

USIP - ADST
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #25

Executive Summary

The interviewee started in Afghanistan in January 2005, working for an Afghan NGO called the Tribal Liaison Office (TLO) through May. After May he has been working with the UNAMA [United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan] as a Civil-Military Affairs Officer and Humanitarian Officer in Kabul. He is not directly connected to a PRT.

- UNAMA works between the PRTs and the Coalition Forces, our staff, the UN, NGOs, and other humanitarian actors. It works as a liaising point in the group; some coordination to give constructive advice and cooperation.
- The idea of the PRT is to help in development, humanitarian relief to help aid stability and the reconstruction process, more generally.
- A break-down for ISAF's [International Security Assistance Force] PRTs shows its mission divided up as follows: 20% for security systems operations; 6% for the Afghan National Army; 15% for the Afghan National Police; 20% for development work, 16% for DDR [Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration]; 11% for governance and 5% for Judicial Reform; there's also 7% percent for "CN." (I'm not sure exactly what that stands for.) The Coalition does things on a different basis, a different funding structure and may have different priorities as well.
- Kabul is the classical image of peace keeping with ISAF troops patrolling the streets, also Coalition troops. Both the Afghan National Army and National Police presence is visible; also reconstruction work is evident.
- In the South East are Coalition Forces, which are conducting reconnaissance or fighting patrols. Reconstruction is barely visible. Because it is all-insecure, aid agencies tend not to go there.
- In regional capitals, the provincial capitals like Gardiz, there are quite significant new expenditures, for example, to pave the roads. There is much activity in the urban centers.
- Little attention is paid to the rural regions: the poor people will tell you about it. It's all about the local people to get them to support the government, but they have to see the reconstruction that they were promised. So that's an issue.
- The general structure of security is different in different parts. In the Southeast, a lot of the tribes have started their own police forces; that's an issue for integration.
- The North and other areas still have the problem of warlordism. But that has been harder in the Southeast, that's been the difference. How you deal with that would be different.

- It's a very complex situation in that you don't have a uniform reaction to the government. The politics are very different in different parts of the country that underlines the fragmentation that still exists to some extent. On the other hand, the general opinion among people is that they support the new government, but there is the problem of corruption and the ability to deliver on reconstruction and the economy. Also the issue of international involvement is still a sensitive one. People would prefer not to have their government so much in bed with external powers, but, on the other hand, they're very aware that if there was no international presence things could deteriorate rapidly; they see it as the lesser of two evils.

- UNAMA is an assistance mission. But it also has a political mandate; the primary mission is coordination working with the other specialized agencies, such as humanitarian aid, reconstruction, and the political work as well and directly with UNDP. Also it has an advisory role and a liaison role between the Afghan government and the other actors here. It also works in capacity building to strengthen the government. It has a lead role in organizing elections, the provincial and the parliamentary elections.

- It has no direct line of authority with the PRTs. The PRTs have been run under ISAF ; they are commanded by NATO and also by the Coalition. The Coalition's position is to localize, transfer command of PRTs to NATO, gradually. But this is all part of an expansion plan which eventually will be turned over to Afghanistan. It's a counter clockwise expansion in four phases, which starts in the North (that's already completed), and then the West, which is underway, and then they will expand the PRT system to the South and then the East and beyond that. The PRTs are not in every province.

- There has been a lot of debate about the PRTs in various forums; the main difference is in how the PRTs work depending on where they are located and the political-economic situation there.

- Some of the issues are: what degree of engagement in development work, how development work is conducted and by whom, by the military side or by an embedded USAID team or for the UK, a DFID [UK's Department for International Development] team. From the NGO side, I think the conclusion is that they prefer the British model.

- PRTs have different approaches for maintaining security in the area. It really depends on where you are; you've got everything from really classical peace keeping operations where soldiers patrol in helmets and speak to the local population, really working the liaison role. Then you have other areas, which are more dangerous particularly in the South where it looks more like combat operations.

- I'm not sure that it is entirely fair to look at the PRT as having a national approach, because it is more defined by the area of operations. And from now, the Coalition tends to be more inclined towards PRTs in the more dangerous areas; I think part of the transfer strategy to NATO is to stabilize those areas and transfer them to really soft operations under NATO.

- PRT operations: we mostly interact with the USAID rep. He is looking at development projects that also could contribute to political stability or "hearts and minds". For the military, it has been difficult for them to get a grasp of the region that they are working in because they can't actually

leave the PRT; they are given cultural briefings, how Afghan people interact, politeness; this is important and an issue, especially with the rotation of people every six months, a typical tour.

