

USIP - ADST

Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #51

Executive Summary

The interviewee commanded PRTs in Eastern Afghanistan from June 2004 to June 2005. This oversight role led him to conclude that a critical contributing factor for future PRT success will be the sharing of best practices and lessons learned. Best practices he noted during his tour include:

- Meetings among the PRTs' personnel working in economic and political development to share hints about how to get funding from the USG bureaucracy.
- Sharing advice on how best to gain influence with local leaders.
- Conferences with local religious leaders ("information operations") to guarantee their input into development and other initiatives and therefore to give them a sense of ownership in the process.
- Emphasis on teacher training.

The subject stressed the need for working to win over the local population. The challenge in Afghanistan is not just to find and neutralize the enemy; it is to keep the enemy from generating new recruits. The U.S. message should be positive: We build schools while Al Qaida and the Taliban destroy them. The Afghans have a natural affinity to America, given our shared fight against the Soviets and because the Afghans recognize that the U.S. is, like Afghanistan, a "religious country." At the same time, it should be remembered that few people hold a grudge longer than the Afghans; successive unfortunate developments, such as the accidental death of innocent civilians, have a cumulative effect on public opinion.

The subject recommended that the local population should be as involved as possible in the work of development projects. He praised the Afghani work ethic. And warned against international agencies who might create and foster a "donor mentality" among the Afghans.

The subject praised the work of Army Civil Affairs officers, especially the wealth of experience that reserve officers brought to their work of civilian life. But subject noted that a Civil Affairs background, or even a U.S. Army background, need not be a firm requirement for PRT command. What matters most is the personality of the individual chosen.

The subject noted coordination problems with State Department officers at Embassy Kabul, especially regarding personnel. There was no consultation about which State officers would be posted at what PRTs, and on what schedule. This resulted in gaps at critical times.

The subject criticized overall assistance funding arrangements. He considered it ludicrous that commanders had to work with four different funding sources to get development work done. CERP was relatively fast, but other sources were slow. And all funding was subject to ebbs and flows resulting from Congressional action (or inaction), different annual budgets, different agencies' procedures, and different accounting/accountability constraints.

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

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Interviewed by: Jack Zetkovic
Initial interview date: August 24, 2005
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Q: Could you tell us when you served in Afghanistan and what your position was?

A: Okay, I was in Afghanistan from June 2004 to June of 2005. I was the brigade commander for what was called the Thunder Brigade, which was really in eastern Afghanistan. We had oversight of 16 provinces in Afghanistan that extended from Paktika Province in the south up to Kunar Nurestan Province in the north and as far west as Bamian Province. While it included Kabul, really, that was the purview of ISAF and NATO to take care of that. Although our PRTs did go into Kabul Province and do reconstruction activities in there so that was part of what we were doing.

Q: Could you describe your relationship with the PRTs?

A: Right, we had our brigade was constituted out of a division artillery. I was the division artillery commander so it was kind of a nonstandard mission for our brigade and as such a lot of the other pieces of it were equally nonstandard, so the nucleus of the brigade was formed by three and by the time we left four infantry battalions. One was a Marine infantry battalion. One was a U.S. Army National Guard infantry battalion. One was a light infantry battalion, later replaced by an airborne infantry battalion and then we added a fourth airborne infantry battalion before we left. I think eventually probably by now its back down to three battalions in that region. Now, also, when we first took over we had four provincial reconstruction teams. By the time we left we had nine provincial reconstruction teams. Part of that was not so much the growth of those teams although they didn't grow considerably while we were there. The other piece of it was it was just a reorganization of the battlefield kind of pushed control of a few of those to us that were not held by our predecessor, which was a Marine regiment. The eastern Afghanistan area of operations really began in March of '04 with a six Marine regiment, so it was a new, I guess, a new organization for the, I'll say, battlefield, but just a new organization of how we were running things there by introducing a new brigade or colonel level headquarters in there to run that. Anyway, I know your focus is on the provincial reconstruction teams. We had nine teams. As I said we had 16 provinces and so typically our provincial reconstruction teams had oversight of about one and as many as four provinces depending on the different teams that were operating with us. Most of these were U.S. centric teams with the exception of the New Zealand PRT, which was in Bamian Province, which they really had I don't want to say 100% New Zealand, but they had most of their entire cadre

was from New Zealand with exception of State reps, USDA reps and we did have one, we had an army, a civil affairs officer that was working for them that was mostly to control funding. We also had an army communications team to help bring them in communications with the rest of us. The other eight teams were all U.S. centric and they were commanded primarily by U.S. army civil affairs officers, mostly reservists. We did have one navy commander. We also had a Marine lieutenant colonel as well who commanded one of the teams, so they were again mostly army-centric, but with a few twists I guess.

Q: How did you see the relationship among the representatives of the different services?

