United States Institute of Peace
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INTERVIEW #65

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Executive Summary

The interviewee participated in a survey of thirteen Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) sites in October 2008. While the security situation varied in each province from full-on counterinsurgency to almost no military presence, it had a marked effect on each PRT. The organization of the PRTs varied, but they have a few basic characteristics: a governance team, a rule of law team, a USAID representative, a Public Diplomacy Officer (in some locations), a Department of Agriculture (USDA) representative (in some locations), an economic development representative (in some locations), and an infrastructure team. On the latter, the PRTs say they do not do bricks and mortar any more, although they have Department of State (DOS) Quick Reaction Funds (QRF) and Commander's Economic Reconstruction Program (CERP) projects in the pipeline. They are shifting away from infrastructure projects to building capacities and helping the Iraqis spend their money.

The DOS staffs the PRTs with 3161 temporary hires, an ad hoc 1-2 year contract arrangement. The DOS is not, however, the organization to field PRTs or do nation building. The 3161s varied in competence: some well-qualified with relevant experience, others successful but not qualified for the job they were doing, and, then, there are those one wonders how they got there. The Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) is getting better at recruiting. The DOS Team Leaders are getting better as leaders. It takes a strong leader to see what skills he has to work with, what the needs are and then take all these people and direct them in a coordinated fashion towards some long term sustainable capacity building. The three most impressive team leaders had prior experience as DOS Deputy Chiefs of Mission (DCMs). Deputy team leaders are almost all civil affairs military officers, who fit what the PRT does. However, non-civil affairs military deputies have the advantage of being able to relate with credibility to their military counterparts on the bases. Firing people is a problem, because of inherent structural problems in the US agencies and the disincentive of long periods without a replacement.

The PRTs have mission statements as forms of guidance with a private annex— a unified common plan, which draws on the Provincial Development Strategies (PDS) of the Provincial Councils. Most of the PRTs have gone to military support for their movements rather than the DOS Regional Security Office provided firms, which are more restrictive.

On governance, the teams try to improve the budget execution of the three budget streams: Iraq Reconstruction and Development Funds, the Director Generals' (DGs) Capital Investment Budget and their Operations and Maintenance Budget. The PRT works to rationalize the project process, helping the Provincial Councils and the DGs development a long-term plan and work together in the Provincial Development Committees (PRDCs) using the governance team's facilitating and convening power.

There is the problem of the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) local governance staff, the local USAID representative and the PRT staff members not sharing information for security reasons and because of the different programs' administrative structures.

The Rule of Law program has two categories: the criminal side, building the capacities of the judges and police and the civilian law: working with law schools, law associations other legal educational activities. There are also the economic development type activities one associates with traditional development, but it is uncoordinated and the PRTs are not suitable for doing this kind of work, although, for example, the agriculture team members are helping local universities create extension centers. The Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) are trying to make the Iraqi local government institutions look good. The Political Reporting Officers (PROs) play a huge and very important role keeping the Embassy informed about provincial affairs. The Bilingual, Bicultural Advisers (BBAs) are 60/70 percent Iraqi-Americans, but others are Palestine-Americans, Egyptian-Americans, serving as translators.

On relationships, there is tension between the military "get it done" culture and the civilian "consensus culture." Also there is tension over differences in pay, overtime, leave and other perks. The military do not look highly on what the PRT does. The situation varies depending on the size of the military and the counterinsurgency mode. The PRT ideally provides a link between military non-kinetic activities, provides expertise the military does not have, and helps with strategic planning. It serves a diplomatic role in civilian-to-civilian relationships with the Iraqis, particularly with the Provincial Councils who, in many cases, value the relationships with the PRTs.

Yes, the PRTs should continue, but are they the best way to carry out the functions they perform? Recommendation: push all the traditional development work on to the national level with USAID; keep the PRTs doing capacity building, reporting, and diplomatic functions. Evolving the PRTs into mini-embassies would be insane— a sovereignty issue, but for reporting alone they are worth justifying. The provinces serve as alternative nodes of power for the central government leaders and they want the PRT to be there.

Interview

Q: What has been your association with the Iraq PRTs?

A: My boss and I went out to Iraq.

Q: How many did you cover?

A: Eleven.

Q: How long was this period?

A: It was 17 days and we also attended a two-day team leaders' conference in Baghdad.

Q: What were the dates of that visit?

A: October 1st to the 17th 2008

Q: You have written a report already on this trip?

A: Yes, I have, mostly, written up a report. We are still editing it.

Q: Which PRTs were the ones you went to?

A: First, we went to Tallil Air Force Base, which is home to three PRTs: the Dhi Qar PRT, Maysan PRT and Muthanna PRT. Then we went to Najaf PRT, Hillah PRT, Anbar, Mosul, Arbil, Diyala and then we went to two Baghdad EPRTs, one in Mada and then one in the Rasheed-Dora area and actually went to the Baghdad PRT, so that is twelve. Come to think of it, it was really 13, because we also interviewed the Ramadi EPRT while we in Anbar.

Q: And how long did you have at each one of these?

A: Basically a day. So, not a lot of time. If there was any drawback to the trip, it was rushed each time, a grueling schedule.

Q: How did you get around to all these places?

A: By helicopter.

Q: How would you characterize the security situation across the board since you looked at a number of them?

A: It is really different in every province and it has a marked effect on every PRT. From Mosul, where you have a full-on counterinsurgency effort going on, to Najaf, where you have almost no U.S. military presence, basically the only military presence that is there is a Military Transition Team (MTT), very small and then on the same base you have the PRT, a Movement Team for the PRT and that is it, that is the entire U.S. military presence in the province.

Q: And were they all organized the same way, or what were the differences in organization?

A: Every one is different from each other. They have a few basic characteristics that were the same.

Q: What were the basic characteristics?

A: You always have a Governance Team, you always have a Rule of Law team, you always have a USAID rep, and you have a Public Diplomacy Officer, but not always. You typically have a US Department of Agriculture (USDA) representative, but not always. Sometimes the USAID officer covers agriculture.

So as far as the organizational structure, you have the basic components and because so many people are always on leave, when we showed up at a PRT, a good twenty per cent of people would be on leave. So it could be hard to get a picture of the whole.

Q: Was there an Economic Development Team and an Infrastructure Team?

A: Not always. They do not always have an economic representative. Typically they have an infrastructure team, but PRTs are out of the infrastructure business. They keep saying this, they do not do bricks and mortar anymore.

Now, that being said, they still do a fair number of bricks and mortar projects, because they have a lot of Department of State (DOS) Quick Reaction Funds (QRF) projects that are still in the pipeline, as well as Commander's Economic Reconstruction Program (CERP) money that they are still utilizing. But that is going away. So the PRTs are trying to make themselves into consulting bodies, just building capacities and helping Iraqis spend their money, rather than spending a lot of U.S. money on projects.

And those infrastructure teams, where they exist, tend to be 3161s that are engineers.

Q: Describe the 3161s. They have been mentioned several times, but we have never had a good story about who they are.

A: They are everybody. The State Department obviously was not an organization built to field PRTs or to do any kind of nation building or to do whatever it is that PRTs do. They are diplomats, so all they have to draw on are Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) and USAID people, which is not nearly enough. They do not have the manpower to field PRTs and more than that, they do not have the expertise.

So the 3161 program just means temporary direct hire, which is a way of contracting people outside the normal hiring process of the State Department and it is just *ad hoc*, one years, two years, whatever. They bring in private sector people that presumably have the skills that are needed on the PRTs to help with whatever it is the PRT needs help on.

