

LESSONS ON A SHELF

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

LESSONS ON A SHELF

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ABSTRACT

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Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq have been largely successful but there have been substantial growing pains. The United States went through similar growing pains during the Vietnam War and after multiple reorganizations the pacification efforts were consolidated under a civilian deputy who reported directly to General Westmoreland. Ambassador Komer was the individual selected to run the pacification effort also known as the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) program. Regardless of how the Vietnam War ended there is substantial evidence that the CORDS program was working. This project looks to examine the CORDS experience and compare those efforts with the PRT experience in Iraq. The research reveals that many of the lessons learned in Vietnam were relearned in Iraq, particularly those dealing with unity of effort. The findings conclude that a careful review of the past operations is critical before new initiatives are tried in a combat zone and that in the future we can and should do better.

LESSONS ON A SHELF

Fools, say they learn by experience. I prefer to profit by other people's experience.

—Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898)

The United States has countless organizations that are dedicated to preserving the lessons of the past so that we can avoid the painful mistakes that others made before us. The military is particularly fond of creating “lessons learned” and they are available for review if policy makers or their advisors take the time to review them. “Lessons learned” do us no good when they remain on the shelf in a dusty binder. There were lessons from the Vietnam era that may have allowed a less painful experience in Iraq, but only if someone took the time to review what happened in our past. The most important of those lessons was the need to establish unity of effort. This is particularly important when the interagency is involved.

In the cases of Iraq and Vietnam, many of the key agencies involved are the same and that is not likely to change in future conflicts of this nature. An organization that is interagency in nature, like a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), should focus unity of effort rather than to pull it apart. The core of the problem is the different perspective that each of the three largest agencies involved have. The Department of Defense (DOD) is charged with winning the nation’s wars. The Department of State (DOS) is charged with conducting diplomacy, largely from the worldwide embassy structure, as well as advising the Department back in Washington as to current atmospherics worldwide. While the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is officially part of DOS, they certainly view the world in a very different way.

USAID promotes our national interests through foreign aid in the way of development projects around the globe.

In the case of Iraq, DOD is dealing with many issues that seemingly fall outside our doctrinal template. In other words many of the tasks associated with the fight in Iraq do not seem like warfighting. DOD has vast resources and a cultural desire to find quick solutions but quick solutions can often short change the ability of the target audience to learn how to do it themselves. DOS is used to a longer term approach to problems which runs counter to the DOD approach. DOS is also not typically accustomed to working in an active combat zone. USAID typically works through NGOs as implementing partners. They typically charge the NGO with running a program over a longer period of time and may not be flexible enough to adapt the rapidly changing situation in a place like Iraq.

Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice inaugurated the first of ten Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq on November 11, 2005. Just a little more than a year later President Bush announced that ten additional PRTs would be created as part of the "New Way Forward".¹ This paper focuses on how these PRTs were developed and whether or not lessons from Vietnam were thoughtfully considered or should have been. This paper will focus only on the U.S. PRTs in Iraq. It is important to note that there were PRTs working actively in Afghanistan as the teams in Iraq were formed and that there are also PRTs working in both countries from coalition nations. Additionally, the U.S. has experience with counterinsurgencies in the Philippines, the Greek Civil War, Malaya and others including some in South America. A review of each ongoing

approach would be worthwhile but for this paper I will concentrate on the U.S. effort in Iraq.

When committing scarce resources, lessons learned from past operations must be considered, particularly in reference to unity of effort. It seems as though we refuse to look back to the Vietnam experience when considering approaches for today. Did “failure” in Vietnam cause us too completely lose the lessons that should have been gained and applied in future conflicts? It seems that many of the lessons learned from the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) program are still useful today and in fact given the division and competition we see in today’s interagency process, even more relevant today than when the principles were first applied. History since Vietnam certainly shows that the United States will be forced to deal with counterinsurgencies. We should have learned a great deal in our efforts from that era. “But, we still do not seem to have profited by many of the operational lessons so expensively learned in Vietnam. One is tempted to recall Santayana’s maxim that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.”²

The first part of this paper will examine the CORDS program, particularly the difficulties that led up to its establishment and some of the lessons learned. It will examine those lessons for relevancy as applied to the PRT model in Iraq and make suggestions as to how we might do an even better job of setting up interagency teams meant to deal with insurgencies to improve the unity of effort in the future. By no means is the history of the CORDS program in this paper complete as it is only meant to illustrate some of the difficulties that led to the establishment of CORDS.³

History Leading to CORDS

Prior to the establishment of CORDS in 1967, there were many Americans in South Vietnam with very different outlooks based on their place of employment and which agency was paying their salary. Civilians tended to look at the pacification as a civil effort. Members of the military saw pacification as a military effort. Neither group saw the solution in a joint civil-military effort. Most of the military believed that the economic, political and social societal solutions would not come until a security solution was found. In other words security would win the confidence and loyalty of the population. Most civilians believed that the economic, political and social societal issues would bring about the loyalty and confidence of the people which would eventually bring security. Insurgencies without popular support die a quick death.⁴

“By 1966 the separation and degree of emphasis on the military were so great that President Johnson, to give pacification more attention, began to speak of it as “the other war”.⁵ Basic organization issues and human nature led to many of the problems seen with execution of the mission on the ground. Typically, the closer to the battle, the more focused the effort is likely to be. Although the ambassador in a country is the central figure in meeting the President’s policy goals, most individuals from the interagency that are in a country look back to their agency headquarters in Washington for guidance. Back there, where budgets and agency interests may sadly trump support to the mission is where the problem lies. In 1961 President Kennedy made two key decisions that would have a negative impact on the ability of the ambassador to lead efforts on the ground. First, instead of appointing responsible leadership in Vietnam and Washington to oversee wartime operations, he reserved the responsibility for coordination and direction to himself and the Whitehouse staff. Later that year he put a

four-star general in the picture with equal rank to the ambassador to lead the military effort.⁶ As the war effort grew through the next several years many aspects of the support became unmanageable. Personalities and the perceived mission of the many agencies involved tended to lead to conflicting programs and conflicting advice given to the South Vietnamese government that the U.S. was supposed to be developing.

