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Toward Making Practice More Perfect In Stability Operations

A Critique of Appendix F, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams," to FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*

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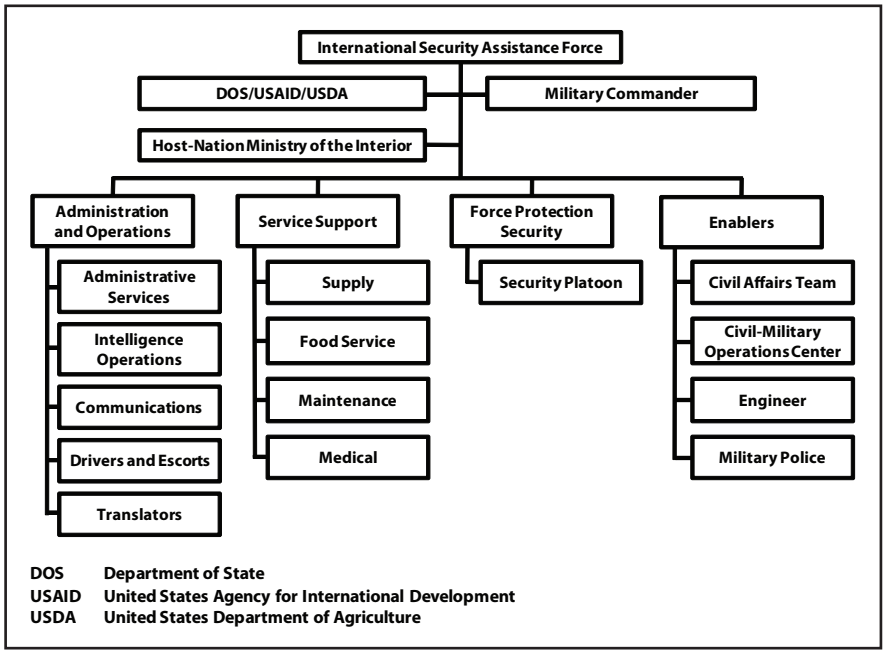
The U.S. Army's history is replete with an aversion to stability operations regardless of the name, e.g., "operations other than war," "peacekeeping," or "small wars." However, the publication of Army Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations*, in October 2008 signaled that a large category of missions – those characterized as neither strictly offensive or defensive operations – are not only part of the Army's charter to engage in, but to win decisively and efficiently. In particular, Appendix F, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, in FM 3-07 is a significant step forward to codify an initiative from Operation ENDURING FREEDOM that the military now considers a best practice in stability operations. The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) concept maximizes interagency strengths, emphasizes a 'whole of government approach' to stability operations, and seeks to optimize the four elements of national power: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic. Unfortunately, as a doctrine to establish "a common frame of reference including intellectual tools that Army leaders use to solve military problems,"[1] the appendix falls short. In promoting a "mutual understanding and in



An example of a Provisional Reconstruction Team organization, taken from Figure F-1, FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*

1. U.S. Department of the Army, Operations, Field Manual 3-0 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, February 2008), D-1.

enhanc[ing] effectiveness,"[2] the appendix is weakened by omissions and ambiguity. Shortcomings appear in both principal sections of the appendix.

In the first section of the appendix, *Principles of Provincial Reconstruction Teams*, paragraph F-3 states that "a PRT does not conduct military operations."[3] This assertion requires either significant elaboration or outright removal. Provincial Reconstruction Teams are elements of military forces that conduct stability operations. With stability operations defined as "…various *military* missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power…,"[4] a statement that a military element (the PRT) does *not* conduct military operations almost certainly will confuse the reader.

