United States Institute of Peace
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Iraq PRT Experience Project

INTERVIEW #53

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Executive Summary

The interviewee was in Iraq from between 2005 and 2007 serving as a Provincial Program Manager. He was located in one province for a month. Then he was relocated for six months to another province in the Provincial State Embedded Team (PSET) - the predecessor to the PRT, and finally for twenty months at the Regional Embassy Office in a large provincial city.

The organization of the PRT included two different State Department team leaders and three military deputy team leaders over the twenty months. Other staff included three USAID representatives, three expatriates in the USAID Local Government Program (LGP), 15-20 Civil Affairs soldiers. There were five Bicultural Bilingual Advisers (BBAs) serving the five teams. The five teams included: diplomacy, governance and political development, economic development, rule of law, and infrastructure. The total number of civilians was 24-30, plus 15-20 military and a security detail from Blackwater. The interviewee served as the Infrastructure Adviser and, for a time, as the Economic Development Adviser. He had an Iraqi Reconstruction Assistant.

The PRT's mission statement was part of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) of the Embassy National Coordinating Team (NCT) mission statement. The gist of the statement was to get the Iraqi provincial governments to do the job they should do in the work areas of the PRT five teams.

The security situation changed over the twenty months from good to bad to improved. It deteriorated because of Iranian support to the militia in the area and the Sunni destruction of a local mosque. It improved because of the impact of the surge on the Iranian involvement. Meeting with government officials was difficult and the interviewee found the State Department Regional Security Office (RSO) far more restrictive than the military.

On infrastructure, the focus was on capacity development so that the Provincial Government could provide infrastructure itself and on coordinating the uses of the various pots of money available to the Provincial Government. The team had five technical experts working on project processes — from selection, to contracting to maintenance — with the Provincial Council and the Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee (PRDC). Projects included streets and a hospital. The Local

Government Program worked on developing the Provincial Development Strategy. While he found that the Iraqi process did not make sense from an American perspective, given what they were trying to accomplish within their culture, it made eminent sense.

On governance, there was never any discussion of democracy, but there was about rule of law such as monitoring the training and efficiency, and adherence to law of the police, prisons, and courts. On economic development, the PRT helped Iraqis go to international business fairs. There were discussions with Iraqi businessmen about the morality of making a profit. In agriculture, the PRT was trying to get high Iraqi government officials to work together; also date palms were sprayed. On Public Diplomacy, the PRT Public Diplomacy Officer arranged for a lot of good press on the PRT's work and on advising the Provincial Government on the importance of public relations.

On relationships, within the PRT the civilian and military got along pretty well with some cabin fever. Some good support from the contact in Baghdad but that deteriorated with the change of the contact. The Iraqis were a tremendous resource — very courageous. With government officials, it was one long negotiation requiring attention to details on how to treat them. The Iraqi understanding of the PRT was to do projects not build capacity.

The PRT had some effect on the insurgency mostly facilitating the flow of money into projects. The main achievement was increasing the Iraqi confidence to do projects and being willing to listen to people of lower levels.

An important lesson was to network, network, network. The Provincial Program Managers got together three or four time a year in Baghdad, which was tremendously valuable. There is a need for a guidance book; the NCT's Standard Operating Procedure book was not great, but it was the fundamental source of PRT doctrine on what a PRT is, what it does, its missions, and the people involved. Another lesson: train, train, train; people came to Iraq with no training. The interviewee had no training in preparation for the assignment.

Finally, PRTs are one way, but they are not the ultimate answer; there is a better way. The up-coming provincial elections are going to lead to an absolutely magnificent change. The PRT will have a strong positive influence on them.

Interview

Q: When were you in Iraq?

A: From 2005 until mid 2007

Q: And where were you located?

A: I was over a month in one province. Then I was relocated for six months in a different province and then I was 20 months in the regional office the main city of yet another province.

Q: Were they Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)?

A: The first was a PRT; second was a Provincial State Embedded Team (PSET), the predecessor organization of the PRT.

Q: What was the focus of the PRTs?

A: We were focused on work in one city that was our PRT area.

Q: What was the organization of the PRT?