President Johnson clearly saw problems with the way pacification efforts were going. In 1964 he created the Vietnam Coordinating Committee. This interagency committee sat within the Department of State but it failed miserably in its attempts to put forth major policy decisions or to manage operations.⁷ In July 1964 President Johnson appointed General Maxwell D. Taylor as the new ambassador. President Lyndon B. Johnson empowered Taylor with “sweeping delegation of authority” to coordinate military and civilian activities.⁸ As a former military leader Ambassador Taylor had great respect for the position senior commanders hold and as a result military matters were still handled by the General William Westmoreland for the most part. Ambassador Taylor restructured the country team to create more unity of effort but the Washington agencies’ hold on their members in country remained too strong.⁹

The CIA, USAID, DOS and the U.S. Information Service were the major players in early 1965 as far as the civilian side of the U.S. effort went in Vietnam. These agencies developed their own programs and coordinated them through the Embassy in Saigon. At the same time the military footprint was rapidly expanding which allowed a great expansion of military advisors throughout the country. There were military advisory teams in every province and in almost every district as well. With the military reaching down to the lowest levels of government throughout the country it became very

difficult for the civilian programs to gain traction. To top this off there was not a system that worked to synchronize the two efforts.¹⁰

It is typically the role of the “country team” to deconflict and coordinate the many programs within an individual country. The country team was first discussed in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Departments of State and Defense and the Economic Cooperation Administration written by General Lucius Clay. This paper concluded:

To insure the full coordination of the U.S. effort, U.S. representatives at the country level shall constitute a team under the leadership of the ambassador....The Ambassador’s responsibility for coordination, general direction, and leadership shall be given renewed emphasis, and all United States elements shall be reindoctrinated with respect to the Ambassador’s role as senior representative for the United States in the country.¹¹

In April of 1966 President Johnson was still seeking a more unified effort towards pacification. He decided to put a single manager in charge of the pacification effort. He chose a member of his National Security Council, Robert W. Komer, who was given written access to the White House along with his difficult task which was to solve the unity of effort issue. Komer began writing papers outlining the problems. He was able to convince General Westmorland that only his staff had the wherewithal to bring this effort together. Komer worked to convince Secretary of Defense McNamara that the pacification effort would be better led by Defense than State. A final attempt at a civilian answer led to the establishment of the Office of Civilian Operations led by Deputy Ambassador William Porter. Once again the military was not included and failure was certain.¹² It seems that by the time the organization was put together, President Johnson already knew where he was headed in reference to pacification. The Office of

Civilian Operations was successful in one aspect; it built a large organization, over one thousand Americans that CORDS would be able to draw from.

The Birth of CORDS

In early 1967 Ambassador Lodge notified the President that he intended to step down. After considering a dual role for General Westmorland, serving as the ambassador and military commander, the President decided to replace Lodge with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. It was announced at the same time that Komer would head up the pacification program. In a series of meetings with Westmoreland and his staff Komer basically hammered out the National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) for Presidential signature but perhaps more importantly Komer and Westmoreland set a way forward for the pacification effort that both could support. The American role would remain advisory to the South Vietnamese, there would be a single manager at each level of government that would be the one voice for pacification issues and positions were to be filled by the best person available regardless of whether they were military or civilian.¹³ When the President signed the NSAM in May it dramatically shifted the U.S. approach to pacification.

The decision of the president to put a civilian deputy under Westmorland was a major change in U.S. Policy. He did so for three reasons. The first was that there were so many different U.S. agencies involved in pacification. They were unable to generate efficiency working separately and working loosely with the military was not enough. Second, the civilian agencies and the military were stepping all over each other at the lower levels where South Vietnamese lower level officials might have several U.S. advisors giving conflicting advice. Finally, it was understood that the agency with the

most resources would not really take this part of the mission seriously unless they were held responsible for its success.¹⁴

The following four charts show the changes in the pacification organization from February 1966 through the establishment of CORDS in May 1967. They clearly illustrate the lack of unity of effort and the desire to move in that direction through time.

