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After Hiroshima: Allied Military Occupations and the Fate of Japan's Empire, 1945–1947

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Ronald H. Spector

Abstract

The United States and its allies were almost completely unprepared for the enormous occupation responsibilities they faced in the Far East beginning in 1945. The author reviews Chinese, American, and British occupation decisions in immediate postwar China, Korea, and Southeast Asia and the role of the forces of recently defeated Japan. Allied occupiers came into the area for the nonpolitical task of disarming and removing the Japanese, but they quickly found themselves in the middle of insurgencies or civil wars, because the basic political future of these countries remained undecided. By 1948 all the states of the former Japanese empire were involved in conflicts. The ultimate fate of the occupied nations seemed to depend more on internal forces than on the techniques or plans of the occupiers. Consequently, the lessons of this period for the recent Iraq occupation are ambiguous at best, and they suggest that nation-building with guns will have no more certain outcome.

BY now the subject of military occupations is familiar to everyone. The ups and downs of the American sojourn in Iraq have long been a staple of the TV news and the op-ed columnists. So the following state-

Ronald H. Spector is Professor of History and International Affairs at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He has served in various government positions and on active duty in the U.S. Marine Corps (1967–69, 1983–84) and was the first civilian to become Director of Naval History and head of the Naval Historical Center. His most recent publications are *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam, Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan,* and *At War at Sea.* This lecture was delivered on 8 January 2005 at a special session of the American Historical Association Convention in Seattle, Washington.

ment from a young American army officer will probably sound familiar to many of you.

> As a liaison officer, I had the privilege of observing first hand the operation of the [occupation authorities.] Obviously there were no advance plans or authoritative directives. Further, from the commanding general down to the lowly private in the occupation force no one had received any training nor were they qualified to assume the responsibility of ruling a foreign country, least of all a country whose language and culture were a complete mystery to them. These gross disqualifications however were hidden behind a protective screen of arrogance.

One and a half years after the start of the Iraq war there are probably few Americans who have not heard such views expressed. The statement, however, is not about Iraq but is taken from the memoir of a young officer in the American Military Government in Korea in 1945.[1]

Even when we know the source of the statement it still seems somehow strange and out of place. The popular American understanding of World War II is that "The Good War" was followed by "the Good Occupations" of Japan and Germany. Those countries eventually embraced democracy and the free market system and signaled their rise to the pinnacle of civilization by establishing their own MTV channels.

Yet the end of the Pacific War involved not simply the occupation of Japan but the military occupation by the victorious Allies of a vast area of Asia stretching from Manchuria to Java, from Burma to Shanghai. Just one portion of this area, the countries to be occupied by Lord Louis Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Command, comprised one and a half million square miles with a population of 128,000,000 people. As for the Americans, in addition to Japan and the Ryukyus, they were responsible for the occupation of Korea below the 38th parallel and of various strategic points in north China as well as for providing logistical support, air and sealift and advisors to Chinese forces occupying Manchuria, northern China, and northern Vietnam. The experience of these earlier experiments would seem to suggest that there are lessons to be learned that may apply to our current problems but it is important to examine the specific historical context of these occupations before we begin to draw conclusions. After all, it was facile historical analogies that got us into the mess we are in, in the first place.

The Allied commands responsible for the occupation of various segments of Japan's defunct empire faced significantly different geographical, operational, and political challenges, but they all shared two common

1. Peter Hyun, *Man Sei: The Making of a Korean American* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 117.

characteristics: they knew almost nothing about the places they were going to and they did not have enough troops.

The war had been won in the Pacific. In Asia, Japan's empire was largely intact. This included northern and western China and, until 9 August, Manchuria and Korea as well. Japanese armies had been badly mauled in Burma but all of Indochina, Malaya, and the Netherlands Indies were still under Japanese control. At the moment of surrender there were approximately 6,500,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians—about one in every twenty Japanese—in the western Pacific and on the mainland of Asia. They included about 1,200,000 in Manchuria, 750,000 in Korea, 1,500,000 in China proper and at least 700,000 in various parts of Southeast Asia.[2]

Allied policy was that all Japanese were to be returned to Japan. In principle Allied forces would occupy the whole of Japan's former Empire, where they would receive formal surrenders from various commands, and disarm and repatriate the Japanese. The basic surrender document, General Order No. 1, provided that the Japanese forces in China, Taiwan, and northern Indochina, but not Manchuria, were to surrender to Chiang Kai-shek.[3] All Japanese forces in Manchuria and in Korea north of the 38th parallel were to surrender to the Commander in Chief of Soviet forces in the Far East. Japanese forces in Southeast Asia and the southwest Pacific were instructed to surrender to the Supreme Allied Commander Southeast Asia Command (SEAC), Lord Louis Mountbatten, and those in other parts of the Pacific to Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet. The Japanese government and all forces in the Home Islands were to surrender to General Douglas MacArthur, designated the Supreme Allied Commander in Japan. Japanese forces in Korea south of the 38th parallel and in the Philippines would also surrender to MacArthur.

