



(Photo by Spc. Elvyn Nieves)

Taking Security into Their Own Hands

Mahamad Maheadi, an Iraqi Security Volunteer in Baghdad's Adhamiyah District, Shabatkar neighborhood, checks the trunk of a car for possible security threats. The ISV program allows volunteers from local communities to join and provide security to their own neighborhoods. According to Harrington, NJ, native, 1st Lt. John Suh, 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, the volunteers love the program and want to be involved because they're trying to help their own neighborhoods. See story page 4.

Governance Center Opens in Sab Al Bor

By Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp
1-1 Cav. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- Tribal sheiks joined members of government of Iraq ministries, officials in the Taji qada (district government council), Taji nahiyah representatives (neighborhood councils), senior ranking Iraqi Security Forces leaders and Coalition troops to open the Sab Al

Bor Governance Center of Taji in Sab Al Bor, Iraq Dec. 13.

The governance center offers the local populace access to government services offices which fall under the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works that include electricity, water, communications andThe center also has under its purview two civilian health clinics that staff six doctors and boasts six ambulances which

serve a city that once had only one clinic and one doctor.

"We're providing them capability they haven't had which is a single place for the people of Sab Al Bor to go where they can address issues and problems with regards to essential services and education-- a

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New Center Offers Government Services

Governance

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place they can go where they expect to get some results," said Lt. Col. Kevin MacWatters, commander, 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, whose squadron has been working with Iraqi government officials and tribal sheiks along with the 1st "Ironhorse" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division's embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team, ePRT Baghdad-5 and the 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion to aid in the reconstruction of infrastructure in Sab Al Bor.

"The visibility of this reopening and dedication of the new government center shows the local people and others in the (Baghdad) province that Sab Al Bor is ready to receive residents back home and that the government is providing a place for them to go to receive government services of all



(U.S. Air Force photo by Tech Sgt. William Greer)

Joined by Iraqi government officials from local, provincial and national government offices, tribal sheik Nadim Al Sultan (center) of Sab Al Bor cuts the ribbon during the opening of the Sab Al Bor Governance Center of Taji in Sab Al Bor, Iraq Dec. 13.

types," said Col. Mike Bridges, a government group advisor for ePRT Baghdad-5, who hails from Anchorage, Ala. "It is also a visible presentation that the community is returning to life."

Sab Al Bor was formerly a retirement community at its

peak had a population of nearly 65,000 residents. After sectarian violence erupted in the town in 2005 and early 2006, the population fell to 2,600—a level at which it stayed until six months ago.

According to Bridges, trib-

al sheiks, Iraqi Security Forces, Iraqi security volunteers, concerned local citizens and Iraqi government officials at all levels working with troops from the 1st Sqd., 7th CAV, the Ironhorse Brigade ePRT, the 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion and Estonian troops have greatly improved security in the city allowing for a transition from a focus on mainly security-related efforts to those involving the reconstruction of critical infrastructure and essential services.

"Now that the security situation has changed so dramatically, people are coming back in large numbers and the population today is anywhere from 25,000 to 28,000 people and growing daily," said Bridges.

"The government of Iraq has identified Sab Al Bor as a key city for the return of displaced persons and as a model example of that program and the return to normalcy in a community that was once marred by violence," Bridges added.

**Arabic Word
of the Day**
Bettawfeeq!
**Defined:
Good luck!**

Iraq 3-Day Weather Report



Today

High: 60
Low: 44



Tomorrow

High: 59
Low: 39



Thursday

High: 51
Low: 35

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Committee Works to Improve Essential Services

By Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp
1-1 Cav. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- Representatives from ministries within the government of Iraq held the first meeting of the Taji qada's Joint Rural Planning Committee in Baghdad with the Baghdad Provincial Governor's office and Taji qada (a Baghdad rural district council) officials Dec. 12.

The directors general of the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Agriculture attended the meeting along with Fakhher Najem Abdullah, the Taji Quaim Makam (equivalent to a city district manager in the U.S.); Subhai Mashadani, the rural services committee chairman and Radhy Ja'afar Muhssin, the director of the qada's Sab Al Bor, Iraq nahiyah (similar to a neighborhood council) were a few of the guest speakers.

Some of the topics for the first meeting included such things as road projects, agriculture, essential services such as water and sewer projects, education and the construction of schools along with the budgets that make those projects possible.

Senior leaders from the 1st "Ironhorse Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division to include Lt. Col. Kevin MacWatters, commander, 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, along with the brigade's embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team, ePRT Baghdad 5, were on hand to support the meeting. Leaders from the Provincial Reconstruction Team-Baghdad



(U.S. Army photo)

Representatives from ministries in the government of Iraq as well as those from the Baghdad Provincial Government and Taji qada leaders among others hold the first meeting of the Taji qada's (a Baghdad rural district council) Joint Rural Planning Committee in Baghdad Dec. 12. Senior leadership from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division worked with the Taji council to prepare for the meeting.

and the Gulf Region Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also attended the JRPC.

According to Anchorage, Alaska native Col. Mike Bridges, governance group advisor for ePRT Baghdad-5, the JRPC is an outgrowth of the Joint Planning Committee which began 18 months ago for the city districts in Baghdad. The JRPC is intended for the six rural qadas (rural districts) to receive the same visibility and support from the central government ministries in the Baghdad Provincial government as the city districts receive.

"The Joint Rural Planning Committee's primary goal is to coordinate and deconflict projects between government of Iraq entities such as ministries

and other levels of government using their own budgets while also working with Coalition Forces and agencies," said Bridges.