Typically, they have a lot of engineers, lawyers, but a lot of time they just have people that are interested in the job, have made the case that their skill-set makes them a good, say, governance officer and because there are no skills that people have yet identified to being a governance officer, they get hired. So it is really a mixed bag.

Q: How would you characterize the quality of the people that were there?

A: Again, you had a lot of different situations. Sometimes you had people that had relevant experience and seemed to be getting traction and were qualified for the job. Sometimes you had people that were clearly successful and qualified in a general sense, but they were not necessarily qualified to do the job that they, in fact, ended up doing.

And then, sometimes you just had people that you just had to wonder how they even got out there. As one PRT leader joked, "Sometimes the qualification to be a 3161 is being a carbon-based life form," which is mean but can be an accurate description.

But I think they re improving in their quality, or at least, having read reports, I had this impression that some 3161s were uniformly awful, but, as you would expect, the Embassy Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) has gotten better at recruiting.

Q: Do you think that is a good way to go in the future?

A: I do not really know. I have not wrapped my head around the possibility that if we are going do this in the long term, the best way to do it. The State Department has a lot of organizational challenges, anyway and then you are sticking a round peg in a square hole when it comes to PRTs, just because it is just not a core capacity that they have at all.

USAID, as everybody talks about, has been completely diminished. It is ten per cent of its former strength and all they know how to do, really, is manage contracts, anyway. That is probably a little unfair, but the USAID people we found, part of their job was to manage contracts and then beside that they just pursued targets of opportunity.

I do not know. The Afghanistan model, where it is all military led and you bring in civilians just for the expertise they provide, but then the whole chain of command is still military and most of the people that you are working with are doing civil affairs, that seems to make a certain amount of sense to me. But in Afghanistan they play a different role as well, because they really are much more about infrastructure, your typical civil-military relations. So it is almost apples and oranges to compare them.

Q: Was the head of each PRT a State Department person?

A: Yes and they have actually gotten better at the leadership.

Q: What do you mean by better? What happened?

A: The thing about the PRTs is that for a variety of reasons, mostly because what PRTs are and what they are supposed to do has never been that well defined. And they have come up with this maturity model now that we can talk about, but they have come up with some fairly decent general guidance, but it is very hard sitting in Baghdad to develop more specific guidance and work plans and so forth and to exert a policy guiding the hands-on work that PRTs do. You add to that the fact that OPA really is not much more than just a coordinating agency, it is not big enough or [does not] have the people to really guide policy.

So what happens: the team leader ends up of playing a very important role in developing the broader team strategy: setting priorities, setting goals and so forth. The team leader has a very loose relationship with OPA. So if you do not have a strong leader, as we saw and heard accounts about, what you have is, people just end up saying, " I am here. What can I do?" and just try to do their own thing and be helpful where they can. It really takes a strong team leader to see what skills he has, see what the needs are and then take all those people and direct them in a coordinated fashion towards some sort of long term, sustainable capacity building, which is a general goal that he gets from OPA.

Q: Did you find that happening anywhere?

A: Yes. There were three team leaders that fit the same profile and they were the three most impressive. They were ex-DCMs, deputy chiefs of mission, in other embassies in other countries. Because so few people in the State Department are actually managers, the DCMs are an exception. They have really run major organizations, because they have handled the administration side of an embassy.

So those people were really top notch, high caliber, and, in several cases, they had been brought in after they had had very poor leaders, aimless leaders. There were situations where they just had to make things up as they go along, very poor morale.

So it is still a mixed bag, but at least we saw cases where it was clear that OPA had made an effort to bring in top-notch team leaders. But overall, across the board, again, my problem is, I read all the reports that have been written about the PRTs and I read a number of the interviews and I had very low expectations about what I was going to find. They have become better, as you

would expect they would. However incompetent the State Department might be, when people are identifying these obvious problems they can take measures to fix them. So it makes sense that things are better.

Q: One of the topics that comes up frequently is that the State Department was unable to remove people; they had no discipline about dealing with personnel who were not working out.

A: Yes and that is a problem. First of all, if it is a State Department employee or a detailee from Justice or Treasury or, typically, Justice, they have their own hiring and firing and that is akin to a separate set of administrative procedures to get rid of them, or at least that is our impression. Yes, it is definitely accurate there that they have a hard time. They cannot fire them; even getting them transferred, there are a set of procedures you need to go through and it is very cumbersome. So if what you are talking about is getting rid of a State Department person, which is what a team leader would be [concerned with], yeah, that is definitely inherently and institutionally difficult.

Now, at least on paper, 3161s, they are temps, in a way. Part of the point is that because they are contractors you can fire them when they are not doing what you need to do. But they still end up getting a measure of due process that a couple of different team leaders we talked to were frustrated by.

But then the other thing is, in addition to those inherent structural problems in getting people fired, there is an inherent disincentive to firing people because it takes OPA so long to staff positions. So you are faced with the prospect of either keeping somebody that is no good but having at least a person in the position or getting rid of them and waiting six months for OPA to replace them; you will be understaffed during that period. So there is that back end disincentive built in there, too.

Q: One thing I have never heard about, while we are on the State Department, is how are they organized in Washington, or were they not organized in Washington, to deal with PRTs?

A: I have never really covered that side. I know that they have an office over here that is a mirror to OPA. I know some one, who I have talked to, works there. That is actually a good thing for me to look into, as I am updating this paper.

Q: I have no sense (other than a desk officer) of how they are prepared to run the PRT operation.

A: I really do not know.

Q: The deputies to all of these team leaders were military?

A: Yes and the thing about them is they do not go on leave, so they are always there. They [only] have as much leave as the other military people. So we got to meet a number of them. They tend to be, I think without exception, all colonels, all civil affairs [officers], except for one. In the Baghdad PRT, the deputy there is not civil affairs.

On one level it is good to have a civil affairs military officer because they are all reservists and the civil affairs aspect is obviously connected to what the PRT does, so there are all kinds of reasons why they do that. But one person made a counterargument, that if you put an active duty, non-civil affairs, officer in that position he has a whole lot more credibility when it comes to talking to the military counterpart of the PRT, to the forces in the PRT's area of operations. They are better advocates for the PRT, better at convincing them what their value is, because they take them more seriously, where they tend to, (or, at least, what this officer was saying) to write off the Civil Affairs Officers as civilians, anyway.

Q: But did they work well together with the team leader? Did that function effectively?

A: Yes, they seemed to. It was, again, different in every case. There is an incredible amount of administrative work that goes into being a team leader. They all complain about this, that they are consumed with internal processes. They complained endlessly about it to OPA during the team [leaders'] meeting as well. But they end up delegating a lot of that work to the deputies, so the deputy tends to be like a senior administration officer, so that the team leader can focus on substance. That most often seems to be the relationship that is set up.

Q: Did all of these PRTs have mission statements?

A: Yes, what they have is, they are forms of guidance. They are obliged every month, maybe it is every quarter, to fill out this maturity model form, which they have developed in response to Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) assessments of the PRTs.

Q: What do you call it?

A: A maturity model. The maturity model has five categories: economic development, rule of law, reconciliation, infrastructure, and governance. Then there is a set of categories in which you scale the province's sustainability in that particular area in a lot of different subcategories. So they assess the province based on that. That is one of their main forms of guidance.

But, yes, in addition to that, the PRTs have also drafted a private, specific annex to the Joint Campaign Plan (JCP) or what is also called the Unified common plan (they are two different names for the same thing). There is a big one that is the guiding civilian-military strategy in Iraq that they all use. And so the PRT team leaders are responsible for drafting an annex to that for their particular province that draws from the broader JCP in terms of priorities and general parameters, and they also draw a great deal from the equivalent Iraqi document, which is called a Provincial Development Strategy (PDS). The Provincial Councils and the various central government officials who are located in the province —the Director Generals (DGs) — work together to come up with the PDS. It is typically a five-year development plan for the province in which the Iraqis set the priorities and the goal. The PRT makes its own strategy (the Joint Common Plan, its own annex, mirror PDS as much as possible. So that is their strategic document, but there is still a lot of improvisation that goes on, of course.

