

## Joining forces to rebuild Afghanistan

ISAF reconstruction teams are key to counterinsurgency strategy

**From their headquarters on the road from Kabul to Kandahar, in the heart of Pashtun-dominated Afghanistan, more than 100 Turkish civilians plan a more prosperous future for a province whose industrial base consists of little more than a neglected marble quarry.**



CZECH MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

Members of the Czech Republic's Provincial Reconstruction Team in Logar province inspect a traditional Afghan irrigation tunnel, known as a karez, in the village of Jasa Kala. A key mission of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force PRTs is to help provide reliable water sources to farmers.

The Turkish Provincial Reconstruction Team, or PRT, works out of Wardak province. As part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, the team has rebuilt a mosque, opened a maternity clinic and trained scores of Afghan police officers. Turkish investment in this region west of Kabul has totaled more than \$20 million.

But Turkey's ambitions are larger. Enlisting farmers who scratch out a meager living growing apples, maize and wheat on the province's rocky soil, the Turkish team has opened an experimental farm to grow saffron. The spice, made up of delicate flower filaments laboriously collected by hand, has earned the name "red gold" for its lofty price — \$500 to \$5,000 per pound, based on the quality.

In a country that naysayers complain breeds little but fratricidal strife and opium poppies, saffron would provide a model crop for Afghans struggling with subsistence. The Turks have also introduced fruit dryers and refrigeration to preserve apple crops for sale abroad.

The PRT operates under the NATO premise that greater economic security means greater confidence in Afghanistan's central government. "Developing the agricultural sector will improve food security; increase agricultural productivity and rural employment; improve family incomes and well-being; reduce pressures on the poor to grow illicit crops; and increase the export of agricultural products in Afghanistan. Therefore, a vibrant and growing agriculture sector is essential to ensure that the benefits of economic development are spread throughout the country and reach the bulk of the Afghan population," said Cüneyt Yavuzcan, the head of the Turkish PRT.

Decades of civil war and unrest have taken their toll on the infrastructure of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, and NATO and ISAF leaders have granted 27 PRTs a central role in rebuilding and stabilizing them. Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Italians, Spaniards and other coalition partners run the PRTs, dubbed the "softer side of counterinsurgency." They collaborate to restore services — and confidence in the Afghan government — to nearly 30 million people.

At the March 2010 conference held in Kabul, ISAF commanders assigned the PRTs a leading strategic role in the country for the subsequent 18 months. Mark Sedwill, the United Kingdom's ambassador to Afghanistan, flagged the R's the teams should highlight during their multimillion-dollar missions. "The first, regain: We need to regain the initiative against the insurgents. Secondly, we need to rebuild and reinforce Afghan government institutions, military and civil, so they may take responsibility for governing their country," he said. "And lastly, resolving the political grievances that fueled the insurgency."



PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS ARAMIS RAMIREZ/U.S. NAVY

Turkish Sgt. 1st Class Ramazan Cagliyan lifts an Afghan boy at the Wardak central market in Maiden Shahr, Afghanistan. Turkey's civilian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team, part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, is helping farmers with their crops.

Since going operational in 2003, PRTs have finished paving projects in regions with impassable roads; opened schools in a country with high illiteracy; supplied clean hospital beds to places where medical care is primitive and provided reliable water to an agricultural sector with endemic drought and flooding. The effort is truly transnational, enlisting people from more than a dozen countries, including many European nations.

Among more than 50 projects it has sponsored in Ghazni province, Poland has donated 40 new beds and X-ray machines to a hospital in the provincial capital. Polish Soldiers and civilians have refurbished a street market in the town of Sangemasha, built playgrounds, bought books for a local law library and taught classes on the importance of women's rights in the staunchly traditional country. Ghazni is a critical province south of Kabul with more than 900,000 residents and a mixed population of mostly Pashtuns, the dominant ethnic group, and Hazaras, a minority group that descends from Mongols and largely practices Shia Islam.

