

## USIP - ADST

### Afghanistan Experience Project

#### Interview #47 Executive Summary

The interviewee was first in Afghanistan from December, 2001 until mid-March, 2002, working to establish the Embassy. He later became part of the Office of Afghanistan Reconstruction, where he was responsible for PRT concept development and for recruiting State Department officers for them. In March/April, 2004 he did an assessment of the PRTs, visiting 10 of the 13 in existence at that time.

The interviewee describes the evolution of the concept and the origin of the PRT name – consciously chosen by the Afghan government to emphasize the idea of reconstruction. Early PRT design also emphasized flexibility and very broad guidance, so that each PRT developed its own strategy to meet the three broad objectives of improving security, extending the authority of the central government and facilitating reconstruction. The interviewee describes the concrete ways in which PRTs improved security, specifically through persuasion and providing advice to local leaders.

According to this interviewee, the greatest impact of the PRTs was in the area of governance. He describes one situation in Jalalabad where the PRT managed to arrange face-to-face meetings among the leaders of three separate military forces, co-opted local militia leaders, and ultimately persuaded them to coordinate their security efforts, enhancing both security and governance. He also describes the specifics of PRT support for police training in Gardez, and PRT activities in cooperation with the Afghan National Army.

The interviewee addresses how PRTs functioned under non-U.S. control, the value-added by the Ministry of Interior's representative to the PRT, and the three main currents of NGO attitudes toward PRTs. He explains that the NGO field perspective was usually one of cooperation, while the perspective from NGO Kabul headquarters or Washington headquarters tended to be more critical of PRTs. Recent gaming exercises with NGO and military participants, however, has succeeded in creating significantly greater mutual understanding.

United States Institute of Peace  
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #47

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*Q: You were involved at the origin of the PRTs. Can you explain a little of the historical process, how the concept was adapted and determined?*

A: We wanted to expand the security environment in Afghanistan. There were issues with fighting or combat operations in a portion of the country and trying to provide additional security in the rest of the country. ISAF, International Security and Assistance Force was constrained to Kabul and its environs. As we discussed with European and other allies about expanding ISAF to other locations there were relatively few if no takers on providing forces. We had used a combination of civil affairs, Special Forces and State officers in several other locations in Afghanistan that seemed to be a good combination of military and civilian assets during the early phases of operation in Afghanistan. We asked CJTF180 to take a look at the idea of combining civilian and military elements in small numbers in specific areas across Afghanistan. The original concept was for a joint security team, which was developed along the lines of the small security element, a civil affairs element, a small civilian package from State, USAID, USDA and other civilian organizations as required for the environment. In discussions with the government of Afghanistan it was decided that the joint security teams' name would be changed to provincial reconstruction teams. The government wanted to de-emphasize regions where we did have some concerns with warlords and they wanted to emphasize the idea to the population of reconstruction. So, the name was changed to the provincial reconstruction teams. The first three teams were also deployed to areas where the government felt it was appropriate to put the PRTs. I'll say that that did not necessarily equate with where we saw the most need for the PRTs. We envisioned the PRTs going to most areas that were non-secure, had few to no NGOs and could actually kick-start reconstruction and stabilization, which would allow the NGOs to come in and improve and enhance reconstruction.

In designing the PRT and providing the PRT guidance, we attempted to make the guidance very broad so the PRT had the flexibility in each of the locations it went to to develop its own strategy to meet the political and security dynamics of that situation. The three broad objectives of the PRT were to improve security, extend the authority of the central national government and to facilitate reconstruction in the area. The PRT was viewed as an evolutionary asset, that is you would go into the area, you'd gauge the situation, you would develop a strategy and as you improved the security, as the government was extended into that region, then you would evolve what you were doing and change what you were doing. For instance, on the reconstruction side, each PRT

initially went in fairly heavy with quick impact programs with the idea that there needed to be a certain degree of quick improvement that the population leadership could see. That would facilitate the PRT's access to key civilians in the population and acceptance by the population that this of course was not an occupying force, but an assistance force.

