INTERVIEW SYNOPSIS

Participant's Understanding of the PRT Mission

Interviewee served in Iraq for almost three years, first as the USAID rep on the Baghdad PRT, then as head of USAID’s PRT office at the embassy. The PRTs’ mission was to build the capacity of local and provincial governments. PRTs were a coordination mechanism for existing, ongoing programs.

Relationship with Local Nationals

Dealt with governor of Baghdad province, chairman of the Provincial Council, the mayor and deputy mayors of Baghdad. “There were a lot of people meeting with Iraqis and calling it capacity development. It’s hard to know if there was any real capacity development.”

Observations: The surge of American personnel to the PRTs meant that meetings with Iraqis frequently were overloaded with Americans who weren’t relevant to the issue. It was almost better that there weren’t more movement assets because the Iraqis were having to work full time while dealing with all these Americans.

Insights: You can’t be in the face of the people you’re trying to talk to all the time, but you have to be present often enough to monitor programs.

Did the PRT Achieve its Mission? (Impact)

Observations: After the surge, the increased security made it easier to bring people into Baghdad from the rural areas.

Insights: USAID is much better prepared to plan and fund development projects than other agencies.
Lessons: USAID should have been in the PRT planning process from the beginning but was not.

**Overall Strategy for Accomplishing the PRT Mission (Planning)**

Observations: The Baghdad PRT had a well-thought-out work plan which was very useful. Some PRTs actively resisted Office of Provincial Affairs’ (OPA) efforts to introduce work plans, but it’s important to have objectives, methods for achieving them, resources that can be deployed, and metrics for success.

Insights: OPA worked hard and eventually got its work plans in place, but it should have had better support from higher levels at the embassy. Some PRT leaders were ambassadors, and the head of OPA, while senior, was never an ambassador – and that made it hard.

**What Worked Well, What Did Not? (Operations)**

What worked well: Coordination – procedures to arrange meetings, get transportation, and have access to key Iraqis.

What didn't: Not enough flexibility in using funds to let PRTs take advantage of changing opportunities – though that improved over time. The PRTs “Maturity Model” was not a very useful tool. It was designed too quickly and without much thought or input from all the players – especially USAID. “There were things in the maturity model that would not pass muster in a standard USAID performance measurement plan.” Also, “people aren’t programs” – people are being sent to PRTs before the question of what they are to be doing is answered. And PRTs were discovering problems at the local and provincial levels of a government that was still basically centralized and unable to deal with problems at lower levels.

**THE INTERVIEW**

*Q: Can you explain what your PRT background was?*

*A: I was in Iraq from August of ’06 until May of ’09. I was the USAID representative on the Baghdad Provincial Reconstruction Team from August of ’06 through January of ’08. I was dual hatted there at the end, because from December of ’07 until May of ’09, I was the head of the USAID Office of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Baghdad. In that capacity, I handled the USAID aspect of PRTs throughout the entire country, to include everything from recruitment and training issues, from getting people in, briefing people when they came in, dealing with issues once people were on the PRTs, mainly programmatic, trying to get our USAID programs to work well in the regions with our USAID representatives out on the PRTs, and of course interfacing with the embassy, with*
the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA), on policy level issues about what PRTs should be doing, how are we tracking their success, for example.

Q: So a lot of what of what we’re going to be talking about will not be pertaining to a particular PRT, but rather to your perception of the PRTs.

A: Right. Basically I can talk about the Baghdad PRT, plus all of the PRTs, based on my experience at the PRT office.

Q: What is your understanding of the mission of the PRTs?

A: My understanding of the mission of the PRTs in Iraq was to build the capacity of local and provincial governments.

Q: And how would you characterize your relationship with the local nationals?

A: Of course the problem was that you could never spend as much time as you would have wanted to, because you’d sometimes have to cut meetings short, because of various changing security guidelines.

The other thing that hampered access that was not well thought out at the mid-point of the history of the PRTs is that they increased the size of the PRTs rather radically and they didn’t give any thought – well, they gave thought but they weren’t able to do anything about it – to the issue of team members’ movements.

Let me back up a bit. As part of the civilian surge, PRTs were asked what they needed to get the job done, and the assumption was that you’d get anything you needed to make it happen. As a result of this, the size of PRTs went up very substantially, but one of the assumptions was that there’d be extra movement assets to move people around. Well, we got great support from the military, but obviously we didn’t get a doubling of movement support.

