

USIP - ADST
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #32

Executive Summary

The interviewee served in USAID's Office of Infrastructure, Engineering, and Energy in Kabul from February 2004 to December 2004. Apart from his long years of experience with the agency, he had no specific training for this assignment. He strongly believes that an organized orientation program, first in the United States and then with follow-on after arrival in country, is critical for the success of individual officers and for the success of our broader mission in Afghanistan.

The interviewee describes his dissatisfaction with the overwhelming influence of the DOD in all aspects of our presence in Afghanistan. During his time in country, AmEmbassy Kabul was a "DOD Embassy" from the top down, as were the PRTs. These military personnel were unfamiliar with economic and political development (such as procedures, budgets, coordination). Their culture led them to "just threw money at problems" without careful planning. Given the short tours of most DOD personnel, few had time to create bonds with the local population, or with their interagency colleagues.

The interviewee notes little focus on the PRTs at the embassy. The PRTs were not mentioned in the staff meetings he attended. At the same time, development officers in the field expressed frustration with the degree to which high-level officials in Washington controlled their work – without taking into consideration local conditions, the views of the nascent Afghanistan government, or the activities of other development entities (NGO and international) in country. He gives as an example firm requirements for the number of schools to be built – without any focus on what was to be taught in the schools, if teachers or administrators were available, or if a particular school was even needed.

The interviewee recommends that the dual tasks of the PRTs -- providing security and facilitating development – should be split up and given to different organizations, such as DOD for security and a civilian agency for development. His further recommendations include:

- lengthening tours of duty for military personnel assigned to the PRTs, to ensure a better understanding of the local situation and to encourage the building of bonds with the community;
- allowing military personnel in country to not wear uniforms when local conditions permit, such as when accompanying NGO representatives to meetings;
- increasing the ranks of civilian agency personnel at PRTs, so that they can deal as equals with their military counterparts;
- integrating military officers into USAID, with full tours of duty; to increase interagency coordination and communication, and
- giving PRT officials greater autonomy to make decision related to local development projects.

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

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Interviewed by: Jack Zetkovic
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Q: Could you please describe your work in Afghanistan and what period of time you were there?

A: Yes. I ran USAID's Office of Infrastructure, Engineering, and Energy, based in Kabul. I served in that position from February of 2004 through December of 2004.

Q: You were there at an interesting time, when the PRTs were still in the process of evolution, wouldn't you say?

A: Yes, they were still in a formation state. When I came in to Kabul, the work was backlogged to such an extent that one just had to get in and start working. In hindsight, I think that one of the most important things that they sacrificed or neglected was a sort of orientation program so that new arrivals, regardless of their rank or their position or their organization, could quickly develop or acquire a sense of the total effort. We were many organizations trying to work together as a team. I think there was good esprit de corps, but I think there was a lot of ignorance, certainly on my part and the part of a lot of people, in terms of what the other actors were doing and how we could and should relate to each other. There were very few opportunities for that sort of a dialogue and there was no program at all to introduce newcomers. That's was especially damaging because many of the people who came to work on the team over there only came for two or three months. We got the sense that they barely learned who we were and what we were trying to accomplish and it was time for them to leave, so that was to me, in hindsight especially, a major shortfall.

Q: Are you talking about the AID people?

A: The whole team, including military. The military probably had their own programs where they were telling their people, but in general, there was not enough effort to give everyone that overview of that total U.S. effort, what our objectives were in the country, who the different actors were, what their roles were, what their relationships would be and all.

Q: Would this orientation begin before getting to post, in the United States, or would it be in country -- or some combination of the two?

A: Time there is always at a premium, so probably it could be done before. The disadvantage of doing it before is that you don't have a chance to interact with people who are right at the post

and people who are going to be working with you. But in hindsight, I see that as something that would have been very useful and something that perhaps they want to consider.

Q: What characteristics would that kind of an orientation program have? How long do you think it should be? Is it baptism by fire or is it learning by doing? Would you take an hour of a day while they're working or would it be a couple of days when you just show up?

