The Origins of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan

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Chris Sidell
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Abstract

The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan are a new form of civil-military cooperation launched by the U.S.-led coalition as part of a strategy to move from warfighting to stabilisation and reconstruction. The remit of the PRTs combines working towards political and security objectives with the delivery of stability and reconstruction assistance, representing an evolution in the delivery of aid in post-conflict situations.

The context for the formation of the PRTs can be found in discourse on the widening of the meaning of security and softening of absolute sovereignty; in the merging of development and security discourse and policy; in the bid for coherence in development and humanitarianism; and in the increasing politicisation, governmentalisation and instrumentalisation of aid. These factors have changed the basis for action by international actors responding to global threats and have led to new modes of intervention. In situations of conflict, a new role of stability and reconstruction has emerged that represents a broader interpretation of assistance than conventional aid actors are used to providing. Development and humanitarian actors, accompanied by the growing engagement of military actors, have tried to occupy this space, raising the importance of civil-military cooperation. These developments have resulted in the need for new structures to deliver stability, reconstruction and political objectives in situations of conflict.

The circumstances that prevailed in Afghanistan have shaped the actions of international actors engaged in nation-building. The country’s poverty, socio-political structures and norms and the need to establish security and effective governance controlled from Kabul to enable reconstruction to progress were intractable challenges to coalition objectives. The mechanism to deliver these objectives was not found within the conventional aid system: the U.S. and her allies chose instead to launch the PRTs. The PRTs are the product of discourse and trends in development, humanitarianism and peace building, but it was the confluence of factors on the ground in Afghanistan that was the catalyst for their formation.
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Research Methods

This study is based on desk research conducted during the summer of 2008. It surveys discourse and policy across a range of themes pertinent to the origins of the PRTs in Afghanistan and attempts to synthesise key arguments and draw them together into a coherent narrative.

The research process was at times iterative. An early idea for the subject of the dissertation - the efficacy of the PRTs in delivering development - was fairly quickly abandoned after early research indicated that too little published information was available. Given the security situation, a visit to a PRT was not likely to be possible. The research would therefore have to be desk-based.

After conducting some initial research of academic and agency papers on the Web, it became clear that the main focus of writing on PRTs was around their work in supporting the process of extending the political and security influence of the Afghan government. This reflects, not surprisingly, their main purpose. Published analyses look at the political and security dimensions - areas of interest but not the original focus of research.

Broadening the research area to take in all dimensions of the PRTs looked promising. Several key texts provided a valuable introduction to these new subject areas and indicated sources for further reading. Academic papers and agency reports provided a more in-depth understanding of the most pertinent areas of discourse and helped shape the nature of the research question. References within each book, paper or report indicated further reading in specific areas of interest. Within a few weeks I had collected a large amount of material.

Material on the relationship between development and security suggested a framework for the research project. An initial proposal entailed only an introductory chapter to set the scene for an analysis of the PRTs. I again collected more material. My interest had repeatedly returned to themes associated with the origins of the PRTs, and after some deliberation, I decided to abandon much of my earlier research and focus only on this area. Given the vast amount of published material by established
authors in these subject areas, and that the new focus of the dissertation was more academically rather than practice orientated, an entirely desk-based research project seemed justified.

Once again, this led to an iterative process: further reading developed new areas of interest and refined the focus of the dissertation. The time spent researching other areas had proved useful however, both in developing understanding of a larger area of discourse I had not encountered before as well as shaping the focus of the final research question.

A number of authors write about the near origins of the PRTs, specifically in the context of the situation in Afghanistan. Others link them to previous civil-military operations. But I have not (so far) found an author who has surveyed the themes contained in this dissertation and drawn them together in an analysis of the origins of the PRTs. This may reflect the wide range of subjects that must be reviewed in order to achieve this. I believe the areas discussed in this dissertation are vital to an understanding of the origins of the PRTs. As stated, this dissertation is a survey of a number of wide-ranging developments and this may be its biggest weakness: a more thorough treatment of these areas is probably necessary.
The Origins of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan
1: Provincial Reconstruction Teams

The Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan

International military intervention in Afghanistan has been accompanied by a new form of civil-military cooperation: the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). PRTs are civil-military organizations configured to operate in semi-permissive environments usually following open hostilities (Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2007). PRTs were conceived to help create conditions for development in areas that are too unstable for traditional development organisations (Joint Warfighting Centre, 2007).

PRTs have become the dominant civil-military model in Afghanistan, with 25 now deployed (Gordon, 2005). PRTs have evolved in response to different local circumstances and vary in structure, size and mission. Three distinctive PRT models have emerged, but the most dominant, with 13 currently deployed, is the U.S. model (Brandstetter, 2005). Individual PRTs are led by NATO member countries under NATO/ISAF control.

PRTs differ in size, composition and operational style but they share some common features. They are typically made up of 50-300 personnel, with the military making up 90-95% and the remainder composed of civilian political advisers and development experts. Their structure includes a headquarters, civil-military affairs section, a civilian-led reconstruction team, engineers, security and military observer teams, linguists, interpreters and a medical team (Jakobsen, 2005). PRTs do not provide protection for local populations: they are equipped for self-defence only. They can however call in coalition air power when necessary (Perito, 2005).
The Purpose of the PRTs

The U.S. Department of State gives the rationale for the PRTs:

“[PRTs] ...were established for the international community to provide both improved security and to facilitate reconstruction and economic development throughout the country” (U.S. Dept of State, 2007).

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which now oversees command of the PRTs, emphasises their political role:

“PRTs will assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operations, and enable SSR [security sector reform] and reconstruction efforts”.

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul issued *Principles Guiding PRT Working Relations with UNAMA, NGOs and Local Government* in February 2003. These principles established three primary objectives for the PRT program: extend the authority of the Afghan central government, improve security and promote reconstruction (cited by Perito, 2005). Reflecting these themes, the provisions of the document outline the PRTs’ role in developing working relationships with local governmental and civil society organisations; emphasise that they should assist in mentoring the Afghan police, and should observe, assess and report on the capabilities of the Afghan National Army, of the justice system; and on factors affecting disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) in their area of operations (cited by Perito, 2005).

The PRT handbook states that reconstruction efforts should be conducted under the direction of the Afghan government to help create the conditions for conventional development agencies to engage in reconstruction and development. Activities include capacity building of local institutions and Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) designed to win the support of the local population. In particular, PRTs should focus on areas where they can add value. The handbook emphasises the interim nature of
PRTs, seen as a transitional structure to support the Afghan government (ISAF 2006, cited by JWFC, 2007).

The operational activities of the PRTs have evolved considerably since their inception in early 2003 as a result of lessons learned, demands and suggestions from the NGO community, the UN and Afghan authorities, as well as the changing security situation on the ground (Jakobsen, 2005). In response to these concerns and developments, the U.S. abandoned its initial view that PRTs should play a major role in coordinating humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. Emphasis instead shifted from an initial focus on QIPs designed to win hearts and minds to the restoration of vital infrastructure (Jakobsen, 2005).

Jakobsen (2005) quotes Colonel Henderson, former commander of the British-led PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif, who characterised the role of the PRTs as one of “robust military diplomacy”.

**Perspectives on the PRTs**

The PRTs have received mixed reviews. The debate is somewhat polarised according to two viewpoints. For international donors, subject to political and cost constraints, PRTs are their instrument of choice in Afghanistan. NATO and the governments fielding the PRTs consider them to be successful. In their view the PRTs are an effective, flexible, low-cost instrument that may see utility in other conflicts (Jakobsen, 2005, citing Goodhand and Bergne, 2004).

Criticisms focus on their mixed effectiveness, over-emphasis on military objectives and priorities, failure to effectively coordinate and communicate with the UN and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and differences in staffing and mission (Abbaszadeh et al, 2008). Humanitarian organisations see them as a second-best solution behind a robust peace operation covering the entire country, while some consider that they have done more harm than good (Save the Children, 2004). In their view, for ideological and principled reasons, there is no place for PRTs (Jakobsen, 2005).
The PRTs are a new way of linking the delivery of political and security objectives with assistance in the form of stability and reconstruction. This represents a broader interpretation of assistance than conventional aid actors are used to providing. And unlike conventional aid actors, PRTs are run by donor government departments. These two developments appear to indicate an important shift in the understanding of what constitutes assistance, and how it can be delivered. This development is interesting because, if the PRTs are successful, they may be used as a model in future interventions in armed conflicts (Jakobsen, 2005).

This dissertation attempts to identify the origins of the PRTs. Are they the product of discourse and trends in development, humanitarianism and peace-building, or have conditions in Afghanistan been the catalyst that has led to their formation?
2: Development, Security, Sovereignty and Intervention

To understand the origins of the PRTs it is instructive to examine some of the significant developments in academic, assistance sector and donor government discourse in the spheres of development and humanitarianism. In particular, how has the assistance sector responded in situations of conflict after foreign intervention?

