

Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: A Model for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development

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The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) concept currently employed in Afghanistan is a proven, flexible model for post-conflict reconstruction that the United States and its allies have endorsed and remain committed to. These specialized civil-military (CM) units provide a unique blend of development and security that is the result of an evolutionary process and refinement that continues to date. There are some practitioners within the international aid community who object in principle to the employment of these teams, and view them as the embodiment of what they term the “new humanitarianism” or politicization of aid. The intent of this paper is to offer a pragmatic argument in support of the PRT concept as a model for post-conflict reconstruction and development, given the difficult post-war paradox of providing security on the one hand and critical aid and development on the other.

Introduction

Despite speculation regarding the pace and direction of ongoing post-war reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan, one thing is abundantly clear to almost everyone taking part in the debate. The stakes are extremely high, not only for the people of Afghanistan who are directly affected by these efforts, but also for the international community and its citizens who remain at continued risk of terrorist attacks both at home and abroad. Certainly from the perspective of the people who even now struggle to rebuild and reclaim their country from the oppressive and tyrannical regime that has been removed, but not completely destroyed, the time for hand-wringing has long since come and gone.

In response to the need for action in expediting the post-conflict reconstruction process in Afghanistan, the United States and its coalition partners created specialized civil-military (CM) units known as Provincial Reconstruction Teams, or PRTs as they are commonly referred to. At the time of this writing, the Coalition (Combined Joint Task Force 180) commands 13,000 military personnel from all four branches of the Defense Department and 21 other countries, encompassing a 250,000-square-mile area of responsibility (Cole, 2004, p.1). In addition, some 6,300 NATO troops separately provide security in the capital city of Kabul, and have recently taken charge of a PRT in Konduz, with future plans to expand their security reach in the north (Cole, 2004, p.2). The intent of this paper is to offer a pragmatic argument in support of the PRT concept being employed in Afghanistan as a model for post-conflict reconstruction and development, despite objections from some practitioners within the international aid community who view it as the embodiment of what they term the “new humanitarianism” or politicization of aid.

Objections to the Provincial Reconstruction Team Concept

Why do some practitioners oppose it? After reviewing available literature and opinions on the subject from a

variety of aid and development organizations, it appears the principal issue is one of ideology. The objection is to the government’s use of aid and development as a vehicle to reinforce strategic policy objectives. From a humanitarian viewpoint, this objection is congruous with the sacrosanct principle that aid must be provided strictly on the basis of need, with “no strings attached.”

From a pragmatic standpoint, however, that argument is not only idealistic at the expense of those in need who benefit from government reconstruction efforts, it also ignores the reality of having to: meet urgent humanitarian life-support (food, water, shelter, and basic health care) requirements for the general population; restore order and security; and accomplish all the specified and implied tasks involved in developing the capacity of an interim government at the local, regional, and national level necessary to achieve legitimate self-governance and sovereignty.

This is a difficult task, and the irony of the criticism leveled against the reconstruction teams is that the desired end-state they are working so hard to achieve, is somehow suspect from a humanitarian aspect or incompatible with that of the aid community. The following discussion will examine the major points of opposition from the aid community in light of the intended purpose and intent of the reconstruction teams.

The opposition from the non-government organization (NGO) community to the PRT concept can generally be summed up in six major points:

1. It violates the central humanitarian tenet that aid must be provided in a neutral and impartial manner based solely on the criteria of need, i.e., aid should not be politicized.
2. It is a further encroachment of “humanitarian space” traditionally occupied by the NGO community.
3. The use of soldiers in humanitarian aid projects blurs the lines of distinction between non-combatant aid workers and

soldiers, thereby placing NGO personnel at greater risk.

4. It is cost-ineffective and a duplication of services and projects already available and provided by the international aid community.
5. The military does not have the capacity for this type of work and their efforts actually create more harm than good, jeopardizing long-term development projects and relationships with the local people.
6. It distracts the military from its primary mission and responsibility of providing security.

Barbara Stapleton from British Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) traveled to Afghanistan in November 2002 to research the PRT concept, or Joint Regional Teams (JRT's) as they were called at the time, and in January 2003 published a definitive point paper based on her research that summarized the concerns felt by many in the international aid community (Stapleton, 2003, p.3). Her paper is both informative and enlightening because it addresses not only the specific points of issue with the PRT concept, but it also articulates the points of contention regarding the recent advent of increased CM operations in the area of aid and development.

