

USIP - ADST
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #38

Executive Summary

At the time of this interview, the interviewee had just returned from PRT Sharan in Paktika province, where he served from March through June, 2005. He also served there three times previously. As the political adviser to the Governor, the interviewee frequently traveled with him throughout this remote southern province, little-changed since Biblical times. The province's 400-mile long border with Pakistan is a porous conduit for Taliban activity.

In the absence of NGOs, and unlike most PRTs, the Sharan PRT is the primary entity implementing construction projects in the province, rather than simply coordinating reconstruction activity. The interviewee stresses as well that re-construction is not the correct term for Paktika province, where construction is taking place for the first time. He chronicles some of the difficulties facing those doing development work. Since local contractors cannot provide the specified quality, outside contractors are used. However, these firms are resented and thus harassed in a variety of ways – through overcharging for supplies, through extortion for protection fees, etc. The construction effort is further hampered by the province's inaccessibility, such that PRT engineers cannot inspect projects as often as necessary to ensure quality. As a result, the interviewee cites examples such as the school that is literally collapsing after two years on account of slipshod construction.

Although the mission of the PRT is to extend the reach of the central government and demonstrate its authority, the interviewee opines that in Paktika, the average rural villager is incapable of fully comprehending the notion of a central government 400 miles away in Kabul, let alone seeing the Americans as a manifestation of that government. To the villager, the government in Kabul is "a distant and abstract concept," and President Karzai is a kind of "mythical figure who exists outside their daily consciousness." The interviewee suggests that having Afghan officials - security and development personnel- as part of the PRT is essential to establish this linkage in the mind of the villagers.

In travelling throughout the province, the interviewee often made speeches about the need to support the governor, President Karzai, and the American troops so that democracy is established, security is enhanced, and economic development takes place. Unfortunately, this public affairs effort was derailed by the "desecration of the Koran at Guantanamo" story, which obliged the interviewee to focus his speeches on America and its respect for Islam rather than on his original message.

One negative development he describes is the evolution of the Sharan PRT (as well as four other PRTs) from an independent entity to a civil affairs section of a combat maneuver company. This restructuring on the part of the Army has in effect down-graded the PRT's mission, made travel for the PRT personnel more difficult, and created some tension between civil affairs personnel and the paratroopers, with the latter thinking of themselves as the "real" soldiers.

Regarding the Taliban, the interviewee comments that they have been successful in slowing down the reconstruction effort by scaring away the NGOs and by putting out propaganda that points out the unfulfilled promises of development. They are able in small numbers (2-6 persons) to move covertly around Paktika, sheltering in the homes of sympathizers and making their crude propaganda pitch, but failing to inspire much real sympathy among villagers.

The interviewee's recommendations stress the magnitude of the development task and thus the need for far greater resources, not only on the part of DOD, but also from State, USAID, and USDA. He argues that the strategic importance of Afghanistan and the danger represented by Al-Qaeda elements viewing it as a safe-haven justify the 20 year commitment to fighting a counterinsurgency that he believes is required. On the micro-level, he suggests commitment to language training and to providing a more reliable stream of funding (the CERP budgeting process being characterized by a frustrating stop/go tendency.) Finally, he advocates returning the PRTs to the independence from maneuver companies that they had initially.

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

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Q: The interviewee is recently returned from a tour as the State representative in Paktika province. I believe he was there three times previous to his most recent stint.

Could you locate your province and describe the history of the PRT there and its primary mission.

A: Sure. Paktika province is on the southern border of Afghanistan. It has about a 400-mile long border with Pakistan. It is in the middle of the border. The provinces of Kandahar and Helmand are further to the south. The provinces of Konar and Nurestan, Nangarhar are further to the north. Paktika province, together with Paktia province and Khowst province, form what traditionally in Afghanistan has been known as Greater Paktia, a region in the center of the south that forms kind of a strategic wedge between the Durani tribes and the Gilzai tribes further to the south and the Yusefsai Pashtun tribes further to the north around Jalalabad and stretching up into what is now Dur and Catral in Pakistan.

Q: So the ethnic composition of the region where you were consisted of these Durani and Gilzai tribes?

A: The majority of the tribesmen in Paktika are Gilzais, most of them Suleiman Khel in the area known as the Katawaz, which is the dryer region to the west of the Oruzgan mountain chain. Then once you get across the mountains and down towards the Pakistan border there are both Kharori Gilzais and also the Waziris and the Zagrans or the Karlanri group, the hill tribes.

Q: In terms of language, what is their language?

A: All Pashto. There are about a thousand Tadjik merchants living in the town of Ourbani, but the rest of the 600,000 residents of Paktika were all Pashto and all speak Pashto.

Q: You spoke about the economic development of the region also. For orientation, could you describe what characterizes their principal economic form of livelihood?

A: Paktika is subsistence farming and animal husbandry. It's high desert country. Most of it is over a mile in altitude. The PRT is about a mile and a half above sea level. There is not a lot of irrigation yet. There is some water moving through the province. It hasn't been used or harnessed to its full capacity yet, so most of the land is pretty arid. People raise goats, sheep, some cattle, some camels, although the economic utility of camels is diminishing. There is also some farming going on, primarily wheat, a little bit of sorghum, a little bit of nut and fruit farming. But for the most part, 95% of the livelihood of the province is from subsistence farming.

Q: You said literacy there is lower than the rest of the country. How does it compare?

A: As we know from the UN report on education, Afghanistan rates dead last in the world in terms of the quality of its education system. Paktika province ranks dead last in Afghanistan, so Paktika literally has the worst education system in the world according to the UN.

Q: So against that backdrop, what were the principal goals of the PRT when you were there?

