



## Middle East and North Africa

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### U.S. Officials Explain Iraq Political, Economic Transformation

#### Officials speak to reporters in Baghdad one week before December 15 elections

Three U.S. officials involved in the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq say important progress is taking place toward the goal of establishing a democratic, prosperous country.

Ambassador Dan Speckhard, director for strategic governance and economic effects and director of the Iraq Reconstruction Management Office; Dawn Liberi, the mission director in Iraq for the U.S. Agency for International Development; and Brigadier General William H. McCoy Jr., commanding general, Gulf Region Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, gave their assessments at a press conference in Baghdad December 8.

The three spoke one week before Iraqis vote in national elections December 15 for a Council of Representatives, which will complete the electoral process to establish a democratic government.

For additional information, see [Iraq's Political Process](#).

Following are the opening statements of the three officials:

Embassy of the United States – Baghdad  
Opening Remarks  
Press Conference  
December 8, 2005

Ambassador Dan Speckhard, Director for Strategic Governance and Economic Effects & Director of the Iraq Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO)

It is a pleasure to be with you today to discuss the important progress being made in Iraq.

One week from today Iraqis will be going to the polls to elect their first Government under the new Constitution. This is the result of the courage and determination of Iraqi leaders and people to exercise their new found freedom and build the democratic institutions to ensure all Iraqis share in a prosperous future.

This is an historic event and Americans can be proud of the support and sacrifice they have made in assisting Iraq. In a moment, the U.S. Agency for International Development Mission Director, Dawn Liberi will say more about the support we have given to Iraq in developing its democratic institutions and processes.

Progress is also being made in Iraq in building its economic future, as the President highlighted in his speech before the Council of Foreign Relations yesterday.

Iraq's economy is forecasted to grow at a rate of 4 percent this year, and accelerate into the double digits next year. Per capita income is nearly double what it was two years ago. Sales of consumer and durable goods are booming and business growth is strong with over 30,000 new businesses registered in just the last year.

Iraq has a stable currency and inflation is under control.

Support from the United States has played an important role in building this solid economic foundation:

-- from the significant reconstruction program to revitalize the oil industry;

-- to assistance in opening seaports, airports and upgrading and restoring roads and rail service;

-- to restoring essential services and adding capacity in water, sewer, and electricity and the communications network that are critical to the economic future of the country.

General McCoy, head of the Army Corp of Engineers in Iraq will talk more about our work in this area in a moment.

Significant challenges remain and Iraq has a lot of work ahead to ensure broad-based economic growth and prosperity.

But the fundamentals are there. The same courage that the Iraqis are showing in going to the polls later this month is playing itself out daily in the economic world.

They are starting businesses, modernizing their infrastructure, developing responsible fiscal and monetary policies, and rebuilding their country after the years of neglect and decay under Saddam's regime.

And they continue to do this in the face of threats, intimidation and attacks by extremists who want to deny Iraqis their fundamental rights and economic future.

The United States and our Coalition partners remain steadfast in our support to the Iraqi people as they build a new Iraq where all citizens benefit and share in its future prosperity.

Dawn Liberi, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission Director

Over the past several months we have witnessed a dramatic political transformation in Iraq highlighted by the ratification of the Iraqi Constitution in October; and we are about to witness the birth of the permanent new Iraqi Assembly.

This Assembly will select a government that will continue with the task of establishing a democratic ruling system. Iraq will set an example for the entire region to follow.

The upcoming elections will also draw Iraqis from different ethnicities and sects to participate in the democratic process.

I am proud to watch this country cement the foundation for democracy. USAID has been honored to stand beside the people of Iraq as they so bravely mold and form a strong democracy.

The voice of Iraq's civil society resounds in the articles of the constitution.

Through four national and regional conferences, USAID's Iraq Civil Society Program provided a vehicle for Iraqis to formulate and submit recommendations to the constitutional drafting committee.

Eleven of their human rights recommendations were incorporated into the Constitution. Also incorporated were numerous articles about gender equality, anti-corruption, and even care for vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled.

Eager to participate in the political process, Iraqis attended political dialogues by the thousands. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis from the heart of Baghdad to the southern tips

of the marshlands attended constitutional dialogues.

All members of a community, from mothers to religious leaders, convened to learn about the profound impact democracy would have on their lives and their role in shaping a constitution to protect their rights.

USAID has been working with the UN to provide technical support to the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq. Together, we help with election operations, logistics, public outreach, and training of poll workers.

This process of assistance is building capacity among the Electoral Commission to assist them in conducting professional, free, fair, and safe elections.

To support the Iraqi government in public outreach, USAID distributed 1.X million educational pamphlets prior to the Constitutional Referendum as guides to democracy.

For the upcoming elections public outreach activities include over 700 voter education workshops across the country that helped voters better understand the new governorate based system of representation, new to this election.

Thousands of mass media campaigns and television programs also became a popular tool to engage the populace in a debate about the political process, an opportunity that had not been available during the previous regime.

Families tuned in every Sunday night to watch the USAID sponsored program called Our Constitution where prominent political leaders and analysts engaged with a studio audience to debate the constitution.