Her comments merit repeating here because she makes an eloquent argument that succinctly outlines the background of the issue and the underlying premise of opposition from a humanitarian viewpoint.

This paper sets the recent developments in Afghanistan against the emergence of the "new humanitarianism" which developed in the wake of the Cold War. As lethal "low intensity conflicts" broke out around the world and in the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, the Great Lakes crisis and the civil war in the Former Yugoslavia, a new view of humanitarianism and how it should be used/developed in the 1990's. This trend away from humanitarianism as a politically neutral "good" towards the merging of development and security was driven by the seemingly intractable nature of these conflicts...This has resulted in the increasing involvement of the military in various crises alongside the traditional assistance community...Most NGO's are alarmed by the increasing politicization of aid. This alarm is deepening as humanitarian space shrinks further and as the core principles of humanitarianism: independence, impartiality and neutrality, which have allowed humanitarian NGO's to operate across divides, is eroded. In Afghanistan the merging of development and security is at the heart of policies being engendered in support of the political project underway there and is epitomized by the new JRT plan (Stapleton, 2003, pp.5-6).

Ms. Stapleton is not alone in the development community in her feelings towards military involvement in humanitarian operations. Published by the Humanitarian Network Practice (HPN) in January 2002, Jane Barry and Anna Jefferys wrote a paper entitled *A Bridge Too Far:*

Aid Agencies and the Military in Humanitarian Response that reinforces the first two main points of opposition.

Military movement into what has traditionally been 'humanitarian space' raises significant issues of principle... the idea that increased cooperation-and with it coordination-will itself improve humanitarian assistance is a pervasive but relatively unchallenged assumption...Finally, the simplistic perception that barriers between humanitarian agencies and the military are based in misunderstandings and cultural clashes glosses over much deeper, intrinsic differences between core aims and principles (Barry, 2002, pp.5-6).

The aid agency InterAction also published a point paper in April 2003 that voiced its opposition to the reconstruction teams along the same lines (ReliefWeb: InterAction, 23 April, 2003).

Other opinions, while perhaps more emotional, are no less indicative of the negative sentiment felt by many towards civil-military operations. The executive coordinator of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghanistan Relief (ACBAR), an umbrella group for more than 70 NGOs in Afghanistan verbally outlined a few points of his own during a January 2003 interview regarding the PRT concept.

I can understand why the military forces are involved in these things. The main reason is to conquer the hearts and minds of the people. Mainly to stop being shot at, so they are seen as the good guys. For an army it's better to do this than kick in doors and insult people. Leave the NGOs to build kindergartens. Some things are better left to professionals (ReliefWeb: IRIN, January 2003, p.1).

Regarding the point that military involvement blurs the lines of distinction between combatants and aid workers, Caroline Douillez, a spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Kabul said,

"As a general position, we feel it creates confusion in the minds of those who receive the aid and creates confusion among those who carry out military and humanitarian missions at the same time." In the same article, Sally Austin from CARE was quoted as saying, "Our security is being put at risk...their understanding of neutrality and humanitarian principles is pretty weak" (ReliefWeb: Center for Humanitarian Cooperation, 31 May, 2003, p.2).

The fourth main point of objection over the PRT's is that their operations are both cost-ineffective and a duplication of effort for services already provided by the aid community. In a February 2003 report, critics say that in addition to a lack of expertise and the fact that development projects are viewed as a public relations exercise, they go on to make the point that NGO's and locals are a much cheaper alternative to reconstruction than bringing in the military (ReliefWeb: IRIN, February 2003). Absent any hard statistical data or activity-based costing metric to verify this claim, presumably critics are inferring that overhead costs are generally greater for the military than for aid organizations. This may be true, but without an equivalent comparison of all true associated

costs, it is impossible to offer an objective argument to support this contention. Another related point that deserves mention is that PRTs also use local labor and they predominantly operate in areas where NGOs either will not, or cannot operate because of security concerns.

