

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

**DENISE DAUPHINAIS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Interviewed by: Larry Lesser
Initial interview date: July 27, 2004
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Denise Dauphinais has a BA from Drake University and did public affairs graduate work at the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota. She was a Peace Corps Volunteer in early 1980s and has ever since worked in international development, especially in the areas of post-conflict elections and humanitarian assistance. She has worked for USAID, the UN, and the Carter Center. In Iraq, Ms. Dauphinais worked for USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) on a personal services contract. Her early work was focused on reconstruction while her later work focused on governance. Her period of service in Iraq ran from April through September of 2003, plus four weeks in Kuwait prior to entering Iraq.

Ms. Dauphinais received several weeks of Department of Defense (DoD) Iraq-specific training prior to her deployment. This training concentrated on skills, such as security training, as well as Iraqi history and culture. She found the training to be high-caliber, although she notes that cross-cultural training was not as well attended as it should have been.

Upon her arrival in Iraq in April 2003, as part of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), she focused on food aid, local infrastructure rehabilitation, and local governance. The initial ORHA planning was for a humanitarian disaster, which didn't occur. A large part of Ms. Dauphinais job was to keep Oil for Food's public distribution networks open. Country-wide, more than 60% of Iraqis were dependent on Oil for Food. It was essential to keep the distribution program going in what was basically a non-cash economy.

Starting in June, Ms. Dauphinais worked in Baghdad directly for USAID/OTI, on a range of governance issues. OTI worked on human rights and transitional justice issues, including the support of local non-profits involved with these issues.

One major OTI initiative was to provide "ministries in a box," (i.e. several truckloads of furniture and equipment to replace destroyed and looted government offices) in order to allow government to resume. This program was essential in part because the coalition failed to prevent massive looting after Saddam's government fell. Ms. Dauphinais sees the failure to protect the physical assets needed to run a government as perhaps the coalition's biggest planning failure. The task of reconstructing government was made more difficult because the initial occupation forces (including ORHA) were largely ignorant of how Iraqi

government had been organized. She partially blames this fault on political infighting between US government agencies which resulted in inadequate information sharing.

There were other operational problems at the ministries because the top echelons of ministries were gone and lower level bureaucrats were accustomed to following orders, not taking initiative. CPA senior advisers were not co-located with ministries and in some cases were not knowledgeable or able to communicate effectively to subordinates. Further complicating the situation were multiple layers of organizations (ministries, CPA, USAID, and contractors) involved in the same sector, as in education. Attempts at politicization of ministries -- by differing Iraqi groups -- was another challenge.

The perceived threat level was not high in the early days of occupation, and there was plenty of interaction with Iraqis. That soon changed, and later CPA senior advisers had little contact and difficult communications with Iraqi ministries for which they were responsible.

The CPA did not clearly articulate goals or timetables for reconstructing most Iraqi ministries or government institutions. There were three exceptions to this rule, where goals were set for (1) maintaining public distribution networks; (2) rebuilding the police; and (3) dealing with the Iraqi army. Overall, little guidance or evaluation was provided. This was in part due to the fluidity of the situation early on, when Ms. Dauphinais was posted in Iraq.

CPA succeeded in doing things that were easily quantifiable -- e.g. "ministry in a box," rehab of schools, and providing kits for school children. It was less successful in establishing connections to build or rebuild institutions. Part of the reason for this failure is that personnel brought in from other US government agencies lacked post-conflict or development experience.

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Q: This is an interview with Denise Dauphinais being done on behalf of the US Institute of Peace and the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training as part of the Iraq Experience Project. I am Larry Lesser. Thanks very much for agreeing to participate in the project. Could we start with some basic information about you?

DAUPHINAIS: My name is Denise K. Dauphinais. I currently work for United States Agency for International Development, Office of Transition Initiatives, USAID/OTI. In February of 2003, I was assigned by USAID/OTI to work at the Pentagon with the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), particularly in the Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator's Office. I started over at the Pentagon the day after President's Day in 2003, around the 18th of February. In fact, I was hired by USAID/OTI in January of 2003 specifically to work on general Iraq programming. Then I was seconded over to the Pentagon, to ORHA to work with Ambassador George Ward, who was the coordinator of humanitarian assistance.

In our unit, we had another individual from USAID, but it was mostly people from the Department of State. I remained there working on the planning until ORHA deployed out to Kuwait City. We arrived on the 17th of March. We set up temporary offices at the Hilton resort, where we continued to work throughout the war. The Marines took Baghdad on the 9th of April.

I had been working closely with a US Army reserve unit, the 352nd Civil Affairs Command Battalion from Riverdale, Maryland, on the structure and organization of what would come to be known as the Iraq Assistance Center. This was really a humanitarian operations center in Baghdad. So, I was asked to accompany them to Baghdad.

We departed on April 13th, Easter morning. We had prayers from the chaplain and then we drove off into Iraq, which was quite an experience. We went up in a convoy of 36 HUMVEEs, a couple of LNTVs, which are these big army vehicles, a bunch of other trucks, and one Chevrolet Suburban, which was my vehicle. A few soldiers, who had taken ill but didn't want to be separated from their units, hitched in with me because my vehicle was air conditioned. We arrived in Baghdad on the 14th. I believe I was probably one of the first civilian civilians there. They did make me wear a uniform, however.

Q: What Iraq-specific training did you have, and what was your specific assignment? Where did you fit in your organization?

DAUPHINAIS: I completed two different training tracks. Within USAID, before the NSCD (Presidential National Security Determination) that created the ORHA, I had already been hired by USAID/OTI to work on Iraq programming. The interagency process was well developed, and they knew that they were going to be doing programming in Iraq. I agreed to do that, so I was placed on USAID's Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART). I was technically a DART member from January of 2003 to the beginning of August 2003, even when I was with ORHA.

The DART team had its own specific training. There was communications; how to operate various kinds of radios and satellite equipment. There was some landmine awareness training which was quite good. We had a day-long "How to behave if you're taken hostage" training with the FBI -- also very interesting. The bottom line was, "Don't get taken as a hostage."

All of their examples had to do with situations that they themselves had worked on and they all involved civilian civilians -- I mean, non-USG personnel. So at one point I raised my hand and said, "So what are the prospects of coming back home in one piece and alive if you're a government employee?" They didn't answer. A guy came up to me later and he said, "Don't get taken hostage."

Q: That training was here in Washington?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes. It was set up by USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, which organizes the DART teams. We also did training on general things of being on a DART team. They have something called a "Response Management Team" (RMT) that is your connection back to Washington, and we did training on how that all works. We also did some first aid training.

Lastly, on the USAID side, OTI and the Center for International Strategic Studies (CSIS) put on a series of seminars [on Iraq]. There was a seminar that dealt with the oil sector. Another seminar dealt with the security sector and related topics: the prospects for internally displaced people, humanitarian action, all of those things.

Q: Because you anticipated the likelihood of great humanitarian disaster.

DAUPHINAIS: That was the assumption that everybody was going on at the time... We were talking at one point about post-war governance and restructuring governance.

I remember lots of odd bits of information that were given, but the one thing that stood out was a little snippet from a presentation by Anthony Cordesman who works for CSIS; a real bright guy. Somebody raised this idea of winning the hearts and minds and Cordesman took exception to that phraseology. He said, "You know, I think we need to think about this a bit differently. Maybe what we need to be thinking about is how -- the best that we can hope for -- is that in five or 10 years the Iraqis will forgive us." That's one thing that stayed with me.

Q: That suggests questions about how you were prepared for going into this particular different culture.

DAUPHINAIS: Yes. The seminars at CSIS were really meant to start you thinking... All the other ones were technical things; general use. These [CSIS] ones were really talking about the political, socioeconomic, and cultural background. They discussed some scenarios looking at what might happen, particularly in relation to post-conflict humanitarian assistance and the possibility of large population displacements – where people might go. They also looked at ethnic tensions and [other] stuff that could spur additional conflict.

Q: Ethnic tensions among the Iraqis?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, between Kurds and Sunnis, Kurds and the Turkmen, and Shia and Sunnis. [We also got a look at] geographical orientation: where those [conflicts] might occur and what was the historical background. The series was really useful. I don't think it was as well attended as it should have been. But it was really quite useful to start people thinking about the issues we might be confronted with.

