

Peace through Institutions: Woodrow Wilson and the Paris Peace Conference

Kurumlar Yoluyla Barış: Woodrow Wilson ve Paris Barış Konferansı

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Abstract

As we approach the centennial of World War I, it is fitting to undertake a retrospective, academic review of the institutions devised in the war's aftermath. The efforts to build and sustain a global order ensuring peace and cooperation in the international community - which ultimately failed with the beginning of a Second World War—constitute telling and timely lessons for world politics today. This paper looks critically at America's role in World War I, diplomatic talks preceding the signature of the treaty of Versailles, and domestic and international reactions to President Woodrow Wilson's signature idealism. The paper begins with a historical overview of how World War I began in Europe in an effort to contextualize the entrance of the United States in 1917, two and a half years after the war began. Since Woodrow Wilson originally promoted American neutrality, and U.S. public opinion had mostly favored isolationism until World War I, Wilson's presidency represents a historic shift in American foreign policy to interventionism and eventually, its post-Cold War "global policeman" status. Assessing the main actors of WWI and America's role in it serves to frame Woodrow Wilson's asymmetrical reception within his own country. In the U.S., Wilson's foreign affairs record is characterized by his intervention in Mexico, his original attempt to remain uninvolved in Europe's war, and his failed attempt to keep peace after the war. Wilson garnered domestic support for U.S. entrance with his call to "make the world safe for democracy." Using such overt idealistic rhetoric in the foreign policymaking decision process was novel at the time, but sounds all too familiar today. Post-WWI, Wilson's fight with Congress and the U.S. not entering into the League of Nations resembles rifts between U.S. administrations and their Congresses in recent times, and it arguably indirectly contributed to the occurrence of the World War II. As U.S. public opinion once again begins favoring non-interventionism amidst volatility overseas, a critical approach to WWI history and its discourse invites salient questions about today's international order.

Key words: World War I, League of Nations, American Foreign Policy, Woodrow Wilson.

Özet

Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın yüzüncü yıldönümüne yaklaştığımız bu günlerde, savaşın ertesinde oluşturulan kurumlara dair retrospektif bir değerlendirme yapmak için zamanlama uygundur. Uluslararası kamuoyunda barışı ve işbirliğini güçlendirecek bir küresel düzeni oluşturma çabaları (İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın başlamasıyla nihayetinde başarısız da olsa) günümüz siyaseti için önemli dersler içermektedir. Bu çalışma, ABD'nin Birinci Dünya Savaşı'ndaki rolüne, Versay anlaşmasının imzalanması sürecindeki diplomatik görüşmelere ve ABD Başkanı Woodrow Wilson'un ünlü idealizmine eleştirel bir şekilde yaklaşacaktır. Çalışma Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın Avrupa'da nasıl başladığına dair tarihsel bir

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açıklamayla başlayarak, ABD'nin 1917'de savaşa girişini bir bağlama oturtacaktır. Woodrow Wilson esasen Amerika'nın tarafsızlığı yönünde çaba gösterdiği ve ABD kamuoyu Birinci Dünya Savaşı'na kadar izolasyonizmi desteklediği için, Wilson'un başkanlığı ABD dış politikasında müdahaleciliğe ve Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemdeki dünya jandarmalığına gidiş anlamında tarihi bir kırılma dönemidir. Savaşın ve Amerika'nın rolünü değerlendirmek Woodrow Wilson'ın kendi ülkesinde karşılaştığı asimetrik tepkiyi anlamaya yardımcı olacaktır. ABD'de Wilson'ın dış politika karnesi Meksika'ya yapılan müdahale, Avrupa'daki savaşa ilk başta mesafeli kalma çabası ve savaştan sonra barışı tesis etme yönündeki nafile çabalarıyla hatırlanmaktadır. Wilson ABD'nin savaşa katılması için ünlü "dünyayı demokrasi için daha güvenli kılmak" çağrısıyla iç politikada destek toplamıştır. O dönemde, dış politika yapımında bu tür açıkça idealist bir retorik kullanmak yeni bir hamleydi, bugün ise çok daha normalleşmiş durumdadır. Birinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra, Wilson'ın Kongre ile mücadelesi ve ABD'nin Milletler Cemiyeti'ne girmemesi yakın zamanlardaki ABD yönetimleriyle Kongre arasındaki çatışmaları hatırlatmakta ve bu durum muhtemelen İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın çıkışına da katkıda bulunmuştur. Çatışmalı bir dış politika ortamında ABD kamuoyu bir kez daha izolasyonizme yöneldikçe, Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve etrafında kurulan söylemlerin eleştirel bir değerlendirmesi günümüzün uluslararası düzeni açısından da dikkat çekici sorular ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Milletler Cemiyeti, ABD Dış Politikası, Woodrow Wilson