Linking Development and Security

Superpower rivalry and fears about the spread of communism during the Cold War led to an increase in the number of wars, conflict, humanitarian disaster and refugee flows (Gordon, 2006). Combined with Western initiatives to modernise the economies of the Third World through intervention in a variety of forms, a set of circumstances was created that provided an opportunity for INGOs to expand “into the emergent world of peoples.” (Duffield, 2007: p. 25). Development discourse thus gained recognition among policymakers through this period (Sovacool and Halfon, 2007).

Mary Kaldor (1999) contends that the conflicts of the 1990s were replaced by a broader concept of threats to global instability. Policy documents written in the late 1990’s draw attention to the impact of globalisation in an interconnected world in which problems in remote places increasingly impact other nations around the world (Abrahamson, 2005, cited by Duffield, 2007). In 1992, An Agenda for Peace signalled an early development in this discourse by listing other dimensions of insecurity:

“Poverty, disease, famine, oppression and despair abound, joining to produce 17 million refugees, 20 million displaced persons…. (UN, 2002: para 13).

Ongoing violent conflict was related to under-development and a range of scourges of the developing world: ecological damage, poverty, disease, famine, population
growth, debt burdens and inequality (UN, 2002). A widening range of social trends is now viewed through a lens of security (Duffield, 2001).

The notion of a broadening of security is reflected in the UK’s National Security Strategy (2008). It opens by outlining the range of new threats to individual citizens and way of life that extend beyond the concept of the nation state:

“The Cold War threat has been replaced by a diverse but interconnected set of threats and risks…which have the potential to undermine wider international stability. They include international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, conflicts and failed states, pandemics, and trans-national crime….driven by a diverse and interconnected set of underlying factors, including climate change, competition for energy, poverty and poor governance, demographic changes and globalisation” (Cabinet Office, 2008).

These problems require management by international actors since the alternative may be a destabilisation of Western society (Duffield, 2007). International actors’ choice of interventions include military, diplomatic, economic and humanitarian responses – with growing emphasis placed on the role of development and reconstruction. A broader understanding of the meaning of security implies a wider range of interconnected problems – and this widening establishes linkages that embrace development.

The aim of development and reconstruction is the modernisation and transformation of the societies with which it engages. In addressing development to situations of conflict, effecting social transformation is now a direct and explicit aim of policy (Duffield, 2001). Sovacool and Halfon (2007) write about an emerging discourse on reconstruction that is the product of a U.S. foreign policy that recasts the relationship between development and security. They suggest that the discourse on reconstruction relies on a convergence of economic, social and political factors that extend beyond conventional notions of security. Reconstruction discourse, they argue, “repackages security and development into a singular…worldview” – and may now even be used to justify intervention (Sovacool and Halfon, 2007: p. 242). The link between development and security, and their interdependence, has become institutionalised in
the practices of policy makers, military commanders, academics and development practitioners (Duffield, 2007). Development has now evolved “as a technology of security that is central to liberal forms of power and government” (Duffield, 2007: p viii). The security of the West therefore has been increasingly predicated on establishing an effective developmental trusteeship over poor, failed or failing states (Duffield, 2007).

**Sovereignty**

New optimism following the end of the Cold War saw the UN aspire to a world ‘free from the scourge of war’. To address the new causes of insecurity identified in An Agenda for Peace, Boutros Boutros-Ghali called for limiting sovereignty:

“The time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty, however, has passed; its theory was never matched by reality. It is the task of leaders in States today to… find a balance of the needs of good internal governance and the demands of global interdependence” (UN, 1992: para 17).

The policy document identified four key policy instruments that could be used in the struggle to help ensure lasting peace: preventive diplomacy, peace-making, peace-keeping and post-conflict peace-building.

“Taken together… [these] offer a coherent contribution towards securing peace….”(UN, 1992: para 22). And, “Humanitarian assistance, impartially provided, could be of critical importance as part of a conflict prevention effort…[and] could play an important role in ameliorating the circumstances that generated conflict” (UN, 1992: para 29).

Here, humanitarian intervention was being promoted both as a corrective and pre-emptive tool in conflict prevention, signalling a changed basis for intervention with implications for sovereignty (Macrae and Leader, 2000). Leading politicians were also advancing new ideas about sovereignty. In a speech in Chicago in 1999, Tony Blair spoke of the need for world powers to adopt an internationalist stance to deal
with threats to global stability – a position that diluted the notion of absolute sovereignty. Although territorial integrity is still respected by international actors, sovereignty over people within ineffective states was becoming internationalised, negotiable and contingent (Elden, 2006, cited by Duffield, 2007). Contingent sovereignty is therefore determined by the actions of a range of international actors in the global periphery (Harrison, 2004, cited by Duffield, 2007). Macrae and Leader (2000) suggest that the weakening of sovereignty was a necessary pre-condition for expanding the scope of security – and has therefore led to new thinking about the legitimacy of international intervention (Macrae and Leader, 2000). Indeed, security in the West may now depend on pre-emption (Duffield, 2007).

**Intervention**

Prior to the early 1990’s the UN’s preferred method of humanitarian intervention was based on negotiated access to affected populations under Chapter VI of the UN charter. Peace-building consisted of negotiated settlements, deployment of UN peacekeepers, international supervised elections, aid-driven demobilisation, resettlement and reconstruction and development (Stockton, 2004). But by the mid-1990s there was a trend towards interventions under Chapter VII in which the UN could take action to maintain or restore international peace and security (Duffield, 2007). Peacekeeping operations increased from four in 1990 to fifteen in 2002 (UN, 2003).

DFID advocates the role of development in interventions in failed and failing states, since ignoring these problems leaves open the possibility of colonisation by criminal interests (DAC, 2003). The growing number and scope of interventions has blurred the distinctions between them however. Since 9/11 interventions in failing states have merged political and humanitarian approaches but depended on the use of force. Experiences in Haiti, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and East Timor demonstrated that foreign policy objectives could best be realised by taking sides, picking local allies and going in with overwhelming force (Stockton, 2004).

Western states have sought to justify their interventions by appealing to universal values – particularly humanitarianism, human rights and reconstruction as discussed
above – but also those of free trade and democracy (Macrae and Leader, 2000). Added to this is justification based on the wider concept of security leading to more ambitious interventions (Duffield, 2007). The underlying objectives of the international institutions for example – peace, stability, development, accountable governance have, during this period, become more ambitious and wide-ranging (Donini et al, 2004).

The need to reconstruct war-torn nations following conflict and intervention has led to a search for new policy instruments to strengthen capacity, establish order and deliver basic economic and welfare services (Leader and Colenso, 2005 cited by Duffield, 2007). In pursuit of a notion of global stability shaped in the West, Western powers have built a humanitarian empire, led by the U.S., which works to rebuild state order and reconstruct war-torn societies for global stability (Duffield, 2007). This humanitarian empire is implemented by a matrix of institutional arrangements – linking governments, UN agencies, militaries and NGOs together in what Ignatieff (2003) terms ‘Empire Lite’. Through this interconnected empire the prize of relatively rapid self-rule is on offer (Duffield, 2007). Ignatieff (2003) argues that to confer the benefits of development on the poor living through emergency or conflict, and to remove the threat of world disorder, a period of illiberal rule in failed or failing states may be necessary – both for those peoples’ wellbeing - and our security.

“The essential paradox of nation-building is that temporary imperialism, Empire Lite, has become the necessary condition for democracy in countries torn apart by civil war” (Ignatieff, 2003: p. vii).

It is under these circumstances that the emerging doctrine of regime change, involving full-scale armed force, has entered the peace-building toolbox (Costy, 2005).

Discourse Into Policy

Discourse about the merging of development and security and new ideas about sovereignty and intervention are brought together in Western powers’ discourse and policy. In a speech on development in March 2002; President George Bush said:
“As the civilized world mobilizes against the forces of terror, we must also embrace the forces of good. By offering hope where there is none, by relieving suffering and hunger where there is too much, we will make the world not only safer, but better.”

The U.S. National Security Strategy (2002) links ideas of human dignity, free trade, development and cooperation with international actors and multi-lateral institutions with security and pre-emptive action:

“America is now threatened less by conquering states than by failing ones….poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders….We will disrupt and destroy terrorist organisations by…identifying and destroying the threat before it reaches our borders” (National Security Strategy, 2002).

These ideas formed the basis of what came to be known as the Bush doctrine. Some of the key ideas have been echoed by other nations, although compared to U.S. policy, the UK’s strategy is softer and more nuanced:

“Wherever possible, we will tackle security challenges early….the most effective way…involves early engagement.” It continues: “…the most effective way to reduce the threat posed by failed states is to support fragile states in strengthening their governance, their development and their security capabilities…." (Cabinet Office, 2008).

Although published after Operation Enduring Freedom, the ideas contained within these national security strategies were evolving in conjunction with developments in international affairs following 9/11. They were subsequently articulated in Western powers’ foreign policies. This discourse has set the context and framework for intervention in Afghanistan.
New Humanitarianism

The merging of development and security is associated with a widening in the understanding of security, a weakening of sovereignty and a changing rationale for and more frequent intervention in failed or failing states. These trends have reshaped the context in which the assistance sector must work and have been a catalyst for a redefinition of its role.

