



Policy Options for State-building in Afghanistan:

The Role of NATO PRTs in Development in Afghanistan

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The Role of NATO PRTs in Development in Afghanistan

Abstract

This document outlines policy options for how NATO's stated commitment to development and reconstruction through PRTs can proceed in the current limited security environment in Afghanistan. The development role of NATO PRTs in Afghanistan needs to be reevaluated given deteriorating security on the ground. The current NATO-ISAF PRT development role is twofold: (i) PRTs support reconstruction and development projects and secure areas for development work by other national and international actors and (ii) undertake certain reconstruction and development activities themselves when civilian assistance workers cannot safely operate. The key challenges facing NATO-ISAF PRTs in facilitating reconstruction and development are confronting the lack of security and correcting the development coordination gap. In order to address the challenges currently facing NATO-ISAF PRTs, the development role of PRTs can either be expanded, refined and refocused, or diminished. Given the policy analysis presented in this document, the recommended course of action is to expand and improve the development role of NATO-ISAF PRTs in Afghanistan.

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Important Terms

ANDS:	Afghan National Development Strategy
ANSF:	Afghan National Security Forces
ISAF:	International Security Assistance Force
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PRT:	Provincial Reconstruction Team
UNAMA:	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

I. Introduction

Since the U.S. intervention to eliminate terrorist safe havens in 2001, a range of national, regional, and international actors have been greatly involved in efforts to bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan. Among international actors, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) directs the military and security operations in Afghanistan through the U.N.-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). NATO is a key actor in driving and implementing policy in Afghanistan through this leadership role and its coordination with U.S., UN, and international efforts. This policy document will focus on NATO's development role in Afghanistan, which is carried out through 26 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) across the country. Given the declining security in parts of Afghanistan, analysis of the development role of NATO PRTs is urgently needed.

The PRT structure was developed by the United States, in conjunction with the government of Afghanistan, in response to the need to expand the presence of international security forces and the writ of the Afghan government throughout the country. The stated goal of the initial PRTs in Afghanistan was to extend the reach of the Afghan central government throughout the provinces of the country. While the specific composition of PRTs has differed according to who commands them, the general structure includes civilian experts – diplomats, development experts, engineers, agriculture professionals – and a small contingent of security forces to provide force protection for the civilians under the command of a military officer. The PRTs focus on governance, security, and development efforts at the local level in Afghan provinces. However, the development role of NATO PRTs in Afghanistan needs to be reevaluated given deteriorating security on the ground. As such, the purpose of this analysis is to

outline policy options for how NATO's stated commitment to development and reconstruction through PRTs can proceed in the current limited security environment in Afghanistan.

The convergence of major Afghanistan policy evaluations in early 2009 warrants a timely analysis of NATO's policy on PRTs and reconstruction and development. The United States, the lead NATO Ally and troop-contributing country, inaugurated a new President in January 2009. President Obama has since conducted a comprehensive policy review and unveiled his strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. In March 2009, Afghan and international leaders gathered in The Hague for a United Nations-sponsored conference on Afghanistan. Finally, NATO celebrated its sixtieth anniversary at the April 2009 NATO Summit in Strasbourg-Kehl. The NATO Summit focused greatly on the Alliance's mission in Afghanistan and the need for additional resources and strategies to address rising violence and instability in the South and East. The convergence of these three major Afghanistan policy events demonstrates the importance of the mission in Afghanistan to NATO and the international community. However, a clear path for greater success in stabilization and reconstruction through PRTs has not established. All of these military, civilian, and multilateral actors approach the subject of PRTs and NATO's efforts in stabilization and reconstruction differently due to their audiences and motivations in demonstrating their achievements. As such, this document fulfills a need in analyzing the development role of NATO PRTs in Afghanistan going forward.

Given the deterioration in the security environment and the need for a clear and coordinated NATO policy for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan, this document will analyze how NATO's stated commitment to development and reconstruction through PRTs can proceed in the current limited security environment. The following sections will provide an analysis of NATO objectives, the role of NATO-ISAF PRTs, and challenges for reconstruction

and development activities in Afghanistan. Following the analysis, policy options for the development role of NATO-ISAF PRTs will be presented and evaluated, along with a final policy recommendation and conclusions.

