



SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report is the product of the United States Institute of Peace's Afghanistan Experience Project. It is based on extensive interviews conducted with American and foreign officials, soldiers, and representatives of nongovernmental organizations that worked directly with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan. It also reflects interviews conducted with a broad range of contacts during the author's visit to Afghanistan in June 2005. The report discusses lessons identified by those who served in Afghanistan. It is intended as a training aid for developing programs that prepare American personnel for service in peace and stability operations.

Robert M. Perito, Coordinator of the Afghanistan Experience Project at the U.S. Institute of Peace, prepared this report. The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training conducted the interviews under a contract with the Institute.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.

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Robert M. Perito

The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan

Lessons Identified

Summary

- Important lessons for current and future U.S. peace and stability operations can be found in the experiences of Americans who served in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan. PRTs are small, joint civilian-military organizations whose mission is to promote governance, security, and reconstruction throughout the country.
- In June 2005, the United States led thirteen PRTs and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) directed nine. This multinational program was characterized by an emphasis on flexibility, a proliferation of national models, and an ad hoc approach to security and development.
- The U.S. model featured a complement of seventy-nine American military and three civilian government representatives. The U.S. PRTs stressed governance, force protection, and quick impact development projects to "win hearts and minds."
- The PRT emphasis on governance translated into supporting the respective provincial governors.
- Security was limited to self-protection, providing a security presence, and assisting Afghan forces.
- Reconstruction projects suffered from a lack of coordination and oversight. Military involvement in development brought criticism from relief agencies that claimed it put them at risk by blurring the distinction between combatants and humanitarian workers.
- In the view of many PRT veterans, the entire multinational PRT program would benefit from an agreed concept of operations and an effective central coordinating authority. The U.S. PRTs would profit from interagency delimitation of civilian and military roles and improved civilian agency staffing, funding, and administrative support.

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- PRT veterans believe the addition of USAID representatives and better coordination with Afghan national development plans improved U.S. PRT reconstruction efforts. Rapidly disbursing long-term funding sources available to civilian representatives would rationalize and speed reconstruction efforts, which should focus on security-related infrastructure.
- PRT veterans also argue that PRTs are primarily military organizations; thus, better suited for performing security-related tasks. PRTs should concentrate on supporting Afghan security sector reform and providing a security presence in contested areas.

Introduction

The Provincial Reconstruction Team Program

Provincial Reconstruction Teams find their origin in the “Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells” that the U.S. military forces in *Operation Enduring Freedom* established in early 2002. A dozen Army Civil Affairs (CA) soldiers staffed these small outposts, dubbed “Chiclets,” with the task to assess humanitarian needs, implement small-scale reconstruction projects, and establish relations with the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and nongovernmental organizations already in the field.

To augment the CA effort, by late 2002 the United States expanded this program with the creation of the first PRTs, which added a robust force protection component and representatives of U.S. government civilian agencies. The first PRT was established in Gardez in November 2002 and PRTs in Bamian, Konduz, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar, and Herat followed in early 2003. These initial sites were chosen to provide a U.S. military and central government presence among key locations, including Afghanistan's four primary ethnic groups, the former Taliban headquarters, and the base of the country's most difficult warlord, Ishmael Khan. The primary purpose of creating these outposts was political, but PRTs were also seen as a means for dealing with the causes of Afghanistan's instability: terrorism, warlords, unemployment, and grinding poverty.

In February 2003, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul issued a general set of parameters in a document entitled *Principles Guiding PRT Working Relations with UNAMA, NGOs and Local Government*. These principles established three primary objectives for the PRT program: extend the authority of the Afghan central government, improve security, and promote reconstruction. The PRT Executive Steering Committee, chaired by the Afghan Minister of the Interior, endorsed these objectives. The Steering Committee provided a forum for consultations among Afghan government ministries, UNAMA, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and U.S. military commanders, and donor country representatives. Unfortunately, the Steering Committee lacked authority to direct or even coordinate PRT operations, which were guided by donor country priorities. A subordinate, staff-level PRT Working Group provided for information exchange, but also lacked authority to provide guidance. Because the PRTs lacked a central coordinating authority, a governing concept of PRT operations, and a strategic plan, each sponsoring country was free to interpret the overall guidelines and to conduct operations based on its national priorities and the local conditions. This approach brought beneficial flexibility, but it also resulted in an ad hoc approach to Afghanistan's needs for security and development.

Lessons Learned: Focus On U.S. Operations

In attempting to identify the PRT lessons learned, it was clear that the national character and donor government priorities were determinant. It was impossible to draw general conclusions due to the following factors: lack of a strategic overview, agreed measures

of effectiveness, and guidelines for civil-military relations as well as a proliferation of national sponsors, inconsistent models, and divergent operating environments. The U.S. military did not emulate the British Army, despite its success in disarming rival militias. Likewise, U.S. civilian agencies were unable to adopt the approaches of the Europeans, which would require fundamental changes in legislation and organization. Participating countries might benefit from an awareness of their counterparts' approaches and problems, but no country, including the United States, could alter its operations in ways that violated national legal requirements and instructions from capitals. In addition, comparing and evaluating PRT performance in the absence of generally agreed standards and measures of effectiveness was highly problematic.

As a consequence, this report focuses on lessons learned by Americans working in U.S. PRTs. It highlights areas where U.S. capacity and methods of operation required adjustment, or failed to achieve desired objectives. Since the PRT program is ongoing, the United States can utilize a review of its experience and the lessons identified for improving operations. Hopefully, the report will contribute to the current debate over whether the PRT model is applicable in other stability operations, and can assist those preparing to serve in peace and stability operations.

