



Occasional Paper IV

The Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Role model for civil-military relations?

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The responsibility for contents and views expressed in this *Occasional Paper* lies entirely with the author

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Introduction

Since 2003, 26 so-called Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), currently under the authority of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), have been established in Afghanistan. Their objective is to extend the authority of the Afghan central government, enhance security in the provinces, and facilitate humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts (NATO, 2003). PRTs are relatively small integrated civil-military units designed as a stabilizing force in Afghanistan's provinces and were first introduced in 2002 by the US army in the context of the 'global war on terror' as Operation Enduring Freedom. The PRTs model is part of the NATO strategy of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC). According to the PRT Handbook, PRTs combine both military personnel and civilian staff from the diplomatic corps as well as from development cooperation: "A PRT is a civil-military institution that is able to penetrate the more unstable and insecure areas because of its military component and is able to stabilize these areas because of the combined capabilities of its diplomacy, military, and economic components." (ISAF, 2006, p. 5).

The establishment of the PRTs in Afghanistan has led to an intense debate about civil-military relations. In the field there has always been interaction between military and humanitarian actors during former multinational peace operations. It used to be common sense that humanitarian action was independent of politics and governments and was not included in peacekeeping mandates. However, since the end of the East-West conflict in the late 1980s, the foreign and security policy framework conditions have changed considerably for humanitarian aid. With the end of the Cold War a new model of peacekeeping was established, which led to three important changes: 1) increased number of peacekeeping operations, 2) an expanded and

more dangerous form of operations, and 3) an emphasis on 'humanitarian intervention' in many of the operations (Barry and Jefferys, 2002, p. 4). Integrated approaches to peacebuilding have become more important in the new model of peacekeeping that combines the instruments of security, foreign and development policy. As a consequence, humanitarian aid has increasingly become an integral part of multinational peace operations. In the framework of this integrated approach, armed forces are increasingly taking over a multifunctional role including counter-insurgency operations, peacekeeping and humanitarian aid. As a result, the independence of humanitarian aid had to be defended by aid agencies time and again in political conflicts in the 1990s, e.g. in Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and in the Kosovo.

Afghanistan is a special case. Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Afghanistan became a strategic priority for the coalition forces and a testing ground for the 'global war on terror' as well as the focus of international attention and aid. The close involvement of the military in the delivery of aid within the PRTs goes far beyond the former NATO concept of civil-military cooperation and has set an important precedent for civil-military relations. Thus, according to Frerks, Klem, van Laar et al. (2006, p. 7) the PRT experiment can be considered "a crucible of civil-military relations in the future".

Humanitarian aid agencies working in Afghanistan have been critical of the PRTs and how they operate ever since those teams were established in 2002. For many humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) the PRTs embody a new paradigm of linking military, political and humanitarian aims in international peace operations and, thus blurring if not erasing altogether the distinction between military and civilian actors. On one hand, aid agencies argue that it is essential to keep the different mandates separate and that otherwise the "humanitarian space" they need to operate

will be jeopardized and the safety of aid workers will be endangered. On the other hand, military actors argue that there is a need for integrated civil-military operations to facilitate reconstruction and development as well as to win the 'hearts and minds' of the Afghan population. Furthermore, according to the political rationale of the governments, which provide troops for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), PRTs are the best political option available to address the security problem in Afghanistan's provinces. Although there is an intense debate about the pros and cons of PRTs in Afghanistan, the humanitarian perspective in this discussion is rather underestimated or politically marginalized.

The main purpose of this *Occasional Paper* is to provide a humanitarian perspective to the ongoing debate about PRTs as a role model for civil-military relations. It will analyze the security dilemma in Afghanistan and the impact of the PRTs on the delivery of humanitarian aid. It will further explore the consequences of 'blurring the line' between humanitarian aid and military goals. This *Paper* will draw upon the discussion within the humanitarian community, especially with German humanitarian NGOs, which have made clear their position on civil-military cooperation and the PRTs (VENRO, 2003; 2009). The German PRTs in northern Afghanistan will serve as a case study because the German government has put into practice a separation of roles based on an awareness of the different mandates of PRTs (Deutsche Bundesregierung 2003, p. 3f). This *Paper* will reflect on the following questions:

- What is the impact of international military operations and the changing context of security and conflict in Afghanistan on different humanitarian actors?
- What is the impact of the PRTs on the programs of humanitarian aid agencies and their concerns regarding the preservation of 'humanitarian space'?

- What are the lessons learned with regard to the cooperation of military and humanitarian actors within the PRT framework?

The conclusion consists of a set of recommendations regarding the scope and limits of cooperation between armed forces and humanitarian agencies.

The military intervention in Afghanistan after 9/11 and the Provincial Reconstruction Teams

After the Soviet troops left Afghanistan in 1988 and after two decades of civil war had devastated the country without attracting significant media or political attention, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 once again brought Afghanistan onto the international political agenda. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks the former US President George W. Bush launched a 'global war on terror' and Afghanistan became its first priority. Washington began to create a 'coalition of the willing' and started the United States-led military intervention in Afghanistan. For US policymakers the terrorist attacks exemplified "the danger that a weak or failed state, in this case Afghanistan, can pose to the outside world as a haven for terrorists and source of regional instability" (Sedra, 2005, p. 2). While the military intervention in Afghanistan led soon to the collapse of the Taliban regime in November 2001, the fight against Taliban forces, Al-Qaida and other oppositional armed forces has continued until today.

The international engagement in Afghanistan after 9/11

After the fall of the Taliban, Afghan representatives met in Bonn, Germany, and signed the Petersberg Agreement in December 2001. This agreement outlined a power

sharing arrangement and the plans for a new constitution and democratic government as well as military stabilization and economic reconstruction. The conference was facilitated by the Special Representative of the UN General Secretary, Lakdar Brahimi who developed the 'light footprint' approach for international engagement in Afghanistan. According to this strategy, only a small international peacekeeping force was to be created to patrol Kabul and to assist the Afghan government in providing security. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was subsequently authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 1386 (20 December 2001) "to assist the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas". The idea behind the 'light footprint' strategy was to give ISAF the function of a low profile stabilization force rather than a combat force in order to avoid being regarded as occupying force. ISAF was given a peace enforcement mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and was initially led by several European countries until August 2003 when NATO took over the command. As of February 2009, ISAF consists of 56,000 troops from 41 countries (NATO, 2009). As Hippler (2008) has noted, ISAF had 4,700 soldiers on the ground in 2003, while the number of ISAF and coalition forces rose to 65,000 by mid-2008.

For the debate about the security environment in Afghanistan it is important to note that—parallel to the ISAF mission—the 'global war on terror' has continued in Afghanistan under the name of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). About 8,000 OEF troops from more than 20 nations have continued extensive counter-insurgency operations against oppositional forces in southern and southeastern Afghanistan. However, OEF has not managed to lower conflict intensity since 2001 (Gauster, 2008, p. 14). Even worse, the acceptance of OEF by the Afghan population has deteriorated rapidly because of increasing numbers of civilian casualties caused by "disproportionate or indiscriminate

use of force" according to the Afghan NGO umbrella organization ACBAR (ACBAR, 2007, p. 1).

While the coalition forces and ISAF took over responsibility for security in Afghanistan, the United Nations took over a leading role in the political process. With UN Security Council Resolution 1401 (28 March 2002) the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was created to assist in setting up an administration, holding a Constitutional Assembly (*Loya Jirga*) and drafting a constitution. Apart from UNAMA, several UN agencies and bilateral and multilateral donors as well as a great number of international NGOs started their programs in relief, reconstruction and development. Soon after the fall of the Taliban regime, the number of international aid agencies on the ground skyrocketed.¹

There have been many political achievements in Afghanistan since 2001: the establishment of democratic institutions and ministries, a significant improvement in health care and immunization, the expansion of primary education, construction of roads and transport infrastructure, economic growth, and the formation of state security forces. However, millions of Afghans—mostly in the rural areas—still live in extreme poverty. Violence and insecurity continue to be major threats for the population. More than seven years after the fall of the Taliban regime various warlords maintain *de facto* control over some of the provinces in the south and east of Afghanistan.

