

RAY JENNINGS
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CHARLES FERGUSON: All right. Tell us your name.

RAY JENNINGS: Ray Jennings.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And tell us what you did in Iraq.

RAY JENNINGS: Right. Went to Iraq in May of 2003. From May of 2003 until August of 2003, I worked for International Relief and Development, which is an American NGO. And at that time, we were doing community-based development, primarily in Baghdad. Community-based development being small-scale infrastructure projects that are done in such a way that we are involving the communities in the process of deciding what needs to get done.

Now after that, I worked for the United States Agency for International Development as a consultant. And then, later on, I became [a] country director for the United States Institute of Peace, and in that position until September 2004.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So you were in, you lived in Iraq for, what, 18 months, something like that.

RAY JENNINGS: On and off.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yeah.

RAY JENNINGS: Mainly for about 12 months.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. Tell us what you saw.

RAY JENNINGS: Well, I mean, that's a very broad question. It changed, as it, as it is these days, you'll see...

CHARLES FERGUSON: When you arrived.

RAY JENNINGS: Well, when, when we arrived, in May, frankly, from May to August were the best days to be in Iraq, primarily because we lived in the neighborhoods. We had contact with Iraqis who were trying to understand what had just happened. We had relationships with local grocers, local

restaurant managers, waiters, barbers. We were part of the communities we were working in. Which, to be honest, when you do this kind of work, especially community development work, that's the only way to do it. Uh, it's the only way you can have a chance of success in doing that kind of work.

By August of 2003, the organization that I work[ed] for, and the subsequent organizations I worked for, adopted a much harder profile. They hardened up their presence, their footprint, as we call it, moving into the Green Zone, in many cases. And from that point on, our contact with Iraqis, our informal contacts, which are vital, uh, they dried up.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What were your first impressions of Baghdad yourself, when you got there?

RAY JENNINGS: Well, Baghdad, as many people may not understand, uh, or, or see Baghdad, or comprehend Baghdad in this way, Baghdad's a huge city. In terms of the population distribution in Iraq, that's where, you know, f-, uh, most of the population in Iraq is concentrated. And Baghdad is a, is a, a multisectarian community. Uh, it's interesting in that right in the heart of this city you have the palace grounds. And these, uh, these grounds, this territory right within the heart of the city, during Saddam Hussein's time was considered off limits. People didn't really want to actually ever have to go into these palace grounds.

And I have a story, uh, of a driver that I [had] developed a relationship with who, whenever we drove past the palace grounds, would never even look in the direction of the palace. And when asked why, when we would enter the palace grounds, which, which became later the Green Zone, why he was shaking when we would enter the Green Zone, he would say, well, nobody ever left these grounds when they came in. We never saw people who would come in here come out again.

And that was instructive in that here, in the very heart of this city, many of the roads of this city were, circumnavigated the Green Zone, was this heart of darkness. So Baghdad was, in many respects, a city that up until that point, had this dark heart that people, common people who lived in Baghdad were very afraid of; [had] significant fear of it.

So in addition to the city being huge, you had this, this phenomenon of people being wary in their own city of this, this center area that, uh, represented something that they, uh, rather not think about, and [had] certainly become too familiar with.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. And I remember the first time I spoke with you, which was when I talked to you during the Kerry campaign, you said then that one of the first things that you saw that struck you was that there were weapons everywhere, and that in every bazaar, you could outfit a small army with what you could buy there. Tell us about that.

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah. Uh, uh, that's quite true. Uh, and in fact, at that time you probably had, uh, many, uh, uh, organizations that would later become micromilitias do just that. Um, because of the looting; because of perhaps lack of anticipation; the arms would be easy to come by by, by Western military forces, these were, uh, freely available. And this was AK s-, it was, uh, RPGs — rocket propelled grenades — there was, uh, grenades were, were a favorite, um, of especially youth, who would buy them and then use them f-, in the course of their, their play; um, dropping 'em off buildings was, was something they took great amusement in. Um...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Dropping grenades off buildings?

