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WILSONIANISM



Tony Smith

Defining a term like "Wilsonianism" presents the same sort of difficulties one finds in attempting to define virtually any "ism" in world affairs. On the one hand, aspects in U.S. foreign policy of what we currently call Wilsonianism handily pre-date Woodrow Wilson's tenure in office (1913–1921), while on the other, aspects of what came to define the term appeared later in fuller or different form than Wilson himself could ever have imagined. Given the multitude of connotations the term consequently bears, at times it may appear that everyone is to some extent Wilsonian, while at other moments it seems that Wilsonians may differ among themselves over how best to proceed in world affairs, as if their compass lacks the sure points of reference an "ism" should rightly give them.

These concessions made, no other American president has had his name used to define a foreign policy orientation. Given the importance of the set of ideas introduced by America's twenty-eighth president, it is widely agreed that using the term "Wilsonianism" is meaningful, even if just what the word means may be open to some disagreement. Surely the best way to proceed is to look at the sets of policies Woodrow Wilson advanced for world order, then to place them within earlier and later American foreign policy initiatives so as to see a family resemblance from which a group of concepts may be said to emerge that, taken together, is the substance of Wilsonianism.

The first (and for some the only) defining element of Wilsonianism is the conviction that a leading priority of U.S. foreign policy should be the promotion of democratic government the world around—"national self-determination," as Wilson put it. Original as this conviction was with Wilson, we should be careful to see it more as a development out of an American tradition rather than as a wholly new departure. For as Wilson himself said, what he was calling for was the "globalization of the Monroe Doctrine." Put differently, international

order should be based on a politically plural world, a situation where national self-determination (a phrase Wilson used constantly after 1914) would be the rule of the day. As the evocation of the Monroe Doctrine (1823) indicates, and as the Open Door Notes with respect to China confirmed at the turn of the century, Wilson understood that his call to dismember the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires in 1918–1919 was long-standing U.S. policy. This same reliance on globalizing the Monroe Doctrine would be reflected later, during and after World War II, when the administrations of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman denounced great power spheres of influence and so supported the decolonization of European empires and criticized the expansion of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe by use of the Red Army.

If Wilson's dedication to a politically plural world was in the established tradition of American foreign policy, his call for the democratization of this political plurality most certainly was not. Here was this president's single most important contribution to the American foreign policy tradition—the notion that in an era of nationalist passion, the blueprint for state construction should be of a liberal democratic sort.

At the time, most diplomats were astonished—or amused—at Wilson's ambition. Only today, nearly a century after Wilson's dramatic appeals, can we fully appreciate how momentous his suggestions actually were. For nationalism—the ideologically based demand of a "people," defined in terms of a collective history and purpose, for a state based on popular participation—came to be one of the politically most volatile forces of the twentieth century. The problem was that while nationalist passions excelled at destroying authoritarian and imperial regimes, they were less good at establishing new forms of the state, modern regimes based on radically different principles of legitimacy and different structures of state power and mass mobilization.

In sum, to be "for nationalism" and "against imperialism," as U.S. policy was prior to Wilson, turned out not to be enough. Once the old order was destroyed, what would go in its place? Into this hornets' nest Wilson stepped with his blueprint for liberal democracy, first for Latin America (his intervention in the Mexican Revolution in 1914 and the U.S. occupations of various countries, of which the most ambitious was the Dominican Republic in 1916), and later, and with far more consequences, for eastern Europe, in a design presented to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

With the notable exception of Czechoslovakia, Wilson's hopes came to naught. Many blame Wilson himself for the demise of his plans, pointing to his personal rigidity at home and abroad as the source of his undoing. But surely a better explanation was the tenor of the times. The Bolshevik Revolution (1917), Mussolini's seizure of power in Rome (1922), the Great Depression that started in 1929, and Hitler's assumption of power in Berlin in 1933 combined with the U.S. Senate's refusal to let the United States join the League of Nations so as to make Wilson's policies seem impractical in the interwar years. The United States had played a determining role in winning the Great War but Wilson could not win the peace that followed.

