

## USIP – ADST

### Afghanistan Experience Project

#### **Interview #27**

The interviewee arrived in Afghanistan in 2002 and left in 2004. She worked as a political advisor at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) office in Bamian after an initial six months at the UN office in Kabul. She is no longer employed by the UN.

The interviewee gives a highly positive assessment of the PRT in Bamian, which was under New Zealand command for most of her tour there. She thought the concept of the PRT was a good one, since it provided security with the lowest level of military presence possible. She notes that the NGOs operating in Bamian Province were initially concerned that the PRT would "militarize" the assistance programs, but were gradually reassured by the PRT's operations under both American and then New Zealand command. The interviewee was particularly struck by the command turn-over ceremony in 2002, when the New Zealand soldiers, many of whom were descendents of the original inhabitants of New Zealand, put on a mock battle in which the victors spared their victims and peace was restored without bloodshed. The interviewee said this resonated with the local population, who saw in the New Zealanders some of their own traditional practices and also a confirmation of their preference for settling disputes through reconciliation.

At the same time, the interviewee notes that we should not expect rapid or radical change in Afghanistan. She argues for supporting incremental steps toward modernization of the justice and political systems, as well as alterations in the traditional treatment of women. She felt that, as an Armenian (in a veil), she had greater empathy with the local population than the Western Europeans or the Americans. She also experienced extreme courtesy and deference in her dealings with the local population, who saw her, she says, as a powerful woman as well as a UN official.

In sum, by providing a sense of security to the local population and to the international aid groups present in Bamian, the PRT makes it possible for the central government to gradually extend its authority into the province. This process, in The interviewee's opinion, has a long way to go and she half jokingly wished that the PRT could remain in place "for 500 years."

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

**Interview #27**

*Interviewed by: Michael G. Anderson*  
*Initial interview date: June 24, 2005*  
Copyright 2005 USIP & ADST

*Q: I am doing an interview with a former U.N. official from Bamian, Afghanistan. Let me start by asking if you could describe the location, history, physical structure, size, and staffing of the organization that you were a part of in Afghanistan.*

A: I was with UNAMA [United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan] as a political affairs officer between 2003 and 2004. I left UNAMA at the end of April 2004. I'm going to talk about the period from the end of 2002 until the end of April 2004. I was working for UNAMA based in Bamian. Although initially I was in Kabul, I'm going to concentrate on Bamian.

*Q: How long were you in Kabul?*

A: I was in Kabul from November 2002 until the end of May, I believe, 2003, about six months or so. Then I moved to Bamian, which covered about 10 months. When I talk about PRTs I am really only talking about the one in Bamian, since that's where I was dealing with PRTs. The United Nations office in Bamian was quite small in terms of international staff. During the time I was working there, there was just one political officer (myself), and one humanitarian officer (an international civil servant)... The humanitarian officer was dealing with the PRT from the humanitarian projects point of view. I was dealing mostly from a political issues point of view. There was the head of office and some international technical staff. The rest were Afghans.

*Q: I assume you had the Afghans there partly as interpreters?*

A: Yes and no. Some of them had the status of interpreters. Some of them had the status of something like political affairs assistant. We basically had them as our local counterparts. At least that's how I saw them since they were key in terms of helping us to understand the dynamics or certain nuances locally, so they were not simply translators.

*Q: Were any of these Afghan nationals Afghan government employees or were they all paid directly by the UN?*

A: While they were working with us, no, they could not be employed by government – often not even formerly. In this case, formerly would have been really bad because it would have meant they would have been employed by the Taliban. But in general, UNAMA tends to do its best

not to hire people who were involved with the government or with the opposition, although often it's inevitable. In our case, no, these were people who had worked for NGOs during the Taliban period, working either in Afghanistan or in Pakistan. But we were working very closely with local governments, meaning provincial governments and district governments. Bamian was a province covering most of the central highlands and a UNAMA covered a little bit beyond that. In a way, our area included most of the Hazara-populated districts in Bamian province. Just to start all over again, Bamian is a Hazara area of Afghanistan. Hazaras are Shia Muslims. They look like Mongolians to be more specific, although I don't want to make any claims on their ancestry. That's their job and they dispute this.

*Q: Local people in Afghanistan would say, "Oh, that person looks like a Hazara?"*

A: Absolutely, because they have Mongolian eyes, the shape – as opposed to Pashtuns and Tajiks. Often, it's hard to distinguish between Pashtuns and Tajiks, too, but Hazaras have a very distinctive look. So, we were covering Hazarajat even though it is probably politically incorrect to call it that because we don't want to draw ethnic maps within Afghanistan, but it was UNAMA's intention to make sure that each and every ethnic group was covered by an UNAMA office.

*Q: Did the UN cover the whole map of Afghanistan through this kind of organization?*

A: Yes. I am not sure right now, but according to UNAMA's map, which was pretty much the PRT map, the same actually – and if I'm not mistaken, also the government map – had eight provinces. In total, there were 32 districts.

*Q: Is that the same as the Afghan government?*

A: I believe so. The Afghan government has eight provincial governments and 32 district governments. Currently, and this happened after I left, in my area of coverage during my stay there, there was one area called Daykondi which is Hazara populated – we covered it as part of the Bamian UNAMA office but now Daykondi has been established as another province because of its size, location, and the terrain. There may now be nine provinces, but you can always double check.

*Q: As far as you know, the PRTs were divided up that same way so that there was a PRT that was conterminous with what you were doing there? In other words, the UN and the government province, and the PRT area of jurisdiction were identical?*

A: Yes, at least for Bamian province exactly identical. For other provinces, we can always double check, but it should be more or less the same. Daykondi province as created now was covered at that time by Bamian's PRT. So, yes, the PRT was based in Bamian province covering all eight-nine districts of Bamian province, mostly Hazara populated.

*Q: You came in 2002. How long had the UN been operating there?*

A: The UN has been there all the time in different periods with different-

*Q: But the structure you were stepping into?*

A: UNAMA as such was created after the Bonn Conference, which I believe was after the coalition bombing of Afghanistan.

*Q: Sometime in 2002.*

A: The attack against the Taliban was launched in November [2001] or so. Don't rely entirely on my information. I'm just testing my memory. The Bonn Conference that brought together all Afghan factions except the Taliban under the UN and U.S. umbrella was held sometime in the spring of 2002, so immediately after that the mission started.

*Q: Then when you moved into this job that you had in Bamian, were you replacing someone who had done the same thing before you?*

A: Yes, I was replacing my former colleague who moved to another province for the same job. He has been there for a year.

*Q: You didn't really have to set the thing up. It was functioning at the time you arrived?*

A: Yes and no. In mission areas, often you set up your own things, your own style, your own contacts. Indeed there was an office, there was a UN structure set up.

*Q: There was a local staff.*

A: Yes, trained by my former colleague. But because our job descriptions are quite generic, we have to figure out ourselves what we can do and how we can do it. Nobody really explains to us how we can do things. In that sense, I had to set up a lot of things myself.