U.S. Army officers meet with Provincial Gov. Del Bar Arman in Zabul, Afghanistan, to plan reconstruction projects. (ISAF photo)

Another limitation of the first section is the *Reconstruction* sub-section. The most obvious shortfall of this sub-section is the absence of any mention of PRT interaction with the provincial governor in identifying optimal projects, prioritizing projects, and identifying all potential funding sources, e.g., U.S. Government, host nation, and the international community. Not only are these important tasks, they are extremely difficult responsibilities that require the utmost persuasive skill of the PRT leadership. The PRT commander must ensure that nominated projects are selected and developed in concert with long-term U.S. and host nation goals. These frequently may conflict with or at least not directly align with the parochial whims of the provincial governor. The sub-section further incorrectly states, in paragraph F-11, that the "PRT exists to encourage central ministries to distribute funds to provincial representatives."[5] This is dangerously misleading. Although such a scenario may occasionally occur, a Provincial Reconstruction Team's consistent direct dialogue with the central government would likely undermine the legitimacy of the provincial government, especially its governor. Likewise, the entire F-12 paragraph explaining Provincial Reconstruction Development Committees (PRDC) is both confusing and too prescriptive. The paragraph should define which level of host-nation officials are members of the PRDC – district, provincial, national, or a combination there of.

Prior to deployment Provincial Reconstruction Team members train to meet with local province officials to address Commander's Emergency Response Program projects. (U.S. Army photo)

Overall, the entire *Reconstruction* sub-section focuses on a 'host nation committee' approach to project nomination. In my experience, governors often marginalize their provincial committees and retain sole authority for reconstruction priorities. Also, the sentence, "A PRT has limited involvement in project implementation following project selection" is wrong.[6] A PRT has extensive involvement by way of contractor identification, contract initiation, and quality assurance if the endeavor is a Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP)-funded project.

2. U.S. Department of the Army, Operations, Field Manual 3-0 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, February 2008), D-1.
3. U.S. Department of the Army, Stability Operations, Field Manual 3-07 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, October 2008), F-1.
4. U.S. Department of the Army, Operations, Glossary-13.
5. U.S. Department of the Army, Stability Operations, F-11.
6. U.S. Department of the Army, Stability Operations, F-11.

Finally, yet another shortfall in the *Reconstruction* sub-section is that, when providing illustrative examples, the manual omits any mention of the construction of roads and bridges. Although some might feel this is not particularly significant, the omission in fact results in a failure to shed light on exactly those critical individual projects that contribute to self-sustaining systems affecting multiple areas, i.e., security, transportation, commerce, and education.

Australian and American Army combat engineers work together to build a replacement bridge in Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo)

The Appendix's second major section, *Structure of Provincial Reconstruction Teams*, also disappoints. The reader has no point of departure regarding PRT-internal unity of command and unity of effort. Furthermore, in describing the team leader's relationship to actors external to the PRT in paragraph F-18 of the sub- section on *Staff Functions*, the appendix omits sufficient discussion of the relationship with the PRT's military element. With the PRT being a nontraditional, interagency element, a considerable treatment of the relationship is required. Similarly, Figure F-1, Example of provincial reconstruction team organization, recognizes a PRT *Military Commander*. Yet, paragraph F-19 identifies the position as *chief of staff* or *executive officer*. One could suspect that this major disconnect is an unwillingness by Training and Doctrine Command to define, or inability to obtain Department of State and Department of Defense consensus on, who is truly in charge of the PRT. The appendix's avoidance of this topic is perhaps its most significant failing.

Finally, providing increased discussion of two items would greatly add value to the appendix. First, the appendix should elaborate further on the role of the bilingual bicultural adviser (paragraph F-29). The fact that this individual is usually whom the host nation populace sees and hears most cannot be overemphasized. The values, commitment, and *persona* of this individual should mirror that of the PRT. Second, the PRT's interagency composition, with each individual possessing unique experiences and differing perspectives, develops a synergy that can be brought to bear on any problem that the PRT encounters. The appendix would best serve if it described and emphasized this phenomenon.

Members of the North Babil Provincial Reconstruction Team discuss plans for creation of an area fish holding pond with a local Sheikh (U.S. Army photo)

Conclusion

The likelihood that the United States, alone or as part of a coalition, will undertake stability operations in fragile of failed states remains as high today as it did a decade ago. One can expect the U.S. Army's participation in Provincial Reconstruction Teams to be part of any successful strategy. Unfortunately, the Army's current doctrine on PRTs contains ambiguity and omissions that detract from its effectiveness. As the body of knowledge on this subject is expanding, the next revision to FM 3-07 needs to overcome these shortcomings.