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Meeting the Logistics Challenge in Iraq

By Erika Morphy

Before there is rebuilding of any sort, there must be procurement of the capital goods, followed by logistics planning and actual transportation. It's never an easy process, but in Iraq the procurement-logistics-transportation formula can quickly become downright ugly.

Most of the contractors and subcontractors that have won bids to work on the reconstruction in Iraq are subcontracting out this essential piece to firms that specialize in global logistics to less-than-ideal locales. Logenix International, headquartered in Springfield, Va., has been retained by a number of contractors and subcontractors in Iraq, working on such projects that range from helping procure generators for the Al Rashid Hotel, to distributing the first wave of post-Saddam era textbooks, to procuring and distributing medical supplies for some 600 health clinics. "The planning that goes on for even the simplest – or what would be the simplest of transactions in other countries – can take months in Iraq," Ronald S. Cruse, president and CEO of Logenix says.

Logenix has been involved in Iraq since the start of the U.S. invasion, first under the auspices of an Air Force Contract Augmentation Program as a small business contractor. The company arranged for the delivery of some 3,000 metric tons of equipment and aid – much of it chartered on an Antonov 225, one of the world's largest cargo aircraft.

The Many Challenges of Moving Goods

Since the official end of hostilities, the challenges of moving goods from points A to B then C has not gotten much easier in light of the instability and violence that has become a part of everyday life in Iraq. For example, coordinating the security for both the transportation and installation teams on a water plant project has proved to be particularly cumbersome given the many comings and goings of both labor and capital goods.

But delays and glitches are not always the result of security concerns. The procurement and distribution of textbooks is one example: although the contractor wanted this project scheduled on a fast track, it was production shortfalls and other unforeseen difficulties that pushed back the delivery date, Cruse said.

From Dubai to Downtown Baghdad

Sometimes though a procurement and delivery project does indeed go like clockwork. Cruse points to the movement of generators it procured for the reconstruction at the Al Rashid hotel as a case in point. Over the course of three days, Logenix arranged for generators to be picked up in Dubai, then transported to Baghdad via Kuwait.

"That's about as good as it gets in Baghdad," Cruse says.

Breaking it down, it does seem easy enough, although as Cruse hastens to point out, at any step along the way anything can bring the flow of goods to a halt.

Day one: Logenix organizes the procurement of the generators in Dubai, a purchase that goes through very quickly.

Day two: Logenix charts an Antonov 124 (not the same bulk as the 225 but close) and arranges for the loading of the generators into the aircraft, which are then flown to Kuwait.

Day three: Clearance for customs is received. Meanwhile Logenix has been working to arrange transportation and security for the trip to Baghdad. At the Kuwaiti airport, the trucks are loaded with the generators. The security company Logenix uses for freight transportation keeps most of its weapons on the Iraqi side of the border. Once the crossing is made, the convey "arms itself to the teeth" — at a minimum there two armed gunmen riding in cars both in front and behind the convoy.

Day four: Given the load it is carrying the trucks cannot go faster than 50 miles per hour. A day after setting out from Kuwait they arrive at the hotel, where the generators are safely delivered.

Now, of course, they must be installed. But that is a whole other story.