- The school reconstruction has been one of the top priorities. But to be effective in reconstruction, you need a much larger scale of economic development programs; schooling is good especially done properly, but people still are destitute in these areas. If you look at it as a security problem with people engaging in poppy growing or even in insurgency (there are suggestions from various sources that insurgency issues are sponsored from external parties), these provide financial incentives. You need to develop the economy before you can help with stability. So that's going to be a priority, especially in the more dangerous rural regions.
- It's a chicken and egg problem: it's insecure so aid agencies don't want to go there; on the other hand, you'll most often have a PRT, which is significantly funded, (which tend to be Coalition PRTs,) in the secure areas. Really, what you need to look at is large scale, like agricultural reform, industrialization; these things don't really exist on a large enough scale yet.
- The central government has a growing presence. There's a visible difference, particularly the Afghan National Army, which has been a fairly successful project; they are well respected by local people. The issue in the army is desertion; there are still very high desertion rates.
- The police are still weak; there are two major police reform programs, and one is a U.S. funded police academy, and the other is a German-funded police training project; the national police program is still grossly under funded.
- Re development agencies: most of the efforts at this point are directed at provincial government capacity building, which is a very complex project. The regions are very destitute with very few resources, so much of the government's work is dependent on international funding, which determines what can be done. The other element is constantly building capacity and making sure that the administrations in different provinces are effective. That's a long road.
- It's felt among the NGO community that humanitarian space is being lost, because of the military engagement in development work and relief work, the idea of neutrality has disappeared and that this is the source of the attacks on the aid community by insurgents, for example. This is a problem; one thing that UNAMA and the military haven't done is to set up a NGO and military working group and actually meet and discuss some issues.
- The growth in the number of Afghan NGOs is a really new development since 2002, partly because the main inflow of capital here comes from international donors for these kinds of projects. If you can set yourself up as an NGO, you gain access to them, and that's an incentive for the well intentioned and for the more entrepreneurial.
- There is a NGO umbrella organization, which is called ACBAR (Afghan Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief). It doesn't have any official mandate to tell NGOs what to do, but there is a code of conduct that people have to subscribe to in order to become a member. It's quite a credible organization. It does have its own staff.

- They went well, on the whole. The security for the elections, I think, has been somewhat over-represented as an ISAF/Coalition victory. Much of the election security, especially for the provincial ballot centers, was actually organized by tribal police. This was in collaboration with UNAMA; UNAMA funded some of that, as well as the government. The reasons they were successful is because the tribal police are essentially the communities policing themselves. In terms of insurgents coming in across the border from Pakistan, it is a different matter for them to attack, for example, a Coalition soldier than it is for them to attack tribal police because, if you do that, you're going into a war with Pashtun tribes on the borders.
- Reconstruction is a top issue: the need for large-scale development projects; to have any kind of transition you've got to provide the overarching economic incentives to support the state.
- Problem number two: further strengthening the army, but, more importantly, strengthening the police to have a credible, and professional, national police structure.
- The PRTs should do more in terms of direct security support; peacekeeping and having a more visible presence in the areas that they operate in. The PRT system needs to be expanded nationally as well. How do they do development work? There are issues of sustainability and expertise and there are also discussions of developing measures of effectiveness. You have to allow for flexibility in this kind of country because the situation does vary so differently depending on where you are. So in some ways the PRTs are good, because with enough autonomy they can adapt their operations to the context. Sometimes the problem with a traditional peace keeping mission, if it's nation wide, is that you have a single mandate for them to operate by, so broad guidelines are good. The PRTs need to be more accountable to the public.
- The tour is going to be six months for any contingent; if you have contingent that's there for six months, there's a learning process; an institutional memory in the PRT or in the broader civil-military and defense community. That's something that we're working on. It's difficult to coordinate, because if you have different actors; you end up with a few from the Coalition, a few from ISAF, some development people and then there are people from different embassies that are being trooped in.
- There are two main forums: a PRT working group, which discusses the operational level issues and an executive standing committee, for the main policy decisions.
- The chairman will be Afghan and the military Afghan government with possibly a PRT Secretariat in the Ministry of the Interior, which will essentially try to institutionalize the working group and provide a more permanent forum to deal with policy and operational issues.
- Not a permanent institution, but it will be here for a few more years. Issues need to be handled on a less ad hoc basis.
- It's not entirely clear yet what will happen with PRTs once the international operations are transferred to the Afghan government or just dismantled. I don't think the decisions have been taken on that yet. It depends on how well the provincial administration works.

- Issues for the PRTs: the measure of effectiveness (do they help development); humanitarian space; accountability; expansion of PRTs.
- The idea is to phase them more into the Ministry of Interior and to give it more input and more control over the projects. One issue is the process of integration; PRTs operate on their own.

