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Q-West 'Souq' opens dialogue between Army, provincial leaders

SOUQ

By Sgt. Keith M. Anderson
16th SB Public Affairs

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE Q-WEST, Iraq — As local Iraqis hawked their rugs, decorative glasses and garb from tents and tables, area Sheikhs, municipal leaders, Iraqi Police officials, Iraqi Army leaders and others from the Ninawa Province met with Q-West military leaders and U.S. State Department Provincial Reconstruction Team officials at a “Souq” here Oct. 4.

“People overlook the importance of this,” said Sgt. 1st Class Sean Shanahan, event and communication non-commissioned officer in charge, Mayor’s Cell, Q-West. “It is us doing our part to bring villages together for a stronger Iraq. They can talk about their issues and differences in a neutral setting.”

In Arabic, a Souq is a marketplace or bazaar, but also a neutral location to meet, trade and talk, and officials hold one monthly here.

“Here we make friends and share culture,” said Taha Yusif, a translator on the base, and a former Iraqi Air Force air traffic controller. Yusif said there were several larger Souqs held weekly in the province, but that this one was the only one where leaders could meet

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with U.S. Army officials to address regional concerns.

This Souq was the first occasion for some provincial leaders to meet with the base's new command team, Col. Martin Pitts, commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. James Spencer, command sergeant major, 16th Sustainment Brigade. The sustainment brigade from Bamberg, Germany, assumed authority here Aug. 9. It has command and control over Q-West and is responsible for sustainment operations throughout northern Iraq.

Mahmood Al Tabour, city council chairman for the nearby city of Qayarraah, was one of the first to address Pitts.

Al Tabour, through a translator, reminded the colonel of previous agreements base officials had made, and asked for help repairing the pumps and water lines at the Qayarraah pump house, to get more water to city residents.

"As long as we can get six hours of water per day, that'll be plenty for everybody to store," Al Tabour said.

Pitts told Al Tabour that four of the eight pumps were being replaced at the moment, and the remaining pumps would be replaced soon, and that the base was working with the Army Corps of Engineers and others to find a more permanent solution to the regions' water shortages.

Other leaders addressed issues such as hospitals, schools, economic development, and security concerns.

Local PRT representatives weren't surprised by any of the concerns addressed at the meeting, but said that the process was important, and that they looked forward to working

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with the 16th SB to address regional concerns.

“This is a meeting where the sheikhs and leaders expressed once again the sentiments they’ve expressed for years,” said Tim Knowlton, PRT outgoing leader. “The government of America is interested in Iraq becoming a fully-functional democratic society. It’s important that we assist the legitimate and elected government through projects like the rule of law, good governance, and political and economic development.”

After addressing the concerns of provincial leaders and sharing a lunch of chicken strips and rice, Pitts thanked everyone for coming out to the souq.

“We are glad to be here and we are committed to the Ninawa province,” Pitts said. “We are grateful for the great relationships we have, both on and off the base, and look forward to meeting with you again.”

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souq.jpg

Col. Martin Pitts, commander, 16th Sustainment Brigade, and Command Sgt. Maj. James Spencer, command sergeant major, 16th SB, meet with leaders from the Ninawa province at the October 'Souq' on Q-West Oct. 4. The bazaar was the first occasion for some provincial leaders to meet with the base's new command team. The 16th SB has command and control over Q-West and is responsible for sustainment operations throughout the Ninawa province and northern Iraq. The sustainment brigade from Bamberg, Germany, assumed authority here Aug. 9. (Photos by Sgt. Keith M. Anderson)