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The Wilsonian Model of Foreign Policy & the Post-Cold War World

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President Woodrow Wilson's approach to international relations, especially his use of force, has become a model, which has influenced American foreign policy for almost 80 years. Many recent American operations have reflected Wilsonian ideas and ideals. Over the years, Wilson's model has proven to be quite resilient.

This paper will examine Woodrow Wilson's background and how it influenced his views on foreign policy; examine how the current world situation resembles that of Wilson's time; compare Wilson's and post-Cold War presidents George Bush's and Bill Clinton's foreign policy, especially their use of military force; explain why the Wilsonian model has not been changed; and present a possible alteration to the model.

Woodrow Wilson's Background

Woodrow Wilson was a complex and often contradictory man. To understand his foreign policies one should understand the person. Wilson was a staunch Presbyterian, the offspring of Southern clergy on both sides of his family. He often looked down upon other denominations of Christianity, some times referring to them as unworthy of the Almighty (1).

Wilson had great faith in himself, too, bordering on arrogance. He saw himself cut from the same cloth as the great English statesmen William E. Gladstone and Edmund Burke (2). He fancied himself a mixture of the best of British Conservatism and British Liberalism. While participating in campus debate clubs as an undergraduate, Wilson often imitated the Englishmen in both their rhetoric and methods. Wilson also harbored a more favorable view of the parliamentary system of government. He thought that the office of Prime Minister held more prestige than that of President. Wilson often referred to himself as the "Prime Minister of Princeton" when he held the post of that college's president.

Wilson's beliefs also showed signs of influence from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant's 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace*, stated that democracies are less likely to be warlike in comparison to monarchies and dictatorships. This is because people governed by a democracy are citizens who participate in the governing process, and are not mere subjects to be arbitrarily directed by a ruler (3).

Many of Wilson's ideals reflect the beliefs of his idols. As a scholar, Wilson spoke of an optimal world system of federated nations, which would, of course, be democracies. Wilson believed representative governments held the key to world stability. Woodrow Wilson believed the United States and Great Britain could promote the course of peace throughout the world by championing the cause of self-government (4).

Wilson's sense of conviction was reflected by the partnership he formed with his officials. His first Secretary of State was William Jennings Bryan, the proud champion of populism, and himself a great orator (5). Wilson's most trusted advisor was the able, intelligent, and very like-minded Col. Edward House (6). Many others on his staff shared most of Wilson's beliefs.

In contrast to his belief in the possibility of a stable world governed by an enlightened humanity, Wilson, however, had many of the same contemptuous ideas toward non-Anglo Saxon people that many Americans of that day held (7). This was due in part to his upbringing in Virginia during the reconstruction of the South. He thought that Black Americans were incompetent to form intelligent opinions concerning governmental issues (8).

Wilson came to power immediately after William Howard Taft but more importantly his administration followed Theodore Roosevelt's. This is significant because Woodrow Wilson had been disillusioned with the Office of the Presidency up until Roosevelt's administration. From Andrew Johnson to William McKinley, Wilson perceived there had been a string of weak presidents who abdicated their power to Congress. These ineffective Chief Executives led Wilson to originally consider a career in the Senate and not the White House. Roosevelt's ability to rally public support by his use of the "bully pulpit" changed Wilson's mind. Wilson fancied himself a great orator, and like Roosevelt felt he could guide public opinion to support his causes.

Woodrow Wilson's America was changing too. One of the most important changes occurred in 1898, namely the Spanish-American War. Wilson's contemporary and rival, Theodore Roosevelt, had become a national hero for his exploits in Cuba. This war is important in that unlike most other previous military interventions, the United States took the initiative and mounted a sustained foreign campaign. Up to that time the last major war on foreign soil was the Mexican-American War of 1848. The Mexican-American War involved the annexation of the Texas territory and the definition of the border between the United States and Mexico. However, the war with Spain over Cuba was not a boundary dispute. U.S. forces had to be transported over water, make an amphibious landing, and take the fight to the enemy. The Spanish-American War proved that America could fight and win a war away from its immediate borders.

