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PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS IN AFGHANISTAN

AN INTERAGENCY ASSESSMENT

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Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Stabilization and Reconstruction
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The views expressed in this assessment are those of the team and do not necessarily represent the views of the sponsoring organizations.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
ACM	anti-Coalition militia
AO	area of operations
AOR	area of responsibility
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
CERP	Commanders Emergency Response Program Fund
CFC-A	Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CJTF-76	Combined Joint Task Force-76
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support program
CRDA	Community Revitalization and Development Activity
DDR	disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DIAG	Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups program
DfID	Department for International Development
DOD	U.S. Department of Defense
DOS	U.S. Department of State
FOB	forward operating base
GOA	government of Afghanistan
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JFCOM/JCOA	U.S. Joint Forces Command/Joint Center for Operational Analysis
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization
ODHACA	Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Aid
PRT	provincial reconstruction team
QIP	Quick Impact Project
RAMP	Rural Agriculture Marketing Program
UN	United Nations
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USG	U.S. government
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNOPS	UN Office for Project Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) have been an effective tool for stabilization in Afghanistan, strengthening provincial and district-level institutions and empowering local leaders who support the central government. In many locations, PRTs have helped create conditions that make increased political, social, and economic development possible. Three years into implementation, and with transitions to International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) control accelerating, the assessment, dissemination, and application of lessons learned is appropriate and important to U.S. government (USG) national objectives. Over the past three years, the operational center of gravity for security, reconstruction, and governance has been slowly shifting away from Kabul to Afghanistan's provinces. National programs are adjusting to this shift, but their geographic reach is limited in many of Afghanistan's dangerous and remote areas. This means that PRTs will continue to be a primary vehicle for USG and international stabilization efforts. The issues and recommendations below capture key lessons that can serve to improve the effectiveness of PRTs and meet future stabilization challenges.

CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION

- The U.S. interagency community should develop guidance that clearly outlines the mission, roles, responsibilities, and authority of each participating department or agency within the PRT.
- The U.S. Embassy and Combined Forces Command Afghanistan (CFC-A) need to reinvigorate an in-country interagency coordinating body that articulates how national programs and PRT efforts fit into broader U.S. foreign policy objectives.
- Guidance must be strengthened to direct U.S. PRT commanders to incorporate non-Department of Defense (DOD) representatives into PRT strategy development and decisionmaking; otherwise, PRTs will fall short of their goals.
- To fill key U.S. PRT positions and better achieve assignment objectives, civilian agencies need to further develop policies and incentive structures. In the short term, funding should be provided USAID for more direct-hire staff. Military and civilian personnel tour lengths should be aligned to ensure team development, and personnel must have appropriate experience and training for PRT duties.
- U.S. PRT management and information systems that support civilian representatives need to be strengthened.
- U.S. PRT access to funds and capabilities needs to be improved to support the operational center-of-gravity movement to the provinces.
- USAID needs to recompute the Quick Impact Project (QIP) funding mechanism to draw in implementing partners that can operate more effectively in unstable provinces.
- USDA representatives need access to dedicated funding, as should representatives of any civilian agency who serve on PRTs.
- The USG needs to develop team training for all PRT personnel.

TRANSITION TO ISAF AUTHORITY

- ISAF, the USG, and the government of Afghanistan (GOA) need to have a common political vision and strategy for PRTs transitioning into the south and southeast regions.
- As ISAF PRT control moves to more volatile areas, NATO and lead nations need to continuously review available combat power and reach-back capabilities to compensate for lead-nation implementation restraints.
- Improved security requires a combination of political, economic, and military efforts. As the list of participating countries in ISAF PRTs expands, NATO and lead nations need to ensure that each PRT has the resources to conduct all essential tasks necessary to achieve GOA and NATO objectives.
- As more Coalition PRTs transition to ISAF control, the United States should ensure that a minimum level of U.S. staff and funding remains to enable continuity of operations and a smooth transition.

EXTENDING THE PRT CONCEPT TO OTHER PEACE AND STABILITY OPERATIONS

- PRTs are most appropriate where there is a mid-range of violence, i.e., where instability still precludes heavy nongovernmental organization (NGO) involvement, but where it is not so acute that combat operations predominate.
- PRT security measures need to be periodically reviewed and adapted to local conditions.
- If PRTs are replicated in other countries, their initial focus should be on mapping causes of conflict and developing targeted programs that respond to conditions underlying instability.
- PRT assets and funding must be tailored to specific cultural and security contexts. Therefore, PRT representatives need specialized skills other than those held by many military and civilian officers.

INTRODUCTION

By the fall of 2005, Afghanistan had reached a critical transition point. In many parts of the country, there was broad-based support for the national government. Recent elections for the National Assembly and provincial councils unfolded with very little violence and, for the first time, Afghans elected representatives at the local level. However, corruption and violence in the provinces continue to threaten to undermine the legitimacy of the national government and reverse these gains. As the operational center of gravity for security, reconstruction, and governance shifts to Afghanistan's provinces, national programs are beginning to adjust, but their geographic reach is still limited. PRTs, therefore, will continue to be one of the primary vehicles for USG and international stabilization efforts outside of Kabul, particularly in the unstable south and southeast.

