

# TESTIMONY

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## The Role of the Department of Defense in Provincial Reconstruction Teams

MICHELLE PARKER

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Testimony presented before House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee  
on Oversight and Investigations on September 5, 2007

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**Statement of Michelle Parker<sup>1</sup>  
The RAND Corporation**

***The Role of the Department of Defense in Provincial Reconstruction Teams<sup>2</sup>***

**Before the Committee on Armed Services  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
United States House of Representatives**

**September 5, 2007**

My name is Michelle Parker, and I am a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow based at the RAND Corporation. My testimony is based on the time I spent from July 2004 to February 2006 as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Field Program Officer in the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), and from March to December 2006 as the Development Advisor for General David Richards (UK), the Commanding General of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). General Richards' headquarters was the ninth leadership unit of ISAF, and is referred to as ISAF IX.

**Provincial Information**

The Jalalabad PRT operates in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, which is due east of Kabul. Nangarhar is an extremely important province in Afghanistan economically because it provides the primary licit trade route with Pakistan at the Torkem border crossing; is the economic center of the east for business and development; produces 15-20% of the world's heroin on an annual basis<sup>3</sup>; has one of the most educated populations in the country; and is considered one of the "breadbaskets" of the country due to the land's fertility. Nangarhar is also notorious for its history of supporting insurgents, including: welcoming Osama Bin Laden when he was forced to leave Sudan in 1996; providing sanctuary for Al Qaeda's training camps; hosting some of the most serious fighting early in Operation Enduring Freedom in the Tora Bora section of the Spin Ghar Mountains; being the site of the first Stinger missile launch in battle by the mujahedin against the Soviets; and serving as a staging ground for the insurgency raging in the eastern part of Afghanistan.

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<sup>1</sup> The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of RAND or any of the sponsors of its research. This product is part of the RAND Corporation testimony series. RAND testimonies record testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

<sup>2</sup> This testimony is available for free download at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT290>.

<sup>3</sup> This was not the case in 2005 and 2006 due to counter-narcotics programming by the Government of Afghanistan and the international community.

It has two large tribes: Pashtun and Pashai. Of the Pashtun tribes, there are four sub-tribes (Khogiani, Shinwari, Mohmend and Ghulzai). When I arrived, the governor was Haji Din Mohammed, an influential leader from a powerful family that has had political influence over the eastern provinces for generations. In 2005, he became the governor of Kabul and was replaced by Gul Agha Sherzai, a powerful figure from Kandahar, who remains in this position today. Both men are Pashtun.

The tribal, economic and historic context is offered simply to provide a peek into the various factors playing into the situation. As a PRT, we had to learn about our new home, its power brokers, its history and its goals.

### **PRT Mission**

Provincial Reconstruction Teams were created in late 2002 to bridge the gap between major combat operations and civilian-led reconstruction and development efforts. A PRT is a team of interagency partners with representatives from each of the “3Ds”: Defense, Development and Diplomacy. The “3D” concept came out of the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy, which stated that the United States needed to maximize each component of its foreign services to achieve national security. It’s important to note that each “D” had two jobs. We supported our own agency or department’s mission, and as a team we also created and implemented a PRT-specific stability operations mission.

The PRT’s mission is to (1) assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan extend its authority, (2) enable security sector reform efforts, and (3) enable reconstruction and development efforts. Together, these three objectives are designed to facilitate the stability and security of the provinces in which they operate.<sup>4</sup>

According to the International Security Assistance Force PRT Handbook:<sup>5</sup>

The PRT should not act an alternative to the Government of Afghanistan (GoA), but rather seek to improve the capacity of the GoA to govern itself. PRTs perform a vital role in occupying the vacuum caused by a weak government presence and hence deterring agents of instability. PRTs seek to establish an environment that is stable enough for international agencies, the local authorities and civil society to engage in reconstruction, political transition and social and economic development.

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from the Terms of Reference for CFC and ISAF PRTs in Afghanistan, which were adopted by the Executive Steering Committee on 27 Jan 05.

<sup>5</sup> Edition 3 (3 Feb 07).

