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“They Never Stop to Talk to Me”: Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the Dilemmas  
of Instigating Rapid Social Change in Afghanistan

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### **Introduction**

In Early 2010, U.S. Major General Michael Flynn, deputy chief of staff for intelligence in Afghanistan stated that, "Eight years into the war in Afghanistan, the vast intelligence apparatus is unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which U.S. and allied forces operate and the people they seek to persuade" (Flynn, Pottinger, & Batchelor, 2010). Field Manual 3-24 (2006) establishes that in order for US and coalition forces to be successful in Afghanistan, they must understand the society and culture within which they are conducting operations. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), a product of counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, are one of the Department of Defense's (DoD) attempts to better understand the societal and cultural elements that the counterinsurgency manual establishes as important in "winning the hearts and minds" of the Afghan people.

While the counterinsurgency manual sets forth a framework that attempts to incorporate the societal and cultural nuances into the PRT's mission in Afghanistan, there is evidence to suggest that PRTs are still unable to connect with the environment and the people of Afghanistan. This implies that a mere understanding of societal and cultural nuances is not enough to comprehend fully the nature of conflict transpiring in Afghanistan.

The disconnect between PRTs and the people of Afghanistan is evident throughout the country and shows up across different stakeholder groups, as will be shown from a number of interviews conducted in Afghanistan for this study in January 2011. For example, Afghan provincial council members from the province of Panjsher and personnel in the office of the Governor of Helmand province expressed a concern for the lack of effort to include the council members and other government officials in the planning and initiation of PRT development projects in rural areas. Interestingly, an objective of PRT operations is to legitimize state actors in rural areas. However, the lack of effort on behalf of PRTs to include council members in the planning and initiation of development projects has led to issues where community members are accusing state government officials (like provincial council members) of corruption. This has led to distrust of PRT representatives, as well as Afghan government officials, and has delegitimized their presence in the community.

Also, while I was interviewing a local elder from Panjsher province, he motioned to a white SUV driving by—clearly packed full of US military personnel—and exclaimed, “they never stop to talk to me.” While admitting that the road the PRT had built was greatly appreciated, the elder couldn’t understand why PRT personnel, who lived in a compound just down the road, didn’t spend more time speaking with him about his community’s needs. He was full of ideas as to how his people could be helped, but was frustrated with the PRT and their lack in effort to reach out to him. He also mentioned feeling anxious about the PRT compound and its mysterious walls. The PRT lives directly within the community, but never attempts to blend with the locals or open their reinforce-barbed wire doors to the public. While security concerns inhibit the

degree to which PRT personnel can interact with community members, according to the PRT Handbook (2006), the objective is to “conduct operations in such a manner that optimizes direct, regular and positive interaction with local authorities and populations.” There may be nothing that can be done about barbed-wire walls, but stopping to talk with local elders and de-mystifying what is behind such walls are small, but significant acts that attempt to enhance “positive interaction.”

International efforts in Afghanistan have set in motion various projects to develop infrastructure, promote democracy, and establish security--elements that are important in the sustainability of peace in Afghanistan. These projects have introduced many Afghans to concepts and practices that have never before been part of their society or culture and are bringing about massive changes that are causing social dislocation. Because “there exists in humans a powerful drive to maintain the sense of one’s identity, a sense of continuity that allays fear of changing too fast or being changed against one’s will by outside forces,”—in other words, a drive to maintain a sense of ontological security--it is important not only to understand the cultural and societal nuances that exist in Afghanistan, but to understand how the introduction of new concepts and practices are changing those cultural and societal norms (Kinnvall, 2005).

There is no question that the people of Afghanistan greatly appreciate the time and money being spent in an effort to make their living conditions better. However, fundamentally, there is a clear divide between the needs as Afghans define them and the efforts initiated by the international community. Development, democracy and security in Afghanistan are essential, but while attempting to deliver on these, PRTs and other international actors are potentially failing to recognize that there is a separate set of

Afghan needs that will ultimately have to be addressed in order for the larger structural concerns to be met. The force driving the disconnect between PRTs and Afghans is of a deeper nature that spurs social change in Afghan communities. Specifically the research question in this paper is: *what can the elements of social inclusion, trust, and ontological security tell us about the nature of PRT-initiated change occurring in Afghanistan and the local population's motivation to accept this change?*

This paper takes a closer look at the disconnect occurring between PRTs and Afghan communities. by assessing how PRTs initiate unmanaged social change, impacting Afghan notions of social inclusion, trust and ontological security, which form the social architecture of Afghanistan. The conclusions support the following: simply by being a foreign entity, PRTs risk disrupting community routines. What may seem like the most benign change can disrupt community relationships. For example, paying Shura<sup>1</sup> members changes the perception of how relationships are defined. PRTs do not necessarily introduce practices or concepts that support Afghan notions of normalcy. These new concepts and practices are also introduced in a way that can sometimes drastically redefine a community member's role and shift their relationship with the community. In order for PRTs to motivate community members to support the changes being introduced, PRT members will have to establish a degree of predictability. To do this, PRTs will need to deliver, most importantly, on promises made, and deliver on the expectations raised among Afghan community members.

Community members, in some cases, are not confident that the structure of the community can handle the changes being introduced by PRTs and other international

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<sup>1</sup> Shuras are locally constructed councils that are comprised of community elders and often function as mediators of intra and inter-community disputes, make important community decisions, and provide for their community's basic needs.

interveners. QIPs are described as being short-term solutions focused on “winning hearts and minds” rather than being long term solutions focused on the sustainability of development in Afghanistan. Confusion over the inconsistency of PRT objectives, along with the frequent rotation of PRT personnel, adds to the uncertainty felt among Afghans and further inhibits PRT abilities to connect with the overall social architecture of Afghanistan. Afghans are told that PRTs are there to help them, but when coalition forces conduct searches of houses, the expectation that PRTs will treat them with respect are dashed.

Many changes initiated by PRTs are not inclusive of the Afghan voice, do not maintain a degree of predictability, and fail to replicate individual and community understandings of how the world operates. Lack of communication between PRTs, Afghan government officials, and community members are in large part to blame for the unsuccessful implementation of various development projects. Uncertainty that develops as a result of changes initiated by PRTs leads to the distrust of new actors and concepts. When PRT attempts fail to legitimize state government officials, it is because they don't incorporate the “realities” of Afghan community members. PRTs enact development projects that don't truly reflect or attempt to gauge the impact that they have on the individual and community identities in existence. PRT and other international intervener attempts to use old authority figures to legitimize state government presence in provinces has not effectively changed Afghan community members perceptions of state government and has resulted in the reaffirming of old lines of authority and done little more than increase the flow of international money into communities. Finally, without much attention paid to how new concepts and practices are changing Afghan identities, the

result has often been the frequent accusation of corruption toward both PRTs and the Afghan Government.

### **Methodology**

In an effort to determine what role Provincial Reconstruction Teams play in facilitating social change in the state of Afghanistan and to examine what social inclusion, trust, and ontological security can tell us about the nature in which PRTs attempt to establish relationships with rural Afghan community members, I conducted 11 interviews (3 NGO, 2 foreign military, 6 Afghan citizens) with various stakeholders involved in development, reconstruction, and the establishment of state governance and security in Afghanistan. Each stakeholder group was either involved with monitoring or observing the above operations, and/or work or have worked with PRTs. The stakeholder groups interviewed consisted of independently funded NGOs, military personnel, military contracted civilians, Afghan government officials, and local Afghan citizens. The collection of literature, and the interviews and observations conducted in Afghanistan were primarily coded with the intention of determining where and if the needs for social inclusion, trust, and ontological security are accounted for by PRTs. 3 separate questionnaires were drafted in reference to three specific stakeholder groups:

- 1) NGOs (both locally and internationally based) and other agencies that either work directly with PRTs, work indirectly with PRTs, or observe/observed PRTs
- 2) Foreign military representatives and civilians contracted to work for foreign military organizations working for or with PRTs
- 3) Afghan citizens (which includes: government workers, urban and rural community members, and community leaders).

Each questionnaire included questions grouped into three primary categories: social inclusion, trust, and ontological security. The questions were designed to assess and measure whether PRTs either explicitly or implicitly accounted for the needs for inclusion, trust, and ontological security.

Selection of participants was based on the three established target groups listed above. Due to security concerns, restrictions in transportation, language barriers, and the need-to-know nature of military information, access to participants was limited. Participants for this study were primarily collected in collaboration with Boston University's American Institute for Afghanistan Studies (AIAS) based in Kabul, Afghanistan. Participants were also collected through personal contacts with various organizations and personnel working in Afghanistan. Most of these participants are working directly with NGOs who are working specifically for the Department of Defense or the Government of Afghanistan. Others are representatives who have, in one way or another, come in contact with PRT operations in Afghanistan simply through the nature of their work.

Afghanistan is still a nation beset with conflict, and as such requires additional care in approaching participants and protecting their anonymity. Having discussed the nature of translation services with various experts who have worked in Afghanistan, it is evident that translation can be extremely unreliable. Therefore, I restricted the use of translators by interviewing English-speaking participants. In the rare case where participants didn't speak English, a translator was present who was of the same ethnic background of the participants being interviewed. Security concerns also restricted the environment in which interviews could be conducted.

Participants were interviewed, in many cases, at AIAS headquarters in a semi-private business setting, or where it was convenient and comfortable for the interviewee. AIAS is located in a relatively physically secure neighborhood of Kabul, Afghanistan and had private rooms available for interviewing. AIAS is affiliated with Boston University and is a research institute, established in Kabul in 2003. According to their mission statement the AIAS “is a private, non-profit organization run by scholars with the aim of promoting and encouraging the systematic study of the culture, society, land, languages, health, peoples and history of Afghanistan.” AIAS has a strong working history with the community and is managed by a well-respected Afghan native, Omar Sharifi. Because security was of concern, there were a limited number of locations where interviews could be conducted, and security was always the first priority for both the participant and researcher. Local security briefs were be consulted, along with any information coming out of the US embassy before any interview location outside of AIAS was considered.

Interview participants were made aware of the fact that I was a graduate student researcher from the University of Massachusetts in Boston. At the time of the collection of interviews I had no affiliation to the US government. Interviews were conducted independent of any institution outside of the sponsorship with Boston University’s American Institute for Afghanistan Studies. The trip was funded in small part by a grant that was awarded from the University of Massachusetts in Boston and the remaining expenses were paid out of pocket. There was no concern of hierarchy.

In terms of confidentiality of the interview participant, the names of participants were not reflected in any of the notes gathered or in any of the other collected materials. Also for confidentiality reasons, when referring to interviewees, I will refrain from

mentioning where participants are from, what agency they work with, or what council they are a member of. It is easy to determine from office location or province what individual it is that is being interviewed. Please see Appendix B for Institutional Review Board approval document.

Finally, there are some obvious issues with the validity of the data collected. The fact that only 11 interviews were acquired and that there was not equal representation of stakeholders makes any recommendations or conclusions very unstable. Also, as with any research, there are always researcher biases that pertain to such things as career history, academic history, political leanings, etc...None-the-less, the information that was collected across stakeholder groups is interesting and allows for some brief, but fascinating case studies that support the fact that PRTs and other international interveners should consider the elements of social inclusion, trust and ontological security in the implementation of development projects in Afghanistan and other theaters.

## **Literature Review**

### Provincial Reconstruction Teams<sup>2</sup>

According to Army Field Manual FM 3-07, “joint doctrine provides a definition for stability operations that captures the role of military forces to support broader

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<sup>2</sup> To remain within the scope and purposes of this project, I will not be including a review of literature pertaining to Afghanistan in general. For a more in depth look at literature on Afghanistan please see Rubin, Barnett R. (2002) *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*. New York: Yale University Press. or Barfield, Thomas. (2010). *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton University Press.

governmental efforts:

*[Stability operations encompass] various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief (JP 3-0).*

Stabilization and Reconstruction (S&R) is still in a nascent state of its evolution and concerns by in large the merging of military-led security focused stability operations and the more reconstruction focused nature of civilian-led efforts. “Army doctrine states that stability operations include counter- insurgency operations, peace operations, security assistance, and combating terrorism.<sup>4</sup> Reconstruction activities include all aspects of improving governance: training civil administrators, improving essential services and public safety, supporting civil society and self-determination, and promoting the rule of law and economic development” (McNerney, 2006). Thus, in essence S&R comprises a coordinated effort to initiate operations concerned with stability and reconstruction within conflict zones. The part of stability operations that I will focus on in this paper will be that of Provincial reconstruction Teams (PRTs). PRTs have the potential to become a model for future stabilization and reconstruction operations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed account of Stabilization and Reconstruction efforts in general see: Yates, Lawrence A. (2006). *The US Military's Experience in Stability Operation, 1789-2005*. Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press.

