shoulder. It falls with the U.S. government, State Department, USAID, the Afghan government. Believe me ...

Q: And you've mentioned the NGOs.

A: Then let's bring the NGOs into it because they're running around like a bunch of wild cowboys and Indians out there. You've got so many ... from so many concerns that say, this is what we're going to do ... and let me ... Let me make this just as clear, the attitudes that the big gorilla has, are held just as strongly by the little ... I don't want to say chimpanzees, but the marmots out there as well because NGOs, I mean one of the biggest complaints from governors that I've talked to especially in Takhar, said, "well what can we do, can you tell these NGOs, can you tell these people that we need to coordinate. That they can't go out because Swedish aid decides or Danish aid decides they want to build the school out of this impoverished village. That doesn't fit with our plan!" Yet, you know, Danish aid says, what are you going to tell us, we'll do what we want to do. So they act essentially just as ...

Q: Right.

A: The people that they complain ... they complain about the U.S. military: "Hey, you're out there doing stuff that we didn't want you to do! You're infringing on our space, you're on our turf, you're not talking to us!" They do the same thing ____ as equally, complain.

Q: Okay, apparently there's no magic key.

A: I knew that's where you were going, Larry. That coordinating entity is nonexistent and I don't ... in my experience, I'm sure that there are much, much brighter, more insightful minds out there. I don't know who could take it over. UNOMA the United Nations is just such a monster and the monster to the effect that it just I think they did some great things but it's just this behemoth out there that can't ... You know, I think there's more United Nations cars on the road in Kabul than any car out there. I mean, they're just sat in there, they're entrenched. They're not a good candidate. U.S. government? I think, USAID has got enough on its plate. I think politically, we're not the right people to do it. Afghan government? I think would be the logical repository of say this coordinating entity, but do they have the capacity and legitimacy to direct and coordinate ... Would the U.S. government and the U.S. military go through with the Afghan coordinating committee with all their plans and to say, this is what we're thinking about doing from all the PRTs? I don't know. It might be a great idea.

Until that entity or that capacity is built in somewhere to all the activity spinning ... There's a constellation of just spinning stars out there! Everybody's doing this. Nobody's harness... I mean my god, if they could just harness all the activity and all the resources and everything that we're doing over there. Not just the USG, everyone, and start making some rational decisions and allocations out there. I think ... Believe me they try ...

Q: Is there a model for that?

A: I don't know.

Q: Do you know any place where?

A: I don't know where that model is. I mean I looked at it and I've discussed at my office at the Afghan Stabilization Program with everybody that we walk in to talk to and this was the missing piece; that coordinating. Who was going to ... ? Because instead of everything funneling up through let's say a district governor's office. I mean that would be a logical place for provincial activities to then come through the provincial government. But it doesn't work that way because the line ministries don't report to them, they report to Kabul so you've got these activities going with education, health, irrigation, whatever it might be. Then you've got a governor over there trying to make sense and consolidate and to rationalize what he's going to do? His resource is in there. So you've got all these people doing that, then you've got NGOs and the USG which may or may not go through him.

Q: I've been in countries where they had a ministry of planning for these ...

A: And they've got ...

Q: ... and they have a very difficult management task but conceptually, they have the idea that you put together a list of all of the projects you hope will be done and you're looking for funding for, including what you regard with your own resources and that becomes a shopping list. And then the Swedes say, well we actually do this sort of thing, they can pick that and say, okay, we'll take that one.

A: The ministry of the ... The ministry of reconstruction ... rural reconstruction and development ... MRRD. In fact, serves in that capacity. That's one thing that now, finally, people are looking to that list. It's been brought to their attention that oh, hey, this is on our list on what we project, infrastructurally, our construction project. That's what we're going to do and these are our priorities. So they're starting to turn away from this just frenetic activity, this independent activity into heading in to that ministry of rural ... what is it, rural rehabilitation and rural ... I don't know. MRRD and development. But in fact, that's out there. MRRD, it'll come to me.

But, that's just one ministry and not to say that coordinates with finance and education and health. I mean... so, logically, for many of these things, it would be so simple if it was something that came straight down to the district governor, the provincial governor's office where they had a unit. That, whether it was a PRT, whether it was an NGO, whether it was anybody. Whether the plans, orders came from up top or not, they had to say, look at ... this is how, these are our priorities out here in Konduz and this is what we plan on doing, take it or leave it. You know, we've got ten schools that are unfunded that are out there and the Swedish aren't going to do it, then so ...