The purpose of a PRT is to enhance stability in the provinces of Afghanistan. Stability is defined as the government having a monopoly of the use of force over its people<sup>6</sup>. For this intervention, it can be measured along two axes: legitimacy of government and effectiveness of government. This is achieved through an increase in the capacity of the government to provide basic services, and a willingness of the population to be governed. PRTs can support this in many ways, ranging from training and mentoring the government, to constructing government facilities such as district centers, courthouses and schools that provide a clear platform from which government can operate. The construction of basic public works such as bridges, roads and micro-power projects that serve the population the government needs to affect is another option for PRT support.<sup>7</sup>

### **Part of a Full Spectrum Operation**

In Jalalabad city, we were not the only U.S. presence. There were Special Forces, Army and/or Marines conducting combat operations, Intelligence Services and USAID implementing partners running development programs.

It is important to understand that the PRT is but one component of a full spectrum operation that ranged from combat to midwife training; therefore, the military component met every week with other security stakeholders (maneuver units, other foreign governmental actors and the Government of Afghanistan) in the area to deconflict the PRT strategic planning with on-going combat operations. At the same time, the development and political officers met with their development agencies and embassies in Kabul to ensure the strategic plan of the PRT was in line with the current policies.

### **Personnel**

The organizational structure of my PRT varied over the 20 months I lived there, but there was always a core comprised of a Command Group (CG) and support elements. The CG included one representative of each agency or department considered a key component of U.S. National Security: U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense (represented by the Military Commander at a Lieutenant Colonel rank). In addition, our PRT also housed a U.S. Department of Agriculture representative who was also included in the Command Group.

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<sup>6</sup> PRT Handbook, ed. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Kvitashvili, Elisabeth. "The Role of Development in Combating Terror".

It is worth mentioning that the USAID field office in the Jalalabad PRT was unique because it was a fully staffed office with two expatriates, two senior Afghan program officers and an interpreter. All positions except the interpreter were funded by USAID. In all other PRTs, there is only one expatriate working for USAID, and possibly one Afghan interpreter or senior program manager. USAID/Jalalabad was an exception due to its large portfolio and counter-narcotics mission.

The Ministry of Interior provided one senior police officer with the rank of Colonel to serve as a liaison between the Afghan government and the PRT. Col Maboob, the Jalalabad PRT representative, was a key advisor to the CG especially regarding security and cultural issues.

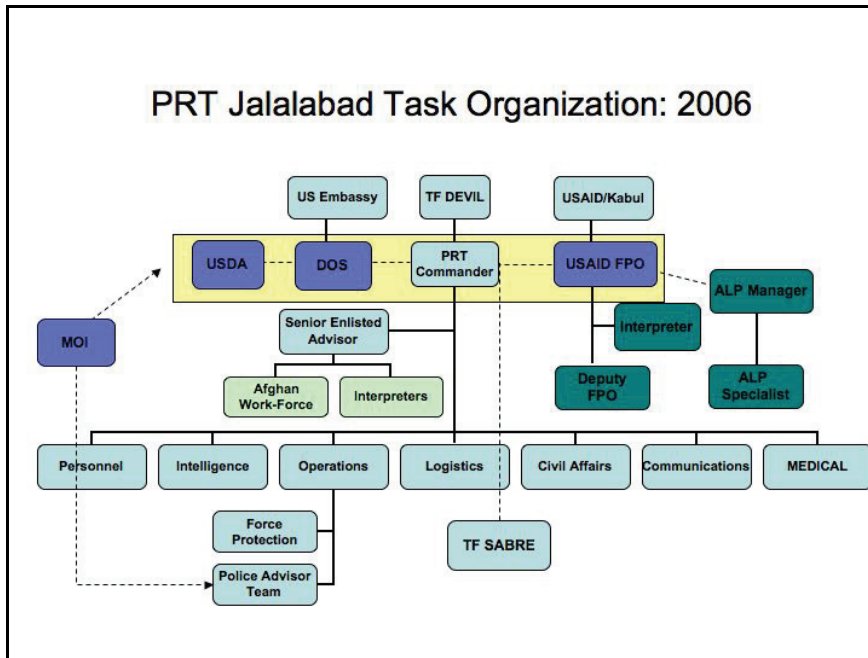
The remaining support members of the PRT were divided into two sections: Civil Affairs and Force Protection. The Civil Affairs section included two officers, usually a Captain and a Major, and six enlisted soldiers dedicated strictly to civil affairs missions and support. All were U.S. Army reservists. A Captain, who was also responsible for troops at neighboring PRTs, led the Force Protection component. They provided all support functions including force protection inside and outside of the base, medical, communications, logistics, food, supplies, transportation and base operations. These positions were all staffed by the U.S. National Guard and amounted to roughly 80 people. We also employed over 100 Afghans to support base operations and provide interpretation.

