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INTERVIEW #7

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Executive Summary

The interviewee was based in the Provincial Reconstruction Team for Salah Ad Din and Tikrit. He served as a political reporting officer for the PRT from October 2006 to September 2007. The PRT was on a military base called a Contingency Operating Base (COB), COB Spiker. (Spiker is big base with about 15,000-20,000 soldiers serving as the logistical hub for north and central Iraq.) The PRT had about 40-50 people: about 30 civil affairs reservists and another 10-15 civilians from U.S. government agencies (State, Agriculture, USAID, and Justice) and Department of Defense (DOD) contractor linguists. The team leader, a Senior Foreign Service Officer, was from the State Department (DOS) and the deputy was from the military. The military part of the PRT reported to the Iraq Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO) and the civilian group reported to the National Coordination Team (NCT) in the Embassy. These two units were replaced by the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) under the Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission. The PRT was organized into five groups focused on governance, economics (including agriculture), rule of law, infrastructure, and health—each with a leader. There were staffing problems in the PRT: short of expertise and not trained for economic development. There was a Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee (PDRC), which was very infrastructure-based and funded by the military.

Salah Ad Din, as part of the Sunni triangle, was a dangerous province with lots of small groups. Despite a high threat level, the teams were able to get out with military support. Being in the heart of Sunni Iraq, it had huge issues of reconciliation and debaathification with a lot of ex-military officers with no jobs. Economic issues revolved around oil and control of fuel distribution from the largest oil refinery in Bayji.

The interviewee was not aware of a PRT mission statement, if the PRT had one. There was not much direction from Baghdad so defining what was to be accomplished was a problem. The big issues were coordination, stove piping, sharing resources, as well as the lack of information on Baghdad agency initiatives in the province. These issues were not a problem for political reporting but became one for project initiatives. The situation improved over time.

The governance program focused on working towards a transparent, open, provincial council that was elected in a fair and equitable manner with a budget that was fair. On economics there was not much direction: let the Iraqis take the lead, build capacities in

areas such as business development and associations. Equitable fuel distribution was a priority. But there was no blueprint for success. The Rule of Law program was best directed from Baghdad as more initiatives were centered there; the PRT program was focused on the traveling judges program and the university law school.

Relationships within the PRT, despite different cultures, were good; there were good team leaders who were able to smooth things over. More conflict was evident between the PRT and the military outside of the PRT, i.e. the 82nd Airborne Division. There were points where the objectives of the PRT and the military diverged: for the military it is security; for the PRT it is building Iraqi capacities. The situation improved towards the end of the interviewee's tour: the National Coordination Plan set forth priorities: 1) security; 2) reconciliation; 3) economic development. Relationships with the Iraqis outside the PRT were good but a love-hate relationship.

On resources, the PRT had no money, no budget until the end of the interviewee's tour when it had something like a PRT Commander's Economic Recovery Program (CERP). Although at the outset, the PRT civilians could tap into the CERP. The Provincial Council had more money than they could spend in a transparent way; most communities were able to weigh in on a fair number of projects.

The PRT's biggest achievement was the establishment of a much more transparent governance process. Achievement in the economic development area is long term; there was some progress in private sector development, fairer fuel distribution, development budget processes. PRTs have a lot of merit in the right situation with top-class leadership and with symbiotic relationships with the military.

Recommendations: mold the team with the military units with the military and the PRT leaders of the same mind with a central coordination strategy; get real USAID officers in the PRT, better coordination at the national level, synchronize the civil affairs soldiers with PRT training.

Interview

Q: When were you in Iraq?

A: I was in Iraq from October 2006 until September 2007.

Q: Where were you located?

A: I was in Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Salah Ad Din and Tikrit.

Q: Could you describe the organization of the PRT?

A: It was about a 40-man unit; when I say, "man" I mean men and women of course, primarily military. There were probably about 30 staff mainly from the civil affairs unit mostly reservists, and then there were probably another 10 to 15 civilians that were in the PRT, ranging from the Department of State direct hires, Department of State 3161s or contractors and a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contractor. The United Statements Department of Agriculture (USDA) also had a couple contractors, and a couple of other miscellaneous people. The Department of Justice had somebody there; and we also had some translators, some linguists that were hired through a Department of Defense (DOD) firm. Altogether I would say between 40 and 50 folks.

