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INTERVIEW #71

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Executive Summary

The interviewee was a representative of USIP and served in Iraq from 2007 to 2008. He engaged with several of the PRTs, in and around Baghdad. The embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams (ePRTs) were just getting started. Compared to the PRTs, the ePRTs are based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Defense (DOD) to provide for life support and transportation; the MOU made the local military commander responsible for this support. This enabled the PRT civilians to have somewhat greater movement and focus on local governance, although security was still a problem in such areas as Mosul. The ePRTs were intended to augment the surge capacity addressing the counterinsurgency. The security situation, in general, has improved for various reasons; the PRTs and ePRTs, however, have helped reduce the security concerns by augmenting the local governments' capacities to expend money for basic services. As the drawdown of the U.S. surge brigades occurs, it will become more difficult for the PRTs.

The organization of the PRTs depends on their status and location, but, basically, they include a team leader (State Department Foreign Service Officer, DOS/FSO), deputy team leader (military officer) and a USAID representative and an agriculture representative, economic development person, a local governance person including a Research Triangle Institute (RTI) person and a Rule of Law person. The military covered the medical/health area. The PRTs often lack a Public Diplomacy (PD) person, which the PRT team leaders complained about.

Having a military officer as the deputy helped with the PRT management where the military officer was an active duty officer not a civilian affairs officer. The DOS team leaders were more effective where they had been Embassy Deputy Chiefs of Mission (DCMs) with management experience. The number of civilians at PRTs ranged from twenty to forty. On Iraqi staff: the Bilingual-Bicultural Advisors (BBAs) played a very important role, but there are not enough of them. There is a long way to go in educating both the military and civilian sides of the PRTs about each other's culture.

The PRTs claimed that they had mission statements, something that the Embassy and Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) left largely to the PRT team leaders without much guidance. The statements differed depending on the personalities of the local commanders and the PRT team leaders. The PRTs all started off with assessments of their area. Some of the sector teams had mission statements. But that was haphazard owing to staffing inconsistencies, rotations and absences.

In the governance programs of the PRTs, the most important activity is to provide budgetary execution support for basic services. The PRTs provide a connective tissue and coordination with the government ministries, the Directors General and the Provincial Councils and the Provincial Development and Reconstruction Committees (PDRCs). The PRTs have focused on building up governing relationships based on the local district and neighborhood councils; there is a fear that these local councils will wither on the vine, because they have no budgetary authority. The Provincial Powers Law is quite progressive in the amount of autonomy that the Provincial Councils and local councils will have, but will the law be implemented given the Iraq tradition of centralized government?

The Iraqis interviewed say the PRTs are extremely important for simply monitoring and mentoring activities. They say the PRTs should remain another year or two as a shield for the "democracy experiment." The PRT role is diminishing as its funding resources decline, and as it shifts to a more advisory role— a healthy change. There has been a lot of progress at the provincial level in their governing capacity. The PRT governance teams have helped the Provincial Councils work more democratically, although it is based on Iraqi individuals who may be swept out with the elections [in January 2009], assuming the electoral processes function and are not corrupted. The PRT has focused on individuals not on institutions.

On business development with the Economic Sector Teams, the PRTs have made a start on small business capacity building, but there is a need to focus on sustainable businesses. The U.S. military's approach has been, in the counterinsurgency phase, spreading money around; that approach does not promote sustainable businesses. In agriculture, the military focus tends to be on short-term projects with inappropriate strategies and technologies, which are not effective. There has to be participation in a shift to long-term development with the involvement of development agencies. There was a "tremendous" amount of work on infrastructure: electricity, water, schools, but a lack of coordination resulting in some duplications.

The Rule of Law sector teams have been able to help with detainees and have Baghdad send in judges to the provinces. The sector teams played a convening and monitoring role. There was some resistance from local judges and lawyers to outside assistance. The PRTs had almost no Public Affairs staff. They often had reporting officers keeping the Embassy and OPA up to date on what the PRT was doing, the most valuable element of the PRTs.

On relationships, the PRTs are appreciated and understood by the Iraqis, because the Iraqis recognize that they have a deficit in understanding the roles and responsibilities as government leaders; however, the high turnover of PRT staff has been very problematic, frustrating the Iraqis. The general population in the provinces is not aware of the PRTs; nor does it have a sense that the Provincial Government is working.

Major achievements: building up the capacities of local governments, particularly in budget execution, identifying priorities and spending money. The sustainability of the provincial governments after the PRTs leave is a big question.

Lessons: (1) the PRTS need strong support from the Baghdad Embassy and OPA to respond to their concerns and support needs; (2) in a post-conflict environment, there is a need for a stable Iraqi civilian human resource and bureaucracy; (3) the role of the PRT in its relationships with the military in a counterinsurgency situation needs to be understood, (4) subject matter civilian experts can help the military make wiser decisions, (5) one has to have a measured approach to advising Iraqis on local government, (6) training for participation in PRTs has been inadequate overall.

The PRTs are worth having, but you have to have competent team leadership, proper structures and staffing. The PRTS need to evolve with the situation.

Interview

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

A: I was formerly a representative for USIP in Iraq, from 2007 to 2008. In that capacity, I worked on and off with the PRTs in carrying out some of our projects and programs. So I had engagements with the PRTs in several places, most specifically with the Mahmudiyah PRT, but also with other PRTs in Baghdad.

Q: But you were based in Baghdad?

A: …based in Baghdad at that time.

Q: And for what period of time, again?

A: … from 2007 to 2008.

Q; And you were representing USIP?

A: That is right and now I am a Director of Programs at USIP.

Q: That was a special assignment, while you were out there?

A: At USIP's office in Iraq.

Q: What was its program?

A: It has a program focused on Iraq and the field mission; we have an Iraqi staff there that we manage; we facilitate and coordinate USIP projects that are being carried out in all kinds of realms: in rule of law advisory, in terms of reconciliation work at the national as well as the provincial and local levels; we have a media program that has now been stood up; we work with all kinds of Iraqi institutions and partners, and we have developed a cadre of USIP-trained Iraqi facilitators who operate all over Iraq. We work in partnership with them, in peace-building efforts at the local and regional level.

Q: But we need to focus here on the PRT. How many PRTs were there when you were working there?

A: I do not remember the exact number when I came, but, of course, they had the *plus up* under Bush. I was there just at the time that they had stipulated that those Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams (EPRTs) were just coming in when I got there. The whole embedded program was just getting underway. So they were establishing those EPRTs.

Q: Would you clarify the distinction between EPRTs and a regular PRT?

A: EPRT is an embedded version of the basic PRT structure. The purpose of the EPRTs, as I understand it… one of the problems with the basic PRT structure was that they did not have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Defense (DOD) to provide for life support, transportation issues and those kinds of things. So the embedded version made the local commander in the field, the military commander, responsible for all of that, number one. Number two, they were there to supplement the efforts of the counterinsurgency strategy, basically the surge effort underway; the EPRTs, the embedded versions, were there to help augment that surge capacity.

Q: But the regular PRTs were also based on military bases?

A: Yes, in large part, yes, they were. Not necessarily on bases. For example, the Hillah PRT is not on a military base. They are the ones that are side by side with a military base nearby.

