United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Iraq PRT Experience Project

INTERVIEW #57

Interviewed by: Mehmed Ali
Initial interview date: August 15, 2008

Executive Summary

The interviewee promoted development projects as part of an e-PRT in the Taji area north of Baghdad. At first there was a clash of cultures between American civilians and military, and lack of knowledge of the procedures of the other side, as well as ignorance of Iraqi culture and history. This was ameliorated over time with changes in personnel and improvement in the working environment. Also in the beginning, sometimes roles were not appropriately assigned, or military hierarchy undermined more efficient operation because a person of superior rank would have more influence over operations than an expert of lower rank.

The overall operating environment, which was plagued by a high number of attacks on Americans, improved dramatically with the beginning of the Sahwah, or Awakening, in which Sunnis began to cooperate with U.S. forces and Iraqi civilians were able to resume more normal lives.

The interviewee credited the "surge" of U.S. forces with providing enough troops to allow success of the U.S. policy of stationing of troops in pacified areas for the long term, rather than pacifying and withdrawing. This gave Iraqis confidence to return to areas they had fled and to re-engage in business and other activities.

The interviewee noted that sometimes it was very useful to have immediately disbursable funds to kick-start an Iraqi activity, but that too often in the past short-term projects had been implemented quickly in the interest of counterinsurgency and had not provided a lasting benefit. As a result, for example, Iraq is strewn with empty clinics that are not staffed because their construction was not coordinated in advance with the ministry of health.

The interviewee believes strongly that local people must be involved in projects from the beginning and that U.S. input must be leveraged to bring out Iraqi resources and input: "This has to be an Iraqi owned process…. It's got to start and end with the Iraqis…. We shouldn't do step one without doing it in partnership."

The interviewee enjoyed good cooperation from some international organizations and NGOs, such as USIP. But others, such as ILM representatives, objected to PRTs because they "blur the distinction between humanitarian and military-based operations."

The interviewee's past experience in development work was cited as having been beneficial to working in Iraq, as was training at the Joint Readiness Training Camp.

The interviewee had high praise for Ambassador Crocker and for General Petraeus and his staff and the U.S. military overall, including brigade and company commanders: "I want to commend the strategy that the U.S. has adopted. I think it's fantastic. And now we have to have the courage to follow through and reduce our footprint."

Interview

Q: What made you decide to come to Iraq?

A: That's a loaded question. I was never a very big proponent of our foreign policy in Iraq, I didn't think the war was the best idea at the time, and at the same time I realized that we had come here into Iraq and removed the structure that was here, and in 2006 when I was looking at my options there was a lot of chaos, there was a lot of sectarian violence and it looked like Iraq was headed into chaos, and it looked like the American people had lost their appetite for what was happening here and I was just like, "Hey, we have an obligation, we started this thing and we have an obligation to get involved." I was impressed with General Petraeus and they were talking about these ePRTs and PRTs and the surge, and it was an opportunity to come in kind of late to the surge. It was an opportunity to come in on the cusp of the surge with this new thing called an embedded PRT, and for me honestly it was a chance to rediscover my heart for development, to get out there right on the ground in a kinetic environment. It was a chance to be a part of history. But at the end of the day it was a deep sense of obligation, this feeling that we had a commitment to stay and produce something when it wasn't very popular but, I felt, we had an obligation to be here.

Q: Tell us a little bit of background about your ePRT, the location and the history, the size, just go through the numbers.

A: There is a fundamental difference between PRTs as they existed and this concept of ePRTs as they came along with the surge. Our area is up in Taji and that is about 30 kilometers north of Baghdad. And at the time our area concentrated on Taji itself; you can think of it as kind of a rural county.

Most of our focus is right on the gates of Baghdad outward, everything north of Baghdad, west of Baghdad, and the area is comprised now of four rural counties: Abu Ghraib, Tormea (north of that), and just on the other side of the Tigris River over behind Sadr City, a place called Istikal. We call them kaddahs. Taji itself really doesn't have a population center. There's an area that is so many kilometers long along a major highway that we call Taji. There is a large market there, but it doesn't really have a focal point, unlike Abu Ghraib which has the city of Abu Ghraib, and Tormea which has the city of Tormea, and Istikal which has a city called Husanea.

To give you some kind of context, right now our area is 1300 square miles and is largely rural. It wraps around the western side of Baghdad all the way in a crescent shape around the northern side of Baghdad. It's still part of Baghdad province, which is unusual because most of the municipalities in Baghdad are really urban entities. So we're kind of the country cousins of Baghdad, but critical for a lot of things with regard to security obviously. The Baghdad-Mosul highway goes right through there and it was a major lane of operation during the time when a lot of Al-Qaeda type operatives were active.

When we got there the unit was called the First Cav. One of the units was actually General Custer's original Cav unit, and if you know anything about Cav units, they have a rich history and a sense of tradition as to who they are. They can trace it all the way back. They're not afraid to color outside the lines. They had inherited a tough area. People were really worried about them when Iarrived. It was a very kinetic area, which is the military's way of saying there was a lot of violent activity. There was the camp itself, Camp Taji, and from the minute you stepped outside the camp it became dangerous. The Taji market had about 10 shops and there was a sniper operating there who would take shots at our vehicles and at the guard towers. You would find bodies thrown into the market in the morning. They said at the time I arrived that they were averaging about 380 significant actions (SIGACTS) a week. That was either incoming mortars or IEDs that were hitting people or sniper shots that were hitting people. But an average of 380 per week.

We had Taji and about half of Abu Ghraib, including the city of Abu Ghraib itself. Well, the city of Abu Ghraib belonged to an Iraqi general but we had the city around it and it was tough going. Things had started getting better in Abu Ghraib due to this thing called the Sahwah or the Awakening. Our area looks a lot like Anbar, predominantly Sunni and a lot of Sunni sheiks. It's a different environment. The minute you leave the gates of Baghdad it is a different feel and a different climate. There's a strip that's largely Shia along the Baghdad highway as you come into the city, but the area along the Tigris River, which is just a little bit east of that, and everything west of that little strip, tended to be more Sunni.

