



U.S. Department of Defense
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)
News Transcript

On the Web:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3919>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131/697-5132

Public contact:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/faq/comment.html>
or +1 (703) 428-0711 +1

Presenter: Brigadier General Michael Walsh, Commanding General, Gulf Region Division, Army Corps Of Engineers And Ibrahim Mustafa Hussain, Deputy Mayor, Technical Affairs, Baghdad

**March 29,
2007**

DoD News Briefing On Reconstruction In Iraq With Brigadier General Michael Walsh And Deputy Mayor Ibrahim Mustafa Hussain In The Pentagon Briefing Studio, Arlington, Virginia

(Note: General Walsh and Deputy Mayor Hussain appear via teleconference from Iraq.)

COL. GARY KECK (director, Department of Defense Press Office): Well, good morning. It is 9:00. And I welcome you again to the Pentagon briefing room. As you know, I'm Colonel Keck, the director of the Press Office.

And we have with us today from Baghdad our briefers for today, who are two individuals closely involved in rebuilding efforts in Baghdad in Iraq. We have, first, on the screen to your left, Brigadier General Michael Walsh, who last spoke to us about four weeks ago. He is the commander of the Army Corps of Engineers' Gulf Region Division. And on his right on the screen is Mr. Ibrahim Mustafa Hussain, who is the -- Baghdad's deputy mayor for technical affairs. They each have some opening comments and after that will take some Q&A.

Gentlemen, with that, I'll turn it over to you. General Walsh.

GEN. WALSH: Thank you, and good morning. I want to thank you all for being here this morning, certainly wanted to welcome you to this opportunity for me to talk to you today about Gulf Region Division's reconstruction efforts here in Baghdad.

I also want to thank the deputy mayor, Ibrahim Mustafa, for joining me here today to highlight the progress being made in his city.

You can't pick up a newspaper or turn on television these days without seeing violence every day in Iraq. What you don't see are the successes in the reconstruction program, how reconstruction is making a difference in the lives of everyday Iraqi people, especially here in Baghdad.

The United States has contributed almost \$22 billion towards the rebuilding effort here in Iraq, an effort that's going to require estimates between 60 billion (dollars) and 80 billion (dollars) to put the infrastructure back together.

The U.S. government and the government of Iraq are working together to yield the positive, tangible reconstruction results that are significantly improving the lives of the Iraqi people.

As General Petraeus has made clear, Operation Fard al-Qanun is making progress but it will take a continued commitment and determination over the course of many months. While I'm not a principal on the operational side, I am helping in the reconstruction side, working in conjunction with our Iraqi partners.

I'm here to talk to you about reconstruction. Certainly the work in Iraq is challenging and difficult, but our building efforts are a vital component to Iraq's progress towards democracy. As citizens feel safer, conditions will be set for the resumption and improvement of basic essential services.

We have a broad plan of projects planned, under way and completed throughout Baghdad in the area of potable water, sewage, electricity, schools and medical and emergency facilities. To date we have more than 2,500 projects that were planned in Baghdad province and have completed almost 2,000 of them. This number reflects all of the U.S. government reconstruction efforts, not just from the Corps of Engineers Gulf Region Divisions.

As you can see from the charts behind me, we're making an impact across Iraq and in the 10 security areas in Fard al-Qanun. Just to give you an idea of how we're making a difference in the 10 security areas, in the police, fire and military facilities we have completed 28 projects totalling \$24 million, which affects all of the people of Baghdad. On the education side, we finished 21 projects totalling \$1.1 million and affecting more than 225,000 children; in the health sector, 24 projects totalling \$12.9 million affecting more than 260,000 residents; water, 20 projects totalling \$10 million and affecting 240,000 residents; and in electricity, 79 projects totalling \$125 million and affecting over 500,000 residents. And these projects are just in the 10 security areas. Remember, we are working also on projects throughout the province as well as Iraq.

Iraq is a country rich in natural resources and intelligent and talented people, and I'm confident that by continuing to work with our Iraqi partners on reconstruction and focusing on essential service projects, we can help build a bright future for Iraq. We continue to strive for that success, but we're not doing this alone. By teaming with our Iraqi partners, we are building the foundations for continued success.