Background

From the start, the PRT program was seen as a means of burden-sharing among countries participating in the U.S.-led Coalition, and as a mechanism for expanding the reach of the NATO-led ISAF beyond Kabul. Coalition members Britain and New Zealand took charge of the PRTs in Mazar-e-Sharif and Bamian, respectively, while Germany assumed responsibility for Konduz under the ISAF mandate. The initial PRTs developed distinct personalities, creating what came to be called the American, British, and German models. American PRTs had less than 100 personnel and stressed force protection and quick impact assistance projects. The British PRT was somewhat larger, emphasized Afghan security sector reform, and helped defuse confrontations between rival warlords. The German PRT had over 300 members and was strictly bifurcated between its military and robust civilian component. Led by a senior foreign ministry official, the German Assistance Agency had offices outside the military camp, reflecting the relaxed security environment in Konduz.

The proliferation of national approaches accelerated as the United States established the practice of handing over mature PRTs to a growing list of Coalition partners and ISAF participants. In July 2005, there were a total of twenty-two PRTs: thirteen Coalition and nine ISAF. As the list of participating countries expanded to include the Italians, Spanish, Lithuanians, and Scandinavians, it became less clear how PRTs would prioritize their objectives, implement programs, or fulfill their responsibilities. Initiatives devolved to the PRT military commanders and their civilian counterparts. Personality and local circumstances largely drove operations and relationships. Emphasis on force protection and high turnover rates among military personnel restricted interaction with Afghans and the ability to evaluate and correct PRT practices. More troubling was that ISAF-led PRTs were subject to "national caveats" that restricted undertaking a variety of security-related functions without explicit approval from capitals. In the most extreme cases, military forces were not permitted to operate at night or venture more than a set distance from their encampment. Nor was an ISAF-led PRT permitted to admit foreign relief workers who sought shelter during a civil disturbance.

Regional differences in operating environments added more divergence in PRT organization and practices. As a rule, ISAF PRTs were located in relatively stable areas in the north and west of Afghanistan. U.S. PRTs were located in the volatile southern and eastern quadrants along the Pakistan border. Operating in relatively peaceful areas, ISAF soldiers donned "soft cover" traveled in small groups on weeklong driving tours of district capitals and worked directly with local police and militia forces. In contrast, American PRTs emphasized village improvement projects as a means of "winning hearts and minds"

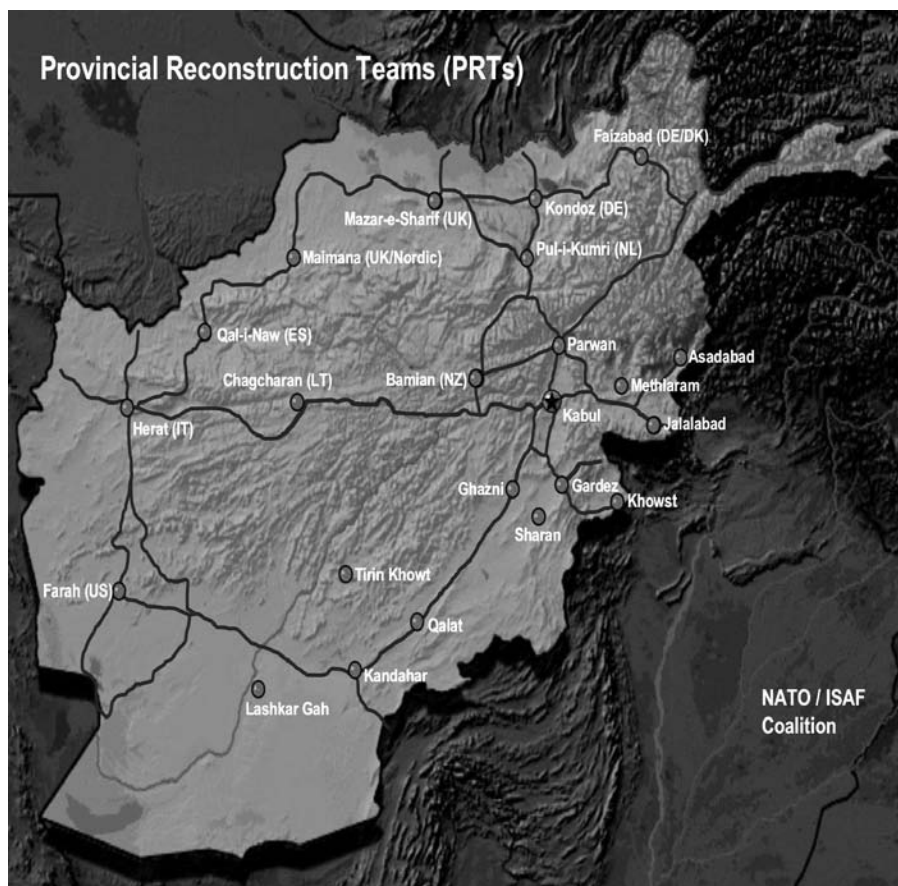
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in the Taliban's spiritual heartland. U.S. PRTs were co-located with Coalition combat units that conducted counterinsurgency operations against Taliban and al Qaeda infiltrators, and handled other security threats related to tribal animosities, narcotics traffickers, bandits, and illegally armed rogue groups.

On January 27, 2005, the Executive Steering Committee adopted the “Terms of Reference for CFC and ISAF PRTs in Afghanistan.” Unfortunately, attempting to establish a general concept of operations did little more than restate the initial intention to support the Afghan government with security and reconstruction. PRT obligations were subject to the caveat “where expertise and resources permit” and limited to observing and reporting to their superiors, or providing advice and information to Afghan authorities. The primacy of national priorities and the individual commander's discretion were clearly acknowledged. The document was silent on such important issues as the distinction between military and civilian personnel and UNAMA's role.