Three years into the use of PRTs, it is time to start gathering lessons about what works and what needs improvement. This is particularly relevant as the United States begins to replicate the model in Iraq and as NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) begins taking on increased responsibility for PRTs in many parts of Afghanistan. In October 2005 a team from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of State (DOS), and the U.S. Joint Forces Command, Joint Center for Operational Analysis (JFCOM/JCOA) assessed PRT operations in Afghanistan. The goals of the assessment were to

- generate lessons to inform greater cooperation and coordination between different USG departments and agencies in conflict and postconflict settings
- determine key lessons to inform the transition of PRTs to ISAF
- analyze the PRT and other implementation approaches to determine their applicability to other U.S. peace and stability operations

Before traveling to Afghanistan, the team conducted interviews with key officials and others with recent experience in Afghanistan. During the three-week, in-country phase of the assessment, team members interviewed over 100 officials at the U.S. Embassy, USAID, USDA, CFC-A, CJTF-76, ISAF, UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), GOA, international donors, and NGOs.

The team visited PRTs in Gardez, Ghazni, Kandahar, and Mazar-e-Sharif, as well as Regional Command South and battalion task forces in Ghazni and Paktika. The team met with most DOS, USAID, and USDA PRT representatives during a two-day Embassy-sponsored conference in Kabul and was able to meet with a broad range of military officials at the CJTF-76 PRT commanders conference at Bagram Airfield. All interviews were conducted on a non-attribution basis. A list of assessment questions is in appendix A, and a full list of interviewees is in appendix B.

BACKGROUND

PRTs, established in Afghanistan at the end of 2002, were integrated civilian-military organizations designed to meet three objectives:¹ improve security, extend the reach of the Afghan government, and facilitate reconstruction in priority provinces. In keeping with the overall policy environment at the time, the central focus was on maintaining a light international security “footprint” and on building the capacity of Afghan institutions to address instability in remote, ungoverned regions.

When the assessment was conducted, 22 PRTs were operating in Afghanistan (see map), 13 managed by the U.S.-led Combined Forces Command, Afghanistan and 9 by the ISAF. Initial guidance on the structure and functions of U.S.-led PRTs was agreed to by senior civilian and military leadership in Afghanistan and approved by the U.S. Deputies Committee in June 2003. The guidance envisioned that civilian representatives and military officers in the PRT would work as a team to assess the environment and develop strategies to achieve the three primary objectives.

DOD was assigned responsibility for improving security in their area of operation, all logistical support, and providing force protection for all PRT members, including civilians. USAID was given the lead on reconstruction; and DOS was responsible for political oversight, coordination, and reporting. All members of the PRT leadership structure—military and civilian—were required to approve reconstruction projects and coordinate with local government offices and national ministries. The concept anticipated that as PRTs matured and conditions changed, additional capacity would be available through reach-back to additional military and civilian assets.

Beyond this basic guidance, the essential tasks of the PRT were left open to allow them flexibility to adapt to local conditions. This flexibility became a double-edged sword, however. On one side, there would be no cookie-cutter approach to Afghanistan’s diverse regions. Each PRT was expected to address the most important issues in its area of responsibility, and many did so with remarkable creativity and success. In Gardez, for example, the USAID representative supported the work of the Tribal Liaison Office, an Afghan NGO dedicated to enabling dialogue between powerful tribes in unstable areas and the new central government. Building on this work, the Gardez PRT and UNAMA sponsored a provincial reconstruction workshop that brought together 100 tribal elders, local government officials, and representatives from Kabul to discuss national reconstruction plans. Similarly, in Jalalabad, the PRT commander held regular meetings with religious leaders, university students, and tribal elders. After riots in May 2005 over alleged U.S. disrespect for the Koran, these meetings served as a forum to discuss local concerns. To demonstrate that the United States was not opposed to Islam, the PRT commander helped refurbish the city’s main mosque.

¹ U.S. PRTs comprise 50–100 personnel. A small number are U.S. civilians, generally a DOS representative, a USAID representative, and a representative from USDA. There is usually an Afghan representative from the Ministry of Interior. Not all PRTs have a full civilian complement. On the military side, there is a PRT commander, two civil affairs teams (with four members each), operational and administrative staff, and force protection elements (see appendix C).



Where PRTS operate in Afghanistan.

The downside of this flexibility was confusion, particularly in the NGO and international donor community, about what a PRT is, what it ought to do, and what its limits should be. People who served with NGOs argued that PRT activities, particularly in the areas of governance and reconstruction, could be counterproductive. For example, in the startup phase, some PRTs constructed schools and clinics without paying enough attention to whether the Afghan government could afford to equip them with teachers, books, doctors, or medical supplies. While many PRTs have taken steps to redress this issue, the NGO and donor community remains concerned about the nature and scope of PRT programs.

Another cost of flexibility is the risk of focusing on local, rather than national, objectives. For example, if the Ministry of Education is trying to establish national standards but the PRTs have local approaches to that issue, the PRTs risk undermining the ministry’s efforts.

FINDINGS

This assessment differs from the several previous studies of the PRT model (see bibliography) in that it is an interagency assessment that reflects input of evaluators from DOS, USAID, and JFCOM/JCOA. Broadly, it supports the conclusion that the PRT can be an effective political-military tool in the strategy to stabilize Afghanistan's remote provinces. PRTs helped extend the authority of the central government by providing technical and organizational support to governors and provincial ministries. PRTs also delivered reconstruction and humanitarian assistance in remote, violent areas where no other development actors have been able or willing to operate. They also made significant contributions to security through their presence and through their support of the Afghan National Police and Army, the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program, and the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) program.

Even so, not all PRTs have lived up to their potential. As the United States transfers PRT responsibilities to other nations and alliances and extends the model into Iraq, it is critical that the interagency community understand both the strengths and weaknesses of PRTs as a tool to meet USG objectives.

