

A Call from the State Department
Interviewer

Okay, today is June 14â€”

Burdin Hickok

Yes.

Interviewer

2011.Â Â Weâ€™re in the studios of the Center for Oral History at West Point with Burdin Hickok.Â Â Burdin, you spell your name for the transcriber please?

Burdin Hickok

Right.Â Â B-U-R-D-I-N H-I-C-K-O-K.

Interviewer

And Burdin, your story that youâ€™ve come to tell has to do with your time as a member of the State Department.

Burdin Hickok

Yes.

Interviewer

Working in post-war Iraq.

Burdin Hickok

Yes.Â Â Well, it was stillâ€”

Interviewer

Letâ€™s start right withâ€”actually, letâ€™s begin with a little bit of your background on you.Â Â Your background professionally is what?

Burdin Hickok

I spent about 20-plus years on Wall Street, and theâ€”

Interviewer

Does that mean you were at a brokerage firm, you were atâ€”

Burdin Hickok

Right.Â Â I was a global buy salesman, trader, with bulge bracket firms on Wall Street.Â Â My academic background was international political economy, which is international economic development as well as international politics as well as macroeconomics.Â Â So the idea of going to New York was to meld all that together.Â Â The bond market really is â€”you really need to have background in all those areas to be effective in the bond market; youâ€™ve got to understand whatâ€™s going on in the macro picture as well as the micro

picture. A A And I left Wall Street in 2003. A A My last gig on Wall Street was with Lehman Brothers. A A I left Lehman Brothers in 2003 when the stock price was still going up and they were the king of the hill, really, and started out on my own, essentially trying to start up hedge funds. A A That was meeting with mixed success, and both Jan and I had been in Washington.

Interviewer

Jane being your wife.

Burdin Hickok

Jane, my wife. A A And worked in Washington when we first got in college. A A I was on Capitol Hill, worked as a senate aide to Bob Dole, Senator Bob Dole from Kansas, and my wife, Jane, was working at the Heritage Foundation as the executive editor of Policy Review.

Interviewer

The Heritage Foundation being a conservative think tank, right?

Burdin Hickok

Yes, exactly right. A A And so we thought, ah, you know, New York was great. A A We've learned a lot. A A You know, maybe we could go down to DC. A A So I started looking at opportunities at a State Department agency and that kind of thing, and a job popped up that was literally taking my resume and matching it with what they were looking for. A A At the time, it was the senior banking and finance advisor in the State Department in Iraq, and I thought, "Well, I'll go ahead and apply for it; they're not going to call me back." A A About two months later, I get a phone call from the State Department, and they're interested in "they want to clear up my reference emails" they weren't right. A A And I'm like, "Well, what do you want to talk to my references for?" A A They said, "Well, we're putting you in front of the selection committee tomorrow," and I'm like, "Oh, really?" A A At that point, I thought it'd probably be a good idea to tell Jane that something might happen as far as the offer. A A Sure enough, about two months later, I did get an offer, and I didn't know what I didn't know what a PRT was.

PRT Explained

Interviewer

What is a PRT? Now you know, what is a PRT?

Burdin Hickok

So a PRT is a provincial reconstruction team. It is a civilian-led diplomatic outpost. It is paired with a military unit, generally a brigade. In Iraq there were also EPRTs, which means embedded provincial reconstruction team "and that's probably going to be embedded with a smaller unit, maybe a battalion. But in Kirkuk, which is where I was based, is in the northern part of Iraq, but south of Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan. A A And the PRT, as I said, is a civilian-run team leader with a military deputy team leader of lieutenant colonel. There is a military support element, and then there are civilian subject-matter experts. They may be Foreign Service Officers. They are generally detailees from other agencies: USDA, DOJ, Department of Justice."

Interviewer

Department of Justice, right.Â

Burdin Hickok

First oneâ€™s agricultureâ€™and then thereâ€™ll be private sector specialists, as myself, that would address certain pillars of activity within the PRT that the State Department could not really effectively man.Â

Interviewer

Letâ€™s back up for a second. How many people are in one of these PRTs?Â

Burdin Hickok

When I got to Kirkuk, there were about 60.Â

Interviewer

And how many PRTs are there in-country?Â

Burdin Hickok

There are 18. There are 18 PRTs. There are more EPRTs, but for the most part, at this time, EPRTs are gone, and they are winding down the PRTs very rapidly. In fact, Juneâ€™by the end of Juneâ€™

Interviewer

Of what year are we talking about?Â

Burdin Hickok

Of right now, of 2011, thereâ€™ll only be a very handful of PRTs; by September, theyâ€™re all gone.

Interviewer

And the notion is that increasingly theyâ€™re turning over the management of these duties to the Iraqi civilian population.

Burdin Hickok

Ostensibly, thatâ€™s exactly right. The other thing, too, is that this matches the military draw-down, and the PRT structure is symbiotic with the military presence. The PRT in Kirkuk was on a military base, FOB Warriorâ€™FOB is forward operating baseâ€™now called COS, contingency operating stationâ€™and there is a brigade there. That would be anywhere from three to five battalions, plus the brigade headquarters. Â And their AO will be the province of Kirkukâ€™

Interviewer

AO meaning â€œarea of operations.â€

Burdin Hickok

Area of operations will be Kirkuk. It would occasionally go into Kurdistan, which Kurdistan

is a semi-autonomous region within Iraq. It's called the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Interviewer

Let's get the geography down here. So where's Kirkuk in respect to Baghdad, Baghdad being sort of southeast, I guess, isn't that right, within the Iraq's "central east, I guess?

Burdin Hickok

It's 150 kilometers north-northeast of Baghdad. It is really the only disputed province. There are disputed internal boundaries between Kurdistan and Iraq that goes along the Kurdistan border with Iraq, but Kirkuk, the entire province is disputed. Mosul and Ninawa, part of that is disputed. Diyala's part of that is disputed. This is the oldest what has been known as the "green line," the no-fly zone. All those are

Burdin Hickok

Is a province just south, contiguous with Kurdistan, with Arbil and Sulaymaniyah, and it is about 150 kilometers north-northeast of Baghdad.

Interviewer

You're making a distinction now between the Kurdish regions of Iraq's

Burdin Hickok

Yes.

Interviewer

And the rest of Iraq, because you said, you know, "between Iraq and Kurdistan," but really, Kurdistan is part of Iraq's

Burdin Hickok

Absolutely.

Interviewer

And a more independently governed province than the rest of the provinces of Iraq's is that right?

Burdin Hickok

Exactly right. The constitution of Iraq allows for regional "semi-autonomous regional configurations, and a region could be as small as a province, and it could be as large as multiple provinces. And Kurdistan is three provinces: Arbil, Duhok, and Sulaymaniyah.

Interviewer

And Kirkuk, then, is a province?

Interviewer

And about how many people live in Kirkuk?

Burdin Hickok

1.2 million.

Interviewer

And the capital of Kirkuk would beâ€”

Burdin Hickok

Is Kirkuk.

Interviewer

Is Kirkuk, and so when we speak about the population, is it mostly urban or rural orâ€”

Burdin Hickok

Itâ€™s mostly urban. Â I would say Kirkuk City is probablyâ€”boy, itâ€™s got to be close to 450,000. Â Hawija is the other large city, larger city in Kirkuk; thatâ€™s probably about 50,000. Â And then the balance is going to be pretty rural. Â I mean thereâ€™s other sectionsâ€”Tazaâ€”Kirkuk is youâ€™ve got Kirkuk center, and then youâ€™ve got kind of a sprawl that would be Taza area, so itâ€™s industrial. Â So thereâ€™ll be, you know, higher populations there.

Interviewer

What kind of industry?

Burdin Hickok

Oh, boy. Â The way we looked at Kirkuk, Kirkuk is an oil rig province. Â Oilâ€™s a big deal. Â It sits on roughly 4% of the worldâ€™s oil reserves, known reserves.

Interviewer

Of the worldâ€™s oil reserves?

Burdin Hickok

Yes. Â It is responsible for about 25% of Iraqâ€™s daily export volume in crude oil. Â So oil is a big deal, and the headquarters for the North Oil Company is in Kirkuk. Â But from the employment standpoint from the populace, the North Oil Company covers everything from Baghdad northâ€”actually, a little bit south of Baghdad.

Interviewer

So the North Oil Company.

Burdin Hickok

The North Oil Company, the NOC. Â Iâ€™ll refer to it as the NOC. Â Also, the NGC, which is the North Gas Company that processes associated gas from oil production for heating, and also the power plants are mostly run off of that natural gas.

Interviewer

And these are firms that existed in Saddam's Iraq?

Burdin Hickok

Yes. They've been around since about the '70s, or yeah. Obviously, oil's been there much longer. They first found it, the Kirkuk 1 or the K/1 oil field, 1921, I think, is when it was found.

Interviewer

We can look up some of this and update the transcript with the real, with the fact side. But your give me a sense of the PRT is arriving in Kirkuk to do what? I mean when you arrived there, which was what year, then?

Burdin Hickok

I arrived in 2008, May of 2008; the PRT was put together in the end of 2005, beginning of 2006. They had a small office in Kirkuk. It moved to the existing place, which is on FOB Warrior, in 2006, I believe, and the structure of a PRT is led by a senior-level State Department Foreign Service Officer—an FSO-1, or senior Foreign Service Officer. The deputy team leader is military, lieutenant colonel. Then you have five pillars of the PRT: rule of law, essential services and basic infrastructure, agriculture, economic development—which would include private sector development, governance. When you talk about governance, you're talking about the actual effective bureaucracy of administering a governmental entity. The politics, the political aspect will run into the governance side. And then, lastly, there is public diplomacy, but that's really more internal to the State Department.

Islamic Banking Laws

Interviewer

So you were economic development?

Burdin Hickok

I was economic development. I was originally hired as the senior banking and finance advisor to the PRT. I was in the PRT for about two weeks, realizing that's going to be a waste of time. The reason I say that is because all the banks—there are 34 private banks in Iraq. There are 2 state-owned banks in Iraq. Everything is controlled out of Baghdad, even for the private banks; it's all controlled and centralized out of Baghdad. So if I'm going to be effective in changing, updating, effecting the banking system in Iraq, you got to be in Baghdad. Now, having said that, we did run a banking conference, a very effective banking conference, that brought all the private banks in Kirkuk, with some private banks out of Arbil, with a lot of small business people, with Baghdad, the Ministry of Finance there also, to try and get a conversation going to have people understand what is missing. And there was a lot missing. The bottom line is that there was no financial intermediation in Iraq. That means deposits are taken and loans are not made. Loans are only made to the level of the capital of a bank, which was pretty small; maybe a tenth or less of a balance sheet. All those deposits that people put with banks goes directly into the central bank.

Burdin Hickok

Now, when I got there, the central bank rate was 19%, so if you wanted to borrow money from a bank, it was probably 25%. No one's going to do that plus it's a Muslim

country—you don't pay interest. So

Interviewer

Explain that for a moment. You don't pay interest

Burdin Hickok

Islamic Banking.

Interviewer

Right, because

Burdin Hickok

Islamic Banking

Interviewer

How does Islamic banking make money off of loans?

Burdin Hickok

Off of fees. It's okay to pay a fee. You pay a fee when you get a loan out—2%. You may have a fee when you pay it off—2%. So, effectively, the bank is making 4% over the life of a loan. Maybe it's a half, six-month loan, so that's effectively an 8% loan.

Interviewer

And why does the Muslim religion forbid interest on loans?

Burdin Hickok

That was Mohammed's decree when he put together the Koran, and it's in the Koran that they are not allowed to charge Muslims interest. They're not allowed to pay interest.

Interviewer

Now, nonetheless, there's this 19% interest rate. Who's that for?