More than 200 Hungarian troops and advisors, running their PRT since 2006 in Baghlan province on the slopes of the Hindu Kush Mountains, have set up a bakery for flatbread, carpet



weaving centers and a brick factory. The Hungarians have budgeted about 2 million euros (about \$2.6 million) a year to support and equip their team, money that also paid for 14 full university scholarships allowing Afghans to study abroad in Hungary.

Czech Soldiers and civilians operating out of Logar province, immediately south of Kabul, built or renovated 77 classrooms for an estimated 12,000 children. Two new schools in the Khushi district will teach girls exclusively. The Czechs have invested heavily in bringing reliable water to the province. The team dredged and repaired Surkhab Dam, a vital source of irrigation neglected for nearly half a century, and updated the region's ancient system of underground water tunnels. "We are happy that the PRT operates here and that the Czechs are helping us," said local school Principal Wahab Ahmadzai, referring to some of the 11,000 farmers benefitting from the Surkhab renovation. "Without water, our local farmers couldn't grow anything."

Some of the best-known PRTs operate in the provinces ringing the capital of Kabul. Insurgents in those Pashtun-heavy provinces remain a threat, even if those anti-coalition forces remain dormant in many cases. So it is no surprise that soldiers play a pivotal security role in the Polish, Hungarian and Czech teams, as they do for most of the teams.

On the other hand, Turkey opted to run its team with civilians, relying on its Muslim connections to win hearts and minds. Turkey's secular democratic government — frequently cited as a model for the Islamic world — invited 10 Wardak judges and prosecutors to Ankara, the Turkish capital, for training in human rights and the rule of law, the Pajhwok Afghan News reported in April 2010. "The Turkish programs are very much receptive and acceptable to Afghans because they work within the Afghan culture. They are sensitive to Afghan values," Halim Fedai, the governor of Wardak province, told Turkey's Cihan News Service in November 2009.

Polish troops distribute newsletters to Afghans in Ghazni province in April 2010. Since 2008, Poland's Provincial Reconstruction Teams have initiated more than 50 projects to rebuild the province.



INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE



TECH. SGT. JAMES MAY/U.S. AIR FORCE

Polish and American troops from the Provincial Reconstruction Team at Ghazni meet with the village elders of Jaghatu, Afghanistan, in April 2010.

An Afghan man receives medical treatment from a Spanish Army doctor at an International Security Assistance Force medical center in Herat, Afghanistan. Spanish troops are members of a Provincial Reconstruction Team in western Afghanistan.



TECH. SGT. LAURA SMITH/U.S. AIR FORCE

How effective have the PRTs been? A 53-page study published in March 2009 by the Strategic Studies Institute concluded that while insurgent attacks have not declined in many Afghan provinces during the reign of the PRTs, the projects, by impressing the locals, helped depress the number of possible recruits. The institute determined that PRTs, with their military component, were the most secure way to accomplish the “build” part of the counterinsurgency’s “clear, hold and build” strategy. Though about 46 countries are directly part of the Afghan mission, PRTs allow some nations that are constitutionally reluctant to commit troops — most prominently Japan — to supply money for reconstruction. Japan, for example, funded Hungarian PRT projects in Baghlan such as carpentry and carpet weaving classes.

And success could breed success. In the spring of 2010, Turkey began establishing another civilian-led PRT in the Jowzjan province in the far north of the country, where Turkic-speaking Uzbeks and Turkmen represent more than three-quarters of the population. The Turks will work with a Swedish-Finnish PRT operating out of the neighboring province of Mazar-e-Sharif, beefing up the Afghan Security Forces and repairing infrastructure.

“The decision to establish the Jowzjan PRT ... is based on the request and consent of the Afghan government,” the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced in April 2010. “The PRT will enable Turkey to further enhance her contributions to Afghanistan and to the friendly and brotherly Afghan people.” □