Source: USAID Mission, U.S. Embassy Kabul

The U.S. PRT Model

The size and composition of U.S. PRTs vary depending on maturity, local circumstances, and the availability of personnel from civilian agencies. Combined Forces Command (CFC) does, however, have a model, which U.S. PRTs generally emulate. According to the model, an Army Lt. Colonel commands the U.S. PRTs, which have a complement of eighty-two American military and civilian personnel. There are also an Afghan Ministry of the Interior (MOI) representative and three to four local interpreters. The model's civilian component includes representatives from the Department of State, the Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The PRT's military component is intended to include the following staff:

- Commanding officer and his immediate staff;
- Army Civil Affairs Teams (two teams, four soldiers on each team);
- Military Police Unit (three soldiers);

- Psychological Operations Unit;
- Explosive Ordnance/De-mining Unit;
- Intelligence Team;
- Medics;
- Force Protection Unit (infantry platoon of forty soldiers); and
- administrative and support personnel.

In actuality, most U.S. PRTs did not have all of these representatives. Many had less than two CA teams; military police and other special units often were also missing. Lack of skilled personnel was a significant constraint on PRT effectiveness.

Staffing

Looking at the balance between operational and support personnel, or the PRT's "tooth to tail" ratio, only sixteen members had duties that took them "outside the wire" to interact with Afghans. These "maneuver" components of the PRT had the following responsibilities:

Military Commander: Normally a CA officer, the commander maintained frequent contact with the provincial governor and police chief, city mayors, and influential Afghans. The commander also maintained liaison with the regional UNAMA office and international NGOs. The commander attended the Provincial Development Council, which coordinated development efforts, and chaired the PRT Project Review Committee, which vetted proposals for reconstruction. He also chaired meetings of the commanders of CFC combat units that were co-located with the PRT to coordinate military operations.

U.S. Army Civil Affairs Teams: The hallmark of U.S. PRTs was a concentration on small, quick impact development projects designed to "win hearts and minds," or at least to encourage a more benevolent local attitude toward the U.S. military presence. Civil Affairs "A" Teams were responsible for conducting assessments of reconstruction needs and contracting with Afghan firms to build schools, clinics, bridges, and wells. Civil Affairs "B" Teams operated the PRT's Civil Military Operations Center and coordinated with the UNAMA regional office and international NGOs engaged in providing humanitarian relief and development assistance.

Military Police (MP) Teams: These three-member teams often included reservists who were police officers in civilian life. They were responsible for assessing the needs of the local police and for providing training and material assistance where possible. MP teams offered training in public-order functions, such as crowd control, operating vehicle checkpoints, and conducting building searches. They also provided vehicles, communications gear, uniforms, and office equipment. When co-located, the MP teams worked with the seven U.S. regional police training centers.

State Department Representative: In June 2005, the State Department had thirteen Foreign Service Officers (FSO) serving in PRTs, with six additional slots available for assignment in PRTs and regional military commands. While there was no standard job description, assigned for a one-year tour of duty, State Department officers served as the following: political advisors to the PRT commander and the provincial governor, resources for the PRT on matters related to Afghan culture and provincial politics, members of the Project Review Committee, and assistants to the USAID officer on development projects. They also functioned as regional reporting officers for the U.S. Embassy, providing fifty percent of the reporting to Washington. As Embassy personnel in Kabul were often in security "lockdown," they were the only State Department representatives that had routine contact with Afghan citizens and the ability to observe conditions throughout the country.

U.S. Agency of International Development Representative: Agency representatives were present at all levels of the U.S. PRT structure, including regional commands and Coalition headquarters. USAID personnel advised the PRT commander, provincial governor, and

other Afghan authorities on development matters. They also reported to the U.S. Embassy on conditions in the field and the development capacity of local governments. They were key members of the PRT's Project Review Committee, which considered project proposals to ensure suitability. They worked with the CA teams and locally based NGOs, and were able to monitor and to report on development projects administered from Embassy Kabul. In a few cases where they had authority as contract officers, USAID representatives were able to supervise and to make on-the-spot decisions regarding local projects.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Representative: The agency provided ten PRT advisors in six-month rotations whose task was to foster reconstruction of the agricultural sector and to enhance the central government's ability to provide services to the rural population. USDA representatives were selected from among volunteer respondents to the general appeal to all of the Department's constituent agencies. In June 2005, USDA fielded a mix of veterinarians, soil specialists, food safety experts, forest conservationists, plant pathologists, and agriculture extension specialists.

Afghan MOI Representative: A colonel from the Afghan National Police represented the Afghan central government and the Interior Ministry. This officer advised the PRT commander on local personalities and conditions. He was also the primary liaison and point of contact with local Afghan authorities. Evaluating the MOI representative's performance, a CFC survey of American PRTs found that seven thought the MOI representative was indispensable, three felt he was helpful, and two thought he was irrelevant.

PRT Mission

The PRTs were small, joint civil-military organizations that aspired to promote progress in governance, security, and reconstruction.

Governance

Among the three objectives of the PRT program (governance, security, and reconstruction), U.S. commanders viewed promoting the authority of the central government as the primary mission.

Among the three objectives of the PRT program (governance, security, and reconstruction), U.S. commanders viewed promoting the authority of the central government as the primary mission. In most cases, this translated directly into a policy of supporting the provincial governor and the provincial police chief. Appointed by President Karzai, these officials were responsible for administering central government programs. In cases where governors were competent administrators and had the support of their constituents, moral and financial support from the PRTs warned off local challengers and promoted a range of beneficial initiatives. In Paktika Province, the PRT commander escorted the newly appointed governor and local UNAMA representative on a lengthy tour of district capitals to demonstrate U.S. support for the Afghan government and its programs. In Nangahar Province, the PRT's visibility and provision of alternative livelihood programs helped the provincial governor obtain an eighty-three percent voluntary reduction in opium cultivation in 2005. PRTs also played a mediating role among disparate elements by reaching out to disaffected religious leaders, university students, and disgruntled tribal elders. After student-led riots protesting alleged U.S. disrespect for the Koran, the PRT commander in Jalalabad brought in student leaders to discuss their complaints. He also invited 200 local mullahs for lunch and refurbished the mosque of a radical cleric to demonstrate that the United States was not opposed to Islam.

