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

INTERVIEW #8

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Executive Summary

The interviewee was located in a Forward Operating Base (FOB) just outside of Ba'qubah in Diyala Province from April 2006 to January 2007.
The security situation was never safe, but deteriorated over time when the surge was implemented in September 2006. "It was dire; we could never go out without armor and guards."

On organization: in theory the PRT had a leader the rank of the Senior FSO (Foreign Service Officer), a military deputy the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, a Provincial Reconstruction Manager, an Iraq Political Officer(IPAO)-political officer from State, an agriculture person, USAID person, legal person, a public diplomacy person and a civil affairs unit and a movement team (Blackwater). At the outset, there were only three people, but the PRT staffing was mostly fleshed out by 2007. However, most positions were unfilled a good deal of the time, and the people who filled them were "totally unqualified to do what they were supposed to do." The team leader (the interviewee), reported to the National Coordinating Team (NCT) and the Iraq Reconstruction Management Office; no authority over team members. The role was to coordinate activities with the Brigade and others, and with the provincial government, teaching them democratic procedures. There was no job description and no mission statement.

On resources, the Commander's Economic Reconstruction Program (CERP) was the only funding available; uses were highly restricted and at the discretion of the Commander. In time there was a budget, largely focused on bricks and mortar, but it involved convoluted procedures and delays. No operating funds initially.

On relationships: enjoyed working with the Iraqis who were desperate to do things to better their country; within the PRT: initially excellent commander, staffing: "some good, some not, all suffering from a lack of a coherent mission statement so everybody pulled his own way;" high turnover a problem for continuity. USAID staff in Bagdad difficult, uncooperative, failed to provide information on activities in the province; a very negative view of RTI's performance.

Activities included, for example: helping the provincial council to develop democracy, particularly helping the council choose reconstruction projects, bringing the council closer to the provincial director generals of the sector ministries and helping it focus on the Baghdad national constitution and its implementation in the province; setting up a business development center; arranging for cooperation between DG Agriculture and School of Agriculture on a soil mapping program; some work on the court system and prison conditions; work on sewer and water, electicity systems, but with little attention to institutional strengthening.

Overall assessment and lessons: "PRTs are a waste of taxpayer money since the Bagdad Embassy and Washington were more focused on turf wars;" PRT plan not well thought out; budget and financial problems are "absolutely major;" poor communications between the center in Bagdad and the PRTs; "military not trained or equipped to face the kind of conflicts it will face in the future." "The first provincial action teams were doing an excellent job and should have been continued; they had a budget, more autonomy, and greater peace."

Suggestions: visit the PRTs to learn what is happening; determine what can be done at the provincial level and what requires actions by the national government to facilitate work at the provincial level; provide the PRTs with more resources, more information and communications, cut Bagdad staffing in half, and, in general, "create a bureaucratic situation in which people are able to spend more time on what they are supposed to be doing than on internal problems."

Interview

Q: When were you in Iraq?

A: I arrived in Iraq in April 2006 and left in January 2007.

Q: And where were you located?

A: In Ba'qubah, the capital of Diyala Province. More specifically, at a Forward Operating Base just outside of Ba'qubah.

Q: Was this a regular PRT or an EPRT?

A: This was a regular PRT. The EPRTs did not begin until after my departure.

Q: How was security in the area where you were?

A: It changed over the course of time. It was never very secure, meaning that it was not possible for Americans to be out without armor and guards. But it became worse, beginning really all throughout, but especially with the surge in Baghdad that began to be implemented in September 2006. As you know, the surge that General ... presided over was not the first surge. And at that point, there were a number of Al Qaeda and other fighters who came out of Baghdad into Diyala. We felt the effects of that very badly. By the time I left, the situation was dire.

Q: How would you characterize that?

A: When I was sitting in the mayor's office having a conversation, my deputy came in and said, "We have got to go.The rebels have cut off two of our three ways back."

When I was in the government office downtown, a policeman was killed outside.The head of the radio station, who was going to come in and have a meeting, had his car hijacked right in front of the government office. According to the Assistant Governor, approximately 11 per cent of the personnel were coming to work, because the rest were afraid. That is what I would say is dire.

Q: Describe the organization of the PRT and its staffing and chain of command.

A: There are two aspects to this. One is the theoretical aspect, and the other is what there actually was.

Q: Let us hear both.

A: The theoretical aspect was that the PRT had a leader who was at the rank of a Senior Foreign Service Officer and a deputy from the Brigade, with a rank of lieutenant colonel. Both of those were in fact in place, although I was retired, rather than an active Foreign Service Officer. We had a Provincial Reconstruction Manager, a kind of a manager of the projects from Baghdad and then various officers: a political officer from State, that was called an Iraq Political Affairs Office (IPAO), whose main job was reporting; an Agricultural person; a USAID person; a Legal person; a Public Diplomacy person; and a Civil Affairs unit from the military; and then a Movement Team of one sort or another.

When I arrived we were three people: the Provincial Reconstruction Manager, the IPAO, who was a junior officer from State. That was us. And then we had Blackwater as a Movement Team. By the time I left much had been fleshed out. We had and lost and then gained another USAID person. We had our Legal person. The bottom line was that most of our positions were unfilled for

a good deal of my time and the people that did fill them were often, although very good people in their own right, totally unqualified to do what they were supposed to be doing.

Q: For Example?

