The post-Cold War trend of convergence between military and nonmilitary tasks has accelerated over the past six years as western nations seek to defeat the insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq. One result of this convergence is an increased role for military forces in the conduct of humanitarian missions previously viewed as the sole preserve of nongovernmental organizations. This transition is reflected in a greater emphasis on reconstruction activities by the military in contemporary operations.

To some extent, most western military organizations involved in Iraq or Afghanistan now appreciate the requirement for military units to conduct reconstruction operations as part of their normal missions. At the strategic level, the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada have established government offices for developing a more coherent approach to nation-building activities. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams established in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last several years are evidence of this. These may have a limited impact in some higher threat areas because of a lack of sufficient, integral intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and force protection assets.

A more robust approach to military-led reconstruction operations would see organizations with increased mobility, a strengthened ISR capability, and enhanced security. This self-contained capability will allow for the conduct of reconstruction operations where and when required. If the indigenous capacity is weak and nongovernmental organizations are unable to work securely, such an organization can make a significant contribution to shaping the opinions and perceptions of the local population. This article examines
the contribution of military-led reconstruction operations as part of a unified counterinsurgency campaign. These operations require the precise, discriminate application of nonkinetic effects to support the overall campaign plan in an effort to defeat contemporary and future insurgencies. Such operations require the allocation of significant combat support elements such as engineers and civil affairs, and should be synchronized within a joint, interagency application of national resources in support of the counterinsurgency effort. The ultimate aim of these operations is to coerce or persuade target populations to support friendly forces over insurgents.

Reconstruction and Counterinsurgency

Reconstruction operations play a vital role within the broader conduct of a counterinsurgency campaign. In many respects, the effects of reconstruction activities will have a more enduring influence than tactical, nonkinetic operations. This is not to minimize the importance of robust combat forces; there will always be a need to target certain insurgent elements for destruction. But the population-centric nature of counterinsurgency means that kinetic operations may often play a supporting role for other nation-building activities. The ability of the counterinsurgent to achieve the right balance between precise, discriminate kinetic and nonkinetic actions will have a major impact on how successfully local populations can be influenced.

Given the number of civilian agencies and the depth of their capabilities and experience, some may question the rationale for an expanded role for military organizations in reconstruction operations. The harsh reality is that in many areas such as southern Afghanistan and Iraq, tenuous security conditions prevent many aid groups and other government agencies from establishing a presence. In some instances these aid organizations, and other contractors, are deliberately targeted by insurgent groups in an effort to prevent them from gaining a foothold and becoming effective in assisting the local populace. In spite of these negative influences, the need for reconstruction operations in support of security missions remains. This ca-

---

Lieutenant Colonel Mick Ryan is the Commanding Officer of the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment, Australian Army. From August 2006 until April 2007 he commanded the Australian 1st Reconstruction Task Force in Uruzgan Province, southern Afghanistan. In 2005 he served as the Deputy-J3 at the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq. Lieutenant Colonel Ryan is a graduate of the US Marine Corps Command and Staff College and School of Advanced Warfighting.
pacity is best provided by highly capable organizations that possess an integral mobility and protection capability permitting the conduct of reconstruction operations with minimal interference from insurgents. Only military organizations, particularly military engineers, possess the ability to conduct reconstruction activities while concurrently providing robust self-protection.

Military-led reconstruction operations provide time and space for indigenous capacity to backfill existing military programs and functions. They also allow for the eventual integration of nongovernmental and aid organizations. This is not to say that reconstruction operations occur only after kinetic operations have terminated. The key to any successful counter-insurgency campaign is the commencement of reconstruction activities from the very beginning of the campaign. Such campaigns and their accompanying strategies require some cultural adjustment in most western military organizations. In traditional, conventional operations, the enemy is the object. Their defeat or destruction is the key goal of military forces. Consequently, Army combat units (infantry, armor, attack aviation) have primacy on the battlefield and are supported by a range of combat support and combat service support organizations. In complex insurgencies, however, when opposed by western nations and their militaries, the population is the object. As a consequence, the main effort becomes the effects generated by those military (combat support and service support) organizations that are best suited to provide support to population operations and the rebuilding of indigenous capacity. Security operations, conducted by combat units, should be integrated into these population support operations.

