



## PRTs – TOWARD UNITY OF EFFORT

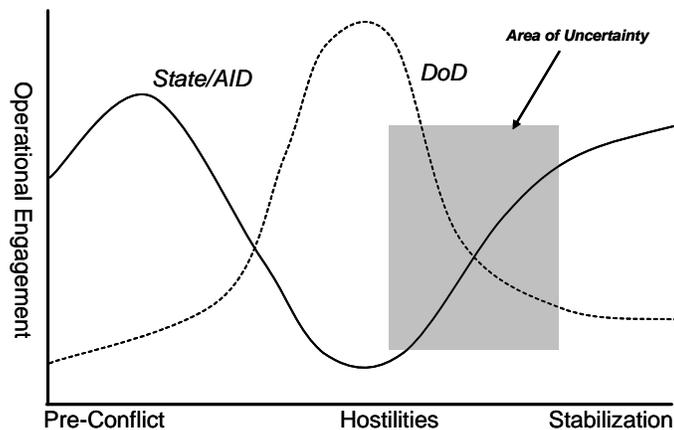
### Purpose

This is a discussion paper. It's purpose is to engender thought and interchange among the agencies involved in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan, leading to a common understanding of the PRT mission, essential tasks and roles of the organizations involved, particularly as these relate to reconstruction and development.

### Background

Over two years into the PRT effort, key stakeholders, including the Afghan Government, have concluded that PRTs have been successful and have contributed to the achievement of USG objectives in Afghanistan. At the same time, the evolving political, economic and security situation necessitates rethinking the PRT business model.

This is particularly relevant at a time when ISAF expansion is picking up pace and planning is underway for the eventual draw-down of U.S. military forces, with a possible assumption of some PRT roles by civilian agencies. What is proposed here is intended to compliment and facilitate those transitions, illustrated at right.



As indicated in the shaded area, there are considerable uncertainties in the post-conflict transition from a military to a civilian lead. A premise of this paper is that unity of effort can not only help bridge the gap, but is a prerequisite for a smooth transition.

### A Brief History of PRTs

To facilitate a unified view of the current status of PRTs and the way forward, it may be helpful to outline their history.

2002 – *The “Chiclets.”* PRTs grew out of the Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells (CHLCs) established in 2002 to provide the military HQ with information on humanitarian needs, de-conflict military operations with assistance, and implement small projects using OHDACA in order to build trust and confidence among the population (widely seen as a force-pro measure). By late 2002, the limitations of the 10-12 man CHLCs had become apparent, the humanitarian crisis never materialized, and the Coalition was planning phase 4 operations. The PRTs were conceived as a way to use Civil Affairs, USG civilians and other

assets to help address what were identified as the causes of instability: the threat of terrorism and insurgency, regionalism/warlordism, and poverty.

*2003 – Validating the Concept.* The first PRT was established in Gardez in November 2002. PRTs in Bamyan, Konduz, Mazar, Kandahar and Herat followed in early 2003. Of note is that these sites were chosen for political purposes – the four major ethnic groups were covered, as were the spiritual home of the Taliban and the location with Afghanistan’s then most troublesome warlord.

The first six PRTs were pioneers in that they operated without a great deal of guidance in terms of mandates and essential tasks. This naturally led to each PRT focusing on a different array of activities shaped by local conditions. Mazar did outstanding work mitigating the Dostum/Atta conflict. Gardez used OHDACA for community engagement with the Pashtun tribes. Kandahar was busy supporting a new, progressive Governor and continued combat operations. Bamyan quickly became involved in assistance coordination and capacity building with the UN and GoA.

The asynchronous evolution of PRTs in 2003 was both a strength and a weakness. On the positive side, it firmly established that there would be no “cookie-cutter” approach – i.e. each PRT would adapt to its environment and the resources available. This has been an enduring strength. The downside was confusion among many (and NGOs in particular) about what a PRT is and what it ought to do. Although this led to criticism of the concept itself, by the end of 2003 many had concluded that PRTs were adding value. One significant milestone was the support PRTs provided for the registration and election of delegates to the Constitutional Loya Jurga. That led to much closer collaboration with the UN on Bonn process activities.

