United States Institute of Peace
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Iraq PRT Experience Project

INTERVIEW #70

Interviewed by: Mehmed Ali
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Executive Summary

Interviewee has a university degree in agriculture and has three decades of experience in soil conservation, natural resources conservation and something called range conservation, which is a discipline that helps ranchers (mostly in the western U.S.) manage their livestock and improve their property for livestock enterprises.

He came to Iraq as a contract employee from the US Department of Agriculture. He has had experience in two PRTs. He describes his first two months in country in this way: "Salah ad dan province and FOB Speicher, when I got arrived there was already one ag advisor and then another came in about a week after me. So there were three of us for most of that time and we were going out with mostly the provincial officials at Tikrit and the university folks and working with those guys, but mostly at the provincial level, not the farmers on the ground, so to speak. So that was kind of a weird use of manpower, to have three ag advisors just engaging provincial officials.

So they reached a point where they wanted two of us to go away and do something else. And so two of us got assigned to satellites, two different satellites.

Mine was a new satellite. Satellite Tuz at FOB Bernstein, which was brand new."

His experience in the satellite was not positive. "The mission of the satellite, well, it was screwed up from the get-go, because they had two people there: me, the ag advisor and another person who was the business development advisor and they didn't need either of those people in that satellite. Since we got there, early in the year, the team leader at Speicher decided that the satellite should be manned by a governance advisor and an economic development advisor and I and the other person were not either of those. So we were there, even in their vision or their plan, call it bottom-up staffing plan, we didn't fit the picture at all.

And so I assumed that we'd be replaced and that we'd be reassigned and then they'd come up with the people they needed to man this satellite. But they didn't want to do that. They got rid of the other person after which they were happy to have one warm body, myself, to be there.

I felt like they just wanted to be able to say they had a satellite manned and staffed, regardless of the fact that they wanted a governance person and being a USDA employee I didn't want to step that far out of my lane. I cannot do that. I have to do agriculture work, period.

So I attended a lot of meetings and I did some reports that in a general way covered governance and economic development stuff, but the PRT guys didn't give a damn what I did, as long as I stayed there and didn't make waves and didn't fuss too much. So it was a real bad use of my time."

The interviewee described several intractable Iraqi agricultural problems, including multi-year drought and the fact that there are "2 to 3 times" more sheep than they have forage for.

The interviewee felt that more thought should be given to how to work effectively in Iraq's governmental infrastructure: "It's still hard for me to believe the government of Iraq's structure, their government organization. After being here a year, it still absolutely baffles me. No wonder these people are so screwed up. Their system is horrible."

"Traditionally it was top-down and they haven't overcome that yet and the local Iraqis I deal with are all afraid to talk to their superiors. That's an overwhelming problem. They want me to do it. They want me to go to Baghdad and fight their battles for them."

"Also, at three different places, now, the farmers, the local Iraqis, all think the U.S. government has replaced the government of Iraq for all things that they used to get and they claim they used to get almost everything, from their food through the public distribution system, through their agriculture stuff, every kind of agriculture you can think of: feed, seed, fertilizer, water, tractors, everything was provided, they say, by the government of Iraq."

"If you look at the numbers, three thousand acres and 250 farmers, the average farm there is twelve acres. There is no way those farms are ever going to make it. Those aren't real farms. Those are like hobby farms. These aren't very economically defensible farms. Every one of the farmers works in town. Every one of them is either a Son of Iraq or they work in the market, selling produce."

"We're not doing well in our administration of the PRT business and we are actually holding Iraqis back. Again, I'm speaking in the agricultural arena. Our presence here is holding them back. If we stepped out of the ag picture they'd recover faster without us. And the reason I say this is that a lot of these guys have money. They could buy their own seed or tractor or fertilizer, but they don't think they're supposed to, so they're just sitting back asking us to do this."

"If we simply weren't here they would take what the government of Iraq gives them but they would take their cash out of their pocket and carry on with business and grow their

vegetables or their wheat or their sheep or whatever much more efficiently. But they're holding back because they know we're going to come up with the money."

Interview

Q: What brought you to Iraq?

A: Oh, USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, was advertising about every six months for volunteers to come here. So I talked to other people. I have another colleague that had done this in Afghanistan in '06, for I believe a four-month assignment. I heard his whole presentation following his experience and so it sounded like this should be a lot of fun and I thought pretty easy.

Q: Tell us a little bit about the general background of your specific PRT: location, size, staffing, that kind of stuff.

A: I've actually been in two. I started in Salah ad dan province at FOB (Forward Operating Base) Speicher near Tikrit and after two months they decided they wanted to assign me to satellite Tuz, which is FOB Bernstein and I spent eight months there.

And then I reached a point there where I really couldn't get out and do any work with the local nationals anymore, because of the change in the mission, they were closing that FOB and what that does it sort of puts the military into a wrap-up mode, so they're strictly attempting to tie up their projects and they're going to do mostly military missions, no longer the stuff that would support PRTs, at least an agriculture advisor, very effectively.

So I asked to be reassigned or sent home early. So with seven weeks to go I was reassigned to a Baghdad EPRT, one which is **i**n Rasheed district.

Q: So tell us, maybe you can break down your experiences, essentially you've been at three locations. So why don't you tell us about your first two months and your experience with that?

A: Salah ad dan province and FOB Speicher, when I got there there was already one ag advisor and then another came in about a week after me. So there was three of us there for most of that time and we were going out with mostly the provincial officials at Tikrit and the university folks and working with those guys, but mostly at the provincial level, not the farmers on the ground, so to speak. So that was kind of a weird use of manpower, to have three ag advisors just engaging provincial officials.

