United States Institute of Peace
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INTERVIEW #10

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Executive Summary

This interviewee was the PRT team leader for Salah Ad Din province; he was based about six miles outside Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown and a heavily Sunni, Baathist area.

This interviewee provides a detailed description of his relationships with his military counterparts at the battalion, brigade and division levels. In close coordination with these commanders, he created several PRT satellites in his province, an innovation which was very instrumental in accomplishing the goal of putting a civilian face on the governance, economic development and reconstruction aspects of the mission. As an experienced manager, the interviewee stresses that their goal was to mentor the Iraqis in the process of governance, with the short term result being less important than whether their Iraqi counterparts absorbed the means by which they could repeat their successes and learn from their mistakes. The interviewee alludes to the tension that can exist between the military's short term perspective – e.g. creating jobs now- versus the State Department's longer term development perspective.

This interviewee believes that his experience validates the idea of the State Department's suitability for the leadership role in the PRTs. In his view, foreign service officers are uniquely qualified, not as development technical experts, but as flexible, tolerant, adaptable individuals capable of the nuanced political judgments necessary to work successfully in a culture where things are not done according to U.S. standards. In addition, he has high praise for the quality of the civilian experts that the State Department has been able to recruit to serve. He also points out how the PRT forms a necessary civilian bridge between the U.S. military and the many NGO's funded by USAID and working in Iraq. He discusses his own experience with several of them, including RTI, INMA, Louis Berger and IRD.

Finally, although not a PRT endeavor, he describes the beginnings of the "Awakening" movement in Salah Ad Din, in which the local sheiks began recruiting their young tribal members to be paramilitaries, and the positive effect this had on security in the province.

Q: I believe you were at the PRT in Salah ad Din province?

A: It was Salah ad Din province, and we were stationed at a military base, a US army base, probably about 6-8 miles outside Tikrit, which was the provincial council. That's

pretty much Saddam's home town there, so we were at the center of Baathism and Sunnism, right there.

Q: You were the team leader. Could you describe the composition of your PRT team?

A: It changed over the year that I was there. A year ago feels like about 10 years. When I arrived there, it was primarily military. We had a lot of civil affairs officers who were pretty much the doers there at the PRT. We had an economic team and we had a governance team and both of those were primarily military when I arrived; there were reserve officers in charge. We had a Rule of Law team as well, and that was headed by an assistant US attorney from Baltimore. He had a couple of military officers working for him, one from the JAG and then another who was an attorney in training who was a civil affairs officer. So we basically had three main teams and then we had a representative from AID and then somebody in the office who was reporting back to Baghdad to the folks who did the infrastructure funding there, the economic support funded projects (ESF), that the Department of State has in its own appropriations. That's where we started and we probably had about 50 people by then. We were all in Tikrit. When I wrapped up just a week ago, it was up to 75 people or so. I guess since I'm talking to the State Department I can, with a little bit more understanding, refer to the fact that I shifted the leadership of our teams from our civil affairs military colleagues over to State Department officers. A year ago when I got there we had two State Department officers who were reporting officers. One did economic reporting; one did political reporting. Within very short order I decided, I have to take these two FSOs and put them in charge of the two main teams, the one for economic development and the one for governance, because even then I saw that it really was a good idea to put more of a civilian face on our interaction with the Iraqis. FSOs are pretty good broken field runners, and that's exactly what we needed there in Iraq. I think the time for fixing what was broken and following a civil affairs more structured approach to development had long since gone. We were in a very dynamic situation with the Iraqis. It was really not clear what needed to be done. I told my two FSOs: ' you are now in charge of the teams and let's figure out what we should be doing and how we should be doing it, and let's put a civilian face on it in dealing with the Iraqis.' That evolved...

Interview

Q: Let me just interrupt. One thing you said was 'broken field runners,' did I hear that right?

A: Yes, exactly. Are you a football fan?

Q: I will have to confess that I am not very knowledgeable, as you can tell.

A: It's broken field running when you give your ball to your half back, and the whole play falls apart and all of a sudden the guy with the ball has to say, 'I am now going to just wing it and head for the goal line.' That's broken field running.

Q: I get it.

A: It's seeing where the opportunities lie and how you can get to the goal line.

Q: Sure. When you were making these shifts in personnel, obviously you are a diplomat so you can do it subtly, maybe?

A: I was also the boss!

Q: You were the boss, and you were in charge, but did it bother the military folks who were in charge to find themselves no longer in charge of their team?

A: It worked out very handily because about the time I was making these decisions they were also in their rotation. They were at the end of their tours, and they were looking to get back to the United States, to get back to their jobs. They were also reservists, and the reservists are very good at being able to discern what works between the military and the civilian worlds, and how you have to strike a balance. I think they were all very, very good at understanding that in the roles that they had. Not that active duty military are not, but their focus is first and foremost winning the war, and the civil affairs folks are very, very good to work with. Again, they understand the duality of their roles there in Iraq, between a military role and a civilian role, and so they understood the reasons for it. I was really quite surprised one day when the head of civil affairs or civil military affairs at the division level, which was a notch above the command that I worked with, paid a courtesy call on me. During our conversation, I had asked him, I'd probably been there about a month and a half or two and I said, rather I asked him, what have I done right so far, and he said, 'the one thing you have done right is to put civilians in charge of your major programs.' So I thought 'well, I've done something right.'

