United States Institute of Peace
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Iraq PRT Experience Project

INTERVIEW #38

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Executive Summary

The interviewee was a senior USAID officer who was embedded in 2007 in a PRT with the 4th Brigade Combat Team, initially with 8 civilians. That group dwindled very rapidly to 5 after 3 either quit, or in one case, was lost to an IED. On paper the ePRT reported to the State Department, but in fact was reporting to the brigade commander, who was responsible for their safety and daily needs. The informant found the ePRT to be effective in the context of an ethnically charged and violent area of South Baghdad.

The ePRT got off to a slow start because of the surge of violence in Iraq in early 2007. The brigade in its eagerness to restore power and water to the area ended up working with the wrong Iraqi agency. After 6 months the right district public works office was found and soon after a cooperative arrangement was established. Also initially the State Department tried to manage funds, and the grant money was not moving. Another correction was made, and USAID with its expertise in contracts took over the grant and contract management. Also the culture of the brigade and its mission of counterinsurgency did not always mesh well with a culture of reconstruction in a war zone. It took a while for the brigade to realize that nonviolent forms of reconciliation were often the appropriate tools as part of a counterinsurgency program

Economic reconstruction was often difficult because the more prosperous traders had fled the country. Also GRF money was handed out so freely that it affected adversely the local economy. A microcredit program could not take off when there was so much Defense and other USG money floating around. There was some success in political reeducation even though bottom up New England style democracy would take years to instill in the local culture that was not used to asking the central government for anything. In the old days, it would have gotten you arrested.

The interviewee was disappointed at the lack of state-side training before he left for Iraq. He was also disgruntled that he, a USAID veteran, was not asked to be debriefed by anyone in Washington nor asked to train others, even though his group was one of the first groups of USG civilians to operate in reconstruction outside the Green Zone. But overall, the informant rated the effectiveness of their efforts in South Baghdad as "good," but not "excellent."

Interview

Q: Can you describe, please, the location, history, physical structure, size and staffing of the PRT in which you served?

A: I arrived in 2007 and we were part of the surge. I was on one of the original ten embedded PRTs in South Baghdad. I was embedded with the 4th Brigade Combat Team, First Infantry Division, on Forward Operating Base Falcon. That is in South Baghdad.

Q: And when was this PRT established?

A: When we arrived.

Q: You were part of the first team?

A: Yes.

Q: What was the staffing? How many people did you have?

A: Initially there were only two civilians. There was myself as the USAID representative and the State Department team leader. And then we had four U.S. Army civil affairs reservists and one BBA, (bicultural, bilingual advisor) and one translator. So there were eight of us.

Q: Eight at the beginning. And when you left?

A: We lost one of our civil affairs guys to an IED, lost his leg and thumb and we lost another civil affairs person for PTSD and we lost our BBA, who just voluntarily left. So we lost three of the original group.

Q: Could you describe the role and mission of the PRTs in Iraq and be as specific as possible?

A: I am going to speak about the embedded PRTs. That is what I am familiar with. And I should preface, all my observations are going to be from my perspective, in my little narrow world in South Baghdad, on my EPRT. Our embedded PRT mission was to be the governance and economics advisor to a brigade commander in advancing the non-lethal element of the brigade counterinsurgency strategy in the district.

Q: Can you describe your relationship with the Provincial Affairs Office or the National Coordinating Team, the U.S. embassy and the U.S. military command? How did you fit into that?

A: Well, it was very complicated and there were some institutional tugs of war going on while we were there, because the Department of State had an MOE with the DOD concerning the relationships. To make a long story short, we never did report to the brigade commander. We reported directly to the NCT and State Department.

Now that was kind of like on paper. The reality was, as we were embedded with the military and with the brigade and the brigade was providing all of our life support, our movement, everything, in practice, we would be fooling ourselves if we thought we did not report to the brigade commander, also. We depended on the brigade for everything. We got practically zero support from ITAO and NCT and the State Department. That was one of the big weaknesses of the setup.

But, in all fairness, once again, we were the first embedded PRT experience, so institutionally there was a learning curve that we all had to go through. So we were defining a lot of this as we went.

Q: What was your title and role in the EPRT?

A: Well, that was another thing that was kind of fluid. All the EPRTs were a little bit different. In fact, the thing boiled down to the interpersonal relationships people had.