*Q: You said the UN was there in the numbers of people that you described. The U.S. and Afghan government were there also, not part of the structure of your organization obviously. How would you describe your relationship was with those two entities?*

A: When I arrived, it was still the American coalition, the American PRTs. Sometimes we use the word "coalition" for any uniform-

*Q: The ISAF or other-*

A: Exactly. At that time, ISAF was only in Kabul. I think they have now gone beyond Kabul, I hope. But I think it's NATO now.

*Q: The one that I was talking about in Mazar-e Sharif is NATO, a British-led-*

A: Exactly. So, when I arrived in Bamian in the summer 2003, the American PRT was there. So, I did work with them briefly for a couple of months, very low profile. We were having

briefings, political sessions, and exchanges of information. By August, the New Zealand PRT replaced the U.S. PRT or at least sometime by the end of the summer of 2003 So my main work then started with the New Zealand PRT. By the time I arrived and I was trying to get used to and trying to get acquainted with the area and all the things that were going on, I did interact a bit with the Americans.

*Q: So they were gone. When New Zealand came in, does that mean that New Zealand military forces were replacing American military forces?*

A: Yes.

*Q: It was still a military-*

A: Not civilian. In the case of New Zealanders, they had the reputation of being one of the best combatant groups.... *Q: They were really professional.*

A: They were professionals.

*Q: And then on the Afghan side-*

A: The military at that time was not yet the new Afghan army. The government was setting up. There were two registered units of the former military forces that agreed to cooperate with the government, but there were many, many other subunits that still were so-called warlords. In the case of Hazarajat, we never used the term "warlord," but I think this term could be applied to any commander who didn't necessarily want to cooperate with the government and was not necessarily Taliban or former Taliban. In terms of military, across all of Bamian province, we had lots of military subunits. We had a number of military subunits that were keeping strongholds in the area, often inaccessible, very remote, and not cooperating with the government. We had some that were cooperating with the government. But overall, they were difficult entities to deal with, not necessarily because they were bad. It's because we had to build trust between us. I never blamed them for not wanting to cooperate with us straight away.

*Q: They have a pretty rough history there.*

A: We were foreigners and we were in their country and they had to be cautious to understand why we are doing what we're doing.

*Q: What sort of Afghan government representatives were there in Bamian when you arrived?*

A: The political map of Bamian province or Hazarajat is the following. There are two main leaders. All of the Hazaras are Shias. There are two main leaders: Khalili, who used to be in the transitional government as Karzai's vice president (I don't think he's in the government right now. He may not be vice president.) and then Akbari. There were lots of allegations that Akbari cooperated with the Taliban.

*Q: Did these people have some kind of titles or were they just local notables?*

A: Akbari was a big mullah for Hazaras. They both were jihadi leaders. They both fought against...

*Q: I'm more interested in discovering whether there was any official government structure there.*

A: Yes, there was an official government structure, but it's important to understand how those unofficial government structures were making more impact than [the official one]\_\_\_\_\_. On Khalili's side, they were cooperating with Karzai's government. Khalili's followers were mostly in the government, in provincial and [district positions].... These two gentlemen [Khalili and Akbari], who were former jihadi leaders, had their own strongholds within the province. Because they both had big military units, one belonging to Khalili and one belonging to Akbari, since jihadi time and since they both separately fought the Taliban in their own ways, when the Taliban government fell and the new government took over and the PRT and UNAMA were there, their military strongholds were still there. There were some government appointees in the areas "controlled" by Akbari, some districts that had Akbari's followers, some districts that had Khalili's followers. This whole puzzle is confusing, but the story is the following: they were rivals.

*Q: Would you call them "warlords?"*

A: No.

*Q: They had armed followers?*

A: They had armed followers who probably were being financed by them even though those armed people were collecting taxes illegally and had their own sources of income, but they were obviously also being supported by those two mullahs, two former jihadi leaders. But I'm giving a little bit of this because that explains that all the districts were [staffed by] official government appointees and the provincial government was an official government. But there were a lot of complications because they were rivals. Rivalry in Afghanistan is much more complicated than [elsewhere].

*Q: It's not like Republicans and Democrats. It's a little stronger.*

A: I don't know what would happen if you give guns to Republicans and Democrats. In Afghanistan, the political culture is so underdeveloped in that sense.

*Q: It's almost like a feudal system, going back to the European experience of 5-600 years ago where you had the big lords and then the little ones, who were vassals of them and so on. It sounds like there is a formal government structure, but there is an informal power structure which doesn't necessarily-*

A: Yes, which influences all the formal government structures. So, for us and for the PRT, it was very complicated to deal with each and every district governor and the provincial governor

because we were touching different interests and we were stepping on different feet. We were in a very, very sensitive situation. The provincial governor was responsible for the entire province, but he didn't have influence over certain districts whose district governors were his rival's followers. They managed to get their way through their influence in Kabul. Kabul was also being influenced by different political parties. There were two different political parties, but they were not political parties by our definition.

*Q: Factions.*

A: Yes.

*Q: Was there any continuing U.S. presence there in Bamian that you dealt with after the PRT soldiers left? Was there a USAID mission?*

A: Yes, USAID was there.

*Q: As part of the PRT?*

A: They were attached... They were staying in the PRT compound, I believe as part of the PRT. The State Department representative was there with the New Zealand PRT and a couple of other State Department-

*Q: Usually they have an agriculture-*

A: Agriculture and stuff like that, yes.

*Q: I'm not sure if DEA had a-*

A: Not in Bamian.

*Q: I think they sort of stayed in Kabul.*

A: Could be. In Bamian, the poppy problem was the least of the problems. Bamian is one of the least important poppy cultivating areas.

*Q: I'm going to talk about the PRT. I guess you can tell me what you know of it from your angle and how you interfaced with it and so on. The role and mission of the PRT there? Can you describe the formal or actual role of this PRT? What were they supposedly doing there? Were they building things? Were they providing security?*

A: The main function... The aspect of the PRT that I was most interested in and was working most closely with was the security aspect and the political situation. But of course, the PRT was also involved in reconstruction activities. It's not difficult to get the list of all the things they have done. I'm sure the State Department has it. When the PRT just started, UNAMA was perfectly fine with the PRT. But at some point, UNAMA got caught up between the PRT and NGOs. The NGO community, the humanitarian assistance community, was not very pleased

with the concept of the PRTs or-- in their eyes -- the Americans trying to expand their activities over there-

*Q: Were they upset because it was kind of a militarization of this-*

A: Exactly.

*Q: The assistance program, turning them into an arm of the military.*

A: Yes. You could understand them also to some extent if you try to see it in the field, not from here. The aid community is one of the most vulnerable in any field mission in any post-conflict situation.... They don't have any security, any protection. The only protection they have is people who like them. It's very easy not to trust them and not to like them. That's it. It means that they are in danger. So, in that sense, they were concerned. But I don't want to cover what they were concerned about because our aim and our objectives were basically to work with all counterparts. But at some point, I remember very well how we were caught up as UNAMA, as the UN, between NGOs and the PRT, trying to reconcile them and trying to work out common ground for their activities. Bamian was one of the most successful provinces in terms of [cooperation between] the PRT the , UN and the NGOs. We found a common language to deal with each other.

