

**The lessons from the post-WW2 occupation
Of Japan**

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Abstract

The American military occupation of Japan after 1945 has served as a widely admired example of successful post-conflict management. MacArthur's General Headquarters not only achieved demilitarization and democratization of Japanese society, but also economic growth through decentralization, equalization and liberalization. Military occupations throughout the world have ever since drawn on this Japanese experience. However, seen from the recent example of Iraq, lessons drawn from Japan have not necessarily been very successful, since the country has not escaped from chaos and instability.

Most academic research in the past has focused on political and economic reforms carried out by General MacArthur. This paper will attempt to emphasize two factors rarely accounted for: (a) attainment of postwar internal security through anti-disturbance measures, and (b) marginalization of the occupation of outlying regions, such as Okinawa. The first factor established the ground for the execution of the better known postwar reforms, and the second factor shows that occupation of some peripheral Japanese areas has been much less successful than has been the case for the mainland.

The results of this research are twofold. That (a) stabilization was not the achievement of the occupier, but rather the result of the conscious efforts by the occupied, and that (b) the occupation of Japan was inextricably linked to the marginalization of Okinawa. In order to be more realistic, the lessons to be drawn from the occupation of Japan should be less focused on the occupation as a U.S. undertaking and should take into consideration important socio-cultural factors.

Introduction

Since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003, much of the debate about "bringing freedom to Iraq" turned into a discussion as to how far the United States would commit itself to nation-building in Iraq. On 30 August 2005, in his speech at the North Island Naval Air Station in California, George W. Bush cited from a letter sent nearly 60 years previously by Sergeant Richard Leonard to his friend from devastated Hiroshima. President Bush read: "Sure, we've got to occupy their country and watch them, but at the same time, we've got to help them and do everything possible to reconstruct them as a peace-loving nation" (Carroll, 2002: 317). Starting the war in Iraq meant committing America to a project of "nation building" abroad, and analogies to similar projects in the past were well known. In

his speech, President Bush mentioned countries “from Japan and Germany to Eastern Europe and Latin America and Southeast Asia and Africa” (Bush, 2015).

U.S. policy-makers have made ample use of American experiences with post-conflict nation building of foreign societies. For example, seven months prior to the Allied invasion of Iraq, the CIA made a comparative study of the occupations of Germany and Japan and their potential utility for the occupation of Iraq (CIA, 2002). From 2003 to 2008 the RAND Corporation, a renowned think-tank which supplies many studies to the U.S. government, compiled a multi-volume study on postwar nation building led by the U.S. or UN, which lists more than 14 successful cases of foreign occupations (Dobbins, 2003; Dobbins, 2008). The topic of spreading democracy through nation-building has also received substantial scrutiny in academia, but the conclusions of those studies do not tend to be as optimistic as those in the RAND study. They argue that the record of direct American involvement in spreading freedom through nation building is not as significant as it might appear, and that Japan and Germany are rare exceptions.

This article suggests that claiming unqualified success even in the cases of Japan and Germany, and especially of Japan, should be done with caution. The lesson that should have been learned is to look at the failures which tend to get marginalized, such as the occupation of Okinawa, and at the wider socio-cultural factors which may provide more explanatory power than a focus on the initiative of the foreign occupation forces.

The “Japanese Model”

Before discussing the lessons of success, let us first glance at what the “successful” Japanese model looks like when applied to the occupation of Iraq. The American occupation of Japan has generally been divided into three distinct phases, each telling a different set of lessons: defeat, pacification and reconstruction.