My colleague in this effort is Deputy Mayor Mustafa, and he'll talk to you in just a few moments about our partnership and the effects that are being held in Baghdad.

Deputy Mayor?

MR. HUSSAIN: Thank you, General.

Good morning. First of all, Amanat Baghdad serves the inhabitants of Baghdad, who are about 6.5 million inhabitants now in Baghdad. We supply the services for water, sewage, roads and parks, and we're responsible for the urban development of the city.

This city during the '80s, from that time till now we didn't really had any big projects here.

So we received deteriorated networks of services in water and sewage everywhere in the city.

Now, we have in Baghdad a shortage about 1 million cubic meter per day of water to be supplied to the people. I know all the cities have water networks, but they don't have sufficient water. In sewage sector, with 75 of the city only served and 25 is not served yet with sewage, and we have also a shortage in treatment of the sewage which is released to the river; also in other services in Baghdad.

What we did really with the help of the coalition and other donors and with the money from our government, we've started a lot of projects to improve the situation in Baghdad. We had a plan for four years, and we've started now to have projects executed, and we hope in the future that you will see Baghdad is a better city and a good city as it was before.

Thank you.

GEN. WALSH: Thank you, Deputy Mayor, for joining me today, and I also want to thank you all for your interest this morning, and with that, we'll take your questions.

COL. KECK: Okay. Let's begin. I'd remind you that they cannot see you, so please identify yourself.

Kristin.

Q This is Kristin Roberts with Reuters. I'm hoping you can tell me, General, since we've begun to see a slight decline in violence over the past few weeks in Baghdad, how many projects, if any, have you been able to advance to completion, again, in Baghdad? And then, also in Sadr City, have you been -- what projects have you been able to bring specifically into that area with the decline in violence?

GEN. WALSH: All right. We have about 70 projects that are ongoing in Sadr City as well as hundreds throughout the city, and we're certainly finishing up probably between 15 and 20 projects every two weeks, so about 40 projects a month.

In regards to the security piece, about 12 percent of my projects are delayed -- that's across the country -- in regards to security. So as we're beginning to get control or re-get control of a lot of the portions of the 10 security areas, we're able to get our contractors back in there and look at the work that's been going on.

Q A follow-up to that, sir, please. The 70 projects in Sadr City, are those new projects or are those projects that were going on before the surge?

GEN. WALSH: No, these have been projects that have been going on. We've been working in Sadr City and all of Baghdad since 2004.

Q General, this is David Wood from the Baltimore Sun. Could you describe some of the projects that you have started during the surge in those 10 security areas, and what kind of projects they are?

And could you tell us a little bit about how many Iraqis you were able to employ in the reconstruction projects?

GEN. WALSH: Certainly. The type of projects that we've been working on, certainly working with the mayor, is water projects. We're continuing to work on the water treatment plants, putting in water lines, sewer lines, and we're continuing to work on electrical distribution systems. I don't know what the number is in Iraq, but we have about 30,000 Iraqis working for coalition forces, Gulf Region Division, across the country. About 60 percent of my contracts are with local Iraqi firms.

Q How much money would that be, roughly?

GEN. WALSH: I missed that question.

Q How much money would be represented by that 60 percent of the contracts? In other words, how much money are you putting into the Iraqi economy?

GEN. WALSH: We have so far, since 2003, put in about eight-and-a-half billion dollars, and I'm working on another three-and-a-half billion that we're working on right now. And that should take me up till about the next 10 to 15 months to finish up that construction.

Q General, it's Mike Mount with CNN.

Can you talk just a bit about the number of projects you've been completing since the surge, in terms of the number of projects or percentage of projects completed prior to the surge. I just want to kind of get a -- just see if you could quantify the security situation there.

