

## USIP – ADST

### Afghanistan Experience Project

#### Interview #35

#### Executive Summary

The interviewee served in the Office of the Defense Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul from August 2003 to September 2004. Part of his job was to observe the PRTs and to use the information they gathered for reports and analyses of the situation in certain parts of Afghanistan.

When he arrived, there were 4 PRTs, in Mazer-e Sharif (under British command), Bamyan (under New Zealand command), Gardez and Kandahar, both under the U.S. The Mazer-e Shasrif PRT was considered the most effective in dealing the various factions in the area, which were very loosely answering to Kabul. The governors in the provinces varied in effectiveness, with the army corps commanders (warlords) often being more powerful

The usefulness of the British commander in Mazar-e Sharif stemmed from the fact that he was a senior colonel, experienced in dealing with difficult situations (eg. Northern Ireland) and was given considerable latitude by his government as compared to the U.S. operation, which used lieutenant colonels and had closer supervision.

A major problem with the U.S. PRTs was that it was difficult to get adequate, long-term staffing of the civilian positions, ie. State, Agriculture, and AID. Often the positions were filled by those on TDY for 60 to 120 days and did not have much training or experience.

Security problems inhibited the effectiveness of the PRTs. PRT personnel could not always get out into the countryside. Changing the role of Afghan women and stopping the production of drugs did not have a high priority during the period under consideration.

When interviewee left in September 2004 the PRTs had proven to be valuable and sixteen more were established, mainly in more contentious parts of the country along the Pakistan border.

Subject had reservations about the turning over the PRTs to NATO command. The first NATO-run PRT was German, which did not connect well with the military command in Kabul. It seemed to be controlled out of Berlin and was working according to principles laid down by its home country. This may have been a temporary problem.

When he left, the interviewee noted that the PRTs were becoming more part of the Afghan government's reach into the countryside, there were representatives of the government on the teams. Eventually, he expected, the PRTs will be dissolved and their duties taken over by the Afghans.

United States Institute of Peace  
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training

**Interview #35**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*

*Initial interview date: April 15, 2005*

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*Q: To begin with, could you tell me, how long were you in Afghanistan?*

A: I arrived in Afghanistan August 31, 2003 and departed on September 8, 2004. I was there for just a little bit over a year.

*Q: What was your job?*

A: I was (in the office of the defense attaché), a member of the country team at the U.S. embassy in Kabul.

*Q: We're focusing on the PRTs, the provincial reconstruction teams. Was that part of the agenda when you arrived there? Had they come up with the idea of it or not?*

A: PRTs had been established probably six to seven months prior to my arrival. When I arrived, there were four established provincial reconstruction teams functioning within the country.

*Q: Had you any feeling about these... Was this a natural offshoot of our experience in Vietnam with CORDS?*

A: My understanding is that the CORDS program was used as they were looking at a way to accomplish our national goals in Afghanistan so that PRTs were drawn from that concept.

*Q: As you saw it when you arrived there, what were PRTs?*

A: I looked at them as tools by which I could get out of Kabul and into the regions of the country so that I could pursue my mission. So, they were islands of Coalition presence outside of Kabul that would offer me an opportunity to get out into the hinterland.

*Q: When you arrived, where were the four located?*

A: Mazar-e Sharif, where the PRT was operated under the Coalition by the Brits, in Bamiyan, where the PRT was operated by the New Zealanders, in Gardiz, where there was a U.S. PRT, and in Kandahar, where we had a presence as well.

*Q: How did you feel the PRTs were viewed from the embassy?*

A: They were part of the program by which we hoped to extend central government influence outside of Kabul because there had been a common complaint that Karzai, the interim president, only exerted influence within Kabul. A term of derision was that he was the mayor of Kabul, not the president of Afghanistan. So, the PRTs were seen as an opportunity to dispel that notion by displaying a central government influence and by providing some element of security that was serviced by the Coalition outside of Kabul.

*Q: Were you getting reports from the PRTs or did you more or less go out and get your information from the PRTs?*

A: There was information flow from the PRTs to the Coalition headquarters, which at that time was Combined Joint Task Force 180, headquartered in Bagram Air Base. So, the PRTs communicated through the Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force [JCMODA] to the Combined Coalition Headquarters and to the extent that there were other agency representatives within the PRT structure, whether they were U.S. Agency for International Development or State Department reps, those individuals reported back to their representatives at the embassy as well. So there were a couple of information lines that were visible to me in Kabul. But of course, I also wanted to get out and see first hand what they were seeing and talk first hand to people that they were talking with.

*Q: I haven't talked to anybody who worked with the British PRT. How did you find that operation there in Mazar-e Sharif?*

A: It was, at the time that I arrived, probably the PRT that was held in the highest regard from my observation. The PRT commander, a British colonel, was a very able officer, had a good team that had worked themselves into a position of, I won't say influence, but they were a respected entity amongst the various factions that held sway in that region. I think they were also held in a good light by the UN representatives that were based up there and seemed to be very good interlocutors with their Afghan partners in the region.

