United States Institute of Peace
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Iraq PRT Experience Project

INTERVIEW #2

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Executive Summary

The interviewee was located in the Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team (EPRT) Bagdad north of Baghdad with the Second Brigade Combat Team of the 82nd Airborne Division. His area of operations covered Sadr City and Adhamiyah. His period of service there was April 2007 to December 2007. The EPRT received all of its life and movement support from the brigade with the responsibility for helping the brigade implement its counterinsurgency strategy.

In terms of organization, the team leader was a State Department FSO, the deputy team leader was either a military reservist or a USAID FSO as the development officer. There were stages in the staffing: first, the State, USAID leaders, military civil affairs officer and a Iraqi Bicultural Bilingual Advisor (BBA) went out to set up the EPRT. Second, in May/June, the Department of Defence (DOD) provided technical experts (augmentees); they were, originally but unsuccessfully, to be provided by the Department of State (DOS). The six or seven DOD augmentees included city planners, economic development specialists, government, health and education, agriculture, and engineer specialists. In the third stage, DOS and USAID civilian contractors came to replace the military augmentees. However, these specialists were not suitably qualified for their assignments, lacking experience in working in a different culture. Iraqi staff with security clearances was hard to find. The total staff by December 2007 was about 12 members. Also the brigades received from DOD Human Terrain Teams —anthropologists, historians, linguists — who understood the Iraqi culture to help the EPRT staff be more effective.

It was very dangerous in the area with lots of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), Rocket Propelled Granades (RPGs) and small arms fire. The situation was better by September and October largely because of the surge and the presence of American civilians from the EPRT helping to identify and resolve needs with the provincial, district and sub-district councils.

The EPRT mission was to help stabilize the area and work in two areas: political reconciliation and economic development, preceded by an assessment of the area and developing Iraqi trust. As development advisor, the interviewee worked to have EPRT staff develop strategies, not just do one-off feel good activities and help the Iraqi councils take responsibility. RTI (Research Triangle International) "did an absolutely great job" using their facilities to get Shia and Sunni councilors to work together. There were programs in agriculture, rule of law (especially women's rights and detainees issues), micro-lending and vocational training.

Relationships with the US military were excellent— a very professional group. They were somewhat difficult with Iraqi NGOs because of the intimidating affect of military presence in the communities. There was limited contact with Embassy and USAID with some initial roadblocks. Understanding the Iraqi culture was difficult, but very important.

Resources were the DOS Quick Reaction Fund (QRF), USAID's Economic Security Funds (ESF) and the Commander's Economic Reconstruction Program (CERP). The Councils had no funds except those provided by the EPRT, which helped to develop the councils experience in managing funds and programs.

Lessons: (1) Improve the training program for EPRT team members; the current training program was practically non-existent. Special attention should be given to understanding the Iraqi culture, and for the long term, people trained in Arabic and Middle East languages. (2) Establish metrics in EPRTs to measure progress, (3) Make clear to political and military leaders that EPRTs are involved in a long term effort, (4) View PRTs as decentralized platforms for launching programs and coordinating US government programs, but look out for creeping bureaucratic centralization, (5) help the Iraqis with ideas to unlock their own resources. Money is not the problem. (6) Get true development people into the field.

The Interview

Q: When were you in Iraq?

A: I was in Iraq from April of 2007 through December of 2007.

Q: And where were you located? What PRT?

A: I was in what was called EPRT Baghdad 3; we were located just north of Baghdad about thirty kilometers, in a forward operating base (FOB), but in our area of operation, we were responsible for Sadr City and Adhamiyah, two very large and densely populated areas just to the east of the Tigris River, about probably a thirty minute drive to the northern edge of Adhamiyah from the forward operating base.

Q: Explain the "e" part of EPRT. How is that different from other PRTs.

A: The "e" part means embedded. We were embedded; this was a new concept and we were the first group back in April to go out and be embedded directly with a Brigade Combat Team (BCT). There were ten newly stood up EPRTs, and I was embedded with the Second Brigade Combat Team of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Q: What is the difference between being embedded and not being embedded?

A: First off, some of the "normal" PRTs were almost like mini-embassies, maybe with a dozen or up to a hundred employees; they were not located within a military brigade. They provided for their own life support, their own housing and their own movement support. Being embedded with the military, we were part of that brigade in a sense, even though we were a civilian

organization. We got all of our life support from the brigade and also all of our movement support from the brigade. We were responsible for helping the brigade implement its counterinsurgency strategy.

Q: And how was it organized?

A: Our EPRT was organized in the following manner and most of them were organized similarly: the team leader was a State Department Foreign Service Officer, the deputy team leader could either be a military reservist or, in the large majority of cases, usually ended up being an USAID Foreign Service Officer. In our case, there was a Senior Foreign Service Officer from the State Department; he was the team leader and I was the deputy team leader, being the senior officer from USAID; I was also a Senior Foreign Service Officer.

Q: And what about the rest of the organization and its staffing?

A: There were different phases to the staffing. The general concept, which was unproven at the time and probably looked good on paper, was that there would be a core team going out initially to set up the EPRT and that was the State Department person and the USAID person as a development officer. Then there was a military civil affairs person who trained with us back in the States and also went out with us and the forth and final member of the core team was what was called a BBA (Bicultural Bilingual Advisor). These were Iraqis who were there not so much to interpret or translate for us but to give us advice on how one actually gets into the culture, helping us understand all the different aspects of the culture and the language. So that was the general concept.

