

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

INTERVIEW #59

Interviewed by: W. Haven North
Initial interview date: October 8, 2008
Copyright 2008 USIP & ADST

Executive Summary

The interviewee led Research Triangle Institute's (RTI) Local Government Program (LGP) funded by USAID, which spent about eleven million dollars a month, mainly for salaries, training activities, and some equipment. The LGP had about 75 subject matter experts assigned to PRTs in Iraq. He was in this position from September 2006 to August 2008, including a month in the PRT in Mosul. RTI was active in all provinces and in 16 of the PRTs. In Salah Ad Din Province the expatriates lived on the military base and the Iraq staff lived in the town. The security situation and movement at the PRTs varied: Dyala and Anbar Province were very restricting; Hillah was open to the community; Baghdad required military escorts. Personnel were rarely allowed to go to Najaf or Karbala. In a majority of places, personnel went out with U.S. military-provided Movement Support. Work was carried out in provincial buildings. RTI had its own private security firm.

On PRT organization, the State Department had about 13 of the 16 team leaders with military deputies. The four substantive teams—infrastructure, governance, economic growth, rule of law—reported to the PRT team leaders who reported to the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) in Baghdad. RTI had staff primarily on the governance teams (finance and planning), but also on the infrastructure teams (city managers) and economic development teams (engineers). Training was a major component with significant numbers involved. Because the PRTs were on military bases, the RTI team members, who were third country nationals or U.S. contractors (not U.S. government employees), were not allowed access to military base buildings; subsequently, some unclassified areas were set up. PRT Mission Statements were classified and, thus, not available to RTI staff.

One of the main RTI governance activities and its best program was strategic planning. This involved economic, social and financial analyses, and the development of a five-year plan for each province with projects, their beneficiaries, and their financial requirements down to the district level. These plans became the rationale for the central government transferring as much as three and half billion dollars of its funds to each province on a per capita basis. The process was highly participative and led by strategic planning committees in provincial legislatures. This effort preceded the formation of Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee (PRDC).

Other RTI work: transparent budget and accounting, project financing and general provincial expenses, data gathering, and the beginning of a provincial civil service. RTI was training about 20,000 Iraqis each year with attention to team-work to get over the tribal structure of the culture. The issue of decentralization caused a great deal of angst in the central ministries. On infrastructure programs, the staff worked on the institutional aspects, for example: water and sewage projects. One issue was the desire of the PRTs to use the Iraqi staff as extensions of the PRT and direct their work or provide intelligence to the military. Another issue was Iraqi staff integrity—hand in the till. However, the staff members were fully vetted to avoid infiltration by insurgents.

A major activity was setting up a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in each of the provinces primarily for identifying the location of projects. There were many claimants for ownership of the data—municipalities, universities, Northern Oil Company. There was the on-going question of how the GIS would be institutionalized and sustained.

While the RTI staff did not work directly on the up-coming provincial elections, it did work to consolidate the gains in provincial management for the new legislators and provincial administrators and to insure inclusiveness.

The USAID LGP with RTI started right after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The program was predicated on the assumption that country stabilization post-conflict would best proceed at the provincial and district levels in order to have something concrete and understandable for the local populace while the national government sorted itself out.

Major achievements of LGP/RTI: the acceptance of strategic planning leading to the transfer of central resources to the provinces; the ability of the Provincial Councils to behave like representative legislative bodies. The PRTs, a Washington interagency program pushed on the country team, were only able to get their feet on the ground by the beginning of 2008. With wise leadership, they were able to focus the U.S. Government's effort on a particular province and began to deal with the local population in a constructive way. They were very personality driven, which affected their performance. They were becoming more productive with a body of knowledge of the local scene and individuals, making their work more precise. The PRT is a good idea as long as the State Department runs it, if the leader is a civilian officer, and it is staffed with civilians.

On lessons: in Mosul and Kirkut, the PRTs' principal mission was mediating difference between Arab and Kurdish populations; they were generally successful in doing that; there is a need for someone on the ground to do that.

- the PRT in Baghdad has not accomplished anything, because they did not go out of the Green Zone;
- the PRT in Anbar worked well with the U.S. Marines and got all of the districts into the political process, similarly for the PRT in Diyala;
- the PRTs in the nine Shi'ia Arab provinces have not been as effective as those in the Sunni provinces;
- the PRT in Arbil was essentially the American Embassy to the Kurds.

In sum, PRTs have been successful where American policy was relatively well defined such as with the Kurds and Sunnis, but not with the various factions of the Shi'ias.

