

USIP - ADST
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #18

Executive Summary

The interviewee was in Afghanistan for 6 months from August 2004 to February 2005. He was located in Mazar, Balkh Province as a USDA agriculture advisor. He worked closely with the provincial Ministries of Agriculture in five northern provinces.

Local conditions

- Security: All of Afghanistan is dangerous, but the north is much less so than the rest of the country. “I never once felt threatened or endangered whether I was in Mazar itself or elsewhere.”
- Politically: “It is a weird animal. You have former military commanders (Afghan) trying to be political animals now but still using the strong arm of the gun to enforce what they want to do.”
- Economically: “it was improving. They were investing in new buildings, new businesses, buying goods and reselling. Money was starting to flow in the communities again. Activity was going on.”
- Agriculture is “the backbone of their economy. From a production standpoint, they produce wonderful produce. There is some export, but not a great deal. Quite a lot of their produce rots and goes to waste because they just don’t have the infrastructure in place to take it from field, put it into cold storage, processing plants, and then export or moved it to a different market in the country.”

Mission of the PRT

Up north in the five provinces where they (the British) were, there were two PRTs (major PRTs). In the other three provinces, there were safe houses that the mobile observation teams (MOTs) would live in while they were in the provinces going out on different patrols. So there was a military presence in all five provinces, but the two major were Mazar and Meymaneh.

- The mission of the PRT was to extend the reach of the Afghan government and to work towards security sector reform and reintegration of militia back into society.
- The British have a very different way of doing things than the American army. They were always giving a presence of deescalating the situation. They were always going up to people and finding the village elders, sitting down to tea and bread, and conversation. Everything was upbeat.

Assignment

- Interviewee had difficulty getting the PRT commander to understand how he could help improve security through work in agriculture, even though the commander had agreed to his coming. (Note: He had no funds with which to work, except, as he was able to obtain funds from other donors (e.g. DFID). However, he was successful in explaining and demonstrating how improved agricultural production would provide employment for demobilized militia and keep them from returning to militia activity.

- He was successful in helping the provincial Ministries of Agriculture plan and set priorities, providing motorcycles so that extension workers could visit outlying farmers, facilitate the introduction of improve cotton seed varieties, arrange for linkages with Uzbekistan agricultural technicians to assist in northern Afghanistan (although the U.S. Embassy was not cooperative on this), helping FAO get a grant to provide pesticides and herbicides.
- In summary, he served as a facilitator, coordinator linking needs and resources.

PRT staffing and NGOs

- Staffing: "From the British side, a foreign affairs officer and a DFID (UK Department for International Development) officer; from the U.S. a U.S. State Department representative and myself. "The deputy commander was from the Finnish army. We had a Norwegian police liaison, a French army liaison officer, USAID was there, and the Romanian army also sent a liaison to work with the Norwegian police liaison. The Norwegian was civilian. USAID, myself, State Department officer, and the two British were civilian. The rest were military. There were 10 nationalities represented at that PRT."
- NGOs: there were NGOs from many countries with some tension with the military. NGO coordination was provided by the UN representative and the PRT commander provide periodic security briefings.

Other activities – observing the national election, police training

- He served as an unofficial election observer accompanying the State Department Officer. (USDA objected to his working as an observer.) "We went out to a bunch of different polling stations. Those people were so excited about what they were doing, in orderly long queues, wanting to do things. It was a wonderful atmosphere and a wonderful process and just so gratifying to see these people... Some had walked 15-20 miles to be there, to participate in this event and to cast their vote. The Afghan workers in all these polling stations, they were ecstatic about their job and the turnout and what was happening. They kept thanking us and thanking us and thanking us for the help and what we were doing for them and allowing them to do."
- Police training, police station and courthouse construction were being provided by DFID. They provided supplies and equipment, although large quantities were stored in Kabul and not distributed.

Future of the PRT and an assessment

- The British are moving to Kandahar; the Swedes will be taking their place in Mazar.
- PRT provides the only way he could be involved; he dos not agree with the NGOs: "I think they are very foolish and foolhardy in their attitudes, the NGOs."(re wanting to be disassociated from the PRT military.)
- Concerned about the flow of assistance: "We're using money in Afghanistan and Iraq to try to appease people. ...They see a cash cow when it comes and they're going to milk it dry.... There is no cohesion to what's going on." "You can have five layers of people for organizations, businesses, before you ever get to the person who puts it on the ground — each taking their 20 % for overhead."

Lessons

- From my perspective, you don't have to be a specialist in any particular thing to work there. You need to have skills in communication and be able to partner and bring sources together to work on your problems that you've identified and let other people implement it.
- That is how my role (facilitator and coordinator) evolved and that's really how I see the rest of everyone else working. We go over there with no money. We have to find money from other people to make projects work. But it really all has to go through the Ministry of Agriculture.
- No funds were available through USDA.
- Six months is too short a time for an assignment.
- There is some uniformity in approach among the PRTs under the U.S. military, but not under NATO: "once NATO continues to expand, each country will do it differently, how they want it done."

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

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Interviewed by: W. Haven North
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Q: When were you in Afghanistan?

A: I left August 23, 2004, and I arrived back in the States 21 February of '05.

Q: About six months then.

A: Yes, six months.

Q: And where were you located?

A: Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province.

Q: What was your position there?

A: I originally was going up there thinking I was going to work with farmers and producers and locals in helping them address some of their needs and achieve their goals. I went there, as all USDA employees do, without any money. The U.S. Army was there; Major xxx had CERP (Commander's Economic Reconstruction Program) funds that could be used. I got to Mazar the second of September and by the end of the month, (he) was gone and all the money was out of there. All of a sudden, the money I thought I might have had to work with was not available, so I had to change the strategy of what I was doing. So I started working very closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and somewhat with the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources.

Q: Let's come back to that in a minute. How would you describe the situation in the area where you were in terms of its political, economic, and security issues?

A: All of Afghanistan is dangerous, but the north is much less so than the rest of the country. I never once felt threatened or endangered whether I was in Mazar itself or elsewhere; we were able as civilians to go into Mazar and not have an escort, never felt in danger there... Any time we left Mazar, we had to be a two vehicle convoy with two long guns at least, one in each vehicle. Again, never felt threatened once when I was there.

