

Statement for the Record
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Hearing on Iraq Reconstruction: An Overview
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Let me start with a bit of background. I joined USIA in 1980 and retired as a Senior Foreign Service Officer in 2002--somewhat early as I had re-married and because it was an way to avoid dealing with President Bush's Iraq policy. My career included a good deal of work on democracy and governance as well as on the transition from a controlled to a free market economy.

I thought the war pure folly and still am not quite sure why it was pursued so vehemently, but came back from retirement to head a PRT because I had the requisite skills and we Americans have a moral obligation to try to do something about the mess we've created in Iraq. I lived and worked on FOB (Forward Operating Base) Warhorse from April 2006 until January 2007 when I resigned for health related reasons. I went "out of the wire", wearing armor and in HMMVs, regularly to meet Iraqi officials. If I were military I would be qualified for a Combat Action Award. Twice. My remarks are not theoretical.

I have decided to speak out because the men and women, civilian and military, deserve the best possible leadership we can give them. We cannot formulate coherent, effective policies without being honest about the problems we face and, for various reasons, people are reluctant to provide or accept honest information and opinion.

I have two major themes here: (1) The civilian surge will not succeed; (2) The problems in the PRTs are illustrative of problems that run throughout the planning and execution of this war.

Why won't the civilian surge succeed?

In spite of the magnificent and often quietly heroic work being done in Iraq by a lot of truly great people, the PRTs themselves aren't succeeding. The obstacles are too great.

--Nobody knows quite what the PRTs are supposed to do. The initial conception was that the PRTs would work with the Provincial Government and thus build democracy. Democracy, however, isn't restricted to government. It requires rule of law, a free and responsible press, and an informed citizenry. It needs to work in an economic context and, in this case, an economy that needs to complete the difficult transition from a state controlled semi-socialist context towards a free market economy. Over the months, this

initial concept has shifted towards a more encompassing definition of the work, but we were slowed down by it in the beginning.

--The PRTs were/are not given necessary resources. The PRTs had no/no operating budget until about October 2006 (our motto was, "If it's not nailed down, it's ours") and still have no flexible funds for programs. The initial concept was that we'd simply teach the government how to operate, and use other people's money for projects as needed. "Other people", however, tend not to want to relinquish control of their money and in any case most of the funds were and are oriented toward brick and mortar projects. The Iraqis don't need brick and mortar money--the GOI is sitting on billions of unspent dollars as it is. They need knowledge, access to information, and ideas to offset twenty years of being cut off from the rest of the world. We aren't equipped to supply that need.

--Staffing of the PRTs was and is haphazard and often misguided. We are to "coach, mentor and teach" democracy but few PRT members have any experience in this area. RTI is supposed to fill the gap but my RTI supplied senior Governance and Democracy Adviser was a Pakistani who has, as far as I know, never lived or worked in a Western democracy. My Provincial Program Manager was a former Border Patrol Commander. Smart, hardworking guy. No experience or knowledge relevant to the job he is supposed to do. The Civil Affairs military--National Guardsmen--came with a haphazard mix of skills. Some fit, some didn't.

--We don't have enough time to do the work. Democracy doesn't happen in a day or a year or even two years. Americans can't learn the territory and make wise decisions about the ways in which to advise a Provincial Government or spend money in two weeks or a month, especially when they have no prior Middle Eastern experience and no Arabic language skills, as is the case with most PRT members. Staying more than a year, given the difficult circumstances, is probably too long. As a result of this time warp, we are caught up in a frenzy of "get it done now" and that hasn't served us well.

--We don't have enough time to understand the Iraqis before being expected to make decisions that involve them. Iraqis are not (surprise) Americans and don't necessarily see things the way we do. They operate in a history rich and nuance laden environment. We Americans tend not to pay much attention to history (to our detriment) and are not comfortable with nuance. These cultural differences are tremendously important and we, by and large, have ignored them.

--We inherited a lot of history, some of it good, some bad, all of it relevant and most of it unknown to us until we fell over it. The CPA Provincial Governance people appear to have done a good job--at least in Diyala. Some of the Baghdad-imposed, military elaborated procedures forced on the Diyala Government were administrative disasters. This destroyed much of our credibility and it took time, again precious time, to undo past mistakes. My successor will probably feel he has to undo my mistakes, resulting in yet another change of policy. La plus ca change...

--The military runs the show in many provinces (and probably Iraq) and this can cause problems. As one of the PRTs on a FOB we were totally dependent on the military for our life support, safety, and daily working environment. They also had the most accessible money. When the Brigade was good, this worked well--our PRT was considered a model in civil military relations as long as Colonel Brian Jones was in charge. We drew team members from the Brigade (their legal people, PAO, and Brigade Surgeon) as well as from a confusing array of USG agencies and private contractors and if you had asked me then to choose between State and the military I would have taken the military in a snap. After rotation, the new Brigade did not really support the PRT and its mission but, rather, thought it knew our job better than we did and wanted to control our work. Things fell apart. The Salah ad Din PRT had the opposite experience--it started with a nightmare military but a new Brigade turned things around. All the PRTs embedded with the military are subject to the vicissitudes of military fortune, for good or ill, and it is hard, again, to maintain any continuity of policy.

--The Provincial Governments can't resolve many of their problems because the origins and solutions to them lie in Baghdad. For instance, CPA Regulations gave the Provincial Councils powers to make laws and raise revenue but these regulations are no longer accepted by practically everyone except the American Embassy. The new Constitution enumerates shared powers, but does not contain operational detail. This leaves the Provincial Councils in a legal limbo and, not incidentally, makes it very difficult to "coach, mentor and teach". Many other problems are beyond our ability or the Province's ability to resolve unless and until something is done in Baghdad. And the Government in Baghdad is dysfunctional.

--Finally, and most important, as the level of violence grows--and it has, as I'm sure you know, grown throughout the country--it is less and less possible to conduct non-kinetic operations. Investment isn't coming in, jobs aren't available, contractors are kidnapped and/or killed so projects don't go forward, the government grinds to a halt as people decide they'd rather live than show up for work.

The end result is a situation where the existing PRTs do not actually accomplish very much. There are some solid achievements--in Diyala it is primarily in the Rule of Law where we have an outstanding individual from the Department of Justice working to improve the ways in which the court system deals with prisoners; our USACE engineers and a Bilingual Bicultural Adviser managed to get four electrical substations, built with US funds but without proper consultation with the Ministry's representative in the Province, integrated into the electrical grid. Most of what we have begun, however, has fallen victim to American bureaucracy and Iraqi violence.

Now, into this context, the Administration is proposing to inject multiple mini PRTs. It is not clear what they will do, nor is the administrative relationship to existing PRTs fully outlined. I would worry about the resulting bureaucratic nightmare, but since they are unlikely to find the personnel (specialist positions already on PRTs remain vacant throughout Iraq as I write) in the first place and it takes months to put people in position in the country in the second, I'm not losing any sleep over these questions.

What I am losing sleep over is that none of the objections or recommendations coming from the field about this "civilian surge" appears to have reached Washington or to have been taken into consideration. Once again we are proceeding to lay people's lives on a line drawn with faulty information. Once again the fantasies of the "policy makers" drive decisions without much link to the realities on the ground. Once again dissent carries too many risks for those who need their jobs, even when the national interest is at stake.

The people still on PRT Diyala risk their lives almost every day to do their work. We owe them our very best. Nothing less is acceptable.