

USIP - ADST  
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview # 20

Executive Summary

The interviewee served on a temporary assignment from September through December 2003 at the PRT in Bamian Province, in the area of Hazarajat in the Hindu Kush, about 100 miles west-northwest of Kabul. The Hazara people are Shiite and were persecuted by the Taliban. They are sympathetic to the U.S. presence in Afghanistan.

Interviewee received no training or orientation for the assignment, since he went to Afghanistan directly from his overseas post. He was able, however, to be included in meetings set up for a Congressional staffer in Kabul, so received good orientation there. He arrived at his PRT on September 23, the day the U.S. was handing it over to New Zealand.

The Kiwis increased the PRT's personnel to about 120. They had over 100 military personnel from their army, navy, and air force. Interviewee was from the State Department and was joined by representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and USAID. The U.S. presence included a four-man civil affairs team made up of reservists. There was also a PsyOps detachment that included cleared Afghan interpreters. Interviewee cited the importance of language skills among American personnel because he had "minimal confidence" that the interpreters were interpreting correctly. He felt that communicating with the local community was the "weak link in the whole PRT process."

The NGO and international organization presence in Bamian was quite extensive, including ICRC, UNAMA, UNHCR, Doctors Without Borders, Aga Khan, World Food Program, and Catholic Relief Service. Interviewee emphasized the "deep suspicion" among NGOs toward the military and the U.S. Government. The NGOs appreciated the protection provided to them by the military and could understand the need to extend the influence of the Afghan government, although they mistrusted it. But they did not want the PRTs to engage in civil development projects. They feared that such PRT involvement would make the Afghans think that NGO activities were an arm of U.S. policy.

Interviewee reviewed the importance of "de-confliction," the process of avoiding or defusing conflict between various groups, e.g., between PRTs and NGOs and between US military and others. UNAMA was key in smoothing over "accusations and bitter infighting." He noted that perhaps his own most important accomplishment in Bamian had been one of "de-conflicting" when he stood up for the New Zealand detachment after the U.S. military had refused to cooperate in delivering personnel and supplies for the visit of New Zealand's prime minister.

On his arrival in Afghanistan, interviewee had been advised by the DCM to think strategically to come up with recommendations, to try to advance U.S. interests as well as development in Afghanistan, and to focus on provision of security, extending the role and influence of the central government, and assisting in building democracy and civic affairs. He did not have a work requirements statement, and daily activities varied widely, including

meeting with the police chief to deal with complaints about depredations of bandits or mini-warlords, choosing candidates for the International Visitor program, sending sitreps to U.S. military authorities, and deciding on projects for local development. He saw his job as thinking outside the box to come up with creative mechanisms to serve the interest of the U.S. and the local community.

PRT personnel in his area were vulnerable to IED explosions, but the greater risks were from road accidents or getting sick in the absence of adequate medical assistance. There was no threat from insurgents in the area, although there were renegades and bandits. Building a centrally coordinated police and judiciary system was still in rudimentary stages.

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

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*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy  
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*Q: To start with, when were you in Afghanistan?*

A: Well, I served in Afghanistan from September through December 2003.

*Q: How did you get into it?*

A: There was a cable that was transmitted to all diplomatic posts earlier in 2003, I think, perhaps around April, seeking volunteers to go out to Afghanistan. This was at the very beginning of the PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) process, and the State Department was looking for people to go out either on an assignment or on a TDY (temporary duty). From that moment on, when I received the cable, I knew that this was for me. I went back to Washington, made a number of inquiries with the office that was responsible for Afghanistan, and at that point requested the names of people who were either already in PRTs in Afghanistan or who had returned from Afghanistan, and went back out to those people by e-mail, inquiring as to their experiences. Within about two weeks I had gotten e-mails from everyone that I had, every name that I had received, and I was absolutely flabbergasted that, universally, every single person had only positive comments to make about their experiences at the PRTs, and not a few said that if they had to do it all over again, or if they had another opportunity to go out, they would do so.

*Q: Did you get any training or orientation before you went out there?*

A: In my case, no. I was already overseas. So for me, I could not make this into a normal PCS (permanent change of station). This was only going to be feasible as a TDY. I was probably the first TDY-er for the PRTs who actually came out of an overseas post for service in Afghanistan.

*Q: How were you received in Kabul when you got there?*

A: I was on the same flight with a very senior, well-known Congressional staffer. So when I arrived, there was a lot of attention on his arrival, on his visit, which was, as it turned out, very important for the long-term budgetary welfare of our program there. So I was able to hitch on his visit for the few days that I was in Kabul, take advantage of his appointments with our military, with senior people, and got a very good orientation that I probably would not have received otherwise.

*Q: Was he focused on the PRTs?*

A: He was overly, exclusively focused on the PRTs, but it was very high on his agenda, because looking at our assistance program you really couldn't consider extending our assistance to Afghanistan without serious thought to utilizing the PRTs.

