

The Iraqi Intervention and Democracy in Comparative Historical Perspective

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Is military occupation likely to be the midwife of democracy? Can democracy be imposed by force from the outside? This is the assumption driving America's intervention in Iraq and posited as a potential new pillar of ambition for U.S. foreign policy elsewhere. But is this assumption historically grounded? The architects of the Iraqi intervention point to the success of America's occupation of postwar Germany and Japan as evidence that occupation *can* deliver on democratic objectives. But careful examination of the historical record suggests that we should be tentative about drawing lessons from these cases to guide our endorsement of military occupation today. Germany and Japan began with a set of endowments, many of them anticipated by democratic theory, but others peculiar to the cases' unique historical context and time, that favored democratic outcomes. These endowments are not replicated in Iraq, nor does military occupation guarantee them elsewhere. Cases of occupation more comparable in initial endowment to Iraq suggest more pessimism about occupation's capacity to deliver democracy. Historical experience suggests that although military occupation may increase the likelihood of democratization, and wise policy choices certainly improve its chances, the outcome is largely shaped by factors, both domestic and international, that cannot be controlled by military engineers operating within the confines of current cultural norms and conventional limits of time and treasure.

To elaborate upon this argument, this essay will begin by identifying the essential noncomparability of the German, Japanese, and Iraqi cases. Given their dissimilarities, it seems an oddly selective reading of history to focus on the

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German and Japanese occupations (out of a much larger universe of cases) to draw lessons about occupation's political potential in Iraq. The essay will then turn to two other cases of occupation better (although not perfectly) matched in initial endowments to Iraq: Haiti and Bosnia. This comparison will suggest some pessimism about military occupation's capacity to deliver democracy. The essay will conclude with lessons, both positive and negative, about occupation's potential contribution to democratization that can be gleaned from the German and Japanese cases. Although military occupation cannot fashion democracy out of whole cloth, it nevertheless can steer countries in a democratic direction through wise policy choices.

NONCOMPARABLE CASES

It is highly problematic to use the military occupation of Japan and Germany as the standard of comparison for occupation's potential to deliver democracy in cases such as Iraq.

The comparison is ill-conceived, primarily because the starting conditions that characterize these cases are dissimilar in ways that are crucial for democratic outcomes, favoring them in Japan and Germany and disfavoring them in Iraq. As such, they obscure the independent impact of military occupation as a force for democracy. At least five of these starting conditions are factors anticipated by democratic theory that alone would have made us optimistic about democracy's chances in Germany and Japan, irrespective of foreign intervention. Several other factors favored democratic outcomes in the postwar cases that were specific to the historical context and time in which these occupations occurred and are unlikely to be replicated in contemporary cases of occupation. All told, eight factors will be identified that make for crucial noncomparability of these cases and that counsel wariness about drawing historical lessons too hastily.

The most obvious dissimilarity between our cases, and one that is crucial for democratic outcomes, is their dramatically different levels of economic development. Prior to the outbreak of World War II, both Germany and Japan were great powers. Both were highly industrialized countries with developed economies that boasted impressive GNP per capita.¹ And although the war devastated much of the physical capital in both countries, Japan and Germany retained the human, organizational, and social capital (that is, skilled workers, skilled managers, and social networks) that is the lynchpin of economic development. As the economist Luigi Zingales has written, Japan and Germany in the aftermath of World War II were akin to a firm whose plant has burned down. To restart the enterprise, all that was needed was an infusion of financial capital to rebuild the plant, a comparatively simple prospect.²

¹ Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan from Tokugawu to the Present* (New York: Oxford, 2003); John Killick, *The United States and European Reconstruction, 1945–60* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997).

² Luigi Zingales, "For Iraq, A Plan Worthy of Zambia," *The Washington Post*, 9 November 2003.

