

United States Institute of Peace  
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Iraq PRT Experience Project

**INTERVIEW #62**

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**Executive Summary**

Interviewee is a Foreign Service Officer of recent vintage, who is two months shy of completing a one-year Iraq assignment. While assigned to handle press liaison and media training duties, the interviewee has in actuality worked in a number of other PRT sectors and feels that flexibility and adaptability are as important as any other skills one might bring to an Iraq posting. "...you don't need any training to serve on a PRT. All you need to do is have integrity and a good heart, then you'll get things done, because it's all about you having actually to do your work and you actually wanting to do something."

Interviewee underscored the difficulty of mastering Arabic, saying that even if one can read it, there are still many obstacles to having conversations about even elementary subjects. "Oh and then, of course, getting some Arabic would have been nice, but I found it to be no problem not getting any Arabic, because if you can read Arabic, you still can't speak it. So there's a huge learning curve, unless you speak it fluently enough to have a real conversation, I don't see any point and I get by all the time."

The PRT, in which the interviewee worked, was a consolidated entity that resulted from folding three earlier PRTs (representing 3 provinces) into one.

The mission/role of the newly formed PRT was three-fold: reconstruct, reconcile and report. Interviewee saw the PRT as having a special role in helping the province be independent and self-sufficient. The interviewee thought that in terms of democracy building, the PRT had fallen short of its mark: "Building democracy? I don't think we are that successful, because what is democracy? Democracy is fair elections. Are we going to get fair elections? I don't know. First and foremost, it should be an open list, which means who you vote for is who you vote for, you don't vote for a party or a closed list system."

The interviewee successfully managed to tap into several pots of project money (e.g. CERF) and make needed activity happen as the result of persistence, energy and conceptual ability.

"Do I think as a result of the PRTs the provinces have improved? Yes. So, yeah, we are accomplishing (*our mission*). Each PRT has its own unique character, as does the

province, so we all approach it differently and in a way I'm glad I got stuffed where I got stuffed.

So we are really slim and we're lean and mean and we still did what we could. So, overall, yeah, I'm really glad I was here."

### Interview

*Q: So you joined the Foreign Service in...?*

A: 2003.

*Q: Okay, the focus of our study is on the PRTs. Can you describe the location of your PRT, identify some of the history and the size of it, the structure, etc? Just a general overview of where you are.*

A: I think our PRT is very unique, because basically I'm looking at both Najaf and Karbala and Diwaniyah and in 2007, we were pulled out of the provinces for Najaf and Karbala because of a lack of security, when these provinces went PIC or were going to go PIC, which means security controlled by the Iraqi security forces. And so we were actually based outside the province at Hillah, that's the Regional Embassy Office in Babil province. There was a big massacre in August of 2007 in Karabala, where I think 400 people were killed during *Shahbaniya*.

So, by the time I arrived we were at Hillah and they somehow folded two or three PRTs into one. So we are called NKD: Najaf, Karbala, Diwaniyah and it was very small. There was one team leader and when I joined there were only nine people. So we're talking about nine people doing three provinces.

And it was different back then. You couldn't move as often. You couldn't move to various meetings for various reasons. So that was the downside of it.

And I think Baghdad named us "provincial support teams" as opposed to provincial reconstruction teams. That's just a name.

And then there was lots and lots of talk, all the way up to General Petraeus' level and Ambassador Crocker's, about how we were going to rebuild three PRTs and somehow move us out to the provinces. Lots of talks on that and two team leaders were chosen, deputy team leaders were picked and in 2008 the Diwaniyah team leader came, so it was Najaf, Karbala one team and Diwaniyah another team, but they were very small.

Diwaniyah went away with four or five people in January, or February, maybe. They actually went to Camp Echo. So Diwaniyah is a little easier, because we do have a military base in that province. Eventually Diwaniyah was going to go PIC. In fact, Diwaniyah was going to go PIC a month or two ago and then something happened and everything slowed down. So it still will experience the same problems we have, which is it goes PIC and the military moves out, what do we do?

*Q: Could you define the term PIC?*

A: Provincial Iraqi Control. So, basically what it means is the U.S. military is no longer the one supporting security in the province. Basically the responsibility goes back to the Iraqi security forces.

So, then, they moved out, but for my role, which is public diplomacy, there wasn't any placement of new people as the PRTs split. So I just kept doing all three of them on an unofficial basis. And then in February, another team leader arrived and he then took Karabala [**into a separate**] PRT. So the original team leader was then focusing just on Najaf. That worked out fine and I was reporting to all three of them. Officially, I was under Najaf.

Basically, there actually is lots of synergy among different provinces, especially in this region, because they are very similar, especially between Najaf and Karbala, because they are both considered holy cities in Iraq for the Shiite Muslims.

And then, of course, at very high levels we're still talking about moving us out to the provinces. Finally, maybe March, they decided to go ahead and start building these new forward operating bases, FOBs. I still think we're the only two provinces doing it, which is we built two brand new FOBs using local contractors. So what they did was, the U.S. military hired someone and someone from the council was responsible for building those two FOBs.

