

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

**INTERVIEW #72**

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Initial interview date: January 2, 2009  
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**Executive Summary**

The interviewee served in Iraq in 2008 as the Team Leader of an embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team (ePRT) in Baghdad Province. The ePRT covered a district (Qadha) that included several sub-districts called Nahiyahs. The ePRT was embedded with a U.S. military brigade that provided all the logistics, security, housing and transportation. PRTs are stand-alone with the military for security.

The Team Leader (a Foreign Service Officer) reported to the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) in the Embassy, but this changed to reporting to the head of the Baghdad PRT based in the Green Zone. (There are several ePRTs covering different parts of Baghdad Province. The Baghdad PRT is responsible for the whole province.) The staffing of his ePRT numbered about ten, with various subject matter specialists Agriculture, Infrastructure, Economic Development, Rule of Law, Governance, plus a number of Bilingual Bicultural Advisors (BBAs)—bi-nationals — American, Canadian, European Iraqis. The BBAs were “terrific”; they knew the culture, and though this was not their function, often helped with translation/interpreting. The military filled in the staffing gaps with reservists. The Deputy Team Leader was from the military.

Security in the area was very good—greatly improved, although the area had previously been extremely violent. The military provided movement support. This did not impede the work, but one had to give notice ahead of time.

The ePRT had a Mission Statement plus other planning tools including a joint mission statement with the military—“more than a mission statement.” OPA and the ePRT had a “maturity model” for assessing progress in the area of operations. The ePRT also developed a detailed, week-by-week, three-month work plan linked to the maturity model.

In the governance area, the ePRT worked to improve communications between the Qadha and the Nahiyahs and the Qadha and the national and provincial governments. The communications were designed to convey needs and obtain more resources to meet those needs. There were a lot of needs: electricity, water, sewage, and trash; in agriculture, irrigation canal cleaning. There was no provincial development strategy. The Joint Rural Planning Committee (JRPC) met semiannually, was run by the provincial government, and included representatives from the ministries of the central government and from the Qadha and Nahiyahs to go over needs and review projects to avoid duplication. The ePRT encouraged Qadha officials to take the lead in making presentations at these meetings. The Qadha and Nahiyah councils had little say over their

budgets, which were controlled in Baghdad—one of their main problems. To promote better communications, the PRT helped set up radio stations. Through Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and others, the ePRT provided governance training to the Qadha and Nahiyah councils but had a problem with Iraqi attendance.

In the economic development area, the biggest project was to revive an integrated, market-based poultry industry; the industry has prospects for continued success and expansion. Other projects underway or under consideration included assistance to a bicycle and wheelchair manufacturer, a clothing factory, a date distiller a fast food factory, and training for women workers. The ePRT worked with a group using USAID funding to make small loans.

In infrastructure, the ePRT encouraged the Iraqis to finish laying USG-donated pipe for an important water distribution project and to repair a large water treatment facility. The team worked with local leaders and ministry officials to clean up irrigation canals, a significant effort. The ePRT assisted an agricultural cooperative. There were also a few health and school rebuilding projects. There were a few Rule of Law initiatives and preliminary planning for others. A priority for the ePRT was to open communication lines and link people with authority and resources.

Relationships with the Iraqis were “pretty good,” with numerous meetings covering topics such as how to run a meeting, agenda items, ideas for future discussion, and a review of what was happening and being accomplished. Iraqi officials were well aware of the ePRT and what it was doing. Relationships with the brigade staff were good; they were professional, and the military recognized that the civilians were trying to do something useful which made their job easier.

Some issues: the State Department could have done a better job of filling staffing gaps. The quality of civilian staff was mixed. Training for the staff was useful but not perfect— just the standard three weeks. There were some problems with getting civilian funds, especially from USAID—differences over, and changes in, priorities and restrictions over what could be funded.

Major achievements: the poultry project creating more employment in the agriculture sector; improved local government in some areas. (But what happens after the elections if you get a whole new group of people?); support for bicycle/wheelchair and clothing factories. Perhaps the PRT helped somewhat in reducing the insurgency.

Lessons:

- focus more on the Qadha and Nahiyah governments’ permanent staff of civil servants;
- promote good communications among the Iraqi groups;
- maintain good relations, good communications with the military and with the Embassy;
- with Iraqis, get to know them, establish a personal relationship not just business, be persistent;
- on use of QRFs, make sure the Iraqis contribute something.

PRTs are somewhat effective and could be more effective with more resources and the right people.

## **Interview**

*Q: When were you in Iraq?*

A: In 2008.

*Q: And where were you located?*

A: In Baghdad Province. We were responsible, essentially, for a district or Qadha that included several sub-Districts known as Nahiyahs.

*Q: You were the team leader?*

A: Yes.

*Q: Can you describe the PRT organization? You were in a regular PRT?*

A: No, it was an embedded PRT.

