

USIP – ADST
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #21

Executive Summary

The Interviewee is an officer in the United States Army, with 27 years of service. He has been a civil affairs specialist since 1995. He commanded a PRT covering two Afghan provinces from January to early October 2004.

The PRT initially consisted of about 70 soldiers, a CAT A team of four, and a CAT B team of 6, plus a support element and a maintenance team. A State officer and a USAID officer joined the PRT, and an Afghan police colonel was assigned as general liaison and participated in all unclassified activities and meetings. Later a contingent of Marines – not under the PRT's command – brought the total number to around 300. The PRT also employed Afghan security guards and interpreters.

The PRT's mandate was to "extend the authority of the central government." Its biggest effort went to promoting the national elections, by assisting voter registration, conducting educational seminars, and engaging local religious leaders in the process. The educational efforts included talking about the democratic process and encouraging involvement of women. The responses were generally positive. Election turnout was excellent.

Interviewee had immediate access to Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds up to \$25,000 per project, and undertook about 150 projects, including schools, clinics, and government building construction, providing ambulances, building a children's park near a women's center, and refurbishing a municipal fire department. Interviewee worked to encourage Afghan initiatives and self-reliance. CERP funds got things started but did not include recurring costs; that was the responsibility of the Afghans.

The PRT helped reduce incidents of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) through good relations with provincial governors and road improvement projects. They also supported police training efforts funded by State. (USAID also had access to funds, but a more time-consuming approval process than for CERP funds.) The PRT was not directly involved in anti-drug efforts.

PRT personnel encountered no major security incidents during this period. Away from HQ they traveled with gun trucks. They were always well received except in remote areas where drug culture was dominant. Afghans easily distinguished PRTs from other military and adjusted accordingly. Biggest problem was when different military elements failed to coordinate and acted against one another's missions. An example: drug eradication raids without a program to introduce alternative means of income for farmers. Afghans also needed repeated reassurance that the US wouldn't abandon them (again).

UNAMA played an effective role coordinating and disseminating information among entities working in the region. PRT relations with NGOs were generally neutral; some NGOs would not deal directly with the US military, and some resented PRT's ability to move quickly on projects. Interviewee's mantra was that the PRT's mission was to extend the central government's authority, not compete with NGOs.

Interviewee believes PRTs are accomplishing their mission well. Their reconstruction projects are not large but have high visibility and high local impact. This PRT had good cooperation among all elements: military, State, USAID, and Afghan liaison. They worked democratically and openly. They had satisfactory relations with Afghan regional officials – who were generally doing effective work themselves. Interviewee proposed transitioning the PRT to Afghan control by bringing in an Afghan co-commander, but that idea was not getting support during his tour of duty there.

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

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Q: What did you do in Afghanistan, when you were there, maybe add your present employment, and any future plans that are relevant to your service in Afghanistan.

A: I've been in the civil affairs business since 1995. Afghanistan was my third deployment. Previous to Afghanistan, I deployed to Bosnia and to Guam with associated duties with international agencies dealing with the forwarding of the government in Bosnia and also helping resettling Kurdish citizens to the United States.

Q: You're a lieutenant colonel in what service?

A: The United States Army. I assumed the PRT command in January of 2004 and concluded my tour of duty October 1, 2004.

Q: Okay. That was the period that you were-

A: That was PRT in [province in Afghanistan].

Q: Okay. And you remain in the U.S. Army.

A: Yes, total number of years in the Army is 27 years. My duties in [my] civil affairs unit basically have me as a planning chief for the team that supports [an army group]. Right now, I'm preparing to conduct a disaster preparedness mitigation assessment survey in Bangladesh. I should be leaving within the next two weeks. Afghanistan was my third deployment. Previous to Afghanistan, I deployed to Bosnia and to Guam with associated duties with international agencies dealing with the forwarding of the government in Bosnia and also helping resettling Kurdish citizens to the United States. I've been in [my present] unit since 1995. Prior to that, I was in a training division conducting annual training at the various training posts in the United States. Prior to that, I was active duty Army and Air Defense one tour to Germany. Prior to that, I was in the Air Force as a Russian linguist in Germany, in Berlin, from 1973 through 1979.

Q: Excellent background. Let's home in on your service in Afghanistan from January to the beginning of October of last year. Can you give a general description of the organization of the PRT in [location of PRT] and what your main mission was there?

A: Okay. Basically the PRT in [location of PRT] started off with a team of approximately 70 U.S. soldiers. We had a security team that came from the United States Army reserves. They were dedicated to the PRT.

Q: Included in the 70? Or these are in addition?

A: This was part of the 70. The actual working crew of the PRT consisted of a CAT B team of about six people. Then there was a CAT A team, which was a movement team, of about four. So we had 10 civil affairs plus myself as the civil affairs army working in the PRT. On top of that, we had a support element that helped us with our logistics, cooking and security and things like that. We had a maintenance team that helped with the vehicles. Then on top of that, we hired Afghan security force to help us with guards around the PRT itself.

Q: Do you want to estimate how many Afghans were associated with the PRT?

A: I'd say probably about 30.

Q: And they were all involved in security. Some of them must have been interpreters.

A: They were also... Well, they had interpreters on top of that, but the guards moved with us and they helped us with relationships in the local areas. They could recognize sensitivities that may be a problem for us and they could help mitigate those problems ahead of time or while we were moving through crowded areas. We had interpreters that were hired that... Actually when I arrived there in January, they were already hired. There were probably eight interpreters that were being used for various purposes. Some were assigned to the PRT, stayed at the PRT, and others moved with us as we conducted our projects. We later identified some interpreters that worked with USAID workers and then Department of State workers when we had separate missions or activities.

Q: You mentioned that most of your interpreters were already there, which reminds me to ask you to say anything about the history of that PRT before you arrived.

A: Okay. Prior to that, I was preceded by the PRT commander, [another army Lieutenant Colonel]. He is the one that actually established the PRT at its present location. There was a grand opening on the 8th of January. I arrived on location in [location of PRT] on the 10th of January. And then we did kind of an exchange and then he departed and I assumed the physical responsibilities as the PRT commander.

Q: So, does that imply that he was there just to set it up?

