The Actions Behind the Rhetoric: The Foreign Policy Practices of Woodrow Wilson

By Gabriel Homa

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Introduction

Pillars of American Foreign Policy

Woodrow Wilson entered office as President of the United States in 1913, almost a century and a half after the founding of the country, and well after the country had extended itself across the North American continent. Before him was a vast history filled with traditions and legacies that shaped the country and many of its policies, especially in regard to foreign policy. As the modern presidency, which had begun to take shape at the turn of the twentieth century, continued to evolve, Wilson had to consider many of these traditions as well as create his own. Before analyzing the foreign policy of President Woodrow Wilson, it is important to understand the traditions that preceded him, and also understand that in the end it would be up to him to determine how to use the past to shape his own period.

Much of the initial foreign policy of the United States involved the question of what role Europe would play in the new nation, as well how it would continue to relate to the rest of the New World. From speeches given by different Founding Fathers during their respective presidencies, many precedents and traditions were set before Wilson entered office. Over time these messages were used to shape the nation, and many time these speeches were reevaluated to fit with the times. It was this evolution of American foreign policy that Wilson inherited upon entering office, and it would be these traditions that he would have to juggle as the United States entered uncharted territory during his presidency.

Foreign Policy of the Founding Fathers’ Generation

The generation of the Founding Fathers initiated the traditions of American foreign policy. The lessons that they taught to the nation became a precedent of foreign policy that
became imbedded into the nation’s fabric. Departing from these traditions would be a challenge for any executive. The major traditions were learned from the Farewell Address of George Washington, the first inauguration speech of Thomas Jefferson, and the 1823 State of the Union Address of James Monroe, where he echoed the Monroe Doctrine. All three would bring forth ideas for foreign policy that would be echoed, and even twisted, by the leaders that would come after them.

As the nation’s first President, Washington had to set the tone, and he started with the Proclamation of Neutrality in 1793. However, it was not until the end of his second term that he wrote down his thoughts on foreign affairs in his Farewell Address, first published on September 19, 1796. Washington warned the nation to “steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world,” and to not get dragged into the affairs of other countries. Washington’s message has over the course of history been seen as pushing the United States to focus and act only for their interests, and to not entangle the nation with the pursuits of other nation’s interests.

Washington’s successor John Adams’ presidency was plagued by a naval conflict with France that endangered the freedom of the seas for the United States due to the seizure of American ships by France. This damage done by the conflict was one of the reasons why Adams was not reelected, and his successor, Thomas Jefferson, inspired by the lessons of the conflict, called for “peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none,” in his inaugural address. For a nation that was commercially alone in the Western Hemisphere, the sea was the United States’ door to the markets of world. To be successful, the nation needed to have the freedom of the seas guarded as a guaranteed right.

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1 Farewell Address, George Washington, Published September 19, 1796
2 John P. Diggins, John Adams, 106
3 Inaugural Address, Thomas Jefferson, March 4, 1801
The foreign policy of the Founding Fathers was culminated under James Monroe, who succeeded Jefferson’s successor, James Madison. Washington and Jefferson had guided American policies in dealing abroad with the Old World. At his fourth State of the Union address, Monroe added to the foreign policy tradition by creating a precedent by declaring the supremacy of American power in the Western Hemisphere. According to Monroe, the United States would not tolerate further colonization of European powers in the Western Hemisphere. Colonies that did exist would be tolerated, but he tried to make it clear to Europe that she could not expand those colonies, nor could they interfere with the existing independent states that had broken off political ties with Europe. According to Monroe, to do such an act would be seen as “an unfriendly disposition toward the United States;”\(^4\) i.e. an act of aggression towards the largest country in the Western Hemisphere. The United States had tried not to entangle itself with the affairs of the Old World, and now Monroe tried to make it clear that he did not want to see Europe involve itself in the affairs of the New World. Each “world” had to remain to their respective regions.

**Spanish-American War Changes Playing Field**

With the national policy set to stay away from any entanglement from the powers of Europe, the United States found itself grow into the power of the Western Hemisphere. By the middle of the 19\(^{th}\) century, the nation had achieved Manifest Destiny, the dream of a transcontinental North American nation. In the post Civil War era, as the nation healed and the military continued to evolve, the American people began to look beyond its borders. The traditions of Washington, Jefferson, and Monroe would be handed down to the next generation of Americans for their interpretation.

\(^4\) State of the Union Address, James Monroe, December 2, 1823
In 1898, the United States partially broke away from the previously mentioned traditions. Under pressure from the public to aid Cuba in their attempt at independence from the Spanish, the United States declared war on Spain. However, the United States expanded their mission beyond freeing Cuba. The nation sent troops abroad and, along with Cuba, attacked Puerto Rico, Spain’s other Caribbean colony, as well as the Philippines across the Pacific Ocean. The Filipinos too were in a fight for independence from the Spanish.

Many variables brought the United States to war with the Spanish. Since 1895, the Cubans had been fighting for their independence. With Cuba not far off the coast of Florida, many in the United States saw Cuba as a potential addition to the nation, and many American businesses had interests on the island.

Many Cubans had already moved to the States seeking opportunity, and many found a forum to speak out against the oppression of the Spanish colonial system. The American press, led by the New York Journal’s William Randolph Hearst, took up the Cuban war story as a means of trying to connect the United States and Cuba. Cuba would be pictured as a damsel in distress with Uncle Sam as the savior and the Spanish as the villain.

American businessmen sought government help in protecting their interests abroad. President William McKinley agreed with these businessmen that it was imperative to protect all American businesses in Cuba, but that going to war was not the right way of doing that. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt disagreed. An admirer of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, the visionary for a strong American navy, Roosevelt too had a vision of a strong navy, as well as having a strong military that was prepared to fight. Cuba and the Philippines were two important territories in Mahan’s vision of creating coaling and hub stations for American shipping. These territories would also help protect American interests abroad.

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5 Crucible of Empire (Documentary), PBS, 1999
Tensions began to rise as the rhetoric in the Senate, in the press, and on the street began to call for the United States to go to war with Spain. On February 14, 1898, after three weeks of no incident, the USS *Maine* exploded in the harbor of Havana, Cuba, killing 266 sailors. While a later investigation showed otherwise, the American media quickly blamed the Spanish. On March 17, 1898, anti-war Senator Redfield Proctor, back from a visit to Cuba, spoke of the hardships of the Cuban people and called for war as the only answer. The Senate deliberated and passed a joint resolution on April 20th calling for Cuban independence and permission for use of the military to achieve this. In a move to appease the anti-imperialists, included in the resolution was an amendment by Senator Henry Teller that promised that the United States would leave Cuba after ridding them of the Spanish. The message of the resolution was delivered to Spain and the latter declared war on the United States on April 23, 1898. The United States declared war back two days later. With that declaration, Roosevelt took to the wire and dispatched a message to Admiral Thomas Dewey who was stationed in Hong Kong. He ordered the admiral to mobilize and advance on the Philippines. Roosevelt himself would later step down and lead a regiment in Cuba. By the end of the war the United States had successfully taken occupation of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines.

Many lessons can be learned from the experience of the Spanish-American War. There were no major protests among the American public concerning the country sending troops abroad to the islands of the Caribbean or across the Pacific into the Philippines. It also showed that public support and the will of the Senate could sway the President to make decisions that he personally did not want to make, as McKinley did not want to go to war with Spain. Overall, it also proved to the United States as well as the international community that the nations did have
the military might to be a respected power in the world, and McKinley’s successor, Theodore Roosevelt made sure to continue this lesson.

**Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine**

Roosevelt was an instrumental figure in the Spanish-American War and was elected Vice President in the 1900 Presidential Election. Following the assassination of McKinley in 1901, Roosevelt assumed the office of the President. With the military still in all of the territory that the country had taken from Spain, Roosevelt envisioned a new foreign policy and added his own wisdom to the Monroe Doctrine based on the recent military action of the United States in the Caribbean and the Pacific and its rise to a regional power.

> “Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.”

From those words at his State of the Union address in 1904, Roosevelt added his own corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. This speech dictated a policy that allowed the United States to unilaterally intervene in Latin America if the United States deemed there was a problem to fix in their southern neighbors. It was Roosevelt’s way of reinterpreting a tradition that was hardly invoked before his presidency, and using it for imperialist motives whether the country that the United States was involving itself in invited the nation or not.

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6 State of the Union Address, Theodore Roosevelt, December 6, 1904
7 Carl Cavanagh Hodge and Cathal J. Nolan, U.S. Presidents and Foreign Policy, 202
8 Michael Hogan, *The Ambiguous Legacy*, 87
The View in 1912

By the Election of 1912, the United States was a country that ranged from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with territories in Alaska, Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam. It affirmed itself as the police force of the Western Hemisphere, making it national policy through the vision of Monroe and Roosevelt to assert itself when necessary into the affairs of the other local nations. Through the vision of its military leaders of the late 19th century and the gains it made in the Spanish-American War, the nation was also becoming a global power, gaining territories and growing commercially.

The foreign policy of the United States had evolved in the years between the terms of Washington and Wilson. While many would invoke the initial traditions of the early 19th century as putting the United States on an isolationist course, the United States was never an isolationist nation. Besides for the attempt at not trading with either side during a war between Britain and France in the late 18th century, the United States had always been a commercially active nation, and these commercial interests would dictate much of its foreign policy. This connection of commerce and foreign policy was not an official tradition of the nation, but it had taken place in the past and it would continue under Wilson.

The stage was set for Woodrow Wilson, a man whose rhetoric was against American military intervention abroad and called for nations to use self-determination. “No president has spoken more passionately and eloquently about the right of self-determination. Yet no president has intervened more often in foreign countries.” ⁹ Many times Wilson’s drive for other nations to be able to have self-determination caused him to use the American military to create those avenues. The problem with Wilson though was that many times his actions were backed by other unspoken reasons that were counter to his rhetoric. Was Wilson a hypocrite, or was the use of

⁹ David Foglesong, America’s Secret War Against Bolshevism, 11
force justified in the wake of his rhetoric? By looking at the early foreign policy decisions of Wilson, then looking at his actions during and after World War I, and finally his policy concerning Russia, it will be easier to understand the differences between Wilson’s rhetoric and his actions and to see through them.
The Foreign Policy Wilson Inherited

Woodrow Wilson had the challenge of succeeding three presidents who broadened the reach of American foreign relations and helped change the powers of the president. Presidents William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and William Taft all involved the United States military in overseas operations the like the country had not seen before. McKinley was in office during the Spanish-American War. The war was the country’s first major overseas military operation and it also saw the countries take control of overseas territory for the first time, in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, as well as a protectorate government over Cuba. Over the first decade of the 20th century, Roosevelt and Taft would both work off of the momentum that the Spanish-American War gave the United States. Using Roosevelt’s Corollary as a new tradition and continuing to expand military intervention across Latin America, they handed over a very involved foreign policy to Wilson in 1913.

Theodore Roosevelt’s Foreign Policy Practices

Roosevelt entered office following the assassination of President McKinley in 1901. Before being elected Vice President in the 1900 election, Roosevelt was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy in the period of time that led up to the Spanish-American War, and was very instrumental in getting the United States involved in the war. During the war itself, Roosevelt resigned from his government post and formed his own volunteer regiment that fought in Cuba, known as the Rough Riders. It was his fame from this experience that got him onto the ticket to be McKinley’s running mate.
Due to his understanding of executive power, Roosevelt has been cited by many as the first modern president in the United States. Article II of the Constitution draws out the powers given to the Executive Branch, i.e. the president. The thirty-year period between Lincoln and McKinley saw a period of time of relatively weak presidents that governed with a very hands-off approach, with a more powerful Congress. Roosevelt’s interpretation of Article II drastically changed the Executive Branch’s power. Roosevelt understood the Constitution as allowing the president to do anything that he was not prohibited from doing as written in the document. From this conviction, he had a very expanded notion of Presidential powers. He believed the President had to be a steward of the people and represent them in the government. In the foreign policy field, he wanted to raise the United States to a position of power.

Roosevelt’s understanding of foreign policy drew inspiration from his experience in the navy department and by naval experts. As he learned from Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, the emphasis of power, especially in the seas with a strong navy, was the major determining factor in international relations. This policy called for the United States to grow commercially with bases overseas, and also to uphold the law in the international community. These two beliefs helped guide his policy towards the outside world, both within his own hemisphere with the creation of the Roosevelt Corollary and towards the rest of the world as well.

It was this background that influenced Roosevelt’s imperialist policies. Roosevelt gave off the image of an American warrior brandishing a big stick towards other nations. In his rhetoric, he spoke in a language that described the duty of the American people, national obligations, and the need to protect the helpless nations against the imperialism of others. He did not find his own imperialist ambitions as contrary to any of this, for the United States was a virtuous nation. To those in the Progressive Era that approved of expansion, Roosevelt’s

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10 Ronald Powaski, Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism and Europe, 2
language spoke to them. However, to many others it spoke of chauvinism, racism, and aggression.\textsuperscript{11}

Right after the Spanish-American War, the Philippines expected to be granted independence as Cuba was. When this was not granted, revolutionary forces led by Emilio Aguinaldo began to attack the United States military. The war had officially ended in 1902, but the United States military was still engaged against revolutionary groups through 1913.

Unlike the Philippines, the United States had written into law that it had to leave Cuba. Cuba was under United States Army administration until 1902. However, a loophole called the Platt Amendment was created into the Cuban Constitution, saying that the United States could intervene in Cuba for “the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty, and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the treaty of Paris on the United States, now to be assumed and undertaken by the government of Cuba.”\textsuperscript{12} The first time the amendment was put to use was in 1906 when a public uproar leading to civil disorder arose in Cuba after a disputed election, resulting in 5,000 troops being sent by Roosevelt to restore order. For the next three years, the island was under an American military occupation, and they only left with order restored in 1909. The military was briefly in Cuba again in 1912. Cuba, however, did not come up in the party platforms or the rhetoric of the 1912 American national election.

Panama, though, was a special case for the election. In 1903, President Roosevelt, without Congressional approval, aided Panama in separating itself from Colombia by sending naval and marine squadrons to the region. Once Panama became its own sovereign nation, it made a peace treaty with the United States and rewarded their new ally with the contract to build

\textsuperscript{11} Paolo E. Colletta, \textit{American Foreign Relations}, 92

\textsuperscript{12} Platt Amendment
the Panama Canal through their territory. From 1904 through 1913, the United States Army Corps of Engineers built the Panama Canal Zone, connecting the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. All parties expressed excitement over the prospect of the canal.