Also, all four of us were supposed to have trained together, but, in the end, only the civil affairs person, the State person and the USAID person trained together for a week or two back here in the States. The BBAs had not been identified, or at least were not available to train with us. So we did not actually meet the BBAs until we got to country.

Stage two, probably starting in May and June, when we started receiving augmentees; they were generally military reservists or National Guard staff. These were Americans. They were called up and they were provided to us by the DOD. Now the original concept called for the DOS to provide these people, but DOS could not provide them with such a short time fuse, so there was an agreement drawn up that the first round, for the first year or so the DOD would provide these people. They were supposed to be technical experts in different areas. The truth is we got what we got.

We would ask for city planners and we would get somebody who did contracts for the army, maybe did contracts to rebuild a base, definitely not city planners. We would ask for an economic development specialist. You might get somebody who owned a small business before. We asked for a government specialist. We got somebody who at one time in his life had been involved in local politics for a couple of years. In our book, in the USAID and State Department development world, these people would not count as development experts.

Q: And other staffing?

A: In the second round we received these military augmentees, "specialists" and we got about six or seven of those in that round and one DOD civilian employee.

Now in the third stage, we were beginning to receive civilians contracted through DOS, who were to come in and little by little replace the military augmentees; just as I was leaving we were starting to get a few of these people. Again, by and large, these people were not highly qualified; they were very well meaning and very hard working, but they had no overseas development experience, had no idea how to work in a different culture with all the cultural subtleties and linguistic subtleties. There are some basic development principles that always need to be followed and you cannot run around, as many of us learned early in our careers, andsay, "Here is how we do it in the States." We were in Iraq; we were not in the States.

Q: What were their specialties supposed to be?

A: ...specialties in local governance, economic development, agricultural development, health and education, engineering —people like that. Those were supposed to be the specialties.

Q: How many were there of them?

A: When I left we had about 12 members on our EPRT and we were probably one of the largest EPRTs at the time.

Q: Were there a large number of Iraqi staff, too?

A: No. We had maybe two or three or four Iraqis who worked as translators or interpreters for us. A couple of them were highly qualified. One I remember was an electrical engineer. Another one had been an engineer in the Iraqi military at one point; he had been a prisoner of war in Iran for 11 years or so.

At the end of the day we really did not want a lot of Americans there. We wanted to find people, Iraqis, as I just described; felt that that was the ticket. The problem was that it was next to impossible to find cleared Iraqis, with a minimum security clearance, so that they could come into your facilities, come onto your base. So it just made it very, very difficult. But the Iraqis who we did find were cleared, at least cleared through a limited security clearance level, but at least we could work with them.

Q: Who did the clearance?

A: It came through the military who received candidates from the company that provided them under contract to the military.

Q: What was the security situation in the area where you were located?

A: Our base was about thirty minutes driving time from our actual area of operation. Life on the base was not that hard, although for the first six months or so, we were rocketed and mortared

every day and every so often there would be attempts to crash through the gates by bad people, so there would be a lot of gunfire. But out in Adhamiya and Sadr City, the security situation there initially was very, very precarious.

There were lots of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), lots of small arms fire, Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs). It was very hard to move around in that area. The small bases that the battalions had out in these areas would get attacked quite frequently. Though it made it very difficult, we went out every day and met with people and visited these different places and tried to open up a dialogue with locals from the area. But by late August, early September, we all felt that we had turned the corner on security and that things had gotten a whole lot better. It was a lot easier to work and also it was easier to get around, but also you saw a lot of changes on the streets in these different places. Where before you would not see people on the street, you would not see people in the markets, restaurants would be closed, all of a sudden we were seeing mothers out walking with their children, people sitting out in makeshift outdoor cafeterias. So we took that as a good sign.

Q: What do you think brought that about?

A: It was a lot of things. Part of it was the military part of a surge, finally implementing a real counterinsurgency plan, where you do not have all your troops based on a big base rather you have them pushed forward out into the communities where people are. That made a huge difference. Also, all humility aside, it made a huge difference to have civilians like us going out there and meeting with people and trying to help them identify needs and help them to resolve some of their most pressing needs. There were a number of factors.

Iraqis got fed up, too, with all this violence; they just got tired of it and they started repudiating a lot of it. The insurgents and the militia committing a number of very heinous acts that hurt innocent people and so people repudiated that. And remember back in August or September the whole "awakening" happened. It was a confluence of events, but all of them, these little things, added up into something that hopefully we can continue to build on.

Q: What was the mission of the EPRT and the program?

A: We were there to help in stability operations. This is tricky, but we were embedded with the military, with a brigade combat team and essentially we were serving as advisors to the brigade commander on how to go about implementing different civilian aspects of a counterinsurgency campaign. Where traditionally their mind-set may have been more focused on the kinetic part of it, the crashing down of doors and winning terrain, we were trying to help them win the people. And that is one of the things we convinced them of very quickly; it quite frankly did not take much convincing, because they had been doing things for four years and they saw that they were not working. We kept telling them, "The prize is not Sadr City or Adhamiya, the prize is the people. If we win the people, then you have stabilized the place."