For Iraq, too, the first phase was the end of the war. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was an early admirer of air power. Air power has two advantages. It can win a war without engaging heavily on the ground, and it can force the enemy into submission. At a press conference on 6 March 2003, two weeks before the beginning of the preventive war in Iraq, President Bush showed impatience about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction, which Condoleezza Rice previously referred to as Saddam’s “mushroom clouds.” At the time, Donald Rumsfeld was advocating a “shock and awe” solution. The strategy of “shock and awe” called for shocking civilian populations to destroy their will to resist, and awing them into submission, and it specifically referred to the lessons of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A war would be over within days. “The Pentagon” was also “bragging about its new 20-thousand-pound bomb that would create its own mushroom cloud,” which might combine the shock and awe effect with the demoralization effect of firebombing Japanese cities. Images associated with late wartime Japan included “suicidal islands,” endless resistance, millions of casualties, and the necessity of unconditional surrender. The memory of a quick victory over Japan became a model for circumvented diplomacy and an overwhelming military response against any totalitarian and militaristic regime oppressing its own citizens (McGrory, 2009: 305; Gordon and Trainor, 2006; Franks 2004).

Post-conflict pacification was the second stage of American involvement, which coincided with the early phase of the occupation of Japan. This period is associated with fundamental reforms and punitive measures. In mid-May 2003, the newly arrived Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, chief of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad, issued orders numbers 1 and 2, which implemented plans for de-Ba'athification of Iraqi society. Defense Undersecretary for Policy, Douglas Feith, recalls that the Ba'ath party "had become a synonym for the Iraqi regime, more or less as the Nazi Party was the German regime under Adolf Hitler (Ba'athism was invented in the 1930s on the model of the European Fascist and Nazi ideologies)" Bremer adds that de-Ba'athification was similar in its intent to "MacArthur's decrees in occupied Japan that removed the trappings of the militarist regime." In Japan, this was the period of disarmament and demobilization, abolishment of repression, initiation of purges from public office, democratization and demilitarization of society, and also of constitutional revision and initiation of war crimes trials. The image of Japanese society changed drastically from the first phase. It was peaceful, diligent and cooperative, and there was no longer any trace of suicidal resistance or repressive militarism. As seen from the case of Bremer, often called the "MacArthur of Baghdad," the lessons often drawn are those of the absolute, impartial, unquestionable and patriarchal authority of the Supreme Commander as the true leader, who would ensure that all things would work well (Feith, 2008: 419; Bremer and McConnell, 2006: 42; Ricks, 2006: 158; Elkins, Ginsburg and Melton 2009: 199; Dobbins, 2009: 330).

The third phase of the occupation of Japan was that of recovery. That was what George W. Bush had in mind when, in his August 2005 speech, he drew upon the 60 year old letter, and stated: "With every step toward freedom, the Japanese economy flourished. With every step toward freedom, the Japanese became a model for others in the region. With every step toward freedom, the Japanese became a valued member of the world community, a force for peace and stability in the region, and a trusted and reliable ally of the United States of America." The image of Japanese society is no longer one of an abruptly liberated nation, it is the image of a vibrant liberal capitalist society, with a strong middle class having a stake in defending the free world. This was the ultimate lesson of "success" that the Pentagon officials were trying to transplant to Iraq (Bush, 2005; Feldman, 2004: 25; Diamond, 2005: 39; Feldman, 2003: 194; Serafino, Tarnoff and Nanto, 2006: 7; Dobbins, 2003: 51).

The parallels were apparent. Iraq was ruled by an authoritarian regime, it denounced the West, and what was needed was to overturn the authoritarian system, punish the wrongdoers, and put the country on the track of democratization and capitalist development. Who could resist the remarkably successful Japanese model (Shillony, 2003: 278)?

Occupation accomplished: pacification of Japan

Historian of modern Japan, John Dower, raised his voice in resistance since the early beginning of American preparations for the invasion of Iraq. He repeatedly proclaimed that in Iraq the U.S. could not expect a successful repetition of imposed democracy as in the case

of postwar Japan (Nihon, 2003: 197-99). He advanced four reasons: legitimacy, competence, social cohesion, and geographic factors (Dower, 2010: 319).¹

First is the legitimacy of the occupation. The scale of Japanese aggression in World War II, made the militarists, ordinary Japanese, but also people in neighboring countries determined to abolish militarism and its influence in postwar Japan. This meant that the occupation authorities had an unquestioned legitimacy in the eyes of the occupied population but also in the eyes of the neighboring countries.