Findings are grouped under three central themes: civil-military coordination, transition to ISAF authority, and extensions of the concept to other peace and stability operations.

CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION

The lack of explicit guidance led to confusion about civilian and military roles in the U.S.-led PRT.

Without a shared understanding of respective roles and responsibilities, individual experience, skills, and leadership style, personality played a disproportionate role in determining the direction of PRT activities. Where PRT commanders worked closely with the civilian and military members, the PRT developed a common vision and sense of aligned purpose. Where this was not the case, project implementation tended to be ad hoc and driven by response to higher headquarters versus local dynamics.

If the military commander of the U.S.-led PRT did not proactively incorporate non-DOD representatives into PRT leadership decisions, the goals of the PRT suffered.

While interagency guidance gave civilians from USAID and DOS the lead on governance and reconstruction, PRT culture, people, and resources were predominantly military. Military dominance was reinforced by force protection and security concerns, and by the collocation of several Coalition PRTs with maneuver units. Moreover, subordination of PRTs to maneuver units threatened to dilute a core focus of the PRT, which was to strengthen the Afghan government's capacity to address issues underlying instability and support for insurgency.

A shortage of staff, limited technical and managerial support from Kabul, and inadequate mechanisms for project implementation undermined the effectiveness of the U.S.-led PRTs.

Military officers and civilian officials both stressed that if civilians were to lead on reconstruction and governance, they would need resources, skills, and authority. Lack of a strong mechanism to support both military and civilian reach-back for subject-matter experts hindered the U.S.-led PRTs' ability to meet the changing needs in their areas of operation.

As the operational center of gravity for reconstruction and governance shifted to the provinces, USG supporting programs did not keep pace.

Many national programs in the provinces were poorly coordinated with U.S.-led PRTs. This limited the ability of the U.S.-led PRT to align their programs to support the broader stabilization and reconstruction strategy. Additionally, nationally implemented donor programs had limited geographic reach.

Combined team training for military and civilian staff proved essential.

U.S.-led PRTs were formed in theater, and tours were not synchronized, often leading to a lack of civil-military coordination and standard operating procedures. This stood in sharp contrast to some ISAF PRTs that assembled and trained extensively prior to deployment.

TRANSITION TO ISAF AUTHORITY

A common vision of PRT organization, roles, and mission was needed to enable the PRT to reach its potential.

PRTs have an intrinsic political-military role in support of the Afghan national government. In the future, ISAF, lead nations, and the GOA need to develop a common vision and strategy to ensure ISAF PRTs meet the political-military objectives approved by the GOA and NATO and reinforced by the PRT executive steering committee.

As ISAF lead nations move into more volatile areas, continuous examination of available combat power and reach-back capabilities must be conducted to compensate for changes in lead-nation implementing restraints.

In southern and eastern regions, the risk of insurgent activity is higher, demanding a flexible and representative response mechanism that allows PRTs to respond to increased hostile combat capabilities and counter offensive operations against them. Additionally, lead-nation restraints that limit operations and implementation of their activities could significantly reduce PRT effectiveness in a more volatile security environment.

Security in unstable provinces was improved by a combination of political, economic, and military efforts.

PRTs, alone or in coordination with other organizations in the province, needed to implement a full array of security, governance, and reconstruction initiatives tailored to local dynamics.

Continuity of effort proved critical to success.

A seamless handover of projects and information was needed to maintain credibility when handing authority from a U.S.-led PRT to the Coalition or ISAF. Coordination for the remaining U.S. staff and their PRT duties, interrelationships with the incoming PRT leaders, and lead-nation responsibilities for the U.S. staff needed to be formalized prior to transition.

EXTENDING THE PRT CONCEPT TO OTHER PEACE AND STABILITY OPERATIONS

PRTs were most successful within a limited range of security challenges.

The teams proved most effective when instability precluded heavy NGO involvement in reconstruction and when violence was not so acute that combat operations predominated.

Resources provided to PRTs needed to be tailored to local dynamics to provide the greatest chance of success.

Both military and civilian chains of command provided standard packages of resources for each PRT, but a one-size-fits-all approach did not meet unique challenges and opportunities in Afghanistan's diverse provinces. Reach-back for specific skills and capacity were extremely limited.

PRTs proved most effective when they devoted attention to understanding and responding to issues underlying instability and support for insurgency.

Many security incidents were related to tribal competition over land, the narcotics trade, revenge killings, or violence between nomadic and sedentary populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite implementation challenges, PRTs have played an important role in stabilizing Afghanistan's remote provinces over the past three years. Following is a series of recommendations that would strengthen PRT performance. The recommendations are intended to serve as a starting point for discussion on how to increase the effectiveness of the PRT model.

CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION

The integration of the security provided by military forces with projects intended to build infrastructure and strengthen the role of the national Afghan government proved a key advantage of the PRT model. Civilian representatives and military officers, working with local partners, extended stabilizing influences into a wide-ranging area. But there were inevitable tensions within the PRT, exacerbated by

- lack of operational guidance clearly delineating missions, roles, responsibilities, and authority
- lack of understanding of the importance of incorporating non-DOD representatives into strategy development and decisionmaking
- lack of adequate team training
- difficulties in providing adequate staff and resources

The U.S. interagency community should develop guidance that clearly outlines the mission, roles, responsibilities, and authorities of each participating department or agency within the PRT.