So they reached a point where they wanted two of us to go away and do something else. And so two of us got assigned to satellites, two different satellites.

Mine was a new satellite. Satellite Tuz at FOB Bernstein was brand new. I got there December 2nd. They did bring another economic business development advisor with me. He was also new to the country, at least as a PRT advisor he was new.

Anyway, the two of us show up there December 2nd after being promised they were going to be ready for us and there were weeks of emails and telephone conversations about what we needed, office space, computers, living accommodations. And when we get there absolutely nothing was ready for us.

So we have to fight our own battle after we got there, which took weeks, by the way, to get set up with all the stuff we needed. Even things like an office space, the office they gave us initially was an empty room: "Here's your office!" We literally had not a desk or chair to sit in, much less internet connection or telephone service.

The problem was higher ranking military guys like the executive officer would just assign us an NCO, just telling them give us what we needed and of course it wasn't a high priority on their list, so they seemed to drag their feet, they didn't want to do it. Essentially everything they gave us, they had to take away from a soldier at FOB Bernstein and FOB Bernstein was small, at the time they had about 550 personnel there. Word got out pretty quickly that they gave us two desks they took away from soldiers. And then they jammed us into dry (*i.e.* without running water for sanitation) quarters, that's all they had available but they evicted two soldiers, lieutenants, from this dry space. So pretty quickly, we were not very well appreciated on that FOB, because every damned thing we got was taken away from a soldier.

Q: And they couldn't get other resources from other commands?

A: Sure they could. They just didn't. Eventually we had to buy our own desks and chairs through the PRT at Speicher. That took about three or four months to go through the procurement process and buy simple things like desks and chairs. We can't just go out and buy it on a local market tomorrow. For some reason you've gotta go through this procurement process and buy this local furniture and chairs, all of which is absolutely horrible crap, usually comes out of the box busted. But that's what we got.

Q: So in the time before you could get a computer up and running, or anything like that, or this time that you're trying to get furniture, what were you guys doing on a daily basis?

A: Mostly moping around talking to each other and trying to decide if we're really gonna be able to make this satellite Tuz work, given what we're up against. My partner at the time and I just decided that we were going to continue to try to make this damned thing work, even if we thought the odds were against us.

Eventually we did get internet. They made us share one internet line. Commercial internet was what we needed and we eventually got it, but in the army's world commercial internet is absolutely taboo. It's like their prohibition against pornography

and gambling on computers and stuff. They view soldiers and commercial internet as a bad mix, so they don't want soldiers to get their hot little hands on commercial internet. They're just allowed to do that nonsense at the MWR that doesn't work very good, the internet cafe stuff.

So we got a computer internet line. I believe the army actually paid of this five-line system, some sort of a small satellite. So they gave us one of those five lines. Literally they didn't allow us to split it, but we split it with a switch, so we both had connectivity but, again, in the army's world a switch is illegal, taboo, you can't do that. But we did it anyway.

So the moral of the story is, the army did provide a five-line internet satellite, four of which were commandeered by the army, but they paid for it, so we really didn't have any issue with that. Our system did work and it worked fairly well, until they continued to split too many lines on it. And incidentally in June somebody at the army corps level decided, they were looking at the bills for FOB Bernstein and they saw that bill for commercial internet service there, they just decided we do not need commercial internet at Bernstein, so they quit paying our bill and turned it off.

So my last six or seven weeks there, I had no internet, except for the MWR, which of course is not authorized for work purposes and it's too slow, anyway. So if I wanted to do simple emails, I had to literally borrow a soldier's computer and use their computer and stuff to log in and take care of the minimum stuff I had to do. So I haven't had internet, really functioning internet, the last three months I've been in Iraq.

Q: So there was you and and the other person as ag people, or was he

A: No, the other person was a business development specialist. I was the only ag person.

Q: Okay and who else, civilian people, connected with the PRT?

A: No one. And then this other person was terminated. So then I was by myself for the next four months.

Q: So during this time, what was your actual chain of command?

A: I chain of command was, picture yourself sitting on a rock somewhere, you can't see the rest of the world, you don't have any colleagues, you're just sitting on this rock, trying to do your job. The chain of command was theoretically Speicher.

Q: So the military was your chain of command?

A: Well, yeah, everything I did had to go through the local military and there's been about three changes of command on FOB Bernstein during this time. And the key here

is they teamed us up with a civil affairs, which is usually a team of soldiers. On a small FOB like that it's gonna be four or five soldiers that comprise the entire civil affairs team.

So we were considered joined at the hip. I didn't do anything without them and they did most things with me in attendance. There were some things that were strictly army stuff that I did not participate in. But if they were doing their civil affairs kind of work I would try to go out and do agriculture assessment work, always. We'd get out maybe four or five times a week for a period of time that was pretty good, actually, engaging with the farmers.

Q: How would you describe the mission of this satellite, essentially?

A: The mission of the satellite, well, it was screwed up from the get-go, because they had two people there: me, the ag advisor and the other person, the business development advisor, and they didn't need either of those people in that satellite. Since we got there, I think the team leader at Speicher decided that the satellite should be manned by a governance advisor and an economic development advisor and I and the other person were not either of those. So we were there, even in their vision or their plan, call it bottom-up staffing plan, we didn't fit the picture at all.

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Q: How'd you describe the PRT's relationship with the Office of Provincial Affairs, from your horizon?

