

USIP – ADST

Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #22

Executive Summary

When, Where and Position

The interviewee has been based in Herat Province as the State Department's representative since October 2004.

Local Conditions

- It is one of the better-off provinces in the country. It has a lot of active trade. So economically, it is probably very active compared to most places in the country.
- Politically, it's been calm since last September when they removed the then-governor, when there was a big flare up. We've had, of course, smaller security instances regularly, but it's one of the more permissive environments compared to the south and east.

PRT Mission and Organization

- The mission of the PRT is to support the role of the central government, to extend the reach of the central government to the different provinces of the country. So that it's not just a Kabul-only endeavor and to increase the legitimacy of the national government throughout in all different sectors: health, education, infrastructure development, security such as building up the Afghan National Police, Afghan National Army, the national campaign for narcotics control and the growth of democracy such as support for the election process.
- We've just gone through one major transition after another. But right now at this PRT, it is run by Italy, not by America anymore. That switch was at the end of March. At the end of May, in fact, it's going to switch from being under the Coalition to under ISAF [International Security Assistance Force].
- We're getting a little multi-national; we have a couple of French soldiers here now. We also are co-located with the regional command, so we have all the structures of the regional command.
- The region includes Badghis, which will be Spanish and Ghowr, which will be Lithuanian. There's also a PRT in Farah to the south of here, which is considered the same region that was always a U.S. PRT and will continue to be a U.S. PRT except under ISAF.

The Assignment

- Two large categories: providing policy advice to the commanders here (the PRT and regional commanders) the political and economic-type things; and providing the reporting and analysis back to the Embassy and serves as kind of a platform for other Embassy activities and programs out here as well.
- Embassy programs specific to State Department: refugee funding, police narcotics funding; cultural programs (something that we're doing in Herat that some of the other parts of the country don't have the luxury of getting involved in), exchange programs.

Elections support

- Presidential elections: the elections came off quite peacefully. Herat itself is a majority Tajik province, ethnic Tajik. But it voted overwhelmingly for Harmid Karzai, so that was a good sign of national cohesion and also the stability and safety of the area.
- Preparing for the elections in September, the parliamentary elections: We have programs with U.S. government funding: some training efforts; the National Democratic Institute is training candidates, eventually poll workers, and campaign training and familiarization. The U.S. is probably the biggest funder of the whole electoral process. There's a lot of keeping an eye on security issues and logistical issues, some things that can turn into bottlenecks. There's also some civil education, or civic education about the process. There's a setup here at the Joint Afghan Government with UN support; we pour money into that. That's the basic mechanism for the joint electoral management body.
- Provincial elections: They're more complicated because people have to be registered in a locality before they can vote anywhere; before even refugees outside of the country could vote.
- At one point they were predicting that there might be 10,000 candidates running for office, nation-wide, during this election date. It will be less than that, it looks like, and that's because they peeled off the district elections.
- There are also minimum requirements for women's seats, which is going to be very difficult to meet in certain provinces. Herat, we think, is going to be okay, but in some of the smaller provinces it will be quite difficult to get women candidates.
- Political parties are very undeveloped here. Some of NDI training, for instance, will work with political parties. My sense is that for this particular election, we're going to see most people running without necessarily being actively endorsed by a party.
- The biggest danger in this part of the country that I see, are people just trying to be disruptive in order to keep a certain amount of lawlessness that a lot of people profit from; the narcotics traffickers profit by that kind of lawlessness.
- Civil society development I think is big. We're seeing an opening up of the government, but it's slow. There is pretty good public dialogue on a lot of issues out here. The other thing would be the capacity of the governmental actions and styles. The last governor was very much *the* person in charge, a very charismatic and take-charge person—the political machinery underneath him, the leadership, wasn't really well developed.
- The district councils are the part of the election that they have now postponed yet again without a date yet. So those will eventually come; they are in the constitution.

Reconstruction programs

- The two pots are basically military and civilian. On the military side the Commander's Emergency Response Program, CERP. This last year was the last year of the U.S. team. They've really taken on a developmental strategy. They've looked mostly at schools, clinics and water projects. Those are the things the villages asked for. They try to do them in places that are further from the main cities where NGOs have less reach, which is a new kind of evolution. They've also tried to make sure that every project that they do now is actually part of the government's priority list.
- On the civilian side, USAID, focused on infrastructure: roads, canals, some capacity building but most of those kind of big capacity building things are administered out of Kabul, nation-wide.