A: There is always a processing in period where you're getting your housing and all. I would think that just a one day session when they bring you in for security briefings and things of that sort... I'm thinking about an overview where they would have presentations that have been well thought out, PowerPoint presentations or something, and inform the newcomer about the total U.S. effort and objectives and teams and relate to each new person right away where they fit in this structure. I think that was a major shortcoming in the way we were... We were basically brought in baptism by fire.

Q: And it was like that throughout the time that you were there?

A: Yes.

Q: So there was no orientation in place when you left?

A: No, there was none in place, not at this time. Not at all.

Q: People who were coming in through Kabul and then going out to the PRTs, did they have much time to spend in Kabul and get an overview or they just went right out to post?

A: In the beginning, I believe they were going straight to their assignments, but later, they were spending a week or so within USAID. There was not very much structure to it, but they were spending the time in USAID and not only in USAID but with the military and with the embassy. The PRTs had a person from USAID who was representing USAID and one from the State and then one from the military, so they did work together in that sense. But in the program in general, there should have been an orientation. The PRT people... I think the PRTs themselves were a big experiment. In my view, the experiment was not going well when I arrived and it was not going well when I left. I have some very specific comments concerning that.

Q: Was it not going well in the same way as it was not going well at the end? From February to December, did you see any changes in how the PRTs were performing? Or was it just not going well through that whole period of time?

A: When you first arrive, you don't have any knowledge, so it's very hard to compare one to the other because you yourself are new, with no knowledge base. But I believe that when I arrived there was an idealism that shifted more toward disillusionment as I stayed on there longer. The PRTs themselves to the extent that I could see them were tasked to do virtually impossible things. First of all, the first role of the military was to take care of any military or security problems in their area of responsibility. Then we had people there from USAID and Agriculture and State. Some of those people were not very experienced. The culture of the PRT must have

been very difficult to develop because the people were moving in and out... there was a constant turnover of people. I doubt if you ever had more than 50% of the key members there at any one given time. And there was difficulty recruiting professionals in general, but in particular professionals in the PRTs. But there were some very good PRTs, good professionals assigned to the PRTs. I remember one lady in Heart who was from the Department of State. I saw her as very proactive, very experienced. I thought she was kind of that ideal person that you're looking for. And there was a person from USAID who went over and tried very hard to contribute to the PRTs. I think he has since moved back to Kabul. There was a fellow in Jalalabad who had been in the Marine Corps as an officer and then he left and went in there as a USAID contractor to work there, a PSC [personal service contractor] and he was very good. I think he benefited a lot from having a master's in business administration or public administration. But also, his military background gave him a certain ability to relate. And I think the military officers had an incredible challenge because they were being asked to run a military operation and also be responsible in the ultimate sense for the development and everything going on in their area. Many of them are reserve officers. We did have one meeting of the PRT commanders that I was invited to attend. In that meeting, there was an incredible amount of frustration expressed because someone comes in and wants to accomplish something during a four or a six month assignment and I think that most of them must have sensed that they were failing because with such a short horizon, it's very hard to accomplish anything concrete. Then you're dealing with a lot of people you have not worked with before. My most basic comment about the PRTs is that it was too idealistic and it was too much agency oriented. There was an attempt to bring in every agency and tap Agriculture, tap State, and tap USAID. In the case of USAID, the USAID people were not USAID people. They were people brought off the street in almost every case.

Q: Do you mean too "idealistic" or too "unrealistic?"