Politically, it is a weird animal. You have former military commanders (Afghan) trying to be political animals now but still using the strong arm of the gun to enforce what they want to do, be

it General Dostam over in Jowzjan Province to deal with, or, who we had to deal with, General Atta in Balkh province. Atta had been appointed governor. I guess there was a former governor there and he didn't like him, so he booted him out and Karzai said, "Okay, if you booted him out, now you're the governor."

Q: These are all Afghans you're talking about.

A: Yes.

Q: What about the economic situation?

A: It was improving. What amazed me both when I first flew into Kabul and then when I was in Mazar was the amount of building going on and the amount of people out on the street selling things, which to me indicated that the economy was growing. People were taking the money out from underneath their mattresses. They were investing in new buildings, new businesses, buying goods and reselling. Money was starting to flow in the communities again. Activity was going on.

Q: And the agriculture area?

A: Agriculture is the backbone of their economy. From a production standpoint, they produce wonderful produce. I'm not necessarily a fan of melons and nuts, especially here in the States. I think they have a bland flavor. Over there, I've never tasted such wonderful fruit and nuts in my life. They have great products. They have a huge disconnect in getting it from the field to a market. Right now, mostly they have just local markets that they deal with. There is some export, but not a great deal. So, quite a lot of their produce rots and goes to waste because they just don't have the infrastructure in place to take it from field, put it into cold storage, processing plants, and then export or moved it to a different market in the country.

Q: We'll come back to that again. How would you describe the mission of the reconstruction team, the whole unit? What were they trying to accomplish?

A: In the north, I was with the British army. They had a PRT in Mazar. Up north in the five provinces that they were dealing with, there were two PRTs, major PRTs. In the other three provinces, there were safe houses that the mobile observation teams (MOTs) would live in while they were in the provinces going out on different patrols. So there was a military presence in all five provinces, but the two major were Mazar and Meymaneh.

The British have a very different way of doing things than the American army. The American army knows how to win a war and, in my opinion, they have not a clue how to win the peace. The British army has had 30 years experience of trying to win the peace in Northern Ireland, and they've gained a lot of insights of how to deal with these kinds of situations.

Q: How would you describe what they did that was different?

A: The major thing was on every one of their patrols, we never went out with body armor on, with Kevlar helmets on, the guns weren't cocked and loaded, ready for action. They didn't go into an area trying to escalate the situation; they wore their berets, their soft webbing; they did have their arms with them; they were never at the ready as if they were expecting something to jump out at them. So they were always giving a presence of deescalating the situation. Yes, we're here with guns, but we're not pointing them at you. They were always going up to people and finding the village elders, sitting down to tea and bread, and conversation. Everything was upbeat. Even when the situation was talking about poppy or some thugs in the area, it was always, "Okay, who are they? Where are they? We can go into that area and see what's going on." They were always trying to help the situation and deescalate problems. Whenever I was with the U.S. army, everything was the opposite. They were escalating the situation at all times. Just their presence with the Kevlar and the body armor and the guns with their fingers covering the trigger put everybody in a different situation.

Q: When they went out to the communities, what kind of problems were they trying to solve?

A: As it was explained to me the first afternoon when I got to Mez, the mission of the PRT was to extend the reach of the Afghan government and to work towards security sector reform and reintegration of militia back into society. That was their aim. That was what they were going for. That's why they were there. The British army does not have a Civilian Affairs program like the U.S. army does. They did not bring money to the table as the U.S. Army does. They did have their equivalent to USAID, but they were strictly there to build new courthouses, new police barracks and stations, things to do with judicial reform, police reform, security sector reform: that's how they defined it. To me, it was very narrow. I worked for six months to get them to think outside that box that security sector reform was not just police; it was not just judicial. If we didn't create jobs in the agricultural sector and find ways of assisting farmers to get their families sustaining income, then no matter how many police stations and courthouses you build, you will not have security sector reform and you will not be bringing the peace.

Q: Right. Let's come back to that. But they weren't doing school reconstruction or water supply development; all those kinds of things?

A: No, none of that. Their feeling was, that's what NGOs were there for and not the military; the military should not be involved with that.

Q: And that work was not sponsored by the PRT then, even the NGO work?

A: No. There was always a tension between NGOs and the military. It wasn't 100%; but many of the NGOs wanted to stay as far away from the military as possible. There were a number that had no problem coming into the PRT compound or going out with them to a project. They didn't feel threatened by the military in that respect. There were other NGOs there that I had gone to visit to introduce myself that were really hopeful for my expertise, but they would not allow me to be with them with the military escort that I was required to have.

Q: Who were the NGOs working there? Can you name any of them?

A: I have a lot of initials for you.

Q: Okay. That's good enough.

A: You had JDA, (Japan), GAA (German), FAO(UN), IACD.

Q: Were these all foreign?

A: No, some of them are U.S.

Q: And some are British?

A: Well, there was German Agro Action. There was a Korean. There was an American. There was Australian. There were all types of nationalities represented there by the NGOs.

Q: How did they coordinate their work? Was the PRT involved in that, at all?

A: No, not at all. The only thing the PRT was involved with was, Monday mornings; they would go to one of the UN compounds and provide a security briefing to the NGOs.

Q: So the UN was a coordinating point for the NGOs.

A: Right. And the commander of the PRT had weekly meetings with the UN to coordinate their activities.

Q: What were some of the projects that these NGOs were doing?

A: German Agro Action, GAA, was doing a lot of work in Sar-e Pol province, southern Sar-e Pol, with irrigation. They were also a subcontractor of IOM (International Organization for Migration) for the reintegration package of the militia from the DDR province. JDA (Japan) and IACD were doing experiments with soybeans to have that crop grown in Afghanistan. It was the first time it had been tested. JDA was doing it to have an export market into Uzbekistan to some of the projects that they were working on there. IACD was doing it so that they could build a processing plant and then take the flour that you could make from the soybean and put it back into a cake or a cookie for the school kids to have a more nutritious snack. IACD also taught English classes. There were NGOS there that were dealing with schools and clinics. BRAC was a Bangladeshi organization and they dealt with schools and clinics. Good Samaritan was an American organization dealing with clinics.