*Q: What did you understand before you were actually assigned, in regard to the origin of the PRTs and what the PRTs were doing?*

A: I had in my own mind thought of the PRTs as the logical next generation from the CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) program in Vietnam. And that's how it had been described to me. That's how I envisioned it, not that I had ever served in Vietnam--I was too young to have been there--but I knew about the program. I knew how important a role they had played in Vietnam and, actually, how successful they had been. Afghanistan, of course, is quite different from Vietnam. One of the critical differences in how I felt when I first was exposed to the PRTs was that the PRT effort in Afghanistan was a truly international effort. It was not just the U. S. effort. It may have actually started as a U. S. mechanism for, as we would think, pacification. However, over not a long period of time PRTs really became much more multinational. Of course, today, which is two or three years after the PRTs were first started, we see over a dozen countries that have responsibility for PRTs.

*Q: In 2003 what did you expect to be doing, that the PRT would be doing?*

A: I really at the time that I arrived in Afghanistan had no preconceived notion of my role. However, I had met with the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) at the time, sat down with him, and he had one very critical piece of advice which actually made tremendous sense, and I never forgot it, and I told him that afterwards. He said, "Washington will be expecting you to be like a political officer and sending reports back and doing what we would consider to be more traditional type of work, Foreign Service work. But where your value-added is most important is when you're out at the PRT, away from Kabul, to think strategically, to look at things strategically, to come up with recommendations, strategic recommendations, to try to advance not only our interests, but also the development of Afghanistan, with a focal point on three things: first, the provision of security, which is what the PRT was there to do to begin with or to provide patrolling and a presence; two, to extend the role and influence of the central government, which, traditionally, in Afghanistan has been almost nonexistent in many of these places; and three, civic development, including democracy-building and civic affairs."

*Q: Did you get any PRT training in Kabul, or anything like that?*

A: There was no such thing as PRT training. The PRT office, and I use that term loosely, at the time I was there consisted of one FSO (Foreign Service Officer), whom I had known previously. He was assigned as the PRT coordinator. That was it. He was placed within the political section. He should have had quite a bit of independence, but I think because of the structure of the mission he was kind of placed underneath the political counselor. His role was completely unique from that of any section because the tendency, if you are a coordinator but are subsumed within a larger office or underneath a counselor of some sort, whether it be econ (economic) or political, is for your supervisor to try to direct you more towards issues that would be of relevance to the political section or to the economic section. Yet the PRTs themselves are really an amalgamation of all the interests of the embassy, not just the political section. I was doing PA (public affairs) work because I was looking for IV (international visitor) applicants. I did, of course, work closely with AID (U.S. Agency for International Development), which I think was

absolutely critical. You worked, of course, very closely with the military in all its forms, not just with Bagram but with the people in Kabul. Certainly, you're with the military at your PRT. So, because of the nature of the job, the PRT office should be an independent office within the mission, directly answerable to, say, the deputy chief of mission. And at the time I was there it had not matured enough to be independent.

*Q: When you got there, what did they assign you?*

A: I was assigned before I got to Afghanistan. I had quite a strong familiarity with the region, having served in South Asia. So at the time of the selection process, of trying to make the decision whether to go out to Afghanistan or not, I looked at the list of available PRTs, and there were a few that I redlined, so to speak. So when I went back and forth with Washington I looked at what was available and which jobs were being filled at the time and I settled on Bamian. It was available.

*Q: What was a redline consideration?*

A: Let's put it this way: any PRT that would be in the line of fire.

*Q: Basically along the southeast . . .*

A: Along the southeast border, Gardiz, for example. I did not seek to go to Gardiz or Kandahar. It left, of course, about five or six PRTs available. Bamian, I don't think, was necessarily considered a priority PRT, the attitude being that in Bamian you already had a relatively tranquil security situation compared to the rest of the country. However, from the point of view of development, say, number two and number three out of my considerations, Bamian, in my view, was certainly right up there at the top.

*Q: Could you explain where Bamian is?*

A: Bamian is located approximately a hundred miles west-northwest of Kabul as the crow flies. Unfortunately, as the crow flies is not the way that you get to Bamian, so by vehicle it would take an absolute minimum of six and a half hours by a terrible road, and that would be if you were flying on those roads. By airplane, say, by UNHAS (United Nations Humanitarian Air Service) or any other Beechcraft airplane service from Kabul, it wouldn't be more than half an hour, and you had a dirt airstrip with a lot of rocks on it. The PRT itself was located right next to the airstrip. In fact, the airstrip separated the PRT from the tiny village of Bamian.

*Q: I was looking at the map here and it's basically pretty close to what you might call the center of Afghanistan.*

A: And in the center of the Hindu Kush, I might add.

*Q: All right. Would you describe the area you were dealing with?*

A: I tell people, and, by the way, I have my own PRT presentations that I deliver. The description I use of Afghanistan is that it's a country the size of Texas, but if you were able to put it on an ironing board and flatten it out, it would be the size of Brazil. In my experiences I've never seen a more rugged territory than Afghanistan, and everyone who's been there will concur