Right in the middle of Taji, below the camp, there's a thing called the grand canal that splits our whole area in half. There are only one or two places where you can cross that canal, and everything north of that canal is absolutely Sunni, so there were dividing lines out there. We were dealing with more of an al-Qaeda threat than anything else. Right about that time the Sahwah began to kick in. This is August, early September of '07. They had formed this ePRT that was staffed by one guy from State Department, one guy from AID, and a BBA, (Bilingual Bicultural Adviser) and it was augmented by army reserve officers; first there were four guys and then it was augmented month after month.

Q: What happened to the other ones?

A: A couple things. First, this whole idea of an embedded PRT was brand new in the military, and what makes an embedded PRT different from a PRT is that the focus of an ePRT is stabilization, counterinsurgency, short term/high impact civil-military efforts

aimed at pacifying the population. This is one of the first times I was aware of when we were so intricately involved with the military. We relied on them for housing, food, transportation, movement, office space. We literally sat nested inside the "fire and effect" side as a nonlethal group. The G9, which is the civil-military affairs office, they sat with us, the Cad-A civil affairs team, the press corps, sat with us.

I think it was awkward to have so many State Department guys walk in that were not under the direct command of the U.S. military. I think it was supposed to be a collaborative, team-type environment. Added to this you had these State and AID guys that weren't really familiar with the military context or the military environment walking in there too. There were some personalities that were involved. Some people, one person in particular, was very resistant to this new situation.

Q: That civilian guys would show up?

A:. The resistant person was used to this absolute authority. He was going to tell them what to do and where to sit. As soon as I got there it was incredibly kinetic for the first three or four months anyway, so we had governance guys that were trying to go out and meet with the government officials, but there weren't functioning government councils and it was dangerous. You could forget about getting out there and doing large scale economic development because it just wasn't safe. People weren't going into markets. We had 12 or 15 schools that were blown up in our area, so the whole area had stagnated. There wasn't a whole lot that was going to happen, at first anyway. Added to that, the tools that ePRTs needed hadn't been developed at that time; they were just coming on line, including a thing called the Community Stabilization Program, CSP, which is AID's response to a short-term counterinsurgency tool, and this is the sort of thing that AID traditionally deals with.

AID has AFTA which is their disaster people, who can do short- term disaster kind of stuff, but by and large it is a development agency and there's a fundamental difference between stabilization efforts and real development efforts. AID is used to thinking about things in the long haul, in the big picture, and planning on being in a country for 20-30-40 years. It will develop a seven-year strategy and work its way through, yet here it is in this environment where things change daily and the military is there for a set time, and they want to measure results on a week-to-week basis. The environment being what it is, kinetic, you've got to be able to show results on a week-to-week basis, so the tools for ePRTs weren't really there.

So this group of people shows up at this First Cav place and they really have nothing to offer when you think about it. At the time, they didn't have any money. AID's programs hadn't kicked in yet. AID has what I call a collection of eight or nine tools that are available to PRTs, which are really value-added but at the time these things hadn't really been stood up. There's a State Department tool called the Quick Response Fund. It looks like everything from cash to incoming grants to programs and organizations that come in and build civil society, but that didn't exist yet. The initial group landed at this base, there was this conflict of personality and culture as people tried to get used to each other and

figure out who each other were, and it didn't quite work initially. The PRT was also supplemented initially by a colonel who took over the governance piece and a navy captain (which is equal to an Army colonel) who took over the economic development piece. There was an engineer on staff, there were two or three or four more BBAs, and a veterinarian, and eventually an agriculture guy. They were thrust into this situation with very few resources and they were winging it.

Initially I used to compare it to a pickup game of basketball: A group of guys arrive at the scene and you look at the tallest guy and you think, ah, you have to be the center. And you assign him that job. He might have never been a center in his life, he might have never touched a basketball in his life, but a bunch of guys get together and we look around the room and say, "Oh you ran for city council, you ran for the school board once, you be our governance guy. And once upon a time you worked on a production line, so you will be our economic development guy." It wasn't so bad, but in a way it was a little bit of a hodgepodge hit and miss thing. Much later I realized that it wasn't like a pickup game of basketball; it was more like a pickup game of cricket. We were out there playing but we had no idea what the rules were.

Think about it. It's this advanced culture that goes back thousands of years, we don't speak the language, we're not in the typical AID setting where you can just jump in your car and go out and spend time with people, we're not getting to know the culture or the people. We're thrust out in this thing called an ePRT, and for civilians this is as vastly different as anything you can imagine. You're out on this base, simple things like making a phone call become obstacles that are almost impossible to overcome. They gave us cell phones but there's no cell phone reception up there. I had got all these military acronyms and things on my desk, such as an SIPR (Secure Internet Protocol Routing), and I had no idea. It was overwhelming. The culture itself, and all these people with green uniforms and their ranks, and how they interacted and what the rules were and how that affected our ePRT by having a large military component to it. It was a bit chaotic. When I got there, this big personality, the colonel who was a tough guy, was moving on. So the whole climate changed within the brigade. The climate had changed in regard to security because of the Sahwa, and I told you before there were 380 SIGACTS per week. They dropped to seven a week, within a week.

Q: And this was because the local people were asked, in a way, to stand up for themselves?

A: I think it was a combination of two factors. The first was fundamental to General Petraeus's strategy, and that was let's get guys off the FOB (Forward Operation Base) and out into the community where they walk a beat. Let's get them out of the vehicles, out from behind the walls, and out there interacting with folks. Before, we would go into a community, clear out the bad guys, and leave, and the bad guys would come back. So to move into a community sometimes meant fighting our way into that community and setting up in a house that we called a COP, a command outpost, and throwing in a company of soldiers, 70 guys, and they're out there every single day and they're walking three times per day through the community, through the markets, and they're meeting the

teachers, the folks in the community, the local leaders in the community, and they're sitting in people's homes drinking tea, and they're not leaving. What we noticed was, after a week or two or three, at first it was either deadly quiet or people were shooting at you. Then people realized that you were there to stay and all the fence sitters realize it's safe. So you get these quiet mysterious phone calls: So and so has a cache of weapons, so and so is a bad guy, and so on. And within a month or so, people with enough confidence would walk right into the COP and say such and such is going on. They realized that these guys were there to stay, that they were invested. That strategy was fundamentally important. Because of the surge we had the manpower to go out there and do it.