*Q: An ePRT?*

A: Yes, we were embedded with a U.S. military brigade. And the area we were responsible for was contiguous with, not exactly but close, contiguous with the *Qadha*. It was a little bit unusual, because the brigade headquarters was actually located outside of our area of responsibility. I am not sure why, but that is how it was set up.

And, of course, there were battalions of the [brigade] that were in the *Qadha* and most of our team, initially we were actually spread out in four different locations, three within the *Qadha* and then the fourth one being the headquarters, where a couple of us, including myself, were, just so we could liaise better with the brigade command staff.

*Q: When you say embedded, how is that different from a regular PRT?*

A: Well, again, not having served with a regular PRT this is second hand, but my understanding was that they were not embedded, they were stand alone, although they still depended on the military for security. But it was a stand alone, whereas we were totally embedded, we were all at different bases occupied by the brigade. Everything we did was hand in glove with the brigade or its component battalions.

*Q: Did the brigade provide your logistic support?*

A: Everything, yes. Security, housing, transportation. They even supplied us with people. One of the problems we encountered, which I gather is not that unusual, is we had quite a few staff vacancies and also just delays in getting positions filled, so we turned to the brigade for assistance and they provided it.

*Q: What kind of assistance?*

A: They provided us with reservists: for instance, for almost the entire time I was there the head of our Economic Development subunit within the team was a captain in the reserves who in private life had financial experience. And then we had also the head of our Political subunit, again because of gaps, was a reservist major who was not in politics or government, but he did a good job.

*Q: Did they report to you?*

A: Yes, they reported to me and they also reported to the brigade. This was really embedded. Their chain of command would have been with the military, but, in fact, they were reporting to me, because everything they were doing was related to the ePRT.

*Q: To whom did you report?*

A: I reported to Baghdad. Initially, it was the head of the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA), when I first got there. Then they decided to change the management setup, so I was reporting to the head of the Baghdad PRT. He had all the ePRTs in Baghdad reporting to him.

*Q: There were several ePRTs in Baghdad?*

A: There were quite a few, yes, in the province, which included a lot more than just Baghdad city.

*Q: And one main one, I guess?*

A: Then there was the non-embedded PRT, which was based in the Green Zone. When they changed that management setup, then we were all reporting to him and then also, through him, to the head of OPA, the Office of Provincial Affairs.

*Q: How were you staffed? What is the structure of your ePRT?*

A: It varied quite a bit. As I said, we had a lot of staffing gaps. I would say we averaged a staff of about ten and we had different subject matter specialists.

We also had a number of what they called Bilingual Bicultural Advisors (BBAs), which were very, very valuable, but there, again, we actually only had as I recall one BBA that was actually formally part of the ePRT. The rest, even though they worked for us, were all part of the military. So there, again, the military was very, very helpful in helping us do our work.

But in terms of subject matter experts, where I was, agriculture was particularly important, so we had a couple of agricultural SME's, we had an infrastructure SME. Initially we had two economics SME's, but then they both left, and that is when we had to rely on the military.

*Q: Did you have rule of law?*

A: We did and there, again, was another slight peculiarity where we were. Because of the end of the surge, there was another ePRT that had covered part of our *Qadha* and another area and their brigade, the one that they were embedded with, left without being replaced. As a result, the area that had been covered by the departing brigade fell under the responsibility of our brigade.

So what we decided to do, we decided to merge the areas covered by the two teams and let both teams work the entire combined area. So what we essentially did was we merged the two ePRTs, not officially, although that happened later, but in practice we had two ePRTs covering the same area, and they had a Rule of Law guy. So he took over responsibility for Rule of Law for the entire *Qadha*.

*Q: Did you have a Governance team?*

A: We had a Governance team, again, using the reservist major, he was really the head of the Governance component. And then the other team leader, for the other ePRT, when we had the merger of the areas of responsibility for the two teams, we decided he would be primarily responsible for governance, whereas I would be primarily responsible for economics.

So that worked for about three months or so, until we finally came around to the conclusion that it was not working that well, it was better to have just one ePRT, rather than two. So we recommended that the two teams be formally merged under one team leader. That did not happen right away but, with rotations, the teams were left with one Team Leader.

*Q: So how many in all did you supervise?*

A: As I said, the number varied, but I would say it would average about ten and then there were quite a few BBAs.

*Q: Did you have a Public Affairs Officer?*

A: We did not. In fact, one of characteristics, I was one of only two Foreign Service persons on the team and then when we had the other ePRT, their team leader was also Foreign Service. But everybody else were contractors or worked for other USG agencies.

*Q: And you had a deputy?*

A: I had a deputy. She was a lieutenant colonel reservist, which is generally what you have with the ePRTs, you have a reservist who is the deputy. She was very good. She had executive officer duties, but she also provided very good liaison with the military. She understood how they operated. She knew how we needed to do the requests for movement and so forth.

