

To Create a Stable Afghanistan: Provisional Reconstruction Teams, Good Governance, and a Splash of History

Major Andrew M. Roe, British Army

THE COALITION and NATO face the complex challenge of establishing a legitimate functioning government in Afghanistan that can withstand the withdrawal of Western forces. To meet this challenge, they might look to earlier British efforts to manage the North-West Frontier along Afghanistan's eastern border.¹ Proven methods the British used in the frontier districts could generate a coherent four-step plan for Afghanistan's reconstruction. Indeed, as resources shrink, new, imaginative measures—plus tried and true ones—will be needed to control Afghanistan's geographically dispersed tribes to prevent the reemergence of terrorists or armed insurrection.

The North-West Frontier linking Central and South Central Asia, an ethnic Pushtoon area where tribesmen cross freely from Afghanistan and back, was one of the British Empire's most challenging territories.² A negligibly small British administrative and military apparatus routinely and successfully controlled this extensive area using a mix of incentives and force to encourage tribes to control themselves.

From the 1890s to 1947, British control relied heavily on a small number of highly trained British officers and officials who embraced many of the structures the East India Company established during the previous century.³ These frontier officers, part of the Indian Civil Service or Indian Political Service, were highly educated, committed, conscientious, and hard working. Many had studied Indian law and history and spoke some of the local languages. They had a deep sense of duty and a strong national identity. All required a great depth of administrative competence and judgment to wield successfully the extensive powers that lay at their disposal. They contributed significantly to the province's security and stability. The political officer and Indian political agents were particularly valuable in navigating the intricacies of tribal politics.⁴

Despite the frontier officers' unquestionable ability, it was impossible for British officers alone to administer such a large geographical area. Educated and trustworthy Indians were recruited into the ranks of the Indian Civil Service.⁵ Recruitment standards were high, with emphasis on integrity and ability. These Indians were invaluable, and many shared the same ethics and principles as their British counterparts, which they gained during their education in England. Their participation was essential (for balance and legitimacy) and inescapable. A small number of geographically dispersed Britons, unaided from within, could never have successfully governed such a diverse population.

The same organizing principle was true of the army. While a relatively small British Army force remained in the North-West Frontier (acting more as a cohesive, reliable reserve than a force of first use), the majority of forces came from the Indian Army. The Indian Army's main duty was to protect the peaceful border inhabitants from hostile tribesmen and, on occasion, to conduct punitive operations. In the main, volunteer British officers commanded these units, which served as a large, capable standing force. However, for more routine activity, frontier scouts normally controlled tribal territory, and the frontier constabulary normally controlled settled areas. Both came from the local Pushtoon populace.

Lessons learned from the British experience of the North-West Frontier remain pertinent and are transferable to settling the conflict and furthering the national reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Lessons from the British Experience

The coalition's mission to defeat the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan has focused on eliminating guerrilla forces through conventional military attrition in the southern and eastern areas of the country. Little emphasis has been placed on securing and



Afghan President Hamid Karzai at the Kabul Military Training Center, 23 July 2002.

stabilizing the countryside beyond Kabul. The absence of security has diminished the trust of the population in the central government, impaired relief efforts, prevented nationwide reconstruction, and rendered aid agencies vulnerable to guerrilla actions. Guerrillas capitalize on the situation by targeting relief workers and projects and government officials in an effort to impede stabilization and progress.⁶ The absence of government control has resulted in the growth of local militias and the influence of warlords. Opium production remains inextricably linked to nationwide insecurity.

The British recognized that military operations alone could not effectively stabilize the region. Simultaneous social and economic development and political reform had to accompany the military's stabilizing effort. To integrate civil and military efforts within an all-inclusive strategy, these activities should have a common objective and a unity of command.