Introduction

World War I was the opening act of the political chaos that dominated the first half of the 20th century. Involving all the major powers in the world, it generated long, costly battles frequently in form of trench warfare which further increased casualties. Until World War II, it was the deadliest war in world history, hence dubbed "the Great War". It resulted in the abolition of much of the existing monarchies, major territorial changes in Europe, Asia and Africa, the emergence of very large colonial empires such as the British and French Empires, and the dissolution of large, multi-ethnic European Empires such as the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary, and caused a communist revolution in the Russian Empire.

Despite these major changes, it took another, bigger world war for the global order to settle and become relatively stable. At the end of World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the two superpowers. In mainstream historical narratives, the Cold War has often superseded the aftermath of World War I.

Although most of the major powers of the world were directly involved with the War, non-participants played their part as well, and their role needs to be better addressed if we are to build a bridge between the two World Wars and the ensuing global political and economic order. Indeed, America's role in World War I has been largely understated given its rather low-profile stance during and after the war caused by the absence of its direct military involvement. At the time there were also greater military and economic powers and challengers in the global arena, such as the British, French, German and Rus-

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sian Empires, as well as Japan and even Austria-Hungary. Finally, perhaps an equally important reason for the relatively opaque memory we have of America during and after World War I was the unsuccessful attempt of the President Woodrow Wilson in implementing his 14 principles, and the American Congress' rejection of ratifying the Versailles Treaty despite Wilson's months of work.

This paper will focus on America's role in World War I and how this role contributed to the occurrence of another world war by examining President Woodrow Wilson's policies and his diplomatic efforts throughout the Versailles Talks at the end of WWI. Such an analysis is both meaningful and timely, because as we approach the centennial of World War I, the international political institutions that were the product of the global power balance in the aftermath of WWII are largely intact and continue to function as intended thereby shaping the global economic order today, whereas those that were devised after World War I quickly became ineffective and dissolved in the years that led to the second World War. Shedding light on this difference and the process that led to Woodrow Wilson's partial failure is important in understanding the functioning and the success of these political institutions, as voices critical of the United Nations and the global order are being raised more frequently nowadays.

World War Beginnings

The origin of World War I can be traced back to July 1914 in central Europe. The conflict known at the time as *The Great War* or *The War to End All Wars* was in fact culminated by several factors. Tensions between major European powers were stretched immensely in the decades preceding the war. Thus, the war is a culmination various factors that, however, cannot simply be listed as direct reasons for the conflict, as the roots of the War lied deep. Conflicts and tensions that have brewed over past decades have led to the war. The war was fueled by ideologies and ideals such as militarism, the use of alliances, imperialism as well as nationalism. The era was filled with diplomatic confrontations between the Great Powers, mainly Russia, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy. These disagreements within the group were mainly over European colonial problems that occurred in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹ The July Crisis of 1914 is often seen as the main origin of World War I. The crisis was sparked by Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination by Serb nationalist, Gavrilo Princip.² There was rising tensions over Balkan territories. Austria-Hungary was competing with Russia and Serbia for regional influences and territorial expansion. As a result, they had forced the Great Powers into their regional conflict by means of alliances and treaties.

1 Lieven, D.C.B. (1983). *Russia and the origins of the First World War*. New York: St. Martin's Press. ISBN 0-312-69608-6.

2 Henig (2002). *The origins of the First World War*. London: Routledge. ISBN 0-415-26205-4.

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The European web of alliances required participants to engage in collective defense in the event of a provocation. The Treaty of London in 1839 established Belgium as neutral; the German-Austrian Treaty of 1879 was known as the Dual Alliance, Italy joined this treaty in 1882; the Franco-Russian Alliance was banded in 1894; furthermore, the alliance between Britain, France, and Russia was known as the Triple Entente. These treaties contracted these diverse actors throughout Europe before the beginning of the war. Entangled alliances obligated states to act on behalf of and/or in accordance with their allies in case of military provocation from an enemy. This, in essence created a domino effect of sorts which pulled one country after another into armed conflict. This cascading effect eventually involved every country in Europe.

Without such treaties and alliances, the crisis in Austria-Hungary with Serbia could have remained as a localized regional issue. In the abovementioned political context, however, Austria-Hungary declaring war against Serbia resulted in Russian involvement to the conflict defending Serbia. Since Germany witnessed Russia mobilizing, it declared war on Russia. France was pulled in against Germany and Austria-Hungary. Britain was then pulled when Germany attacked France through Belgium. Later, Japan had entered the war, followed by Italy and the United States joining the Allies, and the Ottoman Empire joining the Central Powers.