A: It's idealistic in terms of trying to bring together a group of people to work together and take everyone and every organization into account. I thought it would have been more useful to have a more close-knit organization where you looked at the functions more than you looked at the place the person came from. In one case, you might find the best leader would be the person from USAID in terms of development, or it might be someone from State. You would still select within that group. Of course, I'm drawing on my own experience in management in the developing world where when you put together a team, you look at that team as a miniculture and you get everyone to commit themselves to the objectives of that team and you don't discriminate... The best leader should be the best leader, regardless of the organization they come from. Perhaps because of the military having such an important role in security, they have the dominant voice in the PRTs. And probably the PRTs were doing a better job in the security and the military arena than in all the other arenas. I don't think they achieved very much support of USAID. I don't believe they achieved a lot of support from State. The biggest contributions in terms of the activities of the PRT came from the military themselves. I would like to say that the general sense... It's hard for me to talk about the PRTs without talking about the setting of the PRTs. Even before I arrived in Kabul, it was quite evident that the embassy in Kabul was a DOD embassy, not a State embassy. I think that was a very damaging thing. I was in the military myself, so I'm not biased against the military. That was a very important part of my own career and my own experience and in my own formation. But over there, the military held an attitude of throwing money at... They had almost unlimited resources. Almost no one would

stay there more than four months. Many of them were very qualified individuals, officers who were called in, were in the reserve or the national guard and they had been called in, and they were very good professionals. But many of them were working in professional areas that were completely different from their background. Almost uniformly, they were all very enthusiastic when they arrived. I had occasion to meet with them socially and all in mess hall and all that. The fact that they were only there for a very short period of time and that the people they were working with would be there almost always the person that they found when they arrived would be gone before they left because everybody was rotating in... The mix of military and State and to a lesser extent USAID was a real problem there. I really believe in this concept which I guess is fairly new at least in this presentation about defense, development, and diplomacy are... I believe there is an important role for each. If there had been a more of a recognition that each of the three parties have a lot to contribute and have a lot of responsibility for results, that would have given us a better chance for success. One got the impression that the ones who had the money were the military and they were the ones who were commanding. Even their master, (Ambassador) Khalilzad, was from the DOD. There was (an embassy official) who had no official role that I could discern who had been a general counsel for the Department of Defense. He was rather elderly. He had a role over there that was probably ad hoc or unofficial, but he had an incredible amount of influence in pushing the DOD perspective. I think he's over there maybe even right as we speak – he's back over there. I think he was already retired. I was retired by him and others before I went over there. I was considered to go with the embassy's afghan reconstruction group. That group was really a DOD group that put up a staff of officers – kind of a military model, to have a staff that the ambassador relied on instead of relying on the staff from USAID, who have experience in doing what they wanted to have done. There was a tremendous jealousy and rivalry between this group that the embassy depended on the ambassador to depend on. They were appointed by the military, which was contracted by State. They brought in people who had no experience at all in the developing world and no experience in economic development, but they had considerable voice. I think that was one of the most difficult... In the PRTs, the PRTs seemed to be mainly just out there under the... They didn't seem to merit a lot of attention in many, many senior staff meetings in the embassy. The PRTs never were a focus of the staff meetings.

Q: Were the staff meetings mainly Kabul-centric?

A: The staff meetings... Another thing that was very peculiar to that assignment is that the Deputy's Committee back here in Washington... I was disappointed to find that after we defeated the Soviet Union, where they had central planning and everything was top-down, we've somehow come up with a system that's very top-down in terms of the Deputy's Committee mandating what is to be done and when it's to be done and even how it's to be done. So, we were tasked to do things without any kind of consultation – build so many schools, build so many health clinics, build so much road – and schedules were given-

Q: You mean, "meet the plan."

A: Meet the plan. There was no sense about "We'd like to do this. What input can you provide?" I don't believe it was professional jealousy on my part to say that I needed to have a voice in what we were going to commit ourselves to. There was a tremendous problem. Even if