Q: How was it structured, who was in charge?

A: We had a PRT team leader, who was a member of the Senior Foreign Service, and we had a deputy team leader, who was usually a military person, supposed to be the rank of 06, but I had an 06 there for the first half of my tour, then the man who replaced him was an 05. Underneath that the PRT was divided into groups. There was a group that focused on governance, and a group that focused on economics, a group that focused on rule of law, another group that focused on infrastructure. Each group had a group leader; and so each one had anywhere from three or four people.

My role: the DOS provides a couple of reporting officers in each PRT; their main job was political reporting. This is a little different from the function of the other people in the PRT, who are actually to work hands-on in projects. I went as a reporting officer; I focused actually more on economics than politics. I did that for all my entire tour; during the second half of my tour, I also started working more hands-on with the economic group. So I was complementing my reporting by starting to work on some projects.

Q: What was the line of authority to Baghdad and who did the group report to?

A: When I first got there, they had an organization within the embassy called the National Coordination Team (NCT). They were kind of a hybrid group, actually mostly military, and they had a separate chain of command; they went up through the Iraq Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO). And then during the second half of the my period there, they restructured and got rid of IRMO, they got rid of the NCT, and they created this new entity the Office for Provincial Affairs (OPA), which reported up to the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM). I am not exactly sure of all the details, but in any case they were more independent and more of a civilian presence and the team leader then would report through OPA; that was how it worked.

Q: What was the security situation there?

A: In Salah Ad Din it was mixed. It was a dangerous province; it was still in the Sunni triangle. It is a pretty diverse province; it is Sunni, but there are a lot of different groups, smaller groups, within the province. And even today, it is still fairly restive in some areas. There was a pretty high threat level, but it was still safe enough so we could get out and do our jobs; it was right there in the middle where we were able to get out. We

were also fortunate, though, that we were with the military as they tend to be a little more liberal about getting out and getting the job done than the State Department does. So, the fact that we were on a military base —there was no State Department security presence there, it was just pure military —we were able to get out and do a lot more than we would of otherwise.

Q: Were you an embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team (ePRT), embedded or were you just on the base with the military?

A: No, it was a regular PRT, but for all practical purposes we were embedded because we were on a military base. There was no State Department presence there.

Q: Is that what would be called a forward operating base (FOB)?

A: It was actually a Contingency Operating Base (COB).

Q: What are the characteristics of that?

A: It is the same as a FOB but it is bigger. The one that I was in is the main logistical hub for north and central Iraq. It is a big base. There are also a lot of KBR folks.

Q: Let us talk about the reporting role you had and get more specific about what you were reporting on on both political and economic matters.

A: It is a Sunni province so a lot of the issues that are troubling Iraq still, reconciliation and those political issues in Baghdad such as debaathification; those are huge issues in Salah Ad Din; especially since Salah Ad Din was really the home of most educated people in Iraq before 2003, stretching all the way back to the Turkish occupation of Iraq. There is a decent-sized educated class there that has been shut out of the decision-making and been shut out of a lot of the institutions in Iraq; it is the reverse from the way it was. So debaathification is a huge issue there. Being the heart of Sunni Iraq, you have a lot of ex-military officers there who now do not have jobs. You can imagine that there are a lot of political issues.

The economic issues revolved principally around oil, as most economic issues do in Iraq. Salah Ad Din does not have any oil in the province as far as drilling for it. But it does have the largest oil refinery in Bayji. Almost all of the petroleum products for all of northern Iraq, north of Baghdad, come from Bayji, including Anbar. The state of the refinery: who is controlling the refinery, where does the fuel go after it has been refined; who controls that process, manipulates the process, etc., where the profits go, those are all issues that I looked at when I was there.

Q: Was there a mission statement for the PRT?

