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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Provincial Reconstruction Teams Manage Infrastructure Projects in Iraq

By Mohammed Aliwi
Gulf Region South

AN NASIRIYAH, Iraq – In Iraq, the ultimate goal of the multinational coalition is for the Iraqi people and their newly formed government to run their country themselves.

To this end, an important initiative is to empower local and regional Iraqi government and community leaders with the responsibilities and the decision-making for construction projects that support their needs.

Richard Riley, a deputy team leader with the U.S. Department of State in Dhi Qar, said that the U.S. government with its coalition partners has established Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in the provinces of Iraq.

"The mission of the PRTs is to work in collaboration with the provincial government in each province to identify the critical needs of the province in terms of infrastructure reconstruction, and to assist the government to meet these needs by providing coalition funding (where appropriate) and expertise and advice," Riley said. "In addition, the PRTs deliver training and other programs to assist the provincial government to build up its own capacity and ability to fulfill its responsibilities to deliver services to the people of the province."

The first objective of the PRTs is to establish a professional, effective and cordial relationship with the provincial government, Riley said, and then develop the



Lt. Col. Dale Johnson, center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers area engineer, discusses a project with Wade Weems, leader of the Muthanna Provincial Reconstruction Team, and fellow Iraqi engineers. [USACE Photo by Mohammed Aliwi]

trust and cooperation of those government members in order to achieve mutual goals.

"The second objective is to work on a regular basis with the government to identify the critical needs of the population, to see where and how the coalition can best assist the government," Riley said. "It will also revitalize Dhi Qar's economy with the goal of alleviating the unemployment situation in the province and bring greater economic opportunities and a higher standard of living to the people."

The PRT establishes and maintains ongoing communications and contact

through face-to-face meetings, phone calls and e-mail communication with the provincial government, as well as other non-governmental organizations and donor agencies active in the province, Riley said.

According to Lt. Col. Dale Johnson, the Dhi Qar Office area engineer for the Gulf Region South District (GRS), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) helps provide construction support and technical engineering assistance to the PRTs.

"Our role is to ensure that quality construction products are provided in the rebuilding of Iraq," Johnson said. "We work hand-in-hand with the PRTs, local Iraqi politicians and tribes to ensure that their priorities and wishes are met in the infrastructure rebuilding efforts. We in the Corps are trying to make sure our professional engineering knowledge and advocacy is used for the benefit of the communities.

"If we are sure we understand the requirements, then we will be able to provide the best quality of construction available to support their (local governments') goals and objectives," Johnson said. "The PRT is made up of coalition personnel, U.S., Italian or Romanian representatives. The PRTs work with the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee or PRDC, which are often made up of engineers from each of the ministries.

"The PRDC is the committee formed by the provincial government to engage with the PRT to conduct our business together," Johnson continued. "Typically, they will meet at least once per month; however, some will meet as often as every week. This depends on the amount of activity in the reconstruction, and governance building in the particular province that the PRT supports."

The Corps' aim is to work from the beginning of a project to the end with the local engineers and ministries.

"This relationship allows us to constructively work every challenge that comes



Lt. Col. Dale Johnson, left, uses the details from the provincial reconstruction team meetings to gather more information and discuss concerns with Iraqi contractors during construction site visits in his area of operations, here at the maximum security prison project in An Nasiriyah. [USACE Photo by James Bullinger]

before us and provides local director generals assurance that their projects are being built to meet the geographic, environmental and cultural requirements for each of their projects," Johnson said. "This has been a fulfilling relationship between our U.S. engineers and the Iraqi engineers. We are learning from each other and supporting a common goal to provide the best products possible to the Iraqi people."

Wade Weems, leader of the Muthanna PRT, said the Corps works closely with his team.

"The Muthanna reconstruction team and GRS are partners in working together

with the provincial government on numerous reconstruction projects," he said.

"The reconstruction team works closely with provincial government to prioritize the needs of its citizens, and then turns to GRS to assist in planning and execution of projects that meet those needs," Weems said. "Throughout the execution of these projects, GRS trains Iraqi engineers in the art of effective project management in order to develop a skilled cadre capable of managing government-funded projects in the future."

Julie Nutter, a Maysan reconstruction team leader, said that USACE's Capacity Development Initiative (CDI) directly supports the reconstruction team's rebuilding efforts.

"A GRS engineer attends our meetings with local officials and is an integral part of the planning process," she said. "Our current priority is the improvement of essential services in the province like water, sewage and electricity. We depend heavily on the expertise and operational skills of GRS. We are working closely with GRS to link the need in the province for the delivery of es-

sential services to a larger provincial development strategy. The Army Corps of Engineers' capacity development initiative is playing an important role in that process."

Weems said that the reconstruction team aids the provincial government in developing its capacity to govern.

"Good governance is the ability to identify the needs of the people and design plans to meet those needs," he said.

"The USACE-led CDI helps the provincial government achieve this goal. With the assistance of Iraqi engineers, the CDI program assess infrastructure in the province and helps the government identify and correct critical gaps and make repairs. Once completed, the infrastructure survey will serve as a key planning tool for the provincial government for years to come," Weems said.

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