

USIP – ADST

Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #33

Executive Summary

The interviewee served in the Kandahar PRT from May, 2003 through October, 2003. He describes in detail the very positive relationship with the U.N. and chronicles reports that he got from local leaders critical of certain NGO activities. Among the criticisms voiced was a tendency for foreign NGO managers to live ostentatiously and to seem to be driven by profit-making rather than by helping to meet the needs of the people.

The interviewee stressed that at the time he was there, his PRT placed emphasis on improving security in the region and on extending the writ of the central government. In his view, the biggest impact the PRT had was being a presence that enhanced security.

In evaluating PRT effectiveness, the interviewee noted that there was inconsistency among PRT commanders in how closely they were willing to work with the Afghan militia or, after it was formed, the Afghan National Army. He suggests that the better PRT commanders knew the importance of cooperating with these local forces, and that as time went on, the U.S.-Afghan joint patrols became more culturally sensitive. The interviewee also notes that training the U.S. troops for PRT duty in Afghanistan has greatly improved, with simulations and role playing conducted at Fort Bragg prior to deployment. Senior NCOs and officers also are able to take a very helpful seminar called "Leadership Development for Sustained Peace," which provides professional training in cultural sensitivity, political figures and issues, Islam, etc.

The Kandahar PRT commander tried to project an image of his staff as separate from the "regular" military (here termed the "maneuver" units), with a mission of peacekeeping and reconstruction, rather than searching out Taliban. He accomplished this through distinct dress (baseball caps instead of helmets), letting the men grow beards, and using less intimidating pickup trucks rather than HUMVEEs. Unlike the other soldiers, the PRT officers would seek to interact with the people on a daily basis, visit the bazaars and buy food and other supplies, pass out school supplies and toys to the children, etc., in an effort to gain the trust of the villagers and potentially serve as intermediaries between the local people and the main military force. By and large, according to the interviewee, the PRT was successful in cultivating this relationship and effective in its mission.

The interviewee also describes the violence against moderate clerics who had spoken out in support of the Coalition as a peacekeeping and reconstruction force, and against the Taliban. While not directly related to PRT activities, the interviewee's description of the activities of the Kandahar Islamic Council and its public fatwas in support of the central government and President Karzai, and against Mullah Omar, sheds light on the subsequent retaliatory killings of the leaders of this Council.

Finally, to illustrate the progress of the central government in extending its authority, the interviewee comments on President Karzai's administrative changes in Kandahar. He describes PRT behind-the-scenes encouragement of the provincial governor, Golaga Shirzai, to loyally accept these decisions and, thus, to play a role in the political modernization of his country. Some of the difficulties of dealing with a traditional warlord mentality, which does not operate on the basis of a professional military subject to civilian control, are related. The PRT role in facilitating police training is also mentioned, briefly.

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

INTERVIEW # 33

Interviewed by: Barbara Nielsen
Initial interview date: July 13, 2005
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Q: Please tell me where you served in Afghanistan in conjunction with the PRTs.

A: Sure. I served at the Kandahar provincial reconstruction team at Kandahar army airfield. We were based out of the army airfield pretty much most of the time because the current PRT compound had not yet been established.

Q: What was the timeframe of your service?

A: May 2003 through October 2003.

Q: At that time, can you describe the mission of the PRT?

A: When I arrived, they had three civil affairs teams that were part of the PRT. However, at that point in time, there was a PRT commander and they had the Office of Military Cooperation that they have all over Afghanistan - OMC Alpha [Office of Military Cooperation for Afghanistan]. It's a civil affairs branch of the military working with the civilian government sector. So, it had not yet fully developed into the PRT, though we did have a PRT commander there. My role in that capacity and the role of the PRT was to go out and meet with local government officials, find out needs that they had for projects, problems, security issues, concerns they had with their interaction with the U.S. military in the area, and help to resolve those concerns, help to identify projects that needed to be accomplished (wells, schools that needed to be repaired, or other things), and coordinate between the military civil affairs branch and the USAID field officer or our program manager and then their contract NGOs, work to help establish the projects.

Q: Let's talk about some of those elements. You were visiting local officials. What kinds of local officials or how would a typical negotiation or conversation go?

A: I think I was pretty lucky with the commander of the civil affairs OMC Alpha office there. He took me to meet local officials. At the provincial level, they have a mirror of the national level offices where you have instead of Minister of Education, it would be the provincial director of education, the provincial director of agriculture, and so forth. I met several of these provincial level officials. A typical meeting, for example, was when we met with the Kandahar provincial director for planning. He talked to us about problems they were having with non-governmental organizations in the area. You had NGOs that would come in and set up essentially for profit where they would have donors or other sources of income. They would contract with USAID or

other sponsor agencies. There was a lot of frustration in that office. He had worked apparently with NGOs before coming back. He was an expatriate who returned from Pakistan. He had submitted plans for monitoring and not licensing but registering NGOs in Kandahar to keep track of them, wanting NGOs to provide a general list of money that came in and then expenditures. He saw project managers or NGO managers driving Land Rovers or Land Cruisers, expensive vehicles, living quite well. Then you had domestic NGOs set up by Afghans that also seemed to be in construction and they would say, "We're helping build a school," but it also seemed to him to be for profit and not enough money that was coming in was going to the people or helping the reconstruction projects. So we would sit down in the interview with him and just ask key questions. The military civil affairs officers would ask, "What are your top three security concerns? What are your top three reconstruction concerns? Are there any political concerns, rivals or other problems that you might have locally, corruption, graft, those kinds of things? If you want to talk about it, we might be able to help you resolve those problems." That seemed to be a standard set of questions that I saw at all locations we went to. I tried to not stand in the way of the civil affairs officer at first – let him open the dialogue, ask his set of questions. Afterwards, I would ask follow-up questions in areas that were of particular interest to me. If he said something that caught my attention like this discussion we had about the NGOs, then I would ask follow-up questions.

Another example about the NGOs was, I guess, early on in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, some NGOs had returned... The Afghans were used to planting seeds. There was a particular seed mix called Pak-Mex or Mex-Pak where Pakistan and Mexico produced these seeds, and they were reliable. But what had happened is that-

Q: Seeds for what?