II. NATO Objectives for Reconstruction and Development

2008 ISAF Strategic Vision for Afghanistan

The NATO approach for Afghanistan is contained in the ISAF strategy, which is agreed upon by all NATO Allies. NATO's ISAF strategy is revised annually at NATO Summit meetings of heads of state. At the 2009 NATO Summit, the vision statement from the 2008 Summit in Bucharest was reinforced and its principles reaffirmed as the foundation of NATO's political-military plan for Afghanistan.¹ During its 2008 Summit in Bucharest, NATO issued a declaration of its strategic vision for Afghanistan and emphasized a new Comprehensive Approach to support reconstruction and development in all operations. The guiding principles of ISAF's strategic vision include:

“A firm and shared long-term commitment; support for enhanced Afghan leadership and responsibility; a comprehensive approach by the international community; bringing together civilian and military efforts; and increased cooperation and engagement with Afghanistan's neighbors, especially Pakistan”.²

At the core, ISAF's guiding principles are intended to align NATO capabilities with the practical needs communicated by the government of Afghanistan. The Declaration specifically states that ISAF's objectives will be consistent with the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and the Afghanistan Compact, as well as the priorities of local actors. The Afghanistan Compact, signed by 65 participating and observer countries and 10 international organizations in

¹ “Summit Declaration on Afghanistan, Issued by Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg/Kehl on 4 April 2009”. North Atlantic Treaty Organization. <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52836.htm>

² “Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of the Nations contributing to the UN-mandated NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, April 3, 2008. <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8444.htm>

2006, serves as the framework for cooperation between Afghanistan and the international community in achieving a shared five-year vision for Afghanistan.³ The ANDS sets out high-level goals for Afghanistan in the areas of security, governance, economic growth and poverty reduction.⁴ By focusing on consistency with the Afghanistan Compact and the ANDS, NATO ensures that ISAF objectives meet the specific requests of the Afghan government.

The success in implementing the strategic vision for Afghanistan will be measured in terms of two key elements: (i) elimination of the threat to stability from terrorism, and (ii) achievement of fully-operational Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) that can extend the reach of the government across the entire country in the areas of “good governance, reconstruction, and development.”⁵ Therefore, as evidenced by explicit reference in the measures of success contained in this document, working with the ANSF to extend the reach of reconstruction and development across all of Afghanistan is one of NATO’s two key objectives. The acknowledgement of the important connection between security and development is the basis for NATO’s pledge to intensify its efforts in both areas.

NATO’s Comprehensive Approach

The Comprehensive Approach is NATO’s new strategy to better coordinate civilian and military operations. This new strategy reflects NATO’s integrated approach for merging security and development, which has been applied in Afghanistan. The application to Afghanistan is intended to improve ISAF’s contribution in five key areas of work: (i) planning and conduct of operations; (ii) lessons learned, training, education, and exercises; (iii) enhancing cooperation

³ “The Afghanistan Compact”. The London Conference on Afghanistan, January 31-February 1, 2006. <<http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Documents/AfghanistanCompact-English.pdf>>

⁴ “Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008-2013”. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. <http://www.ands.gov.af/ands/final_ands/src/final/Afghanistan%20National%20Development%20Strategy_eng.pdf>

⁵ “Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of the Nations contributing to the UN-mandated NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, April 3, 2008. <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8444.htm>

with external actors; (iv) public messaging; and (v) stabilization and reconstruction.⁶ What this approach means in practice is that NATO is committed to improving its support to stabilization and reconstruction and joint training and operations of civilian and military personnel. Emphasis on utilizing a Comprehensive Approach in Afghanistan implies NATO's goal of addressing the full range of challenges facing the country.

By implementing this new integrated approach, NATO is demonstrating it has learned the lessons from its initial operations in Afghanistan, where military and civilian efforts were not synchronized. During the first years of the war in Afghanistan, international forces sometimes worked at cross purposes with the civilian efforts at stabilization because of the two formerly separate missions in Afghanistan: counterterrorism and stabilization and reconstruction. NATO recognized that these prior efforts were counterproductive, and as such, has focused on a comprehensive political-military strategy to achieve success going forward. The importance of this integrated approach is that it recognizes that NATO must play more than a purely military/peacekeeping role. The importance facets of ISAF's Afghanistan strategy that are new to this approach are the greater focus on lessons learned and the public messaging. Strategic communications and the propaganda war against the Taliban were not previously part of NATO's mandate in Afghanistan, but are now incorporated into the comprehensive strategy as it is clear that such efforts are necessary for success.

Through its strategic vision for ISAF and the application of the Comprehensive Approach, NATO has demonstrated that it considers development a top priority in Afghanistan and within its mandate. NATO support for reconstruction and development efforts is critically important because it brings many additional resources to bear on the economic and governance

⁶ "A Comprehensive Approach". North Atlantic Treaty Organization, updated April 8, 2009. <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_51633.htm>

problems facing Afghanistan. The extensive NATO military presence means nothing if the organization is unwilling to tackle development projects as part of its responsibilities. As such, implementation of the Comprehensive Approach represents an important next step toward defining the role of ISAF within the broader spectrum of development actors in Afghanistan.

