

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

**INTERVIEW #67**

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**Executive Summary**

The interviewee was in Iraq in 2007 and 2008. He was located at the ePRT in Al Asad in western Anbar Province, which was embedded with the Marines. He served as the ePRT team leader. His deputy was an USAID officer. The team leader reported to the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) in the Embassy in Baghdad; but the team was relatively autonomous. The PRT received enough support, money and what was needed. The team wrote its own Mission Statement with general guidance from OPA; it was prepared as a joint statement with the Marines.

(Note: Anbar Province has three PRTs, three ePRTs, plus the main PRT in Ramadi. The PRT in Ramadi has about 35 people with range of specialists common for most PRTs. Its specialists focused on the Provincial Governance Center. There are five sub-districts in Anbar. The PRT “battle space” is very large about the size of South Carolina. )

The interviewee’s PRT had officially 17 people, but only about a dozen actually worked there. These included a banking specialist (there were no banks) and a budget specialist. These specialists were less effective as what was needed was generalists who could call in the specialists for short-term assignments. Generally, the biggest problem re staffing: qualifications were not suited to the organization. However, the team leader had the authority to make staff changes. Specialists in governance and economics did not work out well. The two specialists that the ePRT ended up with were an agricultural specialist and an accountant; the latter was very important to keeping track of the grants. There were USAID teams who did the training in governance (i.e. Research Triangle Institute RTI), a USAID contractor. We had some good and some bad translators. The Bilingual Bicultural Advisors were not successful; some had left Iraq long ago and did not know the local situation.

Security was a constant problem; but the situation improved and the PRT staff was able to travel to freely to talk to people in the markets.

The PRT staff worked with the Marines to establish security; then they worked with the Iraqis on how to spend their money. The local governments had a lot of money, but they did not know how to spend it, so the team provided training in budget execution. However, the Marines (ninety people working on civil affairs), the Army Corps of Engineers, and USAID projects and Iraqi projects carried out the main reconstruction work in Anbar. The PRT was just a small part of the work. The infrastructure problem in

Iraq was not the result of war damage but rather years of lack of maintenance. For example, a Marine reservist restored an oil refinery named K-2; he had run a refinery in Louisiana. The Marines built a sewage plant; the PRT provide an additional small amount to get the system unclogged.

In agriculture, the team had an agronomist (who had, incidentally, studied Iraq soils in the States). He worked with high Iraqi officials to identify areas with the best water. He linked them with experts in the U.S. with the latest information on agriculture technology such as with Texas A&M— the main accomplishment of the PRT in agriculture. The Iraqis had a plan for restoring oases with trees with government money and US expertise. The PRT also helped the Iraqis cull their sheep population to provide a sustainable solution and avoid the tragedy of the common pasture land. It also helped with some of the irrigation system restoration, but it encouraged the Iraqis to rebuild them with help on plans and some money. The PRT also helped get the ice factory going to help with the marketing of fish and the fish industry returned. It help set up business associations.

The PRT did have an impact in the Rule of Law area: moderated a tribal sheik feud, provided office equipment for courthouses— simple things that made a big difference.

On relationships with the Iraqis: we got along pretty well, they seemed to like us, treated us well. We would do market walks, stopped to talk to people, buy meals in town. It showed confidence in them. One of important things done was confidence building. Interviewee did not think the general population knew what the PRT was there for, but they were aware of it.

On relationships with the Marines: we got along real fine. But you cannot allow yourself to be different, have different operating and behavioral policies and practices.

The Marines had Commanders Economic Reconstruction Program (CERP) funds. The PRT had Quick Reaction Funds (QRF); it was unable to move the money (cash) from Baghdad to the PRT quickly enough.

The PRT helped reduce the insurgency because of the confidence building work and being seen with the people.

Lessons: Success depends on a sustained effort, being adaptive, persistent and close to the people. The sustainable part is the connections you build and the people who have been trained. On managing a PRT: “you have to have loose leadership being opportunistic in the outside environment and a strong, tight leadership of the actual money.” Do not send any staff who are just doing it for their career goals; management and the social thing are more important than the precise expertise.

Overall: the PRT is good idea; ours worked very well. However, they are not managed properly in many ways: for example, properly preparing staff, sending people who do not want to go.

## Interview

*Q: When were you in Iraq?*

A: I was there 2007 and 2008.

*Q: And where were you located?*

A: Al Asad, in western Anbar province.

*Q: What was your position?*

A: I was a PRT team leader.

*Q: Can you describe the organization of the PRT?*

A: We had officially 17 people. We never actually saw 17 people, but we had about a dozen people that worked there. And at first we had specialists: we had a banking specialist and a budget specialist, things like that. But we found that did not work out very well at all, because we needed more generalists. So by the time I left we had people that did general work, although they had specific qualifications, sometimes.

*Q: Can you explain the problem, or the difference in the two?*

A: We had a banking specialist, for example, when I first arrived. We had no banks, no working banks, really. And so he had nothing to do in his specialty. So what we really needed was somebody who would know something about banks and then be able to call in a specialist to do the talking or the training when it was required, for the short time it was required. So I think that the biggest problem we had, not a problem we solved. The qualifications were not suited to the organization. We needed real general things, because there was not enough specific work to do. But I guess it was tempting for our masters back home and others to say, "We will be sending the top flight guys, that sort of thing, the specialists, the ones who can really solve the problem."

