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Corps of Engineers looking forward to newest resident office

QALA-I-NAW, Afghanistan — When U.S. Army Afghanistan Engineer District-South's newest resident engineer office opens in October on the Spanish Army's Provincial Reconstruction Team base "Ruy González de Clavijo," near Qala-i-Naw in Badghis province, its eight-member team will be immediately welcome, according to South District leaders who visited the installation May 2.

"They were very welcoming to their compound and accepting our mission," said Julio Arocho, deputy district engineer for programs and project management. "They seem to be honored and thrilled to have us there."

The South District's senior civilian leader said based on his observations and interactions with the officers and Soldiers he met during a site assessment visit, the relationship between the future Qala-I-Naw Resident Engineer Office staff and their Spanish Army hosts will be positive and productive.

The South District is standing up a new resident office in Badghis province's capital city, about 100 miles northeast of Herat, to be closer several Afghan National Police border forts and police stations currently under construction, Arocho said.

The Spanish Army installation, home to its provincial reconstruction team and smaller contingents of U.S. and Italian Forces, is the northernmost allied forward operating base in the South District's area of operations, Arocho said.

"We have seven active projects in Badghis province," said Maj. Victor Millán, Herat Area Office officer in charge. "One of the projects, Afghan National Army brigade in Chashma-e-Dozdakhis, is the biggest and probably will be one of the most challenging projects in our area due to the topography and location of the project site."



Air Force Col. Benjamin Wham, South District commander (rear), looks over Spanish Army Provincial Reconstruction Team base "Ruy González de Clavijo" with Spanish Army escort officers May 2. Wham led a site survey team to the future home of the district's Qala-I-Naw Resident Office to inspect the facilities and meet with Spanish Army counter parts. (USACE photo by Dave Melancon)

The construction projects in the area include facilities for ANA Garrisons and Afghan National uniformed and border police headquarters, he said.

Plans call for one office building and billeting facilities, Millán said. The containers will be moved to an area close to the Spanish living areas.

"Through a bilateral agreement, the Spanish FOB will provide US Forces with overall security, utilities and services," Millán said.

Capt. Sean Burnett, Herat Resident Office officer in charge, is completing a combined reconnaissance mission with USACE engineers, security experts and Spanish forces to assess the roads conditions for the project, he said. The result of this assessment will determine what type of security assets we need to support the operations of our future forces.

The FOB boasts "easy runway access, great security, a state-of-the-art gymnasium, a mess hall with international cuisine and breathtaking views of Qala-I-Naw city," Millán said.

South District Command Sgt. Maj. Lorne Quebodeaux said the installation has several tactical advantages.

"You have line-of-sight vision into the village from the FOB," he said. "It seems the Spaniards are on very good terms with the local population. Obviously the Spaniards are very comfortable with that area; they do not feel a threat from the local population."

"The Spanish went out their way to share information and their hospitality," Arocho said. "Sometimes you move into a place where they have to let you in just because that is part of their mission. I think these guys are really going to work well with us."

"We built a great rapport with the PRT leadership from the beginning. The commander, Col. Demetrio Munoz and his staff are very professional and cooperative in everything related to our resident office construction," Millán said. "We truly feel welcome to this FOB and I foresee the development of a great relationship with our NATO partners from Spain. All of the people that I sent there for combined missions or meetings with the Spaniards all agree that this is the best FOB in Afghanistan."



South District Command Sgt. Maj. Lorne Quebodeaux chats with a Spanish Army Soldier during a site visit to Spanish Army Provisional Reconstruction Team base Ruy González de Clavijo May 2. Quebodeaux was part of a site survey team looking over the site of the future Qala-I-Naw Resident Office. (USACE photo by Dave Melancon)

Base Ruy González de Clavijo gives the South District a location that provides up-close support for the district's construction projects and comfortable working and living area for the USACE team, said Air Force Col. Benjamin Wham, South District commander.

"We are looking forward to working with the Spanish Provincial Reconstruction Team," he said. "They have a great facility, a great leadership and Soldier team and good relationship with their Afghan neighbors."

There is also a one major unofficial benefit of the move, Arocho added.

"We'll be looking forward to Sundays when they serve paella in the mess hall," he said. "I think our people will be welcomed there too."

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USACE's Afghanistan Engineer District-South provides design and construction services throughout southern Afghanistan to support the International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan. The work is carried out in Regional Commands South, Southwest and West with the goal of achieving counterinsurgency effects and bolstering the Afghan Government's services to its people.

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