United States Institute of Peace
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Iraq PRT Experience Project

INTERVIEW #24

Interviewed by: Marilyn Greene
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Executive Summary

This report is based on experience with the Babil PRT, between April 2006 and April 2007. The training was as a civil affairs team leader, with no training for the PRT before departure. This was a great disadvantage.

There were problems with senior leadership and their qualifications. The makeup of the PRT was skewed at first – too heavily military and not enough civil affairs people and training. With time, the balance was adjusted.

The role of this PRT was to help the Iraqi government and local business leaders to develop the local economy and local government.

The area is traditionally agrarian, with resources to grow many crops – wheat, dates, and oranges – and to produce fish. However, all of this activity was stumbling at this time.

Training and resources for the PRT job were definitely inadequate.

Some of the BBAs were good, others were not. They were important, because without them it would have been very difficult to establish relationships and trust with Iraqi counterparts. Achieving relationships requires a long period of time and numerous meetings.

Security presented problems. The PRT was on its own for security. Civil affairs specialists were doing security work instead of their specialty jobs. "There are 16 (civil affairs personnel) when you probably need only one or two, and you can be utilizing the other resources that you've not tied up with … developmental type work. You commit all resources to that one point on the battlefield when you could have them spread out."

State Department personnel were not necessarily suited for their responsibilities. Several high level personnel were on vacation during much of the interviewee's assigned time there, thus making establishing good relationships locally difficult. "Needless to say, if you're only there for a year and you're gone for six months it is impossible to establish relationships. It takes time to build a relationship."

Also lacking was coordination and a system of measurement linking the PRT's work to long term strategy and development.

There was stove piping: Individuals would sit in their own offices without communicating with each other, and would take on projects without consultation. The result was crossover in effort, redundancy and inappropriate or irrelevant expenditure of time and effort.

PRTs went outside the wire more after June than early in the year, since by then they had a better idea of purpose so there was reason to venture out. But safety and security were major concerns. In and around Babil, a heavily Shiite area, sophisticated EFP (Explosively Formed Penetrator devices) weapons supplied from Iran, created many casualties.

There was little productive interaction or cooperation with international or non-governmental agencies.

Public affairs efforts were weak, except perhaps in publicizing the Iraqi government's important program (supported quietly by the US) for spraying date palms.

The biggest problem seen in a year inside Iraq was the US government "throwing money" at projects without coordination, follow-up or effort to empower the Iraqis to do this work for themselves. "All the money that we found on the insurgents was directly linked back to the money that we paid for projects and ways to try and bolster moderates."

The Provincial Reconstruction Development Council was not effective. It handed money to the Baghdad government, and did not follow through to ensure accountability. "It was a great step and a great initiative that was somewhat undermined by the amount of money that ended up going directly to the local governments or reconstruction in the area. The PRDC was supposed to be an educational tool for the Iraqis that would slowly be able to wean American presence from Iraqi government and have it continue in a self-containing body.

Rule of law resources were misdirected, focusing more on building courthouses and police stations than on establishing the laws to be enforced in these places. This was a function of the system in place, not the individual Justice Department person involved.

The agriculture adviser was very competent, but got only as far as diagnosing the relevant problems there, not in solving them.

The PRT, ultimately, was not successful. It had the potential to be successful, but even after a year, it had not achieved its stated goals. "There's a great need for a very good PRT, but there needs to be competent people from both the civilian side and the military side. There has to be measurable goals and metrics that are based on reachable expectations. Achievable goals are best." Unfortunately, there are few achievements that can be reported from the PRT in Babil. The one achievement was that the local

government boycotted the PRT a couple of times. That was seen as positive because it meant that the PC had to agree on something.

Lessons learned:

1. Choose PRT team members carefully, with their individual strengths and abilities in mind according to the job that needs to be done.
2. Tie salary and remuneration to achievement for both military and civilian partners. As it stands, military personnel have no choice about going to Iraq, are paid less and have less comfortable quarters. State Department people have an option to go home if they are not happy.
3. Align written performance sheets to reality. For instance, a chart showing how many gas stations are open is meant to be, but is not really, a measure of fuel availability. These "bubble charts" were a waste of time.
4. Establishing a rule of law is essential to all other growth and success. "We've never once pulled any country above the poverty level that didn't have a solid rule of law before we toppled the government."

