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INTERVIEW #39

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Executive Summary

The interviewee is an Iraq policy staffer in the Office of the Secretary of Defense International Security Affairs. She is team leader for the Iraq Economic Reconstruction Team.

Her group focuses on reconstruction activities once two earlier phases – “clear” and “hold” are achieved. She says that the Provincial Reconstruction Teams are effective because they can get out among Iraqis and help restore entities of governance, public order and job creation.

The State Department being in charge of the PRT effort can present challenges for DOD participants, largely because of State’s more restrictive security rules, which prevent people from getting out among the people. The new embedded PRT arrangement alleviates this, as members of the PRTs live with, and thus are protected by, their military hosts. The PRTs are showing huge initiative, and are very committed to their mission.

Some problems have arisen from:

- Manner of operation. Military being more action-and-results oriented; State or civilians being concerned with process and relationships.
- Funding, and the issue of who is paying for what.

Counter to some public opinion, many PRT members are reluctant to leave. They want to see completion of the work they’ve started, and are willing to overlap – that is, share their quarters and resources – to ensure a smooth transition to the incoming teams.

Ms. Morgan believes that the achievements of the PRTs are vastly under-reported and that this should be addressed.”There has been such good news for so long, and it just doesn’t get out. The good news doesn’t sell particularly well but there are so many stories to be told from these PRTs, and they just haven’t been told.”

Medical care is one area that needs attention. Nurses’ training, in particular.

She also sees the importance of making this an inter-departmental effort, with contributions from Justice, Agriculture and other departments, as well as from the military and diplomatic services.

PRTs would be more effective, says Ms. Morgan, if they trained together before leaving for their posts. The issue of which department is responsible financially should also ideally be settled before the teams arrive in country.

In summary, Patricia Morgan is tremendously optimistic about the accomplishments of the PRTs, and believes their effectiveness can be enhanced by attention to the issues mentioned above, as well as by giving their achievements much more public attention.

Interview

Q: I am interviewing an employee of the Department of Defense.

A: I am on the staff of the Office of the Secretary of Defense International Security Affairs. I do Iraq policy, and I have been involved in the PRTs for over a year.

Q: What exactly is your function?

A: I am the team leader for the Iraq Economic Reconstruction Team in Iraqi Policy, which sounds bigger and better than it is. We basically oversee reconstruction, essential services, budget, execution, everything having to do with the build part of 'Clear, Hold, Build.'

Q: All right. So in terms of PRTs?

A: And we have PRTs. We sort of inherited PRTs, but they are a part of the 'build;', the President's 'Clear, Hold, Build' plan. PRTs are a part of the 'build.'

Q: You mentioned reconstruction; does that include governance and security?

A: Not security, we don't do security. There are three phases. One is security, which is the 'clear;' the second is security, which is the 'hold;' and once they get the areas secure and cleared, then the reconstruction can begin. That's where the PRTs can really make their difference, because they can get out and help with governance, reconciliation and restoring order and decent livelihoods.

Q: Until now, who has been the lead in a PRT? Has it been a DOD person, or a State Department person?

A: It is a State-run. State hires for it, State runs it. The only involvement we have in the PRTs is we supply a deputy team leader from DOD and we supply a civil affairs officer and General Petraeus' people have a contract to provide bicultural, bilingual advisors. So

we do those three things for PRTs. Last February the President called for the stand-up of 10 more PRTs, and these were the ePRTs.

Q: Can you explain what an ePRT is?

A: An ePRT is a PRT that is *embedded*, not co-located -- and that is a big difference. An ePRT is embedded with a brigade combat team. They literally sleep together. They plan together, they eat together, they work together. These ten embedded PRTs were called for in the President's New Way Forward Plan, and State Department knew from the minute that he called for it that they couldn't hire and train and deploy fast enough to make a difference.

So they came to DOD and asked us for 119 people. Everyone assumed they were going to get 119 military officers. Our very forward-looking Deputy Under-Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness said. 'Why can't we do DOD civilians as well?' So she put out the word, in both the military side, the joint staff and DOD Civilian Personnel, and advertised for volunteers.

