

USIP - ADST
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #17

Executive Summary

The interviewee had been in Afghanistan for eight months at the time of the interview. He had multiple responsibilities as a State Department officer in the PRT in Khowst Province and political advisor to the commander of Regional Command East at Salerno in Khowst, and also worked with PRTs in Paktia and Paktika Provinces and with the maneuver battalion in Paktika.

His political reporting, including his reports on cross-border attacks from Pakistan, was useful to the military as well as to civilian agencies. There is little NGO presence in Paktika and no NGO office in Khowst. Development work and nation-building activities fell primarily on the PRTs and maneuver battalions. The latter focused on short-term projects, while the former looked more at the long-term, particularly in Khowst Province.

The Khowst PRT was divided into Civil Affairs Teams A (CATA) and B (CATB). CATA went into the countryside to patrol and meet with district governors, mullahs, or local and tribal leaders and set up projects. CATB set up offices in towns to deal with development projects in town and serve as liaison for contractors and others who wanted to contact the PRT.

Communications, particularly classified, were relatively good at the Regional Command in Salerno, but much more limited in the PRTs. Movement was facilitated out of Salerno by access to the commander's helicopter during his travel. Interviewee also went into the field with Special Forces and Marines--with no less than two HUMVEES each time-- except when the primary purpose of the foray was combat.

Maneuver battalions engaged in kinetic (kill/capture) and non-kinetic (civil affairs) operations. Over the previous year there had been a marked shift from kinetic toward non-kinetic.

Interviewee said that the PRTs and regional command had done a lot to extend the reach of the government of Afghanistan into the countryside. He did not think he had contributed much personally in that regard, however, because he was stretched so thin.

One accomplishment of the Khowst PRT was to set up a series of council meetings, most effectively with mullahs in councils called shuras. At shura meetings, perhaps 130 mullahs sat down monthly with representatives of the coalition forces, the Afghan government, provincial government, and provincial security. This provided an opportunity to do such things as explain the purpose of elections. There were also periodic meetings with subgovernors, tribal leaders, business leaders, and women's groups.

A special problem during elections was communications among the coalition forces and various Afghan entities. The Khowst PRT took a lead role in setting up a communications center at the governor's compound to alleviate this problem.

There was a lot of fighting along the Khowst border. This caused insecurity that discouraged NGOs from working there. The town where the PRT is located was hit repeatedly by rockets.

The attitude of the Afghan people toward the PRTs was positive. They want security and development, so they welcome international assistance. Warlords, crime, and armed gangs remain a problem. The police are weak and need to be built up. Until that happens, it will be difficult for the US to leave. The ministry of interior also needs a drastic overhaul.

A military background would be useful for someone joining a PRT, but not essential if one is willing to cope with the steep learning curve required to understand military procedures and terminology. A Peace Corps background would also be useful. Interviewee cited the value of preparatory training in Afghan language, Afghan culture, and geopolitics. Before departing on assignment he had one month of Pashto, which was insufficient. The shortness of tours of duty has been a problem for both civilian and military personnel, since it takes time to build experience and expertise.

Interviewee felt that the biggest achievement of the PRTs has been to give confidence to the Afghan government, people, and security forces. PRTs have also been successful in some aspects of development. At some point, however, the PRTs need to step back and USAID needs to get more involved. AID, however, has had a hard time in getting implementing partners, including UN agencies to go in to certain areas. PRTs have been important because they can work even where security is shaky.

Interviewee said that the US military personnel he worked with in Afghanistan were extremely good, but they are trained primarily as war fighters. So it is important to have civilian personnel who bring a different perspective assigned to PRTs and regional commands.

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

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Q: Thank you for being here today. I know you're on leave and you're returning later today, so it is very generous of you to give your time this morning and talk about your tour thus far.

A: I've been in Afghanistan for the last eight months. I was originally scheduled to go to Kandahar. When I got to Afghanistan, my assignment had been changed, so instead I had to go out and look at various PRTs that were empty and pick out one that I wanted to work at. The way that worked out is, in the end, over the last eight months, I've had multiple jobs, one of which is to work at Salerno, which is a fire base in the province of Khowst near the border with Pakistan.

Q: You said a fire base?

A: Yes, at Salerno, the Regional Command East headquarters. Regional Command East covers 16 provinces of Afghanistan, starting in the north in Nurestan and then going all the way down to include Ghazni, Paktia, Khowst Province, sort of the eastern quadrant of Afghanistan. At the same time, because the State Department was lacking in officers, I also was assigned to the Khowst PRT, which is separate and apart from the Regional Command. So, I'm very much dual-hatted in that sense and will be when I go back. I will be working with the provincial reconstruction team in Khowst, but I'll also work as a political advisor to the third colonel who's in charge of Regional Command East.

Q: The political advisor to the colonel.

A: Yes, and he was a brigade commander.

Q: He was a brigade commander at Salerno.

A: Correct. Also, because, as I mentioned, the State Department had not been able previously to fill two slots, I was also coming in the Gardiz PRT in Paktia province as well as the Sharan PRT in Paktika Province. Eventually, in early December, another State Department officer came into Gardiz, so I didn't have to do that anymore, which actually covered two provinces, Lowgar province here, which was Pol-e-Alam, and then Paktia Province, which was Gardiz. Until the day I went on leave, which has been almost a month ago, I was covering Paktika province. I made perhaps a dozen trips down to Paktika Province working in this area. But another consideration here also is that, in Paktika, I not only work with the PRT, but I also work with the

maneuver battalion down there. Previously, that was the 227 Second Battalion, 27th Regiment. Now it is the First Battalion, 508th Regiment, 82nd Airborne, which is the maneuver battalion in Paktika Province based out of Oruzgan.

Q: And physically throughout all of these changes in hats, where are you living?

A: I keep two residences at least, one at the regional command, and then also one at the PRT in Khowst, and then when I need to be in Oruzgan with the maneuver battalion or in Sharan with the PRT or wherever, they always have a spare room; so I stay in a spare room. Or I'm out on patrols.

Q: You have a number of different missions that you can speak to. Let's take them one by one perhaps. Could you describe your role with each of these different commands?

A: At the regional command, first of all, one of the things that took a long time was that I was the first person to go there. Actually, in the PRT in Khowst, in the PRT in Sharan, and into the Regional Command East in Salerno, at the Salerno base, one of the first things I had to do in all three of those jobs was to actually set them up, just do the physical setup. I had to explain to the military what I was there for, who I worked for, what I'm supposed to do, and especially what value added I brought to the military.

Q: Could you run through that?

A: My initial job, just because these were new positions, was to explain to the military first of all what value added I brought to them, what is the value added for the military.

Q: As a political officer.

A: As a political officer for them. Then after that, I had to explain to them also my job, what I was supposed to be doing for the State Department, what I was supposed to be doing for the ambassador in Kabul, and then how I could do that job and to some extent what requirements I needed from the military to do that job.

Q: What came as a surprise to them in your job description?