Q: Yes.

A: If there was going to be a skeptic, it certainly was going to be him, and for him to have corroborated that decision from the military's perspective, I really thought was, well, I'd done the right thing.

Q: Very gratifying. Now you'd mentioned that you'd gone from 50 to 75. Is that a reflection of some of the successes that you were having, or how did it evolve?

A: I'll call it more of a gamble. Early in the summer of 2007 or even late spring as talk in Washington was turning to the surge in military terms --in April or so of 2006-- the new strategy was the military surge. The State Department picked up the same theme and said 'now we need a civilian surge.' And the way things worked is that they simply told us there was going to be a big surge in civilian personnel devoted to the PRTs and they said 'how many people do you need, and what skill codes, or rather what skills do you want to bring into your PRT?' I was by no means certain that the security was going to enable us to do our jobs because the PRTs are completely dependent on security. There is no way around it. So I surveyed all the staff and said, 'now what do you want? who do you

want?' and we gambled on how many people we said we could use. I spent the entire summer and early fall really with butterflies in my stomach thinking, 'can we put all of these people to productive work when they arrive?' I was very fortunate. The security improved to what we had hoped it would be in order for us to absorb and use those additional people and so by the time they began arriving in November and December, we came up a few people short of what we could have used, because some of the commitments that had been made to supply us folks at the end of the day did not come through. First of all, it was a gamble, and the gamble paid off, because it was our position that it was better to gamble and perhaps lose. You can always turn people back if we can't use them, but if it turns out that the situation is such that you could use more people for your program than you thought, you didn't want to be in that position. Shoot high, and hope for the best. At the end of the day, it turned out well.

Q: At the time you were making your plan, if I understand correctly, DOD was still in charge of actually recruiting the individuals, who many times were military, ex-military or civil affairs folks. I'm not quite sure how they would come up with the city planners that you would want, or the experts in trash collection.

A: Probably the first 4-6 people, I could sit down and write them out but I'll say the first 4-6, were DOD surge people and they worked out very well. They did have former military, some with skill codes that worked out quite well. They were a little bit specialized it seemed in certain circumstances, but most everybody grew into the job, and they had some civil affairs people that were just…one was a superstar. It worked out wonderfully. The bulk of the surge people by the time they arrived, were products of the State Department's 31-61 program, the civil affairs people that the State Department is now hiring. They were different than those that the military sent us. The military's surge people, again they were a fairly limited number, were basically within the parameters of the skills that we had asked for, but the ones that the State Department provided were, gosh, they were gold-plated. When it came down to their skills, they were just phenomenal. I just left a week ago with my head spinning at the professional skills we all of a sudden had.

Q: Could you just tick off a couple of them to be concrete?

A: Yes, exactly. We had two guys who were urban and city planners. I didn't realize how much of city planning involved the economy. They went right to work, traveling with each other. I first tried to send both of them out to the satellite or branch offices that you read about a little bit. One of them went out there, and he said, 'well, you know, I've been out there, but I don't think that is going to use my skills.' So I said, 'well, okay, you define what you do here and we'll see how it goes.' I was skeptical, and I very badly wanted him to go to another community, but somebody with credentials like that you are kind of stupid if you try to tell them what they are best suited for. You have confidence in their ability or you don't, and I had a great deal of confidence in his skills, so basically he talked me into the fact that he should stay where he was and work at the provincial level. My point being he and his colleagues traveled downtown everyday or every other day, they had a very intense travel schedule, all their own motivation, they traveled all over

the base, met everybody there, and developed a huge, very rapidly, a huge repertoire of economic information on the entire province. It was wonderful to watch them work, because everybody associated with the military likes to do PowerPoints. I have some reservations about PowerPoints because you drive everything to an immediate conclusion, whether it's right or wrong. But these two got themselves a big board and used post-it notes to inventory all the different economic factors, sectors, and in the end they had 60 little Post-it notes there describing entire provinces and gradually developed it in a way that agricultural development floated to the top. I was so impressed that I had a reception for all of the senior officials in the province about a week before I left to introduce them to the new team, to let them meet all of these wonderful, newly-arrived and highly-skilled people, and I had these guys bring their little Post-it notes and it was like a magnet. Movers and shakers in the province indeed, gradually went over to that and learned more, saw more, and I think it was very illuminating to them, but it was their introduction to the fact that all of a sudden they have world class urban and city and economic planning right there at their finger tips. My reason behind the reception was to tell the Iraqis, 'these guys and we work for you, so figure out what we do and tell us what you need.' There is a good example. These guys were absolutely just top drawer.

Q: Excellent, and you mentioned that agriculture bubbled up as, I guess one of the main-stays of the provincial economy. Did you have an agriculture person, or someone from USDA?

A: Yes, we had someone from the US Department of Agriculture. There is a very agriculturally rich area in the Tigris flush plain near Baghdad.

Q: That's where you have your canning factory?

A: That's exactly it.

Q: Right. I was going to take a look at some of these projects in the framework of the implementing partners, which is a nice phrase, I think, and I don't know if they are all USAID implementing partners?

A: All of them we were dealing with were AID funded, yes.