So you had a lot of more Americans competing for the same level of resources to move around and so you could not go out as often as you might otherwise do. Plus you tended to have very crowded meetings in which you had five, six, seven, eight Americans in a meeting with some poor Iraqi. Not all of the Americans were completely germane to that discussion, but all of them were really anxious to get out of the International Zone to see what was going on and try to do something useful during their time in Iraq. So that was a major issue.

The other issue is that once it was decided to radically increase the numbers of civilians on PRTs, people were hired that in many cases had no relevant experience whatsoever. Now, with very, very, few exceptions, everyone tried extremely hard and you had some really amazing things happen, because some of the people without the experience still managed to do a great job.
But that’s not the way to run things, because there were a lot of people who didn’t have experience and it cost a huge amount of money to bring them on over. They were in that line competing for resources to go out for meetings, competing for programmatic resources to get projects done.

So I think a lesson learned is that there has to be a lot more thought about what it is PRTs do and a very thorough analysis of how many people you need to do them, because people cost money, people are put at risk, I think there’s a moral obligation there not to put people at risk who don’t need to be put at risk and especially if they’re not quite sure what they’re supposed to be doing. Almost by definition then, anything that happens, to me, is a moral risk in that case.

And you have to look very closely not just at what people you need, but whether such people exist in numbers, because we live in reality and if you can’t possibly get the right number of people with the right number of qualifications, someone at a higher level has to take the steps to, one, start training up those people, so in two, three, and four years we’ll have them and secondly, come up with a way of working now that doesn’t assume the existence of people who literally don’t exist.

Really I think everyone did know what they were supposed to be doing: building the capacity of local government. What was not understood was how that was supposed to be done.

I never really saw much in writing on this, but when I put pen to paper, or electrons to hard drives, I saw PRTs as really being two things: I saw them being a coordination mechanism for existing U.S. government programs, to ensure that if you have an aid program in an area, that the public diplomacy people know about it, that if there’s agriculture money going into the area, that the USDA people are talking to the USAID agriculture people, so you’re not stepping on each other. Especially in an area where you just can’t get in a car and roll around because of the security situation, you get people on site talking and coordinating with each other and finding out what’s actually happening with our programs in the area.

Now, there’s the other thing that the PRTs were doing that wasn’t an implementation mechanism itself. AID is in this particular phase right now in which for the longest time, certainly as long as I’ve been with AID, since the early 1990s, we manage implementing partners to do work.

So for AID, putting someone on a PRT, this was all about having someone on site to make sure that implementing partners were doing their job, that they were coordinating, that their work plans took into account local conditions, conditions you wouldn’t necessarily be able to know from sitting back in Baghdad.

I was in Baghdad, but still, someone sitting in Baghdad next to me managing a local governance program that covered the entire country just never knew the particularities about local government in Baghdad.
That was my job, I was the guy on the Baghdad PRT, and so because of that we were able to put things in the work plan, look at targets, look at indicators that were more appropriate to Baghdad, as opposed to other parts of the country. So it was worthwhile from that perspective.

Now, people keep talking about AID moving to more direct implementation. That’s why the other half of the PRT experience, I think, is useful for AID and for the U.S. government as it determines how to do foreign assistance. Because the other part of the PRTs was implementing a program.

Initially, they had access to no money. So you had people but no money, an obvious disconnect. Later on, they finally were able to provide funds to the PRTs, but you still had issues. Were people trained to design projects? Were people trained to award contracts and did they have the warrants to do so?

A lot of this was done through a centralized AID contract to provide this kind of support to the PRTs, but an awful lot of small grants were done directly by the people on the PRTs after they received a certain amount of minimal training.

And once again, there was a war on, people had to do things fast, people worked very hard to get the required training out to people, but, once again, if we’re looking at this systemically, you need to have a system in place to get this training to people ahead of time. So they don’t go out there and have to be trained on the job while they’re trying to learn about Iraq, implement programs and oh, by the way, learn how to do grants management, for example.

But I think that because of that disconnect, there were a lot of people meeting with Iraqis and calling it capacity development. It’s hard to know if there was any real capacity development.

In my time covering all of Iraq, I certainly heard good success stories of very qualified people sitting down on a regular basis working through a program of instruction with their Iraqi colleagues. Unfortunately, that was in the minority of cases.