A: Well, it is interesting. I think from the standpoint of the army, I'm trying to go through this in my mind. For the most part every one of our army commanders really were civil affairs experienced officers and we went through a couple of iterations and commanders because they'd changed out after I'd been there about three months and they changed just after we left as well. One of the things I think was a very strength force is the experience that by virtue of being a civil affairs officer, those commanders were very well versed in what they needed to do and how to integrate the civil military operations and what they were doing. That was not the case really with the navy commander, nor the marine commander, the two marine commanders that we had, but I will just say that so much of it is personality driven and just initiative and how clear thinking you are about stuff. I would hesitate to say that I think that the guy must be a civil affairs commander or must be army or otherwise. I don't think that's the case.

Q: It's more the personality of the person that matters.

A: Right, but there are significant advantages to someone who has done this type of work before. I think it really is a benefit. There are probably things that you could do from a school of predeployment training standpoint to help them. I know for example, many of our PRT commanders did some language and cultural training before they left, so they were reservists, they were mobilized, they knew they were going to Afghanistan, they'd get some courses in Pashtu and Dari and then they'd get some cultural awareness training before they go and I think all those things are very helpful for them.

Q: Several of the people who had gone out have said that they had no training at all. Those who have had training have said that it was invaluable and they wished that they had had more. Is that your basic take on it?

A: Right. Yes, I think especially for them probably more than anybody else, more than our other soldiers and leaders in our maneuvering units because they are immersed immediately in the culture and in the political systems and the local leaders. It is essential for them. One of the things that we did particularly, we would do periodic conferences and these, I guess these adapted and evolved over time, but one of the things that we tried to do with our new commanders is share best practices. In other words, we tried to make sure that if we had a good idea being done at the Jalalabad PRT, we would share how they would do that with all the PRT commanders. It could be something as

mundane as how to get funds for this type of thing, so working on the 100% U.S. side of things, what bureaucrat helps you or staff officer helps you get something done or it could be a technique you used to kind of gain additional influence with local leaders. Examples are we started doing conferences with religious leaders, with the mullahs and so we kind of put that idea out, a lot of guys started doing it and then we started sharing it. This worked, this didn't work, here are some good ideas of how we were able to get more a Muslim face on things and talking to the groups and we went through a big challenge on how do you fund something like that because there were some real backlash on hey you can't pay for food for a conference, etc. for a bunch of religious leaders. I would tell them, hey, it's an operation, it's an information operation. Of course we can fund it. We went back and forth on what was the right resource to do that and we finally through sheer will forced the money guys, the finance guys to let us do that.

Just to kind of add some color to that, it's interesting because when you contact a mullah who is in a village somewhere and you tell him we're going to pay you 20 bucks to come to a conference and we're going to pay for your food and your travel and all the other stuff, he really feels like he's a big deal. He's a big you know, so he's almost flattered and it's a lot of prestige for him. Then he comes and you put your message in with some of the speakers that are there and he goes back to his village with this information. Now, I'm not saying we could win the support, trust and confidence of every one of these guys, but it makes a big difference. One thing I probably would like to say that probably would come up eventually in this anyway, but looking at our goal in Afghanistan and finding what I would call a counterinsurgency effort there, the thing I think that we tried to always keep at the forefront that I always talk to soldiers and leaders about is that the war itself is decided by the population. The population will determine who the winner is, so as an army guy and especially our infantry battalions, we tend to focus on where's the enemy? I'm going to go kill the enemy. Well, if that becomes your main focus or your complete focus, then you will perpetuate the war forever because the manpower is almost inexhaustible, particularly in the eastern regions of Afghanistan where you've got the federally administrated tribal areas that can just generate out of their moderate size just fighter after fighter. Now, eventually you could perhaps exhaust those guys. I would say that is feasible, but it is a long way, a long hard way to fight the war.

The other side of it is to start working on the population, specifically through their leader groups and these can be political leaders, religious leaders, and tribal elders. We would even start to look at the businessmen and how we could work on them to gain their and all we're trying to do is gain their influence. I think it is very easy to do because the message of the U.S. government there is we are here to provide security. We're here to restore order, we're here to assist with the reconstruction of your country after 30 years of war and we're doing this by building schools and establishing institutions and helping your country. That's kind of our message. The Taliban/Al Qaeda message is we're going to burn down the schools. We're going to kill people and so forth. Theirs is nothing but a violence and destructive message and in the end if we're successful we're going to put a repressive regime over you that will essentially direct your lives and so on. With the Afghans those two messages resonates very well and so we saw in so many of the places that were in a real turn around and support from the general population, but it's

something that you have to work at continuously and that you have to listen to them and the other part is you have to be realistic because Afghanistan is an incredibly primitive place. A billion dollars wouldn't scratch the surface there. We had provinces without a single asphalt road in the whole place.

Q: One of our interviewees said you can't talk about reconstruction when it was never constructed in the first place.

