

Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan

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**Mennonite
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MCC's work in Afghanistan is in the areas of relief (food and school supplies), development (education and health) and peacebuilding (training, research and advocacy). MCC carries out its work through local Afghan partners.

The following document was produced through consultations with MCC partners in Afghanistan. Partners have expressed concern about the use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams by foreign military forces.

Introduction

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) are a crucial part of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and the operational model for civil-military cooperation. A PRT is a military unit with embedded civilian personnel from the diplomatic corps and the relevant development agencies. It is tasked with promoting governance, enhancing security and facilitating humanitarian relief and reconstruction operations. Currently there are 26 PRTs deployed in different parts of the country, 12 of which are led by U.S. forces, mainly operating in the southern and eastern regions.¹

The primary reason for the combination of military efforts with reconstruction/development needs is part of a broader strategy to “win the hearts and minds” of the Afghan people.² The *hearts and minds* strategy was designed to gain the support of the Afghan population for Coalition-led military efforts against the insurgents. PRTs were established as a response to “growing resentment toward the Coalition among the majority Pashtun community in the south and east,” which is where major military operations have taken place.³

Reconstruction and development projects that are undertaken are often short-term, visible and quick impact projects. PRTs, as part of a broader military and development strategy, raise the following concerns:

1. Using the military as tool for development and reconstruction is *the wrong tool for the job and works to undermine long term sustainability.*
2. PRTs divert *funds and resources from sustainable development efforts.*
3. PRTs essentially have the effect of *militarizing aid* and its use *infringes upon humanitarian space.*

The Wrong Tool

The nature of military operations, the military’s institutional role and short deployment cycles make the PRTs an undesirable tool for the job. According to a report by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, some PRT members reported that due to lack of planning and coordination, units engaged in “short-term ‘feel good’ projects (with success measured by money spent or satisfaction of the local governor) without consideration of larger strategic and capacity-building implications.”⁴ Furthermore, in a report to Congress the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction stated that “there has been no standardized measurement of the effectiveness of the PRT program...no metrics have been devised to provide data on the quality, impact, and usefulness of PRTs and their efforts. While PRTs have collected data such as projects completed or dollars spent, these figures are inadequate to determine a PRT’s effectiveness.”⁵ The inexistence of adequate monitoring and evaluation instruments means that money and time may continue to be invested in unsustainable and ineffective projects.

In addition, the military is not equipped to plan and implement development projects just as a development agency or an NGO is not equipped for counterinsurgency operations. The military lacks development expertise. Even though a development adviser is supposed to make up part of

¹ *Report to Congress, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, January 30, 2009; p 10.*

² Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Sippi; Wardak, M; Zaman, I; Taylor, A. *Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds: Exploring Afghan Perceptions of Civil-military Relations.* 2008. p7

³ *Ibid.* p13

⁴ *Agency Stovepipes vs. Strategic Agility: Lessons We need to Learn from PRTs in Iraq and Afghanistan.* U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. p72.

⁵ *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the U.S. Congress.* January 30, 2009. p55-56.

each PRT, the sheer number of military personnel often drowns out the voices of development professionals.

Furthermore, as an institution designed and trained for security purposes and not development, the use of the military for development and reconstruction projects tends to focus efforts in areas where it serves strategic security interests rather than where it is needed the most. NGOs and development agencies, on the other hand, respond to communities that are most in need. NGOs are also better positioned to make a long term commitment for sustainable development⁶ whereas the military may shift its resources and efforts due to changes in the security situation or shifts in deployment cycles.

There is some evidence that the use of PRTs can be useful in highly insecure areas, where civilian agencies are unable to gain access. The heavy reliance on the PRT model, however, leads to inefficient and unsustainable projects that are limited in their ability to improve the lives of Afghan citizens.

Funding Diversions

PRTs have taken up a significant amount of U.S. and international resources. Much needed development dollars are taken up by the PRT program that can otherwise be used for long term sustainable development projects that work to meet human need.