"The PRT in and of itself, I think what we saw was complete failure. But you had small wins. I'd still classify it as a non-working entity. There were people who provided incremental benefits to society, but it's not measurable enough to say, 'This works.'

Interview

Q: When were you in Iraq?

A: I was in Iraq from April of 2006 to April of 2007.

Q: Where were you?

A: I was initially in the Babil PRT. Six months later I moved up to Baghdad, as the civil affairs team leader in Baghdad

Q: You are civilian, then. You're not a military person?

A: I graduated from West Point in 1991 as a field artillery officer. I got out of the army in 2004 into the Individual Ready Reserves. As a civilian I work in strategic marketing, business development, commercial marketing for medical device manufacturers.

In fall of '05 I got called back to active duty but trained and deployed as a civil affairs officer. I have a military background, but I was completely out of the office for all intents and purposes, called back and sent over in '06 after six months of training. I use the word "training" loosely.

Q: When you went back was it specifically to part of a PRT?

A: I was trained to be a civil affairs team leader, not specifically toward a PRT. The training at the time was more geared toward the tactical level, interfacing with local tribal leaders, government officials, any spheres of influence around that particular military unit.

Q: Do you speak Arabic?

A: I didn't before but I actually speak decent Arabic now, after spending a year there.

Q: You had a very unique position in that you were dealing with the Iraqis themselves. You weren't nailed down to the base particularly.

A: I was nailed down to the base. I was trained to be this CAT-A team leader, and they worked hand in hand. I would actually end up being embedded with the military unit. A CAT-A team leader is like a staff officer. It's not something organic to the unit.

Getting back to your original question whether I specifically trained up for the PRT: I didn't find out I was going to a PRT until about eight or nine days before I deployed overseas.

Q: Was that a nice surprise for you?

A: It actually wasn't mostly, because you don't like to walk into something without rehearsing, planning. At the time the military leaders on our side weren't being as proactive as they possibly could be, and there were a lot of issues dealing with Iraq at the time to find out exactly what the troop footprint looked like in country and what they would have to backfill with the new soldiers coming over. There was a little bit of a problem with our senior leadership in terms of their qualifications and general ability, so by the time they finally decided where we were to go, we were already packing up our bags, getting ready to get on a plane. There wasn't time to start doing things ad hoc.

Q: So you had no PRT training until you got there. Is that right?

A: Absolutely none.

Q: How did it come about? Where was the training given, in Baghdad?

A: There was no formal training; it was on the job training.

When I got into country I landed in Baghdad, got some pay officer training, which is some random in-country requirement they give. How to pick up money, disburse money, etc. We got on a plane and linked up with the unit we were relieving.

We linked up with our unit probably about three days after we got into Iraq. They had an entire 10 day schedule planned for us. We were the first military unit at that PRT.

Q: This was in Babil?

A: This was in Babil. We relieved the previous unit in April, and they had just started the mission themselves in November or December, so they received some training in Iraq to stand up that PRT in the end of 2005.

When they stood up the PRT in Iraq, none of the military people that were put into that PRT had any sort of training to be in the PRT because it was the first one sent up to that particular area. They sent over a bunch of civilians, and they all did their training in theater to try and train up. You were taking military people who had already been in country for a total of eight or nine months and then saying, "By the way, everything you were just doing, you're going to shift gears." It's pretty common in the military.

Anyway, we followed them in, and then we transitioned in place. The immediate thing we found out was that the way they were set up was not effective to accomplish what they were trying to do. They were still operating like they were civil affairs instead of in military units.

Q: So the organization changed a little bit after you arrived?

A: Yes. When I got there, the physical structure of that PRT was supposed to be 60 to 70 people. The 24-person civil affairs company I was assigned to was the bulk of the PRT. There might have been seven or eight other civilians. The civilian part of the PRT's structure was supposed to be around 70 to 75 people, and they had about 35. The military component is supposed to be the smallest part of the team, but for this unit that was before me, it was the majority of it. When we got there we were still the majority.

The role of this PRT was to help develop the local economy and local government and basically to act as a support structure to help the Iraqi government as well as local business leaders and any other power brokers in the area to develop their economy, their government, and their municipalities.