A: That's right. I think overall people who are living under those conditions they are greatly appreciative of what you do. The flip side of that though is a country that has been at war for 30 years, had NGOs running around in the country for 30 years has got a culture of donations. It is a donor mentality of what are you going to do for me. So, that's really unfortunate. The good news is though the work ethic of the Afghan people is pretty good. Its maybe not like some of the other Middle Eastern countries of having a reputation of being spoiled by petroleum wealth and things like that. I would not say that's the case in Afghanistan. They are a hardworking people. I think given some opportunity will start to move forward, but it's a great challenge to get everyone to kind of understand the paradigm under which you're working because we can focus on chasing guys through the hills of Afghanistan and if you did that in West Virginia you'd get a fight, too, if you're chasing hillbillies. That's what a lot of these guys are, they're not really devoted, ideological Taliban that want to fight you to the death. They're just hey somebody showed up with a gun in my neighborhood and we're going to fight it out with them. That's the nature of how they are. You can in many ways just isolate those areas and just start putting out feelers and work with them and slowly moving into those areas, stay in there for a long period of time and kind of working, reconstruction issues that show the, I don't know, I guess to show that we really do care. We're going to be here for a long time to help solve their problems and make a better future for them. You have to carefully choose your fights with the resources that you have.

Q: You mentioned some best practices and gave some examples. Any other examples that come to mind?

A: Okay. I'm trying to scope back in my mind because the way we did that we gave two or three, I know I mentioned the mullah conferences and I'm trying to think of some of the others, but we didn't do like one per team, but we had like three or four. Gosh, I wish I could. You said you interviewed (a military colleague) I think.

Q: Yes, just last week.

A: I know he had some of those. We had like four or five, I just can't recall them off the top of my head. I wish I had the conference slides. This is from a conference we did in probably March or April which is why I'm having a hard time trying to pull the thing, but as I'm sitting here if I can think of some of those.

Q: Okay, if it pops up.

A: Right.

Q: Different question. You were there for a year. Some of the PRT commanders are there for three or four months. Do you think the tours of duty should be longer?

A: Well, they were there, yes they should be there longer. I think that is important especially for them. I'm trying to think the first group we had they left about three months after we had been there. I think they were there about nine months, I think was their tour of duty. The second group was also there for nine months. The New Zealand PRT changes out every six months so theirs is a little more turnover. I think it is important though the longer tour allows you to build relationships, the trust and get to know things. It is much better. The Marines and the Navy -- their commanders that they gave are there on six month stints. I know for example and especially for our Marine commanders that we had down in Paktika Province I think really struggled with it. They were not civil affairs trained officers. They were put in a very, a brand new PRT that had no, it had to create its own momentum. A very primitive place. It was a place where we had an infantry battalion which was essentially doing the reconstruction before they got there and had a tremendous relations with the governor, probably the best governor we had of the 16 was in that province, just a wonderful man. So, it became very difficult for that PRT to get momentum going. You know, Paktika Province also is like in the wintertime essentially you just weren't going anywhere. The traffic ability was so difficult for them and such a vast place, it's also a fairly dangerous place as well, so it made for enormous challenges for the PRT. Compared to Jalalabad, which is a fairly metropolitan city, and that province is fairly progressive province with really a lot of going on.

Q: Just yesterday I edited the transcript of an officer who was down in Paktika Province and yes, the description of the topography and economy was just dramatic.

A: Now, he was there for like three months, right?

Q: Yes. This is one of the issues we have because now the State officers are going to be going out on one year tours.

A: That will be a huge help.

Q: And it's like a regular assignment. Just like you have a regular bidding process for a job and that's a big change for us.

A: I had a lot of run-ins with the State Department guys, not the reps at the provincial reconstruction teams. In fact (the State officer in Jalalabad) would probably tell you when you talk to him, he and I had knocked heads right off the bat, but we got over that I think pretty quickly. I can't remember the thing, but I was very upset with the way State officers were being managed within our region. First of all I was never consulted.

Q: Managed from the embassy you mean?

A: Right. From up at the embassy. They had one guy up there. I think it was like, was it (name)? He was the guy in charge of it, so he made all these decisions of where State reps were going to go and never asked me for any input and then it became, then you couldn't by the time I found out about it and I would go through (name) who was up at.... I tried working with him and essentially (name), I felt like he just couldn't change his position because he would be too embarrassed that he didn't have a good decision there.

Q: He couldn't walk back?

A: Yes. It was very harmful. The problem we had, I had nine provincial reconstruction teams and we had about five State reps, so we had gaps. What we, I had places where I really needed a State rep very badly. One was in Paktika Province, which was the last one that he wanted filled. I didn't have a rep either. I spent my first three months with no State rep at all and no AID rep. I'll tell you I didn't know what I was missing until I finally got one; USAID as opposed to State was awesome at giving the guys out there and putting great people.

Q: Most of them were contractors. They were not direct hires.

A: Yes, but they kept us filled with people who really knew what they were doing and gave us some enormous perspectives. The guy we had from USAID working at our brigade headquarters was absolutely brilliant, a brilliant guy. His perspective on.

Q: Do you have a name?