So there were two main strains of training... USAID/DART was general and technical. OTI and CSIS was Iraq specific. There was also a third strain of security training provided by DOD. This had to do with chemical, biological, and radiological warfare; what a MOP suit is, how to put it on, and practicing putting it on. I think there were about 170 who went through it. I'm not quite sure. It was actually a fun group. People had a good spirit about them in this big adventure.

Q: How long were you together before you traveled over?

DAUPHINAIS: Oh, about five or six weeks at the Pentagon.

Q: And everybody essentially was going through the same series?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, the whole group was required to go through the training together. In fact, before I was seconded over, I had to agree that I would deploy with ORHA to the region for a minimum of 90 days. But I was also trying to do all of this DART team training, trying to do the OTI specific stuff for my work.

We also did our physical exams through DoD, which was quite a great show on their part. TRICARE Medical Center was there at the Pentagon to get everybody through with their physicals at the last moment: all of their shots and everything. They did a terrific job.

Then we went to Fort Myer and started getting all the lingo from the army guys for the "duffle-shuffle" to pick up all of our equipment. They issued huge amounts of equipment – two sets of army uniforms per person, sleeping bags, helmets, and body armor: everything you could possibly think of. Then we went off to Fort Meade and did our WMD recognition training; how to recognize what chemical, biological, or radiological weapons might have been used, what to do about it, and how to put the suits on correctly. We did quite a bit of that. I think there was a little additional land mine awareness training.

Then our group did weapons familiarization with the 9 millimeter berretta. I remember thinking and telling people, "You know what? If it comes down to Denise Dauphinais and a 9 mil Berretta, God help us all."

Q: You mentioned earlier that there were some training sessions that you wish had been better attended. Do you want to say anything more about that?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, the [seminar] series with CSIS on the socioeconomic, political, and geopolitical background of Iraq, and the scenarios. Yes, I think that should have been better attended and better publicized by the Office of Transition Initiatives, at least within USAID. That actually got started in January before there was an ORHA or anything like that. But within USAID, certainly it was there as a training tool. And the people from OTI who knew they were going to Iraq attended, but other people from USAID - and I think people at State should have been advised about it as well - could have attended. I think they would have found it real useful.

Q: Do you have anything more specific or concrete about how it would have been more useful or how people felt, you could see that they had missed it, had it made a difference?

DAUPHINAIS: Well, you know, I don't know if there were concrete things that you could say, "Okay, they could have used that background." However, I would say that this all happened... It was one of those "Slow down, slow down, hurry up" kind of things where everybody could see what was happening and you knew it was going to happen and staffs were being put together very hurriedly, admittedly of people almost none of whom had ever been to Iraq, of course, or even worked on Iraq, or even worked in the Middle East.

Q: This assumes also they didn't have language.

DAUPHINAIS: Well, and they did not have language. I didn't have language. So, this provided an opportunity to kind of sit back and think about things and learn about Iraq and what was going on there from people with a tremendous amount of expertise, which wasn't available in... Everything else was very much... The training was very skills based, which was absolutely necessary, but it was skills based and stuff.

I'd also like to mention one of the trainings that I didn't get to go to, which I always wished I did, but I did some training with some Special Forces guys when we were in Iraq, which is this thing about, there is an anti-terrorism driving school that most of my colleagues from USAID anyway went to. It's given down in Richmond. Everybody there who took that training said it was the best training - and they actually used it all the time.

Q: In Iraq?

DAUPHINAIS: In Iraq, because the DART team... And I would have to say, we from ORHA when we were in Kuwait and then in Iraq initially, no one had drivers. We drove ourselves. And so this training had a lot to do with if you're being followed and surveilled and how to get around that and if you're going to be ambushed or hijacked, how to get around that, and also handling at

high speed armored vehicles, which ORHA didn't have any, but when I moved back over to USAID, the DART team had armored vehicles. So, that was quite good.

You mentioned language training. Once we got to Kuwait, we actually were provided with an opportunity to do introductory Arabic, which I did and very much enjoyed. I actually wish that that had been available a bit earlier. It was (A) a nice mental break from everything else going around; and (B) it was very useful. I still can't say a lot in Arabic, but I could say "Hello" and I could say "Thank you." I could ask for certain things, and I could understand a bit about what was going on in a conversation. That was very useful. It made a positive difference.

Q: Did you find that some people adjusted better than others to the different cultural? Did you find that some people didn't need to or didn't want to have any interactions with Iraqis? Is that the kind of thing that was related to the training?

DAUPHINAIS: I don't know that any of those sorts of issues would have been dealt with in that training. It was more like understanding the history, the background, the culture, and what [Iraqi] people had been going through. As far as navigating the culture, those of us who got to Iraq early after the conflict were very lucky...

We headed out of Camp Arif John -- which is the large US army reserve camp that's forward in Kuwait -- and crossed the berm into Iraq. "The Berm" is a giant sand hill built to keep the Iraqis on the other side. Once you crossed that and got into Iraq, we didn't see people for a long time. Then as we started driving up towards Az Zubayr and places like that, we started to see Iraqis. We could see that even here in the south, people were a bit disoriented. [There was] kind of a strange look on people's faces. We drove up in a convoy and stayed overnight at Tulil Air Force Base. It was freezing out. It had been hotter than Hades when we were in Kuwait City, but at night out in the open desert it was really cold.

We left Tulil and started to move up towards Baghdad the next day. There were more and more people alongside the road and you could just see a look [on their faces]... I've been in a number of conflict zones -- right after and sometimes during pitched battles -- and people get first a very sort of frantic and terrified look on their face. Afterwards there's this look of sort of befuddlement because you're not quite sure what's going on anymore. You don't quite know whether you should still be terrified at what's happening. People seem to be quite befuddled.

So early on, the Iraqis seemed quite confused to me. They had believed the information minister, but then there we were. They didn't quite know what to make of it. Everything was disrupted. The violence that's going on now -- in the summer of 2004 -- didn't exist at that point. The [insurgency] networks and units weren't organized. So we had a luxury of being able to interact with Iraqis, and not just the Iraqis that came to work in the Green Zone.

Q: There wasn't a Green Zone yet.

DAUPHINAIS: No, there wasn't really a Green Zone yet. Where we were going to locate ORHA headquarters was decided before we left Kuwait. There had been discussion about all of that and so they were trying to set up the Green Zone. There were housing compounds alongside

the palace and various ministries. The reserve army unit I was with was assigned to live in one of these housing compounds inside what is now the Green Zone.

There was [also] the Republican Palace, which is where first General Garner and then Ambassador Bremer had their offices. [It was referred to as] the CPA Palace, or -- as I like to call it—"the Big Head Shed", because it had these giant busts of Saddam Hussein in Republican Guard formal regalia and a pith helmet. They were fairly hideous. They have since taken them down, so "the Big Head Shed" is headless, but still full of big heads!

What people don't know is that a big part of the Green Zone was [originally] a residential compound for senior Iraqis. The families who lived there [before] were families of officers in the Special Republican Guard, the palace guard. Some of their belongings -- furnishings, pictures, mementos and such -- were still there.

Q: Were any of them still there?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, some of them were there as well. They obviously moved rather rapidly when they saw the US Army moving into those houses, but people came back later to pick things up. I don't recall any big confrontations or anything over this, but I do recall one incident where a couple of men were arrested. They had come with their families to get a few things out of some of the houses that were as of yet unoccupied. This was probably late April or early May 2003. The men were identified from some photographs as being people that the coalition wanted to talk to. I don't know if they were in the deck of playing cards, but there were some instances like that. You would see pictures of these guys in the houses -- and clearly they must have been the people who lived there -- all shaking hands with Saddam Hussein. That was a little bit strange.

Q: From an operational standpoint, was there any procedure for dealing with people who might have claims? Were people evicted who had not left on their own?

DAUPHINAIS: I don't know if anyone was evicted. However, early on the military was finding stashes of money: large quantities of US bills. For example, they found a metal box under a bridge, not far from CPA Palace, within what is now the Green Zone. They found about eight million dollars in cash as well as pictures and things like that which might be useful to the G2 in the unit. [But back to eviction,] I think that most of the folks who had lived there ran away rather quickly because they were of interest to the coalition.

