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

INTERVIEW #61

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Initial interview date: October 29, 2008

Executive Summary

The interviewee was in Iraq from 2007 to 2008, located in the main PRT in Baghdad, based in the Green Zone. (Note: there are about 14 or so embedded PRTs in Baghdad co-located with Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs). The interviewee had no advance training or orientation, but is fluent in Arabic, lived and worked in the Middle East and works on security issues. The training the teammates had sounded "ridiculous."

A State Department Foreign Service Officer (DOS/FSO) heads the main PRT; the deputy is a U.S. Army officer. The staffing totaled about 110 people — a mix of civilians and military personnel, contractors and local hires (mostly Iraqi translators, but not very good translators; the dual nationals were better). The staff was divided into several functional teams: governance (political section), infrastructure, public affairs-media and diplomacy, rule of law, economic development, and an operations section for logistics (military). The main PRT reports to the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA); the embedded PRTs report to the main PRT (initially to the OPA). The USAID representative on the PRT helped with coordinating programs. The PRT staff had a lot of movement capabilities, both civilian and military with restrictions depending on the security situation and procedures for requesting movement support.

The PRT mission statement: to help the Baghdad Provincial and local governments provide essential services and govern effectively without regard to sect or political party or ethnic group: building democracy, strengthening democracy and rule of law. The ePRTs, when they came on line, took over the interface with the District Councils. The individual program sections had their own mission statements, which they prepared themselves. Re resources, in the beginning the PRT had no money; in the last eight months, it had Quick Reaction Funds (QRF). The interviewee did not see a lot of benefit in those programs.

The Governance section's main function was diplomatic relations with the Provincial government, maintaining the political relations and building capacities of the Governor's office and the Council on subjects such as development plans, liaison with civil society, increasing representation among marginalized groups, working on getting services to areas not getting them, and on reconciliation. The infrastructure team worked on the physical tasks related to the services —water supply, electricity, trash collection and

health— and making sure that what the U.S. was spending money on was not being repeated elsewhere with Iraqi or other donor money.

The Rule of Law team focused on the police, courts and prisons, access to justice and building a legal profession. They made progress, for example, with the Iraqi Bar Association and legal centers. However, success was uneven depending on the security situation. The Economic Development team was successful with doing business expositions and making micro-grants to small businesses. But with 30-40% unemployment, would one call that success? The PRT Media group worked with the Provincial Council's media committee on public outreach to inform the public about the government's activities and how to have access to it.

Relationships within the PRT were fine, not a lot of friction, despite the complexity of the organization and staffing—military and civilian and PRT structure. Relations with the Iraqi officials were very much person-to-person, but generally they were willing to work with the PRT staff with some significant exceptions. For Americans working with Iraqis, it is important, at the outset, to have personal relationships before doing business. PRT staff turnover is a big issue. On PRT staff qualifications: some were super-bright and qualified but did not understand the environment making them ineffective; some were asked to do jobs they were not qualified to do.

Overall assessment: a good job at maintaining diplomatic relations with the Provincial Government; lot of progress in building competence. The governance function needs to be there for a long time.

On lessons: the need to calibrate expectations, things move slowly; staff need to understand that there are lots of moving parts and no room for territorialism and ego; a need for a lot of networking.

Did the PRT have an impact in improving governance? Yes, but was there enough of an effect taking into account the expenditure? In principle, PRTs are a good idea, but there are a lot of kinks to work out such as what is on paper, what is in practice, e.g. guidance from OPA, command structures?

Interview

Q: When and where were you in Iraq with the PRT*?*

A: I was in Iraq with the PRT, the Baghdad PRT, from 2007 to 2008.

Q: Is that the only PRT in Baghdad, or were there several?

A: Just the main PRT. There is the main PRT and then there are about 14 or so embedded PRTs that are co-located with Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) outside of the Green Zone. I was in the main one, in the Green Zone.

Q: What about the organization of that PRT. Could you describe it for me?

A: The main PRT is a civilian/military team, headed by a State Department Foreign Service Officer and his deputy is a U.S. Army officer and the staff are a combination of State Department, Department of Defense (DOD) soldiers and civilians, contractors and local hires that are mostly translators.

Q: And were you divided up into teams?

A: We were. We were divided in functional sections.

Q: What teams did you have?

A: There was what was first known as the governance section and they changed the name to the political section. There was infrastructure, public affairs and public diplomacy, rule of law and policy.

Q: Was there an economic development one, too?

