

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Iraq/Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons Learned

INTERVIEW #190

Interviewed by: Charles Cecil
Interview date: July 27, 2011
Copyright 2011 USIP & ADST

INTERVIEW SYNOPSIS

Participant's Understanding of the PRT Mission

The interviewee, a State Department Foreign Service Officer, served at Regional Command North (RC North) in Afghanistan from December 2009 to June 2011. He was sent to prepare for the opening of the first U.S. Consulate in the north, at Mazar-e Sharif. He simultaneously served as Deputy Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) under an American SCR. The interviewee worked within a complex multinational hierarchy at German-led RC North, where eleven different NATO countries were represented. In addition to facilitating preparations for opening the consulate, he responded to many reporting taskings from U.S. Embassy Kabul and from the military command structure.

Relationship with Local Nationals

Observations: Interaction with host government leaders was quite limited, partly because the interviewee did not speak Dari and usually had no interpreter available. However, during the early part of his tour, before security began to erode, he was able to drive freely to attend dedications of various projects, where he was well-received. By participating in various ceremonies at Lincoln Learning Centers he was also able to meet and interact with younger-generation Afghans.

Insights: The governor of Balkh province was extremely effective in facilitating cooperation between U.S. and NATO units for marshalling resources for the benefit of his province. He also was supportive of efforts to promote rule of law issues in his province.

Lessons: Investing in pre-deployment language training for field team members would greatly facilitate the establishment of relationships with host country nationals.

Did the PRT Achieve its Mission? (Impact)

Observations: Using the construction profile as a guide, the consulate is 75% completed and is scheduled to open in December 2011, sixteen months behind the original target date. This is a temporary, interim facility. A permanent consulate is scheduled to be constructed and open by

2017.

Insights: More could have been achieved if higher priority had been given by the USG and international community to the needs of the northern provinces. However, because these were more secure and less kinetic regions, they tended to be neglected when it came to apportioning resources. As a result, an opportunity to build Balkh province into a showcase province for the north was missed. Security is now deteriorating, making it hard to recoup this lost opportunity.

Overall Strategy for Accomplishing the PRT Mission (Planning)

Observations: During the interviewee's tour, there were three or four separate “right-sizing” planning exercises, with accompanying site visits, conducted by various offices in the USG hierarchy in attempts to address the proper apportioning of resources for our mission in Afghanistan. The results of these exercises, which were time-consuming, were not apparent to the interviewee.

Insights: Lines of authority were not always clear. Although the Ambassador wanted all civilian USG employees to report through the SCR, the senior USAID and USDA reps in the embassy felt as if they had direct lines of authority to personnel from their agencies serving in RC North and nearby PRTs. This caused some confusion.

What Worked Well and What Did Not? (Operations)

Observations: Frequent VIP visitors to RC North required extensive planning, usually for security reasons, which diverted officers from other pursuits. Hiring procedures were painfully slow. It took over a year to hire one local national employee, a deficiency which impacted negatively on operations. For 12 to 15 months only three vehicles were available to support the movements of 17 people. No interpreter was assigned to Camp Marmal, the NATO base nearby, for civilian use. Most of this was because the north was not a very kinetic area and was therefore deemed a lower priority than the south and east of the country. Unfortunately, security in the north eroded throughout this time.

Insights: The interviewee provides examples of the rapidity with which the military—both NATO and U.S. units—responded with support when requested, versus the slowness and inability of the civilian agencies, especially the State Department, to respond. Solutions are not readily apparent. The embassy appears to be overwhelmed.

THE INTERVIEW

Q. For starters tell us what your assignment was and what period of time did it cover?

A. I first went to Mazar-e Sharif in northern Afghanistan in December of 2009. It was a rather unique assignment; it was a total of 18 months. I returned in June of 2011. Somewhat unique in that I was assigned—as you know Afghanistan was divided up into five quadrants- I was in

Regional Command North (RC North). It was one of the five, the only command that was led by the Germans rather than the United States. There was a section in Herat led by the Italians, but it was distinct in that in that particular point of view. I realize the focus of your interview is for PRTs; now perhaps I should explain I was at regional command north in Mazar-e Sharif. But, within a 5-mile distance was PRT Mazar and the idea was that I was sent there initially to help with the opening of the first U.S. consulate on the northern frontier, consulate Mazar-e Sharif, after which all of the American staff at Camp Marmal and all of the staff at PRT Mazar would be joined and these would be the first individuals to open the consulate in the north. It is somewhat unique in that we had the regional command and then we had actually five sub-sets, PRTs across RC North.

Q. As a Foreign Service Officer sent out to help arrange the opening of a consulate, what was your relationship to RC North exactly?

A. Let us just say it was extremely interesting. I fall back on the point that most of my colleagues in the other RCs would be taking their instruction from Embassy Kabul, but then also would be taking their instruction or would be embedded with the U.S. military as a commander or deputy commander. In this case we called ourselves the proto-consulate at RC North. Actually at the onset, there was one officer and one rule of law advisor. At the time of my departure in June we had 11 officers. What we did and I will be very frank, we had to find our way in that environment because it was somewhat unique. Again the commander was a German Brigadier General, the Deputy was U.S., the Chief of Staff was a Swede, the Deputy Chief of Staff was Norwegian, and I think we had 11 of the NATO countries represented. I was the Deputy SCR. The SCR (Senior Civilian Representative) always encouraged us to demonstrate our value added to RC North and to Camp Marmal.

