

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

**INTERVIEW #34**

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*Initial interview date: August 7, 2008*  
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**Executive Summary**

Service was from November 2005 to May 2008 as a '3161' Provincial Program Manager with an evolving PRT in Erbil City, beginning with an assignment to what was at the time USAID's North Regional Office.

Here, in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) area, the USAID representative was the senior U.S. official. The facility included a rented office villa and a rented guest house on a compound of streets blocked off with T walls. Other local and international NGOs were housed in the same compound.

In August 2006 it was decided to set up a PRT in the Kurdistan Regional Government area, although prior research had indicated the KRG area would be better served by a traditional USAID-led mission.

The PRT was referred to as a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) and covered the provinces of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. This RRT was a Coalition PRT, as the Korean Army was involved. The area was considered "green." Trips were possible out into Erbil and Dohuk provinces by way of embassy RSO convoys and DynCorp-contracted security details. By May 2008 no US or Coalition ground movement assets were assigned to the Erbil RRT. There were plans to move the RRT offices and housing, but this had not happened by the time of the interviewee's departure from Iraq.

The mission of the RRT seemed to be to serve as a platform for diplomatic and cultural engagement with the KRG and local populations. The security pillar of the PRT mission statement did not seem particularly applicable.

Relations with the PAO, NCT, Embassy and US military were not much different than those of other PRTs with those bodies. Erbil team leader dealt more directly with the embassy and military command structure, while interviewee had more to do with NCT than did other staff members.

Once the Erbil PRT was up and running, its team leader was a Korean diplomat. A senior FSO was deputy. Then came a chief of staff, the PPM (interviewee), IPAOs for each of the three KRG provinces, a regional public diplomacy officer, a rule of law advisor, several RTI advisors and an ARSO.

The parallel US-Korean RRT structure was not the ideal way to organize a PRT, but that structure was maintained because of political realities.

While the PRT structure served the transitional period (2005-2008) adequately, it may not be ideal for the long run. Given limitations in the structure, work was more in the area of coordination than of integration.

Relations among staff members, most of whom served one-year terms (as opposed to interviewee's 2.5 years), were generally professional and collegial.

Security in the three-province area served by the Erbil RRT was mostly controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government. The threat level was considered lower than elsewhere in Iraq. The US military presence in the area was small, and no US military were assigned to the RRT there. (some US Army civil affairs units were assigned to the area, but not directly to the RRT). Any contacts between US military and the RRT staff were professional and collegial.

Although the KRG area was generally a lower threat area, at times the embassy RSO restricted RRT staff movement in the border area of Dohuk near the Turkish border, when the Turkish military was conducting operations against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Because of the KRG area's greater permissibility, international NGO presence was greater there than elsewhere in Iraq. Relations between the RRT and these groups were cordial.

RRT relations with Iraqi counterparts and other groups were limited to mostly representational social events, trade fairs, civil society events and supporting Congressional delegation visits.

A public diplomacy officer with a staff of about five did local media monitoring, cultural programs, press conferences and educational programs. The audience for these was the population and government of the KRG area. Until this time, no US public diplomacy program had existed in the area.

Efforts to counter insurgency were limited because of the relatively low level of threat in the area to begin with.

As for governance, the area had more functioning provincial and sub-provincial governing bodies than other areas of Iraq. Technical assistance to local governments was focused on targeted areas. For example, RTI advisors helped the Ministry of Electricity develop a master plan. (Several RTI advisors were assigned to the Erbil RRT and worked in that office. The RTI North Regional Office was located in the same compound as the RRT.

In the more permissible KRG area, programs might better be described as development programs than reconstruction programs. These efforts focused on longer term projects.

The Provincial Reconstruction Development Committees were not functioning in this area because the legal status of provincial councils had not been finalized. Functions of the PRDCs

were undertaken by pre-existing provincial engineer staff of the respective governors' offices.

