

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

INTERVIEW #1

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Initial Interview Date: February 8, 2008
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Executive Summary

The interviewee was a former high-ranking official in the Baghdad Provincial Reconstruction team, who had a 15-month tour of duty during a time of considerable violence and political instability in Iraq. He witnessed the establishment of embedded PRTs in the provinces, and found that the decentralized structures of these ePRTs often led to a failure to report to and co-ordinate activities adequately with Baghdad and Washington. There was a reluctance to report, partly because some State Department reporting that focused on smaller incidents often got writ large in the Washington context. The PRT structure was tightened toward the end of his tour, with ePRT reporting ultimately going through the Baghdad PRT.

The informant described in detail how the PRT answered to the National Coordination Team (NCT) and later the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA), which in turn reported to the Iraqi Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO). The mission of the PRTs was mainly political reconstruction with economic reconstruction playing a lesser role. The mission became to bolster moderate voices in Iraq, although the informant worried that some of the moderates cultivated would never hold political power. The most notable success was bringing Shia and Sunni leaders together and breaking down political and religious divides in some governmental structures. The PRT notably strengthened the role of district councils as a nonpartisan, nonsectarian venue for neighborhoods to express their views on everything from schools to central markets. There was a particular interest in school construction, and the district councils helped to bring citizens and the Ministry of Education together in giving a citizen voice to some of the decision making.

The security situation was particularly bad during the interviewee's tenure, and representatives of the PRT had to endure sniper fire once while visiting Baghdad City Hall. Yet there were luckily no casualties during this period. PRT representatives wanted to go outside the Green Zone in convoys as frequently as possible, and got better co-operation to this end from the U.S. military than from the Regional Security Office, which depended upon the private security details of Blackwater. The informant estimated that 2000 PRT meetings took place outside the Green Zone during his tenure, despite the worsened security situation.

The informant expressed confidence that some of the structures set up and facilitated by the PRTs will endure, and emphasized the importance of having the reconstruction effort

made up by volunteers. He also liked putting a civilian face on the reconstruction effort in a country with such a strong tradition of military rule and dictatorship.

Interview

I am the division engineer for the First Calvary division, Fort Hood, Texas. I deployed as such, but I ended up spending the 15-month deployment as the deputy of the Baghdad PRT.

Q: Will you please describe the location, history, physical structure, size of the staffing of the PRT or ePRT in which you served. Let's start with location, please.

A: The Baghdad PRT was located in the Green Zone, you would say somewhat around the embassy complex. Our physical office space was in the Freedom Towers, which is the part of the Gulf Regions Division Corps of Engineers complex. Somewhat high-rise for the area, about seven stories, we occupied two floors in that. We went from about, in my 15 months, from about 70 personnel to about 120 personnel in the PRT. We also had an office through multi-national division Baghdad that we were able to use up in the embassy, up in the military, in the north wing of the embassy, which was quite helpful as well, because it kept us plugged in well at the embassy, and provided us with some other secure areas to work.

Q: Can you describe the role and mission of the PRT in Iraq, being as specific as possible, and then describe the mission of your PRT.

A: The role and mission of PRTs were basically to facilitate the provincial government and get the provincial government up and working in whatever province you were assigned to. It is a pretty wide mission statement, but I did not feel there were a ton of specifics because it was so vastly different in each province and even down further to the next level for the ePRTs.

Q: So would you describe the role as more political development than economic development...

A: I think that the name itself, Provincial Reconstruction Team, was a misnomer. In fact, I was in NATO when we were trying to decide what we would name what eventually became known as the PRTs, that NATO was providing, and argued very hard for making it provincial stability teams, PSTs, something along those lines. Before the PRTs, the organization that existed, that came out of the division themselves that saw the need and made what they called governance support teams. Everything we did touched on governance, and whether it was physical reconstruction, whether it was economic, it was all tied back to governance, and I think that was really the backbone of what we did.

Q: Can you describe the chain of command, both civilian and military, and the internal organization of your PRT?

A: I could explain that for the rest of the day. The PRT was a State Department led entity, the PRT that I worked on. At least, that was how it was supposed to be, anyway. The team leader was to be Department of State personnel, and the deputy was to be from DOD. The PRT Baghdad team leader was an FS01. I took over for a full colonel from the departing division, and he was a very strong-willed individual as well.

Q: *When you said you took over, what was your title and role?*

A: Deputy PRT team leader. The team reported back to the National Coordination Team (NCT), and that eventually turned into the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA). That was more towards spring of 2007. I arrived in September of 2006. We reported to the National Coordination Team. There is no doubt; they were tucked up under IRMO, the Iraqi Reconstruction Management Office, in the embassy. IRMO was led by Ambassador Joe Saloom.

Q: *Okay. And in his absence the Deputy Chief of Mission, presumably?*

A: Well, that was a separate organization, but there would be some that would say we also reported directly to the DCM, or to the Ambassador. When I say we, I mean the NCT. The NCT was run by a retired Major General, and he was very plugged into the highest levels of the embassy.

Now, we had that reporting relationship. When you have a military deputy who is part of the division that is in charge of Baghdad, you are also very tied into that division. To think that they did not have an awful lot of influence on where and what the PRT was doing as well, would not be true. In the end when they came up with the PRT, when they talked PRT and ePRTs, they called us a partner PRT, and we were partnered with that division. But there was a lot of direct influence as well. So, although we officially worked for the NCT and for the embassy, there is a great deal of influence from MNBB Baghdad as well.

Q: *But at the same time it would not be accurate to call it embedded.*

A: Absolutely not. Partner. MNBB was very good at understanding that. Maybe at some time we will talk about spheres of influence, but MNBB was making sure that we had defined roles and that we worked together, but they did have a lot of influence, I think, was the best way to say it. They had all the resources.