- Capacity building: different governmental functions; customs reforms, for instance, is a big program that USAID has going. Just about every ministry has some element of capacity building. There are also programs working with Rule of Law. Besides just building the courthouse, (we just opened a couple here in our province) it involves judicial training; and there is a new Civil Affairs Reform Commission.

Police Training

- Just about a month ago or two months ago, the regional police training center opened up in Herat that serves the entire west. That program is administered by or paid for by out of the Embassy in Kabul. While we were waiting for that, we even had some local military police here attached to the PRT that were doing some informal training; we also have some German police in town. Germany is the lead country for police training, and they've been doing a little bit here, a little bit there. So now with that new regional training center opening up, we have a lot more ability to train large numbers of people from all these four Western provinces.
- We have a brand new Coalition program to replace the border police.

Legal systems

That is a component of the USAID's Rule of Law program. There has been some training out here under that program, but the PRT itself is not directly administering that now.

Other reconstruction activity

- AID has spent a little over a billion dollars in the country and five percent of that was for projects that were specifically managed from the PRT. But 95 percent was managed from Kabul for the Ring Road and other roads, court houses, clinics.
- We're looking at a new pot of money this year for alternative livelihood spending, which is supposed to help develop economic alternatives to poppy growing.
- There are a lot of Afghan contractors along with major U.S. contractors.

Security arrangements and impact

- We always have the security procedures that we have to follow.
- We've had a lot of people coming in here, but it is difficult just because we run out of vehicles and soldiers. You have to limit how many people can be out of the office at a given time. There are a few places where NGO offices won't let us in because we're coming in a military vehicle or with military people.
- The general population might not have super clear knowledge of what's going on, but the PRT is known here.
- The PRT has had quite a good reach; previously there was a concentration of projects and efforts in the districts closest to the city, but they've really tried to overcome that over the past year. So hopefully the Italians will keep up with that kind of extended service.

PRT effectiveness

- Without the PRT, there would be no way for us to have a reach into the rest of the country.
- We need to evolve away from PRTs and some places sooner than others. I think Herat would be a good place to sooner rather than later open up a regular American consulate where we could use that for a platform for American government assistance activities and other activities.

- Does the existence of the PRT inhibit the extension of the Afghan government's role in the area? No. I would say the opposite. We are pretty good at letting the government take credit for things even if they are PRT inspired or coaxed or urged along.

Lessons Learned

- Keep the PRTs experimental, very flexible and adaptable to the changing circumstances with an eye towards graduating out. We need to graduate into something that's more normal.
- One of the big problems: the budgets aren't fungible. To open up a new post is a huge step and then, of course, the budget isn't there. The budget is in the DoD.
- I'm hoping that people understand that this is very long term ... it requires a very long-term commitment.

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

Interview #22

Interviewed by: W. Haven North
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Q: How long have you been in Afghanistan?

A: On this particular trip, since October. I've been sent a lot of times to Afghan. I've had other trips. I've spent three years working in Afghanistan.

Q: But with the PRTs [Provisional Reconstruction Teams] you were there what, six months?

A: Yes, since October.

Q: What's your location, where are you posted?

A: I'm at the PRT in Herat, which is in Western Afghanistan.

Q: And what's your position?

A: I'm the State Department representative here. Each PRT has somebody from the State Department, someone from USAID [United States Agency for International Development], U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Local conditions

Q: How would you describe the situation in Herat, generally: politically, economically?

A: Economically, I'd suggest that it's one of the better-off provinces in the country. It has a lot of active trade. It has borders with Iran and Turkmenistan. So economically, it is probably very active compared to most places in the country. Politically, it's been calm since last September when they removed the then-governor, when there was a big flare up. We've had, of course, smaller security instances regularly but it's one of the more permissive environments compared to the south and east.

Q: I see. Security-wise?

A: I guess, it's relative, but it's a little more permissive than other parts. But we're always on alert for this or that. The city itself is pretty good.

