

United States Institute of Peace
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Iraq PRT Experience Project

INTERVIEW #36

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Executive Summary

The interviewee was in Iraq, first at the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) base in Kirkuk (2006- 2007) and then in the Regional Reconstruction Team in Erbil in Kurdistan (during 2007). He had previously served as an advisor to the Iraqi Property Claims Commission 2 years earlier. The PRT situation was bifurcated: the Regional Embassy Office (REO)— subsequently closed—was established before the PRT; the latter was based at the Kirkuk airbase. Although he knew who specifically had been hired to work for the PRT, it was nonetheless unclear whether the State officers who worked for the REO had responsibilities as well for providing support for the PRT. After the interviewee moved to the Kirkuk AFB, the State officers refused to provide any more support, with a few exceptions (e.g. the Communications specialist).

In the Kirkuk PRT, the interviewee was the Provincial Action Officer (PAO), which he says was basically a political officer. His job was to report on the political and economic conditions in the province and how they affected reconstruction. He reported to the head of the PRT, a Foreign Service Officer (FSO) and the deputy, a Navy captain, who ran the PRT on a day-to-day basis. His reports were sent to the Embassy for clearance, which took “forever”—two to three weeks—and then to Washington. He got no responses to his reports. Civilian and military staffs totaled about 25 people—fifteen—twenty were military reservists with diverse backgrounds. There were Iraqi translators: some American, some from Arab countries or Kurdish (Altogether up to 40 including the Iraqis).

PRT security was not too bad but got worse—on the base, one or two rockets exploded each week, for a while every night; on the street, a VBED a week. Security at the REO was provided by State Department contractors (Blackwater and Dyncorps)—frequently locked down, and then by the military at the base—rarely locked down. The bifurcated arrangement had advantages: Iraqis were more willing to come to the REO or meet at the Government Center. Some civilian staff worked at the Government Center four days a week, but when he, the interviewee, first arrived, the PRT head and the other Provincial Action Officer spent almost all of their time in the REO. Many Iraqis preferred coming to he REO rather than the Government Center—all preferred the Government Center or the REO over the base; it took more than an hour to get through the entrance checkpoint and, as indicated, was risky for a number of reasons.

The staff was divided into four teams: governance, infrastructure including contracting for construction, rule of law, and Research Triangle Institute (RTI) with a big team with short-term

training classes. RTI's effectiveness was unclear. It provided some products, but it was unclear if they could be directly tasked and they reported directly to USAID.

Work on governance was impeded by the break down of the Provincial Council owing to a boycott by an opposition group. The main issue was whether Kirkuk should join the Kurdish region. PRT work focused on trying to get the various parties together. The PRT did manage to get high government officials to go to Baghdad to meet with national ministries.

On infrastructure, the PRT managed to set up a successful project review process involving the Provincial Council. Projects included: roads, sewers, water, and trash removal. The PRT had Commander Economic Recovery Program funds (CERP) and the Council had substantial funding from the national government \$80 to \$140 million. Other activities included a small business center, an agricultural advisor, and rule of law work with judges and court restoration, and prison building. The Public Diplomacy program never got off the ground.

Relationships: in the beginning they were complicated by having the civilians at the REO and the military at the base, but improved after the PRT moved to the base. The Brigade Commander and his staff did not see the PRT as vital to their function. They had their own relationships with the Iraqi political leaders. One of the issues was the frequency of staff changes. The National Coordinating Team (NCT) in Baghdad was not particularly responsive with frequent personnel changes and changing requirements. There were in the relations between State and the Military major differences on vacation schedules causing resentment and problems of continuity.

The main issues of concern were: the coming referendum on whether Kirkuk would become part of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the ethnic situation, lost property, job growth, and the tripartite education system by language. There was a special problem of the insurgency in the south; no, or very few PRT projects were there, as it was too dangerous, especially when compared with the northern part of the Province.

The main accomplishment: a well embedded contracting system and infrastructure work. On lessons learned: a better way is needed to coordinate the military and State Department and civilian agencies, as leaders tended to let things slip. Also, there is need for longer terms in the PRT (The one year terms are okay, but many people did not stay the full term.) and a better plan in place with dedicated resources from the beginning. The PRT concept is a good one, but you need the right people in the right jobs with the right skills and more security people to help the teams go out and do their jobs.

Interview

Q: When were you in Iraq?

A: I was in Iraq twice; the first time I was an advisor to the Iraqi Property Claims Commission '04 and '05.

Q: Right.

A: The second time was with the PRT in Kirkuk in 2006 and 2007, at which time I transferred to the PRT in Erbil and was there through mid-2007.

Q: What was the second one?

A: The Regional Reconstruction Team in Erbil.

Q: Lets us talk about the PRT time. And where were you located again?

A: I was in Kirkuk.

Q: Yes.

A: And I was the Provincial Action Officer, one of the two Provincial Action Officers on the team, which basically meant that I was a political officer.

Q: What does the Provincial Action Officer do?