A rule of law member joined the RRT in fall of 2007. The RRT was not directly involved in Multi-National Security Transition Command programs.

There was no agricultural advisor, nor was there a cultural advisor.

Significance of this RRT: Its establishment was a significant diplomatic achievement. The PRT structure provided a bridging framework for supporting increased US engagement in the KRG area.

Nevertheless, in the longer term, a more traditional USG diplomatic presence would be appropriate.

Training: Home agency provided none. The only formal training provided was the pre-departure diplomatic security anti-terrorism program in November 2005 (this was before the PRT training courses were started. These are presumably sufficient).

Much was learned in a total of some six calendar years working in Iraq, especially regarding dealing with the US military and the PRT structures, both of which are relevant to current job with USAID in Afghanistan. Also learned much about working with the State Department.

### **Interview**

*Q: Please describe the location, history, physical structure, size, and staffing of the PRT in which you served.*

A: My dates of service as a '3161' Program Manager with the Iraq Mission spanned a 2 ½ year period from 2005 to 2008. During this period the PRT I was associated with evolved in its physical structure, size, and staffing.

The first PRTs were stood up in November 2005. I was posted to Erbil City in February 2006 to what was at the time the USAID North Regional Office, located in the AinKawa neighborhood of Erbil City. Erbil City is located in Erbil Province, which is part of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) area (comprising Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah Provinces... in this report referred to the 'KRG area').

The USAID Regional Representative was the senior USG official in the KRG area. This USAID/USG facility consisted of a rented office villa and a rented 'guest house' villa within a 'compound' (this 'compound' was an existing residential neighborhood with the streets blocked off with 'T walls.' Other local and international NGOs, USAID contractors, security firms -- including the USAID security contractor -- and local residents were located in this same compound).

At the time, according to the PRT functional matrix assessment used by the National Coordination Team (NCT) to track PRT 'end state' progress, Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah

Provinces were largely assessed by the Mission as “GREEN.” The Mission decided to establish a PRT for the KRG area in August 2006. Leading up to this decision, most of the information that I had received, based on the functional assessments, was that the KRG area would be better served by a ‘traditional’ USG mission, i.e. a USAID led mission.

The Erbil City-based PRT for the KRG area was referred to as a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT), as it covered Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah Provinces. The formal inauguration ceremony took place in early February 2007. Erbil City-based Chief of Mission (CoM) staff managed field based local staff in Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah Provinces. The local staff for Erbil Province and local staff with regional responsibilities were co-located in the RRT office in the Erbil City compound.

Day trips were possible within Erbil Province and to Dohuk Province by way of convoys managed by an embassy Regional Security Officer (RSO) and DynCorp contract PSDs.

Before I departed post in May 2008, RSO managed Kirkuk Regional Air Base (KRAB), contract rotary air assets for QRF, and intercity travel. No U.S./Coalition ground movement assets were assigned to the Erbil RRT. Life support for CoM staff was available in Sulaymaniyah at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region North (GRN) Sulaymaniyah Resident Office (SRO) outside Sulaymaniyah City.

Due to life support limitations within the Erbil City/Ain Kawa compound, Diplomatic Security (DS)/RSO staff and contract DynCorp security staff (supporting missions to Sulaymaniyah Province) were located at a U.S. Embassy compound in Kirkuk City (known as the ‘REO’). Vehicle maintenance and U.S Postal Service facilities for the Erbil RRT were located at the Kirkuk Regional Air Base (KRAB).

Beginning in October 2006, CoM staff presence was increased from three (the USAID representative, an ARSO and myself) to approximately 12 CoM. Additional rental property was secured for the associated office space and housing, etc. During my period of service there were plans to relocate the Erbil RRT offices and housing to the Korean Army ‘Camp Zaytun,’ but this process was not complete by the time I departed post.

