

Good Afternoon and A'salaam AlayQum.

I am pleased to be joined by U.S. Air Force Major General Dave Edgington, Director of the Air Component Coordination Element for Multi-National Force-Iraq.

Coalition forces routinely conduct operations aimed at improving security and stability today. I will brief you on some of the significant developments Iraqi and Coalition Forces are undertaking to help improve Iraq's infrastructure and basic services while helping business owners get back on their feet.

Then, General Edgington will provide an update on a very important aspect of our operational capabilities that is playing a vital role in helping Iraqi and Coalition forces maintain the momentum against al Qaeda and criminal elements that attempting to destabilize Iraq. Iraqi and Coalition Forces realize we must have the right balance of kinetic and non-kinetic operations to defeat terrorists and to create the stability necessary to allow for political and economic progress.

The Iraqi economy is growing slowly but steadily. The most recent Gross Domestic Product figures indicate that real GDP grew 6.4 percent over the past year.

Much of the growth is in the form of services, with agriculture and manufacturing continuing to lag and in need of investments.

One example of a successful investment program is the MNF-I Micro-Grant program. To date this year, the Multi-National Corps has provided over 2.6 million dollars in grants to business to help them recover from the effects of terrorism.

An example of this is the Mew-ta-na-bee (Mutanabi) Book Market in Baghdad. The picture on the left is in March of this year following a car bomb that destroyed the market. On the right is the market following micro-grant funding used to help rebuild and re-open 14 such shops, like the one depicted in the picture.

Other successful projects are taking place across Iraq.

Last month in Nasiriya, a water treatment facility was completed to provide safe drinking water to over 550,000 area residents. The Gulf Region Division headed up a 277 million dollar project in cooperation with local Iraqi contractors.

This is just one of more than 578 ongoing Gulf Region Division projects valued at over 2.5 billion dollars. There are another 225 planned projects not started, valued at an additional 1 billion dollars.

In areas surrounding Taji, irrigation was restored for the first time in four years.

Coalition forces worked with local leaders, and together, they fixed the pumps and provided stable electrical power to keep the pumps working. The farmers will now be able to grow a crop for the first time in years.

The Qudas power plant in Baghdad is on track to be completed in March of 2008, and will add up to 260 megawatts to the power grid, providing electricity to more than 235,000 homes.

The electricity production levels over the last two months have consistently been above pre-war levels, with September 16th marking an all-time high of 5,595 megawatt-hours produced. However, electricity supply overall is still far short of the growing demand.

On October 19, Diyala residents held the annual date festival to celebrate their successful harvest, and their improved ability to get products to the market. At present, over 65 million kilograms of dates have been harvested, 50% more than in 2006.

The Ministry of Communication has signed a contract to build a communication infrastructure at a cost of 595 million dollars, funded through a Japanese loan, to include a communications center and installing 870,000 telephone lines over the next six months. The Basra oil terminal was completed on July 31, increasing terminal loading capacity to three million barrels per day. Oil production has increased to the current 2.24 million barrels per day at the present rate.

Modern medical facilities are being built across Iraq to meet the health needs of its citizens. These facilities contain state-of-the-art equipment and will not only be able to handle basic medical emergencies, but also have the capacity to perform specialized medical procedures.

One such facility is in Basrah. A cancer clinic and children's hospital is slated to be completed in November 2008. The hospital will provide the only state-of-the-art pediatric oncology referral hospital in Iraq, and is viewed by the Iraqi Ministry of Health as one of the single most important developments within the Iraqi health care system. And finally, in the al Awad neighborhood of Baghdad, al Qaeda in Iraq destroyed four schools in July. Coalition forces and local Iraqi leadership have been working together to rebuild these schools. Temporary trailers were brought in to create a consolidated school for the over 700 students.

These examples are in part a result of the improving security situation we are seeing here in Iraq. While Iraq remains beset by many challenges, good things are happening every day, many of them driven and led by Iraqis in cooperation with Coalition forces, the US Embassy and many other Federal agencies. All of these groups, along with Coalition forces, are continuing to support Iraqis to develop a secure and stable country.

I will now turn to General Edgington for an air power operational update.