Q: There is definitely interest in knowing how some of those organizations worked out. RTI is one that often comes up. Are they good to have, in your view; how well have they met their goals?

A: They did better as time went on. When I got there a year ago, they were, 'underground' is not a fair turn of phrase, but it's not too far off. While I was there, USAID to hear tell, found out where all of the RTI staff were that were positioned all over the province, and were a little bit surprised at how many and how far flung they were. RTI worked very independently from USAID as best we could tell, but as the year went on, it did improve. Now, of course, in RTI's favor, they were working quite independently throughout the province. The only AID people were stationed right there

with me at the PRT in one city. The ability of AID to get out, monitor, meet, see what the RTI programs are was minimal; it just wasn't there. There was no marriage whatsoever between the activities of RTI, or any of the AID fund implementers, and the people on the ground dealing with civil affairs, and that was the military. There was just no bridge of the civilian/US government presence; with a certain degree of logic I think it is almost necessary to be the intermediary between the military and AID funded implementers and NGOs and whatnot. The NGOs, quite reasonably, don't wish to have an affiliation with the military.

Q: On the other hand, this is US government money going into development, and one of the reasons for all of this money is to support the moderates; I was going to ask you how you went about identifying them….

A: Let me finish up on our need for a civilian bridge between the military and the NGOs funded by AID. Philosophically they are both very different. The NGOs are there for the long term; they are there to help develop the political processes; they are there to help develop the budgets, and make the budgets work. The military and their civilian affairs people are there to fix what is broken and do it now. Philosophically, even though it is all US government money, the horizon, the time span in which each of those two organizations view their objectives, is very, very different. Apart from military versus civilian appearances, you need somebody who is the, shall we say, the broker, the intermediary, perhaps even better the leader of all those programs to ensure the correct balance between 'lets fix this right now' versus 'let's work on the infrastructure and the capacity building.' Anyway, back to your question, which was political moderation?

Q: Actually, the two I think are related in the way that you are hinting at, because you have the NGO, or RTI, and they have large numbers of personnel, but how does anybody know if they're working, you might say, with the 'right' people as opposed to throwing money at a situation? Maybe they are very thoughtful and have been able to figure it out, but if they weren't there all along, how could they be well informed about their counterparts?

A: Yes, exactly. I had asked my folks out at the satellite and branch offices to figure out who the RTI people are and to start working with them. The issue of whether they are doing the right thing is first based on trust, but ultimately on verification. Unless there is somebody else there, somebody from AID in Baghdad to come up and take a look, talk, find out what they are doing, it fell to the PRT folks. I don't think our civil military or civil affairs colleagues were quite the right ones, often times to be making those judgments. This is simply an aside: There is a real intolerance for, shall we say, the informality or even sometimes often corrupt way in which much of the world works. We had, not really debates, but it was very clear that when you get around to the State Department, we are much more adaptable in dealing with the array of politicians, and folks, and officials that are thrown at you in a situation like this. I don't think it would have been fair to anyone to have asked our military colleagues to be assessing the effectiveness and the rightness of the contacts of many of our employees around the province.

Q: Well that comes back to your civilian bridge.

A: That's exactly right, and I sort of wondered when I got there, why is the State Department doing this, this is AID work, but as I began to realize how large a component politics is and the judgment that comes with working with politics around the world, that really the State Department in the situation like we find ourselves in Iraq, is as good as it gets, I think, at being the lead organization in these provincial activities. We are tolerant and understanding, but at the same time have the integrity to adjudge whether somebody is the right or the wrong person with whom to deal. We can also deal with those who, in our world, are far less than perfect.

Q: I think you made that point in your notes, and it leads to the question of, if you are not an Iraq specialist when you go there, how do you know whom to believe and whom to trust?

A: People ask me what I thought my qualifications for working in Iraq at a PRT were, and I pointed to two. I was a school board chairman in a Latin American country, and that was certainly an exercise in trying to bring democracy, moderation and capacity to a governance process, and I've had five tours in Africa in which you deal with governments that are feeble in the economy and governance, and you kind of learn to size people up based on their role, based on how you see the government conducting itself, what you see them doing and not doing. I think service in the developing world, and I commend Africa for this, is great experience for Iraq.

Q: I can see that, and I guess many people who have Peace Corps experience also fit well. You apparently didn't have military experience beforehand?

A: My draft lottery number kept me out of Vietnam.

Q: Let me ask about a couple of the other implementing partners in your area, such as INMA, I-N-M-A, which was a funding mechanism primarily?

A: The contractor, the implementing partner for that is Louis Berger, which is another one of the big NGOs that has a lot of AID contracts. The project for agricultural development, which they funded with grants to Louis Berger, is called INMA. It's an Arabic word - you better check me on this one; I think it means "hope" or something.

Q: Were you in a similar position of trying to figure out what they were up to?

A: Yes, they were challenging too. Their initial program began I think in May or June of 2006, and they couldn't quite get if off the ground. I don't know that they really felt that they had the right business plan for it. They weren't really effective in Salah ad-Din province until probably November. When my PRT decided that the one thing they really wanted to have happen was to re-open this canning factory, they did a lot of research on various funding sources: the military CERP, ESF perhaps. They had three or four

different options, one of which was Louis Berger, and it turned out that what we wished to do was exactly what Louis Berger hoped to do, and that was to identify private organizations or projects in the agricultural sector that would have a great multiplier effect up and down the food chain, if you will. So we put the pitch to Louis Berger, and at the end of the day, they said, 'this is just the kind of project we're after,' and it's approved.

