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Tracking tanks



A fleet of refurbished T-72s infuses 'new blood' into Iraqi Mechanized Division

Refurbished T-72 tanks beef up Iraqi Army's Mechanized Division



Iraqi Gen. Bashar, commander of the Iraqi Army's 9th Division (Mechanized), drives a T-72 tank from an off-load area to a division motor pool.

Photos by U.S. Army Sgt. Lorie Jewell

By U.S. Sgt. Lorie Jewell
MNSTC-I Public Affairs

TAJI, Iraq – The arrival of dozens of T-72 tanks from Hungary this week infused “new blood” into the Iraqi Army's 9th Mechanized Division, its top leader said.

“This is a great day for our division,” said Iraqi Gen. Bashar, division commander. “We are building our division and these are the base. We are pinning the strength and power of our division on our tanks.”

The 77 tanks arrived over three days, culminating Nov. 11. The delivery also included 36 BMP personnel carriers, four recovery vehicles and several containers of parts and weaponry. It's the largest equipment donation to the Iraqi Army from NATO allies to date, officials said.

Iraqi soldiers and their leaders were visibly excited as they off-loaded the freshly painted tanks and drove them to a division motor pool.

“This is a huge event for them,” said U.S. Lt. Col. Kevin Meredith, the mechanized and armor project officer for the Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq (MNSTC-I). “In the former Army, only the elite troops had T-72s. So they really associate having T-72s with something



Iraqi soldiers, with help from Coalition advisers, spent three days off-loading 77 T-72 tanks, which will equip the 2nd Brigade of the 9th Division.

special. The pride they have in these tanks is palpable.”

The T-72s and BMPs will equip two tank battalions and one mechanized battalion of the division's 2nd Brigade, Bashar said.

Until now, the division's tank fleet has consisted of Russian T-55 models, which belong to a 1st Brigade battalion. The brigade also has two mechanized battalions. The division expects to form a third brigade within the next year, Bashar said.



The T-72s can be operated by a three-man crew, travel up to 60 kilometers an hour and fire eight rounds per minute.

Many of the division's soldiers drove T-72 tanks in the old Iraqi Army, so they are familiar with operating and maintaining them, leaders said. A handful of the tanks from the old army remain at Taji and are used for training purposes.

“We have no trouble using these types of tanks and maintaining them,” said Iraqi Lt. Col. Saleem, commander of the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade. “The soldiers are very happy because now we have enough weapons to kill the terrorists in our country.”

The 45-ton tank can move as fast as 60 kilometers an hour and fire eight rounds a minute with an auto-loader and a three-man crew. With a laser range finder, the crew can shoot while moving at speeds up to 20 kilometers an hour.

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Iraqi Highway Patrol students have new training academy

By Ann Bertucci

CPATT Public Affairs

TAJI, Iraq – Efforts to train and develop the Iraqi Highway Patrol (IHP) were boosted with the Nov. 9 opening of the new IHP Academy. The new facility is designed to double the stu-



U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Joseph Peterson and Iraqi Maj. Gen. Ali and Ghalib cut the ribbon for the new IHP Academy. Photo by Ann Bertucci

dent capacity at the training site.

Iraqi Maj. Gen. Ali, deputy Minister of Interior for Iraqi Police Services (IPS), addressed the audience attending a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening, noting that the IHP stands side-by-side with the IPS and is a key to making Iraq safer and more secure.

Also attending the ceremony was U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Joseph Peterson, commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq's Civilian Police Assistance Training Team. Peterson emphasized that Iraqis are increasingly in the lead and assuming more responsibility for building the foundations of an effective government and police force.

"I applaud you for building, protecting,

and serving your country," Peterson said. "I am proud of you and I am proud to serve with you in making Iraq a self-reliant Iraq for all Iraqis.

The IHP was established Oct. 23, 2004 as an independent, national police organization primarily responsible for securing the nation's highways and escorting key supply convoys. The IHP will focus on highway and major roadway security to ensure the safety of Iraqi citizens, international visitors and the free flow of national and international commerce. There are currently 1,551 trained and equipped officers in a force that will grow to nearly 6,300.

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"These are a very good type of tank," said Saleem, through an interpreter. "Not all countries use this type of tank."

Hungary approached Iraq earlier this year about donating the tanks. Bashar and others traveled to the country to inspect the tanks before agreeing to accept them. Another country offered 500 BMPs through NATO, with Iraq accepting 100, said Meredith. Three dozen of the 100 arrived with the tanks; the remaining 64 are expected in the coming months, Meredith said.

Although the vehicles were donated, the cost of refurbishing and shipping them here was covered by Iraq's Ministry of Defense, which paid about \$4.5 million; roughly \$500,000 came from MNSTC-I, officials said. NATO handled much of the logistics of the effort.

Italian Maj. Gen. Pier Giorgio Segala, deputy commander of NATO Training Mission – Iraq, visited the new tanks Nov. 11. Bashar gave a brief history of the division and talked about how the new equipment will energize his troops.

"This is like new blood in our division," Bashar said.

Bashar also expressed appreciation to all of the organizations and countries involved in donating the equipment and getting it delivered to the division.



Iraqi civilian truck drivers delivered the tanks to Taji in several convoys. Soldiers with the 9th Division unloaded the tractor trailers over a three-day period. The shipment also included 36 BMP armored personnel carriers, which were off-loaded in a separate location on base by the Iraqi soldiers.

Photos by U.S. Army Sgt. Lorie Jewell



"We give many, many thanks to them," Bashar said. "All of the people gave us all of their effort."

Segala called the equipment delivery an important event for the Iraqi Army, and NATO as well. This is the second major opportunity NATO has had to support Iraq's Army, following the September re-opening of the Iraqi Joint Staff College at Ar Rustamiyah.