Our goal was to help the brigade establish the necessary minimum security requirements in an area, so that we could go in and work and carry out development programs. Again, even though we were a civilian organization working alongside the brigade, we did not work technically for

the brigade commander, we worked for the ambassador. But that was never a problem for us. I know it was never a problem for our brigade commander.

Q: Was there a mission statement as such, a formal statement of the mission?

A: I believe there was. There was a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the DOS and the DOD, which outlined the mission and I remember reading it once. I will be honest; I do not remember much of it. In very general terms, it outlined what the mission was but also it was more about who paid for what and who provided what. I am an old Peace Corps volunteer. We used to joke in the Peace Corps that when you went out to the countryside, your mission was to go out, do good and avoid all evil. Our mission statement was a bit better than that but it was a lot of: "You guys are pros, you are senior officers, you have been around. You go figure it out." It was not a road map and that is for sure.

Q: What was your role in this operation?

A: I was the senior development advisor. There were two general areas where we were working programmatically. One was on the political side — the reconciliation side; my colleague from DOS handled most of that part of it, although I was deeply involved as well. And that is really their forte, so he served more as a political advisor to the brigade commander and also helped us strategize on how we moved forward in a bunch of interventions.

Q: You were deeply involved, but what does that mean? What were these interventions that you were working on?

A: The DOS officer was working mostly on political issues and reconciliation. I was working more on issues of development writ large: local governance development, economic development, agricultural development. We were looking at health and education. When we went in, we really had no idea what had gone on in the battle space before. One of the problems that you have in Iraq is that there is so much turnover, it is really hard to find anyone with an institutional memory.

So the very first thing we did was a rapid assessment of what some of the problems were and that required us going out in the field and talking to people. We would go out with civil affairs people from the brigade or from the battalions and we would find out what the problems were in governance, economic development, employment, essential services, and health. We spent a lot of time crossing cultures, developing contacts and establishing relationships in the area based on trust. It is like this anywhere in the world, but it is even more pronounced in the Arab world, that you do not do anything with somebody if you cannot trust him. So you have to spend a lot of time establishing a degree of trust.

Q: How do you do that?

A: By meeting with them. I remember meeting new people; we were under big time constraints. We were really pressured to get something done quickly. You can imagine the political pressures back here in Washington. And as Americans I think we want to cut to the chase right

away, sit down with brand new people who we are meeting and go right into business. I remember so many times making that mistake, and people, as soon as we tried to talk about business, they would say, "You know what, we are just getting to know each other right now. Let us not even talk about those things. We will talk about those things next time. We have a lot to tell you, about how you guys have screwed up and what the security situation is here and how we think you can make it better, but we are not going to talk about that right now. If we like you, we will set up another meeting with you in a week's time."

So there would be a lot of small talk. It is small talk, but it is not just chit-chat, either. It is like, "What have you done before? Where have you worked?" Things like that and, "What do you bring to the table? Why are you here and why were you not here four years ago?"

Q: Let us go on about your role and what you were doing.

A: I was the Development Advisor and since our "technical experts" working on the PRT were not experienced in development, I had to guide them along in all of our efforts and keep focusing them on a strategy and not doing just little one-off, feel good kinds of things, which in the business we call "sprinkling fairy dust." I was really trying to get people to focus on doing activities that, maybe would be short term activities, but they would construct a needed bridge from things that had been done before to more medium and long term kinds of activities.

Q: Could you describe one of those strategies, in one of the areas?

A: In the area of governance, for example, this is more theoretical but we had our military people calling together meetings of District Advisory Councilors in their battle space. The District Advisory Councilors were groups that were set up by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) whose legitimacy was questioned and even I did at the beginning. I left, hoever, convinced that these councils were very good, because this is where the rubber hits the road on governance issues. These were the people who knew their neighborhoods the best and they were out talking to their neighbors, their constituents. So they knew what was needed, they knew how to get things done, but they needed to learn how to govern and how to hold public meetings.

At first we would have our military colleagues call them together and then we would take over the meeting. We would run the meeting; it would be our agenda. There was nothing about their agenda. Then eventually all the councilors did was just sit back and wait for us.

For example, they might complain that in a certain sectors the sewers were all backed up, and our military colleague would say, "Okay, we will go out right away and write a contract to get somebody to pump that out."

I watched this the first couple of times and I said, "Wait a minute. We are here not to make ourselves look good. We are here to stand up a government. We need to increase the legitimacy of local government and the way you do that is by strengthening them and enabling them to do things."

So all of a sudden, at the second or third meeting, I would stop everybody, our military people and say, "Wait, this is the Iraqis' meeting, the councilors' meeting. Let them run it." "Oh, if we let them run it, it will go on forever and ever and nothing will ever get done." "Well, let them do that. They are learning. They are learning how to talk to each other. They are learning how to disagree. They are learning how to find consensus."

So eventually we would get to a situation with them arguing and saying, "The sewer is all backed up." And then where before our people would say, "Okay, we will fix that for you," I would say, "how do you suggest we fix that?' And they would say, "Can you guys write a contract and get some trucks and suck the sewer out?" And I would say, "No. Who in your government is responsible for doing this?" And they would say, "There is a sewer department in the mayor's office that is supposed to do that. "Okay, have you raised this with that person in the mayor's office?" "No, they do not pay attention to us." "Why not write them a letter and we will see what happens?"

