

USIP - ADST
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #26

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The interviewee is an active duty Senior Foreign Service Officer who served in USIA for a number of years before its absorption by the Department of State. She was in the U.S. Navy before joining the Foreign Service. She has not previously served in Afghanistan or South or Central Asia. She arrived in Afghanistan in December 2004 for a one-year tour with the PRT in Mazar-e Sharif. She had been under the impression that she was to be the political advisor at the PRT in Mazar, but found out upon arrival that since this PRT had been transferred to British control in the summer of 2004, the political advisor was a British diplomat. Her role was to serve as the U.S. Government representative at the PRT (there is only one other American there, a U.S. AID contract employee) and she took on the additional task of reporting to the American Embassy in Kabul on the political and security situation in the four provinces served by this PRT.

The 120 British soldiers at the PRT are helping the new Afghan police force in the four provinces in bringing law and order to the area. The police are only briefly trained at the police training facility in Mazar before being put on patrols and the British forces in the PRT act as mentors and back-up for this rather weak force. Warlords and drug dealers (often the same people) are among the main problems for the forces of order in the four provinces and the local governors are often unable or unwilling to oppose these individuals. Pat noted that DEA's occasional forays into the provinces to conduct drug raids were not supported by an effective public information campaign against poppy cultivation and she undertook to outline how such a campaign might be launched. She noted that her criticisms of U.S. drug interdiction policy (particularly the lack of any public information program) were deleted from her reports by Embassy Kabul before forwarding to Washington.

The interviewee thought the PRT concept, especially the low-profile British model (no Humvees and minimal military gear), was an effective means for delivering services and security to the provinces of northern Afghanistan. She recognized that the security situation in the southern provinces might preclude adoption of this approach at present, but recommends that when security permits, the U.S. seek to imitate the British style. She also recommends that those named to future U.S. Government slots in ISAF PRTs be given a clearer explanation than she got of what their role is to be before being sent to Afghanistan.

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

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*Interviewed by: Michael G. Anderson
Initial interview date: May 19, 2005
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Q: This is May 19, 2005. We will be discussing the PRTs in Afghanistan. . Can you tell me the location and some of the history of the PRT that you are working with, how long it's been there and what you're doing?

A: Yes. The PRT is in Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province in northern Afghanistan. It was started in 2002 by American troops as a civil affairs outpost before they formalized the PRT concept. The first American officer was assigned here around mid-2002, a female Foreign Service officer. The PRT is now under British command.

Q: Last summer it became what?

A: Last summer this PRT became a NATO PRT. Here we call it ISAF [International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan]. There is a British commander and there is a British foreign service officer and a British AID-equivalent who run this PRT. The American officers now are not a formal part of the PRT structure. We're just here as advisors.

Q: What are the titles and functions of the Americans there?

A: There are two of us here. There is an AID officer and me. My title is U.S. Department of State Representative, but I don't have a formal role here. I didn't know that until I got here. No one bothered to tell me that. I thought I'd be more involved in the decision-making of this PRT, but I'm not. So, that's a bit of a disappointment, but I'm still enjoying being here. I just thought I'd have more involvement in the actual running of the PRT.

[NOTE: At this point the connection to Embassy Kabul was broken. The following continuation of the interview took place on June 20, 2005 when the interviewee was back in the U.S. and Canada for a short period of time. The interviewee was using a cell phone.)

Q. We are resuming the interview begun on May 19 when you were at the American Embassy in Kabul. You may recall that I t asked you for a description of the location, history, physical structure, size, staffing, organization, and the agencies of the U.S. and Afghan government represented in the PRT in which you served.

A: The PRT where I work is located on the outskirts, the eastern side of Mazar-e Sharif, which is a major town in Balkh province in northern Afghanistan. It was started in 2002 by a U.S.

army civil affairs team. It was turned over to the British government in 2003 and then it became part of the NATO, or as it was called in Afghanistan ISAF [International Security Assistance Forces]. It's still actually run by the British, but now it's under ISAF NATO since December of 2004.

Q: So, in other words, since you arrived there, it has been a British facility.

