



## LESSONS LEARNED RECORD OF INTERVIEW

<b>Project Title and Code:</b>			
LL-01 – Strategy and Planning			
<b>Interview Title:</b>			
Interview with former advisor to the military.			
<b>Interview Code:</b>			
LL-01-c11			
<b>Date/Time:</b>			
10/15/2015; 1330-1430			
<b>Location:</b>			
RI			
<b>Purpose:</b>			
To elicit interviewee’s thoughts on U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan			
<b>Interviewees:</b> (Either list interviewees below, attach sign-in sheet to this document or hyperlink to a file)			
<b>SIGAR Attendees:</b>			
Candace Rondeaux, Matthew Sternenberger			
<b>Sourcing Conditions (On the Record/On Background/etc.):</b> On the record			
<b>Recorded:</b>	Yes	No	
<b>Recording File Record Number (if recorded):</b>			
<b>Prepared By:</b> (Name, title and date)			
Matthew Sternenberger			
<b>Reviewed By:</b> (Name, title and date)			
<b>Key Topics:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civilian and Military Differences</li> <li>• Reintegration</li> <li>• Red Teams</li> <li>• Assessments</li> <li>• Connecting the Dots</li> </ul>			

(b) (5) [REDACTED]

**Civilian and Military Differences**

It was clear that the Marines were doing the job and that they thought they were going to build an economy. That was going to be by building the highway up to the Kajaki dam. I think the cost was roughly two lives per mile, or per day. I am forgetting what [data] we went through [for that calculation]. I went to the transfer ceremonies two to three times a week. It was about a half hour drive to the far side of the base. [The actual number of how many lives per mile] can be found out. I am sure that is on the record. We can look at when they did it [built the road] and



---

## LESSONS LEARNED RECORD OF INTERVIEW

---

what it took. I recall it was a mile or two a day and there was one to three deaths every couple of days. The concept as to what this economy or what this regional economy was really going to look like and how it was going to function was not spelled out to me. It may have been spelled out at higher levels, but that is something that hopefully was assessed. Plans for [this concept] which, [I hope were] subject to scrutiny by knowledgeable people at policy levels. That is the higher level of problem.

The other level is what was actually happening on the ground or in these reconstruction teams. There was a PRT office on the base, as on most bases. There seemed to be expertise from State and AID, but the numbers were just so small in comparison to the military that you can imagine what the impact was. I think that the influence of the experts, probably varied greatly from commander to commander. It was not clear to me who was really running the show, but it certainly seemed to be the two star [general] or the RC commander, even though there was a senior State Department person usually present.

The thinking, it seemed to me, was left to the military – the grand concept – and the operationalizing was certainly left to the military. This was true for at least where I was. **Even though I have met some very knowledgeable people on the civilian side, I also met, probably a greater number, whose expertise I would question. That went from trainers to development experts.** I used to joke that civilians had a hard time getting a meeting to happen, but it wasn't a joke. There were actually a number of issues. We could go many days or a couple of weeks without getting people together, which when you are working 16-18 hours a day, is a lot of time. You should be able to make that happen. **The military could make things happen. I don't think the civilian expertise had the management skills and I don't think that they were necessarily welcomed by the two star [general].** I am not sure what the greater problem was. I was impressed with some of the experts, but I was not impressed how the civilians in this operation, operated as a unit. I came away completely convinced that the State Department does not groom for leadership positions.

### Reintegration

I don't know how it worked out in detail, but I can tell you that the RC had a very different concept at the high value target level, than did ISAF. If important people in the opposition said they wanted to stop fighting us, they wanted to say great, we won't hurt you and we will give you a long time in order to figure out what you want to do. If you are a commander and you are out and your people are getting killed, especially if you think these people are manipulating the system, by getting taken off the list for 30-60 days, then go back to fighting, then taken off the list again, it doesn't work. The actual policies were different and they were not coordinated. I drafted up something that was a compromise between the two that I thought people agreed to. I doubt it was signed off on by the commander, but who knows. At that time, it was a highly kinetic approach and I doubt that there was a lot of emphasis on reintegration of general fighters, but I could be wrong.