The point of all this is that early on we -- me and my colleagues from the 352nd Civil Affairs Command Unit -- could go out and have lunch at a restaurant in town. You could go to a store. You were still heavily armed and there were lookouts and stuff, but it wasn't the same issue of the constant threat as there is now. So we were able to do that and interact with Iraqis, and not just Iraqis who worked for the coalition or who were coming into the Iraqi Assistance Center to ask for help.

The Iraqi Assistance Center ended up becoming an interface between [Iraqi] civilians and the military... [International NGOs were there doing work, but it was] really a service center for Iraqis who needed help, who needed something from the coalition. Usually what they needed was just information, "An M1 Abrams tank made a turn a little too sharp and ran over the corner of

my Toyota. Now my car is destroyed because the tank smacked into my car. What am I supposed to do? My car was parked." That kind of thing happened quite a lot, actually.

Q: In a case like that, you weren't the ones who were going to adjudicate the claim? Instead, you were giving them information on how to pursue it?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, and the Iraqi staff at the assistance center would help them fill out the forms, make sure that they knew where to go to get the information and the access they needed, who could help them, those sorts of things. There were also briefings on the situation for the international NGOs and contractors there that were doing work. Things like providing maps and a whole other series of interfaces.

Q: What exactly was your Iraq assignment? What were the job and the location? Did you get any specific training for that?

DAUPHINAIS: I did a variety of things. Before we deployed to Baghdad, when I was in Washington and Kuwait, I worked on the food aid issue. This involved the public [food] distribution system and the Oil for Food Program. In that capacity, I liaised with USAID's Office of Food for Peace and the World Food Program (WFP). I did a lot of liaison work with UN agencies. When we got to Kuwait City, I worked on planning for the Humanitarian Operations Center in Baghdad, which became the Iraqi Assistance Center. Ambassador Ward wanted the Iraqi Assistance Center to have less of a military optic to it. He wanted it to work itself into being a real Iraqi assistance center, with the goal of enabling Iraqis as well as internationals to do their work.

Q: And where did you fit into the organizational structure for the Iraqi Assistance Center?

DAUPHINAIS: The 352nd Civil Affairs Command Battalion organized and ran the Iraqi Assistance Center, which was located in the ground floor of the Baghdad convention center inside the Green Zone, across the street from the Al-Rashid Hotel. They got up and running in late April/early May. I worked on planning and liaised between the assistance center and the humanitarian assistance coordinator's office at ORHA.

I also did a lot of work in Baghdad attending meetings with the Civil Military Operations Center [CMOC] for Baghdad, which was located in another building in the Green Zone and was run by the 354th Civil Affairs Unit. CMOC had the information about what was happening in Baghdad, so I did a lot of liaison and coordination activities with them, the international NGOs, and the UN agencies.

Now at this point there were no internationals from the UN present on the ground in Baghdad. I don't believe they came until the beginning of June in 2003. The UN agencies' staffs were pretty remarkable, in particular the staff of the WFP. They were able to keep themselves up and running and hold it together with no international staff. They were really quite dedicated. That turned out to be essential in the long run.

I think prior to the conflict something like 60% of the Iraqi population was completely dependent on the public distribution system, the Oil for Food Program. Probably everyone in Iraq was [dependent] in some way, shape, or form. They were [all] registered; they were [all] receiving something. Countrywide, 60% of the population was completely dependent on that program!

Q: Would dependence vary significantly from one region of the country to another?

DAUPHINAIS: It would have because there was some discrimination against ethnic groups like the Shia. Of course in the north it was the Kurds, and although they were included under the public distribution system they were across the green line. That was the parallel in the north which Saddam's forces were not allowed to cross: Kurdish territory. They had the same program, but up there it was administered directly by the World Food Program. In the center and the south of Iraq, it was actually administered by the government of Iraq, through the ministry of trade, and it was monitored by the WFP. So in those parts [World Food] had fewer employees.

One of the strange things I noticed was that totalitarian regimes tend to keep really good records. They certainly did with the public distribution system. They had meticulous records, computerized lists and databases, of who was where. One of the key aspects in keeping things together in Iraq was keeping that public distribution system up and running, because people had no other way of getting food. The government of Iraq under Saddam Hussein had turned a large part of the regular, everyday economy into a barter economy. People were given things in kind but they weren't given any money. And after we took over, it was clear we couldn't just pull the rug out from under people and say "There's nothing." They would starve.

Their social safety net was this public distribution, which gave not only food but also medicines, soap, and a lot of basic commodities. So, it was essential to keep that going. If you didn't, before people starved to death, there would have been huge, massive social dislocations, protests, and riots. That never happened, at least not in relation to the public distribution system and the Oil for Food Program.

I should note that public distribution system distributed commodities purchased through Oil for Food, and Oil for Food was highly controversial and full of corruption.

Q: But the country had an enormous dependence on that program even though it was administered in different ways in different parts of the country, and it was equally important in Baghdad city itself as it was out in the hinterland?

DAUPHINAIS: Absolutely, across the country. And I would venture to say that after the conflict started and after the conflict subsided, the public distribution system became even more important because of the looting and the destruction that went on. There were no jobs. There was nothing. The situation that existed before [the occupation] -- as far as employment and stuff - didn't exist [again] for a long period of time. So you had probably a higher degree of dependence on [public distribution] after the conflict than you may have had directly before. That would be a really interesting statistic. [I would like] to see if anybody was looking at that and measuring the degree of dependence on public distribution which continues today.

Q: You mentioned no jobs. In connection with your own program at the Iraqi Assistance Center, to what degree were you hiring Iraqis?

DAUPHINAIS: Well, the army unit that ran that... Again, I was doing the liaison between ORHA and the Iraqi Assistance Center. But the center had hired a number of Iraqis to work with them. I would venture to say they ended up with 25 or 30 at the end of the day. The army used the "Titan" contract to hire interpreters and that sort of help.

They were classified as interpreters, but of course that did them a great disservice because they did vastly more than that. These were Iraqis who were from all different walks of life who spoke English and turned out to be quite an amazing bunch. You'd get a medical doctor over here and a lorry driver over there, who could speak English because he drove back and forth through various countries. [There were] two or three young people who learned their English completely from the VOA... It was a very diverse group of Iraqis who took on all sorts of tasks, and I think really helped guide the folks at the Iraqi Assistance Center to say, "Okay, we can do more to help by being an interface between the local population, the CPA, and the military." That was really what was needed.

For example, if your brother was taken prisoner by coalition forces, where would you go [to find him]? You could go to the police station, but the police didn't have him. The coalition took him: it had nothing to do with the police. So, where would you go? The assistance center started a program and they had forms... You could come in and you could fill out an application to get information about such-and-such a person, and then you would come back [later to find out where they had been taken]. That was a procedure that they helped to develop.

Q: Did you have other categories of Iraqi employees?

DAUPHINAIS: No, I think everybody pretty much was listed [as interpreters] because they were using the Titan contract.

Q: But they were doing all kinds of things.

DAUPHINAIS: Yes. The title was "interpreter," but they did everything.

I ended up living in a two story cement brick house in a [Green Zone] housing complex. I think there were 20 of us in this house. Everybody shared rooms. Of course, the weekend was Friday and Saturday. On Thursday nights, the army folks would have some kind of a little get-together. Lo and behold, most of the Iraqi staff would come every Thursday night and bring food and bring music and then folks from the other houses would come because this was sort of the end of the week, the Friday night.

It was the best thing going on, and the Iraqi staff was really terrific. But they would go to their houses, get changed, come back into the Green Zone to go to this thing. It was very nice. So we actually got a chance to have some quite closer interaction – I think probably at a level that's not really possible [anymore]... It started to become more difficult after the UN was bombed and the

security situation really started to go down. But up until that time, we had quite a bit of interaction with the Iraqis.

Q: How long was your period of service in Iraq? Was it always in more or less the same job situation?

DAUPHINAIS: I stayed working directly with ORHA until late May of 2003, when I headed to the States for a family emergency. When I went back out to Iraq, it had been decided that I should go work with my original employer, which was USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, also based in the Green Zone in Baghdad. One of the reasons behind the decision was that by June the Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator's Office had increasingly less and less specific activities to take care of.

What had been anticipated before we left Washington was that the conflict -- and the potential for use of weapons of mass destruction -- meant that there was the potential for huge population displacement. The result of that would likely have been a major humanitarian catastrophe. None of that happened. And so by June, obviously, it wasn't going to happen. So, most of the people who had been working with the Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator's Office were transitioning into other roles. In fact, Ambassador Ward himself I think left around June/July of 2003 simply because there wasn't enough to keep us going.

