

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

**Interview #28**

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**Executive Summary**

The interviewee was based at the PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Team) in Ba'Qubah at the Forward Operating Base (FOB) War Horse and then moved to the Contingency Operating Base (COB) Spiker for the PRT in Salah Ad Din Province. He was there between 2006 and 2007. His position was as the Company Commander of the Civil Affairs unit (infrastructure team), which covered both Diyala and Salah Ad Din.

The security situation in Ba'Qubah was tolerable for the first months but then it became a combat zone. The intensity ratcheted up because the surge pushed the insurgents out of Baghdad. Everyone in his company was engaged in combat. Salah Ad Din—a Sunni area— had some violence, but it was better, although with a steady hum of anti-Americanism with attacks from Bathists and al Qaeda types.

The missions in the two areas were the same: to establish a just and legitimate government in the provinces; to work with the Provincial Council on how to run a transparent meeting, have agendas, publish meeting reports, solve issues, budget and spend money, track expenditures focusing on issues of schools, sewers, water, electricity—the functions of government. The mission in the governance area was hindered because the central government retained power, control and funds, i.e. the power to legislate, power of the purse, local taxing authority. The PRT was involved in promoting democracy, e.g. making sure the Council followed its own charter. The Memorandum of Understanding on the mission was too broad to be useful.

Initially, the PRT was not organized. It had to be established without much guidance. The head was Senior Foreign Service Officer with a Lieutenant Colonel as deputy. He was the Executive Officer of the Third Brigade of the Fourth Infantry Division with which the PRT was co-located. The staff included: military Civil Affairs Officers, an infrastructure team, a rule of law team, a governance team, and a health team; RTI provided some staff who tended to do their own thing; the USAID staff person was an obstacle, not an asset. The staff totaled about thirty-five people. In addition, there was Iraqi staff mostly outside the base in the towns. But others included American, British, and Canadian Iraqis; for example, a very helpful British-Iraqi professional engineer and Bicultural Bilingual Advisers (BBAs). The organization was confusing to the Iraqis, because the different US agencies provided conflicting messages.

Logistical support was provided by the military, but initially, it was not clear how it was to be paid for. The State Department had no capacity to provide this support. The support was by the grace of the Brigade Commander.

Coordination on all aspects of the PRT operation between the military and the civilians was essential, but it was a continuing problem, necessitating reliance on informal systems. It improved after the Brigade Commanders began to appreciate that the PRT was a good thing—not because they were directed to.

Achievements included: in infrastructure improvements such as water, sewer, electricity, roads; in business development with a business center; in agriculture: clearing irrigation canals and pumps started, crop spraying for dates— production up two hundred percent, and bee keeping, work with the justice system. Most important was setting up an oversight system for expenditures—that went a long way towards squelching corruption. In economic development, building confidence: once people become convinced that there is a future, the need for counterinsurgency dies,

The interviewee had no training before going to Iraq; his Civil Affairs team did not exist until two weeks before departure to Iraq.

The PRTs' vertical relationships with the National Coordinating Team, Embassy and Military Command in Baghdad were broken—no coordination, no strategy guidance, no best practices advice, and no information on sources of funding.

On resources, the PRT borrowed money from the Commander's Emergency Relief Program (CERP); it monitored Corps of Engineers money — largely centrally driven for large projects. It had no State Department Quick Reaction Funds (QRF); no Economic Support Funds (ESF). USAID had a lot of funds, but never let the PRT know how it was being spent.

The main achievement of the PRT: instilled hope among the Iraqis.

Lessons:

- knock off the interagency fights, e.g. unwillingness to share information, unwillingness to set policy at senior levels, unwillingness to commit to policies that are specific.
- PRTs should have been set up from day one—they came late and were thrown together.
- More coordination at the strategic and tactical levels.

The PRTs were absolutely effective; they had a big impact in the province.

## **Interview**

*Q: When were you in Iraq?*

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

*Q: Where were you located?*

A: I was located first at the PRT in Ba'Qubah at FOB (Forward Operating Base) War Horse and then moved to contingency operating base Spiker to set up the PRT in Salah Ad Din Province.

*Q: Were these regular PRTs or ePRTs?*

A: No, regular PRTs.

*Q: Let's take the first one.*

A: In Diyala.

*Q: How was it organized?*

A: Initially, it wasn't. There was no PRT. We established a PRT.

*Q: What was involved in doing that?*

A: A whole lot of figuring things out because there really wasn't a lot of guidance on how to do it. The PRT was set up essentially with a senior State Department Foreign Service officer as the PRT leader. She was sort of equivalent to a military general officer. Underneath her was a deputy PRT leader who was a lieutenant colonel in the army. It was supposed to be filled by either a full colonel or a lieutenant colonel and in this case it was provided by the executive officer of the brigade we were co-located with. That worked out very well because even though he was not a full colonel, he was of the unit whose area we were operating in and so he knew how to get everything done. Beneath that, there were supposed to be a large number of civilians but there were none. There was a junior Foreign Service officer, a great guy, but pretty much the military civil affairs soldiers did most of the actual engagements. We had an infrastructure team, a rule of law team, and a governance team, so we set up sort of functionally based on what the need was. We evolved a little bit over time.

We did end up getting more and more civilians, which is great because it worked out well that we had some military members with some substantial civilian sets but that was sort of happenstance. There was no thought to that. They just applied a Civil Affairs Company to the PRT, we happened to have some NPAs; we happened to have some people who knew economics, but our infrastructure team was weak. We ended up getting a Lieutenant Colonel from the Corps of Engineers who came in. He was great. It started to piece together over time; over six, seven months, we started getting people. We had a very senior U. S. Assistant Attorney General who was a SCS 2 level equivalent. He was a rather remarkable individual, and eventually RTI kicked in some staff. USAID did have a presence there but, to be frank, USAID initially was an obstacle, not an asset. Eventually, he was replaced. There was a gap of three or four months when things got better when we did not have USAID there. We did get a USAID person towards the end, but I am not sure whether she was value-added.