To simplify things, I did not get sucked into this struggle over titles and positions, but there was a big debate about team leaders and deputy team leaders and all that. As far as I was concerned, I was the USAID representative on the team.

I think ostensibly it was supposed to be set up where the State Department guy was the team leader and the AID person was the deputy team leader, but every EPRT structured itself a little bit differently. For example, the team leader I worked with, on our team, felt the need to have two deputies, which I thought was kind of ridiculous, on a team of eight people. But he wanted to have his senior military civil affairs guy as a deputy, also. So, officially, on the organic structure that he created, he was the team leader and there were two deputies, one civil affairs deputy and then myself as the AID representative as a deputy team leader.

Q: How would you rate the effectiveness of the EPRT leadership and management structure?

A: For our EPRT, I think it was very good. I would not say excellent, but I would say very good. In all the ten EPRTs you had the whole range, from very good down to very poor and it all boiled down to the personalities and personal relationships that individuals had formed on the team. And I was fortunate in that me and the State Department team leader and the civil affairs deputy, our personalities all meshed and we got along really well. So we had no problem at all. We had a very good, effective, functioning team from that standpoint.

Q: Were there improvements you would recommend?

A: Yes. Going in, as the first embedded PRT, we had a mix of civilian and civil affairs military people on the team. In terms of the way forward, all the civil affairs guys were being replaced by U.S. State Department 3161 contract employees, and I do not think the

teams are going to be nearly as effective being primarily all civilian. They are going to retain one military civil affairs person on the team, but they are not going to be nearly as effective as we were. There is this institutional cross-cultural issue and problem: we, as civilians, being embedded in the brigade, were looked at very suspiciously.

What we were able to do that others did not do was to embed further down, into the battalions. We sent our civil affairs guys down to each one of the battalions. So we were embedded all the way down, organically, at the battalion level and we were able to do that because we had civil affairs military guys on our team. They were able to be absorbed organically into the structure of the battalions much more readily and easily. They were accepted. I do not think civilians are going to be as readily accepted and absorbed and integrated as part of the organic structure of a battalion. They are always going to be outsiders.

I know there are a lot of politics and things going on behind this. I think it is a mistake for embedded PRTs to be primarily civilian and think they will be integrated into the brigades and battalions as well as they could and should be.

Q; So in rating the effectiveness of your organization, what kind of adjective would you use?

A: I would say very good.

Q: Okay, did you encounter agency stove piping? You, as a USAID representative, say, versus State Department, versus…

A: Stove piping is not the exact term. It was just very interesting to go through the process, because once again it was unique. In the role and nature of our mission, I do not think that the respective agencies were given the latitude to do their jobs. Between State and AID, each organization has its respective strengths and weaknesses. For the State Department, their strength is not project and program implementation and they were trying to do that. I think it has really hampered the program. They want to be in the driver's seat for everything, including program implementation and frankly, it is just not their strength and that is what AID is all about. That is what we do. That is what I have done professionally, personally, for the last thirty years. So that is costly. I am sure I am biased, because I am sitting on the AID side, but that is what I experienced.

Q: Well, can you describe the relationship and interaction of members of the PRT staff? Did the PRT function effectively? Some of my questions may be a little redundant, but they bring out, often, new information.

A: Ours did, once again because it boils down to the personalities. The team leader that I worked with was a very savvy and astute person, and he understood and recognized the strengths and weaknesses of respective agencies. Anything related to implementing projects and programming and contracting and grant making and all the stuff in that realm, he basically turned it over and looked to me to do.

Q: So he was good at delegation?

A: Excellent. He got it. A lot of the State Department team leaders on other EPRTs did not get it and they wanted to try to do everything. More important were the NTC and OPA trying to manage things. You could see that most effectively on the QRF program.

Q: QRF is?

A: It was the Quick Response Funds. That was the ESF money that was set aside, that the PRTs actually had in their own budgets, to manage, to implement projects themselves. But the OPA thought it was going to manage everything.

Q: And that is the Office of Provincial Affairs?

A: Correct, it used to be NCT.

Q: And we might note for the record that ESF is Economic Support Funds.