Roosevelt also had an eye on Europe. At the turn of the 20th century, Germany was a rising power, both militarily and economically, with Great Britain being the traditional power in the region. Commenting on whether or not Britain would always be able to keep the balance of power in check in Europe, Roosevelt said that the United States was “becoming, owing to our strength and geographical position, more and more the balance of power on the whole globe.”13 Not only was he foreshadowing future events, Roosevelt also believed emphatically about the potential of the military power of the United States, and really believed that the nation should be considered as one of the major powers in the world.

Aside from pushing a more militaristically involved foreign policy, Roosevelt even played the role of peacemaker during his presidency. Between 1904 and 1905, the Russians and Japanese engaged one another in a war over both countries territorial ambitions in the Chinese territory of Manchuria as well as the Korean peninsula. The war had been going favorably for the Japanese, as they had won many key and strategic battles. However, as Roosevelt explained in his autobiography, “from all the sources of information at hand, I grew most strongly to believe that a further continuation of the struggle would be a very bad thing for Japan, and even worse thing for Russia.”14 In Roosevelt’s eyes, the Russians were losing the ability to defend their eastern front, while the Japanese were losing so many men that any gains they would have made would end up having been for naught. It was with a stroke of idealism that Roosevelt claimed to have wanted to mediate a peace agreement between the two sides.

13 George Mowry, The Era of Theodore Roosevelt, 148
14 Theodore Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, 583
Roosevelt though, for reasons that leaned more towards his realism, had wanted the Russo-Japanese War to take place. When Russia threatened American interests in China that went counter to the earlier signed Open Door agreements there, Roosevelt’s rhetoric was warlike. With the United States committed to defending China vis-à-vis the Open Door notes, there needed to be a response to Russian aggression in China. So when Japan attacked Russia, and then began to win battles, Roosevelt’s public expression was to decry the Japanese actions, but the reality was that he had actually drawn up plans to aid the Japanese. Roosevelt just hoped the Japanese would not make too many gains, and when he saw that this was happening, he intervened with a plan for peace.\(^{15}\) The Treaty of Portsmouth that was signed in the wake of the war earned Roosevelt the Nobel Peace Prize. With limited Russian concessions, both sides evacuated Manchuria, the resource rich Chinese territory, and a balance of power in Asia was maintained.

**William Taft’s Foreign Policy Practices**

Roosevelt groomed William Howard Taft, his Secretary of War, to be his successor, but that did not translate totally. Taft would not completely emulate Roosevelt in regard to policy. While Roosevelt emphasized power overseas through displays of military strength, Taft believed more in the economic power of the United States as a means of dictating his foreign policy. Under Taft, “gold would replace guns as a way of obtaining needed outlets for surplus capital and goods, thus avoiding formal colonialism and political control.”\(^{16}\) Taft’s policy was known as Dollar Diplomacy in this regard.

\(^{15}\) Arthur William Thompson and Robert Hart, *The Uncertain Crusade*, 52-55

\(^{16}\) Paolo E. Colletu, *American Foreign Relations*, 100
It was not that Taft did not use the military abroad during his term, because he did, sending American troops into Nicaragua, Honduras, and Cuba, as well as continuing the military project in Panama that Roosevelt started. The emphasis, though, changed from the Roosevelt Administration. “Taft did not interfere with the execution of foreign policy unless a crisis demanded his intervention. On the other hand, he did provide subsidies for a merchant marine, obtain freer access for United States firms to engage in overseas banking, and so improved federal management procedures as to increase American investments abroad.” This goes back to the unofficial policy of the commercial interests of the nation being tied to the foreign policy. Taft’s policy resulted in the State Department officials that were abroad acting more as salesmen than as diplomats. Their job would be to push the agenda of American commercial interests while still making it appear that the United States was interested in the interests of the nation they were having diplomatic relations with.

Roosevelt cited “chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society” as his raison d'être for being able to intervene in Latin America with the military. Taft did the same thing with money. By giving other nations loans, these nations would begin to depend on the United States because the Treasury was buying out their debt. Taft favored acquiring political power through financial control of other countries. This would give the United States weight in the other nation’s economies, essentially creating a quasi-colonial situation in a clandestine matter.

Taft also made an attempt to champion a movement to create world peace. He made treaties with foreign nations, especially Great Britain, France, and Germany. The idea would be that the nations would contractually pledge themselves to a peaceful settlement to all

17 ibid. 101
18 ibid. 102
controversies that may arise between them, so that war would be at least a remote possibility between them.\textsuperscript{19} For Taft, international arbitration was one of the key ways to prevent war, and with these treaties he would try to effectuate world peace. He was certain that courts and the judicial procedure, even though not sustained by anything more than public opinion, could accomplish this dream of centuries. He believed that the acceptance of international arbitration equaled an eventual departure from wars taking place.\textsuperscript{20} Taft would continue to fight for this even after his presidency, and his ideas on this matter would find fruition in the policies that Wilson attempted to dictate in his second term.

**Legacies of Roosevelt and Taft on Wilson**

The traditions of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century as well as the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and William Taft played a significant role for Woodrow Wilson’s presidency and the decisions he would make in his foreign policy. Whether or not he would follow or break from the traditions would be his decision, but their actions paved a direction for him nonetheless. He would not always follow the decisions of his predecessors. There were operations of his predecessors that he pulled the United States out of and there were policies of his predecessors that he diverted from. But there were legacies of his predecessors that played a significant role in allowing Wilson to act the way he did during his administration.

Wilson’s presidency saw a large amount of military intervention into Latin America. It was through the vision of Theodore Roosevelt in his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine that set a precedent for the United States to act as the power in the region to dictate regional policy. But

\textsuperscript{19}“President Taft on International Peace”, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Jul., 1911), page 718

\textsuperscript{20}George Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt*, 278
even more so, it was Roosevelt’s interpretation of the Constitution that allowed Wilson the opportunity to act like a powerful president.

Wilson did not agree with Taft’s policy of dollar diplomacy, but there were aspects of Taft’s foreign policy that Wilson agreed with. Taft was a firm believer in international arbitration as a means to achieving world peace. A major conflict during Wilson’s second term would surround this subject. Roosevelt and Taft would remain as vocal characters in the upcoming years while Wilson was president, trying to rally their party and their ideas either to counter Wilson or to push common ideas with the new executive.
Wilson’s Early Foreign Policy

There were two themes that Woodrow Wilson tried to maintain through his successive terms as Commander in Chief. On one hand, he tried to maintain a policy of self-determination for foreign peoples. At the same time he also tried to maintain a policy of nonintervention of American forces when nations had disputes where they were going through the process of determination. Both of these policies were Wilson’s rhetoric, and through this rhetoric, these two policies were the cornerstones of the new president when he entered office in 1913. Though they were his official policies, it did not always mean that his rhetoric matched his actions.

When Wilson entered office, the United States still had troops stationed in the Philippines, Panama, and Nicaragua. While the military would soon withdraw from the former two, Wilson continued the occupation of Nicaragua throughout his presidency. To Wilson though, the 1912 election was shaped around domestic issues, and as he boarded the train to Washington DC from New Jersey to go to his inauguration in March 1913, Wilson said, “it would be an irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs.”21 The next eight years would prove to be quite ironic for Wilson.

New Freedom – A Domestic Policy Translated Abroad

Soon after his inauguration, Wilson wrote a statement on his repudiation of Taft’s policy of Dollar Diplomacy. This statement was published in the American Journal of International Law.22 The statement discussed the business that American bankers had in China under the Taft

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21 James Chance, 1912: Wilson, Roosevelt, Taft, and Debs, 243
22 Woodrow Wilson, American Journal of International Law, Volume VII, pages 338-339, March 18, 1913,
administration’s orders. The bankers had asked Wilson if the new administration would continue the policy, and Wilson declined stating,

“The conditions of the loan seem to us to touch very nearly the administrative independence of China itself; and this administration does not feel that it ought, even by implication, to be a party to those conditions. The responsibility on its part which would be implied in requesting the bankers to undertake the loan might conceivably go to the length, in some unhappy contingency, of forcible interference in the financial, and even the political, affairs of that great Oriental state, just now awakening to a consciousness of its power and of its obligations to its people.”

Two weeks after his inauguration, Wilson let it be known to the bankers in China that, in respect to them, he would not continue Taft’s policies because he did not deem it right to interfere in the independence of foreign nations.

Wilson instead chose a new route and a new vision, which he implemented with the help of Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan. “Wilson and Bryan promised a New Freedom abroad as well as at home – a foreign policy of friendship based upon altruism rather than upon sheer considerations of national and material interests.” In theory, this meant a break from the policies of Roosevelt’s Corollary and Taft’s Dollar Diplomacy, where the United States would act as a friend there to help, not always there to gain something for its own interests. Wilson’s rhetoric began.

Wilson and Bryan were both missionaries of democracy. In the same repudiation of Dollar Diplomacy, Wilson stated “the awakening of the people of China to a consciousness of their possibilities under free government is the most significant, if not the most momentous, event of our generation.” Wilson wanted to have a new relationship with China, which at the time was undergoing a democratization process. Wilson felt that interfering in Chinese affairs without their request would only inhibit the growth of the democratic process within China. New

Freedom was seen as a way of being there if China asked for help, not to take advantage of the Chinese market because the United States saw something that they could gain there.

Wilson, an academic who had earlier served as the president of Princeton University, was able to use his master of oratory and the written word to explain his actions to the American people and the world. He would twist accusations of acting abroad for the interests of the United States by twisting the action and making it appear that the nation was acting for the greater good of their ally. Wilson’s vision was to create a ‘Pax Americana’ in which the United States would promote, but not force, the application of democratic methods and values to the problems of all nations elsewhere. He wished to replace the realism of Roosevelt’s foreign policies with a more altruistic approach. Roosevelt justified intervention in the name of the Monroe Doctrine and Taft in the name of dollar diplomacy. Wilson, on the other hand, used the language of political reform with the promotion of democracy and the general principles that would follow that.

New Freedom Through Panama

When Wilson entered office, he inherited a dispute with Great Britain from the Taft Administration. On August 24, 1912, Congress passed the Tolls Exemption Act, exempting American ships from paying tolls when crossing the Panama Canal. The British Foreign Minister, Sir Edward Grey immediately protested this American action. Citing Article III of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty of 1901, a treaty Britain made with the United States which gave the latter the right to build the canal in Panama without competition from Britain, Grey said the

\[\text{ibid. 278}\]
\[\text{Michael Hogan, The Ambiguous Legacy, 87}\]
United States was going against its promise to leave the canal open to all nations on terms of equality that were stipulated in the treaty.

While on the campaign trail, Wilson spoke in favor of this same piece of legislation that the British were contesting. At a speech given in Washington Park, NJ on August 15, 1912, Wilson was quoted as saying, “I believe, yesterday by the Senate, as it had passed by the House, provides for free toll for American ships through the canal.” Wilson went onto explain his support for the legislation by describing how giving American shipping a free crossing through the canal would cause lower prices for the commerce, which would then cause American train companies to have to lower their prices to compete. By doing this, he argued, it would give Americans the best price inevitably.

It was even written into the official Democratic Party platform for presidential election that they favored the toll exemption. The platform, adopted on July 2, 1912, already after the Act had passed through the House, read, “We favor the exemption from tolls of American ships engaged in coastwise trade passing through the Panama Canal.” However, once the issue with Britain arose, Wilson believed that this provision was void, and pushed for the repeal of the Act during the first year of his presidency. He would have to do battle with his party though, as the House majority leader, Oscar Underwood (D-AL), promised to oppose any repeal of the Act.

Wilson believed that not repealing the Act would show a lack of good faith on behalf of the United States, and would only lead to a feeling of distrust directed at the nation from the rest of the world. On March 5, 1914, Wilson addressed a joint session of Congress. He explained that the rest of the world interpreted the text of the Hays-Pauncefote Treaty one way, and that it was in the interest of the United States to accept it. “The large thing to do is the only thing we can

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afford to do, a voluntary withdrawal from a position everywhere questioned and misunderstood.” He asked Congress to give this to him because otherwise, “I shall not know how to deal with matters of even greater delicacy.” Following that plea, the House voted to repeal the Act in a vote of 247 in favor and 162 opposed. Wilson’s attempt for a New Freedom abroad, by cooperating with other nations without forcing American interests onto the others, and in this case actually giving up on American interests, succeeded in the Panama toll crisis.

No New Freedom in Nicaragua

There had traditionally been two locations seen as suited for building a canal in Central America. Panama was one of them and the United States began building one there in 1904, completing it in 1914. The other site that was proposed was in Nicaragua. Even after the Panama Canal began to undergo construction, the dream of building a canal across Nicaragua did not fade away.

The American military entered Nicaragua under the Taft Administration at the end of 1909 to support rebels there against the President Jose Santos Zelaya. After a few more years of fighting, the American-backed Adolfo Diaz took over as president. A new wave of violence broke out in 1912, this time in the form of an insurrection against Diaz. Wilson asked Diaz to ensure American interests were to be kept safe; Diaz asked for American assistance. About 2,000 marines came to Diaz’s aid, and put down the rebellion. Elections were held again with American marines monitoring, the rebels boycotted, and Diaz won. Had the populous actually voted, however, he would have lost.31


30 Arthur Link, Wilson: The New Freedom, 312

31 Samuel Inman, Problems in Pan Americanism, 304-305
The Nicaraguan government led by Diaz only survived because of the American military support. American reports claimed that the rebel liberal faction made up 3/4th of Nicaragua.\(^{32}\) The United States continued to back Diaz though, and under Wilson made a treaty to ensure the unpopular Nicaraguan’s power. This course of action went completely counter to Wilson’s policy of ensuring the interests of other nations over the interests of the United States. Wilson believed in self-determination, but he was ignoring the majority of the Nicaraguan people by backing his man, Diaz. Diaz, however, would remain President of Nicaragua until 1917, when his term ended.

Diaz rewarded Wilson for the help. In 1914, the American Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, and the Nicaraguan Minister to the United States, General Emiliano Chamorro, negotiated a canal treaty between the two countries, even though the United States had already built a canal in Panama. In the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty, the United States would receive exclusive rights on the Nicaragua canal route and a naval base in the Gulf of Fonseca in return for $3,000,000. Diaz received money and an assured American military presence to aid him, and the United States received a monopoly on the rights to canals in Central America.\(^{33}\) Nicaraguans and the countries of Central America cried foul, but the United States did not listen. American interests were more important in this case.

