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INTERVIEW #51

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Executive Summary

Interviewee was assigned to the Ninawa PRT. Was a military reservist, and volunteered to be recalled to active duty. Served as deputy team leader in the PRT between 2007 and 2008.

Some 55 PRT members lived on the PRT compound, which was located on an FOB. That number grew to about 80 by early 2008.

The compound and FOB were quite large. Ninawa PRT was the first in Iraq, established in late 2005. Its main mission was to guide governance and economic work, previously managed by the military.

The National Coordination Team became the Office of Provincial Affairs in 2006.

Interviewee traveled to Baghdad mostly by air. Ninawa had a large airstrip and regular flights to and from Baghdad.

Served under two team leaders, both senior foreign service officers. One had both military and USAID background. Both were competent and fit for the assignment.

Along with the military surge there was a PRT surge in 2006. State Department personnel increased, and so did 31-61 contractors. Organized across departments, with sections for governance, economics, education, medical, rule of law, USAID.

There were problems with stovepiping internal to the PRT organization, especially between USAID and State Department people. Also outside the PRT. It was not always clear that the PRT was on board with the brigade combat team's goals. Stovepiping was due mostly to lack of communication.

Within the PRT, relationships were fairly good, although there was room for improvement. It was a challenge to get departments to work together.

Tour of duty should be at least one year, with opportunity to extend.

Security situation was fluid, ranging from almost no threat to serious threat. Traveled out

with military security. Upon arrival at the destination, local Iraqi security contingent came on. Because of the security situation, we were not able to travel enough.

Interviewee was responsible for the operations and security planning and administration of the PRT, so got out less than others. When PRT team leader was otherwise occupied, I represented him in meetings with local officials.

Public diplomacy people did not have journalism backgrounds but were able to serve as liaisons to various programs managed from Baghdad. At times they worked with embedded reporters, sometimes with Iraqi journalists. Worked with counterparts on the brigade combat team.

Counter-insurgency. Not sure counter-insurgency efforts were effective. Aim was to connect with legitimate political leaders.

USAID was trying to identify key legitimate business and agricultural officials and ways to share information, to introduce technology and the concept of farmers' cooperatives. Ninawa was considered the breadbasket for Iraq. Agriculture experts had a good idea of what needed to be done in Ninawa, but were not able to act on that, partly due to scope of the job. Partly due to security issues.

Governance and democracy: A major part of the effort was working with the high government officials.

Interviewee was not impressed by the work of RTI, during my time there. Achievement not evident. For example, failure to deliver a strategic provincial plan. Also failed to conduct consistent level of outreach, in the capital and across entire province.

Civil affairs. The PRT had a detachment of civil affairs soldiers, but their efforts or responsibilities really didn't cover reconstruction efforts. The agency or the principal who did have a civil affairs office working reconstruction was the brigade combat commander, not the PRT.

Rule of law:

The Ninawa PRT I think was distinguished in that Ninawa province was the first province to employ this idea of traveling judges. PRT was effective in doing that. The rule of law person was effective in meeting and introducing himself to all of the judges. He was well connected. Ahead of his counterparts in other PRTs.

Achievements of the PRT:

Helped set up farmer cooperatives

Helped the provincial government extend its level of communications with the central government.

USAID program for the populace -- youth sports programs, youth education programs.

Probably the most successful PRT in theater, in terms of the number of people that it was able to touch or get involved in these programs.

There is room for improvement in all areas of PRT mission. Still, the PRT is an effective structure. Should become less an instrument of State Department and more of USAID.

Training. Went to US Army civil affairs officer school. Training for PRT consisted of going down to Baghdad, looking at the organization chart for what was then NCT, and just introducing myself to as many people as I could.

Lessons learned.

Training for PRTs could be improved. OPA should interview and debrief departing PRT team members to capture feedback.

Never saw sort of information-sharing or good communications channel among PRTs themselves. Each province had its own PRT. And they did not communicate. This should be corrected: Should share best practices, ideas, should try partnering efforts among PRTs. Just get together and talk.

Need better communication could also exist between the military commander and the PRT.

Need better communication between OPA and its military equivalent in Baghdad, be it Multinational Corps Iraq or Multinational Forces Iraq.

Interview

Q: Were you with a PRT?

A: I was assigned to the Ninawa PRT, which was responsible for Ninawa province.

Q: How large was that PRT?

A: When I arrived the PRT was approximately 55 persons, the number of individuals that actually lived on the PRT compound.

Q: Was that a military base, or near the embassy?