Most of the time, it was people going out, talking to Iraqis, asking what they were doing, asking why they weren’t doing something else, coming back, writing a report, and the next week going out and doing the same thing.

And in that case, it almost seemed that it was a good idea we didn’t have more transportation assets, because these poor Iraqis were trying to do their fulltime job and having to deal with all the civilians who wanted to talk to them and do capacity development and oh, by the way, the military would drop by and try and do the same thing, because everyone wanted to be out there, being seen as doing something.
That’s a very long way of getting around to the question of how to interact with local Iraqis. Typically, as an AID manager, you realize you can’t be in the face of the people you’re trying to talk with all the time, but you have to be present often enough to see, if there’s a training program, how the training is going on, how’s it being received, and find out what people are doing differently that they didn’t do before.

And then you have to have enough face time with the senior political leadership to make sure that they have bought into this capacity development that we’re doing, that we’re not just a bunch of Americans giving classes and the guy at the top says, “Don’t listen to these Americans. Just give them tea, get them out of the office.”

So I think I more or less had enough time to establish those relations with people like the governor of Baghdad province, the chairman of the Provincial Council, the mayor, and the deputy mayors of Baghdad.

That’s where I interfaced with them and then an awful lot with the people below them who were receiving various training through AID programs, predominantly the local government program.

Q: Great, very useful. What agreements or outcomes resulted from your interaction with the Iraqis and did they meet these commitments?

A: In Baghdad we had, one of the biggest success stories was as the surge started succeeding and you started getting more security. We were able to, throughout that period, use our local government program to get key groups within the city and the province meeting with each other.

In central Baghdad we were always able to do that, even in the worst of times. It took the surge to start getting people in from the rural areas. That was one of the big changes resulting from the surge. We had lost people in our AID programs trying to go out to these areas and had had during 2005 and early 2006, casualties, people had been killed. So we had to of course curtail AID programs in those areas.

After the surge, we were able to get people out in those areas. More importantly, people out in those areas felt that it was safe for them to travel. To me that was a huge proxy indicator. When an Iraqi would get in their car and drive from Point A to Point B, that told me much more than an analysis by the military saying, “Okay, security’s better, because we’re down to one attack a week, instead of five attacks a week.”

That’s important information to know, but the outcome is when the Iraqis feel it’s safe to get in the car and drive across a couple of sectarian militia checkpoints -or the checkpoint didn’t exist anymore - to come to find out how to be a better District Council member, so they can do better for their citizens in their area.
Take an example as mundane as trash collection. Early on, the military realized that heaps of trash were great places in which to hide improvised explosive devices, IEDs. Plus they wanted to get people employed, and off the streets.

They started to spend a lot of their money to pay people to collect the trash. Fine, Iraqis aren’t stupid. They’re not going to use their own money to pick up trash if you have a bunch of Americans in town who are paying people to pick up trash.

And so you have the municipal trash system basically fall apart. Obviously there’s a problem because of the war, but now it was really not working. You ended up continuing to pay for the trash program, because you had units move in and move out, commanders come in and come out, and you didn’t have a centralized system of trash collection.

And so you have some parts of the city where the trash collection was very good and some parts where it was pretty horrible. In a rich part of the city, if they couldn’t get the Americans to pick up the trash, they usually put in their own money, but in the poor parts of the city, well, tough, they’ve just got lots of trash, until it eventually got so bad and people planted enough bombs, that the Americans came in and cleaned it up.

We ended up with a USAID program that in the name of getting a lot of people employed, ended up just paying a lot of people to pick up the trash, but each and every one of those programs was coordinated directly with the city and the districts.

And then we were able to use a specialist on the Baghdad PRT that AID was able to provide that could then work with the city officials in charge of trash collection. So they could say, “Hey, okay, we’re working in these five areas now. As the security improves, we’re going to move up to 10. Eventually we’re going to get up to 15.” Those are just illustrative numbers. “But we’re not going to work everywhere else. So let’s start figuring out how you’re going to work everywhere else and then work on the plan for, as AID’s program scales back, how you’re going to pick up the trash collection in those areas.”

Now it wasn’t perfect, but the Iraqis were able to stick to their agreement and as we had to scale back the USAID program for employment generation and particularly the trash collection component of that, they were able to pick up the trash in these areas.