A: For wheat and for a variety of food crops that they would plant. But what had happened was that NGOs, after the withdrawal of the Soviet occupation force, came in and they were packaging lower quality seeds under the same Pak-Mex brand, and they were providing it to the farmers – alternative livelihood so they wouldn't grow poppy or other things, just to help them out. But with the previous brand of seeds, the farmer knew that if he planted so many hectares of wheat, he would get so much harvest and so many kilos of wheat. But with the less reliable wheat, the way he explained it – he said, "It's pretty simple. The farmer puts in the same amount of effort and the same amount of water. After a couple of harvests, it was inconsistent. When he didn't get what he thought he was going to, and since he had budgeted for certain expenditures and couldn't make those, he would go into debt." So then the farmers became frustrated with these NGOs. They thought they were being less than honest. They may have been buying cheaper seeds and then selling them as these, or getting them as these quality seeds. That's another problem. In local markets, donated goods would be turned around and sold – donated by even USAID – the flour sacks or other food stuffs, vegetable oil or canola oil cans – and then turned around and sold at the bazaar.

Q: When you had a conversation like that and uncovered some of these problems, what would happen next? Was the PRT empowered to take some action?

A: In this case, like I said earlier, he had developed a plan for licensing or registering NGOs. Typically, both through military channels and in the State Department and USAID channels, I would only occasionally read their reports, but as for myself, we would go back and write a reporting cable. I had submitted a reporting cable of the meeting that listed some of the grievances that he had mentioned, some of the possible solutions he thought might work, and would send that reporting cable back to the embassy in Kabul. Then they would format it and put it into an actual State Department cable frequently and send it back here to Washington so the people back here at USAID, the State Department, or wherever else could access that. I would say 98-99% of the cables that I drafted while I was out there were unclassified just because the location where we were at, there wasn't a lot of sensitive discussions. Very seldom... When you're talking about security situations, possibly you could get into areas that would involve classified information. But the most important things, the day-to-day concerns that the people have there, weren't. So, we were able to more easily transmit our reports back to the embassy, contact people via cell phone or the Iridium phones that they had, and report back.

Q: I understand that the mission of all the PRTs is security on the one hand, development assistance on the other hand, and, in addition, demonstrating the authority of the central government. In your PRT, how were those three missions represented?

A: I'll give you an example of a combination of the security and the authority of the central government and development separately. With development really, the other civil affairs teams... since I was usually with the civil affairs commander and the PRT commander going out and we were meeting with the office directors, the other two civil affairs teams would go out and they would do more of the site surveys and establishing the wells, helping rebuild the schools, etc. There was a clinic or a hospital called Miwand Clinic in Kandahar and they were providing medicines to the clinic. They met with the doctors there, asked them what their needs were. As far as development in Kandahar, it seemed like the provincial governor was pretty well equipped. There was a Japanese company named JAMCO that had donated a lot of equipment. They were doing reconstruction road repair, repairing bridges and those kinds of things. So, on the development side, the PRT while I was there didn't get involved a lot in other than small projects like the wells, the medical clinics where they give shots, a veterinary clinic treating farm animals, giving them shots so they would have vaccinations and so on. But outside of that on the development side, there wasn't a lot that we were involved in.

But on the security side, we had a couple missions. On one occasion, we flew down to Spin Bolduk, which is right on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. We did the typical meeting. We sat down with the village elder and a bunch of the elders from the village and just talked to them about security concerns - had they seen strangers that were passing through the area - any mysterious activity, Taliban coming through? And your typical response would be, "No, we haven't seen any strangers. We know everyone who comes through this area." Even if there had been, in a lot of cases, there wasn't a lot of information that was given that way. Then after the meeting, as you're walking back, one of the interpreters would get pulled aside and they would say, "We don't want to say in front of everyone else, but we have had some guys passing through here late at night." But as far as security, I think the biggest impact that the PRT has is by presence, just being out in the area, meeting with the people, talking to them, getting them to feel comfortable so they can come and do those kinds of things, come and report to the PRT, or to

other military folks that are passing through, Afghan National Army officers or soldiers, Afghan National Police, not necessarily just the PRT.

Q: At the time you were there, the PRT was being established, but the American military presence in some form had been there for a while. I'm wondering whether the local population would be able to make a distinction between one entity and the next. Also, how comfortable was the local population with the American presence?

A: That's a good question. The one problem is that with every rotation, every PRT that came in, every PRT commander would set the standard. You had some that would say, "We're going to go out and have a military uniform" and they all did, the civil affairs soldier with their military uniform. But in some cases to try and make them maybe a little bit more distinct or separate from the regular military forces, they would allow them, to wear different hats or grow a beard or not be clean shaven. In the culture there, men typically have facial hair. Just to try and make them see that you're trying to be more like them, maybe a little more familiar, more comfortable.

Q: They would be viewed with a little greater respect.

A: Right, possibly maybe a little bit greater respect, as opposed to clean shaven. I know, for example, the former president of Iran, Rafsanjani, that they used to make fun of him in the press. They would call him "Qusay," which is "Shark," but it actually was talking about him because he really couldn't grow a beard. So, you're right, maybe a little bit more respect. But there was a lack of consistency as far as what I saw from the one rotation not only on the PRT side, but also on the military side, the way they interacted with the locals. On one occasion, the 82nd Airborne Division was there. They were called Task Force Devil at the beginning. I was there through the transition to the 10th Mountain Division, which was Task Force Warrior. When the Task Force Devil personnel were in the area and the commander there... it seemed like it was a command decision that they cooperated less with the local, at that point in time, Afghan militia forces, which are quasi-official. They are paid infrequently by the Afghan ministry of defense. They were tentatively under the control of the Afghan ministry of defense. But they were still a semi-official body because the Afghan National Army was still being built and established. The 82nd Airborne commander did not cooperate or work closely with these people. Frequently, it was the Afghan militia force's patrols that were the first to engage Taliban insurgents and to need help and assistance. The Kandahar provincial governor at the time, Golarga Shirzai, and his aide, his key advisor, Khalid Pashtun, had talked about needing more assistance, helicopters. "Sometimes we engage the Taliban and they try and run away. If we had a helicopter, we'd put our own guys on there and you could just fly us past to cut off the Taliban's retreat and let our guys off and then fly away. We'd stop them and capture them." Possibly even, if they had to, kill the Taliban. The 10th Mountain Division showed up and that commander worked a lot more closely with the Afghans.

Q: Going back a second there, did they get those helicopters?

A: They did. From what I saw, the entire time that the 82nd Airborne was there, it continued. Also, their behavior in the villages and on patrols was a lot firmer.

Q: Was it culturally insensitive?