A: We had a State Department team leader, an FSO 1. I had two different team leaders in the course of the 20 months. And then we had USAID representatives we had two primaries and two secondaries. Over the course of those 20 months I was the Provincial Program Manager primarily. Most of the time we had three expatriates in the USAID Local Government Program (LGP). We had a company of roughly 15 to 20 soldiers- Civil Affairs soldiers. We had actually three different companies; over 20 months the Deputy Team Leader was a military officer, a lieutenant colonel, or a navy commander or captain. As time went on and we got a bit stronger, we had interpreters. I had a Reconstruction Assistant, who had spent most of his time in the Provincial government buildings. I had an assistant who was a local national who did a great many things. We had had five Bicultural Bilingual Advisers (BBAs). They were spread out in our five functional teams

Q: What teams did you have?

A: We had diplomacy, governance and political development, economic development, rule of law and infrastructure

Q: And did you have a number of civilian technical people?

A: We had some purely technical people; we had an agriculturist and we had the LGP people (one was a municipal planner and a couple other specialties in that group. We had quite a number of civilians

Q: What do you think the number was roughly?

A: I would say roughly in civilians on the order of 25 or 30 total and plus another 15 to 20 military. I am giving you rough numbers and then we had the security detail. We had some from Blackwater, primarily provided by the State Department.

Q: You were not in a military base?

A: No, we were actually on the Regional Embassy Office (REO) compound.

Q: Did you have a mission statement?

A: Yes, we did; we had the mission statement as it was taught to us in late 2005. It was written in the SOP, the national teams SOP whatever. I cannot remember the acronym right off the top of my head but anyway the SOP had our mission statement. We did have that mission statement and that was what was primarily adhered to.

Q: What was the gist of that statement?

A: The gist of that is that our mission was to get the Iraqi provincial government to be able to do the governance job that they should do.

Q: Did it have specific program areas that you were supposed to work in?

A: It did, some of it took a bit of reading to understand what the mission statement was. It included economic development, rule of law, essential services, which, of course, we translated to infrastructure and essential services and the political and governance development.

Q: How was the security in that area during your time?

A: From late 2005 until early 2006 it was pretty good. From mid 2006 up until probably mid 2007 it was bad.

Q: What does that mean?

A: And then things got better up until the time I left, and apparently have continued to get better.

Q: What was accountable for the change? From bad to good?

A: The security situation deteriorated primarily because the Iranians were pumping a lot of money and supported to the militias in our area and trying to establish a sphere of influence. With the destruction of the mosque in Samarra, the Shia decided that they had had enough and they started whacking Sunnis, and so there was an intramural firefight going on for a while there. If they were going out to kill people, they might as well bag some Americans while they were at it.

Q: What made it get better?

A: In my opinion, the surge told the Iranians that if they kept screwing around they just were not going to win. And that they were wasting what little influence they had; the Iraqis figured out that the foreign fighters, whether they be Iranians or Sunnis were not

doing them any favors and the religious parties we steadily going out of favor. Consequently, people were clearly starting to see when I left in 2007 that the violence was not getting them what they were hoping to get

Q: Let us talk then about some of the program areas. You were focused on the infrastructure. Is that right?

A: Yes. I was the primarily the Infrastructure Team Leader virtually the whole time I was there and for about a year I was also the Economic Development Team Leader.

Q: What were you trying to do on the infrastructure side?

A: On the infrastructure side, our job was to teach the Iraqis how to coordinate and develop their own infrastructure, first using money that we had. Then, when the Iraqi government gave the provinces money directly to help them get their capacity up so that they could run projects and provide the infrastructure themselves; so our focus, of course, was provincial governance capacity development. The second half for us was to coordinate and figure out what was being done with a lot of the various pots of money that were available.

Q: Did you work with the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee (PDRC)?

A: I worked with them extensively. I was the primary point of contact for them for our PRT. By the way, we had a PRT engineer who was normally a navy officer, lieutenant commander or commander, who was there on a six month tour. So we had 5 of them, who were the technical experts on project processes where I was focused on programmatic and budget execution.

Q: Were you working with the Provincial Council as well?

