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INTERVIEW #41

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Executive Summary

This interviewee did political-economic work, then switched to governance at the Nineveh PRT between 2006 –2007. Nineveh, one of the first PRTs, was already well-established at this time. The interviewee describes his efforts to leverage U.S. government funds to help the provincial government learn effective budgeting and budget execution, with a focus on ensuring transparency and accountability in these operations.

The PRT had considerable success in introducing the idea of minority representation on the provincial council, in order to give a voice to the diverse groups represented in the province, including a number of Christian groups. The interviewee stresses that in this province, the sectarian divide is less important than ethnic divisions, and that the PRT did have success in reducing these tensions by bringing local leaders together to foster cooperation and to encourage them to talk regularly to resolve problems before they escalated. The PRT was also able to accomplish its goals in planning for the next elections - educating people, establishing the polling places, and putting in place the routines necessary for the provincial government to manage independently. Another notable achievement was the establishment of the Mosul criminal court. In this case, the PRT provided the logistics to transport a team of judges from Baghdad and to house them secularly. The program provided a deterrent effect, and has been replicated in a number of other Iraqi provinces, causing the locals to comment, tellingly, that "justice is back."

According to this interviewee, the Nineveh PRT members were able to move about within the city or province virtually every day. In addition to the 20 member movement team, the PRT consisted of some 20 civil affairs officers as well as a comparatively large contingent of from 20-30 civilians. The civilian contingent included a robust USAID presence, with its implementing partners, with whom he describes very effective coordination and information sharing. Additionally, the PRT had officers from the Departments of Justice and State, under the direction of a State Department team leader and a military deputy. The interviewee praised the excellent PRT leadership he encountered, and stressed that strong and competent leadership was perhaps the single-most important factor in predicting a PRT's success. Military-civilian cooperation and understanding were also excellent, aided by the fact that a number of the PRT civilians, this interviewee included, had served in the military. The balance between long and short-term goals was also worked out satisfactorily. Support from the Office of Provincial Affairs was very solid, especially in providing logistical support to bring high

regional officials and their staffs to Baghdad regularly to meet with national officials. This effort was key to overcoming the "communication gap" between the provincial government and the national government.

This interviewee recommends that State Department training prepare those Foreign Service officers without military background to better understand the military structure and mindset. Some "tactical" training should also be included, including some things which seem elementary, such as how to open and close the various kinds of Humvee doors, but which in a conflict can save your life.

The interviewee also conducted a very active public affairs program, working with large numbers of international and U.S. media, as well as mentoring and providing assistance to local media. The PRT conducted a number of traditional public diplomacy activities as well, such as administering the flagship international visitors program, which was helping to break down some of the cultural barriers among Iraqis.

This interviewee believes that the PRT made a valuable contribution to reporting, complementing that done by the military. In terms of recruitment and training, he believes that the less tangible qualities of being able to take initiative, understanding the stresses to be faced, and being able to make good decisions under pressure were the most important qualifications for PRT members.

In sum, this interviewee views his PRT experience very positively. He believes that the team improved the quality of life for the people in Nineveh and helped move the province toward greater stability and security. Many tangible accomplishments, such as the reopening of the Mosul airport after 14 years, stand out as highlights of his tour.

Interview

Q: Please tell me about the location, the size, and the function or your PRT and Ninawa province.

A: Our provincial reconstruction team in Nineveh was one of the first created in September of 2005; it succeeded another structure that had actually been in place from shortly after things changed in 2003. There has been somewhat of a continuous State Department presence there since 2003.

Our provincial reconstruction team was structured such that there was a senior Foreign Service officer who was the team leader. There was a deputy who was a military person for the entire time I was there, and rotated depending on which military unit was there, typically at the 06 grade, the equivalent of an Army colonel or a Captain for the Navy. We were divided into a number of different sections. The total group comprised about 40 persons, including our military movement team which was a platoon minus of soldiers dispatched from the local battalion that was subordinate to the brigade combat team there, charged with moving our assistance team around the province. We had a number of

civilians that were there, both USAID and USAID implementing partners, Department of Justice personnel. From time to time we had visiting people from the Department of Agriculture or other Departments who would come up.

For the first six months of my tour in Mosul, I was the only Foreign Service officer besides the team leader primarily responsible for political and economic reporting, also responsible for public diplomacy which was actually quite a robust program there. For the second six months, I took over one of the sections that our provincial reconstruction was dividing into, as the section head for the governance section. The PRT is divided into governance, economic, rule of law, and reconstruction sections, and then we have an operations section which is much like the management office in a traditional mission. It was responsible for taking care of all the travel orders and making sure that vehicles were ready to go and things like that.

Q: What was the time period that you were there?

A: I was there between 2006- 2007.

Q: Among the specific missions for your RPT, were there some that your PRT paid more attention to?

A: I think that there were and that we used to have a specific emphasis on assisting the provincial government. As many people know, the embassy spends a large portion of its time devoted to assisting the national government and helping it formulate its structure and policy at that level. Provincial reconstruction teams at the time I was there were focused on assisting the provincial government and also supporting the military. Specifically, our focus was to be at the provincial level assisting with the establishment of more effective governance, implementing various rule of law programs. These programs depended upon the different timeframes we were there, but the goal ultimately was transitioning that provincial government away from an entity which relied on American support toward a self sufficient entity which was capable of administering its governance in total with support from the national government.

Q: Was there a great deal of emphasis on budget preparation and execution of budget?

A: That was definitely one of many aspects that we focused on a great deal. The amount of money coming from the national government to the provincial government was enormous. While I was there, the budget for their infrastructure alone, for the provincial government of Ninawa was in excess of two hundred million dollars, a rather sizeable amount for a provincial size region with approximately 2.3 or 2.4 million people.

One of our big focuses was attempting to help the provincial government make an accountable budget and execute it correctly. One of the ways we did this was to use U.S. government funds as something of a training mechanism where we said, "These funds are available to you. Small amounts of these funds are available for certain projects, for example, working on reconstruction on the airport in Mosul."