A: Perhaps the reporting function. I don't think the military really understood how much of my job is to report, so a lot of what I did was reporting via cables, and in the end they were actually very much in favor of that. One of the ways I made that transition for the military to understand that I needed to do reporting, why I needed to do it, and the value that it brought to them, was to show them the actual printout of a comeback cable, and to show at the top who the addressees are and how it will come out National Security Council and the State Department and White House and DIA and CIA and the whole alphabet soup of Washington policymakers. So, when they saw that, they realized, okay, the reporting that this guy's doing is actually valuable and it helps us and in some cases also makes us look good. It brings up their chain of command what they're doing, and also is a chance for some of their successes to be highlighted. They appreciate that.

Q: Right, and that seems quite normal to me, but apparently they report in a very different way when they're blowing their own horn.

A: They did, and I don't think it gets back to Washington much either. And it's not even what's going right. It's also sometimes what's going wrong, too. For instance, particularly along Paktika and Khowst borders and up here in Konar Province as well, there are a lot of cross-border attacks coming over from Pakistan. I spent a lot of time over the last eight months not only in Afghanistan but also going over to Pakistan, particularly Islamabad and the consulate over in Peshawar, to talk with them, trying to understand the nature of these cross-border attacks.

Q: Talking with whom in Peshawar?

A: The U.S. consulate there, consulate officers, but also Pakistanis as well. Same thing in Islamabad with the embassy and the Pakistanis as well. To understand the nature of what's basically sort of a cross-border insurgency. One part of the value added I bring to the table, particularly for the military there, is that I have contacts within Pakistan among U.S. government officials that I can talk with and say, "Okay, what's the situation in Pakistan? What is happening in Washington? What is happening? Why are these cross-border attacks taking place? What is the Pakistani military doing? What is the Pakistani frontier corps doing? What are other parts of the Pakistani government doing to try and perhaps stop these attacks?" That is one of the big elements of value added I have right now for the U.S. military, particularly Regional Command East: understanding what is happening in Pakistan, why these cross-border attacks are happening, and what Pakistan's policy is on those.

Q: Can you explain a little bit about what you have discovered, why it's happening and what the Pakistani government is doing?

A: Part of the situation across Regional Command East stems from that fact that this part of Pakistan is what's called the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The government of Pakistan has not really controlled this area during the existence of Pakistan since 1949. Before that, the British really didn't control it either. What they did was to cut deals with the tribal authorities there, who are the real power there. Only in the last two or three years has the Pakistan military gone into this part of Pakistan and particularly stayed through the winter, so they've done some fairly large offensive operations in there and have actually taken a fairly large amount of casualties as well.

Q: We read about them from time to time. That's where Osama Bin Laden is reputed to be, in those tribal areas.

A: That's correct. What happens in the border areas of Pakistan has direct influence over what's happening in Afghanistan. That is a lot of the value added that I bring to the U.S. military, being able to explain conditions in Pakistan. The regional command, the PRTs, and the maneuver battalions as well are involved day-to-day in tactical things and they have their plate full with dealing with tactical matters. It's a large command. It has a lot of moving parts. And there are also a lot of constant trips and contact, constant IED attacks, constant rocket attacks; there are all

sorts of stuff going on. They don't have the time to focus on larger pol-mil picture. I did. So that's a lot of my job at the regional command.

Q: Does your PRT have time to do some of the other traditional PRT activities that involve local development or economic reconstruction, democracy building? Are any of those activities something that you have been engaged in or has it not been feasible?

A: One of the other factors of the host Paktika Province, less in Paktia Province, is that there are almost no NGOs working. In Paktika Province, there are only two NGOs, one of which is Brak out of Pakistan, the other of which is Swiss Peace. Because there is not the NGO presence, there is not the IO presence, a lot of development work, the nation-building parts if you want to say that, development, strengthening the role of government, economic planning, development planning, falls on the PRTs and maneuver battalions (which should include the Marine Corps, because the Marine Corps in effect has a maneuver battalion in the host province and Paktia Province). I will make the distinction here though to some extent the maneuver battalion is more involved in very short relief aid almost, handing out blankets, that sort of thing, digging wells. The PRT, particularly in Khowst Province, has tried to look at more long-term development projects and integrate those projects into the five year plan that the Afghan government has been using as their development model.

Q: Let's just focus on the Khowst Province PRT for a moment. I'm having a little bit of trouble sorting them out. You're describing that they have been involved in some development activity. Could you elaborate on that a little bit? And maybe we'll take this time to describe the composition of the PRT, what it looks like in terms of numbers and who all is present there.

A: In regard to development work and what the host PRT is doing, the composition obviously is important. It's one of the smallest PRTs, partly because Khowst Province is a small province. You can see from one end of it to another from a tall mountain. So as a result, it's perhaps the smallest PRT in Regional Command East. It has about 80 people total, including one State officer (me) and one AID officer, who was on a one-year contract. Much of the development work that they were involved in is done through CERP funds, which is Commanders Emergency Response Program funding, which is at the discretion of the PRT commander. They do a lot of the very fast projects that way and get the money flowing fairly well. I don't understand military finance, but I understand the money comes from CENTCOM, goes through CJTF 96 in Bagram, down to regional commands of the PRTs. Once it gets through that chain and into the PRT commander's hands, they can use it very effectively very quickly. The CERP projects have been one of the real assets of the PRT in Khowst Province. One of the reasons why also is that the commander of the Khowst PRT is an investment banker in real life. He is very sharp in this sort of thing, has a master's in finance. That's what he does.

Q: A unique asset there.

A: Yes. So, he's looked at it as a broad picture development of this province and what needs to be done. What he has focused on is a system of roads so it will be hub and spoke, so that Khowst, which is also in the town center of the province, is the economic hub and then the districts around that sort of tie into that.

Q: So now he can say, "Well, we have built a network of roads of 20 miles" or whatever; he can now point to a road network.

A: That is being built as well as the capital, paving a lot of roads there, and then paving the bazaars as well.

The other big project there, much larger and done through ODACA, which is military funding, is about a \$600,000 project to provide an electrical grid for the town.

The other project that we're working on as well down there is – and I think this has a lot of validity for Afghanistan as a country, but particularly for Khowst Province, since being on the border with Pakistan makes it a transit route for goods coming from Pakistan – to help the Afghans set up customs posts so that they have a revenue stream. Otherwise, a lot of revenue is lost.

Q: And there was no formal customs.

A: There was no formal customs. For the most part, that border in Paktia and Khowst Province is open. It's there only as a line on a map.

Q: Is that because it's very inaccessible?

A: Part of it's historical. The Durand Line, which was designated in part by the British in 1997 or 1998, divides the Pashtuns, who are the ethnic group in Khowst in Paktia and Paktika Province. So it was designed in part to divide them. But on either side of the border there are tribes that cross the border, people who live on both sides of the border. So historically, it divided what was sort of one ethnic group. As a result, there is a lot of movement across the border. Also, it is mountainous, so there's no real way to control it. Also, it's somewhat inaccessible. A lot of it is inaccessible. Plus, Pakistan and Afghanistan never really made the effort to do so much. It's a little confusing with the different provinces and the different jobs.

Q: Just to clarify a little further, the folks who are working on some of these projects that you just talked about, the electrical grid and the roads, are these civil affairs officers or what kind of military personnel are they?

A: Most of the people who work on these projects out of the PRT are civil affairs officers. They're divided into two groups. There's CATA [Civil Affairs Team A] and CATB [Civil Affairs Team B]. The way the Khowst PRT team works, Civil Affairs Team A goes out in the country and patrols and meets with district governors or mullahs or local leaders, tribal leaders, and they set up the projects that the PRT's going to do out in the province.