**Background to Mexico Revolution**

The problems in Mexico predated Wilson’s administration, with the Mexican Revolution breaking out in 1910 when Taft was still President. Francisco Madero had led a revolt against the government led by Porfirio Diaz, and eventually rose to power in 1911. When Wilson took

\(^{32}\) ibid. 306; Claim made my Lieutenant Colonel Charles E. Long  
\(^{33}\) ibid. 306
office, Victoriano Huerta, another revolutionary, seized power from Madero in a coup d’état. His main opposition was Venustiano Carranza, the leader of another revolutionary group, the Constitutionalists. Other rebel parties included armies led by Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata respectively. The revolution was fought hard and was bloody, and just next door the United States watched the events unfold.

Wilson was not very educated on the Mexican Revolution when he entered office. Thinking of the revolution in the way he understood the world, Wilson viewed the Mexicans as wanting to create a democratic government, but that the war was getting in the way. If the problem was political, then for Wilson, the solution should be to. To promote a fair democracy, Wilson believed the constitutional government needed to be restored and the people of Mexico should choose their leader in free elections, not on the battlefield. Wilson’s worldview was that democracy was the form of government that was needed to govern the countries and thus the people of the world. He hoped that this would be extended to his Mexican neighbors. However, to remain consistent with his rhetoric, Wilson had to wait for the Mexicans to ask for help.

**Wilson’s Attempt at Diplomacy with Mexico**

In an address to a joint session of Congress on August 27, 1913, Wilson set down his initial policy concerning the situation in Mexico. Speaking in his New Freedom rhetoric, Wilson said, “We shall yet prove to the Mexican people that we know how to serve them without first thinking how we shall serve ourselves.” He did not want to interfere with the Mexicans. He also cited a law passed on March 14, 1912, passed by the Taft Administration that authorized a discretionary arms embargo by the United States onto Mexico, by saying, “neither side to the

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struggle now going on in Mexico [will] receive any assistance” from the United States.  

For Wilson, it was not right for the United States to get involved.

Wilson’s rhetoric spoke the New Freedom language. As he explained in his address, he had offered assistance to Mexico by sending former Minnesota Governor John Lind to Mexico City to try to find a way to stop the fighting and prepare for elections as soon as possible. Lind, though, was rejected, and the fighting continued. Wilson admitted that, as a result, there was nothing that could happen except wait. If the Mexicans did not want his help, it was his position that he could not force anything onto them.

Wilson’s announcement of non-intervention received a good amount of approval from American political leaders, especially Bryan. “‘I cannot allow this hour to pass without telling you how gratified I am with your message on Mexico and its reception by Congress… I have heard nothing but praise from those with whom I have spoken.’”  

Bryan was very antiwar in his beliefs, so this news was obviously good news for him.

Wilson’s actions, though, only helped Huerta. Huerta’s forces had complete control over the ports, meaning they could still import arms from Europe, and the British government was supporting Huerta. Carranza, on the other hand, was landlocked and relied on the United States for aid. With Wilson not aiding either side with shipments, he in effect was aiding Huerta.

However, Wilson had his own way of hurting Huerta, a man whom he deeply distrusted and disliked. Wilson refused to recognize Huerta’s government, which in effect gave moral disapproval to the latter’s power. As a result, the United States was also effectively telling their bankers and businessmen in Mexico that they were at their own risk in dealing with Huerta, because he was not recognized as legitimate by the government. If American businessmen had

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36 Arthur Link, Wilson: The New Freedom, 361
any problems in deals with Huerta’s government, Wilson made it clear that his government would not come to their aid.

This moral intervention and indirect economic blockade on Huerta did not work, though. Congress did not approve of the idea of any armed intervention. That left Wilson with few options. He either had to recognized Carranza, or lift the arms embargo to the rebels. Wilson chose to do just that. Up until this time, the Constitutionalists had been crossing over to the United States to buy American arms. Wilson lifting the embargo allowed for this to become an official American policy, and they could stop crossing over the border to illegally purchase the weapons.

Huerta, as well as many other officials in his government, already knew the distaste Wilson had for them. He chose, however, not to retaliate against the United States after Wilson lifted the embargo to their opponents. The armed struggle between the rebels and Huerta continued, with the only difference at this point being that the United States was now officially arming the rebels against Huerta. Huerta continued to refuse a democratic solution to end the revolution.

**Intervention in Mexico, Part I**

To understand what happened next, it is imperative to understand the business interests that the United States had in Mexico. Prominent members of both the Republican Party and Wilson’s Democratic Party had strong business interests in Mexico. Many of Wilson’s close confidantes and cabinet members, many of whom were major decision makers of both domestic and foreign policy, were included in this group of people that had much at stake in Mexican affairs.

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38 *Ir Times*, *Huerta Welcomes Lifting of Embargo*, January 29, 1914; *Won’t Retaliate, Says Huerta*, February 4, 1914
business deals. Most important in this situation was Colonel Edward House, one of Wilson’s closest friends and one of main foreign policy advisors. House’s cousin, Henry House, was the head of the Texas Company’s operations at critically important Tampico, and his wife was the friend of the friend of the Texas Oil Company’s chief representative in Mexico, William F. Buckley.39

It has been argued that Wilson’s racism may have played a part in his choice of backing Carranza over Huerta. Huerta, by American standards, was too dark to be considered Caucasian. Carranza, on the other hand, fit the bill.40 Wilson was famous for segregating most aspects of the federal government offices, and had imbedded into him much of the racism that he grew up with in the Reconstruction South. The idea of a dark colored leader in neighboring Mexico would be unsettling to a man like Wilson.

The United States had already been preparing for war. While the Republicans in Congress were pushing for an annexation, a protectorate, or a severing of northern Mexico to become American territory, Wilson began planning as early as September 1913 that he wanted to topple Huerta and install Carranza. It went against his rhetoric, but he felt it was necessary to keep all options on the table. In January 1914, Wilson’s cabinet agreed upon an armed invasion of Mexico.41

Tampico, where Henry House and other Americans had very important business holdings, was a Mexican coastal city and one of the main ports for the country. There was also a large American presence in the city’s population. By the beginning of March 1914, Carranza had been making gains in Mexico and was pushing towards the coast, in the direction of Tampico. At

39 John Mason Hart, Revolutionary Mexico, 285
41 John Mason Hart, Revolutionary Mexico, 290
the time, Huerta’s federalist army had control of the city and the surrounding region. According to reports, Carranza’s forces were within two miles of the city by March 14.\textsuperscript{42} By March 27, they had begun attacking the city, but were still on its outskirts on March 28.\textsuperscript{43}

The attacks by the Constitutionalists continued into the beginning of April, with Huerta’s army, led by General Morelos Zaragoza, still holding onto the city. On April 9, a group of American sailors from the \textit{USS Dolphin} went into Tampico to go to a fuel warehouse, as they would usually do. A group of Huerta’s soldiers, on alert for an attack and aware of the American tilt towards Carranza, confronted the sailors and eventually rounded them up. The United States demanded the release of the soldiers and an apology. Both were granted, but Mexico did not go through with the full terms of the apology, thus insulting the United States.\textsuperscript{44}

In a message to Congress on April 20, Wilson asked for permission to “use the armed forces of the United States in such ways and to such an extent as may be necessary to obtain from General Huerta and adherents the fullest recognition of the rights and dignity of the United States.”\textsuperscript{45} Two days later, the House voted on the issue, with 337 approving and 37 not, giving Wilson Congressional permission to use the United States military to enforce the American demands on Huerta.

On the day in between Wilson’s address and the House vote, the American consul in Veracruz sent the State Department a message that the German ship \textit{Ypiranga} was en route to Veracruz with a large amount of arms and ammunition for Huerta, with trains prepared to carry them to Mexico City. On the morning of April 21, with the House still yet to have approved of military intervention, American marines entered Veracruz unopposed and seized the

\textsuperscript{42} New York Times, \textit{Tampico Quiet, But Rebels Near}, March 15, 1914
\textsuperscript{43} New York Times, \textit{Rebels Hammer Tampico}, March 28, 1914; \textit{Rebels Active at Tampico}, March 29, 1914
\textsuperscript{44} Arthur Link, \textit{Wilson: The New Freedom}, 397
\textsuperscript{45} http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/tampicoincident.htm
customhouse. After a series of battles they took the city, and with it the vast warehouses of ammunitions. This temporarily backfired for the United States, as the rebel groups began to unite to fight off the American military that they saw invading their country. Wilson was trying to get rid of Huerta, but his military was in fact helping Huerta by giving the Mexicans a common enemy, the American invaders.

The unity did not last too long, and the Federalists and the Constitutionalists continued to fight. The United States continued to occupy Veracruz through the end of November. After Huerta agreed to step down, the United States continued with their policy of aiding Carranza and turned over Veracruz and the vast store of arms there over to the Constitutionalists.\textsuperscript{46} After Carranza agreed to terms that the United States wanted him to rule by, he was also handed over the 2,604,051.20 pesos that the United States deposited at New Orleans from the customs they collected at the Veracruz port during their occupation of the city.\textsuperscript{47} By supplying him with arms and money, Wilson paved the way for a Carranza victory. By 1915, with Huerta deposed, Carranza was firmly in place as the Mexican president.

**Impact of Veracruz on Wilson**

The operation at Veracruz both traumatized Wilson and taught him lasting lessons. By the end of the occupation, nineteen American servicemen had been killed, with an additional seventy-one wounded. At a speech in Brooklyn, NY on May 11, 1914 commemorating the dead from the battle that occurred three weeks earlier, Wilson spoke of war as a dramatic symbol of duty, but that it is “hard to do your duty when men are sneering at you as when they are shooting

\textsuperscript{46} John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 320
\textsuperscript{47} John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 301
at you.” Wilson the academic finally saw the evils of war, and felt deeply responsible for the deaths that had occurred under his watch. The battle hit the president hard, making him understand the human sacrifice that goes into war.

Wilson also became even more steadfast towards his policies of non-interventionism and self-determination in the wake of Veracruz. Writing to Lindley Garrison, his Secretary of War, in only a few months after Veracruz in August, the president remarked, “there are in my judgment no conceivable circumstances which would make it right for us to direct by force or threat of force the internal processes of what is a profound revolution,” and continued to explain that this would be his policy even if that revolution was as big and bloody as the French Revolution was. Veracruz traumatized Wilson. He did not want to feel responsible for American deaths on the battlefield like that anymore.

World War I Breaks Out in Europe and Wilson Declares Neutrality

As the United States continued their occupation of Veracruz in the summer of 1914, war broke out across the continent of Europe, and due to a series of security alliances, pitted Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire against Great Britain, France, and Russia. The United States, traditionally a military power within its own region, had never been involved in a war in Europe before, nor had an official American army ever stepped foot on European soil. American policy dictated for it to involve itself with its neighbors, but its tradition was to stray away from European disputes.

Wilson was not going to suddenly break from this tradition. On August 19, 1914, in a message to Congress, Wilson declared, “Every man who really loves America will act and speak

48 New York Times, War is Symbol of Duty Says President, May 12, 1914
49 John Milton Cooper, The Warrior and the Priest, 268
in the true spirit of neutrality, which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned.” He accepted the fact that the United States population drew people from all the ethnicities that touched both sides of the war, but he warned Americans not to let those divisions divide the country. To be neutral would be the only way to be fair.

On September 16, a Belgian Commission visited President Wilson, asking American help to redress the wrongs visited upon them. Belgium had been invaded by Germany and was seeking help. Wilson told them the American people “love justice, seek the true path of progress, and have a passionate regard for the rights of humanity,” and that “it would be inconsistent with the neutral position of any nation, which like this, has no part in the contest, to form a final judgment.” He was moved by the atrocities that Germany waged in Belgium and said to the members of the mission, “Presently, I pray God very soon, this war will be over. The day of reckoning will come when, I take it for granted, the nations of Europe will assemble to determine a settlement. Where wrongs have been committed, their consequences and the relative responsibility involved will be assessed.” He would not however, offer any military help to get Europe get to that day of reckoning.

While neutral, the United States traded with both sides in the war, staying firm with the traditions of freedom of the seas. Bryan, on the other hand, tried to push the policy of “banning sales and loans to the belligerents,” but he realized that the “lost of Allied war orders would have severely damaged the American economy.” The United States needed to continue trading to keep their economy afloat, and Wilson tried to affirm the country’s neutrality anyhow. The supporters of the Allies in the United States repeatedly criticized Wilson for violating neutrality by accusing the government of having a tilt in favor of the Central Powers. Supporters of the

51 Josephus Daniels, The Life of Woodrow Wilson, 245
52 John Coogan, Chapter 5, American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890-1993, 81
Centrals criticized him just the same for violating neutrality by accusing the government of having a tilt in favor of the Allies. The president often cited these attacks from partisans of both sides as the best possible evidence that he was in reality maintaining neutrality.\textsuperscript{53}

While the United States did trade with both sides in the war, it has been well documented that they traded much more with the Allies. The Germans obviously saw this favoritism as taking sides in the conflict, and decided it had to take matters into their own hands. The Germans, who were starving and were economically hurt by the damage of the war, needed commercial help. As the United States continued trade with Europe, Germany attacked American merchants in a policy known as unrestricted submarine warfare. As a result, on February 10, 1915, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan sent a message to Germany stating that the United States would have to hold the Germans accountable if the attacks continued, and asked for assurance that American ships would not be harassed anymore.\textsuperscript{54} The Germans continued with their attacks.

This came to a head on May 7. In the afternoon of that day, the Germans fired torpedoes at the British ocean liner, the \textit{RMS Lusitania}, sinking the ship, murdering 1,198 passengers. Of that number, there were 270 women, 94 children, and a total 124 American citizens. It was the first time the United States had experienced total war since the Civil War.\textsuperscript{55} Many Americans called for war, but Congress neither introduced any measures for war nor did Wilson call for it, instead he reaffirmed neutrality. Germany claimed that the \textit{Lusitania} was holding weapons bound for Britain, and as a result it was deemed a military target.