Overall:

- the lesson that USAID intended to demonstrate that one could stabilize a country first at the provincial level, has been demonstrated;
- the U.S. Government, unlike the private sector, likes to work with centralized national ministries because working at the local level complicates things; authoritarian government is easier to deal with.

Interview

Q: How were you associated with the PRTs in Iraq?

A: I was with Research Triangle Institute's (RTI's) Local Governance Project (LGP) [USAID funded] and as part of that project we had approximately 75 subject matter experts who were assigned to PRTs in Iraq.

Q: And what period of time was this?

A: Between 2006 to 2008, roughly 2 years.

Q: And were you ever in a PRT?

A: I lived for a month in the PRT in Mosul, in 2006. I also lived in a PRT in Afghanistan.

Q: Was RTI active in all of the PRTs around the country?

A: Yes, in all 16.

Q: What was the security situation in general, as you saw it, in that period when you were there, in the various PRTs where RTI was working?

A: It depended on where we were. For instance, in the Province of Diyala, we were rarely able to get out and activities were confined to a government building. It was very similar to what Anbar Province was before the security situation improved, where everything took place in a single building in a heavily guarded compound.

Q: And how about the other areas where you were working?

A: In Hillah, we were able to deal openly with the community. We had the good fortune to have our compound adjacent to a large meeting hall and we were able to bring people there and do training and hold meetings and things like that.

The security situation in Baghdad, the expatriates were able to get out generally under military escort, because we did not have enough contract-funded assets to do it. Our offices were out in the Red Zone there, also we had approximately 275 Iraqis that came in for training and meetings.

Q: How many different areas were you working in?

A: We were in one location in each of the provinces. The actual work was carried out in the provincial building in each of the provinces.

Q: But there were not PRTs in each of these places.

A: The PRTs were on the next closest military base. For instance, in Salah ad Din Province, the project offices, which were staffed by Iraqis, were downtown and the expatriates lived on the military base, which was about 25 kilometers away.

Q: And from the RTI perspective, how did you view the organization of the PRTs? How were they organized?

A: The organization of the PRTs tended to have four teams. There was one for Infrastructure, one for Governance, one for Economic Growth, and one for Rule of Law. Those teams were all headed by a government employee from one or another government agency.

Q: And then they reported to?

A: They reported to either the team leader or the deputy team leader, depending on how the individual PRT was set up.

Q: And above the team leaders?

A: Above the team leaders, you had to come back to Baghdad, to the Office of Provincial Affairs.

Q: Was there a State Department team leader at each PRT that they reported to?

A: There was a military or a State Department (DOS) team leader in each PRT. I would guess that the DOS probably had 13 of the 16-team leaders on site at any given time. There was a lot of vacancy as they rotated people in and out.

Q: And how did RTI interface with the PRT structure?

A: My personal interface was with the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA), where we coordinated our program in broad strokes with the central administration. And then in each PRT, we were involved in the Governance cell, but we also had city managers who were involved in the Infrastructure offices, looking at solid waste and at water, things like

that. We had a small number of economic development people that AID had requested of us in mid-2007 and they worked in the Economic Development cell.

We did not do anything with Rule of Law, because in Iraq rule of law was defined as building courthouses and dealing with prosecutors and I grew up believing rule of law had a lot to do with codes and setting up the rules and things like that, but the term had been preempted to focus on courthouses and prosecutors.

Q: But the RTI team in a particular PRT, reported to the Governance team leader?

A: That is correct. The Governance team leader could have been a military person, or it could have been a State Department person, depending on the individual PRT.

Q: And how would you characterize the relationships between RTI and the PRTs, because you were a contractor, as opposed to an individual employee?

A: We had difficulties primarily because we were an unclassified contract. We used a lot of third country nationals and therefore could not be a classified contract and that caused a great deal of difficulty, especially for the military people, because each PRT was on a military base. And as a result, when they started out in early 2007, everything was classified, so we could not even go into the building, we had to meet them in other places. And eventually they relented and set up a number of unclassified offices where our people could work hand-in-hand with the rest of the team.

It turned out that what they needed was a classified conference room, a couple of senior offices that were respected. But, again, because it was military, they just announced that everything was restricted and if you were not a U.S. citizen and an employee of the U.S. government then you just could not go in.

Q: How did your teams get their support?

A: Our teams got their life support from the military base, military transport, helicopters, with the exception of Hillah and Arbil. For our office in the Red Zone in Baghdad, we were able to provide our own.

Q: You contracted out to a security firm?

A: That is correct. We had a private security firm.

Q: And were your people able to get out regularly, or were they impeded by security concerns?