A: Right. The OPA set up a mechanism where all the QRF money was going to be managed and run through them. But to make a long story short, they found out fairly quickly that they could not move the money; they did not have the contracting capacity and the know-how to move the money. So basically after losing about six to nine months of momentum, they switched. Basically AID is handling all of that now, for the most part.

Q: Civil military relations, can you describe more closely your relationship with the brigade combat team?

A: Once again, very complex. A brigade combat team is a unique and highly specialized military unit and their mission is focused and pointed. Because they are a light infantry brigade combat team, you can imagine what their focus is on.

However, they are being used for counterinsurgency and I think there are some competing objectives. The military has been asked to do so much. The general staff, from Petraeus and Odierno and at that level, intellectually of course they were architects of this and they really get it and understand it. I think the brigade commanders understand and get it, counterinsurgency and the importance of the non-lethal aspects and the governance and economics of this strategy.

There is a rapid fall-off below the brigade commander level, even extending to the battalion commanders. They are so focused on their mission of killing insurgents and keeping their own guys alive that the non-lethal elements of the counterinsurgency program become such a distant secondary objective that it became very difficult for us.

During the time we were there, we arrived at the height of the kinetic activity, in

February-March 2007. And so it is completely understandable that the brigade could not really give that much focus and attention to the non-lethal, governance and economics, components of the counterinsurgency strategy. Over time, as the kinetic situation dropped off, it enabled us to do a lot more and shift the focus increasingly towards governance and economics, to the point where I suspect that my successors and the guys there now are operating in a completely different environment than we were then.

So, to answer your question, the first six months we were there, we were welcomed wholeheartedly and we were embraced and supported, but there was just not very much focus and attention to the non-lethal aspects of the counterinsurgency program.

Q: This point raises the issue of security and what was the level and nature of the threat?

A: Our Area of Operations was one of the most violent areas in Baghdad, because it was very much a mixed sectarian area. It was fifty per cent Sunni and forty per cent Shi'a when we arrived and by the time we left those figures had reversed. The Shi'a had pushed out a lot of the Sunnis. So it was unlike some areas of Baghdad, e.g. the infamous Sadr City, where it was a hundred per cent Shi'a. We were right in the middle of the Sunni-Shi'a mix. Sunni and Shi'a insurgents were trying to kill each other and both were trying to kill us. And so it was a very kinetic Area of Operations. The exact nature of it ranged from literally 24 hour a day if incoming rockets and mortar fire to our FOB itself.

Q: And that is forward operating base?

A: FOB is forward operating base. The first two or three months we were there, literally just every time we would go out, leave the FOB to go to the district council, we came under attack, either from small arms fire or RPGs or IEDs. It was a dangerous place.

Q: And you have mentioned this already, but the military's specific role, then, was obviously force protection and eradication, how would you describe it?

A: Their number one mission had several objectives. Number one was to kill the insurgents on both the Sunni and Shi'a side, plus targeting al Qaeda specifically and then providing protection to enable the non-lethal side to establish local government. And the other big element for the military was building the capacity and training of the local Iraqi security forces.

Q: And did you rely any on Iraqi security forces for your PRT?

A: No.

Q: Were you able to operate in the field, given this environment?

A: Yes and no, depends on what you mean by "operate."

Q: In terms of your non-lethal goals.

A: I would say, during our twelve months there, we really saw a sea change. The first six months were very difficult. The non-lethal elements of our mission were, most importantly, to build the capacity of local government to govern. It was very difficult, the first six months, especially for the local government authorities. Any Iraqi who was brave enough to work with us and would work with the newly formed Iraqi government that we were trying to stand up, were of course targeted for assassination, and we lost many council members to that. So that whole spectrum of threats and targeting and intimidation by Iraqis on Iraqis it really hampered any type of quick progress. We worked through it, though, doing our best to help build local government.

On the economic side, it was very difficult, of course. Number one, the mid-level businessmen and larger businessmen, anybody who had any resources, money that left the country, were in Syria or Jordan. The only thing that was left behind was small traders, for the most part. We tried to kick-start a lot of their businesses through grant programs and various types of small business training and development. But given the surrounding kinetic environment, it was not surprising that it was not any environment where you could really expect to accomplish much.

Now that began to change dramatically through the latter part of our tour.

Q: Can you describe the PRT's relationship with international and non-governmental organizations, if there were any operating in South Baghdad?