the formation of the PRTs, it was “We’re going to use a cookie cutter. We’re going to put one here and put one here and we’ll put one here.” The thrust was to have a body there, not necessarily have a qualified body. It was a bean counter’s paradise in that you get credit for having a position filled no matter who you get to occupy that position. So, the PRTs in my view could have been very... If we had had a more thought out and integrated approach, the PRTs could have become very important outposts or regional offices or operations centers for the kinds of infrastructure work that we were doing. I had a \$1.1 billion program building roads, schools, and clinics, and repairing power lines and generating plants and irrigation canals. I had no ability to... There was no formal structure for me to relate to the PRTs. The PRTs were asking us for technical assistance, but it was on an ad hoc basis. They would say, “Help us to do this or that,” but we had such a full plate ourselves and there was no formal structure for that relationship. I was an advocate of the PRTs and USAID having a relationship so that the people in Kabul would know that they have people out in the field in their area that they can count on to take care of things so you don’t have to travel from Kabul. But when there was not that kind of relationship, I had to contract a large number of people to become my eyes and ears and travel all over the country. And they were not allowed to see the PRTs as their host office when they arrived in a region. They were supposed to check in with the office, but they were not seen as being an integral part of the U.S. program. The military, to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who was putting in engineers out there to also do things... So, we were very discoordinated. We were building schools and clinics, or the military were, that had no relationship to what the ministry of education wanted or the ministry of health wanted. We had cases where there were health clinics – I’m told; I didn’t see them personally – were not even occupied. They met the target of getting a building built, but education is not building a building. Education is that whole infrastructure including the building. It’s like the least important thing might be the building because you can even educate people in tents.

Q: So this was uncoordinated with the U.S. military’s efforts and with the central government’s efforts.

A: Yes, very much so.

Q: How about international NGOs?

A: The NGOs had a big stake in security. Their strategy was to demonstrate that they were non-partisan. They were not part of the conflict. They were there to serve the people. Their own basic strategy was, “We’re do-gooders. We’re here to help.” They did not want to be associated with the U.S. military because if they were seen as being seen as partisans of the U.S. military campaign, they considered that they would be targets for the opponents of the U.S. So they were extraordinarily sensitive about the U.S. military being seen as the ones doing the inspections and coming to their sites. They wanted no formal relationship with the military. Of course, they kept the military informed about where they were going and what they were doing. But they didn’t want that physical presence. They didn’t want to see a uniform. We had the Corps of Engineers working in my office and their policy was for the most part to wear uniforms and if they visited a site, they were in uniforms. The NGOs that we were funding did not want to be seen with the U.S. military because they would be guilty by association of being part of the military effort of the United States. To me, that was one of the most sensitive things we had going there.

Q: Is that a fixable problem or is that just something that is a matter of culture and orientation and it's not going to change?

A: I think it's a fixable problem. The PRTs could have been structured so that the military - they have certain vetoes over where people can go, but you have a staff of local professionals and others who can go out and visit sites and know what's going on and not have to wear a uniform. If the military really wanted to go somewhere, they could certainly have made exceptions and gone without uniforms. But they have their own regulations which required them to have shooters or people with guns with them at all times. Right there in the city of Kabul, I had a situation one time where the military arrived with their guns and one minister said, "Hey, why do we need guns here in this meeting?" But the military had its rules. NGOs really had a problem not with the military as such but in terms of the military presence, the projection of the military coming in to a site that they were building in and our military interest in a site where they were building a school or a clinic. They were quite expressive in saying they did not want the military being the ones who would come in and inspect their sites. There was an effort one time to have the military... We were asked to identify all the different sites that we were doing and the military, when they were in the neighborhood, would go by and check and report on how things were going. In a certain setting, that would be quite okay. It would be very efficient. But in that setting, it was not the way to go about it. I could give you names of some of the heads of the NGOs.

Q: We've contacted some NGOs, although it's hard to get through to them in many cases. You can mention the names. They will be scrubbed from the transcript, but feel free to go ahead.

You've made some really interesting general comments and some specific comments about problems that existed. Are there specific examples that you could give? You were talking about the coordination gap and-

A: I can give you one great concrete example of the problems we had. We were not allowed... Our official --myself and all my immediate staff were considered official Americans or official employees -- we had to build a highway from Kandahar to Herat. In order to authorize the contractor to go out and do the work, we had to understand what we were buying and what work was to be done. So, we needed to travel that road and take pictures and notes and be able to react to what the contractor was proposing. Otherwise, we'd be left-

Q: An international contractor or a local?

