

USIP – ADST

Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview # 6

Executive Summary

The interviewee was the Department of State representative at the PRT in Jalalabad in the fall of 2003 and in the PRT in Tarin Kowt (Oruzgan province) in the fall of 2004, for 90 day periods. He describes his relationship with the civil affairs teams, with which he worked closely, as well as with the other elements that provided force protection within the PRT, including the Afghan militia.

In pursuing development and reconstruction projects, interviewee indicates that he and the civil affairs soldiers had an excellent relationship, and that they agreed that they should seek complementarity with other donors, almost none of which operated in Oruzgan. In Jalalabad, however, various UN agencies and other NGOs operated. According to interviewee, NGO-PRT relations were cordial: most NGO's "had a wary acceptance of the PRT; ... some stayed their distance. Many were very happy to talk with us." On balance, he concluded, the NGOs saw that the PRT presence was valuable: it discouraged attacks on unarmed civilians, provided an entrée with local militias, and had the capability of rapid response if need be. The PRT could also conduct projects in areas where NGOs could not go. Interviewee also indicates that he heard from villagers and government officials many criticisms about the NGOs that did not apply to the PRT.

According to interviewee, his presence and that of the PRT were well received both in Jalalabad and in Oruzgan. Despite Taliban efforts to sabotage the elections in Oruzgan province, a former Taliban stronghold, the elections occurred almost without incident, with "pretty good" turnout, according to interviewee. The men were excited to participate in a national experience and to be voting for President Karzai, a fellow Pashtun with ties to the province. (In this very conservative province, only about 2% of the women were registered to vote.)

The interviewee recommends language training for this assignment, particularly in Pashtu, since FSI currently only teaches Dari/Farsi, even if only courtesy level is achieved.

He is very positive about the effectiveness of the PRT, stressing the need for "a light footprint, but a footprint in many places." Because the provinces are often cut off from the central government, the PRT serves the very useful purpose of providing a "safe haven that can project interest in the areas and facilitate assistance." He recommends that people in his position be given a small amount of funds that they can disburse on the spot as they see a need: \$500 to rebuild a room that has been destroyed, a few hundred dollars to pay for broken windows after an attack in a school building. This would demonstrate our support for the people on a very concrete level.

Finally, he believes the PRTs are a good model and should remain in place even as the overall troop levels go down, with an increase in the civilian component, since the need for such a protective shell is likely to continue for some time.

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

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Q: I understand that you are connected with two PRTs, one in Jalalabad and you described one soon to be established in Tarin Kowt?

A: Yes. My experience was a little unique in that way that I've been at two. Both times, I was only there for 90 days, in country for 90-day TDYs. In both cases, I was there before either one was officially called a PRT. You might call them pre-PRTs. They both are now formally designated PRTs. They have moved into, I might add, much more commodious facilities now than they had when I was at those two places.

Q: So you were involved in the creation of the two PRTs.

A: Creation, or as they were forming, yes, something like that. I was in Jalalabad in the fall of 2003 and a year later in Tarin Kowt.

Q: If you can describe them, sequentially for the moment, and we can contrast them as we go along. Jalalabad: what was its size and its structure and which agencies were represented there?

A: One thing that's important to remember actually with both of them is that the PRT was co-located with other U.S. personnel in both locations. In a lot of cases, there's just a PRT there. But in Jalalabad when I was there, we were on a compound in the town and there were basically three parts to that compound. I was with the civil affairs soldiers in basically one third of that compound. There were about 25 of us in an area not much larger than a tennis court. It did have buildings there. They were very good to me and I got my own room. It wasn't much, but it was okay. Then there were other U.S. personnel in those other two compounds. I was the only unarmed civilian there. Since then -- in fact, while I was there, we were working on it, but it did not happen in my time -- the whole PRT to my understanding has moved to another location not much more than a kilometer away from where we were.

Q: In terms of agencies that were represented in the PRT...

A: I was the only unarmed civilian. As far as the PRT itself, not counting the other 2/3 of that compound, I was the only agency other than the Department of Defense civil affairs soldiers whom I worked with. I can talk a little bit about the other parts, but I know we need to be careful

about what is classified and not. The other two parts of the compound get more sensitive. I'll say there were other U.S. government civilians and other U.S. military in the other 2/3 of the compound. We coordinated very closely. In fact, it was their compound but they had basically a different mission than we in the PRT had in that their mission was dealing with the more immediate threat and we were there with the standard PRT mission to extend the government's reach to prepare the conditions for stability and security and facilitate reconstruction.

Q: Let me just go back to the number of folks to make sure I have that right. You said it was about 25?

A: Yes, there were about 25. The numbers would fluctuate all the time. There were about 25 on the civil affairs side plus the other 2/3 of the compound. Except for very rare moments I'd say the usual number of total Americans there was less than 50, including all parts of the U.S. Government that were there. The PRT's area of operations at that time included four provinces: Nangrahar, Laghman, Kunar, and Nuristan. However, Jalalabad is the capital of Nangrahar and when I got there they had not been yet to any of the other three provinces. While I was there, we did manage to get up to Laghman with some frequency because we could go there by land. For Nuristan, the only practical way to get there was by helicopter. It was about an hour's helicopter ride. Just as I was leaving, they had supposedly built a road in, but it wasn't much of a road. Before that, it was a five-hour walk from the nearest road to the capital of Nuristan. In Kunar, though we always wanted to go up there, there were other U.S. forces in Kunar and it was deemed by the military that I worked with and depended on to be too insecure to go by road to Kunar, so we did not work in Kunar. I kept pointing out, and I think it was obvious to people, that it was too much area for us to cover. Since then they have opened a PRT in Kunar that has responsibility, as I understand it, for Kunar and Nuristan; whereas the PRT in Jalalabad covers now just Laghman and Nangrahar, which is still a lot of area.

Q: Okay. That clarifies that. You began to describe the PRT's mission. In speaking to others, I gather the mission of the PRT tends to be somewhat the same throughout the country.