### Red Team

I came in and challenged the military's idea of where the center of gravity was in the whole RC. They were saying it was the population's feeling about being secure. I was saying that there actually has to be real security. We had this debate back and forth. That immediately setup the confrontation [between me as a member of a red team and the military]. It was pretty hard to get real red teaming.

At the time, [I thought real security was] the ability of people to move freely and have [interactions with] whatever the economy was, despite it not being a western style economy; [it was also to] be secure from pressure and assassination. It was real physical security. I think Fukuyama ended up here at the end too... saying that people really want some basic things like human security, food security, and some kind of view of the future. It was just really a wishy-washy thing. There was no way to get what they [the military] were trying to get done [which was creating a perception of security and not actual security]. It was theoretical in some ways. My point here is that red teaming, has got to have support from the top of whatever command you are in.



## LESSONS LEARNED RECORD OF INTERVIEW

---

### Assessments

Yes, [I share the same concerns of (b)(6) about the color coded progress maps], and we continue to use them for the period I was there. There would be a caveat that these are not actually scientific figures, or this is not a scientific process behind this. So what is? My feelings and what colors I want to put up? We continue to use them and they had a really expensive machine that would print the really large pieces paper like in a print shop. It made for interesting discussion. There were a number of discussions and there was not a willingness to answer questions such as, what is the meaning of this number of schools that you have built? How has that progressed you towards your goal? What is the meaning of the number of students who are in some way, shape or form taking an English language class? What is the meaning of laudable of the number of girls in schools? How do you show this as evidence of success and not just evidence of effort or evidence of just doing a good thing?

I will also say that the assessment shops but basically marginalized. It had a Reserve O-6 and the Reserves in general, throughout the military, are not really respected. They can if they are really good and aggressive and have the presence, but they are generally not. **Even so, the person [running the assessment shop while I was there] did not have the mental skills. So the assessment shop was...a shop. I would see it more as a PR shop.**

I was just amazed at what the Marines accomplished in just a year, compared to what the Brits accomplished in the years before that. It was amazing that you could take on these strongholds and clear, not hold necessarily, but clear temporarily these places. It was amazing they could build that with the relatively small number of soldiers. **There was a kind of success on the ground, it is true, but it was relative success. It was nothing short of impressive. The problem was the grand scheme.**

To me it was clear that the scheme and the assessment was all geared to getting out. At the highest levels, the P-4 level or Petraeus level, after I looked at his transition plan, *inteqal*, I was just repulsed as it was all this color coding language. After a day or two, I was saying, this is brilliant from a political standpoint. If you recognize that we are not going to get what we thought we were going to get out of this, and here it is 2011, than this plan is brilliant. There was almost no way that you couldn't slowly retract from each region. It was a completely squishy, sliding scale approach to success and color coding, but if you are a senior military leader, you could make the case that, okay, we are drawing down and this region is next and here is way (and I have these five or ten indicators). That was the grand scheme. Unfortunately, the regional commander was in a different reality. [This different reality to that person was that he] has 10,000-14,000 soldiers here and we are going to fight, and do our job, and we are Marines who don't sit at the base. They did amazing things. The question is what was question to the larger strategy at that point? I think it was a strategy, which I think was the right strategy, was a strategy of getting out before 2015.

### Connecting the Dots

The groupthink thing still goes on in strategizing. I was warned about it by some knowledgeable analysts before I left. I said, "yeah, yeah, I studied that in history." It was truly overwhelming. There were a couple of issues on which we had lengthy meetings and working groups. One was protecting the base and another was the economic picture in the medium-term, especially after we leave. We would sit around and everybody's perspective was so classically determined by where they sit in the bureaucracy. It was incredible. This is something, if you want to think about lessons learned, I can do off-the-record.