Q: *Can you describe then the relationship, you have already started in a sense, the relationship and interaction of the PRT staff?*

A: It is funny, because at times, this changed. I had one team leader who was there a couple of months when I got out there through sometime in April. I was the team leader for a couple of months until very late June when another came in from the State Department. She was there seven weeks and then got moved up to take over OPA, and

then I got another team leader. There was a lot of turnover in the team leader position. I was really the continuity when I was not acting as team leader.

Q: Did you find that impaired the effectiveness?

A: Absolutely. I would be lying to say otherwise. I do not mind being in charge, and being the continuity, and most military officers will enjoy that and take advantage of it. I think that it really was important that we get a civilian out front training civilian leadership in the Iraqi government and take the military face off of it. Once you have a relationship in Iraq, it is yours for the rest of the time you are there. So, if I became the point of contact with the governor, and with the deputy mayor who really ran the city, in my view, they were mine the rest the time. It did not matter if team leaders came or went. They met them, but they still come back to the person that they really trust and have a relationship with.

Q: When you arrived, did you receive a handoff memo from the person you replaced?

A: On the military side we always overlap. I got brought into theater 45 days early because [my predecessor] had to leave early. I was told, ‘hey, pack your bags, you are leaving next week.’ So I got a physical handover, and a pretty good continuity book.

Q: The next question involves liaison. You already touched on this, but you might want to touch further. Describe the PRT’s relationship with the Provincial Affairs Office or the National Coordinating Team, the US Embassy, the US military.

A: Certainly, in Baghdad PRT, it was stronger and easier because we were there. We were called into a lot of meetings that other PRTs were not to put a PRT face on things. The Ambassador would call down and say “send so and so up, I need to know something about Baghdad,” and he would summon a certain expert within the PRT. So, you get all the good of being close to the embassy, you get a lot of resources, but you also get tasked an awful lot.

Q: Lots and lots of taskings?

A: Overboard. You had to keep pointing out to them that we could not be too pulled off our mission to spend time in the embassy, because our real mission was to be out interacting with people. We had a very good relationship with the NCT, I guess would be a good way of saying it. Being that close to them, a team member made sure that when they asked for stuff, the request would come through them. They had good visibility about what was going on.

Q: What was your relationship in Baghdad to the ePRTs?

A: When the ePRTs began, there was basically not a lot of definition on how they were going to work. It was unfortunate because I think we spun our wheels somewhat as they came on board. I think we got to where we needed to be and hopefully things are going

well now, but we really did not have a lot of definition on reporting chains, who they were actually going to plug into. The memo that was signed at the Department of State between the Secretaries of DOD and DOS was clear. It said the ePRTs will not work for the military except for security. They will be in charge of the governance and economic assistance within their areas, and the security will remain the military's.

Well, when they moved down to a BCT, they are going to work for that BCT. That is who decides where and when they can move, they have all the resources because the ePRT did not come in with resources. When Ambassador Clark came in, he decided that things would be very decentralized, and I think that was the mistake he made, it is not decentralized. There was not a lot of guidance, they had to kind of go out there and figure it out. The Baghdad PRT had a loss of situation awareness as the ePRTs came in. Some of them we worked very well with because they needed things and we got a good relationship going. I was a team leader at that point and they came in very rank heavy. And there did not seem to be a whole lot of interest, although we tried to push for some kind of weekly or biweekly get together.

There was not a lot of interest from an O7 level State Department person coming in, and I was not asking them to come in and brief me, we just wanted some regular reporting. And since that was not mandated in any of the orders as they came on, it was not happening. We were told that OPA would take their reports and put back out to Baghdad PRT what we needed. Well Baghdad PRT's job is to get the provincial government up and working and unless we have a real feel for what they need down at the district and neighborhood level, we may be working at odds with what they are doing. Things kind of fall into place eventually; as I was leaving, I know Phyllis Powers put the ePRTs for reporting and coordination underneath the Baghdad PRT. So things are going to flow through, filter through the Baghdad PRT. But that was months too late.

We knew what the problems were going to be as they came on, and they happened. I think a lot of that happened because of that hands-off decentralized approach. I think that when the units are going out to work with the military, we need to have it a little more clearly defined. I will tell you, at times the military is, I won't say paranoid, but they are very concerned about State Department reporting. As you know a cable goes directly back to DC, and they can have a lot of sway. Sometimes I do not think there is an understanding back there, that an ePRT team leader who is a great guy, smart as heck, up in Adhamiyah or down in Risafa, sends 'this is what's happening in Baghdad', that it is one small neighborhood in Baghdad. That was why things have to wash through mothership PRT, as they called it.

Q: Yes. You touched on this a little bit, what was the PRT's relationship with the brigade combat team?

A: When I got there, the old division had some strange rules. Everything that was going to the PRT from the BCT had to come through the division and then get sent to the PRT. It was kind of like, not even a funnel, it was more of a filter at times. We worked very hard to change that when we came on. The Baghdad PRT put on a road trip. We went out

and visited eleven different BCTs to say this is what we do, this is how we can help you, and this is what we need from you to help you. We were just about finishing that up, as the ePRTs came on board. I think it was helpful because the BCTs had an idea what our capabilities were and how we could help them up at the ePRTs. I had the ability, once again remember I am an officer from the 1st Cav Division, which was in charge of MNBB, to reach out and talk to any of the BCTs. At times I would talk directly to the commanders. I usually worked through their deputy commanding officers and their S9s. That duty often times falls to the military guy, it was just kind of that breakdown. That I would be on board with the BCTs and then the team leader would deal more with ePRT team leaders. I am sure that is all coming together a little bit, so we are kind of speaking with one voice.

Q: Describe the PRTs' relationship with international and nongovernmental organizations.