A: The PRT is relatively new. It was just stood up beginning with a safehouse beginning in September 2004. So it's less than a year old. When I was there, it was just about seven months old. It now has a compound of its own about five kilometers from the governor's compound in Sharan. Unfortunately, there are still virtually no NGOs working in Paktika province. There is one small Bangladeshi NGO that does well drilling. So, unlike some of the PRTs - for example, up north in the Tadjik, in the Hazara and Uzbek areas north of Kabul - the PRT in Paktika does more of the construction and development work itself than perhaps is common for PRTs now. Many PRTs are engaged in coordinating reconstruction activity, but the PRT in Sharan is actually the primary entity implementing construction projects.

Q: What were you involved in in that part of the PRT mission?

A: I left the actual construction projects to the USAID officer in Paktika, who was an expert in development and construction projects and focused primarily on the political aspects of the mission there.

Q: I understand that in principle the PRTs exist in part at least to extend the reach of the central government or to demonstrate the authority of the central government. Was that part of your mission?

A: That is certainly the theory, but I don't think in practical terms that's the case, at least not down south. I don't think the average rural villager is capable of the

abstract conceptual linkage between a group of Americans in uniform standing around HUMVEEs and a government 400 miles away in Kabul. Because there are no Afghans in PRTs apart from half a dozen interpreters, there is no obvious linkage between the PRT and the national government. I think it might be more accurate to say that the PRT extends the reach of the American government more than it extends the reach of a government in Kabul which the rural villager cannot see or sense.

Q: Do you think that's a shortcoming of the PRTs – A) that there aren't representatives of the Afghan government and then B) that they seem to be so much an American creation?

A: Absolutely. I've long felt that we needed to do more to put an Afghan capacity at the forefront of the PRT effort. If the Afghans are unable to develop their own capacity to do the kinds of things that a PRT does, then we create sort of a perpetual dependency on American know-how or NATO know-how in the case of the PRTs further to the north. I think it's absolutely essential to begin to put Afghan security personnel and Afghan development personnel inside the PRTs. That's a difficult thing to do for a number of security reasons. But if we are saying that a mission of the PRT is to extend the reach of the national government in Kabul, it's a sine qua non that we have personnel from the national government in Kabul nested inside the PRT.

Q: Would the climate in terms of security permit Afghan development personnel to be posted to the PRT at this point?

A: There are Afghan ministry representatives to a greater and lesser extent at the governor's compound in the provincial capital of Sharan. There is a representative of the ministry of education. There is a representative of the ministry of health. There is a representative of the ministry of tribal affairs. But they're not connected to the PRT except in tangential terms when a project affects their ministry. If a clinic, for example, is under consideration, then the ministry of health would be consulted. If a school is under consideration, the ministry of education would be consulted. But they exist outside the structure of the PRT.

Q: Maybe your PRT was classic, but if you could just delineate who was there, what military forces or civil affairs officers were represented to the PRT. You did say an AID representative was there.

A: An AID contractor. It's important to note that these are not AID personnel in the sense that we knew them as Foreign Service officers – program officers, project officers who are part of the Foreign Service of the U.S. government. Rather, they are contractors hired from NGOs or development organizations by USAID on a 12-month contract and then sent to the PRTs as contractors. Sharan was one of five PRTs so far whose structure has been changed dramatically by the army. In the cases of Sharan, Gardiz, Ghazni, Kandahar, and Khalat, the PRTs

don't exist as they were originally envisioned. The PRT concept was initially to be a joint civilian-military independent reconstruction facilitative group, which existed separate from and independent of the maneuver elements of coalition forces in their regions. In the case of the five PRTs that I mentioned, those structures have been disbanded. The elements of those PRTs which did the logistics - the force protection and so on, the mechanics, the cooks, the shooters who provided force protection - have been cored out of the PRTs, leaving just the 10 or 11 personnel who are civil affairs specialists in the army - typically, two to three officers and seven to eight enlisted personnel. Then those civil-military affairs operations centers or CMOCs have been rolled into maneuver companies. Either the maneuver company has moved into the compound formerly occupied by the PRT or the PRT in the case of Khalat has been moved into a compound with a maneuver company of American infantry. They have become sort of a subset of the maneuver company whose roles and missions are different from those of the PRT. Force protection for the PRT is somewhere down on the list of their priorities and missions and duties and responsibilities, towards the bottom third. So, what were PRTs have now become sort of enhanced civil affairs sections of combat maneuver companies.

Q: With the added disadvantage that you are not as well protected? The infantry folks have their mission and then the civil affairs unit is a stepchild of the structure. So who is protecting the civil affairs soldiers, you and the AID contractor?

A: The army civil affairs people sort of bristle when they are treated as people who have to be protected. They will tell you, "We're Special Forces. We are Airborne trained. We're all soldiers. We're all trained. We're all armed. We protect ourselves, thank you very much. We're not orphan children who have to be shepherded by army infantry." They take pride in the fact that they are Army and they can protect themselves. Just because they're civil affairs doesn't mean that they're not soldiers. The maneuver companies have a rather different perspective. They tend to think of the PRTs more as sort of civilianized entities and not "real" soldiers. In Paktika province, the First Battalion, the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, they are proud of the fact that they are Airborne soldiers and they're not civil affairs soldiers. So there is some tension between the civil affairs soldiers and the paratroopers. The civilians who are there, the State Department officer and the USAID officer, sort of look after themselves. No one in a PRT has the mission of being the bodyguard of the State Department officer or the AID representative.

Q: What does that mean as a practical matter? When you have your meetings to attend, how do you organize your transport, for example? Most of the folks that I've spoken to describe how they travel in a convoy and are accompanied by their military counterparts. They didn't give me the sense that they had to worry too much about protecting themselves.