Q: What kind of area is Babil? Is it primarily agricultural? What is the main economic activity?

A: Babil is primarily an agrarian environment. The economy is agrarian. It is actually referred to as the bread basket of Iraq.

Q: What do they grow?

A: They grow everything from corn to dates to wheat. They grow oranges which I find hilarious. Anything that would be required to sustain most of Iraq. They also had major fish farms.

Q: Was it a pretty robust economy in terms of growing? Were they able to export things or were they stumbling along in producing?

A: Stumbling. It supported the regional economy for the most part. Back in the '70s they used to be the largest date exporters in the world, but they were not going to be back to that level for a while. The infrastructure didn't allow for the necessary level of training. They were really starting from 'how do we sustain ourselves' and then the next step would be 'how do we take this and generate some increase in gross domestic product.'

Babil is primarily a Shiite area. There are places called the eight northern strategic cities. These are on the northern end of Babil. Four of them along the northern bend are Latafia, Lutafia, Dia, Al Jizarie, and Jeerful Nadath.

What Saddam (a Sunni) had done in the late '70s and early 80's was he had annexed two of the qadahs, or districts on the south and southeast side of Baghdad. He made them a part of Baghdad, so Baghdad had, I think, seven qadahs. By annexing those territories he started to push state-owned enterprises into those lands that had been primarily Shia and influenced by Persia and Iran for thousands of years. He tried to push Sunnis in by setting up state-owned enterprises. The northern portion was primarily Sunni and everything south of that was Shia. There was a regional fault line which ran right through there. The fault line still exists because you have Sunni farmers in the north who want to process their wheat but all of the wheat mills are in the south.

Getting back to the mission: The PRT was basically to work with their local government officials and structures, including the district councils, qadah councils and the Nahia councils.

Q: Did you feel that you had the resources and training and the equipment to do that effectively, to communicate with the Iraqis and to carry out your mission in terms of working with them?

A: If this is a yes or no question, I would say no. Absolutely not. We had the BBA's, which is actually a military program.

Q: How many did you have?

A: We had four. Of those four, two of them may have been somewhat useful. One of them almost created an international incident.

Our battalion commander used to run the BBA program, and he was surprised when he came down and ran into them because he had done everything in his power to get them removed. On multiple occasions he tried to get rid of them.

Q: So they weren't all great, positive entities, the BBAs.

A: Absolutely not.

We had BBA's who were great. Without them it would be very hard to interact with the Iraqi people. It takes about six months to develop a relationship built on trust, a solid seven or eight meetings until the Iraqi will trust you as a human being, not just some American who's over there trying because you got sent over.

Q: Was it difficult to have these meetings because of the Iraqis' reluctance to be seen with Americans? Were those meetings difficult to engineer, in other words?

A: I'll step back and answer in a different way. With the military side I had no problem meeting with Iraqis because nobody told me when I could and couldn't leave the post. I got in my truck, and I went on a mission.

Q: Without security?

A: We were our security.

Q: Was there a minimum that you needed around you to go out?

A: The minimum to go out in Iraq was you had to have four trucks in a convoy.

Q: You could arrange for that for yourself, the four trucks.

A: Therein lies the problem. Civil affairs was meant to be a highly specialized force. You put four guys into a truck, and these four guys are specialists in what they do. Then they would get security from surrounding units. We never got security elements provided to us. We would send for a minimum probably 15 or 16 civil affairs guys out to provide security. There are 16 guys when you probably need only one or two, and you can be utilizing the other resources that you've not tied up with security to do other developmental type work. You commit all resources to that one point on the battlefield when you could have them spread out. There were first companies who were meant to operate in a decentralized role.

Getting back to it, we would go around. We would have lots of meetings, the Iraqis generally. If the Iraqis were coming to the post, you had the US officials in the region present. There wasn't a real emphasis on the civilian side to get out and meet with Iraqis. They would every now and then, and occasionally we had high ranking US officals there. Some US officials were on vacation the entire time I was there. The State Department has a very interesting vacation schedule that we need to get into. Needless to say, if you're only there for a year and you're gone for six months vacation or on regional vacation it is impossible to establish relationships. It takes time to build a relationship.