A: We were very fortunate to have a Baghdad PRT head who was a USAID officer who worked for the PRT. We had several folks in RTI as well, and a few other NGOs that worked on behalf of USAID. Actually, they were for all intents and purposes members of the PRT. Most of our work through other agencies and aids, or NGOs would occur through USAID because we had them right there. At times other agencies, or other NGOs would come in. We had full access and they had full access to us, but I would say most of it happened through USAID contacts.

Q: How about your interaction with Iraqis? Who were your Iraqi counterparts? Describe your interaction.

A: We had responsibilities for the provincial council, the Baghdad Amanat, which is the city hall, the city government for a lack of a better way to explain it. Before the ePRTs came aboard, we also had responsibility to get out to the district councils quite a bit, to have a feel for what was going on down at that level. But now in terms of direct contact, the big three were clearly ours, back to the spheres of influence I brought up earlier. MNBB was very good if they were going to have an engagement with anything political, they would have us set it up and we would attend with them. If the Brigadier General wanted to go meet with the deputy mayor, he would call me and say, "let us set something up, and go in PRT and MNBB to talk about such and such subject." We would set that up. That was very helpful because we were always working for a common purpose. The big three were the Provincial Council Chairman, the governor, and the Mayor over in the Amanat city hall who had several deputy mayors. We worked very closely with one of the deputy mayors, actually more than the mayor. Amazingly, he was a Sadrist who worked very well with us. Within the PRT, for most of the year, the governor was my main point of contact. We had another political officer who also had a good deal of contact with the governor. The deputy mayor was really my point of contact as well. It fell out that way when I got there; these are people I set up relationships with. The provincial council chairman was much more of the team leader's. Now, when a new team leader came in, we worked to hand those off to him. He was very much interested in those being his contacts. I think that is a good idea, I think the military team leader

should be as any deputy, he should be doing more deputy tasks than direct interaction. I enjoyed that, it made my year interesting. But I think that is why we have an OC level person from the State Department, in the Baghdad PRT.

Q: How would you characterize your contact with Iraqis in general? Cordial? Fractious? I am not trying to do a leading question...

A: That could be according to when you walk into their office. But I would say overall we had pretty good relationships with those Iraqis that we met with. The governor, we basically, we had an open door policy. At one point, he kind of stopped talking to several people in the coalition, so there was an incident. I was able to go and walk into his door, almost like an open door policy. He said, “you always have access” because we had a very good personal relationship.

He was the most facilitating leader that we worked with. We said, “we need you to come out tomorrow to such and such place outside of Baghdad, we need to go to speak to a tribe,” and the governor would do it, especially if you had some key military leaders going out. He also went on a patrol with us up to Sadr City. He went up to the Adamia Wall when the Adamia wall was an international issue. This is a Badr Corps leader coming out as a Shia prominent figure would meet with Sunnis, with us. He was really, by far, out in the lead on that type of action.

The Baghdad provincial council chairman was iffy. He was a little bit less likely to be seen with us. I would say, cordial, was the relationship with him. He spent a lot of time back in Iran. He was not usually what I would call a facilitator in helping us get stuff done. He would listen to us and tell us why he was going to do what he was going to do. We had a little less influence with him. Not a bad relationship, just a little more, I think how you would put it, cordial. The mayor himself, he would meet with us, he would talk, and I did not see him doing very much. The deputy mayor, who was a Sadrist, he would work with us, to common ends. None of these people would do blindly what we told them to do, but we had access to all of them.

Q: I want to discuss the security environment now. What did you feel the level and nature of the threats that you might encounter or could encounter?

A: Broad question, broad answer. The threat was high most of the time we were there. I mean, right up to the time where I was departing, I was taking my replacement down to the Amanat to meet the mayor, we got pinned down by a sniper at the front door. That was when things were much better than they had been before. The Baghdad PRT had over 2,000 missions in my time there. That means people actually rolling out the gate in a convoy, and everybody came back every single mission. No matter what you felt, the odds were certainly with you. We had people hit with IEDs, and once again, thank God the equipment was good, everybody always came home. We had people shot at often, you know...

Q: The staff that you are working with did not have any casualties?

A: No, nothing serious. I do not think anyone had an overnight stay in the hospital. For a portion of the year we commonly had incoming fire into our facility where we worked. Had one guy take some shrapnel in his arm, but literally walked in and out of the hospital. That was stressful for a lot of people. Once again, it was a mixed civil/military organization. During that time period, people said, we might as well go out, we are getting so much fire, it is probably safer out there. Now, there was a great change in security throughout the year. Through the surge, from about June-July on, things started getting much, much better, to the point where we were having very few incidents.

Q: *When you went out in convoy, how many military personnel and vehicles would be involved?*

A: Okay, I will tell you we had support from two different areas. We either went to the RSO, the Regional Security Office of the Embassy, who could give us Blackwater support. Now our soldiers, we would only allow to go out with military units, we did not let them go out with Blackwater. This was an issue, there were differences in what the civilians were allowed to do, and what the military was allowed to do. It cut both ways, but the RSO also had a military unit attached to it, so we could get support from them, or we could go back to MNBB, who very graciously provided us with a good deal of convoy support as well. I was more likely to go to the RSO if we were going to a common venue, like the Amanat or the Provincial Council, which were close by, we commonly went to. If I was going to a venue that we had not been to before, I was more likely to go to the military because the RSO would have turned it down anyway. They were overly concerned and they were actually so restrictive that it made it hard to do your duties at times. If I needed to get somewhere, I had to go to the military if I had a problem, if I needed helicopter support.

Q: *You mean in the sense that they did not have the Blackwater personnel available for you.*

A: They had them, they just did not want to go out. They were very cautious. Very restrictive on what we could do. We taught governance two hours at a time because that is all they would allow us. They knew as a rule, they were badgering you to get out in less than that. You had to ask for your convoy 48 hours ahead of time.