Q: I noticed that you said it was a private factory. Was the owner still around?

A: The owner was still there. He was Middle Eastern, but not Iraqi. I believe the factory was limping along with one or two food lines open. They had well over a dozen, but they have power problems, and water problems, and supply problems, and distribution problems and debt problems. I suppose I could keep going on but you get the point. So he needed a huge infusion of cash. The owner owed several hundred thousand dollars to previous suppliers even before being closed down in 2006. Borrowing money, the interest rates in Iraq right now are prohibitive, so even borrowing money was not economically feasible, because he couldn't have sold his product at a competitive price with the borrowing costs being what they were. INMA worked out very well.

Q: You were able to get the necessary inputs there, the electricity, the water?

A: Well everybody is pitching in now; the military liked the idea so well that when I left they were going to use their CERP funds for I think the electricity. It's one of these things that really is conceptually a platform for other projects and contributions as well, all of which get it up and running and rolling. So I think by next harvest season, as they say, 'Inshallah,' everything should be running smoothly.

Q: I think you also alluded in your notes to another group, IRD. I hadn't heard of them, but interestingly they had an office in your PRT building, apparently.

A: They were just moving in as I left. Their first person had shown up and we'd identified office space for them, and they were going to move in. They were sponsoring a community support program which was going to offer vocational training, grants for various projects, very low-skilled employment job creation projects like picking up trash and that sort of thing. Then micro-loan programs as well. Their vocational training, which they had described looked very interesting. But they were going to be moving in and luckily, under foot, under thumb, cheek by jowl, close enough that I'm sure that we could work with them well.

Q: Is it an Iraqi organization?

A: No, I've forgotten what IRD stands for, but I think it is another American NGO. I'll have to do my research, but I believe it's another RTI-like, Louis Berger-like, organization. AID gave them large grants and works with them very closely. I would suggest that the relationship between each of those three organizations and the PRT is that we are basically grant writers on behalf of Iraqi needs. These AID-funded

organizations have the money, we have the people on the ground working with the Iraqis to figure out where we can pitch in with money to accelerate development, and we in turn write the grants to AID and these implementers to see if we can get them to fund the projects that we, along with our Iraqi colleagues, identify. Begging for US government money back again seems a little odd, but at least it assures that there is a good checks and balances process on 'is this necessary?; does it fit the intent of Congress and AID? At the end of the day they vet these quite thoroughly.

I didn't realize this, though I could have figured it out, but when you get money from these AID funded organizations, you get a huge amount of technical expertise that you don't get, let's say, if it was a CERP project. My lieutenant colonel, who had done such a wonderful job in getting the INMA grant for the canning factory, after the INMA money came through, he breathed a sigh of relief in front of me, and he said, 'you know, I was almost scared that CERP and the US military were going to fund it,' because he would have wound up being the expert on the ground, making it all work. When INMA adopted it, oh my Lord, the list of technicians, engineers, financial experts, marketing experts that come with that grant is really quite astonishing. It makes things happen slowly, but everything is done thoroughly and with a great deal of expertise that you don't always get with CERP.

Q: It also seems quite marvelous to imagine that these are civilians. Not only do they have the expertise, but they are able, apparently, to go about their work without getting killed.

A: There is a whole lot of security that has to surround it.

Q: Which presumably they cannot rely on the same way that you do on the US military to provide?

A: I think for the most part they did. I'm not sure how…well the IRD people are going to be going with their own security. Indeed, they are going commercial.

Q: Right.

A: I remember going to an Iraqi military base, and the Iraqi general in charge was just ecstatic when I showed up as a civilian,. He made so much of the fact that 'oh, my gracious sakes, a civilian is showing up here.' He had me handing out awards at the promotion ceremony. After I thought about it, the analogy of seeing a civilian to their eyes -- I don't know if you grew up in the Northern United States, but I remember the first harbinger of spring was always when the first robin showed up. The first robin was there, you said it was spring, and I realized that I felt like that first robin. When they see civilians, in many cases it signals to them that there has been a change in the environment around them, and we are kind of like the first robin of spring. The military are wonderful, but they signify something different. You realize they are for protection, for security, and as long as that symbol of military power has to be the one that everyone sees, it's not the Iraq that any of us want. It's still dangerous.

Q: Very much so. I had a couple of questions on that, which I'll come to in a moment, but I know you have alluded to some of your satellites. I would like to hear about them a little more formally, because I think you had a unique approach to marrying the governance objectives at the local level with the PRT's stated mission, i.e. to be doing governance at the provincial level. So maybe you could tell us why you created these satellites and how they operated.

