

USIP – ADST

Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #34

Executive summary

The interviewee was stationed in Kabul from September 2004 to June, 2005. He was working for an NGO as an advocacy coordinator.

Situation in Afghanistan

- **Security:** When he arrived: the situation was better than expected, it was still somewhat tenuous. During the long, incredibly cold winter nothing happened, absolutely nothing at all from the point in time when the UN hostages were released in November through April; at least in Kabul it was wonderful... You still had violence in the south and southeast. From May, the security situation was as bad, if not worse than anything I've seen in my 10 months there. The change appeared due to: a vibrant insurgency movement, slow pace of reconstruction and counter narcotics activities, and Demobilization, Disarmament, Rehabilitation (DDR).
- **Political situation:** Political conditions are tied to security; optimism changed as the security situation deteriorated.
- **Economic situation:** The economic situation, though it was improving – certainly had economic growth, it wasn't reaching large swaths of the country; there had been a failure of managing expectations.

Role of the PRTs

- PRTs were a way of trying to do reconstruction on the cheap to a certain extent. The idea was to get joint military-civilian teams with the military playing a leading role in different provinces and then have them take a leading role in reconstruction and support for local government activities. It is incredibly difficult to generalize about the PRT role overall because not only do you have the distinction between Coalition and International Security Affairs Force (ISAF) PRTs and within ISAF the difference between the British model, the German model, etc., but on the U.S. side, on the Coalition side, it seemed that it was almost impossible to talk about a common PRT model in terms of what they did. Different PRTs in different areas seemed to do different things.

- The American model was most military led and was most focused on doing reconstruction activities, especially quick impact projects, very basic hearts and minds, get in there and get it done. The British model from our perspective was much more receptive to concerns that the military does not have training to do a lot of these quick impact projects well. So the British model had a stronger civilian component.

Coordination

- The purpose of the NGO civil-military working group was threefold to:
 1. work out basic coordination issues, e.g. NGO security;
 2. try and clear away some of the misperceptions on both sides;
 3. create a neutral space for discussion — in reality to provide an avenue for advocacy.

Alternative to a PRT *what should be different?*

- It is not tweaking along the edges of the PRT; if forced, most NGOs would say the British model, where there is much more focus on the military side on security sector reform as opposed to other development and reconstruction activities.
- The question becomes, are they helping further reconstruction and development activities? In some places, probably yes. In some places, no. The fundamental problem is, you have a military team that's relatively small that's supposed to cover an entire province.
- The government and the military side loaded so many expectations onto PRTs, especially when you see all this talk about PRTs supporting governance, you're talking about very, very few people to confront massive structural problems. I'm dubious that in fact they're seen as or are effective in extending the writ of the government.
- The problems are so massive at the end of the day even if you have 34 PRTs for all of Afghanistan's provinces, it's a finger in the dyke. The NGO critique is, it's not even a particularly good finger in the dyke.

Local NGOs

- The number of registered NGOs has skyrocketed. A large number of NGOs, especially Afghan NGOs, in fact, are not NGOs but really private contractors masquerading as NGOs and there are problems with corruption. The legitimate NGO community has tried to address this, working with the government to come up with appropriate NGO legislation and then within the community itself launching an NGO code of conduct in May of 2005.

Reconstruction agenda

- He who has the money sets the rules, right? So, if you want to talk about a common reconstruction agenda, the World Bank, US Agency for International Development (USAID), U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), the Afghan Government, the European Union (EU), had better be pulling in the same direction. It's a work in progress.

Opium and alternative livelihoods

- The U.S. and the UK are the two main international players here. They and the Afghan government are taking a holistic, comprehensive approach to the problem of opium in Afghanistan.

Police training and local courts

- In Kabul, there was a feeling that the judicial reform aspect of the overall reconstruction efforts was lagging far behind.

PRT phase out

In the PRT working groups, the idea is that they (PRTs) would transition; they would become more civilian, less military over time. Of course, that is based on the assumption that the overall security situation improves, a somewhat questionable assumption at the moment. The military certainly support PRTs, but they are not likely to want to have PRTs on the ground indefinitely.

Advocacy

There was advocacy on:

- issues affecting Afghanistan generally; e.g. there are certain policies that might be counter-productive, such as on counter-narcotics issues.
- NGO legislation and the NGO code of conduct. That stretches out to relations with the government to a certain extent.
- other areas such as NGO security or insecurity; capacity building; working with Afghan NGOs.

Lessons

- First, the most important thing is, there needs to be continued contacts between NGOs and the military, a neutral space to discuss issues of common concern;
- Second, in terms of what PRTs do and how they look, the more the PRTs look like the British model as opposed to the American model, the more the PRTs are civilian led and the more that their reconstruction and development activities focus on security sector reform, whether that's training police, whether that's supporting the Afghan National Army, or building jails or police stations, that's preferable to a

PRT which goes out and does more traditional development work (digging wells, building schools).