A: Yes. There was also operations, which handled all of the logistics for the PRT, like acquisition of computers and materials and things like that and planning all of our movements outside of the Green Zone.

Q: Was that the military or the State Department?

A: That was all military.

Q: How many people, civilians, were involved, roughly?

A: The entire PRT was about 110 people. Civilians: there were probably about sixty or seventy of those.

Q: And you were located within the environs of Baghdad?

A: We were. We were in the Green Zone. We lived in the palace compound, where the Embassy annex is located, but our office was separate from that compound.

Q: You call it the main PRT. What does that mean in relationship to the others?

A: The relationship between them changed over the course of the year. The main PRT is usually referred to as the "mother ship" PRT, because it is free standing, it is not located with a Brigade Combat Team (BCT) and it answered directly to the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA). When the embedded PRTs came on line in roughly the summer of 2007, in the beginning they first answered directly to the OPA, but now they answer to the Baghdad PRT, the main PRT.

Q: How would you describe the security situation? That would be different from the PRTs out of town, but in terms of being able to do your work and getting out, having movement teams?

A: We had a lot of movement capabilities. Certainly more than people in the Embassy typically had, because we had both civilian and military assets at our disposal. There were very few times when I was unable to move when I wanted to because there were no assets available. But when there was a significant deterioration in the security situation, for whatever reason, sometimes all movements would be cancelled or all movements to a certain area were cancelled. So, if I was unable to move, it was usually for that reason not because we did not have enough assets.

Q: But you went out with a movement team every time that your team went out?

A: Yes, we had to.

Q: And was this in any way restricted, in terms of getting out?

A: Yes, of course, just logistically it makes things difficult. You have to put in a request to make a movement like three days in advance and that is not the way that Iraqis do business. They do not tend to plan things that far ahead and often cancel at the last minute, or become unable to come because they are living amid pretty significant security problems or they get stuck at checkpoints.

So, yes, it certainly makes things harder, but also it is just not feasible to do it any other way. We cannot just get in cars and drive out into the city. Your life expectancy would be about five minutes, if you tried that.

Q: Did you have a mission statement for your PRT?

A: We did.

Q: Can you cite the gist of that?

A: The gist was helping provincial and local government provide essential services and govern effectively without regard to sect or political party or ethnic group. That was the upshot, building democracy, strengthening democracy and rule of law.

Q: Were you working with the central government or with neighborhood governments?

A: We worked with the Provincial Council, the Governor's office and the District Councils. After the embedded PRTs came on line they took over interface at the district level, but we ended up maintaining some of the those relationships. Those of us that were there a long time had relationships at that level that predated the existence of the embedded PRTs.

Q: So you were working with the government of Baghdad?

A: Yes, the Baghdad Provincial Government.

Q: Let us talk about some of the programs. Of course, the main one was governance, now you call it political. What were you trying to do in that?

A: Basically, the governance section's main function was diplomatic relations with the Provincial Government, maintaining the political relationship between the U.S. mission and the Provincial Council and the Governor's office in capacity building, working to help the Provincial Government build its capacity to govern effectively and efficiently. We worked on a lot of different things, like provincial development plans and liaison with civil society and trying to increase representation among marginalized groups and provincial outreach.

Q: What did you find most effective in that work?

A: Obviously, the low hanging fruit of that group is just maintaining the diplomatic relation, because that is just a conversational function, just maintaining relationships. So that came, more often than not, in the context of doing other things.

I would say we made some pretty good inroads on the reconciliation front and the infrastructure section worked on the actual pipes issues of infrastructure and we in the governance section worked more on the political side of that issue. So if certain areas of the city were not getting services and other areas were, why is that? So we worked on those issues a lot, addressing the political problems that were preventing certain people from getting services.

Q: And were you involved in things like budget plans and development plans and with the council?

A: The economic section had the lead on that. I worked in the governance/political section and, again, the piece we had of that was the political part, making sure that all citizens' interests are represented in development plans and making sure that the Provincial Government is talking to the National Government to make sure that they actually have resources to allocate and support their plans and that they can explain to their people why they are doing what they are doing.

But in terms of actual numbers crunching and deconflicting (*avoiding project duplications and past mistakes, ensuring sustainability)* what the U.S. mission was doing with what they were doing with their own money and budget execution that was dealt with by other sections, by the economic section and the services section.

Q: How big was the provincial council? Did you work with them?

A: 51 members.

Q: And they were broadly representative?