The changing civil-military relations

In keeping with the definition of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and for the purpose of this *Paper*, civil-military relations can be defined as "the

¹ According to Theuss (2006) the number of international NGOs in Afghanistan rose from 50 in 2001 to about 1,000 in 2002.

relationship between humanitarian organizations and multinational military missions in situations associated with armed conflict" (Rana, 2004, p. 570). Within NATO military strategy, the nexus between the military force and the civil sector is part of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC). According to NATO's definition, CIMIC describes

the co-ordination and co-operation, in support of the mission, between the NATO Commander and civil actors, including national population and local authorities, as well as international, national and non-governmental organizations and agencies (Rehse, 2004, p. 29).

CIMIC activities have the clear strategic objective of backing up military operations. One of the major goals of CIMIC is "force protection", i.e. providing social services to the local population in order to boost the acceptance of the peacekeeping forces and, thus, to improve the safety of the troops and prevent hostile actions against them. This can also include direct relief activities in the area where troops have been deployed. However, being an integral part of military operations, CIMIC has nothing to do with development cooperation or humanitarian aid. The term "civil military cooperation" is a purely military concept that suggests the subordination of the civil to military objectives. Hence, most NGOs prefer the term "civil-military relations". The ICRC definition is thus preferred by NGOs as it describes the formal aspects of interaction between two different actors with two different agendas, while the NATO definition suggests a cooperative relationship in support of the mission. Currently, NATO is developing a new and comprehensive civil-military interaction concept under the name of Enhanced CIMIC or Future Comprehensive Civil-Military Interaction Concept. In the framework of this new concept Civilian Actors Advisors (CAADs) will be appointed who will be in charge of liaising with high-ranking civilian officials (Paul, 2008, p. 27).

Since the 1990s, there has been a shift in the

political context of civil-military relations. The study commissioned by the Dutch NGO Cordaid (Frerks, Klem, van Laar et al., 2006, p. 23f) identifies six important broader political changes in contemporary conflicts:

- conflict parties tend to involve non-state actors;
- conflicts are multi-faceted and have various root causes (complex emergencies);
- many conflicts involve regional and global actors;
- the battlefield is not clearly defined;
- many conflicts are protracted;
- there is no longer respect for International Humanitarian Law and for the distinction between combatants and civilians (non-combatants).

The international community's response to these challenges was to develop "a peacebuilding approach integrating military and humanitarian action into a series of sequential activities" (Franke, 2006, p. 7). Consequently, in the second half of the 1990s multinational forces were already given a stronger humanitarian role, e.g. in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, or Timor Leste. Furthermore, due to the increasing number of NGOs delivering humanitarian aid, the points of contact between NGOs and armed forces working in the same conflict region at the same time have also increased over the last 10 to 15 years.

In 2001, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (OCHA) described the increasing influence of the military in humanitarian aid as follows:

In NATO and elsewhere there has been an evolution of the doctrine of military-civilian operations, with an increasing tendency for military forces being used to support the delivery of humanitarian aid, and sometimes even to provide this aid directly (Barry and Jefferys, 2001, p. 1).

The United Nations coined the term 'integrated missions' to describe the multinational peace missions bringing

together a whole range of civilian actors into one structure and under uniform UN command. According to the philosophy of integrated missions, all instruments of international conflict management are to be coherently oriented towards a common political goal. This approach of integrating foreign, security and development policy is reflected in recent important documents on security policy, such as the Brahimi Report on UN Peace Operations published in 2000 (United Nations, 2000). It has been criticized that the Brahimi Report regards humanitarian aid as an element of conflict transformation:

The Brahimi Report presents an extreme example of the merging of humanitarian aid and political agendas by suggesting a need for an overarching command-and-control structure that uses humanitarian aid as simply a 'tool in the toolbox' of conflict management (Barry and Jefferys, 2002, p. 8).

In the context of the European Union the "Solana Doctrine" (European Commission, 2003) argues for greater "convergence" between conflict prevention and response activities. In the framework of this policy change humanitarian operations have become a mainstream, non-combat function of armed forces (Rana, 2004, p. 587). The US military, for instance, recently even 'embedded' development programs in their operations, e.g. in Afghanistan and Iraq.

From the NGO perspective the term 'integrated missions' implies an ambiguous proximity of humanitarian organizations to military operations. Unfortunately, for parts of the population in countries such as Afghanistan, the perceived association of humanitarian aid workers and armed forces has blurred the distinction between the two. Humanitarian agencies usually take a very cautious approach to interaction with military forces because they fear that association with a military intervention can compromise their acceptance by local populations. The remark of former US Secretary of State Colin Powell (US Department of State, 2001) that NGOs act as

a "force multiplier" for US combat teams proved to be rather counterproductive for the independence and security of humanitarian organizations, especially in a highly politicized conflict like Afghanistan. For the first time in the post-9/11 period the integrated approach in Afghanistan was connected with the 'global war on terror'.

The evolution of the PRT concept

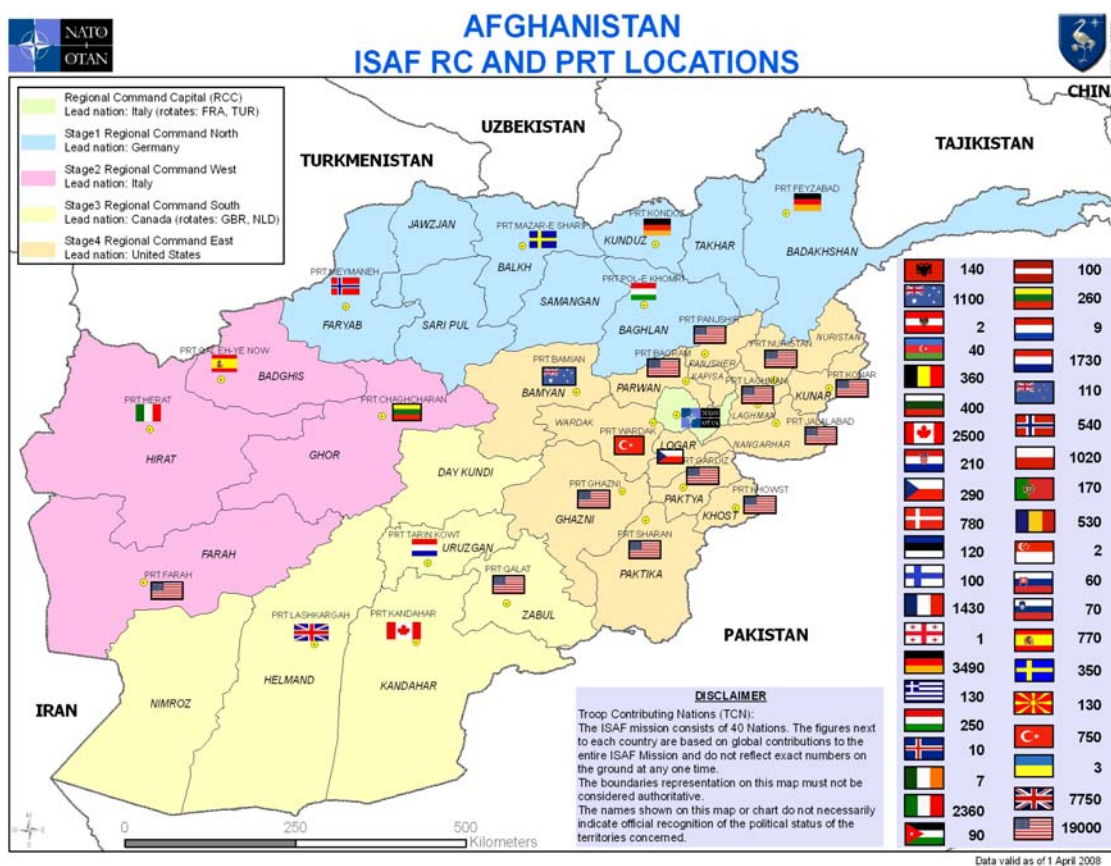
To provide security not only in Kabul but also in the Afghan provinces, the United States launched a third military initiative in November 2002 in addition to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and ISAF: the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). The idea of setting up PRTs in Afghanistan can be regarded as another output of the 'light footprint' strategy devised in the framework of the Petersberg Agreement. Although the Afghan government had initially pressed for a more comprehensive extension of the ISAF mandate to the provinces, it finally supported the establishment of the PRTs, which were more limited in terms of their military capacities. On the one hand, PRTs were the second-best option to enhance security outside of Kabul because the international community was not willing to deploy more soldiers to Afghanistan. On the other, there was a lot of political pressure by the international community for a coherent approach to post-conflict reconstruction in the Afghan provinces using the strengths of the multinational troops. Another reason to establish the PRTs in 2002/03 was to "win the hearts and minds" of the Afghan population in the context of OEF because of the growing resentment toward the US-led coalition in the south and east of the country where most of the military operations were undertaken (Sedra, 2005, p. 1).