A: No. He came to [location of PRT] around May of 2003 and he was in [location of PRT]. He shared facilities with the Special Forces group that was in [location of PRT]. They occupied a different location in [location of PRT]. Then as the mandate for PRTs became more pronounced, then he identified a place at a former military compound near the airport, a portion of that to be the PRT location. They started doing site development and construction around

September/October of 2003. Then toward the end of November, they had taken over the location and the grand opening was in January.

Q: You were present for that?

A: No, I wasn't.

Q: You arrived shortly thereafter.

A: Yes, I arrived to Afghanistan in Bagram approximately the 3rd or 4th of January 2004. Then we did a short mission prep for onward movement to [location of PRT]. I left the 10th of January. I arrived in [location of PRT]. Then we conducted about a 10 day transition handover. Then General Clark left and I stayed as the commander.

Q: Would you describe the formal and actual role and mission of PRTs in general and of course yours in particular? My question sheet says "Be as specific as possible – i.e., built six elementary schools rather than saying 'Promoted education.'"

A: The mandate for the PRTs were to extend the authority of the central government. We looked at Kabul for their national and regional programs. Then we tried to reinforce that by having face to face encounters with the local government to include... My area of responsibility was [two provinces]. So I dealt with two governors, two police chiefs, the various other local authorities... I worked also with the United States Assistance Mission in [location of PRT]. They tried to set up PRTs where there were UNAMA offices.

Q: Could you tell us what UNAMA is?

A: United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan basically was an office designed to work with the military. They were kind of the bridge between the United Nations, the non-governmental organizations, international organizations, working in Afghanistan, and the military basically trying to work a cooperative effort to more or less have the same objective and same goals, as far as moving the Afghan transformation forward. One of our goals while I was there was to work towards the national elections. So, we tried to help promote registration and also information about elections to the local people throughout the various two provinces. That was one specific that we did. We had several seminars. We conducted seminars. In fact, one of our success stories is that we started engaging the mullahs in the local areas. At first at the PRT we had a mullah breakfast that we had maybe eight to 10 mullahs that came from the area. We talked to them not about religion but more or less about the democratic process, the elections, and what the role of the mullahs would be in Afghanistan. That grew to kind of a national program where toward the end we were having 250 mullahs in attendance in [location of PRT].

Q: And essentially were you... You were going beyond just telling them that elections are a good thing. You actually had some things to say about how they could – their role?

A: We were trying to engage the mullahs in how they felt, what their participation would be in the progress of Afghanistan, what they felt about how to deal with, say, the poppy problem or with terrorism and how they could make Afghanistan a better country.

Q: What about their taking an active role in the elections themselves and in the political process?

A: For one, they were considered the elders of their area and they would encourage everyone to participate in the elections. Then we also wanted to talk about the women's involvement in the Afghan government and how the mullahs could influence that in a positive way. We actually had good reactions. At first, I think we had some trepidation about mullahs being overly conservative and not wanting women to participate, but actually, it worked out.

Q: It's natural to have been worried after the experience of the Taliban.

A: But actually we had a very positive experience with the mullahs in this regard. I think it helped bring the attention of the elections as a focus point for the mullahs and also it extended a hand to the mullahs to make them feel that they're participating in the process as opposed to being excluded. I think that was good. Actually the balance of the country, in Bagram and everywhere, they started picking up the ball and they were having these engagements throughout, not just in [location of PRT], but in other areas, too. So it was pretty good.

Q: But you were kind of the pioneers?

A: Well, kind of. It just kind of fell in that way. It was an accident that we got started. There was my chaplain that had started, talked about maybe having this as an idea. Then we took the ball-

Q: You had a chaplain attached to the PRT?

A: Not to the PRT, but to the task force in Bagram. No, we didn't have a chaplain at the PRT itself. We did have chaplain visits. It wasn't to visit the Afghans. It was to visit the soldiers, kind of a spiritual thing.

Q: In addition to working toward national elections, did you have any other major categories of what your mission was?

A: We had a program called the Commanders Emergency Response Program [CERP]. It was a CERP program with dollars. As the PRT commander, I was authorized up to \$25,000 per project to spend in areas that supported the central government, provided some high impact visibility in the local areas. So what we did is, we worked on schools, some clinics, some roads. We worked on government buildings. Then we also did educational seminars dealing with the elections and things like this.

Q: You did educational seminars using the Commanders Emergency Response Program funds?

A: In a very limited sense, yes.

Q: That's interesting. I hadn't heard of that before, but that corresponds to ambassadors' self help funds.

A: This was all kind of... It was something that was supporting the upcoming elections. We were doing this as an education, something to benefit the Afghan people.

Q: So your overarching mission at that PRT was to work towards national elections, a kind of democratization.

A: That's kind of what became our primary focus. Then we were also dealing with providing an education for the people to receive the Afghan National Army. We received one CANDAC [?] in the area that actually provided security for the elections, too. We weren't directly involved in the drug efforts because that came from a different thing, but we did do face to face encounters with local leadership to discourage them from being involved in the poppy growing and things like this. The military didn't have that as a mandate, but as the PRT commander, I took it as a responsibility to... Since it was the central government's theme to actually talk that poppies was not a good thing to do. So I was engaging the governors and trying to get them to take up programs to find alternate economies and to talk to the people and discourage them from getting involved in that kind of stuff.

Q: Okay, but that was essentially a kind of ancillary function.

A: Yes, more or less. I didn't spend any money on any drug programs, nothing like that. What I spent money on mostly... We had 150 projects that covered some education but it was dealing with the building of schools... we bought ambulances for local clinics to provide them with a means to provide emergency response to outlying areas. We were involved a little bit in the women's cultural center. We did little... We did a children's park in [location of PRT] trying to provide an opportunity for women to meet. It was near the women's culture center. So they could bring their children and also have access to the women's center. So it was kind of a way to provide synergy for some of the programs that were taking place.

Q: Right. Would you say in general that your mission was appropriate to the available resources and the circumstances in which you had to operate?

