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INTERVIEW #19

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Executive Summary

The interviewee served as the Iraqi Provincial Affairs Officer for the Najaf-Diwaniyah PRT from January, 2007- January, 2008. At that time, the Najaf PRT was not fully stood up, and was based at the Regional Embassy Office in Hillah. The interviewee explains why the PRT operated remotely, and why the team could not travel to Najaf from January until September, 2007. While its small size – with only four members initially- and inability to travel did hamper the effectiveness of the PRT, the team was nevertheless able to encourage political pluralism and democratization. On the economic front, one of the most significant efforts of the PRT was to encourage foreign investment in the new Najaf airport, to be used primarily by religious pilgrims and visitors to the grand ayatollahs who reside in this important Shia center of learning. The interviewee also described his work with one of the state-owned enterprises, putting them in touch with international buyers and helping them to assess their market, as part of DOD's "Task Force Business Stability Operations."

The interviewee comments critically on PRT leadership, and on the need for each member of the PRT to be given "ownership" of specific issues or projects. He also evaluates the relationship with the military unit they worked with, addressing such issues as how PRT movement was arranged, and how the PRT could respond to the steady flood of requests for information. Among his accomplishments, the interviewee cites his report on the decline of assassinations in Najaf, which proved particularly useful to both DOD and the State department, along with the intermediary role he was able to play between high Iraqi officials and the Army Corps of Engineers working on the airport project.

In the opinion of this interviewee, the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) was very helpful, particularly in providing support for VIP visits to the PRT, as well as other logistical and budget support. His evaluation of RTI, USAID's principal implementing partner for the Local Governance Program, was more critical, but relations between the PRT and RTI improved markedly once the PRT acquired its own AID representative. Finally, one general criticism this interviewee voiced was that PRTs needed to do more planning, particularly devising a means to measure success.

Interview

Q: Please tell me about your PRT, its location and the constitution of it?

A: Yes, when I arrived in January of 2007, I believe I arrived on January 29th, 2007, after about ten days in Baghdad I went down to Hillah, in Babil province. At the regional embassy office in Hillah, I joined the Najaf-Diwaniyah PRT. I was working as an Iraqi Provincial Action Officer, an IPAO and my focus was on Najaf, although I did also backstop for the IPAO for Diwaniyah during that time.

Q: And what was your role?

A: Within the State Department framework, it was largely a combination of a pol/econ job and maybe a USAID job. Roughly a third of what I was doing was really focused on managing reconstruction projects, on problem solving, meeting with people who were involved, with engineers, with contractors, serving as a liaison between the Army Corps of Engineers that was implementing these construction projects and the Najafis. So it was very construction and reconstruction focused.

Roughly a third was a little more of what a traditional political officer might be doing: meeting with political party representatives, with government officials, doing reporting, that sort of thing. And then roughly about a third was more econ focused, again, maybe somewhat what a traditional economic officer would be doing, again, focused on what we can do to encourage economic development in the province, meeting with representatives from the chamber of commerce, businessmen, government officials, reporting, that sort of thing.

Q: Could you describe the team that you were a part of?

A: When I arrived there was a team leader, who was a recently retired Foreign Service Officer who had gone there as a 3161. There was myself as IPAO for Najaf and then there was another person who was the IPAO for Diwaniyah. And then a few weeks after I arrived, there was a third person who joined the team, who was also sort of, I think his official title was the political officer for Najaf. We were largely doing the same job. And then we had a public diplomacy officer who shared her time between Najaf, Diwaniyah, Karbala and Wasit provinces. There were some short of shared assets at the REO (Regional Embassy Office), such as USAID, which had projects going on in each of the provinces. There was a rule of law team. There was an agriculture advisor. And we relied on these people, but those assets really belonged to the Babil PRT, because they were a fully stood up PRT, as opposed to the not fully stood up PRTs of Karabal and Najaf and Diwaniyah.

Q: And what does it mean to be a not fully stood up PRT?

