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Energy Conference has more buy-in from stakeholders

By LuAnne Fantasia
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COB Speicher, Iraq – This time last year the requirements for a pipeline exclusion zone—80 kilometers of berms, ditches, chain link fence and triple-strand razor wire—seemed unwieldy. Today the ongoing Kirkuk-Bayji pipeline exclusion zone project has significantly decreased attacks on the pipeline in the five short months since the project started in July. When finished next spring, the project will save the Government of Iraq an estimated \$30 million per day in lost product.

Last week, lessons learned from that project provided the framework for a follow-on exclusion zone project due to begin construction in April 2008 that is twice the length of its predecessor. Coalition forces, members of the 4th Iraqi Army, Sheik Manaa of the Northern Oil Company, and other key Iraqi stakeholders came together in an Energy Conference here hosted by Multinational Division-North, or MND-N, to discuss the Bayji to Baghdad pipeline exclusion zone. The \$60M Economic Support Fund project will be managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region North District, or GRN.

Colonel Mike Pfenning is commander of GRN which includes 66,000 square mile area of responsibility that includes the project area in the Salah ad Din Province of Northern Iraq.

“This is basically a partnering meeting—an opportunity for open and clear communication amongst all the parties,” Pfenning told the group at the onset of the meeting. “For some of the issues we identify today, we’ll have answers. For others,



Pictured left to right at last week’s Energy Conference is Brig. Gen. Ibraheem, Deputy Commander of the 4th Iraqi Army

we’ll find the answers and bring them back to the partnering group at our next meeting.”

Security issues for Iraqi construction contractors are often at the forefront of critical infrastructure projects. The 4th Iraqi Army officers attending the conference voiced concerns on organizational issues that could prevent them from providing security for the Bayji to Baghdad pipeline exclusion zone project; i.e., personnel shortages, training and logistical requirements; location and control of crossing points across the zone; 400kV transmission lines near the zone; and concurrent construction of guard towers by the Minister of Defense contractors.

Other critical infrastructure issues discussed included the badly damaged 16” product line transporting refined fuels

from the Bayji Oil Refinery to the depot in Ninewa Province; the repair of which would reduce dependence on ground transport; as well as the potential consequences of not repairing the 400kV towers throughout the seven Northern provinces; a requirement that is presently unfunded.

"This is the third one of these events since I arrived [Sept. '07]," said Col. (P) Tony Thomas, deputy commanding general (Support) of MND-N during the morning session. "Today we have more buy-in ... with many of the decision-makers in this room so we can push some of the concerns identified to them this afternoon."

"We should never let financial challenges stop us from our goals," Thomas said. "During October and November, 10 million barrels of oil went through the new 46" pipe both months, at about \$100 per barrel;" income not projected by the Government of Iraq.

According to Pfenning, MND-N brings a fresh perspective of GRN efforts in the North and their effects. "That perspective doesn't have the 15 months of experience that the 25th ID had, but each new division brings in new ideas on how to get things done more effectively," Pfenning said after the conference.

"General Hertling intends to use his division's capabilities to best influence the Iraqi and Coalition Forces to accomplish our collective goals ... and the "how" to do that is still being developed, as conditions here continue to change.

"In events such as the MND-N Energy Conference, GRN can help influence that "how" because of our experience with reconstruction projects associated with energy over the last three years in Northern Iraq."

Additionally, Iraq's capacity to influence the energy situation in the North is also changing, Pfenning said.

Maj. Gen. Mark Hertling, commanding general of 1st Armor Division and MND-N, closed the afternoon session with a request and a personal reflection. "I ask each of you to do two things: please return for our next meeting in January and bring someone from another ministry with you.

"We need Ministry of Oil here and Ministry of Electricity. They are critical for true coordination at our next meeting. These meetings with Iraqi representation have caused some things to leap forward over the past couple of months, and we need more coordination like this in the future."

He shared a personal experience from two weeks ago—during kinetic operations to clear an area near the pipeline. "I started talking to a young Iraqi boy and his two friends who were not in school that day because of the operations. That little guy told me his father used to work on the pipeline, but was out of work, now ... and he asked me when his father would be able to go back to work so that his family could take a vacation again.

"That's what these conferences are all about ..." Hertling said, "...getting Iraq back to work. I know that's why all of you are working so hard, but we need to bring others in to join our efforts."

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