Q: There was a wide array of activities.

A: Absolutely.

Q: And it was covering much of the province?

A: Most of it was in Balkh province. GAA was also in Sar-e Pol. There wasn't a lot of NGO activity in Sar-e Pol province or Jowzjan. There was more activity than I realized in Samangan province. I didn't find that out until late in my tenure. There were probably six different NGOs working agriculture in that province.

Q: Back again to the PRT, what was the staffing? It was British military, but was there other staff?

A: Military or civilian.

Q: What were the civilian staff members?

A: From the British side, they had a foreign affairs officer there and a DFID (UK Department for International Development) officer, their equivalent of USAID. Then we had a U.S. State Department representative there. The deputy commander was from the Finnish army. Myself. We had a Norwegian police liaison, a French army liaison officer, USAID was there, and the Romanian army also sent a liaison to work with the Norwegian police liaison. The Norwegian was civilian. USAID, DOS, the two British, and myself were civilian. The rest were military.

Q: An international group.

A: There were 10 nationalities represented at that PRT. We had Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, Finns, French, British; for a while Spain was there and they'll be coming back (They had a battalion there during the elections), Romanian, Lithuanian, German, besides the U.S.

Q: That's quite a group to coordinate with. What were you doing? What was your task and responsibility?

A: My first task was to convince the commander that I was actually needed at the PRT. I got there on a Thursday early afternoon. Late in the afternoon I was given a briefing by the commander of what the mission of the PRT was. His basic comment at the end was: "And we don't see where USDA fits into this mission." Both the commander and DFID rep. saw absolutely no reason why I should be there. There was nothing personal in this. They didn't see where USDA could add to their mission. I was fortunate enough that for the next 10 days, they had other business down in Kabul, so they were gone

Q: Had they asked for someone?

A: Oh, yes, that's why I was there. They were at some meeting and requested USDA to be up there. I sat down with the DFID rep before he left and he offered me his car and interpreter and driver and said, "Go out." So I went out and started interviewing NGOs, trying to find out what they were doing, where I could fit in. Before they came back, I had put together a little PowerPoint presentation as they had given me their computer and showed them how I thought what USDA and I could do that would improve security sector reform. I could see the light bulb go on in the commander's eyes. DFID rep didn't quite agree, though he was less stringent and forceful about his disagreement after the presentation. So, I was able to stay.

Q: What was the thrust of your presentation?

A: A little bit of what I told you before. How can you have security sector reform? If you're demobilizing militia, disarming them, and then reintegrating the DDR (Demobilization, Disarmament, Reintegration) militia, if you cannot be successful in the reintegration - and over 40% of all DDR militia were going into agriculture and over 80% of the country deals with agriculture - if you cannot get that sector to be a viable entity and produce family sustaining jobs, how are you going to have security sector reform? Every one of these people is going to have to go find another job and a lot of it's going to be back with the rifle. So you need to work that sector, not just police, not just judicial, to be able to keep most of the people on the land doing what they're supposed to be doing - and that's farming. That's when the light went on with the colonel.

Q: Surprising.

A: Yes. Keep these people employed and keep them out of the militia and security's going to be a lot better.

Q: What kind of programs were you proposing?

A: I really didn't know. So, what I started to do was to interview all five provincial Ministers of Agriculture and try to find out from them what their plans were. Come to find out, none of them had a plan. None of them could make a priority or a decision. I would go in and go through my little spiel, who I was, why I was there. I was here to be able to help them. What can I do for you? They'd give you a list as long as their arm of things that they wanted. I'd say, "What is it that you want me to work on?" They'd say, "You choose." I'd say, "No, this isn't my list or my country. What is it that you really want to accomplish?" They couldn't get it. They had no real clue of what I was asking. So, with each one of them - some took longer, some took a shorter period of time - went through a process of "Identify your top five activities that you feel are necessary for agriculture to progress in your province." I'd sit there for a long time while the minister and his sub-ministers would talk and argue and discuss. Every once in a while, the interpreter would tell me a little bit of what was going on. It could take more than one meeting. But every one of them finally came up with a list of at least their top five. Then for each one of them, I did my best to get them to identify their top priority. I was successful with three and I began, but was not able to be successful in completing it while I was there, with the other two.

Q: What were their five top priorities? What was the common characteristic of them?

A: Three were all the same. I won't give them in any order. They all wanted new seeds. They all wanted pesticides and herbicides. And they all wanted tractors. If you think about it, for 25 years from the Soviets, especially in the 10 years of the Soviets occupation, each minister was given seeds, fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and tractors for the cooperatives that they had set up for distribution. So they were all still thinking in the Soviet style. Well, you're here, the big government. You give us the stuff and then we deal with it on a local level. They didn't have the concept of free enterprise of, "Well, you have to figure out how people are going to get this stuff.

People aren't just going to give it to you any more." Two of them said that the only way their extension agents out in the districts could get around was if they hired taxis, and they had to pay for that out of their own money. So they were looking for transportation. They gave me a list of how many Russian jeeps and how many motorcycles they wanted to be able to get around the provinces. Two of them had a priority of restarting their artificial insemination program. Those are the two I could start but there was no way I could finish. In one province, Farah, 80-100% of their wheat crop in the prior two years had been destroyed by a sap sucking bug. Their number one priority was to fight that infestation. So, in Farah province and working with FAO, I was able to help FAO procure a grant to fight that bug this year. They got it early enough that they could mobilize and get things prepared and they should be fighting that bug – it should have started last month since this is June 1st. They should have started fighting it May 1st. So, I was successful there.

Q: And the pesticides came from where?

A: FAO was dealing with that. They were just hopeful to get the grant and I assisted them in making the presentation and working with other NGOs and funding organizations so that they got the grant. After that, I was out of it. I haven't e-mailed Andrew yet to find out what's happening.

