
PERSPECTIVES

Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Security Assistance: Comments on an Evolving Concept

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Introduction

After a quick victory, toppling the Taliban and sending its al Qaeda allies into hiding, the U.S. led coalition in Afghanistan found itself in charge of a country devastated by over two decades of conflict. The country needed extensive reconstruction in every aspect of society and lacked a trained indigenous work force to assist in the stabilization process. The task of rebuilding Afghanistan was made even more difficult by an active insurgency, large numbers of armed militiamen and a quickly developing narco-trafficking industry. In order to assist in the stabilization of Afghanistan, the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council passed, on 20 December 2001, the U.N. Security Council resolution 1386 establishing an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to aid the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in and around Kabul. By summer, 2002, 5,000 peacekeepers from nineteen countries were providing security in a 250 square kilometers area around Kabul. As a result of its success in enhancing security in Kabul, there were numerous calls for ISAF to expand its presence out into the countryside to provide security for humanitarian and reconstruction efforts.

Among those calling for ISAF to move beyond Kabul were then Afghan Chairman Hamid Karzai, the United Nations (U.N.) Secretary General Kofi Annan, the U.N. special representative to Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, and many in the international organizations and non-governmental organizations community. Their desire was to see an expansion of ISAF to key locations and major transport routes outside of Kabul to assist in the reconstruction process and to support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of militia forces not under the control of central government. The key impediment for reconstruction, according to the non-government organization community and others, was the lack of security throughout the country. International security



One of several ISAF projects providing assistance in humanitarian and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.

assistance force troops were needed to assist the Afghan National Army soldiers (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP), who were still being trained, in providing security. The non-government organization community was calling for a peacekeeping force on par with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) mission in Kosovo. A 2003 RAND report noted there were twenty peacekeepers per thousand people in Kosovo. To reach a comparable number in Afghanistan would require 500,000 peacekeepers. That number was totally unfeasible and impractical.

Development of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) concept successfully addressed Afghanistan's security environment, reconstruction needs and political requirements. This article documents and explores the development, implementation and overall effect of PRTs in Afghanistan.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams Origins and Mission

The summer of 2002, called for an increased ISAF presence collided with a reluctance on the part of the international community to provide more troops, a lack of international political will and a U.S. government desire to keep western troop levels in Afghanistan as low as possible. The traditional model of creating security equates more troops with increased security, but Afghan history demonstrates this model does not always hold true. Drawing upon lessons from the Soviet experience, U.S. policy makers were determined to not aggravate Afghans' sensitivity and low tolerance of occupying armies. Afghan history is replete with examples of how large occupying

armies led to a coalescing of the country's fractious tribes against a common enemy. In this environment, the goal was to expand the ISAF effect, without expanding ISAF itself.



Two members of the Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team.

The early success of small six-person Civil Affairs teams, working with Special Forces personnel, scattered across Afghanistan to conduct limited 'heart and minds' reconstruction projects and work local Afghan security forces to provide security, developed further into a concept initially termed Joint Regional Teams (JRTs). The concept, unveiled in November 2002, was intended to assist in stabilizing the country in order to facilitate reconstruction efforts. By January 2003, at

the request of President Karzai, the name was changed to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Karzai argued for the name change; first, because Afghanistan is a country of provinces, not regions, a term associated with warlords, and second, the name should reflect its primary missions, reconstruction and capacity building. The first PRT in Gardez formally opened 1 February 2003, and within two years there were nineteen PRTs in Afghanistan, under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ISAF or U.S. command through Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A) and the Operation Enduring Freedom Mission.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams are civil military teams, composed of about 70-100 personnel, the German PRT at Konduz has upwards to 400 personnel. Although relatively small, through flexibility and cooperation, the PRT's civilian military partnership is intended to fulfill three critical missions:

- Enhance security;

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- Extend the reach of the Afghan central government; and
 - Facilitate reconstruction.