*Q: What was the situation in Mazar-e Sharif as far as Afghan politics go?*

A: The two principal characters, power figures, in the region were General Atta and General Dostam, each of whom held authority over one of the Afghan militia force corps as they were known in the region. Dostam was headquartered in Sheberghan. Atta was headquartered in Mazar-e Sharif. These two figures were nominally under the control of the minister of defense in Kabul, but they had exerted authority and some coercive authority over people in this region even prior to that connection to the corps. So they were both what had been come to be known as warlords in the region and their interfactional fighting and friction was a cause of concern for stability in the region.

*Q: Part of the PRTs responsibility was to help install and give influence to governors sent by the Karzai government out into the provinces. Was a governor put in there while you were there?*

A: My observation was that the governors in some regions were the key players; in other regions, their role was subordinate, that practical authority was subordinated to other power

figures in the region. My recollection was that in Mazar-e Sharif at this time, the governor of Balk province was the central government's man in the region, but he was not the real power broker in the region. In the south, in Kandahar, President Karzai had just upon my arrival, within weeks prior to my arrival, had installed a centrally appointed governor there that was a Pashtun, to whom power accrued, although there were other informal power structures there. I didn't see the governor of Balk province in Mazar-e Sharif as being a key authority figure in the region.

*Q: Did we see a situation up where the British were, in Mazar-e Sharif, as a problem or was this not a problem?*

A: It was a problem because a centrally appointed governor couldn't assert central government authority and control over the region because these two generals wearing their warlord hats had followings that created frequent situations of instability. But it was complicated by the fact that they were also nominally central government figures in that they were commanders of corps that fell under the ministry of defense structure. So at that point, this was from my observation very much part of the political Afghanistan, that the characters that were put into the central government as a result of the Bonn process were vested into that process by their support of the Coalition, much of which came from their position as warlords. So, Fahim Khan, who was the minister of defense, was a warlord. Corps commanders that fell underneath his authority as minister of defense were beholden to him by virtue of that connection as warlords, yet they were also central government figures. He was the first vice president of the country but at odds in many respects with Karzai in the way that he wanted to move forward, so it was a very complicated political dynamic.

*Q: Sticking with the British, how did you observe they operated in this tricky situation?*

A: I think based largely on the personality of the British commander of the PRT. He established relationships with the various authority figures in the region, was seen by them as certainly a Coalition authority figure but also as someone who could move amongst the various power brokers and play the role of an honest broker amongst them even though he was obviously not an honest broker in that he had a strong tie to the Coalition presence there, which was tied closely to the central government. But he asserted himself by showing good common sense and openness and honesty in his dealings with these figures in a way that allowed their doors to be open to him. By virtue of the open door, he had an engaging dialogue and he was an excellent negotiator, just did a fine job of mitigating and moderating the discussion between these various power centers.

*Q: As a military officer, did you see a different method on the British side? We have our civil affairs units and we were making an effort to get people from the State Department as political advisers and somebody maybe from AID or from the Department of Agriculture. How were the British doing this?*

A: I think to the extent that the British colonel up in Mazar-e Sharif was able to practice this art better than his contemporaries in other PRTs, it was very much a factor of, he was a more senior and experienced officer. He was a colonel in the British army. The PRT commanders that we

put into position were lieutenant colonel civil affairs officers at that time. He had a lot of cache. He was a very capable officer with experience, no doubt, in Northern Ireland and other situations-

*Q: Probably in Bosnia, too.*

A: -where he had been in similar situations. And I think he had a fair amount of latitude from his own military structure and from his own political structure to pursue the route that he saw best as he went about his business.

*Q: Maybe I'm editorializing. I want you to comment. By being British, without significant British forces there, as an American PRT commander you say is a lieutenant colonel, often had several layers above him sort of in the same area of fighting teams and all this which were an inhibition.*

A: The U.S. PRTs at the time were pretty much stand-alone units as well. There may have been a Special Forces presence collocated, but for the most part at that time, in the early days, there weren't other significant U.S. forces located in Gardiz, where we had a PRT – there were special operators there. In Kandahar there was a fairly significant U.S. presence and the PRT naturally interacted with that group. There were also other pre-PRT kind of elements scattered around the country in Kanduz, in Jalalabad. So when I said four, it's my recollection that those four were established as PRTs when I arrived, that others were in the pre-PRT evolution. But the British commander had a tieback to the Coalition headquarters as well but he just had more wherewithal. I think that was largely the reason for his relative level of success in dealing with a very contentious situation. He personally had the experience and the wherewithal to be a solid Coalition interlocutor with these other power figures.

*Q: The New Zealand PRT was where?*

A: It was in Bamiyan to the west of Kabul in a fairly quiet region of Hazarajat [PH], that region of Hazara Shia population. It was not heavily infiltrated by Taliban and there was very little terrorist activity going on in that region at that time. So, it was a fairly stable environment.

*Q: How were they constituted? More or less the same way?*

A: I think in a way comparable to the British PRT. Their commander was also a colonel. It was very much the flagship New Zealand contribution to the Coalition's efforts in Afghanistan. They had a liaison officer up in Bagram with the Coalition headquarters. But that was about the extent of their participation, so they saw their operation of the Bamiyan PRT as very much their most significant contribution to the Coalition effort and it was a fairly robust effort by New Zealand standards for an overseas deployment.

*Q: The political situation there was what?*

A: In the province?