*Q: What was the mission of your PRT?*

A: I can best speak of my association with the Erbil RRT. Given that the PRT structure has three ‘pillars’ (economic, security, political), my overall sense of the mission of the Erbil RRT was primarily to serve as the platform for diplomatic (political) and official cultural/civil engagement with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and population living in the KRG area (Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah Provinces) and not on the security pillar.

*Q: How would you describe the PRT’s relationship with the Provincial Affairs Office or the National Coordinating Team, the US Embassy and the US military commands?*

A: I would say the Erbil RRT’s interactions with these offices was not significantly different than those of any other PRT. In my role as IRMO/ITAO PPM managing ESF, I perhaps dealt

more with the NCT than other Erbil RRT staff. The Erbil RRT U.S. Dept. Team Leader dealt more directly with the US Embassy and the U.S. Military command structure.

*Q: What was your title and role in the PRT? What was the chain of command -- the Internal organization -- of the PRT?*

A: My job title was “Provincial Program Manager (PPM). Once the Erbil RRT was formally ‘stood up’ in February 200, the RRT Team Leader was a Korean diplomat.\* The RRT Deputy Team Leader was a U.S. Senior Foreign Service Officer (FSO) who also served the role as “Regional Coordinator” for the U.S. Embassy (the senior USG civilian official based in the KRG area. Under this position were a Chief of Staff, myself as the PPM, IPAOs for each KRG area province (Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah), a regional Public Diplomacy Officer, a Rule of Law Advisor, several RTI advisors, In addition, an ARSO was assigned to the Erbil RRT under the Kirkuk-based RSO.

\* ***A Note:*** It is important to note here that the Erbil RRT was a Coalition PRT as the Korean Army was based in Erbil City (their AO was restricted to the area surrounding Erbil City, i.e. not Dohuk or Sulaymaniyah Provinces). The Korean Army did have a civil affairs operation (CIMIC) and the Korean development assistance agency (KOICA) did run an assistance program. The Korean (both civilian and Korean Army CIMIC) and U.S. RRT team members held weekly coordination meetings.

*Q: How would you rate the effectiveness of the PRT leadership and management structure? What improvements would you recommend?*

A: The essentially parallel structure of the Erbil RRT outlined above (Korean-US) was perhaps not the ideal way to organize a PRT, but given the diplomatic/political realities this organizational structure was maintained during my period of service.

*Q: How do you rate the effectiveness of PRT organization?*

A: The PRT structure served the transitional period of 2005-2008 sufficiently, but is perhaps not a relevant structure for the longer term for a region like the KRG area.

*Q: Did you encounter agency “stove piping”? Did agency representatives coordinate and integrate programs?*

A: Given the limitations inherent to the PRT structure, agency representatives were perhaps better able to ‘coordinate’ programs as opposed to ‘integrate’ programs.

*Q: Relationships: Describe the relationship and interaction of members of the PRT staff. Did the PRT function effectively?*

A: My service period was atypical with the Erbil RRT in that I served two and a half years so I witnessed three separate one-year staffing rotation periods, each of which was reflective of the respective stage of the Erbil RRT’s life cycle. In general, I would say that the interactions

between the staff in these different groups was professional and collegial.

During my time with the Mission (November 2005 through May 2008) I worked with three distinct rotations of staff.

*Q: Civil-Military Relations:* What was the PRTs relationship with the Brigade Combat Team? What was your relationship and role with the BCT?

A: N/A

*Q: Security:* What was the level and nature of the threat?

A: The AO of the Erbil RRT (Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah Provinces) was largely under the security control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) during my period of service. The KRG was a coalition partner during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 and became formally recognized as a regional government in the Iraqi Constitution. The overall threat level to CoM staff of the Erbil RRT was relatively less than elsewhere in Iraq.

*Q: Describe the PRT's relationship with the US military.*

A: US Military presence in the KRG area was relatively small. There were no US military directly assigned to the Erbil RRT. U.S. Army civil affairs soldiers coordinated their activities with the Erbil RRT staff. Overall, relations between the Erbil RRT and US military based in the KRG area (civil affairs, CORP LNOs to the KRG, BTT, etc.) was professional and collegial.