The Spanish-American War also was surrounded by many claims of higher moral purposes. The overarching moral reason behind the war was to deliver the Cubans from their Spanish oppressors (9). Many newspapers and public speakers echoed the popular sentiment that America must act in the name of freedom within its own hemisphere. The famous incident with the battleship *Maine* may have been the catalyst and rallying cry for the war, but it was not the primary motive for American action. As a result of the war, America had taken control of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. America saw itself not as conquerors but as liberators and benefactors and engaged in a concerted effort to modernize these newly acquired territories.

The Spanish-American War and the strengthening of the presidency occurred less than two decades prior to Woodrow Wilson's taking office. He inherited a country with new interventionist mentality and a presidency that had reclaimed its prestige. These events, coupled

with his own sense of destiny, set the stage for Woodrow Wilson to intervene into the affairs of other nations.

Wilson's World and the Post-Cold War World

The world of Woodrow Wilson was very similar to the world of today. In Wilson's day there were several major and emerging world powers: the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany, and Japan. Each nation had a series of treaties and alliances aimed at improving their own national interests. It was a fractious, multi-polar world.

Those countries are still players in the world of today. The difference is that during the Cold War, the common enemy, the Soviet Union, united the America, Western Europe, and Japan to a great degree. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, an even more multi-polar system has come into place. As was true in Wilson's time, Russia is very unstable politically and economically.

The economies of the two eras are also similar. In Wilson's day a "second industrial revolution" was taking place with the advent of aircraft, oil-powered ships, radio communication, and the wide spread use of the internal combustion engine.

Today, information age technology is having a great impact on the world economy. In both eras new markets emerged and the subjects of trade agreements, tariffs, and protection for American workers arose. In both cases the "haves" employed cutting edge technology, while the "have-nots" tended to be left behind.

Wilson's Foreign Policy and Influences on Today

Woodrow Wilson's foreign policy was based on supporting the growth of just governments using the rule of law(10). For example, when asked what he was going to do to stabilize matters in Latin America, Wilson said "I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men" (11). Wilson had a very wide-ranging view of foreign policy. To Wilson, foreign policy was not just pursuing American national interests but the interests of humanity at large. One example of this was Wilson's and William Jennings Bryan's drafting the Pan-American Treaty that set forth a collective security arrangement and a mediating body to settle intra-membership disputes. (This treaty was never ratified by the Senate and was dropped from discussion due to ongoing problems between the United States and Mexico and one with Nicaragua). This treaty is one example of how Wilson wanted to expand the positive influence of democracy, republicanism, and collective security.

Economics played a key role in Wilsonian foreign policy. Wilson believed in the liberalizing force of free trade and international commerce. He once said trade was the "great nurse of liberal ideals" (12). This belief reflects the thinking of some of Wilson's British role models. Wilson saw the need to develop a true national economy and to inject that national economy into world markets because this action would revitalize democracy at home and give the United States a

voice on the world stage (13). Wilson described how he thought about the importance of finances when it comes foreign policy; "you cannot be a statesmen and not be a banker" (14).

Current American foreign policy shows evidence of Wilsonian beliefs in the power of republicanism. In 1996, the Office of the President of the United States issued a National Security Strategy entitled *Engagement and Enlargement*. The plan's three main ideas are the promotion of democracy abroad, the maintenance of a combat-ready military to meet the myriad of the nation's needs, and to improve America's economy through international trade. The foreign policy in this strategy reflects Wilson's ideals when it states "Democratic states are less likely to threaten our (U.S.) interests"(15), and "Democracies create free markets that offer economic opportunity, make for more reliable trading partners, and are less likely to wage war on each other'"(16). The U.S. Government is currently promoting Wilsonian ideals abroad in the hopes that representative governments and market economies will take root and grow. *Engagement and Enlargement* also discusses the post World War I isolationist mentality and how that sowed the seeds of later conflicts in Europe. This is in direct support of Wilsonian beliefs in involvement in world affairs.