For a more detailed account of Stabilization and Reconstruction efforts specific to Afghanistan please see: Serafino, Nina M. (2006). *Peacekeeping and Related Stability Operations: Issues of U.S. Military Involvement*. IB94040; Mann, Sloan. (n.d.) Taking interagency stability operation to a new level: The integration of special operations forces and USAID in Afghanistan. *Small Wars Journal*. Retrieved from [www.smallwarsjournal.com](http://www.smallwarsjournal.com); &Kern, Jack D. (2007) Stability and reconstruction operations: Connecting the dots between military and civilian efforts. *Small Wars Journal*, 7. Retrieved from [www.smallwarsjournal.com](http://www.smallwarsjournal.com).

Since the bombing campaign against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in October of 2001, United States and coalition forces have attempted to establish security, reconstruct the state of Afghanistan, and build a legitimate government. Moving quickly from conventional methods of warfare into counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics, former President George W. Bush called for a reconstruction plan reminiscent of the Marshall Plan, in April of 2002. The new plan focused its attention on offensive, rather than defensive tactics, bringing soldiers down to the rural community level in an effort to better understand, and become familiar with, local cultures and traditions. According to Army field manual (FM) 3-24 (2006), “successful conduct of COIN operations depends on thoroughly understanding the society and culture within which they are being conducted.” To ensure success, FM 3-24 (2006) goes on to explain the elements which need to be understood:

- 1) Organization of key groups in the society
- 2) Relationships and tensions among groups
- 3) Ideologies and narratives that resonate with groups
- 4) Values of groups (including tribes), interests, and motivations
- 5) Means by which groups (including tribes) communicate
- 6) The societies leadership system

FM 3-24 establishes that through a better understanding of key groups, relationships, ideologies, motivations, communication, and leadership systems, the Afghan population can be motivated to participate in sustainable reconstruction,

governance building, and establishing security within the state of Afghanistan. This shift in military policy has “become America’s primary tool for using large-scale reconstruction to improve security in Afghanistan...” (Malkasian & Meyerle, 2009).

The mechanism through which this new counterinsurgency strategy is implemented is the Provincial Reconstruction Team. PRTs are civil military teams, on average, composed of about 70-100 personnel, with some PRTs containing as much as 400 personnel. According to the United States Institute of Peace, some PRTs are an integrated establishment composed of the United States military, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the local government (Perito, 2005).

The Government Accountability Office in Washington D.C. (2008) states that “in Afghanistan, PRTs were established by the U.S.-led coalition as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). PRTs evolved from humanitarian assistance teams established by the U.S. military in 2002 after the overthrow of the Taliban.” Designed by the United States embassy in Afghanistan, According to Perito (2005), PRTs operate on an established set of principles that focus on “extending the authority of the Afghan government, improving security, and promoting of the Interior.” PRTs in Afghanistan operate through the direction of NATO/ISAF<sup>4</sup> but are highly influenced by the unique nature of the communities within which they are operating. The diverse nature of each province has encouraged PRTs to develop strategies that are equally as diverse, incorporating the tribal, cultural, and environmental context of the area where they are

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<sup>4</sup> According to the PRT Handbook (2006), “ISAF emerged from the Bonn Agreement of 2001. The UN Security Council, under UNSCR 1386, authorized the establishment of ISAF to assist the Afghan government ‘in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas, so that the Afghan Interim Authority as well as the personnel of the United Nations can operate in a secure environment.’”

operating into their mission objectives. The PRT is also highly influenced by its originating country government and accompanying political objectives. In fact, a final report drafted by the Woodrow Wilson School Graduate Policy Workshop, finds that, “PRTs are heavily shaped by the contributing country’s political priorities and capabilities. Domestic political constraints and priorities in the capitals of PRT-contributing countries are often directly translated into a PRT’s operational priorities” (Abbaszadeh et. al).

Another domestic factor that deeply influences PRT priorities is funding. The agencies that have designated a majority of the funding have the ultimate authority in how the PRT structure is designed. As in the case of the United States, the DoD receives a large majority of the budget, which in effect, can “lead to an over-emphasis on short-term, security-related projects out of sync with long-term development plans. The US military has access to much larger (and more quickly-released) funds than its development counterparts.” (Abbaszadeh et. al)

PRTs vary in structure (i.e., the balance between civilian and military personnel) and size. The level of relative security experienced in the various PRT operating areas often impacts the nature of the individual mission and structure of the PRT. For example, the United States’ PRT operating in Kandahar is much larger and is operating within an environment that has very little established physical security. Therefore the PRT mission in Kandahar is heavily focused on establishing security. In contrast the PRT operating in Panjsher province is much smaller and operates within a much more relaxed security situation. In fact, PRTs in Panjsher travel about in unmarked white SUV’s and don’t carry their weapons when they are approaching community members. The PRT mission

in Panjsher is much more focused on development, leaving security concerns to the provincial police and government.

Another challenge facing PRTs is that there is a lack of unity among PRTs operating in Afghanistan. At a yearly event, PRT commanders and representatives will convene in a meeting to discuss overall goals, best practices, and issued policy documents in an effort to design an overarching strategy for PRTs across the country. However, many best practices that are developed at the individual PRT level often don't make it to this convention or to newly arriving PRT units.

Currently, as mentioned by multiple reports (Malkasian & Meyerle, 2009, Abbaszadeh et. al, Perito, 2005, Morris et. al., 2006), there are no methods in place with which to measure the success and impact of PRT models and strategies. "This diversity in field operations can negatively impact unity of effort and purpose across PRTs and creates the challenge of reconciling various PRT models in a multinational context. In Afghanistan, even NATO coordination has not mitigated this problem" (Abbaszadeh et al.). Other issues concerning PRTs consist of lack of staffing capacity, continued violence and lack of security, personality clashes between civilian and military PRT personnel, as well as with, local actors and Afghan governmental officials.

Potentially the most unique characteristic of PRTs, in general, is that they attempt to bridge civilian and military expertise to better understand the nuances of the conflict transpiring in Afghanistan. Combining the forces of the US military with the NGO community was initially seen as an effective way to treat "the causes of Afghanistan's instability, terrorism, warlords, unemployment and grinding poverty" (Perito, 2005). The PRT Handbook (2006) advises that, "A PRT is a civil-military institution that is able to

penetrate the most unstable and insecure areas because of its military component and is able to stabilize these areas because of the capabilities brought by its diplomacy, defense, and development components.” While there are obvious concerns with the combining of very diverse organizational identities, PRTs have proven to make small advances in development and reconstruction, as well as in helping to legitimize state government presence in rural areas.

However, reviews remain mixed on whether PRTs have been an effective mechanism for state building, establishing security, and reconstructing the state of Afghanistan. In an interagency report headed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2006), the overall theme was that while multiple PRTs have made significant improvements to security, governance, and infrastructure in Afghanistan, PRTs have largely been unable to meet expectations. This sentiment has been mimicked in multiple reports drafted by such institutes as the United States Institute of Peace (USIP, 2005), the Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2008), and the Strategic Studies Institute (2009).

PRTs have shown throughout their course in Afghanistan and Iraq that they have some valuable measures to contribute to the efforts playing out in both areas. Those who argue in favor of PRTs claim that they have “strengthened governance and contribute to security” (Malkasian & Meyerle, 2009). Overwhelmingly most authors claim that PRTs are able to operate in areas with low levels of security due to the military element of the PRT, unlike many civilian counterparts who generally don’t have the capacity to maintain security either for themselves or for the community they are serving. This becomes an important advantage in areas like Kandahar and Helmand where the Taliban

and other insurgents continue to maintain a significant presence. It is argued by some that “civilian development agencies—USAID, NGOs, the United Nations (UN), the Afghan government’s National Solidarity Program—cannot do the same job as the PRTs” (Malkasian & Meyerle, 2009).<sup>5</sup>

Critics from the civilian policy realm argue that PRT military personnel don’t have the development expertise required to facilitate sustainable reconstruction in Afghanistan. Military personnel often are not educated about Afghan culture and are ill equipped to address the human side of development that is a necessary component to address in a post conflict zone. It has been observed by aid workers that often, military personnel will partake in development endeavors yet will leave “in their wake schools without teachers and clinics without doctors” (Malkasian & Meyerle, 2009). Along the same vein, civilian agencies are often skeptical of collaboration with the military. PRTs have done a lot to blur the lines between military based peacekeeping and civilian based humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan. In its efforts “to improve their coordination with civilian actors...the international military remains continuously challenged in delivering assistance” (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, & Taylor, 2008)<sup>6</sup> The military bases its aid distribution strategy on the ‘charity paradigm’, which is often interpreted as being unsustainable and patronizing by both Afghan community members and PRT civilian counterparts. Many aid workers also don’t believe that the US mission should be focused on counterinsurgency strategy. “In their view, development should be conducted

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed account on PRT concept and purpose see: Peter Viggo Jakobsen. (2005). PRTs in Afghanistan: Successful but not sufficient. Danish Institute for International Studies.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on how Afghans perceive international intervention see Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, S., Wardak, M., Zaman, I., & Taylor, A. (2008). Afghan hearts, Afghan minds: Exploring Afghan perceptions of civil-military relations. British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group.

for development's sake, not as a means of defeating the insurgency" (Malkasian & Meyerle, 2009).

Another interagency issue is tour lengths of PRT personnel. While tour lengths vary between representing country, as an example, some civilian PRT members will often only serve in 6-month rotations while their military counterparts tour length lasts for 12 months. Also, it is often the case that military and civilian personnel have no previous experience working with one another and aren't privy to the organizational identities and languages that comprise the other's agency. The personalities that are involved in making up each organizational identity have a significant impact on collaborative efforts that happen both within the PRT and with Afghan community members. Realistically, PRT personnel have a relatively short time to manage these personalities into a workable situation and then attempt to build a reputation with various personalities within the Afghan community they are operating in. This sometimes encourages the development of insincere relationships between all stakeholders and can damage successes that have been attained.

In review, PRTs are an attempt to develop a cutting edge counterinsurgency strategy through the means of bridging the gap between military and civilian expertise. However, while there are multiple examples of PRTs having implemented successful development projects, established security, and having promoted the establishment of state government in rural areas, there are a variety of issues that impact a PRTs ability to operate effectively. PRTs are a complex organizational entity that is constrained by a plethora of factors. First, as cited above by Abbaszadeh et al, PRTs are unapologetically a political entity, sometimes driven by divergent country agendas, initiating a complex

pool of motivations, and accompanying tactics and practices across the whole of Afghanistan. These divergent agendas are also fueled by divergent funding structures that favor civilian actors over military actors in some PRTs and vice versa in others. The American PRTs in particular are known to be heavy on the military side.

Secondly, PRTs are operating within a diverse social environment in Afghanistan, which heavily influences the design of strategy from province to province. The lack of security in some provinces has encouraged PRTs to take on a more security-focused track, while others are almost solely focused on development projects. Thirdly, combining civilian and military strategies into one grand counterinsurgency effort has been a challenge in and of itself. Many critics cite multiple areas of contention between the organizations ranging from lack of military education on Afghan culture to questioning the use of counterinsurgency as a means to win over the population.

Overwhelmingly, however, the main reason why PRTs have not lived up to expectations is that there are multiple simple structural elements that cause PRTs a great deal of difficulty in fostering relationships both amongst themselves and the Afghan population. Tour lengths vary between civilian and military PRT personnel, as well as between one country PRT and another. Also, there is a lack in collaborative training, which encourages and reinforces individual organizational identities and objectives, contributing to issues in miscommunication and diverging objectives. These inter-organizational struggles, themselves, make it difficult for PRTs to connect with the social architecture of Afghanistan.

