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Shortages Of Power, Parts, Jobs Drain Iraqis' Patience

Beleaguered province reflects scope of nation's woes

By Stephen J. Hedges, Tribune correspondent

In a dimly lighted back building of the glass factory, engineer Adel Achmed rests a hand on the shoulder of a sleeping giant of a machine. He points to a tin plate about the size of a wine label, affixed to the machine's side. "Maul Bros. 5/5/75," the plate reads. "Serial No. 6-214."

"It is American," Achmed explains. "We could make it run, but we do not have the parts."

The phrase could be an anthem for Al Anbar province, where this glass factory is located, if not for all of Iraq.

Under the U.S.-led occupation, factories, farms, businesses and hospitals have reopened or resumed working. But many cannot function efficiently because, in the broadest sense, they do not have the parts. Even in generally stable areas of Iraq, such as the Kurdish regions in the north and the mainly Shiite areas in the far south, the institutions of this struggling society work hard just to maintain the status quo.

Blame nearly 25 years of war, sanctions and an oppressive dictatorship.

"There's not a single, fully functioning, fully viable factory in this province," said Keith Mines, the U.S. State Department representative assigned to modernize Al Anbar. "It's 10 years of sanctions; it's the whole isolation."

Al Anbar, stretching west from Baghdad to Syria, is the size of Wyoming and is Iraq's largest province. Nourished by the Euphrates River, the province is a mix of lush green date groves and austere, rolling desert. In recent months, it also has been home to Iraq's worst problems.

Roads conceal bombs aimed at Army convoys. Robberies, shootings and ambushes are commonplace. Saboteurs attack oil pipelines. Bad experiences with the U.S. military have made cities such as Fallujah and Khaldiya anti-American hotbeds. It is open season on the new Iraqi police; three chiefs have been assassinated.

Unemployment in the province, population 1.2 million, is 60 percent. The six large factories, including the glassworks, employed about 10,000 people, but they closed during the war. Restarts have been halting.

Washington has given the job of fixing things to the U.S. military and, more recently, to Mines, the civilian in charge. The idea is to prop up Al Anbar on three pillars: security, economy, democracy.

\$6 million spent

There has been undeniable progress. A provincial council has been formed by the U.S. military to determine Al Anbar's needs. Schools have been upgraded. Markets and small shops are busy. A contractor from Raleigh, N.C., is modernizing 41 health centers, and the Army is fixing others. More than \$6 million has been spent here, according to U.S. figures, and the province has benefited from Iraqi efforts to repair electrical, sewer and water service.

But military officers are the first to admit that they are experts in fighting wars, not building nations. Mines said he is just getting started.

The Army's presence, the cycle of violence and the lack of private investment from U.S., European and Arab sources have left residents with increasingly negative impressions. Even many Iraqis repulsed by the regime of former leader Saddam Hussein are drawn into the camp of the America haters.

In that regard, the unfolding story of Al Anbar province illustrates how the U.S. was equipped to deal with Hussein and his army, but not always with the country's people and problems. The American-led coalition must fix things, a task that is taking a great amount of time, fueling resentment and giving life to a dangerous if often clumsy resistance.

Until last week, the seemingly serene farming village of Al Husay, population 400, didn't merit a place on Iraqi road maps. Then an Army Chinook helicopter came crashing down into one of Al Husay's wheat fields, killing 16 soldiers. None of the locals rushed to help. Al Husay has become an anti-American village.

When major fighting was declared over May 1, the people of Al Husay say, they only wanted one thing: electricity. Not for their homes, but for the vital pumps that carry water into their fields.

"The Americans came, and they fixed the schoolhouse and they promised to bring the electricity," said Abdul al-Sumid, 38, a farmer. "All of them lied."

American troops have come several times to Al Husay to conduct searches. A month ago, troops detained Al Husay's local cleric and its tribal sheik; neither have been heard from since. There is still no electricity.

"We hate the American troops," said Jessem Mohammed, 22, a laborer.

In Al Anbar's Al Qaim region, on the Iraqi-Syrian border, electricity is also an issue. The giant fertilizer plant there employs 3,200 people, and restoring electricity has become the job of Lt. Col. Greg Reilly, commander of the Tiger squadron of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment.

Reilly said he knew nothing about making a phosphate factory run. But, he said, "No one else was doing it." More jobs, Reilly says, will mean less anti-American violence.

The factory needs a lot of power, 32 megawatts, to operate. That power comes from Hadithah on the Euphrates River, but sabotage causes interruptions. So emergency generators are essential. The plant has two of them, both broken.

Manufacturer balks

Reilly and the plant director asked Siemens AG, the German manufacturer of the generators, to visit. Siemens declined because the place is too insecure, Reilly said. "I told them that 'I will secure you, I will

pay for you to come."

The company still refused, so plant employees sent a list of needed parts. Siemens said they would cost \$4 million.

"Then we found out we can buy two new generators for not even half that amount," Reilly said. So he asked the Coalition Provisional Authority for the money, and the new generators are on the way.

In Al Qaim, as in much of Iraq, the U.S. postwar plan relies on the military to provide economic assistance, organize local governments and provide security.

"Our forerunner for post-conflict resolution was the Balkans," Reilly said. "In the Balkans there was an aggressor and a population, and we stood in between. And the people were not trying to kill Americans."

The military has already poured \$1.5 million into Al Qaim, but it has become more violent. Al Qaim's mayor says the Americans have made things worse.

"This is not a problem of Al Qaim but of the whole country," said Raja Nawaf Fahan Al-Sharji. "The presence of the coalition forces is the problem. People here reject their presence in the city, and they do not want them to stay in the city. If they go out, we could take control of the security and maintain it."

Ramadi's glass plant has plenty of electricity, but its machines are clanking relics. Production is running at about a fifth of capacity. Only a Swedish bottle furnace and a Soviet-era plate glass oven are operating. The plate glass is contaminated with black specks, and each piece breaks as clumsy metal arms drop it onto a conveyer. American and Japanese furnaces stand cold.

What's needed is capital. Factory director Fuoad Hamad Anyzi said the plant's 2,300 employees are subsidized by Iraq's Ministry of Industry, which is backed by the U.S. But he knows that can't last.

"What we need are new furnaces and new production lines," he said.

Hope for investment

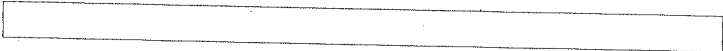
Mines said he hasn't made contact with likely investors or banks, but a provincial business conference planned for December might help. In the meantime, military civil affairs teams are assessing Al Anbar's six factories: cement, brick and tile plants in Fallujah, the phosphate and cement works in Al Qaim, and the glass factory.

"In Al Anbar, the military is doing more than is normal just because of the security situation," Mines said. "Other people won't relocate here. That's just a reality."

Sheik Amir, head of Al Anbar Provincial Governing Council, said the U.S. must turn control over to Iraqis soon. Promised elections seem too far off, he said, and the U.S. is not clear about the timetable. The economy is stumbling, and security is hardly improving. Many on the council think the Americans are easy targets and that Iraqis would have a better chance of ending the violence.

The sheiks on the council have been patient, Amir said, but the public's growing concern is that the Army is staying and that jobs are not returning and that the atmosphere is more tense.

"I think the Americans want to help Iraq and Al Anbar," Amir said. "But seven months, that is a long time



to be helping."