Speaking on May 10 in Philadelphia, Wilson declared, “There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight. There is such a thing as a nation being so right that it does not need to

\textsuperscript{53} John Coogan, Chapter 5, American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890-1993, 77
\textsuperscript{54} Josephus Daniels, The Life of Woodrow Wilson, 251
\textsuperscript{55} Arthur Link, Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality, 372
convince others by force that it is right.” Just as Wilson had declared after Veracruz that it is hard to do your duty of fighting when men are sneering at you, Wilson here is showing that sometimes it is not necessary to involve oneself in the duty of war. Sometimes it is okay to look the other way. The lessons from Veracruz about the sacredness of life and Wilson’s responsibility over the servicemen of the United States military as commander chief were beginning to show as Wilson dictated his policy of non-interventionism in the war that was raging in Europe.

Wilson had been accused by many of being pro-British, especially by the Germans. Trade records would show that there did exist some sort of tilt. However, even after the sinking of the Lusitania, Wilson continued trying to keep the United States out of the war. But his stance in talks with Germany got tougher. Bryan, accusing Wilson of orchestrating the country into the British camp, resigned from his position in the State Department. Germany never apologized for the incident, but unrestricted submarine warfare did stop for the time being.

**Intervention in Mexico, Part II**

As Wilson persisted in keeping the United States out of the war in Europe, he continued to keep an eye on Mexico. Carranza was ruling over Mexico and was supposed to pave a way for a democratic process. This was being stalled as rebel groups that were around when Huerta was in power still existed and were still vying for power, only now against Carranza. Pancho Villa led one such group. Villa believed that if he dragged the United States military back into Mexico, it would undermine Carranza and help his own cause. Veracruz already proved once that the

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56 John Milton Cooper, The Warrior and the Priest, 269
57 Thomas Paterson, American Foreign Relations: A History, 271
Mexican people would not tolerate an American military presence in Mexico. Villa was hoping that it would work again.

On March 9, 1916, Villa crossed into the United States and raided the city of Columbus, New Mexico, killing fifteen Americans. As he had hoped, Wilson responded with a military response. However, Villa’s plan did not work in the beginning the way that he had wanted it to. Carranza spoke out against the American operation, making Mexican nationalists believe he was against it. However, at the same time he diplomatically was clearing the road for the American army to pursue Villa for hundred of miles inside Mexican territory without any armed resistance from the Mexican army. Wilson, with Carranza’s covert help, had sent in General John “Blackjack” Pershing onto an expedition into Mexico to capture Villa.58

As the expedition continued into the summer and the winter, the Mexican government and people became very agitated by the American military presence, just as Villa had hoped. Pershing, though, spread his troops out in search of the rebel leader, and after a series of mini battles destroyed Villa’s source of power. Villa, though, was never captured. Pershing was eventually recalled by Wilson, and left Mexico in February 1917. Carranza remained firmly in power.

The expedition proved to be a very good dry run for the United States in handling a military operation over a long stretch of land. For the first time ever, the American military used air power as a means of reconnaissance. For Pershing, the expedition would be valuable for him as well. Besides for the use of the airplanes and the general battlefield experience gained, Pershing also was able to create a trust with Wilson. The expedition was put under civilian control and Pershing was given direct orders to only pursue Villa. There were cases when Pershing was put under hostile fire by Mexican troops and he grew frustrated that he could not

58 John Mason Hart, Revolutionary Mexico, 321
fire back. However, his ability to properly follow orders in Mexico paid off. The United States had declared war on Germany, and Pershing was going to Europe. He was going to be the first American general to lead an American army in Europe.

Did New Freedom Exist in Mexico?

It is a mixed message when trying to look at the New Freedom policy in relation to Mexico. Before the crisis at Tampico and Veracruz, Wilson was very sure to make sure that the United States kept with the policy of New Freedom. The president did not interfere in the revolution that was taking place in his neighbor to the south, nor did he openly take sides. He initially even refused to continue trade with the belligerents as the war ensued. He was very adamant in making sure that the United States would allow Mexico to determine itself without any interference.

The events that took place at Tampico caused the United States to accept the possibility of a military option to solve the problem in Mexico. However, it was at Veracruz that the United States for the first time overtly violated New Freedom. The United States all along had a tilt, and it was not towards Huerta.

The fiasco that ensued in Veracruz proved that Wilson was not purely about New Freedom. The United States attempted and succeeded in stopping German arms from being delivered to Huerta’s forces. After that they went on to seize the customhouse and other sections of the city. This was followed by an occupation of the city that lasted for about seven months, and only ended when Huerta’s major opponent, the more American favored Carranza agreed to follow American guidelines to how he would govern. After that agreement, the United States handed over the city and all the money that it had collected there to Carranza. The excuse that
the military acted without Wilson’s consent cannot be tolerated. The fact is that the United States took a city that was controlled by Huerta, whom Wilson hated, occupied it for seven months, and then handed it off to Huerta’s opponent Carranza, whom Wilson favored, and gave him the arms and money that were collected in the city. He also openly traded with Carranza and not Huerta. This is tacit approval of the operation. While his actions in Mexico initially could be seen through the lens of New Freedom, Wilson did not solve the crisis with that policy. Like Roosevelt had before him in other countries, Wilson used the military to protect the interests that he and allies in government had.

The events that occurred at Veracruz, however, also proved to teach Wilson a large lesson about the consequences of what it means to have to send the military abroad to engage in combat. It would be with this humbled spirit that Wilson began his stance on the war that broke out in Europe. He attempted at all costs to stay neutral and let the Europeans solve their own problems, while continuing to trade with all belligerents. Though, just like Mexico, Wilson’s policies in Europe changed as the reality changed.
The United States Enters World War I

When war broke out across Europe in the summer of 1914, Woodrow Wilson stood firm with American tradition and tried his hardest to keep the United States out of the European conflict. The United States had a history of remaining neutral in conflicts in Europe, and there was no reason for Wilson to break with that tradition. Germany on the other hand, with unrestricted submarine warfare on any ship in the Atlantic Ocean, kept on giving the United States a reason to intervene. On April 2, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. For the first time ever the United States would send a full army across the ocean. For the first time ever, the United States would directly involve itself in a European conflict on European soil. For the first time ever, American soldiers would march in Europe in American uniforms under the American flag.

Election of 1916

After what had been seen as a successful first term, Wilson ran for re-election behind a unified Democratic Party. The Republican Party too was united, learning its lesson from 1912 when Roosevelt and Taft ran against one another and split the vote, thus rocketing Wilson to the presidency. They took this new party reunification behind Associate Supreme Court Justice Charles Evan Hughes. Upon his nomination, Hughes resigned from the Supreme Court, becoming the first Supreme Court justice to run for the presidency. Unlike the election of 1912, 1916 would include much foreign policy rhetoric.

59 Link and Leary, Schlesinger and Israel, History of American Presidential Elections, Volume VI, 2252
Citing that they had held the countries to the “old path of neutrality”, the Democratic Party plank affirmed the traditions of the past as well as the moral obligation of the United States to assert peace first. The plank stated, “We hold that it is the duty of the United States to use its power not only to make itself safe at home, but also to make secure its just interests throughout the world, and both for this end and in the interest of humanity, to assist the world in securing settled peace and justice.” The Democrats affirmed neutrality.

The Republican plank also cited neutrality, but, mocking Wilson, declared that it “cannot be preserved by shifty expedients, by phrase-making, by performances in language, or by attitudes ever changing in an effort to secure votes or voters.” They accused Wilson of being an opportunist who would say what was at the time politically popular for his own gain. The Republicans instead called for “a firm, consistent, and courageous foreign policy” held in accord with the traditions of the country, something that they charged Wilson with departing from. They also favored the establishment of a world court to settle the peace of international disputes, a multilateralism that Wilson agreed with.

The Democrats though had a very popular ending to their plank. They ended by saying that Wilson “kept us out of war.” Wilson’s campaign painted Hughes as in accord with Roosevelt, who was calling for American military intervention in World War I. Wilson’s advertisements read:

The Lesson is Plain:
If You want WAR, vote for Hughes!
If You Want Peace with Honor
VOTE FOR WILSON!
And Continued Prosperity

60 ibid. 2274
61 ibid. 2281
62 ibid. 2280
63 ibid. 2267
Wilson had painted the picture of himself as the candidate for peace, while Hughes was the candidate for war. With a serious war going on across the ocean, this rhetoric was very important in the minds of voters.

Early returns on the east coast made it almost apparent that Hughes was going to be the clear victor. As the night progressed though, a victory for Hughes was not as clear as before. It took until two nights after the election, but on November 9, Wilson was declared the victor. He ended up with 277 electoral votes to Hughes’ 254; 9,129,606 total votes to Hughes’ 8,538,221.\(^{64}\) As a candidate who kept the United States out of the war, and making sure to cite this throughout the campaign, Wilson won a second term in the White House.

**Wilson’s Tilt and Preparation for Post War**

The United States claim of neutrality at the beginning of World War I was questionable to begin with. Just like in Mexico, though Wilson claimed to have wanted to remain neutral, he showed an obvious favoritism towards Great Britain and the Allies. Wilson permitted the Allies to interfere in American commerce with both the Central Powers and those that remained neutral in Europe. The same liberty was not extended to the Germans.\(^{65}\) To be a neutral nation, law dictated that one must treat both sides of a conflict the same way. By giving the Allies the right to interfere in American commerce while not giving the same right to the Central Powers, Wilson effectively showed his tilt of whom he favored.

The United States also realized that a German victory would be a threat to American security. The United States had the blessing of being defended by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, but technology was advancing, and it was becoming easier to transport armies. As

\(^{64}\) ibid. 2269

\(^{65}\) John Coogan, *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered*, 1890-1993,
Roosevelt pointed out during his presidency, competition in Europe enhanced American security because it kept European problems in Europe. If Germany were to become victorious though, the balance of power would be lost, competition would end in Europe, and in Wilson’s mind “would change the course of our civilization and make the United States a military nation.”

Roosevelt had already predicted this previously. He realized during his presidency that Germany was on the rise and could possibly threaten the balance of power that Britain had by that point kept in check. Wilson was beginning to catch on.

Wilson was looking forward to the peace that would eventually follow the war. He already made it known that he wanted a hand in planning the postwar peace, and he began outlining his vision for this before the war appeared close to an end. On January 22, 1917, Wilson declared to the Senate that the war needed to end with “peace without victory… [because] victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished.”

Wilson saw that the only way that countries could get along would be for them to treat one another as equals. Mutual cooperation and multilateralism, which was the idea of international arbitration that Taft proposed during his administration, would lead to better relations, giving hope for a better future where the type of war that was taking place would not occur again.

Wilson continued his speech by discussing a vision of extending aspect of the policies brought down in the Monroe Doctrine to be given to each respective nation for them to use. As he declared in the same speech, “no nation should seek to extend its polity over any other nation or people, but that every people should be left free to determine its own polity.” The Monroe Doctrine, called for the European powers to stay out of the polity of Western Hemisphere
powers. Now, it was time, according to Wilson, for the nations of the world to respect every other nation in that same exact regard.

Wilson also saw entangling alliances as the precursor to the war. He thus called for all entangling alliances to be replaced by a “concert of power which will make it virtually impossible that any such catastrophe should ever overwhelmed us again.” That concert of power was to take place in what Wilson envisioned to be the League of Nations. In the League, nations would be able to come together to properly work out disputes in an open forum, hopefully resolving conflicts with multilateral decisions. They would be able to seek arbitration and also seek justice. Taft’s vision was coming to fruition under Wilson’s guidance.

**Steps Before Entry**

Germany had stopped unrestricted submarine warfare after the sinking of the *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915, but continued with the blockade that they had on Britain on and off. That came to an end on January 31, 1917, when the German Kaiser Wilhelm decided it was time to return to using submarines. The Kaiser believed that Wilson would keep true to his rhetoric, and just like after the sinking with the *Lusitania*, would still try to keep the United States out of the war.

Wilson though, chose a different course this time. On February 3, the United States cut off diplomatic ties with Germany, with Wilson citing the continuation of the unrestricted submarine warfare as the reason in front of a joint session of Congress.\(^{68}\) Two weeks later, British intelligence revealed to the United States a telegram sent from the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmerman, to the German ambassador in Mexico, Heinrich von Eckardt. The telegram was to relay the following message to the Mexicans: “On the first of February, we intend to begin unrestricted submarine warfare. In spite of this, it is our intention to endeavor to

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\(^{68}\) Woodrow Wilson, *Messages and Papers*, 358-9
keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we propose an alliance on the following basis with Mexico: That we shall make war together and make peace together. We shall give generous financial support, and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. Germany was baiting Mexico to involve the United States in another conflict so that it would be too preoccupied with sending troops into Europe to fight the Central Powers.

To put this into context, this was happening at the same time that General Pershing was finishing his expedition in Mexico. The longer the expedition continued, the further it pushed into Mexico, and the more Mexican land became damaged, the more Mexicans grew to be more anti-American. The Carranza government was growing impatient with the Pershing Expedition as well. Mexico, however, was realistic, and rebuffed the German offer. Wilson’s administration on the other hand, was given even more reason to prepare for war with Germany.

With the knowledge that Germany was seeing the United States as a potential belligerent in the war, and with Germany deciding it would not cease to attack American shipping, on February 26, Wilson addressed a joint session of Congress and asked them to give him permission to arm merchant ships. While the measure would probably have passed in a vote, several anti-war Senators led a successful filibuster that consumed the remainder of the Congressional session. Under the spirit of Roosevelt, though, Wilson chose to ignore Congress, decided to arm American merchant ships by executive order. He claimed that an old anti-piracy law gave him the authority to do so. Wilson began to flex the muscles given to him under the power of the modern presidency

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69 Zimmerman Telegram
70 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/wwi/82205.htm
Germany assumed Wilson would remain neutral, but they were wrong. They could not side track the United States with another war in Mexico. Wilson broke from his actions in the past by breaking off diplomatic ties with Germany and arming American merchant ships. The United States had shown that they were disgusted with Germany’s actions and that they would act upon this feeling. All of the signs pointed towards the United States accelerating itself towards war with Germany, and that is exactly what happened.

Official and Unofficial Reasons to Enter the War

On April 2, 1917, in front of a joint session of Congress, the same Wilson that had earlier publicly promised to keep the United States out of the war, and had only months earlier won an election with a campaign slogan declaring to the nation that he had done just that, urged Congress to declare war on Germany. He began his argument by describing Germany’s policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. “Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be. The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind.”  

Wilson promised to make the world safe for democracy, and reminded Americans that they must fight for the democratic values that the United States professed. America must “spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured.” It was with that message that Wilson insisted the United States declare war on Germany. With a Senate vote of 82 in favor and 6 opposed, and a House vote of 373 in favor and 50 opposed, on April 6, 1917, the United States of America declared war on Germany.