A: Right. Next March, it will be taken over by the Swedes. We're in a compound of about four buildings on about an acre of ground in a residential area. There are a few modern houses, but mostly it's just mud houses with mud walls and people cultivating wheat and raising goats and chickens and cows. It's all dirt roads in front of where we are. There are walls around it and there's wire and we have guard posts at each of the four corners. We have local guards outside and British guards inside on the rampart. There are about 120 soldiers, mostly British, about 15 Swedes, six Romanians, and a couple Finns, Norwegians, and Danes. The soldiers are divided into [CONNECTION IS CUT OFF AGAIN AT THIS POINT]

[INTERVIEW RESUMED JUNE 20, 2005]

Q: We were talking about the location, history, physical structure, size, staffing, and bureaucratic organization. We got through physical structure. Size – I believe you were telling me how many people were involved in this?

A: 140 soldiers, including, 15 Swedes, a couple of Norwegians, Finns, Danes, one French officer. They were mostly Brits though. There is one British foreign service officer, me (a U.S. Foreign Service officer), one USAID contractor, and one British AID officer. We're the only civilians.

Q: In terms of organization... Who was in charge there?

A: There is a British colonel who is the commander of the PRT. There are five ISAF or NATO PRTs in the north and then all the other 12 in the south are currently run by the U.S., but they're slowly going to be turned over to NATO.

Q: Are there any Afghan government representatives in the PRT?

A: There is one ministry of the interior representative. He's the senior police officer. He lives at the PRT and is our liaison with the ministry of the interior. Then, of course, we have about 10 interpreters, some of whom live in the camp and others who just come for the day.

Q: What language were the people there speaking?

A: Dari, which is like Persian.

Q: How would you describe the formal, actual mission of the PRT?

A: Our PRT covers four provinces. We have small teams of soldiers, six soldiers, and two Land Cruisers. They go out and are each designated several districts within the province and they patrol those districts on a daily basis. They can't cover the whole district in one day. It's too big. But over a period of a week or 10 days, they will continuously cover their areas, meeting with the local governors, chief of police, elders, and villagers. Their main goal is to extend and reinforce the authority of the Afghan central government. The Afghan central government has never been strong outside of Kabul, so this is a whole new thing.

Q: But these are British soldiers.

A: Yes.

Q: So these British soldiers are supposed to be expressing the will of the Afghan government in Kabul?

A: Well, not quite. They're ensuring that the local police force, which is newly trained by the U.S. government and then assigned to the districts is being obeyed, that the local warlords aren't getting back to their old tricks of bribery, extortion, and drug running. -- which they are -- it's happening all the time -- but we're trying to report on it and help the local police to enforce the law. Our people don't arrest anybody. They don't confront anybody. There's really is a peacekeeping role. They're trying to mentor the local police when they're having problems. If we notice they're having problems they can't solve, then we'll notify the central government and maybe ask the Afghan army to come out and help them.

Q: What sort of problems, were most common?

A: The most common, of course, is drugs. In some cases, it's too big for us even to tackle. We don't get very involved in the drug issue because it's just so big. The central government along with the British and the Americans has DEA and others to deal with that. But the sort of problems we deal with are local warlords who are setting up illegal checkpoints and charging people to use roads or stopping the irrigation water to force people to grow poppies. That sort of thing. We'll help the police... If they don't feel strong enough to confront these people, we'll ask the provincial government to send in more police. We keep reporting back to the national government in Kabul about what's going on so that they can try to sort it out.

Q: So you're sort of the eyes and ears of the central government there.

A: Yes, right. Their whole infrastructure was completely destroyed [during the war against the Taliban] and now they are beginning to rebuild the police force with pretty minimal training. Their police, most of whom are illiterate, get four weeks of training and then are sent out on the job. Those who are literate get eight weeks of training. They get no firearm training at all. So, it's quite minimal and we're pushing them out pretty fast. The same with the army. We're giving them fairly minimal training to build up this army, but they're not getting enough training to replace highly trained U.S. or British or European troops.

Q: So in other words, you really have to hold their hands there or at least be present?

A: Yes, we have to be there.

Q: What projects have you been working on personally?