The PRT was essential to this, because there’s the political side to this. That’s where the State Department role is key. We knew so much more about the politics of Baghdad, because you had some really fine State Department political officers and of course the PRT leaders interfacing and reporting back and getting people to the table, talking to people and getting buy in from local Iraqi leaders. Also the military leadership of the PRT could talk to the military units in the area and get their buy in, to say, “Hey, wait a second, I know it won’t be perfect here, but the Iraqis agreed to pick up the trash. Don’t pick up the trash for them! Do something else, or let us know if it’s really getting bad and we’ll go in and talk to them, establish a feedback loop, so that there’s a way of getting this done, but don’t mess up the system. Otherwise, we’ll never be able to leave this area.”
So that worked. Another thing that worked that way, for example, was that we were moving around all the time with military. There was a period of time before the surge and when the surge was starting in which the Iraqis didn’t want to meet with Americans coming to town in their armored vehicles and with security details.

But we had a good local governance program that had a compound that was secure, where people who were literally from communities that were killing each other would still come in and meet with each other and talk.

So, one, that was good for the Iraqis, talking to each other and trying to work out problems, but I was also able to, in the course of monitoring those programs, bring in State Department political officers to attend these meetings.

They couldn’t have gone out to the areas, because of security issues, but they could go to this secure compound and meet with people from places like Sadr City, for example, and watch and see the interaction between Shia and Sunni elements. That provided them with more in depth knowledge of what was going on and gave them more ideas of how to move the reconciliation process forward.

Q: In your dealings with the local leaders, you mentioned governors, mayors, and Provincial Council members. Did you get the feeling that the objectives that we had as the U.S. government coincided with those of the Iraqis?

A: I think so. I think the longer I was there, sometimes I wondered, at the national level, because this whole U.S. policy of decentralization obviously got a lot of resonance with local leaders, because their role was being built up.

Towards the end of my time, then, an increasingly assertive national government was trying to realize what was happening out in the regions and there was a certain amount of push back, not all of which was bad. I think it was Iraqis coming to terms with how they were going to rule and govern their country.

That was a huge role for the U.S. political leadership in Baghdad. That was outside the purview of the PRTs, to make sure that people at the national level were kept in view.

Of course, that wasn’t just a U.S. government policy, to decentralize things. That was come upon in initial discussions with Iraqi leaders back in probably 2003. It was an example of how, as things move forward, it was successful at the local level. But people come and go in politics and as you got a new set of people in at the top in Baghdad, they asked, “Wait a second, how much decentralization do we really want?”

Q: How did you get the situational and political awareness for what was going on in Baghdad, in your area?
A: Everything from intelligence reports to embassy reports, although a lot of that was us reporting to the embassy. The military intelligence reports were very useful. But it was from going out and talking to people, and because of the security problem, you didn’t have as much contact with people as you normally would.

We employed a number of Iraqis as technical people in the AID projects. I talked to them a lot, because talking to the leadership is one thing, but certainly in other posts I’ve been at, one of the biggest sources of information for me was always talking to my neighbors. I couldn’t do that there, so I had to talk even more with Iraqi FSNs (Foreign Service National employees) that worked for me, the Iraqis that worked for AID implementing partners, and the Iraqis that worked as interpreters, for example, on the PRT, and who would every day have to go back to their homes. So I asked them, “Hey, how do you get in? What about checkpoints? What do you think about the police?”

Probably the biggest thing that hit home to me, at that first meeting outside the wire in ’06, I met an Iraqi woman who was on their Provincial Council and I asked her straight out, “How do you define security in Baghdad right now?”

And she said, “I define it as the presence of American troops.” And over the course of three years that changed, but in ’06 there was zero confidence in the Iraqi police or army. Of course that was just one data point but it was reinforced by other data points.

Q: What was the relationship between your planning and higher-level planning?

A: One thing that was missing in Iraq for the PRTs was a set plan. I can’t take credit for this, because it happened just before I got there, but the Baghdad PRT had a very well thought out work plan that we actually followed when I got there.

Q: But you were smart enough to understand that it was a good plan.

A: Yes, and people were using it. I can tell the difference between a plan that’s on the books but no one’s using and this one was being used. Nothing’s perfect, but we had agreement on what we were doing and we worked towards getting it.