A: I was going to say it was less sensitive to the cultural norms, doing searches in villages, perhaps not asking permission from the village elder before going in. The 10th Mountain Division commander of that task force changed the practice where there were on many occasions joint patrols with the Afghans. If they came to a village, they let the Afghan soldiers go in first while the Americans stayed on the outside to do the search. When it was the Afghan militia forces, they still ran into some problems because there were stories that would come out in the press after that that the American soldiers would stand there on the outside of the village to cordon off the area so that no Taliban could escape and the Afghan militia force guys would maybe pocket some money or threaten the village elder when they were out of earshot. So they had to change the tactic to account for that, that these were only quasi-official ministry of defense personnel operating – no real chain of command, no laws or responsibility. They didn't have a uniform code of military justice to punish these guys. But as the Afghan National Army troops were deployed, that kind of search and seizure process where the Afghans went in first improved a lot. But you went through a rotation where it went from the 82nd Airborne to the 10th Mountain to the 25th Infantry Division, and now the 82nd Airborne is coming back again.

Q: These rotations are every three months?

A: No, for these individuals, it's either every nine months or a year.

Q: So you didn't witness all of these rotations?

A: Not all of them. I was there to witness the transition from the 82nd to the 10th. But the 25th happened after I came back, but I remained in contact with other PRT officers in the field. I have less information about the 25th, but as the 82nd prepared to go back out to Afghanistan this time, we went down to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and watched some of their preparations, training exercises. They called it Operation Braggistan. There were 6,000 82nd Airborne soldiers down there. They had simulated villages. They had Afghan-American contractors that role played the situation.

Q: You mentioned the 82nd Airborne going back. Are they different individuals that belong to the 82nd Airborne than the previous rotation?

A: It's the same brigade that's going back and a lot of the same senior non-commissioned officers and senior officers. But from what I understand, there is a high turnover rate. In the interim, this group that was in Afghanistan in 2003 had come back; some were deployed to Iraq and they were back again, and now they're deploying to Afghanistan again in the leadup to the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan. There is a relatively high turnover, as I understand it, in the junior enlisted ranks. Maybe it was in some cases more than what they had expected to be away from their families or other problems. I was speaking to an officer who had just done an exercise and he said that there are a lot of first time new enlistees who were not with the group in Afghanistan. So then your concern becomes, will the lessons learned by the senior NCOs and the officers who are still there be passed on to the junior enlisted troops that are actually the frontline force that goes out on the ground, that goes to the villages?

Q: That was part of your purpose then. You went down to observe the training.

A: Right, get some feedback and give some comments. The military has improved some other areas of training. For instance, the naval post-graduate school has a class called Leadership Development for Sustained Peace. They have had several rotations of classes where the senior NCOs and the officers of these organizations come out for a week-long graduate level seminar on Afghanistan or Iraq (They also do the Balkans and Kosovo), and they just teach them about these cultural sensitivity issues, political figures they might have to deal with, issues, customs, and courtesies you should respect when you're going into a village, and general ideas (e.g. understanding Islam...). They have one of the two Muslim Navy chaplains come out. He talks about Islam and he answers questions. It's a "there are no dumb questions" kind of thing. Lots of people ask us questions once they get to Afghanistan. They don't have to go in with a complete lack of understanding, though a lot of these guys have a very limited understanding. These soldiers who join the 82nd Airborne or 10th Mountain Division often are from the southern United States, predominantly the inner city, those areas, so they have a very limited exposure.

Q: They're not widely traveled or cosmopolitan?

A: Right. Well, not before enlisting. Then they get exposed to it.

Q: Going back to the security situation there in Kandahar, you were asking the villagers what they observed. At the time you were there, how would you characterize the threat or the security situation?

A: I think it was better during that timeframe in 2003 than it has been lately. There was a lag there. In the fall of 2001 and 2002 when the Taliban were forced out of power, and maybe even into 2003, there were attacks and there were a few sizeable engagements. They had north of Kandahar a fight with 200-300 Taliban at one point in time earlier that summer in 2003. But other than that, not a lot of significant activity. In Kandahar itself, in Kandahar City, there really were rocket attacks where they would light a timed fuse, some 107 millimeter Chinese rockets, and point them at the base. But the outer security perimeter for the base was far off enough that they couldn't get a good aim at it. In the city there weren't a lot of problems. There were two mullahs who were killed in the summer of 2003 -- motorcycle drive-by shootings. Then they had a grenade attack at a mosque. That was relatively unheard of. The target at that point in time was the head of the Kandahar Islamic Council, Mullah Fayez. There was a council of the Muslim clerics from Kandahar and the surrounding provinces, maybe 3-4000 clerics, but they had this overall council of 12-15 individuals.

Q: Was that a long-established council?

A: It was. Even during the time of the Taliban, they had some form of this council. A lot of the same clerics were involved.

Q: So why were they a target?

A: In this case, they were moderates. They spoke out against narcotics trafficking, unnecessary murder of civilians, in support of the central government. They spoke out, saying that the coalition was there as a peacekeeping force, a reconstruction force. So it was likely in retaliation for this support. They also attacked the religious foundation of the Taliban. So, in about early summer 2003, two clerics were killed in a drive-by shooting and then a grenade attack – they killed some other individuals, but not the target, Mullah Fayeze. After that, there weren't any other significant attacks for quite some time. But recently, you have had a string of kidnappings of young children, kidnappings for ransom, in Kandahar. Or they would kidnap young girls and then take them to a different province and sell them. In some areas of Afghanistan, they have what they call a "bride price." So it is profitable. It's not like a dowry where the bride's family would pay the money. The groom's family would pay money, so it would be profitable to have a young girl kidnapped at the age of 12 or 13 and then give her food for a couple of years and then sell her for this bride price and make a profit.

Q: That sounds more like a criminal activity.

A: Right. They had those things.

Q: I don't know if the Taliban was engaged in kidnapping young girls.

A: Probably not. But that has increased the tension a lot recently. And also the number of attacks recently spiked to where you had the head of the Kandahar Islamic Council killed. Then at his funeral, the former chief of police... The chief of police from Kandahar from 2003 when I was there had been transferred to Kabul, where he was the chief of police. He was back at the mosque for the memorial service. He was killed by a suicide bomber who killed him and 20-30 other individuals at the mosque at the memorial service. Since that time, they have had another member of the Kandahar Islamic Council shot in a drive by shooting. So it's begun to increase again.

In this recent string of killings, what happened was, they called a national council together in Kandahar. That council voted and decided that they would denounce the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar. They said that he had no right to call himself a "defender of the faith," a title that he took on himself when he was the head of the Taliban government. They also said that the Taliban movement had no real foundation in Islam, that it was not worthy to call itself a "jihad" or a "holy war" movement. So, after that, there were public announcements made that they were going to have revenge against these individuals. Mullah Fayeze, who was the head of that council and the head of that national meeting, was shot first, and then the bombing at his funeral, targeting some other individuals. The other mullah who was killed was one of the candidates to replace Mullah Fayeze. In Paktika province recently, another mullah and his wife were stabbed to death. He had also participated in that national council. So there are likely targeted assassinations by the Taliban in retaliation against the members of that council for that vote and for their condemnation of the Taliban movement.