So they said, "Okay, we will write them a letter." It would take them a week to write the letter and then nothing would happen and then we would say, "Okay, we will help push this letter forward, but you have now learned the process of doing this." Before we were doing everything for them. Now they knew the process. All of a sudden they knew what representative to go to with a complaint and if they wanted to get a whole bunch of neighbors together to go besiege the local mayoral representative in that area, they could.

So these were learning processes that had to go on, but this fostered the development of a more effective relationship

Q: And you found they picked up on that?

A: Absolutely. The easiest thing was always to wait for us to do it. Fortunately, a lot of the money started running out, so it was a good time to let them know that we are not going to be there for a long time. Our intention is to leave. Our money is going to run out sooner or later. What are you going to do then? You need to figure this out.

And actually their government had money to do all this stuff. Their problem was not money. Their problem was figuring out how to get it done, because, remember, their model of government for the last forty years was highly centralized, top down, a couple of government officials would tell them what they would get or what they needed. It was never bottom up.

Q: Is there another example like the sewer one that you worked on?

A: There are probably a million examples like that. There were examples on the health front all the time.

Q: Was Research Triangle International (RTI) there then? And what were they doing?

A: RTI was working with both Adhamiya and Sadr City in training, training the district councilors in how to be councilors. From everything as basic as how to work a computer and

how to do spread sheets to annual budget planning and how you do transparent and open contracts, and just the whole business of government. RTI did an absolutely great job, in my opinion.

They worked out of their training center in Karadah. So the people from Adhamiya would go on a given day or given days for their training in Karadah. People from Sadr City would do the same. In the end, we identified some weaknesses in some of the areas that we felt that the councilors needed, so I worked with the people from RTI on how we could beef up some of those areas through their training.

Q: You found them complementary, rather than competitive?

A: Right. I failed to say this before. Where Sadr City was largely a homogenous Shia community, Adhamiya was a very fractured community of Sunnis on one side and Shias on the other, and then there was an area of mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods. So the District Advisory Council had Sunni and Shia members, but the Sunnis would only meet together by themselves and the Shias would only meet together by themselves. We learned over time that it was not because they did not like the Sunnis or they did not like the Shias, it was because they were afraid to cross the Army Canal that went through the middle of Adhamiya, because if the Sunnis crossed one way they could be killed by insurgents on the other side and vice versa. But during this whole period, it was RTI that really held them together down at the training center.

So even though this was not part of training, RTI lent their facility to the Adhamiya District Advisory Council so that the entire council, Sunni and Shia, could meet together and conduct their business, which was not the best situation but it kept them together until we could work out with them areas within their community where they could meet safely and where we could guarantee their safety.

Q: Are there any other elements of the program that you want to comment on? What you were trying to do on the development side, reconstruction projects and agriculture projects?

A: Our purpose was not to do a whole bunch of reconstruction projects. That phase was ending by the time we got there.

There were some very large, multi-million dollar essential services projects going on in the area that had been going on for several years, which nobody had a good handle on and so we had one person do an inventory of all the different things that were going on in our battle space and what their status was. This went from fuel deliveries and the number of petrol stations open to the number of liquid gas distribution areas and how much gas they had, electricity, water, sewers, etc. So we monitored that.

In the area of agriculture, we were just beginning to do some very interesting market renovation projects, looking at markets as a whole and as an integral part of a community. If you could make a market safe to go, with easy access, and then you make it clean and healthy, you get more people in there. We would give out micro-loans to some of the people who lived in the

area, they would set up other little shops near the market, so it then became a commercial cluster which helped increase jobs and helped a turnover of money.

We were also working in some of the rural areas, setting up packing sheds and helping people produce things that they already knew how to produce, but to produce them more efficiently. We also worked on how do you get irrigation to these places. Many of them already had irrigation, but the canals were all clogged up. So, how do you organize communities to keep their canals clean and get an allotment of water so they can produce products which then go to the packing sheds, which then go to the markets, eliminating a lot of the middlemen. How to also have a good product going to the market, without a lot of spoilage.

Q: And your staff was working on these things?

A: Yes, absolutely. We had a very good micro-lending program, both in Sadr City and in Adhamiya through the Cooperative Housing Foundation, as well as through a local lender, which was through one of the USAID contractors and that was starting to take off as I left. Then there was also a micro-grant component, also, to a vocational training project that USAID had. There were vocational training centers throughout Baghdad, but in our area there were three or four, where people would apply to go to vocational training for three or four months and that pretty much provided them with an income for those three or four months. Say they were studying carpentry, if towards the end of their vocational training they came up with a business plan and an idea to set up a little woodworking shop that made doors for houses, then they could apply for micro-grants to get basic tools and material supplied to them so they could start up their business.

Another really very interesting thing that we were doing, and I am not sure anyone else was working in this area, at least through the EPRTs, was in what we were broadly calling "rule of law." We actually brought in a Rule of Law advisor, who was a reservist colonel, a lawyer, who had been a Judge Advocate General before; he was good. He knew his business and, by and large, I had a lot of experience in this area in prior jobs. I gave him some initial ideas when he first got there, I introduced him to a few people and he just took off with it and developed all kinds of really interesting projects, which are developmentally very sound and I know that they are going to really help out.