Military personnel provide force protection, information and psychological operations, medical, logistics, and communications functions. In addition, civil affairs officers conduct village assessments, identify potential reconstruction and humanitarian projects, and provided logistical support. Additionally, military observer teams serve a patrolling function and mentor Afghan security forces. The other component of the PRT is civilian. Civilian diplomats, assistance experts, and in some places, agricultural and police experts are part of the PRT contingent. It is a goal to have at least one member from the U.S. Department of State and one from the U.S. Agency for International Development in each PRT. At non-American PRTs, development experts from the lead nations are present e.g., Department for International Development (DFID) in United Kingdom PRTs. At most PRTs, Afghan Ministry of Interior Colonels are also present. The PRTs were intentionally designed to adapt to the needs and political condition of the area; able to morph and adjust into any environment they were assigned. Because no two provinces have identical political, developmental and security requirements, no two PRT are identical in terms of on the ground strategies.

It must be noted, each province provides very different challenges for PRTs. Some PRTs, in the southeastern portion of Afghanistan, are in zones of active combat against insurgents whereas at other PRTs, for example the United Kingdom PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif, the primary security issue is factional violence. Some PRT locations are full of active information operations (IO) and non-government organizations, others have almost no IO and non-government organization presence at all. Each PRT, therefore, has to be flexible in addressing the wide range of issues in their province.

Enhancing Security

In the role of enhancing security, PRTs are not intended to directly implement major security sector activities; they lack the size and military assets to disarm local militias or play a direct role in the disarming militia groups. Their primary tools for enhancing security are dialogue and liaison. PRTs are intended to be a visible international presence in the province and their main element of force protection was their ability to reach back and call in coalition air support. The reach back ability provided PRTs a significant deterrent capability. The PRTs were designed to be proactive in facilitating security reconstructions efforts: mentoring deployed Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan National Army (ANA), providing situational awareness to Afghan authorities and international actors, and providing liaison functions to prevent factional violence, i.e., green on green conflict. It was through the trust build up over time through dialogue and rapport that allowed PRTs to shape the security environment in a manner allowing for a successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process.

In most some provinces, one of the main problems confronting PRTs was the local police and military leadership in the police and military. Many of the local leaders were holdovers from the pre-Karzai and warlord eras. Additionally, the nature of the Afghan security environment confronted each PRT with a very different set of local circumstances and an array of unique personalities. This required PRT personnel to be flexible and think creatively in addressing the security problems in their provinces. Sometimes PRT addressed these issues through diplomacy, negotiations and liaison, but other times it took the presence of the PRTs' military component, to get the cooperation needed to address the security issue.

In early 2004, the PRT in Jalalabad needed to deal with several local warlords including:

- A corrupt chief of police;

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- Chief of the border patrol; and
 - Commander of the Northern Alliance's Army Corps in the region.

To begin working on improving the local security environment, including the removal of illegal checkpoints, the PRT leadership organized a Provincial Security Task Force (PSTF) consisting of the three warlords, the U.N. Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) representative, the provincial governor's office and PRT leadership. The PRT task was to get cooperation from warlords who did not trust one another and had little reason to work together. The PRT leadership used persistent negotiations and subtle pressure to accomplish its goal of improving the province's overall security environment.

To accomplish its task, the PRT first needed to get the main players talking. Several weeks of negotiation were required to get everyone to agree PSTF meetings should be attended by principles, not their representatives, and any decisions made by the group were binding. The several weeks were well spent, for it provided the PRT leadership an opportunity to build rapport and a level of trust with the warlords. It also allowed the various actors to buy into the PSTF, investing their reputations in the process. Once the ground work was set, more sensitive issues could be addressed.

Before tackling the main issue of illegal checkpoints, the PRT leadership addressed a less contentious topic, the creation of an emergency response unit. The need for an emergency response unit was demonstrated; when a truck bomb exploded in downtown Jalalabad and no one, not even an ambulance, responded to the incident. The first organization on the scene was UNAMA, who arrived almost an hour after the event. Not only was the lack of an emergency response unit a problem in itself, but it also demonstrated a complete lack of local governmental capacity. The development of an emergency response unit took nearly two months of negotiations, both at the PSTF and in numerous one-on-one meetings. The big issue was each warlord wanted their group to be in charge of the unit. The PRT leadership made clear that an emergency response unit in the city of Jalalabad was not the responsibility of the Border Police or an Army Corps; it was the responsibility of the local police. The major impediment to an agreement was the lack of trust each warlord has for the others. No warlord wanted a rival to have complete control of the unit; it could give them an advantage in some possible future conflict. The impasse was not overcome until each warlord was allowed to assign a representative to the emergency response unit.