Mission and organization of the PRT

Q: What's the mission of the PRT?

A: The mission of the PRT is to support the role of the central government, to extend the reach of the central government to the different provinces of the country. So that it's not just a Kabul-only endeavor. So to increase the legitimacy of the national government throughout and that's in all different sectors.

Q: What sectors?

A: Health, education, infrastructure development, security such as building up the Afghan National Police, Afghan National Army, the national campaign for narcotics control and the growth of democracy such as support for the election process. It's part of the generalized mission statement.

Q: How is the PRT organized; what kind of staffing does it have?

A: We've just gone through one major transition after another. But right now at this PRT, it is run by Italy, not by America anymore. That switch was just at the end of March. At the end of May, in fact, it's going to switch from being under the Coalition to under ISAF [International Security Assistance Force]. Are you familiar with the ISAF —another major transition coming up. But what we have basically: the PRT command itself has an Italian Colonel and his staff. The part that they (ISAF) would probably have the most interaction with is the civil military team.

Q: Right.

A: Which is very small on the Italian part and is bigger with the U.S. And then of course all the support people that go along with it, you know force protection, etcetera, etcetera. But there are also civilians at the PRT. Now we have a new Italian foreign affairs rep.; would probably be considered our lead civilian advisor now and then the U.S. is leaving behind civilians as well — State Department (myself), the USAID representative and the U.S. Department of Agriculture representative. We're also getting a little multi-national; we have a couple of French soldiers here now. We also are co-located with the regional command. So we have all the structures of the regional command.

Q: This is the U.S. command?

A: It's U.S., yes, and the Coalition but, by the end of the month, we're in the process of switching to ISAF. May 31st it will be ISAF. So it's quite a huge shift, you know, real multi-national. With this ISAF shift, we will be opening up new PRTs in two of the neighboring provinces that really need them, one led by the Spanish and one led by Lithuania.

Q: What provinces?

A: Badghis will be Spanish and Ghowr will be Lithuanian. There's also a PRT in Farah to the south of here, which is considered the same region that was always a U.S. PRT and will continue to be a U.S. PRT except under ISAF.

Q: I see. But the two new provinces you said are opening up?

A: Badghis, which is to the north of Herat and Ghowr, which is to the east of Herat somewhere over there.

The Assignment

Q: Well let's talk about your work, what are you supposed to be doing, or are doing?

A: A couple of different things, but basically I guess, two large categories. One would be providing policy advice to the commanders here, the PRT and regional commanders, the political and economic-type things. The other thing is to provide the reporting and analysis back to the Embassy. Those are the two main ones. One of them extends to serve as kind of a platform for other Embassy activities and programs out here as well.

Q: I see. What kind of programs does the Embassy have there?

A: Well, if you count U.S. missions it's quite large. Somewhat specific to the State Department: refugee funding comes through State, police narcotics funding comes through State, for bureaucratic reasons. Cultural programs are something that we're doing in Herat that some of the other parts of the country don't have the luxury of getting involved. Things like that, exchange programs.

Election support

A: And of course, elections support.

Q: Right. Were you involved in the national elections, in supporting that?

A: I came in just after the presidential elections last Fall. But now, of course, the lead up to the next big thing, which is the parliamentary elections, which will happen in September and that pretty much takes me to the end of my tour so that is definitely the focus of this half of my tour.

Q: How did the national elections go?

A: They went well. Last fall, what they had to do was limited to just the presidential part of the election. Here in Herat, I think you're talking about specifically in Herat, is that right?

Q: Yes, right, in your PRT area.

A: They went quite well. A month before we had a major outbreak of violence in Herat; some people were very concerned, but in fact the elections came off quite peacefully. Herat itself is a majority Tajik province, ethnic Tajik. But it voted overwhelmingly for Harmid Karzai, who is the Pashtun president, he did get elected. So that was a good sign of national cohesion and also

stability and safety of the area. There weren't any major allegations of mis-doings out here so things went pretty well. There were some inefficiencies and stuff like that but it did go pretty well. The next election, of course, is much more complicated.

Q: What are you doing to prepare for the elections in September, the parliamentary elections?

