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A Separate Peace? Reconsidering Post-conflict Military Occupations¹

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ABSTRACT

This research note makes the case for further historical work comparing the military occupations of Japan and Iraq. Despite serious differences, a comparison of these two related events reveals long-term trends. These include Anglo-American strategic and economic thinking, questions of legitimacy in military occupations, how policy planning works, the problem of interagency rivalry in foreign policy making, and the limitations of advance planning.

Peace is a strange word. It is an abstract noun, neither singular nor plural. As we reflect on the end of the Second World War from 75 years remove, we see that it ended not with one peace, but with many separate peaces, in different places at different times. There are clear demarcation points for the end of hostilities in 1945: 8 May in Europe, 15 August in Asia. But for the vanquished, peace was a thing that developed in the space between surrender, foreign military occupation, and the eventual transition to returned sovereignty.

This long liminal space between war and peace had profound impacts on the occupied, occupiers, and on world order. It is no surprise then that American-led postwar Allied military occupations have inspired a vast historical literature. Historians have considered a diversity of national and subnational perspectives, and myriad effects

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¹As an historian of the occupation of Japan, the author has been considering the themes in this article for some time and would like to thank Stephen Stedman and the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law at Stanford, Daniel Wirls at UC Santa Cruz, and Atul Bhardwaj and Inderjeet Parmar, organisers of the 'US Think Tanks and Foundations in World Politics Workshop' for providing the space to develop these ideas.

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from social to political to environmental.² But while so much has been written on the war and on individual occupations, relatively little historical work has been done bringing the separate ‘peaces’ together in comparative perspective.³ This research note presents a call for more comparative work on occupations.

Several factors have gotten in the way of such work. The expansion of the field of diplomatic history into multilingual research has reinvigorated the field and driven a corpus of excellent globalised work which looks beyond Anglo-American perspectives. However, this also leads to a sort of siloing of researchers into area specialisations. Historians with expertise in Japan, Germany, Korea, or Italy, all countries occupied in the wake of the Second World War, infrequently read each other or ‘compare notes’ at academic conferences as they work in what appear to be very different subfields. Rare is the historian who can conduct research in all of these languages or who has deep knowledge of the history of each country.

This siloing problem is even greater when considering the more recent but related occupation of Iraq, which is separated by not only region but also era. John Dower, a giant in the field of the Occupation of Japan, blazed a trail when he published *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9–11/Iraq* in 2010.⁴ In regard to such complex comparative work, Ussama Makdisi, a specialist in modern Arab history, asks ‘what

²Laura Hein’s ‘Revisiting America’s Occupation of Japan,’ *Cold War History*, 11, 4 (2011), pp. 579–599, is a useful survey of the literature on Japan. For a consideration of current trends in the early Occupation of Germany, see Gareth Pritchard, ‘The Occupation of Germany in 1945 and the Politics of German History,’ *History Compass* 7, 2 (2009), pp. 447–473.

³Some examples evaluating the occupations of Germany and Japan together include, Susan Carruthers, *The Good Occupation: American Soldiers and the Hazards of Peace*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Masako Shibata, *Japan and Germany under the U.S. Occupation: A Comparative Analysis of Post-War Education Reform*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008); and Melissa Willard-Foster, ‘Planning the Peace and Enforcing the Surrender: Deterrence in the Allied Occupations of Germany and Japan,’ *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 40, 1 (Summer 2009), pp. 33–56. Comparisons also appear in International Relations literature on nation building. For example, Francis Fukuyama’s edited volume draws historical comparisons between Germany, Japan and many other American reconstruction projects and interventions in the context of understanding 21 Century American nation building in Iraq and Afghanistan. Francis Fukuyama ed., *Nation-Building Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq*, (Johns Hopkins, 2006).

⁴John Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9–11/Iraq*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010). The book presents sweeping comparisons of the immediate origins and ends of both conflicts, and the third part of the work is devoted to comparing the occupations.

kind of expertise or collaboration is required to take [...] [such a juxtaposition] to its full potential?⁵ There is a sense that such research focus is too big to be undertaken alone. As most work on such recent events has so far been done by political scientists rather than historians, this comparison also requires overcoming a divide by academic discipline.⁶ In the face of these challenges, much remains to explore.