By operationalizing the Comprehensive Approach within the ISAF strategic vision, NATO will assume a more prominent role in coordinating development activities in Afghanistan. NATO is uniquely positioned to have the country-wide presence through its Provincial Reconstruction Teams and regional commands, as well as the resources and political will of the majority of Western allies, to assist in effectively coordinating development efforts in Afghanistan. The willingness of individual ISAF commanders to use their Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds for maximum local development impact will be reinforced within a more consistent NATO ISAF policy of conducting and facilitating development projects through the new approach. Capitalizing on steady streams of funding and resources already in place across Afghanistan through ISAF provincial and regional structures with a more coordinated approach to civilian and military objectives will lead to more focused and effective NATO development efforts.

III. NATO-ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Teams

PRT Mandate and Objectives

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which have been operating in Afghanistan as part of coalition forces since 2002, are ISAF's principal vehicle for implementing NATO's strategic vision and comprehensive approach in Afghanistan. Currently, 26 ISAF PRTs operate throughout Afghanistan and are led by 14 different nations.⁷ The United States leads 12 PRTs,

⁷ "International Security Assistance Force and Afghan National Army strength and laydown". North Atlantic Treaty Organization, updated April 3, 2009. <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/isaf_placemat.pdf>

with the remaining 14 teams led by non-U.S. NATO Allies and partners.⁸ The initial stated objective of PRTs in Afghanistan was to expand the authority of the central government throughout the country. NATO PRTs were conceived as a way to merge civilian and military efforts in Afghanistan to enable security, governance and development. PRTs have failed to consistently achieve success in their objectives as a result of increasing insecurity and inadequate resources. While individual PRTs have achieved limited success in specific projects, such as health care training, road building, and greater tribal governing involvement, consistent improvements in security and development have not occurred.⁹ Furthermore, to date, NATO PRTs have not been fully resourced, which has limited their chances of success. NATO has identified the lack of adequate resources for PRTs. The ISAF strategic vision from 2008 included a pledge by NATO to “provide all the PRTs needed, enhance their unity of effort, strengthen their civilian component and further align their development strategies with Afghan Government priorities until such a time as Afghan Government institutions are strong enough to render PRTs unnecessary”.¹⁰ This statement, combined with others from the 2009 NATO Summit indicate the Alliance’s willingness to increase the commitment to PRTs to give them a real chance at success in Afghanistan.

PRTs and Development

NATO is a major contributor to international reconstruction and development efforts through PRTs. PRTs are a key feature of ISAF operations and are the principal vehicle for NATO’s development support. To date, PRT activities have contributed more than \$545 million

⁸ “International Security Assistance Force and Afghan National Army strength and laydown”. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, updated April 3, 2009. <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/isaf_placemat.pdf>

⁹ Malkasian, Carter and Gerald Meyerle. “Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How do we know they work?”. Department of the Army Strategic Studies Institute, March 2009. p. xiii, 24-25. <www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/>

¹⁰ “Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of the Nations contributing to the UN-mandated NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, April 3, 2008. Accessed at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8444.htm.

in projects throughout Afghanistan.¹¹ PRT Commanders have access to CERP funds, which among U.S. commanders amounts to up to \$100,000 in discretionary monthly spending.¹² Non-U.S. commanders may not have access to this same level of CERP funding, but are able to tap into a much larger resource base through NATO.

The role of ISAF PRTs in development is twofold. First, PRTs support reconstruction and development in Afghanistan and secure areas for development work by other national and international actors.¹³ The PRTs play a critical role in providing local logistical coordination for the development projects undertaken by the Afghan government and international organizations. In essence, the first role of the PRT is as a development facilitator for other direct development organizations, including USAID, NGOs, UNAMA, and the National Solidarity Program.

Second, PRTs undertake certain practical reconstruction and development activities themselves, but in close coordination with local government and UNAMA representatives. PRTs were not designed to lead the overall development efforts in Afghanistan, but they have assumed expanded development projects in provinces where other actors cannot operate due to security concerns.¹⁴ A recent study conducted through field research at the Army Strategic Studies Institute found that PRTs were unique in that they filled a need that could not be met by other organizations.¹⁵ Thus, when other actors like local government agencies and NGOs cannot operate in certain provinces, PRTs can and sometimes do effectively fill the void. In addition to

¹¹ "Afghanistan Report 2009." NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2009.