Nationalism was spreading across Europe. Slavic peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina did not wish to be part of Austria-Hungary, but rather to join Serbia. By each country trying to prove their dominance and power, this growing trend of nationalism throughout Europe contributed to the beginning and the extension of the war, pulling in major as well as minor powers. Because of the territorial disputes between states, the balance of power was quickly deteriorating.³ Furthermore, colonialism, which can be described as "The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically"⁴, is an important factor which contributed to the start of World War I possessing colonies give a substantial advantage to major powers in their competition with their rivals in economy and military power.

The United Kingdom and France grew powerful and wealthy during the late nineteenth century mainly due to their grasp on trade in foreign market and their imperialistic influence. The other major powers, mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Russia also intended to colonize overseas territories and gain economic edge. Their goals however proved to be more difficult

3 Van Evera, Stephen. "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War." (Summer 1984), p. 62.

4 Oxford Dictionaries. (n.d.). Colonialism. Retrieved January 7, 2014, from Oxford Dictionaries: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/colonialism?q=colonialism>

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than imagined due to British and French dominance⁵, and tensions were created by this gridlock. Prior to World War I, almost the whole continents Africa and Asia were both disputed areas among European powers. These areas provided the most sought raw materials desired for trade and industry. The intensified competition and yearn for stronger empires paved way for further harsh confrontation which in turn would culminate into World War I.

The need for securing colonies and taking the lead in industrialization pushed a new arms race. Germany had heavily increased its military force by 1914. Meanwhile, Britain had also increased its naval power and Russia had used their military establishment to heavily influence their public policies. All inclusively, increased militarism in European states also played a key ingredient towards the commencement of World War I.

American President Woodrow Wilson attempted to retain American neutrality for approximately two and a half years into the war. Most Americans were unaware that war was approaching Europe until after conflict emerged. Most Americans up until early 1917 were strongly opposed to American intervention in the European conflict. When news of German aggression grew popular in the United States, public opinion began to change gradually. The German attack on the passenger ship *RMS Lusitania* angered American public and led Woodrow Wilson into thinking that the United States was obliged at this point to help make the world safe for democracy.⁶

Germany resumed its practice of submarine warfare by attacking commercial ships sailing towards Great Britain in the North Atlantic Ocean. Their acts were an effort to provoke the United States into entering the war. In 1917, The German Foreign Minister sent a decoded message to Mexico inviting them to join the Central Powers. They believed that American involvement was inevitable with the ongoing unrestricted submarine warfare campaign. This message is known as the Zimmerman Telegram. British intelligence intercepted and decoded the message. Germany had proposed that the opportunity would help Mexico retrieve territory lost during the Mexican-American War seventy years ago. Mexico was then devastated with revolution and it had lost territories in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona during their previous war with the United States⁷, thus looking like a good candidate for adopting irredentist policies, not in a position to refuse a substantial amount of foreign monetary aid. Once the telegram was revealed publicly, the American public grew angry and eventually supported military involvement in the conflict.⁸ In the meantime, German submarines were continuously attacking American ships crossing the

5 Bukharin, N., (1972), *Imperialism and World Economy*, (London).

6 Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (1959).

7 Barbara Tuchman, *The Zimmerman Telegram* (1966)

8 Andrew, Christopher (1996). *For The President's Eyes Only*. HarperCollins. ISBN 0-00-638071-9.

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North Atlantic Ocean.⁹ President Wilson proposed to Congress for “a war to end all wars” that would “make the world safe for democracy”. Shortly afterwards on April 6th, 1917, the American Congress voted to declare war.¹⁰

In the spring of 1918, American soldiers were eagerly welcomed and received by the Allied troops in Europe. 10,000 American soldiers were arriving on the battlefields per day. At this rate, the Germans were unsuccessful in replacing their casualties. The American military was pivotal in the final Allied offensive, known as the Hundred Days Offensive.¹¹ This period was at the finale of World War I. Allied forces carried out a series of offensive attacks towards the Central Powers on the Western Front. The offensive forced German troops out of France and eventually the offensive ended with an armistice.¹²

The end of World War I was marked by the Treaty of Versailles which was signed on June 28th 1919 at the Paris Peace Conference, exactly five years after Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated. The Treaty of Versailles required negotiations for six months after the armistice signed on November 11th 1918. The Treaty in particular ended the conflict between Germany and the Allied powers. Separate treaties were drafted to address the other Central Powers, who were sided with Germany.¹³ The most important and somewhat controversial provision in the treaty was Article 231, which is known as the War Guilt clause. The clause mandated that Germany accept responsibility for all losses and damages during the war. The treaty also forced Germany to disarm their military, pay reparations, and also concede territories acquired during the war.¹⁴

After the war, political shifts were noticeable with the diminishing of most of the remaining world empires. Austria-Hungary as well as the Ottoman Empire had fully collapsed as a result of the war. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire sparked forth the Turkish War of Independence, which gave birth to today's Republic of Turkey. Similarly, the German and Russian monarchies collapsed, becoming republics. The end of the war also sparked nationalistic revolutionary movements in several British colonies outside of Europe.