In many cases, however, PRT support for local leaders was counterproductive. A number of provincial governors and police officials were old-line warlords, militia commanders, or regional power brokers whose loyalties were questionable and whose interests were divergent from those of the central government. Support from PRTs actually enabled these leaders to further distance themselves from relying on the central government.

Many provincial leaders were suspected of involvement in narcotics trafficking, misuse of public funds, and human rights abuses. Others were simply poor administrators, or lacked the financial and human resources required to tackle local problems. PRTs often faced the prospect of either becoming identified with unsavory or incompetent officials, or of working to obtain their removal. In a few celebrated cases, PRTs literally stood behind central government officials who were sent to remove entrenched, corrupt officials from provincial sinecures.

Beyond their dealings with provincial officials, PRTs proved effective in encouraging popular participation in selecting delegates to the national assembly that adopted the constitution and to the presidential elections. During preparations for the constitutional *Loya Jirga* in 2003, PRTs conducted an extensive public information campaign to explain its key elements: the reasons for the assembly, the process of delegate selection, the importance of widespread participation, and the requirement to include women. They also provided security for meetings to select constitutional convention delegates. During the presidential election in October 2004, PRTs joined other Coalition forces in providing a security presence and conducted frequent patrols in contested areas. They also guarded polling stations, secured ballot boxes, and provided transportation for election workers. This pervasive security presence resulted in a massive turnout of voters, the election of President Karzai, and a major step forward for democracy in Afghanistan. PRTs played a similarly important role during parliamentary elections in September 2005.

Security

Given the importance of establishing a stable environment in Afghanistan, it is surprising that the security role assigned to PRTs was limited to providing for their own protection. PRTs were not responsible for protecting Afghans, UNAMA or representatives of international relief organizations. They were excluded from conducting eradication and other “enforcement” activities in the counternarcotics effort. They were not expected to track and engage insurgents or other troublemakers. The mission of the armed element in American PRTs (usually an Army National Guard infantry platoon) was “force protection,” principally providing armed escorts for the PRT’s commander and civilian members. In the face of civil disturbances, PRTs withdrew into their compounds, leaving the task of restoring order to Afghan security forces or Coalition combat units. The limited nature of PRTs’ security mandate was often misunderstood and a source of tension with UNAMA and NGOs. Foreign relief workers assumed PRTs would provide security in extremis. Failure to protect NGOs was important in contested areas, given that the insurgents’ strategic goal was to drive out humanitarian agencies, prevent any meaningful development, and thereby demonstrate that the government was incapable of fulfilling its promises.

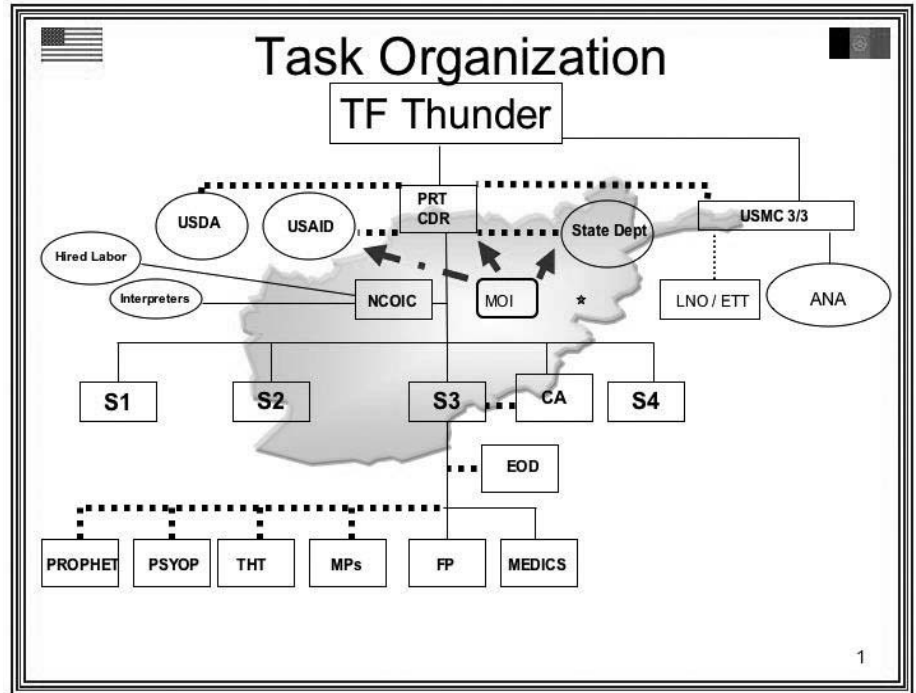
In addition to their limited mandate, the PRTs’ small size restricted the scope of their security-related activities. In the early stages of the program, a single PRT was responsible for a group of neighboring provinces, often an area equivalent to several northeastern American states. This meant that PRT units could send only small teams of soldiers on occasional visits to distant parts of their Areas of Responsibility. Over time, each PRT’s “turf” decreased as more were established, but distance, poor roads, mountainous terrain, and harsh winters limited the scope of PRT operations. Although PRTs attempted to “show the flag” in as large an area as possible, in most cases their activities were concentrated around provincial capitals.

With their small complement of troops and limited armaments, PRTs were extremely vulnerable, if they were not co-located with Coalition combat units. The PRT in Jalalabad shared its quarters with a U.S. Marine battalion, a U.S. Army Special Forces Team, a helicopter medical-evacuation squadron that included two gun ships, and an Afghan Army unit with an embedded American training team.

