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INTERVIEW #55

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Executive Summary

Interviewee worked in the Ninawa PRT, during the 2007-2008 period, on economic issues. They are returning soon to Iraq as a contracted DOD employee with improved access to personnel, improved pay, and heightened status and authority. They are going back to work with higher level officials.

They have an unpleasant memory of working with the State Department PRT. The Foreign Service Officers treated the 31-61s (including the interviewee) who work under them, as outsiders. The 31-61s are better paid than Foreign Service Officers and probably there's some resentment. The individual very seldom got the opportunity to talk to the team leader at Ninawa about anything they were doing. It makes no sense for the State Department, lacking experience in nation-building and economic development, to be in charge of this program to reinforce economic development. AID would probably have been in a better position to run this than the State Department.

The PRT where the interviewee worked is on a military installation, a little compound that is smaller, more compact and better accessible than other PRT locations. The PRT had lots of contact with the military structure in Ninawa, although the FSOs tried to keep them separate. U.S. interests need to communicate with each other and get on the same page before working with the Iraqis. The PRTs are staffed by the OPA, which does not typically deal with strategic issues. If anything is to be done to make PRTs act as a cohesive unit, working together across organizations, it's not going to be done through OPA.

The PRT's mission was unclear. The impression was that the PRTs were to develop, at the provincial level, programs to support what the military was doing. However, no specific function was defined for the PRT. The outline for the economics group was the weakest of the five or six. There are lots of things you could do with infrastructure, with rule of law, with politics, with the regional government. On the economics, it was kind of an extension of CERP programs. The individual thought they should build a financial sector. There's no banking system; people can't borrow. Few lines of credit are available. To achieve that would have required legal changes, but they couldn't get it done.

For all of the presence they had up there, for all the money the U.S. is spending, all the military people involved, the dump from their contacts was really pretty thin, partly because of the security issues; partly because of the way the contacts were managed.

What the PRT did accomplish:

- Good people worked on rule of law and infrastructure.
- The military has done a good job on counter-insurgency – bringing the civilian population over to our side.

Lessons learned:

- If we had a more coherent strategy at the top we could use the resources, the people we have out there, more effectively.
- Baghdad embassy needs to put together a coherent program.
- State Department has to learn to use outside talent better, if they're going to try to run these things. They can't just have senior people reporting to junior Foreign Service Officers and expect to have coherent programs.
- OPA should be revamped, make them create some coordination, some communication, and some strategic guidance. If OPA can't do it, let somebody else do it.

Interview

A: I was with the PRT in Ninawa.

Q: What year was that?

A: '07 and I stayed there until, mid 2008. Basically, I worked my way out of a job.

I am returning to Iraq soon, this month. I've already started working with a contractor, a Department of Defense (DOD) contractor, and I'm actually taking a much better job, better not just in terms of what the content might be, but in terms of status, my access, all of those sorts of things. I'll be working in military headquarters: a very interesting job, which will have a lot more authority.

Q: You were with the military before and now you will be private, is that correct?

A: I have never been in the U.S. military. I was in Ninawa, working on economic issues. I often found that to do the things I thought should be done, to do things that would make some difference economically, often involved dealing with people on the national level, either on the U.S. side or on the Iraqi side. If you wanted to make a structural change, it tended to be very difficult to do it from Ninawa. As one friend put it to me, "Pal, do you think anyone cares what the governor of, say, Nebraska thinks?"

Nevertheless, I was trying to deal with people at the national level and I met some people at the multi-national division (MND) in another city, who wanted me to come and work with them. What they wanted me to do was to stay with the State Department and spend half my time working with them, sort of be on call and that sort of thing. At first, the PRT

was very amenable to that, but, somewhere, they lost interest. Indeed, I can imagine that the State Department is very concerned about appearances. What people say, or what people might say, that just might upset someone, somewhere, down the line. I think, while I was trying to work with the military, I probably would have upset someone in Baghdad, if not the PRT in Ninawa.