A: I think so. I think that a lot of times the PRT was – the success or not so success of the PRTs depended upon the personalities of those that were working at the PRT. We had a very synergistic happenstance. In other words, the Department of State person that was there, the USAID person who was there, and myself, and the other military folks, were very keen on working on the same goal. So we didn't have cross purposes. From that, we worked well in dealing with the Afghan people. In fact, one of the success stories that I felt is that in all the projects that we did, finally the governor undertook a project on his own which was to refurbish his fire department in [location of PRT]. So, he invited me to a grand opening. We did several, but he invited me to a grand opening where he took his own funds, his own labor, and actually demonstrated that he refurbished his fire department.

Q: That's remarkable.

A: I thought that was a good success story. Actually, one of my goals was to kind of demonstrate to the Afghans self-initiative. This was an example of how the Afghans could basically be self-reliant.

Q: That's very interesting. I wonder if there's any more to be said about the specifics of that. Did you have any greater role than you've just described in stimulating or enabling that project?

A: I don't know. It's difficult to say. I developed what I felt was a very close relationship with the governor of [province]. We met biweekly, certainly once every two weeks. We talked about security. I introduced a civil defense plan, trying to start it very basically. Maybe this was part of it. Part of that civil defense plan was to have a fire response program. We had tremendous problems in the beginning with these improvised explosive devices. They would put them in vehicles and stuff and it would almost handicap the transportation routes in places. The Afghans didn't really have a means to disarm them. We had a United Nations rep. that used to be a former British special forces guy or something like that, so he took it upon himself to disarm these things. After a while, he started to get a little resistance, so I basically said, "Well, I'll try to work kind of a response program to this" and started that. I felt it didn't go very well, but then when I saw the fire brigades being refurbished, I said, well, maybe this is a good start. I don't know exactly where it went after that because I had left. One thing I've learned with the Afghans, they work on a different time scale than us.

Q: Right. And did the threat of improvised explosive devices recede or diminish over the time you were there?

A: I think one of the things that we needed to have was, the road network needed to be improved. In [location of PRT] itself, we had some occasional problems. As you got outside of [location of PRT] where the roads were less improved, you would end up with more opportunities for people to place bombs. What I think now with the major reconstruction taking place, as they asphalt most of the major highways, the IED problem should diminish. They have other issues working, too, with the elections and people getting involved in the economy and everything.

Q: Were you saying over the course of the time that you were there, you got greater cooperation from the Afghan authorities in addressing that kind of question?

A: What I saw was more independence. They were able to take care of some of these themselves even though their methods may have been a little bit haphazard at times - they would just pick up the bomb and take it right to the police station instead of disarming it. But that was what they would do.

Q: And maybe it's not just a question of methods, but also the limits of the resources they had.

A: Yes, that's true, too. But I think that as we worked closely with the authorities, their eagerness to become partners with us became more evident. They just seemed to have developed more and more trust as we went along. I wanted to mention also that the police training program was instituted in [location of PRT] during my tenure. They were acutely training from the eastern area, from four different provinces, the police that would eventually... I can't remember exactly how many they were supposed to have. They were supposed to have up to 100,000 Afghan police throughout Afghanistan. The eastern region had a police academy in [location of PRT]. We helped support that.

Q: It was another entity that was responsible for the training?

A: Yes. We didn't provide the training, but we did provide kind of an indirect umbrella of support. We would talk about it, we would provide support in what way we could. We had kind of a cooperative... Sometimes we would take our medic and provide some exchange of equipment and things like this to the police academy. It was contracted individuals that worked through the State Department. I thought that was something that came on that was a fairly positive experience for the people.

Q: While you're discussing relationships, could you say something more broadly about the range of contacts that you had and the quality of the relationships and the importance of them both within the PRT and in widening circles with Afghan authorities, with other international or American or Coalition institutions that you were dealing with?

A: In January, we had a pretty small footprint of about 70 or so soldiers at the PRT. We also had a ministry of interior liaison Afghan, a colonel, that lived with us. He went with us. He basically represented the central government of Afghanistan when we went. So he would speak to the regional programs, talk about the importance of where Afghanistan was going. So he had kind of a face to face relationship with the government as we worked in both [of our provinces].

Q: He was kind of a liaison in both directions.

A: Yes.

Q: And he was virtually part of the PRT.

A: He was part of the PRT. He spoke English and Afghan. He was from Afghanistan. I think he had known recognition. He was picked because he was known in the area.

Q: You said he was a colonel, so he actually had a rank in the Afghan army.

A: Yes, he was professionally trained as a colonel... Actually, he was a policeman by training. I thought he was very helpful as far as the PRT efforts to do things. Then also with the PRT, we had a Department of State representative that came toward the end of February. I got there in January. Prior to that, we had a USAID representative that was already there when I arrived. He had been in the area. He had money also. He was able to recommend and implement what was called quick impact projects. So he was working on roads and schools to a certain degree. So

we were able to put our efforts together to get a bigger bang for the buck, so to speak. Also, we had within the PRT the civil affairs team. So, altogether, we had, counting the security force, 75 or so people. As we moved along, to about June timeframe, then we had a complement of Marines kind of move in to the PRT. That jumped our population up to around 300. But they had a separate mission and they were considered a separate element within the PRT.

Q: But insofar as you were the PRT commander, they were under your command?

A: No, they were not under my command. They had a regional command concept and so we were all under the command of an O6 colonel back in Bagram. The Marines' mission primarily was for security patrols. Also trying to kind of look for terrorist networks and things like this.

Q: Your tour of duty was about nine months. Was the tour for the State person and the AID person and some other key people the same?

A: Generally it was around a year. Everyone had about a year. People that were at the PRT for approximately eight or nine months and then they went back to Kabul to complete their three months. Then they went on to other jobs.

Q: Do you have any observations to make about the appropriateness of those lengths of tour? On the one hand, some continuity is obviously desirable when you're dealing with the local population. On the other hand, it can be difficult psychologically and physically.

A: I know that from conversations with the Afghan government, they expressed some frustration about the continuous rotation of teams. They said that once they get to know somebody, they leave. So, it was frustrating for them. For us, because we were able to probably do good handoffs and things like this, we can continue projects from one team to the next. I think a year in country is probably appropriate.

Q: And you found that, as you said, because of good management of handing off to successors, in terms of getting things accomplished, you could do that pretty well.