with that assessment. Bamian is located in the heart of the Hindu Kush mountain ranges at about maybe 7,800 feet, between 7,500 and 8,000 feet, and that's the valley. The mountains around Bamian easily surpass 15,000, 16,000 feet. The area of Bamian is called Hazarajat, the location of the Hazarajat Shiite, unlike most of Afghanistan, and also they generally appear to be in a direct lineage back to the Mongols from the time of Genghis Khan, the group that's over years and centuries been despised and even persecuted by the Sunni majority amongst the Afghans. The area consists of deep valleys, with impassable mountains, literally impassable mountains, where you really are restricted by very high passes, mountain passes, which, during the winter, are snowed in. The area that we're responsible for, and "we" refers to the PRT run by the New Zealanders, ran, I guess I would say, north about 50, 60 miles, south about, maybe, 80 or 90 miles, and west for about 80 miles. It wasn't a large area. If you were looking on a map, you'd say, this is a pretty small AOR (area of responsibility). However, because of the immense difficulty of travel in this area and of communication, it was a very difficult assignment. There was not a square inch of macadam in Bamian Province. There was not one foot of telegraph, telephone wire anywhere. There were no electricity generating capabilities in the area. We are talking at a level of technological development that I would refer to as "Biblical." Because of all these issues, and even communications, even using radio communication and other military communications, because of the high mountains, one valley over and you couldn't even talk to your patrols. So this was a far more difficult AOR to deal with geographically than some others in the country which may have been located in somewhat more, shall we say, developed areas.

*Q: Let's go back in history up to the recent overthrow of the Taliban and the role of the Taliban outside of Bamian.*

A: Well, one of the reasons Bamian was considered a relatively easy PRT, and I shouldn't be using the term "easy," is that the Hazara were extremely persecuted by the Taliban. Thus they were very strongly supportive of the efforts of the United States and of the coalition throughout our invasion in 2001 and afterwards. The Hazara have been among our most fervent supporters. When the Taliban were close to taking over Afghanistan in 1998, they were finally able to break through the valleys, the passes into Hazarajat, into this region, which had succeeded until then in keeping the Taliban at bay. When the Taliban did get in there they proceeded to massacre hundreds and hundreds of people, not only in Bamian, but in Yaklin (phonetic) and other small communities. They also destroyed most of the housing and they either killed or took all the livestock. At the time when I was there, in 2003, and I asked about where the livestock was, because there was relatively little livestock, I was told that they were perhaps only at five percent of the levels that had existed prior to when the Taliban came through. It was also an area that had been severely depopulated because of the Hazara fleeing into Pakistan, and particularly into Iran, from the Taliban. So this had been an area that was deeply impacted by the Taliban and their policies, culminating, of course, in early 2001, with the decision by the Taliban to destroy the Bamian Buddhas, which they proceeded to do. You can go to the places where the Buddhas are, or were, and they are nothing more now than huge cavities in the cliff, with the rubble below of the destroyed Buddhas. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and others, particularly the Japanese, are now trying to do something with the sites, but it will obviously be impossible to replicate the original Buddhas.

*Q: This is considered a real crime against human culture.*

A: Certainly. And having witnessed it firsthand, there's no doubt. But the Hazaras themselves-- I can't even think of a good word in English--but they're "humilday" (phonetic), even more than

humble. They certainly are a very humilday people and they obviously have many of the same attributes and the same very attractive qualities of other Afghans, of hospitality and of graciousness. But, again, what struck me the most from Hazarajat was that the level of technological development was, in my view, certainly no greater, no higher, in many ways, than what I had witnessed in Africa. It's a bit of a shock to witness something right out of the Old Testament in front of your eyes as far as threshing wheat or raising goats. In this instance I have to say that one of the things that the Taliban probably succeeded in doing was pushing segments of Afghanistan back about three millennia. Not that they had ever gotten forward from that, but because the society itself, the structure, was so fragile that the Taliban by their very activities forced this region to go back to a kind of Bronze-Age level of technology.

*Q: When you got there, can you talk about what the PRT consisted of?*

A: I arrived in Bamian on September 23, 2003, and I was accompanied by the U. S. Department of Agriculture representative, who was also being assigned to Bamian. The very day that we arrived was the day of the transition, the transfer of authority, from the U. S., which had started the PRT, to the Kiwis, to New Zealand. So we were there for the ceremony of taking down the American flag, the New Zealanders raising the New Zealand flag. The Kiwi soldiers performed a kapahaka, the traditional Maori dance, for us. A number of speeches, the various local dignitaries, et cetera. So we got there on the very day that, in some ways, you could say history was being made. The PRT under the Americans consisted of about a dozen plywood huts, a mess hall, a large perimeter with sandbags and the casements filled with dirt, a lot of barbed wire, of course. The reason it was so large despite the fact that the Americans only had about 50 military personnel located there was because it had been used as an Afghan militia base as well.

The Kiwis came in and intended to increase the military complement to over 100, and in fact their level was about 121, I believe, military personnel plus... Let's round at about 120 personnel, total, on the facility, which meant that things were a little bit tight. The latrines that were designed for half that number of course had now to service more people. The laundry facility had to service more people. The mess hall had to service more people. The communication systems, the command center, and everything else the Kiwis had to upgrade to meet their specs. So during this time that I was there the Kiwis were expending a lot of effort to expand the facilities to make them adequate for a longer duration stay, including insulation. When the Americans built these plywood huts, which they built, I believe, early that year, they were obviously not built to winter specifications. So the Kiwis feverishly had to obtain insulation and install the insulation. It gets cold up there very early. The Americans, for heaters, had used the local kerosene heaters that Afghans, of course, use; but Afghan houses are made of mud, and what's going to burn down in an Afghan house would be the roof, but the walls would certainly not burn. These plywood huts, of course, would go up like matchsticks. So the Kiwis made the immediate decision to take out all these kerosene heaters and install electric overhead space heaters. The problem with that was that the space heaters required electricity and there was not enough generating capacity to run the space heaters. So during my time there we did not have heat in the huts because of the lack of generating capacity, and it was cold. That was the most difficult aspect to the TDY, just the frigid nature of being located high in the mountains without heat.