For example, the second Provincial Reconstruction Manager I had, who was supposed to manage the budget that came from the State Department in Baghdad and oversee the reconstruction projects in the province was a Border Patrol commander with no budget experience whatsoever. My major democracy person was from Research Triangle International (RTI), nice guy, who was from a country with an authoritarian tradition. He did not have a democratic bone in his body. He had never lived or worked in a democracy in his life. The Army Corps of Engineers' Chief Engineer was a CPA from Texas. And then we had a very mixed grab bag in the civil affairs unit.

My second IPAO was not a Foreign Service Officer. He had never written a cable in his life. I had to teach him how to write a cable.

The Public Diplomacy person, when we finally got one (I did this because I was in public diplomacy), came out of the management cone and had never worked in public diplomacy.

My role was to bring these people together as a team, to try to coordinate our activities with those of the Brigade and other organizations in the reconstruction process in Diyala and also to coordinate working with the Provincial Government in teaching them democratic procedure. I must say that, although this sounds pretty coherent, there was no job description and I could not get, before I arrived, any idea of what I was supposed to do from the people who had developed the PRT concept in Baghdad.

Q: You were the senior State civilian, then, in the group?

A: Yes, I was the senior U.S. person on the base, in fact.

Q: And you reported to the embassy?

A: I reported to the NCT, the National Coordinating Team in the Embassy, which reported to Iraq Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO), which was not part of the Embassy.The management structure of the team was enough to make a strong woman weep and I often did. I wrote nobody's Employee Efficiency Report (EER), and I had authority over nobody's pay check.The only authority I had was moral. And the team was great. There was not any real problem with them most of the time, except for a couple of individuals and we worked well; we had a good team.

But if you drew a management diagram of it, you would find the real lines of authority went back to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Brigade where we were and two separate units of that Brigade and the National Guard unit that was with us, the Civil Affairs unit, actually reported to a superior on another base, to USAID, to the State Department, to IRMO, to the Department of Justice. You begin to get the picture?

Every individual had a career to think of in terms of a different organization, which might or might not have understood the work of the PRT.

Q: Was there a mission statement that was given to you when you took on this assignment?

A: No.

Q: None developed over time?

A: Not that I know of.

Q: Before you went out, did you have some training before taking on this assignment?

A: We had two weeks. The second week was entirely security, and the first week was partly security and generally Iraqi culture; it was for everybody going out there. It had nothing to do with the specific PRT.

Once I got to Baghdad I had appointments set up for me, but they were all political liaison appointments: "Let's touch base with the rear admiral in charge of X, or the general in charge of Y." When I said, "Now, I would like to know what kind of resources I have to work with. What kind of budget?," I learned that there was not any budget. I said, "Okay, who has money and who has resources that I need to meet with?" And the man who was supposed to be in charge of the financial aspects did not even know what I was talking about.

Before you went out to the country, you would go around to everybody who could possibly give you something and that was an important thing to know. There was none of this. Absolutely none of it. Now it changed, because I did, since I was retired and did not have a career to think of, I could be very vociferous and was.

Q: Did the military have what they called Commander's Economic Reconstruction Funds (CERP)?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: But you had no say about those or did you?

A: The CERP fund was the only money that we really had access to, but we had access to it during the time that the first commander of the base was there. The second commander preferred to retain control of everything himself. But we were not able to use it, in the first place because of the restrictions on the process of the funds and what they could be used for. I am pretty creative about being able to use funds, but it took us a long time to get around it.

But the second thing is, it takes time to be able to use money wisely, and, by the time we got to the place where we knew what we wanted to do with it, the security situation was deteriorating so badly that many of the things that we had had plans for and funding for were no longer possible. Now if we had had a budget of our own, we could have done some things.

Q: Were you able, in time, to get a budget, or funds?

A: All of this is very complicated, of course. Baghdad said, "Oh, but you do have a budget." But the budget was only for reconstruction projects in specific areas, like roads or electricity and everything had to be approved by Baghdad, or in a lengthy process. They later widened the budget and said, "Okay, you can use it for perhaps non-bricks and mortar, but the process in Baghdad was so convoluted and lengthy that, again, the situation deteriorated over time, and by the time we were able to get something through, it was no longer possible to do it.The budget generally focused only on bricks and mortar.

Not everything that needs to be done, especially if you are working in democracy and trying to change a whole country and culture, as we were trying to change in Iraq; not everything is measurable in terms of building something and all of the funding has been set up for bricks and mortar. The Iraqis have money. That is not the major problem. And they have some knowledge and some organization, but what they do not have is either democracy, on the one hand, or having had access to the knowledge of the rest of the world, on the other, for several decades, and that is what they needed and wanted. They did not need a building for a health clinic so much as they needed the latest way to administer drug distribution at the health center.

Q: For this budget, what was this process? Who actually approved your budget or your request for funds?

A: It changed over time, but basically it was a process that wound its way through both the military and the civilian sides in Baghdad.

Let me return, we finally got some operating funds. We had no operating funds at the beginning. If we wanted to buy a newspaper, it had to be out of our own pockets. We finally got operating funds in October, but we never really got the kind of budget I had as a public affairs officer.

Q:What scale of budget are we talking about, what range?

A: The brick and mortar projects that we could apply for —it was not our budget —we could apply to get up to X number of dollars or a couple of million dollars.

Q: But then the operating budget, what did that amount to?

A: We had sixty thousand dollars a year, which was, in fact, at that point more than we needed, but that was after five months of not having anything. Our motto was, "If it is not nailed down, it is ours," because we did not have enough desks for our people.

Q: Let us turn now to PRT relations with the Iraqis. What were you trying to do? What was your main task and what were some of the activities you took on?