Anyway, having said that, they almost brought me on and then suddenly, I was out of a job. I said, "Well, I still want to work with you but you have to bring me in. You need someone like me just to make sense of what we were doing on the whole economic front," which of course is what the senior military people have become very concerned about now. Having made some military and security progress, they're now focused on what we can do to reinforce the economy and all the non-combat things we're trying to do in Iraq.

So, anyway, it did not happen with MND but it is now happening, actually, a level higher. I'm going down there to work on economic issues and probably on a lot of other issues.

Q: It sounds very exciting, actually.

A: Oh, it is. Now, the disclaimer here is that, possibly, this leaves me with a somewhat unpleasant memory of working with the State Department PRT in Ninawa.

Q: Were you a career diplomat, a career State Department person?

A: No, I was a 31-61, which is a clause in some legislation that lets the State Department bring on non-career people, to work in Iraq. I think it's only for Iraq, or maybe Afghanistan, too, to bring professionals in who are not Foreign Service Officers, who are not career State. We have a lot of 31-61s in Iraq. And one of the things that is a bit dysfunctional is that the State Department, the Foreign Service Officers, always treat 31-61s as outsiders or as Christmas help or something like that. On the other hand, 31-61s are better paid than Foreign Service Officers. Probably there's some resentment, but, again, they try to treat us as outsiders.

If the military works with civilians, they will put a civilian in the command structure, wherever he or she belongs, in terms of what they can do. With the State Department, if you're an outsider, no matter what kind of qualifications you have, you will report to a Foreign Service Officer. The officer very possibly will be a junior Foreign Service Officer, which is kind of dysfunctional. I was reporting to an officer there, who was only 28 years old. Very seldom, did I get any opportunity to talk to the team leader at Ninawa about anything I was doing. Where I'm going next, I will be working with military officials of higher rank.

Anyway, my initial experience was dysfunctional, and I can tell you the hierarchical organization irritates a lot of people. Basically, the State Department people have no

experience in economic development, but, again, they're in charge of this program to reinforce economic development to support our military gains.

I was talking to a quite senior military person recently. He was retired, but still involved, who met with the head of OPA, the Office of Provincial Affairs. OPA oversees PRTs. The officer sort of muttered that none of the division commanders (generally major generals, two stars) came in to see them. And the military officer said, 'Well, they're pretty busy. You've got to take a little more initiative. If you've got something you think they should know you better go out and tell them. Don't expect them to come in.'

And then the individual asked me, "Do they have any plan? Do they have coordination from one PRT to the next, a strategic plan under which they work? Does OPA do anything like that?"

I said, 'Well, what I understand to be OPA's function is to make sure PRTs are adequately staffed. In other words, they don't touch strategic issues. They don't touch coordination with any PRT in terms of any kind of work effort. They just make sure things are staffed right.'

So, if anything is to be done to make PRTs act as a unit, coordinate with USAID, coordinate with the military, it's not going to be done through OPA. Then you're back to the State Department, either on the ground in the PRTs, or with other State Department groups at the embassy. At the embassy, though, you've got a senior diplomat, some are ambassador level, who are in charge of economic policy, but you're back to the basic sort of dysfunction here, which is the State Department. They handle diplomatic relations, not economic development.

Q: They're not AID?

A: AID would probably have been in a better position to run this than the State Department. I've got reservations about AID, too.

The State Department does not have experience in nation-building and economic development, the kinds of things that we are critically trying to do over there. That's basically dysfunction: no plan, no coordination. Everyone, no matter how senior, reports to a junior Foreign Service Officer.

Whether that's true everywhere I'm not sure. That was true in my PRT. I also understand that at the embassy itself, for the first two or three years, the 31-61s had a larger role in direction and management. Someone decided that we want to make this a normal embassy. That meant bringing in career State Department people and putting them in charge, so the 31-61s reported to the Foreign Service Officers. They've got what appears to me to be something very similar to what was happening down at Ninawa. You've got 31-61s who have 25 or 30 years of professional experience in banking or whatever and they're suddenly reporting to much more junior Foreign Service diplomats. It didn't go over any better there than it does at the PRT level.

And, yeah, they still claim it's easier for them to manage that way. Basically, Foreign Service Officers have these sycophantic relationships among themselves. They trust each other and they don't trust outsiders.