A: Yes. There were different elements and we did work together very well, but I took as my mission as the first State Department officer in the eastern part of the country to get the lay of the land and report it back to the Embassy. I think there was quite a bit that they didn't know about the overall situation there. There were other personnel out there, but their reporting tended to be focused on things that we in the State Department don't focus on so much and didn't always get distributed as you would hope it would. Also, the mission was to coordinate with other parts of the U.S. government that were there, those in the PRT and those in the other parts of the compound, so that we could have an efficient and effective approach to what we were all trying to do. Then to work with the Afghans, both the officials and the local people, to show primarily by our presence and our deeds and our assistance that they weren't forgotten, and to encourage them and enable them to basically gain responsibility for their own welfare. And then finally to work with the other donors, the UN and NGOs who were there, so that we could all work to that common goal.

Q: I imagine you were doing something similar in Tarin Kowt as well?

A: Yes, it was similar in overall goal, but actually the situation was different. Tarin Kowt is the capital of Oruzgan province. Both the area that I covered the first time out of Jalalabad and Oruzgan are Pashtun areas, but Oruzgan is more isolated and is probably the most conservative province in the entire country. It's a very long way from anywhere. Parts of where I worked were remote, but actually Jalalabad itself is right on the main road between Kabul and Pakistan and so it's a bit more connected. In Tarin Kowt, the PRT was co-located with battalion headquarters of an infantry battalion that had three other bases. Altogether there were four U.S. bases in the province. So, you had a lieutenant colonel for the PRT and you had a lieutenant colonel for the maneuver battalion. They had different missions, but they also had related missions. In both cases -- in Jalalabad as well as in Tarin Kowt -- I saw that to do as much as I could I needed to work not only with those who were technically in the PRT but with other U.S. government personnel in the area. For example, in Oruzgan, the PRT itself including its force protection element usually had about 70 people around; whereas you had a battalion of many hundreds of personnel, so they had a great deal of effect and influence in the province. So I made an effort to work with them and they were very receptive to having me work with them. So, I worked with both parts and also did my best to ensure that the PRT and infantry battalion worked together and coordinated as well. Conditions were also more difficult in Oruzgan than Jalalabad. Although we were in town in fairly cramped quarters there and we had plenty of space in Tarin Kowt, this location had been taken over from the Marines who went in there earlier in the year and it was in the middle of a giant dust bowl. It was just the most pervasive dust. We lived in tents without any running water or hot water. The temperatures would vary 40 degrees -- it was sort of high desert -- between the hottest time of the day and the coldest time of the day. It was very, very hot when I got there. Then ice would form in the mornings by the time I left. We had no TV, no fax, no VCRs, intermittent e-mail Internet connection, which was a problem as well in Jalalabad; it often went out and was our main way to connect with the world, although we did have satellites too. It has been improved in both Jalalabad and Tarin Kowt; they now have much better facilities.

Q: You were describing your relations with the force protection unit. I really don't have a clear idea of the various military units that formed part of the PRT and those that maybe work with you but aren't part of the PRT.

A: It was very different in that regard from Jalalabad to Tarin Kowt. In Jalalabad, we had no dedicated force protection soldiers at that time. Now they do and it's much better. We had two civil affairs teams in Jalalabad and just one in Tarin Kowt. So what it meant was the -- and it did constrain us -- civil affairs soldiers also had to provide the force protection. Now, we worked with Afghan militia and they greatly supplemented our force protection. But the general rule in Jalalabad was that you could not go anywhere without two American shooters and two Afghan shooters. Sometimes we wanted more, depending on where we went. We were not supposed to get by with less, though occasionally we might for very short trips into town. If I needed to go somewhere, to a meeting or something -- and the soldiers everywhere I went always took very good care of me -- it meant that they had to go with me, at least two soldiers in most cases. Since they were civil affairs soldiers, what I was doing often was of interest to them, but that meant they couldn't go off and do other civil affairs things. Now, in Tarin Kowt, which is more like the situation that I think exists in Jalalabad now, the PRT had an infantry unit there. It was National Guard infantry, basically, there for force protection. So if I wanted to go somewhere I

didn't have to divert civil affairs soldiers to accompany me, to basically escort me. The infantry soldiers were there; that was their job. Also, often out of Tarin Kowt, I would travel with the infantry unit that was there and I got my force protection from the infantry that was there. They were always glad to provide it. Only once in Jalalabad did I travel with the other soldiers that were there and they provided the force protection that time.

Q: How would you describe the nature of the threat? Obviously it was not a safe environment.

A: It's what the military calls a non-permissive environment. Working out of Jalalabad, there were constant threats being reported. I deferred generally to the military and other government agencies on that. Once when I was traveling with that other military unit, we got shot at, just a few pot shots maybe. I don't know; I didn't hear it. But then they all stopped and said, "Well, we just got shot at." We were kept from going. There were a lot of stray rockets fired in the town. Once they even went right over our location. There was always the potential for mines or IEDs, as the military calls most of them, along the roads there. When we would go out at night – we went up to Laghman, spent some nights up there – we would go out into the desert and when it got dark, we would move to a new location or shift locations after dark to just decrease the chance of a threat. But nothing really happened to us. There were no injuries to U.S. personnel or even to Afghan personnel who were with us while I was there, though some of the other U.S. personnel there did make contact from time to time. So the threat was reportedly strong and there were some attacks on NGOs and UN personnel and there were places we did not go. Like I mentioned, we didn't go up to Kunar. We did not go up to the northern part of Laghman, although I wanted to, because it was felt we didn't have the military assets to do that prudently. In Oruzgan, that was a former Taliban stronghold, IEDs [improvised explosive devices] were the greatest threat. During the time I was there two U.S. soldiers were killed. These were not with the PRT, but it was the infantry unit. At least three were medevaced to the States.

Q: And these were on account of IEDs?

A: They were usually IED. The fatalities were IED. There were also some wounded by RPG rockets. Two Afghan personnel with the PRT while I was there were wounded and medevaced because of IED injuries.

Q: So it was not a permissive environment for the kind of work that you were trying to do.