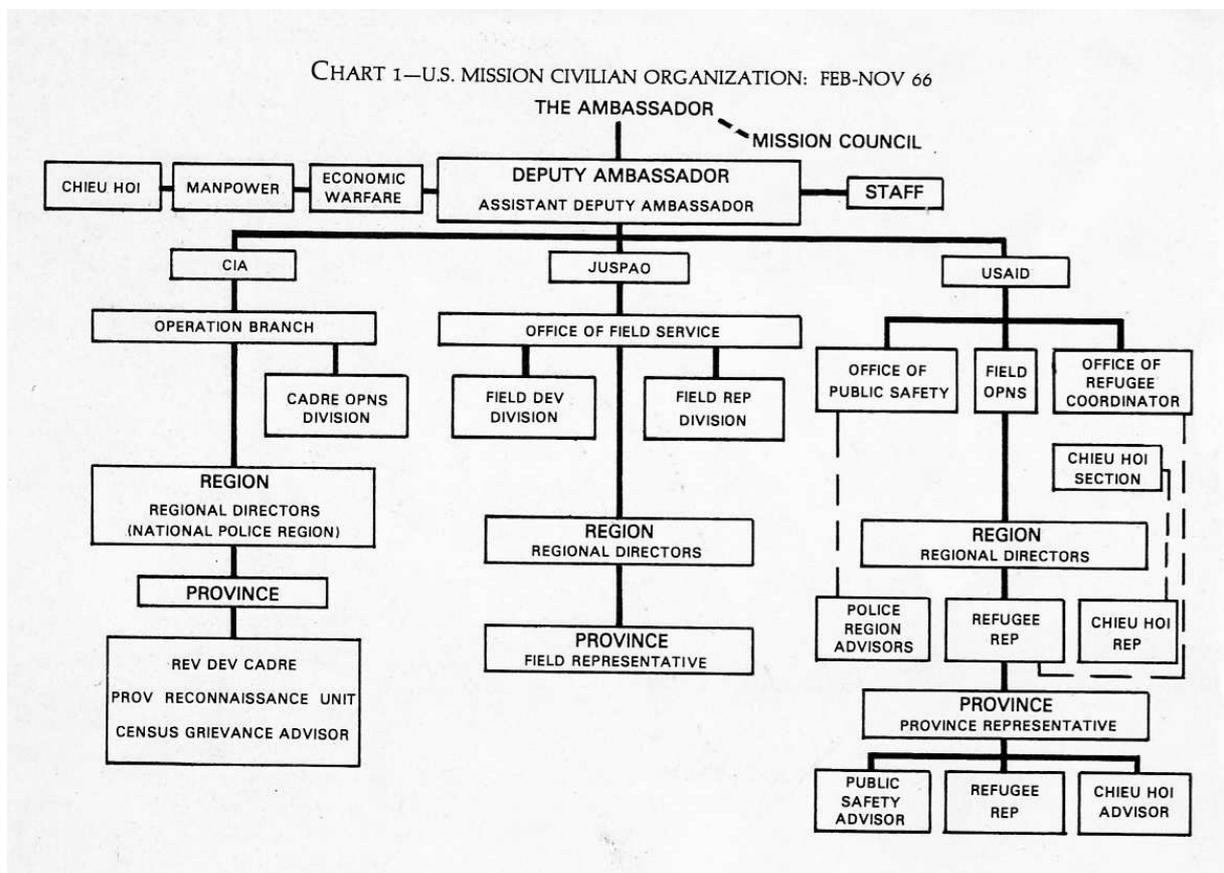


Figure 1. U.S. Mission Civilian Organization: Feb-Nov 66¹⁵

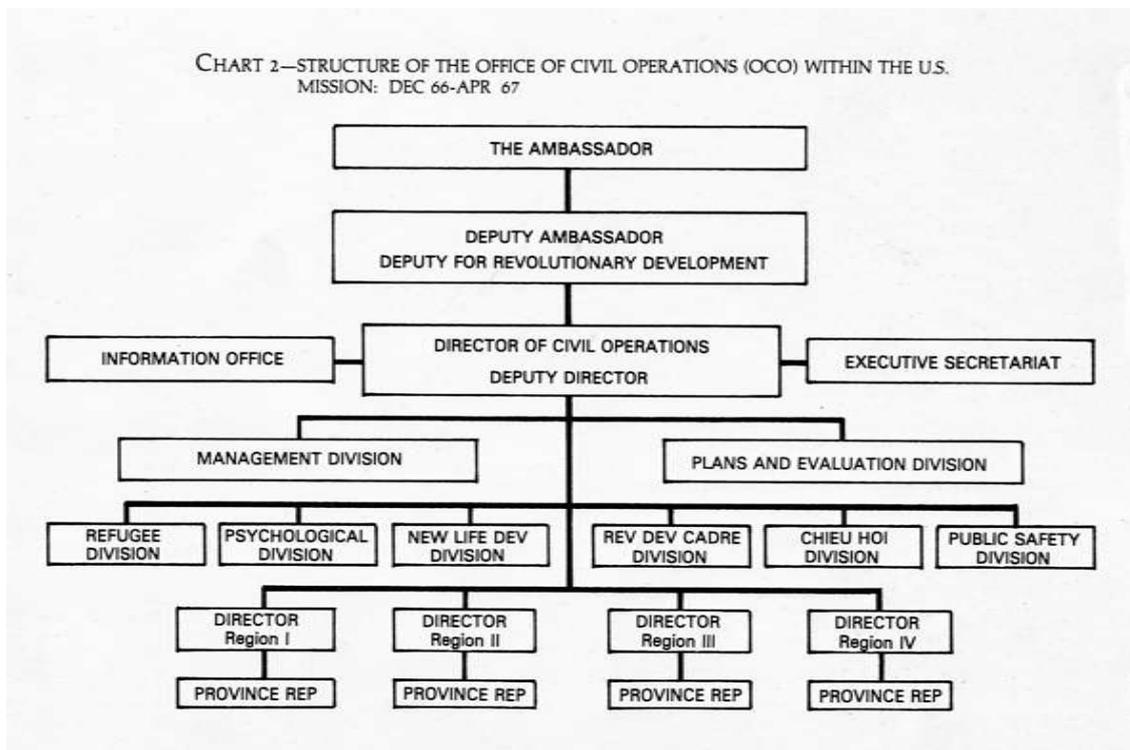


Figure 2. Structure of the Office of Civil Operations Within the U.S. Mission: DEC 66-APR 67¹⁶

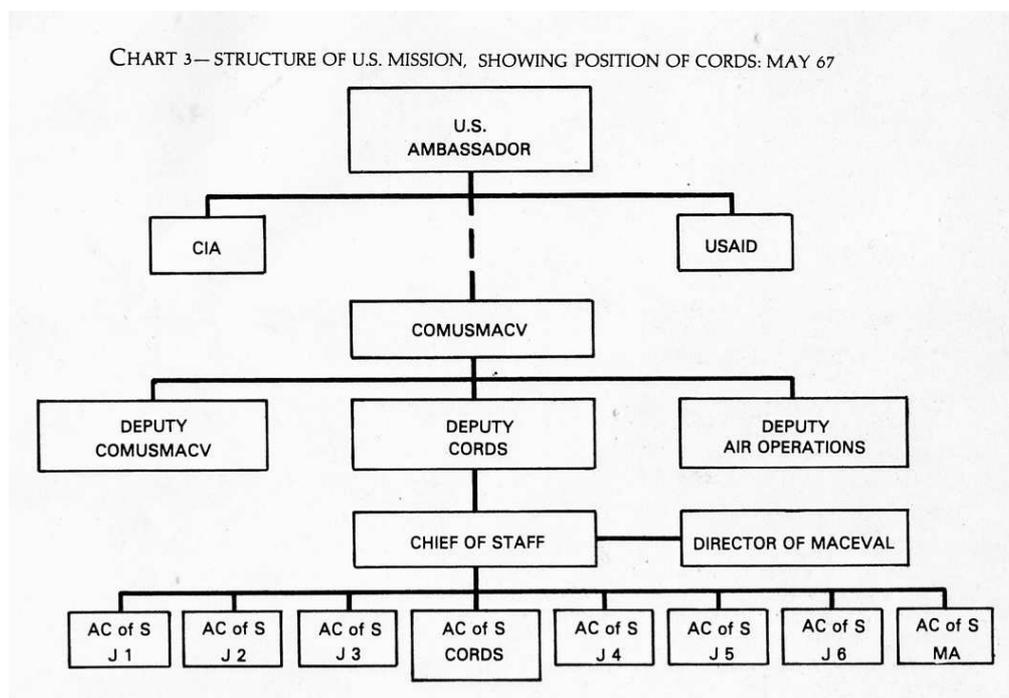


Figure 3. Structure of the U.S. Mission, Showing Position of CORDS: MAY 67¹⁷

CHART 4—ORGANIZATION OF ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF FOR CORDS