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71 Congressional Record
72 Congressional Record
Many factors go into why the United States entered the war in 1917 in contrast to the many other instances that it could have in the three preceding years while the war was being waged. The factor that Wilson cited was the continuation of the unrestricted submarine warfare resulting in the loss of innocent lives. Other factors that Wilson did not mention also were taken into account.

The United States had arbitrated treaties between belligerents in conflicts before. As mentioned earlier, Roosevelt had negotiated an end to the Russo-Japanese War and the split of Morocco during a standoff between Britain and France. Wilson longed to be a Christian statesman spreading morality, and as seen from his speeches before entering the war, hoped to mediate the postwar peace, just as Roosevelt had mediated peace agreements.

The Allies saw this desire by Wilson and welcomed it. However, they too realized that it was becoming more pressing that the United States aid the Allies cause with military support if they were to stop the Germans. As a result, they made it conditional that the United States would need to be a belligerent power in the war to have the right to be part of the postwar peace process. This was one of the circumstances that compelled Wilson to turn to the use of force, to get his name into the ring for the discussion of the postwar peace.73

This refusal by the Allies to let the United States be involved in the postwar peace unless they were a belligerent caused Wilson to say, “Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved,” in his war message to Congress. However, the United States never entered the war as an ally, but only as an associate of the Allies. As a result, Wilson hoped to make it clear that he was not fighting on behalf of European territorial ambitions, but on the ambition to shape international politics and the postwar peace.

73 Frederick Calhoun, Use of Force and Wilsonian Foreign Policy, 100
This part of Wilson’s message was the same path taken by John Dewey, one of the leading philosophers and political scientists of his generation in the United States when rationalizing his reasons for supporting American intervention in the war. Dewey, who has been identified with the Left and was generally opposed to war, explained that the United States could only fight in the war by leading by example. “If the war were fought to preserve and expand basic American values, even a descent into fighting could enhance democracy in the United States. But if America fought in order to grow in power, the country would be defeated, whatever the war’s outcome.” Dewey had been warning the American people about the evils of the German people and the dangers of imitating their ways, which were contrary to democratic values. By fighting in the war while embracing democracy, Dewey, who had been an outspoken pacifist, supported American intervention against Germany.

Almost twenty years later, the Senate investigated another possible reason for the United States to have entered the conflict. After the 1920’s, many have argued that Congress became increasingly isolationist, as Republican leaders bashed Wilson’s interventionist policies. Between 1934 and 1936, when Congressional isolationism was near its peak, Senator Gerald Nye (R-ND) led an investigation into why the United States had entered the war in Europe under the Wilson administration. They argued that the United States military manufacturers lobbied Congress to enter the war. By joining the war, these manufacturers made a major profit as the demand for their products skyrocketed. Their revisionism on the reasons to enter the war gave great insight into how financial interests had played a huge role in why the United States had gone to war.

The committee, called the Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry, was known as the Nye Committee for short. By the mid 1930s, rumors had already been going

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74 Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 268
around that the armament companies had profited from World War I. The Senate probe gave weight to the rumors.\textsuperscript{75} The Merchants of Death, the nickname given to these arms makers, profited well during times of war, and they had been accused of doing everything they could to keep the United States in war for their own profit.

Economics were connected to the war effort, and American companies did profit from the war. However, all American commercial interests were potentially at risk. The Allies were threatening to essentially close the Open Door and recreate the mercantilist spheres where markets would be closed and countries would discriminate against whom they traded with. To Wilson, the foreign markets were essential to the growth of the domestic markets. Without foreign trade, the home front would suffer. If the either side won the war without American intervention, the United States would potentially be closed off in the proposed mercantilist system. The United States depended on Europe for trade, and Wilson vehemently believed in the Open Door. To keep this policy alive, he needed to join the war effort with to get his say with the Allied powers.\textsuperscript{76}

\textbf{Congressional Feelings Toward Joining the War}

When the United States declared war on Germany, the executive branch was enjoying the beginning of its second term in the office of the presidency. The 65\textsuperscript{th} Congress though, had a split makeup. The Senate held a majority in Wilson’s favor, with the Democrats having 54 seats, compared to the 42 seats for the Republicans. The House though was different, with a slight Republican tilt. The Republicans had 215 seats, giving them a plurality over the 214 seats belonging to the Democrats. However, there were six other seats in the House and three of them

\textsuperscript{75} Thomas Guinsberg, \textit{The Pursuit of Isolationism in the United States Senate from Versailles to Pearl Harbor}, 153
\textsuperscript{76} Carl Parrini, \textit{Heir to Empire, United States Economic Diplomacy 1916-1923}. 
belonged to the Progressive Party that Roosevelt created in 1912 and leaned in the same direction as the Republicans. The remaining seats belong to the Prohibition Party, the Socialist Party, and an independent congressman.

When Wilson addressed Congress on February 3 to cut off diplomatic ties with Germany, Congress resoundingly rallied behind him, with a Senate vote going 78-5 after a five-hour debate. The New York Times declared that “Party Lines Disappear,” with Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA), calling for his fellow Republicans to “stand firmly behind the President. The Senators who voted against endorsing Wilson’s call claimed that doing so would be a preliminary declaration of war.77 They were right. However, this friendly relationship that Wilson had with Congress in regards to the conflict would be very short lived, and would test the determination of his foreign policy going forward.

77 New York Times, Senate Indorses Wilson, February 8, 1917
The Fight for the League

Although the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, the full size of the American Expeditionary Force, led by General John Pershing did not reach European shores until that winter. On November 11, 1918, a year and a half after the United States officially entered the war, the German army, the last of the Central Powers to do so, agreed to an armistice with the Allies, effectively surrendering and creating a cease-fire. What is now known as World War I officially came to an end. Of about 4.7 million Americans in the American Expeditionary Force during the war, 116,516 were killed, and 204,002 were wounded. President Wilson had taken upon his shoulders the burden to create a new world order in the wake of this war. He would run into two problems though, one at home from his Senate, and one abroad from the countries that he had to negotiate the postwar peace with.

With the United States military in Europe for the first time ever, and Wilson now actively fighting for a war to stop Germany with the goal of making the world safe for democracy, Wilson got back to discussing his plans for a postwar peace. On January 18, 1918, as he had done before, Wilson gave this vision to Congress again, this time outlining his fourteen points for the postwar peace he desired. Among these points were open diplomacy between nations, no secret deals, freedom of the seas, an armaments reduction agreed to by the nations of the world, self-determination of colonies and territories, and an association of nations known as the League of Nations where conflicts could be arbitrated openly.

Wilson saw the League of Nations as a place where the nations of the world would be able to come together to properly arbitrate their problems, hoping to replace the traditional

military route. The League of Nations became Wilson’s pet project, and he decided he himself would go to Europe to sell it to peace conference. A year after introducing the fourteen points to Congress, Wilson found himself in France, hoping that his fourteen points would frame the postwar treaty and help create a new world order.

**Wilson in Paris, Part I**

On January 18, 1919, the Paris Peace Conference commenced. Wilson personally headed the American delegation at the conference, becoming the first sitting American president to go to Europe. He brought along with him his secretary of state, Robert Lansing, Colonel House, a few other aides, and his fourteen points. There were no representatives from either chamber of Congress present with him.

Wilson did not see the need to get the Senate involved because he believed he could work around them in the initial time period of the negotiations. Using Roosevelt as a precedent, Wilson believed he would be able to get the United States into a preliminary treaty over the League. This preliminary treaty would grant American membership in the League of Nations through an executive agreement that did not need to go to the Senate for approval. This would initiate American membership in the League right away, and would leave the Senate in a tough position when voting on whether to agree to the full length of the treaty or not because the United States would already technically be a member by Wilson’s hand.\(^79\) Without a representative present, the Senate had been shut out of what was being discussed at the peace conference first hand. They did have reports sent back to them from time to time, and they

\(^{79}\) Kurt Wimer, “Woodrow Wilson's Plans to Enter the League of Nations through an Executive Agreement.” The Western Political Quarterly (1958): 800-12
already knew the frame of the message that Wilson was going to France with from the speeches that he had been making over the course of the years.

While Wilson tried to relate in this instance with Congress like Roosevelt did, he was in a different situation than his old political opponent was. While away in France and going behind the back of the Senate when he was in France, the powers shifted in both chambers of Congress, with the Republican Party, taking control of both the House and Senate. Roosevelt, on the other hand, had been a Republican President working with a Republican Congress. Wilson’s opposition was very weary of his postwar plans. Without party politics favoring him, Wilson would find it much harder to force his decisions upon Congress as Roosevelt did in the previous decade.

On February 14, Wilson submitted his draft for the Covenant for the League of the Nations to the delegates of the peace conference, a group comprised of only the Allies. None of the Central Powers had been invited to the peace conference, as Wilson had wished. This did not stop Wilson from making his plans a focus of the peace that needed to be achieved. The Covenant ended up formulating the first 26 articles of the eventual treaty, placing the Covenant in the treaty directly, and making the League and the eventual peace treaty a two-for-one packaged deal. The next day he left Paris and embarked on a return trip to the United States to sell the deal to the American public and the Congress that he had left behind.

**Wilson Returns to the States, Part I**

Wilson arrived in Boston Harbor on the February 24, ready to begin his campaign of defending the League of Nations. He talked about a Europe “buoyed up and confident in the spirit of hope,” and when describing the European people, he likened them as people “in the
saddle and they are going to see to it that, if their present governments do not do their will, some other governments shall.”

He made it clear that the European nations were ready to work for the treaty as it already looked, and he wanted the United States to be ready to do the same. From Boston, Wilson took a train back to Washington DC, where he had many critics in the Senate waiting for him.

By the time Wilson arrived, the Senate had already become familiar with the treaty. Before Wilson’s arrival, on February 21, Senator William Borah (R-ID), read the Covenant aloud and declared on the Senate floor, “The mere reading of the constitution of the League will convince any reasonable mind, it seems to me, that the policies of [George] Washington and [James] Monroe must depart if it is adopted. The two propositions cannot exist together.”

As many other senators would profess, Borah felt that two long lasting American traditions were being threatened. Already the United States had broken with the idea of staying out of Europe’s affairs, but Borah was hoping that this war would not create a new precedent. Now it appeared that Wilson was proposing that the United States and Europe open up the world to a forum where they can deal with one another’s issues together. Borah was opposed to such a degree of multilateralism. This was very counter to Washington’s Farewell Address and the Monroe Doctrine. Wilson, on the other hand, wanted the border created by the ocean to fall, and for the world to work together.

It was not only Republican senators who attacked the Democrat Wilson. Senator James Reed, a Democrat from Missouri spoke the day after Borah. He too attacked the idea of moving away from the traditions of Washington and Monroe. Along with repeating Borah’s sentiments,

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he too saw joining the League as allowing foreign domination of US foreign policy. The problem that Reed had was with Article X of the Covenant. According to his interpretation of Article X, it stipulated that the United States, like every other nation in the League, would be forced to fight in international conflicts over any problem the League would deem to cause impediment to world peace. The New York Times reported that “at the conclusion [of Reed’s speech], both Democratic and Republican Senators flock[ed] to Senator Reed's desk to shake his hands, while the galleries kept up a wave of handclapping.” While there were senators who spoke out in approval of the League, mainly from Wilson's Democratic Party, the overall focus on the speeches during the week that Wilson spent in Washington were of those rejecting the treaty or calling for changes within its makeup.

What was it about Article X that Reed, along with many other Senators, was against? As mentioned, the Covenant of the League of Nations in its final form was made up of twenty-six articles. The tenth article read as following: “The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League. In case of any such aggression or in case of any threat or danger of such aggression the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled.”

The interpretation of many in Senate was that this article would militarily bind the United States to the decisions of a foreign body in the event of any aggression, bypassing the need for Congress to authorize such action. This meant that the United States military would be subject to the decisions of the League of Nations, not Congress. Under the United States Constitution, Congress has the right to declare war, a right that was solely given to

82 http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp
83 Herbet Margulies, The Mild Reservationists and the League of Nations Controversy in the Senate, 76-77
the legislative branch. By giving this power to the League of Nations, whose representative would be chosen by the President, a member of the executive branch, this Constitutional right would be stripped away from the legislature.

Before Wilson headed back to Paris, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA) wrote a resolution calling for the Senate’s rejection of the League. While the matter was not up for vote at the time and the current Senate was to be replaced in a few weeks, Lodge got the signatures of thirty-nine Senators, all of whom were to be in the Senate when the matter would be up for a vote, on a Round Robin calling for the treaty and the Covenant to be separated. This number was well above 1/3 mark of the total Senate, meaning the 2/3 majority needed to approve treaties was not going to be attained. As Wilson left the capital, he was given the message that if he did not make fundamental changes to the treaty, it would not pass.

**Wilson in Paris, Part II**

On March 4, Congress adjourned and Wilson left Washington to go back to Paris. He stopped in New York City first and in front of a large audience at the Metropolitan Opera House, he responded to the Round Robin made by Senator Lodge. Speaking to the audience but directing his message to the Senate, he declared that the League and the Treaty were inseparable. The Senate had sent the message to Wilson that they wanted to deal with the peace with Germany first before even considering the League. Wilson’s message pitted him in direct

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84 Article 1, Section 8, United States Constitution
85 A Round Robin is defined as, “A statement of position prepared by a legislator and circulated among colleagues for their consideration. Those who support the stated position indicate their backing by placing their signatures in a circular fashion around the edges of the document, disguising authorship and the order of signing.” <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1451.html#round-robin>
86 http://history.sandiego.edu/GEN/WW2Timeline/1919League2.html
contention with the incoming Congress. An eventual showdown would be necessary if neither side would back down from their positions.

While the European countries that he was negotiating the treaty with seemed positive regarding the League, Wilson found it hard to get many of his other wishes through to them. None of the nations that surrendered were included at the conference, leaving the postwar agreement up to the nations that had technically won the war and wanted to get their vengeance on the Central Powers. As Wilson predicted two years earlier, by creating a peace with victory, the victors were not creating peace, but imposing a punishment on the side that they had defeated.

