

Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: A Canadian Perspective

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, the United States of America declared war on Afghanistan and began an aerial bombardment designed to flush out the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The U.S. turned its attention to Afghanistan as the primary base of operations for Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden as the Taliban had granted Al Qaeda a safe haven within the country and was regarded by the Bush administration as co-conspirators in the 9/11 attacks.¹ Following the commencement of ground operations, American and Northern Alliance fighters quickly routed Taliban and Al Qaeda forces; however, the Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters were not completely defeated. They dispersed throughout the country and began to wage an insurgent war against the U.S. and coalition allies. With the conventional war over, Afghanistan became the first site for twenty-first century counter-insurgency and reconstruction efforts.²

How the insurgency in Afghanistan is dealt with will determine whether or not Afghanistan can emerge as a viable country that supports U.S. interests and is an ally in the war on terror. The U.S. has significant experience in counterinsurgency warfare and to educate its strategies and tactics, the U.S. can draw from experience in Vietnam, Cuba and Nicaragua, to name but a few.

According to Roger Trinquier, noted counterinsurgency practitioner and author, the central tenet of counterinsurgency warfare is winning the allegiance of the indigenous population through an interlocking system of actions: political, economic, psychological and military.³ The preferred counterinsurgency approach is to separate the guerrillas from their logistical support, the people.⁴ In practice, determining who is a guerrilla and who is not is extremely difficult, and the costs of getting it wrong are high.

One of the greatest challenges of counterinsurgency warfare is the importance of the support of the population. While many governments have discovered ways of countering the tactics of insurgencies, the factors that motivate insurgencies persist. These issues often include the perception of repression, anger, frustration, and an inability to improve their overall living conditions through legitimate political means.⁵ An insurgency cannot be successful without the support of the population, and neither can a counterinsurgency. The fundamentally asymmetric nature of the struggle implies that the war for the indigenous insurgents is total, but that it is inherently limited for the great power.⁶ The insurgents are therefore much more motivated than the counter-insurgents and view the struggle as one of life and death and execute the war accordingly.

In Afghanistan, not only is the terrain varied and challenging, but understanding the nature of Afghan culture, history and politics is also difficult. Ethnic identities are important but in reality they represent too broad and simple a framework and have very little relevance in Afghan history.⁷ Village communities, clans, tribal groups and religiously defined local communities form the most important reference points for political identity and action in Afghanistan. Understanding the motivations of insurgency in Afghanistan is complicated,

¹ Vaishnav, Milan. Afghanistan: The Chimera of the "Light Footprint". In Winning the Peace. An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction. Orr, Robert C. (Ed). The CSIS Press. Washington D.C., 2004. pp.244-262 p.244

² Ibid.

³ Tomes, Robert R. Reclaiming Counterinsurgency Warfare. In Parameters. US Army War College Quarterly. Spring 2004. pp.16-28. p.17

⁴ Cassidy, Robert M. Major. U.S. Army. Why Great Powers Fight Small Wars Badly. In Military Review. September-October 2000. pp.41-53 p.46

⁵ Metz, Steven & Raymond Millen. Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response. Strategic Studies Institute Discussion Paper. November 2004. p.12

⁶ Cassidy, Robert M. Major. p.43

⁷ Wimmer, Andreas & Conrad Schetter. Putting State-Formation First: Some Recommendations for Reconstructing and Peace-Making in Afghanistan. In Journal of International Development. Vol 15 pp.525-539. 2003. pp.527-528

and predicting who will participate, via implicit or tacit support, is a challenge. Afghans are extremely skilled practitioners of insurgency, thanks to experiences both with the Soviet Union and the civil war between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance.

The current approach to the insurgency by U.S. and the coalition in Afghanistan involves a several techniques. The North American Treaty Organization's (NATO) mission in Afghanistan is centered on securing Kabul and has only recently begun to expand out of the capital. Operation Enduring Freedom is ongoing⁸ with the mission of capturing and killing Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters. The last approach, and the subject of this discussion is the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have been and continue to be deployed throughout the country under the mandate of NATO and the U.S. with the mission of providing security and reconstruction efforts to the outlying provinces.

The PRTs aim to target the underlying causes of the insurgency and to provide stability and security. As a result, the PRTs will likely be engaged in Afghanistan in the long term, as nation-building operations can be lengthy, complex and expensive.⁹ In Afghanistan, nation-building is even more daunting because what has been termed "reconstruction" is actually "construction". After decades of war, Afghanistan has little infrastructure that can be reconstructed.

Afghanistan is currently the largest recipient of Canadian aid and military forces. In August 2005, Canada deployed a PRT to the province of Kandahar in the south of Afghanistan and will deploy a brigade headquarters to the area in 2006.¹⁰ The challenges that Canadian Forces face in Kandahar are significant. The Kandahar PRT is expected to assist in the stabilization and security of the province and begin reconstruction efforts. However, Kandahar is the traditional base of support for the Taliban, and is a major source of the ongoing insurgency.