A: We almost never engaged with OPA. It's usually a top-down kind of thing, some directive or instructions which we find, I know some of it's necessary, but some of it's downright obnoxious. Matter of fact, I'm here to go home, right, I'm here for my last two days or so in Iraq right now and yesterday I went to OPA, thinking that I was gonna be out-processed in some form or fashion.

Well, someone took my cell phone and my State Department email encryption device and that was it. I wasn't asked for any information, I didn't sign anything. Matter of fact, I

had to sign for that stuff and they never signed it back out to themselves. So I just handed it to them and walked out the door. It's all they wanted.

So OPA's got some serious, serious problems.

Q: So nobody came to you to debrief you and say, "What did you work on? What are the projects outstanding?"

A: No.

Q: None of that?

A: No, not at all. USDA people do. I do a monthly report to those guys and of course I do a consultation visit every time I go on R&R, approximately every eighty days or so.

So the last seven weeks I was at Embedded PRT One, which is Rasheed, out of Baghdad and they did want me to leave a report of my accomplishments and whatever information that I gathered in the seven weeks I was there. So I did all that, put it on the computer and I made sure key people had certain reports electronically before I left.

Q: So you had little connection, I guess, with OPA. Did you have any relationship with the U.S. embassy itself?

A: Not when I was at Bernstein, *per se*. Any time I'm here in Baghdad**,** I could have and I did if I had some questions. We do have a PRT ag liaison here and he's the first person to go to for help and he does an excellent job. The embassy folks, I knew most of them when I got here a year ago. We were introduced during orientation. Most of those folks have now left.

So the guys that are here now I just see at meetings occasionally. I don't really think they want to be bothered by the likes of me with questions. So we just lean on the liaison officer to help us out and he does a very good job.

Q: Now, is he a USDA employee?

A: He's a detailee from the Cooperative Extension Service, which is technically federal, state and county employed, if you can imagine that. It's a three-way merger. He's an extension service specialist in Colorado.

Q: Is there a USDA presence here in Baghdad, aside from you as an individual? Is there an office?

A: Well, there's the liaison officer, who's on detail. For this assignment, he's a USDA Foreign Ag Service person, just like I am, through the State Department. And there's the chancery folks, there's a USDA chancery group in Baghdad and there's a team of specialists there, maybe, I suppose eight people.

Q: Did you have much interaction with them over the course of the time that you were here?

A: Not a whole lot. I did some emails when I needed their help and they would respond. I reealize I'm in such a remote location. It's very difficult to get to Baghdad and I wouldn't come here for just a simple meeting. It had to be a very important endeavor to go through the many, many days of travel to get here.

Q: Really? How long would it take you to get here, if you came for a meeting?

A: From Bernstein, I can't come direct, 'cause Bernstein is off the flight path. From Bernstein I can only predictively go to Warrior, which is Kirkuk, FOB Warrior. So I get there and normally I'm relegated to "Space A" status, space available and depending on the weather, it might take you two to twelve days to get out. Normally it would take me three or four days.

My last two times through there, for some reason this whole Space A business had gotten to where civilians almost don't get on. For some reason they prioritize personnel in uniform and I've been sitting there three days on my last trip this way and could not get a Space A on a helicopter. I thought I'd never get out and then I stumbled on to a space available by fixed wing aircraft, which normally has a lot more seats.

So what that means is I had to change my travel plans. I couldn't go to Speicher to do any kind of exit processing with my Speicher superiors. So I just came directly to and went on to my new assignment, which is Rasheed district.

Traveling has gotten phenomenonly worse since I've been here, talking about out in the outlying areas.

Q: What would you attribute that to?

A: I don't know. I could be just fewer air assets available. I don't know. Sometimes it's bad weather and they can't fly for two or three days. We all go through that kind of stuff, but this last time, when I got snagged up at Warrior for three days, it wasn't bad weather. They just wouldn't give me a seat. No matter how long you've been there, no matter what your number or position is on the sign-up sheet for space available, you can be number one and they're gonna look at the list and pick the soldiers to get on the bird first and the civilians just gotta sit there and wait indefinitely.

Q: Wow. So you've had your share of dust storms?

A: Oh, yeah. You bet.

Q: And some people say that the dust storms are really horrendous this last year or two, because of lack of agricultural development. Do you have any opinion on that?

A: I certainly do. The dust storms in Iraq were about ninety per cent caused by their poor management practices on their farms. They basically farm a lot more land in Iraq than they have water to irrigate, or other resources to grow crops on.

So what made this problem so bad this past year was in '07 there was a severe drought and I would say we got about 25 per cent of normal rainfall, which isn't a big deal in Baghdad, 'cause Baghdad's about a three-inch rainfall zone. So if it doesn't rain very much in Baghdad it shouldn't be an issue, but this is geographically a very small part of Iraq. You fly from here to Speicher and on to Warrior and anywhere near Tuz and you'll see millions of acres that have been farmed.

Because of the socialist system, these guys, it's like playing the lottery, these guys get a tractor and fuel and seed and they have farmed a lot more acres than they're authorized to do by the government of Iraq. The government doesn't really care if they farm more land, but they're authorized so many acres and these guys just farm a little extra, hoping to hit a cash cow. If it rains, they're gonna make a crop.

I'm talking about up north, where it's a higher rainfall zone. Tuz was around eleven inches of rainfall. So you could actually farm without irrigation there in most years and make a crop yield of maybe 30 to 35 bushels of wheat.