In China the American-supported forces of Chiang Kai-shek were poorly positioned to take immediate advantage of Japan's collapse. Chiang's power lay mainly in the southwest corner of a disunited China. His armies were over a thousand miles from the great cities of the north and east. His forces were very large on paper, with a total of four million men, but his top American advisor, General Albert C. Wedemeyer, estimated that only about twenty divisions had been properly trained, and the rest "scarcely worth a damn by the standards of modern warfare."[4] After

2. *Reports of General MacArthur: MacArthur in Japan: The Occupation: Military Phase,* Volume 1 Supplement (Washington: GPO, 1968), 170, 176, and passim.

3. For a detailed discussion of the drafting of General Order No. 1, see Mark Gallicchio, *The Cold War Begins in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 75–92.

4. Hallet Abend, *Reconquest* (New York: Doubleday, 1946), 52.

eight years of war, Chiang's Nationalist government was weary, ill organized, and corrupt; at once ineffective and oppressive. "If peace comes suddenly, it is reasonable to expect widespread confusion and disorder," declared General Wedemeyer at the beginning of August. "The Chinese have no plans for rehabilitation, prevention of epidemics, restoration of utilities, establishment of a balanced economy, and redisposition of millions of refugees."[5]

Wedemeyer, whose main mission had been organizing, training, and equipping Chiang's troops for an offensive intended to progressively win back east China from the Japanese, now found himself with a new task as the end of the war approached. Washington instructed him that after a Japanese capitulation he was to continue military aid to Chiang and assist his forces in reoccupying all the former Japanese-held areas of China as well as Taiwan. American naval and marine forces would take control of key ports on the China coast to facilitate the disarming of the Japanese and the arrival of Chiang's Nationalist troops. Wedemeyer was to do all this while at the same time insuring that U.S. forces did not become involved in "fratricidal war."[6]

In the north of China Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese communists wasted no time. Even before General Order No. 1 had been issued General Chu Teh, commander of Communist forces in the north, had announced that "any anti-Japanese armed forces can take the surrender of the Japanese." Communist radio broadcasts declared that "the Fascist chieftain," Chiang Kai-shek "cannot represent the Chinese people and the Chinese troops which really oppose the Japanese."[7] Troops of Mao's Eighth Route Army moved forward to disarm the Japanese and headed north to meet the victorious Russians. Communist forces also occupied, or threatened to occupy, some of the large cities and to seize the railroads.

Chiang ordered the Communists to stand fast and await his orders. He reminded the Japanese to surrender only to him. The Communists ignored these instructions and were soon fighting those Japanese who refused to yield to them while confiscating the weapons and equipment of those who did. Some of the latter were soon recruited into the Eighth Route Army. Alarmed at these developments, Wedemeyer urged Washington to give China first priority in allocation of U.S. occupation forces. "I see Asia as an enormous pot, seething and boiling" he wrote to Washington. Wedemeyer wanted seven American divisions sent to China, and

5. Wedemeyer to Marshall, 1 August 1945, letter, ABC 336, (26 Jan 42) China, sec 1-B-4, Box 243, Record Group 218, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter cited as NARA).

6. Herbert Feis, *The China Tangle: The American Efforts in China From Pearl Harbor to the Marshall Mission* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1965), 337–38.

7. Feis, *China Tangle,* 356–57.

requested, as "an absolute minimum," that two American divisions be sent to Taku, a port near Peiping, one to Shanghai, and elements of a fourth to Canton.[8] Having just passed through the fires of World War II, Americans felt little desire to jump into any boiling pots. U.S. Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall promptly advised Wedemeyer that "your proposal that we give China first priority over Japan and Korea will not be acceptable" and that the most he could expect would be two U.S. divisions whose arrival would be dependent on the availability of shipping.[9]

By the time Wedemeyer received this reply his headquarters was receiving reports of "armed clashes between Central Government and Communist Forces in several areas." In view of these developments Wedemeyer believed it was urgent to lift Chiang's armies by sea and air to eastern and northern China as soon as possible. Admiral Nimitz reported that an amphibious task force would be available to transport two Marine Divisions to China but only after all available assault shipping had been used to lift MacArthur's forces to Japan and Korea.[10] All this would take time. In the interim, Chiang and his American allies would have to depend to a great extent on their erstwhile enemies, the Japanese, to hold back the Red tide.