When looking at these 'peaces' in tandem, the connections are compelling. The occupations which began in 1945 were planned and overseen by many of the same individuals, and all were based on common assumptions and constraints. This led to similar policies and similar problems, such as the tension between troop numbers, costs, and political will, or the practice of purging elites associated with the old regime, which proved problematic and was rolled back in the cases of Germany, Japan, and Iraq. Further, despite a sense that 2003 is 'not yet history,' an increasing number of primary source documents are available that make well founded historical work possible. These include the online partial archives of former United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, a wealth of material available via the National Security Archive, and published oral histories and interviews. These can be combined with the deep existing historical literature on individual post-1945 military occupations and political science work done on Iraq to generate new historical analysis. This new area of historical research has the potential to help us better understand both the older and the more recent past.

⁵Laura Hein et al., 'Cultures of War Roundtable,' *Critical Asian Studies*, 43, 3 (2011), p. 447.

⁶James Savage's *Reconstructing Iraq's Budgetary Institutions: Coalition State Building After Saddam*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) is an example of the excellent empirical research which is possible despite archival limitations. So too is Stephen Benedict Dyson's, 'What Really Happened in Planning for Postwar Iraq?' *Political Science Quarterly*, 128, 3 (2013), pp 455-488. Inderjeet Parmar considers the start of each conflict in 'Catalysing Events, Think Tanks and American Foreign Policy Shifts: A Comparative Analysis of the Impacts of Pearl Harbor 1941 and 11 September 2001,' *Government and Opposition*, 40, 1 (2005), pp. 1-25. Political scientists have also used theoretical frameworks to consider 'why did one occupation succeed and the other fail?'. Examples of this approach include Jeff Bridoux, *American Foreign Policy and Postwar Reconstruction: Comparing Japan and Iraq*, (London: Routledge, 2011) and Jonathan Monten 'Intervention and State-Building: Comparative Lessons from Japan, Iraq, and Afghanistan,' *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 656, 1 (November, 2014), pp. 173-191. However, with a few exceptions, historians are yet to weigh in on the occupation of Iraq.

Comparing Japan and Iraq

On first sight, the American-led multilateral post-conflict military occupations of Japan and Iraq have obvious differences that discourage comparison.⁷ First, as they say, the past is another country. The global situation in 1945 bears little resemblance to that of 2003. Nor did the lead occupying powers, the United States with the major involvement of Britain, closely resemble the countries they had been 60 years prior. Second, the nations of pre-occupation Japan and Iraq had very little in common. The population of Japan is largely homogenous, where Iraq contains religious and ethnic divisions. The geographies are different. Japan is an island archipelago, with no shared land borders over which chaos or outside influence could easily spill. Pre-invasion Iraq was neighbour to hostile and more powerful states, while prewar Japan had been the dominant actor in its region.

Prewar Japan was a leading world power and an established democracy. Although there was a marked rise in ultranationalism and militarization in the 1930s (largely in response to domestic terrorism), the country had complex political, financial and industrial institutions, a constitution and parliament established in the late nineteenth century, and (from 1925) universal male suffrage. As Chalmers Johnson persuasively argued, the stability and economic success of postwar Japan owes much to the legacy of its prewar system, not its seven years of foreign occupation.⁸ By contrast, pre-invasion Iraq was not a major developed power. As political sociologist Larry Diamond describes, Iraq 'had no prior experience of democracy as a system of government' beyond fragmentary institutions created in the British colonial period.⁹ In its recent history lay ten years of war followed by ten years of crippling international economic sanctions.

The conditions of the occupations were also very different. Years of war and a prolonged bombing campaign targeting Japan's cities, and the public surrender of the country's leadership, made it clear to the Japanese people that total war had turned to total defeat, making resistance futile. By contrast, there was no clear 'point of no return' in Iraq's case. The government collapsed, but its head of state was missing for the first nine months of occupation. In a situation where the old regime could re-emerge, and the occupying powers could leave quickly as they had a decade earlier

⁷While both of these occupations were multilateral, with a significant role played by Great Britain, this article focuses on the United States as the primary driver of policy making.

⁸Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975*, (Stanford, 1982).

⁹Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2005), p. 24.

after the first Gulf War, cooperation/collaboration with the occupiers was a dangerous gamble that risked the reprisal of a future state. These conditions help explain a significant difference in the occupations; 'while not a single Allied soldier was killed in occupied Japan or Germany, the occupation of Iraq has led to [thousands of] U.S. and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilian fatalities.'¹⁰

And yet the 'Japan model' was consciously used to justify and define exploits in Iraq. Since then, the violence, destruction, and chaos which arose as a result of these Anglo-American actions have in turn led historians to reconsider the occupation of Japan through a more critical lens. The remainder of this piece will introduce possible points of comparison and consider what a careful examination might reveal.