The airport had been closed since the mid-1990s. There was a lot of work that needed to be done, so our reconstruction section, which was the section working on the budgets and these sorts of things, spent a great deal of time working with the provincial government and the appropriate officials: it's a varied group, as you might suspect. A lot of actors were involved, and there was definitely a need to ensure that there was transparency and accountability in the execution of these funds.

Our reconstruction section would go and meet with the provincial council, and help to budget, allocate funds, and execute specific projects with American money with Iraqi input, Iraqi consultation, so that they could understand how that process is run, at least in the United States.

We were trying to impress upon many of our Iraqi colleagues at the provincial level the importance of having some mechanism in accordance with their appropriate national laws for the funds that were coming down, that two hundred million dollars and other funds they were having come down as well. In some ways the idea of a provincial council was something of a new concept.

Q: I was going to ask about the different actors that you numerated. Were you inheriting a provincial government structure, with these directors general, for different functions?

A: That's correct. By the time I arrived in 2006 most of the laws that had been laid down, whether it was a transitional administrative law, CPA orders, existing Iraqi law prior to 2003, or the laws that had since been passed by the Iraqi parliament, all these had shaped the structure as it existed in 2006 when I arrived.

We did send our comments back to Embassy Baghdad on another law under proposal, under consideration right now regarding reconstruction under the provincial powers law. When we came in, there was already a structure in place. Most of our work was to help the Iraqis at the provincial level, our colleagues there, understand that structure, and provide efficient and effective methodologies for them to do their work.

Q: It was a new structure for them as well?

A: Some of the positions had existed previously. For example, Mosul traditionally had a governor, sometimes for the entire northern region of Iraq. There is somewhat of a cultural heritage there, having a strong governor-type individual type in Mosul. The idea of a provincial council is very new along with the idea of bringing in minority representation, representation from political parties, and giving those individuals a vote and a say in how funds are allocated. This was a new concept.

In Nineveh where you have such a diversity that not only are you looking at their religion, but there are Sunni Kurds and Shiite Kurds as well. There a number of Christian groups, a variety of confessions of Chaldeans and Assyrians, the Wasit groups that were there. You had some Shabbock. There are an enormous number of different groups

present in Ninawa who all have their political say, and their voice is heard within that provincial council.

I think in some ways Foreign Service officers have the luxury of becoming experts on their country. When people are trying to explain things to Americans or people outside the countries, to divide Iraq into three groups, we have Shiite, Sunnis, and Kurds. At most levels when you look down a little bit lower than that, it seems to be much more complicated than that.

As you know, there are historical reasons for that, but there is a wide variety of groups that are there. Traditionally, throughout Nineveh the division is actually along ethnic lines. It's not along sectarian lines. Whereas in other parts of the country, from what I've read, you might see that there are issues between Sunni and Shiite. For the most part in Nineveh, with the exception primarily of the city of Koaffur, you see that the sectarian divide is not wide but the ethnic divide can sometimes be the primary motivating factor for various groups.

Q: That's probably an important point. Some of the ethnic groups you mentioned, such as the Shabbock, I've never heard of them; is that S-H-A-B-B-O-C-K in English?

A: There are a variety of transliterations.

Q: Then the Chaldeans I've heard of and the Assyrians. These are significant ethnic groups in your province?

A: They are significant minority groups. The two primary groups within Nineveh are first, the Sunni Arabs. Of course, there hasn't been a proper census since 1960, so it's difficult to say exactly what that percentage may be. They are the majority in Ninawa province.

The second largest group, probably about half their size, would be Sunni Kurd. Those are the two major groups. Estimates vary in size, 50% - 60% Sunni Arab and 25% - 30% Sunni Kurd, something around those percentages. Those estimates are probably not too far off. Again, there hasn't been a definitive census in a long time. The rest of the groups are probably, combined, 10% or less, but they are still very important for a variety of reasons. The Turkelmen, for example, in the city of Tall 'Afar. The city of Tall 'Afar, the second largest city in Ninawa province, is primarily Turkelmen, with a percentage above 90% in that city. That city is divided in half both geographically and along sectarian lines. Half the city is Shiite-Turkelmen; half the city is Sunni-Turklemen. Many of the issues that are relevant to Shiites in other parts of the country are relevant to the Shiite-Turkelmen communities in Tall 'Afar. In addition, Turkey maintains some interest in the Turkelmen communities. The city of Tall 'Afar has also played a larger role than one might expect for its relatively small size. The Christian communities I found were culturally very significant and very strong there. While they're somewhat small in size, there's a large heritage there, culturally, historically, so they also get a lot of attention.

Q: This gives us an idea of the ethnic makeup of the province. Was the provincial leadership drawn from these local groups, or were some people brought in from outside?

A: In Nineveh the large majority of the provincial government there was from the province. There are questions about the percentages of Sunni representation because the large majority of Sunnis boycotted the election. There is not the number of Sunnis in power—Sunni-Arabs in power—that you'd expect to see to be provincially representative. But some of the key positions were occupied by local Sunni-Arabs, such as the then governor.

Q: Was he elected?

A: He was elected by the provincial council to replace his relative who was unfortunately killed, who was the previous governor; the governor was elected by the provincial council in a sort of mid-term replacement election, if you will. All the minority groups have some seats on the provincial council. Even though the Sunni-Arabs did boycott the elections, they still managed to pick up a number of seats. I forget the exact number now, four or five seats, were won by the Iraqi Islamic party which represents Sunni-Arab interests both locally and nationally. They hold some number of seats there, a Christian group holds some seats, and the Turkelmen party holds a seat or two.

The majority of the seats are held by the Kurdish Democratic Party—KDP—and the second largest tranche of seats is held by the PUK, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. These are the two strongest, two largest Kurdish political groups in northern Iraq.

Q: Those parties existed before?

A: Those parties have existed for some longer period of time. They became especially active during the 1990's. They are the two dominant parties in what is designated the Kurdish Regional Government Area.