- 9 Schmidt, Donald E. (2005). *The Folly of War: American foreign policy, 1898–2005*. Algora Publishing. ISBN 0-87586-383-3.
- 10 Link, Arthur S. (1972). *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910–1917*. New York: Harper & Row. pp. 252–282.
- 11 Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (1998).
- 12 Christie, Norm M. (1999). *For King and Empire, The Canadians at Amiens, August 1918*. CEF Books. ISBN 1-896979-20-3.
- 13 Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1919) with Austria; Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine with Bulgaria; Treaty of Trianon With Hungary; Treaty of Sèvres with the Ottoman Empire; Davis, Robert T., ed. (2010). *U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security: Chronology and Index for the 20th Century* 1. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger Security International. p. 49. ISBN 978-0-313-38385-4.
- 14 Sally Marks, “The Myths of Reparations,” *Central European History* (1978) 11#3 pp. 231-255

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Along with these dire consequences, World War I marked one of the earliest examples of American intervention in world affairs. President Wilson won his campaign for his second presidential term with the notion that he had kept the United States away from war. As mentioned however, opinions about the conflict had shifted over a short period of time. The American public felt compelled to align with France, Britain and their allies against their fight with Germany. Germans were portrayed negatively through propaganda materials especially after the sinking of the passenger ship Lusitania, which killed American passengers. After numerous German attempts to elicit the United States into the war, Congress granted President Wilson a resolution of war to fight Germany in April 1917.

Increased Intervention

Many view the Spanish-American War of 1898 as the beginning of the U.S. emerging as a world power. Theodore Roosevelt fought in this war before serving as president from 1901 until 1908, embodying a new and stronger spirit of internationalism. Roosevelt's belief in internationalism was based on the notion that mutual cooperation among countries is beneficial.¹⁵ The war also gave the U.S. a colony of its own, the Philippines¹⁶, taken from the Spanish. While isolationism, which is the policy that refrains from cooperation and alliances with other international countries¹⁷, was no longer of national interest, the old tradition of noninvolvement in Europe's wars still persisted. This was in fact a better labeling of the American Policy, since American interventionism was quite evident in many of the regional issues surrounding American borders and taking place in its proximity, such as in Cuba and South America. The policy of isolationism can be spoken of in the European context, where America long followed a rather stable non-involvement policy. It was in this climate of uncertainty and tentative involvement that President Woodrow Wilson took office in 1913.

Wilson's predecessors, including Roosevelt, used the concepts of "American exceptionalism" and "manifest destiny" to extend American influence throughout the world, in an interventionist move, as mentioned above. American exceptionalism was the belief that the United States was outstanding and special when compared to another normal nation.¹⁸ This sense of exceptionalism gave the United States heavier responsibility in maintaining world order. Wilson abandoned this imperialist policy, instead asserting that all peoples throughout the world have the right to self-determination. He felt

15 "Internationalism." Merriam-Webster.. 2011. <http://www.merriam-webster.com> (8 May 2011).

16 Group, Gale. "The Spanish-American War (1898)." Gale encyclopedia of U.S. history. War. Thomson Gale, 01 Jan 2008.

17 "Isolationism." Merriam-Webster.com. 2011. <http://www.merriam-webster.com> (8 May 2011).

18 "Exceptionalism." ibid.

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it was America's duty to protect democracy and free peoples in other countries, rather than spreading it aggressively. Prior to the outbreak of World War I, Wilson pursued this policy by protecting fledgling republics in Latin America (in line with Monroe doctrine) that had struggled in the past with corrupt governments, diplomatic pressures from European powers, and even American imperialism under Roosevelt. Despite Wilson's signature idealism, he ended up resorting to military action in Latin America just like his predecessors.¹⁹

These problems seemed small compared to World War I, which broke out in Europe one year into Wilson's first term. Even though Wilson was inclined towards internationalism, he at first was against entering the war. But following the U.S.-intercepted Zimmerman Telegram-a secret German message to Mexico in early 1917 proposing an alliance against the U.S. - in addition to other direct U.S. security threats, Wilson concluded that isolationism was no longer possible.²⁰ The president made the case that Germany had "thrust" war upon the U.S.,²¹ and in this context the Congress voted in favor of declaring war on Germany, and later Austria-Hungary, in 1917.