Military and civilian representatives needed to act in partnership to achieve the full potential of the PRT. In practice, this was a challenge. While initial guidance gave civilians decisionmaking leadership on reconstruction and governance issues, many military officers viewed civilians as more advisory and believed the commander had final authority over all PRT activities, especially when security challenges seemed paramount. Very few PRT staff, civilian or military, understood or had seen U.S. national policy guidance on their roles within the PRT.

In the absence of broadly accepted guidance, the importance of personality, individual leadership style, and previously established relationships had inordinate influence on the effectiveness and impact of the PRT. In places where PRT commanders worked closely with the civilian and military team members, the PRT developed as a team with a common vision and sense of aligned purpose. In other cases, the PRT effort was fragmented.

For example, in the spring of 2005, CJTF-76 decided to consolidate operating bases in Paktika, giving 24 hours' notice to the PRT that it had to move to the forward operating base (FOB). Neither USAID nor the Embassy had been notified or consulted. After they were consulted, the decision was made to move the maneuver element to the PRT rather than the PRT to the maneuver element. This left the PRT closer to the city. After the move, the maneuver commander was given operational control of the PRT. Because the maneuver commander had a clear understanding of the importance of reconstruction and political engagement, the move did not negatively affect the accomplishment of PRT objectives. But the positive outcome was based on the commander's experience and understanding of the overall mission—not interagency guidance on roles and responsibilities.

The U.S. Embassy and CFC-A need to reinvigorate an in-country interagency coordinating body that articulates how national programs and PRT efforts fit into broader U.S. foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan.

Both U.S.-led PRTs and national programs needed to work in concert to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals. The Embassy's mission performance plan envisioned an increasing role for the PRT, but there was no written plan to direct the implementation of this vision. USAID's strategic plan mentioned the PRTs only in passing and in an annex. Neither plan discussed how national programs and PRT activities complemented one another.

Coordination was ad hoc, but there were successes. In Ghazni, for example, DOS and USAID representatives discovered that several U.S. military and civilian programs were beginning to work on justice sector reform in Wardak province. The civilian representatives and PRT commander took the initiative to coordinate these national programs in collaboration with local officials. This resulted in a unified justice sector initiative for the Wardak province.

Guidance must direct PRT commanders to incorporate non-DOD representatives into PRT decisionmaking.

While interagency guidance gave civilians from USAID and DOS the lead on governance and reconstruction, PRT culture, people, and resources were predominantly military, especially when security concerns reigned and when PRTs were collocated with maneuver units. However, subordination of PRTs to maneuver units threatened to dilute a core focus of the PRT—to strengthen the GOA's capacity to address issues underlying instability and support for insurgency.

Occasionally the maneuver commander assumed the role of leading the political—as well as military—effort, even when civilian representatives were present. In one case, the maneuver commander arranged to take a newly appointed governor to meet officials and constituents in remote districts. The DOS representative was not included in these meetings, despite having requested to participate. As one civilian explained, “When kinetic operations are necessary, we become an extension of the forward operating base, [but] when the environment permits, we can do what was envisaged.”

The PRT concept envisioned a combined military and civilian project development and approval process. Though DOD, DOS, USAID, and USDA each had their own objectives, it was expected the objectives would merge through collaboration and consensus. In some PRTs, however, this did not happen, even after CFC-A issued guidance concerning project development and approval in early 2005 and USAID placed representatives at CJTF-76 and the regional commands to facilitate coordination at all levels of command.² In the best PRTs, a working group met regularly to refine the PRT reconstruction strategy and approve and designate funding for all PRT projects. This approach should be expanded.

² This guidance directed that the use of Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds needed to be coordinated with USAID.

In filling key U.S.-PRT positions, civilian agencies need to further develop policies and incentive structures to better achieve assignment objectives. In the short term, funding should be provided to USAID for more direct-hire staff. Military and civilian personnel tour lengths should be aligned to ensure team development, and military personnel must have appropriate experience and training for PRT duties.

There needs to be a commitment to appropriately staff the PRTs. Given the importance of PRTs in the USG strategy for Afghanistan, PRT commanders need broad operational experience, appropriate past assignments, and service school training.³

Civilian personnel assigned to PRTs need to be capable of making key assessments, refining analysis, and implementing response activities. Early in the PRT implementation, desirable skills for personnel could include short-term stabilization and conflict mitigation experience. Subsequent staffing might well emphasize expertise in the development of basic infrastructure for security sector reform and local governance.

Additionally, civilian agencies must do more to find senior staff for PRT positions. Because of staff shortages, DOS, USAID, and USDA were generally able to put only one representative on each PRT or regional command. In the startup phase, many civilian slots remained vacant. Where this occurred, the military took the lead in reconstruction and political engagement by default. While USAID, DOS, and USDA were able to eventually staff most positions, many civilian representatives lacked the experience to function as leaders on the PRT or were short-term volunteers.

Military and civilian representatives were doing extraordinary work under very difficult conditions. They were smart, energetic, and dedicated. However, junior or non-direct hire staff civilian representatives often lacked experience with and knowledge of their own agencies. By comparison, most of their military counterparts had 16–20 years experience prior to PRT command. There are significant limits to what civilian agencies can do to address this issue given current funding and staffing levels. Both DOS and USAID are taking steps to attract more senior, direct-hire staff. However, civilian agencies must determine what priority they will give PRT assignments.

PRT management and information systems that support representatives of DOS, USAID, and USDA need to be strengthened.