As I argue below, however, beyond these and of much greater importance is the lack of attention paid to the changes initiated throughout Afghanistan, in part, by PRT

operations, and how those changes impact to the social architecture of Afghanistan. While PRTs face inter-organizational challenges, they face an environment of great social complexity that, as Major General Flynn indicates, is still largely misunderstood by the intelligence community of the United States Military. After 10 years of occupation, Afghanistan is experiencing a rapid amount of change on multiple levels. The day-to-day routines that were once familiar to Afghan families are in many cases disrupted by various actors who are interested in facilitating change. Even as the counterinsurgency framework attempts to incorporate the cultural and societal nuances of the Afghan population into their strategy, PRTs, a counterinsurgency tool designed specifically to win hearts and minds, in many cases still remain disconnected from the communities within which they operate.

#### Assessing the Impacts of Social Change

In an attempt to understand why there is a disconnect occurring between PRTs and the communities in which they operate, I will be assessing how PRTs impact three elements of the social architecture of Afghanistan. The first is **social inclusion**, which, for the purposes of this paper, will refer to one's participation in the structures of society and adherence to the rules that govern the interactions between individuals within a particular community. Second is the element of **trust**, defined in this context as confidence in and reliance upon the predictability that any changes introduced will meet expectations raised by those changes. And lastly, I will consider the element of **ontological security**, the process through which one establishes routines revolving around the need to maintain normalcy and individual stability.

## Social Inclusion

While the concept of inclusion traditionally addresses the ideas of in-group acceptance and belonging, what I am predominantly focusing on in the context of Afghanistan is one's participation in the structure of society and their adherence to the rules that govern the interactions of individuals within a community. More to the point in this case would be one's participation in and acceptance of the *unwritten* rules that govern a community, and are established and normalized over time. Like most societies, Afghan communities operate based upon a particular social structure. The Afghan social structure is very communal in nature, which makes the study of the individuals and their interaction with one another very important when considering how social structures are impacted by outside forces. This social structure, in essence, guides community members through day-to-day operations; operations that are established both through implicit and explicit means.

There is a lack of information on how PRTs impact this social structure. The literature reviewed in this section explains what elements need to be present in order to create a functioning social structure and then reviews what the absence or alteration to the various elements can do to break down that social structure. Later, I will use this information to analyze how PRTs and the work they are conducting impact the social structure of the communities within which they operate.

Author William Sewell (1992), states that “societies are based on practices that derive from many distinct structures, which exist at different levels, operate in different modalities, and are themselves based on widely varying types and quantities of

resources.” He further insists that, “structures shape people’s practices, but it is also people’s practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures” (Sewell 1992). In other words, while the structure itself provides the foundation or rules that govern the interaction between community members, it is also through the replication of these interactive practices that allows the structure to be established and sustained. Because the sustainability of the social structure requires that community members reinforce practices through replicated action, community members need to be motivated and feel confident in replicating that particular practice. This requires that people be allowed to maintain a sense of control over the practices that make up the social structure. They need to feel included in establishing and participating in the structure. Author Albert Bandura (1989) states that, “among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs function as an important set of proximal determinants of human motivation, affect, and action.”

The comfort level that people feel in relation to various practices is an extremely important factor to consider. The more comfortable people feel with a particular practice, the more likely the practice will become part of the social structure--so much so that the practice becomes unrealized; an instinct that is built upon predictability and trust. To illustrate the point more clearly, Sewell (1992) posits that, “deep structural schemas are pervasive, in the sense that they are present in a relatively wide range of institutional spheres, practices and discourses. They also tend to be relatively unconscious, in the sense that they are taken-for-granted mental assumptions or modes of procedure that actors normally apply without being aware that they are applying them.”

Sewell also points out that structures are malleable in nature and can change as time progresses and as new actors deposit different influences. However, structures, while flexible in some cases, are not always adjustable or transferable. According to Goffman, there are particular mechanics involved in a social structure; certain contracts upon which individuals place their sense of security. These contracts are “necessary because of the fragile nature of both the interaction and the social self. The constant threat of annihilation hangs over both: When an incident occurs and spontaneous involvement is threatened, the reality is threatened” (Rawls, 1987). The relative predictability of these social contracts<sup>7</sup> reinforces community members’ mutual feelings of trust (Misztal, 2001). When the delicate nature of social contracts is challenged, the after effect is often social dislocation.

Social dislocation occurs when the “working consensus” or the understood contract between individuals is disrupted in one way or another. The primary risk in the collapse of the “working consensus” is that as the interaction between individuals collapses, the rules that governed the interaction are then called into question as well. People realize that “what had been taken for granted as ultimate entities are really held together by rules that can be broken with some kind of impunity” (Rawls, 1987). Thus, the very foundation of a persons understanding of the way the world works is disrupted and challenged by entities that attempt to alter or adjust the understood implicit and explicit social contracts. “A lack of capacity and resources to see or to combat incorrect interpretive frameworks leads people to attach wrong meanings to all occurrences. Such

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<sup>7</sup> This atypical version of “social contract” is derived from the research conducted by author Misztal, B. A. (2001), “Normality and trust in Goffman's theory of interaction order,” *Sociological Theory*, 19(3), 312-324. This version of social contract diverges somewhat from the more common notion of Rousseau’s contractual relationship between the government and its people.

an absence of readability of order results in the long run in distrust, and the final resolution to cognitive ambiguities, Goffman (1974:316) notes, carries real, often deadly, consequences” (Misztal 2001).

In conclusion, community structures are founded upon basic written and unwritten social practices that are normalized over time. These social practices can be malleable in some cases, however, delicate at the same time. Community members, out of necessity, place a great amount of trust upon normalized interactions and social practices. In order to generate enough trust to normalize actions and social practices, community members must feel that they exhibit a level of control or agency in changing or managing the practices. Essentially, a social contract is formed between the individuals of a community, upon which people abide as long as the individuals feel that the contract is being upheld. Because of the trust-based nature associated with social practices, any alteration or challenge made to these practices must adhere to the “contract” and promote the sense that individuals have control over the alteration or challenge. If the contract is not upheld, and if people feel like new or altered practices are not in line with other normalized practices in the structure, social dislocation can ensue. The implications for this in particular to Afghanistan will be discussed below in the analysis section of the paper.

### Trust

Trust in the context of the relationship between Afghan communities and PRTs is the confidence in and reliance upon the predictability that changes introduced will meet expectations raised. First, I establish how both the elements of trust and distrust interact

with social structures to create cooperative versus uncooperative environments and how the presence of one or the other changes the nature of relationships between individuals. I will then establish that the exhibition of distrust can be a product of raising expectations and then failing to fulfill them.

The research regarding the correlation between PRTs raising Afghan expectations and the level of predictability that expectations will be met suggests that it is difficult to analyze the level of trust that Afghan community members exhibit and feel toward PRTs in relation to the predictability that expectations raised will be fulfilled. I will be drawing upon work that is primarily concerned with how governments generate trust or distrust and will then apply it to the case of PRTs in Afghanistan in my analysis section.

Authors Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998), “define trust in terms of confident positive expectations regarding another's conduct, and distrust in terms of confident negative expectations regarding another's conduct.” Understanding the role that trust plays in any social architecture is important because, it allows one to understand the motivations behind the promotion of cooperative environments vs. non-cooperative environments. The difference between cooperative and non-cooperative environments is essentially related to the level of effort that individuals put forth to reduce the amount of complexity and uncertainty they face on a day-to-day basis. The motivation is more often in the direction to reduce the complexity and uncertainty in one’s life (as will be explained in more detail in the ontological security section below). To do this, one must agree to exhibit a level of trust between oneself and the object in question (i.e., social structure, person, practice, etc...). “Trust is the essential background of everyday interaction, and as such it helps us to simplify information, reduces the complexity of

signals, and protects us from the ambiguity and uncertainties of many situations” (Misztal, 2001).

For one to have the ability to exhibit trust they must calculate the potential risks associated “with the type and the depth of the interdependence inherent in a given relationship (Shepard and Sherman 1998:423)” (Misztal, 2001). Trust exhibited within a given social structure encourages the development of cooperative social environments because it reinforces understood social contracts and expectations about relationships that are based upon mutual exchange. It is likely that those who are more comfortable with their environment will calculate the potential for risk as being low, and will therefore more likely initiate trust-based practices and will participate in building trust-based relationships. According to author Barbara Misztal (2001), “the perception of the situation as normal results in the development of trusting intentions toward others in the situation. Trust, as an outcome of situational normality, reduces the complexity of a situation and increases the probability of cooperation (Misztal 1996)” (Misztal, 2001).

While it is important to consider the effects of the presence of trust in a social structure, the element of distrust, is too, an important factor to evaluate and consider. “Distrust is not simply the lack of trust, rather it is a functional equivalent of trust. An individual must make a choice between the strategies of trust and the strategies of distrust, when seeking to reduce complexity” (Notter, 1995). By making the choice to distrust something, one then also makes the choice to define the object in question as a negative intrusion, the effects of which must be mitigated. When one’s trust has been violated, “Luhmann notes that the ... ‘consciousness of distrust is often lost, and the strategies of reduction demarcated by it become autonomous; become a habitual outlook

on life; a routine” (Notter, 1995). Distrust, as an element present in a social structure, propagates an uncooperative environment and fosters the normalization of the practice of creating barriers against the development of trust. Often, to counteract the development of this practice, “one side must make a conciliatory move that is independent of the other side doing the same. In trust, it is the same process. One must take the risk and expose oneself to harm without *knowing* for sure how the other side will react” (Notter, 1995).

While there are multiple factors as to why individuals develop feelings of trust and distrust, I will be looking at predominantly one: the raising of expectations and the subsequent lack of fulfilling expectations raised. Most interview participants mentioned, in one form or another, how the raising of expectations and the subsequent lack of fulfilling expectations raised has impacted their impression of PRTs and other international interveners. Failing to meet expectations raised was mentioned most frequently by participants as being the reason why motivation to accept changes being initiated by PRTs or the Afghan government was lower in some cases.

In addition, I have chosen to use literature that analyzes the development of trust and distrust between governments and citizens for several reasons. Firstly, there is little research that analyzes the amount of trust or distrust generated between PRTs and Afghan communities. Secondly, much of the work that PRTs conduct is nominally carried out on behalf of or under the direction of the Afghan government. The PRT handbook (2006) states that PRTs specifically work under the direction of the Afghan government stating: "The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) has limited outreach to the provinces. The PRT should not act as an alternative to the GIROA, but rather seek to improve the capacity of the GIROA to govern itself." In fact,

the US military makes it a point to say that part of the support of the hosting government comes from the counterinsurgents themselves. According to the US Military Counterinsurgency Manual FM 3-24 (2006), “people do not actively support a government unless they are convinced that the counterinsurgents have the means, ability, stamina, and will to win. The insurgents’ primary battle is against the HN [Host National] government, not the United States; however, U.S. support can be crucial to building public faith in that government’s viability.” And lastly, at least one author addresses the issue of promises, contracts, and expectations and how these mechanisms are used to generate support and trust of a government entity. However, as discussed below, these mechanisms can also be a government’s demise if left unfulfilled.

When it comes to generating support and compliance among citizens of a government entity, trust is an important factor. “Trust of the state...affects the level of citizen tolerance of the regime and also the degree of compliance with governmental demands and regulations” (Levi, n.d.). The “degree of compliance” is key because without a moderate to high level of compliance from citizens, a government cannot enact policies or govern the population effectively. If a government is unable to establish a level of trust that invokes compliance and support in citizens, often the result is resentment and opposition whether it be subtle or obvious. To maintain compliance and support, author Margaret Levi mentions that, “citizens are likely to trust government only to the extent they believe that it will act in their interests, that its procedures are fair, and that their trust of the state and of others is reciprocated. These are the conditions necessary to produce contingent consent, behavioral compliance with government demands.”

In politics, frequently people will use promises, contracts, or raised expectations as a means to gain support and compliance from citizens. “When government has a good track record of delivering on its promises, especially those for which its commitments are not credible, citizens are more likely to trust the government and respond with trustworthiness—even in situations where it is extremely difficult to monitor them” (Levi, n.d.). However, the use of promises, contracts and raised expectations can complicate the relationship between government entities and citizens, especially when citizens feel that those promises, contracts, and expectations are not being met. “Failure of government representatives to uphold policy compacts, to achieve stated ends, or to treat potentially trustworthy citizens as trustworthy can have disastrous effects on the extent to which citizens trust government and trust each other” (Levi, n.d.).

