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Iraq PRT Experience Project

INTERVIEW #60

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Executive Summary

Served with the main PRT in Anbar Province, from 2007 to 2008. Retired State Department officer working as a contractor.

Original PRT grew from 17 to 40, while nearby E-PRT had about a dozen members. Eventually, the two were co-located. Relations between the two teams fluctuated due to bureaucratic conflict. Roles were purposely altered at least twice – at first, the implication was that PRTs were in charge of E-PRTs, through a command relationship. Later this was altered: no command relationship, than later altered back again.

Anbar had been subject to great violence and destruction in years prior to 2007. PRT was moved many miles from Ramadi, while E-PRT was much closer, actually with the brigade command. There was prejudice toward the E-PRT by military commanders.

There was little understanding by military command of OPA on the purposes of PRTs. Instead of OPA supporting the PRTs, the PRTs became support for OPA. It was an upside-down situation. It was not a support-up situation from OPA to the PRTs. And it became very political as well. The military basically was the tail that wagged the civilian PRTs. PRTs had to depend on the military for transportation and security. We couldn't travel because the military didn't think we had a high enough priority. It was frustrating.

People running the PRT were political officers that were there to please their bosses in Baghdad so that they could make reports back to Washington. Some of the E-PRT people were senior in terms of State Department rank to the head of the PRT, and they politicked personally. The surge brought in other problems – people placed because their resumes suggested they might be appropriate, when in fact they were not.

Another problem: lack of USAID integration within the PRTs. There was a conceptual breakdown between how the PRT and USAID should collaborate

We had a $50 million process and projects we wanted to do, and the Iraqis were not politically or technically capable and able to handle the process that we outlined for them. We were under tremendous pressure because Anbar was supposedly the success story, and leadership didn't want to hear about the problems. There was great pressure to spend

the money. The Iraqis were not prepared to do so properly. They were in complete disarray. Many were very young; older, more experienced leaders having been killed. Also, they were accustomed to being told what to do, rather than exercising initiative. The Iraqis didn't have good communications because of security problems; they didn't talk to each other. Many were deep, heart-felt blood enemies. Corruption was also a part of the process. It is hard to smooth that much money into a system that did not exist before. And the political system is also part of the problem, too. They have different regional interests. It is beyond ideology.

We should have changed the whole system in a much more comprehensive way and built more institutions. Because what we are trying to do in Iraq now is tag onto old Saddam Hussein-era institutions and it is a very messy, very unpleasant situation.

In Baghdad and other places there was a lot of success with finding out what capital projects needed to be done and getting them restored. It didn't work that way in Anbar because there had been immense violence, with lots of people leaving; half of the population displaced or going into refugee status.

The PRT had a very poor relationship with the BCTIs in 2007. There was an effort to keep the PRT from being part of the command structure. The brigade that controlled the resources for the PRT did not give them to us as part of the power play to support the E-PRT, which was part of their team. They did not support us with transportation and other assets because that would somehow help us in our 'competition' with the E-PRT.

We tried to work with Iraqi NGOs, and developing the capacity of the provincial government, to execute, evaluate and plan capital projects. A lot of the nationally developed programs at USAID were so generic that they weren't of use.

Many of the NGOs were scam artists. Most were just trying to raise a buck. Would overcharge wildly for goods and services and labor, and people would give them the money. People wouldn't pay any attention to what they were doing because our job was to spend money.

The problem we saw with the PRT is that there was nobody assigned for the specific job of NGO in civil society and development, and that was huge.

We had lots of budget experts where there was no budget. They were trying to make us put budgeting at all these lower levels of government where no one had a budget or the concept. And they instilled in people the idea that they had to have large amounts of money and this built up huge expectations and a lot of conflict. We caused a lot of our own problems. The NGOs were not an effective group. OPA and the PRT were not responsive in looking at an effective way to integrate civil society and particularly women's affairs into the PRT process. Which is ironic because they use a lot of it for press releases; but almost all of that was done by individuals on the teams outside their normal duties.

There was a true anti-feminist bias on some of the military-dominated PRTs. They were condescending toward those projects which were the most effective ones that we had in our entire PRT. For $100,000 we got women's small-loan banking set up, helped widows and orphans set up their own markets, make their own society. In comparison, the PRTs would spend $500,000 to arrange a useless meeting with politicians in Jordan.

Public affairs work was not effective. The public affairs person on the team was a State Department officer who worked the same issues as the other State Department officers -- taking care of the politics of the ruling party and reporting back.

Counter-insurgency: Being able to have senior State Department people work closely with all the civilian local government people was very important. One constant frustration was the problem of not being able to take these reservists out of uniform. They were often city planners and experts in other professions who could have been very effective working with Iraqis as though they were civilians. But they were not allowed to wear civilian clothes to do this.

Governance: The person running governance section had little international experience. Tried to re-create a US type system: executive and legislative branches in the Provincial Council. That is not the Iraqi way. Theirs is more a parliamentary system. So new friction points were made by creating systems that made no sense.

RTI was unevenly staffed. Some were dedicated professionals; others were not at all effective. A big problem was lack of international understanding. They came over and they saw Iraq like the U.S. None spoke Arabic.

In reconstruction, we couldn't move faster than the Iraqis were ready to move. They would take off on a week's vacation; they always wanted to go to the U.S. or Japan on a junket.

Rule of Law: Extremely important. Problems arose because of friction between the E-PRTs and PRTs in execution of the Rule of Law program. Example: Iraqis were supposed to feed prisoners. Didn't want to. We wanted to force them to pay, but the military just went ahead and paid for it. And the prison system, the law system, the courts, just stopped feeding them and said, well, the Americans are going to do it. However, Rule of Law sector was effective in that we had good lawyers who could interact with Iraqi lawyers and make a real difference.