Development and humanitarianism continued to evolve during the 1990s. A view began to form that aid could exert leverage over the course of conflict. Aid policy actors could decide whether to engage with countries in order to defend human rights, peace and prosperity (Macrae and Leader, 2000). So accompanied predominantly by U.S. military power, the aid system was tasked to deliver programmes that supported political and security imperatives through peace-building. As a result, the U.S. and other donors were persuaded to increase aid spending – and did so partly as a result of lack of alternatives (Stockton, 2004). But during this period international aid was challenged by critics who questioned its political, economic and social utility. Aid’s capacity to transform war into peace, to overcome social disorder with justice and law and to generate wealth for the poor, although promoted by the sector, were unproven (Stockton, 2004).

O’Brien (2005) writes about a crisis of confidence in the assistance community. Donors were asking why development was failing while endemic poverty survived. Critics drew attention to NGO mismanagement and funds lost to corrupt regimes. These challenges led NGOs to seek a change of course. They wanted to move from inadequately treating the symptoms of poverty and suffering to tackling its causes O’Brien (2005).

O’Brien (2005) summarises the assistance communities revaluation of its methods. If programming was putting people in danger, then it needed to reduce harm. Where conflict was eroding peace then the assistance sector should engage in peace building. Where corrupt regimes were impoverishing their people, NGOs would press for their rights and for the world to act. And if donors were not meeting their obligations, NGOs would seek to educate and if necessary embarrass donors into action. These
fundamental changes in programming represented the new humanitarianism - which would be used to help resolve conflicts and reconstruct societies afflicted by conflict (O’Brien, 2005). Arguments for the new humanitarianism recognised that NGO work was changing and increasingly required political acumen. Donors wanted peace strengthening over emergency response; presence on the ground to assist and mobilise communities; and development efforts to strengthen government capacity (O’Brien, 2005).

NGOs reserved their right to act apolitically, but these new objectives necessitated a move onto terrain occupied by conventional political actors and would require that NGOs become far more politically astute. The new humanitarianism therefore sees assistance as a means to political and security-oriented ends, rather than an urgent and inalienable right in itself (Duffield, 2007, citing Aaronson, 2001).

As a consequence of the assistance sector’s move onto this new terrain and engaging with other actors, it has become increasingly difficult to define the legitimate or practical boundaries of humanitarian action. It is difficult to establish humanitarian and protection issues as joint objectives – particularly given donor’s prioritisation of political imperatives (Gordon, 2005). The developments in humanitarianism have led senior commanders to conclude that assistance work is not apolitical but a tool for ending conflict, securing peace, relieving suffering and easing the military’s departure from a conflict zone (Gordon, 2005).

**Summary**

The themes briefly surveyed in this chapter indicate a change of thinking about what constitutes Western security and about how Western nations can choose to respond to new threats. The basis for intervention has shifted to include new justifications such as regime change and, to a lesser extent, reconstruction. The new humanitarianism, partly a manifestation of the merging of development and security, has a role to play in reconstruction and therefore in interventions in conflict. Indeed a core strategy of Western intervention is pacification, which utilises humanitarianism to accomplish social reconstruction (Duffield, 2007).
Intervention to accomplish regime change in Afghanistan was fought for the people of the U.S. in order to prevent further terrorist attacks on the homeland (Stockton, 2004). But a significant part of the mission in Afghanistan is about reconstruction in its broadest sense: establishing effective political and administrative institutions, establishing security, the rule of law, improving livelihoods – as well as development of infrastructure and services. The delivery of reconstruction activities was a central part of coalition strategy in Afghanistan following the initial phase of Operation Enduring Freedom. The U.S. and her allies therefore needed to secure an effective delivery mechanism to accomplish stated objectives.
3: Coherence and Politicisation

Coherence

Calls for coherence between political and humanitarian action grew throughout the 1990s but perhaps originated in the 1980s (Macrae and Leader, 2000). Citing Adelman (1996), they suggest that neo-liberal interests in the U.S. coincided with the political interests of a foreign policy establishment that was concerned to promote free trade and ensure stability of states. The mechanism to achieve these changes in the Third World - or global periphery - was no longer seen as the transfer of resources, but internal political reform (Macrae and Leader, 2000).

One of the methods used by Western states to exert influence and control in these regions is through the matrix of self-organising civil, non-state and private actors – collectively the assistance sector (Abrahamson, 2007, cited by Duffield, 2007). Since donors largely control funding disbursements, they are also able to influence assistance actors. But in this matrix of actors, multi- and bi-lateral agencies and CSOs, often with competing agendas, compete for space in the development environment, leading to disorder (Duffield, 2007).

This situation has led to attempts by donors and the assistance sector to coordinate humanitarian intervention and to align its objectives with the actions of political actors – and has given rise to a move towards coherence. The coherence debate has both contributed to and is a result of the merging of development and security (Duffield, 2007). At its most developed, coherence is concerned with a harmonisation of objectives, strategies and programming tools (Donini et al, 2004). Stockton (2004) writes that there is a normative dimension to coherence – that integration is an attempt to implement coherence through management or institutional or structural reform. It requires that organisations work together to avoid gaps and to avoid obstructing commonly agreed objectives.
UN Integration

The UN was early in articulating ideas about the need for coherence. In part this was associated with the changing basis of its interventions and more coercive stance – a development that has resulted in a growing need to police transitions from war to peace (Stockton, 2004). In An Agenda for Peace, Boutros-Ghali called for the resources of the UN system, donor nations and international civil society to be brought together to establish sustainable human security as the pre-condition for peaceful development (UN, 1992).

The importance of UN control in crises was developed in the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda. Following the failure of international political and humanitarian leadership in the Rwandan crisis, the report recommended that a team of core advisers should be created for each crisis, who should formulate:

“The essential framework for an integrated UN line of command between headquarters and the field, and within the field, for political action, peace-keeping and humanitarian assistance to ensure that the system speaks with one voice and that there is mutual reinforcement among the three types of actions.” (HD Report, 2003).

These ideas were carried forward in the UN Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (2000) - the Brahimi Report. It introduced the concept of the UN integrated mission that saw the UN’s humanitarian, development, military and political pillars brought together for individual countries under common leadership. UN mission integration and strategic coordination became the mechanisms by which the UN pushed for greater policy coherence – necessary if it was to assume a lead role in securing peace (Gordon, 2006). However, Gordon (2006) notes that humanitarian assistance would be subordinated to the political elements of the response under this framework.

At the forefront of interventions during the 1990’s, the bid for coherence at the UN has provided a normative model for peace-building. Bringing together the pillars of response in the form of an integrated mission presents a template that other assistance
actors, working alongside the UN, can utilize. This idea is developed further in chapter five.

The calls for coherence, embodied in UN policy documents, were partly driven by political considerations, outlined above. However conflating political imperatives with humanitarian concerns has contributed to the politicisation of aid.

**Politicisation of Aid**

Macrae and Leader (2000) suggest that aid may always have been a political activity. Strategies of conflict are designed not just to secure military victory but to disempower the opposition and degrade its economic viability. Aid operations are often designed to mitigate these consequences and therefore aid has an impact on the political economy of war. Duffield (2001) suggests that the politicisation of aid is a result of assistance actors’ encounters with the ‘New Wars’ of the post-Cold War period. Unlike earlier notions of war in which states range massive armies against each other and fight over control of sovereignty, the New Wars are characterised by internal and regionalised conflict, humanitarian interventions and development programmes. These new dimensions to conflict add to their complexity. Alongside conventional protagonists, humanitarian agencies represent another group who compete for access, acceptance and the support of the people (Slim, 2004). An example illustrates the point.

The Carter doctrine of Cold War by proxy saw the U.S. financing the Islamic mujahedeen uprising and the refugee camps in Pakistan, provoking the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The presence of international organisations at Peshawar enhanced the legitimacy of the mujahedeen insurgency – a strategy that was partly dependent on the cooperation of NGOs, the UN system and the freedom fighters (Stockton, 2004). The strategic success of this campaign in advancing U.S. interests impacted Western powers’ thinking about assistance elsewhere. The potential of the soft power of NGOs combined with official Western aid funds coordinated by the UN was seen as a relatively inexpensive low risk tool of foreign policy (Stockton, 2004). In this instance, aid was being targeted to the freedom fighters acting as proxy for U.S.
interests, engaging the aid agencies on the frontline of the Cold War and thereby politicising them.

Macrae and Leader (2000) suggest that a political disengagement of the West from non-strategic countries at the global periphery following the end of the Cold War has often left aid actors the primary representatives of foreign policy. In these situations, assistance actors claim a role in the internal affairs of host countries as they work to deliver aid. Consequently aid agencies have become integrated as resource providers in situations of conflict (Macrae and Leader, citing Gasper, 1999). But as the de facto representatives of state departments, there has been a blurring of politics and development that has eroded the distinction between foreign and aid policy (Macrae and Leader, 2000).

The Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda confirms this view. It identified a lack of coherence in policy and strategy formulation, principally within the political, diplomatic and military domains (UN, 1996). This caused a ‘policy vacuum’ that humanitarian agencies were required to fill, but could not because of a lack of political will by international actors. The Evaluation’s key conclusion was that humanitarian action cannot substitute for political action. Duffield (2007) cites Cutts (1998) who suggests that humanitarian action is instead that very action.