None of the civilian departments and agencies involved in the PRT had much on-the-ground experience supporting individual staff in remote, isolated locations. As a result, civilians on the PRT were often left to their own devices. While DOS, USAID, and USDA eventually put a PRT management team in place, all had difficulty fully integrating PRT programs into overall Embassy or Mission programs. Of note, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul became aware of the need to improve and developed a new process for PRT reporting.

Many DOS and USAID PRT representatives indicated that they did not have reliable access to information about national projects in their province. Their inability to provide comprehensive information about U.S. activities to PRT and regional commanders undermined civilian credibility and limited their ability to integrate their activities with national programs.

³ There were differing opinions about what type of military officer would be best suited to command a PRT, whether previous battalion commanders, alternate-command list officers, or senior civil affairs officers (at the rank of colonel).

Civilian PRT representatives proved to be one of the best sources of information on political, economic, and social developments in Afghanistan's remote provinces. As the PRT concept matured and the center of effort shifted to the provinces, DOS and USAID began to draw on this information and put systems into place that helped with coordination between Kabul and the field. A recent USAID report outlines a broad series of recommendations for management reform. However, more needs to be done. For example, an initiative to map all development activities has been underway for a considerable period, but the information is still not easily accessible to field staff.

PRT access to funds and capabilities needs to be improved to support moving the center of effort to the provinces. USAID needs to recompute the Quick Impact Project (QIP) funding mechanism to draw in implementing partners who are able to operate more effectively in unstable provinces.

The two implementing partners for USAID QIP programs had a mixed record. While USAID project approval could come in a matter of hours or days, project startup and completion often dragged on for months, lagging far behind military projects. USAID's Quick Impact Program (QIP) implementing partners often seemed unwilling or unable to operate in insecure regions. For example, in one insecure province, funding for 14 schools was split between Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) and QIP resources. All school projects were coordinated through local and national governments and approved simultaneously. However, schools funded through CERP and implemented through local NGOs were constructed in three months, while a similar number of USAID QIP school projects languished for over six months and were not projected to be finished until the following spring.

One central complaint was the lack of local community coordination. While some PRT projects were well coordinated with local leadership and government officials, others had poor community participation. In contrast, most NGOs strived to work with local communities to ensure buy-in and some level of financial or in-kind contribution. Lack of community participation in PRT projects had implications for both the sustainability of the project and for community willingness to contribute to parallel or follow-on NGO projects. Learning from U.S. and Coalition experiences in Iraq, the overall USG assistance effort could benefit from leveraging the experience and capability of international NGOs that have a record of working successfully in high-risk environments.

Additionally, implementation of the USAID Community Revitalization and Development Activity (CRDA) should be considered for Afghanistan. It is an effective model for community development that is currently being implemented in 10 countries, including Iraq.

USDA representatives need access to dedicated funding, as should any civilian agencies that place representatives on PRTs.

Eighty percent of the Afghan population depends on agriculture to earn a living. Any discussion about building support for the central government, minimizing support for the insurgency, and reducing the influence of the drug trade must therefore include a discussion about how to engage people in the agricultural sector. In many cases, USDA representatives provided invaluable support to the PRT in advising on agricultural activities. But USDA had no legislative authority to provide funding to its representatives for these activities, and relied instead on persuasion to access CERP or QIP funds.

USAID's Rural Agricultural Market Program (RAMP) made progress improving key agricultural areas of Afghanistan. Similarly, alternative livelihood programs in poppy growing areas made progress. However, few projects designed by USDA representatives were coordinated with RAMP, except Jalalabad. In fact, a significant proportion of USG civilians on the PRT complained that they knew little about RAMP projects and could not get the RAMP implementing partners to coordinate their efforts with the PRTs.

The USG needs to develop team training for all PRT personnel.

Many of the critical challenges faced by the PRT could have been addressed through synchronization of tours and tour lengths among agencies to enable adequate pre-deployment training. Instead, decisions about where to place military, USAID, and DOS representatives were often made after representatives arrived in Afghanistan. In fact, several military personnel found they would be serving on a PRT (as opposed to a maneuver unit or staff headquarters) after they arrived in country. This stands in sharp contrast to ISAF, where some countries identify PRT members as much as a year in advance and have the members undergo significant training together.

Virtually everyone the team interviewed said PRTs would have been more effective if assigned personnel had known their postings in advance. This would have allowed them to obtain language training, conduct research on local dynamics, and coordinate with the outgoing team. Currently, deploying U.S. units are developing unit-sponsored training for PRT commanders, and a course is being developed for PRT leadership at the National Defense University. The U.S. military is also developing a 45-day PRT training program for future teams. These are important steps, and they should be expanded and reinforced. But there continues to be a serious lack of civilian trainers participating in pre-deployment programs for military units. In the past year, civilian representatives have been invited to several maneuver unit exercises, but their role and contribution has been short term and unclear.

Training should not only bring together military and civilian components, but should draw on the experience of people who have previously served in PRTs. All agencies should be fully briefed on PRT guidance and the roles, responsibilities, and authorities of different actors. Training should also include a frank discussion about the challenges PRTs have faced and the strengths and limitations of participating agencies.

TRANSITION TO ISAF AUTHORITY

When this assessment was conducted, there were nine ISAF PRTs located in relatively stable areas in the north and west of the country. The Canadians, operating under the Coalition umbrella, led the only non-U.S. PRT in the southern region. The Canadian and other PRTs in the southern region are scheduled for transition to ISAF during April–August 2006. It was anticipated that the United States would continue to lead in the volatile eastern region along the Pakistan border. The decision to transition from a U.S. to an ISAF PRT is ultimately a political decision made by NATO and predicated on the lead-nation's willingness to assume responsibility for a PRT. There are three critical issues to consider: 1) the security environment and ability of ISAF PRTs to maintain stability in the face of lead nation restraints, 2) the availability of resources to continue reconstruction projects, and 3) whether systems are in place to ensure continuity in operations from the United States to ISAF.