Lessons

- Measure your expectations by the level of national interest in your outcome: what we're doing is not necessarily reconstruction, because that suggests that there's something to reconstruct; rather it's developmental work. That's a new way of thinking. You have all these ministry operations and political operations, which are not creatively managed. They're all separate actors and so you have to have consensus, that's a real problem for coordination. On the other hand, we're trying to create a democratic government and an economy at the same time. The merging of roles in some ways; everyone has to learn the different areas that they're not necessarily specialized in, so there's a lot of crossover, e.g. village people doing development work, some humanitarian people doing political work.

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

Interview #25

Interviewed by: W. Haven North
Initial interview date: June 15th, 2005
Copyright 2005 USIP & ADST

Q: When did you go to Afghanistan and how long do you plan to be there?

A: I came at first in January, 2005. I was working for an Afghan NGO [Non-Government Organization] called Tribal Liaison Office (TLO) through May. Now I have just started with UNAMA [United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan] as a Civil-Military Affairs Officer and Humanitarian Officer. So two hats really.

Q: Where are you located? In what PRT are you located?

A: I'm in Kabul now at UNAMA headquarters.

Q: Are you part of a PRT [Provincial Reconstruction Team]?

A: No, I'm not. I'm part of UN's assistance mission to Afghanistan and the Civil-Military Affairs Office. We work between the PRTs and the Coalition Forces, our staff, the UN, NGOs, and other humanitarian actors. We work as a liaising point in the group, some coordination; we're trying to give constructive advice and cooperation.

Q: Is this country-wide?

A: It is. We deal with national issues mainly; there are Civil-Military Affairs Officers in the regional field offices that are based locally.

Q: We particularly want to focus on the PRTs. What is your understanding of the missions of the PRTs?

A: The idea of the PRT is to help in development, humanitarian relief and also to help aid stability and the reconstruction process more generally.

Q: I see. What kind of programs do they carry out?

A: PRTs?

Q: Yes.

A: Actually I just received a breakdown from ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] today. If you hold on for a second I'll give it to you, because it's got all the percentages of how they distribute their funds. Let me see here. This is ISAF. The Coalition do things on a different basis, I mean they have a different funding structure and may have different priorities as well. But for ISAF's PRTs, the mission is divided up as follows: It's got 20% for security systems operations; 6% for the Afghan National Army; 15% goes to the Afghan National Police; development work is 20%, DDR [Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration] is 16%; governance is 11%; and Judicial Reform is 5%. There's also 7% percent for "CN." But I'm not sure exactly what that stands for, so I'm going to have to make that clear. So yes, they're having quite a draw.

Q: So this is funding for all the PRTs?

A: These are for ISAF PRTs specifically. Yes, ISAF/NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] PRTs. The Coalition PRTs have different funding structures, which are mainly U.S. Government at least American PRTs. The American PRTs commanders have greater autonomy in how they spend their funds, which one can look at in different ways.

Q: What is your view of the situation in Kabul or Afghanistan, generally, when you arrived; what were the political, economic and security conditions?

A: From experience with the TLO, we were working in the Southeast, the border provinces, which are to some extent former Taliban areas, heavy Pastun tribal areas.

To me, I think what you saw in Kabul was the classical image of peace keeping, if you will, with ISAF troops patrolling the streets, also Coalition troops. Both the Afghan National Army and National Police presence is visible. You see reconstruction, so it's what you would expect to see.

When you move out of Kabul, especially into the South East, you stop seeing ISAF. What you see, instead are Coalition Forces which are conducting war fighting operations, dividing out the reconnaissance or fighting patrols and so on. You don't actually shoot anyone, being peace keeping as such. Reconstruction is barely visible. You don't see anyone doing peacekeeping as such; also reconstruction is barely visible. You go to a village and you see perhaps a well or two, but apart from that it's just all-insecure; aid agencies tend not to go there. Although, if you go to the regional capitals, the provincial capitals like Gardiz, there are quite significant new expenditures to pave the roads and so on. There is much activity in the urban centers, but in the rural regions, they've really paid little attention and the people, the poor people, will tell you about it. It's all about the local people to get them to support the government, but you have to see the reconstruction that they were promised. So that's an issue. Also, I think to some regards it's a bigger issue than political representations, although that is still an issue for Pashtuns to reconsider.

Q: Right. Security-wise? Is it different in different parts of the country or is it pretty much the same?