Q: And each of the sub-teams has their own mission statement, so to speak?

A: Not that they talked about. Maybe they did not bother to mention them to us.

Q: How did they know what their priorities were, what their team should be doing?

A: Again, this applies to the whole area here, these are just my impressions, but it seems like either the team leader is pretty intimately involved in setting their priorities, or they just kind of make it up as they go along and find targets of opportunity.

Now, in certain cases, too, with different programs it is more the case than with others, but the Rule of Law people, for example, very often will look to the Rule of Law (ROL) coordinator in Baghdad. There are a number of national rule of law programs, or, if not programs, certain things that they are doing in a lot of different places that are similar. So the PRT ROL people, to figure out what they are supposed to do, will often look up to Baghdad for that.

The Economic Development people will look to SETI. The Governance people, to a lesser extent, will look to the Embassy Political section, but that is more informal, looking for guidance that the team leader is not providing or does not have the team arrayed towards a particular goal or set of objectives.

Q: One of the common concerns has been, of course, movement from the PRT in order to see the Iraqis that one needs to. What impression did you have about the movement process?

A: That is an area of major improvement. It used to be that most of PRT staff had a Regional Security Office (RSO) or the State Department-provided security firm, called Blackwater. It was highly restrictive of what the PRT people were allowed to do, very expensive; the PRT members constantly complained about it, because they could not get out to do what they wanted to do.

Now most of them have gone over to having military support for their movement and in that sense they are effectively embedded. The distinction between a PRT and an embedded PRT has almost nothing to do with the fact that they are embedded anymore, because they all are embedded. Not all, there are a few exceptions.

Q: That was my impression, because they kept talking about being on a Forward Operating Base (FOB) and so on.

A: Oh, yes, right. The distinction now between an embedded PRT (EPRT) and a regular PRT is just that the EPRTs are focused on the municipal level, they work with district governments and city governments. So they are much more micro-focused and they are going to get pulled back, because there is no need; unless you are in a heavy counterinsurgency mode you do not need to be focused at that low a level.

At any rate right now of the PRTs, the ones that we saw, some had RSO provided security; some had a mix between the two, RSO and military. And the people that have solely RSO really hate it, for all the reasons they have always hated it and they would all prefer military security escorts. The problem is that in some locations, obviously there is no military there.

Q: They hate it because RSO is too restrictive, or other reasons?

A: Because they find RSO too restrictive.

Q: Some people indicated that the RSO was more aggressive?

A: Yes, you mean the security companies are?

Q: Yes.

A: Yes, they certainly are. The best example: we, with my group, go up to Arbil all the time to do training and we have security because we are required to, but it is very low profile. It is basically just a guy that is driving us around, that is the extent of it. And there are other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) staff, like us, who take cabs. It is a peaceful place.

But, of course, because the RSO has one policy for the whole country going out in Arbil is just like going out in Baghdad. So we went to see a project that we were doing up at the Citadel. For the two of us to do that and a staff person from the PRT… to take the three of us required four Chevrolet Suburbans, two private security staff in each one, both of whom had M-16s. The convoy would not brake when you go through traffic and turned, very aggressive driving posture. In Arbil! It is crazy!

So we go to this Citadel and they are fanning out and we are have to wear our body armor. The poor security people, it is ridiculous, are at the point, were they do not know what else to do so they are standing in front of potholes and trying to make sure we do not step in them. It is at the point of being an absolute caricature up there and the PRT staff hates it. They do not understand why they have to have such a restrictive posture. And you can speculate on why they do.

But the people that have military support, by and large, tend to be much, much happier, because, first of all, there is less of a time delay between when you ask to go out and when you go out, in most cases. It is much, much less intrusive, you can go to more places, see more people. There is a problem when you are arriving with a military convoy and that can send a message, but it is not like arriving in a big PSD convoy, which does not send a message, either. Yes, the military people have a much higher acceptance of risk than the RSO people do.

Q: That is a key point. Did you find that movement was very inhibiting to getting the work done?

A: In different cases, yes. Even the people that had military movement security still wished they could get out more and did not have enough contact with their Iraqi counterparts. The PRTs that were working with more advanced provincial governments, did not feel the need to see their counterparts more than a couple of times a week, anyway. So they did not complain as much about it. But, yes, definitely movement is still a major obstacle, but it is par for the course. It is always going to be a major problem.

Q: Let us take some of the programs. How effective do you think they were being, working on the governance side, for example? What were they trying to do?

A: The main thing the Governance Team does is to try to improve budget execution. That is both the goal they have as well as a metric for measuring how they are doing. By budget execution, I mean there are essentially three different budgetary streams that the Provincial Councils and the local Directors General of the national ministries are responsible for spending and this is almost totally for essential services.

Q: What are the three?

A: The three different budgetary streams? As I understand it and I am pretty confident of this: first of all, you have money called Iraq Reconstruction and Development Funds (IRDF). That is money that is allocated to the Provincial Councils that they can spend however they want.

Then you have the Capital Investment Budget, which is money that the Directors General and the Provincial Councils together decide how to spend. And, again, by capital investment, that is meant to invest in infrastructure, to build, say, bridges or roads or generators, anything that is about provision of services.

Then you have one of the biggest budgetary streams and that is the DGs' various Operations and Maintenance budgets.

So essentially what you have is two different forms of capital budgets and then one operations and maintenance. The difference between the two capital budgets is, in one case, the central ministries have a big say in where it gets invested, and, in the other case, the Provincial Councils make the entire decision.

So the issue here and one thing the PRT has spent a whole lot of time on in the early days. You have probably heard all these stories, where the military will go out and they will build a school, but then the school just sits there empty, because they never coordinated with the Ministry of Education to agree to staff this school and pay the bills and keep it running. Or, say, the military builds a clinic for which they did not get the Ministry of Health buy-in, so same problem, there.

Now, not only does it turn out that that problem happened with the military, but also the Provincial Council would say, "We want to build this school," they would go ahead and build it. At that point they would turn to the Ministry of Education DG, who would say, "We cannot fund that. We were not part of the decision making process. You did not ask us about it, so we are not under any obligation to do anything about it."

So a lot of what the PRT does is to get the Provincial Council and the DGs to work together, for one thing, not to mention the military, in those cases where the military is doing a whole bunch of stuff. The PRT works to rationalize the project process, help the [Provincial Council] and the DGs develop a long-term plan so that they spend all this money in an orderly fashion that is going to be sustained by the central government ministries and is not duplicating other efforts and is done in the right way.

So when we talk about how they are building capacity, mostly what they are doing is acting as the glue between all those various entities and all those different budgetary streams and getting them to spend the funds in the right way. So there is that coordination role.

And then, there are the people that they are dealing with (the case everywhere in Iraq), who are a completely new political class. The people that ran the government before, in Saddam's time, are gone. So the people that they are dealing with do not tend to have a lot of basic skills: management, budgeting, planning. Budgeting is a big thing. So the PRT works with them on that. And the Local Governance Program (LGP), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)'s LGP program, is designed to provide a lot of those basic skills, too.

Q: This is with RTI, right?

A: Right. But the Provincial Councils were never empowered under Saddam. They did not play any kind of role. The central government ministries did everything. Another challenge that the PRTs face is helping these new Provincial Councils, which are an Iraqi priority. The provinces are given autonomy in the new constitution, the new Provincial Powers Law gives them a lot more say than they have ever had, but Iraqis, even though it is their law, it is not their law, it is not their constitution, it was written by others, but they do not really know how it works, they do not have the habit of mind required for autonomy.