Second is competent administrative machinery. Dower argues that many of the American occupation personnel embraced a proactive kind of New Deal reformist idealism, with which they seized the opportunity to expand on the campaign of democratization. The GHQ staff introduced a sweeping land reform program, which redistributed the land in a way that created a powerful class of small rural landowners. Other reforms were zaibatsu dissolution, a labor standards law, and the revamping of the educational system. It was followed, after the outbreak of the Cold War and the initiation of a “reverse course” in Japan, with policies that aimed at early recovery rather than reform. U.S. foreign aid funds were targeted to revive Japanese industries and Japanese economy prospered after the outbreak of the Korean War.

Third is social cohesion and a resilient civil society in Japan. The Japanese accepted defeat and occupation with calmness and deference. Political differences were certainly present in postwar Japan, but their expression was channeled through nonviolent movement and protests, especially among labor unions and left-wing radicals. No cleavages based on religion or ethnicity would be significant enough to incite society-wide dissatisfaction and civil strife. Furthermore, Japanese civil society had been vibrant and highly literate, waiting to embrace democratic ideals.

Finally, Japan was an island archipelago geographically and socially isolated from other societies. This remoteness not only guaranteed that neighboring countries or supra-state movements would penetrate its borders and cause social unrest, but also that Japan would not be split and would retain its unity.

This paper builds on Dower’s findings, but it disputes them. The first two reasons, about the legitimacy and competence of occupation forces are dubious because they reify GHQ’s role and put it too far above that of Japanese society. The success or failure of any policy of GHQ depended on how the Japanese government implemented it, and how Japanese society reacted to that policy. American occupation was a two-way relationship. Dower’s third and fourth reasons, about cohesion and integrity, will be addressed in this and the following sections.

The third point raised by Dower is social cohesion. Why was Japanese society so peaceful during the occupation? Was it because of the ethnic homogeneity of Japanese society, or because of the authority resting in the imperial throne, which told its imperial subjects how to behave? Neither. From the occupational anti-disturbance policies, we know that Japanese

¹ Dower divides his analysis into five points, but for the purpose of expediency I combined his third and fourth points into one.

society was not as peaceful as it has been often described as being in academic literature. At one point, Japanese society faced an outbreak of anti-occupation disturbances which might have escalated into civil insurgency. Had widespread civil disturbances of that sort occurred, today we would be drawing different kinds of lessons from the occupation of Japan.

In order to find out about the dynamics of the process of the pacification of Japan, including failures in pacification, such as the possibility of civil disturbances, we will have to examine the degree of social upheaval that Japan faced shortly after the end of the war. Three issues dominated the public agenda: (a) demobilization of military personnel, (b) departure of Korean and Chinese laborers and other repatriated persons back to their homelands, and (c) repatriation of over 6 million Japanese nationals from overseas areas. The three issues were about the mass movement of people and thus also about the composition of society. If mishandled, they might contribute to social disruption after the end of the war. From documentary evidence, we know that issues related to social dislocation, such as demobilization and repatriation, figured high on the Allied lists of potential causes of trouble.

The war ended abruptly in mid-August with Japanese acceptance of the Potsdam declaration. Articles 7 and 8 of the Potsdam declaration laid out the terms for postwar disarmament and occupation. The first and foremost of the initial American occupation objectives was to disarm the country. Requirements and procedures for interception and destruction of Japanese war-making material were at the top of the list. They were specified in general Order no. 1, which was part of the surrender documents. One single feature which stands out is that the primary responsibility for both the disarmament of Japanese arsenals and the demobilization of Japanese military personnel would be with the Japanese government itself. Most of the administrative burden associated with the two policies would be carried out by the Japanese themselves, and most of it was achieved promptly, before the main Allied forces even arrived to fulfill their occupation duty (Kato, 2012: 72).

Article 9 of the Potsdam declaration promised Japanese military forces stationed overseas the return to their homes to lead peaceful and productive lives. Arrangements for the demobilization of troops at home, and repatriation of nationals abroad, were initiated only after the Japanese acceptance of the Potsdam declaration. The first transports started to arrive one month after the signing of the surrender document, and the bulk of repatriation was scheduled for the spring and summer of 1946.