The two other provinces, Jowzjan and Balkh, each said that their number one priority was transportation. So, all the time I'm at the PRT, I'm working on a DFID person. We got along tremendously. He was young. He was in his mid-20s. The first time he had been working overseas. I was trying to get him to broaden his aspect of his job. I was about three months into it and went up to him and sat down and talked to him about what I was doing. I said, "You know, I could really use \$50,000 to get some of this work done." He said, "Okay." He understood what I was trying to do, so I had \$50,000. I didn't use all of it while I was there, but for two provinces, I was able to use the money and buy motorcycles, one for each of their districts and then two for the main office. We didn't do jeeps for two reasons: one, you could buy a motorcycle for \$200 and you had to buy a jeep for \$8,000. If you bought a jeep, that became the person property of the Minister of Agriculture and it almost became their personal vehicle.

Q: Yes. It sounds familiar.

A: So, we wanted to stay away from that. The motorcycles were less expensive to buy, less expensive to run, and less expensive to maintain. I put together a contract between the ministry and the PRT saying, "Okay, this is what we're going to do and these are the things you're going to do." It was, "You're going to maintain them. You're going to buy the gas for them. You're going to register them. You're not going to come to the PRT and say you need money for gas or they're all broke and you need us to fix them. These are your responsibilities. We're just getting you this transportation." They were just so thrilled.

Q: I'm sure. How did they use them?

A: I was not there for the presentation at Jowzjan, but I was there and got on Balkh TV many times while I was there for the presentation at the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Minister had brought in all his extension agents from the 14 districts. We had a little signing ceremony in his office. We shook hands, touched cheeks. Then we went out into the courtyard; and they had all the motorcycles lined up and ready to go. He presented me with a bunch of keys and asked me to personally present them to the first Samangan. A couple of them gave little speeches to these extension agents of the things now that they would be able to do. It was a wonderful little ceremony. They were just so thrilled. Really, it cost less than \$8,000 to do this for them. I was given a synopsis of the event in Jowzjan province. That minister and I got along tremendously. I guess he just couldn't say enough good things about me.

Q: That's great. You were a very important person to him.

A: So I was able to fully accomplish three items and to start two in each one of the provinces.

Q: And do you have any indication that these extension workers are now getting out and around?

A: Oh, yes. One of the items that each minister had to do was submit a monthly report of their activities that were now occurring because of the motorcycles. We wanted that for three months.

Q: What kind of activities were they doing?

A: They were out to many of the villages that they weren't able to get to because it was just too far away; or expense-wise, they couldn't afford the dollar a ride for the taxicab and were now talking to a bunch poor farmers. Governor Atta was proclaiming that Balkh province would be the first poppy free province in Afghanistan; I have pictures to prove it is not true. But that was his spiel. They were out trying to talk to farmers about not growing poppies, growing alternative crops, some pest control activities. They were out doing things.

Q: Were they able to follow up with fertilizer and pesticides and all the other requirements?

A: No, I told them, "I'm not going to work with that because farmers have to figure out how to do that. And the Central Government needs to figure out how they're going to either produce the fertilizer and pesticides in the country or how to import those products — higher quality products — into the country." That was beyond what I could deal with.

One thing as far as seeds were concerned, the number one crop that the Minister of Agriculture in Balkh province described was cotton; it would be a crop that could really help get beyond poppy. It used to be a major crop in the province. There was a mill still there, a gin and press that were workable. But they were down 90% in production. They had been producing like 45,000 metric tons a year of cotton lint and they were down to 5,000. So we wanted to really improve the varieties of cotton. So, there were two things that I initiated. One was that with all my connections back in the States, I finally found a person in our plant materials center in California working with cotton and he was able to get 15 different varieties donated. After I left, because we couldn't get it worked out — he had been there before — he actually flew with the

cotton seed to Afghanistan and presented it to the Ministry of Agriculture and went out with the extension and crop people and actually had the seed planted in the ground.

Q: Did you have a research station?

A: Yes, they have a little research station there. I told them before he left that as soon as he got there, the minister would ask for money, saying that they didn't have any money to be able to do this, and I had told the minister that, yes, he did, because he already had people out there, he had the Afghan Conservation Corps out there working, which was not money out of his pocket, and he did have the resources, so I refused to try to find him any money. Again, they have to be able to stand on their own two feet. They have to go out there and figure out how to get things done. As soon as xxx got there, the first thing they hit him up for was money; he went to a couple NGOs and found some money for them and so they were happy. Something I told them him I wouldn't do. So the seed's in the ground. They also brought some grass seed. I don't know if it was grass for pasture or grass for range. One would be irrigated and one would be non-irrigated. He also distributed that for their experiments.

Q: So they were able to multiply this cottonseed and other seed and distribute them?

A: Some of the varieties of cotton are not for redistribution because they still have a patent on them. Others are public domain and they can reproduce a seed and propagate it as they wish. The reason for the trial is to determine which varieties of cotton are acclimated to that growing condition and would produce a good product at a reasonable return and then start to look at those varieties and import them to rejuvenate the cotton industry up in the north.

Q: How did you find the technical capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture and their extension people?

A: They're well educated. A lot of them had master's degrees from universities from other former soviet republics. Well educated; they just were behind the times because continuing education was not thought well of for the last 25 years. But they had done their best to stay up. They knew their problems. They knew their crops. I was more behind them than they were behind me as far as crops and how to grow them in the region. Obviously, they had been there all their lives and knew what they were doing. Melons and cotton and vegetables really aren't the crops that I've dealt with here in the States, so I had to do a lot of educating of myself.

Q: So you had a good group to work with. They had the capacity. They just didn't have the resources.

A: They didn't have the resources. They had the capacity. They had the desire. They were fervent agriculturalists. They wanted to get things done and to improve their lives and the lives of the farmers that they were dealing with.

Q: Was the Ministry of Agriculture providing any support?

A: No, very little. There is so much corruption in Kabul that most of the money that goes into the government doesn't come out the other end.

Q: So there wasn't really an extension of the central government out to the local ministries with any effect.

