

USIP-ADST

Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #8

Executive Summary

The interviewee was in Jalalabad, Afghanistan from Feb. 2004 to Sept. 2004. He was a brand new civil servant, a presidential management fellow, hired straight out of graduate school but had some experience in Afghanistan.

The PRT in Jalalabad counted up some 600 people and while there it grew to over 100. The other civilian was a USAID representative; the PRT was led by a lieutenant colonel and two majors, one of whom was from a civil affairs team. Prior to his arrival, the PRT had been in executive for a month and a half and prior to that a U.S. military civil affairs team had created relationships with power centers in the city. There was a Ministry of the Interior attached to the PRT.

Normally good coordination existed between State and military officers posted in Jalalabad and their colleagues who focused on intelligence matters. However, some priorities did not mesh. For example, in one instance PRT leadership was looking toward long term changes while intelligence officers sought short term solutions, which meant the PRT was trying to get rid of an official while the other team was working with him.

The relationship between the PRT and the NGOs was varied; some appreciated cooperation; others wanted nothing to do with the team.

The PRT focused on the major issues, disarmament of the militia, deploying the national army, security for elections, reconstruction projects and helping promote selective government reforms.

The embassy had a hands-off role, for the most part, with the PRT. The embassy was not staffed to provide good support during this period.

The security situation was unstable for the PRT members. The economy, however, was thriving mainly because of poppy production and the money it created. The PRT did not focus on the drug trade or the role of women. The team was working to promote the upcoming elections. Subject left just before the election, which he felt was pretty successful.

There was an effort at police training which was rudimentary at this time and the police were not very effective.

There was a problem with the State Department not having the resources to staff the PRTs, which the Defense Department did.

AID was an important player in advising civil affairs soldiers in reconstruction projects, designing and financing their own projects.

There were quarterly meetings of PRTs but there was not enough sharing of experiences; rather the central command was telling them what to do.

All in all, subject felt that the PRTs were very successful and he could see real progress developing

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

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Interviewed by: Charles Stewart Kennedy
Initial interview date: March 14th, 2005
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Q: When were you there?

A: I arrived in Jalalabad on February 21, 2004 and I departed on September 24th, 2004.

Q: What were you told before you went there that you should be doing?

A: I was given a set of work requirements on a piece of paper; it was a one page document that said that I would be engaging with local leaders to learn their intentions and reporting back on them to the embassy. I would be facilitating security sector reform, things like assisting with disarmament. I would be seeking out public diplomacy opportunities for the embassy, engaged in local conflict resolution initiatives, facilitating the spending of emergency support program funds to build reconstruction, to—you know—reconstruction.

So, a list of about ten different things I would be doing.

Q: That was quite a plateful.

A: It was a huge, very, very, very wide set of responsibilities. That really encapsulated everything that, really, the US government was trying to do in eastern Afghanistan, or all of Afghanistan. I was just in charge of that in eastern Afghanistan in my two provinces. Not only was it that broad but really the direction that I got from the Deputy Chief of Mission before I departed was go out and really just be an agent of change, he said. To do whatever is necessary to make, ensure that the authority of the central government is extended out to that area of the world and make sure it doesn't... the peace there doesn't unravel.

Q: Let's talk about where you were working in Jalalabad and did this include several provinces.

A: Jalalabad was the capital of Nangarhar province and so we dealt with Nangarhar province and one other province: Laghman province which is a separate province. And then we dealt with western Nurestan, which is a third province. So we really had parts of three different provinces.

Q: Tribal-wise, what, how, where did your provinces fall?

A: Well, I mean there are two predominant ethnic groups. One's Pashtun and one was Pashai(PH). Pashai is a small ethnic group. Within the Pashtun ethnic group there were many

tribes. The largest were the Shinwari, the Khugiani, the Mohmand, the Afridi. It was a very complex tribal structure. The Safi(PH) and Laghmen provinces were very large.

Q: Did you have any training or preparation or experience before you went out there?

A: I did. I was some what unusual. I am a civil servant, or what's called a presidential management fellow, hired straight out of graduate school.

Q: Where did you go to grad school?

A: I had written my master's thesis on assistance in Afghanistan. So my master's thesis was about Afghanistan and during graduate school I had worked for the International Rescue Committee; an NGO [Non-Governmental Organization] in Pakistan, in the Afghan refugee camps just before September 11th. So I had worked in the Afghan camps. During that time I had traveled inside Afghanistan. So I had some experience in the country.

Q: Describe your PRT.

A: When I arrived it was about under 60 people. When I left it was over 100 if you include a company of marines that was there, it was over 200. The corps of the PRT [Provisional Reconstruction Teams] ... let me describe our all 50 ... it was me, an USAID [United States Agency for International Development] representative, a commander who is a Lt. [Lieutenant] Colonel, a deputy commander who is a Major and then something called a CAT [Civil Affairs Team]-A Commander, a Civil Affairs Team Commander who is also a Major. We were the leadership element of the PRT. Now, supporting us were several, half a dozen civil affair soldiers and a force protection element, there was also a communications element and all kinds of logistics elements and a medical element.

Q: So when you arrived there, was this an already established PRT?

A: It had been established, yes. The site itself had been completed a month and a half before I got there. And their grand opening for the PRT had been held about a month before. We rehabilitated a Russian R&R site. So there was a destroyed building that we took over, refurbished, built a wall around, and then we added several buildings, brought in generators for electricity and that the site of our PRT.

Q: Had connections been made at this point? Meaningful connections to the local area?