Q: How would you fix that if you were arranging for something like this in the future?

A: Without sounding extremely negative, the general consensus among my comrades, who I would consider some of the best people I've ever worked with, was that a lack of

competence existed with some State Department personnel. You would see the military personnel going out and doing what they needed to do.

A common joke about what we were doing over there was that we sent the most socialistic department of our entire government over to develop a market economy. All they do is throw cash at countries, and there's no expectation of getting better. There was nothing tied to the State Department employees' salaries, bonuses, and paycheck that was connected to performance.

Some of the people I worked with were absolutely fantastic, but when there's only eight or nine State Department officials in your PRT… when I say State Department I mean anyone who has civilian status. It could be USAID, State Department, or some of the contractors. There's nothing linked to performance or work plan.

When we were six months in, we were still on a 90-day work plan. There were people who were very qualified but then wouldn't work in teams very well. To get back to your stove piping question: When I showed up to the PRC we would have a morning meeting, I think it was once a week. And the way we were originally organized I was working as an economic development liaison because somehow 18 months in the civilian sector working in business development qualified me to stand up the provincial economy and a failing society.

That was another joke. Here I am the head economic guy in a PRT, and I'm just some random guy with a math degree from West Point, but who understands somewhat what capitalistic ideals are. What we noticed in these morning meetings was, someone would draw up some little tidbit to try to have some work today. It wasn't related to quarterly goals or work plans. There was nothing that was tied to what the strategic road map was for helping develop the Babil society.

There was no measurement, no format. It was just a round table discussion. From what I understood was that this was a heck of a step forward. Having a morning meeting six months into it once a week to say, "Hey, how's everybody doing?" was a step forward from where they'd been.

When I got there it looked like everybody went to these morning meetings and they'd go right back into their offices, and you wouldn't see them again except in passing in the hallway for about a week. You'd never really know what they were doing. Finally I said, "This is ridiculous. You have all these civil affairs assets here that aren't doing anything, not assessing anything, not going out into the economy and finding the stuff that people in the PRT are looking for. You just need to line yourself in functional areas which is how they do it in my company."

You have project teams, and those project teams fall into a larger program, so a good relationship would be to have the NCT that has this overall program and the PRT works within that overall program. On the PRT team there should themes of the PRC. Once you

got everyone to buy into it, then you'd set the work plan up with respect to functional areas as opposed to random documents.

I did all this, then I patted myself on the back, pitched it to my battalion commander, but then once we finally find the documents, I see that's the way it is supposed to be set up from day one. It blows the wind out of your sails. You think you're doing something creative here, and the entire PRT was supposed to be that way to begin with.

As to stove piping yes, it was one big silo organization. The agricultural economist would work in his office on stuff. Then we would find out two weeks later that he had gone out and assessed a couple of silos and mills, which is civil affairs' job.

Q: Is this a function of the organization of the PRT or of the management of the PRT?

A: I would say it's a blend of both. Over the course of three or four months, some people never once showed up to any of the PRT meetings. They never had any relation to the PRT.

The deputy PRT leader was a lieutenant colonel. I don't know if he was active duty. All I know was that from my military time I know exactly the type of officer that gets sent to a PRT. It's not hand picked. It's a, "We need to send a lieutenant colonel from division to a PRT," and they pick whatever guy they don't need. So you had terrible management from the very top. Combine that with people who ultimately were collecting a paycheck. The good personnel had already learned after six months that they didn't want to interact with any of the people that were just collecting a paycheck. Then you had the military guys who never got any guidance to steer them in the right direction to outline a plan: "This is what you're here to do. Let's set up goals and objectives for this entire year, then let's manage toward them and use that as a road map." It was never anything like that.

Just saying that, there was the organizational piece as well as the management piece, so they weren't even organized in a way that they could look at a problem from a team aspect and see this wasn't working. Some people were taking up space in that PRT.

Q: Did PRT function effectively?

A: It did not function effectively during the initial stages. Later on throughout the year it started to get a little better, but at the same time suffered due to lack of commitment to working together as a unified group toward a common goal, everybody started to fall off of the thing. Before the end of my year, I got moved up to Baghdad to work as a CAT-18 leader to support Operation Together Forward.