The first US-led PRT in Afghanistan was established in Gardez in December 2002, another eight US-American PRTs followed. Having developed the initiative, the United

States requested other NATO partners to take over existing US-led PRTs or to set up additional PRTs. Thus, the PRT concept was “gradually internationalized” (ibid, 2005, p. 6) starting in 2003 when Great Britain established a PRT in Mazar-I Sharif, New Zealand in Bamiyan and Germany in Kunduz. Since 2003, 26 PRTs have been established, predominantly in the southeast of Afghanistan, involving members of the armed forces of more than 40 countries (see

training and supervising armed forces and police personnel, demobilization and disarming, and intelligence. Thus, PRTs can be seen as a “civilian-military annex to a military force, and are oriented towards a nation-building role as part of both military strategy and political aims” (Rana, 2004, p. 575). According to NATO, the primary tasks of PRTs are:

- to help the government of Afghanistan extend its authority in the provinces;



Source: NATO, available at <www.nato.int/multi/map-afghanistan.htm>.

Map). As of 1 April 2008, the largest troop contributing nations are the United States (19,000 troops), followed by Great Britain (7,750) and Germany (3,490).

In general, PRTs comprise between 50 and 300 military and civilian personnel in order to improve the security situation and facilitate the reconstruction process. The proportion of non-military staff in PRTs is generally low—around five to ten percent. PRT tasks include patrolling, mediation, reconstruction projects,

- to facilitate the development of a secure environment in the Afghan regions;
- to support security sector reform activities, and within means and capabilities, to facilitate the reconstruction effort (cf. Frerks, Klem, van Laar et al., 2006, p. 44).

The internationalization of the PRTs led to the implementation of diverging PRT concepts. Actually, PRTs are very different in institutional set-up, size, objectives, funds depending on

the implementing country and whether they operate under the ISAF or OEF mandate (ibid, p. 45; Hett, 2005, p. 4). Due to the different mandates and authorities over the PRTs there is a lack of clearly defined operating principles, command structures and coordination among the PRTs. In view of the existing differences, an Executive Steering Committee was created in 2005. Its purpose is to provide the guidance over all existing and future PRTs. It adopted terms of reference for ISAF PRTs in 2005, and a PRT Handbook followed in 2006. However, in spite of these efforts towards a coherent PRT approach, PRTs in Afghanistan lack an overarching strategy, set of common objectives, and a common concept of operation and organizational structure. Therefore, Frerks, Klem, van Laar et al. concluded in 2006 that the “significant differences prevail between the PRTs” (p. 48).

Probably, differences between the US and the German PRT model are the most striking. While the US-led PRTs, for instance, exert military command over subordinated development agencies like USAID, the German PRTs have strictly separated the three pillars of development, foreign and security policy. While the priorities of US PRTs are combat and stability operations, the German PRTs are dedicated to stability and reconstruction/ development activities. Civilian experts are embedded into the military structures in the US PRTs, whereas according to the German model, civilian implementing agencies basically act independently of the military structure and are also based in different locations, for instance in Kunduz.² Another distinction is that German PRTs are operating in more permissive areas while US PRTs are usually operating in volatile areas.

² The Canadian PRT in Kandahar, for example, has the services of a CIDA, a DFID and a USAID representative as well as a diplomat from Foreign Affairs Canada (Frerks, Klem, van Laar et al., 2006, p. 50).

The German PRT model

Germany's military engagement in Afghanistan began with former Chancellor Schroeder's policy of “unlimited solidarity with the American people” after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In December 2001, parliament approved of Germany's participation in ISAF. Peter Struck, former Minister of Defense, coined the phrase that “Germany's security nowadays also has to be defended at the Hindu Kush”³. In spite of this remark, Germany's involvement in Afghanistan can be attributed to its commitment to the NATO alliance rather than to important strategic interests. Hippler argues that the decision by the German *Bundestag* in late 2001 to deploy troops to Afghanistan was ill-informed and that not only Germany's but also the international community's military and civilian engagement in Afghanistan was *ad hoc* and ill prepared. In his view, “the mission's objectives were, in some cases, unclear and even contradictory, making their prioritisation and operationalisation almost impossible” (2008, p. 4).

After the United States had introduced its PRT concept, NATO allies were asked in 2003 to take over several US-led PRTs. The German PRT concept—as a reaction to the then predominant critique of the US-PRT model—was devised in 2003 by four ministries: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Ministry of the Interior. The German inter-ministerial approach aims at military stabilization and civil reconstruction. After close scrutiny a fact-finding mission proposed the region of Kunduz for the German PRT. Actually, the site of the PRT in Kunduz was selected because it was located in a rather stable and low-risk area of Afghanistan (Deutsche Bundesregierung, 2003, p. 6). Obviously, the German government was afraid of bad publicity at home about

³ Press Release by the German Federal Ministry of Defence of 5 December 2002.

exposing German troops to a high-risk conflict area. In January 2004, Germany took over the position of the former US-PRT in Kunduz. The German government follows a “joined-up” approach of integrating foreign, security and development policy. This integrated approach, often implemented through “integrated missions,” stems from the UN context and describes a manner in which the UN has tried to address complex crisis situations that require a system-wide UN response, through subsuming actors and approaches within an overall political-strategic framework and coherently orienting them toward a common political goal.

The logic of German PRTs follows such an integrated approach with emphasis on the ‘hybrid’ concept of civil-military relations. From the perspective of the German government, the PRT concept is the first comprehensive example of an integrated approach in post-conflict peacebuilding. However, the German PRT model is clear cut in terms of the different branches and their respective responsibilities with each ministry funding its own activities. The PRT Kunduz has a civil-military double command with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs selecting the civilian head and the Ministry of Defense appointing the military commander. Furthermore, there are representatives of the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in charge of coordinating development aid, as well as a representative of the Ministry of the Interior in charge of helping to set up the Afghan National Police. Apart from the PRT in Kunduz, a second PRT was set up in September 2004 in Feyzabad in the province of Badakhshan. In 2008, Germany was the third-largest troop-contributing nation with up to 3,500 soldiers, responsible for the Regional Command North with headquarters in Mazar-I Sharif, and running two PRTs in Kunduz and Feyzabad (see Map on p.11). In July 2008, Germany took over the command of the NATO Quick Reaction Forces (QRF) for the Regional Command North from Norway and, thus, has entered a new phase in the transformation from a stabilization force into

combat troops. In total, in the context of Regional Command North, the German Armed Forces (*Bundeswehr*) is responsible for security in an area of 20,000 km².

