

**Temperatures Rise – Power; Water; Planning – and the lack thereof – in Southern Iraq**  
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SAMAWAH, IRAQ—Even on an early-June day, it's 130 degrees and rising in this Shiite town in the southern province of Al Muthanna. In a marketplace, vendors in unlit shops, some dabbing their foreheads with cloths, apologize to customers for the darkness and heat. "We don't have services," says shop owner Aied Hussain, 36. "There's . . . no water, no electricity."

Water and electricity shortages plague all but the richest corners of Iraq—nowhere more so than here. All over the four provinces occupied by British forces, residents complain of shortages, and occupying forces insist they're doing all they can to fix a problem 30 years in the making. Meanwhile, the days get hotter, tempers flare, and everyone points fingers.

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Williams, 43, commander of British forces in nearby Maysan province, population 500,000, says power and water woes have been a factor in attacks on his troops that have killed five since May. "Their frustrations with the lack of infrastructure are exacerbated by the rising temperature," Williams says of Iraqis in the province. "They lack clean drinking water. They lack electricity for their air-conditioning. The flies, the disease, the smell . . . it all gets a lot worse. The violence tends to peak."

Which is one reason the coalition is working hard to restore basic services in Iraq. More fundamentally, an Iraq with a healthy infrastructure is an Iraq that can "take care of itself," according to Matthew Stuart Ines, British consul general in Basra. And while there are tentative plans to withdraw British troops from some southern provinces in 2006, there's no comprehensive plan for restoring the area's infrastructure.

Outside the Samawah market, teens drive donkeys into the Euphrates River for a break from the heat. Standing on the riverbank, Major Ian Mattison points out pipes spilling sewage into the river.

Mattison leads the British Army's Civil-Military Cooperation Team in Samawah. His job is to apply quick fixes to the most urgent infrastructure needs.

Right now, Mattison says, Samawah's 125,000 residents need clean water. Clean water requires water treatment. Water treatment requires power. Power requires plants and generators.

At an old water treatment facility, Mattison gazes into three tanks where debris is filtered out of the water supply. He says that when coalition forces took Samawah in March 2003, all three tanks were "sedimented up." Coalition forces cleaned them, only to discover that power outages were sapping the pressure in the plant's pipes, contributing to the clogging. This year, the British installed generators to even out the power supply.

Still, the plant gets only 60 percent of the power it needs, according to Mahdi Hassan, a 43-year-old technician. Compounding the problem, he says, thirsty Samawahans have been tapping the pipe network illegally, creating leaks and adding miles to the network. At the Basra offices of Mott MacDonald, a U.K.-based engineering firm, an engineer says there have been more than 600 leaks since April.

Clean sediment tanks and backup generators are only temporary solutions to a water problem that grows with Samawah's population. Even a new \$80 million treatment plant planned by a Canadian company might not be enough. Besides, building a new plant is pointless without power. Mattison says that a new 40-megawatt power plant opened here recently but that much of the electricity it generates goes to Baghdad, where insurgent attacks wreck infrastructure, meaning much of what gets sent north is wasted. Projects like Samawah's are small drops in a large, leaky bucket.

But small drops are all Mattison and Williams have to offer. British forces have been authorized to spend only \$500 million in southern Iraq, and most of that has been poured into repairing existing infrastructure, according to Ines.

Such an approach is only so effective, says Ray Yeates, 60, a Mott MacDonald manager. "We're running out of the benefits of patching up," he says. "The major projects required for the next step are ongoing or awaited."

But someone's got to pay for them. With so much of the money the U.S. has spent in Iraq funding only military operations, little is left over for infrastructure, especially in the provinces where there are no U.S. troops. What southern Iraq needs, Ines says, is "big investment" from regional financiers.

But luring Gulf investors into southern Iraq has been difficult because of the tenuous security situation, which grows worse as infrastructure decays and people grow more agitated. Security must improve before there can be major progress improving southern Iraq's infrastructure—and some locals know it. At every opportunity, they hype southern Iraq's relative security. Colonel Niall Campbell, 48, the senior British officer in Al Muthanna, says sheikhs come to him singing the praises of local security forces, trying to impress upon him the province's ability to protect foreign workers.

Investors remain unconvinced. The Japanese government, which has committed billions to reconstruction in Al Muthanna province and maintains 600 military engineers in Samawah, is especially wary. The Japanese base is off-limits to even the Australian soldiers who patrol its perimeter. Such a stiff defensive posture makes third-party oversight of Japanese efforts difficult—and that limits locals' participation. At the Samawah market on June 6, Sayid Hassan, a 55-year-old shop owner, complains that the Japanese are repainting a school that's about to fall down.

Hassan's claim that the Japanese are wasting money on dead-end projects is a common one here. Yeates says one of the biggest problems plaguing reconstruction is a lack of strategic planning.

In other words, no one has a real understanding of exactly what southern Iraq needs. Many current projects were born of educated guesses, not the result of a master plan.

"There are lots of well-trained [Iraqi] engineers," Yeates says. "But there's no experience in strategic planning. So things tend to get replaced on an ad hoc basis. There's been not one attempt at a master plan."

Ali Mohammad, 38, an Iraqi engineer at Mott MacDonald, blames Baghdad. He says Iraqi politicians, even if they understood the need for strategic planning, are interested only in small projects that make for good press.

Of course, even the most forward-thinking government minister would be largely incapable of making a real difference. Baghdad's all but bankrupt—and the provinces are even worse off. Barring big investment from Gulf countries, the only meaningful capital in Iraq comes from the U.S. and other coalition governments. Yeates says members of the U.S. Congress holding the purse strings have the same problem that shortsighted Iraqi politicians do: They have no idea what Iraq really needs. But that doesn't keep them from approving billions for specific projects. "Congress needs to approve [more] flexible funds," Yeates says, which would allow money to shift to projects that will make a real difference as the country's needs become clearer.

But needs will never become clearer without planning. Mott MacDonald engineers say someone needs to undertake a comprehensive survey of Iraq's infrastructure needs so that people like Williams and Yeates can build power plants and water treatment facilities in the right mix, where they're needed. Delay means that everyday Iraqis, like shop owner Hassan in Samawah, become only more hostile to foreigners.

Like many other Iraqis, Hassan demands to know when the British Army will leave Al Muthanna.

Lieutenant Scot Wiseman, leading a patrol through the market, answers Hassan the way he always does, rumors of a 2006 withdrawal aside. "When Al Muthanna can take care of itself," he says.

But to take care of itself, Al Muthanna and the rest of southern Iraq need power, water, and planning. All three are in short supply.