A: Gosh, what's his name? I can't believe I can't remember his name. I can picture him. It'll come. He ended up going off to Kabul and working for General Eikenberry is where he is now. He came to us from Jalalabad PRT to work in our brigade headquarters and then went back up to Afghanistan. He was just terrific. Then we had...gosh, I can't remember his name either. I can't remember. (name) He was our State rep in our brigade headquarters. He initially was out there slated to go to Kandahar when the guy down there extended so he just came knocking on my door saying hey, I'm looking for a job.

Q: We had an interview with him.

A: Did you? (Name) had him slated for Khowst PRT so we basically stole him from Khowst and he worked both places. I probably got him in a little bit of trouble, but I kind of wouldn't back down, but in the end the input I got both.... He was awesome. He would give me a perspective that as a military officer I just could not get that type of perspective.

Q: In that area of expertise.

A: I had to have it. It was interesting because when he first got there said, hey, I want to go to Paktika Province and interview some guys down there. At first I was a little bit skeptical, but I got some guy who is going to a boondoggle around the area, but he did one of these trips and came back and had his cable essentially done and provided me a copy of his report. I read it and I was, like, "this is fabulous." I told him, you can go anywhere you want anytime you want, if you're going to put together products like this to give me the kinds of insights that you have. I guess what I'm telling you is the inclusion of (name). (Second name), yes. Those two guys in particular provided me with such tremendous perspectives on things they in particular worked a lot with our planners to help us see through planning and allocation of resources and was very hard on what PRT commanders might have, projects that they want to do, he would be, he would challenge those in terms of the types of effects that they were trying to create with those. I'll just give you an example. My PRT commanders and I'm being stereotypical here, they weren't all like this, but they would like building schools, why? Because we got the blue prints, it's easy to get the funding. We don't have to line that up. Everybody likes that, so we built schools and schools is a good thing. Those help win popular support and it does help the country, etc. It's easy. What's hard is organizing a leader conference and bringing in the mullahs and working with them for three or four days or the business leaders and setting up those types of things. Those require intellectual capital.

Another initiative we had and this with (Interviewee #40) was the teachers. Here I am thinking the teachers are the ones influencing the youth that will eventually decide if they're going to be fighters or if they're going to be civilians or whatever. Those kinds of things require a lot of work. You're starting something from scratch. You've got to set it all up. You've got to do a lot of coordination. You've got to invite people in. You've got to get a facility, etc. A huge amount of work, but the impact is tremendous. It's way more than a school. We're talking about impacting the leaders who are going to influence the people and that's the kind of thing that I would have to push incredibly hard to get the PRT commanders to really do those types of things. They would tend to focus on the reconstruction or the construction of the physical things. All you've got to do is go check on the project and that kind of thing. Hey, that's useful, but it's a single dimension. You've got to have a multidimensional approach.

Q: We had some people who said, yes, we built the school, but then there wasn't anybody to teach in it or there was no curriculum designed, etc. So, it's the hardware versus software.

A: Well, I don't know that I personally, I don't think that was too often the case. In Paktika Province we almost stopped building, well we didn't really build many schools, we built a few, but we were very careful about that and there was another initiative that we did down there. We took what was an old camp for one of our entry companies. We were going to convert that to a teachers college in Paktika where they could bring some of the gifted students right out of school and send them up there and we would contract someone to come in and teach them how to be teachers and start producing teachers for this province that could fill schools with people to teach students. I know that one of the things I did was I would do battlefield circulation. I would go to places like schools and

meet with elders and things like that and most of the time those schools would be in a small classroom, like 50 or 60 students. They would be laid out on mats, lined up perfectly quiet. The most polite school kids you've ever seen in your life. They would have UNICEF texts and curriculum and the other part that you would notice is that as you went up in grades the classes got smaller and smaller. We had girls schools and these were some that we built and some that we didn't build and we would go in and if they were really had a lot of students, hey, we'd say, well, what can we do to help you? We'll get you those books, desks and chairs and things like that. We did do a lot of things like that.

Clinics is a place where we would have priority. You go to any village and they would say, "We want a clinic." Who is the doctor who is going to be at this clinic? I think the days of building the white elephants if you will I'm sure it still occurs, but its not as, I think that's probably overstated. I know every place I went, if I went to a grand opening for a school there would be hundreds of people there from the local village and the teachers were there and the principal was there and we walked through the school and I'm pretty sure we've kind of gotten beyond that problem, so. We had one school in Gardez in Paktika Province where a 12 year old girl, I can't remember exactly how she did it, came by with some books and they were I guess doing their classroom outdoors in tents is all they had from school. She organized among the other students, basically refused to accept the books until we built her a school. A very outgoing young lady. I guess our PRT commander got involved, we took him up on him, we got a local man donated land to build a school on. We built the school and she was one of the students who spoke or gave a poem or something like that at the grand opening of the school. The governor was there and all like that. These were all very positive events.

Q: Did they use CERP funds for that or did they use AID money?

A: We used for that one, I think it was CERP. One of the funding sources we were trying to use for schools was ODACA, but boy, I'll tell you what, we had just enormous problems trying to get that. We would, we purposefully kept pushing schools in that because we wanted to save CERP funds for other things.