The aim of this article is to examine the concept of the PRTs in Afghanistan. The following research will seek to answer the fundamental question of whether or not PRTs are an appropriate strategy (or element of a strategy) to counter the insurgency in Afghanistan. Canada's role in the counterinsurgency and the challenges that Canada will face at home and abroad will also be examined in the context of the long-term implications of PRTs in Afghanistan.

The Current Situation in Afghanistan

The security situation in Afghanistan continues to be extremely precarious. The Afghan National Army and police forces have only recently begun to deploy outside of the capital Kabul.¹¹ Posing an additional challenge is the difficult political situation, as tribal loyalties often supercede loyalty to the central government.¹² These tribal and clan loyalties make the security situation in Afghanistan extremely volatile and unpredictable. Afghanistan has few functioning state institutions, very little in the way of a genuine army or effective police force

⁸ Operation Enduring Freedom is the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. It began on 7 October 2001 with the mission of capturing or killing the leadership of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Operation Enduring Freedom continues to be active in Afghanistan, particularly in the southern and eastern portions of the country. Wright, Julian. (Ed) Canada in Afghanistan. Assessing the 3-D Approach. IRPP. May 12-14, 2005. p.1

⁹ Anderson, Geroge E, III. Staff Sergeant, U.S Army National Guard, Ph.D. Winning the Nationbuilding War. Military Review. September-October, 2004. pp.47-50 p.47

¹⁰ Wright, Julian. (Ed).p.1

¹¹ Rudd, David. Leading from the Rear: Canadian Defence Efforts Beyond Kabul. Strategic Datalink # 124. Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies. November 2004. p.2

¹² Ibid.

and suffers from a dilapidated organization of provinces that are barely in contact with, let alone subservient to the central government.¹³

Guerrilla activities such as kidnappings, hit and run attacks, mine attacks and other forms of improvised explosive devices are common throughout the countryside and in the cities themselves.¹⁴ In the traditional Taliban stronghold of Kandahar, insurgent activities have continued despite the ongoing efforts of Operation Enduring Freedom. Clan feuds are also common throughout the country and contribute to the destabilization of the security situation¹⁵ and thwart coalition efforts at reconstruction.

One of the main sources of both stability and instability in Afghanistan are the regional and provincial warlords. There are numerous warlords throughout the country that control militias and exercise control over regions at the expense of the central government. Indeed, during the war against the Taliban and in the ensuing battle with insurgent elements, the U.S. government invigorated and strengthened the Afghan warlord network, as it was one of the only viable elements that could provide security.¹⁶ The U.S. financed, armed and facilitated the re-emergence of these warlords in the post-Taliban environment.¹⁷ The regional warlords seek political power, money, and immunity from central government control.¹⁸ Their control of militia forces poses a test to the power of the central government and frequently forces the government to make concessions to them.

The warlords receive a significant amount of their income from illicit arms smuggling, transit fees and the opium trade.¹⁹ The drug trade has become the single most important source of income in Afghanistan. It supports the majority of government factions and large sectors of the civilian population.²⁰ Afghanistan's share of global opium production rose from 12% in 2001 to 76% in 2002.²¹ Drugs are essentially the only viable economy; replacement crops have met with little success²² as they are never anywhere near as profitable as opium. The drug trade poses the largest security problem in all of Afghanistan as it funds all forms of opposition to the government, including the ongoing insurgency.²³ The insurgency will likely continue as long as it maintains a strong source of income.

The political and security situation in Afghanistan is extremely unstable, resulting in little economic development within the country. There is little industry, and investors are hesitant to consider investing in economic activity outside of major cities because of the threat of attack.²⁴ The economy is essentially a coping economy, consisting of a subsistence agriculture sector and a weak system of commercial trade.²⁵ A thriving black market

¹³ Rubin, Barnett R. (Re)Building Afghanistan: The Folly of Stateless Democracy. In Current History. April 2004. pp.165-170. p.165

¹⁴ Rudd, David. p.2

¹⁵ Kleveman, Lutz. The New Great Game. Blood and Oil in Central Asia. Grove Press. New York, 2003. p.215

¹⁶ Rubin, Barnett R. .166

¹⁷Watkins, Charlotte. PRTs in Afghanistan. Oxford Brookes University. 30 September 2003 p.19 Ms. Watkins' approach to understanding Provincial Reconstruction Teams begins with the premise that the PRTs are a "peacekeeping" force. However, the PRTs neither have a UN mandate as a peacekeeping force, nor do they have a mandate or rules of engagement that support this hypothesis. Instead, the PRTs are an aspect of a counter-insurgency war. Despite disagreement of the origins of the PRTs, some of the conclusions that she draws in respect to the utility of PRTs and their potential for success are relevant to this discussion.

