

# EYE ON IRAQ

November 20, 2005

The Iraqi people, with help from coalition nations, continue to succeed in reconstruction, economic development and fighting terrorism



## Tikrit palace turnover symbolizes transition from autocracy to democracy

Saddam Hussein's Tikrit Palace Complex once symbolized the autocracy of his regime; it now symbolizes an emerging democratically elected Government of Iraq.

The planned turnover of the complex Nov. 22 to the Iraqi Government and its security forces will be a landmark event highlighting the increased capability of the Iraqi Government to administer and govern itself. "Soon this place that was once for only an elite few will be a place for the Iraqi People. Instead of representing how one man used Iraq's wealth, it will represent how Iraq's wealth can be used for its people," said Maj. Gen. Joseph J. Taluto, 42nd Infantry Division commander, summarizing the future turnover during the 42nd's transition of authority ceremony with the 101st Airborne Division Nov. 1.

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Although 24 coalition operating bases have been turned over to Iraqi Security Forces control this year, the Tikrit Palace complex is the most significant transition of real estate thus far.

The scenic complex consists of more than 1,000 acres of land situated on a high bluff overlooking the Tigris River. There are 136 buildings on the property, with a combined 1.5 million square feet of administrative and living space, including 18 palaces. Additionally, there are 60 structures located on the complex grounds used for logistic, utility and maintenance functions.

The centerpiece of the complex is the Presidential Palace built by Saddam Hussein for his mother. It is the largest and most elaborate of



the presidential sites built by Saddam Hussein. The construction of the facility began in 1991.

Other palaces within the complex were used as residences for select members of the regime and visiting dignitaries. The complex is located about 90 miles north of Baghdad.

Since the spring of 2003, the complex has served as the headquarters for the 4th, 1st and the 42nd Divisions. Earlier this year, the 42nd began the arduous task of vacating the complex. The Iraqis plan

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to locate the Ministry of Finance and provincial and city government offices in portions of the complex. Salahuddin Provincial Governor Hamid Hamoud Qaisi said, "First we shall open the gates to allow the people to see the palaces," which have always been off-limits to the public. Other sections of the complex are under consideration to use as tourist attractions with a luxury hotel. "We are thinking about establishing a tourist area in those palaces," said Qaisi, who intends to move his office from downtown Tikrit to the palace complex.

The panoramic view of the Tigris River, along with the unique architecture and elaborate furnishings of the 18 palaces, should attract the interest of travelers and curiosity seekers from around the world. The palaces' large rooms and halls are adorned with marble floors and walls, large chandeliers and inlaid designed ceilings.

The complex that once symbolized the privileges of a few elites now symbolizes the progress of a free and democratic Iraq with a government elected by its citizens. At a provincial governors gathering at the palace complex in Tikrit on Oct. 23, Kirk Provincial Governor Abdul Rahman Mustafa Feta-eh surmised, "We have built a brand new Iraq and support for the government system after the dictator regime of Saddam Hussein."



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