Wilson's' Foreign Policy, the Use of Force, and Presidents Bush's and Clinton's Foreign Policy

It is in the area of using military force to support foreign policy objectives that the Wilsonian model has been most used since 1989. Wilson, who did not serve in the military, sent American forces abroad seven times during his tenure in office (17). Some of the places Wilson sent troops to include Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has sent forces to Panama, the Middle East, Somalia, and Haiti, among others.

In his book *Uses of Force and Wilsonian Foreign Policy*, Fredrick C. Calhoun divides Wilson's use of force into five categories: Protection from self-inflicted harm, Retribution for an criminal act, Introduction into a political situation, Solution of a problem, and Association with other countries. Each of these categories describing Wilson's use of force coincides with American missions in the post Cold War world.

Protection from Harm

In 1915 Woodrow Wilson sought to protect people from themselves in Haiti. The small island nation was in a continual state of chaos and Wilson wished to restore order (18). Wilson stated to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan "The United States cannot consent to standby and permit revolutionary conditions to exist there"(19). The series of revolutions, followed by counter-revolution, had destroyed all of Haiti's public and governmental infrastructure. Wilson was motivated by humanitarian desires to help Haiti become more stable and modern, that is more American. Wilson sent American forces with the task of settling matters in Haiti and implementing some form of stable, representative government.

This mirrors Operation(s) SUPPORT, UPHOLD, RESTORE DEMOCRACY that the United States engaged in Haiti from 1994-95. Once again U.S. forces went into Haiti, not to fight a war, but to promote stability in the wake of political turmoil. President Clinton's use of troops in

nation-building has its precedent in Wilson's Haitian policy. It could be said this most recent Haitian intervention was just the latest chapter in American involvement on the small island that began in 1915. During the crisis in 1915 U.S. Navy officers involved in Haiti, believed forces would be needed to protect American lives and promote the national interest (20). Seventy nine years later the U.S. military again to the same conclusion about a very similar situation (21). Woodrow Wilson's nation-building efforts in Haiti were repeated again eight decades later for many of the same humanitarian reasons.

Retribution for an Criminal Act and Introduction into a Political Situation

Woodrow Wilson's most famous use of force for retribution occurred in 1916 with his sending of the U.S. Army into Mexico to capture the revolutionary-turned-bandit Pancho Villa. Villa's crossing the New Mexico border prompted Wilson to punish Villa for criminal acts against Americans. Woodrow Wilson initially resisted the temptation to expand the scope of the exercise and meddle in the unstable affairs of Mexico and made this a singular action solely designed to capture Villa. Wilson charged General "Black Jack" Pershing with finding the bandit and bring him to justice.

Economics also played part in Wilson's decision to send troops south of the border. American businesses had a considerable amount of money invested in Mexico, especially in gold mining. Wilson believed the economic threat posed by Villa hurt U.S. commercial interests and undermined the Mexican government's stability.

Early on, the State department and the U.S. Army made it clear that the United States was not intervening in Mexican domestic affairs (22). However, because of the Army was unable to find Villa and the hostility that Mexican citizens showed toward the American troops, the nature of the mission to Mexico began to change from one of retribution to one of intervention.

In an effort to stabilize the political situation in Mexico, Wilson used troop withdrawal negotiations to inject of American positions concerning Mexican government (23). The objective shifted from chasing a criminal to influencing Mexican domestic affairs. Wilson sought to direct Mexico toward a more modern (*i.e.*, American) way of life. This was especially true when it came to economics, which Wilson felt held the key to a stable Mexican government.