When a dignitary would be on his way to Ninawa, you'd see in the team leader's office, all of his twenty-something Foreign Service Officers would be down in the office. They'd be holding a bunch of neckties and all be giggling at each other and the rest of us would stay back and do whatever we were doing. It was just that kind of division of labor. They would go down to the airport to greet whoever was in town that day.

That gives you, maybe, some flavor of the way I worked. I can tell you at Ninawa, if you talked to the guy who was in charge of the justice program, or to the guy of the infrastructure program, or to the people at USAID, they would be just simmering with frustration about trying to deal with the FSOs running the projects.

Q: And they came in and out more rapidly than the other folks?

A: Actually, the Foreign Service Officers sort of come and go. They've got a short tour.

Q: So you've got to get used to one after another?

A: Most of the Foreign Service Officers only go to Iraq because they figure it will help them get the next diplomatic assignment. That's the way that they look at the world. If another Foreign Service Officer comes into town and they sit down and have coffee, that's how the conversation always starts: "What's your next assignment going to be?" When you talk to a 31-61, they're more likely to talk about what they've done and have been doing.

Q: the PRT, it was on a military installation, not out of an embassy?

A: It's on a military installation, a little compound. More or less, half of the people on the compound were military. And for everything we did, especially anything that involved leaving the base, we went in a military convoy. Personally, I think civilian security firms are generally a better deal. They're lower profile and all that. But military convoys seem to be a nationwide military policy, so there's no point in arguing it.

Q: How long had that PRT been in that location? Was it fairly recently established when you arrived?

A: I don't know the date. I had the impression that it had been there at least a year when I got there.

Q: And it was just a physical addendum to the military compound, then?

A: Well, no. It was on the base, but the bases are spread out, some of them. The base was actually more compact than other places; some of them are just spread out. Where I was at was much smaller, and more accessible. You didn't have to get in a car and drive everywhere. You didn't have to wait around and coordinate with people. You could just walk over to the dining facility and everything else.

Q: What kind of accommodations did you have?

A: Sort of a put-together hut, a put-together building. You had to walk outside to use the latrine and showers, which were a separate structure. All that was maintained: the heat worked. They were decent. There was no problem with the accommodations.

Q: How many people were in the PRT?

A: I think the number used was something like 60, including Iraqis.

Q: So the State Department person was the team leader. Was there a military officer next in line?

A: The deputy team leader was military. As it happens, both of the deputy team leaders, while I was there, were in the navy.

Q: In terms of the mission of this particular PRT, what was it supposed to do? What was its mission?

A: Well, I'm not sure I ever saw a statement of what the mission was. There'd been a statement. Maybe it was given to me and I neglected it.

The gist of it was that we were having a civilian surge to support the military surge. We were to develop programs at the provincial level, generally in some coordination with the military. A PRT was run separately from the military, so the military would have to come in as a counterpart, rather than as a controlling party. We did occasionally hear rumors that the military wanted to take it over and make it an embedded PRT.

As I understood it, the impression was that the PRTs were to develop programs to support what the military was doing.

Q: But didn't your PRT have a special, discrete mission that was maybe different than a PRT in another part of the country?

A: That was never brought to my attention.

Q: That would be a problem, wouldn't it, if the mission wasn't clear?

A: I was called, soon after I arrived, into a discussion with the team leader and was told that what we did at the PRT was really pretty similar to what the State Department did at

an embassy in other countries. Now, I thought that was a strange way of putting it and I didn't believe it was serious. Yes, I believe that we have to behave diplomatically, but embassies in other countries do not have nation-building or economic development functions. They're not trying to reform the judicial system. Embassies usually have diplomatic and information-gathering functions.

Indeed, the way the PRT looked at it was, they wanted to get along with people and they wanted to send their State Department cables back to Washington. Those were the things that the Foreign Service Officers concentrated on.

But did we have a discrete, specific function? Again, not that anyone ever showed me.

Q: Okay, that's interesting. I think you've already talked a little bit about the relationship with the Provincial Affairs Office, but, can you describe the relationship with the OPA and the National Coordinating Team, the embassy and the U.S. military command?