There were three problems with planning and execution of repatriation back to occupied Japan. First was the planning required to return of over six million nationals. The provision in the Potsdam declaration guaranteed their return, and it was designed with the idea of luring Japanese military forces overseas to accept surrender and to soften the impact of that acceptance. After the war, however, it introduced the problem of who was to be responsible for repatriation. The question of who would execute the repatriation program became the second problem. At that moment, the U.S. authorities turned exceedingly skeptical. Neither the U.S. nor any other Allied power would volunteer to transport enemy soldiers at Allied expense. The only repatriation possible would be on the few remaining Japanese ships and executed by the Japanese government. Some of the initial projections were that the whole enterprise of repatriating Japanese soldiers would last more than 10 years. The Allied policy had its own turns, and after three months, the Allied forces, and especially the U.S. Congress, agreed to provide over 100 military transport vessels to enable the mass repatriation

program to end by 1947. With this planning arose the third problem, the dislocation of repatriated troops, dependents and other Japanese nationals (Kato, 2009: 56).

Dislocation resulting from the execution of the mass repatriation program would only add fuel to the problems of hardship caused by the systematic bombardment of Japanese cities, further aggravated by confusion from the speedy disbandment and demobilization of troops stationed on the home islands and by the termination of the Imperial War and Navy Ministries. Rapid demobilization of home troops caused problems of lack of subsistence in their home towns. Work was scarce and former soldiers suffered from social stigma. By November 1945 the Japanese started to fear food shortages and the first protest movements began to become organized. In December, the Allied forces registered the first violence, some of which was aimed at Allied storehouses.

What is more, the first period of postwar confusion also had to cater for masses of Korean forced laborers, or Korean, Chinese and other minorities flocking to ports on Kyushu Island in order to be repatriated to the newly established republic of Korea or elsewhere. Koreans had been discriminated against by Japanese for a long time, and in the early postwar period they seized upon their new upgraded status to incite quarrels and then became a principal source of skirmishes, especially in large port cities. The Japanese police and American occupiers feared a deterioration of public security. From November local occupation headquarters started to draft new plans for local emergencies (Morris-Suzuki, 2010: 57).

The picture of worsening public security in occupied Japan was further exacerbated by two events. One was acceleration of the mass repatriation program, which was already hurling thousands of starved, fatigued and reticent repatriate soldiers from overseas onto Japanese shores. The other was the deterioration of regional job markets, which served as the reception safety net for displaced repatriates and demilitarized soldiers. At the same time, military disarmament was still in progress and cases of hidden military arsenals were reported occasionally (Ara, 1994: 71).

As frustration and tensions rose, in December the Occupation Headquarters received information about plans for local disturbances and civil unrest incited by members of former suicide squads and Japanese demobilized personnel. Local actions of violent resistance would not be enough to harm the occupation forces, but what the Americans feared was that they might ignite wave of social unrest, which might instantly turn into large-scale civil unrest. MacArthur's Supreme Command promptly reacted with an increased alert, and initiation of military planning for a larger scale civil uprising (Narita, 1990: 72).

From the recent U.S. experience in Iraq, we know that no number of occupation troops is enough, especially when internal security deteriorates. The situation of postwar occupation forces was not dissimilar. Mobilization of American troops was being terminated and occupation troops were losing men in their thousands. Not only did occupation forces dwindle, but public opinion at home and among the overseas forces grew restless over the slow process of demobilizing their troops. President Truman, and General MacArthur in Japan, faced an impossible situation of balancing understaffed occupation troops and the potential for civil upheaval. General MacArthur mentioned his dilemma in a secret radio dispatch to the Army Chief of Staff Eisenhower on 24 January, in which he called for the retention of the Imperial throne (MacArthur, 1946).