*Q: What would be a quick impact project? Building a well, building a school?*

A: Quick impact projects were generally wells, clinics, some schools, certainly supplies, humanitarian assistance if necessary, school supplies and clinic supplies, these types of things. It was recognized that when we put the PRTs in that these programs did need to be connected to the national government. I'd like to emphasize that the governors are part of the national government. The governors are appointed by the Minister of the Interior and the President. All projects had to be coordinated with the local government, coordinated with the regional United Nations offices if they were in the area, and in the first three PRTs there were three UN officers and all major projects above \$25,000 had to be coordinated at the embassy.

*Q: Would that be phase one of the PRTs? I know you mentioned that you did an evaluation of PRTs in March and April of 2004, so I'm thinking that what you've just described would have been the first phase. Did that come to an end or did it depend on each PRT?*

A: We didn't try to phase it and set conditions down, but each PRT should meet certain criteria before it evolved to another stage. We provided some examples of how we expected the PRT to improve security. One is through presence patrolling. Two was in helping local security forces like the police becoming more effective and efficient. As the Afghan national army was built we expected the PRT to help introduce it to the area of operations, but no, there wasn't a phase. It was loose and I think some people would say it was too loose of guidance because there was certainly a large variance of how each PRT operated in their areas. Loose guidance also allowed commanders with different backgrounds to take different tacts. The one thing I think is important is that we did not expect the PRTs to go and create security. We didn't have resources to do that, but they did have the capacity to advise and influence local forces and local government officials to improve security. Gardez, which was the first PRT, developed and opened in December of 2002. The security instances reported to that date were about 30 security instances. After the PRT was established that went down to two security instances over two months. That was in the general vicinity of Gardez. We did that through a variety of ways, such as demanding from the governor what he was doing about the situation. Demanding from the police chief why he wasn't, or rather insisting that a roadblock be taken down. Negotiating between commanders, why there's a roadblock here and five kilometers down the road there's another roadblock with competing forces.

In Bamian, another example is a patrol was stopped by some policemen who said "we need your help. We need you to arrest the local bad guy." He was an Afghan citizen and the PRT says "we don't have the authority to do that, but tell us what the issues are and maybe we can find a way that we can help." Basically there were only three

policemen and the bad guy had 10 armed guards and so they didn't have the capability. The PRT went through the logical process of "what are your options? Can you call the central authorities in Bamian headquarters? Don't have a phone. It would take three days to get there and the bad guys get away." So, through a process of conversation regarding options, they basically came up with deputizing local citizens to ensure that the police force was bigger than the other guy's forces. We helped them put the plan together of how to arrest a person with a considerable amount of force. The PRT had arranged to drive in to the village a half hour before the arrest was made and made their presence known, stop outside the village where they were visible and after the arrest drive back in through the village and check and see how it was. So, the presence bolstered the police confidence. The advice provided them a process to come up with how they were going to do this and then they'd go make the arrest. That's the very least costly way of improving security without providing major military forces to provide security.

*Q: It sounds too as if the local commander is called upon to use his intelligence to figure out how to respond to this situation with the resources at hand, and time being of the essence he doesn't need to go back and consult with other authorities.*

A: Yes. This whole process, the PRT process in the way they approached our military forces was to operate in consonance with the initial policy decisions that we would fight this war with Afghan allies and that we would not be an occupying force after the war. There was always a design to have a light military footprint in Afghanistan and that light footprint would not be an occupying force that went around arresting people and took over the authority of the Afghans. The Afghans themselves had to provide security and help to reestablish the mechanisms of the security.