A: I have been working on trying to get bidders and build an American library in Mazar-e Sharif. I've been working on that for a while, trying to get bids and get the governor to give us a place to build it. I've gotten a donation from the Sackler Gallery in Washington. But my primary job is that of reporting officer. I meet with local officials – the governors, the chiefs of police, the local aid workers and NGOs – and report back to Kabul and to Washington on the political situation, including drugs, warlords, elections, women's rights, that kind of thing.

Q: In other words, you see your role there as not so much being a part of the PRT but rather reporting on what's going on there?

A: Right. But because it's a British-run PRT and there's a British diplomat as the official political advisor I don't really have an official role. But because I'm a senior Foreign Service officer and because I represent the United States and we're spending more money than all the other countries combined, my advice is sought all the time. If my British counterpart is on leave, and she's already taken almost two months of leave since I've been here, I'm the political advisor when she's away. I advise the colonel and the other military.

Q: How physically or technically do you transmit your reports from the PRT?-

A: Yahoo e-mail.

Q: So these are strictly unclassified over the open e-mail system.

A: Yes. Not the most satisfactory means, but that's all we have.

Q: Do you carbon copy people at the embassy in Kabul?

A: I send my reports to the embassy. I don't send them to Washington.

Q: So you feed into the embassy, which then may or may not use your material in its reports to Washington?

A: That's right. It goes through the clearance process, and I have found (because I see the final cables that go out sometimes) things that I've written have been removed. I have to say that some of the reports I've sent in that have been, for example, critical of our counter-narcotics policy because I've seen that it's not working, have been taken out by various agencies at the embassy and [my critical reports] don't get to Washington, which is not good.

Q: If what you're reporting is what you see, then that's of value to the people who are trying to assess the effectiveness of the program, so it would be a shame if it's lost. I guess that's perhaps part of the reason for this exercise.

A: I'm going to make a recommendation that would result in a radical change in our cable [clearance] system. Under this new system, the originator would write the cable based on what they see and observe, and while other agencies or offices would want to clear it, I don't think they should [be allowed to] rewrite what that person has written. I think they should be allowed to add on at the bottom their comments about what was written, but not change what the originator wrote. I think that would provide a much more accurate reflection of the realities on the ground rather than watering down everything.

Q: What about other U.S. agencies are represented in the PRT? You mentioned drugs. Are there DEA folks there?

A: No, it's just me and an AID officer. The DEA folks have done a couple of drug raids in our area. They just land, do their raid, and leave again.

Q: You said AID has a permanent representative?

A: A contractor.

Q: And what does that person do?

A: He oversees all the AID development. They have millions of dollars of development projects – schools, roads, bridges, and the agricultural programs, all sorts of AID programs.

Q: Is that person part of the PRT?

A: Like me. We're all part of the PRT. We all attend all the meetings and participate in everything. We all share one big office.

Q: Are there other international aid programs?

A: Just the British, the British aid officer and the British diplomat. Then there's me and the USAID officer.

Q: So it's pretty much a British-American setup there.

A: Yes.

Q: You mentioned that there is an Afghan government representative there. What ministry does he represent?

A: The ministry of the interior. He is a police officer.

Q: You also mentioned that the PRT comes in contact with Afghan warlords and local officials... Can you describe that relationship and interaction?

A: We meet with local officials all the time either getting information from them about how they're functioning or providing guidance to them or questioning them on what they're doing and then going back to the central government through our embassy or through ISAF and asking them if they could please speak to these people and get them to stop their corrupt practices or appointing police chiefs who we know are criminals, that sort of thing. When I say "warlords," I mean these are the guys who refuse to disarm.

Q: That's a very colorful term: "warlord."

A: Yes. Well, they are armed. They're sort of bandits really. But they control whole villages or regions. We meet with them sometimes hoping eventually to get them to stop doing what they're doing.

Q: Are they traditional tribal leaders of some sort?

A: Some of them are tribal leaders. Some of them are just strong men. A lot of these guys accumulated a lot of weapons during the war against the Russians, weapons that we provided. So they built big, powerful armies in different parts of Afghanistan. Some of them have not completely disarmed and they still run drugs and control a lot of territory.