I think there were a couple factors related to the Awakening. People's lives had been wrecked over the last several years. You could forget about sending your kids to school, the local school had gotten blown up, you couldn't go to the local market, there were no shops in the market to begin with. Life really sucked, for lack of a better word. The economy was in the toilet and it wasn't secure. I think people were tired. The second thing was that people saw the opportunity with Gen. Petraeus's surge; there was an incentive for the Sunnis in our area. We were one of the first areas with the awakening. It started in Anbar, but with regard to the Baghdad region we were one of the first. A lot of these guys came to the table and they just said enough is enough. There is a thing called Sons of Iraq, which people can criticize if they want, but there's something about a group of guys out there watching the entrance and exits to that community, and they know who belongs there and who doesn't belong there. That has done more to give this area a breather. I'll tell you a bit more about how dramatically that set the conditions for this dramatic economic development.

But the surge began happening, Within a month or so of all these great tools coming online, resources like the Community Stabilization Program which is a half million dollars of short term counterinsurgency type projects, and the CAP (Community Action Program). I spent a couple of hours talking to these guys, and I can go into detail about what these programs do. Fascinating. INMAS (funding for agricultural development) strategy, microcredit/microfinance through what is now Tijar and back then was called Istajar, the local governance program working with local councils to train and bring them up. All this stuff was kind of coming online right around the time I was arriving so I got really lucky. The other thing that was happening was that the ePRT was starting to figure out who they were and establish a better relationship. The brigade went through a period of about two months without a State Department leader and without an AID guy. They sat there and watched all the other ePRTs go through the benefits and the advantages of having those guys there. They were a brand new group. It was like the doors were wide open, come on in, how do we build partnership and where do we begin. And to this day the partnership we established with the First Cav, and by "we" I'm talking the team itself, but on the personal level myself and the team leader.

Q: What about the military personnel?

A: I was so impressed with the caliber and quality of the officers and the intellect that these guys had. Think about a young company commander out there. He has 70 men

under his command; he's responsible for everything in the community: the security, getting the bad guys, restarting the city, managing the city, managing essential services, figuring out the healthcare, figuring out the education, figuring out the local governance situation, keeping the morale high with his troops, coordinating the logistics of food coming in and out, clearing the routes and coordinating a strategy. A young guy has these responsibilities. So when you meet one of these guys, coming from the outside like I did, it's an impressive experience. I've got a much different mindset about it now.

So it was an impressive group and the officer in charge was a great guy and he got it; he understood what we were trying to do. What we were trying to do was, really, when it comes to lessons learned, you get a group of guys out there who were all thrown out there. A lot of them did not come from a development context. They came with great skills and great heart. I didn't meet anyone who wasn't out there because they didn't want to be on the ePRT; it was a volunteer group. You take off spinning with the concept of projects, and you get into the military pace of things and the demand for quick results. The tendency is to get scattered, to run off in ten million different directions. There's a tendency to do what you're good at instead of necessarily what people need. I know this because I've had conversations where we would look at a strategy and say, we're not there yet when it comes to large scale industrial development, for example, but the guy who's the industrial development guy looks at you and says, well that's what I'm here for. So are you going to build that into your strategy because that's what you're there for or are you going to take the skills that you have and adapt them to the environment and come up with what the Iraqis really need.

That was one particular piece, and there was a tendency to want to go out there and be Santa Claus, to go out and do things that make you feel good. There was one education development guy that wanted to go out and hand out pencils. It made him feel really good. He was part of a club or something back in his hometown and they would send him hundreds of pencils a week of giveaway stuff, and his idea was to go out every day and give stuff to kids because that's what made him feel good. And I'm not sure that that's what's best for development. Maybe it fits more with making friends and stretches into counterinsurgency.

Another problem was that we were heavily staffed with senior military officers. By the time I arrived, because of the military structure, it had become very hierarchical, so who was allowed to speak at a meeting depended on your rank versus what you really brought to the table. The officer with a higher rank might not be the one who really knew what the heck he was doing or what he brought to the table. And it was frustrating. It created a dynamic that I didn't think was the most helpful. So I concluded that the most important thing was building relationships within the PRT and within the brigade. What little I knew, what little I had heard, was that the PRTs and the ePRTs that were working well were working because of the right personalities and relationships. So I focused on that. I realized that when the AID guy first arrived he was regarded as Mr. Moneybox, which is not at all what AID does. He was the senior development advisor and wanted to shape and have a strategy, shape the strategy, and think about a long-term picture with short,

immediate term impact and results, but layered and structured in such a way to get to the goal. That approach worked with some members of the team, but not others.

Q: What do you think was the reason that your long range planning wasn't received well?

A: We had a thing called a Joint Common Plan, but we were coming out of a kinetic environment and nobody really thought about where we wanted to be with essential services, where we wanted to be with governance and what we were doing. The other factor was simply this: We were seven or eight guys thrown into this 4,000 member machine in the middle of what was at the time a war zone, and the battle rhythm, the day to day schedule, began at 8:00 in the morning and often went to 12:00 or 1:00 o'clock at night. It wasn't uncommon to have a meeting at 10:00 o'clock at night. Nobody left their office before 10:00 o'clock at night.