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, off the sides of buildings. Uh, from the roofs. Um, and this was, uh, you have to understand [in this], at the time of the, the disorder that was present in the city, this was not very, uh...uh, it didn't raise too many eyebrows. Because at this time, uh, you have to remember; the looting had just happened, in early May, throughout the month of May. When you had, uh, looting continue on one scale or another. Many of these weapons were actually s-, procured through looting. Uh, there are many stories, uh, several significant stories of arsenals that were looted while, while, uh, Western forces did look on, um, because it was not part of their mandate to control this. And so many of these arms did come through these, uh, these venues, and found their way to the market, where they could be, where they could be sold to provide liquidity for the people who had, who had procured them, and now had sold them, perhaps resold them.

So the place was awash in weapons, and in many ways, uh, it's not too unusual; many post-conflict environments, you'll see the same thing, and it's primarily because of a lack of, of security that many people did just that. If they didn't already have a weapon, they certainly bought one. If they already had a weapon, and could afford it, they'd buy another. And personal security was high on people's agenda in Baghdad in, in May 2003.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. Did you carry a weapon yourself?

RAY JENNINGS: I did not.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Did you have bodyguards?

RAY JENNINGS: I...when I left the Green Zone, after we had relocated into the Green Zone, did travel in what we call a package. And that would be with individuals who would follow us in a chase car, and they were armed. But they weren't in the same car as we were.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm.

RAY JENNINGS: Now, different organizations handled security in different ways. Um, when I was working for this nonprofit, in the, uh, for the duration of the summer of 2003, we didn't have, uh, people with guns following us. Uh, we worked in communities, in much the same way, and acted the same way, as people we were working with.

Security was a little bit different then. Uh, by August, uh, the heat had increased to the, uh, or the, the, the level of danger had increased, uh, to the point where even that organization did have armed guards travel with it. But once we relocated into the Green Zone, um, the most dangerous part of doing our work was getting in and out of the Green Zone. And then once we were out, it was easy, coming out of the gates, to be tracked wherever you went, so anybody who wanted to know who you were and what you were doing could easily follow your movement after you left the gates of the Green Zone.

And uh, for those reasons, and many others, uh, we had a chase car, uh, with armed personnel.

Some organizations decided to go the next step, which is have armored cars. We chose to use normal, what we call soft-skin vehicles, which are the same as any Iraqi would drive, only to have two cars in tandem.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. And tell us about Iraqi reconstruction. What did you see? What did you think of it?

RAY JENNINGS: Anything more in particular about that? There's several different types of reconstruction that went on.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Yeah. Yeah. It's a big subject, I know. Start anywhere.

RAY JENNINGS: Well, reconstruction proceeded on a number of different fronts, um, and using a variety of different methodologies. There was large-scale, centralized reconstruction projects which took place. Many of those have had such a high profile, you've heard quite a bit about them in the U.S. press, and these are projects that, uh, looked to repairing electrical generation systems; the electrical grid; uh, water filtration systems; uh, restoring the marshlands was something akin to that as well.

But that was kind of the large-scale, high-profile, uh, types of reconstruction — big-ticket — that uh, w-, was often envisioned by, you know, some of the post-conflict planners as being the most important kinds of reconstruction to undertake.

Below the radar, and what you didn't hear often, were other kinds of reconstruction projects, which were the kinds that I engaged in, and, and several other organizations. And these were community action projects, or smaller-scale projects, which were only a fraction of the money being spent on some of the larger projects, but uh, were being done around the country in smaller towns, neighborhoods, and in smaller villages.

And these were projects that were often, [well they] often entailed building a schoolhouse, or a clinic, or a small section of the wastewater system, or a water filtration system on a neighborhood basis, or a small-village basis, not for a large population center like Baghdad, for example. And these were in the range of s-, 30,000 to 150,000 dollars.

But the methodology was somewhat different, because to do those kinds of projects, there was a process attached to it, which entailed getting communities on board to identify what they wanted to do; and then find a contractor to do that work; make sure there was accountability for that contractor; make

sure that the work that the contractor did was transparent; and then to do the project. So there was a lotta leadup time, and then the project time. It took a little bit longer. But uh, you know, our experience was that they were ultimately more successful, because these were outcomes that, uh, were relatively sustainable.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay. So your own experience was good with how things went, how things worked.