The Wilsonian act of a punishment raid transforming into an intervention operation manifested itself several decades later under the auspices of President Bush. Bush's actions in Panama fit nicely into the Wilsonian Model. In 1989-90 U.S. forces entered Panama for Operation JUST CAUSE. The stated objectives were to capture Panamanian President Manuel Noriega and remove him and his cronies from power (24). President Bush's justification was Noriega's alleged dealing in narcotics bound for the United States, his ill treatment of American citizens, and national security concerns for US bases in Panama as well as the Panama Canal. Unlike the Mexican expedition sanctioned by Wilson, JUST CAUSE was successful in capturing Noriega and bringing him to trial in the United States. However, just as Wilson expanded the scope of the America's role in Mexico, America's role in Panama changed too. Operation JUST CAUSE gave way to Operation PROMOTE LIBERTY. With Noriega gone, the United States sought to

place a democratic government into power in Panama . This effort has met with some success in that a much more democratically inclined government is in place in Panama (25).

In both instances, the United States first went after a political element engaging in criminal activity. One operations met its objectives while the other did not. U.S. forces failed to capture Villa but did capture Noriega. In the efforts that followed that the two excursions also differ from each other. Wilson's negotiations to stabilize the economy and the government of Mexico were unsuccessful. However, American forces replaced the Noriega regime with a more US style democratic system in Panama. In both events the model held its form in motivation, if not results.

Solution of a Problem

Wilson's goal in applying force was to have the affected people perceived Americans as liberating heroes (26). In 1915 U.S. forces landed in the Dominican Republic to prevent the tiny nation from continued revolution and chaos. To keep the Dominican Republic from self-destructing Wilson decided to establish law and order and an American style of government. Wilson essentially wanted to run the country until the Dominicans could do so themselves (27). However, the Dominican's rebuffed the assistance of the United States. Initially Wilson thought the longer the United States stayed in control the more sympathetic the Dominicans would be to American causes. This was not the case. The Dominicans' resisted American efforts at every turn, including attacks which killed 2 Marines. This did not deter the Wilson Administration, troops remained in the Dominican Republic until 1921 when newly elected President Warren G. Harding removed them.

Wilson was less involved with running the Dominican affair in comparison to his involvement with other areas of foreign policy. Because of the start of the Great War in Europe distracted Wilson, he delegated most of the control of the situation to the military and individuals in the State Department. Also the relatively small scope of the Dominican mission did not warrant his full attention. The overarching humanitarian mission could not be faulted; after all, Americans were there to save the Dominican Republic from itself and to make it a better nation. U.S. troops were not there to conquer territory, but to solve a desperate situation (28).

In the mid-1990s the United States found itself in a very similar situation half- way around the world in the Horn of Africa. U.S. forces involved in Operation RESTORE HOPE were part of a large multi-national effort to prevent starvation in Somalia. The motivation for action in Somalia, as it was in the Dominican Republic, was humanitarian. The strife in the African Nation had led to mass food shortages (29). United Nations efforts, coupled with those of international relief organizations, temporarily brought relief to thousands of people. To that end the effort was successful, but as was the case in the Dominican Republic, the halting of the present problem was much simpler than the preventing of the continuing problem.

On 5 June 1993, 24 Pakistani UN peacekeepers in Somalia were killed by members of the Somalia National Alliance. In response to the slaughter, the U.S. began to seek out the Alliance's leader, General Mohamed Aideed. After a series of strikes on his strongholds, on October 3, 1993, U.S. forces attempted to capture some of Aideed's key lieutenants. As in the Dominican

Republic 78 years earlier, Americans were attacked, by the "ungrateful" locals. The terrible firefight that ensued killed 16 American servicemen and wounded over 100 more. Somali casualties were estimated to be more than 1,000 (30).

The mission to Somalia began during the Bush administration but was under the control of the Clinton Administration for most of its duration. Interestingly, during this time President Clinton let Secretary of Defense Les Aspin monitor the situation in Somalia, in the much same manner Wilson delegated the Dominican Republic situation to others.