A: No, they were not. The Sunnis boycotted provincial elections and therefore I think 49 of the 51 members were Shi'ias and of the two Sunnis, one quit or he was removed and the other one was Sunni, but he was a Communist, which is not particularly representative of the Sunni community.

Q: And did you work with the Provincial Council trying to get then to meet and negotiate?

A: We did, yes. As far as making it more representative, that is for the elections to decide. The Council had different committees that would work on different issues. So there is the Legal Committee and the Council Affairs Committee and the Internally Displaced Persons Committee. We encouraged those committees to hire staff who were professional and competent, rather than hiring staff from their families or from their political parties. In terms of just holding meetings, they did not really need our encouragement to do that; they met regularly. We did encourage them to do things like take minutes and make them available to the public.

Q: Having agendas?

A: Having agendas, exactly. The Baghdad Provincial Council is really functional. In those regards we did not have a lot of trouble with issues like that.

Q: They were a lot more organized than those out in the provinces, I guess?

A: They were, yes. If anything, though, it was because the Council is run in a fairly dictatorial manner. That is a different kind of problem, but the basic things like setting agendas and speaking one at a time, we did not even have to discuss things like that with them.

Q: You were trying to get them to be more democratic in their processes?

A: Yes, but that was a political problem as much as it was a security problem, so we did not…

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: In one way, a lot of governance in Iraq is really top heavy, both within the family structure, within the government structure and within the tribal structure, there is an alpha dog and everyone follows what he does, if he has the power to enforce that structure.

So people often did not really feel like they were free to disagree with the top person on a lot of things. On some things they did, but there were just certain red lines and people's safety was at stake at the end of the day. We were not really in a position to say: "Oh, you

should commit suicide" essentially by contradicting a chairman on point X. It just was not something that we were able to do.

Q: Were you able to relate to the Chairmen and try to influence their way of working?

A: We did. We had a relationships with them. Our level of success in influencing them varied significantly. There were not relationships that existed in a vacuum, let us put it that way.

Q: And you were the one that was principally trying to relate to them?

A: When I first arrived I was the main point of contact for the Chairmen and then my portfolio changed, so other people in the PRT assumed responsibility for that relationship.

Q: Did the council and the government have a long-term development strategy? I gather there was a move to try to develop these generally.

A: They do, yes, in Baghdad, at least. I am not sure about the other provinces, but Baghdad has a Provincial Development Strategy. It is pretty comprehensive.

Q: Was this something that RTI had worked with them on?

A: They did, yes.

Q: And that has been adopted by the Council and now generally recognized?

A: Yes, absolutely.

Q: Let us turn to the infrastructure sector, unless there is more on PRT governance work or political program?. What were the main things you were trying to accomplish on the infrastructure?

A: I cannot speak with much authority on that subject, because I did not work in that section. Their primary interlocutor was the *amanat*, which is like City Hall, basically. The *amanat* is the government structure that is responsible for providing essential services within Baghdad city limits. So they were responsible for the interface with that body.

Q: Was that a large team in that section?

A: Yes, it is actually probably the largest section in the PRT, either that or rule of law team. The infrastructure team was a combination of civilians, like city planners, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers folks, Iraqi local hires that were engineers and translators as well.

A lot of what they did is deconflict projects, to make sure that what the U.S. was spending its money on was not being repeated elsewhere with Iraqi money or other donor money and making sure that from the Iraqi government's point of view the projects are sustainable. A lot of mistakes were made early on where the U.S. would undertake these big infrastructure projects that the Iraqis either did not want or could not or would not maintain after we left.

So one of their main functions was making sure that we did not repeat those mistakes.

Q: Were they involved in the process of project planning, selection, design, and implementation?

A: I am sure they were. As far as what the Iraqis decided to do with their own money, certainly there was a consultative relationship, but I do not think they had any kind of veto. For example, if the PRT or the U.S. Mission writ large would say, "No, we do not want you to do that project, " or, conversely, "We want you to do this project with your own money," that kind of leverage was not evident.

Q: Were they working on procedures like bid processes and making them open and so on?

A: I do not know the answer.

Q: Do you have any sense of what the infrastructure work was, impression of what was accomplished in the infrastructure area?

A: The main focus was on sewers, water supply, electricity, trash collection and health. Those were the main functional focuses. There were areas where we made a lot more progress than others: electricity was just notoriously difficult, whereas sewage and water, we made very significant inroads. Trash collection also came a long way.