A: Well, the ministers were the extension of the republic government, but they weren't supported well by Kabul. Jowzjan province, the minister there told me that... Early in my tenure, he described a meeting he had had in Kabul with the lead minister. They took a map out and said, "Here's your province." They put a big X through it and said, "Jowzjan gets nothing." That's wonderful. "I'm your employee. I'm here to try to do the work that you're wanting me to do and now you're telling me I get nothing?"

Q: Why was that? Was it a political factor?

A: Just factional stuff. General Dostam's power base was Jowzjan province. Somebody probably didn't like General Dostam. So that was the kind of activity that we had to deal with.

The motorcycles, they had to go back to the central government, to the Minister of Agriculture, and say, "We have all this nice equipment now. You need to increase our budget so that we can maintain these, so we can add gas to them." They weren't sure they were going to be able to get it, but they were going to try to scrape through somehow.

Q: Were there other activities that you were engaged in?

A: I'd go around with the mobile observation teams and talk to NGOs and talk to village elders just to get a feel for what was going on out in the field. I didn't want to base all my knowledge just on what the local Ministries of Agriculture were telling me. I'd get a feel for the land, for the agriculture itself, walk the fields, talk to the producers, the farmers, and find out what their problems were. Was the ministry actually echoing to me what was out happening in the field?

Q: What did you understand about what you were learning?

A: They were pretty accurate. They had a good pulse of what was going on out there.

Q: What were the main concerns of the farmers?

A: They all wanted better seeds. For 25 years, they had been using the same variety, so they were shot. They were actually regressing on some of the varieties, especially cotton. It used to be nice long staple cotton. Now it was less than exportable quality. If you cross your first cousin with your first cousin with your first cousin with your first cousin, after a while, you get some strange things. Even with seeds, you start regressing with the quality that you started with. That's what was happening. With the more open borders, there were many new pests that were coming in. Just that year, there was a fruit fly that had been imported unintentionally from Iran that was starting to destroy a lot of the melon crops that were being grown and they had no idea what was happening. I talked with FAO and they knew what was happening. From a cultural

standpoint, there couldn't be enough pesticides to get rid of it. So, spraying wasn't an option. But there were cultural practices that could happen on the farm that would lessen the effect of the fly such as when you find your fruit infected, bury it at least a foot in the ground. That way, the fly can't get out and won't multiply. The fly bores into the fruit, lays its eggs, the grubs eat the inside, they come out of the fruit, and then they bury themselves just below the surface of the ground in the soil below the fruit to pupate, and then they come out as a fly. Well, if you bury it deep enough, they're not going to be able to survive extracting themselves out of the soil.

So those were the types of activities and information I was trying to pass on to the producers. I was also teaching the soldiers. They had not a clue what agriculture was about. So, I would sit and talk with the captains or lieutenants and explain what I was seeing and why I was seeing it and why I was saying the things I was doing. They were just soaking it in like sponges. They said, "We have to deal with this every day and I've never seen what you're telling me even though it's been here." So, I gave them a whole new perspective of what they were looking at. Again, that whole thing about security sector reform. They're out here. All of these villages depend on agriculture. If we can't make agriculture a viable opportunity for them, then you're going to be in a less secure environment out here. And they all went, "Yes, that makes sense to me. There are only eight of us here and there are lots of them, so the more secure the situation is, the better off we feel."

Q: That's good. Did you observe any of the political events that went on in terms of the elections?

A: I'm glad you're not going to name me by name with that question.

Q: No, none of this is going to be by attribution.

A: I was there for the national election of the president. We were asked to be observers. The USDA liaison there thought it would be a great opportunity for us and he was for it. USDA in the United States didn't like the idea of us being out there, so they told us, "No, you will not be observers." They may even have said, "We don't want you to be outside the compound on Election Day." I couldn't see sitting in the compound at this historic event that was going on in this country, so I did not become an official observer, but the Department of State guy was and he asked me with a big smile, "Do you want to come out?" So, I was the official picture taker of the official observer. We went out to a bunch of different polling stations and I had the time of my life. Those people were so excited about what they were doing, in orderly long queues, wanting to do things. When we'd come in, they would just stare at us. It was a wonderful atmosphere and a wonderful process and just so gratifying to see these people... Some had walked 15-20 miles to be there, to participate in this event and to cast their vote. Whether they were casting it because they were told to for a certain individual or they actually had the freedom to make that decision on their own, they were there to do it. The Afghan workers in all these polling stations, they were ecstatic about their job and the turnout and what was happening. They kept thanking us and thanking us and thanking us for the help and what we were doing for them and allowing them to do. I don't know if we're going to get to it, but that was the other thing that truly was remarkable. All the people there that I dealt with were so, so appreciative of the work that we were there doing. They kept saying, "You're here for six months. You're

sacrificing away from your family for us for this length of time.” They were so gracious, so thankful, wherever we went and whatever we did. Even if it was nothing, they just thanked us for being there.

Q: So the election went off reasonably well then?

A: The election went off. The only problem was, the ink, which was sort of well publicized and yet... We were investigating the ink problem while we were going on our rounds because the workers there were saying, “The pens are running out. The ink is not staying on.” Actually, it wasn’t that big a deal, we didn’t think, and neither did the locals. If there was any duplication of people coming back, it was so minor as to be negligible. Some of these people had to walk 15-20 miles. They weren’t going to go and turn around and come back.

Q: Right. But the polling areas were all well organized and safe?

A: Well organized. There were never any scuffles, pushing, shoving. There weren’t any outbreaks of violence. Things went off, except for the ink, wonderful.

Q: This was widespread throughout the area as far as you could tell?

A: As far as we could tell because we had the mobile observation teams [MOT] out. There were at least two independent teams – a British foreign officer was out, our Department of State foreign officer was out, I was with him traveling around looking and observing what was going on.

Q: Were there any other political events?

A: There were lots of rallies before the election for the different candidates. I didn’t go to any of them. I do have pictures of some that were taken. I had to go through one to get somewhere else one day.

Q: Were there any dominant warlord types who were trying to-

A: Oh, yes, General Dostam, who took fourth in the election, was up there and campaigning. He actually took more votes in the south than anybody would have thought since he was sort of a scourge to the Pashtuns down there. But he actually did take a number of votes from the south.