Q: Did you have anything to do with a brigade combat team?

A: I did, but I didn't work in the EPRC. EPRC came along later. I was in on the initial phases of how we were going to support civil affairs support, the EPRC.

Q: Just a quick question about the level danger in Babil as compared to Baghdad. Can you talk about that a little bit?

A: Yes, absolutely. I worked in a couple of different areas in Baghdad, and I worked all throughout Babil. I started out in East Baghdad. I used to get shot at probably 75% of the time I would go outside the gates up in Baghdad, and we'd get attacked with explosives a lot. The type of weaponry up in the area in East Baghdad was less sophisticated than what we saw in Babil. In Babil we were in the country for five days, and we lost four out of five guys. The fifth guy lost his arm. The weaponry that was coming in from Babil was coming straight from Iran. They would be EFP's that you see on television.

In Baghdad we would get shot at, and you'd see the rounds coming by. In Babil when people went out, they used what were called EFP's. You have a very high percentage chance of surviving a regular conventional IED, if there is such as thing as a conventional IED. I think the casualty rates were less than one casualty from a conventional IED, and there's always greater than two casualties with an EFP.

Q: What is an EFP?

A: It's an Explosively Formed Penetrator. It's a basically directed weapon that would go completely through all the vehicles. There's not one vehicle that would survive it. Since Babil was all Shiite, they had lots of support from some of the different militias who are in turn supported from Iran, so we would watch the weapons come in from Iran. There would be Iranians in the area.

Q: You say you still got out a lot in spite of all of this.

A: Yes. We didn't a lot in the beginning because from April to June we didn't get out as much as we would have liked to mostly because there's no reason to go out if you don't know what you're going out for. If the work plan wasn't developed, we had no real reason to go out. There's always got to be some sort of task and purpose every time you go outside the wire, and if it's just to drive around and talk to coffee shop owners, it was not enough of a reason. We got out a lot in the end but not in the beginning.

Q: Tell me about the PRT's relationship with international groups and NGO's. Did you do much interaction with them?

A: I'd say no. We had some of the international groups there. We had ARDI, which is a USAID contractor and stands for the Agricultural Research Development Institute. We being military, they didn't want us related to any of those initiatives. In turn, they wouldn't tell us what they were doing, so you would turn around and then the military would start doing stuff in the same areas.

We were able to work with some of those groups, at least from the shadows, and that would give us the ability to see what money was being spent in the area. The USAID rep

wanted to hold that all close to her chest so in turn she wouldn't let us say anything, view anything, or talk to any of those contractors.

Izdihar (Prosperity) was another one. They were never in Babil. They were mostly up in Baghdad. They were supposed to be working on economic development. The only thing they worked on was teaching people English and computers, so rather than teaching them how to be productive in their business plan development, 99% of what they taught was how to turn on a computer.
(Note: IZDIHAR is a comprehensive, 3-year program designed to assist the Government of Iraq expand the private sector and create jobs by developing a more market-friendly environment for economic growth.
IZDIHAR is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented in partnership with the Iraqi private sector and government.)

Q: How about Iraqis. Do you have a lot of contact with Iraqi counterparts and local government people?

A: We ended up finally deciding to focus on our agricultural group, our economic group, our government group. We leveraged those centers of gravity in our area. We would be able to prime the pump to get their economy going. We met with a lot of the business owners. We had two business development centers in the area, and I had a good working relationship with both of them. I worked on economic development as team leader.

There was a definite agricultural standpoint to the economic side, agriculture being a subset of the overall economy, we would go do stuff usually hand in hand with the agriculture group. I would look for ways to develop business aspects of it; the agricultural guy would work on the side of agricultural education, training, and overall productivity.

Q: Did you have a public affairs officer in your PRT?

A: We did when we initially got there. I think he was good, but we didn't really have any interaction. The only thing I saw the entire time that he was there was that he tried to put together some sort of media release to the people of Babil when we sprayed their date palms.

Q: Would you say that program was effective, public affairs?

A: No.

Q: What about counter-insurgency and the effort to bolster moderates?

A: They sent a guy over to be the big PAO guru in our PRT that had just graduated from college. Here he a 25-year old guy who doesn't carry much weight with the Iraqis because he doesn't look over teen age, and can't grow facial hair. Iraqis look at facial hair as a sign of machismo.