Still, seeds had been planted. When the United States confronted the task of winning the peace after it won the war against fascism in 1945, the Roosevelt and Truman administrations found themselves returning to Wilsonianism as the basis for at least a part of U.S. policy for world order. Thus, in occupation policy for Italy, Germany, and Japan, U.S. intentions were that these countries be democratized—purged of their militaristic elites and converted by institutional and ideological means into pacific, constitutional polities. In eastern Europe, the United States called on Joseph Stalin to respect national self-determination for the peoples liberated from Nazi control by the Red Army (an appeal Stalin agreed to in the Declaration on Liberated Europe at Yalta in 1945). In Latin America, too, there was for a brief moment hope that democracy would take root.

Nevertheless, even before the Cold War obliged Washington to work with authoritarian friends against local communist takeovers, the United States recognized that in many parts of the world in which it had an interest after 1945—Iran and China, for example—the prospects for democratic government were decidedly dim. Roosevelt

had seen the failure of Wilson's efforts in the Caribbean as a warning signal as to how much change the United States could actually introduce into agrarian, authoritarian lands. As a result, Roosevelt might be called a "realistic liberal," ready to push for a Wilsonian world where the ground appeared promising, but careful not to engage American power in quagmires from which it could not easily extricate itself.

Still, the dream of promoting democracy elsewhere did not die with occupation policy. During the Eisenhower years, Washington continued to call for democratic national self-determination in Eastern Europe so as to undermine the rule of "puppet" governments in "captive nations" controlled by Moscow. So, too, the Kennedy administration saw American security in Latin America helped by that region's democratization and authored the Alliance for Progress. Jimmy Carter's important innovation in the Wilsonian tradition was to craft a "human rights" policy that called not so much for democratization as for the liberalization of authoritarian regimes (constitutional restraints on the government's power), a policy that might be seen as a prelude to eventual democratization.

Ronald Reagan's foreign policy continued in the Wilsonian tradition through innovations of its own. For example, "constructive engagement" was designed to ease authoritarian allies of the United States into the construction of liberal democratic regimes, an initiative that had impact in lands as different as the Philippines, South Korea, South Africa, Central America, and the Soviet Union. Also, the deregulation and privatization of the economy Reagan called for was seen as a socioeconomic facilitator of a democratic political order.

Promotion of democracy in Central America and Eastern Europe remained an appeal of the Bush administration, but George H. W. Bush famously commented that he did not "have the vision thing." Under President Bill Clinton, Wilsonianism became the centerpiece of administration policy early on, when it was announced that "the containment of communism" would be replaced by "the enlargement of democracy."

In sum, the best short definition of what it means to be Wilsonian is that American security interests are well served by promoting liberal democratic governments internationally. When most people casually refer to Wilsonianism, this is what they usually mean to summon up: the notion that promoting democracy for others should be "a," if not "the," leading goal of U.S. foreign policy.

EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF WILSONIANISM

It can well be argued, however, that Wilsonianism has critical elements besides fostering democracy in its framework for global order. For a politically plural world, one opposed to great power imperial spheres of influence, would rather obviously need mechanisms to stitch together regional and global consensus on any number of matters. One of Wilson's leading concerns, consequently, was to get international affairs past balance-of-power politics. His solution was "collective security," the notion that all peace-loving states (a category he at first reserved only for democratic countries) should pledge themselves to joint action to keep the peace. Wilson recognized early on that a world composed of a large number of independent states, an order explicitly committed to anti-imperialism in the name of national self-determination, would by its very nature be forced to create a set of multilateral institutions to maintain the peace. Hence, he proposed the Pan American League (today the Organization of American States) and, most important of all, the League of Nations (the prototype of what became the United Nations). In short, a second element of Wilsonianism is multilateralism: the conviction that a system of international institutions based on the rule of law could keep the peace among states pledged domestically to the same principles.

Wilson's hopes for multilateral institutions may be said to have come to fruition in the five years between 1944 and 1949, the period that saw the creation of the Bretton Woods system for the world economy, the establishment of the United Nations, the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe, and the setting up of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Here were the instruments for Washington to pursue two goals—a two-track policy—at the same time: the containment of communism and the construction of a democratic fraternity with special emphasis on western Europe and Japan.

International economic openness was a third element of Wilsonianism. Following the British example, Wilson championed liberalism in world economics, the notion that states should not claim special privileges for themselves in economic matters (a position that often led to political imperialism) but instead let market forces operate, treating all comers equally through what are called "most-favored-nation treaties." The result would contribute not only to a more pros-

perous, but also to a more peaceful, international system. The concern to foster such a system stretches back in American history to the American Revolution itself, with its hatred of British mercantilist practices.