USAID is currently sponsoring a similar Sunday evening program in preparation for the upcoming election.

The one hour program engages five to six political party representatives with a studio audience to discuss events like security, public services, corruption, employment and the unity of Iraq.

To create a free and fair election, the USAID Iraq Civil Society Program gave political parties and alliances the opportunity to create 3 minute TV spots to discuss their platform; 228 organizations participated, and their spots currently air on television.

To encourage an issue based election rather than a personality based campaign, USAID granted the Civic Coalition for Free Elections, a non-partisan Iraqi movement of 76 civic organizations, funds and supplies to print over one million pamphlets that detail party platforms and electoral systems.

USAID also helped the IECEI develop TV advertisements that encourage Iraqis to vote.

USAID's \$5.1 billion program in Iraq has worked to improve infrastructure, education, economic opportunity, and government efficiency and accountability.

USAID's infrastructure projects have added over 1,000 megawatts to Iraq's power grid. On-going projects will total over 1,700 megawatts by the end of 2006 with the capacity to supply power to approximately 7 million Iraqis.

By the end of this month, USAID will add 260 MW to the national grid by commissioning the V-94 gas turbine generator in Kirkuk.

USAID has increased potable water supply for over 8 million Iraqis, and sewage treatment for an additional 8.7 million.

In the area of education, USAID trained 32,000 teachers during the 2003 school year, and is on track to complete training for another 32,000 teachers by the end of the month.

Over 100,000 teachers will be trained in physics, chemistry, biology, English or pedagogy by the end of school year 2006.

USAID has adopted a strategic approach to transform its 2006-2008 programs away from centering on rebuilding infrastructure and delivery of essential services, to a program that will foster sustainable capacity development at the national and local levels.

Brigadier General William H. McCoy, Jr., Commanding General, Gulf Region Division, US Army Corps of Engineers.

We are working hand in hand - in Partnership - with the Iraqis to develop Infrastructure projects across Iraq. In fact, I am very happy to report that we recently surpassed the 2,000th project completion and the 3,000 project start. This is great news.

Iraqis are first and foremost in the planning and implementation of reconstruction efforts because it's their future and they have both the responsibility and the capability to make it work.

We are aggressively assisting the Iraqi government with their own reconstruction projects, too. In fact, just last week we signed a Project Partnership Agreement with the Minister of Electricity that empowers the MoE to quickly implement important electricity sector projects. Together, we are making great progress with infrastructure reconstruction.

It will take time and considerable resources to rebuild Iraq after years of neglect under Saddam's rule. Despite 25 years of neglect and a costly insurgency, Iraq's infrastructure is bouncing back and reconstruction projects are having a real impact in the lives of the Iraqi people.

We believe that security and reconstruction are intertwined. We are seeing a framework for stabilization and prosperity in areas where reconstruction activities have taken place. Millions of Iraqis defy the insurgents by putting their lives on the line every day to go to work building a new nation. They are Iraq's heroes and will defeat the insurgency's plans to stop progress in Iraq. Security allows Iraqis to be free and prosper.

We are partnering with the Iraqi government in virtually every essential infrastructure area. In the transportation area, roads to bridges to rail stations to airports and sea ports are being built and rehabilitated. In critical needs areas, scores of hospitals are being rehabilitated. Schools have been restored and built - we are nearing the completion of 800 school rehabilitation projects. And the list goes on to include important projects in: public works and water; electricity; facilities and transportation; and oil.

There are three projects which typify the positive impact reconstruction are having on the lives of the Iraqi people:

-- Across Iraq, we are augmenting capacity to provide clean water to about 2.75 million Iraqis. The Erbil Ifraz Water Supply Project provides potable water to a local population of over 650,000 people which is over two thirds of the population of Erbil. The project will upgrade local potable water facilities to present world standards which should help address health concerns associated with adequately available drinking water. A clean water source is extremely important factor in reducing high infant mortality rates.

-- We are increasing sewage capacity for 4.5 million Iraqis. We have a combination of sewage rehabilitation projects impacting over 1.2 million residents of Sadr City. Some are complete and others will be finished in spring 2006. Our efforts are rehabilitating Sadr City's antiquated sewage infrastructure but also involve constructing essential new sewage pump stations.

-- Roughly half of the current electric power output is the result of U.S. projects. The completion of the power generation plant is adding 250MW to the national grid which will provide over 1 million Iraqis with additional electricity. This plant should be completed by the end of December.

It is important to note that we are transitioning toward Iraqi control of reconstruction. We are increasing ways to improve construction thru direct contracting. This is an area we are moving quickly with the help and partnership of the Iraqi government.

Since the beginning of the IRRF reconstruction program 44 percent of our projects have been and are being accomplished by Iraqis. However, today more and more projects are being constructed by the Iraqis. Of the remaining 1.2 billion in IRRF funds over 75 percent of these projects will be direct contracts with Iraqis.

Despite 25 years of neglect and a costly insurgency, Iraq's infrastructure is bouncing back and reconstruction projects are having a real impact in the lives of the Iraqi people.

Reconstruction of Iraq's infrastructure is supporting the emergence of democracy and establishing a foundation for a strong economy.

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