Q. Who was that SCR, not the name but the nationality?

A. In fact it was the U.S. SCR. That too is an interesting point, in that RC North had a German SCR. We worked very closely with him. And then across RC North we had a presence in Baghlan Puli Khumri, which was Hungarian led. So, our USAID officers there, although they reported to us in a chain of command, on site in Puli Khumri was a Hungarian SCR. I traveled frequently throughout the country in Maymana, which was Norwegian led - there was a Norwegian SCR. It was a very fascinating dynamic. I would say on a quarterly basis each of the SCR and military staff would meet at Camp Marmal for strategy sessions. Another interesting element, midway through this process designated the NATO SCR and there too created a little bit of difficulty for Embassy Kabul as far as taskers and assignments.

Q. To clarify, the U.S. SCR is also a Foreign Service Officer?

A. Yes, that is correct.

Q. So you reported to him. Who does he report to?

A. We all made it clear we reported to Ambassador Eikenberry at the embassy. The structure of the embassy was the head of IPA (office of Interagency Provincial Affairs) was our immediate

supervisor. However, on a day to day basis we would sit in the General's command briefings and as taskers were given to the SCRs, we would work very closely with the German SCR at Camp Marmal and we would prepare joint responses to the NATO German commander. However, we would take the additional step of ensuring that that had been cleared through Embassy Kabul.

Q. Did you have previous experience in the area?

A. I actually served as Chief of Staff in Baghdad during the transition from Saddam Hussein's palace to the new NEC (new embassy compound) complex. That would have been October of 2008 through May of 2009 under Ambassador Crocker, coincidentally now returning to Kabul as Chief of Mission.

Q. Prior to arrival in Afghanistan what level of local language capability did you have?

A. To be honest, before I went to Baghdad I had five or six weeks of filler so I elected to take the fast class in Arabic (a short language class given at the Foreign Service Institute). Apart from that I had no other experience in the region prior to Baghdad and I had no language training in that region, unfortunately. I consider that quite a deficit, obviously.

Q. In Mazar-e Sharif is the language Dari?

A. That is correct. Actually of our 19 staff we only had two individuals who had completed the FSI training in Dari. Both had the 3/3 level (working proficiency on the Foreign Service Institute grading scale).

Q. How would you describe your mission that you were sent out there to achieve?

A. Again, it was unique. As you know, we, the administration, the department, decided to open two consulates in Afghanistan. Apart from the Embassy in Kabul there would be a consulate in Mazar-e Sharif and a consulate in Herat. The primary focus of the mission for me during this 18 months would be to assist the SCR, assist the embassy with opening this first diplomatic presence in RC North. Second of course would be the routine business of the department and the embassy, all of the reporting across a number of disciplines, of course, rule of law is extremely important for RC North if not nation-wide. We supervised, again, staff from Department of State – from USAID and USDA at six locations across RC North. That required frequent travel to their areas. Then of course, taskers received from Kabul, reporting on provincial elections, reporting on national elections, reporting on the banking system, the aid and development projects across RC North. I often refer to it as mental gymnastics.

Q. How many other Americans in your immediate area also reported to the Embassy in Kabul?

A. Of the 19 U.S. staff, I would consider them embassy staff assigned to RC North. We had five U.S. Department of State officers, three were Department of State Foreign Service officers, and two were the special category of 3161 contractors, they were brought in specifically for rule of law. You bring up a bit of a touchy point, which we experienced in Iraq and also in Afghanistan: the reporting chain for USAID officers and the USDA officers. Clearly through the chain of

command I think Ambassador Eikenberry made it clear to his five SCRs that they are/were the Senior Civilian Reps in their area, so all USG Chief of Mission personnel would report through the SCR. That said, the senior USDA official at Embassy Kabul and the senior USAID official in Kabul wanted to have a direct chain of command or line of authority to their personnel in the field. To be frank at times it caused some confusion.