Q: And this condemnation, the timeframe was when?

A: The meeting was probably late May of this year, 2005. It would have been the end of May, within a week or so after that. The 29th of May was when Mullah Fayeze was shot. He was the first one who was killed shortly after the vote and their announcement.

Q: It took them a while to make an announcement like that. It's a courageous thing to have done, to come out and say, "Well, Mullah Omar and his ilk are not good representatives of Islam." Had that announcement occurred in 2003-

A: And Mullah Fayeze had issued public fatwas – or rather the Kandahar Islamic Council representing the southern provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Ouruzgan, Zaba province, those clerics had met together and they had issued three separate fatwas during the summer of 2003, religious edicts based on the Koran, the words of the Prophet Mohammad, and then other teachings. They had all the citations, what they based their findings on. Similar points that Mullah Fayeze independently made were counternarcotics statements, that poppy growing is not good for the Afghan people, drug use is not good for the Afghan people, and statements in support of the central government. At that point in time, they hadn't had the presidential elections, so he said the loya jirga (grand council) had identified and named Karzai as the current interim leader of the country and as long as President Karzai was named that by the proper council, then they should respect it and his position. Then he said that the coalition was there to help, that they shouldn't be attacked or killed. Part of that also was the condemnation of killing innocent civilians. "It's wrong to attack Afghans that work with the Coalition because they're working for reconstruction." So, he had made statements early on in 2003, but I think that died down a bit after the three attacks in 2003. There was a lull from the fall of 2003 until they came back around. Perhaps then he thought, "We need to bring this to a national level." In addition to the kidnappings, there were more explosive attacks, IED attacks, in Kandahar. Before this council decision, a wheelbarrow was placed full of explosives across from the Afghan militia force, the Second Corps, compound. It happened that a bunch of children were playing in the area. It killed 20-30 kids. The Taliban actually came out and apologized and said, "Well, the kids weren't our intended targets. We wanted to get the soldiers." But that doesn't help the families of the kids that were killed, the public apology. And there were a lot more rocket attacks also leading up to that announcement. They had a suicide bomber drive into a PRT convoy. The PRT convoy from Lashkarga was in Kandahar visiting. As they were driving back, the suicide bomber blew himself up and injured some soldiers in that attack. So I think the security situation and the number of attacks in the Kandahar area began to increase again in early 2005. The council, maybe they thought, "It's time for us to make a statement. This is wrong." Then after they did, you had this series of assassinations starting again, the Taliban in retribution, coming back to get them.

Q: It's an evolving situation.

A: I think the situation now is worse than it was in 2003, worse than it was in 2004. The only time in '04 that there were more violence and more attacks was just a short window around the presidential elections, maybe a couple weeks before and a couple weeks after last October, 2004 when they were trying to disrupt the elections. That's a monthlong window right there. But this has been a more evolving or progressing situation.

Q: That's obviously very worrisome. I think we'll try to focus on the time you were there even though now it's a little historical. What I conclude from what you've explained is that the security situation was relatively stable and you were able to go about your mission rather predictably. You could set up your meetings. You could travel. I think you did travel fairly extensively. Your realm of operation was the whole province.

A: The whole province and sometimes into Helmand province and up to southern Ouruzgan province.

Q: When you travelled, would it be under the rubric of passing the message that Afghanistan now has a central government and getting people sensitized to that kind of a political structure?

A: It was. When we went to Lashkarga before the establishment of the PRT there (Kandahar was the first in that area), there was a firebase at Garetch, and we went out there because they had coordinated with an NGO to repair a clinic. So we took the opportunity to go out there. They had the ribbon cutting ceremony for the clinic and it said, "The central government of Afghanistan with the support of USAID (The sign they put up was translated into Pashto) brings you this clinic for the people of Helmand province." We met with the chief of police there. We talked to them about their needs. We talked to them a little bit about the Afghan national police expanding into the area, the possibility of sending police from their province to do training and come back as Afghan national police. But I think the biggest thing that we experienced in Kandahar with the central government authority expansion was in mid-August of 2003. There was some political turmoil in Kandahar, some disputes between the chief of police and the head of the Kandahar province, the central prison, and the governor, and along tribal lines – longstanding disputes that these guys had had starting to boil up. The governor at the time, Golaga Shirzai, was in frequent phone contact with President Karzai. He was talking to him about problems the chief of police was having. He said, "Well, the few security problems that we have here are the fault of the chief of police, who is not taking care of things." I'm sure the chief of police was calling and talking about Shirzai. So, President Karzai made the decision to make some changes. It was his first real provincial level administrative change. So, he invited a set of governors to come to Kabul for an announcement. I had talked to Governor Shirzai before he left. He was kind of pleased. He said, "I'm going because I know they're going to announce that this rival, the chief of police, is going to be transferred." Also, another rival, the governor of Zabol province, he knew that he was going to be transferred. And so he went. The next day, I was sitting in a meeting at his brother's house, who was Rizik Shirzai, and he was in charge of the outer ring of security for the Kandahar army air field. The U.S. military contingent had their own fence, their own security. Then beyond that to provide extra security was the governor's brother and his forces. So, we went to be with him the next night when he received a phone call. The governor informed his brother that when the president read off the list of people that were being removed, he was on the list and Golaga Shirzai's name was on the list. But he was surprised to hear that he had been removed. It was news to us. We were not informed ahead of time. President Karzai didn't inform the Ambassador or anyone. I made phone calls immediately and my military counterpart made phone calls back to Bagram, to the CJTF 180 (before it became 76) and no one there had heard ahead of time. Had we heard ahead of time, we maybe could have prepared the groundwork a little bit and started talking about change, central government authority. But instead, his initial reaction was that he was going to respect the

decision and come back and collect his things. But his brother was mad. His brother stormed off and we were there with Rizik's chief of staff, who was also his translator, just asking, "What happened?" He said, "Well, the governor's brother, Rizik, is going to go call a meeting of all the Afghan militia force generals together and they're going to resign in protest, take other men with them." Then the next day-

Q: That doesn't sound good for the central authority.