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, good in the sense that my early experience was very affirming in that, uh, the Iraqis we worked with are spectacular people. And bad in the sense that after we removed ourselves from the communities and from the people we were there to, to work with, the job of reconstruction became much more difficult. And the, and I would argue that, uh, some of our lack of accelerated success that, that we had expectations for are due to the fact that we had to withdraw, and were constrained by that distance.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Ah, okay. So your point here is that when the security situation forced you to stop moving around Iraq as freely, that led to a diminution in your effectiveness.

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, it led to a diminishing of effectiveness for not only the large-scale projects, but certainly the smaller-scale projects I just referred to. The large-scale projects suffered because the cost of security went up; the ability to get out to project sites, if you were an engineer, was constrained; and certainly, doing these smaller-scale projects is absolutely more difficult to freely interact with these, with these towns and villages, and these councils had been, uh, either self-appointed or elected, which we wanted to interact with. Very hard to do so, [and that], and I say that; nn-, a-, and what I mean is, it was difficult for them. They were at personal risk to participate in these kinds of projects. And also the people from my team were at risk in doing these kinds of projects as well.

So in order to continue to do them, we had to slow down the process, and be far more imaginative about how to get the job done.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. And what did you think of the effects of the American presence when you were there? Did you see it? You must have seen it. And did you have an opinion? Did you have a reaction?

RAY JENNINGS: Well, the American presence was multifaceted. You had everything from American nonprofits, which were relatively autonomous in the way they went about their business; to for-profit firms, which were far, uh, [they're there] to link to their donor, uh, which was usually the United States Agency for International Development, was far more developed. And you had the State Department, which would eventually create the largest presence, uh, [in any country] within Iraq. Uh, [foreign] embassy presence. And you also had the U.S. military.

So the U.S. presence there had all kinds of faces. Um, I was part of the U.S. presence, by being there, in any one of those guises. It's hard to, to characterize the U.S. presence across those different, uh, characterizations in any one way.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm.

RAY JENNINGS: Each one of those presence, each one of those mi-, micro, uh, presences, if you will, had its different impact, and was regarded differently, often, by Iraqis.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, tell us about that. Start with one. Start with, you know, the one you knew best, say, which I assume would be the NGOs.

RAY JENNINGS: During the time I worked for NGOs, one of the way that NGOs enhanced their security and their ability to do their work was by making sure they were meeting security needs. [So that] they had had regular, ongoing discussions with communities about what they wanted in their future.

And that tended to do a number of things; probably most importantly, enlist Iraqis who lived in these neighborhoods to help ensure the security of these organizations on the ground, because they had a vested interest in seeing these organizations continue their work. And that's pretty vital. And many NGOs, [I mean] to this day, continue to use that method to help shore up their security profile: basically

being part of a community, and making sure the community is looking out for you in the same way you're looking out for them on the projects you do.

Now that is a very different, uh, sensibility than what most Iraqis harbored toward U.S. military, whose, uh, objectives were not always developmental. Uh, and, and certainly their objectives were more focused on providing security, gathering intelligence; and the kind of actions undertaken to promote those kinds of interests are often different than development groups, which were trying to figure out, with communities, what could improve their living conditions, and perhaps address, you know, the impoverishment that had certainly, uh, that had certainly developed, uh, over the last 10 years prior to the war.

CHARLES FERGUSON: So the Iraq that you saw was a poor country?

RAY JENNINGS: Many parts of Iraq were, were impoverished. And since the first Gulf war, uh, for example, the level of maintenance of basic infrastructure had, uh, really gone down. So you had bridges, you had, uh, transport infrastructure, water infrastructure, wastewater, uh, treatment; these kinds of systems required constant maintenance to work effectively. Uh, very little was done in the last 10 years, since '91, in Iraq.

So you had, when we arrived in Iraq, not only the results of the looting that we had to contend with; which was, uh, far greater than any of the direct impacts from the war. But you also had this, this problem of working on systems that remained intact throughout the looting, uh, of a lack of maintenance, basic maintenance. So working on wastewater projects, you quickly discovered that, uh, your pumps, all the pumps had to be completely, uh, completely replaced. Uh, the basic piping, the, uh, that, uh, water and wastewater, uh, f-, uh, systems utilized had to be completely replaced, which turned what originally looked like a small job, when [we] would get into it, into much larger jobs than we anticipated.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. And what did you think of the way AID handled itself?