Q: Let us focus on the PRTs or EPRTs that you are particularly knowledgeable about and let us start out with how would you characterize the security situation related to the performance of these PRTs?

A: Speaking now for when I was there, the civilian engagements that were undertaken by USAID and other personnel on those PRTs really began to be able to bring a civilian capacity out into the field and engage with local leaders and local tribal leaders as well as local government officials that had not been there before. The military had been conducting most of these efforts exclusively.

So the PRT civilians were able to get out and about and travel. I knew several people that under the old system they were not able to move until they had established this Memorandum of Understanding with the military side that enabled them to get in the field more often.

So as part of the surge strategy these field staffs were very helpful, particularly in areas like budget execution. One of the critical aspects of calming and providing stability was to get services moving and that is still problematic. With the increase in the number of PRTs, we are now using the term liberally to include EPRTs and improving their staffing, in terms of the numbers and the quality of the people assigned, these people were able to really move about and really focus on local governance, particularly at the provincial level.

Q: You felt the security situation had eased quite a bit?

A: Oh, no question about it, in the time I was there and that was for a variety of reasons, not necessarily directly tied to the PRTs. EPRTs and the PRTs augmented the capacities, to some extent, particularly with their focus on helping at the provincial level, helping provincial governments spend their money, helping them develop the capacity to spend their money to provide the basic services people were desperately needing.

But the security improvement had to do with other issues, more specifically having to do obviously with the "awakening" program, which provided basic security and got terrorist and militia elements under some degree of control and the stand down of Muqtada al-Sadr.

So the PRTs are too small in number to have an overall magnified impact, but they definitely helped, As I said, particularly in that area of working with local officials, decision makers, to identify priorities and connect with one another in actually expending resources to improve services.

Q: Many people I have talked to express frustration with the fact that they could not get "out of the wire", and that they needed a movement team.

A: That is absolutely true. They could not move that often and this was, as you also probably heard, it was very much dependent on the relationship between the PRT team leader and the local commander, the brigade combat team leader. That is still very much the case, at least in those cases where the military is still the dominant element, which are in a great many of them.

There are a few, for example in the south, in Talil, that is Talil base; there are three PRTs down there for Dhi Qar, Muthanna and a third province. They have private security. They use Triple Canopy private security. They do not rely on the military. So they have more autonomy.

It is interesting, because those that move with the military… they have a responsive military unit that has been assigned to look after their transportation needs; they are very happy, because generally the feeling of most of the PRT members that we talked to is that the military, although they move slowly, they are less aggressive in their approach to security when they reach a destination in how they deal with locals. They are much more laid back in many cases than the private security people are, who tend to take a much more aggressive stance.

Q: The private ones are provided by the State Department?

A: That is correct.

Q: And they were more aggressive, as you say.

A: They tend to be and they move a lot faster through the territory and villages, which some times can be a problem. All I know is that I think in those cases where people were moving with the U.S. military that was dedicated to them, they had a movement capacity that was dedicated to the PRT, were extremely pleased with that. It is those instances where they are not dedicated or

the relationship is sour between the local commander and the PRT team leader so that the resources just are not there that you really get a frustration level.

Q: But you had a sense that over time people were able to get out and do their job?

A: Increasingly, especially with the improvement of the security situation, yes. But it is still a problem and some of it you have to allow for the context. Like, for example, up in Mosul, where you now have an ongoing counterinsurgency situation still prevailing, that is the prevailing environment, it is very difficult to commit assets to get people out in what is essentially a very dangerous environment for them to be in anyway. So the environment is going to be more inhibitive in terms of getting people out. But as the security situation improves they are getting out more. But in a lot of cases, still, you find people only able to get out two to three times a week.

It is not a lot, because there is still the lingering perception, it is still a movement in what has up until recently been dangerous territory, no matter where they were in Iraq and particularly in places like Baghdad. And as the surge draws down, the surge brigades have virtually left now. If we go into next year when there will be a brigade leaving every month, which is I understand what Obama wants to do, those assets are going to go with those guys. So I think it is going to be in some respects even more difficult, depending on how the PRTs evolve.

If they want to keep these PRTs, the same number or at least a reduced but sizeable PRT presence around Iraq, I think that is going to be increasingly a challenge as the drawdown proceeds.

Q: Would the PRTs go back to the private security, or would they not have it?

A: If they want to remain, then they will have to go to private security. I think that is very much the case. They will have to commit the resources to provide them with private security movement teams.

Q: Let us talk about the organization of the PRTs. Are they all the same? What is the basic structure of a PRT?

A: They differ from place to place, depending on what their status is and where they are. But basically you have a team leader, a deputy team leader. You have your USAID representative, your Agriculture representatives.

One area they are often lacking in is a Public Diplomacy (PD) person. We found only a few PRTs out of the eleven or so that we visited that actually had a dedicated PD person. That is a capacity that a number of team leaders complained that they were lacking. They have a Governance person and that includes local governance, an RTI individual as well, in many cases. Economic development, Agriculture

Q: Medical?

A: I do not know about a medical person. You mean a health person?

Q: Yes.

A: That is not always the case and very often I found, in the cases that we looked at, we saw that that was provided by military, the military was looking after the health issue.

Q: And then they had Rule of Law people?

A: And, of course, Rule of Law. The interesting thing about the Rule of Law staff is that a lot of them were detailees coming from Department of Justice. So their actual focus was much more on the criminal justice side. There was some complaint about that from other Rule of Law people we spoke to who felt that that was somewhat narrow. They were not there necessarily, for example, to be focused on the civil law side. They were much more on criminal justice. We saw a lot of focus on trying to improve relationships between the police, for example and the judiciary. Also providing a lot of assistance in learning how to handle evidence and things like that, not so much on the legal capacity building side.

Q: Did the PRTs all have a mission statement, a PRT mission statement?

A: Yes, they certainly claimed to and there is, of course, the joint program that they are supposed to be developing with their military counterparts. So that is an overarching mission that is laid out. Actually there is a tremendous amount of autonomy in doing that. The Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) and the Baghdad embassy have largely allowed the local PRT to define its own mission and set its own priorities.

Q: Do they give them any particular guidance on what their purpose is?

A: Not a lot. Very little, by the sound of it.

Q: There was no real guidance from OPA?

A: No. Actually there was some complaining about that, about a lack of guidance. To some extent, they are trying to address that through creating OPA-level representatives. This was one of the recommendations that we also heard coming from the field, from PRT leaders themselves, to create OPA-level representatives that would be the liaison, to help try to bridge the two institutions and help create a overarching plan for these PRTs, in terms of what they should be doing. But that has always been a problem. And so I think that in lieu of that, OPA has deferred to team leaders and given them a tremendous amount of autonomy in coming up with their own

Q: Have you seen any of the mission statements from the different PRTs?

A: We have looked at them. In Najaf we looked at them. But I have not looked at them closely, no.

Q: Are they the same, or very different purposes?

A: Between PRTs?

Q: Yes.

A: They will be different and that is reflective both of the priorities and personalities of the local commander and the PRT team leader. Again, there is a lot riding on that bond, or the lack of it. They will differ. We did not look at enough of them closely to be able to determine the differences among them. But my sense is they are also very much affected by the metrics that were used, where the province is, in terms of its development, political, economic. That is a very interesting tool that OPA devised. The purpose of it was to gauge the progress and development level of a given province, in terms of its self-governing capacity. The PRT would ostensibly and should orient its strategy according to what that assessment tells them. In other words, if they are, in fact, still lacking in budgetary execution, for example, that should be an area of ongoing heavy focus.

