

smaller pieces across the province. So it's happening here.

MR. WHITMAN: Luis?

Q Colonel, it's Luis Martinez of ABC News. How would you rank the challenges that you face right now? Which is the greatest challenge? Is it still the security challenge or is it more the infrastructure or getting funds, let's say, from the central government into the provincial government?

COL. MCBRIDE: Five months ago, hands-down, I would have told you security was our greatest challenge. Security is still a challenge, but if I had to rate them now, it's governance, security, economics all kind of neck-and-neck here. Because of the increased security we've got here we're able to get on with some development and then governance.

So I am working very hard while paying attention to our security operations and tying the provincial government with the equivalent of the county governments and then the county governments with our equivalent of the city governments, because in this province there's an inherent distrust, at all levels, of each other. And it's mainly because they don't talk.

That's improved pretty dramatically in the past three months. I'll give you an example. We have the city of Ad Dawr. If you'll remember, just north of Ad Dawr, that's where Saddam Hussein was captured when he was captured. The people of Ad Dawr in 2005 did not vote in the elections, therefore they had no representation on the city council.

Ad Dawr lies about six or seven miles from the provincial capital of Tikrit. For the last two years, no one from the provincial government had been to Ad Dawr and visited their people or their government.

At my urging, working with my partner, the governor and the deputy governor and the provincial leadership, I encouraged them to go to Ad Dawr and listen to the people, go talk to the people. And we've done that twice and it's made a tremendous impact on that city.

About two -- about three weeks after that, things started to happen in that city, and then the population began to have a little bit of trust in their government. And then business owners came together and over a stretch of about one mile, as you run through the center of the city of Ad Dawr, which is about probably 65,000 people, they had painted every shop pink, which was quite amazing to see.

But I asked them, why did you paint everything pink? They said this is the color of peace and reconciliation.

But I think that effort by the provincial government to tie itself to that district made a huge difference. So that's taken up a large amount of our -- of my personal effort and efforts of junior leaders at their respective levels, to tie and to develop the trust so these different levels of government can work together and achieve something for the population.

So security's still up there, but we're able to work governance and then, as an extension of governance, the provision of the central services to the population. So I think they're about neck and neck right now.

MR. WHITMAN: (Off mike.)

Q Colonel, it's Al Pessin from Voice of America. I want to follow up on two of the earlier questions. You said that Iraqi security forces have made dramatic improvements, and yet your unit will be replaced by a unit of similar size and capability. When do you see that changing? When will the Iraqis, with these dramatic improvements, be able to stand more on their own in that province?