The recent yield they've been producing in much of that area under irrigation is 37 bushels per acre, which is absolutely horrendous, bad. If you look at the seed and fertilizer and water that Iraq provides their farmers, it's like they're planning for failure.

Q: Why is that?

A: They're not giving them enough of any of these things they need, water or fertilizer, specifically. And then they spread what they do get over too many acres. So you have agriculture problems here that we haven't even thought of yet and nobody here is thinking of it.

The ag advisors here, we're all very, very specialized. There's damned few of them here that know anything about farming wheat and maximizing wheat yields and irrigation. I do. I'm not a specialist in it, but I worked in it for a long time. You're never gonna fix this problem here.

Q: Bring this discussion back to my original thought about dust storms and what I've heard.

A: Okay, since there was much less rainfall in '07, people still planted wheat and barley, whatever, based on what they were given by the government of Iraq. So they planted it, but it didn't produce a crop, it didn't produce a cover on the ground. So they had all this land tilled up and it's bare ground just sitting there ready to blow away when the wind comes up, okay?

Then to compound the problem, there's a livestock business here. There's way too many sheep in Iraq than they produce forage for, at least two to three times more sheep than they have forage for. The sheep where I've been working are eating garbage and trash from the streets of Tuz, mostly. Actually, the donkeys do the same thing.

I've seen essentially no pasture, no forage pasture, for the livestock industry here. So the livestock are expected to just subsist or get by on eating trash or wheat residue, wheat stubble, which is a really bad use of resources, to spend all your seed and fertilizer and water to plant wheat to graze it like pasture. It's absolutely horrendously bad management.

So they've farmed all this land that wasn't gonna produce a crop anyway and then when the crop gets up two or three inches high, I'm talking millions of acres, the sheepherders down there, if you fly over, you see the sheepherders herding their sheep all over Iraq. You fly over this country between here and Speicher and Warrior and Tuz, on any given day, I would see ninety per cent of the surface of the land down below me that had fresh livestock footprints all over it, meaning a herder has just passed by within the last day or two, always chasing that little dab of forage to keep his sheep alive.

And because of all this drought business and lack of production this year, they did sell their herds down substantially. Different farmers will give you different numbers, but some sold all, some sold half. Overall I'd say they sold probably sixty per cent of the livestock in most of Iraq, which is a good thing. The last thing in the world we need to do is buy them feed to artificially sustain this herd that they can't sustain, anyway, in a good year.

All the farmers up north want me to drill 'em a well and buy 'em some feed in a bag, right and I tell these guys, "This drought didn't just strike your neighborhood. Everybody around here has the same drought situation. You have to import forage or hay or feed, probably from Canada and the U.S. or Europe, you have to import it from a long way, which would make it terribly expensive. And then, guess what? You feed them for a while, you still aren't producing any forage. You're still going to have starving animals when the feed runs out. So you cannot afford to spend enough money on livestock feed right now to really do any good." They should do what they've done, which is reduce the herds.

Q: And when you say they sell them off, that means they're sold on the market for consumption, essentially, right?

A: There's apparently a substantial number that were smuggled out and sold, exported.

Q: To which countries?

A: All of the neighboring countries: mostly Iran, probably Turkey, maybe Jordan. I'm not sure about Jordan.

Q: So, just for my own illumination, the dust storms that we're experiencing this year, last year, caused essentially by the same things that caused the Dust Bowl in the Thirties in the States?

A: Exactly. Poor farming practices, coupled with a drought. In the States it was a multiyear drought and I keep telling these Iraqis that, 'Yeah, we had a drought last year in Iraq but they need to be thinking they might have a drought for several years. It just may not rain for a while."

Out working in the desert southwest of Arizona and grew up in Texas, droughts have a tendency to come in cycles, just like wet years. There are seldom one-year droughts. They're usually multiple years, followed by multiple years of average or above average rainfall.

Q: I think you've touched on this subject a little bit, but let me just ask the question again, in case you want to relate something else. Describe the relationship and interaction of members of the PRT staff and did the PRT function effectively?

A: I think there's a problem with satellites. I think satellites are a crock. I think satellites need to go away. I believe Salah ad dan province is still the only PRT that's doing satellites.

My understanding is this concept was invented by a former team leader there. He was the team leader when I started there in October last year. I can't for the life of me understand why they think they work.

From the agriculture perspective, they absolutely do not work. You can't put a person, an ag advisor, in an isolated location like that, 'cause we were truly isolated. We didn't really have the fallback, to go to resources.

Now they do have various websites we can go to for help. You can ask questions through the PRT portal, which has been very effective, but it's slow and it's cumbersome.

These guys are all Stateside that are answering your questions, right? So I'm asking this guy a question about baby chicks, for example: where do I buy day-old chicks anywhere in Iraq? So he has to do his thing and find out information. He eventually gets back some information to me which works wonderfully, but in the meantime I found other sources, too.

And then some of the questions I would ask about rangeland forage improvement, pasture and so forth, some university guy out of Hawaii is answering the questions with a Hawaiian perspective, which is wonderful, but not adequate. It satisfied my need, but I have enough knowledge of the subject matter to know the limitations of his answer.

So if you have the internet you can stay somewhat connected, but you cannot get answers to the most basic question you need. Like, for instance, ag statistics stuff. How many chicken houses do you have in Tuz, for example.