The USG, GOA, and ISAF need a common political vision and strategy for PRTs.

NATO has established a common political vision and strategy for PRTs in ISAF's Operations Plan and other alliance documents. However, NATO has no authority over lead-nation civilian efforts within the PRT. Without a common political vision and strategy between NATO, lead nations, and the GOA, individual PRT guidelines and execution tasks could be established independently by each lead nation. As noted earlier, the PRT is an important political-military tool for empowering local stakeholders, improving stability, and gaining popular support for the central GOA. U.S.-led PRTs are key instruments in the counterinsurgency effort in the south and southeast provinces and lend considerable support to stabilization of these areas. It is thus imperative that all Afghan governmental stakeholders, NATO, and PRT lead-nation officials share a sense of purpose as to the future direction of the PRTs. Each ISAF PRT

needs to have the resources necessary to implement this common strategy and to achieve stabilization in its area of responsibility.

As ISAF/NATO members move into more volatile areas, continuous examination of available combat power and reach-back capabilities must be conducted to compensate for changes in lead-nation implementing restraints.

Many ISAF PRTs have a more robust military and civilian presence than U.S. PRTs. The Italian PRT in Herat and the German PRT at Konduz have significantly more soldiers and civilians than U.S. PRTs. However, ISAF PRTs often operate under “national restraints” that restrict the range of security-related measures that can be undertaken or restrict specific reconstruction activities. For example, national restraints initially limited the ability of some ISAF PRTs to conduct extended presence patrols, support GOA actions, or rapidly respond to local security incidents. The inability to reinforce GOA operations and actions could lead to increased insurgent or tribal challenges to an expanding but nascent national government authority.

Past decisions by ISAF members to assume command of a PRT in the north and west provinces were generally based on the assumption that the environment supported a security posture similar to that of a peacekeeping mission. As ISAF PRTs move into less secure regions, the risk of insurgent activity spilling into their area will increase, and the ability of the PRT to adapt and ISAF to support rapid changes in force posture to support the PRTs will become more important.

NATO and lead nations have given significant consideration to meeting the challenges they face during transition. However, they should take care to ensure there are processes to continuously review the changing nature of the volatile south and mechanisms to ensure that rapid response and reach-back capacity is available to respond to new dynamics.

Improved stability requires a combination of political, economic, and military efforts. As the list of participating countries in ISAF PRTs expands, NATO needs to ensure that each PRT is sufficiently staffed and resourced to conduct essential tasks.

PRTs, alone or in coordination with other actors in a province, must be able to address security, governance, and reconstruction needs based on the dynamics within their specific area. In permissive environments where NGOs have a significant presence, the PRT may not need to implement reconstruction projects focused on basic services or other key efforts that help stabilize the local area. However, as ISAF PRTs shift to the south and southeast where there are fewer NGOs operating, the PRT will need to have the capacity to assure implementation of reconstruction projects in their area or responsibility as a key element of their stabilization effort.

For example, the British PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif focused primarily on security sector projects such as renovation of police stations, road infrastructure, and municipal buildings to avoid overlap with the large NGO community in the area. However, in less permissive security environments where there are few—if any—NGOs, such a restricted focus would cut off one of the only sources of funding for reconstruction and development projects essential for stabilization. In these cases, improving the security sector alone would only help keep conflict in check for the short term but would not address longer-term, underlying causes of instability.

A good example of lead-nation efforts to address the full spectrum of efforts in the south is the development of a UK stabilization plan for Helmand. The UK deployed a strategy development team to Kandahar and Helmand in September and October 2005. The strategy team consisted of two planners from their Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) and advisors with skills in conflict mitigation, local

governance, economic development, police, justice, and military. This team, in conjunction with UK Embassy personnel and U.S. PRT expertise in Helmand, developed a broad strategy to stabilize the province. The UK Embassy used the strategy to develop operational programs and a personnel assignment plan that places the appropriate civilians with the skills to manage civilian projects at the Helmand PRT while the military works to improve the security environment.

As more PRTs transition to ISAF control, the United States should ensure that a minimum level of staff and U.S. funding remains in place to enable continuity of operations and a smooth transition.

Continuity of operations is critical to maintaining credibility with the local populace. A key element of transition is the handover and transfer of authority between incoming and outgoing teams. Several successful handovers have included leaving U.S. military personnel with the new team for a short time. Unfortunately, this was done on a limited, volunteer basis. For example, while the Canadians had a robust force-protection element in Kandahar, their priority was security sector reform rather than small reconstruction projects. Canada believed reconstruction was more appropriately carried out by other agencies, with the appropriate environment facilitated by the PRT's work. Although money would become available through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canada required time to establish its local project funding and management process. During the assessment, it was not clear how much funding would be available for reconstruction within the security sector reform programs.

The Canadian PRT was promised U.S. CERP funding to facilitate the transition of the PRT. However, rather than continuing to develop new activities, a U.S. caretaker staff was instructed to close out as many projects as possible for financial reasons. Incoming Canadian PRT members indicated that Afghans had noticed the drop in activity and were concerned the Afghans would interpret this drop in support as a sign of weakness or lack of equal commitment by the Canadians, which could increase instability.