The brigade had all of these power point jockeys running around to do different things, and you're briefing every week or every two weeks with your slides about what your projects are, what they've accomplished, boom, boom, boom, boom. The military had CERP (Commander's Emergency Response Program) money at the time and we were just now getting our hands on this thing called QRF (Quick Reaction Fund) and some of the AID projects, but didn't really have much in the way of financial resources. And there's all this pressure to brief it, brief it, brief it. There was not a lot of time. You could get sucked into this pace, this incredibly frenetic pace, sucked into running around trying to keep up with everybody, and if you didn't stop right at the very beginning and take a step back from this whole thing and say, why? Why am I doing this, what's really happening here? What are the core principles that should be guiding what I'm doing, and where do I want to be with that six months out?

It's not that they weren't receptive to it; it's that they were really, really busy. They were too busy trying to do stuff; that's what they had come out there to do. Some of my military guys were secretly hoping to get their combat patch, or whatever that was. We were able to impact the strategy. I had an ally in agriculture so that's where we were really focused.

All those guys transitioned out around the first of the year, our brigade transitioned, we lost the First Cav and picked up another Brigade combat team called which had a completely different mentality. It was an opportunity, with a whole new group of guys coming in. By the way it's about 100% civilian now, but we had a whole new group of guys.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: I mean the army reserve officers that were initially brought in to supplement the ePRT as part of the surge were being backfilled by State Department employees and contractors. The new guy for education was a civilian, the new guy for governance was a civilian. The new guy for agriculture was a USDA rep, the new guy for health was a contractor. It changed the dynamics. The other thing was, who runs the ePRT? The State Department

no doubt has the team leader, but the question was: who should the deputy be? At the time, most of the deputies were from AID. It made sense because you paired up the State Department guy with the AID guy. The AID guy is the one who understands the development piece to begin with and is out there with all the AID programs and a large percentage of resources. And the particular batch that came in with the surge, some of these guys were seasoned Foreign Service Officers and there was a natural pairing and partnership. Whether or not they were always officially the deputy team leader, whenever the team leader would go to a meeting down in Baghdad, the one guy he would bring with him was his AID guy.

With the new team coming in, I sat down and said I wanted them to sit down with their area before doing anything and develop a long-term strategy. If it's health, there should be a health strategy. Target it out a year if that's what you can do. What are we really doing here? Sit back and start asking some fundamental questions.

Let's take a step back. The environment had changed. What was once a very kinetic short-term environment was shifting. The government of Iraq was coming out of these holes, local quedda councils were beginning to flourish. Let me start foremost with what happened with the transition. That market across the street with the 10 shops, right away, because of the security, began to flourish: 100 shops, 200 shops. We went in right away and started a market association there and talked about what their plans were. They wanted to see a market revitalization happen. It was about 200, 250 shops at the time. My job was to match the needs to the tool, I matched them to the community stabilization program (CSP), which had a critical infrastructure piece. CSP would largely put people to work, young men ages 17 to 25, cleaning trash. Later it became young men, age 18 to 25, clearing canals. Cleaning trash became passé; Congress didn't like it so much. They had within their mandate the ability to do some infrastructure. This was the first time we experimented with this to a large degree. The group put together their proposal and took it to the local nahea, which is a sub-county, a town. That council approved it and took it to the quedda, the county, and they approved it. The fact that there could now be a quedda county meeting was significant. These people had gone away and come back. They were being trained by AID's RTI (Research Triangle Institute) program. They were going down into Baghdad and finding out how to run a meeting. They were getting skills. And then RTI complemented their staff with an admin person and an engineer and a financial person.

Q: RTI is a private company?

A: RTI is AID's local governance program. This can be confusing, you're going to run into this a lot, differentiation between the AID program and the AID partner. The AID partner is the company that gets the cooperative agreement to do something, in this case it was RTI. The program was the Local Governance Program. They were going down to this LGP center and getting training. The Taji set up a council that was functioning and healthy. Abu Ghraib struggled a bit because of some dynamics that were down there. That was our focus at the time; we had part of Abu Ghraib and part of Taji. The local sub-councils were beginning to stand up. In some cases they were working well, in some

cases they weren't. In some parts of Abu Ghraib there was a lot of sectarian violence, but in some places it was working well. So they took this project through and I started working with CSP, and they had people at the quedda council, and the proposal came through and we started this market rehabilitation project. It's not completed yet, but it's largely done.

What was amazing about it was that we came in and looked not just at the market itself but at the whole community. We looked at the families that were living around the market, we looked at the struggling medical clinic that was in the market, and we looked at the market itself. In the medical clinic there was a local doctor. This guy had stuck it out. His windows had been blown out by multiple IEDs, people had fired gunshots, and there had been vehicle-borne bombs that had gone off in there. He was an amazing doctor. This was the only clinic serving around 60,000 people, the only public health clinic in that area. He stuck it out. When we got in there, this clinic looked like a war zone. This was just when the Sahwah was happening. He said, "You guys have been making promises to me for two years and I've never seen anything." My colleague reached into his back pocket, took out $10,000 QRF and asked, "What can you do with this?" That was the advantage of QRF, or Quick Hit Stabilization Funds. The doctor was able to take that $10,000 and replace all of his doors, replace all of his windows, clean out all the trash, fix his roof, buy some odds and ends of medical equipment, slap some paint on the clinic, and, I think, work on the generator. He stretched it like you couldn't believe. And it earned us a friend.

So we started working on this market project. We were going to put in drainage because the community behind it was all dirt and mud and tightly compacted houses, and when it rained, and it did rain a lot in the rainy season, all that dirt and mud would flow into the market. So we thought we would put storm drains into that area and do a hard pack. Now we've actually decided to pave it. We paved the market, we paved the roads around the market, we put in sidewalks, we put in public restrooms, and we're putting in solar powered lights this week. What was significant about it though, was that we injected a little bit of capital into that place.

I came back and I was shocked at the amount of activity and reconstruction, private Iraqi capital, going into that market. The sidewalk that was put in was about eight feet wide but the distance between the sidewalk and the shops is another 18 feet. It's this wide swath through the middle that people walk in. All the local shopkeepers came out and got their own local contractors and completed the concrete from the sidewalk to their shops. I was surprised to see that those were not our contractors. Every single one of them was being paid for by local shopkeepers. The market had exploded in size and took off. It went from ten shops to one hundred, one hundred and fifty. I don't know where it is now. Maybe it's eight hundred, maybe it's a thousand shops. The footprint of the initial market rehabilitation design, which was encompassing the whole market, now only encompasses the core of the market. The market actually goes out for almost a kilometer. And the shops that are out there are shops just for construction, just the shops within the market itself I noticed were becoming second and third story shops.