I would like to reemphasize the point that the PRT was comprised of seven people who conducted the substantive work. The other eighty-six people supported our missions. PRT capacity is often misunderstood when simple numbers are presented.

During various times in my twenty month tour, we supported other military sections including: Explosive Ordnance Disposal Teams, Police Training and Advising Teams, Embedded Training Teams, Psychological Operations Teams, Fuel Re-supply Teams, Pilots and Aircraft, and a company of Marines.

Every PRT is different based on a number of factors including: the political, developmental and security situation in the province; the PRT host country's security requirements; and, the province-specific mission that the PRT host country's higher military and civilian headquarters want to achieve.

This was our structure in 2006:



The light blue boxes represent the military<sup>8</sup>. The dark blue boxes represent civilians. The light green boxes represent Afghans the PRT directly employed. The dark green boxes represented the USAID Jalalabad office staff. The yellow box denotes the Command Group, and the boxes above the Command Group refer to each component's chain of command.

### The Military Role in a PRT

The military's role in the PRT was twofold. First, it provided basic life support that enabled each agency's mission. This includes base operations, providing meals, housing, transportation and medical support. It maintained vehicles, supplied food and water to facilitate each member of the Command Group's mission.

The second role of the military was much more complex. The very presence of the U.S. military filled a security vacuum that was left when the Taliban retreated in 2001. Its presence also balanced the power of local warlords or power brokers.

The internal military structure had three distinct leadership positions: The Military Commander (Lieutenant Colonel), the Civil Affairs "A" and "B" Team Leaders (Major and/or Captain) and the Force Protection Commander (Captain). For specific tasks, it's best to explain the military's role by each leadership position.

<sup>8</sup> The exceptions are "The Embassy" and "USAID/Kabul", which are both civilian posts.

The Force Protection Commander was responsible for securing the base and all missions outside of the base—civilian or military. I personally went on over 500 missions “outside the wire” during my 20 months, and the captain managed the security and logistics for each of them. He met regularly with the other U.S. military and Afghan security agencies in the area to coordinate operations. His soldiers ran joint operations with Afghan security forces, such as vehicle check points, foot patrols and on occasion would perform a cordon and search mission, with the goal of mentoring the Afghans.

The Civil Affairs (CA) Officers were responsible for the “hearts and minds” campaign. The "A" team leader was responsible for visiting areas outside the city limits, often going to every district multiple times. He and his team identified needs and capacities by talking to elders, mullahs, business leaders and government officials, and brought the information back to the PRT for assessment and follow-up. The "B" team leader was responsible for outreach to the International Organization / Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) community, and "within city limits" engagements. Normally the "B" team leader would synthesize the information from the "A" team and work with the Afghan provincial government officials to address the issues. Proposed projects were always coordinated with Afghan governmental officials. If the issue could be solved with a project / program that the Civil Affairs Team could fund, contract and manage, the Civil Affairs Team would work with the government to determine the project and hire a company to implement it. Projects were discussed with other actors to reduce redundancy, conserve limited resources and to ensure the intended effects were achievable.

The Military Commander was responsible for: managing a joint, combined task force; planning and executing tactical missions; overseeing non-lethal systems including Information Operations, Civil Affairs Activities, Public Affairs and Police Training Advisory Team; engaging, mentoring and advising the provincial leadership on security issues; and ultimately responsible for all PRT operations (security, life support, and logistics) in support of a Forward Operating Base (FOB). The Military Commander helped unify Afghan security elements, and clarify their roles and responsibilities, served as the primary liaison between the U.S. military and the Afghan government, and had final approval over military-funded projects.

NOTE: The formal title for the Military Commander in an American PRT is “PRT Commander”. In my testimony, however, I use the NATO/ISAF term for the position, “Military Commander”, because I feel this more accurately denotes the lines of authority in a PRT. The military has authority over the individual civilians regarding security matters, but not over other agencies’ programs or activities.