A: Part of the problem with the consolidation of the civil military affairs operations centers with the maneuver elements, rolling them together with the maneuver companies as opposed to having two separate independent entities (a maneuver company and a PRT) is reduced mobility. Because Army doctrine requires that whenever you travel 15 kilometers outside of your home base, you must have two armored HUMVEEs equipped with heavy weapons turrets, which civil military affairs soldiers, the civil affairs troops, don't have as part of their table of organizations, they're dependent on the Army maneuver company when they want to travel somewhere. Before the consolidation of the PRT with the maneuver companies, the PRTs had the assets to go wherever they wanted to whenever they wanted to because they had assigned to them this 120 or 130 man group of soldiers whose mission it was to protect, transport, care for, and provide logistic support to the CMOC. In their absence, "taking care of" the PRT or transporting the PRT becomes a lesser included subset of the maneuver combat company's kinetic activities, which is a buzz word of the Army. Kinetic means patrolling and movement, raids and searches, that sort of thing. So, when the PRT goes somewhere, they go somewhere with part of the maneuver element – at least the PRT that I was with. I really can't speak to what happens in other than these five PRTs. They go with the maneuver company - but if you get into a firefight or an ambush, what I meant to say was, it's nobody's assigned job to get the AID representative out of the firefight or to keep the State representative's head down or to protect the State person's life and property. They just happen to be on hand and they go where the HUMVEE goes. In other words, the PRT is not a bodyguard for State or AID.

Q: Could you describe some of the activities that you were involved in? Maybe the logistics of them will become clear, too, but on a daily basis, what were some of the activities that you were undertaking?

A: As I said before, I focused on the political aspects of the job, working closely with the governor, advising the governor on political issues, and traveling with the governor around the various 34 "argendal" or districts of Paktika when the governor would make public appearances, sitting in the shura meetings with the elder shura, and the religious shura, the "arayma" shura, giving public speeches. The speech would vary depending on the political circumstances. After the story appeared in the news about disrespect for the Koran at Guantanamo, for example, I had to give frequent speeches on Islam in the United States and American respect for the religion of Islam and speak to the issue of Koran desecration and try to explain to rural villagers that this was taken out of context and did not represent Islam in America or America's respect for the religion of Islam.

Q: Had the rural villagers gotten a very complete picture of what was going on? I don't know what their main source of information would have been.

A: The rural villagers get their information from the mullahs. The primary sources of information are the religious authorities in the district. Their primary

source of information unfortunately is not Voice of America. They get a fairly one sided explanation of events.

Q: The kinds of speeches that you gave were to small groups of villagers that you would make a point to visit with the governor?

A: Typically the whole village, the whole district center, would turn out for the governor. You would get the ulema shura, the elder shura. Most of the elders and several hundred people would gather around a central podium area where the governor would speak.

Q: He had his message, which would have been typically what?

A: "You need to support democracy. You need to support President Karzai. We're here to help. We're going to carry through on projects. We're going to make your lives better. Be patient. We need time to get these things done. And we need your help to provide security. Unless you turn in bad guys and tell us where the weapons caches are and who the Taliban are in your area, the NGOs won't come and reconstruction will be considerably slower" was basically the governor's message. And he got beat up on a regular basis by the elders and by the mullahs for broken promises. They would say, "You promised us a school" or "You promised us a clinic. Where is it?" This was a litany of complaints. Every speaker that got up from the mayor to the district council to the mullah to the schoolteacher would come to the microphone and proceed to bash the governor and the Karzai government for not delivering whatever it was they said three years ago they were going to deliver.

Q: So then you would follow the governor to the podium or the microphone-

A: Typically precede the governor. The governor would be the culmination of the fireworks at the end of the Fourth of July celebration as it were, the big featured event. But before the Guantanamo issue broke, primarily the speech was about the need to support the governor, the need to support the president, the need to support the American troops who were there. Then it morphed after Guantanamo and there really wasn't any air space to talk about anything else besides that issue because it really captured the public imagination to the exclusion of all else, all they really wanted to know about. They weren't interested at that point in talking about elections. They weren't really interested in talking about reconstruction. They were interested in the Koran story and America's relationship to Islam. So I would get up and say, "It was my intention to talk to you today about the coming elections and how important those elections are for your future and how important it is for you to select representatives who will represent you well, but instead of that, I would like to speak to you today about something that I know is in your hearts and on your minds" and then go into the Guantanamo story.

Q: When did you leave?

A: I left at the end of June (2005).

Q: So that's very recent. Do you think the story had begun to recede from public consciousness by then?

A: I think we have fundamentally different paradigms of how stories continue in the public consciousness between the American culture and the Afghan culture. We sort of see these things as a flat line on a graph that has blips on it. With a story like the abuse of the Koran at Guantanamo, we tend to think that there is a blip on the graph like a heartbeat on an EKG. It blips up and we think that it blips back down and goes back to a flat line. Then we accidentally shoot up a wedding party with a Spector gunship and we kill some civilians and we think there's another heartbeat and there's a blip and then it blips back down. I think that's the way somehow we subconsciously view these stories as a baseline with blips or heartbeats on it. But that's not the way the Afghans see this. In the Afghan consciousness, these stories never blip back down. There is no downside of the heartbeat. The story goes up and then the flatline goes up to that level and stays at that level. Then a bomb will go astray and seven schoolchildren will be killed and there will be another blip up, but it will stay at that level. So it's more like stair steps going up and up and up and up. Somewhere far above us there is an invisible threshold of tolerance among the Pashto of people where the cumulative effect of an accidental bombing, an overreaction of U.S. forces to a stone throwing incident, or this kind of disinformation story about abuse of the Koran or whatever other stories the Taliban makes up... And they're very effective, by the way, at information warfare. The Taliban is as good as the KGB used to be in the old days of USIA at disinformation stories and misinformation stories. These stories get a kind of traction. They get the legs of the old baby parts story or the old "AIDS was a CIA experiment which escaped from the laboratory." I remember that one from the 1980s. So these Taliban disinformation stories get legs, too. But the point I'm trying to make is, it's not a heartbeat graph. It's a stair step graph. Eventually, if we're not careful, those stair steps will pass through the threshold of what the Pashto are willing to tolerate in terms of abuse as it were – abuse of their culture, abuse of their people. It happened to the Soviets in the 1980s and the potential is there, the possibility is there, for it to happen to us as well.