A: I think so. You wouldn't want to be there too long. Then you might become a little less useful. A year is about right. It takes about six weeks to get up to speed as far as getting relationships going with the various leaders. After that, you can get down to work. We peaked as far as getting projects up and going at about the four to fifth month and then we were really going pretty high speed. Then the last 30 days or so, we had to start thinking about handing off to the next team coming. So you've got some times where you're kind of idling, but I think a year in Afghanistan is probably appropriate. We were able to get done what needed to be done at the time. The mission is always changing. Right now, what they're doing in Afghanistan is certainly different than what I was doing.

Q: And yet it's only a year later.

A: Exactly. Right now, they're getting prepared for the local elections that will be taking place in September, so that's going to require a lot more detailed work as far as getting out and talking to the local people to get them involved in the registration and participating.

Q: You mentioned something about how you related to the governors of the two provinces you were responsible for and the police chiefs. What about getting out further to local officials - you mentioned the mayor of [location of PRT] – and is there anything meaningful to be said about Afghan warlords or Afghan security forces or other Afghan power centers?

A: It was my effort to try to recognize those that were recognized by the central government. In some respects, you had to deal with the warlords because they had title and official status from Kabul. In fact, the former corps commander for the four provinces on eastern region was made police chief of [province]. Now he is working in partnership with the governor on the furthering of the development in [that province]. The police chief in [that province] was moved [to a neighboring province]. These all were former warlord fighters. They may have been associated with the Northern Alliance. They may have been associated with the mujahidin. We had to look at what the person was doing at the moment. What was past was past. As long as they showed a willingness by actions to support the central government, I had no problems with who they were. I felt it wasn't my duty to investigate them as far as whether or not they had done anything wrong as long as they weren't doing anything wrong at the time. But my influence went all the way to the border of Pakistan all along the area and then all the way up into northern [province]. Everywhere we went, we always made an effort to talk with the local leadership. We were always dealing with mayors, with the local leaders, everywhere we went.

Q: And in general were you well received?

A: I think so, yes. We had a couple of occasions in [region within province] where we had some resistance. But I think, in my opinion, looking back, it wasn't necessarily political or military resistance. It was more dealing with we're interfering with their drug culture. There was an economic interest in a lot of the people dealing with poppies and stuff. If they felt threatened that we were going to disrupt that, then we would get some resistance. We had a couple occasions where our teams, being far away, were actually attacked. We didn't have any injuries, but we did have a couple things like this. But it wasn't so much "We're Taliban and we want the old Afghanistan." It was more like we were interrupting somebody's economic interest.

Q: When your personnel were going out in the field, can you describe what kind of security they went with? I'm thinking of a possible contrast with people I interviewed last year who served in Iraq. They said that if they had the full security support, a lot of people who they needed to talk to were not willing to talk to them. But if they came quietly, they were willing to talk to them. But then they weren't following our own security standards. Did you have any of those kinds of considerations?

A: Basically when we went outside of the PRT confines, we had two gun trucks and then basically we had rental cars. These were like SUVs, the Toyota Land Cruiser and things like this. They knew that we were PRT, so we weren't aggressive. It's very interesting how the Afghans quickly understand who you are just by who you look like. So, it was our activities that

got us in to work with the Afghans. Other elements that were a little bit more aggressive – looking for terrorists or whatever – they tended to have some problem sometimes. But I think the situation in Afghanistan was a little different than Iraq. But if we had the gun trucks, we didn't really have too much problems with anyone giving us any problems. We usually traveled by day and then at night we would remain overnight, usually with the governor in the other province or other area. So we were under their protection. So it kind of worked out well.

Q: And you didn't have any serious adverse incidents during your time there related to the PRT.

A: Nothing really serious. We had one situation where we had our team pretty far north. In fact, they had gone as far as they could go. We were trying to make contact with people that probably hadn't had any contact with Americans even during the Desert Storm, the initial after 2001. We had a night attack. Our team had stayed overnight in this one compound. They had local security. Maybe a week before, they had some Special Forces guys that were there. They went up and made an arrest of some people. I think maybe the result of that attack is that they thought they were coming after those guys. So, they had launched several RPGs and things at the building where this other team was. We weren't there, fortunately. We didn't have any injuries. But a lot of times whenever something was done to an element, then they would turn around and look for a way to have revenge. But there were a lot of different agencies and military elements moving around the country. Sometimes that created friction.

Q: Friction between whom and whom?

A: Well, for instance, the Department of State had an anti-drug program where they actually hired local Afghan special forces group come in and do arrests, break up drug labs and things like this. A lot of times for security purposes they wouldn't notify me that they were coming into my area. For example, there was one time when I was going to the governor to have a regular meeting and then he said, "Well, can you meet with 300 people that are upset because they had some military come in and do this drug bust and nobody knew about it?" So I had to sit there. It was kind of like having a local impromptu meeting. It worked out and everything, but they had misunderstood the purpose of the program. This was coming from President Karzai, had nothing to do with me. But because it was a national program, I had to sit there and say, "Look, don't do drugs and you won't have these raids." So after a while, it was something... The counter to the idea of not doing drugs is, "Well, what can we do? We're trying to make money." A lot of times an acre of poppies can bring about \$1200 where an acre of corn can bring maybe \$50. So there's the whole thing of economics. So we had to work through that.

Q: Right. It's easy to see-

A: It was kind of my role to help opportunities and alternate economic efforts and things like this. That's where we're working right now. President Karzai is now the nationally elected president. His program is a little bit more resolute. He's got an anti-drug program that is pretty serious. Last year, it wasn't that serious. They allowed the poppies to be harvested.

Q: I understand... In fact, I attended a seminar here at USIP a few weeks ago in which they were discussing how complicated a problem it is that so much of the economy of this extremely poor country depends on opium and poppy production.

A: For one, they're still going through a drought. I don't know how the snow was this year. There was a little bit more snow than last year, where they had like five years of continuous drought and so it was very hard to grow anything. They didn't really have a lot of farm equipment. Everything has to be done by hand. So, as far as getting a return for your efforts, you get more for growing poppies than you would for growing corn or alfalfa or whatever. You can see it. It's really interesting. The Afghans will grow their poppies and they'll just do one season. It's not like they grow it all the time. After a while, they'll rotate the crop and they'll start growing the stuff for their cows. It was really interesting.