*Q: What would a generalist do?*

A: We used to compare it to like a general practitioner versus a specialist. The generalist would be embedded with the marine units in various cities around western Anbar and would get to know the people, do the general diplomacy and then when, for example, they said, "We have an irrigation problem," he could call on a specialist to come in and teach them about irrigation. And if they said, "We are opening a bank," you could call in a banking specialist. But there was no need to have a specialist in each of these things, in each of these places. There was not enough population for that; it did not support that kind of a need.

*Q: Did you have any say in the kind of people you got?*

A: Yes and that is why by the end we had generalists, not specialists. I have to say that they were very good to me about that kind of thing. We had a lot of authority to make our choices.

*Q: This was EPRT, or just a PRT?*

A: An EPRT, embedded with the marines.

*Q: Tell me more about the staffing. Did you have separate teams?*

A: At first we were not well integrated, because it was a new team. My predecessor was there just for a couple of months before I got there. But after we got used to each other, worked together, we integrated very well. We did not make a distinction between marines and the PRT. We did the things we did best; we determined those. For example, as civilians we appeared to be more peaceful [*i.e.*, less threatening]. So for example we would go into a marketplace and we would talk to the people and it was easier for us to walk into the marketplace, because the marines, they came with us, of course, they had to come along, but we went in front and people were more apt to talk to us, because we did not look as threatening to them. And so that was how it worked. There was just a difference in outlook between civilian and military and between the two of us we came up with the proper balance.

*Q: And your PRT, on the civilian side, the other PRTs had a governance team and an economic team and so on. Did you have separate teams?*

A: No, we did not. First, we had no teams of these people; we had specialists in governance or economics, but we found that did not work for us. The only real specialists we ended up with at the end was an agricultural specialist and then we had an accountant, because we used to give out grants and we worried that we would make mistakes, so we kept a guy just doing the accounts.

*Q: So you did not have a rule of law team and an economic development team and a governance team?*

A: No. We called in others to come and do the training.

*Q: You covered all those?*

A: We would call in others. There were USAID teams who would do the training, for example, in governance. And so we did not try to train anybody on governance matters.

*Q: This was the RTI group?*

A: Yes.

*Q: How did that work out?*

A: They worked out all right. In some places they were a bit skittish at first. We were still in a war zone and it is really hard to get around in a war zone. If you are going to go to one of our far away cities you have to assume it is going to take you a week and a half to get there. There is going to be a sandstorm or something to stop you. My complaint about them is they did not allocate enough time; they would say, "We will be there in three days." You cannot always say that. Also, it was so hard to travel because of sandstorms. So we had to leave our people in place, deployed forward. Otherwise they would never get back and forth. So we just left them with the units. We had five people embedded with the units up front.

*Q: ...meaning out in different forward operating bases, is that it?*

A: Yes.

*Q: So the PRT was spread out in different locations?*

A: We were.

*Q: That is unusual?*

A: It was unusual, but we had a very big space. Our battle space was the size of South Carolina and so, with the travel, you just could not move. So we were always stranded. So we just decided if we were going to be stranded, we would be stranded where we could work and so we put people out there.

*Q: But you had a movement team, you worked with the military to go everywhere you went?*

A: Yes.

*Q: And was that restrictive?*

A: No, they were very good to us.

*Q: This was the military, not Blackwater?*

A: No, not Blackwater. I flew with Blackwater to and from Baghdad, perhaps twice or three times. It was more fun to fly with the marines, because you are safer with them and they are professionals, they get along with you and they have a lot of equipment. The only problem is you have to sometimes wait, if you have ever flown with the military, they are not very customer friendly. They consider us like packages of goods. They get you where you want to go, but it is not like flying the friendly skies.

*Q: Was security a big problem?*

A: Let me put it this way: security was a constant problem, because we were in a war zone, but beyond that, no. We would go places and I would always try to take off my helmet and my glasses, sunglasses, to talk to people directly. When we went in to engage, we would take off our armor, leave it outside, or leave it in the other room, because we did not want to look like... it is kind of embarrassing if you are there dressed like a Klingon and the other guys are just in ordinary clothes. We did this to make people feel that the situation had improved, and it had actually. When I first got there, I do not think we would have been able to travel the way we did. When I was finished, we were able to travel, freely talk to people in the markets randomly, not with a plan and that was good.

*Q: Did you have a military deputy?*

A: No, I did not.

*Q: Like the others did?*

A: No.

*Q: Did you have a deputy?*

A: I had a deputy. He was an USAID officer.

*Q: This is very different from the others, then. And whom did you report to?*

A: I reported officially to Baghdad.

*Q: OPA?*

A: The OPA director, but we did not report to very many people in general. We were kind of autonomous and that was a very good thing. I am happy they left us alone. I am not complaining about it. We got enough support. We got money. We got things we needed.

But they understood; at least, they behaved as they did that our situation was unique; we had to react to it at the time.

*Q: Did you have a mission statement?*

A: Yes.

*Q: One you wrote, or one was given you?*

A: We wrote it.

*Q: But did you have guidance from OPA?*

A: General guidance and we worked with the Marines on this. We had a joint common plan.