Q: So you're trying to encourage the Afghan government police force, but actually you're having to deal with a lot of irregular forces.

A: Right.

Q: Are there any non-governmental agencies operating there?

A: There are lots of NGOs. There are hundreds of them.

Q: And how does the PRT relate to these organizations?

A: The United Nations is sort of the main international organization. They have a big office in Mazar and they have regional offices around the country. They're sort of overseeing and coordinating all the development. Then there are NGOs. There is Human Rights Watch, Doctors Without Borders, the Red Cross, Oxfam, Save the Children... There are just hundreds of NGOs.

Q: And does the PRT have contact with them?

A: Oh, yes, we have contact with them all the time.

Q: It sounded like the PRTs' emphasis was more on law enforcement and not so much on development.

A: Right. In the north, we leave the development to the NGOs.

Q: What would your contact with them be? What would you talk to them about?

A: We talk to them about the political situation, the security situation, and sometimes if there's a disaster. If our people go way out into the remote areas, they may notice that there's been a flood or an earthquake or something and they'll report back and we will talk to the NGOs and try to get out there and help the people.

Q: So they can come out for relief purposes.

A: Yes.

Q: What about local citizens, people who are not affiliated with any particular organization but may be prominent? Do you have any contact with such people?

A: Oh, yes, we talk them all the time. We talk to the local political parties. They come to see us. Sometimes landowners and village groups come to see us if there are land disputes. They think we can solve them, which we cannot. They come to us for that. People come to us for projects and ask if we can help.

Q: So it's a complex social situation you're looking at there.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Let's move on here to security. If you could describe the PRT's military complement. You already told us there are 120 British military there. Can you tell me what the specific role and mission is of the 120 people?

A: Yes. The specific role is to support security sector reform and to extend the authority of the central government into the provinces. In our PRT, we have three teams of six soldiers each who actually go out and patrol our province. And we have little satellite PRTs in the other three provinces and what we call "safe houses" in the capitals of those three provinces. Soldiers actually live there. They come in once a week to our PRT to get food and then they go out and stay in these safe houses. They patrol their provinces from the safe houses. In each one of the safe houses, there are 12 soldiers and interpreters. They patrol their region.

Q: Do these soldiers rotate out there and come back into Mazar?

A: No, they basically live in the safe houses. They just come in to get food and get their mail once a week and then go back out.

Q: Do you talk with them to try to get information on what's going on in the areas?

A: We talk to them when they come in. I think I'm the only one who does this, but I go out on patrols with them, overnight patrols, out into the mountains just to get a sense of the lay of the land and meet the people and talk to them.

Q: How is the population? Are they relatively cordial?

A: Very friendly.

Q: You don't have any hostility to deal with there?

A: There are a couple very remote areas where there are kind of anti-western mullahs. For the most part, people are very happy to have us there because they know, as long as we're there, it's going to be peaceful. They're quite happy to see us.

Q: So the soldiers are not there so much as a security force because there's not really that much of a threat to your security?

A: Oh, yes, there is a threat to our security.

Q: How would you describe the threat?

A: There are occasional IEDs [Improvised explosive devices] going off. There is a very small number of people who would like to see us go away. They do put IEDs on the roads. I cannot go out without armed guards. I never go out on my own. If I go out, it's not in an armored vehicle, but I'll go out in a vehicle with an armed driver and an armed escort.

Q: So despite the fact that 99% or so of the population is happy to see you there, there is always that one part of it.

A: That one percent of them, so we're still vulnerable.

Q: That sounds like a situation that's probably common throughout Afghanistan.

A: Except in the south it's more dangerous- [END TAPE]

Q: Do you rely on any Afghan forces for protection?

A: Yes, we have Afghan police guarding the exterior perimeter of our compound.

Q: Would you consider the force protection adequate?

A: Yes, I would.

How could it be enhanced? Is there anything you saw there that you thought could be fixed?

A: No, I think our security is very good. We have Afghan guards on the outside of our perimeter. We have the concrete barriers around the perimeter. Then we have British guards up on the top of the roof on the four corners. I think our security is very good.