A: The reason most of the EPRTs were probably not doing Rule of Law activities is because they are normally something you would do at a much higher level, at the national level, at the provincial level, because it has to do with court systems and training judges and getting adequate law school programs up and running and things like that. So at the very local level sometimes it is very hard to find things that you can do effectively. But one of the things we realized very early on and it came through a counselor that we had met who was a moderate, who said that there were certain provisions in the new constitution that really jeopardized women's rights. Iraq had been very progressive under the past regime on women's right. Women were at peril of losing a lot of their hard won rights and could be subjected to Sharia law and just a number of things in those areas. So we funded a couple of legal clinics through an NGO to provide pro bono legal assistance to women, to explain to them what their rights were. If they, for example, wanted to get divorced, how could they get divorced legally and not be thrown out on the street

and not be viewed as pariahs and be able to take what is theirs, too, because there was a fear that if they divorced, the man could take everything and they would be left out in the cold with nothing. So we set up a couple of legal clinics in various cities to help people with these things.

Then later we added on health activities to these legal clinics, so that women could also get different health check-ups and services. And the plan called later on for these centers to be places where women could go; they could go with their children, if they had an issue they could leave their children in the center; there would be a day care center there, which they were working on as I left, to take care of the children while women were taking care of their health or legal problems.

Q: What were the legal matters based on? Were there national laws that you could use as a base?

A: Again, there was a new constitution and I do not remember what the article of the law was that was very disconcerting because it opened up a whole Pandora's box, e.g. under certain circumstances women could be subject to Sharia law. So what we were doing was trying to provide advice on the interpretation of that law.

Q: Were there other areas besides women's rights?

A: That was the main area we were working in, but we hired a few people to work on detainee issues, to be what we called a detainee ombudsman. Whenever you ever went out to a public event like a District Council meeting, as you walked in, you would be besieged by a hundred or two hundred ladies holding up pieces of paper and pictures. "Here is my son, here is my father, or here is my brother, he was taken prisoner four months ago. We do not know where he is, cannot find out anything about him."

If the U.S. military detained somebody, we could always tell them where this person was, what they had been charged with or what their status was. But, if Iraqi security forces detained them, the Iraqis did not have a way to do that easily or sometimes did not have a way to do it at all. So what we did was hire a couple of Iraqi attorneys who were well connected, who had connections within the Iraqi police force, to serve as peoples' ombudsmen for detainee issues. These women could go and fill out a form and say, "I want to know where my son is. He was taken on such and such a date by these people and we want to know what his status is." So these ombudsmen could track them down and find out where these people were. The intent was eventually to get all of this on a computer database, so that you could just punch in the data and tell these people where they are loved ones were.

Q: Is there anything else on the program side that you would like to touch on?

A: No, I think I have talked plenty about that. I do not know if I mentioned this to you but next week we have (and this I think is a first) six District Advisory Councilors from one city and six District Advisory Councilors from another city coming to the U.S., which our EPRT is funding. These are all Sunnis and Shias, men and women, and they will be coming to Washington, and

other cities. They are going to go meet with local officials and see how local government interacts with county government and state government and national government.

We are really excited about this because, number one, these are people who, many of them, when we first got there, would not even meet with us and, if they did meet with us, they would not meet with us openly, because they would be killed if extremists or insurgents found they were meeting with us. But now some of them have become much more moderate in their views. Others, who were moderates, and bolstered by us, are starting to be heard by their own people. And to get a group of people that before, figuratively speaking, were all throwing stones at each other, to get on a plane and all come to the U.S. together. Well, we are really, really excited about this.

Q: Have any of them suffered the consequences of the insurgency?

A: Oh, all of them.

Q: But they have all survived, as far as you know?

A: Yes, in Iraq, it is impossible to find anyone who has not had brothers or loved ones or somebody killed by somebody. One District Advisory Council member, who will be on this trip, has lost two or three brothers killed by the insurgents, killed by al Qaeda. Everybody has had people killed. Everybody has been affected.

Q: Turn to the relationships area. Within the EPRT, how would you characterize relationships between you and the military and other groups?

A: Fantastic. We never, ever had a problem. Our commander, a Colonel, was a wonderful person and really looked to us for guidance and support and we certainly got a lot of support and guidance from him. He was wounded after we arrived, quite severely in an attack and so was med-evaced for about four months. During that time another commander came in, also a Colonel, who was equally good and equally enlightened and very, very supportive of the EPRT. We enjoyed all of his support but he got a lot of great support from us and he recognized that. But last September our first Colonel was released to come back, so for the last four or five months that I was there we were in his command again.

Q: When you went out to the community, did you go with a brigade military group?

A: Oh, yes, we always moved with them.

Q: So they were very visible to the community. Did that intimidate the people?

A: It is always a little bit intimidating, but people got used to it after a while. We are civilians. We had to wear all the combat gear, but we did not wear uniforms and we did not carry weapons, but we were with people who wore the combat gear, carried weapons. They had to and they were there to protect us, too. But it is always intimidating to show up at place with four Humvees with crew-served weapons on them. But I would not say people were scared. Our soldiers were, I

have to say, very, very professional. We would go out into the communities and they just had a knack for dealing with people. This was the 82nd Airborne. They were just very, very professional in their dealings with people. The intention was never to intimidate anyone.