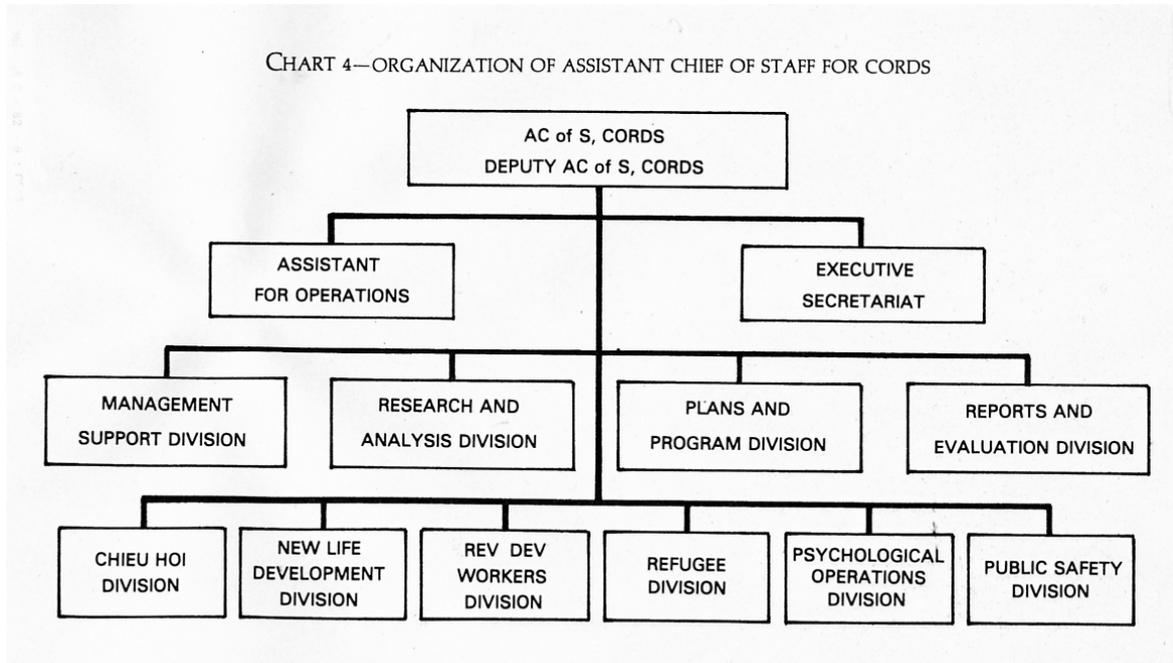


Figure 4. Organization of Assistant Chief of Staff for CORDS: MAY 67¹⁸

CORDS took shape quickly. There was relative harmony between Ambassador Bunker, General Westmorland, newly promoted Ambassador Komer and most of the other key players. One thing that never changes is that good things happen when key leaders get along. There were many military leaders and staff officers who detested Ambassador Komer and his power as a civilian. Komer was known as the “blowtorch” for his fiery personality. Those who got to know him well often gained a higher opinion as he was as effective as he was abrasive according to BG Denny Roush (USA, Ret.).¹⁹ In a May Commander’s Conference Westmoreland made it clear to his subordinate commanders that they would support this effort wholeheartedly. While it was not always easy, the support to pacification efforts improved dramatically.

Unity of effort was a key principle. For the first time a U.S. Ambassador was reporting directly to a military superior while at the same time having command responsibilities over members of the military. This arrangement went from the top of the

organization to the bottom. There were civilians rating military members and vice versa. The programs that were consolidated under CORDS were impressive and numerous including New Life Development (AID) which concentrated on economic development and public works, Chieu Hoi (AID) which encouraged Viet Cong soldiers to switch allegiance, Rev Develop Cadre (CIA) which trained locally selected teams to help establish governance, Montagnard Cadre (CIA), Census Grievance (CIA), Regional/Popular Forces (MACV), Refugees (AID) which aided the government in refugee issues, Field PYOPS (JUSPAO) which focused on posters, leaflets, television and radio in support of the RDC and Chieu Hoi programs, Public Safety (AID) which dealt with provincial and national police, and Civic Action/Affairs (MACV).²⁰ Getting these programs moving in the same direction was a challenge made harder at times by the traditional interagency infighting and power struggles. For example USAID tried to buck the system and fought giving authority and funding to CORDS. Komer attacked this problem as he saw a loss here as one that would cripple efforts. With the support of both military and civilian leadership Komer won the fight. USAID in Washington continued to want to work through their Saigon Office instead of directly with Komer but the relationship did improve over time.²¹

Although the war did not end well for the U.S. there is strong evidence that the CORDS Program was working. It was suggested that the NVA/VC attacks against RFs/PFs signaled that they had determined CORDS efforts were having an effect in the districts and provinces outside Saigon. It is also thought that the reason the North Vietnamese government launched a large offensive in 1972 was in response to the recent successes in pacification and the basic elimination of the Vietcong insurgency.²²

It is interesting to note that as the North Vietnamese finally turned the tide and won the war that the final blows were all conventional. The insurgency more or less floundered and much of that can be attributed to what the CORDS Program accomplished.