By contrast, a country such as Iraq has never achieved an advanced level of economic development. Although the country has enjoyed the bounty of oil wealth, it has not yet developed into an advanced industrialized country, and it is woefully lacking in the social and human capital essential to such ambition. To continue Zingales's metaphor, Iraq is not like a firm whose plant has burned down. Rather, it is akin to a firm putting its business together from scratch. This is a much more daunting objective, especially given the reality that in the United States at least, nearly 70 percent of all new businesses fail within their first five years.³

Democratic theory suggests that this differential level of economic development has a huge impact on democratic outcomes. One of the most robust findings of twenty-five years of political science rumination on democratization is that durable democracy is strongly correlated with economic development. The reasons are complex and not fully fleshed out, but statistically, it seems irrefutable that democracy is most likely to flourish and survive when a country enjoys more than \$5,500 per capita GNP.⁴ This is not to argue that economic development is either a necessary or a sufficient condition for *transition* to democracy. Contrary to the modernization school, Adam Przeworski et al. have shown that, statistically speaking, such a transition can occur at any level of economic development. But for democracy to *endure*, historical experience suggests that the chances for democratic survival are directly linked to per capita GNP. They are most favorable once a country surpasses the \$5,500 mark.⁵

Now, truth be told, none of our cases, not even Germany and Japan, had achieved this level of wealth at the time of occupation.⁶ But Germany's and Japan's endowment with rich supplies of human and social capital meant that both countries were capable of absorbing foreign aid effectively and taking advantage of growth opportunities (such as the Korean War boom) to grow so rapidly that, in retrospect, their experience has been dubbed an economic miracle.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98.

⁵ This is not to argue that a per-capita GNP of \$5,500 is a *necessary* condition for democratic survival in countries where democratic transition has already taken place. Many strong, durable democracies, including the United States and Great Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and India in the twentieth, have survived on much less. Rather, Przeworski et al. simply present the statistical finding that based on past historical experience, the probability that a democracy will collapse into authoritarianism falls to near zero in the per-capita GNP income range of \$4,000 to \$6,055. This per-capita GNP appears to be a *sufficient*, although not a *necessary*, condition for democratic survival, once transition to democracy has already occurred. For a more extended discussion of the relationship between economic development and democratization (specifically focused on the Middle East), see Eva Bellin, "The Political-Economic Conundrum: The Affinity of Political and Economic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Working Paper, September 2004.

⁶ In fact, neither had achieved this level of GNP even at occupation's end. Japan's per-capita GNP at the time of democracy's inauguration in 1952 was only \$1,768 (in 1985 PPP USD). Germany's per capita GNP at the time of democracy's inauguration in 1949 was \$2,567. See Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development*, 108–109.

Iraq's relative poverty in these endowments means that even with aid (and oil rents), economic development is doomed to be slower, postponing the day when the country will enter the statistically surest zone of democratic stability.

The second factor that distinguishes the Japanese and German cases from that of Iraq is the dramatically different levels of ethnic homogeneity found in their societies. Japan and Germany were relatively homogenous ethnically. Both countries enjoyed significant consensus about their national identity, and both could count on a fair degree of social solidarity in their societies. There was no need for "nation building," to use a term now recurrent in contemporary political discourse. If anything, an overweening sense of nationalism characterized both Japan and Germany and accounted for their headlong venture into war in the 1930s.⁷

The same cannot be said of Iraq. Although a sense of Iraqi identity exists among Iraqi citizens, this is a country deeply divided along three primary cleavages: Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish. The social divide between these groups was exacerbated by the policies of Saddam Hussein's regime, which seized upon these cleavages, as well as other primordial loyalties like that of tribe, to solidify its own hold on power.⁸ Deliberate state practice of privilege and prejudice meted out along primordial lines fueled suspicion and distrust among the different communities of Iraqi society.

Democratic theory suggests that ethnic homogeneity is an important factor in shaping democratic outcomes. As constitutional scholar Ivor Jennings said, "The people cannot decide until someone decides who are the people."⁹ Conventional wisdom in the field suggests that some consensus about national identity, that is, some degree of social solidarity, is necessary to prevent the inherently conflictual nature of the democratic process from tearing a country apart.¹⁰ The fact that Germany and Japan enjoyed this ethnic homogeneity while Iraq does not suggests that conditions are less propitious for democratic outcomes in the latter.¹¹

A third major source of dissimilarity between our cases is their differential endowment with effective state institutions. Both Germany and Japan emerged

⁷ Thanks to Charles Maier for this insight and the reminder of the hypernationalism that characterized both Germany and Japan in the 1930s and 1940s.