A: In my interpretation and the way I read the job description, it was basically reporting, reporting on political and economic conditions in the province and how they affect reconstruction policy. When I got there they also wanted me to do work as an advisor to the Provincial Government. They had a governance team, which at that point was made up of two reserve army officers. And so I worked with them for a while, but I found that the real need there was for more understanding and reporting of what was going on in the province. And so I ended up doing mostly political reporting and left the governance work to them.

Q: Whom did you report to?

A: I reported to the head of the PRT, who was a Foreign Service Officer. He had a deputy who was a Navy captain. He was more of the executive officer; he really ran the PRT on a day-to-day basis.

Q: Did you report to the Embassy or...?

A: The PRT reported to the Embassy. We sent our reports out by email to the Embassy for clearance and then the Embassy sent them to Washington.

Q: Did you ever get responses to your messages?

A: Not really. I assumed that someone read them and had some interest in them. One of the big issues we had at the PRT was that it took forever to get them cleared in Baghdad. So typically two to three weeks in some cases. And that was very frustrating, especially when we had timely issues. We had a contact person, one of the officers in the Embassy's political section. But it was very hard to get them to focus, I mean all the people in the political section were heavily overworked and our reports were one of their lowest priorities. In fact, I have hear that even now

PRT cables tend to still go out two or three weeks after they have been submitted to Baghdad. They typically talk about events that happened quite a while before.

Q: Because of the clearance problem...?

A: I assume that is probably it.

Q: We will come back to that in a minute, but what was the security situation in Kirkuk?

A: When I got there security was not too bad. They had relatively few attacks, you know, there may have been one or two rocketings a month, at most, and one or two VBEDS every two or three months, but it got much worse while I was there and by the time I left, they were getting at least one rocket, or one or two rockets a week and for a while we were getting them almost every night. This was on the base, and on the street, there was probably a VBED a week, which made it very hard for us to get around.

We lived a very bifurcated lifestyle; there was an Embassy office called the Regional Embassy Office (REO) that had been established prior to the PRT. It had been established in an old compound on the east side of the city. It had been fortified and turned into a small embassy office with a lot of security and a lot of gate guards. And then when the PRT was established, they were placed originally, at least all the military members, were placed on the Kirkuk airbase which was on the other side of town. There was a long battle—it predated me by at least six months— between various organizations, I do not know if it was military and embassy disagreeing about whether the PRT would be based on the military base or at the REO. It was finally decided, about six months after I got there, that they would move everybody to the military base and close the REO, but during that time for six months I was going back and forth. For four days a week we traveled by convoy to the Provincial Government headquarters and worked in that building. The military members of the PRT, self-convoyed themselves. They ran their own convoy and they were their own drivers and gunners. And the people on the REO came usually accompanied by the Blackwater or by Dyncorps, and sometimes the military guys went and picked them up. That worked most of the time; we got locked down a lot in the REO; we rarely got locked down on the military base.

Q: ...because of the security problem.

A: Yes, the State Department security people were extremely sensitive; they would lock us down if there were any kinds of threat in town. The military people tended to ride no matter what.

And when we moved over to the base permanently, we were not allowed to use the State Department security anymore. The civilians they said, “No, this is part of the agreement, the military is taking it over.” So then we convoyed with the military, and they were very rarely locked down; we almost always went out with them.

Now, this bifurcated situation had some positive results, because there were many Iraqis who were willing to come see us at the Embassy office, who would not come to see us at the government center and who would definitely not come to see us at the base. And in general it

was a lot easier for us to have them come to see us instead of us go out to see them; in fact most of them did not want to have a convoy full of people in front of their houses.

In terms of reporting, it worked much better when we were able to spend a lot of time at the REO. When that closed and we were moved from it, it was very hard for us to get back in there to use it for reporting. A lot of my contacts would not come to see me either at the Government Center or at the air base.

Q: So you said you spent four days a week at the Government Center?

A: Yes, that was the standard thing. Although when I moved into a full time reporting mode, I would only spend about two days a week at the Government Center, since most of my contacts would come to the REO. We had very little private space at the Government Center to have a meeting. Once we moved over to the base full-time, I spent most of my days at the Government Center, except when I was drafting the PRT's weekly and monthly reports— then I would stay on the base.

Q: You actually lived there?

A: We did not live there; we went out every morning and we came back in mid-afternoon. That was our ride back and forth, our vulnerable period.

Q: How long a ride is it?

A: About fifteen minutes. A couple of things happened here. One was that the Government Center had the Provincial Council; it had the government senior executives' offices and high officials in it— most, if not all, of the ministries were elsewhere in the city. And so we had a ready-made set of contacts there, but I found that over time it was hard to get information. They were only reacting to the basic set of issues around which the provincial government moved. If you wanted to talk to a wider set of people about issues like religion and minority parties and various other minority issues, which were big in Kirkuk, we had to meet them outside of that venue, which meant back at the REO usually. When we lost that venue, we also lost the ability to make a lot of our contacts; that was a problem. We also lost State Department Communications, which meant we had only very limited access to cables traffic from the Embassy or Washington. State would not allow the REO communication package to be transferred to Kirkuk AFB. The same thing happened to the PRT in Mosul when they moved from the old Mosul REO to a military base.

Q: Were you able to get to the other parts of the province?