¹² Malkasian, Carter and Gerald Meyerle. "Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How do we know they work?". Department of the Army Strategic Studies Institute, March 2009. p. 7. <www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/>

¹³ "NATO's Role in Afghanistan – ISAF Missions: Reconstruction and Development". North Atlantic Treaty Organization, updated March 27, 2009. <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_8189.htm#missions>

¹⁴ Malkasian, Carter and Gerald Meyerle. "Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How do we know they work?". Department of the Army Strategic Studies Institute, March 2009. p. vii-x. <www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/>

¹⁵ Malkasian, Carter and Gerald Meyerle. "Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How do we know they work?". Department of the Army Strategic Studies Institute, March 2009. p. 24-35. <www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/>

these development projects, PRTs have assisted the Afghan government and international actors in providing humanitarian relief services upon request. Humanitarian relief operations include the distribution of medication, food and winter supplies to meet immediate needs during severe weather conditions.

The two ISAF PRT development functions of facilitator and project implementer involve both civilian and military personnel. The civilian components of PRTs take the lead on reconstruction and development projects in support of the Afghan government's national development priorities, while the military components take the lead on security. It is essential that the civilian and military components work well together since the military personnel are needed to direct assistance to the civilian elements for transportation, medical assistance, and engineering. The military components are doubly important, because while civilian components report to their national leadership, the military personnel come under ISAF command and are coordinated by their respective NATO Regional Command. The NATO Regional Command structure provides a clear chain of command by which PRT leaders are organized, are able to share best practices, and can be held accountable. The benefits of a clearly-defined command structure are apparent in the ability to get work pushed through proper leadership channels swiftly. Therefore, the military PRT components are centrally commanded at the province level and have a defined chain of command to address their goals and objectives for reconstruction and development.

PRT Reconstruction and Development Projects

ISAF PRTs facilitate a range of reconstruction and development projects. Like many aspects of PRTs, there is great variation in projects depending on province, national leadership, resources, and civilian expertise. Specific examples of projects facilitated by ISAF PRTs include

the rebuilding of schools; construction of irrigation ditches, pipelines, reservoirs and wells; repair of infrastructure for transportation and communication; and access to medical assistance.¹⁶ The type of projects undertaken by PRTs in Afghanistan has evolved over time and continues to be a principal area of debate among the international community. The initial PRT projects in Afghanistan were designed to provide immediate local impact to win “hearts and minds”.¹⁷ Some of these initial “hearts and minds” projects, such as rebuilding schools, were initially well-received by the local populations, but ultimately failed because they lacked a clear strategy for local sustainability. Lessons learned from these PRT experiences have led to a shift currently underway from quick impact programs to more transitional programs intended to support long-term development objectives.¹⁸ NATO has recognized the importance of factoring long-term sustainability into its PRT project proposals, which is why ISAF’s strategic vision requires PRT operations to be consistent with local Afghan priorities and the ANDS.

In addition, some PRT projects have required a buy-in from the local population to ensure their success. The local-buy comes in the form of a small financial contribution, such as the National Solidarity Program requirement of 10% local contribution, made by the local population to give them a stake in the project outcome. Giving Afghans a stake in these PRT projects improves the likelihood that they will be protected and maintained over the long term.

IV. Development Challenges Facing NATO-ISAF PRTs

Security limitations, a lack of coordination, and risks to non-PRT development actors are the principal development challenges facing NATO-ISAF PRTs.

¹⁶ “NATO’s Role in Afghanistan – ISAF Missions: Reconstruction and Development”. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, updated March 27, 2009. <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_8189.htm#missions>

¹⁷ Malkasian, Carter and Gerald Meyerle. “Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How do we know they work?”. Department of the Army Strategic Studies Institute, March 2009. p. 31. <www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/>

¹⁸ Henrietta Fore, “Aligning ‘Soft’ with ‘Hard’ Power”. *Parameters*, Summer 2008.