I understand that a lot of PRTs actively resisted attempts by OPA to actually have a work plan, let alone use it. And so that’s a huge problem. You had massive resources and large numbers of people put into this, all trying to do good work, but not having enough time to step back and write down, “Okay, here are our objectives, here’s how we’re going to go about doing it, here are the resources we’re going to employ, and here’s how we’re going to measure our success.”

The three years I was there, the embassy, through OPA, always realizing this, but working harder and harder and bit by bit making progress in getting these plans in place.

I think by the end they finally got them in all the different PRTs, but clearly it would have helped if the people in the leadership of OPA had received a higher level support,
because let’s face it, some of the PRT leaders were ambassadors. The head of OPA was always very senior, but never an ambassador. And it’s hard to tell an ambassador what to do.

That’s a key thing, you’ve got to have a work plan, you’ve got to have a strategy and you’ve got to have metrics to determine what kind of progress you’re making, because otherwise, you’ll never know when enough is enough.

There was a process that was engaged in Iraq. I think there’s a lot of opinions on its effectiveness. I think one of the problems with it – it was called the maturity model - was that it was designed not so much as a management tool but as an answer to criticism by Congress and by various auditors for not having such a thing.

So because it was a reaction to criticism, it was done very quickly and, honestly, it was done with zero coordination or input from USAID. I think we’ve all done enough with the interagency to know that when you put together an interagency document, you’ve got to have input from all the players and certainly all the major players. Certainly if you’re talking about how to measure development success, it would probably help to bring USAID into this.

Because we were not key players, USAID was never really bought into the process and there were things in the maturity model that would not pass muster in a standard USAID performance measurement plan.

Q: You’re in an interesting position as former military. How did the military and civilian members of the PRT get along, professionally and personally?

A: I think that certainly at the Baghdad PRT, we got along very well. You heard of some problems in other PRTs. Of course, people are people. I think in general people appreciated each other.

The problem is of course not knowing, the military not really knowing what AID does, for example, or what a political officer from the State Department does, or what a public diplomacy person does, and so the PRTs were a great way of sharing that information. And conversely a lot of people on the civilian side didn’t have a clue about what the military did. So you had a very steep learning curve. And to be honest, that’s one reason why I volunteered. I had reached the point in my life where half of my time had been spent in the military and half in AID and if I walked away from this challenge, it’d be ridiculous.

Q: What about resources? When you were planning things, were you able to take resources into account? You said at one point you had people and no money.

A: It can’t be reiterated enough that people aren’t programs. What has happened in Iraq, what’s happening in Afghanistan, is that people are being fielded before the fundamental
question of what it is that they’re supposed to be doing is being answered. You need to figure out what you’re supposed to do first and then staff it with people.

Resources. The U.S. government and AID in particular has to do a better job of, one, working through its contract system to find an appropriate way of decentralizing contracts, take advantage of the fact that you’ve got people out in the field that can check on performance and take local conditions into account. So that’s the challenge on the contracting side.

I think that in addition to those resources, every PRT needs direct access to a certain pot of money but once again, let me emphasize how critical it is to have a work plan, because otherwise the “good idea fairy” will be here, doing a lot of things which individually might make everyone feel good, but don’t necessarily add up to anything.

You don’t necessarily need as many resources as maybe we’re given, but you got to have something and you need to bit by bit transition away from having the military doing a lot of development work, because that’s one thing I saw while I was there, the Iraqis appreciated any indication of normality.

I mentioned before that they needed the U.S. military, they wanted the U.S. military, for security, but as time went on they appreciated that coat and tie at the table without a weapon. There’s an entire dynamic of talking to people and you can just see it on people’s faces. So that’s just so critical, in terms of the civilian presence. And at a certain point in time it’s probably not possible to have. When that point is reached, you really do need to civilianize development assistance and let the military concentrate on its core function of security.

Q: How close do you think we are to that in Iraq?

A: I’ve been gone since May. I think that we’re getting there and certainly the military gets it. What the military doesn’t necessarily get is, we talked a lot about transitioning from the military to civilians. In initial meetings, you would tend to have the military give you a long project list of the 500 projects they were doing and say, “Okay, here’s what we’re doing. Who’s going to pick up these 500 projects?”

Well, we probably wouldn’t do any of those. We’d do five other projects instead. So this turnover is more talk about approaches and what needs to be done, especially given the fact that you’ve had a radical reduction in resources available to civilian agencies.