*Q: Some of the program areas: on the governance area, you were working with the Provincial Governor and his staff?*

A: No. The Provincial Governor was in the capital city, Ramadi and there was a PRT that worked with him.

*Q: Another PRT worked with him?*

A: Let me give you a little background. Anbar had three PRTs, three EPRTS, plus the PRT. So the PRT in Ramadi had about 35 people and they did the things you are probably familiar with. They had the specialists and they spent most of their time in the Governance Center. What we did was more like old-fashioned diplomacy. We traveled around, met people and tried to figure out what their problems were. As I look back on my time there, say what did I do that worked the best, the thing that I did that worked the best was nothing special except being seen, just being out there.

*Q: Did you have a district government to talk to?*

A: There were five sub-districts in Anbar and we would talk to many levels of officials.

*Q: And what were you trying to do to help them?*

A: First of all, let me say this, just my opinion, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, if you cannot establish security you got nothing. So the first thing we were trying to do, we worked with the Marines to figure out how they could be made secure. And once that was more or less solved, we tried to help them spend their own money, or get their money from the provincial or national governments. Iraq has a lot of money, but they cannot spend it. They just do not know how, or they do not know how to ask. And so we provided training in bureaucratic execution. A lot of what we did, by the way was, agriculture infrastructure. We tried to explain how that would work, mostly just to share information. They have a lot of the skills they need. It is not an undeveloped country. It is just a badly developed country. So what we were trying to do is connect them. One of the things they told us in the agricultural field, for example, is that they had been isolated for thirty years and so they just needed contacts with people.

Also the big problem for Iraq was that the actual war did not damage the country very much. It is like a myth we see on TV. What damaged the country was thirty years of mismanagement. So people would build things in 1985 and never maintain them. So we were trying to explain to them you cannot just build something and leave it alone for thirty years. It was a big problem, because, for example, there is a big dam in Anbar, called Hadithah dam on the Euphrates and it was built in 1985 and never maintained, evidently, not well maintained, at least.

And so when we got to Iraq, the United States, we had to shut down a lot of things. We got blamed. It was like buying a really old car which has to be taken it to the shop for maintenance the day after you buy it and the previous owner says: "It worked before."

We worked with them to get the oil refineries on line. They had a refinery called K-2; the Marines helped them build it. The Marines are very good about this, because they have reserve units; the reserve units usually have really good skills. And so one of the reserve units had a guy who had run an oil refinery in Louisiana and they put him in charge of helping them build this back up.

*Q: So you were working with a local council?*

A: We worked with the local council and the mayors, if you are talking about the politics. I, in fact, suggested that our EPRT should go away after this year, in western Anbar, because when we first got there, Iraq was disorganized, still a war zone. By the time we left, it was becoming a decent place. Never going to be nice, but decent. But what happened is the old pattern of centralization was reasserting itself. I do not think we could stop that. Money comes from Baghdad and it is not generated locally, as it would be in the United States. And so working at the local level is not that useful in the long run, because the local mayors do not have the kind of authority a mayor does in the United States. Their relationship is more like mine, as a federal government employee, with my boss. They do not have an independent power base.

*Q: ... but you attempted to get more integration of political groups?*

A: We did not deal with party politics. In fact, we stayed away from that as much as possible. It is very difficult, in fact, in that area not to be associated with the politics, because if you are seen with somebody, it has political power. So we would be careful not to do that if we did not want to and that is always hard, because there are a lot of politics going on we do not understand. It is a different culture. But we did not interfere with the politics. They are going to hold elections, we hope, pretty soon and we were staying away from that as much as possible. Our only challenge is, of course, that if we do not help out there will not be security. So we have to make that kind of a balance between arms length and protecting the perimeters.

*Q: But was the district leadership diverse in background or all pretty uniform?*

A: There are all different types. It is a tribal society. There are not many educated people there and the ones that were in positions of power were similarly educated. A lot of former military officers; whether or not we liked the former military officers, they actually could run things. Nobody else really can.

Then we had the tribal leaders, some of whom appeared to be corrupt and we had serious trouble with some of them. Iraq is a different society from ours and by our standards many people are corrupt in Iraq, but some are more corrupt than others. Some are so



corrupt that their own people called them corrupt. A tribal sheik, if he steals like say five or ten per cent, that is considered all right, that is like his fee. If he takes more, then he is a crook. There is some level that the Iraqis think the guy is a crook and we had some of those sorts.

*Q: Did you have to deal with them?*

A: We tried to deal with them, but Iraq is a sovereign country. There was an important local official, for example, a bad guy, we disliked him with a passion, he was actually dangerous to us, we thought. He was causing trouble. But we could not get rid of him, because he had protection up in the high ranks of the Iraqi government. We complained about it, and we would not associate with him ourselves, but the Iraqis have. We helped them build a rule of law, so it can be that we know the guy is a bad guy, we know he is even an insurgent, but we cannot prove it, so there is nothing we can do about that. In the long run, it is a good thing. In the short run it is frustrating. You know the guy is a bad guy, but you cannot build a case. That is a trade off. They have rule of law, they have sovereignty and so we have to live with the system that we helped them create.