According to the 2003 PRT concept, the presence of the German military should remain as small as possible (Deutsche Bundesregierung, 2003, p. 6). Out of the 570 soldiers of the PRT Kunduz only about 90 are operational (infantry). The remaining soldiers basically carry out logistical tasks and are occupied with securing the PRT infrastructure. It can be argued that the stabilization of the security situation in northern Afghanistan with the aid of the PRTs has generally not been successful. This is also due to the limited scope of action that the German troops have. Since a Defense Ministry decree of 2006 following the attack of a German convoy in Kunduz, troops may only go on patrol in armored vehicles and in convoys with medical support.

Representatives from the four ministries meet a few times per week to discuss security, intelligence, and ongoing projects. The civilian branch of the PRT Kunduz is rather strong consisting of about 10 to 15 staff members from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and a few governmental implementing agencies like German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and German Development Service (DED). Nevertheless, there is an evident mismatch of military and civilian staff, and civilian personnel complain perpetually of being sidelined by the military.

The BMZ has been particularly clear about the separation between civil and military activities, while the German Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defense were keen to support the “whole of government” approach. In 2004 the BMZ insisted on moving into the “German House of Development Cooperation” in the city of Kunduz outside of the military compound because it did not want to be subordinated to the military command. After earlier tensions between the different branches of

government inter-ministerial cooperation has obviously improved in the meantime, and both the military and civilian head of the PRTs now have offices in the city of Kunduz.

There is a rather strict separation of tasks between the different branches of government, too. The civil ministries have deployed staff members as political advisors and

Germany's foreign and security policy the German PRTs might be regarded as "precedence for the organizational and political integration of civil and military activities in one intervention strategy (Heinemann-Grueder and Pietz, 2004. p. 203).

In 2007, the German PRTs introduced a new instrument: the Provincial Development Fund

Box 1: Differences between the US and the German PRT model

	US-PRT	German PRT
Institutional set-up	Department of Defense is lead agency	Separate branches of government: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and Ministry of the Interior
Size	Approx. 100 soldiers, 3-5 civilians	300-400 soldiers, about 10-20 civilians
Objectives	Combat (global war on terror) and stabilization, Quick Impact Projects	Stabilization, reconstruction and emphasis on long-term development
Command structure	Military command and subordinated development agencies	Civil-military double command (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense)
Funding	Department of Defense is main donor	Each ministry is funding its activities
Interaction with development agencies	Development advisors are 'embedded' in the PRTs	Development advisors are not 'embedded', NGOs are independent of the PRTs

experts who are responsible for the reconstruction of the police force or to support security sector reform. However, those staff members are not 'embedded' like in the US-PRTs, but work under their ministry's leadership. The basic task of the German PRTs is to support Afghan National Army training, provide medical and logistical support, liaise with local authorities and secure its own infrastructure. Although the German PRT concept differs considerably from the US model, in the framework of

(PDF). In terms of its concept and volume, the PDF reaches way beyond the CIMIC approach. The PDF tries to integrate the Afghan population into the entire process of project identification and implementation. Communities can apply for small infrastructure projects. The proposals are then evaluated by a committee comprised of provincial-level officials and one representative from each of the four German ministries. The PDF is aimed at awarding projects to Afghan communities in a transparent and partici-

patory manner, thus contributing to visible improvements in living conditions. The PDF funds are employed in the northern Afghan provinces of Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan, which are also assignment areas of the German *Bundeswehr*, thus also fulfilling the purpose of force protection. A study commissioned by the Ministry of Defense in 2008 (Koehler and Zuercher, 2008) clearly refers to the strategic benefit of PRTs aid measures:

The measures that are implemented via the Provincial Development Funds are needs-oriented and generally suitable to raise the acceptance of international engagement among the Afghan population.

From 2006 up to 2008, the Ministry of Defense approved Euro 4.72 million for the PDF. In parallel, the BMZ provided Euro 3.5 million for the first projects in the framework of the PDF and for their expert and administrative support.

Unlike with the missions in the Balkans, the German *Bundeswehr* is not running any extensive CIMIC projects in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, a total of around 40 German CIMIC staff have been deployed in northern Afghanistan, and quite a few so-called Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) have been carried out with the following goals:

QIPs are measures to be implemented on a short-term basis the origin of which (...) can directly be identified by the target group, through the immediate impact of which on the civil environment a stabilizing contribution is achieved and which thus contribute to raising force protection ((Koehler and Zuercher, 2008).

In general, QIPs reflect the short-term perspective of force protection and, therefore, undermine longer-term development prospects as well as national and local institutions. Although the expenditures for CIMIC activities and QIPs have been rather limited, the overall funding of the PRTs shows a gross imbalance between the military and civil engagement of Germany in Afghanistan. The Association of German

Development NGOs (VENRO) has criticized that in 2007 the German government spent Euro 530 million on the military engagement and only Euro 100 million for development cooperation and reconstruction (VENRO, 2007, p. 4). Thus, the maintenance of the PRT structure is diverting financial resources for humanitarian and development aid.

Humanitarian aid and the PRTs

Humanitarian aid addresses the victims of crises and disasters. It is aimed at saving lives and mitigating human suffering, and is performed independently of the victims' ethnic, religious and political affiliations. Traditionally, humanitarian aid has neither a political agenda nor is it supposed to be used by governments as an instrument of foreign policy. While humanitarian activities were not included in peacekeeping operations of the United Nations in the 1980s, humanitarian aid has increasingly been politicized since the end of the Cold War. The clear separation of foreign and security policy objectives and humanitarian aid was abolished and a "new humanitarianism" emerged in which humanitarian aid became "a tool for peacebuilding and the starting-point for addressing poverty, as well as a palliative in times of conflict and crisis" (Macrea, 2002, p. 9).

The inclusion of humanitarian action within a broader security agenda has also encouraged a new group of actors—the military—to enter the humanitarian arena. As the military involvement in the context of humanitarian aid has increased over the last 20 years, there has been an intense debate in the humanitarian community about the impact of civil-military relations on the independence of humanitarian aid. The changing nature of violent conflicts, the increasing disrespect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles by warring parties, the limitation of

'humanitarian space' by armed forces and the instrumentalization of humanitarian aid by political actors have put the humanitarian system under pressure. The issue at stake for humanitarian agencies is safeguarding humanitarian principles from subordination to military objectives. The case of Afghanistan can be considered a paradigm of the 'new humanitarianism' as well as of the difficult relationship between aid workers and armed forces. With regard to civil-military relations there have been several efforts in the past to come up with guidelines outlining—from a humanitarian perspective—general terms of engagement with armed forces.

