

USIP – ADST

Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #45

Executive Summary

The interviewee was the PRT commander in Ghazni province from September, 2004 through June, 2005. In describing his PRT's mission, the interviewee stressed the objective of "winning hearts and minds" in the rural areas of this province, described as a "hotbed" of Taliban activity, by means of a number of "quick impact" projects. He cites examples of schools being built, farm animals treated, and medical clinics held. As evidence of effectiveness, he provides the example of a young child whose cleft lip the PRT arranged to have repaired, and the hero's welcome the boy received, along with the PRT representatives, upon his return to the village. This deed was even given local TV coverage, also arranged by the PRT commander. On balance, the interviewee felt that through a series of small-scale projects, the PRT became associated in the minds of the people with genuine improvements in their lives.

In addition to economic development, this PRT commander placed an emphasis on training and equipping the local police. He describes some of the difficulties in achieving this objective, as well as the popular mistrust of the poorly trained and often corrupt police force. He suggests that better police training would occur if American or Coalition representatives were stationed with the local police, living, working and patrolling with them. He also criticizes the USAID policy of prioritizing assistance to those areas where drug smuggling was important, which meant a shortage of funds for his region. When military project funding also became centralized, he recounts that this change severely slowed down the process and greatly hindered his effectiveness. Overall, the lack of an adequate and reliable funding stream was frustrating for this commander.

There were few NGOs in Ghazni at the time. According to the interviewee, those which were there were either hostile to the PRT, such as the ICRC, or left the area in order to avoid appearing to work with the military (Doctors without Borders). Finally, the interviewee indicates the value added by having the State Department rep, the USAID rep, and the USDA rep as part of his team.

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

Interview #45

Interviewed by: Barbara Nielsen
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Q: I understand that you were in Ghazni as the PRT commander from approximately September 20, 2004 until the end of June 2005. Is that right?

A: That's correct.

Q: Would you describe how you saw the principal role of your PRT during the time that you were there?

A: The principal role of the PRT was basically to win over the people of Ghazni province and Vardak, which we were to assume responsibility of later on, to support the central government of Afghanistan, and improve relations with coalition forces. While doing this, the whole basis was to isolate the Taliban and Al-Qaeda people operating there from the populace and beat them through winning over the hearts and minds of the people of Ghazni.

Q: What were some of the techniques that you used to accomplish your mission?

A: I took a different view. My predecessor had worked heavily in the provincial center, which was doing alright, and that's where all the businessmen were. I went out to the rural areas. My goal was to hit every district and spend time there meeting with the local council of elders. We would meet with the council and find out what their needs were, see how we could help them. They wanted everything. You couldn't give them everything, but maybe a school... Even if we just came in the first time, we'd bring in certain things like schools in a box, which would help out some of the schools there. We'd bring in a doctor or a medic, some medical supplies for a clinic down there. We'd just spend the day with them and talk to them and find out what's going on, what they needed. They needed everything, but how often have the Taliban been there? The typical answer was, "Security is great," but then you'd find out it wasn't so great. The Taliban were basically acting as bandits in some areas. In other areas, they were just part of the local government. We were in cases probably dealing with Taliban people, but they would say, "Yes, yes, come in here and treat our people" and we were just trying to win over some favor with all those people.

Q: Were you meeting primarily with the village elders, or were you also meeting with the governor of the province?

A: I met with everybody. Generally, when I first got there, the presidential elections were taking place. I was working very closely with the governor and with the police on the security situation. We worked with information operations on the television promoting the elections and telling them how this was their chance to build a new Afghanistan through the democratic process. That also was taped and put on the radio.

Q: That would have been presumably the Afghan governor of the province who would be taped and you would be providing advice on some of the kinds of things to emphasize.

A: I actually got on there. We'd have a roundtable with the deputy governor. At that particular time, it was security-focused, so we'd have the Afghan police commander, the military commander from the Afghan army, myself, and an infantry battalion commander from there, as well. The deputy governor kind of ran that. What we tried to do, we'd get the governor on there to do his own show, but we would kind of do a little "Hey, here's the coalition talking to you, the people of Ghazni and this is why you need to understand what we're here to do is to help you." We had a lot of different messages. We kind of said, "Hey, guys, we were the ones who helped you get rid of the Soviets. If you didn't know that, we spent millions and millions doing it. We didn't come through afterwards, but still, we were on your side."

Q: Right. We did help the mujahedin during the '80s and therefore the Soviets were defeated. I guess maybe we were a little indiscriminate about those groups in Afghanistan that we might have helped. It has come back to haunt us a little bit.

A: Of course it did. But that part of the world is just so different. It was convenient at the time. But you pay for that though. If you're down there now, it's like, "Hey, wait a minute. What did we ever have against you? Nothing. We helped you. We won out." We didn't try to change them. The democratic concept is quite alien in that part of the world. The fact that we even got them to have elections is a miracle. It's starting. You've got to start somewhere. These are tribal people.