Q: Were there any alternate candidates?

A: Well, there were like 30 candidates for president.

Q: So there was a choice.

A: Oh, yes. And the ballots were interesting. They had a picture of the person. Each person was asked to have a symbol for their campaign, so they all had a symbol. They had a written name. So they had three ways for a person to identify who they were voting for: either by the

picture, the symbol, or if they could read, the name of the party. There are many of them there that have no idea what the written word looks like. So, the ballot was designed for an illiterate population.

Q: You mentioned earlier something about people working on the courts and the legal system. Did you get much chance to understand what they were trying to do?

A: Well, with the police liaison there and DFID doing a lot of work with police stations and courthouses, I heard lots of stuff that was going on with police.

Q: Did they have an active training program for the police?

A: Yes, in Mazar, there was a police-training compound. They were doing some very basic police instructions. The problem is that they're underpaid. DFID spent a lot of money buying uniforms, belts, shoes, socks, because here somebody's coming out with their certificate of being a policeman and they weren't getting anything. The money that they get is minimal, so you watch them out on the streets and they're taking money from people, they're soliciting bribes. During the winter, they didn't have winter uniforms, so DFID went out and bought winter uniforms for the policemen.

Q: There was no evidence that the central government was helping to provide anything?

A: Funny story with that. There is a warehouse in Kabul that is stacked full of police equipment. Well, the person in charge of the warehouse's job is to make sure everything is properly warehoused. His job isn't to distribute. So, all this equipment's down in Kabul is being very well maintained in the warehouse by the warehousemen, but not being distributed because that's not his job.

Q: And there wasn't any system set up to...

A: There was no system for him to come in – or anybody to come in – and say, “Okay, this goes here, this goes there, let's ship this. This is shipping on Monday. This is shipping on Tuesday.” It was very well warehoused.

Q: It seems like a lot of systems have to be developed to make the place work well.

A: People have no idea how to make a decision, how to go from Point A to Point Z. It is hard time for them to figure out the steps in between. That's how I started with all the Ministers of Agriculture.

Q: Were there other activities that you were engaged in during your time there?

A: I started a dialogue with the Ministry of Agriculture in Uzbekistan to entice them to come down into northern Afghanistan with their experts and assist northern Afghanistan get their agriculture back on its feet. I went up there twice and met with the Ministry of Agriculture people and they were all for it. I was working with a Department of State person to get the

clearances to get that done. The Department of State is not the easiest, the quickest, or the most... They've been more of a stumbling block than a help other than the Department of State person up in the PRT, both of them. I started one trip with one and then he left and the next person came in and picked up. They were both wonderful to work with and are excited about the project. But the embassy is just being a stumbling block.

Q: All the restrictions and protocols and all that they had to go through.

A: No... Well, some of that, but also, other people don't want you to be successful because then it doesn't make them look successful.

Q: So the Uzbeks had been in Afghanistan?

A: We found out that the majority of the scientists that we talked to had formerly worked in northern Afghanistan while the Russians were still there. So, they knew agriculture there. They knew what was going on. So, it was like, "hey, let's bring you back so you can upgrade your knowledge of the area and then start making suggestions in helping the northern ministries improve their product."

Q: The Uzbeks were more advanced in their technology?

A: Absolutely. They took us into a room where they had seed collections. They had 30,000 varieties of cotton in the seed collection. They were propagating these seeds every once in a while to keep the viability, but just so there was this treasure chest for research material or if all of a sudden a new pest arrived, well, we knew all these varieties had this resistance, so let's start bringing this variety and reinvigorating that variety for that particular trait. They were far and away advanced in agriculture than Afghanistan. They're exporters of food and fiber and Afghanistan can't even feed itself.

Q: Were the Uzbeks financing the assistance themselves?

A: The deal that we sort of made with them – and this was also with DFID. I should put that forward now again. DFID said that they would fund it, so I was successful in my education, that they would fund the travel for the Uzbeks to come down. They wouldn't pay for their salaries, but they would pay for the travel expenses for the Uzbeks to come down and they would also pay the travel expenses of the Afghans to go over into Uzbekistan and learn and observe there.

Q: So this program is still underway, I guess.

A: It's still underway. Within the last two weeks I asked for an update and the embassy is just dragging their feet.

Q: Do you understand why?

A: No. I'm sure somebody has a reason, but to me, it doesn't make any sense?

Q: Were there political issues about Uzbekistan?

A: Oh, yes. We have to get this other dialogue going first before we do what you're trying to do. Boloney. We already have it in place. We just need somebody to put up the green flag. But, oh, no, there are too many other things going on. I don't believe that.

Q: You sound like you had to get approval from the embassy in Kabul to undertake some of these activities.

A: Oh, yes, and they were all for it. And then as soon as we come back with this wonderful project and program, there are political steps you have to go through. The Uzbeks said, "We need an invitation from the Afghan government. This is the ministry you have to go through up here so that then they can contact us in agriculture and then we can set it up." "We understand that. That's fine. Now that we know the process you need to go through, we'll go back to Afghanistan and start it." Well, as soon as we started working with our embassy in Kabul, things got bogged down. There's nobody in the embassy going to the foreign minister in Afghanistan explaining what they'd like to do so they could send a letter to the foreign minister in Uzbekistan saying, "We're inviting you down to be able to address these issues." It hasn't gotten out of our embassy compound.

Q: Were there large numbers of Uzbeks involved in this and then a large number of Afghans in the training program?

A: To begin with, we were just looking at the ministerial levels. The Uzbeks come down... What we ended up with was a plan of action that they developed. We went there with the same real ending points but a different program. They modified it completely and we just sat back and went, "Now, this is real." They are making the call of what they feel would be correct. So we just sat back and went, "Yes, that would be great." They suggested, "Why don't we send down about eight people into the two provinces, make a quick, dirty assessment of where we feel the problems are and how we can then help the Afghans?" We went, "That makes a lot of sense." We were saying, "Okay, why don't we just bring the Afghans up here and you can tour them around?" Well, they come down, do the assessment, they make a report, and then we put together what the Afghans were going to Uzbekistan to learn and see. And that's what we came back from the second trip in Uzbekistan with and presented to the U.S. embassy in Kabul and it still sits there.

