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INTERVIEW #18

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Executive Summary

The interviewee was a mid-level management USAID contractor working for the Salah Ad Din PRT near Tikrit in 2006. His brief was to manage the USAID contracts for that province, most specifically in the area of governance. The informant found the environment on his base somewhat disorganized with a definite military-civilian culture clash. Sometimes separate military and civilian convoys would appear for appointments in the same building in Tikrit without either side knowing about the other's business. Research Triangle Institute representatives could hardly work with the military, the conflict was so intense.

The dangerous security environment did not help the situation. There were threats from bombs and snipers, and outlying USAID contractors were reluctant to attend meetings at the PRT for fear that they could become stranded in a dangerous security situation. Nevertheless, PRT representatives managed to attend meetings in Tikrit at least three or four times a week. They were particularly proud of having established procedural rules for the conduct of the provincial council meetings, which helped to minimize the power of the chairman and allow other voices to be heard.

Another success story was in the area of microfinance. There were no military or civilian funds for establishing a microfinance program in Tikrit. Through some creative negotiation, the PRT representatives managed to persuade the microfinance institute in Kirkuk to share its funds with Tikrit, even though there were initially some Sunni Arab-Kurdish cultural differences to overcome.

The informant found it somewhat difficult to evaluate the performance of the PRT. He felt that six months or even a year was insufficient time to see whether reforms and progress were being made. Too many PRT team members were also unqualified in their specialty areas. The interviewee felt that the extraordinary situation in Iraq called for extraordinary people, and they were apparently in the main just not available.

Interview

Q: Can you state just briefly what your position was at the PRT in Iraq?

A: I was the USAID representative on the PRT, first, in Nasiriyah, which was an Italian led PRT and then in Tikrit, which was a U.S. led PRT.

Q: Okay, two experiences.

A: I spent only two months with the Italians, not even two months, with the Italian PRT.

Q: Can you describe to me the location, history, physical structure, size and staffing of the PRTs in which you served? So, for you, it is two PRTs.

A: I will try to concentrate on the U.S. PRT, because that was most of my experience. When there is a dissimilarity, I will mention it. In both cases, for instance, we were located on military bases.

I arrived at the Italian PRT in May. It was just the start. There were two or three people there before me, and the PRT never worked very well because there was the lack of staffing, the lack of equipment, the lack of workmen and this type of thing. So after just a few weeks, I was removed. USAID realized that the PRT was not working and they pulled me out, because they needed me somewhere else.

So my experience with the Italian PRT was very limited, and I know that after I left the team leader had to be replaced, because it was not working very well and then the Italian PRT moved to another base in the same province, Nasiriyah, a U.S. military base. Then they provided a new team leader, and then the PRT started in earnest. But I was not there by the time the real work started. The PRT had some growth problems and at the beginning the staffing was not appropriate in terms of numbers and skills and so it did not work. So they had to take a step backwards and start from scratch, and I think the second time around the PRT worked much better.

Q: So let us concentrate, then, on your EPRT in Salah Ad Din.

A: I arrived there in July, something like that, June-July 2006, and at the time there was already a team leader, who was from the State Department, and there was already a deputy team leader. There were about twenty people when I arrived. I was the first USAID representative. There must have been six or seven civilians, and I was one of them. Three of the civilians were from RTI; they were working the local governance program. It was a USAID program implemented by RTI, a U.S. company.

Q: We will get to RTI later. What was the physical structure and the number of staff?

A: We always were in a building that was not designed to be an office building, but that was available on the base. It was why we were there. We were not the only ones in the building, so we had offices here and there. It was not rare to see all the people at the base coming, knocking at the door, asking their way through the building, because they were looking for the other people working in the same building.

As far as staffing, there was about six or seven civilians; everybody else was military and at the beginning we did not have any equipment. Myself, I did not have a computer. I found one by accident in a corner of the building. I found cables here and there, and I connected everything and it turned out I was able to make it work. I am relatively knowledgeable in computers, so I was able to find bits and pieces of equipment here and there and sometimes buy them myself at the PX and get something working.

So the beginning was kind of difficult. The accommodations were also a problem. At the very beginning I was in a trailer, sharing with someone else for a few weeks. Then the showers were about a hundred yards from the trailer. Same thing for the rest rooms. So it was not easy. The trailers must have been four to five hundred yards from the office, which is not too far. Sometimes it was painful, because Iraq is a very hot country but it was not a major problem. The lack of privacy in the private accommodations, that was a problem. After at least three months we moved to accommodations, which were smaller but which were individual. We had very small trailers, maybe two and a half by three and a half meters at the most and in the same trailer there were two rooms and in the middle there was a shower and a toilet.