A: Yes, we worked with the Provincial Council quite a bit. Much of my work was with the PRDC, which in Babel was a mix executive and legislative branch organization. I did not work as much with the Provincial Council. But I worked more with the executive branch, the Governor's office and his assistants and the Director Generals (DGs).

Q: What were you specifically trying to do?

A: Primarily, we were trying to make sure that when we got the money that we thought was coming from the Iraqi government, they were going to be able to spend it on the things that they needed such as roads, water, hospitals, and sewage. Forty thousand people out of 1.6 million in the province had their sewage treated. So you name it; we were trying to get them to figure out what they needed, what would be of greatest benefit to the society, and how to go about making that happen.

Q: Were you working with them on the procedures and process for setting up projects and contracting?

A: Yes, the entire project process from the original selection, figuring out what do, what we need – all the way down to the life cycle of project cost and maintenance. The entire project process.

Q: Were you trying to help them with the difficult process of deciding on priorities; who gets what and when?

A: Absolutely, absolutely, prioritizing the project list was a constant- constant struggle; it is political football. It is the politics of getting the Iraqis to go out and consult with people at lower levels; it was a constant effort. It is like anybody else: if you could get away without consulting with anybody, clearly you probably have a better idea than everybody else, why would you want to listen to them?

Q: Were there different factions you had to deal with or was there a homogenous community?

A: It was fairly homogenous; for the most part everybody in the Provincial Council was Shia; there were very few Sunni in the executive branch of the government. For the most part, the majority of the Provincial Council was a particular party; frankly the names of the parties all run together for me.

Q: What were some of the major projects that you actually carried out?

A: Under the U.S. government funding early on, we did a street project which was a bi-pass to make the major traffic flow out of the center of the city. Then, when we received the Economic Support Funds (ESFs), the Iraqis put all seven million of that into a hospital. Remember it is a Shia government, and they put all of that money into a hospital. It was a maternity hospital. Most of the people who lived near the hospital are Sunni so we felt we had a real success in that.

When we finally received the Iraqi money in 2006, we received $111 million and in 2007; you name it, they were building it. The contracting process of the entire program was well within the culturally acceptable level of corruption. It was a good effort.

Q: You worked with them on each of the details of the process?

A: We worked with them on the details of the process. You need to have town hall meetings and discuss what the districts and sub-districts needed. You need to convene folks to make sure that you have priorities. The local governance project was working on getting the Provincial Development Strategy put together. We had a fairly good Provincial Development Strategy. But we also worked the details of the process. Now when they got the money and they let the contracts. We had some visibility on that, but we had been through it with them in a couple previous cycles using U.S. money, so we had a pretty good idea of how they were going to work. My take on it is, yes, there was some corruption, but I did not have any actual visibility to say: "Oh yes, that there is a

percentage coming out. But the whining and squealing was pretty much within the predictable level.

Q: How did you find the Iraqi competence in handling all of this?

A: In many ways, they were as good as the U.S. Congress in handling money. They made compromises and they apportioned and lots of people said, "Oh that is not fair." Americans are great at saying, "Oh, that is not fair" but frequently the Iraqis were smarter in that the Iraqis were saying, "Ok, well, look: I have this much money from the Americans under the ESF fund or the Commander's Economic Reconstruction Program (CERP) fund and we put that money up there because with the American money we can do some things with that we cannot do with the Iraqi money." Or vice-versa. So I found the Iraqis did a fairly good job with it. It was not perfect and I am sure that if I were to go back, which I probably will next year, I will probably see projects that did not get done. But that is inevitable.

Q: What do you consider your major accomplishments in the infrastructure work?

A: My major accomplishment is, and, of course, it is not solely my accomplishment is that our province was the first province, as far as I can tell, for 2006 and 2007, to have all of its money on contract, to actually spend their money and to actually get projects completed, as best as I can tell, within the culturally acceptable level of corruption. My mission was provincial governance capacity development, and that is what we did.

Q: What other projects were you most proud of?

A: I am inordinately proud of the maternity hospitals. When we had the Iraqis to that point that they were looking at putting all that money into a hospital, in an area where it was mostly Sunnis, that for me was a crowning moment.

Q: That was quite a cultural achievement, as well as a technical one.

