



Afghanistan Policy Page

A one-page brief from the [Afghanistan Congressional Communications Hub](#) on a major issue concerning U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

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Provincial Reconstruction Teams

Take Aways

- **The US and NATO Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have an annual budget of over \$1 billion, making PRTs one of the largest development actors in Afghanistan.**
- PRTs are often focused on quick-impact development projects; some analysts think it would be more beneficial if PRTs focused on larger technical projects and Afghan capacity building.
- **Afghan capacity building is necessary for creating a credible and resilient Afghan government** that can counter the insurgents' Shadow Government and rival development efforts.
- **PRTs vary in their organization, size, objectives, and funds depending on the implementing country. There is very little intra-PRT standardization.**

In Quotes

"You don't learn how to drive until you get the keys to the car." -**Mark Ward**, UNAMA Special Advisor on Development on getting Afghans rather than foreign actors to engage in development projects. 18 February 2010.

Key Facts

There are currently 26 PRTs as part of the NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan

- 12 PRTs are under US command.
- USAID has personnel in 19 PRTs across Afghanistan.
- Collectively PRTs are estimated to have over \$1 billion in annual funding.

PRTs are usually comprised of between 50 and 300 military and civilian personnel.

- Civilians usually comprise between 5 and 10% of total PRT staff.

ISAF Multinational PRTs members:

Hungary, Lithuania, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Canada, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Turkey, New Zealand, South Korea, and the Czech Republic.

Key Issues

Composition and Mandate – Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are integrated civilian military structures, with the objective to expand the authority of the Afghan government in order to facilitate security and reconstruction. Because PRTs can operate in insecure areas of Afghanistan, they have a broad "reconstruction" mandate:

- Engage key government, military, religious, and local leaders;
- Support elections and militia disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration;
- Work to improve security, support good governance, and enhance development;
- Provide humanitarian assistance in partnership with the Afghan government, United Nations, and other donors and NGOs.

Mission – PRTs were initially the only actors in Afghanistan capable of engaging in development projects when they were launched in 2002. Their mission is to eventually disassemble themselves once a province's government is capable of governing and engaging in development and reconstruction on its own.

- The Afghan government has steadily achieved the capacity to engage in many smaller development projects, but they often still are competing with PRTs.
- Some analysts say that PRTs need to focus on capacity building rather than quick-impact development projects, because Afghan capacity for conducting its own development projects will determine when the coalition forces are able to leave.

Projects – Most PRT commanders agree that a focus on Afghan capacity building is critical, but many commentators have noted that PRTs can often feel pressure from their home countries who sometimes prefer short term "ribbon-cutting" projects.

- Long term and large technical projects are outlined by the Afghan Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development's Provincial Reconstruction Plans, but most PRT tour lengths are too short to see these projects to completion.

'Militarization' of Humanitarian Aid – Some analysts worry that PRTs blur the distinction between military and civilian actors since they operate with development means towards military ends. Some NGO workers worry they will be associated with the military and that they will be targeted by insurgents as a result.

- PRTs can quickly engage in development projects and humanitarian relief to ameliorate instability in areas that traditional development actors are unable to reach.
- In 2001 then-Secretary of State Colin Powell noted that NGOs can be a "force multiplier" for US combat teams.

Major Challenges for PRTs

- No clear lines of authority exist to ensure military and civilian efforts are coordinated and effectively planned, and PRTs can have trouble coordinating with each other.
- Poor synchronization of tour lengths and deployments complicate logistics, sometimes leading to unfulfilled promises by departing PRT officers.
- "National Caveats" can restrict the activities of some coalition countries' PRT officers.
- Organizational differences due to insufficient pre-deployment joint training.
- Complex funding mechanisms exist because of the many different nations and departments involved in PRT deployment and support.
- Short tour lengths of PRT officers limits the assessments, monitoring, and evaluations of PRT projects, and hurts the development of institutional memory.

Possible Questions

- When PRTs deliver development assistance do they coordinate with the appropriate Afghan ministry, and if not, does this undermine the Afghan Government's authority?
- What is being done to allow PRTs to focus on Afghan Capacity building?
- How much are different departments of the US government spending on PRTs each year?
- What are the lessons learned with regard to the cooperation of military, civilian, and humanitarian NGO actors?

Further Reading

[SSI](#)
[USAID](#)
[Prague PRT Conference](#)

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