



Good Winner, Good Loser by Yoichi Funabashi

As war on the ground in Iraq begins in earnest, the world awaits serious plans for the peace that will follow. Much has been said in recent months about the relevance of the post-World War II occupation of Japan that could serve as a model in Iraq. It is a seductive historical parallel, and the common policy objectives of democratization and demilitarization in both countries make it an especially appealing comparison. Japan's postwar success is a direct result of the United States' nation-building strategy. Thanks to an experiment unparalleled in international politics, a nation that had been brought to its knees in 1945 was, by independence in 1952, able to cast off its pariah status and reenter the world stage. The rest, as they say, is history.

While the Japanese model provides food for thought in Iraq, it is worth dwelling on the differences between the two cases. These range across cultural, ethnic, religious, historical, and political grounds. Their pervasiveness means that ignoring them and simply emulating the Japanese paradigm is to court danger.

Indeed, the very legitimacy of the occupation of Iraq can be called into question by comparing it with that of Japan. The occupation of war-weary Japan was founded on unconditional surrender under the Potsdam Declaration. The sense of utter defeat after Hiroshima and Nagasaki is a stark contrast to, for example, Weimar Germany, which believed that it had been "stabbed in the back by the Jews and a Fifth Column." History suggests that "embracing defeat" (the title of John Dower's classic study of the Japanese occupation) is the prerequisite for a new start in Iraq. Japan chose to play the "good loser," in former Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru's famous phrase. So should Iraq.

Moreover, Japan's occupation was supported by other Asian countries, which were given a place in the United Nations' Far Eastern Commission that officially oversaw the mission. The occupation of Iraq follows a preemptive invasion and will be based on a much shakier form of legitimacy. The vast oil reserves involved further complicate the equation - a factor obviously without comparison in Japan's postwar experience. Ninety percent of the "Arab Street" believes that the U.S. motivation is to get its hands on Iraq's oil.

These twin challenges of legitimacy and oil will probably complicate and compromise the U.S. occupation in Iraq.

The part played by Emperor Hirohito in Japan's rehabilitation must not be underestimated either. Albeit still controversial, the "grand bargain" struck between the U.S. and Japan laid the symbolic foundations for stability in postwar

Japan. The U.S. preserved the emperor's status and waived his war responsibility; Japan, in return, lent the occupying forces its cooperation. Domestically, Hirohito became a symbol of integration and contributed to postwar stability. Iraq has no comparable unifying figure.

A similar disparity is revealed if we examine the political leadership in each case. Japan was exceptionally fortunate in this department. Both Shidehara Kijuro and Yoshida Shigeru (immediate postwar prime ministers) were former diplomats with a good grasp of international politics. Who can we expect to rule Iraq? Throughout his almost 24-year rule, Saddam Hussein has terminated all promising members of the leadership.

In terms of national makeup, too, the Japanese are far more homogenous and united than the Iraqis. Minorities and religious differences no doubt existed in Japan in 1945, but did not serve as serious fault lines. Iraq's ruling Sunni Muslim minority, on the other hand, comprises only 20 percent of the population, and the repressed Shia majority makes up more than 60 percent. The Kurds are another factor that must be addressed in the democratization process. You cannot just call a free election and abandon Iraq to the tyranny of the majority.

First, a tolerant, multiethnic civil society must be built. Iraq's new constitution must make clear that its identity should be neither Sunni, Shia, nor Kurd. In contrast to Japan, the identity of which has developed for more than 2,000 years, Iraq is the post-World War I creation of colonial powers. The burden is on Iraq to meet the serious challenge posed by its artificial identity.

Substantial differences therefore exist between the successful Japanese occupation and the outlook for Iraq. Cynics wonder if it was precisely because of these obvious difficulties that the neoconservatives latched so firmly onto the Japanese precedent. Having separated the apples from the oranges, I would like to elaborate on some lessons from the Japanese occupation that America might do well to recall.

Above all, the key to the success of the occupation of Japan was that the United States was prepared to play the role of the "good winner" opposite Japan's "good loser." Occupation reforms imparted many Japanese with a sense of having been set free. The advent of labor unions, women's right to vote, land reform, and so on created new constituencies for reform. This ensured rock-solid support for the postwar regime. Soon, 90 percent of the Japanese felt that they belonged to the middle class.

