

Strategy Research Project

What Provincial Reconstruction Teams Can Teach Us About Interagency Coordination

by

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Abstract

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were interagency teams employed in Iraq and Afghanistan to assist in stabilization and reconstruction operations. The experience of PRTs offers lessons for efforts to improve coordination of the activities of the various national security agencies at the strategic level. Many aspects of PRTs, including the physical collocation of different agency representatives and collaborative leadership structures, are necessary ingredients where close interagency coordination is required. Nonetheless, although PRTs provide a useful model, it is one that cannot be entirely duplicated in other environments. The key lesson PRTs offer is the importance of defined roles and mission, cross-agency funding to promote a unified effort, and coordinating structures at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.

What Provincial Reconstruction Teams Can Teach Us About Interagency Coordination

Calls for Goldwater-Nichols type legislation to better coordinate the activities of the various national security agency have increased in recent years in reaction to the U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. The interagency process is broken, these critics say. Only by reshaping the national security structure can we achieve the “unity of effort” needed to address complex problems.¹ While these reform efforts have focused primarily at the strategic level, the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan provide examples of interagency coordination on the tactical level. These are the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).

PRTs were first established in 2002 as an ad hoc response to rebuild Afghanistan, a country struggling to recover from decades of civil war, the authoritarian Taliban regime, and the U.S.-led invasion in 2001. The concept was simple: small, civilian-military teams would assist the newly established Afghan government to bring security, governance, and reconstruction to the Afghan people. The motivation for PRTs was both practical and political. By the time the first PRTs were stood up, the focus of U.S. attention was already switching to Iraq. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) did not yet have the authority to operate outside Kabul, leaving PRTs as the primary mechanism for U.S. and coalition government assistance to reach beyond the Afghan capital. From this beginning, PRTs quickly became the preferred structure for getting a coordinated, “whole-of-government” effort to the local level. The concept was later adopted in Iraq, where PRTs and similar teams, embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams (ePRTs), were fielded.

Reviews of PRT performance have been mixed. Some evaluations credited PRTs with helping maintain stability and, if not reducing, at least containing the spread of violence.² Others argued that PRTs undermined reconstruction efforts by competing with other development actors and local governments.³ The effects of PRTs were difficult to measure, and reliable metrics were never developed. This paper will not attempt to address performance metrics, but instead will focus on the structure and function of PRTs and whether they can provide a model for interagency coordination not just on the tactical level, but for the operational and strategic level as well. First, it will review the problems with interagency coordination that arose in Iraq and Afghanistan. Next, it will discuss the leadership and command structure of PRTs, examining the U.S. model and examples from other nations. Third, it will examine other factors affecting the performance of PRTs, including staffing, funding, and the presence or absence of coordinating structures.

Although PRTs are a far from perfect model, some form of PRT-like structure is necessary in order to get interagency teams out into the field during stabilization operations. Moreover, many of the aspects of PRTs, including the physical collocation of different agencies and collaborative leadership structures, are necessary ingredients for situations where close interagency coordination is required. Nonetheless, although PRTs provide a useful example, it is not one that can be entirely duplicated in other environments. The key lesson PRTs offer is the importance of defined roles, cross-agency funding to promote a unified effort, and coordinating structures at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.

The Whole of Government Approach

The U.S. combat mission in Iraq ended in 2011 and its military mission in Afghanistan is winding down. While the ultimate success or failure of the U.S.-led interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan is still unknown, analysts are already examining how they were conducted in an effort to identify how the United States could have done better. One issue that has been the focus of much debate is the failure of interagency coordination to develop a unified effort for post-war reconstruction, which could have prevented much of the ad hoc nature of the eventual response as well as improved outcomes. PRTs, as one of the interagency structures developed for the express purpose of carrying out the reconstruction effort, offer us the opportunity to examine how interagency coordination functioned at the tactical level and what lessons can be applied to the operational and strategic levels. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to review the history of the U.S. response in Afghanistan and Iraq from the perspective of strategy development and interagency coordination.

Strategy is often defined as the relationship amongst ends, ways, and means.⁴ However, as some analysts have pointed out, the purpose of strategy is not just to develop a plan, but to analyze the environment and available resources to determine how to best exploit one's advantages over competitors. In this view, the true importance of strategy is not the end product but the analytic process.⁵

There is a longstanding tendency in the U.S. Government to equate strategy with a list of desirable outcomes. When this occurs, there is little discussion of what barriers stand in the way of achieving these goals, or how these barriers might be overcome, given the limitations on available resources. Thus, rather than working out how scarce resources can best be employed to achieve a challenging security objective, the mere statement of desire to meet the objective is deemed sufficient.⁶

