

South Dakota National Guard
Public Affairs Office
2823 West Main St.
Rapid City, S.D. 57702

Phone 605-737-6721
E-mail PAO@sd.ngb.army.mil

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Guardsman sees promise as Iraqis strive for normalcy

by Maj. Orson Ward, public affairs officer

AL-TAJI, Iraq – (12/10/07) – There is an “Awakening” in Iraq and one local soldier has found himself right in the middle of the movement.

South Dakota National Guardsman, Lt. Col Harvey Fitzgerald of Hermosa, S.D., says progress is being made as Iraqi citizens continue to strive toward a state of normalcy created by the recent surge of U.S. forces.

Fitzgerald is a member of a ten-man embedded provincial reconstruction team (ePRT) assigned to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. The team is stationed at Camp Taji which is located about 17 miles northwest of downtown Baghdad.

“The surge has certainly had the effect as hoped for by the planners,” said Fitzgerald. “We have seen a coordinated and effective campaign to push the insurgents out of hiding places and display a resolve toward reconciliation in Iraq.”

Comprised of six military and four civilian members, the team is tasked to assist provincial and local government to develop its capability to govern while supporting economic, political and social development and respect for the rule of law.

“The truth on the ground is that reconciliation is moving forward at an increasing speed,” he said.

According to Fitzgerald, the area around Al-Taji Nahia is moving through just such an “Awakening” that has united huge groups of citizens who are tired of seeing the violence kill innocents and overshadow any sense of a normal life.

“Iraqis are rejecting the insurgent influences that have been promoting a violent agenda,” he said.

Fitzgerald says the results are obvious as the amount of deaths and attacks are down dramatically. Although it has not been eliminated, sectarian strife has greatly been

reduced. Conditions can certainly change, but each day of progress reduces the chances for Iraq to go back to the way things were.

“They are rejecting the Al Qada and Jace Al-Maydi influences that promote a violent agenda,” he said.

Iraqis are participating in programs to report caches of weapons, report insurgents, not allow safe havens for insurgents, and seek cooperation from the Coalition, Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army, according to Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald is the agriculture business specialist on the ePRT and has recently developed a three-year strategic plan for agricultural transformation. The plan was recently labeled “What Right Looks Like,” and consists of using a seed planting program as a mechanism for bringing in new members to farmers associations.

The program will help buy time and increase momentum for developing an agriculture committee that can help provide assessment of local agricultural assets, which can be transformed into regional strategic industrialized value-added marketing chains.

“It is exciting to be able to help the Iraqis design these new systems and be at such a historic intersection,” he said.

The other ePRT members work in specialty areas such as city planning, governance, health-care systems, public engineering and state owned enterprises. The team is also supported by three bilingual, bicultural Iraqi advisors who have lived for a significant amount of time in a Western culture.

“We have set the stage for the government of Iraq to come forward and start providing essential services,” states Fitzgerald, whose team performs dozens of missions a week within various Iraqi communities.

Lt. Col. Fitzgerald is a member of South Dakota National Guard’s Joint Force Headquarters and volunteered to deploy for one year to serve as an agri-business specialist. Fitzgerald departed in July and has been serving for the past five months as a senior advisor to the Iraqi provincial government in formulating agricultural policy to expedite government investment in the agriculture sector and also guide the investment policy to induce private sector agriculture.

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Photo cut line:

AL-TAJI, Iraq - South Dakota National Guardsman, Lt. Col Harvey Fitzgerald of Hermosa, S.D., visits with a local Iraqi on Sept. 29 as he and fellow provincial reconstruction team members assist provincial and local government to develop a transparent and sustained capability to govern while supporting economic, political, and social development and respect for the rule of law. Fitzgerald has been serving for the

past five months as a senior advisor to the Iraqi provincial government in formulating agricultural policy to expedite government investment in the agriculture sector and also guide the investment policy to induce private sector agriculture. (Photo by Maj. David Parker)(Released)

Link to photo: https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil/released/20070929_LTC_Fitzgerald.JPG

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Maj. Orson Ward at (605) 737-6721, or cell (605) 431-8753.

NOTE: Since the terrorist attacks on America, the South Dakota National Guard has mobilized more than 3,100 Soldiers and 700 Airmen in support of the Global War on Terror.

Currently, more than 150 Soldiers and Airmen from the South Dakota National Guard remain on duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 4,000 National Guardsmen are available in South Dakota to provide support for state and national emergencies and homeland defense.