A: I do not know; I am not sure. If there is one, I do not think I saw it. I am not saying there is not one, but in a war zone, mission statements do not necessarily mean that much.

Q: How did your group define what it was supposed to be accomplishing?

A: That was part of the problem. From what I can recollect, especially the first half of my tour, there was not a tremendous amount of direction from Baghdad. When I was focusing on reporting, that was fine; reporting officers do not need a lot of direction, they just go out and report. When we were working on initiatives and projects in the second half of my tour, it got a lot better in terms of coordination not only with Baghdad and through OPA, but also with the military. Part of it for me personally was that I knew more people. I had more contacts and as I spent more months there I was able to get to know the staff and synchronize with them to a greater extent. It certainly is an issue having direction. To some extent that is good because every province is different, so each PRT has to be autonomous to a certain extent and be able to come up with solutions that are Iraqi solutions that are attainable, but also are tailored to a particular province. But certainly coordination, sharing of resources, and stove piping were big issues.

You could have certain projects and initiatives that were being coordinated by an agency of the U.S. government about which we had no idea in our province. We might have been able to contribute to activities had we known. It just would have been beneficial to know about them and in terms of resources we could have weighed in and probably helped send them in good directions to a certain extent. That started to get better the second half of my tour there.

Q: Let us go back to this question of mission. How did you decide what your objective was, what did the group think they were supposed to accomplish?

A: It really depended on which group you were working in and which sphere was your area of expertise. Governance is fairly obvious, if you are working towards transparent, open governance, that situation you can measure on the ground to a certain extent. All of us have a pretty clear understanding of what a transparent provincial council should look like, at least in a general sense. That was a little easier. There were still disputes between PRTs in terms of how much direction should be given the governor and things like that.

Economics was a lot trickier because there is no blueprint for successful economic development, especially in a war zone. It was a struggle. During the first half of my tour, there was not a lot of direction and there was not a tremendous amount of information sharing between the PRTs. What we tried to do is look at PRTs that seemed to be having some success and model ourselves after them. Then the other thing is: we let the Iraqis take the lead as much as we could and build capacity in the economics sphere instead of trying to take over the process ourselves and building capacity in economics and small business development and assist business associations. Help the provincial government start making positive contributions in the economics realm: that was what we started and we had a lot more success in that area.

In the rule of law, rule of law is probably best directed from Baghdad in terms of there are a lot of more initiatives that are more centralized there.

Q: You had several sets of relationships, those within the PRT, those with Iraqis, those with Baghdad. Could you characterize them? Start with the relationships within the PRT, how would you characterize those?

A: Relationships with people in the PRT?

Q: Yes, and with the military and the civilians and the Iraqis within the PRT?

A: There are different cultures. It also depends a lot upon personalities of the people who are there. It is a stressful situation but, by and large, we had good people and we were able to cooperate and work together pretty well. To some extent it is a little strange because you have reservists thrown in, many of whom are having adjustment problems, especially the enlisted guys many of whom are on their second and third tours in Iraq; they were infantry soldiers that have been stuffed into a civil affairs unit. That was a bit of an issue. By and large the work, communication and cooperation were pretty good.

Q: There were no major issues among the different groups?

A: Not any more than you would expect from any other organization when different agencies come together and work together. They are different cultures. By and large, we had good team leaders who are good leaders and were able to smooth over some of those problems. There is probably more conflict between the military and the PRT outside the PRT than there was inside the PRT. I mean to say between our military colleagues that were outside the PRT that we worked with and the staffs that were actually in the PRT. We were basically attached to the 82nd Airborne Division. By and large, again, our relationship was good. But the military had their set of objectives; the PRT has a set of objectives; by and large they go together fine, but there are points where they diverge. And that is probably a natural of any PRT.

Q: Could you give an example of where they diverge?