Q: Let me go back over to see if there's more to say in the couple of categories that you've already pretty much covered, but I want to make sure I get everything that the question sheet asks us for. On governance, describe PRT activities related to promoting democracy, creating local governance, and extending authority of the central government. You mentioned a considerable amount about that. What was the relationship about the PRT and Afghan power holders?

A: I think we had a continuous dialogue. Also, we used UNAMA as a go-between. We would have joint meetings and UNAMA would have meetings and then we'd reinforce each other's role and purpose in [location of PRT] area. We'd basically have the same story to the Afghan leaders. A lot of times they would see kind of a chink in your armor if one contradicts the other. So they were very... One thing the Afghans said over and over again is that "We have been at war for 25 years and we know that you have abandoned us at least once." They were speaking to me of the United States military. We had left them and that created the opportunity for the Taliban to come in. So they said, "What are you going to do to ensure to me that you're not going to abandon us again?" So we had to go through this over and over again, so we'd these projects going. So it would be one thing after another to say, "The United States will never abandon Afghanistan again. We're going to be here for a long time to see this democratic process to its end. We want you to basically take responsibility for everything that you're doing." It kind of worked out that way.

Q: Well, we'd better live up to that.

A: I hope so.

Q: Did the PRT organize local councils, assist in conducting elections, or otherwise promote democracy, protect human rights, or advance women's rights?

A: Yes. In fact, the USAID rep. that took the place of the first one... We had a woman USAID person replace the male. One of her focuses was women's rights. Then there was the Human Rights Commission that had an office in [location of PRT] as part of the UN appointed position. We supported that. We had education program. We dealt with women shuras [PH], which is kind of like the local women's council. The Afghans had men's councils and they had women's

councils. So, we had to deal with them, the women, separately from the men. We conducted educational seminars about the elections, about projects, about the responsibility-

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We talked about this extensively. When we had situations where there was an instance where someone, maybe there was a recommendation from the Human Rights Commission regarding mistreatment of people, we would go and talk with the governor about it and try to get him involved in making corrections to the situation. So I did that on numerous occasions.

Q: Out of curiosity, since you had to deal with – since Afghans organized men's organizations and women's organizations separately, did that have any implications for who could talk to whom out of your PRT?

A: As Americans, they accepted the situation that because we were leaders, it was more that we were representing the country of the United States, so they accepted that a little bit better. But where we had women military, we used them as the face for dealing with the women.

Q: And where you didn't, it was okay to have men deal with them?

A: Yes. When you were in uniform, more or less, that was your calling card. I felt that I had no problem in representing myself in any meeting because I was in uniform.

Q: So those issues didn't slow you down.

A: No, I didn't see it as a slowdown at all. A lot of it just depended upon the personalities of the military. If you were shy, then you may have a problem. But if you just went in and were yourself and were businesslike, you had no problems.

Q: Could you give an overall evaluation of the PRT's performance in promoting good government?

A: With the example of the elections, we had a great turnout for the elections, I felt that we had an influence there. I felt that by the governor taking on that fire department project, there was influence there. The governor was very supportive of the Afghan police and the Afghan national army. So I felt that the governor of [the two provinces] were very supportive of the central government. I felt the PRT's role in that would be to reinforce the influence of the central government. So I felt that it was a good interaction.

Q: Let me see if you've got anything to add on political events. Describe the role of PRTs in Afghanistan's major political events, the emergency and constitutional loya jirgas, and the presidential elections?

A: I missed the constitutional loya jirga. That was just prior to my arrival. But I believe from my reading and experience with my predecessor, there was some involvement in supporting the constitutional loya jirga, supporting those candidates that were running for office, to elect and get

them going. Then as far as the presidential election, I guess our presence provided some limited security umbrella for the candidates. The vice governor actually became a campaign manager for President Karzai in the [location of PRT] area, so he kind of recused himself from being deputy governor and actually performed as a campaign manager for the area.

Q: Did he go back to the job after the election?

A: As far as I know, that was his plan.

Q: Was there an active campaign? Were there open discussions? Did opposition candidates have an opportunity to-

A: Yes, all the candidates had an opportunity to campaign. They had local rallies. There were some... You remember Dostam, who had some history in [location of PRT] not so positive. So, we were a little bit concerned about his presence in [location of PRT], but actually his rally went without any problems. People were more willing to be hopeful of an election than to hold grudges for what occurred during the Northern Alliance days.

Q: Let's move on to reconstruction. This is an area that you've touched on. Can you describe PRT activities related to economic reconstruction and development? What U.S. agencies were responsible for these activities? Did civil affairs soldiers participate in reconstruction and development projects? What was the impact of these efforts? I know you've said a little about all of it, but now maybe concentrate more on-

A: Let's see if I can do this from memory. When I took over as PRT commander in January, there were 27 ODACA projects. It's a different fund program primarily for rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged buildings. The projects we had were clinics and schools. So, there were mostly ODACA projects in [one province], but we had maybe four or five that needed to be finished in [the other province]. So those were 27 projects. And then in January, they initiated the CERP program, which provided me with my own independent fund money. We focused on schools, clinics, government buildings-

Q: How did you identify projects to spend CERP money on?

A: There was an approved list that had come out of Kabul from the ministry of ... I don't know if there was a ministry of reconstruction, but there was a ministry of development and there were a few other ministries that the local areas provided a wish list from their local governments. It went up to Kabul and then from there they basically vetted the list. This was a nationally approved list. So we worked off that list. Then we took that list to the governor and basically talked about these are the areas that we can work on particular projects. Then the governor would say, "Okay, I agree" or "Here is an area that hasn't been covered." Then we would take that as a matter of exception. So we were able to between the governor and the local leadership and Kabul to work on programs that would be conducive or compatible with whatever the national programs are. What we didn't want to do was to just kind of build projects in a vacuum. There was a couple of occasions where schools were built, say, on tribal boundaries that neither tribe would accept and then the building would be left empty because they couldn't

agree on who was going to occupy the school. So there were some issues still in Afghanistan where the people had some division among themselves.

Q: I've also heard of projects where, for example, a school could be built, but there was no commitment by the ministry of education to provide teachers for that school.