A huge problem concerned property rights: Who owned a given piece of property. All those public health clinics that the Iraqis never took over, a lot of times it turned out we built a public health clinic on property we had no right to build on because people hadn't really made it clear. And it wasn't easy to make it clear.

Achievements of the PRT:

The PRT in Anbar accomplished the overall mission despite deficiencies in policy, focus, planning and execution in the detailed projects. While some things didn't work out the way we wanted them to, but we managed to make the overall project work.

Incredibly important was managing a very volatile political situation while overcoming an extraordinarily violent insurgency. Anbar was a success because we gave them all the support they needed.

We also engaged every layer of the province in a very widely diverse, socially, economically diverse area. We had people talking to people who felt like they were suddenly part of their own solution to the problem. They owned the problem. We could get them to talk to each other and suddenly somebody was listening to them. It was a huge conceptual leap forward. We were less successful in physical projects (electricity, etc) because they are so huge.

Corruption: Probably a lot less than people think. There was a lot of incompetence but not much corruption because no one understood the system enough to abuse it. Part of the problem was to build a system that was transparent.

Ninety percent of the credit for the good that happened in Anbar belongs to the Marines.

Effective use of resources: We waste more money than I even want to think about. Waste and corruption has a moral and a developmental cost way beyond the simple monetary cost.

CERP: One argument is that they need a CERP, but really it takes away from the effectiveness of good programs because people know they can come to you and you give them money. The other side is, 'Well, that is what saves our lives.'

Training for the PRTs is inadequate. There isn't enough of it. There needs to be an integrated idea of what the PRT is, to promote coordination of the elements.

Lessons learned.

Need a greater integration of developmental experience in the leadership -- people who understand about development of local society from a Third World point of view.

Things are working in Anbar because people working there have experience in Iraq. We should re-tread these experienced people. Send them back to use their knowledge.

We need language and cultural training and understanding.

Develop a long-term outlook of at least two years.

Interview

A: I was with the main PRT in Anbar Province. The original PRT began with 17, and headed towards 40. And there were between 8 to 12 people in the E-PRT. We were originally not co-located but we moved and were co-located by the end of my time there.

Q: Were the roles and missions of the two groups similar?

A: That started a long series of issues when you ask that question. The relationship between the two changed several times in the deployment, due to bureaucratic conflict.

Q: Was that because there was ambiguity as to the chain of command?

A: It was not confusing. They purposely changed it twice while we were there. First, the implication was the PRTs would be in charge of the E-PRTs through a command relationship. Then, it was specifically made that they would not be in a command relationship. Then, when I left, it was changed again where it would be put under a command relationship. It wasn't that it was ambiguous, it was that either side agreed to either of the outcomes and were continually successful in over-changing the command relationship.

Q: Who made the decision? Was it the NCT or the Embassy or who changed it?

A: There was not an NCT when we were there. That was part of the problem. Part of the problem was that the NCT had been dissolved in April 2007.

Q: You just got back; is it fresh in your mind?

A: Actually I just called them up to see if maybe I will go back. I'm down here with a bunch of guys and I'll think I'll come up. Thanks to the stock market, most of my retirement assets have been dissolved.

Q: Oh, I am sorry.

A: That's okay.

Q: Are you a military person or are you a State Department person?

A: I was a 26-year State Department retiree. I went over as a 31-61. Now are you calling 31-61s or everybody who was on the PRTs?

Q: I'm talking with everybody, 31-61s, military, State and people who were not even part of PRTs, just observing them; so everybody we can find who is willing to talk about them, basically.

A: A lot of this is of historical interest because things were so ad hoc, particularly in Anbar, which was almost shut down because of the tremendous violence a year earlier.

But the E-PRT was better organized than was the PRT, which was almost stuck over by itself on a lesser used base, which had been the command center.

So you had the PRT which was the interface for overall command physically 50, 60, 70 miles away in an area where you couldn't move very quickly. And so they were sort of detached, whereas the E-PRT was with the brigade command and the brigade command was, in effect, using them as an extension of civil affairs and able to work quite a bit more effectively. So the E-PRTs actually were developmentally ahead of the PRTs in terms of things on the ground when I got there.

Q: The next question has to do with liaison. Describe the PRT's relationship with the Provincial Affairs Office or the OPA or the NCT; the Embassy and the military command. Was there good communication?

A: When I arrived there was an ambassador. Every day the ambassador and the command general had a "booyah"* and they would discuss what was happening in the country with all these things, whether or not we were reaching specified goals.

Q: Was that an effective way of communicating?

A: Well, the military liked it. They thought it was pretty good and the joint military thing kept people on their toes to see what was happening, the interesting problems. A good example was supposedly at one point we built a large number of health clinics which nobody had ever taken to and were in disuse so what is happening here is that people would run around and find out why we had built all of these public health clinics that had never been put to use by the Iraqi government.

Q: We were talking about the liaison and the next question has to do with the organization, in other words, what was the chain of command (civilian and military) in the internal organization of the PRT?

A: Can I go back to the liaison and drop a lot of the detail and just say it was often unclear and frequently changing.

Q: Who changed?

A: The changes were determined basically on the national level by the ambassador and by the military leadership. The overall pop structure, what they did was they burnt the, how do I put this... You are familiar at all with the NCT Program that was part of the old IRMO?

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* *a mixture, or stew*

Q: *Yes.*

A: What happened was when XXX, who ran the PRT, became the Chief of Staff for the new organization IKAY, and they brought a bunch of people in, it was sort of like the blind man and the elephant,* who didn't quite know what OPA was. They removed one person because they weren't responsive to queries for information from the military command and the ambassador. And the next person that got in basically thought their job was just to supply information to the leadership there. So basically the PRTs became an extension for information supply.