Q: Okay, maybe we can now move to the role and mission of the PRTs in Iraq. Describe the role and mission of the PRTs in Iraq and then more specifically the mission of your PRT.

A: Well at the beginning my feeling was that the PRT is depending very much on the team leaders who were running the PRTs. There was a strong tendency not to follow any work program. There was a work program, a work plan, which was written, but it was put in a drawer and no one ever talked about it after it had been approved. So the work plan was not really a working tool to guide the activities of the PRT. It was simply an administrative requirement, which had to be satisfied to meet the requirements from the people at the NCT in Baghdad, but it was never used as a guiding tool for the activities of the PRT.

The PRT had a huge emphasis on governance, on relationships within the tribes, on improving the relationship of the local authorities with the central government, because we were close to the city called Tikrit, which is the capital of Salah Ad Din, and this province is a Sunni province. As you know, the government in Baghdad is majority Shi'a, so the relationship between the Shi'a government and the Sunni local authorities was obviously a priority. It was very difficult for the Sunnis in Tikrit to be heard in Baghdad, and very often the team leader had to broker meetings with government officials. If the PRT had not been there, very often no meeting, no communication would have taken place with the government.

Q: So what would you describe, then, as the overall mission of your PRT?

A: The overall mission was to improve relations with the central government.

Q: Between the provincial and the central government?

A: And try to appease the various factions of the local government. There was some friction between the provincial council and certain local councils, such as municipal councils in other cities of the province. Very often the provincial council was the focus. Some local leaders tended to be very authoritarian in their relationships with municipal councils. So some conflict erupted because of that.

And then we spent a lot of time in developing the working operation of the provincial council. At the beginning they had absolutely no idea that they needed to have a quorum in order to have a meeting, that they needed to take votes, that they needed to have minutes of meetings, and that the meetings needed to be open to the public. All these things were entirely foreign to local officials after the elections in 2005. So we worked a lot in bringing some democratic procedures to the council, but maybe it is saying too much to use these words, but we attempted to bring in some fair procedures, fairness in the way the provincial council was operating.

We spent also a lot of time working on the budget for the governor and the development of a provincial strategic plan for the development of the province because this obviously had a direct relationship to the budget of the province. It is related to the central government and in the allocation which was done by the central government to the province for the various functions that the central government had responsibility for.

Q: Your PRT, then, I assume had a relationship with the Provincial Affairs Office? How was your relationship with the National Coordinating Team, the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. military commands?

A: With the NCT, it was distant. There was a liaison officer. I saw him once. Nice guy, I saw him once and that was it. I exchanged a few emails with him and then he was replaced by someone else that I saw once or maybe twice.

Q: But did your team leader have more of a working relationship?

A: Probably. Personally, I had very little relationship with the liaison officer from the NCT. I assume that the team leader, and also the deputy team leader did. The deputy team leader was military, but he was not from the army, he was from the navy, a navy captain, which is equivalent I believe to colonel, something like that. I am not sure they had much relationship with the liaison officer. Because of the positions they occupied, they must have been communicating directly with the head of the NCT or the deputy head of the NCT.

Q: And how about with the U.S. Embassy?

A: We talked regularly to the embassy. There was someone who was also someone who was coming from the embassy, a kind of public relations function. I know they were sending reports. These reports very often happened to be classified, and they were extremely reluctant to share the contents with the other staff of the PRT. Myself, I have

never seen the reports. I was responsible for preparing the minutes of meetings that were sent to the embassy to do the weekly report. However, I never sent it directly. I always gave it to the public affairs person or to the team leader, who then modified it and sent it, under what format I do not know, because communication was one way. I never saw the classified communications which were sent.

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

A: Extremely militaristic. USAID was not recognized as a valid partner. We were really put at the bottom of the pile and people tended to keep us there and keep a foot on us. The first organizational chart was a joke. It was simply done to satisfy the requirements of the NCT, but it was not followed in practice, in real terms. What was followed was the rank of the military in the PRT. That was the hierarchy which was applied. The civilians, having no rank, were very often without any say.

In particular, my colleagues from RTI, from the governance group, were totally at the whim of the military. They had a lot of difficulties to work through and there was some tension, some very real tension, between the civilians in the RTI team and the military. They were simply not recognized, they had a different culture, different ways of communicating, and very often when the military wanted to go see the provincial council, they scheduled a meeting and then if there was room in the Humvee, they would take a civilian. If there was no room, it happened to me that I was bumped out of a trip because simply there was no room.