¹⁸ Rudd, David. p.1

¹⁹ Watkins, Charlotte. p.18

²⁰ Rudd, David. p.2

²¹ Vaishnav, Milan. p.249

²² Intelligence Officer Interview. Interview conducted on 20 Aug 2005. An interview was conducted with an intelligence officer who specializes in Afghanistan, focusing on the strategic implications of the PRT concept. This officer has requested anonymity, as much of what he expressed was his personal opinion.

²³ Watkins, Charlotte. p.18

²⁴ Rudd, David. p.2

²⁵ Rondinelli, Dennis A. Economic Growth and Development Policy in Afghanistan: Lessons and Experience in Developing Countries. In Beyond Reconstruction in Afghanistan. Montgomery, John D & Dennis A. Rondinelli. (Eds) Palgrave Macmillan. New York, 2004. pp.132-155p.136

economy also exists that specializes in opium production and export and the trafficking of illegal arms.²⁶ The warlords are responsible for the oversight of the black market with the involvement of noncombatant profiteers who smuggle black market consumer goods, minerals and conduct blockades.²⁷ All of these players benefit from a weakened Afghan state and therefore have a major interest in maintaining the status quo.²⁸

Legitimate domestic and international markets for Afghan products have all but deteriorated from years of neglect.²⁹ Within the country, human capital has been lost from years of interrupted education and training.³⁰ Without markets and human capital to develop the economy, legitimate development is unlikely in the medium-term.

It will continue to be impossible to secure foreign investment unless the security situation in Afghanistan improves.³¹ In order to stimulate investment, the infrastructure of the country has to be improved. Economic growth is important to generate jobs, income, public revenues, and to build a genuine military and government. For this to be achieved, a legitimate tax base must be secured, which implies an economy from which it can legally be derived.³²

The overall situation is slowly improving thanks to the PRTs and the non-governmental organizations operating in Afghanistan. However, without resolving the security situation and ending the insurgency, the economic situation is unlikely to improve in the medium-to-long term. The question remains: can the PRTs effectively defeat the insurgency and rebuild the infrastructure, and by extension, the Afghan economy to create a viable state?

Insurgency and Terrorism in Afghanistan

Coalition forces operating in Afghanistan often refer to the enemy in Afghanistan as either the Taliban or Al Qaeda; however, the situation is nowhere near this simple. Rather, there are several main groups, all with varying aims. While a comprehensive overview of the various groups in Afghanistan is beyond the scope of this article, a few of the main groups bear mentioning.

The main groups in Afghanistan continue to be the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The Taliban aspires to recreate its former glory in the form of a Muslim state that adheres to Sharia law. Al Qaeda, on the other hand, seeks to defeat the U.S. in any forum and expel Western forces from Saudi Arabia and the holy lands and achieve the overall destruction of Western hegemony.

Another major player in the Afghan insurgency is the Hezb-e Islami Gulbudding group (HIG), named after the warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. HIG and the smaller groups are suspected of being more interested in the power play of Afghan politics, and are likely seeking to exploit any potential for a power vacuum in the central government. There are many other factions as well, and they are collectively referred to in U.S. literature as Other Militia Forces or OMFs.

²⁶ Rondinelli, Dennis A. p.135

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid p.136

²⁹ Ibid p.132

³⁰ Ibid p.133

³¹ Kleveman, Lutz. p.224

³² Rubin, Barnett R. . p.169

There is little in the way of an overlying strategy for the insurgency, as the groups executing it vary significantly. However, they are all vaguely linked to the global jihad movement espoused by Al Qaeda.³³ The ongoing insurgency remains a mixture of the nation's traditional, low-level conflict between groups and the global insurgency centered on radical Islam.³⁴

The basic determinants of success in an insurgency have by and large remained the same for the last twenty years. National insurgencies remain linked to a wider global conflict and they continue to pit a hyperpower against a significantly less powerful enemy. However, there have been several significant developments in insurgencies in recent years. Insurgencies have developed the capability of strategic power projection in the form of terrorism, and have succeeded in building a wider range of regional and global linkages without the aid of a greater power. In addition, the nature of psychological warfare has changed because of technology; while it is now easier to transmit messages to more people, it is harder to sustain perceptions or themes critical to the movement.³⁵

These changes in insurgency warfare have been taken advantage of by Al Qaeda, the Taliban and OMFs operating in Afghanistan. However, the insurgency in Afghanistan has also taken on unique characteristics by metastasizing into a networked global phenomenon motivated by a violent form of radical Islam. Taliban and Al Qaeda forces continue to harass indigenous and coalition actors, and maintain a low level of violence threatening aid workers, soldiers and government officials.³⁶ The insurgency in Afghanistan follows a more or less protracted war model, as this is historically the preferred form of insurgency in Afghanistan.