Burdin Hickok

Exactly. There's one thing you have to understand when you're talking about Iraq: it's incredibly complex. It is not straightforward. There's a lot of contradictions, so one smaller contradiction is the central bank charges 19% interest. What they're doing is that they're paying 19% on deposits to the banks, to the local banks, so the banks take the money from the depositors and they put them in the central bank. The banks will pay interest. If you are a Muslim, you can't do it that way. They just restructure it. If you give them—one thing you can do is discounted notes. You want to borrow \$90,000, so you borrow \$90,000 and you pay back \$100,000. Well, the note is a \$100,000 note, or 100,000 dinar note, but you only get 90 up front, but because it's 100, you got to pay the 100 at maturity. That's accepted.

Interviewer

Now, tell me howâ€”let me phrase this differently. Soâ€”I mean this is obviously, to Americans, is a kind of cultural oddityâ€”

Burdin Hickok

Yes.

Interviewer

What youâ€™re describing here. So do theyâ€”does your average streetwise Iraqi look upon this as just an obstacle to get around, or do they truly believe that thereâ€™s something immoral about taking or paying interest, but thereâ€™s not something immoral about a fee?

Burdin Hickok

Yes. If youâ€™re a Muslim, you canâ€™t pay interest. You can pay bank fees. I mean itâ€™s

Cultural Missteps in Iraq

Interviewer

But does the average Iraqi understand that itâ€™s really describing the same thing with a difference in language?

Burdin Hickok

Oh, no, no, no; itâ€™s okay. The Koran says itâ€™s okay. No, itâ€™s one thing that I learned very quickly when I got there, in Iraq: You have to leave a lot of your Western notions at the door. A lot of your Western thinking, a lot of the Western culture, is just not relevant in Iraq. Now, I was in Iraq, I was in northern Iraq. Itâ€™s Arab, Kurd, and Turkmen. I can generalize that if youâ€™re in an Arab Muslim country, these comments are probably pretty relevant.

Burdin Hickok

It is a different world. Itâ€™s different. They have multiple wives there. Itâ€™s okay. Theâ€”Mohammed, the Koran allows for up to four wives. Now, thatâ€™s something really difficult for a Western person to understand, but they do it, they do it regularly. The people I engaged with on a regular basis, the sheikhs, they had more than one wife. They couldnâ€™t understand why I only had one. Weâ€”Sheikh Mohammed was a younger sheikhâ€”was very

Interviewer

In Kirkuk.

Burdin Hickok

In Kirkukâ€”was very pro-American; was a contractor to the U.S. Army for Sons of Iraqâ€”weâ€™ll get into thatâ€”we call them SOI. This is out of the awakening from Anbar that spread through the country. So he was a contractor. He made a lot of money off the United States, and I met him through our military contacts. And we sat down, the first time we talkedâ€”he was a very congenial guy, very Western appearance, and he told me that he was looking for a third wife, and he asked me if I was married. And I said, â€œYes, Iâ€™m married; Iâ€™ve got two boys at home.â€” And he said, â€œBut you

only have one wife.â€ A And I said, â€œOf course. A Westerners only have one wife.â€
Â So he joked at meâ€”he said, â€œIs your plumbing okay?â€ Yeah. Â It is more than
widely accepted; itâ€™s their culture. Â Well, thatâ€™s one aspect of it, but there are
many aspects of everyday life, and how they do commerce, and how they negotiate, that is
very different than the West. Â And you canâ€™t go in there with a Western
mindsetâ€”you have to understand that youâ€™re in a very different country and you need
to adjust. Â And you need to adjust the day you walk in the door, because if youâ€™re not
adjusting, you may well be insulting the people youâ€™re trying to assist, andâ€”

Interviewer

Did you make any blunders that way in yourâ€”

Burdin Hickok

I made one. Â I made oneâ€”after being there three years, I made oneâ€”just a
blatantâ€”but she was a good friend, and it was no big deal, but sheâ€”

Interviewer

Tell me.

Burdin Hickok

Well, you are not allowedâ€”the men. Â When you greet men in Iraq, you do the man-kiss
on both sides. Â Itâ€™s expected; itâ€™s how you greet people. Â We shake hands; they
do a man-kiss on both sides. Â You donâ€™t do that to women. Â If itâ€™s family,
thatâ€™s okay. Â If itâ€™s a close friend woman, you donâ€™t do that. Â Most women in
Arab society wonâ€™t even let you shake hands with them. Â You donâ€™tâ€”a stranger,
you donâ€™t touch them. Â And this one good friend of mine, who actually was a Kurd, but
still Muslim, see her all the time. Â Sheâ€™d been a tremendous local that we had
supported in many ways in developing a small business center, small business
development center. Â She was a very capable, educated Iraqi that was going to beâ€”her
type was going to be the future of Iraqâ€”tremendous. Â And I stood one day, and she came
in the office, and I just all of a sudden just gave her the man-kiss on both sides, and she
went back. Â And Iâ€™m like, â€œOops.â€ Â And we have terps in the officeâ€”they are
Arab Kurd Turkmen employed by the State Department, and we rely on them enormously.

Interviewer

Terpsâ€”what is a terp?

Burdin Hickok

Interpreter. Interpreter.

Interviewer

Interpreterâ€”okay, thank you.

Burdin Hickok

Interpreters, and we rely on them enormously for just in conversation, but also some
cultural, you know, insights. Â And then we have a womanâ€”we had a woman and three
men that, you know, you have to have a woman interpreter, at least. Â And she was in the
room when I did this, and she started laughing, and Iâ€™m like, â€œOh, my God, what did

I do?â€ A And my good friend, Dhalia, looked at me, said, â€œDonâ€™t worry, Mr. Burdin. â€ Donâ€™t worry, Mr. Burdin. â€ Everything is fine.â€ â€ And I asked Azheen, my interpreter, afterwards, and she said, â€œYou canâ€™t do thatâ€ in public, particularly.â€ â€ And Iâ€™m like, â€œOh, Godâ€ Iâ€™ve already been here for three years, and I make a blunder like that.â€ â€ Butâ€

Kirkuk: A Unique Province
Interviewer

Tell meâ€ so youâ€™re, the PRT is trying to nowâ€ your part of the PRT is trying to encourage economic development in the Kirkuk area. First of all, Kirkuk is Shia, Sunni?

Burdin Hickok

Kirkukâ€ thatâ€™s the issue of Kirkuk. It is a Sunni Arab area, it is Kurdish, it is Turkmen, Shia Turkmen, and thereâ€™s a good Christian minority, Chaldean and Assyrian. They all live in Kirkuk. â€ The people live together there in mixed neighborhoods. Kirkukâ€ â€

Interviewer

Unusual for Iraq?

Burdin Hickok

Oh, yesâ€ oh, very, very.â€

Interviewer

And why is that, do you know? Is there any story or reasonâ€

Burdin Hickok

Because there are no Kurds south ofâ€ there are very few Kurds south of Kurdistan.â€

Interviewer

I mean the willingness to live among each other there, between Shia, Sunni, Turkmen, and Kurd.â€

Burdin Hickok

I donâ€™t know specifically what Baghdadâ€™s like. You got Sadr City, so my impression is that thereâ€™s less willingness to have mixed neighborhoods. I donâ€™t know that for sure. In Kirkuk, there were definitively mixed neighborhoods. My Turkmen interpreter was married to a Kurdish woman, and it was not a big deal.

Burdin Hickok

Kirkuk was a very cosmopolitan city within Iraq for many, many years. If you go back pre-Saddam, go back to the â€50s, â€40s and â€50s, Kirkuk was kind of the upper more well-to-do city. People were very proud of being from Kirkuk. It had a reputation of being more cultural, more cosmopolitan, because of this mix. It had been part of Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistanâ€ Iâ€™ve got to be careful with thatâ€ itâ€™s Iraqi Kurdistanâ€ and so it had a different perspective or perception. And also, within Kirkuk, in an area called Arrapha, was the place to live in Kirkuk. It was upper-middle-class; it was tied to the North Oil Company, which is where all the North Oil Company employees lived, and the North Oil Company

employees were predominately Arab”predominately Arab. So it had a very long history of mixed”and there were Christians. It has a very long history of mixed culture. The people who have the hardest time with it are the political leaders, and this is the challenge of U.S. foreign policy in face of U.S. draw-down of military in Iraq, and in Kirkuk in particular. The Kirkuk status is unresolved. The politicians have spent all their political power essentially maintaining their ancestral positions. Everybody in Kirkuk, at one time or another, could call Kirkuk their ancestral home. The Turkmen were the predominate ethnic in Kirkuk for centuries under the Ottoman Empire.Â

Burdin Hickok

The Kurds”it”s a Kurdish homeland. And, of course, Arabs”it”s in Iraq. So they”ve all got a legitimate historical claim to Kirkuk, but”and the politicians have wasted all their political capital in maintaining those divisions. People aren”t like that. But that doesn”t mean that we can walk away thinking, “Well, the people will keep a lid on things.” No”that”s not the case.Â

Interviewer

You did not see ethnic and religious tension between the Shias, the Sunnis, and the Kurds in Kirkuk.Â

Burdin Hickok

Not among the people.Â

Interviewer

That”s what I was talking about.

Burdin Hickok

Among the politicians, absolutely”absolutely.Â

Developing a Middle Class in Iraq

Interviewer

We”ll come back to that. The economic development, then, of this region: you arrive there thinking you”re going to do banking, and then you get moved over in some kind of”which sort of is you”re encouraging them to what, expand beyond their oil-based economy to something else?Â

Burdin Hickok

Yeah. Yep. Okay, so the mission of the PRT is to assist the Iraqis developing sustainable and effective governance that will support economic development, rule of law, and internal basic needs met. I”m paraphrasing it, but that”s essentially what we”re there for, so therefore we”re the pillars that parallel that. When I got there, there were some challenges. All of the PRTs, by the way, there”s no book about how to run a PRT. It is very entrepreneurial. It is a expeditionary diplomatic outpost. Â Your ties to the embassy in Baghdad are pretty much at the creative disposal of the team leader. It is very”

Interviewer

So you”re just told to develop the economy, and then you do it on your own and your own imagination.

Burdin Hickok

This is the mission of the PRT.

Interviewer

That seems like itâ€™s not very well-governed itself, then.

Burdin Hickok

However, in a war zone, in â€”when you were going saying earlier, post-conflictâ€”we were in a counterinsurgency environment when I got there in â€™08. I was part of the surge, the civilian surge. It was hot when I got there. Real hot. Andâ€”

Interviewer

The insurgency was hot.

Burdin Hickok

Very much so. We hadâ€”and still thereâ€”al-Qaeda Iraq, Naqshabandiâ€”Naqshabandi is the old Baathists. Iranâ€”Iran is a major disruptive force in Iraq. I donâ€™t know what you may have heard, but thatâ€™s the reality. So you had a lot of bad guys that are more than happy to disrupt anything.

Interviewer

And you saw them because they were happy to disrupt what youâ€™re trying to do in terms of economic development?

Burdin Hickok

Absolutely. Whatever the PRTâ€™s doing, and what the militaryâ€™s doing. So the military is there trying to maintain security, so thatâ€™s their main job, obviously, and theyâ€™re going after the bad guys. They go out every night in route clearance operations, to get rid of the IEDs, so that the next morning, we can go out in MRAPs with a full military convoy to the government building without having a bomb blow up in front of us.

Interviewer

An MRAP isâ€”

Burdin Hickok

Mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle. Itâ€™s essentially armored personnel carrier. High-techâ€”itâ€™s got the V-bottom, so that when a VBIED goes off itâ€™ll disperse the effects of the concussion.