The conduct of large-scale reconstruction operations by military organizations may require a reallocation of resources from kinetic security operations into what has traditionally been support roles, such as construction and civil liaison. While undertaking reconstruction, military engineers may also teach the local populace basic trade skills and the planning and conduct of construction tasks, while ensuring that the indigenous capacity to execute such skills and tasks is constantly improving. Providing skills improvement to the local population is an effective way to assist disrupted populations in helping themselves and is a key element of any exit strategy.

In the conduct of reconstruction operations, both the populace and the nascent indigenous government often require additional support. This should be done concurrently, both to enhance the legitimacy of the government and to maintain the credibility of the military forces performing the reconstruction operations in the eyes of the local populace. This two-tiered approach could be described as a top-down–bottom-up approach. Such an
approach is best exemplified by the conduct of concurrent operations to rebuild government institutions and infrastructure (top-down), while at the same time conducting small-scale missions to assist the people in individual towns and villages (bottom-up) based on community priorities.

Reconstruction undertaken in the top-down category should wherever possible be based on the priorities of provincial officials. This requires detailed consultation and interaction with local inhabitants and their representatives. It also requires the development of a relationship where both sides are able to build trust and candidly discuss the projects that will benefit the local populace, not just those benefiting local officials. These projects will normally be significant in their scale and scope, for example, the wide-scale construction of schools, roads, or healthcare facilities. The duration of these projects will probably take a fairly long time and should involve significant contributions from local contractors.

Consultation with local officials and other interested parties will be a critical aspect of prioritizing the reconstruction projects. It is worth establishing a formal mechanism, involving all stakeholders, to facilitate community and government consultation. This interaction should include regular meetings with officials and local inhabitants to work out the details of individual projects, ensuring that what will be delivered is what the locals need.

It is also worth considering the adoption of a minimum level of local labor content for every contract signed with local construction companies. The threefold aim of such a plan is to keep locals employed in constructive endeavors, foster the transfer of work skills, and inject money into the local economy. To enhance employment opportunities for local people, a benchmark percentage of local labor should be set for every project. This can be reinforced by making it a contractual obligation. When contractors fail to meet this benchmark, they should not be allowed onto worksites. If contractors identify during the tendering process that the technical nature of a project would prevent them reaching this minimum level of local labor involvement, that fact should be part of the contract negotiations.

Bottom-up reconstruction requires detailed consultation with local officials, not just at the provincial level but at the community level. Once again, the quality of this interaction with community leaders depends on the trust that is established with the various military elements. The importance of these bottom-up operations is twofold. First, they provide an immediate and tangible justification for the presence of foreign military forces. If local people see immediate benefits resultant of this presence, they are less likely to provide support to insurgents. The second advantage of this type of project (also known as quick-impact projects) is that they provide time and space for
the completion of the larger scale—and longer duration—reconstruction projects in the top-down category.

**Building Capacity**

The second part of this conceptual model for military-led reconstruction operations is a dual focus on physical and intellectual (capacity-building) reconstruction. As impressive as new hospitals, clinics, schools, bridges, and other infrastructure may be, the capacity of local people to staff this infrastructure and maintain it in the long-term is of overwhelming importance. Consequently, reconstruction operations need to undertake capacity-building—military and civilian training and education—as a foundation for the entry of a broader range of government agencies to assume these functions once the security situation permits. It should be emphasized, however, that capacity-building cannot wait until other government agencies are totally mobilized—these actions should be undertaken from the beginning of any military operation. This will ensure, once again, the local populace will see a tangible benefit from the presence of military forces. It should also ensure that those that may be tempted to support any insurgents have other options.