- Third, the blurring of the lines issue: you can't have military folk doing reconstruction activities outside of uniform in Mufti or what have you, which was sometimes the case. Nor can you have the military in psyops campaigns.

- On the overall more meta-policy level:

1. because the military part of PRTs does not do reconstruction work well,

2. because we don't think it's an efficient use of resources in terms of providing security, and

3. because we think it makes it much more dangerous for NGOs and other humanitarian staff to operate because of blurring the lines,

we are not in support of the PRT model to begin with. We would hope that there would be a transition away from that. At the same time, PRTs are a reality and we all have to grapple with that reality. Hence, you have things like the NGO Civil-Military Working Group to try and smooth out some of the rougher edges and try and get us around that very fundamental disagreement about whether PRTs should be there or not.

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

Interview #34

Interviewed by: W. Haven North
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Q: What was the time period that you've been in Afghanistan?

A: I arrived in Afghanistan on September 12, 2004 and then left on June 22, 2005.

Q: And are you permanently out or are you going back?

A: Actually, I've been posted somewhere else, so I now work in Africa.

Q: What was your position and where were you located in Afghanistan?

A: I was located in Kabul and my position was advocacy coordinator for CARE in Afghanistan.

Q: How did you find the situation in Afghanistan when you arrived there and then toward the end of your time in terms of security, the political situation, the economic situation?

A: Starting with security, when I arrived, there were a great number of fears about violence surrounding the presidential election, which was in October. For the most part, those seemed to be somewhat unfounded insofar as the election went off much more peacefully than people assumed. That said, there were a number of incidents in the fall that certainly focused people's attention. The one that I remember, of course, is the UN kidnapping and also a few rocket attacks. So, though the situation was better than we had expected, it was still somewhat tenuous. Then came this long, incredibly cold winter when nothing happened, absolutely nothing at all from the point in time when the UN hostages were released in November through April; at least in Kabul it was wonderful. You began to hear statements from U.S. military personnel and from other sources saying all the standard clichés, that the Taliban's back has been broken, that we've turned the corner, etc. We did a survey of NGO perceptions of security in February, so right in the middle of this quiet time. As I remember the numbers, roughly speaking, 40% of NGOs, which responded said the security situation had improved. Roughly 30% said it had stayed the same. And 30% said it had deteriorated. You still had violence in the south and southeast.

Q: So this depended on where they were.

A: So it depended to a certain extent, it seemed, on where their operations were. But on the whole, you had more organizations who thought things were getting better than worse. Then basically, at least from my perspective, the wheels started to fall off. They really started to fall off in May. You had a series of abduction attempts in Kabul. You had massive anti-government and, to a certain extent, anti-NGO riots in Jalalabad, in Logar, and in Badakhshan, all within the first few weeks of May. In fact, a CARE office was ransacked in Logar. You had a number of NGO deaths. You had three NGO workers working with the demining agency killed towards the end of May. Then what affected us most directly; you then had the abduction of a CARE staff person on May 16th, at which point the security situation was as bad, if not worse than anything I've seen in my 10 months there.

Q: Who was responsible for the change?

A: I don't know. As I understand, security tends to get better in the winter because there is simply not much movement anyway. And I think everyone had simply been too optimistic about the effect that all the counterinsurgency operations had had on the Taliban. You had a number of factors. You have a vibrant insurgency movement. You have localized displeasure with the central government either because of the slowpace of reconstruction or because of counter-narcotics activities. You have a government, which is doing a bit of a minuet with warlords, but there is the ongoing Demobilization, Disarmament, Rehabilitation (DDR), which certainly on a local level, if not a regional and national level, can cause instability. So all these things went into the pot. I think that a number of these chickens came home to roost in May. Then, of course, you had the killing of the Chemonics workers in Helmand, in Zabul, at the same time. So, the security situation was sort of bell shaped, the best in the winter and especially very bad in the spring.

Q: How was it when you left?

A: To be honest, it was much worse than I remembered in the fall. Even though the xxxx staff person was released unharmed, everyone was incredibly thankful and thrilled that that was the case, but that didn't seem to mean that the security situation itself had improved. You had Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) starting to appear in Kabul. As I was leaving, the people that I knew, my colleagues, were girding for a long, hot summer.

Q: Let's look at the political side. How did you see that evolving?

A: It's interesting. The political side is certainly tied to the security, or perceptions of the political situation are tied to perceptions of security. So, again, in the fall, when the presidential election occurred and went much more smoothly than had been anticipated, it seemed that you had for the first time a legitimate and hopefully as time went on stronger and stronger central government, a democratically elected government, then as the security situation began to deteriorate and as all the complications with the upcoming parliamentary election became more and more evident, there was less optimism. At least on a personal level, I became less optimistic about just how strong the government was and just how stable the political situation was overall.