Q: So they consult with the local leaders and agree on what kinds of projects.

A: Correct, and with the provincial governor of Afghanistan, of course. The CATB team has what's called a CMOC set up in Khowst town, which deals more with projects in the town and

also serves as a liaison point for people coming who want to contact the PRT – for instance, contractors. So at least in the Khowst PRT, the CATB team does most of the in-town development projects.

Q: Each of them then could have people skilled in the appropriate skills. If you're going to be doing an electrical grid, you need some people skilled in electrical engineering. Would these civil affairs officers be those individuals or are they going to be relying on technical contractors?

A: They were relying on contractors, which is actually a problem in that part of Afghanistan because a lot of the people with educations left during the various wars and have gone to Iran or Pakistan or they're in Europe or they're in the United States now. Roads they can do. Roads are not a problem. My understanding is that they had to bring in a contractor from Pakistan to help out with the electrical grid. A special situation also with the Khowst PRT is that they also had the resources of the U.S. Army at Salerno at the regional command, so there are always engineers over there whom they can consult. There's sort of a cooperative relationship, which makes the Khowst PRT probably one of the most effective PRTs. It's one of the smaller PRTs, but on the other hand it's one of the bigger PRTs because it has the very big army base that it can use also as a resource.

Q: Let's just delineate what all that implies, a big army base, in terms of numbers and specialties.

A: That's right. At Salerno, at the regional command, there are engineers, there are lawyers, there are translators, there are com specialists, there are more or less all the resources that you need. There are helicopters, there are mechanics, there are extra HUMVEEs, there are road graders, there are a lot of resources that the big army has.

Q: What would be the size of this force at Salerno? Are we talking hundreds?

A: Seven or eight hundred.

Q: That brings me to the topic of communications. This is a good point to talk about that. We were talking earlier before we began how you handle your needs for communication. Apparently, you have perhaps a unique setup because you were part of the Salerno base. What do the communications that are available to you as a State officer consist of?

A: At Salerno, I had access to the military classified system, which is classified e-mail, which is important because most of the way the U.S. military communicates is classified e-mail. They use a lot of that. The other thing they use a lot and that State needs to use whether we want to or not is PowerPoint. Almost all military formal briefings now are given through PowerPoint. So the added advantage of having a classified system is that you can move your PowerPoint slides around or draft them. Even if you have to do something classified you can do it on a classified system and pass it on to somebody else that way. It's also useful that way. The third and very big advantage of having a classified system is that I can do classified reporting. About 2/3 of the

reporting I do as cables is classified partly because of what's going on along the Afghan-Pak border. It's a lot of counterinsurgency activity. How we deal with that is classified.

Q: Why wouldn't that be standard for all PRTs, the same infrastructure?

A: It should be. At the Khowst PRT, I could have classified access, but they have problems with their classified system themselves, keeping it up and running. They have a limited number of computers and a limited amount of bandwidth to get what they need done. So, if I were to do classified processing at the PRT, it would be much harder for me and for the military guys, too, because they'd have to share with me. At Salerno, I have a dedicated system.

Q: So, Khowst is a more typical setup for anyone in a PRT?

A: Correct.

Q: They're going to all be functioning under some of these same limitations, which I gather is a bit of a shortage of personnel, a shortage of hardware, equipment.

A: Yes, I believe so. From what I've seen at the other PRTs and at Gardiz and Sharan also there is a similar problem. The military has limited resources to keep their classified systems up and running. To be fair to them, too, it's a difficult situation. They're out kind of in the middle of nowhere trying to run a class system. It's not easy. But I think it's critical that all State Department officers have access to as much classified processing capabilities as they need, and not just to write things. The other thing that I use a lot is Supernet to get background information as well. Supernet is classified Internet. So I use that to get, for instance, sitreps on what's happening in Regional Command East – when were there troops in contact? When were there attacks? That sort of thing. Or I can access INR web sites, things like that. It allows me to collect background which is background not only for the reporting I do, but also to use as information for briefing materials for military commanders. They don't have time to look at the larger picture geostrategic things, or even what's going on in Afghanistan. I have time to sit down and say, "This is important. I need to brief my colonel on this."

Q: Would you be doing daily briefings for your military commander? What is the typical routine?

A: At Salerno Regional Command East, I typically brief the commander every Monday afternoon. I have some time set aside, so I'll put together the PowerPoints and brief him. That is the one formal briefing that I do. I would also send a lot of e-mails up the chain as well. In some cases, I do PowerPoints and send those just as electronic files so that, at his discretion, he can flip through them. With the PRT commander, it's much more informal. We sit down in his office and talk. That's much more give and take. With the regional commander, a lot of times he says, "Okay, I need to know what's going on in Pakistan. I need to know what's going on in the federally administered tribal areas." That was the situation right before I left in April. I went over to Pakistan to answer specific questions that he had.

Q: In talking with others, I've learned that when you travel it is not such a simple matter. You don't just jump in your vehicle and go off. You generally need to have some protection with you. In terms of the appointments that you want to make, the contacts that you're making, how do you get to your meetings and how do you move about in the region?

A: One of the ways I move about is to travel with the regional commander. For the most part, we get in Blackhawks and fly where we need to go. Unless it's right there in town, we move with helicopters, usually a Blackhawk and an Apache as an attack helicopter.

Q: So it's not a big entourage.

A: No. You can get 12-13 people in a Blackhawk, so this is about as big a unit as we move around in. So that's with the regional commander. With the PRT commander or his CATA or his CATB, if we go out with them we go out in up-armored (a fancy word for armored car) HUMVEEs. I also go on patrols with Marines. I also go on patrols with Special Forces.

Q: Can you recount what a typical patrol would be in a group of so many?

A: We'd never go out with less than two HUMVEEs. That's the bare minimum we go out with. The most we've ever gone out with was perhaps with the Marines, Marines travel more heavily armed because a lot of times they're going out and trying to start a fight, they're trying to find, fix, and finish. They're trying to make contact.

Q: Would there be a purpose in your going along with them?

A: In some cases, yes. Sometimes they go out for three or four days, so going out with the Marines gives me a chance to go out and see what's going on in remote parts of the provinces. In the other cases I don't go along. If I talk to the Marines, they may say, "We're going to go out. It's pretty sure that we're going to get in a combat situation. There's really no point in your going out." And I say, "Fine, I understand perfectly." In other cases, they say, "Please come."

Q: Right. So it would depend on whether they were going to be having conversations with the local officials or whether they're really expecting it to be more of a combat situation.

A: That's right. And usually before they go out, they know. Sometimes they get specific information and they go out and try and capture or kill them. There is no reason for me to go on that. In other cases, they're going to talk with the governor and that's not really a combat operation.

Q: The PRTs have as their general mission to extend the reach of the central government in Kabul. This is an important goal for us. Do you see that your work is contributing to that?