Q: He did a very good job, however.

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, I think he did.

[END SIDE]

DAUPHINAIS: At the beginning of June I came back to Baghdad and resumed my earlier, pre-invasion position as "Senior Field Advisor" with USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives. This was a different job from my earlier liaison work with the assistance center and the NGOs.

OTI works only in countries undergoing some sort of a transition. For the most part, that means from conflict to something else: post-conflict or [continuing] conflict. I think Iraq fits well within that [realm], of still being in conflict and going to "something else", which we hope would be stability, a form of democratic governance, and all of those kind of good things. But that doesn't always happen. And our program in Iraq was a large one. We had people in Arbil, Hillah, and Basra as well as in Baghdad.

We worked through a mechanism of small grants in kind to local government, local NGOs, [and other] local community entities (with an emphasis on those entities). We identified their needs. If those needs seemed to fit within our programming parameters -- and in Iraq our programming parameters were deliberately very, very broad-- then we would ask our implementer in the field to implement the grant.

Our implementer was a contractor called Development Alternatives, Inc. [Once a grant was approved,] they provided the goods and services in kind so that the [local] groups never actually

got money but [still] got what they needed. They needed things like computers, or they needed their building fixed, or they wanted to hold a conference or a workshop. It could be almost anything.

[For this small grants program] we had a rather robust budget of \$70 million, which is extraordinary for our office. Usually our country programs are \$10-15 million over two years. We had \$70 million right off the top for this! One of the activities that got implemented immediately was something that got coined as “ministry in a box.” This turned out to be really popular. Obviously all of the ministries had gotten looted in Baghdad. Everything got looted; anything that was government.

Quite frankly, for those of us in Kuwait working with ORHA, [the looting] was a huge discussion. If you’ve ever worked in a conflict zone before, in a war zone, the first thing that comes to your mind is that it’s really messy. Everything gets thrown out onto the streets. There is debris everywhere. Everything that’s not nailed down, and even things that are nailed down, get “un-nailed”: they disappear.

So, those of us working in ORHA on the post-conflict planning were quite dismayed when the specter of looting was raised – and I’m going to be fairly blunt here – to have folks in the military say, “Well, we’re not the police.” Excuse me? This was a major problem, a major flaw, and a major error. And I said this at the time. [Even] the military who were working with us in ORHA were on the same wavelength [as the rest of us], “The US military is going to go in there, break things up, and then they’re going to stand by and let everything be looted?” If they didn’t have enough people to prevent the looting, then that’s a grave error on our part.

Q: And it had very serious consequences?

DAUPHINAIS: It’s having serious consequences to this day. So much in Iraq would be different if [the looting] had not been permitted to happen. Like I said, even the military people in ORHA were pretty perplexed about that decision to simply allow the looting to happen. Big mistake. Big, big, big mistake.

So, our “ministry in a box” program, a good chunk of it, was designed to help identify ministries (especially specific work units and essential offices within ministries) and quickly get them desks, chairs, computers, printers and [other such] office equipment. That’s what was in the metaphorical box. Usually, it’s six large trucks that pull up and put 100 people back to work with the basic things [they need]. [It was a] quick fix designed to get people [at the ministries] up and running.

Q: And most of the things in the box would be applicable to any ministry?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, for the most part. It was a standard design so that it could be distributed very, very quickly. It was simply a question of identifying [who was in need]. Usually ministries or offices were identified to us by someone who was working within CPA, [like] the senior advisor.

Each ministry had a coalition person who was their senior advisor. These advisors had several staff working for them, mostly army reservists who were civil affairs officers. They would come to us and say, ["We need this."]

Take the Baghdad post office for instance. Part of what was happening is putting Iraq back into the world. The other part is you've got to put the world back into Iraq. One way you do that is have a postal system. There was an army civil affairs guy who, in his life in the States, was a letter carrier. So, of course, he was real interested in the post office, which is an important government institution. He came to us and said he'd already been in contact with the postmaster general and a few others. They had identified a building [to use]. So, we did some work with them and provided a custom ministry in a box.

This required some work on the building, which we provided through our vendor, our implementer partner, DAI. They got a local construction company to fix up the building. These weren't massive structural things, just cleaning up and painting it. We fixed up doors, windows, and light fixtures: the basic things. Then we put supplies, equipment, and furniture in there. The post office had actually been running on its own volition and with its own workers before the ministry in a box. After we did the ministry in a box they were able to perform even better.

I think [our program] touched virtually every government office with the exception of the security services (the police and the military). As [OTI is] a USAID program, we're not allowed to do things for military and police, and so we didn't.

[OTI's] other big programming areas were human rights and transitional justice. [We worked on] the whole thing with mass graves -- the identification of mass graves. [We also worked with all of the] local civil society groups that sprung up.

For instance, in one area not far from the Green Zone, there was a group of former prisoners. These people had all been political prisoners of Saddam. These folks took over a Muhabbarat house after everybody fled as part of the conflict (The Muhabbarat were the Iraqi secret police that did most of the torturing. They had houses like this one all around the city). The former prisoners had protected the house's contents from being looted. Most of its contents -- like I said, totalitarian regimes keep really good records -- were records. [There were things like] before and after pictures of people that the Muhabbarat had killed. There were data cards on everybody that they'd questioned. They had rooms and rooms of files that were just scattered everywhere.

This local group [volunteered themselves to] go through the records. But what they needed was a little bit of support. They needed to install some security for the houses that they had taken over, some metal doors and some bars on the windows. They needed computers, office equipment, and filing cabinets.

Then they systematically went through and computerized the files. This way, if a family knew that their loved one had been taken prisoner and been taken to this house, then they might come looking at that house. This group would be there and they would ask, "What is your loved one's name?" The family would usually come with the person's ID card, and they would show it. And that was just one example. There are groups like this all around the country.

Q: Where did those groups come from?

DAUPHINAIS: Sometimes these groups had been meeting clandestinely. Somehow, in the aftermath of the fighting, they went to a house as individuals because they wanted to protect the records. They were afraid that the Muhabbarat and Saddam's people would destroy them to cover up the evidence, and they knew that the records were the only way for people to find out what happened to their loved ones. So people would go and protect those records, and then as they were there together, they would form these small groups.

Q: They'd become better organized.

DAUPHINAIS: Yes. That one group in Baghdad -- the Association of Freed Prisoners -- was a pretty dynamic group.

We also did a lot of work on the issue of mass graves. We helped in setting up the court that's been formed now, the tribunal that will try Saddam Hussein. We helped in getting some forensic work going, like identifying the location of the mass graves.

Early on, there were the pictures of the families digging up the mass graves by hand. Actually, a lot of work was done to try to stop people from doing that because of forensic purposes. That destroys evidence, and if you're really going to go back and seek justice through a court system, that's not a good thing to have happen.

Trying to make sure that the families know [was also important]. In many cases, those people who dug up bones and took them home and believed it was their loved one probably didn't have the bones of their loved one. There is no way to know without forensic work. So we did a lot of that.

In the north, up in Kirkuk, rehabilitate the fire stations, as well as some public services like clinics. [We did] a lot with civil society groups and community centers throughout the country. We especially did a lot with women's groups.

Q: Earlier, when you were describing the assistance you gave to the postal system, I think you said that it did continue functioning...

DAUPHINAIS: I think it stopped for a while, but it seemed to have started back up by June. They had already been receiving-

Q: Not by the initiative of the US coalition forces?

DAUPHINAIS: I think a couple of the reservists and stuff might have given some encouragement, but [it was] mostly [done] by the [Iraqi] staff themselves. It was the same way with the national museum. There was a lot of focus on the stolen art and it turned out that a lot of that art wasn't really stolen -- it was hidden by people in various places and those articles were brought back.

Q: They were hidden not to be stolen but for safekeeping.

DAUPHINAIS: [Yes,] to give back because they didn't want people to really steal them. There were all sorts of examples of that all over the place in the government offices. People had worked in these places for 20 years. They're civil servants.

Q: Right, and they know what to do. They know how to do it.

DAUPHINAIS: And some of them actually came back and started to try to figure out what it is that they were going to do. A lot of them never came back, or later came back cautiously to see how they could get involved.

Q: If people who worked in the postal system spontaneously kept at least a piece of it going, they must have done worked for a period without knowing who would pay them or whether they would get paid for it at all.