Q: How did the economic situation look to you?

A: It's interesting. NGOs are not particularly popular in Afghanistan on a local level and especially in terms of the government view of NGOs. It seems that NGOs to a certain extent are made a scapegoat for the overall slow pace of reconstruction. This is just anecdotal. It's simply my opinion. But the economic situation, though it was improving – you certainly had economic growth – a) it wasn't reaching large swaths of the country and there had been a failure of managing expectations. You had people scattered throughout the country, rural communities, because the news had penetrated had understood that billions of dollars were going to be spent to reconstruct Afghanistan, that there was now a democratically elected government, and they would look around and say, "I haven't seen any change whatsoever in my day to day life or the only change is that security is now worse." b) Then in terms of the economic boom in Kabul, it's an open question how much of that was legitimate economic growth and how much of that was opium money. According to the World Bank, opium makes up 40-60% of Afghanistan's total economy. It was certainly the driving force, or a driving force, behind economic growth in the past few years.

Q: Was that countrywide or was that localized?

A: That's countrywide. Roughly speaking, opium accounted for just over 50% of Afghanistan's total GDP countrywide.

Q: Anything more on the general situation?

A: What I'd be happy to do, if you'd like to use these materials, we prepared two reports that might be of use to you. One is a police brief of the opium situation and counter-narcotics policy, which has a number of statistics culled from the UN, the World Bank, and the U.S. government. The second is a report we released in May based on the February figures about NGO security or insecurity, whatever the case may be.

Q: I'd be glad to have them.

A: I will try and e-mail both of those documents to you.

Q: Okay. Of course, the purpose of the interview is to focus on the PRTs, but we want to provide a context for it. What is your understanding of what the mission of the PRTs was? What were they supposed to be accomplishing?

A: My understanding is that PRTs were a way of trying to do reconstruction on the cheap to a certain extent. You didn't have a lot of boots on the ground overall. Larger areas of the country are dangerous to work in. The idea was to get joint military-civilian teams with the military playing a leading role in different provinces and then have them take a leading role in reconstruction and support for local government activities. Of course, it's incredibly difficult to generalize about the PRT role overall because not only do you have the distinction between Coalition and ISAF PRTs and within ISAF the difference between the British model, the German model, etc., but on the U.S. side, on the Coalition side, it seemed that it was almost impossible to talk about a common PRT model in terms of what they did. Different PRTs in different areas

seemed to do different things. I came in a year and a half or two years after the PRT idea had been mooted and they'd been sort of put in. But only during my tenure there was there an attempt on the part of ISAF and the Coalition to come up with either a common PRT Terms of Reference (TOR), which came out in January of 2005, or to come up with strategic guidance documents about what the PRT mission as a whole should look like going forward. So there seemed to be a bit of a post-facto attempt to model what PRTs should be doing, but a bit like herding cats in reality.

Q: You said that they were all very different. What would characterize the major differences among them?

A: I have to be honest. My interaction with all this was, I sat in on and then later co-chaired the NGO Civil-Military Working Group. That brought together interested NGOs, which wound up being relatively few, the UN, which originally set up the group U.N. Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), and then representatives from the Coalition and from ISAF to work out basic coordination issues and to try and create a neutral space for discussion about issues of common concern. Obviously, one of our concerns was PRTs, so this was something that was discussed. I also for a while, about four or five months, sat in on the PRT working group meetings, which were mostly between the military, the Afghan government, the UN, and representatives from troop contributing nations to set the agenda of the PRT Executive Steering Committee meetings, which were once a month. That was my perch to view and to a very limited extent sort of participate in the discussion about PRTs. I never visited a PRT. I had almost no experience with PRTs in the field, so it's a very Kabul-centric view that I have. When you ask what are my impressions of the difference between the different PRT models, I can tell you the major difference between the American model, the British model, and the German model, but that doesn't come from personal experience. That comes from things like a Save the Children report and a Danish report that was actually very good that came out in June.

Q: What were your impressions?

A: That the American model was most military led and was most focused on doing reconstruction activities, especially quick impact projects, very basic hearts and minds, get in there and get it done. The British model from our perspective was much more receptive to concerns that the military does not have training to do a lot of these quick impact projects well. So the British model had a stronger civilian component. At the same time it limited the reconstruction activities it was doing to the security sector as opposed to going out and building wells or clinics or schools willy-nilly. Then the German model was a bit between the two and was very, very focused on force protection. Whenever people spoke about PRT models, they usually discussed the British and the American model; and the German model no one seemed to be paying much attention to.

Q: You said you sat in on or chaired some of these meetings with the coordinating sessions. What were the principal issues that came up in these sessions?