*Q: In terms of the size of the military force in each PRT, when they were first established they had a protection force of maybe 80 people, is that correct?*

A: The whole military force again was in principle designed for each location it went to. The general theory was that you would need about 50 to 100 military for each site. That was under the assumption that there was a lot of reachback to the military capability that was in country, including the Special Forces, so that those forces could always be called to reinforce that organization. Out of that 50 to 100 men there was a force protection element generally more in the 30 to 40 range. There was an operating headquarters that provided logistics, command and control, administrative support and then there was a civil affairs portion and in each one of the early PRTs it was called a CMOG, Civil Military Operations Group, with two captains, two four man teams for civil affairs.

*Q: So the total of the individuals working in civil affairs in the PRT would have been either eight or 12?*

A: Probably closer to 12.

*Q: Okay, so about 12 and then the additional forces, be they 40 or 50 or more are to*

*provide security for the team and for their headquarters?*

A: Force protection for the team, force protection for patrols, force protection for the civilians when they went out on patrols. We developed an MOU with CJTF180 that basically passed the DS security, the RSO's rule of military force protection. All civilians in the PRTs were under the authority of the military for force protection only. All civilians in country by law come under the chief of mission and so the civilian chain of command reported directly to the embassy and the military chain of command reported directly through our chain of command. That made a requirement that the embassy and the military chain of command develop a system, particularly on reconstruction sites, since there were different pots of money, such that all three major elements - the PRT commander, the State officer and the USAID officer - basically became the triumvirate to determine what was the best pot of money to use for reconstruction efforts and what was the best project or priority. Guidance specifically said - and I think there's some misunderstanding about it - guidance specifically said that civilians had the lead in all reconstruction efforts and that the State officer was the lead civilian agent who was responsible to coordinate and pull the civilian team together on the PRTs.

*Q: When you were evaluating results up until April of 2004, what did you find was the degree of success in promoting governance, providing police training and in promoting or establishing legal institutions that didn't exist previously?*

A: I think probably the biggest impact of the PRTs was in governance. Some of that was by influencing. Some of that was providing novel ideas of how the government or the security forces could develop means that were much more legitimate than just individual security forces in the region. As an example, I would point out Jalalabad where you had three separate military forces, military and police forces all providing loyalty to specific powerful men in the region, one of whom was a governor, one of whom was a second corps commander and one of whom was the police chief.

*Q: Second corps commander of the Afghan national army?*

A: No, the Afghan militia force. That's a whole different story, but anyway each one of these security forces was part of the solution and part of the problem. The second corps commander authorized roadblocks for his men to shake down trucks with material, etc., quick bribes, same with the police force and same with the governor's militia. So, the PRT called a meeting of security forces and set up a security task force requiring, requesting that these three commanders meet to determine how to deal with this security situation. At first it was hard to get the three commanders in the same room together, at least without their bodyguards. Over time they basically got all three commanders to start coordinating their efforts and they got one particular commander to break down his roadblocks because they would fight back and forth. "That one was in the city, so that's a police job, or this one's a military job, etc." Once they got this commander to start to break down his roadblocks, then they used that to leverage the other commanders to break down their roadblocks. Then that led to the fact that actually we had three separate forces talking to each other and we could start to coordinate the roles and responsibilities

and where to hand off the security to each particular group. Early on there wasn't a training program to train the police. There wasn't sufficient output for the military training program to put Afghan national army folks there. Regional Afghan militia forces were in a position to provide support to the national government, but were in fact controlled by local commanders. In some cases warlords. Part of the process of the PRT was to start breaking those relationships down and developing legitimate institutions. I had to do that in a very much "ad hoc" way because there wasn't a stability reconstruction package to go out there and do that. It probably wasn't politically feasible early on for the PRTs.

As programs expanded they supported those programs. For instance, in Gardez we got our first police regional training center and the PRTs supported that police training center. It helped with bringing the appropriate U.S. government officials there to talk to the police. They found land that they could use for the training center. They helped negotiate that. They provided additional security teams for the civilian police officers who came to that location to train regional police and so they participated in that sense, too. When we deployed Afghan national army, the small forces we had to the region, the PRT was instrumental in introducing them to the governor, getting them out to areas that we felt needed to have national government focus and presence. Certainly providing some additional equipment and transportation as needed in those areas or even arranging through our military command that we needed to have an ANA presence because the governor of the province was going to make a tour of the province and go in and talk to specific tribal leaders that we had difficulties with. So, they had the Afghan military as well as U.S. military with them, too.