The end state of the Dominican Republic after Wilson's intervention and Somalia after RESTORE HOPE were much the same. American forces had temporarily help stabilize the situation in both nations; however, when American forces left both the Dominican Republic and Somali, neither, were much better off than before American intervention.

Association with other Countries

Woodrow Wilson's most famous use of force was, of course, his entering the United States into World War I. Wilson initially wanted to keep American involvement neutral "in fact as in name"(31). However, he also wanted the warring powers to come to him to solve their problems (32). Wilson believed that American morality, championed by himself, could be the only way for lasting peace in Europe (33). The issues that caused the Great War had to be solved by the United States showing other nations the errors of their ways.

The economics of the war in Europe did not bother Wilson much at first. In fact, American exports to the belligerents increased four-fold during the earlier part of the war (34). However, economic issues began to concern Americans, as the British surface blockade and the German U-boat action started to take their toll on American ships and commerce in the North Atlantic. Still Woodrow Wilson sought to deliberate and solve the dispute with his "Victory without Peace"(35) plan for a truce. In fact his re-election slogan was "He kept us out of war"(36).

Wilson's hope of staying out of the war did not last very long. Once involved in the turmoil in Europe, Wilson turned the Great War into a crusade: the "war to make the world safe for democracy." However, Wilson was shrewd and avoiding the label of "entangling alliances" by stating that the United States was in *association* with the Entente Nations (37).

Wilson saw American leadership as the key to both victory on the battlefield and to a stable post-war peace. His reliance on collective security and belief in the cooperation of states led to his efforts to form the League of Nations out of the ashes of war-torn Europe. After the armistice, it was in the post-war world where Wilson hoped to shine. The modern term "new world order" can trace its origin to Wilson's desire for a "new order" resulting from the Paris Peace Conference(38) . Wilson did not actually coin the phrase, but it was attributed to aides who worked with him (39).Wilson proposed the League of Nations where all states large and small would be guaranteed their freedom and security from outside aggressors (40).

In 1990, just after the end of the Cold War, the Iraqi military invaded neighboring Kuwait. Saddam Hussein tried to annex Kuwait as breakaway province. This aggression sent political

ripples throughout the world. The United States took the diplomatic lead by condemning the Iraqi actions.

As in World War I, economics played a substantial role in forming US policy. In the Gulf crisis the economic worries were more immediate than they were in World War I. This was due to Iraq's proximity to the Middle East oil fields and the strategic shipping lanes through the Straits of Hormuz. Oil was deemed the "lifeblood" of the world economy and Saddam could potentially control the flow of petroleum from the Persian Gulf. American corporations also had substantial investment in Kuwait and the other Arab nations in the region. The potential threat to a commodity that the world needed pushed financial issues to the forefront of the Gulf crisis. Similarly, in both World War I and in the war in the Middle East, economics were an important factor in pushing the United States into war.

Where Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM and World War I really resemble each other is President Bush's hope for a peaceful, diplomatic solution to the conflict, and failing that, framing the war as a crusade. President Bush used the United Nations to pursue sanctions and peace talks with Iraq (41). President Bush hoped pressure put on Iraq throughout the United Nations would lead to a withdrawal of Iraqi troops. This having failed, the United States entered a coalition war—not an alliance war—against Iraq.

President Bush cast the conflict as a war against tyranny. On January 16, 1991, in reaction to Saddam's refusal to comply with the U.N. deadline to leave Kuwait, coalition airpower attacked Iraqi forces. President Bush stated "the liberation of Kuwait has begun" (42). The war ended 1000 hours later with the Iraqi military forcefully ejected from Kuwait but with Saddam Hussein still in power.

Though the geography, circumstances, and duration of the wars were different, the Great War and the Gulf War had much in common. Both Presidents Wilson and Bush sought diplomatic solutions early in the conflicts. Failing to resolve things peacefully, both men framed their respective wars as crusades against despotism.