The only place I could find that is talking to the local director of agriculture and I did actually get that kind of information, he gave me some very good information and told me, "We have seventy chicken houses privately owned, 53 are in production, so 17 are not in production. There's actually one state-owned enterprise that raised eggs, the only egg production facility." You could do the same thing with fish farm, aquaculture, kinds of stuff. Farming and numbers of sheep, everybody you ask about those questions, you'll get different answers.

The basis for doing ag work is you need to have an assessment inventory of how many acres of what do you grow and so forth, how much is irrigated, how much is not irrigated? So you need that kind of information to understand what you're doing and from day one in Tuz I couldn't understand why they sent me there, because I didn't see enough agriculture to warrant a fulltime ag advisor working on a measly 70,000 acres and that's basically what I spent the next eight months proving over and over and over again, I was wasting my time.

When it came right down to it, the only thing I could do there was try to help those 17 chicken house farmers that were not in production. I found out they had wheat and besides the drought there were canals that serviced irrigation and that was turned off in the spring, turned off for political reasons and I can't really fight that fight. So I couldn't do anything about it, couldn't do anything about lack of rain.

So what I determined there was, the farmers in Tuz don't have any problems, it just didn't rain last year. They can buy everything they need in town, so those 53 privately owned chicken house guys can buy everything they need in town on the free market, free enterprise system and that's what they do. They tell you they need government of Iraq feed, water, etc, but do they really? I don't know.

My task and my mission and my direction here has always been to convert these people to a free enterprise system and I'm not buying them a damned tractor, I'm not buying them a damned cow.

So, okay, I got down to my last months in Tuz and the only thing I thought I could actually work on effectively was 17 chicken houses, right? Well, after we gathered all this information, this has taken me months to get here, right, gathered all this information, apply it to my map and I find out they are all out of production because of al Qaeda, nothing else and I can't fix al Qaeda.

The soldiers don't really want to go there, unless they're doing military activities, so once I clearly understood that all my 17 chicken house problems are in an al Qaeda hotbed the, I just decided I'm not gonna be able to do any good here at all. So that's when I asked to get out.

Q: And when did you finally figure that out?

A: When I got back from R&R and that's when I put all this information together. I just had a list of where the towns were located. Then you start plotting it and I realized, " They're are right here in a pile in the al Qaeda hotbed."

First off they ate or killed or sold all those chickens and vandalized their chicken houses and then they used them for hiding places, caches of weapons and hiding places. That's what the soldiers kept telling me. Of course, they attribute that to all chicken houses in Iraq, not just those in that area and I know it's not true, because I've been to others that are growing chickens.

Q: Tell us some more along these lines that you've been going on about, security issues and how did you deal with those and what was the security situation to you?

A: Oh, security, it's strictly a crap shoot. Got IED'd twice in May, once when I was in an MRAP and then the second time I was in a humvee. And, again, they were both in the sub-district of Tuz *qadha*, in various places there. One was right off a main street in in the farmers market.

The soldiers are doing a hell of a job of taking care of us and I just trust them completely and I really appreciate the up-armored humveees and the MRAPS. They are wonderful I felt real comfortable in those things, real safe.

I've seen some that were IED'd very directly, I could see what kind of damage they incurred and I still feel very comfortable, especially in the MRAPs.

Q: So tell us about these two incidents, though, in more detail.

A: Well, one day, it was a joint mission, actually it started as a joint mission and became a kinetic operation during the day, the commander changed it to a kinetic ops. So I spent very little time on the ground doing ag work, but I did in one village, which was okay. Then, driving around to another location, an IED just detonated right after our vehicle passed it. So I believe the technical system worked, it suppressed the cell phone signal 'til we got about twelve feet away from it, then the IED exploded. By then we were moving around thirty miles an hour. We just coasted 'til we got about I think 300 meters, more like 150 meters, away from it, tried to assess the situation.

I thought the soldiers really should have been blasting the hell out of 'em, 'cause we saw the guy that did it. They, for some reason, didn't take action. They just let him drive away. For some reason, they didn't feel like they had enough evidence or whatever, so they didn't detain him, but they certainly should have, in my opinion.

Q: Tell us about the other incident.

A: The other incident, we were right in town, leaving town and we were on our way to the farmers market, which is on the edge of town. We were actually just turning into the farmers market. This is on the main highway and there were two U.S. convoys that were meeting and we were mostly in humvees this day and basically when the two convoys met right in front of the farmers market the IED was detonated. Again, it wasn't close enough to a humvee to cause any damage, so, again, we were very lucky. And, again, I feel like we saw the guy who did this, pushed the button, but they didn't detain him. I guess they didn't feel like they had enough evidence. We watched him for 15 minutes, walking around and walk away, never did do anything.

Q: While you were working there, did you have any relationship with any non-governmental organizations?

A: Yes, there was only one in Tuz at the time and that was a personwho ran the Tuz business and economic development center and she is a person that managed this microloan or lending institution and she had been through the training at Hillah, which is the Babylon Center for Economic Development, that specializes in teaching Iraqi businesses and associations to become NGOs, teaches them to write a business plan and budgets and so forth and how to engage with the government of Iraq for support. Once they get the NGO status they're officially recognized.

I didn't know this until much later, when I got to working in Rasheed district in August, but apparently there's been some changes in Iraqi law and under the old law all these farmers associations and farmers union and coops and business associations have to be reregistered under this new law and to really make this work apparently they need to go through this training, which is a five-day training class located in Hillah.

She does this in groups of ten plus people, I believe and when they finish the class there's a little workshop, she actually walks them through the application process and makes sure they are fully engaged and they are recognized as NGOs when they're done.