Wilson's Foreign Policy Approach

Wilson's personality and upbringing impacted his decision-making tendencies as president. He was brought up in a strict 19th century Presbyterian household, where he learned that good and evil exist, and man exists to serve the greater good. This contributed to his sense of justice on one hand, and often-damaging sense of self-righteousness on the other. In fact, his black-and-white view of morality probably contributed to his ideological rift and failure to compromise with the U.S. Congress on the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. Throughout his career as an established academic, he viewed political history as shaped by men with integrity and purpose. As president, Wilson's foreign policy was driven by his belief in the principles of international law. Wilson's leadership can be qualified as one in which personal qualities are distinct, and his source of power is "intellectual policy and strategic vision", rather than public entrepreneurship (e.g. F. D. Roosevelt) or personal charisma (e.g. Hitler).²²

While Wilson's foreign policy judgment could be clouded by this idealism, he excelled in the domestic policy realm. He is known as a president well

19 Yates, Richard E. "Zimmerman Telegram." *Dictionary of American History*. Ed. Stanley I. Kutler. 3rd ed. Vol. 8. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003. 590-591. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 8 Jan. 2014.

20 *Source Records of the Great War*, Vol. V, ed. Charles F. Horne, *National Alumni 1923*

21 Sellen, Robert W. "Why Presidents Fail in Foreign Policy: The Case of Woodrow Wilson." *Social Studies*, 64.2 (1973): 64. ProQuest. Web. 8 Jan. 2014

22 Masciulli, J., Molchanov, M. A., & Knight, W. A. (2009). Political Leadership in Context. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Political Leadership*, 3-27. pp.19

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prepared for domestic political battles. He knew how to handle one major legislative matter at a time, avoid ad-hoc plans, emphasize his agenda's contribution to humanity, and advocate these agendas using accessible and appealing language.²³ He managed to expand the power of the presidency and used his influence to implement economic reforms. He focused on lowering tariffs via the successful Underwood-Simmons Act, and handled currency problems through banking reform by pushing for the Federal Reserve Act of 1913 that established a new system, which increased federal control over money circulation, that still provides the framework for U.S. banks, credit, and money supply today. Wilson also supported the Clayton Antitrust Act, which protected labor and farmers and prohibited unfair business practices, and the Federal Trade Commission law, which also sought to enforce accountability in business.²⁴

Wilson's foreign policy successes, however, are less identifiable compared to its domestic policy successes. He did not often pay attention to the power-balancing in Europe as his predecessor Theodore Roosevelt. He perceived the certain national interests of some countries, such as Britain (and their desire for colonies and trade), Germany (with its ambitions in the Near East), and Japan (with its geopolitical vulnerability). However, at the start of World War I Wilson had to increase his knowledge and time spent on international relations, and foolhardily condemned both the Allies and Central Powers at the start of the war.²⁵

Wilson eventually lost sight of neutrality, but never of morality. In fact, he used this emotional morality to ground U.S.'s eventual preference for the Allies. In Manchester in 1918 Wilson said that while "interest separates men... there is only one thing that can bind people together and that is a common devotion to the right."²⁶ Wilson's first Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan agreed with and reinforced Wilson's idealism, while his second one, Robert Lansing, specialized in international law and followed a more realistic approach. Wilson was suspicious of Lansing and thought he would fail to keep America out of the war. The two drew apart after 1916.²⁷

When it comes to Latin America, Wilson's foreign affairs record is characterized by three involvements: Mexico, the attempt to remain out of World War I, and the attempt to keep peace after the war. Two of these three involvements are directly linked with WWI. Each instance reflects Wilson's sig-

23 Sellen, Robert W. "Why Presidents Fail in Foreign Policy: The Case of Woodrow Wilson." *Social Studies* 64.2 (1973): 64. ProQuest. Web. 8 Jan. 2014.