Governments often fail to keep promises and there is a spectrum of trust levels that citizens exhibit toward governments based on various circumstances. However, the importance of mentioning the fulfilling of promises and expectations raised in the case of PRTs in Afghanistan is that PRTs are intended to be directly involved in legitimizing the Government of Afghanistan. Because the central government has a difficulty in establishing relationships with some rural communities, in many cases, it is important for the Afghan government to establish the precedent that they can fulfill expectations raised, whether it be through the assistance of international forces or not. A strong component in the legitimizing of the government is that it and PRTs fulfill expectations raised. The importance of fulfilling expectations is also reinforced by the frequency at which interview participants mention unfulfilled expectations in their responses to questions particularly designed to gauge the level of trust that Afghans exhibit toward PRTs. It is

recognized in the PRT Handbook (2006) under the PRT Guiding Principles that PRTs should “promise ONLY what you can deliver: manage expectations (under promise and over deliver)”, alluding to the fact that the US Department of Defense considers it important as well.

The damage that the failure of fulfilling expectations can bring to a government entity is that not only do they establish that they lack the capacity to deliver on promises, contracts and expectations, but they fundamentally change the nature of the relationship between government and citizen. This relationship shift establishes precedents for future interaction between government and citizen and, if contracts, promises and expectations remain unfulfilled, it is possible that citizens will find alternative means to gain what they feel is theirs whether it be through alternative networks, which further distances citizen from government, or through aggression. Author Margaret Levi states that, “destruction of trust may lead to wide-spread antagonism to government policy and even active resistance, and it may be one source of increased social distrust.” In some cases, this shift in relationship does not remain specific to one particular government entity. Often, agents or policies associated with the government could also suffer from the distrust generated, despite the fact that they may be working to benefit citizens. “Revelations of falsifications, incompetence, corruption, or promise-breaking may erode citizen confidence in government, or at least in politicians. Thus, the very institutions that reduce monitoring costs may increase distrust” (Levi, n.d.).

In conclusion, the elements of trust and distrust are paramount in understanding the motivations behind cooperative versus uncooperative environments. The presence of trust in a social architecture insinuates that individuals are comfortable relying upon

social contracts established, as long as they continually reaffirm what individuals expect. When distrust is present in a social architecture, an individual will expend significant amounts of energy mitigating whatever the cause of distrust is, thus propagating an uncooperative environment and fostering the normalization of creating barriers against the development of trust. A government's role in establishing an environment of trust versus distrust partially hinges upon their ability to deliver on promises, contracts and expectations raised. The inability to fulfill these can be damaging to the relationship established between government and citizens, sometimes ending in aggressive action against the governing entity, its policies, or its agents.

### Ontological Security

Having considered the elements of social inclusion and trust, I will now finally consider ontological security, the attempt to create an environment of consistency by routinizing particular everyday practices. Author Jennifer Mitzen (2005), explains that, “ontological security refers to the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time – as ‘being’ rather than constantly changing.” As a consequence of this need, people place a strong emphasis on “normal appearances,” routine events, relationships and conduct, which help to reinforce that environments are safe and predictable. Changes to these routines directly affect one's identity, which can lead to varying degrees of uncertainty. “Such uncertainty can make it difficult to act, which frustrates the action–identity dynamic and makes it difficult to sustain a self-conception” (Mitzen, 2005). This can lead to ontological insecurity, which as Mitzen (2005) explains: “refers to the deep, incapacitating state of not knowing which dangers to confront and

which to ignore, i.e. how to get by in the world. When there is ontological insecurity, the individual's energy is consumed meeting immediate needs.”

In situations where there is deep uncertainty, such as during periods of war, individuals are forced to either drastically re-define their existence or to strongly hold on to old routines, doing whatever in their power to maintain their identity. The need to feel a sense of “normalcy” can also be referred to as “a psychological state that is equivalent to feeling ‘at home’ with oneself and the world, and is associated with experience of low or manageable levels of anxiety” (Dziebel, 1997). Thus, in environments where individuals experience higher levels of anxiety, they will take greater care to ensure that routines are re-established in order to balance the anxiety level. “Actors will draw on rules and mobilize resources to re-enact practices that are found comforting: waking at the same time each day; putting on clothes in a particular order; eating a familiar breakfast; catching the train at the same time each day and so on” (Dziebel, 1997).

These seemingly small and insignificant routines are vital in the way in which a person identifies their self and understands their role in the environment around them. This self-identification process creates a sense of stability and predictability and promotes a feeling of continuity. In other words, it allows an individual to carry out particular activities without question. These activities aren't questioned because they are carried out in much the same way everyday, thus creating a predictable and stable environment. As author Jennifer Mitzen (2005) states, “a crucial requirement of a stable self-understanding is that one's actions can sustain it over time. The consequences of action will always either reproduce or contradict identities, and since identity motivates action its stability over time depends on it being supported in practice” (Mitzen, 2005).

In applying the ontological security concept to the international sphere, particularly on the topic of globalization, democratizing practices and attempts to modernize societies can cause profound uncertainty. The social changes and the subsequent uncertainty brought about by globalization can be seen at all levels of Afghan society, with the younger population being at greater risk. “According to Arnett (2002), the most prominent self changes are evident in adolescents and young adults where an increase in identity confusion has been recorded. Identity confusion occurs when the disruption of traditional practices and perspectives results in a loss of meaning (Tomlinson 1999) and the erosion of tradition” (Callero, 2003). In developing nations, globalization can be a force of drastic social change, inadvertently challenging identities and routines that have been solidified over centuries. Often, in the face of globalization one’s sense of predictability and “normalcy” is lost and identities are forced to be re-defined or they are defended. In fact, “resistance to the forces of globalization has been manifested in the construction of a wide range of oppositional identities. This can be seen, for example, in the growth of religious fundamentalisms (Marty & Appleby 1993, Swatos 2001), a resurgence of nationalist identity projects (Barber 1996), and the emergence of global protest movements...(Elkins 1992, Russell 2003)” (Callero, 2003). To alter or contradict a person’s understanding of themselves or their understanding of how the world operates can potentially create an environment of great uncertainty and distrust, which ultimately stymies attempts to introduce social change. Multiple negative impacts of a person who is ontologically insecure are often evident:

- Rather than being focused on embracing new changes, energy is consumed with attempts to reaffirm trusted routines in an effort to reestablish normalcy.

- Development of the perception that other individuals and actions are a threat, no matter the intention of the action or individual.
- Identity confusion, which may result in the development of oppositional identities geared toward the *aggressive* defense of traditional practices.

In review, ontological security refers to “the condition that is obtained when an individual has confident expectations, even if probabilistic, about the means-ends relationships that govern their social life” (Mitzen, 2005). An individual’s need to experience “normalcy” or stability culminates in the routinization of particular events, relationships, and conduct. Challenges or changes to these routinized practices can also inadvertently challenge identities and cause adverse reaction to introduced changes. In applying the concept of ontological security to the affects of globalization, it is reasonable to assume that as developing nations experience attempted modernization, their sense of ontological security is challenged. As argued in more detail below, when established individual routines are disrupted, subsequently challenging identities, environments of great uncertainty are created and anxiety causes people to react, which in the worst cases can give rise to oppositional identities.

### **Framework**

Although counterinsurgency operations presume to account for needs and motivations of the Afghan people, there is a fundamental lack in these operations’ consideration of how PRTs enact change and how those changes affect social (cohesion) inclusion, the generation of trust, and the ontological security of Afghan community

members. Consequently, this paper analyzes rapid social change in Afghanistan using these three elements as a means to explain the disconnect occurring between PRTs and Afghan communities based on interviews collected in Afghanistan in January 2011. The analysis is organized upon 3 general themes:

- 1) Rapid social change, initiated in part by PRTs, undermines the social cohesiveness/inclusiveness of Afghan communities. This will be measured in terms of how community-based relationships and social interactions change when new concepts are introduced. The focus of the analysis will be on whether community members are motivated to accept PRT-led changes, and whether these changes are anchored into the community social structure through repetitive action. For example, one independent researcher interviewed stated that long-established Afghan community events, such as cleaning out trash gutters, promote social interaction between community members and create a sense of responsibility to the greater good of the community. Replacing this activity by paying one or two individuals to do it erodes community interaction and lessens the importance of the obligation to the greater good of the community. The introduction of paid employees has drastically changed a time-honored practice that can result in the deterioration of social cohesiveness.
- 2) Rapid social change initiated in part by PRTs undermines the trust of Afghan community members. This will be measured in terms of how unfulfilled expectations impact the level of trust that Afghan community members exhibit toward PRTs. The focus of analysis will be on whether the result of unfulfilled

expectations is that community members are reluctant to collaborate with PRTs.

**3)Rapid social change undermines the ontological security of Afghan communities.**

This will be measured in terms of how community members react to disruptions to individual routines. The focus of analysis will be on whether individuals are motivated to accept changes or are motivated to reinforce old routines or defend against changes. For example, with the strong emphasis on legitimizing state government representation in rural areas of Afghanistan, many people are faced with attempting to figure out how to re-define the process through which they solve community disputes. Some have attempted to take their disputes through the new process only to be faced with notions and concepts that do not reaffirm their beliefs about justice. In some cases, this results in the re-establishment of old practices that do represent local understandings of justice and can even result in the choice to allow Taliban practices to prevail.

## **Analysis**

### Rapid Social Change and Social Cohesion

Afghanistan is comprised of multiple communities that operate based upon social structures that are unique to the local population. The social contracts and practices that make up the structure of any given community are either directly or indirectly established between members of that particular population over time. Whether individual Afghan community members have agency in the process is beyond the point, the idea is that there are customs and practices in place that are adhered to and have been adhered to for centuries. The social contracts established between community members allow

individuals to routinize practices that only develop as a result of the level of trust each member is willing to exhibit in relation to the other members within the community and the structure that governs their interactions. Because of the delicate and unique nature of social contracts and practices, unwelcomed changes by outside forces may encourage a degree of uncertainty to arise within the community, potentially eroding feelings of trust. When trust is compromised, community members lose faith in the predictability of established social contracts and focus their efforts on regaining stability rather than on embracing change.

PRTs are perceived as foreign entities in Afghanistan no matter the effort they take to submerge themselves into the Afghan social architecture. Just the mere presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan breeds skepticism and distrust and causes an element of instability. For instance, several community representatives interviewed expressed a dislike for the ominous presence that PRT camps pose in their communities. One PRT base observed was constructed behind barbed wire-tipped concrete walls with armed guards resting at strategically positioned observation towers, constantly monitoring community activity. This offset, mysterious presence was not received as welcoming or supportive by many of the interview participants. PRT association with state government is itself a flag of concern, and in some cases causes Afghan community members to question the motivations of state government representatives stationed within their community. As Suhrke (2006) states, “International forces, *qua* foreigners, are especially likely to attract criticism and protests...because they constitute a politically convenient target for other conflicts generated by social change. The Afghan government is simultaneously targeted by association, proximity and its demonstrably junior role in a

dependent relationship.”

With the introduction of PRTs into some rural communities in Afghanistan, there has been a shift in the way some Afghan community members interact with one another, particularly in how basic members of the community interact with authority figures, as will be argued in the case of Shuras below. It is the goal of PRTs to legitimize state government actors specifically in the rural communities of Afghanistan. While noble and necessary in the quest to attain democracy, this effort involves the introduction of new actors and practices into communities that have for long periods of time been without state government representation. According to interview participants affiliated with the Afghan government, in an attempt to ensure that new practices and actors are anchored into communities, older and more trusted forms of community structures are used to mask new actors or to foster new relationships with the state.

Interviewees confirmed that the UN and other international interveners have introduced new concepts into rural areas via community Shuras. Shuras are locally constructed councils that are comprised of community elders and often function as mediators of intra and inter-community disputes, make important community decisions, and provide for their community’s basic needs. These Shura members gain their status as community leaders through processes that involved long-established social practices. They have particular functions and their relationship with community members is based upon a certain degree of trust that community members and authority figures have indirectly (or directly) negotiated over time. PRT or any other intervener involvement with Shuras has led community members to question the role of Shuras in some areas. The relationship between community members and the Shura, in some instances, is

changing as PRTs and others utilize them as a tool for facilitating social change.