⁸ Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policy," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (February 1999): 1–31.

⁹ Ivor Jennings, cited in Dankwart Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Towards a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2 (April 1970): 337–363.

¹⁰ For a dissenting view, see Steven Fish and Robin Brooks, "Does Diversity Hurt Democracy?" *Journal of Democracy* 15 (January 2004): 154–166. By the authors' own admission, this study is preliminary and contradicts conventional wisdom in the field.

¹¹ Asserting that Japan and Germany were ethnically homogenous is not to deny that both countries were characterized by deep divisions along ideological lines at this time. Historically, however, ethnic cleavages have proven to be the most difficult cleavages to bridge and the most dangerous to the integrity of new democracies. See Juan Linz, "Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes" in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Palsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 3 (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1973), 330–333.

from World War II with meritocratically organized, rule-bound state institutions intact. Both possessed an effective police force, judiciary, and civil service with which to govern. Germany, after all, had been the paradigmatic bureaucratic state, and the Nazi regime did not dismantle these bureaucracies, but rather ruled through them during its twelve-year reign. Once the war was over, these state institutions were there to be mobilized by the occupation forces after limited de-Nazification.¹² Similarly, in the case of Japan, the country had a strong state bureaucracy that survived the war and that was immediately available for mobilization by the occupation forces. The occupation forces eagerly seized upon this resource because the Americans were woefully under-equipped with proficient Japanese speakers and Japan experts to run the country on their own.¹³

By contrast, Iraq is sorely lacking in effective, meritocratically organized, rule-bound state institutions. The state under Saddam was patrimonially organized, riven with corruption, and driven by politics and loyalty tests, rather than merit.¹⁴ As a result, many key institutions, especially the police and the judicial system, have to be rebuilt from the bottom up.

This is a huge task, but it is an absolute prerequisite for successful democratization. As case after case of failed democratization in the postcolonial world has shown, order is prior to liberty. Before democracy, you must have a state of law, with effective state institutions that can deliver fair, predictable order to citizens.¹⁵ Democracy cannot flourish in a context of chaos, as countless cases of failed democratization from Haiti to Somalia have shown. Here, too, Iraq is sorely disadvantaged in its quest for democratization when compared to the cases of Japan and Germany.

A fourth major source of dissimilarity between our cases concerns historical precedent, and most importantly, the degree to which the country cases have had prior experience with meaningful democracy. As democratic theorists have learned, history matters. The record of democratic transition around the world over the past thirty years indicates that the countries that have had the most success in democratizing in Eastern Europe, in Latin America, and elsewhere are countries that have had some prior experience of democracy to draw upon in building their new regimes.¹⁶

¹² Edward Peterson, *The American Occupation of Germany: Retreat to Victory* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State Press, 1977).

¹³ John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 212; T.J. Pempel, "The Tar Baby Target: 'Reform' of the Japanese Bureaucracy," in Robert E. Ward and Yoshikazu Sakamoto, eds., *Democratizing Japan: The Allied Occupation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

¹⁴ Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

¹⁵ The best-known contemporary statement of this position is found in Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968). Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* offers the classical rendition.

¹⁶ Thomas Carothers and Bethany Lacina, "Quick Transformation to Democratic Middle East is a Fantasy," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 16 March 2003.

In this endowment too, Japan and Germany were advantaged, compared to Iraq. Both Japan and Germany had had significant experience with democratic rule prior to World War II. This is not to deny the fact that Weimar democracy and Taisho democracy were seriously flawed.¹⁷ Nevertheless, under these regimes, both countries had developed consequential party structures, extensive experience with a critical press, and familiarity with competitive elections. The presence of the Social Democratic party and the Zentrum in Germany and the Minseitō and Seiyūkai in Japan proved especially consequential as precedents for electioneering and the political mobilization of a popular base. In short, both Japan and Germany had crucial political institutions, practices, and habits of mind to call upon when building their new democracies in the postwar period.