PRTs in Iraq

The National Security Council published their National Strategy for Victory in Iraq in November 2005. This document built on those strategies set out by President George W. Bush in 2003. The strategy identified three integrated tracks which were political, security, and economic.²³ The Political Track entailed isolation of the enemy from the population, engagement with those who could be brought back to the political process and the building of Iraqi national institutions. The Security Track called for clearing areas of enemy control, holding the areas with Iraqi Forces and building the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and local governments that would provide service, justice and civil society for the population. The Economic Track was to restore the Iraqi infrastructure, reform the Iraqi economy so that it would be self-sustaining and build the capacity of Iraqi institutions.²⁴

The 2005 Strategy also identified eight strategic pillars: 1) Defeat the Terrorists and Neutralize the Insurgency, 2) Transition Iraq to Security Self-Reliance, 3) Help Iraqis Form a National Compact for Democratic Government, 4) Help Iraq Build Government Capacity and Provide Essential Services, 5) Help Iraq Strengthen its Economy, 6) Help Iraq Strengthen the Rule of Law and Promote Civil Rights, 7) Increase International Support for Iraq and 8) Strengthen Public Understanding of Coalition Efforts and Public Isolation of the Insurgents.²⁵

Following the identification of the pillars the document goes on to identify that each pillar has a corresponding interagency working group. It discusses the requirement for a weekly strategy session at senior levels of the U.S. Government that would ensure that Iraq remains a top priority. Finally it states that “our team in Baghdad – led by Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and General George Casey – works to implement policy on the ground and lay the foundation for long term success.”²⁶

In the month that this 2005 Strategy was published the first Provincial Reconstruction Team was established in Iraq seemingly supporting the new policy. The Embassy was attempting to reach out to the provinces and local government. There were some regional and provincial teams established by the Coalition Provisional Authority but they had not been empowered or resourced properly.²⁷ Ambassador Khalilzad was impressed by the work done by PRTs in Afghanistan during the time he served there and wanted a similar effort in Iraq.²⁸ What exactly the PRTs were supposed to accomplish was not well defined. “In fact, beyond the mission statement, there is no agreement within the U.S. government or between the U.S. and its allies on how PRTs should be organized, conduct operations or what they should accomplish.”²⁹ PRTs initially reported to the National Coordination Team (NCT) in the U.S. Embassy. Major General Eric T. Rick Olson (USA, Ret.) was the Deputy Director of the Iraq Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO) and Director of the National Coordination Team (NCT), which provided guidance and coordinated the activities of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq. MG Olson, as Commander of the 25th Infantry Division (Light), commanded Joint Task Force 76 in Afghanistan, an allied command of over 18,000 personnel representing 18 countries. In this position MG Olson saw firsthand

what PRTs did in another theater. Although MG Olson allowed great flexibility to his team leaders; there was feeling of centralized control. He stated that most of the guidance the NCT sent out to the PRTs was developed internally within the NCT. The NCT worked hard to support the overall campaign plan while trying to synchronize the efforts of the many agencies involved. Although the organization chart at the embassy showed a PRT Executive Committee which was to be chaired by the Ambassador's Deputy and the Commanding General of MNC-I, it never really happened that way.³⁰ Without MG Olson's understanding of the military and the credibility he had when addressing MND and BCT commanders we would have been lost in my opinion. His efforts got the mission headed in the right direction and set his successors up in good shape in relation to the military leaders they would deal with.³¹

From my point of view there were problems in many areas including lack of personnel with mission-specific training, lack of pre-deployment training, security and movement of the PRTs, logistical support to the PRTs and the lack of a national reconstruction plan to name a few. The PRTs in Iraq were set up with dual chain of command. The State Department was responsible for the political and economic issues while the Department of Defense was responsible for security and movement. There were even exceptions to these basic guidelines. For example the Baghdad PRT received movement support from both the Regional Security Office (RSO) and from the Multi National Division – Baghdad (MND-B) under very different guidelines. Ambassador Khalilzad and General Casey put out an "initial instructions" telegram that officially established the PRTs. "No Washington interagency- approved doctrine or concept of operations governed the first PRTs in Iraq. Nor are there agreed objectives,

delineation of authority and responsibility between civilian and military personnel plans, or job descriptions.”³² It took a full year from the time the PRTs were first established for the Department of State and the Department of Defense to issue a joint memorandum of understanding that addressed basic logistic and financial agreements on provisioning the teams. PRT Team members were often forced to scrounge basic items from the military rather than go through the cumbersome DOS procurement procedures. That time could have been better utilized focusing on the mission at hand.

The PRT’s initial focus was governance and most actions could be traced back to establishing governance. The simplified definition of governance is a government or structure that meets the expectation of the population to deliver services through a definable process. Under the former Saddam Hussein regime the system was centralized. PRTs had to teach the provincial officials how to think for themselves when serving their constituents. This requires constant interface which was difficult initially due to security considerations. In Baghdad, where we were better resourced than most, missions were often limited to one to two hours on the ground and with only 3-5 missions possible on a good day the interface was minimal in many instances. Consider that the conditions for Iraqi officials were even worse where intimidation through assassination and kidnapping was constant. While the PRT decided who they had to meet, the military unit providing security or the RSO had ultimate control as they approved movements for PRT personnel. Initially teams were interacting at the provincial and district level. Establishing a link between those two levels of government was important. That meant that PRTS really needed to travel through the entire province.

The biggest issue in establishing the PRTs was getting qualified U.S. government officials onto the PRT staff. The initial ten PRTs were to consist of up to 90 personnel although teams varied greatly based on support requirements. State Department problems with staffing were well documented in Iraq. Articles published in late 2007 from Reuters, FOX, USA Today as well as many others outlined this problem. Harry Thomas, the Director General of the Foreign Service, threatened Foreign Service Officers with mandatory or directed deployments. It is interesting to note that in 1969, after the establishment of CORDS, an entire class of Foreign Service officers was sent to Vietnam as directed assignments to support the effort. While this may have filled slots with young and talented FSOs, it did little to provide the type of experience that was required.

The teams were to be made up of primarily civilian personnel. The initial teams were made up of mostly of personnel from DOS, USAID, Justice, Agriculture and personnel from Army civil affairs teams. As discussed, the Department of State had well documented problems finding volunteers to deploy to Iraq as did USAID. Those that did deploy were often young and inexperienced and lacked basic Arabic language skills. PRT mission focus was based largely on the team leader's desires based on their individual expertise. Some were well integrated mixing the military and civilian personnel to meet mission requirements. Others kept military and civilian team members more or less separate. Most personnel on the PRTs rotate after twelve months. Often times the entire civil affairs portion of the team is forced to rotate out all at the same time. Although this causes challenges to continuity the military does a good job of compensating through pre-deployment site surveys which are trips into theater for

the unit's leadership months before the actual deployment and through a very structured overlap between incoming and outgoing units. Civilian personnel are often gapped meaning critical positions go uncovered, sometimes for months.