A: When I made my first trips around to the battalions around Salah ad-Din, the battalion commander said, 'hey, could you send us some help?' They had to spend a lot of time on governance: going down to the city councils, listening to all these complaints about the water, the sewage, the electricity, and whatnot. After I had listened to this, I thought, 'it sure makes a lot of sense for the PRT to provide that help.' The battalion commanders were wonderfully generous; they said 'we'll set you up with whatever you need.' They had huge resources. It took us a little while to set up in other places but we set up about two months ago. But it was a response as much to the battalion commanders saying we really need help on these civilian functions, the economics, the governance, and whatnot. These guys are really smart. I am just so tremendously impressed at the quality of the battalion commanders that I met, that they realize that there were was a need for civilian help there, both from our perspective and the image that we project, and how we would be able to interact with the Iraqis in a way that was difficult for them to do.

Q: What rank are the battalion commanders usually?

A: They are lieutenant colonels.

Q: Okay. The individuals that you set up in your satellites, where were they going to be housed?

A: They were all going to live on the military base. So they would get the military transportation. I was eager for them to work with the civil affairs teams, the ones that go out and they try to fix the water and the electricity, and the fuel distribution and all that. So I thought marrying up the longer term PRT with a shorter term civil affairs was a pretty good marriage. I didn't want them all thinking alike. This is the problem that I think may prevail with the ePRTs. I think they are really part of the military, and I think their approach is closer to the military civil affairs, and with PRTs there I knew there would be the occasional conflict because they were complementary but not the same. Sure enough, there have been some difficulties and misunderstandings that we've ironed out as everyone goes back to their corners and says, 'you're there for this, and I'm here for that, but they're both in the interest of the government, so we'll keep plugging away.'

Q: It sounds like you saw eye to eye with your brigade commander?

A: That made all the difference.

Q: I say brigade commander. Did you also have a battalion commander?

A: I was with brigade level, and then subordinate to him are the battalion commanders.

Q: Okay. Please go ahead and describe the different relations that you had with your brigade commander and then your division commander.

A: A division commander that I worked with was far more active in PRT and reconstruction and economic development and job creation. Their initial perspective was very much a short term one, you know, 'let's get all these young people out there and working, get them a salary, and call it good.' We kind of worked him over. I think the general in charge of the division is now more appreciative of the role of the PRT in the fact that we do have to take a longer term perspective. There was an educational process that he went through and, a very sharp guy obviously, he came around to our way of thinking, but at the same time certainly pushed all of his division staff to get the jobs created now. The brigade relationships were very good. I had two brigade commanders and during the tenure of the first one, the violence was so bad in the province that he really had to focus all the time on pressuring the Iraqi authorities to bring down the violence, and it's hard to make nice with them on governance and economic development but at the same time, he never felt that they were working as hard as they could to bring security to the province. His relationship with them was a balance between pressure on them to improve security and support to them to improve governance and economic development.

Q: Was the brigade commander able to bring enough pressure on Iraqis so that violence diminished?

A: At the end of the day, what did it was the onset of this awakening movement or support council, where we began paying the sheiks to turn their young tribal members into paramilitaries, the gendarmes of the province. That made a huge difference, the number of violent incidents plummeted dramatically as the effects of that took place. The next brigade commander encountered a situation where there had been great improvements in security, so he was able to take a look at our own military presence, and he said, 'you know, I have to loosen things up so economic development can take place.'

Q: He said he had to do that?

A: He said there were going to be risks. He did that in full knowledge. Where for example there had been roadblocks or streets closed or in one way or another security had been put in place that impeded movement, he said, 'if it's worth more to our economic development than to security, I'm going to take that block down.' And he did so. They are opening a market near that canning factory, a market that had been shut down for security reasons; he did a number of things like that. He responded very quickly to the improved security in order to breathe as much life into economic development as he possibly could. That change in brigades I think was very fortuitous because the previous one, you know sometimes it's just hard to change your thinking that quickly. But a new brigade hit the ground about the time the security improvements hit. They were able to take a fresh look

and do things without, shall we say, the sort of the investment of the prior action, undoing what they had earlier done. They could very objectively take a look and say 'hey, we're going to change things,' and they did so.

Q: I saw a statistic of how many weapons there are per capita in Iraq.

A: Probably approaching American standards.

Q: Yes, I think surpassing, believe it or not.

A: We have a long term commitment. Iraqis are interested in reintegrating as many of these young men into civil productive society, but we're committed to making sure that the program is not abandoned as long as it's needed, and it's certainly needed still.

Q: Many of these young Iraqis, before the war, what were they?

A: I don't know. I think unemployed. These are young men, many are illiterate; they have very few skills. If you take a look at how these poor young people grew up, the wars and economic deprivation and sanctions, and the whole almost Old Testament Biblical tragedies that Iraq has gone through since 1980, there's been no happy outcome for the young people growing up there.

Q: I guess some of them are joining the police?

A: Yes. That's been part of the program for re-integrating the paramilitary members into society again, to bring some of them into the police and the army, and there are other vocational training programs.

Q: That would not be a PRT endeavor, however.

A: No, we have as a matter of fact had some pretty stringent rules laid down by the State Department on what we can and cannot do to help with that re-integration.

Q: You don't want to go outside your area of expertise.

A: No. That's not why we're there.

Q: Recruiting for police might be a thankless job. One other fascinating thing that you pointed to though, that did apparently come under your rule of law mission, was the endeavor to secure better human rights and specifically, to address the detainee issue.

A: We hadn't yet been able to nip that one off by the time I'd left, because the new people were just arriving. We had a new civil affairs company coming in, and we were working to see who might be a good fit to get into the rule of law and help with that.