A: The military's number one priority is always going to be security, no matter what. The PRT is not really concerned with security. This is another example of how it did get better my second half of tour; because they had the National Coordination Plan, I cannot remember the exact name of it. It finally delineated the priorities for the U.S. government policy in Iraq, and it puts as number one security, number two reconciliation, and number three economic development. That is when I was there, now they may have changed some of it. Otherwise, the PRT is there to build capacity, to help the Iraqis; to help them develop governance institutions, economic institutions, and rule of law institutions. The military is there to do all that, yes, but their fundamental priority is security. Sometimes the folks you are trying to build capacity with might be the ones that are counterproductive on security, for example. So then, something has to give, because you cannot always pursue all of the priorities at the same time. Separate organizations,

like the PRT and the military, worked together very well. Generally speaking, the military people want the same things that the people in the PRT want. But, sometimes the means might be slightly different.

Q: How was the relationship with the Iraqis outside of the PRT in the community?

A: It was good, generally speaking. They knew that they needed us. There was a kind of a love-hate relationship. In some ways they viewed Americans with disdain, but at the same time most knew they had to work with us. So they kind of grin and bear it.

Q: These are the people in the provincial government?

A: Yes, the Iraqis in power. Now, the Iraqis that were not in power were more willing to work with us because they knew they needed us, they needed access to resources.

Q: Were you able to get out frequently on missions?

A: Pretty frequently. There were some areas I could not go into, some things I could not do. Generally speaking though, I could get out.

Q: And would you always have a military escort going out?

A: Yes, always.

Q: Did having a military escort impede your ability to connect with the Iraqis?

A: It was a bit of a drawback, yes. We always tried to have meetings in separate rooms, closed doors. At many of the meetings, there would be someone in the military there with us that might be working on the same issues, or it might be somebody in the PRT. Although we tried to focus on the issues that PRT was trying to focus on, when you have a soldier with an M16 standing behind your head, it is pretty hard to forget about it. That is a fact of life here.

Q: What kind of resources did you have to work with?

A: One of the problems is that the PRT did not have any money when I was there, until the very end.

Q: It did not have a budget?

A: It did not have any budget. You can only get so far with your good looks and your charm. We had an outstanding team leader, deputy team leader, as well as outstanding team members, especially in governance. Of course the Iraqis associate us with having influence, even if we had no money. So they always give some deference. We had very good leadership, so we were able to make a big impact on the Iraqis especially in

governance, even though they did not have any money. But, money talks and the military was spending money right and left, plus they have the boots on the ground.

Q: What were they spending the money on?

A: They had all sorts of different projects. Now it is probably a little tighter than it used to be; a company commander just could go out and spend thousands of dollars wherever he wanted to.

Q: But the PRT did not have any money to work with?

A: Not until the end. Now they have something like a PRT CERP, I do not remember the name of it. Now there is a recognition that the PRTs need some resources.

Q: They did not have any of the State Department's Quick Reaction Funds?

A: Quick reaction funds, yes they got that just as I was leaving. But they were still trying to work out how exactly it would be utilized.

Q: Did the military provide you with some of the CERP money to work with?

A: They did. And, again, we had a good relationship with our colleagues. The commander of the brigade that we worked with was willing to help; he recognized the PRT was a valuable tool. Yes, were able to tap into that. But, still it is not your money. It is always going to be subjugated back to that priority that we discussed earlier.

Q: From what you said I gather you were not informed about other programs that were going on in the province? Is that right?

A: Yes. When I was there, my town was kind of a backwater; in terms of a lot of the bigger agencies, like USAID they were in Baghdad, they had invested in my town back in 2003 and 2004 but not for a long time when I had arrived there. Still there were a lot of programs that might have been going on, then or in the past, that we had no idea about.

Q: On the governance program, what were you trying to do and how did you go about it?

A: In the governance program, we were trying to get a provincial council that was elected in a fair, equitable manner that represented the people of the town as well as the different communities of the province, in a transparent manner. They would also need to vote on a budget that was fair.

Q: How did you go about achieving that?

A: Some of this happened before I got there, when the PRT was first stood up. First of all, the provincial council was elected in 2005. In the election, some communities voted

and some did not so you had representatives, like, for example, one town, with 5% to 10% of the population, had 40% of the representatives; so it was out of kilter in terms of representation.