*Q: Going back to your example of the Jalalabad situation with the three different forces who were persuaded to cooperate. I'm wondering how the first militia leader was persuaded that it was in his interest to stop doing what he was doing and kind of cede some ground to the other forces?*

A: I wasn't privy obviously to all the various conversations, but in some senses what all the PRTs tried to do was to gauge each one of the leaders to find out where they supported the government and whether they wanted to be part of the solution in the future. If they were part of the problem and did not have much confidence in any future they were going to sustain their positions; or if they were somewhere in the middle and supported the government when it was useful to support the government and did their own thing when it wasn't convenient to support the government. We sort of lined up those; that's the idea of this evolving PRT concept and the strategy of determining who were the right people and encouraging them, trying to co-opt them into the system, arguing "if you want to be in the future army, if you have political aspirations, you need to support the government's directives. You need to show that you are supporting returning Afghanistan to an institutionalized normalized state." So, a lot of it was persuasion. A lot of it was influence with the understanding of the Afghan individual that we were talking directly back to Kabul and our input was being listened to. Certainly when we felt that there was a governor or a commander that would be helpful to meet with, the decision was obviously going to be to meet with those folks. I think people

understood that there was a degree of influence of each of the PRTs there. I think that was greater with the fact that you had both military and representatives of the United States government and the State officer who could deliver that message.

*Q: From your observation, though the State officer was only one person and the PRT was considerably larger in number, what was the value added by him and the other civilian representative, the AID representative? How would you describe that?*

A: Well, first of all we had very mixed records of getting State and USAID officers out to the PRTs. Many PRTs operated for long periods of time without civilian support and that's the weakness of the PRT.

*Q: Is that because they're new and so the State pipeline doesn't have people ready to jump in?*

A: First of all, there were no positions. We had to go to State and ask for positions so that we could fill them. We filled the original ones for the first year; we filled them with TDYs. The other aspect is on the civilian side: are we going to do voluntary? You want to have a relatively experienced State Department official, but one who is also young enough to be fairly adventurous to go out to some of these locations and doesn't have a family, commitments or whatever, someone who could be away for six months to a year in a very remote location. It was very hard. We got hundreds of junior State officers or officers who were just coming out of the A100 (course) that wanted to go to the PRTs, but we did not want to put a junior inexperienced officer at the PRTs. One of the things that we did to ensure that the civilians had some authority on the PRT obviously is providing resources. We provided \$52 million in ESF funds to the PRT system to support quick impact projects. Quick impact projects could be a well, or a building or a bridge. The idea was as NGOs came into the region then we would shift from the more humanitarian assistance and civil service needs to the higher level aspects. You see that in a place like Mazar e Sharif where we established a PRT. The British came into it, to an established PRT, with dozens of NGOs; there wasn't any need to do wells and schools. We started doing roads, municipal buildings, working with the police and police vehicles, communications and those types of projects through our funds rather than schools, hospitals and that type of stuff. ESF was provided, though the mechanism used to actually implement it was through a USAID program, but the State officer, because ESF funds are State funds, had control of those funds as far as his nominations were concerned. Of course the USAID officer could also nominate; that's why they had the process of all three senior reps involved in a decision on which projects went forward.

