

Iraq's Maliki courts rival factions

by UPI

BAGHDAD -- Political observers say Iraq's prime minister has been building bridges with provincial leaders with an eye toward a stronger national government.

The Washington Post reported Friday that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite, has recently joined forces with an outspoken leader of Iraq's Sunni Muslims, and has also been making overtures to former Baath Party members and anti-American cleric Moqtada Sadr.

The developments have been blurring the strict sectarian battle lines that marked Iraqi politics immediately after the U.S.-led invasion, the Post said.

"There is a new political map," said Anwar al-Luheibi, a Sunni adviser to Maliki. "I anticipate this map will be far better than the one we had before."

The maneuverings have been complex and somewhat cautious, the Post said, but Maliki's goal is to forge the right alliances across Iraq to support a strong national government.

Maliki's overtures have been getting a fairly warm response, however. Analysts say the leaders of the Sunnis, including Saleh al-Mutlak, and other have questions about what Baghdad can do for their constituents and how much of a voice they will actually have in running Iraq.

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