Big Ideas

Comparing the cases of Japan and Iraq illuminates long-term trends in American political thought and approach to foreign policy. Generally speaking, the dominant contemporary American view of economic theory and development defined the aims and policies of both occupations. It is certainly true that this led to very different economic policies in each case. 1930s-era New Deal paradigms led to support for initiatives including land reforms and increased labour rights, while neo-conservative ideals of the 2000s created support for privatisation in both the Iraqi economy and in carrying out the occupation itself.¹¹ Despite marked differences, the approaches rhyme in that they were shaped by an emphasis on capitalism and free trade. Crucially, in both cases, re-entry into the international community was understood to be tied to dependence on foreign exports (in Japan silk and textiles, in Iraq oil) for economic growth.

In both cases, arguments about the justification and legitimacy of American actions reveal how U.S. policy is shaped by the racial, religious, and cultural biases held by the public and government officials.¹² For example, American policy makers used the cover of gender and women's rights to legitimise an expansionist foreign policy in both instances. Japanese and Iraqi women were depicted as 'subject-objects of American liberation and recipients of... liberal feminist tutelage.'¹³ Once the occupation was underway, a powerful military figure served as the face of both occupations. Military authority was given primacy over civilian in Iraq because 'the prestige of the victorious

¹⁰Hein et al., 'Cultures of War Roundtable,' p. 445.

¹¹Dower, *Cultures of War*, pp. 426-427, and Savage, *Reconstructing Iraq's Budgetary Institutions*, p. 48.

¹²Dower, *Cultures of War*, pp. 50-58.

¹³Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 90.

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General was translated into his post-conflict legitimacy.¹⁴ However, there were other strong claims to legitimacy in Japan.

A pronounced legitimacy gap is a point of distinction between occupations. As Laura Hein argues, there were no international protests against the 1945 action. Japan itself had occupied and colonised spaces after military victory, so domestic opinion was that the same actions were legitimate in the face of the country's own defeat. Allied occupiers also worked through existing government institutions.¹⁵ The unconditional surrender of that government provided legal cover for such a military action.¹⁶ None of these factors existed in the case of Iraq. Instead, the actions of the Coalition of the Willing were met with public protest around the world, and hostilities ended not with formal surrender, but government collapse and the disappearance of Iraq's leader. Rather than working through a defeated and cooperative government, plans to transition authority back into Iraqi hands were centered on 'illegitimate bodies' constructed, as one American advisor argued, because of 'the contradiction between our aspiration for democracy... and our impulse for total unilateral control'.¹⁷ Despite, or perhaps because of, the legitimacy gap between the interventions, the perceived benevolent success of General Douglas MacArthur loomed large in attempts to claim legitimacy in the occupation in Iraq.

The Process of Planning

Occupation planning is another point of continuity and contrast. While the length of the planning periods differed greatly, in both cases planning was undermined by interagency competition, involved external experts from think tanks and universities, and created a community of 'planning alumni' who retained influence in the occupation phase and beyond. However, both processes failed to accurately predict the situation on the ground.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the planning phases was duration. Official planning for the treatment of postwar Japan began in 1942 with the creation of an interdepartmental committee drawing on staff and reports from a previous secret collaboration between the State Department and the Council on Foreign Relations begun in 1939, six years before VJ day. Planning for Iraq can be dated from November 2001, less than a year and a half before the invasion, when the Secretary

¹⁴Dyson, 'What Really Happened,' p. 463.

¹⁵Hein, 'Revisiting America's Occupation of Japan', p. 592, note 5.

¹⁶The motivations behind American insistence on unconditional surrender is tied to the use of the atomic bomb and has long been the subject of historical debate. The issue has been examined most recently by Marc Gallicchio in *Unconditional: The Japanese Surrender in World War II*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁷Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, p. 62.

of Defense directed The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) to develop a plan for the forcible removal of Saddam Hussein.¹⁸ Both planning processes were largely conducted in secret. In Japan's case, this was because revealing American postwar aims might cause division between the Allies while the war was on. In the case of Iraq, it was because the American government had not officially committed to conflict, so could not advertise looming invasion and post-invasion plans.

