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FIRST SEA LORD OPENS THE IRAQI COASTAL DEFENCE FORCE

Today the rebuilding of Iraq took another step forward as the newly formed Iraqi Coastal Defence Force (ICDF) took control of its assets in the Naval Base at Umm Qasr.

Having been formed in January this year the personnel of the ICDF have been conducting training under the guidance of a combined team of British, American, Australian and Dutch naval personnel.

The day marked the handover of five fast patrol boats, ten rigid inflatable boats, and the facilities at the Naval Base in Umm Qasr to Iraqi control. The ceremony was attended by Mr Hasim Shalan and numerous military dignitaries including Generals Mohan and Kamal, and Admiral Sir Alan West GCB DSC ADC, the First Sea Lord of the Royal Navy.

A spokesman for the ICDF said "This Base, its assets and personnel are physical proof of the successful rebuilding efforts that are taking place in Iraq. The role of the ICDF is to conduct policing operations on the Iraqi coastline and territorial waters out to 12 nautical miles in order to counter terrorism, smuggling, piracy and other unlawful activities and provide a limited search and rescue capability, with the aim being that the ICDF will provide Iraq's maritime security therefore increasing trade and reducing crime."

As they were shown around the Naval Base, the guests saw how the ICDF have trained and as they toured the Patrol Boats and other facilities a senior military guest said "A small force needs high quality personnel, which is what we see here. All are determined to serve their country at the highest standard."

The handover ceremony also marks a step change in the training of the ICDF away from the core skills and towards the operational training moving towards actually conducting live operations in the northern Gulf. Captain John Murphie Royal Navy, the Director of the Coalition Military Assistance Training Team responsible for training the ICDF said "I would describe this as only the end of the first chapter, the relationship between the ICDF and training Team now

changes, but the commitment remains to get the ICDF to its full Operating Capability and secure Iraq's seaward border."

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