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## ***Reconstruction focus shifting to building capacity, governance***

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**BAGHDAD, Iraq**--The focus of U.S. reconstruction efforts in Iraq is shifting away from big projects to assistance designed to advance such goals as building capacity and enhancing governance, according to Mark Tokola, director of the Iraq Transition Assistance Office.

ITAO was created by President George W. Bush by an executive order issued in May of this year. Its mission in part is to facilitate Iraq's transition to self-sufficiency. It is the successor organization to the Iraq Reconstruction Management Office. Tokola, a career Foreign Service Officer, was named its first director. He most recently served as the Minister Counselor for Economic Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in London.

In remarks at a conference in Baghdad this week, Tokola said most of the approximately \$20 billion in so-called IRRF (Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund) monies appropriated by Congress for the Iraq reconstruction effort has been spent, with only about \$3 billion of these funds left. But he said efforts to help the Iraqi people rebuild their country will be ongoing as the American focus shifts to new approaches and initiatives such as those recently proposed by U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker.

Ambassador Crocker, in Congressional testimony, called for creation of an enterprise fund, which would fund venture capital-type initiatives in Iraq with equity investments, and an operations and maintenance

facility conceptually akin to the U.S. Highway Trust Fund to assure that the Iraqis have the wherewithal to run and maintain infrastructure facilities over time.

ITAO Director Tokola said in response to questions at the Baghdad conference that the amount of money to be provided for these funds will be determined through the policymaking process in Washington.

Tokola said there will only be three or four big Iraq projects on the table by next spring. He said tasks going forward include completing expeditiously the large projects now under way, giving advice on how best to achieve stability through economic assistance, and providing support for the hiring of experts needed to assure the viability of facilities in Iraq over time.

Tokola spoke at the final session of a three-day partnership conference in Baghdad on the Basrah Children's Hospital. He said the hospital project may not be the biggest project in Iraq but that it certainly has the highest profile. He noted that the ambassador and the State Department in Washington often ask about the project's progress.

Lt. Cmdr. Chad Lorenzana, the resident engineer on the project for the Basrah Office of the Gulf Region South district of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, reported at the conference that there has been significant structural progress on the project since the Corps took over management of the project from USAID and that construction is now 64 percent complete.

**Note:** John Connor is a public affairs specialist with the Gulf Region South district, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, contact Grant Sattler, public affairs specialist at 540-665-1233 or email requests to [CEGRD.PAO@tac01.usace.army.mil](mailto:CEGRD.PAO@tac01.usace.army.mil). For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit [www.grd.usace.army.mil](http://www.grd.usace.army.mil).