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U.S. Occupation of Iraq? Issues Raised by Experiences in Japan and Germany

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Specialist in International Security Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Summary

This report provides background on the U.S. occupation experiences in Japan and Germany after World War II, and discusses four sets of factors from this period that could be relevant to a U.S. occupation of Iraq. These are: (1) acceptance of U.S. goals, (2) homogeneity of the occupied populations, (3) ability to manage their own affairs, and (4) international legitimacy and support. This report will not be updated

Discussion of a U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq has led to consideration of conditions in a post-Hussein Iraq, including the prospects that a possible occupation force could mold the Iraqi government into a democracy. The Bush Administration reportedly has looked at past U.S. occupations, particularly the democratization experiences in Japan and Germany after World War II, as precedents. Some analysts question whether conditions in Iraq today are sufficiently similar to the conditions in Japan and Germany to presume similar results, i.e., a functioning democracy, and whether the level of sustained U.S. commitment that was required there could be realistically expected. This report provides information on those occupations, and discusses their applicability to Iraq.

Major Features of U.S. Occupations in Japan and Germany

Planning, Duration, Force Size.¹ Planning for both occupations, which began as early as 1942, was marked by sharp disagreements within the Roosevelt administration that continued into the early phases of the occupations. The first of many documents discussing the post-war political configuration of **Japan**, in particular the status of the emperor and the possibilities and particulars of democratization, was issued in March 1943. The final directives, which provided the particulars of political reform, were issued by the inter-agency State, War, and Navy departments' coordinating committee (SWNCC)

¹ Sources for this section include: Robert E. Ward and Sakamoto Yoshikazu, editors. *Democratizing Japan: The Allied Occupation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987. pp 1-38; and Edward N. Peterson. *The American Occupation of Germany: Retreat to Victory*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977. pp 37-39.

after the Japanese surrender. For **Germany**, initial moderate plans of the State Department and the Army were replaced by more punitive measures that would hold the economy to subsistence level through severe deindustrialization, as reflected in a January 1945 revision of what became the occupation blueprint, the Joint Chief of Staff Document 1067 (JCS 1067). In the end, it was the leading U.S. official of each occupation who proved a major voice in redirecting early punitive policies.

It was presumed that both military occupations would be relatively short. For **Japan**, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) Gen. Douglas MacArthur judged the occupation would last no more than three years.² It lasted six years and eight months (August 1945-April 1952). For **Germany**, the first Military Governor of the U.S. sector, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, anticipated that the U.S. military would “provide a garrison, not a government, except for a few weeks.”³ Instead, direct military government lasted four years, the important first phase of the occupation (May 1945 - May 1949). (Some analysts believe the U.S. military occupation of Germany was prolonged by problems in establishing self-government because of differences with the other occupying powers: Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, each of which controlled its own sector.)

In both cases, a substantial drawdown of U.S. occupation forces occurred after the first year, as there was virtually no armed resistance. In **Japan**, a peak level of 385,649 was reached by November 1945, but dropped to 160,000 by the end of May 1946. In **Germany**, the 1.6 million troops in Germany in May 1945, dropped to 277,584 in 1946, 119,367 in 1947, and 79,370 by 1950.⁴

In **Japan**, most major reforms had been accomplished within four years and six months. In **Germany**, the U.S. occupation was phased out in two stages. Germans in the U.S., British, and French sectors jointly gained control of most domestic affairs in May 1949 with the ratification of a new constitution, dubbed the Basic Law, establishing a parliamentary democracy, the Federal Republic of Germany or ‘West Germany.’ Until 1955, these occupying countries retained emergency powers, a veto over laws inconsistent with occupation policy, and authority over such matters as foreign relations, foreign trade, the level of industrial production, and military security. In its zone, the Soviet Union created an authoritarian Soviet-style state, the German Democratic Republic or ‘East Germany.’ (The “West” and “East” entities persisted until reunification in 1990.)

