

USIP – ADST

Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #46

Executive Summary

The interviewee was posted to the PRT in Ghazni from September, 2004 through August, 2005. During his tenure, the PRT focused extensively on providing support and assistance to local police and security forces.

The interviewee is highly critical of the U.S. government efforts to support the Afghan police, and suggests several reasons for our failed efforts: in his view, we should have emphasized the police from the outset, rather than the Afghan National Army. In addition, we should not have relinquished the reins of control so early, before the training was adequate. Further, the training provided by the police academies is not sufficiently comprehensive. He proposes a better model, which was apparently under exploration when he left, which would embed the Afghan police as part of the PRT security detachment.

The interviewee describes how PRT reconstruction efforts were severely hampered by the winter weather, an erratic budget cycle, and the decision to centralize CERP funds, which resulted in the loss of “almost a year of good construction time.” Moreover, in his view, by the time this centralization occurred, the original problems with CERP funds had been resolved, making this action unnecessary and counterproductive. The interviewee opined that the concept of having an Afghan Ministry of Interior official assigned to the PRT was flawed, even though the individual in his case was “a good man,” with whom he had a fine relationship, but who did not really represent much value added.

In terms of accomplishments, the interviewee points to several. They include the construction of a teacher training center, using CERP funds for the building and AID funds for curriculum development and books. He also recounts the PRT role in creating a secure environment for the October, 2004 elections, including keeping the ballots safe. After the elections, the PRT and the infantry battalion in Ghazni, along with the Afghan security forces, were successful in progressively improving the security environment in measurable ways – i.e. many fewer IEDs per week. During his tenure, he also credits the PRT with the achievement of “getting the governor to govern” as well as effectively building trust and confidence between the local Hazara and Pashtun leaders so as to diffuse ethnic tensions. This role of the PRT as honest broker was a particularly important one, according to the interviewee. In the area of women’s rights, the PRT also demonstrated its support for the newly appointed female provincial ministers, and managed to persuade the local police chief to add some females to his staff for security reasons (to help interdict Taliban posing as women).

Finally, the interviewee believes that another real accomplishment was educating the populace to understand that the PRT was not the “welfare agency for the Afghan government,” while helping to build up local institutions that could serve their needs. Access to classified communications was mentioned as an important need, as well as the need for a more rational weapons policy for civilians serving with PRTs.

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

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Interviewed by: Barbara Nielsen
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Q: Could you describe in which PRT you worked and the timeframe that you were there?

A: Yes. I was assigned to the provincial reconstruction team in Ghazni, Afghanistan. That's 80 kilometers south of Kabul on the main ring road running down to Kandahar. I arrived there in early September, 2004 and departed in August, 2005.

Q: So, your experience is very recent. I suspect you were not the first State officer to be posted there?

A: The PRT had first been put together in March '04 and I believe there was a State officer there for about two or three months in that time period.

Q: What was your focus, the main mission at the time you were there?

A: I would say the main focus of the effort, and I want to clarify that I think all PRTs are a little bit different from each other, so I wouldn't say this is universal for all the State reps, but mission number one was generally seen as letting the embassy know what's going on in the area, basic traditional, political reporting. Number two and sometimes on a day to day basis more important was serving as political advisor to the PRT commander and to the commander of the combat battalion we had located in Ghazni. Ghazni is a little unique for U.S. forces in Afghanistan. At least it was at that time, in that we had an infantry battalion based in the same location as the PRT and the two commanders, both lieutenant colonels, had to sort of develop a cooperative working relationship.

Q: If you were going out to visit the governor, did it fall to you personally or to your PRT commander to make the arrangements for your escorts and so on?

A: No, we let the PRT commander make arrangements for that kind of thing. They're his troops; they're his resources; we're along for the ride.

Q: That makes sense, but I guess the dual forces - because one was an infantry battalion and the other was the PRT battalion- won't concern us for our dialogue - unless there are some points to...

A: It was helpful. I had colleagues who served in places where the PRT and the infantry

battalion were not co-located. Sometimes because of that the two wouldn't be working on the same sheet of music. Of course, the infantry battalion being much larger with much more firepower has a much greater footprint and influence in the area than sometimes the PRT could manage. So, being co-located allowed us to have a much better coordination and influence than we would have had if we'd been separate.

Q: I'm assuming the infantry battalion wouldn't get involved in the primary mission of the PRT, which would be the reconstruction kinds of projects and supporting the governor?

A: No, actually there was a good bit of crossover.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: For starters, I think part of it might be the unique nature. We had the only, at the time the only, National Guard infantry battalion in Afghanistan. It was actually a group of National Guardsmen from Northern Virginia and D.C. Quite a few government employees, lots of law enforcement. Their commanding officer is a lobbyist in D.C., so with excellent political knowledge and understanding. Where things really came together a lot as part of a PRT mandate is to provide support and assistance to local police and security forces while part of the infantry battalion's mandate is to work with local police and security forces. In the realm of security, you really do have the infantry with considerable political influence through dealing with the security sector.

Q: That is a structure that I haven't encountered before, so I can see why you make a point of it. Let's look at the work with the local police and the enhancement of security there. Just in terms of the PRT, how did you get involved in that and what were you able to accomplish?

A: Well, not as much as we'd hoped. The police, I hate to say it, but I would have to characterize U.S. government efforts to support the Afghan police as a failure. We probably made a tactical error when we decided to put our emphasis on the Afghan national army rather than the national police force. Armies invade other countries, defend your country from being invaded by other countries. For dealing with an internal insurgency we would have been a lot better off focusing on the police. I think we figured that out too late in the game. We're trying to correct it now, but we've lost a lot of ground.

