

# The PRTs structure, strategies and their relationship with NGOs

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For the purposes of this paper there will be a brief history of how PRTs came in to being, and a discussion on their alleged and perceived goals. Following this the structure of the individual PRTs and their strategies will be discussed. Finally a look will be taken of International NGOs perceptions of PRTs and their experiences of working with them.

## History

Following the fall of Kabul the US set up the CJCMOTF<sup>1</sup> after fall of Kabul to act as a coordination body for the military Civil-Military relations. This in turn created CHLCs<sup>2</sup> in provincial capitals, they were groups that acted in many of the ways that CMOCs<sup>3</sup> do in present PRTs, except they did not open shop fronts. They often worked in plain clothes and were supported by USAID staff. These were the basis of PRTs.<sup>4</sup>

It is from here in summer 2002 that PRTs start to emerge (they were originally called Joint Reconstruction Teams but this was changed on the wish of President Karzai) because US military planners started to plan for Phase IV which is supposed to be the 'stabilizing' phase of US military activities<sup>5</sup>. At this point the picture regarding the PRTs gets progressively more confusing. The original intention was to deploy 10-12 PRTs, however after the first three, in Gardez, Kunduz and Bamiyan,<sup>6</sup> it was decided to wait for the pilot PRTs to show up problems in the system before expanding the programme. Mazar-i Sharif and Herat have since followed this deployment<sup>7</sup>. Part of the problem with understanding the development of PRTs is that in all the provincial cities where PRTs are planned there are already CMOCs working, and in some cases, they acted a lot like PRTs.

## Structures and Strategies

For individual structures and histories of the PRTs please refer to the tables and diagrams at the back to compare with the strategies of the PRTs which will be discussed here.

The PRTs were originally supposed to tackle the following problems: The terrorist threat; poor infrastructure; economy and education; regional instability; difficult internal relationships between various power brokers.<sup>8</sup> This rather wide understanding of their work was refined to three aims:

1. To extend the authority of the central Government
2. To monitor, assess, report and share information on local developments
3. To assist in the reform of the security sector<sup>9</sup>

Even with this refined role the scope of the PRTs is still wide and open to a large degree of interpretation. As will be noted later actual actions and perceived roles of the PRTs by NGOs varies considerably from these 3 idealized aims. Indeed others have quoted one of the aims of the PRTs as being:

4. To assist in Phase IV (i.e. Reconstruction)<sup>10</sup>

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1 CJCMOTF: Coalition/Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force – based in Kabul, with principal responsibility for coordinating Coalition civil-military operations, including assistance and reconstruction activities: this is taken from the Humanitarian Affairs Advisory Group (HAAG) Meeting No 13 11th November minutes

2 CHLCs: Coalition Humanitarian Liaisons Cells

3 CMOC: Civil Military Operation Centre, please see charts for more information

4 Taken from Two Steps Back: Relearning the humanitarian-military lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq by Eric James October 2003 Journal of Humanitarian Assistance (JHA)

5 Humanitarian Affairs Advisory Group (HAAG) Meeting No 13 11th November minutes

6 Please see notes in table for the full list of dates and commands of PRT deployments, also the Gardez and Bamiyan PRTs were called Provisional Reconstruction Teams, so there are two versions of the PRT, but they are the same; Humanitarian Affairs Advisory Group (HAAG) Meeting No 13 11th November minutes

7 The most recent deployment has been in Herat and there is not much information at present

8 Humanitarian Affairs Advisory Group (HAAG) Meeting No 13 11th November minutes

9 Humanitarian Affairs Advisory Group (HAAG) Meeting No 13 11th November minutes

## US lead PRTs

What has been most controversial, certainly for NGOs has been the involvement of the US military, through the PRTs and CHLCs, in reconstruction and humanitarian activities. This will be discussed in detail later, and their exact actions can be seen on the PRT table.

## Kunduz and Bamiyan

It seems the German lead PRT will follow the model the US had already started there. As such they will continue to be involved in reconstruction projects, despite the fact they will be under ISAF's control and not under US control.<sup>11</sup> The same can be said of the New Zealand PRT in Bamiyan, especially as they are still finishing the Bamiyan University refurbishment.

## Mazar-i Sharif

The UK led PRT has had a slightly different focus from the US lead PRTs, and in many ways is the only alternative model at present because the New Zealand PRT is still finishing off projects started while the Bamiyan PRT was under US command, and the German PRT in Kunduz is not at full operational capacity yet.