*Q: Let us talk about some of the programs. Let us talk about the Governance program. What were you trying to do there?*

A: A couple of things. One of them, we wanted them to improve their communications two ways. We were working primarily with the *Qadha*-level governance. There is a *Qadha* council chairman and there is also a mayor for the *Qadha*. What we wanted to do was get them and their staff to communicate better with the *Nahiyas*, which were the sub-regional entities. The communications were not all that great between the *Nahiyahs* and the *Qadha*, even though we were not talking about a large area here.

We wanted to improve communications there between them and their staffs and also and perhaps more significantly between the *Qadha* people and the Provincial Government people in Baghdad and also the National Government people at the ministries, because the *Qadha* people really lacked resources in terms of being able to command money. They really relied a great deal on Baghdad, on the Provincial Government side, the Baghdad Province and also on the National Government, which controlled the ministries and which also had resources.

So basically you had the *Qadha*, which had a pretty good idea of what they needed but they did not have the resources. So I wanted to encourage them to communicate better with Baghdad, so that they could get some resources and, on the other hand, with the sub-district level, because the sub-district people were even closer to what the needs were.

And then there were a lot of infrastructure needs. For instance, power was just a mess. Many portions of the *Qadha* were without electricity for twenty hours a day; this was not unusual. There were problems with potable water. There were problems with trash cleanup, basic stuff.

Also, on the agricultural side, they had problems with irrigation. They needed to clean up their irrigation canals and so we encouraged them to get together with local sheiks, with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Water Resources to undertake an effort to clean up the canals, and that seemed to be working pretty well when I left.

*Q: Did they have a development strategy?*

A: Not really, no. We tried to work with them on that as well, to develop that and not with a great deal of success. Our infrastructure officer really made a point of trying to do that and pretty much did not get very far.

I would not call it a strategy, a development plan, *per se*. But we had meetings every five months or so; the *Qadha* and the sub-districts, the *Nahiyahs*, met with Baghdad Province and the ministries, where they would go over all the projects that they were doing or were planning to do and we worked very hard with the *Qadha* to get them to present those projects themselves.

The U.S. military was doing a lot of the projects that were taking place. So what we did was, we presented a list of all the projects we were doing and we worked with the *Qadha* council, showed them how to do a power point presentation with our projects. We showed them how to do a Power Point presentation with their projects and said, "Okay, this is your *Qadha*. You do it!"

So rather than having us do the presentation for the US Government projects, we told them to do it, and quite frankly it did not work all that well the first time we did it. And then, just as I was

leaving, they were getting ready to do a second one, where we again said, “You do it!” I left when that that was taking place, so I do not know how it turned out, but hopefully practice made perfect.

But the idea was, “You guys take ownership. You guys present the projects. You guys tell them what it is that you are doing or what it is that you need.”

*Q: These were presentations to Baghdad Province officials or to the central government?*

A: It was called the Joint Rural Planning Committee (JRPC). The Baghdad Provincial Government runs it, but it included representatives from the central government, from the various ministries.

It is a big meeting. They have it for each of the rural *Qadhas* in Baghdad Province and each meeting is held approximately every five months. So they get a large group of people, maybe fifty, around a table and then you sit around all day and you talk about what everybody is doing. The idea is everybody understands what everybody else is doing, so you avoid duplication and make sure everybody is coordinating well. It does not always work that way, but it is a process.

*Q: Did you help them with both the budget and then the implementation?*

A: On the budget, they had very little control over budgets. Again, they were relying on Baghdad for money and they really did not control budgets themselves. They were given budgets from Baghdad, if it was something being done by a ministry. But, by and large, that was another one of their problems. They really did not have very good communication with Baghdad to tell them what their budgets were.

*Q: What about the implementation, selecting contractors?*

A: For our projects we were involved with it, of course. For theirs, if it was just an Iraqi project, they were doing it, so we would not be so involved with the implementation. What we helped them with was with the presentation, when they presented it to the committee, to the JRPC.

*Q: But what about the actual implementation, contracting?*

A: Not for their projects, no.

*Q: Did you have a Mission Statement?*

A: For ourselves, we did. We had a number of planning tools that we used. We did one together with the brigade. It was more than a Mission Statement. It was a description of where we wanted to go, what we wanted to do, what we were trying to accomplish.

And then there was something that the Baghdad Office of Provincial Affairs was pushing called the maturity model, which is a short-term thing. We would assess where we were on various dimensions like Governance and Transparency and Economics, Rule of Law. Tied to that we

would have a work plan for the following three months, where we actually broke down in a fair amount of detail what we would be doing week-to-week in each of the areas: who would we meet with, what would we try to accomplish, so that we could assess it at the end of the period. Of course, it was a planning document, so things do not always come out the way you want, especially in Iraq. But it was something to orient ourselves with.

*Q: How was the security in that area?*

A: It was surprisingly good. The area where we were used to be extremely violent. It had been very nasty until about a year, six months, before I got there. But, by the time, I got there it was really very much improved.

Just to illustrate, our brigade arrived in Iraq in 2007 and left in 2008. During their entire deployment, they had only one Killed In Action (KIA) and that was right after their arrival, from an old Improvised Explosive Device (IED) that blew up.