A: When I got there, they were actually calling us PSTs. These were teams that were not actually in the provinces to which they were assigned. They were operating remotely. And they had a very small team. Babil province, by contrast, had a full civil affairs team, they had business and economic development specialists and agricultural specialists, a rule of law team, USAID representatives. They had what appeared to be

more of a multidimensional team, whereas for us it was really just a team leader and the IPAOs and that was about it.

Now this was, in part, because we were operating remotely. We weren't able to travel to Najaf. As I said, I arrived in the end of January. The first time I set foot in Najaf province was on September 11th. At that time we weren't able to travel there. We were having all of the meetings at the REO.

To some extent it was hard to justify a very large team if we weren't able to physically move there. Now the reason we weren't physically moving there to a large extent was because in September, 2006 there was a forward operating base in Najaf and that forward operating base closed. In December of 2006 Najaf went under provincial Iraqi control. So once they went "PIC," as they called it, the U.S. really no longer had a presence there. After they took those guys from Karbala and they killed them, they even closed down Najaf. So we really had almost no presence in Najaf after that point.

Given the distance between Najaf and the nearest U.S. military base, there was no way to stage what they refer to as a QRF, a quick reaction force. So in case we traveled down there and we had problems, they couldn't meet the window of time to deploy forces to get us out in case something went bad. So because they weren't able to stage the QRF we weren't able to travel there. Long story short, that's why I never went down there until September.

Q: When you arrived, what constituted your mission at that point? Perhaps it evolved during the year, but let's start from there. You were told to try to do what?

A: There were very general objectives. They were essentially to help the Iraqis stand up so we can stand down was the gist of it, but I forget the exact sort of bland objectives that were laid out for us.

Q: Some of the PRTs which were matched up with provincial governments were working with local government leaders to establish democratic processes and you described at the outset you also had some economic projects and reconstruction projects. To what extent were you working on the governance prong; was that part of your mission?

A: Absolutely. There were economic development, governance and rule of law, and these latter two areas were a bit related to reconstruction issues. Those were the general areas where we were working.

As far as governance goes, we were trying to do some things. We were working with the political parties and trying to encourage pluralism. We had a very close relationship with many Iraqi officials. We enjoyed a very positive relationship with them.

We were certainly encouraging democratization and political pluralism but at the same time we had a very close relationship with the people in power and the people in power were pretty decent. It wasn't as if we spent a great deal of effort trying to build up a

political opposition in the province. Honestly, we were pretty satisfied with the people who were in power.

Q: Had these officials been recently elected, how did they get their positions?

A: Yes, they had been elected. They had a popular mandate. They were pretty good people.

Q: Now, how did your economic development projects evolve? That is, you obviously met with Iraqis and formulated some plans, but how did it work in your area?

A: Well, it was largely through meetings, primarily with the high government officials. They really had a vision for where they wanted to see the province going economically and they were also pretty attuned to those areas in which the U.S. government might play a beneficial role. And so, for example, there was the ongoing project of converting what used to be just a military airstrip into a regional airport, a fully functioning airport.

They were trying to attract foreign investment. We were trying to help them think through how they needed to go about doing this. There were a lot of issues that involved coordinating between local authorities and the Baghdad central ministry officials. So we were trying to serve as an interlocutor between those two and meeting with potential investors to try to facilitate this.

We were also putting some U.S. money, ESF funds, towards some of the construction of the airport. We gave them advice and feedback from the USG when they were considering turning to Iran, to get Iran to build it.

It was really multidimensional and we ended up playing and I think we are continuing to play a positive role.

Q: Was the airport project a PRT effort, or how did the PRT fit into that? It sounds like quite a mammoth project.

A: Yes, it's really since the fall of Saddam that the people said, "Look, we're going to turn this airstrip into a runway." So it's something that they've been working on for a long time. We didn't initiate it, but we've been trying to be supportive of their effort.

Q: I think a read an article that was talking about it having been completed and that one of the aims was that it would facilitate religious tourism, is that correct? Najaf is a center of religious pilgrimage?