Security

The increased instability and violence in Afghanistan over the last year has significantly hindered reconstruction and development work in volatile provinces in the East and South. The United Nations reported that 2008 closed as the most violent year in Afghanistan since 2001, with a 31.0% increase in violent incidents such as bombings and armed attacks.¹⁹ NATO faces a much more difficult security challenge in its operations with the intensifying insurgency and control of territory regained by the Taliban. The 2008 Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan people confirmed that insecurity remains the biggest problem facing the country.²⁰

As the security environment deteriorates, it becomes increasingly difficult for Afghan government and international aid organizations to operate in dangerous provinces. A recent PRT field study found that the PRTs have a unique capability to complete large-scale projects in dangerous areas where USAID, UNAMA, and NSP projects were very limited.²¹ While the PRTs have not yet assumed an expanded security role to provide for human security in the provinces in which they operate, they do provide the essential force protection for international civilians needed to coordinate stabilization and reconstruction efforts. The PRT security forces allow governance, development, and agriculture civilian experts assigned to PRTs to extend their reach into more remote and dangerous villages. Without the force protection provided by PRTs, development experts would be unable to initiate or supervise projects in volatile provinces and districts. In a March 2009 report, the UN Secretary General reported that freedom of movement of unarmed civilian personnel has been reduced as a result of increased violence. Among

¹⁹ "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General". United Nations General Assembly Security Council, Agenda Item 17. 10 March 2009.

²⁰ Ruth Rennie, ed. "State Building, Security, and Social Change in Afghanistan: Reflections on a Survey of the Afghan People". The Asia Foundation. Kabul, 2008.

²¹ Malkasian, Carter and Gerald Meyerle. "Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How do we know they work?". Department of the Army Strategic Studies Institute, March 2009. p. 27-28.
<www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/>

approximately 400 total districts, the UN estimates that in 2009, 30 more Afghan districts will likely be added to those already reported inaccessible to civilian personnel in 2007.²² Due to insecurity, the most dangerous Afghan districts will be completely inaccessible to unarmed civilian personnel. As a result, there exists a reconstruction and development vacuum in the most violent and unstable provinces of Afghanistan. Given this need, it is important to analyze whether ISAF PRTs should restrict their development work to situations in which logistical capacity or insecurity gives them the sole capacity to reach people in need.

As the only development delivery mechanism with significant attached security forces, there is an opening for an expanded role for PRTs to deliver development services in the most insecure provinces of Afghanistan. The level of security has an effect on whether other development organizations can operate, and equally important is the willingness of the military to assume additional risk by providing protection to civilian counterparts. Security conditions affect the balance of civilian and military roles within PRTs. One expert, Carlos Pascual, argues that PRTs are most appropriate in a medium security environment.²³ Pascual makes the argument that in a non-permissive environment with major kinetic military operations, the civilian personnel within PRTs may be restricted in how much they can accomplish, specifically in terms of reaching out to other local development actors, like the NSP or NGOs. In the opposite scenario, the security environment could be so permissive that the civilian personnel and development actors can operate freely, thereby at least partly negating the need for PRT force protection and military coordination. In Afghanistan, the 26 ISAF PRTs operate in security environments that span the entire spectrum, which is why a “one size fits all” PRT model is not

²² “The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General”. United Nations General Assembly Security Council, Agenda Item 17. 10 March 2009. p. 5.

²³ Carlos Pascual. “Building Capacity for Stabilization and Reconstruction”. Testimony for House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. January 29, 2008.

appropriate for Afghanistan. However, it is clear that the most critical need in terms of reaching local populations that have no other sources of development assistance, as well as fighting the insurgency, is met by PRTs that work in very insecure and dangerous provinces. Thus, the current limited security environment provides a critical opportunity to evaluate the important role of ISAF PRTs in facilitating reconstruction and development.

Lack of Coordination

The potential for an expanded PRT development role in volatile provinces brings up the debate over whether NATO PRTs should engage in development projects for security and effectiveness reasons. Development experts worry that ISAF PRT reconstruction projects can interfere with civilian aid projects and achieve very little based on their own merits. Robert M. Perito's study of the American PRT experience highlights the serious shortcomings in coordination and oversight, which made reconstruction projects suffer.²⁴ In particular, the long-term sustainability of initial PRT military reconstruction projects has been questioned since military actors are not trained to assess the long-term capacity of the local population to sustain their projects. As a result, some PRT projects have been unsuccessful and duplicated efforts of the civilian assistance community.²⁵ The key to preventing duplication or inconsistencies with broader regional development strategies is to establish consultative mechanisms between the relevant actors.²⁶ Consultative mechanisms like the Afghan-led Joint Coordination Monitoring Board and the PRT Working Group and Executive Steering Committee should be regularly utilized to share best practices and coordinate PRT efforts to avoid duplication.

²⁴ Robert M. Perito. "The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan". Special Report 152, USIP, October 2005. p. 9-12.

²⁵ For examples see: Michael J. Dziedzic and Colonel Michael K. Seidl. "Provincial Reconstruction Team". Special Report 147, USIP, September 2005. p. 9; or Robert M. Perito. "The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan". Special Report 152, USIP, October 2005. p. 9-10.