In the war termination stages, both conflicts parallel each other. Both Wilson and Bush have been blamed for not seeing the job through to the end and thus allowing the seeds of future conflicts to grow. Neither Berlin nor Baghdad were occupied by their respective opponents. In fact both Germany and Iraq did not surrender; World War I ended with an armistice and the Gulf War with a cease fire. Wilson's battle with the United States Senate over the League of Nations treaty and its subsequent non-ratification has been cited as a contributing cause of the World War II (43). President Bush's failure to conquer and occupy Iraq is blamed for the continued robust American presence in the Middle East since March 1991. The Wilsonian model of diplomacy, then crusade served President Bush well. Unfortunately, the lessons of the failures in the aftermath of World War I were somewhat lost on the Bush Administration.

A Resilient Model

Why has the Wilsonian model not changed in almost 90 years? Why has it been used so frequently since the end of the Cold War in 1989? The answer lies in the fact that the motivations

behind the model have not changed much since Wilson's presidency. America tries to balance national interests with humanitarian efforts to improve the world situation (44). As we have seen, Woodrow Wilson world, and the post-Cold War world share many of the same problems. Consequently, American leader's have tried the same solutions to deal with these problems, often with the same incomplete conflict resolution as Wilson. Without a shift in the paradigm, the model will most likely continue to be used.

Modifying the Model

Americans tend to view wars as crusades (5). Americans have often rallied against tyranny in one form or another, though often with mixed results. Woodrow Wilson was an extraordinary crusader. He used force as part of his foreign policy whenever he thought it useful, again with mixed results. For good or bad, Wilson's model has helped shape American foreign policy.

One way to change the model is to alter the outlook of foreign policy from that of the crusader to that of the missionary. Crusades tend to be short lived; however, missionaries who are successful in reaching their target peoples are the ones who are invited to stay and become involved with people for long periods of time. Woodrow Wilson believed in democracy, prosperity, and stability. To achieve this he sought a new order for the world (45). However, at the end to the 20th Century Wilson and his counterparts did not have the patience to see things through. Thus, when American troops departed things were not greatly improved. If the United States wishes to see the community of market democracies grow as stated in Engagement and Enlargement, then it has to be ready to do so over the long haul.

Post Kosovo Addendum

The recent military action the Former Yugoslavia Republic (FRY) has again highlighted the Wilsonian influences in U.S. foreign policy. President Clinton's and Secretary of State Albright's stated motives from committing American forces were for humanitarian reasons, not *realpolitik* national interests. Indeed, even the heads of many of the NATO nations, most notably British Prime Minister Blair and Czech President Havel have used Wilsonian rhetoric to support Operation ALLIED FORCE. President Clinton said in a speech in the FRY of Slovenia that "Democracy, tolerance, and human rights must prevail everywhere, for no nation is safe, no prosperity is stable, if conflict and refugees and crime and terrorism can be pushed across borders." (47). This is very reminiscent of "Make the world safe for democracy."

Another key Wilsonian trait exhibited by the current cadre of western leaders is their adherence to and reliance on multi-national governing bodies. Unilateral action was subsumed by the NATO coalition and later the influence of the U.N. This smacks of Wilson's desires for the League of Nations to oversee world affairs.

Though it is too early to tell, the great trap that the leaders of NATO can fall into is the same one that often befell Wilson; namely not resolving the conflict for the long term. Wilson's actions in Mexico, the Caribbean, and even in Europe started out well intended but came up short in terms of long lasting solutions. What will happen in the FRY? Will the presence of NATO

peacekeepers actually resolve the centuries old conflict, exacerbate the situations, or only put hostilities on hold?

The key will be the stamina of NATO. Is there a commitment to resolving the conflict and making a lasting peace? If the NATO leaders leave Kosoosvo and do not create a stable environment, they will have fallen into the same trap as their political Godfather, Woodrow Wilson.

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