A: To be quite honest, I contribute some to that goal but I don't contribute as much as I could or should. The reason why is that I've been stretched too thin for the last eight months. I don't have as much time to spend with the PRT talking with the governor or with the regional command looking at the larger picture. I've done some, but I haven't done as good a job as I

could have just because I've been tasked with so many different jobs. I've taken those jobs on myself. It wasn't Embassy Kabul saying, "You need to do this, this, and this." It was more a case of where I saw a need because there weren't enough State Department officers and I needed to cover some of this and some of that. That's how it was worked out. As far as me personally extending the reach of the government of Afghanistan, I couldn't. I have done some but not enough to make a difference. On the other hand, the PRT and the regional command have done a huge amount of stuff to move the government of Afghanistan in that direction. Particularly what's been real successful with the Khowst PRT is that they've set up a whole series of council meetings. One of the most effective are the mullahs. They have those once a month. That brings in all the mullahs from all through Khowst Province and they meet together.

Q: And those councils are called what?

A: Shuras. With the mullahs' meetings, maybe 130 mullahs get together with us. There will be coalition forces, government of Afghanistan, provincial government, provincial security as well. It's a chance for us – coalition forces, government of Afghanistan, the mullahs – to sit down and talk together. For instance, right now, we've been using them for elections, to explain the upcoming elections in September. "This is what's going to happen in the elections. This is why you're voting. This is what you're voting for." We did that also with the presidential elections. So then the mullahs can go back to their mosques and explain to the people going to that mosque, "The elections are coming up. This is what you need to do to register. This is how you need to vote. This is what you're voting for."

Q: And who takes the lead in these meetings, actually explaining to the mullahs?

A: Three parts. It will be government security, Afghan security. There will also be coalition forces. There will also be the provincial government; if he's in the province, he'll stand up and speak. At the last one I was at, the United Nations rep. also spoke, for example, on the elections. So that's what we did. I use the example of elections, but also there was a chance for the governor of Afghanistan to stand up and say, "Okay, we need to work together with coalition forces. This is why the coalition forces are here. They're here to support us. They're not here to colonize the country or whatever." So, it gave us a chance to explain why coalition forces are here. We also use them a lot as a counterinsurgency tool, frankly, to say, "Look, we've had IEDs recently. This has to stop. It was near your town. We want you to find out who did it and tell them to stop."

Q: So how often would you be able to arrange one of these council meetings? I would think there would be a lot of business to transact, some of the kinds of things you've mentioned.

A: We do the mullah meetings once a month.

Q: And that could be over several days?

A: Three or four hours. The reason why we don't do them more frequently is that we don't want to end up giving the mullahs too much influence and power. We feel that if we meet with them too often they might, at least in the eyes of the people in Khowst Province, take on an

importance more than they actually have or even start to overshadow the government of Afghanistan, the governors, and the district subgovernors.

Q: The mullahs, of course, are not elected.

A: No, not at all. So the other people we have similar meetings with are tribal leaders. We also have one shura and we also meet with the subgovernors.

Q: So, the tribal leaders and the leaders of women's groups.

A: That's correct. That's a difficult one, the women's meetings. Then we meet with subgovernors. Periodically, you have a kind of business shura, meet with business leaders.

Q: You mentioned that the women's group is a hard one. Is that for any particular reason?

A: It is a particularly difficult one for several reasons. In Khowst Province I very rarely see women above seven or eight years of age. Because Pashtun tradition is one where women are kept inside. They have compounds and women work inside the compounds for the most part. That's not a hard and fast rule, but if you go into downtown, you don't see very many women. They're sequestered. They're kept apart. It's a very traditional society. Women are very much second class citizens. So, to some extent, our getting involved in that is going against a lot of culture.

Q: How are the women's meetings viewed?

A: It's well viewed by the women actually. I haven't actually sat through one of the women's shuras, but from what I gather, this is a chance for them to really come out and talk with each other. They don't always have the ability to talk with each other. It supports the ministry of women's affairs as well. It's interesting; what comes out of these is that the women have said they want education, they want job opportunities, they want job training. And then there are other problems. Say, if a woman has a child, the child can be in some cases be taken from her and given to another mother. Then there are also a lot of instances of women being beaten and killed. So, this has come out in some of these women's meetings.

Q: The child would be given to another mother for what purpose?

A: I don't know. I don't know the whole background of that. My knowledge is sort of superficial.

Q: So there are a lot of women's issues clearly and it's not routine for them to get together, so when they do it provides a forum for them airing all kinds of topics, I would guess.

A: That's right. It's a very touchy subject, one that we have to handle very carefully, I think. The representative host of the ministry of women's affairs has had several death threats against her, probably because she's been proactive.

Q: Right, and she probably is not from that area to begin with.

A: I think she is.

Q: But even so, she would be viewed as an upstart at the least.

A: That's right. It's an extremely conservative society, especially when it comes to women.

Q: Yes. I spoke to someone else who had been working in those very areas and he said the same thing about how traditional the society is. In the elections, for example, maybe two percent of women registered and voted and they were happy with that result because it showed some participation. But still, participation was very low.

A: I think that actually in Khowst Province, it ended up being fairly high. A lot of women voted. I was there for the October elections. I went around to a lot of polling stations. They had women's polling stations and men's polling stations. My understanding is that the women had a fairly high turnout. I think part of the reason was that the men realized that it was a force multiplier for them. They actually were reluctant at first and then they realized that women in other provinces were going to vote, so they thought it would be good to have their women vote as well. It was how they view it, as "their" women.

Q: Women are property, does that explain it?

A: Somewhat. I think at large the society is very much a man's society. Within the confines of the house, the women actually have a lot of power. It's hard for me to judge.

Q: The tribal leaders you mentioned also have council meetings. One of your roles is to help organize that. What have you found comes out of the tribal leaders meetings of interest?

A: There is sort of a two-pronged thing that we're working on with those right now. First of all, there's development. This is a forum to come to us. This is how they view it. They say, "We want this well or this health clinic. We want this well dug." So, from their perspective, it's coming to the United States Government, which has money, and they know we have money, and they want to pry that money out of us. This is not entirely good. That to some extent bypasses the regular process of going through the government of Afghanistan, so we discourage that. We use it as a source of information. This is what's going on. But we're more and more reinforcing the role of the government of Afghanistan to handle development, particularly as the first point of contact.

Let me back up. In Khowst and Paktika Province both, the tribal structure is still very strong. The tribal leaders still have a lot of influence. To some extent, the government of Afghanistan has traditionally been centralized out of Kabul and has traditionally been weak in these provinces. So, we had to work with the tribes just because they are, particularly in rural areas, almost a de facto government. We have no choice. We have to work with them. But as you mentioned, and that's correct, a part of our job is to extend the reach of the government of Afghanistan even though it doesn't really have that reach yet. So, we're sort of at a funny

junction where the modern Afghan state has still a tribal sort of de facto government. So we're trying to sort of act as an intermediary between the two so that there is no backlash by the tribes against the government of Afghanistan. Does that make sense?

Q: Yes. I understand that. It's a delicate balancing act for you. I think you mentioned a subgovernor's group as well?

A: Subgovs, that's right. These are the district governors. I've actually never sat in on one of those meetings. I think a lot of that is just mostly development status. But again, as it gets closer to the September elections, we'll use those to explain how the voting procedures will go. I believe before the October elections, they were also used to coordinate security.

I should mention also that more and more as we get closer to September this will be the PRT and the regional commands' real focuses: helping the elections.

Q: What kinds of activities will be required of you to ensure peaceful and successful elections?