A: International. It was a U.S. contractor, a firm called Louis Berger. I was mandated by USAID management to actually go out and inspect that road and be able to show that we knew what the problem was and we could then react in a professional way to what was being proposed by the contractor. We had to know how many bridges had to be repaired and the condition of the road that had to be rebuilt, etc. But we were required to count on the PRT approval. The PRT commander had to give his blessing and had to provide us escorts. The PRT commander on three different occasions gave his blessing for us to make this tour. We actually sent people to Kandahar to go on this tour. Then some military incident would occur and we would just be in

limbo waiting and waiting and waiting and have to go back to Kabul and then reschedule because the conflictive role of the PRT team... They tried to use the military for development, but at the same time they were the military force within a region. The way that could have been handled is that they could have had a different unit of the military to handle the kind of escort support we wanted and needed. It was not that it was any more unsafe to travel at that time. It was just simply that the PRT people... The military people were busy with things military and they were mandated to provide us security service.

Q: So would you recommend that that security component be Kabul-based or regionally based but not working...

A: There should be a PRT unit that is development focused but with their own resources. Then there can be a security unit that can do things that are strictly security. There were some very good professionals from the military. I encouraged the Corps of Engineers to work with us so that we could interface better with the military, so I'm not saying that the problem was the military leadership of the two functions. It was that there was only one leadership of two functions. In a situation like that, generally, the military responsibility takes precedent over these other...

Q: It happened three times...

A: It happened in that one road... And it happened in other cases, too. There were other incidents, but that's the one case that really sticks in my memory.

As I said, another major problem was the shortness of the tours of duty. There are certain functions - developing a certain rapport with the local people and with your local government counterparts and all - you cannot do that on a short term basis and in and out.

Q: Shortness of the tours of duty of which personnel?

A: The USAID people were supposed to go there for a year. It was the military people. Four to six months was the length of their tour instead of a year. A year is... In Afghanistan, no one was expected to stay more than a year.

Q: Some of the people in the PRTs have commented about how the whole character of the PRT would change from one day to the next when a new unit would come in with responsibility for security. Did you see a lot of those dramatic changes yourself?

A: Yes. I can relate it to a road building experience. We were building a road from Kandahar up to Tarin Kowt. Tarin Kowt is north of Kandahar. It's up in Taliban country. The leader of the Taliban was from up in Tarin Kowt. There is a very special interest in opening up that area, so we were asked to build that road. Because it was rather hostile country, we were asked to... The U.S. military was going to send in a construction battalion and they would build a certain part of the road and then we would work with them and put the asphalt on top. The military was stretched so thin that after we got the construction going - and it took quite a bit of construction, but we had the United Nations Office of Project Service [UNOPS] working as our contractor...

USAID gave the money to UNOPS. By the way, there was a lot of international cooperation. The U.S. worked a lot with the UN and there was never any problem with us working with the UN and UNOPS. Anyway, with UNOPS, they were tasked to fund our side of the reconstruction of those highways and to provide technical and material support to the U.S. military unit. The military unit was working and they had some Apache helicopters and other military security assigned to them. Then there was a problem in Heart. Lo and behold, the U.S. military construction battalion lost their security and they came to us and they asked us to authorize the UN to provide them security services. I find that the most humorous thing, that the United States military assigned a construction battalion to work in a very dangerous area and then they came to USAID and said, "USAID, you please provide money to the UNOPS so they can contract security services for the United States Army." That's convoluted. And we did provide that service. I gave you the name of (a UNOPS official). He's the person that can comment on that. By the way, he has worked there a long, long time. He was working also with the PRTs. He had a grant... One of our grants was a grant to build three or four kilometer sections of highway going through these district capitals – not provincial capitals, but district, the next level down. He was mandated really to work with each of the PRTs in identifying those pieces of road, in which town they would be built. I think he had incredible coordination problems with the PRTs.

Q: On the security side?