## **My Role in the PRT**

As stated above, I wore two hats at the PRT. First, I supported the PRT mission by providing leadership and advice on development issues within the PRT and to the provincial government. I worked with the Command Group to design and implement a comprehensive stability strategy for Nangarhar province. I directly programmed USAID's stability operations fund to support that strategy. Finally, I provided technical reachback for the PRT's projects through USAID in Kabul. For example, the Civil Affairs team wanted to construct a school, so I acquired the Ministry of Education's approved school designs for the team to use in a bidding conference. I also gave copies of the designs to the local ministry representative, the Director of Education, while insuring that the school was on the Ministry of Education's construction schedule. This coordination reduced inefficiency and allowed the PRT to expend its resources on projects that were priorities for the Afghan government.

My second job was to run the USAID Field Office in Jalalabad. That included serving as the primary point of contact for all of USAID's projects and programs in my area of operations, which totaled \$70 million during my 20 months in the position. I directly managed the Afghanistan Immediate Needs Program, a cash-for-work labor program worth \$18.8 million, which contributed to the 96% decrease in poppy production in Nangarhar in 2005. I provided input on the design of Kabul-run programs that targeted my area such as a vocational training school for construction trades, and a comprehensive alternative livelihood program. I coordinated all USAID activities with the Afghan provincial government. And finally, I directly managed 4 staff members and handled all logistics, property and finance issues for the office itself.

## **A Normal Day**

If I decided to stay in Jalalabad, a normal day at the PRT began with two meetings with NGOs, contractors or Afghan government officials before lunch. I visited a project or attended an opening ceremony for a USAID or PRT project in the afternoon, and then returned to the base in time to attend the daily 1700 hours Battle Update Brief, chaired by the Military Commander and attended by all section heads. Everyone reported what they did that day, and then shared their plans 24, 48 and 72 hours out, which allowed us to de-conflict meetings, transportation needs and redundancy of mission. I answered emails in the evening until bed, and then did it all over again the next day.

If I decided to leave the city, we set out early in the morning and drove to the first destination, usually a village to discuss an issue or monitor a project. I spoke with the village elders over tea,

met with local government officials, addressed any concerns they had and returned to base by nightfall. Depending on what issues were raised on my visit, I scheduled meetings with appropriate Afghan provincial government officials to determine how best to address the population's concerns.

### **The Value of the PRT**

The PRT is not a physical structure; it is a platform for components of U.S. National Security to coordinate larger political missions, while jointly developing and implementing a targeted stability operation. The military works on improving the host nation's security, USAID works on developing government institutions, health, education, infrastructure and private sector. The U.S. Department of State analyzes and reports on the complex Afghan political environment to the Embassy and its PRT partners. Each component is critical to achieve the U.S. mission in Afghanistan.

Some examples of how the Jalalabad PRT achieved its mission include: helping facilitate the Presidential and Parliamentary elections; supporting Afghan security forces during the 2005 riots, meeting with the riot's initiators multiple times to understand why they rioted and together with the Afghan government, addressed their frustrations; employing upwards of 20,000 people per day in 2005 as part of a counter-narcotics strategy and extending projects into areas where neither the government nor aid agencies had previously ventured; informing decision makers in Kabul and Washington, D.C. about policy success and failure in the province; and, working with the provincial Afghan government to identify villages that were politically fence-setting, and programmed funds to "win" the support of the villages for the Afghan government that resulted in blocking key smuggling routes for the Taliban.

The PRT's unique value lies in how it integrates the mission of each National Security component: Department of Defense, U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development. No one agency or department can manage all of the tasks that need to be accomplished to win the war, but by creating a unity of effort that maximizes each component's core competency the United States stands a greater chance for success.

### **What Works?**

1. The Command Group model where each agency was a co-equal partner. It allows the team to develop and implement one comprehensive provincial stability strategy, while also coordinating his or her agency's larger mission in the area.

