

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

BOB BISHOP

Interviewed by: Philip J. Wilcox
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Note: The USIP recording apparatus failed to record this phone interview. This summary is based on notes taken during the interview.

William R. (Bob) Bishop, is a Col. In the U.S. Army Reserve, Special Forces. He is 47 years of age. He has a BA from the Army War College at West Point and an MBA from Duke University. He is currently a health care executive in Little Rock, Arkansas. He was first based in Mosul and served in a Civic Affairs battalion of the 101st Airborne from April to August 2003. He then served as a Senior Management Reform Officer in the Sadr City district of Baghdad until March of 2004.

Col. Bishop had no instructions, reconstruction plans, maps, or base line data to work from. His requests for guidance from the CPA went unheeded. For this reason, a civic action coordinator in the CPA's headquarters in Baghdad would have been useful, as would a conduit for information sharing.

Col. Bishop notes that the infrastructure in the 5 northern governates was decrepit, but there was little war damage and looting was minimal. There were adequate food resources and the economic situation was relatively benign. A lack of electrical power was the main problem. Gen. Petraeus, the commander in charge of Mosul, set his priorities as power, water, schools, and hospitals.

Reconstruction money came from special, quick disbursement funds controlled by the Division commander. There were no CPA funds. The quick disbursement funds allowed for grants of up to \$10,000. The influx of cash created jobs with minimal bureaucracy in a situation where the U.S. needed to immediately capture the good will of the Iraqi people. Col. Bishop notes this as the chief success of his operation, and one of the few tasks which was properly executed.

Under Gen. Petraeus's creative leadership, American forces in Mosul won support by identifying Iraqis for a city council to participate in reconstruction [This specific incident is alluded to in the interview with Lt. Col. Joe Rice, paraphrased here: "General Petraeus surveyed the Iraqi community to get some notables, and selected a council based on ethnic division, ensuring roughly proportional representation of all groups. Later on, neighborhood councils were formed using the caucus method developed for council selection in Baghdad."]

Criteria for prospective council members were leadership/effectiveness and tribal/ethnic balance, not friendliness. The Americans relied heavily on Ali Jabur to stand up the city council. Jabur proved very capable, and his success overshadowed his roots as a former pimp/playboy and Saddamist. Part of the success in building the council was due to the effective use of local media, especially radio and television.

Col. Bishop notes that the abolition of Army and de-Baathification were both mistakes. Not only did these maneuvers disqualify capable people, but they added to unemployment and rebelliousness. For example, the firing of Baathist teachers caused student riots. Gen. Petraeus complained about the policy's effects, but got no CPA support. He therefore worked out a separate arrangement to rehire vital teachers. The prompt creation of the ICDC, a paramilitary force, helped to soak up the glut of jobless, ex-army personnel. The ICDC served as local Iraqi militia associated with the American regional commands. They assisted US forces with work details and border security.

Col. Bishop was also critical of the pace of reconstruction. He notes that by March of 2004, no supplemental funds had reached the north. U.S. contractors were slow and constrained by rules and regulations. Bechtel, a major contractor, was sluggish in executing its contract to rebuild 600 schools. Col. Bishop believes that more local contractors should have been used.

The painfully slow pace of restoring critical infrastructure was worsened by unrealistically high Iraqi expectations. Iraqi dissatisfaction bred violence, most notably in the form of the insurgency. Once unleashed, the outpouring of violence was difficult to stop. In this respect, the delay in training and equipping Iraqi police was a critical error.

The main lessons Col. Bishop draws from his Iraq Experience are the following; First, not enough troops or money were provided to accomplish such a huge task. Second, planning was generally poor for the reconstruction effort, for civic affairs, and for winning hearts and minds. He believes that the lesson to be learned from this and previous deployments is that more quick disbursing funds are needed. Third, the mind-set of the decision-makers was too exclusively on war-fighting. This was a trend that continued during the occupation. Security and military needs always trumped reconstruction needs. Fourth, the CPA civilian/military interface didn't work. A three-star General as CPA chief would have been more effective than a civilian.