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| Legend: Task Force Thunder | |
|----------------------------|--|
| PRT/CDR | PRT Commander |
| USDA | U.S. Department of Agriculture |
| USAID | U.S. Agency for International Development |
| USMC 3/3 | U.S. Marine Corps |
| NCOIC | Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge |
| MOI | Afghan Ministry of Interior Representative |
| LNO/ETT | Liaison Officer/Embedded Training Team |
| ANA | Afghan National Army |
| S1 | Personnel Administration |
| S2 | Intelligence Section |
| S3 | Plans, Operations and Training Section |
| S4 | Logistics Section |
| CA | Civil Affairs |
| EOD | Emergency Ordnance Disposal |
| PSYOP | Psychological Operations Section |
| THT | Tactical Humint Team |
| MPS | Military Police Section |
| FP | Force Protection |
| MEDICS | Medical Unit |



Source: USAID Mission, U.S. Embassy Kabul

Each unit had a distinct mission, but operated in the same “battle space.” An officer of roughly equal rank led each unit and reported to Regional Command East, located at Firebase Salerno, near Khowst. An informal, but critical, role of the PRT commander was to convene his military counterparts to coordinate and de-conflict operations. This was particularly important when Coalition forces were engaged in combat against insurgent forces in areas where PRT Civil Affairs teams and USAID representatives worked with local residents on development projects. In the words of one PRT commander, “We do not want the State Department representative to meet with a tribal leader in the morning and have that person arrested by an Army Special Forces Team in the afternoon.”

Differences in the attitude and behavior of troops assigned to PRTs and those serving in combat units created problems between some co-located units. PRTs recognized their need for good relations with provincial officials and tribal leaders and behaved accordingly. Troops assigned to PRTs were more culturally sensitive than those in combat units. One early PRT commander sought to differentiate his troops from U.S. combat units by allowing them to wear baseball caps, grow beards, and mix with local people in the market. When PRT units traveled out in full “battle rattle,” they sought to minimize the negative psychological impact of armored vehicles and weapons in their interaction with Afghans.

Relations between PRTs and combat units depended, however, on personalities and the attitudes of individual officers. In cases where combat unit commanders regarded PRTs as important, they were able to provide visible military “cover” that enabled PRT elements to operate more widely and in areas otherwise considered too dangerous. In some cases, combat units looked down on PRTs and treated their CA teams and National Guard units as “not real soldiers” who required protection. In extreme instances, tension between soldiers in PRTs and those in combat units precluded cooperation.

Despite their restrictive mandate and practical limitations, PRTs played a positive role in providing a security presence and in helping to improve the security environment. Afghans saw American forces nearby as a welcome indication of U.S. concern and international support. Much was made of the “B-52 Factor,” a reference to the fact that PRTs could “reach back” to Forward Support Bases for Quick Reaction Forces, including deep strike aircraft based at Bagram Airfield. PRT commanders attended monthly meetings of the Governor’s Provincial Security Committee, which brought together Afghan security units to improve

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situational awareness and coordinate operations. PRT military units engaged in frequent patrolling, while their commanders called on local Afghan government officials and tribal leaders to discuss their security concerns. In many cases, these conversations resulted in friendships that produced actionable intelligence on insurgents' movements.

PRTs played a key role in supporting the program for disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation (DDR) led by UNAMA and the Japanese government. PRTs monitored heavy weapons cantonments, and reported on troop strength and the movement of armed groups. This effort reduced the size of the old Afghan army, which had degenerated into separate garrisons loyal to individual warlords. PRTs also supported Afghan government efforts to disarm illegally armed groups. In Asadabad, a local militia commander fled to Pakistan in disgrace after the PRT publicly confiscated his cache of illegal weapons, a process that required U.S. soldiers to work ten hours a day for five days. Among the weapons seized were eighty-two 107-mm rockets and six World War I-era German machine guns.

Perhaps the PRTs' most helpful security-related contribution was the training, technical assistance, and equipment provided to the Afghan police. PRT Military Police teams provided training and moral support to local police, which was critical to creating a properly functioning judicial sector. PRT construction of police stations, courthouses, jails, and border checkpoints also filled a vital role. In cases where PRTs were co-located with Afghan National Army units with embedded American training teams, Afghan units were brought along on joint patrols and provided support when challenged. In Kunar, the PRT assisted the local police in executing the provincial governor's order to remove illegal roadblocks. The presence of the armed American units empowered the Afghan security services, which forced the local militia commander to back down. The PRTs' role in increasing Afghan capacity was critical to the long-term U.S. goal of instituting the rule of law and building the Afghan National Army and National Police.

Reconstruction

As military units operating in a nonpermissive environment, PRTs used quickly built village improvement projects to demonstrate goodwill and encourage a favorable reaction to their presence. CA teams hired local contractors to construct schools, clinics, wells, and other small village improvement projects to establish good relations with Afghans and collect intelligence on local events and personalities. These projects were financed by funds from the Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) that could be disbursed on the PRT commander's own authority. Rapid turnover among CA personnel, pressure from senior military authorities to demonstrate progress, and limited knowledge of local conditions often resulted in the hasty construction of buildings without reference to the Afghan government's capacity to support these activities. Schools were built without teachers and clinics without doctors. Multiple wells dried up shallow aquifers. With few, if any, technical criteria, some of the construction was substandard.