A: Again, it depended on the location. For instance, we had very little trouble in Hillah, but we were only rarely allowed to go to Najaf or Karbala. In the majority of places we went out with the Movement Support of the military. So we would send a person and

there would be two or three other government employees that would go in the convoy as well.

But the Iraqi staff, as I said, we had 75 foreigners that were assigned to the PRTs. Also we had a staff of approximately 350 Iraqis who were scattered around the country and they of course did not live in the PRT, would not go on the military base. They were able to move around with a fair amount of freedom.

Q: On your staff in the field, what kind of qualifications did they have? What kind of background did they come from?

A: We had a substantial number of city managers. We were asked to provide a number of engineers. Essentially we became a hiring hall for USAID. When they wanted civil engineers or electrical engineers, whatever the PRT program called for, then we were asked to go and recruit those people. Some of them were quite closely allied to our contract terms of governance and some of them got a little far afield, but not too bad. We had a lot of people who were related to finance and planning. We did not do elections at all. That was someone else's responsibility.

And then there was a training component and the training component dealt with significant quantities of people. The PRTs were never particularly interested in the training component, because it very often operated in a place where the military could not go on a regular basis.

Q: Let us move to the specific program areas in which you were working. Let us just take them one by one and describe what the program was and how it worked and how effective was it.

A: The one that worked best was the strategic planning. This was a two-year effort where the team members sat with each of the provincial legislatures and then eventually the governors' offices as well. They did an analysis of each of the provinces and their resources and endowments and then put together a five year plan very similar to a development plan that you would see in a state in the United States, listed the projects, began to put finance information on the projects, as well as how many beneficiaries. It then culminated in late 2007, and then into 2008. It was to be repeated with the 2009 budget, where this planning exercise became a rationale for the government transferring as much as three and a half billion dollars of central funds out into the individual provinces; it was done on a per capita basis in order to let the provinces implement infrastructure projects and pay a certain amount of other salaries.

The revenue sharing was a direct result of the fact that the provincial authorities, both the executive and the legislative branch, were able to demonstrate that they knew what they were doing, as far as getting ready to spend the money.

Q: Who was involved in this planning exercise?

A: On their side, in each of the provincial legislatures, there was a strategic planning committee. This would have been a group of perhaps eight people and they were the ones that we worked with to organize the data gathering, to organize the public outreach, to organize the contact with the population and a variety of stakeholders. They were the ones who were responsible for overseeing the drafting of the documents. They were also the ones who were responsible for bringing the governor's office into the process, as the governor's offices became strong enough that it was not just the personality of the lead man. As a result, it was a very Iraqi-driven process. It did not have much of an American flavor.

Q: Was there participation by the general populace?

A: Yes, they held public hearings. They would hold meetings where they would bring in economic, political, and tribal officials. It was done better in some places than others. For instance, in Anbar the participation was quite substantial. If you went across to Kut, over on the Iranian border, the participation was less robust. It was still fairly broad, but those were mostly Sadrist over there and they really were not very much interested in anybody's opinion but their own.

Q: But you felt it was a fairly "democratic" process?

A: It was highly participative. It was as inclusive as we could make it, accepting that some parts of the country were more inclusive than others. We justified this based on the fact that in every democratic country in Western Europe, the United States and Pacific Rim, not every state or prefecture or province looks alike.

But, yes, it was a highly inclusive process and lots of people got involved with it. The documents were all done in Arabic and then translated into English. In most cases the PRTs got along well with the process. The PRT in Anbar, when the marines came in March, they looked at it and said, "Okay, if that is what the Iraqis want to do, then that is what our plan is." They simply incorporated it into their activities.

At the other end of the spectrum was Mosul, where things did not go as smoothly.

Q: How far down, did it go down to local governments: municipalities and neighborhood councils? Did they get involved?

A: We were able to push it down as far as districts. With the exception of Baghdad, where with all of the EPRTs that were involved, there was enough horsepower to push it down into the neighborhoods, below the districts. But in the other provinces it had good district representation.

Q: Were the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committees involved (PRDC)?

A: This effort happened before the PRDCs got going. The PRDC was a mechanism, as we understood it, to push forward the execution of U.S. government-funded infrastructure

projects. It tended to run parallel to the Iraqi planning process and one of the challenges we had was to get the Iraqis to take into consideration different sources of money. There was the PRT acting as a donor, had money that it could spend on infrastructure. The Iraqis had their own money they could spend on infrastructure. There were occasionally other donors that came in that had funds they could spend. As you see in many developing countries, they had to deal essentially with the ordinary budget and then the extraordinary budget and put all that together.