On 23 August, General Ho Ying-chin (He Yingqin), commander of the Nationalist armies, ordered the Japanese generals in northern and eastern China to hold fast and defend all areas they occupied against the Communists pending the arrival of Chiang's forces. Despite their contempt for China's military, the Japanese generals were more than willing to comply in return for implicit understandings that the Japanese in China and their property would be well taken care of.

The tacit Japanese realignment with the Nationalists was made easier by the fact that several of Chiang's top generals had attended military schools in Japan during the 1920s and early 1930s and retained a deep respect for their erstwhile mentors. When Major General Imai Takeo, Deputy Chief of Staff to General Okamura Yasuji, Japanese commander in China, arrived at Chi Kiang to arrange the formal surrender of Japanese forces he found that three officers of the Chinese delegation were his former pupils at the Japanese Military Academy.[11] General Okamura himself, despite having carried out one of the largest gas attacks of the war against Chinese troops and directed a brutal pacification campaign

8. Wedemeyer to War Department, CM-IN 12388, 12 August 1945, Record Group 218, NARA.

9. Marshall to Wedemeyer, WAR 49550, 14 August 1945, Record Group 165, NARA.

10. CINCPAC to CNO CM-IN 15162, 15 August 1945, Record Group 218, NARA.

11. Louis Allen's summary of Imai's memoir. "Shina hakengun no kofuku" ["The Surrender of the Expeditionary Force in China,"] in Louis Allen, *The End of the War In Asia* (London: Hart Davis MacGibbon, 1977), 238–40.

in North China which caused the deaths of thousands of civilians,[12] was cordially received by Chiang's generals. One of General Ho Ying-chin's aides recalled that when Ho arrived in Nanking for the formal surrender ceremony, "He immediately visited General Okamura, who had taught him at the military academy in Tokyo, and addressing him as "sensei" [teacher], apologized profusely for having to subject him to the indignity of surrendering."[13] Ho's senior interpreter, Major Wang Yao-wu, was so distressed by Ho's conduct that he confided to an American advisor his fear that "his countrymen had forgotten about the rape of Nanking."[14]

Thanks largely to the Japanese and the puppet regimes, the Communists were kept out of the largest cities in north China and forcefully expelled from many smaller ones. The Japanese patrolled the rail lines, protected key installations and used bayonets to suppress a Communist organized strike in Shanghai.[15] In the area of Kaifeng, the OSS reported that about 130 troops of the Japanese 12th Army had been killed in fighting with the Communists between the Japanese surrender and late November 1945. Though the Japanese fought well "they have nothing but contempt for Chinese inefficiency and their only desire is to return home."[16] For many that return was still far off. An American naval officer reported, following a meeting with Chiang, that "the Generalissimo does not desire to disarm and repatriate additional Japanese troops from North China. At this time he is fearful that if sufficient Chinese national troops are not available to prevent it, the Chinese Communists will move in."

At the end of September, elements of two U.S. Marine Corps divisions, all that could be spared in response to Wedemeyer's call for seven divisions, began landing in North China. The Marines' mission was to disarm and repatriate the Japanese, safeguard the vital coal mines and railroads, and take control of key cities and points in advance of the arrival of Chiang's troops. The shortage of troops meant that for a considerable time Wedemeyer and Chiang remained dependent on Japanese troops to assist in keeping the rail-lines opened and in patrolling key areas. "Tomorrow's surrender ceremony will be just a formality," wrote an OSS officer in Tsingtau. "The Japanese will probably turn over several hundred small arms, retaining the rest for guarding the railway." By the

12. Herbert Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), 363, 594–95.

13. Donald G. Gillin and Charles Etter, "Staying On: Japanese Soldiers and Civilians in China, 1945–1949," *Journal of Asian Studies* 42 (May 1983): 499.