*Q: So as far as you know, the PRT's main function there was to provide security or to build up the local infrastructure? What exactly were they doing? How many military or how many people were in that PRT?*

A: I won't be able to tell you, although I don't think it was ever confidential. I think it was a couple of hundred, not more. It was a small base. Providing security is a very, very general concept. Basically, they were doing patrolling. For example, one of the security activities was doing patrolling in areas where we both would assess - UN and PRT - that [their was a security problem].... Their presence itself meant more than what they would do. Just the fact that there was an "international" presence. Although in the eyes of the locals, New Zealand meant the same as the U.S., it was foreign, but to have a so-called "foreign" military base in this case, a PRT, meant much more than what they would do on a daily basis or what was their strategy there. Their presence already was sending very strong signals around. It was very, very important. So, on a daily basis, they would do patrolling in certain vulnerable areas, in certain areas where just driving through was often enough to send signals. I worked on one major project with the PRT where we formed a provincial task force to disarm one of the most complicated so-called warlords. When I arrived in Bamian, the American PRT at that time was very displeased with this guy, who they'd never seen and they could never access. They tried a few times and failed. Then when the New Zealanders took over, we formed a task force. I already started getting into the rhythm of the area and the dynamics. We couldn't expect the PRT, for example, to go and deal with this guy straight away. First of all, our assessment was showing that it was not the best way and we wanted to have a soft approach as much as we could. So, we and the local government and PRT, all the national and international counterparts, [went] in one group and we managed to get this guy to talk to us. Only after that, when the guy agreed with all the conditions we put forward, then the PRT entered into the area for patrolling.



For example, they wouldn't just drive into the area because the assessment was that there would be possibly armed conflict and it was a very civilian populated area. We didn't want to be associated with any shooting or any provoking. . Then they [the PRT soldiers] would go into the area and do patrolling. In one of the northern districts of Bamian province, that summer was very, very tense. There was very serious fighting between the two factions. Basically, the PRT had to set up a subbase there and have a few rounds by helicopter and that was enough to-

*Q: To make a demonstration.*

A: Yes. That calmed the situation a lot. In fact, after that, there were no armed conflicts in the area.

*Q: Did you have to call in the F-15s or anything like that?*

A: No, no, no, no, no. These people were fighting with obsolete Soviet technology.

*Q:*

*You were the political affairs officer in UNAMA. Your contacts are going to be the NGOs, the other government, the various power holders, mullahs, and the PRT.*

A: What a puzzle.

*Q: Yes, this is an extraordinary constellation of players that you have to-*

A: And I'm a woman on top of that. Imagine in Afghanistan, I had to cover my hair, which was not the most comfortable thing to do. Often I couldn't hear, so I had to open my ears when they were talking.

*Q: Was that the first time you had to do something like that?*

A: It was the first time I had to wear a veil for other than fashion purposes.

*Q: It was like a masquerade or something. What did you do then? You talked to people and then you came back and wrote reports and sent them to UN headquarters or Kabul?*

A: Yes. The line of command was the following. I was on a grassroots level. I was right in the very, very-

*Q: We'd call it a "reporting officer."*

A: Okay, I was a reporting officer. During my stay there, I would call it more than a reporting officer. I was there to solve issues. We were not there to observe. At least I saw my role not just to see and observe but to try to do things. I had activities there that were more than reporting like bringing the rivals together, to talk about and solve issue like disarming this monster. For one and a half years before my arrival there, UNAMA was just reporting on human rights

violations, abuse, extortion, and everything. Then when I talked to all the sides and we agreed that we can do more than just report and we can do more than just hope that the military will go and solve it. In fact, we solved it without really-

*Q: You were proactive on these things.*

A: Yes.

*Q: You had other people at UNAMA. Was there somebody above you who was in charge of making these contacts and doing things? I say "reporting officer" because I'm not sure where you were in the bureaucratic sense. Did you have enough influence and power within your own organization to go out and make contacts and do things or did you have to clear it with your boss?*

A: Yes.

*Q: The top person, was he willing to give you the kind of freedom to do these things?*

A: Yes. Even though the UN may sound very, very bureaucratic and it is – it's a huge organization; you cannot survive if you do not have such a heavy bureaucracy – in the field, things can work out quite differently. It all depends on personal relationships, on how much you show credibility that your boss can trust you to go out there and do things, and on how much you're willing to do things. Whatever you do in the field, whatever I was doing in Afghanistan, I was taking personal risk, after all. It was my personal decision often. Yes, I did have a boss in Bamian who was the head of the UNAMA office. Above him was the chief of UNAMA in Kabul, the Secretary General's special representative. We were sending the reports directly to Kabul, but it was not like I was bypassing my boss in Bamian. We were talking together constantly. I was explaining to him why I think this way, why I think we should do this. Yes, in my case, it worked out well. I think he admired what I was doing. Here comes the personal relationship thing.

*Q: He didn't X out parts of your reports or otherwise edit things in order to conform to-*

A: No. And he didn't think... You have to also realize that especially once you're in Afghanistan and you're a woman, the internationals treat you much better because... For the first time, I realized there are women's rights, and it was when I was in Afghanistan. They're very careful how they treat you. If they don't let you do what you have to do, then it's a very serious violation.

*Q: A political problem.*

A: It creates a political problem. It was also a lot to my advantage that I was a woman. It was to my advantage particularly with Afghans. They treat – at least in my case, I felt like they treated me with absolutely great respect just because I was a woman and I was coming from not necessarily a western country. I looked like them but I was not one of them, and I somehow

entered into their lifestyle. I would drink the water from a dirty glass that they would give to me and that inspired a lot of respect and confidence.

*Q: You didn't suffer ill effects as a result?*

A: No, because before Afghanistan, I was in another mission where every other day I was having an upset stomach, so I have built up a system for Afghanistan. These little things matter. Because of these little things, you can do really big things.

*Q: It gives you a great deal more access than somebody coming in without that kind of background.*

A: You would be amazed how much access it would give to you.

*Q: So you're not just reporting. You're in there negotiating and bringing together people.*

A: And literally working on building capacity within the government. My daily interactions with the provincial government, police, and army units, and with district entities basically were aimed at building capacity within those [institutions]\_\_\_\_\_. We would constantly go through procedures, through problems, through ways of dealing with those problems. I was also dealing with human rights. I was political affairs/human rights officer just because I was covering two posts. Now, they have two officers instead of one. I was dealing with very complex issues of human rights violations. On a daily basis, those interactions were breaking the ice of the local authorities and people, helping them to see why it is a violation and how it can be stopped.

*Q: What about your interaction with the PRT.... Is there somebody, a political advisor, at the PRT, an American?-*

A: Yes, he was an American.

*Q: Was he interested in the things you were interested in?*

A: Yes.