A: For all practical purposes we felt as if we were an island. We were pretty much by ourselves. We had very little to no contact. The UN was not really there. The UNHCR was doing some stuff with refugees, a little bit. But for all practical purposes there was not an international development community. For all practical purposes it was nonexistent.

Q: In terms of your interactions with Iraqis, who were your Iraqi counterparts?

A: That is another important distinction that I should have clarified at the beginning. PRTs worked at the provincial level, hence the name provincial reconstruction teams. As embedded PRTs, we worked only at the local, neighborhood and district, levels of government. Our district encompassed about a million people in southern Baghdad and so our primary counterparts were the district council members.

Q: And that was headed by a mayor, or?

A: A district council chairman and his staff and members.

Q: Did you also work with any tribal councils?

A: Not directly, at first. Our brigade actually started working with the tribal councils in October/November, so about eight to ten months into our twelve-month tour. Towards

the end, once they had the "awakening" and people got tired of what they called "the foreigners" (al Qaeda) when they started the Sons of Iraq program and at that point we started working with the sheiks.

Q: And you were saying there really was not much of a local business community left or even citizen groups that you could work with?

A: As time went by, local nongovernmental organizations became increasingly visible, as the kinetic situation started to calm down. I think the Iraqi NGO community, civil society, was fairly weak to begin with but during our first six months, once again, you were asking to be targeted for assassination if you had any appearance at all of working with us and cooperating with us. So the first six to nine months we were there, we had very little contact at all with any local civil society organizations or business organizations. There were some individuals here and there who were brave enough to either come to the FOB to meet with us, to work with us or even allow us to go visit them at their residence or place of business. But for the most part, it was not until the last three or four months of our twelve-month tour that civil society and business associations and local NGOs wanted to be seen associating with us.

Q: Did your EPRT have a public affairs officer and program?

A: The EPRT did not. Of course the brigade had one.

Q: Had a public affairs officer? What was the audience for that?

A: Primarily doing psyops--psychological warfare operations.

Q: Was the program effective?

A: It is hard to tell. Our brigade commander did not think so, let us put it that way. The PAO and the psyops people in the brigade were always the ones getting the most cussing out from the brigade commander.

Q: Distributing the wrong leaflets?

A: He was not impressed with their work.

Q: Counterinsurgency, the PRTs and EPRTs are intended to bolster moderates and to provide the economic component of the U.S. counterinsurgency effort. What comprised this effort and was it effective?

A: Well, once again, we defined "moderates" very loosely. Moderates, to us, were any Iraqis who were willing to participate and work in the system without resorting to the use of violence to attain their objectives. So that cut a pretty broad swath of people.

So all the people we worked with, the district councilmen, the private businessmen, the

whole universe of Iraqis who were willing and able to actually work with us and be associated with us were the moderates, from our perspective.

Were we effective at it? I think so. I think there has been tremendous progress. If we had been doing this counterinsurgency strategy from the get-go we would be much further down the road than we are now.

Q: Describe the PRT's activities related to promoting democracy and the ability of provincial and sub-provincial government to function effectively and to provide public services.

That is pretty broad, yes,

A: A couple of snippets or observations, where I think that we got things right and got things wrong. First of all, given what we were trying to do, the CPA could not have scripted a better series of colossal strategic blunders than they did. We were trying to set up a New England-style form of local, bottom-up government, democratic form of government. It is going to take a long time, if ever, to succeed there.

USAID has been doing this stuff for a long time and to me it was interesting to see a lot of the parallels. I spent my whole career working in Central and West Africa and there are some parallels. Twenty years ago, when we were working in West Africa, some of these African countries had been under strong-arm dictators, or strong top-down central governments, for generations. Once they fell and we came in to try to establish democratic forms of government, we learned a lot. We have learned how long the process takes.

Q: Well, for example, did you help the district council to establish procedures, rules of order? Did you work with that process?

A: We were starting from step one. When we first got there, the Iraqis had zero understanding or concept of how to do something as basic as run a meeting. And so through the AID local governance programs we provided a lot of training on some basic stuff, such as how to run a meeting, how to set an agenda, how to stick to an agenda, how to run a meeting, Robert's Rules of Order and things like that--a lot of the mechanical aspects.