Q: *And how about for the military, how many hours?*

A: I could have requested a convoy every single day from the military to go some place, to the same place, and we would go on. The RSO did not want you going more than two, sometimes three times to the same place. Well for God's sake, the Baghdad Amanat and Provincial Council, that is our reason for business, we needed to be there every single day. What did I do? You play them against each other. Okay, I will take two trips with the RSO this week, and I will not tell them I am doing 3 or 4 trips with the military this week. So, you find ways around it. Left to the RSO, our mission would have failed.

Q: Let us move, if we can, to counter-insurgency. The PRTs were intended to bolster moderates and to provide economic component to the US counter-insurgency effort. Maybe we should add political component, as well. What comprised this effort, and was it effective? Bolstering of moderates...

A: I heard the question put as to whether we should be bolstering the moderates, or moderating the people who are in power. Kind of an interesting question. We did have a lot of moderate contacts. The problem with working with moderates, is they were generally out there without party affiliation, and very difficult to do anything productive with them in my view. Because they do not have a large party and they are not going to get into office.

Q: So you are saying you really had to identify movers and shakers, no matter whether they were moderate or not?

A: Keep them within moderate limits. I think that, at least my experience that was more important. Now with the ePRT's, I think they probably had down at the neighborhood level a much easier job finding people who were moderate and had a voice within a neighborhood, or within a district, and able to help bolster them. And that is really important. Up at our level, if you went back and looked at the files of the people we were working with, a lot of them were strong arms in the past, and that is how they survived, and that is how they got to their positions of power.

The governor, former Sadr Corps commander, was very willing to work with us when it made sense to him. Once again, a Shia guy who was willing to hop in a U.S. helicopter or humvee, and go out and sit down and talk with the Sunni tribesmen. The only one in Baghdad willing to do that. You find the people that you can work with, and you do. We had some very good programs, some reconstruction programs that were helpful, and you do this, and we will help you get that project. I think that was probably the biggest door opener to the provincial council, where some funds we had for reconstruction that we basically let them manage more or less. They decided where the projects were going to go, but we were able to install a process for how projects would come into the districts in a fair and balanced way, regardless of sect. We were able to push them to do some things in some physical areas where they may not have on their own. That would open that door to the neighborhood where the people thought the provincial council was helping them a little bit. You know, they would start talking.

Q: Did you feel as a follow-up on that, that your activities, the PRT activities, were directly related to promoting democracy, and the ability of provincial or sub-provincial governments to function effectively and provide public service?

A: Yes. I think we have a long way to go, and we really had to get through the violent period to start doing that effectively, but I think the longer I was there, our ability to do that was greatly improving as we were getting a more peaceful atmosphere to work in.

Q: You mentioned RTI International already, can you describe and evaluate the role played by RTI international in terms of the PRT's efforts.

A: We had some great folks come in from RTI, worked within the PRT and worked down at the city hall. I can give you an example of them being able to go down and help the Amanat set up Geographical Information Systems (GIS) systems that would help with future projects.

A: They set up a classroom for training. They did a lot of the training themselves. Then they were gone for a year and they went back to assess. They actually found that the Iraqis down at the Baghdad Amanat had continued and actually accelerated the classes. They were able to come in and as a reward for using the facilities correctly that were built, and bring in some advanced instructors, and some advanced software, and keep them moving forward. I really think there is great power in having those people work out of the PRT versus on their own.

We had agricultural reps that came in towards the end of my time there, working in the Baghdad PRT. They were able to get a more synergistic view. If they are sitting over on their compound, they are not seeing the big picture. Lots of good things to say about them. There were some programs before the ePRTs came on that involved different subcontractors. I did not always agree with the way the USAID money would come in. Overall I liked the program, but you know, let us say they got a half million dollars for something. Well, they would report back the next day that it was all committed. Basically, all that means is they handed it off to a subcontractor. Then finding out the information of what happened with that money, and where the money was going was not always easy. If you are a BCT commander, and you are out in a neighborhood that is not responding, for example Sadr City, which was shooting rockets everyday at the Green Zone, you say no more projects. But RTI has contacts out there that are still pumping money into clean-ups. This is an example.

We do not have an effects-based program across the board. When the ePRTs came in, it just gave a better situation awareness down at that level, because you had an USAID rep who could say, 'hey these are the projects coming up in the next six weeks, let us make sure they are not at odds with ours', and we were able to influence things as a team, and I am talking from the division, the BCT, over to USAID leadership. We had some very good relationships with the leadership over at USAID. They are contractors, they are supposed to have transparencies, the Iraqis know who they are, they know where the money is coming from, and they would play us against each other if we were not talking together as a team. Overall, most of those programs were pretty good, we just had to help give them the focus to achieve and effect.

Q: Can you describe some PRT activities related to economic reconstruction?

A: Absolutely. Once again everything, ties back to governance. As I came in, we were just having our first economic meeting. The Provincial Council had many subcommittees, the provincial council, and the economic one really was not doing anything, but it had a

great leader. He was about a 70-year-old man, who had good English. We had good ins with him. He was very much a moderate. When the Provincial Council Chairman was away, he more or less led the Council. He would say he was having a meeting, and two districts would show up that were kind of in-line with the Provincial Council, and they would call it a meeting. The Provincial Council did not really care about the District Council, once again they were a U.S. institution.

At the Baghdad PRT, the major who headed up the Economic Section at that time, said “a lot of the people said to go down into the neighborhood that the Provincial Council is in, why do not we actually sponsor the meeting for you down in the Green Zone?” We offered some incentives, things like we would have a nice lunch with them. We were able to, in a period of a month or two, and these were bi-weekly meetings, to start getting every single district in the city to come in. That became the norm. Some of them they were eventually held down in the Provincial Council itself.