*Q: Yes.*

A: Again, fairly stable. The Hazara population was not restive as the Pashtun population down in the south and the southeast was. So that PRT was able to focus on assistance efforts with a fairly strong hand and they had representatives from USAID and from the British USAID equivalent actually there as well to facilitate assistance programs and projects. Proximity also to Kabul also allowed more projects to be carried out there than was the case down in the south where the security situation severely impacted...

*Q: Was Karzai's man there at the time?*

A: The governor of Bamiyan province was a centrally appointed governor and there wasn't the same kind of interference by warlords. Warlords or commanders were a presence around the country, but unlike Mazar-e Sharif or Herat, the warlords or commanders that exerted influence in Bamiyan had nowhere near the same level of visibility or power as their counterparts in other parts of Afghanistan.

*Q: Moving down to Gardiz, what was the situation there?*

A: Gardiz was south and east of Kabul, much closer to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda areas of Post province along the Pakistani border. The PRT there was established in a very Beau Geste-like Afghan walled, turreted kind of compound. Not far at all from that compound was a U.S. Special Forces compound. They were within sight of each other. The city of Gardiz was also a walled, a very picturesque traditional Afghan populated area. The Gardiz PRT was shelled and mortared regularly. They were in a fairly contentious locale. Based on that very tenuous security situation, the ability to get out of the PRT to work projects and assistance programs was significantly limited. But the fact that we had a PRT presence there and the other collocated Special Forces security element and the fact that there was an Afghan national army company that had been deployed there were all visible signs of our intent to establish ourselves in that area despite the very contentious security situation. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld came and visited the Gardiz PRT early in my time in the country and wanted to again reinforce the statement that this is the way we're moving forward through this vehicle, through the Provincial Reconstruction Team vehicle. This is an important place. It's a contentious place. But we're going to assert our authority here, ours and the central government authority, to try to work even in the tough places.

*Q: How was the Gardiz PRT constituted?*

A: It fell underneath the control of the Coalition headquarters in Bagram through the auspices of the Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force. Its commander was a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel civil affairs officer as I recall. It had a heavy security component within the PRT structure but it also had the civil affairs and civil military operations pieces. But at that time, I don't think that there was a USAID rep. or any other non-DOD rep. within the PRT.

*Q: This was essentially because of the security situation.*

A: And the fact that the other departments were working hard to come up with bodies to fill the non-DOD slots in PRTs. In many cases, the State and even the USAID folks were TDYers that were there for 60, 90, 120 days.

*Q: Yes. In places like that, how were these slots filled in our PRTs? From the American army point of view, were these desirable jobs or just a job?*

A: I had absolutely no role in carrying out that portion of the PRT mission. That wasn't something that I had a hands-on role in at all. But what I drew from talking to PRT commanders over time – at that time the actual officers involved saw it as a very challenging opportunity to exercise their civil affairs skill set and to make a contribution. So, I think they saw it as a unique and challenging job opportunity. That doesn't mean that they weren't frequently frustrated by those things that kept them from getting out and doing more, engaging the way the textbooks said you should be able to engage. Most of them understood why that was the case, but that didn't make it less frustrating. Resourcing and other things were also frustrations. But I think the individuals saw it as a challenging, useful duty.

*Q: On this theme, looking at it from a career aspect, and as a serving officer looking upon the equivalent to PRTs, or civil affairs, as being almost the wave of the future or at least a significant portion of our force is going to get involved in things that require civil affairs experience?*

A: I think we've seen an ever increasing role for that specialty over the course of the last decades. I think we've seen an ever increasing role for soldiers with that skill set over the last 10 or 15 years. My first interaction with civil affairs officers was in Guantanamo Bay back in the mid-'90s when we were dealing with Cuban and Haitian migrants. I had had very little interaction prior to that with even the idea of what civil affairs officers were able to do. But I know subsequent to that, in the Balkans, they played a huge role. And now with Afghan and Iraqi experience, we're seeing that that is very much a skill set that we need to be mainstreaming that specialty more than we have done in the past.

*Q: Not shucking it off to the Reserves or something of this nature...*

A: There seems to be an ever increasing idea that they are going to be playing a larger and larger role in the world that we live in now.

*Q: How did you find relations with the PRT and the fighting force there?*

A: My observation was that the individuals put into those situations, personality always being a factor, but assuming the personalities weren't a driving factor in and of themselves, I think the individuals found out where their missions overlapped and worked, coordinated to ensure that they maximized the utility of each other's skill sets. There were generally good relationships between the folks on the ground, where they were driven into circumstances where good relationships advanced the mission .

*Q: Was there any room for performing the skills that they were supposed to be using, fostering development?*

A: In Gardiz in particular?

*Q: Yes.*

A: I think there were such efforts and that the PRT folks were constantly trying to do the things that they knew they were there to do, but they had to always work within the security constraints that they were challenged by. There would always be individuals in the community that were receptive to their advances, others that weren't. Security would sometimes derail efforts that they had undertaken. I think they were approaching these things with the professional background and experience that they had and then dealing with the realities on the ground.