The Taliban is influential in portions of the southern provinces along the Pakistan border, but this influence is tenuous. While they enjoy the loyalty of local Afghans, they do not specifically control any territory that could be classified as a safe-haven. The warlords are the ones who are fully in control of their territory;³⁷ the presence of the insurgents is merely tolerated, so long as it does not interfere with the goals (often economic) of the warlords.

The level of popular support that the insurgency enjoys in Afghanistan is extremely difficult to quantify. Some aspects of support for the insurgency come from tribal linkages, which can represent less support for the insurgency but rather support for extended family.³⁸ Some support for the insurgency comes from economic incentives: politicians and the security apparatus have a vested interest in maintaining an unstable environment, as it provides them with employment.³⁹ Essentially, the Afghan people perceive support for the insurgents as a choice. They can choose to either support the insurgents or the coalition, but the decision comes down to which group they perceive will be present in the country the longest, and they have therefore hedged their bets accordingly.⁴⁰

The causes and motivations of insurgents have historically been socio-economic and are not static over time. Movements can create and manipulate causes based on the actions of the enemy. The initial causes often decline in importance as the struggle continues.⁴¹

³³ Metz, Steven & Raymond Millen. p.13

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. p.4

³⁶ Rudd, David. . p.1

³⁷ Metz, Steven & Raymond Millen. p.17

³⁸ Intelligence Officer Interview. Interview conducted on 20 Aug 2005

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Cordesman, Anthony H. The Ongoing Lessons of Afghanistan: Warfighting, Intelligence, Force Transformation, and Nation Building. Center for Strategic and International Studies. May 6, 2004. p.104

⁴¹ Tomes, Robert R. .p.27

Insurgents mobilize support by playing up the dissatisfaction with the status quo in portions of the population. In Afghanistan, where insurgency warfare is the status quo, this involves maintaining a low level of support for the insurgency by playing on the natural xenophobia of the Afghans. This natural distrust and dislike for outsiders has provided a significant amount of low-level support for the insurgency.⁴²

In Afghanistan, insurgents have taken to hiding in plain sight, as U.S. and coalition forces have the ability to destroy targets from a distance. Embedding within the civilian population and the dispersal of operators has therefore become the preferred method of protection and operations.⁴³ However, this form of operation implies at the very least the tacit, if not implicit, support of the population. Consequently, it must be assumed that the insurgency enjoys a significant amount of support from the local population, or it would not be possible for the insurgents to hide.

Widely dispersed, networked insurgencies such as the one in Afghanistan are extremely difficult to eradicate. These forms of insurgencies are also less likely to gain conventional victory than more concentrated insurgencies.⁴⁴ Due to the nature of the insurgency and the lucrative source of funding from the drug trade and the potential support from outside, the Afghan insurgency is likely to persist in the long-term. In Afghanistan, the causes and motivations have remained relatively stable, as has support for the insurgency. In order to counter the insurgency, the support for the insurgency must be made to decline and the causes and motivations addressed.

The fundamental issue of finding and capturing insurgents will continue to pose a significant challenge to the coalition and Operation Enduring Freedom. Tribal traditions and the adherence to the Islamic faith will continue to complicate operations. Conservative Muslim tribes view many of the insurgents as guests and have refused to turn against them as they are, by both faith and tradition, under their protection as guests.⁴⁵ Therefore, to defeat the insurgency and root out insurgents, their hosts have to be made to “unwelcome” their guests.

Counter Insurgency In Afghanistan

During the Soviet war in Afghanistan, over 115,000 Soviet troops, 40,000 Afghan government troops and 70,000 paramilitary forces were unsuccessful in defeating the lightly armed mujahideen, whose forces totaled not more than 70,000.⁴⁶ Any insurgency in Afghanistan presents a serious challenge to conventional forces. However, an insurgency whose members have some of the most experience in the world and whose leaders could easily write the books on insurgency warfare presents additional challenges, even to a conventional force well versed in unconventional warfare. Combine a very complex political situation, a global movement supporting the insurgency and complex geography, and the situation could begin to look quite dire.