So the [PRT] spends a lot of time helping them with these new processes and empowering the Provincial Councils. Now the overall wisdom of the U.S. helping in that I do not know. It is going to be hard. You cannot just build institutions overnight.

So when you say that they are trying to do capacity building, that is typically what they do and if you measure it in terms of budget execution, in terms of the money spent, they have unquestionably made progress. It is different for every province, but there is certainly steady improvement since the PRTs have been there. How sustainable that is, who knows?

Q: Were there these Provincial Reconstruction Development Committees (PRDC) that worked with the councils?

A: Right, the PRDC, when I was talking about the DGs and the [Provincial Council] meeting together, that tends to be in the format of the PRDC, which can also include other officials. That is the body. That is my understanding, anyway.

Q: But is there a real difference between the PRDC and the Provincial Council?

A: The PRDC also includes DGs and other central government officials, as well as, I think, even other community leaders. I am not really sure. They did not really talk about it that much, but the PRDC is the one that has developed the PDS, the Provincial Development Strategy. So that is the main provincial/federal working group that is in charge of doing all the planning according to which projects and services and so forth are being implemented.

Q: And then there were advisors to the council?

A: Often, they had advisors, but when you talk about the PRDC, my understanding is that you have specific provincial council members on it, or at least their representatives.

Q: So it is a duplication of function between the Provincial Council and the PDRC?

A: No, it is a form of coordination between the Provincial Councils and the DGs. It is a way of getting everybody on the same page.

Q: How did the governance teams relate to these groups and try to get something done with these people who were so inexperienced?

A: Good question. The teams talked about it as a struggle. First of all, they have convening power and they can get the people to come sit together. They describe that as being a very important role.

Q: Who had the convening power?

A: The PRT governance people, because otherwise they could not get the Iraqis to come talk to each other and even work together. But they are talking about basic skills, like how to draft an agenda for a meeting and how to write up minutes, just a variety of basic management and administrative skills that they did not have. But the main thing they seem to do is trouble shoot and when the Iraqis are having trouble with figuring out how to spend their money, they are there to guide them, show them the right way.

Another thing the Governance Team does is: if the ministry in Baghdad is not releasing funding or is being difficult and not making a decision in some other way, they, the PRT, will get an American in Baghdad to put pressure on them, hassle them to make things happen. They called this the "connective tissue" role the PRTs play between the provinces and the central government.

But, yes, when you say the Governance Team, it is pretty much whatever the [Provincial Council] and the Directors General are trying to do; the Governance Team just helps them. And this is how it is supposed to be. We are trying to empower the Iraqis. This is the whole idea, right? Now that the PRTs are in the capacity business and not in the infrastructure business, the idea is to let the Iraqis take over and for the PRTs to be playing less and less of a role.

So, in every case, it is supposed to be an Iraqi-led operation and the PRT is really there to fill in the gaps and help the Iraqis where they need it. So it is very, very hard to say, "Well, this is what the Governance Teams do in every case." By design, it is supposed to follow Iraqi priorities.

Q: But you talk about the PRT having convening powers, do the Iraqis accept the fact that the PRT can call a meeting and nudge people in different directions?

A: Yes and they value it and again, the convening power is something that typically they are still doing it in several cases. We heard several examples of it, where they are still required to play that role. But very often they would talk about how they had played that role in the past and then the Iraqis started meeting on their own, which is the idea.

Q: So the Iraqis originally were quite welcoming to having this outside group push them around?

A: Right. Push them around? Yes, they were, because they did not know what they were supposed to do, either. They were all brand new to their jobs and realized they needed help.

Q: So, by and large, they made a lot of progress in that area?

A: Certainly, if measured by budget execution. It depends on what you mean by "progress." If by progress you mean getting Iraqis to spend their own money in developing their own infrastructure and developing their ability to provide services, or at least in the immediate provision of those services, I would say, yes, they definitely are.

Now the question of sustainability and especially the question of institution building, are they successful in that, that seems much less clear. It is very hard to say, for example, whether the [Provincial Councils] will remain empowered when the PRT is gone. Are they really building institutions, or are they really just building relationships?

And they are definitely building relationships that depend on it and they are all worried that when these provincial elections happen in January that they are going to have to start from scratch, which tells you a little something about the nature of their effort.

They have good relationships with particular people and they have facilitated relationships between various Iraqi officials that otherwise would not have happened. That is all-important, but institutions are something much bigger than that and require a very long time to set up and establish.

So while they are providing particular people with particular skills that will in some way be valuable down the road and, in certain cases, may be doing a bit of institution building, for the most part whatever happens when they leave will take its own form and I do not know how much it is really sticking in the soil, so to speak, what they are doing.

But that does not mean that they should not be doing it. It does mean that they should assess whether sustainability is really the right goal to have in mind. There is certainly an immediate benefit in getting more Iraqi money flowing and into the economy and, at least in the immediate term, getting service provision to make peoples' lives better. That all has a value, and it is certainly better than spending our money to do it.

So I have been skeptical as far as the long-term benefit, but I could be proven wrong.

Q: Anything different that needs to be done to make them more sustainable?

A: One thing people that we talked to on PRTs mentioned, when we would talk about this problem, is the Directors General. As I was saying before, in Iraq you always had a very top-down form of governance, in which central government ministries in Baghdad set the priorities and decided everything and then administered the provinces through their director general offices.

So in those cases you have institutions. You have different people at the top of them and even down into the middle management, but you are not creating something out of thin air, the way you are essentially with Provincial Councils and the *qadha* councils. So what some people have said is, "First, work with the DGs, more than the Provincial Councils."

The Provincial Council is the legislature. Theoretically, anyway, it is not doing this yet, but on paper it is supposed to be able to legislate on certain matters and I guess in various cases it does. Most of them have not really assumed that role yet, because they are so consumed with spending their money.

But the other thing they do is they have input on one budgetary stream and a core responsibility for another and that is the main thing that they are working on now. But what a lot of the PRTs say is, "Well, do not work with the [Provincial Council], because who knows if that is even going to stick around after we leave? Work with the Directors General, because they are there and there always are going to be Federal Government ministries, even if you do drift back to a much more centralized system."

Then the other thing that people said was that the lower you work down the food chain the better. Instead of working with all these politicians and political appointees, better to work within the Directors General, work with the worker bees, because there is going to be some fixity there and you are going to get more bang from your buck in the long term.

Q: Was there any attempt to work with the lower echelons, in the municipal governments?

A: With the LGP program, the RTI program, yes, but, again, this is a huge problem. LGP, when you talk to Iraqis and we talked to only a few, but we have talked to other people who have talked to more, they really seem to value the LGP program and the skills that it provides.

But the problem is that the PRT, even though there is an RTI/LGP person on every PRT, they do not share any information or very little information with the PRT itself because of security reasons and most of the people that are doing the training are RTI-trained Iraqi staff that are out there doing their training and doing everything far from the PRT's view, even to the point where the RTI person on the PRT does not even know what is going on.

And they do this for security reasons, which may or may not be valid. But the problem is that you have the capacity building effort that I have described that mostly goes on at the top levels and mostly with the [Provincial Councils] that the PRT is doing and then you have this kind of raw provision of training in bureaucratic skills that LGP is doing and they are very clearly two connected efforts, but they are not coordinated at all. It makes no sense.

