

## MilitaryScene

# Security enterprise strengthens Tunisian Air Force

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Fifty-five foreign air force members have graduated a months-long training course on the OH-58D Kiowa during a ceremony at the Performing Arts Center of the Eastern New Mexico University in Roswell, New Mexico.

The pilots and maintenance crew members from the Tunisian Air Force received training on the armed reconnaissance helicopter at the Roswell International Air Center as part of a foreign military sales case managed by the Security Assistance Command.

"This graduation (held Dec. 21) brings together Tunisia's capability of integrating air-ground operations utilizing the Bell Helicopter OH-58 Kiowa Warrior for observation, utility and direct fire support," Col. William Krahlung, USASAC's director of EUCOM/AFRICOM regional operations, said.

Krahlung called this a turning point for the fledgling democracy, as it brings a significant new capability to the country and Northern Africa.

This is especially important as Tunisia continues to face terrorist threats throughout the region despite its successful transition to a democratic state. Libya, with which it shares a 500-kilometer border, is one of many competing threats in the region. Tunisia also remains on high alert as the Islamic State loses ground in Syria and Iraq, causing Tunisian citizens-turned-militants to return to Tunisia.

Assisting the young democracy, the Security Assistance Command is managing two multimillion dollar FMS cases that provide instruction, equipment and long-term sustainment to the Tunisian Air Force. The instruction and sustainment portion of the case is being executed by the Security Assistance Training Management Organization, a USASAC subordinate organization that deploys subject matter experts to 25 countries to meet the training needs of America's allies.

While the FMS cases are a huge success for the coastal nation, the real test will be in the coming months, according to William Sautter, a country program manager in the AFRICOM Regional Operations Directorate.

Sautter said newly trained TAF members are looking forward to integrating their reconnaissance capabilities (Kiowa) with the assault capabilities of UH-60M Black Hawks expected to arrive in country this summer. Meshing the new skills and equipment with their ground forces will take work, but it's a challenge Sautter said the Tunisians are ready to take on.

"The Tunisian Air Force plan is to use the Kiowas as part of its main defense against violent extremist organizations conducting terrorist attacks on military and



File photo by Sgt. 1st Class Eric Pahon

**Two Task Force Saber, 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade OH-58D Kiowa Warriors fly toward a training range near Jalalabad, Afghanistan. In 2016 Tunisian Air Force members conducted training on the Kiowa in Roswell, N.M., as part of a multimillion foreign military case managed by the Security Assistance Command.**

civilian targets in Tunisia from remote domestic bases and Libya," Sautter said.

He said by March approximately 75 Tunisian Air Force members will graduate the Kiowa training, making them one step closer to strengthening their nation's defense. But it is not only Tunisia's national defense that is receiving a boost.

"This is much more than a delivery of aircraft to a partner nation. It is not just about hardware," Krahlung said. "The aircraft and training provides a long term, and hopefully enduring relationship with an important international partner that have been a valued partner since our first trade agreement when our nation was young."

And that is the root of the USASAC mission.

"USASAC activities play a critical role in U.S. foreign policy by ensuring the safety of not only our men and women in uniform, but also our interoperability with our military partners as they ensure the security of their own sovereign nations around the world," Krahlung said. "While graduations like these are an important milestone, it is just the beginning of a new phase of the continued challenge to ensure stability in Tunisia and here at home in our fight against terrorism."

## In this section...

<b>WARRANT OFFICERS SHARE READINESS INFORMATION</b>	<b>PAGE 6</b>
<b>TEST CENTER WORKERS DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS</b>	<b>PAGE 7</b>
<b>PROTOTYPE BLACK HAWK SOARS</b>	<b>PAGE 8</b>
<b>THOUSANDS OF SOLDIERS MARCH ON INAUGURATION DAY</b>	<b>PAGE 9</b>
<b>PROTOTYPE FACILITY DISPLAYS FOCUS ON DIVERSITY</b>	<b>PAGE 10</b>
<b>ENGINEER TAKES ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>PAGE 11</b>
<b>REAGAN TEST SITE UPDATES CONTRACTOR COMMUNITY</b>	<b>PAGE 12</b>
<b>IRAQ ANNOUNCES LIBERATION OF EASTERN MOSUL</b>	<b>PAGE 13</b>
<b>RESEARCH ENGINEERS WRITE FLIGHT CONTROL TEXTBOOK</b>	<b>PAGE 14</b>
<b>DEFENSE DEPARTMENT REVAMPS CIVILIAN RIF PROCESS</b>	<b>PAGE 15</b>
<b>CONTRACT CLOSEOUTS GET ROLLING AT CENTER</b>	<b>PAGE 16</b>



Courtesy photo

**Col. William Krahlung, USASAC's director of EUCOM/AFRICOM regional operations, presents a diploma to a Tunisian Air Force member, standing next to retired Gen. William Looney, former commander of the Air Education and Training Command and president of Integration Innovation, along with OH-58D Squadron Commander Col. Hichem Sayadi of the Tunisian Air Force, Dec. 21 in Roswell, N.M.**