Cassandra Nelson, a senior spokeswoman for Mercy Corps-Afghanistan, sums up the sentiment felt by many in the NGO community regarding the next point of opposition, the military's capacity to provide aid and relief. "When we tackle reconstruction, we don't have the stigma of having carried guns" (ReliefWeb: IRIN, January 2003, p.1). Ms. Nelson and others argue that in addition to a lack of expertise in development, the military's efforts can actually hinder long-term efforts by alienating the local populace as a result of prior or ongoing military operations. Again, this is an overall subjective assessment, but clearly any collateral damage to civilian life and property from direct or indirect fire in support of Coalition operations complicates the reconstruction process and understandably alienates those who have suffered.

The final point, and probably the single most pressing concern for those on both sides of the debate, is related to the security issue. Opponents of the PRT concept argue that trying to do both development and security not only distracts the military from its primary responsibility of providing security, but it is also a poor substitute for the real thing in terms of the manpower, reach, and capabilities necessary to ensure the safety of NGOs operating in the country. The problem here is the level of security desired by NGOs is not within the intended charter of the reconstruction teams. That security task belongs to regular combat troops who are manned, equipped, and trained to accomplish it, similar to the NATO forces already in country.

This erroneous perception is conveyed in a number of related articles such as a July 2003 report from Refugees International entitled *Security on the Cheap: PRTs in Afghanistan*. As Larry Thompson and Michelle Brown reported after returning from the country, the general view was that many NGOs felt the PRTs were an attempt to provide a cheap substitute for real security, something the teams were not manned or equipped to accomplish (ReliefWeb: Refugees International, July 2003). The security situation in Afghanistan is obviously an issue of great importance for all concerned stakeholders because peace and stability are necessary conditions for the implementation of long-term development programs. The type of military operations required to achieve this objective, however, is beyond the scope and capabilities of the PRTs as previously noted. Although addressed again later in greater detail, critics are confusing two distinct constructs by comparing PRTs to regular combat forces. The reconstruction teams were neither designed for, nor intended to conduct the type of direct-action operations necessary to rid the country of terrorists bent on derailing its peaceful transition towards a sovereign democracy.

What the aid community and coalition forces do have

in common, is the shared conviction that NATO-led International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) should be expanded to provide the security necessary to speed up recovery efforts; and slowly that is happening. Where before ISAF was confined to security duties in Kabul only, as General John Abizaid, commander of U.S. Central Command, has recently noted, they have greatly expanded their security role outside the capital by taking charge of the PRT in Konduz and four adjacent provinces in the northeast (Cole, 2004, p.2).

Background: Provincial Reconstruction Team Concept

Before responding directly to the preceding points, it is important to first provide some background information on the reconstruction teams themselves and their intended purpose. As the previous comments indicate, in addition to feelings of mistrust and even animosity felt by some towards the military, there is also a degree of misperception concerning the teams and their mission. Not entirely, but certainly some genuine misperceptions have contributed to the negative sentiment felt by those who question the intended purpose of the teams. Therefore it is necessary to provide a brief overview on the topic of military civil-affairs (CA) units from which the PRT concept was borne. CA units differ from regular military forces in that they are designed and trained to facilitate civil-governance functions and public sector services, as opposed to troops and units that are equipped and trained to conduct combat operations.

First, it is important to note that the reconstruction teams currently operating in Afghanistan are the result of evolution rather than a revolution in terms of CM operations. The concept of using CM operations to facilitate post-conflict reconstruction, stability operations, nation-building, or Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), is not something new. Excluding the obvious example of the military's involvement in rebuilding Europe and Japan following World War II, the U.S., NATO and other Western allies have gained considerable capacity and experience in conducting these types of operations in recent history.

In addition to the conflicts referenced in the BAAG paper, Somalia, Haiti, and East Timor are also recent examples of military intervention where combat troops and CA soldiers worked closely with the NGO community to deliver aid, alleviate human suffering and facilitate development efforts. The CA experience gained from those and similar operations is well documented in military doctrine. This provided the foundation and general objectives for the first contingent of CA teams introduced in Afghanistan.

