



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-PRT Helps Anbar Province After 'Long Night of Battle'-

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Camp Ramadi, Anbar - The best "good news" story coming out of Iraq's Anbar Province in 2008 is the dearth of "bad news" stories. In September 2006, some U.S. military intelligence analysts declared the province completely lost to Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and Sunni insurgents. However, the U.S. troop "surge" of 2007, as well as the rejection of AQI by Anbar's Sunni tribes, resulted in one of the more secure provinces in the country.



Anbar PRT Team Leader confers with Anbar Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rashid Al Alwani (left) and Awakening Council of Iraq tribal leader Sheikh Ahmad Abu Risha (center).

Now, the remarkable turnaround of Anbar from "lost cause" to a model for achieving long-term peace in Iraq is no longer breaking news. Stories contrasting the violence that convulsed the province between 2004 and early 2007 with the tranquility and rebuilding that presently characterizes the streets of Fallujah, Ramadi, and Haditha are almost commonplace in American media.

What is not being reported with as much frequency, and is far less visible, is the "capacity-building" work that the Anbar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), in coordination with Multi-National Force – West (MNF-W), is accomplishing in Anbar Province.

The Iraq PRT initiative is a civilian-military inter-agency effort that provides the primary connection between U.S. and coalition partners and provincial and local governments in all of Iraq's 18 provinces. "Capacity-building," or helping Iraqis help themselves, is one of the PRT's primary objectives.

According to Anbar PRT Team Leader Jim Soriano, "Anbar Province is leaving the long night of battle" and "there are rising expectations among the citizens for better services, and transparent, accountable government." The PRT is assisting the Anbaris overcome serious challenges as they learn self-governance, as well as develop their own economic, agricultural, financial, industrial, and commercial capabilities.

The capacity-building work of the Anbar PRT is proving essential to help Iraqis build a self-reliant, democratically governed, and peaceful nation, he added.

For many Iraqis, particularly officials who were subjected to years of Saddam Hussein's authoritarian rule, democratic governance is at best a new and idealistic concept. Nevertheless, the PRT is finding that Anbaris are eager to enlist its assistance in order to govern themselves.

The PRT works with the Anbar provincial government, while three smaller PRTs, which are "embedded" in regimental and brigade combat teams in the province, work with Anbaris at the municipal level. In July 2007, the Provincial Council (PC), chief governing body in the province, met in the provincial capital, Ramadi, for the first time since it was forced into exile in Baghdad by AQI. The PC is now meeting regularly in Ramadi twice a month. Furthermore, the Provincial Government Center, also in Ramadi, which in late-2006 and early-2007 was a fierce battle-ground, is now a bustling center of activity.

The PRT and MNF-W are facilitating the efforts of Anbar officials to meet with their constituents throughout Iraq's largest province. These "helicopter engagements" enable the PC Chairman, governor and others to connect directly with Anbaris from Fallujah in the east to Al Qaim in the west. In January of this year, the Governor traveled to Haditha in order to assess its burgeoning market economy and discuss infrastructure issues with city officials. He also visited Baghdadi, near the city of Hit, to open a reconstructed bridge that the Anbar government funded and inspect a new station for local Iraqi police.

On the economic front during 2007 the PRT offered counsel to the provincial government as it honed its budget execution and policy-making abilities. At the end of the year, for example, over 100 Anbari government, tribal, and civil leaders, participated in a PRT-supported conference to draft a strategy for future economic and social development. The Anbaris led their own plenary session and break-out groups covering governance, infrastructure, social services, agriculture, and economic development.

The result of their efforts was a guidepost document that will serve to shape the Anbar government's development efforts in 2008 as it continues expanding its delivery of essential services, governing with accountability, and building a robust economy.

In addition, last November, a team of Anbari officials participated in a State Department International Leader Visitors Program to the United States that the PRT sponsored. During that trip, Anbar Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rashid Al Alwani stated: "We . . . have seen first-hand how your democracy works in building and running your country, and . . . we are hoping to . . . apply those things in our country at this critical stage of the history of our nation." The PRT is advising the Anbaris as they apply what they learned in order to build long-term institutions, a healthy economy, and a forward-leaning society.

Other ways the PRT is helping Anbaris include:

- Assisting the Anbar government hire and train local advisors to work in the governor's and the Provincial Council's offices;
- Encouraging the Anbar government to bolster the efforts of women's groups to expand and to form small businesses;
- Supporting the Anbar College of Agriculture improve its extension service skills and the College of Veterinary Medicine renovate its facilities;

Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte recently told Congress, "PRTs are significant innovations in the way America can and must practice 21st century diplomacy. They are essential elements in achieving the goals [of reconstruction and capacity building] and "in ensuring the effectiveness of our foreign assistance to Iraq."

(Charles Hawley is a career diplomat who is serving on the Anbar PRT as a public diplomacy officer.)