*Q: Did you do any rule of law work?*

A: Yes, we did have a Rule of Law expert for a while, and he would bring in others to try to teach Rule of Law. The problem with the Rule of Law is sometimes simple organization. For example, the courthouses did not have file cabinets. So we made grants to put in file cabinets so they could keep track of their records.

A big challenge in Iraq is the lack of property rights. And so we went to places like Hadithah; we went to the deed office and there is just a pile of deeds, a genuine heap and in there is the deed to your property, if you can find it. But as you know if you ever bought property, some people might have other encumbrances on it. You cannot do a title search. It would be impossible. So we bought some file cabinets, so they at least would put them in files, making a title search at least possible, theoretically.

Then we also bought things like furniture for the courthouses, so judges could have chairs to sit on. It is simple things like that that make a big difference.

*Q: Did you work with the judges?*

A: I did not, personally. I met them. We had a person who worked with the judges.

*Q: And with the prisons?*

A: Not so much the prisons. I stayed away from the prisons, because it is depressing. Also, we did not have the expertise. So occasionally we would be in a police station and we would see the prison, but I did not know what was going on and it was not my business. The Marines had experts and the big PRT had experts working on prisons but we did not have the skills to take care of that.

*Q: You said something about a big area of your work was agriculture. What were you trying to do there?*

A: Iraq is a rich agricultural area, the cradle of civilization and they have wonderful soils, but they have been just misused for a long, long time. We always think of agriculture as basic and old fashioned, but it is not. It is one of the most technologically dynamic sectors we have in our economy and in the last thirty years or so, a lot of work has been done on desalinization, on fertilizers, on use of water.

None of this Iraq has and so our goal was to put them in touch with some of the latest methods, so you do not have to ruin your soil by irrigating it. Very simple things, it is just that they had been left out for about thirty or forty years. Other varieties of crops, for example: they still had old-fashioned varieties of crops that were no longer useful. I do not understand agriculture as a specialty, but what they told me is you have to do rotation, things like that and they just were not doing these things.

Another problem was unsolvable by us: the curse of oil. Oil had helped impoverish Anbar, by making it unprofitable to work in agriculture. You could tell that at one time, like fifty years ago, there had been more agriculture than there was today, because they just abandoned some of the farther off fields, because they told us and I think it was right, that you could not get workers to do that work, because people wanted to work for the government, which was not a hard job and paid better.

*Q: But you had an agricultural technician doing this work?*

A: Yes, we had an agronomist. Very lucky to have him, he had studied Iraqi soils in college. It is not as strange as it sounds. Iraq was the first agricultural area, so people study that in college in America. It was interesting; he would go someplace and he would be talking with the local Iraqi guys and they would explain what kind of soils they had and they would be surprised what he knew. It gave him real credibility, because he could talk about it.

What we were trying to do is identify the places that had the best water. The water quality varies greatly as it moves downstream and, for example, if you want to farm in the farthest north in our district it takes about half as much water to grow the same amount of crop as it does downstream in Baghdad, which is near us, because it picks up more salt on the way and so you have to dump more water on the land to keep it from becoming unusable.

*Q: Did he have Iraqi agriculturalists to work with?*

A: He worked with the officials concerned with agriculture; these guys are pretty smart, they knew what they were doing.

*Q: They had field teams to work with.*

A: They did, yes.

*Q: And he linked them with resources in the U.S.?*

A: He did. He talked with people back home and put them in touch with the latest information. One thing we tried to do, just as I was leaving, is, the desert was creeping up on Iraq and so what we wanted to do is set up a string of oases that would have mixed tree crops that would stop the sand. We thought that was a real good idea and we thought we would talk it up, but as we explored it we found out the Iraqis knew about this already and they had had it before in the past.

Iraq is an interesting place, because during the time of the [monarchy], until 1958, it was actually very well run. So they are not trying to develop a new future. They would be better off going back to that pre-dictatorship time, because beginning in the Seventies they started to go to hell. When you reach way back you find the evidence of things that were good ideas that just did not work. We met the people whose job it was to set up these oases and we talked to them about it and they already had a plan. They had trees that could grow in these places and things like that and they told us they just needed x amount of money and we told them, "Well, you have to get it from your government. We can add expertise." So we put them in touch with Texas A&M so they could work on joint projects.

*Q: Was there a USAID agriculture program there, too?*

A: There was. We did not do much with them. Again, we had the big PRT in Ramadi that does the provincial stuff and we were doing more of the local stuff.

*Q: And what would you say is your main accomplishment in the agricultural area?*

A: We put people in touch. I was only there one year. Of course, you cannot raise anything in a year. It is one harvest. So I think that we helped them understand, give them hope to build up the trees and the soils. It is a longer-term investment. It is like the rooster taking credit for the sunrise. The Iraqis are doing a lot of stuff. We went there and we helped them a little bit. We told them they were not alone in this.

We talked a lot about, for example, the Dust Bowl in the United States in the 1930's and so we would go someplace, we would talk to the people and say we had this same problem or a similar problem and we solved it in these ways and you can, too.

It is true that there is more dust in Iraq than there should be. It does not really need that much dust. It is an ecological problem; it is not a climate problem.

