Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: An Interagency Assessment
Office of the S/CSR
JCOA/US JFCOM
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"The team is moreover thankful to their parent organizations for their support of this unique interagency assignment. Their assistance and encouragement throughout the assessment was instrumental in achieving a comprehensive review of the PRT concept and its implementation… (The views expressed in the Assessment are those of the team and do not necessarily represent the views of the sponsoring organizations)"

A Series of Important Lists:

Civil-Military Coordination
1) U.S. interagency community: develop guidance: outlines mission, roles, responsibilities, and authorities of participating depts/agencies
2) Embassy and CFC-Afghanistan: reinvigorate an in-country interagency body to coordinate national programs/PRT efforts with US policy
3) Guidance and direction for US PRT commanders to incorporate non-DOD representatives into PRT strategy development and decisions
4) Civilian Agencies: develop policies and incentive structures to achieve assignment objectives, civ-mil tour alignment, personnel training
5) Strengthen US PRT management and information systems that support civilian representatives
6) Increase US PRT access to funds and capabilities that support operational shift to provinces
7) USG: develop team training for all PRT personnel

Transition to ISAF Authority
1) ISAF, USG, GOA: accept a common political vision and strategy for PRT transitioning in S and SE regions.
2) NATO and other lead nations: continually reassess combat power and reach back capabilities to compensate for lead nation restraints
3) NATO and other lead nations: ensure that each PRT has political, economic, and military capabilities to achieve GOA/NATO objectives
4) USG: leave US staff and funding even after PRTs transition to ISAF control to ensure continuity of operations and smooth transition

Extensions of the Concept to Other Peace and Stability Operations
1) If PRTs are used outside of the mid-range of violence in which NGO involvement is not feasible but combat operations are not needed, the model for their use must be changed

2) To operate in a broad range of environmental contexts, PRT security measures must be periodically reviewed and adapted
3) If PRTs are used in other countries, initial focus should be on causes of conflict targeted programs to respond to underlying conditions
4) PRT representatives need specialized skill sets to adapt assets and funding to the specific requirements of different cultural and security contexts

Goals of the Assessment:
1) Generate lessons to inform greater cooperation and coordination between USG depts/agencies in conflict/post-conflict settings
2) Determine key lessons to inform the transition of PRTs to ISAF
3) Analyze the PRT concept and various implementation approaches for transferability to other current and future U.S. peace/stability ops

PRT objectives:
1) improve security
2) extend the reach of GOA
3) facilitate the reconstruction of priority provinces
4) light-footprint, high-penetration institution building

Usefulness of the PRT Concept
1) political-military tool
2) empower local stakeholders
3) improve stability
4) gain popular support for the central government

Stakeholders in the PRT concept include
1) all Afghan governmental employees and civil servants
2) NATO
3) Lead nation senior officials
    It is essential that these people all share a common sense of purpose and of the future direction of the PRTs. As ISAF takes over more PRTs, it is imperative that there be common understanding and protocol in order to maintain the trust of the locals and avoid inefficient transfers.

PRTs must be able to discern
1) level of violence
2) kind of violence
3) set of skills and resources necessary for USG policy objectives in the particular operation
    they can bring a combination of military and civilian resources to bear on local causes of violence and to support the development of viable governance and security sector institutions to strengthen the hand of those who have an interest in stability. Therefore…

PRTs must have the ability to identify, define, and address the causes of conflict:

1) anti-coalition militia
2) tribal competition over natural resources
3) violence linked to poppy cultivation and opium production
4) fighting between local military commanders over control of transit routes
5) unemployed youth
6) economically marginalized civilians
7) groups supporting the Taliban because of (1) coercion (2) services

The effectiveness of PRTs will largely depend on:
1) commitment of resources
2) security environment
3) political realities

> "To maximize the future application of the PRT concept, however, interagency doctrine development is essential"

Outstanding Questions:
1) Long-term impact on the lives of civilians in AO
2) Ways to integrate and interface PRTs and NGOs
3) Criteria for transition from intervention to traditional development programming
4) Metrics for the effectiveness of PRTs

A Series of Important Points:

--Flexibility in doctrine was an asset for PRT commanders who were capable of reacting creatively to solve the most important problems in their AORs. Examples include PRTs that scheduled regular teas with imams, students, and tribal elders as fora for the local notables to air concerns and disputes. Others experienced confusion, particularly the NGOs and international donor community, about what a PRT is, what it ought to do, and what its limits should be. The results included schools built without teachers, hospitals built without doctors, and equivalent shortcomings.

--Local objectives are attained by clever, reactive leaders, but the absence of connectivity between the front and the rear means that the local successes do not add up to complete national objectives. Lack of doctrine translates to lack of progress. Currently, teams suffer from horizontal (interagency) and vertical (front/rear) miscommunication: flat decisionmaking structures allow for reactivity and quick local results, but steep structures are more conducive to strategically significant progress being made through the aggregate of tactical operations. Horizontally integrated teams achieve on multiple dimensions, but still need clear policy for how to act or interagency wrangling will halt progress.

--A clear chain of command is required to operate both within the PRTs (does the commander decide, do the civilians, or is one or the other an "adviser" only?) and between the various departments and agencies. Authority and responsibility to implement

national interagency policy needs to be given to someone, but that authority is currently lacking.

--PRT members should receive notice of their deployment in advance, so that they can get language training, research local dynamics, and coordinate with the outgoing team to gain situational awareness. Training needs to involve (1) Conflict mitigation and stabilization in the short term (2) development of local security and governance infrastructure. PRT members have a great deal to learn from NGOs, who are very good at coordinating their projects with locals to ensure "buy-in" or financial or in kind contributions from the local beneficiaries of development projects, to help offset their costs. Additionally, the experience and capability to work successfully in high-risk environments is very important.

--Funding: USDA representatives relied on persuasion to gain access to CERP or QIP funding for projects they suggested. Given the importance of agriculture to Afghanistan, USDA should be enabled to participate more actively in project initiation and support.

Conclusions:
The quote at the opening of this review is a somewhat facetious reminder that real interagency cooperation has a long way to go when an interagency assessment group is not authorized to represent the views of its parent departments and agencies. Flattening the hierarchy is necessary, either through actual structural change or, more practical, an institutional bypass to senior leadership to ensure that solutions reached at the front are transmitted quickly to a level at which they can be assessed and approved by intelligent regionally aware officers.

On the degree to which the USG should or even can learn from NGOs, one must wonder about the scope of NGO operations. It could be the case that NGOs working in hostile environments are not actually trying to treat causes, but only symptoms, out of a selfless and misguided sense of morality giving medicine to people who are subsequently shot or food to people who are subsequently raped and infected with HIV. USG has expressed its commitment to a policy of changing political systems, install new orders, which NGOs are not equipped to do and have no experience doing.