Q: You mentioned that you began your tour largely in a reporting function and then you moved to the governance program. I'm interested to know why there was this shift and what kinds of activities you undertook in governance.

A: There were a number of reasons for the shift, but paramount among them was the fact that tours in Iraq are typically limited to a year, or, as in case of our military colleagues, 15 months. There's a constant rotation in and out. By the time I had been in Ninawa for six months I was one of the longest serving people there. That was very good in terms of continuity of knowledge, of expertise. When the previous governance section chief, who was a very talented, military man with almost 30 years of experience, rotated out, I was able to take his place and to spend about a month and a half, two months transitioning with him. He was really able to pass on all the knowledge that was important, all the important contacts which make those relationships work.

Q: The person you replaced was a military person?

A: Correct. For the first six months I was the only other State Department officer there besides the team leader, so the sections were largely headed by either military officers or senior civilians depending on the expertise that those individuals had.

Q: What was the balance and the relationship between the civilians and the military?

A: Within the PRT, the percentage of civilians and military varied, but typically we had at least a platoon of approximately 25 to 30 soldiers who were assigned to us for our movement, divided between six and eight Humvees. This allowed us to move in teams to go out in the city, go out in the province, which we did. Usually we had two moves out per day. I know that there are questions about mobility in some of the PRTs. We were out every single day. We usually had one day a week where we would have our vehicles in for maintenance and crew rest and things like that. We were out usually eleven to twelve times per week with the two teams.

We also typically had assigned to the PRT and civil affairs team Bravo, a TAC-B team. This is a military contingent of about 20 folks, usually civil affairs, reservists, typically officers who may bring with them important civilian skills. People came in with some Arabic; people came in with a PhD in public policy; we had engineers, usually very task oriented individuals brought in specifically for certain jobs. Although in many cases it turned out that the background expertise wasn't as important as their general qualifications; judgment, initiative and ability to work under stress and things like that seem to be as important if not more important in some cases than the academic qualifications.

We also had a large number of civilians, comparatively large, typically ranging at any one time from 20 to 30 civilians. As I was leaving, there were large numbers of additional civilians coming in. There was a robust USAID presence including a number of USAID implementing partners who lived on the forward operating base with us. As I noted, we had Department of Justice people; we had, of course, all of our bilingual, bicultural advisors, which in Iraq are essentially the PRT's FSNs (Foreign Service nationals). They're not local nationals in the sense that they are local people that were hired in the cities where we're functioning, but in many cases they were Iraqis who left Iraq in the 1980s and the 1999s. They were living abroad either in Sweden, Great Britain, or the United States, and now have chosen to come back. In many cases they have security clearances. They have other valuable skills. For example, when I took over the governance section, I had a USAID implementing partner who was responsible for governance functions, working in the section so that we could obviously be coordinating our efforts. I also had two bilingual, bicultural advisors, one of whom helped in the governance section.

A: This individual worked as an interpreter, and was paid like any other interpreter, but he was also exceptionally talented. He had gone to university in the United States, spoke

much better English than I, for example, and had very, very good, very formal Arabic as well, so that he was capable of translating at an incredible level. I was quite impressed with this gentleman in his mid 20's, who was exceptionally well gifted in his bilingual talents.

Q: The bilingual, bicultural people were also doing interpretation?

A: They were, but that's not their primary duty, and in fact that's specified in their contracts from the various contractors used by both the State Department and the Department of Defense. They're not just interpreters, though there are anecdotal stories about bilingual, bicultural advisors doing that sort of work.

My experience was that all bilingual, bicultural advisors in Ninawa were quite good, and they were all working toward the same goals. We didn't have those sorts of problems. They were functioning as interpreters or whatever other skills they brought, but in many cases that individual was also a PhD in bio-sciences. The bilingual, bicultural advisors working in the reconstruction section had advanced engineering degrees, and had extensive work experience. We had a PhD economist. These are people who understand to a degree beyond what even an expert from the United States, from Great Britain, from Europe can understand about the systems that we were trying to work with. They were incredibly useful, an incredibly great resource for us to have.

Q: You had at any one time two of them on your staff?

A: Within the governance staff, that's correct.

Q: Did you ask them, on a daily basis, to go with you to your meetings? How were they viewed there?

A: They had their own areas of responsibility. One was responsible for maintaining our relationships with the provincial council. The other one was responsible for the high government officials. Those two had their responsibilities fairly well delineated. Of course, they would overlap as well and cover for each other when one went on leave and things like that.

One of the largest strengths was that those two individuals, in my case, had both been there for almost two years, so there was an extensive continuity there. They already knew many of our interlocutors; the relationships were already formed. They were extremely helpful in much the same way that FSNs function at a normal mission to allow me to function effectively.

Q: There was no reason that they would be turning over any time soon?

A: No, we did have some bilingual, bicultural, advisors who chose to change PRT's, for personal reasons. Some had friends or relatives and in some cases spouses in other parts of Iraq, and they wanted to be closer to those people. In some cases, they had already

spent a year or two or three years in Iraq, and it was becoming hard for them to either return to their country of origin or do something else at that point.

For the most part, a lot of the people had extensive tenure there, and were one of our most significant resources.

Q: What kind of development personnel did your PRT have?

A: We usually had at any one time two to three, three to four military personnel assigned to the section from the civil affairs team.

Q: Did they have any sort of special expertise?

A: Yes, though it varies with whomever is available from the units. I would want to emphasize that again, while some of the qualifications on paper were very impressive, in my view it's most important to have individuals who were capable of taking initiative appropriately and understood the stresses they would be facing and were capable of making some good decisions under pressure. Those sorts of people were exceptionally valuable.

Q: I can understand that. In the time you were there what were some of the situations that illustrated this approach, with respect to governance, for example?

A: There were a lot of very positive developments. Of course, there were some developments that still remain challenging for us, and plenty of work for my successors to do. But there were many things that were positive in governance there. Specifically, we were able to work on bringing a lot of minorities together, a lot on budget execution, and on provincial reconstruction. We were also working on a lot of issues with rule of law. One of the big projects we focused on while we were there was helping to establish the Mosul criminal court.