Interviewer

Other than the attempts to disrupt things violently, did you see al-Qaeda in Iraq? Did you see the former Baathists try to undermine your work in some more, letâ€™s say, creative way? Paying off people to do someâ€”

Burdin Hickok

Oh—that was one of the big challenges. This could be a very long interview. One of the big challenges is we’re spending a lot of money in Iraq and in Kirkuk, and when I say —œwe, you know, the U.S. military has a commanders’ emergency relief program, or reconstruction program—CERP. Now, CERP is a hot topic in Washington, —cause a lot of money was spent on that, and the purpose of it was to use —œmoney as a weapons system—MAAWS. That was the guideline of how to implement CERP.

Burdin Hickok

Now, it’s commanders’ emergency relief program, so the commander has authority over it. However, when I got there, there was a joint—December of —08, there was a joint campaign plan put together in Baghdad that explicitly states that the civilian leadership, led by the State Department, will take the lead in non-lethal effects. So now we’re talking about effectively delegating the spending authority and the spending project choice, project determination, to the civilians, but using DOD money. Now, the State Department had one also. State Department had the QF—quick reaction fund.

Interviewer

What does this money do? — What do you—

Burdin Hickok

Okay, so the purpose of the money is guidelines, money as a weapons system. — And this is the—this is where the economic development comes in, very much so. — I actually had graduate academic training in actual development, and in actual political economy. — If you want to have —œyou’re starting from scratch in Iraq. — You’re talking about a country that’s coming out of 30-plus years of central planning, a demand economy out of Baghdad. — There’s been no real private sector, other than small shops—and there are plenty of small shops. — But all the industry—oil is done by the government, refining is done by the government. — Agriculture distribution, refining—the farmers deliver their wheat to the ministry silos to get paid at a subsidized rate. — They buy their seed from the same ministry at a subsidized level. — So everything is effected economy. — Their thinking is—which is sound. — If you look at Hayek and Schumpeter and Adam Smith, you can—

Interviewer

Three important groundbreaking economists from—

Burdin Hickok

Yes.

Interviewer

Over the last hundred years, essentially.

Burdin Hickok

Exactly—200 years. — If you want to have a viable democracy and a market-based economy, you have to have a middle class. — If you have a middle class, they will demand the freedoms of a market-based economy and of democracy, so from a big macro perspective, what I wanted to accomplish was do everything I could to have the Iraqis understand, and to effect—to the extent I could—a economy to develop and support a middle class. — That was the key to long-term success in Iraq. — And the Army, when you

look at money as a weapons system, essentially takes that in a very tactical sense. "This town doesn't have water. Let's build a well and give them water. There's no roads from this village to the market, so they can't take their harvest to the market because the roads are all beat up. Let's fix the road. The bridge is out" let's fix the bridge.

Interviewer

So these are all infrastructure things"things that government would do in a free society.

Burdin Hickok

Exactly right. But they're basic to have a functional economy. So that's kind of the very basic"

Interviewer

Let me understand how this happens, though. So you think a road needs to be repaired. You make that decision?

Burdin Hickok

Actually, the initial decision is the military. The military comes in and says"for a very military reason"we can't get to these villages very easily from"

Interviewer

You mean the Army when you say that.

Burdin Hickok

The Army, the U.S. Army"yeah, the U.S. Army. We can't get to these roads effectively, or get to these villages effectively, because there's either no road, or the road is completely messed up. We got to fix these roads. So in one sense, we got to fix these roads for purely a security reason"to get to the villages to ensure security. One. Bridge is out"got to get the bridge fixed. So you got some real basic"and you're coming into a"

Interviewer

But in the beginning, these infrastructure issues come up first as security questions.

Burdin Hickok

Yes.

Interviewer

But could they come up purely as an economic development question?

Burdin Hickok

Absolutely. What happens"

Interviewer

So you would make the decision"State Department makes the decision that it's

necessary to build this road for distribution of goods, irrespective of what the Kirkukians

Burdin Hickok

No, no, no, no, no.

Interviewer

Okay, let's go there.

Burdin Hickok

Okay. You bring up a really good point, and I come in in '08. There are people there before me. They are running pretty much on a first served, first come basis with the local ministries. Now, the Iraqi government is run by ministries and by the provincial council, which is the elected body. The elected body develops a budget, which is a list of projects that they want to do, capital projects, and they send that budget to Baghdad. If Baghdad approves it, sends money, they're going to implement it. Well, the provincial council does not implement it; the ministries do. So if you want to know what needs to be done in a village, in a town, in the countryside, in Kirkuk City the ministries will tell you what they need done. Ministry of Roads and Bridges: This bridge is out; we need it fixed. Can you help us? So there was a great deal initially the requests came from the ministries. We need help here, here, and here. There is a

Interviewer

Well, let me ask, if that's all right, so you're that economic development guy, and you articulate that there is a problem here with respect to distribution routes. I'm making this up

Burdin Hickok

Yeah.

Interviewer

But let's call it that. How likely is it that the ministries are in sync with the same need particularly in a country that has been rife with fraud for so many generations?

Burdin Hickok

And from a military standpoint, are we dealing with a security issue, or are we dealing with a nonlethal economic issue? If it's a nonlethal economic issue, it's the PRT. Now the PRT makes the decision, working with remember, it came from the ministry, from the Iraqis they want it done. This was going on for a number of years. There was a change in the structure of the PRT. The head of that unit left; it was given to me, added to my portfolio. I had a huge portfolio. And now my approach, and what I wrote a cable on, and what became the policy, working very closely with the 1/1 AD the Colonel, Larry Swift, was on board with this we had 40

Burdin Hickok

Right. This is where I come in. Business as usual when I got there. You deal with the ministry. Ministry tells you what their wish list is. This is what we want to get done. What can you do? The Army and the PRT looks at the wish list and says, We

can do that. A We can do that. A We can do that.â€ A Is it in sync with what the government wants done? Â Or just what this minister wants done, for maybe an agenda that we donâ€™t know about. Â Seems like a good idea. Â We can go talk to the village elders or the tribal leaders and say, â€œWhat do you think of the ministerâ€™s idea of building this bridge, this road?â€ Â They may have another idea, but itâ€™s going to be the ministry that implements itâ€but itâ€™s our money.

Interviewer

Larryâ€

Burdin Hickok

Larry Swiftâ€Colonel Larry Swiftâ€he was theâ€

Interviewer

S-W-I-F-T.

Burdin Hickok

Mm-hmm. Â Heâ€™s the brigade commander for the 1/1 AD, headquartered in Kirkuk, 2000â€

Interviewer

Thatâ€™s the 11th Armored Division.

Burdin Hickok

1st.

Interviewer

1st Armored Division.

Burdin Hickok

1st Armored Divisionâ€™1/1. Â Itâ€™s the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 1st Armored Division.

Interviewer

I see; okay.

Burdin Hickok

And there were five battalions connected with that brigadeâ€™maneuver battalions. Â Plus a BSB, which is brigade support battalion, which is essentially mechanics peopleâ€I mean logistics people, which actually move us around. Â But we came toâ€™the team leader, myself, and the brigade commander got together, and I proposed to them that weâ€™re not doing what weâ€™re supposed to be doing from a building a country standpoint. Â You donâ€™t go to the ministries, interbank ministries out of Baghdad that have the local representatives, and ask them for their wish list. Â â€œWell, are they part of the local government?â€ Â Well, no; not really. Â Theyâ€™re part of the Baghdad government. Â Weâ€™re trying to stand up a local government here. Â That doesnâ€™t work. Â Weâ€™re not doing what weâ€™re supposed to be doing. Â So what I proposed is that

we are no longer going to send a letter to the ministries and ask for their wish list that's over. We're not going to do that anymore. If the ministry wants something done, they're going to have to go through the Iraqi process, and the Iraqi process was the minister develops a list of preferred priority projects. They, first of all, have to be approved by a subcommittee of the ministry of planning and the provincial council, which is called the PRDC, provincial reconstruction and development center.

Burdin Hickok

That was made up of provincial council members, and made up of ministerial members. And to get a project in consideration that would be nominated by the DG, the director general of the local ministry, and it had to be supported by two provincial council members. It goes to the subcommittee. They have a hearing about it, and they agree whether or not it's a worthy project. Okay.

Introducing a Foreign System to a Traditional Culture
Interviewer

All right, but here's my quick question about this, though: So it's either controlled by either of those models by the ministries back in Baghdad, or, in this new case, by the local Iraqi process as you're describing it.

Burdin Hickok

Right.

Interviewer

But in each case, how do we know that the process itself isn't corrupted to, you know, the sheikh's brother's

Burdin Hickok

Oh, yeah.

Interviewer

Wants a bridge to facilitate the movement of his goats

Burdin Hickok

Right.

Interviewer

From one region to the next?

Burdin Hickok

Yeah, we had all kinds of corruption.

Interviewer

So where is the plan for the State Department plan that is sound towards building a durable civil structure that can last well beyond our presence?

Burdin Hickok

Okay—that's exactly what we're doing. Bear with me a second. The State Department had USAID, which was also representative in the PRT, had implementing partners that

Interviewer

That's the Agency for

Burdin Hickok

Agency for International Development. And they have implementing partners that specialize in governance, in budget execution—local budget execution. In other words, teaching the local people how to create a scope of work for a contract; to put the contract out to bid; to receive the bids; to review the bids; to judge whether or not you're avoiding exactly what you're talking about, to the best ability they can. A Competitive bidding—and the U.S. government created a center, the PRDC center—and it was also called the PCC, which is a provincial contracting center—to do exactly that. They're the ones who, under our training, learned how to create contracts, to create RFPs, or requests for proposals, for the bid process, to get it on their web page—which they have a web page, which we helped them develop. And the contractors all had to be registered. So

Interviewer

Now, how is this greeted there, though? I mean after centuries of tribal and

Burdin Hickok

Right.

Interviewer

Sort of, you know, whatever you might refer to it as—a kind of cultural process that is foreign, as you said. Here, you're introducing a procedure, a set of procedures, that are distinctively Western and don't match up with the culture. How is this received?

Burdin Hickok

It wasn't a lay-up. I mean it was—I got there after the

Interviewer

Was it a jump shot, or was it a Hail Mary?

Burdin Hickok

No, it was actually—it just takes a lot of work. It wasn't like they were closed-minded to it, it was that they weren't familiar with it. It was new to them. Pretty much anything

Interviewer

Did they see a reason why to do it, though? Did they understand—I mean because I guess I would wonder, if I were in your shoes in that situation, they have been doing it whatever way they've been doing it for centuries. Now we introduce this way, that is really

embedded into the structure of free markets and democracy”

Burdin Hickok

Exactly”

Interviewer

Foreign elements.

Burdin Hickok

Yes.Â

Interviewer

And we”re saying to them, “This is the way you should do it.” It”s different, but is it likeable in their judgment? Is it something to want? Is it something to seek?

Burdin Hickok

Mm-hmm. They embraced it. Bottom line: they embraced it. The governor embraced it. Because it gave the governor some level of local authority, which he never had before. Instead of having to go back to Baghdad all the time”he was extremely frustrated with how little authority he had. We were trying to instill that in them through a structure. They still got”they still had to go to Baghdad to get the money for their budget, for their projects. They still had to go to Baghdad. But once those, that money”Â

Interviewer

Unless it was our money, right? Unless it was”Â

Burdin Hickok

Unless it was our money”then they had to come to us. But once that money came in, it was up to them to get it done. Now, it was originally an elected council, in “05”all kinds of politics prevented it from being elected in “09, I guess it was”a period that Kirkuk did not have provincial elections, so it did not have provincial powers authority, which every other province in the country did, but not Kirkuk, because of the unsettled political situation, so that was even more frustrating. But even within that environment, they still got money to do projects.