Between DOD civilians and Army retirees, reservists, National Guard, the whole shooting match, about 5,000 volunteers for 119 spots. It's a little more heavily weighted in the military, but we ponied up. In the end, they only needed 99 people, and we ponied up 99 people. That's how the DOD part got into these PRTs. At the time we hammered out a memorandum of agreement with the State Department that they would backfill as soon as they could. We wanted to make sure our people didn't deploy and get stuck over there forever. And State did. State is starting to replace our people now, problem being that our people don't want to come home.

Q: Really?

A: No, they don't. The enthusiasm is overwhelming. They have gotten knee-deep in their own particular projects, they want to see them through. They requested extensions, and Pat Bradshaw who is the DUS-D for Civilian Personnel, and the joint staff have had to say no. We've hammered on State to backfill, and they've got their plan for sending their people. Some of our people applied to State to be a backfill person, and they have self-backfilled. But I pointed out when we were wringing our hands over these people who wanted to stay; they could have wanted to come home.

Q: Which would have been a problem.

A: Yes.

Q: Could you talk a little bit more specifically about your own personal working relationship with the PRTs?

A: I don't have much of a personal relationship, in fact I have none. My relationship with the PRT is one of sitting on the PRT Interagency Working Group, and that's where we

hammer out these problems. I have been on PRTs, I have visited 11 of them, so I've seen them and I've seen the enthusiasm. But actually relating to them, no. But I get telephone calls occasionally from PRT people, and I try to direct them to where they should go. Basically, by August, we'll be out of the business, unless State comes to us again and asks us to do it. But I doubt they will.

Q: All right, let's take relationships. Describe the relationships and interactions of members of the PRT staff. Did they function effectively?

A: I would say initially there was a military-civilian problem. Not in the PRT, but with the military that was supporting the PRT. There was an asset problem, where the military wasn't 100% on board with it. There was some friction, depending the PRT. In some PRTs there was no problem at all, other PRTs did have problems.

Q: Was it a question of authority, of who was in charge?

A: I think it was authority, and I think it was misunderstanding of the mission. The military was overtaxed in their own mission, and they were told they had to provide movement for State. The military had their own civil affairs officers and felt that their mission was (their priority). Then when the President sort of put PRTs as a priority and called for the ePRT, there was a sea change, from what I saw and from what I heard, particularly with the ePRTs and more and more with the PRTs, because we also visited PRTs. The commanding generals whose areas cover PRTs were determined that these PRTs were going to get movement. One PRT in particular never gets out and the commanding officers was very determined that he was going to change that.

Initially, there was some friction, there is obviously going to be some personality friction, but the PRT leaders they are bringing in now are extremely seasoned Foreign Service Officers. One who we thought was marvelous had actually been in Vietnam. They are bringing in people with counter-insurgency experience, and the military was right there. One PRT team leader told me the best thing he had was an Army medic/staff sergeant on his PRT who could talk both languages. He could do the medical part of the PRT but he could also get the message over to the military.

Q: Back to the reference to Vietnam: There was some comparison early on to the Vietnam CORPS effort. There was some discussion about how it was different. Is there any lesson to be learned?

A: I don't know, I've never looked at the Vietnam mission. My son is a Special Forces medic, and I think there is some similarity there. They are out in the community, doing capacity-building and improving the quality of life, but I don't know about Vietnam. I haven't looked at that.

Q: How are they being received by the local Iraqi people at the provincial level?

A: At the provincial level? Well, again, the provinces are having a harder time moving than the ePRTs. But I can say this: A year ago, we received a weekly report from the PRTs. Each PRT submits a weekly report, which you have probably seen. They were about five pages, and if they reported anything, it was a meeting that some American mission had come through, or some congressional delegation. They are now 25 pages long, they take forever to get through. These people are out on the town, with the Iraqis, and in many cases sitting in the back of the room during provincial council meetings, instead of being up there teaching them the rules of law or teaching them the rules of how to conduct a meeting. I would say that it's a case-by-case basis, but they sure seem to be making great inroads. There are two indicators to me of their effectiveness. One, the fact that the Iraqis aren't killing each other as much, can't be totally given to the PRTs. But the fact that the Iraqi provinces are executing their budgets and paying for projects, I think you can hand completely over to the PRTs. You can give them all of the credit for that. That's a huge accomplishment.

Q: I am going to jump around a little bit. The organization that has a lot of contacts is RTI International.

A: I know RTI; I thought they were more of USAID.

Q: They put a lot of money into some of the projects, training and technical systems projects. There was some question about whether that money might have been better spent.