How did the occupation forces resolve the threat of civil unrest? Essentially in two ways. One was in making military preparations to face civil unrest. These were expressed in military planning to face civil insurgencies, relaxation of restrictions on the use of tear gas, and in safeguarding the Japanese Emperor from war crimes prosecution. The other and more important way, which related directly to the potential threat of civil disturbances, was reliance on the Japanese police. After the initial confusion about potential insurrection, we hear less about insurgencies planned by demilitarized soldiers, and more about spontaneous food riots by the distressed population, or, after mid-1946, occasional resistance by revived communist cells. But that would be much later, after the American forces achieved pacification and stabilization of the occupied areas (Compel, 2016: 84).

In the midst of drafting anti-insurgency plans, the occupation headquarters imposed two punitive purge directives on the Japanese. One measure directed dissolution of militaristic and ultra-nationalistic organizations, and the other purged high-level public employees from public office. Purged and dissatisfied, such persons were also considered potential troublemakers and were added to the lists of anti-insurgency targets (Saunavaara, 2013: 1086; Masuda, 2013: 29).

With the aid of hindsight, one may state that since there was no civil upheaval in Japan, key occupation policies including anti-insurgency measures were successful, because they pacified and stabilized the country and enabled democratization reforms to take place. But could a set of ambiguous potential scenarios drafted far away in Tokyo, unsupported by sufficient troop levels and never really put to the test, be the reason for precluding sparks of anti-occupation violence? That is highly doubtful. Such day-to-day omnipresent control could only be carried out by Japanese police and governmental machinery. Only police would be able to effectively locate, identify, and eliminate newly formed or remaining hot spots of resistance. Local occupation military detachments might assist such actions, but they would not be able to locate and eliminate resistance. What was in MacArthur's powers would be to make sure Japanese government machinery was fully cooperative, despite the series of purges and reforms that were to be carried out (Hosaka and Yamamoto, 2004: 155).

Here is where MacArthur's strategy of protecting the Emperor from the War Crimes Tribunal, but using him as a guarantee to generate cooperation from the Japanese government, paid off. The lesson that can be drawn from Allied internal security policy in Japan is that the Allies failed to design policies to secure Japan. Any success that can be attributed to the occupation period must first be built on the fact that the Japanese were patient and pliable enough to withstand and accommodate American demands and MacArthur's maneuvering. Internal security was considered the stepping stone for any further democratization or reform, and thus it was the occupied who exercised the agency, not the occupier (MacArthur, 1966: 770).²

No better contrast could be drawn with "de-Ba'athification" or eradication of Saddamism during the American occupation of Iraq. The early Allied policies towards Iraq were not in

² The four volumes of the MacArthur Reports are a classical reference source about the Pacific war and the occupation of Japan. One can notice an abrupt change in tone when the reports deal with the responsibility and postwar treatment of the Emperor.

themselves much different from the ones taken in Japan over half a century earlier (Rosenfeld and Sajo, 2012: 26; Al-Ali, 2011: 78). Their success or failure would, after all, depend not only on whether such policies were good or bad, but also whether Iraqis would resist them, or, like the Japanese, show an accommodating attitude.

Occupation neglected: marginalization of Okinawa

The fourth point raised by John Dower in the explanation of the success of American occupation was about the integrity of Japanese society. That might be true for most of that society, but not for all of it. Most students of the occupation of Japan tend to forget about Okinawa, and so do majority of Japanese themselves. Okinawa simply suffers the fate of being marginalized, despite the fact that the occupation of Okinawa was radically different from that applied in the rest of Japan, and thus may provide us with a different menu of lessons. Okinawa is the southernmost of Japan's main islands, located within the Ryukyu (Nansei) Islands, half way between Taiwan and Kyushu but remote from both. At the end of the war, the battle of Okinawa utterly devastated most of the island and decimated its population, which was driven out to live in refugee internment camps. The islands (Nansei Islands) were under the control of American military forces. There was no functioning local government and almost no remaining social infrastructure. Okinawa was under the command of MacArthur's GHQ, but it was administered separately from the Allied occupation machinery in Japan (SCAP). What are the memories of American occupation in Okinawa?