A: Yes, I think so. It was still pretty early in our PRT's arrangement but before the PRT with that name as such, was established, you had civil affairs teams that had been working Jalalabad and Nungarhar province and they had created relationships with the governor and the police chief and local, religious--some local religious leaders--so yes. I wasn't walking in to a totally unknown situation.

Q: How would you describe the political and economic situation at the time that you got there?

A: Okay, well, politically it was ... We're talking about two provinces. The political situations in each province were quite different. Generally speaking, the political situation was very tribal, it was contested by both official ... there was a contestation of power between official government leaders and commander-war-lord types. There was a significant security threat from Taliban and Al-Qaeda and Hezb-e-Islami/Hekmatyar insurgents. A large degree of informal power in the hands of informal political actors I would say. So it was very fluid, politically. In Nungarhar province there was a rivalry between a governor and between a warlord named Hazrat Ali. Hazrat Ali was of Pashai ethnicity; ethnic Pashai person who had obtained a lot of power in the wake of the fall of the Taliban partially in cooperation with the United States government. He had helped fight with U.S. government forces, U.S. military against ... in the battle at Tora Bora and had obtained a lot of power that way. And then the governor who was a tribal leader and an important, former, mujahidin commander who was Karzai's designee.

In Laghman province, the other province where we worked, there was a very weak governor and several warlord types who were also battling him.

Q: How much did the central government–Karzai's government–hold sway in the two provinces?

A: More and more over time. When we arrived there I think that President Karzai had difficulty getting his decrees and wishes implemented in the provinces. But over time with things like disarmament and deployment of the Afghan National Army? His authority increased. It was very clear that it was increasing. Also, our efforts were all aimed at trying to directly increase his authority, bolster his decisions, try to get the governor and the others to implement those decisions. You wouldn't see the central government often directly. But Karzai was popular in our area and increasingly over the eight months we saw that there was, he had more power.

Q: You have a central government which is putting itself together at that point, still, but how were orders or decrees or decisions transmitted? Were they coming to you and then to the government or were you catching on the side of finding out or...

A: No...

Q: .. how did that work?

A: Well often say, in order, say a transfer of a government official. Often we would just hear about them. It would not go through us because we were not a governmental authority. So we often heard informally and I suppose it depends on what kind of government decree it was that you're talking about. At one point in the time that I was there, Karzai reappointed the first corps commander of a military unit, a militia unit as the police chief. That was a move that was designed to weaken this military commander and we heard about it on the news actually, and then were able to use ... I should have mentioned this earlier, we had a Ministry of Interior representative living at the PRT with us who was providing us guidance on what the central government's wishes and plans were. So that Ministry of Interior representative, a Colonel, could call the Ministry of Interior and verify things that we had heard. So he was sort of a back channel that we had to the central government.

Q: How did you find relationships with the American presence there when you first arrived ... How did you work on this?

A: The relationships were fine, they were good in general. Americans were welcome in this area of the country as I think they are in most parts of Afghanistan. There's a huge fear in Afghanistan that we will abandon the country again. So we found a very positive reception. I always say to people that if, you know, you don't hear about a lot of American deaths in Afghanistan and that's largely because people want us there. If people wanted to kill us with road-side bombs or shooting at us, they could—fairly easily—because we weren't very well protected at all and we have a very small number of troops. But people liked us. We also provided a lot of assistance which also improved and helped our image.

There were some problems though. Specifically problems related to our offensive operations, you know, combat operations in the provinces; search and coordinated operations where we'd break in to houses in the night and haul women and children out in to the night and those made people very, very angry. It wasn't something that the PRT or our unit was involved in but there were other U.S. government forces out there doing that and that created a lot of animosity.

Q: Well was there anyway you could work on that, I mean I'm sure the feelings was that operations were necessary but at the same time to have more Afghans involved and taking care of it too.

A: That was proposed, our—at the PRT level —our proposed solution was that you should have government people going with the special forces to wherever their operations are but the U.S. army works with such tight security and secrecy restrictions that they're very reluctant to bring along Afghans with them. We didn't get them to go along with that. I think now they may be doing it more but we always encouraged them to do that and to try to inform us or inform the government that there was some operations that was going to be happening. But they rarely did.

We also had—I actually mentioned that—there was other U.S. government agencies working in this area of the country and they had a fairly high profile as well.

Q: Well one thinks of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], I mean, its operations and I've heard them from some people, I'm not trying to be slighting of it, but were there cowboys off on their own? Was this impression that you have of other agencies ... were you working pretty much as teams?

A: Is this briefing?

Q: It's unclassified.

A: It's unclassified ... We, I guess it's not easy to talk about, the CIA had a base there and that was a declared base so people knew about it. Coordinating with them was very important so we worked hard to inform them about what U.S. government policy was, what the embassy's mission was and what their mission was as they came under the U.S. mission. And often they frankly were glad to hear that, to receive this kind of political guidance. I saw it as my mission to

continuously inform them about the developments and policies so that they would not stray. They had a slightly different mission than we did because we were trying to facilitate the extension of the central government and reconstruct things. They were focusing on the counter-terrorism mission. You can imagine how there might be conflicts between those two missions. Our mission was long-term. Theirs was very short-term. Sometimes the people that we were trying to weaken and disempower were people that they felt it necessary to cooperate with in the short term. So we had to work some of those issues out.

Q: How did you find your relationship with the governors and all? Did they look up on you as interfering foreigners or people to be co-opted, how did you think they were using you?