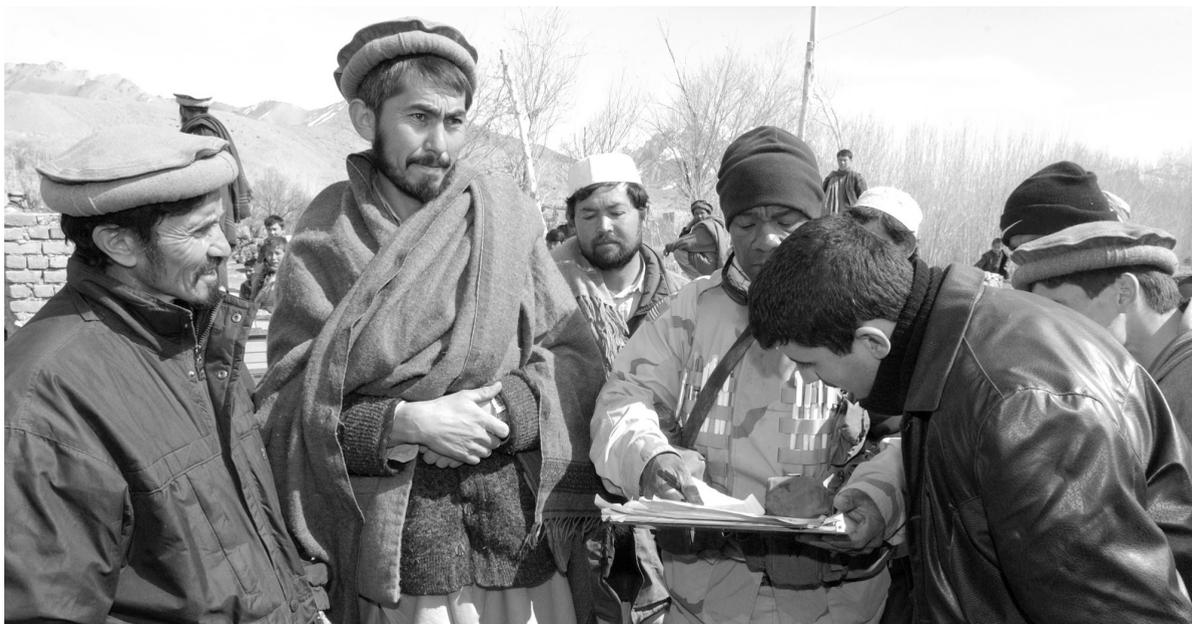
A flawed strategy? The coalition and the international community have focused on strengthening Afghanistan's central government, seeing strong control as a principal means of achieving security throughout the country. However, corruption, inefficiency, and political divides—fueled by ethnic rivalries—plague the advancement of the central government into a modern democratic state. Peace, order, and domestic security remain elusive. Personal interests and connections are common throughout President Hamid Karzai's regime and erode popular support for the administration.

The absence of security outside Kabul has resulted in continuing reliance on local powers for security and administration. Coalition efforts have failed to erode the influence of regional warlords, and militias continue to be the cornerstone of re-

gional power. Lieutenant General John R. Vines, while commander of Combined Joint Task Force 180 in Afghanistan, stated: "Militias are part of the existing reality, some are legitimate, and some are predators. We need to work aggressively to disestablish militias who are not legitimate, but the challenge is, if you disestablish a militia, who provides security? The vacuum can be filled by anarchy."⁷

Expecting either a strong centrist or Western style administration to take hold immediately in a country with no recent history of strong central government is unreasonable. Ethnic, religious, and provincial diversity thwart progress. The British recognized the need to delegate responsibility within the North-West Frontier to achieve security, while still maintaining political primacy. Strong central control alone, which the British enjoyed, could not address the unique challenges of diffuse tribal rule. A distinct bureaucracy in the form of separate administrative districts, each headed by a civilian deputy commissioner, facilitated control.⁸ Within the districts, the irregulars or scouts provided primary security. These locally raised regiments, commanded by British officers, maintained control of the tribal areas. An analogous organization, the Frontier Constabulary, conducted similar duties in settled areas. The Army of India had oversight of both organizations. Such a delineation of responsibilities proved effective, and regional security was maintained.