Q: ... would you like to take one of those schools ...

A: ... Do you want to take the schools, do you want to take that as yours so that they could devote resources in some other way? I don't know, but that's ...

Q: But it's very striking to me to note that, that is not the way Americans do their government, economic planning. So if that's a solution, we don't bring any particular expertise based on our own experience.

A: No, no, that's true. We don't do it that way. Maybe that's why, that's the disconnect.

Q: That's a big part of it, I think.

A: Frankly, Larry, I don't ... I'm not a critical person, okay?

Q: We'll decide about that ...

A: Alright [chuckle], people always say they're not something, they usually are.

Q: Bingo.

A: How can I say that? You know what I mean? I know that and I just said that. You know, I went to a State Department round table several months ago and I dealt in the State Department as a field program officer. My sense coming out of so many meetings is that there's a hubris, there's an arrogance and there's a sense that, "don't bother your pretty little heads about this, we know what's best, so we're going to do what we want to do." Oh yeah, that coordinating entity over there in the governor's office? Oh yeah, that's fine. I'll have somebody look in to that. But other than that, this is the way we're going to do it.

Q: ... this is what we're going to do. The coordinating entity can come in behind us, since we've done that, tell everybody that we've done and figure out what you can do to fill in the little gaps.

A: ... if it fits in what we want to do, and by the way, oh that's right, we better talk to some Afghans because we're working in Afghanistan! So it's difficult when you have that ... When you're dealing with that environment, even for the bright stars and the tall poppies that come up with wonderful ideas for them to get an ear or to gain the traction needed to really start getting some of these ideas out there. And it's a shame because there's just so much going on, so much money!

Q: Is there a lot of potential which is not being fulfilled?

A: Oh boy.

Q: Because Afghanistan is a difficult country to develop economically.

A: Yes, yes it is. Again, I'm the worst kind of critic because I have not the solutions out there. I agree, there's a long way to go, but as I said, there's a robust, established civil service. There are a lot of grassroots programs working in from the national solidarity program, which is working from the bottom on up with small grants for community development. There were programs such as the ASP and these other ones working back down to deconcentrate Afghan government power, bureaucratic power; if in fact we worked closer with them, and not to say that we're not,

but I think so many times, our ideas and our programs are just imposed on people without ... This alternative lifestyle thing ... how are you going to get rid of these poppies? You know, let's think about it guys and let's not do it politically! This is insane, we're going to go out to do this, we're going to push ... Money isn't the answer. Money, the four hundred million, the five billion, the whatever. If it's not spent right and it's not dedicated for the right programs you're just throwing it down the hole. Again, you need to take a subsisting society with a tremendous history of commerce and trading, you're at the crossroads of central Asia, what are we doing? We try to work on ... Our idea up in Kondozi was what we called an economic corridor a bridge across into Tajikistan and opening markets not only to the north but bring them on through and let's gain back ...

You know what, whether it was a good idea or not, I don't know. I thought it was pretty good, commander thought it was pretty good, we were looking at barges on the river and let's go down to Tiermez (PH) and open up Uzbekistan while we're at it. Let's just look at this stuff. Let's get railways going, let's get some products out, you know, let's get some development going on here! But then we find out that all our money is already programmed, ideas have already been made so it goes nowhere. And I think that many of the ideas are programmed by remote control and little cubicles and offices here in Washington with a couple of one week, two days ... Believe me, a lot of folks have tremendous experience in these areas and whatnot but I just ... I guess it goes back to that isolation. The enclave, the American enclaves out there that are established and that people aren't getting out to really explore all the potential that's out there and that our projects need.

Q: Well there's clearly a lot of human potential.

A: A lot of human. Well, agriculturally, you've got some great things going there. I mean Kondozi is a bread basket out there. You've got rice, you've got wheat, you've got melons, you've got fruit, you've got almonds for sale and pistachios are gone but the Asia Foundation went in and they started maybe ten, twenty years ago and reforestation. There's stuff going on. It won't realize its full potential to human and whatever agriculture or light industrial, industrial, because you've got people who didn't know how to do everything until that security situation is squared away and that goes back to why PRTs are there.