After several months of working on smaller, albeit important, issues the PRT leadership was ready to address the checkpoint issue at the PSTF. A modicum of trust had been built up between the key actors, and each had invested time and personal prestige in making the PSTF successful. The PRT leadership first negotiated an agreement among the principals that there should be only four checkpoints for Jalalabad. To reduce the opportunities for cheating, each of the warlords would have a representative be present at each checkpoint. The key to getting the agreement was the personal relationship developed between the PRT leadership and the individual warlords. The PRT negotiators made it clear the presence of illegal checkpoints was a leadership issue. The warlords' lack of leadership demonstrated to everyone they were not interested in law and order or bettering the lives of their people. Sitting at the PSTF, each warlord wanted to be perceived as a leader, who takes care of their community, and community; and by playing upon their pride, patriotism and personal desire to be seen as a true leader, the PRT leadership was able to eliminate illegal checkpoints from the Jalalabad area.

Another way PRTs promote security is through conducting presence patrols which creates situational awareness important for them and the political and military leadership in Kabul. One example of this was in Gardez, the location of the first U.S. PRT. At the time of the PRTs

establishment, the province's major problem was illegal checkpoints and roadblocks. It was clear the checkpoints were the work of men under the control of provincial police chief and the divisional commander of the old Afghan army, both of whom were corrupt. The checkpoints were used to raise money to pay their private militias. Over time, the PRT worked with provincial governor Raz Mohammad Dalili, a trusted appointee of Karzai, to get the two officials transferred to Kabul to prevent them from continuing to play the role of spoiler in the province. After reassigning the corrupt police chief to another area, and to assist in facilitating the change of police chief, Karzai then sent an elite police unit to assist in the transfer process. When the new police chief arrived with his Karzai provided escort, a standoff ensued and a firefight nearly broke out between the escort unit and the departing police chief's private militia. One of the primary factors in preventing an escalation of the standoff was the presence of PRT soldiers some distance behind Karzai's police unit, to act both as a deterrent and to demonstrate U.S. support for the central government.

Another role PRTs play in enhancing security is providing support for the DDR of militias. Although the PRTs themselves do not possess the numbers or firepower to confront and disarm militias directly, their presence provides a modest incentive for local commanders to cooperate. In essence, PRTs are the grease, not the wheel in the DDR process. Additionally, PRTs assist in facilitating IO and non-government organization and Afghan led reconstruction projects providing jobs for demobilized combatants.

PRTs play an important role in reducing factional green on green conflicts. In the fall of 2003, members of the British PRT in the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif helped the Afghan government negotiate a cease-fire between the feuding militia faction of ethnic Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum and ethnic Tajik commander Mohammed Atta. Several previous cease-fires between the rivals had collapsed, but the new deal backed by the presence of the British military observers at the PRT seems to be holding. Similar results have been achieved other by other PRTs.

The goal of PRTs in the security realm is to promote an atmosphere of security to facilitate civilian reconstruction efforts. Additionally, by assisting in the creation of a stable security environment, through mentoring ANA and ANP, PRTs promote another mission; facilitating central government authority outside of Kabul. In short, the PRTs mission is a multifaceted security assistance mission, which varied from province to province.

Extending the Reach of the Afghan Central Government

The second mission of the PRTs, extending the reach of central government beyond Kabul, is vital to convincing Afghans to support the transitional government. Additionally, it has helped to develop Afghan administrative and governing capacity. During the early portion of the Afghan Interim Administration Administration, the central government ministries had little or no authority outside of the capital. Many of the provinces were run as private fiefdoms of the local warlord. Two decades of conflict had destroyed governing infrastructure and pushed almost all highly education Afghans into exile. The PRTs were charged with assisting in the process of building governing capacity at the local and provincial level. As with the security mission, they were not intended to be the primary tool of developing government capacity, but are designed to be flexible and creative in assisting the process.