Rather than dismantling regional militias, the Afghan Government should consider co-opting and incorporating them under government control for legitimate purposes. Arguably, this is no more difficult than pursuing the current goal of establishing strong central control, something that is alien to the people of Afghanistan. Regional forces could be trained, equipped, and organized into a nationwide security structure that is centrally paid and has common operating procedures. Under such a structure, militias could become a lawful cornerstone of security throughout Afghanistan. Supported by a small cadre of Afghan National Army personnel or coalition trainers and reinforced by a larger central force (the Afghan National Army), these militias could perform the same role as the irregulars of the North-West Frontier. This system would provide regional security under a recognized ethnic framework, offset the requirement to establish immediate central control, and provide gainful employment for personnel being demobilized (an additional source of regional instability).



The Parwan Provincial Reconstruction Team, a soldier from Task Force Thunder, and an Afghan elder review the list of supplies for the Shekh-Ali district, 26 February 2005.

Warlords or deputy commissioners? The central government does not possess sufficient muscle to eliminate warlords who pose a danger to internal regional security and stability. To date, Afghan Government efforts to appease warlords through political and military appointments have failed to restrain ambitions for regional dominance. Warlords continue to rebuff central control, and green-on-green disagreements between rival militias continue to destabilize rural areas. Warlords' continued involvement in poppy production and associated illegitimate activity is also divisive. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, warlords play a pivotal role in regional security. Their removal would create a vacuum of lawlessness and disorder. In short, warlords are essential to enhancing stability throughout Afghanistan.

Accepting warlords as provincial governors might be a solution to addressing the underlying issues of regional control. With government approval and clear jurisdiction, warlords could play a legitimate role in security and reconstruction. Their extensive knowledge and respect within their local communities are key attributes. Warlords are well suited to rendering local legal decisions, determining land tenure, and providing relief. Many have previously undertaken such responsibilities. By filling appointments as provincial governors, warlords could maintain their militias for legitimate purposes (albeit at a reduced establishment) and preserve their status within the local

community. This path might prove to be an agreeable way to generate overt support for the central government.

Adviser to the province governor? Newly established province governors would benefit from the advice of knowledgeable advisers versed in the procedures of effective administration. Political officers filled this role effectively within the North-West Frontier. They were central players around whom the entire local government revolved and were highly respected. Their responsibilities included overseeing tribal areas and supervising the collection of taxes and distribution of allowances. They improved the economic life of the people they controlled. Proficiency was based on education, experience, and skill.

Placing highly trained advisers—such as seasoned U.S. Army foreign area officers (FAOs)—at the elbow of provincial governors would confer many advantages. The advisers could coordinate regional reconstruction with aid agencies, monitor militia activities, and provide an essential link to coordinate coalition activities. They could help mentor the governor and shape the local administration's development. They would also prove useful in gaining low-level intelligence.

Reintroduction of tribal police? The coalition has made limited progress in dismantling the Al Qaeda and Taliban network in the southern and eastern areas of Afghanistan. Attacks against aid agencies and the coalition have

increased. Capturing insurgents in remote areas is particularly difficult and hindered by tribal traditions and strict interpretation of the Islamic faith. Local intelligence has been almost nonexistent. Al Qaeda and Taliban forces continue to conduct cross-border guerrilla warfare from the tribal areas of the North-West Frontier.

Carefully selected tribesmen, called “levies” or Khassadors, were a central element of control on the North-West Frontier. Khassadors were paid (but not equipped or clothed) by the British to regulate their respective tribal areas under the watchful eye of the political agent and irregulars. They also proved to be excellent sources of local intelligence. The program was relatively successful for routine matters and was cost-effective.⁹ However, the Khassadors were not always able to deal with major disagreements, tribal disputes, or differences with the central government.

Establishing a network of tribal Khassadors in the southern and eastern areas of Afghanistan might prove beneficial in countering the insurgency. The focus of the network should be on gathering low-level intelligence and providing early warning of guerrilla attacks. Policing routine tribal issues should occur simultaneously or once the threat has diminished. Accepting initial shortfalls and variances in standards will be fundamental to making the initiative work in the long term. Khassadors would continue to face numerous conflicts of interest, but the earlier British experience shows that the overarching benefits significantly outweigh the shortfalls.