A: Rarely, the area south of us was too dangerous and people rarely went out there. Our infrastructure people went out there; the PRT had people working in agriculture and water. They went out a lot with the military. In fact, the head of our infrastructure section was an Army Corps of Engineer officer, who was very good, and they had their own security people. They had a British group who was taking them out and they could go almost anywhere and they did not have the restrictions we had.

Q: How was the PRT organized?

A: You had an FSO1, the head of the PRT team: a career Foreign Service officer. The number two officer, who really ran the team, was a Navy captain who was a reservist captain who was actually an aviator. He had no experience in this kind of work, and he had no experience working overseas that I could see.

The team itself when I first got there: consisted of myself, and I was the 31-61 (a temporary hire), but I had been on the Foreign Service in the past and I had spent ten years in the Foreign Service as a political officer, so I had a background. We had one other junior Foreign Service officer, who was a reporting officer, and we had a third officer who actually was working in Kurdistan, did not work in Kirkuk, but they lived with us.

State Department Administration Officer was at the REO. This was one of the issues: the REO pre-dated the formation of the PRT; it was unclear how much support the REO staff, specifically the FSOs, were obligated to provide us. The Communications person was the most responsive, and we had no problems with him at all. The Administration Officer felt the section did not work for the PRT and therefore did not support us very strongly, if at all. And in fact, it was a big issue when I was there, for many things. It was specifically stated that, "You're the PRT and I work for the Embassy office." One of the issues was that there had originally been a head of the REO, but when the PRT was created, the head of the PRT seemed to de facto take over this role, perhaps because it was vacant at the time, but he seemed to have no effective authority over the rest of the REO staff—I believe that the Admin Officer (FS-4) reported directly to the Admin head in Baghdad. Then, within PRT, there were about twenty-five people of whom about fifteen or twenty were military. All of them with maybe one exception were reservists; most of them had backgrounds that were rather diverse. The two governance people— one was a state policeman in Minnesota and the other was a public relations specialist from DC. Then we had an epidemiologist who worked in a contracting section along with a man, who was actually a project manager in civilian life. They were both military officers and they were actually quite good fit.

And then we had a regular army officer, a lieutenant colonel, who was the head of the infrastructure and contracting section; who was from the Army Corps of Engineers, was very good and whipped things into shape when I was there. But she was only there six months. They brought in another officer. They usually were pretty good, because they actually had experience in this field they were working in. And then we had a bunch of military enlisted people who did various functions; some of it was just acting as security while we were at the Provincial Government Center, because we were not certain that it was a secure venue. It was heavily guarded by Kurdish police and Kurdish security, but it was unclear how skilled they would have been if there had been a real effort to try to attack the place. So that was basically the setup.

Q: Did you have any Iraqi staff members?

A: We had a number of different translators, some were actually American citizens who typically had been born in Iraq or from one of the Arab countries; a lot of them were Kurdish,

probably the majority. And then there was a sprinkling of Arabs, Arab Americans as well, Kurdish Americans and Arab Americans. We also had locally hired staff, which included a mix of different ethnic groups, so with them we probably had about forty people.

That was my section. Then there were even more over in the contracting section, they had a bunch of people from Kirkuk who worked there. So it was quite a large group and they expanded; before I left, they had a civilian surge. One of the things we got was a number of technical people: we had an agricultural economist and a small business specialist, and others, who were quite good, and they were able to be quite effective, or at least they had the skills to be quite effective, especially the agricultural person. That helped, because up until that time, especially in the military we had a lot of qualified people but they were not doing jobs they were qualified to do. They were trying hard, but they had not been trained to do this work.

Q: Were you grouped in teams as they are in some places?

A: Yes. We had about four teams: the governance team, the infrastructure team which also included contracting, their job, among other things, was to help the Iraqis develop a provincial contracting system for construction. There was a [rule of law] group that worked, for example, with people who had problems with arrestees, wanted to contact detainees, who had been picked up by us or the Iraqis and we would help locate them. They also worked on developing the court system, including physical infrastructure, and the construction of new prisons. Research Triangle International (RTI) did a lot of work there; it had a big team.

Q: How effective was RTI?

A: It was never clear to me. They had a lot of people; they did a lot of short-term training, classes and seminars. One of the problems that I heard about was that people (Iraqis) would commit to attend and then not show up to the classes—usually Provincial Government employees. They had problems with that. It was unclear to me how effective they were, I do not know. They had a lot of people there and, on paper at least, they produced good programs. They were outside of our bailiwick thought.

Q: But they were under the direction of the PRT?

A: That was unclear to me. Their head was a senior, an older gentleman who had been a member of the British Parliament. And he liaised a lot with our number two, the Executive Officer, but I do not think they actually worked under our direction. They worked for USAID and USAID more or less worked under the PRT but that was always a little unclear too. They again had started there before the PRT existed so that was always a little uncertain. And they had a long period there; I arrived in August and their representative left in December and they had not filled that slot when I left in April. So I do not know when they finally got somebody back in.

Q: Let us talk about some of the programs and one of the principle ones was the governance program, government capacity building. What was actually done?