One method used by PRTs to facilitated the reach of central government and develop governing capacity was through selecting reconstruction projects. For example, if a local or provincial official approaches a PRT requesting a school in a particular village, the PRT checks to see if the school is on the Ministry of Education priority list. If so, immediate approval of the project is given. If it is not on the priority list, the provincial official could negotiate with the central ministry in Kabul to get the location added to the national priority list. Once confirmed,

the PRT begins the process of contracting for the project. Not only does the process help develop ties between provincial leaders and Kabul, it also ensures the central ministry has allocated resources to properly staff and sustain the school over time.

Another attempt at developing government capacity and extending the reach of the central government was the creation of the PRT Executive Steering Committee (ESC), chaired by Minister of Interior Ali Jalali. The PRT ESC plays an active role in shaping the PRT's priorities. The ESC expresses the government's recommendations for priority PRT sites. The ESC also plays a valuable role in providing guidance and a forum for NATO ISAF, CFC-A and IOs and non-government organizations, to communicate with the Afghan government officials related to the PRTs security and reconstruction missions. The PRT ESC creates intergovernmental dialogue, which is crucial to the development of a functioning government. The PRT ESC efforts also helps create effective, meaningful, and more coordinated reconstruction initiatives.

Facilitating Reconstruction

The PRT reconstruction efforts are influenced by the local security environment. PRTs are envisioned as providing limited reconstruction and humanitarian activities in their areas of operations. As originally conceived, PRTs manage their reconstruction efforts dependent upon the local security situation. If the security situation is safe and non-government organizations could operate, then PRTs would invest less effort, but in more non-permissive environments, where non-government organization could not operate safely, PRTs take on a more active role in reconstruction efforts. In permissive environments, PRTs focus primarily on local capacity building, political liaison, assisting non-government organizations as needed, while those in or near combat zones focus less on these efforts and stress the overall stabilization mission. In no case, are the military elements of a PRT envisioned as the driving force for reconstruction, recognizing they lack the expertise, experience and resources of civilian agencies such as the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, IOs and non-government organizations.

As testament to the U.S. government's desire that PRTs not compete or replace civilian reconstruction efforts, the original eight PRTs were located in the same area as UNAMA field offices. This allowed PRTs to work closely with UNAMA to coordinate and de-conflict various reconstruction efforts. Unfortunately, UNAMA has not expanded the number of its field offices as the number of PRTs has expanded, making it more difficult to coordinate with various IOs and non-government organizations working in the PRTs area of operations.

Conclusions

The PRT concept is a unique and successful solution to a political and security environment requiring a complicated balance between security and reconstruction, while maintaining a light footprint. Additionally, PRTs are active in shaping the security environment, addressing the security issues in their provinces and providing security assistance and mentoring to the developing ANA and ANP. Their economy of force and interagency approach to stabilization and reconstruction operations allows these small units to provide security and stabilizing effect to greater extent than their numbers would normally justify. Instead of simply acting as a force multiplier, PRTs function admirably as stability multipliers. Additionally, PRTs have lived up to their design by being very flexible tools, which have evolved depending upon the local situation. PRT played a substantial role in the stabilization and development trajectory of Afghanistan as the Afghans assume increased responsibility for governance, security and reconstruction. In sum, they have been a valuable model for thinking about and learning from the integration of civilian and military capabilities to facilitate both security assistance and stability operations in ambiguous or non-permissive environments.

About the Author

Dr. Craig T. Cobane was an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Defense Policy Fellow (2004-2005). He was assigned to the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict in the office of Stability Operations (OUSD(P) SO/LIC Stab/Ops). He is currently the director of the University Honors program and Associate Professor of Political Science at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky. Dr. Cobane is the author of over sixty articles and essays. He is currently editing the two-volume *North Atlantic Treaty Organization: An Encyclopedia of International Security*.