Q: Was there any risk to the participants when they returned to their neighborhoods?

A: Yes. That is why they were interested in coming down to the Green Zone versus going into a neighborhood they did not see as being safe such as where the Provincial Council was.

Q: No, but I meant, was there any political risk, or security risk, to these individuals after they visited the Green Zone and returned to their homes.

A: There could be based on the timing and the situation. Sadr City’s district council eventually broke off relationships, for instance. But they still had reps. They just did not sit in the front seats. They sat out in the crowd and spoke. If they saw value, they were going to come. The value was, we bring RTI in one week to talk about their programs. We would bring the Corps of Engineers in to talk about their programs. We would kind of throw a hook out there, like talking about some school building programs. Then eventually, by the time I left, we were not participating, we were sitting in the back row and it was an Iraqi meeting.

We got an economic committee working that became, in my view, far and away the best committee within the provincial council, and probably nothing was more important. Now, things were able to work directly. If the military, for example, was looking at putting in safe markets, you know, walling off some markets to make them safe, we would bring that group together and ask the chairman to talk to them about which markets should be the priority, what were the markets the whole city depended on. Small things, like getting a beekeepers’ association started. Might sound not so important, but the small victories...

Q: Did your civil affairs soldiers participate in these reconstruction projects?

A : Let me talk a little bit about how we were staffed in the Baghdad PRT. We had a civil affairs company. When I got there it was 33 people and when that unit was replaced, it

was 20-some people, and we got a contingent of civil affairs soldiers in. When you read the original PRT documents, it looks like they were going to provide some of the security and the movement, and they were going to be the guys going out and talking to people. Well, my predecessors, and I think very rightly so, took that expertise and broke it out throughout the PRT. Every single section we had, except our operations section, had a mix of civil and military personnel, and that really helped with continuity. A lot of the military units tend to rotate at the same time. It was very, very helpful. Give me that original question again so I can loop it back in?

Q: Whether in the economic reconstruction and development you had the active participation of civil affairs soldier?.

A: Yes. We had a major out of the reserves from Massachusetts, and he was actually the economics team leader. We had an interesting mix. When you get reservists in, it might say civil affairs, as a lot of military folks have just joined civil affairs, its kind of an expanding area. When you get reservists in, you get civilian skills. That is how we tried to break it down. We had folks with banking experience working in our economics section and we had accountants, so we kind of had a nice mix of those military folks come in, and we put their civilian skills to use, and that is how we slotted where they fit.

Q: So they were mainly reservists.

A: Yes. I think there was myself and one other captain I brought with me that were active duty on the team.

Q: Now if we could turn to the work of the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee. Describe its work, and any kind of evaluation of the performance there.

A: Okay, PRDC had a civilian who led that program, but it was very much tucked up under the deputy. As a division engineer from MNBB, I had an interest in this kind of thing. I had run a Corps of Engineer's district before I came in as well, so I had good relationships with the Corps of Engineers, but we also had a great facilitator who was an Iraqi-born Kurd/U.S. citizen who came in and helped run our program. He was great at the relationships part, and we would work goals and send that to him. He was working directly back at OPA but we gave most of the guidance.

The idea of this was, here is 100 million dollars. Baghdad got 100 million, I think every other province got something like 15 or 20 the first year, or 10 even. And then we were given another 50 million because we were very good at getting contracts out as compared to the others. That is not because we are better, it is because we were working in a city that had a lot of needs, and had an institution in the Amanat that actually knew how to do projects and could do some work. The whole idea though, was to try and put a process in place that could bring the need to the people up through the provincial government, and have them approving it and basically saying this is what we are going to do. There is a lot of good and bad with this.

When I arrived, the push was OTF to Operation Together Forward II and there was a lot of push to put projects into what they were calling focus areas at the time. There was a group that sat together every week with Iraqis and looked at what was going on in the city in terms of services, and we were pushed to put projects into those areas. The Iraqis accepted that as well. They tended to be areas of strife, so we were planning on putting our projects in the most contentious areas in Baghdad. Maybe rightly so, they did not have a lot of services. It was not just us, the military was putting projects in these areas, and every week we briefed it, so...

Q: So a lot of these projects were, for example, then in Sadr City?

A: Sadr City had a lot of big, old Iraqi construction money into it, the big project money. These focus areas were small places, like Bora, certain places up in Adamia, old Adamia, it was really the flashpoints where the sectarian barriers came together. We did a lot of good work. The second year we were given a little more latitude in spreading things out. I will give you one example of how this really worked well. In the Ministry of Education, once again, ministries were not our main focus but everything you do in a PRT is about making connections. So either connections between the provincial council to the districts, or from the provincial council up to ministries, which have a great deal of influence and money, and actually do projects. You know, Baghdad Provincial Council does not build schools; the Ministry of Education builds schools. Well, a lot of these ministries are basically failing as compared to the Baghdad Amanat, which had the ability to get project money and spend it. It just did not get enough. The education folks at the Ministry are very difficult to deal with. No one really had good ins with them. We approached them and invited them to a conference, because we had tried to do a few PRDC projects to build schools, and to upgrade schools, and we had a lot of issues with them.

We found some problems with doing school projects. When we went to the neighborhoods, where the district council told us they needed a school, and where it seemed to make sense, we discovered it was not Ministry of Education land, and the Ministry of Education was not stepping up and saying they would accept that school in the future, that they would staff it, that they would equip it. Lots of time you would hear people say, the only thing that mattered was electricity. Typically, when I asked leaders in the community, it was education for their children and health care was the first issue they worried about. We called for a conference, and we got some guy from the Ministry of Education to show up for this event. The provincial council chair showed up, the provincial leader for the committee for education showed up, and every district came with its district leader, and someone attached to someone responsible for education in their district. We had two different conferences, and basically what we said is, how do you address school needs in Baghdad? How do you build a school in Baghdad? That was kind of the hook to get them in there, because everyone wanted to build schools. We were able to come away with some processes, and once again, as with any conference, the side bars that took place, and the people being introduced to their Ministry of Education was in Baghdad. They did not know the people, who really have a common goal and this was the most valuable thing.