*Q: Did you work with that person on something like human rights reporting or intervention?*

A: Yes. The political officer at the PRT, who was the State Department official-

*Q: Was it the same person the whole time you were there?*

A: Yes. He left and then another person was deployed just briefly after I left Afghanistan. Before his arrival, there must have been someone else there. I think he was there during most of my stay.

*Q: Was he a State Department person?*

A: Yes. But I think his appointment was something like a few months. My most interesting work was with him because that was one of the most critical times in terms of the situation. That was a few months after I arrived in Bamian, so I was already ready to take action. So, yes, his activities were – at least all my activities were interesting also for him. I don't know what he was doing beyond my area of coverage. But in my area of coverage, we did work very closely. As simple as that, we had to exchange information, we had to double check information. I don't think we had secrets, UNAMA with the PRT. We didn't have secrets between each other. I don't think there was any need for confidentiality from UNAMA's point of view. We have information and it's always a good idea to see if they have the same information. Maybe we're getting it from the same Afghan sources and maybe they're trying to manipulate us or use us against each other, whatever. So we had to be cautious.

*Q: Did you have a schedule of meetings of PRT representatives and the UN?*

A: Yes, we had briefings. I have to specify. The head of office met more often with the commander, the general. We were all participating in these meetings, but often he would just go on his own and talk but not because there was something confidential to discuss. Then I was dealing more with the political officer and my colleague, the UN humanitarian officer, was dealing more with USAID or Agriculture Department officers. We each had our own counterparts at the PRT. We each worked out our own schedule. In my case, at least twice a week we would see each other if we were available, if I was not on a mission somewhere. I was meeting not only the political officer but also the security people from the PRT, the intelligence people. I was dealing with a wide range of people.

*Q: These would be people from the New Zealand contingent?*

A: Yes, mainly New Zealand. My interaction, my cooperation, with the American PRT was only for a couple of months.

There is an interesting thing I should add which would help you to understand at least in the context of Bamian province the people's perception of the PRT. A lot of human rights complaints were coming to my office because there was also an Afghan independent human rights commission, so people would come to this human rights commission, give them the complaint, come to me, and then go to the PRT. Often it was interesting to see how they would tell it to all three of us to make sure that at least one of us would get involved and solve the problem. There were often cases when while the PRT would do patrolling, people would go to them and talk and tell things and they would identify serious human rights issues in areas and come and tell us because they would [go to places we could not]... We couldn't travel constantly all over the place, so there was a lot of useful exchange of information.

*Q: So the patrol was the eyes and ears for you in the outlying areas.*

A: Yes.

Q: Can you be more specific as to what was going on between the NGOs and the PRT and how you interacted with the NGOs in this case? What were their major concerns?

A: My UN colleague who was in charge of humanitarian affairs, she was the one who was dealing mostly with the NGOs. Almost all NGOs were involved in humanitarian activities, reconstruction, so that was her area. I was dealing with them only when I needed information and to understand what we could do politically to improve the situation so that they could have access to one or another area to penetrate and do health, education, or other activities. We couldn't survive without each other. Our activities were dependent on each other. But because it was all happening in the same office, I was witnessing tension between NGOs and the PRT initially. Anything that is new is not [immediately accepted]... There are dynamics until things fall into their places. But my understanding is that in Bamian province, they managed the relationship well. Of course, you had some NGOs in health areas who were absolutely sensitive to the fact that the PRT might go into villages and do some health projects or whatever.

*Q: They didn't like the competition?*

A: As I mentioned, they feel they own this area of activity in a sense. Second, there were indeed legitimate concerns initially expressed by them that it may mislead the local population and it may eventually confuse them.... Because they [the NGOs] don't have any protection. If there was a security alert in Bamian province and the internationals had to be evacuated, the PRT was going to evacuate first the UN and then after there was a space the NGOs. You see how vulnerable they are. So you cannot blame them for not wanting to be mixed up or confused with the military. They managed their way through many decades in very, very sensitive areas without any protection.

*Q: I get it. They preferred almost to have a situation where there wasn't any military there beforehand because in a sense then there was no chance that they would be mistaken for allies. If it should come to some sort of a conflict, they would have been vulnerable...*

A: Yes. But again, in the area of reconstruction, I believe they must have found a common language at least in Bamian province, where for example, NGOs, even reconstruction NGOs, often do not have the capacity of building the same bridges as the military can build. So they were okay if the military built bridges, but they were not necessarily okay if the military built schools or built clinics. The schools and clinics are the easiest ways of earning hearts and minds, but not necessarily something that is so difficult that only the military can do it.

*Q: They don't really have a military use or a justification, whereas a bridge, you can say, "we need this for the \_\_\_\_\_ troops-"*

A: And even government buildings, governments don't have offices and buildings. It's all ruined.

*Q: So did the PRTs and the NGOs come to an agreement as to what one would do and what the other would do?*

A: I believe they did. I believe they came to a consensus where they understood each other.... I think also a lot was dependent on the commander of the PRT, the personality, his attitude.

*Q: Which can change.*

A: It can change things. Of course, he was taking a big burden of trying to convince Kabul. He himself was reportable to Kabul and to his country. When PRTs were launched, they themselves didn't exactly know what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it. It was a sort of an experiment. They were testing the limits in their field. In each province, there were different limits. I think overall this is fantastic because then you can put it in perspective.

*Q: What was the nature of the security threat there? . What kind of security threat existed in Bamian province?*

A: Unpredictable. Quietness is the most dangerous thing in Afghanistan. When it's too quiet, you're more scared than when you hear shooting and bombing. You are very wary of a very quiet situation.

*Q: It means that a lot of people know that something is afoot.*

A: You don't know what it is, but you start trying to understand why it is so quiet. In other words, it's unpredictable. You don't have guarantees. As far as I have managed to understand Afghan people, just because they may be quiet, they may be soft, they may be polite doesn't mean yet that they may not do something that is beyond description.

*Q: It could explode.*

A: It could explode and someone else could come, like outsiders... We believed that we managed very, very good relationships with locals, with different factions in Bamian, and they were very friendly toward the international community. Hazaras are in general considered to be moderate people. But outsiders could have come. Who was controlling any borders? Who was controlling those rocks and mountains? From other provinces, former Taliban who were spread all over the place could have penetrated and could have committed a provocation. They could have hurt us for the sake of discrediting the local government there if they wanted to. Our house, the UNAMA staff house, was a mud house. There were two police guards provided to us by the provincial government. These policemen were there many shifts, 24 hours a day. I don't know why if there was any danger they wouldn't run away instead of protecting me. I wouldn't blame them. Why would they have to give up their life for me? So, it was in a way symbolic and in a way to meet the UN security standards for the sake of peace of mind, but there was no guarantee.