*Q: What was the military's specific role?*

A: There were U.S. Army civil affairs units assigned to the Erbil RRT AO, but not directly assigned (FRAGO) to the Erbil RRT. I would say their primary role was a limited CERP program, 'presence' and other tasked duties such as supporting the Brinkley Task Force.

*Q: Did the PRT rely on Iraqi security forces?*

A: The Erbil RRT relied on Iraqi (KRG) security forces in that they provided the overall security umbrella for the KRG area, which made the Erbil RRT AO relatively permissible. The ARSO assigned to the Erbil RRT liaised with KRG security officials, etc.

*Q: Were personnel able to operate in the field?*

A: As mentioned above, the KRG area was generally permissible. From time to time the embassy RSO restricted Erbil RRT CoM staff movement in the border area of Dohuk Province near Turkey when the Turkish military was conducting operations against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The Erbil RRT staff were under the same embassy RSO security procedures as elsewhere in Iraq (Baghdad, etc.) Towards the end of my period of service (spring 2008) "low profile" vehicles that operated under different procedures were delivered to the Erbil RRT for ground movements within Erbil City.

## The Erbil RRT

*Q: External relations: Describe the PRTs relationship with international and non-governmental organizations, if there were any in your area.*

A: Because the KRG was relatively permissible, the presence of international NGOs was relatively greater compared to other parts of Iraq. Several countries maintain diplomatic representation offices in Erbil City. In addition, UNAMI maintained a presence in Erbil City. Overall, relations between the Erbil RRT and the NGO community was collegial.

*Q: Interaction with Iraqis: Who were your Iraqi counterparts? Describe your interaction with the Iraqi provincial/local government, tribal council, local business community and citizen groups?*

A: The Erbil RRT's primary GoI counterparts were KRG officials (regional ministries, governors and their line technical staff. These interactions were conducted under what might be described as 'traditional' diplomatic environment, with 'representational' social events possible, supporting CODELS, trade fairs, civil society organizations, etc.

*Q: Public Affairs Program: Did the PRT have a public affairs officer and program? Who was the audience? Was the program effective?*

A: Beginning in November 2006 a U.S. State Department FSO Public Diplomacy Officer was assigned to Erbil, who managed a local staff of approximately five. This office's program encompassed what might typically be found at a 'traditional' State Department diplomatic facility: local media monitoring, cultural programs, media interview/press conference events, educational programs (e.g. Fulbright), International Visitors (IV), etc. The audience for these programs was the population and government of the KRG area. Until this time there had never been a USG public diplomacy program based in the KRG area.

*Q: Counter Insurgency: PRTs are intended to "bolster moderates" and to provide the economic component of the US counter insurgency effort. What comprised this effort? Was it effective?*

A: Due to the capabilities of KRG security assets, there was a relatively low level of active insurgency in the KRG area so this is not particularly relevant issue compared to other parts of Iraq. Formal "Return of (Security) Control" of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah Provinces (the KRG area) was effective in May 2007.

*Q: Governance: Describe PRT activities related to promoting democracy and the ability of the provincial or sub provincial governments to function effectively and provide public services.*

A: Relative to other provinces in Iraq, the KRG area had functioning provincial/sub-provincial governments. Technical assistance available through the Erbil RRT was focused on targeted areas as identified by the KRG, e.g. RTI advisors assisted the KRG (regional) Ministry of

Electricity to prepare a master plan, etc.

*Q: RTI International: Describe and evaluate the role played by RTI International in the PRT's effort to promote good governance.*

A: The RTI North Regional Office was co-located in the same compound as the Erbil RRT. Several RTI selected advisors were assigned to the Erbil RRT and were co-located in the Erbil RRT office.