A: This was co-located on a forward operating base, FOB. When I arrived, the count of individuals actually living on the PRT compound was probably 55. By the time that I left, it was approximately 80 - 82 personnel.

The compound itself was fairly large. It was built specifically to accommodate the PRT. The FOB on which it was located was very large.

Q: What was the particular mission of that PRT? How long had it been in existence when

you arrived?

A: The Ninawa PRT was actually the first PRT commissioned in Iraq. We're talking about late 2005, if I remember correctly.

Q: And what was its stated mission?

A: The PRT mission was to take over the lines of operation in governance and economics. In other words, what was previously primarily assigned to the military commander, the PRT was established to take over the lines of operation in governance and economics and other collateral missions, as well.

Q: Could you describe the PRT's relationship with the Provincial Affairs Office, or the other U.S. units, the NCT, the embassy and the military commands?

A: The OPA, or Office of Provincial Affairs, and NCT were really the same organization, just at different times. So at one point the agency located out of Baghdad in charge of all PRTs was the NCT and sometime around early calendar year 2006 NCT became the Office of Provincial Affairs.

Q: How far were you from the embassy in Baghdad? Was it a trip that you could make easily, or not?

A: Well, in terms of number of miles it was approximately 230 miles.

Q: So you didn't go there frequently?

A: Well, no. I was down there several times, but I was never traveling by land, I was traveling by air. One advantage that the PRT had up in Ninawa is that it had a fairly large airstrip with regular rotation of aircraft and helicopters flying from Mosul down to Baghdad and Baghdad back. Traveling by air wasn't easy, but you always had some asset or some means of getting down to Baghdad.

Q: You were in a military capacity there, is that correct?

A: That's correct. I was a Navy reservist, volunteered to be recalled to active duty.

Q: And what was your specialty?

A: I really didn't have a specialty *per se*, but I was the deputy, I was the second in command, serving under the PRT leader.

Q: And the leader was a State Department person?

SEBASTY: That's correct, Foreign Service Officer.

Q: Some of the other folks who have described the organization mentioned problems when, for example, you have a relatively young State Department person in command with a very experienced military person as deputy. Was there any issue like that in your PRT?

A: Not with the PRT leader. While I was there, there were two PRT leaders and both were senior officers. One had had USAID as well as military experience as part of their resume. I'm guessing this person probably had 20 years-plus in the State Department. The same could be said for the second PRT leader that I served under, again, a senior Foreign Service Officer and I'm guessing at least 20 years.

Q: So it sounds as if they were both quite competent. Is that your perception?

A: I would say both were competent and fit for their assignments.

Q: What about the organization itself, absent personalities? Were you satisfied with the way the PRTs are organized, with usually a diplomatic person in charge, then a military and then a varying number of contractors and other folks doing specific jobs underneath them?

A: That's kind of a hard question. Again, I saw a lot of growth while I was there. So the PRT went from somewhere in the mid-50s up to the low 80s while I was there.

The PRT had actually conducted what it considered its surge, or what the State Department considered its surge to be, in 2006. So when I arrived there were two or three State Department officers that were there. It went from three upwards to five State Department officers and not only did it go from three to five but it also brought on another five to six State Department contractors, I think 31-61 was the term.

Q: So it really grew while you were there.

A: Yeah, it really grew, but to answer your question, the way that the PRT was organized, it was organized across departments (sections). So there was a governance department, an economics department, an education/medical department, rule of law department. Of course there was the USAID department, but that was really linked across those other lines, those other departments.

So sometimes you would see a State Department officer talking about a junior being assigned to lead a department that he may not have necessarily had any sort of experience or background in. So, for example, at another PRT you had a State Department officer that was fairly junior, I think he had one post prior to reporting on board and was a liberal arts major in college and he became the economics leader. Whether or not that was the best fit probably could bear some further discussion.

Q: Did the PRT have a public affairs officer?

A: They did, and I think actually the term that we used was public diplomacy officer. And that person was charged with carrying out diplomacy and public affairs-type duties.

Q: Did he have a journalism degree? It seems as if that would have been an appropriate fit.

A: There were a couple of people there that filled that assignment or that desk while I was there. Neither one had a journalism or a public affairs-type background. But I would say in the comportment of their duties they were able to perform and take charge of the different programs and serve as the liaison in the different programs that were being managed or discharged from Baghdad.

Q: Did you observe any “stove piping” going on within the PRT?