Q: For quick, fast projects.

A: Well, you know, ODACA is a pool of money that exists and you can get schools approved that way and so we were trying to push, just to use that funding source to just give us additional monies for other things. From a standpoint of a commander, I think it's absolutely ludicrous that we're trying to pull funding from four different sources and fund projects that are all the same. The other part was.

Q: That frustration has been expressed by a lot of people regarding the paperwork and the delays.

A: The other challenge we had was the CERP program kind of ebbs and flows as to whether the degree of control that's put on it. It's actually designed beautifully and the

way it's designed is you know, it's, like fast and I think that's the way it should be. Give him guidance and let him execute and then from up to I think \$250,000 might cut off and \$500,000 was the commanding general's cutoff and over that would be the CFC commander. It's a great system and it should work by giving guidance and let people operate within those parameters, but as money gets tighter the control starts coming down and then we start getting a lot of commanders that probably General Barno went there. He was trying to initially and probably rightfully so, he just didn't have a good understanding of how that money was being spent. The answer was stop spending it. I want to see what you're doing with it. We had to kind of go through that.

The other piece that was very frustrating was you're always waiting for either congressional approval of the CERP funding and the other part just the way CENTCOM accounted for the funding. They had an account for it. Until you basically close out a project they would consider the money unspent. What happens to you is you have a school and it costs \$100,000, well, you've committed that money to build the school. You've hired a contractor, the school is being built, but you still have \$100,000, but you've already committed that money. When you apply that across the entire, all the PRTs, suddenly you've got what appears to be five million dollars in your account, but you really have zero, so you're trying to get more money and you can't get more money because well, you've got five million dollars. "No, I don't have five million dollars, it's being spent right now." It was very difficult to get that through.

The other thing we did is initially we started out I got and I never knew what I had for a year. It's not like they came to me at the beginning of the year and said you've got \$50 million, no, I'd have \$10 million and when you run out tell me. So, I'd get \$10 million here, \$5 million there, \$8 million here and it really was difficult to try and have any kind of cohesive thought as to how you would spend that. But the other thing we learned is if I took my \$10 million and I said, okay, \$10 million, every PRT gets a million and I'm keeping a million as my reserve at the brigade level. That does not work at all. What happened is I'd have some PRTs not spending anything and the other guys running out asking for more money. Again I'd go back and say I need more money. They'd say, well, you've got \$8 million. I had to reprogram from another PRT and everybody is crying foul, so I said, stop. You guys get no money. I'm keeping all the money. If you want money, ask me I'll give it to you until we run out. So, we would start pushing money to them in like \$200,000 to \$300,000 at a pop for them to do all their low level projects that they were working on. That was a much better system. Essentially the reason I like this kind of a capitalist approach and if you're aggressive and you do a lot of work, go for it.

Q: Money goes to the people who spend it.

A: That's right. Now the hazard with that is it means you may not be applying the money where from an operational standpoint you need to have the most effect. So, there are some drawbacks to that, but again what I would do was as the projects were coming in for my approval I would look through them and several times I would note this PRT has no projects for my approval. I'd call and say what are you doing? You got nothing?

Well, we're doing this and that. Hey, you know, the greatest need, this was in Paktika, you've got the greatest need and you're spending the least amount of money. They really were struggling down there. That was my one place and that's where the guy that you mentioned earlier.

Q: (Name of Interviewee #38).

A: Yes. That's where he went and that was probably our least effective team. The nicest guy in the world you'd ever want as a PRT commander and he left about the same time as I did. The new guy that went in there was much different. He was an experienced guy and a very aggressive guy and I would imagine things probably would have improved, so maybe at the tail end of (name)'s time he might have a different perspective, but they had a very good AID rep, Lisa Gonzalez who was very good, but I think in the end the challenges of that particular area, very primitive, the Italians were doing a lot of good work. The PRT by virtue of where it was located up in the northwest corner of the province had a difficult time getting places. Anytime they wanted to go somewhere it took a pretty big commitment of time and so on like that. They just I don't think I think they just struggled coming up with a good vision for that province working with the governor on the things that they wanted to focus on.

Q: There have been some suggestions that you would, at least on the military side, but perhaps also interagency, train an entire team, bring it out and then replace it with another complete team. That's instead of rolling individuals through at different times. Any comment on that, any suggestions?

A: Right. Well, I think there are pluses and minuses to that, too. You'd have some amount of institutional drop, but that's essentially what we do with our infantry battalions and our brigade headquarters. They come in and you do about a 10 day handoff and I think that probably would work much better. The other thing I would say, too about PRTs is they kind of started out military-centric and started incrementally adding on representatives which are key. I mean the USAID rep, the State rep I think in particular are instrumental. The Agriculture rep is also very helpful because it is an agrarian society, but of course that guy is looking at a much narrower field and you look at Agriculture and the USAID guy might be a veterinarian, but you might need a guy who is an agronomist or something like that, so there are some nuances that make it a little tougher, but those guys still are very helpful to the process. Where we really, where the future of those teams need to go if we really want to have an impact is we've got to bring in expertise to help teach the city management to help school administration, to help training and organization and leadership, some of the civic pieces really need to grow from all those pieces and that's the piece that the PRT needs to go into. What you'll find is soldiers are pretty versatile. We'd get soldiers out there, teach them how to teach police and they'll go teach the police and they'll do a good job. They'll teach them how to patrol and they'll work with them and give them some credibility. We could do amazing things with just the basic infantry or artillery or whatever the branch the soldier is, they could do a lot of good stuff, but we need to kind of branch that out a little bit.