So this person got the training in the early part of the year, it took her a while to get the NGO certificate. She did get it, 3 months later. So things seem to move slowly here but the person did finally get it. So this was the only NGO in Tuz at the time.

Q: What was your interaction with that NGO?

A: My partner, who left, was working with the NGO to help them set up a microfinance funding source. So we were trying to do a QRF funding of $50,000 to use for seed money. For some reason this never got approved. To this day we have not been able to fund them. We tried CERF, ICERF, IIRP. We just can't seem to fund this and I don't know why.

Technically it's not my lane, so I never paid a lot of attention, but realize in a small satellite my partner and I would travel and engage together a lot, so I'd sit in on his

meetings and he'd sit in on my meetings, so I would just be listening, I wasn't technically with 'em, but I absorbed what was going on.

But the NGO thing was critical for these people to become recognized by their government and their government does not seem to be getting the word out to them. I only learned this two months ago. It kind of bugs me that I've been here ten months and now I learn even the farmers need to become NGOs.

For them to be supported by the government of Iraq, they need to have this certification. Their association has to certified, registered, I should say. And then, theoretically the government of Iraq will recognize them and help them with loans and support them better with the things they need for farming, which is mostly seed, fertilizer, water, fuel, tractors and so forth.

Q: This Hillah center, is that run by the Iraqi government, or is it a thing supported by the U.S.?

A: I would say it was started by *Izdihar*, which was I believe a USAID funded organization. They set this thing up, I think it was a training opportunity, or a situation where they set up, there may be more than this one in Iraq, I'm not sure how many there are, but it was *Isdihar*-assisted, which is an AID program, which still exists but *Izdihar* is like the behind the scenes partner in this Babylon Center for Economic Development.

Q: Do you work with the folks from RTI at all?

A: Yeah.

Q: Tell us about your interaction with them, what they're doing out where you were.

A: Well, they didn't work in Tuz. I only worked with them in Speicher. I did not work with any in Rasheed. It was just Speicher.

In my experience with RTI, they're frequently people that seem to always want people with masters degrees or higher and I don't see them really doing much, to be honest. It's like they're there, there might be five of them on the staff and it seemed like it's difficult to get most of them to actually do something, or do anything that I've ever been able to observe.

Q: Are they more interested in policy, do you feel, or

A: I ain't got a clue. I do not know what they do. I haven't seen them do anything, let's put it that way.

That's not entirely true. I know one or two that I seen host workshops and plan stuff, but the majority of them just hide out, in my opinion.

Q: Any other interesting stories or projects with the local Iraqi folks?

A: In Tuz I learned that the high officials in agriculture there, were key persons to get information from on assessing the agricultural problems and I leaned on them really heavily. I got to know them really well, so I would ask them for information that would take them a while to get the information to me, maybe a week, maybe longer. But the chicken house inventory, for example, I learned that if you give them time and you asked them correctly and adequately, they'll give you a pretty good set of information and they'll give you names. They are always afraid to give you phone numbers, for security reasons.

In that area, you've got to realize, there's the three ethnicities in Tuz *qadha*, the Arabs, the Turks and the Kurds and they don't get along and they like to live separately and they like to do things separately from the others and they don't like to cross into each others' area. And so they don't just freely travel around. Some of the people I dealt with were Kurds and they were afraid to circulate. Now I know why, because that's the preserve of al Qaeda.

But they would make phone calls and get this information and then give to me, but it would be difficult to get phone numbers from them, because the farmers didn't want to give their phone numbers. So I could call him the day before I had to meet him and he would arrange a meeting. We can't do that, for security reasons. We don't ever let 'em know we're coming. We just roll up early in the morning and start knocking on doors. So with very few exceptions, unless we know the person very well, we won't make an appointment or let them know we're coming ahead of time.

And he would do things like that with aquaculture, fish farming, issues or requests for information. And we get pinged by people up here in Baghdad that want this information.

This is one other thing that really bugs me about this whole system, is nobody here seems to really have their finger on the pulse, nobody here seems to even know there's supposed to be a pulse out there. If they want some information, they should be engaging the government of Iraq for this stuff. They already have it, they know it, they have all the resources right here, but they don't do that. Our people contact us in the boonies and ask us for this information. So we gotta go beat the bushes and try to find it out locally. There's something wrong with this system. There's something gravely ill here.

Q: Any ideas on how to rectify it?

A: We need to have some sort of, I won't say it's an OPA type of task, but it needs to be something. For example, USDA needs to have some BBA position or multiple positions with the government of Iraq. And I don't just mean at the army division level. They have that and that doesn't work, either. I contact those contacts and they're clueless. They're as isolated as I am. These are BBAs that are fluent in Arabic and there's a few

of them that you can email, not all of them, but again and again I'd think, "Oh, boy, I've got a really good contact here," the guy doesn't really know much.

So we don't have a true relationship with the government of Iraq that I can determine. And what I see is there's a real rigid adherence to a protocol for contacting, for instance in the Rasheed district here, out of Baghdad, I can't call my local director of agriculture directly. They want me to go through the director of agriculture for the Baghdad province and he will determine if my request is sufficient for me to bother his subordinate.

I'm sorry, but that just ain't gonna work. There's about 12 or 14 of 'em, directors of agriculture, just here in Baghdad province and one overall director for the province and that don't work. I tried emailing, I tried calling. I've had my local interpreter try to call her for some information and she does not respond.

Q: Through your interaction at the different PRTs, did you ever work with folks that were working on public affairs or cultural areas?