Are Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) the answer? Establishing PRTs is a revolutionary step in Afghanistan’s reconstruction. The program combines security and civil action to facilitate regional development. Unity of command and

effort is central. The PRT initiative mirrors many of the functions the British political and military structures of the North-West Frontier undertook. PRTs present a distinct defense against an evolving insurgency in Afghanistan. They can positively influence a significant proportion of Afghanistan’s rural population and provide regional stability. They deliver services that directly affect welfare, income, and quality of life—services often not provided by Afghanistan’s central government.

A mutually supporting network of PRTs could lead to enhanced security over the entire country. However, any expansion must include efforts to train and equip local police, a task some PRTs have neglected. Regional security is essential, and local police will gradually replace coalition and NATO security forces conducting such duties. They will provide stability and security after PRT liaison teams move on to new areas. Local police should investigate crimes against civilians to negate criticism that PRTs have no mandate or training to investigate local crimes or human rights abuses.

PRTs should also develop closer working relationships with regional leaders and warlords. Military liaison officers should be assigned to work with these leaders, monitoring behavior and activities. The use of embedded medical assets should receive attention. Most PRTs contain a doctor, a dentist, and a number of highly trained medical technicians. As most rural areas lack the infrastructure to meet the population’s basic health-care needs, medical assistance could be an important factor for securing the middle ground.

The local population’s educational needs must also be taken into consideration. The spread of education throughout the North-West Frontier was well received by the tribesmen. Education also proved a useful counter to resistance, fanaticism,

Recommendations for Stabilizing Afghanistan

- Integrate regional militias as lawful arms of Afghanistan’s government. Trained, equipped, and incorporated into a nationwide security structure under central authority, militias could become a lawful, cooperative cornerstone of regional security.
- Accept warlords as provincial governors (with government approval and clear jurisdiction). Separating the duties of governor and militia commander is essential for success.
- Establish a network of Western advisers to support province governors. Advisers could coordinate regional reconstruction, monitor militia activities, oversee the collection of taxes, and provide an essential link to coalition activities.
- Create an efficient civil service equivalent.

- Stand up a network of tribal police throughout Afghanistan, but particularly in the southern and eastern areas of the country, to address low-level intelligence shortfalls and provide early warning of impending guerrilla attacks.
- Establish a mutually supporting network of PRTs throughout Afghanistan.
- Invest in efficient road and rail networks, giving particular consideration to regions hosting PRTs.
- Institute a corps of dedicated European and North American Afghanistan specialists. Highly trained personnel should fill key appointments in PRTs, act as advisers to province governors, or directly support tactical operations in southern and eastern areas of Afghanistan.



U.S. Army

A Provincial Reconstruction Team and U.S. soldiers provide humanitarian assistance at a women's center outside Bagram, Afghanistan, 18 July 2005.

and extreme sensitiveness to moral influences. Therefore, PRTs should also coordinate regional educational and medical support as part of a wider reconstruction campaign.

Senior representatives from the U.S. Department of State and other international equivalents are in charge of all reconstruction work. Many serve for 2 years, providing continuity and experience. They ensure the effective use and integration of aid organizations into the civilian-led assistance coordination program. However, integration, collocation, and closer working relations with the PRT render aid agencies vulnerable to attack. PRTs must convince the local population that aid and assistance will be withdrawn should they fail to warn of or prevent attacks. This approach had some success on the North-West Frontier.

Finally, thought should be given to civilianizing some PRTs to help restore the perception of normality, return the military to its primary mission, and perhaps, lead to a reduced threat. For example, liaison officers or advisers to warlords or regional commanders could be civilians with prior military service. Qualified local Afghans should also be incorporated into key PRT appointments. Graduates from the newly formed Afghan Civil Service Academy should be assigned to the provinces. This would help with perceived legitimacy and is a natural evolution of the PRT concept.

Roads and railroads. Complicating the work of the PRTs and coalition in Afghanistan is an archaic transportation network. The principal roads of Afghanistan are in a poor state of repair. Two-and-a-half decades of civil war and a lack of infrastructure investment have led to considerable deterioration. Rehabilitating the roads is essential in order to provide increased access to clinics, hospitals, schools, and markets.