²⁶ Michael J. Dziedzic and Colonel Michael K. Seidl. "Provincial Reconstruction Team". Special Report 147, USIP, September 2005. p. 9-10.

The NATO structure dictates that the objectives and functions of the PRTs are decided at the national level, which complicates efforts to achieve consistent guidelines. The lack of consistent guidelines and objectives has impeded efforts to ensure that PRT reconstruction and development projects are consistent with the Afghan National Development Strategy and local needs. The NATO Bucharest Summit Declaration in 2008 outlined ISAF's comprehensive civilian-military approach and stated NATO's goal of strengthening the civilian component of PRTs to better align the PRT development strategies with Afghan government priorities.²⁷ However, the latest report from the U.S. Inspector General for Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan indicates that the NATO strategic vision to align PRT projects with Afghan development priorities has not been implemented.²⁸ The Inspector General's report assessed that the Afghan National Development Strategy has not been fully implemented by NATO Commands. This finding indicates that NATO PRTs still have work to do in terms of aligning their project objectives with the ANDS priorities. As a security and development actor with extensive reach across Afghanistan, NATO-ISAF PRTs need a consistent application of local development priorities with a view toward long-term sustainment.

Inexperience in reconstruction and development projects has resulted in PRT projects that lack the local buy-in from the community, which is necessary to achieve sustainability. The U.S. Agency for International Development emphasizes the importance of local buy-in for PRT projects and efforts to build local capacity as determinants for success.²⁹ Examples of projects with local buy-in opportunities include clean water and utilities projects, safe recreational

²⁷ "Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of the Nations contributing to the UN-mandated NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan." North Atlantic Treaty Organization, April 3, 2008. Accessed at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8444.htm.

²⁸ "Second Quarterly Report to Congress." Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. January 30, 2009.

²⁹ Henrietta Fore. "Aligning 'Soft' with 'Hard' Power". *Parameters*, Summer 2008.

facilities, road improvement, and management training for local administrators, which all require considerable development expertise to effectively execute. With a minimum local contribution to the financing and construction of these projects, which are vitally needed in the community, the PRTs give the local Afghans a stake in the projects. When the local population has invested in and relies on water systems or other projects facilitated by the PRTs, they are more apt to protect the projects and contribute to their long-term maintenance. The ISAF PRTs can give more importance to long-term sustainability of their efforts through close consultation with local leaders regarding their needs throughout the project process.

The short length of military and civilian tours with ISAF PRTs continues to pose a major challenge in terms of coordination and the duplication of efforts. Some PRT personnel serve on tours of only four to six months, which hurts the continuity of local PRT reconstruction and development projects. Mistakes can be repeated by incoming PRT personnel with limited experience, resulting in additional setbacks. NATO has not yet developed an adequate lessons learned and information sharing mechanism to remedy this problem and preserve the institutional memory of successful PRT development activities.

V. Policy Options

The sixtieth anniversary Summit of NATO heads of state provided a unique opportunity to evaluate current policy and propose solutions to existing challenges in Afghanistan. As a follow up to this overall policy review, a reevaluation of the role of NATO PRTs in reconstruction and development is particularly timely. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan places an increased burden on PRTs and their capacity to provide logistical coordination for development projects. Since the current model for ISAF PRTs is ineffective in addressing these new challenges, a policy decision must be made on how to move forward with a new approach.

To address the challenges of security and development currently facing NATO-ISAF PRTs, there are two possible courses of action:

- (1) Step up the role of PRTs in facilitating reconstruction and development in Afghanistan through an improved and better coordinated PRT model.
- (2) Downsize the development role of PRTs if security is NATO's top priority and the development role is viewed as taking resources and focus away from the primary security function.

The two policy options above will be discussed in greater detail in the sections below. Following a detailed analysis of each policy option, an overall policy recommendation will be presented for the development role of NATO PRTs in Afghanistan going forward.

Policy Option 1: Encouraging and Improving the Development Role

The need for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan is acute, and an improved development role for ISAF PRTs would enhance development efforts. PRT roles can be revised for consistency with conditions on the ground in Afghanistan and the unique security and development challenges. Given the current ISAF military structure built around the PRTs, it is best to improve and more clearly define the roles of PRTs rather than to completely discard their ability to effectively facilitate development. Large organizations move and process change slowly, which means it is more efficient to reform an existing NATO institution or structure, rather than develop an entirely new one. The existing PRT structure allows for significant flexibility in personnel composition and variety of projects, which should make it pliable to change. Furthermore, the PRT structure has given 14 different countries a defined stake in Afghanistan's reconstruction and development and provided a mechanism to merge civilian and military efforts.