In planning the reforms, Gen. MacArthur and the postwar Japanese leaders were fortunate in being able to draw from the

well of homegrown ideas proposed in the Taisho period of 1920s democratization (derailed by the militarists in the 1930s). Postwar politicians were able to revisit and repackage these proposals. The key point is that, rather than appearing to be foreign reforms imposed from above and inducing resentment from below, the pattern of renewal cultivated the Japanese people's sense of ownership in change.

Fostering Iraqis' own sense of ownership is similarly vital, although the absence of indigenous traditions will require creativity. MacArthur himself harbored suspicions that the Japanese remained too immature to sustain democracy: "Measured by the standards of modern civilization," he said, "they would be like a boy of 12 as compared with our development of 45 years." Understandably disheartened by the Iraqi émigrés' state of confusion, many Americans may also be tempted to believe that the country is ungovernable. The Iraqi people, however, are blessed with enormous resources and talent groomed in a splendid civilization. Once liberated, they can be left to themselves. Remember, the supposedly pubescent Japanese public managed its own miracle.

Another critical pillar of Japan's comeback was the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, designed by the victors to bind them in a relationship of "trust and reconciliation" with the vanquished. This gave Japan the chance to start over. The cycle of revenge was contained and anti-Americanism averted, by virtue of the U.S. foresight and generosity.

The international community faces battles for "trust and reconciliation" on two fronts when the actual fighting stops in Iraq. First, it needs to find ways to bring reconciliation to Iraq's international relationships, particularly with the U.S. Second, there is the job of healing the ethnic, tribal, and religious wounds that have been exacerbated by Saddam's divide and rule policy. These are not challenges for the faint-hearted. But international society should not - and cannot afford to - shy away from them.

America also facilitated Japan's reconciliation with "free world" East Asian countries, particularly South Korea. This kind of international peace strategy should accompany reconstruction in Iraq, particularly vis-à-vis the elusive Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement. Democracy cannot be generated in a vacuum; the regional peace structure must be addressed, too.

Don't place too much faith in the democratic domino theory, though. It contains its own catch-22. In the first place, it relies on democracy taking root in Iraq. If that fails to materialize, the dominos will never start to fall. Second, even if democracy does flourish in Iraq it could destabilize autocratic U.S. allies in the area. In that event, tensions may arise between the U.S. and its friends, who might resort to crushing the democracy movements. Net effect on dominoes: the same. In the case of Japan, it took almost 40 years for neighboring countries (the Philippines, Korea, then Taiwan) to democratize. Were that mirrored in the Middle East (if any dominoes ever begin to fall there), it would be a super-slow motion domino effect.

In the last analysis, perhaps the most important question to emerge from a comparison of the Iraqi and Japanese cases hangs not over Iraqi characteristics, but over the way in which America's identity may have changed since 1945.

Put simply, the key question is this: does America in 2003 still have the will to commit itself to this effort? Particularly after events in Afghanistan, many conclude that the answer is that America is "no longer in the nation-building business." In World War II, U.S. planners began to prepare for the occupation three years in advance of Japan's defeat. Thousands of Americans underwent a program of historical and linguistic training to form the main administrative pillar of the occupation. In peacetime, a number of these went on to contribute greatly as scholars to laying down the intellectual foundations of mutual understanding with Japan - Edwin O. Reischauer, Donald Keene, and Edward Seidensticker, to name a few.

To coincide with the year of Japan's independence, the two allies also created a potent symbol of friendship in the Fulbright Program. By virtue of the enduring effects of this program, 7,000 Japanese and 3,000 Americans have forged bonds of lasting friendship and understanding to date. This type of 50-year vision is also called for in Iraq.

One has to search hard for evidence of a similar level of dedication today.

The U.S. must prove that this pessimism is unfounded. The potential gap between America's level of commitment then and now points to the most valid historical lesson that Japan's occupation can teach. In order to succeed in Iraq, America needs to commit as it did to Japan, reprising its role as the good winner in a prolonged curtain call. What is more, it has to do so multilaterally, in concert with U.S. friends and allies - and most importantly, in partnership with the United Nations. Establishing jurisdiction for the Japanese occupation, one should recall, was one of the debut acts of the UN.

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