*2004 – Laying the Foundation.* Among other critical elements laid out in OpOrder 04-01 (the South/Southeast Strategy), the decision was made to scale up the PRT effort from the originally planned 8 to 16. PRTs were established in Parwan, Jalalabad, Asadabad, Ghazni, Khowst, Qalat, Farah, Tirin Khowt, Lashkar Gah and Sharan. Those sites were chosen based on the relative lack of security and reconstruction activities, which set the stage for PRTs to play a much greater role in both areas. However, it was not until the second half of the year that three key factors converged to help ensure this potential might be realized:

- The widespread implementation of approximately \$125 million in funding for PRT-managed projects. The DoD-funded CERP program and the State/AID-funded QIP program made all the difference in being able to achieve visible and relatively quick results in the field. Neither program is a panacea, nor can they substitute for long-term, technically sound, sustainable development efforts. But to promote stabilization they have been invaluable.
- The reorganization of the military chain of command and shift to a classic counterinsurgency campaign. Most notably, three Regional Commands were created to decentralize decision-making and combat units were dispersed throughout the most insecure areas along with PRTs. There also began to be a widespread recognition that kinetic operations alone were not going to lead to success without meaningful reconstruction and development to help undermine the causes of insurgency.
- The deployment of significant numbers of State, USAID and USDA civilians to the PRT effort. From January to December of 2004, those numbers grew from roughly

15 to over 45, with a corresponding increase in influence. That necessitated the creation of interagency coordination mechanisms, leading to better visibility on respective activities, improved understanding of roles, relationships and comparative advantages, and the beginnings of institutionalization of best practice.

*2005 – unity of effort?*. Having validated the concept and laid the foundations – literally and figuratively – for PRTs to have a significant impact in Afghanistan, the next step is unity of effort. The current challenges in Afghanistan require that all elements of national influence be deployed and integrated into a unified strategy – diplomatic, informational, military and economic (DIME). To date, we have achieved much in terms of de-confliction and even a significant degree of collaboration, but while both are necessary for success they are not sufficient. The strengths and resources of the agencies involved in PRTs have not been systematically and consistently exploited to achieve maximum results. Although led by a military Commander, PRTs must become truly interagency, rather than a predominantly military effort augmented by “embedded” civilian advisors.

To appreciate why, consider that over the past fifteen years the United States has been involved in seven major post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization operations, and contributed substantial resources to over ten more. Recent studies from RAND and the U.S. Institute for Peace concluded that the results have been mixed. The reasons vary, but a common thread in the transition from kinetic operations to long-term development is “...the complexity of simultaneously managing threats to security, political and economic postwar transitions, humanitarian crises, and daunting reconstruction tasks among traumatized and exhausted populations...” Given the diverse nature of these efforts, an interagency approach such as the PRTs is called for. As a tool of nation-building, that is their real potential.

### **Challenges**

With regard to the PRT role in reconstruction and development, a number of challenges have emerged:

- *The Shotgun Approach.* There is a tendency for PRTs to support whatever projects the Governor and local population want. While the desire to show results and build trust and confidence are positive, it must be informed by a deeper understanding of needs. A scattershot approach often results in a series of individual projects that, taken as a whole, do not advance a long-term strategy or support an overarching policy framework. Moreover, the gains achieved may be short-lived and/or reinforce power structures that act as barriers to positive change.
- *Comfort Zones.* A related issue is that PRTs do what they can and what they know. That’s why thousands of wells have been drilled and hundreds of schools rehabilitated. These are not necessarily poor choices, but as with the shotgun approach, staying within the comfort zone is only appropriate if that is what a deliberate analysis of the situation indicates. As the environment changes PRTs have to adapt.
- *Spend, Spend, Spend.* Far too much emphasis has been placed on how many projects a PRT is implementing rather than the quality and sensibility of those efforts. As a measure of effectiveness, dollars spent has obvious shortcomings. It also ignores

more intangible contributions the PRTs make, such as providing logistical/security support and situational awareness to other development actors.