A: It was a little of both. They definitely wanted our assistance, they're very happy to have the attention from U.S. government, but we had to play. We had to be very, very careful because this is a sovereign country that was seeking to become more sovereign. Leaders didn't always appreciate or wouldn't have appreciated us telling them what to do. So we provided, I saw my role as very supportive and facilitative. I didn't tell the governor anything about what to do or how to run his province but there were times where it was necessary to say, "sir, you know, we see a problem in this particular district we know that this particular district leader is corrupt and is growing poppy and perhaps is involved in the narcotics trade and we think that's an issue that you should pay attention to." So we would try to provide him with friendly advice based on our, sort of, alliance. I always try to emphasize that we have the same goal and that is to facilitate, strengthen the government. And as the designated representative of President Karzai, my job was to facilitate his legitimacy and his capacity. But that wasn't always easy.

I always try to say that our goals are the same. A strong Afghanistan, a strong Afghanistan is good because America is then not threatened by terrorists and it's good for you because it becomes peaceful and prosperous. So I worked in that sphere. I got along very well with the governor. I learned to trust him in many ways I think he learned to trust me because I tried to be as honest with him as I could, even when there were problems. Especially when there were problems, he appreciated the honesty.

Q: Well, we always talk about the Afghan-American relationship but sometimes the more complex ones from diplomacy one of the ones you've mentioned, to talk about with the CIA operations ... but also as a non-governmental organization-NGOs. I understand that sometimes they come in and they want to do their thing and they're not really interested in having governmental interference, particular American. How did this work?

A: There was a real tension between us as a U.S. government/military unit and the NGOs. NGOs are very protective of their independence and try to be as impartial as possible and didn't always want to be associated with us. I would say in general, they try to minimize their association with us. But they also realize that in many ways ... well let me take a step back.

NGOs are difficult to classify. They're not a monolithic entity. You get a huge range of different opinions when it comes to NGOs and their attitudes towards the U.S. government. Some are very cooperative and we got along very well with and we could plan projects together and go in to provinces together. Other NGOs wanted to have nothing to do with us what so ever. The UN

[United Nations] is not an NGO, it's an international organization, we tended to have a good relationship with the UN and we informed them on almost ... about ... as much as we could about our operations and we cooperated on initiatives, particularly on political initiatives. Such as planning of the elections security element or pushing certain elements of government reform. One of our big initiatives was to try to get rid of illegal checkpoints that were springing up at night in Jalalabad city. We worked hand-in-hand with the UN representative there to try to get all of the different players involved to take down their checkpoints in Jalalabad.

Q: Checkpoints were really money-collection. I saw this when I was in Kyrgyzstan. This is a good old central Asian custom.

A: Yes. It goes back as long as there had been people there. Most of these checkpoints were a chain across the road and a couple of kids with AK-47s and the various checkpoints belonged to various leaders. Some were associated with the Frontier Brigade, some were associated with the militia, some were associated with the police and they were all just taking money and it was a huge economic burden and a huge security burden. We met with all of those individual people and pressed this initiative and got them eliminated.

Q: All those quite difficult because you're really breaking some body's rice bowl on this. This isn't just a matter of change, somebody's not going to get some money

A: Right. For us it had to happen. What we didn't do was demand that all checkpoints all over the province get eliminated over night. We focused on Jalalabad first because we thought that within the city at least they shouldn't exist. We got them to accept that. We were worried about what implications it would have, whether it would make us a target. I think that it went hand-in-hand with other initiatives that were meant towards helping the people that might be hurt, economically with that. Like the disarmament program; it was focused on taking guns away from soldiers and giving them jobs. So those same soldiers who may have worked on a checkpoint would now be receiving our agricultural assistance or job training.

Police officers would be getting regular government salary and would be going through a training program. So there were ... so many things going on in Afghanistan at the same time that we were hoping that there wouldn't be—we wouldn't be—breaking the rice bowl.

Q: In a way you could say, take down the chain and maybe there's a good place to put in a well or something. Have a little almost implicit bargaining, I mean, was that happening?

A: In this case we didn't specifically say we're going to trade you for it. We just simply said this is wrong. It's been existing for a long time and it really is a threat to citizens and it has to stop and got them to agree to it.

Q: Well, did you find yourself ... You studied this as a grad student and all, but did you find yourself dealing with two cultures that didn't see things in the same way? The American culture and the Afghan culture and saying, "this is bad" and they're saying, "no, it's not bad we've always done it this way." You know, this type of thing.

A: There were huge cultural differences. And they weren't always easy to overcome. On the other hand, the situation there was so chaotic and so different, that we were under no illusions that Afghanistan was going to become anything like the United States in a near term. It never will. When you're out living on a dusty plain and all you see around you is utter, total, squalor and the lack of any kind of real government provision of services at all, you give up those ideas. So the cultural things were there but I don't think they were really ... we were very, very realistic about what we hoped to achieve. We didn't try to achieve too much. We focused on big things like implementing the disarmament program in coordination with the UN, on deploying the Afghan National Army, on setting up a security for the elections, on developing and implementing reconstruction projects, you know, like building some schools and putting in some wells, building some roads and bridges and things like that. And then make these random ... or not random, but selective government reforms like taking down checkpoints and providing assistance to the police, things like that ... we were focused on.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the arms program. I thought young boys at the cradle were given an AK-47 practically. This has to be pretty difficult to get a real disarmament.