Other than that, sure, they had some casualties but none killed and I would say that was indicative of a greatly improved security situation. I never felt particularly threatened. Obviously we took precautions. We went around with our gear and with protection, but I always felt we could get around anywhere we wanted to in the entire *Qadha* and do our jobs without any particular constraints.

*Q: And with the brigade provided Movement Support?*

A: Yes.

*Q: So you went out always with Movement Support.*

A: Oh, yes, yes, we always had a protective detail. We would go out either in Humvees or those monstrosities, the MRAPs, the mine resistant vehicles; we also moved around quite a bit in helicopters.

*Q: Did that impede your work at all?*

A: No, we just had to plan ahead. We had to give a bit of notice. But it was pretty straightforward. Again, our lieutenant colonel did a good job of getting us organized. We knew what to do and when we had to let them know. The only trouble we had, really, was sometimes our air movements were constrained because of the weather, when we had sandstorms and what not, but that is just the weather.

*Q: Apart from what you have talked about on the Governance side, was there anything particularly that you were trying to do?*

A: On the Governance side?

*Q: Yes.*

A: Just general transparency, communicating better with the population. We helped them set up a couple of radio stations, which they could use to propagate information as to what was going on. We said, "You guys should be as transparent as you can."

*Q: Did you provide any training?*

A: We did. We had USAID there.

*Q: RTI (Research Triangle Institute)?*

A: Yes, among others. We had some trouble there, as well. We had inconsistency on the part of the Iraqis. They did not always attend. We would organize training for them and we might have scheduled 10 or 15 people and, on occasion, we had one or two show up, which was rather frustrating. We tried to work on that as well, saying, "It does not do much good if you guys do not show up." Yes, there was quite a bit of training offered, actually.

*Q: What about in the economic area? You had somebody working on that, I gather.*

A: Actually we spent a lot of time on economics; we figured it was important to get people employed.

*Q: What kind of projects did you do?*

A: Our biggest was a poultry project. This area had had a very big poultry industry during the time of Saddam, but it was very command-economy oriented. The government would provide the inputs at a fixed price and it would buy the product at a fixed price. Only if there was product left over would the farmers sell that on their own.

So what we tried to do was revive it as a market-based effort. We helped to create a poultry association, and we got about \$800,000 from the military, to show them how it could be done, modern, efficient and market-based. So we imported a bunch of eggs from Europe and incubated them at a hatchery, we refurbished hen houses which we had identified as being the most promising. They were all members of this association and then we had our subject matter experts go out and work with the farmers. They were experienced poultry farmers, but they did not necessarily know the latest and best techniques for hygiene and keeping the cages at the right temperature and water and so forth and vaccinations, which was very important.

So we had our subject matter experts go out and work with these farmers and the chickens hatched and we distributed them and after forty days or so the chickens were ready for sale and it was very successful. They were fat, healthy chickens and there was a lot of demand for them.

So then the idea was we would get them started and they would do it on their own. The farmers, they got the eggs for free, because we had paid for them, but then they had to plow back thirty per cent of their profits into the association and they did, more or less. I was still waiting to get the books on that first cycle, to see how much actually went to the association.

But clearly enough of it went, because the association then proceeded to launch its own second cycle and they financed the eggs themselves and went out and bought them. They found a good local supply of eggs and all we did on that one was again we provided technical advice with our subject matter experts and gave them like \$10,000 in vaccines, that was it, because we wanted to make sure they had good quality vaccines.

And all the rest was financed by them. They did it so that they could sell; it was done in waves, so chickens would be ready for sale in four different waves, about one week apart. A good bit of that came due around Ramadan, which is a high demand period. Again, they got a very good price, and it was a successful second cycle.

*Q: What about other business development?*

A: Let me just finish with the chickens, because in addition to that, the other thing that we were working on with them, we were refurbishing a slaughterhouse, to allow them to keep the chicken fresh for a period of almost two weeks, which would allow them to sell to a much larger market. And then we were working, trying to get some USAID financing for a parent farm, so that they could produce the eggs themselves and control that aspect of it. The whole poultry project generated some controversy because a lot of people said that the Iraqis cannot compete against frozen chicken from Brazil, and we said, "They are not competing against frozen chicken. This is fresh chicken, and it is a different market niche."

So there was some controversy, but I felt pretty confident, at least when I left, about the prospects for continuing success and expansion. The project had expanded to some degree with the second cycle, but the idea was to expand much more, because there are quite a few chicken farmers in that *Qadha* and in that region.

*Q: These were separate entrepreneurs running each of them?*

A: Each hen house was owned, yes, by individual farmers, although they were all part of this association, because that gave us the mechanism for working with them and making sure that they were following the techniques. But as people saw how successful this was, more and more of them wanted to join the association and participate in this.

We were also supporting some smaller projects. There was a metal and bicycle company, which was partially state owned, and as the name implied they had produced bicycles. We were working with them and with an outfit that is part of DOD that is supposed to help formerly state owned enterprises to find investors.