Pros – Policy Option 1

The PRT model has been a useful innovation for tackling the range of challenges facing local provinces, and in particular, the interconnection of security and development. As the local Afghan government and provincial leadership have developed increased capacity, the role of PRTs in facilitating reconstruction and development should change. Provinces have been successful in improving the coordination of their local projects, and as they continue to build capacity, can begin to provide direction for local development projects. The principal benefit of encouraging and improving the development role of NATO PRTs is the logistical capacity and more extensive reach provided by PRTs, and their attached maneuver battalion force support, to facilitate development. The PRT development role should be limited to facilitation of local development projects consistent with ANDS, and should only be expanded to engagement in their own projects in provinces where other actors are unable to operate due to security concerns.

It is clear that changes are necessary to improve ISAF PRTs and address the challenges of security and lack of coordination. However, PRTs are the only development delivery mechanisms that extend across 26 provinces in Afghanistan at all levels of security. PRTs have the ability to fulfill a critical reconstruction and development need in the most violent provinces. In addition to fulfilling this need, ISAF PRTs can build public goodwill by providing needed services in an area prone to influence from insurgents. The more permissive security environments in other provinces enable the PRTs to coordinate their substantial resources with local development actors, including NGOs, the NSP, USAID, and UNAMA. PRTs can enhance the reconstruction and development projects initiated by local civilian groups by coordinating PRT funding for selection of desired projects and assisting in preventing corruption in such efforts by regular monitoring.

Specific policy recommendations for improving ISAF PRTs to better facilitate reconstruction and development include the following:

- Instituting minimum standard predeployment training for both military and civilian ISAF PRT components that includes an orientation on the role and operating norms of the civilian assistance community;³⁰
- Propose greater NATO participation in regular meetings between the UN Special Representative and UNAMA military counterparts to develop an action plan to implement Afghanistan-specific guidelines for the coordination of humanitarian actors and military actors;
- Promote the Afghan Government's chairmanship and regular participation in the Provincial Reconstruction Team Working Group and its Executive Steering Committee to implement measures of effectiveness and coordinate PRT objectives;³¹
- Establish a regional PRT forum (complementary to the nationwide PRT Working Group) for NATO civilian and military personnel to share lessons learned in reconstruction and development, and develop best practices;
- Address the problem of frequent turnover of military personnel by offering incentives and recognition to officers who volunteer to remain with their PRT longer than their four to six month rotation; and
- Engage ISAF classification officers in how to facilitate the sharing of information among ISAF PRTs and with the broader development community.

³⁰ A training program similar to the U.S. three-week interagency Afghanistan PRT predeployment training program conducted at the State Department Foreign Service Institute and a U.S. military base could serve as a model because it brings both military and civilian PRT personnel together for a broad-based training program to develop their relationships and provide practical training for work on the ground.

³¹ The first Steering Committee meeting since June 2007 was held on 29 January 2009. The most recent meeting focused on agreed-upon policy guidance for PRTs to strengthen PRT alignment with ANDS objectives. Source: "PRT Executive Steering Committee Meeting January 29, 2009 – Summary". Ministry of Defense, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. <www.unamagroups.org/PRTESCmeeting290109summary1.doc>

Cons – Policy Option 1

The difficulty in pursuing a policy of encouragement and improvement in ISAF PRT development capabilities is that significant resources will be required. Given the already scarce resources available to NATO operations in Afghanistan, making the case for devoting additional resources to PRT development support will be a challenge. NATO-ISAF PRTs will have to be substantially improved in order to fulfill this role.

Policy Option 2: Downsizing the Development Role

An argument can be made for scaling down the reconstruction and development activities of ISAF PRTs in the interest of focusing entirely on security. The argument for pursuing such a policy is based on an assessment of security as the first necessary condition for success in Afghanistan, which must be achieved in each province before PRTs can contribute to reconstruction and development. Therefore, because security is fragile in large sections of the country, including primarily the South and East, it is not appropriate to devote resources to other objectives until security is firmly established. Based on this argument, the PRTs should focus primarily on supporting broader ISAF security and stabilization operations and the civilian development community, including the Afghan government programs, USAID, UNAMA and other organizations, should exclusively direct development efforts where possible. As security has deteriorated in certain provinces, it may be more effective for PRTs to focus explicitly on their security objectives, which include force protection, training and supporting the ANSF and implementing security sector reform projects.