A: Correct.

Q: And was that only one of the aims for the airport or were there some other purposes that it should serve?

A: Well, principally that. It's a destination for religious tourists, pilgrims from all over the Shia world come to Najaf. It's one of the holiest places in Islam, millions of people every year make their pilgrimage to Najaf. The overland route, it's long, it's dangerous and being able to have people have the ability to fly into Najaf would really facilitate the flow of people and a lot of these people who'd be paying to fly in would have more money, they might be looking for more high end accommodations. And so there's potential for some economic multipliers here that would really help, for example, the hospitality industry in the province and that sort of thing. So that was really the focus of it, to capture that potential market.

Q: The economy of the province, at the time you were there, was based largely on agriculture? Was it a very poor province to begin with? What resources did it have?

A: Agriculture was certainly an important part of the economy, but it was really the pilgrims.

Q: That's the basis of its economy?

A: As it stands now, there are about three million pilgrims a year that come to the province. They're all coming in, spending money. So that's really the main income generator.

Also, it's also the center, most of the grand ayatollahs live in Najaf. So it's really a center for Islamic learning. That's another reason that people come, they have audiences with Sistani and with the other ayatollahs.

So there's that. There's also, as you mentioned, agriculture. As far as industry goes, there's really not that much to speak of. There are a few factories. There's a cement factory, a garment factory and these tend to be state-owned enterprises.

Q: I imagine some of the visitors also are, you said from all over the world, but Iran being next door, they would be some of the principal travelers that would frequent your province?

A: Absolutely. Domestic tourists are a very large part of the market, but outside of that, it's primarily Iranians and it will primarily be Iranians that would be using the airport. There are also religious tourists in Bahrain and some of the other countries around the region, but it's primarily Iranians.

Q: Now, looking at the structure of your PRT, it was small, you weren't very many, so how would you describe the interaction, the dynamic among the different members and particularly, for example, with the team leader, in terms of the effectiveness of the running of your PRT?

A: Over time, when we started to move to Najaf in September, the decision was made that we were really going to fully staff and it was no longer going to be called a PST but a PRT. By the time I left in January 2008 the team had grown substantially. There were another perhaps five people that had joined the team by that point. So it was growing. We had a rule of law advisor. We had a banking advisor. We had someone who was working on urban planning. So the team had grown considerably.

Q: And all these folks came under the direction of your team leader, as opposed to the folks in Hillah, those assets that before you could have taken advantage of but now you had your own?

A: I'm sorry, your question was what was the dynamic?

Q: I'm trying to get at the leadership dynamic and overall effectiveness of the team organization. You weren't the team leader, so you didn't have overall managerial responsibility, but from your vantage point, was your team well managed? and with the addition of different elements, was everyone able to work in synergy as opposed to each one working in their own domain, independently. How would you describe the dynamic of the organization?

A: Under the first team leader, I would say that the management was not optimal. It was a very small team with just a handful of us and I think that the team leader at the time wasn't sure how to take full advantage of the staff. I served as the acting team leader from his departure in May until the new team leader arrived in August and at that time I'd say the current team leader has done his best to try to manage it well. If there's an area for improvement, it's my personal opinion that people need to have ownership of an issue or two, they need to feel empowered, they need to feel that "This is my project and I'm entrusted to work on this project." While there might be some advantages to everyone sharing every issue, I think that people can become much more motivated when they are able to have ownership of certain issues. So I feel that if people had that sense of ownership, if you will, they might be a little more motivated.

Q: That makes sense. It sounds like a good sense of management would apply, whether you're in an Iraq PRT or whether you're in the bureaucracy in Washington, as a matter of fact.

Let me ask about the role of the military in assisting your PRT, because there wasn't a military individual on the PRT staff, apparently. Obviously you had to have folks from the military helping.