We did have RTI. RTI was supposed to fill a number of the technical experts' positions. There were some good RTI staff, but they were more often than not not inclined to go out of the wire

when it was dangerous and they tended to be more stove piped, which is to do their own thing in your cubicle.

*Q: What do you mean by that?*

A: A stovepipe is a long, narrow tube meaning that if you are doing complex operations and you exist in that paradigm, you are not talking to your neighbors. You are working on your thing and your thing alone as if no one else existed. You just cannot do that. You have to be absolutely interconnected with everybody. The Iraqis have their mental image of the United States. The reality is that there is the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, and other agencies. You have contractors who are great people, but honestly are just are not there for the mission. They are not always there to serve the flag and country. They do not have that sense of a 'get it done' mentality.

What happens is the Iraqis get really confused and they say: "I met with the military commander and he said one thing and then I met with this State Department person and she said another thing. And I met with some USAID person who said something completely different from what everybody else said and then I met with the Department of Justice person and this is his priority." We competed with ourselves far more than with the Iraqis. For me as a somewhat youngish major going in there, it was an object lesson in how interagency rivalries can hamper actual progress.

*Q: What was your position?*

A: I was the Company Commander of the Civil Affairs soldiers. My company was split in half; two thirds of my company in Diyala supporting the PRT there and then the other third of the company was up in Tikrit in Salah Ad Din Province supporting the PRT there. Just to let you know, in Diyala Province the main city is Ba'Qubah, the main U.S. support base is Forward Operating Base (FOB) War Horse so Ba'Qubah, Diyala, and War Horse all go together. Up in Salah Ad Din, which is the adjacent province to the north, the capitol city is Tikrit and Contingency Operating Base (COB) Spiker is the military base there. I use those terms almost interchangeably.

*Q: How many American civilians or military were working in the PRT?*

A: Initially, it was maybe about twenty. Then it grew. By the time we left we are looking at around thirty-five people.

*Q: And then you have Iraqi staff too?*

A: Yes, we had some Iraqi staff. No Iraqi local nationals actually worked on our operating bases with us. The time it took to get them on and off was just too painful. We definitely had people who worked for us that were in the local government in Ba'Qubah and Tikrit but for the most part what we tried to do is rather than have them work directly for us, we would try to sort of fund their salaries and they actually ended up working for an organ of the provincial government. For instance we had a team that reviewed contracts and bids that came in for infrastructure

projects and they worked for the provincial government but their salaries and offices were funded through our monies. So did they work for us or did they work for the Iraqis? They worked for the Iraqis but we certainly funded their offices because we were interested in having that kind of oversight of the contracting process so they weren't being doled out to friends and family.

We had quite a few folks, including translators, who were Iraqi Americans or British or Canadians. We had a smattering of folks who were actually of Iraqi descent but not currently Iraqi citizens and they were absolutely invaluable. There were probably some of the most valuable people we had. They were dedicated.

*Q: What did they do for you?*

A: They did a range of everything. We had one British guy who had been an engineer in Iraq. I think he left in his late thirties or early forties, went to England and continued to be an engineer there for twenty years and so he came to us when he was at the peak of his professional competence. Boy, that helped having somebody who was an engineer and spoke the language, was of the culture and knew when people were telling the truth and not and what to expect and what not to and as a bona fide engineer really knew what he was doing and could speak with technical experts. Sometimes you have an interpreter and it's great that they speak the language, but if they don't speak the technical or professional jargon of what on occupation, sometimes it is unhelpful or not as helpful as it could be. Things get missed because each profession has its own jargon. So when you have an engineer who also speaks fluent Arabic and Kurdish and other dialects, you've got a guy who is a real valuable member of the team and somebody who is not just a translator but can actually run projects, can be responsible for things. We had a great Iraqi American who had a masters degree in political science. He was on our governance team and he knew the ins and outs of the provincial council. In Ba'Qubah he knew who was who, what was what, which tribe was which and he had a lot easier time sorting out that kind of stuff. It took us a lot longer to master which guy was irritated at which movement and which guy's suggestion or proposal. So he was very good at that kind of thing. Those guys I think were some of the most valuable people we had.

Like a lot of military units we did not have more of the locals who were interpreters. For our purposes there was a bit of concern about having interpreters be targeted and then there was the process of getting on and off the compound which sort of made things a little bit harder.

*Q: Who provided your logistic support? Your housing and other services?*

A: The military. Unfortunately, at the beginning there was a silly notion that somehow the PRTs would exist separately and from the military and that probably briefed well in some presentations, but the reality is that you have a mixed bag of agencies co-existing in somebody else's area of operation which is under a maneuver commander who is ultimately responsible for everything that happens in that area. You are living on his base camp and he is providing security and food and the State Department just absolutely has no capacity to provide any kind of logistic support whatsoever. So essentially if you did not get on well with your Brigade Commander, you did not get support. Technically, you were supposed to get support, but it was

never elaborated exactly which pot of money this is come from, the sort of detail you need to actually support an operation. Pretty much by the grace of brigade commanders, we were supported.

*Q: But you were not an embedded group though, were you?*

A: No. It is foolish to think of the PRTs as not being absolutely part and parcel with the military and vice versa because if you are leaving the wire, who are you going to call if you get hit? How do you know which radio frequency to check into? Well, you better be going to their security briefing and you better know what the procedures are. They are telling you about the latest threat in the area. You better be in with, their intelligence officer. Who is telling you which routes are cleared? Who is clearing the routes for you? Who is going to show up when you get hit and medevac you? Well, it's the guys on your base camp and your range is limited by their ability to cover you.