What they tried to do first was to instill a more professional demeanor, because they were used to getting together; there were maybe 3 or 4 or 5 power players. The governor, the deputy governor, and a couple of Iraqis from the Provincial Council would always sit together and make all the decisions. A lot of this also went back to their tribal roots. What they tried to do was to get them to meet as a group and just talk about simple things like Robert's Rules of Order, how do you run a meeting, how do you vote on things, how are measures introduced, things like that. And they tried to help get them started using the press and the television to broadcast to people to show the people what they were doing.

But then the biggest thing was getting contact between the Provincial Council and the community, especially in terms of the budget, and then getting that published so that everyone could see it. That was probably the biggest maneuver. They were pretty successful with that. In March of 2007, they passed their first real transparent budget that was pretty equitable in terms of projects. All the Provincial Council does is vote on projects, capital projects. They do not make laws, so until they change the law they have no power to tax, to zone, to do all sorts of thing like that, all they do is vote on projects. So that is kind of what they focused on.

Q: Did the Provincial Council have any money?

A: Yes, they had quite a bit of money actually. They had more money than they could spend, in a transparent way. Because the way the Iraqi budget works is half their national budget is just distributed to the provinces. Kind of a bulk payment and then the provinces are responsible to dole out the money. One of the issues when I was there concerned the Ministry of Finance trying to make rules in a fair way. Yes, they had more money than they could spend. That all comes from the central government.

Q: Was there any technical assistance work on administration?

A: We were working with some of their accountants to teach them how to use an Excel Spreadsheet to keep track of their expenditures, before they had never done that. We were trying to work with them to be able to first of all create a budget, pass it and then execute it in a fair way, and finally reconcile it.

Q: And the development of a budget was it fairly open and was it by popular participation to some extent?

A: It was fairly open from the standpoint that most communities were able to weigh in, even if it meant we brought down representatives from the Provincial Council to the community to discuss the issues. Most communities were able to weigh in on a fair

number of projects. Now if you equate that to the people on the street understanding what is going on and having a say, it would not go that far.

Q: But they did have the neighborhood councils?

A: They had some neighborhood councils, but those were more security related. They did have city councils also. The main job for the Governance Team was to connect the City Councils with the Provincial Council. So, for the City Councils, the idea was that they would come up with a list of projects that they supported and they would pass it on through their Director Generals (DGs) to the Provincial Council. So it was, not a perfect system. For a city like Samarra, one of the biggest cities in Iraq , they did not vote in 2005 and they had only one representative on the Provincial Council, out of 40. So it is a matter of getting some community support for the projects that are going to be recognized by the people and then get the Provincial Council to stick them in the budget.

Q: Did you work with the DGs on their management tasks?

A: We did work with the DGs to a varying extent; I think some of the DGs were more effective than others. So, it was a question of where do you spend your limited time and resources. But, yes, some of the DGs were extremely helpful and some of them were very tied in to what was going on in the province, which was good.

Q: You had an economic program, what was included in that?

A: I have an old PowerPoint, and I can just read off it to make sure I catch everything. To give you an idea, there was really capacity building, similar to the governance except it was an economic spin.

Q: What kind of capacities were you working on?

A: Essentially, we were trying to get the Provincial Government to be able to have a mechanism to address their economic challenges, to reach out to the private sector and to bond with the private sector. Because of the way they were thinking, they were used to the government doing everything. And so, while we were definitely also trying to work directly with the private sector, to work exclusively with the private sector in one town would not work. You had to include the power players in the province who had the connection to the money, who had the muscle to get things done.

What we were trying to do was to help the Provincial Government form task forces, which would be a mix of private and public sector people. They then would meet; depending on what the issue was, they could come up with some solutions that then would be recommended to the either the Provincial Council to get money for their proposals or even to the U.S. government. If we were going to help somebody, why not help a broad-based group of people who are on the ground actually getting the job done?

So, really what we were focusing on was economic capacity building, which was through the task forces: we had an agricultural task force, we had a banking finance task force and we had a couple of others. Some were also in the process of being formed when I left.

