

Book Review

G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Tony Smith, *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp.157.

Reviewed by Tuba Ünlü Bilgiç

The United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, and its subsequent failure that has become increasingly more apparent, have ignited a large-scale and heated debate among intellectuals, academics, experts, and politicians subscribed to various ideologies. The main thrust of the debate has been whether the war or the administration's new foreign policy vision as enshrined in the Bush Doctrine was in conformity with the American values that have been guiding the American foreign policy since the days of the founding fathers. "The Crisis of American Foreign Policy" is a noteworthy contribution to this debate.

The book aims to answer a critical question: whether the war in Iraq was launched by the U.S. to spread democracy and freedom around the world in accordance with President Woodrow Wilson's ideas or, on the contrary, the goal was to fulfill geopolitical ambitions hidden behind the high ideals of liberal internationalism.

The book consists of four chapters written by four authors. G. John Ikenberry, the Albert G. Milbank Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University, a well-known liberal and a distinguished expert on American foreign policy, provides an introduction and sets the framework for the debate. While Tony Smith, professor of political science at Tufts University, argues that the Bush Doctrine is Wilsonian, Thomas J. Knock, associate professor of history at Southern Methodist University, and Anne-Marie Slaughter, former dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton, simply disagree.

Neoliberals vs. Neoconservatives:

In his thought-provoking essay, Smith argues that the Bush administration was Wilsonian since they followed the Wilson's trail, that is, promoting democracy worldwide. According to Smith, Wilson provided the Bush Doctrine, which relied on military power to shape global affairs, with a purpose: expansion of free market democracy. The Bush administration forcefully claimed that national security of the country was closely tied to promotion of democracy in the Middle East.

According to Smith's definition, Wilsonianism calls for democracy promotion and opening of markets to free trade worldwide, multilateralism to ensure international security, and sees American leadership as an alternative to multilateralism, in case of necessity, especially when the possibility of intervention with the aim of regime change is on the table. For him, the Bush administration's policies are in compliance with Wilsonianism's basic tenets, with a mere exception of multilateralism. In his opinion, a system of democratic states reinforced by market economy is more essential to Wilsonianism than international institutions. In other words, it is democratization which is central to Wilsonianism not multilateralism. Moreover, Smith argues, since American leadership may replace cooperation in international institutions providing an alternative to multilateralism, Bush Jr. can well be regarded as an heir to Wilson. From this perspective, he also claims that multilateralism is only a façade that hides almost hegemonic American leadership over a global coalition.

Admittedly, his most provocative argument is that (neo)liberals are equally guilty of the Iraqi fiasco as neoconservatives. Smith sees Bush walking on a path built by joint efforts of neoliberals and neoconservatives. Neoliberals contributed to the Bush Doctrine as much as neoconservatives since they have advocated democratizing the world as they believe in centrality of democracies with open markets to international peace and security. For Smith, both neoconservatives and neoliberals want to shape the world in accordance with the American vision, if necessary through the American force. However, he notes, the mission of democratizing the world has brought suffering and material loss both in Iraq and at home. Therefore, liberal internationalism must share the blame.

Knock, in his essay where he places Wilsonianism in a historical perspective, states that if what the Bush administration did in Iraq is Wilsonianism, then we need to invent another term for it. In response to Smith's argument blaming neoliberals for "doing the intellectual heavy-lifting" to provide a purpose to the Bush Doctrine, Knock explains that neoconservatives were more Rooseveltian than Wilsonian as they placed national interest before multilateralism.

Slaughter, on the other hand, rejects Smith's conclusion that multilateralism is only a disguise for American primacy. She argues that Wilsonian commitment to multilateralism is a genuine belief in international legitimacy. For her, liberal internationalism differs from the Bush Doctrine because Wilsonians have faith in not only multilateralism but also the liberal international regime, i.e. web of rules and institutions.

As is the case with most intellectual debates, here as well the participant authors reach at different conclusions mostly because their definitions of the concept under scrutiny vary. While Smith emphasizes democracy

promotion as the most important tenet of Wilsonianism, Knock and Slaughter highlight multilateralism and cooperative international order founded on rule of law. Based on their respective definitions, Smith concludes that Bush Doctrine can be called Wilsonian whereas others infer the contrary on the grounds that the Bush administration effectively ignored multilateralism.

Liberal imperialism:

In my opinion, one of the most interesting questions that the book deals with is whether Wilsonianism or liberal internationalism carries the risk of turning into (liberal) imperialism. In his introductory essay, Ikenberry pinpoints Wilsonianism's main ideas as follows: democracies are essential to peaceful international order; free trade and international law promotes international peace; collective security is needed for peace and stability; America is responsible to lead the world towards a more democratic, progressive, and rule-based order. Therefore, Ikenberry recognizes the possibility that Wilsonianism may indeed inspire liberal imperialism. Smith makes the same argument more forcefully.

Slaughter acknowledges that liberal internationalists cannot totally escape from Smith's criticisms as Wilsonianism may be interpreted as paving the way for intervening in sovereign states to ensure regime change for the sake of democracy. Nevertheless, she differentiates between democratizing countries and supporting democratic institutions in those countries while letting them decide their own destiny. She argues that Wilson did not believe that democracy could be imposed by external forces but could be facilitated by global peace which in turn would be guaranteed by international organizations, such as the League. In the same vein, she maintains that liberal internationalists differ from neoconservatives as they do not advocate to democratize people but to liberalize already existing institutions with no external intervention.

Yet, a fundamental question remains begging for an answer: whether and under what circumstances multilateral or even unilateral use of force is permissible to secure people from their own governments' wrong-doings. Slaughter's main answer to this question lies with multilateralism again. As a mechanism against both the lurking danger of imperialism and devastating ramifications of use of force, she suggests institutionalized consultations among leading democracies. She recommends prioritizing preventive measures over use of force when risk of internal crisis rises in a country, as it was the case in Macedonia. She also recommends emphasizing promotion of democracy not through external force but through integration as the European Union model has successfully demonstrated.

Last but not least, while Ikenberry declares that "we are all Wilsonians now" implying that Wilsonianism has replaced realism, its closest rival,

as the dominant foreign policy paradigm, Smith asserts that Wilsonianism is in crisis because it failed in Iraq, and that it will never emerge as a major theme in the American foreign policy. As with the previous points, this part of the debate seems to remain unresolved as well.

Overall, the book is an interesting reading for everyone from students of the American foreign policy to causal followers of America's latest involvement in Iraq for two reasons. First, it is a good source to become acquainted with Wilsonianism as an American foreign policy tradition, among others such as isolationism or realism. Second, it situates the Iraqi war in a historical and philosophical context and helps us understand the motives of the American administration to launch the invasion.

Furthermore, the book provides a rare and agreeable opportunity to get familiar with different points of view on a given subject and witness how these conflicting ideas collide in a sparring match. Even for this reason alone, it is a good read.