

# **The Netherlands' approach to its PRT operations in Afghanistan?**

## **April 2007**

### **PRT Mission statement**

*“Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT’s) will assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend it’s authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operations, and enable Security Sector Reform (SSR) and reconstruction efforts”* (Source; COMJFC Brunssum Revised OPLAN 30302 annex LL)

### **Introduction**

The Netherlands have been closely involved in the deployment of troops and development assistance to Afghanistan under NATO’s ISAF –operation. First in the northern province of Baghlan and then, from April 2006 onwards, in Uruzgan province in the south. Considering the ever -growing international attention to ISAF -operations, and the ever closer cooperation between the various ISAF –contributing partners and civilian organisations, what follows is a short summary of the Netherlands’ approach to its PRT –operations in Afghanistan for all those civilian as well as military actors involved in Afghanistan. This article is meant to be merely informative, and is not to be considered an exhaustive summary of all the various elements influencing the Netherlands’ PRT –approach in Afghanistan.

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### **1. PRT Guiding Principles**

The Netherlands’ approach to its PRT operations is embedded in both the international principles for the functioning of PRTs, as well as in a number of particular Dutch policy frameworks.

#### **International Principles**

The main international guiding principles for all NATO PRTs in Afghanistan were publicized in NATO’s *ISAF PRT Handbook*. It gives guidance through a ‘checklist’ of basic tasks set out to produce the maximum effect. Most importantly, the primacy of creating stability, the necessity of actively engaging the civilian sphere, national and international unity of effort, promoting Afghan (national) ownership of projects, managing expectations and striving towards sustainability of projects are mentioned. It also recognizes the need for short – and long term efforts to be closely intertwined, and to reach an ethnically, socially, economic and gender- balanced segment of the Afghan population. A second important document that sets out those developmental principles the Dutch PRT in Uruzgan adheres to is the *Afghanistan Compact* of 2006, which identifies three interdependent pillars of activity for the development of Afghanistan (security; governance, rule of law and human rights; and economic and social development) and the various principles for (international) cooperation agreed upon. The Netherlands’ PRT largely adheres to the guidelines set out in the PRT Handbook and the Afghanistan Compact, the notable exception being the PRT’s military (instead of civil –

military) command structure. Furthermore, there are a number of Dutch policy documents that set the framework for PRT operations specifically for Uruzgan province.

### Dutch Policy Frameworks

The Netherlands strive for a '3D' - approach (Defence, Diplomacy, and Development) to the functioning of its PRT in Uruzgan; all three sectors, in both their departmental as well as their functional activities, coordinate their activities as closely as possible to maximize unity -and minimize duplication of effort.

There are a number of basic documents that set out the Netherlands' particular framework within which its PRT operates. The starting document is JFC Brunssum OPLAN 30302 for the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. This document sets the framework for all ISAF operations. Specifically for the Netherlands, the NL CHOD OPLAN 11415 was designed, which lays down the Netherlands plans for the execution of the operation.

These plans created the need for a comprehensive document, describing the environment in which the operations will be conducted. It is a relatively new document, but one which has become the leading source for all operations in the province, for both the Dutch and the Australian contingent; the *Civil Assessment*. The assessment is basically a document which analyzes the specific challenges of the regional context, and subsequently sets out TFU and PRT priorities and funding options for all three of the 'D's' in Uruzgan. It also describes possible working methods and specific approaches to these regional problems. It was set up in the deployment phase of the TFU by a combined team of civil and military experts and (international) NGOs, under the guidance of the Netherlands' embassy in Kabul. Derived from the Civil Assessment and NL CHOD OPLAN comes the *PRT Masterplan*. This document translates priorities and funding options set forth in the *Civil Assessment* to overall effects to be achieved. It helps the PRT/TFU set priorities and derive associated tasks to achieve the desired effects while maintaining the 'big picture'. The Netherlands' policy towards Afghanistan as a whole is laid down in the Netherlands *Afghanistan Policy Framework* ('beleidskader'); for every country in which the Netherlands deploys reconstruction –or developmental efforts a specific framework is created which sets out the focus and eventual goals for the activities there. The Policy Framework is closely linked to the Civil Assessment, but has more of a nation -wide view of the way development in Afghanistan is supposed to come about in the coming years, where the *Civil Assessment* focuses on Uruzgan province. Policy Frameworks are regularly updated, based on changes in the assessment of the country's political and socio –economical situation.

To monitor the progress of PRT operations in Uruzgan, there is a growing focus on regular effects bases reporting, evaluations and mission reviews. Based on these, priorities and approaches are re-evaluated and if necessary adjusted.

## 2. Organisation and Civil-Military integration

The Task Force Uruzgan (TFU), which is under the command of a general staff, consists of three comprehensively operating elements: The BG (Battle Group), the PRT and a civilian element. More about these individual elements later.

Both the Battle Group and the PRT have their own supporting staff, while the civilian advisors are seconded as special advisors to the commander of the TFU. As was mentioned earlier, the TFU is built around a '3D' (Defence, Diplomacy and Development) approach to effectuate its mission. The fields of Defence, Diplomacy and Development are supposed to work mutually reinforcing, and each is incorporated into the different elements which make up the TFU. As we have seen, each of the components of the TFU has its own centre of

gravity, and works in support of the other two. The BG provides security and logistical facilities for the PRT units and the civilian element as well as performing stability and security operations. The civilian staff focuses on the long –term goals –thereby keeping the framework for operations clear -ended- and advises the PRT and BG on its activities. The PRT works together with national and international organisations, facilitates reconstruction activities and monitors and advises government bodies and security forces. It provides support for the civilian element and provides the BG with operational information to act on. Each component therefore has a certain overlap with the others, and because of the integrated command team this overlap is used to engage the different factors that cause instability and insecurity in a coordinated manner, and on various levels. In addition to the internal support the three elements provide each other, support is also provided through the Netherlands Embassy, Ministry for Development and Cooperation and the Ministry of Defence. This gives the TFU a strong ‘reach back capability’ which can provide the TFU with expertise (civil and military), a direct link to the Afghan government and the international community on a higher level.