A: No, just in the selection of these sites and getting them to focus on the work and things like that. Just because the PRTs were... They had quite a large mandate and they were rather thinly staffed. Many of the people they had were rather inexperienced. If you were dependent on the PRT to get something done, they were not able to contribute very much. I believe that the PRTs could be very effective if they were structured more like a private company would structure a regional office. I can give you an example. I worked for the public utilities. You know that a utility provides service over a big geographic area, so they have to be able to have customer service and technical operations and maintenance capability across geographic regions. Generally what they do is have a headquarters office and then they have the district offices. Those district offices work under procedures and policies and all of the central office but within their region they are the company and anyone who wants to come into the region can count on them for support. If you're going to do a marketing study or anything in that region, you've already got an office sitting over there. You don't have to go out and bring in new people. I think the PRTs could have been structured in such a way that they were more of a field office of the U.S. operations rather than independent offices out there with their own mandates and even with funding sources. They had their own funding sources. The military funded them with these CERP funds.

Q: This gets back to one of the points you made at the very beginning where you said the best leader should be the one who leads. But the way they're structured, the PRT commander is the lieutenant colonel or the colonel who runs it.

A: He runs it.

Q: But then on the civilian side, you've got less than a handful of civilian, State, AID, maybe Agriculture people. When you say "The best leader leads," do you mean within that civilian component?

A: First of all, I think you have to bifurcate the PRT into security and development. Of course they have to work very closely together. You might even give the military guy the ultimate responsibility for the security of everyone there. If you do, security is going to become more important than development. But I believe that the problem came when the commander was... Everyone reported to this commander - the USAID person and the State person. If there had been a head of the development effort, maybe you could have attracted a professional there who was more expert in that area and maybe it would be someone who would be there for a longer period of time. For example, the State officer in Herat struck me as being one of the most active persons in a PRT. Of all the people that I was exposed to, I sense that she was probably the most committed.

Q: I'm just trying to get back to the lessons learned and the restructuring. The people we've talked to have all said that the military leadership is not going to change simply because the military has the money, the resources, and the civilian authorities just don't have the necessary number of personnel. So the PRTs will maintain their military structure. Do you think that there is some way to change that if that's the way you want to make the change?

A: I think you ought to call them "provincial security units" and they should be limited only to security. Then you should have another unit that comes from USAID and is responsible for development like you do in other countries.

Q: And it would be a consulate or an embassy office or whatever?

A: And you know, USAID and the embassy are now working more closely together. Even if it were a State function to kind of arbitrate between USAID and the military, if you leave the military in charge... We had a lot of money for our province, but we had to manage it ourselves. I had lots of money going into each one of these provinces, but it was completely outside of the PRT. Contractors had nothing to do with the PRTs except to say, "I'm going to be coming in..." It's like in the movies, where you see when you go on board a ship, you have to get the captain's permission. Same thing. But the captain doesn't really care what you're doing there. He might care where you're going.

Q: Did you have a lot of situations where the CERP funds were being used either parallel to or contrary to funds that you were administering from Kabul? We've heard of various reports of situations where the PRT would be building a school or building some project that was not coordinated with the NGO and an international NGO would be doing the same thing and they wouldn't have talked to each other?

A: Yes-

Q: Was the same thing happening with AID, too?

A: Yes, that happened... We had five NGOs and a contractor, Louis Berger, that we tasked with building schools and clinics. With the minister of health or the minister of education, we would identify a site for a school or a clinic and we'd go there and find in some cases it had already been built. It had been built by the military. I have incidents reported but never was able to follow through on my own to verify that there were schools and clinics that were built under the PRT program that were there but they were not being used. They were just not built where they were needed. After a building is built, someone's got to have the budget to put staff there and arrange for staff-

Q: Electricity and you name it.

A: Yes, all those things. There was an incident where we were asked to... We were tasked to do a lot of secondary roads. There was kind of a main highway, a ring going around the whole country. Everything else, the state highways, we were building those as a separate category called "secondary roads." There was a place outside of Kabul that was called the... It was kind of like a little retreat place. It was up near the higher elevation where the elites of the city or the bureaucracy of the city would go on the weekends. We were asked to asphalt it. We didn't have money to move all the equipment, so the military did it. They had a budget that gave \$500,000. They actually brought a satchel of money out and gave the cash to the minister of public works, who we knew was a crook. That's how they got these things.