Q: They do have a lot of participatory mechanisms though. They meet in these tribal councils.

A: That's true, but it's all for the tribe itself. Apache Indians did that. The Montagnards probably did the same thing. It's always the elders and then they'll have the... I can't remember that word, but it's basically the council for the village or whatever. But that's one apparatus and then you've still got the tribe versus the town. If you have several groups working in a larger district center, they're competing against each other. The family is everything. Then the clan, then the tribe. But that's not just in Afghanistan. That's all over. But I think I'm digressing.

Q: I wanted to pick up on something you were saying about security. I don't know if you were describing simply the time around the elections or in general, but the PRT... To what degree did the PRT have a role in creating security? Did you have a force to do that?

A: The PRT was one organization. There were two organizations in Ghazni. Pretty much with most of the other PRTs, you had a provincial reconstruction team, where the primary focus was to try to help rebuild the infrastructure and also establish security by training the police and

doing certain things like that. While we were doing this, we were also on the lookout for illegal weapons. If the police had them and we felt like, “hey, these can easily fall into the hands of the bad guys,” we’d take them from some police. There was also mujahedin in villages that had stuff stuck away. I would use different techniques to go in, like just go in and say, “Hey, we’re here” and if we spot something we’ll take it away from them. We’d come in and say, “Look, we’re trying to get these weapons out of hands. We don’t want people being killed accidentally by them. We’ll have them destroyed. In turn, we’re going to build you a school or do something for you” depending on the community. One man found out, came down, and he said he’d been a Hazara mujahedin chief, commander, and he wanted some food for his village and he was willing to turn over weapons to get it. We gave him a truck full of rice and sugar and salt, American rations, and some fuel. He gave us a bunch of heavy weapons. They always hold on to some. Everybody there is not 100% warm, fuzzy, that everything’s going to be good. They expect that someday it’s going to kick off again and they’re going to stay ready.

Q: This sounds like the Decommissioning Program.

A: No, that was different. The DDR was the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration. That was for specific registered militias that were registered, sanctioned by the ministry of defense. There was an organizational structure. In turn, those guys were paid a certain amount. They were on the books allegedly. They received a package through the UN DDR team and the Afghan office of that. I think the Japanese paid quite a bit of that - I’m sure the U.S. did, too – to help demobilize these guys and bring them off the streets. You could have just a village out there where these guys had weapons. They may have been part of some other group at one time and had just broken away and not been part of one of the more formal ones where the commanders were recognized.

Q: Okay, so you were working more with these unrecognized folks.

A: I worked with all of them. I worked with the recognized ones because most of them had never known anything but fighting their whole lives. Say you’re 45 years old; you’ve been fighting since ’73. To go over and say, “Hey, I’m going to go do something different” is very hard for them to do. They’re very into the power game. They want to be the leader of their group. Some of them started swinging to get into the parliament later on. They have the lower house and the upper house of parliament. They could be on the provincial council as well. A lot of people were just trying to stay known and not give up their power base.

Q: You mentioned, too, that you were involved in police training. I’ve understood that that often is the case. What form did it take in your PRT?

A: When I got there, my predecessor had focused on the city. I said, “Okay, this is great. We don’t have any problems in the city. Let’s see where the problems are, where the bad guys are hiding.” We went out there and we’d see these police stations that had former mujahedin sitting around drinking tea. They weren’t policemen. They were a bunch of former mujahedin. They were brought in. They didn’t know how to train. They didn’t know how to act like policemen. They didn’t. They were just there in case... In reality, they were just there for security should somebody come in and the governor wanted him taken out. He would send them out there. So, I

came in and didn't like it. My view was, "hey, we need to have a well trained police force that's going to fight terrorism but also protect the people here." It was just so corrupt. Everybody should know it. I went in. I wanted to get them in uniforms. So I gave all these uniforms to the general in charge. He took care of his policemen in the city and he didn't care about the people out in the districts. One day the Taliban came in and these guys didn't have weapons and they were supposed to be the police. This happened just a month or so before I left, but all along, I had been trying to get them in uniform and get them trained, but I didn't have money to buy any weapons. If we captured some from the Taliban or found them in caches, we could give it to them. So I had three military policemen. That was their job, to train the police. We'd go from district to district whenever we could. We tried to give them mobility by buying motorcycles and one police truck per district, and get them in uniform. We would leave them food sometimes. We tried to get the main police general in the capital to make sure that the people were paid, but everybody was stealing left and right, so all we could do was get out there, spend a few days with them, get them looking like soldiers, and try to get them some ammunition sometimes. But they would make... They were known to make deals like, "Hey, Taliban, you don't bother us, we won't bother you." In other places where they actually stood up to them, the government... They were so far away from the flagpole; they were poorly equipped, and they weren't getting paid. If the Taliban came in, you haven't been paid in six months. Basically run or hide because there are like 13 of you total maybe with four rifles and 75 Taliban coming into town; there's not much they could do. They weren't going to give their lives for nothing.