*Q: The realities on the ground there... Were the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces an ever-present threat there?*

A: In Gardiz in September of 2003, I think that there was a constant level of threat demonstrated both by attacks on the PRT complex and by attempts to interdict their movements with the use of IEDs [Improvised Explosive Devices], checkpoints and ambushes. Those were constants in their life to a greater extent than was the case in Mazar-e Sharif or Bamiyan or Kanduz or Kandahar, some of the other established locations.

*Q: In Kandahar, what was the situation? When you got there, it was a rising PRT.*

A: It was. I went there in late September or October of 2003, shortly after my arrival there. The PRT commander there was in the process then of surveying a site that he was going to actually establish the full-up PRT infrastructure at. So we went out to that site, met with the owner, who happened to be a relative of President Karzai's as it turned out. The PRT at that point was operating from within the larger Kandahar air base coalition location. So, it was a fairly new site that they were going to establish, but they had already developed a relationship with Governor Pashtun and with some of the other developmental organizations that were located in Kandahar, the Japanese and others. They had a USAID rep. already in that PRT structure. So they were a little more advanced in some respects than some of the other locations.

*Q: What were the Japanese doing there?*

A: The Japanese had been major players in Afghanistan from the assistance perspective from the very beginning. They had an NGO sort of coordinating office there that sponsored Japanese assistance projects in the region.

*Q: How did you find the NGOs working within the system?*

A: Across the whole spectrum of interactions. There were NGOs that very much saw U.S. military or Coalition military as part of the problem, not part of the solution, saw military as a

hindrance to their ability to operate freely in the country and pursue their humanitarian NGO goals. They saw military as a presence that complicated the situation for them and confused the local populace, especially in those cases where the military had monies to do small scale assistance programs. Many NGOs saw that as potentially confusing and only as a way to pursue their military objectives, so again complicating their efforts. There were other NGOs that acknowledged that there was a security situation that a military presence could assist with and where to varying degrees they were appreciative of that, although they also... Some would say that, "Yes, you're here and you're providing some security. That does facilitate our ops. But your presence is coercive and gets in the way of our ops." There were other NGOs that said, "We can work better where there is a Coalition presence and where security issues have been tamped down and we're willing to interact with you to see how we can best pursue a common assistance agenda." So, I think more concentrated on the earlier side of that spectrum where they had been there before the military was there. They had operated effectively before the military was there. And they would be happy if the military left, assuming they could still do their jobs without our presence. More NGOs fit into that category when I arrived than into the latter.

*Q: What other place haven't we covered when you initially arrived?*

A: Gardiz, Kandahar, Bamiyan, and Mazar-e Sharif. There was also, again, a pre-PRT kind of presence out in Herat. That, being furthest away from Kabul, had an interest and allure all its own.

*Q: Was Ismael Khan still in charge? This was a very contentious problem. Could you explain how you saw it?*

A: Just prior to my arrival in August of '03, Ismael Khan, who was both the governor and Herat province and the commander of the Fourth Corps of the Afghan militia forces, was told that he could have one of those two positions but not have both. He remained as governor and Fourth Corps commandship was filled by a central government dispatched officer. Ismael Khan had been a prominent figure in the fight against the Soviets, had been a factional commander in the struggle against the Taliban and the fighting that preceded our intervention, had sought refuge in Iran at various times in his life, and was fully entrenched in Herat province. As governor, he still exerted a fair amount of control over the military presence, the Afghan militia force presence, in the west. He had been their commander. He was a jihadist, so even when he gave up his Fourth Corps commandship, he still had a fairly influential structure that was beholden to him. We, the U.S. government, the international governments, and the Afghan central government were all suspicious of his control of monies collected from the transit of goods across the border from Iran. We were concerned about the possibility that his efforts might be driven by the Iranians. He just seemed an unsavory character to be controlling and influencing a fairly important part of Afghans away from the center.

*Q: What was our incipient PRT doing there?*

A: As was the case of the others, demonstrating the central government's authority to reach out into that area, providing nominal security for ongoing assistance programs and projects. There was a State Department rep. invited in that PRT at the time. I think she was the first State

Department person to be permanently sent to a PRT. She was there for almost a year. So, we had a more concerted effort to try to influence the political situation there by virtue of a State Department rep. that had been vetted in the PRT.

*Q: How did you find that the PRTs were given sufficient funds to start projects?*

A: There was a program called CERP, the Commander's Emergency Response Program, which gave commanders monies that they could use to provide small scale assistance in the local community as a way to build goodwill, as a way to develop relationships, as a way to solve local and smaller problems that would inhibit the growth of central government authority and broader assistance programs in the area. So these PRT commanders had a procedure by which they could dispense funds to that area.

*Q: I talked to somebody who was in Herat at one period who was saying that sometimes it got confusing and that the PRT and the next layer of actually a battalion of security forces got involved there, where each one had funds and they weren't coordinating how they were spending their money.*

A: I could see that being an issue in Kandahar, where you had a larger U.S. presence a level above the PRT and there would be a potential for the brigade commander down there to be undertaking CERP projects at the same time that the PRT commander was trying to pursue assistance support and perhaps USAID all could bump up against each other. In Herat, there really was no structure above the PRT for most of the time that I was there.