A: We've done a few different things. We have programs with U.S. government funding: some training efforts, for instance; the National Democratic Institute is a U.S. based NGO [Non-Governmental Organization] which you probably know is out there doing training of a bunch of candidates and eventually poll workers and campaign training and familiarization, which is the one big thing. Also, the U.S. is probably the biggest funder of the whole electoral process; so we *could* in a way, take credit for a lot of that. But there's a lot of keeping an eye on security issues and logistical issues, some things that can turn into bottlenecks. There's also a certain degree of civil education, or civic education about the process that we contribute to. There's a setup here at the Joint Afghan Government and UN support, we pour money in to that. That's the basic mechanism in the joint electoral management body.

Q: You said something about the provincial elections being more difficult. What do you mean by that?

A: Yes. They're more complicated because people have to be registered in a locality before they can vote anywhere, before even refugees outside of the country could vote. They can't now. Also, that formulation, a lot of that, we're a little bit behind. In part of it is things like the formulation, how many feet from which province; this time, numbers matter a lot more you know, population figures, they had to be politically acceptable. So that took a lot longer. Plus they're doing simultaneous elections for the national assembly and the provincial councils. In fact, there was supposed to be a third set of simultaneous elections, but they have postponed those because of the complications. They would have been for district councils.

At one point they were predicting that there might be 10,000 candidates running for office, nation-wide, during this election date. It will be less than that, it looks like, and that's because they peeled off the district elections. There are also minimum requirements for women's seats, which is going to be very difficult to meet in certain provinces. Herat, we think, is going to be okay, but in some of the smaller provinces it will be quite difficult to get women candidates. That's going to be a complication that we will watch closely because it means a lot for the development of democracy.

Q: Sure

A: Political parties are very undeveloped here and there are some historic reasons for that. Some of NDI training, for instance, is to work with political parties. My sense is that for this particular election, we're going to see most people running without necessarily being actively endorsed by a party. They'll be running as individuals. Those things will take a while to grow and have their own model.

Q: Were you worried about the warlords, did they try to interfere with the process or are they getting involved? Are they're any in that area?

A: Yes, that's one of the things that we definitely keep an eye on. The candidate list isn't out yet, but there are a couple of different things that can happen, one is some warlords can run for office. It'll be a test for the system to see whether or not they pass the credentialing stage, whether they can keep their names on the ballot or not. Others don't really have an interest, working for a living; they'll try to influence candidates who come in there. Having people brought into the system could be positive and in some ways, if they're fighting someone within the system that might be positive, but it depends on what they have on their hands, what kind of blood they have on their hands. Also, there are outsiders who are just trying to influence who gets elected. The biggest danger in this part of the country that I see, are people just trying to be disruptive in order to keep a certain amount of lawlessness that a lot of people do profit from; the narcotics traffickers profit by that kind of lawlessness. So that would be the kind of thing that, in this part of the country, we might need to keep our eye on the most.

The one particular ex-warhunter, warlord from this part of the country, was the guy removed from the governorship last fall. He's now in the national cabinet already, so I don't think he'll directly run for parliamentary. But certainly everybody out here in this province is either for him or against him. So he certainly has a lot of influence; it'll be interesting to watch whose people get in.

Q: Are there any other dimensions of the political processes going on that we haven't touched us?

A: Oh, I just maybe quickly add that civil society development I think is big. We're seeing an opening up of the government, but it's slow. The last governor was rather oppressive. The new one, even though he doesn't have the policies, it doesn't mean the automatic blossoming of the press. There is pretty good public dialogue on a lot of issues out here. The other thing would be the capacity of the governmental actions and styles that—again the last governor was very much *the* person in charge, a very charismatic and take-charge person—the politically machinery underneath him, the leadership, wasn't really well developed. It was very childlike in a way. For such a big and important province, it's kind of an unusual thing they're behind in that sense. Women being able to actively participate in society at all levels is a huge issue, political or not. We also have a little ethnic stuff going on in the Herat area which has both Pashtuns and Shias and, of course, returnees from Iran, some of whom are Hazaras, who maybe haven't lived here for generations but do live here now. Like a lot of the parts of the country, they are kind of put down in a lot of ways. So those are some of the things that we watch out for here.