But what we are trying to do is going to take generations, frankly. You are talking about a whole concept of asking private citizens and local government to recognize and understand that they have a responsibility and a role and right to make demands of central government that is completely foreign to them. This was an activity that used to get them killed and now we are trying to encourage this system. I get frustrated when Congress says, "they are not making progress!" That is nonsense. They have made tremendous progress in the past 12, 18 months, given that we are asking them to do something that is completely foreign to them.

They are embracing it slowly. I have seen this happen in other countries. Once that democratic genie gets out of the bottle, it is hard to put back, and once civil society and local governments grasp that they have the right to make demands of central government, that is a great thing. That is human nature.

Q: Research Triangle Institute International: did you have any relationship with RTI in your district?

A: They did our local government training.

Q: How would you rank their efforts to promote good governance?

A: I would say close to excellent--very, very good. Once again, though, they are being tasked to do something that is much more complex and involved and difficult than the layman or average John Doe American understands. This is a lengthy process that they are trying to undertake. This extends to all the USAID programs. In any other country where we are operating, we are just one of many donors and through donor coordination we can kind of carve up responsibilities and each do our own little niche. We are rather alone in Iraq and trying to do everything. USAID is being tasked with doing too much and our contractors and implementers are being asked to do more than is realistically manageable.

And that extends to RTI. They are being asked to basically reform the Iraqi government, at the national level, the central level, the provincial level, and the local level, throughout the entire country. That is too big a bite to chew.

Q: For them to be totally effective, yes.

A: Yes, but they are doing a great job, given everything they have been asked to do.

Q: Can you describe PRT activities related to economic reconstruction and development? You have touched on some of it. Did you have a microcredit program, for example?

A: Towards the end. Credit programs were going to be notoriously ineffective, because there was so much free loan money being injected and available. It is not surprising it was difficult to get businesses interested in obtaining credit when there was so much free loan money out there available.

However, I think, once again, during the first nine months we were there our AO was so violent it would have been misdirected time and money pondering how you are going to bring about economic and business growth. I actively resisted the pressure to get sucked into that, because it was just not the right time and environment for it.

Q: Did your civil affairs soldiers participate in any reconstruction projects?

A: Well, yes, and that was part of the problem. Reconstruction is really kind of a misnomer, but in terms of building capacity of local government to provide services, for example, that was a big issue when we first got there. The provision of basic essential services: water, trash, sewage, electricity, right? The brigade of course had a whole team that was working on infrastructure. When we came in, we immediately saw that there was not a clear demarcation between governance and the provision of sewage services, for example, or water. It was a governance issue.

The brigade was very focused on getting, for example, the water and sewage treatment up and running again and they were able to do that. They were able to do it. But what they did not focus on and they did not pay any attention to was building the capacity of the Iraqi municipality to do a lot of stuff they really are just not equipped to do. The Army Corps of Engineers can go in and they can put in a sewage system. That is no problem. They can do that and they can do it very well. But they are not equipped and they do not have the patience and time necessary to build the capacity of the Iraqis to do their jobs. That is on the infrastructure side.

The same thing is true on the economic growth side. They were out there using CERP money, the Commander's Emergency Response Program money. They were giving out loans, loans, loans, loans. They were literally walking down the street, almost, with bags of money, giving out money to shopkeepers. The military is so focused on their metrics, so numbers of loans and the amount of loans and number of businesses helped, without any thought at all put into the consequences of what they are doing.

In all fairness, they were being asked to do something they were just really ill-equipped to do and that created a lot of problems for us. When you mentioned credit, that was another one of my favorite examples. We have done so much damage to the local economy in injecting so much U.S. money into the system that we have totally distorted the local economy and it is making it very difficult to kind of get things back on a real track.

Q: Did you have any relationship or work with the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee, the PRDC?

A: Very little, unfortunately. Once again, at all of the different levels, at the national level, provincial level and at the district and local level, we were not all in sync, in terms of coordinating our effort. It is not surprising, but that is what happened. We were at the lowest level and embedded with a military unit. Our military guys, they know one speed, and that is a thousand miles an hour, full steam ahead. We could not sit down and wait for a lot of the things that, for example, the Baghdad provincial council and the Baghdad provincial development committee hoped to do. They were going through a much more deliberative planning process and they were just on a different time frame than we were.