Q: Well, that's a good segue to these kind of summary questions. Are the PRTs accomplishing their mission? Is the PRT an effective vehicle for—and I have a series of things—providing security...

A: It provides an illusion of security because what is its mandate? Does the PRT there, to secure and protect who? Americans?

Q: Well, personnel of the PRT, I think is ...

A: But so what? It's kind of like you're moving your wagon train ...

Q: ... sure ...

A: ... and yeah, okay, the scouts and everybody keeps us protected. But who else are you protecting? Is the mandate to protect the NGOs, American NGOs that don't even want to walk through the doors until the firing starts and they're clambering over the walls? Are they there to protect Afghan officials? Well isn't that why we have the ANA? So what it does is it projects an illusion of American militaristic might and it says, you know that PRT is there. You've got American soldiers there and you know what? We know that they can have an AC-120, a Specter [?] in here. We can have helicopters here in 20 minute, we can do this. So in that sense, whatever it is. But protection?

Q: No, the kind of security you need, as you're implying for true reconstruction and national development is deeper than that. There has to be confidence that you can build something and it's going to stand and people are going to be able to work in it productively, that they'll be able to do the function that they're intended for.

A: But that protection and that security is derived from an Afghan perspective, from something that's derived as from an Afghan security force, from their police, from their institutions. Their police and security institutions, their army, if the ANA comes in, they want to know ... When somebody robs them, they don't go to the PRT, they go to the police station if they do that, or they go to the tribal leader, whatever the hierarchy is. So again ...

Q: Do the PRTs work to provide a transition and make it possible to get to that point? Then they would be accomplishing their mission.

A: Then yes indeed. If that mission, *if* that mission is to train and equip Afghan national, say, police or security apparatus; provide that, yes.

Q: Let's try number two. Is it an effective vehicle for expanding central authority? Now, I'm not an Afghanistan expert, but I am a little puzzled by the step to which ... it is the mission to expand central authority?

A: Well, they're trying to project Karzai power in Kabul, the mirror of Kabul out in to this ... That wouldn't be my first take on it.

Q: And it wasn't a major consideration, it wasn't pounded in to you, "what we do here is ..."

A: Well, yes it was. I mean it was, constantly: "this is the transitional Islamic state of Afghanistan, the government in Kabul and Hamid Karzai is President, everybody, that went out with everything. But back to the question, I don't think that's an effective means of projecting authority out there. Again, it goes back, it's got to be Afghan land. His governors, all the way down to this civil service and the Afghan institutions have to be the ones to project that authority. Not ... Fort Laramie sitting out in the middle of nowhere and that's what these things are.

Q: Fair enough. And if I'm not mistaken, Afghanistan has a history of limits to central authority that its central authority is not effective out into the boondocks.

A: The hinterlands. It never has been, it never has been.

Q: So that's not going to come easily since it hasn't been there before.

A: Until they're politically compelled, the regional power brokers, look at what's his name, Abdullah Khan out in Herat, the guy runs his own country out there! What does he care what the PRT ... by the grace of God go the guys out there. They're under his protection. It's just, they're kind of annoyance or nuisance but they've got to let them go. I think it's the same, "alright, fine, let the U.S. government get all involved with eradicating poppies and getting rid of Al-Qaeda and Taliban, just as long as they don't meddle in our local politics and let us go on." This is the usual, "let them have the place and we'll rent them out that compound at some outrageous price" and that's that.

Q: It reminds me of what Bhutto said in Pakistan many years ago, that "the American cow can be milked."

A: Believe me.

Q: There's bound to be an element of that. What about the PRT as an effective vehicle for utilizing American, military and civilian resources?

A: Oh I think it definitely could be. I think there's a place, military resources as opposed to civilian affairs and with the funding that came through, yes, with—and that's with the caveat—that properly coordinated with the outside partners and stake holders, yes.

Q: But it's a pretty good structure?

A: Oh yeah, I liked it.

Q: For projecting the American element?

A: Yes. If in fact concrete programs and results are seen as coming from the PRT. If you're going to put a USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] guy in there and you're going to put a USAID guy and USDA and whoever else from many of our other agencies, it might, say from the Department of Justice. If they are seen as working out of that PRT and because of their presence in that PRT, let's say the local judicial capacity is whatever, whether it's *Sharia* [Islamic law] or not, that capacity is increased and enhanced, of course. That's what all these guys ... that's the idea, the original idea of the PRT.