Q: These mujahedin who were supposed to be the police, did you try to work with them or did you bring in different people?

A: We did. It was just, Americans are so used to having everything happen quickly. We had to get over there. It's like, alright, so a little bit was happening at a time. Gradually, you'd start getting different chiefs of police in there. But then the governor would put them in. Some of them were professionals. Some of them weren't. The ones that were professional, many of them had been under the communist government, so they weren't trusted by some people. The ones that weren't professional, many of them were just thugs. We had one guy come up and say, "I am the acting police chief." I looked at this guy. He'd slit your throat for a quarter. This guy was a thug and he came in in uniform. I said, "No, not on my watch, buddy. We'll give you something here to feed the policemen, but I'm not leaving anything worth any value." When he moved out, then I turned it over to the district governor. That was just before I left. But you had these thugs and they were out there. You'd see some hope, a glimmer of the future. But you get somebody good out there and they either move on or they're basically hamstrung from doing an effective job by the government there. They had their own checks and balances on making sure things worked. My idea was, we were all doing the wrong thing. We put a lot of money into training the army, which is good for fighting wars and stuff, but no one was down there. I wish they had Americans or coalition guys with the police down there, working with them, training with them, eating there, living with them, and patrolling with them. Of course, that didn't happen. I think there was some talk about it before I got there, but this was old stuff. It wasn't anything new. We'd give them the money. "Here, pay your policemen." The generals at the top would cut theirs and then it would get down to the provincial level and everybody would take their cut. Then all the way down to the soldier (They call the policemen soldiers). The poor soldier, policemen, didn't get hardly anything. All these other people were getting rich. So how

do you build any credibility? I had a police colonel, a professional policeman, who worked for me at the PRT. He said, "The people hate the policemen. They trust the Americans because they know you're going to do something if you can." They also know we're not going to be around very long. They see the policemen as shaking down merchants and everything. And the worst were the highway patrol. They would set up regular checkpoints and basically, "Hey, here's the toll. You give us money to pass on here." They were also known to be trafficking in opium up and down the Kandahar highway. It was just like, "okay, this is trying to build a nation which hasn't existed; it's worked on tribal laws." It was the most backward country on the planet. Here we are over there, expecting too much too quickly.

Q: That is a big part of the problem, I'm sure.

A: It is. We can't do Burger King or McDonald's, fast food, make it happen overnight. This is a long term investment. We're not willing to put the people where they belong. Oh, someone might get killed if you're out there living with them. Well, yes, they might. We're soldiers. We realized that when we joined. But let's make sure we got the security and go in there and back it up. But that sounded too much like what we did in Vietnam with Special Forces and other programs. Some people acknowledged it, but...

Q: The Afghan police colonel that you mentioned, he was assigned to you by the ministry of interior, apparently. The statement that he made is interesting; he was acknowledging that people really didn't like the police and yet he was himself a career policeman.

A: He had been under the King. He had been under the communists. He had been unemployed during the warlord days. He got back into it when the Taliban were defeated.

Q: Was he a rare bird?

A: He was a rare bird. He was a nice guy. He had good ideas. He was supposed to be paid by us \$400.00, which is far more than he'd regularly get. Then we screwed him on that one. They had been paying them and they said, "Oh, we're not allowed to pay officials with government money. Stop paying him." Then here's this guy who's there. He's been paid. All of a sudden, how do you explain to him, "No, we can't pay you." He said, "Well, you're Americans. What do you mean, you can't pay?" "Well, we have the money, but we can't pay you because you work for the government." He was there and he had a lot of local knowledge. He was learning English. He could carry on limited conversations, but I had some good interpreters, so...

Q: So he was helpful to you.

A: Yes, he was helpful. I didn't utilize him as much as I could have. All of my focus wasn't on police stuff. He wasn't from the area either. He was from way over northeast of us. But he had been put there. They rotated him around. The guy before him had been like from there, knew every trail, which was very useful. He did bring up certain things. He would go and he would admonish the policemen and say, "Start acting right." You could see an improvement. We really did in many places. There was always like this one problem child police station where this guy was just a thug. You could see him as a thug. Nothing improved, so we gave him some

uniforms; never gave them transportation because they didn't do anything anyway, so we just went to the ones we thought we had hope with and tried to do something.

Q: You indicated, somewhat to my surprise, that the Taliban would periodically show up in your area. Was this in Ghazni city?

A: In Ghazni city, we were just four kilometers down the road from the entrance to Ghazni city. The thing is, a Taliban is just a fundamentalist Pashtun. That's all they are. What's the difference between the Taliban and a terrorist?

Q: I guess I'm assuming that there would be shades of grey.

