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## *Partnership drives Iraq reconstruction*

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Gulf Region Division



From left: Gulf Region Division Director of Programs Lloyd Caldwell, Director of the Iraq Transition Assistance Office Mark Tokola, and Government of Iraq Spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh update Arab media on reconstruction progress.

BAGHDAD, Iraq – Spokesmen from the Government of Iraq, the U.S. Department of State and the Multi-National Force-Iraq presented a review of Iraq's reconstruction programs for pan-Arab media at a roundtable press event Feb. 23 in the Baghdad International Zone. During the hour-long conference, Government of Iraq Spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh, Director of the Iraq Transition Assistance Office Mark Tokola, and Lloyd Caldwell, the director of programs of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region Division, reviewed Iraq's reconstruction, obstacles faced and the ways to push programs forward.

"Together, we represent the U.S. and Iraq partnership that has driven reconstruction in Iraq for almost five years," said Caldwell. The Gulf Region Division is a part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, an engineering organization in the United

States, somewhat unique within the world, that provides both military and civil construction within the U.S. and other parts of the world, including Iraq.

Since 2004, there have been more than 2,900 projects completed for the education ministry, transportation ministry has 1,700 projects, construction and housing ministry has 2,600, while more than 1,100 projects for health ministry, more than 3,400 projects for the municipalities and public works ministry, more than 2,000 projects for the electricity ministry and 250 projects for the oil ministry, according to Caldwell.

"GRD has not done all of these projects, but these represent the projects accomplished by many U.S. agencies in Iraq ... despite the large number of pro-

jects, the reconstruction needs in Iraq remain very large," Caldwell added.

About 90 percent of the construction is accomplished by Iraqi firms, Caldwell said.

The U.S. government has contributed \$1.7 billion to oil infrastructure reconstruction, which the World Bank estimated will require \$8 billion or more, and it gave \$4.3 billion for the electrical infrastructure for which the World Bank estimate for reconstruction reached \$20 billion in 2003.

"We [are] satisfied with the work that has been accomplished with the funds that were expended," Caldwell told the reporters in the press conference.

Sundis Ali, the ministerial liaison officer with GRD, said that the information reflects reconstruction three years after Iraqis held their first elections Jan. 30, 2005.

"We allocated over \$14 billion for the 2008 budget for investment projects in the ministries and provinces," al-Dabbagh said. He described 2008 as "a good year."

Each ministry has the right to invest more than \$5 billion, according to the Iraqi spokesman.

The budget, passed on Feb. 13, 2008 after months of wrangling by the divided parliament, devotes the lion's share to the security forces, \$4.99 billion for the defense ministry and \$3.68 billion for the interior ministry, education got \$4.13 billion, \$1.92 billion went to the health ministry, and \$1.37 billion was the electricity ministry's share.

Al-Dabbagh guaranteed that there will not be bureaucracy or routines that hinder the ministries' projects.

"We need a good vision and a good responsibility between the provinces and the officials at the ministries regarding the contracts so that they [can] facilitate the projects ... we [will] avoid any kind of corruption," al-Dabbagh said.

But the spokesman for the Iraqi government said that his country is suffering from both the lack of experience in managing the ministries and from terrorism. He considered the "contactors in Iraq and the level of implementation is not the level that we aspire."

The senior Iraqi official invited international companies to come to Iraq, pledging to provide security to them.

In his remarks, Tokola expressed his pride in the work done over the past years "in building electrical capacity, schools, public health clinics, water treatment plants and many other projects.

"Our role has shifted from reconstruction to a transition to reconstruction by the Government of Iraq," the ITAO official added. "We are providing funding for provincial governments to carry out work on local projects."

Despite the encouraging signs of progress, serious problems remain, according to Tokola. In response to a question about the reasons behind the electricity power shortage, he said "Some provinces are drawing more electricity than they're allotted by the Ministry [of Electricity]."

The electricity power lines are frequently sabotaged; some of them have been targeted more than 1,000 times, according to al-Dabbagh.

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