American presence on Okinawa has centered on issues about bases. U.S. bases have been located in the middle and southern part of the island and most of such areas have been densely populated. This means that the U.S. military has been in close contact with local population, and this has led to literally thousands of cases of military misdemeanor, rape and other crimes and traffic accidents. Almost all cases tried by the system of American military justice acquitted U.S. nationals, and local victims have rarely received any compensation at all from the U.S. government. Poor treatment of the local Okinawan population by the military has left memories of betrayal and bitterness towards the occupier.³ Issues surrounding military bases epitomize at least two problems that Okinawa has faced since the beginning of the American military occupation in 1945: military bases per se, and denial of self-government.

Okinawa was considered to be the last stepping stone before the invasion of the Japanese main islands, and the Pentagon cared little about remaining on the island after the war was over. Masaaki Gabe reviews the process of the American decision to invade Okinawa, and the way that decision transformed itself after the end of the war into the call for permanent retention of military bases on Okinawa. The initial decision for retention of U.S. bases was related to the overall postwar policy on overseas bases determined in the JCS policy paper no. JCS 570/34 of November 1945, which put the American bases located in Okinawa into the top category of most important facilities overseas. The decision reflected a major change

³ Most such incidents occur on daily basis. They generally receive little attention but much sympathy. Such memories come back when especially felonious cases occur, when noticeable mistreatment of justice had been done. The stories have deep impact, especially when told by renowned personalities. One among many is the story of well-known author Toshiaki Shinjo (Shinjo, 1995).

in thinking. The Pentagon had previously thought of Okinawa as important but not vital, and the bases it developed were intended to be temporary. The Ryukyus would be a staging area and a stepping stone for the invasion of Japan. Now that the war was over, the administration developed a new set of strategic interests and decided to hold on to its existing facilities. Such a commitment was further reinforced in January 1946, when in JCS 570/40 the administration opted for the establishment of a trusteeship in the area, withdrawing the decision about the sovereign rights of Japan. Okinawans were “liberated,” but the Pentagon busied itself with thinking about the protection of its military interests, and it lent no ear to local demands. Strategic interests mattered more than local voices (Gabe, 1996).

Shortly after the battle, Okinawan society was in a desolate state. People lived in relocation camps (Masahide Ota calls them “concentration camps”), far away from their homes. In many cases, there were no homes any more. During the battle, the U.S. military acquired many new land areas for the purpose of development of military facilities. In Okinawa, land is scarce and population density is high. Many U.S. bases were built on land areas inhabited or irrigated by the local population, and thus it was the inhabitants who had to move out. De facto expropriation without consent of the owners, aided by wartime confusion and post-war military resolve to retain its military bases determined the framework of the unequal relationship between the occupying military and the hapless local population. The heavy-handed treatment to protect U.S. security interests have not added legitimacy to the relations between the American military and the local population. As seen in the recent Futenma base relocation dispute, an atmosphere of tension and distrust has been present ever since the large permanent military bases were acquired by the American military in 1945 (Gabe, 2003).

In May 2003, soon after the battle was over in Iraq, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz granted an interview in which he mentioned: “There are a lot of things that are different now... we can now remove almost all of our forces from Saudi Arabia. Their presence there over the last 12 years has been a source of enormous difficulty for a friendly government.” The planned destination for the new permanent bases was Iraq, mentions Lloyd Gardner, who comments that the Pentagon went into the war determined to negotiate a generous status of forces agreement like those signed with Japan and Korea. The response of Iraqis, who saw American troops scramble for new military installations and pay little attention to looting and the deterioration of peace in the cities, could not be expected to be different from that on Okinawa (Gardner, 2008).