Q: What about district councils, are they functioning or are they organized?

A: The district councils are the part of the election that they have now postponed yet again without a date yet. So those will eventually come; they are in the constitution. Some of the programs, the development programs that include some money (one is called the National Solidarity Program) that goes out to the very village level and they do have these little elected

“shurahs” (PH) they call them, that are supposed to decide how the money is spent. So there are some little examples here and there, and every village has a council of elders. There are some organic, democratic processes that are out there but there’s nothing under the constitutional system yet at that district level.

Reconstruction programs

Q: Lets turn to the reconstruction. What kind of reconstruction projects is the PRT sponsoring?

A: There are two big pots of money that are spent locally at the PRT as opposed to programs administered from Kabul...

Q: Lets talk about the local ones.

A: The two pots are basically military and civilian. On the military side the Commander’s Emergency Response Program, CERP. This last year was the last year of the U.S. team. They’ve really taken on a developmental strategy. They’ve looked mostly at schools, clinics and water projects. Those are the things the villages asked for. They try to do them in places that are further from the main cities where NGOs have less reach, which is a new kind of evolution. They’ve also tried to make sure that every project that they do now is actually part of the government’s priority list. The Ministry of Health actually forced that on us as far as clinics go. They said, do not build a clinic unless it’s on our national plan because we can’t continue to support them. But for schools, similarly we make sure that the guts of the school, the teachers and schools that are already there in a community before that we’d build a building and also to make sure that it is on a priority list with the Department of Education here in the province. Water, similarly; the military might not be experts at development work and doing regular assessments, but we try to make sure that these things are clear government priorities; that they’re the kind of projects that have good developmental impact.

On the civilian side, USAID, we’re looking at more of the infrastructure: roads, canals, and things like that. Some capacity buildings but most of those kind of big capacity buildings things are administered out of Kabul, nation-wide. We keep an eye on how they’re doing here in the province and nudging them here and there.

Q: Capacity building of what?

A: For instance, different governmental functions, customs reforms, for instance, is a big program that USAID has going. There are also programs that have been working with Rule of Law programs. Besides just building the courthouse, (we would just open a couple up here in our province) it also involves judicial training and things like that. Just about every ministry has some element of capacity building.

We have the new Civil Affairs Reform commission here; and one of the things the military did, for instance, was to help get their office up and functioning, the furniture and things like that so that they can administer their program that’s nationally mandated.

Police Training

Q: Are they involved in police training?

A: Yes. Just about a month ago or two months ago, the regional police training center opened up in Herat that serves the entire west. That's the program that's administered by or paid for by out of the Embassy in Kabul. While we were waiting for that, we even had some local military police here attached to the PRT that were doing some informal training; we also have some German police in town. Germany is the lead country for police training, and they've been doing a little bit here, a little bit there. So now with that new regional training center opening up, we have a lot more ability to really finally train large numbers of people from all these four Western provinces so that they can be well trained and become a more professionalized cadre.

We have a brand new Coalition program to replace the border police, who will have the combined effect of improving—we hope—the ability to collect customs corruption free and really increase revenues for the central government's coffers, so it's a quite important project.

Q: Right. Are you providing a lot of equipment?

A: In Herat? Not so much; of course some vehicles here and there. We've done some camo (PH) stuff, but not like some of the other provinces are. It hasn't been a big emphasis here. Ideally we'd like to have all that stuff coming from the center, because, then, we'd truly have a national police force. But in a lot of places the PRTs do get involved with that just because the need is so pressing you know; if the police don't have uniforms how do people know they're police? So we registered the uniforms to match the national uniforms. We haven't had to do with as much of that here in Herat but we haven't had the same kind of direct needs. But we work very closely with the police but what they want is more salary; we can't do the direct supplements. Once they get the training, then they get the higher national police salaries.

Legal systems

Q: Are we involved in setting up the courts and the legal systems and all that?

A: That is a component of the USAID's Rule of Law program. There has been doing some training out here under that program but the PRT itself is not directly administering that now. It's good stuff; it's definitely needed. We've talked about analytic reporting back to the Embassy before, I have identified and tracked a particular land dispute claim here that have implications of a possible precedent-setting case for the whole country, involving refugee returns and discrimination against Hazaras and the nonfunctioning of the local courts. By doing that, that's going to a national court, especially set up for returning refugees and we're hoping that it sets a very good precedent by getting the right decisions for these folks.