Insurgency can only survive with the support of the population; therefore, in order to counter the insurgency, the population must be convinced not to support the insurgency. It is not simply enough that they be neutral on the subject. They must actively help the

⁴² Metz, Steven & Raymond Millen. p.14

⁴³ Ibid. p.12

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Cordesman, Anthony H. p.103

⁴⁶ Chin, Warren. Operation Enduring Freedom: A Victory for a Conventional Force Fighting an Unconventional War. In Mockaitis, Thomas R. & Paul B. Rich (eds) Grand Strategy in the War Against Terrorism. Frank Cass. Great Britain, 2003. pp.57-76 p.62

counterinsurgency effort. Even mild support for the insurgency can be disastrous. The counterinsurgent must recognize that the total dependence on the terrain and the population is the guerrilla's weak point. Once the guerrilla becomes separated from the population or his support ceases, then the movement will inevitably die.⁴⁷ In Afghanistan, convincing the population to actively deny the insurgent poses a significant problem because of the interplay between religion, tribes, families and politics.

The U.S. has adopted a strategy that calls for a "light footprint" on the ground in Afghanistan, resulting in an increased reliance on the warlords and militia leaders to provide for much of the "security" in Afghanistan. These same people have a vested interest in maintaining the "insecurity" of the country.⁴⁸ Relying on warlords does have the potential to make life much more difficult down the road for the continuing security of the country.

Thus far, the coalition's stabilization efforts have reflected an institutional approach. They have focused on creating institutions that are aimed at greater cooperation and enhancing the legitimacy of the central government in Afghanistan.⁴⁹ Despite these efforts, the warlords continue to threaten the stability of the central government. Therefore a successful counterinsurgency campaign will only be possible with the collusion of the warlords.

U.S. attempts at nation building in Afghanistan have been criticized as being part of a strategy for "nation building, lite".⁵⁰ Many have suggested that the PRT concept in Afghanistan is an attempt by the U.S. to counter the ongoing insurgency without the overwhelming superiority in numbers that is traditionally required. The U.S. has been reluctant to support the expansion of ISAF outside of the city of Kabul, resulting in a decreased security situation throughout the country and has generally reduced support for the coalition.⁵¹ The expansion of NATO sponsored PRTs is a step in the right direction, and is aimed at increasing support for the mission as a whole.

For an effective counterinsurgent strategy, the U.S. and NATO must manage the overall campaign in every possible sphere of activity.⁵² The political, economic, social and developmental aspects of reconstruction must be merged with the security aspects to create an overall campaign of reconstruction and security and will require a significant amount of coordination and organization. Achieving that in a multinational environment will be extremely difficult, as all the different nations will have their own agendas to follow and their own interests to promote. While they will all likely have similar objectives, these differences can be crucial in a counterinsurgency operation where the message is key and obtaining the support of the people is the only way to victory.

Indeed, an effective counterinsurgency must continually reassess the nature, scope and degree of problems in the country and must proactively address them in a coordinated manner. Addressing these issues leaves the insurgents without a cause with which to mobilize the population. This, in turn, can increase solidarity for the regime and undercut the ability of the insurgency to function.⁵³

The question remains whether or not a coalition of countries operating PRTs can effectively implement the requirements to achieve counterinsurgent victory. In previous insurgencies, a long occupation has often been required, which can only be facilitated

⁴⁷ Tomes, Robert R. p.19

⁴⁸ Vaishnav, Milan. p.259

⁴⁹ Metz, Steven & Raymond Millen. p.43

⁵⁰ Vaishnav, Milan. p.245

⁵¹ Vaishnav, Milan. p.251

⁵² Ganor, Boaz. The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle. Transaction Publishers. New Brunswick, 2005. p.38

⁵³ Tomes, Robert R. p.23

through political will.⁵⁴ One must question if a coalition of countries can maintain this political will, and if the withdrawal of one of the partners will compromise the success of the mission.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Origins and Applications in Afghanistan

The PRTs evolved out of a concept brought forward by two U.S. Army Colonels who participated in Operation Enduring Freedom. The idea was first put into practice in the form of Coalition Humanitarian Cells (CHLCs) with the intent of winning the “hearts and minds” of local communities, show a positive face of the coalition and to jump-start the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.⁵⁵ The CHLCs evolved into Joint Reconstruction Teams and eventually into PRTs, and along with the name change came a new mandate: to extend the influence of the central government outside of the capital and to provide a security umbrella in which NGOs could operate.⁵⁶ The intention was that the Joint Regional Teams would not be used for long-term reconstruction, and would instead provide a short-term solution to the ongoing reconstruction problems. It was generally considered that the Joint Regional Teams would eventually be handed over to non-governmental organizations.⁵⁷

The organization of PRTs is extremely country-dependent. Each lead nation is responsible for establishing its own mandate and criteria for what it requires to accomplish its mission. Each PRT is also composed of varying levels of involvement from lead civilian government organizations and various NGOs.

PRTs have a responsibility to combat the insurgency whenever possible. However, the PRTs are not a robust war-fighting force, and are thus limited in their ability to achieve this secondary aim.