A: Yes, yes, quite so. It is quite different. The general structure of security is different in different parts. In the Southeast, (they've been there in the effort to create national police have

not been effective enough yet) a lot of the tribes have started their own police forces, which is a very old tradition— tribal police. So the community will contribute members and the tribal council will authorize it and pay them so they maintain their own security: that's an issue for integration. I mean how do you seize the security architecture for Afghanistan? Because scared people in the Southeast, for example, trust their own community members more than the National Police. But then again, if you go to the North and other areas, you still have the problem of warlordism and that's quite different, if social cohesion is reached and you can actually take control, if you have enough ?. But that has been harder in the Southeast, that's been the difference. How you deal with that would be different. I think in the Southeast you might have to work more with the local communities and partisans and conceptualize the state differently, the security architecture and integration. Where in other areas of the country, where you still have Commanders with greater measure of enforcement, for example, which, if you know, would not be politically possible.

Q: Right. How would you characterize the political situation in various parts of the country and the role of the central government: is it able to reach out to the regions?

A: I haven't been to all parts of the country; it's just too difficult for me to comment. It's a very complex situation in that you don't have a singular, uniform reaction to the government. The politics are very different in different parts of your country and I think that underlines the fragmentation that still exists to some extent. On the other hand, I think the general opinion among people is that they support the new government, but they have the problem of corruption and the ability to deliver on reconstruction and the economy. Also the issue of international involvement is still a sensitive one. People would prefer not to have their government so much in bed with external powers, but, on the other hand, they're very aware that, if there was no international presence, things could deteriorate rapidly; they'll see it as the lesser of two evils.

Q: Right. What parts have you been to in order to get a more specific picture?

A: I worked mostly in Kabul region and in the Southeast.

Q: I see. And how would you characterize the political situation in just the Kabul region?

A: In the capital region ... One of the emergent issues here, which nobody has given enough attention to, is the criminalization of society; this is something that leads directly towards foreigners that is quite new. For the first three years of the intervention, Westerners, at least, in Kabul were relatively safe. But now it depends on what you attribute it to. The idea from along the Afghan front, they think perhaps that Karzai formed the cabinet perhaps a little too quick and that some of the former commanders that were involved in the government were put out outside now and are now turning their hands to other things; that's an argument that I, for example, heard last year. Ex-commanders are diversifying their economic and political portfolios so they're engaging in extortion and kidnapping. And by kidnapping I don't mean just the Westerners, which is rife; largely under reported is the kidnapping of wealthy Afghans and particularly expatriate Afghans for ransom. These are quite often killed, if money is not paid up-front. So that's an issue. They arrived in Kandahar a few months ago by local people and the deputy governor's office and that was because of really widespread kidnapping of children. I

heard from some people that these children are used for sexual exploitation or trafficking. Those are really the kind of issues, which really do start people to ?. I think the Western attention tends to form on gender and political expectations, but people here are really looking for human security.

Q: Let me back up. What is the mission of the UNAMA? What is it supposed to be trying to do? The one you're working with?

A: UNAMA is an assistance mission. But it also has a political mandate.

Q: It's a UN organization, is that right?

A: Yes, that's right, the primary mission is a coordination role working with the other specialized agencies?

Q: What specialized agencies?

A: Humanitarian aid, reconstruction, and the political work as well and directly with UNDP that could change in the future. But then it's generally coordination. Also, they have an advisory role and a liaison role between the Afghan government and the other actors here that work. It also works in capacity building to strengthen the government. It also has a lead role in organizing elections, the provincial and the parliamentary elections.

Q: I see. Its coordination is related to just the UN agencies or to all programs, all agencies?

A: It's the UN agencies essentially. But it provides advice and strategy for coordinating by consensus. The general plans are made with Afghan government funds or national priority programs and tries to steer the work in the same direction.

Q: What is its connection to the PRTs?

A: Well, there's no direct line of authority. The PRTs are run under ISAF in 2003; they are commanded by NATO and also by the Coalition. The Coalition's position is trying to localize, transfer command of PRTs to NATO, gradually. But this is all part of an expansion plan which eventually will be turned over to Afghanistan. It's a counter clockwise expansion in four phases, which starts at the North (that's already completed), and then the West, which is underway, and then they will expand the PRT system to the South and then it's the East and beyond that.

Q: They're not PRTs in every province?

A: No, no not yet. Absolutely not.

Q: How many are there do you know? Approximately.

A: Somebody did give me that figure the other day. I think there are 13 NATO PRTs and a different number of Coalition PRTs. I have it written down somewhere; I can e-mail that to you later.

Q: That would be great.

A: But that's a rough estimate.

Q: What's your impression of how they work or how well they work? What are the main issues of the PRTs across the board?

A: There's been a lot of debate about this in various forums. I think what it has come to now, if you stop to look at different national models, the main difference is in how the PRT work, are dependent on where they are located and the political-economic situation there.

Q: Can you describe the different national models?

A: Well, I can send you the tapes on it actually, which will define it much better than I can tell you, but some of the issues there are: what degree of engagement in development work, how development work is conducted and by whom, by the military side or by an embedded USAID team or for the UK, a DFID [UK's Department for International Development] team. From the NGO side, I think the conclusion is that they prefer the British model and there are some recent papers here that support that as well. I'm not really that closely focused on PRTs at the moment to be able to comment.