U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Joint Publication 3-57 *Doctrine for Joint Civil Affairs* is a capstone doctrinal manual pertaining to CA in support of military operations. While the doctrinal definition of CA as contained in the manual is understandably broad, a table from the manual entitled "Additional Characteristics of

Civil Affairs Activities” provides useful insight into the concept behind these operations. CA units are designed and specially trained to facilitate coordination between military and civilian authorities in order to deconflict operational matters (civil or military) that can impact one or more key players involved in the reconstruction effort. An excerpt from that table follows:

- The use of forces (units and personnel) possessing an in-depth understanding of politico-military, economic, and social aspects of countries or regional areas where military forces are employed;
- Civil military operational planning and execution by DoD, non-DoD, multinational, nongovernmental organizations/private voluntary organizations, and other agencies through estimates of operational impacts on civilian populace, resources, and institutions in areas where military forces are employed (Joint Publication 3-57, p.62).

While military CA units are comprised of soldiers, they are not combat-troops in the traditional sense, nor are they trained as such. They have a unique skill set, or Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), designed to provide commanders in the field with resident technical capability and expertise on all matters related to civil affairs.

A largely unknown point is that a number of Army CA units, including those currently serving in the Middle East, are reserve units comprised of citizen-soldiers. Upon being called to active duty, many of these reservists bring a unique level of technical expertise related to this field from their respective civilian careers that do not fit the stereotypical soldier skills required to survive and win on the battlefield, i.e., skills related to firepower and maneuver.

Reserve CA units throughout the United States actively target their recruitment at individuals who already possess the functional specialty skills outlined in Joint Publication 3-57 such as:

Public administration areas such as law enforcement and emergency services, health, labor, legal, welfare, finance, and education; areas of economics and commerce such as property control, supply and logistics, food and agriculture; public facilities skill areas such as public works and utilities, public communications, and public transportation; other functional specialty areas include cultural affairs, civil information, and even arts, monuments, and archives (Joint Publication 3-57, p.34).

Referring back to the previous point concerning the range of skills required in this field, and the breadth of experience that many reserve soldiers bring to active duty from their civilian jobs, it is apparent that CA soldiers are atypical troops. But then again, trying to build even a modicum of the civil capacity that we take for granted in the United States, in a country ravaged by 23 years of war in an environment like that of Afghanistan, is

a very atypical task. Nonetheless, that was the situation confronting Coalition forces in late December 2001, after the Taliban regime was driven from power and the first CA units began to arrive in country.

The planning effort for CM operations in Afghanistan actually began shortly following September 11th, 2001, in Tampa, Florida, the headquarters for U.S. Central Command led by General Tommy Franks. Humanitarian agencies such as World Food Program, InterAction, and the UN Joint Logistics Center were present at the time to advise the military on the civilian agencies’ plan to handle the humanitarian aspect of future operations (Fields, 2002, p.3).

Major Kimberly Fields was on hand for the initial planning, deployment and operations of the first CA units on the ground in Afghanistan. A seasoned veteran of CM operations, she was a military police platoon leader in Iraq during Desert Storm, and a company commander in Somalia during Restore Hope where her unit provided convoy security for NGO relief supplies. She also served as an academic and one-time policy advisor to the UN Department of Peacekeeping (UNDP) regarding issues of public security in Bosnia and Kosovo. In addition, she was a strategic planner for the Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force in Kabul, Afghanistan where she had first-hand knowledge of the following events (Fields, 2002, p.3).

Soon after September 11, 2001, when initial planning efforts for the Afghanistan campaign were underway, General Franks ordered the U.S. Land Forces Component Commander to activate a command and control cell specifically designed to coordinate all civil affairs unit activities during Operation Enduring Freedom. This organization, termed the Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF), was ordered to Kabul in November 2001. As Major Fields put it, they initially floundered as the first-ever CJCMOTF attempted to define its role in serving as the focal point to deconflict all ongoing military and humanitarian operations. “CJCMOTF quickly realized that whatever we could do would have to be explained, justified, and otherwise rationalized to all audiences – the Afghan people, the civilian relief community, the military itself, and the interagency to a lesser extent” (Fields, 2002, p.3).