Q: I haven't heard about the Afghan National Police Force.

A: Well, that's because there isn't one.

Q: Is it that the Afghan government has said, " We'd like an army, but we think we need a police force?"

A: No, it's too late. We're committed to the army. There is the Afghan national police

force and we're now committed to a large program to try to build that up, including, I'm told, embedded trainers at the provincial level. Of course getting police trainers is much harder to do than getting military trainers, but I know the government is working on it.

Q: That is our government?

A: Our government. Now, there were police academies established in several areas. The one that served us was located in Gardez. These police academies did not provide terribly comprehensive training. We weren't too impressed by the level of training of guys coming out of it. It was certainly far superior to nothing. More than that, it just couldn't handle the volume and couldn't really have a cultural influence the way an American police officer living in the police chief's office could have had an influence.

Q: How long was the length of the training at the academy?

A: Brief. There was I think a four or five week training course for illiterate police officers, because there just aren't enough literate people in the country to staff the police force. The police generally, what they really wanted from us was equipment, motorcycles, telephones, weapons, fuel for the vehicles, extra charger cards for their telephones. Some of these things we were able to provide, but after a certain point you don't have a lot of good control over what they're doing with it. You don't get a lot of value added out of it. We gave out a lot of uniforms. We found some of them for sale in local bazaars. We had to kind of cut back on that and focus more on efforts to train, but our training component in the PRT is three military policemen, the highest of which is a staff sergeant. The other two were teenagers. Combat support military police don't really have the background to run an intensive training course. We were exploring when I left a program where we'd bring in one or two cops from each district to live at the PRT and work as part of our security element for six weeks or two months where they would really start to understand how we do things and why some of the things we do are better than some of the things they do. I hope that program got off the ground since I left because I thought it had real potential.

Q: Right, these were Afghan police who would come and live at the PRT?

A: Come live with us, work as part of our security detachment, get full time training, travel out with us on convoys. It's something we thought had a lot of potential because then you send them back to their districts and get a new set of them and hopefully everyone gets a bit of a learning experience from it.

Q: How were these potential police recruited in the first place? You said they didn't have to be literate of course because that would have been too high a bar, but what backgrounds did they typically have?

A: A lot of the time among the officers you've got some who are former police. You might even call them professionals. They attended the police academy back in the '70s. Some of them were extremely good, some of them were complete wastes of time.

You've got a lot of former Jihadi commanders. Again, some of whom are excellent. Others not quite out of the feudal warlord system yet. The grunt police, the enlisted men, were pretty much like anybody else you'd find in Afghanistan. They're the sons of farmers, or city people or towns, you know, laborers. They were looking for a job. They knew somebody. They had some influence. It's a good job to have if you can get it, so they were able to come in. Very often owning your own weapon is a prerequisite for getting in because the police don't have a weapon to issue you.

Q: Most people in Afghanistan would fulfill that prerequisite, right?

A: Yes, that's not the hard part to fill.

Q: Obviously the initiative in training the police was a priority during the time you were there and it's an evolving priority, hopefully.

A: Yes it is.

Q: Most of the PRTs also engage in some reconstruction activities. Was that one of the missions that you undertook there?

A: As much as we could. Unfortunately, at the time I was there we couldn't do much. The fiscal year ended within a month of my arrival. We were on a continuing resolution for four months. When the continuing resolution ended we were in the middle of the worst winter Afghanistan had seen in several years. We spent most of February actually unable to get out of Ghazni City.

It was almost impossible to get projects going or even to monitor projects. We had no funding for new projects for almost the entire, for pretty much the entire planning cycle at the time I was there. We were able to monitor the implementation of new projects. I mean monitor the implementation of already existing projects, but we were not really able to get any new ones started. We also, very consciously put a lot of effort into trying to get the Afghan government to work on more of these. They were a little too quick to come to us as their place of first resort. We really tried to get them to stop doing that, with varying degrees of success. Some ministries really picked up on that and really did a good job of coming up with their own plans, their own ideas, really getting a fully formed plan coming to us with an implementarian proposal, seeking partial funding perhaps. Others never really caught on. Some of them we pretty much had to cut off at a certain point because they just were not going to get it.

Q: The funding sources that you're referring to were military funds ?

A: Military funds, AID quick impact project funds.

Q: AID funds?

A: Though AID had the same funding problems the military had during this entire

period, no money available.

Q: I've never thought about the military being on a continuing resolution.

A: Well, they are for things like CERP.

Q: They are even for CERP funds? Too bad because people like the CERP funds.

A: Another problem that we had in Afghanistan as I left it was CERP had died. It is no longer CERP. I don't know how many other State officers have told you about this, but...

Q: No, I haven't heard about that.

A: The two star general level, the CTAF headquarters, task force 76, you know the basic organizational structure of the military in Afghanistan?

Q: Well, I've heard about task force 76.

A: All right. The task force 76, basically the division command level, the general in command centralized all the CERP money. Now, instead of a commander on the ground having authority to spend up to \$25,000 and then going to the brigade commander for more, all CERP project proposals must be approved at the division level before they can be implemented. This has been going on since I believe April or May.

Q: What was the idea in centralizing those funds?

A: I think part of it is a military tendency toward centralization. Another part of it is -- it is certainly true that in the earliest days of the PRTs and activities in Afghanistan, civil affairs guys were running around throwing money at crazy uncoordinated projects. They didn't really know what they were doing. They were signing up with shoddy contractors or digging a well in one place not realizing that that would inadvertently dry up three wells somewhere else. A lot of these projects were just coming to fruition or just ending when the new command staff came into task force 76. I think they looked at these projects and said, "this is ridiculous; we're taking charge." "We're taking control of the situation." I think part of it is combat armed officers who don't really trust civil affairs officers because there was also a drive at that time to stop using civil affairs officers as commanders of PRTs and start using combat officers, which is not bad in and of itself, but it shows a trend.

