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GRD Programs Director Caldwell talks business with Gulf Region South district leaders, staff

By John Connor
Gulf Region South District



Gulf Region Division's Lloyd Caldwell, center, talks with Gulf Region South district leaders and staff. (USACE photo by Betsy Weiner)

TALLIL, Iraq – Lloyd Caldwell, director of programs for the Gulf Region Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said the rate of execution of the Economic Support Fund (ESF) program is receiving great attention from the U.S. leadership.

Caldwell said staff has looked at ways to increase the rate of execution including process improvements and adding capability at the USACE district level to work with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in the

ESF program. That includes hiring more Iraqis to work on the program.

At the same time, he said the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad faces a challenge with respect to the program--to promptly use ESF monies that Congress has appropriated for the program or face the risk that the Office of Management and Budget back in Washington will direct the money to other uses.

The ESF program is managed by the

State Department, with projects guided by Provincial Reconstruction Teams through Iraqi Provincial Reconstruction Development Committees. The actual construction work is overseen in most cases by USACE. A primary objective of the ESF program is to build Iraqi local governing capacity, which requires mentoring and coaching the provincial governments to plan and develop scopes for the projects to serve their citizens.

Caldwell, the senior civilian official in GRD, made his remarks at a meeting with GRS leaders and staff during which he told the GRS personnel that "you are doing great things" and that there is "good leadership here in the district." He urged the leaders and staff to keep their collective eye on the fundamentals and never lose sight of the good they are doing in Iraq.

Col. Steve Hill, the GRS commander, said the district has about \$850 million worth of projects in process. He said ESF is a top priority and asked Caldwell about other priorities.

Caldwell said that "every program we have must be done well, and one does not have a priority over another." He acknowledged resource constraints, but advised, "Don't constrain hiring." He said the district should continue to hire people for the forecast workload, and that management decisions will be made about reducing resources when requirements are forecast to drop off.

Under a scenario where reconstruction work does drop off, Caldwell said in response to a question, GRD could be a slightly different type of organization--a theater engineer command with a smaller group at GRD and area offices in the various regions collapsed into a single district office. He said such reorganization is not schedule driven, and specified that there is no timeline in this regard and that decisions depend on how programs develop.

"Right now, focus on doing the work we have now," said Caldwell, who has been in the construction business for over 30 years, more than 20 of that in the field.

"I'm impressed with you, and the important contribution that you are making to this nation," Caldwell told the GRS personnel. He urged them to focus on the fundamentals, saying things typically go well when the basics are covered.

Caldwell also urged the district leaders to focus on the good things they and their teams are accomplishing, not the problems they inevitably encounter along the way. He said that "our business is about resolving problems," and that a primary responsibility of leaders is to ensure that their team members do not lose sight of the goodness of their work.

He said the Iraqi ministers and other Iraqi leaders that he meets in Baghdad regularly express their appreciation for the work and commitment of Corps of Engineers employees in Iraq.

Caldwell said he is confident that the Corps of Engineers' work with Iraqi local nationals, officials and companies will leave a lasting imprint by their adoption of the good business practices demonstrated by USACE. He said he has seen other developing nations adopt USACE project management and construction business practices after a few years of working with USACE, although it is not uncommon for locals to push back initially but eventually to use those very methods because they see the results. "I think we'll see the same thing here," he said.

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