By February of 2003, CJCMOTF had received humanitarian assistance funds and established guidelines for project selection. Soon thereafter the civil affairs teams began coordinating projects to rebuild schools and clinics, dig wells, and make minor road repairs. Major Fields noted that one standard consistently applied was that all projects were prioritized and approved by the Afghan people whose number one priority, almost without exception, was schools (Fields, 2002, p.3). She also noted that the relief community took exception to the military doing these projects, especially to the fact that the soldiers who oversaw them wore civilian clothes. They transitioned to wearing only uniforms, within a month.

Based on the initial experiences of and lessons learned

from the first CA teams in country, the reconstruction team concept was formalized and introduced on November 21, 2002, at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, with a follow-up briefing conducted on November 30th (Stapleton, 2003, p.6).

The following information was presented during the meeting that was attended by several NGO representatives, as well as members of the U.S. and U.K. embassies, the UN, ICRC and donors who attended to hear the Provisional Joint Regional Team concept as it was called at that time (Stapleton, 2003, p.15). The teams were to range in size from 50 to 100 people, consisting of CA soldiers, a civil-military operation center (CMOC) headquarters to coordinate and control reconstruction activities, and a security force contingent (i.e. combat troops). The CA soldiers were listed as reservists with a variety of backgrounds and skills such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, economists, telecommunications experts, and civil aviation professionals. Their stated mission was to:

- Coordinate the reconstruction effort
- Identify potential projects
- Conduct village assessments
- Coordinate activities of those engaged in the reconstruction process such as the NGO's, the Afghan Transitional Authority, and Coalition forces (Stapleton, 2003, pp.6-7).

A little over a year later, the JRT concept had evolved into the Provincial Reconstruction Teams as they are known and operate today in Afghanistan. In January 2003, at the request of the U.S. military, the United States Institute of Peace hosted a civil-military cooperation conference. The meeting included a panel discussion with representatives from the UN OCHA, UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), U.S. Central Command, and guest speaker Ambassador Robert Oakley, former Ambassador to Pakistan from 1988 to 1991 (Conference Minutes, 2003, pp.5-7).

Prior to the panel discussion, each group presented their views of the PRT concept based on observation feedback from their organizations. Military officials also provided an update on the mission and role the teams were expected to play in the reconstruction process, which at that time were to:

- Extend the influence of the Afghan Transitional Authority outside of Kabul
- Expand the work of I-NGO's and IO's beyond Kabul
- Facilitate conditions for reconstruction to encourage movement of pledged funds
- Function as an information-sharing node to facilitate information sharing (Conference Minutes, 2003, pp.5-7).

The speaker also noted that initially the teams were called "provisional" because they were a test case used by the Joint Task Force Commander to determine staffing,

equipment and military specialty requirements. Based on that assessment, each PRT was manned and fielded slightly differently depending on the security situation and requirements unique to their geographic area of operations. The point was emphasized that the teams were a work-in-progress, and had been since their original inception.

He concluded the update by saying,

"In geo-political terms, the PRT's serve as a point of spreading influence for the central government. Metaphorically, their reach will generate concentric circles of influence and at some point those circles will meet. However, across Afghanistan, there are different stages of military operations. In some areas active pursuit of Al Qaeda continues, in others Phase IV reconstruction operations could be underway. This is the complex nature of Afghanistan right now" (Conference Minutes, 2003, pp.5-7).

Currently there are 12 PRT's operating in the country; nine of them are led by the U.S., with the remainder led by the U.K., New Zealand, and NATO. There are plans to have a total of 16 teams in operation by the summer of 2004 (Miles, 2004, p.1). The first PRT was established in Gardez, in February 2003, with additional teams fielded in Bamiyan, and Kunduz in March and April, respectively. The British established the first international led PRT in Mazar-e Sharif in July 2003, followed by New Zealand, who relieved U.S. forces in Bamiyan in the fall of 2003. Additionally, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder announced in August 2003 that his country was sending an advance team to the country to evaluate PRT participation in the Kunduz area as well. In the same article, France and the Netherlands were also mentioned as considering participation (Synovitz, 2003, p.2).

Unfortunately this is a new subject and although the teams, in one form or another, have been around for over two years there is not a great deal of hard data on the topic available in open source. Currently, for example, there are no published studies available to compare differences between two or more regions based on the presence or absence of a PRT. It will take some time before this type of data is collected, sorted, and in some cases declassified and available for query in open source.