Another critical obstacle and constant source of friction to the establishment of PRTs was the issue of how security was to be provided. There were constant issues of who would provide security and which methods would be utilized. The Embassy's Regional Security Office had standards that were very different from what a DOD personal security detachment would follow. Security procedures differed from PRT to PRT as there was a mixture of military security and DOS contracted civilian security. Site security for the teams was also an initial issue. The PRTs all had to operate within the battle space of a Brigade Combat Team (BCT) or in some case the battle space of several BCTs or even an MND. Deconflicting movements in an active combat zone is a difficult business. PRT movements generally had to be submitted 48 hours in advance of the desired movement time. While this may have made sense in avoiding ongoing operations it signaled PRT movements to Iraqi counterparts well ahead of the actual movements. When a high ranking provincial level leader wants to meet it seems like 48 hours of hoping for a convoy does not suggest full U.S. support. There was more flexibility in getting permission for these types of missions through military units rather than the RSO's office.

Funding for PRTs was also identified as a problem. One of the initial tools that would allow the PRTs to establish some credibility with Provincial officials was the money from the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committees (PRDCs) program. The PRDC was made up of Iraqi officials at the provincial level who would work with the

PRT representatives to identify projects that would be built with U.S. money. The idea that the PRTs had “something to offer” was a key to establishing their credibility.³³ This was particularly important when one considers the amount of projects that were being generated through the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) at the local level. If the U.S. was supposed to be establishing confidence in the Iraqi government and building the capacity of that government to serve the population, an Iraqi face had to be put on the funds expended by the U.S. government. The money initially used for PRDC came from both CERP and the Iraqi Relief and Reconstruction Fund (IRRF) but follow on funding would be critical. That funding would be difficult to attain as the House Appropriations Committee position during the FY2006 supplemental directed that no new funding would be provided for PRTs until current programs were assessed. The PRTs were seen as a pilot program in Iraq by Congress. This disconnect between the executive and legislative branch was a key problem.

With all these problems many things were going well. Where PRT members could get out into the community they were making headway. Individual teams came up with work plans and went to work. Without defined goals and metrics to measure success from above it was often hard to prove that progress but most involved felt that they were having an impact. This lack of definable goals and strategy to attain the ends drives what is seen as lack of unity of effort by the interagency. Leadership rotations were difficult and often the expertise and comfort level of the team leader drove what the team focused on. Many team leaders had not been in charge of large organizations in the past and certainly not in a combat zone. At the same time the team leaders brought a different focus than the military commanders. The bottom line is that the team

leader's role is essential, particularly in working with the associated military unit if unity of effort is to be achieved. An example of where this was not achieved is illustrative:

One interviewed PRT member reported that the first PRT team leader was not able to achieve a productive working relationship with the PRT. The interviewee described this particular Department of State (DOS) team leader as having no desire to contribute to unity of effort. As a result, there was disagreement as to what the main effort should be for the Diyala Province until a new DOS PRT leader, with a better understanding of the military culture, brought a cohesive vision to the PRT.³⁴

There may have been some friction between military and civilian leaders but it was often a constructive friction. The Deputy Team Leaders, a military position, were meant to be more like a Chief of Staff for the team but this role varied team to team. In some cases the Deputy was very involved in the actual diplomacy aspect of the mission. When the Deputy came from the unit that was in same geographical space that the PRT operated in there was often a better unity of effort between the PRT and the military unit.

The bottom line is that the President had confidence that the PRTs were a worthwhile venture as in January 2007 he announced his "New Way Forward" including a surge of five new BCTs and a doubling of the PRT effort. These new teams, called embedded PRTs (ePRTs) were meant to be stood up at the grass roots level and would be embedded with various BCTs in Baghdad, Anbar and Babil. The confidence that President Bush showed and his support of the program was clear in several secure video-teleconferences he held with PRT leadership. I was able to brief the President and his National Security Team along with several other PRTs and ePRTs not long after the surge began. His questions to the civilian and military team members clearly showed his support for the program. Of course the entire group practiced the briefing

and ensured a unified front by placing the Deputy Chief of Mission and the Corps Effects Officer in charge of the pre-brief.

A great deal of work was done at the Embassy and Multi-National Corps Iraq (MNC-I) to try and make this new effort work. The Embassy was transitioning the National Coordination Team into the Office for Provincial Affairs and brought retired Ambassador Henry Clarke in as the Director.³⁵ He believed in decentralization and did very little to pull the new ePRTs and the associated PRTs together. As recently as early 2009 he still defends that “for maximum effectiveness, the teams and their successors should remain a decentralized structure, pursuing coalition and U.S. goals in Iraq according to the particular opportunities and challenges in each province.”³⁶ When the teams actually came on board the original PRTs lost visibility of what was happening at the District level in many cases. Even the weekly phone conferences between team leaders were discontinued.³⁷ Ambassador Clarke was only in country for a period of months and was replaced by Minister Counselor Phyllis Powers who, after a short time as Team Leader of the Baghdad PRT, took on the role of OPA Director and moved towards a more centralized structure. Once again though it seemed like information and direction from Washington was behind implementation schedules. The most serious problem would be in manning the ePRTs. At the time that the President made his announcement on the expansion of the PRT program the State Department could only fill about 80 percent of the established positions in Iraq. USAID and other agencies were having similar problems. One must remember that compared to DOD these other agencies are without a float system so moving anyone just creates a vacancy elsewhere. With that understood the national priority was clearly to fill positions in Iraq

and the personnel system on the civilian side of the interagency was not working. The State Department had a solution for hiring on members through IRMO as contractors and labeled those employees as 3161s. Some of the best qualified and certainly most enthusiastic PRT members came to the teams through this hiring practice. The problem was that the pool of qualified applicants was getting smaller and even more importantly was that DOS did not have money to hire the initial employees required for this “civilian surge”. As the largest resource holder in the endeavor DOD was once again called on to provide a solution which was to bring DOD employees on until the other agencies could attain funding and go through the hiring procedure. An example of what the “civilian surge” brought to the Baghdad PRT was 19 new employees 17 of which were reservists in uniform along with two DOD civilians. All came with skills, particularly from the civilian side of their lives, but many did not have a skill set that was originally requested to fill a desired slot on the team. To further complicate team dynamics several of those new team members outranked the Deputy Team Leader.³⁸ Many of the positions that the PRTs required expertise from were agencies that are not funded or set up for foreign support such as the Department of Justice. Having DOD set up a temporary solution and then handing the mission back to DOS does nothing more than detract from unity of effort.