A: He joined in the beginning of October. We had a lieutenant colonel who came on as the deputy team leader. Even before that, we had a relationship with a military unit but it was not a close relationship. They were certainly willing and they wanted to work with us. They were based out of a forward operating base.

So early on, the first three months that I was there, this military unit wanted to work with us, but we really didn't have anything to offer. We weren't really meeting with Iraqis, we weren't traveling to Najaf. We were just sitting there, hunkered down. We really weren't engaging much. And so we just didn't have much to offer.

Beginning in May an army division took over and it became their area of operation. Their commanding officer was just a great guy, fantastic and he was very active and really wanted to work with the PRT very closely. So really once he arrived in May, we started having a very close relationship with the locally based military units. After our team leader left in May and I was acting for those few months, I would be on the phone several times a day with their governance team. We were always sharing information, sharing ideas. It was a very collaborative relationship. It was a very positive relationship.

And then there was a memorandum of agreement that originated in part because of our inability to travel to Najaf. I think it said essentially that if the RSO couldn't move us, then the military would move us. Based on that agreement, we started hammering out the details of how that division was going to support our movement down to the province. That conversation took several months.

Eventually there was an arrangement that was made that the RSO, through Blackwater, would be the first stop. They would try to facilitate movements. If they needed any assistance from the military they would let them know or if they couldn't do it at all, then they would let the military know and then the military would take over.

But it often came back to that personal relationship with the commanding officer, who had dedicated air assets. If ever he was traveling down there he would stop and pick us up. If we needed a lift up to Baghdad for meetings or whatever, he always tried to be as accommodating as possible with his helicopters to help move us around.

Q: Where was he was located?

A: The commanding officer was up in Baghdad.

Q: And you began your travels to Najaf in September 2007?

A: Right. Then a military officer joined us, as I said, in the beginning of October. I was very glad when he did, because while the relationship was still very positive and very collaborative, by that point I felt like I was really getting buried under requests for

information. The military are always conducting briefings and for every briefing they'll ping you with a dozen requests for information. So I could have spent all of my time just responding to requests for information for these briefings.

Q: And the newly-arrived officer would have to find the answers, or he would be able to perhaps suggest that some of them didn't need to be done right now?

A: The latter. He was able, much better than I, to push back and say, "Look, you don't need to know this."

Q; So he was a gold mine to have arrive, to allow you to do your job.

A: Yes, he did.

Q: Did he stay, then, throughout the remainder of the time you were there?

A: He did. I learned that he's since left but he did stay there throughout the time that I was there. And as far as the collaboration goes, that continues to this day. It's been a very collaborative thing between division and the State Department.

Q: Now the length of time that you were there is a year; I've been told that very often the PRT personnel, State Department folks, were the continuity in the operation. One of their particularly good functions was to kind of advise the military in their regions about conditions, because the military turnover was (a) very great and maybe (b) they weren't as well equipped to take note of local conditions. To what degree was that your function and to what degree do you agree that you were there long enough to be able to provide this kind of feedback?

A: My opinion about issues was solicited, it certainly was, but I was at a similar disadvantage to the military, in that I wasn't living in the province. The information that I was getting, aside from meetings that I had with people at the REO, the information was as second hand as the information the military was getting. We were equally disadvantaged, if you will.

We had a staff of Iraqis who were paid by the U.S. government, who were there and they were our eyes and ears and they would provide us with information, respond to our questions. They, of course, were absolutely invaluable. Otherwise we had no way of knowing really what was going on, aside from the meetings that we would have at the REO. But they were extremely valuable.

So while my opinion, as I said, was occasionally solicited, it was more often that I would get requests for information, because I had good access to our staff and to some other people, who had that information. They weren't looking necessarily for an analysis but more information and I was happy to provide that and I think I did a pretty good job and I think I had a decent reputation of being pretty responsive and getting people the

information that they needed, which is, in that setting, it's extremely important. Everyone's under pressure to produce the information that's requested.

Q; You mentioned earlier that you spent part of your time reporting, also and the reporting that you were doing presumably was more like State Department reporting, as opposed to some of the requests for information?