That was of course one of my biggest disappointments there. For the last year that I was there, you hit that point in which the surge had succeeded, U.S. units were leaving areas. Doctrinally, that was the time for civilian agencies to step up their efforts, and of course we had our budget slashed in half.

Q: When you got there in 2006, did you have any overlap with your predecessor?
A: Someone was filling in temporarily, because the person I was replacing had an accident and had to be medically evacuated. So I did have a week’s overlap with the person that was covering that area, and then that person went out to a different PRT.

And when I was managing it, we probably had overlaps two-thirds to three-quarters of the time, maybe even more. When new PRTs were established, you might sometimes have a one-, two-, or three-month gap before you’d get an AID person out there.

But I think once we got people there, we were pretty successful at having overlaps. I’d say maybe 10 to 15 per cent of the time we didn’t.

Q: When you left, did you have overlap with your successor?

A: Yes.

Q: And what kind of advice did you give your successor?

A: I was moving on to the PRT office, so once I did the overlap I was still in Baghdad, so the guy could ask his questions. So that helped.

The advice I gave was to get to know the programs, get to know the people and establish good relationships within the PRT and understand what the AID programs were doing, so that you could properly integrate everything and keep pushing to maintain and follow the work plan.

There’s a wonderful word that Field Marshall Rommel used, *fingerspitzegefühl*, that feeling at the end of your fingertips. You can’t define it. It’s not a matter of sticking to the plan, because sometimes the plan needs to be changed. And you can’t just react to the circumstances, because if you do you’ll never establish a level of competency to be able to move on to the next level and the next level.

So you’re constantly having to decide: “OK, what’s the effect if I make this change now? Am I not going to be able to make progress in the other programs? Or wait a second, am I going to have to cut back or change this other program that I’ve been running for the last six months in order to take into account of this new thing that happened?” You’re always asking those types of questions.

Q: In your day-to-day activities, what worked well and what were the major obstacles?

A: The biggest obstacles were security constraints. I’m not saying they were wrong, but everything from an actual bad security situation that prevented you from going to certain places, to being able to go to certain places but not often enough, because there weren’t enough security assets to take you. That spanned the whole gamut.
What worked well? Coordination I think went very well, in terms of procedures to arrange meetings, to get transportation to meetings, to have access to key Iraqi authorities.

What didn’t work well was the initial lack of any funds to take advantage of changing opportunities that presented themselves at the local level, but then that got changed over time, so that was good.

PRTs were a presidential priority and they were the flavor of the month, which wasn’t necessarily bad. However, what didn’t work as well as it should have is that you had all these resources, all this attention, paid to the provincial level of a government that was still basically centralized.

And so you had a lot of problems dug up by PRTs at the provincial level that could not be solved in the Iraqi context at the local level. There was a crying need for a very well developed and extensive capacity development program at the ministries at the national level with reach-out to the provinces. We were starting to get that when I left, we had a good project in place to do that, but once again it was not resourced like it needed to be, and certainly the way it could have been a couple of years before, when we had more money.

It’s tough. For example, it’s easy to say, “Oh, we should have had a program with the minister of agriculture.” Well, in 2006, we could not have worked with the minister of agriculture. It would have been a waste of money to work with him. But that calls into question: if you can’t work with the minister of agriculture, what do you do with agriculture at the local level? Sometimes you just can’t do something and you have to wait until you’ve established the right kinds of inroads with the government in order to get the buy in that allows you to do development work.

Q: You said coordination with the military was good. What about with the different civilian agencies? What agencies did you have?

A: We had Department of Justice, USDA, State Department, and AID. I think that was it. There was pretty good coordination among the agencies. But going back to the frustration of not having a well developed strategy or funding for the strategy, we had a fantastic Rule of Law section staffed with some really great people out of the Department of Justice and State/INL (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs) who were out all the time, knew the court system and the prison system and the police systems of Baghdad like the back of their hands, and they didn’t have any money. There was no thought-out program for them to do. It was great political reporting but to me, as an AID person, political reporting is not an end in itself. It has to lead to something. And to the end, there was no thought-out and top-to-bottom, worked-out Rule of Law program in Iraq.

Q: Did you coordinate with other PRTs?
A: When I was in the Baghdad PRT, they started these embedded PRTs. We got nine of them initially in Baghdad and it worked, but it worked because we made it work.

The original concept would be that we were all separate, but that was ridiculous, because you could have had 11 people trying to get in to see the mayor of Baghdad to get the trash problem solved.