A: I've heard that. I've heard it, and I've heard passionate arguments.

Q: How about design of the function between the members of the PRTs and the Office of Provincial Affairs, Baghdad?

A: I'm not sure it's the best. The Office of Provincial Affairs in my opinion was extremely ineffective. But I'm coming from a military organization where we plan and we do, and I don't know if State is the best at that. I know that we worked very hard to improve it. We offered to send some planners over to help them. It has gradually gotten a lot better. I sort of questioned how much better, and a military officer fired back an answer that works for me. If the generals are happy then the work is effective. I know that our person, our DUS-D sent out an e-mail to all of our DOD people on PRTs, saying you have to come home when your time is up, and they're still calling me saying they never heard that, so I don't know whether they just didn't want to hear it. So there is a bit of a communication problem, but for the most part I think it has gotten a lot better.

Q: Talk a little bit more about the idea that people want to be extended, that is a huge deal, hearing that people want to stay.

A: I have to tell you, when I went to these ePRTs, I thought, what would I do if somebody flew me over here, dumped me in this place, and told me I had to live here for a year? They are living under the awfulest circumstances. There was even a question, when State

backfilled, about the requirement that they would need at least 10 days to turn over. When I asked our PRT people if 10 days was enough, they said in some cases no. And I said, well, there is a question of whether there is enough room for two of you. And our guys said we'll sleep on the floor but we need to make sure they get it when they get here. They start projects like a police call-in center, where you can call in the bad guys, report the bad guys, and they are halfway through, they've got it half-staffed and half-up, and they want to see it finished. They don't want to come home in February without seeing it finished.

None of it is for money. These are all government employees, so they aren't making any money over there. They are not contractors; it's not a \$300,000 job. They are in it because they are making a huge difference, and I think every day we are seeing things get better over there, and they are part of it. It's really quite something to see the enthusiasm. Now, are all of them happy? No, I'd have to say, and I'll say this 100 times, and nothing's been done about it. We have DOD people on big PRTs that are not happy, and they are not happy because they are not getting out, and they are not getting much to do, so they've basically gone out and found their own jobs with the military. There is that, so I mean it's not all happy.

Q: They are showing initiative.

A: They are taking huge initiatives. These are colonels and they are going to do something while they are there. We've tried to, we've asked that they be moved to the ePRTs because the ePRTs are understaffed, but it didn't happen.

Q: That brings to mind the question of security and how safe they are and what's being done to keep them safe.

A: Well the military provides all of that, and we haven't lost one yet. In the end, it's up to the brigade combat commander to decide whether it is safe to go or not. They work together to decide where they are going to go, and the combat commander can call it off if he thinks it's not safe.

Q: There was some comment in some of this material about the fact that because of the shortage of security people to escort people out, that they were hampered in being able to go out and do their jobs because there aren't enough security people to go around.

A: I think that was more true before than it is now. It is not true with the ePRTs. There are a couple of PRTs that are still under State Department security rules and Blackwater, and the safety requirements for them to move are so enormous that they just can't. That's where the military on the ground and the people on the ground are trying to come up with a way to fix that. They've done it actually in Hillah, they've moved some smaller teams out and nestled them in with the military so that they can move. But it's really a State Department security requirement that's hampered it. But you talk to the ePRT members and they are out all the time.

Q: But they are protected?

A: Oh, yes. There is one case where a friend of mine just got back from Baghdad, she's a professor, and she has a great deal to do with the Iraqis. She went in on the initial wave to help start up their education system, thinking that this was going to be easy. She got back last week.

Q: Was she a member of a PRT?

A: She's not a member of a PRT. She's kind of an independent, but she's very tightly protected by the Kurds, she goes into Kurdistan. She told me that she visited the Erbil PRT last week, and she said it was utterly ridiculous. She had to shake hands with them over the wall.

They are on the Korean FOB, but it is an American team. She said I came to take them out to dinner. I had a driver, and it was me and my driver. I was going to throw them in the van and take them to one of five restaurants in town where they could get really good food and beer. She said you know this is a different world here, and they weren't allowed off the compound. I said, were you wearing body armor, and she said of course I wasn't, it was perfectly safe up there, but because of the State Department security rules, they couldn't move. She said it was utterly ludicrous. Here is one American shaking hands with people over a wall. I've heard State have fights among themselves about these rules. But if they are with us (DOD), then they are fine.