Afterwards the PRDC said, “let us not concentrate on the schools like we were going to in these focus areas. We asked the Ministry of Education, what are your top 10 priorities in Baghdad?” Basically, they did a good job of spreading them out throughout the districts of the city, so everybody got a little bit of something because there are needs for schools everywhere, but they gave us their top priorities. We turned around and said, ‘we aren’t just going to build these for you, you have to provide the design.’ They had a standard design that they site adapted, and they provided the land that the Ministry of Education owned for each one of these schools. So we were able to get a process going, and to me, that is the value of the PRDC program, not building projects, but getting processes in place that will last and be enduring.

Q: I assume that your PRT had a rule of law officer. How did the PRT assist the Iraqi police, courts and prisons?

A: My Rule of Law advisor was a frustrated puppy by the time he left though he was a great guy. We also had a prosecutor from the BOJ who was really an expert. As I came in to the PRT, they were in an assessment phase. They were concentrating, at that point, on police. You have in Minstick (Multi-National Security transition Command Iraq) a lot of people giving the police attention, but this was a separate look. It is interesting because the PRT, being the provincial level organization, really, if you think about it, they do not really have police stations, they do not have courts. But it was a good place to put the Rule of Law people.

The Embassy was very focused on a few projects. A Rule of Law Center, and some other projects, and that is where all the money was going, but some thought small bits of money going out to a lot of these court houses would have been very helpful. Anyway, they visited police stations for months. I think there were 20 some police stations, and they would go back for follow-up visits. But basically, when they would go into these police stations, they would look at the conditions of the prisoners that were being held there, how long they had been held there, and always got in to speak with the prisoners. They had pretty good access. They would talk about the role of the police investigators, and how they tie back into the court system. The rule of law over there follows more closely the French system than our system, which is something to look at in the future. Maybe we could bring some experts from a country that is a little bit closer to what they are trying to attain there none-the-less they were trying to make connections between the courts and the police stations. We did a lot of assessment, and especially in the beginning there was no way. There was no money, nothing to offer them.

We were able to help sometimes through the unit in the area if something was required. We would go to the unit and the unit could help out. We would look at situations where they said a coalition unit came into their courthouse and did a search, or came into their police station and did a search and did not do it correctly. We would address issues like that. The beginning was really focused on the police stations. Then they moved to the courts, and they did basically the same things, visiting a lot of courts and setting up some very good relationships with high court officials, and on down to the lower level courts.

They also started spending a lot of time with the Iraqi Bar Association, with some of the different universities and groups.

A: These are the people that are going to be teaching in the future. Obviously in our country, and a lot of countries, lawyers are pretty good at networking and coming together as a group, so I think there was a lot of promise there. Right as I left, we were just starting to be able to put some projects through to help these folks, though the money that was coming in through the State Department, the QRF Funds. I think we are going to be able to take it up to the next level. Initially, I thought there was more assessment than action, and that was a big frustration. The embassy Rule of Law folks were so focused on those big projects and not down on the courts that were helping people. I know some of the ePRTs were able to set up legal assistance centers around the courts in the areas they were at because people did not have access to lawyers. There was some really good work starting to take place. I think it was very valuable to have them, across the board, at a PRT. I do not know, one or two of the ePRTs were picking up a Rule of Law specialist here and there. I am not sure the usefulness of having a Rule of Law Section when they may only have one court in their entire district.

Q: How did these programs, training programs, relate to the Multi-National Security Transition Command Iraq (Minsticky)? They ran some of the programs, I guess, training programs.

A: Minsticky, to be very honest here, was somewhat of a mystery. Whether we wanted to talk about reconstruction of Iraqi police, they were always a little bit harder to access than any other military organization. I would not say there was a great synergy between the different people training police. The MTTs (Military Transition Team) and the Pitts, the Police Training Teams that were something separate. The Police Training Teams are what we are talking about. I will tell you, when we go to the police stations, they love them. They just said they were not getting enough of them. We worked to talk with some of them when we would find problems, and would let them know what is going on. I felt like the whole Rule of Law approach was somewhat disconnected and disjointed. You had different people plugging in at different levels.

Q: Did you find it was a little bit too ethereal? That is was all theory and not enough practice?

A: There were just some real needs at some real basic levels that I know our Rule of Law team would have liked to address to help a court be more effective. They did not have the resources to do it, and they did not have a good connection with the people in Minsticky who may have had the resources to do it.

Q: I see. If we could move on now to a public affairs program. Did the PRT have a public affairs officer and a program?

A: Yes. I do not believe most the PRTs did. Baghdad PRT, once again, was kind of at the center of the universe there. We actually had a slot for someone from that cone in the

Department of State. We had an FSO. We also had someone on temporary duty, and we were able to extend that into this current year. We had two senior PAOs. We always called it something else over there, and the military would call them PAOs. Yes, we had some very senior people, and we were able to plug one or two of our military folks into that section as well.

Q: Who were their audience, these PAOs and their programs?

A: Interesting, because I would have thought they did the typical stuff. We have got many reporters coming in, and even more important, they were training the public spokesman for the Iraqi government. To me, that was their best work. I just got an email today from someone I talked about earlier, our economics guy, who said that he will be visiting with the eight people for whom our PAO set up an international trip. So, they were in charge of setting up the International Visitors program, they were very involved in setting up training for all the different provinces, and this came out of Baghdad, once again, because we had the expertise. They set up a training program for all the provinces to send spokesmen for training in how to deal with the press. They were also setting up programs for the press themselves. You know, teaching how a responsible press organization works. They have very rudimentary skills in their press over there, and the PD section is very valuable. They did all the stuff you would expect a good PAO to do in an organization, and they were training the Iraqis.