Other reconstruction activity

Q: You talked about some reconstruction work being done from the center (Kabul); are there major projects that are being done from Kabul that do not go through the PRT?

A: Yes. Basically, AID spent a little over a billion dollars in the country and five percent of that was where the project that was specifically managed from the PRT. But 95 percent from Kabul,

so it's a lot of money. A big one out here is the Ring-Road Project. This year, the effort is to link up Kandahar Highway with Herat, where as the year before they had done Kabul's. So that will come through but not through a province; there are also some secondary and tertiary roads. Again, courthouse construction, the major programs to fund clinics, both infrastructure and operational costs all throughout the area it's a big national program that's run out of the USAID. There is also a similar one on the agricultural side. We're looking at a new pot of money this year for alternative livelihood spending, which is supposed to help develop economic alternatives to poppy growing. Looks like we're hoping to get two of the Western provinces on the expanded list of places where that program will be active with the extra help of that money in those places.

Q: But are those administered and coordinated with you all in the PRT?

A: Yes they all have the cognizant, technical officers, or people who are all in Kabul. And yes, we have field people out here to provide some ground truthing and also, help facilitate visits from the AID offices and also some contractors. So those contractors have lot more mobility and are out here a lot.

Q: Who are these contractors; are they Americans or are they Afghans?

A: It depends on the project. For instance, for the road projects there's a lot of contracts and subcontracts with USAID, contracts with Louis Berger group, that's a U.S.-based organization; it had to have subcontracts with a US private company to do the security and an Indian and a Turkish construction firm to do different sections of the road. It gets very complicated. They don't end up building roads like that anywhere. The agriculture program's acronym is RAMP, Rural Agricultural Market Program. I don't have the acronyms in front of me. The lead contractor out here is called Chemonics, a U.S. private company. Each program like that will have sometimes a non-profit, sometimes a for-profit contractor. If it's an employment generating type of activity, ideally working through local sub-contractors for the job.

Q: There are a lot of Afghan, local contractors?

A: Yes there are. For instance, the PRT itself when they do a project on the military side, they put out notices for the project that they want to build, say, a school in such and such a district, they put out an notice in Herat. We get about 20 bids from little construction firms. There's a boom here on these things. It really has shot up, which is a good sign actually in that there's economic activity here.

Q: Are there any international NGOs working there?

A: International? Yes, there are. In our big Western region, there are some parts where very few NGOs have reached. So some of the remote parts of Ghowr province or some of the Farah province have some projects but the active presence is mostly Afghan NGOs. Because of security issues, a lot of that NGOs don't go there. Badghis to the North, of course, had the famous incident of over a year ago now, I think about a year ago with the MSS doctors were killed? A lot of NGOs pulled out at that time from the whole country, which is the greatest, lost.

Herat itself is more permissive and has more NGOs. They're requesting UN agencies as well. So there are a lot of actors involved in the assistance currently. But other parts of Afghanistan do have more.

There are some great Afghan NGOs that have been active and involved for a long time. I knew them back in my days as a refugee coordinator in Islamabad.

Security arrangements and impact

Q: Well, we can finish up. One question: is security such that you always have to go out in a convoy to travel around the province?

A: Yes. We always have the security procedures that we have to follow. It's a little bit different in each PRT. We are in some ways a little more permissive so we do not usually travel in armored vehicles for instance, but we always do travel with force protection. We have to have a military communications link, if we're going anywhere far from the city center. Within the city we just have a couple shooters with us and we make sure everybody knows of our whereabouts. So yes, it's a pretty serious thing. You get in some places it's even more serious, they have to go out in armor wearing helmets, etc all the time.

Q: So it's kind of inhibiting to getting around and talking with the people?

A: Yes, we've had a lot of people coming in here, but it is difficult just because we run out of vehicles and soldiers. It's difficult, you limit how many people can be out of the office at a given time. There are a few places where NGO offices won't let us in because we're coming in a military vehicle or with military people. But most of them don't have that problem.