The key here was security, which was a combination of Iraqi and surge forces. I noticed on one trip there were all these vendors and wholesale fruit distributors who were coming online, and I asked why they came here, and they said, "We saw all this investment coming into this community and we wanted to be part of it," so it comes back to being a fundamental tenet in what we do. You do short term stabilization efforts – the market was a stabilization effort because it was an important part of that community – but it was also linked to a longer term economic development strategy where we wanted to leverage our resources for local Iraqi investment. The clinic itself has now expanded, a combination of different sources of funding, initially U.S. government funding; we put on a maternity wing and a trauma unit.

This brings us back to the new guys coming in. I said, develop a long term strategy for your area. Secondly, reach in deep to your ministries, develop and cultivate relationships with the directors general of these local ministries. The way the money works out here is, these local quedda councils don't have any budget; the counties don't have any budget.

Q: Not a single dime?

A: Zero. But the ministries can send down from their level to the district level, then to the sub-district level. So the ministry of health is stovepiped all the way down. In the ministry of education, if schoolteachers need books they have to go straight up through the ministry of education. It's just how the system was set up. So I said dig in deep within your contacts within the ministry. And then the third thing was, I said you've got your vision and you've got your contacts within the ministry, so get out there and mentor. Mentor those company commanders on the ground, mentor your civil affairs teams. You guys probably won't be the ones out there doing the projects. You guys will be the ones who will lay the vision, you will be the technical resource, and those guys are going to be our hands and our feet. If we can get the efforts all going in the same direction in a way that makes sense, we're not going to be spending all of this additional energy fighting each other in the meantime. It has worked out brilliantly.

Q: And so the military has been good at essentially taking advice from you guys?

A: We had this fantastic group of guys, a brigade commander who really got it. In their first couple weeks some guys go running off like chickens with their heads cut off. Agriculture was an example where we developed a strategy that made sense. We need to be talking about programs not projects, we need to get people comfortable with these heirloom projects, where they can come and go and not see everything that has had to happen. Having that longer term, two or three year look, layered with short immediate results, that's the key. The brigade gets it, the brigade commander gets it. They've organized their brigade around this, we're an essential part of the team. We were recently highlighted by the Corps for the fantastic relationship we have with these guys. So much so that they had dedicated to us a platoon of soldiers to move around, dedicated guys. So I've got a small group of MRAPs (Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles). For lack of a better word, we call them Cougars. We have six dedicated vehicles that we can divide up in two groups of three. We get two movements per day dedicated to just the

ePRTs and what we are doing. We move hand in glove with the brigade and go to all the meetings. For example we have a BBA who is an irrigation guy, and the brigade engineers utilize him as an essential part. They don't touch water without bringing him into it.

Q: BBAs are all Iraqi folks or have some kind of Arab background?

A: They're all Americans but many of them have only been in America for a few years; some have been there for ten or twenty years. They are all Iraqi origin, they speak the language fluently, and they are fluent in the culture. Many of them have PhDs and all kinds of resources that they bring to the table in our AO (Area of Operation).

Our health guy, did a fantastic thing. You'll hear stories about going into a community and getting the whole shirt-pulling, "Mister, Mister" routine: "Mister, Mister, give me this, give me that, give me whatever." And a local sheik, on the other hand, might be, say, interested in what would benefit his community: "Hey, I need a medical clinic." This request was often met in the interest of short-term counterinsurgency. And today, our AO is littered with empty buildings originally intended to be, say, medical clinics and built by some very well intended American folks. But they didn't coordinate it with the ministry of health. By not doing that, it's a recipe for failure. And that comes back to a central tenet of what we're about, and that relates to the historic quote from Lawrence of Arabia: "Don't try to do everything yourself; it's better to let the Arabs do it on their own, even if it seems imperfect to you." Maybe your idea wasn't as good as you thought it was in the beginning, but the bottom line is that we are here to empower and build capacity for the Iraqis to govern and deliver essential services to their people.

You can start with a strategy that's counterinsurgency or you can start with a strategy that's short-term quick hit as long as you recognize what you're doing. In many cases it's working against what the long term goal is, and acknowledging that this is a temporal step. There is no easy solution to this; you're playing the continuum in a kinetic environment. We're way past that now, but if we have to replicate this again in another environment you have to realize that you're coming in and it isn't static, it's going to be changing, and your short term goals are important and necessary and they may take you in a completely different direction from where you want to be going. Eventually where you want to swing it around is locally led, long-term development and sustainability. You have to find a way to make that transition occur. You can say, I'm going to do this; it doesn't fit with my long term goals but I know why I'm doing it. And you can eventually crank that thing back around.

Our health guy has done a really good job of linking in to the ministry of health, and that's not an easy ministry to link in to. He has put the ministry of health in the driver's seat, and we don't do anything that they don't buy off on. You can go out there and throw a lot of high tech into a clinic, but if it's not part of a ministry of health's repertoire of equipment, nobody's going to know how to maintain it or train people on it or fix it if it's broken and get replacement parts. If you use their stuff, even if you don't think it's the best, at least you're building capacity within the ministry of health.

The clinic we were working with in the Taji market now has a maternity wing and a trauma center and another building that's being built. Ministry of health engineers do all quality control on that; they've been intricately involved in all the planning. We paid for it so we selected all the contractors, but I think eventually even that piece will shift as well. They've led in the design, they've led in the approval process, and more importantly they've said, "If you build this, we will staff it with five additional doctors." When we went in to Abu Ghraib hospital, we did what we were good at; we reconnected an electrical line to that hospital so it has 24 hour a day electricity. We also have this CSP project that's in there that's doing some equipment and pieces. But through the whole process, and there's a lot that they wanted to do, we put the director of the hospital and the ministry of health at the table and right away stepped out of the room. It's been Iraqi-led. As a result, today the ministry of health has pledged $3,000,000 of additional money to that particular hospital and another $60,000 to some of the area clinics.