14. Message, CCC FWD ECH to CCC Kunming, 23 August 1945, Record Group 493, NARA.

15 Gillin and Etter, "Staying On," 501.

16. Redford to Indiv, 18 December 1945, Record Group 226, entry 210, Box 156, NARA.

spring of 1946, the Marines had evacuated most of the Japanese under their control to Japan.[17] Chiang, however, showed no inclination to follow suit. As late as the end of 1946, an American diplomat estimated that there were at least 80,000 Japanese operating under Nationalist command in China.

Although too few to exercise effective control in North China, the Marine forces were still sufficiently large to alarm the Soviets and to incur the animosity of the Chinese Communists, who were well aware that the mines and rails the Marines were guarding provided fuel, supplies, and transportation for Chiang's troops. By November 1945, Marines were beginning to be involved in skirmishes with Communist forces.

Several days before the Marines arrived in China, a Seventh Fleet Task Force landed advanced elements of Lieutenant General John R. Hodge's XXIV Corps at Inchon, Korea. Hodge was supposed to get three divisions, but two were still in the Philippines and would not arrive for several weeks. Consequently Hodge, like Wedemeyer, was short of troops and could just manage to occupy Inchon, Seoul, and a few other places in Korea.

At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the Allies had agreed that the northern half of Indochina would fall within Chiang Kai-shek's China Theater. In March 1945, the Japanese military, who had been based in Indochina since 1940 under an agreement with the French colonial government of Admiral Jean Decoux, suddenly seized direct control of the colony; disarmed and imprisoned the French colonial army, police, and all officials; and proclaimed that Vietnam was now independent. The chief beneficiaries were the Viet Minh, a communist-led coalition of nationalists under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. The Viet Minh, which was already engaged in guerrilla warfare against the French, moved in to create mass organizations, recruit former members of the French-trained militia, and organize shadow governments in remote rural areas.

When news of the Japanese acceptance of the Allied surrender terms reached Vietnam, the Viet Minh stepped easily into the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Japanese and the imprisonment of the French. Everywhere in northern Vietnam local People's Revolutionary Committees took control of the government machinery. In Hue on 30 August, Emperor Bao Dai abdicated in favor of the newly established Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Three days later, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of Vietnam before a crowd of 500,000 people in Hanoi.

The Japanese viewed these developments with mixed emotions. When newspapers published news of the surrender and Viet Minh

17. Peiping to WARCOS, 22 September 1946, SCAP Manchuria File, Record Group 331, Box 384B, NARA; *Reports of General MacArthur,* 155–57.

demonstrations began, the French demanded that the Japanese "maintain order" and prevent "terrorist activities." Some leaders of the army were inclined to suppress the Viet Minh, but many others hesitated, unsure of Allied attitudes or because they sympathized with the nationalists. On 20 August, the Japanese Army adopted a policy of refraining from interference with the Viet Minh so long as Japanese nationals were not molested. During this period, Japanese soldiers and officers were reported to have turned over or sold a significant quantity of confiscated French weapons to the Viet Minh.[18]

Japanese actions meshed well with the plans of the Chinese warlord armies moving into Indochina ostensibly to disarm and repatriate the Japanese. Three of the four Chinese armies assigned to Indochina were scheduled for early redeployment to Manchuria once they completed their surrender tasks in Vietnam. In the meantime, the Chinese generals proceeded to make the most of the situation. The Viet Minh government was permitted to remain in place in return for allowing the Chinese to engage in currency manipulation, black marketeering, and other profitable enterprises, and the French remained locked in their prison camps and locked out of power for several critical months. While the state of affairs in northern Vietnam would hardly have provided inspiration for any Norman Rockwell covers, it was positively salubrious compared to the situation which shortly developed in southern Vietnam and the former Netherlands Indies.

Of all the Allied Commanders Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten suffered from the most critical shortage of troops as well as the worst timing. At the time of the Japanese capitulation SEAC was in the midst of mounting a large amphibious operation, Operation Zipper, to retake Malaya. These plans and preparations were brought to a screeching halt by an order from General MacArthur that other commands take no action to accept Japanese surrenders or reoccupy Japanese-held territory until after the formal surrender ceremony had taken place in Tokyo Bay at the end of August. MacArthur wanted to make sure that all the far-flung Japanese commands understood unequivocally that Japan had surrendered before any Allied commanders took actions, which might complicate the situation. Mountbatten was furious. The occupation forces in Malaya were already at sea. "Any considerable delay imposed on me will add to the suffering of prisoners of war. . . . Moreover I can see no reason why the signature in Tokyo should make my task any easier."[19] Nevertheless the Combined Chiefs of Staff backed MacArthur and

18. Christopher E. Goscha, "Belated Allies: The Contributions of Japanese Deserters to the Viet Minh (1945–1950)." Unpublished paper, courtesy of Dr. Goscha.