Also critical is that PRTs be continuously aware of what is going on in their areas of operation: incoming teams need access to information on political and security dynamics, full details on key personalities, and a project database. Where possible, classified information should be released to Coalition and NATO members. This would avoid the situation where, for example, a Canadian PRT funded a local organization to conduct a mapping of tribal groups, and a U.S. PRT funded the same organization to do a similar project in another region. Neither was briefed on the other's operations, and they were unable to share the information with each other.

Currently no memorandum of understanding exists between USG and ISAF nations assuming leadership of U.S.-led PRTs. The U.S. Embassy is beginning to negotiate force protection and logistics support for those U.S. civilian staff left with ISAF lead-nation PRTs. But there remains a critical need for a common understanding between the USG and ISAF members about the appropriate role for U.S. PRT members and ISAF PRT responsibilities toward those members. As the United States passes the baton to ISAF, having protocols in place will ease the transfer.

EXTENDING THE PRT CONCEPT TO OTHER PEACE AND STABILITY OPERATIONS

Use of the PRT model could help stabilize other postconflict environments. An initiative based on the PRT concept has been instituted in Iraq, and there is interest in exploring its use in other postconflict environments. PRTs are seen by many as a useful mechanism to coordinate military and civilian efforts in building stable, desirable governments.

In addition to the above recommendations, three key issues must be considered in determining how elements of the PRT model can be applied to other stability operations: 1) the level of violence in which the PRT is introduced, 2) the type of violence, and 3) the tailoring of PRT skills and resources to USG policy objectives for the specific operation.

PRTs, as currently structured, are most effective where instability precludes heavy NGO involvement, but where violence is not so acute that combat operations predominate. The PRT model should be adapted if it is used outside this range.

In very permissive environments where NGOs are implementing a broad range of development activities, PRTs are less essential to reconstruction. For example, ISAF PRTs have, in many cases, been able to adopt an approach that limits their military focus to security sector issues. They also operate in a manner that minimizes duplication of NGO efforts. There may also be areas in another country context where NGOs have an established presence. In such contexts, adding PRT reconstruction activities to the mix could complicate overarching international reconstruction efforts.

In areas of active insurgency, it has proven difficult for civilians to operate effectively outside the auspices of the PRT. Furthermore, in highly volatile areas it may make sense to embed civilian elements with maneuver units, where leaders have more force protection assets. However, increased reconstruction within active combat zones increases requirements for security forces to protect new symbols of change and success.

Security measures need periodic review and adaptation as conditions and challenges change.

A one-size-fits-all approach to force protection in significantly different security environments reduced the ability of PRTs to effectively use other tools available to them. All PRT staff members interviewed understood that their job entailed risk. They also were acutely aware that force protection requirements could limit their effectiveness and ability to interact with the local population. Force protection requirements ought to be eased in more permissive areas and as the threat diminishes. Typically, the ability to rapidly adjust force protection to the current challenge means that decisions regarding force protection should devolve to the lowest level.

If PRTs are used in other countries, their initial focus should be on mapping the causes of conflict and developing targeted programs to understand and respond to conditions underlying instability.

The key advantage of PRTs is that they are positioned to do what no other actor can do in remote and insecure districts: bring a combination of military and civilian resources to bear on local causes of violence, support the development of viable governance and security sector institutions, and strengthen the hand of groups with an interest in stability. While some PRTs did commendable jobs at defining and addressing these dynamics, they were not always equipped with the right skills to rapidly identify and address the causes of conflict.

Most PRT members explicitly acknowledged that it was difficult to disentangle violence perpetrated by anti-Coalition militia from violence driven by other factors—tribal competition over natural resources, violence linked to poppy cultivation and opium production, or fighting between local military commanders over control of transit routes. Even when the original causes of violence were not directly a result of the anti-Coalition militia, generalized instability and lack of governance in remote districts made it easier for such militia to take root and flourish.

Personnel assigned to a PRT need to identify and address the issues underlying regional violence. The task includes identifying and engaging at-risk populations, such as unemployed youth; those living on the edges of the formal economy; and groups who supported the Taliban, either because of coercion or

because of the services the Taliban provided. More than one-third of the violence in southern Afghanistan was attributed to tribal conflict. PRT staffs were not always well suited to this mission and lacked reach-back capability to deal with tribal conflict. Not directly dealing with this source of conflict jeopardized overall mission success.

This lesson can extend to other countries. For example, if the PRT model were implemented in Haiti, where violence is heavily shaped by youth gangs, staff on the PRT would need to place a heavier focus on youth activities, anti-gang initiatives, and community policing.

PRT assets and funding must be tailored to meet specific requirements of different cultural factors and security conditions. Those assigned to the PRTs need specialized skills—and not always those held by many military and civilian officers.

One respondent lamented, “the PRT is a place, not a concept.” USG PRTs have achieved a degree of stability and refined their strategies to meet the changing dynamics of their area of responsibility. However, they have not always been resourced to meet the changing nature of their efforts. Individuals possessing the appropriate skills to address emerging challenges have frequently not been deployed nor provided through temporary reach-back mechanisms. Individuals assigned to PRTs should be capable of making key assessments, refining analysis, and implementing response activities. Initially, desirable skills of personnel should be related to short-term stabilization and conflict mitigation. Subsequent staffing may well emphasize skills in development of basic infrastructure for security sector reform, and then on improvements in local governance. Thus, the skills of PRT personnel change as the nature of their efforts and challenges change. PRT support and personnel mechanisms have to be developed to expedite deployment of appropriate skills or linkages to ongoing national programs that can be melded into specific PRT dynamics.