Q: What was your title and role in the PRT?

A: My official title was USAID PRT representative. In other words, my function was to manage, evaluate and oversee the various programs of USAID in the province. As much as I could, I had to implement those programs and to act as an emissary between the contractors for USAID and the PRT, in order to make the resources of the programs available to the PRT. It was very difficult to do, because of the security situation. People did not want to come to the U.S. military base where the PRT was located.

In one year at Spicher, once I went up to Kirkuk to meet with the people of an NGO contracted by USAID to implement a community action program, and I saw them only once. They were based in another city but they did not want to come to Spicher, because it was too far, transportation was too difficult and therefore they agreed to meet halfway. So we met there at the regional embassy office midway. The meeting was very good, very positive. Unfortunately it happened only once in nearly a year, which was not enough. And it was the same for the other implementers. But I would not blame the implementers. I would blame the security situation, which makes transportation very difficult.

Another example, if I may. USAID had a program to evaluate the contractors, and this program was run by a company called IBTCI. We organized a meeting in Spicher, and

we invited all the USAID contractors who had obligations to perform in the province. Nobody came. Only IBTCI came and the poor guy who came for a two-hour meeting ended up spending six days in Spicher. There was a problem with the helicopters, a problem to put him on flights, to find flights that had space to take him, problems with the weather. He had a two-hour meeting and he spent six days in Spicher. The rest of the time was just wasted.

So when you are a contractor and you have to deliver a certain performance for your employer, which was USAID, you can understand that the contractors hesitated a lot to go to an area where there was a risk to be stranded.

Q: How do you rate the effectiveness of the PRT leadership and the management structure?

A: The structure was poor, I would say, but that was very much linked to the nature and the personality of the team leader. The first team leader was an individual who was very nice, I had a very good relationship with her, and she worked a lot. She gave a lot of time and energy to developing a very good relationship with the provincial council and she succeeded. However, there were some substantial management functions which were problematic.

After eight months, in December 2006 or January 2007, the team leader was replaced because the first one had done her full year and then she left. The new one was a person who had substantially more experience in management of his office and who delegated much more flexibility to the various staff in the PRT and assigned roles to the members of the PRT. At that point the PRT went into a totally different phase, and the dynamic of the PRT changed substantially under the new team leader, simply because the management function was changed.

Q: What improvements would you recommend?

A: There was a much better definition of the roles of team members, a much better use of their personal skill sets. For instance, the team leader, the new one, asked to have the CVs of everyone. We had a staff meeting organized weekly, which did not happen under the first leadership. Under the first team leader there were some staff meetings from time to time, but they included only the head of each group. The PRT had four groups and they included only the heads of the groups, which were all military. For instance, I was excluded from these meetings, even though I was representing USAID and bringing probably several million dollars worth of programs to the province; nevertheless, I was systematically excluded from these meetings. It was not the case during the second leadership period.

Q: So would you characterize at least the second team leader and the team in general as effective?

A: There was much more interaction with the team members and much less friction. There was much more discussion among the group members, let us call it the management group, of what was the function and what each one had to do under his work plan and how what was being done could influence the others. There was more intellectual exchange among the staff. That was good, because it was reflected in the relationship with the provincial council, with the various directorates in the province and with the various municipal councils in the province.

Q: Did you encounter agency stove piping? Are you familiar with that term, stove piping?

A: Well, yes, there had been a lot of that going on. I am very glad I was part of this experience, do not misunderstand me, if I may at times I sound critical. I am glad and proud I had the chance to be part of such an extraordinary situation and to have contributed what I could to such a venture.

But the PRT is a very complex organization. You have people coming from the State Department, you have people coming from the Agriculture Department, you have people coming from the private sector like myself, you have people coming from all different branches of the military, the air force, the navy, the U.S. Army. You have other people who are career military, and you have other people who are reservists. So each of them belongs to a different organization. Each of them has a different culture. Each of them has a different loyalty.

Putting it together is a very different experience and it is probably why there was some slack in the first leadership of the PRT, because putting together everyone is very difficult. Over time this changed a little bit, because during the time of the second leadership, there was more emphasis on the management of the team. The individuals on the team had a better emphasis on the work program and the definition of an activity plan and that influenced it substantially.