We worked on various emergency planning procedures, and worked with our military partners at the brigade combat team on improving the effectiveness of interaction between the central government and the security forces, to better manage the security forces. There were a large number of things going on.

We had one individual in our governance team who was preparing for the next set of elections already before they had been announced. They have been announced now, but a year and a half ago we had already started planning for the next set, educating people, establishing the polling places, working the set-up systems so that it could effectively be a much easier and more transparent exercise, so the next time it happens it will be easily manageable by the provincial government.

Q: That sounds like a good idea because the populous wasn't really in the habit of elections. You mentioned the Mosul criminal court. Could you elaborate? It sounds like a concrete achievement.

A: This is one of the most, in my view, important projects in Iraq. It made the Washington Post several times. It's one of the things when you talk to local Iraqis they would specifically tell you about. In this instance, it resulted from the work of a combination of individuals in the rule of law section, an incredibly talented Department of Justice individual, and an officer from the U.S. Navy who was also incredibly talented.

I had seen a similar system work in other countries; here they would bring judges from Baghdad up to Mosul to try terrorism cases. In many cases, we were finding that there was an unusually low conviction rate because of the threats to judges. Our work was simply to facilitate the logistics of transporting a team of judges from Baghdad up to Mosul and then ensuring that they were housed in a secure compound; the judges themselves ran their own trials. We didn't need to deal with that at all. It was an Iraqi process from the beginning to today. The conviction rates went back to what the historical mark suggests it should be. There were all these jokes about why you didn't get 100%. They said: "yes, of course, it wouldn't be much of a justice system."

They went back up to, in our view, an acceptable level. I know that this was one of those things where, as I noted before, you would talk to Iraqis and they would say, "Justice is back." This was very tangible, and you would hear stories about insurgents being very afraid because the Iraqi judges from Baghdad were not afraid to try the case and if the defendant was found guilty, the judge would issue appropriate sentences. They were not all life sentences. There were many cases where somebody who had facilitated some sort of crime would get a five year sentence or three year sentence, but there started to be an effect. A prevention effect was seen.

Q: A deterrent.

A: A deterrent effect, thank you. A deterrent was seen by the local population. This model has since been replicated in a number of other provinces in Iraq, where it has been incredibly successful.

Q: It is interesting that the Iraqis commented that local justice was back. Apparently there was a functioning justice system in this area before?.

A: There was a functioning civil justice system when I was there. I was not in the rule of law section, but I spent a great deal of time working with all the sections, of course, being responsible for the provincial government and governance. We interacted with pretty much everyone else, pretty much all the other actors whether it was in the PRT or the United Nations or NGO's or the military partners that were there. One of the things they talked about was the civil court system continuing to function there, in a fairly effective way. Iraqis were suing each other over various things, such as land disputes. That system continued to function quite well. It was the major crimes court that was having a lot of problems, specifically because of the terrorist groups.

Q: I'll come back to that in a moment, but first I wanted to ask about your PRT organizationally. You had both a PRT leader and deputy team leader.. How would you describe the effectiveness of the leadership of your team?

A: I have to say I was exceptionally fortunate. We benefited from extraordinarily strong leadership the entire time I was there, and that is, in my view, probably the one factor that will determine success for a provincial reconstruction team, the strength of its leadership. I had the opportunity to work with two different senior foreign service officers there, both very experienced. Both had prior experience as deputy chiefs of mission or, in one case, principal officer; they had long experience and understanding of how to manage in difficult situations.

I was impressed by our leadership and, again, I cannot emphasize enough how important it is that we continue to send very strong senior foreign service leaders out there to really move those PRT's forward.

The deputies were also quite good. We got some very good officers. We got an incredible colonel from a top unit who was very effective in managing all of our resources and was able to really cement our relationship with our military partners up there and really facilitate all the work very effectively. I was impressed on every point with our leadership there.

Q: Did you experience any of the tension that I understand exists sometimes between the military approach, generalizing, which was to say, "We have to get certain things done, using high impact programs. We have to put these unemployed people to work so they are not attacking us," vs. what is traditionally thought of as the State Department's long term view, with more of a focus on development, giving micro grants that will eventually lead to businesses that have a future and create employment in the long term. Did that scenario apply to your experience?

A: I think it's an important point you bring up. First of all, one of the things I would say about provincial reconstruction teams is that one of the functions was to find that balance between what is traditionally associated with embassies' long term view of a state and what is sometimes described as the very short term goal of job creation within a month, within a year.

Part of the work of a PRT is to bring those two approaches together and really to do some of both in many cases. To move toward the long term objective you need to do some short term things. In many cases, some of the short term projects made some sense, but needed to be viewed a bit from afar to see what sort of consequences they would have for such things as reinforcing legitimacy or the local provincial government's ability to govern.

Specifically, with regard to the relationship with the military, our PRT had a fantastic relationship with the military and I had a fantastic relationship with all the military people. Some part of that is due to my previous military experience, which was

incredibly useful for me. That was one of the things I always mentioned after returning from Iraq as something that makes officers successful in Iraq.

I think my military experience was very helpful from a tactical standpoint, knowing how to use the doors on a Humvee and things like that, which can be somewhat complicated, but also from a more abstract standpoint, in that I had a good understanding of the military mindset, of what their goals and objectives were, of the way that they are structured. For example, it was much easier for me to walk into a military unit and ask where the EF-6 is because I have a communications problem, and go directly to that individual, knowing the appropriate level.

Sometimes it sounds corny, but knowing the difference between a corporal and a colonel can be incredibly important. Sometimes that wasn't the case with all of our foreign service colleagues within the PRT. One of our senior foreign service officers had also served in the military. A number of our civilians had served in the military before, so I think that contributed to the very strong relationship that we had with the military there. We saw ourselves as partners, and we had a very close working relationship with the military there.

Q: How many years had you spent in the military?

A: I was in the active duty Marine Corps for six years.