Q: What would be the way to counter this cumulative effect? Presumably some of the good works that we're engaging in and the transmission of democratic ideas and institutions would also be represented somewhere – someone's keeping score. I don't know if we're making progress that can be used to counterbalance all of these mistakes that we make.

A: Democracy is certainly necessary. It's the sine qua non of development in Afghanistan. If there isn't representative government that's responsive to the

people, then we can't reach our foreign policy goals in Afghanistan. Having said that, I don't think that democracy is the panacea that perhaps some people view it as. The average Pashto villager back in the back hills of Paktika province is proud to vote. He's proud to show the world that he can vote. So he turns out in record numbers to cast his vote as part of an event, as part of his national pride. But government as an entity is remote from the rural Afghan villager's life. Government in Kabul is a distant and abstract concept. President Karzai is sort of a mythical figure who exists outside their daily consciousness. As for that matter is the provincial governor most of the time. The provincial governor of Paktika province, Governor Raji Gula Mongol, is in a minority of Afghan governors in that he actually gets out and travels to his districts and he visits his districts once or twice a year. Most governors in Afghanistan don't do that. So even provincial government is a remote thing for most villagers. The government that they see is district government, which tends to be the traditional twin shura format. There is the elders' shura and then there is the ulema, or religious, shura. In some districts, one is more powerful than the other. In some districts, they are more or less coequals. So, in a sense, the elder shura is a form of representative democracy in that the people of that family or that clan determine through a mekot, a genealogical system of Afghan life, who is going to go and represent them; they have a sort of participatory democracy in the district councils. Their clan has a voice if it's big enough on the district shura. That's the government that they know. That government has no resources, so that government is not delivering anything to them.

Yes, in principle, in answer to your first question, good works that we're doing should counterbalance the unfortunate accidents of war when they occur. However, this development in Afghanistan – I wouldn't call it "reconstruction" because in many places there is nothing to reconstruct; you're actually just doing construction down south – has been painfully slow. Three and a half years after the fall of the Taliban in Kabul, in Paktika, for example, we have still not built one school or one clinic or paved one foot of road. There are 352 government recognized schools in Paktika, but only 32 buildings. All of those buildings are adobe. There are no brick and mortar or concrete block and mortar schools anywhere in Paktika province. There is not an inch of electrical grid. There are three clinics or hospitals, if you could call them that, for 600,000 people. Average overland speed is about five miles an hour.

Q: Walking speed.

A: Yes. Vehicular speed is a little better than walking speed. The province is not much changed from biblical times. The reconstruction effort is hampered by the Taliban, who are able to prevent NGOs from working in the province, which leaves it largely to the PRT and/or the maneuver company.

Q: What would be the Taliban objective in Paktika? Simply control of territory?

A: The Taliban doesn't need to control territory. The Taliban has a sanctuary in Pakistan and safe houses in Afghanistan. I would guess that not more than 20% of the Taliban actually resides in Afghanistan. Those that do aren't the Taliban main force infantry. They're not the guys with the chest packs and the AK-47s. The 20% that are in Afghanistan are probably more like the logistical facilitators, the guys who provide the safe houses for the Taliban insurgents when they move through a district, the guys that can provide food, water, perhaps fuel for the motorbikes, maybe money, caches of buried ammunition, that sort of thing, Taliban sympathizers who can provide the logistical support that the guerrillas need to operate inside Afghanistan. The Taliban doesn't need to control Afghan territory to be a political force. All they need to do is continue enough pin prick attacks which on a tactical level of the war are insignificant. Yes, it's tragic when there is American or Afghan loss of life. Recently we lost 17 soldiers when a Chinook was shot down and that's a tragic thing. My heart goes out to the families whose loved ones were killed in that action. But in overall military terms, these attacks on a tactical level of the war, tactically, they're pin pricks. A bomb here, a mine there, a mortar attack here. Unfortunately, once in a while we are unlucky enough that they manage to shoot down one of our aircraft.

But, there is an impact to these Taliban attacks at a strategic level, and that is that they chase out the NGOs, which is their real goal. They prevent any meaningful level of development. As hard as the PRTs try, or as hard as the maneuver companies try, they're not builders. They're not themselves contractors. They're not themselves the builders of schools. American soldiers don't go out with mortar and brick and lay one brick on top of another and build schools. That's really the role of NGOs. You would want the international community to go and build schools and provide teachers and provide doctors and provide experts on governance. Much of that is happening in the north. You see that in Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Kanduz, Bamian, or places around Kabul and up into the Panjshir Valley where the PRTs are able to do more of what we thought the PRTs were going to do, which is provide coordination and capacity building effort. The NGOs carried most of the burden of actually creating architecture. All the Taliban really needs to do with these annoying pin prick attacks is scare away the NGOs, scare away the doctors, the builders, the advisors, scare away those who would bring construction efforts and bring money to develop the rural areas, and leave it in the hands of primarily the PRTs. They're just trying to slow down the reconstruction effort and make their propaganda come true.