Q: What were the other main subject areas that the RTI groups worked on?

A: In the planning area?

Q: You mentioned strategic planning.

A: We have done strategic planning. We then also worked on public finance.

Q: What was that?

A: That was primarily done with Iraqi staff, although we had a Public Finance Advisor in each one of the PRTs whose job was to work with the budgeting and accounting areas of the provincial government. The goal was to ensure that the individual project plans and the salaries and the other general expenses of the province were transparent enough that the Ministry of Finance would have faith in the ability of the provincial government to spend funds.

We did a lot of data gathering and that data gathering then was brought in, consolidated in the central project office and turned over to the Embassy. We were perversely proud of the fact that both the military and the U.S. Treasury would take the AID emblems off the slides, put their own emblems on and use the data. The military was very good about corroborating the data.

Q: And you did a lot of training, I guess. What kind of training did you do?

A: We were training approximately 20,000 Iraqis a year. The training was in finance, it was in committee work, a lot on the strategic planning, certain contextual things within strategic planning, where there was some project management, some on economic development. For instance, out in the provinces, they did not know what a population pyramid was and how it fit with their planning over a five-year period, the number of young people who were coming up.

We did a lot of work on teamwork and committee work and generally trying to get over the tribal basis of the culture there. Once the Iraqis found out that they could talk about technical issues, then they began to function like a county board or a provincial legislature, where they would not give up their individual agendas, but they were able to talk in a rational way about the budget and about technical project work, separate from politics, if you will, because they have their own issues of pork barrel spending as well.

Q: Was there training in the nuts and bolts of administration, like budgeting and accounting and auditing and things like that?

A: We were just getting into that when I left. We had done a lot of work on budgeting. We started a very basic standardized accounting system. It was driven by the Ministry of Finance and related to the revenue sharing, but it was not intended to be a provincial accounting system. It was not obliged to take into account all of the expenses. It was not that sophisticated, yet.

We were pushing also on the beginnings of a Provincial Civil Service, because it was the desire of the central government to share out the funds, instead of paying everybody from Baghdad, they wanted to give the money to the provinces and they would pay for their own staff. But then the provinces had to come up with, well, how many staff do we have and what do they do and what pay grades are they? It was essentially dismantling the remains of the old Baath Party system, which was still functioning as a way of getting hired and operating.

Now this particular payroll budgeting did not include the staff of the various Directors General (DG) that represented the central ministries. They still remained attached to their own ministries.

Q: Who did you work with directly?

A: We treated the Directors General as stakeholders in the process. We worked very closely with Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Finance Director Generals and their staffs. In some places where water resources or agriculture was a big part of the province, especially in the agricultural regions, then they were brought in.

We worked a lot with the Ministry of Municipalities. Under Iraqi law, that ministry administers water systems and sewage systems, outside of Baghdad. One of the questions that looked like it was going to come up in 2009 was should these things all be run by a central ministry or should the central ministry begin to turn them over to the, say, city government, if the city government had reached some level of competence that was agreed on beforehand? This true decentralization was causing a great deal of angst in the central ministry.

Q: Were there other program areas you have not mentioned that you were working on?

A: We provided advisors to the PRT on infrastructure.

Q: Advising them on what?

A: Usually it was on water supply. We did a lot of [advising on] solid waste and trash removal.

Q: This was more the institutional aspects, rather than the construction aspects, right?

A: That is correct: what should be done, who were the Iraqis that could do it. We were able to reach out, using our Iraqi staff, for instance, in Baghdad to make sure that the specifications for, say, sewer systems were correctly drawn, because we could find out how many people lived in the area and, therefore, instead of a four inch pipe, maybe they needed a six inch pipe, those sorts of things, because the Iraqi staff were able to get out and get the data more accurately than the military could and then we were also able to corroborate data that they had. Sometimes, as far as technical specifications, we did not get involved that much.

We did have a major issue with the PRTs nationwide, because they wanted to use our Iraqi staff as extensions of the PRT. They asserted that because they were employees of a government funded project, therefore the PRT could order them to do things and, of course, the first thing that everybody wanted was information and it became the classic conflict between an NGO and the government, where as soon as you get too close to the government then you become part of it and you lose your access, lose your independence and things get dangerous. Half the time, I felt like saying, “No, you cannot talk to my people. Give us the questions, we will go out and get you the answers, but, no, you cannot direct them. We are not intelligence gatherers,” that whole dialogue.