A: Yes, in some cases. But if they had not been known... You have major players that were on the run. There were vendettas because some of these guys had done a lot of harm to other people, both the Pashtuns and the Hazaras. Most of those guys have either taken off or they had the Allegiance Program of "Come back and we'll try to win you back in." That was handled by the governor to a certain degree. We had some involvement, but ultimately it was their game. Then you had the known players that were still out there making IEDs or planting mines and those were the guys we were after. The infantry would actually go out and do the surrounding, kicking down doors. I had intelligence teams that would collect information. We'd all pool our information. Someone would try and get them. Unfortunately, the police would often let them go if they paid them money. We know that for a fact. It happened.

Q: On average, how many Taliban would you arrest or hand over to the Afghan authorities in a given week?

A: Probably none. I'd say in a given month, depending on who they were and how much information came up, two or three, and that was usually done by the infantry battalion that was operating there. Personnel under U.S. control would be picked up as the intelligence people developed a list of who we thought were bad guys, where they were. Sometimes that intelligence was faulty. Sometimes these guys had vendettas against each other. If you don't like someone... And maybe they are a fundamentalist Muslim, a Pashtun. Well, okay. The funny thing was, we had lots of people there and they said Ghazni was a Taliban hotbed. Most of the people there were... It was. It was big. In fact, when the Northern Alliance came south, there was some major fighting down in Ghazni and then they pushed down to Kandahar. They were hardcore Taliban, "Death to the infidels." Then there was just, "Okay, this is the new society." Remember, the Taliban were fanatics on certain religious things – having a beer, the women being in burqas, all these other things. If you take it from a strict religious sense of the culture, most people there were having to adhere to that. Even Hazara who were Shia had to follow those rules if they were to get along. So, that makes them Taliban. Who were the active insurgent Taliban or continued to fight afterward? Those are the ones we're after. You'd go into a village and you'd see these guys. It's like, okay, is this guy just on R&R? We didn't know. There were young guys wearing black. My interpreter, who was from Kabul, was like, "So, these guys are Taliban." I'm like, "Yes, but they don't have weapons and they're not doing anything. Don't worry about them." We were trying to behave. They had never seen an American up close. We came in, treated their animals, and did that. Of course, we were ready

for action. We left there and nobody bothered us. It's not like the Viet Cong. In some ways, it is. These guys let us come, let us go, and they were probably happy we had helped them with their animals. Maybe we changed some of their minds. Then as soon as the mullah gets in there with his third grade education and starts saying, "Hate the Americans," it starts all over again.

Q: The treating of the animals reminds me that many of the PRTs did have a USDA person assigned to them. I know you had a State and an AID rep. as well. Could you comment on how those folks were useful to you?

A: Sure. I could probably go into other things, too. You talked to my colleague who was very astute on the political situation over there. He would bring things to my attention I would have never thought of regarding the election, and even just Machiavellian power play. For instance, our governor, who I liked a lot – yes, he was a warlord, but he was kind of playing half and half – he had been in Ghazni; he was a power play there. Then he was kind of controlling Zabul down there because it hadn't had an effective governor. Then eventually just a couple of days before I left, he went and took over Kandahar, which is big. Now he's got control of all those from Kabul south. He's one of Karzai's guys. So, this political maneuvering within the Afghans, my State colleague would bring this stuff to my attention that I might not have seen otherwise. This little intrigue is going on around here. From a political point of view, my colleague was well read. A young guy, just 30 years old, but he had a wealth of experience. Our USAID guy was a retired State Department guy. I just got an e-mail from him the other day. He was a good guy, experienced, pointed out lots of things, too. Unfortunately, in the whole time I was there, USAID had no money. We did a lot of project nominations and things like that, which really kind of hurt. The guy before me, USAID had all this money, so all these projects the PRT was doing, he would get credit. I came there and... What money we had, we could only do small projects. They were like, "Well, gee, you guys aren't doing as much as the last group." It was like, well, because they had all this USAID money.

Q: How did USAID operate? I would think they would have kind of a steady stream.

A: As far as personnel or funding?

Q: Both, I guess.

A: They did. They were very wired into it. State and USAID were very much into this whole thing. I'm going to try and do something similar for the Philippines/Mindinao. I've got some ideas. I'm working in the Pacific now. AID funding... What they had was this Alternative Livelihood Program, which was a big AID program. They had basically taken all the money and put it towards those provinces with the opium problem. So, here we have these not so agriculturally blessed provinces which needed money for fertilizer, seed, and foodstuff, and we didn't get any money from AID for that, but if you had opium up in the other ones which actually could grow other food, they were getting all kinds of money. I would say our priority is to win the hearts and minds of the people and then we can go and arrest the drug dealers afterwards. But no, no. So here we have the opportunity to win these Pashtun, who had been marginalized because they were Pashtuns and Pashtuns had run the Taliban, we could have won these guys over, but, no, everything from USAID in the period that I was there was going to

these other guys. Apparently that was a decision made at the highest levels. There were some appropriations where they were just kind of left off for the year. Someone had forgotten about Afghanistan except for that counter drug type thing.