Eventually the ePRTs met the initial operating capability deadline but in a minimal way. The initial teams consisted of a Team Leader from DOS, a Deputy from DOD, a USAID representative and a DOD provided bi-cultural bi-lingual advisor. DOS worked hard to find qualified team leaders and came up with some impressive résumés ranging from 2-star equivalent Ambassadors down to the FSO-1 level. For the most part

they were the best DOS had access to. The one problem was that you now put a Major General equivalent working side by side with a BCT Commander who was a Colonel which created some problems in the short term. Personalities always drive the success of teams and for the most part the teams came together despite differences based on the common mission. As always, the closer you get to the fight, the greater the cooperation. Most of the DOD employees that were part of the “civilian surge” ended up serving a full year in the position and based on the need for continuity this was a good choice. Many of the best performers are now wearing civilian clothing and working for DOS as 3161s. They are paid a much higher salary than they were as military team members so one must ask what sense it makes to bring them in as civilians instead of in their capacity as Reservists.

The PRT program is an attempt to bring together many of the non-kinetic programs aimed at ending an insurgency by making the government and civil society organizations in Iraq care for their own population. When the people are getting what they need from the government they have no desire to look elsewhere for assistance. The program has worked but the question remains is whether it could have worked even better if we applied what we should have learned in Vietnam?

The Bottom Line

The first and most obvious question is whether or not the PRT effort was best placed under the Department of State? A basic question must be applied to the overall strategy of the war effort. That question deals with whether to fight the war through means that are primarily military with support from the interagency or is the war, or at

least the current phase of the war, primarily a political struggle led by the Department of State with support from the military and interagency team?

There were obvious problems with unity all the way from the interagency working groups defined in the 2005 National Strategy for Victory in Iraq. There were too many agencies putting guidance out to their people directly in theater as a result. The effort in country would have greatly benefited from a more centralized effort. It is clear that DOD had the greatest access to resources by orders of magnitude. Also many of the problems came from the fact that DOS is not used to working in a combat zone. Some might argue that the non-kinetic missions in Iraq lined up better with DOS. “None of the primary PRT functions – governance, security and reconstruction – is a State Department competency. Nor is the State Department normally required to operate from geographically dispersed and heavily fortified bases in a war zone.”³⁹ Clearly the DOD is better suited to lead this effort with strong support from DOS and other contributing agencies. With the decision to put DOD in charge of the CORDS program there was a conscientious decision to make the largest resource owner responsible for the success of that portion of the mission. Although it may seem a paradox, CORDS demonstrated that “subordinating civilian capabilities to the military chain of command actually realized the principle of primacy of civil power. This unique placement gave civilian authorities greater influence than they had ever had before because it provided resources they did not previously have.”⁴⁰

A simple example sums up how difficult it was to even discuss the chain of command or unity of effort even at the operational level. LTG Odierno hosted a meeting in the spring of 2007 to discuss the initial impressions of the ePRTs. The PRT team

leaders, the ePRT team leaders, the Director of OPA and his staff attended.⁴¹ It is interesting to note that several BCT Commanders commented to me on their dismay at having the ePRT team leader attend without them since in their minds the ePRTs worked for them to achieve specific effects in accordance with the plan for their sector. The C9 had prepared some slides to guide the meeting which went smoothly until a line diagram was shown that attempted to depict who was in charge and how reporting was to take place.⁴² Several of the ePRT team leaders began to assert that they worked directly for the Ambassador and even stressed that they did not work for the PRT or military commander that was responsible for dealing with the province or district that they were operating in. This is critical when one considers spheres of influence assignments and common messages at the provincial level. The argument was diffused when LTG Odierno sort of joked it away and had the slide taken down.

The parallels between Iraq and Vietnam are not perfect. In my view it is likely that MNC-I would have been the proper command level to plug the PRT effort into. An Ambassador level appointment as the MNC-I Deputy Commander for Non-Kinetic Operations would have likely filled the same roll that Ambassador Komer filled for General Westmoreland. A simple example of where this change in responsibility would have helped could be found in the area of security. Often times one would hear DOS personnel saying that they could not get out and do their job until the area was secure. At the same time military units were saying that as long as there was no government providing essential government services that they could not beat the insurgency and secure their area of responsibility. If there was one agency in charge there would be less finger pointing and more effort put into accomplishing the mission. It should be said

that there was rarely disagreement on the ground as to what the end goals were but when different agencies saw different paths to those goals there was no arbitrator. A lessons learned document from Vietnam said that the U.S “ran their share of the war with essentially a peacetime structure—in largely separate bureaucratic compartments. This had a significantly adverse impact on prosecution of the war. Lack of overall management structure contributed to the proliferation of overlapping...U.S. programs—to the point where they competed excessively for scarce resources and even got in each other’s way. Meanwhile, counterinsurgency—or pacification—fell between stools; it was everybody’s business and nobody’s. Though many correctly analyzed the need for it, and it was from the outset a major component of GVN/U.S. declaratory strategy, the absence of a single agency or directing body charged with it contributed greatly to the prolonged failure to carry it out on any commensurate scale.”⁴³ This quote sums up many issues seen in Iraq and one wonders if any policy maker was familiar with it as the PRT program was born.

If indeed the policy decision is made to change peacetime structures and responsibilities to match wartime requirements in theater, then it would seem that something different should be considered for the overall management in Washington as well. “If and when an exceptional U.S. supporting effort which cuts across normal agency responsibilities is decided upon, it seems advisable to set up special ad hoc machinery at the Washington level to manage it”⁴⁴ The most important point that Komer attaches to this statement is that the ad hoc machinery must be designated by the President and needs the full support of that office to prevail over the interagency

backbiting that is sure to follow. Once again, this advice from the Vietnam era is still relevant.