The British established a robust road network throughout remote areas of the North-West Frontier as a security measure. The initiative was a success. Roads linked to garrison forces allowed rapid deployment of assets across the frontier and provided greater flexibility for government irregulars and the Army of India. Roads were an alternative to military occupation and a much cheaper substitute. They contributed to the economy of the region and facilitated trade. Moreover, roads were a principal means of bringing tribesmen into contact with civilized India.

Investments should be directed toward improving the existing road network and the construction of new roads, especially in regions hosting PRTs. Better roads would allow PRTs and aid organizations to cover a greater area in less time and improve access to government services for tribesmen and their families. Such an initiative

would bolster the central government's authority in remote districts and influence the middle ground in the coalition's favor.

Developing a railway network should also be considered. Terrain, economics, concern over gauge standards, and a past history of opposing railway construction have prevented Afghanistan from constructing a railroad. The current government, recognizing the economic and social benefits of improved communications, is eager to address this shortfall. The 2004 agreement for Russian Railways to build a circular railway, linking Afghanistan to neighboring Iran and Pakistan, should be supported. Similarly, linking Afghanistan's mineral deposits to any embryonic railway network should also be examined.

Lack of cultural understanding. The coalition also suffers from a deficiency of cultural awareness, regional knowledge, and local language skills. Ignorance of tribal customs leads to misunderstanding and alienation. While insurgents communicate freely to gain intelligence, PRT members' inability to speak tribal languages is a barrier to basic understanding and communication. Language difficulty prevents tactical units from establishing working relationships with village elders and receiving local intelligence.

A lack of continuity, produced by short operational tours and compressed handovers between rotating forces, also compounds the problem, further diminishing the coalition's ability to gather vital intelligence. In contrast, a British officer serving in the North-West Frontier often stayed in India his entire career. Years of experience and a first-rate education produced individuals who were well versed in the country's culture and people. Speaking the language was essential, and the mastery of tribal dialects was a matter of pride. Unbroken service produced officers acclimatized to the North-West Frontier's unique weather and who possessed an intricate understanding of the land and its people.

Creating a corps of Afghanistan specialists should be considered, and the specialists should have a thorough grounding in Afghanistan's laws and procedures, revenue system, history, and the language of the province in which they would work. They should also expect to operate exclusively in Afghanistan during their career. Afghanistan specialists should not be limited to serving military personnel. Retired service personnel or those with a particular experience or skill should also be recruited and generously paid for

their term of service. These highly trained people could fill appointments in PRTs (providing much-needed continuity and experience), act as advisers to province governors, or directly support tactical operations in southern and eastern areas of Afghanistan.

Recommended Course of Action

The challenge of creating an Afghan state is daunting and time consuming. Converting many of the existing structures into government organizations is necessary for nationwide security. Convincing the ruling elite of the advantages of such an approach is central to any viable strategy. With social and economic growth taking hold throughout Afghanistan, a coherent long-term assistance plan is required. The plan would require a progressively stable operational environment (with NATO taking an ever-increasing lead), legitimate regional rule by local tribesmen, and coordinated international assistance at the regional level. Here, the lessons learned from the British North-West Frontier experience have applicability. Combining the pertinent lessons learned into a coherent strategy would help support a four-step plan for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.¹⁰

In step 1, NATO would expand throughout Afghanistan, creating an extensive network of supporting PRTs. PRTs would continue to be predominantly military (for security), but would be increasingly supported by international agencies and qualified local Afghans. During this step, roads would be enhanced or constructed and a railway network established. PRTs would remain a cornerstone of regional stability and provide an indispensable coordination function.

After the establishment of a network of PRTs, step 2 would integrate regional militias (under close supervision of NATO or coalition trainers) into the national military structure. Concurrently, warlords would be trained in centralized administration in Kabul and subsequently return as qualified (and legitimate) provincial governors. Military liaison officers, who would play an advisory and mentoring role, would support the newly qualified governors. This step would lay the foundations of legitimate province government. Physical support would be required to create government infrastructure. "Reinforced" PRTs would oversee and support regional activities.