At the local level, at the brigade level, in our AO, our brigade commander did not have time to sit around and wait for some new bureaucrat at the provincial level to decide on a course of action. Our brigade commander and our brigade were moving, for good or bad.

We were just working at a different pace, and it was difficult if not impossible to effectively synchronize things.

Once again, everybody's situation is very unique. My situation was very unique in that we were embedded in a combat brigade team, so what we called the daily battle rhythm was completely different where we were than, for example, the folks who were sitting in the Green Zone. We were literally a 24/7 operation. There was none of this taking Fridays off and weekends off. It was a completely different battle rhythm and it was very difficult to synchronize with what somebody was doing at the provincial reconstruction level.

Q: Did you have a rule of law officer?

A: No.

Q: And so your EPRT was not assisting Iraqi police, courts and prisons?

A: No and once again, this is kind of another issue and dilemma that we faced. We worked at the district level in a lot of the problems and issues, and we immediately found that when you start trying to connect the dots, they were really central systemic issues and that was not in our lane. The military is very good at staying in their lane. We did not have direct contact with any of the central line ministries, education or health or, in your last example, justice, for example.

Q: Did you interact with any training programs run by the Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq?

A: The EPRT did not, no. Of course, our brigade was intimately involved with that. Once again, that consumed a large portion of their time and energy, working with building capacity of the Iraqi security forces, both police and military.

Q: I assume that your EPRT did not have an agricultural advisor.

A: We did not. We did not really need one. Actually, I started with AID as an agriculture specialist, so we did not really need that capacity, for that reason. Another reason, our AO was primarily urban. The extreme southern boundaries and areas had some agriculture, but we were primarily in an urban, light industrial area, so agriculture was not a major component. However, I think there was room to do agriculture, but we did very little.

Q: You mentioned that you had an Iraqi bilingual, bicultural advisor, a so-called BBA. Can you describe and evaluate his role and effectiveness?

A: Well that was a real interesting situation. Our BBA happened to be Kurdish. So that added a whole different dimension to things. It took us a while to figure out how best to use a BBA. BBAs came in and there was a real hierarchy and difference. The BBAs made it very clear. Yet we did not really understand and really appreciate the difference between a BBA and a translator. But amongst themselves, there was a very clear

hierarchy. It was very clear that a BBA was not a translator.

But they were invaluable. We could have used more training before we went out on how to effectively use that position on our team.

Q: And you had only one, I think you said?

A: We only had one.

Q: Who left early?

A: He left early. It is interesting, of the original ten EPRTs and ten BBAs, I think seven out of the ten left early and most of them left primarily because they really had intellectual problems with what we were doing there. Many of them thought we were sidling up too close with the Shi'a at first and a lot of them left.

We learned fairly quickly how valuable these guys were, because they could sit off to the side in meetings and other interactions. Then afterwards they gave us a report: "This guy was not serious and this was guy was telling you the truth." We were very naive and, as Americans, we were occasionally manipulated by Iraqis.

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

A: Once again, that is a rather loaded, difficult question. A couple of things pertain. First of all, just establishing and getting a program up and running and integrated within the brigade was a big accomplishment. Programmatically, one of the biggest accomplishments that I think we did, when we first arrived, was infrastructure development. I mentioned that the primary effort in reconstruction was getting all these essential services up and running. The brigade was investing all the energy and resources and time working with the district council developing these public infrastructure systems. We came in and we quickly identified that we were working with the wrong partner. The correct partner that we should have been working with and we working with, and were towards the end, was the *baladiahs*. The *baladiahs* were effectively the local municipal services department. So the brigade was actually working with the wrong government entity in trying to address the delivery of public services.

Q: And that was a central function, I assume, or not?

A: Well, no. The city of Baghdad actually is a stand-alone province and the Baghdad town hall, if you will, was central and then each district had a municipal public works office. That was the *baladiah*. And we were able to shift the focus and energy from the brigade from the district council to the public works office, the *baladiah*.

To us, that was a big hurdle. The brigade was working with the wrong government entity in establishing all of that.