These developments indicate a coupling of politics and aid, in which political actors have viewed aid as a political tool. The politicisation of aid however does not only derive from the actions of political actors, but also by the actions of assistance actors.

**Politicisation by Assistance Actors**

Slim (2004) notes that the majority of agencies in Afghanistan are multi-mandate liberal agencies rather than single-issue humanitarian agencies – with a mandate around poverty eradication, development and human rights that shares the Coalition’s liberal ideology. As well as ameliorating suffering, they aim to campaign against its causes and transform society towards a particular vision of peace and prosperity.
Holding these beliefs represents a political position. Multi-mandate agencies are politicised by their presence in situations of conflict (Slim, 2004).

A study conducted by the Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue of UN operations at the outset of deployment to Afghanistan found that humanitarian activities were being couched in developmental and peace-building terms. NGOs in particular were under pressure to provide assistance that went beyond life-saving measures. The study notes a trend towards ‘developmental humanitarianism’ apparent in NGO programmes by mid-2002 (HD Report, 2003).

Yet despite these trends assistance actors have not defined the type of politics in which they are engaging. A tendency to defend developmental activities under the protection of humanitarianism may conceal their broader objectives (Slim, 2004). This stance has led to a lack of clarity about the purpose of humanitarian aid and the extent to which it is expected to contribute to development and conflict–reduction provides room for manoeuvre by conventional political actors (Macrae and Leader, 2000).

**Instrumentalisation**

The politicisation of aid and the bid for coherence has seen assistance – multi-lateral, governmental and non-governmental – co-opted as a tool in the arsenal of the political masters who provide its funding. Combined with the pressures of delivering results in stabilisation and peace-building in post-conflict situations, in which aid is considered to have an important role, there is a powerful conflation of factors which causes donors to seek to influence and control the objectives for and delivery of assistance.

While these trends represent the instrumentalisation of assistance by political actors, there are pressures too from within the aid sector. The new humanitarianism advocates the role of assistance in peace building. Under this framework, aid is employed to bring about behavioural changes and institutional reforms (Costy, 2005). For example, in Afghanistan during the latter 1990s, the humanitarian focus of international efforts was designed to change the Taliban’s position on human rights
and the role of women (Costy, 2005). By choosing to pursue such policies, assistance actors have invited co-option of their activities by donors.

Developments on the ground have been reflected by changes in donor government organisational structures. For example, a change was made in 1997 that saw the Administrator of U.S.AID report not to the U.S. President, but to the Secretary of State – a move that would suggest that aid in the U.S. is subservient to foreign policy (Macrae and Leader, 2000). O’Brien (2005) notes that U.S. policy at this time, acknowledged within U.S.AID, was to apply all efforts to winning the war on terrorism. Aid was therefore a tool to be used in this fight.

Contemporary nation-building, which looks to the assistance sector to play a significant role - raises difficult questions (Ignatieff, 2003). Collectively the humanitarian system avoids leaving an audit trail of decisions that can be linked to outcomes (Stockton, 2004). Without evidence of results, with donors obliged to justify spending and looking for effective ways to implement policy, donors are further motivated to seek to influence and control the delivery of aid.

**Governmentalisation**

Falling aid allocations in the 1990s forced aid actors to reassert their purpose, giving rise to new claims by agencies about aid’s role in conflict reduction (Stockton, 2004). Concurrently, and associated with growing interventionism, donor governments have been obliged to justify aid expenditure. Together these trends have shaped the need for a more coherent and politically informed aid response to conflict situations (Macrae and Leader, 2000).

The need to address a lack of coordination and control has contributed to the bid for coherence. One of the consequences of this move was to identify the need for the role of coordinator. As discussed above, the UN has often filled this space. But if the UN does not act in the interests of powerful member states, these states may seek a leadership position. Since coordination is needed if coherence is to be achieved, there
exists the opportunity of a foothold for governments to engage in and exert control over development policy and the delivery of development aid.

Confusion about aid agencies’ mandates, operational practices and capabilities leaves Western powers’ state departments and militaries unclear about the role of relief and development agencies and their ability and willingness to cooperate. Such uncertainty is likely to lead donors to choose to exert greater influence over the provision of assistance. In the absence of adequate civilian capabilities as viewed by governments, a link is established between coherence and the role of the military in the delivery of aid: governments may view their militaries as the most secure way to channel and target aid (Gordon, 2006, citing Payne 2004).

Pressure on donors to deliver results and a discourse that sees the need for coherence and coordination and inadequate civilian capabilities – have contributed to the governmentalisation of assistance. Western governments have responded by making organisational changes. The UK provides a useful example.

Following the election of the New Labour government, DFID emphasised the importance of consistency in its white paper, Eliminating World Poverty (DFID, 1997). It stated that:

“…there is a complex web of environmental, trade, investment, agricultural, political, defence, security and financial issues which affect relations with developing countries….To have a real impact on poverty we must ensure the maximum consistency between all these different policies…”

These ideas were subsequently realised in the formation of the UK’s Post-conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) – which later became the Stabilisation Unit. Civilian and military personnel have been brought together into a co-located headquarters jointly owned by the Department of International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence (Cabinet Office, 2008). The department’s mandate states that it should provide:
“…specialist, targeted assistance in countries emerging from violent conflict where the UK is helping to achieve a stable environment that will enable longer term development to take place….filling the gap between emergency humanitarian assistance and longer-term development assistance” (DFID, 2008).

Although the PCRU was set up after the creation of the PRTs in Afghanistan, the formation of an integrated organisation – focusing on stabilisation and reconstruction - directly reflects the thinking that saw a need for and shaped the PRTs in Afghanistan. These operational changes are mirrored with new funding bodies. The UK Government wants “a more strategic and cost-effective approach to conflict reduction” (FCO, 2003). It also seeks to promote democratic rule in the regions “in support of wider UK political aims” (FCO, 2003). Like the PCRU, the UK’s Global Conflict Prevention Pool, which funds operations in line with DFID policy, “combines perspectives drawn from security, foreign and development policy designed to achieve coherence”. The same approach is applied on the ground in the British embassy in Kabul, where “diplomatic, political, economic, financial, development, cultural, security, military and British Council staff are co-located and working to agreed objectives” (Cabinet Office, 2008). These organisational changes reflect an integration of the UK government’s pillars of response at policy as well as at operational level.

In part these developments reflect a lack of civilian capacity and capability that can be called on immediately after a conflict has arisen. Gordon (2005) contends that failure to engage early in crises, military and civilian ignorance of humanitarian principles and best practice, excessive or inappropriate military roles and the unpredictable engagement of different government ministries have led to poorly-managed transitions from military to civilian responsibility that have combined to force the need for governmental integration.
Summary

Coherence has been pursued at a number of levels. The UN has sought to integrate policy and planning, developing the concept of integrated missions. Integration at the UN has been mirrored by national governments who have created new departments responsible for policy, coordination and delivery across the spectrum of activities they deploy in post-conflict environments.

Politicisation has both driven and is a result of the bid for coherence, trends that have contributed to a coupling of the assistance sector to Western political interests. By exerting control over the matrix of organisations that make up the assistance sector, Western powers, led by the U.S., recognise its utility. The instrumentalisation and governmentalisation of assistance are manifestations of this trend. Coherence – manifest as integration, and politicisation – realised as political expediency, have laid the foundations for the conceptual framework for the PRTs.
4: Civil-Military Affairs

Changes in development and humanitarianism and have been accompanied by the growing engagement of military actors in traditionally humanitarian space. From the military’s perspective, this is a result of the convergence of a number of factors. The post-Cold War re-structuring of forces, a search for new roles for the military as ‘forces for good’ and the perceived shortcomings in deployable civilian capabilities were important drivers (Wheeler and Harmer, 2006).

Until the 1990s, humanitarian activities were not included in peacekeeping mandates (Thornberry, 1996, cited by Barry and Jeffries, 2002). UN humanitarianism was instead based on investigating and monitoring ceasefire violations and undertaking stabilising tasks such as brokering of local agreements and defusing incidents. However, ideas put forward in An Agenda for Peace and the Brahimi Report signalled the militarization of assistance efforts. For example:

“…for peace-building to accomplish its mission, no amount of good intentions can substitute for the fundamental ability to project credible force” (UN, 2000).

An expansion in peacekeeping following the Cold War that was led by UN interventions has subsequently evolved to include more direct action by Western governments (Stapleton, 2003a). This has been coupled with a growing expectation that Western and allied militaries will be deployed for stabilisation and reconstruction tasks in post-conflict zones, while providing protection for civilians.

Following 9/11 the urgent task of enhancing Western security challenged the aid establishment (Stockton, 2004). Given the growing acceptance of the need for development to support security and vice versa, this encouraged some Western nations to stress the strategic and force-protection benefits of assistance and reconstruction used as part of a broader military strategy (Gordon, 2006). The merging of development and security also saw the military and private sector taking on operations that had previously been the preserve of the aid sector (Stockton, 2004).
In NATO there has been an evolution of CIMIC doctrine associated with an increase in the use of military forces used to support the delivery of humanitarian aid, sometimes directly (OCHA, 2001, cited by Barry and Jeffries, 2002). New tasks for the military in peace-building include demobilising combatants, facilitating elections and assisting in the rebuilding of political institutions (Wheeler and Harmer, 2005).

