



## Anbar Province Sets the Example for All of Iraq

**Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed , Governor of Anbar Province**

**Jim Soriano, Provincial Reconstruction Team Leader**

Via Digital Videoconference

Anbar Province, Iraq

September 2, 2008

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**MODERATOR:** (Inaudible) is the PRT Anbar leader. And with that, I'll throw it out to Anbar Province and he can begin.

**MR. SORIANO:** Good afternoon from Camp Ramadi. My name is Jim Soriano. I'm the leader of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Anbar. I've been living in Ramadi for the past two years, and during that period of time there have been remarkable changes. The person you're going to be speaking with in a few minutes is Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed, who is sitting to my left.

Yesterday, at a ceremony in Ramadi, Governor Ma'amoun signed an MOU with the commanding general of the Marines in Anbar Province for the transfer of security responsibilities from the Coalition forces to the Iraqi Government. The changes that I have seen anyway in the last two years have been absolutely remarkable. The general outline of the story of Anbar is pretty much well known. But two years ago when I arrived, the insurgency had disrupted economic and social life. Today, the markets throughout the province are flourishing, schools are open, and life has returned to normal. Two years ago, barely a dozen or so recruits answered the call for – in a police recruitment campaign. Today, there are 24,000 police in the province. They're on the beat, and security and stability have been restored.

And two years ago, the local government, the structures of local government, were in disarray. City and town councils had disbanded and gone underground. Today, every city and town in the province has a mayor and a functioning council.

That's about all I'd want to say in terms of background. I think you pretty much know what has happened in Anbar Province, and there's somebody with me tonight who can give you a much better insight than I can.

Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed is the longest serving governor in Iraq. When I first met him two years ago, I made a call on him at his office in Ramadi and there was a gun battle, literally, outside on the street. He has, arguably, one of the most difficult jobs in the country. He is an incredibly brave man. He kept his office hours at his office at the government center in Ramadi during the height of the insurgency. I've known him to be a democratic reformer, a friend to the Coalition. He's certainly a hero of this chapter of Iraq's history.

He's recently visited the United States twice and saw the President three times. But that's enough from me. Let me turn this over to Governor Ma'amoun. We have an interpreter with us at our side. His name is Paul (inaudible). He's working with – on the PRT as one of my colleagues. And let me ask Governor Ma'amoun to make an opening statement, and he'll take your questions.

**GOVERNOR RASHEED:** (Via interpreter) I am Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed, governor of the Anbar. I took over that responsibility on June 1, 2005. The province at that time was divided and the terrorists were wandering around all over the province with the thoughts and the reality. Prior to my duties as governor, I was the deputy chairman of the Anbar Province Council and then chairman of the Council. After the assassination of the previous governor of Anbar, Mr. Raja Nawaf, by terrorist organizations, the Council nominated me to be the governor.

I took over the responsibility at times when there was chaos in the province, both administrative chaos and the terrorists were virtually controlling the entire province from Fallujah all the way to the (inaudible) region near the border. However, our determination and belief in democracy and freedom is what gave us the strength to continue to fight. And such were the situations at the time when we were in the Council. We challenged the event at the time and entered the election.

We entered into a new stage of rebuilding the province and working a province that is so vast and diverse, both in size and in tribes. After we started rebuilding relationship with the Coalition forces in the area and friendship with them, we were getting some good result that made us very happy. We were able with these efforts of cooperation with the Coalition forces to educate the people of the Anbar and show them how they can fight the insurgency. And we never missed an opportunity to encourage the tribes inside Iraq and out – and those who have left and were outside Iraq to return and fight.

At the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006, only very few of the tribes responded to that. And the action of the terrorists at the time were the reason for changing their minds. And after the terrorists start killing the heads of the tribe, it proved to the tribes what the terrorists were. Such sheikh as Sheikh (inaudible) and Sheikh (inaudible) were assassinated by the terrorists. And as I mentioned, these actions pushed the tribes to change their mind. After the tribes realized that the al-Qaida terrorists were nothing but killers and criminals, they started changing their mind.

After that, the tribes started responding to our pleas for them to return and help us fight, and in the lead was Sheikh (inaudible) was of this entire region. And other (inaudible) insisted that they were going to stand up and fight the insurgency. We entered a new stage of resisting the al-Qaida. Not only was it a defensive act, as we were in the past, but we were on the offensive. We went on the offensive against al-Qaida all over the province, from Ramadi all the way to Al Qaim. We can consider the year 2006 as the turning point where we changed from defensive actions into going on the offense against the al-Qaida.