And the same can be said for other USAID programs that are national in scope. You would have a USAID person on the PRT whose job it is, theoretically, to monitor those projects in the particular province. There are a variety of them, big, hundreds of millions of dollars contracts to do long-term development projects in Iraq. Now the USAID person is supposed to be watching what those different national programs are doing in his province, but often he will not have visibility over them and even if he does, he does not have authority over them. So it would be very hard to integrate efforts with those programs, either. LGP is the most obvious example of this problem, but it is clear in other cases, as well.

Q: So, a real lack of communication?

A: Oh, complete and by design. I really do not understand it.

Q: What do you mean by "design?"

A: Maybe not by design. It is just that the national programs that are run by a contractor have their own complete separate administrative structure and are responsible for a certain set of deliverables on that contract and it does not benefit them, or there is no structural incentive for them to cooperate with the PRTs. If anything, it is just more of a hassle and more sets of eyes looking at what they are doing.

That is what I mean by design. I do not know if somebody thought that this was a good thing. I think that it just ended up this way, but, structurally, yes, it is just completely independent.

Q: And that causes duplication or conflict or what?

A: It could be causing duplication. The main thing is that it is a missed opportunity and it is just irrational, because you have all these resources going to these USAID contracts, particularly LGP and you are not coordinating with the other efforts that the PRT is doing. So, yes, you could have duplication, but more than that you just do not have unity of effort. So, yes, it is crazy from an organizational standpoint and is reflective of the broader *ad hoc*, chaotic environment that the PRTs and the broader development mission in Iraq emerged out of.

Q: What are the main issues that the PRT has with trying to do this capacity development with the Provincial Council? What would you say stands out as a big issue?

A: I have already mentioned several of them. There is the fact that, with the [Provincial Council], you are working with an organization that has not been historically empowered. In all cases, you are working with politicians and political appointees and workers that are inexperienced.

You are also working in an environment of intense political competition and extremely high corruption in which because of the absence of institutions, this is a particular problem, people are just looking to find ways to enrich and benefit themselves.

And so you are struggling with them, competing against their own personal interests to enrich themselves, in order to do what is good for Iraq, broad brush, which is to channel that into institutions for the sake of long-term development.

Q: Were there a lot of ethnic conflicts?

A: It depends. Certain places, like Najaf, of course, it are all Shi'ia and you do not have that problem. Definitely in a place like Diyala, a place like Mosul and these are places where there is still an insurgency going on.

In Diyala, you have a pretty serious, in part it is a conflict between Sunni and Shi'ia, but mostly it is a conflict of the central government, which happens to be Shi'ia and an emerging political class in Diyala that is trying to gain more power and become more influential that is Sunni. And there are major clashes there.

So, for example, we were talking to the Diyala people about how well the Provincial Council was doing and they are saying they had made a lot of progress and then when we asked when would they be able to stand on their own, they said, "Oh, that is far off on the horizon."

But then one Iraqi said, "If you had asked me two months ago, before these government operations happened," when the central government came in and in the name of establishing security ended up antagonizing a lot of the Sunnis on the Provincial Council and various other local leaders, "If you had asked me before those operations, I would have told you that within six months they would be ready to stand on their own. But now, because the central government has inserted itself more, both pushed around a lot of Sunnis on the provincial council and has taken a more active in the management of its affairs, the Provincial Council's ability to stand on its own as an independent body has been much weakened and compromised."

So that is an obstacle they face is the broader political environment that they work in. But, see, again, that gets to the institution-building thing. What the hell is the [Provincial Council]?

Historically, it does not stand on its own and so if the central government, which has always been the boss, comes in and decides that it is going to drive out or arrest Sunni members and then empower the Shi'ia ones, what is the PRT going to do about it? And, certainly, what is going to happen once the PRT leaves?

Q: Let us turn to the infrastructure work, what has the PRT been able to carry out and accomplish? What are they trying to do?

A: For the most part, they are moving out of the infrastructure business.

Q: In the past, what were they doing?

A: In the past, just building electrical substations, building bridges, working on sewers, water treatment. They still do a lot of this work, like buying reverse osmosis machines for particular communities so they can have clean water. Some of it has been part of the broader capacity

building effort of helping the Iraqi government provide these services, which is what it is all supposed to be. But there are also a lot of *ad hoc*, more community-oriented efforts, like the reverse osmosis project I was talking about.

Yes, but the PRT members really, in all of our interviews, were trying to stress to us that they are done with it, that they are done with doing projects. Quick Reaction Funds (QRF) are drying up, the Commanders' Economic Reconstruction Program (CERP) is drying up. It is much more a matter of helping Iraqis spend their money.

Q: Are you saying the CERP money is now not available?

A: Not nearly to the degree it was before and, moreover, they also have developed this thing called ICERP, which is basically the same as CERP, except that it is Iraqi money, but the American commanders have access to it.

Q: What about the QRF?

A: QRF is also drying up.

Q: And so the PRT does not have any funds any more?

A: Right, funds for projects. It has funds for its people, to pay them to be there. But, yes, what they are doing is providing skills and doing their broader coordination effort.

Q: One of the earlier complaints was: "We do not have any funds to do anything with. We have no money to do a little agriculture project or a training project."

A: Right and that was a problem in the past of access or the bureaucratics. They just could not get the funds fast enough or there were too many conditions. And that was a problem and to the extent that they are still using these funds, it still is, but now it is a problem by design. Now it is "Your job is not to spend money for the Iraqis. Your job is to get them to spend their own."

Q: Let us turn to the Rule of Law program. What do you think the ROL team has been able to accomplish in that area?

A: You can divide the Rule of Law program, into two categories, a harder side and a softer side. On the harder side, what they are doing is, first of all pressuring Baghdad to process terrorist cases and getting Baghdad to deal with and replace judges that have been bought off or are corrupt or incompetent. They are working hard to encourage collaboration between the Iraqi police and the judges in particular provinces.

They work completely on the criminal side. The civil side is functioning pretty well and they do not have many problems. But on the criminal side, they have operated in the past essentially on a confessions based system, where there was not much evidence gathering, they could only convict people if they confessed to the crimes and obviously that is stupid and lends itself to corruption and innocent people being forced to confess.

So the ROL teams are trying to build the capacity of the judges, because in their legal system the judges do more of an investigative role. But they are helping the judges and to a lesser extent the police with evidentiary practices, how to treat crime scenes, etc. All the PRTs, to a degree, are doing that and then also the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), the State Department's group that works with courts and prisons throughout the world. Like USAID, INL has its own independent programs run by contractors designed to do that kind of thing. Central Prisons Advisory and Training Team (CPATT)(?), for example, is working on the prisons. There are a variety of other ones. So that is the hard side of ROL.

Then there is what I call the soft side: all of the PRTs are working on revamping the curriculum of the law schools in their provinces. This is a nationwide program and everybody brags about it. It is a great success. Iraqis love it, because their law curriculum has not been updated in forty years. That is a big thing they are working on.

They do a whole lot on civil society on the legal side, in working with the bar association, there are other legal civil society groups that they are trying to empower, but the Bar Association is the main one. There are a lot of ROL education programs, where they will bring in outside scholars to give seminars and try to inject more intellectual activity into their lives, which are pretty closed off and dreary.

Up in Mosul, the ROL group up there was doing vocational training for prisoners. There are a number of other activities, targets of opportunity, just where can we make a difference and where can we help.

Q: Are the ROL activities making a difference?

A: They are making individual differences in peoples' lives. The goals of the PRT that are clear are on the on the capacity side and I would include the hard ROL aspects of that, or at least some of them. But in working to try to get government institutions to spend their money and provide essential services, that is a pretty clear goal.