McNerney (2005) suggests that the U.S., at the forefront of military interventions, will typically expect to deploy a significant stability and reconstruction effort in major combat operations in the 21st century. The post-9/11 strategic environment has resulted in a focus on stability and reconstruction from the Philippines to Yemen to Georgia to the Horn of Africa. The U.S. is therefore seeking to resolve internal conflicts, defeat insurgencies, and eliminate ungoverned spaces using military advisory missions, security sector reform and training programs, intelligence cooperation, and reconstruction and development assistance (McNerney, 2005).

These developments have resulted in the need to create integrated and closely coordinated military-humanitarian responses (Barry and Jeffries, 2002). Civil-military relations and civil-military guidelines have therefore become more critical in the attempt to delineate the military’s involvement (Stapleton, 2003a).

**The Origins of Modern Counter-Insurgency Doctrine**

Slim (2004) suggests that trying to win hearts and minds in Afghanistan has led to the rediscovery of the link between development and counter-insurgency. Its origins are seen in the conflicts of Malaya and Borneo in the 1960s in which the British Army developed counter-measures to defeat the communist insurgency. Its strategy was based on beating insurgents at their own game: if insurgents set out to fight an integrated political and military war through the people, then counter-insurgency would do so too (Slim, 2004).

The British devised a plan based on coordinating military and civilian activities that sought to deny the Malay Races Liberation Army access to key sources of supplies
Insurgency and counter-insurgency warfare is therefore primarily a political struggle (Slim, 2004). Robert Thompson, in his 1966 book Defeating Communist Insurgency, argues that the primary goal of counter-insurgency is to defeat the political subversion and not the guerrillas. The battle therefore is for the support or control of the people – who are the medium of the fight itself. Whoever wins the people will win the war and win the state (Thompson, 1966). While the aim of much counter-insurgency is pacification, in this understanding, counter-insurgency strategy focuses on improving people’s lives through relief and development work to make people believe that they are better off with the government than with the insurgents (Slim, 2004). For this to be achieved people need to see that the government is winning in order to feel confident and secure to support it. Security is therefore a precondition for democracy. If the state cannot protect its people then it makes little sense for them to side with them against the insurgents (Slim, 2004).

Drawn from his experiences in Malaya and Borneo, Thompson (1966) outlines a number of principles governments seeking to defeat insurgency should adopt. The government must have a clear political aim - to establish and maintain a free, independent and united country that is politically and economically stable and viable; it must function in accordance with law; it must have an overall plan that includes all political, social, economic, administrative, police and other measures that have a bearing on the insurgency; it must give priority to defeating the political subversion, not the guerrillas, and; in a guerrilla phase of an emergency, a government must secure its base areas first – in other words its major towns and cities – and extend outward.

As part of the strategy to win popular support, there is a need to establish and maintain close contact between the government and people. The importance of an effective and widespread police force, supported by a trained army is emphasised
(Thompson, 1966). He argues that ‘winning’ the population and isolating insurgents from their base of support is summed up as good government in all its aspects. Improved social benefits such as health measures and clinics, new schools and improved livelihood and standard of living are critical to this process. Thompson (1966) emphasises the importance of schemes that are ‘self-perpetuating’ such as building projects that develop the production of local building materials. Improved communications are particularly important in remoter areas – and these types of infrastructure projects demonstrate that the government is intending to stay in the long-term, giving people a stake in stability and hope for the future, encouraging them to take action to help prevent the continuation of the insurgency (Thompson, 1966).

Many of these strategies are reflected in the design of contemporary counter-insurgency doctrine deployed in Afghanistan, of which the PRTs play an important part. The PRTs mandate to support the extension of the influence and control of the government in Kabul, liaison with local commanders and tribal leaders to support the process of reconstruction, and security sector reform including disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation, can be traced back to the ideas Thompson put forward following the Malaya campaign. But the formalisation of these tasks, carried out by standing units following their acceptance into military doctrine, was to be a later development.

During the war in Vietnam, the U.S. initially pursued a program of ‘accelerated pacification’ of insurgents by working to enhance security at a local level, with programs to distribute food and medical supplies as well as attempting to implement lasting reforms such as land redistribution. From the outset of this programme several civilian agencies including the Central Intelligence Agency, the Agency for International Development, the U.S. Information Service and Department of State each developed and ran discrete programs, while the U.S. military also fielded thousands of its own advisers. A lack of coordination resulted (U.S. Army, 2006).

In response, the U.S. implemented a program called Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) to integrate U.S. civilian and military support of the South Vietnamese government and people. Civilians were integrated into military staffs at all levels, while CORDS teams worked closely with Vietnamese
counterparts. The relative success of the program is considered to have arisen from its ability to meet basic needs, leading to improved intelligence (U.S. Army, 2006). Despite a predominantly military purpose, these teams, which included civilian alongside military personnel, are the first formalised organisational implementation of civil-military cooperation and can be seen as a precursor to the PRTs in Afghanistan.

**Civil-Military Co-operation**

From the origins of civil-military cooperation discussed above, the civil-military relationship has meant different things to different actors. For the military, CIMIC is expected to reduce commitments by facilitating the transition to civilian administration. Military involvement in rebuilding roads or hospitals is not primarily aimed at relieving suffering, but is designed to support broader military, and therefore political objectives (Wheeler and Harmer, 2006).

McNerney (2005) suggests that CIMIC, while still evolving, can be viewed as the intersection of military-led stability operations and civilian-led reconstruction activities in societies experiencing internal conflict or international military intervention. He argues that the primary objective of stability and reconstruction should be building the capacity of the host nation to provide security and good governance – illustrating CIMIC’s pivotal role in modern military doctrine.

CIMIC capabilities have now been mainstreamed within militaries and in NATO, UN and EU missions, while North American and European militaries have developed specialist ‘civil affairs’ troops and structures (Gordon, 2005). NATO defines CIMIC as:

“…the co-ordination and cooperation, in support of the mission, between the NATO Commander and civil actors” (NATO, 2003).

While the U.S. Department of Defence uses the term civil affairs:

“Commanders plan and conduct civil affairs activities to facilitate military
operations and help achieve politico-military objectives derived from U.S. national security interests” (U.S. DoD, 2001).

In both definitions, the military mission provides the objectives and framework of operation for CIMIC activity. By contrast the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ (UNOCHA) understanding of civil-military coordination emphasises the protection of humanitarian principles and the importance of cooperation and coherent strategy:

“The essential dialogue and interaction between civilian and military actors in humanitarian emergencies that is necessary to protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimize inconsistency, and when appropriate pursue common goals. Basic strategies range from coexistence to cooperation. Coordination is a shared responsibility facilitated by liaison and common training” (UNOCHA, 2008).

This is a quite different understanding and it is apparent that tension between military and humanitarian principles and objectives could quickly arise. Much of the discourse on civil-military co-operation identifies the root cause of tension as a lack of understanding between the actors on each side, exacerbated by cultural and organisational differences (Barry and Jeffries, 2002). When both military and humanitarian organisations come together to work in new structures created on the basis of civil-military cooperation, the senior organisation with greatest ownership of the structure is likely to push for its own interpretation of civil-military affairs to be implemented. It is in the interests of contributing organisations to take ownership of these structures. In the case of the PRTs, military doctrine will take precedence in civil-military cooperation.

The growth in importance of CIMIC is partly a result of the invasion of Afghanistan, which has seen a much larger role for humanitarian assistance in stabilisation of failed states with military-led structures dominating the provision of assistance (Wheeler and Harmer, 2006). In the absence of established structures to manage these activities, new ad hoc organisations had to evolve (Gordon, 2006). Without adequate civilian
capabilities the most secure method to channel aid or become involved in other civil aspects of peace building may be via the military (Gordon, citing Payne, 2004).

CIMIC structures have developed from centres for information exchange between military and international civil institutions to service-providing structures, facilitating the delivery of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) (Gordon, 2006). Military involvement in what are now understood as QIPs began in the Balkans in the 1990s. They were viewed as providing force protection benefits while enabling soldiers to facilitate reconstruction activities. QIPs have since found a place in military doctrine for many western militaries (Gordon, 2006). The UK for example believes that QIPs should contribute to the creation of a more normal and therefore secure environment, and can shape local perceptions. While QIPS may provide fast, visible and quantifiable results, they have also been controversial (Stapleton, 2007). Supporters emphasise perceived but largely unmeasured force-protection benefits, while detractors are concerned that they may blur the distinction between humanitarian and military activity (Gordon, 2006). Notwithstanding, QIPs have been an important component of PRT activity in Afghanistan.