And this was a particular sore point with the American military, because, of course, they had no Iraqi staff and, as the PRTs did, they eventually began to bring in senior Iraqi staff. But it felt very much like other places in the world where this had happened, you had particular people who were brought in to deal with the European traders in the Chinese treaty ports and you knew the guy was as much a spy as he was a technical assistant. Dealing with the Ottoman Empire back in the old days, where the Venetians and others were not allowed direct access to the decision makers and you needed someone as an intermediary. And that was the sort of Iraqi that was being put forward by the Iraqis to deal with the PRT and, of course, understanding that, the military kind of kept them at arms length.

So the ability of the PRT to interface with Iraqis who were in less ceremonial positions, was an issue for them and it was an issue for us, because we were trying to get things done [and] at the same time be responsive to the attitudes of the American government. Those two [goals] tended to clash sometimes.

Q: Did you have any sense that the insurgents tried to infiltrate any of this work, as employees?

A: As with any local governance project in a difficult area, our people occasionally were under threat, they very often knew better than the military where the insurgents were and of course, then, they did not go there because it was dangerous. I think we had, out of several thousand Iraqi employees over a six-year period, had two who were arrested for ties to the insurgency.

We had a huge difficulty with integrity in areas where we were not able to supervise closely. The Iraqis would sometimes succumb to putting their hand in the till. We had an awful lot of problems in that respect. But we vetted our people very closely, so that we knew enough about them that they were not personally involved with the insurgency. But very often they knew a great deal more about what was going on on the ground than we did or the PRT did.

Q: What about resources? What kind of funding did you have to do these local activities?

A: The project was disbursing about eleven million dollars a month at the time that I left.

Q: Eleven a month?

A: Yes. Salaries were approximately half of that. The other half was training activities and some small infrastructure projects that USAID insisted that we do. Some of it was meeting expenses and, for instance, purchasing computers and things like that to support provincial accounting.

We were also involved in setting up geographic information systems in each of the provinces and that involved a fairly substantial purchase of equipment. The United Nations provided us with a lot of data on geography and all of the background stuff on the map and then our people were locating each individual project on the maps. And then for the cities we were taking the old property maps, which were paper or cloth. There is a technological way of transferring that into a computerized map.

So it was not a cadastre, as such, but for the urban areas, if you are going to estimate how many houses and, therefore, how many families, how much water and sewer you needed, we did not do electricity, but you could also use it for that, then the city maps were helpful, because they had the lots defined and the streets and things like that and you could overlay it with where are the hills and then how many sewer pumps do you need and things like that.

That effort was important but I think it was least appreciated, because of the fact that it is not seen. You could produce a map, but the amount of data that needed to be crunched in, we did not have it all in for any place except Basra at the time that I left. And the goal was to have it done for the majority of the capital cities by the end of 2008.

In some areas, for instance, in Salah Ad Din Province and in Anbar, the PRT went out and actually purchased additional computer equipment so that they could expand this GIS system down into the district area. They specifically wanted to be involved with agriculture and water and those sorts of productive activities. They were headed towards what we would recognize as a cadastre.

The difficulty was that the Iraqis had never done a lot of the basic data input and, of course, that had taken us two years. And everybody kept saying, "Well, when is it going

to be done?” and the lay people did not have an appreciation for the volume of the data, Then the fact that it had to be accurately transposed onto the map, because if the map was not accurate then the whole system went down.

And then, for us, we were particularly interested in the projects were? Where are the Iraqi projects, where are the Americans putting their projects? In the budget for next year, where do those projects fall? How do they complement each other, instead just doing little things, each one out in its island?

Q: How was this data program and all that instituted vis-à-vis the Iraqis, in terms of both the central government and then the provincial areas? Or was it all run out of your office?

A: On the assumption that knowledge is power, the Provincial Governor in many places insisted on being the, if you will, the owning authority of the data. There was a great deal of discussion with the Ministry of Municipalities. In some places the data was owned by the province but resided with the local Municipalities. Both the University of Baghdad and the Northern Oil Company in Mosul wanted to become the national controller, if you will, of geographic data and they were beginning to push and shove a little bit about, “People have to give us their data.” There was not any system of handling the updates and the rest. It was simply a matter of claiming the information as a resource.

Q: It was not built into the Ministry of Planning, for example?

A: The Ministry of Planning did not wish to have it. They wanted to use it, but they did not want to be responsible for it. The Iraqi Ministry of Planning was conflicted within itself. You had the old style Saddamist planners who wanted to run everything from the center, but then the younger people, who tended to be locally hired from whatever province they were actually working with, their allegiance was primarily to a decentralized system. They did not mind sharing the data but they did not want to give up control of it.