Their propaganda is, "Look, the Americans said that they were going to give you a school. They said that they were going to give you a clinic. I don't see one. Have they done it? Have they kept their promise?" They look around themselves in this sort of theatrical way and they say, "I don't see one. Where is the school? Where is the clinic?" The villagers have to sort of nod their heads and say, "Well, you have a point there. They said they were going to build us a school, but we don't have one." Then the Taliban hands over a briefcase full of cash, they give

them \$1000 or whatever to distribute to the families to buy wheat or cooking oil or whatever. The Taliban, therefore, looks good and we look bad.

Q: The Sharan PRT in Paktika, was it a wise move to put a PRT there? Some of what you're saying suggests to me maybe we moved prematurely.

A: I think it's essential to have a PRT there. I would only argue that one PRT, given the troop to task ratio, is wholly inadequate to the task. You've got 10 or 12 civil affairs soldiers in a province the size of Vermont. If you thought of that state of Vermont as being in the biblical era with 10 buildings that were not made out of adobe in the entire province of 600,000 people and you took 10 Americans and said, "Okay, go and take Vermont from biblical times to preindustrial feudal society," perhaps you could build one school and one clinic in each district, you could build 34 schools in a province which has 300 or 534 schools, only 32 of which have buildings. So, they need roughly 500 school buildings just for the number of recognized schools that they have. The PRT hasn't built one yet. Each district could use a clinic. There are two hospitals and one clinic in operation in the entire province. Getting an injured or a sick child from Mazaqua to what you might charitably describe as a hospital in Sharan takes eight hours. What you find in Sharan is not any kind of medical care that you or I would care to have. That would be in Kabul, the closest place, and that's another six to seven hours further on. So if you have an emergency medical case, your child is going to die, it's as simple as that. One third of all children in Paktika province die before they reach the age of five.

So, I would say in answer to your question, it's absolutely essential that you have the PRT in Paktika province, but the magnitude of the task of trying to take 600,000 people from a Biblical state of development to a preindustrial state of development is beyond – it's absurd. Ten people, given the amount of money that they have, and even the 10 best, most dedicated, hardest working, most motivated Americans in the world, the magnitude of effort pales into insignificance in the face of the challenge. The amount that has to be done is so great that 10 or 12 Americans simply can't do it. You would need NGOs to do it or you would need a much greater American civil affairs presence. You would need a PRT in each district. You would need 34 PRTs to develop it to a meaningful level, to where the villagers had access to fundamental healthcare, where they had a handful of good schools with teachers with more than a sixth grade education. Most districts in Paktika do not contain a high school graduate. Six graders teach first graders, literally. There are 2,600 teachers in Paktika, but only eight have ever been trained as teachers. So, to get these 34 districts and 600,000 people even to a basic baseline level of access to clean drinking water, of access to rudimentary healthcare, of access to education for their children which consisted of a roof over their children's head and a teacher who has a high school education would take a level of effort several orders of magnitude beyond anything that we're doing now.

Q: Or beyond anything that we planned to do when we went into Afghanistan which of course is the crux of the problem - developing any Third World country takes a lot of time and effort and that doesn't even speak to fighting a war, so I'm not surprised that we haven't been able to modernize Paktika; rather, it seems that we're doomed to fail.

A: I'm more optimistic than that. I would argue that Afghanistan is more strategically important to the United States. Perhaps it's the cruel mathematics of necessity, but Afghanistan because of its history of involvement with Al-Qaeda, because of the intentions of Al-Qaeda to bring death and destruction not just to this country but to all of the civilized world, Afghanistan needs to be a higher developmental priority than, say, Malawi or Zambia, which may perhaps face the same magnitude of challenges in terms of providing basic human quality of life but don't harbor the same strategic dangers in the near term to the United States that a return of safe haven for Al-Qaeda to parts of Afghanistan would present.

Q: How would you characterize the attitude of the inhabitants of the province toward the American occupation and toward Americans as individuals? How did they perceive you and how did they perceive the PRT folks?

A: I think the majority of Afghans have a positive tolerance for the presence of Americans. Afghans in general tend to be a fairly inward looking people. Louis Capri in his classic textbook on Afghanistan called them an "inward focused society." I wouldn't go so far as to say they're xenophobic, but Afghans are not particularly keen on outsiders and their presence- [END SIDE]

They view the Bonn process, the Karzai government, and the presence of Americans as perhaps the last hope to end the madness, this cycle of killing, poverty, of warlordism, of the horrors of the last 25 years in Afghanistan. So they're willing to cut us some slack, as it were, for unfortunate incidents and accidents of the war – up to a point. I think there's some theoretical limit somewhere to Pashtuns' patience and Pashtuns' tolerance. We haven't reached it yet and I don't think we're approaching it. It's hard to know sometimes what will set the Pashtun off. The great Pashtun revolt on the frontier of 1897, for example, seemed to be sparked by what the British thought was a relatively minor incident. So one never knows. Perhaps it's not quantifiable in any Western metrics. But I think the overwhelming majority of the Afghan people are willing to give this a try. They're willing to see if President Karzai and the Americans... And they don't make really a distinction; they see President Karzai as an American representative; the government in Kabul they see as an American government, just as they saw the Kamal and the Teraki government in Kabul as a Soviet government in the 1980s. Teraki was assassinated in 1979, providing the pretext for the Soviets to invade in the Christmas Eve invasion, so it was really the Bagram Kamal government. But they certainly don't see Hamid Karzai as some sort of an independent, strong-willed president of Afghanistan. They see him as an American figure. But they're willing to give it a try. But they're sort of