An interesting observation came out of an interview conducted with a group of provincial council members, where it was stated that it would be a detriment to the community if the elders in the Shura were to begin receiving financial compensation for their function as community leaders. The attachment of monetary values to roles of authority is a concept that exists outside of the traditional contract that authority figures have with their citizens, and it is this fact that largely contributes to the delegitimizing of authority figures on all levels. “When an individual senses that others are insincere or affected (in their assumed role) he tends to feel that they have taken unfair advantage of their communication position to promote their own interests; he feels they have broken the ground rules of interaction” (Rawls, 1987). The introduction of profit leads community members to believe that authority figures are taking action based on impetuses outside of the traditional system and the community itself, which goes beyond the average citizen’s ability to control outcomes. It is also this fact that creates an environment of distrust and further exacerbates the establishing of relationships between Afghan citizens and government officials, as well as international actors like PRTs. “A recent World Bank report widely seen as critical of the involvement of PRTs in governance as well as development at provincial levels, summarized the critical dilemma ‘confronted and constituted’ by PRTs – ‘in trying to create the space for the Afghan state to develop and cohere they run the risk of undermining it’” (Stapleton, 2007).

As recounted by an interview participant from a research institute in Kabul, another interesting observation on the events unfolding in Afghanistan is that, “there’s not a dichotomous relationship between the community-based processes and the state-based

processes that are now being introduced.” The researcher goes on to say that such concepts as central justice systems are not suitable to the Afghan context because the system is adversarial, often requires a significant amount of money to utilize, and involves the sacrifice of a great deal of time; all of which don’t fit into Afghan notions of justice. Changes to justice systems and other integrated social structures involve a comprehensive and complex process of adjustment that drastically alters identities and community relationships. The researcher recounted an interesting case study that brings this phenomenon to bear quite well:

A research team, studying rule of law, observed how a community attempted to request funds from the municipality to improve the infrastructure of their small settlement. To begin, some community members approached their *wakeel* (a community representative that is entrusted to monitor the affairs of the community and often serves as a liaison between the community and the federal government), and inquired about requesting funds from the local municipality. Dirt roads needed paving and they needed better access to water and electricity. The problem that arose was that the community had never attained formal land tenure, despite having settled there centuries ago. Formal land tenure is not an abnormal concept to even the most remote Afghan citizen. The way to formalize land tenure is to acquire a *safayee*, which is a notebook that documents and proves that the community made municipal tax payments to the federal government. People know that these *safayee*’s exist and that they have to pay utilities and taxes in order to get the notebook, which then backs up the informal land ownership. To acquire the *safayee* and balance their dues with the federal government, the community needed to pay the municipal representative 6,000 *Afs* each. Because the *wakeel* is the locally trusted official, the municipal officer left it up to the *wakeel* to collect the money. The *wakeel* then approached the community members and explained the well-known process through which formal land tenure is to be made, which will then get them the funds they are requesting to fix their community. However, instead of paying the money, the community claimed that the *wakeel* was corrupt and refused to pay the dues. Although the land tenure process is fully understood and well known, no one from the federal government and no *wakeel* has ever made them pay to formalize their land tenure before. Therefore, the community deemed that it was not worth it to gamble 6,000 *Afs*, which is just over 100 US dollars, to get the funds that they wanted to fix their community.

In essence what the example above is saying while the *wakeel* and the practice of formal land tenure are trusted figures and practices, the state municipal officer is not and because of his involvement, the once trusted figure and practice are no longer trusted within the community. The new role of the municipal officer is what has drastically

shifted the role of the once trusted wakeel in the eyes of community members, as well as the practice of acquiring formal land tenure.

In conclusion, PRTs need to be aware that their presence is seen as foreign and as such, any PRT affiliation with the Afghan government can complicate the work of state government representatives within rural communities. The very presence of PRT members in a community can disrupt the natural flow of routines, and as PRTs become more involved, their affiliation with one leader or one group over the others can cause community members to re-evaluate the role and their relationship to PRT-affiliated leaders or groups. Not only does this result in the rejection of new changes or concepts but can cause old and trusted leaders to lose their status in the community, and it can generate conflicts where they did not previously exist. For example, one researcher interviewed recounted that a local Afghan working for an the International Red Crescent gave some money to a local leader to buy some land where a mosque was to be built, thinking that it was a good deed. It was, however, a deed that ignited conflict between the larger ethnic group in the area and the other smaller ethnic groups. What the international intervener did not realize was that they had bought land and constructed a mosque that was representative of only one ethnic group, which then resulted in the creation of new tensions between ethnic groups in the community.

It is also important for members of PRTs to understand that in order to motivate community members to support the changes and concepts being introduced, the changes should not drastically disrupt the internal written and unwritten rules governing the interaction between individuals in a community. For example, with the introduction of paying Shura members, the perception of how relationships were defined in a community

changed. Community members perceived that Shura members were making decisions based on the amount of money they were receiving rather than out of an obligation of service to their community. This re-defines the understood contract in place governing the interactions between community leaders and community members and initiates an environment of uncertainty. This leads to the rejection of trusted community members and the new concepts and practices they were being asked to help initiate by the PRT and other international interveners. And finally, any practices or concepts introduced should support Afghan notions of normalcy. For example, enacted justice systems should work to incorporate Afghan definitions of justice into their framework, helping to avoid outright contestation and resistance. Also, new concepts and practices should be introduced in a way that does not drastically redefine a community member's role and shift their relationship with the community. By introducing state government actors into the process of acquiring land tenure, without understanding how this introduction would affect trusted community leaders already in place and their relationships with the community, not only was the state government representative rejected, the *wakeel* (community representative) was rejected as well.

### Rapid Social Change and Trust

PRTs have been operating in Afghanistan for approximately the last 9 years. One could easily assume that PRTs are well established and are recognized without difficulty by various community stakeholders. Overwhelmingly, interviewees understood what Provincial Reconstruction Teams were when I referred to them during questioning. Interview participants could also readily recognize and refer to projects initiated and

constructed by PRTs within their communities. Many were grateful for the time, money and effort put into building the roads and the irrigation ditches and were quick to offer their praise of PRTs. While grateful, however, 7 out of 7 Afghan interviewees mentioned that they, or their community, were perplexed and often more confused over PRT initiated projects than they were appreciative. For example, one community elder could not understand why PRTs would build a school 3 miles away from the community, when no one had a car and few had mules to carry children to the school. The same community elder was also frustrated over the construction of clinics in the community, that to this day, remain unstaffed and lack the fundamental supplies needed to maintain basic clinic operations. It is questions like these that lead many Afghan community members to attach themselves to concepts such as corruption to explain why PRTs build clinics without supplies or construct school where few can get to them (this point on corruption will be discussed at length below).

It was stated by some interviewees that the US promise to bring democracy, stability, and reconstruction to Afghanistan had, at first, garnered the support of many across the country. This observation is supported by Stapleton (2007) who states that, “public support for the establishment of a strong central government was rooted in the belief that this would prevent renewed conflict. Thus the establishment of government control over the means of violence to end the fragmentation of power and facilitate development was an objective supported by the vast majority of Afghans at the outset.” The PRT focus on quick impact projects (QIPs), as a means to win favor among community members seemed, initially, to be the approach that would help to bring stability to rural Afghan communities. Minor reconstruction projects such as digging

irrigation ditches, building schools and clinics, and constructing roads are thought to have the greatest effect on garnering support from the local communities. However, “that the PRT plan had been initially oversold by coalition spokesmen was acknowledged by the coalition in its report to UNAMA in the only evaluation of PRTs conducted. The long shopping list of skills and resources that PRTs would bring into Afghanistan mostly never materialized” (Stapleton, 2007).

Many PRT initiated projects, indeed, have improved the quality of life for some and are appreciated by all. However, QIPs are not gaining the support of community members across the board because some fundamental needs and expectations are not being met. Afghan respondents of a study conducted by Gompelman (2010) stated that “the majority of aid projects were not addressing Afghanistan’s problems in a fundamental way: while any assistance is welcomed, many interventions are described as short-term, stopgap solutions, whereas any ‘real’ investment in the country, such as factories, hydropower dams, and other major infrastructure projects are not being implemented.”

Vast amounts of unchecked money are flowing into Afghanistan, destabilizing community structures that aren’t designed to handle large influxes of money. According to Suhrke (2006), several “analysts concluded that the reconstruction program had structural flaws that were likely to produce conflict, above all relating to the magnitude of aid which greatly exceeded local capacity and was distributed in a framework that encouraged regional inequalities” (Suhrke 2006). Also, it is clear to many Afghans that the funds are not being allocated equally. While discussing the weaknesses of PRTs with a group of provincial council members, they claimed that they were unhappy about the

amount of money going into provinces like Kandahar and Helmand. Interviewees from the Government of Afghanistan were also very aware of the amount of funds pouring into provinces identified as areas where the Taliban is more prevalent.

Another complaint was that PRTs employ nepotism, awarding contracts to non-local, corrupt counterparts and distributing large sums of money to garner favor with influential community stakeholders. The provincial council and other Afghan officials interviewed claimed that perceived PRT practices in nepotism contribute to the accusation that PRTs support poor quality construction work. “Government people introduce the projects to the PRTs and they don’t provide the right guidance. They employ corrupt people.” Afghan journalists and aid workers in 2005 who traveled extensively in the country confirmed that Afghans saw the PRTs as being tarred by the brush of an officialdom mainly seen as corrupt or ineffective” (Stapleton, 2007). An official working in the Afghan government recounted to me a situation in which a community Shura had requested the funds to purchase several generators as a means to bring electricity to their area. The PRT working within that particular community delivered the funds and collaborated with the Afghan government to bring in the requested generators. The problem with this situation was that after two years the generators began to break down. No one in the community had been trained to fix the generators and there were few generators to replace the ones that had quit working. Because the PRT is typically suppose to provide communities with technical assistance, the official wondered why the project was ever approved without the consideration for training and replacement materials.

In a similar example Gompleman (2010) observed that:

Communities living along the road funded by the U.S. military between Qaisar district center and Shakh complain that the military is not monitoring progress; the contractor is widely believed to be siphoning off funds by delivering sub-standard work. Compounded by complaints that no local labor has been hired and that contracts are always awarded to those with connections, such infrastructure projects contribute to an uncomplimentary perception of international forces as illustrated by the comments of a member of the Provincial Council: The Americans didn't discuss the building of the Qaisar-Shakh road with the government or local people, which has resulted in a low-quality road, especially the culverts. Also, no local laborers were hired and the contractor has been accused of using low-quality materials to get a higher profit. This is an example of a project that has achieved the opposite of what international forces intended. Even though, in general, local people are happy with a road being constructed, the low quality and lack of local revenues has caused much criticism.

Potentially, the greatest concern should be for the confusion that exists over the role of PRTs and where they fit with the overall military goals in Afghanistan. Afghans find themselves beginning to trust PRT representatives only to have other coalition military units come through the community to conduct home searches or deploy drones to attack identified targets. "A PRT might visit a community to assess needs in the morning. The next day the same community might be subjected to coalition operations under Operation Enduring Freedom, which was mandated to fight the 'war on terror'" (Stapleton, 2007). This development versus security focus is inconsistent and creates an extremely unstable environment for Afghan community members, making it tremendously difficult for people to trust PRTs.

Another inconsistency in objectives appears as PRT units rotate personnel through their deployment cycles, which can also cause a great deal of instability and generate distrust of PRTs. As discussed in the literature review, as PRT personnel rotate through their deployment cycles, personalities change, strategies are adjusted and relationships are broken. As explained by Stapleton (2007), when it was observed, by a PRT located in northern Takhar, that people were being beaten by a Afghan militia commander, the PRT had moved in to protect the people. The Afghans were satisfied with this reaction.

However, “a few months later a new PRT commander of the same PRT did not follow in his predecessors footprints. A carefully prepared plan to disarm a local commander led by UNAMA with strong local support came to nothing when the PRT in question pulled out at the last minute” (Stapleton, 2007).