The second problem Okinawa faced after the end of the war was the problem of limitations to democracy and self-government. In 1945, Okinawa was destined to become the first test-case of democracy and self-government in Japan. Before the planned invasion of the Japanese mainland, Okinawa would become a show window of American liberation and exercise of that liberty. The first local government body “Shijunkai [Advisory Council]” was created on 15 August 1945, the day of the Japanese public announcement of the acceptance of the Potsdam declaration. Its members were selected by the American Military Government, and the powers of the Advisory Council were limited to advice, and even the scope of advice was strictly controlled. The Advisory Council had no decision-making powers. Many limitations were extended to the Okinawa Civil Administration established in April

1946, and some restrictions on self-government continued until the reversion of Okinawa in 1972.⁴

Okinawa was also the first place where post-war “free” elections were to take place. The election of the mayors and assemblies of the local “chiku” [regions] took place in September 1945. In Japan they are generally known as the first elections which enfranchised women. In the Japanese homeland islands the population had to wait for another half-year to participate in the first national elections. But, with the turn in American strategic thinking, any further elections were put on the back burner in Okinawa. Okinawa was soon administratively detached from Japan, and it would have to wait for new elections for two more years. The first elections to an island-wide representative body took place more than five years after the end of the war, and direct elections of the chief executive had to wait for 23 years, despite having been written in law for 15 years. Okinawan democracy was poignantly described in 1947 as a “game of cat and mouse”, with the American military command being the cat and the Okinawan population playing the mouse (Toriyama, 2013: 35; Wakabayashi, 2015).

American occupation of Okinawa has received little attention among the researchers on Japanese postwar history. Despite being marginalized in the literature, Okinawa remained one part of the “successful” occupation story of Japan. Or more precisely, because the story of Okinawa remained marginalized, the story of Japan could sell under the label “successful.” The lessons that Americans might have drawn from Japan (meaning Okinawa) before embarking on their recent democratizing missions might provide them with more sobering advice. In the end, what we can see is that, when American military interests were put first, they tended to minimize everything else.

Conclusion

So what conclusions should be drawn from MacArthur’s occupation? There are two main lessons. One is about the fallacy of misappropriation. The other is about the risk of mismanagement.

First, judging the occupation of Japan as a success story “because of” the occupation democratization policies is a too optimistic distortion. The foremost precondition for carrying out occupation reforms was the stabilization and pacification of Japanese society. The *Beginner’s Guide to Nation-Building*, published by RAND in 2007, mentions the promotion of democracy as one of the main goals of nation building: though it does not advance it as the primary goal. RAND stresses pacification as the most important precondition for being able to carry out any other occupation policy, like democratization (Dobbins, 2007). MacArthur got the credit for the successful pacification of Japanese society, but that was not the result of American efforts to contain any military resistance. Those would not have been very successful anyway. American plans were overdue, ambiguous and missed the point. Once resistance gained legitimacy among the population, the occupation forces would have had a hard time to calm the situation down. It was the result of the Japanese themselves to discover, intercept and reconcile early forms of resistance. It was a matter of administrative

⁴ More comparative analysis of the extent not only of the few postwar years, but rather the whole occupation period is necessary. See e.g., Okuda, 2012.

management and political craftsmanship, and not of military clout. The American occupation avoided unrest because it acted through the Japanese government, not despite of it.

Second, from the Allied administration of Okinawa, one can learn how not to run occupation for purely military objectives. Occupation of Okinawa did not face the problem of civil uprising as above. No unrest would have a chance to succeed against the omnipotent military machinery on the island. What the occupation of Okinawa desperately lacked was ingenuity, initiative and attention on behalf of the military to the needs of the local population. The only thing the population received was apathy, suspicion and condescension hidden between the lines of numerous military proclamations and ordinances.

The above two lessons should serve as an early warning mechanism for any kind of attempt to draw upon the “success” of the American occupation of Japan. The more one tries to look only for success, the more one is prone to misunderstand the case study. Many lessons about what to do to “bring freedom to Iraq” have been about achieving the high standard set by the Japanese or German cases. If this paper has something to contribute to the debate, it would be that, at least in the case of Japan, the “success” was not as high as some might have considered it to be (Nishikawa, 2004: 117; Amemiya, 2008; Maulucci, 2008: 128; Fukuyama, 2006: 4; Textor, 1951: 5; Textor, 1992: 34).

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