A: Not yet. The next day, we went out to the airfield when Shirzai was going to be coming back. As he stepped off the plane, he came off and his key advisor, Koli Pashtun, stepped off the plane, and then Christiane Amanpour stepped off the plane. It was a UN flight. She was heading to Herat. Of course, at that point in time, the only big story was Ismail Khan in Herat. She didn't know that she was on the plane with the governor of Kandahar. She didn't know that he had just been fired. She didn't know any of this. She came over and started asking us questions. I said, "There is a public affairs officer over on the base. We can get him to answer your questions." I did talk to her a little bit off camera, but she said, "Can we put you on camera" and I said, "No, that's not my position to comment." When I offered to get the public affairs officer, she said, "No thanks" and got back on the plane. So she had no idea what was going on. I went to talk to Governor Shirzai and his aide, Koli Pashtun, said, "We just need to get him back to the compound. We don't want him to talk to anybody right now." So, I said, "Well, can we meet with him?" I knew that things were happening. I talked to the governor through the interpreter. I said, "Can we meet with you?" He said, "You can meet with us on Saturday." That was like three days away. I said, "How about later tonight?" He said, "Okay." So we went and met with him that night. He said, "I've got three choices. I'm willing to either accept the job and go to Kabul..." What his "firing" meant was the governor was being moved to a cabinet level position in Kabul. It was actually a promotion, but it removed him from his power base in Kandahar and local tribal politics. So, first choice, he thought, "Maybe I ought to accept the position." Second was, "I will not accept the position and fight against the central government, stay here in Kandahar." Or third, "I will not accept the position and I will stay here in peace as the tribal leader of my tribe" in the private sector, which would probably mean graft, corruption, crime, and narcotics trafficking. He said, "I have to have these series of meetings before I make my decision." So Saturday, he had meetings with the local police officials, local militia, his tribal elders- [END SIDE]

He said he was not going to come to a decision until after he had these meetings. But he had laid out the three choices. It's kind of funny. Walking out of that meeting, I met a set of people from the UN who were going in to meet him. We met in the parking lot and I said, "Here's what I talked about a little bit. What are you guys going to talk about?" They said, "The same thing. We heard what had happened." I said, "Let's make sure we're on the same page here so that you're not giving him a mixed message." He was asking us in that meeting that night, "I've supported you for all this time..." The base commander was with me, not just the PRT commander. The task force commander. The governor said before we left the meeting, "I've provided a lot of security for you guys these past couple of years. My brother's out there." He was trying to make a deal like he would make with another Afghan, like another warlord. You could tell they really didn't get the concept of our military soldiers who listened to, respected,

and obeyed the direction of civilian authorities. They hadn't been used to that for 20-something years with the civil war in Afghanistan.

Q: More likely throughout their history.

A: Oh, throughout their history it was the warlord or the regional commander who had the ability to make decisions for himself regardless of what the central government said. So he was kind of hinting at, "Well, I've helped you out. Can't you support me in this to stay here in power?" So we talked about that in the parking lot with these other people. We arranged a meeting and we went over to the UN compound. They had their regional security meeting every week and they called an emergency regional security meeting with the local NGO representatives, UN officials. It was kind of a closed meeting with those officials. We reported, "Okay, here's what we understand has happened." I reported, "Here are the choices that he said he had: reject the job and fight, go to Kabul and take it, or reject the job and just become a tribal leader." It was funny because a day or two later, when we got the UN security report that they sent out, it had basically the points that we relayed to them.

Q: You could recognize your contribution to the report.

A: Right. So, on Saturday evening, the USAID representative, the field program manager, the task force commander, the base commander from Kandahar airfield, the civil affairs colonel and I went back after 5:00 PM on Saturday, after he had had the meetings, to find out what his decision was. Well, during the interim two or three days, President Karzai had been on the phone to a lot of these different people – to the clerics, to the tribal elders, to these other groups – saying, "You really need to support me in this. You really need to help me out." So, it almost seemed like when they had their meetings and they had their votes, Shirzai didn't stand a chance. President Karzai was able to talk to these groups and say, "This is really important that you cooperate with us."

Q: Explaining what a central government was all about.

A: Right. And so when they had their votes, all the votes were going the central government's way. All the votes were saying, "Accept the transfer. Accept the position. Don't fight. Go to Kabul. Take the ministry position. Take one for the team. Be a good follower. Be a good leader for the tribe. It will be good for us." So, when we went to meet with him, Governor Shirzai didn't initially let on how the votes had turned out. We had a couple cabinet ministers with us, the minister of communications and another minister, who President Karzai sent to come to this meeting with us.

Q: I wondered how you got these cabinet ministers.

A: They escorted the new governor, Governor Pashtun, who was going to replace Shirzai. So, they had had a chance to meet also on that Saturday. We showed up for this meeting and he said, "Well, I'm still trying to decide what to do." So, we talked about things. The biggest message that I related to him - there were a couple of things. One was that the whole ballgame had changed in politics in Afghanistan. They were going towards a democratic society, were

evolving, moving away from the politics of the warlord to a more central government – that to survive, it was in his self-interest to obey the mandate of the central government. I said, “For your longevity and to survive in this new atmosphere, you’re going to need to get some national experience, national exposure. You don’t have any college education, maybe up to high school. So, if you take the position as a cabinet minister, that will help you. You will learn things. And you might be able to help your tribe back here in Kandahar from the national level and direct funds back here. That’s also important to Afghanistan, that patron-client relationship.” I think that he was afraid that if he left Kandahar to go to Kabul, he would lose some of that patron-client loyalty – purchased loyalty, but still loyalty and then power.

The other thing we talked about is that there were rumblings that President Karzai still wasn’t finished when he made the transfer of the governor of Zabol and removed Governor Shirzai and the police chief, that he was going to make more changes. Ismail Khan, a rival of the governor of Kandahar, Golaga Shirzai -- there was a lot of talk that he was also going to be transferred. So I told him, “Also, you’re the first. As the first, you can be kind of a pioneer, set the example, go out, obey the central government. If you do this, then when President Karzai goes to remove Ismail Khan, he’ll have no choice. If you disobey and stay here and fight, then Ismail Khan can, when President Karzai goes to him and says, ‘I need to remove you from power,’ then he can say, ‘Well, look at Golaga Shirzai. He fought you. He resisted. Why should I not fight and resist?’ So, by going to take the ministry position, leaving, and going to Kabul, you serve your self interest by going there, then you’re the bigger man. Then when Ismail Khan comes due for transfer, -- And he ultimately did, in the interim months was transferred-- he couldn’t point to Golaga Shirzai because Shirzai had gone and he had obeyed. He did it the right way. Eventually, he was transferred back to Kandahar. The way the Constitution was written, cabinet ministers had to have at least a college degree and he didn’t have it, so by technicality, President Karzai transferred him back, but it’s likely that he’ll be transferred again somewhere else. I think they learned their lesson. When he came to Kabul after the presidential elections in December when the new cabinet was announced, he couldn’t stay. There was no way he could stay because he didn’t meet the constitutional requirements. He was sent back to Kandahar in late December 2004. The security situation started to deteriorate. There were a couple of protests, mass demonstrations, in Kandahar against the governor saying, “You’re not doing enough for our security.” They sent the Minister of Interior, Jalali, out to investigate, a big investigation, after those kidnappings we talked about because some of the kids were murdered after their parents paid the ransom. Riots occurred, and I think now it’s shaping up to where he’ll likely be transferred again. The way the Constitution is written in Afghanistan, the governors are appointed or transferred by the president. So, that way, if he’s an ineffective civil servant or government official, then the people can be upset at him, but he’s transferred, and you bring in a new governor. It’s not so much that people get mad at the system. They can say, “He’s an ineffective bureaucrat.” It helps diffuse some of that frustration that they’re going to be feeling. But if you bring Shirzai back, and they did, they focused on it. They were standing outside the governor’s compound throwing rocks at the police, doing these kinds of things.