A: Disarmament is not only about guns, taking guns away. It really is about providing alternative livelihoods to soldiers. So there's no way you're ever gonna take away all of the guns in Afghanistan. It would be as absurd as doing it in the United States; there are just too many guns. What you need to do is take away the incentives for using those guns as part of a unit, a militia unit. And that means providing alternatives to people that are part of those units. That's what the program focuses on, it really is about making those units illegal, taking away their funding sources, and then providing them with alternatives. That's what it was about.

Q: When you're doing that, you've got a small group of unemployed young men who've got guns and have been checkpoints or something, what do you find for them to do?

A: A lot of them accept the agricultural assistance program. So there's a small ... kind of a ... they get some tools and they get some seedlings or they get some seeds or they get other equipment that allows them to farm. Some of them get job training so they learn how to be iron smiths and they actually do an intern, sort of an apprenticeship program where an iron smith or some kind of a tradesmen teaches them how to do something and then gives them a job or sets them free afterwards. They've done their best to try to come up with a program that gives you ... some of them can join the police or the army if they meet the qualifications; they're young enough and have enough education. They try to provide us a portfolio of choices for these soldiers so that there is a real choice about what they can do and it does really provide them a livelihood.

Q: What sort of support were you getting from your headquarters or Afghan government to set up programs such as this? I mean, get blacksmiths on the place, to get the seedlings, you know and the whole support thing?

A: Yes. I should say that we didn't implement the disarmament program. The UN implemented it. The program is a nation-wide program run by the UN and the PRT, we mainly assisted by negotiating with commanders and convincing commanders that they should participate in the

program. We facilitated in other ways such as ... we participated in a survey of heavy weapons so we used our assets to look around and find out where heavy weapons were. We also used our assets to help build a heavy weapons cantonment site. So mainly our support was around the fringes and it was political. When the first corps commander, this warlord named Hazrat Ali said he wasn't going to participate, that was where the UN would call us and say, "help us out here, talk to Ali about participating" and we would go and meet with him and say, "this is very important and you have to ... here's what the program is." ... and other commanders too. So there was a continuous ... we were sort of out there more as political support for the UN program, saying that the U.S. government think that this is important and you should participate and try to, you know.

Q: Was there a sort of a relationship between the UN or central Afghan government, saying, "alright, this warlord doesn't want to do this, but maybe if we do this or that it might help?"

A: Oh, yes. We were on the phone with each other almost constantly talking in just those terms. You know, "we're trying to do this, could you make a call to do that cause we can't get through to this guy, he won't answer our calls but he'll answer your calls." And so we would make calls like that or we'd bring up their points in our regular meetings with them. We worked very closely with the UN mission. It was very lucky, actually, cause I had gone to graduate school with the head of the regional UN head so I knew him.

Q: Where was he from?

A: He was from Sudan actually. He graduated the year before me so we had the same professors and everything. And occasionally there would be, you know, maybe a way that we could provide a local assistance project in an area where there was trouble or something like that so we could provide concrete support. The heavy weapons cantonment was a good example. The UN didn't have the money to create the site, to build the little guard towers and to build a fence around the site where all these tanks would be held: tanks and artillery pieces. But we did have the money to do that and so we funded it and built it.

Q: How about the embassy, what role does the embassy play in all of this?

A: Well, the embassy through me, was providing guidance. But it really took a hands-off role. I reported to the embassy in cables mainly trying to update them on the larger developments such as when a major step forward or back was taking on disarmament or a new political dynamic that was occurring. But other than that they really left me alone; let me do my thing out there. It was quite incredible actually. In terms of the State Department's normal mode of operations it was very, very unusual.

Q: Well, I mean, sort of what works, works. Probably, it works better than having too complete a plan because that usually, an overlay of that usually doesn't work well at all.

A: Right. Well the PRTs are very experimental and I think that on one hand ... There were two things: One it was experimental and they decided, lets just put people out there and see what

happens. On the other hand the embassy wasn't staffed or resourced to really provide a robust amount of support to the people like me.

Q: Right, I have a question here and I'm not quite sure what to say. Describe the relationship or interaction of the PRT with OEF and ISAF. Now what are those?

A: OEF is Operation Enduring Freedom. That is the U.S.-led coalition, military effort in Afghanistan. And ISAF is International Security Assistance Force that is led by NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] in Afghanistan. So you've got these two main military missions. OEF, Operational Enduring Freedom which is mainly an offensive, counter-terrorist operations, American, and then NATO, which is mainly a peace-keeping mission. And they're different in their mission. NATO takes care of the north of the country and Kabul, and soon the west. OEF has basically everything else. All of the east, south-east and south where the fighting was.

Q: You really talk about sort of the areas that essentially border Pakistan which is where the insurgency is coming from, is that it?

A: Right. And the peaceful areas NATO is working in. Our relationship with OEF ... well we are part of OEF. Some PRTs are in ISAF now, or under ISAF authority but most of the American ones are still under, actually, all of the American ones are still under OEF. The coalition presence, sort of non-PRT presence was mainly through the special forces who were engaged in search and operations to find terrorists and insurgents. So we had a pretty good relationship with them.

Q: Well, as you went about this, were people coming up, were Afghans coming up and saying, "I think there's a problem in this village and that." Were you picking up things that you could pass on?

A: All the time. Some of it was disinformation. People trying to tell on their neighbors and say their neighbors are bad so they could take over their land. A lot of that.

Q: Welcome to the Middle-East. Welcome anywhere to the world.

A: Yes. Right. So we had to be very careful. But there were people constantly coming to us and providing information about where they thought terrorists were or anti-coalition militia forces were. We received a lot of good information from people.