The conference ended in June 1919. Wilson’s peace without victory dream ended when Germany and her allies, under force to make the admission by the victors, accepted the sole responsibility for starting the war. ⁸⁷ This resulted in Germany owing an exorbitant reparations bill, the forced demilitarization of the Rhineland region bordering between Germany and the Low Countries, a major disarmament of the German military, as well as territorial losses in Europe and her colonies. The Austro-Hungarian Empire ceased to exist after the war, as it had broken up into various smaller states based on self-determination. Wilson predicted two years earlier when describing what a peace with victory would be like. “It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an intolerable sacrifice, and would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory upon which terms of peace would rest, not permanently but only as upon quicksand.” ⁸⁸ While prophetic in hindsight, the peace was signed with victory. The Paris Peace Conference did not work out the way Wilson had called for in 1917, and the Treaty of Versailles that was signed in its aftermath did not heed his advice.

⁸⁷ Ronald Powalski, Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism and Europe, 52-53
⁸⁸ Woodrow Wilson, January 22, 1917, US Senate
On May 19, the 66th Congress opened with a change in the guard as the Republicans controlled both chambers of Congress. In early June, Senator Philander Knox (R-PA) submitted the Knox Resolution, calling for a distinction between the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations by asking that one not be dependent on the other, as the Round Robin had called for in March. Wilson remained against this resolution, and it did not pass in the Senate.\(^89\)

As it became apparent that the Knox Resolution was doomed, Elihu Root, the former Secretary of State from the Roosevelt administration and a former Republican senator from New York, wrote to Lodge to outline the new course of action that he recommended for Republicans. Root, like other Republicans, supported the League in theory, but wanted to see a few changes made in the Covenant, which was consistent with the Republicans that had some support for it. The problem all along had been that Wilson refused to amend anything. Root called for the Senate to begin work on making reservations to the treaty, especially in regard to Article X. Root wanted to ensure that the United States would remain independent of foreign contracts.\(^90\)

Lodge made his letter from Root public on June 21. The guidelines that Root laid down were as follows. Article X would have to be amended to satisfy Congress’ constitutional right to declare war. The United States should be allowed to withdraw from the League after giving two years notice. The United States must be allowed to continue its enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine as it sees fit.\(^91\) These points by Root were the foundation of the Republican reservationists camp creating reservations to the Covenant to help fix the concerns of many Senators. Former President William Taft would later use a similar approach in trying to unite the Senate to accept the treaty.\(^92\)

\(^89\) New York Times, *Knox Resolution Cannot Pass*, June 20, 1919  
\(^90\) New York Times, *Qualify Treaty On Ratification, Says Elihu Root*, June 21, 1919  
\(^91\) ibid.  
\(^92\) Karen Miller, *Populist Nationalism*, 63
Wilson Returns to the States, Part II

On July 8, Wilson returned to the United States and two days later he went to the Senate to deliver the treaty in person.\footnote{http://history.sandiego.edu/GEN/WW2Timeline/1919League2.html} Addressing the Senate, he declared, “The stage is set, the destiny disclosed. It has come about by no plan of our conceiving, but by the hand of God. We cannot turn back. The light streams on the path ahead, and nowhere else.”\footnote{http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Woodrow_Wilson_Addresses_the_Senate.htm} He received a small applause from a Congress that he had isolated himself from. The treaty was then referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, whose ranks were led by Lodge, who at the time was also the new Senate majority leader. The battle over the League finally was on its way to debate and eventual legislation.

Lodge was not completely against the treaty. History has placed him in the camp of the reservationists to the treaty, meaning he would only approve of the treaty if reservations – i.e. changes - were made to certain parts of it. Those who were completely and irately against the treaty were known as the irreconcilables.\footnote{Irreconcilables Senators: William Borah (R-ID), Frank Brandegee (R-CT), Albert Fall (R-NM), Bert Fernald (R-ME), Joseph France (R-MD), Asle Gronna (R-ND), Hiram Johnson (R-CA), Philander Knox (R-PA), Robert La Follette (R-WI), Medill McCormick (R-IL), George Moses (R-NH), George Norris (R-NE), Miles Poindexter, (R-WA), James Reed (D-MI), Lawrence Sherman (R-IL), Charles Thomas (D-CO)} Only numbering sixteen of the ninety-five senators who would vote on the matter, the irreconcilables only made up $\frac{1}{3}$ of the complete opposition to the treaty. Of those sixteen, two of them were Democrats, proving that it was not completely a partisan issue.

Luckily for the irreconcilables, there were forty other reservationists, including Lodge, who wanted changes in the treaty. This meant that about 60% of the Senate had some sort of opposition to Wilson and the League. Twenty-eight of them were strong reservationists, while
The other twelve were only mild reservationists. With thirty-nine Senators, including one Republican, forming the side that approved of the treaty, Wilson would need to either give into some reservations that were proposed or get most of the reservationists onto his side for the treaty to even have a chance of passing with a 2/3\textsuperscript{rd} majority.

Lodge did not want to make it appear that he was tarrying with the treaty and help garner Wilson any public support, because the President would use any delay by blaming the Senate for stalling. As a result, he got to work right away on the treaty. His first action was to read the treaty aloud on the Senate floor, which took place over the course of two weeks between July 14\textsuperscript{th} and 28\textsuperscript{th}.

Three days after finishing the reading, Lodge began holding public hearings in the Foreign Relations Committee about the treaty. A large group of the media was invited to cover the hearings. Lodge had an agenda in mind. With the press present at the hearings, Lodge did not care to get a better understanding of the treaty. His goal was to get public opinion on his side.\footnote{Karen Miller, Populist Nationalism, 56} To help make this a reality, he filled the committee with irreconcilables and reservationists who would not shape the treaty in a positive light. The Senate had known about Wilson’s intentions with the postwar peace for over a year by this point. They had debated about those intentions before Wilson left for Paris and while he was negotiating the treaty there. The Senate did not really need more information. What Lodge needed from these hearings was to get public opinion on his, and the Senate’s, side.

There were those in the American public that had problems with the treaty as well. As the summer progressed, just as Lodge wanted, criticism of the treaty escalated. Much of that criticism came from a wide variety of groups. There were those of Irish ancestry, who saw the document as a sellout to the British, and only as helping increase British supremacy of world
affairs. There were groups of anti-imperialists who viewed the treaty as a betrayal of the American traditions of Washington, Jefferson, and Monroe. Then there were nationalists, who worried that the collective security mechanism of Article X would rob Congress of its constitutional right to declare war. Leaders of these groups all received an audience to make their case during the hearings.

On August 29th, Knox got on the Senate floor and demanded that the United States not be a party to the League of Nations and called for a Congressional resolution declaring that the war had come to an end. Suspicious of the President, he also demanded Wilson not withhold information from the Senate and the American people concerning the treaty. Seeing how it was Congress’ right to end the war, he called for a separate treaty with Germany, citing that the treaty on the table at that present time was just a truce that would be broken later due to the harsh cost being put on Germany, alluding to Wilson’s past warnings about what peace with victory would look like.

Cross Country Trips

As the hearings continued in the Foreign Relations Committee and other senators continued to get on the Senate floor denouncing the treaty, Wilson decided he needed to get public opinion on his side. To do this, he embarked for a cross-country speaking tour on September 3rd. He felt that if he could sway public opinion on his side, the members of Congress would be forced to follow the will of their constituents. At least this was what Wilson hoped.

Wilson planned to visit twenty-three states, a distance of over 8,000 miles, in a period of time just under four weeks. Two things hurt Wilson as he went forward. First, he was opposed to

98 New York Times, Knox Counsels Rejecting Treaty, August 29, 1919
just about all of the reservations that Senator Lodge proposed. It would be very hard for Wilson to get the Senate to budge at all without him accepting any of the reservations. Second, he was traveling through seven states that were represented by irreconcilables. To get those senators to budge from their positions would be essentially impossible.99

On September 8th, in Sioux Falls, Iowa, Wilson declared, “Sometimes people call me an idealist. Well, that is the way I know I am an American. America is the only idealistic nation in the world.”100 He wanted to give the American people a new sense of duty, moving himself contrary to his rhetoric about the responsibility of duty is to sometimes not act. In this case, the idealism of America gave it a sense of duty to come to the world’s aid. Three days later, in St. Louis, Wilson admitted that the “war, in its inception, was a commercial and industrial war. It was not a political war.”101 He gave weight to the accusation that he entered the war for commercial and industrial interests. He displayed that he brandished the big stick that Roosevelt created to keep the Open Door open for American commerce and industry. America needed to act in their interests. That is a reality of war, and this was Wilson showing his realist side. However, the idealism was still alive in him. He fought to also create a world where multilateralism would take place among nations. As he said near the end of his tour, “I can predict with absolute certainty that within another generation there will be another world war if the nations of the world do not concert the method by which to prevent it.” Again, Wilson played the role of a prophet. Unfortunately for Wilson, his tour did not help his cause with the Senate.

Following Wilson’s lead, Senators Borah, Hiram Johnson (R-CA), Miles Poindexter (R-WA), and Medill McCormick (R-IL), all of whom were irreconcilables, went on speaking tours of their own across the country soon after Wilson began his, making sure to speak in the same

99 Ralph Stone, The Irreconcilables, 128-129
100 http://www.voicesoffreedom.us/voices/woodrowwilson/woodrowwilson4.htm
101 Arthur Link, The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 45–46.
forums where Wilson spoke. In total, they gave more than double the speeches than Wilson did, doing so in more states than he visited. By early October, it became apparent that Democrats in the Senate were beginning to turn from support of the treaty, but they still gripped onto the party line as Wilson dictated them to do. However, while a few Democrats switched sides, nobody in the Senate, irreconcilable or reservationist, was budging to Wilson’s side. By staying firm on rejecting most of the reservations, as well as refusing to separate the Covenant from the treaty, Wilson was beginning to enlarge the gap between himself and the Senate.102

**Senate Begins Deliberations and Votes**

On September 10, the Foreign Relations Committee proposed forty-five amendments and four reservations to the treaty and Covenant to go for a vote in the Senate. All of the amendments failed to pass. The reservations, though, the same ones that were outlined earlier by Root, passed. The official policy of the Senate was to only accept the treaty if those four reservations were to pass. The Senate had officially broken off the path that Wilson had been preaching across the nation and in Europe.

The Senate continued to debate the treaty and the Covenant through the beginning of November. Lodge understood that the reservations forced the Democrats to choose between approving the treaty with reservations or not. Knowing the Democrats would not accept the reservations Lodge could then blame them for the failure of the treaty.103 On November 6, the Foreign Relations Committee proposed fourteen more reservations to the Covenant. They would be known as the Lodge Reservations.

102 Ralph Stone, *The Irreconcilables*, 132-133
103 [http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/People_Leaders_Lodge.htm](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/People_Leaders_Lodge.htm)
Seeing how the debate was getting nowhere, on November 13, Senator Gilbert Hitchcock (D-NE) filed a motion, Senate Resolution 139, calling for cloture – and end – to the debate over the treaty. Two days later on the 15th, with a vote of 78-16, the Senate voted to end the debate. It was the first time ever in Senate history where a vote of cloture took place to end a debate in the Senate.

On November 18, the day before the Senate was set to vote on the treaty, Wilson wrote to Lodge his response to the latter’s reservations. Giving his advice to the Senate concerning the Lodge Reservations, Wilson wrote, “On that I cannot hesitate, for, in my opinion, the resolution in that form does not provide for ratification but, rather, for the nullification of the treaty. I sincerely hope that the friends and supporters of the treaty will vote against the Lodge resolution of ratification.”

Wilson advised the Senate to vote against the reservations, and hoped to get the majority on the side of the treaty as it was. This gave the Democrats a clear message about their party line. Nobody in the Senate budged from his position though.

On November 19, Congress was due to close its first session. Three votes would take place concerning the treaty that day. However before that would occur, Borah rose to the floor and gave a two-hour speech. In the speech, he outlined how, like Lincoln, there should be no compromising. He was fundamentally against the League, and no reservations would be able to talk him into wanting to join it. He asked what would happen to Congress once the League took away its power to declare war. He reminded his fellow senators about Washington’s warning about entangling alliances, and Jefferson’s advice to Monroe that the United States should stay out of European affairs, and vice versa. He repeated over and over the revered traditions of the past, asking his fellow senators how they could break from them. On that note, he declared the

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104 Senate Documents
United States must “return to this policy… return to the faith of the fathers.”\textsuperscript{105} To do otherwise, to Borah would be a great step backwards. Upon the completion of his speech, he received praise and applause from his fellow senators and those in the gallery. Lodge himself was moved to tears. After Borah, three and a half hours more of debate took place, but Borah set the tone for the day.\textsuperscript{106} The Senate was ready to vote.

The Senate took up Lodge’s version of the treaty for a vote twice. The measures failed, with irreconcilables, who were adamantly against any version of the treaty with the Covenant in it, and Democrats, under orders from Wilson to vote against any reservations, combining to destroy it. The vote went with 39 in favor and 55 against. The Senate then voted on the treaty without Lodge’s reservations. That vote had 38 in favor and 53 against.\textsuperscript{107} By combining the votes of the irreconcilables and the votes of the Democrats, the Treaty of Versailles and thus the League of Nations failed to pass in the United States Senate. For the first time ever in American history, the Senate had rejected a peace treaty. The irreconcilables had their first taste of victory.

The debate was not dead yet, but it was almost there. In the coming months after the vote there were attempts to make different amendments and find some sort of compromise. Wilson remained adamant that the treaty not be rewritten, but on February 1, 1920, England and France both said that they would accept the reservations made by the Senate.\textsuperscript{108} Seeing this opinion abroad, the Foreign Relations Committee again submitted the version of the treaty with the Lodge reservation to the Senate for a vote. On March 19, they again voted the treaty down, this time it receiving 35 votes in favor and 49 against. On May 20, as Knox had called for more than

\textsuperscript{105} http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/BorahLeague.pdf
\textsuperscript{106} http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Speeches_Borah_League.htm
\textsuperscript{107} Congressional Record
\textsuperscript{108} http://history.sandiego.edu/GEN/WW2Timeline/1919League2.html
half a year earlier, Congress ended the war with a joint resolution, only for the measure to be vetoed by Wilson.

**Election of 1920: A Referendum on Versailles?**

Early in May 1920, the Republican convention to choose a candidate for that year’s Presidential election began. With no irreconcilables on the committee to write the party’s platform concerning the League, the Republican convention took the platform of seeking reservations towards the treaty, while defending the “time honored policies of Washington, Jefferson, and Monroe.” After a fuss was made by Borah and Johnson, a compromise was made between the irreconcilables, who made sure a completely pro-League statement was not made, and the reservationists, who were allowed to leave in the platform the idea that the door be left open so that the United States could join the League at a later date.¹⁰⁹

Johnson hoped to use the momentum he gained in being a champion of the irreconcilables. However, the convention was deadlocked between him and two other candidates. Not getting anywhere, the convention chose a dark hose candidate, and after eleven ballots chose Senator Warren Harding from Ohio, a reservationist in the debates over the League.

