

Top Maritime Advisor in Iraq



John Gaughan is the Coalition Provisional Authority's top maritime advisor in Iraq. Charged with resurrecting Iraq's maritime transportation system, he deals with a full plate of challenges every day. (Below) A sunny November day in Baghdad.



Checks in From the Front

As Iraq begins its slow rise from the ashes after being loosed from decades of despotic abuse by the former regime, a member of MEBA's extended family is aiding the country's ascent. A longtime influential advocate of the maritime industry, John Gaughan's experience and know-how are being relied upon to resurrect a broken and neglected marine transportation system in Iraq - a daunting task. Burdened by an outmoded inter-modal structure and the fallout from years of war, Iraq's seaports were further crippled by looters in the short-lived eruption of anarchy following the Coalition victory.

The sheer enormity of resuscitating Iraq's maritime system calls for veteran leadership to help engineer its return to viability. John Gaughan is that leader, and in July, the Department of Defense appointed him as the principal Maritime Advisor to the Iraq Ministry of Transportation. Based in Umm Qasr, Iraq's sole deepwater seaport, he is primarily responsible for effecting the resurgence of the port, the nation's maritime infrastructure, freight handling terminals and ironing out an endless slew of other maritime-related challenges.

A former Maritime Administrator during the Reagan years, John tackles the Iraq assignment during a hiatus from the American Maritime Congress which he serves in his post as Vice President of Government Affairs. AMC is a maritime research and educational organization made up of companies that have collective bargaining agreements with the MEBA. Prior to AMC, Gaughan served as President of the First American Bulk Carrier

Corporation (FABCC), a company which is owned by the MEBA Pension Fund.

The *Marine Officer* was privileged to attain an exclusive interview with the #1 maritime man in Iraq:

M.O.: *Can you give us a general description of some of the things you deal with in Iraq? Is the job more encompassing than you imagined when you agreed to the assignment?*

JG: I am the Senior Maritime Advisor to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). When I arrived, I found that they did not have anyone here who even dared to take that position - so literally anything that has a tangential relationship to water or maritime lands on my desk. I was counting the number of folders that I have opened as different issues have come in and it currently stands at 42 open folders - all on different subjects - and that's down from a much larger number because the computer system administrator keeps sending e-mail warnings that the size of my mailbox has exceeded the prescribed limits. So I routinely go through it and if a particular issue hasn't been acted upon in a week, I put it in my archives to remove it from my mailbox.

The primary focus of what CPA envisioned was to work with the maritime entities within the Iraq Ministry of Transportation which is made up of Iraqi nationals. Within the Ministry, the Iraqi Port Authority has responsibility for five ports in Iraq that handle dry cargo as well as two offshore loading ports for oil that the IPA does not necessarily control but provides

marine services to. The biggest focus right now is on the port of Umm Qasr down in the south of Iraq - that's where the bulk of the infrastructure money that is part of the USAID rebuilding effort is focused.

M.O.: *Sounds like you've got your hands full there. What is a typical day like for you? Give us a rundown.*

JG: I will use the last couple of days as an example of the highlights of the issues. We

Railway specialists repairing track at Umm Qasr. John Gaughan detailed some of the problems in the country's rail system during the interview.



work seven days a week. I have not truly had a day off since I've been here. Friday here in Iraq is considered their weekend. So on a Friday, if you really cheat, you don't go into the office until noontime. Most of the time, the workday starts at 7:00 a.m. Ambassador (Paul) Bremer (CPA Administrator) has a 7:30 and 8 a.m. staff meeting for the senior advisors. At 8:30 you get right on the hot topic of the day and then you're off and running. Right now, here's a range of issues I've been working on in the last couple of days: First of all, the whole infrastructure/reconstruction at the port of Umm Qasr — that includes the reconstitution of electrical power at the port. They are not on the national grid of electricity because of looting and sabotage, not as a result of allied war damage etc., but the aftermath of the victory. So there's a huge effort to reestablish reliable electrical power to the port - both to the container trains, security lighting and the running of all systems. There are currently no water systems at the port, no fire protection or electrical power back-up. On any given day there's something to do on those contracts. On a typical day you've got port authority issues, you've got issues of oil smuggling out of Iraq and the