Aside from the lack of published data, however, there is other information available that can be used to draw inferences on the teams' progress. One good measure of any program's success is to examine the allocation of resources apportioned to it, and in that regard the reconstruction process is impressive.

In his remarks to the Senate Appropriations Committee on September 24, 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said that in addition to the \$1.8 billion previously apportioned to the country for reconstruction, and the \$5 billion pledged thus far from the international community, the President requested an additional \$21 billion for the people of Afghanistan and Iraq. In Afghanistan: \$300 million for roads, schools and clinics, \$400 million to train and support the Afghan National

Army and national police and border patrol, \$300 million to support rule of law, elections, and other critical support for the Afghan government (DefenseLink, 2003, p.2). These numbers will translate into a tremendous amount of development work in the coming months by the DoD and other government agencies; work facilitated on the ground by the reconstruction teams. In addition to budgetary indicators, the following news items, while anecdotal in nature, do provide a general sense of the positive impact the PRT's are making on the local population. In Gardez, a year after implementation, security incidents had dropped from 30 to 1 in January 2003. In June 2003:

The Konduz Provincial Reconstruction Team concluded a successful Cooperative Medical Assistance (CMA) visit that... provided medical care to over 1,600 people, including 165 children who were vaccinated against measles. Veterinarians treated 2,700 animals. As part of the screening process, the CMA team collected personal health and geographic information that will aid in determining possible future health care assistance and preventive medicine visits. Participants in the CMA included Bagram Air Base Hospital personnel, two treatment teams from the Republic of Korea Army, three Special Operations Forces medics, medical personnel from the Coalition Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force, three Afghan doctors and one doctor from the Swedish committee. The Konduz police chief and 30 Afghan police officers provided security. Twenty interpreters and 40 Afghan school children assisted the medical teams. The Konduz PRT staff and four vets from the Konduz Institute for Agriculture and Animal Husbandry also assisted (Davis, 2003, p.1).

Again, although systematic data on the direct contributions of the teams have not yet been collated and published, clearly there has been measurable progress. In terms of international support, fiscal resources, and projects already completed or currently underway, the ongoing reconstruction effort has enjoyed success and the reconstruction teams have played an integral role in the process. As former Ambassador Robert Oakley pointed out during the civil-military cooperation conference in January of this year, the United States remains committed to supporting the PRT concept in the future. "The U.S. has decided that it is going to facilitate the Karzai government moving into the countryside by using the PRT's as part of that effort. You get an overall effect with IO's, NGO's, Afghan government, AID and other bi-lateral private government projects all working together" (Conference Minutes, 2003, p.7).

Responses to Objections to the Provincial Reconstruction Team Concept

As noted earlier, the underlying issue of contention over the employment of the PRT's is related to ideology and the primary humanitarian tenet that aid should not be politicized. They view the teams as a direct extension of government policy and therefore their employment violates the central humanitarian principle of neutrality.

This principle is understandable given the opportunity of government, or any other international or non-governmental organization for that matter, to abuse its power and use aid and development as a means to pursue a corrupt, oppressive or self-serving agenda, but that is not the case in Afghanistan. Critics might argue that even if abuse is not the case in Afghanistan, it could happen elsewhere if non-U.S., NATO, or UN troops are involved in the operation. While the potential exists, the risk of abuse from democratic nations wealthy enough to participate in reconstruction efforts, whose armed forces are under the control of popularly elected civilian leaders, is quite small. A free press that provides round-the-clock media coverage from around the world further reduces this risk. Not only do the media promote transparency, but accountability as well. Any blatant wrongdoing by military or government officials will be picked up by the press and immediately put under public scrutiny until amends have been made.

Those who would continue to argue this point on the basis of idealism should consider two points. First, radical extremists don't respect NGO neutrality or independence anymore than they do government authority. Because of this, the brutal attacks against aid workers have forced many organizations to suspend operations until security is re-established by CJTF-180 and the ISAF. The PRT's, meanwhile, do have the necessary security and capacity to deliver critical aid and proceed with the reconstruction effort. Second, considering the desired end-state and strategic political objectives of the interim Afghan government and the Coalition compared to those of the Taliban regime or similar radical extremists. The choice seems fairly straightforward.