Now I have no doubt that certain agencies had more weight than others, and could pull the blanket towards themselves. It happened. It happened all the time. It happens everywhere. So it happened also in the PRT. It is part of the game.

Q: So would you call the relationships and interaction among the members of the PRT as developing into something more harmonious, in terms of your work, over time?

A: It did develop. I have seen some substantial conflict between civilians and military. I would say there were two reasons for the conflict. One is that the military tends to follow orders and they are trained to follow orders. Civilians do not follow orders so easily.

The other thing I must say is that a number of the civilians who were in the PRT had very weak personalities. They were technically qualified, but they were very weak personalities. So they found they were overwhelmed by the very well disciplined

behavior of the military, and the way the military can give orders and be very effective without having much substance. Because they wear a uniform and they shout a lot, very loudly, they carry the day.

Q: You have already described civil-military relations, but what were your relationships specifically with the brigade combat team?

A: At the level of the PRT, there was a very difficult relationship at the beginning. When I arrived there it was probably at the peak of the difficulties of the relationship between the PRT and the brigade. The brigade was led by someone who had very strong combat experience and was very tough and did not believe in the effectiveness of the “soft” approach represented the PRT. So the relationship was very tense and that translated into the difficulties in having proper office accommodations and in having proper housing accommodations. It took months to have proper accommodations. In fact, it took a change in the brigade to obtain decent accommodations and to have work in the office performed satisfactorily.

So the relationship was very tense, because of the leadership. I am talking about at the upper level in the brigade, where they tended to ignore us. It was not appropriate to have the brigade organizing meetings and going in a full convoy to the provincial council building at the same time the PRT was organizing meetings in the same building, with another full convoy going to the same place. That meant a lot of Humvees standing as very stationary targets around the council building. It happened to us, to find ourselves with ten soldiers with M-16s in the same room with two or three members of the provincial council.

Q: Did coordination improve while you were there?

A: Yes, it did improve substantially over time and I must say that this instance that I just mentioned, which was obviously very unfortunate, happened at the beginning of my stay, which was about one year. But they tended to disappear towards the end. There was better coordination and sometimes even the convoys were leaving together, in other words, even from a security point of view we worked together. So the brigade, which also had staff participating in activities, were coordinating much better with the PRT, or the PRT was coordinating much better with the brigade. But this happened after the change in the leadership of the brigade and was emphasized again after the change in leadership of the PRT.

Q: I want to address security now. You have already touched on it in many respects, but what were the level and the nature of the threat that you faced?

A: Basically we were traveling in convoys of Humvees. The convoys could be six or eight Humvees. Generally, we were broken into smaller convoys of three or four Humvees. Rarely five--if we had five cars we were all going together, but if we had more than five cars, we were broken into three or four. One of the main risks was the

risk of going into the city, two, three, four times a week, and then it was the risk of parking the Humvees, while we were inside the building.

We had basically three locations in Tikrit where we could go, where we organized meetings and each of them was surrounded by walls. However, there was only one gate and going through that gate represented a risk.

Q: Was the risk from snipers?

A: There was a risk from snipers, there was a risk from rocket attacks and there was a risk from car bombs. We had a rocket attack on a convoy. I was not in the convoy the day we had the rocket attack, but there were several wounded in the Humvee. There were no deaths but there were several wounded.

We had a grenade attack on another convoy. I was personally not there, again. Two grenades were launched at a Humvee. One missed the Humvee and the other one managed to enter through the open turret and fell inside the Humvee and exploded inside in the Humvee. There was one killed and two-three gravely wounded soldiers. There was no civilian in that Humvee that day, because a Humvee can carry five people: four seated inside and one standing in the turret. That day there was no civilian in that Humvee.

So the risk was a risk of attack on the convoys, the risk of attack when we were in the building. When you are in the building, you generally remove your flak jacket, you do not wear your helmet in the building. Anybody can penetrate the building, because there is no check of who comes in and out of the building by the U.S. military. They simply go there and they clear the building. They go through all the rooms and they make sure there is no bomb. They make sure nobody is carrying weapons who is not authorized, but the check is obviously limited, because it is only a few minutes, and they do not know who was in the building five minutes before they arrived. So there was always the possibility that someone in the building would start behaving badly against foreigners. I was never a witness to such a situation, but I know it happened elsewhere in Iraq.

Q: Did you sustain mortar fire on your base?

A: On the base, it did not happen too often. When I was in Basra--there was no PRT at the time I was in Basra--but we sustained mortar attacks or rocket attacks quite a few times.

