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Mahathir-Iraq (US)

TOO LATE FOR THE US TO INVOKE INTERNATIONAL LAW, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, March 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that it is too late for the United States to invoke international law following Iraqi television footage of four bodies said to be that of American soldiers and five prisoners who claim to be Americans.

He said: "They've total disrespect for the UN (United Nations), they've lost their right to bring up issues pertaining to UN matters...they've no more right.

"You can see the pictures where Iraqi soldiers who have surrendered with their hands on the head. So, what is wrong with the Iraqis showing American personnel who were captured by them...they've this much right.

"It's a little bit late for the US to invoke international law because America has shown that it has total disrespect for international law," he told reporters after tabling a motion to condemn the US-led invasion on Iraq at the Dewan Rakyat here.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's statement yesterday saying that the footage would be a violation of international rules of war as laid out under the Geneva Convention, a sentiment echoed by Gen Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The footage was relayed by the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera which said that the dead and wounded came from a battle near the southern Iraqi city of Nassiriya, where US Marines are fighting for control.

Dr Mahathir said that the US had lost its right to refer Iraq to any international law because they themselves had rejected it.

"It shows that the concept of an international body that regulates national behavior has now been rejected and so, other countries are entitled to disregard international law," he said.

The prime minister said that the UN should insist that the US and its allies stop its war campaign and withdraw from Iraq.

Commenting on public opinion around the world that UN secretary-general Kofi Annan should resign because he had failed to stop the war, Dr Mahathir said: "I think Kofi Annan should resign but then, it creates problem because you have to get consensus of very powerful people to appoint a secretary-general," he said.

Asked on Annan, who seems to be futuristic when he talked about rebuilding Iraq, Dr Mahathir said that he was not a free agent as he was much subjected to pressure.

"And, therefore whatever he says, I think do not reflect the opinion of the UN," he said.

On Bush's claim that it was a "clean war", Dr Mahathir said cynically that "it's a very clean and precise war with precise, accurate weapons, so much so that the Americans have shot down British planes. That's how accurate it is."

The prime minister also said that the US' claim of using smart bombs was nonsense, as the weapon could not be selective over which persons it wants to kill.

"Anyone who is exposed to the bomb will be killed. So it's a dirty war and you can see in the pictures that it's a dirty war," he said.

To a question whether Washington has contacted Kuala Lumpur to close the Iraqi embassy, Dr Mahathir said that he had not been contacted on that

matter.

"Washington has not contacted me but I've heard they've been closed in some countries. They don't have the right," he said.

Asked on the position taken by some Arab countries in supporting the US, Dr Mahathir believed that they were under pressure and being threatened.

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