Q: That's a significant amount of time, and good preparation for this kind of assignment. I would agree. Your military colleagues would find it easy to talk to you, too.

A: I was able to speak the same language, if you will, in many cases. My military time was more helpful to me than the year I spent studying Arabic.

Q: Does the training they provide for people going to PRTs include a module for those who have no prior service in the military?

A: I have talked with the trainers who are involved with the course now. When I went through it, it was, I think, still a bit of a transition period. I went through the traditional crash course which was very good, but I have spoken with the organizers about possibly adding some training. I understand that has been done since. While I was in Iraq there were additional training courses that were added that I think have been very effective.

I've also specifically talked about focusing on some of the military aspects that I think sometimes some of our foreign service colleagues are not necessarily prepared for: the military mindset, the structure of the military, what to expect, and then some of the basic things. For example, how to open and close a Humvee door, which may sound incredibly trivial back here in the United States, but when you're in a conflict, very basic things like that can be very important.

Q: How long would it take me to learn to open and close a Humvee door?

A: Not very long. A simple demonstration of a few minutes. There are a number of different armored Humvee doors, three or four different current types doors and door locks. There are various different types of medical kits, different kinds of radios, and other equipment that you would expect to be in contact with on a day to day basis.

Firearms training I don't think is particularly relevant for the most part. Most of the time, certainly all the time you are there, you have some sort of protective detail with you, so it wasn't relevant for me. Other training, such as the training about how to use radios, the training about proper safety procedures, that sort of training is critical. Some of that can be done when you get to the PRT or the particular unit you're located with, but I don't think it would hurt to have some of that happen back here.

Q: The military mindset, I think that would be very important. How long do you think it would require to clue foreign service officers into that?

A: I don't know. I think that would be something I would definitely refer to our colleagues in the training Department. I think at least some exposure, perhaps even an afternoon, could be incredibly helpful. I know that when the military brings the reservists back on deck, they need to have a long period where they reorient them to everything. While the duties of a foreign service officer are not going to include combat, they are going to require usage of some skills that would previously be associated with the military.

Q: I think you made some important suggestions about the length and content of pre departure training. You also alluded to the threat that you faced in your province. Could you characterize that a little more precisely?

A: I think that there were security difficulties within the province, but I also think it's important to properly assess the risk/reward ratio. While it was a challenging environment, it was very important for us to not find ourselves confined to the forward operating base out of a sense of fear or concern for safety. In those instances where there were certain threats or danger of a particularly elevated nature, we would take that particularly seriously.

This work is being done in a conflict zone, and there will always be some level of violence or some level of threat in the region. Part of the reason we were there—that I was there—was to help people, and if you're not actually out in the province, it's very difficult to do that. As I tell people, I stopped counting when I had 200 moves off the forward operating base. We got out all the time. Our team was out every single day. There were difficult times as part of that.

Q: Which group or groups were behind the threat that you faced?

A: There are some difficulties that fall along ethnic lines as well. That was true during the time that I was there. One of the things we would caution people about was the speed

with which things change in Iraq. The problems that I faced are not necessarily the problems that are faced now.

For example, when I was there we always used to talk about our colleagues in Anbar being in somewhat of a difficult situation. That has changed quite precipitously to an entirely different situation. Similar problems have happened in Mosul as well. The situation was very difficult at the end of 2004 in Mosul. Security and control of the city were reestablished in late 2004, 2005. It depends on when you were there what the forces against you were.

Q: When we think about insurgents, that may be a very loose term and may encompass the different manifestations that you mentioned. They could even be criminals who we are calling insurgents because of their activities.

A: That's one of the big complications in Iraq in that every province has its own unique set of factors that influence it. For example, I know that in other provinces the tribal engagement strategy has been particularly effective. In Ninawa you're unlikely to see a significant gain from such a strategy simply because the tribes, at least in the Mosul area, are not strong the way they are in other areas.

Some of the programs that are focused in Baghdad on bridging the sectarian division between Sunni and Shiite don't make a lot of sense in Mosul, where the city is predominantly Sunni and the divisions tend to fall along ethnic lines. It tends to be that every province has a completely different set of circumstances, for better or for worse. Within Nineveh, there are specific groups that need to be addressed; some, in my view, were criminal when I was there, although there are many other groups as well. Obviously, there's an active insurgent group there specifically targeting coalition forces.

Q: Was part of your mandate then to try to bridge some of these ethnic divisions?

A: Typically, the way that mandate was structured is that cables and directives would come down from the U.S. embassy, indicating our goal was to try to empower local leaders to bring various groups together to work out their differences. I had some success in doing some of these things.

For example, I know that as my time in Ninawa was drawing to a close we had the senior Sunni-Arab political leader talking to senior Kurdish political leaders on the phone at least three, four times a week. This practice was able to diffuse and resolve many situations that otherwise would have escalated out of control. In some cases, for instance, you'd find a farmer had wandered onto another farmer's territory and perhaps a sheep got killed. That could easily escalate into an ethnic disagreement but because these two individuals were very committed to reducing tensions, we saw some very impressive gains in that direction. I would emphasize that to see very significant gains in Ninawa, I think the thing that we'd be looking for is provincial elections.

Q: What means did you use to bring these leaders together – did you simply meet with them separately and then facilitate a meeting between them?

A: We did that. We would host various conferences, or lunches to bring these individuals together. In cases where we found out about an incident, such as the farmer who had a sheep killed, at that point we immediately called both individuals and asked them to please contact their constituents and ask them to please remain calm and assist the Iraqi security forces working in that sort of capacity. Although security is not our primary motive, that's really the focus of the brigade combat team, in those areas where we could help politically to stabilize the situation, we did it as much as we could.

Q: Were there other organizations, perhaps, working in your area as well? I'm thinking of NGO's and one that has been specifically mentioned to ask about is RTI, one of the main AID implementing partners. What was your experience with those groups?