A: We're talking about the NGO civil-military working groups, not the PRT working groups. Basically, the purpose of the NGO civil-military working group was threefold. First of all, it was

to work out basic coordination issues. One of the issues that we brought to the table was about security, which cut both ways – a) making sure that military forces knew where NGO compounds were to hopefully mitigate any collateral damage, and b) to try and set up a mechanism wherein if the Coalition or ISAF had threat information about a threat against a particular NGO, an imminent threat, there was a mechanism through which they could alert that NGO to the danger. So, we spent the entire time that I was there working on something which was just a working document called an NGO Safety Protocol, working through on the NGO side something called the Afghan NGO Security Office, which was an umbrella organization put together by NGOs to work on NGO security issues, and that also sat in on these meetings. So, this document served two purposes. One, it tried to create a mechanism through which NGOs could give their GPS coordinates to Afghanistan National Security Organization (ANSO), which would then pass them on to ISAF and the Coalition, and on the other side, try to set up or formalize points of communication between ISAF and the Coalition and ANSO, and also I guess define what kind of threat information was imminent and what could just be passed on to ANSO when it came up to the Coalition or ISAF that there was the potential of an attack. That was number one.

The second purpose of this working group was to try and clear away some of the misperceptions on both sides. There has been a somewhat rancorous debate in Afghanistan between NGOs and the military, a lot of which goes back to PRTs. Some of the disagreements on both sides are legitimate and are simply differences in opinion. But I think some of the friction came from a fundamental misunderstanding on the military side about what NGOs are and what NGOs do and on the NGO side about what the military's purpose or motive in setting up PRTs was. So, to address that, we tried to set up reciprocal briefings. We set up an ISAF-Coalition briefing for NGOs in January to explain why they had set up PRTs and what their conception of PRTs was. Then in response we set up a briefing for ISAF and Coalition staff at the colonel, lieutenant colonel, and major level in May to explain what NGOs are, what we do in Afghanistan, and the rationale behind our concerns about working too closely with the military or being seen to work too closely with the military.

The third purpose of this working group was to create a neutral space for discussion. What that meant in reality was to provide an avenue for advocacy but on a sort of narrower ground. In 2002, 2003, to a certain extent 2004, the NGO critique had simply been "PRTs are bad. We don't support the PRT models. Here's why." Within this working group, we didn't reach that level of discussion. It was more a discussion centered around the fact that, alright, PRTs are a reality on the ground. These specific aspects of PRT activities we have specific concerns with.

Q: Such as?

A: Such as the way the PRTs were doing medcap or medical exercises. We had reports from NGOs in the field that PRTs would sometimes assume control over an NGO clinic and see thousand or a thousand, 1200, 1400 patients in a day and during that time distribute antibiotics basically willy -nilly without adequate or any patient consultation. Those were the sorts of issues that we brought up and which the military was responsive to, which we were able to engage in discussion about.

Q: Were there others like that?

A: The other issue that came up... We started a discussion about civilian casualties in Coalition military engagements. To be honest, I don't know where that stands now. That was sort of kicking off as I was heading out.

Q: Did these help? Did these exchanges change anything?

A: Yes and yes. On the medical front, the military was very receptive. We met with the officers responsible for Coalition medical guidelines. Some new operational orders went out. At least there was an understanding that there was a problem that needed to be fixed. Overall, was this worthwhile? Yes, it was certainly worthwhile. All of these activities together did create this space where NGOs and the military could meet and discuss these issues and build up personal relationships, which at the end of the day made working together that much smoother. It went a way towards taking some of the animosity out of the debate. Given the massive scope of reconstruction activities, the massive amount that needs to be done, the military has a role to play, especially in providing security. NGOs have a role to play as the main implementing agencies, as the main service providers. And the more each side understands where the other is coming from, then the better for the overall reconstruction effort.

That said, NGOs – and again I'm generalizing wildly – do not support the PRT model. There are basically three criticisms of it: a) that the military does not do reconstruction activities well, they don't have the training for it... You can no more expect a soldier who has no experience in development work to do development work well than you can expect someone like myself, who has had no military training, to suddenly be able to go out on patrols simply because you put a gun in my hands. NGOs and USAID and DFID have decades of trying to figure out what's the best way to do development work, whether it's something that appears as simple as digging a well or building a school or whether it's more complicated. Though it's true that USAID and DFID play a larger role in PRTs, especially the military led quick impact projects, they're very concerned that they're either ineffective or counterproductive. That's the first criticism. b) The second criticism is that PRTs are not necessarily the most effective use of resources. The most prime need in Afghanistan is for security. You can see that on a countrywide level and you can see that from an NGO perspective as well. Over the last three years since 2003, I think it's between 46 and 50 NGO staff have been killed in Afghanistan. Let's say you have over 45 NGO staff killed in Afghanistan in the last two and a half years, which is out of proportion to almost every other conflict in the world with the sole exception perhaps of Iraq. So, the military has a role to play. You will not see very many, if any, NGOs saying, "The military has no role to play." But the role to play is to provide security. You can get into a debate about whether hearts and minds activities are effective or not, but we'd much rather see military forces focused on providing ambient security than digging wells. c) The third criticism of PRTs also gets back to this tremendous NGO fatality figure. That's that PRTs by having military personnel engage in humanitarian work contribute to the blurring of the lines whether in the minds of locals or insurgents or whomever about the difference between humanitarian and military actors, especially because as NGOs, our security is premised on the perception of independence, neutrality, and impartiality. We can work in areas like Afghanistan only as long as local actors perceive us to be independent, neutral, and impartial. The fear is that PRTs erode that

