



A pilot training with the Iraqi air force's 23rd Squadron runs through a systems check before taking off in one of three C-130 Hercules provided to the Iraqi air force by the Department of Defense. Airmen from the U.S Air Force 777th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron are teaching the Iraqi airmen to use their new aircraft. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. David Foley

U.S. Pilots Train Iraqis to Fly C-130 Hercules

Pilots and enlisted Airmen from the 777th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron are training their Iraqi counterparts to be a fully functional flying squadron

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TALLIL AIR BASE, Iraq, May 6, 2005 — U.S. pilots are training their Iraqi counterparts to fly three C-130 Hercules the Iraqi air force received from the Department of Defense.

Pilots and enlisted Airmen from the 777th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron at Little Rock Air Force Base, Ark., are here working hand-in-hand with pilots and crewmembers who served in Saddam Hussein's air force before Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"By the time the program is over, which we estimate to be May 2006, they will be a fully functional squadron," said Maj. Roger Redwood, operations flight commander for the 23rd Advisory Support Team that is part of the 777th EAS. They are training airmen at Iraq's 23rd Squadron.

While many of the new recruits have ample flight experience, their exposure to English has been more limited, officials said.

"Most of the officers can communicate pretty well, but they

Even though they are taking a significant pay cut in the new Iraqi air force, there is a greater concern for some than money.

One of the Iraqi pilots, who asked to remain anonymous, said he lives in fear of the insurgency every day because of what he is doing.

"There is a threat for anyone who is trying to build this country at this time," he said.

The pilot added that the threats don't come from Iraqi citizens. They come from people from other countries who want to make trouble in Iraq.

"I do not know why they do this," he said. "I just know they do."

The Iraqi airmen recently came face to face with what the insurgency is willing to do to try and stop the reconstruction of Iraq.

An Iraqi loadmaster's brother was killed because of his

have a hard time understanding the radio calls from air traffic control," Major Redwood said.

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"They know the airplanes. They know the systems. They can do it all in Arabic, but we require them to do it in English, because if they are going to fly worldwide, they will need to be able to do it in English," Major Redwood said. The Iraqi airmen are certainly not lacking in determination and dedication, the major said.

"These guys are all true patriots. They want to help their country," Major Redwood said. "All of them were higher ranking in the Saddam era, so they took a pay cut. A lot of these guys were colonels and now they are majors. The guys coming in now are all captains, and they used to be majors and lieutenant colonels."

involvement with the new Iraqi air force. The loadmaster then took time off to move his brother's family into his house, and considered quitting the force, but his comrades supported him and convinced him to continue training.

Major Redwood said there have been several other incidents where insurgents have targeted family members of the Iraqi airmen, and every time he wonders if the airmen will come back to the training, but they always do.

Once the squadron is fully trained, they will be able to support most of the Iraqi army's missions, but will need a few more airplanes to be completely self-sufficient, Major Redwood said.

There is also a need, he said, for younger pilots.

"The problem they are having right now is that these guys are all old. They need some new blood," he said. "A lot of these guys have been in the air force for 20 years or more."