In order for the actions of multiple agencies to accurately reflect strategy, there must be a common understanding of what resources can be brought to bear by each agency, and how they will be employed. The failures in interagency coordination that existed from the very beginning of the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq reflect a lack of agreement over expected roles and a disregard for the reality of the limited resources available, especially on the part of civilian agencies. First and foremost was the Bush administration's reluctance to openly acknowledge the need for the United States to engage in "nation-building" activities and that the military would be a vital part in those activities.⁷ This, and the presence of strong personalities in the Bush cabinet, appears to have hampered interagency efforts from the very beginning.⁸ Upon taking office, the Bush administration abandoned the framework for interagency coordination on reconstruction, PDD-56, established by the Clinton administration based on experience in the Balkans and Haiti. While the invasion of Afghanistan initially saw good interagency cooperation between the CIA, State and Defense, this quickly evaporated as Defense opposed efforts to expand stabilization activities outside Kabul.⁹ The consequences of the lack of a formal structure became apparent soon after the invasion of Afghanistan: "[I]n the absence of a PDD 56-like framework for planning, much of the resultant work was ad hoc; no working group was created, no integrated civil-military plan was developed, and no senior coordinator was named to head such an effort. In the absence of a grand strategy or integrated political- military plan, the way the war unfolded on the ground in Afghanistan drove the nature of the U.S. involvement in postwar planning."¹⁰

In contrast to the initial cooperation in Afghanistan, interagency coordination in Iraq was absent from the start. Most notably, the State Department was almost entirely excluded from the military planning for the reconstruction and stabilization process, although the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) did participate to a limited degree.¹¹ After initial confusion over who was to be responsible for postwar reconstruction, responsibility was assigned to the Department of Defense in January 2003 by NSPD-24. Reconstruction planning by the Department of Defense relied heavily on erroneous assumptions, including that Iraqi government forces would be able to provide security in the aftermath of the invasion.¹² Initially, reconstruction efforts were headed by the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), but control was shortly transferred to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA).¹³ Mirroring the later experience of staffing the PRTs, both the CPA and ORHA experienced problems in finding sufficient qualified personnel.¹⁴ In 2004, NSPD-36 transferred responsibility for Iraq relief and reconstruction from the CPA to the State Department.¹⁵

In 2004, the State Department established the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS).¹⁶ Unfortunately, the funding to allow State to perform this function effectively was not forthcoming. The result was that an agency with few resources to accomplish the mission was given responsibility for coordinating the activities of another agency, the Department of Defense, with much greater resources.¹⁷ In 2005, the administration took further steps to clarify the responsibility for reconstruction activities through NSPD-44, which designated the State Department as the “coordinating” agency.¹⁸ However, the resources needed for State to carry out its mission were never directly supplied by Congress. Instead, the Department of Defense

transferred \$200 million of its funding to State.¹⁹ S/CRS was later reorganized into the Bureau for Conflict Stabilization Operations (CSO).²⁰

A 2008 effort by the non-partisan Project on National Security Reform to reform the interagency process for national security identified various factors that inhibited effective interagency coordination, including the tendency of agencies to focus efforts on their core missions rather than national (interagency) missions and a system biased towards intra-agency capabilities at the expense of interagency coordination mechanisms.²¹ The study noted that tactical level organizations, such as PRTs, often were capable of interagency cooperation, but that too often such cooperation depended on the willingness of the individuals involved to cooperate, rather than the inherent effectiveness of the organizations themselves.²² Another factor in the relative success of tactical teams may lie in their isolation from their respective agencies under conditions that foster cooperation.²³

The PRT Program

The PRT program in Afghanistan began with four PRTs located at strategic regional locations and followed in the footsteps of U.S. military “Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells.” These cells were designed to assess needs, carry out small-scale reconstruction projects and coordinate with the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other organizations in the field. The PRTs added to this structure force protection elements and representatives from civilian agencies.²⁴ By 2010, there were 27 PRTs operating in Afghanistan, of which 12 were U.S.-led or co-led.²⁵ In addition to the PRTs, smaller district level teams (DSTs) were also established. The last PRT closed in Afghanistan in 2014.

In Iraq, PRTs were first established in 2005, growing rapidly in numbers during the 2007-2008 surge.²⁶ In addition to the traditional PRT model, Iraq also pioneered the embedded PRT (ePRT), much smaller civil-military teams ranging in size from 3 to 20 persons embedded within U.S. brigade combat teams and focused on supporting counterinsurgency efforts.²⁷ By 2008, there were 14 PRTs in Iraq, including 11 U.S.-led, and 13 ePRTs, all U.S.-led.²⁸ The last PRT in Iraq closed in 2011.²⁹

Although the name PRT was new, the concept of an integrated civil-military team was not. The best known U.S. example of a similar structure is the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development (CORDS) program in Vietnam, which was widely considered to be successful in reducing insecurity in the South Vietnamese countryside.³⁰ There are important differences to the CORDS program, however. First, CORDS had a unified command structure under military command. Second, CORDS operated in relatively secure environments and accordingly did not serve the same force protection purpose as PRTs.³¹ Third, the number of civilians participating in the CORDS program was larger in relation to the military element than it was in PRTs.³² Fourth, the CORDS program had a controversial mandate, the Phoenix program, designed to identify and detain insurgents and their supporters. In contrast, the PRT program had no direct role in combating insurgent infrastructure. Finally, the funding structure for CORDS was different, with funds being specifically directed at CORDS activities.³³ As discussed at greater length below, while elements of the CORDS program may provide useful examples for interagency teams like PRTs, the model is not directly comparable.