With Wilson claiming the election a referendum on the League, Harding defeated the Democrat candidate, Governor James Cox of Ohio, by a very large margin in the first presidential election featuring women voters. If the vote was a referendum as Wilson saw it, then the Republicans had the last laugh. In an address to Congress in April 1921, President Harding announced he would not support the membership of the United States in any organization of nations, because he felt by doing so would go against the will of the American people as

¹⁰⁹ Karen Miller, *Populist Nationalism*, 86-88
expressed in the election. If Wilson wanted the election to be a referendum on the war, Harding allowed it. This was another victory for the irreconcilables. Wilson’s treaty was defeated in the Senate and then his party lost the presidency. The United States would never join the League of Nations.

However, the story is not complete concerning Wilson’s actions during World War I. Wilson’s rhetoric took a spin during World War I. He went from declaring that he would stay out of other countries problems unless he was asked to intervene, to taking the nation to war in an effort to achieve some level of world peace at the end. Yet, the message of self-determination and fighting for peace and multilateralism remained fervent throughout and after. However, while the American army was in Western Europe, Wilson also had his attention elsewhere. In Russia there was a civil war going on, just as it had in Mexico.

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110 Howard Jones, *Crucible of Power*, 108
The Case of Russia

On May 26, 1918, the American explorer George Keenan sent a message to Secretary of State Robert Lansing saying that an expedition to eastern Siberia would “help the Russians of the trans-Baikal to throw off the Bolshevik yoke and to set up an independent, anti-Bolshevik, and anti-German government on their own,” and by doing this, it would “bring about the overthrow of the Bolshevik everywhere,” i.e. in Western Russia as well. Two months later, on July 17, 1918, with American troops already engaged in Western Europe, an Aide-Memoire issued by the Department of State, but drafted by President Wilson, called for an intervention of the military onto Russian soil. Why was the United States sending its troops to another front during World War I against a country not aligned with the Central Powers?

Russian Revolution and World War I

Unlike the United States, Russia was still ruled by a monarchy when World War I broke out in 1914. Tsar Nicholas II had been in power since taking the throne in 1894, succeeding his father Alexander III. When World War I broke out, Russia declared war on the Central Powers and immediately went to war with both Germany and Austria-Hungary. Three years into the war, Russian casualties were high, and the people were losing their faith in the government. Revolutionary feelings were in the air.

The first time a major uprising took place under Nicholas II was the year 1905. It broke out again in 1917. American public opinion had the same response as it did in 1905: a cycle of hope for a democratic process and freedoms for the Russian people followed by dismay that this
may not happen in Russia due to the fact that the Russian people had been ruled by autocrats for their entire history.

The tsar was officially overthrown in March and a provisional government that tried to create a democracy took power to try to restore order. That government could not even last the year. It collapsed in October when the Bolsheviks, a communist revolutionary group led by Vladimir Lenin and known as the Reds, seized power. From the previous revolt, they were already seen in Russia as being dangerous radicals with a socialist identity. However, this time around they were able to seize control and establish a communist government. American public opinion had hoped that the Mensheviks, the more democratic group vying for power and known as the Whites during the revolution, would be able to seize power and create a democracy in Russia. This did not happen. For the time being, there were more pressing matters for the United States that needed attention in Western Europe.

With the Bolsheviks seizing power, it was time for them to consolidate power and make the Russian people happy. One of the major gripes of the Russians was the major loss of both Russian life and land that was occurring from the war. By 1917, the Russian army was falling apart. The Bolsheviks promised to get Russia out of the war. Once they seized power, they immediately began cease-fire talks with Germany to surrender and end the war for Russia, as well as Germany’s Eastern Front.

On March 3, 1918, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed by Russia and Germany, ceding much of western Russia, including the wheat-rich territory of Ukraine, to the Germans. This also effectively closed off the Eastern Front, allowing the Germans to focus their ground forces on the Western Front against the Low Countries and France, and their navy on the

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111 Michael Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy*, 113
112 ibid. 113
blockade around Britain. In response to this, Britain and France, according to a more Orthodox interpretation, wanted to send troops into Russia to force the Germans to reopen the front on the Russian-German border. They were also suspicious of Germany in regard to the weakened Russia, and wanted to defend interests there.\textsuperscript{113}

\textbf{The Closing of the Eastern Front}

The Allies were obviously very angered by the news of Brest-Litovsk. The Russian military force in World War I was very large, and it caused the Germans to stay busy on the Eastern Front. They were not happy to see an even larger German military force in Western Europe due to the closing of this front.

Brest-Litovsk caused other alarms to go off for the Allies. There was the appearance of the possibility that the Russians were acting in the interests of the Germans with the concessions they were willing to make. Ukraine was one of the most resource rich parts of Russia, and they gave it all to the Germans. Ending all fighting on the front was also very convenient for the Germans. Many felt that the Bolsheviks were seen as German agents acting in the interests of the Germans, and they had reasons to feel this way. Lenin spent many years of exile in Germany before the revolution, and many believed he was actually a German agent.\textsuperscript{114} It appeared to the Allied powers and America that Russia was acting on Germany’s behalf.

The Bolsheviks for their part tried to reach out to the other countries of the world. The Bolsheviks wanted to gain legitimacy, and as a result made every effort to open diplomatic channels with foreign governments. However, many were still bitter that they pulled Russia out of the war, and many did not appreciate that they dissolved the freely elected Constituent

\textsuperscript{113} Betty Unterberger, \textit{The United States, Revolutionary Russia, and the Rise of Czechoslovakia}, 5,7
\textsuperscript{114} Michael Hunt, \textit{Ideology and US Foreign Policy}, 113
Assembly in January 1918 Secretary of State Robert Lansing, however, noted an inability to trust the Bolsheviks because of their doctrine that pushed, as here said, a “determination, frankly avowed, to overthrow all existing governments and establish on the ruins a despotism of the proletariat in every country.” Based on this doctrine and the Bolsheviks determined hatred for democracy, the United States did not and would not recognize the Bolshevik regime.

The Situation in Northern Russia

The closing of the Eastern Front served as a major problem for the Allies. The possibility of Russia acting in Germany’s interests also was a major problem. There were other potential problems arising at the time in Russia that caused Wilson and the Allies to be cautious. Murmansk, one of the major ports of northern Russia, had a major railroad that linked the port to St. Petersburg. Wilson was also told that anti-Communist Finns, under German influence, might attack the Murmansk Railway. This would allow them to seize Murmansk and develop the port as a submarine base if the Allies did not take preventative action. This would give the Germans a strategic base far away from the Allies.

The Allies also had other interests in Murmansk. Left over from the war, there was a very large arms stockpile there that belonged to them and they did not want to lose. The Allies agreed that they needed to have troops in northern Russia to protect their strategic military interests there, in both the rail system and the arms. They also wanted to keep the Eastern Front engaged in battle against the Germans and wanted to make sure that the Germans would not be able to use the Russian railroads and resources for their advantage to use against the Allies.

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115 John Lewis Gaddis, *Russia the Soviet Union and the United States*, 67
116 ibid. 67
117 George F. Kennan, *American Troops in Russia: The True Record*, 38
118 ibid. 38
The Allies approached Wilson about sending troops to northern Russia, but the president was skeptical. In his Aide-Memoire, he stated that he felt that “military intervention there would add to the present sad confusion in Russia rather than cure it, injure her rather than help her, and that it would be of no advantage… to win the war against Germany.”\textsuperscript{119} Wilson argued that opening up a front in Eastern Europe would only be using the Russians for their territory and not actually doing anything that would be serving them and their interests. It was consistent with Wilson’s rhetoric of the past of keeping out of another sovereign countries business if the Untied States did not look to serve that country’s best interests. If he had went on record with the way that the Allies approached intervening in Murmansk, it would have been a break New Freedom, especially since Wilson was fighting in World War I to promote democracy and to create good will amongst other nations for future concerts of power, not to act in the interest of the Allies.

\textbf{The Czechoslovakians}

If Wilson stopped there, he would have stayed consistent with his past rhetoric. That was not the case though. In the same message, Wilson declared a reason for why he would send troops to Russia. “Military action is admissible in Russia… only to help the Czechoslovaks consolidate their forces and get into successful cooperation with their Slavic kinsmen and to steady any efforts at self-government or self-defense in which the Russians themselves may be willing to accept assistance.”\textsuperscript{120} Self-determination was a big concern for Wilson too, and the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for this was a major point of Wilson’s plans for the postwar peace.

\textsuperscript{119} Aide-Memoire
\textsuperscript{120} Aide-Memoire
What were the Czechoslovaks doing in Russia in the first place? The Austro-Hungarian Empire was made up of many smaller ethnic groups besides for the Austrians and Hungarians. One such group was the Czechoslovakians. During the war, a group of Czechoslovakian troops made up largely of men who had been taken prisoner by the Russians were stranded in Siberia as a result of being freed after Brest-Litovsk declared Russia out of the war.  

Wilson wanted to get them safely to Vladivostok, a port city on Russia’s eastern shore at the Pacific Ocean. From there, the plan would be that Allied ships would bring them to France to fight on the Western Front against the Germans. The Czechoslovakians had an interest in joining the war effort on the side of the Allies, because it would give them the opportunity to fight for the freedom of their ethnic region back in Europe. Wilson even hoped that the Russians would be willing to help assist in this venture in helping get the Czechoslovakians out of the country.

Wilson’s hope did not come true though. When the Czechoslovakians attempted to get to Vladivostok to catch a boat back to Western Europe, fighting broke out along the Trans-Siberian Railroad with Bolsheviks troops. Wilson believed the only option would be to send troops to Siberia to clear out a path for the Czechoslovaks. Wilson had an official reason to send troops to Russia, the self-determination of Czechoslovakia.

The Japan Variable

The Japanese did not stop having dreams of expansion onto mainland Asia after the Treaty of Portsmouth ended the Russo-Japanese War. The Japanese wanted to help get the Czechoslovaks out of Russia, but Wilson was skeptical and suspicious of Japanese intentions.

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121 George F. Kennan, *American Troops in Russia: The True Record*, 39
122 John Lewis Gaddis, *Russia the Soviet Union and the United States*, 67
It is possible that Wilson intervened in Siberia to counter the Japanese threat to the region. He suspected that Japanese military leaders were determined to find an excuse to peacefully get their troops onto the mainland, and once there, make an attempt to establish a sphere influence in Manchuria that would conflict with America’s Open Door policy. Yet again, the interest of keeping the Open Door open found Wilson sending troops abroad.

Japan, however, did send troops. Once that occurred, the United States found itself dealing with other problems. The United States tried to limit Japan to fewer than 12,000 men for the operation. However, by November 1918, the Japanese had dispatched more than 70,000 troops to eastern Siberia. Suddenly Japan was in a position to fight for their interests in Manchuria, something America did not want because Manchuria was still seen as an important region in terms of keeping a balance of power in Asia and safeguarding the Open Door.

What Happened in Northern Russia?

As mentioned above, Murmansk served as a key strategic position for the Allies in terms of preventing a perspective far off German submarine base, preventing the occupation of the strategic city by pro-German Finnish troops, as safeguarding the railroad the connected the city to St. Petersburg, and defending a large amount of Allied arms. The operation was drawn up by the British, and initially used only Allied troops.

The Bolsheviks, at least locally, initially welcomed the Allied intervention, fearing for the Finns and Germans. The Bolshevik brass decided to remain neutral in the manner. The British actually ended up fighting against the Finns, who were backed by the Germans, to defend the stockpile in the beginning of their stay in Murmansk. The Germans protested to the

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123 Ronald Powaski, Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism and Europe, 16
124 David Foglesong, America’s Secret War Against Bolshevism, 109
125 ibid. 110
Bolsheviks for allowing the Allies onto Russian territory.\textsuperscript{126} As the Allied army in Murmansk grew, the Bolshevik grew weary. On July 25, Lenin threatened the Allies with war, seeing their presence on Russian soil as an act of war.\textsuperscript{127}

Wilson was being courted by the British to help out in the intervention. He continually refused, citing the Russian entitlement to self-determination. Even though he was fundamentally against the Bolshevik regime, he did not believe that Bolshevism could be stopped with military force. He wanted to bide his time. Britain pressed, though.

Wilson eventually gave into the British requests though, and sent three battalions of infantry, which numbered about 15,500 men,\textsuperscript{128} to Murmansk, arriving in September 1918 with orders not to engage against the Bolsheviks directly. Maybe the orders were not received in time or they were just ignored by the British commanders in charge in the region, but American troops upon arrival were involved in an Allied mission against the Bolsheviks at Archangel. Clashes would occur from time to time over the following months. The American army withdrew from northern Russia in June 1919, engaging against the Bolsheviks on different occasions.

Revisionist William Appleman Williams saw the operation another way. To Williams, the administration’s decisions to recognize the Bolsheviks as German agents gave them a purpose to intervene in Murmansk; to protect Allied interests. Wilson would frame them as German agents’ in public discourse, however, in private discussions he saw them as dangerous social revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{129} After discussions with Colonel House and Secretary of State Robert Lansing, it was decided that the Americans would intervene against the Bolsheviks, but that the operation was to be covert, and would be framed as a means to reopening the Eastern Front.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{126} New York Times, \textit{Asserts Russia Violates Treaty}, May 1, 1918
\item \textsuperscript{127} New York Times, \textit{Lenine Threatens to Fight Allies}, July 26, 1918
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ronald Powaski, \textit{Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism and Europe}, 16
\item \textsuperscript{129} William Appleman Williams, \textit{American Intervention in Russia, 1917-1920}, 39
\end{itemize}
against Germany.\textsuperscript{130} For Williams, Wilson’s intervention in Russia was to crush Bolshevism, but he would fail to be able to do so.

### What Happened in Siberia?

Wilson emphasized his reason to intervene in Siberia with the purpose of wanting to get the Czechoslovakians out of there and return them to Europe to help fight the Germans, and eventually to fight for Czechoslovakian independence. However, what he never mentioned was that the Czechoslovakians were not in a rush to leave, but in fact were aiding the Mensheviks in Siberia against the Bolsheviks.\textsuperscript{131} This was fine for Wilson. He had preferred the Mensheviks over the Bolsheviks, and had made arguments privately that the Bolsheviks did not represent the Russian people, so aiding the Mensheviks would even work under the idea of seeking the self-determination of the Russian people.