Guidelines for civil-military relations

In 1994, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) of the United Nations published the Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (the so-called Oslo Guidelines, updated in 2006, see United Nations, 2006), which describe the key concepts for the use of military resources in natural disasters and technological or environmental emergencies. In 2003, OCHA published additional Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (the so-called MCDA Guidelines, see United Nations, 2003). This document provides guidelines for the use of international military and civil defense personnel, equipment and services in support of the United Nations in pursuit of humanitarian objectives in complex emergencies. It develops criteria when those resources can be used, how they should be employed, and how UN agencies should interface, organize and coordinate with international military forces (OCHA, 2003, p. 5). The guidelines emphasize the following core principles:

- military means should be employed by humanitarian agencies only as a last

resort, i.e. only in the absence of any other available civilian alternative (Article 5);

- a humanitarian operation using military assets must retain its civilian character (Article 32.3);
- the military should not engage in direct assistance in order not to be mixed up with UN activities in humanitarian aid (Article 32.4);
- the use of military resources should be limited in time and scale and the military should withdraw from this area as early as possible (Article 32.5).

Furthermore, the OCHA and MCDA Guidelines suggest a set of criteria to decide when to use military resources to support UN humanitarian activities. In addition to the core principles two operational standards are proposed: if military capacities are employed in UN peacekeeping missions, they will have to be under civilian control, and at no cost, i.e. the military generally provides its capacities free of charge. Unfortunately, there has been no evaluation of adherence to these guidelines so far.

In 2004, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee⁴ (IASC, the main forum in Geneva for political dialogue between the United Nations and NGOs on humanitarian issues) published a reference paper on "Civil-military relationship in complex emergencies" which is to complement the OCHA Guidelines. The paper states that the increasing military involvement in relief operations has led to "an erosion of the separation between the humanitarian and the military space" (IASC, 2004, p. 3). It outlines a set of principles and concepts for civil-military relations similar to the OCHA Guidelines, such as humanitarian access to vulnerable populations, perception of humanitarian action, security of humanitarian personnel, respect for inter-

⁴ The IASC consists of the most important humanitarian UN organizations (OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP) and—as standing invitees—several NGO networks (ICVA, IFRC, SCHR) as well as a few international organizations.

national legal instruments, option of last resort, etc. (IASC, 2004, p. 8ff). The reference paper proposes practical considerations for humanitarian aid workers engaged in civil-military coordination, such as liaison arrangements, information sharing, the use of armed escorts, etc.

In the same year, the non-governmental humanitarian agencies represented in the Steering Committee on Humanitarian Response (SCHR, the main umbrella organization of Geneva-based humanitarian NGOs)⁵ passed the "SCHR position paper on humanitarian-military relations in the provision of humanitarian assistance" (SCHR, 2004), which goes beyond the OCHA and IASC Guidelines. The SCHR position paper states that it is never appropriate for the military to directly implement humanitarian aid in general circumstances and that there must be specific criteria for these exceptional circumstances. The paper also underscores that special attention needs to be given to the fact whether or not the armed forces are party to an armed conflict.

If humanitarian agencies are perceived as being supportive of, as having taken sides with, or as being partisan to a certain military force or faction, their ability to work in all areas may be compromised. Agencies may become targets, limiting their ability to work even further. Those in need of assistance may suffer as basic service provision is forced to be withdrawn (SCHR, 2004, p. 3).

Especially after the 2003 war in Iraq, many humanitarian NGOs began drafting their own position papers on how to interact with the military. VENRO, the network of German NGOs, for example, published a policy paper on the scope and limits of cooperation between aid agencies and armed forces in humanitarian aid (VENRO, 2003).

⁵ SCHR is a group of nine independent humanitarian organizations: World Council of Churches, CARE, Caritas, IFRC, ICRC, Lutheran World Federation, MSF, Oxfam International and Save the Children Alliance.

All existing voluntary guidelines for humanitarian-military relations have two important shortcomings: they are non-binding and they are based on the (false) assumption that the humanitarian principles will be acknowledged and respected by military actors. The PRTs in Afghanistan illustrate these contradictions: The much-lauded principle of the use of military means in the delivery of humanitarian aid as a "last resort" finds little resonance. According to Donini (2009, p. 2) "humanitarianism is under deep threat in Afghanistan" because there is no respect for humanitarian principles in Afghanistan and the ability of humanitarian agencies to address urgent needs of the civilian population is politically compromised.

To address security challenges, NGOs have promoted the drafting of Guidelines for the Interaction and Coordination of Humanitarian Actors and Military Actors in Afghanistan, which were developed and finalized in 2008 by the Unama Civil-Military Working Group in Kabul. However, according to a group of British and Irish NGOs, the military side has failed to follow-up and implement the commitments made (British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group and European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan, 2008, p. 5).

The principles of humanitarian aid

Humanitarian aid addresses the victims of crises and disasters. Its objective is to save lives and mitigate human suffering. Humanitarian aid is based on principles set down in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1994). In particular, this means that aid exclusively serves the purpose of mitigating an existing humanitarian crisis; aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients; it will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint; the

aid agencies will not act as instruments of government foreign policy. The conceptual and operational foundations of humanitarian aid are based on these fundamental principles of humanity, independence and impartiality. These humanitarian principles are referred to in all relevant political documents regarding humanitarian aid, e.g. the UN OCHA Guidelines or the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (European Commission, 2007) passed in 2007.

While independent humanitarian NGOs and the ICRC adhere to the humanitarian principles on which their work is based, armed forces pursue a military mission and, thus, can neither act impartially nor in a neutral way in an armed conflict. Neither are multinational armed forces like ISAF perceived by the conflicting parties as independent and impartial. Therefore, the call for independence and impartiality of humanitarian aid is not purely academic or dogmatic, but means upholding a political principle which has a specific impact on the implementation of humanitarian aid. The humanitarian principles are of paramount importance for access to the 'victims' on all sides of a conflict. In conflict regions such as Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sri Lanka, etc., independent aid organizations were even granted access to the suffering population when all organizations with a political mandate were barred (VENRO, 2003, p. 4). The ICRC, for instance, is only granted access to prisoners of war by the conflict parties thanks to its recognized neutrality. Therefore, humanitarian agencies are very cautious about interaction with armed forces because association, whether real or perceived, with military operations can compromise NGO acceptance in conflict areas.

Nevertheless, according to international humanitarian law armed forces do have an explicit mandate in humanitarian aid: According to the 4th Geneva Convention, if a foreign power is exercising control over the territory of the enemy, then it is an occupying

power and has a duty to ensure the safety and well-being of the civilian population. This neither means that the armed forces of the occupying power should deliver humanitarian aid directly nor that the military is a humanitarian actor. Governments and policy-makers like to borrow from the humanitarian vocabulary without adhering to humanitarian principles. They have even developed their own 'humanitarian' rhetoric, but expressions like 'humanitarian intervention', 'humanitarian bombing' (Kosovo) are misleading and a contradiction in terms, too. The term 'humanitarian' must not be used arbitrarily, but should be applied only to humanitarian actions which meet the humanitarian principles. Unfortunately, this is not conventional wisdom among international armed forces as a NATO/ ISAF press release of December 2007 shows: "Humanitarian assistance operations are helping both the people of Afghanistan and coalition forces fight the global war on terror."⁶ According to Donini (2009, p. 2) the defense of humanitarian principles in Afghanistan is left to the ICRC, which is—for the time being—the only international organization able to work neutrally, impartially, and independently on both sides of the conflict.⁷

Blurring the line between military, political and humanitarian action

The establishment of PRTs has set a new precedent for the intermingling of military objectives with humanitarian aid. From a humanitarian point of view, PRTs are hybrid structures which have contributed to the blurring if not altogether erasing the distinction between humanitarian aid and military objectives. The ICRC described the 'blurring the line' phenomenon as follows:

⁶ 23 December 2007, available at <<http://www.natoint/isaf/>>.

⁷ Donini admits that the ability of the ICRC to interact and negotiate access with the Taliban and other insurgent groups is impaired by the volatility of the situation.