Health was pretty complicated, because the Ministry of Health was run by people with strong political leanings, some of whom were hostile to us, so we did not have much of a relationship there.

Q: Was the Central Government much involved in the work of the PRT?

A: Oh, certainly. The PRT did not just go and do projects without consulting with the Iraqis. Absolutely, the Provincial Government was involved in everything that we did.

Q: But I mean the Central Government, the National Government.

A: No, the division of labor was that the Embassy dealt with the National Government and the PRT dealt with Provincial Government. If there were issues that needed to be solved at the national level we did not go directly to the National Government. We would take the issue to the Embassy, to the person that was responsible for maintaining that

relationship [and say], "Hey, you need to talk to this ministry or that person in the cabinet." We did not do that, ourselves.

Q: Let us talk about the Rule of Law program. What were you trying to do there?

A: Again, I did not work in that program, but my understanding was their main focus was on police, courts and prisons, access to justice, building the legal profession like the capacity building of the Iraqi bar association. They did things like provide training for Iraqi lawyers and building up the Iraqi Bar Association and opening legal centers to educate the public about their rights and the rule of law and access to justice. As far as the police and the courts and the prisons issues, I am not exactly sure how they deconflicted their activities with the Embassy, because there was also a Rule of Law section that worked on national level issues.

Q: Were they dealing with displaced persons?

A: Actually, no, the Political Section dealt with that more. There were discrete issues that the Rule of Law section worked on, like property rights with regard to displaced persons, but actually that was my portfolio in the Political Section. So that was not something that they dealt with as much.

Q: But did they have a criminal law program and a civil law program?

A: I do not think they divided the Rule of Law section that way. I think they divided it by functional areas.

Q: Such as?

A: Like the police, courts and prisons were one group and then the other group was the legal profession, access to justice. But certainly the staff had varied backgrounds. Some were more experienced in civil law; some were more experienced in criminal law.

Q: Did you have an impression they were having an effect on the local system?

A: Sure, they made progress that was particularly visible in certain areas like their work with the Iraqi Bar Association and the legal centers that they set up. But I think Rule of Law activities generally in Iraq are difficult, because Rule of Law is so heavily dependent on security. You cannot have Rule of Law without security and peace is not always in place in different areas, so success was uneven, depending on what they were trying to do.

Q: Was there a Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee (PDRC) that worked with the Council?

A: Yes, actually there was a body called the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee. They worked mostly with the Infrastructure Section. I did not really deal

with that body very much, so I do not know exactly what it did, but it was something to the effect [that] U.S. and Iraqi money would be used on joint projects. They worked both with the PRT and with the Provincial Government.

Q: In the economic development area, was that involved with the infrastructure or was it involved in business development? What were they working on?

A: They were more involved in the more traditional economic issues, like business relations, microfinance, micro-grants, micro-loans, things like that and then the bigger picture development strategies and budget execution.

Q: All at the Provincial level, not at the National level?

A: Yes, Provincial level. Just generally speaking, the PRTs do not interact at the national level.

Q: And do you have any sense of their effectiveness? Were the businesses being developed as a result of their work?

A: Yes, the Economic section had a lot of success in doing business expositions. They gave out a lot of micro-grants to small businesses that I am sure had an effect at the micro level. But, again, for individual small businesses these programs were very successful, but when you are looking at a country that has an overall unemployment rate of probably somewhere in the neighborhood of thirty to forty per cent, I do not know. Would you call that success or not? It is a matter of perspective.

Q: In your governance area, did you have an RTI program?

A: We did, yes.

Q: And how were they working?

A: I thought it was useful. The Iraqis who participated in the program found them useful and usually were asking for more training. So it seemed to be an effective program.

Q: Their work was mostly training, is that it?

A: Yes.

Q: Training in what kind of things?

A: Administration, budgeting.

Q: Did you have a Public Affairs program?

A: We did.

Q: And what were they doing?

A: They worked mostly with the Provincial Council's media committee and worked on training that committee to do public outreach on behalf of the Provincial Government, using the committee to inform the public about what the Provincial Government is doing and how people can have access to the Provincial Government.

They also were responsible for the different public diplomacy programs, like the international visitors program, where community leaders or local government leaders are invited to the U.S. for a three-week trip to participate in different workshops and other activities. They were responsible for all of those programs like that.

Q: Were they trying to get the work of the PRT into the press?

A: Yes, they did that as well.

Q: And do you think that the word was getting out to the Iraqis?