Q. Can you illustrate some of the difficulties this gave rise to?

A. Let me try and provide some balance as well. If you look at the geographic region RC North was 1/3 the land mass of Afghanistan; we covered nine provinces in the north, and we had a physical presence at five of the provinces across the region. I will say that communication, first and foremost, was extremely complex. When I arrived in December of 2009, we were dealing with cell phones and occasionally when we would try to coordinate amongst our personnel it would be over a Skype communication system, which was extremely difficult. Only over time, I would say six to eight months, did Ambassador Eikenberry decide we needed to install stand alone units. Only at the end of my assignment there did we have access to IVG lines (dedicated phone lines), which improved communication throughout the north and with the embassy and with Washington. Communication was difficult. Often times what would happen, depending on the personalities and the particular region of the provinces, and depending on the USAID, State, or USDA individual employees relationship with his host, we had some individuals who were acting as independent operators. Oftentimes absence makes the heart grow fonder, but they would sort of go off on tangents based more on what either their personal interests were or maybe leading towards their personal strengths. If we needed economic reporting from a certain region, that was not the officers' strength. Again, to be fair, in some provinces we only had one officer assigned to a region. What we would try to do is back-fill with at least two to three officers per PRT, which helped the situation somewhat. There could be days, if not weeks at a stretch, when we did not hear or could not communicate with some of our officers in the field. That would pose some difficulties. Travel to and throughout the region was problematic as well. What the SCR and I tried to do was at least once a month visit each of the PRTs, to connect with our officers, to set the priorities as we were receiving them from Kabul. Whether that would be political reporting, economic reporting, or we had frequent visitors, Ambassadors or other representatives, to come throughout the region to check on a number of USAID or USDA projects. That to be honest could be somewhat overwhelming. Just planning for the security component and even with one or two officers assigned to a region pulling together, a one or two day visit was quite complex. I think where we are leading is, I personally felt that 19 officers to cover all of our RC North was quite slim. So we suffered from quite a difficult deficit in officers for the period of time I was there.

Q. Tell us more about the effect of the impact of these logistical issues on your ability to operate. I am thinking primarily of transportation, you already mentioned communication, and maybe there are other sub-categories under logistics. Tell us how that affected your work.

A. We hit the major nails. I will try to be as blunt as possible. I am the eternal optimist. I came out of a positive experience in Baghdad. I was pleased that we established our first embassy there and opened the first NEC. As we are covering lessons learned, I worked very closely with General Petraeus on CERP (Commanders Emergency Response Program funding) and

development projects. I was in the front office in Baghdad; we were very well funded, and very well staffed. When I decided to accept the assignment in Afghanistan, for a number of reasons I decided not to serve at our embassy in Kabul, on the advice of many in the region, who said I would have a much more enriching experience in one of the PRTs or serving at one of the regional commands. I was surprised over a period of time...again I have a strong background as a multi-functional officer, but my primary strength would be administrative management. I think (State Department) Under Secretary (for Management Patrick) Kennedy's idea would be to put someone in the region who could back-fill the SCR in a substantive role, but also have a management background to open the consulate. We received a great deal of attention and support; I was surprised that 20-30 percent of my time was spent trying to deal with the embassy to increase our administrative support and assets, personnel and staffing. I will be honest that I was told many times that the north was of less priority than RC East and RC South. As I mentioned when I first arrived, we had three personnel at Camp Marmal, we finally grew to 11 and I think at our height to 33 officers across the region. In that period and even until I left we were still requesting vehicles, armored supports, we were trying to hire additional staff, it took us well over a year to hire one FSN (local national employee). That had a gravely negative impact on our operations.

Q. Could you that explain that a bit?

A. Very difficult. Again it was part of the process. I thought I was a bit ahead of the game in that coming from Baghdad I thought I was part of the process, again we need to be very mindful of security and the vetting requirements, the necessity to polygraph each of the local FSN support. When I arrived... I have set up smaller embassies in Africa before. Foreign Service officers recognize that a great deal of the strength is to build that that cadre of very well qualified, talented, local support, who will be the institutional memory over time. And again, I must say that the policy guidance and directives from Kabul were placing much more emphasis and manpower, money, and resources on the south. At that point they were looking for great success stories in that region. The SCR and I tried to make the case to Embassy Kabul and the (State) Department and the NEA (Near Eastern Affairs) bureau as well, that RC North had been relatively less kinetic. During this same period 2009-2011 East and South were highly kinetic. I think we were being driven for a number of reasons to have success stories for development projects or to have provincial elections and national elections. We, the SCR and I, were trying to make the case that although the north was more stable, although the north was less kinetic, we had a very pro-active governor of Mazar-e Sharif, of Balkh province.

Often times we had the discussion that if we could make Balkh province the showcase, that this is something that could be infectious across the nine provinces across the north. We had the advantages of being on the border with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and we had the Asian Development Bank funding a railroad project from the border down into Mazar-e Sharif. What we needed was more man-power, knowledge, and technical expertise. As I mentioned we had a wonderful group of dedicated, bright, very competent officers, yet here we were for 12 to 15 months strapped with only three vehicles to support 17 people. That is nearly impossible. Again we had no interpreter or translator at Camp Marmal. Out of fairness at our five other locations we had at least one local staff and that person would be the jack of all trades, political assistant/interpreter/ translator. Frankly, it was just the process.

I realize that embassy Kabul was quite overwhelmed. We went through any number of right sizing exercises through the S reps (Secretary's representative) office, through the under secretary's office, through the (regional) bureau, any number of site visits. It was one of the most frustrating endeavors of my career and I have mentioned this to senior level people as well. I arrived in December of 2009, we had the first of these exercises in February of 2010, we had the second in May 2010, a third in September 2010, leading to what was going to be the final decision of staffing was going to be made in December of 2010. In that period of time I received no additional staff. Each of these exercises was called the "blue sky" exercises; tell us what you need to support your operations, each and every time. We set out a staffing pattern, a staffing tree, putting in the requisite numbers of rule of law officers, USAID, USDA, but the most critically, the FSN support we would need to make this operation work. A number of well-intentioned individuals, I know Ambassador Holbrooke, was personally invested in two of his staff in at least two of those exercises. I was most encouraged when it was, I think Secretary (of Defense) Gates, who finally offered to Secretary (of State) Clinton, that he could provide 500 slots for 500 individuals. I think Secretary Gates recognized how woefully understaffed we were in the department.