The second thing that we did that I think was very good and it is going to sound funny but we did not pay to feed sheep. Let me explain what I mean: there are too many sheep in Anbar, probably about a third too many, at least. They are overrunning the range,

destroying the grass. And what happens is, in Iraq, as I understand it, western Iraq, there is one year of good rain and then there are five or six years of drought. That is how the system works. When they have the good year they call that normal and when they have the five years of drought they claim it is abnormal. It is a human nature thing. During the “abnormal” years, what they call abnormal, they want somebody to subsidize food for the sheep and we were asked to do that and we turned it down, because we thought it would just increase the problem. It was not a solution.

I was telling my agriculture guy, “If they make a movie about us, we are the bad guys” for letting the sheep die. But it was a sustainable solution. We are always looking for sustainable solutions. And feeding the sheep for a couple of weeks is not sustainable. They needed to cull their herd and we explained how to do that and some of the guys did it, they understood it, others did not.

There is a problem with the tragedy of the commons, because if you cull your herd and your neighbor does not, he eats all your grass. It is a problem that has been going on for about four thousand years. But we did not contribute to the problem. We tried to work in our little way towards the solution, although it was hard, hard to sell and hard to take.

*Q: Was there something else in the agricultural area that was significant?*

A: Just the general idea of putting agriculture back into place, the irrigation networks. We helped with some of the irrigation networks.

*Q: You did a lot of rebuilding of irrigation systems?*

A: We did not rebuild much at all. The Iraqis do it. I guess if we are trying to be nice to ourselves we are like viruses. We infect them and help them get to something they would not otherwise do. We did not build. We helped them build. In fact, one of the things that we tried very hard to do is not do things for them. For example, we would get a request, they would say, “We need to have this rebuilt.” And we would say, “You guys can find the money, you can do the work and we will help with some of the plans or we’ will give you a little bit of money to finish this or that.”

We were not making just grants to build things. Even when we could, even when we thought we should, we did not, because we wanted the Iraqis to do it. Everybody always quotes Lawrence of Arabia, who said that, “The Arab doing it badly is better than you doing it perfectly” and I believe that is true, because if we build things and he or she do not use it or that cannot use it. I will give you an interesting example.

When I first went there we were interested in solar energy and wind energy, because that is cool, right? It is a stupid idea in Iraq, because the Iraqis will not maintain it. They just do not have the infrastructure at this time to take care of that kind of stuff. So we built solar power and it got all dusty and stopped working. And you go someplace and people say, “We do not have any electricity.” We would say, “What about the solar?” It is too hard to make it work.” So the technology is inappropriate for Iraq at this time, although

it sounds like a good idea and it sells real well in America. If you come back here and talk about that everybody loves you. It will work; I think it will. In five years it will probably be appropriate. But now, it is not. The time is not right for it.

*Q: Apart from agriculture, were there other sector areas where you made a significant impact?*

A: I think we did make an impact in the rule of law, just putting people in touch again. Let put it this way: when I arrived in Iraq western Anbar was very bad. When I left, it was much, much better. Now it is easy for me to claim, oh, yes, that was I, we did that. The marines did a lot. We did some. The Iraqis did the most. They built their things back. A lot of it would have happened anyway, but we facilitated it by explaining things, by being there, by coaching, by giving hope. That is the intangible. We cannot take credit for this turnaround in Iraq. I got there in late 2007 at the time we started to win. I was lucky to land at the time we started to win the war. And so it looks good for our record, to say, "Yes, we got there and started to win." But those conditions had been in place. They were moving already.

Now I think that there were times when we did little things to help. I will give you a concrete example. It is just a small thing, but it is significant: we had a contractor and one of the local leaders and they were trying to kill each other, literally shooting at each other's men. And so we wanted to stop this, because it is bad to have violence. And so we brought them together, unwillingly, they were complaining but the Marines had the authority to do it. We just talked to them, "What is going on here? Why are you guys trying to kill each other?" And at first they were just obstinate and we sat for a long time, a couple hours and finally they started to talk.

It turned out there was no real problem. What happened was, the contractor had come to town a couple times and not stopped in to see the local leader. Now I do not know how long the situation held, I left two months after this meeting. But for two months there was no killing going on between these two guys and there would have been without us.

And so these are things you do a lot of; and each of them is an interesting story, but cumulatively they make a difference and only we could have stood between those two guys. No other authority could have brought them together with the force of the Marines and the moral suasion of the diplomacy.

*Q: How would you describe your relationship with the Iraqis, the officials and the non-officials?*

A: We got along pretty well. It is hard to say. It is a different culture. They seem to like us a lot. Now you might say, "Well, they are just being nice to you when you are there." Maybe that is true. I do not know. But every place we went, with few exceptions, we were greeted, people were happy to see us, they treated us very well and we tried to reciprocate when we could.

I used to go in the market place; we would do market walks and we would just walk down the street, literally. I stopped to talk to people and they would offer us tea and things like that. They seemed generally happy to see us. They would thank us for saving their lives and they would tell us stories about the old days, days like two months before when it was too dangerous to go out. I tried not to build up too many expectations. We were not going to make this place into a paradise.

One thing we did very well near the end, we started to get Iraqi money and buy meals in town and eat right there, for example, go to the falafel stand and buy some falafels and eat them. People gather around to watch. It showed confidence in them. That was one of the important things we did, confidence building.