A: Certainly among the Provincial Government, but if you would say to an average Iraqi, if you would use the term Provincial Reconstruction Team, the average citizens did not really know what that was.

Q: How did Iraqis understand this [term] Provincial Reconstruction Team?

A: They understand the term, but they did not know what it was, who staffs it, is it military, is it part of the Embassy, is it neither, is it an Iraqi thing?

Q: Did they understand what the PRT was trying to do?

A: Yes, if you explained it to them, but the average man on the street, if you were to just walk up to a person in downtown Baghdad and say, "Hey, do you know what the Baghdad Provincial Reconstruction Team is?" He probably would say, "No."

Q: And did you have cultural advisors or, as some people call them BBAs (Bilingual Bicultural Advisers)?

A: Yes, we did. Every section had at least one or two and then there were local translators. Their function was more just straight translation services, but they certainly provided that kind of advice as well.

Q: And did you find them very useful?

A: I did not, actually. The local hires were generally not very good translators. The Iraqi-Americans or the dual nationalities that were Iraqi-American, Iraqi-British, and Iraqi-Canadian that were on DOD contracts, they were definitely better. One of the problems

with them is that the Americans on the team often did not really use them very well. They tended to use them just for translation and there was a lot more to be gained from their presence and it did not work out that way in practice.

Q: Is there any other program area that we have not touched on? You did talk about the health and [there] seemed to have problems with that.

A: Health was part of the infrastructure section.

Q: It was not an independent program?

A: No.

Q: And did USAID have a lot of programs in Baghdad, too?

A: Oh, definitely, yes. We also had a USAID representative on the PRT. USAID has a ton of programs throughout the province, like Community Action Programs, the Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance programs, Community Stabilization Programs.

Q: Education programs?

A: I am not sure what they had going on in education.

Q: How did the PRT and USAID people coordinate? They could bump into each other a lot.

A: That is why we had an USAID rep on every PRT, so they were heavily involved in deconflicting and making sure that programs were not running at cross purposes.

Q: Were there any other program areas we have not touched on that you were working on, that I missed?

A: I do not think so.

Q: Okay, let us talk a little bit about relationships. How did you relate to your military team that was supposed to be part of your group?

A: There were different aspects to the relationship with the military. There were military people that were assigned to the PRT; they were part of the PRT. It was basically part of a civil affairs company and then there were a few like individual soldiers that were taken from different units, like infantry or whatever, that were permanently assigned to the PRT and that was their job.

And then there was the aspect that was how the PRT related to Multinational Division Baghdad and Multinational Division Central, which were the two pieces of the military

that shared our area of operations and those relationships were mostly dealt with by the deputy team leader.

The first one that we had when I was there was a lieutenant colonel. The second one was a colonel and they were from MDB, Multinational Division Baghdad, because that was the unit that we shared more space with. So he and the team leader both were responsible for maintaining those relationships, but functionally it seemed to fall more on the deputy team leader, because he was himself military.

Q: How about the relationship within the PRT, in terms of your different groups and getting them coordinated? Your team leader must have had a big job keeping it going.

A: Yes, he did. I think that within the PRT there was not a lot of difference between us. Most sections had both military and civilian personnel; the internal command structure within the sections like the political section or the services section, sometimes you would have civilians working under military persons, sometimes you would have military working under a civilian within a section. But within the overall PRT, it had its own structure.

So I think within the PRT it was fine. I did not really see a lot of friction. There were isolated issues that were more personality driven than structurally driven. Certain civilians had bad relationships with the deputy team leader, who was a military person and he was not really in a position to officially discipline them, just like the civilian team leader is not really in a position to officially discipline a military person. Those problems were really at an individual level. It was not something that came up a lot.

Q: What were the main issues that the PRT had to deal with internally?

A: The operating environment was pretty complex. There are a lot of cooks in the kitchen. There is the Embassy, there is the PRT, and there is the military. They have shared goals and they work to deconflict what they are doing, but, at the same time, like each of those bodies has its own culture and its own personality and its own way of doing things and when you put them together it is kind of messy, sometimes.

For one thing, the mission itself is huge, almost impossible to keep track of what everyone is doing and that creates problems when you have a bunch of different Americans talking to the same Iraqis and saying different things.

Generally, the military was resistant to ceding leadership on certain issue areas that most people would agree should be civilian led.

Q: Like what?