The initial ambivalence in the U.S. administration over its nation-building role not only affected interagency coordination at the strategic level but also was reflected in the

confusion and vagueness of the mission of PRTs in Afghanistan. Were PRTs a tool in reconstruction or counterinsurgency? Or did they primarily serve to demonstrate political will and commitment to the Afghan government? When they were established, PRTs in Afghanistan had three objectives: “extend the authority of the Afghan central government, improve security, and promote reconstruction.”³⁴ This initial, somewhat vague guidance gradually evolved with PRT practice and the increasing tendency of PRTs to focus their efforts on civil-military development projects.³⁵ Adding to the confusion were the differing approaches to PRTs adopted by coalition partners. For coalition governments, PRTs’ were “essentially political, providing a mechanism for states who were unwilling to deploy conventional troops in a combat role to provide visible support to NATO and, to a lesser extent, to the United States.”³⁶ To some degree, this divergence of approach was desirable and reflected the local conditions in which each PRT was operating. Nonetheless, the confusion over the role of PRTs, extending even to the name Provincial Reconstruction Team, which implied a specific function, led to PRTs being viewed as tactical organizations, rather than as a means to implement an integrated, strategic approach to build “sustainable local capacity to govern.”³⁷

This failure to define the appropriate role of PRTs was never corrected. From the initial three objectives, PRTs came to be regarded as a one-stop-shop for any and all agency activities. According to the 2011 Afghanistan PRT Handbook, PRT activities included strengthening Afghan government and civil society institutions, helping develop the capacity of local government officials and institutions, consulting with partners such as UNAMA and nongovernmental organizations, encouraging investment, and reporting

on the situation on the ground.³⁸ While some of these functions were related to PRT core tasks, others, such as reporting on political development, appear to reflect the missions of the individual agencies involved rather than those of the PRT.

Perhaps because PRTs were established later in Iraq, their missions appear to have been better defined than their counterparts in Afghanistan. A Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Defense and State Department stated that PRTs would “bolster moderates, support counterinsurgency strategy, promote reconciliation, and shape the political environment, support economic development, and build the capacity of Iraqi provincial governments to hasten the transition to Iraqi self-sufficiency.”³⁹

PRT Leadership and Command Structures

The U.S. PRTs in Afghanistan were led by an O-5 military commander, typically a Navy or Air Force officer. The military commander and civilian personnel representing the State Department, USAID, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) formed an Integrated Command Group.⁴⁰ PRTs fell under the ISAF Regional Command (RC) for their area of Afghanistan. U.S.-led PRTs reported through the U.S. military command structure, with most reporting directly to the task force commander.⁴¹

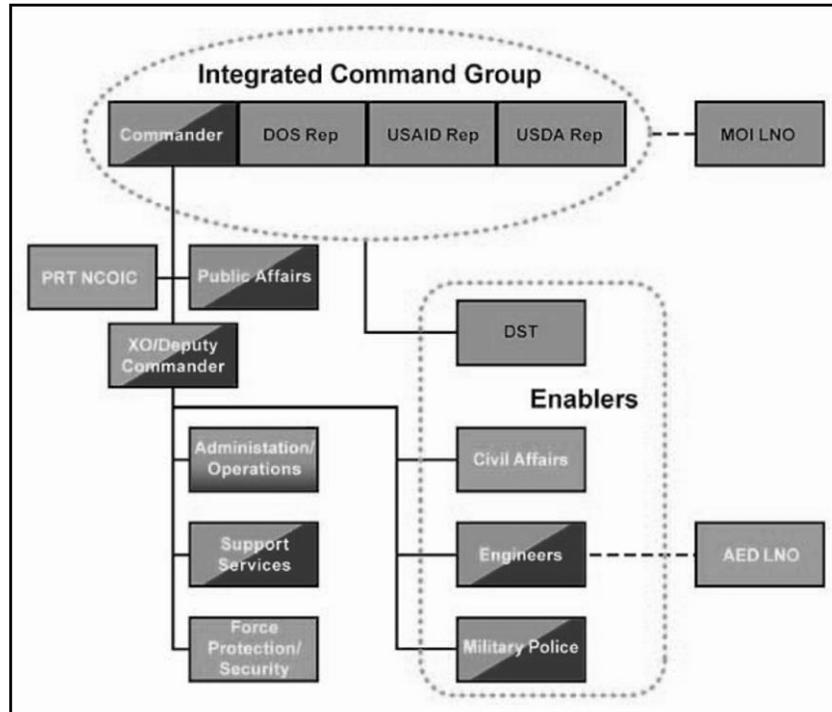


Figure 1. Command Structure of U.S. PRTs in Afghanistan⁴²

Unlike the CORDS program in Vietnam, civilian PRT employees were not under military command, but reported back to their respective agencies. To allow for increased coordination of civilian efforts outside Kabul, the State Department created regional senior civilian representatives located at regional commands who oversaw all U.S. Mission employees and “ensure[d] coherence of political direction and development efforts, and execute[d] U.S. policy and guidance.”⁴³ However, this structure was not put in place until 2009, almost seven years after the PRTs were established.⁴⁴