*Q: The New Zealanders, what was their approach to the PRT? They were new to the game. Were you sensing a different set of priorities or a different philosophy?*

A: No, on the contrary. Yes, the Kiwis may have been new to the game in Afghanistan, but they were not new to the game. These were soldiers who had had previous experience elsewhere, in the Solomon Islands, in East Timor. So they were used to peacekeeping-type of operations, or similar type overseas missions. The New Zealanders came under the U. S. within the coalition. They are not a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) country, and they were not a member of ISAF (International Security Assistance Force), run by NATO. In Afghanistan you have two principal commands. You have the coalition command, led by the United States and consisting of countries, including Great Britain and Australia, et cetera, Japan, whatever. Then you have ISAF, of which the United States is also a member, but ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force, consisted of NATO countries. The U. S. command really was the big dog during my time there. ISAF was responsible for providing security in Kabul and its environs. The United States and the coalition were responsible for the entire rest of the country. There were a lot of complaints that ISAF was kind of Kabul-centric. Now ISAF has actually gotten out and expanded itself. The Germans were first in having a PRT at Kandoz, which was under ISAF command, an oversized PRT, as it turned out. The Brits in Mazar-e-Sharif also then came under the ISAF command, as did these other new PRTs which have cropped up. The one I'll be going to in a few months, in Herat, comes under ISAF and it's run by the Italians. The Spanish, the Lithuanians, the Dutch, all these countries now have taken over various PRTs. The Kiwis, to my knowledge, still remain under the coalition, and despite the problems that we had, they kept to American rules and American procedures and American objectives. During my time there, the commander adhered to the U. S. policy and precepts very carefully, including that of having no alcohol on the base, which for a Kiwi is a very serious policy decision. So, yes, we were part of the American team.

*Q: What did the team consist of? You mentioned the U. S. Department of Agriculture representative. You were State Department. Were there others?*

A: Yes. First, the Kiwis themselves had a whole complement. I'm not exactly sure if I would describe it as a company, but it had over a hundred troops. It was company-size. Of those troops, you had army, navy, and air force. That is, they didn't just limit it to the army. The commander was army. In fact, he was out of the armored side of the army. But you also had engineers. You had a tiny engineer detachment. You had your medical unit, which, I believe, was navy personnel. You had four different patrols. Those would have been your infantry types, the personnel who would go out on patrol, and there were four different ones that had different areas of responsibility around Bamian. Your best people they sent farther afield--I noticed that--the ones that seemed to have the most competence and they were given the hard tasks. I would say, maybe ten percent of the personnel were women, again army, navy, and air force. Then, of course, you had your command structure. They had their own cook, their own mess hall staff. They would hire the locals to do some of the more custodial work around the PRT, taking care of the trash, making sure all of the hooches had water, doing laundry, et cetera, help in the kitchen. It was a fully functioning PRT as the Kiwis took command. They had been eased into command by the Americans and then they took over on that date and they were fully functioning from day one.

Amongst the non-Kiwis, you had myself, of course, with State Department; you had an AID rep, who was actually a contractor, but he was representing AID; USDA (U. S. Department of Agriculture) had a representative, a fantastic individual who has gone back now for his third tour in Afghanistan. We also had a PsyOps (Psychological Operations) team, including cleared interpreters. Interpretation was, of course, one of the Achilles heels for the entire operation. The



PRT relied on about half a dozen "terps," interpreters, usually young Afghan males who had perhaps even been imprisoned by the Taliban and clearly had their own motivations for doing this. The communication, then, with the local community was done through these terps. I submit that this is the weak link in the whole PRT process. By the way, because I am going out again to Afghanistan and I will be serving in a PRT, I started Dari about six months ago on my own. I've been studying it on my own for the last six months and will take about five or six weeks this summer. Not that that will get me to fluency, but at least I won't have to depend 100 percent on terps, in whom I have minimal confidence that they're interpreting correctly.

*Q: Were there other forces from outside the area, non-governmental organizations, other groups?*