Wrangling between agencies was also an issue in both processes, although there was a clearer demarcation of responsibility in Japan's case. The State Department was responsible for setting long range political aims, while War and Navy departments were tasked with the practicalities of invasion and security stabilization. War and Navy had a larger voice in planning once an end of the war came into view, but by then outlines has already been set.¹⁹ This long mid-level iterative process with regular buy-in from cabinet level officials, resulted in consensus building and a single set of approved policy documents outlining aims to guide the occupation.²⁰ And yet, despite that consensus, during the occupation itself the Diplomatic Section in Tokyo was undermined by restrictions to its direct communication back to the State Department in Washington.²¹

In the case of Iraq, the Department of Defense took the lead. In stark contrast to the clear division of responsibility between agencies on Japan, the first CENTCOM recommendations for Iraq included a set long range political goals.²² In addition to the blurred division of areas of responsibility, there was not good coordination between agencies or planning groups. In fact, there was in many cases a concerted effort to avoid collaboration and information sharing. National Security Advisor Condoleezza

¹⁸Stephen Benedict Dyson has done the best work to date in reconstructing the Iraq planning process.

¹⁹Treasury was effectively kept out of Japan planning (but not planning on Germany) by State manoeuvring. For an overview of official planning on Japan, see Dayna Barnes, *Architects of Occupation: American Experts and the Planning for Postwar Japan*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), pp. 31-37.

²⁰These two documents are SWNCC 150/4 and JCS 1380/15. Both are available at Japan's National Diet Library website.

<https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/shiryo/01shiryo.html>. Accessed October 2020.

²¹Eiji Takamae, *Inside GHQ: The Allied Occupation of Japan and Its Legacy*, Translated and adapted by Robert Ricketts and Sebastian Swann, (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 149.

²²End objectives according to then CENTCOM Commander Tommy Franks were the 'establishment of a representative form of government, a country capable of defending its territorial borders and maintaining its internal security without any weapons of mass destruction.' Nora Benshel et al., *After Saddam: Prewar Planning and the Occupation of Iraq*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), p. 7.

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Rice, for example, ‘frequently sent her own spies to the Defense Department in hopes of surreptitiously collecting the information she and her staff needed to do their jobs.’²³ The result of this is clear in a statement made by Larry MacDonald, Deputy Assistant Treasury Secretary for Technical Assistance Policy. ‘People speak in shorthand about whether there was a plan for Iraq,’ he said, ‘I think it is more relevant to speak of plans. There were plans, there were lots of plans, created at different times by different agencies and levels of government.’²⁴ This disharmony continued into the occupation. Coalition Provisional Authority head Paul Bremer and others were reported to have distrusted and underused the State Department and experienced diplomats.²⁵ Infighting and information hoarding marked both cases, but were more damaging in the planning for Iraq.

In both cases, these planning processes established and reinforced an informal policy network of officials, academics, and think tank experts, who wrote policy recommendations and influenced opinion. In both cases, the work of anthropologists was brought in to occupation policy-making and personnel training materials in order to ‘understand’ spaces beyond the knowledge of most Americans.²⁶ During the Second World War, area specialists from the Council on Foreign Relations’ War and Peace Studies Program were hired into government planning, and think tanks played an important role in providing expertise and platforms for exchanging ideas.²⁷ At the turn of the 21 Century, experts and elite exiled Iraqis were brought together by the State Department in planning discussion groups known as the Fol Project, and think tank publications were circulated amongst policy makers.²⁸

During and after the occupations, these policy network members took on important positions in Washington, Tokyo, and Bagdad. Feisal Istrabadi and Salem Chalabi, for

²³Zachary Shore, *Blunder: Why Smart People Make Bad Decisions*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 208.

²⁴ Savage, *Reconstructing Iraq’s Budgetary Institutions*, p. 49.

²⁵Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, p. 299.

²⁶Ruth Benedict’s *Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1946) was highly influential. For more on anthropology and the ‘cultural turn’ in U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq, see Sheila Jager, *On the Uses of Cultural Knowledge* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007).

²⁷Dayna Barnes, ‘Think Tanks and a New Order in East Asia: The Council of Foreign Relations and the Institute of Pacific Relations During World War II,’ *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 22, 2 (2015) pp. 89-119.