Q: The difference between a combat and a civil affairs officer, are they not all active duty military?

A: No, most of them are reservists.

Q: Most of the civil affairs folks are reservists.

A: 95% of civil affairs officers are reservists. The combat arms officers come from different backgrounds, but most of them were also reservists as well. The difference is one has had civil affairs training and has been in that career field for a while and the other one hasn't. That's not necessarily a bad thing. Some of them have very -- I had two non-civil affairs PRT commanders and they were both outstanding. I don't think I'm alone in feeling that way. I think they were well regarded by their superiors. Another part of the problem is that Iraq sucked up all the civil affairs officers, so there was no one left. At any rate, I think these projects came to fruition, wound themselves down when this command staff came in, and they decided they wanted to get control of the situation. The problem is they didn't see that those problems had already been worked out in the past year with projects that are still ongoing and not completed yet and that's harder to get a look at. The problems they were having with spending on CERP money were largely already worked out, but they didn't notice that because they were looking too far into the past.

Q: They couldn't be told about it?

A: It's unfortunate. What one of the PRT commanders said, and I thought it was a very good line, was "you wouldn't take away an artillery battalion commander's Howitzers and then ask him why he's not providing fire support." You're doing the same thing when you take away a PRT commander's funds and then ask what's up with his projects.

Q: Sounds very reasonable to me.

A: That's what we thought.

Q: Even with the battalion commanders there, the general in command would have been very smart and noticed that I would think.

A: Evidently not.

Q: All right. So, there was a problem of funding for a considerable period in your stay, but after the wintertime did things change? Were you able to resume reconstruction?

A: After winter we were able to start getting back out in the field, coming up with new project proposals, sending those proposals in. Of course, because those proposals now have to go through this murder board, many of these proposals won't be approved until we're too late into construction season to start building this year. We've literally cost ourselves almost a year of good construction time. Now the winter played a part in that. That's not entirely our own bureaucratic fault. We blew a real opportunity this year.

Q: Well, what was on the drawing board or is in the pipeline now?

A: Well, now I should say the other thing that happened in Ghazni that was unexpected was in April a dam, -- thank God, not a dam built with U.S. government funding-- a very old dam north of Ghazni City broke, flooding out a good chunk of the downtown and a

large stretch of farmland to its south. This kind of turned some of our proposals into a cocked hat. We've got a power plant and two bridges in town that we've put in money to get repaired. Those are all underway. We had to divert a lot more of our efforts. We'd done some humanitarian assistance airlifts with helicopters during the winter to isolated places we'd heard were having food shortages and needed blankets. We had to put a lot more energy into getting more of those kinds of operations done.

Q: That was because they were needed as a result of this flooding?

A: Yes, exactly because we had a humanitarian emergency. Fortunately, actually that was the one occasion when the Afghan government did a very good job of coordinating at the provincial level. They found the food. They got the food from the Afghan Red Cross. They set up a storage facility. They linked up to our helicopters and our trucks with their own trucks. They even got their own helicopters down. It was really impressive to see. We're focusing now on other big projects. We've kind of decided to get away from schools and clinics which is what a lot of people had done very early on, often without noticing that they were building a school in a place that didn't have a teacher or building a clinic in a place that didn't have a doctor. We are putting our focus now on roads.

Q: I've heard a couple of people really extol the value of roads..

A: Roads, yes, roads, are possibly the most important thing you can do there. They are a big ticket item. They employ a lot of people especially if you're doing a non-asphalt road. They link people up better. They allow us to push into more places; yes, they allow the enemy a little more freedom of movement, but they allow us more freedom of movement. If you build a bunch of roads, you don't need to go building a bunch of hospitals because you've just simplified getting to the central hospital. So, we're really behind road building projects and we've been pushing out quite a few of them.

The other big project we've been working on is a teacher training college in Ghazni City, basically like a two year junior college type program, but for training teachers. There's a serious shortage of them. We were tired of building schools that didn't have anybody qualified to actually be sitting in them or who had a mullah who maybe isn't teaching the stuff we want taught using a school building we paid for. So, we decided instead of focusing on the schools at the other end of it, let the schools go on in tents or under a tree if they've got a good teacher in them. We put our focus on building a teacher training center, getting a basic curriculum put together. Getting books out for them and that kind of thing.

Q: Were you doing that in conjunction with USAID?

A: Heavily. Ironically, the money for the building is going to come from CERP. That's not the kind of thing CERP was really designed to pay for, but it's still...

Q: It's development?

A: You don't argue with it. It's AID which is working on curriculum, getting the books, coming up with a teacher training program and that kind of thing. They will come down and work on the actual teaching side.

Q: Okay and was there an AID person there while you were there?

A: Yes. Yes, a spectacular guy.

Q: So, you were working together presumably on many of these things?

A: Very, very closely. I can't characterize it better than our PRT commander did when our ambassador came down to visit it. The ambassador asked, "Who is in command in Ghazni?" My PRT commander held his arms out and said, "There are four of us", by which he meant the PRT commander, the infantry battalion commander, myself and the AID guy.. What he said was none of us makes a decision without talking with the rest of us first. That's easy to do because we saw each other from 7:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night.

Q: There were only four of you.

A: There were only four of us, but it got to the point where we were practically of one mind.