Q: What kind of accomplishments in the economic field did you think you had?

A: Not many. I was actually only working the economic group three or four months, and when I was leaving they were still getting started. But in agriculture, though, they came up with three or four really good projects that were sustainable, that were broad-based, community based and were going to be funded. They came up with projects that we never could have come up with.

Q: What kind of projects were they?

A: Things such as greenhouse projects and agricultural hubs, where you would have a hub where farmers could bring their produce and it could be transported to the marketplaces. That is one of the main issues there, because of the security situation individual farmers could not transport their products to Baghdad or Mosul or some other places they used to; so they would have to sell it locally at much lower prices, and it is hard for them to stay alive. So those were a couple of things that were ongoing when I left.

The other areas that we were focusing on in the economic team, fuel distribution, worked through the Provincial Government and with the Bayji oil refinery to make it a more equitable and transparent process with fuel. And then we also targeted economic development. Those were specific projects.

Q: But on the fuel distribution, what were you trying to do? What specific things?

A: Right now, there is really strong control of the fuel distribution process. Most of the fuel is sold on the black market. So what that means is that you have interference with supply and demand and the people suffer in the street; they are the ones that have to pay the much higher prices.

The Ministry of Oil came out and said point blank the provinces are in charge of their own fuel distribution, we are not getting involved any more. It comes down to the Provincial Council and the Governor stepping up and leading by creating an equitable distribution system. That resulted in their assigning certain days the fuel would go to certain cities in an equitable way, so that people knew when it was coming. This was done with security provided to make sure it was not routed off elsewhere and sold somewhere else. That is what it takes, in conjunction with the refinery, and obviously with the refinery officials.

Q: Were there a number of infrastructure projects?

A: There were a decent number of infrastructure projects. The military did a lot more on infrastructure than the PRT did.

Q: The PRT, what kind of projects were they doing?

A: They were mainly assisting the Director Generals and the Provincial Council with designing some of their own projects, projects that were voted on by the Provincial Council. Capacity building, fuel distribution, economic development, was our focus for economic development.

Q: What about the rule of law area, did you deal with that?

A: Yes, the PRT rule of law group was focused on trying to get a system in place so that judges could come down from a different area of Iraq and visit the town where I was resident, decide cases and then go back to wherever they were from. That worked. They were working with the entire judicial system in Baghdad trying to get a system of rotating judges.

Q: Are there other program areas you the PRT was working on?

A: Rule of Law, they also worked with the university, strengthening the law school.

Q: Beyond the Rule of Law, other sectors, were there other program areas that the PRT was working on? You mentioned agriculture.

A: Agriculture was part of economic development. There were four main ones. They had a medical team as well which worked with the hospitals and the clinics, trying to ascertain what their problems were, especially vis-a-vis the national government in Baghdad, and how best to establish a functioning national network. So, we had five teams: governance, economic development, rule of law, infrastructure and health.

Q: Was there a Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee (PRDC) there?

A: There was indeed. We did not deal too much with them; they are actually a little more of a relic of the past. They primarily dealt with projects that were funded by the military. I never went to a PRDC meeting while I was there. Again, they were very infrastructure-based and they worked quite a bit (I would not say they were a relic of the past) with development of a budget for the Provincial Council.

Q: Is it a subcommittee of the Provincial Council?

A: Not exactly, but they are tied in. They are a separate committee, but someday they will be a subcommittee. This was an organization that was founded in 2004 or 2005 by the military who just wanted somebody on the ground, an Iraqi group, that they could deal with to develop project. And now it is more of an official government entity that has a

more official but autonomous role as well. We did work with them, especially the infrastructure team worked with them.

Q: Did you have anybody working as a cultural advisor; they were called a bilingual bicultural advisor (BBA)?

A: We had linguists there; some of them were BBAs. We had three or four BBAs and two linguists.

Q: Were they helpful to the process?

A: They were a mixed bag. There were one or two that were good and the rest of them probably did not add too much. The linguists were good; I thought the two linguists we had were quite good. We were lucky. The linguists we had were better than the military linguists, in general.