A: A lot of what the military and the United States government provided in the October elections was security. So, we worked very closely with the Afghan national police, the Afghan national army, NDS [National Directory of Security] and the provincial governors, as well as with Global Security, which at that time was the contractor for assisting with election security. So a lot of what we do is helping the Afghan security forces provide security for the elections, which takes the form of a lot of planning. One of the biggest problems in the October elections is coalition communications. First of all, coalition forces have never coordinated that closely with Afghan national police, Afghan national army, Afghan border police, and it really forced the two to start working together and do essentially joint planning. Then the other problem was Afghan national police, Afghan national army, Afghan border police, NDS had never coordinated between themselves that much either. So we had to sort of push them in that direction. We need to coordinate. You don't have a lot of means. Everybody sit down and figure out, okay, how are we going to secure this place? When the ballots come back into town, how are we going to secure that convoy route? That sort of thing.

Then the other part – and the PRT took the lead role in Khowst – was setting up the communications center, which was actually at the governor's compound, so that all these different pieces could communicate with each other on election day. So, a lot of it was security. Having said that, the last round of elections was simpler than the upcoming round of elections. The October election was a simple presidential election with 17 or 18 candidates, so people could understand that. The next round of elections is going to be parliamentary representatives and provincial council members, which is more complicated. To some extent, what we're having to do, in coordination with the government of Afghanistan and also the United Nations, is a public education program. The government of Afghanistan still doesn't have the capacity to do that, and so we're trying to help out with that.

Q: What electoral model are they using for their parliament?

A: Frankly, I don't know.

Q: Is it supplied by the UN perhaps?

A: Yes. That's my understanding. The United Nations working with the government of Afghanistan has the lead on that and it takes place mostly up in Kabul. I see the end result of that, but I don't have a whole lot of visibility in the work, how it's done.

Q: You all at the PRT get the instructions and then you'll be able to provide some of those to the different groups that you meet with in the run-up to the elections?

A: That's correct. And part of my job is to collect that information coming out of the embassy in Kabul and then disseminate it out to U.S. military. That's a large part of my job, getting information either from Washington, from the embassy, from newspaper clippings, or wherever, and then I disseminate it. So I'm sort of the funnel for information. To some extent, that process goes the other way. I'm a funnel for information coming from the military up to the embassy. It has worked well, but it has to be used with common sense, delicacy, and intelligence to make sure that you don't inadvertently jump the military chain of command.

Q: Can you give an example, a pedestrian subject perhaps, but just how that works in practice?

A: In a particular province, in Kurdo Province, we have problems with some of the Afghan security officers there who are either corrupt, involved in the opium trade, or tied in with Taliban or Al-Qaeda.

Q: Or all three.

A: Or all three. So, the military asked me to get the embassy involved in pressuring the government of Afghanistan to take a hard look at these officials. At the same time, the military ran that up their chain of command also. But I had to coordinate closely with my commander, a colonel, to make sure that I wasn't speaking for the military or the embassy in a way that should have gone up my colonel's chain of command to a one-star to a two-star and then over to the embassy. You have to be extremely careful in the military chain of command and keep them looped in to make sure that in your commander's judgment you're not jumping chain.

Q: I can appreciate that. And they do have a lengthy chain of command in the military, so that would be an important process. You mentioned that you had observed the elections in October. I was going to go back to that a little bit. Would you characterize them as peaceful and successful?

A: I was in Khowst Province during the elections. I was in Paktia in Khowst Province in the two weeks prior to that, traveling around a lot. Everything I saw was peaceful, surprisingly so. I think everybody was surprised at how well the security worked there, including the Afghans. It was a major defeat for the Taliban, too, just because they had been saying, "we're going to disrupt the elections" and they were unable to. They did not do so.

Q: They tried, I guess.

A: They tried, but the security arrangements, as I mentioned earlier, were good enough that they had a real hard time doing it. The other part of that is that it wasn't just formal security forces. In Khowst Province, for instance, there is a tradition of standing up Lashkars. Lashkars are a group of militia that gets stood up by a tribe and then the Alberkai are people from the tribe who volunteer for security purposes. We used the Alberkai in Khowst Province, which worked out extremely well because these guys from the community knew the community, knew people who knew if anybody came from outside the community. So it was like a matter of personal tribal community pride that they were going to stand up for their elections. "Buy-in" is almost too shallow a word for those guys. Even at the community level, they really took over responsibility for their elections there and the balloting there. They were very proud of it. It was a big day for Afghanistan. This was a big deal.

Q: The term that you used was what?

A: Alberkai. Lashkar. Lashkar is like a larger unit used more for fighting wars.

Q: And that's a traditional tribal unit?

A: Yes. So as far as successful elections, I think they were extremely successful presidential elections. The turnout was good. The results were fairly clear cut, so there wasn't a whole lot of dissension about who actually won. I think in the end, particularly where I work, in that part of Afghanistan, he got very high backing. I think overall in Afghanistan, too, there is sort of an acceptance that Karzai is the elected president and has the power. It's sort of interesting, in Afghanistan, they have traditional consultations. So, in a way, you could almost look at it as elections as sort of a national consultation. We've been doing these shuras, the council meetings, with the mullahs, with the tribal leaders, with the women, with the business leaders, with the subgovs. I think that's really one of the keys to Afghanistan: consultations. You really have to consult everybody. Although it slows down the process, you really need that legitimacy. That's part of the reason elections there have been successful also: they have the tradition of consultations. In a way, Afghanistan is a very democratic society. I've sat through these meetings with the tribal leaders. Everybody has a chance to talk, to have their say, and at the end they more or less come to an agreement: "This is what we're going to do." If the United States and the coalition and the international community are going to be successful in Afghanistan, it's key to make sure that everybody is consulted on things. That's why, for instance, the loya jirgas have been successful. It gave them a lot of legitimacy. I think that's why these elections in October gave Karzai that legitimacy, the sense that they're a form of consultation. Now, hopefully, the September elections will go off well enough that they will give legitimacy to the parliament and the provincial councils as well.

Q: We didn't talk about the business shura, but clearly that is a slightly different grouping than the tribal leaders and the mullahs. What did you observe when you saw the business group?

A: I didn't observe that.

Q: Okay. But clearly these are part of their consultative tradition and it gives them a leg up in democracy if they can somehow figure out how to incorporate the women in the process.

A: To some extent also women are incorporated in the process. The meetings are almost always men, but my understanding of Pashtun society is that the women in the house have input but the man then speaks for the family. Having said that, the women also are very cloistered starting from an early age, so they don't have a whole lot of awareness of what's going on outside of their house or community.

Q: Right, and they don't have formal education.

A: They have very little formal education.

Q: As opposed to men maybe, nor not?

A: The men are also lacking formal education, particularly in Paktika Province. They say that Afghanistan has one of the worst educational systems in the world. In Paktika Province, the educational system is almost completely broken. It lacks funding, teachers, infrastructure. A lot of the teachers are illiterate still. Building on the consultation, if democracy in a larger sense in Afghanistan is going to take hold, education is key. It's something that's more or less broken. The educational system in Afghanistan is broken. It's getting better, but it's getting better very slowly. I was going to say I have limited optimism. I'm pretty optimistic about Afghanistan. I think that's key. We really need to move forward on education if democracy is going to be sustainable in Afghanistan.