A: But I should point out that in both cases there was always a threat out there and we needed to be alert for it, but we did not feel that we were in a hostile environment. It just takes one person, and maybe not even a local person, to do things like that. Basically in Jalalabad, in the area I worked out of in Jalalabad, and in Oruzgan, you got a sense that we were welcome.

Q: Okay. Your work was in the political realm. I don't know if the timing coincided, but did you have any role in the preparation for the emergency and constitutional loya jirgas or the presidential elections?

A: I'm trying to recall now. In Jalalabad, I think there were preparations for the constitutional loya jirga when I was there. I left a little bit before it convened. I left in November. We did

coordinate, and this was more the military side, but I was there, to make sure that we had communications and what we would do if UN personnel or election personnel or a constitutional loya jirga ran into problems somewhere. So we worked on that. When we had meetings in town, we were asked to pass by just to show the flag, show presence, just to show that the U.S. forces were interested in the proceedings and that was all. It was all very friendly and it worked very well. Then I was in Oruzgan at the time of the national presidential election. The U.S. was very much involved with that in supporting the Afghans. The primary responsibility for security for the area fell to the infantry battalion because they had the resources and they did lots of preparation. The PRT was involved, too, particularly locally. I worked closely with the officer at the infantry battalion who was working on the elections. For a couple of days before and the day after, I stayed down at the compound where the election central was in town and with a few of our military or a couple of expatriates hired by the JEMB (Joint Electoral Management Body) which was directing the election, to work there, just to see how things were going and report on it. I was the only civilian election observer in Oruzgan province because nobody else came out. Basically things went very well. We did have one other civilian in Oruzgan. He was AID FPO, field program officer. He went up to Towraghondi province for the elections there.

I should also mention, though this is a little bit off track, that in Oruzgan, unlike Jalalabad, there was only one NGO doing anything and there were no other expatriates in the province -- no UN presence, although they hired some contractors up there. UNAMA (U.N. Assistance Mission for Afghanistan) had a compound in Tarin Kowt but they did not let any of their own personnel spend the night there. They'd come up by helicopter, be there in daylight hours, talk with us, and then go back before night. And there were no NGOs working there except for this one NGO that was doing very, very good work, but it was all Afghan personnel. It was funded by the European Union.

Q: You mentioned the JEMB.

A: Yes, that was the Joint Electoral Management Body. I may not have the acronym accurately remembered now, but it's something very close to that. That is basically a joint UN-Afghan commission that was responsible for conducting the elections.

Q: I was surprised when you mentioned that during the elections you were working with the infantry officer. Here's something that the civil affairs officers would have been working on.

A: Well, the civil affairs officers also patrolled around, but the infantry battalion -- it was a Battalion of the 25th Infantry Division based in Tarin Kowt -- was very good. Although they did what we usually associate with their infantry mission, they also really understood the long-term goals that we had in the country and that elections and reconstruction were what we needed to do and you just couldn't go around shooting people up all the time. They were really good. They had the capabilities to provide election security for the province because they were out in three other locations and they could provide the reaction force or the extraction force or extraction capabilities and so on. So they were mostly coordinating with the governor and the JEMB coordinator for the province. And the PRT commander also participated in those discussions but effectively he didn't have the capabilities if something went wrong, which was a concern. Actually, the day of the election, basically, things went very well, but one vehicle that was

bringing back ballots from one part of the province not too far from Tarin Kowt did come under attack and sustained casualties and a reaction force was sent out which did include a number of PRT personnel because they happened to be the forces that were available at that time.

Q: Okay, I see. So a lot of your work was preparing for contingencies?

A: Well, by "your work," I guess you mean mine personally. I know the questions are directed to the PRT, though in the case of Oruzgan or Tarin Kowt, sometimes it will be an artificial distinction to say the PRT when there were 500 other U.S. soldiers in the province, so obviously they were a big gorilla there.

Q: You described how on the day of the elections you were an observer. In the run-up to the elections, were you involved in observing the registration process?

A: The registration took place before I got there, but I was involved in talking about it to officials, to local district officials and the provincial government and with the U.S. personnel there as well and reporting to the embassy in Kabul that preparations seemed to be going well despite Taliban attempts to sabotage it. The Taliban had murdered a number of Afghans and launched other attacks to try to discourage the election in Oruzgan, but they did not succeed in that. There were one or two other incidents that happened on election day that did not significantly have an impact on the elections. So, yes, everywhere I'd go, we'd ask about it and it was clear to see that the infantry battalion was doing all that they could out in the areas where they were located. The JEMB coordinator had a lot of good resources for the province. I was really surprised that he had a number of vehicles and satellite phones for his personnel. They did about the best they could. But still, to give an idea of how conservative that province is, in the overall country, we were very happy, as we should be, that about 40% of the eligible voters were women. In Oruzgan, it was more like 2%; in some districts none at all. I got there after registration time, but it's just so conservative.

Q: And what was the turnout in that province?

A: Well, the turnout was pretty good. The men -- because I didn't get much chance to talk with women and the women, very few of them voted, in some districts not at all -- were excited to participate in a national experience and to be voting for the President. I didn't get any sense that there was coercion or bribery or things like that, not to say it didn't happen out of my knowledge. I think it wasn't really needed. The province went overwhelmingly for Karzai. He's got ties to that province. He's a Pashtun. He is basically seen as a benign ruler. So it's not surprising that he got a very high turnout there.

Q: You mentioned though that the province had been a Taliban stronghold. So you have two very different currents of thought, those who were adhering to Taliban ideas and those who wanted something different. How would you characterize people's political sentiments around the time that you were there?