Q: But do they all make assessments?

A: Yes, they are all doing this.

Q: So they started off with an assessment, pretty much?

A: Yes and it gets upgraded. There is still a lot of debate over how that tool should be used and how accurate it is and how to actually conduct the assessment, who will get to sit in on and contribute to that assessment within the PRT and on the military side.

And the model that was used that was successful was the way that the team leader out in Anbar did it, He would bring a group together of both military and PRT civilian members that they felt had something to contribute and have a skull fest for an entire day or two and go through every area; they would come to consensus on where the province, as a whole, was in any given area, whether it was the agricultural sector and the governance sector and on the other sectors and then do the ranking.

Q: Did they have any dialogue with the Iraqi provincial officials about situation in the province?

A: Insofar as this particular assessment tool is considered?

Q: Yes.

A: Sure. I cannot say that they specifically queried them for that exercise. It is probably more of an objective assessment, I would probably guess, rather than having Iraqis weigh in on what they thought the situation in the province was. I would hope that the more enlightened team leaders would actually query them as to where they thought they were. But how much weight they assigned to that, I do not know.

Q: I think the RTI local governance people developed the strategies, provincial long-term development strategies. Are you familiar with those?

A: Yes. I am not too familiar with how RTI structured their local governance project. I am aware of it.

Q: I understand that each province has these development strategies that have been developed.

A: That is right.

Q: Each of the sector teams, do they have pretty clear mission statements, or sub-mission statements?

A: No. You mean on a given PRT team?

Q: Yes, the agriculture sector or the economic development or rule of law sector.

A: We asked in a number of cases and some of them were able to provide it; they were actually fairly organized about it. For example, for the Rule of Law sector, one of the PRTs had a very detailed mission statement about what they were supposed to be doing. But that has been very much hopscotch and haphazard, in large part due to the staffing inconsistencies. It is very hard for them to develop and stick with consistent missions when they have people rotating in and out all the time.

You know that this has been an ongoing problem; a major problem is trying to get these PRTs consistently staffed and when they rotate in and out in just a year and are gone for several months out of that year on breaks. We would go to PRTs that were missing three or four people at a time, key people on that PRT: a common problem.

So there is still going to be a great element of disjointedness and a lack of definition of mission under those conditions, when slots go unfilled for long periods of time or people are away for long periods of time.

Q: It is largely because of the rotation and the absence of people?

A: Oh, very much so, yes.

Q: And recruitment and filling the slots in the PRTs; was it difficult recruiting people?

A: Yes, one of the complaints, though, by team leaders is that they did not get enough time to vet these people themselves. They would be notified the day before and OPA would say, "We have to make a decision on this person, so please respond, thumbs up or thumbs down, from your perspective." There was some frustration expressed by some team leaders that they did not have enough time to actually speak directly with these recruits, in order to have an informed assessment of whether this person would be good to have out in the field.

Q: So they had to take what they could get?

A: Very much so and, of course, that has always been the kind of *modus operandi* with the PRTs; just trying to get some bodies out there. They have improved with the team leaders. We are increasingly, as opposed to the past, starting to see team leaders that actually have management and leadership experience.

And that has been a big problem. They would put people in team leader positions, Foreign Service Officers, who had good substantive knowledge in their background, political or economic officers with very good political or economic backgrounds or instincts and so forth, but not necessarily strong records of being able to manage teams. Not a core State Department competency, the result of which is that you had team leaders that were just not able to managing teams effectively. This is something that, of course, the military would look upon with a great deal of skepticism. That could damage a relationship very quickly, if they sense that the combat commander does not have a counterpart who is fully on top of his team.

Q: But each PRT had a deputy, a military person?

A: That is right. On all of them it is the case that the team leader is going to be a civilian State Department representative and then the deputy is always a military guy.

Q: That has not helped with the management function?

A: It has helped. It has not always helped, though, with the relationship with the military counterpart, as you would think it would. One of the recommendations that was made to us was that that the deputy team leader should be an active duty officer, not a civil affairs specialist, and he should be from the kinetic side; this is especially true in a combat environment, or an environment where active combat is still the norm or combat operations are underway. They will respect a fellow combat officer who is in the role of deputy team leader. They will simply group a civil affairs officer (and those tend to be, of course, reservists) group them as part of the civilian team. So one of the recommendations made was to try to have the number two, a military officer, as an active duty deputy.

Q: Talking about the team leaders, is it possible for you to characterize those that seem to be doing well? What was it about them that made them effective or not effective, what was their background?

A: First and foremost and there are some good examples; they are increasingly getting people, Deputy Chiefs of Mission (DCMs), we noticed. We noticed at least three or four of the team leaders on the PRTs that we visited had Deputy Chief of Mission experience. This is very important, because that person will have had clear leadership and management experience to apply to the role of team leader. And, in the case for example of one PRT, where the predecessor did not have that background and was actually removed from the job because the relationship with the military completely deteriorated, there was complete dysfunction on the team; clearly this individual had deficits in terms of management abilities. And they brought in a DCM from a U.S. Embassy. He was clearly setting up a structure that was much more coherent and organized

and you could already feel that the atmosphere was improving with the implementation of a real management structure.

Q: Was there a standard size for the PRTs, in terms of staffing?

A: Standard size?

Q: Yes, the number of people?

A: They ranged from about twenty to forty.

Q: These were civilians, right?

A: Yes, civilians, depending on where they were located. One province south of Baghdad is held up often as the example of a smaller, nimble PRT. That is an interesting case. It is there, for the most part, to engage the provincial government, which is probably the best functioning province in many ways in the country. So they do not need to have such a strong PRT footprint there; its major accomplishment, at present, is to help the provincial government build an international airport in the area. The interesting thing about that case is that there is a clear desire on the part of the provincial government to have that PRT to help them in getting this airport built, which is one of its biggest, if not its biggest priority, to handle all the influx of religious visitors. So there is a clear purpose, for the time being, for that PRT.

Q: So that is distinctive, unique?

A: And the relationship with the provincial government is very good, as a result, because it is satisfying a core Iraqi desire and need.

Q: But the PRT has a small staff, right?

A: It has a relatively small staff, and it also has a very small military component. There are only 16 soldiers there and the other interesting thing about that is that they are co-located with an Iraqi Army unit. So there is a MTT team, Military Transition Team, the American military presence there is largely there to provide ongoing advice to an Iraqi Army contingent; they are co-located; the EPRT is there as well.

Q: Does that imply possibly that the Iraqi Army could pick up some of the security requirement for the PRT?

A: Absolutely, and that is what they are doing, in that case. So it is a model in that respect, as well, in that you have a very small American footprint there and that there is some sharing of security responsibilities with the Iraqi side. Now that does not mean that the Iraqi Army is going to be providing direct movement support for the PRT team anytime soon, but I do know of cases in that area in which the Iraqi military has provided advance or support to a team of PRT staff going out to a given area where they had not been able to go before. So the Iraqi Army helped pave the way for that.