Q: Did the job get done?

A: Well, it didn't get done very well. There is a fellow who was with the Corps of Engineers, who was so disgusted by that he's no longer with the Corps. I think he's now working at the Air Force. The military did that all the time. The military didn't have any kind of control over the money. Maybe it's an important instrument of foreign policy. It is certainly alien to our way of doing things. Here we're trying to put in procedures, and also we'll end corruption because we're not interested just in building roads. We want a stable government to be there eventually. The minister of public works put his crews to do a very sloppy job and he collected the money himself. Satchels full of greenbacks put in his car.

Q: When you left, did you have any kind of outbrief, either in Kabul or when you came back to Washington?

A: No.

Q: Was there any effort to learn from your experience within your bureaucracy?

A: No, not at all. I wrote my own report about leaving things and I have that available, but that was mainly what I was doing.

Q: That was very tactical – specific to your day-to-day work?

A: Yes, but there was never any... Of course, I recommended this and that, which... Each new person comes in and kind of does their own thing.

Q: Did you have overlap with your successor?

A: No, my successor is not even in place yet and I left in December. I talked to him about two weeks ago. He's been contracted to go there. I stayed on contract until May but I was not serving there. I was serving the mission, but here dealing with some procurement. I'm very disappointed with the way development is being treated. First of all, I've always been a person who believes that we have to have one U.S. policy and one U.S. team. But the development function is a very important function in this whole thing. USAID people now seem to be more interested in giving money to NGOs and all and absolving themselves of any responsibility for results. "Give it to them and if it doesn't work, we'll blame the bastards." State is reacting apparently by setting up a parallel organization under Carlos Pasqual and all-

Q: S/CRS.

A: I don't know if that's going to work very well. USAID should be made more of a FEMA-type organization -- an agency that doesn't do a lot except they put systems in place and they contract out or reach agreements with different organizations, private and government, to take on roles. The Corps of Engineers has a nose in it if there's going to be a hurricane, but their role is going to be in... Florida Light and Power knows what their role will be. Depending on where you are in the country, they have these contracts and these agreements in place. So they can go in real quickly. USAID probably, instead of trying to build up a capability that they lost a long time ago, should become more of a coordinator and the funding agency, but working much more closely to State. We've got too many voices. Being very candid here, we have too many people in USAID who don't share the overall policies. They still see themselves as being an NGO with a mandate that's independent of U.S. policy. The new approach is that we need to go in and help countries to create wealth. That requires a certain amount of infrastructure. We are now... USAID is mainly an agency doing soft things, studies in providing technical assistance in ways that you cannot really gauge whether or not you're being successful. That's one of the big challenges of the U.S. as we move forward. How are you going to help countries to put in infrastructure? In Afghanistan and Iraq, those are... I guess even in Eastern Europe, we had to fund some of the infrastructure. We don't have an agency to do it. USAID is not capable of doing that the way this operates now. Almost everyone in USAID now is a soft assistance person. They don't understand... Especially our contracting people-

Q: Many of the people that we've spoken with are contractors of one kind or another. Some of them are very dedicated. Those are the ones we hear from.

A: For USAID to be able to participate in a PRT, they've got to be able to attract or assign persons who are qualified to go and do it. The idea is good. The idea is that AID will be asked to put a person in who really understands development. But we put a person in there who maybe has never worked in development. But they are a USAID person and they're expected to carry out a function that they're not qualified to carry out.

Q: Any comment on the USDA people that were there?

A: I had very little exposure to the Ag people. I met them socially.

Q: Now, as we're wrapping up... You know we're looking for comments, suggestions, constructive criticism. If there are things that you think could be changed – big picture or more specifically.