A: That's true. Another problem we had in clinics, where you build a clinic and we had no medical people to actually run it, or supplies would not be... That was another problem. I was restricted from buying medical supplies because that's like a reoccurring expense. That was one of the restrictions of the CERP program, to have a reoccurring cost. So, let's say we buy a generator for a clinic that needed power. I'd have to have a separate agreement with the leaders that received the generator that they would agree to separately work the maintenance and fuel program for that generator so they wouldn't keep coming back to the PRT for fuel.

Q: Right, so you were basically seed money to get the thing going, but you could not-

A: Ours wasn't exactly a fire and forget, but it was the idea that we would get a project going and then Afghans would take over and operate it themselves.

Q: What was that phrase you used?

A: Fire and forget. We didn't want to do per se, but we wanted to get ownership taken by the Afghans.

Q: Right, and for the thing to be sustainable, they had to be able to show that they were going to follow up-

A: And responsibility for the projects. There were occasions that I saw where, say, the Red Cross had provided a generator to a hospital, but the capacity of that generator was, say, two megawatts and then you'd find out that some locals had tapped into that generator and the hospital got maybe a third of it. That was a problem that I wanted to make sure didn't continue. We didn't go around and make people unplug, but we put that responsibility back on the local leadership.

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

A: We were mainly facilitators. For the CERP program, we provided the quality assurance inspections, went out and made sure that the project was being done according to the best quality of work that was available. We ended up working not with all the contractors but with maybe a handful. We tried to be fair, but some contractors just did really bad work. That was one of the complaints the governor had on many occasion, that some of the NGOs didn't really QC their projects and they had actually sidewalks that would melt in the rain. The governor on many occasions lambasted NGOs. That in a way became a friction point. PRTs became kind of an object of scrutiny by the NGOs because we developed a reputation for doing good work and then the NGOs kind of, some of those had a reputation for not doing good work.

Q: That's a good segue to my section of questions on relations with NGOs. Could you characterize the NGOs a little bit more as to international American based humanitarian assistance or development assistance?

A: Across the board in general I would say that we had a neutral relationship with the NGOs. On some occasions, like from the European Union, we were in a European Union area, and some of the European Union NGOs would never accept the activities of a military PRT. They had the opinion that we were causing more problems than we were fixing. But that was just an opinion, I thought.

Q: Did that mean that you had no relationship with them at all or you were-

A: Some... In fact, I can give you an example. There was one where we had vetted a project in [province]. It was for a school. Within a mile of that project, there was a Scandinavian NGO working another project. They abandoned their project because we were there. But that was just one example. I tried very hard to make sure that we had at a minimum neutral relationships with all the NGOs and we tried to engage them on a regular basis. I tried to have like an NGO conference and things like this. There was a thing called ACBAR [Afghan Cooperative...], a gathering of NGOs through UNAMA. We tried to participate in those meetings and we talked about our focus and gave our mission statement and what we were doing and tried to basically tell them that we were not competing with NGOs or their projects. They were certainly welcome to work their projects. Our focus was more along the lines of a little bit higher order. We were working more to extend the reach of the central government, working with the governor and things like this. We weren't into the detail of trying to take jobs away from NGOs. That was kind of our mantra or our statement we'd make all the time.

Q: Would you say that UNAMA took a fairly active role in trying to coordinate at least information?

A: Oh, yes, I would say UNAMA was very effective in our area for being the go-between. We met with UNAMA on a regular basis. In fact, we called each other on the phone. We talked to each other about what we were doing. He would provide support for the PRT to the NGOs that may have expressed a little disconcert or whatever. We would always refer ourselves back to UNAMA before we would actually engage in some of the NGOs. That was very helpful. That was their mission anyway.

Q: Right, a coordinating mission.

A: Right, to work with the local PRTs and the military to kind of bridge efforts of the NGOs and IOs and also with the military.

Q: Were there examples of situations where the NGOs were better situated than the military to provide particular required assistance?

A: Oh, yes, I think some of the NGOs had specific projects they worked on. For one, IF Hope provided the wheelchairs to the handicapped, the war veterans of Afghanistan. Their donors to that NGO was better suited than what the PRT could do.

Q: It sounds like in a case like that there wasn't much likelihood that anything you were doing would get in the way of what they were doing.

A: As we worked in the areas where we were doing the schools or government buildings or roads – we did some minor road projects – we'd actually provide kind of an umbrella security which some of the NGOs would benefit from. We also provided information about security threats and things like this, so NGOs sometimes would come to us and request information. There were occasions where we took NGOs with us on certain projects. When we went on long trips, we would take NGOs with us. So it was a cooperative effort. On some occasions it worked.

Q: Any estimate of the number of NGOs that were operating in your area?

A: I would say it could be as many as 100 in the four provinces.

Q: Were all of these international NGOs?

A: Some were religious NGOs. Some were non-governmental NGOs, so they were private donors. There was the Rotary Club. San Diego adopted [location of PRT] as a sister city. This was done last year. The Rotary Club from San Diego actually sponsored a school project that we helped open. We helped them with their grand opening in [location of PRT]. There was an effort where you had a non-governmental organization working with the PRT for a common project.

Q: Were there any indigenous Afghan NGOs?

A: Yes, there were, but we didn't have a lot of... I didn't really have a lot of visibility to those, but they were working through ACBAR, through UNAMA. I didn't have all the details, but, yes, there were Afghan NGOs.

Q: Anyway, all of them could have access to information about what your operations were.

A: Oh, yes, we pretty much ran an open PRT. We had a storefront. We called it a Civil Military Operations Center, a CMOC. We had that at the PRT and that's where we would meet visitors. We had all kinds of... I was probably engaging four or five times a day people coming and making requests for information. A lot of them were looking for work. Maybe they had complaints about a local leader and I worked that out through UNAMA or through the United Nations. So there was lots of things that were going on.

Q: Moving on, the subject of handover. Some PRTs were organized by the U.S. and handed over to other countries. You haven't mentioned that, so I guess that [location of PRT] was not.

A: It went from U.S. to U.S.

Q: So you had U.S. successors when you left in October of 2004.

A: Exactly. The scheme of maneuver... What's happening now is that some of the PRTs are being handed over to the international community. It's going to be going north counterclockwise. So [location of PRT]'s going to be one of the last PRTs probably to be handed over to non-U.S. unless something changes because of what they consider the threat environment.