Q: Let us talk about some of the programs. On the governance program, with which I think you are most familiar, what were the PRTs trying to do?

A: There are several functions; the most important function, of course, is to provide the budgetary execution support, which has been a key, key function and focus in the last two years, to help build up the capacity to spend the money necessary to provide these services. They, by all accounts, have had some success in that area at the provincial level.

Q: When they say capacity to spend money, actually to do what?

A: To improve basic services, whether it is garbage collection. Now there is still a lot of room for improvement, but the areas of garbage collection, provision of electricity, water, those types of things. And the PRT has played a connective tissue role in that regard, too, helping to get people on the line ministry side, the Director Generals (DG) side, to understand their relationships and to collaborate with and engage with the Provincial Council leadership, in other words the subcommittees of the Provincial Council, that will deal with those areas, whether it is water or electricity, that their DG counterparts are concerned with on the ministry side. And this is still a key role that the PRTs play in many cases is, again, a kind of convening capacity in helping the Iraqis really coordinate with one another at the local level, which is not a capacity that has really always been there.

Q: Were there provincial development committees?

A: Sure, that provincial development program that you mentioned earlier is

Q: But a separate committee of the Provincial Council called a PDRC, they were working with them?

A: Yes, they are very much involved in helping the PRDCs, the Provincial Reconstruction Development Councils set priorities of how to spend their money. There has been some marked success in that regard. Again, it depends on what region of the country you are focused on.

One of the things that Iraqis, now these are Iraqis that work for the PRTs, so you have to take what they say in that context, but they feel very strongly, when we talk to Iraqis on the PRTs, that the PRT presence was also extremely important from a simple monitoring and mentoring standpoint and that, as one Iraqi put it, we really need the PRT to remain for a period of time, he felt another year to two years, in order to act as a shield for the "democracy experiment" in Iraq.

Now I think this is valid, even though this individual, of course, is depending upon the PRT for his livelihood. That is an important role. What is interesting is that previously, of course, we were really having a very, very strong handed role in convening Iraqis, encouraging them, prodding, pushing them to do certain things, to meet benchmarks that were our benchmarks, not necessarily always their benchmarks and also that was very much buttressed by the fact that we came with projects and money.

Now all of that is diminishing. Commanders Economic Reconstruction Program (CERP) funds are being drawn down. The Quick Reaction Fund (QRF) funds are diminishing. So the question we frequently posed to the PRT team leaders and staff that we met with is, "Okay, if you're not bringing these projects to the table, what is your relevance? How are the Iraqis perceiving you?"

And increasingly that role is shifting and it is a healthy thing, more to an advisory role and, of course, it is taking some time for Iraqis to adjust to that, that they can no longer anticipate or rely on the U.S. to provide money and project financing. But that is a good thing and forcing the issue increasingly, where Iraqis are going to have to step up and provide their own funding for these things and that is starting to happen, because it has to and that they will increasingly turn to the PRTs as more of a consultant. And this is the way that some team leaders view their role themselves, that is, as shifting into a consultancy role.

Q: Are they going to push the Iraqis to be more democratic in their processes, like deciding on projects and who gets what?

A: The U.S. may have had that capacity may when we were the ones coming with a project and the money; we could cajole and try to push those issues on that basis. Our ability to do that is much diminished and, in some cases, Iraqis are pushing back. For example, with the local governance project within Baghdad, where you have the neighborhood and district councils, which are largely a creation under CPA, they are an American-induced institution at the local level, to try to build up local government. And there is very little evidence so far that that has been supported at the Provincial Council level in Baghdad. There is a fear or concern that those are going to be allowed to wither on the vine, because they have no budgetary authority of their own.

Q: You are talking about the neighborhood councils, or the provincial councils?

A: I am talking about the district and neighborhood councils, because they have no budgetary authority. All they can do is establish priorities. So our projects have been focused on trying to help build up their ability to advocate for the kinds of priorities that they believe are needed in their neighborhoods and districts. But the Provincial Councils, in many cases, are still resistant to taking that kind of advice, or to acting in a way that takes those priorities into consideration.

There is no history of this, going back. There is very little history, in a top-down structure, of the provincial level taking direction or even advice from those at the local level. And the PRTs have been desperately focused on trying to build a relationship that is more based on the local folks pushing up their priorities. But without actual budget authority at that level, it is very hard for them to do that and it is very questionable whether at the end of the day that effort is going to be successful.

Q: Do you find the Provincial Councils themselves are more or less democratic in their processes or procedures?

A: As I understand it, I have not taken a close look at it, but the Provincial Powers Law is actually quite progressive in terms of the amount of autonomy that the Provincial Councils are supposed to have and, by extension, Local Councils. But it is not clear that having stipulated that in the powers law, whether that is actually going to be acted upon whether they will follow through to the letter is very much an open question, because the tradition and its history is for the upper levels of government to dictate down to that lower levels what is going to be funded and how it is going to be funded and who is going to do the work to make it happen, what contracting companies.

And that is often what it comes down to, is that, for example, you have a huge disconnect between one provincial council right now and the *Qadha* Council, that is the local council. A lot of this has to do with the provision of services and it is still very, very weak there. You have a *Qadha* Council pushing hard to get more authority over what projects are conducted. And also, of course, it concerns who gets to appoint the contractors. There is a lot of corruption in that whole process.

So there has been a great deal of progress made but there are still a lot of challenges. It is very much an open question, the degree to which true, grass roots democracy is going to be a successful experiment in Iraq. There has been a lot of improvement at the Provincial level, Provincial versus Baghdad, but below that is still uncertain.

Q: But within the Provincial Councils themselves, some of the governance people say they have been helping them learn to do an agenda, how to vote, how to organize themselves.

A: Oh, yes, there has been a great deal of progress at the Provincial level, in terms of their governing capacity, no question about it. And, again, it varies. For example, down in the south, there are areaa that we just do not know much about, because there has been almost no engagement with them, because it was a Sadrist-dominated Provincial Council and basically said, "We do not want the Americans anywhere near our province."

That is now changing. Interestingly enough, the PRT for this province , which is based on a Forward Operating Base, is slated to actually go into the province and establish a presence in a base that is a shared Iraqi-U.S. Army post. So coming in late into the game, that is a reflection of the fact that, again, the provincial folks are probably, the Iraqi Provincial Council there, is probably expecting the Americans to come and bring in development assistance. Which they missed out on. I think they are going to be disappointed in that regard. So that us going to be an interesting test case, to see whether or not that heavily Sadrist-dominated province is actually going to welcome a PRT in a consultancy, advisory role, even though it comes with very little project or money resources to grease the way. Now what they are doing, interestingly enough, when we talked to the PRT team members, they are going to be doing some projects, just to buy themselves some credibility. Of course, that is a tricky slope at this stage, because you come in and you want to say, "We have these projects." In the past, that has been done in a way that has created a dependency. This province will be interesting, because they will not have anywhere near that level of money and projects to offer. So how will the provincial government value their presence?

Q: But you have the impression that in the provincial governments that the governance teams have been able to get the councils to work more democratically and more efficiently?