On the base, in Spicher, we had two or three rocket attacks. One of them fell about 150 yards from the office building, but it was rare. My explanation is that the insurgents did not have too many rockets and the military bases are very big. So the chances of hitting someone with a rocket, which is generally launched from quite a distance, are very small on a big base. So we had a few rocket attacks, but it was not a problem.

Q: You felt that you were all able to operate in the field, in other words you were able to get into places despite the security environment?

A: I am glad you mentioned that, because we were going out three, four times a week. Personally I was going out two to three times a week, but we had convoys four times a week, at least. One day I asked the team leader and I asked this in a meeting, when everybody in the PRT was there--we had thirty people in the room—what were the criteria which were used to decide on the mission from the point of view of security? Were the criteria used by the military, because it was the military who were deciding on the trips to the city, different from the criteria used by the RSO at the embassy or the RSO at USAID?

And the response from the team leader was very candid. She said that the situation in Tikrit is such that if we were applying the same criteria we would never go out, absolutely never. There would be absolutely no chance that an RSO would authorize a visit by civilian personnel outside the base under the security risks that we had. Practically every day there were car bombs, there were explosions in the city. And we were going through that, and several times we had attacks on our convoys.

So the criteria were very different for civilians, we were hired under embassy RSO rules, but we were in fact subject to military rules, which were combat rules and not so stringent.

Q: Well, if you could describe the PRT's relationship with international and non-governmental organizations, with the exception of RTI. We are going to talk about RTI later.

A: The relationship with NDI, for instance, was very good. NDI had an office in another military base. This base used to be a U.S. military base, but after some time the U.S. handed over this base to the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Army security inside that base. NDI managed to have an office within that base and they were coming to Spicher, we could meet with them fairly often. The relationship with NDI was excellent and we coordinated the message and the assistance provided by the PRT and by NDI. It was good.

Q: Were there any other NGOs, other than RTI, operating in the area, or international organizations? Was the EC, the European Commission, present?

A: I never met anyone from the European Commission, and the only NGO that I saw was NDI. As for expatriate NGOs, foreign NGOs, there were substantial difficulties for them to come to Spicher, and it was really a province that was not given much emphasis.

Q: Can you now describe your Iraqi counterparts and your interaction with Iraqi provincial and local government, tribal councils and the local business community and citizen groups?

A: There was interaction at all or most levels of government. There was also some relationship with the private sector, but not too much, although one of things we tried to do with the private sector was to develop microfinance.

It was extremely difficult to develop microfinance in targeted cities. We had to go through a combination of cities to develop it, and it was developed as an extension of the microfinance institutes in these cities, because of the risk, because of the difficulty to find staff and because of the funding requirement. Funding for microfinance was also a problem. USAID did not have money anymore, and therefore they tried to split the money that had been allocated to other microfinance institutes so that some of this money would be used.

Q: Did you meet with tribal councils, as well?

A: Yes, I met a number of times with tribal councils. It was not really my function to meet with tribal councils. However, I was always very glad when I had the time.

My function was to oversee the USAID program and to facilitate the relationship with the PRT. Because the PRT did not always have enough staff, whenever they needed someone to cover a meeting, I was always there.

I have attended meetings and discussed with the provincial councils and the representatives of various tribes and tried to hear their problems, tried to communicate with the central government in Baghdad and tried to resolve their problems. One interesting thing, in Iraq before the war you had the structure of the former regime, but you had also a very ancestral structure of relationships among people which was provided by the tribes. The tribes provide an organization and this organization is a very long lasting one, and has very deep roots within the population. And when the elections were held to elect the provincial council. The ancestral structure of relationships, maybe we can say of informal government, in the province was brought forward and was put in place through the new structure of provincial government. That was very interesting to see.

Q: Did your EPRT have a public affairs officer and program?

A: There was not an EPRT in my time. I have not witnessed any EPRT in Tikrit. The EPRTs started shortly after I left.

Q: Did your PRT, then, have a public affairs officer and public affairs program?

A: There was a public affairs officer, but I was not too aware of his programs.

Q: The U.S. counterinsurgency effort. What comprised this effort and was it effective? Were you bolstering moderates? Providing support to moderates?

A: I do not know, frankly, because the elections were held, the provincial council was elected, and then the chairman and the governor stayed on, and there was no change. There was no change until the new elections and the elections were delayed and delayed.

Q: And you would not describe them as moderates?