*Q: You worked with them on expenditures, how to program and budget the money?*

A: Yes, my team did, not me. What I would do is I would travel around and try to see what is going on. The various contractors would be training. We would facilitate that. A lot of people working there, again, we were just one part of it.

The Marines had all sorts of projects going on. They had ninety people working on civil affairs. They were building things. We had the Army Corps of Engineers. We had USAID projects. And, of course, the Iraqis had their projects.

*Q: So it was a big operation.*

A: Yes and we were just a small part of it.

*Q: Did you have a public affairs program?*

A: No.

*Q: Some of the others did.*

A: There was no media really in our area. We would talk to people all the time and I would talk to any American media that would come but they rarely came. Until Anbar got to be relatively safe, they stopped showing up. We had perhaps five people from various media organizations. In fact that is one of the things that I complain about, because Americans have entirely the wrong impression of western Anbar. It is a 2006 impression. They showed all the terrible things and then they stopped coming, so people think it is still like that. I had trouble explaining to people. They would say, "You went out there; they must have hated you. They must have tried to kill you." I would say, "No, they were very nice." I would go out there; we would talk to them and we would be among them. If someone wanted to kill me they could have. So we trusted them, to be safe with them. It is not like it was in 2006, when you would not dare do that.

*Q: Did you think the population was aware of the PRT and what it was there for?*

A: I do not think they were aware of what it was there for. I think that a lot of the population was aware of it, because we were seen and we were kind of a curiosity and so I think that people knew we were there. I do not think they knew what it was there for. They would see that we were helping with agriculture, something like that, but most of the people had a cynical attitude towards government, in general; they probably thought we were just another sort of an official.

But we were locally famous. People would recognize us. I am relatively tall and I am bald, so I take off my helmet, I am easy to see. My agricultural guy is a little taller than I am, he is also bald and we look alike in some ways. People got to recognize us as the non-military Americans. We would walk in the marketplace; we would be seen.

About the time I was leaving we went to Hadithah and we were talking to the police chief in Hadithah, along with the Marines. I had met the police chief on a couple of occasions, I did not know him very well and the Marine did not know that I knew the police chief and so he started to introduce me. And he said, "Oh, everybody knows him! He walks in our markets!"

*Q: Did you have a translator?*

A: Yes, we had translators.

*Q: And how well did they work?*

A: We had some good and some bad. I had some very good ones and then some that were not very good at all. Sometimes you would be talking to somebody and you would realize that he could not be saying what the translator is saying he is saying, it just does not make any sense and this guy looks like a smart guy and he could not be saying these stupid things. And you look at him and he is thinking the same thing about you.

I cannot speak any Arabic and that bothered me a little, but I would get rid of the translators that were not good. If I could, I would put them to other duties. But we had a couple very good ones and some that were just not as good.

*Q: Did you have any of BBAs (Bilingual-Bicultural Advisors)?*

A: Yes, BBAs are not so successful, because the BBAs, they do the work of a translator sometimes, but a lot of time, at least in my experience, I cannot speak for the whole country, but you get a BBA, get somebody who has left Iraq when he is 13 years old fifty years ago, he knows no more about Iraq than I do, but, unfortunately, thinks he knows more because he was born there. I was born in Wisconsin. If you asked me to go back there and talk about the politics, I cannot do it.

Americans think, if a guy is from the country he must know it, but it is not true. You are an American. I do not know if you have ever been to Idaho. If they shipped you there, how would you do? We overemphasized that aspect of it.

*Q: They were not as helpful as you liked?*

A: No, they were not. They were not local. A guy comes from, say, Baghdad, he comes up to Anbar; he is not from there.

*Q: What kind of resources did you have? Did you have a large amount of money or did you have very little?*

A: We had grant money we could give and I could on my own signature assign up to \$25,000.

*Q: Was this Commander's Economic Reconstruction Program (CERP) money?*

A: No, CERP was what the Marines had. I had Quick Reaction Funds (QRF) and QRF was great at first, well, it was great the whole time, except what happened was, we realized we could not spend it as fast as we thought, because Iraq is a cash economy and so we had to pay with cash, we could not replenish our money fast enough. So we would just spend about \$130,000 a month, which is still big money, but no more. Although we were allowed to, we could not physically do it, because we could not replenish it quickly enough.

*Q: Because of the implementation of the projects?*

A: No, because of the fact we could not move the money; we could not move the money from Baghdad to al Asad.

*Q: Just the physical movement of the cash?*

A: The physical movement of cash, which turned out to be all right, because you probably should not be spending that much money, anyway.

*Q: What was it mostly spent on?*

A: For example, the Marines and Iraqis built a sewage plant and it was done, it was ready to go, but the pipes were clogged and it was too small an amount of money for anybody to get it pumped out; it was like seven thousand dollars. And so we could just sign the papers, send it over there and it could be done. So the plant that was worth a million dollars was not working because of a thousand dollars and we could make it work.

The same thing with the K-2 oil refinery I mentioned, for example. There are little things you just have to do, such as they need some kind of piece of machinery or some kind of a patch and it is too small a thing or too precise for a big grant and nobody has it.

It is funny, you could probably get three hundred thousand dollars and you cannot get thirty dollars. So we were able to do these kind of precise things. Water purification, for



example, a little village, its pump broke down, we fixed it. Most of our grants were about ten thousand dollars, not more. We tried not to do the big projects. That was not our business.