Q: Are there different approaches for maintaining security in the area?

A: Yes, absolutely. It really depends on where you are; you've got everything from really classical peace keeping operations where soldiers patrol in helmets and speak to the local population, really working the liaison role. Then you have other areas, which are more dangerous particularly in the South where it looks more like combat operations. There is a great emphasis on force protection. People go out, soldiers go out, not necessarily heavily armed but heavily armored, if you will in armored vehicles, full body armor and so on. They don't necessarily interact with the population on the street. Those are very different images of how PRTs can look. I'm not sure that it is entirely fair to look at it as a national approach, because it is more defined by the area of operations. And from now, the Coalition tends to be more inclined towards PRTs in the more dangerous areas; I think part of the transfer strategy to NATO is to stabilize those areas and transfer them to really soft operations under NATO.

Q: Have you visited a particular PRT?

A: I haven't visited a PRT as such, but I used to work around the Gardiz PRT, which would probably be defined as one of those in a more dangerous area. You really have the full body armor approach and everything; they don't move around in the community at all.

Q: You haven't actually been to a particular PRT operation or have you?

A: I haven't been in a PRT operation, but I have worked with PRT people. Yes, in Gardiz and parts of the province.

Q: What was your understanding of how it was organized and staffed?

A: The person that we mostly interacted with was the USAID rep. He really was looking at development projects that also could contribute to political stability or "hearts and minds", if you will. For the military, it was difficult for them, I think, to get a grasp of the region that they were working in because they can't actually leave the PRT. They go out on patrol, they go back to the PRT and basically they'd go to our office for a meeting and then they go back in the APC [Armored Personnel Carrier] and they go back to the PRT. They can't really do anything else so they give them cultural briefings, for example, how Afghan people interact, politeness and so on; I think this is important because they are new to a lot of people within the compound. That is an issue, especially if you're rotating people every six months or so, a typical tour.

Q: Right.

A: You need to have this, at least, as regular, you know, pre-deployment training package.

Q: Right

A: In Afghanistan and some of these areas, people are so conservative and very traditional that how you conduct yourself in public is very important to how you are perceived.

Q: Looking at different kinds of programs, particularly in the reconstruction area, what ones do you find very effective or most effective?

A: The reconstruction programs? Well, the school reconstruction has been heavily engaged in. That's been one of the top priorities. But really, to be effective in reconstruction I think you need to look at a much larger scale in economic development programs; schooling is good especially done properly, but people still are destitute in these areas. If you look at it as a security problem with people engaging in poppy growing or even in insurgency (there are suggestions from various sources that insurgency issues are sponsored from external parties), these provide financial incentives. Really, you need to develop an economy before you can help with stability. So that's going to be a priority, especially in the more dangerous rural regions that we see this kind of engagement. It's a chicken and egg problem in a sense. It's insecure so aid agencies don't want to go there; on the other hand, you'll most often have a PRT, which is significantly funded, (which tend to be Coalition PRTs,) you'll only have them in the secure areas. So yes, it's a chicken and egg problem. Really, what you need to look at is large scale, like agricultural reform, industrialization; I mean these things don't really exist on a large enough scale yet.

Q: Do you have a sense that the central government is beginning to find its way out into the provinces and become more effective or recognized?

A: Yes, they have a growing presence. There's a visible difference, particularly in terms of the Afghan National Army, which has been a fairly successful project; they are well respected by local people. The issue in the army is desertion; there are still very high desertion rates. The public needs to speak to somebody working directly in the security sector. I've heard some of the gripes of the people that they're underpaid; it tends to be dangerous and so on; but the ANA is otherwise a successful project, and they look credible as well when you see them. The police are still weak; there are two major police reform programs, and one is a U.S. funded police academy, and the other is a German-funded police-training project. In terms of really dealing with internal security, the national police being the next step that is still, I think, grossly under funded. We need to be engaged much more heavily.

Q: What about the extension of some of the development agencies like agriculture, education or health, are they getting out in the areas? Are the ministries having an impact on the country?

A: I think most of the efforts at this point are directed at provincial government capacity building, which is a very complex project. In some areas you have governors, who are competent and engaged and that facilitates a lot. In other areas, you have governors, which are not necessarily so.

Q: What kind of capacity building projects are they carrying out?

A: We're really training officials, even actually seconding international staff, which is widely done now with the national government and, in fact, the advisors, to help them really restructure the governments and develop their programming. It's largely developmental work. You start with the political dimension. Before now the programs were directed mainly towards the national government, but after the Presidential elections, the provincial elections, the programs are much more focused on provincial capacity building. This is also much more complex, because you're dealing with situations where there's more pressure on the governments, because you really have very little to work with. You still have a very destitute region with very few resources, so much of the government's work is dependent on international funding.