Posing an additional challenge to the security situation is the spread-out nature of the PRTs. They are not concentrated in one region of the country, and their areas of responsibilities do not overlap.⁵⁸ The insular areas of operations of the PRTs can actually

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.20

⁵⁵ Sedra, Mark. Civil-Military Relations in Afghanistan: The Provincial Reconstruction Team Debate. In Strategic Datalink. # 126. Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies. March 2005. p.2

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Maloney, Sean M. From Kabul to Kunduz: Lessons for Canadian Reconstruction of Afghanistan. In Policy Options. May 2005. pp.57-62 p.60

⁵⁸ While risking oversimplification of the British strategy in Malaya, their success was attributed to their strategy of isolating the guerrillas from their base of support through political and economic concessions and resettlement.⁵⁸ In Malaya, the British made the security of the citizens paramount. They used the police to provide intelligence while the military engaged in small-unit operations.⁵⁸ By ensuring the safety of the local population, their allegiance was quickly won. Very few individuals enjoy a state of terror imposed by guerrilla war, and if a force can provide security, then the allegiance of the population can easily be won. By using the local police forces for intelligence gathering, it employed an important element that understood the insurgents, and by having the military assume the risk of hunting them out, freed local police forces for security tasks.

Between 1961 and 1962, the U.S. Army Special Forces met some success in Vietnam using small-unit patrolling, intelligence gathering, and a robust psychological operations campaign aimed at winning “hearts and minds”. The combination of these approaches resulted in the creation of Combined Action Platoons (CAPs) and Civil Operations and Revolutionary / Rural Development and Support (CORDS) by the Marines operating in the I Corps area.⁵⁸ The CAPs in Vietnam were composed of a marine rifle squad and a platoon of local forces for self-defense of the village. Their mission was to destroy VietCong infrastructure within a village or hamlet in their area of responsibility. They also aimed to protect public security and help maintain law and order, protect friendly infrastructure, bases and communications, organize intelligence nets using human intelligence, participate in civic action programs and conduct propaganda efforts against the VietCong.⁵⁸ By working together, the CAPs were able to create a situation of mutual trust, and demonstrate to the villagers that security could be established and that there were alternatives to supporting the insurgents.

While CORDS or CAPs were never deployed on a large-scale, and the insurgency was never defeated in Vietnam, both the concept of CORDS and CAPs have influenced counterinsurgency warfare theory. CAPs and CORDS expanded the quality and quantity of the forces conducting pacification and counterinsurgency operations, and improved their capacity for dispersed small-unit patrolling, consequently improving the scope and content of actionable intelligence.⁵⁸ While CAPs and CORDS were ultimately unsuccessful in defeating the insurgency in Vietnam, they were certainly a force-multiplier while they were in use.

Despite all the positive achievements of the CORDS and the CAPs, the fact remains that the insurgency in Vietnam was never defeated. The CAPs and the CORDS were not widely applied throughout the conflict and they were mainly confined to the Marines’ area of operations, and as such could never effect full coverage of the conflict area. The CAPs and the CORDS left gaps through which the

facilitate the movement of insurgents from one area of operations to the next. Indeed, by allowing the freedom of movement of the insurgents, the very success of the previous operations may very well be negated.⁵⁹

In August of 2005, Canada began the deployment of a PRT to Kandahar, Southern Afghanistan. The PRT is composed of approximately 250 soldiers mainly from 3 PPCLI with elements of JTF 2⁶⁰ attached for a more robust counterinsurgent capability.

Kandahar was chosen as the site for the first Canadian PRT to Afghanistan because of its importance as a major city and the former (and possibly continuing) seat of Taliban power.⁶¹ Kandahar is an extremely complex province within a complex country. For the most part, it is ethnically homogenous, but tribal politics and dynamics play a crucial role in relationships.⁶² Kandahar is at the center of the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan, and while it benefits from a relatively robust combat presence in the form of Operation Enduring Freedom, the Canadian contribution faces a population that fails to distinguish it from American forces.⁶³

The main task of the PRT is to erode support for the insurgency, which continues to maintain a relatively strong presence in the province.⁶⁴ PRTs have previously been established in relatively “safe” areas where security was better than average.⁶⁵ However, this is not the case in Kandahar. The PRT in Kandahar faces significant challenges in working to establish a safe zone for reconstruction and fighting the ongoing insurgency. Generally, PRTs suffer from a lack of military strength to confront in security, an ambiguous mandate, lack of institutional memory and the potential for compromising the role of humanitarian agencies.⁶⁶ The PRT in Kandahar is no exception.