A long winded answer to your question, I think it was the mechanics of the process, I think they were just shifting priorities across the five RCs. What was frustration was that what I saw from Iraq was that money was not the issue. We had (Congressional appropriations) supplementals. In the period of time I served in Afghanistan the funding was sufficient. Somehow we just did not get the process right. I think many of us from the field would comment why does it take three times the number of individuals in Kabul to support us in the field. I think Ambassador Holbrooke toward the end saw this disparity and what he wanted to do – and I think Ambassador Eikenberry was very much on board – was to try to flush more off the support from Embassy Kabul out to the field operations. What happened during that period unfortunately was security across the north eroded, and then it became more difficult. I came from a self-drive region. I could leave Camp Marmal, I drove, we had no drivers, at the end we had one interpreter, and we drove ourselves downtown to a meeting. We'd have to borrow a military interpreter or translator to conduct business with the governor or to visit a project. In my mind's eye, that was unacceptable. We could have done better, we should have done better. I am not quite sure what the answer is.

Q. In the final analysis, does the answer come down to the fact you were a lower priority? Is that what concludes all the arguments?

A. To be frank, yes. Guaranteed. I think on numerous trips to the country we considered ourselves lucky - we were fortunate in RC North in that we were not inundated with Congressional Delegations and visits and what have you. Again the center of activity, frequent visits from congress, deputy national security advisor and others, came for their central meetings in Kabul, and of course Kandahar and would visit East and South. We had few if any. At the end of my tenure in May, we hosted Senator Kerry who came for a visit. Each of our five Ambassadors would visit routinely, at least one visit per month. That would be more of a senior leadership in Kabul trying to strengthen the rapport with each of the provincial governors, if not the district governors. I would say that was a huge success. But at the end of the day, I would say

yes. We made a calculated decision. I would have to admit I was biased working in that region. But I saw an opportunity lost. If we had had the man-power, the resources, the cars, the drivers, the interpreters, and the additional USAID and USDA staff, much earlier in our tenure, when the situation was less kinetic, we could travel freely, we could reach these regions. I feel we would have had a far greater impact. I am sure you have kept up with the press. It was very sad to hear that April 1st of this past year the horrific attack on the UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) compound in downtown Mazar and I still keep in touch. I think a week or so ago two or three bicycle-borne suicide bombing incidents... So clearly the region is destabilizing somewhat. I left far more optimistic than I was when I arrived in December of 2009.

Q. What is the U.S. military presence in the north?

A. When I arrived in Camp Marmal we were truly in the minority. We had 100-200 American troops in a total population of roughly 2,700. When I left, I joked with the German general, or the general joked with us, that we had taken over. By that period of time we had surpassed the number of German and NATO troops across RC North, we were upwards of 2,700 US soldiers and I think the NATO contingent was roughly 2,200 or 2,300.

Q. If your area is a low priority when it comes to seeking additional civilian officers, why is the U.S. military increasing its presence so dramatically?

A. I think you need to take a look at the overall numbers throughout Afghanistan. Even 4,500 NATO and U.S. soldiers scattered across the nine provinces in the north is but a fraction of the soldiers that have been deployed to the east and the south and some of the other regions. I think what we can always respect with the military is that they see a mission, they see a goal – Since you mentioned it I will use one example. We have one rule of law officer, who supported the entire RC North. This individual would need to travel to the nine provinces, each of the five PRTs. One officer. He was very fortunate to have been able to hire one FSN. They created an extraordinary team. The rule of law section in the Embassy in Kabul was, despite repeated requests – this individual, our rule of law officer, was extremely pro-active, in fact had a two year assignment there to do training, to establish courts, extraordinary operation. Again, we demarched Kabul repeatedly for additional resources and it was not to be. This individual approached the deputy commander, again the US brigadier general said, “Absolutely not an issue, we will find space, we will provide computer support.” He within a month was able to provide us five rule of law officers, JAG officers to come. I can’t tell you what that did to jump start his program across the north. By comparison again, look at the size of the department of State Foreign Service officers corps. I think we joke that that is basically either a battalion or what have you. We are so extremely small. What I found interesting was our NATO allies and our German Commander clearly saw the value of our knowledge and expertise that we can bring to this region. They too were frustrated that we could not provide more. I personally traveled to two of the regions, met with the Hungarian Commander in Puli Khumri who immediately picked up on our offer. I said, “Sir if I can provide you with additional USDA, USAID personnel, can you support them?” He opened offices, he reconfigured personnel, and we were able to place three officers there within a three or four month process. The military overnight would establish entire units; offices would be set up, equipped, staffed, contractor support, interpreters,

translators, and what have you within a matter of days. There is just something very, very different in the culture of the Defense Department and in the culture of the State Department. I am very proud to have served there, but in retrospect I think of how much more I could have done, how much more we could have done as the U.S. SCR office –how much more the embassy and the department could have done.