As Nancy Lindborg put it in a recent Mercy Corps article, "Without questions, the U.S.-led coalition forces and the international humanitarian community share the common goal of assisting the Afghan people achieve a long-awaited stable and prosperous peace. The PRT's can be an important part of that effort without compromising the ability of the humanitarian community to contribute and help speed this important effort" (ReliefWeb: Mercy Corps, March 2003, p.1).

The next point concerning whether or not PRT's blur the lines of distinction between military forces and aid workers, putting the latter at greater risk, is also a valid concern and the Coalition has taken steps to mitigate it. First, the location for PRT placement is selected on the basis of where NGO's are currently unable to operate and provide services because of the security situation. In addition, the military changed its operating procedures and uniform requirements based on input from NGO's in order to ensure the Afghan people can make the distinction.

The assertion that PRT's are a cost-ineffective duplication of NGO efforts, which is a debatable point absent any hard quantifiable data, actually supports the PRT concept given that coordination and unity of effort is the single most important function of the teams. The

other factor in this regard is that unfortunately there is plenty of work to go around. As Ambassador Oakley put it, "In Afghanistan there has been duplication of effort between the civil affairs and the NGO's. Both have built schools and secondary roads. Some NGO's resent this, but why? You get two schools rather than one" (Conference Minutes, 2003, p.7).

The argument that the military does not have the capacity to engage in humanitarian or civil affairs, given the level of technical expertise and skills that the CA soldiers and their interagency counterparts bring to the table, is overstated. Even so, the military has taken the advice of the aid community and shifted away from the quick impact projects they initially focused on, to larger projects beyond the capacity of the NGO's such as major transportation infrastructure projects.

The issue that CM operations are an encroachment of NGO "humanitarian space" would be more productively framed in terms of how to synchronize efforts to accomplish the task at hand, rather than an issue of "turf-protection." The role and importance that NGOs play in the long-term development projects and programs in Afghanistan and elsewhere is secure as long as their donors have the will and means to sustain them, as there is plenty of work for all. The PRT's in concert with regular security forces are designed to create the conditions for "humanitarian space" in order to facilitate the efforts of NGO's, not remove them from the equation. In short, the PRT concept is designed to provide the tactical and operational bridge necessary to implement the strategic goal of a gradual transition of functions and authority from the Coalition to the interim Afghan government and ultimately to an elected democracy.

Finally, the issue of security in Afghanistan as previously discussed is a major concern for long-term peace and stability. The argument, however, that committing troops to development efforts will detract from the security mission is incorrect. The CA troops and interagency personnel in each of the reconstruction teams are not combat forces; therefore employing them in the role for which they were designed does not adversely impact security. As mentioned, it appears that NATO and the international community have heeded the Coalition's repeated request to expand their security role in the country and progress is being made.

Conclusion

The PRT concept currently employed in Afghanistan has proven to be a flexible model for post-conflict reconstruction that the United States and its allies have endorsed and to which they remain committed. PRT's are a unique blend of development and security, and are the result of an evolutionary process that continues to date. The fact that it is still a work-in-progress should encourage those who oppose it in principle to engage the CM community and influence its future development to ensure all stakeholder interests, concerns, and mutually shared objectives are acknowledged and incorporated into

the model. This last point is especially pertinent given the current reconstruction efforts in Iraq and the potential for applying the PRT model there as well.

As the security situation in Iraq stabilizes and the priority of effort shifts back towards reconstruction, development, and civil governance functions, some form of the PRT model and lessons learned from Afghanistan will undoubtedly be employed to facilitate those efforts. As transition of power from the occupying Coalition Provisional Authority to an interim Iraqi government authority occurs, and the new Iraqi government seeks to provide critical services for its citizens, the PRT's can play an important role in facilitating that process. They must play a role because the teams are one proven tool in a post-war environment where the kit bag of options is unfortunately limited given the difficult post-war paradox of providing security on the one hand, and critical aid and development on the other. There are no easy answers, but there is hope and opportunity for the future. The PRT's are a part of the solution, not the problem.

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