It's a new day at Umm Qasr as the Port is becoming more serviceable. (Below) A sign in both English and Arabic at the Port.

interdiction of those ships by the military. Because of the electrical problems of the country, the refining capacity they have cannot operate at a level sufficient enough to provide for the country's own oil needs. So we're also dealing with emergency transfer of oil products into Iraq - and there is not a single location in Iraq designed to import oil product. So we're working on emergency oil transfer operations to try to set up, in some safe way, the ability to import diesel fuel, gasoline, kerosene and LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas). Those four products are important because it does get cold in the winter here and the people use kerosene to heat their homes, they use LPG typically to fire their stoves, they need diesel to use all the generators that we're trying to put in, and gasoline for their vehicles. This country sits on the second or third largest oil reserve in the world and they're unable to, at the present time, to even meet their own needs.



1980 on. The south of Iraq borders Kuwait on one side. I'm literally within walking distance of the Kuwaiti border and it isn't far to the Iranian border - so with the Iran-Iraq war there was constant warfare down there which resulted in the sinking of vessels, unexploded ordinance all over the place and so forth. So, all over Iraq it's like a junkyard landscape particularly in the south because there are the remnants of warfare going back to the 1980's followed by Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom. The port itself - while undamaged in the recent conflicts - I mean we have scrap metal everywhere...who knows where it came from? - some of it is old equipment and so forth. But we have been trying to get the Iraq Port Authority to agree to some kind of scrap removal project where we would put a Request For Proposal out to see who could come in to remove these warehouses full of twisted metal and to help us get closer to a working port again.

The Port Authority leadership, in concept, supports that - but before we could do it they want us to form a committee to review the scrap to make sure that we have an accounting of the metal and make sure we don't dispose of anything that would have some use. We thought we had an arrangement that they could

come look at equipment that was obsolete - or didn't have wheels on it or whatever - and take the necessary survey and then move forward. We also needed to remove some of the pierside cranes - many of which were old Russian cranes that you couldn't get parts for - none of which work. We went out and got bids and actually got some very attractive bids to move the metal. When we went to the Port Authority for approval to move forward they said they'd been directed by the Ministry of Transport not to sell scrap.

M.O.: I take it that it hasn't been all smooth sailing. Can you talk about some of the frustrations or impediments that have helped hamper your efforts to get things back on line?

JG: I'll give you a classic frustration - Iraq - particularly in the south - has suffered from warfare from





A British ship unloading at the Port of Umm Qasr.

I came to find out that under UN mandates - even scrap metal is considered an asset of Iraq and that in order to remove it - it must be a fully transparent transaction and any proceeds that come from the sale are to be deposited in the Ministry of Finance into the general treasury. It may well be that the Minister of Transport didn't want any scrap sold until an internal Iraqi arrangement could be worked out. So that the monies that come from the scrap

JG: There's no question that the port of Umm Qasr from the day I got here to today is a changed place. Working with both the Iraqis and CPA - we're loading container trains out of the port every day. Now, it's not quite the double stack system that you would see coming out of Long Beach or Seattle because the Iraqi railroad is a single-track railroad throughout the country. The longest unit train we can put together is 40 boxes at a time because

wouldn't go to the Treasury but would go to an account for the Port Authority. Because, in theory, the Port Authority is supposed to be a revenue-funded agency. In other words, they would not get money from the General Treasury and instead, would in fact be expected to operate all of the ports from the revenues raised from port activities. That would primarily be revenues raised from their port services tariff. But there's no incentive right now for them to allow us to go forward with the scrap if the IPA is not assured that the proceeds wouldn't go into an account for use on port activities.

M.O.: *Have you been able to see a difference made on issues that you've dealt with directly? Can you give us an example?*

that's the controlling length of railroad sidings - so that if we have a train leaving the port going north and they have a train going south - you must put the unit train on the siding so that another train can pass. But it's a single-track system throughout Iraq, so that when you talk about increasing capacity or throughput of the port you find practical constraints such as that. We'd like to do more but (laughs) we can't put more than 40 boxes on a train because it would block the rest of the system unless you run the train all the way through. And you add to that the fact that after the war, all the communications and signaling services for the railroad were ripped out. So right now - you gotta love these guys - a train pulls into a station where they somehow send a message to the next train station saying, 'we're ready to pull out - is there anything coming down the track the other way?'