One thing I am proud of is self-restraint, because there are so many things you think you could have done that I realized it would have been bad. And so we stayed away from trying to rejuvenate jobs, for example. We cannot create jobs.

*Q: Were there any businesses that you helped develop, apart from the oil?*

A: Let me give you an example, fishing. The key to fishing is ice. Now you would not know that, but it is, because if you do not have ice you cannot sell fish. And so when they lifted restrictions on Euphrates fishing, the Marines did, for security reasons, we thought the fishermen would come back, but they did not. And so we tried to figure out what was going on, are they still afraid of terrorists and things like that? It turns out that the ice factory had stopped working and so they could not put their fish on ice, so they could not sell their fish. So we helped with a small grant to get the ice machine fixed. And when the ice machine was fixed the fishing industry returned. It was the weak link.

The effectiveness of our PRT had to do with the fact that we were close to the ground and we could see these links, because when we were talking about reviving the fishing industry at the time, it was just simply the lack ice and the only reason we knew about that is because we were near the ground.

We tried to set up business associations in a couple of cities and helped them with grants to buy furniture and things like that. They worked all right. It depends on whether the local society could handle it and so they had business associations that worked all right in Hadithah and Anah and al Qa'im and they probably would work without us. We helped them a little bit. We set up a couple of others and they just did not work. What some of the associations wanted were subsidies, to have a job. So when I figured that out, if I figured it out, we stopped giving them money.

*Q: What about employment? Did you have any employment generation work?*

A: Only that some of the businesses would help with employment. The Marines at first were doing things like paying people to clean the streets, things like that. It soaks up some of the unemployment, but it is not a sustainable solution. Sometimes you are trying to soak up unemployment just so you can get the terrorists off the streets, or the potential terrorists off the streets and that really was not our business, so much. The Marines did some of that work.

We were trying to build things that would last until the next year, or the year after that, like ice for the fishermen. When the fishermen have ice, they can fish. People want fish, they can buy fish; there were fish in the market. It creates work. The idea that you create a job; that was not what I thought would work.

*Q: Do you think the PRT helped reduce the insurgency?*

A: Our PRT? Yes, I do, because the confidence building was important; the fact that we were seen with people. A lot of insurgency is psychological. There is a tipping point where people stop supporting the insurgency. Most people do not care either way; they do not want to take a side because they do not want to get killed. And so they wait and see whom they think is going to win and as long as they think the insurgents are going to win they stay with them. When they see civilians walking around, we tried to act casual, at least. Now the insurgency is finished. It moves to the terrorist stage, which will not go away for a long time, but it is no longer an existential threat to the government of Iraq and we helped with that. The Marines thought we did.

*Q: Are there any areas important to you that we have not touched on?*

A: If people ask you what you do in a PRT, it is hard to say. My opinion on this is that success depends mostly on sustained effort. So it is not possible to say this is a golden thing I did and if you just do this same thing you will be successful, because the situation in my PRT changed radically from the time I arrived to the time I left. I could have the best advice in the world in 2007 and it would have been useless in 2008.

And so being adaptive, being persistent and being close to the people, talk to the people, do not try to understand it with charts and graphs, go there and talk to them. You have to be not afraid. Some people are just afraid to go out. They think they are going to get hurt or killed and you could, but it is not a big chance. You just have to go out there and you have to hope it does not happen, but if you are not out there, you cannot do the job. You cannot run these PRTs from a distance.

The Marines talk about the five thousand mile screwdriver, where you are trying to micromanage. It cannot be done. You have to go out there and talk to people and you are going to make some mistakes, but if you are flexible you will be all right. Be adaptive, do what has to be done when it has to be done.

*Q: So what would you say was the overall achievement of the PRT?*

A: To the extent that we helped calm western Anbar, I think we implemented some things in agriculture that will in the future help. The little trees that we helped plant will get to be big trees in thirty years. We did help with the rebuilding of the refinery, which to some extent solved part of the fuel problem. We helped with some of the infrastructure. We established some peace, as I mentioned, between these two guys, for example. We just helped build confidence.

*Q: Did you feel you left a more effective local government operation?*

A: Yes, I think we did, and again, with just mentoring. It is hard to say. Our results were very good by objective standards. I do not think it would have been as good without us. Every day we were out there trying to do things. We traveled all the time. We were

among the Iraqi people. They got to see us. They got to know us and they got to know that we were not trying to steal their goods.

*Q: What would you think was some aspect that would be sustained?*

A: After we leave I hope it takes care of itself. The sustainable part is the connections you build, the people you have trained. Our PRT caused people to be trained in various activities. We talked to them about how government should work. We planted the trees; we saved some lives and I guess that is good enough. A lot depends on the bigger picture. If Iraq, in general, goes to hell, our work will be for naught. But it will contribute to that not happening.

*Q: As you look over the whole experience there, what would you say were the two or three major lessons that you would pass on to somebody else from your experience?*

A: I think I said them: be there. There is no substitute to being there. Do not hunker down in your camp.

*Q: ... be out with the people?*

A: Go with the people, yes and assume that they like you and like them back. Even if they are, do not treat them like the enemy; do not treat them like children. The people of Iraq, the people of every country in the world, they are pretty smart in many ways, they adapt to their local society. Just because we do not understand it does not mean that it is wrong and it also does not mean, however, that you have to just take what there is.