A: Oh, I think so. Certainly in cases we looked at, I think that they are definitely a presence that is helping, not hurting. The extent of their success is questionable; one of the problems here in this whole dynamic is that they are very much based on the individuals, the Iraqi counterparts that occupy those positions. Now a lot of those Iraqis are likely to be swept out in the coming elections. So whether or not their institutional capacity will extend beyond that is very questionable at this point. It all depends on who gets elected. There is definitely a feeling that the religious parties have failed, and they have, to provide effective governance. And so, in many cases, the PRTs have been working with people who are very under qualified to be actually in office in the first place.

And certainly when USIP conducted SENSE training, which is a Strategic Economic Needs and Security Exercise, it is a simulation, it simulates a whole government decision making environment in a post-conflict context, where they have to make decisions on what they are going to apply very limited funding to, what sectors of the economy they need to focus on and then they can see at the end of the day what their decisions have wrought, in terms of what the social indicators are saying. We found that the capacity of a lot of those from all 18 governorates —the knowledge and experience and capacity— was still very weak. That was a year ago this past August. And so these are Iraqis who very much owe their positions to their party affiliations, not to their expertise.
So we have to understand that the PRTs have been working with an lot of those Iraqis who are not trained civil servants to begin with, in fact, in some cases their own educational levels are fairly low.

Q: But, with the election, will you get a clean sweep of all these people we have been working with?

A: No, not necessarily a clean sweep, but there arre definitely going to be changes.

Q: Changes of the governors and their staffs?

A: This is assuming that the electoral processes function and that they are not so terribly corrupted that incumbents manage to hold on to their seats through corruption and intimidation. That is something everybody is very much worried about, especially with an absence of international monitoring, without an international monitoring element in these elections. The Iraqis are going to be running these on their own and if they are successful, if they are seen, more importantly, if the Iraqi population see them as successful, that will be very good news indeed and that will result, if it works properly, in more qualified people getting on to the Provincial Councils.

Q: But that will mean a new group that the PRT would have to work with?

A: Start from scratch all over again. That is one of the big problems here, of course, those efforts have been very much focused on the capacity of individuals and not on institutions.

Q: More on the details of program management and implementation, do the governance teams work with contracting and bids? Implementing selected projects and how you implement them and how they are bid and who gets selected?

A: Yes, they have very much been trying to provide that. Again, I did not look specifically at contracting. But that has been a focus of the PRTs. There is a long way to go on that, the contracting processes have been very haphazard. But definitely, building up their capacity of understanding how to administer contracts, how the whole contracting process works, has been a huge focus, particularly at the national level.

Q: What do you think are the major accomplishments of the governance teams? We will go to the other teams in a minute, but what would you say has been the major accomplishment?

A: Budget execution, as I have said before, definitely stands out. Understanding their role as public servants has also; through the Local Governance Project they have trained thousands of these Iraqis and hopefully some of it has rubbed off. There has to have been some success there, in terms of understanding the role of a public servant. Again, the absence of a stable civilian bureaucracy is a great hindrance to lasting success and until they develop a civil servant element, a stable bureaucracy, those gains are tenuous at best.

In terms of helping, there has also been some success, particularly, say, in Baghdad, for example, in helping local government leaders to understand how to coordinate, how to plan, how to set priorities, certainly how to conduct meetings, a lot of that very, very basic stuff.

So you get certain areas that have really improved, like in one district in Baghdad that has a well-functioning local government and that, of course, owes in part to the fact that they have a much more educated population there. It is an area where many elites reside. So you cannot hold it up necessarily as indicative of all the other areas. Other areas, have been much less effective in many respects, because they have still been in a very kinetic environment down there.

So to the extent that they have been effective, especially helping government leaders learn to plan and coordinate with one another, how to put a strategy in place, what are the components of developing priorities in the community, of establishing needs that are immediate priorities, short term versus long term planning. It also involves getting them to know that if you are on the education committee within a Provincial Council that you have to establish an effective working relationship with your counterpart from the Ministry of Education, or for Water Resources, or any one of the other sectors, agriculture and so forth.

They have been effective in trying to help people understand that they are part of a whole, rather than just working within their own small ministry or their own small committee and not realizing that they have to collaborate with people across the spectrum. It is that connective tissue role that is really important.

Q: Then there is the economic development, infrastructure team. Do you have any sense of what they were able to accomplish, or what they did?

A: On economic development, again, it is hard for me to get a sense, on a whole. I want to be hesitant before I give too much expertise, because I have not been tracking the PRTs specifically in their progress overall.

They have been effective in areas where they have reasonably well-educated leaders to work with and that has not always, unfortunately, been the case. USIP has seen through programs like the SENSE training, where you get unfortunately a lot of people who owe their positions to party affiliation not to expertise.

It has been slow going, but I can tell you that they are starting to see, for example, small business capacity, that is an area where that is increasingly becoming a focus now that the environment permits it and where they really can make a very, very strong contribution. And that is happening in certain areas. For example, in one district of Baghdad, there has been a lot of violence. But it has a terrific small business advisor there and he is really quite dynamic and is making progress in terms of helping small businesses set up medium sized businesses.

And in terms of trying to reach out and get people who have been exiled from those areas or maybe are displaced to come back and reestablish the kinds of businesses that employ a significant number of people, getting beyond just a small kiosk. One of the challenges in the economic development sphere, of course, is to make sure that you are focused on sustainable businesses. This has to some extent run into conflict with the military's approach.

If the military is very much involved in a counterinsurgency strategy phase, they are spreading money around and trying to get people some money so that they can restart small businesses immediately. That is not a sustainable business model and what needs to happen, especially in those areas where things are stable enough for it to occur, is to move to a more normal development strategy. And that has been a source of conflict between the civilian and military counterparts on the PRTs.

They have to agree on where on the spectrum of counterinsurgency versus development, normal development, that they lie and then agree how to address that, because they can be working very much at cross purposes. That has been a problem where the USAID representative or the business advisor feels that, "We have to get out of the business of handing out money and into the business of giving out loans" so that you build up local capacity for banking, local lending capacity and start to make the kind of targeted investments that will result in sustainable business development, rather than just throwing money at small business owners. Seed money, you have to get beyond that.

Q: Were they working in agriculture?

A: Again, that has been an area in which there has been a tendency to focus on short-term project. There have been a lot of problems with that sector, because, again, the military looked around for the last few years and did not have a real civilian capacity in agricultural development to work with, so they just started building irrigation ditches wherever they were asked to do it and it seemed to make sense to them. Or, for example, providing seed. There are classic cases,

like in one province, where the Marines were told by a local sheik or a combination of sheiks that, "We really need seeds." So the Marines say, "Okay, that makes sense to us." They go out and buy imported seed and overnight destroyed the local seed production capacity. So that is held up as a poster case, where short-terms efforts frustrate long-term development strategy.

Q; Is that changing?

A: Yes, it is. The problem, of course, is you have a lot of legacy projects that are in the pipeline and those are already underway and the military is going to see those through, in many cases, but they are not necessarily appropriate when you shift towards a more longer-term development strategy; they are not conducive for setting the stage for that and they can create a lot of local conflicts, because they have not been part of an integrated overall plan.

Now in the south, one USAID Representative in a province was pushing to get immediately towards a normal development context for agriculture and small business. He was pushing for that, saying, "Look, this area, it is no more dangerous than it is in other parts of Africa that we work in or Southeast Asia, in some cases and other contexts. We really need to be shifting immediately towards longer-term sustainable development and getting out of the quick impact projects that really are not building up local sustainable capacity."