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

A: I would say that it was unstable. I mean in U.S.-government terms it was "high risk." I went everywhere with a flak vest and often it was two armed Americans and two Afghan support soldiers, guard soldiers that we have. Later on it became four Americans and four Afghans. We considered that anytime we could get attacked at anytime. We were attacked several times. I was not there one night, but one night we were ... A group of us were camping in the hillside and they came under RPG and heavy weapons and small arms fire and got involved in a fire fight that lasted about 30 minutes. Another time I was in a convoy that was targeted by a road-side bomb.

Another time a soldier had a grenade thrown at him, so there were several incidents and it was risky.

Q: Did you get a feeling for—in your area—the support for Taliban and other elements there?

A: I think it was small but significant. I would say under five percent of the population actively sympathized with the Taliban. But it existed, and there are also a number of people supporting Hezb-e-Islami which is an old mujahidim party associated with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the former prime minister and now, basically a terrorist.

Yes, they're there. And they are planning operations all the time. There were also a large number of people that were kind of in the middle, that really didn't know ... they were kind of hedging their bets. They didn't like one side or the other, they just wanted peace.

You know, the thing about Afghanistan is that it's a very ... it's seen so much instability that they don't want to see more. They don't necessarily like Americans but many people know that they need us and they feel it and so they're happy to have us there for the time being.

Q: Where you seeing the development or already have been there, different groups like the merchants, the Bazaaris or the farmers or the intellectual classes? Were there these groups and were they influential, treated differently?

A: Treated differently by us?

Q: Did we see them as being a particular problem?

A: I should say, you asked earlier about the political and economic situation. The economy there was thriving. But it was not official. Unless all of the economic activity was, hardly any of it was taxed ... Much of the farming activity because it was so much poppy cultivations, a lot of it was actually illegal. A third of the poppy in Afghanistan come from Laghman and Nungarhar provinces combined. So, you know there was a large amount of illegal economic activity and what legal economic activity that existed was untaxed. But it was a thriving one. A lot of trade, a lot of retail. The markets were full of produce and of things ... You could buy almost anything you wanted. If you wanted to buy a computer you could buy it. And so there was a very, very sophisticated ... although Afghanistan is a very, very poor ... it was a very, very sophisticated social structure with money changers, with merchants, with upper-class land owners, with destitute share croppers, everything. Traders, merchants, store owners, everything existed there.

Q: Were we trying to bring about social change? One thinks of the role of women, giving more power to the land, land reform, that sort of thing. Was this almost too destabilizing?

A: We weren't actively trying to change attitudes about women. When you talk about women in particular it's such a hot-button issue that it deserves special attention. We do not promote the emancipation of women or the casting off of the burkha or anything like that. We didn't promote the equality of women or anything like that. What we tried to do was work with government officials to support women's initiatives. So there was a local minister, women's minister and we

worked with her on women's day. It was about a year ago today and we had a big festival and we provided them with money. But we didn't say what they should be saying, we didn't write their speeches. They just had an event and we supported it. In most of our initiatives we were like that. We try to provide support for things that were already Afghan-owned so that in a cultural-sensitive play, we were operating, you know?

In general you have to think in terms of our social programs, there weren't very many of them. You have to remember the PRT's leadership, most of what was getting done at the PRT was done by five people. Me, the commander, the USAID representative and the two Majors. So there was just, to engage in major social reform or projects was very, very minimal. And then the elections started coming up and we really had to focus on the elections and that took up a lot of our time.

Q: What with mostly elections, what about poppies? What were we doing?

A: We were not. We were only advocating against them. We weren't doing anything else. In an advocacy terms that meant meeting with local officials and raising it in our meetings by saying, "you know this is wrong, it's against Islam and it is going to be destructive for your country if you continue to do this." We said that every chance we got.

The thing is about poppy was that it was everywhere. It was planted as far as the eye could see. Last year this time, that's all you ... it was 80 percent of what you could see in the country side. It's quite beautiful but it was stunning how much poppy was being grown. There's actually a term in the PRT, I think in some of our guidelines that say, "when we run across narcotics activity, we can get involved." But that would mean, we wouldn't do anything but chop down poppy plants because they were everywhere. So we advocate eradication. We have the governor to go on the radio and say stuff and we got the local head of the Haji mosque ministry, the lead religious scholar, ulama or mullah in the area to get on the radio. But that's about it.

Q: All these people are growing this, were they making balls of opium or something? Was this translate itself in to the tremendous corruption that comes from the drug trade in your area?

A: Yes, it was. The main element of corruption comes at the local, at the district level. You've got the province and in Nungarhar province you had 22 districts and many of them...

[PAUSE]

Q: You were saying at the district level. How did that translate, I mean, what did this mean and what were they doing?

A: It would often be district officials using their vehicles to transport poppy who were providing protection for poppy fields...

[END SIDE A]

There was just so much to do, you know. But basically these officials would be involved in one way or another, maybe using their land or their vehicles or using there, you know, officials especially police officials can control access to road ways. So if you are a corrupt police official and you run a checkpoint, you control the trade on that road. So they could use their control of these roads to promote the trade that they wanted, which would be poppy trade or something like that. They could be providing—since they are the wealthier people—they could be providing some of the loans to the farmers to grow the crops, or loans to families that would be paid back with the money that they earned with the crops. So a lot of this went on under the eyes of these officials who got a cut.