Q: Sounds like it should be a good formula for success. Was there an Afghan PRT representative assigned there?

A: Yes, there was a colonel from the ministry of interior.

Q: How was that relationship?

A: He was a good man. We had a good relationship. I questioned the value added he gave us. If the local government is functioning properly, why do we need a separate representative brought down? I can see that he is maybe an alternate chain for the central government in Kabul to know what is going on in Ghazni, but is that the kind of thing we want to encourage if we want a centrally run government? Moreover, given the level of corruption within the ministry of the interior, do you want an interior ministry guy doing that report and depending on the local politics of the area, who does the interior ministry listen to more? Random colonels sent down to the PRT or provincial governors and police chiefs in the province? I don't necessarily think it's a bad idea, I'm just not sure it's a really useful one.

Q: I have heard others talk about the ministry of interior reps and generally they've been positive about having them, but each place is going to be a little different. In terms of the governor there, what kinds of activities did you undertake with the governor. I'm thinking many people traveled with the governor, for example, to visit areas in the

province that were hard to get to.

A: We didn't travel with the governor a lot. I can think of two occasions when we really went out and traveled together. The first three or four months I was there governor Asadula, I have to go into a little background on him I guess. He's about 36 years old, very good English speaker, Mujahadine, a drug dealer, warlord.

Q: How did he learn English so well?

A: I don't know. Extremely bright. Extremely capable. He's a trusted confidant of Karzai. Karzai would use him as an emissary to talk to other people both in Afghanistan and in neighboring countries.

Q: Oh, so he wasn't always at home?

A: He would do some private diplomacy. He liked to live mostly in Kabul. He was traveling around a lot. Then, sometime during the winter, Karzai stopped leaning on him so much for diplomatic stuff and he really came back down and started focusing on issues in Ghazni. Once he did that he was outstanding. A lot of it was because he had proper ins and friends and contacts in the ministry of interior so he could get money and support for projects he wanted to do. He also wasn't afraid to throw his own money into projects, his own money being quite considerable.

Q: Well, that's a very nice thing for him do with his money..

A: I think what he finally figured out, he aspires to be the president of Afghanistan and he doesn't hide it. I think he realized that if he didn't make a "rep" as a good governor, then he had no chance of becoming president of Afghanistan. He could be made ambassador to someplace insignificant and thus be sidelined. So, he started paying attention and focusing and became very impressive, but he is a guy who could take care of his own business. I guess instead of traveling with the governor, he, on several occasions called all of his district managers into Ghazni and had us do large conferences with them where up on the stage would be he, the PRT commander, the battalion commander and myself talking with the district managers.

Q: What kind of message was in his mind that he wanted to convey and as far as you all were concerned was it the same message?

A: Yes, he did a very good job of conveying the messages that we wanted to hear, but the best part was we weren't, I never had to be, standing next to him whispering in his ear. He knew what he wanted to say. He said it well and it happened to be the same thing that we wanted put out. Now, what he did in his own private time with people I can't judge or assess, but for the most part he seems to have been pretty successful at getting people to execute his bidding. The most notable was he told these guys, "stop coming to the PRT with your problems. All right? You want a school, talk to your education teacher in your district. Have them talk to the education director here in

Ghazni. The education director in Ghazni will come talk to the PRT about it.”

Q: So he understood how the government should work, his provincial government.

A: He had a very good idea of that.

Q: Presumably he was a good embodiment of the national government? He was Karzai's emissary?

A: Strong supporter of the national government. Now he's governor of Kandahar so that can only be seen as a major promotion and with that he effectively dominates southeastern Afghanistan.

Q: Yes, well, he's moving up.

A: Good for him. A new governor was named back in late June, early July. The most known thing about him was that Human Rights Watch had recently called for his indictment for war crimes for things he did as a subcommander of Abul Rashid Saayif during the civil war.

Q: Oh.

A: Yes. He has a third grade education, tends to fall asleep in meetings. He's in his '60s.

Q: He's an older guy.

A: It doesn't appear quite clear why he was named governor. He's not even from Ghazni for God's sake. The relationship between the PRT and the central government was deteriorating a little bit.

Q: Central Ghazni government.

A: Central Ghazni government, I should say. It was not as good when I left as it had been in the months previous. It was still doing okay.

Q: Were you there during the elections last October?

A: Yes.

Q: Often the PRTs have had some facilitative role to play in the run up to the elections.

A: Very delicately.

Q: Very delicately I'm sure. What was your experience there?

A: We were asked very early on by the UN and election personnel working there to not

involve ourselves heavily in election preparation. In particular they did not want us doing public relations efforts, public diplomacy efforts connected to the elections. We saw no reason to object to that. They had their own plan. They did quite well for themselves and so we kept out of it. The infantry battalion ramped up its patrolling. We held regular weekly meetings with we formed a group called the provincial security committee. It was the battalion commander, PRT commander, myself, the governor and the deputy governor, police chief, NDS chief. You know NDS? The national director of security. It's kind of the FBI and CIA all rolled into one as well as UNAMA, JEMB and UN OPS personnel.

Q: I forget what JEMB is.

A: Joint Election Management Body. Afghan government and UN. Lastly from the people who probably played the biggest part in making the elections succeed, a group of guys from a firm called Global Risk. They were the election security specialists, mostly South Africans and Rhodesians, but they were the ones who were setting up the real logistics making sure that things would go off smoothly. In the ramp up to the election, we provided the police with a large number of extra trucks and Thoria satellite phones to perfect communications abilities. About a week before the elections started, we stood up a joint operations center at the governor's residence where we had communications networks for the Afghan national army in the area, the police and coalition forces all in one place. That way we could keep track of pretty much all the reporting from our area of operation.