Q: Let's take you a little bit further down this road because I think this is a very important topic. How do you think you and your team have been able to get the buy-in from the ministries, whether it be health or ag or whatever?

A: That's a huge question. I think part of it is recognizing your place. I'll give you an example. Iraqis are going to do things the way Iraq wants to do things. When you think about it, it's a four thousand year old society, give or take a few hundred years, and it's complex. I used to say this about the governance efforts. We were trying to stand up these local queddas and assiyahs. It's almost like we came out to create governance in our own image. We have to have a county, we have to have a sub-county, and it has to operate this way. At the same time out in our area already (and this is different from Baghdad) there existed sheik councils, and these councils had an education guy and a health guy, etc. It exists as a shadow government in some ways but and we wanted to ignore that. They functioned when things were bad, but we wanted to march blindly along our way. In conversations with my superior he said, "We're going to leave here and Iraq is going to look the way Iraqis want it to look and like it or not, these guys are players." These sheiks are players, these sheik councils are players, and there needs to be a way or a process that integrates the existing system into these other systems.

Having the queddas, the kaddahs, and the hiyyahs, that's Iraqi too, but trying to bring together this traditional tribal structure with the local structure, in stepping away from a Western U.S. viewpoint, in working with ministries and building those relationships, we may not like the way the public health system is set up in Iraq or the way it is so stovepiped down with the different directors general, but it is what it is. And I have to tell you, a lot of these guys have stuck through thick and thin and are in it because they care about what they do. I spent a lot of my time on water and irrigation because we're a largely rural area and if farmers can't farm then that's most of the employment in our area. And the key to water is electricity.

My hero is this director general for water and irrigation because he knows his stuff. This guy is bright, really, bright, well educated, but with no resources. To give you an example

of what happened, during my first couple of weeks out there, the Iraqis formed ag associations with our motivation. And I attended this ag meeting and they said, "Water. We need pumps, we need generators to run the pumps, we need these canals done." And I was sitting there listening to this and they said, "You guys haven't delivered." So now I'm on the defensive. I've got to deliver something, and it's north of the grand canal, so these are Sunnis. The grand canal splits our AO in half. Everything south of that canal is pump-fed; we pump the water out. Everything north of that canal doesn't get its water from the canal. It gets its water from about sixty miles north, and it comes down here through the west canal and the east canal and it's gravity-fed; it's a hundreds of years old gravity-fed canal system.

I'm talking to the guys north of the canal and they're talking about pumps and generators and I do the math on it. And by the way, the AO was dry when we got there. So I do the math on it and it's about a million bucks. How much of a crop are they going to produce, a couple hundred thousand dollars worth of stuff? I save the U.S. government $600,000 if I just cut these guys a check and walk away. We started talking and I asked: "why are we talking so much about pumps? It seems like we're trying to pump water up hill; I thought this was gravity fed." And they start saying, well it is gravity fed but the guy north of us blocked the canal. And I say, well what are you doing about it? And they're looking at me because I've got money and maybe an opportunity to get a contract, so I say, who's in charge of water issues? And they respond, that person doesn't come up here. So I ask if they have the person's phone number, and tell them to get him on the phone. Two hours later he shows up at the meeting, and comes in with all these maps. Here's a guy I hadn't interacted with before, didn't even know he was out there.

I got everybody together, in two or three meetings, and worked out exactly where the problems were. They – these sheiks – and this guy from the ministry of water and irrigation took a trip up north into Tormea and had a conversation with the water officials about what the problems were, and within a week the blockages had lifted. They had resulted when somebody had blown up a car and blocked off a gate and jammed up the water. It took eight days for the water to reach us and at that point the whole area was just flush with water and it didn't cost us a dime. It was about Iraqis, not us, taking ownership, linking into their own structure, and being empowered to do it.

I don't want to discount counterinsurgency and I don't want to say that this represents counterinsurgency, but the short-term, knee-jerk "I have to do something quick and spend money now" has its drawbacks. The ability to really step back and reach into the ministries and be a resource and as much as possible use Iraqi money and Iraqi resources pays off for the long term. At the same time I've got a major agricultural project south of the canal and we had to focus on this one pump section to supply the whole area, and I knew the military had the capacity to reconnect the electrical line to that pump station, and they did that. They targeted it; they saw it as a critical node; they worked in partnership with the Baghdad ministry of water resources. They got that electrical line connected and they got that pump station going and this whole area is flush with water and that's strategic for us because that's right by the gates of Baghdad. It's this well organized well developed agriculture system out there with these sheiks.

I'm working on a feed lot with a sheik. He and his sons have a couple hundred thousand dollars of their own money to invest in this project. The feed lot is going to allow us to do forward contracting with local farmers to do alfalfa and corn and connect that to a feed node. Our main goal is to stand up a cheap source of feed in our AO. The feed lot is going to give us the capacity to do that. And the military will focus on its piece. That's what we do. we do this thing called network targeting. We say, "Here's the problem set, here are the critical nodes, here's what we can influence, here's what you guys can influence, and we're going to work this thing together so that we can set the conditions for this feed lot to come in and this employment to take place." I've got maize in the ground now that is a predecessor to the actual feed lot being constructed, and I've got a project that's getting going with alfalfa, and I've got a group of ag extensionists out there working with farmers, so that when the feed lot comes in we are set to go. You're going to see a tremendous impact on the AO. It's going to be Iraqi-led, with Iraqi investment and Iraqi money.

