

Interview with Daily Yomiuri. 19 February 2004.

Annan Says Iraq Elections Essential, But June Is too Soon

The Yomiuri Shimbun: Do you think that the United Nations needs another resolution to clarify its role in the political process in Iraq and how helpful would that?

Kofi Annan: It may be necessary for the Security Council to pass a resolution, but we will need to wait and see how things evolve. Any resolution that the Security Council passes and the timing of the resolution must be such that it will be helpful and will have a positive impact on developments on the ground.

The Yomiuri Shimbun: Do you think it is indispensable to have a new resolution in order to settle the political process in Iraq before the deadline of June 30?

Kofi Annan: We have several resolutions on the books which have given us a mandate for our activities. But if as I said, it is determined that another resolution will be helpful for the process and help clarify issues and get everybody on board, I'm sure the council will not hesitate to act.

The Yomiuri Shimbun: Do you think direct elections or caucuses, as (U.S. administrator Paul) Bremer wants, are possible or practical?

Kofi Annan: There seems to be a consensus emerging that elections are essential and everyone would want elections. But at the same time, there seems to be general acceptance of the fact that it is not going to be possible to arrange an election between now and the end of June. Elections would have to be properly organized, the conditions have to be right in terms of security, political, and the other legal instruments for the elections to yield the result that one expects. So I think the conclusion then will have to be that elections before the end of June may not be possible, but there will have to be better organized elections later on.

The Yomiuri Shimbun: Now the United States is facing more and more difficulties in Iraq and is asking you for help. What do you make of the appeal?

Kofi Annan: The U.N. has had lots of experience in post-conflict peace-building and has also had lots of experience in electoral systems and offering electoral advice to governments and working with them on constitutions. So it is not surprising that the U.S. and the Iraqi Governing Council will turn to us for assistance. And we are going to do whatever we can to help the process. We would work with them to ensure that the Iraqis take charge of their own political and economic destiny. But this presupposes that the security situation will improve considerably. Once the interim or caretaker government has been established, and that government wishes us to help, we will work with them in the areas that I have indicated, constitutional, electoral, and reconstruction and so forth. But a secure environment has to be created for us to be able to carry on that.

The Yomiuri Shimbun: What do you think is the biggest threat to international peace and security?

Kofi Annan: When I set up the eminent persons panel to look at threats and challenges and changes required, I was hoping that they would not only focus on weapons and mass destruction and terrorism, but they would also look at poverty, disease, like HIV/AIDS, and environmental degradation. I think the other issue they will have to deal with is when is intervention legitimate. Should preventive war be part of the arsenal? Under whose authority? Which rules? I hope that the panel will give us competent and wise advice as to how we deal with these threats. I'm looking forward to their recommendations towards the end of the year.

The Yomiuri Shimbun: How long do you think it will be before we see significant changes to the current form of the Security Council?

Kofi Annan: My hope is that the Security Council will be reformed before I leave office in three years time.

The Yomiuri Shimbun: The Japanese are frustrated with the United Nations because of such things as the "ex-enemy state clause," despite the fact that Japan is the second largest contributor to the United Nations and is sending Self-Defense Force units to Iraq. What is your response to that?

Kofi Annan: I can understand the frustration the Japanese government and population has over the "enemy Clause," which is today anachronistic when you look at the role Japan plays in the world. I cannot tell you when the members would want to remove that clause, but, of course, I think if the time came for it to be removed, I don't think there will be much opposition to it.