Aside from the senior Foreign Service officer engaging with high government officials of a province, that brigade commander is also engaging with that government. It behooves you to make sure that whatever the Foreign Service officer are saying and the brigade commander are saying are in conjunction with each other and not at odds at all. That goes down to, "Well, what if about this maneuver of a battalion working in this city here? Are your projects in coordination with what they are doing? Have you checked to make sure they are not doing an operation the day you are going to open some soccer stadium or something like that?" You have to be closely tied to what they are doing, what their operations are, to what their intent and objective is because if not, then again the United States looks like one hand is doing one thing and the other hand is doing the another thing. In the tribal areas they are like, "What the Hell is going on? These guys don't know what the heck they are doing." And then of course, rather than us saying we don't know what they are doing, they consider it to be some elaborate conspiracy but really it is just lack of coordination. If you are in that environment, you absolutely must be intertwined with the other arms of U.S. government. I was in uniform and I had an American flag patch on my sleeve and to me, I worked for Team America. I was sort of flabbergasted in the long-term, but maybe it is because I am a reservist and I am not like necessarily tied to the Department of Defense or Department of State. It just seemed to me we should all be working on the same side and I saw DOD folks complain about DOS folks and vice versa. I thought to myself, "Snap out of it. You are at war and you are on the same side so stop bickering." It eventually happened, but it was very personality based.

We had problems with an officer in Salah Ah Din.

*Q: This was in Salah Ah Din?*

A: Yes, in Salah Ah Din because he, unfortunately, was negative on the State Department because they do not know how to do fine tune coordination. They do more broad-brush coordination and assume it will all work out. If it does work out, it works out by back channel. Like pens and pencils, where do you get those? That is a good question, but from which account to you draw on so you can go and access the military supply store that has them? Well, are you going to go steal from the army? The supply sergeant will not let you do that so what happened

for the first six months was you had some sergeant who knew a sergeant over in the other unit and said, “Hey, I am going to bring over a box. Can you fill it up with office supplies?” “Yeah, OK. I will work on your jeep or your Humvee later,” and that is sort of the back door thing and we were able to get supplied. That is not the way to do business long term.

Eventually, the systems got worked out, but the systems got worked out because brigade commanders realized the benefit of the PRT. Rather than being an obstacle, the PRT was actually what we call a force multiplier— a way to make things better. Brigade commanders’ light bulbs turned on and they are like, “Oh, wow. These guys could really do quite a bit.” There was more of an embracing of the PRTs and making sure that the army was very pro-active about incorporating them and making sure they got supplied and they got everything they needed. Brigades were setting aside their own budgets for all office furniture, for our materials, for our support and that was not because they were directed to, but because brigade commanders on their own realized the PRT was a good thing. Hopefully, by now some of that has been worked out, but call me cynical. It will get worked out when we are done with Iraq and then we will forget about it before the next war comes along.

*Q: How would you describe the mission of both PRTs?*

A: The missions were the same, which was to establish a just and legitimate government in the provinces. Under Saddam’s regime there were no provincial governments as such. There were no representative assemblies; it was by Sunni dictate and so it was a very top down, centrally driven system. They had provincial legislatures that had to be filled. The elections had occurred before we got there so they had actual legislatures or provincial councils. Their intent was to be able to run the government for the province for most of the daily services. That was still an issue but we worked with the Provincial Council, wanted to show them everything from how a meeting is run, to how agendas are kept, to how to be transparent. You are transparent by having open meetings, publishing the notes of your meetings and putting them in the newspaper, having open access for citizens, having your delegates take the concerns of the citizens and, then, if you cannot solve a problem at your level, you pass a resolution and send a delegation to the central government but you certainly get your voice heard about what your issues are for your province. It should be focused on things that occur at your level like schools, sewer, water, and infrastructure.

To that end we also helped work with them on how to spend money. Money was becoming available; not just U.S. money but Iraqi government money. The local government needed to learn to do infrastructure such as roads. In the past, it was a friend of Saddam in charge so there really was not much of a bidding system or anything like that so there was no accountability for the money. How do you set a system up so there is accountability for the money? I am not even sure the United States has mastered that completely, but we set up a system for them to track how dollars are spent, how bids are managed, how you identify a need that you are going to spend your money on and then the Provincial Council and the Governor agree upon what the money is to be spent on. The projects are determined, bids go out, and contracts come in. Offers go out and bids come in and then you review those and there has to be a review board and then at some point you have to disperse money and then supervise the work and make sure that it all gets done and then conclude there is no malfeasance in the process. That is really a tough thing to do

in getting that oversight in and making sure it is all publicly available so somebody can walk in and know what is going on. That is governance, infrastructure, and rule of law all rolled into one. That piece was big for us.

*Q: That was one of your primary missions?*

A: That was one of our primary missions. There were other missions and, unfortunately, they were hindered in the governance area as the central government was retaining quite a bit of power. Unfortunately, they had not let the provinces actually pass legislation so they did not technically have the power of the purse. They could control money that was doled down to them from the central government, so they had some power but what they did not have was the ability to tax themselves. So we lamented that, but it may have been a deliberate act on the central government's part to weaken the provincial governments.

*Q: What other components were there to the mission?*

A: We worked on infrastructure. The most critical areas were sewer, electricity, and roads. We built more focused rather than general infrastructure on those things that were the most critical. Then business and economic development was an area that we were involved in, getting the economy started again which was a large challenge, getting business associations moving along, working with the agriculture sector to get some bright points that people could see. Showing examples of success is a pretty good way of doing that. The problem is to centrally plan everything, using the world's largest capitalist country, which would come in and dictate central planning and thus achieve nothing. We are walking the wire between free markets but then also directing the changing of reconstruction. Trying not to stifle industry or pick winners but helping in general. We started these business centers which were designed to help businessmen make connections, learn new skills on how to write business plans, learn how to get some financing and things like that. That was definitely in the embryonic stage.

*Q: Was there a specific memorandum of understanding that described the mission of the PRT?*

A: Not in enough detail to be useful. There was a Memorandum of Understanding that talked in broad, sweeping terms that you could read in the *Washington Post* but nothing helpful on the ground. It said to establish governance, establish legitimacy, provide an environment where the rule of law is secure, and establish a peaceful environment and conditions for economic success. That is the kind of stuff you may need two hundred years to agree on. It is contentious to say the least as to how you get that done and frankly, how do you get done with little or no resources and how do you get it done in a year? There is this notion that every project has got to be wrapped up in a year. That is ridiculous. We could not unscrew ourselves for ten years after our initial downing, redo the constitution and everything. Even then it took us decades to figure it all out.