A: The State Department people all wanted to coordinate with the State Department people at the embassy. Certainly, that was a key relationship. I don't know how much it advanced anything. Part of the problem at the embassy was that the State Department was running things, because they were making it a normal embassy, again. That was sort of dysfunctional. Most of the development things we were trying to do, the State Department doesn't have much experience with it.

Now, dealing with the military, yeah, there were lots of contacts between the PRT and it was the brigade, or whatever the military structure was in Ninawa.

Q: Did you, personally, work closely with any military people in your job there?

A: The Foreign Service Officers tried to keep us separated. They wanted to handle all that, because they thought it was all very delicate and felt that only Foreign Service Officers were up to handle it. That was the basic view.

At one point, the guy I worked for was on vacation and our group had a temporary head for a few weeks. They were a 31-61 who advised us that the military was fed up with the Foreign Service Officers and did not want to deal with them anymore.

So, while our head was away, some other people and I were going over to the military offices once a week or so, talking and answering questions. But then as soon as my supervisor got back, all of those contacts ended. They tried to put together this list of things they were working on, so that they could sit down with the military once a week and say, "Okay, here's our list, here's where we are." I guess they felt it was easier to keep control of things that way.

Q: Since you were focusing on economics, it probably wouldn't be logical for you to have a whole lot of contact with the military, anyway, would it?

A: Well, that's the question. The military wanted to understand what we were doing, how we wanted to get there, and how they fit in. That's the way they think about things. I was a little uncomfortable even trying to discuss that with them, because I didn't think we had much of a plan. I could tell them what I thought we should be doing. The Foreign Service Officers don't want me to go over there and tell the military what the PRT should be doing, because we're not doing it, and I was almost just as happy not to have to

Q: Can you explain that?

A: How do I present that information? What do I say about that? There may have been certain logic to the separation.

Q: Well, in talking about the effectiveness of the leadership and management structure, what improvements could you recommend for a future PRT?

A: The group I will be joining works on strategic issues, including economics, politics, judicial administration, infrastructure, and the medical sector.

Q: So you'll be working for a contractor, not anything to do with the U.S. government?

A: I will be paid by a contractor.

Q: Is this something like Aegis or RTI or one of the others that has been working there?

A: It's the same idea, except, we will not be reporting to the State Department or USAID. The direct client is a group inside DOD. However, our on-the-ground client will be a military command. There will be a lot of interagency effort there. It's not specific to Iraq.

Frustrations build up. You think you should be doing something, and you find out there are bureaucratic reasons for why you can't get it done. People say, "That's not your function, that's our function. We're dealing with that."

I was talking to someone a few days ago in Washington, whom I've for years. They were at the U.S. Trade Representative's Office. People were advising the Iraqis on trade, but they were advising them to do something that was, from the U.S. Trade Representative's Office point of view, sort of unacceptable. As soon as they got in their first meeting, everything was going to blow up. They were going to say, "No, that doesn't work. We don't accept that."

If there were just some basic communication between the trade advisors in Iraq and the trade office back in Washington, you could cut out several months of grinding wheels and moving sideways instead of forward.

Q: We're talking as if the people who are advising Iraq on trade are Americans, but there are other people advising them, too. Aren't there other governments or other countries with private helpers who are in there as well?

A: Well, we have some trade advisors working through USAID. In fact, I was on a project where we were doing that. I, myself, was not doing that, but I knew people who were. They were financed by USAID. Some of the trade advisors were not American. I was not aware, though, of any European Union project, for example, to advise the Iraqis. If there was something, I was not aware. I can tell you, 95 percent of the coalition right now is American, though the British do have a few people there.

Q: So it would make sense for those advisors to make sure that what they were advising was going to be acceptable before they gave their advice?

A: To give you just a quick aside on that, I was in Saudi Arabia in the late 90s, working on some trade issues. I talked to some people at the U.S. embassy in Saudi Arabia. One person said, "Why don't you talk to so-and-so back in the U.S. Trade Representative's Office (USTR) in Washington?" (They are still there. In fact I was talking to them last week.) I replied, "Here's the situation in Saudi and these are the things I think we should be working on. If we put together a trade regime or something like that, is that acceptable to USTR?" When you get into trade negotiations involving the World Trade Organization (WTO), you will have to sit across the table from different counterparties, and one of the most important parties is the U.S. By just talking with the person from USTR on the phone, I was able to tell the Saudis, "These are the kinds of things we should work on. This is what will be acceptable."