perception. This was a debate that's been going on. We have to do a better job of getting this point across, especially the third one. This is something that's deeply felt that's sort of anecdotally supported, but we have to do a better job coming up with the data to support this sort of blurring of the lines. We point to these horrendous NGO fatality figures and say, "PRTs contribute to this because of the blurring of the lines." But we don't provide that critical middle bridging data. Our analysis has to become more quantifiable. At the same time, I don't think that that makes it less true. I'm not saying that this isn't something I don't believe in, but I am saying that we have to do a better job presenting these arguments. That last statement is my own personal view.

Q: In the NGO community, are there groups that have an alternative approach to the situation?

A: What do you mean?

Q: Alternative to a PRT or how the PRTs are structured? What should be different?

A: It's not tweaking along the edges of the PRT, changing this, changing that, though if forced I think most NGOs would say the British model, where there is much more focus on the military side on security sector reform as opposed to other development and reconstruction activities, is preferable. But again, this is my impression - I make no claims to some omniscient view of NGO opinion on this - is that this model where you mix, where you have the military doing humanitarian and reconstruction activities and provincial planning, which also was becoming a larger and larger part of the PRT brief in the spring and the summer, having prepared to support local government, especially through provincial development councils and what have you, that the military should not necessarily be engaged in that and that these joint civilian-military units, which is what PRTs are, that that model was something that we're just very uncomfortable with. If USAID or DFID want to travel with armed guards, fine, but having a structure where it's explicitly mixing together humanitarian and development actors in the military... In its place, you would have military forces, whether it's through patrols or God knows what else, focused on providing security without so much the hearts and minds aspect of it and then let development actors with the lead from the Afghan government work out the reconstruction and development agenda.

Q: One of the thoughts about PRTs is that they were a means for extending the visibility and the role of the central government out into the provinces. Is that a fact or is that not working that way?

A: I don't know. Again, this is all my own personal view. I seriously have my doubts. I mean, you're an Afghan villager in Khowst or an Afghan villager in Zabul, Helmand, and you see a U.S. military installation, a PRT base camp. I'm not sure that that then translates into your mind, "Oh, this clearly represents an attempt by the Afghan government to exercise control." Furthermore, for that to be successful, the PRT role would have to be successful. Even assuming that people looking at a PRT said, "Oh, this is an attempt to increase the writ of the Afghan government," then the question becomes, are they providing security? And the question becomes, are they helping further reconstruction and development activities? In some places, probably yes. In some places, no. The fundamental problem is, you have a military team that's

relatively small that's supposed to cover an entire province. At the end of the day, we all scream about PRTs. PRTs are the focus of the debate. But sometimes I think it's a bit of a red herring. So what, you have one PRT in Helmand in a relatively poor area, a massive province. What's one team of 100-150 people going to accomplish overall? We load on the government and the military side so many expectations onto PRTs, especially when you see all this talk about PRTs supporting governance. But at the end of the day, you're talking about very, very few people to confront massive structural problems. So, that's a longwinded way of saying I'm dubious that in fact they're seen as or are effective in extending the writ of the government.

Q: Their ability or their contribution to strengthening the provincial government you feel is pretty limited, I guess.

A: I think that it's a mixed bag. Different PRTs have different impacts in different places without even getting into the fact that ISAF PRTs operate in a much different environment in a much different way than Coalition PRTs. But even beyond that, the problems are so massive at the end of the day even if you have 34 PRTs for all of Afghanistan's provinces, it's a finger in the dyke. The NGO critique is, it's not even a particularly good finger in the dyke.

Q: In terms of the NGO work, how did you see that evolving in the same provinces where the PRTs are operating?

A: The old comment is that trying to get NGOs to do anything is like herding cats. Some NGOs already work with PRTs, PRT projects. Some NGOs will meet with PRTs in a neutral location for basic coordination but will not work closely with them. And some NGOs take the 10 foot pole approach that they won't have anything to do with PRTs whatsoever. So you can't generalize about how the NGO community as a whole will interact with PRTs. The fact of the matter is that NGOs are finding it more and more difficult to work in different parts of the country, the south and the southeast especially, because you have a live and growing insurgency.