*Q: This may have come a little later.*

*You were saying that Ismael Khan presented a potential problem. Were we trying to figure a way to move him on and bring in somebody else, or was Karzai as far as we knew trying to do something about this?*

A: I think at the time that I arrived and certainly saw the situation evolve over the course of the year that I was there, the more immediate problems, where governors or other central government figures were actively fighting each other, lay in the north in Mazar-e Sharif with Atta and Dostam. So more focused attention and intervention was taking place in the north. In the west, Ismael Khan was seen as a coercive influence. Certainly his record of things related to women's rights and to human rights in general were on the down side of the spectrum. But that was counterveiled by the fact that he had fairly strict control over the region securitywise, that he had huge funds at his disposal by virtue of the tariffs and customs duties to where he was able to execute fairly broad scale improvements in the region, bring power from the Iranians, building roads, lots and lots of construction going on out there. So, focus in the north because there was actually fighting going on up there between Atta and Dostam, concern about the west because of the Iranian influence and the coercive effects of Ismael Khan, but willing to let that situation sort of bubble because this one was boiling. After the fall of 2003, the November and December timeframe, the British PRT negotiated a truce between the parties in Mazar-e Sharif. Promises were made. Duty positions were... New jobs were promised. Disarmament and heavy weapons contonement of their resources was arranged. Those started to progress. At that point, the

central government was able to focus more attention out in the west. Eventually it resulted in Ismael Khan being replaced as the governor out there and being brought to Kabul just prior to the elections in October.

*Q: Is there any other place we should cover when you first arrived in the number of PRTs or potential PRTs?*

A: The only other one that comes to note was that timewise there was an event that occurred there in October. The Kanduz PRT was the site of the first DDR [disarmament, demobilization, reintegration] effort that the central government undertook. President Karzai went up there and presided over the opening of that event. I went up there as well and was there for the event and to take a look at the PRT corps that we had established there, which ultimately was turned over to the Germans and became the first NATO PRT. So, Kanduz sort of stood out in my mind as a key location for this first DDR event, another program which ultimately the PRTs around the country became very involved in and because the evolution of that PRT caused it to be handed over from the Coalition to the Germans under the auspices of ISAP and NATO, so it was sort of a unique situation.

*Q: What was your impression of the disarmament? Somehow the idea of taking away weapons from an Afghan is like emasculating them.*

A: The DDR process was undertaken by the Japanese. They had proponency for it underneath the Bonn Accords. The idea was to take militiamen who no longer had a role given the rise of the Afghan national army and allow them to turn in their weapon and to take a job or a career that would provide them a livelihood, allow them to take care of their family, without having to take up arms. That premise was affected by several realities. Most of these guys were never full-time militiamen. They already had farms or they had businesses that occupied most of their time, but they would take up arms when they were called upon by their patron, the warlord or the commander.

*Q: It was really quite feudal, wasn't it?*

A: Very much so. And the program had to be adjusted to deal with that reality, to separate commanders from their troops, to provide opportunities for the commanders so that they were less concerned about the troops and could get along without them, and to break down some of those patronage relationships. Over time, we saw that program evolve to better address those realities. Ultimately, have we taken every weapon out of the hand of every Afghan male in the country? Absolutely not. But they did turn in weapons. The weapons turn-in was a very small element of this. The breakdown of the patronage relationships and the driving these people to an idea where they understood they could have a livelihood and take care of their families and have a better future if they weren't carrying a gun for someone else was the principal role and that's been accomplished to varying degrees. [END SIDE]

*Q: Two of the things that one thinks about our policy in expanding the role of women and cutting out poppy cultivation. Were these on our agenda of our PRTs or were they fairly low down?*

A: I think human rights and women's rights were on our agenda from the outset, or at least they were certainly evident on the agenda when I arrived there. To varying degrees, the PRTs facilitated those agendas. USAID and DIFID had programs that helped the cause of women in the country and they were successful to varying degrees based on the local culture and local attitudes and sometimes local influence of people like Ismael Khan. The PRTs served as a hub for those projects, so there was a connection there.

On the drug side, when I arrived in August and started getting out in September, the Coalition policy towards drugs was along the lines of, they're certainly a bad influence, but it's not something that is a military role to pursue. We recognize it as an unsavory influence, but our job is to kill and capture Al-Qaeda and Taliban and we don't have time for that distracter any more so than we have for a number of other distracters. It diminishes our ability to pursue our principal mission. So, drugs were not a huge issue on the PRT agenda as I saw it.

*Q: In the year you were there, was there an election?*

A: I left just prior to the presidential elections, which occurred in October of '04. I left in September of '04. The principal governmental activities that took place during my tenure were the meeting of the constitutional loya jirga in December of '03 where representatives from around the country came and crafted a constitution for the country, which mandated elections. Those elections were originally scheduled for the spring or summer of '04. I would have been present for them had they been conducted on schedule. They were pushed back to October of '04 and I left just prior to that.

*Q: When you left in the fall of '04, how stood the PRT situation?*

A: Shortly after my arrival, the agreement that the PRTs were a viable way forward was pretty much general and so there was a program to increase the numbers of PRTs. When I left in September of '04, I want to say 16 PRTs were either established and functioning or on the very near-term agenda for creation. More importantly was the locations of the PRTs. We were growing PRTs and establishing PRTs in the more contentious parts of the country: along the Pakistani border in Assadahbad in Jalalabad, Bust, in Ghazni coming down, and then in Oruzgan province, there were plans for PRTs in Lashkarga [PH] and in Farah. So, this arc where we had security concerns was also being targeted by presence of PRTs.