In Iraq, U.S. PRTs were civilian-led, usually by a State Department foreign service officer (FSO). The PRTs operated under the joint command of the Ambassador and the MFN-I Commanding General.⁴⁵ Critiques of this arrangement focused on two weaknesses in this structure. First, because the PRTs depended heavily on military assets to function, civilian leaders had little effective authority. Second, some State

Department officers lacked the leadership skills, training, and experience to function effectively in a combat environment.⁴⁶

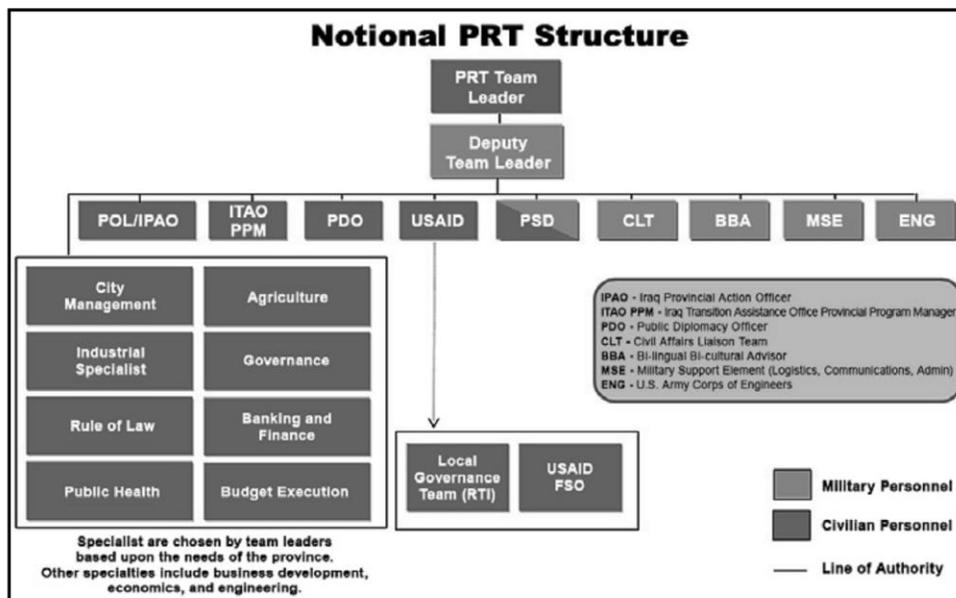


Figure 1. Command Structure of U.S. PRTs in Iraq⁴⁷

Coalition-led PRTs in Afghanistan varied from the U.S. model. Most notably, the British-led PRTs featured a senior-level civilian leader who outranked (but did not command) the senior military PRT member.⁴⁸ German PRTs had civilian and military co-leads. These PRTs were also larger than the U.S. model, with more civilian members; as many as 30 civilians on the British PRT in Lashkar Gah and 20 on the German PRT in Kunduz.⁴⁹ The British PRT, in particular, was considered to be one of the most successful PRTs for the way it coordinated civil and military efforts.⁵⁰

There is little data to compare the performance of PRTs to see if one type of leadership and command structure proved to be more effective than another. One research project on U.S.-led PRTs in Afghanistan found that PRT leadership structures in practice varied greatly, often depending on the individuals involved.⁵¹ The attitude of

the PRT commander was key. Some commanders observed the “unified command structure” concept, meeting regularly as a leadership group. Other PRTs devolved towards a dual-leadership structure, with a civilian (usually State Department) taking responsibility for the lead of civilian agency employees. Further complicating the situation were interagency rivalries, particularly between the State Department and USAID, and the fact that many civilians were contract or temporary hires with little institutional knowledge of the agencies for which they worked.⁵² The preponderance of resources brought to the table led some some military commanders regarding civilians as advisors instead of co-equals.⁵³ This attitude often generated resentment.⁵⁴