Q: Do they have any relationship with the Afghan provincial governments? Do they try to work with them at all?

A: NGOs?

Q: Yes.

A: Yes, NGOs have, especially at the Kabul level... This is something that's continually being worked out. But the vast majority of NGOs work with and through government ministries. If you do health projects, you coordinate with the Ministry of Health. If you do education projects, you coordinate with the Ministry of Education. I'm no expert. This is my own view. The amount of provincial coordination that goes on depends on, to a great extent, the capacity of the provincial government, which is also uneven. But over the last few years, NGOs... Under the Taliban and before, when you didn't have a government, NGOs could to a certain extent do as they wished. Now, everyone knows that that's no longer the case and that the Afghan government, because it is a legitimate government, is playing a leading role in reconstruction and is setting the overall agenda.

Q: I think you mentioned earlier that there was some friction or misunderstanding between the Afghan government and the NGOs.

A: Yes, and that's part of working out this new relationship. There are definitely growing pains.

Q: Does the Afghan government have a problem with NGOs feeling that they're too independent?

A: The Afghan government certainly has been critical of NGOs, to a certain extent with good reason. After the Taliban fell, the number of registered NGOs skyrocketed. A large number of NGOs, especially Afghan NGOs, in fact, are not NGOs but really private contractors masquerading as NGOs and there are problems with corruption. The legitimate NGO community has tried to address this, working with the government to come up with appropriate NGO legislation and then within the community itself launching an NGO code of conduct in May of 2005.

Q: Are the NGOs helping to build any local capacities at all?

A: Yes. There is a lot of work to help build government capacity. It's so fractured between different NGOs it's hard to get an overall view, but this is something that everyone understands is very important.

Q: We keep hearing about the coordination... As you say, things are fragmented and it's difficult to get everybody to be on the same track or the same concept. Is that right?

A: It depends what you mean by that.

Q: Everybody has their own agenda and they're carrying out their own programs in their own ways. Is it a problem to get a common approach among the different communities whether you're talking about the military community or the NGO community or the government?

A: Or the donor community as well. He who has the money sets the rules, right? So, if you want to talk about a common reconstruction agenda, well, you'd better get the World Bank, USAID, DFID, the Afghan government, the EU, the EC had better be pulling in the same direction. There are other people you can talk to who can give you much more informed views on whether that is or is not the case.

Q: Right. What is your impression?

A: It's a work in progress.

Q: On the question of democratic processes, do you see any movement in that area, the NGO relationship to it or the PRT relation to it?

A: There are NGOs or civil society organizations, which do civics work, democratization work, voter education. If you'd like, I'd be happy to put you in touch... This goes across the board. If there are people that you think it would be useful to speak to, whether people involved in ANSO... I do think you should speak to someone who works or worked for ANSO if you're interested in the PRT issue.

You do have PRTs, which do voter education and such. You do have NGOs, which do voter education. I know that the PRTs are supposed to support, broadly speaking, governance. But at the end of the day, I'm not sure how much impact PRTs have on democratization. Outside of NGOs, which specifically do, for instance, voter education work, I'm not sure how much impact other NGOs have.

Q: Do you have any sense of how the overall reconstruction work is going in the different parts of the country?

A: No, to be honest.

Q: Do you hear of any successes or any thing that just don't work at all?

A: In the south and southeast, it's going much slower. Government has trouble penetrating those areas and NGOs have problems because of safety launching programs or continuing programs, so it's going slower there. That's the catch 22. There's the vicious cycle that if you can't get in to improve the quality of people's lives, it makes it that much easier for the insurgency to continue on and on. More and more schools are being built, more and more teachers are being trained, clinics built. I don't think that you have nationwide enough economic – and this is not CARE; this is my own view – growth that your average man on the ground is beginning to see it and feel it in his everyday life. That's the main problem. You can point to statistics all you want, pro or con, but unless people in villages all over the country are saying, "My life is getting better and here's why," then the sand is running through the hourglass. I'm not sure we've reached the point yet where villagers across the country are saying, "My life is actually improving," especially when you add in all the complications around counter-narcotics. Opium is a, if not the, main driver in the economy. When you have completely understandable efforts to stamp out opium production without necessarily giving time for alternatives to have taken hold, then you're creating a lag, you're creating a dangerous gap between taking away people's livelihoods before you've actually replaced it with something else. So that's a dangerous situation as well.

Q: Are the NGOs associated with that, trying to move from poppies to other crops or things of that sort?