So my guy was there and had we had money we would have done all kinds of stuff. But we planned for things. We had worked with the IOM [International Organization for Migration]. They did a lot of stuff formerly with IDP and refugee camps. Then they got into road building, so we started contracting some of those guys and getting them in. So, yes, we at least did something. Then we had money. Most of the time I was there, we had control of our own funds a certain amount and had a very supportive commander..

Q: You said you had CERP funds at your disposal?

A: Yes. We'd do \$50,000 or so. I put a lot of mine into small things so I could spread it out in the rural areas and work with the police. Big projects like... We started a power station. That was three million dollars, large scale. That would have been a great USAID project. I would point these out. It's like, "hey, you know, don't spend your money on that. You'd just be "nickel and dime"ing it. Wait for something big to come along for that. That was my AID rep. He gave some good advice on things like that. We had this one guy who was an Afghan-American who wanted this Korez system, which is an underwater well, to be repaired. It had been destroyed during the war. Normally, we would have said, "Go fix it yourselves." That used to be a community thing. But it was damaged pretty bad. This guy might make money off of it, but it was going to bring money to the economy, those villages out there. So we sank in \$25,000 to help with that.

Q: So that would have been one of the larger projects.

A: Oh, I could approve \$25,000 on my own, so I did lots of \$25,000 projects.

Q: I would think that would be a significant investment in Afghanistan.

A: It is a significant one. But then we were always... Politically from Central Command on down, "oh, all our CERP funds are frozen; we don't have any money." Then you'd get it. Most of the time, we didn't even have to justify it to anyone. \$25,000... Of course, if it was something stupid, you'd be in trouble. But it was easy to justify almost everything there. We would spend \$25,000 at a pop for motorcycles for the police. We'd spend \$25,000 on school supplies or shoes. We'd just go around with kids' shoes. You went to a village and started passing out shoes there. I'd buy \$25,000 worth of medical supplies for clinics to go out and make sure people were treated during the wintertime.

Q: With several projects at \$25,000, you're beginning to effect a lot of people.

A: Yes, we spent every penny we could get from them. Very rarely did we have to ask for... Unless it was a big purchase... We wanted to do a bunch of snow plows. In the wintertime, they were all cut off. That one never got approved. Certain things like building a road, the minimum you're going to build a road for, depending on the length, even rudimentary roads are like

\$50,000 per kilometer. Two kilometers of road doesn't go too far. We'd do stuff like that. Work in sanitation, buy different trucks and stuff. But then you had to count on them to do the maintenance and do the fuel. When my governor was there, I felt pretty good about it. He knew what color white was. He had his own agenda. But if we said that we bought something that wasn't taken care of, he would probably go beat the person in charge and then fix it. Yes, our funding there, we were really challenged in getting things to continue.

Then after our change in command-

Q: When was that?

A: On March 15th, the 25th Division left and the SETF [Southern European Task Force] came in. The first couple of months, they left us alone. We kind of continued as normal. Then it was like, "okay, we're going to control all money, and then all projects must be approved." We had to justify everything. It became micromanagement. It was rough. It was like, "okay, well, we don't want you to do this. We don't want you to do that. We know what's best." If you knew your province, which every PRT commander probably did, he knew what the needs were down there; he knew the players and understood politically. Like I said, I had a really good team down in Ghazni. I wanted to stay. I wanted to stay the full year. I got promoted, too. It was supposed to be six months and I ended up staying 10. Then it changed and it was almost painful. I said, okay, I didn't think I could contribute any more, so I left.

Q: You actually were allowed to determine when you left? I didn't know the military was so flexible.

A: No, no, no. I volunteered to go. I had to fight to go over there. They let me go for six months. They didn't expect me to stay past six. I wasn't supposed to be a PRT commander either. I was supposed to work at the staff. Then because I had been in Africa working other things, they figured I had better experience and put me down in command. Then I said, "I'll stay until all my men are gone, the army troops." I stayed for that.

Then what also happened, when the new group came in, they had brought new PRT commanders, so they already had my replacement there. So, I said, "Okay, my last guys are gone. New people have shown up." I headed out the door when we set a date for him to come in and take over.

Q: Okay. And you're a career army officer?

A: Yes, I've been in the army for 30 years total, but 26 active this month. I was enlisted for two years and 24 years as an officer.

Q: So you have a breadth and a length of service. I guess most of the commanders are going to be-

A: Reservists.

Q: I've heard that. And maybe a little bit younger, I don't know.

A: Yes, maybe. Most of them were in their early to mid-40s. I turned 48 over there. For me, I was pretty senior going in. Most were new lieutenant colonels. I was a senior lieutenant colonel. It was just lucky for me I got the chance to do that.

We were talking about the staff. The Department of Agriculture rep. was really good. He knew his stuff quite well, could talk to the people. The only problem was, once again, when he came, it was wintertime, so he had to get a chance to learn and know about the crops, the irrigation, and everything else. While he was doing that, we once again ran into money crunch problems and had to get approval and identify sources for seed, fertilizer, fruit trees. My goal was to try and get the Taliban back into the fields by giving them so much. But we needed millions. If I had had two million dollars, I probably could have done a lot more, really made a major impact. But here I had like \$100,000 for seed and fertilizer. That wasn't even enough for one district and we were trying to spread it out over several. We made friends in one area, bought fruit trees to get planted. We'd buy 12,000 fruit trees, but they were just small little trees. They were like plum, apricot, and apple. It was a start.