A: Yes, I did, in Speicher. That's about the only place. It was a one-person team, actually, in Speicher, for a long time. He left and he was I think technically replaced by a public diplomacy specialist at Speicher. So I've seen the new person at meetings. I've never really worked with them at any meetings in the field with local nationals. By then I was assigned to the satellite and only saw here occasionally when I was traveling through the Specher PRT.

Q: You were telling a story, there was an area where they had shut off the canal system. Tell us about the background of that. You said it was a political situation.

A: Yeah, this was a canal system that came out of the Dokhan Dam, which is up north. Most of the water is provided by reservoirs in Tuz. There may be rivers associated with them, but usually it's stored in a reservoir. So these big canals that carry this water down from Dokhan Dam down to the Tuz *qadha*, in the spring, when they really, really needed irrigation water to make their crop it was turned off.

There's two stories here. One is there's a hydrogeneration component to the Dokhan Dam and they didn't want to provide a lot of irrigation water because it would affect their ability to generate electricity with the hydrogeneration component, so they kind of held back for that reason.

And then there was actually a time when the Iraqi person who managed the headgate simply turned off the water 'cause he didn't want to send water down there 'cause he was a different ethnicity. These are mostly Kurdish and I think Arabs that were getting the water, I can't remember for sure. But anyway, apparently he was of a different ethnicity and he didn't want to give them water. So he just got away with that for maybe two months, three months and then eventually he was made to open the water back up. He

did that about in I think June, maybe late May. That's too damned late. They couldn't use it then, except for drinking water.

They were so desperate for drinking water that they were starting to take water out of the canal for drinking. For a while, no sanitation. They were just drinking nasty canal water, which they were glad to have. It's better than no water.

I'm not aware of any diseases that were caused by that, but the Iraqis, if you ask them, they'll show you like a mosquito bite on their leg and say, "Yeah, I had this rash from drinking bad water." We look at it and know it's not a rash from drinking bad water. I was actually a medic in the navy and know a little bit about treating injuries. So the Iraqis sometimes attribute, the cause and effect relationship is sometimes a little different in their eyes and minds.

Q: What do you think your PRT achieved during your tenure?

A: I'd rather address that specific to agriculture, only, 'cause that's really my lane. Absolutely nothing.

Q: How do you feel about that?

A: I feel really, I'm very pissed, I'm mad, I feel like I've been set up for failure, not from the get-go here, in October, but by Salah ad dan PRT when they relegated me to satellite status. And no matter what I said, they had their minds set that satellites, oh, man, we've got to man this satellite! Apparently it makes them look good to somebody. Not me. It makes me think they're fools and as far as I know Salah ad dan PRT is the only one that does this satellite concept.

Many of those are one or two or three person staffs, okay? And if you look around at their staffing plan, they frequently put their problem individuals in satellites, people that they don't get along with and I'm probably one of them, 'cause I'm an outspoken s.o.b. You just look at the staffing plan for Salah ad dan province and you'll see several of those people have been reassigned and reassigned and reassigned and reassigned and eventually they land at a place like that, where hopefully they'll fulfill a role and maybe do something, but sometimes they have been people hard to place elsewhere.

And I'll also tell you this, some of those people at satellites, it's the opposite, they can't get along with the main PRT folks. The economics team leader has driven off a lot of us. The individual was a Foreign Service Officer who's absolutely clueless about economics, has no management skills when it comes to human resources. I think he left Iraq a day or two ago, went to his next assignment.

But he did an extremely poor job of judging people, both the PRT staff and the local nationals. He put all his eggs in the wrong basket with the local nationals. He decided that somebody's a good guy that he needs to engage with and I'm going to bet you the

economics section chief didn't get a damned thing done the whole time he was here, but wasted a lot of time.

Q: Training, looking back at your total experience, was your training adequate to prepare you to serve in a PRT?

A: I think it was quite good. I did not actually go to the initial part of that, that's called PRT specific training. It was considered optional and I had a personat conflict. I needed to go to this damned wedding in Texas, so I decided that since it's optional I'd skip it. And I wish I hadn't skipped it, but I'm glad I went to the wedding.

The other part of the stuff, the FACT training, I thought that was excellent. It did as much as was humanly possible, I think, to get us ready. Of course nobody involved in this training has ever probably experienced a satellite at an extremely small austere FOB, so nothing can get you ready for being relegated to portapotties and showering in nasty shower facilities and latrines. Some of our colleagues have very different sanitation standards than we do. It can be pretty damned gross.

Q: Did your home agency provide you with programmatic training for your position?

A: Yeah, very little, but adequate. Again, as much as I could absorb. It's still hard for me to believe the government of Iraq's structure, their government organization, okay? After being here a year, it still absolutely baffles me. No wonder these people are so screwed up. Their system is horrible.

Q: How would you describe the system?

A: Well, traditionally it was top-down and they haven't overcome that yet and the local Iraqis I deal with are all afraid to talk to their superiors. That's an overwhelming problem. They want me to do it. They want me to go to Baghdad and fight their battles for them, okay?

Also, at three different places, now, the farmers, the local Iraqis, all think the U.S. government has replaced the government of Iraq for all things that they used to get and they claim they used to get almost everything, from their food through the public distribution system, through their agriculture stuff, every kind of agriculture you can think of: feed, seed, fertilizer, water, tractors, everything was provided, they say, by the government of Iraq.