Some critics of PRTs argued that the lack of a unified command structure, such as existed in the CORDS program in Vietnam, reduced the effectiveness of PRTs.⁵⁵ Arguably, formal recognition of military command would have enabled military commanders to direct civilian activities more effectively. In the absence of a command structure, personalities became more important. Often, the PRT military commander’s personality dominated and determined the degree to which civilians effectively participated in the mission.⁵⁶ Other commentators argue that, rather than a unified approach under a single command, it would be preferable to have clearly defined lines of authority, with each agency having the control over resources relating to its area of focus. An example of this was the German PRT model, in which the civilian agencies operated independently of the military side of the PRT, with all agencies meeting frequently to discuss areas of common interest.⁵⁷ In this regard, it is important to note that the German PRT was located in an area of relative security, enabling the civilian actors to carry out their duties without military support, and that the civilian staff of

approximately 20 people was substantially larger than the typical 3-4 civilians on a U.S. PRT.⁵⁸

The PRT leadership structure that developed in Iraq and Afghanistan is roughly analogous to that of an Embassy country team, in which the Ambassador leads a team of agency representatives who also report back to their home agencies. Unlike the leaders of PRTs, the Ambassador has a presidential mandate to direct team activities. In spite of this more formalized command structure, the country team has been criticized for the same lack of unity of effort that affected PRTs.⁵⁹ This has led some to call for a more structured, unified command as the solution to the perceived dysfunction of country teams.⁶⁰ Contrary views suggest that the benefits to unitary action need to be weighed against the costs to individual agencies, and that a certain amount of friction is necessary in the interagency process in order to gain the benefit of different approaches.⁶¹ Unified command may be the answer for interagency teams that are tightly focused on a particular task, but may not be suitable where agencies have a multitude of missions and need the flexibility to balance scarce resources amongst them.

Studies examining PRTs have identified other factors, including a shortage of suitable civilian staff, differing cultures and methods of operating, and a lack of dedicated funding, that had a substantial impact on interagency coordination. Unifying command might have solved some issues, but it would also naturally tend to emphasize the interests and viewpoints of one agency (the one in command) over that of the others. This would undercut the requirement for coordination and cooperation that is

needed to ensure that all participating actors – agencies that are represented on the PRT and outside actors – are not working at cross-purposes.⁶²

Other Factors Influencing PRT Effectiveness

Staffing and Training

Evaluations of PRTs often focused on the difficulty of finding the right people for the job. For civilian agencies, capacity was a serious problem. The State Department and USAID are, in comparison with the military, small organizations. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates once famously said that the military had more band members than the State Department had Foreign Service Officers (FSOs).⁶³ Although the military stepped up to the challenge of filling positions that would ideally be filled with civilians, it too faced staffing and rotation issues that inhibited effectiveness. For example, the Army Reserve Component was essential to providing the civil affairs and security force personnel for PRTs. These components were limited to 12-month rotations, including training, which meant they were on the ground for nine months, versus twelve for the civilian personnel.⁶⁴ Like the civilian agencies, DOD also had trouble finding people with the right skill sets for the mission.⁶⁵

Many military commenters understandably criticized the civilian agencies for failing to step up to the plate and providing sufficient, trained personnel to staff PRTs. Some of this criticism is justified. However, even in a best case scenario it was never feasible that the State Department or USAID would be able to provide the numbers of civilians required without a large increase in funding from Congress. The facts speak for themselves. In 2008, the State Department had 230 employees deployed to PRTs in Iraq (of whom 75 were career foreign service officers) and 18 foreign service officers assigned to PRTs in Afghanistan. At the same time, USAID had 95 employees in Iraq

and 19 in Afghanistan.⁶⁶ These numbers were to increase with the civilian surge in Afghanistan in 2009, although the increase was somewhat offset by the drawdown in Iraq. The commitment sounds unimpressive unless one considers that at the time, the State Department employed approximately 6,500 FSOs and USAID 1,100.⁶⁷ Moreover, not all of these FSOs routinely work on issues related to those encountered on PRTs, such as governance, rule of law, or economic development. Similar to military branches, State Department FSOs are organized into areas of expertise: political, economic, consular, public diplomacy and management. FSOs are normally assigned all over the world, with more than 66 percent of State Department FSOs and 61 percent of USAID FSOs forward-deployed at any one time.⁶⁸

The slowness of the civilian agencies to staff PRTs in the field was complicated by the fact that, unlike the military, they are not organized for crisis response and operate with little spare staffing. The difference in structure between DOD, State and USAID has been compared to the difference between the fire department and the police. The fire department, like the military, is on call for emergencies and has a surge capacity built into its structure. Civilian agencies, like the police, are engaged in a constant steady state of operations which consumes most of their personnel resources.⁶⁹ Funding for additional hiring was a problem. For example, when ePRTs were stood up in Iraq as part of the surge, State and USAID struggled to find sufficient personnel to increase staffing. Many positions were temporarily filled by the military. Nonetheless, additional funding to allow State to hire personnel was not approved in late May, and State and USAID did not succeed in filling positions until 2008.⁷⁰