Essentially the Mazar PRT has the following aims<sup>12</sup>:

1. Supporting the Bonn Process<sup>13</sup> by liaising and having dialogue with all power brokers, local, central government, UNAMA, religious and secular leaders and coalition partners
2. Monitoring of the local conditions and local progress of the Security Sector Review<sup>14</sup>
3. Active engagement with NGOs in *stimulating* the reconstruction process

The most significant point here is the word *stimulating* in the third aim. By distancing themselves from actual reconstruction efforts or humanitarian aid they are reducing their role and their sphere of influence to assisting International and Local NGOs with their work.

## The NGO response

It has been widely reported that NGOs have significant issues with the role of PRTs, however only a few NGOs have managed to voice these concerns effectively. BAAG has decided not to give a single response primarily because of the variety of views its members take, however ACBAR (Afghanistan), Christian Aid (UK), Care International (US) and VENRO<sup>15</sup> (German) have all published discussion papers or made policy statements regarding PRTs.

Essentially most of the issues NGOs have come down to the Military being involved in humanitarian activities.<sup>16</sup> Specifically it is noted that using the military to achieve humanitarian goals politicizes aid and humanitarianism. It must be noted that under the Geneva Convention the US military as an occupying power has responsibility to ensure that there are no humanitarian crises such as famine, and that there is security throughout the country.<sup>17</sup> However the types of projects that the PRTs are also running and funding involve the rebuilding of schools, universities and health clinics, which are classically seen as medium-term humanitarian aid, and not short-term emergency aid.<sup>18</sup>

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10 The Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan and its role in reconstruction 31st May 2003

<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/0/7fa2a04b0431553b85256d6a00740fe2?OpenDocument> or <http://www.cooperationcenter.org>

11 Notes from the German Parliament

[http://eng.bundesregierung.de/top/dokumente/Artikel/ix\\_541966.htm?template=single&id=541966\\_4317&script=1&ixepf=\\_541966\\_4317](http://eng.bundesregierung.de/top/dokumente/Artikel/ix_541966.htm?template=single&id=541966_4317&script=1&ixepf=_541966_4317)

12 Taken from The Provincial Reconstruction Team plan in Afghanistan, a new direction? By Barbara Stapleton May 2003, ACBAR

13 The Bonn Process is based on the document signed in Bonn in 2001 between various Western political leaders, the UN and a variety of Afghan groups. The document legitimizes the transitional Government of Karzai and mandates that they must conduct elections by June 2004.

14 The SSR includes the reform of the army, police, judiciary and disarmament.

15 VENRO is a voluntary association of around 100 German NGOs, 20 of whom currently work in some capacity in Afghanistan.

16 Christian Aid Submission to the International Development Committee enquiry on Afghanistan September 2003

17 Civil-Military Conference, Centre for Humanitarian Cooperation January 16th 2003

18 VENRO position paper 'Armed forces as humanitarian aid workers? Scope and limits of co-operation between aid organisations and armed forces in humanitarian aid' May 2003

In addition because the US Military is pursuing an active war against the Taliban/al-Qaeda elements there is a significant possibility for a blurring of the lines between combatants and civilians. This then creates distrust between the local Afghan population and NGOs trying to help them.<sup>19</sup> Alongside the actual fighting the US military claims to be running CJCMOTF teams in every single district in every province in Afghanistan, even if PRTs are only officially present in 5 locations.<sup>20</sup>

More damaging than this there have been allegations that the PRTs, far from even trying to act in an independent humanitarian way, have expressly supported reconstruction projects for groups seen to be useful/helpful for US aims.<sup>21</sup> This stems from the conflict of objective, the military wanting to win the war, and will support specific groups for their own reasons, as opposed to humanitarian activities which are intended to be unbiased and independent.<sup>22</sup> To some observes it seems that roles have been switched, with the UN overseeing Disarmament, and the Coalition controlling Reconstruction.<sup>23</sup>

However with the confusing state, not only of objectives but of commands for the PRTs it seems likely that the individual contexts of each PRT will encourage some NGOs to work with PRTs. While other organizations such as MSF and ICRC refuse to work with PRTs on principle, regardless where their projects are based.<sup>24</sup> This leads to the final criticism of PRTs, because there is a limited amount of money available for reconstruction projects, and a significant amount goes through USAID and CMOCs, NGOs may feel obliged to work with PRTs if they are to be able to continuously fund their projects in Afghanistan or they may see the money given to foreign contractors.<sup>25</sup> However Care noted that the amount available for reconstruction through PRTs, \$12m, is only 0.01% of Afghanistan's total reconstruction needs.<sup>26</sup>

The US Embassy has published guidelines on the operations of PRTs, however it seems that this is more of a clarification of PRT structures (such as the coordination role of UNAMA between the Coalition, Government and NGOs) than a change in policy.