Q: As far as we know things went very smoothly.

A: Things went almost without a hitch. Part of that, honestly, we had a great patrol plan; some of it I can't really discuss. We know the enemy wanted to do bad stuff and we know our patrols thwarted them. It also helped that the night before the election around 5:00 in the afternoon a massive sandstorm swept through Ghazni and lasted for about five hours and I am quite sure there were all kinds of nasty tricks the bad guys wanted to hatch during the night setting up rockets, planting IEDs, that they just couldn't do. In fact I heard a couple of local mullahs saying afterwards that clearly God wanted the election to succeed because he thwarted Taliban efforts to disrupt it. We ran the operations center through election day and went on running it for about four days afterwards until all the ballots were consolidated and shipped up to Gardez where they would be counted. By about mid-afternoon once it became pretty clear that nothing had happened and nothing was going to happen, I had wanted to do some election monitoring. I've done a lot of election monitoring in the Balkans and wanted to see how some of the local polling stations in Ghazni City were doing. I hadn't chosen to go out into the countryside because with my luck I would be in one place when something really bad happened somewhere else and I would have no idea and the embassy would find out before I know and that would be a big mess. I took some plainclothes intelligence personnel we had from the army's military intelligence and I used them as convoy escort to get me up to a couple of polling stations in town where I could just walk in in my civilian clothes. I've got the proper security I need, but it's not as obtrusive, so the

election people weren't complaining about it. The polling went very well. I was actually really impressed by having to run it inside; it was as good as what I'd seen in the Balkans. Nobody, not a single person, complained about the ink. You probably heard that everyone was complaining because you're supposed to ink your thumb after you vote and everyone was complaining; oh, it just washes off really easily. I didn't hear a single complaint about it that day.

The day after that I rode down in a ground convoy of U.S. forces from the infantry battalion to a southern city where we are consolidating a bunch of ballots from the outlying districts into one central ballot convoy of police, national army and the U.S. army. Sort of rings of security. We were far out front and far behind and they were actually guarding the ballots. Ran those back up to Ghazni where they were consolidating all the ballots for the province. Then a day after that, that was an agonizing ride down a terrible road to get to Gardez in a massive convoy we'd set up to make sure all those ballots got through. We were really surprised. We expected to get hit on that convoy. It was a bad road we were going down and if you blow up a polling station, you've cost maybe 500 people the right to vote. If you blow up a convoy taking all the ballots of the province, you've probably just invalidated the election.

Q: How many ballots were you transporting?

A: God, I would have that written down somewhere, but I have no idea. It was several truckloads. I think it was about four trucks.

Q: Do you remember the percent of turnout?

A: Extremely high with the exception of two districts, two heavily Pashtun districts that since then have had a record registration rate for this election. I think they realized what a stupid thing they did not signing up for the last one, but yes, two provinces, two districts had fairly low turnout, but the others were extremely high, in the 80% range and up.

Q: Wow, very impressive because these were first time elections?

A: It made it interesting for them.

Q: The first time in a long time I guess. The fact that your convoy was not threatened, there were no sandstorms that day, what do you think was the explanation?

A: Part of it was we had a huge force. We had something like a dozen armored Humvees driving with us and constant helicopter overflights from a couple of Marine attack helicopters. Yes, you could attack us; you would not live to tell about it.

Q: That was nicely handled obviously and it worked well. In terms of accomplishments, I would think that would be one that you would certainly point to for your tenure, but what would you say are the main successes of the year that you were there?

A: Getting the governor to govern. It took a lot of work, but he was a guy we knew if he would just focus on the job would do fairly well at it, so getting him to do that was good. Pushing down Hazara -Pashtun ethnic tensions.

Q: I've heard of the Hazaras, a minority.

A: They are a double minority. They are both Asian in background and they are Shiah. Yes, so they're unpopular in two ways with the Pashtun. They are about 30% of the population of Ghazni.

Q: How would you go about reconciling these two groups and getting them to cooperate?

A: The most powerful Hazara in the area was a warlord named General Kasemi and his unit had just been DDRd, you know the DDR process? Disarmament, demobilization, reintegration. It took some trust building between him and the governor. They hate each other, always have.

Q: This is which governor?

A: Governor Asadulah. It took a lot of trust building and confidence building with Kasemi to make him realize that he could DDR. He wasn't going to be attacked. We did a lot of go between work between the governor and Kasemi. We also put a lot of effort. I mean the governor has his own troops. He is himself a warlord, but being a provincial governor, he was able to sort of launder his troops so to speak through the police force and say oh, no, they're special reserve policemen for emergency uses. We got him to agree that he could publicly be seen to disarm. The governor had once told President Karzai in a public meeting in front of television cameras that he had no private soldiers. It finally got to a sticking point where Kasemi said: " I will not disarm further troops while the governor is still so well armed." We sort of brokered a solution where the governor could downsize his police force, which would not be the same thing as giving up the militia that of course he does not have.

Q: And those folks who used to be his police, they ...?

A: Get DDR packages. First they get DDR packages. Some of them took a job with a USAID contracted security firm that handles security projects for AID - like who guards the construction workers building a road, and that kind of thing.

Q: Good jobs if they can do them.

A: Others of them were moved into the highway police.

Q: Okay. The DDR package consists of a certain sum of money?

A: I think it's a suit of civilian clothing, a small sum of money, a lot of inkind like bags of flour and that sort of thing and it's supposed to involve, but I don't think this part was working as well, enrollment in job training programs.