The same cannot be said of Iraq. Although it is true that the country had a brief experience with competitive elections under the British mandate in the 1920s and early 1930s, this was largely an elite charade manipulated by the colonial overlord. Under the Hashemite monarchy, the depth of parliamentary experience did not go much deeper.¹⁸ Since 1958, with the installation of military rule, Iraq has only known rule by force. As a consequence, there are few institutional remnants or habits of mind from the preauthoritarian period to draw upon today to help build democracy in Iraq. Most notably, there are no party institutions to resurrect today. Their replacement by cliques of ethnic or religious elites sorely handicaps the chances of vibrant democracy in the country.

The fifth major dissimilarity that distinguishes our cases stems from their differential endowment with leaders of national stature capable of sponsoring the democratic process. One of the most striking elements in the story of the Japanese occupation was the central role that Emperor Hirohito played in helping along the democratic project in that country. It was his endorsement, his imprimatur, his association and identification with the democratic project that persuaded many conservative Japanese to go along with it, despite their misgivings.¹⁹ Other leaders, such as Yoshida Shigeru, Ashida Hitoshi, and Ishibashi Tanzan, also played key roles in this process.²⁰ In Germany, leaders with national stature, such as Konrad Adenauer and Kurt Schumacher, were central to their country's turn to democracy. These men enjoyed extra legitimacy because they did not go into exile during the war but rather stayed the course in Germany, suffering persecution at the hands of the Nazis. Their embrace of the democratic project after the war helped anchor it at home.²¹

¹⁷ Eberhard Kold, *The Weimar Republic* (London, Unwin Hyman, 1988); Bernard Silberman and H.D. Harootunian, eds., *Japan in Crisis: Essays in Taisho Democracy* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1999).

¹⁸ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 330, 363.

²⁰ John Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Empire, 1878–1954* (Cambridge, MA: Council of East Asian Studies, Harvard University, distributed by Harvard University Press, 1979). Thanks to an anonymous reader for suggesting the importance of these figures in Japan's transition to democracy.

²¹ Hans Peter Schwartz, *Konrad Adenauer* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995).

What is problematic in the Iraqi case is that there is a shortage of leaders of national stature who did not go into exile during Saddam's rule and who might endorse and shepherd the democratic project. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is one potential figure, but his stature is largely limited to the Shia community. Democratic theory suggests that this is a serious deficit. The commitment of elites is central to successful democratization. Even elites not existentially committed to democratic values can often play a crucial role in this process.²²

Thus far, the five factors that differentiate our cases—level of economic development, ethnic homogeneity, strength of state institutions, historical experience, and elite leadership—are all factors that democratic theory would anticipate as key to shaping the success or failure of democratization. Germany's and Japan's positive endowment in these areas predisposed these countries to successful democratization (although clearly the occupation played an important role in ensuring this outcome rather than an authoritarian one). Beyond this, however, there are three additional differences that favored democratic outcomes in Germany and Japan that are not anticipated by general works of democratic theory. These conditions sprang from the particular time and place of the German and Japanese occupations and are not easily replicable today.

The first of these context-specific factors concerns the psychological state of the occupied at the time of occupation. What is most striking in the historical accounts of Japan and Germany in the immediate postwar period was the sense of utter defeat and desperation that pervaded their societies. Both Japan and Germany had suffered the firebombing of major cities, the loss of many lives, and the specter of starvation. In Japan, more than three million people had been killed in the war, over sixty-four cities had been bombed, nuclear attack had destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and millions of people were homeless.²³ In Germany, seven million Germans had died during the war, a huge refugee crisis loomed, the economy had collapsed, and hunger haunted nearly everyone.²⁴ This defeat and misery created a state of psychological crisis in both countries, a critical juncture that broke down old conventions and made people receptive to new ideas and approaches, especially ideas and approaches that seemed to be associated with hope and liberation from misery. As noted historian John Dower informs us, the Japanese referred to the American occupation as the "liberation," that is, liberation from death and from "the fifteen year war" (because their military effort began in the early 1930s with the intervention in Manchuria). The Japanese and Germans were eager to break with the past and embrace something new.