Q: What has been the reception by the general population to the PRT? Do they know it exists and what it does?

A: Yes. They know it (the PRT) exists, sometimes we have other elements that are military, like the regional command like I mentioned before and the border police. They think it's all PRT. They might not have super clear knowledge of what's going on, but the PRT is known to be here. It's quite possibly there was a lot of concern when the U.S. was passing the PRT over to the Italians, but we managed to calm people's anxieties about that part quite a bit.

Popular reactions

Q: What about the rural populations, not just the official community? Do you have any sense of their views?

A: Yes, definitely. The American team that has just finished up their time here has been out to every district of Herat province, to some very rural places. Places that told us they had never seen an NGO or anything before. Sometimes that's a bit of a local exaggeration; sometimes we'd see a well that was dug. But the PRT has had quite a good reach; previously there was a concentration of projects and efforts in the districts closest to the city, but they've really tried to overcome that over the past year. So hopefully the Italians will keep up with that kind of extended service.

PRT effectiveness

Q: When looking at the whole operation, would you consider the PRT an effective mechanism for this kind of situation?

A: Yes, I think without it I don't see that there would be a way for us to have a reach into the rest of the country. We'd be bottled up in Kabul under their strict security rules. When these were invented, it was only a military platform that would give us reach around the country. As things evolve, we need to evolve away from PRTs and some places sooner than others. I think Herat would be a good place to sooner rather than later open up a regular American consulate where we could use that for a platform for American government assistance activities and other activities. But for now, this is what we have. We wouldn't be allowed to come here if it weren't for the PRTs. There are debates on whether PRTs are really doing the project work and if they're good at it or not, I don't think it's either or. I don't think the money works that way. If you took it out of the military-run projects, I don't think it would just project in the civilian side. We don't get the money from the CERPs and the civilian side is separate.

Q: Do you think the existence of the PRT some how inhibits the extension of the Afghan government's role in the area? Or does it encourage it?

A: No. I would say the opposite. If it's done well, of course mistakes are made, we are pretty good at letting the government take credit for things even if they are PRT inspired or coaxed or urged along. When we go to villages, for instance, we'd tell people, "we're here because the governor told us that we hadn't been there a while and he wanted us to come see what your needs are in the village." That kind of thing. So we always refer back to the government.

Q: What about the role of the government in Kabul and their ministries and their recognition in the area?

A: Yes, the governor even in the provinces is only an appointee of Kabul. He's not an elected official and the ministries have their department heads. For instance, when we're doing their education project, we make sure the village elders are working with the Department of Education so that it's not just us but the elders working directly. We make sure that it's prioritized through the government people here. There is definitely the fear and even the observation of dependency growing. There are certain officials whose immediate reaction is always, well can you pay for this, can you pay for that, without even coming up with plans or priorities of their own that we could then feed in to. There is always the possibility of dependency being too permanent. I'm worried about that. I think we do our best to try to make sure people understand what we are doing for them, for the government, and that we're not just a handout agency. We're there to give them a hand-up but not always a handout.

Lessons

Q: Looking over the whole program, are there some lessons that come to mind from what works and what doesn't work and what should be done differently; do you have any thoughts along those lines? For example, you talk about models: the British model or the German model or the American model.

A: I think one of the key things will be to keep the PRTs experimental in a way. Keep the PRTs very flexible and adaptable to the changing circumstances with an eye towards graduating out. Like I said in Herat, graduate this program to civilian-led institutions. That would be ultimately the good thing. Now one of the big problems with that is, we were talking about before, the budgets aren't fungible; just because the military stops, it doesn't mean that you have all that money that was used to run the base to fund the management of the civilian operations. The State Department might not have the budget. I think the big lessons that we have to watch out for is the fact that money keeps getting poured in to the military to do things, and in fact, it is very expensive to do it that way because of the security costs are high. You have all the logistics of running an army that are just incredible. It's not, where you talk about how much it costs to build a school, the military will only tell you the cost of the contract with the local contractors, that's cheap, but if you look at all the soldiers that are stationed out here and all the support costs all the way back to the U.S., they are the most expensive schools you've ever seen in your life.

Q: Yes I understand.