Burdin Hickok

So the governor was able to have a better handle on what was going on in his province by this structure, so he embraced it. All the provincial council members, they embraced it because”pretty much because of the distrust of everybody else. This is a way to keep him from getting more money than me. The negotiating with Iraqis, the ones that we”ve come across, was very frustrating, politically or economically. It was very rarely a win-win situation in their mindset. They don”t”l”m going to do this anyway. They don”t have a win-win mindset. It is a zero-sum mindset. Regardless of how much I get, it”s really a function of how much he doesn”t get, and that was pervasive in everybody we dealt with in Kirkuk.Â

Burdin Hickok

So we were trying to get political resolutions done of some issue, to try and get them to come to a compromise. Compromise means everybody's got to give up something. Well, that's extremely difficult concept, and it was very frustrating. You're absolutely right—it was very frustrating. But it played into the notion that, well, we're going to make sure that everybody knows exactly what everybody's getting by going through this process. "Okay, we can accept it now, because I know how much he's getting. I may not like it. I may try and thwart it in the subcommittee. But at least I know what's going on. Oh, by the way, if you're going to build a bridge in that village you got to build one in my village." A lot of that going, but that's because it's Kurd-Arab. If it's in the south, it's Arab; if it's in the north, it's Kurd.

Burdin Hickok

For a long time, everything we did with U.S. dollars, if we did it in the south we had to do it in the north.

Interviewer

But this is a very—you, as a political economist, right? That is what you call yourself, political economist—might have found this interesting, because free-market economies are built upon the principle that people act out of self-interest.

Burdin Hickok

In valuing self-interest—you're exactly right.

Interviewer

Now, what you're describing is a kind of reversal on that, which is in the negative interest of someone else.

Burdin Hickok

Yeah—that's true; that's true. Now, it played—that played a very big role in politics. In business and in trading and commerce, they had lots of shops, so on the local level, on the individual level of not a political leader, not a tribal sheikh, not a tribal sheikh, but as an individual trying to make money and selling whatever they're selling, it worked. I mean they could do it.

Interviewer

So you're making a distinction here between the free market business economy and the infrastructure questions that you had articulated before, that had to be made with government money, and how the government money is parceled out. That there's a kind of entrenched politics that works—

Burdin Hickok

Absolutely.

Interviewer

Kind of that doesn't work—there's a kind of inertia—but that had more chance of working when it was decentralized.

Burdin Hickok

And itâ€™s concentrated at the top, with the sheikhs. The sheikhsâ€™this was a big sheikhâ€™

Interviewer

Concentrated at the top of the local area, right?â€™

Burdin Hickok

Yes, exactly true.â€™

Burdin Hickok

I mean once we got out of Baghdad, but weâ€™re down to thatâ€™

Burdin Hickok

Yeah.

Interviewer

Right.

Burdin Hickok

So youâ€™re right. Itâ€™sâ€™if you, from a theoretical standpointâ€™and I found this fascinating, because it was so true. If you readâ€™thereâ€™s been a lot of studies on traditional society. You have to understand this is a traditional society. Itâ€™s not a modern society.â€™

Burdin Hickok

Itâ€™s a difference. If you look at a lot of work done, academic work done on peasants of Southeast Asia in the 1920s, 1930s, it was a very traditional society. And the disruption of that society, of the traditional life, was a entrance for communism, because it provided a replacement. The family is a traditional societyâ€™itâ€™s the tribe, itâ€™s the clan is a traditional society. The clan provides for everybody, so long as you provide for the clan. And in bad years, you get help out of the clan, they help you along; in the good years, you got paid more. Youâ€™re never going to get out of your subsistence environment in the traditional society, but youâ€™re never going to starve, either. So your mindset is not profit maximization. Your mindset is completely risk-averse. Iâ€™m not going to try anything new. Or you could buy this good piece of property and grow more corn. â€œOh, what if it doesnâ€™t grow?â€™

Burdin Hickok

What if we have a problem?â€™ Seriouslyâ€™thatâ€™s the mindset of a traditional society, a feudal society. In Iraq, just take all the studies, replace peasant for tribalâ€™itâ€™s exactlyâ€™the analogy is amazing. The traditional farmers on the 36,000 farms in Kirkukâ€™it was part of the breadbasket of Iraq. Farming was the largestâ€™agriculture is the large interest by far, if you take away oil and gasâ€™by far. Eighty percent of the economic activity was in agriculture. And the farmer was in a tribal environment. The tribalâ€™sheikh would take care of all of his cousinsâ€™which most of them were cousins and family in a village.

Burdin Hickok

Most villages were founded by a sheikh family. So they're going to take care of their family. Now, in the good years, you're going to pay the sheik a whole lot more, because that's the role of the sheikh. In the bad years, sheikhs would take care of you. You're never going to get ahead, but you won't starve, and it was reliable, so you don't do anything to rock that boat.

Burdin Hickok

In comes a demand economy and in a dictatorship, what does Saddam Hussein have to do? He just has to be friends with all the sheikhs. He doesn't care about anybody else. The sheikhs will take care of that. So you make sure you are favorable to the agriculture, because, by far, you're going to touch the most people in Iraq, and you do it through the sheikhs. Favorable sheikhs, everything's fine. The traditional society pretty much continues on. In comes capitalism and modernity. All of a sudden, people say, "Well, we have a bad year because the government's no longer subsidizing, or the sheikh is no longer subsidizing my existence as a farmer. Bad year. I'm going to go to the city and get a job."

Burdin Hickok

All of a sudden, the family's breaking up. What's taking that place? Nothing. You have chaos. It's a driver of instability. So the farmland, the countryside, is a big focus of the military and of economic development, because it's a major driver of instability. You've broken the traditional bonds of society and tribal life because of war, sanctions, bad economy, drought—ah, drought—and the replacement? Well, there is no replacement, because you don't have a centralized government anymore. You have a democracy; it's completely different. That's why you need to have the middle class as the driver of all those freedoms that they demand in a democracy, but that wasn't there yet. So you really just created a lot of disruption—a lot of people out of work. A lot of people out of work and with no hope of getting work, because their farm is—there's no government to get the seed from anymore for a few years.

Burdin Hickok

What do they do? They pick up an AK-47, because someone's paying them money to carry it. Someone's paying them \$70 to go put an IED on the road. Seventy dollars—that's, for a farm in rural Iraq, that's easily a month's worth of life—easily.

Interviewer

Let's take a pause here, and then we'll pick this up on the other side, then—okay?

Burdin Hickok

Sure.

State & Army: A Symbiotic Relationship, Part I
Interviewer

So, Burdin, let's talk about the relationship between the State Department and the military in theater in Iraq.

Burdin Hickok

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

And help us understand the distinction between the PRT, which you were a part of, and your normal State Department personnel.

Burdin Hickok

Okay. All right—oh, boy. The PRT, like the one in Kirkuk, is on a military base, and it is a brigade or brigade headquarters. So a colonel, a bird colonel, is the senior officer on the base. The PRT team leader is the senior civilian. And they are equal in rank and in responsibility for what—TMs supposed to be done. It is a partnership. Now, the PRT relies on the military for movement. We went into the Kirkuk government building every single day; every single workday. We only got there on our military convoy, with three soldiers in each truck—the driver, the TC, the truck commander, and the gunner, and he was manning a .50 caliber machine gun or a 240 machine gun.

Interviewer

You actually had to fire as you would go through?—

Burdin Hickok

Oh, yeah. — We would fire—as we exit the compound, they would test fire—every time.

Interviewer

But did you come under any fire when you were in this vehicle?

Burdin Hickok

We—yeah. — Yes. —

Interviewer

From insurgents.

Burdin Hickok

Yeah. Very, very rarely—in fact, the three years I was there, I came under fire on the convoy to the KGB, which is the Kirkuk government building—oddly enough called the KGB—which was a real good one when I first got there, having studied international politics during the Cold War. Going to the KGB, all right?—

Interviewer

KGB being the Soviet intelligence agency, yes.

Burdin Hickok

Exactly. — But it was the Kirkuk government building. — So in the entire 600 missions in three years, and we got fired on once or twice.

Interviewer

And what's the distance of the trip?

Burdin Hickok

It's well, as a bird flies, it's about or the quickest direct way is about four minutes, but you never go that way rarely go that way. It could take us five minutes, ten minutes, an hour to get there, because you don't want to go the same route the same day in a row, and you don't leave at the same time. All this is for security, so that the insurgents can't plan an attack on your route with any confidence. They could be opportunistic, but they won't have any confidence. We go out of different gates; we take different routes; we leave at different times; we stay for different lengths of period so our come-back is staggered, also.

Interviewer

So you say you only came under fire once in

Burdin Hickok

Yeah. Once literally, the week before I got there, the convoy got hit with a RKG, which is an anti-tank armor-piercing grenade, and the guys were beat up pretty badly, but nobody was killed.

Under Fire: A Daily Occurrence

Interviewer

And you say that's the only time you came under fire there. Did you come under fire from insurgents in other situations?

Burdin Hickok

We got what's called indirect fire, which is rocket fire, onto the base every day; every day, more than once a day. The worst was December 2008. We received indirect fire these are Katyusha 107s, 120s, 105s two or three times a day, for the entire month, unrelenting. And at the time, the alarm system was an after-the-fact alarm. In other words, it wasn't it was a code red, where the rockets landed. The alarm would go off because the assumption is that more were coming, so get to bunkers. And it's a big, loud, you know, wailing sound, and everybody ran for a bunker, or stayed in our CHU. Our CHU, our containerized housing unit, had sandbags all over it, so that was it it was better to stay there than to run 50 yards to a bunker in the middle of an attack.

Interviewer

But did the fire you undertook in that situation, those situations, ever appear dangerous to you?

Burdin Hickok

You never knew. They had no control over targeting. They had the accuracy of a bottle rocket, but they were real rockets. These were 107s, 120s. A 120 hit a bunker, the bunker's gone. The time I was there, they got lucky a few times. They hit a third-country national housing unit and killed quite a few third-country contractors that were doing construction work on the FOB. They literally the rest of them, hundreds of them got up and walked out the next day; just walked out. I don't know where they were from.

Interviewer

And where was this fire coming from?

Burdin Hickok

Kirkuk, the airbase is contiguous to the city on the southwest portion of the city. And the fire was coming from the southeast—yeah, from the southeast, which was, arguably, the more Arab area. And some of it was—military or somebody had spent \$10 million renovating the train station that was never used, and they were fired from behind the train station. Now—

Interviewer

So why couldn't you root these guys out? — Not you, but why couldn't the—

Burdin Hickok

Oh, they were all done remotely. All the fire was done remotely, so as soon as you get there, everything's gone—or the rockets, you know; just the launchers are there. However, about sometime in —09, we got C-RAM. C-RAM is an early warning system that's a big balloon, big blimp, sitting over the airfield that has a sensor that can detect launches. And in Baghdad, it had a counter-battery operation, so as soon as they detected a launch, they would hit the launch site immediately, so if it was not remote, you actually might get somebody. We didn't have the counter-battery because it was all in the city, so—but we had the early warning. So now we had the wonderful occasion that when rockets are coming, you hear the —incoming, incoming—you know, Clarion, and you've got—you hit the dirt. You don't run, you hit the dirt, —cause this is—it's a one-kilometer radius of the anticipated landing zone. So you've got the POI and the POO. POO is point of origination, POI is point of impact. So the POI, the point of impact, was estimated to be one kilometer of diameter, given where the sound goes off, where the alarm goes off, so it could be anywhere near you. And you don't know—

Interviewer

A little like thunder.

Interviewer

How often would these alerts happen?

Burdin Hickok

Daily. Daily. In fact, in the last six months I was there, every morning at four in the morning, six in the morning, I'd be laying in bed, and you hear the damn alarm and it'd wake you up. Now, you're not supposed to go anywhere —cause you're in your CHU, which is sandbagged, so you don't go anywhere. You wake up and you wait; you wait for the explosion. If you hear the explosion, everything's okay—go back to bed, go back to sleep.