**U.S. Counter-Insurgency Doctrine**

As the world’s dominant military power and leader of the coalition in Afghanistan, an appreciation of current U.S. counter-insurgency doctrine helps in understanding the origins of the PRTs. As Gordon (2006) notes, states wishing to maintain operational relationships with the U.S. must both be familiar with and adopt U.S. military principles.

During recent operations, U.S. forces have developed new ways to organize, train, and equip their forces to assist in stability, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) operations. The military’s support to SSTR takes the form of stability operations, which are:

“...various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure
environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief” (Joint Warfighting Center, 2007).

SSTR is augmented with counter-insurgency doctrine, which has been required to develop rapidly following U.S. engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although the latest version of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counter-Insurgency Manual (COIN) was published after the inception of the PRTs, its doctrine was being developed as a result of choices made by the U.S. military in response to the situation in Afghanistan. It therefore crystallises contemporary doctrine. The manual positions the role of military power:

“The U.S Government influences events worldwide by effectively employing the instruments of national power: diplomatic, informational, military and economic” under the control of joint interagency coordination groups in which government departments work together (U.S. Army, 2006: p2-10).

And the purpose of counter-insurgency is to:

“…regain the populace’s active and continued support for the host-nation government …to deprive the insurgency of its power and appeal” (U.S. Army, 2006: p 2-1).

For the military, counter-insurgency operations require a closer relationship between civilian and military actors to amplify ‘effect’ on the ground (Stapleton, 2007). CIMIC has been instrumentalised within U.S. counter-insurgency doctrine as a tool of information operations and is now increasingly coordinated with combat operations (Gordon, 2006). This development has been partly driven by the development of Effects Based Operations. Although a product of theorising about high-intensity warfare, its precepts have been applied in post-conflict environments and are now a key component of counter-insurgency strategy which may include operations ranging from humanitarian relief to high intensity combat (Gordon, 2006). This creates
pressure on commanders to find ways of changing the enemy’s behaviour or attitudes. To commanders, CIMIC can therefore appear as a tool to help achieve these effects (Gordon, 2006).

The COIN manual devotes a chapter to ‘unity of effort’ – integrating civilian and military activities under unity of command. It states that in COIN operations, political, social and economic programs are usually more valuable than conventional military operations in addressing the root causes of conflict and undermining an insurgency. COIN operations require coordinated military, paramilitary, political, economic psychological and civic actions – in other words, a wide range of operations that includes activities previously the preserve of assistance agencies (Slim, 2004). However, for the military, the distinction of who performs these functions is not important, whereas effective implementation is. Where civilian capacity is unavailable, the manual states that the military should “fill the gap” (U.S. Army, 2006: p 2-2).

The manual takes a holistic view of the role of counter-insurgency and states that counter-insurgents should consider the people’s well-being in all its manifestations. Stability operations are therefore likely to include work to sustain key social and cultural institutions as well as more practical facilities such as the provision of essential services like water, electricity, sanitation and medical care. Indeed, the recovery stage of COIN operations reads like an operational mandate for the PRTs: Logical Lines of Operations (LLO) in counterinsurgency are broken down into combat operations and civil security operations; development of host-nation security forces; provision of essential services; support for building the capacity of governance; and economic development. The manual emphasises that success in one LLO reinforces successes in the others (U.S. Army, 2006).

And, echoing strongly the role of the PRTs in Afghanistan, the COIN manual states:

“As civil security is assured, focus expands to include governance, provision of essential services, and stimulation of economic development….The host nation increases its legitimacy through providing security, expanding effective
governance, providing essential services and achieving incremental success in meeting public expectations.” (p 5-2)

The relationship between the PRTs and evolving military doctrine is evident. It is notable that the activities of the PRTs are now incorporated into U.S. military doctrine – suggesting that the PRT model has, in part or in whole, a place in future U.S. counter-insurgency operations.

Summary

The role of the military in humanitarian assistance in the 1990s signalled an evolving relationship between the military and aid. As a result of recognising how aid can be used to support military objectives, the military’s involvement has grown from providing aid to an engagement that expands the definition of aid to embrace stability and reconstruction activities. CIMIC has therefore grown in importance.

The origins of modern CIMIC can be traced back to Robert Thompson’s ideas, borne out of his experiences in Malaya and Borneo. Taking a more holistic view of the populaces well-being places aid – including stability and reconstruction - at the centre of winning hearts and minds. CIMIC initiatives deployed in Vietnam have required new organisational structures to be fully effective. These experiences have shaped U.S. counter-insurgency doctrine, which has provided a template for the objectives and therefore configuration of the PRTs in Afghanistan.
5: Afghanistan

So far the discussion has focused on developments across a range of areas of discourse to establish the context for the formation of the PRTs in Afghanistan. An array of interconnected factors has converged to create the conditions in which a new type of civil-military organisation could be conceived and considered necessary. However, the PRTs in Afghanistan have only been established as part of post-conflict reconstruction in that country. Did the circumstances that prevail there contribute to the formation of the PRTs?

The Situation in Afghanistan Before Operation Enduring Freedom

Decades of war, ethnic tension, inter-tribal conflicts, lawlessness and banditry have resulted in the disintegration of Afghanistan’s state institutions and civil society leading to population displacement, human rights abuses and a political economy reliant on narcotics (Their, 2004).

The lack of durable government institutions has been a consistent feature of the country’s political history for thirty years. Afghanistan has moved from a constitutional monarchy to a republic to a communist dictatorship under the USSR to a failed state, to a fundamentalist Taliban theocracy backed by Al Qaeda and funded by the sale of opium (Thier, 2004). With no effective government, the provision of basic services has been extremely limited. In 1999, NGOs in Afghanistan were obliged to operate a de facto parallel government running social services the Taliban were unable or unwilling to provide (O’Brien, 2004).

Poverty is widespread. The country’s human development index, measuring education, longevity and economic performance, is 0.345 – placing Afghanistan 174th out of 178 countries in the index (UN, 2006). By 2000 the economy had virtually collapsed. What economic activity remained was regionally based and heavily dependent on neighbouring states. The situation has been exacerbated by a dilapidated transportation and communications infrastructure, leaving populations isolated from each other.
These political, economic and social factors have combined to create a haven for the Taliban and Al Qaeda. In 2000 the Taliban controlled some 90% of Afghan territory while the Northern Alliance controlled the remainder (Thier, 2004). The Taliban however were not interested in nation-building in Afghanistan, but instead focussed on security. They de-weaponised areas they controlled, while co-opting or eliminating Mujahedin commanders in order to ensure their own supremacy (Donini, 2004).

Afghanistan’s position as a failing state is not only shaped from factors emanating from within the country. The outside world, through force of ideas, arms and economics has imposed on Afghanistan’s sovereignty through its porous borders (Stockton, 2004). Regional political, economic and military influence has been exerted by Iran and Pakistan, while cross-border smuggling has been significant in Afghanistan’s economy (Donini, 2004).

**U.S.-Led Intervention**

9/11 placed Afghanistan at the centre of the world’s attention. Following the Taliban’s refusal to hand over Osama Bin Laden, the U.S.’s campaign to defeat those responsible for the attacks led to Operation Enduring Freedom. The operation, which was designed to destroy Al Qaeda and its supporters, was launched in October 2001. The Taliban were removed from power in Afghanistan within five weeks.

International donors quickly reached a strategic consensus. The Coalition and the UN brought together the factions of Afghanistan’s Northern Alliance and diaspora to agree interim power-sharing (Their, 2004). The conceptual basis for peace-building in post-conflict Afghanistan was seen in the broad support for the Bonn Agreement, agreed in December 2001, and the Interim Transitional Authority, as well as support for a rapid transition from short-term relief to longer-term development (Costy, 2004).

Leader and Atman (2005) summarise the goals that resulted from this process: the Afghan population leading longer, healthier and richer lives in a secure and moderate Islamic society based on the rule of law and broad-based economic growth. Achieving
these goals would mean changing the political economy from military rule, oppression and illicit economic activity to democratic civilian governance and a thriving private sector and political freedom.

**Challenges After the Fall of the Taliban**

The Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA) and the coalition faced numerous challenges in moving Afghanistan into post-conflict reconstruction following the removal of the regime. Their (2004) writes about the cleavages in Afghan society: urban-rural and the location of power in Kabul; between modern-traditional and the influence of outsiders and the West; the role of Islam, politics and ethnicity. These cleavages shape the interplay of political, military, social and economic forces in Afghanistan. The role of military commanders in particular is deeply rooted in Afghan culture. A hierarchy of commanders has for decades controlled local and regional militia, with senior commanders requiring the patronage of junior commanders. Without a functioning state providing adequate or comprehensive services, communities have relied on the largesse of the militia for their survival (Their, 2004). An example is the production of opium, which operates in a politico-military framework that is based on local and regional tribal affinities.