Pros – Policy Option 2

A policy shift toward a purely security focus for ISAF PRTs is consistent with President Obama's newly released strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as the security focus of

the recent UN-sponsored international conference on Afghanistan held in the Hague. The President's strategy emphasizes the primacy of the security objective in both countries, which is to disrupt and dismantle Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. The Obama Administration notably left out any remarks on the long-term U.S. commitment to a prosperous and democratic Afghanistan, as was promoted by the Bush Administration.

The United States and other international actors are looking for a way in which to achieve success in Afghanistan by building up sufficient Afghan capacity to turn over the bulk of security and development operations to the ANSF and the government. In this vein, the President's new strategy targets a more narrowly-defined vision of success in Afghanistan, which focuses on the U.S. role in increasing security as a precursor to extending the writ of government and fostering development across the country. PRTs were designed to spread the reach of the Afghan government throughout the country without a large international force that could cover the entire country. Therefore, it can be argued that originally, PRTs were primarily military organizations and are better suited for performing security-related tasks.

Consistent with the objectives established for the first PRTs, NATO and the international community may focus on attempts to lower the level of violence and come to agreement with the Afghan leaders on long-term goals in the country. The existing stabilization and reconstruction goals for Afghanistan are medium to long-term in nature and dependent upon relative peace and security.

Cons – Policy Option 2

NATO has a stated commitment to development through PRTs in its 2008 strategic vision for Afghanistan and promotion of a Comprehensive Approach. PRTs were established to provide an integrated civilian-military approach to the unique challenges facing Afghanistan in

security, governance, and development. NATO is still focused on these three challenges through its PRTs. The PRT innovation arose from the need to spread a peacekeeping presence across the country without creating a large peacekeeping force. As PRTs provide the only international security forces that can reach to the most lawless and dangerous provinces throughout the country, they will remain an essential tool. Since the number of international forces in Afghanistan is insufficient to cover the entire country, the ISAF PRT structure gives NATO the opportunity to have the greatest reach throughout Afghanistan with a relatively smaller international force. Because of this reach into each province and a central coordinating organization, NATO, ISAF PRTs are best positioned to implement a consistent set of reconstruction and development objectives across the country.

Downsizing the development role of ISAF PRTs in favor of a purely security-focused role until security has been established brings up the issue of whether security must come before development or development is needed to achieve security. If development does in fact assist in quelling violence and insecurity, then delaying PRT reconstruction and development projects will only make the challenge of establishing security more difficult.

VI. Conclusions and Policy Recommendation

Policy Recommendation

Given the policy analysis presented in this document and the two policy options of either (1) encouraging and improving the development role of PRTs, or (2) downsizing the development role of PRTs to focus more on security, the recommended course of action is to implement Policy Option 1 to encourage and improve the development role of PRTs.

Rationale

1 – While security remains the key consideration for ISAF PRTs, NATO should fulfill its commitment to a Comprehensive Approach in Afghanistan by continuing the PRT role in development through a more integrated strategy.

2 – The existence of the PRT model is evidence of the fact that problems of security cannot be tackled in a vacuum, but rather must be part of a more comprehensive strategy including reconstruction and development.

3 – PRTs are critically needed to provide reconstruction, development, and humanitarian assistance in provinces that are too violent for local or international organizations to operate effectively. PRTs also enhance other local and international efforts in more secure provinces through their access to additional resources and coordination capacity.

4 – ISAF can capture the institutional lessons of PRTs and transfer them into an improved model for implementing development that leverages the higher level of local Afghan leadership present today with enhanced PRT development facilitation capacity.

Conclusions

The need for a reevaluation of NATO PRTs and their stabilization and reconstruction efforts is particularly acute given the limited security environment in Afghanistan today. This policy document has focused on how NATO's stated commitment to development and reconstruction through PRTs can proceed in the current limited security environment in Afghanistan. Based on an assessment of two policy options for the ISAF PRT role in development, this document recommends that NATO continue to support the development role of PRTs in Afghanistan as an important instrument in implementing the Comprehensive Approach. There are significant opportunities for improvement in how ISAF PRTs can facilitate

reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. The specific policy recommendations for improving the development capacity of PRTs include better coordination of civilian and military efforts at the regional level, increased sharing of lessons learned by PRTs, and an enhanced incentive structure to reward experienced PRT leaders.

A strong action plan for implementation will be crucial to successful implementation of this policy for improving the reconstruction and development function of NATO PRTs. The seriousness of the security situation in Afghanistan underscores the critical need for effective civilian-military solutions to security, governance, and development challenges. By implementing a new policy for strengthening the role of ISAF PRTs in facilitating reconstruction and development, NATO will further contribute to local and international efforts at bringing stability and long-term development to Afghanistan at this critical juncture.

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