*Q:*

*When you traveled around the province, did you have an armed guard?*

A: No, armed people are not allowed inside UN vehicles. There is a sign on the window so that also local people know that we are not armed. I did travel only once in a big convoy when we

had this task force where we negotiated with one of the most monstrous commanders to pull out so that we could penetrate the area. The convoy was composed of two UN vehicles. We were obliged to travel with two vehicles. In case something went wrong, the other vehicle could come and rescue... Then there were local government vehicles, local police vehicles, and PRT vehicles. But the PRT vehicles because they were renting locally – I think that's their procedure – were so slow and so mechanically unsophisticated that it would take them at least an hour to catch up with us when we would arrive in a location. In other words, if we were caught up in a fight or a gunshot, I don't think they would have been of any help.-

*Q: They would arrive to bury the dead.*

A: And I was not necessarily the most enthusiastic to be seen in the same convoy as the military because I didn't want them to see that they are my escort. *Q: You had somewhat the same concerns that the NGO people would have had.*

A: Slightly different.

*Q: In the sense that you don't want to militarize your particular-*

A: Not necessarily. I didn't want them to think I was afraid of them. My concern was slightly different, actually quite different. I wanted them to see I am not concerned about the security and I am not afraid and I believe that they're my friends.

*Q: So the security threat in the Bamian area was relatively low?*

A: It was easy in terms of UN in most of Bamian. In Daykondi area, which is southeast of Bamian center, until the time I left, there was no formal government and there were different factions ruling the area. But the area was running itself very well. It's amazing that sometimes when there is no government in a place and you see that things are running themselves very well, so you wonder, do we need government at all? I shouldn't be saying this because I'm starting government.

*Q: It only seems to be required where there are troubles. One of our founding fathers said, "If men were angels, there wouldn't be any need for government." I think there are other reasons why there wouldn't be any need for government. It may just be that it's so primitive in a sense that there was no reason for people to – there was nothing to steal in a sense.*

A: Yes, and also Afghans throughout at least the last 25 years of civil wars have learned to manage themselves often without leaders, often without often . And also, because it's a tribal society, in every village, in every area, they have tribal elders, so they do have their own structures of government.

*Q: No government is better than bad government in a sense. I guess they've had a lot of experience with very bad government.*

A: They have their own ancient structures of governing themselves, which was the elders and mullahs and mosques and so on. So, yes, in that part, [the Daykondi area] there were legitimate concerns about security. But overall, we didn't have an area in Bamian province where we were not allowed to enter. . We often had to do it at our own risk because you never knew. But when compared to other provinces and regions like in the south, where UNAMA officers were almost bound to their offices and the coalition forces had to protect their offices, so they couldn't even step a foot outside , never mind going to villages, we were under no security threat.

*Q: Was there a problem with thievery or common crime that you had to deal with or was that not an issue there?*

A: We had Afghan staff working in the house for us as cooks and cleaners. We had someone who was not armed but was still -- in a way -- a 24 hour guard because he had to run the house, to bring the water from the river and stuff like that. Thievery is not an issue in Afghanistan. They cut off hands and heads for that up until recently. I'm not saying it's because of that. I do believe it's because they're honorable people, not necessarily because they are afraid of their hands and heads being cut off. But thievery is really not a common problem. But when you walk in Kabul, you have to be careful.

*Q: What about paying bribes and so on, corruption of any sort? If you wanted to see somebody or go somewhere, did you ever have the feeling that you were supposed to pay somebody off to get what you wanted or that the PRT or the UN would have to... Was corruption an issue there?*

A: You mean whether or not we came across situations when we thought that this may lead to corruption?

*Q: I was thinking mainly of the local officials. Were they corrupt?*

A: Local officials – corrupt... This is not a straightforward thing. Yes, they were corrupt because they were collecting illegal taxes or if there were any poppies being cultivated , I am sure they were receiving their percentage of income or whatever. They were surviving on that. You could see that they had better lives than the normal population and their wages or salaries were not necessarily providing this better life. I don't think they would ever dare to ask for corruption from us. I don't think they needed a bribe from us. How much would I bribe an Afghan official to give me information?

*Q: No, it wouldn't really affect you, I guess.*

A: I don't think they're so stupid. They're smart people. You have to bear in mind they're smart people and they wouldn't do something that would be a fatal mistake for them.

*Q: They were more likely to entertain you and provide you with all different gifts.-*

A: No, no, no, we didn't seek any-

*Q: You didn't get the sense that sometimes they were courting you as an influential person?*



A: No, I didn't. Again, in my case, I was a woman and I'm still a woman and entertaining a woman is taboo in Afghanistan in many ways. So, they would be very careful. But you have to understand one thing. No matter who visits them, they immediately open a table. Whatever they have, they invite you to join them, if it's tea with nuts or rice with-

*Q: I've had some experience traveling around Pakistan, which I think is much the same culture. Even if they appeared to be poor, if you came, a guest came, everything was available.*

A: They didn't entertain us in that way, but there was a great Afghan hospitality in a way that, once you enter their office, immediately, the tea guy – they have tea guys in every office – would bring tea, nuts. Whenever I was traveling in the field, it was obvious to them that I traveled five or six hours and they would immediately open a table for all my entourage, drivers and so on, and we would eat basically rice and meat if there was meat available. Yes, you have to eat in those places. You cannot cook your rice on the way. You don't have those facilities. So that was the basic Afghan culture of hospitality which they would provide for any traveler. My impression was that they didn't even have to please us in that way. Of course, there were rival factions we were dealing with and each faction was trying to sell their side of the story. They know that we don't need that, in a way. Probably they knew exactly how much my salary was because the UN salaries are public and you can check it on the Internet. Once the word goes around, the salary becomes an even more exaggerated figure, so I was considered probably a wealthy woman who didn't need anything except to do my job.

*Q: What about the humanitarian people or the PRT, the AID officials? Were they under some kind of pressure to build or to put in a particular reconstruction activity in one place rather than in another?*

A: These things happen inevitably for one or another reason, for good or bad reasons. There were cases where we were receiving complaints. But in a place as devastated as Afghanistan, if you build a clinic in one place, not in another, there is always suspicion. Why not in another? You need to build everywhere, not in one or another, and you cannot build everywhere at once. So the speculations also would be around because there was so much need and you could do only so much. Having said that, I'm not saying that the aid community was totally outside the influence of local-

*Q: There was some political pressure to do it there as opposed to somewhere else.*

A: That was the purpose of the UN's humanitarian affairs coordination. We had to make sure that things were not being done under political pressure-

*Q: The need had more to do with it than power or something like that.*

A: And need had to be weighted because there was need everywhere. But we had to make sure that maintained the credibility of both the UN and NGOs. The NGOs often would come to us for help to try to assess the situation and to ask us to help if they were under pressure.

*Q: What were the PRT's activities related to promoting democracy, creating local governance, extending authority of the central government? Did you get any sense as to what they were trying to do? . Were the PRTs involved in trying to build up the rule of the national government in this locality and how did they do that?*

A: Yes. Just the fact of their presence would send very strong signals and they would always make it clear that they are here to support the Afghan government, not anyone else. In those areas when there was rebellion against government or lack of desire to cooperate with the government, the PRTs patrolling alone would help the provincial government to assert its authority.-

*Q: So the PRTs were seen as an arm of the national government?*

A: Yes. They [the Afghans] would never tell you exactly what they think of you. But in general, it was very clearly said and presented that the PRTs are there to [represent the national government].-

*Q: Was there an Afghan army presence there?*

A: Yes, there were two rival units-

*Q: Each mullah had his own-*

A: Each one had his own-

*Q: Are you talking about the preexisting armies that had been nationalized?*

A: Yes, and not fully nationalized, so there were still individual commanders who had their own strongholds and the government didn't yet have influence over them. The PRT was working quite well with at least one of the military units that was allied with the provincial government.