The involvement of PRTs in reconstruction provoked extensive and, at times, bitter criticism from private relief, humanitarian, and development organizations. In Afghanistan, the United States was a combatant and its forces were engaged in ongoing military operations. NGOs argued that the aura of neutrality that relief workers relied on for their personal safety would be compromised if local people were unable to differentiate between foreign civilian and military actors. If military personnel engaged in relief and reconstruction activities, the boundary between civilian and military efforts would be blurred, if not erased altogether. PRTs were accused of contributing to this ambiguity when troops wearing the same uniforms were seen fighting insurgents and building clinics. Relations with NGOs became strained, and many refused to have direct contact with PRTs, fearing retaliation from insurgents. This fear grew as attacks on aid workers increased and the security environment eroded in the spring of 2005. One NGO, Doctors without Borders, withdrew from Afghanistan, claiming the presence of a PRT in its area of operations contributed to a deadly attack on its personnel. Rising casualties caused NGOs to argue that PRTs should concentrate on the military's primary duty, which was estab-

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lishing a safe and secure environment. Many NGO representatives remained wary of public interaction with PRTs, and limited their contact to indirect or electronic communication.

NGO representatives also argued that soldiers were not experts in development and that CA projects often reflected a lack of expertise. Economic development involved more than simply constructing buildings, especially if construction was undertaken in an uncoordinated manner. PRT development projects often competed or conflicted with NGO projects, undermining relationships developed with Afghan communities. PRT projects were funded completely, while NGOs normally required Afghan communities to contribute materials to “buy in.” The contrast between NGOs’ frugality and the free spending by PRTs appeared to lend credence to Afghan government accusations that NGOs’ malfeasance, rather than scarce international resources, was responsible for the overall slow pace of development. NGO representatives were accused of misusing development funds to purchase expensive vehicles, take vacations, and (in Afghan terms) live luxurious lifestyles. Veteran civilian relief workers rejected these accusations.

Internal evaluations, public criticism, and the arrival of USAID representatives produced a shift toward a more thoughtful, coordinated, and longer-term approach to reconstruction. Project Review Committees became expert at utilizing a mix of funding sources in addition to CERP, including USAID’s Quick Impact Program (QIP) and the Defense Department’s Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Aid Program (OHDACA). (PRT participants complained, however, that CERP funds were not always available and it was difficult to obtain QIP and OHDACA funds.) PRT-administered AID funds were utilized for projects that were consistent with the Afghan government’s national priorities. Provincial Development Councils brought PRTs, UNAMA, and NGOs together with the governor and tribal leaders to engage in coordinated project planning and implementation. PRT projects were implemented through NGOs and foreign commercial firms to ensure quality construction. UNAMA regional offices took on the task of information exchange and coordination between PRTs and NGOs wanting to avoid direct contact with the military. CA “hearts and minds” projects were more often reserved for insecure areas, such as Kunar province, where NGOs could not operate. In secure areas, PRTs turned their attention to infrastructure projects, such as roads and bridges, and the construction of public facilities, such as police stations, courthouses, and civil administration buildings. Such projects were beyond the interest and capacity of private agencies, which generally supported this approach. Over time most NGOs came to regard PRTs as a fact of life and adjusted to their presence.

Future Of The PRT Program

As of summer 2005, the CFC long-term objective was to transition the PRT program to ISAF control as part of a larger plan to integrate the two military commands and permit a reduction in U.S. forces.

As of summer 2005, the CFC long-term objective was to transition the PRT program to ISAF control as part of a larger plan to integrate the two military commands and permit a reduction in U.S. forces. Under the plan, the United States would retain one PRT in each of Afghanistan’s key geographic regions as its contribution to ISAF. During the first two phases of ISAF expansion completed in May 2005, PRTs in the north and west were transferred to ISAF, with the United States retaining the PRT in Farah. In Phase III, which would be implemented in spring 2006, the United Kingdom would shift its military resources south and, along with the Netherlands, take over the American PRTs in Lashkar Gah and Tirin Khawt. Canada would take over Kandahar. The United States would retain control of Qalat. In the north, ISAF-led PRTs were expected to conduct traditional peacekeeping operations in a permissive environment. In the south, PRTs would be co-located with Coalition combat units that would continue to conduct counterinsurgency operations. In the east along the Pakistan border, the United States would retain control of all PRTs. This area would remain the focus of “kinetic” operations aimed at blocking infiltration of Taliban, al Qaeda, and other extremist fighters from their redoubts in Pakistan’s frontier provinces.

Transfer of PRTs to a variety of ISAF partners raised questions concerning the ability of U.S. civilian agencies to remain outside of Kabul. In some cases, State Department

and USAID representatives stayed behind after the handoff to ISAF partners. The United States, however, did not negotiate arrangements for their housing, logistical support, and security. These informal and often personality-based arrangements were subject to misunderstandings or termination. (Fortunately, the State Department officer at the PRT in Konduz spoke German.) Unless the United States was willing to conduct its political and economic activities under foreign flags, it would have to find another means to project a civilian presence throughout Afghanistan. This could take the form of establishing regional consulates or storefront USAID offices in major cities. Fortunately, suggestions to expand the number of Afghan government representatives assigned to PRTs beyond the current solitary police officer did not gain traction. Over the long-term, the objective remained to strengthen Afghan government agencies rather than supplant them by transferring their functions to PRTs.

Lessons Identified

1. Improvisation is not a concept of operations.

Absent an established concept of operations and a clear set of guidelines for civil-military interaction, PRT commanders and civilians had to improvise. This was problematic because military officers and civilian agency personnel came from different “corporate cultures” and had different, sometimes competing, mandates. Without an interagency pre-agreement on individual roles, missions, and job descriptions, it took time and trial and error to achieve a common understanding of mission priorities. The mismatch in human and material resources between the civilian and military staffs exacerbated the problem. The fact that civilian agency representatives arrived without their own administrative or logistic support meant disagreements were most likely resolved in accordance with the priorities of the military commander who controlled the available resources. Without a dedicated vehicle and security guards, State Department representatives were restricted in their movements and their ability to engage Afghan officials. USAID representatives were unable to meet with NGOs or travel to development projects. Fortunately, most PRTs arrived at workable accommodations, but not without the inevitable tensions arising from disagreements over priorities. The most effective PRTs were those where the military and civilian elements fused into a close-knit and mutually supportive team. This was the goal in every instance, but it was not always possible to achieve.

