



# Wheelchairs Donated in Babil

WASHINGTON — Thousands of Iraqis have benefited from U.S. humanitarian missions, the latest effort being a donation of 2,000 wheelchairs in northern Iraq.

In Babil province, representatives from the Babil Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), community groups and several U.S. aid organizations presented 25 new wheelchairs to patients in need at the Babil Rehabilitation Center in Hillah, Feb. 19.

The 25 wheelchairs are the first of 2,000 slated to be distributed to Iraqis throughout the province, said Army Capt. Pam Foley of Army Civil Affairs in Hillah.

The wheelchairs include 1,500 “Rough Riders” designed for rugged terrain and 500 standard wheelchairs for hospital patients.

PRT members helped to coordinate the humanitarian effort and the donation ceremony.

“I would like to thank the coordinator of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Babil province, Mr. Ken Hillas, for this occasion, and we value your efforts in this province,” Gov. Salem Saleh al-Masla

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A child is helped into the new wheelchair he received at the Babil Rehabilitation Center in Hillah, Feb 19, 2009. This delivery of 25 wheelchairs was the first of 2,000 slated to be distributed throughout the province. U.S. Army photo by Capt. Stephen C. Short.

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**BASRAH** — Hundreds gathered as Iraqi officials hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony marking the completion of the new \$10.9 million regional courthouse here, Feb. 26.

“Opening this facility is an important step,” said Iraqi Judiciary Commission chairman Medhatt Al Mahmoud. “We had just 500 judges in Iraq in 2003, and now we have about 1,500 judges. Our judicial system has made significant progress in the past four years.

“Judicial independence is critical to a stable social structure. The rule of law is a prerequisite for political stability, economic development and public confidence in

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President Barack Obama talks to troops and civilians during his visit to Camp Lejeune, N.C., Feb. 27, 2009. Obama was on the Marine Corps installation to discuss current policies and an exit strategy from Iraq. U.S.M.C. photo by Lance Cpl. Michael J. Ayotte.

## U.S. Combat Troops Out by August 2010

WASHINGTON — U.S. combat troops will redeploy from Iraq by August 2010, leaving about 35,000 to 50,000 American forces there to attend to Iraqi troop and police training, counterterrorism and other duties, President Barack Obama told servicemembers at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., Friday.

“So, let me say this as plainly as I can: by Aug. 31, 2010, our combat mission in Iraq will end,” Obama told servicemembers gathered inside the post’s Goettge Memorial Field House.

“As we carry out this drawdown, my highest priority will be the safety and security of the troops and civilians in Iraq,” Obama said, noting he’d consult closely with U.S. commanders on the ground and with the Iraqi government as the redeployment gets under way.

Next month marks the sixth anniversary of the start of the war in Iraq, Obama said.

The situation in Iraq has improved, he said, thanks in great part to the efforts and sacrifices of U.S. servicemembers. There are about 146,000 U.S. forces currently in Iraq.

However, “we cannot sustain indefinitely a commitment that has put a strain on our military and will cost the American people nearly a trillion dollars,” Obama said of the U.S. military presence in Iraq.

“America’s men and women in uniform -- so many of you -- have fought block-by-block, province-by-province, year after year, to give the Iraqis this chance to choose a better future.

“Now, we must ask the Iraqi people to seize it,” Obama said.

Violence in Iraq “has been reduced substantially” from the horrific sectarian warfare experienced there in 2006 and 2007, Obama said. Also, al-Qaida in Iraq

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## Iraq Drawdown Decision Included Commanders, Gates Says

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama’s decision to redeploy all U.S. combat troops out of Iraq by the end of August next year emerged from a process that included input from military commanders and senior defense leaders, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said Friday.

The president made his decision after in-depth talks with commanders on the ground and in Washington, Gates told the Pentagon press corps via telephone from Camp Lejeune, N.C.

The timeline takes into consideration Multi-National Force - Iraq Commander Army Gen. Ray Odierno’s concern about security during district and sub-district elections scheduled for the summer and another national election at the end of the year.

Odierno wanted to ensure enough U.S. troops remained to help the Iraqis and still allow time to redeploy the combat brigades, Gates said, noting that an earlier drawdown would pose some “significant logistical and security issues.”

The president will be flexible and reserves the right to make changes, Gates said. “He clearly does not anticipate having to do that,” he added. “He has balanced the risks of staying longer or coming out sooner.”

All those involved with the discussion believe U.S. forces will meet the

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An Iraqi fisherman sets out for the day in Qadasiyah, Feb. 26, 2009. Photo by Senior Airman Eric Harris.



Iraqi Col. Rassoul gives a man a blanket during a foot patrol in Beladiyat, Feb. 27, 2009. Photo by Staff Sgt. Alex Licea.



An Iraqi man puts seasoning on fresh fish for Iraqi Soldiers in Qadasiyah, Feb. 26, 2009. Photo by Senior Airman Eric Harris.