²² John Waterbury, "Democracy without Democrats" in Ghassane Salame, ed., *Democracy Without Democrats: The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1994); Giuseppe di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

²³ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 87–120.

²⁴ James Dobbins, John McGinn, Keith Crane, Seth Jones, Rolie Lal, Andrew Rathmell, Rachel Swanger, and Anga Timilsina, *America's Role in Nation Building* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003); Thomas Berger, "The Occupation of Germany and Japan as State-Building Lessons for the 21st Century," (unpublished manuscript), 8.

By contrast, Iraq has not experienced that same shock of utter defeat and crisis. America's victory over the Iraqi military was certainly irrefutable, but the war's duration was relatively short and the civilian casualties were, thankfully, limited. This lessened the sense of crisis. And although the Iraqis had suffered many years of severe hardship prior to the war, including food shortages, medical supply shortages, and progressive impoverishment due to international sanctions and the corruption of their own regime, this suffering was more akin to a slow bleed than a shocking mortal blow. This is important because a slow bleed practices people in coping mechanisms. In contrast to a cataclysmic mortal shock, it does not create the same psychological receptivity to dramatic change. This difference in psychological state made the Japanese and German societies more amenable to embracing a new political project under occupation auspices than has been the case for Iraqi society.²⁵

The second context-specific factor that distinguishes these cases concerns the different level of commitment on the part of the occupiers to seeing their occupation project through. In Japan and Germany, the United States was in it for the long haul. The United States went into both countries intending to stay for several years and committed to investing millions in treasure and manpower in order to establish stable democratic regimes. The American occupation of Japan lasted more than six years and involved deployment of over a million Americans. In Germany, a comparable investment was made. In part, this commitment was a consequence of the horror of the Second World War and the deep desire by the United States to uproot those regimes whose hyperaggressiveness had spelled destruction on such a massive scale. But equally important was another time-specific issue: the heightening of the Cold War. Soviet expansionism in Eastern Europe and the outbreak of the Korean War in Asia made tangible the fear of Communist threat and deepened America's commitment to establishing stable democratic allies in Germany and Japan. Central to the staying power of these American occupations was the irrevocable pairing of idealism and interest, idealistic commitment to spreading democracy as well as realpolitik interest in containing Communism.

In the case of America's intervention in Iraq, we see a much slimmer commitment to seeing this political project through. We are rhetorically committed to democratization in Iraq, but the pairing of this ideal to our realpolitik interests in the country is much more tenuous. Our meager engagement in Iraq's democratization is reflected in the measure of resources we are willing devote to this venture, most notably, in terms of time. The United States is committed to a much shorter intervention in Iraq than was the case in Japan or Germany. For example, the administration was intent upon handing over sovereignty to the Iraqis by June 2004, that is after fourteen months, not six years, of occupation.

²⁵ For a similar argument stressing the importance of crisis as a critical political-cultural juncture, see Thomas Berger, *Cultures of Anti-militarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998).

This is not to imply that America should prolong its occupation in Iraq or that prolonged U.S. occupation would bolster the chances of democracy there. America's association with colonial domination and its illegitimacy in the Arab world taint any of its political projects for the region, no matter how well-intentioned. Multinational supervision à la Bosnia would be more promising. But the point is simply that fourteen months of intervention is a relatively short period of time to deliver on a complex goal like democratization. Here again, Iraq is dissimilar to the Japanese and German precedents and is disadvantaged in achieving the desired political outcome.