Q: There are comments in other situations like PRTs where the NGOs were unhappy because the military would show up and make life for difficult for them in their relationships with the community.

A: That part of it is very true. If we ever had disagreements between the EPRT and the Brigade, it was probably about that. The Brigade owned that battle space. That is the way they looked at it. So if they owned the battle space they owned inside of it. They wanted to know everything that was going on and there are some legitimate reasons for knowing everything that is going on.

The NGO people out there are not Americans. These are Iraqis who go home to their families every night. Having [the U.S. military] show up at one of their offices or their project sites puts their lives in jeopardy and all the workers who are out there. We had a lot of people, contractors, getting killed. They have no protection. But they are building a school, and we want to make sure that when they are building the school no IEDs or RFPs are going into the school walls. That is a legitimate force protection issue.

So you know what we did? We just agreed that our military would go out, say, to the school site or to the sewer construction site, they would do it on a Friday when nobody is working there. Nobody would think twice about it, because the military is supposed to be snoopy, so they could go and look around. There are no workers there. There is no association between them and the project staff. That is just one of the things we devised to get around this and meet everybody's needs.

Q: They would clear the area of IEDs and things like that if they could?

A: Yes. One of the biggest problems that arose when USAID contractors would do street projects or curb projects or sewer projects began with the trench they dug down the street. If the insurgents or the militia comes in and kills your contractors, they may leave the project for a couple of weeks, so all that dirt is piled up in which they can plant IEDs. So those are really legitimate force protection issues to be taken into account.

Q: You were under the Embassy. How did you relate to them?

A: I have to say I did not have a lot of contact with the Embassy, because I did not need to. Our State officer handled all of the relationships with the Office of Provincial Affairs. Truthfully, I do not think we needed them for much of anything. I do not mean that in a disparaging way at all. It is just that we were seasoned officers, so we knew how to get things done. We were self-starters; we would find problems and we would work them out ourselves.

Q: How about with USAID, their headquarters? They had a big program, of course. How did that relate to you?

A: We had very good support from USAID. But initially (I am going to be brutally honest here) a lot of the USAID people, who were back in the Green Zone, saw us EPRTers come out and they thought this was the a political show. So initially they did not really take us seriously and they did not think anything was going to come of our mission. That is the way I looked at it. The reason I say that is that USAID had these very large projects and some of those projects had activities out in our areas but the people responsible back in the Green Zone for those projects in USAID obviously had never been out to those areas because they could not get out there. So they really had no one with the on-the-ground knowledge of what was going on, whereas we did, because we were out there every day.

Q: And you did not report to them back and forth?

A: No, but in the end, we started doing that more and more, although initially, I felt that they did not really want to help us a whole lot back in the Green Zone. I felt they thought they had their projects; nobody is going to screw up their projects, especially this guy who is working out in an outlying area. If he wants to talk to any of the project staff, he has to go through me, which was a tremendous roadblock. A lot of us had those problems. It probably took us three or four months to break down those walls.

Once we broke down those walls things were great, because we all of a sudden started getting great support; we did not have to go through these funnels of information, we could go directly to the contractor or to their field staff and coordinate with them. And the advantage for people in USAID in the Green Zone was all of a sudden they were getting great information from us on what is going on out in the field, what needs to be changed, what is working right, what is not working right. So I think after a while everybody realized this is good for everyone.

Q: What about resources? We have not touched on that. What kind of money did you have and where did it come from?

A: When we headed out in April, we were told that we would have a fund for doing small projects, a quick disbursing kind of mechanism.

Q: These were the Transition Initiatives type things?

A: Yes, but if that is Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), OTI had already left a couple years beforehand. No, it was more having access to quick disbursing funds for doing things immediately. We were told that was going to be a major part of our toolbox. So when we all got out there, we opened our toolbox figuratively, and it was empty. There was nothing in there, but, maybe, a little tiny fig leaf. And I remember one day saying, "You know, the Brigade Commander is looking to us to start funding projects and pretty soon he is going to say the emperor has no clothes, because we do not have any money."

Q: Where was it supposed to come from?

A: There was supposed to be a fund. It is a long bureaucratic story, but it got hung up in the appropriation, and then got hung up in who is going to pay for what, how is it going to be

implemented. It came through DOS initially and it was called a Quick Reaction Fund (QRF), but we really did not start getting the funds out into the field until September-October. We had already been there six months by the time we finally had access to funds to do small projects, up to $200,000, quick reaction, quick disbursing things. But there was still a lot of bureaucracy tied up with accessing these funds and eventually part of the appropriation went to State, part went to USAID, but it was all one fund available to the EPRTs, so we started drawing on it. There was a lot of bureaucracy involved in getting different projects approved. Depending on the size, they would have to be approved by a group of wise people back in the Embassy and, if they were over a certain size, it would then have to go up to Washington to another group of wise people. It was anything but quick.

The reason for this is that the people wanted to make sure that: these are public funds, and they need to be handled carefully, and we all agree with that. The problem is most of us have done contracting and had warrants before, we knew how to handle things like this, so we were miffed that we were not trusted to do that.