But the OPA structure did not function as expected. It said it was there to support the PRT and its programs. But most of the time it was not. It was an up-down situation. It was not a support-up situation from OPA to the PRTs. And it became very political as well.

That is why, as I mentioned earlier, the command structure of Anbar Province changed. Because of the political forces working between the military at that point. The military basically was the tail that wagged the civilian PRTs. And in fact, I just talked with XXX the other day and they finally have apparently given the State Department civilians greater control of effective running of the PRTs.

Q: Is that a positive step?

A: I think it all depends. Again, it is the blind man and the elephant. I have had various co-workers on both sides of the table.

On the other side, we had the military people who tried to order Provincial Council members around and there wasn't a real consensus as to where we were trying to move these people in an effective way. Particularly in Anbar, which was a very violent war zone, there was a lot of misunderstanding. The PRTs depended almost exclusively on the military for transportation and security. My first six months there, we couldn't travel because the military didn't think we had a high enough priority. And the reason was that we were not part of the fighting brigade that had all the resources. We were a detached part of the headquarters another 40 miles away. We sat on our butts most of the time.

Q: That sounds so frustrating.

A: It was frustrating. The other point that comes in is that the people that were running the PRT were political officers that were there to please their bosses in Baghdad with information taskers to help them do things so that they could make reports back to Washington. But the PRT is also a proactive government capacity-building thing. The

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* *From Wikipedia: A group of blind men (or men in the dark) touch an elephant to learn what it is like. Each one touches a different part, but only one part, such as the side or the tusk. They then compare notes on what they felt, and learn they are in complete disagreement. The story is used to indicate that reality may be viewed differently depending upon one's perspective, suggesting that what seems an absolute truth may be relative due to the deceptive nature of half-truths.*

people there were not particularly interested in that because their chain of command was trying to pull information so they could go back to Washington. In this case, Anbar was extraordinarily successful. Arguably the information we were able to pull out of the changes with the awakening made the difference in being able to allow President Bush to keep the surge going and make the case that we are not losing the war in Iraq. Not a small thing in the big world. But it meant that those of us at work in the developmental area didn't have much ability. And because some of the E-PRT people were senior in terms of State Department rank to the head of the PRT, they started a lot of the politicking which was all personal.

Q: How do you rate the effectiveness of the PRT leadership and management structure? What improvements would you recommend?

A: I think one of the problems was the surge itself. The surge brought in lots of people who had something in their DOD personnel file that said they might be appropriate in this area. A lot of them were inappropriate in that area. The other problem was, I think, a lack of fuller integration of USAID into the process of the PRTs. There was a conceptual breakdown between how the PRT and how USAID should work and sometimes a lack of cooperation even within USAID toward that. And a lack of focus by the PRT leadership on that developmental thing is a critical issue going forward.

Q: What was the main focus of the PRT? Was it in physical reconstruction or governance reconstruction? What did you feel the main thrust of it was or should have been?

A: Again, we keep going back to the metaphor of the blind man and the elephant. For me it was meant to be physical reconstruction. When I got there, every office of the provincial government was bullet-pocked. People hadn't been back in the city for years. So we had all of these Directors General of different functions, who instead of being 55 or 60 years old were 27 and 28, because these other people had been killed. And it was really very chaotic.

To see the city go from what it should look like, to just total rubble and then to a semblance of an ugly Iraqi city was something. With buildings and paint and lots of security there, you'd see the violence go down. I mean it was truly an impressive change.

But when you got there, we had a $50 million process and projects we wanted to do, and they were not politically or technically capable able to handle the process that we outlined for them. So we were under tremendous pressure. Because Anbar was the success story. We don't want to hear any problems about Anbar. We've got to get out there and spend that money. But they wouldn't spend that money.

Q: The Iraqis?

A: The Iraqis--they were in complete disarray.

Q: Was it because they were so young and inexperienced?

A: There were a tremendous amount of reasons. One of them is exactly that they were young and inexperienced. You know, the line is about Stalin finding this guy coming up with all these wonderful ideas to do wonderful things with agriculture and he executes him. He said he had an alarming amount of initiative.

And you know Iraq was where people who had a lot of initiative were always being seen as a threat. So culturally, they always waited for people from the top to tell them what to do. And they saw where they could skim off by corruption somewhere along the line. Now they were being told they had to go out and get ideas, talk to people get a semblance of interaction among them, bring these ideas together and then put them through a democratic process and have the Army Corps of Engineers execute the projects. Well, they didn't have good communications because of security problems, and they also just didn't talk to each other. There were deep, heart-felt blood enemies.

This is a huge thing. And we are under orders, 'Well, you've got to make them do it. You've got to do it.' And we're sitting there saying, 'Well, they're not ready. They give us the wrong projects, they don't know what they're doing.'

We've already spent all this money. The military is out there doing these projects; they are not coming down. We've cancelled projects because of a whole range of reasons, among which at least 40% of the problems were because of our own incompetence bureaucratically in executing these capital projects.

So we have lots of bad reports from the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction (SIGIR), and it is all true. But of course the thing was, it is hard to smooth that much money into a system that did not exist before.

And the political system is also part of the problem, too. For example, you live in Arlington, so in Arlington you know who in the county is your person and you know who in the state is your person and you know who is your congressman. The point here is you know all that. The way they set up the system up in Iraq, you have this huge place almost the size of Utah -- Anbar is almost a third of the country -- and no one represents any part of it. There's a huge homogeneity of the origin, but tribally and regionally, it is like people in Georgia and Hawaii. They have different regional interests. It is beyond ideology. It is just where they are, they see different issues.

So we had all of these things. A lot of people had been assassinated for cooperating with the government in earlier years, so there was a sense of not wanting to talk to people. It was pretty much a jumbled political situation where everybody believed quite frankly that all the politicians were stealing all of the money because that is how it had happened under Saddam Hussein.