A: I did not think a lot was done. One of the issues I had was that the military officers tended to spend a lot of time meeting the requirements of the Brigade Commander of the local brigade, the Battalion Combat Team, and reporting to him about daily happenings and responding to issues he had with the government there. What we were supposed to be doing was advising high government officials, advising provincial officials, and others on ways to move ahead with some of their problems. Shortly after I got there, the opposition, shall we say, in the Provincial Council went out on boycott which lasted over a year, and most of the governance team's energy during the rest of that time was spent on trying to get them to come back to the table, to find ways to entice them to do so. Those are the Arab and the Turkmen groups in the Council, because the Council was ethnically defined; they had not succeeded when I left in April. The following December the Arabs finally came back and then following this year, two months later, the Turkmen finally came back. The big issue in Kirkuk was that there was going to be a referendum to decide if Kirkuk should join the Kurdish region as a fourth province in the Kurdish region. And the Council broke down over various issues related to how that was going to be carried out. To the degree we were doing anything with them, it was advising them on finding common ground, to get them to sit down together and to break this boycott.

Q: On procedures or process, or on substance or...?

A: The issues seemed to focus on reorganizing the Provincial Government so the minorities would have a stronger voice. They wanted changes both in the Provincial Council and also a better, wider segment of jobs in the Provincial Administration. We were trying to find some kind of formula that would satisfy everybody and get them back into the Provincial Council. As I said, at least when I was there, not much headway was made.

Q: Who was the prime mover in trying to get the Council reorganized?

A: The minority parties were the ones who wanted to see all these things changed. In other words, "We did not win the election and we feel the election was unfair, therefore we should rebalance the government so that each ethnic group has a fairer piece of the pie," so to speak. I guess from my standpoint, my sense was they were going to decide to get back together when they decided to get back together. And it was difficult to try to get them to at least talk to each other. Now, on the other hand, if they did talk to each other behind the scene; I do not know what they were saying really. They may have talked to each other all the time when we were not there.

From my standpoint I thought the most important thing that I could do was to keep Washington and Baghdad, and whoever else, informed of what was going on there because there were a lot of misunderstandings of what the issues were.

Q: Were there any particular actions on increasing their capacity to function and administer a budget?

A: In terms of the Provincial Government?

Q: Yes.

A: One of the things that we did, and we were actually fairly effective at it, was to try to get the Provincial Government into better contact with the Government in Baghdad. Try and get them, if not a larger share of funding, at least make Baghdad understand what they needed and where they needed to spend it. There were a lot of the issues related to the whole question of how much control Baghdad had over provincial governments.

And so we had arranged several times to have high officials go down to Baghdad, meet with various ministers to discuss various issues: there were different programs or funding that they hoped to get, and that was fairly effective. That was something we could do that was tangible; it showed we had some interest and some ability to get something done.

My view of the PRT was that it had not been well thought out when they set them up. They in Baghdad wanted to have something on the ground. They did not give us the proper resources, even though the concept was pretty impressive, and it was important. Secretary Rice came — I do not know if was to Erbil or to Kirkuk or both—to initiate the PRT. But once having been set up, the basic funding issues were never settled, the basic roles of the Department of Defense, and its support requirements and the Department of State were never settled properly. “Who has the most influence; who runs what?” was not settled properly. When we were there, one of the points we made on a continuing basis was when the new group of military people came— they came in as a unit and a year later they left as a unit and a new unit came in — was to bring in people with specific skills that we needed. We sent them a list: city planner, public finance specialist, things like that, and when they arrived, none of these people had the specialties we asked for. And the story I heard —they came right after I left —was a lot of them actually came with health backgrounds. So it was very frustrating, because even our basic support systems were not as strong as we would have expected.

Q: Did you have a mission statement?

A: I do not know that there was one. There was a basic mission statement about what you were supposed to do, and while I was there, there was an attempt to create a project plan that would state what everybody was doing and what they were supposed to accomplish at various times, but a lot of work that we did, especially in the governance section was reactive. There were so many things that kept happening and then the security situation got worse, so that a lot of what we did was just to respond to those things and sometimes to respond to requirements from Baghdad. But we did not have good coordination with Baghdad, and it was a lot of last minute funding; things were cancelled or changed. To me it was not a well-thought out program. Now some of that may have changed; I notice for example, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) right now has a series of courses that apparently they are giving to people before they go out to be on the PRT. When I got there, I got no training: I came into Baghdad for three or four days, and they had me read some stuff and then they just sent me up to Kirkuk. Now, I had had a background in Kirkuk because that was one of the issues I worked on when I was in Iraq the first time, and so that gave me a heads up over lots of other people. But that was just a coincidence in some ways.

Q: Let us take some of the programs. What did you do or try to do in the infrastructure area?

A: I am not an expert on it and its been a while, but the first thing they tried to do was set up a process by which the Provincial Council and Government could review, they had a budget for infrastructure projects and they can request proposals, they can review proposals, they can decide which ones are worth funding, and then they can fund them. And they set up a fairly successful review process involving members of the Provincial Council and members of the Provincial Government, sitting down and making a judgment based on hopefully objective criteria. And they were able to — compared to some other Provincial Governments and maybe even that government in the past— come up with a series of projects and fund them and authorize them and begin them. When I left, that was one of our high points; Kirkuk had one of the best records, among Iraqi provinces, for actually moving through the development process with these projects.