A: Remember that there was no mission statement and nothing written. At first we were told that our main task was to coordinate reconstruction and the projects, to make sure the Iraqis had a hand in it and were involved in making the decisions. Now that was pried out of Baghdad by me, so I am not sure that that is what they would have come up with if I had not pulled it out. On the other hand, were supposed to work with the Provincial Council to develop democracy at the provincial level.

Q: What did you do? How did you do that?

A: I will take a step back here and say that in my view democracy is not just an institution. In order to have a functioning democracy, you have to have a much wider range of activities and institutions than simply a provincial council and elections; this includes civil society; it includes a free media; it includes a reasonably functional court system. What was set up under the military... And remember there had been Provincial Government Teams in there in 2004 and teams out in the provinces. As far as I could tell, they were doing a good job, and a lot of civil society work started, and then the Provincial Government Teams left because of an American decision and the Civil Society people left because they no longer could live on the economy and it was too violent.

Then, the U.S. Army came in and the army was actually working with the provincial government. The U.S. Army was working with each of the ministries in reconstruction, sending people, often sergeants, to meet the senior government people in the province. This was a great affront to the Iraqis depending on the individual abilities of the person involved. The major way in which the U.S. Army was working with the provincial government was

to try to get the government involved in the process of choosing reconstruction projects and contracting for them. We came in and began to work with this process. The military had developed a newspaper and a radio station and the young major in charge of that really did not want any help and that was fine, except, of course, he had given the contract for everything to the same assistant governor, but that is another thing.

So we began working on the economy, because I had some strengths in the civil affairs team on the economy. In July, we had plans for a business development center. The Iraqis were so excited about that that they ponied up ten thousand dollars of their own money, which I thought was pretty impressive. Unfortunately, by December all the businessmen had fled and the assistant governor who was working with us on this said, "You really have to back off, because it is not going to work."

We were trying to take up the work with the civil society groups that had been organized. There had been some really good work done in that area.

Q: By whom?

A: With giving them funding and so forth, because, of course, we did not have any funding. So we had to listen to them and then go and try to find funding; none of which was successful.

RTI was supposed to work with the actual training of the provincial council on democratic methods. We finally, along about September, got a Department of Justice person. Even before that I had met with the courts and had talked about what we might possibly do and the military person who was there, the Judge Advocate General, was doing a superb job along those lines, all on the criminal side, rather than the civil, but really trying to work with the prisons and make the process a bit fairer.

Let us see, what else? Ah, yes, peace. The Iraqis themselves had done some remarkable things to come to an agreement about peace in the town of Miqdadiyah; and we were going to try to do a couple of off-site conflict resolution techniques. But, again, although I had people falling over themselves to fund this, everybody's processes were so slow that by the time things got around to where we could do it, we no longer could, because of the violence.

Q: Were there other activities you took on, with the Provincial Council?

MINSHI: It turned out that the Provincial Council did not have the authority to make laws and it could raise no revenue. It worked with money for reconstruction projects, and then it listened to the complaints of citizens and

they did try to resolve them, but the Provincial Councilors did not know what they were supposed to do. So I started two projects with them.

One was trying to get them to focus on the elaboration of the constitution in Baghdad. The constitution had been written, but none of the implementing legislation had been passed and it was that implementing legislation that was really going to shape the relationship between the provinces and the center. In education, is everything run out of the Ministry of Education in Baghdad, or is there some local autonomy? All of the revenues that came in at this point, still, to the provinces, such as the rental of government buildings, etc, immediately had to be funneled back to Baghdad. So there were lots of things in every area that people needed to talk about and debate. We started on that process and in the process we were trying to bring the Provincial Council more closely together with the Directors General of each ministry, which were Baghdad's representatives in the provinces.

But two things caught up with us. One is that we had no money, and while the things that we were talking about would not cost a lot of money, they did cost something. You need at least to be able to provide lunch to people if they come together for discussion, or what have you and we just did not have any funding. And the second, again, was the increase in violence. It takes time to first identify what might be done, and then to begin to implement it; and all of this time the violence was increasing and pretty soon nobody was coming to Provincial Council meetings.

Q: Was there any money flowing through the Iraqi channels to the Council or to the different sectors?

A: The Iraqi government gave the Council money to do projects, but, again, it was all for bricks and mortar. We also worked with the university, by the way. That is another thing and with the education people, the whole gamut, but nothing ever got done. I am still working on this one, trying to get Ba'qubah University (Diyala is an agricultural area, probably the richest agricultural area in Iraq) to develop an agricultural extension division; they were very excited about this. We tried to get conversations going, telephone conversations, because we could not send people easily or get visiting experts, but telephone lines would not sustain it.

Anyway, back to the Iraqi money. The Iraqi money was for bricks and mortar projects; it was set up in a very strange way. One example is the Iraqi requirement that money not be obligated by the end of the fiscal year, but that it had to be spent by the end of the fiscal year. So if you had to build a bridge or do something which takes more that one fiscal year, you had to start with what you could spend in a fiscal year and just hope that you were going to get funding for the second and the third and the fourth.

In any case, we worked a lot with that, but it was only focusing on bricks and mortar and only focusing on how the money and the bids and things went through the system.

Q: How did those actually take place? Did that system work?

A: No, it did not work at all. The Iraqis had had a perfectly good functioning system for contracting before we arrived but somebody, some hot shot in Baghdad, set up another system in which members of the Provincial Council sat on committees along with a couple of civil servants to write the advertisements for bids, open the bids, evaluate the bids and so forth and that did not work because most of the people saw no gain in doing it. Remember, you have a political system in which there is no geographical constituency; the only gain in being on a committee was in being able to skim off money, which became a preoccupation of a lot of people in the process. So it had been a massive mud hole.