They had their jojoba plantation. It is called the jojoba plant. The oil seeds of those plants are used in generating electricity, through bio-energy capacity. Why would you be doing that in a country that is full of oil and is in such a low stage of development? It is crazy. Makes no sense.

One of the other problems in the agriculture sector and small business, too, is that you get staff on these PRTs, they get there and there is already a project in the pipeline that they then log onto and say "Okay," or they go in a completely new direction. They want to do something, so they have something to show at the end of their year and the incentive to try to jump onto quick impact projects is very, very high, because they are not there to implement a longer-term development strategy.

Q: How would you change that?

A: That is where you really have to have the participation and shift towards longer-term development, the involvement of development agencies and that means the international community, in those areas where it is safe to move around and they have the movement capacity. They really should encourage international development agencies to start coming in and to apply some of their strategies and get those working and get out of the quick impact business, the bricks and mortar business.

Q: Were the PRTs involved in a lot of infrastructure reconstruction?

A: Oh, a tremendous amount. Oh, yes, no question about it.

Q: Mainly what?

A: Electricity, water projects, building schools, those types of things. There has been a lot of lack of coordination. We heard many instances of, again, this is part of that quick impact approach and it is understandable. You want to get money into the economy; you want to get things built; you want to get people working as quickly as possible. But you end up with a situation where the same school… there was one case in a provincial capital, an incoming PRT team was laying the foundations to build a medical clinic up in a given area that they had been told by someone would be a good place to put a clinic and the military said, "You know there is a hospital that was built there by us just last year and it is sitting empty. There is no reason to be building. Get the equipment and the personnel to staff that hospital, do not build a new clinic!"

And that happens over and over and over again. But, again, a lot of this is the legacy of the earlier part of the U.S. experience in Iraq under Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and we are still, unfortunately, suffering from it.

Q: Yes, that is probably right.

A: From the lingering affects of that.

Q: Let us go back to the Rule of Law program. You did start talking about that. Provide a little more about what was being effective in that program.

A: It depends on where you were. One of the interesting things that we discovered about the Rule of Law program is that the Iraqi judiciary, the judicial sector, has a history. They have laws on the books. They had a functioning judiciary, by and large, and they are quite proud of it. There has been some resistance to having outside advisors go in and particularly in the Rule of Law sector, telling them what they need to do to improve their legal structures. For example, in one province in the south, the Rule of Law advisor said that he had a really hard time connecting with or making progress in his advisory role with the local judiciary, because local lawyers and judges would refuse to do anything without the approval of the judicial authorities in Baghdad.

We did find, for example, again, a lot of it is on the criminal justice side of the equation, helping to deal with detainees, helping to encourage Iraqis to speed up their processing of detainees. So they have been playing a very critical monitoring role in that regard.

In another provincial capital, the Rule of Law team, in particular, where they were unable to move around and do much with the actual institutions, because it is such a kinetic environment and a lot of the judges there are corrupt. But they were able to convince the Baghdad government to send in judges from Baghdad to try terrorist cases. So, again, playing more of a convening role and a monitoring role.

They would go out to the detention centers and monitor detainees and the treatment of them, encourage local lawyers, defense lawyers, to take up the cases of certain detainees. They were doing a lot of that and then helping to try to improve relationships between the local judiciary and the Iraqi police, which are often very bad. In a lot of places in Iraq, we saw they were playing a similar role in that regard.

Again, as I mentioned earlier, one of the criticisms from some of the Rule of Law advisors we have seen is that so many of the advisors were detailees coming from the Justice Department and so there is a heavy, heavy focus on the criminal justice side, rather than building up the civil law capacity.

I know that the Rule of Law advisors in Baghdad have had some success on dealing with the status of juveniles who are under detentions. I know they have helped build secure centers for trying certain cases. Providing protection for judges is another key area, because they are definitely assassination targets.

Q: Was the PRT related to the training program run by the Multinational Security Transition Command? You know about that?

A: No, I have no knowledge of that particular program.

Q: What about the public affairs area? Were there media officers working in the PRTs?

A: Media advisors?

Q; Or Public Affairs.

A: Public affairs, almost none. Very, very little in that area. It does not appear to me to have been a particular priority.

Q: And in the PRTs generally?

A: Yes, PRTs, in general, were often lacking a public diplomacy element, or public affairs element. That was definitely something we heard PRT leaders expressing some frustration over, that they did not have a dedicated public affairs person.

Q: But they had somebody, a reporting officer?

A: Yes, they often had a reporting officer. Public Affairs is not his job, but I do not know whether in some instances they were playing the role of public affairs or not.
But the reporting officers just do just that, generally keeping OPA and the Embassy up to date on what the PRT is doing.

Q: Some people felt that was the most valuable aspect of PRTs. Was that right?

A: That is actually a fair assessment in some cases, because, of course, one of the critical roles that the PRT plays, outside of governance, outside of some of these specific areas of expertise like economic development, is in being the eyes and ears of the Embassy and the U.S. government in general on what is happening at the provincial level, as well as providing a diplomatic role that these PRTs are playing in engaging with their provincial counterparts.

That has been a very important function that the PRTs are playing, in terms of helping the U.S. as it proceeds with determining its policy towards Iraq, figure out what is happening at the provincial level, because as we encourage these provinces to increasingly… As the law has now granted them a great deal of autonomy, to a greater or lesser extent, areas of Iraq are seizing on the opportunity to act autonomously.

What is uncertain at this point is the degree to which the Iraqi government is going to continue to appreciate that role, because in some respects you have a strange situation where a foreign entity is playing a very direct role in building up the capacity of provincial governments, sometimes at the expense of central government authority.

Now I say that, it should not necessarily be expense, it has mandated the Provincial Councils are to have a fair amount of autonomy within the Provincial Powers Act, but there will be definitely some resistance. For example, the airport in one province, which the PRT is so dedicated to helping the provincial government establish, was something that the central government looked askance at. They wanted to have control over that airport and they viewed it as a federal competency or federal affair and they wanted to put it in another place, in order to have some control over it. And, of course, the PRT is playing the role of an advocate for the independent ideas of the provincial government. So there may be some pushback on that over time.

*Q: Let us turn to talk about the Iraqis that are members of the PRT staff? How do you assess their participation? Some were cultural advisors and something called bicultural bilingual advisor*s *(BBAs).*

A: Bicultural bilingual advisors.

Q: What was your sense of their role?

A: They play a very important role, no question about it, because there are not enough of them, of course, on any given PRT to have nearly enough local staff and in some cases they have no local staff. We found a couple cases where, for reasons that I think probably have to do with the views of the locals and fears of the locals in terms of working on the PRT, they were all imported, their staff members were all brought in, in some cases from Africa, Arab-speaking Africans we saw on that PRT; there were people from the region, from Jordan in some cases. But I think that particular PRT had almost no local Iraqis on their staff, where in other cases they had quite a few local Iraqi staff.

They play a very, very important role; there is no question about it, in interpreting, as guides to the local context. So there just are not enough of them and not all PRTs have the benefit of them, or of qualified staff.