Q: You mean the provincial government's work is dependent on international funding?

A: Yes, all government work is dependent on international funding. So that determines a lot what you can do. Then the other element is constantly building capacity and actually making sure that there are administrations in different provinces are effective. That's a long road; it's not something that you do over night.

Q: What kind of activities are being carried out to help build up the provincial administrations?

Advisory work. I can give you one example. There has been a large flooding disaster this year. The government in Paktia called a meeting and they said, look, we're going to have flooding in all of these areas and so they developed a paper for all the different international agencies to go out and do surveys or send engineers to build walls and somebody else to erect public dawanas (?) and so on. But essentially they didn't have the funds themselves or the staff, and so all they could do is to ask international donors, specific international donors and agencies, to take charge

in different parts of the response. So how effective the government is very much dependent on whether the contributing agencies are willing to do it. In Paktia, some did and some did not. That shaped the response to a quite a large extent.

Q: Does the central government have funds in their budget that they give to the regions, to the provinces to work with?

A: Well, I believe so, yes. I'm not an expert source on that information.

Q: Right, because one of the problems that we often hear about is that the provincial governments don't have any resources of their own.

A: ... limited.

Q: How about the NGO's how are they working out? I gather there's some tension between the NGOs and the military groups, is that right?

A: Well, I think this is largely linked to two PRTs to some extent. Really, the basics center on the military's role in development work and whether they're using it for hearts or minds or for political ends. It's felt among the NGO community that humanitarian space is being lost. I mean because of the military engagement in development work and relief work, the idea of neutrality has disappeared and that this is the source of the attacks on the aid community by insurgents, for example. This is a problem; one thing that UNAMA and the military haven't done is to set up a NGO and military working group and actually meet and discuss some issues. But it's a learning process from both sides, I think. Really because Afghanistan has really changed the contexts, to some extent, in which people are used to working. The problems of security here are developmental as much as they are political. By necessity the international military actions have been involved in development work. And also NGOs that are traditionally addressing humanitarian work are now becoming involved in development work, because they have to work for sustainability. It's political work because they need the PRTs and so on and international forces to protect them. So it's a clear dependency, but it's not immediately manageable.

Q: Who are the major NGOs that you've have worked with that are out in the provinces?

A: Well, there are quite a few here; they have a high profile. One is TLO, another is the International Refugee Committee, the IRC. They're still here. The Red Cross (ICRC) is still here — the National Society and the International Committee. There is also a multitude of Afghan NGOs, local NGOs. One of the characteristics of this particular mission has been the subcontracting; sometimes from UN agencies or sometimes from large, international NGOs to local partners. It's been part of the thinking here in capacity building; it's good to have local partners to do the actual implementation of projects, because they gain the trust and learn how to do it. That's a long-term goal. Another issue has been funding; funds allocated for projects are not necessarily closely monitored, as they would be if done by a very large international NGO. So there has been some public reaction towards many of the NGOs that are here; some of them are little more than private companies set up as NGOs.

There was a politician as well who seized that topic and pushed into the media but he was a fact eventually. But really I think that's really quite a minor part of it. The major issue with local or new NGOs is the capacity problem.

Q: These are the Afghan NGOs. Is this a recent problem?

A: Yes, some of them.

Q: The problem with the number of Afghan NGOs. Is this a recent development or is this a tradition in the country to have them.

A: No. This is a really new development since 2002. Now I think that's partly because the main inflow of capital here comes from international donors for these kinds of projects. If you can set yourself up as an NGO, you gain access to them, and that's an incentive for the well intentioned and for the more entrepreneurial.

Q: I see. One issue is their own capacity to actually do what they've been asked to do?

A: Yes, I mean you can't say that it's just the national NGO's problem. I think some of the international NGOs as well have capacity problems. But there's immense...so much funding here for this type of activity that it's an incentive for any organization to get involved because you can quite easily gain funding for projects. On the other hand, do you have either the organization experience or subject experience or the country experience? These are all issues that are important for being effective. The national NGO that I worked for before knew we had an international advisor, but it was a largely local NGO. Things didn't always happen as you might expect them to happen. That's an issue; things get left half done and so on. I think you really need to look at the individual organizations rather than perhaps, generalizing.

Q: Is there any coordinating body for all the NGO work that promotes common approaches and understanding of what they're doing?

A: There is an umbrella organization, which is called ACBAR.

Q: What's its name?

