



<Back | 

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## Army Engineers Improving Electricity in Iraq

By Mohammed Aliwi

AN NASIRIYAH, Iraq -- The huge consumption of electricity as a result of the large quantity of electrical goods the Iraqi people with their increasing prosperity, combined with the sabotage of power lines, have contributed to Iraq's challenge of keeping up with electrical demands.

Despite those obstacles, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has made significant progress in improving electrical production and distributing power equitably throughout the country.

USACE engineers oversee the building, refurbishing and upgrading of the electrical power systems, including generation, transmission and distribution countrywide according to Lt. Col. Anthony G. Reed, resident engineer for the Karbala and North Babil resident offices of the Gulf Region South District (GSR).

"The Babil province has awarded 24 electrical distribution networks and several substation projects in 2006. Ten of these projects have been completed and 14 are still under construction," he said. Reed believes that every project helps improve the flow of electricity to Iraqis to some degree.

Most projects focus on distributing electricity from one town to another, and to the outlying neighborhoods. Some of these neighborhoods have never had electricity before he said.

"Due to the fact that the projects are focused on distribution, they really don't reduce the number of blackouts created by power generation source failures. However, the electrical feeders do help people get electricity when they have the power coming to them," he explained.

An Iraqi electrical engineer with the Babil Residence Office, requesting anonymity, said their new projects included "two 132,000 volt overhead lines and three 33,000v overhead lines."

"We supervised three 33,000 and 11,000 volt substations in Babil, four electrical distribution networks in Al-Mahweel and Al-Imam districts, and four electrical distribution networks which were installed in Al-Iskanderia area north of Babil," the Iraqi said.

"All the projects GRS executes are to improve the distribution networks in the residential neighborhoods and businesses. It also improves the ability of the transmission feeders to handle the

transmitted power between the 132kv substations,” he said.

The Iraqi electrical engineer explained that electrical transmission lines were a target for sabotage by terrorists in the Hilla, Karbella and Najaf areas.

“When such sabotage happens, it causes a shutdown for all substations that are connected to the 132kv line,” he said.

Maj. Kevin J. Stoll, the Babil resident engineer, blamed sabotage for contributing to power outages in areas of the country.

“Combined with the antiquated system that existed under the previous regime, sabotage keeps power from reaching homes for an extended amount of time. When one central grid transmission tower falls, it knocks out power to the entire grid,” Stoll said.

“It then takes time to repair or replace that tower and any others that are affected, and even more time to re-energize the system (sometimes 48-72 hours) before finally getting power to the consumers.” Stoll believes consumer demand for electricity has hindered the supply of reliable power.

“Because of the freedom to purchase the ‘luxury’ items that were not as readily available in the past—such as air conditioners, heaters, refrigerators and microwaves— extra demands have been placed on power grids at an incredible rate over the past three and a half years. Sometimes the power demand exceeds the amount generated, causing brown- and black-outs,” he said.

Greg F. Fillers, GRS chief of programs and project management, said that the Corps is responsible for reporting progress on projects.

“The electrical projects are assigned to us to monitor during construction. We have a total of 160 electrical projects for the nine southern governorates worth about \$964 million that GRS is responsible for,” he said. “In Thi-Qar province that total is 17 projects worth \$149 million.”



Local villagers watch as an Iraqi contractor crew sets electric tower in place for the Al Mazraa Tower Project Babil, a project to increase electrical capacity and beti in the region. [ARMY PHOTO]



An Army engineer officer gets an update from Iraqi contractors building a new electrical distribution substation in Hamzah, one of 60 substations the Gulf Region South is constructing in southern Iraq. [ARMY PHOTO by James Bullinger]

The biggest improvements for the city of An Nasiriyah are the upgrades to several substations and construction of additional new substations.

“The new substations prevent

problems with overloads to the electrical network which causes equipment to fail and power outages without warning,” Fillers said. “The Corps recently provided An Nasiriyah with 50 new transformers to

replace the outdated ones which were the main cause for the outages and the rationing across the city.”

He explained the old transformers could not handle the amount or load of high voltage electricity flowing through to feed the damage from all of the electrical devices this past summer, and this caused continuous blackouts during the summer.

New transformers were ordered and installed to convert the electricity to usable levels at the consumer end.

“Most of the new construction substations are in other towns around Thi-Qar, which takes a load off of the existing substations in Nasiriyah and prevents damage,” Fillers said.

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*The Army Corps of Engineers are working many projects to improve electricity distribution in Iraq. Pictured here is a 250 volt transformer connected to new power lines to provide safe and reliable electricity to users; similar transformers were provided to An Nasiriyah in late summer. [ARMY PHOTO]*

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