One of the USAID representatives, for example, said that that was a huge failure, he felt, on the part of his own institution, USAID in Baghdad, and that they had failed to be able to provide local staff or to make the extra effort to track them down, qualified local staff, to help, not only to act as translators and advisors but to help guide the programs, to help understand the local landscapes; he was very disappointed they had not made more effort to bulk up local staff.

Now USAID itself is so shorthanded in staff that in some respects it is not surprising that they are unable to increase the local staff capacity when their own staffs are deficient in numbers.

Q: Let us talk about relationships. How would you describe the relationship of a PRT to the provincial governance group, in terms of their acceptance or resentment?

A: By and large, they are appreciated, was my sense, in many cases. In some cases the relationship, as I mentioned, for example, in the case of a psovince down in the south, they had really almost no engagement, by the request of the local Provincial Council, which, again, is heavily Sadrist and probably influenced heavily by Iran; they had no relationship.

But in most of the cases where they were engaged their presence is appreciated. We did not get to visit the Governance Center up in one province, but, in that case, the Governance Team is actually co-located with the Provincial Council, a very unusual case. That seems almost a little too close, from my perspective.

But my sense is that the PRTs are appreciated. I know in Baghdad, as well, that their presence is very much appreciated, because the Iraqis, by and large, realize that they have a deficit in terms of understanding of their roles and responsibilities as government leaders and welcome that.

The one caveat, of course, is that the high turnover of PRT membership has been very problematic and Iraqis complain of it all the time that they lose their partners and that they are not handed off properly to a successor on the PRT, constant, constant problem, or that the successor was not given any kind of a memo or a handoff report, so that this relationship would not suddenly just be dropped.

And there was a lot of frustration expressed by Iraqis and I know this from my own personal interaction with Iraqis who complained of this, who would tell me, "Look, I got dropped. We were doing all this wonderful work and then my counterpart left and that is the last I heard from the PRTs." And these are very well placed individuals who very much regretted that.

But the relationship, by and large, is welcomed, particularly in functional areas like budget execution and understanding how to do their jobs. The Research Triangle Institute (RTI) programs have been beneficial. The problem there is that there are no real metrics or follow up to understand, the big question is, is the work going to stick, especially after a lot of these people are swept from office.

The hope is that the training has been broad enough that you have reached enough people that now have a better understanding of the need for responsible, responsive, local governance. That is very much a question mark at this point and that is why this upcoming election will be something of a test to see if the whole experiment carries over to a new generation.

Q: But do you think that the Provincial Governments, by and large, understand why the PRTs are there and what they are supposed to do?

A: They do, yes, and there are certainly plenty of cases where the Provincial Councils very much see the Governance Team fairly frequently. In one province the local governance staff person was literally acting as a mediator, which is too close, but that is the role he has assumed, between tribal leaders who set up their own council, a *qadha* council, in the absence of the IAP, an elected *qadha* council, they fled in the violence and the IAP and then the council came back. So now you have two mirror entities, both of whom believe themselves to be legitimate. So they tend to turn to the PRT to help them manage this rather dysfunctional situation.

Q: Do you think the general population understands what the PRT is?

A: No, no idea. I would say in nine out of ten cases local populations have no idea what a PRT is or what it is supposed to do. And again, there is a complete absence of public affairs capacity. And also, in all fairness, you necessarily would not want to publicize what the PRT is doing. So I think that almost across the board there is very little to no awareness in local communities the PRT even exists, let alone what it might do.

Q: Do you think the population has a sense that their Provincial Government is functioning and doing things for them?

A: I would say actually that is very, very mixed and, in many cases, the answer you would get back is "No," because the fact is that the water is not coming through consistently, the education system is still broken, rule of law networks are not functional in a lot of areas yet and electricity, most importantly and energy are not there. As long as that remains, there is a great deal of skepticism on the part of the average citizen towards their local government, because they see this as having performed very, very badly and that is true. But the PRT's presence has definitely been more positive than negative and, again, if building governance capacity, they have had some success there. The question remains whether institutionally that is going to be lasting, because it is focused on people in some cases, institutions that are not solid enough, as I said before, to retain that capacity once the individuals leave.

But playing that connective tissue role between elements of the local government, sometimes even mediating between U.S. military and Iraqi officials, which they have done in several instances, that has been an important role.

Again, a lot of it depends on the expertise of the members of the PRT and that has varied widely; that is still a problem. You are still not getting the best and the brightest on these PRTs and largely due to the challenges of finding qualified people willing to go into the field, enough of them and willing to stay for more than just a year.

So, again, their impact, it has been definitely beneficial, particularly on the governance side, that is very much the case, but it would be a lot further along if you had the kind of quality of person and then having them be able to stay for longer periods of time and not go away on such long breaks.

Q: You have touched on this before, but how about the relations between the PRT and the military, the military command? Do they understand why they are there or what the PRTs are?

A: It depends. In some cases yes, in some cases less so. There is still a long way to go in educating both sides about each other's culture, for sure.

But, in those cases, where the personal relationship between the team leader and the combat leader were strong, then the PRTs were clearly far more effective. For example, in one northern provincial capital, which is still in a counterinsurgency mode, so the military is clearly very much in the driver's seat there and the team leader has wisely recognized that and adjusted himself, being oriented towards the military rather than the other way around. He does not try to assert himself or his organization at the expense of military prerogatives, but yet, having done so and made that clear, the military very much values the input. That was evident; they were doing joint engagements, for example, a lot with their Iraqi counterparts.

Q: What does "joint engagement" mean?

A: When they go out to meet with government leaders, they often will take a U.S. military person with them. Now, that is partly because, again, of the environment. It is a kinetic environment, so the military presence underscores the power issue there, that there is strength behind what the PRT representative is saying and doing, that he has the support of the military.

Because, in some instances, where that relationship is not functioning, the Iraqis will often play the two off against each other. So you will have a military officer meeting with a tribal leader in the morning and then that same tribal leader will meet with a civilian from the PRT later in the afternoon, and that sometimes ends up causing a lot of problems, because they act at cross purposes.

Q: Is there any area that we have not touched on that you feel is important to bring up, any issue?

A: Not that I can think of at this point.

Q: If you look over the PRTs, generally, and you have already touched on this, but what would you sum up as the major achievements of the PRTs so far?

A: The major achievements include helping at the provincial level, for sure and to some extent building the capacity at the local level, too, within cities that have local governance, like the neighborhood and district level, building up the capacity and understanding of their role as public servants. There has been success in that realm.

There has been a lot of success on budget execution, as is evident by the fact that a lot of provinces are doing a better job of identifying priorities and spending their money. That has been a clear success.

Those are the areas that I would point to in general as areas of real progress and being able to advance U.S. goals, acting as the eyes and ears of the Embassy, a very critical reporting role that

they have played. That is critical to understanding the local context, without which the Embassy in Baghdad would be blind.

Q: You intimated that there is some question about the sustainability of what the PRTs are doing.

A: There is a very big question as to sustainability and that is why a lot of Iraqis at the local level and at the provincial level, in particular, are worried about the United States departing, which is really because they are afraid that once that monitoring and mentoring element is gone, those that believe in the democratic experience fear that the thing will come down—[not be sustained].

And, again, everybody is looking at these elections in part because the Iraqis are going to be managing them almost entirely on their own. So that really will be, I would say, the first major test of the degree to which they are embracing the democratic model that they have been presented with.