A: When you meet with them, you think they are moderates because they were very well educated, so one deals with a leadership that is smart and educated. Very few of them have calluses on their hands. I am not really in a position to say they were moderates. They were always very friendly to me. But I was meeting with them maybe two hours a week. What they did after meetings with me I do not know. I was probably a very small speck in their weekly agenda. So I cannot really say. The team leader would be in a better position to say, and the security officer also would be in a better position.

I have seen during provincial council meetings some very heated discussions by certain members of the provincial council. Some of them expressed extreme attitudes. I cannot say, however, whether our support was going to people who were truly moderate. I tend to believe that they were moderates, because I have never seen anyone shooting at me in the provincial council, but I cannot really say.

I can mention a situation to you. One day we were invited to a provincial council meeting, and on our trip to the council building we had three road bombs which were discovered. One exploded, but not next to a car. There were three roadside bombs which were discovered by the security team and we had to change our route to the council. When we arrived there, the officials of the provincial council were not there. Some people told me that it was not a coincidence that we found the bombs at the same time the council was not there. I do not know. These are rumors. I cannot say. I do not have the expertise to say whether this is right or wrong.

Q: Would you describe all of these activities as promoting democracy and the ability of provincial and sub-provincial governments to function effectively?

A: Yes, one thing that I think we did that was very good was to develop operating procedures for the provincial council. It is not so much to have a paper, which indicates the rules, but it is the implementation of these rules that forces people to think about the way they are behaving and about the impact of their behavior on other people. And we tried to facilitate the relationship with the local municipal councils and the provincial council. The tendency of people over there, people in power, in positions of power, is to act in a very arbitrary and authoritarian manner. I think we had an impact in facilitating the relationships and the discussion between the various levels of local government and the central government. I think to that extent the PRT had a positive role.

Quantifying how positive was this role I cannot say. It is very difficult to quantify over a period of one year. Obviously you want to emphasize the role of moderates, but you have to be patient in a situation like this. You cannot change the world as it is in Iraq in only a few months. You have to view the impact over several years.

Q: Can you now describe for us the role played by RTI International in your efforts to achieve good governance?

A: Well, RTI was implementing the local governance program and they had a team of three staff, expatriates, in the PRT and a team of 20, 25 Iraqis outside the PRT. They were also supposed to provide up to eight people, Iraqis but working with the PRT, inside the PRT. They never provided those eight people and the relationship with the people outside was very difficult. They tended to do what they wanted and not react to the needs of the PRT.

This is not to blame what RTI did. RTI had an impossible job, and I have a lot of respect for the people who managed the program for RTI, because they had a really difficult job. They were pulled in all directions, and they were subjected to a lot of pressure. It is not possible to please everybody in such a situation.

However, they had a contract which required the delivery of certain activities and those contracts for the most part were written before the PRTs were created. So they tried to accommodate the PRTs but sometimes they could not, because they were under contractual pressure.

You were talking about stove piping earlier. There was probably something going on like this on the part of USAID. USAID did not want to put several million dollars into a governance program and have the show stolen by some other entities. There was a lot of pull in different directions.

My main concern was that the governance people, the expatriates, who were in the PRTs working for RTI, I would say for the most part were individually, technically qualified. However, working in the military structure did not work for them. They were totally overwhelmed by the discipline, by the severity of the behavior and by the very strong personalities which were present on the side of the military. Some people on the military team had very clear ideas of what they wanted to do and they never paid much attention to what the RTI people were doing. It was very difficult, especially for me, right in the middle, to integrate and bring closer the RTI people and the military and the team leader. It was my toughest job, probably.

Q: Can you now describe for me the PRT activities related to economic reconstruction and development?

A: The main economic activity was the attempt to implement a microfinance institute. For this microfinance institute, the PRT did not have the funding by itself. Even so, we tried to fund it through the military budget. Anyway, there was some discretionary funding which could be used by the brigade and we tried to obtain some of this. We could not do that.

We tried also to use funding from USAID, but there was no funding at that time. All the funding had been disbursed, and we were waiting for new additional funding, which was tied to congressional approval and this type of thing.

So, during my stay there, about a year, I never saw new funding coming for the microfinance institute. So what we decided to do was to expand the microfinance institute which existed in a neighboring city and to convince those people to use some of the money they had to cover part of another province.

We ran into problems, because the people who had the money and the knowledge of one province did not have the knowledge of other provinces. So they had to hire people, and they did not necessarily know them. The people in one province were Sunnis; the people in another were Kurds. That is the situation. In my time over there, there was no microfinance institute developed.