These political, military, economic and social structures provide Afghans with a degree of security but must be broken down if the new administration is to control all of the country. The government and its coalition supporters are presented with an intractable challenge if they are to convince Afghans of why a future under a democratically elected administration is better than regional tribal structures of governance – a challenge that means creating a state strong enough to keep Al-Qaeda from returning (Ignatieff, 2003). Yet the central Afghan government is weak and has limited capacity or resources to improve services exacerbating tensions between central power and regional tribal autonomy (Stapleton, 2007).
The Aid System in Afghanistan and the UN Strategic Framework

Leader and Atman (2005) consider the problems of the functioning of the aid system in Afghanistan prior to Operation Enduring Freedom. Services were delivered through multiple projects run by the UN and NGOs, funded by different donors, with little coordination and no over-arching national policy. They argue that this project-based system of providing aid maintained divisions between external actors and national government and reinforced regional power structures – a situation not conducive to nation-building.

The UN Strategic Framework is an example of how assistance was falling short in Afghanistan. The bid for coherence had seen the UN try to bring the various forms of strategic coordination together to unify aid and politics – and specifically development and security (Duffield, 2007). The Strategic Framework was a UN integrated mission tailored to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and based on ideas contained within the Brahimi Report. Synergy across the UN pillars of peace-making was intended to have a positive impact on conflict resolution; it was believed that aid could advance human rights and create space for reconstruction and development and help to foster peace; and that by subscribing to clearly defined principles in each of the pillars would guard against instrumentalisation of humanitarianism or human rights in order to seek short-term political gain (Donini et al, 2004).

But Donini et al (2004) show that the Strategic Framework didn’t achieve its objectives. They argue that it proved difficult to put into operation, while its principles were used to promote agency interests rather than developing common programmes to support peace. Rather than attempting to support failing state institutions, the UN instead created a parallel set of institutions, functioning according to its needs.

The inception of the Strategic Framework signalled an operational commitment by the UN and member states to greater coherence in post-conflict reconstruction. Normatively at least, it offered a model of integration of the pillars of assistance – several of which the U.S.-led coalition would seek to draw on in its attempts at peace and nation-building in Afghanistan. However, to the U.S. and her allies seeking rapid
results, the approach and results of the Strategic Framework to reconstruction is likely to have been viewed as falling short. In these circumstances a U.S.-led push for greater ownership and influence over the shape of the mechanism of peace- and nation-building seemed inevitable.

Critically, Leader and Atman (2005) contend that strategic coordination of the aid system is only effective when led by government. They argue that societies must decide the balance of welfare and investment through the political process. So the path to weakening the position of warlords and regional power structures is for the state to become a reliable deliverer of services. Indeed public support for the establishment of strong central government following the fall of the Taliban was founded in the belief that this would prevent renewed conflict (Stapleton, 2007). Peacebuilding in Afghanistan therefore requires the expansion of legitimate government throughout the country to spread security and economic resources. But since the government lacks the strength to enforce the rule of law this cannot be achieved by force. Instead, a strategy based on achieving monopoly of force and giving regional commanders incentives to participate in the political process is required (Their, 2004).

**Transformation**

International actors participating in the Bonn Process saw stability being achieved through a number of concurrent approaches: reconstruction of the country’s war-shattered infrastructure, economic development led by the private sector, reform of public administration, and security-sector reform which would necessitate disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), the creation of a new Afghan army, a reformed police force, judicial reform and counter-narcotics (UN, 2001).

The UN affirmed its central role in supporting the political transition when it signed resolution 1378 in November 2001. The resolution appealed to member states to support the transitional administration through the use of QIPs and provide long-term assistance for social and economic reconstruction. It also encouraged member states
to help ensure the security of areas not under Taliban control and it loosely called for the protection of the political mechanisms operating in Kabul (UN, 2001).

The Bonn Process culminated in the Bonn Agreement signed in December 2001. It led to the production of the National Development Framework by the ATA, written to enumerate the ideas laid down in the Bonn Agreement. The framework dealt with human and social capital, physical reconstruction and natural resources and the involvement of private sector development, although it offered no consensus on how to prioritise development (Their, 2004). Realising the goals of the Bonn Process – across its pillars of political, security, reconstruction and economic development - represented international actors’ strategies for nation-building in Afghanistan – nothing less than a wholesale transformation of Afghanistan’s socio-political structures, practices and norms. How was this to be achieved?

**Security**

Without Afghan security forces capable of exerting the state’s control, stabilisation following the fall of the Taliban has depended on Coalition members (Stapleton, 2007). The UN Security Council issued resolution 1386 in December 2001 to authorize the establishment of an International Security Assistance Force to maintain security in Kabul. Following its stabilisation in early 2002, the UN and international NGOs called for expansion of ISAF. However, contributing nations, led by the U.S., were not prepared to commit to so large a stabilisation force. This position was echoed at the UN Security Council, which refused to authorise an expansion of the mandate of ISAF (UN, 2001).

Stapleton (2007) contends that the decision not to expand ISAF, while partly associated with stretched resources, may have been influenced by the two coalition agendas in Afghanistan – of fighting a war against terrorism and of nation-building – which may, for operational reasons, be opposed. The U.S. was concerned that the presence of peacekeeping forces could obstruct the prosecution of the war on terror. Added to this was the availability of U.S. military assets, now being moved out of Afghanistan in anticipation of an invasion of Iraq.
Reconstruction

By 2002, reconstruction programmes were underway. Progress however was hindered by insecurity, the slow delivery of donor pledges, the lack of government capacity and lack of resources (Thier, 2004). Foreign investors, who would be integral to developing the country’s economy, were discouraged. The opium trade fuelled corruption across government allowing criminals to co-opt government officials and set back capacity building (Stapleton, 2007). By the end of the year, the UN-ATA mission found that many agencies were working autonomously. Principle reasons included the remoteness of the regions from Kabul, the humanitarian nature of the work the agencies were engaged in, and the pressure they were under from donors to achieve results. With many donors, multiple agencies and bi-lateral funding operating in Afghanistan, the assistance effort clearly needed co-ordination (Donini, 2004).

The UN: UNAMA

The international community had no desire to run Afghanistan (Donini, 2004). Instead it sought to deploy a ‘light footprint’ – which, in contrast to earlier UN peacebuilding operations, precluded the deployment of a large peacekeeping force. Nonetheless, the UN sought a significant coordination and reconstruction role but committed to functions that would allow the Afghan government to take the lead (O’Brien, 2005).

The United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) was the first integrated peace operation following the Brahimi report and is the most institutionally and normatively advanced fielded by the UN (Donini et al, 2004). The mandate of UNAMA was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 1401, which saw peacebuilding achieved through stabilisation of state structures by political efforts and economic assistance to build legitimacy for the post-Taliban administration – what Costy (2004) calls ‘aid-induced pacification’.

The design of the mission was partly attributable to the recommendations of the Brahimi report (Costy, 2004). It emphasised the political aspects of UN support such as elections, political reconstruction and the rule of law, but it also advocated integration with other UN activities including humanitarian operations. Its
responsibilities include peacebuilding tasks, preventing and resolving conflict, building confidence and promoting national reconciliation and monitoring the political and human rights situation. It does not have its own peacekeeping force (UNAMA, 2008). Notably, Costy (2004) considers that UNAMA was not set up to take a leadership role on humanitarian issues.

UNAMA’s civil-military personnel became involved in QIPs to assist ISAF maintain security and help reconstruction. The criteria for these projects was primarily based on their value to force protection rather than helping those most in need. In fact a silence on humanitarian concerns was associated with a consensus within the mission not to ‘rock the boat’ on human rights and humanitarian issues coupled with a focus on peacebuilding (HD Report, 2003).

The thinking that informed UNAMA’s design reflects trends in humanitarian and development discourse at the UN and within the assistance and academic communities, already discussed. Yet the activities of UN missions are a function of the interests of its member states, who themselves are influenced by and are obliged to pursue agreed policy, contributing to the complex interplay of interests which shape the international political landscape. Under these circumstances, developments in the UN’s approach to its pillars of response has redefined its place in nation-building and has helped create the political space in which the U.S. and her allies can pursue their own policies.

Without a strong legitimate voice within the assistance sector led by the UN to press for securing humanitarian principles, there was no challenge within the context of Afghanistan to U.S.-led coalition advances into humanitarian space. The U.S. and her allies, driven by the need for rapid results, could prioritise other objectives – that is to say political imperatives.

Such expediency may well have impacted the design of the PRTs. As already noted, this evolving and experimental project has been influenced by a wide range of factors, especially developments on the ground in Afghanistan. It is unsurprising that the conceptual framework that existed among international actors that led to a focus on hard deliverables rather than ‘softer’ humanitarian concerns also crossed over into the
evolution of the PRTs. In fact, the PRTs – led by coalition-members, charged with a multi-functional integrated mission and the delivery of hearts and minds projects – appears to echo developments at the UN and within the assistance sector more widely.

Civil-Military Cooperation: The Joint Regional Teams

International military forces have been involved in civil affairs from the outset of the intervention in Afghanistan. The civil-military relationship was promoted by international actors in Afghanistan as a key means of delivering results in reconstruction and development that would lead to an improvement in the security situation (Stapleton, 2003a).