Q: This USDA rep. would also have to know something about livestock and treating animals?

A: Oh, yes. He knew enough about it. He was well trained in all areas. He would check them out and things like that. But really, they had that under control. We'd have army vets come in and do "dead counts." They would go and do deworming, parasite stuff, give them inoculations, and just treat any open wounds and things that they had. Most of the ag. rep's time was spent in irrigation. We also did some repairs. A really bad flood tore out a whole bunch of planted fields that had been planted in the spring. The levee broke, kind of like New Orleans in a way, but on a much smaller scale. It came in and went running along the river. Everything on about a kilometer on either side of the river was taken out. There was not enough time to plant wheat, but my colleague found out they could plant potatoes, so we got a whole bunch of potatoes. We probably didn't help everyone, but we helped a lot of them, at least so they'd have something to harvest probably about now. It was just, "Hey, we're here to help." There was just an attitude shift. We saw ourselves, "hey, we're part of this community. We want to see you be successful" and we did everything. The attitude of the new regime was, "Don't worry about anything. Almost everything you guys did before was wrong." Even I was working on the border trying to win over the guys who were the hardcore Pashtun Taliban sympathizers down there in some cases. But even then we didn't get money to do things we wanted to do down there. So, it really became uncomfortable towards the end of the tour. I hope another progressive commander comes in.

Q: How quickly things can change, just depending on the personalities of who's working there at the time.

A: Yes, exactly.

Q: Were there some NGOs that you worked with as well?

A: You know, Ghazni had a French woman from UNHCR, Petina. It happened in 2003. She was murdered on the street, assassinated.

Q: Right on the street?

A: Yes, right on the street. Apparently, she was somewhat attractive and I think she had something going on with the governor, too. Then we had another French girl come from the UN. He was always after the French girls.

Q: Did he speak French?

A: I don't think he did. He liked French girls. He spoke Russian. Anyway, she was murdered. That turned almost all the NGOs, even the UN agencies, against coming down. Very little support. UN Ops while I was there opened up an office. It was all guys. Naji took over for the UN Ops, worked real well. But the NGOs that were there were usually local reps. of different NGOs. When I was in Africa, of course, I was in the capital, too, but Ghazni was a pretty good size town, and there was hardly anybody there from outside. They would have these different Helping Afghan Farmers Organization [HAFO]. There is probably a whole list I've got somewhere. They would have a local representative and maybe there would be someone up in Kabul that would be there. Maybe Kandahar had more people, I don't know.

Q: So in terms of your meeting with them or interacting with them very often, it didn't sound like there was much opportunity for that.

A: Well, we'd have a public health meeting monthly. The ministry of health would go in there. When we went over, there was this ICRC person there. They were trying to blackball the PRT from coming in. It was all, "You are military." It was like, "Yeah, we are. Also, we're here to help just like you are." They were just playing games. Maybe they really believed they were doing good. What happened, MSF, Doctors without Borders, they pulled out. They weren't going to help because the military was there. It was like, "okay, you don't like us being here, so you're going to let these people go without medicine and treatment." They had put a lot of money into the hospital. We went in and that's where a lot of my money went. I basically had my medical officer go over, check out what they needed, and we'd send out supplies. We had an Afghan doctor I hired for myself and he would go out and buy what they wanted and we'd stock their supply rooms with whatever formulary or anything else that we could.

Q: So in that case, Doctors without Borders basically refused to work with you?

A: They refused to work with... They didn't give us a chance to work with them. They just left in protest because the military was there. "Okay, you'd work with the Taliban, who were murdering whoever, but here we're coming in, trying to give law and order and stuff and you all are upset about it." But you know, hey, they can do that. They're the ones that look like hypocrites, not us. They always try and take the moral highground and we couldn't see it.

A: There is a lot of jealousy, too, let me tell you something.

Q: Among the NGOs?

A: Oh, yes. We come in and we don't play games. We say, "Okay, this needs to be fixed. Do we have the money?" and we go in and fix it. We would do whatever we could. Here they would have a little bit and they'd say, "Well, we'll stay here for years." I said, "Well, that's really good. We're glad you're there. We'd like to help you. But some people are just committed to their little piece of the pie. They can't stand anybody else coming around there. The fact that you wear a camouflage uniform and you've got an M-16 and, by the same token, you're building a school with your money or with your people and you're going down and giving school supplies to kids, that bothers them. They don't like seeing that. That's really threatening to think that guys in uniform would help people.

Q: Yes, I guess it just didn't jibe with their preconceived notions.