A: I would say there were problems or challenges with stove piping internal to the PRT organization. It was probably most notable between some of the USAID principals and some of the State Department principals.

Q: And then outside the PRT, in the whole organizational structure, did you see it there?

A: Yeah. By that I mean it wasn't always apparent that the PRT was fully connected to or fully on board with what let's say, for example, the brigade combat team commander and the divisional commander were trying to do in their responsibilities or what he was charged with across lines of governance or lines of economics.

Even though I told you that the PRT as a concept was introduced to take control of both those lines of operation, governance and economics, that didn't mean that the military commander on the ground was completely discharged or free of those duties. So there was probably stove piping there that I would attribute to lack of communication or information sharing or collaboration. Actually, probably more so than anything else, probably just information sharing.

Q: How was the relationship or interaction of members of the PRT themselves? It was a pretty large PRT. Was it fairly benign? Was there a good camaraderie there?

A: I would say overall it was pretty good. Certainly room for improvement. Some of my challenges were to get the different departments to work with each other and to make sure that they were either sharing or finding ways to integrate or partner efforts across the PRT. So I would say there was definitely room for improvement there.

Q: In terms of security, I would assume that you were in a very dangerous situation there, is that correct?

A: I would say that's a fair assessment.

Q: There are some PRTs that are in more secure areas than others and, maybe on a scale

of one to 10, how would you rank the danger level in your area?

A: I would say it's a pretty fluid environment. There were times when security conditions there were one or zero, no threat. I would say for the most part it ranged probably between seven and 10.

Q: You were there for how long?

A: I came on board in mid-2007 and left in early 2008. My tour there at the PRT was a little bit short. The person I ended up taking over from, an Army officer, had a longer assignment. I ended up waiting for him to get close to the end of his tour.

Q: Was your time there about right for you, in terms of getting acclimated and familiar, or was it too short, too long? What would be the optimal time that someone could become effective as a member of a PRT?

A: I was working off of a one-year set of orders, which I would say was appropriate. But really, depending upon the person, I would say one year at a minimum, with a chance to extend. Actually I was asked to extend and I declined. But maybe if I was to go back again and was asked to extend, maybe I would.

So, to answer your question, a one-year assignment, probably nothing less than that.

Q: The threat level was fairly high. When you went out, you went out with a military convoy, is that correct, four humvees or something like that?

A: That's correct.

Q: Did you have any kind of Iraqi security involved?

A: No, but I qualify that, in terms of the actual movement, so depending on where you were going, there would be a local or Iraqi security contingent available when you arrived at your destination.

Q: Did you feel that you were able to get out into the field when you needed to, as frequently and as far as you wanted to go?

A: There's always room for improvement and I would say that's one area that, to be blunt, I would say the answer would be no. There are always times a particular team or a particular mission wasn't able to get out enough, or wasn't able to conduct that consistent level of outreach with an important principal and availability was the challenge.

Q: You mean availability of the security necessary to go out?

A: Well, it would be a combination of things. Sometimes the prevailing conditions

would not allow or presented a situation where it would not be prudent to move freely or to go to a destination or what have you. It was really a factor of what was known at that time, whether or not it was safe.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about your relationships with the Iraqis, the provincial government, the tribal council, local business community or citizens groups?

A: The times that I went out were times when I was actually representing or covering for the PRT leader. As an individual assigned to the PRT, I probably got out less frequently than anyone else, just because that was the nature of my job. I was responsible for the operations and security planning and administration of the PRT and also charged with growing that from a team of 55 people upwards to more than 100.

So I got out and met with important government, but usually that was because I was representing or covering for the PRT leader, who was either not at the PRT or on a different mission.

Q: Back to public affairs for a moment, who was the audience for the public diplomacy person and did you consider that program effective?

A: Again, I would say there was probably room for improvement there. In terms of the audience, I'm not sure what you mean.

Q: Was it the Iraqi media, Iraqi public, U.S. public?

A: It was a little bit of both. Sometimes the public diplomacy officer would be working with an embedded reporter from the United States or from one of the Coalition nations. Sometimes that public diplomacy officer would be working with a television station or a journalist or a group of journalists that were Iraqi. Again, for the most part, working with their counterpart on the military side, at the brigade combat team.

Q: Counter-insurgency: We're talking about the job of bolstering moderates and providing an economic component of the U.S. counter-insurgency effort. Can you talk about what comprised that effort and whether you considered it effective?

A: I don't know if I would consider it effective. The basic intent was to access as much as possible legitimate political leaders. Again, because the PRT was located in and important capital city, probably the greatest amount of effort was done at the highest levels.