So in the midst of all that, they couldn't spend the money. Add to that the fact that Anbar was among the places that were most critical (to the U.S. leadership). So we were under tremendous pressure to go do their job for them. They were not able to identify where the jobs were so we would have our people run around doing the job for the Iraqis.

Q: And you couldn't get out?. That must have been frustrating.

A: Yes. The other thing is, we should have changed the whole system in a much more comprehensive way and built more institutions. Because what we are trying to do in Iraq now is graft on to old Saddam Hussein-era institutions and it is a very messy, very unpleasant situation.

In Baghdad and other places there was a lot of success with this model of finding out what capital projects needed to be done and getting them restored. It didn't work that way in Anbar because in the year-and-a-half this process was taking root in some of these places, there was immense violence. Lots of people leaving, half of the population displaced or going into refugee status.

So from my point of view as provincial program manager, I was doing the planning and helping to work with them establishing this system for good government and capital projects, while we were so very frustrated.

Q: Did you encounter what they call stovepiping in the PRT structure?

A: A little bit, yes. However, stovepiping infers that people are actually very functional and things are kind of breaking. I think we had all these people off working on all these things, but there was not a whole lot happening.

Q: In terms of civil-military relations, what was the PRT relationship with the brigade combat team?

A: The PRT had a very poor relationship with the BCTIs when I was first there. There was an effort to keep the PRT from being part of the command structure. The brigade that controlled the resources for the PRT did not give them to us as part of the power play to support the E-PRT, which was part of their team. It's all sort of juvenile, but that's what happened.

Q: They did not do what?

A: They didn't support us with transportation and other assets because that would somehow help us in our 'competition' with the E-PRT. So they were helping out the E-PRT. The brigade commander had direct command of the E-PRT. He also had the resources we needed. But to give us the resources we needed would help us out. Some saw it as a competition between the E-PRT and the PRT.

Q: Maybe it wasn't a good idea to have an E-PRT and a PRT in the same place?

A: For a while there was not such good co-operations between the PRT and the military.

We didn't have the resources, and we couldn't do the things as well as we wanted to. That changed in early 2008. It got better, we got more resources. The change of the command changed a lot of the effect on the PRT. PRTs are very much children of the bureaucratic structure and the personalities controlling that bureaucratic structure into which they are placed.

Q: Putting the E-PRT aside, were relations within the PRT satisfactory?

A: Yes, I think the structure was okay. I do think there was a problem with what I call the fitness report mentality.

Q: That sounds military.

A: Yes. So these guys come in with the FitReps, and they would create this thing that would take on a meaning all on its own. Oftentimes, it would divert people's attention and our ability to work with the Iraqis. With all of the displacements and violence, there are only a few competent Iraqis remaining, and you had 30 people trying to get their FitRep out of them. So, first of all, at best, it makes no difference. In a slightly negative form, it takes everybody's attention away. And sometimes it is actually counterproductive to what the overall mission is. Some of these people's FitReps were just really stupid. We'd find a lot of time we sat there trying to do things which were pointless at best but which made people's careers look good.

And that was more of a problem with the military; it was almost exclusively a military problem I should say.

Q: I have a question about external relations. Did your PRT work with either international NGOs or Iraqi NGOs?

A: We tried to work with Iraqi NGOs, and that was an area I did not have in my position description. It was mostly working with developing the capacity of the provincial government, to execute, evaluate and plan capital projects. But my back ground was as a Foreign Service officer who worked with USIA and USAID and for many years I worked with NGOs.

No one else there knew much about civil society. State Department people, for whatever reason, have no experience and no inclination for doing that. They were sort of, 'I need the governor's guy, I need the IP guy, I am the tribe guy.' I spent a lot of time trying to work with the NGOs and found out that civil society was widely underdeveloped for a variety of reasons, and that a lot of the nationally developed programs at USAID were so generic that they weren't of use.

Q: Were there particular groups, like women's groups you worked with or Chamber of Commerce?

A: Well, for the most part, I worked with scam artists.

Q: I'm sorry?

A: They were for the most part scam artists. There were very few true NGOs. Most were people out there just trying to raise a buck. The amounts of money they would charge for things, 10 times what you would pay in the U.S., five times what you would pay in Europe, and four times what you would pay in Japan. And they would just ask for it because the money had come in such massive amounts in previous years. They'd come in and say, we'll get you a thousand people and we'll put them all there and it will cost you $40,000.

They'd charge whatever, and people would give them the money. And people wouldn't pay any attention to what they were doing because our job was to spend money.

We spent a lot of our time trying to work with the NGOs and to develop them. The problem we saw with the PRT is that there was nobody assigned for the specific job of NGO in civil society and development. And that was a huge thing. We politicked about that. We went back to the OPA leadership and we talked about it, and everybody would say, 'Oh, yeah, we understand, that's true.' This is the OPA people, and they said, 'That makes sense and we put in for positions.'

I'm not sure they told us the truth. They, perhaps, misrepresented or misunderstood or had been ineffective when putting in for these positions. But they told us that these positions in civil society development, that they recommended the positions for the PRT.

Q: Who told an untruth, the Iraqis?

A: No, the OPA. When we got back to Washington, that is myself and several of us who worked really hard to get this done, to find out what happened to these positions; I know because we saw our PRT leadership send our recommendations up to OPA, we were copied on these things we saw the stuff from OPA saying they would do it. Then up in Washington they said well, nobody's ever requested this. So there is a breakdown. Lying is maybe too strong, but they kept sending us budget people where there was no budget. We had lots of budget experts where there was no budget.