The other reason, particularly along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, is that a lot of the education is being done through madrasses, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but it depends what's being taught in the madrasses. A lot of people send their kids to madrasses just because they have no alternative. They have no public educational system there. That's not just in Afghanistan. I understand that's across the border in Pakistan and in north and south Hazarastan. I think that's something we need to focus on.

Q: Madrasses are probably not a new structure.

A: Oh, no. They're traditional. They've been built up over the last 15 years, particularly the more radical madrasses, particularly during the 1979-1989 jihad against the Soviets. A lot of money was put in there purely from foreign donors, the Gulf, Saudi Arabia. I suspect that's still the case. Mosques are being built up now by United Arab Emirates, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but it depends on what the curriculum is in there. If they're being used to promote fundamental Salafist or Wahabist points of view, and particularly the idea of confrontation against the West and jihad against the West, that is not good and that's something we need to counter.

Q: Let's return to the NGOs. We touched on them earlier. You mentioned that there are relatively few of them in the province that you're working in. Let's explore that just a little bit

more. Which and where did you encounter NGOs and what was their relationship with you and the PRT?

A: In Khowst Province, the answer is simple: there are no NGOs. The reason why there are no NGOs is actually a two-part answer. First of all, the security concern. Particularly along the border of Khowst Province, there is a lot of fighting going on. We get attacked fairly often. Even in the interior, we get hit with rockets.

Q: In the interior of your PRT?

A: Yes, here in town. Along the border, there is actually an active shooting war going on. As a result of that, NGOs are reluctant to go there. There are no NGO offices in Khowst Province, which makes the PRT much more important. Because we go out with guns and armored cars, we can do stuff like that, whereas the NGOs have a hard time doing it. At the mission in Paktika Province, there are two NGOs operating there, to their credit. I say it's a security issue, but the other side of the coin also is that the NGOs and IOs have the perception that it is like it was two years ago in the sense that Paktika and Khowst Province and Paktia Province are combat zones. They're not as much anymore. A lot of the combat is going on right along the borders, so that more and more in the interior and away from the Pak border they can operate. So, it's a perception problem. We've been trying to deal with that by having meetings with NGOs and IOs. We had one in Sharan here in Paktika about three months ago. It went well. We had Afghan security forces and the new battalion commander, the PRT commander, stand up and say, "Things are about like they were before. We've really turned a corner. Taliban and Al-Qaeda, the people that we fight with, have lost a lot of their ability to operate and the NGOs can operate here now." But again, it's a problem of perceptions and it's not just in headquarters. I would think it has to go all the way back to New York or London or wherever these NGOs are operating out of.

Q: The two NGOs that you did have in your province there...

A: That was Paktika, yes.

Q: Were you working with them in any way or just consulting with them?

A: I don't know the full answer. I think for the most part the PRT and the maneuver battalion operate pretty much independently of them. I know they operate independently of them. I don't think there's been that much cooperation to date, but I think that's changing. More and more, they're starting to talk.

Q: What would you say was the attitude of the local population toward your presence in any of these different PRTs?

A: I think in general the attitude of the Afghans toward the PRTs is positive. Part of the reason for that doesn't have that much to do with us. It has to do with recent Afghan history, that after 25 years of war, they're worn out. The society is worn out. They've had maybe a million and a half people killed since 1979 in Afghanistan, 45 million refugees. The country is wrecked. So at

this point, they've been through so much, I know they want peace, stability, order, a chance for the kids to go to school, a chance for a fairly quiet life. To some extent, they see us as their best hope for that. The other factor, and we played this up a lot as well, is that the mujahidin who fought against the Soviets are folk heroes and the Afghans remember that we backed them up. We have that history of friendship in wartime, so that counts also. It also counts that we bring in money. Afghanistan is a very poor country, so they see us as not just U.S. military/AID money, but also international community. They see us as part of the international community bringing money in. The Afghans are very proud people and their attitude is, "We will get on our feet, but we need help right now." They want us to be there. The other advantage of the PRT and the maneuver battalions and regional command have as well is that we bring some degree of security there. Most Afghans' main concern isn't terrorism or Al-Qaeda or Taliban. It's more criminals, armed gangs, warlords, that sort of thing, which will affect their personal security. They don't want to be robbed. They don't want to be killed, or what have you. I think that's their biggest concern at this point. We actually can't do as much as they think we can, but there is the perception that we're ready to use force and that keeps the lid on things. They're glad we're there for that reason.

Q: Is your area a poppy growing area?

A: Paktika is not. Khowst is very limited. Paktia is very limited. Nangarhar and Konar are the big ones in Regional Command East.

Q: I gather that that is part of the equation. I don't know to what extent the warlords and the armed gangs are living off the profits of the opium trade, but I would assume maybe they are. If the populace is interested in eliminating the criminal element, then they are also part of the fight against poppy growing.

A: I don't have much of a feel for that. I spent some time up there in Nangarhar and Konar provinces, not enough to know for sure. There are two things that are sort of pulling apart here. One is that Afghanistan is such a poor country that people need a way to make a living. A lot of people would rather not grow poppy, but they do so because there are limited other choices. So, a lot of it will come down to a long-term, 15-20 years, economic development for the country and alternative livelihood programs that may or may not succeed. My understanding is that in Pakistan it took 17 years before they finally eradicated poppy. It will take longer in Afghanistan because it's such a poor country. In Bolivia the international community has been working for decades trying to eradicate coca there and they're not there yet. So, I am skeptical about our long-term chances of eradicating poppy. Most Afghans feel this is against Islam, it's something they shouldn't do, but I think they'll do it just out of economic necessity. Having said that, in Khowst and Paktika provinces, it's not that big a deal because there is not that much of it being grown.

Q: Going back to the criminals and the warlords and the armed gangs, those are a presence in these provinces without any reference to poppy growing.

A: That's correct. Part of the reason they're there and can operate is the weakness of the Afghan national police. The Afghan national police are another key to long-term success and stability in

Afghanistan. In a lot of places they're very weak. A lot of the guys that you see have five or six rounds and that's all. They don't have enough bullets, cars, or gas. A lot of times, they're not paid for three months at a time. They're under trained. A lot of times they're corrupt. Sometimes they don't want to go out of the compound and actually do their job. The international community has perceived this as a problem and is shifting to a model where we'll use the ANA [Afghan National Army] model for the Afghan national police. But until that happens, we're going to have a hard time leaving Afghanistan. We really need to build up the police force there. And not just the police force either. The ministry of interior from everything I've seen needs a pretty drastic overhaul as well.

Q: Now we're getting into some of the legal issues which are part of the agenda, too, the third or fourth major theme, which is legal reform, police training, courts, prison system. You've touched on that a little bit, but maybe you have some other observations as to what we are doing in our PRT programs to improve respect for human rights on the one hand but also good policing and adequate prisons and an adequate legal system.

A: One of the things that the PRTs have done which has been successful is the PTAD program. It's sort of an ad hoc, seat of the pants sort of thing where a lot of the military officers that we have who are police in real life have gone out and trained a lot of Afghan police. It's small group training and I think it's been effective. I know on one of the questionnaire sheets that you passed on to me before was the regional training. That's been somewhat effective, but we have very little contact with what's been going on in the regional police training programs.