In my opinion, I think they are actually very poorly built. They probably skimmed here and there. But I have a strong opinion about contractors here, so maybe I can keep it for later.

And on May 24<sup>th</sup>, the Ambassador came and opened both FOBs. It was a big thing. We worked very hard on it.

In the meantime, we ramped up a little bit on team members. So instead of nine for NKD, there were four or five total for Diwaniyah when they moved out and then Karbala had five when they moved out and Najaf had maybe ten when they moved out and that was the beginning of the new stage of the two PRTs.

*Q: So they doubled the number of personnel, essentially for the...?*

A: Oh, there's more. Supposedly, the slate is 15. So there's supposed to be 15 per PRT. Even now, I think we probably have 14 and I, as a PDO, was actually an additional number, somehow.

I don't know how, there's a different reporting structure. We're all under the OPA umbrella, but PDOs are like sort of extras. As someone's PAS is willing to staff it, we can have PDOs in every province above and beyond that 15, something like that.

*Q: What's PAS stand for?*

A: The Public Affairs Section

*Q: And so, have you physically moved your location of living and working several times?*

A: Yes.

*Q: And just tell us briefly where you started out, and where did you go, step by step. Just to kind of get a quick snapshot of that.*

A: I checked into Baghdad the end of the year, moved to Hillah in Babil province after a month, and that's where four PRTs co-located together for a while. In Hillah, one of its functions is to support PRTs. Then we had four PRTs or five. Then at the end of May 2008 Karbala/Najaf moved out together. So Babil PRT itself is still left there and Diwaniyah moved out in February, I think.

*Q: So you've stayed essentially in the same place? You, personally?*

A: No, 5 or 5 months into my stay, we all had to move out. In the end, one person, maybe, decided not to move because they were very close to leaving. But there was no choice. You just had to move. But I did have a choice, more or less, because I was doing all three provinces, so I could choose one. In the end, I chose to move to Karbala physically.

*Q: Okay, so that's where you are now?*

A: Yes.

*Q: So you went to Hillah first and then you went to Karbala?*

A: Correct. So, let's say, seven months, about seven, eight months in Hillah.

*Q: Now, describe the role and mission of your PRT, as you understand it.*

A: Now you're asking me to give our spiel. Our team leader, always said the three R's: reconstruct, reconcile and report. But I think really the PRT is, to sort of summarize it, is really trying to help the province be independent or be self-sufficient. That's really the bottom line: be it advisory, be it providing them opportunities to travel, opportunities to learn, opportunities to attend conferences, or to provide them some sort of infrastructure or supplies or equipment or know-how.

*Q: And what's been your specific role?*

A: I'm the public diplomacy officer PDO), so I have very straight lanes of, number one, the IVLP (International Visitor Leadership Program), which nominates individuals to go to America, future leader types; then there are all these educational programs that the State Department traditionally offers: Fulbright, high school exchanges and what not; and then, I was given the education portfolio.

There's no set rule, but when I was focusing on Najaf, I did a lot of work with the university there, mainly purely because the week before I arrived they approached us for the first time asking us for assistance. I arrived at a very good time, in that before that they were resisting us.

The same with Karbala University, which is now really opening up, not as much as Kufa University, which is the name for the senior university in Najaf. But as recently as four or five months earlier, apparently the whole PRT tried to go down Karbala University and deliver some books we ordered for them. They wouldn't even let us enter. So it was that arduous back then.

And then things started to relax and some university officials, who are very Western-oriented, they approached us and I attended the introductory meeting and it just kind of took off a little bit. So it was just the way it worked out for Najaf.

So, education, English and then I was working very hard and still am, trying to get books, scholastic books, textbooks that we translate into Arabic for a big project that we [are] also funding to get the next generation of Iraqis to learn more about the world and these books are very well vetted, they're culturally sensitive.

So I was working with the education department at all levels, working specifically with the public universities and then of course I was also helping to draft cables and draft memos. The thing with the PRTs is that we really don't have a lot of State Department Foreign Service Officers. So when it comes to doing State Department traditional tasks, the team leader always relies on the officers because some of us know how to write cables, we know what a briefing memo is, or a decision memo, or talking points, biographies and what not.

*Q: I'd like to ask you a couple kind of liaison questions and so if you could attack these one by one. Describe the PRT's relationship with the Provincial Affairs Office.*

A: OPA? Oh, we are completely under them. When I first came over it was a mess, I'm going to be blunt about it.

*Q: And why do you say that?*

A: Oh, we were completely understaffed. OPA was supposed to have thirty staff and they had perhaps five to seven individuals, but it was initially kind of like a lost animal. Now, it's much better and we're trying to staff up desk officers who will support the teams. Every two or three months we changed to a new one, so there was no continuity,

no institutional memory and the left hand wasn't talking to the right hand. But that happens in Iraq quite a bit.