So there's a whole effort by the Iraqi railroad and the people here, as well as my rail counterpart at CPA, to get a communication system in place to allow more control on the rail system. Many of you are familiar with the CSX train operating center in Jacksonville - if there's anything equivalent to that in Iraq - it is somebody writing on a blackboard - "danger - train leaving Umm Qasr headed for Baghdad." Then they manually juggle that all around. I don't mean to go on about that. It is a very particular case but it is endemic to what everyone has found here in terms of the lack of infrastructure here.

What has become readily clear here from the time of the Iran-Iraq war to the present - the wealth of this country was used by the prior regime to buy arms and to equip an army at the expense of not only the fiscal and physical infrastructure of the country but the quality of life of its people. So every time you take on a new issue, dragging behind that is - not the possibility - but the fact that the rest of the infra-



Children in Kirkuk cheer as furniture, provided for by the U.S. Agency for International Development, arrives at their school. MEBA contracted companies have helped transport many AID cargoes to Iraq.

structure is in the same shape. This country at one time exported wheat, barley and dates and fed their own people. It was truly one of the jewels of the Middle East. I live and work at the Presidential palace in Baghdad where every fixture in it is gold, gold-plated or made to look like gold. It's as opulent as you will ever come across. You see where the money and the lifeblood of the people went. You go outside and it's almost a desolate scene from "Mad Max" with kids running around with no shoes on. It is heartbreaking to see that because you know what a great country it was and you understand what the prior regime did to it.

M.O.: *We hear about looting and sabotage. Is that on the decline?*

JG: It is not widespread. But, everyone is experiencing the same things, and it has a humbling effect. If they sabotage a pipeline that is bringing oil that is supposed to go to fire a generator - while they are fixing the pipeline it means there may not be power generation. There are routine cases of what they call IED, improvised explosive devices, that can sit on railroad tracks and might only blow one small section of track. But since it is a single-track system, you

can in fact, disrupt the whole rail system while they fix it. I don't know if it is organized and I don't know if it is on the increase or decline but it happens with fair regularity. We had very few instances of sabotage at the port, but we have recurring instances of breaches of the perimeter wall and minor looting of a warehouse that might have bagged rice waiting for trucks to pick it up. There is a ship delivering garbanzo beans in Umm Qasr as we speak. And if they are not able to get all of the cargo immediately on the trucks, it will go in a warehouse. And you know, tomorrow morning there will be a couple of bags missing. There is no question those types of activities continue, far more disruptive than they would be elsewhere because of the fragility and the thinness of the infrastructure.

M.O.: *Do you sense any danger just walking around town?*

JG: I have sensed danger only a couple of times - surprisingly, only once at the port. It was late at night and I was by myself and came upon a couple of trucks that probably were legitimately there, but it's hard to tell. I had a gun, they had a gun. Everyone just kind of faced off before we all went

about our business. [Editors Note: In November, the palace where John Gaughan is staying came under mortar attack. Although the explosions shook the palace and forced the residents to spend several hours huddling in the basement there were no injuries. However, 50 CPA vehicles were damaged or destroyed.]

M.O.: *The provisional authority is there to keep things running until things can be handed over to the Iraqis themselves. So what is the goal of the maritime program there considering the fact that the whole thing is to be turned over to the Iraqis in a year or so?*

JG: Right. Well, the Coalitional Authority is in fact the ruling government of Iraq. And while there is a governing council and ministries and all, until there is a free election, CPA is the final arbiter here. The goal that I had tried to set is that within a year the port of Umm Qasr will in fact be able to accept cargo of all kinds, process it in a reasonable efficient way, and begin to compete - and reenter the region's maritime community as a legitimate alternative or legitimate port at which to call with reasonable tariff rates to help rebuild this country. Right now, we need to beef up the security at the port so that shippers feel confident that their goods will arrive and pass through the port safely. We need to reconfigure the port so to increase its efficiency whether it be container ships or breakbulk ships. And we need to rebuild - literally rebuild the infrastructure of the port in everything from getting the cranes to operate efficiently to reliable cargo handling equipment and all. We have to get the workforce back to work. Right now, everyone who was on the government payroll, with the exception of those that worked for the office of the President, are getting paid whether they come to work or not. It's not a big incentive to come to work if you can still get paid. CPA has put in a new policy where people must at least sign-in in the morning, and if they don't show up a certain number of times - they