RAY JENNINGS: Well, I mean, USAID, as in many of the places that it works, um, had a tremendous challenge to operationalize itself quickly. And USAID, uh, more so than many of its

implementing organizations — the organizations it gives money to to do these projects — had, uh, very restrictive security, uh, constraints upon it. And that made it quite difficult for USAID personnel to get out on their own, and look at the projects that are underway; uh, build refinements into the directives they were giving their implementing partners. Um, they, they gamely, uh, did as best they could under these constraints, but I think you'd find, in talking to many USAID people who were there, that over time, it became increasingly harder for USAID personnel to get out to the project sites, uh, that they were funding.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And this was because of the real security situation, or because of restraints placed upon them by the State Department, or both?

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, a little of both. Clearly, there were security hazards. Uh, there is always a debate, when you're on the ground, and you work for a government agency, about whether your security folks are being too conservative. But uh, of all the places I've been, in, in Iraq, it was hard to know whether security folks were being too conservative, or whether the threat was really there, frankly, because, uh, it was hard to know without going out enough, and assessing it yourself.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. And you'd been in other rough places before?

RAY JENNINGS: I've been in post-conflict venues since 1993. Bosnia...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Where else?

RAY JENNINGS: ...and Sierra Leone...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Oh.

RAY JENNINGS: ...Kosovo, um, Afghanistan. Um...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Those are rough places.

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, many of them. Although Iraq had its own special features, in some ways. In that we can't really say Iraq was post-conflict, for example. I mean, Iraq was an environment where we were working in a conflict zone. Uh, especially after August 2003. So all the methodologies, and everything, many of the lessons that we learned by working in post-conflict environments; not all of them were applicable in Iraq, because here you're working in, in a hot zone, in a conflict environment.

And that, and that's different. That means that much of the work that you may have done in other places — Afghanistan included — that was very in-, in-, intensively participatory; you can't do as easily there. So you, when you build earlier programs around these kinds of principles, and you realize you can't do that in Iraq, yet you know you want to do those kinds of projects, all kinds of short circuits beg[a]n to be built into the kinds of programs you do. And then it's, uh, then it's kind of a creative process of seeing what works and what doesn't, because very few venues have ever been like Iraq is.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. Okay. And during the time that you were there, after the initial period where things were okay, and then they got worse; so starting in, let's say, late 2003, from late 2003 to the time that you left, what would you say about the effectiveness of your own work; of the work of the organizations you worked for; of the reconstruction efforts that you saw or could assess?

RAY JENNINGS: Well I mean, I have to tell you that the more time I spend with Iraqis, even today — you know, I still work on Iraq issues, but from the States — the more time I, I spend with Iraqis, which is unfortunately, uh, less than I would like, I am very optimistic about Iraq. The more time I spend with Iraq experts in Washington, the, the more pessimistic I am. And I'm glad it's not the other way around. But the Iraqis, who have the most to lose, and you have the most to gain by throwing themselves into projects to develop the future of their own country, are quite optimistic about what can, what the country can become.

Now part of that difference is, I think, because of a difference in time frame. Um, and this is across the board in most of reconstruction, reconstruction projects I've ev-, ever been involved in. I mean, the United States has ab-, a little bit of a attention deficit disorder when it comes to staying the course as long as it takes to complete a reconstruction program. I mean, in, in, in minimum, depending on what you want to accomplish, 10 years is required to stay engaged in some fashion to either support civil society groups, to support media; to support an agenda of democratization, most certainly. But even on reconstruction task, and for a country like Iraq, where maintenance and looting have set the reconstruction project back far, far further back than it was, we anticipated it to be when we first

engaged, uh, it's, and, and to be engaged for a decade is, is probably a, uh, a little bit conservative. I would say, uh, maybe even more.

But let's assume 10 years. Most of the people that we engage in, uh, that I get to see these days occasionally, are thinking of Iraq's future in terms of a generation. And that makes a difference. These are f-, folks who see Iraq getting worse before it gets better. But it's going to get better. And if you talk to them about it, and you ask them, well, how can you think that? Look at the security situation. Their response typically is, more and more people are buying into rules, if you will; that there's a rule of conduct; there's a rule for decision-making; there are new rules emerging for give-and-take on asset allocation. There are more groups than ever arguing for a point of view than you could, would have ever seen in the vacuum of Baathist politics. And maybe disorderly. [It] may be anarchic. But in actuality, they say, look; this is such an improvement over what came before that in a generation, we can pull this off.