Q: Describe how the PRT's activities relate to promoting democracy, creating local governance, and extending authority of the central government. . . You y were talking about the standing up of a police force there. Any there other aspects of the PRT that we could say are promoting democracy?

A: We worked with the governors of the four provinces that we covered. The governors are all appointed by the central government and they're not all the best administrators. So we've encouraged them over the last year, for example, to set up coordination boards, one a police coordination board, where at least once a month they have the police chief, the PRT, the UN office, the local army person, the police training office, anybody involved with policing coming together, and discussing problems and issues and trying to develop solutions. We've gotten them to set up another coordination board that [brings together] all the different NGOs and the aid that's being offered and trying to somehow rationalize it and coordinate that. We're doing [preparations for the elections that are coming up. We're working with the Afghan election board on a project right now.

Q: That's for the elections that are due to take place in September?

A: The parliamentary elections, yes. Some of the warlords have signed up as candidates and so we're working now to get these guys to disarm before they can be on the ballot. We're doing a lot of voter education. Our patrols take voter education materials around _their districts.. Then we're also involved in a project that's sponsored by the World Bank _ to train _the civil service in proper governance. We're trying to help them develop a professional civil service.

Q: You mentioned that you're trying to get the police force to be more effective and respected.

A: Right. We're working now with the Afghan national army, the local brigade, to do some patrols with the police as backup to police trying to enforce the law. We're coordinating that with the army and the police. They're not quite able to get together on their own yet, so we're helping them with that.

Q: How do the army personnel differ from the police personnel?

A: One reports to the ministry of defense. It's the national army. They're trained soldiers. The other are trained as policemen.

Q: Are the army personnel more adept at what they're doing?

A: They're getting more training because they have American trainers with them at all times. Even after they've finished training, they still have Americans with them. The police don't.

Q: In your area, do you encounter American trainers as well?

A: With the army.

Q: So there are American military in the vicinity?

A: Right. They're all reservists and they're all working as trainers with the army.

Q: . What is the relationship like between the PRT and the Afghan power holders? .

A: Our relations with the governors are good. The relationship is a little testy sometimes when we challenge them on their inappropriate appointments of people. They have a lot of loyalty for people who fought with them and even if these guys are corrupt, they'll still appoint them to positions.

Q: You mentioned governors. I thought the governors were appointed by the central government.

A: They are, but then they can appoint local district officials.

Q: Okay. So they're not necessarily people that have some kind of local position?

A: Yes.

Q: They're not sent out from the central government. They're actually local people who have been appointed by the national government?-

A: They're not always local. The central government sometimes appoints somebody to a province who's from another province so they will have less power.

Q: Has that been the case in the areas that you're familiar with?

A: No, where I am, the governors are from this area.

Q: Did the PRT organize local councils, assist in conducting elections, or otherwise promote democracy?

A: Yes, we set up the Police Coordination Council and the NGO Coordination Council. Now the governor runs those, but we helped set them up.

Q: So once a week or so they all come together?

A: Once a month.

Q: And what would take place at one of these council meetings?

A: At the Police Coordination Board, a review of police activities for the last month. Participants can raise any issues and problems, any new developments.

Q: So more information exchange than decision-making?

A: Right.

Q: Nobody can really give anybody else orders, I guess.

A: Well, the governor can in Dari.

Q: What about promoting human rights or women's rights, which of course is a subset of human rights. Is there anything that you can tell us about this?

A: We haven't focused too much on that. We certainly encourage women to get involved in politics. I know many women from my involvement with the International Visitor Program (a State Department program that brings up and coming foreign leaders to the U.S. for educational visits). If we have an event, we'll be sure and invite women. But women's rights are not one of the biggest issues in our area.

Q: It's not a big issue in the sense that it's not one of your top priorities? Or do you mean that women are generally not suffering too much?

A: I mean, they're from a traditional medieval Islamic society, so we would consider them to be suffering significantly. But that's been their tradition for 1,000 years. It's a little presumptuous of us to go in and think we're going to be able to sweep it all away in a couple of years.

Q: You don't see any women coming to you for help? Is there any organized attempt to get education where they couldn't get it before, anything like that?

A: The girls are going to school now.