Q: In terms of external relationships, there hasn't been a whole lot of public affairs work explaining the PRTs.

A: It has been the bane of our existence. It's frustrated me.

Q: What's frustrating about it?

A: The fact that there has been such good news for so long and it just doesn't get out. The good news doesn't sell particularly well but there are so many stories to be told from these PRTs, and they just haven't been told.

Q: That is part of what this is about, to get people to talk about them. So just go ahead and talk about them, right now.

A: Well, where to begin, there are just so many. They are accomplishing reconciliation at the neighborhood level, and they do it by, one example, providing playground equipment to a mixed neighborhood and saying, here's the equipment, build the playground. So before you know it, you have Sunni and Shia men out there building a playground for their children. Once they've actually done it and invested in it, the wall is down. The call-in centers for the bad guys, women go out and do women's issues, health issues. But again, the big issue is the budget execution, teaching these provinces how to take care of themselves.

Q: Could you explain a little bit more about the budget, who's actually paying for things?

A: The guys over at State are probably better equipped to talk about this. The money all comes from Baghdad.

Getting Baghdad to shake it loose was kind of an accomplishment. When it got to the provinces, our PRT people discovered that it would be kept in brown paper bags or they would have a book like this, trying to figure out what to do. They were really starting from nowhere and from nothing, and so for our people to help them decide what they wanted to spend it on and how to do it was really quite remarkable. I don't think any of us thought we were going to make it.

Q: This is the Iraqi budget money, is it AID money?

A: No, it's their money, it's their money. A year ago with the security situation being as awful as it was, we just thought it was hopeless, I thought it was hopeless. Now, they are going to make it. They are rich, they're smart, and they've gotten things like budgets in a year.

Q: Now is this something that the Shias and the Sunnis are working out together?

A: Yes, at least in the PRTs that I was in.

Q: What do you know about RTI International?

A: I don't know RTI International. I do know that they got out a lot with the Iraqis. The thing that I found interesting in talking to the PRT members is you can tell they, too, are out and around and close with the Iraqis just because they talk about them not as you would about your children, but a nephew, maybe. They are bemused by them, they are fond of them, they are frustrated by them, and they see humor in some of the behavior. You don't see the total frustration and anger that you saw a couple years ago. Now it's a good working relationship, maybe an older brother, team captain, or taking a bunch of little kids and turning them into a great baseball team, its sort of that attitude.

Q: Describe a little bit how governance work is going, how the development of democratic systems is going?

A: I'm not probably the best person to talk to about that. If you want to pursue it further from the DOD standpoint, I would talk to a colleague of mine, who has done governance for the last year and is going to a PRT in April. He's been hired by State. He is a Scholar, he's young, but he's just the best, so if he would be willing to talk to you he'd be able to talk governance.

Q: Terrific. So we have the development of a promising financial structure?

A: Yes, and they've got so much money. As I say, they have money, and they are smart. The provinces seem to understand what they need to do. That's my take on it.

Q: Is this the committee that you serve on?

A: No, the Provincial Reconstruction Committee is an Iraqi committee, and these are Iraqis who determine how the money will be spent, what the projects will be. I don't know to what extent we are involved now. I think we are trying to back away from it a little bit, but these are actually Iraqis who decide what they want to do.

Q: How would you rate their performance?

A: I think their performance is very satisfactory, and this is another thing the PRTs mentor and help along.

Q: In fact, can we go for a minute to the public affairs idea, are there some ideas kicking around as to how DOD might be involved?

A: Again, this is not our project. But an essential service I would like to see delivered that is not being delivered particularly well now is medical care. I'm not sure how to do it. ... This is a State game.

Q: So there still is a little tension.

A: It's not tension, it's ownership. You just don't sort of march in and say we are taking over the medical, here we are, get out of our way. They have put a health attaché in place.

Q: What do you see the need is for? Is it or things like hospitals or is it more for training?

A: I think it is more training.

Q: Bringing Iraqis here?

A: No. Doing it there.

Q: More at the physician's assistant level?

A: Nursing, not as basic as Afghanistan, where you really have to start by teaching hand washing. But I think training. I got off the track, because I was talking about public affairs.

By the time August rolls around, we won't have a huge stake in this; I have brought it up at the PRT working group. State offered to send some reporting officers over to try to get some traction. The PRT people are just so busy they don't have time to deal with honking their own horn. I don't know where the fault lies and who should be responsible for it,

but I think it's been a big loss. I think it's been something we could have gotten a lot out of.