Q: Who was?

A: Just a lot of people in Kandahar.

Q: People who didn't like Shirzai?

A: I guess that was March of 2005. After he was transferred back recently and they had that series of kidnappings, there was a big thing in the local press there in Kandahar. Unfortunately for Shirzai, his return coincided with this increase in violence. Who knows if it's cause and effect or if it was just the Taliban looking to the parliamentary elections, like you said a little bit earlier, that they were going to be doing these things anyway. But the people saw him come back. It was in 2003 that the mullahs were killed, the two that were assassinated in the grenade attack in the mosque. He left. Things were relatively quiet for a long time. Just by chance maybe, in the December timeframe after the elections, they probably forgave the brief spate of violence around the presidential elections in October. He comes back in January and then as the Taliban ramps up for the parliamentary elections and he's there, people see three more mullahs get killed and they start wondering, "Wait. This happened last time you were here. Maybe it's you. Maybe you can't handle security."

Q: The whole story is very interesting, including the interpersonal aspect of your meeting with Shirzai along with the base commander and the PRT commander. There was clearly a relationship between the American officials and the local governor. Was it one that you had to create? Presumably Shirzai is a gentleman who is not necessarily accustomed to dealing with Americans.

A: Right. And it was. The civil affairs colonel that was there, the PRT commander, and I, we had a meeting with the governor at least once a week. We're in the capital city and he's the most important administrative/security related political figure in the province. We'd meet with him and talk to him about concerns that we had. After the assassinations of the two mullahs, the head of the Kandahar Islamic Council was concerned for his personal safety obviously. Two of his fellow clerics had been killed. We took that concern to the governor and said, "We know that it's illegal to carry weapons in Kandahar city." It's kind of like a Wild West town. You come into the city. You're supposed to leave your weapons outside of town.

Q: They have a place to check their guns?

A: Check them with the police. But the mullah, Fayezi, wanted to have permission for personal bodyguards to be able to carry weapons to defend him because these other attacks had happened. So we helped arrange written certification for his 20 bodyguards. The governor offered to provide from the police or the Afghan militia forces 20 bodyguards, but they were from a different tribe, so Mullah Fayezi didn't really trust them. He said, "Well, I will choose 20 from my own tribe that I can trust." Then the governor also provided weapons for the bodyguards. Then the U.S. military Special Forces at the fire base away from Kandahar airfield north of Kandahar city offered to provide limited personal protection training to these bodyguards so they could help protect Mullah Fayezi. We had to follow up a number of times because they provided handguns but very few bullets the first time, but no AK-47s, no rifles. So we went back and said, "Please provide the rifles." They provided rusted rifles and very few bullets. So then we had to go back again to the governor and say, "Can you get your brother to please provide newer rifles?" Finally, they had newer handguns, newer rifles, newer bullets, and the security detail seemed to work for the intervening year/year and a half until he was assassinated. Even then,

when he was killed, Mullah Fayez was in his office. The guys rode up on motorcycles in the street and shot to attract his attention. He came to the window and they shot him. So, his bodyguards really didn't stand a chance to protect-

Q: They were performing up to standards. He should have been told not to go to any window.

A: Right. But that was a pretty professional appearing attack, well thought out anyway.

Q: Some of the PRTs have been involved in police training. You alluded to it. I gather it was rather indirect. Basically your PRT was not involved in police training, the training of bodyguards, but you did have a role in facilitating-

A: Right. And we acted a lot more in the capacity of facilitating this kind of training. When I was there, they were planning on bringing in contract police trainers. The trainers were going to be staying in the PRT compound. That was the theory when I was in Kandahar. They told us they would come, stay in the compound, and then travel to the police training compound nearby, and just use the PRT as their residence. But while I was there, the PRT commander there really was trying to keep himself from being seen as a threat to any of the parties – when we would have visitors from DEA or other government agencies, they would have to meet with us on base. Even then, it was only just for a few minutes. The PRT commander didn't want to be seen as somebody who might be involved in counter-narcotics or something like that so that we could operate without the local people seeing us as a threat. They would say, "Oh, these are just the civil affairs or just the PRT folks. They're not here to get us, so we're not going to attack them." His tactic was to reduce our image as being a threat, maybe even to the bad guys. If we saw something, we were going to report it, but really in his mind the purpose was for reconstruction, for solving problems, keeping the peace, that kind of thing, and not for law enforcement or drug eradication or those kinds of things. His people wore baseball caps instead of helmets, grew beards, to look a little bit different. And also, we drove in Hilux pickup trucks and not HUMVEEs. So as we came in in the Toyota Hilux pickup truck, a standard vehicle. So we'd come driving in, the only thing that really distinguished us was that we were three in a row, a convoy. But your everyday person was driving a Hilux pickup truck. When the HUMVEEs came in, everyone in town would stop and look. It is a martial, imposing image, coming through the narrower streets in the city. There are no lanes. The Jamco construction company I talked about earlier was doing a lot of road repair in Kandahar city. So you had lanes closed off. So a HUMVEE would force other vehicles to make room, get off the road, so they could get past because they're really wide vehicles. So it would inconvenience people. But after having driven through the city a number of times in the pickup trucks, we noticed people just went about their business shopping or riding their bikes. You'd go past the shops and they didn't even really look up. They might glance. That Saturday when we went to meet with Governor Shirzai because we had the base commander with us, then it was a huge convoy of eight or 10 HUMVEEs going through. It disrupted the entire city. Guys manning the 50 caliber machine guns sitting in the turrets of the HUMVEEs. That kind of thing. There is a big difference. I know in some PRTs they do have people travel in the HUMVEEs for safety reasons. But in Kandahar at that point in time, it was a little bit more stable. The threat was lower for the PRTs. It was likely low enough that the base commander didn't necessarily need it, but I don't think he was willing to take the

chance. He is a plum target, being the task force commander, if they got him somehow. So I could understand his concern for self-preservation. He had been into the city less than we had.