A: Absolutely. Absolutely. The NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) community was quite extensive. First, you started with the United Nations, and the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) served as the umbrella for the rest of the NGOs. That is, they were the coordinator. They kind of served as the backstop for NGO activities. In a place like Afghanistan coordination is a major challenge. Particularly toward military, NGOs have a deep-seated suspicion, with perfect right, of the military, of our military or any military. And they also have a very deep suspicion of anything having to do with the U. S. Government. In Bamian I think all the NGOs were represented. Amongst the major ones, of course, you had UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees). You had Doctors Without Borders. You had Aga Khan, World Food Program (WFP), Catholic Relief, a long list of NGOs either affiliated with the United Nations or independent NGOs. These were organizations that may have had a representative or two, or an office in Bamian, had projects in the Bamian area, and resented, deeply, the interference of the U. S. Government or of the PRT militarily. However, they saw that the PRT was an absolutely necessary evil because it provided security, and that was uppermost in their minds. So, where did they have trouble with us among the three goals of enhancing security, extending the Afghan government's influence, and improving civic affairs? They had no trouble on the security side. In fact, they wanted us to provide the utmost as far as patrolling and everything else. They understood our role as far as extending the influence of the central government. They understood that that was important. They had suspicions about the central government, the Karzai government, but they understood it. Where they really had deep-seated problems was as to why we were involved in civic affairs. Why are we involved in helping to build schools or to provide teacher training or health services or whatever? "We, the NGO community, should be responsible for that, and you guys, stay away." NGOs had a difficult time appreciating the political expediency that we had to be involved in these activities, that for our own foreign policy we cannot just be involved as a security organization. We had to be involved in development as well. This is where UNAMA's role was absolutely critical, to try to soothe over the ruffled feathers, the accusations and the bitter infighting that occurred. One group that we had at the PRT that I neglected to mention: we had a four-man civil affairs team consisting of one major and one NCO (non-commissioned officer) and two privates, something like that.

*Q: Were these New Zealanders?*

A: No, these were Americans. In fact, we shared the hooch with them. They were reservists. Three of them were out of Minnesota and one was out of Texas. Almost all American civil affairs military personnel are reservists. So they were civil affairs teams and they managed the money directed to projects in the civil affairs side, again, schools and things like that. Money for

digging wells or putting in a small culvert or bridge. Things like that. That's where we really ruffled a lot of feathers amongst the NGOs.

*Q: Was there any conflict?*

A: That's the whole problem. You need to have de-confliction, if you've heard of that term. It'll be in the new Webster's. De-confliction is to try to come up with ways to avoid these disputes and conflicts before they get really serious. The coordination that UNAMA was leading was really one of de-confliction. The NGOs wanted to do projects, but many of them didn't want to go very far from Bamian because of security or whatever. It's very difficult to travel. So if we did the tough ones, if we would do the tough wells and the tough projects that they couldn't get to, then they could do the ones that they could get to. That was kind of the simplistic argument, the kind of de-confliction issues. Where we ran into problems was that some of the NGOs didn't want us to do anything. Even if it were impossible for NGOs to get out to these places, they didn't want us involved in them at all because of the fact that in the minds of the local community they feared that the locals themselves would interpret NGO activities as being nothing more than an arm of U. S. policy. What they really hated was that they were seen as an instrument of U. S. policy. Of course, they were, but the local community couldn't understand that. Poor Afghans would see an NGO, and what's the difference between the NGO and, say, the U. S. They really couldn't sense it. And so that was a very strong point of resentment where we needed to achieve some de-confliction led by UNAMA.

*Q: Did you find your role, as sort of the diplomat in this mix, as one of working particularly hard on the de-confliction type of thing. In other words, diplomats try to smooth ruffled feathers and all that.*

A: I think the most critical role for any PRT-er, and that's what we called ourselves, PRT-ers, is de-confliction. The other issues, the assistance, the civic affairs, the security issues, have clear lines of responsibility. Obviously, the security, patrolling, that's strictly military. Okay, I'm not involved. That's military. Doing the AID projects. We had an AID rep. He did the liaison for that. To do the PsyOps and the force protection work there was a team that did that. But overriding everything was this need for de-confliction and for coordination. So really, yes, for the State Department person on campus at the PRT probably the most critical role beyond the need to think strategically was to serve as the de-confliction lubricant with the local authorities, with local communities, and with the NGOs, and to try to build some level of trust and confidence on a personal basis as much as anything else, because you're in an environment where there's no escape, where you do not have the ability to avoid issues or people. It's a very, very small world, so you have to tackle things because otherwise anything that's left to fester will have serious repercussions. There is no bureaucracy out there. The layers of bureaucracy just don't exist. It's independent action that makes all the difference. And it's also the ability to get along with other people even if you don't necessarily personally have an affinity with them.

*Q: Now, take something like Doctors Without Borders, which is essentially a French organization.*

A: Correct.

*Q: The French and their foreign policy and the American foreign policy don't converge. It's not just at the policy level, but almost at the national reflex level. Could you go over and chat with them? I mean, what would you do?*

A: We shouldn't just pick on Doctors Without Borders. The International Committee of the Red Cross and other organizations had a deep-seated fear that they would be tarred by association, guilty by association, with us, and this could lead to their workers being kidnapped or killed or whatever. And I found their fears to be legitimate. These are very valid concerns. I do not believe that the NGOs, such as Doctors Without Borders or Aga Khan or any of the other NGOs that may have been non-U.S. headquartered, necessarily reflected anything to do with the policies of their governments. But there's no doubt that the individuals reflected the prejudices of those peoples. I didn't find this necessarily to be the case with many of the UN organizations. Clearly, the UN workers saw themselves as being international civil servants. Obviously, each ethnic person within an organization like that does reflect the beliefs and the cultural traits of that group, of that nationality, whatever, but the UN missions had achieved a somewhat higher plane of being more global and international. However, people who were stationed out there, who were by themselves, perhaps under a lot of stress, sometimes these things would come out. I certainly worked, or tried to work, very diligently to get along with everyone, and I think I did. I only served in Bamian for three months. That's one of the reasons I want to return; I don't feel I finished. I didn't have enough time there. But when I left, I felt that when they had a farewell for me it felt very sincere and I felt that I was leaving a lot of colleagues and friends. And I feel that in a short period of time if you can achieve that, you have probably done your job as a diplomat.