Q: The questions we have imply that the style of operation and sometimes the emphasis on the ground are likely to change when the U.S. hands off to some other government.

A: Right. I had several countries come to [location of PRT] to do like a site visit, to kind of look and see, to conduct a feasibility survey of whether or not they would want to assume the responsibility for [location of PRT]. But one of the biggest challenges they had is that they would have to assume their own logistical responsibilities such as emergency response for medical problems, air flight for logistics support, food and all that good stuff. So that became a little bit more than they would want for an expense. I had Norway come, Sweden came, a couple other EU countries came down.

Q: Police training. You mentioned that you had a U.S. police training center also in your area.

A: Yes, it was something that was opened during my tenure. It was in [location of PRT]. The police training program was being subcontracted through the Department of State.

Q: And how did you relate to the State Department funded project?

A: We provided a presence whenever they had their graduation ceremonies. I went and participated in graduation ceremonies to kind of put the PRT face on the importance of the police training program. The police training academy is right across the street from the [provincial] academy, so there's a presence there. We provided at the beginning some security assistance for the academy. We did a security vulnerability assessment for the academy, made recommendations. We basically liaised with them on numerous occasions.

Q: And you worked together harmoniously.

A: Yes, we did. But we didn't really participate in any of the detailed training. But I did observe. They invited me to a few classes and so I sat in on some classes and provided credibility for the thing.

Q: And you had responsibilities on your own account for engaging with local police.

A: Yes, I had a direct responsibility with the police chief of [the two provinces] for basically providing security for the citizens, increasing visibility of patrols, talk to him about his

responsibility for the counter drug program and things like this. I engaged the police chief on a regular basis.

Q: Let's see if we've got anything to say about rule of law. Describe PRT involvement with Afghan police, courts, and prisons. For starters, were local courts and prisons functioning?

A: It was very minimal at the time. The court system, there was discussion as I was preparing to depart about building a new prison in [location of PRT]. Where they had it was in the middle of town, which wasn't very compatible with all the congestion and stuff like this. They had a court system, but I wasn't really involved in it that much. We had a couple of meetings with the court security officer who had made a recommendation for some construction, but based upon my conversation with the governor, that was a regional program that was going to be started after my departure. So it is probably in place now, so maybe you can get information from people that are in place now.

Q: Right, and as I told you, we've got names of people to interview who are presently in Afghanistan and it could well be your successors.

What about involvement with informal or traditional justice systems?

A: They had the local jirgas and shuras [PH] which is kind of the village elders court system, but I had... There was one person who was the brother of the governor of [province] who was very supportive of the old village court system. As the PRT, I wasn't involved in any judicial activities whatsoever. The idea of supporting whatever system would work as long as it didn't become violent or unfair.

Q: What if the PRT encountered a problem of some kind of criminal activity that bore on your own activities? That is, somebody mugged in town or somebody cheating the PRT, a contractor or something like that? What recourse did you have to the system?

A: Basically, it was an Afghan activity where, say, a contractor would kind of create several ghost contractors from himself and then you'd get... Say we require six bids on a contract. We'd have six bids, but when you started peeling the onion away, you end up with one contractor. So we had to look through this. When we found people cheating the system of sorts, we would more or less blacklist them and wouldn't allow them to work through the PRT. After a while, they would not be able to function. If there was criminal activity... There were occasions when the local core commander would take somebody under custody – we would go through the governor, through the Human Rights Commission, through the UNAMA, and try to influence that person to be released from custody. But the military didn't really have any direct authority to interfere with the Afghan thing. If you're talking about somebody within the PRT committing shenanigans or whatever, if he was a military guy, he'd be subject to TMJ. If he was somebody hired, we had occasions where... For instance, some of our U.S. military guards were implicated in smoking hashish at the PRT. They were given a urinalysis test and those that showed positive on that were administered non-judicial punishment. Then the guards that were involved in selling that or providing that hashish were fired. That's as far as it went.

Q: This might be just a pet question of mine, but let's say some ordinary Afghan is caught trying to steal supplies that belong to the PRT. Could you get him arrested and turned over to the local system?

A: You know, I was trying to think of what we could do. It would be something that would be between the military... I guess it would be a matter of the PRT pressing charges. Something along the lines of stealing supplies, that stuff occurred quite a bit.

Q: And you handled it administratively?

A: A lot of it was just administratively. If somebody couldn't be trusted, we wouldn't hire them. For them, working for either the UN or the PRT or whatever was very lucrative in comparison to what the economy had to offer, so that was a big motivation for them to kind of walk a straight line.

Q: Right. That's as far as I want to go on that. It's just a pet subject of mine. I'm interested in rule of law and seeing what access our own organizations have to go to-

A: Nothing that's being developed. At the time that I was there, they hadn't really decided upon some of the judges. Some of the judges were corrupt. They were using mullahs and things like this. Some of those folks had political agendas. We tried to work through that to a certain degree. But my biggest focus, as the focus was for the UN, was human rights and where we had violations that popped up, we tried to work those directly.

Q: Okay, let me go to the summing up questions. In your opinion, are the PRTs accomplishing their mission?

A: In my opinion, I think they are. Maybe it's too early to tell, but I think from what I saw from the 10 months or so that I was there, we were very instrumental in getting some exposure of the central government out to the local people.

Q: Now, specifically, and I'll just ask these in the order that they appear on the sheet, how were they doing on providing security?

A: There is a difference of opinion of what the PRT would do for providing security from what, say, the opinion of the NGOs would say we would do. NGOs would think that the PRTs should actually just be doing patrols. But providing security is more than that. A lot of it is just having engaging conversations with the police to do more patrols. You're being instrumental in getting more security out there, but you're not doing it directly. So I think that having meetings and then trying to engage the local leadership to kind of take responsibility for the security, kind of self-determination, I think the PRT was fairly influential.

Q: And expanding central authority. What you said right at the beginning was pretty fundamental to the mission of your PRT.

A: I think so.

Q: And how are you doing on that?

A: I think we did quite well. In fact, that was one of my major commitments. Every meeting, I prefaced it to say that "I'm here on behalf of not only the United States but also the central government to make sure..."

Q: And you had this Afghan police colonel with you, standing alongside you, reinforcing that.

A: Yes, a partnership thing.