A: ACBAR, what does it stand for? Afghan Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, or something like that. I don't remember exactly what it is. But it's A-C-B-A-R; they don't have any official mandate to tell NGOs what to do, but there is a code of conduct that people have to subscribe to in order to become a member.

Q: It's a government sponsored organization or ...?

A: No, no, no it's independent.

Q: It's just self-mandated? Does it have a staff; is it a real organization?

A: Yes. It's quite a credible organization. It does have its own staff. They have set up a code of conduct and that gives you some degree of legitimacy. Its presence, you can see, is as a trade union in some respects. But how effective it is, I couldn't tell you specifically. I'd have to look at it ... I could put you in touch actually with the (name), who is an advocacy head for the agency.

Q: (Name)?

A: Yes, yes. She'll send you an e-mail later.

Q: Were you around during the elections for the president?

A: No, I came just after the elections.

Q: What was your impression of them, what have you learned about them and how they went and how well received they were?

A: They went well, on the whole. The one issue that was brought up in the media was the one about markers. The ink on the ballots, but that was actually largely a non-issue for local people. On the other hand, I think the Karzai's victory was expected, as it was he was main figurehead of proper transition. So the election went well. The security for the elections, I think, has been somewhat over-represented as an ISAF/Coalition victory. Much of the election security, especially for the provincial ballot centers, was actually organized by tribal police. This was in collaboration with UNAMA as well; UNAMA funded some of that, as well as the government. That wasn't based on enforcement. The reasons they were successful because the tribal police are essentially the communities policing themselves. It had already been decided before various councils and so on that they would support the elections and that they would go and vote. So the presence of the tribal police is largely symbolic. In terms of insurgents coming in across the border from Pakistan, it is a different matter for them to attack, for example, a Coalition soldier than it is for them to attack tribal police because, if you do that, you're going into a war with Pashtun tribes on the borders. There are people up there that they could be related to certainly, if they're operating in these areas for insurgency operations. If you remove the support of the local population, you're really cutting your own arm off. So that was a large part of why there were such few incidents.

Q: Looking across the whole picture there, if you were to pick out say, the top five issues that you see in terms of getting reconstruction underway and how effective it is; what would you select? I know it's a tough kind of a question, but it's a way to get some sense of the situation there.

A: I guess reconstruction is a top issue. It would probably be large-scale development projects. I mean economic development projects, because, I think, to any kind of transition you've got to provide the overarching economic incentives to support the state. The flip side of that is problem number two: further strengthening the army, but more importantly strengthening the police to have a credible, professional, national police structure. Because if you can have economic environment where people can function, it's got to be fairly secure so that nobody can come in and extort your business or extort your land, which has happened; and also a general sense of

security contributes to economic stability. Abandon that and you have panic. So those are the few top issues.

Q: What are the particular issues related to the PRTs, the way they operate and how effective they are?

A: With the PRTs, you could ask the PRTs to do more in terms of direct security support. Peace keeping, if you will, and perhaps have a more visible presence in the areas that they operate in. But then the PRT system needs to be expanded nationally as well. That's another big issue with that. How do they do development work? There are issues of sustainability and expertise and there are also discussions of developing measures of effectiveness based on civilian standards with which to base productivity at the moment. So that would improve the performance I think.

Q: What about the differences; they all seem to have different ways of doing things, or models, is that a problem, is that something we can learn from?

A: I think you have to allow for flexibility in this kind of country because the situation does vary so differently depending on where you are. So in some ways the PRTs are good, because with enough autonomy they can adapt their operations to the context. Sometimes the problem with a traditional peace keeping mission, if it's national wide, is that you have a single mandate for them to operate by, so broad guidelines are good. I think you can say that it's all that they need to be more accountable to the public, if you will, or to public scrutiny. But then again they're an international operation; they're not a national operation. So they'll do things that they'll see as being in the interest of the Afghan people and also give value for money on the own foreign policy objectives of the donor nations which set up to be PRTs. So, at the moment, they are just fairly in line with each other. But there are issues that need to be hammered out.

Q: I gather that the PRTs are being moved around, being relocated. The British are here and then they're moved there and then the Americans are moving here and so on. New groups are coming in. Is there are a problem of consistency and sustainability in the areas because of this?

A: Yes, the tour is going to be six months for any contingent. It doesn't necessarily have to be an issue between the Americans and say, Italians or anything like that. But if you have contingent that's there for six months, I think there's a learning process, and you have to know that there's work that could be done to insure that so that there's an institutional memory in the PRT or indeed, in the broader civil-military and defense community. That's something that we're working on. It's difficult to coordinate, because if you have different actors; you end up with a few from the Coalition, a few from ISAF, some development people and then there are people from different embassies that are being trooped in.

Q: Is there some mechanism for coordination that meets with all the different leaders of all these PRTs periodically, that kind of arrangement?