In the Ministry of Planning, it depended on the personality of the minister. The current minister is a supporter of making the provinces earn their way forward but then rewarding them forward. A more centralized or if you will political minister, such as the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Health, they wanted everything run by the center and that way they could control the payroll and the budgets and the delivery of benefits and they would use the ministries as political entities, rather than service entities. And as a result, going back to the Ministry of Planning, they said, “Here is our job, to provide quality control and corroboration on documents that come up for funding and to make sure that a highway, for instance, that is going through, that the three provinces that are involved have spoken with each other and they know what it is they are going to do.”

It was a very much more sophisticated Ministry of Planning than I had worked with in a lot of other countries.

Q: Are you confident that this whole data system will be sustained by the Iraqis?

A: No, not yet. It was just coming of age. It would have had to have been sustained in the 2009 budget and the 2009 budget was not to be submitted until end September of 2008. And as a result I did not see it, so I do not know if the provinces actually included it. They were supposed to begin putting in salaries, so there should have been salaries for the GIS units and when I left that had not been done yet.

One of the things, if you will, in the dialogue, the policy dialogue with the budgeters was, "You have to make sure you keep this going because it is important" and they nodded their heads and said, "Oh, yes." But I left before I saw the actual documents.

Q: Back to the provincial area, did you see your work on local government as promoting democratic systems and processes?

A: In many places in Iraq we were successfully able to promote an elected government. Democracy, I am not sure how we define it, but, yes, we were preparing for the next elected legislature. Of course, the legislature in the provinces chooses the governor. So it is a winner-take-all thing.

Q: What were you doing to prepare for elections?

A: Because we did not work in the election itself, what we were doing was trying to solidify the gains of the last four years. So that when the current legislators, council members went out (we were guessing that maybe a third of them would stand for reelection and actually make it back in) and the new people who would be elected in January were seated in February of 2009, we would be able to provide them with manuals and with executive level briefings that said, "Here is how your government works. Here is how the budget works. Here is the strategic plan that was put together. Here is how you find out which projects are where."

We were looking for something equivalent to what the Democrats do at the Kennedy School and I guess the Republicans take their people into West Virginia to a resort over there, the new legislators when they come to the House of Representatives and give them enough background that they are able to operate in their new job. That was the task that USAID had set us to.

Now we had become very comfortable with the legislators with whom we had been working over the last two years, because, of course, they had, by today, four years experience in their job. We knew their personalities, and we knew who could be trusted, and we knew the various agendas.

There will be a pause in Iraqi progress in February, March and April, because the new Provincial Councils will be elected. It will take them a certain amount of time to get their act together. They have to select a Governor and then the Governor has to get his act together. So there will be a pause in the way that the Iraqis can go forward, because they

will have new provincial councilmen who will have to learn their job and figure out what they are going to do and get to working with each other.

And one of their first jobs is to elect a Governor and then the Governor is going to have to get his staff together and figure out what he is going to do and figure out how to work with the Provincial Council and figure out how to work with central ministries, who provide him with a great deal of staff and then also how to deal with the central government in Baghdad.

And we were guessing that there would be a slowdown in progress for about ninety days, as the new provincial administration settled in. And that did not frighten us, because that is what happens in every democratic country. What did frighten us was that the PRTs and then on up into Baghdad and then back into the United States, would say, "My God! The Iraqis have slowed down! Why can they not keep going? What is the matter?"

And the matter is that they are getting used to being a democracy, and that the fact of an election, if it is carried off properly and the people are seated in their various jobs, it means that, yes, there will be an interruption as the new folks get back together and then you have approximately four years of the possibility of moving forward again.

There are, of course, all of the issues of who can run off with what and what decisions will be made by ill-advised people, or governors who are on their way out. But, again, to me, that is the way democratic governments function and there are always those risks, unless you have an autocracy.

Now in some of the provinces, especially those along the Iranian border and we hold our breath on Mosul and Arbil, because the Kurds are not particularly inclusive. If you are not Kurdish, then you are defined out. And then if you are not a Sadrist you are defined out. And those provinces are probably going to be more authoritarian in their feel, even though they will have gone through the form of the election. You could almost feel like the American Reconstruction [Era], back in the 18[60's and 70's], where the legislature does not really want to represent [all of] the people and does not really want to represent the national government, because they have an agenda of their own. There will be some of that. Maybe Huey Long will be the most recent American analogue to that.

Q: Did you work with the Provincial Councils on the democratic process trying to deal with the factionalism between the different groups?

