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## *Basrah Province Returns to Iraqi Control*

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Basrah Governor Mohammed Musabeh Al Waelee shakes the hand of the head of Iraqi Security Forces Maj. Gen. Mohan, while Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Mowafak Al Rubai'ee (center) and British commander Maj. Gen. Graham Binns (left) look on. (USACE Photo by B.J. Weiner)

BASRAH, Iraq – Multi-National Division – Southeast (MND-SE) relinquished control of Basrah province to the Iraqi government there Dec. 16 at a ceremony held at Basrah International Airport.

Basrah's governor, Mohammed Musabeh Al Waelee, signed the official transfer papers along with Maj. Gen. Graham

Binns, MND-SE commander. Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Mowafak Al Rubai'ee, spoke at the ceremony along with Binns and Al Waelee.

Al Rubai'ee thanked the crowd of over 100 dignitaries, including the British and Australian ambassadors, the British foreign minister and members of the U. S.



Basrah's Governor Mohammed Musabeh Al Waelee stated that Basrah will "lend a hand to all those Iraqis in the province who want to help rebuild their beloved province." (USACE Photo by B.J. Weiner)

State Department and its military for their support and assistance rendered during the transitional period.

"The Iraqi Forces are ready to receive the security file (for Basrah) from the British," he said. "We all celebrate today a new marriage (beginning) in the life of the Iraqis to the bridegroom of the (Persian) Gulf, Basrah. This event ensures the progress of the abilities Iraqi Armed Forces in training, efficiency and personal integrity." He added that Basrah province is the ninth province to fall under Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC).

"This is a big step towards taking over the responsibility of all provinces of our beloved Iraq, which may happen by the middle of next year," he said. "Taking responsibility of Basrah means a great deal to Iraq's national government because of its strategic location, which highly affects

the economic prosperity of our country."

Basrah's Governor Mohammed Musabeh Al Waelee added that all people of Basrah welcomed the support of the coalition forces. "This event synchronizes with Eid Al Adha (the Hajji, a journey to Mecca required of all Muslims during their lives)," he said. "The Iraqi police are well positioned to assume control of Basrah province. What the police and Army are to do during the future will be in accordance with what is written in our constitution.

"We are ready to apply the law to protect our people in Basrah and will give a helping hand and will be grateful to any Iraqi person who wants to contribute and help rebuild our province," he added. "We will wield a very sharp sword in order to punish those who might try to circumvent the rules, negatively affecting the security of our province. As governor of Basrah, I

am ready to join hands with all political and religious parties to cooperate and rebuild our province.”

Maj. Gen. Graham Binns, commander, MND-SE, said the PIC represents the beginning of Iraqi local control of Basrah province. The Iraqi Forces have improved its capability to the point that they can control the security situation in Basrah, he said, and now it has assumed that responsibility. “In April 2003, the coalition forces began to enhance security here,” he said. “And now, four-and-a-half years later, we returned the province and the city to the Iraqi security forces. We came to protect Basrah from its enemies and now we return it officially to its friends.”

Col. Stephen Hill, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region South district, said that the PIC event could impact the Corps’ mission there in a number of ways. “First positive indicator is that this provides an improved opportunity for international and Iraqi investment when you tie in stability,” he said. “The PIC lends credibility to improved security situation. The ceremony is not the end, but clearly the beginning – it opens doors to the next level of construction and economic opportunity.”

He added that the second thing he noted was that of the nine Iraqi provinces to go PIC was that Basrah creates unique chances of broader success because of the size of its main city – Basrah, the second largest in Iraq – and the desire of its people and the significance of resources in the region, such as oil.

“Much like in other PIC provinces, this creates a potential improved connection with Iraqi security forces that will ultimately enhance our project access,” he said. “Our construction rates will increase as will the overall quantity of projects completed, providing better services for the people. It allows us to reinvest in the city.”

When a reporter for the London Times asked Al Rubai’ee about the ceremony taking place at the airport and not in Basrah City because of the potential for violence because of the clash between the city government and the militia, he said that a celebration was being planned for the city and that the security situation would allow such a celebration.

“I am not saying things in Basrah are perfect,” said Al Rubai’ee. “I am saying that things are improving on a daily basis and will only get better. And we look forward to that day.”

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