*Q: Foreign investors?*

A: Yes. We were working with them. There were a couple of wheelchair projects. This company also made wheelchairs and one of them was being funded by a non-government organization (U.S. NGO), which would make a special wheelchair for Iraqi children, which was designed specifically for kids. And there was another one for adults, as well. It was called the Rough

Rider, because it was supposed to be able to navigate in various kinds of terrain. It was exciting, because it was a nice project, it was going to create, I do not remember our estimate of the number of jobs, but it was a significant number of jobs for this particular company. Also the visuals were good: a U.S. NGO funding wheelchairs for Iraqi kids, and you have this Iraqi company building them. The U.S. partners were very impressed, actually, with a company the Iraqi company built. They were still fiddling about the financing when I left, but it was looking very promising.

There was also a clothing company. We helped get some contracts for them, and that was another large employer in the *Qadha*. They had much more capacity than they were currently utilizing, but we were working with them to get them some more contracts and we actually had a very good relationship with that company.

We also did a project with them, or we were planning to do a project, since we were waiting for approval for it from the Quick Response Funds (QRF) review committee at the Embassy. We would help establish a women's association where the women would be taught how to sew and the company agreed to employ the women after their training. Again, the idea was to try to focus on some of the more disadvantaged groups, such as women.

We were looking at some smaller factories, as well. There was a date distillery in the southern part of our district, which had been out of action for several years. They wanted to make I guess medicinal booze, whatever it was going to be used for I am not sure, but they thought they could make it work and we were looking at using some QRF to fund that.

There was also another factory in the *Qadha* where they made a fast food product. We gave them some QRF money and that got them up and running and, again, created some jobs in an area that had previously been hard hit by violence.

There was a dairy plant that we were looking at. That had not gone very far, but it was potentially a promising thing.

We were doing small loans through USAID to help small businesses, give them a little financing.

*Q: You were doing a lot.*

A: We were trying. I felt that small business actually could be a pretty important source of employment, as it is in this country.

*Q: You said you were doing a lot of infrastructure work?*

A: No, they needed a lot of infrastructure work. Our big infrastructure project was water. They had had serious shortages of water in 2007 and in desperation the U.S. military at that time had given them, just bought a large quantity of bottled water and distributed it to them, because they did not have any. So in order to avoid doing that in the future... this was the U.S. military... they agreed to buy some pipe and then the Iraqis would install it to connect a big water treatment station in the northern part of the *Qadha* with the main urban centers. It was tough getting the

Iraqis... we acquired the pipe, but it was difficult to actually get the Iraqis to go ahead and implement the project. It required a fair amount of handholding and just sitting in their offices. I remember going with the Deputy Brigade Commander to the office of a senior official in Baghdad following this project. So we went to his office unannounced, sat in his office and the Deputy Commander said, "Look, we need a letter from you, so that the people in Mahmudiyah can start laying this pipeline." And so, he did; we stayed in his office until he gave us a letter and they eventually got started. It still took them a number of months, but we did finally get it installed. It was inaugurated shortly before I left, but it was going to add like 25 per cent to the availability of potable water in the Qadha's main town.

And then we also worked with them a bit, encouraging them to fix another big water treatment plant in another part of the *Qadha*. That one, I guess we had had some U.S. military there earlier, and they had damaged the place. The Iraqis agreed to rebuild it, but they were dragging their feet about it. So we just kept at them to do the repairs.

*Q: These were projects that thee PRT was doing, or the military, or ...?*

A: The first one, the pipeline, the project itself was being done by the Iraqis. The ePRT was monitoring it, going to visit and saying, "Okay, this is what the status is. What is the problem?" and kept urging the Iraqis to finish it. But the pipe itself was purchased by the U.S. military. The other project was, again, more moral suasion rather than anything we were doing, because that was funded entirely by the Iraqis, but it required our talking to the ministries in Baghdad, talking to the *Qadha*. We arranged an over-flight in one of the military's helicopters to bring together the folks in Baghdad and the folks from the *Qadha*.

*Q: Linking people.*

A: Exactly. Doing what we could to get those communication lines going again.

*Q: Anything else in the economic development area, before we move on?*

A: I mentioned the irrigation project. That was significant. Also, one of our agriculture experts, who worked for USDA, was big on trying to get a demonstration farm and working with some farmers' cooperatives to help them to increase their agricultural production, their crop production. For instance, we provided them with some QRF so that they could buy a couple of tractors for a farm association and the farm association was then going to turn around and rent those tractors to their members. We insisted that they also use those tractors as collateral, so that they could borrow some money and buy some more tractors. We were still working on that when I left. I do not know if it was going to happen. But that was the idea, to give them some agricultural knowledge through the model farm, but also help get them the tools and equipment that they needed to improve their production.