The other part is most of our security forces of the PRTs came out of the National Guard. The beauty of that is everyone of those guys comes with a skill.

Q: From civilian life, yes.

A: They also tend to be a little bit older than our typical regular army soldier, so they're a little more mature, maybe a little less fit in terms of age, they're just older guys and maybe a little less skilled on the military side of things. Those other skills are probably worth ten times the former.

Q: We've had some PRT commanders come and say, well, I had this new unit come in to provide security and I found out that this guy from New Hampshire or this guy from Oregon or wherever was a city manager and so I grabbed him and I used him to do that. That flexibility was allowed in the system and it worked.

A: Right. There are some incredibly good stuff done. We had some great work done with the police in Khowst Province by a lieutenant who was a policeman in Florida, from the National Guard unit. He did some neat things, too. He would do essentially leader conferences where you bring in the district police chiefs and he would do a three day conference on how to run a police force, how to train, how to screen, how to check, you know, how to administer a budget and those types of things from a leadership standpoint that were not necessarily tied to, how to apprehend a guy, how to do a crime scene, that type of thing. There is enormous room for that type of thing to grow.

One other point on the large scale, too that I would make is the PRT in terms of its influence has about the impact of an infantry battalion. So, for about 80 to 100 guys that you dedicate to that, you get quite a bit of positive influence in the local area, the local community with the leaders and so on like that. It is a very cost effective way I think to I'll say fight the war. I know this was, I guess this was I'll credit it to General Barno, but I know that this evolved out of Gardez, who was the first PRT. In fact a very good friend of mine who was the first commander, just left the joint staff and is gone. I can't remember where he's gone. As an experiment, that was a tremendous idea because each of these PRTs gets us right in with the government officials, enables us to coach and mentor them and in some cases make the case for their replacement. In Kunar Province we had a, he was an expatriate Afghan from California. He was a very nice man. I have no doubt very dedicated in trying to and his heart was in the right place, certainly not a corrupt guy or anything like that which was, but certainly a possibility in Afghanistan, but he had a very corrupt police chief and he had a couple of other advisors that were really out for their own good, not for the good of the province. What we essentially had was a very corrupt, if not even criminal government in Kunar Province that made when we worked with them in the eyes of the people we were supporting this corrupt government. It really tainted a lot of what we did. WE eventually refused to work at all with the police chief. I mean we were buying police cars and equipment and stuff for all the other police forces, but not his. We just stopped in fact we started working around him with some of his district police chiefs that we knew were good. Well, to make a long story short, what we did was we built a case in that province where we said, hey, these

guys need to be removed and we gave them, in fact they called it the dirty half dozen is how the PRT commander called it. That's Lieutenant Colonel (name). I think he's up in New Jersey. He might be within your reach as well. Really a sensational PRT commander. Anyway.

Q: A civil affairs reservist?

A: Yes. We essentially took a lot of what (interviewee #41) did, the State rep. Now if there is ever a guy who captured every nuance and every molecular level of activity that happened it was him. He's probably got 20 CD ROMs full of his cables that lay out all of the stuff that happened in the province when he was there. He went from there to Iraq I think is where he is now. He was probably the finest State Department guy that I worked with there. I absolutely loved him and the stuff that he did was terrific. We took a lot of his work and pushed it up through General Olsen up to the ambassador and basically our position was we need to remove the PRT from this province because we're supporting a corrupt government and ultimately we got the removal of the governor which as I said we have no real umbrage with him. We got the police chief removed and the border chief and all these other corrupt officials were all taken out of the government and a whole new bunch of guys were put in that were far more honest to include the governor who had come from Paktika. We thought he was, this older guy, just thought he was kind of a simpleminded guy. That was perfect for Kunar. He was awesome up there because he was very driven on specific issues that really brought some good progress up there. Anyway, that's another function that the PRT has, it allows us to kind of monitor the government to try and work with who are many times very confident individuals, but their ethics are out of balance with what the jobs are that they've been given. We kind of mentor them as hey, this is the way you're supposed to do this. If they turn out to be criminal then the PRT could help build a case for removing them from within their own government.

Q: So, I'm going to stop the tape for just a second.

[END SIDE]

A: I don't think its necessarily wrong though because the central government really does need to keep tight control over things and if you think about it, Afghanistan is about the size of Texas or something like that. It would be smarter to pick in terms of the state and counties maybe. There's a little more in terms of the scope, but they are governors in the province.