A: Like development activities, like internally displaced persons, purely political issues. Those are things that traditionally fall pretty clearly within the civilian realm, but there

was some resistance on the part of the military, I thought, to ceding leadership to the civilian side on some of those issue areas.

Q: Did each of the sections have their own mission statements?

A: Yes, they did, actually.

Q: Were they prepared in advance for them, or each one was developing their own, like your own and so forth?

A: No, we had to develop our own.

Q: How about relations with the Iraqis, the ones you were directly working with, how would you characterize that?

A: It depends so much from person to person. Generally, the people that we needed to deal with were willing to deal with us, but there were some fairly significant exceptions. There were some influential provincial leaders that did not want to talk to us and that created problems once in a while, because their underlings also are not going to be at liberty to talk to us. Some of them did, anyway, but it had to be quiet and under the table and unattributed.

Q: There was a fear of being associated with the Americans?

A: Yes, that was a factor in all of our relationships, but I felt, for the most part, people were so used to us being around it was not that much of a factor. For the most part, very rarely would anyone say, "I do not want you coming to my facility, because I do not want to be seen with you," or "I will not come to the Green Zone, because I do not want to be seen." That happened infrequently. I can think of maybe two cases over almost three years.

Q: Did you deal directly with the Governor?

A: The PRT did, yes.

Q: Did you personally have a lot of dealings him?

A: At the beginning of my assignment I did and then I changed portfolios.

Q: You changed portfolios from what to what?

A: In the beginning of my assignment, I was the liaison with the Governor and the Provincial Council and then I took on the Internally Displaced Persons portfolio.

Q: During that first period, how did you find working with the Governor and the Council?

A: In that period, we had a very good relationship with the Governor. The Deputy Team Leader was the main interlocutor and I would usually go with him. I would not go and meet the Governor by myself, generally. And he had a great relationship with the Governor. They functioned well together; they saw each other regularly.

The Provincial Council, when I first arrived, had just lifted a boycott on relations with the PRT and the U.S., so it was a touchy relationship. We were on eggshells for a few months, but it was not generally hard to meet with rank and file members, but as time went on the Chairman became pretty difficult to nail down.

And the Governor, later, when we had a change of leadership within the PRT, the relationship between him and the person who was responsible for dealing with him was not the best and it prevented the entire PRT from having a relationship with him. So that was a real problem.

Q: Were there any particular aspects to how you relate to these officials that one has to keep in mind?

A: How do you mean?

Q: Well, in terms of how you talk to them, work with them, in terms of maintaining a relationship?

A: Iraqis have a particular way of doing business and a lot of Americans generally did a really bad job of understanding that.

Q: How would you characterize that?

A: Most Americans that work on the PRTs or in the U.S. Mission, in general, do not speak Arabic, they have not lived in the Middle East, they do not know anything about the culture of the region and therefore a lot of mistakes are made that could be avoided sometimes. Most of the time they were pretty minor, especially this late in the game. The Iraqis have been dealing with Americans for a long time now and they are used to those sorts of things, but once in a while it creates real problems.

Q: So I guess there were special techniques of how to negotiate with them. How would you characterize the effort to negotiate with them?

A: It depends so much on the individual. I would think, like any diplomatic mission, the personalities are all different from us and they are all different from each other.

Q: But if you were to advise a newcomer, saying: "Here are some good points to consider before you start negotiating with your Iraqi counterpart."

A: Some of the big things that we generally misunderstand are that Iraqis are generally reluctant to do business with people that they do not have personal relationships with. So it does not work if you just call them when you want something or you need something. If you expect it to be a relationship that functions at a high level, you have to maintain it all the time and call that person at least once a week and remember the names of his kids and he does the same for you. Just things like that.

And there are things that you never talk about, certainly, especially if you are a man dealing with another man, you do not ever talk about an Iraqi's female relatives, for example. Like religion, you should leave it alone, do not touch it, ever, for any reason. Things like that and you have to expect, too, that they are going to ask you things that are considered rude for us and you cannot take that personally or offensively.

But the big thing that I saw harm relationships was that all politics is personal there, like you have to have personal relationships in order to have professional ones and a lot of people did not understand that.

And, also, Iraqis generally are reluctant to say things like "I will not" or "I cannot" or just flat "No." And Americans generally do not understand that. They take what people say at face value and it is usually not what is meant.

And this is something that the Bilingual Bicultural Advisors could have brought some value, but for the most part people just used them as translators.

Q: They were not advising on the cultural aspects of relationships?

