

**Prepared Statement  
Eric T. "Rick" Olson  
House Armed Services Committee  
Sub-Committee Oversight and Investigation  
December 05, 2007**

It is a pleasure for me to appear before the Committee to speak about this important program. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT's), first established in Afghanistan in 2002, have yielded significant positive results in both Afghanistan and Iraq in support of the overall military effort in Operations ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) and IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), and have furthered broader US goals in those two nations. Perhaps more significantly, the experience with PRT's in both OEF and OIF can provide lessons learned that will serve the purpose of finding ways to better integrate the programs, policies, and activities of civilian and military agencies to produce a more coordinated and effective US approach to post-conflict or post-crisis operations.

### History and Background

PRT's were first established in Afghanistan as an initiative promoted by AMB Zalmay Khalilzad, who served at that time as the US ambassador to Afghanistan. The first PRT was inaugurated in January, 2003 in Gardez Province, located about 50 miles south of Kabul. The purpose of these small, civil-military organizations was to serve as the primary interface between the Coalition and Afghan provincial and local governments, and to assist them to govern their provinces more effectively and deliver essential services to their people. PRT's were commanded by military officers and initially staffed predominantly by military personnel, mostly Civil Affairs officers and enlisted soldiers. Gradually personnel from civilian agencies have been added, mostly foreign service officers from the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The PRT program in Iraq was instituted in November of 2005, again by AMB Khalilzad who had at that time recently arrived at US Embassy, Baghdad to serve as our Ambassador to Iraq. The first PRT's were located in Mosul and Kirkuk in northern Iraq, and Hillah, south of Baghdad. PRT's in Iraq were led by civilians, usually by relatively senior foreign service officers or Department of State hires, and were generally manned by a more representative mix of personnel from civilian and military organizations. As a result of this difference in the composition of staffs in Afghanistan and Iraq, the PRT's in the former were initially more specifically focused on short term reconstruction efforts in support of the requirements of military commanders fighting a counterinsurgency, while PRT's in Iraq have been able since their inception to assist with the counterinsurgency fight while simultaneously focusing on the longer term, more enduring need to develop and strengthen institutions and build capacity at the provincial and local level.

My association with PRT's began in Afghanistan where as a major general I served as the Combined/Joint Task Force (CJTF) Commander of CJTF-76, responsible for all US military operations in OEF from 2004-2005. Upon the standing up of CJTF-76 and taking charge of combat operations, the headquarters assumed operational control of all PRT's in Afghanistan. At that time there were 14 PRT's that had been established; by the time we relinquished control of combat operations in February of 2005, we had stood up an additional 4. Currently there are 25 PRT's operating in Afghanistan.

In August of 2006, as an official in the Department of State, I became the deputy director of the Iraqi Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO) responsible for civil-military and regional affairs. In that capacity I was also the director of the National Coordination Team (NCT), with responsibility for the stand up and operation of all the

PRT's in Iraq. At the time of my assumption of duty there were 5 PRT's that were considered to be at full operational capability (FOC). On my watch we stood up an additional 4 standing PRT's (in Salah-ad-Din, Diyala, Irbil, and Dhi Qar provinces) and brought one PRT in Anbar province back from initial operational capability to FOC. We also developed a new operational concept for the program-- the embedded PRT (ePRT)—and fielded 10 of these organizations. In May of 2007, IRMO's mandate ran out and the NCT was stood down. In its place, the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) was established, headed by an Ambassador from the Department of State. Currently OPA runs 10 standing PRT's and 15 ePRT's throughout Iraq.