*Q: What was the security situation in these two areas?*

A: In Ba'Qubah, it was horrible. It started off tolerable, but then it got really bad.

*Q: What does that mean?*

A: It means for the first four or five months, we would get shot at, IED'd, mortared, and bombed. It was a combat zone. It got to the point by the end of that year in Ba'Qubah that you did not leave the wire without tanks and Bradlees because it went from you had a three or four percent chance of someone getting hurt on each mission to the point where it was almost a guarantee someone is going to get hurt. So the intensity level ratcheted up for a very specific reason: because the surge had pushed all the bad guys out of Baghdad and into other areas. They came to Ba'Qubah because it was a city in turmoil and they had an opportunity for disrupting the area there and they started causing problems. It lasted intensely and we lost one of our soldiers. I can tell you every single member of my company was engaged in combat. Each one of us probably went on a little over a hundred combat missions and all of us got engaged in firefights or got hit by IEDs. We got four guys with purple hearts. It was not World War II; but it was not a walk in the park.

*Q: What about Salah Ad Din's situation?*

A: Salah Ad Din still had some violence, but it was better because it was largely a Sunni area. There were still certainly a lot of the Sunnis who were very resentful and your Bathists did not like us. It was a Bathist stronghold so there were certainly ongoing attacks against the American military there. It was manifestly different in the Sunni areas there was no doubt that the Sunnis were in charge. So when you had an ethnic makeup where eighty percent of the population is one ethnicity, it tends to be much quieter because the minority has no hope of overthrowing the majority so they do not try. A place like Ba'Qubah where it is forty percent Shia, thirty percent Sunni, twenty percent Kurd, each ethnic group has a shot of taking over as there is no clear majority so it is a lot easier to rebel or fight for power.

Up in Tikrit and Salah Ad Din Province, it was more of a steady hum of anti-American feeling, attacks mostly from Bathist or professional al Qaeda types because they were more welcome there. We definitely had some casualties, but Diyala was by far worse, especially the last three months of the year. The surge came in and it became a battle; it was not just a steady drumbeat, it was a concerted effort by al Qaeda to move in and a concerted effort by the American military after they finished with Baghdad to come in and root them out. Actually, it was quite successful because Ba'Qubah now is more peaceful than it was when I first arrived.

*Q: Given those situations, were the PRTs able to relate to the Provincial Governments and District Governments and work out programs?*

A: It was extremely difficult. Early on, we made a lot of traction and a lot of progress, had a lot of things going; and then there was for the last three months of the year and even into January it became more difficult. The focus became more on security because who is going to run a business center when the streets are empty and there is the sound of gunfire rattling everywhere? You cannot do that so it was not the time, so some things were tabled for months and then were revived with earnest towards February, March, and April. I understand from talking with some staff still over there, it is going very well. A lot of the fear that was there before is gone. The way I understand it, a lot of the foundations and the initiation of the PRT got done in the first four to six months of its existence, and then was interrupted. Definitely it built the foundation

for the success that they have right now. If I step back and view the first period of the PRTs and all the growing pains and all the lack of supplies, difficulty moving around and interagency bickering; if I just view that as growing pains, then it is a lot easier to accept that all these things that I thought were screwed up at the time and now I am like, “Well, you know, you throw together something that ambitious, you can expect there to be some problems.” Honestly, most of them did get worked out.

Even with the violence in Ba’Qubah, that was an externally driven event. That was a battle that came to the region, was fought and was won and things got back to normal. Your business people returned. It is hard to run a Provincial Council when people cannot physically get to the Provincial Council chambers and that is what happened those last three months of 2006 and the first month of 2007 and then it got better.

Tikrit was running a low-grade fever. You had a certain number of people who were just dead set against the U.S. presence there and other than that things moved along, things worked and ran. You have some contentious areas like the city of Samara which was largely Shia and the Sunnis and the Shias did not get along very well mainly because al Qaeda was trying to stir up trouble. The PRT tried largely to function in its technical aspects; it tried to function regardless of what was going on, just to keep things going and as a psychological handrail for the Iraqis to say, “Hey, look. We know bad things are going on but we cannot sit and complain about it right now when, if you are an engineer in the government, let us just focus on those things you can focus on.” So we tried to keep the focus on the daily task of running the government and I think they appreciated that.

The PRT leader was certainly a lot more involved in the security situation by dealing with the political situation at large: which sheik from which tribe was doing what and which ones were irritated that they did not get a contract or because the Americans attacked them or something like that and so in both cases the PRT leader up in Salah Ad Din and the one down in Diyala worked very closely with the brigade commanders to have a coordinated message to the senior leaders of the provinces. For the most part, they were on board with their military counterparts to try to cause what some people called the Sunni awakening, but you can just call it this increased engagement with tribal leadership, political leaders to get everybody on board.

*Q: Did you find the government people, the sheiks were onboard with the idea of the PRTs?*

A: Oh, yes, very much so. They liked having that, they loved it, actually. It was what they had been wanting, what they were expecting more of from the military, since the beginning of the operation, was support beyond just the military personnel. They definitely liked having people; they liked having reservists that had civilian jobs who were not just military guys. They loved our rule of law officer, the Assistant Attorney General; he alone coming in as a very senior American legal mind, at least in the Iraqis eyes. They certainly listened when he spoke. I had a team of myself and two captains who were economists and we are young but I am a stockbroker when I am not doing this and one of my staff was a senior VP at Morgan Stanley and another just recently got an MBA from University of Washington and was working for a Fortune 500 company. They are like, “Oh. These people know how businesses work,” and they listened to

that and they really appreciated that engagement. They were thirsting for that. I do not want to paint too broad of a brush but I think that is what they were looking for.