*Q: So give us an example of a disconnect, especially early on. Can you recall something that sticks out in your mind?*

A: Let's say, in the decision making process, let's say related to the move out to the FOBs, the brand new FOBs. There were lots and lots of disconnects in that. OPA has its own chain, so maybe the desk officer was aware of what the PRT thinks or requested or from the local level decided, but OPA, the top, wasn't aware. Then the military side, this was a joint military/OPA operation and then of course our deputy is always a military officer and so the deputy has been talking to the military side and they had come to very different conclusions. But the deputy and team leader got along very well and thank God for that. So the army had a complete set of conclusions, even though we all think we were agreeing, there were little fine points that were major differences, but we didn't even know we weren't agreeing.

So then the army was concluding its own thing and OPA, the State Department, had a complete set of similar with minute but significant differences and we down at the local level just hear whatever comes out of the desk officer, who are not all well informed as to exactly what OPA management decided.

So it's that kind of thing. So we are funneled through a little hole called the desk officer and the desk officer kept changing and then sometimes you get, every two or three months, sometimes you get a good one, sometimes you don't get as good a one.

*Q: Do you know why the desk officers change so frequently?*

A: Yeah, while we have more one year commitments, this whole PRT initiative came on very quickly and all of a sudden higher ups said, "Okay, we need to staff OPA!" But can't just staff people like that and exactly hire somebody from the outside who knows how to be a desk officer. So what we're doing, we're looking for volunteers. A guy that's serving in Embassy Seoul, he can be spared for two or three months, "Okay, we'll take him!"

So it's a work in progress. As we go along we kept trying to staff people, this guy coming from somewhere in Latin America, okay, he can be spared for four months, "Okay, we'll take him!"

*Q: Almost like people were between posts or something?*

A: Yeah, we got all sorts. Oh and we also get contractors who have been in Iraq for a while who we think can do the job.

The ongoing thing in Iraq is that there's almost too much flexibility. If you don't like your job, you can switch tomorrow and they let you do that. So if you're not happy here,

somehow you can orchestrate and you're way out in a PRT, doing something else completely different. And that doesn't help, either.

*Q: And that's continued the whole time?*

A: Yeah, up to this day. You can get away with anything. For someone like me, who doesn't like structure, I actually really, really miss structure. You cannot imagine the wild, wild West that we live in and what people can get away with.

*Q: Describe the relationship with the U.S. embassy directly.*

A: Oh, we report to the U.S. embassy. Like I said, it's a funneling of information. The U.S. embassy sometimes does not know what's going on out there. At the REO, we were much closer. We had openness, we had much more communication. Now, where we are, we have no real phones. The cell phones go on and off. We have a very small bandwidth for internet uploading. So we can't call, we can't use the satellite phone and email is intermittent and not even email's a hundred per cent reliable.

So many excuses can be created. "Information lost." "Information sent. What, you never received it? How can that be?" So there's lots of silly games people can play.

*Q: And then what about the PRT's relationship with the U.S. military?*

A: I think it really varies. I think at certain points, in certain ways, sometimes, some of the PRT team members get along very well with the military side. But what I see most of the time is we don't understand one another or maybe we don't try, I don't know.

The one thing that I have to say is that we had a unique situation in that when we were under NKD (**the U.S. military units whose assigned Area of Operations was our**) two provinces, I was told that doesn't happen anywhere else, they sent their own colonels, lieutenant colonels, to staff the PRT deputy slots. So then we had direct liaison. So it's a direct chain and it's really good. So we really, truly have a person who has insight into the PRT and the military and that worked out very well.

But, then, there are many cases where the deputies are reservists. They're not as plugged in. So they're military, but they're not connected. So the idea of having a deputy who's military, who can liaise with the military because they can talk shop sometimes is only partially true.

*Q: Okay, how would you rate the effectiveness of the PRT leadership and management structure?*

A: Those are two completely separate questions. Leadership, yeah. Management structure, zero.

*Q: And so give us an extrapolation on that.*

A: But don't forget, State Department officers are not usually good administrative management officers. So sometimes a deputy will try and pick up some of the slack but they are also supposed to be leaders.

No, leadership, in terms of direction of the PRT, yeah. They listen. They conclude and they charge on and if anyone disagrees, we talk about it. In terms of purpose and goal orientation, very good leadership.

In terms of managing people, no. If there's a person who wants to do nothing, they were left alone. You can get away with doing nothing for one year.

I hear also in Baghdad, you get five people, one does nothing, one is actually anti-constructive and then maybe two do the work of the other two, plus their own work and then one is like mediocre, good enough. Typical.

So if there were better management or management personnel then there would be more structure, nine to five, you've got to be here and then those that roll in at eleven, go away for a bit, come back in and then all of a sudden at 5:30 gearing away, charging overtime. You get that here in Baghdad, too, so I don't even need to dwell on it, but you get even less accountability out there, because let's say you disappear for five days in your hootch, but you know how to show up on time for certain things, no one says anything, there's just a vacuum.