By the time, I left the idea had expanded to start penetrating or drilling down into the sub-provincial level. The PRT was attempting to expand its level of effort.

As far as the economic component, a large part of what USAID was doing was to identify key, legitimate business officials. So, for example, there was a project that was trying to identify agricultural leaders within the province and trying to introduce different ways to

share information at that provincial level and trying to find ways to introduce technology available, for example with the local university there, this concept of farmers' cooperatives.

Q: Were you in a very agricultural area?

A: Well, it is. Ninawa at one point was considered the breadbasket for Iraq. What you've probably seen over the past couple or several decades is that Ninawa still has that capacity to be an important agricultural principal, but things tend to be cheaper just by importing or bringing them in from neighboring countries. So, again, the capacity is there, but due to all sorts of circumstances, it's not what it used to be.

Q: There was an agricultural person on the PRT, then, who was trying to work on this?

A: Part of what the surge brought to the PRT is an agency rep from USDA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but it wasn't just one deep, because there were several people on the PRT, who I would consider agriculture subject matter experts, who had a good sense as to what could be done in Ninawa.

Q: Were they able to achieve their goals, do you think?

A: No, I don't. It's not any fault of their own. Really, it's the scope of the job, the challenge.

Q: Would you attribute a lot of that to security, or more to economic difficulties?

A: I would say a large part of that was due to security. A large part was due just to what I would call the learning curve of the PRT itself and being able to reach that point where enough information was known to characterize the magnitude of the problem and the ranking or importance of the elements that created that problem or that challenge; and finally starting to get a good idea of what resources were available and how to marshal those resources, particularly resources that would be introduced through the USAID component, in terms of different programs and different resources that would be available to be introduced into theater.

Q: Okay, let's talk about the PRT activities related to governance and promoting democracy. What was the scope of those activities?

A: Well, again, because of our PRT location, a major part of the effort was designed to work with high government officials. That was due not only to location but also a constraint of the number of persons and the number of resources that the PRT had and its ability to effect that outreach across the entire province.

I know that the PRT had a couple of folks that were from RTI. I know some of their effort was geared to the provincial governance, this idea, this strategic master plan that would be leveraged from a national overarching plan that would be most relevant at the

provincial level and that would identify key economic objectives and key governance objectives and key infrastructure objectives. So I know RTI was involved with that.

Q: Were you impressed at their performance?

A: No and, again, not necessarily any fault of their own. Part of it was just the time that I was there. It was a work or level of effort in progress. I think over time there would be demonstrable improvement or progress, but for the time that I was there it wasn't readily apparent that we were really achieving what we needed to achieve, in terms of that one deliverable that I talked about, that strategic provincial plan. Just conducting that consistent level of outreach, not only at the capital level but also across the entire province itself.

Q: Were civil affairs soldiers participating in reconstruction projects?

A: Well, this really is not so much relevant to the PRT. The PRT had a detachment of civil affairs soldiers, but their efforts or responsibilities really didn't cover reconstruction efforts. The PRT had a reconstruction officer, a military officer and he had a civilian counterpart on the PRT staff as well that also worked reconstruction issues, but neither were civil affairs officers.

However, really, the agency or the principal who did have a civil affairs office working reconstruction was the brigade combat commander, not the PRT.

Q: Did you have any experience with the PRDC and if so, could you describe and evaluate it?

A: Again, I knew what it was and the persons that worked that most closely were the reconstruction officer or, as he was titled at the PRT, the chief engineer. So he worked with the PRDC. Again, to come back to this assessment, there was room for improvement.

I didn't see a lot of stability across the PRDC itself. I think the Iraqi person who was asked to lead that or to head that, over the time that I was there, I think it was three different persons.

Q: And they were all Iraqis?

A: They were all Iraqis.

Q: Could you talk about the rule of law officer on the PRT and what his or her achievements were, in terms of police, courts and prisons?

A: The Ninawa PRT I think was distinguished in that Ninawa province was the first province to employ this idea of traveling judges. In other words, to preserve the integrity of the court as well as protect the interests and the safety of the judges, what the country

was doing at one point was taking judges to preside over major crimes cases or terrorism cases, bringing them up from Baghdad, putting them into Ninawa province, in this case and then they would handle or try that docket of major crimes or terrorism cases on a semi-routine basis. By semi-routine I mean I think the idea was once a quarter or once whenever that caseload reached a certain point, reached a certain threshold.