One of the problems, which I basically put back to USAID and RTI (Research Triangle Institute), is that they were trying to make us put budgeting at all these lower levels of government where no one had a budget or the concept. And they instilled in people the idea that they had to have large amounts of money to budget, which wasn't part of the Iraqi political system, it never has been, and it is not all that likely it is going to become a part. So this built up huge expectations and a lot of conflict between Arcada which is the lower area and up to the regional area and on up to the provincial groups.

We caused a lot of our own problems. The NGOs were not an effective group, per se. And OPA and the PRT were not responsive in looking into an effective way to integrate civil society, particularly women's affairs, into the PRT process. That was ironic because they use a lot of it for press releases; but almost all of that was done by individuals on the teams who tried to do that outside their normal duties.

Q: Would you say then there was a lot of waste, a lot of corruption?

A: No, no. It was like, 'Okay, so you got the women to come out here and do all these things, they now have made their own society, they are now doing their own small loan banking, you now have a huge number of orphans and widows starting a market place; and we did this for about $100,000. And the other guy would spend half a million dollars trying to get a bunch of politicians to show up in Jordan where it didn't do anything.

Q: Tell me about the public affair aspect of your PRT. Was that effective?

A: No. As far as I know the public affairs officer went through the other individuals on the team who ran the governance and economic side and worked pretty exclusively with people from the ruling party in the government there. But it was not effective.

Q: Who did their releases aim at? Was it the American audience or the Iraqi audience when they did say something?

A: Well, they didn't say anything.

Q: Okay, then they didn't put out releases.

A: Not to speak of. Public affairs, to me, is press releases, or two to three percent of it. Because we do huge amounts of grants, we do lots of institutional building, we do the Fulbright program, we do English language teaching, we do lot of things for which there is a huge demand there. But we didn't do them. And one of the points we'd bring up was, why don't we see more of this?

Now what you had at the same time were information operations, controlled by the military, which did have the radio, the television, the newspapers. I set up a women's magazine with one woman doing that. But the public affairs person on the team had virtually nothing to do with that because he, in effect, was a State Department officer who worked the same issue as the other State Department officers who were relegated to taking care of the politics of the ruling party and reporting back.

Q: Let us move on to counter-insurgency, which is part of the mission of the PRT. How did the PRT act to bolster moderates and to counter insurgency through its programs?

A: I think the PRT was an integral part of the visual aspect of that. And I think that was very important, because the military can't help but be the military. But being able to have

our senior State Department people sit there and work closely with all the civilian local government people was very important. In fact, one of the things that was a constant frustration for us was the problem of not being able to take these reservists out of uniform who were often city planners and doing these things, and allowing them to work with people as though they were civilians.

Q: In their area of specialty?

A: In their area of specialty where they could really help. And this was because the rationalization for this was the Geneva Convention, which of course the terrorists don't believe in the Geneva Convention.

The Iraqi government is telling us they want us out of uniform and the terrorists don't do it, so why are we holding us here as somehow we will be held as spies by the government, shot as spies by the Geneva Convention? I don't know why they didn't want to do it. This caused a lot of the problem.

Q: Clarify that for me. So, if you take a reservist out of uniform then he might be considered a spy, is that what you are saying?

A: That was their position. In other words, he was a person on a military mission dissembling in the civilian clothes, therefore making himself an open target to be tried per the Geneva Convention as a spy. Which of course, it is just like all of this other crap that people write about Iraq, they take it out of context. But for some reason the military felt good with this. You know when they got the uniform then they understand. I know that sounds dumb but they felt they had better control when their guys were in uniform. That was the problem we had with working with people was we had all these guys in uniform.

Q: Let us go on to governance; that was your area, right?

A: Yes.

Q: You describe PRT activities relating to promoting democracy and the ability of provincial or sub-provincial governance to function effectively. You have already addressed this a little bit but maybe you would like to elaborate now?

A: I think we had one major governance problem, that the person running our governance section didn't have any international experience. So he came in and built a philosophical construct of a balance of powers between the executive and the legislative branch in the Provincial Council. Now this presupposed that there was an executive and legislative division. In fact, in the Iraqi system, there is no executive. They are all part of the Provincial Council, which elects one of its own to be in the government. Much like the prime minister situation in the British system. So working on the fallacy that this system was like our system, he then created all of these new points of friction within the Provincial Council, which in a surprising way, complemented the perception of the Iraqis

in Anbar that the governor was the new Saddamista, Little Saddam, and that this is work where they have to counterbalance him. And this really fit their mentality there. He set up this structure of 'this is the executive, this is etc.,' and it made no sense, it has nothing to do with the real situation. Again, it is like us giving all these lower level government bodies budgets when they didn't have budgets.

Q: Did you work any on the Ramadi municipal government set up?

A: No we didn't. In fact, that went to the E-PRT. Now by the time the colonel who ran the brigade left in February and the new guy came in and that brigade then left out and we had then a whole structural team, we found ourselves actually cooperating in much more organic and normal kind of way with everybody. The problem that we had here was that we mirrored the local situation. They tried to play us against each other. Because we had the other conference we only really started to get once we got co-located and talked to each other it made it much easier to get around the egos combined and they found out things worked out a lot better.

Q: And you did mention RTI. Were you working with them?

A: Yes, we worked with RTI on governance quite a bit. RTI was like the military surge people, very unevenly staffed. There were some tremendously dedicated professionals for whom I have all the respect in the world, and there were others who were not particularly effective and who did virtually nothing.

Q: Were some of these people former State Department people? Where did the RTI folks come from?

A: The RTI folks were almost always USG local government, local people that RTI had recruited from the U.S. Again, probably the biggest problem that illustrates inadequacies in various groups was a lack of international understanding. They came over and they saw Iraq like the U.S. The military that did have a lot of international experience and tended to be much better, and some of the RTI propel were international people also.