*Q: Is it because, perhaps, that they're short staffed out there, so they'll take whatever they can get?*

A: Yes.

*Q: I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but think about that thought.*

A: For sure. A team leader, no matter how unproductive his staff is, I think it looks bad when they leave or when they choose to leave. So no matter what, you just don't let them leave. Somehow, for some reason, it's probably the Foreign Service, maybe, I'm not sure, it doesn't reflect well upon you when the team under you departs, whether voluntary or involuntary or on their own or not on their own.

I'm just a good old typical Foreign Service Officer. I never go to OPA without informing the team leader. You just don't do that kind of thing.

But out there, you can bypass the team leader and say bad things. There's lots of drama that wasn't necessary.

I think team leaders are fearful of having people depart, because it just doesn't look good.

*Q: Describe some more internal relationships within the PRT and the different staff people that you have and how they work together.*

A: When we moved to Karbala, that's when we were one small team, basically we're all officers or 3161s, we didn't have third party hiring. Then, we all moved to Karbala we're desperate for staff. If you're a bigger team, you can do more work, which, really, ultimately is not always true. So for the Karbala team we took a whole bunch of BBAs, which are third party contractors, ethnic Iraqis, if there's such a thing and at first I thought it's great, but it creates strange dynamics and part of it, it's my personal opinion, but there's many others on my team who share it, the BBAs' loyalty may not be towards the PRT's goals nor is it necessarily towards the U.S government.

*Q: Could you present a story that might illustrate that?*

A: And then don't forget, the other problem is we have no structure. So if we had structure, then this story might never have happened.

Many people came to Iraq purely for the money. In our business, in our PRT business, currently, but we're moving away from that, we are doing a lot of projects. We have a lot of U.S. government money. And the way the projects are executed, designed, implemented or contracted, especially contracted, can leave a lot of loopholes for foul play. And if a person doesn't have integrity, doesn't matter, they're going to try. In our situation, they can get away with a lot easily. That's all I'm going to say. This is my opinion and shared by a few other officers and what not.

*Q: So do you think there is corruption that's occurring?*

A: Yes. We all know that. I've heard that in the Iraqi culture, sometimes a ten per cent commission to the one who introduced someone to another person is not even seen as corruption, but, whereas in America it would be outright corruption. You get a contract for a guy and that guy tipped you back ten per cent of that contract, that's corruption to me. But maybe in Iraqi culture it's not. But somehow, if that person who introduced was just another Iraqi, maybe that's acceptable.

But then sometimes when it comes to it that the person who introduced is working for the U.S. government, then that person has some sort of fiduciary duty, no matter what. That's the bottom line. And as an officer we have even more fiduciary duty to report or observe or stop those thing from happening.

So then, sometimes, if it's just cultural and if it's a small cut, maybe it's part of the process. But when a certain individual really, under several different scenarios, looked like they might be walking away with much larger sums, then that really is not correct.

So the fact that we have very few officers in the PRT, we have only a certain number of Americans, we have a lot of money involved with a lot of aid, we're just inviting trouble

and this is the way it just worked out for now. As time goes on there's no doubt we'll establish more and more regulations, but right now we have few internal policies.

And it's funny, I was in Baghdad today talking with several people and other people echoed what I was saying, in terms of, not the corruption part, but in terms of allegiance. You're hired to work for the U.S. government, but your allegiance may be towards yourself, or towards whatever.

We have six BBAs, out of a team of 14 we have six. That's almost half and when you have a big group, it's like you have to be careful.

*Q: And BBAs stands for*

A: Bicultural bilingual advisor, which means they have to speak Arabic and they have to know the Iraqi culture.

I hear a lot of stories even in Baghdad, so I'm sure people are realizing it. It's just that at the PRT level everything is buried. It doesn't even get heard by OPA.

Don't forget, we report to the U.S. embassy and as a State Department person we are more entrenched in different sections. As a PRT, we are channeled only through OPA to the embassy. And really, OPA, a lot of times, the director and deputy director know a little bit. But a lot of time, on smaller things, it's channeled just through the desk officer, that things happen.

*Q: Just a final question about the BBAs. Do you ever feel, when you say that their loyalties might lay elsewhere, do you ever feel that compromises any security on the PRT?*

A: Without a doubt. We have a separate system which is the equivalent of the State Department's classified system and

People would be appalled to find out how things are handled down there. We have controlled access in the embassy. Controlled access, you can't bring cell phones, we have all these rules and regulations to even enter controlled access areas, we have to shred every piece of paper, blah, blah, blah. If you're caught holding secret material openly, without an appropriate document cover, you are fined big time in the State Department.

Let's say in meetings, however, often we talk about local officials and then it becomes very sensitive information that really pretty much becomes input for classified cables or classified information and who translates?