A: I'd say largely the two were separate issues. However, I think at times some of the reporting that I did do, I'd say ninety per cent of it, was really just meeting notes. I'd sit there in a meeting and I'd be the note taker and I'd write up the minutes of the meeting. So for the military there wasn't much value added, because they were already in the meeting.

But occasionally, for example, over a period of about three months there was really a sharp increase in the number of assassinations that were taking place in Najaf, and I had been tracking them. With the help of the local staff, I was tracking who was getting killed every week. I developed a little data base of everyone who had gotten killed and was trying to follow the patterns and looked at the preceding three months, to see where the trend lines were going. And so I was able to do what I thought was a fairly interesting report about the assassinations. I think to some extent I was able to help provide information to our military colleagues, while at the same time providing information and analysis to the State Department.

Q; And these assassinations were of political figures?

A: Some of them. Some of them were U.S. collaborators. Some of them were religious figures. Some of them were probably just criminal in nature. Most of them were Iraqi police officers. That was the majority.

Q: Switching gears a bit, did you have much dealing with the Provincial Affairs Office? Did they provide guidance or help or resources in any way?

A: There was the NCT, the National Coordinating Team. These are the offices that you're referring to?

Q: Right. I understand that at one time the office was called the National Coordinating Team and then it went out of existence and was replaced by the Provincial Affairs Office, which I thought was an office in Baghdad to supervise, if we can use that word, the PRTs.

A: The NCT was a pretty useless organization. I don't count myself among the OPA critics. I think that by and large it's a good organization and they have some talented people and they do play a useful and constructive role.

Q: And what did you observe as their useful and constructive role for you?

A: Part of it was really logistics, if you will. On a few occasions, on short notice, for example, we brought Iraqi officials to Baghdad to meet with folks, representatives from Commerce, because they were organizing some trade delegations. So we talked to our desk officer at OPA, who arranged everything. There were several people in this delegation. We arranged for transportation, for the badges, for the passes, for translators, setting up the meetings with Commerce and then at the last minute the Iraqi official said, "Oh, while I'm in town I need to go over and have this meeting with the finance ministry and I also need to go and see a certain sheik." They just dropped everything and made all the transportation arrangements. I'm extremely poorly placed to make those kinds of arrangements but the people at OPA are much better placed and they did a great job, on more than one occasion, of facilitating those kinds of meetings, often on short notice. So a wide range of logistical issues, they were very helpful with.

They were really helping to be a bridge between the embassy, the front office, the political section, the economic section, when it came to VIP visits. Having OPA be the ones to act to some extent as the buffer, because when you have these sorts of visits the schedules are changing hourly and you're getting constantly tasked for another bio on this person or that person. It can be just all-consuming. Having OPA oversee some of those sorts of visits I felt was also very useful, but again that falls more under logistics.

They have an economic team there, and, largely through the efforts of one individual, he became the expert on budget execution and the repository of all information on how the provinces were spending their money. So if I ever had a question about the budget process, about how this is working out, should be working, he was the source, not just for me but for all of Iraq.

OPA was also heading up a small grants program, the Targeted Development Projects, the TDP funds. OPA was really responsible for that and they provided great guidance and continue to do a good job of managing the TDP program. So they've been a source of knowledge, of resources and of logistical coordination.

Q: You were able to get any funds that you needed for projects in your district there?

A: The demand, let's say, is always going to outstrip the supply of money, but by and large, between the ESF (Economic Support Funds) money, both the 2006 and 2007 ESF funds that were dedicated and the TDP funds, excuse me, I misspoke, OPA was not heading up the TDP funds, they were heading up the QRF funds, the Quick Response Funds. TDP was a different office. The effort that OPA did on the QPF projects was very valuable. But between TDP and QRF and ESF we had some money.

Q: What were some of the ways that you managed to deploy that money?