In my entire year in Iraq, the biggest problem I saw was that the U.S. was just throwing money at the problems. They would throw money at contractors and half of the projects my team and I had to go look at were stuff that the American authorities had spent money to build that was in total disrepair. There was no focus on developing the systems in Iraq to bolster the counter-insurgency. Then when I ended my Baghdad role, all the money that we found on the insurgents was directly linked back to the money that we paid for projects and ways to try and bolster moderates.

Q: What about government activities related to promoting democracy and developing local governance?

A: The efforts were very limited at best. While I was there the constitution was still written in pencil. Things seemed to be changing every minute we were there. When we got there, RTI came in and did their LGP-1, the Local Governance Program.

Q: Was that effective?

A: No. It set up all these local councils, and they got everybody all excited about, "Hey, we can finally vote," and walked around with a big purple thumb having voted. Once LGP-2 hit, that meant that they were going to start working on the provincial level government and higher. Ultimately RTI and the entire local government's program started to build power within those local councils.

The US started to develop a local power base, and then completely turned their back on them. In capitalistic societies, the power should lie in the lower levels of government, and the lower levels give power to the higher levels. But they let those lower levels basically fall in on themselves.

The only people who were supporting the local government were the military leadership as well as the civil affairs team leader. We were the only ones at the PRT who would ever interact with the local government. RTI was constantly dealing with the higher levels of government. The way the RTI measured their effectiveness was how many items on their list that they would check off. The regional government would send members to take classes about required local governance programs. Part of their class would be some sort of practical exercise. The RTI would give them, let's say, $50,000 to come up with a roadway or something like that. There was nothing tied to the effectiveness of that training.

There was never measurement. The other piece of it, too, was they paid the local government members to show up for these classes. They had no reason to show up. They would have to give them money to come and do their job to grow in that society.

Q: Please talk about reconstruction and the civil affairs role in that.

A: PRT activities are really U.S. economic agencies. Funnily enough at the PRC level we weren't involved with the reconstruction projects at all. Even though civil affairs is directly responsible for it, the PRDC managed most of that money.

Q: How would you evaluate their performance?

A: The Iraqis really had no reason to deal with us. They had gotten something like $80 or $85 million from the Baghdad government to do reconstruction projects in their area. They had no reason to talk to the Americans. So you hand a government that's prone to corruption eighty-some million bucks, and then you give their U.S. counterparts about six million. The IRMO rep (Iraqi Reconstruction Management Office) in our area is actually one of the best guys I had met in all of Iraq. He managed that process. They had a bunch of things going on but all the money that was going into the programs had already been confiscated.

Q: Your evaluation of the PRDC doesn't sound too positive.

A: I think that it was a great step and a great initiative that was somewhat undermined by the amount of money that ended up going directly to the provincial council or reconstruction in the area. The PRDC was supposed to be an educational tool for the Iraqis that would slowly be able to wean American presence away and have it continue as a self-contained body.

Q: Let's go on to rule of law. Did you have a rule of law officer from the Justice Department perhaps?

A: I did. Possibly he was right at the top of the guys that were there. He was amazing, very good at what he did. We had a lawyer that was initially in our civil affairs company. I was going to work with him, but he was killed on the fifth day in. Rule of law encompasses a number of different things including police and courts. There are books of law encompassing property law, contract law, intellectual property, and others. That was the stuff that the rule of law officer should have been utilized at rather than building court houses and police departments. He did extremely well, but all the way from the central government on down the decision had been made that we weren't going to focus on those things even though you don't need a police station if you don't have laws to enforce. That's what it really came down to. The police were ultimately referees. The rule of law goes back to everything that is the underpinning of society, this market economy. If you don't have rule of law, nothing else works.

Q: What was the progress in getting things done on paper and getting laws?

A: There was none at our level. There was essentially nothing at the PC because the PC was in flux, and they also couldn't enact any of their own laws. They couldn't levy taxes. There were no official laws signed while I was there. The constitution had just been signed, and the cabinet had just been set. The entire cabinet went through upheavals from the top level on down and was in flux. The first thing the PC did was to take away

every ounce of power from the local councils as soon as the local government was legitimized. The rule of law guy was doing a phenomenal job, but from the top on down it wasn't focused on the areas that it needed to be focused on.