And listening to these very articulate and hopeful people, it's, uh, I find it rather affirming, and recharging for my own work.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And are these people still in Iraq?

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, they are, thankfully. Uh, many of their colleagues, some of their colleagues, because of the security situation, have left. But the people I'm speaking of are people who are choosing to remain in Iraq; in Iraqi think tanks; in Iraqi universities; in Iraqi civic organizations; in, uh, in, in organizations that are, are promoting human rights. Uh, eh, you know, remarkably, these are groups that have learned, in a very short span of time, on occasion to advocate their interests, to form coalitions; like a recent coalition, for example, that impressed upon, uh, the transitional government to pass a resolution to have municipal elections. Like a coalition of women's groups that joined to ensure that women's percentage of participation in a new parliament, uh, would be 25 percent. That's pretty significant, for a country that up until the war, had a complete vacuum of any kind of activity that remotely resembled that.

Uh, so that's, that's hopeful; that's, that's optimistic. Whether or not, in the coming years, uh, this worsening and then coming out of this, eh, of this decr-, of this worsening security environment will support that is anybody's guess. But if you take the lead of Iraqis, uh, they think that indeed, they'll only get stronger.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And what happens when you talk to the American policy community about your observations in this regard, and you tell them, you know, the Iraqis I speak to are optimistic? What do they say?

RAY JENNINGS: Well, most of my colleagues who have regular interaction with these kinds of Iraqis agree. They hear the same thing.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. But you said the American policy community is pessimistic.

RAY JENNINGS: Many of those who look at success in Iraq as being tied to a democratic agenda and stability within five years are pessimistic.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Ah. Within five years. So...

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, which ge-, uh, it gets to my earlier point, which is this idea that our time frame for reconstruction is often far shorter than it needs to be, in terms of the kind of commitments we need to make. So whereas earl[ier] I was saying, we often don't stay the decade that's required to do reconstruction right, our time frame for success in Iraq is far shorter than it needs to be for us to feel optimistic about an outcome.

CHARLES FERGUSON: And is the American military presence now, as of, you know, 2006; is the American military presence good or bad for reconstruction efforts?

RAY JENNINGS: Ah-ah, I think it's too simplistic to say it's either good or bad. Um...the military on the ground, um, is on a very steep learning curve. Uh, there are a number of things happening now which, which, uh, are interesting, let's say. The y-, the military is taking on more of the reconstruction effort, because they're amongst the, the few organizations that can still navigate in many of the places where reconstruction projects are still ongoing. Many of the firms, like the NGOs I spoke

of earlier; many of the contracting firms; have either downsized or departed Iraq. So that leaves the U.S. military on the ground, which can continue many of these reconstruction projects.

In, in June of two thousand and, and six, there'll be a, a deployment of, of what have been called PRTs; Provincial Reconstruction Teams. It's a templating of a model that worked in Afghanistan, or was used in Afghanistan. There's some debate whether or not it's appropriate for Iraq, but regardless of that debate, this kind of templating of these Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which are essentially compounds, uh, that will be scattered around Iraq, composed of State Department personnel, aid personnel, military personnel, and likely implementer personnel, which could be NGOs or firms, or, and, and other USG personnel, all will be centered and working together on a coordinated set of projects.

Now there's some debate whether or not that's wise for Iraq. But what you'll see then is that future reconstruction projects in the country will be driven out of this kind of presence, where the military is very much involved in the decisions that get made about the kind of projects that get done.

So while the military can provide the security for projects to continue, there's some concern that because the military's interest is stability, force protection, intelligence gathering, overall, that that may conflict at time with a development agenda.

So if you have 80 personnel co-located with the military, to do projects as it sees as, uh, priorities and as important, then the trick becomes, as this, this new era in the reconstruction of Iraq unfolds, to make sure that there's a not only coordination, but some kind of mutual understanding between those two sets of priorities. And that means that, you know, the U.S. military can either be a positive force in providing protection for these kinds of, of projects to take place; or it can be a negative influence, in keeping good developmental impact from occurring, because of the primacy of what it sees as its own interest on the ground.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well, okay. What would you say about the military's effects, both good and bad, up to this point, or at this point?