CONCLUSION

PRTs have become an effective tool for stabilization in Afghanistan. In many places, they have strengthened the hand of groups who support the central government and have helped create an environment in which political, social, and economic development is possible. However, three years into implementation, and with transitions to ISAF accelerating, the application of lessons learned is both appropriate and vital. The recommendations in this assessment suggest ways PRTs can be more effective in Afghanistan.

The PRT concept is at a transition point: if lessons are applied and the model appropriately adapted, PRTs offer an effective tool for stabilization and application of regional reconstruction tied to USG national programs and efforts. The degree to which PRTs may be effective in other venues, however, will largely depend on commitment of resources in conjunction with the security environment and political realities. To maximize the possibility of successful future application of the PRT concept, interagency doctrine development is essential.

ISSUES FOR FUTURE STUDY

During fieldwork and the preparation of the report, several additional areas for further review were identified:

- Analyze long-term impact on the lives of Afghan civilians in PRT areas of operation.
- Assess ways to better integrate and interface with NGOs.
- Identify the necessary and sufficient criteria for the transition from military-civilian interventions to traditional development programming.
- Review potential measures of effectiveness for PRT objectives.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Determine key lessons from PRT experience to date to inform the transition policy as PRTs are handed off to NATO.
 - Are there specific local political and security conditions that need to be met prior to transition?
 - What continuity issues should be considered in turnover of Coalition PRTs to ISAF/NATO (political/security/development/funding)?
 - Are there specific aspects of Coalition PRTs that must be replicated by ISAF/NATO PRTs to ensure continued success? What key functions need to be sustained?
 - What issues should be considered related to security?
2. Generate lessons to inform greater cooperation and coordination between military and civilians in conflict and post-conflict settings.
 - How are military and civilian actors currently coordinating to achieve PRT goals? How are roles and responsibilities defined?
 - In what other ways and in what other areas could they coordinate?
 - What coordination lessons can be learned from the PRT experience in the following areas: 1) humanitarian and development assistance; 2) security sector; 3) strategic communications/public diplomacy.
3. Analyze aspects of the PRT concept and various implementation approaches to determine their applicability to other contexts.
 - What elements of the Afghan context (i.e., security situation, political dynamics, geography, etc.) made PRTs necessary?
 - How does the PRT concept relate to USG goals and international mandate for stabilization and reconstruction (S&R) in Afghanistan?
 - What role have the PRTs played as a platform for the decentralized implementation of key elements of the overall national strategy (DDR, policing, counternarcotics) for Afghanistan?
 - Could the PRT model or aspects of the PRT model be applied to other settings?
 - What conditions (security, significant military presence, geography, and political dynamics) make the PRT model the most appropriate model for other contexts?
 - If not the PRT approach, what other options exist?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW LIST

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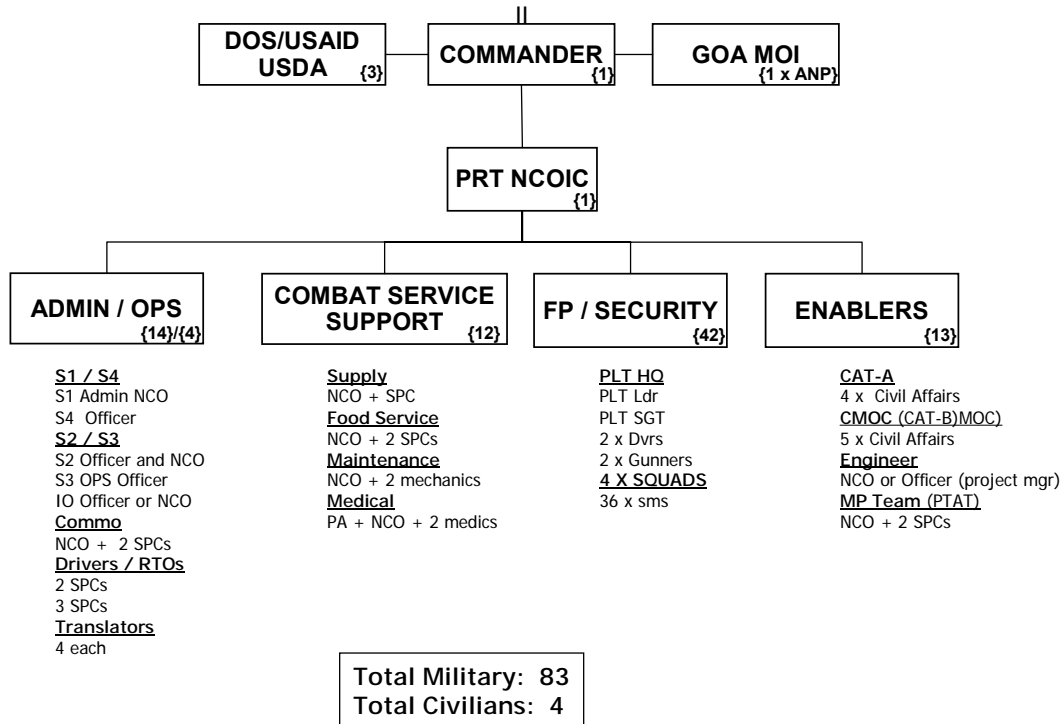
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APPENDIX C: ORGANIZATIONAL DIAGRAM

PRT Core Task Organization



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