And the other thing we were pushing very hard for was to get some agricultural extension people from Baghdad to come out to the *Qadha*, because those people were in Baghdad, they had knowledge, but they just did not want to get off their butts and come out to the *Qadha*. So we were doing whatever we could, in terms of encouraging the ministry to do it and we were

encouraging our folks in Baghdad and in the U.S. military to use their contacts with the ministry to try to get these people to come out here, because one of our constraints was we only had a few subject matter experts on the agricultural side.

Those people were already running ragged just with the chicken projects. If that project was going to expand, if the other agricultural projects were going to expand, we just needed to get some more help. So that was essential.

We also brought in, we were able to get a few outsiders. There was an agricultural expert, a retired academic from the University of North Carolina who was particularly knowledgeable about slaughterhouses. He came out and worked on the slaughterhouse we were refurbishing.

We had a team from the Borlaug Institute at Texas A&M that was doing an agricultural study of a number of regions in Iraq. And this team had had experts in all kinds of agricultural specialties. Initially they were going skip us, but we persuaded them, working through MNDC, the Multinational Division Center; one of their Deputy Commanding Generals was very helpful, to agree to come out and do a study of our *Qadha*.

*Q: What about in the Rule of Law area? Were you doing any projects there?*

A: Rule of Law, I have to tell you, I am less knowledgeable about it, because initially, as I said, we did not have anybody. Then, when we did he was part of the other team and only after the other team leader had left did I work with him to some extent.

He had a number of interesting ideas, in terms of creating structures that he talked about. I learned shortly after I left that that particular subject matter expert left and I do not know that he was replaced. So I am not sure what, if anything, happened after that. He had ideas, but they were mostly at the idea stage when I left and had not yet been implemented. I thought there was a lot that could be done.

*Q: Nobody was working with the courthouses or the judges or the prisons?*

A: He did work with the courthouse. And before we had the Rule of Law expert, we had one of the Judge Advocate General (JAG) officers from the Brigade; he had worked with the courthouse and donated some books and other items. So there was a little bit of that.

*Q: And was there any other program area that was dominant in your work?*

A: We did not do very much on the health side. We did not have a health person for most of the time I was there. I guess we gave them some equipment on the health side, helped them rebuild a morgue and gave them some equipment for a maternity ward, but just small projects. We were getting a health person when I was leaving and I thought we could probably do a fair amount there. I thought there was a need there and we needed an expert who could focus on that, but we had not had a health person previously.

*Q: Or education?*

A: We did a little bit. We helped rebuild schools through QRF, but that was it. No real thematic thing, it was just picking schools to help rebuild.

*Q: Let us turn to relationships? How were your relationships with Iraqis, official ones and the public?*

A: I would say they were pretty good. I mentioned on the government side, of course, we would meet regularly with the mayor and the *Qadha* Chairman and some of the *Qadha* Council members and staff and some of the *Nahiyah* councils, which are at the sub-district level. And since we were channeling some assistance to them, they were somewhat appreciative. Sometimes they wanted more than we could give them. I remember shortly before I left we had, not a heated discussion, but a frank discussion with the Chairman and the Mayor; they wanted financing for a new *Qadha* building. They said, "You guys really need to give this to us. You owe this to us." I told them, "No, we cannot do that but I can tell you what we can do" and I explained to them what we could do and were willing to do and so forth. There was a desire to get more than we could always give them, but I suppose that is not unusual.

*Q: They were getting substantial sums from the central government?*

A: No and, again, this is what I alluded to earlier, they did not control their budget. The *Qadha* was not a priority for Baghdad. It was on the periphery and, yes, they got shafted a little bit. There was nothing we could do about that. We could push them. We could say, "Talk to Baghdad!" We could tell the folks at the Baghdad PRT, "Talk to the Baghdad provincial people and see what you can do." But there is a limit, when it is just not as high priority as the *Qadha* thinks it should be. So that was a little bit frustrating. But, by and large, we got along very well. We met with them frequently. We would meet with them in town or invite them over to see us.

*Q: They were reluctant to come there?*

A: Not a bit. They were not at all reluctant and we would get together with them frequently.

*Q: What would you talk about, mainly?*

A: How to run a meeting, what are we trying to accomplish at the next meeting, what is going to be on the agenda, basic but important stuff. We would talk about ideas, what do you people want to learn, want us to get a speaker to talk about x, y or z? They were good discussions.

And then there was a business association that we supported getting established. We had a very good relationship with them. We would meet with them on a pretty frequent basis.

I mentioned the clothing factory. We had an excellent relationship with them; also with the metallic and bicycle factory staff. When you have some resources to spread around, it does help to smooth the way.

The poultry association. I remember we had a prominent local leader who had a huge dinner at his house to celebrate the completion of the first cycle of chicken sales, tons of people there, all kinds of tribal leaders and sheiks, various groups, and we had a great time.

*Q: Were they aware of the PRT's role in this?*

A: Oh, absolutely. I gave them a speech. Yes, they were well aware of it.