Q: Did any of the PRT speak Arabic?

A: No.

Q: Would that have helped?

A: (Laughter) Yes, yes, it would have. At the beginning, we didn't have translators until January.

Q: You didn't have a BBA?

A: We had two of them but they were not up to the job. We didn't really get good BBAs until January.

Q: What was wrong with the earlier ones?

A: Part of the problem was that it was a 'he said/she said' thing.

Q: Let us go on to economic reconstruction. What were the activities in this area and were there civil affairs soldiers taking part in these?

A: We had an economics group that ran into a problem with the mission here. This gets back to the problem I mentioned earlier, we sort of left this mish-mash of command socialism intact and it didn't get rid of any of it.

So we had all of the state-run enterprises created all this employment and the idea was the military and some of the people would come in there and restart these because all of these people shooting at us would then be employed. There was fallacy in that, but it seemed like it was something we could do right away and relieve the pressure.

As it turned out, all these state enterprises never fired people. They were still employed. They didn't work, but they still got 50% to 60% of their salary.

And so we had a lot of different things done by the military, not PRTs, but by the military, and sometimes instituted with advice in the PRTs and E-PRTs, to re-establish state-run enterprises. And they had a whole bureaucracy called the Brinkley Group that was trying to do all this and see about their eventual privatization. This was complicated because the Iraqis had not established their own business and their own legal framework for investment in these entities.

So we had people working on that. And the problem was we couldn't move faster than the Iraqis were ready to move. And the Iraqis were under stress. You couldn't minimize their courage, but they didn't seem very worried about these things. They would take off on a week's vacation; they always wanted to go to the U.S. or Japan on a junket. We couldn't really move faster than they could.

Part of our problem at the PRT is we had these FitReps. You got a one-year assignment, you got to have something to move you forward and make you eligible for the thing. So the economic stuff did not move very fast. But in the last three four months of my tour, thanks to 31-61s, we got that replaced the surge DOD military people, we had real professionals and the shooting had stopped long enough that things were really starting for interaction leading toward an actual viable economy in Anbar.

I think it was important we were there and we were talking and having all these Americans around even though we weren't in uniform. But even the uniform people talking to them made a lot of difference, gave them a lot of certainty. They both rejected and wanted our presence and our good opinion and our support, but we couldn't do very much in that situation. It just wasn't a possibility. You know, people were still looking at bombs going off behind them and there was no traffic, no banking.

Banks were starting to get set up again. We did do a lot with the banks, and that was important. We did just as much as we could possibly do, as fast as we could. The PRT direct role in that was only starting to become more important and more policy-oriented as I was leaving. It was a pretty messy place when I first got there.

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

A: Yes, that was my job.

Q: Could you evaluate that?

A: Nonfunctional.

Q: How so?

A: The PRDC was set up originally in 2005/2006. They originally set it up, and then killed half the members of the Provincial Council. So they were not able to do the process. We tried to restart the process, but because things had been so obliterated when we tried to hold their feet to the fire to do this, senior members of the governance team, this is civilians from OSG, backed off and pretty much destroyed it.

The original PRDC concept was not a political thing. It was supposed to be a need-based, financial, executable, tracking information system.

Q: And you said most of the members were literally killed?

A: Yes. A lot of the provincial council members were killed in 2005/2006. So that means that the PRDC, by the time we got there, as I mentioned earlier and this gets into the whole capital reconstruction area, capital project area, it was working in some places because it had a system for two years. We were working in a place where we were trying to set it up in three or four months in the middle of a highly, highly politicized environment.

Q: Next question has to do with Rule of Law. You had a Rule of Law office in the PRT?

A: Yes.

Q: Was that a program that was effective?

A: Well it was extremely important, and again the problems we had were due to the friction between the E-PRTs and PRTs in the execution of the Rule of Law program. And that eventually was in a continuous state of being worked out. It eventually worked out, but the people that we had there were among the most qualified, knew what they were doing, the needs were very strong there. The military did not make arbitrary

decisions, it was useful. Let me give you an example. The Iraqis had to pay to feed the prisoners, it was an obligation but they didn't want to. We worked very hard to get these people to force them to give the money to get the system to feed the prisoners. So what did the military do; they came in and took all the money and started to feed the prisoners. And the prison system, the law system, the courts, just stopped feeding them and said, well, the Americans are going to do it.

Q: Are you talking about the Multinational Security Transition Command when you talk about the military?

A: No. That's not MNSTC-I. MNSTC-I is the one that did a lot of the stuff in the form of building the facilities and things here. We were the occupying pal, the political correctness or incorrectness of that, and we had the mandate from the UN to help these guys work their way through it. So here we had a problem. We had the prisons; we had a lot who have been filled by our people, and they said: 'They are not Iraqi prisoners, they are American prisoners, and you caught them.' Which is kind of a political tit for tat sort of thing even though they had the system. Then you had this humanitarian situation where these guys are not getting food, of course they are getting food one way or another, they are buying it like a lot of third world countries. But they are not getting food from the government like they are supposed to. And the military is to make it happen, and they do. But sometimes they make it happen the way they want to do it.

Part of the problem with us is on three levels. With the Washington level with no patience at all, then the military with a bunch of patience and then you had the Iraqi level of movement which for them was incredibly fast. And that sort of is an underlying fact in all of these issues. In the Rule of Law I think the PRTs were able to bridge a lot of that more than any other part because we had real lawyers who could talk to their lawyers and could make ka real significant difference there. I think that was most effective and an immediate need, too.

Q: Was that in setting up courts or prisons or in what area of Rule of Law was this?