Burdin Hickok

Yeah. And every day—I mean it was every day. And—

Interviewer

Did you find that you got used to that, and it was just like a rhythm, or does it always put

you on edge?

Burdin Hickok

The mornings were annoying, because it, first of all, woke you up. And you reallyâ€”you had to wait there. You waited there, very quietly, to hear the boom. It was always a distant boom, but once you heard it, you could go back to sleep. It was okay. All right, yeah, you do getâ€”no question you get complacent about it. I was walking along between the CHUs. Itâ€™s like a little, say, four or five rows of containerized houses, with a little gravel walkway in between that was big enough for a car to go down, and then occasional separations that had gravel that you could walk in between the CHUs. And the CHUs all had three or four rows of sandbags all around it, and then at the outside of the perimeter was 15-foot T-Walls.

Burdin Hickok

The notion is that these Katyusha rockets had about 3% trajectory, so itâ€™s unlikely, even if they had a direct hit, to go towards the CHUs. The T-Walls would slam it, because of the low trajectory, and if it didnâ€™t, the sandbags would protect you. So the rockets had to be right on target to really hurt somebody in where we were living, soâ€”but I was walkingâ€”one night we were walking back with another colleague. Weâ€™re yapping about nothing, and I heard it, but I didnâ€™t recognize it. You heard the whistle. No alarm went off, but you heard the whistle of the incoming rocket, and it went right over us, and both of usâ€”I didnâ€™t think of what was going on. My colleague, who was ex-military, knew exactly what it was, and dove between the CHUs. And then it dawned on me what was going on, and I dove right behind him, and it blew up right behind us. Nobody was hurt; didnâ€™t hit any of the CHUs or anything.

Interviewer

â€œRight behind youâ€ means how far?

Burdin Hickok

Fifty metersâ€”within 50 meters. Andâ€”but itâ€™s just again, yeah, I know the sound. Theyâ€™re always there. But it happens so frequently you just donâ€™tâ€”it didnâ€™t register sometimes, and it just didnâ€™t register that time.

State & Army: A Symbiotic Relationship, Part II

Interviewer

Tell me about the relationship between you as a civilian, as a member of the PRT, and the Army.

Burdin Hickok

We wereâ€”

Interviewer

Let me preface that by saying we all know thereâ€™s a sort of clichÃ©d kind of understanding between Army and State Departmentâ€”something of a rivalry between the two. And Army doesnâ€™t often look very favorably upon Stateâ€”probably State doesnâ€™t look that favorably on Army. And Iâ€™m wondering what it looked like to you.

Burdin Hickok

Okay. It's a 3161. That means it's a direct hire to the State Department as a temporary, non-career appointment. I am a U.S. diplomat in Iraq on a diplomatic passport. I am not a Foreign Service Officer; it's not a specialist from the State Department. I am hired by the State Department as an employee because it's a subject matter expert, and there were a lot of 3161s in-country—a lot of them. And so my perspective is not going to be from the State Department perspective or from the military standpoint. It's there to do a job, and all of these people there are hopefully my resources to get a job done. I was there for three years, I had six brigade commanders. The first brigade commander was the 1/10, now Brigadier General Dave Paschal—came in a very kinetic environment—it was very hot; after that came the 2/1 with Gonzalez.

Burdin Hickok

With each brigade commander, the dynamics between the PRT, the team leader, the Foreign Service Officers, the 3161s, and the military would be different. Many times, it was a recognition by the military, by the Army, that these civilians are here to accomplish a passive stable government and society, which means they don't shoot at the Army. So the Army understood that we had a very key role. Paschal—General—the general I was just talking about—

Interviewer

Odierno.

Burdin Hickok

No, before him.

Interviewer

Petraeus.

Burdin Hickok

Petraeus. He gets to Baghdad in '03 or '04 and looks around and says, "Where are the civilians?" It's a valid point. The Army is there to gain security—to, what is it, hold—

Interviewer

Clear, hold—

Burdin Hickok

Clear, hold and build.

Interviewer

Build.

Burdin Hickok

The clear and hold part, the military does that. The Army does that. Civilians can't do that. The build part is a partnership, and personally, I have—I really mean this—that the Army is the best America has, and I see it every day. I don't go out and meet Iraqis unless the Army can take me there, whether it's a military support unit in the

PRT which, when I got there, was a top CA company or if it was a maneuver element, a battalion, and then one of the villages. I don't go and do my job unless the Army gets me there. And the same token, there's 5,000 soldiers in Kirkuk at one time. I'm myself. The ability for the Army to go out on a regular basis to meet villagers, to meet the sheikhs, to meet the important person of this village, and to hear what their concerns are I can't do that. I can't be everywhere. They're there. Their information back to me is hugely important. It's a huge force multiplier. No question about it. Now, did the and my impression and this actually would go across all the military units that were there, all the brigade commanders that were there valued and respected the subject matter experts' opinions. Okay, so maybe there might've been one exception, but for the generally, they recognize that what we're trying to do is create a better environment, create a better economy, create more people with a stake in society, so they don't pick up a gun and shoot at Americans.

A Typical Day for a PRT
Interviewer

Tell me how okay, so that we know the broad brush strokes of what you're trying to do there.

Burdin Hickok

Right.

Interviewer

Let's go to the nitty-gritty. You tell me what's a typical day like for you there while you're serving in the PRT?

Burdin Hickok

I had about 10 to 12 subject matter experts under me: agriculture, budget execution, private sector development. I was I delved into the oil and gas part of the equation, and I also had the essential services the engineer that dealt with sewer water projects, that kind of thing. We would get into early morning, we'd go to what's called the SP, the starting point, and we'd get a briefing by the military about the security events overnight the SIGACTS significant acts overnight. Where the snipers were, where the bombs went off

Interviewer

This would happen at the FOB this would happen at

Burdin Hickok

This is on the FOB.

Interviewer

Yep.

Burdin Hickok

We'd gather. This was before we were to leave in the convoy to go to the government building. So we'd meet there and get the daily update. What happened overnight, what's the weather forecast, what's the threat environment it was always a high

threat environmentâ€”what was the SIGACTs overnight, this morningâ€”A

Interviewer

Whatâ€”tell me a range of what SIGACTs were about.

Burdin Hickok

IEDs. IEDs predominantlyâ€”IEDsâ€”Â

Interviewer

Every day? Â Once a week?

Burdin Hickok

Well, obviously, it changed. Â When I got there, it was every day; by the time I left, it was very rare. But thereâ€™s no question that over the time I was there the kinetic environment changed drastically. Â It came from a daily course of bombs, VBIEDs, IEDs, rockets, snipers, to an occasional sniperâ€”weâ€™ve got a sniper problem in this areaâ€”just, clearly, it was an opportunistic event. Â We got sniped at because there was a convoy at. Â They were there too long, or they were there for a certain length of time. Â Somebody actually went home, probably, got a gun, came back, and it was a target of opportunityâ€”that kind of thing. Â So thatâ€™s very hard to defend against, itâ€™s very hard to be aggressive againstâ€”it really tells you itâ€™s almost criminal. Â Itâ€™s borderline a criminal activity as opposed to organized insurgent activity.

Interviewer

So after you got this sort ofâ€”

Interviewer

You got the daily briefing.

Interviewer

Daily briefing, then youâ€”

Burdin Hickok

Okay, so then we were given our truck assignments. Â We travel in MRAPs, the armored personnel carriers, and thereâ€™s our militaryâ€”an NCO driver, and NCO truck captain, and an NCO gunner.

Interviewer

How many in this convoy, then, your estimate?

Burdin Hickok

Four trucksâ€”minimum of four trucks. Â Minimum.Â

Interviewer

But then you have 60 people coming from there.

Burdin Hickok

Now thatâ€™sâ€™early on, we went in two trucks. Â We had two trips in, we had Humvees, there were more vehiclesâ€™

Interviewer

So you and about, what, 10 or 15 other civilians are coming out.

Burdin Hickok

Exactlyâ€™10 or 15 other civiliansâ€™exactly right. Â These trucks held eight people, roughly, as passengers, andâ€™

Interviewer

So you take your trip in like we were talking before, going a different route each time, and you go where? Â To theâ€™

Burdin Hickok

To the Kirkuk government building.

Interviewer

Okay. Â Right.

Burdin Hickok

And it was, literallyâ€™and if things got hotâ€™itâ€™s a four-minute drive back to the FOBâ€™in a hurry. Â Get to the Kirkuk government building is like four minutesâ€™in a hurry. Â And so yeah, so now weâ€™re at the Kirkuk government building. Â Well, this is a phenomenal platform. Â The trucks stay there, the soldiers dismount, they do their 5 and 25, which is the check the perimeter of the trucks and of where they are. Itâ€™s a secure compound, secured by the Iraqi police, and itâ€™s actually kind of a diplomatic police that is commanded by the commander on-base, on-location at the KGB. Â Probably about 50 or so police. Â And then, of course, every Iraqi carries a gun, so you have the personal security details of the provincial council members, and they carry AK-47s. Â Theyâ€™re moreâ€™the only reason that weâ€™re able to do thisâ€™thereâ€™s four trucks through: 12, 15 soldiers, 10, 15 civilians. Â If things got really bad in that environment, itâ€™s going to be over very quickly, and itâ€™s not going to be good, and weâ€™re not going to win in that situation. Â Weâ€™re there because the Kirkukis, the Kurds, the Arabs, and the Turkmen and the Christians want us there. Â The governor provides this office space for us in the government buildingâ€™we donâ€™t pay for it. Â We fix whatâ€™s broken and we help out where things need to be done, but they want us there. Â If they didnâ€™t want us there, it wouldnâ€™t make any difference how much security we haveâ€™we couldnâ€™t do it.

Interviewer

Why do they want you there?

Burdin Hickok

Because we are viewedâ€™the United States Army and the United States government is viewed as a neutral third party, and it is extremely effective. Â People come to see us

because they know weâ€™re not taking the Kurd side, weâ€™re not taking the Arab side, weâ€™re not taking the Turkmen side. Â Weâ€™re taking the side thatâ€™s going to make things work and be stable. Â And everybody recognized that, and that may not have always been the case, but the three years I was there, no question about itâ€™they want us there. Â They donâ€™t like to be seen going to the base. They donâ€™t want to be seen going to the base, but they can go to their own government building.

Interviewer

Why do they not want to be seen going to the base if they want us there so badly?

Burdin Hickok

The bad guysâ€™the bad guys donâ€™t want us there. Â There are bad guys. Â There are bad guys watching everything. Â There are bad guys watching us when we go out the gate. Â There are bad guys out there. Â Theyâ€™re AQLâ€™al-Qaeda Iraq, Naqshabandi, I meant before, JTRN, the ex-Baathistsâ€™theyâ€™re there. Â Theyâ€™re always there, and they will be opportunistic, so anyone, any civilian, who doesnâ€™t have a level of security that we do, they donâ€™t want to be seen going to the base. Â So they can come see us at the government building, and nobody knows any better, and this was a tremendous asset. Â So we spend all day meeting with ministryâ€™director generals of the local ministries: agriculture, roads and bridges, ministry of planning. Â We meet with the governor. Â We meet with PC members. Â We go to their offices. Â We go to their committee meetings. We are actively involved on a day-to-day basis at any level of detail they invite us in.

Interviewer

I seeâ€™and what do you talk about? Â What do these meetings contain? Â What are you doing?