Q: But it's functioning, isn't it?

A: No, because the-

Q: They never started it?

A: No. The Department of State person is still pursuing it from Mazar. But the Department of State, the U.S. embassy, isn't allowing it to go forward.

Q: I see. I thought you had already started it.

A: No.

Q: There was only a plan.

A: Yes. We came back with a great plan and the embassy just flattened it. I think in a month or so there is supposed to be another USDA person in Mazar and the Department of State person's going to pass that back over to them. I was the one that started it. We're sort of a tag team working it and doing very well. But it's a shame. It's a beautiful relationship that can start and really start promoting more security in the north and the Uzbeks want to be involved with it, but the U.S. embassy isn't doing squat with it.

Q: There may be some political factors behind that that we don't know about. Are there other projects that you started? It sounds like you've got a lot of things going.

A: Those were the main ones that I started and some of the accomplishments that I was able to achieve.

Q: Are you aware of whether the PRT is going to be shifted to another group or phased out?

A: Do you ask that question because you sort of know the answer?

Q: Not entirely.

A: I heard that the British are going to be moving out of the PRT and the Swedes are going to be bringing in about 90 people, so they will be the main contingent for that PRT in taking over command of that area.

Q: When does this take place?

A: I believe the end of the year. The British, it sounds like they're going down to Kandahar and taking over for the Americans.

Q: I see. They're moving them all around. Why do they move them around?

A: Well, the first commander that I was under was saying that in his opinion that's what everything was pointing to, that the British were really looking at taking over Kandahar and moving out of Mazar.

Q: There was an American group in Kandahar.

A: Yes. They're still there. That's the home of the Taliban, Mullah Omar. There are still some bad guys down in that area. But it's a very large base, plus an airfield.

Q: Right. What do you think about the PRT as a way of doing business in a situation like that?

A: For me, it was the only way I was going over. I wasn't like an NGO thinking, "Oh, we can go over there and we'll be safe because we're NGOs and nobody's going to hurt us." That's not quite a true statement and I think they are very foolish and foolhardy in their attitudes, the NGOs. I don't disagree with all their problems with the PRTs. I'm sorry that the U.S. army and the U.S. government are throwing money after bad over there.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: We're just throwing money out there and it's going nowhere and doing nothing and then the next time you go there, they're looking at you, "Give me more money." We're using money in Afghanistan and Iraq to try to appease people. Those folks are not stupid. They may be illiterate, but they are not stupid. They see a cash cow when it comes and they're going to milk it dry. It may not be for their benefit. It may be specifically for their benefit, I should say, but not for the benefit of the whole – and we're there for the benefit of the whole, or we should be. And so there is no cohesion to what's going on.

Q: Do you see evidence of this?

A: I see evidence of it all the time in the reports that I read, in the activities that are going on, in the way money's being spent through CERP, in the ODACA fund. To me, the plan of action of how to deal with this money-

Q: This is mainly money that's going through the military?

A: Yes. These are the millions and millions of dollars going through the military.

Q: Civilian activities.

A: Yes.

Q: What about U.S. assistance programs like AID and others?

A: Let's see... They spent – and they brag on it - \$1.2 billion in '04 in assistance money in Afghanistan. I would bet dollars to donuts that \$800 million of that went into people's pockets. USAID does not have the people and didn't hire up to meet the needs. They hired two main contractors: IOM and Chemonics. There's your second layer. These two organizations then hire contractors to do projects and these contractors hire people to do projects. Those people hire people to do projects. You can have five layers of people for organizations, businesses, before you ever get to the person who puts it on the ground. How much money would you reasonably guess that each one on an average would be taking out? If you take 20% out for overhead and you do it five times, you don't have any money left at the end to put it on the ground.

Q: You saw this evident in the way the AID program-

A: Every project they put on the ground. They're not putting \$1.2 billion worth of money into Afghanistan. They're putting maybe \$400 million into projects and \$800 million into people's pockets.

Q: Or into contractors getting their-

A: The contractors' pockets. It's all administrative cost. Most of these are not Afghan-

Q: It's not necessarily corruption. It's simply just the process.

A: I'm not going to say that it's not being ripped off. We had one instance where... The USAID person we had up in Mazar was very, very conscientious. The one project she had no control over that was funded, and everything came out of Kabul, was a boondoggle. The main contractor was being held under house arrest by the Afghan government because his subcontractor had run off with a few hundred thousand dollars in cash, run out of the country, never paid his workers. This guy didn't get out in time, so he was being held to come up with the money. It was like \$120,000 in back wages. He's screaming at the PRT to come and protect him and help him. I had no sorrow for this guy. It was his problem. He was the main contractor. If his stuff ran out, it was his problem to deal with, not ours.

Q: He was Afghan?

A: No, he had three citizenships. He was an Uzbek-Turkish-U.S. citizen. All of a sudden, he started really harping on that U.S. citizenship though.

Q: What project was this?

A: It was building some schools in Jowzjan and Farah provinces. So, IOM bailed him out for the \$120,000, and then USAID said, "Well, let's give him another contract and let's pad it so that he can recoup the losses." Is that corruption from USAID? The day I left Afghanistan to fly home, we had a meeting with Deputy Secretary Mosely. He put it into perspective. It still makes me angry to think about what's going on there, the money situation. He said, "Afghanistan and Iraq are high on our priority list from a security standpoint. We can't allow things to fail. So, our cost-benefit ration is not going to be at least one to one. This is going to be a losing money proposition. It will be that way because we have to ensure the security and the situations in both these countries get better." I don't disagree with that premise. I disagree with how it's being implemented.

Q: Is there any other area of activity that we haven't touched on that you want to talk about of PRT work particularly?