waiting for the results. They're waiting for Godot. They're waiting for things to get better, promises to be kept. That race still has a few years to be run. We still have some time to make good on promises. But over the years, various infantry battalions rotating through and PRTs rotating through have raised the villagers' hopes. A man hears what he wants to hear, as Paul Simon noted. When they say, "We'd like a school" and the PRT says, "Well, we can't promise anything, but we'll try," the part they hear is not the "We can't promise anything." The part that sticks in their memories is that we'll try, which in folklore translates into "Okay, we will." So, there is a problem with communication there and people's expectations of a better life are elevated by seeing the PRTers and by seeing the PRT commander or the State political officer talking with the shura and saying how things are going to get better and not making perhaps hard and fast promises but certainly alluding to things being better under the Karzai government than they ever could possibly be under a return to the Taliban. So the people are waiting for those quasi-promises to come true.

Q: Do you think in your province it will be feasible for NGOs to begin operating there anytime soon? You mentioned there weren't any and maybe historically there haven't been any.

A: There was just the one small Bangladeshi NGO, which were three or four guys who drive around in their truck. They have a well-boring rig. They go out and they drill wells, which is okay. At some point, someone needs to look at the water table in Paktika and examine what the effect of drilling wells willy nilly around Paktika is going to have on the water table long term - whether at some point you drill so many wells that the water table goes down below the pumping range of the existing wells and then nobody has any water. So you have to look at the second and third order consequences of development efforts. I'm not an expert on that. The short answer to your question is, no, I don't see NGOs going back to Paktika anytime soon because they're afraid of the Taliban. If they come in, they'll get chased out.

Q: So during the time you were there, March thru June, the ability to do development work and for you even to operate normally was severely hampered.

A: In the sense that there are no NGOs working there, it's certainly hampered. The NGOs bring something vital to the reconstruction table. Part of the problem is winter weather. From December until the end of March, it's impossible to build anything in Paktika. There are 18-24 inches of snow on the ground or there are 18-24 inches of mud on the ground. Building season is mid-April to mid-November. The Army's curious budgeting process with CERP funds is sort of stop and go, the process that they have. It reminds me somewhat of the old children's game of "Red light, green light." They'll say, "Green light. Now you have CERP money." There will be a flurry of activity to get paperwork done to get projects approved. Then at some point it will be "Red light. Stop. There's no more CERP money." Higher ups in the chain of command have decided that they

want to review how the CERP money and development money is being correlated to our other goals in Afghanistan, how is it being used to support the maneuver element, how is it being used to support the kinetic efforts of the Army or something like that. Then there will be a moratorium on expenditure of CERP funds for some period of weeks or perhaps months. Then it will be green light and they'll say, "Okay, go. There is \$26 million. Go spend money real quick." Then there is another flurry of activity, a burst of activity, not particularly well coordinated or planned, just sort of a flurry to get the paperwork in to get the projects approved. Then at some point they'll say, "Okay, stop. Red light. No more money. In fact, the money that was approved before has been stopped. So, the projects that were approved are not funded." It's a curious budgeting process from the State Department perspective, which is more attuned to getting an amount of money at the beginning of the fiscal year for office operations or whatever. An office director is told to have \$1.2 million for training, office equipment, and travel. "This is your budget for the next 12 months. Spend it wisely." The office director probably knows that there might be a five or 10% recession at some point and keeps a little in her or his back pocket in the event of a recession. But that's not the way CERP money gets budgeted in a PRT. So there's that hindrance to the process.

Then there is the problem of getting contractors to work in these provinces who are up to the standard of construction that's required by the Army or by USAID. USAID and the Army don't build adobe buildings. They build brick and mortar buildings. Well, there is nobody in Paktika province who knows how to build out of brick and mortar because they don't build out of brick and mortar in Paktika; they build out of adobe. So there are no local contractors who have the skill sets to do the construction. So, you have to go and get the contractors from outside of Paktika province. When these outside contractors get to their project sites, assuming that they're willing to come, they either have to pay bribes to the police or bribes to the shura or exorbitant prices for sand and rocks and local labor, or they have to pay the police protection fee for each worker, or they are threatened and intimidated by the local contractors, who are not happy that these external contractors are working in their district and taking jobs out of their pocket and food out of their children's mouths. These contractors are either intimidated and threatened and basically have to leave the province for their own safety, or their project costs escalate by being charged exorbitant prices for locally obtained materials (like sand or stones for the concrete or what have you) that the cost of doing business exceeds their bid on the project and they actually lose money by building a project, by building a building, for the PRT, so outside contractors are reluctant to come in and work. Local contractors don't have the quality. Outside contractors don't have the local protection or local support to do the work. So, there are no contractors. So, work is delayed trying to find contractors who can and will do the work and get the local shuras to protect them and not extract extortion money to protect them or charge them exorbitant prices or force them to take workers who happen to be their brothers, uncles, or cousins.

Then there is the dimension of the quality control issue. Because these projects are being done in very remote locations, it's difficult for the PRTs to get out and supervise the work on a regular basis. Some of the work that has been done by contractors, unfortunately, for the United States over the past three years has been very slipshod work. There are numerous cases of buildings that we built two years ago literally collapsing. Fortunately, none of the schools that have been built have fallen down while the children were inside them, so we haven't had children injured by being inside schools that we built when they collapsed. But the contractors will try to maximize their profits by, for example, substituting sand for cement in the buildings. So the building stands up for 12 months, but the first time you get a heavy dead load of snow on the roof, strain on the poor quality concrete occurs, the beams collapse, and the roof will fall. Or the roof might simply leak. The roof leaks onto the floor. The floor corrodes and becomes covered with algae or dirt and becomes unsuitable for the children and the building becomes uninhabitable. In many cases, we're having quality control problems with local contractors because we don't either have the engineers to go out and inspect the work and poke screw drivers into the concrete and see if it really is good stuff or not. So, the buildings that we're getting are either overpriced – and in some cases we're paying exorbitant prices to get work done – or of wholly inadequate quality of construction. So all these things together are combining to severely retard the best intentioned reconstruction effort.

