

Japan's Reconstruction Aid Leaves the Citizens of Samawa Desperate

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by Maekawa Mitsuo

Eight months have passed since the Japanese Self-Defense Forces have been deployed in Samawa. Contrary to the Japanese government's intentions, discontent with the performance of the Self-Defense Forces among the citizens of Samawa has rapidly increased. This is a report of the local situation.

"There is no electricity and no water supply. Where is Japanese support?" Walking around on the market place in the center of the city of Samawa, I constantly heard such complaints. Because of security concerns, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Self-Defense Force personnel rarely show their faces to the citizens. While covering events for this article, there were only two Japanese journalists stationed in Samawa. Since the beginning of July, the mood that had initially welcomed Japan has begun to change swiftly.

The Betrayed Citizens of Samawa

In Samawa city, the temperature during the day time is 45 degrees C. The temperature inside of rooms is 38C, higher than body temperature. Citizens live under conditions in which "water that comes out of the faucet is hot." If there weren't air conditioners, one could not even sleep at night. Electricity was already in short supply in Samawa before the war requiring a planned electricity outage for two hours at night. Since the war, citizens have begun to compete with others in buying imported electrical appliances which have become cheap. However, the power authority has postponed solution of the problem of electricity insufficiency. Currently, less than a third of the necessary electricity is provided. Hence, electric outages often occur daily. That makes the delivery of water from filtration plants difficult and water outages repeatedly occur.

This summer, the number of patients due to heat prostration increased to more than 24,000 in Musanna prefecture. 80 per cents of them are children. The citizens don't hide their frustration. One store owner complains, "The electricity does not last even for one hour. The water condition is also bad. We don't need much help. Electricity and water would be sufficient." In May, 150 carp

streamers were sent from Japan as a symbol of friendship. That was the only Japanese help the citizens here could see. The store owner says, "In fact, they only gave us the carp streamers. The Self-Defense Forces emphasize that they are our 'friends,' but there is no evidence of that." This reality is at the base of the increasing disappointment in the Self-Defense Forces among the citizens of Samawa.

At the end of June, Samawa city council elections were held ahead of the transfer of political power. This new political framework was created under U.S. guidance. In this election, the first democratic one after the war, 39,000 citizens voted. In less than a month, the 13 elected council members put together a 24-article plan for the redevelopment of Musanna prefecture. This is a self-financed reconstruction plan to consolidate the social infrastructure that had been neglected since the Persian Gulf War. However, they lacked essential funds. Former Samawa city council head Hamed Abid Egal petitioned the Japanese embassy in Anman for financial aid, but the Japanese side's response was indifferent. If the great cause of the Iraq War was the construction of a democratic nation state, the handling of the embassy and the Self-Defense Forces is incoherent. They emphasize the relationship with the tribes and the U.S. administration over that with the Samawa city council and the reconstruction plan created by the city council based on public opinion has been shelved.

Relations with the city council have become stone cold. The support from Japan the citizens hope for is infrastructure such as electricity, water, and the building of houses. The former chairman of the city council says, "We are not satisfied with the aid so far. We want the priorities and budget to be decided by the Iraqi people. We are the people who know which projects are most important." About two and a half months later he resigned. In Samawa where the majority of government officials are original Baath party members, Samawa's citizens find no difference from the Hussein regime.

One Cannot Applaud With One Hand

The Ground Self-Defense Force has implemented more than 20 humanitarian assistance projects across Musanna prefecture. On August 1, the reconstruction of roads within the city began. The new chairman Saud Ajiz Jabbaru on an inspection tour points out the discrepancy between the aid given and the hopes of the Iraqi people: "This is not work a big country needs to do. A developing country can do that by itself." To the former commander Imaura Yuki who was visiting the site he quoted the Arab aphorism, "One can't applaud with one hand," and appealed for strengthening cooperation with the Samawa city council.

On 6 August, the arcades of the city were decorated with Tanabata ornaments. Anmaru,

the representative of the Japanese Friendship Association and others worked through the night to install them. Anmaru has continued to appeal to the Japanese side since January of last year to have a place where the Japanese side and citizens can discuss the content of the aid program. If there is mutual understanding, only then will both the carp streamers and the Tanabata ornaments become meaningful. But at present there is nothing but one-sided imposition from the Japanese side.

In mid-July, flyers announcing terrorist actions were distributed in the center of the city. In August, the camp was bombarded three times and the situation worsened. Flyers listed the U.S. military and their supporters, the police and the political parties as the targets. The Self-Defense Forces was not on the list, but if they betray the

citizens' expectations, the likelihood of becoming embroiled in anti-U.S. terror actions will increase. Some of the jobless citizens of Samawa have told me that, "If we cannot get work, we will support acts of terror."

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