RAY JENNINGS: Well, I mean good and bad, th-, uh, you can say that the military, uh, has provided a central security for the projects that, many of the projects that have occurred to occur. Uh, on the bad side, I'm also involved in, in some other work that I do in training the military to be...a little bit more understanding about the cultures that it engages in; to understand what peace operations are about, and engaging with local populations. And I think that the military is on a particularly steep learning curve in Iraq, um, when it comes to community interaction and the way that it interacts, regards, and brings Iraqis into the work that it, that the military does on the ground. Local commanders, by the way, have been very involved in the reconstruction effort. They have had more funds at their disposal in Iraq than they've ever had in any kind of peace operations venue that they've ever been involved in.

So it's necessary, and you would argue that they have to engage with Iraqis to do this kind of work. They've never been trained in that regard. They may, they have been very earnest, and made some very serious attempts to be good at that, and there have been stellar examples of how the military has, on occasion, done it. But by and large, the military has a very difficult time doing it.

So in terms of military's impact up to now, there have been s-, some serious mistakes that the military has made in doing its own reconstruction, despite its great intentions in doing some of the work it has. The military has done very good work. But uh, also in its community engagement policies, and the way that it's trying to promote security, um, it has often alienated communities in such a way that no matter how many projects you do, you're not gonna win hearts and minds, and you're not gonna bring people on board with your priorities of intelligence gathering or stabilization of communities. You're going to engender ill will.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. Is there anything in particular that you would note in that regard; in regard to military behavior?

RAY JENNINGS: In which regard?

CHARLES FERGUSON: That has caused problems.

RAY JENNINGS: Well let me focus on something I know more about, which is the way that the military has gone about doing some of the projects it's engaged in.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Okay.

RAY JENNINGS: Military, uh, several military contingents in Baghdad, for example, did undertake a school rehabilitation program. Um, this was seen as being a, a great set of projects that could, uh, could enhance community relations for local [UI], local commanders. Normally, what kind of developmental groups would do is they would go in, develop p-, parent-teacher associations, and kind of work with communities to identify where the school goes; how the school should be built; how many students are there; what the parents want to see [at] school, and duh-, uh, develop, represent; what should be taught there. Um, in Bosnia and other venues, and in Iraq, the military spent much of the funds that it had at its disposal in Baghdad — a good percentage of them — building schools, that uh, didn't refer to the community, uh. They were decided as priorities by a very small number of local elites and a local military commander. The schools were built, often, with no transparency with local contractors. And they are often built for far, far more money than was required.

Now, the schools that I saw built by many nonprofits were built for 30 to 35 thousand dollars. Many of the military schools were built for 80 to 85 thousand dollars. And the results were far inferior to the projects that were done by the NGOs.

CHARLES FERGUSON: What accounted for that difference?

RAY JENNINGS: Mainly contractors who either skimmed, or a lack of monitoring of the project itself. Normally, what the NGOs would do is get the community involved in watching the contractor do its work, and making sure that the community saw and recognized they had a vested interest in a good school resulting from this investment.

I-, it's easy to see how the military could have thought, military civil affairs folks could have thought that, look; we'll do the work; people will see us doing the work; and it'll endear us to the community. The other side of that, though, is, is that if you don't get the community involved, they don't feel invested. Why should they care, um, if the military and a local contractor are doing the work,

and they have never been asked: should the school be built there again? Maybe it's built on a swamp. Should, uh, should there be a night watchman? Well, many places, there wasn't, and as soon as [the] ceiling fans were put in, they were gone by the next morning. Um, oftentimes, NGOs would, would volunteer somebody to watch the site, the building site, so things didn't walk off. In other cases, uh, what often happened was, in terms of expediency, civil affairs contingents would ask a local self-appointed mayor; what contractor should we use to get the school done? And in too many cases, it was often a relative, and the price was too high.

In the end, the short version of this is that, in the end, you had schools that were built that were substandard, and that were standing monuments to the continuing corruption and elitism of the Baathist era. So the school represented something that in the reconstruction program I was speaking about earlier, we were trying to overcome.