Q: We meaning who?

A: The PRT and coalition forces.

Q: The folks who were doing this training were police in real life?

A: That's right. Some of them are actually military policemen also.

Q: And they happened to be part of your PRT force and so they organized some training for police in the vicinity?

A: That's right, for local policemen. It's been very effective because they have the time and they can sit down and mentor these guys and step through. The other thing going on is that particularly maneuver battalions take the police out and do patrols with them and teach them how to do things.

Q: A maneuver battalion would not normally be doing policing? Or maybe that is what they do.

A: Maneuver battalions are designed, set up, to do kill/capture operations. Having said that, they have started very much to phase out of that. The military that I work with makes a division between kinetic and non/kinetic. Kinetic is where people get shot. Non-kinetic is civil affairs. Over the last year, there's been a major shift within the maneuver battalions. For instance, the 27th, and first the 508, then in Paktika, went into non-kinetic operations. They're at this point

doing a lot of civil affairs stuff and very little hard knocks (hard knocks being where they go and knock down doors) or operations ambush/counterambush.

Q: That's because they've been successful in their original goal?

A: Yes, that is because they've been successful in the combat operations. To some extent, Taliban, Al-Qaeda, HIG (Makhtiar's operation) have been defeated in this part of Afghanistan, at least in the short term. Makhtiar was a fundamentalist mujahidin leader backed by the Pakistan Interservices Intelligence and he is still active as part of the counterinsurgency along the Afghan-Pakistan border.

Q: So they're trying to apprehend him?

A: We are.

Q: The maneuver battalion.

A: The maneuver battalions are, yes. Let me say one thing about maneuver battalions. The way I see the PRTs evolving also is from special forces in the very hot areas (the more combat-oriented areas) stepping back, maneuver battalions come in, and then eventually maneuver battalions step back, and the PRT steps in as the security situation improves. Eventually, the military steps back from the PRTs and civilians step in with PRTs, civilians being State, AID, USDA, maybe the Department of Justice. Then eventually you'll still need a security presence there, some military presence, but the civilian component gets built up, and then eventually you can bring in more Afghans to work with the U.S. civilians and eventually the PRT goes away and gets taken over by the government of Afghanistan as normal functions. That's what I see happening, or what should happen, I guess. The other thing I see happening in Afghanistan is that away from the border, heading north and northwest, the security situation is improving more and more. In this part of Afghanistan, north of the Hindu Kush, up towards Mazar, I think eventually the NGOs and IOs and the government of Afghanistan will take over and the PRTs will be phased out. In Regional Command East, the area of Afghanistan along the Pakistan border, the PRTs will need to continue there much longer. The reason is that this is still a contested area, still to some extent a combat zone. I think the PRTs are the only operation that can extend the reach of the central government, do development work; and they will need to continue on, particularly in Sharan, Khowst, Asadabad, maybe Metheron, too.

Q: So you can see evolution in a direction where stability would increase enough that you could add some additional State people to your PRT and add some AID people, but there would still be a core of military to provide security?

A: Yes, I think that's the way it should go. Eventually, the military needs to step back. That's a function of security, but yes, I think that's the way it should go.

Q: One day, of course, they would be gone, but as the balance would shift between civilian and military, they would retain this PRT structure because they need the security package with it.

A: We do. Eventually perhaps the security can be taken over by the Afghans, too.

Q: That's an interesting point.

A: To some extent, we already do that. Particularly in the PRT, a lot of times we go out with Afghan security people.

Q: And these are Afghan army?

A: We go out with Afghan army, Afghan national police, and people who work for us as sort of hired guns.

Q: All of whom need to be trained. Is that something that we're doing as well? We mentioned police training, but Afghan army training – how is that handled?

A: The Afghan army has been trained to a large extent by the international community. The U.S. and Brits have trained the soldiers and NCOs. The French have the lead on officers. So, the Kandaks, which are the battalion structures of the Afghan National Army, are now being deployed, having been trained by us. To some extent, they are still what they call "arcon" to us. They're somewhat under our control still until they can get up to speed. It's almost a mentoring process. We also have embedded trainers with them.

Q: Training an army is a pretty major undertaking. But that's not the PRT's mission.

A: That is not the PRT's mission. To some extent, we get involved with training the police. I think most of the PRTs are involved in that. It's been an unheralded success. We do it low-key. But just for the one-on-one training or small group training, it's been pretty successful. Part of that is ethics training also. I explain to them, "This is why you shouldn't take bribes or run illegal checkpoints."

Q: Do people respond to that positively?

A: I think the people who are harassed by the police would respond to it positively. On the other hand, we have, to be honest, what we call an "acceptable threshold of corruption." Most people realize that in this part of the world – Pakistan, India, Afghanistan – their corruption is culturally engrained and we're not there to eradicate that. So, we do what we can do but we're not after a zero tolerance of corruption here. What we won't tolerate is corruption to such an extent that it's damaging the government or that we can't work with this person anymore or if they're involved. If we're working with somebody who's obviously very blatantly corrupt, it diminishes the authority of the PRT or the maneuver battalions. Another red line is opium smuggling. A third one is if government of Afghanistan officials are involved in what we call ACM activities, anti-coalition militia, i.e., if they're tied in with Taliban or Al-Qaeda, which is the catch-all for HIG, Taliban, Al-Qaeda, whoever else is coming at us.

If I can mention something before I forget, part of the situation with the State Department political officers at the PRTs is that we rotate in for one year. I understand the need for that. It's

hard to get people out for these jobs. But having said that, the Afghan and Pakistan border area in particular is very complex. So one year is really a minimum. By the time you understand the government or tribal structure, you learn some of the language, you learn some of the history, you learn the local players, you learn who's corrupt, who's not corrupt, which tribe is fighting with what other tribe, it takes years. So, one year is much too short. I know how hard it is to fill them. In a perfect world, we'd be out there for three years.

Q: At least.

A: At least. When the British did this, they sent their political officers out for eight or nine years along the border because it takes that long to really become effective at your job.

Q: When did the British do this?

A: That was 100 years ago.

Q: That was a different era.

A: In some ways, it hasn't changed much, especially in the rural areas. It has changed very little with time. It's been a very isolated part of the world. The culture and the tribal structures are still very strong.

Q: What other recommendations would you have in terms of making the PRTs more effective in their different missions?

A: As far as State Department goes – and I don't know how to do this; I just know the end result – we really need more people out in the field. I've been covering a lot of ground. We need to make sure that all the PRTs are filled and regional commands are filled and, if possible, with people who can stay for more than one year. That's really basic.

Q: What was the most helpful thing in your background that prepared you for this assignment?

A: Peace Corps. It was useful background to me.

Q: But that probably wouldn't give you a feel for working with the military.

A: It gave me no feel for the military. To work with the PRT, and even more so the regional commands, a military background is useful. It's not necessary. It shouldn't be a red line. I think I've done a decent job without a military background. Having said that, it's been a steep learning curve also. But it is useful to have to understand how the military works. A lot of the really basic stuff I had to spend time learning. What is an op order? What is a frago? An op order is an operational order that is a big order. Part of that is a fragmentary order. How do you write those? How do you do those? What are they for? Just simple stuff like that, it takes time and effort to learn that.