The Saudis rejected my advice, I understand, but five or six years later they finally got an agreement at the WTO. I remember seeing the person at USTR after. She just grinned at me and said, "You'll be really amused when you see what the agreement looks like."

I replied, "Oh, yeah?"

They said, "It's almost exactly what you proposed seven years ago."

Q: Well, there's vindication for you.

A: It was kind of funny. It doesn't really make sense to go in with the Iraqis and say, "Raise your tariffs to 40%," or something like that, "because that's what you want to do." That's not going to go anywhere when you get into a meeting. You have to have something that makes sense as a whole. Then maybe the counterpart across the table will buy it, or buy part of it.

The reason I mention that to illustrate how dysfunctional you can get. When people feel it's inappropriate to talk to each other there is a lack of interagency coordination. I think you can go down one or two levels in any group, and find people who are frustrated about things that they think should be getting done that the system just won't allow.

Now, when I am working on this strategic group under military command, our role, is to cut through all of that, to set some priorities, and to get them done. When we want to have a meeting we use a high ranking official as leverage. That makes it easier to get things done. At least, that's what I anticipate will happen. That's what I look forward to doing.

Q: Well, back to the way things are now with the PRT structure, is there anything that could be done, given the realities of the PRT, to make the structure more effective and to overcome some of these problems?

A: My impression is that there is no overriding PRT strategy. OPA does not even consider part of its function to be developing something like that. PRTs are on their own. There were a few people, who were trying to do what I was trying to do. Some, for example, ran off to Baghdad to develop a national initiative so that we can do something at the local level. One person I knew, working on justice issues, told me they spent half of their time in Baghdad. Now, I don't know if it was quite that much, but they did spend a lot of time down there dealing with court issues, putting judges in place, that sort of thing.

You need some kind of strategy at the top and that's basically what was missing. It would have to be an appropriate strategy. Just saying you need a strategy isn't quite good enough.

Q: Does the PRT structure itself need to be adjusted?

A: It wasn't that the structure, itself, was no good. It was the way it was used.

Q: How about security? Did you feel that you were safe when you went out? You said you were under the security of the U.S. military mostly when you went out.

A: Yes. I felt pretty safe. I think military convoys are magnets for improvised explosive devices (IEDs). I honestly would have preferred to travel in a civilian convoy with civilian security guards. The security firm we hire has gotten a bad reputation, of course. There are a lot of other security firms that seemed to have fewer shooting incidents and that sort of thing off base. I think the security firm actually gave some of the other firms bad reputations, because they were such cowboys. Probably, once or twice I've traveled with them as someone's guest. However, I've been in Iraq several times. I've used other private security firms for travel off the base or out of the International Zones and was always comfortable using them. Besides, they're more comfortable to ride in, than using mine resisting attack protected vehicles (MRAPs).

Q: Did you ever use Iraqi security?

A: No, we didn't do that.

Q: And when you wanted to go out, could you go out, or did you need to wait until there was someone available?

A: You had to set up usually a couple of days in advance. I generally felt safe and the level of IED attacks was declining while we were there. Certainly on base I felt safe. But, the other thing about military convoys is they put a lot of Iraqis off. You want to visit me but, you have to have a military convoy sitting out there?" they think.

Q: That's a minimum of four cars, is that right?

A: Yeah, four cars. Typically each vehicle was outfitted with defensive capabilities. Would you want such a vehicle pulling up in front of your house? There were places where we would meet, instead, that were considered neutral. That's generally how we gained their trust.

Q: Did you have anything to do with international groups or NGOs in your capacity there?

A: Occasionally, something would come up, and I would advise management that I was in contact with whoever it would be. We had some dealings with the consulate of another country, located in a neighboring city. I went over there a few times. We had lunch and talked for a while.