Q: What kind of projects are you talking about?

A: Road projects, water projects, sewer projects, trash removal projects. That was not what I worked on full time, but you would hear the briefings about them all the time, and Baghdad was certainly impressed that we were able to get this done. And that was because we had a very good and very qualified team of people working with the Iraqis, and the Iraqis themselves were fairly well qualified.

Q: On contract selection?

A: Yes.

Q: What was the money they used?

A: As far as I know, we had very little if any U.S. money for these projects; what we had in U.S. Money was mostly from CERP.

Q: Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP)?

A: CERP funds, there was some of it which came from a grant; the big money was a grant from the central government in Baghdad.

Q: Iraqi government money?

A: Yes. And it was quite a bit of money; it was not a small amount.

Q: Any idea what scale?

A: I want to say it was like \$80 million, but that may be way off. But I remember the funds were for the second year; because they were actually able to program it and allot it to get it spent. They were going to get a big boost and they were supposed to get like \$140 million, although when it came, it was actually about the same as before. It was probably the most successful aspect of the PRT.

Q: Now economic development side, what were you trying to do there?

A: They opened a small business center, to advise small businesses and also started a micro-lending organization that was set up through Isdihar, which is a USAID-funded NGO. The micro-lending was actually one of the more successful projects they had, in terms of getting it up and running and actually lending money. By the time I left they were actually getting money back; people were paying them back, \$5,000 or \$10,000 for small projects.

Q: Was it generating employment?

A: Yes, I assume so. They were not big projects; it was money for a car repair shop or money for a computer repair place or money for a seamstress shop. But, people were presumably generating employment and also paying the money back, which would be successful. There was a big problem in Kirkuk because security got worse and worse. It was much harder to get people to start any size business there. In fact, they had a couple of business fairs in Kurdistan and some of our people went up there and talked to people and they said, "We understand this an oil rich province, someday its probably going to have lots of money, but right now it is too dangerous." People were not really interested in investing there, and so there was nothing of any size that was taking off there.

Q: You said something about agriculture; did the PRT have agriculture projects?

A: Yes, we had an agricultural economist around February. We got a second person, an Iraqi-American or Arab-American, to work with him at some point, I do not know if that person stayed, but he was very good. He could go and look at some land and say, "This is what you need in terms of water, this is what you need in terms of seed." I left before I saw what the outcome of his work was, but before that we did not have anybody with that kind of expertise. This was an area where, provided they had enough water, they could grow things, and so there was a lot of expertise.

Q: He worked under the Director General of Agriculture?

A: With the Provincial Director General's staff, yes. He was hired by the Department of Agriculture to work, but he was a contractor.

Q: What about the Rule of Law area? What was being done in that area?

A: We had two lawyers. One was a US attorney, I think he was on loan from San Diego I think, maybe New York, I cannot remember which. And then there was a Navy lawyer, who was a Navy reservist who was county attorney in San Diego. And they and an Iraqi-American lawyer were the team. They were concerned largely with helping set up a judicial system that would engage and could work securely. There was a lot of threats to judges, and I can remember that they were involved both helping develop better security for the court houses and also bringing in possibly, some circuit judges to help increase the courts' functioning. They seemed to be very busy; they covered a couple of areas; they may have actually also worked in one of the other provinces, but they were out and about a lot engaging in different types of work with the Iraqis.

They had a couple of military enlisted men, who also worked for them. They were involved in helping to build a new prison and they may have worked on other issues related to people who had been detained without notification to anybody. They were pretty active; I do not know how successful they were; they seemed to be; they had money and they were out on the road a lot trying to get things done; they impressed me.

Q: Was there a health or education program?

A: The infrastructure people had health and education under their purview. There had been a lot of schools built in the early part of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and a little bit later period; they used army civil affairs money. I do not remember what they were doing at this point. I do know that there was a Navy lieutenant who dealt with the education sector, and he was a very well qualified guy. And I do not remember what sort of programs they had. There were programs to provide schoolbooks, but I do not remember the details of them, and I do not remember if they were working on school buildings or not.

Q: Are there any other program areas that we have not touched on?

A: Rule of law, schools, education, and health. I am pretty sure we did some major work in the health area, but I cannot remember what it was.

Q: How were the relationships among the members of the PRT?

A: They went up and down.

One of the programs was public diplomacy. We never really got off the ground when I was there. When I first got there, I cannot even remember if we had someone doing public diplomacy, it was a sub-section of the work that I was doing. The other Provincial Action Officer (IPAO) had had some experience, so he went on television every once in a while to explain some of the work that the PRT was involved with, but they were not doing a lot. And then we got a full time Public Diplomacy person for about three months, but he barely was able to set things up before he left. This was shortly after I left so I do not know if they got a new person doing that or if that remains vacant and they handed that off to one of us.

Q: What was he supposed to do?