The last dissimilarity that distinguishes our cases springs from a time-specific factor that I will call dictatorial freedom of occupation. One of the most remarkable aspects of the occupation of Japan and Germany was the relatively free hand the occupation forces enjoyed in imposing policy on the conquered country. This was especially dramatic in the case of Japan. There, the occupying forces wrote a new constitution for the country and essentially handed the document down to the occupied, with little local consultation.²⁶ In addition, the occupying forces rewrote laws, reshaped property rights, and reorganized gender relations in ways that are quite astonishing today for their radicalness and their dictatorial quality.²⁷ In Germany, the occupying forces had the luxury of postponing national elections for three years (!), giving them precious time to purge the old guard and reestablish order before putting the new political system to the test.²⁸

One of the things that made this dictatorial free hand possible (in Japan at least) was the occupation force's control over information. The occupiers exercised mind-boggling censorship over the press and monopolized control of the broadcast media. This meant that they could limit the parameters of debate by controlling what people did or did not know.

Such dictatorial control is absolutely unimaginable today, not least because of technological advances. With multiple media sources available, from satellite TV to the internet, there are all sorts of ways for the occupied to circumvent the occupier's control of information. Al Hura must compete for the hearts and minds of Iraqis; it cannot monopolize them. But beyond technological advances, such dictatorial control is unimaginable today, in large part because of changing cultural expectations. No one could get away with the paternalism of a MacArthur today. It is astonishing to read the language the general used, referring

²⁶ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 364–390. For a detailed first-person account of the constitution-writing process that argues for a more nuanced view of the process, see Charles L. Kades, “The American Role in Revising Japan's Imperial Constitution,” *Political Science Quarterly* 104 (Summer 1989): 215–247.

²⁷ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 365–373.

²⁸ Richard Merrit, *Democracy Imposed: US Occupation Policy and the German Public* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). In Germany, the United States had less of a free hand because of constraints imposed by the other occupying powers, namely, France, Britain, and the Soviet Union. With the outbreak of the Cold War, France and Britain largely threw their support behind the United States. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this last point.

to the Japanese as children who needed to be taught and guided. Nor can elections be postponed at length when the people are demanding their right to self-determination. In the postcolonial world, there is less acceptance of unilaterally forcing people to be free.

MORE COMPARABLE CASES?

Cases that are better matched to Iraq in terms of initial endowments crucial to democratic outcomes (that is, level of development, ethnic homogeneity, institutional strength, etc.) sadly suggest slimmer reason for optimism about this venture.

One such case might be Haiti. The United States occupied Haiti in 1994 with explicit rhetorical commitment to establishing democracy in that country despite the daunting state of affairs there. The Haitian case shares with Iraq many key initial conditions. It suffered from ineffective state institutions. The country was hobbled by the fact that it had an utterly incapable police force, judiciary, and state bureaucracy, spelling chaos and misery for its citizens. It had limited prior experience with democracy. Haiti had been ruled by brutal dictators from the Duvalier family from 1954 until 1986, and before and after that had known chaos and disorder more than constitutional rule. The country suffered from economic underdevelopment. Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere and one of the poorest in the world. Finally, Haiti shared with the Iraqi case the fact of limited U.S. commitment to its stated goal of democratization. Although the intervention was called “Operation Restore Democracy,” it was driven more by the U.S. concern to stem the flow of refugees from Haiti and restore order on the island than the desire to expand the realm of democracy. The Clinton administration was intent on getting out of Haiti quickly (especially after the fiasco of intervention in Somalia in 1993–1994), and most U.S. troops were withdrawn from the island within six months of the initial occupation.²⁹

The consequences of this limited intervention, paired with inauspicious initial endowments, were predictable. Haiti did not turn into a stable democracy. The country is still characterized by chaos and instability today.

Another case that shares some important initial conditions with Iraq is that of Bosnia. Bosnia is an important case for comparison because Bosnia shares with Iraq the challenge of building a democracy in a country deeply riven by ethnic cleavage. In addition, like Iraq, Bosnia is a country with limited prior experience with democracy. The most important difference between the Bosnian and Iraqi cases is that the occupation of Bosnia has been carried out under UN auspices by multinational forces executing a treaty that was negotiated among the different Bosnian communities themselves. Presumably, this prove-

²⁹ Jean-Germain Gros, “Haiti’s Flagging Transition,” *Journal of Democracy* 8 (October 1997): 94–109.

nance gives more international and domestic legitimacy to the occupation. A second important difference between the Bosnian and Iraqi cases is that in Bosnia, the occupiers have made a long-term commitment to see this occupation through to its intended conclusion—the establishment of a stable, peaceful, multiethnic government. To achieve that goal, the occupation has lasted for nearly ten years, with no end in sight.