Anyway, back in probably October, November or so, a large chunk of these funds came under a new contract, under an USAID contract, a company was hired to actually manage the funds for us. They would go and do all the due diligence, and all the processes that we had a hard time doing and get the money out to these projects once approved. So what I just described is, hopefully water under the bridge, although we lost six months of valuable time.

But during those six months we had what were called the Commanders Emergency Reconstruction Program funds (CERP). We were using those quite a bit and actually even though those were the Brigade's funds, they were consulting with us always on the best way to use those funds. Before it was sprinkling stuff around, no rhyme or reason always for these things, now we started to have more of a development focus and get people to think developmentally about the use of these funds as well.

Q: What about the Iraqi council? What funds did it have?

A: The councils had no funds. They were not actually authorized yet to have funds. I just read that the Provincial Powers Law was passed in Iraq. Initial versions of that law and contemplated funds being passed down from the central government and the provinces directly to the District Councils. So this coming year, they should be able to access funds to actually design and approve and implement projects in their areas.

One of the things, just as an aside, that I did with some of our CERP funds and our Quick Reaction Funds was, knowing that this was going to happen some day but also knowing that the District Advisory Councils had no experience in managing funds, I set up a small projects fund for them to manage. Initially, this meant for each District Council $200,000 that they could advise all the Neighborhood Councils as to the availability of these funds. The Neighborhood Councils could go to their constituents and say, "Give us a request, we will do a proposal, and we will send it to the District Advisory Council. The District Advisory Council has set up a Project Implementation Committee and they will look at the proposal, and they might be able to approve it." It was something like up to $10,000.

The whole idea was two-fold. One was to give them experience in managing funds transparently. The other was for the people, the constituents, to see that their Neighborhood Councilors were doing something for them, because their biggest complaint was "All you guys ever do is go to meetings. We never see anything." The reason they never saw anything is because they did not have any money to disburse.

Q: Did the different sectors: health, education, and agriculture get money from the central ministry?

A: The Ministry of Health manages all of the health funds; so anything that would happen even in the neighborhoods would all be through the Ministry of Health representative. Essential services, it depended on where they came from, but most of it came through the Baghdad mayor's office.

Q: But the money was flowing from the central government through these ministries?

A: Let me say that I do not think it was flowing very well and I do not think that they were anywhere near executing one hundred per cent of their budget. The problem in Iraq is not money. The problem is execution. There is a lot of money in the Iraqi government that is not being spent, because they do not know how to spend it right.

So that is one of the things we were trying to do is help them come up with plans to spend the money on good things.

Q: Back on relationships, what about your relationships with the Iraqis in different categories. How would you characterize them?

A: I have to say that the culture for me, and I have been doing this for three decades, was really difficult to understand at first. I do feel that we were able to establish a rapport very quickly with a variety of Iraqis, all of whom played different roles, some were more important than others. I left Iraq with some really good Iraqi friends, who lived out in various cities, who were the most courageous people on the face of the earth. Everyday they are risking their lives and they are doing it selflessly. They are meeting with us, trying to find a way to make things better for their people. These are doctors and lawyers and engineers, just well meaning citizens. So I made some very close friends,

Also during the time we were there we, at different levels of government, we were able to peck away at that a bit. We were certainly able to make great inroads with tribal sheiks and religious sheiks. I initially was very, very skeptical about our ability to be able to cross the divide with the religious sheiks, but we ended up establishing great rapport with them. We worked our way up from the bottom to people who were very, very close advisors of important leaders. This took a long time, but it was a sign of the rapport we were able to establish with them and the climate of trust that we established with them.

So it is very doable. In Iraq, in their society, if you say you are going to do something, you better make sure you do it. The second you let somebody down you have lost their trust. There are a number of cultural issues that we do not have time to go into here.

Q: Does anything stand out in your mind? You said it was difficult to understand the culture.

A: The only recommendation I could make to people who do not know the culture well is to read as much as you possibly can before going to Iraq. That I did. I read everything I could while I was there.

Another really important thing concerns last summer when some of the brigades got these Human Terrain Teams, which was a new idea that somebody in the army came up with. The Human Terrain Teams were groups of military officers who were specialists, historians, anthropologists who understood Islamic culture. These were people who at the end of the day we started working very closely with, because even though they did not have the diplomatic skills and the development skills we had, they had a lot of the keys to unlock the mysteries of this culture, so that we could be more effective.

They were in the brigade, and we drew on them heavily. They were the most innovative addition to our efforts. Say what you will about our military, I respect the heck out of them and obviously think it is without a doubt the world's best fighting force. That said, they do some really innovative things too, and the reason is they can throw a lot of bodies at stuff, they got the budgets to do it. Somebody one day wakes up and says, "Hey, you know what, I think we need Human Terrain Teams" and in six months you have Human Terrain Teams. This was a key addition to the brigade, but we probably drew on them more than anybody else in the brigade.

Q: Let us move towards the end, you talked about training before you went out.

A: The training was pretty much nonexistent. It was a week long (I do not want to sound too harsh), but I did not think it was very useful. I know the military augmentees who came into our EPRT, they had six weeks of military training, and then they had one or two weeks of training at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), the normal training that we have at FSI. They thought that they really did not need the military training because they were military people. Those six weeks for them were wasted, but they could have used much more than the week or two of civilian training that they had through DOS at FSI.