Our job is to make changes. But you have to understand them before you can make yourself understood by them and you can only do that by being among them. You cannot do it by reading books. You cannot do it by hunkering down. And you cannot do it by staying safe, either physically or intellectually. You have to take these risks.

*Q: What about running a PRT, which is what you were doing?*

A: The thing I would say that I fixed right away, as soon as I could, was make sure you have the finances in firm hands, because the only thing you can really screw up badly in a PRT is money. Because a lot of money is coming in, a lot of money is going out and if your inclination is to be loose with this, to try to be opportunistic, you cannot do that. We had an accountant and he watched the money. We did not have one at first; I got one assigned there. I kept him doing only that. Do not let him do other work. Do not have a part time guy. You have to keep track of that money, because that is where you are going to mess up.

So you have to have this simultaneously, you have to have loose leadership of being opportunistic in the outside environment and a strong, tight leadership of the actual money.

*Q: How about relationship with the military?*

A: The military, we got along real fine. I do not know the reason for that. It was not the case everywhere, in all the PRTs.

We were lucky in al Asad, because we were very primitive. We lived in trailers. None of them had indoor plumbing. In some places, some of them had plumbing, others did not and so that made people mad. So this way, nobody lived better than anybody else. I lived in the same place that the colonel lived in, like everybody else.

And you have to be part of it. For example, the Army, the Marines, cannot drink any beer. And there was some discussion that we could and I told my staff that no; we are never going to drink any beer when the Marines could not drink beer. We did what they did and we did not make that distinction. I did not allow anybody to make trouble about it. I told them I would send them home if I saw them drinking. I do not know if I could have done that, but they thought I could, so it worked.

But you cannot allow yourself to be different. I will give you another example: when I first got there, they have a thing they call "River City Charlie," when a Marine gets killed, they shut off communications with the United States so that nobody can call the parents before they have been officially notified. It usually lasts only twelve hours.

Our telephones still work and one of my guys, I walked in and he is talking on the phone. I did not pay much attention to it, until I realized that he was doing it in front of the Marines and I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "We can call." I said, "No, we cannot! If it is an emergency you can, but you are not going to just do that in front of these poor guys." That was important to do that. We cannot be different.

*Q: Did they provide your logistics support?*

A: They did and we traveled with them. We would go where they wanted us to go, too. For example, the Marine Colonel asked me to go to a place in the middle of nowhere, literally, because one of the local sheiks wanted help with his sheep. So I brought my agricultural guy, went down there and it was a lot of trouble but we did it for them and they were grateful. Let me say this: we did not really do anything. It was mostly just that we went down there. The goal was the meeting.

*Q: Did you have a problem with turnover in staff?*

A: I did sometimes. Nobody stays very long, myself included and we were on vacation a lot. So that is a problem.

*Q: And what about the leave issue? I gather the military and you have different leave policies.*

A: We have a lot more leave. That one we could not really solve. I tried to make the joke about it a little bit. That is a sore point that would not be solved. But we tried to joke about it. I said to the Marines “We are wimps. We are not tough, like you. We have to get out of here.” It did not really work, but it was the best I could do.

*Q: Any other lessons about running an operation like that?*

A: Do not send somebody, who does not want to be there. Nobody wants to be there, but do not send people who do not volunteer. If you are forced to do that, you will mess it up.

Do not send people who are just doing it for their career goals. You do not necessarily have to send someone who is an expert on the area. The management and the social thing are more important than the precise expertise, in my opinion.

*Q: Overall, would you say the PRTs are a good idea?*

A: Yes, ours worked very well. Overall they are. They are not managed properly in many ways. We have not been properly preparing people. We are sending people I think out there that either do not want to go or they are not prepared to go. We are getting better now.

*Q: They did not have any training or orientation?*

A: You cannot really be trained so much to do some of these things. You just have to have the right attitude. You want to have an experienced person who has done some things on his own already. What I thought very useful in my PRT was, as I mentioned [in my private activities in the U.S.] I have worked with contractors and had the knowledge of that. If you are a political officer, a reporting officer, you do not know anything about that and so you are not any use in a PRT. And you are going to get real dirty and things like that, by the way. It is a tough life and you cannot be complaining about that.

*Q: Did you have any training before you went out?*

A: I had the short training that the State Department gives, three weeks.

*Q: What was your background that gave you these skills to run a PRT?*

A: I was a Public Affairs Officer and so I ran a branch post in Brazil and a branch post in Poland and they are not dangerous like the PRT but they are very similar, you are among the people. And as I mentioned, forestry. I knew some things about how things work, or do not.

*Q: Did you have to do a lot of reporting to Baghdad?*

A: I did not. I just did not do some things. I would submit a weekly report where I included everything we had to talk about.

*Q: Did you get any response from your reports?*

A: My written reports were very popular. Baghdad not so much, but other people would send me things. I go out to Quantico now to do some talks and people have read those reports. So people will watch you. I tried to write about how things connected, not just “We did x, y or z” and so I think that is why they were useful.

*Q: Anything else we have not touched on?*

A: I have a blog on that. You can look at it if you want to.

*Q: Thanks for interview*