So the PRT was effective in doing that. I would say that the rule of law person was effective in meeting and introducing himself to all of the judges, be it the major crimes court judges or the civil court judges. He was definitely well connected in that sense, knew who everybody was and they knew who he was. So in terms of access and outreach, I would say he was probably ahead of his contemporaries in other PRTs.

Q: Did the PRT relate to training programs run by the Multinational Security Transition Command?

SEBASTY: Not really. If there was any sort of involvement, it was usually maybe in terms of supporting an advisor that would come up, offering him accommodations or giving him a background brief.

Q: What did your PRT achieve during your tenure, in terms of listing specifics? Can you list , five or six specific achievements of the PRT?

A: I know that the PRT would probably like to take credit for, I've already alluded to it in one case, the standup of these farmer cooperatives. The PRT probably could have taken credit for helping the provincial government extend its level of communications with the central government.

Q: Sounds as if the traveling judges program was a good idea.

A: Definitely. Again, not knowing if the program still exists, but for the time that it did, or the time that I was there, the PRT can take credit for that.

There was also a USAID project of facilitating programs designed for the populace, in other words, youth sports programs, youth education programs

Q: That was an official program or is this something that people did on their own time?

A: No, that was official. It was probably the most successful PRT in theater, in terms of just the number of kids, or the number of people that it was able to touch or get involved in these different programs.

Q: Of all the programs that your PRT was involved in, was there one that stands out in your mind as specially disappointing, where you just felt like there was no way to get it off the ground?

A: No, I wouldn't say there was one. When I left there I had a better appreciation for

the work that remains to be done and steps that need to be taken, probably across all programs. That's a matter of time and further efforts.

Q: That brings us to the assessment question and whether PRTs are accomplishing their mission in the four areas of specialization: governance, economic development, using American military and civilian resources well, and counter-insurgency efforts? You want to take a stab at that one?

A: Well, I would, but, again, just to characterize all four, I would just say there's room for improvement and there's room to get better at it. I would say that in each one of these areas there's a lot of work that remains to be done en route to achieving lasting or genuine results.

Q: Do you think that the PRTs should continue? Are they worthwhile efforts? Or is there something that would be more effective than a PRT structure?

A: No, I think the PRT is a legitimate or effective structure. I think that if the PRT follows its initial charter and becomes an organization that is less Department of State and more USAID, it could achieve its long-term objectives.

Q: I assume you spent some time at FSI?

A: No, I did not. This was a complete surprise. I'm a Navy officer. I ended up going to the U.S. Army civil affairs officer school. But that really had nothing to do with what the PRT was doing or the PRT organization.

Q: So when you got there is when you got your training?

A: My training consisted of going down to Baghdad, looking at the organization chart for what was then NCT, what was about to become OPA, and just introducing myself to as many people as I could: 'This is where I'm going. What do you think would be worthwhile for me to look at while I'm down here?'

Q: That wasn't very much, was it?

A: No, it wasn't, but the training works both ways, too. I think it could be improved, not just to increase training, not so much for me, having completed a tour, but for those who followed me. I think if OPA made an effort to interview departing officers or departing PRT team members and capture some of that feedback.

Q: Well I think that frankly this project is an effort to address that lack. But that's a very, very good idea, to use the expertise and experience of people who've been there.

A: If this is one of the things that can do that, then that's fine.

Q: What about further lessons learned or pieces of advice that you would offer for future

PRTs?

A: Well, something that I never saw while I was there was any sort of information sharing or just good communications channel between PRTs themselves. So where I was at up in Ninawa, that was actually considered, I'm using a military term, that would be Division North. Division North actually consisted of four different provinces. Each province had its own PRT.

But as far as sharing best practices or just getting together on a regular basis and sharing ideas or trying partnership efforts between PRTs, it was something that was really incumbent on the individual PRT itself to conduct that outreach. I would have expected a little more of a management effort from OPA itself to try to coordinate.

In a lot of cases, as far as a lesson learned, just communications flow or information sharing between the military commander and the PRT, I'm not sure if that was optimized.

Probably the most compelling example, there were times when, to me, the appropriate levels of information or objectives or programs that were being introduced, weren't well enough known and it weren't communicated as effectively as they could have been between the PRT or for that matter between OPA and its military equivalent down in Baghdad, be it Multinational Corps Iraq or Multinational Forces Iraq.

Q: Other lessons?

A: I'm sure there are, but none that come to mind immediately.

Q: Thank you so much for your help. I really appreciate it. It was a pleasure talking to you.

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