Q. Is it a result of delegating more authority to the lowest possible level in the field?

A. I think as far as administrative support it is just the reverse. We had such a strangle hold at the Embassy in Kabul in trying to kick loose additional resources and the clearance process that that would entail. Again I mention these four staffing exercises we went through. Again, this was done at the most senior level; Ambassador Eikenberry insisted that the SCR send representatives. We had representatives from Pat Kennedy's office, from Ambassador Holbrooke's office, all of the section chiefs. Again I think we did our due diligences, but something dropped through the cracks after each of those four processes as far as why we couldn't put good faith into action and have these personnel assigned to the field.

Q. Maybe my question wasn't clear, what I meant is that is sounded like the military had more authority at lower levels. We civilians did not delegate the necessary authority in resources.

A. You are absolutely correct. Yes. I was amazed. We worked very closely with something that was called the fusion center, which was the intelligence branch comprised of many agencies. They established new operations under the direct guidance of General McCrystal, and then General Petraeus, the Afghan local police, the village stabilization operation office. In fact that is the office that over the course of a weekend was up and established and running within three days, computer support, staffing, and what have you. They became our best allies. In fact, we drew heavily on the State Department and USAID to travel with them to the field, to loan us their translators and interpreters. In discussion with these individuals, they were Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels, Majors, contract personnel, and I'll say again money was certainly not the issue. But, once the intent and the outline go forth, and yes they were certified as contracting officers and whatever they needed was delivered within the span of a couple of days. It was both impressive and intimidating at the same time. Again, perhaps the most frustrating part of the assignment.

Q. Describe for us the impact of security issues on your ability to get your job done?

A. Again, over the 18 months I must say I was quite surprised. I think family, friends, and colleagues were concerned. Making the immediate transition from my immediate past post in Luxemburg to Afghanistan was of course quite a jolt. I had two or three days of in-processing in Kabul and then flew to Mazar-e Sharif and was quite surprised. I thought we'd be traveling in armored convoys. I was picked up at the airport by the SCR, picked up my bag, walked through the airport with little or no security to the parking lot. We had no driver; he drove me back to Camp Marmal. The next couple of days we drove downtown, very free, and very open. I must say from the first six to nine months, there were few if any security concerns. I branched out and traveled quite frequently to each of the PRTs, the nearby Swedish PRT, PRT Mazar, PRT Maymana, which was Norwegian, PRT Baghlan was Hungarian, PRT Kunduz was German, and

PRT Badakhshan was German. In each case I was able to meet with district governors, provincial governors, visit USAID projects, in three of the five provinces we had Lincoln Learning Centers, able to walk in, English language classes, presentations, little or no concern about security whatsoever. I was fortunate then when I had infrequent meetings in Kabul comparing experiences. Even when I was acting SCR, Ambassador Eikenberry would meet with us each month and I recall distinctly in my first meeting with my four colleagues and Ambassador Eikenberry, they sat rather transfixed for a couple of moments as I told them of the ability to travel so freely across the north and actually visit USAID projects. Of course, I would follow that up with my standard request for additional personnel and additional vehicles. It was only toward the end that the security situation became more grave. Of course the great indicator was the April 1st attack on UNAMA. If our intelligence is correct, on that day the crowd that formed at the blue mosque after Friday prayer was headed towards the U.S. consulate site, which was/is three blocks south of the blue mosque. It is an active construction zone, so there is... and we have a security guard force contract, we have guard towers that surround the facility, I think there had been enough of an alert, we had an excellent security office as well. We received extraordinary support from the governor and it was only because of a show of force that demonstrators decided to change their target, shift it to the west five or six blocks, and decided to descend on the UNAMA compound. The consequences were quite tragic with the death of seven individuals. That, I believe, was the turning point for the north and an indicator for the Americans that when we do open the consulate and there is a flag flying above that facility that we could be quite a significant target for Mazar-e Sharif. I did not have that belief when I first arrived in December 2009.

Q. You described the incident but what was the cause? Why did security deteriorate?

A. I think it was a culmination of factors. I am trying to recall what was happening in the U.S. at the time. It was in part the Koran burning in Florida and there was another incident. It picked up momentum over time and there was a second announcement by the Pastor in Florida on the Koran burning incident.

Q. About the same time was the debate over the construction of the Islamic Culture Center in New York City.

A. That could have been a factor too. Unfortunately, in the north--I was at the Airbase RC North-- I was at the Air base where many of the drone attacks of course would be orchestrated from that region. If I recall there were a series of weeks where there was a number of civilian deaths in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border region. I think that inflamed the passions as well. Again, there was just that mix.

Q. Did this deterioration in security conditions coincide with a more visible Taliban presence?

A. Yes and no. Why we feel in retrospect that, had we had a stronger military presence in the north, we could have kept the Taliban influence to the southern and eastern region. Over time because we were somewhat diverted... The standing joke amongst the Germans was that the Taliban were using the Kunduz/Baghlan corridor as their R&R (rest and relaxation) spot during the winter months to regroup before the spring offensive. And yes, in the time that I was there

three of the nine provincial governors were assassinated. They feel very, very strongly that it is due to the increase in Taliban influence in that region.