PRTs have suffered from a lack of civilian staffers and a reluctance on the part of aid agencies to work with a PRT in the past.⁶⁷ Indeed, the U.S.’s inadequate funding or dedication of resources to the reconstruction effort has resulted in little involvement from international donors and a reluctance on the part of international corporations to commit to the economic development of the regions in which the PRTs are operating.⁶⁸ The performance and impact of PRTs have also been mixed. As they struggle with staffing issues and a poor grasp of local politics and dynamics, their targeted development projects fail to reach the stated aim.⁶⁹

Despite the establishment of nineteen PRTs by the end of 2004, there exists no overarching framework for the institution and management of them.⁷⁰ There continues to be no strategic guidelines established for their deployments.⁷¹ As has previously been

enemy could slip, moving from one area to the other as security increased and decreased periodically. The effects of CAPs and CORDS were transitory at best as the villages became dependent on the Marines for their security.⁵⁸ The local militias also suffered from poor equipment and training which made them incapable of defending the villages without the marines.⁵⁸ A resident security force was never fully mobilized, and the villagers were never required or trained to take full responsibility for their own security. Finally, the CAPs and CORDS were ultimately unsuccessful in defeating the insurgency because of the difficulty of finding the insurgents.⁵⁸ By applying the concept in a loose fashion the CAPs and CORDS were never able to seal transit ways or cut off insurgents in a concerted and overlapping manner.

⁵⁹ Tomes, Robert R. p.20

⁶⁰ Forsberg, Peter. Public Affairs Officer. Conference of Defence Associations. [Media Advisory](#). 8 July 2005.

⁶¹ Wright, Julian. (Ed) [Canada in Afghanistan. Assessing the 3-D Approach](#). IRPP. May 12-14, 2005. p.8

⁶² Intelligence Officer Interview. [Interview conducted on 20 Aug 2005](#)

⁶³ Wright, Julian. p.8

⁶⁴ Intelligence Officer Interview. [Interview conducted on 20 Aug 2005](#)

⁶⁵ Vaishnav, Milan. p.252

⁶⁶ Sedra, Mark. .p.2

⁶⁷ Cordesman, Anthony H. .p.108

⁶⁸ Vaishnav, Milan. p.245

⁶⁹ Goodson, Larry. Bullets, Ballots and Poppies in Afghanistan. In [Journal of Democracy](#). Volume 16, No 1. January 2005. pp.24-38 p.26

⁷⁰ Sedra, Mark. p.1

⁷¹ Ibid.

discussed, modern counterinsurgency warfare requires a highly coordinated approach with set guidelines to achieve the effects that are desired.

The longer the different areas of the country go without this valuable reconstruction and security effort, the more entrenched the insurgents can become, ferreting out support from the local population, as there are no forces there to counter their message and influence.

The continuing failure to stem the deteriorating security condition in Afghanistan and spur economic reconstruction could lead to a reversion to warlord-dominated anarchy.⁷² In particular, the border with Pakistan continues to be a source of major instability in the country, which is likely to extend the duration of the war and tax the patience of American and NATO member nations and their taxpayers.⁷³

In order to determine whether or not the PRTs are achieving their stated aims, measures of effectiveness⁷⁴ must be implemented⁷⁵ that measure the level of support for the insurgency, the perceptions of local Afghans on the work that is being conducted and measures of the security situation. These measures of effectiveness must go hand in hand with effects based targeting⁷⁶ that can determine what projects can be implemented to achieve the most benefit for the overall security situation, and these effects must be coordinated between the different PRTs to enable the consolidation of the authority of the Afghan Central Government.

The military strength of the PRTs is a drop in the ocean when compared to the existing Afghan militia forces and the activities of the insurgents. Indeed, it is far less than what is required to act as a realistic deterrent to would-be peace spoilers and to counter the ongoing insurgency.⁷⁷ As long as the mandate and aims of the PRTs remains unclear, significant military success is extremely unlikely.

Analysis of the Employment of Provincial Reconstruction Teams

When looking at the concept of the PRTs in Afghanistan, one is struck by a question that cuts to the very core of the concept. That question is: was an overall strategy for the employ of the PRTs ever truly examined in depth, or were they adopted as a stop-gap to fill a void without a clear idea of what they were supposed to achieve? The very fractured nature of Afghan society and the fact that many of the men of age have experienced lives only as warriors, speaks to the intractability of the conflict within their society. Afghanistan is essentially a warrior society with the requisite accompanying pathologies which present further challenges to implementing the peace process.

In seeking to answer the above question, it is important to note that the International Development Committee of the UK Government's house of Commons argued that without a specific peacekeeping mandate, the PRTs (then called Joint Regional Teams) would be able to do little that would bring security to the population and may not enhance the aid effort,

⁷² Vaishnav, Milan. p.246

⁷³ Kenny, Henry J. Counterinsurgency and the Conflicts in Afghanistan and Vietnam. Center for Strategic Studies. Nautilus Institute. Special Forum #35.