Objectives. The objectives of the U.S. occupations of both countries have been summed up in two lists of four “d”s. In **both Japan and Germany**, the primary objective was *demilitarization*. All U.S. planners agreed that the ability of both countries to wage war in the future should be destroyed. This included destroying elements of military power, including the economic apparatus that fueled war, and punishing war criminals. In **Japan**, the next goals were the *disarmament* and *decentralization* of the economic apparatus, the latter through the dismantling of the large industrial and banking groups. In **Germany**, they were *denazification* and *deindustrialization*. Regarding the fourth “d”,

² John W. Dower. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999. p 523.

³ Peterson. *op. cit.* p 55.

⁴ Figures courtesy of the US Army Center for Military History, from unpublished briefing papers.

democratization, many U.S. policymakers and occupation planners doubted that the Japanese and Germans had the cultural background and psychological disposition necessary to function in a democracy. After the occupations began, democratization assumed greater weight in both experiences, as those forces who had argued that the inhabitants of those countries were capable of establishing democracies gained credibility, and as the start of the Cold War fostered the concept of a community of democracies as a counterweight to the Soviet Union.

Humanitarian Situation. The occupations commenced amidst a grave humanitarian situation, with large parts of the population homeless, and on subsistence diets or below. In **Japan**, according to one source, the war had produced 1.8 million military and civilian casualties, and destroyed 25% of Japan's national wealth. Air attacks had destroyed 20% of the country's housing (and a greater amount in some cities), and 30% of its industrial capacity.⁵ In **Germany**, between a quarter to a half of housing and transport had been destroyed, leaving some 20 million homeless in the Western zones.⁶

Although the United States provided humanitarian aid at the outset to ward off mass hunger and starvation, occupation authorities and oversight officials soon worried that the U.S. will to continue such relief efforts would flag well before the need for aid diminished. This trepidation was one consideration reorienting economic policies. In 1949, under pressure from Congress, Military Governor Lucius D. Clay abandoned a central feature of occupation policy in **Germany** (with which he had originally agreed): the punitive dismantling of what was left of Germany's industrial base to make Germans pay for waging war.⁷ Instead, he actively promoted Germany's economic revival. In **Japan**, the inter-agency SWNCC approved in January 1948 an economic recovery program "intended to make Japan self-sufficient through the 'early revival of the Japanese economy'" and encouraging industrial growth and foreign trade to enable Japan to "make its 'proper contribution to the economic rehabilitation of the world economy.....'"⁸

Accomplishments. In both countries, the occupations are credited with the construction of functioning democracies. In **Germany**, the direct occupation period ended in the West with the 1949 establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany, a parliamentary system built on improvements in the constitution and institutions of Germany's major experience with democracy, the 1919-1933 Weimar Republic. In **Japan**, the SCAP revamped the laws, institutions, and mores of the country's "divine right" monarchy. The key reform was a new constitution, largely drafted by the SCAP staff, which transferred sovereignty from the Emperor to the people (while retaining the Emperor in a largely symbolic role) and banned a military, arms, and participation in war. It also dismantled the feudalistic structure, creating a more decentralized and representative government through reforms in the Japanese legislature (the Diet), local

⁵ Ward, *op. cit.* p. 428.

⁶ Michael Ermarth, ed. *America and the Shaping of German Society, 1945-1955*. Providence, RI: Berg Publishers, Inc., 1993. Introduction, p 5.

⁷ Peterson, *op. cit.* p 75.

⁸ Michael Schaller. *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. p 120. Schaller quotes SWNCC documents.

governments, and the civil code, among other measures.⁹ Other political changes in Japan included the separation of church and state, the enfranchisement of women, the promotion of a free press, and the liberalization of education. Important economic changes, including the dismantling of the large, family-run industrial and banking groups, and a wide-scale agrarian reform, are seen as essential to the creation of a functioning democracy, because they broke the power of economic and military elites.