### **The Future of PRTs**

Military planners have always thought of PRTs as being a fluid and temporary measure, and future plans for the PRTs change frequently, but as of November 2003, the following was planned:

PRTs are to be expanded to the following locations by *February 2004*

- Kandahar
- Jalalabad
- Ghazni and Parwan (though there seems to be some confusion as a news report has said that there is already a PRT functioning in Parwan but they may be confusing this with a CMOC or CHLC)<sup>27</sup>
- Assadabad
- Qalat
- Khost

In addition there remains the question of the control and command of the PRTs. Are they to remain in the US Operation Enduring Freedom, or will they be transferred to NATO/ISAF control? Two views seem to be apparent.

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19 CARE Afghanistan policy brief September 15th 2003

20 According to the WDW on the AIMS website report 1 <http://www.aims.org.af/>

21 This report discusses the Bamiyan PRT, before New Zealand took over, where US troops are accused of bias in their implementation of projects. <http://www.deccanherald.com/deccanherald/feb04/f4.asp>

22 The Provincial Reconstruction Team plan in Afghanistan, a new direction? By Barbara Stapleton May 2003, ACBAR

23 The Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan and its role in reconstruction 31st May 2003

24 [http://bodyandsoul.typepad.com/blog/2003/08/bits\\_and\\_pieces.html](http://bodyandsoul.typepad.com/blog/2003/08/bits_and_pieces.html)

25 Two Steps Back: Relearning the humanitarian-military lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq by Eric James October 2003 Journal of Humanitarian Assistance (JHA)

26 CARE Afghanistan policy brief September 15th 2003

27 <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/6686f45896f15dbc852567ae00530132/e782fa316ea9ceabc1256def005d1427?OpenDocument>

In the long term, Donald Rumsfeld, has said that he would like NATO to take control, not only of the PRTs, though this may be an intermediary step, but of all military and peacekeeping activities in Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> NATO is said to be preparing a strategy for commanding all the PRTs, which will be decided on early next year, Colin Powell has made similar statements saying that by the next NATO summit in Istanbul in June 2004 NATO must have a robust ambitious plan for expanding outside of Kabul.<sup>29</sup> Finally, in the extreme, the acting Commander of US forces in Afghanistan has suggested that Civil-Military PRTs would one day become Civilian only organizations.<sup>30</sup>

The second view is that there will be a split, mainly along lines of control, or more precisely security. With the South and South East seeing a massive increase of attacks by Taliban elements and general insecurity<sup>31</sup> some are moving towards a two-tier system<sup>32</sup> for managing problems in Afghanistan. It has been suggested that NATO/ISAF would take control of the 'safe' PRTs, Bamiyan, Mazar and Kunduz, while the US would retain control of the PRT in Gardez and further deployments in the South and South East.<sup>33</sup> Indeed in many ways this has already started with the German PRT in Kunduz, which works under the ISAF umbrella.

The splitting of Afghanistan between secure and insecure is becoming more apparent in policy documents with the US Military stating that some areas are in Phase IV Reconstruction, while other areas are still involved in earlier Phases involving combat. As such PRTs are viewed as part of this transition from earlier Phases to Phase IV. Currently the US military claims that Afghanistan is still a 75% combat operation and 25% 'transition' (Stabilization / Reconstruction) operation for them.<sup>34</sup>

Even if PRTs are to be commanded by ISAF, that does not mean that ISAF command will necessarily use the 'modified' aims of the British lead PRT, and given that ISAF also has active Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) teams it seems that ISAF may just continue with the US policy of combining Civilian (i.e. Humanitarian) activities with Military ones. The following is a quote concerning the activities of ISAF CIMIC teams:

'(they) have carried out 530 village assessments focusing on **education, water and health**. 17 projects have been finalized, 20 are ongoing and 66 are planned. 577 policemen from 10 police districts have been trained and passed on to the International Police Training Mission. There has been involvement in the training of the Afghan Border Police and the Afghan National Army.<sup>35</sup>

Comparing this quote with the table of PRT activities it seems there is not change in policy.