Q. Describe for us what kind of relationship you had with host country nationals.

A. Again, as Foreign Service officers we always consider that our strength--to be able to effectively employ host country nationals to establish our contacts, to set the foundation. Even more exciting to those of us is to open a consulate, at the end as we started to ramp up the hiring process in anticipation of it, we would of course say that this is something historic. That these individuals, bright, articulate very western leaning, marvelous individuals, who I would love to go back and visit 20 years from now. I consider it such a difficult part of the assignment because I was not a Dari speaker and again of our personnel we had two, perhaps three, fluent Dari speakers. Our interaction even with government leaders was quite limited. We had such a small, local staff, it was very difficult. Now the flipside was that it was more of a show of goodwill. Because we were able to travel so frequently, we did to the extent possible. I did a number of visits to agricultural projects, we used effectively the department of defense, General Petraeus had almost a blank check for our deputy commander in RC North to sign off on CERP projects. So there, we did have the day to day interaction with the nationals. The rule of law advisor I mentioned was very proactive, again, in traveling across the country; most of the individuals he dealt with were quite fluent in English. They trained either in the U.S. or Kabul University or other universities in Europe. I think we looked to these individuals as the next generation. I personally spent time in each of the PRT district capitals to volunteer at the Lincoln Learning Centers. I found that in every country at least to host programs for Presidents Day and for Martin Luther King Day and Human Rights Days, I thought those presentations were extremely effective to capture the 18-35 year-old age group that would be the next generation of leadership in Afghanistan. So perhaps more than my colleagues in the other regions, I would say to our credit that we did have more interaction with the host country nationals in RC North.

Q. What could have made you interaction more productive, if anything?

A. I think you know the structure of an assignment to Afghanistan: it's 365 calendar days, 60 of those are R&R (rest and relaxation) days, which is either three R&R to the states or two regional rest breaks. With such slim staffing, we rarely had secondary, tertiary type of support. If we had 5 to 10 individuals across the north, discontinuity would be less serious. But, there could have been gaps at a PRT for a week or two at a time because we were just not able to back-fill staff. That does leave a gap and actually a year does go quite quickly. I feel as though an 18-month assignment makes more sense and the Department is now gravitating toward that and I fully support it. When Ambassador Holbrooke's office proposed the new two-year proposal--three months here in Washington for your training at FSI and (Camp) Atterbury, 18 months in-country and then a back-fill at the tail-end of your tour, either to assist with the training here at Atterbury or FSI or perhaps to serve at the desk. I feel that that makes much more sense and I have noticed in the bidding cycle as well that it has become a bit more mature. Where greater emphasis is being placed on the language requirement and component, which was a great deficit. Where is that generation of Foreign Service officer that has the fluent Dari, Pashtu skills? I mentioned this to someone last evening, how extraordinary it is now that Ambassador Crocker will be going back to Kabul. I observed him in Baghdad and of course he is a legend in the Foreign Service for

near perfect Arabic language skills. There is just something to be said to have witnessed day to day his personal interaction with senior government leaders and officials. I think that is what we need to emphasize for the next generation of personnel serving in Afghanistan.

Q. Let us go back to where we started, your primary objective was to prepare the way to establish and open a consulate. To what extent did you achieve the mission?

A. Well, if the construction profile is to be believed, I think when I left we were at the 75th percentile. I think we have another 25 percent push to go through before we complete physical construction of the consulate and the six or seven week certification process, which had been set back for a number of reasons. I think technical issues, contractor issues, worker walk outs on the site, and again the increasing security situation. The flooding in northern Pakistan region, which was one of the main conduits of the container shipments of materials and supplies to Mazar-e Sharif. It was just a confluence of factors. It should have opened in August of 2010. I think as I left that deadline was to be September 2011. As I understand now it is scheduled for completion and certification by December of this year (2011). At which point I believe the Secretary will do a double hitter as I understand. She will fly to open both, consulate Herat and consulate Mazar at the same time. I wish my colleagues well.

Q. What will be the staffing pattern at that consulate?

A. We went through any number of staffing exercises as well. Initially the facility itself can accommodate - both as living and working environment - can accommodate up to 27 officers, I believe. As I was leaving they thought perhaps some of the temporary facilities on the consulate site would be retained and then we could increase staffing to 44 U.S. personnel total.

Q. The housing would be on same compound?

A. This would be on the compound itself. It is built as an interim facility. The governor has the grand scheme of establishing a diplomatic corridor between Mazar city and the airport, which is actually adjacent to Camp Marmal, to encourage all of the consulates and there are seven in the region. Of course, everyone is anxious to have the Americans come on board as the nexus of social activity and various programs we provide. I know a search is underway, and the governor's office has offered a ten-acre site in this diplomatic corridor for us to construct a permanent consulate, which would be one of the new hardened facilities by 2017.