A: Of course not. We went over a few, but they would even say that... I went to a couple UN conferences. The military was more open to dealing with NGOs than the NGOs were working with the military. You'd think the Hari Krishna or the "Kumbayah" types would be the ones offering, and it was the other way around. Of course, there are a number of jerks in the military that have scared them before, but not everybody's like that.

Q: I was thinking, too, the UN was in charge of the elections and yet it sounded like from what you were describing that they weren't very visible in your province during that time.

A: They had a couple of people from outside that were UN people. There were volunteers. I saw more of them the second time around. A lot of it had to do with the UN Ops people, the leadership and the security. A lot of Brits, Aussies, and South Africans, and some other people that were trying to get things happening, a guy from Ghana and a couple from Sri Lanka and India. For the parliamentary elections, they were starting to work a lot better. They were pretty much just dealing with the polling stations. Most of those were local Afghans that were involved in running things. But they did what they were supposed to be doing. They also had security from these guys that were contracted. Of course, USAID ultimately paid for them. That was part of the UN's part. We had those guys countercoordinated. I ran the Operations Center during the presidential one with the U.S. infantry providing security patrols, the police being here, the Highway Patrol being here, and then working all the way around. Then there were these local ex-mujahideen guys we hired to just keep security outside the polling stations. Where we operated, things went extremely well even with the limited forces we had on the ground. No one was murdered in our area. The elections went well.

There was one district which had been put under Bamiyan's control and was ignored. As a result, that area went really poorly. In fact, the parliamentary elections are next week, so I'm curious how they turn out.

Q: Bamiyan is the province to the north of you.

A: Northwest.

Q: But you're contiguous at one point.

A: Yes. Nurestan is the one they put under them for the elections. That kind of messed things up.

Q: But the elections that you observed were the presidential elections and these parliamentary elections are coming up now.

A: October 9th or something like that.

Q: But you had a good turnout for the presidential election and apparently it was peaceful.

A: Yes, it was very peaceful. We had a major sandstorm the day before. It really messed up the Taliban activity. It was bad. We used that, to play it as a sign from God to protect the people. We always did stuff like that. We used little things like, after the elections, they had the most snow, which meant green fields in the springtime. We said "we had snow because you had an election and Allah was thankful. You had draught when the Taliban were there."

Q: Is that right? You actually would put out such statements?

A: Oh, of course. Hey, we were there. We had snow. Snow is good. All these little things. Mother Nature working for... Hey, take credit where you can get it.

Q: Okay. Why not?

A: Why not? Can you prove it didn't happen that way? Of course, the old people believed it. A lot of people did. These are pretty primitive people out there.

Q: Yes, not a lot of formal education.

A: No, most of them can barely read and write.

Q: I'm going to try and bring things to a close, but give you a chance to sum up. As you think back on your year, what would you say were the most important achievements of the PRT in any of the different areas that you worked (security, expanding the central authority, doing some reconstruction and development projects)?

A: They always say if you pick one thing and just focus on one area, you can look really good. I didn't do that. I went to a lot of different areas. My biggest thing was touching as many people as we could. We went to almost every district except for one. I personally met with district governors and leaders. I went to schools. If I wasn't doing it, one of my teams was doing it. We went out there fairly regularly. They knew who we were. They knew that we were there to do good things when they saw us out there. We would have people line those streets and wave when our convoy would come there, especially in Hazara areas because they had been really abused. As they got to know us - I'm not saying everybody loved us, especially in some of the real fundamentalist Pashtun areas. But they knew when we came through, we were looking to

make their lives better. They saw their police being better trained and equipped and little projects within the towns. During the wintertime when villages were cut off, we came in with blankets and food and stuff like that and passed them out there. We were the good guys.

Q: Yes, you definitely made an impact.

A: That's it. I went to this one village one time. It was a village out in the middle of nowhere of no particular value. I'd never been there before. I just kind of pulled in and went looking around. I saw this little kid with a cleft lip. I went over and looked at him. I had one of my medics there. I said, "Hey, take a look at him. Get a picture." So, we took his picture. When I worked in Central and South America, they had these Army doctors come down and they would do corrective surgery with the Honduran or Salvadorian ministry of health. I said, "Gee, I wonder if we can do this here." I got a picture of the kid. I went back and called up our medical people up at Bagram. I said, "Hey, this kid has a cleft lip. Is there any chance we can get him operated on?" They called back and said, "Yes, there is a plastic surgeon who works up here. Can you have him here on January 5th?" That was like two weeks away. So, I went down there and said, "Hey, we can get the boy operated on if it's okay with you." They said, "Yes, okay." I said, "We'll be back on the fifth." So, basically, we got the kid up there. We drove him up. We went down to wait for the boy to come. There was almost waist deep snow for me. The town was blocked off. We went down the highway to the police station. They said, "Oh, they'll be coming." Then the boy's uncle came and said, "The mother said, no, he can't go. She's afraid he'll die." I said, "Oh, crap." It was a three or four mile walk away. I had brought a bunch of clothes for this kid, pants, a shirt, all these different things. We basically walked four miles in the snow to pick this kid up. I brought my Afghan doctor and he talked to them. He said, "We're going to take the boy and get his lip fixed." We brought him back. She saw that we had the clothes. She dressed him up, put on the winter boots and stuff. We got him back to the police station, took him up to our base, let him spend the night there. Everybody was bringing him toys and food. He didn't know what to think of it. He was with his uncle. His father had been away working.