A: Right and there was a high level Iraqi official who was killed just after the decision was made to build the hospital up there; the ninth major attempt on his life. This was one of those emotional attachments with a number of folks that we worked with.

Q: Is the hospital running with staff?

A: It is not complete yet but it is getting close am told, I have not even checked on it in the last few months, given that I have been relatively busy with what I do now. But all the staffing and supplies are supposed to be taken from the al Janabi hospital that was just across the road and that hospital has to be demolished, it is falling down.

Q: What was the most frustrating part of working on this infrastructure?

A: Probably for me, the American attitude that oh all these guys are screwed up, they are all corrupt, they are all unfair, they are not doing it, look how stupid they are, look how stupid their processes are, etc. I am not an Iraqophile, by any means, but, at the same, time, when I look at their processes and what needed to be upgraded to something closer to what we do, frequently, I found that the Iraqis had a process that in our cultural milieu did not make sense. But when you tried to figure out what they were trying to accomplish within their culture, it was very clear that it made eminent good sense, so frequently the American attitude towards the Iraqis and their processes, I found it distressing

Q: How would you characterize their culture, how is it different from ours in terms of what you were doing?

A: They recognize some realities in their culture, that are there are no banks, there were no effective banks there, so consequently, payments had to be made in cash. An Iraqi contractor, when he gets a contract from Iraqis, he does not get an upfront mobilization fee like the Americans pay, he actually has to make a ten percent deposit and frequently the contractor will drive in a Mercedes, sign the contract and the next time you see him, he will be driving a clunker, because he has pawned his car to get the cash to go to work. The Iraqis do that because they know for the most part, there is no court in the world that they use to take on their contractors that will convict them and uphold their contracts so they withhold the ten percent, and that ten percent, in fact, will be withheld a year to two years after the end of the project so that the money is then, what we would call a warrantee holdback. They understand the realities of their culture and its physical situations. We would go out, and it happened many times, and we would let a contractor get a ten percent fee and would never see the contractor again

Q: Anything else on the infrastructure side or we can go to some other areas?

A: No

Q: In the area of governance, which is trying to build a more democratic administration, how is that working, what has happened to strengthening the functioning of the provincial government?

A: I cannot say I ever heard anybody in their mission statement say anything about trying to build a more democratic government. I never heard that word used. I heard the words 'rule of law.' While many of us like to think in terms of democracy, I am far more concerned about rule of law and adherence to the tenets of that as opposed to gathering together and voting on things at every level of government. We had some success in that simply with our continual discussions with the Iraqis on things that they did, for example an Iraqi governor can jail a contractor who is not doing good work. Of course, I had that happen on one of the projects that I was working on; they jailed my contractor and I did not know about it until two weeks later after he had been released. When Iraqi officials told me, I said, no, we do not do that, but that is not something I would ever want anybody in the world to know that somebody was jailed working under a U.S. contract without due process. For them due process is: the official says, 'go pick up this guy and

throw him in jail.' So in the discussion, we made the point about due process and the rule of law; now in many cases, the Iraqis thought we were nuts, because you know they understand their people and frankly, their people understand that if a policeman comes and says the governor says you are going to jail because you are doing crappy work; that is ok; they understand that.

Q: While you are on the rule of law, you had a rule of law officer?

A: We did indeed.

Q: And what was this person trying to do?

A: What we had within our charter and guidance was police, prisons and courts, so the rule of law person was trying to monitor the training, efficiency, adherence to the rule of law of the police, and the ability to efficiently carry on their duties. This person visited the prisons to make sure there were no black holes of Calcutta. With respect to the courts, he had a wonderful relationship and rapport with a very dynamic judge there; he was trying and we were building a court house there in the city and help work on issues with building a new court house, keeping the court people safe.

Q: Were there any training programs by what they call a multinational security transition command? Do you know anything about that?

A: Minsitcky

Q: Is that what it is called?

A: Yes, MNSTC-I most people just call in Minsticky. Were there any training programs? Yes, we had the International Police Liaison Office (ITLOs); we had police contractors who were advising the police. At the police academy, there were a number of different programs that they participated in.

Q: Do you have the impression that work on the rule of law was on the whole system?