It was just a hugely important crop and hugely profitable for some people. The season it was actually pretty short. I mean, they plant poppy in say, October-November, then the winter comes, and then it's the first crop out of the ground, in the spring. So right now, when you would have weed, you'd have poppy. And then they in say, mid-April, they chop it all down or they cultivate it, and everybody is working as you do in any country in the world where there is a big harvest. They harvest it very quickly and then chop it all down and plant something else immediately. So during April and May it is a huge activity, employing thousands of thousands of people who are all out in the fields.

Q: Well was the central government doing, I mean obviously people are getting on the radio and all but, were there any efforts in your area to get up and chop it down?

A: There were some efforts but they were minimal. The governor was reluctant to get involved because he didn't want to alienate the tribes in our area. The tribes insisted upon doing it because they said they had nothing else to survive on and they had a point. There's not a lot of water in this area so without a lot of water, it's hard to grow regular crops. Certainly there was no ... there wasn't a lot of central government enforcement. They did have a poppy eradication force that would come in and ... well not a poppy eradication, a drugs force that would come in and knock down some drug labs every once in a while. But it wasn't a large presence. Last year's program was supposed to—the governors were supposed to—implement. It was supposed to be an Afghan-owned process of eliminating the crop and so most of the governors ended up conceding to the tribes and symbolically whacking down a few plants. The government also said that it was only going to target eight percent of the crop and was very public about that eight percent figure and so when our governor did was he said, he brought in all the tribal leaders and he said, you guys have to agree on how you're going to eliminate a percent of the crop. So they all said, okay, and then they agreed. They eliminated dead crops or crops that had already been harvested, they got one guy to eliminate his crop and they all gave him a cut of everything else, it was a totally bad symbolic...

Q: Well I take it that it was something that you had too much to do and this one was sort of the monster that..

A: It's kind of the elephant in the room.

Q: The elephant in the room, yes.

A: Yes. We knew that if we really took it on it would probably endanger our lives and we weren't in a position to really effect it. To do it properly you have to do what they're doing this year or even more than what they're doing this year and that's fund millions of millions of dollars of alternative livelihoods programs and then have a very serious interdiction and eradication effort. You have to really fight. This is hugely expensive.

Q: Well, were you seeing any tie between the Taliban, Al Qaeda and others in the drug trade?

A: They said it existed but I couldn't be sure.

Q: I want to talk about the elections. What were the elections and how did things go up to the elections and the elections took place during you time there?

A: Yes. I actually left right before the election was actually held and I spent the election time at a different PRT. But they were ... the planning effort was what we were mainly involved in. That meant getting the governor and the UN and some of the NGOs that were involved in creating a security structure that was going to keep the Taliban and Al Qaeda and others from disrupting the process. So, we worked with the UN to come up with an involmentation(PH) plan that got U.S. forces working with Afghan forces; working with the police. Well, I should say, U.S. forces with the Afghan National Army and with the police to protect roadways and to protect the counting center and to protect polling sites. We also developed a program to ... a civic education program that basically brought tribal leaders and government people and professors and elders together to educate them about what the election would be like. That was pretty successful.

Q: Well, you were saying you were in a different place to observe the election, from what you heard, how did the election go in the district you've been in and the one you observed?

A: The one I observed it was incredible. We expected there to be a lot of violence and there wasn't very much at all. People were incredibly happy to vote. There was good cooperation between the Afghan National Army and the coalition, the police, it just went off amazingly well. There weren't very many attacks. It was really nice.

Q: What was your impression of the police training and the national army training? I mean, both the training in the police and the army came out of this effort.

A: The police training wasn't ... it was supposed to be a ... it was a very quick training. It didn't deal with the police as a system, as an institution. It basically gave a quick training to each of the police officers. It was useful but it didn't transform the police the way it should. We really need to ... if you want to boost the capacity of the police you have to not only, put the soldiers through—put the policemen through a full course but you need to restructure the police offices, provide them with equipment... you know, real equipment like radios and vehicles and weapons. The police training that we were doing wasn't doing that. It was just running them through a course where they learned about human rights and how to treat prisoners.

Q: Was this considered, sort of a, first run to get some police out there? Was there a program coming behind that would begin to deal with this?

A: They're dealing with that a little bit more now. They're providing them more vehicles and there's a big policy debate going on right now about who's going to be leading this program whether it was going to be DoD [Department of Defense] or State INL [Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement] people. There's supposed to be some back-fill to focus on the police administration and stuff like that. Hopefully that will be developed in the next year.

Q: Did you find battles raging or impressions of battles raging back in Kabul or between State and DoD or NGOs about who's going to do what? Bureaucratic battles are sort of an issue?

A: Some. But I think the biggest bureaucratic battles are here in Washington, actually. Particularly in State and DoD like on this police issue, you know. The defense department has a lot more resources to rely on, and they have more *people* to rely on as well so that they actually can produce. We have a hard time ramping up a huge ambitious program. Even not an ambitious program like the PRT program, it was hard for us to staff that. The army has thousands of thousands of soldiers to rely upon. They were having problems staffing the PRTs with civil affairs people. But we had an even harder time. So there's always this debate going on in Washington you know, why can't State provide the resources to do this? Or no, why can't State do this program and we would say, "we don't have the resources." Then when we get the resources we often wouldn't have the man power to really implement it very well because we didn't have the manpower. So you have this circular problem here at State. Of course, DoD has this incredible implementing power.

Q: What about the, what are these community relations teams?

A: Civil affairs?

Q: Civil affairs teams, where were they coming from?

A: You mean in terms of geographically in America?

Q: No, I mean were they reserves, regular army?

A: Yes, they were reserves. In fact, my entire PRT was reserves. The civil affairs are just a reserves unit. They came from everywhere.