Q: You mentioned the central government, the goal of the PRT is supposed to extend the central government's influence.

A: Right, the reach of the government.

Q: Several people have said, well, if someone out in the countryside sees an American military officer in a Humvee driving around, how does that extend the influence of the

central government psychologically?

A: Yes. First of all, a lot of the operations we did, we did with Afghans. When we first got there in June of '04 we had zero Afghan infantry battalions working in our area of operations. When I left, gosh, I think we had at least three that worked directly with us and probably another two that worked with the Special Forces as well and that was going to grow. We had a corps headquarters stand up, a brigade headquarters, stand up, so yes, at one point in time it is Humvees and American soldiers, but that dimension is changing. It is changing to become more and more Afghans. The Americans will link up with the Afghans, it will go side by side. When my infantry battalions or companies would go to a city the first place they'd go to would be to see the mayor and the police chief. Gather up some police and let's go do a patrol and they would kind of check out how these guys interacted with the population and that type of thing. We would try to do more and more together with the Afghans to extend that credibility. When they're seen with American soldiers it adds to their prestige in some ways. They're seen with the Americans, they're seen as having more power and that type of thing. Eventually we would get them uniforms, weapons and vehicles and radios. It's a long process and its one that you have to be careful about because you give a car to a guy who makes 300 Afghani a month and you come back the next weekend and its gone because he sold it, okay? Or, his police belt, his weapons, his uniform and all those types of things. You do have to be very careful about how you dole out the equipment. You kind of monitor it, hey where's the stuff we brought here last time. You tell them about property accountability and all that kind of thing is all woven into it, so it's kind of a slow process.

The other thing that we did and so many things that we would do there, we would put an Afghan face forward.

Q: Did you use the ministry of interior fellow?

A: Perhaps on many things, on any time we would do like a school opening or something like that, the key note speaker would be the governor. Maybe the American guys wouldn't speak at all. When we did mullah conferences, one of the things that the PRT commander there, another terrific one. He was an investment banker from Cincinnati and he came in there saying, "I'm going to make Khowst the Hong Kong of Afghanistan." That was his view of things. He would sit down with one of the Afghan local military leaders and talk to mullahs and also like the head mullah. He would go over it with them talking points for the conference and they would address it and kind of give them a message of hey, here is what the Americans have done so far. Talk about things that we have done on a positive. We had a rocket that expired on our base when I was in Khowst and it actually landed about three feet from a mosque and it tore the thing up pretty bad. We show up two days later with the head mullah from the province, the local mullah and the people there. The TV station and radio guys and all that kind, say, hey, this is what the Taliban did or Al Qaeda did and we're going to fix it. What we ended up doing, the local villagers there were like we're not going to let you fix it by yourself, we are going to work. They did like a 50/50 thing with us. It's smart stuff there.

Q: That's great.

A: There are many ways to get the Afghans to step forward and be part of the process. Of course it is far more influential to do that. If you're doing it from the western guy its not going to work for you. There are some interesting things about Afghanistan. One is many of them will refer to us as their long time allies and that we supported them in their war against Russia. I would have told them, yes, we really weren't so much your allies, but the enemy of Russia, but hey if that's the way that they view it, then I'm with it if it works. The other thing they would say is we are a religious nation and while that's not true from a governmental standpoint from a cultural standpoint it is true. We are pretty much a Christian, but a multireligion country of many religions and they like that as well. Better to be that than to be an apostate or an atheist or to push that on the people because the Russians did. That was one of the things that I think over time that we emphasize hey, it's not about religion to us. Do you want to be Muslim or Islamic? Okay, that's not our issue and so I think eventually they kind of see, they don't see us trying to influence their culture or their religion and that resonates well. There are some interesting ways to I'll call it spin, but interesting ways to put our message out to the Afghan people and as I said, they're the ones who are going to decide the winner. They're going to make a decision whether here's an insurgent guy coming to our village, do we chase him out or do we bring him in as our brother and house him and feed him. Will my son go off and fight with him or not? Or will I tell the local police, etc.? Will we be 100% successful there? No, but we can be a lot more successful and we've had to spend. There are places, we had a place in Ghazni Province where some civilians were mistaken for insurgents running a roadblock and we killed three of them. It was a terrible tragedy, not intentional. You call that an accident, but its been a long, long process trying to convince that village that we are on their side and probably will never quite get there. It's very tough and so we've had a few instances like that where we've had civilians killed inadvertently.

Q: One of the comments that we heard from one of the officers was that we look at events like blips. A bad thing happened, back to normal, whereas people in that part of the world look at it more as a stair step or something bad happened, there was an accident, some civilians are killed and then it all adds up. It's cumulative. People have very long memories.

A: I don't know. That's probably true, but the Afghan people deal with death better than anybody I've ever seen. Maybe that's one of the things that 30 years of war does to you. When you kill somebody or someone is killed by whatever the reason they, I don't want to say that inshala you know, God's will, but they deal with it very well, very reasonably.