Nevertheless, Wilson's ideas on this score were not highly developed. By comparison, the efforts at Bretton Woods in 1944 to set up an open postwar international economic system were far more ambitious than anything he had ever conceived. Yet whatever these earlier and later considerations, Wilson certainly embraced international economic openness and saw it as an ingredient in his liberal internationalist package, one that tied in rather neatly with his call for strong multilateral institutions to regulate world affairs.

The fourth element of Wilsonianism was the conviction that the United States had to be deeply involved in international affairs if "the world was to be safe for democracy." Whatever the fear of "entangling alliances" warned against by George Washington, the United States simply could no longer stand aloof. By Wilson's lights, the United States had stepped onto the world stage in the War with Spain (1898), which had made it a Pacific power and the dominant presence in the Caribbean. By entering the European war in 1917 and presiding at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the United States had committed itself to being a European power as well. Henceforth, matters of political moment in most parts of the globe necessarily had to be the concern of Washington.

As with other elements of Wilsonianism, the notion that the United States was necessarily committed to internationalism became more widespread with World War II and the Cold War that followed. To be sure, in the aftermath of the collapse of Soviet communism, both public and elite opinion in the United States began to become relatively more concerned with domestic issues than had been the case before. Nevertheless, the Republican commitment to "unilateralism" rather than multilateralism, vexing as it may be to Wilsonians who fear that neo-isolationism might follow if the Republican penchant should be confirmed, does not necessarily mean that U.S. involvement in world affairs will noticeably diminish in the twenty-first century.

Thus, while Wilsonianism is most commonly identified as human rights and fostering democracy for others, in fact, it is necessarily a commitment as well to multilateralism, open

markets, and U.S. leadership in world affairs. An interest in an open international economic system and a politically plural world may predate Wilson's tenure as president, and all aspects of what we call Wilsonianism may have evolved with time, without putting in doubt the utility of keeping the term.

Perhaps the most significant change since Woodrow Wilson's time in liberal democratic internationalism is the conviction that for democracy to occur, changes in other domains of a people's life must be involved. For example, while Wilson himself did not envision socioeconomic change as a constituent part of the democratizing process, his successors who oversaw the democratization of Germany and Japan were New Dealers, who most certainly did. So, too, the Alliance for Progress linked the democratization of Latin America to socioeconomic change, and especially to land reform. And again, Ronald Reagan had an economic dimension to his call for democratization when he stressed the importance of deregulation and privatization along with economic openness as essential for political change. Neither Jimmy Carter nor George H. W. Bush gave much attention to the socioeconomic character of political change, yet each could nonetheless be called Wilsonian, given their commitment to human rights and promotion of democracy abroad.

With respect to later innovations, Jimmy Carter's call for the respect worldwide of human rights emerges as especially important. The character of virtually all these "rights" dealt with restraints on governments in their relationship with society. Such rights were thus part of the liberal heritage of the West and were basic to the emergence of constitutionally limited government there. But as Carter himself understood, human rights were not synonymous with democracy. Nonetheless, a government that respected human rights as defined by the Western tradition almost necessarily was setting into motion forces that could lead to democratic government.

As this example of Carter's human rights appeal indicates, Wilsonianism is a multifaceted concept, constantly in evolution. Differences may well appear among Wilsonians as to the proper cast of U.S. foreign policy, and changes are sure to be introduced that today we can see only dimly. But such is the lot of any general approach to world events and not a reason to conclude that Wilsonianism is too vague, too internally contradictory, or too subject to change to be worthy of being considered a distinctive approach to

answering the question of how the United States should orient itself, at least in part, with respect to the challenges posed by international affairs.

Perhaps most important of all, Wilsonianism should be seen as a U.S. bid to structure a world order on American terms. It is an essential part of the framework for American hegemony, designed to win the peace after winning three wars: the two world wars and the Cold War. Foreign critics of the United States have generally grasped this truth about Wilsonianism more clearly than many Americans, including those who think of themselves as Wilsonians. Wilson would make the world safe for democracy. But critics of Wilsonianism sometimes have understandably been concerned that in these circumstances democracy might not be safe for the world, that it might become the rallying call for an international crusade, waging war in the name of peace and bringing American domination in the guise of national self-determination. What is certainly the case is that Wilsonianism is part of an American bid for international hegemony, and it should be more widely recognized as such by those who might otherwise treat the doctrine as more altruistic and less self-interested than it actually is.