The PRT would go into the city every day, five to seven days a week. He might go out once or twice a week or maybe every other week, so not a lot of interaction. We would stop at the bazaar, buy some soda or something to drink, some watermelon, batteries for the radios, and other supplies, interact with the people, get back on the vehicles. We were trying to help the local economy. Stopping and talking to people, schoolkids. So there was a lot more interaction with the PRT on that level on a daily basis even as we passed through town. You'd stop at an elementary school and talk to the kids, pass out pens and paper. Somebody sent from a bank in the States promotional, tiny soccer balls. They sent a big cardboard box full of these soccer balls that they hadn't used, little nerf ones. So we passed these out to the kids and they could play. They knew football, the international sport. So, we had a lot more interaction than...

There are soldiers that go to the big bases of Kandahar and Bagram that never leave the base, never have the experience. So all they know is what's inside that barbed wire fence. No exposure. Then the guys that go out on patrol, all they know is, when they go out on patrol, they search a village, they get shot at, whereas we go out and engage these people. Their experience is entirely different from that of the PRT, where it seems to be that you try to have more cordial dialogue and create an atmosphere where you can go into the village and talk and do things. The other elements that come in to do these searches or capture the Taliban, their purpose is entirely different. They don't take the time to do that. That might be also something that affects them. Those maneuver elements, if they took the time in the village to talk to the village elder – and I think they're doing that a little bit more now – had the dialogue, sat down and sipped tea and then said, "Do you mind if we look around" so we don't embarrass or cause him to lose face in front of his people. But that's something that the PRT, the folks that I worked with both in Kandahar and the civil affairs teams which became the PRTs, Lashkarga and Helmand and also in Tarin Kowt, both those civil affairs teams that we talked to and I dealt with, they acted the same way. They would go out and it was more dialogue. That's a big thing, showing the people that they have somebody they can go to. I think you're successful when if they have a problem with the maneuver element, if the people come to the PRT and say, "These guys came to the village and they kicked down our door. They shouldn't have." Then you know that you've got the trust and they can distinguish between the two groups, that they see you as an intermediary between them and the regular military force. We had that happen a few times, but mostly in our case it was the tribal elder who would come to us and say, "Hey, this happened." We did have an incident where the regular civil affairs soldier or the battalion, there were two of them with a platoon up in northern Kandahar province, up in the mountains, and the platoon called back on the radio and said, "We've got some suspected bad guys." The civil affairs soldiers (They weren't part of the PRT, but they were still civil affairs soldiers) told them, "These guys don't look like they're potential bad guys." It was an 80-something-year old man and a 12-year old grandson and a 15-year old grandson. They tried to talk to the platoon sergeant or the lieutenant out of bringing them back. He said, "Oh, no, we know better." They put them on a helicopter, flew them back to Kandahar, and they came back. They talked to them and found out it was a mistake. They didn't listen to the civil affairs soldier. So we spent time coordinating, okay, we need to fly these guys back. You need to give them some money for their travel. One of the kids hurt his wrist, so they gave him medical treatment. And apologize. So when they did that, the

task force, the base commander, learned a lesson, to tell these guys to listen to the civil affairs soldiers because they're not always wrong. His guys are not always right.

Q: The civil affairs guys have some expertise.

A: They have some expertise, cultural sensitivity, and might know what they're talking about. So, I think it embarrassed him. I was in the command center watching the communications that went back and forth. The base commander said, "No, go ahead and bring them in" and overruled the civil affairs commander, who was his subordinate." He said, "Well, Sir, I don't think that's a good idea." Then afterwards, we worked together to say, "You need to not just send this guy back. He needs some kind of reparations for being handcuffed and thrown in a helicopter and flown away from his village. That way, when he goes back, he can at least say 'They apologized. They said, yes, it was a mistake. But they gave me three months wages' or something like that."

Q: So it made it worth his while.

A: Yes.

Q: It's the least we could do.

A: And the grandson got the medical attention for his wrist. There are little lessons learned. The hard part is, like I said, with these transitions, the consistency of passing on those lessons learned. While the program I had talked about at the Naval Post Graduate School, Leadership and Development for Sustained Peace, tries to do that and your officers and your NCOs seem to stay and reenlist. It's the junior enlisted folks, whose education level... Your senior NCOs and your officers, a lot of them now in the U.S. military have college experience. Their focus is a lot longer. They're able to pay attention. Your junior enlisted guys are going in maybe to go to college. They haven't gotten there yet. It's to get the GI Bill or something. They have to have a high school equivalent degree. Perhaps they wouldn't be able to sit through a graduate level seminar to receive this kind of cultural sensitivity training. So they really depend a lot on their sergeants and their officers. They have to depend on them to give them that kind of direction and guidance. So if you've got a poor quality leader, these other guys – it's just out of ignorance. They're only doing what they're told. They're inexperienced. The new batch, the 82nd Airborne guys that were there before, a lot of the junior enlisted are gone now. So that makes it hard to have continuity. Maybe it's because we're spread so thin militarily.

This is the other part militarywise, that force protection for our PRT is a significant commitment. If you have 19 PRTs and you would like to have not only protection for the compound because you want to protect the base while you're gone out traveling around, but also protection for the traveling element to go out and meet with people, maybe it's a standard number – I can't remember if it's like 70-something military personnel, but 70 times 19 or 70 times 13 is a pretty big commitment.

Q: There are over 20 now.

A: So your commitment for the military side is big because the civilian side – USAID, State, USDA or other organizations that have their civilians there, they're in ones or twos. So DOD really has the largest commitment to make to that. This makes you wonder. They have to decide how important it is to them, how successful the PRTs are, what contribution they can make, and is it worth it to make that commitment? We have seen a string of reporting lately like we've talked a little bit about. The other guy from Paktika province who has just come back will be able to give more firsthand information. He had talked about some decisions being made on the ground that may not be known back here – restructuring the PRTs, breaking them down so that you combine and remove that 35 or 75 man force protection military element and take those civilians and put them back in with a fire base or another group. Then there are not enough people for that travel part, to go out and drive around. You don't do a lot of good sitting there behind the Heschal barriers and the barbed wire. You don't get out to find out... When you're out traveling around, you can hear, "Well, Governor Shirzai had this fight with the chief of police and the chief of police had an argument with the head of the prisons" to anticipate potential political problems. We didn't know that Karzai was going to fire Shirzai, but being aware of this by being out and talking to them, we knew that some changes were coming. So it helped us a little bit at least.