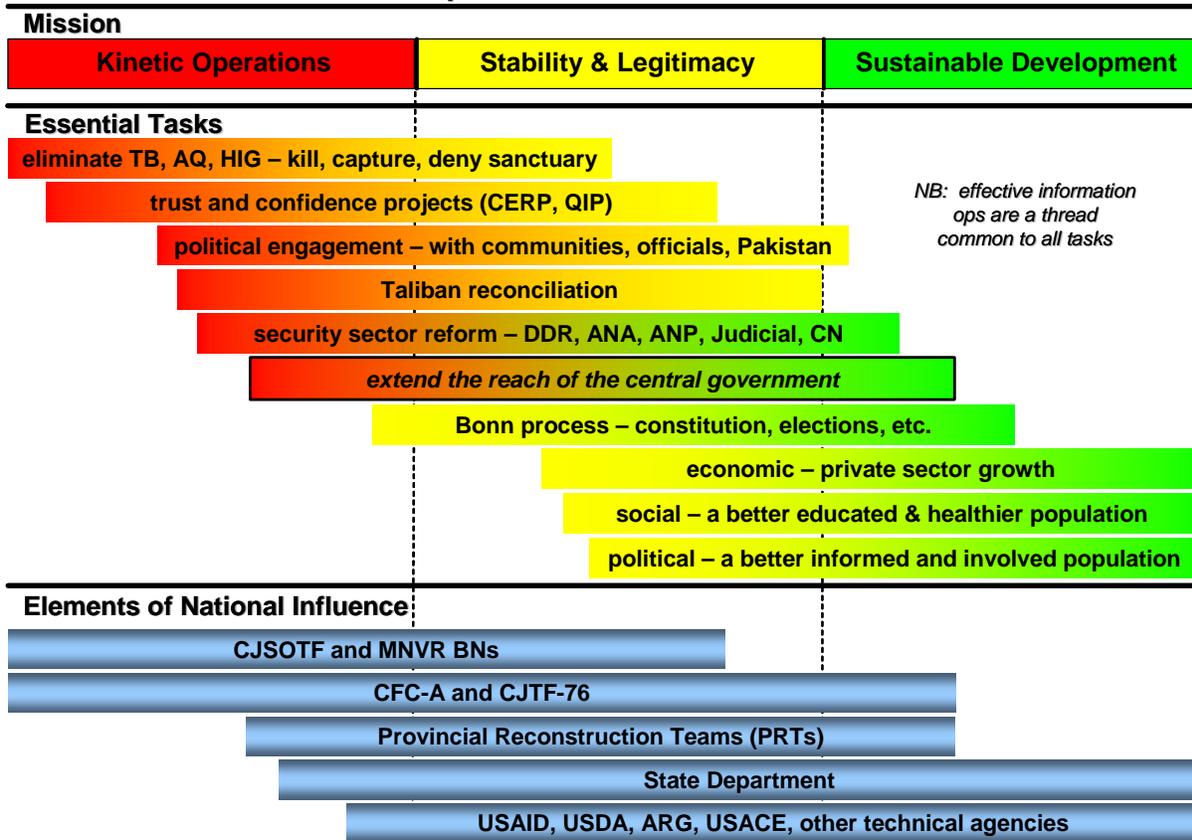
- *An Afghan Face?* In the military, one is taught to lead from the front. In development work, one must lead from the rear in order to guarantee local ownership and build the capacity necessary to sustain the effort. The PRT's desire to achieve results quickly must be tempered with the realization that nations aren't built during an 8-12 month rotation.
- *The Christmas Tree.* The inherent elasticity of the PRT concept is a strength, but they cannot be all things to all people. Kabul cannot continue to direct the PRTs to take on additional mandates (hanging more ornaments on the proverbial tree), particularly when the imperatives are ill-conceived, nebulous or not adequately resourced. Furthermore, PRTs must recognize where their comparative advantage lies and accept that there are some activities which would be inappropriate for them to undertake.
- *The Information Gap.* Most PRTs want to support and leverage national programs and priorities, but are frustrated with the lack of information coming from Kabul. There is also a tendency to assume that if the PRT doesn't have visibility on something, nothing is being done. A step in the right direction would be to harmonize provincial-level coordination and planning bodies in line with the GoA's proposed Provincial Development Councils (PDCs).
- *Measures of Effectiveness?* Two years on, PRTs still have no meaningful MoEs. Since they were always conceived as an interim measure, how do policymakers know if a PRT is successful and can be "switched off?" At the operational level, how do managers measure progress, allocate resources, and make course corrections? Too much rests on anecdotal or intuitive evidence, or activity-level indicators such as projects completed and manning.