19. SACSEA to Chiefs of Staff SEACOS 448, 21 August 1945, Copy in CCS 901/8 ABC 387 Japan (15 February 1945) 1-C, Box 505, Record Group 165, NARA.

the result was a delay of almost two weeks in Operation Zipper. Other parts of Southeast Asia saw no SEAC troops until a month or more after Truman's announcement of Japan's surrender.

Not only were SEAC's occupation forces going to be late in arriving but there were too few of them overall to assume quickly the entire mission of locating and assisting Allied prisoners, disarming and repatriating the Japanese, and providing military security and civil government functions for the vast areas of Indonesia and mainland Southeast Asia which were now its sphere of responsibility. While American policies in China were influenced by postwar demobilization of the armed forces, demobilization in SEAC had begun even before the fighting ended. With the end of the war in Europe in May the British government immediately began to return soldiers to civilian life. First to be released would be men with more than three years of service. The ongoing war with Japan notwithstanding, the program was also to apply to men in SEAC. But this program was still too slow to satisfy the war-weary British public and on 8 June the government, facing a closely contested general election, announced that for soldiers in Southeast Asia the term of service required for discharge would be cut from three years and eight months to three years and four months. "This news was a bombshell that shattered all the plans we had been making," wrote General Slim. "The number of men affected was a large one; one third of the officers and men in SEAC and those the most experienced with a high proportion of NCOs would have to be returned to the United Kingdom before 1st October."[20]

A large proportion of Mountbatten's non-British forces were divisions of the Indian Army. The Indian soldiers wanted to go home as much as their British counterparts. However, a good number of the Indians were career soldiers and many of the rest were in no hurry to be discharged into a civilian economy noted for chronic unemployment.[21] Yet if the Indian soldier was ready, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, to participate in the postwar occupations his government was less happy at the prospect. The British still nominally ruled India with a British General, Sir Archibald Wavell, as Governor-General, but the new Labour government of Prime Minister Clement Attlee which came to power in June soon made clear that it had no wish to hold onto the large and troubled subcontinent. Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders of the dominant Indian National Congress party sympathized politically and ideologically with other independence movements in Asia. They saw no reason for Indian soldiers, whose country was on the verge of freedom, to suppress the freedom struggles of others.

20. Slim, *Defeat Into Victory,* 522.

21. Report on Morale of British, Indian and Colonial Troops, ALSEA, August-October 1945, WO 203/2268, U.K. National Archives, Kew, England.

In southern Indochina and Indonesia, British forces attempted to carry out a mission rife with contradictions. They were to disarm and repatriate the Japanese, maintain law and order, locate and liberate Allied prisoners of war and internees, and assist returning French and Dutch officials while maintaining good relations and avoiding conflict with the local nationalists. Attempting to accomplish these tasks with limited numbers of troops in the volatile political atmosphere that followed the Japanese surrender soon led to widespread fighting.

With considerable difficulty, SEAC forces were able to recover and evacuate close to 100,000 Allied POWs and internees from the Dutch East Indies. At the same time, however, thousands of Dutch civilians, Eurasians, Chinese, Ambonese, and Menadonese—all groups associated with Dutch colonial power—were kidnapped, imprisoned, assaulted, and murdered by Indonesian Nationalist youth gangs and vigilante groups. The exact number of deaths is unknown but some scholars of the period compare the civil violence in Java to recent events in the Balkans and Congo.[22] SEAC forces were too small to control all of Java and Sumatra or even all the major towns and were hard-pressed to maintain law and order in areas they did control.

In these conflicts the Japanese were once again involved on both sides. SEAC commanders with relatively few British and Indian troops to reoccupy large areas of Southeast Asia insisted that the Japanese troops in these areas were still responsible for "maintaining order." In practice this often meant opposing the nationalists forces in these areas. Those in Java were particularly formidable. About 60,000 Indonesians were already organized in military and paramilitary units trained by the Japanese. At least 200,000 more had received some military training. Following the surrender, the Indonesian nationalists had stolen, purchased, or been given about 5,000 rifles, 3,000 automatic weapons with 100 million rounds of ammunition, 50 tanks, 300,000 hand grenades and a number of mortars, field guns, cars, and trucks. Japanese generals were therefore extremely reluctant to oppose local nationalists. Many later claimed that they sympathized with their cause but whatever their sympathies they were also aware that Japanese soldiers and civilians would be vulnerable to reprisals in the bloody guerrilla conflicts that were rapidly developing.

