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Iraqi Engineers Figure Prominently In Activities, Plans At FOB Delta

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FOB DELTA, Iraq—Iraqi engineers are figuring prominently in the activities and plans of those on this sprawling base in Wassit province who are working to advance the reconstruction of Iraq.

The Wassit Resident Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers currently has 15 Iraqi engineers on staff, according to Maj. Clay Morgan, the resident engineer, who called them collectively "a great team of engineers." Kevin Olsen, project manager in the Wassit Office, said he would love to see the day when the staff of the office is made up almost entirely of Iraqi engineers. "Let them run the show," he said. "They can do it."

Morgan fleshed out this theme, saying, "We give them authority and they enjoy using it.

"They're excited," the major added of his Iraqi colleagues

Col. Steve Hill, commander of USACE's Gulf Region South district, of which the Wassit Resident Office is part, said during a visit to Forward Operating Base Delta that giving the Iraqi engineers more management responsibility will increase their confidence and their overall ability and utility. The colonel said the Iraqi engineers appear to be well positioned to assume a larger piece of the reconstruction workload.

Col. Peter Baker, commander of the 214th Fires Brigade and the senior officer on this vast base in a largely rural province, said he would like to use the USACE Iraqi engineers to do technical quality as-

surance inspections on projects being done by his command.

"We want to build quality projects for the Iraqis." Baker said, adding the ability to use Iraqi engineers from the Wassit Resident Office for inspections would be a big help. Morgan said efforts are under way to iron out the details.

Then there is an engineer-specific initiative undertaken by the State Department-led Wassit Provincial Reconstruction Team--the Wassit Engineer Development Program. A PRT background paper explains that trained and capable professional engineers are essential to the short-term reconstruction and long-term development of Wassit Province and Iraq.

PRT's leader Wade Weems and its programs manager, Roberto Bran, have been working for some time on the engineer initiative, with regular input from Morgan. They have held out the possibility of an Iraqi entity ultimately emerging along the lines of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Elements of the program include an engineer internship program; supporting the construction and installation of critical educational infrastructure, such as buildings and laboratories, at a local engineering college using U.S. reconstruction funds; and support for the establishment of exchange, advanced research and continuing development program. The hope is that professional development seminars and courses can get started early next year.

The programs will emphasize the establishment of long-term relationships between Wassit University and academic institution in the United States, and will focus on promoting opportunities for development at the highest levels of Iraqi engineering, the PRT's background paper elaborated on the contemplated exchange and other programs.

Another piece of the program is working with the Engineers Union. Steps under consideration here include using U.S. CERP (commander's emergency response program) money to fund the construction of a new state-of-the-art Engineers Union Building in Al Kut in order to establish a venue where Iraqi engineers can meet and discuss issues, host professional events and attract skilled professional engineers from across Iraq.

Morgan said engineers in Iraq hold an important position in society. He said high school students must have superior

grades to qualify for engineering school. He said the Wassit Engineer Development Program could be a model for other Iraqi provinces and for other professions.

Iraqi engineers working for the Corps of Engineers also could play an important role in the so-called 607 program, should the program gain traction. Under this program, the Iraqi government could hire the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to do projects.

At some point, the Iraqis' capacity to do the work themselves may lag the amount of money available for projects, said Hill, the GRS commander. "They're already there" in some areas where funds exceed capacity, said Bran of the Wassit PRT.

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