Burdin Hickok

Well, on the economic side, I may be meeting with Turkish investors that are being brought in there by a Kirkuki partner, and they want to know how to do investment in Kirkuk. Â And with the number of contacts we have, there is a recognition within the government that if the PRT signs off on it, or if youâ€™ve visited the PRT, it carries greater weight. Â Thatâ€™s not something we intended to do, but the Iraqis, the local Iraqis, recognize that we know what weâ€™re talking about, from a technical standpoint.Â

Burdin Hickok

So if someone wants to build an amusement parkâ€™which is a very popular pastime in Iraqâ€™very popular. Â They may not have water and sewer, but they really want to have an amusement park. Â This was a lot of time and effort on our part, because they wanted to spend the time and effort on it, and we had people that we talked with on a regular basis that wanted to build an amusement park. Â So we were the ones who were explaining to investorsâ€™outside investors or Iraqi investorsâ€™how to get that done. Â âœYou got to go to the ministry of planning. Â You got to go to the ministry of interior. Â You got to do this; you got to get this license; you got to go talk to the governor.â€ Â They donâ€™t know that stuff. Â This is all new. Â Before, youâ€™d go to Baghdad and youâ€™d talk to your buddy in Baghdad. Â âœHey, you know, I want you to make sure I can take that piece of property and build an amusement park,â€ in Baghdad. Â And Baghdad said, âœYeah, no problem.â€ Â No more. Â Thatâ€™s not how it works anymore. Â

Burdin Hickok

You got to get the local buy-in, so it's much more complicated than it used to be. PRT knew that, because we've been there; we pretty much helped create that decentralization. So we would be the ones who would try to tell people, "You got to go see the provincial investment commission person, who's in Kirkuk."

Interviewer

I'm mystified that they would look upon this as better—at least in this state that they might look at it better—if before, it was so much simpler. There was one place to go, and one person making a decision, and yeah, you might get turned down more often, it might not be the decision you wanted, and it might not be the right decision for the province. But rather than going to 16 different ministries to figure out in the local area whether you can get something built or not—that sounds a lot harder to me.

Burdin Hickok

Yeah, democracy's a bitch, isn't it? That's exactly the decentralization if you didn't know Saddam's brother or cousin, or you weren't in the right tribe, you had no shot.

Interviewer

Oh, I see. And then, conversely, did you see people who might've been shut out of the power grid before?

Burdin Hickok

Yeah, absolutely.

Interviewer

Now saying, "Okay, I may have to go find 15 signatures, but damn it, it's going to be mine when it's done."

Burdin Hickok

And when it fell back to the old gangs, we heard about it, because they felt that they could come complain to us. We would immediately tell them, "Don't complain to me; go complain to the governor. Have you told the governor yet? Have you told the PC chair yet?" But that's our job—that was exactly our job, and it happened. I was dealing with a sheikh that wanted to do the amusement park, and he was a contractor to the U.S.. He had

Interviewer

We're talking about an amusement park in the American sense of amusement park, where there's rides and

Burdin Hickok

Amusement, yeah—rides, exactly—yeah. This is big. I thought, "Lucky I gotcha." But this was a very popular thing in Iraq. Right now, if you go five minutes outside of Kirkuk in the north—well, the northeast—there are two amusement parks outside of the city. There are two amusement parks. They wanted one inside the city.

Interviewer

Oh, I see. Â Then this is to build a third one.

Burdin Hickok

â€™Cause then thereâ€™ll be one in the city. Â And there was one before; in fact, it was the same piece of property, so we thought it would be a little bit easier. Â So I had an Arab sheikh who wanted to do it. Â He had the capital. Â He had the connections out of Kuwait to bring in all the equipment, all the rides, and he had a business plan, which we helped him develop. Â So he goes to the provincial investment commission to get a license. Â You get a license with the provincial investment commission because you get tax breaks, even though they really didnâ€™t collect taxes, someday in the future they would, and heâ€™d have a letter saying he doesnâ€™t have to pay tax for ten years. Â But the other thing, too, is you could get titles to land through the provincial investment commission, which was virtually impossibleâ€”virtually impossible. Â And he came back to me and says, â€œWell, they gave it to a Kurd who has absolutely no experience. Â Oh, and by the way, the provincial investment commission chairman was a Kurd.â€

Burdin Hickok

So he comes back to us immediately, saying, â€œThis was just an inside deal.â€ Â So we haveâ€”okay, so our job is now, â€œHave you told the governor? Â Did you tell the provincial council chairman? Â Did you tell Baghdad? Â Did you tell the national investment commission? Â You canâ€™t just come tell us. Â We understand it, but youâ€™ve got to use your system to make it work.â€ Â So a lot of what the PRT did was provide a platform for people to come talk to us, to come talk to each otherâ€”a lot of times. Â We would bring the provincial investment commission in and bring in an investor, and we would kind of just moderate a conversation. Â That is the strength of the PRT. Â We didnâ€™t have a vested interest in who got the deal; we wanted to make sure it was done transparently, and for everybody, it was pretty fair.

Burdin Hickok

So really, what youâ€™re constructing there is, as we described at the beginning of the interview, a civil structure. Â I mean what youâ€™re putting up is a system by which things can be facilitated, but the things themselvesâ€”what it is youâ€™re building, what store youâ€™re opening, what firm youâ€™re beginning, what plant youâ€™re going to constructâ€”thatâ€™s not part of the strategy.

Burdin Hickok

No. Â No, thatâ€™s exactly right. Â We areâ€”

Interviewer

Itâ€™s procedural.

Burdin Hickok

Itâ€™sâ€”yeah, itâ€™s to build capacity. Â Itâ€™s to build the ability to do this same process over and over again on different content. Â Exactly right; thatâ€™s exactly right. Â And thatâ€™s hard. Â Itâ€™s time-consuming, itâ€™s frustrating. Â You got to keep them in the game. Â But we kept on getting more and more inquiries, so thereâ€™s always another opportunity to do it again. Â We set up aâ€”we worked with the governor to have the governor appoint a commission, a multiethnic commission, for a tourist commission that wanted to build a tourist village somewhere in Kirkuk. Â Whatâ€™s a tourist village?

A I don't know. A I don't care. A It's not the point. A They wanted to do this, and we went to the governor, saying, "We would suggest one way of accomplishing this is to create a multiethnic commission, including the relevant ministries that are going to be involved, and have them be the platform, the committee, to see and hear investors to do this." It's going to be investor-driven. A They're going to have to buy the land somehow; had to get title to the land somehow. A You need to have the DG of municipality there, because he's the one who may have the title to the land, or the DG of finance, who probably had the title to the land. A

Burdin Hickok

Eighty percent of the land in Iraq is owned by the ministry of finance. A The other is owned by ministry of agriculture. A So we essentially worked with the governor to explain to him you create these platforms to facilitate investment, to facilitate conflict resolution, to govern to govern. A And we met with him every other week, every Wednesday, and there was a PRT person there. A It was kind of really as an advisor; we were an advisor. A You're going off on the wrong track, here; let's try and stay here. A Don't need to get into the nitty-gritty. A It was extremely interesting at some of these meetings, when you hear the PC member or the minister, ministerial person, start getting into the real nitty-gritty details of something. A And we would stop them and say, "Whoa, stop, stop" not your job.

Burdin Hickok

You want to make sure that these big-picture things are done; the investor's got to worry about that. A "How do we know that the people working there could be paid enough?" A "Not your job." A "Where are the employees going to come?" A "Okay, we want to have them in Kirkuk." A "Okay, fine." A "Well, we want to make sure they're Sunni and Kurdish." A "No, no, no, no, no" not your job. A Let the investor, who has the risk, make those decisions, because he's got to make money. A We would have these conversations everyday, unending, all the time, with the same people. A This suitcase we have a question about"

Interviewer

Now tell me about "we have mentioned sheikhs a lot through this. A What is a sheikh? A And what is the variety of encounters you may have had with a sheikh?

Burdin Hickok

I think that the Army is trained in a counterinsurgency environment to go into a village and find the village elder, the village leaders, as the source of trying to manage and mitigate the violent extremists in that area. A In Iraq, they're sheikhs. A So they're the tribal leaders, the tribal elders. A Imams "there's the religious sheikh" they're the religious leaders.

Interviewer

How do you become a sheikh?

Burdin Hickok

Family "it's all family, through the generations. A There are probably "there are families there that have been there thousands of years. A Same family. A But there's only about, I don't know, is there a dozen families in all of Iraq?

Interviewer

And this is the—the sheikhs are the middle manager sort of power circle in Iraq.

Burdin Hickok

Middle to—non-governmental senior management. The Obaidi family, the Jabouri family—there are sheikhs within there, and they're looked to by the rest of the family for leadership, for protection in the olden days. You can hear the semblance and the leftover of the feudal societies, and I have a hard time kind of overstating that, because you have to have the mindset of a traditional society, a feudal society, when you're dealing with these people, when it's Iraqis. They're not stupid—don't get me wrong. They are not stupid. They're very stubborn, they're very smart, they're very capable of taking care of themselves, but they have traditional rivalries that just are in their face all the time; they can't seem to get past that, many times. That's a problem, and that's not a problem the United States government's going to ever solve. The best thing that can happen is if you can continue to have economic development, the rise of the middle class, over time, that allegiance to a sheikh or to a tribe may mitigate.

Interviewer

You may have had some of—being a political economist you may have had some of these ideas of how things might work in a society like this that you're trying to essentially reconstruct.

Burdin Hickok

Mm-hmm.

U.S. Military Presence & the Promise of Future Stability

Interviewer

It must've also been, though, that your experiences were filled with surprises, and sometimes, I imagine, you may have doubted whether it could work.

Burdin Hickok

Oh, I think it's pie-in-the-sky to think that ten years in Iraq is going to make a lasting change in the culture. Can ten years be enough time to create a lasting democracy? I don't know. You need to have that economic development to sustain the democracy, and that takes time. This is purely my opinion—after World War II, we didn't leave Germany right away. We have bases and we still have military presence in Germany. We still have military presence in Japan; we still have military presence in Korea. Somehow, we're not going to have to have military presence in Iraq: Why? How is Iraq different? If anything, Iraq is the same, if not—not worse, but the need for a military presence because of it's recognized as a neutral third party—at least in the north. And again, I'm talking about Kirkuk. I think that the value of a military presence, ongoing military presence—I'm not talking about huge. I'm talking about kind of what's there now, is a brigade headquarters and a couple of battalions.

Burdin Hickok

Now, obviously, that requires support. I don't know all the details about when you have a military presence, what minimum number that entails. It's probably 10,000. But

that's not 140,000, that's not 50,000—it's a really big different number. And we're not occupying a country. We're there invited. We're there because people want us to be there, and there is forward motion that can be continued that's going on now. As a for instance, the status of Kirkuk, the political status of Kirkuk is unresolved. There's an Article 140 that's in the constitution that's supposed to provide the resolution of it that has not been implemented, and everybody in Baghdad and in Arbil are dragging their feet on it. The reason they're dragging their feet, it goes back to what I said about the politicians using their political capital, wasting it on maintaining century-old positions.

Burdin Hickok

They've got to break that. Gosh, can a third party, a neutral third party, do that? Could a neutral third party be the catalyst to get them past that point and onto a process—not the resolution, but a process that everybody's agreed to, that will lead to a political and a mutually acceptable resolution, that can then be voted on as a confirmatory resolution, not a decisive resolution. And the difference is if you do a resolution today, 49% of the people will be violently opposed to the decision.

Burdin Hickok

If you have a political resolution that is agreed to over time that is abiding by all parties, now you have a confirmatory resolution, and everybody's agreeing to what's already there. Big difference, and the time in between is on Kirkuk's side, because now there's some predictability, and if there's predictability, now you can bring in investors. They don't necessarily have to have a resolution, but they have to believe that there's a political process ongoing that can lead to a resolution that all interests are protected. If you don't have that, capital's not going to go in there. Investors are not going to go in there. There are 38 approved bidders in the first round on the oil fields in Iraq. Thirty-eight IOCs, international oil companies, including national oil companies, like China and Korea, etc., that were approved to bid on oil fields in Iraq. And these are existing oil fields—to improve production on the existing oil fields and their service agreements. There's no risk here from the standpoint the oil's there.