A: All of the areas you mentioned, in particular looking at the adjudications and in particular trying to work out systems that had already been put in place by the Marines to work with the local communities to get a lot of these guys out of jail. A sort of informal system whereby the tribes would take these people if we knew something about them. There was also a centralized system coming from Baghdad which was releasing a lot of people, which made people in Anbar very nervous because there was a perception that they were releasing the wrong people. There was a lot of back and forth and a lot of incomplete knowledge, a lot of partisanship, a lot of real concern about releasing the wrong people. And our PRTs were able to work closely with the judges, and this was very important because the judges probably were not as well respected as the Iraqi police or military so it was important to have that liaison at that point.

Q: Was there a system of Iraqi law that could be called on, or did the legal system have to be resuscitated? Was the Saddam era legal system adequate to set up again?

A: There was a legal system. Part of the problem here is the legal system existed but superimposing the legal system was whatever the big boss, the Saddam wants.

Q: The interpretation?

A: A huge problem we had all the way through was defining the nature of property rights: Who owned this piece of property to do this project? All those public health clinics that the Iraqis never took over, a lot of times it turned we built a public health clinic on property we had no right to build on because people hadn't really investigated. And it wasn't easy to make it clear. So you have a full group of professionals who were often ignored if the overriding authority decided to ignore them.

So how do you re-impose a full Rule of Law situation? There were good professionals. I mean Iraq is not Afghanistan. There are a lot of really bright people who just got dropped out of the world for 30 years. It is kind of funny. It is like you are still back in bell bottoms. That was sort of where we were. So my colleagues and I thought they were dealing with professionals at a higher level than we were in the infrastructures of the provincial government, where people were often junior and just not as experienced.

Q: Moving into the assessment area. Is it possible for you to specify some achievements of your PRT, some things that you can actually list as their accomplishments?

A: I think incredibly important was managing a very volatile political situation while overcoming an extraordinarily violent insurgency.

Q: What in terms of building something or concrete as in: this is what we did?

A: The political elected leadership was suspect because of the nature of the election. They were not seen by the population as having legitimacy. Those who were seen as having legitimacy were the tribal sheikhs and their personal and tribal militias who had fronted with the Americans to defeat Al Qaeda. Now a doctrinaire Islamic party reminiscent of the Eastern European kind of thinking against a highly traditionalist, extremely diverse, romantic and a little bit unpredictable grouping of tribal leaders somehow had to come together and make a government.

Q: That sounds like a challenge.

A: The Anbaries did not do it by themselves. If we had not been nursemaids to that and practiced tough love, and carrots and bananas and whatever mixed metaphors, to do that, we would have had a disaster. Anbar was a success because we gave them all the support they needed to allow themselves to believe in success.

Q: Okay, that is significant certainly.

A: It is hugely significant. We also engaged every layer of the province in a very widely diverse, socially, economically diverse area. We had people talking to people who felt like they were suddenly part of their own solution to the problem.

Q: They owned it.

A: They owned the problem and they could come to us. We could get them to talk to each other and suddenly somebody was listening to them. So when I say this was a huge conceptual leap forward, it is a huge conceptual leap forward. We were less successful, though successful, in physical projects; electricity and these other issues, because they are just huge, multibillion dollar projects. And despite what the military says about itself, we are not General Electric.

Q: Fair enough.

A: The Army Corps of Engineers made a lot of progress there. The problem is the nature of the reporting of the situation. People are very self-interested. All of them think that they will win by stealing: Whoever gets the contracts steals the money and does nothing. And that was like everyone wanted the contracts, everybody believed that the governor was taking all the contracts. He wasn't. Everybody believed all the rules were being broken. They weren't.

Am I saying there was a lot of corruption? You know, probably a lot less than people think. There was a lot of incompetence and the problem we had was with this total incompetence. There wasn't much corruption because no one understood the system enough to abuse it. Part of the problem was to build a system that was transparent enough to move forward, and that was where some provinces were very effective. In other provinces, like Anbar -- given the fact that we were making deals with these sheikhs, the governor and everybody and it was all about contracts -- it was hard. It was hard to take a volatile, potentially violent situation upon which the entire success of Iraq depended and get too nit-picky; pick too many nits about structure when you are afraid that these guys may start shooting at each other tomorrow. Ninety percent of the credit for what happened in Anbar belongs to, God love them, the Marines.

Q: The Marines?

A: Yes. We were an important part of this and were an important movement into what the future has to be.

Q: Are the PRTs accomplishing their goals in the four mission areas? Should they be continued?

A: The PRT in Anbar accomplished the overall mission despite deficiencies in policy, focus, planning and execution in the detailed projects. In other words, a lot of the PRDC and a lot of these things didn't work out the way we wanted them to, but we managed to make the overall project work.

Q: What about in general, the PRTs improving governance, economic development, utilizing American military and civilian resources and counter insurgency, these four mission statements? Are they accomplishing the goals for specific areas?

A: Yes, I think they are. I think the counter-insurgency is really, in this extent, it is the total engagement and the kind of patience that you spend with these people, you invest in them and they invest in you. I think that was very good.

I think economically we muddled a lot, but the real honest effect in the economy is going to sort itself out once you have the security and stability returned. And that the bigger problems in the economy are way beyond the range the PRT can do. It has to be structural change and change in Baghdad, in the basic laws of the country. They do have laws, most of them are not effective ways to grow the economy, it is still very much a command economy.

The other one was the governance. On this side, I think we probably get a C minus. But that grade was going to move up as we got better people out there. I mean people more experienced in international applications.

What was the fourth one?

Q: Effectively utilizing military and civilian resources.

A: We waste more money than I even want to think about. The deal was wasting money was not the issue. Only in the end did we finally get ourselves to start taking money away from them. We had $50 million we were going to give them; I finally got it down to $18 to $20 million we would give them, because they couldn't spend it. I was under tremendous pressure, getting yelled at by these military guys because, 'God damn it I was going to ruin the whole country' because I wouldn't sign off this money. We had shouting matches. I was just saying no, you are still in the mentality of over-spending money. Money is our concrete expression of political will. The more we waste, the greater showing of political will. And that of course comes from the President. And that sort of worked, but it is a horrible thing to see.