Q: I think you did have at one time the AUSA as part of your team there?

A: Yes, that is another one who was replaced. The officer in charge of the rule of law is an assistant US attorney.

Q: Was the idea they would liaise with the military to try to make sure that people didn't disappear?

A: There is a combined provincial joint communications group that the US Army originally set up to coordinate information sharing between the Iraqi police, the Iraqi military, the Iraqi army, and the US military, but it hasn't gotten off the ground. It's still a little bit of a solution looking for a problem, but there is an office there on detainee matters, and we were hoping to invigorate that. There is, at least on paper on a little store front, a function that should do that, but with as many entities that can arrest people, arresting them, sometimes they just disappear, not in the Argentine sense, but there is just no accountability for prisoners in many cases, and information sharing is so awkward, families do indeed wonder, 'where did my family member go?' We'd like to bring some discipline and true coordination to that process and there is enough mistrust and enough problems with intelligence and infiltration that I think that everybody looks to us as an honest broker, and if we could participate in this process, I think it would give everybody more confidence in its integrity.

Q: Do you think we have overcome the bad press of Abu Ghraib?

A: I think so. Nobody during my entire year there held it up as a sample. Now that's not to say that may not be a huge animus against us as a result. We see so few people because of security, such that the folks that who really would say 'I hold you responsible for Abu Ghraib' are probably out in the streets, and we just don't see them. That's one of the problems with the job, is you don't get a real sense of the opinion in the streets.

Q: I'm sure that would be difficult. You're still in a war zone, despite the many things you can get out and do. In the year that you were there, how would you describe the attacks on you or on your base; were there daily rockets coming into your camp?

A: No, it wasn't too bad. I was in a convoy that was bombed only once. A bomb went off; I'd say 75 ft. ahead of my vehicle, maybe 75 or 50. Those Humvees are just built like battleships, so unless it goes off underneath you, I think you are pretty safe.

Q: Maybe they are celebrating.

A: You know it could be. A joyful noise is a AK-47 clip. We had a rocket hit our parking lot at the PRT one evening, nobody was there but then there would be occasional shelling on the base, but not anything remarkable. I think from that standpoint it was more dangerous down in Baghdad, because the base that we were on was surrounded by desert, so if you were a bad guy and dumb enough to shoot something off in the middle of the desert, your lifespan was measured in minutes, I think.

Q: I see, you really were out in the middle of nowhere.

A: The ability to conceal oneself and fire from concealment was just minimal. You had to have a death wish to do it.

Q: I'm glad it was relatively safe for you.

A: Yes, it wasn't bad.

Q: Public affairs is another important topic, and you mentioned in your notes it was something you might have liked to have done differently. Was it the source of some frustration?

A: It was a huge frustration. I finally got a real Foreign Service Public Affairs Officer about three weeks before I left, and wow, she was a stick of dynamite. She was really excellent. Sometimes you have to push the Iraqis; they understand public affairs, but if some is good, more is better. I received a professional from the State Department who helped seize opportunities not just for government officials to express themselves, but also to help NGOs, and other participants in Iraqi political life get out there and talk, and let people listen to moderate views, or if they were virulently anti-terrorist, to get them on the radio too. We were just cutting it from whole cloth there. So to have a good imaginative public affairs officer was just wonderful. She was also very active in just the few weeks that she was there, and I also made sure that we were better informed on what was happening in the Iraqi media. The 10-11 months prior to that, we really had no public affairs program to speak of.

Q: How would the public affairs officer have been able to turn it around in terms of both aspects: briefings on the press, and persuading people to get out and talk to the media?

A: She was able to work a lot with the military as well. They have huge resources. They have huge amounts of information coming in; you've got to pick around, find it, it truly is drinking from that firehose. She was very active in finding out exactly what particular websites have the latest news. Then she took it upon herself to, at our nightly 4 pm meetings, sum up the Iraqi news for us. So we really had our own news readers, and that was tremendously useful in helping us understand what was going on downtown. We even went as far as persuading the Iraqis; we had an excellent Iraqi employee who had prior experience in press work, and for her to be able to work with him to develop ideas and opportunities about how the Iraqis should project themselves to their own public; that was just getting going as I left. She had somebody to work with, and she had the time, energy and training to do it. This is one of those areas where you just needed a body. This is where we really didn't have the adequate number of people, skills aside, to do the job capably. When she arrived, it was just night and day.

Q: She would have needed to know Arabic, I would guess too, if you are doing press summaries.

A: No we had very good translators there. Our translating capabilities were really good and the Iraqi employee to whom I referred a moment ago was also a former academic in English. Talk about a bi-lingual resource. Fantastic.

Q: Someone like him, or your other Iraqi contacts and parnters, if they become closely associated with the Coalition, isn't that making them a target?

A: Well, they're targets already; when I was working with a little group for anti-extremism that we're working with and which is now growing, I told them our influence was behind the curtain. I gave one press interview while I was there, my attitude being the news is about the Iraqis, not about us, and so all of our press activities are conducted with the Iraqis. Certainly my successor can do as he pleases but we're behind the curtain, just like the Wizard of Oz. The story is not about us, it's about them, so all of our activities have been to encourage them to get out more, but as Iraqi public officials, not American puppets. That is the last thing we want.