Q: You already discussed agricultural programs a bit, but do you have anything more to add about the PRT agricultural assistance effort?

A: This was a very important part of what we did, even in Baghdad. You would think maybe not so important, but the Baghdad province had all the outlying area. There was a lot of crossover with irrigation, which the agricultural folks did not necessarily control, as it was under control of the water folks. INMA had a great program, do not ask me to explain the acronym of INMA. But they had, basically, a field-to-market program coming on, and we were helping get that established, where they would go out to areas and ask what was needed from the ground up. What needs to come into the city? They were also building some storage facilities out there with refrigeration, studying what kind of transportation was required to bring things in to the central markets. There are several central markets in Baghdad that all the smaller markets satellite off. They were going to renovate those central markets, give them proper storage to keep their fruits and vegetables fresh, so that it would improve access to the entire city. That was another area that excited all the Iraqis, even within the city when you started talking about improving their access to farm products.

Q: Did your PRT have an Iraqi cultural advisor? Could you describe and evaluate presumably his role and effectiveness?

A: We had a host of different people who were responsible for that. Mostly we called them BBAs (Bicultural, Bilingual Advisor). They came from a military contract, not from a State contract. We also had a bunch of local nationals hired, who did translation and all

for us, and many turned out to be very good cultural advisors as well. The BBAs generally came in with the skills. We would generally use them as interpreters, and at times they were our best interpreters. We would have experts back in the economics section who were native-born Iraqis, or someone from the Middle East, though it was best when you had an Iraqi, who had some understanding of the culture. They were able to come to a meeting and say, “this is what he was really saying to you.” You know your interpreter was supposed to concentrate on getting the words right, to have someone else to sit in the background and say this is what they were really saying, this is what their body language said, was very helpful. I think we could even get more out of them.

Q: Did you also get political advice from these so-called cultural advisors.

A: Some.

Q: But you say their role was more circumscribed in that regard. They were mainly there to give you contexts.

A: Yeah, I would say so. Like I said, they were normally working some hard skill either in the economics section, we had two of them working in our PRDC process, so they were part of that governance...the most valuable thing about them was that most of them had contacts in Iraq. We would have never been able to get that education conference I mentioned earlier off the ground without one of our BBAs. He had worked in the Ministry of Education in the past and he had some contacts in their engineering department. They were great door openers.

Q: What do you feel the PRT achieved or its more significant achievements during your tenure in Baghdad?

A: Once again, one was successful if those connections were made that allowed their government to work, thus we increased the respect of the Baghdad Provincial Council for the district councils. I think we got there. I think the district councils will be an enduring piece of the government. If they have party elections, and there is no geographical base, they do not have a representative government. There was no voice for the various parts of the city, and nobody they could fire for not doing their job up at the provincial council. They were doing the party’s work. Until we have proper elections, they will do the party’s work. But, now that there’s a tie back to the district through the district councils, that brings a little bit of the representational type of government to the forefront.

Q: Did you feel that your PRT helped to break down some of the sectarian and tribal divisions in Iraq?

A: Yes. As I think I discussed, I personally put the Shia Badr governor together with the with tribesmen, and from that an Anbar kind of phenomenon and awakening, spread eastward into Baghdad. We were able to go out and meet with other tribes in other areas and hold conferences in the south and the east, via which that we were able to get the

provincial government tied into listening to the problems that people are having out there and to begin addressing them through services and projects and support in other ways.

Q: So would you say the greatest achievement you felt was your facilitating of communications that you hope will endure?

A: Yes. You know, with the PRT, setting up some structures that will remain to bring projects in. That is all the same thing, it is how the government communicates with other parts of the government. We did a lot of technical work with them and this is how you track finances, this is how you work your budget and other things the Iraqis know how to do. Maybe even with de-Baathification, they will bring some of their experts back into those areas.

Q: You mean with the reversal of de-Baathification. That they might have some experts coming back.

A: Yes. I will tell you, an organization that did not really go through the same things was the Baghdad Amanat. They still had the ability to get projects out, they were not perfect, but I have never met a city hall that was. They were not perfect, but they kept a lot of their expertise, it kind of glossed over them because they were not a national level ministry, although they kind of felt like they were. They kept a lot of the expertise, and they were still effective. Probably more effective than any ministry in the country at getting projects out and getting them constructed. I think that we were able to help them move forward with their trust in each other and to get the provincial government that did not really exist before to understand how the ministries work, how to create some relationships with them, and the importance of connecting back down to the districts, where the people live. I think there is a great value in that.

Q: What lessons do you think you can draw from your experience? That you might be able to pass on to somebody else?

A: I was not there as the PRT was actually set up, but I was there as the ePRTs set up. There needs to be a lot of thought down at the user level. It is great to have memorandums at the DOD level and at the DOS level, but you really have to set how these relationships are going to work on the ground. You do not bring new organizations like ePRTs on while the parent organization is in transition from NCT to OPA. Not a good idea. It ended up being very confusing when it did not have to be. There were a lot of good things also. We got experts down at low levels, be it in PRTs or in ePRTs. People do not like interlopers, and that is kind of what we are over there to begin with, but the Iraqis want somebody that is a face they are going to know for a long time, and build some trust with. I think it is very important we get the civilian face on this. I have read an interesting paper from USIF, where their initial conclusion was that the PRTs should have worked for the military. I like the fact that they were State Department. I wish they had maybe taken a little more leadership and been able to get more experts in initially instead of relying so heavily on the military. I think we need to work on that. I think it is important that civilians see civilians leading. We are telling them their military should not

lead their government, but in many cases it is still our military. When the surge came on, I got in my PRT, 17 of the 19 people I had, were in uniform. The other two were DOD civilians. State Department needs to step up and be able to fill these. They are doing some things. They got the CRC and the ARC, basically a reserve component they are setting up at the State Department. Slowly we are learning our lessons. We can't forget this as we move forward.