*Q: Was it true in both places?*

A: Yes, absolutely. One of the great people who came over was the Department of Agriculture representative. It does not enhance your career to go to Iraq working for the Department of Agriculture. He came anyway. He came over and was talking to a leading agriculture official and they started talking their technical agricultural speak and just were having big confidence building. We are out there and we were trying to help them. We got a number of pretty successful agriculture programs in place. That kind of approach just builds confidence. People feel like there is traction; there is a way ahead. You do not have to solve everything; you just have to show examples of how solutions can be found; it gives people the idea and they go do it themselves.

*Q: What about your relationships with the National Coordinating Team, the Embassy and the military commands, the vertical relationships?*

A: The vertical relations were broken. You have an interesting situation where, the National Coordinating Team did not actually coordinate anything. It largely a skeleton crew that administered some of the basic bureaucratic functions of the PRTs and rarely was there any notion of a broad strategy to follow. There were no best practices, off-the-shelf things to do, or sources of funding to use. It took me three months to figure out we had no idea what we were doing in Iraq from an actual plan point of view so I ended up making a lot of junkets to Baghdad. I actually had one captain, a former Vice President from Morgan Stanley who was a salesman galore. Basically, I made him my de facto Baghdad liaison and he would go there frequently.

This gives you an idea of how uncoordinated things were. We would arrive in Baghdad. There was a list of people we are going to go talk to. They go over to USAID compound, talk to them, find out that they are doing a bunch of things that you are already doing. Go over to the military staff. They did not know USAID was working on that. Their seats are a hundred meters away, but I had to fly in here to tell them that this is what USAID is doing? And vice versa and then go over to the Embassy, which was probably the most clueless of all. I got into an argument with an Embassy person that was trying to tell me that under CPA law the provinces do have the power to legislate. But they do not so if you are making any plans based on that, then they are all wrong. The Multinational Forces Iraq, (MNFI) had different ideas of what was going on and different priorities. They had priorities like governance and infrastructure which are just way too broad. So other than calls for more details about statistics on a province, which you were not able to get, they were very unhelpful.

We decided we are on our own pretty much. That sentiment was echoed in both of those provinces and then also from other provinces I spoke with. They were there in Baghdad; they had their own multifaceted agenda with no one from any one agency or office talking to the other at any kind of length or in any meaningful way and they never produced anything useful that could be pushed down to the PRTs to execute. What happened was you had a bunch of captains, thirty year olds and thirty five year olds figuring everything out on the ground while a bunch of

folks who had PhDs and whatnot and ostensibly had knowledge were doing very little in the rear. It was frustrating. Nor was there a channel for us to go backdoor and say, "Hey, the Iraqis are frustrated with this. What pressure can you put on the central government to influence this?" There were reports and the reports went up and the reports were filed. That was it. It was very frustrating and I have been told by people who are over there now is that that situation is somewhat better; it is not perfect but there is more feedback in both directions, from communication going down up to be actually heard and perhaps acted upon or be entered in our policy.

As an example, the provinces' ability to tax and legislate was ignored for months. You would send something to Baghdad and you just knew that it did not matter. Somebody would check to make sure you were not sending the same report in each day, but it was not that they did anything about the reports.

So what did happen if a provincial council complained about something or had a legitimate issue? We had no counterpart on our side to actually go up and say, "Hey, look. This is where the provinces are hurting, this is where the pain is" and they are trying to get access to their central government. What can we do on our end to influence the central government or at least make them aware of what is going on?" That loop was disconnected so you had a foreign policy establishment in the United States that I have no idea what they were operating under. I have no clue what the Embassy's objectives were beyond the broad brushstroke, certainly in the community of what they are trying to do.

*Q: What about the military command side?*

A: The military command side was equally adrift in that there was an assumption that this was the State Department's bag so they should be handling this. Then there was frustration on the military side that the State Department was doing nothing and so they started to set up these parallel systems which was unhelpful because you cannot have two systems; the right answer was to push the interagency piece, not do your own thing. For instance, the MNCI set up an economic development branch and you ask, "Well, let us see. How coordinated is this with what the NCT is doing or how coordinated is this with the Embassy?" or "Have you spoken with USAID or IRMO?" and the answer is, "Well, no." "If you have not done that, why are you coming to us trying to get us to do things for you? Should not the United States speak as one voice and one policy?" And for the life of me I could not figure out what the United States policy was. I know there is no way the Iraqis did, so again we made our own policy because, in the end, we had to do something. They were advocating these various economic development plans and it was like, "Who is funding this? Do you know that USAID is working on this same canal clearing idea? Are you going to have us do a canal in the same area? Would it not be nice if above us somebody from the military would go over and talk to USAID, get the canal clearing maps and figure out who is doing what and figure out the division of labor? Start with that and then come back and tell us that after you have done your analysis, you think the PRT should be focusing on these areas." That kind of detail was not even remotely forthcoming.

There were some easy things they could have done, like we did beekeeping in apiaries and apiaries are really important not just to produce honey; if you are going to revive your agriculture sector, you need bees to pollinate. So they said, "OK. You guys should help work with these beekeeping cooperatives." "OK, that is great. What have you got for us?" "Not much." "OK, have you contacted vendors for us or do you want sixteen different PRTs independently contacting vendors and the Iraqi agriculture authorities or perhaps coordinate it centrally or at least lay the groundwork, give us a list of vendors you have already contacted, and already approved and perhaps even already funded for us so that it is not this do it yourself kind of thing." All we got were just a lot of ideas that had no fleshing out whatsoever and it ended up taking more of our time to figure out what it is they were trying to do and so about three months into it is when we abandoned what Baghdad said, at least my team did. It was unfortunate but there were just a lot of people as we said whose job it was to monitor where the football was on the field and very few people actually moving the football down the field.