In step 3, handpicked locals trained as civil servants in the new Civil Service Academy would deploy to the provinces. Their training would be progressive, thorough, and practical. To ensure success, experienced faculty who understand the region would be essential. Parallel instruction would also occur for Western advisers within the same academy, allowing joint training where possible. Such an approach would build esprit de corps and prevent unnecessary separation. Particular emphasis would be placed on language and customs training for Western advisers. Also, a corps of trained Western specialists would be established that would employ European and American volunteers (ideally, those nations contributing to military operations in Afghanistan). Afghan specialists would be qualified to fill a variety of civic and quasi-military appointments on graduation. During this phase, PRTs would also oversee the establishment of a network of tribal police.

Step 4 would involve two parts. Part A would see the realization of provincial administrations answerable to Kabul. During this step, local structures (political and military) would be mentored and monitored to maturity and assume all governance. Western advisers would replace military liaison officers as mentors to provincial governors, and trained civil servants would fill the ranks of local government. Local militias would conduct security activities to extend the reach of central

government. Border teams would be established to help control Pushtoon subtribes and prevent cross-border raids from Pakistan. Particular emphasis would be placed on developing effective, legitimate local police forces. PRTs would become increasingly civilianized, with Afghan specialists and qualified local Afghans filling key appointments.

In step 4, part B, PRTs would cease to exist. Local government would be mature, evenhanded, and effective. Military support, in the form of district advisory teams, would be available on request, but rarely called on. The threat from guerrillas would be negligible, and international organizations would freely coordinate their efforts with local authorities. Regional reconstruction would continue.

The coalition and NATO have made a promising start to the complex challenge of establishing a legitimate, functioning Afghan government. However, the country's future is by no means a fait accompli. Notwithstanding international intervention, a resurgent guerrilla campaign, the consolidation of warlords in tribal territories, and a growing drug trade present significant threats to the fledgling administration. Decentralized governance founded in regional realities might be one solution to addressing many of these problems. Such an approach has worked in the past, and many of the British lessons from the North-West Frontier can be effectively incorporated into a contemporary solution for Afghanistan. *MR*

NOTES

1. Andrew Roe, "British Governance of the North-West Frontier (1919 to 1947): A Blueprint for Contemporary Afghanistan?" (Master of Military Art and Science thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2005).

2. The distinctive Pushtoon subtribes of the Wazirs, the Mohmands, the Mahsuds, the Afridis, the Khattaks, and the Shinawaris occupy the mountainous area of the North-West Frontier. These tribes are identified by a proud and uncooperative self-government, a part feudal and part democratic ethos, and a rigid Muslim faith.

3. British involvement in India dates back to the founding of the East India Company on 31 December 1600, when Queen Elizabeth I granted a charter to the company providing exclusive rights to trade with the East.

4. Political officers oversaw both the settled and tribal areas of the North-West Frontier, supervising the collection of taxes and distribution of allowances. Political agents, who assisted political officers, were steadfast and dependable tribesmen who had proved their unquestionable allegiance to the British. They understood tribal customs intimately. Their assistance and knowledge were indispensable.

5. A post in the Indian Civil Service offered upper-caste Indians many opportunities. Senior positions were seen as respectable employment in a hierarchical culture, whereas business was rarely a realistic alternative for an Indian from a good family.

6. Guerrillas inflicted over 1,000 fatalities between January and August 2004, demonstrating restored confidence and successful reorganization. See Jane's Executive Summary, Afghanistan, 2004, on-line at <www4.janes.com>, accessed 7 October 2004.

7. Pamela Constable, "Key Security Initiatives Flounder in Afghanistan Taliban Resurgent as Development, Reforms Lag," *Washington Post*, 19 September 2003, 17.

8. Overall control of the North-West Frontier was the responsibility of the civilian British commissioner who delegated routine responsibility to six administrative districts. Deputy commissioners, most of whom had extensive military experience in India before becoming administrators, headed each district.

9. To provide some scale, 4,600 Khassadors policed the North-West Frontier district of Waziristan in 1923.

10. Roe.

Major Andrew M. Roe, Green Howards, British Army, is a student at the School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He has held various command and staff positions in Germany, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Northern Ireland.