A: My sense was that the Taliban had largely been discredited. The Taliban, even though it was a stronghold and some of their leaders came from there, and Mullah Omar spent considerable

time in Oruzgan, it wasn't a much beloved administration. I think people were largely happy to see it go. They were petty pirates. They were all Pashtuns and they were all Muslim, so there weren't issues like that. But I think they were happy to see it go. I think they were seen as losers as well. They didn't have anything really positive to offer the area. So still, as in the Pashtun east, where I had been my first year, it's not to lead to complacency. There are still problems of governance in a place like Oruzgan, and neglect. When people live out in these villages and don't feel like the central government has any interest in them or that the West, which is personified by the U.S. in places like that, has no interest in their well being, then it's possible for Taliban or something like the Taliban to regroup and recruit and do things again. In one sense, a place like Oruzgan is not of great importance to the government in Kabul because it's so far away. Particularly if you're talking about traveling, you can't be really a threat to Kabul. But it's places like that where the Taliban took root and where they gave Al-Qaeda succor. So, it doesn't matter to the short-term political situation in Kabul, but it does matter, I think, to our national security that we help to stabilize those places and give people hope for the future.

Q: It sounds as if activities of the PRT would build on the first step of the election and that the mission hasn't ended. I imagine that PRTs are promoting democracy in other ways at this point.

A: Yes, we try our best to promote democracy in both places I was at. Now that we're in Tarin Kowt, we can talk about some of the ways. For one thing, these were officials out there who were not used to having any resources to work with. They effectively weren't used to doing anything because there was nothing they could do. We tried to encourage them to work together, to communicate with each other. We'd have meetings for the whole provincial cabinet and encourage the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development's person for the province to participate in that, to try to not have it be a one man show as things tended to be from the top, to encourage the government (which was made up of former mujahidin) that the rule of the Taliban was largely over, although there were still a few bad guys up in the hills, that really the mission for today and tomorrow is reconstruction of the country. We wanted to encourage the government, when the government officials look for assistance, to look at not just things to make their own offices better, which is understandable, but look outside to ways that they could help people that they're paid to help. And also to work not just in Tarin Kowt, which was the capital, and understandable again (it's the showpiece and the center point of the province), but to work out in the districts where people may be of a different tribe and far away but are people that need to get assistance probably even more than those in the capital. We worked on things like that as well as on specific issues. It's not something you can do overnight, but I think we're continuing in that way. Our projects supported that and our words and our actions, by going out to those places, encouraged that. AID was working on a radio station, which I hope is up and running now. They had no radio in Oruzgan to help communication. We were also -- it was either going to be AID or the military -- to build a government building to bring officials together. A lot of them were working out of sort of bombed out ruins left over from the fighting either with the Soviets or after the Soviets left. WE wanted to bring them together, find a place to meet so they could communicate. They did not talk to each other, especially regarding work. Of course, it also requires that these officials have some resources to work with and I'm hoping that there was further progress made on that after I left. I'm pretty sure that the U.S. people -- AID and the PRT and even the infantry people -- were working on that, too, I hope.

Q: The concrete projects like the radio station and the government building I think would be the kind of thing people would get a sense of satisfaction in seeing resolved.

You mentioned AID. Were they a part of the Tarin Kowt PRT?

A: Yes, there was an American USAID contractor -- foreign program officer-- who was out there at the same time I was out there. We worked mostly on thinking of the kind of projects, working with the military side of the house, that we thought would be useful. There was one typical situation there that occurred before I got out there. I think USAID did a day visit up there and commissioned a project to build a girls' school in Tarin Kowt, which was excellent, but it just killed me to see this girls' school. It just sat empty because no girls would go to school in the provincial capital. I kept bringing this up with the governor every time I saw him, or almost every time, and urged him. He would say, "Well, it needs more resources." This, that, or the other. But other people said, "It's insecurity in the area. Our people don't want to send their girls to school." But you had this USAID school that was just built a little bit before I got there. Boy, it would be wonderful if their girls were in school there next year, but

Q: In terms of insecurity, the idea is that the girls remain at home with their family and to go out to the market or to go out anywhere would be considered too dangerous?

A: Yes, that's basically it. Certainly to go out on their own. I could see this in Jalalabad, where the girls would go to school and walk home from school and it was great. But this was not happening in Tarin Kowt. Part of it is cultural fear. Maybe I'm making a little bit too much of a boogeyman, but they feared that men with guns would abduct them or harass them, and they didn't want to subject their daughters to that. The governor said if we did various things like put a wall around the school and other things, and provide a bus, which I don't think we need to do, he would send his own daughters to school next year. We shall see. But what people told me was, they didn't feel the area was secure. It wasn't that it was like Taliban would come and attack them, but "unenlightened males with guns" would be the way to put it.

Q: The Afghans might be thinking of people they knew in their own village.

A: Well, this was in the provincial capital, let alone in the districts. When I first got to Tarin Kowt, we went out to a remote district, again where the Taliban had been strong. They were talking there about how they wanted a big agricultural school built. I said, "But what about a girls' school?" They said, "In our culture, girls don't go to school and we couldn't protect them." I said, "What if we build a school?" They said, "If you build a school, of course, you'll have to protect it." Then I thought, I don't know if we really want to push this. I would hate to have a school like that and have some girl go to school and be abducted or killed or something like that. There was a health clinic in that district where there was a doctor who would treat females and a grenade was thrown over the house where he lived. I believe it killed his wife and several of his children and he left.

Q: This was an Afghan health worker?

A: Yes, it was an Afghan health worker. There were no expatriates in the province other than U.S. Government.

Q: So the idea is that women should not have access to health care?

A: Well, I think, if people were pressed, they'd say it should be a female health care provider. But the problem is there just aren't very many of them around.

Our responsibility out of Tarin Kowt also included the northernmost district of Kandahar province, Nesh (phonetic) District, which is actually closer to Tarin Kowt than it is to Kandahar. They had a very nice clinic there, as they had a nice clinic in one other district I visited. They had a female health care provider, but she just recently left with her husband. So it's very tough for women to get health care if there are no women to provide it.

Q: Of course, we've touched on a lot of issues. So much is culturally based that even in the absence of hostility and insecurity, you would be hard-pressed to change everything overnight.

A: You can't do it overnight, but you can work at it and set examples. I think the country is moving in the right direction but in places like Oruzgan and the more rural parts where I was in Jalalabad before, it goes very, very slowly and we need to be careful how we proceed, that we aren't seen as imposing an alien culture on the people. But actually, I think, on issues like girls' schooling, it's something we will be able to see further progress on. A lot of progress has been made in the past few years already anyway, and I think a lot of fathers, who are the main decision makers on this, would like to see their daughters have an education.