Q: Do you have a sense of what projects got constructed, how many schools or clinics, etc?

A: Not a good sense, because all the contractors were Iraqis; it was very difficult to actually go and see things, because of the security situation and some peculiarities here that have to do with Blackwater and the Embassy that prevented me at the beginning. And then later we went out a lot more, but then it became really too bad for anybody to go out on almost frivolous missions like that.There was a major project at a prison and that had lots of delays; as far as I know, it still has not been finished, although it has been going on for many years.

One of the bridges across the Tigris River was in fact a pontoon bridge. There had been a contract let for a real bridge to be constructed. The contractor fled to Jordan because of threats on his life and nobody in the ministry nor the contractor wanted to let the contract go and let the money be freed up so that somebody else could complete it. It turns out that the regulations were, so they said, that, if the contract could not be completed because of outside factors, such as the security situation, in X number of years, the contractor just got to keep the money he had. So you see where that went.

USAID supposedly built 28 health clinics in the province. We wanted to send people out to see how many were functioning and what state they were in, to try to begin to get them into the military grid, because the U.S. military never used names of villages, they only used coordinates, so the two systems would not mesh. So we were trying to figure out some way to get the systems to mesh, but USAID would not tell us where they were.

Q: You did not know where the health clinics were?

A: No, and they would not tell us.

Q: Why do you think that was the case?

A: They were afraid of finding out that they had not been built; that they were not functioning or maybe they did not know. Maybe their own records were bad.

Q: So you never got to visit any of them?

A: No, but the health clinics are one of the illustrations I use of one of the problems of focusing on bricks and mortar and one of the major problems of the CERP funds. CERP funds are the Commanders Emergency Response Program funds, to make life easier for his Brigade and better for the people he is working with in the country. It is a good idea, but a young captain comes into a village and the village elders come and say, "We need a health clinic. Ours was burned down" or "We never had one" and "Our wives have to give birth at home and we cannot get our kids immunized" and blah, blah, blah. So they build a health clinic. Fine. Staffing? Regular flow of medical supplies? Integration into the health system? Payment for electricity, water? All of those things have to be supplied, too and they usually were not thought of until afterwards, if at all.

Q: So they just built a building?

A:In some ways, if you are providing a health clinic, the building is the last thing you do. First you have to set up all the systems that are going to make that building useful.

Q:But there were no systems, is what you are saying?

A: No, systems. The Iraqis had systems, badly degraded by Saddam and further degraded by war. The health system actually was a real problem for us, because we had a Sunni Director General of Health and the Health Ministry was Shia. In June of 2006 the Director General was called into the Ministry of Health; he was kidnapped from the Ministry and as far as I know he was never seen again. I got pretty involved in it, but he remains without a trace.

Q: Was there school construction, too?

A: There was school construction. We did not actually construct schools so much as repair them and according to our records we had constructed so many schools that they had a command come from somewhere in the military saying no more schools. However, the Director General of Education and several principals continually came to me and said, "We do not have enough

classrooms. We have trained teachers, but we do not have any classrooms." So what happened to the schools that were "constructed?" Whether they were blown up by dissidents or used for other things or were constructed by contractors who pocketed the money and paid the U.S. Army Iraqi employees, who went and checked on them, paid them off, I do not know.

Q: Did you see any evidence of schooling taking place?

A: Oh, yes, in the earlier period there were schools and one of the Provincial Council members was the principal of a high school. I was working with her because one of the things I was trying to get CERP money to do (and it was a minor amount of money): their libraries had all been looted during the war and so they were asking for at least some reference books. You cannot do that for every high school, but for a few high schools in each administrative unit you could give them a few hundred dollars worth of books; it would be a nice PR gesture, but also be nice for the kids.

Q: There were USAID projects to provide school children with textbooks; there were examinations; those kinds of programs. Did you see any evidence of that?

A: USAID would not talk to us initially. USAID seemed to be extremely secretive. As leadership changed within USIAD, we began to have some communication. But I know that one of the things we were trying to do was to get textbooks out of Baghdad into the schools, which was a problem because the schools had no money to send trucks down to get the textbooks. We had no money to provide them fuel or trucks. The U.S. Army said, "Hey, this is a great thing for the Iraqi Army to do" and so the Iraqi Army stepped up and said, "Oh, yes, we will go down and get the books." Unfortunately, the Iraqi Army brought up the books and dumped them in a central warehouse and did not get them to the schools. The Ministry of Education still had no money to get the books out to schools and, as far as I know in 2006-2007, the kids never did get their books. By this time, a lot the kids were too scared to go to school, anyway.

Q: Were there any other projects or activities of that kind that you were associated with or the PRT was associated with?

A: There were several grants we were trying to get for civil society groups. I was trying to get money and I was going to get money for a therapeutic horseback riding program for children who had been injured in the war. That was more PR than anything else, but it would have been really nice PR. And, again, I had people falling over themselves to get the money, but the security situation had deteriorated too much, and you could not be sure that the kids would be safe.

Q: Were there a lot of civil society organizations?

A: There were actually quite a fair number. They were mostly young students, women. They were real, as opposed to some of the civil society organizations in other countries I have worked in, which were put up mostly to get money to pay the salaries of the people that were running them. These people never asked for money for their own salaries. As a matter to fact, I had to sit with them and work with them on having a fair amount of overhead so that they could afford to work.

Q: Do you have an example of one that you were familiar with?