But then there are a number of other activities that the PRTs are doing that are oriented towards traditional development; it is very unfocused. You will have like an Economic Development team member doing small business development. He parachutes into the PRT and says, "What am I supposed to do?" There is no guidance, so he decides, "Well, they need a small businessmen's union" or have one and it needs empowering or it needs training or it needs a new building. "So let us see if I can work with that." Or you will have an Agriculture team member or USAID technician say, "Oh, they really need a agricultural collective here. Let us work with them to do that."

So they are doing all these things that you would associate with the traditional development mission, but it is all uncoordinated; it is all just individual people pursuing individual targets of opportunity that who knows, once they leave and somebody else on the PRT comes in or if the PRT is gone, how is that going to be sustained.

Is that good work? In certain cases, yes. But is it sustainable? No. Is it something that the PRTs should be doing? Probably not.

If you are going to be doing that kind of work, it makes more sense to have it be a typical national USAID development mission that is run by contractors and involves other countries and international organizations as well. If you think that softer human development activity is good and it is more of a philosophical question, but it seems pretty clear that the PRTs do not have much business doing it.

Q: The question of building long-term institutional capacity and permanence is not well defined?

A: In certain cases it is. That is the nice thing about budget execution is that there you have something concrete that you can point to and it is going to have an immediate benefit that even transcends, is good in itself even if you are doing institution building. In the other cases, it is not even clear that there is that immediate benefit or that it is worth the cost of paying a 3161 $150,000 a year to be out there building up a beekeeping collective that might or might not stick together after he has gone.

Q: You mentioned the PRT Economic Development work and you mentioned agriculture, is there anything more in that area that was being done that you found was useful such as business development?

A: You can run through a laundry list of projects, but, again, they all bear that same question: they do media training, okay, they teach journalists or they give women vocational skills. They get a QRF grant to build a vocational center and they teach women how to make beads or some other product. That is fine and probably benefits particular people, but is not tied together with the rest of the work the PRT is doing, has no real strategic objective, other than just making people happy, making their lives a little better.

Q: So there is no institutional development strategy for the province?

A: I separate it into the work that is devoted to capacity building, which makes sense and then the whole range of other human development, civil society oriented, softer, kind of development that goes on in lots of countries but has a much long term approach and is not provided by PRTs, but is provided by USAID or is part of a multilateral development mission.

Q: The PRT really is not equipped to do that kind of work?

A: You would have a lot of people that are in the business, that work for USAID contractors or worked at USAID, or worked for Mercy Corps or some other NGO, who would say, right, the PRTs are not fit to do this, because the 3161s typically doing these things, or FSOs, neither of whom really have much background in doing this kind of work.

But also, more than that, it is that that work is almost always done because you have somebody on the PRT who does not have a very clear job and then just has to figure out something to do. So he decides to organize an agricultural collective.

Q: So it is somewhat ad hoc?

A: Yes, totally, in many, many cases, yes. Now, again, if you have a team leader who has developed a strong and coherent strategy that is oriented towards building Iraqi capacity, then he can marshal the skills, to the extent that they are available, he can apply those people to projects that are more relevant to that capacity building goal. And that is the real importance of a strong leader, to do that. If you have weak leadership, you just have a lot of autonomous people running around doing work that they think is good or seems like the right thing to do.

Q; Do you have any sense of, for example, that the agriculture man is working with the Director General for Agriculture, in terms of helping him have the capacity to have a beekeeping program or a spraying program? Is that happening?

A: It is happening, yes. The USDA detailees, in some cases, are working with local government institutions. Now, what percentage of their time are they doing that? Who knows? Ten per cent, fifty per cent, some more, some less. So they are, in those cases, as in the specific case of agriculture, doing some of it.

But pretty much every PRT member we talked to says, "Look, agriculture policy in Iraq needs to be completely reformed and all of this is way beyond our pay grade." And so they work with the Agricultural DGs where appropriate, but they realize that that is the wrong place to be working if what you want to do is change agricultural policy in Iraq for the better in general.

So as a response what they end up doing is, again, there is the civil society angle and there is also a fair bit of training they do of local farmers, showing them new methods. And, actually, in those cases, there are more inspiring stories, because those show farmers how to do things that the farmers, because they have been closed off and have not had access to modern methods and training and education, they really benefit by it, like how to use plastic mulch or various techniques that have obvious benefit that in training those farmers to do it they will continue to do it, because it is obviously beneficial to them or easier for them. So they do a lot of work like that.

Q: But is that working with the DG for Agriculture?

A: No, they are just working with farmers.

Q: So they are not really creating the DG capacity to do the same thing?

A: Right, exactly. Another thing they are doing is more institution related and potentially [has] staying power, they help the local universities set up extension centers, I had never heard of them before this trip. We have them in the U.S. universities are where all the research and development goes into developing new methods for farming and testing certain products, that kind of thing, a little mini-think tank to educate the farmers in the area. So in various cases you would have the PRT team member, either USDA or USAID, their agriculture person, working in helping set up and improve that extension center. So that is probably worthwhile.

Q: Let us add another one, the Public Affairs program. There were Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) at each of these PRTs? And what were they doing?

A: Not at all of them. That was something that was hit or miss. But typically what they do is they try to make the local government institutions that they are working with look good, the idea being that they need to promote the legitimacy of these governing institutions so that people will accept them and that will contribute overall to their staying power, which is an adaptation of the typical role of these Public Affairs Officers, which is to be the public face or do the public diplomacy of the U.S. government and make America look good. They say they do that as a secondary role, but mostly what they try to do is push the Iraqis out in front.

Q: What do they actually do?

A: I do not know. It is always *ad hoc* in those cases. In general you can say they do a decent amount of training of local media outlets. They do journalists' unions sometimes. But mainly what they do is help the local media outlets, encourage them to do stories about the projects that the Provincial Council is doing, for example and people say, "Hey, the Provincial Council paid to have this bridge built!"

Q: And then there are Political Reporting Officers, who reported back to the Embassy?

A: Oh, yes. That is a huge role that is very important and very much valued in Baghdad and is a real success of the PRTs. PRTs have never really articulated this or talked about it much as a goal or as a function of PRTs and it certainly has not been written about in the assessments of them.

But, it is something that, if you talk to the Ambassador in Baghdad, it seems like the main reason he thinks the PRTs are there is because they provide a window onto the rest of Iraq that they would not otherwise have.

So, yes, they do all kinds of reporting, both the obvious kind of horse race political analysis, who is up, who is down, that sort of information. But they also do a lot of economic reporting. The Economic Officer in Baghdad during the budget execution conference said, "Look, were it not for the PRTs we would not know how much money the Iraqi government is spending in the provinces, because the Ministry of Finance, both for political reasons and economic reasons, either cannot or will not share this information with us. So without reporting officers out there actually monitoring all these contracts and other activities, we would not know."

So that is also like a reporting function. It is not just a reporting officer that does that.

The actual reporting officer takes up other things as well. Like in many cases the reporting officer was the one who showed us around. That is a serious job that they have, to shepherd guests through the PRT program.

These are things that are core competencies of the State Department. This is what they do: they report and they [handle] visitors. So they are very good at it. So the PRT is like a little mini-embassy in that regard.

Q: I have the impression from some that they never get any feedback. They send off reports, but they never hear about what happens to the reports.

A: Oh, yes, definitely. But that said, we had a lot of people in Baghdad tell us how important it is to get that reporting. Now maybe they do not get the sitrep *per se,* and maybe it is more *ad hoc,* and maybe it is cables they value more than those particular sitreps, but the military seemed to like them. The military loves information, even if they do not use it. They just like to have it. But it is clearly a valued role, even if a lot of it does not get read at the end of the day.

Q: So there seems to be some need for improvement in the reporting system?

