

## HOW VALID ARE COMPARISONS? THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF GERMANY REVISITED

Symposium at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., November 3, 2003. Co-sponsored by the GHI and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Conveners: Rebecca Boehling (University of Maryland, Baltimore County), Dieter Dettke (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Washington, D.C.), Robert Gerald Livingston (GHI). Participants: Frank Buscher (Christian Brothers University), James Dobbins (RAND Corporation), Michael Hughes (Wake Forest University), Donald Kommers (University of Notre Dame), Christof Mauch (GHI), Timothy Naftali (University of Virginia), David Schoenbaum (University of Iowa), James Tent (University of Alabama).

During this half-day symposium, participants examined comparisons and parallels between the American occupation of Germany 1945-1953 and that of Iraq beginning in 2003. Before, during, and after the war against Iraq, President George W. Bush, leading members of his administration, and supporters of the war often compared Hitler's tyranny with Saddam's and the liberation of Germany fifty-eight years ago with that of Iraq today, arguing that as freedom, democracy, and prosperity had come to Germany in the wake of the war and occupation, so too would they come to Iraq.

The first panel, on the early years of the occupation of Germany, dealt with security threats to the American occupiers, with local and state elections and the new democratic elite, and with reeducation, democratization, and denazification. Timothy Naftali pointed out that resistance after Germany's formal capitulation in early May 1945 was negligible, even though American generals had expected it to be strong. Once Hitler's death became known to Germans, there was no obvious successor around whom SS or Hitler Youth fanatics could rally. The crushing reality of defeat and the massive Allied military presence in Germany took the heart out of would-be resisters, so that there were almost no attacks on the occupation troops.

Rebecca Boehling explained that the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Directive 1067, in force from 1945 to 1947, attempted a compromise on denazification: it changed top personnel but gradually disavowed the program's punitive and repressive aspects. Although Americans and Germans committed to a fundamental purge and democratization of society were dissatisfied with such compromises, congressional committees believed denazification was impeding Germany's economic recovery, and pressured administrators to halt it. American occupiers tended to

place efficiency and experience above democratic alternatives in their personnel decisions. Boehling described how the occupiers helped build postwar German democracy from the bottom up, holding first local, then *Land* elections before national elections in 1949.

“Reeducation” of society was a watchword in the early occupation years in Germany, James Tent recalled, but it is not a guideline in Iraq. The pace of institution-rebuilding is moving faster in Iraq than it did in Germany, the aim today being to establish Iraqi institutions that promote democratic initiatives rather than “reeducation.” In Germany, real help for higher education was not forthcoming until 1947, when Indiana University President Herman B. Wells instituted ambitious programs of cultural exchange and more resources for the universities. In Iraq, promises of assistance for the universities came just six months after the occupation began.

The second panel focused on the later years of Germany’s occupation, and dealt with the constitution, national elections, war crimes trials and transitional justice, and economic revival and the Marshall Plan. Donald Kommers devoted his presentation to the political stability lent to the electoral system by the compromise between proportional representation and a single-member-district system arrived at by German political leaders. The constructive vote of no confidence was an additional stability-enhancing feature. Frank Buscher noted that American military justice after World War II provided for extensive review of sentences, even though there were no appeals courts. The trials of war criminals in Nuremberg and Dachau had reeducational purposes in the broadest sense. From an early date, German elites, including prominent figures such as Cardinal Frings, criticized the war crimes trials and the sentences. The U.S. Army conducted these trials until 1948. Hughes thought that the Marshall Plan, like the Berlin airlift, was more decisive politically than economically, demonstrating as it did that the United States would stand by the new Germany. Refugees from the eastern part of Germany had a greater economic impact than the Marshall Plan on the economy of western Germany.

The two speakers of the final panel considered the validity for Iraq 2003–2004 of the occupation experiences in Germany described by speakers at the first two panels. David Schoenbaum stressed the unique leadership qualities of the military governor in Germany, Lucius Clay, and pointed out the many differences between Germany of 1945 and Iraq of today, not the least of which was the availability to Iraq of a major natural resource, petroleum. He urged that German non-governmental organizations such as the Friedrich Ebert Foundation initiate projects that contribute to Iraqi reconstruction. James Dobbins drew on a recent RAND study on American “nation-building” in eight countries since World War

II (Germany, Japan, Haiti, Somalia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq). He observed that a substantial and lasting presence of American and allied armed forces had proven key in underpinning enduring transitions to democracy. Where there had been plenty of troops, such as in Germany and Japan, such transitions had succeeded, but in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, Washington had substituted firepower for manpower. Precedents such as Kosovo and Bosnia were more applicable to the Iraq case than Germany, but the Bush administration seemed disinclined to draw on them. A lively discussion ensued, with most participants emphasizing the differences rather than the similarities between the American occupations of Germany fifty-eight years ago and of Iraq today.

*Robert Gerald Livingston*