Agriculture here had been very socialized, they were used to getting handouts from Saddam, and people ask you all the time to give them seed. And God bless my brothers from USDA, who would love to commoditize that and bring in loads and loads of U.S. wheat and such, but that's not a sustainable strategy. Maybe it's good for U.S. farmers, but I don't think that's where we're headed here. I want Iraqis to be able to grow high yield wheat. We did a seed project – remember we established these ag associations – and the carrot was, "I'll give you guys some free seed if you'll establish these ag associations." Well. I wasn't that interested in giving them free seed. We found these ministry-approved high yield tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, eggplant and onions. We paired this with plastic greenhouses (mini greenhouses) and we took some of these ag associations, I think like fourteen of them, and we selected 900 farmers out of the total and we gave them only enough to do maybe one hectare of produce, and we did it as a demonstration plot. At the time, Taji market had the one seed store in our area, and it sold junk, outdated, five year old, expired seed. It was all that people knew. They were sprinkling nitrogen on top of the soil, and idiotic things out there were happening.

This looked like a handout. First Cav was thinking that this was counterinsurgency, was a counterinsurgency handout. It wasn't. That fruit came up, the yields were about three hundred percent what it was with the other tomatoes, so you got three times the amount in profit. The impact is this: there are dozen of stores selling seed where there was one before. They're all carrying only the seed we introduced. It's the market forces that are pushing out this new technology.

But if you give everyone high quality seed for tomatoes and everyone grows them, what happens that year? You have a bumper crop of tomatoes, the market gets saturated in tomatoes, the price of tomatoes plummets and farmers lose their shirts. So our strategy has to be long-term. We're looking at the value chain. I'm rushing to do a $3.5 million packing shed. Most Iraqis lose about forty to fifty to sixty percent of their produce due to damage, just carrying it to market. I visited one sheik in Taji, who showed me his "vegetable stand." It was a warehouse with four refrigerated trucks containing bananas

from Ecuador and tomatoes from Jordan. You look at the stuff coming in from Jordan and the tomatoes are perfect – they're round and they're red and they're all the same size, they're in these cool little boxes, and they look inviting, and they're cheap. Most Iraqis think that the better tasting stuff is being grown in Iraq, but it's discolored; some is ripe, some is overripe, it's cracked, it's thrown into a crate that's two feet by two feet and all the stuff on the bottom is crushed.

So now we are introducing this new technology and I've got this ag extension out there and we're working on production. If there isn't a market for this stuff, these guys benefiting from the improved seed are dead in the water. So this packing shed will be able to forward contract these higher yield varieties of seed to farmers. This stuff comes in, we cool it off, it halts the aging, it gets cleaned and sorted, and we begin to take the same-sized tomatoes and put them all in the same little tray, and we package it up really nice and ship it out through the sheik with the warehouse, who is our ally in this thing. He's got the network and he's got the truck and he's got the distribution system. We send our higher yield stuff into the market in Baghdad, we take the medium level stuff and he distributes that out, and we take the third or fourth level stuff and that becomes fodder and feed for animals.

That attacks the value chain, it creates a market, and it's the same thing for the feed lot. You have to look at the whole value chain, and I'm just using agriculture as an example. You can take this into the ministry of health and healthcare, into the governance side. You have to take this into the whole network. The SOIs, the Sons of Iraq, are about to be transitioned and our brigade wants to put them guys into vocational training sessions, but there are no jobs at the other end of the vocational training. You have to think, if I do such training I need to do job placement. If I do that, I need to have been working with some large scale industry and businesses, and I need to have relationships where the guys in industry and business agree to hire some of these people. It has to be a more systematic approach, and it comes down to this: we don't do projects; we do programs. We look at the overall impact. I will layer that program with some immediate short-term results, but I want it harmonized. If we're going to do CSP and put guys to work cleaning canals, let them clean the canals that are in the feedlot area where we're putting corn in. Then we've got the short-term effect of a group of men 17-25 busy for two months working, but it works toward a long- term effect of getting water flowing to a place where it is strategic for us to have water. If you can have that kind of strategy and that kind of vision, that is the way forward.

Q: External relations. Describe the PRT's relationship with NGOs that might have been in the area.

A: Nongovernmental Iraqi?

Q: Could be international or local. Maybe you can pick one that worked and one that hasn't. Describe the relations with international and nongovernmental organizations if there were any in your area.

A: I'll give you two or three examples. A lot of the organizations that were in our area happened to be, for example USAID programs, so I'm going to take those out of the mix because those don't really count. There are Iraqi NGOs that are standing up now. There's been an absence of a lot of NGO type activity in our area, and it's a hindrance. You want to find partners that can become a mechanism for you to do things. But we've now been successful through, for instance, the U.S. Institute for Peace. We were given a grant to do women's centers, but we didn't know where to start. We didn't want it to come from us anyway, and our team was a group of guys. I spoke with the USIP director to determine who the major players were, including groups working with women's organizations. USIP was able to connect us with four or five different local organizations that agreed to do an extension of their organization in our area to set up these women's centers. USIP was willing to shepherd and be the gatekeeper and the payer for that project.

Q: So they have a center here in Baghdad?

A: USIP has an office here in Baghdad They helped us make the contacts with the Iraqi organizations to do the women's centers, and they agreed to take care of the money and manage this whole thing on our behalf. In that particular case that's fantastic, and our hope is that a year from now there will be a group of locally based NGOs operating.

On the negative side, there's been a lot of discussion since 2006 about internally displaced people (IDPs), and typically UN-based organizations and entities like ILM (International Labor Migration). I attended a conference in Oman to talk about our issues with IDPs and returnees. I told them about the idea of an ePRT and there was a look of shock and awe on their faces, because they pride themselves on humanitarian assistance being completely divorced from the military. And a lot of people were upset because they think ePRTs "blur the lines of distinction between humanitarian and military based operations," and I'm quoting.

I had been involved with a city of 60,000 people that had emptied out to 2,000 people during the sectarian violence. And when the Sahwah kicked in, I looked up and 35,000 people had come home, and it was wintertime and it was cold, and their houses were gutted and they had no electricity and there was a town mayor there that has his hands full trying to handle these 35,000 people. So I am looking to ILM and to these UN-based entities to come out and give us a hand and they wouldn't come out. They felt it was too dangerous and they were not willing to be there. So we stepped in and we worked through the ministry of displacement and migration, and we worked through the local mayor in that town and we gave them some humanitarian packets with blankets and heaters, and helped people get their houses reconnected. The mayor took the lead with the Iraqi police to make sure that people had the right to be in particular houses.