Matching the right person to the available slot is critical and a perfect match in Iraq was rare. Just because someone is a nurse in the U.S. does not qualify that person to advise the provincial health chairman on how to build and staff and train a hospital and that is realistically what was being asked of PRT team members on the ground. The example could be used in almost any sector of government. There were some excellent Rule of Law advisors on the PRTs but being a federal prosecutor does not necessarily qualify someone to teach an entirely different system of law than we use in the U.S. All of these skills would be value added if the incoming expert were given a little mission specific training before arriving in theater. Current DOS training is short and rarely mission specific enough. The DOS is not an organization that is expert in training; in fact, they invest very little time training their own people when compared to DOD. If DOD were charged with the training in the States there would likely be a much more coherent and mission focused training program. DOS has been looking into various exercises sponsored by DOD including Division Level Mission Rehearsal Exercises, National Training Center and the Joint Readiness Training Center rotations. DOD has included PRT scenarios into their exercises and full participation by all deploying personnel would be beneficial particularly if the training of the PRT personnel was completed with the unit they would be serving with.

All of this may be a moot point for Iraq but with the current world situation you can expect to see PRT like organizations fielded again in the near future. This paper does not argue that they should work for DOD. It argues that we should use the

experiences of the past to best set our teams up for success. Turf battles in Washington are meaningless to those charged with executing on the ground. The Center for Army Lessons Learned, the State Department, the United States Institute for Peace, the Special Inspector General for Iraq, the Government Accounting Office and many others are busy documenting how we performed in Iraq. We must recall that after Vietnam we threw counterinsurgency lessons and doctrine out the window. "CORDS was one of the Vietnam War's success stories, and it's well conceived, well executed programs and successful synthesis of civilian and military efforts offer a useful template for current and future COIN operations."⁴⁵ We have been involved in many counterinsurgencies since that time and would do well to take the lessons learned from all of these efforts off the shelf and review them from time to time.

Endnotes

¹ Robert M. Perito, Testimony before U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *The U.S. Experience With Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan*, October 17, 2007, 1.

² Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press Inc, 1986), 173.

³ As the author of this paper I served in Iraq from September 2006 through December of 2007. I was the LTC assigned as the Division Engineer for the 1st Cavalry Division (which served as the Multi-National Division-Baghdad Headquarters). For several rotations the assigned MND-B placed their Division Engineer in the Deputy PRT-B slot. I served as the acting Baghdad PRT team leader for several months when there was an under lap between DOS assigned team leaders. Due to the physical location of the PRT in the Green Zone and the fact that I retained an office in the embassy serving essentially as the MND-B LNO to the embassy I was in a better position than others in PRTs to see into the decision making processes within the embassy. My relationship with the Director of the NCT and later with the Director of OPA allowed me a vantage point that many of peers in other PRTs may not have enjoyed. While in no way trained for this position I had some experience in planning for NATO PRTs in Afghanistan while I was on the NATO International Staff and in my work as the District Commander for the Philadelphia Army Corps of Engineers that were helpful in performing my duties.

⁴ Thomas W. Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1999), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸ Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: US Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1977) quoted in Ross Coffey, "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq," *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 5.

⁹ Ross Coffey, "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq," *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 5.

¹⁰ Dale Andrade and Lieutenant Colonel James H. Wilbanks, U.S. Army, retired, Ph.D., "CORDS/Phoenix Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future" *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 12.

¹¹ Robert B. Oakley and Michael Casey, Jr., "The Country Team – Restructuring America's First Line of Engagement" *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 47 (4th Quarter 2007): 149.

¹² Andrade, "CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future," 4.

¹³ Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support*, 51.

¹⁴ W.W. Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power, An Essay in Recent History* (New York, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1972), 459.

¹⁵ Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support*, 56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁹ BG Maurice D. Roush (USA, Ret.) telephone interview by author, February 10, 2009. BG Roush served as the First Executive Officer for ACOS CORDS, Director of Revolutionary Support. He was a LTC at the time in 1968.

²⁰ Dr. James Embrey, "Unity of Effort in Counterinsurgency: Historical Perspective on the CORDS Program in Vietnam, 1965-1970," briefing slides, Carlisle Barracks, PA, U.S. Army War College, September 17, 2008.

²¹ Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support*, 76.

²² Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*, trans. by Merele L. Pribbenow (Lawrence : University Press of Kansas, 2002), 255.

²³ National Security Council, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* (Washington DC: National Security Council, November 2005) 1.

²⁴ Ibid., 2.

²⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁶ Ibid., 26.

²⁷ MG Eric T. Olson (USA, Ret.), email message to author, February 14, 2009.

²⁸ Joseph P. Gregoire, e-mail message to author, February 10, 2009. Mr. Gregoire served first as the Executive Secretary for the Embassy and later as my team leader on the Baghdad PRT.

²⁹ Perito, *The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan*, 3.

³⁰ MG Eric T. Olson (USA, Ret.), email message to author, February 14, 2009.

³¹ Personal observation.

³² Robert M. Perito, "*Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq*", United States Institute of Peace Special Report 185 (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, March 2007), 3.

³³ Personal observation.

³⁴ *Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq*, Initial Impressions Report No. 07-29, Center for Army Lessons Learned, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Lessons Learned, December 2007), 2.

³⁵ Ambassador Henry Lee Clarke is a career Foreign Service Officer who served in Bosnia and as the U.S. Ambassador to Uzbekistan, 1992-95.

³⁶ Henry Clarke, "Reconstructing Iraq's Provinces, One by One," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 52 (1st Quarter 2009): 147.

³⁷ Personal observation.

³⁸ Personal observation.

³⁹ Perito, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq," 10.

⁴⁰ Ross Coffey, "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq," *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 30.

⁴¹ The author attended this meeting as the acting PRT-Baghdad Team Leader.

⁴² MND-B was particularly concerned about cable clearing procedures coming out of ePRTs. MND-C and MND-N seemed less concerned with this.

⁴³ Komer, *Bureaucracy at War U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict*, 163.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 169.

⁴⁵ Andrade, "CORDS/Phoenix Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future."