The diplomats from the other country were trying to be helpful. They are neighbors with Iraq and they wish the U.S had never gone in. However, since we did go in, they want to help us stabilize things there. They said, "Look, we don't have the money you have, but we do have people in Turkey who are expert at this or that. We can send people over; you can have the Iraqis send a group to Istanbul. We can do a tour, we can look at the stock market," whatever it would be.

Yes, we would meet with them. We would of course advise the PRT management that we were doing that. Sometimes, we would invite the management to come along.

Q: Did you have counterparts in the Iraqi government or in the NGO world?

A: Our most important counterpart was the provincial government. We had a governance group at the PRT, also headed by a twenty-something Foreign Service Officer, I might add. They were the first line, in terms of dealing with the provincial government, including budget issues.

Q: Did you feel that you were being marginalized by those people at the PRT? Could you have done it better without the governance folks in the PRT?

A: Well, it gets back to the whole stove piping question. When the Foreign Service Officers would go on vacation, we would all start talking to each other. As the 31-61 fill-in said with a big grin, "The cat's away, the mice will play."

It would have helped if the cat had stayed away indefinitely. If you knew what different people were doing, it was easier to think imaginatively about what we might put together, what we might do next. But the Foreign Service Officers tried pretty hard to prevent that.

Q: Aside from the Iraqi provincial government, were there local business people or civil society groups that you might have had something to do with?

A: Sure, we were working on that. Now some people up there didn't want to meet with us, because they thought it was dangerous. That sort of gets back to the question of why we have to do everything using military convoys. Some bankers would just flat out refuse to get together with us, for example.

We did try to develop contacts. I was certainly trying to meet people in business, because usually when you meet people in business you can get an idea about what's on their minds, and what we could do that would be useful. Usually, whatever we might do that would be useful would require us going down to Baghdad and try to work on something at the national level. Again, sitting at the local level like that, we had a little bit of leverage, just because we had a different point of view, but not very much.

Having said that, for all of the presence we had up there, for all of the money the U.S. is spending, and for all of the military people involved, the dump from our contacts was really pretty thin. This is partly caused by the security issues I mentioned, and partly because of the way we were managed, the stove piping, the effort to keep things separate.

We did have some contacts. We met a few businessmen for whom AID, for example, might have wanted to spend some money. That all moved pretty slowly. The AID people were quite frustrated.

Q: Let's go on to public affairs. Did you have a public affairs officer?

A: Yes.

Q: Was it an effective program?

A: I don't know what they were doing. I think anything I say there would be so impressionistic and removed that it wouldn't do you much good. The first public affairs officer we had was another twenty-something Foreign Service Officer. I think the team leader managed to get Foreign Service tenure for them. Then the officer then left. Again, they come in, and then they go.

A person from the State Department came in. They were not in their twenties. They are there for another year. To an outsider, they come over as more likely to be competent and to have some judgment.

I don't know what they are doing. I'm just not the right person to interview on that.

Q: And then there's a question about how well how effectively, the PRT fulfilled its mission to bolster moderates and to provide the economic component of the U.S. counterinsurgency effort. Now, what was that? What was the economic component of the U.S. counterinsurgency effort?

A: I was there as an advisor. No one ever gave me a paragraph or a page that said, "Here are what our function is economically." I did see a U.S. inspector general report that came out in late 2007 on the PRTs, which described what the functions of the different sections of the PRT were.

The RTI worked under the governance portfolio. They were contractors and one step removed from what the rest of us were doing. RTI worked a lot around Iraq. They got outside the fence more than most of us did. Indeed, they had their own security and they didn't even share their moves with the PRT or the military.

Q: Do you think they were effective? Did RTI do a good job?

A: I am not the right person to answer that. I just don't know. I wasn't working with them.

Q: But you did have the impression that they kind of kept things close to the vest? They didn't share their strategies?

A: Well, let me be careful. They kept their security very close to the vest. I don't mean to say they were close about other things. Other things were a bit stove piped, meaning most of their dealings were through the governance unit, rather than through the economics unit.

Q: Well, wasn't that their job? Wasn't it mainly to build governance, not anything else?