As the Czechoslovakians acted like they were on their way out, they began an uprising against the Bolsheviks along the strategic Trans-Siberian Railway that ran across Russia. Very quickly, the Czechoslovakian troops had taken control of railway from the Volga River to Irkutsk. By taking over the railway, they had hoped that they could then build a strong enough power base for the Mensheviks to spread westward. This never happened.

Just like in the Mexico situation, interests that were centralized in Wilson’s government appeared to dictate the cause of what happened in Russia. Roland Morris, the ambassador to Japan, and Paul Reinsch, the minister to China, both played big roles in dictating American policy in Asia. Both of them were anti-Bolsheviks, and they both saw the communists as direct and indirect threats to American commercial interests and political influence in the Far East. As a

\textsuperscript{130} ibid. 41
\textsuperscript{131} Ronald Powskii, Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism and Europe. 17
result of that, Wilson valued what they had to say and relied upon much of it. With the advice in mind, he developed a way to intervene against the Bolsheviks while at the same time not giving Japan an opportunity to extend and consolidate its position on the mainland of Asia.\footnote{132} To fulfill his interests, Reinsch played a central role in getting the Czechoslovakian troops to fight the Bolsheviks along the Trans-Siberian Railway, which also gave the Americans a military ally to restrict Japanese expansion into Siberia, as well as restricting the Bolsheviks from the use of the railways for their interests.

**How Credible Were Wilson’s Excuses?**

Wilson was able to find excuses to send American troops to Russia in 1918, however, how credible were they? After taking power, the Bolsheviks attempted to peacefully coexist with other nations. This initial foreign policy stance adopted by the Bolshevik leadership began as a measure of revolutionary security. They designed it to protect themselves against the Germany army as well as any other rebel groups in Russia.\footnote{133} The Bolsheviks were not German agents, and in fact hated the idea of giving so much up at Brest-Litovsk. However, that is only known in hindsight. The shaky intelligence does not make up for Wilson’s general attitude to intervention. He felt obliged to join in the intervention because the British and French were pressing it on his attention.\footnote{134} While the Americans were able to find excuses for sending troops to Russia, it was very apparent that whether by accident or not, the Americans found themselves drawing the ire of the Bolsheviks.

\footnotetext[132]{William Appleman Williams, *American Intervention in Russia, 1917-1920*, 27}
\footnotetext[133]{Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 17-18}
\footnotetext[134]{George F. Kennan, *American Troops in Russia: The True Record*, 39}
The Soviets made their anger apparent. Soviet historians framed the intervention as a plot to overthrow the Bolsheviks government, and many saw it as the beginning of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{135} The dominant theme of these historians is very anti-American, accusing the United States as being both a leader and willing participant in the intervention, and working counter to the will of the Russian people.\textsuperscript{136} How correct were they? Did the Americans really actively act against the interests of Russians? The excuses used by the Wilson administration for sending troops to Russia for purposes of helping the Allied forces in World War I were already stated. However, is it possible that he also wanted to try to overthrow the Bolshevik government?

Wilson had a policy of self-determination of nations, a policy that called for nations to determine their own domestic affairs without foreign influence. However, Wilson also believed that the Bolsheviks did not represent the Russians, especially after they dissolved the elected Constituent Assembly.\textsuperscript{137} It is possible that Wilson, no friend to communism, wanted to attempt to overthrow the Bolsheviks. It is also important to note that the Americans created propaganda offices in Russia to counter the communist regime and they also sent aid to anti-Bolshevik forces that were trying to overthrow the Bolsheviks.\textsuperscript{138} This is evidence of American efforts to at least undermine, but even possibly topple, the Bolsheviks in Russia. While the official rhetoric of Wilson would have one believe otherwise, it is very possible that he would not have minded at all if American troops were to have successfully overthrown the Bolshevik government and help create a democracy in Russia.

In Siberia, their official purpose was to neutralize Japanese interests and liberate the Czechoslovakians. Their unofficial purpose was to send aid to anti-Bolshevik forces that the

\textsuperscript{135} David Foglesong, America’s Secret War Against Bolshevism, 106
\textsuperscript{136} George F. Kennan, American Troops in Russia: The True Record, 26
\textsuperscript{137} John Lewis Gaddis, Russia the Soviet Union and the United States, 77
\textsuperscript{138} David Foglesong, America’s Secret War Against Bolshevism, 107-109, 110-112
Americans favored to the socialist Bolsheviks. Also, after intense pressure from the Allies, American troops were sent to northern Russia at Archangel, where, with the Allies, they engaged Bolshevik forces. This was also unofficially on Wilson’s record as an attempt at trying to undermine the Bolsheviks. Any attempt at trying to place World War I and US intervention into Russia together was squandered when President Wilson continued the operation and aid programs to anti-Bolshevik forces in Russia well into 1919 and early 1920. The last American troops did not leave Siberia until April 1, 1920,"\textsuperscript{139} well after World War I ended.

\textsuperscript{139} William Appleman Williams, \textit{American Intervention in Russia, 1917-1920}, 55
Epilogue

There is rhetoric and there are actions. A man can say one thing and it is up to him whether or not to follow up on his word. Many times people do what they say, and many times people do another thing. Woodrow Wilson has been accused of being the latter at certain points throughout his foreign policy. He spoke a language of idealism throughout his presidency. He entered office with a foreign policy rhetoric that promised that the United States would treat other nations as friends, and would only interfere in their affairs if requested. According to Wilson’s new policy, the days of the United States acting abroad in its own interests were over. It was time for a new type of relationship. Wilson hoped to reintroduce idealism into American foreign policy.

Wilson lived by his rhetoric. He was an academic and an orator. Just because he epitomized a quality by being a man who was able to use speech as a tool of getting his point across, being someone who has mastered the art of rhetoric, it did not mean that Wilson always stood by his words, at least in appearance. From the fact that he intervened overseas more than any other President up to that time, Wilson appeared to be going counter to his words.

He had managed to always find ways to justify what he was doing, and he always managed to find a way to explain himself. “In the name of world peace he waged a war; in the name of self-determination he ordered American troops into Latin America and Russia; in the name of western civilization he failed to provide food for starving German and Austrian children after the armistice of November 1918. He saw neither contradiction nor hypocrisy in these positions.” On one hand, it could be argued that Wilson was the model of a fuzzy minded

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140 John Coogan, American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890-1993, 72
leader with clouds of lofty rhetoric and idealistic moral principles. It could also be argued that he was trying to dupe the American public by really just saying one thing and then doing another. Yet, his supporters would praise him for his idealism, and have called him a champion of self-determination and self-government, and display his work done in Europe to truly attest to this.

Was Wilson as his critics saw him? It is true that many times he would actually have said one thing and done another. In an article written by him in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* in October 1916, Wilson described the United States as the big brother of Latin America, as he saw dictated out of the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary, but that Latin America was growing uneasy with this relationship. He called on his government and the United States to “respect their territorial sovereignty as we insist that European nations should respect them.” He believed intervention in Mexico, which he described as “establishing internal order there without the invitation of Mexico,” would only lead to more suspicion of the United States by Latin America, and would be seen as being done out of good faith.

Wilson wrote this at the same exact time that American troops were in Mexico for the second time in three years! He blamed foreign investors and landowners in his article by saying they were not helping the problem, when members of his government and inner circle had properties and investments in Mexico! He was writing about something, but at that very moment had already gone against the axioms of his message. The whole situation though should not be viewed in as if it were a zero sum game.

The situations in Mexico, as well as the later intervention in Russia saw Wilson officially call for nonintervention by foreign forces, but saw American military intervention in both situations. The Orthodox interpretations for these respective missions, given forth by Kendrick Clements on Mexico and Dr. Betty Unterberger on Russia, try to pit Wilson as a person who

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only acted militarily when he had to for the purpose of defending the self-determination of Mexico and Russia, acting for the interest of those nations. This can be seen at Veracruz in Mexico, where Wilson temporarily took Veracruz to make sure European interests stayed away and to speed up the revolution so it did not become a blood bath. This can be seen with Siberia in Russia, where Wilson sent troops there to neutralize an intervening Japanese army that was dedicated in annexing much of the Russian territory, and Murmansk and Archangel by guarding valuable Russian strategic sites from German backed Finnish troops.

However, there is also the Revisionist approach set forth by John Mason Hart on Mexico and William Appleman Williams on Russia. They show the inner workings of Wilson’s cabinet, policy advisors, and close confidantes. With the Mexico case, much of Wilson’s party, as well as opposing Republicans, had business interests in Mexico that were threatened by the civil war. Many of important members of Wilson’s cabinet and foreign policy team included these people. Intervention had to occur to save these investments. A very similar scenario is seen in Russia, where a communist government took root and threatened to destroy capitalism around the world. Not only that, but many, including two of the United States biggest diplomats in the Far East, believed that American interests in the Open Door were threatened as well by the Bolsheviks. Many of Wilson’s inside men, as well as Wilson, were also just philosophically against Bolshevism and what it represented. Wilson’s cabinet, whom he relied on to help make policy decisions, could have easily have given him a purpose to intervene in both Mexico and Russia because it was in their interests.

There is also the idea that Wilson wanted to champion democracy around the world, but he would only play ball with the leaders that he wanted to deal with. He continued an intervention that he inherited in Nicaragua and throughout Adolfo Diaz’s term, Wilson chose to
back the very unpopular Nicaraguan leader. He also showed his tilt in Mexico by eventually
openly backing Carranza over Huerta, and gave terms for Carranza to follow for the United
States to hand back over Veracruz and the money collected there. In Russia, Wilson did not
openly talk about trying to undermine the communist Bolshevik regime, but in the two
interventions in Russia between 1918 and 1920, American troops either engaged against the
Bolsheviks, as was the case in Archangel, or watched as others would, in this case the
Czechoslovaks in Siberia.

As can be seen stressed in the fourteen points from the Treaty of Versailles following
World War I, Wilson was a man who stressed self-determination of peoples. Wilson’s style of
intervention in Western Europe actually was quite consistent with the style he chose to intervene
with in the past. After stressing that he wanted to remain neutral, events would transpire, and
Wilson would then call for intervention for a higher cause. That was the case in Latin American
interventions, and it was the same in Europe. As World War I expanded over time, Germany
attacked American shipping with unrestricted submarine warfare. This made Wilson’s favoritism
of the British even easier, as trade records show there was an obvious tilt towards the British
camp even before the United States entered the war. He also saw the war as creating a situation
where, after its completion, there could be serious conversations about creating world peace and
allowing peoples to live in the nations of their own determination in the land that they already
live in. As he had done in the past, Wilson chose to intervene so others could determine their
fates. He was championing freedom and used the military as a necessary means to achieve those
ends.

Self-determination was a very important principle for Wilson. So important, it became
the emphasis of his second term in office. From the year before the United States declared war
on Germany through the election that would choose the president to succeed him, Wilson championed the idea of creating a League of Nations where nations could come together to resolve disputes, and also the idea of people being able to determine the nations that they would live in. Wilson dreamed of the League creating multinational decisions between nations, which would lead to the eventual disappearance of wars.

The League may have broken the United States away from the traditions of its past. Wilson went to battle with Congress because of this. But for Wilson, each way that he could achieve the spread of democratic values, world peace, and self-determination, it was worth it for him going to battle, both figuratively with Congress in this case, but also on the world level in foreign conflicts. Wilson saw the League of Nations as the institution that could help him achieve what he desired for the world. Just like he intervened in Latin America, Europe, and Russia to guard certain interests, Wilson went to war with Congress to guard this interest.

Congress had their own interests too, and that was to keep the Constitutional powers that they saw the League taking away from them, as well as guarding the past traditions of the nation. Wilson saw his proposal as the fruition of an evolution that saw the United States rise to the level of a world superpower. He wanted the United States to take the lead in creating a concert of world power. Congress saw Wilson compromising American values to achieve his own agenda. Congress saw World War I as a temporary stray from the norm of the foreign policy of the nation that for them, up to that time, had been consistent with the nation’s traditions. Afterwards, in their mind, they would return to their neutral ways when it came to global foreign affairs that the United States had no vested interest in.

Wilson was combining his idealism with the realism that was required in the period. He was a vehement defender of the Open Door, and his actions showed that he would go to war to
defend it. He inherited a legacy from Roosevelt, where the President was seen as a man of power. Roosevelt took the American military to lengths not seen often before his time in office. Roosevelt got the wheels spinning for much of Wilson’s presidency, by giving him the muscle to be as involved in Latin America as he was, and giving the United States the respect it deserved to be treated as a superpower on the world level. As a result, many times Wilson’s idealism had to be meshed with Roosevelt’s realism.

Today, our President also finds himself in a similar situation. President Barack Obama ran on a campaign masked with idealist rhetoric of American relations with the world. In contrast to Wilson, Obama inherited two very unpopular wars. Like Obama, the state of American foreign policy required him to make decisions that appeared contrary to his rhetoric, such as sending more troops to Afghanistan. However, like Wilson, Obama understands the idea of multilateralism. Obama is taking the world to task much like Wilson did to work together to solve conflicts. Whether he succeeds, only time will tell.

As mentioned, the country that Wilson inherited was the United States that was shaped in the era of Roosevelt. Roosevelt believed in the power of the United States, behind the big stick, as being the major factor for American diplomacy abroad. Wilson was dealt the cards from Roosevelt. It would be up to Wilson to decide how to play, but Roosevelt’s legacy would have a lasting effect on Wilson. Wilson had his beliefs, but he inherited a United States that had changed its image under Roosevelt. This tradition pushed the idea that the United States had to flex its muscles. If there were a tradition that Wilson had to have in mind, it would be Roosevelt’s.

Wilson believed in self-determination, multilateralism, and the Open Door. His interventions overseas were all consistent with at least one of these policies. He was never shy
about talking about these policies and their importance to him; however, he also did not shy away from discussing his belief in non-intervention. His vehement belief that in a perfect world, that war could come to an end was what made Wilson an idealist. This was a rhetoric that he believed in. Yet, the reality of his era required Wilson to wield the big stick of Roosevelt, if only to help get Wilson to a point where the idealism of his rhetoric could be met.
Works Cited


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