*Q: Talk about the job. You've got this inherent problem with the NGOs. How did you go about it? What did you do, go over and visit at night? What would you do?*

A: There are two questions you're asking. One is the job and the other is basically after the job is over. But let me go in first and describe the job itself. The job itself doesn't have a work requirement statement tied to it. Each day will be completely different from the day before. It may consist of going down to meet with the police chief. There may be a number of cases. People may be coming to the PRT with petitions because there's some renegade bandit who's bothering them, who's kidnapping or murdering them, and they're seeking our protection or help. Obviously, there are various disputes going on: This group doesn't like that group. You kind of get pulled into the center of that. You have these mini-warlords. Fortunately, Bamian didn't have the huge warlords, but we had a number of these mini-warlords who just carved out their own fiefdoms. We don't want to create more problems because we have to work with these guys, but on the other hand you'd like to clip their wings. So you're dealing with these sensitive, internal political issues that we really have difficulty, as foreigners, even understanding. We also are constantly involved in the development side, so we're talking to people about what their needs are, looking at the projects that have been done, seeing whether they are working or not working. There was one program, as I hinted at the very beginning, where I spent one whole day interviewing mullahs from Hazarajat for possible participants in an International Visitors program. You have to be very, very flexible. You have to be very, very open-minded as to what your day is going to consist of. And the last thing that I would do would be to sit there and be a reporting officer. I completely agree, as I mentioned earlier, that our jobs out there are not to be traditional. Our jobs are to get ourselves outside of the box, to think outside the box, and to try to come up with creative mechanisms that serve not only U. S. interests but the interests of the local community. That doesn't necessarily mean sitting and writing reports. Now, you write a

number of reports anyway, and every night I would send in one or two paragraphs or so through the Kiwi command post back to U. S. military authorities on the situation, a situation report: what we did that day or what issues had come up. So that was important.

There was one other aspect to the job that is probably most underrated and probably no one else would ever mention, but when you're at a PRT run by a command that is not American but is answerable to the Americans, and you're the American there, you're the head American. Then you also have a de-confliction role between that group, in this case, the Kiwis, and the Americans. I served that role on one occasion, of which, if you don't mind, I'll give you the story. We had a pending visit by Prime Minister Helen Clark. She came to Bamian. The first time a head of government had ever visited Afghanistan outside of Kabul, to our knowledge. It was a big event, of course, for the PRT, a huge event. Well, I was in Kabul a few days earlier for some meetings and was flying back by chopper from Bagram to Bamian. I got to the chopper and the Kiwis were also bringing in some food and ammunition that were part of this visit. That is, food for the Helen Clark visit and additional ammunition and everything else. The U.S. military, in its infinite wisdom, whoever the aviation controller was at Bagram, refused to allow the Kiwis to put the ammunition and food aboard the Black Hawk, the aircraft, the reason being that the aircraft couldn't carry all this weight and couldn't carry the additional Kiwis that had to get back up to Bamian in order to be there for the prime minister's visit the next day.

Now this would be understandable under ordinary circumstances: There's only one plane and you don't have enough weight and everything else. But we have a prime minister's visit coming up. As we're getting ready to take off I notice that a bunch of American soldiers get on to a parallel Black Hawk, and the two Black Hawks fly side by side up to Bamian, escorted by Apache aircraft. Apaches are gunships. I had actually begged the pilot to take on at least some of the ammunition. I said, "Look, you've got to." And he conceded. The pilot said, "Yeah, we'll squeeze it all on." So I got some of the stuff up there, but when we landed and we unloaded, I noticed this other Black Hawk landed about 200 yards away from us, and the soldiers got out with their cameras and took a bunch of pictures of the Buddhas and Bamian. Then they hopped back on the aircraft and when our aircraft returned, they returned as well, back to Bagram. Needless to say, I personally was furious, and I was deeply embarrassed. Of course, the Kiwis were put into a difficult spot because they came under American command. So they didn't like this at all, but how could they complain about it directly to Gen. Barno? It was very difficult for them. It wasn't difficult for me. So I went back to the embassy with a strident message. Now I didn't expect that this message would then be passed on. But the PRT coordinator down there basically just passed it straight up to the DCM. I think it was before the ambassador got there. The chargé then raised this directly with the senior military leadership, the American military leadership. So this whole thing came back to the Kiwis. The commander, a colonel was basically ordered to come down and have it out with the American generals. Now I've made a bad situation worse, right? Well, I think the Kiwis did receive a deep apology because I went back and my messages said, "Look, if this is the treatment he gets from the coalition, maybe he should join ISAF." That really irritated the U. S. military. You can imagine the political embarrassment that would be caused if the Kiwis decided to abandon the coalition and join the NATO group, our rivals. I had ruffled a bunch of feathers. I think the Kiwis deeply appreciated that I stood up for them when they were basically helpless to make a defense in their own behalf. That was, perhaps, the most important thing that I did during my time in Bamian, was stand up to my own military in defense of the Kiwis, and pointing out, just as a matter of fact, that we had a prime minister coming to visit and that if it were an American leader coming--it wouldn't even have to be the president; it could be just some Congressman--we would have rolled out the red

carpet and we would never have been treated so shabbily. We would have made sure that all the food and ammunition personnel had received A-1 priority status to get there. I think that that's a very much overlooked aspect to this, and I think that, perhaps, in some small way, when I do get out to Herat and work with the Italians, I'll be able to contribute in a similar fashion.