Since August of this year I have served as the chief of staff of the Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction (SIGIR) and as such have been able to keep abreast of the progress being made by PRT's in both Afghanistan and Iraq, though I have no direct responsibility for their operations or administration. In sum, my experience with PRT's is unique, having run the program in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

### PRT's Today

There are 3 types of PRT's in Afghanistan and Iraq today. The first type are those PRT's, informally known as "standing PRT's", that are assigned to and located within the provinces that they serve. They are generally the more established organizations with approved work plans and predetermined resourcing to match. The second type, found only in Iraq, is known as a Provincial Support Team (PST). PST's are located outside of the province for which they are responsible. They conduct business with provincial officials by travelling into the province, but generally do not spend a prolonged period of time there. PST's are small in size, with only 4-6 US personnel assigned to them. Their reach can be augmented through the hiring of local nationals (Iraqis) who work as implementing partners of the PST, charged with carrying out key programs under the guidance of the PST leadership, albeit from afar. There are 6 PST's covering provinces in Iraq where the physical presence of a PRT is deemed unnecessary or ill advised. The third type of PRT is embedded into the brigade combat team (BCT) of the Multinational Corps, Iraq that is operating in the area for which the PRT has responsibility. Embedded PRT's (ePRT's) are generally located in provinces where there is already a standing PRT but where commanders have determined that local governments at levels below the province are in need of PRT-like services. Commanders in Anbar Province and Baghdad and neighboring provinces have accepted control of ePRT's that are working with local governments at the district and neighborhood levels. ePRT's take guidance and direction from their counterpart BCT commander. The size and exact composition of the ePRT is determined by the needs of the commander and the ePRT leader. The ePRT work plan is generally more flexible than that of the standing PRT, regularly modified to suit the needs of a changing battlefield.

Regardless of the type, the objectives of PRT's are generally drawn from 5 established pillars:

- The first is the governance pillar. PRT's work with provincial and local governments to teach them the fundamentals of governing, substantive and procedural. This is important in both Afghanistan and Iraq where the tradition of

modern day governing at levels below the federal government is not well established.

- The economic pillar has been developed to address the development needs of local governments, communities, and populations. Objectives associated with this pillar include fostering development of the private sector through assistance to small businesses and factories, and the establishment of government systems and procedures (e.g., those associated with budget execution).
- Infrastructure reconstruction or development is the third pillar. The theory is that the ability to deliver basic services to the people-- electricity, water, sewerage, medical -- will be a critical determinant of the long term success of local government.
- Rule of law is a critical pillar in both nations. The establishment of a system designed to apprehend law breakers, try them, and then punish them for their crimes in accordance with an established and acceptable set of laws and procedures is needed both in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Public diplomacy is the final pillar. The effort of PRT's in this area is to assist the local government to manage the increasingly important functions of public relations and information services.

In addition to the benefits that come from efforts in these five areas, there are positive collateral effects that have been realized. From the standpoint of Coalition operations, one rather significant benefit of PRT activities in military operations has been the understanding gained of the "human terrain". PRT's are not intelligence gathering entities, but the information that they routinely obtain about local customs, tribal and other groupings, the distribution of power (both formal and informal), and the like can be invaluable to military commanders. PRT's have also been able to extend the reach of the Coalition into areas that would otherwise be inaccessible to a military force. Many local leaders who would otherwise be unwilling to work with the US military are less reluctant to cooperate with civilian PRT members in such a way as to assist in the achievement of overall Coalition objectives. Similarly, the work of certain international and non-governmental organizations can at least be coordinated with, if not harnessed in support of, critical Coalition activities.

### Successes

It has been difficult to quantify or statistically measure the effects that PRT's in Afghanistan and Iraq have been able to achieve. There are a wealth of input measures available (e.g., funds successfully expended in support of the objectives of the PRT's and local governments), and several attempts to strike upon meaningful output measures have also been attempted (e.g., the number of local leaders trained in a given period). But the establishment of a set of measures that reflect true outcomes, that is, the actual impacts that PRT operations have had on achieving larger Coalition objectives, has been an elusive goal. How does one quantify improvement in governance or the success of rule of law measures at the local level in a province where collecting data and other statistics is a largely inexact science? Nonetheless there is a wealth of evidence, readily apparent to those who have been on the ground, and offered regularly by military commanders and PRT leaders, that stands as testimony to the success of PRT's-- a record of success that often goes unnoticed by

those who are not intimately familiar with the nature of the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, or who don't understand what conditions must be established before success can be achieved in either area of operations:

- 1. Provincial and local governments have been established and are functioning, even in many of the most unstable provinces in both countries.** Provincial councils are meeting, budgets are being developed, requirements of the populations are being identified and, in many cases, at least partially met. Diyala Province in Iraq is an excellent example. Six months ago, when Diyala was the most violent province in Iraq, it was through the efforts of the PRT working with Coalition forces in the area that the provincial council began meeting again after several months of inactivity. The improvement in the security environment in that troubled province since that time is at least in part attributable to the re-establishment of a quasi-functional government there, whose efforts to deliver to the people what they might expect from their government surely reinforced the military efforts of the Coalition and the Iraqi Army to restore order.
- 2. Reconstruction projects implemented by Iraqi officials working with the PRT's are making a difference in the level of essential services and in the effectiveness of local governments.** The Provincial Reconstruction and Development Councils that have been established in provinces in Iraq are Iraqi entities that identify reconstruction requirements and budget available resources to meet those requirements. In Baghdad alone, PRDC's funded over \$100 million in reconstruction projects, which had a salutary effect on the delivery of services in the capital city. These Councils initially funded projects with US dollars (\$300 million last fiscal year across all of Iraq), but the systems and procedures that provincial governments developed to use these funds greatly enable the provinces to become self sustaining in the area of budgeting and meeting their fiscal responsibilities. It is true that progress in the area of the restoration of services has been slow, and that the Iraqi government at all levels has been only partially successful in developing the capability to execute its own budget. But it is also true that progress has been far more noticeable at the provincial and local level than at the national level. A large part of the responsibility for this success is attributable to the work of PRT's.
- 3. Micro-loans and micro-grants channeled through PRT's are contributing directly to economic development at the local level.** Several programs administered by USAID in Afghanistan and Iraq through their representatives in PRT's have had a fairly dramatic effect on stimulating the growth of small business and the economy in those countries. The Community Action Program in Iraq and the Quick Impact Project program in Afghanistan are targeted at this type of development. There is a clear multiplier effect associated with programs like these. Successful small businesses create jobs, which in turn takes potential insurgents off the street and prevents them from being enticed to support extremist causes by the offer of cash rewards. But beyond that, the growth of small business creates demand for other goods and services up and down the supply chain, which in turn generates

additional demand for labor and brings prosperity to the local community at large.

4. **PRT's have contributed to the reconciliation process.** Reconciliation of former combatants is deemed critical to success in both Afghanistan and Iraq. In Afghanistan former warlords have been brought to the table through the efforts of PRT leaders and other PRT members. The ensuing Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) process was at least in part facilitated by PRT's in several of the provinces in which it was successfully carried out. In Iraq, the reconciliation of Sunni insurgents with the Coalition and, to some extent, with the Baghdad government, though largely an Iraqi phenomenon, was closely observed and in some cases managed by PRT's working with and advising their military counterparts.
5. **Cooperation and coordination between provincial and national governments has been improved through the efforts of PRT's.** Neither Afghanistan nor Iraq has a well established tradition of strong working relationships between federal and local governments. PRT leaders working with military commanders have been actively promoting these relationships by serving as alternative advocates for the provinces, and as another conduit of communication between them and their national capitals. A good example of this concept in action is the program of regular visits by governors in the northern, Sunni provinces of Iraq (Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salah-ad-Din, and Diyala) to Baghdad to coordinate with ministers of the national government-- in some cases for the first face-to-face meetings since the January, 2006 elections. This program has been supported by military commanders in Multinational Division, North in close coordination with the PRT's in these provinces. It is also true in both Afghanistan and Iraq that better functioning provincial governments have placed an onus on central governments to improve their ability to deliver for the provinces-- funding, goods and services and the like-- with a corresponding positive effect on the effectiveness of the central government in both countries.