Recent assessments of the importance of the occupation governments in establishing these democracies give much greater weight to their contribution in Japan than in Germany. Indeed, one academic believes that while the United States was important to a democratic outcome in Japan, “by contrast the strength of democratic forces in West Germany was such that the American contribution appears relatively marginal.”¹⁰

Implications and Questions for U.S. Policymakers¹¹

Some historians have noted that unique preconditions and circumstances contributed to the success of these occupations, particularly in Japan. Four crucial points of convergence often cited as important to the success of those occupations in establishing democracies, raise questions concerning the applicability of these models to a U.S. occupation of Iraq. Although there is predictably disagreement over their relevance, these issues provide a backdrop for post-Saddam planning.

Populations’ Acceptance of U.S. Occupations and Democratization Objective Occupation. Occupation by U.S. forces, and democratic reforms, were widely accepted by the Japanese and Germans themselves, who came to blame their own leaders for the war. Indeed, although historically much is credited to the United States for remaking these democracies, many analysts believe that the high degree of cooperation from post-war Japanese and German leaders was also crucial to their success.

Analysts writing during the occupation of Japan attributed success there “largely...to the wholehearted cooperation of the average Japanese citizen,”¹² a conclusion which subsequent research supports. This cooperation has been attributed to several factors, including Emperor Hirohito’s plea, before the landing of U.S. forces that the population cooperate fully with occupation directives. This ensured not only the cooperation of the average citizen, but more importantly of Japan’s powerful bureaucracy. Moreover, the great majority of Japanese rejected the old political system and military leadership, and were receptive to change. In the early 20th century, Western-style democratic political

⁹ Ward, *op. cit.* pp 426-430.

¹⁰ Tony Smith. *America’s Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994. p 174.

¹¹ Ward judged, however, that the Occupation’s alterations to the Japanese electoral system fell short of the thorough-going reforms of political parties, labor unions, and employers’ organizations needed to make the system more representative. *op. cit.* p 404.

¹² Arthur D. Bouterse, Philip H. Taylor, and Arthur A. Maass, *American Military Government Experience in Japan*, in Carl J. Friedrich *et al.*, *American Experiences in Military Government in World War II*. New York: Rinehart & Company, 1948. p 350. These authors worried, however, that such obedience would undermine long-run prospects for democracy.

institutions had begun to develop, with increasing influence exercised by political parties and greater democratization of parliamentary practices, culminating in 1920 - 1932.¹³

In Germany, U.S. occupation officials quickly became convinced that most Germans thoroughly rejected Nazi Fascism, and desired political change to a successful democracy in line with democratic developments before Adolf Hitler took power. Germany had experience with a limited democracy and the rule of law, within an authoritarian culture and political context, during the “Second Reich” (or the German Empire) of 1871-1918, even before its experience with democracy during the Weimar Republic. Many democratic leaders of the Weimar Republic had remained in Germany, and were eager to work towards the restoration of democracy. Prospects for democracy may have been further enhanced because the areas of U.S. occupation had more of a democratic ethos, in contrast to the legacy of Prussian authoritarianism in the Soviet occupation zone.

To what extent would a model of Western democracy be acceptable to the Iraqis? Even if Iraqis accepted such a model, might problems arise from Iraq’s lack of experience with democracy? If such a model is not acceptable to Iraqis, to what extent do they share a common purpose of unifying their country around a political model acceptable to the United States? Given the history of Western colonialism in the Middle East, U.S. support for Israel, and the drastic effects of current U.S. backed economic sanctions against Iraq, would the United States have the nearly unanimous backing of the Iraqi population for an occupation, as it did in Japan and Germany? If not, would a U.N. force enjoy greater support? What difficulties could arise from the lack of general consent?

Homogeneity of Occupied Populations. Although politically diverse, the Japanese and the German populations as of 1945 were each ethnically homogeneous, and largely without religious animosities.

