



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Journalism in Southern Iraq gets Boost from New PRT Chief-

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Muthanna Province, Iraq - The new leader of the Muthanna Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), Brad Lynch, is expanding important contacts with local media with visits to their offices while hosting a journalism training session.

Shortly after arriving in the Province, Lynch along with members of his team and a public affairs officer (PAO) from the 4th Brigade, 1st Calvary Regiment, made courtesy calls on the three main provincial news outlets: Al-Muthanna Television, As-Samawah Newspaper, and As-Samawah Television.

Lynch said later that the PRT members were well received by all three media outlets and the visit helped provide him with valuable insight into provincial media content and reporting capabilities.

The Director of As-Samawah television told the delegation that he was delighted the PRT had conducted this outreach, as it demonstrated a genuine interest in the concerns of the Iraqi people. The delegation also used the visit to invite the three media organizations to a PRT-led training for local journalists.

On August 8, PRT Public Diplomacy Officer Aaron Snipe and Senior Media Specialist Albert Hadi conducted the training seminar for local Iraqi journalists. Representatives from the three largest local media organizations, along with staff from Baghdadiya News, were among the twenty five participants who attended the session held in the PRT's Mudhif, or traditional Iraqi guest house.

Snipe spoke to participants about the challenges faced by journalists in the United States and abroad in a media environment dominated by fast-breaking news and new technology. The journalists discussed the challenges of reporting in Iraq, and lively discussions ensued around the limits of free speech, and the role of religion and culture in a free press.



Participants of the PRT training session stand outside the Mudhif with Public Diplomacy Officer Aaron Snipe, standing fifth from right.

The public diplomacy officer presented the group with scenarios from the American experience with free speech, and more lively debates ensued. All participants agreed that the session was a success and hoped for additional training in the areas of story development, new media, and polling.

The location of the training, in the Mudhif, was of special importance for the Iraqis who attended the seminar. One participant remarked, "It is such a pleasure to meet with members of the PRT in these surroundings." Another noted, "It shows us that they understand us. They understand the Iraqi thinking."

Completed in February the PRT's Mudhif has been an integral part of the PRT's engagement with local Iraqis. With the complicated security measures needed to protect U.S. personnel in the Province meeting with local Iraqis presented the PRT with a challenge.

"Building a traditional Iraqi meeting house where PRT members and Iraqis can assemble, break bread, and discuss the business of the province in a culturally sensitive atmosphere was a terrific investment made by the previous team," said Team Leader Brad Lynch. "Meeting Iraqis on their own turf reinforces our constant message: This is Iraq, and we are doing all that we can to understand and help remedy the concerns of all Iraqis."

He said the Muthanna PRT plans additional training projects and will consider sending journalists outside the Province in order to upgrade their professional skills.

Prior to his arrival in Iraq, Lynch who is a Senior Foreign Service Officer served in the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security as Director of the Bangkok Regional Courier Division from 2003-2008. Before entering the Foreign Service, he was a Special Agent with the Defense Department's Defense Investigative Service in Santa Clara, California.

A native of Southern California, Lynch holds a Bachelors of Science Degree from San Jose State University. He is married and the father of two school age boys.