A: Yes, there are two main forums. There's one work group, a PRT working group, which discusses the operational level issues. There's an executive standing committee, which I think makes the decisions ... the main policy decisions.

Q: Are these all foreign or are they Afghan government people?

A: It's held in the Ministry of Interior, so the chairman will be Afghan and military Afghan government. Then the others will be contributors as well in the same group. That's how it works. There's discussion now about setting up a PRT Secretariat in the Ministry of the Interior, which will essentially try to institutionalize the working group and provide a more permanent forum to deal with policy issues and operational issues, but that's still in the workings, in the next few months that might take place.

Q: So there is a thought to try to make the PRT a permanent institution in the regions?

A: I'm not sure if it's a permanent institution as such, but I think its visage is that they will be here for a few more years. And therefore issues need to be handled on a less ad hoc basis. That's the general impression.

Q: In any rate, how do the Afghans get more closely involved or have their own PRT mechanism; is that an idea that the people are thinking about?

A: Well, it's been discussed somewhat. It's not entirely clear yet what will happen with PRTs once the international operations transferred to the Afghan government or just dismantled. I don't think the decisions have been taken on that yet. It depends on how well the provincial administration works. We don't know yet, there are several different options that we'll just have to see in time; it's hard to predict at this time.

Q: I guess it is either the question of making it more institutionalized or gradually phasing them out and turning operations over to the Afghan government to run. I guess that's something they're thinking about?

A: Yes. That's something that staff have been discussing. But as I said, I don't think any decisions have been taken on that yet. But I've heard it mentioned, yes.

Q: You said that one group was working on operational issues; do you know what those issues are, examples of those issues?

A: Yes. One of them as I mentioned before, is the measure of effectiveness for how PRTs operate, how effective are they, are they good value for money, do they help development? We're on the verge of imagining the direct impact and efficiency and I think that's partly the question of the PRT concept in future operations. That's one issue; the other issue is the issue of humanitarian space. Another issue is accountability, I think, especially in human rights issues and so on and how to deal with that. There's a host of issues and also expansion, expansion of PRTs.

Q: But it's a mechanism and the coordinating body are extra governmental, sort of a shadow government operation underway. Is that fair to characterize it that way?

A: PRTs?

Q: Yes, as you've seen a lot of the coordinating body and so on: is it sort of parallel administration to the Afghan government.

A: I think the idea is to phase it more into the Ministry of Interior and to give them more input and more control over the projects. That's an idea I think which is important. Because yes, it is a bit of an issue that PRTs operate on their own behalf. Really, in a wide perspective, you're looking at effectiveness as well as complementarity and making sure that all the efforts are complementary within the Afghan government's own development plans and so on. So it's really a process of integration; creates a bit of confusion.

Q: Does the Ministry of Interior run the PRTs as the coordinating body, does it interact with or have some way with the other ministries like education or agriculture, since the PRTs are heavily in reconstruction work; in education, for example, how do the other ministries get involved with the Ministry of Interior?

A: That's a good question; I'm probably not the best person to comment on in the intra-government dynamics. You'd maybe speak to, there's one person that you might speak to, and I can put you in touch if you want. Also, you should actually call xxxx, because he has a more long-term perspective on dynamics.

Q: Are there any areas that we haven't touched on that we ought to include and address?

A: Don't know, not really.

Q: Let me wrap it up a bit. In looking your experience, are there one or two or three lessons from what you've observed that stand out in your mind. What stands out in your mind as something that we should learn from this?

A: Yes. I guess you really have to measure your expectations by the level of national interest in your outcome. I think that's my personal opinion. I think to some extent, why more hasn't happened here, on the other hand, in many of the problems; there's something you brought up the other day that what we're doing is not necessarily reconstruction, because that suggests that there something to reconstruct; rather it's developmental work, in many ways. That's a new way of thinking. You have all these ministry operations and political operations, which are not creatively managed. They're all separate actors and so you have to have consensus, that's a real problem for coordination. On the other hand, a lot of the knowledge that we have from say, Bosnia or Kosovo, isn't directly relevant in the same way, because you're not just trying to set up a democratic government and rebuild the economy. Like I said before, you're actually trying to create a democratic government and create an economy, at the same time. It's pushing people, I think that's pushing the merging of roles in some ways and everyone has to learn the different areas that they're not necessarily specialized in, so there's a lot of crossover. I mean, village people doing development work, some humanitarian people doing political work.

Q: Right, good point.

A: That's one reason for the complexity. I think that's all that I have to add.

Q: That's a good point. Anything we missed on the way?

A: I don't think so, no, I think that's about it.

Q: Well, this has been very helpful, very interesting,

A: Thank you very much. This is excellent.

[END INTERVIEW]