Q: A helpful thing for these folks who had their skills, which they then took with them to other security jobs.

A: Exactly. At the same time General Kasemi was trying to figure out what he wanted to do with his future and he couldn't really decide if he wanted to go into the army or run for parliament. We wanted to make Asadulah realize that having Kasemi on his side would solve most of his ethnic tensions with the Hazaras. We were able to make Kasemi realize that whether he wanted to go in the army or the parliament, the support and endorsement of Asadulah would be really helpful for either objective. Kasemi is now running for parliament. I fully expect he will win.

Q: The Ghazni district?

A: Oh yes. It did in fact solve Asadulah's problem. There was another Hazara firebrand who was trying to organize an "oust Asadulah" movement and thanks to Kasemi's intervention Asadulah was able to shut that down real quickly, very quietly, no trouble. This guy was organizing big street protests of Hazaras who don't like Asadulah. The only problem we had with these protests, they were actually very peaceful and went fine, but we figured sooner or later those protests were either going to be a cover for a terrorist activity or they were going to be the target of a terrorist activity. Either way we didn't want that to happen, so we brought the governor and this protest leader, a guy named Jamal together with the governor, who had wanted to do this meeting, We did it under our auspices, and the governor offered a couple of simple concessions.

Q: What kind of concessions was he able to offer?

A: For example, Jamal was claiming that the governor was keeping private jails. Now, we know at one time the governor did. We also knew that at this time he was not. So, the deal was if Jamal has information on a guy who he thinks is in a private jail of the governor's bring it to the PRT; the PRT will go to that location without informing the governor and we will confirm whether or not it's true. Of course this hoisted Jamal's own petard because he knew there were no more private jails operating. He never came to us with a claim of anybody in a private jail.

Q: Well, that settled that issue without really any loss to him.

A: Right. At the same time, I think that's when the governor really solidified his alliance with Kasemi and got Kasemi to say these protest rallies were stupid. These should stop.

Q: Okay, so this is daily politics here.

A: Daily standard stuff.

Q: What about women's issues in your province? Many of the PRTs have attempted to support advances for women. I don't know if that was something that you were able to focus on at all?

A: Had to be real careful about it. The first and most important thing that we felt we could do, --maybe there's other stuff we should have done -- was work with female ministers at the provincial level, We call "ministers" those at the provincial level of the ministry in Kabul. There was a male education director in Ghazni and a female schoolteacher took his place and she's brilliant. We just backed her to the hilt on everything. Gave her whatever she asked for. We worked very hard also with the provincial health director, also a female. She deserves support just in principle. She's honest, she tries hard. .

Q: Was she an English speaker also?

A: Not really good. The education director actually had extremely good English. The health director not so much. We used; we leveraged our female officers and enlisted people whenever we had them. WE were lucky we had a female MP. We would use her in training classes with the male police, like how you restrain a suspect.

Q: She was the suspect?

A: No, she would take guys down.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: She also was the gunner on the armored Humvee. They had their own little armored Humvee and she'd be the gunner for their 50 caliber. They'd pull in; when they'd pull into a village and she'd be up there on top of this heavy weapon taking her helmet off and out comes the ponytail it made a real impression with people.

Q: Well, she gained respect.

[END SIDE]

A: We did manage to persuade the police chief, especially after he caught three female thieves in the bazaar downtown, that he needed at least a couple of females on his staff for his internal jail and for convoy searches. We were just about to get that program started when I left. That took a whole lot of just very slow, very steady prodding, mentioning it in like every conversation for about three months.

Q: Now, was his view, " well, we don't have any female thieves so of course we don't need them" and then he was presented with the evidence, "here are the female thieves, now you've got a different problem, what are you going to do?"

A: No, there wasn't actually a lot of ordinary crime going on. The thievery was unusual. It would have been unusual even if it were men. It was more from a security perspective; there had been a lot of reports very well substantiated. In fact there was one two weeks before I left. We actually caught a wanted Taliban suspect who'd been hiding under a berka and we kept pointing out to him, "you don't know who's under there." He said, "well, my policemen just make them show their hands and you can tell from looking at the hands if it's a man's hands or a woman's hands." Maybe, but maybe he's been in a Pakistani madrassa a couple of years and all he's done is move Korans around and his hands look perfectly fine or maybe she has been working out in a farm field for the past 20 years everyday and her hands are cracked and leathery and manlike. We think we kind of made that point, but it is still going to take a whole lot of work. It was just in the last few months I was there when I'd come into Kabul I'd see a few female uniform police. That's Kabul. It's going to take some time for that to get out.

Q: I'm impressed with the fact that there were female provincial ministers actually.

A: Our governor is extremely progressive on women's issues. That might be because he likes his wife and all the other women in his life, but he actually is very progressive on women's matters.

Q: So, maybe there are other governors like him?

A: Sharalam as I said was a supporter of Abdul Saayif, who is the head of the Supreme Court - a hardline Islamist and he has effectively frozen the women out ; he can't fire them, but it's almost impossible to get in a meeting with him. At least that's the situation when I left. Maybe it's improved.

Q: Well, we'll see what happens with the upcoming elections in September.

A: Yes.

Q: How many women are returning or are elected to parliament. Okay, when I was asking what your greatest achievements were, you pointed to the relations between the ethnic minorities.

A: If I could point out two more.

Q: Sure.

A: Improvements in the security environment; in June of last year, I think, Ghazni was experiencing about four or five IEDs per week and when I left it was maybe that many in a month. That's not me, that's just stuff the PRT and the infantry battalion, working closely together, working very closely with the Afghan security forces were able to make happen.