A: I believe that it was and my impression is based on the discussion with the local nationals that I worked with. They would tell stories about the Sudan time when the police were totally corrupt, but they had to be in order to survive and how the police were very different. The late chief of police was one of the most magnificent, remarkable men I have ever met in my life. He insisted that all of his police, the old ones and the new ones come back and go through the police academy. He set a wonderful example for not being associated with any political party or taking orders from anybody and adhering to an equal form of justice. We had both Sunni and Shi'a tribal leaders complain about him. They said he arrested my brother, my son, and, at the same time, they would say "but do not let anyone get rid of him, he is the only fair one here."

Q: You were working on economic development at the same time; what were you doing on that?

A: On economic development, we were trying to figure out ways to help the Iraqis cut loose and get to work. One of the main efforts was to get the Iraqis at the international business fairs in Dubai, Jordan, Germany, US and other places. And there is a lot of money in Iraq people say "Oh these poor people" For many years these folks have been burying money under the floor stones of their houses. So there is a lot of money there. But they are afraid. Especially the Shi'a are terrified of taking that money out and spending it. I realize that this is probably a baseless racist sort of comment, but the fact is the Iraqis have a real bent for commerce. And when they would go out and spend time at the business conferences, they would come back motivated just about doing business and they would have contacts with people outside of the country.

But one of the other things was simply to sit and discuss with them the morality of making an honest profit. They have been in a socialist system so long that the idea that making a profit is good had in many ways been lost. It has been covered up with the socialist crap that "if you make a profit, you are stealing from people" as opposed to, in any reasonable free enterprise society, making a profit is what makes you able to employ more people and creating more wealth for everyone. Just to say those words and to discuss the concepts with Iraqi businessmen was liberating for many of them. And a number of times I had them say "thank you" in that, you know, they felt like what they were doing was all about selfishness when, in fact, you know a good businessman who is acting ethically is giving fair value for fair value received.

Q: What were some of the businesses that were beginning to spring up? That you were helping?

A: One of our businessmen bought a German yogurt factory, imported a yogurt factory. It has been up and was actually making yogurt, exporting it. In fact, exporting it to Iran. And we had a number of construction firms. One young man, who started out with virtually nothing in 2003, started doing contracting. And he was of such reliability that when other contractors screwed up we would call him and he would finish projects and sometimes he would not make money and sometimes he would make money. He continually plowed his money back into the business, and now he is a multimillionaire, and he is not even 30 yet. And he is an Iraqi multimillionaire. But he is an extremely hard working young man and, in fact, came and visited me in the United States after I got back last year. But so you name it, the Iraqis are getting into it.

Q: Were you involved with any the state owned enterprises (SOEs)?

A: I was involved in them to some extent. I went and looked at a number of them. Then when the Brinkley group came in I went with them to look at several of them. But State Owned Enterprises are thought to be negative.

Q: And in the agricultural area, what were you doing?

A: As part of the economic team, we had an agriculture component. We had a wonderful agricultural guy. We did a number of things; he primarily led efforts to have seminars to talk about increasing productivity, business and agriculture and things like that.

Q: Were there any particular production projects that you assisted?

A: Of course, everybody was, at least tangentially, associated with getting the date palms sprayed. Which was psychologically a big boost to the Iraqis. And he had funded tree drives and collected many thousands of dollars for new date palm trees to put in places where they had been destroyed by Sadam and wars. But, for the most part, it was trying to get the DG of Agriculture and the DG of Water and others to work together to improve the agriculture situation.

Q: Were there public affairs programs? Did you have a public affairs officer?

A: We had a Public Diplomacy Officer late in the game. The Public Diplomacy Officer was actually quite wonderful in the sense that this person got us a lot of good local press. Because of the State Department press guidance, we were virtually unlimited with respect to the local press. So we got some of it. But before we got our public diplomacy officer, it was very difficult to get stuff out. Most of us were not taking the time for that effort, but we had some real gains. With the leverage that we had with the Provincial Government, when they started reading articles in the papers or seeing them on the television or whatever, about a project being done or something being done within the province, then the big guys wanted a piece of that. So I think it was a very important effort. Probably the most important thing that we did with respect to governance capacity was our public diplomacy efforts.