There was an economic advisor provided by USAID who came in late 2006. Before that there was no economic advisor and, therefore, no economic activity provided by USAID. There was an economic team in the PRT, but this economic team had very little experience of economic development, job creation, job programs and these types of things. So there was very little activity.

When the economic advisor, the consultant provided by USAID, came in, he had much more experience and also a much stronger personality. He could convince others that his ideas had some merit, and they were adopted by the military team which was heading the economic group in the PRT.

Q: Did civil affairs soldiers participate in any of the reconstruction programs?

A: Yes, in fact, the best relationship that civil affairs had was with the economic team. Also the agricultural team, but agriculture and economics were all under the same subgroup within the PRT.

Q: There was no separate PRT agricultural advisor?

A: No, not in my time. The economic group had some substantial internal difficulties, because of personality problems within the military. When the group was created, there was one group leader. For three or four months after that, the guy did a lot of things to develop relationships with the agricultural directorate general, with the microfinance institute and with the university and so on. Then there was a newly assigned individual to the PRT who was put in charge of the economic group, and the guy who had been in charge until then was relegated to the second position. The guy who was relegated had started his own business in the U.S. and was successful. The newer person had no business experience. You can understand that that created substantial friction and sometimes they barely talked to each other for a week.

Q: Can you now describe the work of the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee? I assume you had a PRDC?

A: The PRDC was a subcommittee of the provincial council. This committee, for reasons which are specific to the provincial council members, was renamed several times and I am not sure I can tell you what was the final designation. But they were working very closely with civil affairs and with the PRT.

The problem is that the PRT funding was coming from the NCT, so all the projects were coordinated by the PRT and then sent for approval. The setup between the PRT, civil affairs funding and the NCT was sometimes very cumbersome. Very often programs were funded which did not correspond to the main desires of the provincial council and the PRDC.

There was also a substantial accumulation by a few individuals in the provincial council who were wearing a lot of hats and that created conflicts of interest which would be absolutely unacceptable in the U.S., but which we could do nothing about, so we closed our eyes. But there were substantial conflicts of interest among certain members of the provincial council and obviously giving money was always a problem because of that. So there were some delays because we always wanted to make sure that the money would be used appropriately.

Q: Did you have a rule of law officer in your PRT?

A: Yes, we had a subgroup, the rule of law group. There, too, the group leader was changed after a few months. The first leader was a lawyer working for the U.S. Air Force.

Things changed substantially after five, six months, when somebody new who was also a civilian, this time and a former district attorney, came in. He had taken early retirement and he wanted to see the world and he volunteered for Iraq. Obviously any volunteer for Iraq is immediately hired and he came. He had a much better understanding of the role of judges, what their behavior should be, what should be the rules, what should be the procedures. He could define them and point out how the legal requirements could translate into physical requirements and relate these things to civil affairs or to the NCT. There was a representative of the NCT who was dealing with infrastructure. This guy worked very closely with the NCT's infrastructure expert, and there was a substantial improvement when this guy was in the PRT.

Q: Did the Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq, the so-called MSTCI, did they run training programs in your province?

A: I never heard of them. They may have been there, but if they did anything, it was far from my sphere. I was not aware of everything, by far. The only persons who had an overall view of all the activities of the PRT were the team leader and the deputy team leader.

Q: Well, if we could now move to the PRT cultural advisors, the so-called bilingual bicultural advisors. Did you have sufficient BBAs?

A: We had four of them.

Q: Can you describe their activities and were they effective?

A: For the most part we never understood what those people were doing. One of them, working in the governance group had lived in the U.S. He had an incredibly close relationship with the central government, and we know for a fact that he was talking quite often to people in the central government and it happened that he went to Baghdad and met with very highly-placed officials. I do not know if you realize, but to have a BBA capable of meeting with very high officials is unusual. Even when he was in the U.S., he was active in Iraqi emigre circles in the U.S. and therefore he was politically connected. He was hired, put in the middle of the PRT, and suddenly you had this guy there who actually attended all the meetings, all the discussions and who had this private channel of communication with the highest authorities. It was quite a problem.

Q: So it was more of a problem than a blessing? You were not able to take advantage of his connections, the PRT?

A: Another guy was working in the economic group. He did not have much in the way of qualifications to be there. He was a smart guy though, so he made himself useful, but he was not particularly active in the function of cultural advisor. He was more working as a technical advisor and he tended to favor certain projects and to develop contacts outside the PRT, connections with his friends. Those types of connections can be good and bad, depending on how they are used.