Some are not even Americans. They're not cleared. They haven't even been vetted, a lot of times. So, it's the wild, wild West.

And I'm sure some other people think that way, but not everyone voices it. I'm gonna voice it where I can, because I think someone must know, just because it's so far down the chain, where we live, in very stark conditions without simple provisions. So then people start to focus on other things.

*Q: Let's continue on with this.*

A: Oh, there's more?

*Q: Talk some more about security. Did you ever experience some threats?*

A: In what respect?

*Q: Physical safety. Was there any violence close to you?*

A: The funny thing with the Iraqis, we're going at like exponential speed, like from when I first arrived until now, things have changed so much. Yes, the closest we got to a real attempt, they drop mortars on us, too and they shoot some rockets every now and then, but there was one time when it was a very close call and they really hit right where they wanted to hit and it was a miracle no one was hurt, because one landed about ten meters from me, where I live. As it was, the air conditioner covers flew off and the smoke alarm cover was flying all around, all my room fittings just kind of fell over, because of the shock wave, blast pressure, whatever it's called. And then another one hit the communal shower, destroyed the whole thing. Thank God, there was no one in it. And then there was another one, their aim was dead on, another one actually went through three trailers, one piece of shrapnel and flew right above someone's head who was lying on the floor.

That's really close. That's as close as we ever want it to be. The shock wave was scary, when it lands and you can feel it.

*Q: When was this?*

A: This was when Muqtada called off the truce for a bit, or semi-called off the truce. We got a lot of hits. And part of it is nerves. I lived in a trailer stacked on top of another trailer, so I was especially sensitive to movement, so it was not a good time. All of us were nervous. At one point we were told to walk around outside with our PPE gear.

But then, before that, as I said, I arrived at a very good time, after the *Shahbaniya* thing, August, as I told you and Muqtada called for the truce and so for a while, we had four months of semi-calm. Of course, across the river, there was constant gunfire, even though we were safe and a general, who was the Iraqi police chief, he was killed during an ambush.

It was really sad, because he was a friend and ally. There was no sectarianism for him and he was really doing a good job protecting the province.

*Q: Can you describe the PRT's relationship with international NGO's or local NGO's, if you had any?*

A: I think Karbala's the province of NGO's. We had like seven thousand something, some number that was incredible and most of them are like a guy who just registered, he thinks that he can make some money. So lots of them are not legitimate.

We have very little interaction with international NGO's,, the PRT *per se*, but then we get through USAID some programs with CHF, which is an international NGO that's contracted by USAID. They're doing a very good job. They're doing the CAP program, I think.

*Q: What's that program?*

A: Community Assistance Program.

*Q: What does the program do?*

A: Help rebuild Iraq via, small projects, for example: build a soccer field. Oh, they do a lot of good stuff. Clean up the trash. Even though everyone thinks CHF is not somehow associated with U.S. government money, they think of CHF as their own.

So it's kind of incredible, that program. So all the projects they do, CHF has hired local staff, apart from the top, top guy, who's somewhere else and everything they do is local, completely local, arms length from USAID, and they do a great job.

And then we have RTI, we have a whole bunch of USAID contractors and some are better than others. But in terms of international NGO's just coming to us, no. We're way out there

*Q: Now you talked about a lot of the local NGO's being paper NGO's, if I can [coin] that term. Were there any, though, that you found substantive and that you actually worked on projects with?*

A: Many.

*Q: Maybe you could pick one or two of those?*

A: A lot of them try to approach us and they're all from Karbala, not Najaf, not Diwaniyah. So I just assume Karbala somehow attracts NGO formation. So there's one who helps fresh grads and counsels them and what not.

This is an NGO that helps fresh graduates from university, to give them counseling, find jobs. I don't even know exactly. They built a computer center, with a little help from us and then they teach fresh grads computer courses. Now they have another program, they are going to pick two teachers from each like high school and teach them, one day of human rights and then one month's computer training and then they'll go back, knowing how to use the computers. So there's a trickle down effect. That one is kind of good.

We have a women's NGO and we helped stock their office and then we helped them build a kitchen. That one actually got some spotlight. Somehow that NGO was mentioned in a presidential speech.

*Q: Really?*

A: Yes. She's trying to teach women how to cook, they have a kitchen that we set up. So they're going to prepare food and already they have talked to the mosques about whether they can supply the food during religious festivals and then get paid, so that women will work. Little things like that.

*Q: You talked about the earlier project as benefiting the U.S. How would you see that?*

A: Which one?

*Q: The graduates.*

A: Well, it's very simple. I wouldn't say it's benefiting the U.S. I would say it's along the lines of our mission strategic plan, or the MSP. Education's the big thing on our MSP. Iraq, especially south central, has a very poor educational situation, because Saddam was ignoring that region, it's all Shi'ia.