Q: Right, so the attitudes are changing.

A: I think so, though I need to stress that in places like Oruzgan, that will be about the last place to change. But we've got to keep working on it.

Q: In Jalalabad, I don't think we talked so much about the development or reconstruction activities that you might have been involved in there or that your PRT was involved in. Would you like to describe some of that?

A: When I got there, the PRT and the civil affairs soldiers had been doing a lot of wells and village assessments. They are fine, but the thing I was pushing (and the civil affairs soldiers agreed with this too) was to find a complementarity with the other donors. In a case like Jalalabad, there is UNAMA presence, including various operational UN agencies such as UNHCR and UNICEF and UNDP, etc., and a number of NGOs there. But I think the niche, the value added, that the PRTs can particularly provide is to go out to the more difficult areas where for security and logistical reasons the NGOs can't go.

I've heard criticism by NGOs, saying that basically the PRTs were using assistance for political ends and thereby endangering NGOs if they did haphazard work that wasn't nearly as good as the other donors could do it and they just got in the way of the donors, that the people resented the military for that, and that the people confused the military with the civilian aid workers, thus

putting the aid workers in danger. When I got out there though, impressions I formed were very different. Actually, I heard very strong criticisms of NGOs from people like villagers and government officials out there, that the NGOs were basically stealing from the people by their fancy houses and nice SUVs and the money there never seemed to get out to the projects, and when they did projects, NGO projects were haphazard, were sloppy, and it was short term effect. I did see some like that. But it was so virulent, these comments, that I worked hard to tone it down. First of all, they said, "We're going to kill the next NGO worker." I said, "Listen, that isn't good. That isn't going to get you more assistance. These guys are trying. We need to work together." I worked to try to dispel at least the potentially dangerous attitudes that were there and to see how we could work together with the UN and the other NGOs. Most NGOs had a wary acceptance of us. Some just totally stayed their distance. Others were very happy to talk with us. In fact, many were. But I think they saw that we had lots to offer. If there were no PRT there, it would be less secure. The PRT, its soldiers, could discourage attacks on unarmed civilians. We also had -- I say "we," but it was the soldiers really -- entrée with local militias. They each saw each other as soldiers. We could facilitate disarmament. Plus, we had the reachback capability. If something bad happened, we could call for a reaction force or we could send our own people out if it was small. UNAMA welcomed our presence. Where there were human rights problems, we tried to help without mucking things up. And we could get to places that NGOs couldn't get to. For example, we went up to Tora Bora. We had to go by helicopter because it was such a long trip. We went up to Nuristan, where no NGOs or other donors were working to my knowledge. Very few were working in Laghman. We went up there as well, so we could reach there. I'm sure it wasn't perfect, but we tried to get out of the center around the Jalalabad area, where the NGOs could work effectively. Before I got there they were working in that area. Everybody wanted to work close to the center. Civil affairs soldiers need to do projects. Some NGOs, and I think this is very much a minority, seem to want a very large military presence in the country basically to be the NGOs' bodyguards, but if U.S. forces are there only as gunmen, they're going to have a difficult time with their presence. If they can also facilitate good works, then it makes it safer for them and for everyone there. And also while I was there I worked with the civil affairs soldiers to move our emphasis away from these little projects like wells, which always made me nervous about what they would do to the water table and so on, and village assessments that did not lead to projects, to work on roads, which I thought was by far the greatest priority for the area. Roads take a lot of money and they take maintenance, but roads in my view can do more things. I also want us to be careful, as the military were, about making buildings, if you didn't have a way after you built the building to have a functioning office or whatever, a school or a health clinic in there. But if you did a road, it would help integrate the country, as people from the outlying areas would have a less difficult time getting to the capitals, getting to Jalalabad and getting to Kabul. The government officials could get out there. Donors could get out there more easily. It's also better security, less likely for there to be an IED in the road. If there is an ambush or something, it's quicker to drive out or quicker to respond to it. Roads are high visibility. They give evidence of the West's commitment to help Afghanistan. Plus, they're available to all and used by most people. It can facilitate going to school, make it easier and cheaper for kids to go to school, for teachers to get to school to teach, and for people to make a decision about whether to travel to a clinic if you've got a decent road to go on, and to take jobs. People can take jobs in the town that they couldn't otherwise get to practically. And roads lower the cost of getting the farm goods to market and also getting farm supplies and other items, consumer goods or whatever, out to the places where

the people live. There is also always a developmental issue that I wrestled with; there never was a clear answer. There are issues of getting assistance out there quickly to show people that we care, but also there are issues of absorptive capacity, that you don't give out more than they can handle. We need to be very careful about fostering an attitude of dependency, which can very quickly develop out there, too, and also demands for "me too" assistance. If you do a well for one village, then the next village wants a well. Then the one after that wants a well. If you do a road, since a road kind of benefits everybody in that valley rather than just one village, it's less likely to foster that kind of "me too" demands for assistance.

Q: You've convinced me about roads.

A: Sorry, that was quite a riff there, but you can see I care strongly about that.

Q: Apparently you were successful also in persuading the civil affairs officers that that was a good idea.

A: Yes. I should draw back a little bit to say that these weren't totally my ideas and I persuaded others. A lot of this came by group process. But I think we all came to that view that the roads were a good way to go. The people who were there with me at that time came to that view as well as AID. AID did not have a representative in Jalalabad when I was there. Since then, they have put someone there from AID. The project recommendations that went forward were for roads mostly. My understanding is that they were going in that direction, that things were happening on that. I can't be 100% certain what happened on that. There was some of that going on as well in Tarin Kowt, though it was more of a starter thing. But the military, the Corps of Engineers, was building a road from Tarin Kowt to Kandahar to connect the province to the rest of the country. There was a track there from before, but it was very slow, very long, and very dangerous because you had to go so slow. They're working on that. I think that will very much improve the economic prospects for Oruzgan and help integrate it into the rest of the country.