Nevertheless, many Japanese units found themselves impelled by Allied orders and threats into combat against the Vietnamese around Saigon and against their erstwhile allies in the Indies. When Lord Louis

22. Some idea of the scale of the violence, often directed against women and children, can be found in William H. Frederick, *Visions and Heat* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), and Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991).

Mountbatten visited Sumatra, where Japanese troops had been employed to guard key points and lines of communication, he was "shocked to find over a thousand Japanese troops lining the nine miles of road from the airport to the town and to find them drawn up in parties of twenty, the officers saluting with swords."[23]

A small but significant number of Japanese, however, opted to join the Nationalists. The Japanese Foreign Office reported that Japanese military defectors were "highly valued" by the Indonesians for their "skill and ability, especially their assistance in using Japanese weapons."

In Indochina, an estimated 5,000 Japanese soldiers joined the Viet Minh or other groups opposing the British and French. As historian Christopher Goscha makes clear in his recently completed dissertation, these deserters played an important role in the growth of the Viet Minh armed forces, where they served as technical advisors, instructors in training schools, communications experts and even leaders of Viet Minh units.

One of the reasons the British found themselves in trouble in Southeast Asia was that they had allowed themselves to believe the colonial mythology offered by French and Dutch "experts." They told SEAC planners that the local people were heartily sick of Japanese rule. This was largely true. And that they would welcome the return of the former colonial regimes. Self-proclaimed advocates of independence were simply a minority of malcontents and Japanese collaborators. This was largely false. Of course, as the world's greatest imperialists, the British had little reason to be critical of the information from their fellow colonialists. "I am quite sure," wrote an officer of the 20th Indian Division that landed in Saigon on 12 September, "that the locals have no real complaint about their treatment by the French; this appears to be the usual European colony with native shopkeepers, native nurses devoted to their white charges and so forth."[24]

General Hodge's forces in Korea were free of such misinformation—they had no information at all. Like the Marines sent to China, the soldiers of XXIV Corps had been expecting an early return to the U.S. now that the war had ended. Instead they got Korea. Marines had been in China for over forty years and even the newest Marine in Tsingdau, Tientsin, or Peking had consumed an ample stew of fact, sea-stories, and half-remembered history about China even before he embarked from Okinawa. There was nothing of the sort about Korea, no gossip, no rumors, no colorful or bloodcurdling stories. Nothing. Almost no one in

23. Quoted in Peter Dennis, *Troubled Days of Peace: Mountbatten and Southeast Asia Command, 1945–46* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), 226.

24. Fragment of letter by Captain V. M. Sissons, no date, October 1945, V. M. Sissons Papers, Imperial War Museum, London, U.K.

the army spoke Korean except for a handful of Americans of Korean descent and sons of missionary families. Thousands of soldiers had been trained in Japanese at the U.S. Army Military Government School in Charlottesville, Virginia, but "policy prohibited the study of Korean in Army Schools."[25] Just before embarking, the men of the occupation force had received a *Pocket Guide to Korea* which advised soldiers "if there is one subject to avoid it is politics. Just say you don't know anything about it. Which is undoubtedly the truth."[26]

Hodge might have attempted to work through the Korean People's Republic, a left-wing coalition of nationalists, which was already exercising government responsibilities in many areas and was far and away the strongest and best organized political group in southern Korea. Yet Hodge and his political advisor, H. Merrill Benninghoff, had only a sketchy idea of who was who in Korean politics during those first few weeks. When Hodge invited Korean political parties to send two representatives to meet with him more than two hundred individuals appeared. By early October there were fifty-four political parties registered with the military government.[27] All Korean politics appeared chaotic and disorderly, Korean politicians obstreperous and demanding, given to encouraging raucous demonstrations that sometimes seemed indistinguishable from riots. The People's Republic's leaders shared these characteristics and in addition appeared to include many communists or communist sympathizers probably with ties to the Soviets. Hodge opted for direct American control. He abolished the Japanese General Government, replacing it with a U.S. Army Military government headed by Major General Archibald Arnold. English became the official language of the occupation.