*Q: Putting PRTs in areas of conflict... I would think a PRT needs to be able to get out and around or they're just sitting in the compound and presenting a target. How did this work?*

A: The establishment of PRTs in these regions was accompanied by a broader change to the security concept for these regions as well. When I first arrived, the principal construct for security was that forces based for the most part in Bagram and Kandahar sortied out into the hinterlands seeking targets that had been identified to them through various intel means. They would effect their missions and leave and return to their garrisons. And there were garrisons not just in those two locations, although they were the principal locations. There were other smaller fire bases in U.S. Coalition contonements. But for the most part, we lived on those

contonements and operated from them, conducted operations and returned. In the late fall of 2003, we came to understand that the only way we could influence the behaviors, the people, and the conduct of affairs in the hinterland was to have a more established presence there.

*Q: It sounds a little bit reminiscent of our old Indian fighting army when every once in a while we sent out a cavalry troop or something from Fort Apache and then go back to the fort.*

A: That was sort of the operative concept when I arrived. Before that year ended, with the creation of Combined Forces Command there, the philosophy changed to “We’re going to have to have a more permanent presence there where people can develop trust that we’re not going to abandon them. As it is, we go, as ask them questions. They tell us things. We leave, and then they’re targeted because they conspired with us or collaborated with us. So we need to establish a presence that allows them to build a level of confidence that we’ll be there and they can talk to us honestly and not suffer retribution.” That facilitated the establishment of more bases of Coalition presence in some of the more contentious areas and the natural follow-on to that was with the security that’s come from a broader U.S. and Coalition presence, now we can implant PRTs where they’ll be an additional security element of their presence and based on improved security posture they can get out and do their job.

*Q: How was that working by the time you left?*

A: I think it was working then. I think it has over the course of the last nine or 10 months come to be understood as an appropriate way forward and has worked better.

*Q: I realize you weren’t in the head command tent, but you were at the embassy in part of the deliberation process. I would think in the normal military command, there would be a lot of reluctance to try to both pacify a whole area and spread troops around. It’s better to concentrate strength and go out and meet demands. Was there quite a debate about this?*

A: I think there were debates, but the profit of establishing relationships and asserting control and authority over more of the country in these contentious regions was seen fairly quickly even in the winter where the campaign season is usually April/May through September/October because from September/October through March/April, the terrain and the severe weather sort of precludes intense fighting. But even during that winter period, what we came to see by virtue of our increased presence were Afghans coming forward, identifying weapons caches, identifying individuals who were conducting, setting up checkpoints, and being coercive to an ever-increasing amount. So, that was a very positive response even during a suboptimal time of the year that led the Coalition to believe that pursuing this policy even more strongly would yield even greater results.

*Q: Were you, speaking about our military presence there, finding the PRTs added a certain element that was more embedded within the region and getting information that a normal military commander couldn’t get because he was surrounded by troops and didn’t have these antennae out to the community?*

A: Sure. As the PRTs also gained from the presence of ministry of the interior representatives, which was just starting when I first arrived there to have a ministry of the interior general officer in most cases, or colonel, as part of the PRT staff, to the extent that that occurred, that offered them even greater fingers into the local community and even greater responsiveness to community needs. So, I think it's fair to say that the PRT commanders and their staffs were useful tools for the coalition to gain situation awareness and a better feel for the political players in a region that was an exploitable resource. We also saw that the PRTs served as a great base for central government forays with the Afghan national army, where there had been dust-ups as we came to have more Afghan national army forces available to intervene. Where there were issues on the ground between Afghan players, then the PRT became a natural focal point for deploying AMA forces to a region away from Kabul, they'd offer an immediate basis of support for the U.S. trainers and advisers that would come with the AMA. So, there were a couple of different mechanisms by which PRTs were seen as useful chunks or useful presence of Coalition and central government authority.

*Q: Were you picking up a certain feeling of frustration about the PRT commanders about both the State Department and AID and Agriculture in having to send people on TDY? In other words, there wasn't as long a presence because we all know that it takes some months anyway to get your feet on the ground, to really understand the situation, to be an effective person.*

A: Staffing was an issue, especially when we were constantly filling (to the extent that we were filling at all) USAID and State positions; they were being filled with short-term TDYers at least in the initial days. As the recruiting efforts to fill those positions were stepped up, you had more and more people coming out that could stay for a longer period of time. Frequently, the PRT commanders would be saying, "I want a State Department person here. I want an Ag person here" and they just couldn't be resourced because these departments couldn't come up with the bodies. There was also the issue of the PRT, is it a visitors menu, a hotel and transportation node for visitors from the center? To the extent that that became a distracter to their day to day activities, that was an issue.

*Q: You mentioned that the first NATO was a German group. Did you get out to see them?*

A: I never made it back to Kanduz after they became a NATO PRT.

