

# Forging Provincial Reconstruction Teams

Members of Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team meet with governor of Parwan province in Afghanistan

By RUSSEL L. HONORÉ and DAVID V. BOSLEGO

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**T**he Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) training mission completed by First U.S. Army in April 2006 was a joint Service effort to meet a requirement from the combatant commander to support goals in Afghanistan. The 12 PRT commanders—6 Navy commanders and 6 Air Force lieutenant colonels—coalesced a disparate group of Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen in little more than a month and trained them for a mission unlike any in the military. Their achievement demonstrates four imperatives for future joint force decisions:

- leverage the incredible agility of our Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen
- sustain our investment in developing the world's finest leaders

- apply the concept of joint tactical manning to more of our forces
- extend this joint manning concept to the interagency realm to harness the Nation's talent from all sectors of government.

## The Mission

Provincial Reconstruction Teams were created to extend the reach of the Afghan government outside Kabul, encouraging international and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to operate in the remotest areas. Varying from several dozen to nearly 100 members, these teams monitor, assess, and report on developments in the regions. They assist local Afghan leaders and officials in establishing and maintaining an effective and responsible government structure that meets the needs of the citizens and supports

the goals of the central government. Of the 23 PRTs operating in Afghanistan, 12 are American-led. The others are provided by coalition forces and the International Security and Assistance Force.

The first PRT was established in Gardez in November 2002. The program then expanded to other provinces. Although a U.S. Army civil affairs team provides many of the key personnel for the teams, the mission exceeds the pure civil affairs scope. The PRTs incorporate other technical specialists, such as police advisors, information operators, civil engineers, and explosive ordnance disposal experts. A team commander must be capable of synchronizing numerous activities toward the regional campaign plan. Since there are no PRTs in the permanent force structure, each team fielded in theater must be created from smaller elements and individuals.

From 2002 to 2005, American PRTs were gathered from forces already in

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Afghanistan. While expedient, this method was hampered by varying tour lengths, with members arriving or departing every few weeks. The personnel turbulence detracted from team cohesion and continuity of operations.

By 2005, it was evident that PRTs were effective and essential to achieving the U.S. strategic endstate in Afghanistan. With coaching and mentoring, local Afghan officials were demonstrating the aptitude for maintaining reliable and accountable government structures that were responsive to the citizens' needs. Cohesive PRTs trained prior to deployment promised to accelerate the establishment of civil government throughout the country.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams vary in size but share the same major components. Each has a command section comprising a commander (either a Navy commander or an Air Force lieutenant colonel) and a noncommissioned officer in charge. The commander is assisted by a combat service support section that handles logistics, a force protection platoon, a civil affairs team, a civil-military operations center, and a special staff that provides technical expertise in engineering and police functions.

There were reports of friction with non-governmental organizations during the early stages of PRT operations. Like NGO efforts, early PRT operations were related to humanitarian assistance. This friction is being abated by better preparation and experience in the field. The NGO community subscribes to the guiding principles of neutrality (not using aid to further a political standpoint), impartiality (providing assistance based on need alone), and independence (not viewing agencies as instruments of government policy). PRTs adopt none of those attributes but are explicitly working to extend the reach of the central government and provide resources in concert with the coalition strategy of enhancing

security and governance. Clearly, they are uniformed instruments of government.

Despite these differences, there are ample opportunities for the two communities to synchronize efforts, allowing them to achieve their goals while putting their resources to the best uses without overlap. With their robust force protection resources, PRTs are best suited to enter nonpermissive regions that NGOs avoid due to insecurity. As conditions improve and NGOs increase their involvement, PRTs can shift emphasis to projects that are inappropriate or beyond the scope of NGOs. The PRTs essentially work themselves out of a job as the local government becomes more capable, security improves, and NGOs take on more of the reconstruction.