"Southern Korea can best be described as a powder keg ready to explode at the application of a spark," wrote Hodge's political advisor in his first report to Washington one week after the Japanese surrender.[28] Inflation continued. Thousands of Koreans were unemployed either because they refused to work any longer in Japanese-owned businesses or because of the collapse of many war-driven industries. There was a critical shortage of rice and coal. The Soviets had stopped the movement

25. Carl J. Frederick, *American Experience in Military Government* (New York: W. Sloan, 1948), 356; C. Leonard Hoag, "American Military Government in Korea: War, Policy, and the First Year of Occupation," Draft U.S. Army manuscript 1970, p. 15. Copy in U.S. Army Center of Military History Library.

26 Hoag, "American Military Government in Korea," 110.

27. Richard J. H. Johnston, "Radicals in Korea Hit General A.V. Arnold," *New York Times*, 30 October 1945, 2.

28. H. Merrill Benninghoff to the Secretary of State, 15 September 1945, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945*, 9 vols. (Washington: GPO, 1967–69), 6:1049–50.

of goods and raw materials across the 38th parallel. The only export from North to South was thousands of refugees and other Koreans seeking to reunite with their families. Korean agriculture was a mess and had been so for years. About 3 percent of the population owned two-thirds of the arable land. Farms were small and farming methods primitive.

Having rejected the idea of recognizing any Korean government authority and pledged to eliminate the Japanese, the Americans now found themselves absolute rulers of a country about which they still knew next to nothing. One immediate response was to retain the ousted Japanese officials as advisors and interpreters. Oda Yasuma, who had represented the Governor General in carrying out the surrender arrangements, was a great favorite of the Americans because of his excellent command of English.[29] He continued to be utilized as a key advisor, helped select translators, and wrote memorandums on the situation in Korea. Altogether, the Military Government received 350 separate memorandums on Korean affairs from former Japanese officials between August and mid-September when the last Japanese left Korea.[30]

Hodge and Arnold also had twenty-eight military government teams, totaling about 230 officers and men, some of whom had landed with the first occupation troops in early September. A considerable proportion of soldiers in these teams had received extensive training for military government duties—in Japan. Few knew any more about Korea than Hodge himself. "I don't think the military government was terribly successful," recalled a Japanese language officer.

> It was thrown together on the spur of the moment. . . . I don't believe it had a coordinated thought out plan . . . there were no language or area specialists. The American personnel, in the main, were either people who couldn't be used in Japan or second raters. . . . Moreover the Koreans themselves had no desire to have a military government. They considered themselves liberated and they were very anxious to have us go home so they could begin the self-government process.[31]

The Americans were almost entirely dependent on Korean translators in their communications with the public. American posters and leaflets in the Korean language often contained inappropriate characters, misspellings, and incomprehensible American colloquialisms. All important public addresses and press conferences had to be translated by

29. Allen, *The End of the War in Asia,* 169; Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 140.

30. Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War,* 140.

31. Donald MacDonald interview with Charles Stuart, 25 January 1990, "Frontline Diplomacy" Oral History Collection, Center for the Study of Diplomacy, Washington, D.C.

Koreans or Japanese.[32] Many of the Korean translators employed by the military Government were suspected Japanese collaborators. They were disliked and mistrusted by many Koreans who wondered exactly what it was they were "translating" to the Americans.[33]

By early 1946 public opinion polls revealed that 53 percent of Koreans had a negative opinion of Americans. A second poll showed that 49 percent preferred Japanese rule to the American Military Government. In the autumn of 1946 there were widespread strikes and uprisings in rural areas and towns of southern South Korea. That was the beginning of a series of increasingly bloody insurgencies supported or instigated by Korean communists, which continued up to 1950 when North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel and suddenly placed Korea at the center of the Cold War.

The Allied occupation forces had come to Asia to carry out a nonpolitical task: disarming and removing the Japanese. There was universal support for such a project from all governments, from all Asian leaders and political movements. Yet the American and Commonwealth forces almost invariably found themselves in the middle of an insurgency or civil war because the basic political future of these countries remained undecided. Moreover, the occupation forces, although they may have seen themselves as neutral peace-keepers, were almost always aligned with one side. The British had already committed themselves to recognize French and Dutch sovereignty in those countries' former colonies; the Americans were already committed to Chiang Kai-shek in China and to the containment of communist power in Korea.