*Q: What about relations with the NGOs, sort of after hours or something?*

A: Yes, that was part two of that original question. Well, it was a bit difficult sometimes in Bamian. We were not far physically from the NGOs. They were generally no more than half a mile away. Certainly it could be walking distance. But we were on a military base surrounded by sentries and barbed wire. So, whereas we would receive them, they couldn't just drop in easily on us. They did it, but another thing that was very strange was that we didn't have any communication capability. That is, you had no telephones. We didn't have radio interoperability with the NGOs. Very strange. Think of how illogical it is that here we are in the 21st century and we had no real ability to communicate with these other groups, from our PRT, across the airstrip, to their offices. So oftentimes we did have to just drop in, and I did that quite a bit, but it was awkward. I think that the lesson learned is that we have to come up with a communication system that works, reliably, and other methods for being able to communicate in a timely fashion instead of just dropping in.

In the evenings, yes, there were times I'd go down there and, of course, I welcomed the opportunity to go down, go to UNAMA or wherever, where they would serve wine and have Heineken. I felt bad for the Kiwis that I had to leave behind. That was always warm because you didn't get that warm and fuzzy on a military base. In the evenings after I would do my report back to the embassy or to Bagram, many of the Kiwis watched movies, DVDs. At the mess hall they might play games, get out board games or something like that. Fortunately, they were able to get SKY (TV). Interestingly, when the Americans had the base they had AFRTS (Armed Forces Radio and Television Service), which they were able to bring in through their satellite communication. About a week after the Kiwis took over, for some reason AFRTS failed. We never could track down why it failed. They, of course, said they had nothing to do with it. So we were not able to watch the World Series or football games. But within about a month they were able to get SKY, and SKY network was beaming down the Rugby World Cup at the time. For a Kiwi, the Rugby World Cup is like the Super Bowl and the World Series rolled up into one. They were in hog heaven until the Kiwis were knocked out in the semifinals by the Australians, and then deep depression settled in. But the television was certainly welcome, and it was one way for us to keep up with the news. We were getting BBC and stuff.

*Q: What was the security situation while you were there?*

A: We're not under threat by Taliban insurgents. Perhaps the number-one threat to us was from IEDs (improvised explosive devices), that is, these explosive devices that could be planted on a road or something, a mine. We were driving around in non-armored pickup trucks, kind of Toyota high-luxe pickup trucks, which were overused, high mileage, falling apart, and certainly if an IED exploded underneath them, there would be very little chance of survival. That was probably the high risk to us. But my personal feeling was that of greater risk, than Taliban or some insurgency in an area where the Taliban would have been easily identified by being different and where the locals hated them so much, were just ordinary accidents. A few times vehicles were rolled. You're on steep mountainsides. You have washed-out roads. A very, very

challenging environment for transportation, and you're doing it in all seasons. So I think the greatest risk was from injury more than, say, from attack.

And moreover, the second risk, probably as great as the first one, is from infectious disease. We, of course, don't think of infectious disease in our environment as being a great risk to us. It's more chronic disease in our lifestyle. But if you're not careful and that tea wasn't boiled well enough, or if that food that you ate wasn't prepared right, you could get deathly ill in an area where there is no operating room, there is no IV unit or intensive care unit. Those, to me, were of a higher risk. However, there were bad guys in this region whom I would describe as renegades, bandits, more than insurgents. If you went down to neighboring provinces like Oruzgan, then you did have insurgents, but we were fortunate in the sense that our threat was not from, say, Taliban insurgents. It was more from these other factors that I mentioned.

*Q: One of your jobs was to extend the rule of the Kabul government and all that. What was the government like in your area and how much of the Kabul government extended there? What was happening?*

A: As I mentioned earlier, traditionally, in Afghanistan, central rule has been not only weak, but almost nonexistent. Afghanistan has been operating for centuries, probably for almost all its history, as a country where, because of its geographic nature, you just can't control these other areas. Plus these ethnic groups are so different from each other and resent each other. And in Hazarajat even more so because of its isolation and the fact that they were Hazara and Shia. There has never really been a strong federal role in any of these areas. They've always been controlled by strongmen, warlords coming from the communities themselves. What we needed to do was to bring some sort of, I hate to say, order to this chaos, but we needed to bring some semblance of organization back in. You needed to have a ministry of agriculture representative. Believe me, these other ministries had representatives, even in Bamian. But you needed to have coordination between Kabul and those representatives. You needed to have some sort of lasso-- I'm thinking in terms of Spanish--but some lasso between decision makers in Kabul, primarily, and the people who are implementing those decisions or the people who have to implement the policies, whatever they are. Or how do you get your resources? How do you pay your teachers? How do you develop academic curricula? This all takes federal-type of coordination. We provide, say, assistance for schools. That was part of our civil affairs, part of what the NGOs were doing. But it's their country. It's the Afghan authorities, legitimate or not, who really have to come up with those other issues of getting teacher salaries, of hiring teachers, of what they teach, how they're trained. We can't do it ourselves. This is not our country. And we would resent it if someone were trying to do it to us. So this is where it was essential to have a central government. How do you dispense justice? How do you develop your police force?