A: I think the PRT system is a viable system, but it needs better definition. The definition between what civilian activities/civilian affairs do and security requires because that does get blurred and that is a very difficult thing to deal with from a civilian standpoint whether I'm in the PRT itself or the NGOs outside. Though I don't completely agree with what the NGOs were

saying, we still have to understand their point of view and try to work out any differences in that point of view to be able to get the work done.

Q: Their point of view was mainly concern about this being a military...

A: The military work. You're going into our area where our expertise is. It's not your expertise. You are making this situation much more insecure for us to work in because of your activities. The commander would huff and bang the table and say, "Yes, and the first time that they think they're going to be overrun, who are they going to call? So, the hell with them about their problem with the military."

Q: Right. In terms of the kind of work you were doing, are there any particular lessons that you would pass on as the kind of things that might work well or didn't work well?

A: From my perspective, you don't have to be a specialist in any particular thing to work there. You're not going to be acting as an extension agent and saying, "This is how you should be planting this field. This is how many times you go over it. This is the kind of fertilizer and pesticides you're going to use" because they don't have any of that stuff. Most of the plowing that was done up in my areas was with oxen and wooden plows. They don't have the sophistication. You need to have skills in communication and be able to partner and bring sources together to work on your problems that you've identified and let other people implement it.

Q: So you were sort of a facilitator and a coordinator?

A: Absolutely. That's how my role evolved and that's really how I see the rest of everyone else working. We go over there with no money. We have to find money from other people to make projects work. But it really all has to go through the Ministry of Agriculture. Even if they are corrupt – and you know it -, they really are the authority figures there and it's their country and their government.

Q: True. So it's a matter of helping them think through what they have to do?

A: You need to be able to teach them.

Q: Did you have seminars or classes?

A: I had really considered doing that, but in six months, there is no way I could bring that off. That was one of the things DFID was more than willing to sponsor for me and to pay for each one of the Ministers of Agriculture and maybe one of their assistants to come to Mazar. We put together a seminar of all these different ideas and activities and how to things to teach them. But in six months... If I wanted to work strictly on that for six months, I could have pulled it off. But there is not enough time. If there was a two-year assignment to Afghanistan, I would put in for it and my family would be more than willing to come with me. I wouldn't do more than... People have said, "Would you go back?" I said, "Yes, I will, but I'm not going to go back for six months. That was way too long. That would be way too big a sacrifice for my family, to be

away for another six months.” I’d go back for another three on a short term. I would go back for a long period of time if my family could come with me. And they really wanted to come this last time.

Q: Why would they have just six-month tours? Was anybody thinking about longer tours?

A: Money. If they kept us there longer than six months, then they would have had to give us an R&R and that would have to cost them money.

Q: You were being paid by USDA, I guess.

A: Correct.

Q: They weren’t getting separate funds for the PRT work?

A: No. I think there’s a new agreement now... Well, my agency, my particular State, had to pay my salary plus 50% because there was the post differential pay and the hazard pay, each 25%, that they had to tack that on to my salary for six months. They were responsible for my salary. I was giving nothing back to the State, but they were responsible for it. I think there is a new agreement signed with the Foreign Agriculture Service that now salaries will be paid through Foreign Agricultural Service when we go overseas. But each State had to suck it up and say, “Okay, for the greater good, we’ll pay 150% of your salary to you for six months while you’re not here.”

Q: But USDA wasn’t getting any money out of the Afghanistan program overall?

A: To my knowledge, USDA was not getting any money from the Department of Defense even though Department of Defense (Rumsfeld) specifically asked USDA to come over there and help with the situation.

Q: Are you being replaced there by someone?

A: I am told I will be, but no person has been assigned and no one is over there right now.

Q: Are there any other major points or lessons that you’d like to pass on? This has been very, very useful. You’ve covered a lot.

A: I loved what I did and I’m so pleased that I was allowed to go over and do that. The sacrifice that my family went through for six months of me being away... No, I think I’ve told you most everything and vented a little bit.

Q: Well, this has been very, very useful.

A: I think what I was doing up there was very different from what people do in the south. I know what (name) was doing. I don’t know whom else you’ve interviewed.

Q: You mean what you were doing was different than what they were doing in other areas?

A: Yes, just because what the U.S. army does and what NATO troops do and how the different nations within NATO handle PRTs.

Q: Did you hear much about the other PRTs?

A: (Name) from Iowa – we were both from Iowa at the time – was in Kandoz, which was just to the east. The Germans did things differently than the British, even though it's all NATO. I'm sure that the Italians now that they're in Herat are doing things differently. The Lithuanians, Estonians, and... what's the other Baltic country... who are similar over in the west... NATO has an umbrella plan, but unlike the U.S. army, which has one central command and this is what you're going to do, each nation that provides troops for a PRT and whoever is in command of a PRT, each nation has its own way of running that PRT. So, the NATO commander really doesn't have command. They make suggestions. Each PRT then talks back to its federal government, its home country, and they get directions from the home country.

Q: So there is not much uniformity as they approach these different provinces.

A: Not through NATO. To the U.S. army, yes, there is much more uniformity, but once NATO continues to expand, each country will do it differently, how they want it done.

Q: That's an interesting point. During the various interviews, we're going to be getting a better feel for that as we talk to different people who served in different provinces.

A: You'll really get a feel for that from (name) when he comes back. He's in Herat. His first six months were with the American command and now the Italians have taken over. He will be able to give you a perspective from both sides, the American and the NATO.

Q: He's a USDA person?

A: Yes. He was there six months. He hasn't come back. He re-upped for another six months.

Q: So he's over there now?

A: Yes. He'll be over there a total of a year.

Q: Well, unless there is something else, this has been extremely useful. You've covered a lot of ground. Fax me the release.

A: I'll fill it out and get it faxed to you just shortly after we get off the phone.

Q: Okay. I'm certainly grateful for your time on this and I think it's been immensely helpful. You gave a lot of useful insights on the program.

A: When I've been interviewed before (not for this but for other items), I always take longer than what is expected. I don't know if I just talk too much or what.

Q: No, this is not longer than expected. We anticipate an hour, an hour and a half. It's important to flesh it out and not just be superficial. It's been worthwhile.

A: Excellent.

Q: Thank you so much.