For the past five months, ePRT Baghdad 5 has been working with local governments in the qadas in the Ironhorse area of operations through a mentorship program that involves bi-cultural bi-lingual Iraqi instructors teaching the local government officials an understanding of the concepts of governance to include everything from how to fund and provide essential services as well as how to manage and allocate a budget.

"Taji was put forward as the first (qada to hold a JRPC meeting) because we felt it was the most developed of the qadas since beginning the

local government training program in mid-July," added Bridges.

"They in fact presented a well-developed 2008 project budget request to the provincial council in late November and (this first meeting) was an opportunity for it to be publicly presented to the larger group," he added.

The meeting marked the first of what will become a biweekly program where different qada representatives present information in a shared environment.

"The goal will be to coordinate construction and reconstruction projects and to lead toward all levels of government in Iraq preparing, funding and completing their own infrastructure programs and public services," said Bridges.

Volunteers Contribute to Neighborhood's Resurgence

By Staff Sgt. Mike Pryor
2-82 Abn. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – A volunteer helps someone or a group for the greater good. Each selfless act strengthens the volunteer's community.

The Iraqi people of the Adhamiyah community have strengthened their community within a few months.

"We're not going to get anywhere without the cooperation of the people," Staff Sgt. James Lesco, a squad leader with C Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, from Colorado Springs, Colo., said earlier this year at the end of a long patrol one day. "They've got to stand up."

Lesco didn't know it at the time, but the people of Adhamiyah – as well as other neighborhoods in Baghdad and throughout Iraq – were on the verge of doing just that. Throughout the past several months, more than 70,000 Iraqi citizens took a stand to help protect their neighborhoods against insurgents by joining local security forces collectively known as Iraqi Security Volunteer groups.

The volunteers are a cross section of the neighborhood. They range in age from teenagers to senior citizens, with both genders represented. All share the same goal: keeping their streets safe.

"I am happy because now I am taking a part in protecting the community," said Mervat Hussein, one of the first female volunteers.

Since getting out on the streets in force, the volunteers have had an immediate impact. In November, ISV members either discovered or gave information that led to the discovery of 28 separate weapons caches, said Capt. Phillip Dow, a staff officer with the 3-7 Cav. That was a jump of almost 300 percent from the number of caches found in the previous months, Dow said.

The volunteers' intimate knowledge of the community has helped them spot things U.S. forces might have easily overlooked. In mid-November, an ISV member observed a strange funeral taking place at a local cemetery. A number of details about the funeral didn't add up, the man reported,



(Photo by Spc. Elvyn Nieves)

Hassan Bassil Abass, an Iraqi Security Volunteer in Baghdad's Adhamiyah District, Shabtkar neighborhood, checks the back side of a car for security threats.

including the fact that the coffins seemed far too heavy to be holding bodies. When the Iraqi Army dug the caskets up later that night, they turned out to be full of hand grenades and machine guns bound for insurgents.

The result has been an unprecedented drop in violence throughout the country. In Adhamiyah, Iraqi Security Volunteers have worked together with U.S. and Iraqi security forces to drive out Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups, helping to turn what was once one of the most violent and dangerous areas of Baghdad into a model of security.

"They're standing up to Al Qaeda, they're standing up to anybody who wants to bring down their neighborhoods," said Columbia, Md., native Capt. Al Marckwardt, who commands a Troop of Soldiers from the 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment based in Adhamiyah. "It's their efforts that turned all this around."

Slightly more than 1,000 men and women from Adhamiyah have applied to become Iraqi Security Volunteers since August. Of those, more than 800 have been screened and trained and are now on the job, manning checkpoints and guarding critical sites such as schools, government

buildings and hospitals, said Homewood, Ill., native, 1st Lt. Brian C. Smith, the 3-7 Cav's Iraqi Security Forces Liaison.

On Nov. 14, ISV members spotted a suspicious vehicle in a parking lot. It turned out to be rigged with explosives. When U.S. Soldiers arrived to investigate, they found four more car bombs rigged to go off in the same lot.

Volunteer Ahmed Raja Al Assan said there is a simple reason why ISV members make good detectives.

"We know the area. We know who is good and who is bad," Assan said.

Because of the volunteers' local ties, Adhamiyah residents trust them more than they do the other security forces, said Staff Sgt. David Winkel, a section leader with C Troop from Champaign, Ill.

"It makes Adhamiyah people feel more comfortable knowing they're being protected by someone who is from here," Winkel said.

Early fears that the creation of the ISV might undermine existing government security forces have so far proven groundless. The ISV, the Iraqi Police and the Iraqi Army have formed a strong relationship together, said Maj. Ike Sallee, the 3-7 Cav's operations officer. The ISV even has a liaison cell at the Adhamiyah District Joint Security Station, which houses elements from the Iraqi police, army and U.S. military.

The long term goal is to completely integrate the ISV into the Iraqi security forces, Smith said. That process is already underway. A Nov. 24 recruiting drive gave hundreds of security volunteers the chance to join the Iraqi Police and be stationed in Adhamiyah after graduation from the police academy.

"(This will ensure) that the people of Adhamiyah are going to remain the ones protecting Adhamiyah," Smith said during the event.

But regardless of who cuts their checks or what uniform they wear in the future, the ISV has already had a major impact on the community, according to U.S. Soldiers in the area.

"I really think having the ISV out on the streets has helped a lot," Winkel said.