Q: You were working with the government to make them more sensitive in terms of the public interest?

A: Absolutely. It does not take much. But yes, we definitely worked with the Iraqi government to say, "you are doing good stuff, you need to be telling people the good stuff. These ribbon ceremonies are classic politics; you need to be at the ribbon cuttings to get your picture in the paper and get the Al- Jezeera here and if you want the Americans to go hide, we will go hide."

Q: Did they have a media outfit of some sort in the government?

A: Oh yes. Most everybody has that. All the governors and the Provincial Council Chair had a public affairs officer.

Q: And you talked about having some BBAs and cultural advisors. How did they help you?

A: The BBAs, about 85% of them to start out with, did not have the skill sets to do what they were hired to do. But, generally speaking, about I would say 35%, maybe as many as 45% of them, ended up being fairly functional. They stayed long enough that they were really helpful.

And one of the strongest parts of our rule of law program was from an Iraqi, actually an Iraqi Dutchman; who by the way, had a visa to the United States and his family is living in Virginia not far from mine. But he was a lawyer in Iraq, a lawyer in Holland whose ability to influence the police prisons in court was just astounding, he was a wonderful contributor. Part of it, part if the value of the BBA program is that you have people who understand, for the most part, American and Iraqi cultures, they speak the language fluently and they live inside the wire. They are protected by the security system. So we did a lot of talking with our counterparts in the Iraqi government by cell phones and most of that would be done by getting one of the BBAs to sit and talk with us about what do we need to talk about. They would make the telephone call; the advantage of a BBA over a regular interpreter is that the local national interpreter has to leave the wire and go home.

Q: It sounds like your contact with the government was by cell phone and not by direct contact. Was there a problem getting to the government?

A: You bet. Between 2006 and 2007, we were pretty limited in the amount we could get out face to face with the government. The State Department RSO system was far more restrictive than the military. Consequently, it was very difficult for a large amount of time to get out. Frequently, I would go and join the military north of us and then I could get out with them on one of their conduits.

Q: Did you have a Movement Team assigned to you?

A: Yes. If were making a move from the Regional Embassy Office, we would have a Movement Team, but if I was flying some place, I would fly alone and I could get transportation with the military some time. But the RSO system really is not the right system for a program like this.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Because the RSOs are career Foreign Service Officers, if somebody from their post gets killed, that is a black mark on them and it is bad for their careers. And consequently, they are highly risk adverse. Nothing against them. They are absolutely wonderful courageous, patriotic Americans, but their system does not lend itself well to taking more risk. And when you are in a PRT situation, you have to to take a bit more risk than the RSO system allows for.

Q: You got your logistics support from your Regional Embassy or did you get it from the military?

A: It was all State Department, from the Regional Embassy Office.

Q: You were not connected to any military base arrangement?

A: That is correct.

Q: And in none of your assignments were you involved with the military in terms of being on the same base with them.

A: That is right.

Q: And how was the State Department's support?

A: The State Department support was wonderful. In terms of quality of life, the living conditions, even though it was a postage stamp sized location, were nice living, compared to other situations.

Q: It was all run by the State Department?

A: That is right

Q: Let us talk about relationships. First, how did you find the relationships among the sections in the PRT?

A: For the most part, good. How is that for a banal characterization? But, generally speaking, the civilians and military got along pretty well. There was a little cabin fever, from time to time. After you work together for so long sharing the same hide out after a mortar rocket attack a few times, you get a little grumpy from time to time. Occasionally, we would have some snits and that is fine. That is to be expected in that environment. But for the most part every one wants to do their part. There are big differences. You have the squishy soft-siders from the USAID background, who are convinced that with a little bit of money and some Band-Aids, everybody will get better. You have some of the hardheaded people who do not share the same worldview. There were multiple cultures within the PRT and, for the most part, the people made an effort to understand that you have to work with all kinds.

Q: What about the relationships with Baghdad office and with the Embassy and with the military command?

A: As a Provincial Program Manager, for most of my time, there was a person in Baghdad who was our Bagh-daddy. When we had that person in Baghdad, who was committed to answering our questions, supporting, etc, we had a really good system. Later on, that person went away and we did not have that Bagh-daddy, and unfortunately for us as Provincial Program Managers, the system did not progress.