Q: Yes, it's a little hard to say its something the PRT specifically is doing, but rather...

A: It's how you set the atmosphere. Again this goes to the credit of the infantry and I think it's because they're National Guard. Our infantry long before it became the political issue it's become in the past month or so never ever, not once, did a "hard knock". You've heard what a hard knock is?

Q: I'm imagining that's where you

A: Yes. It's when you kick down the door at 3:00 in the morning tossing the smoke grenades, storm in, drag everybody out of their beds; it drives the locals crazy and it's almost never necessary. What our guys would do is they would get with the police; they wouldn't tell the police where they were going. They would just say, "have 20 police here in vehicles at this time." The police would send them over. They'd drive in and surround the village. You surround the house in question; one American walks over with a bunch of Afghan police. You knock on the door.

Q: A soft knock?

A: You say, please send all your women into one room. Send all your men out. We're coming in and searching the place and it works like a charm. We had an extremely good capture rate. We captured like 16 guys and of course at that time all wanted individuals. Very few combat incidents. Very few attempts to shoot back. You look at your window, there's firepower everywhere. You're a dead man. Your whole house will be blown up. So, it's much smarter just to go along with it.

Q: Now, why wouldn't everyone adopt this same method? That is all of our forces.

A: I think a lot of military forces, especially the more elite ones, the light infantry, the airborne, they have a sense that the best way to control the situation is to roll in so fast and so hard with so much overwhelming fire power that the enemy never has a chance to resist.

Q: That's one approach.

A: It is one approach. The only problems with that approach are first when you shock a guy you don't know what a surprised guy is going to do. He might be shocked and throw his hands up and surrender. He might reach for a gun under his bed. The other problem is it pisses everybody off. It's really annoying and offensive. It offends all the local sensibilities. I think the National Guardsmen were a little older, a lot of cops. We have like 10 or 15 policemen in that group, civilian policemen so they know it's much better to surround the place quietly. Tell the guy "you're surrounded, come out with your hands up." The stuff you've seen in the movies a million times and yes, he might have prepared some kind of massive defensive fortress in his house. I mean there's a one in a million chance of that, but far more likely he's going to take a look out there and he's going to decide it's not worth dying today.

Q: And he's got all of his family members there.

A: Yes, and he's got all of his family members there and you've given him a moment to think about it and it's far more likely that in that moment of thought he's going to realize this is stupid.

Q: Well, it seems very smart to me to proceed that way. .

A: I hope. The last thing I would say that was a real accomplishment for the PRT is that we stopped being the welfare agency for the Afghan government. We really told them, we'd tell average, average people used to come up to us all the time with their list of papers of the things their village wants and it was just no, stop it. You want a school? Talk to your government education official. Hospital? Talk to your government health official. All right? It will get up the chain to us. The province will decide which districts need schools the most. The province will come to us with that list and they will ask us which schools to support and they will go to the NGOs and talk about which NGO is going to pay for what. Too many people far too early on in the day of civil affairs would just go around throwing money and stuff.

Q: So, we learned.

A: We learned. The way I like to put it was you never really appreciate the value of a bureaucracy until you visit a place that doesn't have one.

Q: Yes.

A: We spent a lot of time trying to build a bureaucracy. I think we got pretty good links going between the district and provincial level. What was a little more annoying? Provincial to the national capital because we just didn't see a parallel effort going on at the national level for these ministries. It seems we'd send stuff up with requests for funding or support or guidance and nothing would ever come back.

Q: Perhaps the bureaucracy was too well developed up there; as we know things get lost in the bureaucracy, but okay. clearly an important accomplishment. You've hinted at some things we might be doing better; are there any suggestions for improvement that you'd like to leave here?

A: Several. A lot of them might be more internal management than you're looking for. I think when the military goes into an area; they need to have one single commander. I don't really care if that commander is the combat commander or the PRT commander, but there were a couple of lieutenant colonels who are battalion commanders in the United States army and are by definition individuals of fairly healthy ego. If you put two of them in the sandbox by and large the ones I was with got along fairly well. Every once in a while I had to be doing shuttle diplomacy between my own two army guys.

Q: I would think they would be so schooled in the hierarchy anyway that it would have

been very awkward.

A: It's micromanagement at the brigade and division level. They want full control over everything and they don't want to devolve that kind of authority down. A single integrated command responsible; the attempt to distinguish between civil affairs and government support and combat security operations, is a false barrier. You can't pretend it's there. It's much better to have one military guy in charge of the overall effort. It wouldn't really matter which one it was. At least it wouldn't have in Ghazni because our PRT commander was an infantryman and our infantry battalion commander was a professional politico. They both were quite capable of doing each other's jobs; both of them could have stepped into each other's jobs pretty effectively. State - AID relations were excellent in Ghazni. I'm not so sure they were always so good in some of the other places I've heard about. It probably helped that my AID guy was a retired State FS1. So, he really was far more .., we understood each other and he was very easy to work with and actually probably the best mentor I've had in my time at the Department so far.

Q: Yes.

A: Both the State and the AID (people) are a mixed bag. The AID people more so because they're contract.

Q: Oh

A: So, they're either really, really good or they're horrendously bad.

Q: Not much State can do about that.

A: On a level of internal management, I did not have any access to classified communications in my year there. I stretched the definition of sensitive, but unclassified far beyond what it should have been. Even then I was using my hotmail account because State is the only department I know of in the U.S. government whose intranet is not accessible via password via any computer.

Q: Yes. We were talking about that with your colleague and apparently help is on the way..

A: Yes, they were promising that the moment I got there.

