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Basrah Public Works Initiative Complements Provincial Reconstruction Teams

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BASRAH, Iraq – Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) began as a concept in Afghanistan, developed by then U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad. They proved to be so successful that when Khalilzad was named Ambassador to Iraq in June 2005, he decided PRTs would be a good way to develop capacity in that country as well. PRTs are now being established in each Iraqi province.

The first PRT efforts in Afghanistan differ from those being run here in Iraq, according to Jim Donegan, Basrah PRT deputy team leader.

“Essentially in Afghanistan, those groups are led by the military and have a civilian component to them,” he said. “But here, we try to concentrate more on the civilian side of things – getting people up and working again and helping the local governments get the operational and logistical support they need.”

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is one player in a group of players that number anywhere between 35 and 100 members depending on the area or province they serve. It is the Corps of Engineers that focuses on the reconstruction effort. Other organizations whose members comprise the PRTs include the State Department, coalition military personnel, the Justice Department, the Department of Agriculture, contract personnel and the

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

“Our mandate is to interact with the provincial councils,” Donegan said. “To say we focus only on reconstruction is a misnomer. That’s the Corps’ job, and here in Basrah, of course, that mission is filled by the southern district. The PRT’s job is to build capacity into the organs of local government, whether it’s the police or the city council. Our team has done incredible work in giving the local governments the capability to recognize what their constituents need, recognize the projects that are going to fill those needs, and getting the funding to put those projects into practice.”

He added that the PRT’s aim is for a strong government and infrastructure, noting that the people of Iraq have the ability and a basic infrastructure for a successful government structure.

“What we are focused on doing,” said Donegan, “is improving the capacity people have for doing their jobs – to do the things we, as westerners, take for granted. For example; handling budgets – how do you account for projects or identify the needs of your constituents and then respond to that? In other words, we want to build their capacity – empower them – to build a day-to-day structure for themselves.”

In Basrah, he said, the British head the PRT and each member of that group handles a different aspect of government, including economic, legal and reconstruction. That last piece falls to Corps of Engineers.

"The way it works," Donegan said, "is that the provincial reconstruction development councils in each province identify a kind of 'wish-list' of projects they would like to see completed for their people. Then that corresponding provincial council, like a state legislature, puts its stamp of approval on the PRDC list.

Funding for the projects comes from a number of different sources, such as the United States, coalition partners and donor nations in the form of economic support funds (ESF), Commander's Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and some new funds which have been targeted for USAID such as the Community Action Program (CAP) and the Local Government Program (LGP), said Donegan. "They then give this list to the PRT, with their priorities clearly stated, and the PRT reviews the list, develops scopes of work and then sends it to NCT (National Coordination Team) in Baghdad. They make the final decision on what they will fund," he said.

The Corps of Engineers develops the scopes of work for the projects that involve reconstruction, according to Lt. Col. Kenny McDonald, deputy commander, Gulf Region South district (GRS) in Basrah. "We take what the Iraqis have given us, work the scopes and estimates and forward them to Baghdad as fast as we can so we can get the funding and start building in the community where they need it."

McDonald emphasized that capacity development differs greatly depending on the sector that is involved; detail drive the focus. But establishing people who are qualified for the positions that are needed to run the infrastructures is a big part of the equation. "We take it from an infrastructure perspective and then apply it to

reconstruction," he said. "This is the Basrah Public Works Initiative."

"The BPWI integrates into the PRT," he said. "This began when Colonel Johnston [GRS commander] was looking at coming up with a model that would assist in developing capacity in the PRDC. I met with British Army Lt. Col. Richard Brown, PRT deputy, and found he had a different initiative. He was trying to develop them to look at long-range plans to develop projects."

McDonald said that the two developed the BPWI to address all PRT needs and added that the key to the plan is that it can be used for each sector working group and the overall PRDC.

"The model fits within the model," he said. "By that I mean, for capacity development, you would ask two questions: First, do the folks here know how to run what they currently have; and second, are they set up managerial-wise as an organization to run with some guidance?"

He explained that when a system analysis on Basrah is done, both the capacity development and the infrastructure pieces are addressed. He noted that frequently while the infrastructure may be sound, there is no one able to do the work needed to maintain it.

"When you do a system analysis, you do the whole system," he said. "You look at it from the standpoint of management: Is the organization structured properly? Do you have the right number of people in the right locations doing the necessary work? Currently, Basrah doesn't have that. They have bits and pieces but this needs to be looked at from a holistic perspective. When you do that, you see where the gaps are and you are able to identify where you need to concentrate your efforts."

McDonald said the sector working groups of the PRTs are ideal for the imple-

mentation of the concepts behind the BPWI. The group presents the ideas to the Iraqi representatives on the team and has them present it to their provincial council with an "Iraqi stamp on it."

"We have already started with the water group," McDonald said. "One thing you will find is that they (Iraq) are about 30-40 years behind on infrastructure upkeep. They have maps of pipes and sewer lines, so we are training them on our Geographic Information System. This can be a connectivity thread for all sector working groups. You can click on maps of sewer pipes, and then on a specific pipe and tag it for information, such as when it was installed, the size, who installed it, etc. Then, down the road, you should be able to identify all you have in the ground and start developing maintenance plans.

He said this strategy can be applied to fit every kind of infrastructure Iraq has,

but added that although the learning curve will be steep, in the end it will pay off handsomely. "Here is the thing," he said. "They are going through the GIS training, using the old maps that they currently have and inputting in real data during the training. They will end up with an overall idea of what they currently have in the ground."

McDonald estimates that in six months, the Iraqis could have a viable system with which to work. "Working in concert with Brown has given us both the breadth of knowledge we need to get this idea off the ground. There has never before been a strategic vision as to where the Iraqis want to go and now we are beginning to change that, make some headway and increase capacity development along the way. And that's pretty exciting."

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