### Preparation

Training for the PRT mission progressed in five phases: force protection platoon training, team leader training, main body training, a final collective exercise, and instruction for the commanders at the National Defense University. The first element to arrive was the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 102<sup>d</sup> Infantry (1-102<sup>d</sup>), from the Connecticut Army National Guard. This unit was tasked to provide 12 rifle platoons to form the basis of the force protection element for each PRT. Additionally, the battalion

U.S. Navy (James D. Hamill)



U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Sailors assigned to Provincial Reconstruction Team Khowst in Afghanistan

55<sup>th</sup> Signal Company (Christopher Barnhart)



Sharana Provincial Reconstruction Team meets newly elected provincial council

headquarters would execute other missions in support of maneuver operations once in theater. This unit arrived after conducting extensive coordination and a predeployment site survey with a brigade from the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division (Fort Drum, New York) that would eventually serve as its higher headquarters in theater. The PRT commanders arrived in late January 2006, along with select staff. The remainder of the main body arrived in late February.

The 1-102<sup>d</sup> training was planned and conducted by a training support battalion stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, composed of 58 infantry and armor officers and senior noncommissioned officers. This and similar battalions were originally tasked with training support to Army National Guard and Army Reserve units during their monthly inactive duty training assemblies and annual training. Since 2001, the battalions have been the lead trainers of mobilized Army Reserve units preparing to deploy in support of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) requirements. The training plan started with individual skills and marksmanship and progressed through fire team drills, as well as squad- and platoon-level collective exercises. This plan was crafted so the security force platoons would complete their platoon-level collective events, then integrate with the remainder of the PRTs to assist their preparation.

On January 7, 2006, the 1-102<sup>d</sup> main body arrived at Fort Bragg and went directly to an austere forward operating base in the training area. *Theater immersion* is the First U.S. Army training strategy for rapidly building combat-ready formations led by competent and confident leaders. Theater immersion places units in the sort of environment

55<sup>th</sup> Signal Company (Michael Zuk)

Governor of Parwan province, commander of Bagram Reconstruction Team, and Afghan Minister of Education open school in Charikar, Afghanistan

they will encounter in combat. With few amenities and distractions, Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen learn how to sustain themselves and operate in the field. This experience also provides an outstanding leadership environment that stresses the chain of command and builds cohesion among members. Leaders quickly learn the strengths and weaknesses of their subordinates and build teamwork when executing the endless security and maintenance responsibilities of the forward operating base.

With security force training under way, the training support brigade focused on planning and coordinating instruction for the remainder of the teams. The many unique training requirements for the PRT mission added to the standard requirements for any unit deploying to fulfill a USCENTCOM land component mission. Examples include classes in Afghan government structure and a civil-military operations overview. The Request for Forces specified an extensive list of unique training requirements to enable the teams to perform their mission on arrival. As the trainers conducted their mission analysis, they identified training tasks the teams needed to achieve the endstate of being competent in the required skills, confident in their ability

to perform them in a combat environment, committed to the mission, and disciplined to do the right thing without supervisors present.

After administrative processing, the 12 commanders began training in all the tasks that their main body members would encounter. This approach had several benefits: the commanders could master the skills before performing them in front of subordinates, the trainers could gain an appreciation for the degree of familiarity the Sailors and Airmen had with each subject, and, most importantly, the commanders could have the flexibility to address their unique issues without missing a training event once the main body arrived.

The commanders also participated in officer professional development sessions in the evenings. Many sessions aimed to provide an elementary understanding of topics relevant to team success. Examples included fair election procedures, NGO perspectives, interacting with Special Forces, Afghan culture, contracting procedures, veterinary operations, construction project inspection techniques, and seminars with recently returned PRT leaders.

The arrival of the Navy and Air Force main body elements marked a transition in training. The commanders shifted focus from

personal preparation to team leadership. Most Sailors and Airmen rapidly adapted to their new environment. A few were initially overwhelmed by their new living arrangements, mission, and regimen. The time available to complete training was short even by wartime standards. For units this size, a 60-day training period prior to deployment is ideal.

### Roles and Relationships

The PRT organization added challenges not typically encountered in normal post-mobilization training. First, each team consisted of multiple Service branches: six were Navy/Army, five were Air Force/Army, and one was Navy/Air Force/Army. While the Services have been jointly staffing headquarters for decades, mixing Services at the tactical

level presents different concerns as well as unexpected benefits. One issue is that the Services' enlisted professional education systems generally provide less orientation to other Services' operations and cultures than the officer education systems. Additionally, fewer enlisted personnel have worked closely with their counterparts from other Services. These factors combined to create a clash of cultures when the teams were first formed. Simply communicating was problematic. A Sailor's directions using shipboard terminology was puzzling to Soldiers, just as a Soldier's reference to "latrines, bunks, and MREs [meals, ready to eat]" often required explanation. Despite jargon obstacles, the teams quickly adopted common terms.