Q: So in other words, in terms of women's rights, they're as good as they are anywhere else in Afghanistan.

A: Yes, not great, but... I went last week to visit the women's prison. There are 12 women in prison in Mazar-e Sharif, all for marriage-related crimes, like they ran away from their husband or their family couldn't pay enough dowry. They get put in jail.

Q:

What U.S. agencies handled specific issues? You mentioned AID is there.

A: Right, and AID handles development. I do political reporting. That's it. The DEA swoops in to do their drug raids and then they swoop out again in one day, so they don't hang around.

Q: Can you give me your own personal evaluation of how effective the PRT has been in promoting good government?

A: I think the British model of PRT has been highly effective. They have a very low security profile. They're very cautious, but they present a low security profile. They have worked very hard to help build up the police force and reinforce their authority. I think they've done a really good job.

Q: Does the local population relate better to the British model, the British culture in some sense, than to the Americans? Have you noticed anything like that?

A: It's not the culture per se. Afghans think we're all Americans. If you're white skinned and have a camouflaged uniform on, you're an American. It's not the culture so much as a lower security profile. Americans travel around in HUMVEEs and body armor and helmets. The Brits travel around in white Toyota Land Cruisers and floppy hats.

Q: I see. So the British don't feel that they are under as much of a threat even though they're generally lumped in with the Americans.

A: Right.

Q. Can you describe the role of the PRT in Afghanistan's major political events: the emergency and constitutional loya jirgas and the presidential election. I don't know if any of this is something that happened during your- your time there.-

A: I wasn't there for the presidential election, but I will be for the upcoming parliamentary elections. We are coordinating very closely with the UN, with the Afghan national army, with the Afghan national police, with the local election board (which includes international civil service folks) to be sure that we coordinate carefully on security, the location of the polling areas, making sure everybody gets information about how to vote, making sure the police and the army know where they're supposed to patrol. We're working very closely on that.

Q: On reconstruction, please describe the PRT's activities related to economic reconstruction and development.

A: This PRT does not do that sort of development. That's left to the NGOs. The American PRTs in the south have millions of dollars to spend on development and to build schools and hospitals and other things, but our PRT basically focuses on the security sector. We do some roads and bridges with AID money, but basically it's building police stations and court houses and training the police and the judges and others to make the government stronger.

Q: Some of the money that goes into supporting these local projects like police station construction, court houses and so on, is this AID money?

A: That's right. Or DIFID money. DIFID is the British development office.

Q: So the two are kind of interchangeable. They work together.

A: AID has millions of dollars and DIFID has a couple hundred thousand.

Q: I thought most of the PRT's e had an Agriculture Department representative.

A: We did, but we don't have one right now.

Q: Is there a slot that's not filled?

A: Yes, there is.

Q: There would normally be somebody from Agriculture there?

A: Yes.

Q: Did the civil affairs soldiers participate in the reconstruction and development projects?

A: I believe they did. We don't have civil affairs soldiers at our PRT, but the Americans do.

Q: What does that mean, "civil affairs soldiers?"

A: These are people who do development projects.

Q: These could be even in the U.S. army. We'd have civil affairs groups and so on.

A: Yes.

Q: So in other words, that was not really an issue in the north. The Taliban were not really much in evidence in that area where you are.

A: No.

Q: So there was not really a large U.S. military presence anyhow in that area.

A: Right.

Q: What were the relations like with the NGOs? . How would you describe their functions?

A: They're working in many areas – in health, agriculture, sanitation, education. I think a year and a half ago the relationship was not as good because when the Americans were still running it, they were still doing schools and health clinics and things and the NGOs in the north, many of which had been there for a long time, didn't want the local population confusing the military with them, and so they didn't like the PRT doing what they were doing. Our PRT doesn't do that kind of project. The NGOs do. We have a good working relationship with them.

Q: Could the NGOs have done a better job than the military of providing required assistance?

A: Yes, that's why we have them doing it up there instead of us.

Q: How did the non-American PRTs differ from the U.S. PRTs? Have you had any experience or secondhand information about how a PRT under American control would differ from that of under a British or a Turkish?