A: That was unclear. They had money, for example, to set up an 'American Corner,' an American corner of the library with American books. But they never really got it off the ground, I am not sure why, because I know they talked to the public library in Kirkuk, and materials in the library stored for a long time but not set up. Then they were helping to set up a women's center, and that took forever to get started, and when it finally got going there was some kind of problem with the leadership and then that faded away. Maybe it has come back now and they have completed it, but I know that the person who was there for three months was trying to get a couple of boy scout, sister city programs going with groups in the States, and also arranged the Fulbright competitions for those who wanted to study in the States. We did do that and we

interviewed quite a few people for Fulbright grants, and I do not know what other things that they did with any kind of regularity.

Q: Let us continue with the relationships among the PRT members. How did it function on a day-to-day basis?

A: As I said for the first six, seven months that I was there, from August till February or maybe January, most of the civilians were over in the Regional Embassy Office (REO) and most of the military people were over on the base. Our understanding was that the base commander, the Battalion Combat Team Commander did not want the military people in the PRT outside the base; he wanted their services on the base. I do not know if that is true or not. So the only time they got together was at the Provincial Government Center typically. So they were kind of separate most of the time and the military people saw the State Department people as being reticent to come out of the REO; they were upset about that. I do not think it was quite true, but compared to the military people; it was true that was where they were a lot of the time.

Q: When you moved to the PRT itself, how was the relationship?

A: It was better. People spent more time together, although for the most part the military personnel, especially the enlisted people tended to stay by themselves. At the time, the deputy head's main goal in life was to make sure that everybody got along and at least did not kill each other. That is what he used to say. And he was pretty successful at that. There were a lot of different personalities but the situation never got to where we could not work together.

Q: Did the brigade leadership support the PRT?

A: It is hard to say. The brigade was extremely busy doing what they did. They did provide us with some support in terms of convoying us where we needed to go, although we could have used more support, especially after we lost our civilian security people. For the most part, the Brigade Commander had a pretty good relationship with the number two, who was a Navy captain; the military people spent a lot of time helping the brigade out, so in that sense, yes, they did have a good relationship. I do not think he really had a sense of what the PRT could do.

Q: Did they provide the logistic support?

A: Not really. There was a compound on the military base that had been built by Parsons, the oil construction company; it had been taken over by the Army Corps of Engineers. We leased part of that from the Army Corps of Engineers. The base itself was an Air Force base, so the infrastructure of the base was provided by the Air Force. The battalion was part of the 25th Infantry Division. They had one or two briefings a week that we would go to, and occasionally, we would be able to travel places; particularly, the senior officers in the PRT would occasionally go out by helicopter to some places the centers of Arab population and of insurgent activity in southern Kirkuk. But really our relations were pretty informal. We did provide them with information about what we were doing.

Q: Do you think the military accepted the role of the PRT?

A: I do not think they really did. They did their own thing, and I do not know how much our team leader and number two interacted with the Brigade Commander. I dealt with some of the mid-level officers and they were willing to talk to me and give me information, but one had a sense that they did not see us as particularly vital to their function. The Brigade Commander met independently with all of the political leaders in the province; he had his own method of contact with them.

Q: How about relationships with the Iraqis, both those you worked with and those outside the government?

A: Obviously, the ones we knew best were the ones who worked with us. Because the team spent so much time at the Provincial Government Center we knew most of the people in the Provincial Government in the upper levels of the Provincial Government—the ministries were housed in other buildings around the city and we did not interact on a regular basis with most of them. Beyond that, there was not a wide range of contacts, relative to the number of people out there, that the PRT had. And after we left the REO, it was very hard to bring in people to meet with us, and I do not know how they resolved that, because the REO still existed and technically, we could go over there and use the facilities, but the security people were not very welcoming and not very cooperative, so it was very difficult. The thing about Kirkuk is that two thirds of the people we dealt with were Kurdish, and the Kurds were our allies, so that made it relatively easy in terms of getting along with people, but the number of contacts we had outside of the Kurdish community I would say was much more limited.

Q: How about within the Government Center: how do you think the Iraqis understood what you were about when you were there?

A: It is hard to say. One of the issues was that in the PRT so many people change so often. The longest anybody stayed there was a year, and a lot of people, especially those civilians did not last that long, and I can remember going in to talk to some Iraqis, who would start with one of their stories and say, “I just told this to somebody else two months ago.” “Yes, well, they are gone now.” That was always an issue. They seemed to understand what we were doing; I mean from their standpoint the key thing that we were doing was offering some communications with Baghdad; allowing them to tell their story to a larger world, possibly helped them with funding some of the infrastructure projects. I do not know how effective we were in changing their political views, but that is just my guess.

Q: But you did have positive relationships with them?

A: It depended on the political group. Some were much more difficult than others. We had good relations with the Kurds and from my standpoint there were problems with the Turkmen and the Arabs. At that point, there was an active insurgency going on and so that created lots of strain in that relationship.

Q: To what extent do you think the Government and the Council are becoming more democratic in their processes?

A: It is hard to say, in Kirkuk, because of this ethnic issue and the question of whether the last election was legitimate. And now you have this majority party controlling the government. They were supposed to have a referendum on whether the Province was to join the Kurdish Regional Government; they had a year to prepare for that and they never managed to get it together. There is a tradition there of the different ethnic groups working together, and that was good but again, it was like only the notables in each of those groups work together. And even now that there is definitely a kind of, I will not call it tribal because they claim they have moved beyond tribes, but there is a patron type relationship with many of the leaders and their parties.