A: Sometimes even the ones that tried to were pushed aside. There are a lot of people that think they know everything. It was a real problem, though.

Q: So it is a long process of developing this personal relationship?

A: It does not have to be. With the nature of the short assignments, there is pretty constant turnover and especially this late in the game, Iraqis understand that and know that, but there are little things, I am not talking about kind of a three or four month courtship relationship building, but little things like, the first meeting, you do not talk business, you meet the person and chat with him and drink tea and talk about the weather and that is all you do. You do not get into heavy stuff in the first meeting.

Q: Is there any topic that we have not touched on that you feel we ought to that is important?

A: Yes, turnover is another big issue.

Q: You have a lot of turnover?

A: Some people were here less than a year. But even with a year and it is unavoidable, there is not really a way around it, but it really creates problems. If you imagine trying to run a business that has a hundred per cent of new staff every two years, it is definitely going to fail. So why would you think a diplomatic mission would be different?

Q: Did you have trouble recruiting replacements?

A: I do not know, because I did not work on that.

Q: But in your team area?

A: No, we did not generally have a lot of gaps. But the staffing situation, even with the PRT, was fluid; I do not know that there was a roster for each section, like the political section should always have eight people. I do not think we really had that.

Q: How many did you have?

A: It was really small when I first got there. It was probably five or six people. When I left it was probably ten or so.

Q: And they were turning over fairly frequently?

A: You figure, for the most part no one stays longer than a year and then for those of us that did stay longer than a year, there is very often an attitude among newcomers that "I am going to be the one to turn this whole thing around!" Okay, great.
Q: How would you judge the overall quality of the team members, not just yours, but the others in terms of professional abilities?

A: For the most part, we had really good people, super qualified, super bright. We had a lot of people that were super qualified and super bright, but did not understand anything about the environment in which they were working, which made them pretty ineffective. And then we had people that were really being asked to do jobs that they were just not qualified to do and you cannot really fault them.

Q: Were you able to get those people moved or replaced?

A: No, it is almost impossible to get rid of someone. We had some shockingly incompetent people and you could not get rid of them.

Q: I gather there was concern that the Department of State had difficulty making personnel decisions about people.

A: Yes, turnover contributes to that. There is always a feeling, "Well, he is not going to be around very long. How much damage is he going to do in the meantime?"

Q: Is there any other topic area we have not touched on that is important?

A: No, I do not think so. That will about do it.

*Q: How would assess, looking across the PRT, what its achievements [**were**] during the time that you were there? What was it able to accomplish in the time you were there?*

A: We did a good job of maintaining diplomatic relationships with the Provincial Government. As far as concrete projects, I did not work in those areas. So I am not in a position to comment.

Q: But do you have a feeling the PRT had an impact on the Provincial Government?

A: Yes, it did. I do not know that the effect is going to be clear for a decade, maybe and that goes not just for the PRT but the whole mission. Everything is such a moving target; it is really difficult to assess progress in anything.

Q: Do you get any sense that the PRT became more competent or confident in what it was trying to do?

A: Yes, I saw a lot of progress in competence generally, but part of that is a function of the PRTs being so new when I started. Our PRT had been in existence for a year when I got there. So a lot of the initial problems were just things that are to be expected from any new entity.

Q: You see it as a long term task? Would the PRT need to be there a long, long time, or not?

A: Aspects of it, yes. Certainly the political governance function needs to be there for a long time. Iraq is a big country; relationships need to be maintained at the provincial level. As far as the infrastructure work, sometime in the fairly near future serious American money is not going to be going into those kinds of projects. So I would see some roles dropping off.

Q: What were the resource capacities of your PRT program? Did it have a lot of money?

A: In the beginning, we had no money. In the last eight months or so we had access to what was called Quick Reaction Funds or Quick Response Funds, QRF. I personally did not see a lot of benefit in those programs.

A lot of people thought they were just great, because a lot of the Iraqis that we dealt with were also dealing unilaterally with the military, which had infinitely more resources at its disposal than we had and a lot of them reached the point where they were: "What do we get out of talking to you? What do you bring?" And if it is not resources, they are frequently not interested. So QRF helped in that regard, where at least you are coming to

the table with some resources at your disposal, but whether they were used particularly effectively, I do not think so.

Q: Did you use Quick Reaction Funds yourself?