GEN. WALSH: Right. In regards to the surge projects, we have been completing them at about the same rate we have on the larger projects. Certainly the larger projects that the United States was -- or the coalition forces were working on since the 2004 time frame were the larger projects on water treatment plants across the country, as well as electrical distribution and the larger projects. In Baghdad itself, we do have some large projects going on, but also working with the commander's emergency relief fund, USAID and others. And those are smaller projects. And so those would certainly turn around a lot faster than the larger projects, but they don't have a definition of how quickly the smaller projects had been completed before the surge.

Q Hello, I'm Gerry Gilmore, American Forces Press Service. I had a question for the deputy mayor, please.

How are your Baghdad citizens reacting to these programs and these projects? I mean, is it helping them?

Do they have more hope? Do they feel that they're going to have a better quality of life in the days ahead?

MR. HUSSAIN: Yeah, sure, because I think the people of Baghdad deserve more than what we have now. As I told you, from the middle '80s till now, it's only problems we had in Baghdad, we didn't have good services. So whenever the situation of the security is getting better and the services are there, the people are happy. They are expecting more and more from the new security plan. And everybody here is optimistic that the situation will be better in the future, because we are ready with our projects, the coalition part is ready with their projects, and we hope the security will help us do that.

COL. KECK: Jeff.

Q Mr. Deputy Mayor, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. I believe you mentioned that 75 percent of the city has sewerage. Can you talk about how many connections that translates to?

MR. HUSSAIN: I don't really have the figure of connections there, but I'm talking about the area of Baghdad; it's about 900 square kilometers in Baghdad; 75 percent of that area is served with sewer networks. The rest is not served. We have new plans to serve most of these areas, and we've started in parts of the city.

Q Follow-up. Is the lack of access to sewerage or the effluent a problem for Baghdad?

MR. HUSSAIN: It is a problem because, you know, usually people use the septic tanks to get rid of their sewage. But then, with the high water level in the city ground water level, then the streets are flooded. What we are trying to do in some areas is to help the people, they have trenches to transfer the sewage, which is not acceptable, but it's the only way to serve the people for the time being till we execute the new projects. And with the help of the coalition, we've started in some areas which had the same problem, like Kamaliyah and Obeidi.

Q Question. How much would it cost, do you estimate, to solve or to alleviate Baghdad's sewage

problem?

MR. HUSSAIN: What you're asking about the sewage problem, we are talking about millions of dollars, millions and maybe billions or so. But what we would like to have is just to restore what we had the services before, and from that we will expand to the new projects. Let's say for the mayoralty of Baghdad, this year it's about \$400 million we have an allocation, it's not only for the sewage, we have the water, we have the sewage, we have the roads. And I can't say it's sufficient to cover everything, but it's a start and I think it will be better. It's better than last year and the year before.

So when we are talking about \$700 million, let's say, for the sewage projects, just for some of the sewage projects, and we're talking about billions for water, we had one project which should have been done before 2000, which cost \$1.8 billion (sic\billion). So we are looking for a huge amount of money. But what our plan is, what we get this year, we will start with phases until we finish everything.

Q A follow-up for the deputy mayor.

This is Kristin Roberts at Reuters again. That 25 percent of Baghdad that's not getting sewage, can you characterize the -- can you tell us what the -- which neighborhoods those are, which districts of Baghdad those are? And are they predominantly Sunni or Shi'a or mixed?

MR. HUSSAIN: This is not -- I don't think it's separated like that because sewage has nothing -- relation to do with Shi'ites or Sunnis. It's in areas in Baghdad -- suburbs of Baghdad or some in Baghdad may live some of them in the south of Baghdad and some of them in the north of Baghdad, and some of them are the new areas which were -- I mean, their inhabitants use them now.

Q Mr. Deputy Mayor, it's David Wood from the Baltimore Sun again. Could you tell us, in your mind, what are they most critical problem we face in Baghdad right now so far as infrastructure is concerned? And how much time do you have to fix that before people start losing faith in your government?

