

AMERICAN OCCUPATIONS: GERMANY 1945–1949, IRAQ 2003–2005

GHI-sponsored panel at the twenty-ninth Annual Conference of the German Studies Association, Milwaukee, September 30, 2005. Moderator: Christof Mauch (GHI). Panelists: Rebecca Boehling (University of Maryland, Baltimore County), Robert Gerald Livingston (GHI), Reiner Pommerin (Technical University of Dresden). Commentator: David P. Conradt (East Carolina University).

In some ways this GSA panel continued the discussions begun in November 2003 at the GHI-Friedrich Ebert Foundation symposium, "How Valid Are Comparisons? The American Occupation of Germany Revisited" (see the spring 2004 issue of the *Bulletin*). At that early stage of the occupation of Iraq, scholars of postwar Germany critically analyzed the many comparisons made by the Bush administration and supporters of the United States-led war against Saddam Hussein and the Baathists with the war against Hitler and the Nazis, comparisons made to justify the war and the occupation in Iraq. There the focus was on testing the validity of comparing Iraq in 2003 with the early postwar situation in Germany. Ultimately the participants in the 2003 discussion concluded that there were more differences than similarities in the two cases and that the references to postwar Germany and Japan were merely being instrumentalized to justify a very different, considerably more controversial war and a much less well-thought-out occupation. However, despite the contrasts in the causes and effects of the two wars, there was considerable consensus that there were lessons that could have been learned from the occupation of Germany, including those about the relevance of the views of the neighboring states and the importance of a broad coalition, lessons that might well have prevented or at least have mitigated numerous problems encountered— or provoked—in post-Saddam Iraq.

This 2005 GSA panel compared the two American occupations from the vantage point of an almost two-year occupation of Iraq. Gerald Livingston traced the analogies, starting with George W. Bush's use of the term "Axis of Evil" in his 2002 State of the Union speech, followed by the portrayal of Saddam as Hitler and Baathists as Nazis and, with the outbreak of the war, promises of a postwar reconstruction of Iraq comparable to the Marshall Plan in Germany and Western Europe. From August to November 2003, unexpected Iraqi resistance was explained away by references to Werewolves' attacks in postwar Germany, attacks that never materialized but which both Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice

cited to reassure the American public that this resistance was normal and would be overcome. In December 2003 with the capture of Saddam Hussein, preparations for his trial were compared to Nuremberg, and the transition from the Coalition Provisional Authority to Ayad Allawi's caretaker government was praised for restoring sovereignty so much faster than after four years in postwar Germany. Finally, in the summer of 2004, the anniversary of the Normandy invasion and the opening of the World War II memorial on the National Mall in Washington, DC were instrumentalized at the Republican National Convention as reminders of how Americans do not abandon their tasks in the midst of adversity. Livingston summed up the major quantitative and qualitative differences in the two occupations: namely the level of preparations, the training and skills of the personnel, and the fact that the top German occupation officials, Eisenhower, Clay, and McCloy, had clout and experience, unlike Jay Garner, Paul Bremer, and John Negroponte, the controversial U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.

Rebecca Boehling and Reiner Pommerin divided the priorities of occupation into military security, civil affairs, and nation- or state-building in their approaches to purges and democratization. Boehling looked at the degree to which the scope and purpose of both the German and the Iraqi purges were contested among planners and implementers. She described how Iraqi exiles had contacted her as an expert on German denazification several months prior to the war as they prepared blueprints for "the transition to democracy in Iraq," clearly modeling their categories of levels of complicity and punishment on initial denazification directives. As in the case of Germany, however, the de-Baathification architects had few plans to train new personnel or to encourage the participation of those who had remained in the country and managed to remain untainted. In both cases, the scope of the purge was changed because of the impracticability of purging all those deemed politically incriminated on the basis of formal memberships. Iraqi exiles were more concerned with punishing Baathists, while the Americans concentrated on Saddam and his henchmen, whose photographs they posted as "wanted" on a deck of cards. In Germany, occupiers had found it difficult to administer municipal and state government without the expertise of those initially designated to be removed from positions of influence. Ironically, those least incriminated, who were tried first, received relatively harsher punishments, while many with more formal incrimination benefited from various amnesties as the Cold War intensified and economic reconstruction was the order of the day. Similar mistakes appear to have occurred in Iraq, but far too little is known yet to say for sure.

Pommerin showed how European conceptions of nation-building involve peacekeeping and civil affairs in a way that Americans in Iraq did

not seem to realize. Winning the hearts and minds of the occupied requires intercultural competency, a competency that Americans and the other World War II Allies seem to have displayed in Germany with educational and cultural exchanges, unlike today in Iraq. Pommerin stressed the role of émigrés and expert scholars in the postwar German planning and occupation in contrast to the current situation in Iraq, where the Iraqi exiles who have exerted so much influence were quite out of touch with developments in Iraq and the U.S. occupation was ill-prepared for either state- or nation-building functions.

David Conradt reiterated how politicians pick and choose, even distort, the research that serves them best. He also noted that although occupiers can plant seeds, the people themselves build their own nation. A lively audience discussion, including insights from a current civil affairs officer in Iraq, ensued.

Rebecca Boehling