So that's part of the negative influence of how, uh, the military's reconstruction agenda often worked. Not all the time, but oftentimes. And at least, uh, it's, it's heartening to know that the military has recognized many of these issues, and it's part of a lessons learned, uh, that [I] think new civil affairs contingents are taking, taking note of.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Hm. Okay. Useful. What did you think of the other Americans who were working for AID; the State Department people? Did you come into contact with a lot of them?

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, I mean you couldn't help it. When you lived in the Green Zone, as I did, after August 2003, it was, uh, Little America in the Green Zone.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Tell us about life in the Green Zone.

RAY JENNINGS: There has been much written about it. Uh...let me tell you about the palace, uh, which was the main building where most of the CPA at the time — the, the Coalition Provisional Authority — did its work.

I mean, it always struck me that the, I mean, the CPA was a bit of an aquarium, uh, in that...many of the people who moved around in it, including myself when I would work in it, in and

amongst, uh, colleagues in that building, [UI] we were all underwater; that we would, it would be slow motion; that we would be trying to get things done, but the, the inefficiencies were monumental in the CPA.

CHARLES FERGUSON: How come? Or give us an example, and then say how come.

RAY JENNINGS: Well, I mean, let me tell you of a story then about what I encountered there. I also teach at Georgetown University. I have several students who are graduates, uh, [UI] masters-level students, who when they get out of the program, they go right to work in developmental venues.

During the course of my time in, uh, in, in, uh, the Green Zone, when I was in the palace, I bumped into one, and I [UI] just graduated. And I asked her what she was doing. And uh, she said, well, uh, she couldn't believe her luck. She'd just been appointed to, uh, asked to come to Iraq, and asked to work on the transport sector, especially in Baghdad.

I said, well, in what regard, uh?

And she said, well, I, I'm being asked to, uh, to do the traffic plan for the city.

And I, I asked her if she had any training in municipal planning, and she said, no.

Um, so she's fresh out of school, and had been put in charge of something quite, quite, uh, complicated. To say the least. And being out in Baghdad traffic, uh, the need was apparent for doing something on this scale, that, uh, that was good.

Inefficiencies, in part resulting from a lack of, of personnel; and also, uh, t-, planning f-, uh, even if it was done well, probably could not have anticipated the kind of challenges which, uh, were quickly encountered when you got on the ground in Iraq, in part because, uh, the looting, uh, was so extensive. And a inability, in Iraq, [of the Iraqis], was, uh, so constraining that, uh, that even well-done plans would have, would have been challenged, although far more planning was absolutely called for.

So life inside the palace, then.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Well let me go back for a second to your story about your former student who was suddenly in charge of traffic planning for Baghdad. That's crazy. How could

somebody just out of school, with no relevant experience, be appointed to a complex technocratic job like that? How could that happen?

RAY JENNINGS: I'm not sure. I'm not certain. But it, it certainly impressed upon me that, uh, the CPA, at the time, was, was finding it hard to find the right people to put in the kinds of jobs it found necessary.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Was it that it asked qualified people, and they refused to come? Or they didn't ask the right people?

RAY JENNINGS: Uh, I think it was a combination of factors. Some people weren't willing to come to Iraq. Uh, some people who had the kinds of skills that were needed, um, were in jobs, in the States, that required that kind of expertise, and couldn't simply drop those jobs, and come to Iraq. Um, and in other cases, the kinds of jobs that were needed to be f-, filled would just emerge, on a week-to-week basis. It would be realized that, well, we, we actually, we need to set up a, an office to deal with, uh, you know, refuse disposal. Uh, and it just wasn't anticipated. So all of a sudden, you have a need, demonstrated need, for sanitation engineers. That request goes to, uh, Human Resources, and the process [gins] up, and tries to find an expert. But in the meantime, you need to do it; you need to fill in the gap. So oftentimes, you had people, uh, wearing multiple hats in the CPA, simply because there are gaps to be filled, and they need to be filled immediately. Um, the ideal situation, uh, was to try to locate experts within the Iraq commu-, Iraqi community, to do this work, which might have seemed easy, uh, and s-, and the CPA made a k-, a earnest effort to do this. But it was actually quite difficult in, in the early days, to find individuals who had originally done this work to come and, and advise, and to take up this work again.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Why was it difficult?

RAY JENNINGS: It was difficult initially because many Iraqis weren't sure what, or how they would be treated; whether they would be subject to arrest; um, they, uh, weren't sure whether or not their exposure in being involved with these kinds, these kinds of activities of the CPA would subject them to personal danger.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Ah.