can be fired. The frustrating part of that is, as an example, the port authority headquarters in Basra was completely looted. So there is no furniture, no phones and no computers. And until we get the security settled to where you would have some assurance that if you put furniture in, or more particularly computers and all, that they would be there the next day or next week. It certainly makes it very difficult for the port authority to operate and it makes it difficult to get many things done.

M.O.: *Is there an Iraqi coast guard or maritime academy in the country?*

JG: There is an Iraqi naval academy in Basra. A part of it was dedicated to merchant mariners and training. However, it was looted and destroyed. They are desperately looking for monies to get operations going. While it is a noble idea, right now, with some of the other pressing needs, it's not on anybody's radar screen. But there was a part of the naval training facility/merchant marine training facility for some small number of people.

There are efforts to form up an Iraqi maritime defense service and it's currently being done on two tracks - the riverine aspect of that would be under the Ministry of Interior run by the customs service - which at the present time does not have a commissioner or customs officers - but they're working hard to stand that up. And then there would be - if you will - a coastal service with larger patrol boats - 89-foot patrol boats. There's actually five patrol boats in the region that were built by the Chinese for the Iraqis. If they can be outfitted they'll serve as the basis for the coastal defense service. That's a work in progress. I continue to urge that they combine the riverine and the coastal defense together in one unified command - and that's one of those policy issues that people deal with here.

M.O.: *Can you tell us about some unexpected things - good and bad - that you found in Iraq?*

JG: I didn't expect to find the country so bereft of services. The photos I saw beforehand looked like they did in fact have a robust country and in fact they don't. I wasn't really prepared for the level of poverty and the lack of quality of life that certainly exists in the south caused by the wars but also by their own regime - it's such a study in contrast. When I first got here I lived in the palace poolhouse - a room in which 16 of us stayed. It was just opulent. But you step outside the gates of the palace and it's dire poverty. 60% of the people in Iraq, I believe, are under the age of 20 or 25. When you ride the road from Basra to Umm Qasr - Umm Qasr is 99 kilometers south of Basra - very nice highway - at least from the air it looks like an interstate - it's not quite as good as that when you're on it - but literally in the middle of nowhere there will be kids standing on the side of the road waving - particularly if they see if it's a Chevrolet Suburban or whatever - they know it's a coalition vehicle. When you look around, you don't even know where they would have come from - or where their house could be. It's not unusual to be going down the road and a camel herder races camels across the road or someone is going along on a donkey cart.

So it's a country that has spent over \$50 billion on armaments. You can easily see the money has all gone to the war machine and to the upper echelons of the regime with no heed to the population - I was not prepared for this total disregard of the Iraqi people.

One of my biggest surprises was the cordiality - the dignity of the people and their desire to make it a different world. But the 30-year strangulation hold that the former regime has on them still makes it very diffi-

cult for them to act on what they know are the right things to do - because they were living in abject fear.

I went to a dinner out in the country, and one of the older ladies pulled me into a circle to do one of their folk dances. She said that it was the only dance that they were allowed to do under the old regime - and none of the men would dance. So it was a great delight for her to be able to dance with a man. The absolute contrast - if you fly from here to Jordan - Jordan is like a mecca of trade and night life and so forth - and yet 55 minutes away in an airplane was this regime that literally castrated the men and raped the women.

But...life over here is ok. I haven't seen a cloud or a drop of rain. I do find myself eating dessert first because you never know how long you're going to be around...(laughter). ✕

[Editor's note: As this issue was going to press, the Marine Officer received the great news that John Gaughan had concluded his overseas service and was scheduled to return home by Christmas.]

John with Gloria Tosi, President of the American Maritime Congress. John will resume his duties as V.P. at AMC following his return from Iraq.