And so we have got a lot of men who are not literate and then we've got a lot of unemployment. There's talk of fifty to seventy per cent unemployment for young men between the ages of 16 to 45. So anything that can give them better education will give them a better chance of finding them a job.

At the same time, of course education's one aspect. We are also helping them develop industry, get investment, there's all different programs. So we want to create more jobs for them, but when we create more jobs for them we want to make sure that they are also qualified. So in the end it's all a long mission plan.

*Q: Sounds busy. How about your interaction with Iraqi government officials?*

A: We have a governance advisor on our team and his whole role is to advise the government. So in every province there's a governor and a provincial council and then within the provincial council there are between I think from 25 to 50 provincial council members who are elected.

I would actually say for Karbala and Najaf we work closely with government officials, which in a way is kind of bad, because then we are helping incumbents. On the one hand we talk about elections, fair elections and what not. On the other hand, we are putting all our assistance behind the incumbent administration, that local administration. Then it kind of gives the perception that the local administration is doing a good job, when most of the locals, if you talk to them individually, are unsatisfied with the local government.

So what do you do? Najaf is a little better.

Now we come to a perception of government officials. So we work very closely with them. We work closer with them than any other individual in the province.

*Q: How about our role, through the PRTs, of building democracy? Has that been effective? Tell us what your thoughts are about that. Successes, failures, goals, whatever?*

A: Building democracy? I don't think we are that successful, because what is democracy? Democracy is fair elections. Are we going to get fair elections? I don't know. First and foremost, it should be an open list, which means who you vote for is who you vote for, you don't vote for a party or a closed list system.

And I don't think anyone wants that and I think they're going to get away with it. So, is that democracy? No. I vote for the Dawa Party, because I like you, but then it turns out when you actually win the vote you're just a puppet. Then the guy's who's like corrupt, totalitarian, selfish, he's the one who becomes the incumbent.

So is that democracy? No.

*Q: And that happens?*

A: Well, it definitely happened in 2004. It was a closed list election. And this time, if the election happens, it's been a continuously moving target, but eventually elections will happen and I don't think it's going to be an open list. How can we push them?

And then, of course, we have all sorts of different ties to the incumbents. The problem for diplomats is we're working with the current administration of that country. So in this case, the current government may or may not be what the people want or wanted. So that's not democracy.

*Q: Could you explain, because I've never heard these terms before, the difference between these closed list and open list elections? I'm not familiar with that at all.*

A: I'm sure some political officer knows better. But just basically it means when you go to vote, that day, election day, you will vote by party. So maybe under the Dawa Party or under the ISCI Party, there will be names underneath them. So what you do,

when you vote for a person on that list it doesn't mean that person will somehow get your vote. It just means the party gets the vote.

I don't know the electoral system that well here and there are contacts who told us, "We're number three on the list for elections." I don't know whether that means if there were open lists they would be up there, or they're number three under certain parties, which means if they get enough votes, the first one will be elected and then if there are enough votes the second gets picked. Either way, I know for a fact you are not voting for Joe Smith or Jane Doe or something like that. You are voting for a party.

*Q: Okay and that's under a closed list election system?*

A: Correct. An open list is what we're used to in the U.S.

*Q: So open list would be you vote for Joe Smith as the candidate?*

A: Just like in America. America is open list.

*Q: Gotcha. Thank you. Do you guys work with RTI at all?*

A: Some part of "us" do, sort of. RTI has a contract under USAID, I believe. RTI also runs LGP, the Local Governance Program. LGP is known to be actually a good program.

But RTI, I don't know what happened. I used to think RTI was good. But a lot of my teammates have been telling me that RTI sometimes hires people who don't know what they're teaching. I have been hearing some bad things about RTI, and then for some people higher up, it becomes their preference for us not to be associated with RTI, us being non-USAID. Under those circumstances, we don't work at all with them.

*Q: Do you have a specific instance of why the relationship isn't good?*

A: For example, RTI holds many conferences and training programs, and it would have been so nice if there was some synergy wherein, especially now, with the security situation so much better, that they would invite the team leader to speak or invite another team member to speak. We have expertise. But they rarely do, or when they do, it's the day before, when there's no way we can get the security movement to bring us out there, or back in if we could. So that's hard fact.

Sometimes it's misunderstanding. Sometimes maybe they don't want to be perceived as an American event, a PRT event. That we understand. But there's no communication of that. They didn't communicate with us.

And then other instances and this is only through what people tell me, so I don't know firsthand. They tell me, let's say, there is someone who teaches engineering and then it turns out this person is not an engineer or doesn't know how to teach, whatever. The

same with budgeting. This is all what I've heard, though I haven't seen it firsthand. But for sure, RTI didn't work closely with us, saying, "Okay, we are going to have an event, a closing ceremony, do you want to come out and be a guest speaker or be a guest of honor?" None of that.

So if we are really working closely together, then it would have created synergy. Public diplomacy, the media would always be present. It would be a good promoting of the PRT because I am big on media and as it is I try not to promote a lot of our assistance because, nowadays it's changing, especially back then, with all these JAM "special groups" trying to destroy what we do, it's better not to give it a high profile, what we are actually doing.