Q: Do you think the PRTs are accomplishing their missions and, specifically, in four areas:

- *improving governments;*
- *promoting economic development;*
- *utilizing American military and civilian resources; and*
- *counterinsurgency.*

A: I think that's a very broad question. You are going to get the whole spectrum, across PRTs. I can not emphasize enough the difference between PRTs and EPRTs. Totally different beasts, and I think the expectations and the standards and bar should be looked at separately. There is a tendency to lump them all together, but they are very different.

Once again, I would say, in our area, in terms of building capacity of local government, I think we got off to a good start. I think the task the U.S. government is taking on in terms of building local democratic forms of government in Iraq was a huge undertaking. I think the most difficult part is taking that first step. And we have been very successful in taking the first step or two towards setting up local systems and forms of government.

It is not just "we." RTI is doing all the work. They are doing all the training, for example, with our district council, and the brigade is bringing high tribal officials into the fold.

That is another thing I wanted to point out. One of the big mistakes in what the U.S. government is trying to do in terms of building the local government and the governance structure in Iraq originated with the CPA which excluded the local traditional sheiks. The local traditional sheiks have to be part of the equation, and they need a seat at the table in any type of structural form of government. I wanted to toss that out there. I think we are learning that now; certainly excluding them completely was very short sighted.

Q: Now, looking back over your total experience, was your training adequate to prepare you to serve in an EPRT?

A: Almost totally inadequate.

Q: Did your home agency, USAID, provide you with programmatic training for your position?

A: No.

Q: What modifications, then, would you recommend?

A: In terms of USAID, one of the problems USAID has brought to the table in Iraq is the type of personnel they get to go there. Just like the State Department, they are having a difficult time getting seasoned, experienced Foreign Service Officers. It is full of younger, more inexperienced officers, number one.

Number two, there is an institutional tendency in AID to implement their own structures and programs, business as usual. It is anything but that. It is a post-conflict, emergency type of program. It is not a development context at all and that message never really has sunk in for most of the people there. We are not in a development context. It is not just business as usual there.

So in terms of training, we did not have any AID training. The EPRTs went through something that FSI threw together and that was very poor. It was just inadequate. I do not want to come across too negative, because, once again, in our group of original ten EPRTs, it was the first time since Vietnam that we had embedded civilians in brigade combat teams on the front line of a military conflict.

So do not get me wrong, they did the best they could, but the best training that we had, which was excellent was when we arrived in country. The military sends their senior officers to what they call the COIN Academy, counterinsurgency training program and that was excellent. That was by far and away the best training experience that we had in preparation.

Q: What lessons did you draw, finally, from your experience? You have certainly mentioned a number, but you might have some more that you'd like to mention.

A: That is really almost too broad a task to put together all the different pieces. We were the first ones out there, we spent twelve months starting up this new initiative, and we just left. No one asked us for a debriefing; no one asked us for any out processing; no one asked us any lessons learned; no one asked us anything. I was really kind of amazed.

Q: How your valuable experience was somehow not passed on, is that what you are saying?

A: Well, yes, I was really kind of amazed since we had been at this conflict for four or five years. We had not just been sitting behind the walls of the Green Zone. The director and I were the first two civilians who had been outside of the Green Zone in South Baghdad since the beginning of the conflict. It was the first time we had eyes and ears on the ground, traveling daily in the neighborhoods, in the district, seeing and observing and reporting back, for the first time.

Q: So, for example, USAID has not called on you to train others going out? They have not?

A: I have to say leadership has been fairly poor. They get so sucked into just the political intrigues of the goings on at the palace and the day to day running of the mission. Most of senior management time is spent on trying to recruit and identify people to volunteer to serve out there; they spend most of their time recruiting the next wave. There is such a revolving door of people coming through there for twelve-month tours, which is not surprising in such a chaotic situation.

Q: Well, do you have any more observations before we end this interview?

A: In general, I think the EPRT is exactly what we should be doing. We should have been doing the counterinsurgency stuff from day one. I think we are on the right track and I think the on-the-ground results over the past 12 to 18 months have proven that the surge has worked, and is working, and that we have turned the corner. Things are improving. I think we have to have had some part in that. I feel good about that.

But we can not take our foot off the pedal. It has taken a hard effort to get these gains and we have to stick to it. I just do not know if our government and our country has the stomach to stick to it or not.

Q: Well, thank you very much for the interview.