A: You know, it's a necessary thing we've had to do here because of the security environment, either that or not be here. But we have to keep our eye on the fact that we need to graduate into something that's more normal; those are things that can be debated.

Q: Do you see the PRT graduating anytime soon? Moving out all together?

A: If you just look on the face of it, the conditions in places like Herat, the consulate would also have to have security. We definitely have consulates in places that are dangerous already in other parts of the world. I could see it, but as an organization, nobody wants to take a loss on his watch. To open up a new post that's quite a huge step and then of course the budget isn't there. The budget is in DoD.

Q: Are there any other lessons that come to mind; anything that you think could be done differently?

A: No, I suspect that there are a lot of lessons here that people will start applying or already have tried to in places like Iraq. I think there's a lot of value in that as long as people understand there are also dissimilarities and things that do need to be tailored to the particular place's politics and cultures. But I think there's a lot of value in what we're learning here. I told people that what I've learned here about—it sounds a bit corny—but about the American dream or American principles, either because you see things that are stretched up a little bit too much here or because they are things that people believe in or work for. But I've learned more about those kinds of ideals in a place like this than in a regular desk job in America.

I think what I'm hoping is that people understand that this is very long term ... it requires a very long term commitment. It won't get fixed over night to make sure that these positive changes aren't reversed. We need to stick with it a long time; we need to show Afghanistan that we're going to be their friends in the long haul of the night. And then we will be able to keep moving forward. There's an active fear of abandonment. We've worked close with the Afghans and by proxy the Soviet Union and then didn't stick around when the Afghans actually won that

war. Now we're here and again we've been allied in what's considered a very historic fight. This time, we're going to stay put as far as friendship goes and commitment with helping them with development. I think we're going the right way and someday when you look at it, it's overwhelming what still needs to be done, but then other times you look at it and you can't believe how far it's come. It is fairly quick time, so I guess both of those things are true at the same time.

Q: Is there any aspect that you feel we haven't touched on or that you would like to comment on, any aspects of the governance or the reconstruction program or the role of the PRT?

A: No. I think we did kind of a lot.

Q: True.

A: I think the PRT is a good experiment, I don't think we should be locked into one particular model. I think the more we can remain flexible to response to local needs and get the job done I think that it will do it.

Q: You talk about models, and I'm not quite clear. What are different models? What does that mean?

A: Yes, there's been a lot of talk about PRTs, since they've started. One paper I saw recently talked about basically the British model up in Mazar-e Sharif. They run the PRT there. There the military does nothing but security presence and work only on security issues.

Q: They don't do civil affairs.

A: Basically warlords and stuff like that. They don't do projects themselves. They have a separate civilian component that does projects. The U.S. team, the military does those, and there's been some criticism that again, that blurring the lines between what civilian and military are supposed to do. And, in fact, there's been a lot of violence against civilian agencies here, and some people speculate that that's because the attackers don't know—they're confused about—who are the people there to help them and who are not. I don't think that that argument actually holds much water here, because first of all the attackers know who they're attacking. If they see a land cruiser with expatriates and radio equipment, they know what they're attacking and they know that the military is here, and the fact that the military is building schools and clinics, which kind of reinforces the image that the military is here. You know we've made some mistakes I guess in deciding what projects to do and how to do them, but we are getting better at it. And again it is, it's improving the environment so that a lot of the other big projects can be done, and I think that was the theory behind it and that's what we're doing. So you know each, both models work in their own ways and both have shortcomings in their own ways, but I think it's good to keep that kind of experimentation going so we can compare notes and see how we can learn from the other PRT models and what we can adapt to our own. Herat is a place that in many ways, security-wise, for instance, is more permissive than, let's say a PRT in Jalalabad, which had violence. And you know we just, if we can go around without helmets and actually roll down the windows and wave to the kids as we go, that's good. If security doesn't permit

that, then we have to hunker down a little bit more. But, you know we have to be cognizant of the fact that this is a nation that remembers being invaded by the Soviet Union and we don't want to appear like that ourselves.

Q: Right. Are there any important aspects that we haven't touched on? I guess the PRTs are different in different regions where they have different situations.

A: Yes. And ours will be different now that it's becoming an ISAF PRT.

Q: Well, this has been excellent and very helpful.