Nowadays, we're changing a little bit. Karbala really, Karbala "tipped," I'll use the words of my team leader, "Karbala tipped while I was in Iraq. It was tipping to one side and we actually saw it tip to the other side." So it's kind of nice to be there for that.

*Q: Do you guys have an agricultural advisor connected with your PRT?*

A: We didn't and then we did. He's also a BBA, because if you wait for a USDA guy it might take forever, so our team leader chose to request a BBA. So we have one. He came a little bit after we got there. So he's our newest addition.

*Q: What kind of projects is he working on?*

A: Karbala is big on agriculture. He is working on a lot of projects with me, because the one other thing I didn't say earlier is that I do the QRF thing.

*Q: You do the QRF, the Quick Response Funds?*

A: There was no one doing it and I started doing it and I started to learn everything about it, so when I went down there still wasn't anyone who knew it, so I tried to pass on all the information to everyone. And at the end of the day, agriculture is something I can understand easily and the BBAs, in my opinion, they need guidance from an officer or a direct hire, because they'll just go off on their own tangent if you don't give them some guidance. So we worked on a few projects: we provided tractors for the district councils, below the provincial council and they were so thankful.

We provided another tractor for the faculty of agriculture under Karbala University. We're giving them a lot of assistance. We gave them a new computer room. Team Borlaug, which is part of Task Force BSO, which is a contractor and part of Task Force Brinkley and basically they are from Texas A&M. They are a research group. They're very good and they specialize in agriculture. They're going from province to province in south central Iraq, one month in each and ultimately their goal is to produce a big, thick report on the problems, what is needed.

But in the meantime they also did small things like providing a testing lab of some sort to the ag school, the faculty and also the vocational ag school, both of which are within walking distance from our camp. So that's why we're giving them a lot of assistance; we have been very active agriculture-wise. Someone has an idea and I help him draft a proposal, which we pass and now with extra CERF money from the army, if it gets approved, they're buying a huge, expensive tractor for somewhere or we're building a modern poultry house or poultry farm, something for a district, that kind of thing. So we are active enough, but we can always be more active.

And then with water, it's the same thing. Irrigation is really part of agriculture. It seems like we might have extra money left from the year before. Water's everything, so we have these programs that will hopefully try and re-divert water from a lake that's blocked somehow, or maybe it's just messed up, so that the water can be re-directed and along the way provide water for certain villages, or something like that, way out where there's a shortage of water problem.

*Q: So what does it mean to be a woman on a PRT?*

A: To be a woman where I am is painful. We have hundreds of people and there are two women. In fact, because we're the only two women we end up sharing a hooch, but in return we get a wet bath, a hooch with a bathroom, because we only have a few of those. We have dry hooches, mostly.

But, no, we are very close somehow. The other woman is a BBA and we are both very stressed, sometimes. It's very tough.

But to be a woman at the REO, it was nothing. You know how it is to be a woman in Iraq, anyway, because of the male/female ratio and what not.

In this case, because it's so small, the FOB, in terms of the number of people. We have three Ugandans, static guards, who are female as well, but it's a different thing altogether.

In other places it might have gone better, because I had a, very fine, decent, normal time on the REO, but down on the FOB it was hard. It's as if some people think: "So what, if you're a woman." Instead of giving us a break, some of them actually make it more difficult for us. So it's not pleasant.

*Q: Give us some examples of that.*

A: I don't even know where to begin. Small stuff and it's probably certain individuals, but you know how it is, you can have nine nice persons and then one sort of mean, sort of trouble-creating one and all ten of them just look bad in your eyes. It's that kind of thing.

So I don't want to go into details, but it's just not pleasant. You would think, two girls, with like 150 guys, it's kind of fun and what not, but sometimes you get better treatment

because they're gentlemen and sometimes you get worse treatment because they envy us: "Why should women be treated any differently?" So it's just not pleasant.

*Q: Thank you. I know that's kind of personal, but I think that's important to document. You are almost done with your PRT experience, right? You have how much time left?*

A: Two months.

*Q: Two months to go. What do you think has been your significant achievement during this almost completed year?*

A: I was effective and as I wrote in my EER myself, I got lucky, coming the time that I did, because if I had come half a year earlier the first six months, they did not like the PRT's assistance, they were bashing the USG all the time. And yet, just a month or so before I came they just started to open the door.

I got a certificate of appreciation, just me and the team leader, from the university. I told you we did a lot for them and a lot of it's persistence on the part of both the team leader and myself. We were persistent in getting things through the bureaucratic black hole and getting it down to them. You would not imagine how hard the logistical transport was and still is. We are down there where it's just a different world. That certificate means a lot to me. And the team leader, he said he'll give it to me in Washington. So I want that, I really want that.