DAUPHINAIS: Oh, yes. I think it took quite a while for people to start getting paid again. There was an expectation that certainly if they were working for the government the coalition would pay them. But I think it took them a while to get that up and running.

Part of the planning before the war started was to try to keep as much of the government intact. [We wanted to keep] the folks who weren't implicated in the higher echelons of the Baathist Party, the military and police command, or the secret police. Where we blew it was that we expected people to come back but we didn't bother to protect what they worked with. So what were they supposed to come back to when their offices had been looted and burned up?

There was a big building -- the ministry of foreign affairs -- that got completely looted. The Al-Rashid Hotel and the convention center suffered damage but really didn't get looted. That was because coalition forces knew that we were going to use those spaces and they protected them. The ministry of oil really didn't get looted. Certain things were protected. It just wasn't enough.

It was very frustrating. We wanted people to come back and work and resume their normal lives, which I think was really what most Iraqis would have wanted anyway. But we blew it because we let everything get looted, so they didn't have anything to work with. People come in and, in some cases, management organized them to do a bit of sweeping and cleaning. But all they had to work with had been destroyed or carried off to somebody's house. And the looting went on and on and on.

This [looting] is all really organized. I remember in June, I was asked to go up to the USAID office in Arbil for a couple of weeks to sit in while one of our colleagues went on leave. [As] we're driving out of Baghdad on the road up towards Mosul and Arbil, [we passed by a group of prospective looters]. They had brought up buses filled with people to loot this big factory by the side of the road.

Q: You have, in effect, charter buses to go looting?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes. They carried stuff out and put it on big trucks or put it in the buses. Then I'm sure the buses took them away. It was all very organized. This is mid-to-late June and this was still going on.

Q: In the area where you worked, describe how the government was organized during Saddam's regime; describe relations between outlying governments and the central authority, ethnic representation, mandates, authority, jurisdiction, funding, relations with citizens, and public attitudes. What did you understand to be the situation before the conflict under Saddam?

DAUPHINAIS: Before the conflict, Iraq was organized into governorates. People have trouble with that term, but it [means] provinces. I spent most of my time in Baghdad. Baghdad itself (the city and the greater area) is the most populous of the governorates, as well as being the national capital.

Baghdad was broken into boroughs, interestingly enough. Under Saddam, there was a [city] mayor and there were councils in each of the boroughs. Of course, none of these councils were actually elected, or if they were elected, the election process was meaningless. They were essentially all appointed. Citizens didn't have any real input into that process. Things simply were done in order to be done. There was no real process to it.

There's an area in the southeast part of Baghdad which was called Saddam City, now named Sadr City after Muqtada Al-Sadr's father. It has one million to two million Shia living there. This is a very congested, very unpleasant neighborhood with almost no services. When we initially came in May and June, OTI ended up doing a massive cleanup. They had not had any organized garbage collection in probably 10-15 years. The place was horrid, just absolutely appalling conditions.

Q: You say 10-15 years, but why would there ever have been [a cleanup]?

DAUPHINAIS: Well, there probably weren't any people there before. There were people living in that neighborhood before, but [I understand that] the Shia got crowded in there because of the Shia uprising in the south during the second Gulf War (1990-'91). I could be wrong, but that was my understanding of how that neighborhood came together.

Q: Was it a shanty town, a place where people just go and set-up houses, a place devoid of municipal services?

DAUPHINAIS: Sadr City has blocks of buildings and stuff. It was the Shia ghetto. It was a little bit more organized than [a shanty town], but it still hadn't had any garbage collection. So OTI did a massive employment/community mobilization program to pick up all the trash in Sadr City. OTI worked with the local authorities, including Sheikh Muqtada Al-Sadr, and selected and paid workers. They cleaned up the trash and then hired trucks to haul it away. The town looked great after that. Then there were a variety of other activities going on - renovating sports fields for one - in coordination with a US army unit that was stationed out in Sadr City. This was part of their community interaction, doing things that could make life better for the community. If life

was better for the community, the feeling was that it would probably be better for the soldiers stationed out there. I think the soldiers got a lot of satisfaction out of those kinds of activities because otherwise I think it would have been pretty blindingly dull.

[In any case, looking at the Iraqi government] before the invasion, [it was organized] very top-down, very constrained. There wasn't governance. It was government and it was imposed. "Governance" to me implies a bit of a give and take between the government and the governed. That clearly didn't exist because people seemed quite afraid of governments and government structures.

Q: I guess there was no accountability; that was another aspect of that.

DAUPHINAIS: No, there wouldn't have been any kind of accountability. After the invasion, there was this period of time where the military commanders had a series of little elections to create town councils and stuff. This was in April and May. Quite frankly, I thought that was a good step forward. Yes, there was some controversy, with [people asking] "How did you do this? Were [the elections] fair?" But I think the controversy was more than overshadowed by how happy people were to have participated in a process like this.

Gradually, as Ambassador Bremer came in, there an order went out to put a halt to the elections. Indeed many of the town councils were dissolved and different councils were put in.

Before the war started, USAID had issued an RFP (Request for Proposal) [for local governance] to a limited number of vendors, where "local governance" was defined to be anything at the governorate level or below. The contract was given to a group called Research Triangle Institute (RTI). RTI was to provide technical assistance to help develop local governance. They focused a lot of time and attention on town councils and they had a fairly strong presence in Baghdad. ORHA, and then CPA, also had a senior advisor for "Baghdad Central", which was the city of Baghdad. Essentially, that person was the mayor of Baghdad.

Q: The senior advisor was not an Iraqi?

DAUPHINAIS: No. Senior advisors for the ministries and for Baghdad Central were coalition folks - for the most part, Americans. The senior advisor for Baghdad Central for most of the time that I was there was an American guy, a former USAID fellow named Ted Morse. [His task] was to coordinate the [development of the] local governance structure that was being adopted. That was a structure of community councils in the various boroughs, each having [its own] council.

Q: Were they based on pre-existing structure or was this a new structure?

DAUPHINAIS: No, it seemed to me... It was a little bit confusing. This was one of the really interesting things, which was what a lack of information before we went in about the prior structure of the government.

A little example: two or three days before ORHA started deploying to Baghdad, a friend and colleague of mine who was working with the ministry of social welfare and labor -- who had

been working at the Pentagon – [suddenly] discovered that her ministry not only was responsible for social welfare and labor, but indeed was responsible for the prison system. How diabolical! You give the ministry of social welfare and labor the prison system. That was just one example of the dearth of information that we had in advance.

That dearth of information -- about how things actually worked on the ground -- was pretty astronomical. We knew a lot about the public distribution system and the Oil for Food Program. The UN was heavily involved in both of those so we knew how those worked. But as far as how [other] things worked on the ground, we didn't know.

Q: To pursue that just a little further, if we didn't know before and she discovered it... How did she discover it?

DAUPHINAIS: You know, that's a really good question. I don't know. I just remember running into her in Kuwait City and going, "Oh, my god." That's what she kept saying, too: "Oh, my god." And this was during the war, when people were getting ready to move up to Baghdad. So, I'm not sure how she found out or if there were other parts of the US government who had information and it didn't get communicated to the folks back at the Pentagon who needed it to do planning. I asked repeatedly for things like an organizational chart of the Iraqi government and local government structures. Nobody seemed to be able to get any of that. I always wondered if the Future of Iraq program didn't have some of that stuff, but that gets into a different question.

Q: Really, if you don't even know that, then what do you know?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes. I actually think that other parts of the government had a better picture of it and it wasn't necessarily shared. I think probably -- at the State Department -- the Future of Iraq Program did have quite a bit of information that would have been useful. [The information] just never got to us for a whole variety of political reasons -- internal US government politics.

[In any case], once the CPA was established they started trying to organize these town councils. During the CPA period, and ORHA, you had two levels. You had the Iraqi level [and the coalition level]. You had the same thing within the ministries at the national level government with the ministries. You had the Iraqi ministries and then you had the ministries' senior advisors who were located within the CPA palace. The advisors went and visited the ministry buildings. They had meetings and interacted with the Iraqis. The senior advisor was where all the resources came through. So when we were doing programs for OTI -- the ministry in a box for example -- someone from the senior advisor's office would come and ask [us for what they needed]. [Sometimes] if it was a member of the Iraqi staff of the ministry, they had been directed to us by their senior advisor's office at CPA.