The distinction between humanitarian, political and military action becomes blurred when armed forces are perceived as being humanitarian actors, when civilians are embedded into military structures, and when the impression is created that humanitarian organizations and their personnel are merely tools within integrated approaches to conflict management (Rana, 2004, p. 586).

A drastic example of blurring the line was the simultaneous dropping of bombs and aid packages by US military aircraft in Afghanistan in 2001, which was referred to by the responsible authorities as a "humanitarian" operation flanking military action.

Humanitarian agencies have two fundamental objections against blurring the line between military, political and humanitarian action: First, aid agencies oppose any structural association between humanitarian and military actors. Second, aid agencies oppose to the use of relief activities by armed forces that follow a military logic but are similar to their own independent and impartial humanitarian aid. Aid agencies seek to deliver aid because people need it, while armed forces undertake such action as a means of winning the hearts and minds of the population. According to the *Winning Afghan Hearts, Winning Afghan Minds* study of 2008, there is no conceptual clarity as to why armed forces engage in 'hearts and minds' activities. Furthermore, Afghans are familiar with and skeptical about military strategies to win hearts and minds by simplistic material incentives (British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group, 2008, p. 8). PRTs contribute to blurring the line between military, political and humanitarian action in many ways:

- The physical distinction between civilians and soldiers has been blurred in the framework of the hybrid military-civilian teams. Soldiers, mostly OEF troops, have used civilian, unmarked vehicles and have moved around in civilian clothing although it is the clear and long accepted responsibility of combatants to

distinguish themselves. This issue has been discussed time and again between the military and NGOs in the Kabul-based joint civil-military working group.

- PRTs tend to engage in 'hearts and minds activities' and have directly implemented relief activities although the armed forces have other tasks. The military has a core mandate to foster security and protect civilians by establishing and enforcing a safe and stable environment. Engaging in humanitarian activities may divert the military from their principal objective.
- PRTs have tried to instrumentalize humanitarian aid for military purposes; in 2008, USAID asked NGOs to demonstrate programmatic flexibility to implement "post-battlefield cleanup" operations, essentially requesting that NGOs work with communities in the aftermath of a battle and operate alongside PRT officials (Donini, 2009, p. 6).
- Armed forces are also tempted to make humanitarian assistance dependent on compliance with political conditions; US PRTs have used aid conditionality by handing out leaflets in Zabul province tying the provision of humanitarian aid to receiving information on armed oppositional forces (Frerks, Klem, van Laar et al., 2006, p. 57).
- PRTs have tried to use information given by aid agencies for military objectives; one example: PRTs want to collect data on the civil situation, for military purposes. A UK NGO had to withdraw from its project area in Kamdesh district because US armed forces paid a visit to the project without prior consultation with local authorities and without the consent of the NGO (British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group, 2008, p. 22). Even the perception that NGOs provide the military with intelligence can be counterproductive: An NGO was forced to leave Uruzgan province because they were accused of spying after Taliban positions were hit by the coalition forces.

- In their public relations departments, PRTs have often created the image of an aid agency to win the support of their home population, e.g. the German *Bundeswehr* frequently creates the impression in the public that their soldiers are “uniformed aid workers” (Magazine of the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* of 6 June 2008).

The underlying pattern of the ‘blurring the line’ phenomenon is the need on the part of the armed forces to engage in hearts and minds activities for the purpose of force protection. It would be an interesting research question to look into the negative effects of hearts and minds activities on humanitarian space.

‘Blurring the line’ has also had an impact on the security of aid workers. Afghanistan is third-placed on the list of the countries with the highest levels of violence against aid workers (ODI, 2006, p. 3). In general, the absolute number of reported violent acts against aid workers has risen sharply. Aid agencies are increasingly seen as soft targets by those who identify them—wrongly—with the political agendas of Western governments. Relief operations conducted by the PRTs add to this confusion of roles. The targeted killing of five aid workers of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Afghanistan in 2004 forced the aid agency to stop its operations. A study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) comes to the conclusion that “the perception that aid workers are associated with political processes clearly exists in the minds of local belligerents” (ODI, 2006, p. 3). Thus, humanitarian aid agencies insist that ISAF and OEF soldiers must always wear uniforms and travel in marked vehicles.

The changing security environment in Afghanistan and the role of the PRTs

Until the terrorist attacks on 9/11 the international community paid little attention to Afghanistan. The fundamentalist Taliban had been internationally isolated since

taking power in the mid-1990s, and their inhuman policies and the appalling humanitarian situation in the country were merely registered with resignation. After the terrorist attacks in September 2001 Afghanistan became the first theater of war in the so-called ‘global war on terror’. Today, the security situation in Afghanistan remains extremely fragile and is in danger of jeopardizing the political, social and economical progress made to date. The main sources of insecurity are: a) military and terrorist activities of various paramilitary groups opposed to the Afghan government, b) inter-militia fighting, c) increased banditry d) violence related to the narcotics trade and the sponsoring warlords (Mc Hugh and Gostelow, 2004, p. 2). The dramatic increase in violence that has occurred in Afghanistan since 2003 is an indicator of a serious crisis of the international community’s strategy. After more than seven years of military intervention and civilian reconstruction, the planned stabilization of Afghanistan has so far been unsuccessful. This deterioration seems paradoxical: the more soldiers were sent to Afghanistan, the worse the security situation. Hippler (2008, p. 2) pointed out that the total number of foreign troops has more than quadrupled over the last five years while, nonetheless, the number of assassinations and suicide attacks is skyrocketing.

As a recent study by the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs) pointed out, the security situation in northern Afghanistan has deteriorated since the beginning of the deployment of German troops (Lange, 2008, p. 4). The specific impact of the German PRTs on overall security seems rather limited because of the small military components and the restricted “rules of engagement”. Furthermore, the root causes of the violent conflict continue to exist. The German PRTs, for instance, have not tackled the problem of drug trafficking which plays a dominant role in northern Afghanistan. While the German government

states that the fight against drugs is not part of the mandate of the mission and that the PRTs are not supposed to actively prevent the cultivation of drugs, German PRTs do monitor the cultivation of the poppy fields and cooperate with Afghan authorities by providing relevant information on drug trade in their area of responsibility. Interference with drug trafficking is actually necessary because the drug trade supports the war economy. But interference with local war lords would probably result in an escalation of violence for which the German PRTs are neither equipped nor mandated to deal with.

Another point of criticism is that Germany's PRTs have not intervened in acts of violence perpetrated by the local population. Obviously, due to the many self-imposed restrictions, the German PRTs have not developed their full efficiency in their core tasks: stabilization and security. German PRTs are viewed as being too cautious, mainly protecting themselves and not managing to effectively patrol the three provinces. The "rules of engagement" for the German PRTs have become even more restrictive after the deadly attacks on a convoy in 2006. Since then patrols can only leave the compounds in Kunduz and Feyzabad, if they are secured and accompanied by armored vehicles.

In the fight against armed opposition forces, NATO is increasingly tolerating civilian deaths. This attitude does not contribute to their popularity in the country. Moreover, it violates international human rights. The Afghan population increasingly rejects the 'war on terror'. Furthermore, the militarization of relief and "the usurpation of the term humanitarian by international armed forces and their PRTs" (Donini, 2009, p. 5) have added to the insecurity of non-combatants. Aid agency staff are being increasingly targeted by the Taliban and other insurgents for their perceived instrumentalization by Western political agendas. According to the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO), attacks have become more frequent and more deadly. The primary

explanation for the increase in attacks against aid workers is the expansion of conflict. The vast majority of attacks are attributed by ANSO to the perception that NGOs are functionally linked to the political-military agenda of coalition forces, i.e., the NGOs are seen as having taken sides.

The PRTs: Role model for civil-military relations?