A: Maybe. I do not know. I would have to look more closely at it. I do not know enough to say whether or not it does.

Q: Then there are the cultural advisors or…

A: The BBAs, The Bilingual, Bicultural Advisers.

Q: Did you meet them?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: What were they doing?

A: It depended, but you would have BBAs working on infrastructure, BBAs working on governance. The idea is that they are supercharged translators. They are sometimes Iraqi-Americans. Sometimes they are Americans who are from different parts of the region.

But the idea is, at least my impression of what they do is, they are part of, say, the governance team, and they do the translating and work a lot with the Iraqi counterparts, but they also have some substantive expertise and are at a higher level than somebody that is merely translating.

Q: Where do they come from?

A: They are 3161s.

Q: So they are Iraqi-Americans or…

A: Yes, I would say sixty, seventy per cent are Iraqi-Americans and then you have Palestinian-Americans, Egyptian-Americans. They are people that have professional skills in other areas and, of course, they have a lot of what they call LES, (Locally Employed Staff), the same thing

as [Foreign Service Nationals]. But, yes, they have plenty of them that serve as rank and file translators, for work that is not sensitive or classified.

Q: Let us turn to the subject of relationships. Within the PRTs, how do you find the relationships between the civilians and the military and then with the Iraqis within PRTs?

A: There are a few observations you can make about that that are interesting and I think a lot of them have already been said in a lot of the PRT reports. They are what you would expect, but certainly, the military, as everybody says, they have this "Get it done now!" kind of attitude, they see a gap and they fill it. As they joke about themselves, they are distracted by shiny objects and they just go, go, go all the time, and they are not well suited to leading from behind and getting the Iraqis to do things. They are much more oriented towards just getting work done.

Culturally that tends to be a major difference; the civilians live in a world of consensus-based leadership, whereas in the military you just order people, tell them what to do and they do it, period. So obviously there is that kind of tension.

There is also the tension, really the resentment that the civilians are getting paid so much more than the military. They get all kinds of leave, tons of leave. They get overtime. They can drink alcohol. All these things that the military does not get or cannot do. It does create some resentment there.

And, frankly, too, because so many 3161s have been incompetent in the past and even the FSOs and government employees from other departments, like USDA detailees that they do not, in some cases, anyway, have a very favorable impression of them. Now at the same time there are other cases where people will go into a relationship with a civilian on the PRT assuming that he must know more than a military person because he is a civilian. So you have it going both ways, but mostly it is the former case of the military not looking very highly on what the PRTs bring to the table.

And these are all cultural issues that are going to happen. And then you have the broader coordination question between PRTs and military, coordination of their efforts. That is really one of the biggest issues, one of the most important things you can talk about with [respect to] the PRTs. The relationship functionally between a PRT and the military is different largely depending on how much military there is, where they are and what they are doing.

For example, if you are in a straight counterinsurgency mode, where the military is engaged in a lot of non-kinetic activities, the PRT is going to play one role, whereas in a place like Najaf, where there is basically no military and it is a purely PRT-led effort, that functional relationship, is going to depend a lot on the province.

When you are in counterinsurgency mode, it is clear that the military has the lead and it is clear that a lot of the non-kinetic activities they are doing are not about development or sustainment. What they are about is getting money into the local economy, buying off important local leaders and creating employment programs to keep people off the street. Sons of Iraq were like that. The trash pickup programs are like that. A whole bunch of different kinds of bread and circuses

type programs that do not have any pretence of being about long-term development. And you need to do that from a security perspective.

But there are a lot of things they do: rebuilding bridges, putting up streetlights, all kinds of infrastructure type work that they do, that will eventually become Iraqi responsibilities, to take over and maintain and do need to be done with an eye towards Iraqi priorities and eventual Iraqi leadership.

So what the PRT plays, ideally, in that situation is to serve as the link between all the military non-kinetic activities and the Iraqi government institutions that are responsible for them. So that is the important role that it plays.

It also provides expertise that the military does not have. So you have a USDA agricultural team member. No civil affairs [soldier] is going to have that expertise. There are a range of different cases where you have the PRT providing expertise that there is no way that they could ever get a military person with that kind of qualification. So there is that role that they play in the counterinsurgency environment.

And the PRT also helps with the broader strategic planning aspect. The military is pretty good about keeping things coordinated, but to avoid duplication of efforts and certainly to [prevent] the military from doing things that local governments were already planning to do or already doing, in some cases. So there is that.

And then they play an important diplomatic role in that environment. They are better at dealing with the civilian leadership than the military is and it is also more appropriate and more effective for civilian-to-civilian relationships in dealing with the Provincial Council or dealing with local leaders that you are trying to influence in a certain way and act in a certain way.

So in all the best cases in a counterinsurgency environment like Mosul you really do have a coordinated effort, in which the PRT is doing the civilian stuff that it does best in dealing with the Iraqi civilians and then the military being the kind of engine that drives it all.

Now in a place like Diyala you also have a huge counterinsurgency effort going on, but you have a PRT that has been totally marginalized and feels completely ignored by the military and the reason is that, well, if you talk to the military, the reason is that the PRT just does not add any value or bring anything to the table. And the PRTs are doing lots of targets of opportunity; certainly working with the Provincial Council a lot, but the military is just driving on, doing its own projects, its own engagements.

Q: That was my next question: to what extent do you think the military understand the PRT concept and what it is trying to do?

A: Again, it always depends. In Mosul, we had a very interesting conversation with the head of the Mosul PRT, who said his approach is to not want to be in charge, to say, "Look, I realize that there are 15,000 U.S. troops here. I have a PRT of 80 people. I know that at the end of the day the military is going to do what it wants to do."

And so he says because of that, what he does is, he never stands on principle, he never gets turf-conscious, he never tries to pull rank on the military, he never tries to force them to do things they do not want to do. He would always be deferential at the end of the day. And what has happened, by his doing that he has built the trust of the military and they say, "This guy is not trying to work against us. This guy really wants to help us. Therefore we will listen to him."

And in doing that and having that attitude, he has ended up being more influential than he otherwise would have been, because the military knows that he is there to support them at the end of the day and that he can really help them and he has skills and his team has skills that they really need for their work.

So the cliché is this is personality-driven. Almost everything in life is personality-driven. It largely depends on the various attitudes of the leaders involved as to what is going to happen there.

In other cases, like Najaf, it is a total non-factor, because the PRT is the only reason that the military is even there, so it is completely a support-oriented relationship.

Q: Is there any other substantive or technical area we have not touched on, before we begin to move towards the end of the interview?

A: I do not think so.

Q: Do you think the PRTs are helpful in reducing the insurgency or altering the security situation?

A: I do not know. When you are assessing whether they are helpful, I guess you have to weigh them against a range of different alternatives. So it s hard to really say, for example, if they are more helpful than a purely military effort would be, because the military are very slow and cumbersome and they have certain habits of mind that are not necessarily conducive to the work of long-term capacity building or working with the Iraqis, but they are pretty good at reinventing themselves. It takes a while, but they can learn lessons.

And so if you had a purely military effort, like in Afghanistan, where they brought in contractors to provide expertise where they did not have it, you could maybe see that working. Obviously that would only be in a strictly counterinsurgency environment, but in certain cases I could see that being preferable.

Oh, there is one substantive thing that I forgot, a role that they play and this is something that only the PRT can do that the military would never be able to do, is that the PRT serves as diplomatic representatives to the various Provincial Councils. Now that is very unusual for us as a country to have diplomatic relationships, independent diplomatic relationships, with sub-national governments, but we really do and in many cases the Provincial Council values the relationship with the PRT because it is ma lever against Baghdad or because if they are not getting what they need from Baghdad they can get it from the PRT.