Christine Curtis 7/7/05 10:45 AM
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A: They're doing a lot of development. They have a lot of money and they do schools and medical clinics and all sorts of things that we don't do. They have civil affairs officers there.

Q: So they're much more involved in development work, whereas this PRT that you're with is primarily involved in the security issue, working with the police.

A: Yes.

Q: On the police training, several PRTs are collocated with the U.S. police training centers. Do you know anything about these U.S. police training centers?

A: Yes, there is a big one in Mazar. It's not collocated with us. It's a big separate training center. It's run by DynCorps, paid for by the State Department.

Q: What's the relationship between the PRT and the training center?

A: We just keep each other briefed on what we're doing. We meet once a week and share information.

Q: So many of the police that are trained at that center eventually turn up working in the local police forces in that area?

A: Yes. They're the training center for our region.

Q: I guess your particular interest has been more in political reporting on developments in the area. Does that include going to the police training center?

A: Absolutely. I go every week and meet with them.

Q: In other words, back in Washington International Narcotics and Law Enforcement people at the State Department would be kind of involved. Are they funding that police training center?

A: That's right, but the Defense Department is about to take it over.

Q: So it's going to move from a State Department-

A: They will still have a finger in the pie, but basically DOD is going to be the one in charge now.

Q: What is the reason for that?

A: Because State just hasn't done a real good job doing it. They sort of just let DynCorps do their own thing.

Q: Does that mean that instead of having DynCorps train the police, some U.S. civil affairs people and military people will-

A: The U.S. Government is renegotiating the contract right now. It may still be DynCorps, but there's going to be a lot more oversight than there is right now. There is almost no oversight.

Q: So you could expect to see then some more American military come into Mazar?

A: U.S. military police, trainers.

Q: There is so much going on in your area. At first I envisioned you sort of stuck out there in a desolate area with nobody around, but there are a lot of activities.

A: Lots of activities.

Q: Please describe the PRT's involvement with the Afghan police courts and the prisons. I believe you've already done that pretty well. Anything else you can think of? You mentioned the women's prison.

A: We're not really involved with the prisons. I went to visit the women's prison just to see it. We do mentor the police a lot and try to help them out.

Q: What kind of specialized knowledge does the PRT group have that would be of use to the police?

A: Our soldiers are trained in riot control. They have weapons training. The police don't get that. Some of our guys are trained military police and are trained in vehicle searches and evidence collection, that sort of thing. These policemen only get four weeks of training, so they don't have all that. So our guys will help them on an ad hoc basis.

Q: These are the British forces at the PRT?

A: Yes. The Americans are doing the same thing in the south.

Q: So this is a British contingent that includes not just people with guns but also people who have ability to train police.

A: Well, they're the same guys. These are highly trained soldiers and they have training in crowd control and search and seizure and that sort of thing. That's part of their standard training.

Q: The DynCorps people are not soldiers.

A: They're former policemen.

Q: They're former police people. They're more civilian in nature. How does that work?

A: DynCorps has a formal training program with course books and a training center like a school. The police go there and these police trainers work with local Afghan police trainers and guide them in training the local police. But once these guys leave the training center, there is nobody to provide them any guidance.

Q: The DynCorps people wouldn't follow up then.

A: No. They're beginning to do that now, but they hadn't done it then.

Q: So in other words the military forces that are at the PRT_ are giving them some hands-on-training?

A: Informally.

Q: Very much more realistic perhaps.

A: Yes.

Q: Are there local courts? Do you have any contact with them?

A: There are, but the judicial system barely exists. There are courts, but people routinely just buy their way out of legal troubles.

Q: So the courts themselves are not functioning.

A: Not the way that one would like them to.

Q: How do people get put into prison if there is no court?

A: They get put into prison if they don't have a higher power to get them out.

Q: Is there a judge that sends them to prison?

A: Yes, there's a judge. We're still trying to figure out how it all works. We still haven't figured it out.

Q: You mentioned women. Is there another prison for men?

A: Yes, it's the same place. It's a different room.

Q: I suppose civil disputes are usually settled more traditionally, or do those go to court?

A: Generally, they're settled out of court because local elders will settle it. The courts truly are just barely functioning. It's nothing that we would recognize as a court at this point.