24 "Woodrow Wilson: Domestic Affairs." *American President: A Reference Resource*. The Miller Center, University of Virginia, 2013. Web. 05 Jan. 2014. <<http://millercenter.org/president/wilson/essays/biography/4>>.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

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nature idealism and the naiveté that emanated from it. At the start of his term Wilson announced that America's goal in Latin America was "to cultivate the friendship and deserve the confidence of our sister republics." Prior to the outbreak of World War I, this meant protecting weak republics there that had long struggled with corrupt governments, pressure from European powers, and U.S. imperialism under Wilson's predecessors. To atone for Roosevelt's imperialistic policies, and to further show that the U.S. would uphold the Monroe Doctrine, Wilson persuaded Congress to repeal the 1912 Panama Canal Act that exempted many American ships from paying to pass through the canal. Wilson also signed a treaty with Colombia apologizing for Roosevelt's aggressiveness during the U.S.-driven 1903 Panama Revolution.²⁸

Despite his distaste for imperialism and belief in peaceful cooperation, Wilson resorted to military action in Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. His greatest challenge was, of course, the U.S. involvement in Mexico. Given his focus on democracy and self-determination, Wilson did not approve of the usurping president of Mexico Victoriano Huerta. Wilson denounced the military dictator and allowed his enemies to buy military equipment and arms in the U.S. for staging a counterrevolution. Not long after, a second civil war broke out in Mexico. Opposition leader Pancho Villa sent forces to the U.S. to provoke Wilson into getting involved, and Wilson then sent 5,000 Army regulars into Mexico to find Villa.²⁹

These armies were unsuccessful, and the new Mexican President Venustiano Carranza threatened to declare war on the U.S. The U.S. barely avoided war after the two armies clashed in 1916, but it eventually recognized Carranza's government. U.S. actions in Mexico during this time were highly debated, especially among Constitutionalists. Wilson's policy also did not achieve the "peace, prosperity, and contentment" that it sought.³⁰

Another major issue in Wilson's conduct of foreign policy was to remain out of WWI. When the war began, while he initially supported Allies over Germany and Austria-Hungary, Wilson knew that a victory on one side would lead to bitterness and likely another war. Thus, by 1916, he strongly advocated for the outcome of "peace without victory," which he pursued by offering to arbitrate peace terms.³¹ Neutrality was impossible, as Germany and the Allies refused to negotiate without battle. Eventually, Wilson did enter the war based

28 Goodell, S. (1965), Woodrow Wilson in Latin America: Interpretations. *Historian*, 28: 96–127. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6563.1965.tb01744.x

29 SparkNotes Editors. "SparkNote on Woodrow Wilson." SparkNotes.com. SparkNotes LLC. 2005. Web. 7 Jan. 2014.

30 Goodell, S. (1965), Woodrow Wilson in Latin America: Interpretations. *Historian*, 28: 96–127. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6563.1965.tb01744.x

31 Sellen, Robert W. "Why Presidents Fail in Foreign Policy: The Case of Woodrow Wilson." *Social Studies* 64.2 (1973): 64. ProQuest.Web. 8 Jan. 2014.

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on U.S. interests—he strove to protect U.S. maritime freedom and maybe end the war more quickly.

However, in the public eye these and the Zimmerman telegram were fairly weak reasons for entering the long-avoided world war. Polls taken in 1937, during the opening months of World War II, showed that almost 60% of Americans believed that intervention during the first war should never have happened.

Wilson thus rallied Americans on the effort to “make the world safe for democracy,” using rhetoric that suggested the war would bring justice and lasting peace. In fact, in his address to Congress requesting a declaration of war, he said “Our motive will not be revenge of the victorious assertion of the physical might of the nation, but only the vindication of right.”³² Following, Wilson’s postwar order was built on democratic ideals.

Post-War Peace Efforts

Undoubtedly, Woodrow Wilson’s most important foreign policy move was his post-war Peace Efforts. His statement given on January 8, 1918, declared that World War I was fought over moral principles, and urged a post-War peace in Europe. This statement is famously known as the “Fourteen Points” and successfully illustrates his idealist approach, as those points reflected key principles of idealism, based on the belief that colonial rivalries, large militaries, and power-balancing lead to war, whereas national self-determination, open diplomacy, democracy, and economic independence leads to peace. Most notably, the Fourteen Points, in abandoning the balance-of-power system of international politics—which were in practice for centuries- in favor of a new system of collective security, advocated for the formation of a League of Nations to guarantee independence for all countries, large and small.³³ Under this system, states would join together to oppose aggression by any state whenever and wherever it occurred. In short, these ideas constituted a new world order completely foreign to the experiences of European powers, which implies the need for broader support if it was to succeed in shape the global order.

Wilson wanted the treaty to lay a groundwork that would end all wars, and “to assure his and the nation’s leadership in designing the post-war peace”.³⁴ However, the European allies, victorious in the War, sought revenge and wanted to ensure their dominance on their rivals economically, militarily

32 Jentleson, Bruce W. *American Foreign Policy: The Dynamics of Choice in the 21st Century*. New York: Norton, 2000. Print.