A: At the provincial level we did not. We dealt with it, but we did not try mediating any of it. PRT Mosul and PRT Kirkuk were in that up to their hips and that was indeed the job of the PRT leader.

In Baghdad itself, because we worked with the embedded PRTs, where the military was in charge and State (DOS) was in a supporting role, we had very good contacts in a lot of the neighborhoods and we were able then to facilitate the introduction of civilian mediators, for instance, in Sadri City and in 9 Nissan, because we were, of course, a

technical project from USAID, rather than a political activity, which would be an improper province of the American government.

So we were able to use our contacts to push forward the mediation activities of the government. And then, of course, as we dealt with the strategic planning, the issue of “Well, you have to share. If you are going to do all your projects in just one geographic area, of course, that is not right. Let us spread these out a little.” But we were not able to deal with that in a political sense.

Q: One detail: there were supposedly mission statements for the PRTs. Was RTI integrated in these mission statements?

A: I presume that we were. Most of the mission statements were classified and as a result we could not see them.

Q: Is there some area we have not touched on of your work? This has been very worthwhile.

A: The only thing that I would like to tack on at the end, here, the American government was particularly interested in the Iraqis financing their own reconstruction. And we at the project level asserted that the Iraqis were now financing their own reconstruction, to the tune of at last three and a half billion dollars a year, because they were transferring money out of the central government into the provinces and the provinces then ran identifiable projects. For reasons I do not fully understand, the American government chose not to count that investment that the Iraqis were making.

It used to be you had to have a government 25 percent counterpart participation and we always had the feeling that that is what USAID was looking for, are they contributing to one or another of our projects? And we handled that a bit more broadly, by saying, “Okay, the project has done what it intended and as a result it was not necessary for the Americans to come and build infrastructure, even if that is what the military liked to do best.”

The philosophy that we were working on and this may be an error, on all of this local government program, because it came up right after the invasion in 2003, USAID made the assumption [that we should] push forward on the notion of local government, because we believed the country would stabilize post-conflict first at the provincial level and would take a long time to sort out what was going on [at] the national level and also to sort out the national ministries. So we believed that the target of opportunity was one tier down, in the provinces and then into the districts, where you have something concrete and understandable by the local people, instead of all of this high-flown discussion that you get just at the national level.

That was the rationale for investing what has been nearly half a billion dollars in local government development. It is the only large local governance project that USAID has ever done. And the rationale for it was that in [a] post-conflict [environment] you are

going to stabilize the provinces first, because it deals with concrete services and real people and then you can deal with the ideologies and the conflicting personalities and pressures at the national level with a little bit more patience, because the country is already stabilizing. So that is why we were doing what we were doing.

Q: Is there any other major topic you have not touched on, before we move towards the end?

A: We have covered the high points.

Q: What would you think are, very briefly, the major achievements of both RTI's work but also the PRTs', since this is focused on PRTs?

A: RTI's work, strategic planning and the conversion of that into budgets and then the transfer of central resources out to the provinces. We believe that was a major accomplishment. The ability of Provincial Councils to behave like representative legislative bodies was a major accomplishment for the project people. The acceptance of strategic planning and budget and revenue sharing by both the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Planning, that was major, because it began to pull authority away from the center and, in our view, it reduced the likelihood that a single dictator would be able to grab the country, because the power centers were beginning to decentralize.

As far as PRTs are concerned, the PRTs were Johnny come latelies, because they were invented in Afghanistan and when Khalilzad became ambassador he brought them into Iraq. It took them a year to finally get their feet on the ground, so that would be beginning of 2008. The PRTs are the interagency process in Washington, then it is pushed onto the country team and then you go all the way down to everyday life.

With a wise PRT leader, whether that person be military or civil, the PRTs were able to focus the U.S. government effort on a particular province and begin to deal with the population in a constructive way, so that they would not look towards extremists or authoritarian personalities as the most useful form of government.

Where you had a PRT leader who could not get along with his deputy, or could not get along with the [local] two star general, then the military went on its way, the PRT went on its way and very often the twain did not meet.

So it is very personality driven. It has been, up to now. Now that the PRTs have been running for almost two years and the military have figured out how to do things in both Iraq and Afghanistan on the civil side, all of this stuff has begun to be codified in a field manual that deals with stability operations, the army has begun to acknowledge that, yes, there is a civilian government in the country, there is a private sector in the country, guns are not the answer to everything, the PRTs are now becoming more productive.

