

Statement of Mr. Mitchell Everett Shivers
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Testimony to the House Armed Services Committee
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
“Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan”

October 4th, 2007

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department of Defense’s role in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan. PRTs have matured since November 2002 from a single, U.S.-led pilot project in Gardez, to a fully international effort involving 25 teams in the majority of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. PRTs now represent a major element of the mission to expand the reach of the Afghan government throughout the country. While the effectiveness of individual PRTs is sometimes uneven, the overall PRT effort is achieving noteworthy results and requires sustained support.

The role of PRTs was formally agreed to on January 27, 2005, by the PRT Executive Steering Committee – the international political-military body responsible for PRT direction and guidance – in the following mission statement:

“Provincial Reconstruction Teams will assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment ... and enable security sector reform and reconstruction efforts.”

Of the 25 existing PRTs, 12 are led by the United States. The military component of a U.S. PRT is commanded by a uniformed officer, and is task-organized to accomplish

the following functions: operations, administration, logistics, security, and a variety of enabling roles, including civil affairs and engineering. Each U.S.-led PRT has approximately 100 military personnel, though this number varies considerably. The PRT commander coordinates PRT activities with representatives from other parts of the U.S. interagency. In most instances, this includes representatives from the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Department of Agriculture. Our commanders need civilian expertise for these PRTs to be successful and they appreciate their colleagues from other agencies who provide valuable advice and leadership. However, we must build additional civilian capacity to participate in these efforts. It is vitally important that we increase the personnel capabilities within civilian agencies and fund the creation of a “civilian reserve” to draw on outside experts when needed.

In addition to the resources and expertise leveraged by interagency PRT members, the PRT commander has at his or her disposal Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds, which are used to address urgent humanitarian and reconstruction needs. CERP remains one of our commanders’ most effective tools in helping ordinary Afghans see positive changes in their daily lives.

PRTs in Afghanistan all fall under the broad authority of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), although several other organizations have been established to help ensure unity of effort among various stakeholders. The most important example, the PRT Executive Steering Committee (ESC), provides high-level policy direction and includes the Afghan Minister of the Interior, the ISAF Commander,

the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General, NATO's Senior Civilian Representative, the EU Special Representative, and ambassadors of PRT troop contributing nations.

NATO reports that, as of July 2007, PRTs have completed over 9,000 projects in all development sectors. While this achievement is notable, it is more useful to focus on less quantifiable aspects of what PRTs do. Firstly, PRTs act as "small embassies" for the various reconstruction efforts being undertaken by the Afghan government, military forces, aid agencies, and non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan. They also provide a mechanism for mentoring officials of Afghanistan's ministries at the provincial level. Further, PRTs serve as a vehicle for aligning the priorities set out in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), the overarching strategic document for long-term development in Afghanistan. Importantly, PRTs reinforce the international community's commitment to the people of Afghanistan.

Although the overall PRT construct is an effective and necessary component of the mission in Afghanistan, the PRT effort faces several challenges. By nature, PRTs are civil-military entities, and therefore demand close coordination between the various interagency contributors. As such, PRTs are highly dependent on the leadership skills and teamwork abilities of the PRT commander and his or her interagency colleagues. Additionally, because PRTs fall under NATO direction, extensive coordination and consensus between Allies is required to foster unity of effort. Lastly, different countries inherently have different capabilities and resources at their disposal, and some must rely on other, more capable Allies for assistance in establishing and operating PRTs.

In considering the role of PRTs in Afghanistan, it is necessary to place them in the appropriate context. The international community, in partnership with the Afghan government, is undertaking one of the most ambitious stabilization and reconstruction efforts in history. PRTs play a crucial role in that effort. We jointly are extending the reach of a government in a nation that has endured decades of war, and a nearly complete destruction of its infrastructure, economy, and political institutions. We are making progress, but ultimate success will take many years, and will demand the sustained interest and commitment of the United States and the international community.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.