In conclusion, US and coalition involvement in Afghanistan was built upon the grand premise that democracy, stability, and reconstruction would be the result of international efforts. Indeed this expectation takes a great deal of time and a sizeable effort to deliver on and fulfill. The raising of such large expectations is understandably the pretext of Afghan weariness toward the fulfilling of promises made. It is not so cut and dry that x was promised but only y was delivered, but that there is an inherent expectation (more on a respect level) that the work conducted will be in line with Afghan needs, will be sustainable, and be of good quality. They don't just want their hearts and minds to be won in the short term to help meet US objectives, but that they believe their communities can be improved and that democracy will create peace. The fact that it took a great deal of time and some failure to deliver on what was promised tended to dash hopes that things would improve.

In addition, PRTs make mistakes or half-deliver on promises, such as dedicating the time and money to build schools, but leaving out considerations of staffing and supplies. While Afghan community members have mentioned the need for schools and clinics, the promise to bring schools and clinics to communities is dashed when PRT development projects fail to staff and supply the school. QIPs have failed to incorporate the full spectrum of Afghan community needs and are, in many cases, unsustainable and lead to accusations of corruption. For example, the hiring of contractors has caused an

exorbitant amount of frustration among community members. The complaint is often that too much money is being spent on poor quality work and that locals should be the individuals who are hired to do the construction. The expectation is that when development projects are initiated they will be sustainable and of good quality. When plans to distribute generators result in only 2 years of electricity with no contingency plan, people lose faith in the work being conducted by PRTs and other international interveners. As time progresses, the failure of the Afghan government and coalition forces to deliver basic needs to communities across Afghanistan generates a growing distrust for PRTs and other international interveners. PRT efforts have not gone unnoticed by Afghan communities and there is no question that all efforts are appreciated. The issue arises when PRT initiated reconstruction or state-building efforts fail to meet their intended purpose.

QIPs are described as being short-term solutions focused on “winning hearts and minds” rather than being long term solutions focused on the sustainability of development in Afghanistan. PRT practices in awarding construction contracts to workers outside of local areas, poorly constructed buildings or roads, and failing to provide sound technical advice for community initiated projects has caused many to accuse PRTs of nepotism and corruption. These practices do very little to establish environments of trust among Afghan communities and create barriers in the developing of relationships between PRTs and Afghan community members. Finally, confusion over the inconsistency of PRT objectives, along with the frequent rotation of PRT personnel adds to the uncertainty felt among Afghans and further inhibits PRT abilities to connect with the overall social architecture of Afghanistan. While one PRT commander promises

one thing, another may fail to follow through with commitments, damaging any trust that had been established previously. Also, while Afghans expect that PRTs will treat them with respect and conduct peaceful operations, coalition forces can complicate those expectations by conducting searches of houses in areas where PRTs are operating. This confusion results in the raising of the expectation that PRTs will be respectful and conduct peaceful operations, but because of confusion over PRT and coalition objectives, expectations are seemingly unfulfilled when coalition forces invade communities to conduct aggressive missions.

#### Rapid Social Change and Ontological Security

Ontological security is not a concept that has often been used to analyze the generation of conflict in Afghanistan. However, to fully understand the disconnect occurring between PRTs and Afghan communities it is necessary to consider how PRT presence and PRT initiated changes have impacted the way in which individual Afghan community members understand the world around them. As discussed in the literature review above, ontological security refers to the need of individuals to experience a degree of continuity in the way day-to-day life is conducted. Continuity develops out of the establishment of socially acceptable routines and the reliance upon trusted community relationships. As argued in the analysis above, the types of changes that PRTs are initiating impact social structures and manipulate trusted community dynamics in a way that encourages environments of uncertainty and distrust to develop. When individuals begin to experience anxiety and uncertainty one possible result may be that people become confused as to how to react to change and instead of accepting change they

reaffirm trusted routines and relationships. The following analysis concerning ontological security will attempt to explain how these changes also impact individual identities and why it is that such concepts as corruption are finding their way into mainstream discussions pertaining to PRTs and the Afghan government.

In his observations on the Sociological Theory of Motivation, it is stated by Turner (1987) that "...efforts to sustain a self-conception are directly fueled by the anxiety revolving around three dimensions of group adjustment:(a) the need to feel included, (b) the need to sense predictability or trust the responses of others, and (c) the need to feel secure in that things are as they appear." Thus, in order for Afghan community members to be motivated to accept the changes that PRTs are introducing, change must be inclusive of the Afghan voice, changes should reinforce predictable outcomes, and changes should attempt to incorporate established individual and community routines.

By in large, the biggest complaint from Afghan government representatives, both in Kabul and in the provinces, was that communication between Afghan officials and PRTs is weak. Interviews collected of government representatives from two separate provinces confirmed that, often, PRTs were either extremely aggressive in their conversations with council members or completely cut them out of the communication chain altogether. One government official stated that during a meeting convened by the governor, a PRT official interrupted the governor's opening speech, declaring that they had no intentions of negotiating the terms of a specific development project, and would not return until their demands were met. The PRT official then left the meeting, with multiple Afghan and international authorities looking on, completely disrespecting the governor and

discrediting him before the meeting could even begin.

The case above conveyed multiple things, among them, that the PRT was not willing to listen or collaborate with state officials on development projects. Other examples that do involve active attempts by PRTs to get input from community members consist of simple rudimentary processes that aren't truly representative of the Afghan voice. For example, one government official interviewed stated that one such effort on behalf of PRTs consisted of getting 30 signatures or fingerprints from community members as a means of gaining approval to implement a particular development project. The government official being interviewed stated that PRTs must look beyond the simple collection of names as a means to gain approval for development projects. He claimed that the signatures could have come from anywhere, and sometimes they are a means through which corrupt construction companies get approval for projects they want to initiate, rather than a project that the community members want to initiate. He questioned: "what is the impact of these projects; of building a bridge or initiating an activity? Anyone can go and get signatures and claim that that is what people want. This is not how the Afghan voice should be incorporated into development projects."

The same interviewee recounted that he had submitted a proposal for a development project and the only feedback he received was that it had been written in good English. Based upon that premise alone, the project was approved by the PRT. The interviewee stated that PRTs should consider the following: "if we are investing this amount, what impact does that have on the community? If we build a road, what communities will it connect? If there is no return from projects implemented, what is the social impact to the community? The PRT does not have the capacity to conduct socio-

economic analysis of the projects they implement, and they do not ask these kinds of important questions.”

An Afghan government official from the Department of Agriculture recounted an example of how poorly coordinated projects caused social dislocation in Helmand Province. The government official described that a year ago, a PRT operating in Helmand Province purchased a large amount of wheat seed and distributed it to communities without the approval of the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture. The company through which the PRT purchased the seed provided seeds that were spoiled, unbeknownst to the PRT. When the seed was distributed and planted, the result was obviously that there were no wheat crops for the community and thus a depressed economic situation, which subsequently resulted in strikes and chaos. It is not only for economic sustainability that farmers in this particular area of Helmand province grow wheat. Planting and growing wheat is a practice or routine that has been in place for centuries in the area. Not being able to grow wheat disrupts the routines, identities, and relationships established within the community. Disruption to these elements, combined with an economic depression, resulted in a community revolt against the PRT and state officials.

The practice of including the Afghan voice should not stop at the implementation of development projects. Afghan community members should be included in on discussions such as those concerning humanitarian space. Authors Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor (2008), observed that, “discourse amongst policy-makers on ‘stabilization’ through ‘winning hearts and minds’, ‘civilianization’ of military operations or ‘humanitarian space’ can at times be disconnected from the

realities and concerns of practitioners at field level and completely disconnected from those of ordinary Afghan people.” This can have a profound impact on how the role of PRTs and initiated projects are perceived by Afghan community members. Projects initiated are potentially disrupting individual and community routines and challenging the way individuals understand how the world operates rather than ‘winning hearts and minds.’ Simply because PRTs have defined their role upon concepts that are not widely accepted or understood by Afghans, they run the risk of being rejected by community members. If the social changes occurring in Afghanistan continue to be initiated by forces that are misunderstood by Afghan community members, development projects will also continue to be rejected along with the changes that the projects are attempting to implement, whether if they are in line with humanitarianism or not. Definitions concerning PRT efforts need to be explained in a way that speaks to what Afghan community members already understand about how the world around them operates. This is why it becomes important that Afghans are involved in the discussions surrounding such topics as humanitarian space.

While it is obvious that many PRT commanders and representatives want to do something to help the Afghan communities within which they operate, sometimes, because the help that is being offered fails to reaffirm identities or understandings of how the world works, Afghan community members aren’t motivated to accept the help that is being offered. By involving the Afghan voice in the planning and initiation of development projects, PRTs are allowing identities to be reaffirmed and are allowing development projects to incorporate routines that are otherwise misunderstood and excluded. One particular case study recounted by a researcher interviewed confirms how

initiated projects fail to take hold when they don't incorporate local customs and identities. The researcher explained that various international actors are attempting to incorporate their own version of community Shuras into particular provinces as a means to legitimize state government presence and routinize the process of accessing government resources through state government officials. The researcher went on to say that some communities have welcomed these new Shuras and have successfully received money to implement projects as a result of their involvement with the Shura.

On the surface, this would seem like a successful project, and it is in some respects. However, the researcher explained that the community only recognizes the Shura as a means to get money from international actors like PRTs. The Shura is only a supplement to the traditional community structure that has always been the process through which decisions are made in that community. The Shura holds no authority in the community and only serves as a conduit through which money flows into the community from international actors. The traditional decision making structure still exists and is still the trusted method through which the community conducts business. The researcher notes that perceptions toward the Afghan government are not changing amongst members of this particular community. State government representatives have no more authority in the community than they did 10 years ago. Because the Shura is comprised of people who don't traditionally hold authority in the community, members of that community don't trust new Shura members to make decisions according to the way they understand how decisions should be made. Consequently, PRTs and other international interveners are going down the wrong track because they are imposing practices that are seemingly organic but are not accepted as such because they are

ultimately mechanisms through which money is filtered into communities rather than mechanisms through which decisions are made as they are traditionally seen.

To some, the promotion of democracy and reconstruction may seem like a fairly benign undertaking. However, such Western notions of state governance and infrastructure can be perceived as a threat and cause great social dislocation. “Norms of equality and egalitarianism have tended to delegitimize previous hierarchical structures in many societies. Old patterns of behavior have become undermined as traditional power relations have become democratized” (Kinnvall, 2005). As “old patterns of behavior” are replaced or altered by elements of democratization, Afghan citizens begin to experience a sense of ontological insecurity, or they become uncertain of the way they know things to be. “Conflicts that are expressed...are partly rooted in the nature of change introduced by the political competition generated by the new state building process and the broader modernization projects” (Suhrke 2006).

In an interview with a researcher who has worked in Afghanistan for the past 10 years it was stated that, although corruption is not a common concept among Afghans, the country is now rampant with accusations of corruption at the smallest infraction. She explains that the concept of corruption is “hyper-present in the discourse and people are so angry and disappointed with the state that that’s all they talk about.” Which is the reason why corruption, as she explains it, is “eating the state.” The researcher explains that this has a lot to do with the drastic shift in the roles of the state and its relationship to rural communities. She goes on to say that because the state is now being encouraged to provide services to its people, they have to create a way in which to pay for those services. Typically, the way a state goes about paying for services is levying taxes from

its population, which is exactly what the state government of Afghanistan is attempting to do as encouraged by international interveners. But because many rural Afghan communities aren't accustomed to receiving services or paying taxes, often many actions taken to provide services or collect taxes are seen as corrupt.

This has multiple implications for PRTs and other international actors interested in helping to legitimizing the government of Afghanistan. Rural Afghan community members are attempting to explain the changes that are happening around them. Because some changes don't involve the Afghan voice, fail to reinforce predictable outcomes, and fall short of incorporating individual and community routines, these changes then fall into the realm of corruption, whether that is actually the case or not. It is most likely the case that PRTs are attempting to implement projects that are designed to help Afghan citizens rather than promote corrupt practices. However, some Afghans are finding it difficult to understand the changes that are occurring around them. PRT projects and others, are changing trusted social structures and community relationships, and are challenging reinforced individual and community routines, thus causing a significant degree of uncertainty.