Many of the tribes all over the provinces and the different cities stood up and fought the terrorists. Thanks be to God that the sons of the tribes decided to join in with the police force to fight the insurgents and the criminals. This is how we were able to fight al-Qaida and they failed in different aspects. They failed religious-wise because we were able to prove that their actions has nothing to do with Islam's and religion. They also failed socially because they were attacking schools, health centers and other social services in the – in the Anbar. Beside the two failures we mentioned, they failed economically because they terrorized the economic life and the trade life and the normal life of the people of the Anbar. They failed politically because the people of the Anbar realized that these – their agenda was foreign agenda and it was a stranger to the people of the Anbar.

These organizations failed because they tried to present themselves as a religious organization connected with the Sunni faith. They have nothing to do with the Sunni faith. All they are are gangs of criminals and atoners. All they believe in is the destruction of life. We can consider this the first round that we won when we were able to change the mentality of the people when they realized that what the al-Qaida was, and those same people who had embraced al-Qaida before for the same reasons.

At the same time, we were building our armed forces, security forces, by having Anbaris volunteer for the army and the police force. We were working on two fronts (inaudible). One is to throw the al-Qaida out of Anbar, and the other one is to build the security forces in the area. We started reconstruction, although under difficult circumstances, after the central government starting allocating the funds at the end of 2006 to rebuild the province, so we started working on the infrastructures and

health services and other services.

So as the citizens of the Anbar saw the progress of the three fronts we were working on – that is, to fight al-Qaida, to build the armed forces, and the reconstruction – they started believing that the belief in democracy and freedom is the right path for us, just like we would believe (inaudible).

We had great support from the American forces in the area in all three aspects. By 2007, we were able to contain the terrorists and contain al-Qaida in the Anbar. We started the great project in constructions, also in volunteers – for people volunteering to join with us, and we started training people in the Anbar area instead of them being trained outside, such as Jordan. All of these efforts encouraged the people of the Anbar and helping get their life back and among them was the allocation of 6,000 jobs by the Prime Minister for the people of the Anbar. This is how the police forces in the area expanded and became the supporting force for other security forces in the area.

The people of the Anbar started volunteering more and more in that time, as they were in the past refusing to do so. As they started (inaudible) started life again, they started volunteering and insisting that they're going to fight the insurgency. This is how things started in 2007, continued into 2008, and with the support of the central government we expanded our forces. The police force is now up to 26,000 people. Most of them are trained and willing to defend the people of the Anbar and the property of the Anbar.

Many of our people fell as martyrs alongside the martyrs – the American martyrs, we fell alongside them, to defend the Anbar. Thanks be to God, life has improved in the Anbar in all aspects – economics, education, health-wise – and all the offices of the Anbar are functioning. All of our districts and subdistricts now have a mayor and a council that is running the business of the districts and subdistricts. Our markets are now functioning normally and they're full of goods.

As we improved our hospitals and supplied them with the newest modern equipment, and many of our people are being treated here locally rather than leaving the country and being treated somewhere else.

Our economy is improving and due to many of the efforts that we did here such as the conventions we held and the seminars we held in scientific, religious, and economic aspects.

This all culminated yesterday when the security file for the Anbar was transferred to the Anbaris. I cannot express the warm feeling of the joy that this is the happiest day in Anbar. It's like a wedding, where the people of the Anbar are now capable of ruling themselves with the support of the police and security forces.

This was always through the good efforts of the people of the Anbar who stood up and challenged terrorism over there out of love for life and love for their future and love for their children.

**MODERATOR:** Can I –

**GOVERNOR RASHEED:** (Via interpreter) We were very happy with this day, and the great achievement we achieved due to all the cooperation and coordination of the tribes, the high authority and governments. They were all present yesterday, and grateful to the government – to the support of the central government.

We have -- we started building all the government organizations. Our judicial department started in 2007, our legislative was in 2005. And, in spite of all the obstacles they went through, they were able to function. Our security office -- operations with the police forces, now the people of the Anbar, they see prosperity. And we also made strides in education through the University of the Anbar.

And this shall continue in the province, and with the help of God, for the benefit of the people.