A: ESF was much more bricks and mortar kinds of things; we built a couple of helipads, one at the airport and one at an official's office, an apron to the runway at the airport, a new building at the university, a couple other bricks and mortar kind of projects. That

was mainly the ESF money for the 2006 funds. For 2007, we were looking at, again, spending most of it on the airport.

Q: You mentioned early on, too, that you were personally involved in liaising, I guess, with the Army Corps of Engineers and they were working on, was it the airport project or another project?

A: There's an agreement between the Army Corps of Engineers and I guess it would be the State Department that they were going to be managing the ESF projects. So State essentially pays the Army Corps to manage its projects. They were overseeing implementation and in reality they were really instrumental as well in project development and seeing what the problems were going to be with projects. They were really involved in all aspects of it.

Q: Then what did you have to do? It sounds like they were managing it okay.

A: I didn't do that much as far as implementation goes. For example, there was a problem with the apron. I would go back and we identified what was wrong and then I sat down with the Army Corps people and said, "Okay, how are we going to fix it?" in a collaborative way, thinking through what our options are. "Are we going to have to divert some money from a different project to pay for the deficiency? What's the best way to manage this?" -- that kind of thing.

Some Iraqi officials had a problem a few times with the desire to see more Americans putting eyes on the project. The Army Corps has some engineers that they contract, Iraqis. The officials were wanting American eyes on some of these projects that were being paid for with American dollars and it was an issue that they kept raising in these various meetings, so I said, "What are all the issues that you're having right now with the way these projects are being implemented?" They gave me three or four things that they weren't very satisfied with. So I set up a meeting between the officials and the Army Corps folks and we went through the list and kind of talked about how we could address some of these issues.

Q: You were acting as a liaison, communicating with the Army, and conveying the needs surfaced by the Iraqis; it sounds like you played a very useful role in clarifying that.

A: To some extent.

Q: It's an interesting comment by the officials, that they felt there was need for American oversight. As a technical matter, did you think that they were exactly right, or was it more important politically?

A: I think the contractor engineers were doing a fine job. It was a political thing, absolutely.

Q: Kind of a wise move on the part of the officials?

A: Yes, I thought so, too. They wanted us to have more of a presence there.

Q: Let me ask you about public affairs. You mentioned there was an individual on your team whose responsibility was public affairs. How did that aspect play out in your PRT?

A: She worked with the press

Q: The Iraqi press?

A: The Iraqi press and the international press, to some extent. If there were any media events she would coordinate that. For example, during the time that I was acting we signed an agreement, a 100 day plan, with the Iraqi officials, myself, and the military. We signed this agreement and we had a little signing ceremony. Really the idea of it was to identify the kind of low hanging fruit, what we were going to do before the next report to Congress. It was a two-three page document, in a variety of areas, of what we were going to do in the next hundred days before the report was communicated to Congress. As part of that, she contacted the local media and invited them to the REO, to come and take pictures and everything of this signing ceremony.

So she worked with the local media. She would gather media reports, that sort of thing. She would collect and disseminate information, articles, current events, etc. She also liaised with the media and as for the international press, for example, *Newsweek* was doing a story and they wanted to talk to someone. The public affairs section in Baghdad said that they were interested in talking to someone about Najaf and so they gave me a call and I did this interview for *Newsweek*. I don't think they ever used it, which is fine. I tried to be as boring as possible.

Q: I'm still curious about the media play regarding your airport, again. That should have been a big deal when it happened and covered, possibly, also by the international press.

A: It hasn't been completed yet; it's still ongoing and so I'm sure there will continue to be episodic coverage of it. It'll be a big thing when it gets done.

Q: In terms of your interaction with Iraqis, I know you described you were kind of cloistered for many months, but how successfully were you able to do your job, given the limited interaction with Iraqis, if I can put it that way. Perhaps, it wasn't so limited, after a time.

A: It wasn't so limited, after a time. Even though we weren't traveling to Najaf, we had frequent meetings at the REO. I was meeting with people at a minimum five days a week.