Q: This person was in the Embassy?

A: Yes at the IRMO. There was a succession of those individuals. But when we had one of those, it was actually very good for us. We got a lot of information and actions taken care of, because that person considered themself "the Baghdad point of contact" for all of the Provincial Program Managers. Now each of the other sections, USAID, etc, had their own person, their own higher headquarters in Baghdad. The Team Leader had a dual chain of command with the National Coordination Team (NCT), and their regular State Department chain. Because the Foreign Service Officers have to always be concerned with maintaining career credibility for the most part, to be in Baghdad was acceptable.

Q: Were you getting the support and guidance and information that you need?

A: We were getting support for the most part; guidance not much, but not much was needed, for the most part. What do they know in Baghdad of our situation? We did not know a whole lot better. But we had plenty of visitors. We were VIP magnets.

Q: Did you prepare regular reports?

A: Yes, we did we did a weekly report and a monthly assessment and we did a quarterly report as well.

Q: How were the relationships with the Iraqis or those that you worked with directly and within the community generally?

A: For the most part, it went well. The Iraqis that we worked with on the FOB were all quite wonderful and very courageous people, a tremendous resource for us, who loved to teach and to teach about Iraq and are very proud of being in Iraq, and being Iraqis. As for the official Iraqis we worked with in town, for them life is a one long running negotiation. Every item of game theory that you can think of they would work to try to nudge us to get what they wanted. I had some wonderful relationships with the official Iraqis that I worked with. When General Case, the police chief, came back to the U.S. in October before he was killed in December we went to Ted's Montana Grill and had buffalo burgers together. But also we had sometimes absolutely rocky, stormy relationships with the Iraqis; sometimes it was our fault because we did not sort out the proper way to treat people. And we were not official throughout in making sure those glitches did not occur. You have to pay attention to the details when you are dealing with people who have a degree of sensitivity.

Q: Do you think they had an understanding of what the PRT was supposed to be there for?

A: For the most part, they had a fairly good understanding. Because PRT translates in Arabic to "we are the people who are going to do projects." They did not like to admit that we were there to build their capacity as opposed to getting money for projects for them.

Q: They did not really like the idea that you were trying to provide technical assistance and make them more effective?

A: Right. But they did go along with us on a great many things and we did develop their capacity. It was, in part, because of us and, in part, because it was a natural growth process. But yes, they came along pretty well.

Q: And what about the population? Do you have any sense about what they understood about the PRTs?

A: The population for the most part really believed that we were there to do projects. As much as we worked with the press and got the story out. This was the interpretation. You can say all of the words you want, but what they heard is that we do projects.

Q: And I gather you did not have any problems about resources? Some of the PRTs had a problem getting funds for their work.

A: Yes, for the most part, we did not have nearly the problems that other PRTs had.

Q: You sound like you had a lot of money. You had the CERP funds. Did you have what they call Quick Reaction Funds (QRF)?

A: The QRFs came after just as I left.

Q: Anything else about relationships with any of the groups?

A: Just that sometimes the Americans would do things that were breathtakingly stupid. For example, we had a relatively high-ranking Embassy official come in for a conference. And this Embassy person was a career Foreign Service Officer of ambassadorial rank who was supposed to brief a group of Iraqis on a particular area of expertise. And this person, who had been in the country for over six months, and had a canned brief, came and gave the brief and his slides were all in English. Of course, we had an interpreter to interpret the oral part, but the Iraqis who were involved in the brief, well, it was one of those headshakes. You Americans just do not get it. When you stop and consider that this person, who could speak Arabic, had been trained in Arabic by the State Department, was of ambassadorial rank, low ambassadorial rank but ambassadorial rank nonetheless, who had plenty of notice before this meeting, using a canned speech, planned presentation that he had done before. It just….

Q: Is there any topic area that we have not touched on before we start winding up?

A: I think we have done well.

Q: How do you feel the PRT affected the insurgency, do you think it had any effect on that?