The shortage of civilian officers had implications beyond that of reallocating existing positions in State and USAID to staff PRTs. There was also a mismatch in the skills and rank of personnel available. The U.S. PRTs in Afghanistan were led by O-5 officers; the Foreign Service equivalent would be an FS-02 (although typically an FS-02 would have fewer years of experience than an O-5 military officer.)⁷¹ However, many State Department FSOs assigned were of lower rank, and lacked the experience and institutional knowledge of their agencies needed to be full contributors in a unified command group. Both the State Department and USAID also relied on contractors who, regardless of their individual merit, likewise lacked institutional experience.⁷²

The foregoing is not meant to excuse the very real failures of civilian agencies in staffing PRTs. The State Department has justifiably been criticized for not departing from its traditional staffing mechanisms, which were slow and relied primarily on volunteers versus active efforts to identify and assign officers. Moreover, the hiring process for the first PRTs in Iraq was hasty and poorly executed, resulting in some employees being hired who were ill-suited in both skills and personality for the task at hand.⁷³ These deficiencies were gradually remedied, but to do so took time.

Recognizing these failures, the administration proposed the formation of a Civilian Response Corps, which would maintain an active and reserve component of readily deployable civilians. Approval for this was obtained in 2008.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, funding shortages did not allow for the development of the reserve corps that was envisioned.

Further complicating matters was a mismatch in team rotations and training. Military personnel assigned to PRTs generally received three months training and spent nine months in theater. Civilian training lasted 4-6 weeks (not including any language

training) and civilians spent twelve months in theater.⁷⁵ However, generous leave allowances designed to attract volunteers reduced the amount of time on the job by up to two months.⁷⁶ Civilians did not rotate at the same time as the military elements of the PRT, whose rotation in turn did not synch with that of the BCTs operating in the same area.⁷⁷ Military and civilian members did not train together.⁷⁸ Other nations did a better job. For example, the United Kingdom engaged in an extensive planning process, and trained civilian and military staff together.⁷⁹

Colocation

The biggest advantage that PRTs had in promoting interagency coordination was the simplest: colocation and the frequent interaction that it promoted. Simply placing representatives from the different agencies together had the beneficial effect of increasing cooperation and fostering personal relationships. This seems obvious, but as the experiences in both Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated, military and civilian leaders who fostered relationships through frequent contact with their counterparts obtained better results. This was not just true on the tactical level, such as in PRTs, but at the strategic level as well. For example, Lieutenant General David Barno and Ambassador Khalilzad in Afghanistan forged an effective working relationship, with Barno moving his headquarters from Bagram to the Embassy.⁸⁰ Coordination between military and civilian leaders suffered when Barno's successor, Karl Eikenberry, moved his headquarters out of the Embassy.⁸¹

Coordinating Structures

Colocation in itself is not a sinecure. It needs to be supported by adequate structures and resources that promote coordination:

Co-location of the senior military and civilian leaders on the ground strengthened joint problem-solving and served as a powerful symbol of commitment to civil-military coordination. Co-location at the levels below them facilitated information sharing and joint analysis and planning, strengthened working relationships, and fostered mutual learning. However, co-location, information sharing, and joint analysis and planning were not sufficient to yield consistent coordinated results. Coordination, especially at the level of the PRTs, continued to be impeded by insufficient delegation of decision-making authority to USAID officers in the field; perverse incentives that encouraged civilians and military alike to spend money quickly, rather than take the time to coordinate; and the lack of accountability on the part of all involved for the downstream impacts of activities.⁸²

One important aspect of coordination is that it must occur at all levels in order to be practical. The PRTs had the advantage of colocation, which naturally promoted coordination (although, as noted above, this depended strongly on the PRT commander's willingness to include civilians in the decision-making process). This coordination was not always mirrored at the regional or national levels, or back in Washington.

As noted above, the civilians assigned to U.S. PRTs were often junior in grade to the military commander, and many times were not even full-time employees of the agencies they represented. In Iraq, civilian-led PRTs reported back to the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) at the Embassy. OPA was a civil-military integrated team, which in turn operated under the guidance of the Joint PRT Steering Group.

In 2009, the civil-military leads in Afghanistan took steps to increase interagency coordination by adopting an "Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan." The plan formalized mechanisms for coordination, including interagency teams at the Mission, regional, and local levels. The State Department also established a civilian command structure intended to parallel the military one. Senior Civilian Representatives located at each Regional Command were intended to improve

coordination between civilians and military in the field. In addition, civilian agencies undertook a surge in coordination with the military surge, adding numerous positions in the field, including with BCTs, PRTs, and on the district level.⁸³ From January 2009 to December 2011, the number of civilians under Chief of Mission authority almost tripled, including an increase to 456 civilians in the field.⁸⁴