A: I do not remember names, but there was one that was trying to help handicapped children learn trades in a school and was asking for specific kinds of equipment to do this. The students came in and they wanted to do a civic education project before the elections. There was a women's group that had been given a grant to use a building for women's activities. Women, after they reach puberty, no longer could engage in sports, because they could not dress properly; it was hard for them to learn any kind of trade. So there was this organization that was going to do a whole range of things, from beauty parlor training to sports for young women to a gym. They had been given a big grant by USAID and had obtained a building, but then the Ministry of Telecommunications had taken over most of the building. So we were trying to either get the building back for them or to help them rehabilitate the part they did have, so they could do more.There were several others.

Q: You had time to meet with these people and talk with them and all?

A: Yes.

Q: And how would you describe your relationships with them?

A: People tend to be very charming, if they want money. On the whole the relationship was good. I still correspond with two people from the university.

I was meeting with many people in the political spectrum. Many were engaged in projects because these were bright people with resources; they were also trying to get pensions for those people who were less fortunate than they. But they were also desperate to try to help their country, because even at that time we were having weapons and people coming in from Iran, across the border and they were saying, "Look, we used to be in charge of this border. Let us help you." But that was not what was being done politically by the Americans at that time.

So I would say on the whole relations were good.

Q: How did you find generally working with the Iraqis?

A: I found it frustrating because I did not speak Arabic. I had a good interpreter, but I speak enough Urdu, and there are enough loan words that sometimes I could tell that he was not quite getting things right or I could tell by peoples' faces that it was not right and I am sure that there were more times. I enjoyed working with the Iraqis. I found them charming generally, eager to do things, desperate to do things, to make the country better.

Q: And within the PRT, you have already mentioned it, but how would you characterize relationships there?

A: One of the things about the PRT at that point was that we were embedded, really, with the Brigade. And our first colonel, an outstanding officer and individual, bent over backwards. When we arrived they still had not signed the agreement between State and the Pentagon about who was to provide us resources and we had no resources. The colonel strove to make sure that we could do our job as much as we could. He understood the value of what we were supposed to do and did everything he could to help. I cannot say enough on how good my deputy was.

The rest of the people in the PRT, like any organization, some good, some not so good, everybody suffering from the fact that it really was not a coherent organization with a coherent mission statement and with a kind of a statement where everybody was working together along the same lines, because everybody was pulled by his or her own organization.

The only organization, however, with which we had real difficulty was USAID and that was not with the person who was working with me. He was fine. It was with USAID in Baghdad and, most particularly, with Research Triangle Institute, RTI.

Q: You sound like you had some negative experiences with them.

A: Yes. When I first came to Baghdad I managed to get an appointment with RTI. I have worked in democratization and I have designed civic education materials. I have also designed instructional materials for the University of California at San Diego, so I have an interest and I am a political theory wonk. So I had an interest in what they were doing and I asked to see some of the materials and the answer was that they were proprietary. Eventually, the Embassy and USAID, got around to addressing the question of why are materials funded by the U.S. government "proprietary" to an organization. Then RTI maintained that the materials were done in Arabic and never translated into English. All right, then you have materials to train Iraqis in democracy that are developed in Arabic and which no non-Arabic speaker has ever reviewed?

RTI had two people working in our province. They refused to acknowledge this at first.Then they refused to tell us who they were, saying that if we had any contact with them, it would be dangerous for them. Since we met them at the Provincial Council and since the Provincial Council people told us what they were doing, this is a bit disingenuous. We met them more intimately when one of them was detained by the U.S. Army in a sweep through a village that had been producing IEDs. Now there was no evidence to indicate that he himself was producing and placing IEDs, but his cousin was. Eventually this gentleman was let go.

The second gentleman was rolled up about a month later and directly implicated in the death of an American soldier. This was a person who was working for RTI and who RTI refused to identify for us. We had a major fight with RTI after that. First RTI said, "Oh, but he could not! He was such a nice person! He was a general before the war."

Then we insisted that RTI let us do background checks on anybody they hired to work in the province and there was a lot of resistance to that. So I started talking about the Washington *Post* having a great time with this. They became less resistant, which helped, but nobody, as far as I know, has ever been hired to work in the province locally.

But in the course of this, we learned RTI hired local people, gave them two weeks of training and then expected them to be able to teach democracy and democratic procedures to the Provincial Council.

And then there was the Provincial Council law that RTI funded the development of, which had the Council chairmen come to draft the law, which, of course, ended up being totally weighted towards the Provincial Councils, no balance whatsoever.

There were other small squiggles, but those were the main things. So RTI was a real problem and RTI was supposed to be the major agent that was doing the democracy training. In fact when I was first there for a couple of months I waited, because the RTI people to be on the Provincial Reconstruction Team were constantly arriving and I wanted to wait and let them work with the Provincial Council and not muck up their field of action, as it were and that cost valuable time. As I said, when the young man who was going to do this for us arrived, he just did not understand politics, he simply did not understand the political give and take and the kinds of things that go on in a democracy. He received his book learning, as it were, but that is not the same thing as knowing how a legislature really works.

Q: Did you get any sense that the Provincial Council or the local administration was evolving or advancing?

A: No, I do not think so. The Chairman seemed determined to follow the orders he was given, so he had to do things like change the minutes of the meeting after the meeting and stuff that was generally not considered quite pukka. We decided to work with the committees of the Council on various subject areas, (because there was a possibility of doing something there, given that the Council could not pass laws) and it would have borne fruit, but events overtook us and several of the Council members that we worked with were killed and the Council did not meet from October until after I left.

