

**House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Of the
House Committee on Armed Services**

**Hearing on
Provincial Reconstruction Teams**

**Frederick D. Barton
Center for Strategic and International Studies**

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Thank you for your kind invitation to appear today. For the past thirteen years I have worked in over 25 conflict countries trying to improve the chances for peace. I believe that fast, direct, political development assistance into the various regions of a state is critical to a successful transition. All external efforts must be matched by the engagement and ownership of local people once their personal safety is secured.

Over the past few years we have: served as informal advisors in the development of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs); visited several of the PRTs in Afghanistan; hosted a recent roundtable discussion of USG and NATO officials; and consulted with practitioners in Iraq and Afghanistan. As we have developed broader strategies, implementation plans, and ways to measure progress, we have continued to follow the development of PRTs.

PRTs are useful innovations, but should be seen as works in progress. They extend America's and its allies' presence and connections while providing unique insights. They can be agile and catalytic, and at their best they address local opportunities in an integrated fashion.

Often, PRTs have been left on their own with little strategic guidance, minimal funding, a lack of staff, and overly restrictive security requirements. The arrival of PRTs in Iraq may be too late to be of real value, and their presence in Afghanistan may lack critical mass to make a difference. PRTs will need to change in order to fulfill their promise – and too much should not be expected of them.

The following are six steps that I feel would make PRTs more effective.

1. Targeted deployment to critical provincial areas of continued insecurity. At present, PRTs range from diplomatic outposts with a military presence to military garrisons with a few civilians. PRTs should be directed to the early transition phase and emphasize public safety, territorial defense, and the protection of local actors. Where it is safer, it is better to send diplomats, development experts, humanitarians, and other NGOs – their talents are more naturally suited for such cases and the transaction costs should be lower. In more dangerous areas like Al Anbar in Iraq or Kandahar and Helmand provinces in Afghanistan, PRTs make sense.

The recent combination of a PRT and three embedded PRTs (EPRTs) in Anbar begins to create “tipping point” opportunities in a problematic area. Our 2007 report on Afghanistan (“Breaking Point”) recommended that there be district level reconstruction teams (DRTs) covering 80% of the two key southern provinces where Taliban gains continue. Without a greater presence PRTs will be interesting experiments.

2. Clear strategic direction, operational flexibility and improved connectivity. In both Iraq and Afghanistan there has not been a defined mission or objectives and central guidance has been missing. Many have settled on their own goals and positive entrepreneurial choices have resulted. But when faced with bad Governors (Afghanistan), overly restrictive security arrangements (many places), or questions about the efficacy of the central government (Iraq), the PRTs have been frustrated.

PRTs should also be seen as part of the high risk, “venture capital” period that follows conflict: spending restrictions and audit expectations must recognize that high failure rates are a given.

Feedback mechanisms, where PRTs can exchange lessons learned and can connect to the programmatic initiatives of Kabul, Baghdad or other parts of the USG are also needed.

3. Expanded involvement of a wide range of local people in participatory practices. Critical building blocks of post conflict progress include: seeking out new partners; listening to their priorities; confirming that they represent groups of citizens; making sure that their decision making is open and free of intimidation; identifying real contributions of labor or materials that they will make; and assuring the transparent handling of all funds. Where the process has been rich the products are well received.

Most of this starts with getting to know the communities and their aspirations. Singapore did field assessments in Bamiyan province in Afghanistan before sending a successful dental corps and now a bridge construction and repair team.

4. Improved liquidity. Locally selected, small projects in Iraq are funded at the inadequate level of \$10 million per province this year. While technical assistance has value, the opportunity to leverage funds and to match local initiatives is critical to accelerating hope. That is not happening in either Iraq or Afghanistan – one reason that local people are doubting the sincerity of the international and US effort.

Because the US government funding pipelines are so asymmetrical, there has been a tendency to militarize these efforts in order to provide adequate resources. It is important that more funds flow to both the PRTs and to more traditional platforms.

5. A broader pool of available civilians. There has been a shortage of appropriate talent throughout the brief history of PRTs. Even the NATO model of franchising parts of Afghanistan to member states has often come up short.

The engagement of other internationals and local residents, such as teachers, will help provide the right qualities of talent. The civilian reserve corps initiative by the State Department's Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) is also a step in the right direction.

6. Clarity of leadership and well integrated teams. After several years, many people involved in Afghanistan and Iraq have a difficult time identifying who is in charge of America's efforts. This confusion carries over to the PRTs. Where there is a close marriage of the civilians and the military command, success is greater.

The Dutch effort in The Hague and in Afghanistan is jointly led by three ministers, foreign affairs, defense and development. There is a feeling that ownership is increased for all and turf wars are reduced.

A longer term direction for the USG would be to expand on the current interim arrangement of the "war czar" so that clear guidance for complex operations is provided from the President's office in a timely fashion.

Thank you for this chance to be part of your discussions. As we look ahead at larger states collapsing, it is vital that the United States improve on its structures, analysis, and performance. Your commitment to this goal is valued.