Q. This one is not a hardened facility? I thought that's how we build these things.

A. This is a temporary facility and it is being constructed with a number of security construction waivers. It meets the minimum security requirements and in fact we had several visits by OBO (State Department Overseas Buildings Office) leadership and one of the reasons for the delay in the project is, it was decided to replace all of the 104 windows in the facility with the 15 minute FEBR (Force Ballistic Resistant) windows rather than a locally constructed compromise, which would have been five minute windows. By the time that these were ordered, manufactured, air freighted, and installed, the project was set back four to five months.

Q. In light of what you said earlier, where do we stand in getting the vehicles the consulate is going to need and the FSN staff?

A. Having the benefit of serving in Iraq, I recall we had 300-400 vehicles on site at Embassy Baghdad and as the draw down proceeded in Iraq many of the excess equipment and supplies had been transferred to Afghanistan. In my out brief with the Ambassador and with our Embassy Kabul officials, certain commitments were made, that yes, as these materials arrived – and coincident with the opening of the consulate that we would be able to increase the level of technical support with an increase in our RSO (Regional Security Office) presence. They have a separate funding stream, they will be able to provide – actually the consular general will have a security package now, I feel comfortable that we will be able to increase those resources. The OIG (Office of Inspector General) and other investigative arms did come to Mazar and I understand several of the recommendations as far as FSN (local national employee) hiring have now been addressed. There was a flurry of activity just prior to my departure in June and I feel comfortable now with the attention focused on the opening of the consulate that we will be able to hire administrative assistants, drivers, support staff, additional rule of law personnel, and that each of the agencies understand as well, USAID and USDA, will be hiring to support its personnel in the field. Again, I tend to be an optimist. As we are going through the interview now I am regaining some of my optimism. As we gear towards the consulate yet again I think we have an opportunity to put together a first class establishment.

Q. To what extent do you think Afghan objectives in the region coincide with USG objectives?

A. I feel very much that we are in lock step. Ambassador Eikenberry had, I would say, a very special relationship with the governor of Balkh province, basically the dean of the Governor's Core of the nine provincial governors; he clearly was the strongest personality. Again three others in my time there were assassinated. He's extremely pro-active. I think he gets the big picture, he has the benefit of having a consistent source of revenue from the customs operations just north of Mazar-e Sharif on the Uzbek border. I mentioned that the Asian Development Bank funded a 175 million dollar rail spur from the Uzbek border to Mazar-e Sharif, which now I understand will network across the country. So, he has things moving in the right direction. The governor was able to leverage quite well. He had an excellent rapport with General Petraeus, excellent rapport with our German NATO commander and the U.S. SCR office. I think he actually was quite pivotal in having us sort of join forces. We would have several meetings with him. Of course, as the Afghan representative, however, he would incorporate the Swedes, the Norwegians, Germans, and Americans. We would have extremely productive meetings. As we were switching from the military to the development side, he was quite adept at ensuring if he could have certain pots of money from the Americans, couldn't we maybe have other projects from the Swedes or Norwegians that would complement or would back-fill maybe gaps in our programs. I think he had the best of all worlds; again we had the security situation and again it more emphasis has been placed on that after the UNAMA situation. But, he was extremely supportive of our rule of law initiatives, which is quite interesting because that is a very delicate balance of accepting – having us, the West, accept Sharia and yet the governor could draw on the positive points on the Western framework and the Western rule of law situation. And, as we mentioned often to Ambassador Eikenberry, which of course he understood, the north is agricultural - agriculture is the north. And while Ambassador Holbrooke was still alive, he would

visit frequently, he was very actively engaged in the anti-narcotics efforts. Bit of a policy shift on behalf of the USG from lessening of the eradication programs to more attention with USDA and USAID to improving alternate means of livelihood; livestock and agricultural production and what have you. And the north had a very abundant energy supply coming from the Uzbek border as well. To get back to one of my initial comments, had we placed additional USG assets there earlier and shown a clear strength across all of those regions, I feel we would have had a multiplier effect. With the Germans increasing their development budgets, with the Swedes and Norwegians, I think we could have had more of an impact over time.

Q. Do you consider Bamyan Province to be in that area?

A. Bamyan was not included in Regional Command North, but it bordered us. Again, the Ambassador had a very good rapport with one of the very few female governors. She is absolutely extraordinary.

Q. Did you have a successor?

A. Actually, the econ counselor in Kabul decided to stay a second year. He will be my successor in Mazar. We unfortunately are going through a three-month gap, just due to the assignment cycle. He left his assignment in June, is back for home leave, and he will not arrive in Mazar until late August. His wife, who works in the public diplomacy section, will be our public diplomacy officer in Mazar-e Sharif. I know them both very well. They are excited. This will be a wonderful opportunity; he will be dual-hatted as I was, as the Deputy SCR and the Regional Poll Econ officer for all of RC North.

Q. What is your advice to him?

A. He is a Dari speaker, so that is one great advantage. The north has extraordinary opportunities from the Economic standpoint. Agriculture, again with the advent of the rail system to Mazar and across the region... I have already told him that he needs to travel frequently. I already told him how envious I was that he will be one of the first to raise the flag over Consulate Mazar. But I think he will have the additional resources that we lacked, he will have the local staff, he will have more of the security protection and packages, and he will have the transportation assets. I wish him the very best of luck.