Q: So, one of those Iraqi ministries would kind of have its head cut off, right? They didn't have Iraqi ministers heading the ministries.

DAUPHINAIS: They had acting ministers that eventually got appointed. There was a senior Iraqi who was appointed as the head of that ministry. Now, they didn't have much autonomy as far as making policy decisions. They didn't have access to a lot of resources because the Iraqi

government, of course, didn't really have any resources. All the [government's] resources were coming through CPA. But people were appointed fairly early. They were identified as the senior person for this or that ministry because somebody had to be in charge on the ground, and it had to be an Iraqi. But it was quite clear that they had to work closely with -- and in a way sort of "report to" and work with -- the senior advisor.

Q: That means the Iraqi ministries, the staffing of them, was more or less intact.

DAUPHINAIS: It depended on the ministry, but yes. Over time, more and more of the Iraqi staff came back. The ministries got reorganized a bit -- i.e., they got some equipment and things that you could work with. Offices got cleaned up and payroll started to be made by CPA (because CPA was paying people to come back and work).

Q: Would it pay for the staffing of entire ministries?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes. They made sure that all of those things got paid. As I explained to you before, there was money from found and seized Iraqi assets like the eight million dollars found under the bridge. They found money all over the place.

Q: And that got put into the program?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, but not the entire program because USAID has a policy that we don't work with those sorts of funds. We only work with funds appropriated from the US Congress.

Q: But the CPA used them?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes. The CPA didn't use those funds for its own administration but for the Iraqi government establishment, although that obviously took a little while to get organized.

Q: Could you talk a little more broadly about what you found and where you went with it -- with these Iraqi institutions? If you could put the thing back together again, fix it up, you could get it running again ...

DAUPHINAIS: Well, I mean, you could fix up the physical infrastructure, the buildings. You could put new desks and chairs and things in there. And people would come back. But it turned out to be a much more difficult task because Iraqis were used to a management structure which didn't allow them a whole lot of ability to be creative or to solve problems. They did what they were told but they didn't do a whole lot more because that could be hazardous to your health. They were used to a very hierarchical structure. So if you took the top two or three people out because they were Baathists, or they were corrupt, then who were you supposed to take orders from?

Q: That's where the senior advisor comes in.

DAUPHINAIS: Well, except that the senior advisors didn't speak Arabic. The abilities of the senior advisors to perform in these roles were limited. They were not located in the ministries.

They were located at the CPA palace in the Green Zone. There were limited communications, although by this time MCI had come in and there were cell phones. So you and your [Iraqi] counterpart could have a cell phone. But most of the people who were senior advisors I don't think had ever worked at that level in a US government department. They didn't have the language skills. Although I never served in that capacity, they didn't [seem to] have the cultural/linguistic background [needed] to be able to really understand what was going on.

So what you had was a ministry that had no top senior levels. You had a rank and file that was used to taking orders from the appropriate designated senior person, who was no longer there. So, you had a bit of confusion and political infighting within several of the ministries.

The ministry of health, for example, got to be quite a problem in part because it and the ministry of education were targeted by the Islamists for takeover. If you look at the strategy of Islamists throughout the Arab world, wanting to reach into communities and get them in their vise grip, they [typically] take over the mosques, the schools, and healthcare.

Q: I knew about the first two. I wasn't as aware of the latter.

DAUPHINAIS: Yes. Healthcare is a big thing. This was very evident in Iraq. For a while, the senior advisor to the ministry of health was a USAID person who had lots of experience in the Islamic world. I don't know whether he spoke Arabic or not, but he had many years of experience doing advisory services and development programs in health, with healthcare systems, in the Islamic world. It was a very difficult job, I think, because he was trying to navigate within a very politicized ministry. For example, initially there were a huge number of international NGOs out there, many of whom work in health, all of whom have their own idea about what the right way to do things was.

This was not a battle or a discussion that's unique to Iraq. I just came from Liberia the same thing was going on, minus a senior advisor for the ministry of health.

It can be quite contentious. Who's right and who's wrong? Who knows. These are things that reasonable people can reasonably disagree with. But somebody has to make a decision about it. As time went on, the fellow from USAID was replaced by someone from Health and Human Services who I don't believe had any previous international experience whatsoever. I'm not sure that the Department of HHS here in the United States and the Iraqi ministry of health have exactly the same sorts of things going on.

I don't need to dump on anyone in particular, but those sorts of appointments went on throughout CPA. Things didn't always seem to make a whole lot of good sense. Part of the confusion came from the Iraqis and part of the confusion, a good deal of it, came from CPA.

CPA didn't really know what it wanted to do. You get a new person who comes in and says one of their primary emphases in their programming for health in Iraq is smoking cessation? Maybe I'm being too critical, but I wouldn't have guessed that smoking cessation in June, July, and August of 2003 in Iraq - or even to this day - would have been a prime, key focal point for action within the entire ministry. Don't get me wrong. I think smoking cessation is a good thing and

they need it in Iraq, but I wouldn't have focused on it. But I was at a meeting and I heard that come up. I was a bit stunned.

Q: It sort of misses the point about what the first priority is.

DAUPHINAIS: I raised the issue not to dump on anyone in particular, but it raises the point that a lot of what went on with governance and other issues were [based on] our idea of what they needed, not their idea of what they needed.

Q: And it wasn't a good enough system for getting input from [Iraqis]?

DAUPHINAIS: There was no system for getting input from them. In fact, it's one of the things that dismayed me. I used to joke about this with people. We went in to defeat what was essentially an old-fashioned, Soviet-style, centralized-planning regime -- with a great deal of brutality tossed in. We replaced it with a warmer, kinder, gentler, fuzzier, Soviet-style centralized-planning regime, which maybe didn't have a lot to do with what Iraqis needed, wanted, or could have dealt with. I don't know that a different approach to this would have necessarily worked, but what we tried didn't do so well.

Q: What you're describing as I hear it is a pretty fundamental disconnect between the CPA arriving in the country and people there they're going to try to reconstruct. They didn't connect very effectively with those people, so that the institutions -- which were stopped in their tracks by the conflict -- didn't have any way to get up and running again. And maybe [the planners] didn't think about it enough -- well, surely they didn't think about it enough -- beforehand. I'm trying to be gentle, too. But I think that's what you're describing.

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, that is what I'm describing.

[END TAPE]

DAUPHINAIS: Thinking back to our conversation earlier, I was describing the befuddlement on people's faces as we were driving through the countryside to Baghdad on April 13th and 14th. I think the [Iraqis'] befuddlement just continued and got deeper and deeper because they didn't know how to respond to what was happening. I remember, at meetings early on, when I asked Iraqis what they thought I typically got met by a lot of silence. They didn't know what to expect if they said what they wanted. I don't know that a lot of them had ever really been asked by a government official, "What it is that you want from your government?"

Q: Would it make a difference whether this was asking a group of Iraqis or asking a single Iraqi?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, I think it would make a difference. I think if you talked to a single Iraqi, and you had some rapport with them and a bit of trust, then you could get quite a lively conversation going. But in groups, people didn't quite know what to say. They didn't know what to expect from us -- from the coalition.

Q: Might they be somewhat concerned about how it was going to sound to the rest of their community?

DAUPHINAIS: Absolutely, they were concerned about that. They didn't know what to expect as far as repercussions. We didn't really understand enough about what they wanted or needed. Lastly, they had almost no understanding of us.

Point in fact: when I was in the States I had heard that maps were illegal; common people were not allowed to have them under Saddam Hussein. GPS [global positioning system] equipment and maps were forbidden for security purposes. So, early on [we had problems] trying to locate various grain and food storage facilities (this had to do with the public distribution system). [We had to get] someone from the coalition forces [who] could go out and do a quick assessment of [the facilities] and get a GPS reading to know where the thing was.

Another example, we were at the CMOC for Baghdad with the officer in charge of the World Food Program, an Iraqi, and a very nice man. There was this giant aerial photo map of Baghdad that took up the entire wall. We were asking him to find for us on the map a place called Tadjji. There is a big silo, a food storage facility up in Tadjji, and we wanted to go take a look at it. I remember it was pretty funny. He started at the top, in north Baghdad, and his nose was right up on the map. He was looking, looking, looking, and there were place names and street names and stuff in Arabic and in English – again, this guy worked for World Food Program, so he was fluent in English – and he was looking, looking, looking, and he got all the way down to the bottom, and then it struck me; he didn't know how to read a map.