So there's a huge amount of stuff to learn to effectively work at a PRT: Afghan language, Afghan culture, geopolitics, military, all sorts of stuff. So any preparatory training would be very useful, I think.

Q: What are the greatest achievements that you've had in the very short time that you're there?

A: The biggest achievements of the PRTs, which you can't really define, you can't quantify it, it's not all that measurable, is that they have given confidence to the Afghans, the Afghan civilian population, government of Afghanistan, security forces. In a way, it's like having your big brother there in the sense that people know, "Okay, the PRT is here and they're also backed up." It's not just the PRT. It's also maneuver battalions. It's also Marines. It's also aviation. Also, we have attack helicopters. We have attack fixed-wing ammunition. So, we can bring a large amount of force to bear should we need to. Probably because people know we can do that and are willing to do it and we have done it (we do it continually along the border), it gives a kind of confidence to the government of Afghanistan and the army and the police that they can go out there and handle things. Also, our presence gives people confidence that they can move forward in a way that they might not have on their own.

Q: Confidence in terms of being a modern state? Of course, they have a proud tradition.

A: I think it's more like business confidence. Even from having kids on up, they have a little more confidence that in the future things are going to get better in Afghanistan, partly because we're there on their side. From having kids to planting crops to starting a business to people coming back from overseas, from Pakistan and the area. That's one of the intangibles that we provide. Having said that, I think the other thing as a sort of diversion on that is, we really need to think long-term. If we leave, especially if the U.S. forces leave, then the place could blow up again. The other thing, too, is that a lot of people have put confidence in us, and if we leave I think it would be the wrong thing to do. They've bet that we're going to stay there and they've acted accordingly. If we leave too soon, we'll be letting people down.

Q: Pakistan just said the other day that they thought they'd broken the back of the Taliban. That's fine. You've painted what looks to be an upward trajectory in this fight against the Taliban. What would be your timeframe in terms of being able to say, "Yes, we have broken the back of the Taliban and civil war is not likely?"

A: In the northern parts of Afghanistan, we've reached that point. In this part of Afghanistan along the border with Pakistan, in the region between Nuristan and Paktia where Regional Command East is, we have not reached that point. For instance, in Khowst, Jalalabad, Sharan, and Asadabad, we'll need to stay there as a PRT for maybe another five or six years. I think it's going to take that long partly because it's the border with Pakistan. As I mentioned earlier, this part of Pakistan was not always under the control of the government of Pakistan.

Q: The eastern portion?

A: Yes.

Q: But then Kabul to the west and the south?

A: I haven't spent enough time in Helmand and Kandahar provinces to really know. I think we want to keep a military presence there, particularly at Kandahar air base for a while. Even if we don't use it, just having it there gives confidence to the Afghans and it backs them up. I think it will prevent problems. Part of the problem is not just Afghanistan, either. It's the neighborhood it lives in also. As the last 25 years have shown, a lot of other countries want to meddle in Afghanistan. In a sense, our presence there also is a deterrent to having other countries use Afghanistan again as a political-military-geostrategic battleground to some extent.

Overall, the PRTs that I've seen have been successful in a lot of different ways. They've been involved somewhat in development work. At some point, PRTs really need to step back and AID needs to go in and work more. One of the problems that AID has is that they have a hard time getting their implementing partners, parts of the United Nations, to go into areas and do projects. That's why the PRTs are important. They have the muscle to go in and get things done in areas where security is somewhat shaky still. That's important because we really need to get a lot of points on the board as far as development goes, in the sense that Afghans have said, "Okay, we're with the coalition. We have an optimistic view of the future. We've chosen democracy with the October elections. But what are the tangible results?" These are extremely poor people. What are the tangible results? We have a period of grace here where we (the international community) really need to come in and show the Afghans tangible results, whether it is roads or functioning government. Well, functioning government is not exactly tangible, but irrigation systems.

Q: That would be tangible in the sense that services flow to the localities from the government, schools, for example.

A: Schools, health clinics, water. Education was very key. We really need to get more of our development projects flowing.

Q: There is an AID person in your PRT?

A: There is an AID person in the PRT and then there is also a PRT person in the regional command.

Q: Do you work together on any of the development projects?

A: We consult. The regional guy, our desks our right next to each other, so we work together.

Q: Maybe we'll try and talk to him, too.

Summing up, have we omitted anything that you wanted to be sure to mention?

A: Overall, the military commanders that I've worked with have been extremely good, very competent. But they also are trained as war-fighters, most of these guys, so it's important that there be civilian components in the PRTs and the regional commands, too, because we come out

with a different point of view and a different aspect. We bring a lot to the table. For the most part, they appreciate us being there.

Q: That seems intuitive to me, but I guess we can't take for granted that we would be appreciated for our expertise.

A: It's not as intuitive to the military as you would think. A lot of times, they've turned around to us and said, "I'm really glad you're here because you bring things to our operations that I never would have thought of." They just never knew it was missing.

Q: Can you think of a nice example of that?

A: For me, a lot of it's the larger picture, geostrategic stuff. How do India and Pakistan figure into this? Part of it is understanding how an embassy works also. Like it or not, they're now part of an interagency process, particularly as more and more emphasis is placed on the kinetic/non-kinetic distinction. So, they're more involved in the mission program plan. They have to coordinate with that. There is an interagency process that they're involved in now. Some of them have a limited understanding of how that works. Some of the AID people are the same way in the sense that they're one-year contractors, too. They've never really worked in an embassy setting before, too, so that's something that State brings to the table: how to get through the interagency process as well.

One of the things we're struggling with still is the unity of effort, unity of command idea, too. It's not easy anywhere. But the military is really the big dog of the PRTs and the regional commands. They are the show of their maneuver battalions. So it's still figuring out how to bring in USDA and how to bring in USAID and how to bring in State and the government of Afghanistan and the U.S. military and coordinate things and work together.

Q: The military tours of duty are also very short. Aren't they a year?

A: Nine months, a year, yes. Some are even shorter.

Q: Is that as much a problem as you point out it would be in the State tours?

A: Perhaps even more so. For instance, right now, a lot of the units are getting ready to rotate out and it takes a huge amount of their time and effort to figure out how to rotate out and then rotate the other units in, just because they're bringing in, in some cases, thousands of men and trucks and HUMVEEs and helicopters, and so the logistics of it are huge. Again, a lot of it is that they end up with a limited knowledge of the local cultures, too, which takes years and years and years.

Q: Yes, they don't have a chance to really study that before they come.

A: They don't. Plus, they have very limited language capabilities, which is sort of surprising given the amount of money we spend on the military. You would think we would have more regional experts, but I don't see many of them.

Q: Did you have any language training?

A: I had one month of Pashto. It was interesting, but not sufficient. It would really take a year. As a result, I had to rely on translators.

Q: Yes. That's not easy.

A: That's more or less all I have to say in the interview. As soon as I walk out of here, I'll think of 20 more things.

Q: If you do think of something, please feel free to send an e-mail. You're heading back this afternoon, I guess? You'll be on the plane?

A: I'll fly out this evening, correct.

Q: And in how long will you be reaching your home in Afghanistan?

A: It will take me three or four more days to get there.

Q: What kind of routing do you do?

A: I go through Frankfurt and then to Dubai and then up to Kabul and then down to Khowst.