Q: A lot depends on how they are perceived, and we wouldn't necessarily control that. I know there was one PRT leader who mentioned in passing that the governor that he worked with has been the intended victim of assassination 8 times, but he continues.

A: Oh, our guys have survived dozens of attempts.

Q: That's impressive. I'm thinking every time he pops his head up out the door, it could be the last time he does it.

A: An Iraqi governor I know had a suicide bomber throw himself on the hood of his car. His wife was killed by terrorists. They were trying to get him. This guy has been through the wringer but he just keeps coming back. They know the risks.

Q: They do indeed, and they are really courageous. I think you've discussed theprinciples that have guided the PRT and obviously the objectives have been quite clear. When you look back at your year, what do you think of as the greatest accomplishments that you've managed to achieve?

A: I think probably setting up the satellites was the best thing. When you approach things as a manager, and honestly, I went into that job scratching my head wondering 'what am I supposed to do?' Setting up the satellites put the right people in the right place to do what needed to be done. I early on told everybody we have communication gaps. There is one between the cities and the provincial governments, and there is one between the provincial governments and Baghdad. Between the Provincial government and Baghdad, we just have to work to help the provincial authorities to close that one up, but we can help a lot between the cities and province, and I think there was enough anecdotal evidence that we pushed those folks to deal with one another, that getting ourselves out there at the municipal level was probably the sharpest thing we did over the term.

Pushing all of my staff to worry about the process, trying to figure out what the Iraq counterparts should be doing, and are they doing it the right way. Don't worry about whether or not they accomplish the right thing, but rather in accomplishing the right thing, can they do it again? And they set up a means by which they can repeat their successes and make them better. I think that worked, I harped on everybody to do it, and after a few months they said 'oh, yes, sir, we're very concerned about the process.' I think being able to incorporate that into people's thinking, that the process of governance matters, was a good thing.

The cooperation with the military worked great; I think that worked very well down at the city level, with my staff working with the civil affairs folks, and everybody profited from that. At the end of the day, I think, and this is just within the last month, that security was good enough that now it's time for the PRT to take some road trips and get out and see Iraqis and talk to them, projecting that civilian image was very important. We did a road trip to a little village where the city council also invited us over. So we loaded up in about 8 trucks, rolled into this little town, and a bunch of us just took our armor and helmets and threw them in the truck and walked around town. One young paratrooper came up to me and said, 'sir, you are taking a hell of a risk.' I thought for a minute and I said to myself, 'then I guess I am doing my job the right way, because what the Iraqis need to see is that we're confident that their country is changing for the better, and you are going to have to take some risks to keep that process going.' I don't want to make too much out of this, but it means a lot to them to see civilians who are not, who are kind of willing to risk a little bit and say 'Iraq is safe enough that I am not going to walk around looking like an armadillo.'

I think that the PRT was always responding to the changing circumstances. I don't think we sat on our hands and said 'well, we are going to do this for the next 6 months.' I think every couple of months as things changed, we adapted. That I think is the real hallmark of a PRT, or it should be, and just that: observe and adapt and honestly you've got to take some risks. The Department, when they hear me say this, will maybe cringe, but the Army was doing it and I think the PRTs need to do it, too. Push the envelope. Otherwise we'll be there longer than we have to be. So anyway that's kind of the sum of it.

Q:Be nimble, agile, and flexible. Did you feel that you had good enough support from - I want to say the Office of Provincial Affairs, though I'm not sure how much support was supposed to be provided by them?

A: I'm not sure either, so to answer the question, when it comes to material administrative things, no; the support was inadequate. I can't really blame OPA for that. I was in a video teleconference with I believe President Bush's main military advisor in Iraq and he asked me the same question, and I said, as long as the State Department relies on the MOU between State and DOD to take care of the PRTs, its not going to work. DOD and the military have many priorities and if the PRTs are important to the State Department then they should get their own appropriated funds to take care of it. Honestly, I rode my bike back and forth to work. A whole bunch of people had to walk. We had people with ankle injuries and arm injuries because the footing is so treacherous walking

across the desert that we had people hurting themselves with some frequency. The number of cars was just minimal.

Q: This would be bicycling on your base to get there.

A: It wasn't that far, I only had to ride about a mile to work, but when you are doing so on a very loose gravel road, it's pitch black out, and ten ton trucks are roaring by you, and they're looking at you through bullet proof glass with diminished visibility, well...

Q: Yes, it's not biker-friendly, really.

A: I'm not one to exaggerate, but it's just downright not safe. There are no two ways about it. I'll walk around in an Iraqi street without my armor and helmet on, so when I say something is unsafe, I think I have credibility with that judgment. That's not OPA's fault; they are dealt a bad hand of cards on that one. When it came to program guidance, how to reach out to the Iraqis, how to build capacity, how to develop political moderation, they didn't really give us guidance on that, and I don't think they should have. When I made my courtesy call on Ambassador Crocker, I joined the Ambassador Crocker fan club right there. He said, you know you are there to work on political moderation, and economic development and capacity building, and I quote him, he said "and you figure out how."

Q: Okay. Well I guess that's why they want people who are self-starters in those jobs.