*Q: So you're saying that the national government – that is, the Afghan National Army – was not really a national army. It was sort of the local armies that had allied with the national government.*

A: No, let me clarify. The Afghan National Army [ANA] was just starting to be established. It was launched towards the end of 2003/beginning of 2004. What I'm talking about, those military units, they were all the jihadis, anti-Taliban, or whatever who when the transitional government was established were integrated into the transitional government's defense ministry. They had to be disarmed to be integrated into ANA. I'm not talking about the ANA because there was not yet an ANA unit in my province.-

*Q: So the chronology of the thing is that you went from the provincial mullahs, whoever these local powers were, their armies, the jihadist armies, disarmament of those, and then integration of some of those former fighters into the ANA.*

A: There were three stages, to be more specific. They were the kings of their own worlds during the fighting against the Taliban, those two units – or as allegations claim, cooperating in one or another way with the Taliban. When the transitional government was established, Karzai has now been twice the president. As a matter of fact, he's been elected president now for the first time, but he was appointed as head of the transitional administration in 2002. At that time, those units had agreed to be part of the defense ministry of the transitional administration, so they were registered. But within those units, a lot of subunits and commanders thought they didn't agree with that, so they're independent. Those units then had to undergo disarmament according to the presidential decree and be integrated into the ANA. So, I'm talking about a very strong military presence that did not always have control of its own soldiers, that had not yet been disarmed during the period of time I was there, and part of them were illegal, part of them were legal also.

*Q: Did you see anything like a national police force?*

A: Yes, they had a police force, very weakly armed. They had only one and a half vehicles. One of the vehicles was always broken.

*Q: And that was separate from the people who were guarding your compound?*

A: No, the ANP again passed through the same sequence I described for the ANA. Police training had been taking place, first in Kabul, and then they moved beyond Kabul. The Germans were in charge of police training in Afghanistan. They were training the police. These police and the army I'm talking about were part of the transitional administration. *Q: Was there a police institute or school there in Bamian?*

A: No, the one that trained police for Bamian was in Kabul and was run by the German PRT or German ISAF maybe. But they were planning to expand their activities beyond Kabul. They did have a couple of training sessions in Bamian province. One of the first training sessions dealt with human rights.

*Q: Was the Afghan government represented within the provincial reconstruction team?*

A: Yes, there was a guy from the ministry of interior, from Kabul, who was attached to the PRT. He didn't speak English. I'm sure he had translators there. He had his own agenda obviously. But he was a very cooperative and moderate person, so it was easy to work with him. A lot of the complex issues that we had disagreements on, through some dialogue and discussions we would come to common solutions.

*Q: What is your overall evaluation on the performance of the PRT in promoting good government... Did you get a sense of what, other than providing security, they could or did do in the time that you were there?*

A: The clear signal that was being sent was that they're there to support the government, not one or another faction. No matter which faction is in the government, they're there to support. I

think that was very clearly said. But things don't happen overnight. If you want to promote good governance and want people to believe that you're promoting good governance, it comes only through years of hard work and some results. I know that they were renovating the government buildings in a couple of districts, stuff like that, but that was not the major promotional activity. Just the fact that it was very clear that they are with the government... They were saying that they're there to support the government. But again, Afghans never fully trust anyone, so you have to be able to read their mind to see whether they really meant what they just said, like, "Yes, we believe that you're here to promote..." Maybe inside they're so suspicious. I'm sure they're suspicious of all foreigners. They've learned the hard way.

*Q: It's kind of hard for us as outsiders to come into a country and say, "We're here to represent the national government to you." It's like, "Well, what are you doing here? You're an outsider. How can you..." And in a sense it can actually undermine the credibility of the central government. It must be a pretty weak central government if they need to invite in the Americans.*

A: Oh, Karzai had no stronghold outside Kabul at least for quite some time. But then I think he did manage it quite well through a few radical steps and measures.

*Q: I think you were right – as the security situation improves, assuming that the PRT provides security, that will redound to the credit of the central government.*

A: Absolutely.

*Q: Because the PRT is going to eventually leave and then the central government will be the actual beneficiary.*

A: I hope not soon. I hope they won't leave soon.

*Q: I kind of doubt it.*

A: They should stay there for at least 500 years to be sure that we sort out things there.

*Q: Were you there during any Afghan political events?*

A: I was there during the constitutional loya jirga. I did two elections there for the constitution and then for the constitutional loya jirga. So, we did organize elections throughout the province and districts. The PRT was key in terms of making sure [that election preparations were in place]... Often, we wouldn't travel with them [the PRT soldiers] in the areas, but we would be sure that they had been there or they would be there before or after us so that the locals or those rebellious commanders knew that they were around.

*Q: So that would give people confidence to go vote and to take part in the process because they felt secure?*

A: Yes, exactly. In all districts and in the province during the elections, the PRT was key because they were always around, they were always driving around. In fact, when we went to

that very complicated district, Daykondi, which is now a province southeast of Bamian, without the PRT, we couldn't do anything. The PRT just established a temporary camp there before even we would call. They were patrolling and guarding the election site. The members or the elected representatives had to walk often day and night to reach the election site. They could get killed on the way by rivals. There was a lot of security during the loya jirga, and the PRT played a key role.

*Q: And what was the UN's role in the elections?*

A: I was the international counterpart. There was an Afghan constitutional commission established. These guys were the ones who were responsible for everything that without our final signature could not happen. So, basically, we were building capacity in a way. We were letting them do things, but through constant consultation. We were doing it together.

*Q: So in a sense you gave legitimacy or approval to whatever the local-*

A: Not so obviously because we wanted to send signals and make it clear to locals that especially when it comes to the constitution, the last thing you [the UN or other outsiders] want to show is your involvement because then they will not accept this constitution, saying that it's foreign, imported and so on. It was a very, very sensitive issue. We had to keep as low a profile as possible. We had to not get involved in the essence of the issue but try to guide them.

*Q: Was it technical information-*

A: Not only, no. We had a very key role in terms of deciding the correct procedure.... And we were also listening carefully to what they were saying. Things couldn't go ahead if we decided that that was not the way to do it.. We were not necessarily deciding, but through intensive consultations only certain things could be approved, not necessarily with the stroke of a pen from my side, but if, for instance, they had to have a quota or proportional representation from all factions and they didn't have that, I had to be alarmed and I had to tell them, "No, we have to have proper representation."

*Q: I call that technical, but actually it's more than technical. It's really legal almost-*

A: It's more than technical because we had to also study each and every candidate that was selected and elected carefully. And we were supervising the election. We were supervising the whole process. We had to be sure that the credibility of the process is not harmed.