In reality I believe it was partly provided and sometimes there was a minimum fee or modest fee for the services they got, but they liked it and they were happy with it. They think we're here to do that now and we have a hard time, we can tell 'em over and over and over again, this is what we did in Tuz, we made it real clear, "We're not buying you stuff. We're only gonna help you go to the government of Iraq to get what the government of Iraq should be providing you."

That's another example of it's a different world between that part of Iraq and when I worked here at EPRT One, Rasheed district. Here nobody seems to know that the government of Iraq's supposed to be providing stuff. The army's trying to do it with CERP. They're CERPing the hell out of stuff. They're slinging money around like crazy. They're doing these things called microgrants. Almost all you have to do is ask for it and they'll give you some money, a thousand or 2500 bucks, which is a small amount of money but it's a grant, it's not tied to a specific activity, sometimes. It's just money to get by on.

And the farmers here, in Baghdad, again, they want me to buy 'em everything and they'll just casually say, "Okay, we're the Samoud Farmers Association," this is just one example. They represent three thousand acres and there's about 250 farmers on this and every one of them need two tractors, at least one water pump to pump water out of canals, seed, fertilizer, pesticides, on and on and on, every Goddamned thing you can think of, they want us to pay for all of it.

Somehow we haven't communicated at all to these people what our role here is. We have a serious failure to communicate and it could simply be that there wasn't an ag advisor in that location before. I don't know why there hasn't been one. But if you look at the numbers, three thousand acres and 250 farmers, the average farm there is twelve acres. There is no way those farms are ever gonna make it. Those aren't real farms. Those are like hobby farms. It's like what we do in the States, you want a tax exemption, you buy some acres and you claim it to be an ag property so your tax for your $450,000 home is taxed like an ag property instead of a real retirement home or whatever.

So these aren't very economically defensible farms. They're just hobby farms and every one of these guys work in town. Every one of them is either a Son of Iraq or they work in the market, selling produce.

So how much money do you want to spend on these twelve acre farms? I don't want to spend a damned nickel on 'em, not U.S. dollars, anyway. I want them to go to the GOI and get whatever they can, which is what they've done before we got here.

But trying to help these small acreages and you've gotta realize, some of them are only three acres. The locals there say that it has to be a minimum of three acres to be considered a viable farm in that location. Three acres is what they call five daunums. Three acres is still not a farm. It's a garden. You're never going to be profitable on that.

So what are we doing here? We should be making a hard, fast decision about where we will draw the line, as far helping so called agriculture, but they're to fix all the irrigation ditches with U.S. government money, thinking it's going to solve the problem and I can promise you it will not. These poor guys still can't get water out of a ditch without a pump and few of them have pumps.

A lot of the pumps have been stolen or vandalized or they haven't been used in five years, so they're not gonna work. These are little bitty pumps that you pour gasoline into to suck water out of a ditch and raise it maybe five to ten feet, put it on your field. That's an absolute worst way to do this, from a cost standpoint. This is so inefficient. This is ludicrous.

What you'll find is a lot of the irrigation infrastructure here was not designed or installed or created with a view for cost benefit. It was put in with absolutely no regard for cost. Money's no object. Electricity or fuel to run a pump had to be no concern here in the past, but it's obviously gonna be a concern in the future, so there's a huge issue there that nobody's even thought of addressing that. It's never gonna work.

Q: So how would you gauge the potential success of our efforts to try to transition Iraq to a more market economy?

A: I don't even see any evidence that we've done it, or even thought about it. The Iraqis don't know we're doing it. Are we doing it? I thought we were doing it. I'm irritated because I don't think we're getting the message out. I got one set of orders, but Rasheed, for instance, has a different set of orders. We're not communicating with our own U.S. Army partners.

What they're doing in Rasheed right now is pushing this microgrant business with CERP and it's like there's three army commanders that are competing to get the most what they call "packets," they all want to have the highest number. I'm talking thousands and thousands.

Q: So it's whoever gives out the most money wins?

A: Yeah. I'm really speaking out of my lane here, but that what I saw at Rasheed. The army's competing with other commanders to get the most Goddamned CERP projects out there, so they can look the best to the generals. And none of that's going to really pay off. All you're doing is giving them a thousand or 2500 dollars that'll feed 'em for a while. There might be some good come out of some, certainly, but the majority, it's just not gonna improve anything.

Q: What lessons did you draw from your experience here?

A: My lessons are we're not doing well in our administration of the PRT business and we are actually holding Iraqis back. Again, I'm speaking in the agricultural arena. Our presence here is holding them back. If we stepped out of the ag picture they'd recover faster without us. And the reason I say this is, many reasons, but a lot of these guys have money. They could buy their own seed or tractor or fertilizer, but they don't think they're supposed to, so they're just sitting back asking us to do this.

If we simply weren't here they would take what the government of Iraq gives them but they would take their cash out of their pocket and carry on with business and grow their vegetables or their wheat or their sheep or whatever much more efficiently.

But they're holding back because they know we're going to come up with money next week.

Q: Final thoughts on your time here in Iraq?

A: I'm not glad I did this. I view it as a waste of one year of my life. I've a lot of regrets. I can't even think who to blame, but it's just such a screwed up system here. I didn't do a damned bit of good here. I'm embarrassed.

And I will be brutally honest when people ask me this. I won't go out of my way to get in front of the media Stateside, I won't do that. I don't want to embarrass anybody like that.

But when my colleagues back home ask me what did I accomplish, or my superiors at the Foreign Ag Service already have and I will continue to be brutally honest, that I didn't do a damned bit of good here.

Q: Well, thanks so much for sharing.