A consistent theme in the approach of government and nongovernmental organizations to nation-building is capacity-building. The significant contribution this type of activity may provide is often underappreciated. Training in basic trade courses can also be undertaken by military units. Not only will this contribute to increased basic skills among the local youth, it can also play an important role in information operations. Mentoring of local officials by experts (military or contractor) should also be undertaken. Selective recruiting or contracting of experienced experts in such areas as education, economics, and municipal planning and administration may significantly improve the capacity of the local populace to improve civil infrastructure. Investing in basic capacity-building activities enhances the ability of the local population to play a positive role in the reconstruction of infrastructure and communities.

A critical element of this strategy requires support to capacity-building enablers. A logical step is to combine physical construction with indigenous capacity-building through the development of educational infrastructure. The construction of infrastructure such as schools to train the military, healthcare professionals, and police training centers is an example. If this training is reinforced through the partnering of military, police, and government organizations with friendly military forces from the sponsoring countries, the training is likely to be more enduring.
By overlaying these two approaches, a simple but durable military concept for guiding the conduct of reconstruction operations is enabled. Such an approach ensures that reconstruction projects not only have an immediate impact, but capacity-building that may be incorporated into each project ensures a whole of life approach for the maintenance, training, and development of management skills by government officials.

**Complex Environments and Intelligence**

The human dimension is the most significant aspect of the environments in which reconstruction operations will be conducted. While physical surroundings will often be demanding, it is the people that will drive the complexity of the situation in which reconstruction operations take place. Appreciating and understanding the human environment is an essential part of reconstruction operations. This critical step ensures that reconstruction is undertaken in support of the right people at the right place and time. The precision and discrimination that such actions imply are every bit as important as that required in the conduct of kinetic operations.

A range of friction points will be present in any area in which reconstruction operations are conducted. The most obvious is the presence of insurgents and their support base. Obviously, the role of reconstruction forces is not to directly target these insurgents. Information gleaned during the conduct of projects will contribute to the overall understanding of the insurgent’s operations and patterns. If necessary, information gained during the conduct of reconstruction activities may be used by combat forces to directly target insurgents.

In many regions, intertribal rivalry is likely to be present. These rivalries may require a conscious effort to ensure that reconstruction support is evenly divided among various groups avoiding any accusations of favoritism. A perceived lack of equity harms the credibility, along with the force protection, of forces executing these operations. A formal and transparent process for the prioritization of reconstruction activities is a critical enabler for operations and will assist in enhancing the local populace’s support of military forces.

By their very nature reconstruction operations take place in disrupted societies, impacted by some form of internal conflict. This conflict adds another level of complexity to understanding the overall security environment. Other sources of conflict might include political differences, the role played by individuals in previous conflicts, and local religious and ethnic codes of conduct (such as Pashtunwali in eastern and southern Afghanistan). Another factor adding to the level of complexity may be poor governance as a result of corruption and illiteracy on the part of local officials.
A montage of ethnic and tribal affiliations, political allegiances, and government agencies, as well as local and foreign forces, present those conducting reconstruction operations with a myriad of challenges. Sources of conflict will never be clear-cut and linkages between various actors are not always apparent. As a result, one of the elements of any concept of operations for reconstruction is the requirement for intelligence. Understanding the complex interrelationship between family, tribal, and political loyalties will be a significant undertaking, but absolutely essential in ensuring the conduct of the right project for the right people at the right place and at the right time. This emphasis on intelligence will also assist in formulating the proper level of force protection for those involved in reconstruction operations.

From the start of predeployment planning and throughout the conduct of operations, the development and updating of a “human map” of the area of operations needs to be one of the highest intelligence priorities. While knowledge of the enemy’s order of battle is an important part of force protection, development of a societal order of battle is of greater importance for the conduct of reconstruction operations. This understanding of the local populace provides a view of the most influential people and groups, along with their relationships and interactions. When underpinned by an adaptive system theory that contains a continually updated human map, commanders and their staffs are able to gain insight into the dynamics of the local population and assess the influence of different actors supporting reconstruction projects.