2. Stability operations is not a game for amateurs.

The State Department, USAID, and USDA did not have the capacity to surge personnel and resources into Afghanistan, highlighting a problem that affects all U.S. government civilian agencies. Recruiting a single, usually junior officer or a recalled retiree for every U.S. PRT represented the limit of State’s ability to provide staff for what was a cutting-edge effort to develop effective civil-military cooperation. With only a thousand Foreign Service Officers worldwide, USAID was forced to rely on Personal Services Contactors to staff PRTs. USAID fielded a team of dynamic representatives, but none possessed career-long expertise and all had to learn on the job. Given the massive needs of the Afghan rural economy, USDA officials were able to utilize their expertise and to contribute to the overall mission despite the lack of pre-deployment training, an overall strategy, or a job description. To its credit, USDA attempted to meet a critical need for expertise, but could depend only on volunteers willing to work with little more than moral support from their home agency.

While energy and enthusiasm are vital, these qualities could not compensate for a lack of language skills, area expertise, and work experience. As PRT staff did not receive language training, they were totally dependent on the PRTs’ small number of Afghan

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interpreters, who were not professionals and, in many cases, had limited competency. Much of what PRTs hoped to accomplish was literally “lost in translation.” With limited knowledge of Afghan history and culture and little relevant work experience, junior officers from State and USAID contractors were at a disadvantage in attempting to advise senior American military officers and provincial-level Afghan officials, particularly in a culture that valued age and social status.

The benefits of assigning senior officers with previous service in the region were evident in the success of the few Foreign Service retirees recalled to active duty and assigned to PRTs. Speaking in fluent Dari, a senior State Department officer was able to convince a powerful regional governor to call off protest demonstrations and accept a transfer to a ministerial post in Kabul. In another case, a retired FSO, who had advised U.S. military commanders in Vietnam, was able to inform the thinking of military leaders in the formative stages of the PRT program.

3. Spend and build is not a strategy for development.

The PRT reconstruction mandate lacked accurate evaluation metrics, consistent staffing, and quality control. Using the amount of money spent and the number of buildings constructed as measures of effectiveness had obvious shortcomings. Applying these measures to the work of PRT CA teams resulted in projects that were questionable both in terms of relevance and quality. Short tours and frequent turnovers further aggravated the problem. Absent agreed measures of effectiveness, there was no means to determine whether the substantial sums spent on CA-directed projects really increased local support or promoted development. Fortunately, CA moved away from basing performance evaluations on how much CA personnel spent on construction. Creation of Project Review Committees and the presence of USAID and State Department representatives also moderated the inclination to undertake low-budget, short-term projects. Still, PRTs often reverted to what was familiar, particularly in areas where the United States had recently established a presence. In remote locations, PRTs were unable to inspect projects to ensure that locally hired contractors did not skimp on cement and other materials. In a disturbing number of cases, quality control and building maintenance were lacking. PRT-sponsored buildings developed structural problems, became unusable, or simply collapsed altogether.

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4. PRTs are military, not development, organizations.

Much of the controversy surrounding PRTs would be dispelled if the name (and mission) was changed to “Provincial Security Teams.” As primarily military organizations, PRTs are better suited to security-related tasks than to delivering development assistance. PRTs excelled at providing a security presence and performing duties related to disarmament, demobilization, and de-mining. They also made welcome contributions to security sector reform through police training and assistance and support for Afghan police and military operations. PRTs were less successful when their CA teams undertook development projects. As military organizations, PRTs had an inherent difficulty coordinating on development projects, if they were ordered by higher military authorities to undertake operations. Not concentrating fully on creating a secure environment also risked failing to establish the level of stability required by other international actors with greater development expertise.

5. Silence is not a public information program.

The U.S. PRT program suffered from the lack of readily available information on the results of its efforts. The absence of an effective public information campaign was surprising, given that one of the objectives of the PRT program was winning public support. The U.S. Embassy did not publish information concerning PRT operations, so basic facts, such as

the number of projects completed, funds expended, and types of programs underway, were not readily available. At the local level, PRTs needed to do a better job of explaining their objectives and limitations. PRTs related to Afghans through their interpreters, creating opportunities for misunderstanding at best and misrepresentation at worst.

Recommendations

1. The Combined Forces Command, ISAF, and the Afghan government need to develop a central coordinating mechanism and a set of guidelines for managing the PRT program.

With the proliferation of partner countries and growing diversity in areas of operations, there is an ever-greater need for central direction, coordination, and standardization. The United States has the most experience in counterinsurgency, counter-narcotics, and security sector reform, and the greatest stake in a peaceful Afghanistan, given the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The United States should take the lead in developing a detailed concept of operations and a “manual” governing PRT activities. This effort must be a part of overall military planning, as security should be the PRT’s primary mission. PRT involvement in reconstruction should be limited to promoting security sector reform and improving public infrastructure in ‘No-Go Areas’ where other international agencies cannot operate.

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2. The State Department should prioritize assignments and provide adequate training for those who serve in Afghanistan.

The State Department should prioritize recruitment for postings in Afghanistan and ensure that those selected are of appropriate rank and are properly prepared for their unique assignments. At a minimum, State Department and USAID representatives should receive pre-deployment introduction in Dari or Pashtu, briefings on Afghan society and culture, and orientation on the unique requirements of working with the U.S. military. The State Department should also provide logistical support so that the civilian complement of the PRT is not totally dependent on the military for transportation and logistics. USAID needs to ensure that experienced personnel are assigned to PRTs and that these officers have authority to directly oversee projects in their area. At the same time, USAID needs to review its procedures for processing project proposals so that USAID officers have the same facility in providing funding for development projects as their military colleagues.