Q: Did the Council follow a democratic process?

A: They had a pretty good democratic process. They had majority rule, the Kurds had a majority of the seats, and they could pretty much vote through whatever they wanted. Now, when the other parties boycotted, they did not try and jam things through that were totally against their interests, and, in fact, when issues came up like how to divide up the infrastructure project budget, they still consulted with the boycotting members outside of the chamber and got their input, in order to maintain some semblance of a decent relationship. So, there were efforts to reach across the ethnic divides. The problem was that there was still an insurgency going on, people were getting killed every day; there was an attempt to assassinate the Governor while I was there; there were bombings in the center of the city. And so there was lots of tension, lots of strain.

Q: You were doing the reporting, what were the main themes of your reporting?

A: The first theme was basically, “Is there going to be a referendum and if there is, how is it going to be structured and who are they going to allow to vote, etc.” That was never settled. Now I understand the United Nations is involved in helping to carry this out. Another issue was the ethnic situation in the city: Turkmen, and Christians, are they staying in the city, are they moving away? What do they feel the situation in the city is? Basic questions about local politics: who was working in government, did the Kurds really have all the jobs or do they have a proportionally larger number of jobs as other people claimed? One of the things I was trying to do was to confirm or debunk some of the myths that had developed about what the situation was in the Province. There was a lot of misunderstanding, at least in my view, in Baghdad about what the actual situation was. Again, because of my work with the Iraqi Property Claims Commission, which had been originally set up to help deal with people, mostly in Kirkuk, who had lost property due to ethnic cleansing. The question here: how were they going to reverse that; were they actually going to give people back their property; were they going to pay them off and let the people who still held the property keep it? Those were the kinds of things that we did a lot of reporting on: what people were willing to accept, what they were not willing to accept, and what was going to set off a violent reaction.

Q: Were there other themes?

A: They were mainly economic themes. Is there any place where there could be job growth? What is the situation, for example? A lot of the work I did was in looking at, for example the

education system. They had created a tripartite education system after the fall of Saddam, and they had Kurdish schools, Turkmen schools, and Arab schools, different language mediums. How was that working; was that something people wanted to keep; was there a way of bringing them together; were each of these different types of systems fairly funded; do they get the same amount of money from the government; fairly treated?

Q: Do you think the PRT was helpful in dealing with counter-insurgency problems and quieting the situation?

A: It is hard to say. Counter-insurgency problems tended to be in areas, especially the south of the Province. We would rarely go down there, and if we needed to, usually as guests of the brigade. We did not have any projects down there. One of the issues about these projects was when the project list came out, the majority, or a large number of these projects were in the Kurdish areas; that was because those were the only safe areas where we could work. It was a shooting war down there, and it really was not an area for us to get directly involved with. To the degree that the insurgency has backed off and people like the Agricultural Specialist could get into some of these areas because the Arab areas, especially in the south, had been a big agricultural area. That would be an area where we could certainly offer some assistance. But when I was there, again I did not work in a lot of these other sectors, but my sense was that it was hard for us to understand what the issues were there. Now lots of people came to us and asked for our assistance in various problems, where they were asking us to represent them in front of the Governor and other people, and at various times we helped, especially where we thought there was a legitimate issue where we could mediate. I myself did not have a lot of experience there, I cannot really say with a definitive answer kind of what we did and how we did it.

Q: How were the relationships with Baghdad with the National Coordinating Team?

A: They were fair; there was a lot of back and forth; we got a lot of orders for things to do for them or they were constantly changing our requirements, especially our reporting requirements: weekly and monthly reports, most of which we felt were make-work. As I understood it, they were not particularly responsive; there were a lot of changes over time in their personnel, especially near the last half of my time there. You would call back in two weeks, and the person who had that job was gone and somebody else has got the job, two weeks later they reorganize the whole organization, and you are not sure if that job even exists anymore. Now they were changing it when I left; they got desk officers for all the PRTs, hopefully that would be a little more responsive.

Q: Is there any major area we have not touched on?

A: I would mention just as an aside that: one of the problems I saw there, especially in terms of the relations between State and the military, was that State had a wonderful, great vacation schedule of sixty-three days a year, once every three months you could go out for a couple of weeks. Military went out once, for two weeks in the middle the year and that was it. Since it created a lot of resentment, I questioned whether or not I should not have taken advantage of my time off. While I could have survived without all the time off, since it was offered, I took

advantage of it, but it meant that I was not around during a fairly large chunk of the year. You would call them up, e.g. someone at the Embassy and they were gone for three weeks, and you call them again two weeks after they get back and they are gone for another week. It was very hard to have any continuity. I understand why they did it; they needed to get volunteers and that is what they felt they had to do, but it was just that they were taking so many days off that it was very hard to keep continuity.

Q: These are the civilians?

A: These are civilians. These are State Department civilians. And again, the military people did not have that option, but State did. And then, most of the contractors kept that same schedule as well. So at any one time, maybe 20% of our staff, maybe even 25%, were out.