*Q: The Mazar e Sharif PRT is now under British control and the NGOs are numerous. When you have plenty of civilians to carry out the reconstruction, is the expected evolution that the PRT withdraws from development projects and if so, then what do they focus on?*

A: The evolution envisioned was for the military to go away totally and expand the civilian side so that the civilian side would start to operate in a normal situation and we

assumed -which may have been a bad assumption- that because of the security situation, lack of infrastructure, lack of communications, that we would more likely establish a decentralized program in areas such as in the north because Kabul can't control that program from Kabul. There would be a regional USAID office with a State officer, a USDA officer, a health and science officer - whatever the needs were in that region, when the security environment allowed the military to go with it. Now, in between time we in State expected the PRT to shift its focus to what was needed. In Mazar e Sharif the PRT put its focus on stability in trying to prevent the two major warlords in the north, Dostum and Atta, from coming to blows again and starting the civil war over again. The British, who were very good at this, were particularly effective at having the patrols out, knowing where people were, interjecting themselves in instances where there was a raid by one or the other, sitting them down, discussing the issue and how to solve it. They had a senior U.S. State Department officer and a fairly senior FCO (UK) officer who worked very well as a team to pressure allies in Kabul to control them and to keep them honest by knowing exactly what the situation was on the ground and also getting them together as necessary to solve issues at the higher level. Once you got the two (warlords), once they agreed to come together, they were almost honor bound to come up with a solution on how to solve this situation. There was a lot of discussion and backtracking and you didn't solve everything, but I think that the UK PRT was exceptionally good at working the security sector and in this sense it prevented destabilizing events. For example, a lot of times, with no communications or lack of communications in Afghanistan, rumors fly very quickly and even very sophisticated warlords and commanders, not having much correct information, don't have too much problem jumping to conclusions based on their perceptions of what's happened in the past. The ability to say "General, I'm talking to my patrol commander at such and such over the radio. He's saying, there are no eighth corps forces in that location. So, there is not a threat to you. You need to back off your forces." This was very useful.

*Q: Eighth Corps again being the Afghan militia forces?*

A: Yes, the Afghan militia forces were under the ministry of defense, were officials of the ministry of defense, just like the governors were, but some of the governors were also warlords and the governors were corrupt. Some of the governors were incapable of being governors and it took time to understand and I think our presence, knowing who was doing a good job and who wasn't, who told Kabul they supported it when in the meetings they undercut Kabul - our giving this information was very useful.

*Q: In your experience, have there been many successful handovers of PRTs from the U.S.? How have those handovers worked and how are they functioning at the moment?*

A: I saw two during my assessment back in '04. I have not seen how the newest ones have turned over. My last time being out there on assessment I was at Konduz, Mazar e Sharif and Bamian, Bamian being a New Zealand PRT, Mazar e Sharif the UK and Konduz, German. I actually considered the New Zealand PRT probably the best PRT in Afghanistan. They've done an exceptional job. They resourced the PRT with the people and the expertise they needed for that situation which we have not always done in our

own PRTs. The UK is a close second on par with the New Zealanders. They had no problem shifting, had no problem with us continuing our quick impact programs that we had promised the community and was very supportive of us shifting from those quick impact programs to things that weren't being done in the north, but certainly NGOs don't do any of that.

*Q: Things like?*

A: Like roads. Improving the road system. Building a police station, refurbishing the police station, building the provincial courthouse, setting up the municipal building; no NGOs do that.

*Q: That's because of their size and resources?*

A: That's because of their size and resources and it's much more aimed at services than infrastructure. That was the idea of the PRT, to evolve into those types of projects when the NGOs came back; the allies have taken over those PRTs that are in a more benign security situation and therefore, they could shift to those higher level much easier than ours can. In Qalat, in Khowst, in Sarina (PH), we're still in active combat and oh, by the way, in none of those three locations that I know of is there an international NGO, so we're continuing projects that NGOs would do in those locations.

The third location I mentioned, Konduz, was taken over by the Germans. That was much more problematic. The Germans could not agree internally on their vision of the PRT so they sent out a military element, an embassy officer, a development person, and a minister of interior person, because we were also establishing a police training station in Konduz. All of those entities reported separately back to Berlin and got their directions directly. Very much not a team effort of the sort we tried to develop in the PRT system. That said, I have had recent reports that the German PRT has become much more functional and developed to a degree more along our ideas of having a much stronger coordination between the three elements that are in the PRT, looking at issues from a political-military standpoint, rather than as a separate military, political or development issue.