A: The State Department-led governance group tended to handle relationships with the governor. This involved, for example, how quickly they were spending money, which is very important.

The Iraqis are not spending money very fast. Everybody wonders, "Well, gee, why can't the Iraqis spend money faster, that would create some jobs, then it will help stabilize the economic and political situation over there."

They are spending money slowly and there are a variety of reasons for that. There isn't all that much that can be done at the PRT level. The effort to get them to spend money faster at the PRT level is through the governance group, not through the economics group. And yet, that was one of the most important economic impacts that we could have out there.

Now, I started to tell you about this inspector general report last fall. It outlined the different things that the PRTs were to do, that the different portions, the five or six different sections, were to do. In my judgment, the outline for the economics group was the weakest of the five or six sections. There are lots of things you could do with infrastructure, with rule of law, with politics, with the regional government. With economics, it was kind of an extension of CERP programs. The military has to go out and spend money (commander's discretionary funds) and try to stabilize things.

We were basically doing an extension of that. We tried to get USAID money, community stabilization funds, quick response funds, and that sort of thing.

What I thought we should be doing was building a financial sector. Whenever you talk to any Iraqi trying to do business they always say, 'We can't get any money. There's no banking system. We can't borrow. We don't even have trade credit. We can't even borrow from our suppliers or from those who purchase from us.'

In most economies, you've got lots of lines of credit extended. But in Iraq, there was just very little. I saw that as something we could work on. We had a local presence so we should be able to help bring some people together. To do that, though, we were going to have to get some changes legally or governmentally.

A lot of the credit issues involved Baghdad, for example, the ministry of finance, because this was a country still, basically, at war and because it was an oil rich country where everything goes through the ministry of finance, anyway. That's where the oil revenues go. The ministry of finance just has to be involved with extending letters of credit.

I was trying to do that, from way out on the periphery of things. I couldn't get much done and the people I was working for kind of lost interest. It was clear that my efforts there were kind of falling flat, although, had I gone to work at the MND, I would have had another chance to start pushing some of that.

I thought that was the kind of thing we should be doing at the economics level in the PRTs. We were not doing it. We were just doing these little programs where we'd look for ways to go out and spend a bit of money.

Q: Did you have any contact with the PRDC, the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee?

A: I didn't, personally.

Q: Did you deal with the rule of law person in your PRT?

A: Yeah, very good person.

Q: But they didn't have too much to do with economics, I presume, did they?

A: I discussed that with them. I'd occasionally say, "Does this make sense?" They were pretty good professionals and they had some good ideas. They put me in touch with an Iraqi professional who was excellent, a person in Baghdad, and we talked on the phone.

Q: Would you say that the position, itself, was empowered to be effective and so on, or was it just the personality of this person who made it work?

A: Well, there were a couple of things. They were certainly very competent. They absolutely acknowledged the importance of commercial law. Rule of law is the basis for economic development, but most of the rule of law things they were dealing with had to do with war crimes. Maybe that was all they had room for.

But one of the reasons they could be more effective is that, as a career DOJ employee, they had a certain amount of buffering from PRT management.

Q: Is there a specific list of accomplishments that one could point to that this PRT achieved?

A: We had very good people working on the rule of law and on infrastructure. I'm sure both of them could give you a list of some things they did. I can tell you, both of them were pretty alienated from PRT management. And they both had some buffering. But, certainly, they both had a lot of experience. The infrastructure person has been in and out of Iraq for the last five years.

Sort of an amusing aside: After I was let go, someone came to my office and said, "You know, we want to do something for you. We'd like to have an awards ceremony before you go." And I assured them that I was not interested in an awards ceremony, given the circumstances. But then I learned about a couple of other people subsequently who were offered awards and turned them down.

Q: Who was in a position of authority to fire you?

A: A young FSO went to the team leader, who backed them up. They did it when two people who would have defended me were on vacation. Here was a person who basically hadn't talked to me about business for months. Instead, everything that wasn't about to change. Finally, toward the end of the meeting, I said, "Well, would you be willing to wait a few days? People are coming back, someone who was my supervisor for a while and someone at AID. Would you be willing to wait and get their opinions?"