Q: They felt that their training back in whatever state they were in was adequate or were they learning down on the ground?

A: We were all kind of learning on the ground, really. There's no PRT doctrine, you know and most civil affairs doctrine was oriented towards winning hearts and minds, providing very, very small assistance projects. Certainly, they don't receive training in how to reform a government or how to assist a, engage a warlord about disarmament. None of us have received that kind of training.

Q: In your studies of Afghanistan, were you able to give some hints about perspective or how one deals with a warlord or was this something you learned too?

A: I would say that I learned it too. But the benefit of having a State Department person, officer at a PRT is that we're kind of the kind of ... foreign service officers are trained to understand other cultures and to deal with foreign interlocutors. And also to study and to understand political systems and cultural systems. So yes, I felt that I was ... even though I'm not a foreign service officer ...

Q: No, but you came from the same ... "basket" you might say.

A: Right. So I think that my education and my having spent a lot of time studying Afghanistan really, really did help a lot. I think also in terms of this whole thing that often we Americans go abroad, oversimplifying foreign situations and I think I was able to help them understand the sophistication of this culture and the need to address it with some sensitivity, with a high degree of understanding. To know what "hot-button" issues are and things like that. I think I helped a little bit that way.

Q: What was AID doing there and how did they fit into this?

A: Very important! They were providing advice to the civil affairs soldiers who were planning reconstruction projects. They had State Department money to design their own projects and they were also facilitating the spending of AID, or they were facilitating AID programs in the province. They had these three roles, advising the military, doing their own projects, and helping AID in Kabul to implement projects. So three different things. They were important players.

Q: What sort of things were being ... were there any physical structures or schools or wells, hospitals and all that being put up where you were by us?

A: Oh, yes, that's much of what we were doing was rebuilding things. By the time we left we had done about 150 different reconstruction projects, probably worth more than five million dollars. We had done, we had build probably two dozen schools, we had provided—we didn't build clinics—but we did provide clinics with wells and with electricity. We had built some bridges, we provided equipment to local public works, a ministry so that they can fix roads. We had provided more than 40,000 desks for the entire province. So you would go all over the province and find our desks. So we did whatever was necessary. At one points we build toilets for the Ministry of Tribes and Borders just because they had tribal leaders coming in to this place all the time, elders and tribes and they had no where to go to the bathroom. We helped with the police with vehicles, we provided motorcycles because they just needed them. We did whatever was necessary.

I think it's to our ... that U.S. government provided us with a very flexible funding mechanism so that we could do whatever projects were necessary.

Q: Well, would you say the five of you and your PRT sit around, get together at night to say, "what are we going to do, we've got so much money ..." and set priorities? Was this how things were?

A: Pretty much. We had a weekly project planning meeting where we would all bring up our ideas and talk about, and make decisions together about what we would fund. Then we had a separate meeting to track progress and then we had a separate meeting that talked about strategy. How are we going to develop our strategy and what new ideas do we need to ... how do we need to change course to address problems. We met a lot. It was very important for us to do that.

Q: Was there much interaction with other PRT groups and say, "we've been doing this." Where you all trying things out? At a certain point there should be lessons learned, passed on, was there much of that?

A: Every three months is a PRT commander's conference. Basically that's a large part of what we would do is we'd get together and share stories and talk about what worked and what didn't work. Unfortunately too much of those quarterly meetings were based upon the central command telling us what to do and not enough lessons learned and sharing of experiences. But, sort of on the margins of receiving the briefing about what the new police program was going to look like or narcotics or whatever, we would talk.

Q: Did you find, when you say these briefing and all, my feeling is often briefings are "what we're going to do" plans at a central headquarters, you kind of go in to listen, say "that sounds fine" and go out and there isn't much carry-over.

A: They were important. But there needed to be more of this, you know, what's working in the field. It was a bit of a problem. I think they're getting a little bit better at planning these things.

Q: Obviously you were a leader there at the beginning of this concept. What about schools? How did find them, schools, how were they received, how were they staffed and how were they working if you watch these places?

A: Well schools were very important to Afghans. When you go to any community, the first thing they would tell you is either ... they would usually tell you they want their school fixed. That's good. Often they wouldn't have very good teachers. Teaching was a big problem. But we weren't involved in that at all; in the teaching component. We would build a school if there was ... if the school was already on a list of schools that the government wanted to have built. And each province had its list.

Q: Well, what had happened? Were the schools and other things, were they destroyed because of the war, because of Taliban policies or plain neglect or what?

A: A lot of it was neglect. Sometimes a school didn't exist at all. But no, the Taliban didn't really go out and destroy schools. They just became dilapidated mainly. Or never been built or just been falling apart over the last 30 or 25 years. Yes, one thing you have to remember is that since no body was getting educated, these schools were often empty or they're being used for some

other source and then, after the last three years you'd have eleven million kids that want to get educated. So you have this huge demand now for education services.

Q: You were saying you found the Afghans has such an interest in education. Was this helpful?

A: Very. The most important thing. I think it was at the top of everybody's list. Everybody wanted to have a school built, every village wanted a school, regardless of whether they knew if there were teachers or not.

Q: Did there seem to be a system that could take people that came out of these village schools and get them to higher education and high school and a university? Was that in place or developing in that?

A: It was developing but I mean, we're still working on trying to get the primary schools going and even there, a village would want a boy school before a girls school. I don't know where the high schools were and the universities were completely dilapidated and not a really very good institution. So they have a long, long way to go.

Q: Would you find yourself up on, sort of, taking a policy stand of saying, we'd build a boy school or build a girl school or did you just go with the flow or?