So what they moved to was very useful. They eventually subordinated the ePRTs to the Baghdad PRT. It’s not like it didn’t work before; we made it work. We didn’t need the PRT leader to be directing the ePRTs. More or less they came up with a good way of working as they did with the military units in the area. It helped because we were in Baghdad before, so we were able to introduce them to their District Councils, for example, and to the local authorities and say, “Here are our notes on these guys or maybe we can introduce you to them”. So then we were able to pull back out of the district level things and say, “Okay, if you have problem that requires work at the city level or the provincial level, let us know and we’ll arrange things to get that resolved,” and we were able to concentrate more on capacity development at the city and provincial levels.

The ePRTs were a great idea but they were overly resourced, because you had people being sent to ePRTs who were city managers. Well, it’s a centralized city. We’re the same way. You don’t go into Southeast Washington and come up with a city development plan for that area. No, you do that with the city of Washington with input from the local people. And so there was not a lot of thought given as to what the political realities in the government structure of Iraq were when they came up with the ePRTs.

There were quite a few differences among the PRTs. Most of the ePRTs were in Baghdad. Half of them were highly urban, the other half rural. Differerent sets of terrain. And you had three out in Anbar which were out in the middle of nowhere covering huge swaths of territory, because Anbar’s a huge province. Very different from the Baghdad model. So you had the same levels of government but a different reality.

Q: What about the local Iraqi staff working for the PRT?

A: Because of the U.S. Army, we were able to have contracting mechanisms in place for Iraqis to work with us, both professionally and as interpreters. Because of the security situation, it ultimately became impossible to hire FSNs. In theory you could, but in practice you couldn’t.

And so we actually had fewer FSNs working in USAID when I left than when I got there, because a couple of them were killed and a couple quit because of the problems. When they were able to apply for refugee status in the U.S, we lost a lot of them that way.

The military system tended to be more flexible. Of course, you couldn’t afford to turn a blind eye to the security situation, but we were able to get some Iraqis that way. This was something the military was doing, not part of the PRT program. And so as you came to the end of my time in Iraq and you started having less of money, there’s a lot more
coordination that needed to be done in order to keep these bodies there, because State wasn’t resourced for it. The military was getting fewer resources and was asking, “Hey, why are we spending money for State and AID? Why don’t they pay?” And we would say, “Why don’t we pay? Because we have no money for it.”

**Q: Are there any other comments you want to share about your experience with the PRTs, how they work, how they could be made better?**

A: People need to realize what it is PRTs do. If they’re going to be implementation mechanisms, they need to be staffed and resourced, which means you need contracting officers, you need to have money for contracts, you need to have people who are skilled in project development, in addition to technical experts in how to do things.

If they’re going to be platforms for project coordination, then you need more generalists, people who are skilled at going out and establishing contact and getting buy in from local officials and getting access for the various U.S. government programs that are in the area.

And if you’re going to have PRTs be both, then you have to do both. It goes back to what is the PRT supposed to do? If it’s going to be people going out and developing capacity directly, which I hear is where they’re going in Afghanistan, which isn’t necessarily a bad idea, but you have to realize that if you say A, then B, C, and D follow. You just can’t put out, for example, Rule of Law experts out there. The expert may not be an expert in how to design a program to expand Rule of Law in a given area.

And if you’re going to be moving money, the U.S. government doesn’t move money very well. To do that, you need a structure for that, which means you’re going to have to have comptrollers in these places, you’re going to have to have contracting officers in these places. Or at least people with warrants. You have to think through the system. Otherwise, you get a lot of frustrated people who are taking very grave risks every day.

**Q: I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but is it fair to say then that this confusion about what the role of the PRT is supposed to be, is the problem here in Washington, in Baghdad?**

A: I never got the impression that the policy issues that I’ve talked about were ever really addressed in Washington. Over time, they were more addressed out in the field. They developed the maturity model, the development was flawed, the product’s flawed, but then life is flawed. It could have been a lot worse and it was better to have it than not have it. And that’s something that was done out in the field, with coordination with people back in Washington. But the fundamental questions of what they do and how they do it and what resources they are going to have access to needs to be well understood, in Washington, not in a micromanagement way but as in, “OK, here’s the policy.” Otherwise you can’t train people unless you have that vision. And then in the field, because they’ll be the ones putting meat on the bones.