Q: What did your PRT achieve during your tenure there? Could you give us a list of projects with concrete accomplishments?

A: I think there was substantial improvement in the way the provincial council operated. They designed some rules and they stuck by the rules. This was critical, compared to what was before. So there were better communications within the provincial council. The excess authority of the chairman tended to be mitigated by the democratic process and the voting process, the discussion process, within the provincial council. So to that extent the provincial council was made a more democratic institution.

The relationship, also, with the central government and with the local, municipal governments were also substantially improved. We had extensive conflicts, which were for the most part personality conflicts between various councils, local and provincial, and the PRT managed to mitigate those conflicts and to resolve them into working relationships, not always very effective, but better than nothing.

Q: Can you, at this point, maybe look a little more broadly, at all of Iraq? Do you think that the PRTs are accomplishing their mission? Are they effective vehicles for improving government?

A: You have to manage expectations. I think if you give the PRTs time, if you give money and if you have qualified staff, the PRTs can be effective. But you cannot judge them based on six months or one year. You have to really see them operating for several years. And over the years the PRTs will mature and will develop programs which are more effective and more responsive. The PRT was something new and the scope of work was very broad. You cannot pull something out of a hat like this. You need to follow a trial and error method and you get better as you go along. I think that is very much what I have seen. You learn your lessons and as the security situation improves, relationships and effectiveness will improve relationships with the local authorities.

You need to prove that PRTs are effective and you need to prove that not to the U.S. Congress, even though that might be the priority, but you need to prove that to your counterparts in Iraq. They will trust you if they see that you can do something. It was fairly difficult, especially in the area of physical infrastructure, delivering equipment, doing repairs, doing physical work, because of security, because of funding problems, because of the time it takes to build something, because of the corruption issue, it takes time to build a mutually trustful relationship.

You need to give time to the PRTs. I think the PRTs can do a lot of good, but they will cost a lot of money.

Q: Did USAID provide you with training before you went to Iraq, or in-country training, even?

A: No. The training I received was in Washington, like everybody going to Iraq, which was a little bit cultural. I had an Iraqi lesson for twenty minutes. I had some training in medical emergencies, in case someone is wounded, not me, obviously, but someone else so I can assist someone. I had some cultural awareness training, about how the country developed, the value structure, the tribes and so on. But that is about all. For the rest, it was my personal experience about development, about community action programs, about civil society, about infrastructure and this type of thing. I have been in development for 15 to 20 years now, so I had this personal experience and it is why USAID hired me.

But I did not receive any specific training, beyond the one afternoon training provided by the NCT when the PRTs were created. I attended this training, which for the most part was cut short. There was no specific training from USAID. Afterwards, USAID conducted meetings with all the PRT representatives. There was a scope of work provided to the USAID reps, the definition of what the PRT rep should be doing, and his/her activities, behavior, role, responsibilities were clearly defined by USAID.

Q: Well, would you recommend more training, both outside Iraq and in Iraq itself? Prior to your arrival, would you recommend more intensive training?

A: It depends very much on the staff you have. Some people came to the PRT, and they had never done development work before. Some people in the military had never done development and they were promoted to the heads of groups.

Q: It really depends on your position?

A: As far as training on the technical issues of development, the State Department or USAID should tend to hire people who already have experience. Now you need to have specific training because of the security situation. Medical training, cultural training may be helpful.

Q: How about language training? Would you recommend more language training?

A: No. Iraqi is a very difficult language. It would take months for someone to learn Iraqi. Myself, I spent five years in Egypt before going to Iraq, and I took Iraqi lessons in Iraq. I learned a few words, but you are in a situation where, it is good to know a few words, but you will never reach the point where you can conduct a meeting in Arabic. So if you find people who speak Arabic, so much the better.

I think improving cultural awareness, yes, that is something useful, but also finding ways to integrate the PRTs into a real team. The PRTs are made up of many different people coming from different places with different views. There is a need to integrate the PRT into a coherent team. It is a team. It was not necessarily coherent when I was there.

Q: My last question to you is what lessons did you draw from your experience in Iraq?

A: That is a tough one. Manage expectations, be very patient, bring in people who are qualified to do their jobs, because a number of people were not qualified and maybe some other people would think the same of me--it goes both ways. But it is an extraordinary situation. You need to have extraordinary people. You cannot take any Joe off the street and send him to a PRT, give him two weeks' training and hope you are going to change the country in six months. It does not work that way. You need time and you need qualified people. Quality cannot be replaced.

Q: Thank you very much.