A: I only wrote one grant proposal. One of the problems that I saw was with money like QRF, there were no efforts were made to deconflict the spending of that money and I saw a number of times and pointed out to people that were involved in these projects, that "Hey, what you are doing someone else in the U.S. Mission is doing. So at least you should talk to them." "Well, no, we just want to do it, because they are not moving fast enough" or "They are not doing it the way we want to do it, so we are just going to do it." "Okay, if you want to throw money away, that is your business."

Q: What did you use the funds for?

A: I did a proposal to so some training, business administrative training for the Provincial Council Displacement Committee, but I ended up not submitting it, because USAID ended up doing exactly that. But this is a really good illustration, actually. If I were someone else on the team I probably would have continued with it anyway. You see what I mean?

Q: There is always the problem of duplication or redundancy.

A: Yes, I saw a lot of programs, like QRF proposals, that just reflected a really poor understanding of the environment in which we were working and that is something that cannot be taught. I did not find QRF to be an effective program, at all.

Q: Before we wrap it up, is there any other special topic or frustration or concern that you want to mention?

A: That is probably about it.

Q: Could you pick out two or three or four observations on what you thought were the main lessons learned? If you were talking to a new team that was going out to PRTs, what kind of lessons would you point out to them about what they are getting into and what works and what does not work?

A: Generally, we need to calibrate our expectations. Things move really slowly. Progress, when it is made, is not always readily apparent. The nature of the environment is, at best, two steps forward, one step back. Sometimes it is one step forward, three steps back. And if you come into it with that perspective, it probably helps calibrate your expectations.

I think people also need to come in understanding that they are working with a lot of different moving parts and there is no room for territorialism and ego in a mission that is so big, with so much work to be done. And we saw that a lot, especially, this came up a lot with the embedded PRTs. When they came online they would be very territorial

about, “You came into my area of operation! You did this!” “Really? Are you serious? Are you seriously a 45-year-old or are you ten?” Especially if efforts were made to deconflict, those people just do not read their emails. You cannot have that kind of attitude in such a big mission.

Q: There needs to be a lot of networking, I would guess.

A: There does need to be a lot of networking and, again, that is one of the things that are made really difficult by turnover. You can spend a year just learning who all out there is doing the kind of things that you do and in the space of that year most of those people are going to leave, so you have to learn who the new people are.

Q: Any other lessons come to mind?

A: Those are the big ones.

Q; Stepping back for a minute, looking at the PRT as a way of doing this sort of work, would you think it is effective for improving governance, in your case?

A: Yes, we had an effect. The question that we should be asking ourselves is did we have enough effect, when we take into account the expenditure that was put into what we did? I do not think we will have the answer to that for a few years.

Q: But do you think the PRT is a good idea?

A: I do, they are a good idea. They have a lot of kinks that need to be worked out, but, in principle, they are a good idea.

Q: Any other things that stand out in your mind that you have not touched on?

A: The things that I would say are problematic are settled on paper, but they are not in practice, so I cannot offer a solution. For example, how does the PRT receive its guidance? On paper, it receives its guidance from the Office of Provincial Affairs. In practice, the Office of Provincial Affairs is located potentially hundreds of miles away in Baghdad, whereas the military is co-located on your base and if what they want is different from what the Embassy wants, what do you think they are going to end up doing? That is one thing. Command structures: who reports to whom; on paper it is different from how it plays out in practice.

Q: Were you getting guidance from OPA?

A: Yes, some. That relationship was maintained at the team leader level and I do not think that it trickled down very well.

Q: Any other aspect of the PRT, the general concept, possibly using it in other contexts?

A: No, those are the big points.

Q: Did you receive training before you went out?

A: I did not.

Q: So you had no orientation or training?

A: Nope

Q: And you think it would be a good idea?

A: It would be a good idea. But my teammates who came out who went through the training, honestly, it sounded completely ridiculous. I actually laughed out loud when I heard some of the things that these people were being told. So training, in theory, would be useful, but I would suggest having people who served on PRTs doing the training, because they know what it really looks like, warts and all.

Q: What kind of background do you bring to this?

A: My background was actually in security consulting, but I am a fluent Arabic speaker, I have lived pretty much my entire adult life in the Middle East.

Q: Sounds like an appropriate background for working in Baghdad.

A: I think so, yes. It seemed to be a good fit.

Q: Is there anything we have not touched on? This has been very helpful, very useful.

A: No, I think that is all. How many people are you going to be talking to?

Q: The target is about a hundred interviews and then USIP takes them and writes a report without reference to the sources. There will be no attributions.