As has been argued, uncertainty leads to the distrust of new actors and concepts, as they are the force that is initiating the changes that are challenging, rather than incorporating, Afghan identities and routines. According to Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor (2008), "military and humanitarian actors alike use principles and concepts that are informed by wider international experience – such as 'humanitarian space' and 'stabilization' – to describe their mandate, objectives and experience in Afghanistan." The concepts upon which the PRT and other international

interveners operate such as “humanitarian space” are devoid of the Afghan voice and disconnected from the needs of Afghans. When attempts to legitimize state officials fail it is because they don’t incorporate the “realities” of Afghan community members. For example, Afghan notions of justice are not being included into the establishment of the central judicial system. PRTs enact development projects that do not reflect or attempt to gauge the impact they have on the identities in existence. Building roads without considering what communities they connect and how identities will be modified leads to frustration among Afghan community members. The buying and distribution of wheat seed that is spoiled not only disrupts economic progress, it challenges practices that for centuries defined Afghan family identities.

PRT and other international intervener attempts to use old authority figures to legitimize state government presence in provinces has not effectively changed Afghan community members’ perceptions of state government, and has resulted in the reaffirming of old lines of authority and only increased the flow of international money into communities in some cases. Finally, without much attention paid to how new concepts and practices are changing Afghan identities, PRTs implement projects that are not fully understood or accepted, the result of which, has often been the frequent accusation of corruption. Even when practices are traditionally recognized as being appropriate, because it is the state government asking Afghan community members to do something like paying a penalty for a traffic violation, the request is seen as corrupt.

In order to gain the motivation and buy-in of Afghan community members for changes and projects initiated by PRTs, changes need to be inclusive of the Afghan voice, maintain a degree of predictability, and replicate individual and community

understandings of how the world operates. Lack of communication between PRTs, Afghan government officials, and community members are in large part to blame for the unsuccessful implementation of various development projects. From half-hearted attempts to collect Afghan approval, to aggressive negotiation tactics, PRTs have, in some cases, failed to motivate Afghan communities to accept the changes being introduced. Likewise, by initiating projects that fall short of incorporating Afghan identities into their framework, attempts to initiate social change have failed to meet targeted outcomes in some cases. Communities have proven to revert to preferred and trusted social structures to meet their needs when uncertainty is present. While PRT members may have the best interest of Afghans at heart, projects that challenge individual and community understandings of how the world operates will disrupt traditional social structures and identities, potentially resulting in the rejection of change and causing conflicts where they previously had never existed.

### **Conclusions**

The above analysis raises a number of concerns for PRT efforts to work with Afghan communities:

- PRTs need to understand that in order to motivate community members to support the changes and concepts being introduced, the changes should not drastically disrupt the internal written and unwritten rules governing the interaction between individuals in a community.
  - PRTs are first and foremost foreign entities operating within Afghan communities. Just simply by wearing uniforms, carrying weapons, and

driving military vehicles, PRT personnel stand out. PRT affiliation with community leaders or groups has shifted community relationships.

- What may seem like the most benign change can disrupt community relationships. For example, paying Shura members changes the perception of how relationships are defined.
  - Any practices or concepts introduced should support Afghan notions of normalcy. For example, centrally enacted justice systems should work to incorporate Afghan definitions of justice into their framework, helping to avoid outright contestation and resistance.
  - New concepts and practices should be introduced in a way that do not drastically redefine a community member's role and shift their relationship with the community.
- In order for PRTs to motivate community members to support the changes being introduced, PRT members will have to establish a degree of predictability. To do this, PRTs will need to deliver, most importantly, on promises made, and deliver on the expectations raised amongst community members.
    - Community members will also need to feel confident that the structure of the community can handle the changes being introduced. For example, schools and clinics constructed need to be built with considerations paid to staffing and supplies.

- QIPs are described as being short-term solutions focused on “winning hearts and minds” rather than being long term solutions focused on the sustainability of development in Afghanistan.
- Confusion over the inconsistency of PRT objectives, along with the frequent rotation of PRT personnel, adds to the uncertainty felt among Afghans and further inhibits PRT abilities to connect with the overall social architecture of Afghanistan. Afghans are told that PRTs are there to help them, but when coalition forces conduct searches of houses, the expectation that PRTs will treat them with respect are dashed.
- In order to gain the motivation and buy-in of Afghan community members for changes and projects initiated by PRTs, changes need to be inclusive of the Afghan voice, maintain a degree of predictability, and replicate individual and community understandings of how the world operates.
  - Lack of communication between PRTs, Afghan government officials, and community members are in large part to blame for the unsuccessful implementation of various development projects.
  - Uncertainty leads to the distrust of new actors and concepts, as they are the force that is initiating the changes that are challenging, rather than incorporating, Afghan identities and routines.
  - When attempts to legitimize state officials fail it is because they don't incorporate the “realities” of Afghan community members. For example,

Afghan notions of justice aren't being included into the establishment of the central judicial system.

- PRTs enacted development projects don't truly reflect or attempt to gauge the impact that they have on the identities in existence. Building roads without considering what communities they connect and how identities will be modified because of the road leads to frustration among Afghan community members.
- PRTs and other international intervener attempts to use old authority figures to legitimize state government presence in provinces hasn't effectively changed Afghan community members perceptions of state government and has resulted in the reaffirming of old lines of authority and simply an increased flow of international money into communities.
- Finally, without much attention paid to how new concepts and practices are changing Afghan identities, PRTs implement projects that are fully understood or accepted, the result of which, has often been the frequent accusation of corruption.

While the review of literature and the subsequent analysis above may seem like a glaring indictment of the work the PRTs in Afghanistan, that is not the intention. The intention was to highlight situations that exist across Afghanistan, where PRTs have struggled to connect with Afghan communities and then to analyze the potential cause for the inherent disconnect between the two. There is no question that the people of Afghanistan greatly appreciate the time and money being spent in an effort to make their

living conditions better. However, there continues to be a division between the objectives of PRTs and other international interveners on the one hand and the needs of Afghans on the other.

Development, democracy and security in Afghanistan remain needed. In order to deliver on these needs, however, the social impact and the subsequent changes need to be managed in a way that Afghans can be confident with development, democracy and security initiatives. As it stands currently, international efforts in Afghanistan have created vast amounts of anxiety and uncertainty among Afghan community members. Putting into practice such concepts and structures as democratic systems of governance, women's rights, and equal access to education are essential, but they are also challenging identities, altering community routines and relationships, and changing the way people understand how the world operates.

A tribal leader from Paktia Province stated that, "It would be a bit difficult for the PRT or the military to achieve winning hearts and minds because people still look at them suspiciously as foreigners. It would be good if Islamic countries replaced them and started talking to the Taliban" (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor, 2008). This quote is very telling of the sentiments felt throughout many communities in Afghanistan. This isn't the only instance where it has been stated by an Afghan community member that they would prefer working with the Taliban over US and coalition forces. Author and Senior Counterinsurgency Advisor to General David Petraeus in Iraq, David Kilcullen, points to a clear example of where the disconnect is present between the broader international effort in Afghanistan and the Afghan social

architecture. He states that a clear, and often expressed, need among local community members is “external mediation in settling local disputes.”

In answer to this need, the international community initiated a project directed at training Supreme Court judges “and seeking to build an Afghan legal system based on the post-2001 constitution, but local judges, prosecutors, and police are often known for their love of bribes, and locals see them as giving phony ‘justice’ to whoever can pay most handsomely” (Kilkullen, 2009). Subsequently, when asked by the persons conducting the study who they would prefer to settle their disputes, most often, Afghan community members answered with “the Taliban.” By turning Afghan community members toward other options such as the Taliban, implementing community-based projects for PRTs becomes a much greater challenge. Once a precedent is set, it is difficult to implement subsidiary initiatives that are potentially more appropriate to the Afghan context.

In some areas of Afghanistan, there are PRTs that are trusted. It is through practices such as incorporating locals into the decision-making process via mechanisms such as Provincial Development Committees (PDCs) or Provincial Development Funds (PDFs) that some PRTs are able to connect with Afghan community members. “A process which vests local leaders with a degree of executive authority creates a perception of legitimacy in the community, and local stakeholders who help design and implement projects feel invested in their long-term success” (Abbaszadeh et. al., n.d.). The research team further suggests that, “integrative efforts should be encouraged and expanded” (Abbaszadeh et. al., n.d.) As stated above in the analysis section, one of the greatest challenges to developing positive relationships between PRTs and Afghan community members is weak communication. Again, as Turner (1989) stated “...efforts

to sustain a self-conception are directly fueled by the anxiety revolving around three dimensions of group adjustment: (a) the need to feel included, (b) the need to sense predictability or trust the responses of others, and (c) the need to feel secure in that things are as they appear.” To absolve the anxiety revolving around the three aspects highlighted, incorporating the Afghan voice into development objectives will do much to meet the need to feel included, to develop a sense of predictability, and to feel ontologically secure.

As evidence, it seems that in reference to PDCs, PDFs, and Community Development Councils (CDCs), community members were far more likely to feel positively about their presence and accompanying process of “community consultation” than with that of PRTs who didn’t include or incorporate these practices into their operational objectives. In Faryab Province where National Solidarity Programs NSPs and CDCs are in place it was observed that, “because the Community Development Councils (CDCs) implement the projects and are involved in financial management and procurement, the NSP is considered more transparent than any other project implemented in Faryab. As one CDC member noted, ‘NSP has had a good impact because the priorities of the people are taken into account and we know what happens to our money.’” (Gompelman, 2011)

PRTs have a reputation for engaging in aggressive communication, which has proven to be an ineffective way to motivate Afghan community members and government officials to embrace the projects that PRTs are attempting to implement. The Afghan voice must be a continually present factor in all communications and the establishing of development goals. In order to retain a sense of order, people must feel

that their understanding of how the world operates is supported by the changes taking place. Allowing Afghans to take ownership of the changes encourages environments of certainty and predictability, and increases the likelihood that changes will be anchored into social structures and individual routines. This has larger implications for the way that international development is conducted in general. It is clear, at least with Afghanistan, that people respond more positively to development practices that allow changes to happen as members of the target community indicate that it should happen. Including community members not just to become part of the development process, but to initiate and lead it, makes change happen in a way that they can understand, because they have been allowed to define it. They are then also in control of the timing of the change; they know best when the time is ripe to initiate particular changes.

While there are many factors that impact the fostering of relationships between PRTs and an Afghan community, development projects and attempts to legitimize state governance that bring about changes to community social structures can create some of the largest barriers. As Afghan citizens attempt to understand the concepts and projects that PRTs are introducing, long-established social contracts are being redefined. There are some basic practices that PRTs can employ to make some changes less contradictory in the face of centuries old social structures and traditional practices. “Impression management or, more specifically, face saving mechanisms, help people to build bridges to each other...” (Misztal, 2001). And while this quote rests within the contexts of community members acting among other community members, understanding these face saving practices could help bridge relationships between PRT members and community members. Misztal goes on to say that to analyze appropriately the notions of normality

and trust within a community, one should examine the aspects of “normal appearances, stigma, and frames, seen as devices for endowing social order with predictability, reliability, and legibility” (Misztal, 2001). Observing and integrating these sorts of tactics into relationship- building practices between PRTs and Afghan communities take time and concerted effort across initiatives.

At the outset of US and coalition involvement in Afghanistan, expectations were set at a level that is now hard to meet years later. Afghans had high hopes when international forces entered Afghanistan; however, as time passes, the failure of the Afghan government and coalition forces to deliver on promises and expectations raised is generating feelings of distrust among Afghan community members toward international interveners. PRTs in particular have been criticized for their inability to monitor development projects and for engaging the nepotism of government officials and Afghan community members. PRT “use of contractors has a negative impact, as the lack of transparency in awarding contracts and the perceived ineptitude in hiring the right people is eroding communities’ goodwill towards PRTs” (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor, 2008).