I can give you a good example of that. The Najaf Provincial Council wants an airport in Najaf and they are going to get it, but they want it so that people can fly in from Iran, mostly, to come visit the shrines in Najaf. They were not getting any action on this by the Central Government. They needed the Central Government to help them in terms of getting it set up, getting the money for it, getting the procedures established to accredit it, getting it part of the Iraqi airport system.

Anyway, they were not getting any movement on it. They got the PRT to bring them a contractor who has set up airports all over the world. So he goes to the Najaf PRT and they end up setting up this airport on their own, doing all the work they can and then presenting it to the central government in Baghdad as a *fait accompli*. And because they had the PRT there, the Najaf Provincial Council could get the international investors it needed to get the airport up and running.

So in doing that the PRT got all sorts of good will and positive relationships built with the Provincial Council and that Provincial Council (certain members on it), is very connected to Iran, more connected to Iran, at high levels, than people in the Baghdad central government. So the PRT is one of the main interlocutors we have with the Iranian Government in Iraq. And having it there means that officials from Baghdad can come and talk to these Iranians.

So, again, that diplomatic role was very much valued and is a role that the PRTs are playing that the U.S. government could not otherwise play.

But about the question you asked, are they a good thing: yes, but it is hard to say, because you do not know what would be going on in their absence. But, yes, insofar as they are getting Iraqi money into the bloodstream that definitely would not be getting in there without the PRT moving things along, the budget execution goal, that itself is a good thing.

The Iraqis are terrible at spending money. They just do not have the institutions and processes set up to do it and the PRTs are making that happen. So that is an immediate goal in itself and that is a good thing.

Q: On this question of the relationships, I did not cover the question of relations with the Iraqis. How do the Iraqis, both in government and then the general population, view the PRT or understand what it is?

A: It is a good question. We did not really interview many Iraqis. So mostly I am just going on the assessments of the PRTs of that question. But I think in a lot of cases they are pretty honest about it.

A lot of time they see the PRT as a way of either as a source of money in itself, although that is changing, or leverage to get Baghdad to spend money; they see them as valuable for those reasons. Do they see them as valuable from the capacity building side? In some cases, yes. In some cases, no. It is an open question to me, still yet to be determined, because we are still doing some projects, we are transitioning now to this capacity building mode. It is an open

question to me whether they will see that as valuable in itself and something that is worth having the PRT there for, if the PRT is not bringing lots of projects to the table.

In certain cases: Najaf, Baghdad, the PRTs seem to be in a consulting firm mode and the [Provincial Councils] seem to value that. But then in other cases, Anbar is the best example of this: because we spent so much money out there we brought a set of expectations about the U.S. being this big money tree, honey pot. So there, I do not think we are going to be too welcome there once that money starts to dry up. That is the impression you get, at least talking to some people on the PRT.

Q: So you do not think the Iraqis resent us, "Who are these people, anyway? Why are they pushing us around?"
A: No, but they could be. The Provincial Councils probably would not be nearly as empowered as they are without the PRTs there to help them. So they really realize that they depend on them in that way and because they have brought so much money, at least, to the table, if that is the price of getting pushed around, that is fine.

But, in other cases, it seems like they understand that the pushing around is productive, because the PRT is also pushing around what they need pushed around. So if the DG is refuses to meet with the Provincial Council and the Provincial Council really needs him there, the PRT can push him around and make him meet; and the other way around as well. It is still an open question to me, if the Iraqis value that third party role. If they were enlightened they probably would, but they would also be trying to work themselves out of the need for it.

Q: Do you think the general population has any idea what the PRT is doing?

A: No, no. They know that there is an American presence, but unless they have had occasion to work with the PRT in particular, they are not going to make the distinction between the PRT and all the other Americans, mainly the military.

Q: You have already mentioned them, but what do you see as the outstanding achievements of the PRTs? You have mentioned the budget accomplishment. What are other achievements of the PRT?

A: The reporting role and the diplomatic role that I described. They definitely seem to be good things that we want to keep doing as long as we can.

Other than that, there are lots of targets of opportunity, more traditional development type work, that I think is being inefficiently done, in a way that is not done towards sustainment, but that does not mean that it is not, on some level, good. So I guess you could count that as an accomplishment in certain cases.

Q: And that fits into the last question about what would you say are the three, four, five major lessons that you draw from your observations across the board on these PRTs? What works and what do not work?

A: I would just be repeating what I have already said.

Q: Is there anything about the way one relates to Iraqis in a personal way? Is there anything that comes out of your experience, what you do and do not do, in terms of trying to build a relationship?

A: I know that question is typically for the PRT people. Since I am not a PRT person, because of time and a variety of reasons, we did not meet with many Iraqis. So it is hard for me to address that.

Q: Do you think the PRTs are a good idea? Are they accomplishing their mission? Are they effective?

A: Do I think they should stick around? Yes. Again, are they the best way of performing those specific functions that they are performing, maybe, maybe not. It would depend on what alternative one is offering. But by in large, to answer in a general way, I would give it a yes.

Q: If you were asked what is your major recommendation for improving them, to make them more effective, what would you recommend?

A: My main recommendation would be to strip them down. And for all of the traditional development type activities push them off on to a national level USAID program and to keep the PRT there just doing capacity building, reporting, diplomatic role, things that they are better at doing. And then let agriculture be part of the USAID program. Let economic development be part of the USAID program, a national program. It does not make sense to have the PRTs doing that, because there are other institutions that know how to do that.

Now, again, there is always going to be the capacity building side of that. So it is good to have the PRT there and to have specialists on the PRT that know how to do that, but the way it is set up now, they do not spend enough of their time on capacity building to warrant their place on the PRT. They end up doing so much beside that. So I do not know how best to manage that.

Q: Would it be fair to say that they might evolve into what you might call a mini-embassy?

A: It would be totally insane to have 15 embassies.

Q: You are talking about reporting.

A: I know. Look, as long as we can keep it going in a way that is economically feasible, just for that alone it is worth justifying, but at a certain point, because we use these little mini-embassies as potential balancing and leverage with the Iraqi central government, eventually the Iraqi government is going to say, "Get out of here! We do not want this!" It is going to be a pretty major sovereignty issue.

But Iraq is so divided. The Provincial Councils themselves, for example, almost all of them are dominated by The Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC- Shi'a), which has differences with

Maliki, the Prime Minister, who is growing in power in Baghdad. So they really value having these provinces as alternate nodes of power and they want the PRT to be there.

So we are always going to be part of that broader political mix, and, however long we stay it is going to first of all depend on the military presence that we are going to have there, if we have enough to support us, but also where we fit into that particular political equation.

Q: Any particular recommendation on operations, personnel, support?

A: Not really. I think all the problems with [human relations] have been identified, that Congress, that everybody has identified, you are not going to answer them on the level of the PRT. OPA has done what it can, but at the end of the day, the State Department is an organization that is not built to do this kind of work and you are putting a round peg into a square hole. You are going to have problems.

You are not going to get the people that have the skills that you need. They are not really there on the open market, first of all. You are going to have to give them all this leave [or] you are not going to get anybody to come out and do it.

The personnel problems, they are endemic. If you want to rethink the way we do civil-military operations as a whole, on the level not of the PRT but on the level of our whole national security apparatus…Whether that is strengthening USAID, whether that is building a civilian reserve corps, there are a variety of ways that people spend thinking about how to do this kind of work from an institutional standpoint. If you want to reform on that level that makes sense. But the PRTs, working within the constraints that are there, as an institution, already, these are just problems you are going have to deal with.

Q: Is there anything else we have not touched on?

A: I do not think so.

Q: The interview has been very interesting; thank you