Funding Structures

The most glaring deficiency in the interagency relationship at the PRT level was the lack of resources and authorities of civilian officials. This was particularly the case at PRTs in Afghanistan. In many cases, State and USAID officers brought nothing to the table other than their knowledge. Funding for basic necessities, such as vehicles, equipment, and life support was largely absent.⁸⁵ State or USAID officers had little access to or control over money for projects. PRTs in Afghanistan relied primarily on Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP) funding for PRT-initiated projects. USAID officers at PRTs had little ability to suggest or fund local projects through USAID programs. Funding mechanisms were cumbersome due to both USAID procedures and statutory requirements.⁸⁶

In Iraq, PRTs had two sources of programmatic funding, the Quick Response Fund, which was administered by State and USAID, and the Provincial Reconstruction Development Council Fund provided by State.⁸⁷ However, the amounts that PRTs could commit – up to \$25,000 --- were dwarfed by the up to \$500,000 in CERP funds military commanders were able to commit.⁸⁸ Moreover, the agency with most funds (usually DOD) had a disproportionate influence in how funds were spent.⁸⁹ This led to an overemphasis on the priorities of that agency.

In contrast, all USAID program delivery in Vietnam was done through the CORDS program.⁹⁰ Similarly, other countries, including the United Kingdom, developed funding mechanisms that were specifically tailored to be used by the PRTs and were controlled by the development agencies of those nations. Control over project purse strings encouraged cooperation between the agencies.⁹¹

Recommendations

Unity of Effort is No Substitute for Planning and Resources

PRTs demonstrate an ongoing failure in our planning processes: a lack of appreciation for the limits of available resources. The German and U.K. PRT models were considered successful in part because they had large civilian contingents and experienced, senior-level leaders. In contrast, the United States spread out its civilian assets in Afghanistan through a number of PRTs, often assigning only one State or USAID officer to each PRT. Nor is it clear that the problem was solely one of sufficient funding. DOD, whose resources far exceed those of civilian agencies, also found it difficult to find personnel to staff ORHA and CPA. Heavy demands for Army officers to serve in maneuver units led to the assignment of Air Force and Navy officers to lead PRTs in Afghanistan instead of the land force officers one might normally expect to conduct reconstruction missions. The reality is that the number of qualified, suitable civilians who are willing to volunteer to serve in austere, combat environments is quite small. Absent a total war footing, which both the administration and Congress were unwilling to adopt, it was likely to remain so. Future planning for stability and reconstruction operations needs to be more strategic in its use of finite resources.

Interagency Missions Must Be Defined in Advance

PRTs brought an interagency presence out to the field where it was needed and provided the platform needed to handle the non-combat aspects of stabilization operations. Due to their small size, PRTs could quickly become overwhelmed by competing demands and missions. Mission goals therefore must reflect a coordinated strategy established in advance, with each agency having a defined set of responsibilities. Unified command at the tactical level might also enable team members to better resist conflicting demands from parent agencies.

Balanced Leadership Roles Should Reflect Mission

The size, composition, and leadership responsibilities must be determined based on the PRT mission. For example, a military lead would be appropriate if providing security to local government and institutions is a primary PRT function. Conversely, a PRT focused on governance might have a civilian lead. Roles and responsibilities need to be defined in advance, to avoid the mission creep and confusion that affected PRTs in Afghanistan, and, to a lesser degree, in Iraq.

Interagency Partnerships Require True Partners

While an individual agency might have the lead role on a PRT, the benefit of the interagency presence will be lost if representatives from other agencies have no voice or control over resources. For this reason, the utility of a unified command structure should be balanced against the need for team members to bring their perspective and expertise into play.

Dedicated Funding Encourages a Unified Approach

A notable difference between the CORDS and PRT models is the way in which funds were allocated. PRTs, especially those in Afghanistan, relied heavily on military

CERP funds, which were designed for smaller, short-term projects. PRTs had very little ability to initiate USAID projects on the local level. Program delivery was controlled centrally. In contrast, the CORDS program channeled all of the funding for development. This placed control over funding in an interagency team, ensuring alignment with the team's objectives versus that of a home agency.

Better Training, Including Leadership Training Would Improve Interagency Functionality

Interagency teams, especially those who will be deployed into the field together, need a common understanding of their counterparts' culture and goals. Assignments to austere conditions likewise require resilience and leadership skills. The limited number of civilians available for such assignments means that searches for the "ideal" individuals are not likely to get results. Efforts would be better focused on training team members together.

Interagency Structures at the Tactical Level Should Be Paralleled on the Operational and Strategic Level

Coordination on the tactical level, such as PRTs, can be undermined if there is no coordination at levels higher up. The model adopted in Afghanistan to parallel the military structure with senior civilian representatives at the regional command level and an interagency team located at the Embassy helped improve coordination. However, coordination on the strategic level in Washington was lacking. The creation of S/CRS to coordinate interagency reconstruction efforts was not backed up with funding and authority. Established procedures, such as PDD-56 and NSPD-44 are essential.