*Q: I can't remember, were there outside observers that came for the loya jirga election?*

A: The UN mostly, and EU.

*Q: Were you there for the presidential election?*

A: No, I wasn't there. I missed one of the biggest events there.

*Q: You can't stay forever. You were there for two years.*

A: A year and a half.

*Q: The PRTs were organized by the U.S. and then handed over to other countries. Did that happen before you got there?.*

A: I was there when the Americans handed it over to the New Zealanders. I was there when the New Zealanders did haqa?

The haqa is a sort of traditional game or show. I have been privileged to see it twice, once when the Americans handed the PRT over to New Zealand and the second time when an American general from Bagram base in Kabul was visiting so they did this haqa. It's the local native New Zealand way of greeting their friends. It's a fascinating show. It's a group of men doing stuff like in the ancient times the natives would do-

*Q: Martial arts?*

A: Something like that. My vocabulary is now limited to describe what it is, but it's a very, very fascinating show.

*Q: Do they put on a mock battle of some sort?*

A: Exactly, but a way of sacrificing some of them for their honorable guest.

*Q: It's got a lot of meaning then.*

A: Yes.

You should have seen the faces of Afghans when they were watching haqa. They were so entertained. They realized that, yes, you can also do things and scare people without killing them.

*Q: That's extraordinary. I think these folk ways of doing things are every place. It's interesting that the only people who get to see them are the cosmopolitan types who don't really do things like that anymore. Here you have a group that is recalling what it was like in New Zealand in the old days before the white man arrived and they're coming and putting on a show for the people in Afghanistan, who probably, many of them, have a very, very ancient culture and they recognize that there's something similar there.*

A: Yes, they resonate immediately and they understand that they're also humans.

*Q: That's right, and I think people recognize that at one time they were all warriors of one sort or another, that that was a central feature of their existence. Now it's been ritualized, but it's still there.*

*So you did see the handover. How was this arranged?*

A: There was a beautiful ceremony. All the officials were invited – the UN, the government, the American general and the New Zealand general. There was a reception. We were so delighted each time we would go for some kind of ceremony at the PRT base because the food was much better there than anywhere.

*Q: It's like being invited to the ambassador's residence.*

A: In my residence, all I would eat was just rice and meat and here we come and they have all this military food and they get supplies quite well from outside. Yes, that was done very well. I think the ceremony was also well received by local authorities. It was done in such a style that I think the local authorities could see that these are not just soldiers. It's more than military representation. They have a mission which is more than military. Am I being clear? When we all sat together around the same table – the UN, NGOs, and local government, and American and New Zealand generals – we all ate together, we all raised our Coca-Cola glasses (because alcohol was not allowed at the PRT) and made toasts and talked and exchanged. I think these kind of things help to narrow the gap, to see that there is more than just military uniforms and arms.

*Q: That's certainly what they're trying to do. I think that the civil affairs groups of the U.S. military try to do that, to say, "This is a nation building exercise. We're not here just to kill the bad guys. We're actually here to do something positive."*

A: Another interesting thing you may want to know... For example, local government a lot of time would call the PRTs to ask for their help. If they wanted to sort out one or another rebellious commander, they would ask the PRT to deal with that. The PRT didn't have a mandate to arrest or detain anyone there unless it was Taliban or Al-Qaeda related. So, it was also very helpful that very often while the PRT was asked to interfere by the government, they would make it very clear each and every time that they don't have the mandate to interfere into local affairs. They were there to support as much as they could the government, but they couldn't arrest anyone who was bad.

*Q: They weren't law enforcement mandated.*

A: No. It was important in a sense for the government and everyone else to understand that this military has a limited mandate there which would also, I believe and I hope, have the locals understanding that they're not really here to invade their country in that sense.

*Q: Yes, it's a much more benign presence.*

*Can you tell me how the New Zealand PRT differed from the U.S. PRT, if there is anything that sticks out in your mind?...*

A: I am sure there were different styles. This is not about good and bad style. The New Zealand army was representing a very small country with how many million people?

*Q: Maybe a couple.*

A: Maybe less than five million. And the U.S. army was representing the only superpower.

*Q: At the same time, you said that as far as the local people were concerned, the New Zealanders were the same as the Americans.*

A: Almost. For them they were like Americans. They spoke English.

*Q: It [the difference between Americans and New Zealanders] was not as strong with them [the Afghans] as it would be with somebody from the UN.*

A: Yes, except that the style of a general, whether American or New Zealander, would matter a lot in building up relationships with locals. They still have the same perceptions. For them, they probably couldn't understand the difference much except the ones who are educated and knew the difference between New Zealand and the United States. But otherwise, the personal style of people also mattered a lot.

*Q: So how did the personal style differ?*

A: This was in my initial stage in Bamian for a couple of months only... As far as I knew, UNAMA was very happy with PRT cooperation. I met the American commander and we had a very good couple of months of cooperation and exchange of information. At some point, they would advise us, we would advise them, and so on. That was my main activity and my main activity continued with New Zealanders. There was a great understanding and cooperation between UNAMA and the PRT overall. I wouldn't differentiate in this context the difference between Americans and New Zealanders except that probably they've been eating different food and from one PRT to another there were slight differences when you visited even the compound. But other than that, we all were internationals there, we were all treating each other as allies and counterparts. It was more difficult to understand the English of New Zealanders than Americans. I just got used to the English coming from all parts of the United States. When the New Zealanders came, I had to then train my ears.

*Q: We already said that at least during your tenure there the police were still at a very rudimentary stage of development and there was no resident police training – that was done in Kabul. Did you get any sense of what the PRT's engagement with the local police was? Were they there to somehow or another help them, train them, do anything with the police? ...*

A: I don't think their mandate involved training the police, but they were working very closely with the police commander, who had very few guys under his command and one and a half vehicles. They were not in charge of police training as far as I remember. They were working closely though with the police commander when it was regarding security and other issues. When they had information about some security incidents or so on, there was instantly an exchange of information between the police, the government, UNAMA, and the PRT.



*Q: What about the rule of law?*

A: We were monitoring the prisons. We were going to prisons and trying to see the conditions. Of course, you cannot expect normal conditions in the prisons when people don't have those conditions even at home, so we were being pragmatic also in that sense. But we were mostly trying to see if people were unfairly detained. UNAMA was more involved in those things because of its human rights mandate than was the PRT. But PRT representatives also were visiting prisons and going around.

*Q: What about the court system there and the system of justice?. ...*

A: You mean the official system or the unofficial system? There were two systems, one the tribal and the other the governmental.

*Q: Hopefully they were moving from unofficial to more official. I guess the official one.*

A: The official one in Bamian had just been established. There was no court, but there were prisons. There was a major UNDP program, the United Nations Development Program, a UN agency under the umbrella of UNAMA, in judicial reform, so they were starting judicial reform from Kabul and expanding it to the provinces. The initial stage of the judicial reform program was surveying the facilities like buildings and stuff and seeing how many people are in the system and so on, and then after assessing the situation to plan what to do next. It was a very disastrous situation, of course.