### **The Way Forward – Unity of Effort**

As stated, there is no "one size fits all" formula for PRTs. The latitude given to those on the ground to adapt to their particular circumstances has been a strength and source of innovation. In practice, however, too many PRTs operate on an ad hoc basis without any comprehensive political, developmental or security framework developed through an interagency process.

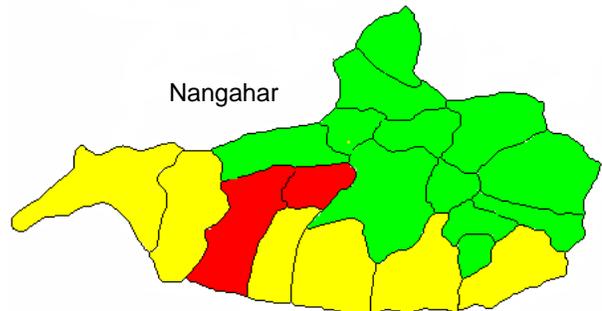
It therefore follows that the first step toward unity of effort is a better understanding of the USG mission in Afghanistan and how the PRTs fit into the larger context. That will inform a joint, interagency analysis of the operating environment – i.e. a common definition of the battlespace a PRT occupies. Derivative of that will be a list of mission essential tasks for each PRT, which in turn will determine the roles and relationships between the agencies involved and the resources each must bring to the table. The outcome of the process will be a ***PRT strategy***. The graphic below illustrates this in general terms.

## Spectrum of Intervention



The essential tasks listed are not exhaustive. Rather, they are activities the PRTs have been directly involved with, or those carried out by primarily by others but which have a direct impact on PRTs. In terms of analysis, the operative units are provinces and districts, not PRT AORs or regions. Clearly, some tend toward the extremes. In Paktika and Uruzgan kinetic operations are still essential, while in Parwan and Bamyan long-term development can proceed largely unimpeded by security concerns. Most places, however, fall somewhere in the middle, and the districts within a province may span the entire spectrum. Kandahar and Nangahar are good examples.

To illustrate how this works, consider Nangahar in more detail. Overall, it's a province that has made substantial improvements in terms of the development climate and support for the central government. However, a district-by-district analysis reveals more variation. In the northern areas and around Jalalabad city (in green), the primary mission of the PRT is to facilitate development efforts and the secondary mission to bolster existing stability. Most of the southern districts (yellow) are in transition. Some development can proceed, but the primary mission is to create legitimacy and stability.

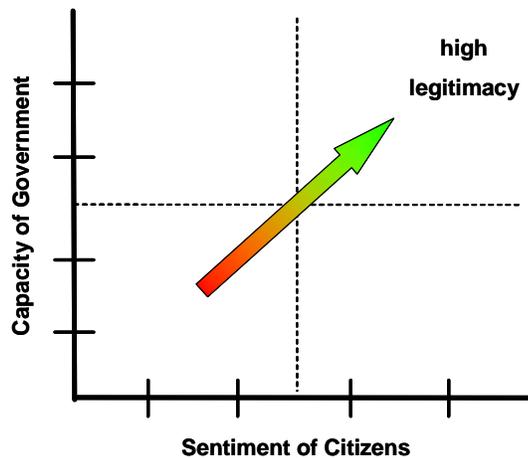


Finally, in the tribal areas around Khogiyani (red) the primary mission is that of 3/3 Marines - kinetic operations and trust/confidence measures, with the PRT playing a supporting role.

An analysis of where an area falls along the spectrum of intervention is useful, but has limitations. The role of the PRTs in supporting kinetic operations is reasonably well-defined (e.g.: CMAs and political engagement and analysis), as is its role in supporting long-term development efforts (e.g.: security support for development agencies). It is also fairly clear how PRTs can support security sector reform (e.g.: equip and mentor the police) and Bonn process activities such as elections (e.g.: logistical support and reporting).