Q: Many of these same problems occur anywhere, but it would appear in Paktika that they seem to have the worst of all worlds. All of the problems that people encounter are going to be found there.

But I'll shift gears slightly and address another issue that many of the PRTs undertake: i.e. supporting the rule of law, police training . Do the prisons operate? Has there been some effort to play a role in strengthening local legal institutions in the province or has that not really been a focus?

A: At the current rate of development, Paktika is probably 100 years from those issues being a part of the problem set.

Q: You mentioned the police, so I guess they do have a few people who go by that name.

A: There are Afghan police. They're ANP. Not many of them have yet had the training at the regional training centers. But there are no prisons. There is a magistrate in Sharan, a traveling magistrate who comes to Sharan occasionally. Law in Paktika is tribal law. It's not courtroom law. In a case of a land dispute, for example, it might go to the magistrate if there are competing claims over a piece of land. But otherwise, legal matters are settled by a shura or not at all. If there is a murder, for example, or a manslaughter, the family that's responsible for the murderer will seek "bidal" and will seek to negotiate, in which case they will agree to move out of the province, move somewhere else. The two families never

meet. Intermediaries will discuss it and see if some number of cattle and sheep can compensate for the dead person. Typically, a woman of mating age is worth a cow. A sheep is worth a girl not yet of marriageable age. Males are worth considerably more and more money would have to change hands to settle a blood debt in that case.

Q: Out of curiosity, how much is a middle aged woman who is murdered worth?

A: If the woman is no longer able to produce children, her value is reduced to perhaps that of a sheep. But if the two parties don't agree to negotiate, then there is simply a blood feud between them. At some point, "bidal" has to be satisfied and the victim's family will have to kill a comparable member of the murderer's family. These blood feuds will continue for decades or even in some cases for centuries. In Paktika province there are no courts. Police don't arrest people and take them to a court for these things. They're decided by the tribes.

Q: So if, for example, you had information that someone was working with the Taliban in Paktika province and the PRT or infantry or appropriate people were able to capture those individuals, if they were from the village, would they be arrested by the Afghan National Army or would our PRT hand them over to the Afghan National Army or to a local authority to deal with them?

A: In the first place, that scenario happens very rarely. It is, unfortunately, a rare cause for celebration when we get good enough intelligence to identify a person who actually is Taliban and pinpoint their location and make a successful arrest. When that happens, that typically is done by American forces of some type. Then that person is taken to Bagram, where they're interrogated and their case is handled. Rarely do Afghan police or Afghan National Army detain personnel. If, for example, a search is made of a compound by a combined team of a squad of American soldiers and a squad of ANA soldiers and prohibited weapons or a prohibited amount of ammunition are found in that compound, it's possible that a male family member from that compound might be detained by the ANA and delivered to the Afghan national police at the government compound in the provincial capital and the chief of police might discuss the matter with the local shura, who will certainly come and petition for that person's release. In many cases, that person will be released on their own recognizance. They might be questioned by the chief of police. Depending on tribal issues - and all politics in Afghanistan are tribal - the person might be allowed to swear his allegiance to the governor and the Karzai government and then be released after giving an oath of loyalty. It's rare for someone to be plucked - at least in Paktika province - and sent to Bagram. It might happen, maybe one person or two persons a month. In virtually every case, as every military officer will tell you, 90% of the people who are sent to Bagram were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. They're not actual Taliban. Where their true sympathies lie is difficult to discern. But in few cases do we have proof that would stand up before a tribunal that Suspect X is provably guilty of Taliban activities. For that, you need witnesses. You would

need a court. You would need evidence. You would need evidence that would stand up in a court of law. Those things rarely if ever exist. The best you've got is a solid case of intelligence against an individual, but not one that would meet American legal standards of beyond reasonable doubt. So, no, arrests happen rarely in Paktika province.

Q: I think you alluded to the fact that Taliban are able to operate somewhat openly. That is, they come in with their sacks of money which they're able to give around freely to individuals. We were talking about how the populace is disappointed because they haven't seen many results from the central government – no schools being built, no clinics being built, but the Taliban shows up and they have plenty of money to hand around. Am I getting that wrong?

A: I don't think that the average Afghan villager has any love for the Taliban. The Taliban's draconian government was at odds with the typical Afghan village lifestyle. They were such Luddites about things like music and dance and television and Indian Bollywood videos and that sort of thing. I don't think that there is any great sympathy for the Taliban among the average Afghan villager. I would be hesitant to put a percentage on it, but certainly less than 20% have any desire to see the Taliban come back at this point. The Taliban are able to in small numbers – groups of two or four or six, in some places in Afghanistan in larger numbers, but not in Paktika – able to move covertly at night, take shelter in safe houses of sympathizers, meet with shura members, distribute their night letters, give their propaganda pitch, and move on, perhaps planting a bomb or setting an IED or something like that along the way.

Q: You talked about night letters earlier, but refresh my memory about what those were.

A: A night letter is a one sheet Xeroxed or perhaps printed on a mimeograph machine, an anti-American, anti-Karzai screed, a call to jihad, basically a very trite and hackneyed call to defend your Muslim sisters who are being defiled by the occupiers and this sort of thing. It would, with some non-literate people perhaps, resonate.