What conclusions can we draw from this unhappy story? One generalization we can make is that it is hard to make generalizations. This applies even to the question of whether these occupations can be considered successes or failures. All succeeded in the mission of liquidating the Japanese Empire and repatriating the Japanese. On the other hand, if the Allies aimed to restore peace to Asia, most were failures. By 1948 all the states of the former Japanese Empire were at war, either with their former colonial masters or with political factions within their own country, sometimes both. There were degrees of success and failure but it is difficult to link these to any general explanations. Thus the Chinese occupation of North Vietnam had probably the smallest amount of disorder and violent upheavals. Ironically, a country that was to be at war for the next thirty years had the most orderly occupation. In contrast Indonesia, which had the bloodiest and most chaotic period of occupation, was independent and at peace by 1950.

32. History of U.S. Armed Forces in Korea, Vol. 1, Chap. IV, pp. 35–36.
33. Ibid., Vol. 1, Part I, pp. 187–88.

One of the hotly debated issues in the recent Iraq occupation has been the question of how much of the old Baathist army, bureaucracy, and police to retain in the new post-Saddam Iraq. On this question the experience of past occupations casts a bright light of ambiguity. In countries where the Japanese military and or civil administration was left most intact the results were dramatically different. In Korea the Americans promptly got rid of the Japanese but retained the old Imperial administrative bureaus and police, staffing them largely with former Korean collaborators. They thereby alienated large numbers of Koreans and ensured that the most reactionary elements in Korean society would continue to run things. In China, Chiang Kai-shek cheerfully incorporated thousands of Japanese soldiers, technicians, and intelligence personnel into his regime, some of whom served him so well that they later accompanied him into exile on Taiwan.

In Malaya, Southeast Asia Command quickly established a British Military Administration and confined the Japanese to POW camps. However, the BMA did so poorly at managing critical food shortages and other economic problems that locals declared that BMA must stand for Black Market Administration. A respected historian has declared that "in seven months it [British occupation] destroyed the goodwill that existed at the time of the liberation and brought British prestige in Singapore to a lower point even than in 1942."[34] The BMA was also unable to control, and probably never understood, the widespread outbreaks of communal violence between Chinese of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army and bands of Malay Mujahidin.[35] An American intelligence summary noted that Mountbatten was reported to be "worried over complaints that conditions in Malaya now are worse than under the Japanese."[36]

The only instance of a military administration establishing quick, firm control was the Soviet occupation of Korea and Manchuria. Soviet generals knew little or nothing about these areas but they had plenty of troops and were able to bring in hundreds of Soviet Koreans and Manchurians as interpreters and political organizers. The Soviets quickly rounded up Japanese police officials, judges, bank officers and company executives. In all about 1,900 civilian officials were confined facing an uncertain fate.[37]

34. C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Oxford University Press, 1979), 225.

35. There are numerous reports of these "regrettable incidents," which usually involved mass murders, in "Malaya Command Weekly Intelligence Reports" and "Intelligence Summaries" in WO 172 and WO 203, U.K. National Archives.

36. ComGen, India-Burma Theater, Weekly Intel Sitrep, 4 December 1945, Radiograms India, Box 42, Record Group 9, MacArthur Memorial Archives, Norfolk, Virginia.

37. Japanese Embassy, Mukden, undated report, August 1945. Microfilm Roll A-0116, frames 733–34, Foreign Ministry Records.

Soviets officials were seldom overly fastidious about their methods of maintaining order. The Soviet approach to dealing with looting in Mukden, the former capital of Manchuria, for example, was to allow Koreans, Chinese, and Manchurians to loot and burn Japanese homes and buildings for three days. After three days the Soviets stepped in to demand that all weapons be surrendered within the next seventy-two hours. The penalty for non-compliance was death. Soviet soldiers swiftly and effortlessly took up where the local residents left off, cheerfully robbing both Chinese and Japanese houses. In the opinion of American OSS observers, "The Russians excelled the Chinese in large-scale house-breaking, looting and in numerous cases, rape."[38]

These varying experiences and outcomes suggest that successful military occupations are not just a matter of technique or planning, though the lack of these can be important. Rather, the ultimate fate of nations under military occupation seems to depend more on the fundamental political, social, economic, and ideological forces in those countries than it does on the plans and policies of the occupying forces. Nation-building has always been an iffy project ever since the Americans invented the term in the 1960s. The experience of military occupation suggests that nation-building with guns will have no more certain outcome.

38. Major R. Lamar, "Survey of the Mukden Area Situation," 11 September 1945, entry 148, Record Group 226, NARA.