A: I believe that we had some effect. I believe mostly that what we did was that we got them to the point that when they got that big chunk of money from the central government, that the flow of that money into those projects in their government, combined in with the surge. There was no one factor that made things go right. We had some effect; how much effect would you say? I would say 10% at minimum; if I were to say 33%, I would probably have to slap myself.

Q: Summing up your experience, what would you consider the major achievements of the PRT during your time?

A: It still comes down to the increase in their ability to do things, their confidence in doing projects; also being willing to listen to people of lower levels. We helped to increase their governance capacity.

Q: What would you say are major lessons from your experience? Was there a lot of staff turnover?

A: No. Not really. We had a pretty stable lot. I was there for twenty months and the USAID person was there for the better part of 14-18 months. We had a pretty stable outfit. The military folks change every year or every six months, depending on which kind they were. We really had a pretty good organization for our stability.

Q: That is unusual compared to some of the others.

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: What are some of the lessons you would say from your experience? What stands out and what do you think people ought to know?

A: Network, network, network. Those of us who were Provincial Program Managers tried to get together three or four times a year in Baghdad, and spend a couple of days talking about our work. Those were tremendously valuable for our mission accomplishment. To understand what was going on in the other provinces, how our counterparts were doing business. Second, is that you need a book. And you may not look at the book very often, but you need a book. And the book, the NTC, the National Coordination Team's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), was our book. And it was not a great book, it was not fabulous, and, by the time, we had finished, there were about ten revisions of it. But it was the fundamental source of our doctrine.

Q: Not a "how- to" book, but it was a "what to do" book?

A: This is what a PRT is; this is what it does; this is its missions; and these are the different people associated with the PRT and this is what they should be doing.

Q: Another lesson?

A: Train. Train, train, train. People came to Iraq with no training. I went to Iraq as a Provincial Program Manager and I walked in and they said: "Okay, you are a Provincial Program Manager, drive on." And I did okay fine, but we can do better than that. We should do better than that.

Q: Did you have any training?

A: No. Not a bit.

Q: What is your background?

A: I am a retired marine. I had a business for eight years and I was Mr. Mom for eight years.

Q: That is good training.

A: It was good training. If you do not have doctrine, you got nothing to train. There is to this day no real State Department book, because since IRMO went away, the NCT SOP has languished.

Q: What can you say about the training you are getting now? Is that appropriate to comment on? You are getting ready now to go back, are you not?

A: I am training military people on how to work with PRTs. We have a wonderful training program at the army and marine combat training centers so that when the units get to Iraq, they already know how to spell PRT and they have an idea of what we can and cannot do. And we have exposed them to some of the cultural nuances of working with civilians. The State Department is getting a little bit of classroom instruction now at the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: How long is the course that you are giving them?

A: We have integrated it into the three-week program that they have here at the combat training center. So while they are out in the field, they are actually fighting the war, they are also working with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Besides teaching, coaching, and mentoring, we also play the roles of PRT members. I get to bounce around in the Mohavi Desert in the Humvees.

Q: Are each of these units going out to Iraq soon?

A: Yes. There are brigades that are in their pre- deployment raining.

Q: What is your overall assessment of the PRTs? Is it accomplishing its mission or is it an effective vehicle?

A: I am sure there is a better way, but I do not know what it is. The PRTs are our one answer. I do not know that they are the ultimate answer that what we accomplished paid for itself in terms of ultimately in helping to get the Iraqi folks on their feet. I know there is a better way. But I do not know what that is.

Q: The provinces are having an election coming up?

A: Yes, provincial elections.

Q: Are they prepared for that?

A: No, they are not prepared for it, but they are going to do fine when they do it. The elections law has to be passed. And then it will take about four months before they can actually have the election and they have an incredible number of details to sort out, things that need to be done. But they will do fine. And frankly, this is going to be an absolutely magnificent change in the whole situation in Iraq and it could even lead to accelerating progress.

Q: Do you think the PRT is going to have an impact on the election?

A: The short answer is yes. We have had some strong positive influence there. Maybe "strong" is too emphatic a word, but we have definitely had some positive influence there. The people of Iraq will be more willing. You are going to see a good turn out. You are going to see a lot of the religious parties have diminished influence.

Q: Thank you

A: You bet.