*Q: What kind of resources did you have to work with?*

A: We had to borrow money from CERP, the Commander's Emergency Relief Program which were controlled by the brigade commanders. That belonged to the military and it was not to be used for reconstruction. It was really to be used by the maneuver commanders for their own purposes; that was not PRT money. However, we ended up taking over some of the responsibilities of the maneuver element by laying out for them what were good projects to work on and coming up with a tracking system for those projects and so we relieved some of the burden of the project management piece from the maneuver brigade; not all of it, but certainly prioritizing them and so, in this way, we became an adviser to the brigades on how to spend that CERP money.

We had the Corps of Engineer money which was largely already spent and dedicated to large infrastructure projects so it was more monitoring where that was going to go and perhaps we did influence a little bit of where those dollars went, but, for the most part, that money was centrally driven and in my opinion, poorly done. It took no heed of local conditions.

*Q: Did you have the State Department Quick Reaction Fund?*

A: No, we did not have anything like that.

*Q: Did you have the Economic Support Funds?*

A: No. Either the wells were dry or they did not exist yet. I had never heard of the Quick Reaction Fund. If they were there, either that is new or old. There were some fundings that I kept seeing on paper, on these PowerPoint presentations; those wells were dry but they persisted in showing them. The money we had to work with was largely CERP. That is what we could do something with.

*Q: In both locations?*

A: Absolutely, yes. CERP was the biggest thing. Our agricultural staff person had access to some funding but it was only about a couple of thousand dollars, very little. USAID had money, but they would never tell us how and where they spent it and they didn't work much with anybody else. That situation got a bit better, but when we found out that they had a project in a certain area, we said, "Great." It turns out we would find out that there was nothing actually happening there because they had nobody to go and check on those projects. So when we actually showed up to see a State Department project they were supporting that was supposed in place and a success on their complete roster, there was nothing there because the contractor took the money and ran. There was plenty of that going on. Again, USAID had money but we were not allowed to touch it; you can sense the frustration. It is as if they were not there.

*Q: What did you use the CERP funds for mainly?*

A: Setting up training programs for the Provincial Council, setting up the payment for the review board projects, the engineering review office; we had four employees in that office whose job it was to review all the incoming data.

*Q: These are Iraqis?*

A: Yes, these are Iraqis and they are working in the Provincial Government. We set up a business center where we refurbished a building and brought in an office manager and office equipment and training. We set up a bee keeping and apiary system and training for that. We did some crop spraying for the dates. We worked with the Iraqis to set up a date harvest festival. We set up a sheep dip tank. That actually was an idea that came from the top, so that is one good thing that came down from higher. We set up inoculation programs for their animals. Agriculture was the area we could make the most progress in.

*Q: In both places?*

A: Yes, it was the least contentious. Nobody argued about it, nobody fought over it. It was common ground that everybody could agree on. We did a lot of canal cleaning, fairly decent canal lining with cement and bought pumps for the canal irrigation system. That took a lot of money. We advised against some make work projects such as street cleaning, but the brigade did them anyway. I find them to be of limited economic value.

*Q: Employment generation?*

A: Yes, but it was temporary employment. It has no economic benefit in the long run and they actually depress wages.

*Q: Were you involved in promoting democratic practices in the Provincial Government?*

A: Yes, that is part of the transparency piece. There were no elections while we were there but we were constantly having to knock down one high-ranking provincial council member who was trying to amass too much power; we were polite and we never had to actually impose anything, but we would have any number of meetings where we would take him aside and say, "Look.

What you are doing really is not in the spirit of democracy.” I think it was interpreted as a threat that we were going to do something if he did not comply with democratic principles; we were trying to let everybody know that no one is the dictator of the legislators. We had to remind another high government official that you do not go in and dictate what the legislature says. So we were working out those kinds of things, because there is a lot of mind changing about how processes work and reiterating what these processes are and getting them to read their own charter which they wrote. They had some pretty good lawyers and they actually wrote a decent charter; it was a matter getting them to adhere to it. We got a copy of their Provincial Charter and we said, “Hey you are not following your own procedures. You said that you would post your minutes from the previous meeting and you passed the minutes.” What they tried to do was alter the minutes so that it came out to be what someone wanted and if you do not watch that kind of stuff, people will sneak things past you and a member will take over and start assuming dictatorial powers; all these little checks and balances would seem routine. If someone is not checking those minutes, if someone is not making sure that the meeting times are published in advance and that you adhere to those meeting times, then you have a usurpation of democratic powers. You go to any town council in the United States and people are upset about that kind of stuff and they are for a good reason because they know that if a meeting time gets changed then there will be a vote on some measure that they are absent for. In Iraq they changed the meeting time and they would not inform the delegates of the other party. Surprise, they have just enough for a quorum and they get to vote whatever they want and there is no opposition there because they changed the time. That is the kind of behavior we tried to circumvent.

*Q: Was RTI there?*

A: RTI was there.

*Q: How were they working?*

A: RTI was sending people out who did not know what they were doing and who were certainly not working in the United States’ interest.

*Q: This is Research Triangle, the American institution you are talking about?*

A: They are fine people but there are they checking their staff in the provinces when they are doing their classes at the Provincial Council? Because we were. One time we went to a provincial council member and said, “RTI provided you with a whole series of classes on how to do rule of law and governance. How was the RTI lecture?” He said, “Oh, did we have one? Oh, he spoke for about five or ten minutes and then handed out a piece of paper and that was it.” We are paying this person to do a figure drill because then he reports back to his RTI boss, the Americans, “I did this.” But the American never follows up on that, never checks it; he cannot. He is not in all those different places. So there is no oversight. Without oversight these people are collecting a paycheck and that is it.

RTI did a poor job figuring out who was biased and who was not. One of these people was in a Provincial Council meeting and had the audacity to sit at the Provincial Council table and participate in the debate of the elected legislature. That was our first encounter; we had never

seen him before. He is participating in the debate substantively, not according to rules and procedures. They were loose cannons on the battlefield. They told nobody where they are, what they are doing. We said, “You are out of here. You do not sit at the table; you are doing damage as a contractor sitting at a legislative assembly presuming to speak. I do not know who you are speaking for, but you do not sit in a legislative assembly. That is not your role.” If you do not vet and watch these people very, very closely, everything from your infrastructure contract to your RTI contracts is just waste. They were happy to set up a system that looked good on paper and presented well. But then they threw this staff out there and they did not coordinate.