Q: How well are PRTs accomplishing the reconstruction and development part of the mission?

A: The reconstruction for the PRTs... In comparison to the entire country, the role of the PRT in reconstruction is very minor when you consider that my spending limits were very limited. I had \$25,000 per project. For the whole time I was there, I spent probably just a little bit less than five million dollars. When you talk about the road projects that cost in the billions, that's pretty small.

Q: Right, but yours are focused on areas where people have already identified that they're going to appreciate it.

A: Well, it was high visibility, high impact projects. So, I went back and reviewed some of my memos that I had written, and we were very appreciated in the local areas where the larger reconstruction projects were not focused at the time. We were kind of getting a fast start.

Q: The last category on the achievements question is a little bit vague. How good were you at utilizing American military and civilian resources?

A: I think for my tenure it was very good. As a group, we had a synergistic effort. USAID, Department of State, the Afghan police colonel, we all worked together as a group. We'd have daily meetings to focus our goals and objectives together. Where we didn't talk about classified information, we would include the Afghans with us. We would talk about what's important. We would agree on that and we would have a list of priorities. Then we'd come up with projects. Then we would identify those projects on paper. Then that would be kind of our working mission and we'd work those projects. So, it wasn't like we were working independently. I thought that was a very good strength of our PRT. I heard it didn't work so well at other PRTs.

Q: Based on my own experience, and from the sound of what you're saying, an awful lot of the success of that kind of coordination depends on the personal qualities of the people involved.

A: It's a personal initiative and a willingness to cooperate. We'd set our... I kind of was the cheerleader, but we kind of set our political agendas aside and we decided this was important. So we had focus meetings. I had what I called a roundtable, kind of like King Arthur's court. We'd meet at a table and we'd discuss what we had done and what we want to do and we'd make

recommendations. Then we'd basically have a democratic process to determine what areas we wanted to focus on.

Q: Typically how many people were sitting around your roundtable?

A: It would vary, but we would have all the major representatives: USAID, Department of State, the Afghans, and my CMOC crew, the PRT, and sometimes we would even try to invite... On occasion, we'd have non-PRT members there to receive information. So it kind of worked fairly well.

Q: And in general, it served to maximize the effectiveness of the resources that you had.

A: Exactly, because we were able to combine our resources so we wouldn't duplicate projects.

Q: I'm asked to ask what were the successes and failures of your effort? I don't like the word "failure" in those terms. I like to refer to disappointments or frustrations. One major success you highlighted earlier was the governor's initiative in refurbishing the fire department. Certainly you've described some general successes in the terms that you just talked about, of coordinating and developing good relationships and pushing forward on a very successful presidential election. Any other successes that you want to underline here?

A: I just felt that my reach at the PRT was fairly influential and significant. I was able to cover most of my area, which was [two provinces]. I actually extended the movement of the PRT as far as I could. I went further than my predecessor went and underwent a lot more projects. Maybe the timing was right or whatever. I tried to engage in the major areas that may have had a way to support the governor in each province and also all the way back to the central government.

Q: I have the impression that you generally had a favorable opinion of the governors in the two provinces you were working in.

A: I felt that I had someone to work with. There were some challenges. The governor was a survivor. He was a former war fighter, probably was a warlord at one time, but he had gone into politics. He was a little bit older, but he had also had a personal relationship with the governor and that's the way these things worked. But I saw his activities and his role as governor change as we worked through my tenure. I felt that he was trying to do certain things. I felt I was getting kind of a reward myself. I thought this was working.

Q: Excellent. What about areas where you with things had gone differently or better than it turned out?

A: Well, the one thing that I was a little bit disappointed in is that there was an original police chief that was removed... He was brought back to Kabul. It was probably a political payoff. The corps commander, a former warlord, who was the corps commander for four provinces of the Afghan militia, as they were going to their DDR (demobilization...), he probably had to have been offered a position. So he was offered the position of police chief. Well, that meant that the

police chief I had been working with for three months got removed. I was a little less than... I was not exactly favorable towards this warlord First Corps commander because of his seemingly... he had a little bit of a grey reputation. I wasn't too positive about that. I felt that my influence to keep the police chief didn't work out. In a way, I felt like that was a little bit of a disappointment. But as it's working now, I guess things are still working favorably in the area. I've been watching the news.

Q: It's interesting. I had asked questions about short tours and frequent changes of personnel in the PRT, but you lost some momentum by a change on the Afghan side.

A: Oh, yes. Something that President Karzai did was remove ministers based on how the wind was blowing. The situation in Herat with Ismael Khan, he got removed as governor, but then he was offered the minister of mines, so he's back in the system. I think that even Dostam is back in the system. It's just the Afghan way of doing things. You have to understand how they think. The idea of keep your enemies close.

Q: Okay, and from the perspective of working in a PRT, you have to be ready to deal with your Afghan counterparts as they appear.

A: Yes. Another thing that I thought was a good idea but I guess it never did get much momentum was to have a co-command PRT. I don't know where that went, but it was suggested and I thought it was a good idea.

Q: What do you mean by co-command?

A: You'd have an Afghan as commander and you'd have a U.S. military commander. They'd share responsibilities.

Q: And your Afghan who was attached to you was not a co-command.

A: No, no, he was only an LNO, but I thought that that might be a good idea for later down the road as we get ready to transition back. When we start to turn these things over, the PRTs, there needs to be a way to address the presence of these PRTs. Are they going to be ministerial offices? Those are questions that need to be answered in the future.

Q: Since my second tape is about to end, I think I'd like to finish off the conversation without the recorder and particularly ask you for ideas of other returnees we could interview. Last item though: what advice would you pass on for future operations?

A: I think putting a face on the problem, put an Afghan face on all the solutions, is the way to think. That's the only advice I would say. Don't try to work in a vacuum. Don't assume that because you're there as the United States, you need to have a United States solution. That may not be appropriate for Afghans. You need to have the Afghans come up with their solution provided that it doesn't violate any international treaties or whatever, whatever they've agreed to. But putting an Afghan solution on the problem is the way to make things work long-term.

Q: And don't you think that what you're just saying is consistent with the general thrust of U.S. policy?

A: I think so. I agree.

A: That would be fine, thank you.

[END INTERVIEW]