I finally said, "I guess maybe you can't find it." He said, "No, I can't find it at all." I said, "But you know where it is?" "Oh, yes, I know where it is." So, the next day, we went with the HUMVEEs over to WFP, we picked him up, put him in the HUMVEEs with us (which of course you'd never do now) and we drove to Tadjji.

I had been told that people [in Iraq] didn't have maps. I didn't translate it into the fact that somebody who spoke fluent English wouldn't understand how to read a map.

Q: It's a form of illiteracy.

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, exactly. And it was just [an illustration of] that gap between knowing something – i.e. Iraqis weren't allowed to have maps – and actually having it demonstrated to me that someone couldn't read a map because they never had them. So, we didn't have enough information about the Iraqis, how things worked there, and how people think about things. Plus, you can never completely get inside another culture; it takes decades of living there. But they also had almost no reliable information about us, about our intentions, and what our expectations were. I would have to say that early on, which was the period that I was in Iraq, we had a hard time clarifying our expectations as well. We had a hard time being clear and consistent because things were constantly changing.

Q: What you've just said is there wasn't a clear idea of exactly what it was you expected to accomplish there. What did you understand to be the goals and objectives of the work when you got there? Or is that an appropriate question?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes it is, and I think it's maybe the big one that got missed in all of the planning for post-conflict Iraq: what was the real goal? If you talk to the military folks, it was to stand up the Iraqi government. What does that mean? To what level and to what degree? This was a debate we had here in Washington before we left because some of the estimates.

I come from a development assistance organization, USAID. So, when they were planning how much various program designs would cost, one of [my] questions was, "To what level are we going to put things back?" One of the early mantras was "We're going to put things back the way they were before we broke them." Well, why would you bother with that? The place was a rat hole before we got there.

That was the shocking thing to most people, seeing how bad condition things were in, things that the military didn't break. They were really crappy. I mean, the Al-Dora power plant barely functioned before [the invasion].

That was the debate. We can't just put things back the way they were. What good is that? What use is that to people? So, then [the question becomes] what is the proper level of development that the US government coalition should feel responsible for putting in place before it's no longer our responsibility? We're no longer atoning for breaking the place up. This was never really resolved. In fact, I don't know that it was really systematically dealt with.

You can say, "We're going to go in and we're going to stand up the Iraqi government." Does that mean all of it all at once? Does that mean certain key parts? What would the certain key parts be? One key part was clear: the public distribution system. The police was another one. The army got a little bit confused because when General Garner was there he wanted to keep the military in place, intact. He wanted to get rid of the top echelon but keep the units intact, keep them paid, keep them occupied, and make them into work-construction brigades for civil works. [Then] Ambassador Bremer came in and fired the whole lot.

Q: 400,000 [soldiers]?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, something like that, and put them out on the streets to protest. So, beyond those three things [-- public distribution of basic goods, setting up the police, and dealing with the army --] what were the real goals and objectives? As far as I know there were not any real targets for the ministries.

Q: You didn't have milestones? "By such and such date, we hope to have accomplished thus and so..."

DAUPHINAIS: No. Not for the ministries. There were some [milestones] related to the public distribution system, which was [run by] the ministry of trade, but that was only one component of the ministry of trade. That [goal] related to resuming the distribution of food within a certain

timeframe, which they met in large part due to; (1) the World Food Program; (2) really good, smart, dedicated people like Ambassador Raphael; and (3) Iraqis who worked in that system before and really understood why it was important to keep it going.

Q: We've read various interpretations of how well the CPA has done in restoring schools, not just the physical schools, but also getting them back in session, getting teachers in the classrooms...

DAUPHINAIS: This gets into an interesting issue. This is where some of the difficulty with CPA came into play. The ministry of education was one entity, [but actually] getting the schools up and running was being handled by a different entity, a contractor. The contractor of course had links to the ministry of education. But the numbers of books printed and schools rehabilitated (particularly primary schools), the number of school kits delivered and teachers trained, these were all stipulated in contracts by USAID to a particular vendor. So the vendor had to work and meet those targets. That had nothing to do with the ministry of education or the senior advisor for education. Those things were stipulated in contracts before we even got to Iraq.

So the way had to be cleared to make sure that the vendor could accomplish those things [they were contracted to do]. And some of the obstacles, of course, dealt with the security situation and confusion in the ministry. But the vendor could have gone ahead and got those things done without the ministry – and [they] pretty much did. Now, they needed CPA to make sure that roadblocks within CPA and with the coalition forces were cleared away so that the work could be done and additional resources could be brought. But really I don't know that that had all that much to do with the ministry of education.

[There were other big contracts.] There was a contract in health. There was the big contract with Bechtel for service infrastructure reconstruction. There were several [other] big contracts let by USAID prior to the conflict. They were based on general study of the area, statistics, and the needs such as they [were perceived to] exist. But they were just based on numbers; they weren't based on real things.

In education, the interesting thing is that those [contracts] were done by people and organizations with a huge amount of experience doing this internationally. I would venture to say those were the programs that CPA did that worked. I would also venture to say a number of the other ones -- where US domestic agencies were brought out to take over ministries -- were the ones that didn't work. I would like to see some review and some analysis of that.

I'm going to blow the horn here for USAID. I work for that agency. I'm not always very pleased with it. Like every US government agency it has its ups and downs, but I think USAID has done really well for the most part in Iraq, which should show its value. But sometimes those activities, [are difficult,] especially in a chaotic environment.

I've worked for the UN as well. If you're coming in with the US or the UN and you're the authority, the "Big Kahuna", you have all the power and the resources. You need to demonstrate that you can do things. Even if you're not consulting with everybody intimately like you would normally like to do, you [need to be] doing things.

Q: You're not institution building, but you're infrastructure building.

DAUPHINAIS: Right, you're doing things. You're fixing the schools. Who's going to disagree with fixing the schools? Who's going to disagree with giving backpacks with pencils and notebooks to little kids? Some things are win-win.

By the way, every single school I was ever in early on in my time in Iraq had been full of weapons – RPGs, mortars, WMD suits (chemical suits), AK-47s – every single one of them had caches of weapons and stuff in them.

I'm not sure that we had enough "oomph" in the approach to knowing what the no-brainers were, those things that you get good will from doing, that connect you with people so that you can talk honestly. After we fix up the school and give kits out to the kids, then where do we go? The next steps require intensive discussion of issues, and you can build a relationship by going in and doing things that are obviously a good thing. That's why the "ministry in a box" program worked to the degree that it did.

It was obvious that people at the ministries needed to have desks, computers, and equipment. Then, when you're in there and you're working with them, you're talking to them. "Well, what else is it that you need? What is it that you need to be doing?" Unfortunately, I don't think CPA maintained enough connection and daily interaction, with their sleeves rolled up, with the folks in the ministries and the other government units.

Q: But it wasn't long before the security situation started deteriorated. Never mind what the various reasons were for that, but it became harder to make connections because you couldn't go out and talk to the people unless you were surrounded by protection.

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, and as a civilian you have to go out with your own little band of armed thugs. I'm not talking about the soldiers; I'm talking about your "gunslingers" as we called them. I didn't mind going out with the army units. I did mind going out with the hired gunslingers. That was pretty uncomfortable.

Q: Then there's another level that the Iraqis who appear to cooperate too much may become targets.

DAUPHINAIS: After the UN bombing, it was consistent amongst the Iraqi staff to be fearful. Their neighbors knew where they worked. And they could be seen coming and going because various folks had spotters at each of the gates identifying the vehicles going in and out all the time. So, yes, they were quite fearful, and it became more difficult.

Q: Let me go to the questions which begin wrapping it all up. Did you receive adequate support, cooperation?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, I think so. I think on the support side there was a terrific amount of training and I think obviously you learn a lot of lessons about what kind of training works best

and proves most useful, but I think there was a good amount of training. There was a good amount of material support in the field.

Q: How about for personal comforts?

DAUPHINAIS: Personal comforts? Oh, well, never mind. Don't go there. When we got to the CPA palace, there were no windows. It was April, so it was already quite hot. The windows were all smashed out. There was no furniture.

Q: There were holes – no glass, you mean?