Q: Do you feel the PRsT are accomplishing their mission?

A: Given the fact they do not have an overly defined mission, sure I do. I think there is great good coming out of the PRT and the PRT program. Once again, where they are very, very tightly tied to the partners in the military, I think it works well.

Q: You have talked about how it has improved governance and it has promoted economic development. How about the counter-insurgency mission? Are they in any way working effectively?

A: Baghdad is a really tricky thing when you are talking counter-insurgency as compared to more homogenous regions like Anbar. When we were able to bring a government representative, the governor himself, out to meet with the leaders of the awakening out in our western provinces, that is directly affecting the counter-insurgency. When the government comes out and says, 'yes, you have decided to fight Al-Qaeda, and you need this service and that service,' and they follow through and actually deliver something, you bind the hands of a group that was fighting us just a short while ago, and fighting the Iraqi government. You try to bind them to the Iraqi government. As violence reduces down, I think it is really important the government step in and become a provider, where Al-Qaeda promised to provide for those people, did not do a good job and we have an opportunity to step in. The PRT can help get the provincial government out there, tied in to those locals who are coming over to our side. That is incredibly important to the counter-insurgency. And it is the only way to sustain it.

Q: As you look back at your experience, I guess it was a year...

A: 15 months.

Q: 15 months, over a year...

A: Do not cheat me three months.

Q: Did you feel your training was adequate both before you went to Baghdad and perhaps during your overlap period?

A: I would say the training I received because I was going for this job, was not adequate. I would say it was fortunate I had the background that I did. I ended up in this job because, a long time ago, the military decided there was moved to work with the Iraqi government in Baghdad and MNBB set up something called the governance support team

(GST), which eventually was moved into the PRT, when the PRT came into being. The division engineer for First Calvary, when they stood that up originally, ended up being tasked to lead that GST with his staff. So, it just became division engineer after division engineer as the rotated units fell into that slot. Now that is not the case anymore, but my background, having run a Corps of Engineers district meant I had done both the military side and the civil side. As a Corps of Engineers' district commander, I worked with everything from local governments, met routinely with congressmen, senators, and had to work with various levels of government, so I got to see how a lot of that worked. That was blind luck. A lot of people would have walked in there with zero experience working with any civilian government structures. There was no training for me before I showed up.

I came to my new unit in July. I came over and visited Iraq, which the military does a good job of getting people into country before their time so they can come back and kind of brush up on their skills. But I did not even know at that time that I was going to take the PRT job. I basically came back and we were trying to get relieved from that. The division engineer coming in behind me did not take that job, one of the reservists who came in on the surge in 2006 said he would stay for an extra year to do that job. While that will be good continuity, he will have less tie-in back to the division.

The State Department is now training the people coming into the PRT for two weeks. It is interesting to go out and talk to people who go through FSI (the Foreign Service Institute). Some of it will be helpful. There are a lot of things you can not learn until you get out on the ground, and you just have to put your expertise to work. Once again, I think I was fortunate to have the background I had. The training is inadequate; in some cases the equipping of the people is inadequate. When the ePRTs came on board, they made a big deal out of the fact they were getting all the same equipment as the US military. Well, my State Department people and my contractors who were hired by the State Department, were pretty upset with that, because they were out in the street more than a lot of the ePRTs and, you know, they had the lousy old State Department vests, not the new high speed military equipment. Equipping across the board has to be addressed. We brought that up a lot and hopefully they are going to fix that. Training is important and equipping is important so that everyone feels they are being taken care of and taught.

There is another thing that the State Department needs to work on: the gapping of positions. Ambassador Crocker recognized that and made a big deal out of that. Once again, the military, you know, basically always does a very thorough handover from one unit to the next. I deployed 45 days earlier so there would be no gap in a position. During a time of surge and national priority, the State Department was happy to leave the Baghdad PRT position open for me to run, for two and a half, three months.

Q: I am sure they were not happy to do that, it was probably...

A: No, it was explained that they not do assignments that way, and the next person was not available yet. Well, if it is a national priority, or Ambassador Crocker says they need someone, you need to get someone there.

Q: Do you have, just as a wrap up, any final comments you would like to make about your experience in Iraq with the PRT?

A: Yes, I think for every problem I can point out, we look back and try to find what we can do to improve, which is kind of how we do business in the military. I think it was a very valuable experience, rewarding personally and professionally. I think that the concept has an awful lot of merit, and I think we did well, and not in spite of anyone, but because everyone there, I think it is important to note, was a volunteer. Whether they were military, State Department, reserve, active duty, RTI, USAID, everyone volunteered for that mission. When it came right down to it, and they began their duties, even if somebody had a different way of going about something, we all had a common goal which was to get that government up and working. That is what made the mission work. Volunteers from the United States and some of our coalition partners who were working with us, who wanted, who really had the desire.

I think the worst thing that would ever happen would be if they had to force people into this kind of job. I have learned a lot and gained an awful lot of respect for my friends in the Foreign Service and the other agencies we worked with. I plan to take these lessons learned and continue to work with them. I am going to go to the War College next year. I am going to try to write some of this up and continue to keep in touch with the friends I made and continue to work on this, because we cannot, the military cannot, do this alone. The State Department cannot do this alone; it is incredibly important that we come together and look at our training, and that we get a trained corps of folks ready to do this again if we have to in the future, so it is not always a pick-up game.

Q: Well thank you very much.