Q: I think we'll try to draw this to a close here by asking what you think, not only the last time that you were in Afghanistan, but in your various incarnations, when you were associated with the PRTs, what do you look at as your greatest achievement? How would you suggest the PRTs should be improved?

A: The greatest achievement would be getting the teachers academy open in Paktika province. The Army vacated several buildings and the maneuver battalion commander and I agreed that we could use these buildings for a teachers' academy. We put a coat of paint on them and got some furniture and put a sign out front and gave it to the ministry of education, which will now use it to take teachers from the districts in Paktika and with help from the ministry of

education in Kabul improve the quality of the teachers in Paktika province. It's difficult to get teachers from Kabul to come down to Paktika because conditions are so difficult. We decided to grow our own, as it were. I think the teachers' academy is a way of turning swords into plowshares at a very cost effective level. I think we spent a total of \$9,000 to open this academy using the Army's old buildings that they no longer had a use for and got the thing open in about six weeks. I would point to that as perhaps an achievement of which I'm pleased.

As to what needs to be done in Paktika, I would say the commitment of more resources, more money, a more reliable stream of money. You can do a lot with a little in Afghanistan if you have a reliable and steady flow of funding. A return to the independence of the PRTs, at least the Sharan PRT and the other four that I mentioned, to being an independent self-standing organization capable of sustaining itself, moving itself, and protecting itself independent from the maneuver companies. The PRTs are the legacy institutions in Afghanistan. Presumably, they will be there long after the maneuver companies are gone and I think they need to be preserved and maintained with continuity as legacy institutions which stand alone and are capable of independent operations.

Q: Do you think that the PRT commander would share your view about the desirability of their being independent again?

A: It's difficult to speak for a military officer.

Q: I don't mean a particular individual, but just from the military side.

A: I would say certainly so. I don't think anybody at the tactical level sees this as anything other than a marriage of convenience. Certainly your majors and your lieutenant colonels are given their marching orders and are doing the best they can in difficult circumstances to make lemonade out of lemons. Certainly they would like to see a cooperative effort between the two institutions, but perhaps with a few exceptions, most see the desirability of the PRTs as independent but cooperating and closely coordinating parts of the military effort there which would also include the maneuver or, as the Army likes to say, "kinetic" activities. We also need to ramp up the political and civilian dimension, but in a way that is responsive to the culture of Afghanistan and in a way that is responsive to the reality of an insurgency. You need to put State officers out there who are allowed to arm themselves, who are issued with and trained with sidearms, as State Department officers were in Vietnam, for example. You need officers who can speak the language. At best, you get 75% of the idea across through an interpreter in one direction and 75% back in the other direction, which means interpretation is costing you 50% of every message in the best scenario, with the best interpreters. Many of the interpreters are mediocre, a polite description. Some have very limited competency. The lack of a language ability is severely hampering PRT efforts. We need to realize that we're in Afghanistan for the long haul. This is going to be a 20-40 year counterinsurgency. We're going to need

language trained officers. We're going to need Afghan specialists. We're going to need people that have a deep-rooted understanding of the Afghan culture. And we're going to have to accept that there are certain environments in which we can't send women officers because the culture is not yet ready or willing to listen to them. So, I would say we need to ramp up the political effort as well, perhaps consider more than one State officer at a PRT. There is certainly more than enough work for one. If the PRT officer is traveling with the governor, he's not working on the local issues. And if he's working on the local issues, he's not out giving speeches. If he's on leave, he's not doing either one. If he's on R&R, he's not doing either one. Transit time to some of these PRTs – it can take a week to 10 days just to get to them and get back to Kabul. There are conferences, health issues. So a State PRT officer is perhaps present 60-70% of the time, so having two State PRT officers out there who are able to overlap and cover for each other would certainly be better than one. So, State needs to do more. Yes, the Army needs to do more. It needs to put more resources against the problem – more people, more money, more vehicles. But State, USAID, and USDA also need to carry the water as well. And State needs to ramp up its efforts with more people, more money, more resources, more satellite dishes, more radios, better vehicles, more telephones, more people, more training, more language skills, more cultural awareness.

Q: Do you think State is going to do that?

A: I'm retiring, so I don't know. I personally don't see it happening. I don't see a ramping up of the PRT effort from where I sit.

Q: That would be my fear.

A: It's fine for State to point the finger at Army and say, "You're not doing enough. Your budgeting process is inadequate" or "You're not putting enough people against this problem," but you can point that finger right back at yourself and say, "Where is the money from State? Where are the political officers from State? Where are the uparmored vehicles to get State officers around? Where is State's..." I'm not assigning blame unilaterally to the Department of Defense in this. Certainly they're putting more people and more money against the set of problems than the State Department is. I don't hold State blameless in this. I think State needs to ante up. If more resources are put against this problem, certainly more political resources need to be put against this problem as well.

Q: You made a very interesting point earlier on that Afghanistan is an important political entity for us. That's the point I would guess has to be more widely accepted. If it's an important relationship, then, the resources have to be commensurate. But I don't know that we've made that commitment.

A: That's several levels above my pay grade.

Q: Okay. I thank you. This was really very informative.

A: I'm glad to help. I hope this has been of some use.

Q: I really appreciate your sharing your expertise. We will be working to give it a quick turnaround. Ideally, the program will be finishing this summer, the end of August, and then the materials will be collated and used in seminars coming up in the fall.

A: Let me know. I'm happy to help in any way I can. I'm passionately committed to the success of the U.S. effort in Afghanistan. I believe in it wholeheartedly, so anything I can do to help, I'm happy to do.

Q: Well, thank you very much. We'll make sure you're contacted.

End of interview