Going into property, they had a great old real estate law and a record system that was actually a British system by design. It was in disrepair. The level of corruption that developed in those areas was impossible clean out, or make it at least manageable again.

Q: Did you have an agricultural advisor.

A: We did. And he was phenomenal. Like the rule of law guy, he said, "I can do this better by myself if I don't have the civil affairs guys with me." He was very good at what he did, but rather than bring to bear the resources of the PRT as a whole, he went off and did things on his own. He subsequently moved up to Baghdad maybe three months into the tour. He was our USAID rep as well, and was an agricultural economist with a PhD. Very smart, but he spent all of his time trying to diagnose the problem which I completely agree with. If you can't find the problem, you can't solve it. By the time he left there was no time to try and remedy the problems which we had decided.

Q: Given all of these situations that you have described, Chris, would you assess PRT as successful or not?

A: Not at all. I think they could be successful, and I think the idea is a great concept, but the Babil PRT; even by the time we left the country coming up on a year ago next month, there wasn't ever going to be anything that would work great. They should hand pick the soldiers that go there. Just by sheer coincidence, a couple of us that were there did a decent job.

An example of this is one very diligent officer I worked with; however, I trained with a guy who might have done better. We were working in Babil on agricultural development stuff. The number one thing with agriculture is you have to have some sort of system to take your finished goods to market. You have to develop a very intricate system. An agricultural advisor should have been helping with it, but there I am working on economics in Babil, while MBA's with multiple years of experience were out doing tactical type stuff that could have been utilized better in a role like what I was doing. For example I had a friend who runs global supply chains for Best Buy. Rather than him working on the agriculture side to get these dates to market, helping develop supply chains, he was doing tactical level stuff in Mosul.

Q: Matching up people with jobs would be something you would suggest.

A: Absolutely. In fact, they took a biography. They had us write up what our backgrounds were and everything before we were even assigned to the companies we were going to. These were apparently not taken into account.

I did believe that there's a great need for a very good PRT, but there needs to be competent people from both the civilian side and the military side. There has to be measurable goals and metrics that are based on reachable expectations. Achievable goals are best.

Q: Were there any achieved goals that you can site from your PRT, one or two concrete accomplishments?

A: I can't say that there ultimately was. That's one of the things that has bothered me ever since I got back from Iraq. You leave with this feeling that you weren't able to accomplish anything. There are small wins, and you have to celebrate the small wins. From the time I was sent up to Baghdad, I pushed it as far as I could push it, and I felt good about the Baghdad piece, but I always had a guilty conscience. The only thing I think we were able to accomplish in Babil was to get the PC to boycott us twice. And they would do that regularly thereafter.

Q: Why do you call that an accomplishment?

A: Because they came together as a group and they agreed on something, which is something they could never do. They would never get together and do anything except to make a decision to not talk to us….you'd have to laud them for their ability to make any sort of decision together as a group.

Q: Can you pull together two or three lessons learned that you would like to offer for future reference?

A: I would say the number one thing is you'd have to have a highly skilled group of people that are selected to work together in a very ambiguous environment. You can't just throw people together and expect them to work. I don't believe that a lot of stateside training with those people is going to help them to operate in this environment. Until you're there and work in that environment, you can't be prepared. However, on the other side of the coin it's necessary to try and decrease the number of surprises and shocks that a person would have. Hopefully they can encounter some of the situations in training. You're never going to be fully prepared, but hopefully you can be partly prepared. That would be number one.

Number two is there has to be a different structure for the civilian counterparts, to make sure that they fulfill their roles. The way the State Department would do things is if you don't want to go to Iraq, you don't have to go to Iraq. You couldn't be forced to go to that part of the world. They would be paid a lot more money than the military, but that money was never linked to anything. Civilian minds said, "You have your salary, and then you have your bonus." There has to be some way you can actually show tangible accomplishments.

The third one is they had these reports in Iraq. They call them the "bubble chart." These bubble charts were established probably the day they pulled down the statue of Saddam.