*Q: Reconstruction: Describe PRT activities related to economic reconstruction and development. What U.S. agencies and PRT members were responsible for these activities? Did Civil Affairs soldiers participate in reconstruction projects?*

A: "Reconstruction" in the narrow sense did not really apply to the KRG area. Due to the permissible environment within the KRG area, the private sector led economic development momentum (Turkish, Gulf countries, Korean, etc.) The programs managed by the Erbil RRT might better be described as being under a more traditional 'development' context, focusing more on longer term technical assistance. However, as part of the Mission's provincial infrastructure program, I oversaw as (IRMO/ITAO) PPM implementation of approximately \$80m in Economic Support Fund (ESF) for mid-sized (\$200,000 - \$5,000,000) public welfare infrastructure facilities. U.S. Army civil affairs soldiers did manage a limited CERP program and the Korean Army Civil Affairs (CIMIC) units managed CERP funds in their AO (which was limited to the area around Erbil City).

*Q: Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee (PRCD): Describe the work of the PRDC. Evaluate its performance.*

A: The legal status of provincial councils was not finalized within the KRG area during my period of service. There were therefore no functioning PRDCs in the KRG area. The functions of the PRDCs were undertaken by pre-existing provincial engineer staff (of the respective governor's offices).

*Q: Rule of Law: Describe the work of the Rule of Law Officer. How did the PRT assist the Iraqi police, courts and prisons? How did the PRTs relate to training programs run by the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq?*

A: Beginning in the fall of 2007, a full-time Rule of Law Advisor was assigned to the Erbil RRT. He didn't directly manage INL programs. I would say in general the Erbil RRT was not directly involved in MNSTC-I programs.

*Q: Agricultural Advisor: Describe the role of the PRT Agricultural Advisor. Evaluate the PRT's agricultural assistance effort.*

A: There was no PRT Agricultural Advisor on the Erbil RRT.

*Q: PRT Cultural Advisor: If your PRT had an Iraq cultural advisor, describe and evaluate the*



*advisor's role and effectiveness.*

A: There was no PRT Cultural Advisor on the Erbil RRT.

*Q: Achievements: What did your PRT achieve during your tenure? Could you describe a list of projects completed or other concrete accomplishments?*

A: Overall, the establishment of the Erbil RRT in February 2007 represented the most significant USG diplomatic achievement.

*Q: Assessment: Are PRTs accomplishing their mission? Is the PRT an effective vehicle for improving governance? For promoting economic development?*

A: The Erbil RRT did support a local staff representative of the U.S. Department of Commerce Foreign Commercial Service (FCS), which arranged private sector delegations to international trade shows and assisted prospective U.S. private sector investors in dealings with the KRG, etc.

*Q: For utilizing American military and civilian resources?*

A: The PRT program structure had utility as a 'bridging' framework for supporting increased USG engagement in the KRG area. In the long term, however, a more traditional' USG diplomatic presence would be appropriate.

*Q: Training: Looking back over your total experience was your training adequate to prepare you to serve in a PRT? In addition, did your home agency provide you with programmatic training for your position? What modification would you recommend?*

A: The only formal training I received was in November 2005 at the pre-deployment 'DSAC' course. This was before the 'FACT' course and the PRT training courses were started (which I assume are effective/sufficient). My home agency did not provide any formal programmatic training for my position.

*Q: Lessons Learned: What lessons did you draw from your experience?*

A: Prior to my period of service as PPM for the Erbil RRT, I worked in the KRG area for RTI International under the Iraq Local Governance Program (LGP-I) (from August 2003 to January 2005.) Taken in total, this represents approximately four years of working in Iraq: from the CPA period, to the handover of sovereignty in June 2004, through the interim constitution, to the elections of December 2005 and the establishment of the permanent Iraqi Constitution, and through the "surge" period. So, when I consider this question I take it in a broader context with experience spanning six calendar years. Needless to say I have learned a lot about Iraq, dealing with the U.S. military and the PRT structure (which are both relevant to my current job in Afghanistan), and working with U.S. State Dept. Foreign Service.

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