The team leader said, "No, I have confidence in my section head."

I would have said, "Well, it sounds like you don't have confidence in anybody else that works for you." I'm told, though, that it's a good thing I didn't say that.

Q: A general question about the effectiveness of PRTs in the four areas they're designed to address: improving governance, promoting economic development, utilizing American military and civilian resources and counter-insurgency.

A: Counter-insurgency tries to bring the civilian population over to your side. In that sense, it's different from conventional war, where you don't worry too much about the civilian population. In that mindset you've got an enemy and you want to go out and destroy it, which is traditionally what the U.S. military likes to do. I think the military has actually done a very good job on counter-insurgency.

Our economic program in Iraq lacks coherence. If this were the private sector, you'd pay somebody millions a year to come in and straighten the program out and to give it some coherence through getting people on the same page, getting them working together, and to be responsible for results.

I think there has been a lot of progress on the combat side. And yet, counter-insurgency requires that these "softer" things, like political development, rule of law, and economic development, be brought into the game. We need some coordination of economic strategy at the top in order for the PRTs to play an active role in implementing it. If there had been a strategy for extending credit to someone outside of the banking system (eg. Financial sector development or property rights, non-bank finance, trade credits, reverse factoring, some things you could do with agricultural commodity warehouse receipts) the PRT could have been more effective. We couldn't do any of that working just at the local level. That had to be coordinated at the center. Had I gotten to the MND, I would have been in a much better position.

Q: Was there an agricultural person in your PRT?

A: Yes. They were not interested in the financial questions. When you get people from USDA, they tend to have a lot of ideas about how to improve growing techniques and how to maintain your equipment.

Q: So they were not an agricultural economist, they were true agriculture purists?

A: That's basically right. Now, had we had a cogent economics program, they certainly, could have worked with it. But we did not. They, certainly, were not playing an active role in introducing the kinds of economic changes that I just loosely identified as critical. They did not see it as their function. I saw it as my function, though, as an advisor.

Q: And what was your home agency?

A: I'm an independent contractor. I was a 31-61 with the State Department. I was hired basically for 12 months.

Q: Did you receive adequate training before going to Iraq as part of the PRT?

The State Department did have some training in Washington before I went to Iraq. It consisted of several days of meeting people in the State Department, or having them come and talk with us.

Q: Was that adequate and appropriate or would you have made some modifications?

A: Well it was appropriate. Was it adequate? It was certainly a good start. I think they made an effort to put together a good program.

Q: Would you make any suggestions for modification in that training?

A: Not really, no. I think that was reasonably good.

Q: What lessons did you draw from your experience?

A: Just with the PRT, it is a resource. If we had a more coherent strategy at the top, we could use the resources, the people we have out there, more effectively.

Q: Who's at the top?

A: OPA, in terms of any kind of strategy or coordination. However, they've been AWOL, and haven't done anything, as far as I can tell. By their own statement, their job is to staff the PRTs. So they're not providing it at all.

Now, the next place to look, the embassy in Baghdad, they've got a large economics group. They also have a political group. Just being an embassy, they're probably better on the political stuff than they are on the economic stuff. That group is not putting together a very coherent program. Indeed, if they were, then the military people might not be so anxious to get their own economic strategist in house.

When I get over there, I will actually see part of my job to as trying to develop some of this strategy at a higher level. As we do that, I hope the PRTs can become more functional. Again, I feel the area where they have been the least functional is in economic development.

Basically, I don't know what the other PRTs are up to and I don't want to talk as though I do. I have a sense in terms of what they're doing in the economics area, based on discussion and what I read in the IG report. The answer is: Not very much.

Q: Are there other lessons that you would point to that would be helpful in the future?

A: The State Department has to learn to use outside talent better if they're going to try to run these things. They can't just have senior people reporting to junior Foreign Service Officers and expect to have coherent programs.

OPA should be revamped. They should make them create some coordination, some communication, and some strategic guidance. If OPA can't do it, just get rid of OPA, push them aside, and let somebody else do it.

Mainly, you need some coherence at the top, so you can implement something through the PRTs.

Q: I want to thank you very much.

A: You're welcome.

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