Despite these more favorable conditions, the Bosnian case suggests the difficulty of delivering democracy in a democratically inexperienced, ethnically divided society. Ten years after the Dayton Accord, ethnic tensions remain very strong in Bosnia. The leaders of the Muslim, Croatian, and Serbian communities still refuse to cooperate with each other and, according to the report of the Economist Intelligence Unit, Bosnia has “still not made a decisive turn toward being a sustainable economic and political entity.”³⁰

The cases of Haiti and Bosnia, better matched to Iraq than Japan and Germany in initial conditions, suggest pessimism about military occupation’s capacity to deliver on the goal of implanting democracy. But even these two cases are not perfectly matched to Iraq, and so conclusions drawn from them are also vulnerable to the criticism of relying on a selective reading of history. A comprehensive review of all cases of military occupation might prove most persuasive but, short of that, one can point to a preliminary study by Pei and Kasper that tracks seventeen cases of military occupation carried out by the United States in the twentieth century.³¹ Out of these cases, only four (Japan, Germany, Grenada, and Panama) have given rise to stable democracies. Historically, the odds thus seem to be against success. Focusing on only the two most salient cases of success in itself constitutes an oddly selective reading of history.

USEFUL LESSONS FROM GERMANY AND JAPAN

But there is no need to discard the German and Japanese cases altogether. Although these cases cannot help us isolate the independent impact of military occupation on democratic outcomes, the Japanese and German cases are useful in that they put to rest pessimistic assumptions about several factors reputed to hamper democratization in conquered countries that were previously authoritarian.

First, the cases of Japan and Germany suggest that indigenous “authoritarian” culture, or perhaps our misinformed perceptions of it, need not be an insurmountable obstacle to implanting democracy. With democracy so firmly established in Germany and Japan today, we tend to forget that in the postwar period, the conventional wisdom was that both Japanese and German societies were culturally inhospitable to democracy. Germany was the focus of numer-

³⁰ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Profile: Bosnia* (2003).

³¹ Minxin Pei and Sara Kasper, “Lessons from the Past: The American Record on Nation Building,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Policy Brief 24) (2003).

ous studies aimed at pinning down the nature of “the authoritarian personality” purportedly endemic to German society.³² Japanese society was considered too “conformist” and “herdlike” to provide fertile ground for democracy.³³ In fact, the cultural descriptions of these countries sound much like what is leveled at the Islamic world today. The point is, these presumed cultural sensibilities, whether accurately described or not, did not pose an insurmountable barrier to building democracy in Germany and Japan. In countries like Iraq, they should be seen as no more determining.

Second, the German and Japanese cases suggest that *imposition* of a political system need not necessarily spell its failure. What is striking, especially in the Japanese case, is the degree to which democratic institutions and reforms were imposed upon the occupied rather than teased out from indigenous sources. Imposition did not spell their failure. Why? The occupation forces were able to corral local interests behind these reforms and get key leaders to identify with the project and endorse it. This was the case with the Japanese constitution. The document was largely written by occupation bureaucrats without Japanese consultation. But the occupation forces were able to sell it to conservative elites in Japan because they presented it as a way to preserve the institution of the monarchy (which was so dear to the conservatives’ conception of Japanese national identity). The occupation forces were able to persuade the Emperor himself to endorse the constitution in the same way. Overall, the larger geopolitical context, notably the Communist threat that peered over the borders of both Japan and Germany, persuaded conservative elements in both countries that their interests lay with the American-led democratic alliance. Engaging these interests further, the allies quickly fixed both Japan and Germany in a web of international organizations and institutions (NATO, GATT, etc.) that further paired their economic and security concerns with the democratic enterprise.³⁴ In this way, democracy did not stand simply on the fragile scaffolding of ideals but rather was multiply bolstered by interest.