RAY JENNINGS: And, and also, I mean, under the, under the Baathists, centralized leadership, centralized management, was the management style. And so there was no central order coming down, ordering people to come back to work either. So, uh, y-, you had experts who eventually were able to be contracted, contacted by the CPA. But what's interesting is that once the transitional ministries were set up, the new minis-, Iraqi ministers found it far easier to find these people than the CPA ever did.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Ah. So the difficulty wasn't with finding these people per se; the difficulty was with the CPA finding and employing these people.

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, in part because the CPA didn't have a ready-made mech-, mechanism for locating, reassuring, and ordering people back to work.

CHARLES FERGUSON: Many people have made that point, actually. Okay. Thank you. Back to life inside the Green Zone. So what was life inside the Green Zone like?

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, where was I? I think I was telling you about an aquarium. Which, which kind of these inefficiencies of us working, kind of a underwater, uh...was quite taxing. People worked long, long hours. You can't, you can't fault anybody in the CPA for not working hard. If anything, people worked...

CHARLES FERGUSON: Too hard.

RAY JENNINGS: ...too hard. Uh, so burnout was rampant. Uh, and, you know, on top of the burnout, you had the stress from being there; stress from being away from families. And you had an awful lot of people who were in the CPA, and working for the contractors, who were, who were implementing the reconstruction effort, uh, actually, uh, not having been away from home very much. So this was ki-, for many people, their first foray overseas. Um, and this was a, a pressure cooker. Uh, as many of the, [UI], take into account that many of the implementers and the contractors were getting huge contracts, much larger than they ever had before. And so they themselves had to dig deep to find people to fill the slots which they are required to fill to roll out these, these megasize programs, which

they had never had to anticipate or roll out in their earlier experience. So you had many people who were relatively new to this kind of work.

The, the interesting thing about, uh, what would happen in the palaces, around lunchtime, then you'd have everybody come out of their, their cubicles, and then meet in the cafeteria, and that's when you would see people, uh, you wouldn't normally see, you know, during the rest of the day. And so the central meeting area was this, this food service area, where, uh, if you wanted to get some business done, or find somebody, especially in the early days, when phones weren't working, and there wasn't a easy ability to contact people, that's where you'd find them. So that's often when I would go to the palace to find people, is [kinda] go there during lunch, and cruise the tables, and find who you needed to talk to. It was a, until, until there was a phone system, it was really hard to find people. It was just part of the inefficiencies of doin' this work.

CHARLES FERGUSON: How long was it before there was a phone system?

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, I mean the difficult part of, of trying to have an efficient operation, uh, without basic necessities like, like phones, was that, uh, you could spend half a day trying to find the person you needed to reach by trying to track them down in person. Or, if you knew somebody who had a phone, because there were only a limited number of phones when phones were first handed out, uh, you could call that person, and have them try to run the person down that you needed to find. And that, uh, that alone was a source of inefficiency in the early days. Um, there were satellite phones; the, they were so oversubscribed that you were constantly dropping a signal. [UI] use satellite phones, so they weren't an easy answer, uh, 'cause it would depend on who you wanted to reach having a satellite phone. And there was some difficulty in having different satellite systems work over Iraq. And then there was the added, additional complication in that satellite signals were often interfered with when, uh, the military engaged in certain kinds of activities in Iraq.

So between all that, uh, uh, there was a pretty enormous amount of frustration for communications in those early days.

CHARLES FERGUSON: How long was it before things actually kind of worked?

RAY JENNINGS: It was far more reliable, you had far more reliable cell phone service by late fall of 2003.

CHARLES FERGUSON: But there was like six months, at least, when people did not have good telecommunications.

RAY JENNINGS: Yeah, certain command[-me], ca-, certain implementors, such as the contractors, for-profit contractors, um, were able to get access; [for] certainly, State Department; certainly principals amongst the U.S. military. Although you have to bear in mind that oftentimes, one of the hazards were too, or one of the complications were too, is that the military was rarely on the same communications grid as the implementers. So if you're tryin' to contact a colonel who's out in the field to say, look, uh, our folks' gonna be out there, working. Uh, they're, they're using a different communications system.