*Q: Anything about how you relate to Iraqis that will be helpful to others?*

A: I mentioned it was frustrating at times when we tried to organize things and they did not quite happen, like some of the training. I would just say, persevere. Be polite, of course, but be firm and just do not give up.

*Q: You worked through interpreters all the time?*

A: Yes, that was a frustration. Not all the time. Actually, there were more English speakers than I would have thought, but, of course, even the ones that spoke English often preferred to work in Arabic. We had some very good translators, I am not taking anything away from them, but obviously it is not the same when you have to operate through an interpreter but that is just the way it is. When we were going there for a year, with short notice, you just do not have time to learn Arabic.

*Q: Were the Bilingual Bicultural Advisers (BBAs) helpful?*

A: Absolutely. The BBAs were terrific.

*Q: What did they do?*

A: What did they not do? Many of them were also subject matter experts, but then they also knew the culture. So, for instance, one of them worked very closely with the poultry association and this staff member negotiated the deal that we had with the slaughterhouse owner, when we agreed to refurbish it. There were some sticky negotiations there, but he knew exactly what to do and he did it and then he also explained to us what was going on with the poultry association meetings. He was excellent.

We had some very, very good BBAs. We would have been greatly hampered had we not had them.

*Q: Were they Iraqi Iraqis, or were they hyphenated Iraqis?*

A: They were hyphenated Iraqis.

*Q: Americans?*

A: Not all. Some were Americans, some were Canadian, some were European, but they were really, really good.

*Q: And they helped you with the local culture?*

A: Absolutely.

*Q: How about the general population? Did they know what the ePRT was there for or what it was doing?*

A: To some extent, perhaps, but probably not as much. That was one of the reasons why we were financing a radio station, to get some of the word out.

We did go out. We did go out to the market and talk to the vendors, but, of course, we did it with a rifle squad to protect us, wearing our vests and our helmets. So it is not like you could go out and sit down and have a cup of coffee on the street with anybody you meet. That is another constraint of the security situation. Again, much better, but we still had to follow procedures.

Word does get around when you are doing things like inaugurating the pipeline, people see that, or you are rebuilding a school or you are giving money to a small factory or to a small business.

It is hard to gauge, because we were not out there talking to the average person on the street on a regular basis, on an unguarded basis and, of course, not knowing the language.

*Q: Did you walk around the markets?*

A: Yes, we did that frequently.

*Q: And so you had exposure to them?*

A: Oh, yes, we did that a lot, but, again, with a few soldiers with guns. But, yes, we could do that routinely. That was not a big deal and we did that with visitors, taking normal precautions.

*Q: How did you get on with the Brigade?*

A: Oh, very well. I got along very well with them. Most of us did. They were very professional and there was recognition that we were trying to do something useful that would make their jobs easier and so they were quite willing and eager to be supportive. They provided us with whatever we needed.

*Q: Of course, the military has a different culture than a civilian culture.*

A: It is a different culture.

*Q: Did you have any issues?*

A: I did not have any issues, no.

*Q: Or your team?*

A: Maybe a couple of issues on the security side. There was some concern, "Make sure that all your people are maintaining good operational security." But I would say we had a good relationship. Because we were embedded, I felt like I maybe was adopting more of the military culture, because that is the situation we were in. But I did not have a problem with that. I have worked with the military a lot over the years and I thought it was a very good relationship.

*Q: Are there any other major issues or topics that we have not touched on?*

A: Just a couple of gripes. Just for the record. We did have some issues in terms of staffing gaps and I realize some of those are inevitable. Sometimes you get people assigned and then something comes up at the last minute and then you lose them and then it takes a while to fill that position. But I felt that sometimes we, the State Department, could have done a better job of filling some of those gaps more quickly.

*Q: What about the quality of the people you had?*

A: It was a mixed quality. We had some excellent people, first rate. We had some people that were not so good. You get people coming to Iraq for a variety of reasons. Some of them are there because they think it is important work and some of them are there perhaps more for the benefits. The money is fairly good. It is a job. There is another thing: people could be vetted a bit more before coming out here. I am not sure how they are vetted, but it seems to be a lot of the vetting is done simply looking at credentials on paper, and that is not always sufficient. Sometimes the credentials on paper may look good but in reality they may not be so good.

*Q: Did you or your team have any training before you came out?*

A: Just the standard three weeks that you get.

*Q: Was that useful?*

A: Yes, it was useful. Like most training, it is not perfect but, yes, it was useful, to some extent.

*Q: Any other topic we did not touch on?*

A: I think that covers it.

*Q: Let us sum up here. What would you say, looking broadly at the PRT, were its major achievements? You have covered a lot, but how would you sum that up?*

A: On the economic side, the poultry project was quite significant and, if that pans out, it would have broader implications, not just for that particular *Qadha*, but also for a larger area and would create some significant employment in the agricultural sector.

*Q: Do you think the local government was more competent as a result of your work?*

A: They improved in some areas, I do. One of the things that worried me about the government side was what happens when they have elections, if you get a whole new group of people? I thought maybe we ought to be focusing more on the permanent staff, the civil servants. But there were not a lot of those.