Q; They weren't afraid to come to you? I'm not quite sure how this worked.

A: No, not really. A few people declined invitations. One of the guys who declined invitations a couple of times had been nominated for a ministerial position and he didn't want to do anything to irritate those who had nominated him, so he didn't want to meet with us. Before he had been nominated to be minister of tourism he had come to the REO and met with us. He had no animosity towards the U.S. It was just for political reasons.

There were a few other people who didn't come, I'm sure some of them out of fear for their lives. Meet with us and you're taking a risk absolutely.

Q: You did mention there were some industries in your area. To what extent were you able to help some of those, I'm going to say "get back on their feet." Maybe they hadn't been destroyed, but what was the situation there?

A: The one that we tended to work with the most was a garment factory which made mainly men's suits. There was an initiative that is supporting the state-owned enterprises. The program is not without its critics, those who feel that the SOEs are, "you're pouring good money after bad, there's no point in this." There are people on that end of the spectrum. Other folks say, "Look, you put people back to work and they'll be doing something more productive than trying to set IEDs and kill each other and kill us." Each side has its merits.

But we were Task Force BSO, Business Stability Operations and Task Force BSO was set up to support SOEs around the country. I spent a lot of time working with some folks in DOD here, and with the factory folks, working through a factory spending plan. They were spending about a million dollars to make some capital improvements to the factory.

But then the side that I spent most of the time on was on the business development side of this: where are your markets, who are your customers, how are you doing your pricing, introducing them to international buyers and then having to have these international buyers give them feedback? We set up a meeting with an Italian company, it was actually going to be an American company. They were both going to come and in the end the American company dropped out but they came and they gave feedback about the suits and talked through what it would take for the suit factory to really break into the international market. All of those conversations, I think, were very instructive. Realistically, their market is the domestic one, but I was doing a lot of that kind of thing.

Q: So you don't think that the factory is really ready for the international market?

A: They can't compete with the Chinese. The Chinese make a suit for twenty dollars, a nice suit, for twenty dollars. The unit costs for a similar suit coming out of Najfa is going to be closer to eighty dollars, ninety dollars. They can't compete internationally with the Chinese.

Q: I'm interested to ask what you thought in your background best prepared you for this assignment. You had to do political work, economic work and you haven't been a

Foreign Service Officer for all that long, but you obviously had some helpful background. What do you think were the skills that you brought that were most useful?

A: I think my time spent as a pol/econ officer in my first tour, in Africa, I think that helped to give me a lot of experience in working with a wide range of people, including government officials, and helped prepare me for the State Department side of things, cable writing, all that kind of thing. I also worked for an NGO, the National Democratic Institute, NDI, implementing a parliamentary support program in Africa. I did that for a couple of years and in it we organized a series of town hall meetings with the parliamentarians all around the country and I think that that experience really helped me in interacting with the provincial council, on the legislative side of things and on the executive as well.

*Q: You saw some similarities between the Niger**iens** and the Iraqis?*

A: Absolutely, I think that that was beneficial. Then, I'd say also my two years spent as a rural Peace Corps volunteer in another African country was helpful; one, it gave me a base in Arabic and I think it helped my ability to communicate with people, but also to I think be a little more adept at crossing cultures.

Q: And you dealt with Sunni Arabs in Africa?

A: Correct.

Q: At least you would know quite a bit about Islam, as well as the language? So those would be very á propos skills.

Did you have any encounter with RTI? What role did they play in conjunction with your PRT effort?

A: RTI was essentially USAID's governance program, LGP, the Local Governance Program. They were managing that. When I first got there, the first half of the year that I was there, we had very little interaction with RTI. They didn't want to meet with us, they didn't want to share information, we didn't know what they were doing, there was no coordination between the activities of RTI and the PRT, zero.

After the AID rep arrived, he got there around July or so I think, something like that, things improved dramatically. There was much more coordination. We knew what RTI was doing well in advance and we did a much better job of sharing information and we tried to coordinate things as much as possible. We've been to their office, they came to the REO. It became a much more collaborative relationship.