To what extent will ethnic and sectarian differences among Iraqis impede effective government by a U.S. occupation force? Given those differences, will Iraqis be able to govern themselves within a short period of time? If not, what arrangements (such as co-government, as exists in Afghanistan) might be desirable to promote effective government? What likelihood is there that such a government would succeed?

Ability to Manage Their Own Affairs Largely Using Existing Institutions. Although the U.S. military governments held power and issued orders, most of the functions of government were carried out by Japanese and German institutions. This delegation of functions was the decision of the two dominant figures in the occupation governments, MacArthur in Japan and Clay¹⁴ in Germany. The decision was based in their assessments of the willingness and ability of Japanese and German citizens to perform these duties, and the scarcity of suitable Americans to do so.

In Japan, MacArthur retained and worked through Japan’s existing, and centralized, governmental institutions, issuing orders that were then carried out by the Japanese

¹³ Ward, *op. cit.* pp 423-424.

¹⁴ Clay served as deputy to Military Governor Eisenhower and to Eisenhower’s successor, until he assumed the MG post himself in March 1947, but even as deputy he was viewed as bearing most of the responsibility for in-theater formation and implementation of occupation policies.

government.¹⁵ (He also insisted on autonomy from U.S. agencies to interpret instructions as he saw fit.) Military government teams, usually of military and civilian personnel, and local liaison offices were also established at the prefecture (i.e., state) level, and charged with observing, investigating and reporting on compliance. However, according to one author, the “lack of an established policy for local military government activity” resulted in abuses, and a “patchwork of wide local variations developed.”¹⁶ MacArthur entrusted the Japanese government with demobilizing its forces.

In the U.S. sector of Germany, the Office of the Military Government, United States (OMGUS) proceeded immediately to reconstruct German government institutions to administer occupation laws and policies, even before all U.S. officials were convinced that Germans were ready for it. With the German defeat, the Nazi government collapsed, leaving the allies to replace officials and structures. From the beginning, Clay sought to turn government over to Germans as quickly as possible, starting at the local level. In some cases, the OMGUS appointed former German government officials from the pre-1933 period. As early as October 1945, Clay issued an order that limited local OMGUS military activities to observing government activities at the city, county and state level, and reporting problems to higher headquarters. Elections for village officials were held in January 1946, followed by county officials in March and city officials in May. Clay then pushed for the drafting of state constitutions and establishment of state governments.

To what extent would Iraqi existing institutions continue to function? What governmental functions would U.S. or other military forces have to assume, and for how long? What new institutions would have to be created? To what extent might grievances of those displaced from existing institutions, or of those removed and punished for crimes related to participation in the Hussein regime, be viewed as legitimate by other Iraqis, and other Middle Eastern governments and populations? To what extent could such sympathies undermine effective administration by occupation forces? How much autonomy would a U.S. or U.N. administration have to adapt to local conditions?

International Legitimacy and Support. The U.S. occupations in Japan and Germany were viewed by other countries as morally and legally legitimate, and there was widespread support for them. This international consensus meant that U.S. policy could be developed relatively free of competing foreign policy interests. This was especially true in the case of Japan. For Germany, however, the development of economic policy was complicated by considerations regarding other European economies.

If the United States were to invade Iraq without the full backing of the international community, to what extent would this lack of consensus or agreement undermine the basis of U.S. international legitimacy or support? What U.S. interests would be affected by the presence of a U.S. occupation force in Iraq? Should the United States expect significant opposition to a U.S. occupation among the leaders or populations of neighboring countries? To what extent would its short-term success be judged by its ability to meet humanitarian needs?

¹⁵ Richard B. Finn. *Winners in Peace: MacArthur, Yoshida, and Postwar Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. p 18.

¹⁶ John D. Montgomery, *Aftermath: Tarnished Outcomes of American Foreign Policy*. Dover, MA: Auburn House Publishing Company, 1986. p. 144.

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