A: I had a very good experience with all the USAID implementing partners. We had, I want to say, three or four different USAID implementing partners present. RTI was one, because one of USAID's RTI individuals worked in my governance section and I worked very closely with that person. Obviously, their governance programs and what we were trying to do for the embassy were very similar, and in many cases we had a great deal of overlap in programs.

It was very nice having that person living in the same compound, living in the same building and, in my case, working in the same office. We were able to share information, coordinate our efforts; we went to meetings together, and that was incredibly useful to me. The time while I was in Ninawa was helpful, and their programs I think were very helpful for the provincial government..

Q: Were you able to be complementary rather than overlapping?

A: There was some amount of overlap, as I think it would be fair to say there would be in any case where you have more than one agency, more than one Department working on an issue, but we were able to limit that overlap and effectively coordinate our resources.

Q: It helps that you were right there. You were talking to them…

A: Every day.

Q: You knew what they were doing…

A: Exactly.

Q: …and they knew what you were doing?

A: We'd talk about it; in these sorts of missions when you take a Humvee out into the province of Mosul, you have to coordinate that some time in advance. The ability to sit down with our implementing partner and talk to him and say, "Here's what I'm planning on doing. I'm trying to go to meet with the provincial council to discuss various issues that might be coming up, provincial elections. We want to talk about different strategies." He would say, "Oh, that's very good. I've been wanting to do that. I haven't had time to do it. This is what my RTI contractors who are local Iraqis have already done. Here's what I think we should address when we go out there, issues we should reinforce, things we should focus on," and we would talk back and forth, much more of a dialogue than anything else.

Q: What were the other AID implementing partners that you worked with?

A: I forget the exact names. Several of them were under the local governance program, the LGP program. Perhaps IRD (International Relief and Development) was one of them. There's another one as well, which did an exceptional job. USAID has been traditionally more focused on longer term programs, but as we were talking about before, some of the efforts were to bridge these ethnic divides. One of the immediate effect programs, one of the LGPs was to start a youth sports league. This was an incredible success in the Ninawa province, with several thousands of students in the summer that I was there playing soccer. I want to say the number was five to seven thousand students in a youth soccer league; getting those children out, specifically the teenage ones, getting them out away from some of the more negative influences in their life and moving them toward something more productive and perhaps keeping them out of trouble.

Q: They did that by bringing in coaches and equipment and…

A: They brought in, of course, soccer balls, nets, and things like that. They also brought in an administrative structure to run that size of a tournament; a league all summer was fairly impressive. They worked through local Iraqi NGO's and associations, and they were able to do it successfully. There was a very good story which actually came out when we were there about being able to organize a soccer game between a Sunni team in Qafrayh, and a Shiite team in Qufrah. They completely forget about sectarian divisions. They were able to play, shake hands. Everyone was having a great time and just playing soccer. We were very careful to never advertise it as an American program, which I think is somewhat different from some of the things that go on with USAID's other programs, with goods usually branded "from the American people" and that sort of thing. In this instance, these efforts were traditionally marketed as things a provincial government wanted to do as a way of reinforcing their legitimacy and working with the district governments as well, the governments the people see every day,. We were really trying to help our local military and teams that were working with the mayors of various cities on a daily basis, helping them reinforce legitimacy of the provincial government as well.

Q: It calls to mind the idea of public affairs and public relations. What kind of public affairs program did you have?

A: I was the public affairs, public policy officer for the first tranche of time that I was there. I would say approximately the first nine months or so I was in that role.

I was replaced by three foreign service officers which I think is fantastic. There is enough work to go around. I was very lucky to be replaced by some talented people.

Q: Three foreign service officers?

A: They were very talented individuals; I've been very impressed to see the work they've continued doing. One of those individuals specifically was a public policy person. She and I have talked extensively about some of the things we were able to do there, including our relationship with the international media.

We hosted large numbers of international television correspondents and print media correspondents, for example with The L. A. Times and The New Yorker. The History Channel imbedded with us for periods of up to two weeks. CNN, BBC, the Boston Globe, The Daily Telegraph, all the way from large, major organizations down to small electronic bloggers whom I'd never heard of. We had a fairly constant flow of those individuals.

One of our key points was to ensure that those individuals had the chance to accompany us out, see what Iraqi life was like, not necessarily going out with soldiers on combat patrol every day but see what a daily Iraqi life was like, talk to other people in the provincial government about their concerns, their issues, and their take. I think that was very helpful in terms of shaping some of the press coverage that came out of Mosul. The story is not just the military conflict. That exists, but there are a lot of other things going on as well.

We also spent a large amount of time working with the local Iraqi media, both mentoring and providing assistance. We also provided them with an opportunity to interview our senior foreign service team leader. Typically, about once a month, in coordination with the press office at the embassy, and also with the military public affairs detachment on our forward operating base, which could offer all kinds of services and had all sorts of capabilities, we would typically join forces with them and go out into the city.

We would host interviews in the city, with local reporters from mobile stations such as Al Mosulia or Al Baghdad Dia. One gentleman was from Al Purr. There was a Chinese news agency stringer who was there. Typically, between 10 to 12 local Iraqis would come in and interview the team leader about various things and get his perspective on what our role was there, how we were working with the provincial governments, etc. We also held joint press conferences with provincial government officials, talking about how we were able to provide some synergy between our efforts and their efforts and what we were doing.

We also focused a lot on other traditional public diplomacy activities, trying to establish an American Corner, supplied with materials about the United States, there. I know some

of the other provincial reconstruction teams were able to do that. During my tenure, we were not able to establish an American Corner in Mosul.

We laid some of the ground work. We went out to the Mosul Public Library. We were able to set up an English language teaching program there. There had been a prior military grant of computers to that facility. We were able to run a number of programs out of there, such as the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) exam which was publicly announced on TV. We had to turn away people because there were so many. That started while we were there. Then we also began an international visitor program as well, a rather robust one.

Q: How many visitors did you send to the United States under that program?

A: I think while I was there we had a number in the pipeline. One of the big problems was there was a shift in the type of passports, so there was a bit of a problem, a bit of a glitch there. I want to say we ended up nominating 15, I think, and we sent five or six while I was there, five or six who actually travelled before I left. The international visitor program has somewhat of a delay from the time people are nominated until they travel.