*Q: I was wondering whether you were picking up anything about how that was working.*

A: I had plenty of opportunity to pick up from the local conversations with the ambassador and the CFC military staff the fact that that PRT went through some growing pains. The whole concept of NATO PRTs was tainted by the unique way that the Germans chose to undertake operations in Kanduz. NATO headquarters in Kabul wasn't satisfied with the way that the Germans undertook their effort in Kanduz initially. How we were going to expand NATO's influence over PRTs, the relationship that the Coalition and the other international players and ISAP had with Kanduz PRT, weighed heavily on the decisions of how we would push NATO proponentry for PRTs, how we would advance that. The concerns about the Kanduz PRT from my observation were driven largely by the fact that when the Germans established the PRT, there were dual chains of command. There was a military chain of command that reported nominally

through ISAP and back to Berlin and to NATO headquarters. And there was a political ministry of foreign affairs chain of command that reported straight back to Berlin. And the conduct of the PRT operations was heavily influenced by national caveats about the way that the Germans would pursue their activities in Afghanistan.

Q: So in a way it was almost a hands-off area.

A: It wasn't hands-off because the U.S.-led Coalition continued to assert its right to operate throughout this region but with respect towards the appropriate coordination to ensure that no one was put at risk. What we weren't getting from that PRT, unlike the other PRTs that were run by the Brits and New Zealanders and by the Americans was a steady flow of information. They weren't responsive players in the way that we had come to see PRTs. If we were going to expand NATO's presence and the German model was to be the operative model, then that caused us some real concern because as we started giving up our U.S.-led Coalition presence at PRTs or PRTs proliferated under the NATO model, if they were following the German way of conduct, then there was going to be less influence, less insight, less central government authority and the potential for other nations who undertook the PRTs under NATO auspices, more national caveats, more independent behaviors, and less cohesiveness.

*Q: With the PRTs, were there any projects that were particularly felt to be valuable?*

A: I don't know that I can talk with any degree of detail to projects.

*Q: I'm thinking of schools, wells, and things like that.*

A: Such efforts were undertaken. The PRT location often, if they didn't have an embedded USAIDer, then the fact that USAID folks could go out to the PRT and through them interact with their various implementing partners was seen as an advantage. But I really didn't play in any significant way in the project role.

*Q: What about medical teams? In Vietnam, this was a significant part of our military effort. The Marines are very good at putting corpsmen out into areas and bringing at least basic medical attention. The idea was to sort of win the hearts or minds...*

A: Sure. The Brits did that very effectively in Mazar-e Sharif. They had a physician and a nurse that were assigned to the PRT obviously justified by the fact that there were British soldiers there and they need to be taken care of. That quickly became a resource that was utilized more broadly within the community. At one point, the physician was a female, which allowed her to do things – outreach for women and establish clinics and it was non-confrontational because it was a woman doctor and the locals could deal with that. So, the Brits had a very effective operation going on up in Mazar-e Sharif. When the Germans took over the Kanduz PRT, one of these national requirements says if you're a German soldier deployed away out of your country, then you're entitled to similar types of medical care as would be availed you in your home country. So, a big chunk of the German PRT presence was focused on the establishment of a very capable medical facility there. There were outreach efforts from that very capable hospital into the local community. The U.S., the Coalition PRTs, the others, had

less embedded medical capability, although they frequently served as a base by which the Coalition from Bagram could send medical personnel out and do some outreach. But there was less embedded in those other PRTs than I saw to be the case of the German PRT or in Mazar-e Sharif.

*Q: By the time you had left, had our embassy established essentially a PRT central point where the information of these things would be absorbed, in other words, the fruits of the PRTs would be coming to our top people there?*

A: There were a couple of things that occurred, evolved during my time there. On the Coalition side, on the straight military side, they established regions where regional commanders had proponency for all of the activities within their region – combat activities, logistical activities, and PRT activities. So, once that structure was in place, then we had a more uniform and controlled (not controlled in a negative sense), but a more visible flow of information from the PRTs into the other Coalition elements in these regions to the center. So, information flow was enhanced there. And control of movement, resources, and visitors, all those things, were similarly improved. Almost from the outset at the embassy in Kabul, there were a couple of sections within the embassy in the country team that had designated PRT persons. The GSO [general services officer] at the embassy had a guy who supported PRT requests for equipment and tools. The political office had a PRT rep who was nominally the focal point for the State Department PRT embedded persons who were reporting back up to the embassy. Those central nodes within the embassy were one-man operations at a couple of different places at the very beginning. As I was leaving, there was an effort to put a coordinator over the political office and the GSO and the media folks as PRT reps. and to provide more structure to that. It had not been established yet when I left.

*Q: How did you find the training of officers coming out? I served in Vietnam with the State Department at one point. We had the Vietnam Training Center with both military and civilians students. There was language training for those who needed it. But also getting the culture and understanding sensitivities and the operations thing. Was there anything of this nature for our people going to Afghanistan?*

A: For the State and other agency reps?

*Q: State and other agencies and the military, to get them ready to go out to...*

A: On the military side, there is predeployment training. There were concerns that soldiers and DOD types from various organizations were given various levels of preparation and sometimes you would see that some people weren't as well prepared as others. The military undertook several different steps to try to make the preparation more effective and more uniform.