33 “President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points.” Lillian Goldman Law Library. Retrieved 07 January 2014 from: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp

34 Graebner, N. A., & Bennett, E. M. (2011). *The Versailles Treaty and Its Legacy: The Failure of the Wilsonian Vision*. Cambridge University Press. pp.38

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and politically, and devised the Treaty of Versailles accordingly to “punish” Germany, and forced it to make very important territorial concessions, pay reparations, and disarm, effectively crippling the country’s war making capabilities. Thus, Wilson’s design for an ideal world “ran the gauntlet of big-power interests”.³⁵ While European nations rejected almost all of Wilson’s ideas in his Fourteen Points, they did agree to set up a League of Nations which became part of the Treaty of Versailles. Back in the U.S., though, people were wary of war and internationalism, so isolationism took hold of the country, despite Wilson’s efforts. Wilson’s isolationist opponents in the government argued that the collective security system would obligate the U.S. to go to war defending other League members. The desire to avoid foreign entanglement was strong; isolationists prevailed, and the Senate refused to ratify U.S. membership in the League of Nations. Many politicians feared backlash at home if the U.S. went to war again.

Surprisingly, the November 1918 armistice represented a high point for Wilson’s worldwide approval and authority, as he was serving a second term and led the U.S. to victory. While Wilson was optimistic about his political influence in Europe, the home front held biting criticism. Wilson was the first president to visit Europe, and his participation of postwar peace talks angered some Americans. Moreover, Republicans accused Wilson of partisanship given the fully democratic delegation that accompanied him to Europe, and the fact that he had encouraged the nation to vote for Democrats in the 1918 elections. When Democrats lost control of both Houses of Congress, Wilson’s influence in the legislature dropped significantly.³⁶

Some Americans thought Wilson gave too much land and power to France and Britain in the Treaty of Versailles. Liberal Democrats especially bemoaned the heavy reparations for Germany and colonial gains for Britain and France. While Wilson did not necessarily support these aspects of the treaty, either, he compromised so that the League of Nations could emerge as part of negotiations. While in Europe, Wilson missed the sense of isolation growing amidst the American public. When he did return, many Members of Congress were opposed to Wilson’s final propositions.³⁷

League of Nations: U.S. Rejection

Bipartisan opposition to the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations combined with Wilson’s refusal to compromise, ultimately brought about Senate’s blocking of U.S. membership. Americans of Irish descent—who voted pre-

35 Graebner, N. A., & Bennett, E. M. (2011). *The Versailles Treaty and Its Legacy: The Failure of the Wilsonian Vision*. Cambridge University Press. pp.40

36 “Wilson and the League of Nations.” *History of World War I. Vol: 2: Victory and Defeat, 1917-1918*. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2002. Gale Virtual Reference Library.Web. 7 Jan. 2014.

37 *Ibid.*

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dominantly Democratic—opposed the treaty given its lack of territorial gains for Italy. German Americans were also democratic, and opposed the treaty that so severely punished Germany.³⁸ These ethnic groups threw their weight behind League opponents, creating an anti-ratification bloc among Democrats in Congress.

Henry Cabot Lodge was a Republican senator from Massachusetts from 1850-1924. As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during Wilson's presidency, he played a critical role in Congress's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles. Ironically, a large majority of Congress wanted the League of Nations in some form, including Lodge himself. However, Americans were also in favor of a treaty that would reduce U.S. commitments so that America would not have to act against its national interests. Lodge proposed amendments to the Treaty that most Americans approved of and most Europeans considered acceptable.³⁹ Wilson, however, refused to compromise and rejected Lodge's amendments, leaving an unchanged and rejected Treaty of Versailles.

Indeed, ultimately the political battle between Wilson and Congress over the League of Nations revealed ideological differences. Most Americans at the time were eager to see the U.S. help restore peace and foster international cooperation. Yet they were also wary of committing to the same types of overseas entanglements that had killed tens of thousands of Americans during the war. Wilson, with his overwhelming sense of idealism and engagements in Europe, did not feel as cautious. The disagreement over article 10 of the League's covenant illustrates this ideological rift. This article required all League members to submit every international dispute to arbitration. Moreover, nations would have to implement economic and military sanctions against any nation violating this clause. Senators thought article 10 threatened U.S. sovereignty. According to Wilson, however, without the article the League would be no more than "an influential debating society."⁴⁰

Party politics ultimately secured U.S. rejection of the League. In 1919, Republicans sought to reinforce the country's changed, wary mood. While Liberal Democrats led by Thomas Gore and David Walsh were from Wilson's own party, they also voted against the treaty. Moreover, Senates already had a slight majority in Senate, outnumbering Democrats 49 to 47.⁴¹ If Wilson had compromised, there would have been enough support to secure an amended version of the League.