Stapleton (2007) suggests that by mid-2002 there was concern that the state building process was slipping out of the control of donors. She argues that this contributed to the development of an expansion of the coalition’s civil-military affairs strategy. In response the U.S. and British put forward plans for the Joint Regional Teams (JRTs) in November 2002. This new organisation would augment the work of the Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells – in which Perito (2005) argues the near origins of the PRTs can be seen – by extending their role beyond previous civil-military practice. The JRTs also built on the concept of the U.S. Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force and Joint Interagency Task Force, but added a force protection component as well as representatives of U.S. government agencies (Perito, 2005). Their tasks included assessment of humanitarian needs, implementation of small-scale reconstruction projects and developing relations with UNAMA and NGOs already in the field.

Stapleton (2003a) cites the primary reasons given by the military for the JRTs: insecurity and instability in Afghanistan. With limited military resources available, Coalition-led forces hoped that stability would be extended throughout Afghanistan through an ‘ISAF effect’. Terrorist activity in 2003 was considered to be under a level of control, allowing coalition forces to address other security concerns: specifically, the relationship between regional leaders, and between regional leaders and the government in Kabul. Military commanders also argued that the JRTs would attract
more humanitarian and reconstruction assistance and would lead to greater stability at these locations, while provincial authorities would only support the central government if Kabul could deliver services. The need to be seen to be doing something also played heavily on coalition commanders’ minds (Stapleton, 2003a).

The failure to address the security gap, largely attributed at the time by the refusal to expand ISAF, intensified levels of insecurity - both real and perceived – holding back the provision of aid and reconstruction. The JRT plan was therefore seen as an initiative to jump start the reforms proposed as part of Bonn process, and was driven by concerns that time was running out for the nation-building project (Stapleton, 2003a).

From JRTs to PRTs

McNerney (2005) notes that the PRTs were conceived and deployed in a changing environment so it is not surprising that their mission and structure continued to evolve. The initial PRT organisational chart focused on the military structure with a dotted line connecting the Afghan government, governmental organisations, NGOs and the UN (McNerney, 2005). But in a rapidly moving political and security situation the JRTs attracted considerable interest from local and external actors in Afghanistan. The government, which had been involved with the planning of the JRTs, requested a name change from JRTs to Provincial Reconstruction Teams to better demonstrate it’s intentions for the PRTs and shift the emphasis to reconstruction (Jakobsen, 2005). The stalled security sector reform process led to calls by mid-2003 from donors and the Afghan Government for PRTs to be more closely involved in security sector reform – particularly disarmament and demobilisation (Stapleton, 2007).
The Assistance Sector and the PRTs

Military commanders appeared open in 2002 and 2003 to ideas about the role of the PRTs (Costy, 2004). Stockton (2004) notes that at the time of the Bonn Process the aid system was expected to help deliver a prosperous future for Afghanistan. But despite its experience in the provision of assistance, the NGO community was not able to provide a comprehensive analysis of basic Afghan survival needs (Costy, 2004). In fact, many NGOs chose to distance themselves from the PRTs. This led Western commanders to look for other prospective solutions to address these tasks (Stockton, 2004).

UNAMA advocated a unified PRT approach that prioritised security sector reform rather than reconstruction projects. It also advised that PRTs should maximise their comparative advantage in areas where NGOs could not operate – such as the building of civil and administrative buildings – an initiative that could assist in expanding the central government’s authority. This would also help prevent duplication of activities with NGOs, would raise the government’s profile while strengthening its ability to function at local level, improve security and minimise blurring of the boundaries between military and humanitarian sectors (Stapleton, 2007).

Costy (2004) also contends that the need for neutral and impartial humanitarian space was assumed by the assistance community, but was not verified sufficiently to argue against the PRT concept. Neither did UNAMA press this position. Notwithstanding, in light of the weight of U.S. and coalition intentions in Afghanistan, a concerted attempt to press for humanitarian space that could have been considered detrimental to U.S. and coalition interests may have been a futile exercise, while wasting humanitarian capital. It appears that the majority of NGOs, in choosing to distance themselves from the PRTs, did not pursue a leadership role or fully seize the opportunity to shape the formation of the PRTs. Not doing so has partly contributed to the encroachment of political, military and private actors – in the shape of the PRTs – into formerly humanitarian space.
Deployment

The first deployment of the PRTs was linked to the transition from phase III of Operation Enduring Freedom, the stabilisation of Afghanistan, to phase IV, its reconstruction (Stapleton, 2007). Stapleton (2007) notes it was at this point that the Coalition moved from use of the term ‘war on terror’ to counterinsurgency. The first PRTs were established to provide a U.S. military and central government presence in key locations, including Afghanistan’s four primary ethnic groups, the former Taliban headquarters and the base of the country’s most difficult warlord, Ishmael Khan. The primary purpose of creating these outposts was political, but at this early stage PRTs were seen as a means for dealing with the causes of Afghanistan’s instability (Perito, 2005).

One of the key assumptions informing the conception of PRTs was that reconstruction and development would be central to expanding the government’s authority beyond Kabul – and that through this process there would be a peace dividend. Deployment of PRTs into the provinces to build capacity was designed in theory to link the provinces to the centre (Stapleton, 2007). Stapleton (2007) notes that although donors and the military spoke in terms of reconstruction, the underlying purpose of the PRTs was to assist the process of political transition.

But with the Bush administration seeking to achieve nation-build in Afghanistan as cheaply as possible with least investment and risk, the launch of the PRTs was seen as a relatively cheap means of managing the situation in Afghanistan, freeing resources for the imminent war in Iraq (Ignatieff, 2003; Stapleton, 2003b). The PRT program was also seen as means of sharing the burden of engagement among countries participating in the U.S.-led coalition (Perito, 2005). Supporters of the PRTs saw them as a means of doing something with available resources (Stapleton, 2007). The light, flexible footprint of the PRTs may also have been viewed as a means of achieving an earlier exit than would have been possible had a conventional peacekeeping force been deployed.
Summary

The prevailing circumstances in Afghanistan have shaped the actions of international actors engaged in nation-building. The evolving national political and security situation, warlordism, Afghan inter-ethnic rivalries and patronage culture, the imperative to establish strong and effective central government in Kabul to govern the whole country and an economy heavily dependent on narcotics have combined to create a unique set of challenges that international actors and the Afghan government had to confront.

The situation is further complicated by a wide array of external forces that have also been significant in determining international actors’ course of action in Afghanistan. U.S. domestic and international strategic objectives and pressures, including the need for rapid and affordable actions, and UN member states’ lack of support for a large peacekeeping force greatly reduced available options to the coalition nation-builders.

Prior to the development of the JRTs, Stockton (2002, cited by Stapleton, 2003a) noted that the transition from UN/NGO/donor authority to AIA/ATA authority was to be a highly complex political process. Although this would be central to the peace process, there appeared to be no plan to manage and monitor this. Stapleton (2003a) suggests that the PRTs appeared to provide the missing plan.

Given the political, security and social conditions that prevailed in Afghanistan, coalition objectives and the lack of available alternatives, the U.S. and her allies were obliged to devise new ways to sustain the nation-building process in Afghanistan. They turned to military commanders and required them to develop new thinking on civil-military cooperation. Uesegi (2007) suggests that PRTs have proven to be a useful channel to fill what he calls the ‘security-development gap’ when no civilian alternative was quickly available, allowing the military to deliver a level of stability so that development could begin.
6: Conclusion

The merging of development and security, in discourse and in policy, originated when Western states saw the value of aid in supporting political objectives. This signalled an evolving interrelationship between politics and aid. These trends have been accompanied by a widening of the meaning of security and changed basis for intervention. Led more frequently by the U.S. and her allies, regime change or reconstruction may now be given as justification for military campaigns.

Under these circumstances, intervention opens up the need for a new role that extends beyond the responses of conventional UN-led peacebuilding to include post-conflict stability and reconstruction. Until now, the new humanitarianism, driven both by its own claims as well as from pressure from external actors, has attempted to fill this gap, augmented by a range of civil-military initiatives. But mixed success has given rise to new debate and ideas about the role of civil-military cooperation and stability and reconstruction activities. It has also seen the creation of new governmental organisations mandated to work in post-conflict environments, with claims made by its proponents that stability and reconstruction can fill the gap between relief and development.

This dissertation opened with the question: are the PRTs the product of discourse and trends in development, humanitarianism and peacebuilding, or have conditions in Afghanistan been the catalyst that has led to their formation?

The areas of discourse discussed here – the merging of development and security, the evolving approach to sovereignty and intervention, the new humanitarianism, the politicisation of aid, the bid for coherence and developments in civil-military affairs, are the context for the formation of a new type of organisation conceived to implement stability and reconstruction activities and political objectives in post-conflict environments.

Yet the PRTs would not have been created if it were not for the complex interplay of forces that prevailed in Afghanistan. The country’s complex socio-political system,
tribal structures, lack of security and the need to exert Kabul’s influence in the provinces, allied to the lack of Western resources and funding, were critical factors that influenced the coalition’s options. It is against this backdrop that the U.S. and her allies, already engaged and seeking rapid results, had to find solutions to the challenge of nation-building. The coalition did not find the answers among conventional actors but chose instead to configure a new type of organisation. To those charged with nation-building in Afghanistan, and pressed by urgent requirements of state formation, PRTs probably appeared to be an expedient solution.
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