A: We would try to demand that there be some kind of facility for girls as well. We really worked on that. But we didn't demand that it'd be equal and have as many ... Often what they'd have is that at school the morning is for boys and the afternoons for girls or vice-versa so that it's getting equal use. I should say about schools also, a lot of villages would have schools that would be made of tents or they would simply be studying outside, that was always interesting because you'd see these kids under a tree and a teacher with a blackboard under a tree. Lots of that. Or the schools where there would be a little school. We built a lot of extensions on the schools too. So you'd see some people inside and hundreds of kids outside, studying in the sun with a teacher, with a chalkboard.

Q: Did you find yourself running up against or working with religious leaders and getting up from the more fanatics or more tolerant than them? How did religion play in your area?

A: We tried very hard to court the religious leaders, starting out with putting good relationships with the head of Haji Mosque. I don't know if you know about Haji Mosque ... is a ministry in Afghanistan. The leader of the Haji Mosque is usually the kind of the head mullah for the area. So we actually started an initiative—a focused initiative—to court these people and get them to understand U.S. interest in Afghanistan. So we first met with a group of about eight of them for breakfast one time and we talked and we met with a much larger group of about 60 of them from all over their region. We had a kind of a town hall meeting, where they were able to ask us questions about why is the United States invading people's homes at night and just ask us anything that they wanted to. And then over the period that I was there, we met with these people continuously so that they understood who we were, that we were there to respect Islam—we respected Islam—that we, you know, there are lots of Muslims in the United States, we're not here to make

Afghanistan a Christian country, we want it to be an independent place. We tried to explain that our real interest was a stable Afghanistan that wouldn't be a haven for terrorists.

Q: Well now, did our war in Iraq have any effect where you were?

A: It did, yes. The Abu-Ghraib scandal had a big effect because they heard about it.

Q: You're talking about the abuse of prisoners by American personnel?

A: There were ... because there were combat operations; that can happen occasionally in our area or elsewhere in Afghanistan, Afghans were getting arrested and they would be put in detentions and there were plenty of Afghans in detention in Afghanistan and in Guantanamo Bay. So that when they found out that there were people being mistreated in Abu-Ghraib, they wondered whether it was happening to Afghans as well elsewhere. So that had a big impact. But the other thing to remember though, while that had an impact, Afghanistan is very, very different. Americans have a very different historical relationship with Afghanistan. We were supporters of Afghans and supported the mujahidin during this anti-Soviet jihad. So Afghans ... Reagan died while I was in Afghanistan and I received so many offers of condolence from Afghans who loved Ronald Reagan for the support that he gave them, that the United States gave to Afghanistan at that time.

Afghans don't have the same experience of colonialism that Iraq has had. Iraq has a much more negative experience than Afghanistan ever had. Afghanistan never really was colonized. The British only temporarily and only in a very, very, weak way, they really never controlled Afghanistan and Afghans ran them out of town eventually.

Q: In 1839 they destroyed a British army.

A: Right.

Q: They sent an army in and one or two men came out.

A: One man. And actually an interesting story about that is that, that guy his name is Dr. Brydon, he was part of 20,000 Brits and support staff that tried to fully cobble ... I was always trying to find out where that British garrison was that he rode up to. He was in Jalalabad where I was and I never could find out, no body knew, until I had read a guide book the day I was leaving and it turned out that, that British garrison later became the Afghan army garrison which became the mujahidin garrison, which became the Taliban garrison, which became the PRT. It was part of the first core compound where we were living in.

Q: As your program was going, how did you feel about ... were you doing what you thought you all should be doing? Making progress?

A: I thought we saw a lot of progress while we were there. I would have liked to have more resources, there was a lot to do and there just weren't enough hours in the day or enough people to do the things that we were mandated to do.

But, we saw disarmament begin, we saw the elections come on, we saw heavy weapons all over the eastern region be cantoned, we saw the building of dozens of schools, the paving of roads, we saw several political initiatives like our taking down of checkpoints occur. We saw lots of police get trained and we saw police receive new equipment that we had provided. We saw the gradual weakening of a key warlord. I don't want to say weakening but I think he was weakened. He was moved from the central corps, the first corps, to the police. That weakened him. And I think we saw things just get generally more stable. So I was very, very happy with what we were able to accomplish. For such a small number of people, too. You have to remember that, really what the PRT is, is about five people. There's a bunch of support elements around them, but having such a small amount of people I think we did an enormous amount.

Q: Were you getting any reflections from others as you came out, from other colleagues like yourself who were on this? I mean were they coming back with somewhat the same impressions?

A: Yes, I think so. I think so. Some had a different approach. I think most of what we did that was ... really had a big impact was political and diplomatic. The FSO who was the political officer in Mazar-e played a key role in keeping things calm during helping to negotiate a resolution of a conflict between two warlords when fighting flared up. The FSO who was out in Herat I think had a really important role in the political situation out there, keeping it stable. Because we all were giving a very, very wide mandate, we all interpreted our jobs slightly different.

Q: And the situation was different.

A: And situations were different, yes. I mean, I think that we could have been used ... I think if the embassy had wanted to they could have used us more. I think they could have given us stronger guidance. They could have told us, "we want you to engage this governor about this issue." For various reasons they didn't approach our jobs that way.

Q: One last question, did you get the equivalent of being debriefed as you were doing that all?

A: No. Not really. Not really. It wasn't a part of it.

Q: Well, I think this is a good place to stop.

A: Okay.

[END TAPE]