On the civilian agency side, I don't know with certainty what steps were undertaken. I know that officers that reported to the country team, many had had exposure to the language and through FSI had been exposed to other cultural issues. Afghanistan seemed to be a hard post to fill and so you had a lot of junior officers coming there that were energetic and saw this as an opportunity and an exciting place to serve but not in all cases did they represent the best and

brightest from their various functional areas from my observations, and one I heard echoed by other folks who had a better perspective on State Department assignment policy and the wherewithal of State officers in the different functional areas. I think in the interest of getting folks out to fill some of these positions and in their willingness to accept volunteers to fill some of the PRT positions, perhaps preparation was either put to the side or these individuals weren't really responsive to the deployment training opportunities that they were given.

*Q: Yes, I've had that criticism leveled a number of times, that we haven't gotten into this – this and in Iraq – in a way, it developed, but we had much more time to do it when we sent people to Vietnam.*

*Overall, what was your impression of the PRT system as you saw it evolving and whether the PRTs? Is this a concept that you think is something that should be fostered and developed?*

A: I think that PRTs today... As I left from my time in Afghanistan, the PRTs certainly held bits of the core as they were envisioned in early 2003, but they had changed considerably based on the evolution of the central government, the leveling of the playing field across the country. There was no single template for the PRT where you could say "Every one of them looks like this," although there were common elements of all of them. They were doing useful work and in some cases absolutely vital work in Herat and Mazar-e Sharif. I saw PRTs that were effecting the Coalition effort and in many cases the U.S. government policy in usually important ways. And individuals within those PRTs who played key roles in very critical situations that advanced the U.S. government and the international community's efforts in very significant ways. But even more broadly, the evolution was accomplishing our intent of pushing out central government authority, demonstrating a continued interest in these regions in the central government and from the international community, perhaps breaking down some of the barriers that had been there concerning NGOs and other international organizations. Where PRTs were effectively led and manned, I saw a trend to have better relations in that region with the UN reps. with NGO reps., with other international organizations' reps., in dialogues that ultimately advanced our national policies as well as the policies of the broader international community.

*Q: The relation with the NGOs, many of them come from – and I'm not using this as a pejorative term; I'm using it as a philosophical term – sort of the left-winger... There's natural antagonism between Doctors without Borders and the U.S. military. The point is that in many cases, they're on the same side in realism. But it's getting both sides to talk to each other, to understand they're on the same side.*

A: Yes, and to the extent that that results in deconfliction of effort or coordination - at least deconfliction, preferably coordination of effort – and sensitivity to where each party stands on the issues so that they can do what's right for the locals, that's a good thing. It doesn't mean that Doctors without Borders or ICRC are ever going to with open arms reach out to do things with the military. I don't think it's necessary that that happen. But you can better affect the broad, positive influence that you want to have if you're at least aware and perhaps in some cases, through intermediaries, interact. And there were plenty of opportunities under the auspices of the UN and the Afghan NGO Security Office [ANSO] was sort of a clearinghouse for security related information that fed the NGO community and they were seen as an NGO in and of

themselves. The fact that the guy who headed that office would call me at 3:00 in the morning and feed me information that he knew would get to the Coalition gave him two layers of removal from the military, benefited all the parties involved, the true tree huggers would still talk to him because they knew he wasn't in the military's pocket, yet through the judicious application of telephone and radio procedures and a willingness to engage, we were able to help people out who never would have openly solicited or accepted our help. That kind of dialogue is a useful thing.

*Q: I have one last question. How did you see the Afghan government, people who were affecting the PRTs? How did you see the Afghan government going out, developing, and being what we at least as Americans would consider effective in other words, more democratic, more responsive, that sort of thing?*

A: I think I saw an evolution in that process as well over time. The PRTs when I first arrived there were very much Coalition entities. Although they were trying to do good for the local populace and they were undertaken with the premise of extending central government authority, there really wasn't an element of the PRT that could be said to be doing that. There were no MOI reps within the PRTs. They were Coalition entities. Over time, we saw more and more central government participation in and influence on the activities of the PRTs. The PRT governing council that was established actually was headed up by the minister of the interior by the time I left. There were minister of interior reps. embedded in most of the PRTs. PRTs became venues through which the ANA [Afghan National Army] could be focused and brought to bear on the central issues. So I guess the PRT steering committee that I was just referring to was actually chaired by the minister of the interior. So, over time, what we saw was the PRTs being more influenced by and coming under greater control by the central government with an idea towards ultimately the PRTs needing to go away and dissolve because their purpose would be achieved by central government figures in the local governments that did what the PRT wanted or what the PRT was originally designed to do. We're going to transfer all of U.S. and Coalition PRTs to NATO over the course of the next couple of years. I think implicit in that transfer is the idea that ultimately those NATO PRTs will dissolve and be replaced by Afghan entities that have the capacity to do the work that needs to be done.

*Q: I take it that, projecting ahead, you're optimistic.*

A: Yes, I'm sort of a naturally optimistic person, but I think in this case, it's supported by the results that we've seen over the course of the last year and a half/two years based on this policy and its evolution and the willingness of all parties to allow it to evolve, resource it to varying degrees but pretty consistently put resources to bear on the problems that the PRTs were encountering with an eye towards making the situation better. I think we're going in the right direction.

*Q: Okay, well, thank you very much.*

[END INTERVIEW]