It is not impossible for changes in identities or routines to happen. In order for PRTs to motivate community members to support the change being introduced, PRT members need to ensure that the changes reproduce identities, not contradict them. To do this, PRTs must ensure that community members are involved in defining the nature of change (i.e., mechanisms of change, timing, agents of change, etc.). By not challenging routines or identities, PRTs will enable personal continuity, which will underwrite their capacity for agency. One American-based organization serves as an interesting example

in the development of trust with Greek and Turkish Cypriot community members. In order to gain the trust and respect from local community members necessary to conduct their work, the organization observed that the following factors were most important in building relationships: “(1) making a long-term commitment; (2) showing up; (3) establishing familiarity; (4) listening; and (5) being perceived as neutral and fair” (Notter, 1995).

The factors listed above cover the elements of social inclusion, trust, and ontological security. Making long term commitments establishes that attempts to assist are meaningful and focused on sustainability. QIPs, short-term projects initiated by PRTs are failing to garner the trust of Afghan community members because they lack the capacity to meet the needs of Afghan communities. Showing up constitutes delivering on promises and expectations made. “This consistent and reliable presence was an important factor in developing trust. One key participant said that he did not really believe that [the international intervener] was ‘for real’ until the sixth visit. Another said that it took until ... (two years into the project) before she trusted that this was not a CIA-sponsored activity” (Notter, 1995). These comments imply that it takes a long-term, committed effort to gain the trust of international actors. This isn’t just about showing up however. PRTs, or any other international intervener, have to exhibit a degree of predictability in conjunction with commitment. In other words, what PRTs promise, they must deliver on.

As a result of the committed nature of some international interveners, they were able to get the two above quoted participants to become “active and critical players straight through the project...which indicates that even as they involved themselves, they

were weighing issues of trust deeply” (Notter, 1995). If we look at communities in Afghanistan as having a degree of social dislocation, it would be reasonable to assume that the “rebuilding of trust is a key step towards resolution and transformation” (Notter, 1995). Establishing familiarity isn’t just about making contact with community members, it is about learning what social structures are in place in the community and what individual and community routines are in place, governing the interactions of individuals. It is also about understanding how your presence in the community impacts social structures and community relationships.

Listening, clearly the basis for any relationship building activity, is paramount in ensuring that social structures, community relationships and identities are not challenged or drastically redefined. By allowing voices from the community to become part of discussions and development projects, individuals take ownership of the state-building and development process, increasing the likelihood that projects will take root in communities. More importantly, by seeking out opportunities where Afghans are forthcoming with ideas and are eager to get involved, the common mediation practice of Active Listening can assure “participants that the project staff was not there to impose a pre-set process or methodology, but was in an interactive mutual process with the participants to develop something together” (Notter, 1995). Listening also fosters trust in that it allows for interveners like PRTs to get a better idea of where to set expectations so that they are more easily met in a way that matches Afghan expectations.

An interesting project, entitled the Listening Project, was initiated in 2009 in Afghanistan, which focuses on collecting the insights of the Afghan people. In A CDA field report it is stated that the Listening was a multi-effort approach to “to undertake a

comprehensive and systematic exploration of the ideas and insights of people who live in societies that have been on the recipient side of international assistance efforts.” The hope is that the information and insights collected from local communities will make its way into the discourse on aid work and humanitarian assistance. PRTs should work to find reports such as those distributed by organizations like the Listening Project and incorporate into their efforts in development, security, and establishing governance at the community level.

The feedback process is also very important. It was stated above that PRTs lack the capacity to measure the effectiveness of development projects implemented. Few long-term evaluation mechanisms are in place that measure the sustainability of projects and the motivation of Afghans, in order to anchor new practices and concepts into already existing social structures. The few mechanisms that are in place fail to address the nuances of the social architecture of Afghanistan that exist within the concepts discussed in this paper: social inclusion, trust, and ontological security. Because PRTs operate on a “charity paradigm”, many projects implemented are designed to quickly cover some basic needs. As stated by authors Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Wardak, Zaman, and Taylor (2008), “The WHAM [Winning Hearts and Minds] mindset is largely premised on a charity approach, which ignores the complexity of any given situation and can create conflict. The PRT learning curve on these issues has been relatively flat in spite of the money and efforts spent briefing personnel and consulting experts.” By not incorporating feedback mechanisms into their project development process, however, needs are not sustainably met and other very necessary needs go unfulfilled.

And finally, being perceived as neutral and fair is paramount in gaining the trust of communities in any context. US and coalition forces are obviously at war with the Taliban both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, which underscores the political motives also at play with PRTs, which can be difficult to mitigate. Yet PRTs and other international interveners must implant themselves into the communities in a way that is respectful and doesn't initiate conflict between new and old parties or, as prescribed by social inclusion, disrupt practices and relationships that are already in place. Notter (2005) mentions that in Cyprus "we had to be extremely careful with our language and our behavior in order to show respect to each community without alarming the other."

What can help in the establishment of such project neutrality would be to get international actors on the same page about what the objectives are in Afghanistan, as well as to create longer tour lengths that coincide with other collaborative partners. Clearly, the disconnect does not exist exclusively between PRTs and Afghan community members, but rather, it is a theme evident across most international efforts in Afghanistan. Many times it was difficult to distinguish which international actor to whom Afghan interviewees were referring. While interview participants were fully aware of what PRTs were and what projects they were initiating in their communities, when answering questions they referred to international interveners in general. This is all the more reason for PRTs to coordinate across coalition and other international efforts, so that they may initiate projects designed for state-building and development.

As discussed, Afghan community members remain confused as to what the ultimate goal is for coalition forces in Afghanistan. The inconsistent nature of efforts between coalition forces raises anxiety and uncertainty among Afghan community

members. While PRTs may do their best to implement projects that speak directly to the needs of Afghans, other groups may employ projects that inadvertently undo positive progress. To be successful, coalition partners cannot allow significant disconnects among themselves, and even less, allow disconnects among members of the PRT. Afghans are of course perceptive to the attitudes and personalities exhibited, especially when international interveners are operating directly within Afghan communities. The political identities that make up the different organizations need to be understood and reconciled before PRTs are placed within Afghan communities.

Also of note, Notter (2005) mentions that, “developing a trust relationship...went beyond mere impartiality. In fact, the term ‘neutral’ does not capture the essence of the relationship because, as in the automotive sense, it implies ‘not engaged’.” This is interesting in terms of Afghanistan because what Notter goes on to say is that in Cyprus, to gain the trust of the community members they *had* to become engaged, which is precisely the case for PRTs in Afghanistan. However, PRTs need to understand that engagement means exhibiting care about Afghans by showing that the development of Afghanistan is within the hands of Afghans, not PRTs. In other words, PRTs cannot simply operate under the directive that to develop Afghanistan is within US and coalition political interests, rather they must let Afghans develop Afghanistan. In the case of Cyprus, Notter states that, “we had to show that we cared about Cyprus, but that we knew the Cyprus conflict is theirs to resolve, not ours, and that they know best, among them, what a fair and just solution would entail.”

Notter’s 5 elements and recommendations should be implement and are worth being reiterated here and expanded upon.

(1) Making a long-term commitment: PRTs must establish a relationship with the Afghan communities they working within that conveys that they are committed to the long-term success and sustainability of Afghanistan. Notter suggests that in order to gain the trust of local actors, one must establish that they are consistent and reliable. PRT tour lengths pose a significant challenge to the establishing of a consistent presence. To mitigate this, handoffs between rotating personnel need to be much more in depth and it might be that tour lengths need to be extended to truly convey a sense of commitment.

(2) Showing up: PRTs must deliver on promises made in order to re-confirm their commitment to the long-term success and sustainability of Afghanistan. QIPs, while able to meet and fulfill some basic needs are missing other extremely important needs such as the need to feel ontologically secure. They are also sometime implemented in a fashion that does not make Afghan convinced that long-term stability is the goal (i.e. shoddy construction). By taking into consideration other underlined needs and put in the effort to ensure that all projects initiated convey that PRT actors are seriously concerned with stability, as Notter has indicated in his own project, local actors will be much more likely to embrace and assist in PRT development projects.

(3) Establishing familiarity: As stated above, establishing familiarity isn't just about making contact with community members, it is about learning what social structures are in place in the community and what individual and community

routines are in place, governing the interactions of individuals. It is also about understanding how your presence in the community impacts social structures and community relationships. PRTs much take these factors into account in order to initiate projects that don't disturb practices that are already in place. Disturbing these traditional norms and practices when the time is not right can result in social dislocation and a population that is unmotivated to work with PRT forces.

(4) Listening: While there are some efforts on the behalf of some international interveners like the Listening Project to gain the insights of Afghans and incorporate their voices into the development process in Afghanistan, PRT specifically are not doing enough to convey that they are interested in incorporating the Afghan voice into their efforts in Afghanistan. Again, as mentioned above, the practice of active listening fosters trust in that it allows for interveners like PRTs to get a better idea of where to set expectations so that they are more easily met in a way that matches Afghan expectations.

(5) And finally, being perceived as neutral and fair: It is absolutely clear that being neutral in a traditional sense of the term is virtually impossible for PRTs to accomplish. What is also clear is that being neutral implies that one should not be actively engaged. However, in the case of Afghanistan, and as Notter expresses in the case of Cyprus, is that neutral can also mean that you are engaged but are at the same time indicating that you honestly care about the local population. Imparting that the responsibility of development in Afghanistan is within the

hands of Afghans, not PRTs is will go a long ways in distancing PRTs from any obvious political objects they have an obligation to operate under. PRTs also need to involve themselves in a much more concerted effort to understand and appreciate collaborating partner identities, objectives, and organizational structures no matter the country or government sector they hail from.

While it is difficult to predict the success of any development initiatives implemented in Afghanistan, by considering the impact that PRT and other international interventions have on social structures, by understanding how to develop trust among community members, and by supporting the integration of local identities and routines in development projects, initiatives will likely have a much greater capacity to achieve success. If PRTs aren't capable of implanting the 5 elements reviewed above I would venture to question if PRTs are the best mechanism for which to initiate development or governance projects abroad.

## Appendix A

### List of Acronyms

AIAS.....	American Institute of Afghanistan Studies
AREU.....	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CDC.....	Community Development Council
CERP.....	Commanders Emergency Response Program
CIMIC.....	Civil Military Cooperation
CNAS.....	Center for New American Security
DoD.....	Department of Defense
GAO.....	Government Accountability Office
GIRoA.....	The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GoA.....	Government of Afghanistan
HN.....	Host National
NABD.....	National Area Base Development program
NGO.....	Non-Governmental Organization
NSP.....	National Solidarity Program
OEF.....	Operation Enduring Freedom
PDC.....	Provincial Development Committees
PDF.....	Provincial Development Funds
PRDC.....	Provincial Reconstruction and Development Council
PRT.....	Provincial Reconstruction Team
QIPs.....	Quick Impact Projects
S&R.....	Stabilization and Reconstruction

UN.....United Nations  
UNAMA.....United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan  
USAID.....United States Agency for International Development  
USIP.....United States Institute of Peace

## Appendix B

Date: December 20, 2010

To: Ms Kirsch  
Dispute Resolution

From: Kristen Kenny, BFA  
Administrator, Institutional Review Board  
University of Massachusetts Boston

Title of Protocol: The Sociological Theory of Motivation and Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan

Type of Review: Expedited

IRB Approval Date: 12/20/2010

IRB Expiration Date: 12/20/2011

This Project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Massachusetts Boston IRB, Assurance # FWA00004634.

As Principal Investigator you are responsible for the following:

1. Submission in writing of any and all changes to this project (e.g., protocol, recruitment materials, consent form, etc.) to the IRB for review and approval prior to initiation of the change(s).
2. Submission in writing of any and all unexpected event(s) that occur during the course of this project.
3. Submission in writing of any and all unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
4. Use of only IRB approved copies of the consent form(s), questionnaire(s), letter(s), advertisement (s), etc. in your research.
5. Submission of a continuation prior to the IRB expiration date.
6. Submission of a final report upon completion of this project.

NOTE: We have approved this to include a waiver of documentation of informed consent. Please remove the signatory lines from the consent forms and use as an information sheet.

The IRB can and will terminate projects that are not in compliance with these requirements. Please be aware of your expiration date, all research must have a yearly continuing review by the IRB. Please direct all questions, correspondence and IRB forms to me in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. Please contact me by phone at (617)287-5374 or email at [kristen.kenny@umb.edu](mailto:kristen.kenny@umb.edu).



Kristen Kenny, BFA  
Administrator, IRB

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