*Q: Was there much of a police-justice system?*

A: In Bamian it was still highly traditional. The Kavi was really his own master. There still was an extremely weak connection between the federal and the local. It was developing. It was a work in progress and it was actually proceeding in front of our eyes. You could actually witness the improvement, even over a short period of time. If the governor did something that the federal government didn't like, or whatever, he could be called back. There was certainly an effort to do, for example, recruitment for police and for armed forces. That has to be done through some sort of coordinating mechanism and we were just beginning that process as well.

We had built an army recruitment center. Again, in our typical fashion, we built it out of plywood instead of using local materials, but we actually built a small center about the size of, maybe, a trailer or so, and they were going to use that to try to hire locals. Now, there was no barracks for these people to use. It was still an underdeveloped system but, again, it needed that federal-local coordination. So you have somebody local who is recruiting your young men, and then the process of feeding those people back to Kabul. All in all, we were at a very nascent stage of this kind of coordination. But this is what nation-building, I guess, is all about, developing those ties.

*Q: When you left in December, what was your feeling about the New Zealand contribution? Were they there for the long haul?*

A: Yes, the answer is yes. I felt that New Zealand was there for the long haul. The fact that Prime Minister Clark had visited them.... She came out after that visit and recommitted the New Zealanders for another year following her visit. I think New Zealand is extremely happy that they got Bamian and not some other PRT. But when I think of the Kiwis there the analogy that comes to my mind was how much the Kiwis were doing, given the tiny country that they come from. There are only four million Kiwis, and yet their international commitments were quite substantial, not just in Afghanistan. And I compare that to Brazil's commitment, which now, of course, is principally in Haiti, where they have 1,400 troops. But Brazil is a huge country, with a huge population, and until Haiti, their international commitments, given their size, were relatively small. That is how I saw the New Zealanders: as a small country that is making a substantial commitment, given their size, versus Brazil, which, because they are Brazil and because of all their other issues, does not have that capability, and only now, with Haiti, where there are a lot of ulterior motives, it's a struggle for them to maintain. So, yes, I was quite impressed with what the Kiwis were able to do. I was particularly impressed, although maybe I shouldn't be, but I was, with their inter-forces cooperation. They didn't necessarily jump for joy at having a navy commander lead an army detachment on patrol, and there were a lot of weaknesses in the system. But I couldn't even imagine our system working in that fashion. I could not imagine having navy personnel lead an army patrol in the mountains of Afghanistan on the U. S. side. So, the Kiwis had something even to teach us. I don't think we would admit to ever learning anything or I don't think our military personnel would ever try to learn anything from any other military, but, to me, it was very revealing about the Kiwi personality, about their character. And also, they are taking this seriously, as demonstrated by the fact that the various forces are striving to get their personnel stationed there. The navy is insisting that we have at least a dozen people in Bamian. You might as well be on the moon. There's no place where you're going to sail a ship in Bamian or in Afghanistan. That's pretty impressive. I admire them for that and I really think that, yes, if there is a long haul, they're in it.

*Q: I gather you said that, in your e-mail correspondence with people, everyone you contacted who had had the PRT experience before was positive. Would you give the same positive evaluation to somebody else?*

A: Yes. And remember, the people with whom I communicated--they're all, of course, Americans, Foreign Service Officer--had experiences at all the PRTs. I communicated with the guy in Bamian, yes, but I also had gotten feedback from PRT-ers who had served everywhere, at all the PRTs, and when I did get back to my long-term post, following my assignment, I came back with a lot of very interesting pictures, digital pictures. The first thing I did was to create a presentation. Soon after my arrival back at post I gave a presentation for the embassy, for the

entire embassy community, not just the Americans, but our FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals), as well. That was such a hit that following the presentation, a couple of the Americans curtailed and went to Iraq. A couple of the Americans, one of whom was with the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), got an assignment to Kabul. She decided to bid on Kabul. She hasn't gotten there yet because the FBI can't get their act together, but that was following my presentation. A guy with AID volunteered to go there. So, yes, I think that by my own enthusiasm I was able to actually generate the interest of others to volunteer, who certainly wouldn't have volunteered otherwise. I've also given about, I'd say, a dozen presentations to host country audiences, primarily university, but I've also done a few for others. I did one for the foreign ministry. I did a couple for the military. I've tried to explain the PRT concept to them. And I've also tried to encourage the host country to think of sending a team out to Afghanistan to visit the PRTs and to learn some lessons that they might be able to apply elsewhere. And General Craddock, the head SOUTHCOM, loved the idea. I don't know. Things don't move very quickly, but I planted the seed and we'll see.

*Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop, and I want to thank you very much.*

A: Thank you.