I know back in the Vietnam days, in the CORDS days, people going out to work on the CORDS program were getting at least six months of training. They were also staying in country for four or five years, so by the time they left they were fluent speakers and understood the culture very well.

I remember one of the courses we had was 45 minutes on the fundamentals of Islamic religion. How can you even pretend to understand the Islamic religion in 45 minutes, or 45 minutes on basic Arabic phrases? Come on, not very good. And I know that DOS has heard us on this. They are making efforts to improve the training. In fact, one of the State people, who I served with on the EPRTs, is now heading up the Iraq PRT training. He made a number of changes, but still the

basic constraint you have is time. You have one week or two weeks. Not really enough to prepare people for this. We need to do a better job of preparing people and I have told USAID this, and I will continue to tell them.

We are going to be engaged in this part of the world a long time, the civilians and we need to start preparing ourselves for that eventuality. We need to put people into Arabic training or other Middle Eastern languages. Maybe you need to do that two years ahead of time.

USAID's comparative advantage has always been on-the-ground knowledge — that we have missions and we have people on the ground and we have people that understand the language and understand the culture. That is one of the reasons why we have been such a successful organization over the years. But here is a case where you cannot say that. We have very few people who understand the lay of the land and speak the language, who understand the culture well. We need to do something about that.

Q: What are the big lessons? There are a lot of specific ones you suggested as you went along, but three, four, five major lessons that you have picked up and an assessment of the whole EPRT concept.

A: A number of things. In this first stage or this first experiment with EPRTs, we were very successful. We need to start establishing, though, metrics to be able to measure progress now; I know people are working on that. This is a long-term effort and everybody knows this. Our political leaders need to understand that development is a long-term process and it is slow, it is painstakingly slow. I used to use this analogy with our brigade colleagues, because they would get very frustrated with us, with our approach.

I would say here is the basic difference between how they approach a problem and how we approach it: their commander tells them, "You see that hill over there on the horizon? You have got one hour to take it. I do not care how you take it. You go take that hill." And, by God, they will figure out a plan and they will have that hill taken in a hour.

On the other hand, we civilians, we are told to take that hill, this is development, right and we might think about it for awhile, we might get lots of people together and we will study it, we might have focus groups and we may actually rent a bus and drive around the hill a couple of times and look at it from all angles before we start marshalling our resources to little by little get closer and closer to the top of the hill and plant our flag.

Those are just different approaches. This is how development is. It is long term. It is not about just capturing the hill. It is about holding it forever.

Some of the other things: USAID is very committed to the PRT concept, but it has to be a decentralized approach. One of the problems we started seeing towards the end of my time there was that we were starting to get overwhelmed with bureaucracy. All of a sudden it was no longer this very agile, quick to respond group of well meaning people. We were now slowly being overtaken by bureaucracy. You cannot have something like that get in the way of the work of an EPRT or a PRT. You have to be able to do things quickly and not worry about all the detailed

report writing. Or if you are going to have all of those responsibilities, you better be prepared to put people into those positions, to write reports and do logistics.

PRTs should be viewed as platforms for coordinating U.S. government programs. That is what works: they are platforms to launch activities from. They are not just an implementing mechanism. What I mean is that it is not just "OK, we have got this PRT that can go write a contract or be a contracting authority or something." No, it should be a platform from which we can launch programs. So people need to understand that.

As I said before, money is not the problem. We are really there trying to help Iraqis unlock their own resources. One of the best things we can do in doing that is help them with ideas, provide the seed money to get things going, much like I told you on this small project fund for the District Councils, seed money to have them get practice for when they start getting major amounts of resources.

One of the last things I would say is the importance of working in tandem with our military colleagues on an EPRT. I viewed them as an indispensable part of our team, and they viewed us an indispensable part of their team. In fact, we had a saying there: "One Team, We are All One Team." But they were the means to crack open the security door for us, so that we could get in and work, the goal being eventually they go home some day, we do not need them there any more and the civilians can stay and we can continue to do the work that the DOS and USAID would do in a more normal country.

Q:… and for the long term.

A: As USAID, we really need to get true development people out into the field. I am surprised at this new round of people going in to replace us; there are a lot of contractors going out there, not Foreign Service Officers and it behooves us to find Foreign Service Officers like the first group that went out there as volunteers, because we know this better than anybody else. We really need to find people to go out there and work. We have to start getting junior, mid and senior level personnel into long term Arabic language training and cross cultural training now, even though these people may not get put out in the field for another year or two.

Q: Are there any other major topics you feel you have not touched on?

A: I do not think so. I should have said this from the get-go: for me it was very difficult. We were working in a very difficult environment in the embedded PRTs during a very critical time, but it is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done and I really have to say that it was an honor for me to be there and to have represented the best that our country has to offer. It was also an honor to serve alongside all the men and women of the 82nd Airborne Division, who were wonderful colleagues, and great friends. They took care of us. They were not going to let anything happen to us. These were consummate professionals and I could not be more proud of our military for having found people like this to serve their country.

Q: That is a good way to wind up. This has been great and we greatly appreciate your time. This is going to be very helpful.

A: Thanks so much. I hope it was not too rambling.

Q: No, it was fine. Thank you very much.