It was all good, and when I presented this account at the conference I thought, this thing is really great, you'll want to hear about it. But the international community reacted with shock and with anger. They thought that that wasn't our role and they were right, but they weren't here to pursue the role. We were present on the ground, and even if they don't like ePRTs and they're not familiar with the concept, we're their vehicle to do this. They

can partner with us and we'll help them make things happen or they can ignore it and we'll keep doing what we're doing.

Q: Did you guys have a rule of law officer with you there?

A: There are two ePRTs in our AO and there was one rule of law guy. He ended up making his home mostly with the other PRT, at the time. That said, on the brigade staff is the legal office, and that officer becomes your lead for rule of law. Abu Ghraib and Tormea had courthouses. By the time we took over Tormea we had a much better role with rule of law and we were able to be present when they sent judges from Baghdad back to Tormea. Now there's a functioning courthouse there with judges, and we're working there to build capacity. But one of the new guys on our list is definitely a rule of law guy. We think we're there; we think he'll have a lot to do and I think we've moved into the phase where that's more applicable.

Q: Were you guys active much with the Abu Ghraib prison?

A: No. That came and went before we arrived on the ground and was shut down long before we got there. So we had no involvement with that at all.

Q: How about a PRT cultural advisor?

A: Initially it was just trying to keep our heads attached to the rest of our bodies and stay safe. The thing to remember when you go through these phases is, where one PRT or ePRT might be, others might be lagging behind. We went from kinetic stabilization and now we're moving into development and partnership and I think now's the time when we can begin to think about something like that. But if you look at Maslov's hierarchy of needs you know that was a little bit further down in our list. But it says a lot about not developing a canned strategy. Your strategies will develop and change over time based on the permissiveness of the environment you're working in.

Q: Do you think you had adequate training to prepare yourself to serve in the PRT?

A: Yes, and no. I was lucky, really unique, I was able to go to Fort Polk Louisiana to participate in the Joint Readiness Training Camp. It's a simulated Iraqi village and it's kind of like NTC (the National Training Center). All the brigades before they come out here go there to do a live drill for three or four weeks. It's just like they're in Iraq and there's a simulated PRT or ePRT there and all these role players. JRTC t had like eight hundred people role-playing as Iraqis living there and speaking Arabic.There are fake insurgents in another military unit living there. It had four different towns and two or three different FOBs. And they put you into this experiment; it was like being in a chemistry class, I guess, where you get injected into it and you role play it. There are explosions that take place and IEDs.

Q: Were you one of the first groups of civilians?

A: I was one of the first civilians to do this. I had never been with the military in any way shape or form. I learned a lot in those two weeks about the culture – who the military were, the difference between a colonel and a lieutenant colonel and a Captain, and what the command structure was. I absorbed as much of the military language as possible and what they were talking about when they said "targeting and deconflicting and syncing," they meant "target." When they said "nonlethal work," it was their word for development and meant "targeting." In other words, you target bad guys to do them harm but you target a medical clinic or an irrigation system to do good. And I have to be very careful with that terminology when I came here in a civilian role. I got a level of training that when I got here nobody none of the other civilians had. It was good for a couple reasons. At the JRTC the military took me out to a village and with a little command operation center and they got called away and left me there and forgot me there for two days. I had nothing. I didn't have a sleeping bag or anything.

Q: For real, it wasn't part of your training?

A: They didn't know what the heck a PRT or ePRT was or who the heck I was, so they dropped me off and didn't come back and get me. So where do I sleep? Well there's a cot there –hot-bunking. He gets off and I lie down. There are these people called OCs—controllers—who are referees running around taking notes. They went looking for me and one found me at like ten o'clock at night and said they were going to take me out of there. So he called in and the guys running the experiment said no, because the brigade had gotten me out there and needed to figure out a way to get me back. They needed to figure out that they had forgotten somebody.

It taught me a lot about flexibility and about how occupied these guys are with different things and the pressure they're under. And I'm not always going to be the number one . And it also taught me that it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, they're going to make a decision about you within a short period of time, about what you can deliver. You need to come in there and you need to be credible. Don't ever represent yourself as somebody you aren't. Be who you are, bring what you bring to the table, be flexible. Misunderstandings will create hostility. You have to realize there will be a lot of other things going on and you're just a part of that.

I got to go through that training, and that had everything to do with my success when I went into Taji. They're talking about doing a larger scale program, If so, I think it would be very beneficial to have feedback from someone who has gone though the training and then gone to Iraq, and if possible to link up the trainees with their brigade if they happen to be going out at the same time. The other training that I brought to the table was years of living abroad and doing development, banging my head against the wall with good intentions and stuff that we often face, and tough lessons learned and knowledge of the development culture. I think it's critical to have someone with development experience as part of these teams, because they can bring that perspective and experience and it helps.

Q: If you had one outstanding experience that you could contribute to other folks that will be learning from this interview, what would it be?

A: I think the core lesson is that at the end of the day this has to be an Iraqi-owned process. You may not like it, you may not like the way it looks, you may not always like the amount of time it takes to get there but, fundamentally to any effort or anything we're doing, it's got to start and end with the Iraqis. If we can't dig in and link in, we shouldn't ever do step one without doing it in partnership. That's what I take away from this.

Q: Any final thoughts?

A: I came out here at a great time because a group of people cracked the code. Hats off to people like Ambassador Crocker and to my heroes like General Petraeus and his team and the brigade commanders, and to the company commanders that are out there. No one ever trained these guys to do all the stuff we're throwing at them. The time will come for the guys in green to step away from the table. Don't be too worried about that. I guess that's where I'm going with this. I want to commend the strategy that the U.S. has adopted, I think it's fantastic, and now we have to have the courage to follow through and reduce our footprint.

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