We did get three RTI staff who actually were co-located with our office in the PRT who were foreign nationals. They were a bit better. We had another RTI person who could not handle the environment, could not and did not want to communicate with the Iraqis or with us. It is a tough environment. You have to be psychologically thick skinned to operate in that environment. It is not some “cushy” job back in the States where you can not get along with people. You have to be somebody who can roll with it because the tensions and stress levels are high and people are going to snap and you have to be able to deal with it.

*Q: Did the PRTs have a Public Affairs Program?*

A: Not really. There was supposed to be a Public Affairs Officer to be coming in at the very tail end of my mission; we did receive a Public Affairs Officer and in Salah Ad Din PRT.

*Q: What was he supposed to do?*

A: As I understand what he was doing, he was in public affairs as a project to help them get their message out, to work with their journalists, to work with their mass communications. The government is dealing with mass communication to show them how to do interviews and things like that. It was not so much about our broadcasting our successes to the Iraqi people which would have been counterproductive anyway because our goal is not to tout ourselves; it is to tout the Iraqis. Everything was supposed to be that, “Look. Here is what the Iraqis did” even if you did ninety percent of the work, you want them to get the credit for it.

*Q: What about the Rule of Law staff? How did they work and how effective were they?*

A: The caliber of people we had was just absolutely phenomenal. I was very impressed with what the Department of Justice sent over, just top notch people. Luckily, the military has a lot of Judge Advocate Generals (JAGs); that was one area where the military was definitely involved.

*Q: What did they do?*

A: Mostly they worked with the judges and the courtrooms; everything from logistics to making sure they had a well-appointed courtroom, a well-staffed court to monitor their caseloads and to give them advice on various legal matters. They also checked on the prison system and the police station. They worked with the police training teams to incorporate the rule of law, the legal aspect that the Iraqi police officers needed to know about; such as criminal rights or ones rights under the law when arrested and these are all written. Iraqi laws are not too different from our

laws in that regard. It was an uphill battle because you could talk to the Iraqi police all day about what not to do and they will still do it. They are a lot more frustrated because it is such a human rights disaster. They had thirty years under Saddam where he just did not care about people. It is a hard habit to break. But they would go out there, they would visit the jails, they would interview the prisoners, “How long you been here? When is the last time you have seen an attorney?” One of the better things they did, the most effective thing they did was a lot of judges were afraid to try people accused of terrorism, because they knew there would be retribution against them so what they did was they set up this system of roving judges that could go and judge and then leave. They also created the central terrorism court where they would actually bring the larger terrorism suspects to a central location and try them there. Both of those were pretty effective because that eliminated that fear. You were not trying your local people.

That was the other thing; if you an al Jabudi (tribe) judge, you are not going to convict an al Jabudi charged with anything. It is just not going to happen. We could catch him red-handed and it was like, “Yeah, well, there is other evidence.” But then you bring in somebody from a different tribe and then they say, “Oh, yeah. He is guilty, of course.” “How do you know that?” “Look what tribe he is from. Of course, he did it.” There is some of that and I am not sure you can instantaneously change that kind of legal system overnight.

But freeing up the ability for judges to pass judgment against your bigger terrorism suspects was huge. By the way, since Sharia law takes care of most of your petty crime and your little cases at the local level, a lot of those cases do not make it to court. If they do make it to court, it is because people are so irritated at the accused that he had lost whatever support he had in the community. They take care of things at the local level. By addressing the terrorism issue, you go after the ones that were the worst and by removing them from the scene of the crime and the area where the judge is not vulnerable to retribution; that was a big step. I am not sure that we really made a difference in how the average police officer treats the prisoners. I know when we are around, they treated them well, but when we were not around we were pretty sure that they were just as bad as they ever were.

*Q: There is something called the Multinational Security Transition Command that provided training for the rule of law program. Do you know anything about that?*

A: I know that we had trainers and we had people embedded with the police and with the military police on the Iraqi side. My knowledge is limited in that area.

*Q: Did you have a cultural adviser?*

A: Yes, bilateral cultural advisers (BBAs). Those are the Iraqis of American Iraqi descent or British Iraqi descent. They were great.

*Q: They were helpful?*

A: Extremely. They made up for a lot of what was missing.

*Q: Looking back at the both of the PRTs, how would you characterize their main achievements and what they were able to accomplish?*

A: Number one, hope. Do not dismiss the psychological value of having people who were there to show and even attempt to show how things should and can be. That was not lost on the Iraqis. It was commented on on many occasions, “You people are working harder for our democracy than we are.” I met any number of people in senior positions in the provincial government who said, “It will take us time but we really appreciate what you are doing. We do not work as fast as you; we work much more slowly.” Just trying to show: look here is how it is supposed to work. Showing examples and models, that alone is huge because no amount of money you spend and there is not enough money to make a difference. The infrastructure problems in Iraq are \$60 billion problem. We are not going to spend that. The Iraqis have \$60 billion but rather than giving them money, we should be showing them how to spend the money, showing them examples of how it is done in other countries is very valuable. A lot of the Iraqis who are in charge now were not in charge before. They do not have this experience. They were not on the in-crowd under Saddam so seeing how it is done is just really important. That is probably the biggest thing single thing. The Iraqis give you credit for trying and that is why sometimes I think, “Oh, this project could have gone better.” It does not really matter. It matters that you tried it and that you put a lot of effort into it and you were seen putting a lot of effort into it and that that Iraqis learned something so that when you are gone, they are going to be doing it on their own and so if you try something and it is only halfway successful, or looks kind of ugly, it does not mean it will not be successful in the future.