A: I think the Foreign Service does pretty well.

Q: Sure, if you need to be told exactly what to do, you are going to be unhappy.

A: I think the Foreign Service and the State Department in retrospect is really the organization to do something like the PRTs. We need all the expertise of the military, we need AID, we need the Department of Justice, we need USDA, but I think picking the Foreign Service to coordinate or lead that effort is just about right.

Q: I hope they continue to get good people like you; you have a good background in administration, and you've been around a while.

A: That was a big help. It really was. I think they need admin management officers very badly in the PRT world.

Q: I hadn't so much thought of that, but it obviously does make sense.

A: It didn't initially occur to me as I thought 'hey, this is a political officer's role,' but no, it really isn't.

Q: In fact, I think you alluded to getting away from that; reporting has its place, but it sounded as if you were inclined to minimize the reporting angle.

A: That's a subset of what you do; reporting is not the primary role there. When I first got there and kind of surveyed the horizon there at the PRT, I told everybody that we had two big disadvantages. We had no money and no authority. Then, we had two big advantages. We could use our heads, and other people's money. I think it worked out quite well.

Q: Indeed, I guess the money end of it seldom is the problem. There are these pots of money; you have to figure out how to tap into them.

A: Well that's it; you just have to leverage other people's money. We had something called Quick Reaction Fund my last 6 months, and that was nice. It was a little bit like the ante and the poker table. It was not quite essential, but close to essential. It was great to have, but generally money is a curse.

Q: Well, having to account for it is a pain.

A: I'm glad I'm out of there, that I don't have to worry about that now. Now, they'll hang you for a nickel, whereas in the early days of our presence there, jeez, billions and billions went up in smoke. Different standards of accountability have come into effect.

Q: But you had what you needed to get things done, to give your satellite leaders a little money?

A: Oh, yes, we had the resources for that. I can crab a little bit about not having cars, and the only reason I crab about that, is everybody else on the base is so lavishly resourced that it's a paradox at the PRT. The President points to it in the State of the Union address, but we are the cobbler's children without shoes. But there is a little bit of heroism in that.

Q: Now if you did want to get out for a meeting, was it very cumbersome to make the arrangements? You had your vehicles, and you had the protection you needed?

A: It required a lead time of about a week for meetings, and this is what is so difficult for me. I am a very spontaneous person, so for me to look ahead and say I'd like to meet with the governor on such and such day about this topic was very difficult. At the end of the day, I just told our movement folks, take me into town every Wednesday, and book me, whether I want to go or not, I'm going. And the others were more ad hoc.

Q: If you were going to see someone, did you tell them?

A: We only told them a day in advance, just for security.

Q: That's what I'm thinking; you really couldn't announce it.

A: There were enough things that pulled me into town that I was usually there two or three times a week, and then there was usually at least a weekly helicopter trip someplace

else. A good week, I was off base three to four times. I told my staff 'you don't belong here on base, you belong out in town.' They were out even more.
The boss has a certain obligation to jockey the desk.

Q: When you were communicating with your folks in the satellites, was that by email, or phone?

A: It was phone and email both. I had my teams communicating with them for the most part because there was always subject matter and I wanted the teams to keep everybody dancing at the satellites. Lots of phone and a lot of email. And they got into town with a good bit of frequency. I was surprised at how often they showed up.

Q: Even your schedule is really quite good.

A: The military movements were, given all the constraints, pretty good.

Q: Definitely.

A: It wasn't so much their frequency that was problematic; it was the narrow scope of them that was the inhibition.

Q: That is, you had to go to just a particular place and meet.

A: Go to the governance building, go to the Provincial Council building, and then you would reverse the order for variety.

Q: And the university, did you go there?

A: That was difficult because the students really didn't like us there.

Q: They didn't?

A: We were unpopular. Not the PRT, but when you roll in in heavily armored military vehicles with big machine guns on top, it creates a special atmosphere.

Q: A little off-putting?

A: They didn't like it.

Q: That I could understand, I guess.

A: That's the way students are.

Q: Well, I certainly want to thank you for sharing all your expertise.

A: I am delighted that the Department is going ahead and studying this, because I don't know who dreamed up the PRTs, but it was very imaginative. I do have to say.

Q: A lot is left really to the creativity of the folks who step up to the plate.

A: The people that you meet in these PRTs are just extraordinary. They are the best group I have ever dealt with anywhere.

Q: I think that is key, to get people who are willing to use their imagination and are pretty dauntless; a lot is accomplished in really difficult circumstances. It brings out the best. I thank you.

A: It's my pleasure. I'm glad to be home and to be able to talk about it.

Q: I hope you have a chance to do more of those media interviews, because at least now I think there is much more desire to communicate, even with our own audiences.

A: I think that is one of the most healthy things that's come out of this, is the State Department has lost itsfear of the press. It doesn't have to just be the State Department spokesman once a day, now we enable Foreign Service people to get out and talk. We do need a constituency; we always complain that we don't have one, and we are our own worst enemies in developing one. I think this outreach program for the Iraq diplomats coming home is just great.

Q: Great. Alright, if you think of anything I can do, please let me know, and I'll wish you all the best, enjoy your home leave, and have a nice sort of down time, which you certainly deserve.

A: Thank you very much and take care.