Human intelligence (HUMINT) operations are the force multiplier for these operations. If reconstruction forces are to have any chance of executing the right project at the right place and time, while ensuring robust force protection measures, HUMINT needs to be effectively employed. While a dedicated, integral capability may be present, the most important HUMINT asset is the eyes and ears of the personnel involved in the project. Military personnel need to constantly interact with the local populace. Such interaction provides invaluable opportunities to gain insight into the local situation and priorities, as well as to pass on messaging in support of information operations.

The integration of intelligence in reconstruction operations provides one of the most effective methods of conducting such operations. It ensures that projects are conducted where and when they are needed. It ensures that deployments to small villages for community projects (bottom-up) support the right people. Intelligence needs to be gleaned from the lowest levels of interactions and disseminated throughout the chain of command. If the conduct of counterinsurgency operations, and therefore reconstruction operations, relies on the strategic corporals and privates, those corporals and privates need to have access to accurate and timely intelligence.
**Measuring Success**

To enhance the chance of successfully influencing a target society, reconstruction operations need to be part of the planning for the overall military and interagency counterinsurgency effort. Reconstruction will be a principal line of effort (or line of operations). Objectives need to be clearly described and synchronized with other lines of effort. These objectives should explain the level and type of influence that military-led reconstruction operations are seeking. The chosen approach has to be flexible enough so that as the situation evolves and the understanding of local requirements improves, objectives can be adapted.

Simple measures of effectiveness (MOE) to ascertain progress, or lack thereof, will also be required. Not only will this provide a snapshot of whether objectives are being met, but it will indicate the level of success of the reconstruction forces in adapting to the environment. These MOE should use both quantitative and qualitative measures to provide indicators of success and a sense of where military forces are on the road to accomplishing specified goals. MOEs are also valuable in reviewing whether goals are still relevant in an evolving environment.

The use of MOE for military operations is not new. They have, however, traditionally been used to measure success in conventional operations and have focused primarily on aspects related to the qualitative aspects of physical destruction. MOE for reconstruction operations need to focus more on human terrain issues, the environment, or the affected society as a whole. Effectiveness in areas such as legitimacy, permissiveness, indigenous capacity, and sustainability may also form part of the MOE, dependent upon the operational situation.¹⁵

**Selling Reconstruction**

Beyond the successful accomplishment of the goals and objectives associated with a particular reconstruction operation is the requirement to have the project viewed as a success by a majority of the population. Advocacy will be an important component of these reconstruction operations and should focus on a wide variety of audiences. Consequently, a robust information operations plan, emphasizing strategic communication, should be interwoven with every reconstruction activity.¹⁶ There are a number of possible target audiences. One of the most important is the local populace. This effort will involve carefully shaped messaging through media outlets and by direct interaction with the local population and government. Another possible target will be the national government (if it exists) of the nation in which the reconstruction operations are conducted. Finally, and of significant importance, is the audience...
of the nation supporting the reconstruction operations. It is imperative that they are kept informed of what their military is doing. Other audiences may include the greater military, government, nongovernmental organizations, and allies.

Influencing the local population is an integral part of any reconstruction operation. The goals of such activities are to cultivate a positive image of military forces among the local populace. In the conduct of reconstruction operations, every action will have some impact on how local people perceive the military. In many of the communities where reconstruction is conducted, there is often cynicism regarding the ability and motivations of the military. For this reason alone, it is imperative that the local populace be informed regarding infrastructure development and capacity-building.

Expectation management is also an important part of implementing any information operations plan in support of reconstruction operations. Promises should be kept to a minimum, and only those that have a reasonable expectation of being kept should be made. The local population should be kept informed so that its expectations during the initial phase of reconstruction—which will primarily be an information-gathering phase—do not exceed the reality of the situation. This will require continued consultation and engagement with the local populace and government leaders. The engagement will provide those participating in the reconstruction operation with a more informed view of requirements and how best to meet them.

The conduct of quick-impact projects in the initial stages can assist in expectation management. Large-scale projects, because of design and contracting requirements, often take additional time to execute. Therefore, it is often possible to fill this void by executing small-scale reconstruction tasks while waiting for larger projects to come online. In the disrupted societies where reconstruction operations take place, actions are always more appreciated than grandiose promises. Forces performing reconstruction operations need to gain and maintain credibility with the local populace. Making promises that have little chance of realization is a sure way to lose credibility, and regaining it often proves quite difficult. An enduring theme of reconstruction operations should be to promise only what can be delivered and deliver on everything that is promised.