Q: His mother didn't make the trip.

A: No, no, women don't do that. They stay home. So, we brought him up there. A couple of days later, he had the surgery. They fixed his lip, but they had to keep him for the post-op for a few days. He was gone over a week. The police chief came up and said they were worried. I said, "No, no, he'll be down in a couple of days." He eventually came down. We actually took him to the TV station. I got a little show on the local TV about what we'd done for that. We finally got back down there. The roads were clear enough. We drove in. In three or four villages, everybody knew what had happened. They were all lining up. This was in a Pashtun area. This wasn't Hazara. These were the people that really had mixed feelings. We went in. That little kid had just gained so much attention. The fact that now his lip was fixed and he could marry now, not be afraid. If I had done one thing out of all of that, that was my personal favorite thing. It's lots of little things spread out all over the place.

Q: Well, it does sound as if you had some latitude for operating. You could see something and say, "Oh, here's what we'll do." You had some resources, maybe not all you wanted, but

enough to make a difference. You could in your own little area there have an impact for sure. You may be the first who has mentioned really an effective use of the media, too, which is interesting.

A: You've got to advertise.

Q: In some of the locales, maybe there isn't much.

A: That's very true. We were a fairly decent sized city, even though it's very rural. It's the size of Massachusetts and Vermont combined.

Q: And people in their homes in Ghazni, would they have TV?

A: There were a fair amount in the city. As you got out, there were less. Then pretty soon it was only radios. The army had bought a whole bunch of those German radios, Grundigs. We sent thousands of those around to different teachers and stuff like that. In some cases, they end up on the black market. But for the most part, that was what they used: radio. Everything we did on TV was also put on radio.

Q: In a mountainous area, radio works. Even the short wave radio is still a good option for places where broadcasting is difficult otherwise.

A: That's right.

Q: In terms of the PRT model, are there some suggestions you would make to improve it for the future?

A: There was a lot of competition between the infantry unit, who had civil affairs people... There was a lot of crossing over, and that was irritating at times, but, hey, there was really no way around it because the command would not change it. I'd put PRTs where you weren't going to have other forces. You basically have to make sure that they have the security apparatus there. We did. We could have done everything with our own. We weren't big, but we could take care of ourselves.

Q: Yes, you had your own security.

A: We had a company of infantry. I tried to make a model for the future which would basically be larger. Once, say, ground troops are gone, it would just basically be about 200-man teams. Half of that would be support and security elements for that. This is going to be my thesis for my Master's. You'd actually need budget. You'd need a larger scale police training team. Depending on how you're going to staff it and set up things, there should be a team at every district police department or at least in the districts where there are problems, all the time working with them. You'd need a reaction force should something happen to back them up. That's the kind of things that we should look at for the future.

Q: Great.

Finally, any suggestions of people to interview?

A: It would be hard to do AI because he's in Afghanistan right now. The Department of Agriculture rep., did you get him?

Q: No, I don't think so.

A: I'll find his e-mail and attach it to yours and have you contact him. You can get an agricultural rep. out there.

Q: Do you think he's in the States now?

A: Yes, he's back in South Carolina. He's down the road from here.

Q: That would be very easy to do.

A: He was good. We had a good setup. I asked him to do too much. He was only there a short time. Even with people there a year, a year is too short.

Q: A year is too short. For any kind of development work, you really need much longer.

A: But in that short period there, we burned bright. We didn't burn the longest.

Q: Well, you had a lot of energy. It sounds like you were very focused in what you were doing, too, so you got some results. That's really impressive.

A: We just need to take it a couple steps further. There are a lot of lessons from Vietnam that were positive lessons. My colleague and I always looked at the CORDS model for a lot of what we're doing out there, tie-in to different agencies, the State Department, USAID, Ag, and the military side of it as well.

Q: I haven't thought about the CORDS model much lately, but I know many of our civilians were working with the military in Vietnam. I haven't actually studied to know how successful that was. I mean, it was a fact, but was it very successful? We lost the war...

A: I'll tell you one thing on that. By the time we were pulling out, we basically crushed the Viet Cong. It was like winning. Then we left and said, "Okay, Vietnamese, take over." It wasn't time for the Vietnamese to take it over. When they did, the North came rolling South and stopped them.

Q: Indeed.

A: But that's history. But the things that were positive about that probably could be utilized and capitalized on.

Q: I certainly appreciate your taking the time this afternoon. I thank you very much.

A: If you need anything, just e-mail me.

Q: I will be sending you for sure the release.

A: And I'll get you my colleagues' information.

Q: Thank you very much.

End of interview