For example, we sent an English lecturer to America on an academic program. They had never seen that. We stocked up the whole English Department with books, so that now they can learn a little better. And most importantly, we put TOEFL testing into that region. That had never been.

So now my big thing is on English and education and then on a project, which is not me, but still, they're building a whole brand new campus, which is impressive because there are Western standards. They built one building and then all of a sudden work stopped because the Army Corps of Engineers paid the wrong contractor the wrong amount, so the work just stopped and so I just jumped in, talked to every party, because people want to help. As long as they know we want to help, and not screw them. So finally the contractor, based on goodwill, started work again and everyone was happy. Every week or so I will give everyone an update, what's happening, we're really trying to fix it.

That's what diplomats do.

*Q: And that was because of your intervention? An FSO in action?*

A: It was my intervention to make sure that every party was happy. That's what diplomats do. So the contractor was really appreciative that I was trying so hard. And the contractor, the wrong one, in Arbil, they weren't being paid because they had the

wrong amount, so they had just sent it back. And my Army Corps colleague, we talked to Army Corps headquarters back in Washington trying to solve it.

We were standing there together, calling and it turned out to be very simple: someone somewhere way out in Texas provided the wrong ABN number or something to the poor guy in Arbil, the wrong contractor. Therefore, every time he tries a wire transfer, he loses fifty or one hundred bucks and a whole day of work and he tried it four or five times. So it he was suffering.

Our guy, who was owed \$700,000, our contractor, was suffering. So all you had to do was somewhere along the way, fix one point. But before you fix the point, it's all about communication.

That's just one of many things that I feel about doing, because all it takes is a good heart, here, really and this team leader, who is Najaf team leader, he also has a very good heart, so the two of us have the exact same objective. We might differ in how we get there, but we are on the same page.

*Q: Looking back over your experience here, do you think your training was adequate for you to serve at a PRT?*

A: Well, there are two things: you don't need any training to serve on a PRT. All you need to do is have integrity and a good heart, then you'll get things done, because it's all about you having actually to do your work and you actually wanting to do something. That's one thing.

But in terms of public diplomacy, which is what I was put here to do, I was actually lucky enough to get some media training. We have a media class and a cultural affairs class and we're always divided. You know how you hear the press attaché versus the cultural attaché? It's all in the PD, but it's usually two sides, right?

So I got media training. It turned out, in all three of my provinces I was doing the cultural affairs side of the work, still am. So that means I got no training on that side and I learned on the job, whereas the media side that I learned, I seldom have anything to do with.

*Q: Why was that? Was somebody else handling media?*

A: No, because the media has professional problems and we can't advertise ourselves too much. So it becomes more like I could do more, that's one thing I am going to do more before I leave, and that is to give them training. But they don't really want, you to say, "Okay, I'll give you training on how to do investigative journalism" to which out loud they'll respond, "Okay, that's cool!" But all they really want to know is, "Can we do it in America?" It's that kind of thing where you feel discouraged by the level, but what I heard is all the good ones left or got killed. So the ones whom we interact with

now are maybe the ones who are very new, who perhaps couldn't find any other job. Who knows?

Oh and then, of course, getting some Arabic would have been nice, but I found it to be no problem not getting any Arabic, because if you can read Arabic, you still can't speak it. So there's a huge learning curve, unless you speak it fluently enough to have a real conversation, I don't see any point and I get by all the time.

*Q: Do you think PRTs are accomplishing their mission out in the field?*

A: Yes. Do I think as a result of the PRTs the provinces have improved? Yes. So, yeah, we are accomplishing it. Each PRT has its own unique character, as does the province, so we all approach it differently and in a way I'm glad I got stuffed where I got stuffed.

These two are the ones who are really in need of our help, even if they thought they didn't and in the end now they do. In Babil province, which is where we stayed, it is so advanced. Babil province is like New York state and they have a huge PRT team, maybe 35, 40 people, because they have a CA team. We don't even have a CA team, civil affairs from the army side.

So we are really slim and we're lean and mean and we still did what we could. So, overall, yeah, I'm really glad I was here.

*Q: Great!*

A: More questions?

*Q: Just one last question. What lessons do you feel you've drawn from your experience here?*

A: I have learned more than anything else about myself, to tell the truth, because it's very hard living. Maybe I'm not the type to be confined, maybe I like spontaneity. All the things I like I don't have. So life goes up, up, up and down, down, down within like a split second. Things are not gradual.

Either very quickly it's very good, the next second you can find yourself in the pits and when you're in the pits of things here, you don't have friends, you don't have people to talk to. You don't even have shopping therapy. You can't go out on a hike, you can't go running, it's sometimes too hot. You can't do anything.

So you really have to know yourself, to not break down, to recover from those lows on your own. So I became a much stronger person as a result of this year, not just physically but also I think internally.

*Q: Any final thoughts you want to share with us today?*

A: No, I think I'm good.

*Q: Okay, thank you very much for your time.*

A: Thank you.