From the humanitarian perspective, PRTs represent the concept of hybrid civil-military structures which bring together a range of military, civilian, political and development actors into one structure. As soon as humanitarian actors were influenced or dominated by military objectives of the PRTs, humanitarian aid would lose its basic precondition: independence. NGOs condemn the increasing dominance of security policy considerations that view humanitarian aid and development cooperation "in the slipstream of military interventions", such as former US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who referred to NGOs as "force multipliers".

The perspective of international humanitarian agencies

From the point of view of humanitarian agencies, the institutionalized form of civil-military cooperation in the form of PRTs is rejected (cf. Mc Hugh and Gostelow, 2004; VENRO, 2007; British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group, 2008; Donini, 2009). PRTs are a negative model for civil-military relations because they have several important shortcomings with severe impacts on the delivery of humanitarian aid:

PRTs contradict humanitarian principles

PRTs embody the mixing of mandates and principles of formal military forces and humanitarian agencies. According to Barry and Jefferys (2002, p. 2)

it is essential that these two roles—impartial humanitarian assistance as a response to an urgent and inalienable right, and peace operations with their inevitably partial and political mandates—are kept separate.

Since PRTs are civil-military units subordinated to a political mission, they cannot be neutral, impartial or independent and, therefore, will not be perceived as a humanitarian actor by the conflict parties. The assignment of political, development and military personnel under one (military) leadership is seen by many in the humanitarian community as “inappropriate and contrary to the fundamental humanitarian principles of independence and impartiality” (Save the Children Fund, 2004).

When John Holmes, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, visited Afghanistan in June 2008 he was quoted saying:

I agree that there has been and there is to some extent a blurring of lines between military operations and, for example, humanitarian assistance by the PRTs. I think it is very important that PRTs do not involve themselves in humanitarian assistance unless there is absolutely no other alternative for security reasons.⁸

PRTs reduce ‘humanitarian space’

Humanitarian aid agencies need ‘humanitarian space’ to operate in areas of armed conflict. ‘Humanitarian space’ signifies unhindered access to people in danger, independent evaluation of their needs and independent and impartial distribution of aid according to the level of need. Humanitarian organizations are often confronted with attempts by third parties to restrict and manipulate this ‘humanitarian space’. If the ‘humanitarian space’ is eroded or completely lost, humanitarian aid agencies might be forced to stop its operations like MSF did in

Afghanistan in 2004. According to the MSF press release, the PRTs in northwestern Afghanistan (OEF) had effectively reduced the humanitarian space:

The violence directed against humanitarian aid workers has come in a context in which the US backed coalition has consistently sought to use humanitarian aid to build support for its military and political ambitions. MSF denounces the coalition’s attempts to co-opt humanitarian aid and use it to win hearts and minds. By doing so, providing aid is no longer seen as an impartial and neutral act, endangering the lives of humanitarian volunteers and jeopardizing the aid to people in need⁹.

According to Donini (2009, p. 2) there is “no humanitarian consensus in Afghanistan and very little humanitarian space. Both have been trampled by political expediency and by the disregard by all parties to the conflict for the plight of civilians”. The Network of Afghan NGOs (ACBAR) also published a statement in 2007 condemning the erosion of ‘humanitarian space’:

Humanitarian actors are increasingly unable to provide adequate protection and assistance to displaced people and other populations at risk in the south and east of Afghanistan due to the significant deterioration in the security situation. Humanitarian space and humanitarian access continues to be seriously limited (ACBAR, 2007).

Thus, in order to restore ‘humanitarian space’ it is mandatory to rebuild respect for International Humanitarian Law and a humanitarian consensus in Afghanistan.

PRTs do not focus on security

In terms of the focus on security, PRTs should use their comparative advantage and direct their resources to security rather than reconstruction activities. The ability of PRTs to provide security outside of the cities has been rather limited. Security is often referred to as the security of the multi-national troops

⁸ Press Conference by Sir John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Kabul, 29 June 2008.

⁹ See: Press release “MSF pulls out of Afghanistan” of 28 July 2004.

and the international aid agencies, but it should rather be focused on the protection of the Afghan population who have suffered from more than twenty years of violence, lawlessness, torture, killing, rape, expulsions and displacement. The insecurity due to the absence of accountable institutions of governance outside of Kabul should be the priority of ISAF. Building these Afghan institutions of governance will constitute the core task of protecting human security in Afghanistan.

If PRTs engage in non-military activities at all, they will have to focus on issues like security sector reform or strengthening government infrastructure rather than infringe on the traditional domains of humanitarian activities, like water and sanitation, health, and education (cf. Franke, 2006, p. 21). German NGOs argue that ISAF should focus exclusively on its military core function, and leave humanitarian aid and reconstruction to the civil agencies (VENRO, 2007, p. 3). The Save the Children study of 2004 comes to the conclusion that “most of the positive effects on humanitarian security result from PRT activities in their core mission areas; and that the negative consequences of PRT activities arise from PRTs engaging in relief operations” (Mc Hugh, and Gostelow, 2004, p. 3).

PRTs are not sustainable

Given the ‘hearts and minds’ approach of the PRTs, their relief activities are neither effective nor sustainable. If the PRTs engage in CIMIC activities or carry out so-called Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), their objective will be short-term force protection and not promoting sustainable development aid. QIPs are supposed to demonstrate a peace dividend to the Afghan population, but these short-term relief activities cannot be a substitute for development. Due to the short-term deployment of the troops, PRTs have a lack of institutional memory. The high turnover of the personnel, e.g. Germany’s troops have a three to six month rotation schedule, has constrained the ability to engage effectively with the local population

and, moreover, has been counterproductive for the sustainability of the PRT relief operations. Even worse, it has occurred that PRT staff members make promises which they cannot keep in the time they are on the ground and which the next rotation may not want to fulfill, e.g. a hydro-electric power project in Logar, which the next rotation to the PRT did not follow through (British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group, 2008, p. 44).

In its policy paper of March 2008, ACBAR (2008) points out that the PRTs were planned as a transitional solution. ACBAR demands that the PRTs be scaled down in the foreseeable future and that the funds they have absorbed flow into the national development plans since they represent a double structure alongside Afghan governance.

PRTs violate guidelines for civil-military relations

PRTs clearly violate the OCHA guidelines for civil-military relations in several respects: According to these guidelines, humanitarian operations using military assets must retain its civilian character; the military should not engage in direct assistance in order not to be mixed up with UN activities in humanitarian aid; the use of military resources should be limited in time and scale and the military should withdraw from this area as early as possible. These guidelines are not respected by many governments, and there is no mechanism to sanction non-compliance.

The diversity of humanitarian actors

Most of the international humanitarian agencies in Afghanistan reject the PRTs and keep their distance from the PRT compounds. However, there are also diverging views within the humanitarian community regarding cooperation with or distance to the PRTs (Mc Hugh and Gostelow, 2004; Frerks, Klem, van Laar et al., 2006; Donini, 2009).

Three different forms of interaction with the PRTs can be distinguished:

Co-existence: presence in the same area, without direct interaction;

Limited interaction: information exchange (e.g. on security matters), but only limited collaboration;

Common projects: projects implemented by NGOs and financed by the military.

towards collaboration with PRTs.