**MODERATOR:** Could I just jump in, just for a second, Anbar? We only have about five minutes for questions and answers before people have to move on to another briefing. So can we move on to a couple of questions from the reporters?

Any questions?

**GOVERNOR RASHEED:** (Via interpreter) Yes.

**MODERATOR:** Please push the button to speak.

**QUESTION:** Hi. I am Susan Cornwell with Reuters. I wondered, based on your own experience, how soon do you think U.S. troops could leave all of Iraq? How soon do you think they should leave?

**TRANSLATOR:** I didn't hear that. Are you asking how soon they should leave?

**MODERATOR:** Yes. All troops out of Iraq was the question.

**GOVERNOR RASHEED:** (Via interpreter) This question is a little bit out of my domain, because I am not expert (inaudible). But, based on my experience, as I see our security forces continuing to be rebuilt, and hopefully within two or three years they will be fully equipped to take over the security situation.

This is not just for the Anbar, but we want our forces to be fully equipped and ready to do -- to the fight against the terrorists, not only in the Anbar, but be prepared to go in other places, such as Mosul, as they did. Our police forces went there and helped in the operation there, and also our military forces that went to other areas and fought to help fight against terrorism. This is the way we want our forces to be ready. We want these forces to be ready in the service of all of Iraq, and not just the Anbar province.

**MODERATOR:** Anyone else? Go ahead, Samir.

**QUESTION:** Yes, Samir Nader with Radio Sawa. Now the police and army elements in Anbar, are they part of the national army, or there is problems between the prime minister and the elements of the Sons of the Awakening?

**TRANSLATOR:** Could you repeat that, please? It didn't come very clear.

**QUESTION:** Yes. Are the police, the members of the police and the army within the province, are they part of the national army and police, or there is difference with the prime minister about the Sons of the Awakening?

**GOVERNOR RASHEED:** (Via interpreter) There is no problem between us, between the police forces and the prime minister. They enjoy the full support of the prime minister. He has recently agreed to raise the number to 29,000, and also the armed forces.

When I spoke of the readiness of the forces, all I wanted to say is that they would be ready in the service, not only inside the province, but also be available to serve

anywhere else in Iraq.

And, as we met repeatedly with President Bush, he always reminded us that he wanted to see the Anbar as the best example for not only for the Anbar, but for all of Iraq. And this is what we're striving -- and this is what we achieved.

**MODERATOR:** Samir, the last question.

**QUESTION:** So you see this development yesterday as an example about the good intentions of the United States toward the future of Iraq?

**TRANSLATOR:** What developments?

**QUESTION:** Transferring the responsibilities of security to the Iraqis in Anbar.

**TRANSLATOR:** Thank you.

**GOVERNOR RASHEED:** (Via interpreter)The memorandum of understanding is, as it's stated, allows the police to take charge of the cities of the Anbar, and the army to be in charge of the outside outlying areas.

Any time that the army enters a city in (inaudible) of a civil unrest, (inaudible) the province has been -- life in the province has been very normal, and we've had no problems. An indication of that is the fact that we were able to send some of the --our security forces from the Anbar to participate in operations outside of the Anbar.

Three days ago, before we took over the security files from the Americans, (inaudible) had asked us to send an entire battalion from Anbar to participate in operations in the Mosul, and we complied with that. This is an indication of our high trust in the ability of the security forces over here, and our belief that the security situation is very stable in the Anbar.

This order came through the interior minister, but it was ordered from the prime minister of Iraq. The interior minister called me late at night before he issued the order, to ask for the battalion to travel to Mosul, to inquire about the security situation in the Anbar, and I reassured him that the situation was under control and very stable, and we would be able to send that battalion, and we, indeed, have done that.

I need to amend that. The call came in actually right after we authorized the transfer of the battalion from here. But, nevertheless, the interior minister still called me to inquire about the security situation, and we are very confident that it is under control here in the Anbar. We were able to send a battalion to participate in operations somewhere else.

This is an undisputed proof that the Anbar enjoys a high level of security. Yesterday there was not a single incident from the enemies during the celebration. The authority in Iraq is all vested through the effort of our sons, our police, our army, and it's in our hands. And we will strive to be a prize for Iraq in this aspect.

**MODERATOR:** And with that we will have to end the briefing. We are out of time. I thank you, and good night.

**2008/684**

Released on September 3, 2008

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