*Q: Okay, a couple of other small points. I've heard that there was an Afghan representative within each PRT. I've also heard that there wasn't. What was the reality from your experience?*

A: The government agreed to put in a representative in each PRT. The most I think we had was 12 or 13. I'm not sure what the status is. Again, just like we had problems getting the civilians out to the PRT, the government had problems with the governmental representatives. Some of that was to make sure we had the right person. Some of it was finding any person. In my experience most of the government representative PRTs were very useful at a couple of things. First of all, facilitating getting in to see the right people in the government. Certainly reinforcing that they represent the national government and they are in conjunction with the PRTs so this is a sort of a joint coalition-national

government operation. But they're reinforcing that the coalition is not here as an occupying force; it's here supporting the national government and accompanied by the national government's representative.

*Q: I can imagine some of the difficulties in finding the right person. As you say we had some similar difficulties, but is it something we have to kind of keep pushing our Afghan counterparts to continue to recruit, that we really want this individual as part of the PRT?*

A: We pressed Afghanistan considerably and we continue to press when we don't have them. I think a key element; they certainly reinforce the objectives of the PRTs. That's another part of the weakness of the PRT system; if you don't have all the elements of the PRT you'll have this overarching political military reconstruction focus, a decentralized platform that is trying to expand the national stability and reconstruction programs to a locality that is fairly remote. Then you leave it up to the military to try to figure it out by itself. The military is the most vocal of those saying "Please, give me a USAID person, please give me a State person, please give me a representative of the government of Afghanistan."

*Q: You're planning another assessment in October and not to prejudge it, but to preview it a little bit, can you give some idea of what you think will be coming out in that in terms of changes you would be recommending for the future, given all that you know?*

A: We're not going to try to prejudge this. There are three areas that we're going to look at very carefully. One is what are the essential elements of the PRT that will ensure a successful transition from coalition PRTs to NATO ISAF PRTs. A second issue is what are the coordination issues internal to the U.S. government and external between the NGOs. I think there have probably been lots and lots of studies and different opinions stated on our PRTs' relationship with the NGOs. I find that there are generally three different NGO opinions. There's one where the NGOs in the field with the PRTs by nature will work and find ways to work with whatever authorities they need to work with. There's the Kabul perspective, which takes a degree of the field's perspective, but also has enough policy, thought process to say we need to solve some of the issues we had with this civil military mix of operations. And then there's the headquarters in Washington, D.C., where NGOs until recently had been very strident about the difficulties that we created with the PRTs. Although there was an interesting game of NGOs and military recently that opened up a lot of people's eyes on both sides, military and civilian. I won't name any names, but there are some NGOs who are starting to take a different look at conditions and why you have to put into effect some of these policies.

*Q: Primarily as a result of their experience in seeing what the PRTs are doing or participating in some of the gaming exercises?*

A: The gaming, I think, because you take it through a set scenario.

[END SIDE]

The next step is phase three, in the south that will probably be more conditional depending on what the security situation is, how successful the Afghan government and coalition are in fighting the insurgency and so on because there's a difference between what ISAF is doing militarily and what the coalition is doing. ISAF doesn't want to get involved in combat. The third element that the PRT assessments are looking at is the potential for lessons learned from the PRT that could be tied to a decentralized stability and reconstruction effort in a different context.

*Q: Not Iraq?*

A: No, not any particular context, general contexts.

*Q: Well, I realize you need to go, but I want to thank you very much for your time. You've given us quite a bit of information, some wonderful examples that I think will be very useful to the folks who need to have a look at this and I thank you. It was very interesting and informative for me as well.*

A: I'm glad it was helpful.

[END SIDE]

[END TAPE]

[END INTERVIEW]