MR. HUSSAIN: The biggest problem now -- and we hope that will be solved -- the security situation because previously it was the funds; now we've started getting the funds, but the problem is that with the bad security nobody's interested in working. With the better situation and security, people will start working with us; also people will start executing projects. I think the people of Iraq and also the people of Baghdad they have started noticing that with this year and the last year the mayoralty in Baghdad, the work of the mayoralty is better than before. And I think til now they are hoping that we will have better and better, and I don't think they will lose faith in our government for the time being.

Q There's questions for both of you. Sorry. This is from Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes again. In the wake of recent attacks using chlorine, is the city taking any extra steps to secure chlorine that could be used to treat effluent?

MR. HUSSAIN: I didn't really get the question. I mean --

Q Let me repeat myself. Recently, insurgents have used chlorine as a weapon. I understand that in Iraq chlorine is used to treat effluent. In the wake of these attacks, has the city and multinational forces take any additional steps to secure sources of chlorine?

MR. HUSSAIN: For the part of the city, we're securing our chlorine which we use in the water treatment plant or also treating effluent.

I don't think we had problem of losing any quantity of chlorine, and everything is secured in our projects.

But if you're talking about other organizations, I can't say about that. It's the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense responsibility and the coalition also.

GEN. WALSH: I would just have to echo that. Chlorine, of course, is a chemical used in all your water treatment plants and is prevalent throughout the country. There have been some measures taken to make sure that people lock those things up a little bit more and take more accountability for it. But it's being trucked and delivered around the country to the water treatment plants and other facilities.

Q Measures are being taken to lock it up and secure it?

GEN. WALSH: I think it's the normal measures that you would take even back in the United States, where you would store chemicals that you've purchased. You just put it in your storage room and make sure that it's locked. But I'm not aware of any additional security that's going on in those particular areas.

COL. KECK: Dave.

Q General Walsh, Dave Wood with the Baltimore Sun. Are your folks involved in building some of these new security outposts and so forth? And if they are, could you tell us how that's going?

GEN. WALSH: Well, the joint security stations are being built by the tactical engineers that belong to General Odierno. And while I'm certainly keeping an eye on them, I'm not involved with the construction pieces of it.

Q If I could follow up, outside or in all of Iraq, is the Corps of Engineers not responsible for building permanent structures? In other words, for the use of U.S. troops and U.S. support facilities. Can you tell us how far along you are in converting many of the impermanent structures to permanent structures -- I'm talking about barracks, water treatment plants, you know, U.S. bases and so forth -- and how big an effort that is?

GEN. WALSH: Well, let -- that's -- yes, I'm involved with that. That's military construction dollars or operation maintenance dollars -- dollars of Army. In some of the large legacy camps, we're continuing to put in water treatment plants and wastewater treatment plants, incinerators and things of that sort.

Certainly, as we redeploy from smaller FOBs to larger ones, and now during this time period we're moving off the FOBs and trying to have our soldiers live in with the joint security stations, that's a moving target on what the end state's going to look like. But that's something that we do every day, every month, every year on the military construction piece.

COL. KECK: Mike.

Q General, it's Mike Mount again, from CNN. I'm just curious, what part of the country right now are you having the hardest time getting projects completed because of security issues?

GEN. WALSH: The biggest concerns right now are in Baghdad province, Al Anbar province. Those are the two big ones that I have concerns with.

Q And those have just been ongoing for some time?

GEN. WALSH: They've been ongoing for some time. Yes, I'd leave it at that.

COL. KECK: Okay, gentlemen, I believe we have exhausted the questions on this end. So with that, I will turn it back over to you for closing statements.

GEN. WALSH: Sir, any closing comments?

MR. HUSSAIN: Thank you very much, and I think the future is good for Iraq. I hope it will be a better country, and I hope that you will visit us all in Iraq in a better situation.

GEN. WALSH: And I would just end that we have a good, strong working relationship with the engineers here in Baghdad, and certainly in Iraq, as we continue to provide essential services for the people. Thank you.

MR. HUSSAIN: Thank you.

COL. KECK: Thank you, gentlemen, for being with us today, and we hope to have you back again to give us an update on the future. Thank you.

GEN. WALSH: You bet. It would be our pleasure.

(C) COPYRIGHT 2007, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES.

FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.

-END-