The most significant trial of the varying cultures concerned the roles and relationships of officers and enlisted personnel. These differences, spanning the careers of the PRT members and rooted in generations of Service culture, had the potential to derail team readiness. Training was the nexus of cultures. Each branch had strikingly different norms for instructors, mixture of attendees, roles of leaders during training, and feedback mechanisms. Those who attended formal schools with other Service personnel may have downplayed these differences, but they remained a

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friction point during collective tactical training in an all-ranks environment. The leadership skills of the team commanders proved the essential element in overcoming these difficulties. The commanders communicated issues to the trainers and jointly developed solutions that enabled all involved to focus on mission readiness rather than Service differences.

Next, the Army mixed its three components in each team—Active, Reserve, and National Guard. The Navy also sourced the mission from both its Active and Reserve Components. The Army and Navy Reservists brought a wealth of civilian-acquired skills that were particularly valuable to the PRT mission, such as law enforcement, construction management, and other public works and local government experience.

Also, the main body portions of the teams were sourced as individuals. On a typical team, two or three junior enlisted Sailors or Airmen might have been previously assigned to the same base, but the remainder were sourced from installations around the world.

Finally, the civil affairs (CA) teams were drawn from the Army's Individual Ready Reserve. A small number had previous CA training and experience, while the others came from conventional branch backgrounds, such as infantry, armor, and field artillery. Their only knowledge of CA operations was gained in the 25-day mobilization civil affairs course they received after arrival at the mobilization station. Many of these Soldiers had left Active service and had no intention of continuing their Reserve careers. They were involuntarily recalled to Active duty since they still had an obligation. To their credit, they rapidly accepted their

responsibility and became invaluable members of their teams.

Since the Navy and Air Force were committing their forces to a nontraditional ground mission, the Army trainers placed heavy emphasis on battlefield survival skills. Many team members arrived with limited small weapons experience. The First U.S. Army Small Arms Readiness Group sent instructors to Fort Bragg to assist with marksmanship training. Using the latest-generation training devices, these instructors helped instill confidence and competence with the individual weapons.

Improvised explosive device scenarios received the heaviest emphasis. Using the latest tactics, techniques, and procedures from the theater, the PRTs were repeatedly exposed to simulated explosions. The teams conducted after-action reviews following each incident to improve detection, deterrence, and reaction skills until the appropriate responses became intuitive.

Like the security force training plan, the PRT main body plan began with individual-level tasks to bring everyone to a common baseline. These tasks are collectively termed the *warrior tasks and drills* and encompass selected marksmanship tasks, communication skills, urban operations tactics, movement techniques, first aid, and other battlefield survival skills.

Following the training on the warrior tasks, the teams were organized into four groups of three PRTs. These groups were arranged geographically, so teams that might

work together in Afghanistan could establish relationships prior to deployment. These groups rotated through four 5-day training blocks. The ground assault convoy block focused on a collective task required every time a PRT departed its forward operating base and culminated in a live-fire exercise. The second block provided individual training in tactical vehicle driving, combat lifesaver procedures, and communications. The third included additional marksmanship training, while the fourth provided collective instruction on security and stability operations tasks, such as entry control point operations, hasty traffic control points, and base defense.

To assist with language training and provide practice using interpreters, a Pashtu linguist was embedded with each team. These interpreters had more value than anticipated. Some were born in the province where their PRT was deployed and provided recommendations on interacting with local leaders and officials. One helped his commander memorize an opening speech when first meeting village elders. The interpreters lived with their teams in the barracks and forward operating bases and accompanied them to all training.

The final collective exercise, similar to an Army Training and Evaluation Program,



Secretary of Defense speaking to Soldiers involved with Qalat Provincial Reconstruction Team

JFQ (D. Myles Cullen)



Members of Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team review convoy security with members of 102<sup>d</sup> Infantry Battalion

U.S. Air Force (Brian Ferguson)

was the most challenging to prepare. None of the training support battalion instructors had participated in a PRT. To mitigate this experience shortfall, the instructors conducted one video teleconference and one teleconference with Combined Joint Task Force-76 (CJTF-76) and Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan early in the training program to gather information on the most important collective tasks.