Q: That makes it difficult.

A: On the other hand, if you could not get volunteers, you would not have anybody in those slots, so that is the question. When I was there the first time for my first tour I think we got one short week off after three months and then we had a long break after six months and another week after three months. And that was enough, that was pretty good and that was acceptable to me. When I came back they had this new regimen, and I said, "This is great." But again, when you came back it took two or three weeks to get into the swing of things, and then a couple weeks and you are gone for another ten days off.

Q: What would you say were the major achievements of the PRT?

A: The best thing the PRT did was in the contracting area. And I assume that system, by the time I left, had been well embedded into the provincial infrastructure, in the government infrastructure and it is still functioning.

Q: Was there a Provincial Development Reconstruction Committee (PDRC)?

A: There was one, and I do not know how useful they were. They were connected with this, of course. It was unclear to me whether they were the ones who did the vetting on all of these projects or if they had been somehow short-circuited by the Provincial Council. Again, I was not working full time so I do not remember that. But that whole contracting area and infrastructure area is where we have the longest-standing impact.

Q: Both in terms of getting things done and also avoiding corruption?

A: No, I mean as best we could, we gave them a system and we trained them in it, and we had good people, good Iraqi people working it. How well it kept going after I left, I do not know.

Q: Looking back over this very interesting experience, what stands out as the four or five lessons learned?

A: My view is that first of all there has to be a better way to coordinate the military and the State Department, the military and civilian agencies. The classic comment that I always hear is that they should have a Goldwater-Nichols bill for the civilian agencies, or the military and civilian agencies that would force them to coordinate their activities.

Q: At all levels?

A: You need to have good leadership and defined roles. And the problem was there were no defined roles, and the leadership tended to let things slip rather than get into fights, and the result was that a lot of things..., there was an awful lot of repetition, there were not a lot of decisions made and people went off on a lot of tangents and that was not good.

Q: This is at the PRT level?

A: Yes. And, it seemed that when I left State was getting better at bringing in stronger teams, although they had a lot of good people come in but not for full-year tours. They were pulling people out of other posts, pulling them in for six months. And to me, that is effective to a point. Some of these people appeared, for example, on the national team, which I thought was very good, but it turned out they were only there for four months. And you really had to be there longer than that. So that is one thing.

One other lesson is that you just have to have a better plan in place and dedicated resources from the beginning. The PRTs got a tremendous amount of initial publicity, and they were given continuing publicity, but on the ground, it was “catch as catch can”; if you had a really good team leader, and some good people on the team, and I can remember a couple of teams that were always pointed out to me as being like that, then you had an effective situation. But if you did not, then the group would drift, and people kept getting pulled out and replaced and moved around, so even if it was something that was doing well one month, it might not be doing well two months later. You need a stronger charter and better organization from the start.

Q: Do you think the PRTs are a good idea?

A: The concept is a good idea. But again, to carry it out, you need the right people in the right jobs with the right skills. We had a lot of good people who were willing to work hard, but were not necessarily trained in the jobs they were given. In that sense, it becomes like the Peace Corps. You have people who you are sending over there: “You are from the United States and you have got a college degree, therefore you must be able to help us set up a public finance system.” And, “Actually, I am a person who works as an epidemiologist, but I will help you out, I will do the best I can.” And that is the kind of situation we found there. If you cannot get the right people, then you are wasting a lot of money to put them there and you are risking their lives to put them there, and the outcome is unclear. The Iraqis, a lot of them get very frustrated, one because people were not there long enough to really settle in, they did not have the language skills. If you have an Iraqi engineer and he is working with somebody who is not an engineer on something that is supposed to be an engineering problem, it is like, “Maybe this guy has contacts who will get us money, etc.” You are not working off the same sheet of paper.

Q: So how would you characterize the right people?

A: You need a public finance person, someone who has fifteen or twenty years or even ten years of experience in the United States in public finance, or better yet, is the person who has worked overseas in third-world countries in post-conflict situations, who has those skills. But I do not know how you can get them. One of the issues I kept hearing at State Department, at USAID is that a lot of the NGOs did not want to work with the Army or did not want to work in a war zone, and so you ended up like the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), a classic pickup team; a lot of the PRTs were pickup teams as well.

Q: Is there anything else that we have not covered?

A: The only other thing, and this was a huge thing, was that there were not enough security personnel to go around. Even if they would let us out to do things, we did not have enough to go to do things that we wanted to do. There was too much competition for security assets and that goes back again to, if you are going to set up a PRT, and it is in a place where there are security issues, you have to have the ability to protect them, but you also have to have the ability to protect them while they are out to doing their job. The question is: if a PRT is locked down and only able to see people who come in to see them, is it better off than no PRT at all? I do not know; that is the question.

Q: If they are locked down, they cannot really do anything?

A: No, you can see the people who can come to see you, and that is a select group in many cases. A lot of people will not risk coming to see you, and you are only seeing a certain small group of people. We found this is true even up in the Kurdish zone, which was a permissive area, the same rules were in place largely, because we did not want to differentiate politically between Kurdistan and the rest of the country.

Q: Thank you.