And if the transition of power goes relatively smoothly and if, most importantly, Iraqis believe it to have gone relatively smoothly and it results in change, obviously, that is true for anybody, anywhere, but the ultimate test is whether or not having gone through the last five years with I would say, to put it mildly, weak governing capacity, leaders that have been of very questionable ability and knowledge and background, whether or not they can begin to get people that have clearly demonstrated a capacity to lead and a concern for the welfare of their people, whether these people get voted into office and that their actions are reflective of that.

But, again, that is something that is very much up in the air.

Q: In looking back over your experience with the PRTs, in the context of lessons learned, what would you point to as two or three or four major, broad lessons that you have learned or what you think are the major issues ahead?

A: One of the big lessons learned is that the PRTs, first of all they need to make sure that they have strong central support from Baghdad.

Q: They do not?

A: Across the board they feel that they could get much stronger support and OPA itself is just way understaffed. You have desk officers there that are not necessarily in position, or not that concerned with, providing support when asked to by PRT team leaders. There are a lot of complaints about that.

So, going forward, I would say one of the big lessons, to make sure that these PRTs have reach back to a central agency that is going to properly respond to their concerns and needs, support needs.

The other lesson learned is that you have to have, if we are going to be in this business again, in a post-conflict environment, you have to have a stable civilian human resource capacity that is

forward leaning and able to get into the field and set up shop and set up a PRT quickly and that you have the right people to draw on to do those jobs, to staff those PRTs right away, because this haphazard approach to human resources, to resourcing these teams, has been disastrous.

Really, it has been entirely self-defeating. You just cannot have people coming in three months or whatever it is out of a year, they are only there for a year to begin with and then they establish these relationships and then do not hand them off properly, or you have these gaps that do unfilled, key positions on PRTs. One case where the Rule of Law Advisor position was not filled for months and you just cannot have that kind of a situation. So that is a key thing, a lesson still to be learned, or dealt with going forward.

And one of the most important lessons is, the relationship with the military, to understand, when you are still at counterinsurgency stage, what is the role of a PRT, how can it advise the military on establishing security and stability.

And also another key thing to look at going forward is how these key subject matter, civilian experts, in the early stages can help the military make wiser decisions, in terms of where they allocate their own funds and their own resources, so that you do not have such a mess when it comes to trying to transition to a more normal long term development context.

That is a critical, critical role and the civilian advisors can provide that capacity, if they are brought in early on, they understand their roles as advisors to the military, maybe, in the early stages. But one of the key things is that they have to be independent enough that they can stand up when challenged. And that is why even some of the civil affairs military personnel on the PRT teams said. "You do not want these people embedded with the military. They have to have their own stand-alone capacity so they can stand up and say, 'No, we do not agree with that. That is going to cause problems down the road. Here is why.' If you go digging all of these wells and start doing all these irrigation projects that are not integrated or these agriculture projects, then you have to do to it in a way that will be conducive to sustainability down the road.

Q: Any lessons particularly on how the PRTs work with or relate to the local governments?

A: Yes, in that case, again, Iraqis have felt "met-to-death" with PRT advisors, in many cases. They deal with all these people that come in and want to meet with them all the time, distracting them from their work. Where advisors come in and they advise on things that are of concern to Iraqis, that are priorities set by the local government, and, in this case, early on we had all kinds of people going in advising everybody to do this, that and the other thing, on a very short term basis and then they are gone. You have to have a more measured approach to advising folks on local government councils and on Provincial Councils, taking their priorities into account and not trying to force-feed them. That can backfire.

Q: Anything else that we have not touched on or other lessons?

A: Probably, but not that come to mind, frankly, at this particular moment

Q: Y*ou have done a terrific job here.*

A: Again, I have to caveat all of this. I have not made a formal analytical study of the PRTs. That has not been my job.

Q: That is what we are doing with these interviews.

A: But I have come at it with some personal experience of interacting with the PRTs and then, of course, conducted this assessment trip.

Q: Do you think PRTs are accomplishing their mission? Are they worth having?

A: They are absolutely worth having. They need to be vastly improved how they are staffed, the quality of people that are put on them as staff and also how they are led. And I think that they are learning to do this, as evinced by the improvement in some of the team leaders that we have seen.

We have seen several cases of team leaders with substantial management and leadership experience replacing those that did not have it and that are absolutely step one. You have to have a competent team leader.

You cannot have people leading those teams that do not have the requisite international management experience, because not only is it bad for team morale, but it immediately signals to a military counterpart that there is a lack of competency. Then they will do one of two things: one, they will move in to try to augment that in ways that may not be beneficial to the relationship or to the needs of the PRT, or they will completely ignore it, which is not good, either and they will not resource it.

We have seen that example. You have a very dysfunctional PRT up in on province and the military are not keeping the PRT informed of its meetings with the same Iraqis. So they are working at cross-purposes already and they are doing it because they do not trust the leadership and they do not respect the leadership of the PRT.

Q: That may be a good point to end on.

A: There is just one last thing and that is that very much across the board civil affairs [military personnel] said that they were coming out, even though some of them had some training in what PRTs are meant to do, they felt that the training was very inadequate overall, that they were not properly indoctrinated into the culture and practices of PRTs and what they are supposed to do and how they do it. They complain constantly of not being provided proper advance training of what to expect or how they would fit into a PRT, what their roles would be.

Q: These are people from DOD?

A: No, these are military guys. There was a constant feeling that the training that they had received was inadequate.

Q: That is important. And the civilians also had the same concerns?

A: Yes, for a lot of them it was a shock to suddenly find themselves trying to interact with military counterparts, especially if it was in an area where they had very specific subject matter expertise and did not know how to communicate it to their military counterparts in a way that, for example, again, down in the south, and it was not the only case, we asked the Rule of Law staff how carefully they were integrating their activities with those of their JAG counterparts on the military side, the military lawyers. And in a lot of cases, there was absolutely no collaboration between the two. In one case, the PRT staff had no idea what their counterparts in the military were doing.

Q: So there needs to be a lot of training before they go out?

A: Right.

Q: On the civilian and the civil affairs sides?

A: And also what that relationship might be in and I cannot emphasize this enough, making sure that PRTs are designed to evolve with the conditions. If you are in a very kinetic environment, when you first get into a conflict or a post-conflict environment, if it actually is not post-conflict, how does the PRT conduct itself relative to the military contingent, whose first priority is to pacify the situation and establish stability and security, how does the PRT conduct itself in that environment, versus later on down the road, after a degree of security has been established.

And that evolutionary process has been very rough, understandably, because this is really a new experience. PRTs in Afghanistan are very different, starting with the fact that they are run by the military. Whereas in Iraq, they are much more involved in engagement in local governance and national building. It is the first time they have done it and it is naturally been a very difficult learning process.

But if they can focus on how a PRT should evolve and getting the military to understand that evolution as well, as the situation improves they increasingly should be encouraged to hand off certain responsibilities to their civilian counterparts. But that is never going to go smoothly until PRTs are properly structured and resourced, that the methods and processes for resourcing and staffing those PRTs has been firmly put in place.

Q: That is a good point to end on.

A: Okay.

Q: Thank you for an interesting interview.