

Interview with Al Arabia

On 29 December 2003, I had an interview with Al Arabia New Channel at MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Centre) in Dubai, UAE. My first contact was Mr. Ihab Osman of Public Relations of MBC. He kindly introduced me Mr. Sabah Nahi Fajer, Iraqi senior reporter, who just came back from Iraq a few days ago. They kindly accepted my interview, as it was good timing (Japan's Self Defence Force has just been dispatched to Iraq) and it was their first time to be interviewed by a Japanese



woman. The interview was concerned with Iraqi situation and Japan's contribution to the reconstruction of Iraq. The interview lasted for more than one hour and was conducted both in English and Arabic.

(Q) What is the current situation of Iraq?

(A) Iraq has become a dangerous and chaotic state. The US war destroyed the government, military and police in Iraq. Iraqi people are unhappy and feel uneasy about the situation. The US promised to bring freedom and liberty to our country, but security situation in Iraq has not yet recovered and reconstruction has not been progressing. The promise is on the verge of collapse.

Even now, electricity works only 2 hours a day and sewage problems are seen in 16 cities. More than 10,000 Iraqis are unemployed. This high number of unemployment never occurred during the Hussein regime. Our education level has also dropped. How many more days do the Iraqis have to put up with this situation? The US destroyed the Hussein regime to save Iraqi people, but has not contributed enough to reconstruct the country.

Iraq became a miserable state because foreign countries continue to seek their national interest, mainly oil. The Iraqis are originally intelligent people and led a good life. Education level was high. Iraq is a country proud of Mesopotamian civilization which lasted for 10,000 years. This is a paradoxical situation. In the beginning of the 20th century, the British invaded Iraq, saying that they would bring freedom and liberty to Iraq. The US is saying the same now. It is doubtful whether or not the US will make Iraq free.

The US invaded Iraq to find and destroy weapons of mass destruction, but no evidence has been found. Saddam Hussein had long been declared that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction. The US justified its war because they wanted to destroy the Hussein regime, a dictatorship, for their own benefit. In the Arab world, Saddam is not the only one dictator. There are many dictators in Arab, as everyone knows.

Iraq has another problem. Iraq needs to unify a country under one government, but the Kurds, the Shiite, and the Sunni claim their own sovereignty and own government; i.e. a federal system and a government representing their own people. It is uncertain whether or not Iraq will become one nation or will be divided into several states.

(Q) Do you think the Shiite and Kurdish will cooperate in order to keep Iraq as one country?

(A) I do not believe so. But the Shiite and Kurdish have one thing in common. They were severely abused by Saddam Hussein. They may cooperate in the future. However, if the security situation in Iraq deteriorates, the country may be divided. Some neighbouring countries appear to be interested in Iraq. Iran has a long boarder with Iraq. As you know, Iran and Iraq had war in the past. Some foreign newspaper has recently said that Israel is considering establishing its military base in the northern part of Iraq where the Kurds reside. So, it is difficult to predict what will happen.



In any case, Iraq situation would not improve unless the US military withdraws from Iraq. The Iraqis are against military occupation. They hate to be under military occupation. They will also fight against occupation. The Iraqis feel fear and become chaotic by the presence of the US military around them. However, it is also true that if the US military withdraws from Iraq, security will further deteriorate and reconstruction will further be delayed.

(Note: I learned later that in the Koran Muslims are not allowed to harm others, but permitted to engage in Jihad (holy war) as part of self defence if an opponent including occupation forces attacks them).

(Q) Do the Iraqis want the US military to leave Iraq or stay in Iraq?

(A) The Iraqis want the US to end occupation and withdraw from Iraq. But at the same time, they are worried that Iraqi situation might become worse after the US withdrawal. Iraq became a failed state as the result of US war on Iraq. Iraq is not functioning as state, because the government, military and police all perished after the war. Iraq went back to the time when it was founded some 85 years ago. It will be a problem if the US leaves, although the Iraqis want to expel the US. The United Nations were in Iraq, but they left. The US created all the problems.

(Q) How do the Iraqis want to rebuild the nation?

(A) Iraq does not need military occupation, but require reconstruction assistance from the international community such as the UN. Whether or not Iraq is divided depends on how much international assistance Iraq can get. Iraq no longer has a centrifugal force to unify the nation, as the government, military and police were all destroyed. Iraq needs external power to unify the nation, and hopes the international community led by the UN to execute the power.

(Q) What do you think about Japan's dispatch of the Self Defence Forces to Iraq?

(A) Iraqi situation is not good and resistance forces who do not wish to see stable Iraq are still holding power. So, it is not wise to dispatch Japanese military to Iraq now. In Iraq, fighting is going on every day and many US, British and Italian military personnel have been killed. Two Japanese diplomats were also killed. They were my friends. They often visited my office in Iraq to talk about Iraqi situation. Their death was very tragic. Japan knows what a war is like, and also understand what overseas military dispatch means.



(Note: Although I explained that Japan's Self Defence Force' is not military, it is generally interpreted as 'military' in the Arab world. Therefore, the expression 'military' is being used in this text).

As some Arab countries are doing, Japan should dispatch humanitarian groups, NGOs and civilian engineers and doctors. Iraqi people understand that they came to Iraq to rebuild the nation, not to occupy the nation. Iraqi people will welcome them with flowers.

I am asked a question. If the US waged a war on Japan and occupied Japan after the war, and the Iraqi government declared to dispatch its military to Japan to rebuild the nation, what would Japanese people react? Japanese people want civilians to come to Japan, not military personnel, don't they?

Iraq needs the following people to reconstruct the country:

Electric engineer: to repair power so that the Iraqis can enjoy electricity more than two hours a day.

Road experts: to repair roads destroyed by bombs with road machine

Experts: to remove weapons and missiles from streets

Farmers: to replant trees (especially plum trees) and recover farm land

Water specialist: to make clean water and construct a dam

Medical doctors: many doctors and nurses. A large quantity of medical supplies is also required.

When Japanese civilians come to Iraq for reconstruction, I recommend they come to one city, concentrate their reconstruction efforts on one city, rebuild the city with Japan's high technology, and make it as a successful model case. The Iraqis and other Arab people will see such Japan's efforts and will truly understand Japan's efforts towards international peace. This success case should then be expanded to other cities and then to the entire Iraq. Iraqi people will not attack Japanese civilians, as the Iraqis know that they are in Iraq to rebuild the nation. You may have seen the Iraqi people on the television always fighting and killing, but the Iraqis are loving people and care for others. Japanese people can do this because of goodwill between Japanese and Iraqi people. It is however not acceptable to have both soldiers and civilians at the same time. Even in the UAE, people do not believe that Japanese soldiers alone can work effectively in Iraq.

My comment

Throughout the interview, I felt that Iraqi people are hoping Japan to help rebuild the nation using Japan's high technology to the maximum extent. Japan's contribution by the Self Defence Force in Samawa is highly evaluated, however Iraqi people still hope Japan to use more advanced technology to make their lives better; provide more electricity and clean water, and rebuild hospitals and schools. It is important to send a clear message to the Iraqis and to the world that Japan's reconstruction assistance is for Iraqi people, not for the US. I strongly hope that Japan will proactively engage in reconstruction assistance using Japan's technological strength.