The longer term, I do not know how it is going to work out, but there was some improvement at least in the short term. We were trying to improve as much as we could wherever we could, so even if it is short term, I think that is something worthwhile.

*Q: What about the insurgency? Do you think the PRT helped to reduce the insurgency issue?*

A: Perhaps. If you help rebuild schools and maybe create a few jobs, yes. I do not think we were anywhere near being a major cause of the reduction in violence, but I think it helped. It probably built a little on the immediate impact of the good work that the U.S. and the Iraqi military were doing. Of course, that was by far the most significant. But if you want this to be lasting, in terms of making it lasting, then you do have to build on progress by improving governance and the economy and creating jobs.

*Q: Let us turn to some lessons learned. one or two or three, relating to managing a PRT on one hand and then on working with the local governments. What lessons stand out in your mind?*

A: In terms of managing a PRT?

*Q: Yes, what would you pass on to somebody else if they had to take on that job?*

A: I would stress good communications. I mentioned that we were initially in four different areas and even later we were in three different areas. It is very important to keep in close contact with all the team members and that means traveling to all those areas on a regular basis and also having some communications, long distance, via computer teleconferences.

*Q: Your team was in different locations, not all in one place?*

A: That is right. Eventually we were going to be consolidated into just two, but the separation made things a little bit harder. Maybe I should have done more in terms of making sure I traveled more regularly to all the areas. We did try to have at least one teleconference a week via computer.

*Q: Were they far apart?*

A: They were not far apart, but you cannot just walk out the door and go see them. You have to fly in a helicopter or drive in a humvee for an hour or two hours, depending. But it was not difficult to get around. You just had to plan it. But that is very important.

*Q: Another lesson?*

A: Make sure your relationship with the military or whoever you are embedded with is good, again, good communication there. And the other, perhaps, would be communication back with the Embassy, because that, too, can be a little bit tricky, with the Baghdad PRT and the Office of Provincial Affairs, because you do not necessarily see them that often and you do not necessarily communicate with them that often and it is important.

*Q: That is complicated, to have two different places to report to?*

A: Yes, that is right.

*Q: What about any lessons relating to working with the Iraqis on various projects?*

A: It is good to establish a personal relationship, get to know them. If you can have a meal with them, get to talk with them not just pure business, I think that is significant. As I mentioned, be polite but be persistent. Be aware that they are not always going to respond the way you think they should. That is the way it is.

*Q: You think PRTs are accomplishing their mission? You had a mission statement. Were you more or less accomplishing what you were supposed to be doing?*

A: We accomplished some of what we were trying to do. I wish we could have accomplished more. We did not accomplish everything that I wanted us to, but I do think we accomplished some things. There were clearly frustrations. There were some satisfying things, too. So it is a mix.

*Q: Do you think the PRT is an effective mechanism for doing the kinds of things you were supposed to be doing?*

A: It is somewhat effective. It could be more effective.

*Q: Why?*

A: Probably more resources and make sure we have the right people there.

*Q: I did not ask you about funding. Did you have ample funding?*

A: We had ample funding because we had the U.S. military funding some of the projects that we wanted to do.

*Q: This was Commander's Economic and Reconstruction Program (CERP) money?*

A: Yes. We had very good support from the military. If we had not had that, we would not have.

*Q: Did you have any Quick Reaction Funds (QRF)?*

A: We did, yes. Yes, we used some of that. I was reluctant in many cases to approve QRF projects unless I saw that there was an Iraqi component. If they did not do something in kind or have their own funding I was reluctant, because I felt if they did not have buy-in by contributing something of their own it was not as likely to succeed and it was not really what we were supposed to be doing. So that is why I hesitate. Yes, I could have approved more QRF projects than I did, so I had funds for that. For somewhat larger projects, the Embassy QRF review committee could occasionally be a bit bureaucratic in reviewing proposals that we considered worthwhile.

But, on the other hand, for some of the bigger projects, like the poultry project, there was no way we were going to be able to do anything like that unless we had had the CERP funds from the military.

I also had some frustrations with USAID in terms of getting funding. I thought sometimes it was just too difficult to get funding from them, or they changed their priorities. For instance, there were a couple of vocational training centers that we were planning to support and then all of a sudden we hear, "USAID has decided not to support the votechs any more." We also had a strong disagreement with some (not all) elements of USAID at the Embassy over our poultry project. For reasons that are not entirely clear to me, these elements of USAID strongly opposed the project even though they were not funding it. Fortunately, the U.S. military continued to be very supportive of the project and to provide us with funding.

*Q: Is there anything we have not touched on?*

A: I cannot think of anything.

*Q: And you think a PRT is generally a good mechanism for doing that kind of work?*

A: It is a fair mechanism that could be better.

*Q: Anything else you want to add?*

A: I do not think so.

*Q: Okay. This has been very helpful.*