An important part of molding the thoughts and expectations of the various audiences is the constant reminder of the long-term nature of projects. Western publics are generally impatient for results in military campaigns. A central tenet of any public awareness campaign directed at home audiences is the message that reconstruction operations may take time, but the return in the longer term will be significant.

Forces undertaking reconstruction operations will be locked in a constant battle with the adversary to shape the perceptions of local inhabit-
ants, the global media, and audiences in the supporting countries. Insurgent and terrorist organizations recognize the importance of shaping a range of differing audiences. Ten years ago the Taliban did not permit the use of various media. Now it is highly adept at exploiting the various forms of media for its purposes in Afghanistan and around the world. Al Qaeda and other organizations have demonstrated a sophisticated capacity to produce and disseminate their messages to local and global audiences. They understand how to effectively exploit the modern media (especially the Internet) as well as maintaining their proficiency in the age-old methods, such as intimidation through the use of night letters and disinformation campaigns.

Insurgents have the advantage in shaping the information environment. While coalition forces are morally bound to the truth in their efforts to maintain legitimacy, the insurgent is able to make any number of outrageous claims about the actions of coalition forces and nascent indigenous governments. The insurgents are likely to implement a simple yet effective information operation that seeks to separate the local population from the efforts of the military. The insurgents constantly inform the media regarding incidents (true or fabricated) of coalition forces inflicting casualties on the local population; this technique is especially effective with the home audiences of the nations supporting these operations.

**Interdepartmental and Interagency Contributions**

Many western governments have determined that there are a number of inherent security issues that require a whole government approach in an effort to harness the key strengths of various agencies. The United States and United Kingdom refer to this requirement as “networked government” and “joined-up government.” Both nations have a similar approach regarding the majority of normal day-to-day business; a single department or agency approach is usually sufficient to meet these daily needs. For more challenging problems, however, an interagency approach is necessary. Such is the case in the conduct of a counterinsurgency campaign. Military-led reconstruction organizations need to be composed of personnel from various government departments at the commencement of operations. Other agency players should be seen as an integral part of any reconstruction team. These contributors need to be an integral part of the planning phase, as well as during execution, in an effort to provide the broadest professional advice to military commanders. These agency representatives also ensure initial military reconstruction operations do not compromise subsequent civilian reconstruction activities.

An alternative approach is to include military personnel who have previously had assignments with other government departments. This would
necessitate greater interaction between the military and the various government departments. It would also require the reallocation of additional military personnel to these assignments. The development of informal networks between military and civilian personnel would certainly be enhanced, adding markedly to the planning and execution of reconstruction missions.23

A critical role that agencies may play is facilitating the gradual integration of a greater number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as reconstruction operations transition from military to civilian. In many respects, the continuity in counterinsurgency operations (from initial military to evolving civilian reconstruction) will be provided by the representatives from these agencies.

**Reconstruction and Nongovernmental Organizations**

By necessity, military-led reconstruction operations have spilled over into what was traditionally the domain of nongovernmental organizations.24 This is not a deliberate attempt to seize additional responsibility by the militaries conducting these operations, but a pragmatic realization that regardless of the security situation, the local population requires rapid humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. Some NGOs accept the security umbrella provided by the military, while others refuse to cooperate based on their organizational culture or fear of reprisal. While this reticence to working with the military is based on a range of factors, nongovernmental organizations will need to reexamine their cultures and relationships with the military if they are to be effective in rebuilding societies impacted by insurgencies.25 The military and NGOs both possess unique capabilities. Not only do they need to cooperate more closely in future operations, but there needs to be formal agreements related to enhanced planning and cooperation.