### **3. Components and responsibilities**

As mentioned, the Netherlands Task Force Uruzgan consists of three distinct components, all with their own expertise and impact on the common ‘Lines of Operations’. The interplay between these three elements allows the force at all times to engage problems with the right strategies and tools. In this view the Australian Reconstruction Task Force will also be mentioned here. Although not a Dutch unit, or under command of the TFU, it does operate along the same leading principles and coordinated with Dutch units.

#### **Battle Group**

The Battle Group (BG) is the clear ‘combat element’ within the Taskforce. Its main focus will be to provide security and stability through security patrols, interdiction of Taliban activities and to support other TFU units. It consists of 4 mechanized infantry companies. During operations the units from the TFU can be supported by fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft as well as artillery systems based at Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawod. It supports the other TFU units by providing them with force protection, reconnaissance and basic security in their areas of operation.

#### **PRT**

The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Tarin Kowt is the Netherlands’ basic military organisation working, through its CIMIC –function, on facilitating reconstruction and development and on supporting the provincial authorities of Uruzgan. The Dutch PRT has several primary functions. It is the main *liaison office* in the area, towards the local government and population as well as to national and international authorities, the various embassies, the press and other visitors. It *assesses* the specific needs and problems of the local population (including ethnic minorities, women and children), and the means to assist them with these. It has a strong *outreach* function, and can act as a platform for meetings and discussions between the various local and (inter)national actors and organisations involved in this effort. And finally, it facilitates initiates and supports *reconstruction efforts* in the area. The Netherlands’ PRT, however, will *not* be reconstructing Uruzgan itself: this is a task for the development sector and the NGOs, which the PRT tries to facilitate as best as possible. CIMIC –operations are always in support of the military mission, and deploy their (‘hearts and minds’-) activities with this quite different goal in mind.

To go about its activities the PRT has four mission teams, a CIMIC element and a military police training detachment at its disposal. These are supported by the PRT staff. The mission teams form the basic unit for reconnaissance activities and communication with the local population. The units from the CIMIC element can be added to a mission team or they can operate separately. Furthermore, the PRT has various functional specialists at its disposal for certain periods of time. These specialists are (often) military reservists who have attained expertise in typically civilian areas –law, technical expertise, infrastructure, cultural affairs- and assist the PRT in these specific areas.

#### *Civilian Expertise*

Although relatively small in absolute numbers, in their function as direct advisors to the commander of TFU, the civilian experts are in direct liaison with the PRT commander, who relies heavily on the expertise they bring to the mission. The civilian focus is primarily on the long -term goals of the mission. Seconded from the Netherlands Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation, a POLAD (Political Advisor), a DEVAD (Development Advisor) and a DEVTAD (Advisor on Tribal Affairs) assist the PRT in all its political and developmental affairs, and advises on its CIMIC –operations, and on relations with local, national and international authorities. Furthermore, these experts identify, evaluate and commission (durable) development projects, and regularly report back to the various departments in The Hague on political affairs and the general state of the development process. Together with these departments and the embassy in Kabul, they advise the TFU and PRT on their situational awareness and provide a strong link to the civil environment and the political centres.

#### *Australian Reconstruction Task Force*

Alongside the TFU but integrated and complementing in terms of leading principles is the Australian Reconstruction Task Force (AUS RTF). This task force has an integrated engineering capacity: it's able to start reconstruction activities without being dependant on (mostly absent) civilian capacity. The ability to produce visible results in a short time fits into the comprehensive approach by fulfilling Afghan expectations present. This allows ISAF units to increase their footprint and build the relations necessary to deploy activities which require a longer timeframe, and to achieve long term effects.

#### **4. Concept of operations**

The TFU adapts the concept of the “Afghan Development Zone”. Within this zone relative stability and security must be created and development activities can be started to consolidate stability. When the aforementioned state is achieved, Afghan security forces should gradually take over control while TFU pushes the zone outwards. This will prevent forces to be (over)stretched into a hostile area, thus degrading their effectiveness.

In all its activities in the TFU Area of Responsibility units keep a very ‘open’ stance towards the local population; while a firm line is held regarding opposition to the force. Afghans are approached with a friendly, respectful attitude. Platoon commanders are in constant dialogue with village authorities, and all Dutch soldiers undergo a form of cultural sensitivity training before deploying to Afghanistan. In a conflict dominated by civil actors and insurgent activity a culturally sensitive and humane approach is vital to maintaining close contact with the local population. This approach has its roots in the Civil Assessment that provides an insight into the social, tribal, formal and informal structures as well as underlying factors of instability. As was mentioned earlier, all effects to be achieved are laid down in the *PRT Masterplan*. These

effects and their priority given are evaluated every two months. Based on this evaluation a re-evaluation of priorities is made by TFU. Possible changes to the NL CHOD OPLAN are discussed by the ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs and the Ministry for Development and Cooperation.

The Netherlands TFU conducts its operations in such a way that it will respect local population, local values *and* bring about a stable and secure environment. Whenever feasible the Afghan government and Afghan inhabitants of Uruzgan are in 'the lead' of projects and activities such as shura's. The use of force is based on thorough situational awareness (intel-driven) and used with moderation. One battle fought the wrong way (civil casualties, large collateral damage) has long term effect on the ability to work together with the local population. Whichever way you look at it we are foreign troops and we will have to prove ourselves in the eyes of Afghans. This means that we have to provide visible results and be realistic about our possibilities.