Q: Had you done any development work before? Had you been in the Peace Corps?

A: Actually, I served in the Peace Corps in Afghanistan. That was particularly associated with why I volunteered for this. I was there a long time ago. My first year, I actually lived in Nangrahar. I taught school in a village outside of Jalalabad. My second year, I worked on the Emergency Rural Development Project, emergency because there was a draught situation, basically a Food for Work program in Farah and Kumar provinces. For the second time I went back, I very much wanted to go to either Kumar or Farah, where I'd already been. But Kumar, there was already a State person there for a full year. Farah, they said they weren't ready yet to have a State person. So I took Tarin Kowt instead.

Q: You obviously had a very appropriate background for this assignment in Afghanistan. Did you have some language?

A: I had Pashtu, which was my language when I was there, but intervening languages have basically pushed all the Pashtu out of my mind. I tried to get as much language training as I

could get before going out there. They did approve one month of self-taught with a tutor here and FSI sent me some materials before I went the first time. I think they did two weeks of self-taught plus the Rosetta Stone they let me buy. I wish they had given me more. I did not have the facility with the language that I used to have. As far as I know, I had better Pashtu than any other Foreign Service officer that was in the country. The ambassador, as you probably know, is fluent in Pashtu, being a native Afghan. But all the language training that they do at FSI now is in Farsi, Dari. They don't do any in Pashtu, but I think they should do some.

Q: That might be one of your recommendations.

A: Yes.

Q: Talking about language and the importance. I would guess that really would help in your work.

A: It does help. They have interpreters and they are good, though sometimes it's nice to be able to say a few words, at least of greetings, and pronounce names in the language. Sometimes I could tell an interpreter, though I could not have said it myself, was not correctly or thoroughly translating what I said and I would talk to the interpreter. Or sometimes I could say he wasn't interpreting back for me everything I thought I heard and so I'd ask more. So, it's always helpful to have some of the language. But primarily, it's appreciated by the people, as you know.

Q: I think that's an important point. I don't know if your recommending it will have an influence.

A: The problem is, it's a difficult language. It's much more difficult than the Dari that they otherwise teach. I think still though, if you could find one or two young officers who might use it then and then later go back for a tour.... The only place you could use it outside Kabul would be Peshawar, so there's kind of limited opportunities to use it.

Q: Well, it's a one-country language.

A: Yes, we have a few of those.

Q: We teach Swedish and Danish.

A: That's true.

Q: We haven't talked about the rule of law kinds of issues. I don't know if that was something you were involved in with your PRTs.

A: Not so much. We did a lot with governance, but not much rule of law. We needed some kind of program. I'm not sure if I fully understand what you mean by that, but basically, what we did try to do was work on that to prevent and discourage abusive behavior by government officials, particularly those who were armed.

Q: That's part of it. The police, of course....

A: Yes, we did work with the police. Certainly when I was in Jalalabad, the other parts of the compound other than the PRT worked most closely with the police. For example, one day, the PRT civil affairs soldiers were out in a village and I was not with them. They reported abusive behavior by armed militiamen who said they reported to the senior military commander for the East. When I got back I heard that they pushed around a civil affairs soldier who had tried to give the people a radio, and that this guy snatched the radio from him and said, "These people are like dogs," stuff like that. And so they reported it. Then, when I heard about that, I said, "We've got to do something about that." I talked with the PRT commander and with the other U.S. officials in the compound who were used to dealing with him. We all agreed that we'd go out to see the military commander that evening. I saw him and we had a good conversation. I think I helped convince him how it's in his interest to be seen as cooperating on human rights. The next day, he sent forces that went with some of our U.S. forces out to that village and they sort of imposed discipline there. They took this guy who was the offender and they put him in jail for a few months. When I left, the village elders kept pleading for his release. I wrote a letter to the general saying, "If you have no other reason to hold him other than this one incident, the villagers say he'll cooperate. I have no objection to you releasing him." But their court systems were just not functioning in either place. It was even worse in Oruzgan. I'd call on the judges, but they were all off in Kabul. They said they had not tried a case in months. The police handled some. The governor handled others. It was a long, long way from any kind of court system. Italy was supposed to be in charge of working with the courts, but there was no sign of any of that getting done there.

Q: You had taken the initiative to pursue this incident. But then later they asked you what you thought about the plan to release this guy?

A: Well, the villagers came and asked. I forget exactly how though. They talked to the soldiers and the soldiers said to talk with me and the elders came and they saw me and pleaded more than once. I wrote this letter saying, "The village elders say the guy made a mistake and brought shame on the family and he would never do this again. I will keep a watch on it. If you have no other reason to hold him, I have no objection to his being released." I think the military commander said if he had some letter to cover his butt, he would release him that way. But I also wanted to say, if they thought this guy was Taliban I didn't want to just give him a carte blanche release. There were some allegations made in that regard, too.

Q: It sounds as if you had a very proper approach. It's interesting that you had a certain credibility in the village.

A: Yes, well, they tried and it worked. I think the guy got released. Since then, the police chief has been changed and there were a lot of changes made in Jalalabad. In Oruzgan, we had an MP detachment, which was working with the police. The police and the governor did not get along real well and a lot of the command relationships with the various police in the outlying districts were really tribal and personal rather than the way they should be on a good organization chart. But we were working with them and trying to regularize the police. In the end, we finally got a ministry of interior official, a colonel, to come out there as I was leaving. I hope that was

helpful, but I'm not sure how it turned out. I remember one of your questions was whether there were any Afghan officials in my place. That was the only one who was out in the PRT in either place. They were moving in that direction. As I say, we finally got a colonel out by the time I was leaving. They had none in Jalalabad when I was there.

Q: Your own involvement apparently really wasn't with police training, but rather the MP group....

A: They were the main ones, but I called on several occasions on the police chief with the MPs. We talked. I took a great deal of interest in that because security was probably the number one issue in the province. I visited with the police chiefs, such as they were, out in the districts. We had MPs who specifically did training programs and stuff like that and could be a conduit for sharing equipment and so on. But it was an issue I worked closely with the MPs and the PRT on.