Q: You were already semi-prepared to engage when you got the news?

A: And also equally important is not just these guys but meeting with the UN folks and the NGOs. That multiplies your level of contacts. They filter and concentrate down from their 300 employees (CARE, Red Cross, whatever) and come in to a weekly meeting where you sit together and say, "What's happened to your guys?" You get this concentrated picture of what's happening. So it's a force multiplier for the PRT. But if you're stuck in that case at the fire base and you can't get to the governor's compound or to the town for the meeting... And there were several things that we'd hear about. The fight between the chief of police and the prison chief we heard about first at the UN security meeting. Dealing with the UN guys, they're seen as entirely different. They would wear two hats. In front of the NGOs, they would be more firm with us. They would say, "You really need to let us know what's going on so that these NGOs don't walk into a military operation." We would say, "We can't tell you where it's going to be happening. We'll give you a general idea. Today is not a good day to go to this district. If you just want to stay in Kandahar city today, that would be good." We couldn't say, "Tomorrow at this time, we're going to go there." It would pose a risk to the U.S. soldiers. But at least the UN was able to pass on the NGO concerns. The NGO and the UN representatives would pass on their concerns to us. Then the UN guy would tell the NGOs, "Here's why they can't or they can." The UN acted in some cases as an intermediary between the U.S. military and the NGO community.

Q: And between the PRT and the NGOs.

A: Yes.

Q: I had made a note to return to that. When you were talking about the UN, I realized we hadn't specifically focused on them. I'll make it my last question in consideration of your time

this morning. Were relations between the UN and the PRT positive? How would you describe them at the time you were there?

A: I think they were positive. As far as what I know talking to my colleague, who is out there now in Kandahar, we had a really positive working relationship with the UNAMA regional director and with his security advisor. They provided us with... There is a UN mapping system agency, information systems, AIMS. They have a mapping database. They provided us with CD ROMs and maps that their geographers had put together being on the ground in Afghanistan, maybe more accurate maps than we had had before, down to the village and the house level, and a variety of different maps where water tables and tributaries and things were, where crops could be planted and that kind of thing. That could be used for planning purposes. The roads – road maps. Even our embassy would use those in presentations and things. So, the exchange we had of information, meeting with them after our meeting with the governor and saying, “Here’s the general idea.” We shared with them as much information as we could because we expected in return that they would say, “Here’s what we’re hearing from our contacts.” I think they’re intelligent enough... We’re intelligent enough not to share with them inappropriate information. But I think they’re intelligent enough that they would see if we were holding back certain things. So we had to be forthright, as honest as we could be with them to get information returned. A lot of times, the information they would give was stuff that we had no access to in other places.

Q: So they were good partners.

A: They were. Information from refugee camps we could pass back to the offices here. They had their UNHCR representatives who would come to the meetings. UNICEF representatives would come to the meetings occasionally. We’d get these different representatives. Even now, at least two of the key figures are still there. We’re on a first name basis and exchange e-mails and things. I think if I went back, or another State person, I think anybody who went there would be able to have a good relationship with these people because it’s been established now, working closely. And from what I’ve heard of other PRTs, too, in Mazar-e Sharif, in Gardiz, Ghazni, Sharana, Herat, they all work relatively closely with these UNAMA regional offices. It’s important. I think the biggest role was played by these provincial security meetings or provincial security councils. In some areas, it’s more expanded and advanced than in others where they would have a council meeting with the provincial chief of police, a UNAMA representative, a State, USAID, the PRT commander, and others. If there’s a foreign PRT there, they met together maybe weekly and then provided reports to their respective parent organizations. They would meet with the governor and say, “Here’s what we found securitywise” and they could focus on problems and direct solutions that way. I’d say Gardiz and Ghazni were pretty good. The governor would travel with the PRTs, too. He would go out on five or six-day journeys and travel with the PRT. That provided additional security. He brought with him his security forces. It meant a longer convoy, but when they camped at night, they could “circle your wagons kind of thing.” Those PRTs would be out in the field for four or five days, going to the remote areas of the province. Our advantage in Kandahar was that since we were at the big base, we could get in a helicopter a lot of the times and not have to convoy. We could fly out there, have the meeting, spend some hours there, and then get back on the helicopter and fly back. We did convoy a couple of times to Helmand province. We drove to Ouruzgan province up north. But when we went to Spin Bolduk and Zabra, we would fly to save

time. But, the disadvantage was you weren't on the street. I mean, you didn't drive the roads. The disadvantage was, you didn't see at ground level. You flew over land and the people in those areas in some cases. Going through the markets, you can tell what the security situation is like –whether it was a quiet or a bustling market. If there's a lot of activity, you know economic activity is pretty good. You could see the farming products, the produce that's for sale. But now it will be interesting to see as they ramp up for the parliamentary elections.

Q: I wondered about that.

A: As the violence increases. It is good, as far as I know, the relationship. And even in Kabul, Jean Arnaut is pretty good as the director for that program, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in Afghanistan. He works closely with the Ambassador. I met with him before I went to the PRT in Kandahar because he was the acting representative at that time. He took the time to meet with me. Now that I think about it, it makes me wonder why he took the time to meet with somebody at my level, but he did. He said, "Here's what I think our concerns are," the UN point of view. He said, "When you get to Kandahar, you tell them that I said that they should work with you and they should cooperate with you." So, I wasn't going to complain. It helped out. But it was surprising that he would take the time. It seems like a lot of people in Kandahar and Afghanistan, in Kabul, are like that. The interior minister, Jalali... Maybe it's because they're all so generally committed to trying to get this thing to work that at the highest levels, it would be absolutely worth your while to meet with them if they would take the time to meet with you. Typically, you wouldn't have a field political officer meeting with the minister of interior or the director for the UN program in the country. Yet, they do. They sit down with you for 10-15 minutes and talk to you.

Q: Colin Powell has said it is very useful to speak not only to the highest levels but also to the people in the field who do the work, so it may be the mark of a good leader and we'll chalk it up to that.

A: Maybe that influence is spreading to where you get these few leaders in Afghanistan anyway that do that. The ambassadors do that also, Ambassador Finn, Ambassador Khalilzad. I haven't worked with the new ambassador. He's just getting out there. But I'm sure it will be the same way where the door is still open and they're out talking like you said not only to the leaders but down to the lower level. So there is something positive there.

Q: I want to thank you. You've really covered a lot of ground and I think very usefully. Some of these stories that we went through in detail I think will be quite helpful as they compile these special reports that the USIP is going to do. So, thank you very much for sharing. I appreciate it.

End of interview