A: Yes and no. The key phrase here is "alternative livelihoods." Basically, the U.S. and the UK are the two main international players here. The U.S., the UK, and the Afghan government are taking a holistic, comprehensive approach to the problem of opium in Afghanistan. No one is just talking about eradication. All the main players agree that to deal with this problem you need alternative livelihoods, you need to provide alternatives to farmers, you need law enforcement, you need interdiction (Maybe that's a better word than law enforcement) to go after not necessarily poor farmers who are growing this and who are often trapped into growing this

because of land tenure issues or debt issues, but to go after the middle and upper tiers of the drug trade. Then you have eradication, you have public education, public information, demand reduction. So, the Afghan government has come up with a comprehensive plan to address these issues. The alternative livelihoods aspect of it is being funded mostly by the United States, and the British are paying a part, and the agencies, which are implementing... On the USAID side, it's called the Alternative Livelihood Program, the ALP, and it's hundreds of millions of dollars. Those aren't so much NGOs as For Profit development firms (Chemonics, DAI, etc.). NGOs are involved because we do rural livelihoods work in poppy producing areas, which is all part of the attempt to build up licit rural economies. That doesn't necessarily mean that the vast majority of NGOs are working under the umbrella of the Alternative Livelihoods Program, though some will, I imagine. But broadly speaking, you can say that as NGOs try and do rural development work in poppy producing places, that draws them into the overall ambit of alternative livelihoods.

Q: This may be something you don't have anything about, but there is an interest in whether anything is being done about training local police and setting up local court systems and things of that sort.

A: That's something that we are not involved in. This is anecdotal and just my opinion. In Kabul, there was a feeling that the judicial reform aspect of the overall reconstruction efforts was lagging far behind. The people that you should speak to are (the former head of ANSO), who only left ANSO recently (I can try and track down his contact information for you)... If you want to know more about NGOs doing governance work or voter education work, I can put you in touch with one or two organizations, which have done that. But on the PRT level, you want to speak to (the former ANSO official) and then also a woman at Afghan Coordinating Body for Afghanistan Relief (ACBAR). Then a third person, who might be interesting is the country director for Oxfam. She also has been involved in civil-military work. If you want to send me an e-mail that simply says, "Please send me the reports that you did on counter-narcotics and NGO security as well as contact information for (these three contacts)" I will get that to you. I'll do my best.

Q: I'll do it that way.

One of the things that people are referring to is that, at some point, the PRTs should fade out. Sometimes you get the impression maybe they should be fading out sooner than later. Do you have any sense of discussion of the continuation of the PRTs over time? I know they're adding new people and they're changing the structure and things of that sort.

A: My impression from sitting in on the PRT working groups is that the idea is that they would transition; they would become more civilian, less military over time. Of course, that is based on the assumption that the overall security situation improves, a somewhat questionable assumption at the moment. My impression was, the military looks at this and they certainly support PRTs, but I don't think that they'd like to have PRTs on the ground indefinitely. So, part of the reason for coming up with this strategic guidance document... Do you have that document?

Q: No, I don't.

A: Put that in the e-mail as well. I'd be happy to send you a copy of that. And do you have the joint TOR [Terms of Reference]?

Q: No.

A: I'll look through my documents. If I find anything else that's interesting, I'll send it. If you have insomnia and need a way to fall asleep at night, I'm happy to send you the minutes from the NGO Civil-Military Working Group.

Q: That would be very helpful.

A: They're a little patchy. We didn't always take minutes. But put those down as well and I'll send those.

Q: Okay. That would be very helpful to get a real document and insight.

Is there a major area that we haven't covered? I haven't asked you about your own organization and I don't know whether you want to talk about CARE's role or not. I'm happy to have that if you want to.

Q: What is CARE doing?

A: I think what's fine to say is, CARE has been involved in the civil-military discussion. CARE helped co-chair this NGO Civil-Military Working Group. Overall in Afghanistan, CARE has a long presence in Afghanistan. It started working there in the 1960s. It works in a swath of the country from the central highlands to the east and doing a range of reconstruction and development activities, everything from water and sanitation to rural livelihoods to education to micro-credit, micro-finance. It does a lot of work with widows in Kabul. Emergency response. So doing a wide range of initiatives.

Q: How do you feel those are going? Are they reasonably successful?

A: Here's to hoping. I think the CARE programs are strong and do good work.

Q: Does anything stand out among them that is significant to particular-

A: My role in CARE was on the advocacy side, so my knowledge of programs is not particularly deep. For that, I would definitely get in touch, I would just send an e-mail to CARE. He can tell you a great deal about the civil-military stuff and tell you much more about the program aspect of it.

Q: What does "advocacy" mean? What do you do?

A: Advocacy just in terms of what I did, you could basically break it down into two areas. First of all, there was advocacy on issues affecting Afghanistan generally. The reason we focused on

those was, our role can only be successful if... Let me take one step back. Everyone wants the overall situation in Afghanistan to improve. There are certain policies that we thought might be counter-productive to that. That's why we engaged in a great deal of advocacy on counter-narcotics issues. Everyone agrees that the drug problem is something that needs to be confronted, but our concern was that, if it was confronted in the wrong way, that it could be counter-productive and then that would have an impact on all of our work in Afghanistan. On another level, a lot of the advocacy was around trying to help CARE operate more effectively in Afghanistan. So you have the civil-military aspect of it. You have the work on NGO legislation and the NGO code of conduct. That stretches out to our relations with the government to a certain extent. And then there was a whole grab bag of other areas that we did work on — NGO security or insecurity – again, an issue about which we're very concerned; Capacity building, work with Afghan NGOs. It was a bit of a grab bag.