Q: In terms of actual training, were the MPs conducting some kind of classes?

A: They were doing some basic things. They would go out on patrols in the town. Some of it was just to get the policemen out of their compound and do the things that we think policemen should do. Yes, they would do that kind of training and talk to them about how you can detain a person without killing them and other things like that. And how to use equipment. They were starting to share. And how to coordinate communications with other policemen who were not at that same location. Yes, they would throw in some training.

Q: I would think that would be a difficult problem. These are not trained police to begin with, presumably.

A: No, though some of them had been sent down to Kandahar for some training. But they were very receptive to it. These were guys who really welcomed the training. This was their job and to know how to do it better and to do it more professionally, I think, appealed to them. We can't be sure if we all walked away tomorrow what they would revert to, but they seemed receptive to it.

Q: Their heavy-handedness then was due to lack of experience?

A: Heavy-handedness really isn't the best description, certainly in Oruzgan. They could be heavy-handed but basically a more accurate description is that they had a very minimal presence. They were not out and about much. They had virtually no vehicles, virtually no radios, and had all other kinds of equipment shortages. And just a cultural thing where if you presented a complaint against someone and you were an Afghan, you were expected to bring the person that you claimed shot your brother in. So, it was sort of getting away from that. And also to show how you could make an arrest without just shooting up the person but try to bring them in without lethal force. That was the situation. In Nangrahar, too, although there were problems with checkpoints, which were gradually getting better, often the problem was that the police just weren't there.

Q: Earlier I think you started to describe that. The Italians were apparently charged with legal reforms or court reforms.

A: Yes. At the Berlin conference, the various interested governments sort of parceled out responsibilities. The Germans would do the police. The British were to do drugs, opium. The Italians were supposed to do legal reform. In the places that I've been, I've seen little to nothing of any of those programs from those other donors. It probably was happening in other parts of the country, but it wasn't happening where I was.

Q: Let's see if we can bring this to some conclusion, summing up. I think you can point to a number of accomplishments and things that actually went well. On balance, how would you characterize the effectiveness of the PRTs in all of the areas that they're working in (security, expanding central authority, reconstruction and development, government, and the effectiveness of using the resources that they have)?

A: I'm very positive. I think we get more bang for the buck out of what the PRTs are doing than certainly most other programs. When you consider that the average PRT has about 100 Americans, how you can do so much out there? I think we're going in the right direction. My views of what is needed in the country is a light footprint but a footprint in many places. Since the roads are bad in the country, it's difficult to get around. People can feel very cut off. The central government has places like Oruzgan where it hasn't gotten any, at least when I was there, resources out to the area or sent visitors or stuff like that. It's good to have a safe haven, which the PRT is, that can project interest in the areas and facilitate assistance. So I'm very positive on that. We could always have more resources. I always felt, for example, it would be good if the PRTs had helicopters. If it takes you six hours to drive to a village one direction, six hours back, that's 12 hours on the road. If you're going to do a day visit, it leaves you no time to work there. So then you can stay overnight, which can raise security issues. But it's much easier for civil affairs soldiers to do that, including possibly with an AID or State person, than just a total NGO without any support. But if you had a helicopter, just think what you could do. You could hit three or four villages and come back that day or get to places that are almost just too far to go. So, I think they're doing great really.

Q: In terms of translators or other resource issues, did you feel you had at your disposal what you needed other than, say, some helicopters?

A: When I went out, I was concerned about being micromanaged, but actually it's quite the opposite. There are a lot of things that are being worked on. I felt in some cases it would have been nice to have some funds that I could get quick access to. For example, working in Nangrahar, we visited a district headquarters that had been rocketed the night before we got there. Nobody from the government had gone out there, but we were out there. We helped buck the people up to feel that they weren't alone. Basically, the rockets had destroyed the room where the district chief usually slept. He happened to be in Jalalabad that night, so he survived. He was lucky. But you could see the morale was down. It would have been so great to give them like \$500 just to rebuild that room that had been destroyed. Another time, we went out and saw a girls' school -- this was again in Nangrahar province, in an outlying district -- that had been attacked by Hezbollah people, anti-female terrorists or whatever. They had broken the

windows and tried to burn the school, but they didn't get very far. When we were out there, we gave them some privately donated school supplies that the soldiers had gotten from the States. But how nice it would have been just to have a few hundred dollars to pay for the broken windows. It's not like the schools in the States where you can just access resources like that. When the windows are broken, they're broken for a long time unless you can get some donor to fix them. But going out there, we showed our presence and support. I think they were very much appreciative of that. But sometimes to have a little bit of money would be very nice. For some of that stuff they're working on, they're trying to work on faster assistance.

Q: They're aware of the need.

A: Yes, I think so. Of course, there are all kinds of laws and regulations that you have to be concerned about. A lot of improvements have been done, but there are still various things for security that could be better, especially armor and -- this is more on the military side -- being able to detect IEDs and so on and getting that out to the PRTs, and vehicles and vehicle maintenance. The radios could be better. For soldiers throughout there, it would be better to have M4 rifles rather than the longer M16 rifles. If you're in a vehicle and are ambushed, it's just a lot easier to respond than with an M16, which just sort of gets stuck. But that's all military stuff.

Q: Your own communications, if you wanted to arrange a meeting with someone, how would you communicate with them to set it up?

A: A meeting out where I was?

Q: Right. If you were going to have to travel to one of your constituent areas.