⁷⁴ Measures of effectiveness include frequent polling to determine attitudes and beliefs, support for the insurgency etc. These measures are generally carried out by an Information Operations team.

⁷⁵ Intelligence Officer Interview. Interview conducted on 20 Aug 2005

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Watkins, Charlotte. p.31

either.⁷⁸ For a multinational force attempting to counter an insurgency within a country as broad and diverse as Afghanistan, the challenges presented are enormous.

For Canada, the challenges of establishing a PRT in Kandahar are significant. Nothing has thus far emerged in Canadian literature to explain the evolution of the PRT concept or how that concept has mutated and can be used to counter an insurgency in Afghanistan, and how Canada can play an effective role in achieving this aim.⁷⁹

Indeed, sometimes it appears that Canada takes a relatively ad-hoc approach to determining operations and projects that appears to be based on risk aversion and economic considerations before overall effectiveness or strategy. This approach in Kandahar is extremely dangerous because of the fluid nature of the security situation. In Afghanistan, committing ourselves to the reconstruction of the country is not something to be undertaken lightly, as this is a long-term project that will last several years, if not decades, and will involve massive amounts of resources.

Killing and capturing the leaders of Al Qaeda and the Taliban has proven to be quite a difficult undertaking. Ensuring the stability and peace in Afghanistan will also likely prove to be a similarly difficult task. In such a fluid security situation, if one or more warlords becomes dissatisfied with the situation and takes up arms against the central government, a security vacuum could be created, facilitating an increase in insurgent activity.⁸⁰ While President Karzai has thus far done an impressive job at managing the warlords, whether or not this situation will persist is extremely unpredictable.

In 2005, there will be three major problems for the PRTs to deal with. First and foremost, and likely the most dangerous, is the persistence of an anti-regime, anti-western insurgency. However, other problems, such as the continuing presence of local and regional private armies and the disquieting growth of the opium economy⁸¹ will all converge to create a very unstable and unpredictable situation in the short-to-medium term.

The questions that remain unanswered are numerous. Will the PRTs make a long-term difference to the stability of Afghanistan? Does the international community have the political will see the reconstruction of Afghanistan through to completion and can the insurgency in Afghanistan be effectively countered through the use of provincial reconstruction teams?

The PRTs lack a coherent way ahead in terms of strategy and coordination and will thus be extremely challenged to make a difference in the security sector of Afghanistan. In addition, they are limited by funding and civilian participation, so their reconstruction efforts will also be hampered. The political will of the international community will be crucial in sustaining the development projects in Afghanistan. However, it is evident by events in Spain and elsewhere that the political will of a country can rapidly be eroded by terrorist activities, or threats of terrorist attacks. The insurgency in Afghanistan remains strong and is likely to continue as such for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately for the Afghans, while there are no concrete answers to these questions, in evaluation of the concept of the PRTs and their current employment, the answers to these questions appears to be leaning towards the negative.

Major political challenges persist in Afghanistan. Political fragmentation, security gaps and inadequate quality of life threaten the region's stability,⁸² and offer uses for

⁷⁸ Watkins, Charlotte. p.32

⁷⁹ Maloney, Sean M. From Kabul to Konduz: Lessons for Canadian Reconstruction of Afghanistan. In *Policy Options*. May 2005. pp.57-62 p.58

⁸⁰ Metz, Steven & Raymond Millen. p.14

⁸¹ Goodson, Larry. p.34

⁸² Wright, Julian. p.2

insurgent exploitation. Unfortunately for Canada, as one Canadian Army Captain said, “it is easier to hunt and kill than to do the more nebulous reconstruction projects”.⁸³ Certainly, Canadians are about to discover what cost comes with these more nebulous projects. Getting Afghanistan right is crucial, yet 3-D⁸⁴ has not developed into a truly integrated and results-driven approach⁸⁵

The PRT experience is increasingly viewed as litmus test for application of similar models in other post-conflict environments.⁸⁶ Regardless of whether or not the PRTs achieve their aim, the situation in Afghanistan is unlikely to be exportable, and therefore the solutions less so. However, the chances of its success in Afghanistan appear to be low. For the U.S. and anyone else involved in counterinsurgency warfare in the coming years, this will certainly require a new approach, other than the one that has been attempted in Afghanistan.

⁸³ Intelligence Officer Interview. Interview conducted on 20 Aug 2005

⁸⁴ The 3-D approach is Canada’s current strategy in foreign affairs. It involves coordinating elements of diplomacy, development and defense in order to create a more effective response. Development and Diplomacy are used as a force multiplier for Canadian Forces, in support of the concept of the PRTs.

⁸⁵ Wright, Julian..p.6

⁸⁶ Sedra, Mark. p.1