Just as military forces have transitioned away from their aversion to peacekeeping and stability operations, so too nongovernmental organizations will have to adapt to the demands associated with a dynamic security and humanitarian assistance environment. NGOs have the skills and resources critical to the successful conduct of military-led reconstruction operations. The need for humanitarian aid and reconstruction operations during and immediately following kinetic operations demands greater participation by NGOs in support of the military reconstruction efforts.26

**Conclusion**

Military-led reconstruction operations play a key role in a cohesive (national) approach to the conduct of successful counterinsurgency opera-
tions. Such an approach requires the precise, discriminate application of nonkinetic effects in support of a unified campaign plan. The conduct of reconstruction operations does not negate the requirement for robust combat forces. Kinetic operations, however, play a supporting role in population-centric, counterinsurgency warfare. The ability of the counterinsurgent to achieve the proper balance between precise, discriminate kinetic and non-kinetic actions will have a major impact on how successfully local populations are influenced.

Ensuring military reconstruction operations are based on sound intelligence is one key to success. The integration of intelligence ensures precision; that projects are conducted where and when they are needed. It also provides discrimination; that deployments to small villages for community projects are supporting the right people while negating any bias toward a particular ethnic or tribal group. Likewise, the synchronization of reconstruction operations with NGOs and other government agencies will play a central role in the success of these operations.

The military’s involvement in reconstruction operations, and the manner in which they are conducted, provide a highly capable, complementary function to the array of kinetic means currently employed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other areas. The mix of construction and internal security is a powerful combination capable of supporting the conduct of kinetic activities in a counterinsurgency environment. Every insurgency is unique; however, military-led reconstruction operations do provide the counterinsurgent with a powerful tool to shift support of the populace away from insurgents. Possessing the ability to destroy the enemy and make them irrelevant to the population through reconstruction operations is a powerful tool in any synchronized counterinsurgency strategy.

NOTES

3. This reflects the practice of “armed civil affairs” as described by David Kilcullen in “Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency,” Military Review, 86 (May-June 2006), 107.
4. This reconstruction encompasses both physical and intellectual reconstruction.
8. This has a range of implications, including organizational, requiring task-organized units to be formed around specific reconstruction missions. For example, the Reconstruction Task Force deployed by the Australian Army to southern Afghanistan in 2006 comprised a battalion headquarters (including an engineer works section and robust intelligence collection capability), engineer company, infantry company, cavalry platoon, and logistics company.

9. The inclusion of an economist to assess the flow-on effects should be considered to ensure that unsustainable false-economies are not created.

10. Capacity-building is a consistent theme in the approach of various government and nongovernment aid organizations. Andrew Natsios also lists capacity-building as one of the nine principles of reconstruction in “The Nine Principles of Reconstruction and Development,” Parameters, 35 (Autumn 2005), 4-20.

11. The US PRT Playbook: Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures lists capacity-building as one of the guiding principals of PRTs (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: Center for Army Lessons Learned, September 2007), 11.

12. Pashtunwali is an ancient code of conduct that governs the behavior of Afghan people of Pashtun ethnicity. Its principal components are hospitality, revenge, bravery, defending honor, and defending females.

13. The essential role of this knowledge, often described as cultural awareness, has been discussed in a wide variety of publications since 2001. David Petraeus has described cultural awareness as a force multiplier in “Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldering in Iraq,” Military Review, 86 (January-February 2006), 8.

14. Ralph O. Baker has called HUMINT the decisive components of strategy in “HUMINT-Centric Operations: Developing Actionable Intelligence in the Urban Counterinsurgency Environment,” Military Review, 87 (March-April 2007), 21. This is also supported by the author’s experience and observations as a task force commanding officer in southern Afghanistan in 2006-2007.


18. One Taliban-affiliated Website is www.Alemarah.r8.org. This site posts news about the Taliban struggle in Afghanistan and other jihadist information.


23. The author acknowledges the work of Dr. Gordon Rudd, US Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting, in suggesting and advocating this approach.

24. For an examination of the convergence of traditional military and nonmilitary, and the redefining of the term “security,” see Wing.


26. The importance of close cooperation between NGOs and the military is examined in Natsios, 14-15.