Q: Arrangements are made usually at the very local community level for some kind of payment or retribution of some kind.

A: When that particular incident I discussed happened, one of the things that was the greatest asset to us was the governor. We worked so much with the governor, with the PRT commander and the task force commander, our relationship was so good and he was

absolutely awesome in assisting us in the process in working with the people and you know, kind of keeping the inflammatory comments down and things like that. Really terrific. In fact we had a mullah conference in that province very shortly after that incident and I actually spoke at this one and it was real interesting. The governor, we mentioned this him, he says, yes, we'll do it, it's a great idea. We'll do a three day conference, don't come until the third day. He made the mullahs meet.

Q: Smart.

A: He made them elect a leader for the province. He basically brought order to the chaos so by the time we spoke at the thing and he spoke also the day that we did it was a pretty organized group. One of the things that I mentioned to them is I told them what happened. I told them exactly from our perspective what happened in that accident. I didn't admit to any liability, which I guess, from a legal standpoint I didn't want to do, but what I told him was that this was a terrible accident. Here's what we've learned and here's how we're changing it. It was an operation we were doing with Afghans and the Afghans fired warning shots, some of which came back toward our guys. Our guys looking at the situation at night see a vehicle driving through, shots being fired and the vehicles coming out of it. Their read of it was they had opened fire on the guards, but in fact it was the Afghan guys that had fired warning shots. Then one guy opened fire to disable a vehicle, another guy thought he was firing to kill and he opened fire right on the passengers. Very unfortunate. In that particular case, like I said, we had such a great relationship with the governor and he really stepped in and was a big help to us, as was the governor of Khowst on a few occasions and some of the others. The others were problematic at the same time. (Interviewee #40)'s governor up in Nangahar was an interesting character, but he wasn't all bad. We could have done much worse than him. He kind of kept some order with that.

One other thing that Interviewee #40 probably talked to you about was the counter narcotics that they were working as well which was became a big mission up there. Again, I think that's something that we can very positively influence and I personally think there are a lot of religious and cultural perspectives on that that make growing of narcotics you know, very much against what Afghan people ought to be doing. It is something that I think we can influence. It would be interesting to see what the future reports turn out to be in terms of how much of a growth has gone up or down.

Q: It's a big debate. Do you focus on other things first or do you go right for the counter narcotics problem?

A: Yes.

Q: Some people have said we just don't have time for that, it's not in our brief. We have other things to do. Then the situation is seen very differently on the ground by different people.

A: Yes, I think you can do many things at once and I think for Nangahar that was not a

big deal for us. The thing I thought was unfortunate is in that neck of the woods there I have three provinces that were all involved in narcotics to some extent and I wanted to expand our roles there. We were doing counter narcotics only in Nangahar from the mandate of the USAID funding in a way that the thing came out. I wanted to include Nangahar, Kunar and Laghman provinces, which I think this year probably, will. I think it was going to expand out. It's just interesting because Kunar Province they don't show a lot of growth there. Well Kunar Province is all mountains and valleys and in the valleys they're growing it like crazy. I was there, I was over in Afghanistan for about a month before I actually came back to be the brigade commander. I was there for the month of April and I flew from Bagram airfield up north of Kunar and as we flew, and this was mid-April, I was astounded at the poppies that I saw growing. It seemed to be that it was about 50% to 70% of what was growing from point to point as we flew. When we landed, we landed in a poppy field where they had built a base. It was pretty eye-opening and to me as I looked at that I said, I cannot believe there are this many heroin addicts in the world because apparently there are not because I guess we overproduce opium by enormous amounts, but anyway a cultural eye-opener for me if you will.

Q: We're getting toward the end of our time. So, again: let's focus on lessons learned, things that need to be different, things that could be changed, any other final comments?

A: I guess if I were to emphasize some things I would say the provincial reconstruction teams need to do a lot more than just physical construction. They've got to get after the intellectual and cultural influences into the population and especially the leaders. The elders, the religious leaders, the teachers, the emerging businessmen that are coming out and any other professional venue or group that you can get into, probably women is another area where we should probably continue to work and engaging those groups, empowering their leaders and giving their leaders our message to share with the people that they influence has enormous impact. So, that's a piece of what we've got to expand as part of the PRT piece of that. I think also the PRTs need to grow in terms of their portfolio of expertise. Each one has to be tailored based upon the province. As an example in Nangahar, you've got Jalalabad; you've got a city that has a lot of capacity for potential manufacturing and things like that. Then in Paktika you've got essentially a desert that's trying to grow food that is just very primitive. Each PRT has to be tailored to the needs of that particular area. You've got to look really closely at that. I would agree that having a PRT commander there for a year or a PRT team, training them up as a task force before they deploy I think would be a great idea and having them come in and do a relief in place would make a lot of sense. I think I would agree with that. Those are all great things, but I think also having the PRT is a huge plus, it is exactly what we need to really fight the insurgency at the population level. It's a brilliant idea and one that should be expanded.

[END INTERVIEW]