



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

## 2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

### -Mechanics Training for Iraqi Army Fuels Engine for Change-

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**Baghdad** - One hundred and eighty-nine smiling Iraqi Jundi (soldiers) received certificates for the successful completion of a rigorous 10-week mechanics course December 30 knowing they will now play an integral role as engines for change powering their Army.



Instructor Theo Koster reviews engine mechanics with Iraqi Army students on day of course graduation in Baghdad.

The graduation ceremony, which took place in the Officers' Mess at the Iraqi Army Sixth Division's base in West Baghdad, was an example of the U.S. Army's partnership with this nation's military toward self-sufficiency.

Referring to his soldier/students, head trainer Theo Koster said, "It's a small fire we've started but if they kindle it they're going to be a great benefit to this army."

The South African contractor touched on the trend toward greater self-sufficiency growing within the Iraqi defense forces that means less dependence on U.S.-led Coalition Forces for operational and logistics support.

"The quality of the students was also quite good," said Koster, noting that 98% of the soldiers in the course passed, with 12 Jundi singled out for special distinction. "The students must realize what they've got now [knowledge] no one can take away. It's up to them to make the best of it," he added.

The graduation ceremony began with a soldier memorializing the Division's comrades killed in terrorist action with a recitation from the Koran. The assembled Jundi then repeated the oath of loyalty to the Iraqi Army.

Iraqi training commander Major Raed al-Timimi greeted his American guests, thanking the U.S. Government for its assistance. He noted the timing of the ceremony was significant because it was within a week of the anniversary of the establishment of the Iraqi Army in 1921.

The senior Iraqi Army officer present, Sixth Division Chief of Staff Colonel Ayad Khazael, handed out the certificates to the top 20 students in the course, congratulating each for their achievement.

The Iraqi-owned FIAFI Group, has been engaged by the U.S. military to operate five motor maintenance courses a year for Iraq's Army in Baghdad, Kirkush and Habbaniyah.

U.S. Army Colonel Robby Robinson, deputy commander of the Military Transition Team (MITT) that helped coordinate the \$3 million U.S. Government funded effort, said, “the maintenance program is not only meant to instill critical skills among these men but to build the capacity of the Iraqi Army to effectively maintain its own vehicles.”

Col. Robinson’s Team works for the Multi-National Security Transition Command - Iraq (MNSTC-I) whose mission, according to its website, is to assist the Iraqi Government in the development, organization, training, equipping, and sustainability of Iraq’s security forces and ministries.

It does this through training programs with Iraqi security forces such as the national police, paramedics and water patrol police.

The goal is to make them better capable to defeat terrorism while providing a stable environment in which representative government, individual freedom, the rule of law, and the free market economy can evolve.

At the same time Iraq’s military continues to grow. In 2004, there were only 96,000 trained and equipped Iraqi Security Forces. That figure has risen to around 350,000 trained and equipped troops.

The result is that the military is undertaking more responsibility for the nation’s security. On June 1, 2007, responsibility for maintaining the security of Erbil, Dahuk and Sulaymaniyah Provinces in northern Iraq was officially transferred to the Kurdistan Regional Government.

As of January 2008, security in half of Iraq’s 18 provinces will be controlled by the Iraqi Government with Coalition Forces positioned to provide assistance if needed.