Q: Were they under threat from the insurgency?

A: Yes, it was a major problem and many of them had to travel long distances to get to the Council, along roads that were increasingly dangerous. The Provincial Council Chairman was attacked several times.

Q: Let us switch to another topic, you did mention that there was some work in the agricultural area and the Iraqis were interested in getting some information. You were working with the university on this. Was there some other agricultural activity?

MUNSI: Yes, we managed to get officials from the university together with the Ministry of Agriculture people. They were going to allow the students to meet in a ministry room, which was really nice cooperation and we put together a project to do soil tests. Apparently there has never been a soil map of the provinces made and so we were going to hire experts to do a work study program with students. The ministry was going to let us use their premises as a lab and do a soil map of the province. But, again, there was no money and as we searched for money the situation got worse and so even if we had had money we could not have done it.

Q: That meant having students out all over the area?

A: Yes, and it would have been possible when we were first there. That is one of the things that if we had had a budget, and perhaps could have started and I wonder would it have made a difference? I do not know.

Q: Was there anything else in the agricultural sector that you were working on?

A: Bees. We were trying to work with the beekeepers to develop honey production and honey marketing. The military did and credited the PRT, but it was really the military. They sprayed the orchards for the first time for a particular pest that ruins the date crops but also the orange crops under the date trees with their droppings. That was quite a traumatic thing because the Iraqis did not see any problem in spraying from planes, near populated areas,

a pesticide that contained nerve gas that was ten years old and had been stored in an unair-conditioned warehouse. The military and the Iraqis cooperated together to do this.

Q: Anything else in that area of your activities that we have not touched on?

A: In agriculture?

Q: Or more broadly.

A: You know, we explored reviving a tomato paste factory, but it turned out that the owner had plenty of money and just wanted some extra money from us. We were looking at marketing structures for truck gardens and to see how we could intervene to make them better for the farmer and more efficient. We developed the concept of an agricultural report to be given on the radio, which started but then the radio was attacked by insurgents and shut down. That is all I can remember off the top of my head. But it was a pretty good range of activities.

Q: Were there other programs, apart from agriculture? You mentioned health and education and you did some road construction or bridge construction.

A: The military, all this time, was doing road construction, some small bridge construction. We were trying to work with three major bridges. One I was a critical bridge across the Tigris and also they were trying to reconstruct a bridge across Lake Hamrin.

We were working with the court system on the process in the criminal courts of gathering evidence, of using it and also on prison conditions and a whole gamut of activity. A very good person was working on that, one of the few real professionals in his area on the team. I was talking about and would have liked to have worked on developing the civil side of the court, because the civil side was not developed at all. Civil law for the court meant family law and if Iraq is to develop economically and attract international investment, the courts are going to have to deal with all of the kinds of civil disputes that arise in commerce and trade, but the judge was very resistant to that. We were working on securing the courthouse and giving it better protection from attack.

We did a lot of electrical work. One of the things that had happened was that there were six electrical substations, $1.5 million each, that had been constructed with U.S. money that were not hooked into the electrical grid, because nobody had really coordinated properly with the Director General of Electricity. So by the time I left four of them were on line and the other two were being worked on.

Q: ....the areas of water and sewage?

A: Yes, water and sewage were real high priorities with the army. The trouble with water and sewage is that sewage starts from the point of ultimate treatment back. You can build all the sewer lines you want, but if they do not go anywhere they do not help. What I really wanted to do and this brought up another problem in the way things were staffed was we needed a sewer expert and the response was, "We are going to have a hard time recruiting a sewer expert to work for a year."

I said, "We do not need a sewer expert for a year.The Iraqis have some good sewer engineers. What they need is a sewer expert to talk with them about development and what has happened and to help them come to an idea of the system they want designed. We should not be designing a system for them. They really have a lot of capacity."

But we were not able to bring in people part time. That was one of the things I was trying to do with the telephone lines. I had people lined up from the legislature in North Carolina to begin to talk to local legislative committees about what their committees did, but the telephone lines in the government center were not good enough to sustain an international conversation and people were afraid to come onto the base, for fear of reprisal.

And the water system and I wanted to do that with sewers, too, is how we got on to that, the water system, the military were doing a lot of water treatment plants. But, again, if you treat water at a plant people either walk there with their buckets or you have a distribution system and a distribution system is really a long term, expensive project. One U.S. military leader tried something, doing an integrated development of one small area, with electricity, water and sewer, thinking that that was the way to go. I am not sure how that turned out, because his successor dropped it, but also one of the real problems we had was fuel, fuel and power.

Although we had done an enormous amount of work on the electrical grid in Diyala and, in fact, the electrical grid in Diyala, at the time I left, was in pretty good shape, nothing was going to help the power situation except more power. Now we got most of our power from Iran. The Iranians had agreed to construct two booster stations along the line but they didn't do it. That would have boosted the power. Those were much more money than we had access to. Power generation and distribution all over the country is a problem. So in the absence of power, people went to generators, which require diesel, and again there was a shortage. Now water purification plants do not work unless you have fuel or power. So all of this came back to problems in operation that we could not solve at the provincial level.

Q: Any other aspect we have not touched on?

A: There was one thing I was concentrating on in this paper I am writing on democratization and figuring out how to put it. One of the signal things about our mission was that we were supposed to work on instilling democracy, but there was never any discussion of what this meant or how to do it. Now I spent a lot of time thinking about it in postings Africa and then later in Romania and I had developed certain ideas. Democratization was never coordinated around the country and really very much second place to bricks and mortar, which are what the army likes, because you have a task, you can do your task, you can finish it, you can rub the dust off your hands and walk away feeling good about it.