*Q: What about some specific achievements?*

A: The specific achievement was the reinvigorating of the business community; getting them to get back to business. A lot of them had run away and were afraid to invest in the local economy so bringing them together under the business centers, bringing together business leaders and getting them back to work was important. We got more out of the meetings than we got out the center just by calling all the senior business leaders in and asking them what could be done. They got going on their own with that, which is great. That is the way you want it.

In agriculture, specifically clearing those canals was huge; getting irrigation pumps back online, to the best extent we could, was huge; getting the crop spraying was huge for the dates. We had their crop yields up over two hundred percent in one year, the biggest crop in Diyala Province. Having the date harvest festival.

Getting their primary crop back on line was a big one; the beekeeping was big because a lot of the bees had died off and that is a non-starter if you are trying to revive agriculture so that was a very good first step. Getting their Provincial Council to have regular meetings where they took minutes, published the minutes, and posted them in advance; they sent the results of the meeting out, they are publicly available: that was very big. Showing them how to run a meeting aside from anything that they talked about; just having regular meetings, provincial level meetings that you would recognize as legitimate. It looks something like a legislature; that was big. Getting the committee system set up so they could divide their labor and their work so that everything was not discussed in detail at the meetings was big.

*Q: Were there other achievements?*

A: I would say getting the oversight system for the spending of their money; that was huge. Being able to track projects and know that the Iraqi government knows about and is transparent; you can see how much is being spent, who is spending what, on what, which contractor got the bid. It went a long way towards squelching corruption. Those are pretty big accomplishments.

*Q: They certainly are.*

A: I have always maintained that projects in themselves are insufficient. It is the sustainable systems that are important. Projects are fish; systems are teaching them how to fish and that is what our focus was.

*Q: If we look back on an overall assessment of the PRTs in their accomplishments, do you think they are effective in improving governance or in promoting economic development or in using military for counterinsurgency?*

A: I absolutely think so. In governance, definitely, most directly; in economic development, yes, because it is fundamentally about confidence building, which is what the PRTs do. Once people become convinced that there is a future, the need for counterinsurgency dies. So it is a two-pronged thing: there is the military side, which we did not have a lot to do with. We were not hunting down bad guys: that was not our thing, but we were listening to when the sheik spoke about what the trouble spots were, and by convincing enough senior people that the future lies in stability, it is amazing. They go, they talk to their people, their tribal members and say, "Knock it off, we have to get things going here. We are trying to build this province up." In that respect, I think we had a pretty big impact on the province.

*Q: How effective were they in handling US military and civilian resources?*

A: Initially, very poor, by the end, pretty good.

*Q: What kind of training did you have for preparation for working in a PRT?*

A: Zero, we had none. As a matter of fact, my company did not even exist until two weeks before we got on an airplane to go to Iraq.

*Q: And that is no preparation for either location?*

A: Nope, zero.

*Q: What lessons do you draw, what four of five broad lessons or specific lessons have you learned from this extraordinary experience?*

A: First, I would say to our own government, knock off the interagency fights, because it kills people. There are dead Iraqis and there are wounded and dead American soldiers because we as

a government dance around did not do our job. We did not go to war with a war mentality. We went to war with an “I am a DOD person, I am a DOS person,” mentality as if somehow that trumped being an American. To me personally, I am offended by that attitude. That is pervasive, unfortunately, in our DOD and DOS establishments.

*Q: Explain what you mean.*

A: The unwillingness to share information from both sides, the unwillingness to set a policy at the Rumsfeld/Rice level, the unwillingness to arrive at a memorandum of understanding, the unwillingness to commit to policies that are specific. The broad based memorandum of understanding policies that they put out is a cop out. So nobody wanted to sit down actually take the risk to say, “Here is what we are going to do and here is how we are going to get into the government.” The fact that the U.S. Embassy was essentially incommunicado with the military establishment is just unacceptable. I do not care whose fault it is. I do not care if it is the Department of Defense’s fault for being too aggressive or the Department of State’s fault for being understaffed or the failure to recognize that there are these problems; we need to fix them. Instead they just left it all to the PRTs to figure out. It is just unacceptable. It was clear to me that I was getting guidance through the military chain regarding priorities in direct contradiction to what the PRTs were supposed to do. The time to figure out is not when you have got staff on the ground and in harm’s way. That is the wrong time to figure it out. It is the wrong time when you have people who are working seven days a week, twelve hours a day or more and then you have people back in DC having office hours. We are at war. Do what you have to do.

*Q: What other lessons come to mind?*

A: The reconstruction business is very hard and you have to go in with it first in mind that winning wars is not just about killing people and breaking things; it is about making the other people quit by whatever method you can. One of the primary methods of making the other people quit is give them no reason to have a problem with you and if you have a functioning government then you mitigate most if not all of the angst that exists. As soon as we entered Baghdad we should have had a PRT or something like them set up right away. The PRT and certainly the CPA should have been able to, to some extent, dictate what the laws were, to dictate here is how you are going to run things. Five years from now, you people can change it if you do not like it but for this stabilization period, here is how things are going to run. Not what it came to what we did in Germany and Japan. Germany and Japan were not independent countries until ’51 or ’52 or something like that until we wrote the Japanese constitution. There is precedence for that because you cannot leave chaos and when you abandon the government, the notion that you are going to support the government, then you are leaving chaos and you are inviting people not in our interests to fill the void and that is what happened. The PRTs came very late and they were thrown together and they were functioning because a lot of people on the ground saw that there is a need and figured it out on their own. That will work but you have to have that ability to engage the local government and the national government. The PRTs are critical for that. I just wish there was more coordination between what our efforts were at the national strategic level and at the tactical level where the problems were.

*Q: Any other more specific lessons?*

A: No, honestly talking about how to tactically improve something is moot until you figure out the strategy. You figure out what you are trying to do first and then, if you know what you are doing in general, then I will buy that you could figure it out on the ground, but you have to figure out what you are trying to do in general first. That was very slow in coming and was very bottom up.

*Q: Anything else that we have not touched on?*

A: No.

*Q: Thank you.*