They were terrible. It looked great. It was every single metric that you would potentially think would be a requirement to grow the economy or greater society as a whole. But they weren't linked to anything that was individualized in each region. They were tied to everything across the state. A perfect example would be, "How many gas stations are open?" What does that mean? People are getting gas. The cars are driving. Is that really a measure of, "Is the society functioning?" especially considering there may be 35 gas stations in one area and one in another or two in another? Then, "How long is the wait in the gas line?" to show a metric of, "Is there enough supply?"

Another one that was on there—and this is one of my favorites—was how many mills are functional? To speak of a mill as functional, does that mean you are now successfully reconstructed? If the farmer can't bring his wheat to that mill, then is it really functional? You're having a bunch of crops dying out in the field.

Q: There were many more factors involved.

A: Exactly. You can't put everything into a quantifiable chart. Granted, I understand there has to be some way to measure it, but it wasn't tailored to each region.

We would spend a week every single month of our time there trying to prepare these bubble charts. We did it for the first two or three months until we realized that it was a complete waste of time, and then we just stopped doing it. In addition to the bubble chart, we also had to send another document that showed what it would take for us to improve the metrics listed in the chart. You would spend more time working through the bureaucracy. This thing was not just one page. It was 20 pages of documents. Naturally, since the civilians wouldn't do it, the military guys who were doing all the other stuff had to do that as well, with no input from the civilians. Really what they did was they took away from the amount of time we actually had to accomplish something and gave us this administrative requirement.

Q: That's very frustrating, isn't it?

A: It was, but overall—I know I've been extremely negative—it was extremely rewarding. I enjoyed my experience there. There were some days that were absolutely terrible, but there were other days where you thought you made a difference. The PRT in and of itself, I think was a complete failure. But you had small wins. I'd still classify it as a non-working entity. There were people who provided incremental benefits to society, but it's not measurable enough to say, "This works."

Q: Does that mean you consider them useless, or could they be fixed if they were?

A: I think they could definitely be fixed. They have to be.

The State Department folks were not the right fit. We were working on developing these state-owned enterprises for the economic development side of it. The U.S. government

decided if we pump a lot of cash to a socialist institution, then we'll get them running again.

In the U.S., when I want to hire another person, it takes an act of God to get the head count higher because that's more overhead, once you add in all the costs, and businesses are interested in decreasing headcount to increase the profit. If you do with less people, then you make more money.

We worked with four large state owned enterprises. They were still under the influence of Saddam in the sense that they believe the purpose of a business under 30 years of socialism is to import people, not generate a profit.

The U.S. came along and said, "We've got to get these up and running." We were saying from our standpoint, "Well, you know if you want to get these up and running, you need to go hire some outside consulting firms to come in here and try to renovate it from the ground up." Say for two million dollars, allow them to work with the local managerial staff at those plants, help them devise a plan to provide some sort of tangible product that was actually going to be able to be sold in the country.

One of them was a tractor factory, and people could use tractors. Once you measure what it would cost to produce the tractor there, what it would cost to buy a tractor externally, there's no reason to buy a crappy tractor, a junk tractor. Why would you buy that when you could buy a Peterbilt or something outside or a John Deere?

Then the State Department economist said, "What are you going to do in five years? There'll be no market for tractors." The manager's exact words were, "There'll have to be a market for tractors because that's what we do."

There's that fundamental problem with the U.S. operation there is that they don't understand what it takes to develop the economy from the military side on down. Both halves don't talk in the same language. One thinks 'if I get people off the street and building buses or building trucks, they're not going to blow me up.' But we'd have school teachers who were fully employed that we would catch for building bombs and blowing you up. It's not that. It's not a paycheck. It's a sense of identity. Right now it's not going to get better until that gets changed.

What we have to do is take a lot of great, old executives or with some military experience, and send them over. People who understand how a market economy works, understand how business works, and understand how the military works to tie that all together. Since we're not doing that, I don't think they're a failure, but I don't think they'll ever succeed until they change the way they're approaching the problems because they're approaching the problems in the same way they've approached the problems in all the other third world countries. We've never once pulled any country above the poverty level that didn't have a solid rule of law before we toppled it. It wasn't a prosperous society before we did it.

Q: Thank you so much

A: Thanks, Marilyn.