## Challenges

The brave men and women who are assigned to PRT's in Afghanistan and Iraq are doing their work in the same operational environment as the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines who are assigned to the Coalition. They face certain challenges that must be overcome in order for the true potential of the PRT concept to be realized. Some of these challenges are owing to the specific characteristics of OEF and OIF. Others are more systemic in nature, and must be addressed as such if the operational concept supporting PRT's is deemed worthy of replication in other, future situations where the US is involved in post-conflict or post-crisis reconstruction or stability operations:

1. **The demands of geography in both countries exceed the reach of the PRT's that have been established to cover them.** Afghanistan is roughly the size of Texas. Anbar Province in Iraq alone is almost as large as South Carolina. In both countries the geography ranges from forbidding to impossible from the standpoint of transportation. The assets available to PRT's for bringing PRT members from their home base to locations where their primary interlocutors are willing to meet them are almost wholly provided by the military. These assets--primarily ground transport and, in rare cases, rotary wing aircraft are provided on an "as available" basis by the military for transportation of PRT members. In some cases the tyranny of distance combined with limited availability of transportation has severely impacted the ability of PRT members to do their business.
2. **In the more unstable provinces of Afghanistan and Iraq, security restrictions have hindered the ability of PRT's to get the job done.** Civilian personnel in PRT's are subject to Chief of Mission restrictions on travel based on availability of security assets. IN PRT's located on military forward operating bases (FOB's), arrangements have been made to allow Chief of Mission personnel to travel with military convoys, so long as fairly stringent requirements are met. This dependence on the military for security limits the freedom of action of PRT members. In addition, many of the key personnel with whom PRT members desire to maintain contact are extremely reluctant to find themselves near a highly visible US military formation. In PRT's not located on military FOB's, the challenges can be even more severe. These PRT's are dependent on security assets contracted for by the Department of State, who are notoriously risk averse when it comes to travel away from the PRT. The expense associated with contracted security is also extremely high; that in itself can be a limiting factor on the number and type of PRT's established in a given area, outweighing even mission requirements in the associated calculus.
3. **There is no established "proponency" for PRT's.** PRT's fall somewhere between the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of State (DoS) in terms of how they are considered, supported and treated in the interagency community. As a result, there is no established doctrine for PRT's, nor is there any agency who feels that it is their task to develop it. Training of PRT members is ad hoc, conducted by each agency providing members almost in complete isolation

from other agencies. This lack of proponency also translates to the theater of operations. For example, in Iraq the agreement between DoD and DoS that governed the support and security arrangements pertaining to PRT's was signed in February, 2007, over a year after the first PRT's were inaugurated.

4. **Considerable lip service notwithstanding, PRT's are not a resourcing priority for the agencies tasked to support them.** Staffing of PRT's has historically been a challenge. In 2004, 2 years after the initiation of the PRT program in Afghanistan, the majority of civilian positions in PRT's were vacant. In Iraq, the "civilian surge" announced by Secretary Rice in January, 2007, was designed initially to double the number of PRT's (from 10 to 20) and civilian personnel to man them (from 300 to 600). The actual response to this challenge has been less than impressive. Of the first 160 requirements, initially to be filled by civilian officials, all but a handful have been filled by military personnel. If current trends persist, these DoD personnel will not be replaced by employees of the appropriate civilian agency by the originally agreed date (February, 2007), unless the respective agencies rely on contractors as opposed to their own employees. The remaining surge positions were to be filled by civilians from various civilian departments (approximately 120), but progress on identifying them and getting them to Iraq has been slow. Financial support of PRT's has been similarly meager, in the case of both OEF and OIF just a fraction of overall expenditures on these operations.

## Conclusion

Despite the significant challenges being faced by PRT members, they are making a difference. The testimonials coming from the military commanders who work with PRT's have been universally positive. The value added by PRT's is directly in line with the latest counterinsurgency strategy that military commanders are attempting to implement in both Afghanistan and Iraq. They are integral to the effort to win over populations and convince them that the legitimate local government, supported by national and Coalition forces, can offer opportunities that are far preferable to those offered by the insurgent.

Perhaps equally significant, the PRT can serve as a model for the integration of the integration of the efforts of US government civilian and military organizations. The principals that now guide PRT activities, and what we have learned from the lessons associated with their establishment and initial operations—where things worked and where they didn't, could well inform the efforts of studies and analyses currently underway to improve interagency cooperation and coordination.