Q: Is there any other program area that we have not touched on?

A: We already talked about the reporting for which we did have a State Department FSO (Foreign Service Officer). I was also working with the PD (public diplomacy) office and there was actually an officer there. He was a 3161, but he worked with the media and we helped him out; he was trying to build the capacity of the media. It was good having someone there doing that.

Q: What did he do?

A: He mainly worked with the television station, tried to get some radio programs going and also worked especially with government officials whom he tried to mentor and coach about how to use the media in the provincial council.

Q: Did the general population have access to the television programs?

A: Yes, definitely. They have a lot of access to television. If you go in an Iraqi village, everybody has a satellite dish.

One program at the grass roots level tried to reach out to some of the Iraqis, especially the kids. We were trying to invite them onto the military base to show them a different side of the U.S. military and Americans in general. I had done it once and they were trying to do it more often. We'd bring them on the base and they would play soccer, listen to the U.S. Army jazz band perform, get some good lunch in the chow hall. It was a small thing but that is the kind of thing PRTs can do that may not win the war, quote unquote, but it makes a difference over time.

Q: Are you familiar with the work of Research Triangle International (RTI)?

A: I worked with RTI; they had a few people on the PRT.

Q: What was your assessment of that work?

A: They, by and large, were a little disappointing. I really did not see too much value added.

Q: What were they trying to do?

A: They were governance specialists, by and large. Some of them were pretty good; some had been in Iraq for a while and were Arabic speakers and obviously had some advantages there that we did not. By and large, though, they were pretty mediocre. I do not know if they were extremely committed to our mission, they had a lot of health problems, a lot of them were moved around a lot, so I do not know if they were that effective where they were.

Q: Any other program area we have not touched on or any issues, any relationships, we have not touched on?

A: I think we have touched on about everything.

Q: What would you think were the major achievements of the PRT during your time there?

A: The biggest achievement, of course, is the establishment of a much more transparent governance process, especially in terms of developing the provincial budget. In terms of government institutions in general, whether it is the Provincial Council, whether it is the fuel distribution system, whether it is the Director Generals and their relationships with the federal government—these all probably were positively impacted and probably received the greatest benefits. Definitely.

Q: And the economic area?

A: The economic area, in my opinion, just takes longer. You can encourage a Provincial Council to meet and pass a budget in a day, but you cannot have economic development, especially in a war zone, I do not think over night. For some of the things, it depends on how you define economics. The private sector development is going to take years, no matter who is there.

Q: Was there some progress in private sector work?

A: There was some progress, but to get to the point where there is true economic progress in some portions of the private sector is going to take a while. Because of the security situation, it is going to be a challenge. But, in terms of improving the lives of the people on a daily basis, we started to make an effect. Even just with fuel distribution there was an improvement of basic services when I was there. In that narrow sense, if you define that as economics in a war zone, then yes, there is a lot of hope. I think, even now, it has

improved quite a bit from when I left. But in terms of overall, true economic development, it is going to take some time.

Q: One of the topics we are interested in is, of course, how you assess the concept of a PRT and its role in addressing the kind of issues it was concerned with.

A: The PRTs have a lot of merit. There is a big upside, definitely. But it has to be the right situation. You have to have really top-class leadership at the top for it to work well. You really have to have that. And you have to have a symbiotic relationship with the military, for it to work in that situation. For that effect, the more cohesive they can make the PRT, the better. Even if it means getting the members together in the States before they go. We should get rid of those RTIs and all those other companies that they throw bodies in; that is not going to cut it. They need full-time people who they can mold into a PRT in the U.S., if possible, kind of a rotation as the military does it. The more that they can do that… (I know it is not probably possible entirely), but the more they can do that, the more effective they'll be.

Q: Was there a problem in staffing the PRT?

A: Yes, we were definitely always short of people. And we were definitely short of expertise, especially during the first half of the period I was there.

Q: And the professional quality of the people there?

