

The New York Times

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

PRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT  
SPONSORED BY



September 13, 2009

## In Anbar Province, New Leadership, but Old Problems Persist

By SAM DAGHER

RAMADI, Iraq — It has been just more than seven months since a mainly tribal coalition came to power here in Anbar Province, but already its leaders are being accused by many of doing little for most citizens while seeking to enrich themselves through sweetheart business deals.

“The majority of them are after personal gains,” said Sheik Ghazi Sami al-Abed, a prominent local businessman recently. “Few are looking to rebuild the country.”

The [provincial elections](#) at the end of January were supposed to enfranchise people in this staunchly Sunni Arab province, once a stronghold for insurgents and militants linked to [Al Qaeda](#). After almost all the Anbar Sunni tribes boycotted the previous elections in 2005, this year’s voting was seen as a crucial way to bring them into government and perhaps ease tensions with the Shiite-dominated national government in Baghdad.

But extensive interviews with Anbar residents show that they see very little difference between their new government and the previous provincial council. That council, widely deemed illegitimate by many boycotting Sunnis, was accused so vehemently of corrupt and dysfunctional rule that it created fears of renewed intertribal warfare.

“They are thugs; they became politicians and now they have a lot of money,” said another Anbar businessman about the province’s current political leaders. He spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

The discontent in Anbar is coming at a critical time, as the United States has reduced its military presence here significantly and completely stopped spending money on new projects despite the province’s “enormous” infrastructure needs, said one senior American official. It was American cash and contracts that spurred most tribal leaders to renounce the insurgency and switch alliances to the American side almost three years ago, in what is now known as the [Sunni Awakening](#) — a model the United States is seeking to replicate with tribes in Afghanistan.

In the absence of American patronage, the worrisome question in Anbar, which makes up roughly one-third of Iraq’s territory, is whether public dissatisfaction coupled with political and economic rivalries between the tribal leaders in power and those on the outside could lead to large-scale violence.

“The structure of modern local governance including transparency and accountability are at variance with the traditional expectations of tribal leaders,” said James Soriano, who leads the [State Department’s Provincial Reconstruction Team](#) based on the outskirts of the provincial capital, Ramadi. “There is a

potential for a recipe for trouble if the pie is shrinking.”

Mr. Soriano spoke before his expected departure from Ramadi this month.

Anbar’s test also comes at a time when insurgents appear to be regrouping. Almost no day goes by without an attack or a bombing in Falluja, the province’s other main city. Several pro-American tribal leaders have been killed, and there have been a number of deadly bombings in Ramadi and other cities like Haditha and Qaim since July.

The picture is further complicated by a still uneasy relationship between this province, once among the most loyal to [Saddam Hussein](#), and the Shiite-led national government. Prime Minister [Nuri Kamal al-Maliki](#) appears to be pitting Sunni leaders against one another and finding tribal allies here who can bolster his standing as a national leader and help him in his bid for re-election in January.

In addition to money spent by the Americans in Anbar, the previous provincial government received hundreds of millions of dollars from the central government. Much of it is believed to have been lost to corruption and mismanagement.

Among the new political leaders coming under increased criticism is the province’s governor, Qasim Abed al-Fahadawi.

In the absence of new American development aid, dwindling as the United States has urged the government in Baghdad to fill the breach, Mr. Fahadawi has followed the Western model and turned to the private sector for investment and help. The governor was even recognized for his efforts as “global personality of the year” by the London-based magazine [Foreign Direct Investment](#).

But increasingly, the governor’s business affiliations are sounding alarm bells inside the province and elsewhere.

In a recent interview, Mr. Fahadawi made no secret of favoring a small clique of his tribal and business friends over others when it comes to future investments and contracts in the province. His relationship with Sheik Ahmed Abu Risha, who two years ago took the lead role in the American-backed tribal Awakening movement, has caused hard feelings here.

Sheik Ahmed has turned the Awakening movement into the dominant political party here, [leading the coalition](#) that runs the Anbar provincial council. Many of the two men’s opponents say that Mr. Fahadawi has basically served as Sheik Ahmed’s money manager, with the two combining forces to use their political power to control how business contracts in Anbar are distributed to outside companies.

Both men insist that their business dealings are completely aboveboard, and Mr. Fahadawi says he has helped bring in investment and jobs that have helped revitalize local industries.

One of the biggest deals the men have been involved in is an effort to bring in two companies from the United Arab Emirates, [Dana Gas](#) and [Crescent Petroleum](#), to develop Anbar’s giant Akkaz gas field. Sheik Ahmed has taken the lead in the negotiations, and the two companies have committed to helping create as many as 100,000 jobs in the province, Mr. Fahadawi said.

But the men are circumventing the Oil Ministry's plan to put the contract up for general bidding, instead appealing directly to Mr. Maliki for support. It was one of the main topics Sheik Ahmed and Mr. Maliki discussed when the prime minister visited Anbar this summer. Almost 175 sheep were slaughtered and the meat was distributed in Mr. Maliki's honor, according to local residents.

Opposing tribal leaders in Anbar see the deal as an attempt by Sheik Ahmed to use national backing to cement his position as the province's de facto chieftain and to freeze them out of lucrative business interests. They say he already has a dangerous amount of control over the local government and security forces.

"There will be a bloody struggle if he takes it all," warned Sheik Ghazi, the prominent local businessman.

Another Anbar business magnate, Sheik Tariq Khalaf al-Abdullah, who was instrumental in introducing American forces to the local power structure at the beginning of the Awakening movement, also is fighting the deal. Sheik Tariq is now based in Amman, Jordan, but he has been trying to galvanize the opposition within Anbar.

In an interview in his plush office in Amman, he wondered why the Americans were not taking a bigger role in monitoring Anbar's affairs. "I am surprised how they could withdraw before tying the loose ends," he said.

Sheik Tariq established a tribal council and businesses for Anbar's sheiks that benefited from American money and largesse when it was more abundant in return for allegiance.

Mr. Soriano, the leader of the State Department reconstruction team, said that the United States would continue to assist and advise Anbar's government but that it would be up to Iraqis to resolve their differences and determine their priorities.

"A nice way to exit Iraq would be for a tribal society to support the structure of local government and local security forces to prevent a setback," he said.

[Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

---