Q: Yes, it's recognized that you need that. So, you didn't have it and you were just there.

A: Another internal housekeeping issue that caused quite a bit of wide disagreement and controversy and you've probably heard both ends of it. We need to, if we're going to be sending State people to places like Afghanistan and Iraq, we've got to talk weapons. There needs to be a policy and to say "no weapons," that's not an acceptable policy. State Department people are not supposed to get involved in combat, they never should, but we don't always control who gets in combat and who doesn't. The military says

women are never supposed to be in combat. They still arm the women just because they know that the women might get shot at.

Q: Yes, it could happen.

A: I don't think if the army followed our logic they would say female soldiers aren't supposed to be in combat so don't give them guns.

Q: That is the logic that we follow?

A: That is the logic we follow and it's pretty stupid when you think about it.

Q: Then you recommend that we do something else?

A: Because the other thing that happens is, if you don't, guys on the ground who appreciate the reality of the situation will just arm themselves anyway. Then you don't know if they're trained. You don't know what they're carrying, what crappy thing they bought at the local bazaar that might blow up in their faces. You don't know what their rules of engagement are because you haven't told them any; you're just trusting their judgment and that's not a good policy.

Q: You would say that it could depend on which location you're serving?

A: Absolutely. I have colleagues from PRTs who served up in the north in Mazar e Sharif, those kinds of areas. They talked about being able to go out to dinner at a local restaurant at night. I'm happy for them. I think the area of Afghanistan run by ISAF in the north is probably more akin to a central Asian republic - fundamentally safe. In the south you have a war going on. When I saw internal disagreement among people on who should and who shouldn't carry weapons it almost always broke down to people working in the ISAF territory or people working in the big cities, didn't see the need for it. People working in the southeast, people working out in the small isolated areas saw a need for it.

Q: There was no possibility of just saying, " here's where we need them, here's where we don't."

A: The embassy made a rather, I think, it's kind of a cowardly decision, but it's a bureaucratically wise one to say that the policy is personnel shall not routinely carry weapons, but your security is the responsibility of your PRT commander, not the regional security officer. It is the PRT commander's judgment on a situation that should decide what you do or don't do with your security. Then they added a line like that that said, if you think you do need to routinely carry a weapon, then the situation in your area is so unstable you probably need to reassess whether you should be there in the first place. That's not a bad policy. It's actually a very levelheaded one. It was the right one to choose. The problem with that is you still haven't addressed the issue. From the liability side of it, you still haven't addressed the issue of whether or not they're trained. You still haven't addressed the issue of whether they're carrying something that's going to blow

up in their faces or where they had to go to get it, or who they scrounged it from. It would be much better to have a policy of you all get this training. We have these in stock. If we think you need them we'll give them to you. If you think you need them, ask. If you don't think you need them, forget about it.. That would be a rational way to deal with the matter.

Q: It sounds to me as if the policy is fine up to a point and then you have these local areas where we're going to have some people using weapons; therefore, we need to train them.

A: On the political side, as a general policy, obviously all political matters vary. I'm not a political officer by background, but all these matters vary depending on where you are, what your circumstances are. If there is one general rule I would take out of my PRT experience it is much better to take charge at the beginning and then give authorities to the locals over time than it is to let the locals run the show at first and then try to steer them or try to take more power back. In Afghanistan I think we made the mistake of being a little too hands off, a little too early. We were just too confident in how things were going. Things took a real downturn I think in '03 and early '04 and part of that's just natural. The enemy runs for the hills and they adjust and recover and they sorted themselves out and rebuilt their communications network. They needed a breather time. We were sitting around thinking we'd won.

Q: Right.

A: There was a point when we were seriously of the opinion, well, we're still seriously of the opinion. The Afghan national police are not going to improve without an embedded training program as rigorous as that which the Afghan national army has where the American trainers of the Afghan national army go out with them on all their operations, they control their fire support that comes in, they control the money and all the logistics operations. I mean the ANA is not doing a thing without the training team supporting it and that way the ANA is actually learning. We saw great improvement in the ANA forces that passed through our area in the time I was there. On the police side, we should have done all that at the beginning. Well, now we're looking to do something not quite like that now. The only thing that's going to make a difference is doing exactly what we did with the Afghan National Army, but now it's too late. Now we're going to be taking power away from them. We'd be seen as colonialists and oppressive and domineering. If we'd done it from the start, nobody would have said a thing about it.

Q: Sure.

A: Then we'd be doing ribbon-cutting ceremonies as we welcome the official independence and graduation of this particular police district. Better to go in hard at the beginning and be really in charge and in control of things because once you've given it to them you're never going to get it back and you're pretty much stuck with how they do it.

Q: Right, there's a pedagogical analogy there;, you build boundaries and then you begin

to let them down as the pupil shows confidence and so on.

A: Yes, other than that the only other thing I would say is that so much of it, I don't know how you institutionalize a lot of these things. We have what both my ambassador and a visiting general referred to as the most outstanding interagency relationship they'd seen at a PRT. That's personalities. I had people ask me, what did you do? I'm like what do you mean what did we do? Somebody asked me to make a list, how did you accomplish your interagency relationship? We read the same books. We talked about the same stuff. I don't know. You build friendships.

Q: Depends on personalities, relationships.

A: I've got a lunch set up after Labor Day with my battalion commander who works five blocks from here. I exchange e-mail daily with the PRT commander and the AID director, I mean the AID representative. It's just you either have the personalities to build a relationship or you don't. I don't think there was any practice; if we didn't like each other it would have been a big mess.

[END SIDE] [END TAPE] [END INTERVIEW]