Q: Your impression is that this is probably the way it's always been or is this something that's happened as a result of the upheavals?

A: I don't think there's ever been a serious national judicial system. Things are resolved by village elders in shuras.

Q: Describe any PRT involvement with informal or traditional justice systems.

A: The involvement is that our soldiers will sometimes go to the court if they know somebody is really getting a raw deal and stand there with them while they're on trial so at least the judge will have to be fair because one of our soldiers is standing there watching. That's about as far as we can go.

Q: That's interesting. So that's how you promote legal institutions. What about local attitudes?... Did you get any feedback on the local attitudes toward what you're doing? -

A: People are very happy with what we're doing. Not the bad guys, but the common people are quite happy that we're there.

Q: In terms of achievements, are the PRTs accomplishing their mission?

A: Absolutely. If we weren't there, there would be fighting everywhere in the north. Our very presence keeps people from fighting. Not that we physically have the strength. We're only 120 guys. But what we represent is the full force of the U.S. In fact, we have a couple times the last couple of months called in – we don't call in air strikes; we simply call in a flyover. We will call in and F-15s will buzz over somebody's house and they'll know we mean business.

Q: Is the PRT an effective vehicle for providing security?

A: Absolutely.

Q: Expanding central authority?

A: Yes.

Q: Reconstruction and development?

A: We don't do that. We provide the security so that the reconstruction and development can proceed.

Q: Is it effective in utilizing American military and civilian resources? Do you see anything there that is wasteful?

A: American civilian resources, yes. We don't use American military.

Q: When we first talked, you said when you got there you expected that you would be more utilized in one area and then you ended up having to do something else.

A: I was under the impression that I was the political advisor, but I was not. My British counterpart is. But I've become totally integrated into the PRT.

Q: So you feel your talents and your energies are being used adequately there?

A: Yes.

Q: What were the successes and failures of your effort? I guess you're only halfway through your tour, but can you point to anything that's particularly satisfying or particularly galling?

A: I feel that my observations on the whole counter-narcotics effort were important. I felt that there was a total lack of any public diplomacy effort combined with the eradication and interdiction. I made that point very strongly and they (Washington) have actually now agreed that they have to do some public information/public outreach in addition to just going in and chopping down people's fields and interdicting supplies of opium. I'm very pleased with that. I also served as a useful liaison to bring the American army trainers together with the PRT to start planning these joint operations with the ANA and the ANP. I served as a liaison for that to get it started. Now it's going and it's going well.

Q: The ANA and the ANP?

A: ANA is the army, the Afghan National Army. They have American trainers and they are at a base about 10 miles from our base. Then the ANP are the police. We work more with the police. Because I got to know the American trainers, this was all informal, and I was able to bring the American trainers and the army together with our guys and they're now planning these joint patrols.

Q: So these American trainers were there in Mazar?

A: We didn't have much to do with them.

Q: Okay. They were there, but they were not really engaged in the training or mentoring the police?

A: They were engaged in the training of the ANA, but they weren't very engaged in the work we're doing with the police, and now they are.

Q: Could PRTs be improved? What do you think? Is there any particular aspect of the thing that you would recommend looking at?

A: The only thing I would recommend is clearly defining the role of the American officer in ISAF PRTs in the future.

Q: Should we adopt another approach to accomplish the same objectives? Is there any other model?

A: The British model worked very well.

Q: The British model meaning the one that you're engaged in there?

A: That's right. Security sector reform.

Q: And that is-

A: Support the police and extend the authority of the central government and let the NGOs do the development.

Q: Okay. And that is something that the British partly as a result of not having huge resources for development have specialized in.

A: Right.

Q: To your knowledge, are they doing something similar at other PRT's that run around the country?

A: No, they're just running this one, and covering four provinces.

Q: What advice would you pass on for future operations? If you were going to go back for a second year there, what would you foresee or say would be the area that they should concentrate on?

A: They need much more mentoring of the police. With the Defense Department taking over, they're going to do that. They need to have international advisors with the police all over the place, not just train them for four weeks and then send them out there on their own. I would put much more emphasis on police support.

[END INTERVIEW]