A: Many of the military reserves, (and I say this with all respect to my colleagues that were there, I fit in that same category,) are not trained for economic development, for example. We were really lucky in the PRT because the head of our governance team was a mayor; so he had a lot of practical experience with developing budgets and negotiating via committee. How many people in the street know about that kind of stuff? Very few. The head of our economics team, when I was there, was a manager at a large retailer. That kind of expertise is hard to find. It would be better to have fewer PRTs and have more folks like that, like our governance team leader, than to have tons of them.

Q: And you had other team leaders, too?

A: We had two team leaders, both of whom were very good because they were good leaders. It was more instinctive leadership ability than actual preparation. But again, if you were able to build a cohesive PRT team before you got to Iraq, like the military does, then you are an immediate contributor to what they are trying to do now. That would be a big bonus, just because you would just be able to know each other's strengths and weaknesses, and you would be able to tailor your approach to a much greater extent.

Q: Did you have any training before you went out?

A: I had a week of DSAC, security training, but no actual training; I had reporting experience, so in my actual job I had some training but in terms of specifically for Iraq, no, or what a PRT does, no. There was none.

Q: How about the relationships with the higher commands outside the PRT in terms of Baghdad organization

A: For reporting on the economic situation, I dealt mainly with Washington and with my colleagues.

Q: Did you get feedback on your reports?

A: Yes, the feedback was pretty good. They thought it was pretty good. But again, they were tailored for what people in Foggy Bottom were looking for and it was probably a little outside the overall PRT umbrella in terms of what that was accomplishing.

Q: What kind of substance were you focusing on?

A: It was again what we discussed earlier, a lot of the corruption issues, and also oil refinery and energy issues. But, in terms of working with Baghdad, anything that was other than PRT project related had to go through Baghdad. There were a lot of issues with Baghdad with the bureaucracies and the different tribes, and there were a lot of egos in Baghdad. There is just a lot of bureaucracy in Baghdad that could maybe be streamlined. But having said that, I will also say that most of the people I met in Baghdad, despite the bureaucracy, were trying their very best to get the job done. Once I was able to establish relationships with the right people, then we were much more effective. OPA, the Office of Provincial Affairs, their new director was very good and was trying to remove as much of the bureaucracy as possible. So I think OPA may be a good thing, in general, if it is led correctly.

Q: But would you recommend that the PRTs continue? What suggestions would you have for improvement?

A: First of all, you need to meld the team effectively, both inside and out, with the military units they are going to be assigned with. Most provinces are still going to be working with the military for a while. To the largest extent possible, the unit commander on the ground and the PRT team leader should be of the same mind and be coordinated, within a central coordination strategy that features policy as the biggest thing. And after that it is then just a matter of getting the best people, getting people that will thrive in that kind of environment; and that is not easy, but, that is what you have to do.

I think it is better to have the contractors, like RTI, and again I am not sure what their value added was. I think USAID, in general, is very Baghdad centric and they tended not to have a lot of people in the field. So if you can get real USAID officers in PRTs and less of them in Baghdad that would be a help too. And if RTI was not there, I do not

know if that would be a huge loss or not. From my experience, it would not be. But again, that is only in one PRT.

Q: What other suggestions would you have?

A: Better overall coordination at the national level. This is outside the State Department's realm but within the mandate of the Civil Affairs people, who again I admire. Some of them lost their lives over there; they are true heroes and I respect them very much. That said, there are a lot of soldiers in civil affairs that are just stuck there in the military. I do not know if they had anywhere else to put them. So maybe the military civil affairs training could be synched with the PRT training. Right now it is completely separate, and I have no idea what they are teaching in civil affairs.

Q: Did you ever see a civil affairs team in your PRT?

A: Yes, they are all civil affairs soldiers that make up the PRT. The ones I was with either (a) did not want to be there or (b) were trained in an old fashioned method of handing out a lot of money, handing out soccer balls, things like that. There were a lot of programs that were really not too relevant when I was there. A lot of those soldiers defined civil affairs as a hand-out kind of activity. So to whatever extent that could be synchronized with more general PRT training would be a good thing.

Q: Do you have any other overall recommendations?

A: That is about it.