DAUPHINAIS: Yes, there were just holes where the windows had been, so the building was full of sand and stuff. KBR rather hurriedly hired some cleaning crews, but we ended up cleaning out our own space and putting together the beds and schlepping stuff through. I have some fond memories of Ambassador Ward doing this with everybody else too, so that's pretty funny. That's what you did to get things together. There was also a real good sense of camaraderie that went along. So, on a personal level, comforts – no, there weren't any. There were port-a-potties out in the back. I recall at one point there was only one hour a day for women to take a shower because there was only one shower house.

Q: How many hours were there for the men?

DAUPHINAIS: 23.

Q: Excuse me. I follow you now.

DAUPHINAIS: Ambassador Raphael and a number of people sort of militated and got us a little bit of time in the morning and a little bit of time in the evening to use the shower house. But I mean that was one area where I'm sure Uncle Sam could have splurged for a second shower house.

Q: Did you have hot water?

DAUPHINAIS: Well, if you got up real early in the morning, you might have gotten some hot water - you might have – before it was all used up. In theory, there was hot water.

Q: Did you generally have electricity around the clock?

DAUPHINAIS: For the most part. There were generators for the complex. There was no air conditioning. This is talking about the early days when everybody was living and working in the CPA palace. The ground floor was office space and upstairs was accommodations. People had cots and stuff and were sleeping and living in the hallways. I think about the only people that got their own rooms were General Garner and a couple of other people. Maybe Ambassador Ward, I don't know. I was sharing with the army folks in the house. We had 20 people in a house. There was only one other female in the house, so we shared a room, but some of the guys shared six,

seven people in a room. And my USAID colleagues shared 10, 12 people in these giant rooms. But everybody was in it together and there was that kind of good camaraderie and support.

Q: You've spoken to that in a general sense that insofar as it wasn't entirely clear what you were trying to accomplish or what kind of measures you'd need to take. That comes to a question of guidance.

DAUPHINAIS: On a day-to-day basis, you had to have a pretty independent spirit and sense of purpose. Then you could carve out your niche and do things and get things accomplished. For the most part you were figuring things out on your own.

Q: You weren't following a manual.

DAUPHINAIS: No. And there would be things that Ambassador Ward or whoever would come up and say, "Well, this has to happen right away." I remember, he came at one point and said there were some Palestinian refugees -- these were mostly Palestinians who had been in the diaspora since the partition in 1948 -- that Saddam had given refuge in Baghdad. They had been given houses at low rates, with the government ostensibly paying the [displaced] owner of the house something [in return]. Now that Saddam was gone, the owners went back and told the Palestinians, "Get out of our houses. We want our houses back or you can pay this huge rent." So, there were about a thousand or so Palestinians who were [now] homeless and took refuge in a football field behind the Iraqi Red Crescent hospital. That became an issue. So there would be things like that which would pop up and you'd have to go and focus on them.

Q: So what did you do?

DAUPHINAIS: We made contact with a couple of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that had funding from USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance [OFDA]. That funding was to provide assistance exactly for these kinds of situations. This was early on; UNHCR only had local staff there and they didn't have any access to funding. [Otherwise,] this would have been something for UNHCR to do.

We found a group called International Medical Corps. They were familiar with the area. They went over and did an assessment about what was needed to help. The first thing needed was for the Explosive Ordinance Disposal Unit to go over because there was a missile in the football field and having a bunch of refugees living around it was probably not a healthy idea. So they got that organized. Then they provided some other assistance to them: tents, additional sanitation, and other stuff.

A lot of the work that we did was putting people together with resources, trying to link things, information and questions and queries coming in to CPA – or ORHA – and trying to link them up with folks that had the resources, expertise, and mandate to do what was needed. You had to be self-directed to be able to do these things and to make any difference. It was a bit frustrating at times.

[As for] evaluation and stuff, I don't know that that necessarily existed.

Q: What you've just described nobody could have planned for. There is no way you would have known in advance that one of the issues you'd have to face is how to find a place to stay for Palestinians who had been put out of their homes.

DAUPHINAIS: Not specifically. The idea of dealing with specific vulnerable groups and the potential for people being displaced was there. That's why those NGOs had already received funding from OFDA, so that they'd have the resources and you could go and say to them, "Okay, there is an issue over here. You're the experts in this, can you take a look? If it turns out not to be an issue, let us know. If they need something, help them out and let us know what the situation is." There was a bit of that, especially early on. Later it was a lot of coordination between a very diverse numbers of actors doing a variety of things, sometimes at cross purposes.

Q: Sure. But this is after all an extremely complex situation.

DAUPHINAIS: Yes.

Q: A certain amount of that is absolutely inevitable.

What were the successes and failures of your effort? What lessons did you draw from the experience? You actually said some of this along the way. What specific prior training or orientation would have been helpful that you didn't receive? And what advice would you pass on for future operations?

DAUPHINAIS: Successes... We didn't get killed. That was pretty good. Looking at my time with ORHA, the essential thing was keeping the public distribution system working. And I think Ambassador Ward and certainly Robin Raphel -- who was the senior advisor to the ministry of trade early on -- did a fantastic job keeping everything running and linking up the humanitarian organizations into the network in case there was a need. It turned out to be less of a need for emergency lifesaving things than it did for the longer term community-based development programs. And a number of those groups morphed into that fairly quickly.

Q: So it was there to build on.

DAUPHINAIS: Yes. Training... Lessons... It was very ironic. Our brothers and sisters in the armed forces would joke and say, "Well, we've been planning on doing this for 15 or 16 months now." Of course, parts of the US government had been planning. There had been an interagency planning process since the fall of 2002. That was very stove-piped, mostly security reasons, and I think political reasons as well.

The bottom line -- especially from the government perspective -- is we should learn to be much more open to taking things in. I'm going to go back and raise a sticky issue, which is this whole Future of Iraq program that the State Department had. This program was gathering information from various groups and groupings -- committees, task forces -- of Iraqi exiles on a whole range of subjects (the oil industry, education, and health). For internal political reasons, that

information was not available to us at ORHA. At one point, it was going to be, and then that was rescinded.

I don't know why, but it couldn't have hurt [the effort]. I think it could only have helped. I think if we're going to be planning for post-conflict reconstruction, we need to have open sources of information rather than having tunnel vision with blinders, saying, "Okay, these people we're going to believe, and these people we're not." This was a bit of a difficulty.

Q: So, mistakes were made and we had the means to avoid those mistakes. Obviously, some mistakes you can't avoid.

DAUPHINAIS: I don't want to oversell this. But I think that when you're going into something that's so complex and so much is unknown, you are better off casting the net wide for your sources of information than going into it with blinders on and saying, for whatever reason, "We're not going to listen to you. We're only going to listen to those people over here."

I think we would have all been better off had we had a mindset not to do that. I also think we didn't realize the government couldn't mobilize quickly enough, that we're not very good at this stuff as a government. You can't just pluck somebody – I'm being facetious here – from the ministry of silly walks in Washington, DC, even if they have a ministry of silly walks in Iraq.

Q: Nation-building seems very complex. That would be a good reason to say "Don't kid yourself, folks. This is very, very hard, and if you think you know how to do it, then you probably don't understand-"

DAUPHINAIS: Absolutely. You don't understand it. You definitely don't understand it. It is really complex.

The other thing we have to be prepared for is to be in these things for the long run. The idea that we're going to cut and run and get out in 90 days, in a year or whatever, is really misplaced. In a perfect world, okay, fine. In a perfect world, I am unemployed because I only deal with places that are going through this stuff. And that would be a nice thing to aspire to. I can retire or something. But that's not the way the world works so we need to adjust our perspective to staying aboard for the longer haul. As far as I can see, this is the five to 10 year plan. So, we don't have CPA anymore, but we're going to have an embassy of 1,200? How big is the USAID mission going to be? Three or four hundred?

Q: And there will still be plenty of military.

DAUPHINAIS: And there's going to be tens of thousands of military. I think you need to have your expectations a little bit better aligned with the reality. You can only do that by sitting down and thinking about it, by having a good discussion, and I don't think a lot of those things were done. So that's my polemic on what didn't happen.

But a lot of really good things did happen and a lot of really good people did a lot of hard work. But it could have been made easier.

Q: Okay, I think we've come to the end of it. I thank you very much.
DAUPHINAIS: You are very welcome. This has been fun.

[END INTERVIEW]