Q. Did you see evidence of corruption during your time in Afghanistan?

A. I always think of General Petraeus in several comments. We need to accept the varying degrees of corruption because it is part of the fabric of Afghanistan. I think in the north that one of the reasons why the governor was so successful was that he controlled a great deal of the distribution network and perhaps some of the customs revenues in Balkh province. By degree and somewhat prejudiced, perhaps the North - less than some of the other regions - I think that in any number of reports, there seems to be more of a strangle hold in the eastern and southern regions. Where we are trying so diligently to make progress, various transportation networks controlled by various factions in the regions and also by various individuals associated with the President, made it very difficult to get business done in the region. I think because we were

really an outpost and somewhat of a less-developed part of the country, a more agrarian part of the country, they're still very tribal. We had more opportunities; I think there was less of that. Clearly yes, evidence of corruption did exist.

Q. What is your advice to other Americans on how to deal with that?

A. I would say again, this is the benefit of having a strong local staff. The two or three staff members we did employ in RC North or Camp Marmal would give us extraordinary advice and guidance on the key players in the regions--individuals that we could deal with. I think it's important now for Ambassador Crocker in his early days to make those initial contacts with those that we consider partners. Just driving here today, I was disappointed by the assassination of the Mayor of Kandahar. Again, an individual we worked very closely with, who got the Western ideas, understood the Western concepts, but still had to work within his tribal system and within the government of Afghanistan. It is a shame to see that over the past couple of weeks and months, those bright stars have been snuffed out in Afghanistan. But, I think what the Afghans do appreciate about the Americans, especially the Americans, is our willingness not to give up. I have been surprised since I have been home that the great debate that is going on in the U.S. is mostly budget driven, whether Iraq or Afghanistan. The upside again is the extraordinary individuals I have met through this experience. You have farmers from Iowa and South Dakota, coming in via the 3161 process, just felt as though they needed to contribute something. There they are in the field not speaking a lick of Dari, but just making that connection, farmer to farmer, horticulturist to horticulturist, and livestock vet to livestock vet. That is who we are, that is what we are, that is what we do. Albeit in a war zone, it is extraordinary. When you see those interactions and you see the people who get that, this is what they appreciate and value about the United States. It is a tough slog, and if we had 30 years, I could see that Afghanistan would be an extraordinary success.

Q. In light of your experience, what do you think the U.S. objective in Afghanistan should be?

A. I use this too often as well, but in informal discussions with colleagues and friends I am wondering if it can't be replicating Richard Nixon's Peace with Honor from the days of Vietnam. Clearly we are in a very critical or very difficult economic time in the United States and we cannot sustain 200-300 billion dollars of spending for the next five, ten, fifteen, thirty years in Afghanistan. What I think we need to do is--and it has started and I think Ambassador Crocker is just the person for this--is this transition needs to be accelerated. This captured a great deal of our time with the NATO SCR and the other SCRs across the country. We need to empower the Afghans with these programs and provide them with the tools of the trade. I think that the next year to 18 months, really will be the critical portion. We have done our work; we have been there for 10 years, going on 10 years. We have provided them with the foundation, they need to look at what we have done thus far and democracy is not one of those one-size-fits-all type of situations. I think we have given the right people the best direction possible. I think the next critical juncture is the election process, quite disputed at the national level and provincial level. And there are certain things we can do and certain things we can no longer do. But, it is time for the Afghans to step up to the plate. And where that takes them as far as their national elections and in their fight now against the Taliban, which the Washington Post article today said the back is basically broken with the demise of Osama Bin Laden, but it is a fascinating part of history and a pleasure to

have been there for this period of time. Obviously I am going to be an arm chair observer for the next couple of months to see how all of this unfolds.

Q. In conclusion, do you have any additional lessons you want to make sure are passed on to your successors?

A. I am very active and engaged in the leadership and management, but also the mentoring process in the department. As far as a Foreign Service Officer is concerned, it was both the experience in Baghdad and more so the experience in Mazar-e Sharif that was extraordinary. It provides a Foreign Service Officer with the opportunities to really use each and every one of the skill sets that we develop over a career. I think the reason I was so impressed is that we have 3161 officers coming in from civilians across the U.S. with expertise in agriculture. They are not Foreign Service Officers, yet they come and bring that value added that I referred to earlier in the interview. So I will continue. What we have done in the foundational stage will be quite different as we move forward in the developmental stage. And then as both Baghdad and Afghanistan mature to more of a formal embassy situation and less of a war zone, and as the consulates now are established in both Iraq and Afghanistan, I would encourage that officer to set up, this is the opportunity to really be on the cutting edge of diplomacy. Again, to have the opportunity to have the sort of mental gymnastics each and every day was different, and exciting, and exhilarating. It's extraordinary. I am hoping again that we will have a very successful transition to Afghans and that over time we can demonstrate and we can do in a more welcoming environment what we do so well in many other countries around the world. Thank you for this opportunity, and the best of luck to you.

Q. You are welcome.

#