2. **Financial Resources.** It is critical for PRTs to have flexible funding mechanisms for stability operations because they allow people at the tactical level to address immediate needs that could become larger problems.
3. **Integration with Host Government.** The Afghan government should take the lead on identifying the needs of its constituency, designing a program to address those needs and allocating funds to the program. In reality, the Afghan government does not have the human or fiscal capacity to do this; therefore the PRT must work with the government to identify needs, design a program, and support the program with PRT-controlled funds. Otherwise the funds could serve to undermine the very goal we are trying to support. If the population comes to the PRT rather than its government to fix problems, then the mission has failed. It may take time for the central government to deliver funds through its own mechanisms, so in the interim the PRT can use its flexible funding resources to not only support government initiatives, but to mentor the government in how to budget, manage and program funds.
4. **Civil-Military Integration** (up and down each agency's chain of command). USAID and U.S. State Department embedded advisors at the Brigade, Division and Corps levels, where they facilitated mission integration. The military did not embed advisors in the civilian agencies, but that should be done in the future.
5. **Dedicated Force Protection.** Having dedicated force protection to support each agency's mission is a necessary condition for the freedom of movement, key to the success of the PRT.

## **Challenges**

The challenges to a PRT's success lie at the policy level, but are manifested daily through PRT operations. Rather than list specific issues at the PRT level, I will focus on the larger policy issue that if addressed, will fix many of the issues at the PRT level.

1. Better align each agency's mission in the PRT with resources.
  - a. The military's job is security sector reform. The Military Commander meets with all of the security forces in the area on a daily basis. The base supports military teams training the host country's police and army. However, the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds cannot be used

for security. This misalignment of mission and resources results in confusion at best and harm at worst: confusion because Afghans, NGOs, aid agencies and the like do not understand why the military is focusing on building schools when security is degrading; and harm because the military has not been trained in development work and often makes unintended, but harmful mistakes with the projects it chooses. For example, another PRT dug wells in a village as a reward for providing information. The team did not conduct a water table analysis and the new wells caused wells in a neighboring village to dry up. The village with the dry wells thought the United States did it intentionally and was no longer supportive of the new Afghan government or U.S. efforts in the area.

To further confuse the issue, the State Department engages in security sector reform through Foreign Military Sales funding from the Embassy in Kabul. During my time at the PRT, the State Department funded a police training and advisory program in Jalalabad run by private contractor. The program was not well coordinated with battle group or PRT operations, despite the shared security sector reform mission. Additionally, redundancies were created because both the PRT and the contractor provided advisors to the Afghan National Police and the Afghan Border Police.

- b. USAID's job is development, yet its current financial resources are set up to deliver development funds from the capital of a country through complex contract and assistance mechanisms. USAID does not have a CERP-like funding mechanism that allows its Field Program Officer to directly manage the delivery of aid. This is due to political decisions in the 1980s to downsize USAID and outsource most of its technical capacity to companies that now directly implement AID's programs. Congress and the administration should create a funding mechanism for USAID specifically for stability operations and increase personnel levels so it can be properly administered. This alignment of human and financial resources to the mission is critical to ensure that the development portion of stability operations is managed by the civilian agency created for this purpose.

It is critical for PRTs to have flexible funding mechanisms for stability operations because they allow people at the tactical level to address immediate needs that could become larger problems. The funds, however, must be aligned with the

mission. The Commander's Emergency Response Program is an excellent mechanism; however, in the future it needs to be focused on the security sector mission rather than reconstruction and development. In the present, there are no funding alternatives so CERP should continue to address both security and development, with greater input from development experts, until such time as a CERP-like fund is established for USAID.

2. Clarify U.S. policy on delivery of assistance

- a. There has been a policy shift over the last five years regarding *how* the United States wants to deliver assistance in conflict environments. For the past thirty years, the bulk of U.S. assistance has been outsourced to private companies and NGOs. This was a deliberate decision by Congress to reduce the size of the foreign assistance bureaucracy in the 1980s. Recent calls for U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education to join the "fight" signal that the U.S. government now wants to directly implement its own assistance by sending technical experts in critical fields to work with local nationals in conflict zones.

If this policy change is indeed what the Administration wants, then serious discussions need to occur about *how* the direct delivery of technical support is done. The United States already has two bureaucratic structures that have the technical competency to perform this function to varying degrees: Peace Corps and USAID. The organizations, however, are currently not staffed or resourced sufficiently to support this policy shift. If the administration is not satisfied with these bureaucratic options and wants to create a new structure, then it must do so deliberately with well-reasoned mission, resources and method for integrating into the full spectrum operation outlined in my testimony.

In the interim, if brave Americans with valuable technical skills who work outside of USAID want to serve their country in a development / assistance capacity, then they could be brought into USAID temporarily to provide their technical function in alignment with existing U.S. government development policies.