Q: Well then that takes us to the final question, is the PRT an effective vehicle for reconstruction and development?

A: It plays a role. It plays a role but I don't think that it's overly effective. I think again, you have to take a look at what authority you are giving the personnel embedded within the PRT. If in fact, for example, if you were put down in Gardiz; a very insecure area, a very hot area, stuff going on. If in fact you had a program officer down there who was in fact responsible and all the contractors reported to that were doing projects out there and then he did in fact, have oversight

of those projects using the security apparatus of the PRT to allow him to do that, yes indeed. I think as you move to a more stabilized area, where I was, not quite ... I mean I could have been more effective, and I think because of the reluctance of many of the partners and many of the people out there to deal with the military, I think it hindered rather than helped.

Q: So then it wasn't really an effective vehicle?

A: In my particular area. I'm saying this as a situation ...

Q: ... where there were many other actors, where they didn't see the PRT as a particularly useful central point to a coordinating point.

A: Right. And there's a reluctance and if it wasn't ... If it was more in reconstruction and not security and stabilization, then no. But if in fact, if you're coming under fire when you're go down the roads to go on out, yes indeed, these are very appropriate operational platform out there to get our jobs done.

Q: Last question: Do you have any advice that you would pass on for future operations? Based on your own experience?

A: My advice all centers around this coordinating issue; the considerations of coordination and the fact that there needs to be greater effort by the military to be made for cross-culture—I mean I don't want to make them turn into a bunch of Peace Corps volunteers—but on the other hand, there's a cross culture ...

Q: I'm a former Peace Corps Volunteer, why not?

A: So am I. Gee _____ But I mean, this is what I'm saying. That was the reason we were there. You know that was the highland, the cross-cultural side. Well, you're not going to get a bunch of guys coming out of Oklahoma and Missouri that are in the military, they're doing their nine months and all they want to do is get back and drink that Gatorade or watch the ball game, you've got some people to take a real interest and some that don't. But the fact of the matter is, as long as they are as isolated as they are, I think that there will be issues. I think there needs to be a greater effort to opening and they need to embrace more from the Afghan perspective. It's hard, especially when you come from an organization that knows everything's right.

Q: Right. And for the reasons you just said, it's especially hard if you're thinking you're going to do it down through your entire military structure and organization because that's way outside of the experience or ideas of most of the people in it.

A: That's right.

Q: So it depends on leadership.

A: But, let's be thankful that the preponderance of officers in that leadership position are cognizant and they do have the intellectual curiosity and predisposition to engage and to say,

that's pretty cool, I'm over here now, tell me about this cross-cultural stuff, what's that all about and why should we think about when we could think about this because of this, this and that. I think, because they are like that, if a greater effort would be made on the cross-cultural side, and I mean more like the Peace Corps cross-cultural training, I think that they could make tremendous gains.

Q: And presumably, civil affairs conceptually, at least, embraces that idea.

A: Yes, they do. That's what I'm saying, that's why I met people with this mind set. But I think civil affairs, one of the biggest issues is that—and I think that this is just, they can't get over it in the military but here—if you're PRTs, the ideal PRT set up would be that if you went to an agricultural area like Konduz and your civil affairs guys were all pulled from Iowa, where you have these reservists that were in ag-banking, in farmer association development, dairy farming, whatever: If they did better coordination of pulling needs and resources of their military personnel in to the areas where they were working to look to see what the match up, the skill set was, then you would have a better operating environment for your PRT and your embedded civilians. So then you've got this, you're working around the table, you've got ideas going, you've got guys who can go out and work on this. And you say, I don't know anything about ag-banking: "Well I do! Let's see what we can do about that, let's see how we can generate some interest, let's see how we can put this proposal on the table to draw any of these other guys. " Like I said, they're just a bundle of energy sitting inside these PRTs looking for things to do.

Q: So if you get the right combination of skills and energy ...

A: Exactly. If they paid more attention, it would really, really be beneficial to the whole PRT.

Q: Well I think I'm going to bring this to a close now, although I have the feeling we can talk productively or listen to you productively for a while longer.

A: You're so kind.

Q: But we've completed our two hours, and I'm very grateful and I found it a very interesting experience. And so I'm turning off the recording machine.

[END TAPE 2]