A: Well, when we traveled we never announced ourselves in advance for security reasons. We just showed up and whoever was there, we'd talk to. In the towns, there was no telephone service in many of those places. Usually we'd send an interpreter out to arrange a meeting in town. Communications with the embassy were sometimes a problem. But things had gotten so much better a year later. Also, being able to send classified messages out, which was a real problem my first time out, was much better. For getting back and forth to the center, the PRT now has its own aircraft. They have a fixed wing, which I left Tarin Kowt in. They were getting a helicopter. I hope that went through -- one helicopter for all the PRTs. And various other kind of things, too, like pre-clearance for U.S. visitors so U.S. persons don't show up on your doorstep without any idea of what the security situation is, which did happen a few times. So, things like that are all getting much better. Plus, the embassy, which I had asked for, and it happened not just because I asked for it, now has two officers who are dedicated to supporting the PRTs or working with them. One is an administrative officer. The other is doing more the political reporting side. Before, people were working flat out anyway and they were supposed to also watch the PRTs, which just was impossible. That's been done. The first time I was out there, I didn't have an AID officer with me. Now, they have AID people out there. So, that's going better. They're getting host government officials out in the PRTs. That's good. If they can get the Afghan national army out to the provinces, that would be great, too. So a lot of things -- I think they're all working in that direction. I'm encouraged about the way things are

going. They seem to be, just from what I read in the press, addressing the opium issue, which is a very serious issue, which basically was not being addressed in the two provinces, I was in but need to be addressed. That's good. I don't know how it will turn out. There's also integration of long-term and short-term goals. I think that's being done better now. So lots of things are happening that are good, I think.

Q: Would you say the PRTs are envisaged as being long-term entities -- that is, they'll be there for the next five years anyway?

A: I think it's very likely. What I would hope is that we get to a situation where most of the U.S. military come home, where that presence reduces and keeps reducing, but that we keep the PRTs out where they are. You're probably going to need a reaction force or two in some places just in case problems arise. But the PRTs are out there and maybe the civilian component in the PRTs can increase and you might need fewer soldiers out in them, but you still need some to provide that hard shell to protect them or just to deter attacks or whatever. But I think they will continue to evolve. My sense is that probably something like that is going to be used again in other places. I really don't know what's happening in Iraq. I think they may be doing something like that in Iraq. I'm not totally sure. But it seems to be a good model. Initially, the aid community was strongly against them. I think they've warmed to them a little bit and that will continue to evolve.

Q: I'm not really sure what the model is in Iraq, although when I did some interviews for that project, I did learn that, for instance, the small amount of money that might be needed in some of the situations you described was available and that it was a very fine mechanism, people felt, to address some of the relatively minor -- they're minor on the large scale -- problems but could do a whole lot to build morale and to change attitudes.

A: That's good to hear. Maybe it's getting out to Afghanistan now, too. There were supposedly programs like that when I was there but they didn't seem to be working quite as smoothly as they were supposed to be. Maybe that's better now.

Q: You were there, I guess, at the inception pretty much.

A: Well, not totally. I went out there in August 2003 the first time. I don't know when the first PRTs went out, probably in 2002.

Q: And your second tour was...

A: I finished in about mid-November 2004.

Q: That's a year's difference.

A: Yes. So, it was like a year or a year and a quarter's difference. There was a long period in there when I wasn't working.

It's hard to measure temporal progress when you're in two different parts of the country. I could see on the administrative side that a lot of good things were happening with the embassy. I think the military was continuing to evolve its approach, too. The good thing is that people were not fixed on "It's got to be this way and we can't change," but recognizing that it was a little bit -- I guess things have been done like this in other places -- of invent as you go and adapt and so on, as everything in life, as many things, are supposed to be done.

Q: That's normal. You have to be a little more flexible, I guess, than in some situations.

A: Some of these issues out there are that you don't develop aid dependency. Sometimes you have to get a self-help component of the aid, of the projects, which can make things go slower, but maybe more lasting like that. So you have short-term versus long-term goals in that regard, too.

Q: I want to thank you for all of your help today and for explaining so much of what your experience was and hopefully sharing it with people who will take advantage of it.

Is there anyone you would like to suggest to be interviewed?

A: I'd say, those who are in Kabul with responsibility for this, get to know them all. This last time when I was in Oruzgan, I was not there during the time they had any conference, so I didn't get to meet others. So, just like the province was isolated, I was pretty isolated. But of the ones that I do recall having talked to before and after, I think every one was positive. I don't know of a negative person. There may be some out there, I don't know, but I don't know of any that were negative.

Q: Was this the first time that you worked closely with the military? You had been doing pol-mil.

A: I'm actually an economic cone officer, but I did serve two years as a draftee a long time ago. I also worked in the Pentagon on a detail from State.

Q: Was it unusual to be assigned to a PRT for 90 days?

A: Yes, it was unusual. They very much wanted people for a year. As I understand the reasoning, one, administratively, if you have to keep trying to get someone every 90 days, it's very hard to get people; two, in a year out there, you really develop the ties and stuff like that. But I basically went to places that nobody else wanted to go, and actually places I didn't want to go. So, that's why I went 90 days. But they prefer at least six months and would really like to have you for a year. It was either me at 90 days or nobody. So they took me. Ninety days was their bare minimum.

Q: That's how it worked. It sounds like you did a good compromise. Fortunately, you came back unscathed and with a lot of good experience and you were able to make a contribution.

A: Yes, I felt really good about it. But there are always possibilities out there, and it was really pretty safe. They took excellent care of me.

Q: That is what we hear from people. That's great. That's reassuring.

A: Yes, and it was a very positive experience working with them, too. I was so impressed with what these guys do. All the PRT soldiers, but one, in both places were either reserves or national guard.

Q: So the civil affairs folks were national guard?

A: Well, they were actually reserve. The force protection guys in Tarin Kowt were national guard. All but the second PRT commander I had in Tarin Kowt, who was technically career reserve, were citizen soldiers called up for this duty.

Q: It is really quite amazing what our national guard and reserves have done in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

A: Yes, it is amazing. It's not, I think, fully appreciated inside the beltway. But a lot of guys have other jobs, families. It's unlike when I was in the military when I got drafted a long time ago and we were single guys. These are guys with pictures of kids up on the wall, some of them kids they've never seen yet and stuff like that. They have jobs. It's okay if you work for the government, you can go off and do these things. But you can't be a private businessman in business by yourself and go off and do this. Your business falls apart. Or if you're partners with one other person, it's really tough. Let alone the family issue.

Q: It's definitely a sacrifice. People really do deserve to be commended for it. Hopefully they will at least come back safely.

A: Well, most of them do.

Q: Okay. Thanks again.