There is a lesson here for Iraq. Political institutions don’t have to be of indigenous origin to be acceptable. So long as the innovations are perceived as serving key interests and don’t come at the expense of national identity, then institutions of foreign derivation might be expected to survive.

A third lesson from these historic cases: economic take-off and prosperity need not be immediate to ensure public endorsement of political change. Conventional wisdom teaches that the surest way to persuade people to embrace political reform is to “deliver the economic goods.” That way, people associate the new institutions with prosperity and endorse them. But what is striking about

³² Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1963). T.W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswick, and D.J. Levinson, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950).

³³ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 217–218. Similar arguments are still made today. See Karel van Wolferen, *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (New York: Knopf, 1989).

³⁴ Berger, “Occupation of Germany and Japan,” 18.

the German and Japanese cases is just how long it took for the economy to pick up in both countries under the occupation. Germany did not begin to see its economy take off until 1948, when a new currency was introduced. That was three years after the occupation began. Japan did not see its economy take off until around 1950, when the Korean War sparked a boom. That was a good five years into the occupation. Of course, prior to that, a great deal of aid had been provided to both Germany and Japan to stave off starvation and social unrest. But it took three to five years for the economy of these countries to really prosper.

The value of this historical perspective is that it encourages us to take the longer view on developments in Iraq. By comparison to Japan and Germany, Iraq today is ahead of schedule. The country has already recovered to prewar conditions in many areas of the economy.³⁵ There is sufficient momentum in the economy to give hope that things are moving forward. If history is to be repeated, then so long as this economic momentum is sustained, the political project should enjoy some breathing space.

Fourth and finally, the case of Japan, especially, suggests that the support of historically nondemocratic leaders can be key to successful democratic transition. No one would have expected Emperor Hirohito to be the champion of democracy in Japan, but, in fact, his endorsement of the process was key to its success. Similar figures may be of equal utility in Iraq. A leader like Sistani may not be ideologically committed to the principles of democracy, but with the skillful enlistment of his interests and self-understanding, he might prove to be an indispensable figure in the country's transition.

In short, military occupation can have added value for democratization. If done right, it can foster transition by rectifying state institutions, kick-starting economic development, and structuring economic and political incentives in ways that make elites lean toward democracy. This is clearly the lesson of Germany and Japan. Although both cases were endowed with qualities that favored successful democratization in the postwar period, in neither case was democracy a foregone conclusion. Extended intervention with democratic intent was essential to steering both countries onto a democratic track.

At the same time, military occupation cannot create democracy out of whole cloth. The successful creation of stable democracies in Germany and Japan was facilitated by their endowment with relatively developed economies, ethnic homogeneity, strong state institutions, and historical experience with democracy, as well as context-specific factors such as the experience of devastating defeat, the fear of Communist threat, and the dictatorial freedom of occupation bestowed by contemporary cultural norms. These conditions are difficult, if not impossible, for current occupations to re-create. Certainly they are unattainable in the course of brief occupations, the sort most common given conventional

³⁵ Neela Banerjee, "Iraq Oil Industry Reviving as Output Nears Prewar Levels," *The New York Times*, 1 March 2004; Adrianna Lins de Albuquerque, Michael O'Hanlon, and Jelly Associates, "Op-Art," *The New York Times*, 11 February 2004.

limits of contemporary norms and interest. Thus, although we ought to recognize the successes of the German and Japanese occupations and draw lessons from them, we must also be careful to avoid a selective reading of history that ignores more prevalent patterns and disregards the specificity of time and context in shaping political outcomes.*

* An earlier version of this paper was presented on 3 March 2004 at the roundtable “Forced To Be Free: Democratizing Occupations in Germany, Japan, and Iraq” held by the Program on U.S.–Japan Relations, Harvard University. The author gratefully acknowledges the critical commentary and consultation of Thomas Berger, Nancy Bermeo, L. Carl Brown, John Dower, Thomas Ertman, Sheldon Garon, Charles Maier, Susan Pharr, Mineko Sasaki-Smith, and Frank Schwartz.