Burdin Hickok

You go in there, you put money in, you're going to get all your money back, and you get paid per barrel as long as you do this production. The Kirkuk fields—the Kirkuk field and the Bai Hassan field in Kirkuk—were both part of that bid process. 38 companies—you know how many bid on the ones in Kirkuk? Two out of thirty-eight, and ConocoPhillips, which bid on it, bid way out—I mean the government was going to pay \$2 a barrel. ConocoPhillips bid something like 27. Why? Well, to make a point that it is, technically, a little bit more difficult to get oil out of Kirkuk. It's a super-giant field; it's a little bit more difficult.

Burdin Hickok

The Bai Hassan field's not as big, and it's better oil, but they're not going to go there because the situation's unclear—the political situation's unclear. Who's my contract with—Baghdad? Arbil? Kirkuk? Could it change? If I'm asking those questions, I'm not going in. Basra—no question. It's Iraq. It's the Iraq government. No question at all. So 38 of them bid down in Basra—36 bid down in Basra. The political uncertainty is a major deterrent to serious capital going into Kirkuk, which is, if you look at the potential for Kirkuk: oil, gas—it's got the only gas processing plant in the north. It feeds all the northern power companies. It's huge. They want to build a

refinery, oil refinery, in Kirkuk.

Burdin Hickok

They've got zero interest on the investors yet"this is a year and"two years ago, we talked about this; went to a conference on it.

Interviewer

Stability is the key, in other words.

Burdin Hickok

It's not stability. It's the predictable that it will stay stable. There's stability there now. They've had a change of government recently, a new governor, a new PC chair. It wasn't exactly agreed to by everybody, not everybody was happy, but nobody was shot and no war broke out. It happened. Now they have a new governor"which happens to be a U.S. citizen, by the way"Dr. Najmddin. He's actually a neurosurgeon in Bethesda, Maryland, who operated on Ronald Reagan. He's a Kirkuki, and he's now the governor of Kirkuk.

Interviewer

Tell me your impressions of the Army and its capabilities, just from your firsthand observation during your time in Iraq.

Burdin Hickok

My first impression"I walked into the middle of a desert. "I don't know exactly what period of time it took them, but they built a city in the middle of the desert. "The Army did.

Interviewer

A FOB, you're talking about.

Burdin Hickok

A FOB.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Burdin Hickok

It's got concrete walkways. "It's got a DFAC, which is a dining facility"or two. "It's got movie theaters. "It's got a stage. "It's got all the electricity is internal to the FOB, and so it's completely self-sufficient, and the grid powers maybe two or three hours or four hours a day in Iraq, and we have it 24 hours a day, nonstop, no questions. "I get air conditioners in my CHU, and when something's wrong, I get somebody to come and fix them. "Potable water, sewage"everything is self-contained, and it's a village, in the middle of the desert, that's popped up over"they couldn't have been there much more than six months before this was completely finished. "And"

Interviewer

What does that tell you about the Army, then? Â What is the message you take from that?

Burdin Hickok

The idea that, somehow, America is declining and weâ€™re not what we used to beâ€™ really? Â Go in the desert and see this. Â Itâ€™s impressive. Â It isâ€™ itâ€™s ever-changing. Â It is secure. Â Soldier rip in and out of there every year, and they come in and theyâ€™ve gotâ€™ theyâ€™re not in tents. Â Their housing situation is very, very comfortable. Â Theyâ€™re not wet CHUsâ€™ they donâ€™t have interior bathrooms, but theyâ€™ve got CHUs that are lines ofâ€™ the walkways that areâ€™

Interviewer

These are corrugated housing units, right? Â Yeah.

Burdin Hickok

Yeah. Â There are latrines, male and female, and showers, and lots of them, and theyâ€™re always there, and they always work. Â And thereâ€™s an army of people who provide the contract work of cleaning this stuff out, and soldiers arenâ€™t doing that. Â One thingâ€™ it, unfortunately, probably costs a lot of money, but it makes a lot of sense. Â The soldiers there are there to be soldiers, and they spend their time being soldiers. Â Theyâ€™re not cooks, theyâ€™re not maintenance men, theyâ€™re soldiersâ€™ tremendous health facility. Â The emergency medsâ€™ oh, my Godâ€™ I got sick as hell there one day. Â I mean just never been so sick in my life, trulyâ€™ a combination of food poisoning and massive dehydration. Â I couldnâ€™t even get out of bed; I was hallucinating. Â I got to the EMEDs, and this doctorâ€™ captainâ€™ looked at me and said, â€œYouâ€™re dehydrated.â€ Â And I said, â€œMy brainâ€™s going to explode.â€ Â I was dying. Â

Burdin Hickok

Fortunately, it was a quiet nightâ€™ there was no casualties in there, so I wasnâ€™t taking time from any of the soldiers who needed attention. Â There was nobody else in there. Â But the level of care I got was tremendous, and you know, they could handle a dozen emergency situations at once in that small containerized place. Â They had a helipad right there. Â So I am extremely impressedâ€™ extremely impressed. Â I was recognized as an expert at what I was doing, and the military recognized that what I was doing was going to make their life better and more secure. Â It may take longer.

Insurgency and Corruption in Iraq

Burdin Hickok

I go back to this money as a weapons system. The military understood that if everybody had a job in Iraq, would that stop the insurgency? It probably would stop the insurgency. Would that mean that no more bombs go off? No, thereâ€™ll be spectacular attacks, â€™ cause there are bad guys.

Burdin Hickok

You still have AQI and the other terroristsâ€™ the VEs, the violent extremistsâ€™ you still have those. But the reduction in violence would be enormous. The Army understands that. My job was to try and create better, and figure out an environment to put more people to work. That takes more time. In the meantime, the military can use money to opportunistically build

a school, build a road, make life—build a well to access for irrigation for the farmers that can perhaps put people to work very quickly. One of the jobs program we did—this is really a very good one. There—2,000 kilometers of canals in Kirkuk—comes off of the Little Zab River. They—re built by the Romans, the French, and the Iraqis. And these are for flood irrigation for the farmers. Over years of neglect, years of sanctions, years of whatever, the canals had these reeds in them; huge reeds that stopped the water flow.

Burdin Hickok

So what we did, we worked with the Army and created a program where the local military-age male would get paid to pull the reeds out of the canals. It was manual labor, it was very labor-intensive, and unfortunately, it was only for a short time—maybe a year worth of employment, but we could employ something like 8 or 900 people.

Burdin Hickok

That—great. Now, from a development standpoint, it—kind of good because you—re doing something, but there—no sustainability. After a year, what happens? They don—t get paid, what happens next? Valid point. But for that year, they—re not shooting at American soldiers. That—important. So the Army and the PRT get together, we do that program, and then the PRT goes, —All right, now we got to sustain this; how are we going to sustain it?— We go back to the minister of natural resources, minister of agriculture, and say, —We want you to hire 500 of these people, —cause you got to keep doing this every year. You can—t just do this—this is not a one-shot deal. You got to maintain it. We got to talk you into hiring these people.— So a lot of our time now is spent with talking to anywhere from the local minister to Baghdad, saying, —You need to hire these people permanently to do this.—

Interviewer

One of the things that you mentioned off-camera before that I—d just like to explore for a second is the how you learned insurgents are made in Iraq, with respect to the decision to disband the army and the de-Baathification of the country. Now, this is a common theme of critics of the war, but you saw it on a firsthand basis. Tell me what you saw.

Burdin Hickok

In the north—okay, so the routine is that you fire all your military, which, by the way, in Iraq, is a very prestigious job.

Interviewer

The routine—what do you mean by the routine is to fire them?

Burdin Hickok

I mean the story line—

Interviewer

Right, right, okay.

Burdin Hickok

The story line that Bremer came in—

Interviewer

Paul Bremer, the "all right.

Burdin Hickok

Paul Bremer "either he decided, Rumsfeld decided, or they all decided they're going to disband the army. I don't know if it was a million men or not, but it was a large number of soldiers.

Interviewer

The reasoning there being that without an army

Burdin Hickok

They're not a threat.

Interviewer

They're not a threat, right.

Burdin Hickok

Which is completely wrong, because now they go from a visible threat to insurgents.

Interviewer

A covert threat, right.

Burdin Hickok

Now it's an asymmetrical warrior fight. So you've got guys who used to get a pretty good paycheck regularly they go home, they can still get an AK-47, and they don't have a job, and no income, and lost their prestige. The

Interviewer

And now they have somebody paying them to

Burdin Hickok

So you got al-Qaeda, Naqshabandi, which is the Baathists, the radical Baathists that are still there, willing to shoot and kill Shias and Americans. They'll pay anybody \$70 who'll go put an IED in the road, an improvised explosive device, to blow up a car, blow up a truck, blow up an American.

Interviewer

Where's that money

Burdin Hickok

Seventy dollars. Seventy dollars to a Iraqi is easily the better part of a month's worth of living expenses. If you're a subsistence farmer, here you go a general in the army makes \$1,000 a month. A highly-paid, a mid-level government employee makes \$250-\$300 a month. A subsistence farmer probably lives off of under \$100 a

month under \$100 a month. A You can buy all the bread you can imagine for a day for a dollar. So now you got a al-Qaeda or Naqshabandi telling these people who are out of work, have no job and no prospects, we give you \$70 if you go put an IED in the road at night. And the next morning it's some U.S. convoy that goes by.

Interviewer

Where is that money coming from Iraq?

Burdin Hickok

Well, that's a very layered question answer. There is a great deal of oil smuggling in Iraq a great deal of oil smuggling. A lot of that money goes to the bad guys. Iran provides money none of it provided to Naqshabandi cause they're Sunni but they'll provide it to other violent extremists. There were early in the war, there was bad guys coming in from Syria. That was cut off pretty quickly. In Kirkuk, when there was this spectacular explosion, a VBIED that goes off which we had two or three of them while I was there. I mean big, 100 people killed in a market. The license plate on those cars came from Ninawa came from outside of Kirkuk. These have got to be Naqshabandi and al-Qaeda that set this up and bring it into Kirkuk, but they're getting money from oil smuggling is a big source. And unfortunately, the reality is there's a lot of corruption on U.S. contracts; a lot of corruption on U.S. now, we say there's a lot of corruption part of the culture of a sheikh is to provide for his village, for his family, and however they can do that is okay by the recipients.

Burdin Hickok

So even if there's a sheikh that we're doing business with as a contractor, them taking 20-30% off the top isn't corruption when they do business in Iraq, from their perspective. When SIGIR comes through which is the inspector I don't know what the S has to be inspector general Iraq reconstruction. I don't know what the S stands, I can't remember what the S is. When he comes through

Interviewer

S-I-G-I-R.

Burdin Hickok

Yes, and when he comes through and looks at some of these issues, to them, it's corruption. These guys are shooting at us. He can stop, this sheikh can stop 30 guys from shooting at us, and we'll build a road through his village. And you put all these people to work, and they'll stop shooting at us. Well, he took 30%. These guys aren't shooting at us anymore. This is Iraq it's not New York, it's not Kansas. It's not condoning anything. It's the reality of Iraq. We have U.S. soldiers at risk.

A Visit from the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

Interviewer

Tell me about you had a visit from Under Secretary of Defense

Burdin Hickok

Yeah.

Interviewer

Flournoy. Tell me about thatâ€”Michelle Flournoy.

Burdin Hickok

Weâ€™re a very operational unit, the PRT, the econ section is. We go out and we do things. One of the things we were doing, recognizing the need for revitalizing the agriculture infrastructure in Iraqâ€”they have strategic silos that have been depreciated, destroyed, looted, whatever. They werenâ€™t working.