Q: You mentioned the Afghan NGOs. I gather there are quite a lot of them. You've been working with them and building their capacity. How are they evolving?

A: Some well, some not so well. Not to be glib; there are just so many of them and such a wide range. You have some that are doing excellent work and others that are basically a farce or a sham.

Q: Is there any longer term vision from the NGO perspective or the PRT perspective as to where you're headed over the next five years or so?

A: It depends what you mean. Is there an NGO perspective about where PRTs are headed or is there an NGO perspective about-

Q: About where they're headed in the future. There was some thought that these PRTs will phase out. Where does the NGO relate to that process?

A: We are not directly involved in setting PRT policy. Everyone would like them to phase out. Most people would like them to phase out. But right now, just trying to work with the reality that they're there and that we have to-

Q: Would they miss them if they were not there; if they got rid of the PRTs that would be a good thing?

A: Again, this is a massive generalization. NGOs want the military to provide security. Most people don't think that PRTs are particularly effective in doing that. Then you have the fact that most people don't think, especially the quick impact projects that are done by the military as opposed to AID or DFID, they don't do the other part of what they're supposed to do well. So, no, I don't think you'd see a lot of tears if PRTs disappeared. But that doesn't mean people want the military to disappear. They just want the military to do a better job of providing ambient security.

Q: Let me just ask you, what would you suggest are the two, three, or five major lessons, looking across the work there, that stand out in your mind?

A: I'm going to answer that in two ways. One is on a technical level, and then one is on a larger policy level.

First, on a technical level, the most important thing is, there needs to be continued contacts between NGOs and the military, a neutral space to discuss issues of common concern. That doesn't mean that the military dictates to NGOs and it doesn't mean that NGOs dictate to the military. But as long as that mechanism exists, then you can at least begin to work through some of the friction that arises. As I said, if reconstruction is going to work, then the military has a role to play, especially security-wise; NGOs have a role to play, and anything that can be done to make sure that everyone is pushing in the same direction is positive and necessary.

Second, on a technical level, in terms of what PRTs do and how they look, the more the PRTs look like the British model as opposed to the American model, the more the PRTs are civilian led and the more that their reconstruction and development activities focus on security sector reform, whether that's training police, whether that's supporting the Afghan National Army, or building jails or police stations or what have you, that's preferable to a PRT which goes out and does more traditional development work (digging wells, building schools). Sometimes it's construed as a turf battle – this is what NGOs do; we don't want anyone else pissing on our side of the lawn. But really, I think that that's a little unfair. Anyone who can do that well, God bless them — the more schools and clinics, the better. But again, building a school involves more than putting bricks together and creating a structure. Digging a well involves more than simply digging a hole in the ground. If you don't have community acceptance, community understanding, if you haven't thought about how this is going to be sustainable, then all that you're doing is creating a structure or digging a hole and you're not necessarily helping anyone in the area. So, again, the more that the military can focus on what it does better – and the British model seems to be in that direction – the more everyone can live with this and the more effective it will be overall.

Third, on the blurring of the lines issue – and this is something that was discussed ad infinitum, and I think everyone pretty much agrees, so this might be a bit moot– you can't have military folk doing reconstruction activities outside of uniform in Mufti or what have you, which was sometimes the case. Nor can you have the military in psyops campaigns saying to villagers, “You will get no reconstruction assistance from anyone unless you cooperate” because then - forget quantifiable statistics – you're endangering everybody. Then someone hears that and thinks the military then controls what all these other groups are doing, so they must all be in the same boat.

So, let's say on the technical level, on the overall more meta-policy level, just to reiterate, basically for the three reasons that I mentioned earlier (because the military part of PRTs does not do reconstruction work well, because we don't think it's an efficient use of resources in terms of providing security, and because we think it makes it much more dangerous for NGOs and other humanitarian staff to operate because of blurring the lines) we are not in support of the PRT model to begin with. We would hope that there would be a transition away from that. At the same time, PRTs are a reality and we all have to grapple with that reality. Hence, you have things like the NGO Civil-Military Working Group to try and smooth out some of the rougher

edges and try and get us around that very fundamental disagreement about whether PRTs should be there or not.

Q: And that covers it on the broad level?

A: And that's the broad level.

Q: Is there anything else that we missed?

A: No, I think this is pretty much all.

Q: This has been very, very worthwhile. I appreciate your taking the time.

End of interview