If the U.S. policy towards delivery of assistance moves from an outsourcing model to a direct implementation model at the PRT level, it will require significant increases in force protection to enable the civilians to work with the host country nationals in a mentoring capacity.

3. Better integrate PRT mission with war-fighting activities. Although PRTs and battle groups co-habitate or live in close proximity to one another, the future planning of operations is rarely integrated. During my time in Jalalabad, I never participated in one planning session with the battle group conducting combat operations in my province, because the military did not see the USAID Field Program Officer as having a “need to know” requirement for combat operations. Sometimes the Civil Affairs Team brought humanitarian assistance to a village after a mission was conducted, but were otherwise not involved. This needs to be changed because of the type of war we are now fighting. A counterinsurgency will not be won or lost with security operations. Security is critical to set the conditions for stability; however, unless strong governance and assistance follow security, the population’s support will wane.

As we learned from Iraq, the stability operations part of war fighting cannot be an afterthought once a modicum of security is established with combat operations. It needs to be integrated from the start of every mission to ensure a seamless transition.

4. More Civil Affairs “A” teams. As noted above, the PRT leadership comprises only six or seven people, with all others serving in a support function. Enormous responsibility is placed on PRTs, yet there are only a few people to do the actual work. Having an intimate knowledge of the province has suffered because there is only one “A” team of four people dedicated to covering vast areas of land over terrible roads. PRTs are supposed to go “where NGOs and the government cannot” yet, the leadership is also tasked with integrating its mission with the provincial government, which means most of the leadership’s time is spent in the provincial capital. Each PRT needs 10-15 Civil Affairs “A” teams to live amongst the population and become intimately familiar with the issues, concerns and lives of the population to better achieve the mission. Ideally, each team should have an embedded USAID officer, but with staffing shortages at present that is not feasible. Those “A” teams would support the link between the government and the population, using the PRT as a facilitator. This model is

successfully used to a smaller scale by the New Zealand army in Bamyian and was used by the British army in Mazar-i- Sharif.

### **ISAF Development Advisor Job**

My last job in Afghanistan was as the first Development Advisor (DEVAD) for a Corps Headquarters running a war. The headquarters was ISAF IX, and the Commander was General David Richards (UK).

ISAF IX was the transition headquarters that oversaw the transfer of authority from Operation Enduring Freedom to ISAF. When General Richards was preparing to deploy, he was concerned that the 3Ds were not represented in his headquarters. He was the defense component. He had his political advisor for the diplomacy, but he had no development equivalent for the 3<sup>rd</sup> "D". He therefore created the position of "DEVAD" in his headquarters. Because this was a multinational headquarters General Richards wanted to have two countries represented in the position, so I was brought in from USAID and Clare Harkin was brought in from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development.

In my capacity of DEVAD I worked with the military planners to bring development issues into various nation-wide operations ISAF conducted, including Medusa and Baaz / Oqab. I worked closely with the Brigadier General in charge of Reconstruction and Development to establish PRT coherence, which included writing part of the PRT Handbook. I also integrated USAID's security needs into ISAF operations. For example, USAID had a significant program to refurbish the entire southern power system, including Kajaki Dam; however, the Taliban had disrupted the program to the point that USAID no longer felt comfortable providing its own security and was considering closing the project until security improved. I alerted General Richards to the situation, and he immediately reallocated security forces to protect the dam and set up weekly strategic planning meetings with USAID's engineers and security staff to develop a long-term solution to protect the dam. This is an excellent example of how missions can be integrated at the highest levels, and should be replicated in future engagements.

This position should be included in all current and future endeavors that include both development and military operations. Some of the reasons this position worked well include:

- I had a Brigadier General rank-equivalency, which provided me complete access to the headquarters, and ensured lower ranked military officers responded to me

- I served as the direct advisor to the Commanding General rather than being placed in the Civil-Military branch. This is critical, because development must be integrated strategically throughout the headquarters activities, rather than being seen as one small component of the civil-military branch
- I answered directly to the USAID Mission Director, so I did not compete with the senior U.S. development representative in the country
- Although I worked for USAID, I was responsible for representing the entire development community's interests to ISAF, and did so by facilitating meetings of key stakeholders

Thank you for your time and attention to these issues.

*The information and views presented in this testimony are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views or the positions of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the U.S. Government.*