Since the commencement of U.S. operations in 2001, the United States has spent billions of dollars for its military operations and assistance. In terms of total allocated funds from FY 2001- 2009 the Department of Defense (DOD) has received \$208.6 billion and the Department of State⁷ has received \$13.9 billion.⁸ There is an enormous gap between the amount of money available to the military versus the amount for diplomatic and development needs (a difference of about 93%).

PRTs are funded by DOD appropriations, primarily through the Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP). The CERP provides funding directly to a commander on the ground. The commander is allowed to spend up to \$2 million without getting approval from his or her superior for small scale projects that cost less than \$500,000. These funds are often used to fund different projects that the commander sees as a need regardless of whether they correspond with Afghanistan's current development strategy.

According to a report released by eleven different NGOs operating in Afghanistan CERP funds "exceeds the total amount the Afghan government spends on health and education."⁹ CERP funding from FY 2001 – 2009 amounted to approximately \$1.6 billion.¹⁰ These resources could be better used in programs that are in line with Afghan needs and plans by the central government such as the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS)¹¹.

Humanitarian Space

The use of PRTs for development and reconstruction projects infringes on humanitarian space and serves to militarize aid and development efforts. Humanitarian space generally refers to the

⁶ Sustainable development includes local empowerment, capacity building, needs based assessment and relationship building.

⁷ Funding for Department of State includes the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and its diplomatic operations.

⁸ Belasco, Amy. *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11*. Congressional Research Service. July 8, 2009. p13.

⁹ Waldman, Matt. *Caught in the Conflict: Civilians and the International Security Strategy in Afghanistan*. April 3, 2009. p14.

¹⁰ *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the U.S. Congress*. July 30, 2009. p36.

¹¹ <http://www.andsgov.af/>

independence and neutrality of development and relief agencies from the military and political groups. Aid and development is provided to the areas where it is needed the most rather than used instrumentally as a way meet a strategic military goal. When the military engages in humanitarian operations it blurs the line between military roles and NGO roles.

Many NGOs have worked in Afghanistan for decades by building trust and crossing the lines of conflict to provide aid to those who need it. According to a Special Report from the U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP),

The objective of humanitarian assistance is to help those in need. To have access to vulnerable populations in war-torn societies, assistance providers must have the ability to cross the “lines” of conflict. This access, or “humanitarian space,” may be compromised or lost entirely if the assistance community is perceived as undermining the interests and objectives of one of the parties to the conflict or having partisan sympathies.¹²

As the military engages in a campaign to “win the hearts and minds” of the Afghan people, NGOs have come under increasing pressure. Public perceptions of the humanitarian work of NGOs are compromised, contributing to the derailment of long term development efforts and putting NGO workers at greater risk of attacks by insurgents. The USIP report states that since the military is involved in a range of operations from “capturing insurgents and bombing heroin labs to building schools and clinics, confusing messages are sent to the civilian population about the difference between foreign military and civilian roles.”¹³

Some Recommendations

1. While the military needs to be knowledgeable and sensitive to the development needs of a community, directly engaging in development projects should not be a role for the military. Capacity should exist for NGOs (preferably local Afghan NGOs) to carry out this work, independent of military and political considerations. This does not mean that reconstruction and sustainable development should not be part of a larger U.S. strategy. A unified strategy for security, development, reconstruction and diplomacy is important and necessary. But the military should not engage in activities where it lacks expertise, experience and mandate.
2. Military funding takes up a significant portion of U.S. dollars in Afghanistan. A comprehensive U.S. strategy for security in Afghanistan must include a balance between military and development spending. Rather than diverting funds for development through PRTs, the same money can be used more effectively by development agencies working for long term sustainability.
3. Development should not be tied to military strategy. The use of the military for development projects works to undermine sustainable development and endangers civilians. Development projects should be conducted where they are needed the most and not where they serve a strategic military goal.

¹² Dziedzic, M., & Seidl, M. *USIP Special Report: Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the Military Relations with International Nongovernmental Organizations in Afghanistan*. September 2005. p.6

¹³ Ibid.