Conclusion

The PRT experience suggests that interagency coordination can be improved by paying careful attention to interagency structures and ensuring that coordination occurs

not just on the tactical level, but throughout the chain of command. Defining missions and interagency roles can increase the effectiveness of interagency teams, as can mechanisms such as dedicated funding and controls over team activities to ensure that diverse agency viewpoints are taken into consideration. Unified command should also be considered for interagency teams focused on a tightly defined task. Proper training and careful selection of team members will enhance the ability of individuals to overcome cultural and experiential barriers to working in a multi-agency environment.

Nonetheless, no amount of structure or training can make interagency coordination a seamless process, nor would such a result be desirable. The lack of coordination that characterized the planning for the reconstruction process in Iraq and, to a lesser degree, Afghanistan did not grow out of unawareness of the interagency process, but out of deliberate disregard for it. Fundamentally, interagency coordination requires a willingness by participants to acknowledge and even embrace the friction and debate that inevitably accompany any such effort. Without it, a whole of government approach will never be more than the sum of its parts.

Endnotes

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¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

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¹³ Caroline R. Earle, "Taking Stock: Interagency Integration in Stability Operations," *Prism* 3, no. 2 (March 2012): 39, <http://cco.ndu.edu/Publications/PRISM/PRISMvolume3,no2.aspx> (accessed March 14, 2016).

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¹⁶ Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, "Frequently Asked Questions," <http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/crs/66427.htm> (accessed March 25, 2016).

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²⁷ John K. Naland, *Special Report: Lessons from Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, October 2011), <http://www.usip.org/publications/lessons-embedded-provincial-reconstruction-teams-in-iraq> (accessed March 2, 2016).

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³⁰ The CORDS comparison is not exact, as CORDS operated in areas that were largely secure. Many CORDS civilian participants stated that it would not have been possible to conduct their work in insecure areas. William P. Schoux, *The Vietnam CORDS Experience: A*

Model of Successful Civil- Military Partnership? (Washington, DC: USAID 2006), 17-23, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnaec349.pdf (accessed March 2, 2016).

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³² By September 1969, there were 7,601 advisors in the CORDS program, of which 6464 were military. Dale Andrade and James H. Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future," *Military Review*, March-April 2006, 16, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a489376.pdf> (accessed March 16, 2016). According to another source, there were approximately 1,300 civilians in CORDS in 1969. In contrast, there were 384 civilians in PRTs in Afghanistan and 907 in Iraq in 2008, however many of these civilians were contractors rather than direct-hire employees. Honn et al., "A Legacy of Vietnam: Lessons from CORDS," 45-46.

³³ Programs aimed at pacification were administered by CORDS. In addition, although USAID maintained separate programs at national level, program delivery at local level for all national programs was also managed through CORDS. Schoux, *The Vietnam CORDS Experience*, 15.

³⁴ Perito, *The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams*, 2.

³⁵ Barbara J. Stapleton, "A Means to What End? Why PRTs are Peripheral to the Bigger Political Challenges in Afghanistan," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2007): <http://jmss.org/jmss/index.php/jmss/article/view/38> (accessed March 2, 2016).

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³⁷ Note that PRTs were not originally designated as such, but were originally called Regional Support Teams. At the request of Afghan President Karzai, the name was changed to reflect the structure and function of the Afghan government. *Ibid.*, 648-649.

³⁸ Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team: Observations, Insights and Lessons*, Handbook No.11-16 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2011), 1-2.

³⁹ Center for Army Lessons Learned, *PRT Playbook: Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Handbook no. 07-34 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Lessons Learned, September 2007), 61.

⁴⁰ Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team: Observations, Insights and Lessons*, 42-43.

⁴¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and Iraq*, 5.

⁴² Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team: Observations, Insights and Lessons*, 42.

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⁴⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and Iraq*, 2.

⁴⁶ Naland, *Lessons from Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams*, 3.

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⁴⁸ Malkasian, *PRTS: How Do We Know They Work?* 6.

⁴⁹ Nima Abbaszadeh et al., *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons and Recommendations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, 2008), 5, <http://www.princeton.edu/news-and-events/news/item/prts-iraq-and-afghanistan-best-practices-and-lesson-learned-0> (accessed March 2, 2016).

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⁵¹ Jocelyn Fritsch, *Understanding U.S. Civil-Military Cooperation in the U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan*, Dissertation (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, September 2012), 109-112, <http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/142308> (accessed March 14, 2016).

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⁵³ U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Defense, and U.S. Agency for International Development, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: An Interagency Assessment* (Washington, DC: USAID, April 5, 2006), 13.

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⁶¹ Baumann, "Silver Bullet or Time Suck? Revisiting the Role of Interagency Coordination in Complex Operations," 42-44.

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⁸⁹ Abbaszadeh, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons and Recommendations*, 8.

⁹⁰ Schoux, "The Vietnam CORDS Experience: A Model of Successful Civil-Military Partnership?" 15.

⁹¹ Abbaszadeh, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons and Recommendations*, 18.