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28 These comments were made just before the NATO summit of Defense Ministers on December 1st/2nd. Taken from Afghan Online Press/Reuters

29 Afghan Online Press 4th December 2003

30 Two Steps Back: Relearning the humanitarian-military lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq by Eric James October 2003 Journal of Humanitarian Assistance (JHA)

31 CARE noted the ratio of armed attacks outside Kabul: inside Kabul had risen from 2:1 to 7:1 when comparing June-August 2002 with June-August 2003. Taken from the CARE Afghanistan policy brief September 15th 2003

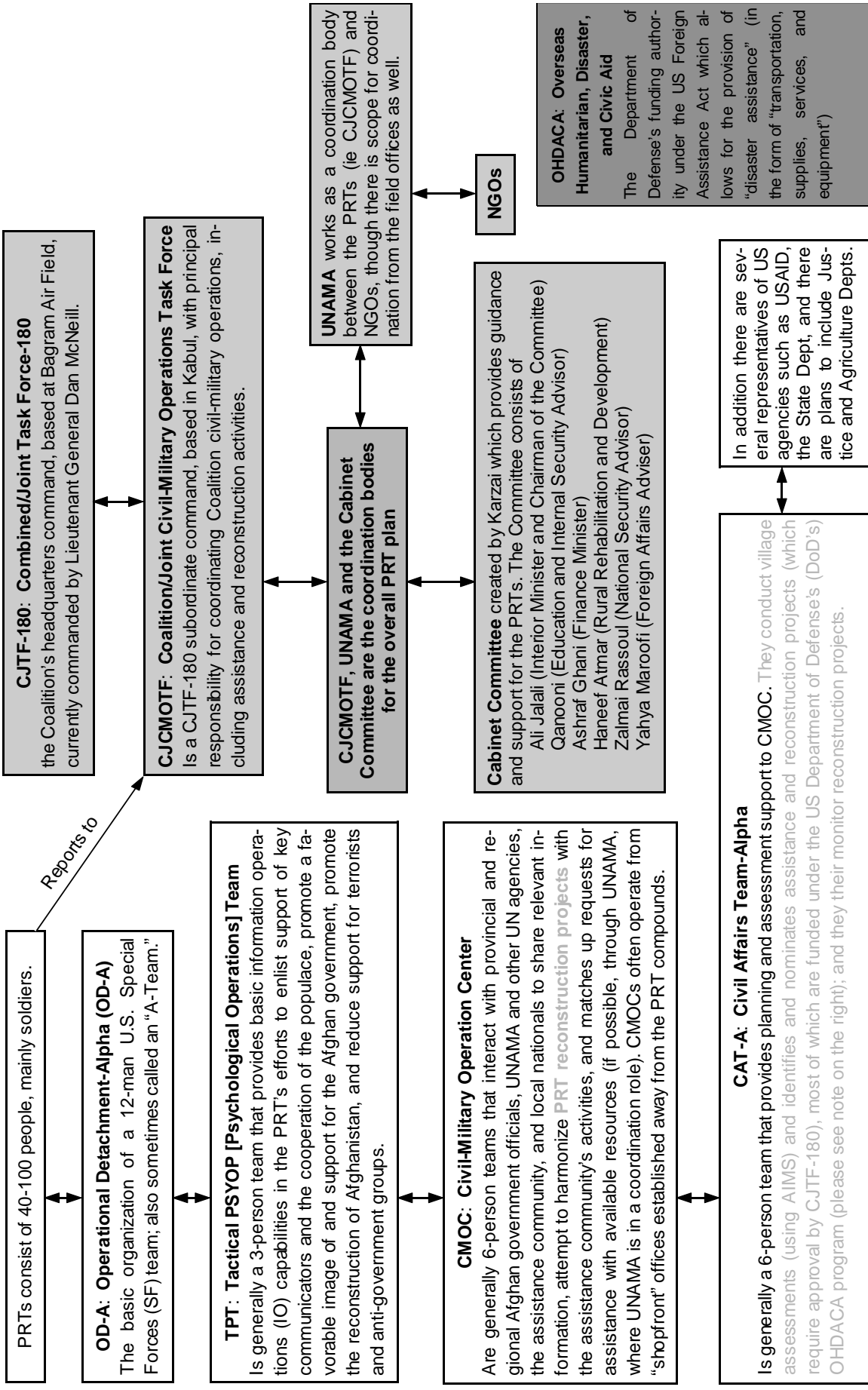
32 The Two-tier system has been mentioned recently as observers note the increasing problems of the South and South-East in Afghanistan. Some have alleged that with a stable north most of the reconstruction work will continue there while the South is left in a state of war because of the resurgent Taliban and a continuing US strategy of fighting the Taleban by proxy militia groups

33 Taken from the Testimony of Dr. William J. Durch before the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US Senate hearing on Afghanistan: In Pursuit of Security and Democracy 16th October 2003

34 Civil-Military Conference, Centre for Humanitarian Cooperation January 16th 2003

35 From the ISAF website [http://www.afnorth.nato.int/ISAF/about/about\\_history.htm](http://www.afnorth.nato.int/ISAF/about/about_history.htm)

# Structure of the US Lead PRT in Gardez



# Structure of the British lead PRT in Mazar-i-Sharif