We also supported a number of international visitors that had been nominated before I got there.

Q: In a year you probably saw half a dozen international visitors travel?

A: I think that would be fair depending on various conditions. There were a lot of issues with Baghdad, which has the only passport office capable of issuing a G- Series passport. The older S-series passports for Iraqis are no longer authorized for travel to the United States. These individuals have to go from Mosul down to Baghdad to get re-issued new passports then come back up. In some cases, it is very difficult.

Q: Would they get their visa while they were in Baghdad?

A: Sometimes that was possible; sometimes it would necessitate an additional trip, unfortunately. There were a lot of logistical difficulties that I think are still being worked out. I know that our colleagues back in Baghdad are working very hard on that specific issue because there are a lot of questions about how can we do that. As I was leaving or a few months before I was leaving, there was a cable that came out noting that we can help facilitate some of that shipping back and forth, but it still remains somewhat difficult. Movement, of course, in Iraq is one of the more difficult things.

Q: Did you think it was not too hard to choose good international visitor candidates?

A: It was very difficult in the sense that we had an enormous number of people to choose from. One of the benefits to me in Mosul is the incredibly educated populous. The University of Mosul with 35,000 is so very active, and we actually did some programs with them.. We helped shape the health and education section. That was being

established as I was leaving, but specifically we worked with the university on health issues and hospitals and things like that. One of the things I was definitely very proud of was I was meeting with the dean of the university, with a number of the professors, relying on some of my academic background to make some of those bridges with those individuals. That was a very large group of individuals who were of a certain age and it is important to ensure that they have an appropriate occupation. You find ways to keep them effectively employed and to make sure the unemployment numbers for university graduates were not getting too high.

We worked with an enormous number of talented individuals on programs with the press. We also sent a number of the mayors below the provincial level out on the international visitor program. One who had been sent out by my predecessor came in and showed me his international visitors itinerary. It was very impressive. Those who have been on the program talk about it amongst themselves. It is a very effective tool, I think, in terms of helping overcome some of the cultural differences.

I think many Iraqis who got to go to the United States and have come back and now spend a lot of their time engaging with either the U.S. military or U.S. civilians find it much easier to relate. In many cases, they have a bit stronger grasp of the idea of what the United States is like if they hadn't already traveled there in the past.

Q: You mean the Iraqis weren't afraid to accept these invitations?

A: No.

Q: None felt they had to decline the invitation because it was dangerous?

A: No. We ran into a few issues, which I think would be more associated with the region broadly than with Iraq specifically. We had, for example, a very conservative woman who refused to go without her husband. Issues along those lines. But no, where we found candidates and were able to extend the offer, they were pretty much uniformly excited. We didn't have any problems with them overstaying their time. They all came back and were very happy to have experienced that time and to continue to collaborate with us closely. It has been a very effective program for us.

We also were doing a lot of the scholarship programs..

Q: It sounds like you had a full public affairs program and yet you were running it all by yourself with your local FSN equivalent. At the same time, you were also working with the press; did you have many international press to take care of? Did you feel you were over extended?

A: I would say in my days in Iraq one of the most difficult things, aside from it being obviously an unaccompanied tour, were the hours and intensity of work. People often say, "Oh, the danger!" That was a factor, but I think that the incredibly long hours that I ended up working were certainly one of the most challenging things for me while I was

there. It was seven days a week of work, with somewhat of a respite on Fridays usually, because our leadership was astute enough to say you can't work these kinds of hours seven days a week. There was an incredible amount of work to be done, and I think everyone who came to the PRT realized that and was able to contribute a great deal. There was no shortage of projects or things to be done there.

The only limits we had were the ability to get out. In some ways we were the victims of our success, and as we were able to get out more and more, we got more and more of a civilian presence. It became more and more difficult for all of us to get out all the time because we only had the two movement teams. That's going to be one of the balances that has to be struck in the future, how we can provide the appropriate movement assets with the appropriate security to get as many people out as possible. While you have to balance the risk and reward, you also have to balance whose mission on a particular day is more important, and that sometimes can be very difficult and very frustrating for some people.

Q: Did I understand correctly that your movement team was 20 to 30 people to provide security?

A: For the entire team. That's correct.

Q: The people who were being escorted would number four or five?

A: Typically no more than six. It depends on a number of factors. The structure of the vehicle you're working with. For example, for some portion of the time that we were assigned to the Forward Operating Base Merez, which is where the provincial reconstruction team was the whole time I was there, one of the military units had Strykers. These are large armored personnel carriers capable of carrying more people. It's a different configuration. When we transitioned to the second military unit there, their primary asset in terms of what we would be using was the Humvee, so that would typically restrict us. If we took out three or four Humvees, the driver and the control officer for that vehicle and the gunner are all military, and then there are usually two seats in the back of each Humvee. So between five and seven seats were occupied by the military, because you also need a space for a medic in there as well.

Q: It sounds like it would have been better if you'd had more of the Strykers.

A: I depends. I think many people in the military would agree with you on that. There's certainly something of a transition toward Strykers. They are an armored personnel sort of vehicle, so that can be somewhat difficult because I know there's a shortage of them overall in the Army. It's one of the challenges. We were supported, I would say, exceptionally, by the brigade on our Forward Operating Base, approximately 4,000 men and women.

Also, we had a Forward Division there as well, and the general who was there was incredibly supportive, as was the Division itself down south in Salah Ad Din; all were

supportive of our efforts, but they also needed to manage their resources as well and they were not free to give us every resource they had although in many cases they bent over backwards to give us everything they possibly could. I would say we had an incredibly close working relationship with the military and in certain instances when we needed aerial assets, when we needed helicopters after some of these suicide bombings, for example, in some of the far reaches of the province, we got them. It was important, for instance, to take the governor out there for him to physically to be present and really establish that the government was there and that he cared about the local people and that a response was coming, so we would get those assets.