In March 2006, the former CJTF-76 director of civil-military operations, Lieutenant Colonel John Harney, USA, traveled to Fort Bragg and assisted. His experience with the PRTs over the past year proved invaluable. He met with the commanders and many teams to answer questions about the mission and coach them on techniques to increase their effectiveness in the provinces.

The collective exercise commenced with a brigade operations order, briefback, and rehearsal. Following precombat checks and inspections, each PRT deployed to one of two forward operating bases and prepared for its first mission. The missions ran the scope of operations the team would likely execute. One scenario involved a simulated meeting with a provincial governor. Another simulated a ribbon-cutting ceremony with a number of surprise developments. A third involved investigating an illegal police checkpoint. All movements throughout the training area were conducted tactically, and each convoy met with a variety of unexpected explosive devices. The remaining teams back at the forward operating base handled simulated mortar attacks, demonstrations at entry control points, and medical emergencies to reinforce previously taught skills. Experienced officers from the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command provided feedback to their CA teams.

For the final week, the commanders traveled to Washington, DC, to attend a pilot PRT commander's course at the National Defense University. They received briefings at the strategic and operational levels and met teammates from the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development. The commanders and their teams deployed soon after the course.

### Training Insights

Our Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen are incredibly agile. They can adjust to changing requirements, environments, and responsibilities faster and better than any

organization on Earth. Our structure should exploit this strength by demolishing barriers and routinely intermixing personnel into joint tactical teams.

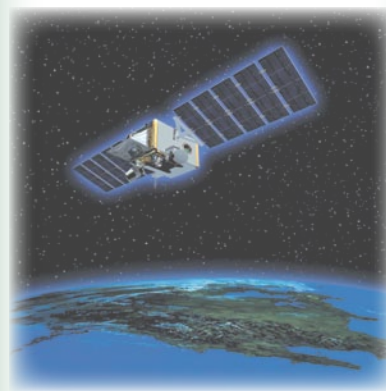
The key to sustaining agility is leadership. We must continue to teach, coach, and mentor leaders. This is an expensive and time-consuming effort that defies quantitative measurement. The Navy and Air Force officers selected for this mission are top-notch. Using the motto of First U.S. Army, their ability to "see first, understand first, and act first" enabled them to resolve day-to-day challenges, while building their teams into cohesive, proactive organizations capable of handling any mission. Many of the commanders had no ground operations experience, but they were ready by the end of their 2-month preparation.

Integrating Services and components at the tactical level vastly expands capabilities. We have seen first hand the impact a few experienced Soldiers can have on a larger organization's ability to conduct ground operations. The same can be done in the naval and air domains. We foresee a day when Service-specific institutional structures are retained but many field forces are jointly manned. These forces—whether combat organizations, logistic outfits, or intelligence units—become globally deployable assets to any ground, sea, or air element in any location. We must use our incredibly talented force to its utmost capability.

The final threshold of jointness is toppling walls between governmental agencies. Today, Federal agencies resemble the Army bureau system at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We remain a government of stovepipes that can occasionally synchronize efforts despite intense institutional pressure to covet resources, techniques, and turf. While this first iteration of Provincial Reconstruction Team training accomplished the joint military training requirement, the teams would have been even better prepared with the full participation of other civilian agencies capable of assisting these provincial governments.

The Armed Forces are among the oldest institutions of the Federal Government and have long and proud traditions. If we can get the Services working together, we can bring the civilian agencies into the mix as well. Victory in this war—and in future wars—requires the seamless integration of all national resources. **JFQ**

## CALL for Submissions



The following are areas of interest to which JFQ expects to return frequently, with no submission deadline:

- adaptive planning and execution
- coalition operations
- employing the economic instrument of power
- future of naval power
- humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
- industry collaboration for national security
- integrated operations subsets (new partners, interoperability, and transformational approaches)
- joint air and space power
- Just War theory
- maneuver warfare
- proliferation and weapons of mass destruction
- prosecuting the war on terror within sovereign countries
- military and diplomatic history

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