PRTs in Transition

The evolving U.S.-Iraqi relationship is affecting the security situation, as well as the roles of the 23 PRTs, ePRTs, and the Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) conducting reconstruction activities in the provinces. RRT Erbil is the only regional team; each of the PRTs operates in a single province, and some used to operate out of Regional Embassy Offices (REOs), but all of the REOs have closed except Hilla in Babylon province. The Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) has described the PRT work as critical to U.S. efforts to achieve a “stable, peaceful, united, and secure Iraq with a developing economy, participatory governance under the rule of law, and civil order.”

This quarter, U.S. Embassy-Baghdad discussed plans to continue PRT teams in Iraq’s provinces for at least two more years. At some point in 2010–2011, some PRTs may relocate from provincial capitals to accomplish most of their work from regional hubs. PRT leadership will still be responsible for directing the implementation of policy and programs in their provinces. Under current planning, the number of PRTs will be reduced to 16 by August 2011 and to 6 by December 2011. This quarter OPA reported it was working with MNC-I and the U.S. Embassy-Baghdad to develop plans for PRT and ePRT drawdown and closures, including closing ePRTs or converting them to satellite offices of the partnered PRT not later than August 2010, reducing staff, and creating a timeline for the drawdown and closure of supporting FOBs and the related PRTs.

OPA is focusing PRT resources in support of prioritized U.S. strategic interests in each province, and discretionary activities are being reduced. Although CERP is a DoD program, OPA noted that the PRTs were heavily involved in MNC-I’s CERP process, including the identification, coordination,
and oversight of CERP projects. OPA reported its concern that reduced PRT and Multi-National Corps-Iraq resources in provinces could lead to problems in the administration of CERP-funded projects or could require reallocation of PRT support resources to maintain oversight of CERP projects. OPA reported it was taking a number of steps to reduce the potential problem, including adding a CERP control officer and coordinating with MNC-I to reduce CERP projects in advance of a PRT drawdown.438

For information about the PRT footprint over time, see Figure 3.4, and for current locations, see Figure 3.5.

As the transition of reconstruction management accelerates, U.S. Embassy-Baghdad has redefined the roles of the PRTs:439

- Support elections and act as a platform for the UN and other international organizations.
- Serve as “honest brokers” to mediate and manage communal tensions.
- Assist Iraqi civil society and governmental institutions in strengthening their ability to protect the rule of law, confront corruption, and deliver basic services.
- Support displaced persons.
- Encourage foreign investment and economic diversification.

PRT expenses are currently included in U.S. Embassy-Baghdad’s expenses. A process is underway to track expenses specifically earmarked for the PRTs. DoS reimburses DoD for additional support costs. Estimated 4th quarter reimbursements made by DoS were $5 million, including personnel costs through July 1, 2009.440

### PRT-related Audits

In an audit released in August, DoS Office of the Inspector General raised several concerns about the costs and security risks of operating the PRTs and REOs. The report noted that there were roughly 4 support contractors for every staff member in 3 offices—or 1,027 support personnel for 265 staff. Moreover, RRT Erbil is housed in inadequate and unsafe offices in a suburb of Erbil City that DoS fire inspectors found lacking in proper electrical wiring and escape routes. The offices and living quarters are dispersed among local residences and businesses, which complicates security. DoS is reluctant to relocate the facilities or approve repairs until a decision is made as to whether the RRT will continue in the Kurdistan Region.441

On August 16, 2009, USAID's Office of the Inspector General (USAID OIG) released a separate audit of USAID's IRAP. Funded by the ESF and USAID's Civil Society and Conflict Mitigation Program, IRAP is designed to provide PRTs in Iraq with a flexible mechanism for funding the initiatives of community-based leaders and local Iraqi institutions to improve access to public services, education, and economic opportunities. USAID OIG found that IRAP is achieving its goal for at least 75% of grants it reviewed. However, the audit determined that some grants had not fully achieved their intended results and identified financial irregularities, such as fictitious invoices and indications of improper billing practices. As of March 31, 2009, approximately $165 million had been obligated through the program, and $64 million had been expended. The USAID OIG recommended improvements for monitoring procedures and controls that would ensure grants were executed properly through its implementing partner, Development Alternatives, Inc. It concluded that USAID had addressed these concerns.442


Figure 3.5
Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Footprint, September 2009