*Q: Then the traditional system of justice, how would you describe that?*

A: The traditional system of justice was not a bad idea for the transitional period in Afghanistan. They've had it for thousands of years

The traditional justice system was very primitive, but in my assessment and from my experience – again, I was in the field, not sitting here in one of the glossy human rights offices; I was there to write reports, not to impress the world with how much I'm able to see the human rights violations or the bad things there... I was there at least with the mindset of seeing how we can solve the daily problems and how we can just take the next step towards a solution instead of saying "This is right and this is wrong." Right, wrong, the situation is grave in all senses. So, the justice system was done by elders in the village. Each village had elders. These were often undisputed people. They were selected or elected by the community. If a man killed another man or raped a woman or did something that dishonored or caused a problem to another family, then either that family would try to take physical revenge or they would take the issue to the elders. Often, elders intervene immediately so that it doesn't go beyond. Let's say a man killed someone's son or husband or brother. The elders would try to take over the issue immediately and try to find a solution. The solution is basically reconciliation. Nobody would be physically punished or killed or hurt, not at least from what I understood there, by the decision of elders. So then he had to pay 1,000 sheep or he had to give his daughter as a wife to their son, some kind of very, very feudalistic-

*Q: Something that would almost be in Hammurabi's Code or something like that.*

A: Yes, exactly. This kind of deal would take place. It wouldn't happen easily, of course. It would be a long process of negotiation. But I think the approach overall was positive - the objective of the system was reconciliation.

*Q: Not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,*

A: Not when the elders would get involved. Before elders would get involved, it could take place, of course. If you kill my son, I come and kill your son. That was probably the concept there, or that was the attitude. But once the elders get involved, then they try to smooth things out.... Of course, they do not necessarily reconcile these people so they would sit down and have dinners together, but at least the revenge, killings and so on, won't take place. It is amazing how effective it is.

*Q: What you're saying is that you wanted to see that traditional system get back on its feet and working without trying to revolutionize the situation but just to get the traditional system back into operation?-*

A: There was no need for that system to get back to work. It was working there in parallel while we were trying to introduce a system of new modern human rights and justice. But because the system that we were introducing was new and we didn't have even the capacity to implement it, often, we wouldn't interfere with elders' decisions. Let's say someone is a big human rights violator and the elders decided that they found a way to reconcile, I don't think we would necessarily interfere in that as long as they would reconcile.

*Q: Peace was the main thing and to maintain that.*

A: That was called a shadow justice system. That was quite well understood by at least the UN and quite understood in a way that we cannot stop it until there is something more sufficient to replace it.

*Q: And the PRT was not trying to replace that immediately. Did the PRT have any kind of involvement in that?*

A: The institution of elders is a very powerful institution in Afghanistan. No one wants to mess with them. They may not necessarily be the most democratic institution in Afghanistan, but it's one of the most sensitive institutions in Afghanistan. These are people who are selected by people, by the community, to represent their needs. You don't want to upset the community by interfering and by implanting something that is alien to them yet. They didn't have a constitution at that time. Now they have a constitution and things will come gradually, but you don't want to remove things if you don't have anything to replace them with.

*Q: You mentioned women's rights and trying to westernize or create a bigger space for women in Afghanistan. Did you find that that was part of your task or were you just sort of representing*

*kind of what a woman could be if conditions were appropriate? How would you characterize what you were doing there? Did the PRT, for instance, have anything to do in that area? It seems to always make the newspapers, the condition of women in Afghanistan.*

A: And we forget that the condition of men is also bad there. I always like to see things in a context. Yes, it's true that the condition of women is bad in Afghanistan as well as in so many other countries. It's true that they have forced marriages and arranged marriages. In one of the largest democracies, like India, they have arranged marriages, matchmaking – the mother decides who the son should marry very often. Somehow it's not disputed. But when it happens in Afghanistan, it is disputed. But I don't want to touch their local habits.

*Q: I just want to hear about your direct involvement and direct impression.*

A: During the constitutional loya jirga elections, there was a presidential decree that was giving a quota to women. So, we had to organize men's elections where women also could participate and put forward their candidacy and be elected, but from each province there was a minimum of two seats for women to be elected to be sent to Kabul for constitutional assembly, so we had to organize also separately women's elections. I dealt also with women, organizing the election. It's amazing how strong and intelligent they are even though they cannot read and write. There was a lot going on in the area of women's rights. There was a ministry of women's affairs that had a department also in Bamian province. I don't know how far you want me to expand on this issue. But we would encourage, for example, we had the men's election or general election separate from women's, but we encouraged lots of women to participate because it was not saying "It's only for men." It was saying, "It's for everyone and then if women don't want to go there, they have a separate election." So we did encourage and manage to get a number of women involved there and even put their candidacy to be voted by men. We had several workshops and several seminars, a lot of activities trying to somehow send signals to men and women that they had equal political rights.-

*Q: Were the schools open to girls as well?*

A: Yes.

*Q: I guess during the period of the Taliban they had been educating them but perhaps not to the same extent as the boys.*

A: They were officially not allowed to go to schools. There was underground education for girls.

*Q: So there were no schools for girls at all during the Taliban period?*

A: No schools for girls during the Taliban period. Mind you, we say that girls were not allowed to go to school during the Taliban period, but we forget that the boys were forced to study religion only at school. There was nothing else. So it was worse than no education. In fact, maybe some girls had a better education during the Taliban period because they were going to

underground schools, than boys, who were forced into madrassahs . Now it was open to girls and lots of beautiful girls were going to school.

*Q: Reconstruction and development is something that could probably go on with or without the PRT. That's the kind of thing that is done by a number of different organizations.*

*What would you say were the successes and failures of the PRT? Did you hear anything negative about them other than the fact that the NGOs didn't want to be too closely associated with them ?*

A: Yes, but that's a different issue and that's very NGO culture and principle, which is not necessarily because the PRT was bad or good. They have their own principles and ways of managing things. For me, it's very, very difficult to sit here now and say this was a failure and this was a success because I was in the field myself and I know how much [or how little] you could have done. .

*Q: , What , in your opinion, worked well and what didn't work so well in terms of the PRT's presence in Bamian province?*

A: My assessment honestly, and I'm not trying to please anyone, because of my previous experience in conflict areas, I think that [the PRT's performance] was just fine. Of course, with time, they would elaborate their mandate and activity and they would expand and that's the way to do it. They had the right approach to start from quite a low key profile and then go a little bit more and more with time. From my observations, they were very closely working with all parties. They were talking to rivals, to mullahs, to everyone. What I have observed at least during my stay there is that they were talking to people, listening to people. They were listening to all sides. That's a good thing.

*Q: . In other words, you see it as a pretty much a positive creation and something that you wouldn't change much.*

A: I wouldn't replace them... How much softer can you go beyond a PRT? A PRT is the softest version of armed forces, right? At least by the sound of the name, you cannot go softer than that. As long as it sustains itself it can do things, you don't need to go even tougher than that. I don't think, for example, in the case of Bamian, you need combatant forces, just combatant forces. I think this is the right balance.

[END INTERVIEW]