38 "Why Did Congress Reject the League of Nations?" *Winter 2010 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly Learning Activity – Secondary Level*. The Library of Congress, n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2014. <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical_thinking/pdf/secondary_activity.pdf>.

39 *Ibid.*

40 "Wilson and the League of Nations." *History of World War I. Vol: 2: Victory and Defeat, 1917-1918*. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2002. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 7 Jan. 2014.

41 *Ibid.*

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Wilson and Public Opinion

Throughout his presidency, however, Wilson was used to trying to win the public via his “bully pulpit” (a term coined by Theodore Roosevelt holding that the White House was a unique platform for advocating a political agenda). For example, to garner support for his legislative program, Wilson broke a long-held precedent and delivered many messages in person to Congress. His administration did not, however, enjoy support from a majority of U.S. newspapers at the time. The press heavily criticized Wilson intermittently for both his reform-minded domestic and foreign policies, reinforcing Wilson’s belief that interest groups controlled the press and could purposely distort news to serve their own interests. Thus, even as early as 1914, Wilson considered creating a government agency to disseminate official information, coordinate press releases, and redress misinformation emanating from biased sources.⁴²

When the U.S. entered the war, this Committee on Public Information was established by an executive order. The Committee was to act as a liaison agency between various government departments and the press and inform the public about government activities. In a letter to the Acting Secretary of War, Wilson explained, “It is my wish to keep the matter of propaganda entirely in my own hands.”⁴³ Ironically, the Committee became a government tool for managing public opinion, trying to build American support for the war effort, and following, for adopting Wilsonian idealism in U.S. foreign policy.

In this fashion, Wilson publicly campaigned for the League of Nations in its original form. Despite poor health—he suffered a stroke while in Paris—Wilson, in 22 days during September 1919, gave 42 speeches and traveled 12,800 kilometers across the U.S. Due to this political strain and extensive travel, Wilson had another stroke on September 25 and had to return to Washington. On October 10, he once more had a stroke that permanently paralyzed his entire left side. Despite all of his public efforts and appeals to Congress, the senate voted against the Treaty of Versailles by a vote of 55 to 39. Wilson’s supporters, following his instructions, voted against Lodge’s amended version of the treaty. The treaty went up for ratification again in March of 1920, but by that time the League of Nations had already been created.⁴⁴ Wilson’s presidency ended one year later.

Conclusion

Wilson’s failure of convincing the congress to ratify the Versailles agreement can be seen both as an indicator of the strength of the separation of powers in

42 Turner, Henry A. 1957. “Woodrow Wilson and Public Opinion.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 21: 505-20.

43 *Ibid.*

44 “Wilson and the League of Nations.” *History of World War I. Vol: 2: Victory and Defeat, 1917-1918.* Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2002. Gale Virtual Reference Library.Web. 7 Jan. 2014.

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the American polity, as well as America's reluctance to be involved in what it sees as "European Matters". However, this move indirectly provoked or aggravated the consequences of the World War II, as the League of Nations without the presence of the United States was born weaker than it should have been.

Looking back to the beginning of the twentieth century from now, one can safely argue that to curb Germany's rise and slow down the emergence of a new political and military order in Europe, America should have invested itself institutionally as well as economically and militarily. As NATO or any Military Alliance involving Western powers did not exist at the time, what was left to America as a rising major power was to create and strengthen ties to its allies and potential allies in order to prevent the irredentist strong leaders and a new wave of arms racing dominating Europe. America's economic size and importance, as well as the existing economic ties with these actual and potential allies were not sufficient for America to dominate the political scene to establish an international balance. The importance of considering these points were so important that Only twenty five years later, the globe witnessed how the institutions that were set up considering the political necessities can be effective in establishing a formal level for multilateral dialogue even during the most crisis-ridden days of the Cold War, when backed by major powers not only militarily and economically, but also institutionally.

Given this rather difficult political landscape, Wilson's success during the Versailles talks is a major political achievement, something which the Congress failed to properly evaluate, missing a very important opportunity to establish a global system that would have better addressed the potential future conflicts. In the absence of any military coalition and a weak economic bloc that was not attempting to balance the rising Germany or the Soviet Union, America's (and the West's) only chance of securing the peace was to invest more in the institutional design of a global order. Wilson was a hard-working, visionary man who had acknowledged this need. Perhaps he had only underestimated the resistance of the Congress, difficulties of internal politics and the endurance of the nominally isolationist foreign policy understanding commonly found among American congress people.

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