²⁸For example, Paul Bremer ‘forwarded a RAND corporation study on postwar governance to Secretary Rumsfeld with his summary of its lessons’ in May 2003. Dyson, ‘What Really Happened,’ p. 478.

example, had worked as expats on the Fol's Democratic Principles working group, and later in Iraq as lead drafters of the interim constitution in 2004.²⁹ Chris Milligan, who was involved in USAID planning from October 2002 became USAID Deputy Mission Director in Iraq.³⁰ There were many such figures in the case of Japan too, although because that policy network was devoid of expatriates their influence was confined to US policy making. Robert Fearey was a junior State Department official who worked on Japan planning and was tasked with land reform policy making because of that experience.³¹ For years after planning gave way to implementation, these 'alumni' continued to draw on their planning experiences and make real impact on the post-conflict landscape.

What Planning Missed

Neither occupation started as planned. Soon-to-be occupying forces experienced 'catastrophic success,' an unexpectedly early surrender or collapse and shift from invasion to occupation. In Japan, to the surprise of military and civilians alike, there was no invasion at all. Planners expected a protracted struggle, and even in plans for a sudden collapse expected mass resistance and hostility. The US military anticipated that 'at best the civil population of JAPAN proper will observe an attitude of non-cooperation.'³² The Joint War Plans Committee warned that once an occupation began, 'suicidal elements' of armed Japanese would target occupying forces.³³ The plans for Iraq were 'predicated on the assumption that the Iraqis would be passive. Not only passive, but gratefully, happily passive.'³⁴ Americans also 'overestimated the degree to which the remnants of the Iraqi government would provide essential services and security' during the occupation.³⁵ While counterinsurgency plans for Japan went

²⁹Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, p. 145.

³⁰Savage, *Reconstructing Iraq's Budgetary Institutions*, p. 64.

³¹'The Occupation of Japan: Economic Policy and Reform' in Lawrence Redford ed., *The Proceedings of a Symposium Sponsored by the MacArthur Memorial, April 13-15*, (Norfolk, VA: MacArthur Memorial, 1980).

³²'Basic Outline Plan for 'Blacklist' Operations,' 8 August 1945, RG 4, reel 607, in *General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives and Library Collection*, (Scholarly Resources, 2002), microform.

³³War Plans Committee, 'Over-all Examination of Planning for the Occupation of Japan, Appendix C, Brief Plan of Blacklist,' August 3, 1945, in Kesaris (éd.), *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Pacific Theater*, Reel 5, 18, as cited in Melissa Willard-Foster, 'Planning the Peace and Enforcing the Surrender: Deterrence in the Allied Occupations of Germany and Japan,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 40, 1 (Summer 2009), p. 41.

³⁴Unnamed former senior official, quoted in Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, p. 36.

³⁵Benshel et al., *After Saddam*, p. 13.

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unnecessary and unused, the case of Iraq makes clear how valuable the work might have been. Very little can be accomplished in the absence of minimum security.

Policies were implemented to purge elites connected with the previous regime in Japan, Germany, and Iraq. In all three cases, these policies, also known as 'de-Nazification' and 'de-Baathification' were later understood to have hindered growth by sidelining the political and economic expertise in the occupied countries, and were rolled back. However, in Iraq de-Baathification had more serious consequences, exacerbating existing divisions within the population and fuelling insurgency.³⁶ The worst results of policy missteps in Japan were avoided because the occupation was perceived to have greater legitimacy, and because Japan had retained its emperor; a potent symbol of national unity, continuity, and stability, who willingly cooperated with the occupation authority.

Conclusion

75 years after the war's end, important stories of how peace came remain to be told. We are at the beginning of a new conversation about post- Second World War military occupation transitions, how they are connected to each other and to later occupations, and how they still resonate in a very different world today. Comparing these events provides fresh perspectives, and invites new conclusions about the once-familiar past. Observing Iraq and Japan together reveals more than just politically convenient use of memory, but also long-term trends in Anglo-American foreign policy and political thought. The expansionist policy choices made in 1945 and in 2003 were based on contemporary cultural assumptions and power dynamics, and on beliefs about economics, 'universal values,' democratisation, and development. More historical work is needed to understand not just why one 'succeeded' and the other 'failed,' but why there are such marked similarities in the conception, planning, and implementation of these two projects separated by decades and continents. Looking beyond one single occupation at the connections between them can help us better understand the peaces that were and the peace that was not.

³⁶Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, p. 40.