Waste and corruption has a moral and a developmental cost, way beyond the simple monetary cost. For Iraq, it probably is by not being better stewards of that money from the beginning and not being clear with it. Some people would override all sorts of fiduciary responsibility and give it to the sheikh they liked the most.

I don't know if you are going to get into the question of CERP, I didn't mention it until now. The whole question of the military use of money for emergency reconstruction projects is really an interesting question and I would be called and they'd say you guys need a CERP, but really it take s away from the effectiveness of good programs because people know they can come to you and you give them money. And they say, 'Well, that

is what saves our lives; you are trying to get our boys killed.' You did have lively conversations on some things.

Q: Would you say that your training for this was appropriate, adequate?

A: Inadequate.

Q: Was it inappropriate as well?

A: No.

Q: Just inadequate?

A: Not enough of it. And again, the problems go back to the whole nature of what is the PRT. A major part of that problem in the beginning and maybe to this day is there is not an overall integrated vision of what the PRT does that gives enough coordination to the various elements. And because you didn't have that it became talking about the activities rather than talking about the mission. So there wasn't the overall thought so you weren't able to bring that in. So people come out there, the blind and the elephant, thinking whatever I am doing is the most important thing and that's what the PRT is all about.

Q: If you had the opportunity to enumerate lessons learned, maybe four or five, what would be the main points you would make?

A: A greater integration of developmental experience in the leadership. In other words, people who understand development of local societies from a Third World point of view. So that needs to be in the PRT leadership as a high priority. Not just typical State Department political reporting of 1,000, 10, 0000 feet above it, do the observations, pick the winners and the losers and try to nudge them in our direction, but someone who understands that developmental area. Critical in all the areas is more appropriate experience in the PRT team members.

I think the most critical and good thing about this, and why we were winning in Anbar, is we have a core of people with a bloc of experience in Iraq. Re-tread these people, find the ones we thought were effective and re-tread them, and bring them back. I think that is really critical. Bring people who have developmental experience and have worked in foreign countries. Those are two things.

A third thing I would say is long-range language and cultural integration. As it becomes easier to see these people you need to make sure that everybody, even people like me who don't speak Arabic, is able to do all the greetings and courtesy-level communication. It is hugely important. And we got two days of it in training, but after, we got there, there was no emphasis at all. It was all back into our world of FitReps. So I think the language and the cultural thing is really important.

And the fourth thing is to get at least a 24- to 30-month outlook on where you are going with the PRTs. We didn't know, really, in what direction we were going in six or eight months; sometimes not even two months. Nor did we know how many PRTs we were going to have, how many E-PRTs, who was going to be in charge of them, what OPA was doing, why we weren't integrating with ITAO (Iraq Transition Assistance Program).

We really would find out that ITAO would be doing things that were incredibly important to us at the ministerial level, like water and power, and OPA wasn't very integrated with ITAO. How do we create the chain so that it works for the Iraqis and not graft ourselves and become the chain of command? It is a very delicate situation. That is why it is very important for us to know if are we doing things for 24 months or 30 months, and at what point we would create these relationships between the provinces and the provincial government.

We nurture them the relationships, then we move ourselves out and find long-terms ways to maintain these relationships in a positive way. Then again, we always support the central government to get its act together.

Those are the four things I would say and I hope they are useful.

Q: Very much so. And I want to thank you very much for taking the time to do this. If I can be of any help in follow up or you think of anything and you'd like to add to this, please feel free.

A: I'm afraid I have a career of being overly blunt.

Q: That is what this is about. I don't know if anyone has de briefed you on this, but in many cases nobody had a chance to have their views known so it is really important.

A: We had a few people, out of Leavenworth, Kansas come out and we told them. Part of the problem is, God I don't know what to do with our the political system, but we end up there and we set the goal but we don't prepare ourselves to get the tools. By the time we get the tools in place, the ball was gone. The whole Leavenworth thing did a book on PRTs as a lessons learned model, which we based our PRTs on. It reviewed different teams. The members of the first teams were seen as innovative people and then the Leavenworth people reported it and then they spread a book for everybody else and the resulting handbook came from Leavenworth on this. I think, basically, the problem is their existence within a political tool for the Administration to say we are not all military but we, to a certain extent, were a bit of a fig leaf on what the Marines really did. The success in moving things was mostly all Marines.

To make the PRTs more effective in the future we need to know what our way out is and to start bringing in more traditional things. The other thing that was very irritating was that we weren't using USAID or State Department training programs at all while integrating the PRTs, which was very upsetting because I had done them all through my career. When I went back to the embassy they didn't want to hear it because the PRTs

weren't a part of that. That integration into that 30-month thing to find out where it is going to go will be really important. And maybe getting much better leadership in OPA or reintegrating OPA into the whole thing. I don't know how that is going to work and sort of by the time you reset the structure the problems are almost over.

Q: I am sure this will be very helpful and I thank you again very much.

A: Now, are you going to quote me by name by any chance?

Q: No, it is anonymous. Although I do need to have you sign the release form which I will email to you. But there are no names used in this. I will probably even have to remove any names you mentioned. I don't know why, but that is the way they have decided to do it, so you are safe.

A: No, it is not that. I don't have any problem talking about that. I think people need to be up front with the problems.

In fact there are a couple people who were on the team, my military friends I was talking about, who have put out their resumes stating they were PRT team leaders and just basically lying on their resumes that show up on the Internet. And I wonder why people do that, but that's not my problem.

Q: Thank you. It was good speaking with you.