Q: Did you have guidance and to some degree instructions from the embassy, specifically from the provincial affairs office?

A: That is correct now.

Q: While you were there, it was the National Coordinating Team?

A: That's correct.

Q: Either way, how would you describe the relationship?

A: I think it's something of an unusual relationship for an embassy. In many ways with a provincial reconstruction team the size that ours was, it is almost like having constituent posts. I think in most respects the relationship was a very effective one, though there were certainly some issues.

For example, when I was responsible for the political and economic reporting, that guidance tended to come through the political and economic section via the provincial team leader. That made a lot more sense in many ways than trying to coordinate our reporting with what Baghdad was doing and have a strategic plan that fit in with the appropriate needs and requirements of the mission in Baghdad.

Q: Could your reporting be shared with the military, or would it be just for the State Department?

A: Certainly. When we were doing our reporting, I always cautioned my successors that it was important that we provide the State Department perspective because there was an enormous amount of reporting going on by various military units there. One of the things I think the State Department does very well is provide a sense of the trends, the atmosphere, a picture for those either in Baghdad or back in Washington who don't have the chance to see what life in Mosul is like, really provide a snapshot of particular issues of importance, particular areas that need to be focused on, and really talk about those in a way that's somewhat different from military reporting. I think it's very important, and we always found it to be the case, to share all of our cable traffic with the commanders of the brigades, the battalions, the divisions, the senior leadership; we circulated our reporting among them not necessarily for clearance but in many cases for concurrence. If they

disagreed on something, it might be cause for us to go back and review why we were saying what we were saying. In many cases, they would do the same for us as well, saying, "Here's a typical kind of reporting that we're going to be sending back. Do you agree with the assessments made here. If not, why would you disagree?" All of our reporting was individual, original, and independent, but I think we were able to find that balance fairly well and to be fairly effective in the issues we focused on.

Q: You didn't find the guidance from Baghdad too confining? Was it helpful?

A: No, certainly I think in the political section it was very helpful in a lot of ways. Sometimes simply by the fact that Iraq has 18 separate provinces with all their individual characteristics means that not every question or reporting plan point would necessarily correspond to us. The questions about Shiite militias, for example, was not particularly relevant in Nineveh but, of course, there are other things that were more relevant to us. I think our team leader and the appropriate section heads down in Baghdad were able to iron that out in a fairly clear way. We did have a good working relationship with everyone there.

During the time I was there, the National Coordination Team and later the Office of Provincial Affairs was a separate organization, and it was able to provide a very, very solid logistical support. They were able to help us very effectively. For instance, in concert with the military division , they were able to arrange to bring the governor and some of his staff down to Baghdad on a regular basis, to have them meet with the national government, with the Department minister, deputy prime minister, ministers of Defense and others. That was very, very effective, and I'm told now that we actually have some of the Ministers reciprocally visiting up in Mosul. They've been able to establish that working relationship again which is one of the biggest problems that the Ninawa government had when I was there, the existence of something of a gap in communication between the provincial government and national government.

Q: It seems that one of the PRT's most appreciated functions was just being able to get the local leaders in touch with their national leaders?

A: That's one of the things we were trying to help them establish for themselves; while we would provide the transportation, we were trying to move away from that. You can do it a few times but then they become very reliant on what we're doing to establish that relationship. I think there have been some significant strides in a positive direction in terms of strengthening support from the national government for the provincial government and also from the provincial government down to the local level.

That's an area we focused on a great deal. In fact, the PRT in Ninawa has two smaller teams we call district liaison teams now that go out to the other Forward Operating Bases or farther out into the province to reinforce our efforts farther away from the main city and push some of the things we were able to assist the provincial government with out to the district governments and sub-district governments, to really support the people on the ground.

Q: Those people are part of the PRT ?

A: They are part of PRT, yes. It was a concept that came up around the same time the PRT concept came up. It's something that we worked on with our military colleagues there in the province, as well as with the embassy. It's been very effective in much the same way as the ePRT's have been very effective in sort of pushing out the work of the PRT's to some of the more distant reaches of the province.

Q: Just to sum up, do you have any suggestions that we haven't covered that you think would make the PRT's better and how would you evaluate the extent to which you were able to accomplish your mission?

A: I would say I'm very satisfied with my time there. It was challenging personally, professionally, very busy as I noted, an intense experience on a wide front. I also feel that I was able to make a tangible difference, that our team was able to very effectively improve the quality of life for the people in Nineveh and move the province somewhat toward stability and security. There were a lot of tangible things, the airport opening up for the first time in 13, 14 years, for example, that were a pleasure to see. There were also difficult things, of course, in a conflict zone. People ask if I knew then what I know now, would I serve again? Absolutely.

The one thing I would reiterate again is the importance of very strong senior leadership. I don't think that that can be overstated because there are challenges that any mission will face, any constituent post, but I think one of the true lessons that we had while we were in Iraq was very strong, incredibly competent leadership, that was able to work through those issues as they arose and was able to effectively manage an 80-person organization. I think this is an impressive task in and of itself, but all the more so in a conflict zone, especially when you're dealing with all the inter-agency implications that you have along with the close working relationship with the military.

Q: In ten years you will be a senior leader. Would you like to go back and lead one of the PRT's?

A: I would certainly consider it. I think this is a question many foreign service officers will face in the next 10, 15 years. For me, the primary consideration, again, I think would be that it's an unaccompanied tour. It's not a question of whether I think the work is worthwhile or whether there is danger there. That's the case, but there's important work for us to do and it's our job. It's a question in some ways that I think will have to be weighed and balanced with the family situation. I can envision an instance in the future where I find myself if not in Iraq, in another conflict zone at some point in the future doing similar types of work, wearing a suit again out there with the people and trying to make it a better place.

Q: I want to thank you very much for your time. You've covered an enormous amount of ground, and I appreciate your willingness to share your observations, which I think will

be quite helpful for those trying to draw together a number of lessons learned. Thanks again.

A: Thank you for having me, and I'm more than willing to answer any questions or further inquiries you may have.