The other thing that is helping the PRTs, now that they have been on the ground is a body of knowledge that new people can be briefed up on, both classified and unclassified and

are not starting from scratch. (For the PRT Mosul, they hit the ground in July 2006, but the other PRTs have not been on the ground long enough to have a solid understanding of local personalities: who are the sheiks, who are the major stakeholders, economic and religious and political).

The pioneers who went out and had to establish a PRT had very little knowledge of the local politics and the local agendas and all of the traps. But all of that knowledge is now in the hands of the PRT, so the new people are less likely to make errors than the first guys did as they were essentially scouting out the terrain. So the PRTs in each place had a rough first year as they were learning what was going on, but once they learned, then they are becoming more precise in the way that they do things.

Q: Do you think they are accomplishing their mission? Is it a good idea to have a PRT?

A: It is a good idea to have a PRT, as long as the State Department runs it and if the PRT leader is a civil officer and the PRT is appropriately staffed with enough civilian staff, whether they are institutional contractors, personal services contractors, or government employees.

But you have to have enough civilians to balance off the military staff. Then a PRT can get its job done. If the PRT is overwhelmingly military, then it becomes so tightly focused and so task oriented that it is unable to accomplish anything but the narrowest mission of moving some money for infrastructure projects.

Q: That moves us into the last questions. What would you cite as the two or three or four major lessons learned from your experience with the PRTs particularly and then doing this work?

A: I am seeing it from the outside, but PRTs in Mosul and Kirkuk have spent an awful lot of effort over the last two years and I believe it has been generally successful in trying to mediate the differences between the Arab populations and the Kurdish populations of those two provinces. You really did need to have somebody on the ground to do that and for those two PRTs I believe that is probably what their principal mission was and many of the things that we were doing as a project were just very secondary to that high political [objective].

PRT Baghdad I do not think ever accomplished anything, because they did not go out of the Green Zone enough.

PRT Anbar was deeply involved in being ready for the increased security out there. They worked well with the marines. The bottom line is Anbar is a much more open place than it was and it is because the PRT worked well with the [military] and got the job done out there and brought all of the districts into the political process, instead of just the city of Ramadi.

PRT Diyala is well on the way to replicating Anbar, or they were when I left, that looked like it would work.

In the Shi'ia areas, the PRTs did a lot of reporting, little things like individual aid projects, the governance project and things like that, but I never had the feeling that the PRTs in the nine Shi'ia Arab provinces were as effective as the PRTs in the Sunni Arab provinces.

And then PRT Arbil was essentially the American embassy to the Kurds and while I am unable to evaluate whether they accomplished American goals, they were able to make strong representations to the Kurds and I presume that that is one of the major things that they were supposed to do and they seem to have done that well.

PRTs have been successful where American policy was relatively well defined, if I might go out on that limb, because we knew what we wanted to do with the Kurds, we knew what we wanted to do with the Sunnis. We were less sure of what to do with the various factions of Shi'ias and as a result those PRTs perhaps received vaguer instructions. I do not see Dawa and Sadr and SCIRI and all of those Shi'ia factions that pushed and shoved in the south; I was never convinced that the PRTs in those provinces had fully dominated the political landscape, that they fully understood it and were able to exert influence in the Shi'ia areas to the same extent that they could in the Sunni and the Kurdish areas. That is an opinion.

Q: Any other lessons that stand out?

A: For me, the lesson that USAID intended to demonstrate, that you can stabilize a country first, stabilize the civilian government of a country first at the provincial level and below, I believe that we have demonstrated that. Whether the U.S. government as a whole wishes to accept it is another matter, but, yes, we were able to make that work and we believe quite strongly, both within USAID and within RTI, that we did the right thing and we did it well.

The other lesson that we learned and I do not know why we did not intuit this beforehand; the U.S. government really likes centralized national ministries, because it is a one-stop shop. You go to the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance, or whatever. A truly decentralized country like the United States or Germany or perhaps Australia, less so in Japan, is kind of messy. You have to work harder as a diplomat.

On the other hand, if you are private sector, you want a decentralized country, because the local people are the ones you are going to deal with and the U.S. government, taken at the policy level, really is not interested in decentralization, because it complicates things and we, the Americans, want everything in a 15 second sound bite, it has to fit on a slide that can be briefed in forty seconds per slide and decentralized and sophisticated kinds of things do not necessarily come across in that [format].

Perhaps I am being idealistic about that, but that is what it seemed to me, that we the Americans, especially the military, they just want to push one button and make it happen and when we deal with a host government, an authoritarian government is easier to deal with, because you do not have to negotiate, you just get them to do [something].

So that is the extent of my wisdom.

Q: This has been very worthwhile and I thank you for the time.

#