Q: Too little attention to the institutional aspects of these infrastructure projects?

A: Yes, very little paid to that. By the way, the PRT teams were at that time just another complication on the horrible administrative structure.

The second thing is that we were totally dependent on the military on the base. We literally depended for our lives on them and also the working conditions and everything. The Brigade Commander was wonderful. There is one time when a well-known general asked me whether I would rather be under the military or under the State Department. I said I would rather be under the military, because it was the military that was enabling us to do our work.

Another commander was a very different personality. Really, I think he would have been a very good commander in World War II, but he simply was not constituted to deal with this complex situation in Iraq, where you are not quite sure who your enemy is and who your friend is, ever. He wanted to control everything, including the PRT, and when we resisted he withdrew support, which made it very difficult for us to function. What he wanted to do with the PRT was to have it focus on bricks and mortar again. That was a problem for the PRT, but, by that time, it was almost irrelevant, because the PRT was not doing anything. It could not do anything.

But it was a real problem in the conduct of the war. When you have people changing every year and having almost diametrically opposing views of how to carry out the same orders that are given to everybody, it makes it very difficult to deal with a battle of this kind, where you need to have some continuity in working with people. Again, it is like having a new country director come in and decide he is going to do something different, but usually it does not mean cutting off all the projects you started.

Q: When you went out from the base to see the Iraqis, you always had to have an American military group with you?

A: Oh, yes

Q: How did this affect your ability to communicate with the Iraqis?

A: It was deleterious, in two senses. One, it just has a whole atmosphere to it, but the other sense was that we could not spend as much time in as many places as would have been desirable. In most countries I will spend a lot of time ambling through the streets, looking at people, looking at the shoes they wear, looking at their interactions with each other, sort through the marketplace, what kind of trucks are on the roads, all of this stuff you do to try to get a sense of the people. I would usually spend many hours sitting with people, drinking coffee, inviting them over for dinner, talking, listening, trying to get a sense of where they are, where their heads are, what things will make them respond to what kinds of stimuli. Truth to tell, it was totally impossible and we really could not spend enough time with our Iraqi counterparts.

Q: Were there local non-government organizations (NGO) groups, not just Iraqis but foreign groups?

A: There were not any foreign NGOs in our province.

Q: There were no American NGOs?

A: There were NGOs that had had Iraqi representation but along about September, October some of their representatives were killed and they withdrew them. And, besides, USAID would not tell us who they were and when they finally did, it left an odd residue. Can you imagine, working as if you are supposed to be in charge of what is going on in a province and USAID would not even tell me what they are doing? But when they finally did tell us what they were doing, they asked and we agreed readily not to mention this to the Iraqis and not to have contact unless we had cleared it because it might endanger their people. But it meant that at no time did we have the kind of input from these people that would have been helpful.

The other thing about going out, when I was first there we had Blackwater. Blackwater (aside from being really very aggressive and they did shoot one elderly gentleman in the leg at one point, which was terrible) took their orders from Baghdad and Baghdad was very conservative and they would not let us go out. Finally I began letting my deputy go out with the military, because I figured if the military said it was reasonably safe that they were better than the Regional Security Office in Baghdad at knowing. And in the end, one of the few good things I did, I got a kidnapped child back; I went to the governor to appeal for this child. I just went with the army and said Blackwater, forget it. So when Blackwater left at the beginning of July we had a military movement team. Much more satisfactory, because their assessments of the situation were

much better and we could go where we wanted to, within the limits of being reasonable.

That said, I personally have qualified twice for a Combat Action Medal so it was not entirely without risk.

Q: Of course. Are there any specific topic area we have not touched on?

A: No, I think you have covered it fairly well.

Q: If you look at the whole experience overall, you already touched on this but how would you assess the achievements of the PRT?

A: Oh, I think the PRTs, based on my experience, are not cost effective and put people at risk doing things that are having no effect. It did not have to be that way, but turned out that way because some people are more focused on turf wars and pandering and American public opinion. There are also some really good people out there working very hard,

Q: Is there a distinction in your mind between the concept and the practice?

A: Yes. The first Provincial Action Teams that were out there should have been continued.They seemed to be doing an excellent job.

Q: What is the difference?

A: The difference was they did have a budget; they had more autonomy; there was much greater peace. And it was the greater peace and the ability to work out in the Iraqi environment that made the really big difference.

If the Provincial Reconstruction Teams had been thought through better, if they had been given a budget, if we had not had to spend most of our time fighting bureaucratic battles rather than focusing on what we were going to do, we might have had a chance. But I am not entirely sure: because of the violence in Iraq, could more economic development and better political development have alleviated it? Quite probably so, but would that have happened? I am not so sure, because one of the real problems is the government of Iraq itself, which is sectarian and has problems. And if nothing is allowed to happen at the provincial level by the central government in Baghdad, no matter what we do out in the provinces, we are not going to be as effective as we should be.

Q: Looking over this whole situation, you have already implied a lot of them, but what would stand out as two or three major lessons of your experience?

A: They are personal and they are political, and the political experience is that, I talked to a lot of groups when I returned about the situation in Iraq and many of them would say "What can we do to help?" We did try to get a local government exchange group going but that did not work. The were a lot of flaws in Iraq. We should not have gone in there in the first place was and is my belief. I went out to the PRT because we had already gone in; it is my country and we made a mess. It is incumbent upon us to [clean it up.] Our government and our State Department are simply not functioning the way they should. When I returned, guess how many interviews I had with people in the State Department about PRTs and what we were doing and what might be changed? None.