Among German humanitarian agencies there are different approaches towards civil-military relations and PRTs in particular. However, it has been possible to come to a joint policy paper on the perspectives for peace, reconstruction and development (VENRO, 2007). Only a few German NGOs

Box 2: Different approaches of international humanitarian agencies towards PRTs

Approach	Mandate	Cooperation with PRTs	Information exchange	Implementation of PRT projects
Principled	Strictly humanitarian	None/Stay away	No	No
Sceptical	Humanitarian	Arm's length distance	Depends, e.g. not on NGO premises	No
Pragmatic	Humanitarian/ Development	Depends	Yes	Depends
Supportive	Humanitarian/ Development	Active engagement	Yes	Yes

Given that international humanitarian agencies are rather diverse, there are different categories of humanitarian agencies and schools of thought on civil-military relations. First, there is the ICRC, which has a principled approach, and a few NGOs which are also "principled neutralists". These humanitarian agencies emphasize the danger of blurring the lines and, therefore, the need to stay away from the military. Second, there are skeptic NGOs which keep the military at arm's length. Third, there are pragmatic NGOs which consider humanitarian principles as very important, but they accept that they have to make trade-offs in order to operate in complex emergencies. Those NGOs tend to question the efficiency and effectiveness of the military. Fourth, there are also NGOs which take a supportive position and work closely with the armed forces. These NGOs accept funding and they implement projects for the military. The diverse political backgrounds, mandates and funding of humanitarian agencies lead to different approaches

work in the northern region of Afghanistan. The most important one, German Agro Action (Welthungerhilfe), decided to keep a distance strategy and even removed their headquarters in the province of Kunduz away from the PRT to the city of Taloqan. German NGOs also refused to implement PRT project proposals because there is no common operational approach due to different objectives. From the German NGO perspective, the PRT model represents the worst case scenario of civil-military cooperation, and German NGOs are very concerned about losing their independence (VENRO, 2007).

The perspective of military actors

The military perspective can be summarized by the following points:

- According to the 4th Geneva Convention, any foreign power exercising control over

the territory of the enemy is an occupying power and has a duty to ensure that the civilian population is adequately supplied with food and medical supplies. This means that the military does play a role in humanitarian aid.

- PRTs are the best available option to provide security in the Afghan provinces, given the financial and policy restrictions placed on the security assistance effort.
- The military views PRTs as islands of stability and security in Afghanistan. Complaints by NGOs about the deterioration of the security situation are contested by the military.
- PRT military commanders are aware of the fact that the ability of the PRTs to contribute to security outside of the cities is limited due to the small size of their lightly armed military components. Therefore, the PRT model is also about 'showing the flag' of the international community.
- The armed forces are generally positive about CIMIC and QIPs because they are an effective strategy to win the 'hearts and minds' of the local population.
- Being able to point to 'reconstruction projects' helps to strengthen support for the PRTs in their home countries.
- Given a humanitarian vacuum, it is the duty of the military to step in and try to fill it.
- PRTs believe that they are in Afghanistan to protect and enable humanitarian assistance. Agencies which uphold their strict neutrality and independence are perceived by the military as being anachronistic (Rana, 2004, p. 582) given the nature of modern wars.

From the military perspective, the PRT model has been a success story. For NATO it could possibly be the role model for future civil-military cooperation in different post-conflict situations. Lessons learned from the PRT experience might feed into the development of an enhanced NATO CIMIC strategy.

It is extremely difficult to reconcile the humanitarian with the military perspective. While aid agencies claim that humanitarian aid is their responsibility, armed forces need 'hearts and minds' activities because they contribute to force protection and help legitimize the Afghanistan mission in their home countries. In the case of Germany, Germany's military engagement in Afghanistan is a top priority of foreign and defense policymakers in Berlin. The issue of force protection is of paramount importance due to the self-imposed restrictive rules of engagement. Furthermore, the German government wants to increase public support for this military mission because public opinion in Germany has been shifting towards rejecting the Afghanistan mission.¹⁰

In general, the military perspective is guided by political directives, while humanitarian agencies insist that their aid is independent of political objectives. Both humanitarian and military actors need to be aware of the fact that the diverging perceptions of the PRTs constitute a classical conflict of interests. From the humanitarian point of view, PRTs attempt to instrumentalize humanitarian aid for military purposes. From the military point of view, PRTs are an adequate instrument to implement CIMIC activities and to achieve the military goals in Afghanistan. The way out of this dilemma is to define the different mandates on the basis of complementarity.

Conclusion and recommendations

Humanitarian aid organizations adhere to the humanitarian imperative, while armed forces are bound by political instructions and principally follow a military

¹⁰ According to a survey in April 2009, 64 percent of the German population is in favor of pulling out the German troops in Afghanistan as soon as possible; cf. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 3 April 2009.

logic. Owing to these different mandates, it is necessary to define the political framework conditions for cooperation between aid organizations and armed forces as accurately as possible. Humanitarian organizations should be clear about the fact that future multinational military operations will focus on cooperation with civil counterparts as part of an integrated approach. The military needs to be aware that the distinction between humanitarian aid and military action becomes blurred when there is a perception that humanitarian organizations and their personnel are merely tools within integrated approaches to conflict management; and that, as a result, aid agencies insist on a distance strategy.

Armed forces and humanitarian agencies should focus on their respective core competencies: on the one hand, to guarantee security, and on the other, to implement humanitarian aid. Armed forces will do more harm than good, if their activities blur the line between humanitarian aid and military activities. In order to preserve the humanitarian space for humanitarian aid agencies and their ability to have access to all victims of a conflict, the military forces should refrain from direct humanitarian aid unless—according to the existing guidelines on civil-military relations—as a ‘last resort’.

The PRT experiment transcends the context of Afghanistan and can be viewed as a “litmus test” for the establishment of similar models in other post-conflict situations (Sedra, 2005, p. 2). After Afghanistan, the US armed forces exported the PRT model to the theater of war in Iraq. In the framework of the new “integrated missions” and the coherent orientation on a common political goal, the PRTs might become a new paradigm for the international community.

From the humanitarian perspective, the following sets of recommendations can be distilled from the PRT experience in Afghanistan:

Complementarity:

- It is essential to keep the mandates of armed forces and humanitarian agencies separate.
- The division of labor has to be based on the respective comparative advantages.
- PRTs have to focus on security and stabilization and should not implement humanitarian assistance unless as a ‘last resort’.
- The scope and emphasis of PRT activities should be redirected from “hearts and minds” activities to security.

Implementation of humanitarian aid:

- There is a need for independent humanitarian aid and the maintenance of distinction between the civil and the military domains.
- Humanitarian space and a humanitarian consensus among all parties to the conflict should be restored as soon as possible.
- An independent cross-donor evaluation should analyze the impact of PRTs and their CIMIC activities/ QIPs in general and also on the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Guidelines on civil-military relations:

- The compliance of donors with the existing guidelines on civil-military relations should be monitored.

Scope of cooperation:

- Humanitarian organizations should refrain from direct cooperation with armed forces, if their mission is jeopardized and their independence put at risk.
- Humanitarian organizations and military actors should exchange information in UN coordination meetings (but not on NGO premises).
- Strategically, contacts between armed forces and NGOs at home should be intensified to achieve a better mutual understanding of the different organizational cultures and political guidelines.

The election of US President Obama might open a window of opportunity for development, security and peace in

Afghanistan. US President Barack Obama announced that an additional 17,000 troops will be sent to Afghanistan. At the same time Obama is talking about a solution based on negotiations that will include two of Afghanistan's neighbors: Iran and Pakistan. Such plans suggest that we can expect a new, productive approach to regional conflict resolution. Hopefully, Obama understands that more weapons will not help to achieve peace in Afghanistan. And, hopefully, a humanitarian consensus will be rebuilt as soon as possible.

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About the author

Peter Runge studied Humanities and Social Sciences at the Universities of Kassel and Goettingen, and in the United States and Mexico. After working with several German NGOs in development and humanitarian aid, he earned a European Masters Degree in Humanitarian Assistance in 1996. Since 1996, he has worked as Senior Program Officer for Development Policy and Humanitarian Aid with VENRO (Association of German Development NGOs).

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