Working through the new Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stability, the State Department should take the lead in negotiating an interagency agreement on roles, missions, and job descriptions for civilian and military personnel assigned to PRTs. This would replace the current ad hoc arrangements with standard agency guidelines for determining priorities and allocating resources. It would also provide clear direction for the military commander and CA teams on relating to State, USAID, and other civilian representatives.

3. The CFC, ISAF, and the Afghan government should determine measures of effectiveness.

In the absence of agreed metrics for evaluating performance, it is difficult to determine if PRTs are an efficient and cost-effective means of delivering clean water, new roads, and police training. More is needed than the current system of collecting anecdotal evidence in a series of trip-based reports. Increasing numbers, proliferation of national sponsors, and varying methods of program delivery make the current situation increasingly untenable. Forthcoming decisions on “civilianizing” PRTs, or transferring civilian functions to alternative venues, should be based on objective performance criteria. Deliberations on

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transferring the PRT model to other venues also should be based on more than general impressions. On evaluating PRT performance, one military officer said, “Now, we look at developments in the province and assume the PRT must be responsible.”

4. The USDA and other civilian agencies should fund and assign representatives.

While USDA's program lacked program funding and logistic support, the agency deserves credit for the effort, courage, and ingenuity of its volunteers. Other civilian agencies did not make such an attempt, but could make useful contributions. These agencies should develop programs to recruit, train, equip, and deploy personnel with logistical support and program funding.

5. The State Department should develop a program of public diplomacy for State representatives in PRTs.

Currently, FSOs assigned to PRTs have no programs or project funding. There is a need, however, for public diplomacy, which is a traditional State Department function. Such an effort would replicate the role once played by the U.S. Information Service's educational and cultural programming. This would strengthen the role of the State representative, who would have a real “seat at the table” in the Project Review Committee and additional reasons to interact with Afghans.

6. Match PRT military capabilities with a robust component of specially trained, adequately resourced, and logistically supported civilian representatives.

Much could be achieved if the military component of the PRT was matched with a robust staff of civilian personnel. The Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) program in Vietnam might provide a model for such a program. CORDS was an integrated civilian-military organization, but USAID was the lead agency and its personnel were overwhelmingly civilian. Even in the hotly contested I Corps area of Vietnam, only 750 of 2,000 CORDS personnel were military. The State Department assigned several hundred FSOs to serve on CORDS Provincial and District Advisory Teams, according to a veteran FSO who served in CORDS and in a PRT in Afghanistan. These officers received four to six months of Vietnamese language and area training prior to eighteen-month to two-year assignments. CORDS received funding for development assistance and was provided its own transport and logistical support. CORDS was developed when it became apparent that U.S. military operations were alienating the rural population they were trying to protect.

7. Congress should pass legislation rationalizing the funding sources available to military and civilian personnel in stability operations.

Currently, military officers have access to the largest and most easily dispensable source of funds for development projects. This has certain advantages, particularly in situations where only the military is present. Similar funding sources, however, should be available to civilian personnel, who likely will have considerably more expertise in identifying viable development projects. These funding sources must provide for long-term as well as short-term expenditures so that developmental planning can proceed in a rational manner. Application and reporting requirements should also be streamlined to ensure that newly hired field personnel quickly understand the process and provide the required documentation.

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Conclusion

The ad hoc approach taken in the PRT program is indicative of the overall U.S. response to the challenges of post-conflict intervention in Afghanistan. Despite the vague mandate and limited resources, PRT military and civilian participants were able to make

helpful contributions. Through imagination, courage, and determination, PRTs provided a positive international presence in places where there otherwise would have been only combat forces conducting kinetic operations. Among PRT participants interviewed for the Afghanistan Experience Project, most felt their PRT was cost-effective and successful in concrete ways. They also felt their own efforts were worthwhile. Nearly all believed the civilian component was critical and should be empowered through the assignment of a sufficient number of qualified, trained, and appropriately supported personnel.

If the lessons identified in Afghanistan are applied, the PRT model might be utilized in some, but not all, stability operations. Clearly, there are considerable advantages to having a forward deployable, joint civil-military entity that can provide its own defense, project a security presence, and promote political and economic development. This would be particularly true if PRTs were part of a well-conceived and centrally coordinated effort combined with robust international military and police forces, and more conventional types of security reform and development assistance programs.

The mandate of PRTs seems best suited to peace and stability operations in rural areas with small- to medium-sized population centers and limited infrastructure. PRTs fare well in reasonably permissive environments, where even a small, lightly-armed military force can make a meaningful contribution to regional security. Current peace operations in Haiti and Liberia appear to provide appropriate venues; PRTs could also be effectively utilized in Darfur. PRTs would not be appropriate for Iraq, with its large population centers and high-intensity combat operations.

PRTs in Afghanistan (As of September 2005)

| PRT | Created | Lead Nation |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| Asadabad | February 2004 | USA |
| Bamian | March 2003 | New Zealand |
| Chagcharan | August 2005 | Lithuania |
| Faizabad | July 2004 | Germany |
| Farah | September 2004 | USA |
| Gardez | February 2003 | USA |
| Ghazni | March 2004 | USA |
| Herat | December 2003 | Italy |
| Jalalabad | January 2004 | USA |
| Kandahar | December 2003 | Canada |
| Khowst | March 2004 | USA |
| Konduz | March 2003 | Germany |
| Lashkar Gah | September 2004 | USA |
| Maimana | July 2004 | UK |
| Mazar-e-Sharif | February 2003 | UK |
| Mehtlaram | April 2005 | USA |
| Parwan | November 2003 | USA |
| Pul-i-Khumri | October 2004 | Netherlands |
| Qalat | April 2004 | USA |
| Qal-i-Naw | August 2005 | Spain |
| Sharan | October 2004 | USA |
| Tirin Khowt | September 2004 | USA |

Source: USAID mission, U.S. Embassy Kabul

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