Burdin Hickok

But theyâ€™re critical to the value chain of agriculture. You got the farmer growing his crop. Heâ€™s got to take it to market. The market in Iraq is a subsidized market by the government, but you canâ€™t get paid unless you deliver it to the silo. So by fixingâ€”this is this driver of instability issue: I want to touch as many farmers as I can. As an economic development person, I want to touch as many farmers as I possibly can. I would love to be able to go out and import better seed, â€™cause I donâ€™t have to change anything they do; I give them better seed, they get better yield, they get paid more, they get a better life. Thatâ€™s great. Thatâ€™s a home run. Canâ€™t import seedâ€”Iraq government wonâ€™t let you. Canâ€™t do that.

Interviewer

Why?

Burdin Hickok

Their regulationsâ€”it has to beâ€”

Interviewer

Whatâ€™s the spirit of the regulation?

Burdin Hickok

It has to be, preventâ€”whatâ€™s it calledâ€”the genetically engineered seed from coming in; prevent any other diseases from coming in. They have a process where an experimental seed has to be tested on an experimental farm by the government for two years. It has to be registered and then approved as an acceptable seed, and itâ€™s a two to three-year process for a new seed. The seed that they have in-country is three, four, five, ten generations old, so the yield is much lower.

Burdin Hickok

Got to go to the silo, and the silo, the market is only open for two weeks during the season. So you got to get your truck rented, loaded up, into the silo, dumped off, within two weeks, or you donâ€™t get paid, which means you got to dump it off on the market, and if everybody does that, the market price drops. And by the way, the governmentâ€™s paying at least 50% over the marketâ€”maybe twice the market. Â So thereâ€™s a big incentive for a farmer to get thereâ€”oh, think about the corruption. â€œHey, you want to get at the top of the line? How much is it worth to you?â€ Oh, itâ€™s getting close to the endâ€”got to get your truck in lineâ€”can only go so fast.

Burdin Hickok

By bringing in new seed I can improve the yield tremendously, and I'm not trying to teach them how to do anything differently. I'm not trying to put a rocket ship in the middle of their farm. All I'm doing is saying, "Let's use this seed instead of that seed, and you're going to make more money." "Okay." They could do that, but we couldn't do that. So let's facilitate their access to the market; let's try and improve their irrigation, let's improve their access to the market. This silo's busted. It's a Soviet-built silo in the '70s. It was originally rated at 50 metric tons a year, a day, an hour—I'm sorry, 50 metric tons an hour. It was down to ten. The lines to get into the silo were costing the farmers money. It was unreal. I got to back up on this, but you have trucks that are rented.

Burdin Hickok

So recognizing the need to improve the infrastructure, we went in, with the Iraqis, first of all—"this is so"—Kirkuk is a livestock and a grain province. The livestock, there wasn't enough grain to feed the livestock. The livestock was on the verge of having a mass sale, early sale into the market. We wanted to stop that, so we imported barley, which we could do because it was feed, it wasn't seed.

Burdin Hickok

So we used Iraqi certain money—"2 million"—to buy \$2 million worth of seed—"of feed, barley feed for livestock, which you can touch about a quarter of the livestock for six weeks, which is enough to get them to breeding time, which is what the critical time was. " The ministry, ag ministry, sold the feed at half price to as many farmers as took it, so they made a million dollars, and we're like, "Ah, that money is kind of yours. We want you to develop, to fix your silo. You need to fix the silo." We worked with the DG of trade, which was the manager of the silos, and we had them do the scope of work. We had them do the bid process.

Burdin Hickok

We oversaw everything, but most importantly, we put that money into an account that we had eyes on, so the money couldn't leave unless we saw it leave. We had no sign-out authority, anything like that, but we saw the statements. We knew if the money was there or not. This was a million-dollar renovation of this facility. It was—"we got it up to 100 metric tons an hour, which means he could do the entire harvesting time to prevent spoilage. It was a one-year project to do the renovation, but it was done by the Iraqis. " All we did was we were the advisors.

Burdin Hickok

We met with this guy once a week, and we went there and looked at what they were doing. Every time there's a payment, we went and did the QA/QC on it—"the quality check and assurance"—to make sure it was done according to the scope of work. But the Iraqis were doing it—"it was an Iraqi contractor, Iraqi manager, Iraqi engineers. All we did was say, "You got to fix the scope of work so that everybody's on the same page." Truly a complete success—"every penny was accounted for. It had the improvement to 100 metric tons an hour and they were up and running 1 year after they started. Legitimate—"every way you look at it, it was a complete success.

Burdin Hickok

And in a way, it was U.S. dollars at the very beginning, but we were able to leverage it to do so much more than just the initial outlay, because of the way that we'd structured it.

“So this thing’s almost done” we have a PRT meeting at the division in Tikrit, and I’m there, the PRT team leader, and a various number of us are there. And they get a phone call from Baghdad that Under Secretary Fournoy, Under Secretary of Policy for Defense, wanted to see something up in “wanted to come north and see what we were doing in the north.

Burdin Hickok

Well, this brigadier general felt very concerned that we had to show her something, and there are four PRTs there, asked each, all the PRTs, “Give us your idea. What do you want to do? Tell us what we can show off.” And I really wasn’t paying attention, and he came up to me and tell the team leader and I what was going on, and I’m like, “Um, well, we could show them the silo” the silo is something. You know, it’s kind of bricks-and-mortar. You can show it to them.” I didn’t really think much of it.

Burdin Hickok

About five minutes later, in the middle of the conference, the brigadier comes back to the team leader and I and our whole PRT team representatives there and said, “I’ve got a helicopter waiting for you. You can be gone in 15 minutes. Fournoy’s coming to you tomorrow.” And we’re like, “Uh, okay.” So, literally, we dropped everything in the conference. We run to the helicopters. I had locked my key “I had the wrong key. I locked all my crap in my room, and I had to get another key to get into the room to get my crap. So three guys go to helicopters to hold the helicopters” these are the brigadier’s helicopters “to hold the helicopters while I get my stuff out of my room that was locked in there. So I’m running around the base. I got my stuff, I run back to the helicopter; we fly back to PRT Kirkuk, FOB Warrior.”

Burdin Hickok

I get back there, and my senior ag advisor literally came back out of R&R that day. Well, he’s sound asleep; the jet lag is brutal. Sixteen hours in three days of being awake, and all you want to do is sleep for two days. So I knock on his door and tell him, “You’re going to have a show tomorrow. We have a dog-and-pony show tomorrow. Under Secretary of Defense of Policy is going to come up, and we’re going to go to the silo. You need to come” we’re going to sketch this out, soup to nuts, right now.” So that night in the team leader’s office with the brigade commander, we sat down and figured out how best to do the logistics to get Fournoy there, get her out, and give her a good presentation, and show her what we’ve been doing. This would entail “so the silo is 20 minutes, 15 minutes outside of Gate 3, by land vehicles, and, you know, a nanosecond by helicopter, and it’s a big, big area.

Burdin Hickok

So we decided the best thing to do is just bring the helicopters into the silo, directly from Tikrit, so that the Under Secretary can just land right there, get out. We do an inspection of the silo, do a presentation, talk about it, and she gets on and she’s back in Tikrit and back in Baghdad that day. Everybody agrees that’s the best way to do it, so now we got to wake up the administrator of trade and say, “We’re coming tomorrow. This is who we’re going to bring. This is a big deal. Make sure everybody’s there that needs to be there to talk about it.” “No problem.” He worked with us.

Burdin Hickok

This was a home run for him, so he was more than happy to work with us, and the original

thought was that itâ€™d land right across the street in a field. A So that morning, we had all theseâ€”oh, God, it mustâ€™ve been a dozen MRAPsâ€”secure on the field, before the helicopters come in. Now, we get there, and Iâ€™m with the brigade commander, and he looks at it and says, â€œYou know, we could land right here on the parking lot. We donâ€™t need to land across the street. Thereâ€™s plenty enough room for two Blackhawks to come in here.â€ So in the air, we tell the pilots that youâ€™re not landing where you thought you were; youâ€™re landing right in the silo itself. More secure, itâ€™s a big wall all the way around itâ€”it actually makes a lot of sense.

Burdin Hickok

And so she comes in andâ€”talk about an entourageâ€”she lands with General Jacoby, which was the Corps commander at the time, whoâ€™s number two to Petraeusâ€”Petraeus, Petraeus, who do you know, Petraeus. And he was the Corps commander, â€™cause he was a two-starâ€”three-star. Cucolo comes in, whoâ€™s two-star of the 3rd ID, from Tikrit; Flournoy comes in; Donahue which is a brigadier general, is there, and some other State Department folk. And itâ€™s myself and the team leader and my ag advisorâ€”we give her a tour of the entire building. We spend the entire day there. We take off all of our IBA, and we go up 12 flights of very steep steps to show all the pieces that are being done of whatâ€™s being done, all the detail.

Burdin Hickok

And to be perfectly honest, it was a very good show, because we tried explaining to her why weâ€™re doing this, why this is important, why we want toâ€”how this can affect drivers of instability in Kirkuk. Youâ€™re chipping away at something, but this is a big chip. This is a big infrastructure. We didnâ€™t build itâ€”thatâ€™s the other approach and the genius. Â It was not my idea to do this; this was the senior ag advisorâ€™s idea to do this. But the genius is that youâ€™re not building the building; youâ€™re not building the building thatâ€™s got to be staffed and be trained how to run. Itâ€™s an existing infrastructure thatâ€™d beat out, so our dollars are so much more effectively used that way. We donâ€™t have to worry about training and accepting and maintenanceâ€”they got it in place. Weâ€™re just going to help them renovate their asset. That wasâ€”quite honestly, that was a home run, any way you look at it, and she was very visibly impressed and pleased.

Burdin Hickok

And this was all Army-PRT working together; weâ€™re all on the same page. She couldnâ€™t get thereâ€”she had to use DOD; it was Army helicopters. It was Army that got us out there to see it. Â It was Army that let us go there and do the checkup to make sure it was being done correctly. It was the Army that made sure the area was secure. So itâ€™sâ€”I really do believe that this combination, this partnership, the way that it was done in Kirkuk, is, no question, in the next eventâ€”which there will be.

Burdin Hickok

There will be another war somewhere, or conflict, or regime change, where you need to have all hands in that country to rebuild the country. This is how itâ€™s going to be done, and itâ€™s going to be done with the Army and with the civilians. Itâ€™s changing now because of success; the militaryâ€™s leaving. The civilian presence is going to be a consulate. Itâ€™s not going to be the operational entity that it was when I was there; itâ€™s not going to be the same thing. Itâ€™s going to be more like a State Department branch office, essentially. Thatâ€™s different.

Burdin Hickok

One thing I have to give the State Department and the government, you know, a pat on the back for, is they recognize that the needs—the skills they needed in Iraq at that time to help secure the country, to help build the country, were skills the State Department did not have, and skills the Army doesn't have. They know something about civil affairs—yeah, no question about it. But the level of what we were involved with, the State Department doesn't have those skills, the Army doesn't have those skills, but you need those skills to get it done. And that's why the 3161s and the civilian professionals that came in out of the private sector really provided a force multiplier to our efforts there.

Interviewer

Terrific. Thank you very much.

From a Window: A Firsthand Account of the WTC Attacks

Burdin Hickok

Burdin, one of the things we ask everyone who appears in the archive is where they were on 9/11. Where you were on the day that the World Trade Center was attacked, and the Pentagon attacked—and I'd like to hear your story, too. Burdin Hickok:

Post 9/11 Reflections

Burdin Hickok

Did you reflect at all, when you were in Iraq—of course, this is a controversy about the war in Iraq anyway, but certainly, there was a chain of events, progressively, forward from 9/11 to the invasion of Iraq, though there may not have been the antecedent there that the Bush administration sometimes obliquely referenced. But did you ever reflect when you were there that there was some connection between what you saw out of the window, in terms of American foreign policy, at any rate?

Burdin Hickok