Q: There was no interest?

A: A couple of people at the mid-level were interested, but they were not in any position to do anything. When my boss returned, same thing. Here is the man who had been in charge of all of the PRTs in Iraq and nobody in the State Department bothered to talk to him about what was going on. This is scandalous, but also it is because people are focused on pleasing the powers that be and the powers that be have made it quite clear that they do not want to have any information coming in that is contrary to the information they wanted.That is the major political lesson for me.

The major personal lesson is really very personal and that is that if you take the natural responses of fight or flight, I now know that my response is fight. When I am attacked, I am pretty much "Hey, give me a gun, dammit." Nobody ever did, of course. I do not know what I would have done with it if I had had it,

Q: Were there any lessons specific to the PRTs themselves? Obviously your big point was about the budget problem and the financing problem.

A: The budget and financial problem was absolutely major. The relationship with the Brigade is important. My colleague, over in another province, had the opposite experience. Things were so bad that they were literally at one point scrambling through trash heaps to try to resurrect some old containerized housing units to sleep in and when new leadership arrived, things did improve.

There is another lesson, too, which is that we really have an outstanding military but our military is not equipped to deal with the kind of conflicts we are apt to face in the future and either in their predilection, they are trained to fight and these are wars that cannot be just fought. They have to be approached on a broad spectrum. So fighting has to be one weapon in a wider array and it may be that we need to look at a different kind of structure for the military, or a different kind of relationship. We have already tried having the

political in charge of the military in Iraq and that did not work very well. It still does not work, because the U.S. military is run by politics in the United States. But the military just is not capable of doing all the political stuff.

Q: And what about on the State Department side, what would you say?

A: The State Department has problems. A lot of good people spent an enormous amount of time and energy doing things that have not a whole lot of effect on the world around them.

Q: And the relationship to the PRTs?

A: The relationship to the PRTs was a philosophy of arms length.There was one experience I had that I have not talked about that was interesting.

Q: Going back particularly to the PRTs, any major recommendations or lessons that you would like to put forth?

A: Yes, I have a whole bunch of them. Some of them you have heard already, about the budget, about the structure. You cannot bring together people from a whole bunch of different agencies without a mission statement and hope that they are going to work well as a team without an enormous and extraordinary effort on the part of the leader but even so it is difficult.

But more important is that we need to spend more time thinking about what we are doing. We need to develop historical data, and I am glad you are doing this. It took us a long time to figure out a lot of stuff and causing mistakes which if somebody had paid attention, it would have been easier to read a five-page document. But, again, I do not think we have any more credibility in the area of democracy building in the United States because of our actions at the national level. And until we fix that we might as well forget things like PRTs.

I belonged to USIA for many years; one of the reasons I am so critical of State and the press relations, you can push policy all you want, you can use Madison Avenue techniques, but if the product is not good, it will not sell and we have not had a good product for some time in the area of democratization, because we are talking a talk but we are not walking the walk. And it is ironic, to some extent, that the people who are carrying out this work in foreign countries, the military and the Department of State, are some of the most hierarchical, non-democratic organizations we have in our country.

Q: Any other recommendations? Any summing up about where we should go with PRTs?

A: What would I do if I were in charge of this activity right now? The first thing, is that I would actually visit the PRTs and learn as much as I could about what was happening and make recommendations based on that.That seems basic, but on the whole it is not done.

You need to look at Iraq as a whole and to where the origins of problems lie and then attack the problems at their origins, because there are some things in the provinces that you can do at the provincial level and there are some things you cannot. If you want to take the brick and mortar example,
you can absolutely build more classrooms at the provincial level because the kids and the teachers are there. But you absolutely cannot increase the electrical capacity, the amount of electricity coming in, at the provincial level.That is a national problem.

Similarly, in the area of governance, there are things that you really can do at the provincial level: develop interest groups, develop civic society, do a lot of civic education, even in the Provincial Council do similar things, work on certain aspects to the court system. And they are other things that you absolutely cannot do until the center acts and I do not think that that has been clearly delineated.

So that is what I would look at overall, if I were in charge of the PRTs. And then I would start talking to PRT leaders a lot more about what could be done in their provinces and then what might be done at the center to facilitate it, bureaucratically, internally and externally with the Iraqi government. I would do a lot more talking and try to help PRTs concentrate on those things that they could do by giving them the resources and also providing information and, to some extent, correcting mistakes. Usually people do things that do not work because they do not know that they have already been done someplace else and have not worked.

That comes to one of the major problems in Baghdad, which is that probably there are too many people in Baghdad. If I were in charge in Baghdad, I would cut everything in half, because as far as I could see most people spend more time defending their turf and trying to further their ideas than they do actually implementing anything.

There is not nearly enough communication. IRMO itself had consultants working with the central government, and it had the PRTs and there was almost no communication between them. So we raised this and IRMO in Baghdad said “All you have to do is raise the question and we will try to get you the answer from them.” And we said that sometimes we do not know the questions to ask. We might not know that there is an initiative being taken in Baghdad that will affect us, unless you tell us. And all of that was not being done.

Trying to create a bureaucratic situation in which people are able to spend more time on what they are supposed to be doing and less time on the internal problems of the bureaucracy and that, of course, is probably above my pay grade.I am sure that you have encountered the same problem in various jobs.

Q: This is very helpful. I do not want to cut you off, if there are any more points you want to make.

A: No, I do not think so.

Q: Thank you.