Q: And you think this change was brought about by dint of someone being able to pay attention to it?

A: Yes, I think it was largely personal. Our AID rep just came in and said, "This is ridiculous" and at the same time, when he came in and looked at RTI, at the person that was heading RTI at that time, there were some issues. So the AID rep had him reassigned and the new guy that RTI brought in was also an open, collaborative guy.

Q: It may have just been a personality-driven circumstance, more than any institutional failing?

A: Yes, it's really hard for me to say if it was institutional or not.

Q: One other area to touch on is the idea that PRTs are intended to bolster the moderates in a particular region and usually this means helping with the economic development of the area. Did you find that you were able to achieve some results that would be said to be bolstering moderates or developing the economy?

A: Well, I think that our work with high government officials would qualify for that and the efforts that we made to support the airport I think would definitely qualify as well. There were a number of people who didn't and don't want to see the airport open, because they don't want these officials to get credit for it.

Q: When are the next elections?

A: They just passed the provincial powers act. It set the elections. They're set for 2008, but I forget the month right now.

Q: We've covered a lot of ground, and I hope I'm not exhausting you here, but let's see if we can bring things to a close with an assessment, if you will, of some lessons learned. In the area of training, would you have preferred to have had some additional training? I don't know exactly what you may have had before going out, but did you feel that there was some training that you needed that would have prepared you better?

A: You know, I was asked this question recently, when I did that high stress debrief and no, not really. I can't think of anything, any other training. You just have to be adaptable and not get too worked up about a stressful environment. How do you train for that? I'm not sure. The one thing that I wish I had learned before I went there, and this is just my own laziness that prevented me from learning it, was I should have made the effort to learn to look at and know what someone's military rank is. That would have been a helpful thing. But that's something I could have picked up in the first week that I was there and I did, by and large, but not totally.

Q: Do you think it's possible to generalize about the PRTs overall? Obviously each one is different and has very specific circumstances, but if we're trying to determine to what degree the PRTs are meeting their objectives and accomplishing their different missions, what kind of a grade would you give yours, which I guess is the only fair way to put it?

A: You try to be effective. It's hard, promoting development remotely. You really have to be there. It's very hard to do economic and political development via remote control. It's hard.

That being said, I'd give us a "C." In the year that I was there, I would give our overall performance, given the constraints over which we had no control, I'd give our performance a "C." And there's certainly a potential to do better, yes, but I did the best I could and the other people on the team, we did our best and you can't do much more than that.

Q: For sure. Do you have any final thoughts, any additional lessons that you'd like to convey that the project should definitely point out to anyone studying the PRTs?

A: One area where I thought we were a little deficient was, I think there needs to be a little better planning on the part of the PRTs. OPA had us do these exercises, like a work plan with timelines. The military's really into that. That's one area where I was a little frustrated. I felt like we needed to do more planning. We needed to have some more kind of objectives, where you identify your goals, your activities, your indicators and your timelines, so you can measure your success. Right now I guess most of the PRTs are not able to measure their success, because they don't have that in place. They haven't identified activities.

When I worked for NDI we had to do this kind of stuff all the time to get donor money. You have to identify what are you going to do, when are you going to do it, how are you going to do it and how you are going to measure your success. We didn't do that in the PRT I was in and I don't think many PRTs do it. It's unfortunate.

Q: As you say, the military knows all about that and so do other civilian agencies, and at State we have our country plan processes that have deadlines and so on, so I wonder why that didn't get incorporated? Would you have had time to do this?

A: You do that and it takes away from project implementation.

Q: And did you hand things off to a successor? Is there someone who replaced you?

A: Yes, I don't know if he's going to have time, either.

Q: I see. I think we've covered a tremendous amount of ground and I thank you for your insights. It is very revealing to me to see just how your PRT worked; I think you've accomplished a lot, even though it was only a year there, so again, thank you very much.

A: Thank you. This was very nice.