Where things get a bit muddy is how a PRT promotes stability and builds legitimacy. This matters, because most PRTs fall into the middle of the spectrum. Moreover, the core mission of the PRTs has always been to extend the reach and enhance the legitimacy of the central government – in other words, promote good governance. To achieve that, further analysis is needed.

The starting point is to realize that “legitimacy” has two basic dimensions, shown at right: the capacity of the government to rule and the sentiment of the citizens being ruled toward that government. By plotting a province or district along each axis the PRT gains a better appreciation of the types of interventions needed to achieve success. In general terms, those fall into four categories:



1. *Increase the capacity of the GoA.* Interagency efforts in this area could include equipping and training the police, building government buildings, roads, communication facilities and other infrastructure projects, facilitation of GoA leadership (e.g.: PDCs and regional Governors’ conferences), and technical assistance.
2. *Counter illegitimate actors.* Illustrative interagency activities include support for judicial reform, DDR and counternarcotics efforts, promotion of Taliban reconciliation, support for anti-corruption initiatives, mitigation/resolution of green-on-green conflict, and the isolation/containment/removal of warlords. Another significant role for the PRT in this area is reporting to policymakers in Kabul.
3. *Improve citizen sentiment.* Aside from the obvious need to conduct outreach and public affairs (with Afghans getting credit, not the PRT), interagency efforts in this area include support to independent media outlets, greater community involvement in CERP and QIP projects (which will slow them down), elections support, civic education campaigns unrelated to elections and support to civil society organizations (e.g.: advocacy groups and business associations)
4. *Counter factors decreasing citizen sentiment.* Any effort in this area must begin with an understanding of sub-national identity based on ethnic, tribal, regional or other

factors. Armed with this knowledge, interventions can be tailored to target and engage specific communities, mullahs and local leaders, undermine the causes of anti-government attitudes, and counter the highly sophisticated information operations of the Taliban, AQ and HIG.

The value of this analysis is that it can result in a more rational, deliberate and focused mission for each agency within the PRT. Once that is determined, essential tasks and prioritization becomes clearer, as does the allocation of resources and the expectations of the agencies involved. Finally, as this is an iterative process, it should make it easier to measure progress and make adjustments as needed.

The process itself does not have to be onerous. Fortunately, the 360<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs is nearing the end of its rotation, so there are many experienced hands in the field. Most of the civilians have also been on the ground for some time. The basic analysis can be done in a day, with some wrangling over essential tasks and key roles taking a bit longer. The product is a 3-5 page paper detailing the PRT's strategy. Of course, review and buy-in from higher HQ (military and civilian) would then be necessary. PRT strategies would be reviewed and adjusted bi-annually, ideally to coincide with the end of a CA rotation.

### **Implications**

Regardless of the outcomes, the PRTs must "own" this process. There is certainly a role for higher HQ in terms of guidance and oversight, but those most knowledgeable about their AORs must do the heavy lifting. A related issue is that the process must be equally "owned" and led by all the agencies involved in PRTs. That includes future personnel. The lack of consistency between rotations (civilian and military) and the desire to make one's mark can be just as detrimental as the lack of interagency agreement about priorities.

That will mean some loss of control for the military, but at the same time should result in greater economy of force. For the civilian agencies, the clear implication is that they must be prepared to provide the personnel, resources and changes to their business models necessary to implement a PRT strategy. As noted at the beginning, if the long-term plan is for the military to exit and civilian agencies assume some PRT functions, that process must begin with a more active role in the PRTs as they are constituted now.

It should be emphasized that this does not represent a change in command. For obvious reasons, one person needs to be in charge and that person is the military's PRT Commander. The creation of a true interagency PRT strategy is a gradual shift away from an exclusive or predominant lead by the military. Interestingly, that is precisely how some of the best PRTs have operated over the last two years. Regardless of the environment and key activities, where the military Commander, State rep and USAID rep form an effective leadership triumvirate, the PRT is more likely to be successful. The process outlined above is an effort to formalize that relationship.