A: Let me tell you something that was done that I think is constructive. We entered an agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers where they would... I pushed that one because I thought that we would have more technical people in USAID and we had to have people who were actually U.S. government employees who could accept responsibility as U.S. government officials. We entered into an agreement... There was an agreement with the Corps of Engineers. I got it amended where the Corps of Engineers would actually second people to work right in USAID. Then that was further expanded to have the Corps of Engineers provide... They would have to be in USAID for the PRT programs. They assigned a lieutenant colonel to work with (the AID officer in Kabul) responsible for these PRTs. He is not himself a USAID person. He has worked in Kosovo or someplace, but he really doesn't have much development experience. He's got kind of emergency relief experience. We were able to get the Corps of Engineers to assign a deputy to work with him. He was a commissioned officer on military duty. It didn't cost AID anything. He would sit right in USAID. He was the USAID official's deputy. That was beginning to improve the interface with the military. I placed a lot of emphasis on these interface. You have to be able to have someone there who can speak the same language. The lieutenant colonel who was put there to work with the PRTs was able then to help tap the technical expertise within the Corps that the PRT commanders thought they might need if they needed some little help with a building they wanted to put up or this or that.

By the way, those schools and clinics that were put up by the PRTs... We were required to make sure that they met seismic standards so they wouldn't collapse under an earthquake. There were no technical standards established for building the schools by the military. They could put up anything they wanted.

Q: Just as long as it looked like a school.

A: It looked like a school. I'm not saying they were not good. I'm just saying there was no control. We thought that by having the U.S. Corps of Engineers available to them - funded by USAID, by the way - then they would have that expertise. That's the way I responded to their request for technical assistance. Set up a special unit... I mean, establish a structure within the PRT program that would give all the PRTs access to the technical expertise of the U.S. Corps of Engineers. Then allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to station engineers in different PRTs. But it's still a duplication because my office was working parallel. It didn't deal with the issue of how you coordinate things, but it did deal with the issue of providing technical expertise to the PRT commanders. My basic recommendation was and continues to be that the PRTs should be seen as satellite offices of an overall program and there should be a U.S. program and not a USAID program and a U.S. military program and a PRT program. There should be one program. When I was there, we never could really get a handle on... Schools and clinics were built by the PRTs. Then we had another office that went out there... In the beginning, they were the Office of Transition Initiatives [OTI]. They were doing a lot of stuff, too, that was

completely discoordinated. So, basically, you had three programs in the same geographic area. One was the PRT program. The other was the OTI program. Maybe there was a fourth one at one time. It was called OFDA.

Q: Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance.

A: They were all different. They had different funding streams, different management teams, and no coordination. PRTs, OTI, OFDA, and then USAID.

Q: But OFDA and OTI are part of USAID.

A: Oh, yes, they are, but they're very independent. Of course, there is a lot of jealousy there.

Q: I have a couple of technical things. You mentioned a contractor that was doing road work. I just want to get the spelling right.

A: It's Louis Berger. They're the major contractor. They were basically contracted to do things which AID would normally do. They were the ones who were contracted to go out and contract all the construction that AID normally would be doing. That's not necessarily bad, but because they have such a broad range of responsibility, they would pay attention here and forget about this one and we had a hell of a time bringing that all under... getting our arms around it and then explaining what the contractor's priorities should be. But I think they have a very dedicated team. I'm not critical of the contractor as such. I think it's the U.S. government had a weakness in the way it contracted a contractor. At one time, the contractor itself was signing memorandums of understanding on USAID letterhead.

Q: That's pretty...

A: That's really interesting that the contractor would sign memorandums of understanding with the government to do work that USAID was paying for. We were surprised.

Q: Any other general or specific comments before we close?

A: No. I think the effort to bring NATO and the Europeans and some of the others in to run some of the PRTs had to be dealt with as a separate model. I know that we were sending some USAID people to work in some of those PRTs and it doesn't seem to have worked out very well. Up in Feyzabad, when there was an incident there where some of the NGOs were attacked and their offices were burned, I'm told that the German PRT commander would not even let the NGO expats even find refuge in the PRT. That was extraordinary.

[End of interview]