Q: Besides the fact the DOD will be withdrawing, I guess we should be focusing on the lessons learned, and yet to be learned, regardless of whom is in charge. What is your idea of some of things that need to be done?

A: I think the big lesson is that we are living in a new world, that our mission is different, and that it has to be understood from the beginning that this is going to be an interdepartmental mission. To include other departments besides DOD and State, to include Agriculture, to include Justice, that the kinds of wars that we are going to be fighting are going to be where the Build part of it is going to be as important as the security part of it. I think that's the big lesson that we've learned: That we can't just go in and clear the zone. Because we saw what happened. I think that we talked a lot about that this morning, that State is going to need to learn how to do things differently, and they are going to have to come to us probably for some assistance, and we need to be able to offer it up. Then there is the big civilian reserve corps, and I don't know anything about that.

Q: Who is in charge of that?

A: State is in charge of it, we aren't players, and that's about all I know. But that's the big lesson that I think we've learned: that the military can't do it all by themselves. I think that they've learned that.

Q: In terms of how a given PRT might function more efficiently, and I know they do vary, depending on where they are located in the country. But as a general entity, how can they function more efficiently?

A: I think I've probably heard, that if they all trained together, it might even be better. If they could train with the unit they were deployed with; if the team trained together and went together. Of course, that would leave the problem that they would all leave together, which might not be a good idea. Other than that, I haven't been on one, so I don't know. There is the cultural State/DOD (differences). You've got the colonel who wants to go *do*, and the State Department person who wants to write a report. I think State is now out there; they are not sitting writing reports.

Q: This is a relatively new concept.

A: It's an extremely new concept.

Q: What do you think led to this idea of working in teams? Just the realization that it is a new world?

A: I think they took a look at what was needed, and if you look at the PRTs and ePRTs, every PRT and ePRT, the composition is a little different, depending on what the need of that particular area is. I mean you aren't going to need an agricultural guy in Baghdad. So

there is thought given to what expert is needed in what area. In a couple of cases, because we had to stand these things up so quickly, we hired a person for a governance job but when she got out there, she saw that the health problem was in much more need than the governance, which was covered by somebody else. She was a nurse, so she just switched hats and kept going. It's been a bit on the fly, but then war is on the fly.

This is not a perfect world where you can do this perfect planning. And that is one of our objections with Congress. They keep asking us for these precise measurements to measure the success of these PRTs. One thing, they are not killing each other, and they are executing their budgets. First, the PRT teams don't have time to go through tables and tables of questionnaires, and secondly it's a war. How do you, against that scenario, come up with some set of measurement that somebody in Washington has set aside?

It's hard to measure, I understand that some measurements, some tools have been put in place and there will be an initial report coming up in the next several months. I would listen closely to what General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker have to say.

Q: Is the PRT issue high on the list?

A: Very high, it's very high on the President's list.

Q: Why is that?

A: Because he believes that this is one of the most important tools that we have right now. He put a PRT team leader next to his wife at the State of the Union address. He calls up a CVC every three months.

Q: A what?

A: Sorry. A Conference Video Call with Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, General Petraeus, two or three PRT leaders and their brigade commanders. He does that every three months to talk to them. This is very high on his list; he believes that this is a deal-breaker. He's about the only one who brings up the PRTs. I think they are a deal-breaker too, I really do. I think they have done, considering there aren't that many of them, I think that they've been a huge success.

Q: Is this something that will be multiplied in the future in another situation?

A: Depends on the situation. They have them in Afghanistan, certainly. I know absolutely nothing about the ones in Afghanistan. I probably should, and I am going to go talk to them about what they do. It seems to be the way we are going if we are going to be fighting wars like this. It is hearts and minds, its counterinsurgency, and its reconstruction.

Q: Okay, good. Is there anything that I haven't brought up that you really think is important?

A: No, I don't. I would definitely downplay the interdepartmental hostilities. I think some of the hostilities that we heard about were personality-driven, not departmentally driven. The amount of cooperation between the two departments in such a short time to deploy these people and get their teams over there and in place was phenomenal. You can't do that if you are fighting over every little word. I personally believe that move that State and Defense did last February is sort of the standard for interdepartmental behavior in times of crisis. There we are.

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