WHY WILSONIANISM?

Wilsonianism came into being not because of American "innocence" and "religiosity," as its critics often like to claim, so much as because the program was based on deep-seated American interests, values, and institutions, and, equally important, because the doctrine found a response in social and political forces the world around that sensed its global relevance. The source of the doctrine's strength thus lies in powerful material forces, some domestic, others foreign, which must be appreciated if we are to free ourselves from the notion that Wilsonianism is simply ideology without substance, a form of "social work" best performed by Mother Teresa, as one critic called it, devoid of an ability to express and serve the national interest. Let us then focus on each of the doctrine's analytically distinct material bases in turn, first the domestic and then the international.

The origins of an American belief that democracy, open markets, and multilateralism might serve as a framework for the construction of the country's foreign policy grew from the interests, values, and institutions of this country

itself. Thus, the American Revolution stemmed from many sources, but one was the colonists' objection to British mercantilism, the feeling that the colonies would be better off if they were able to buy and sell on the world market without London's interference. What was true for London was equally true for Madrid; hence, U.S. sympathy with the independence of Latin America in the early nineteenth century. As the United States grew into an industrial power in the second half of the nineteenth century, its commitment to open markets was confirmed. Thus, the Open Door Notes for China, predicated on the assumption that an independent China was good for American commerce, expressed essentially the same interests at the end of the nineteenth century that the Monroe Doctrine had expressed at its opening.

Antimerchantism meant anti-imperialism. From the Monroe Doctrine to the Open Door Notes, the United States favored a politically plural world for economic reasons. With the coming of Franklin D. Roosevelt to the presidency, the American preference for open markets for the first time became an appeal for free (or freer) trade, an ambition institutionalized in the Bretton Woods system created in 1944, which has evolved and expanded significantly since. As the world's dominant economic power, the United States could only gain, on balance, from open economic arrangements, and it could easily be maintained, as it had been by the British in the nineteenth century, that the political dividends of international accord on open markets would be the dampening of competition, and hence the likelihood of war, among the great powers. In short, Wilsonianism's call for a plural political world of countries engaged in an open international economic network corresponded with the interests of powerful social and political domestic forces.

But there were critical security considerations as well. Protected by mighty oceans and weak neighbors, the United States was able to indulge the belief of its founders that standing armies were a menace to the health of republican institutions and values. Anti-imperialism thus meant that the United States need maintain only a small armed force—at the time of the Spanish-American War in 1898, there were fewer than 50,000 men in the army and navy combined, an astonishingly small number by comparative measures. The fear, however, was that other great powers might somehow endanger the United States by their imperial expansions, developments

Washington was determined to keep at bay in the Western Hemisphere (the Monroe Doctrine) and was concerned to see limited in northeast Asia (the Open Door Notes and later support for China) and in Europe as well after 1914.

In addition to economic and military reasons to oppose great power imperialism, the United States put forth arguments that were political as well. As a democracy, the country was not interested in annexing foreign peoples to participate in its government—especially when these people were numerous, poor, dark-skinned, and Roman Catholic, as was the case in the Caribbean, Mexico, and the Philippines, where American power bulked large after the victories over Mexico in 1848 and over Spain in 1898. Nor did controlling these people through military proconsuls seem appealing, for there was concern that such practices might endanger republican institutions at home. The character of the country's values and institutions thus melded with security and economic considerations to allow the United States to respect the nationalist ambitions of other peoples and to applaud the destruction of foreign empires when they occurred.

Now that some account has been made of why Wilsonianism originated in the United States for reasons apart from Woodrow Wilson's personal genius, we turn to the international reception of liberal democratic internationalism. Too often, U.S. foreign policy is explained "from the inside out," as if the context in which Washington's ambitions are operationalized is of second-order importance (if even that) in understanding a policy's logic. Yet, if we set U.S. policy within a global framework, our perspective changes, because we can see the correspondence, the synchronization, the "fit" between American hopes and global realities and better appreciate how U.S. policy often succeeded (so that the Wilsonian ambition was confirmed) by working in tandem with global forces of modernization in ways that secured a range of U.S. interests. Simply put, there were powerful reasons why large parts of the globe might respond to Wilsonianism—just as there were reasons why parts might respond instead to the contemporary doctrines of Marxism-Leninism or fascism or national socialism.

From a historical perspective, the ideologies of communism, fascism, and liberal democracy that dominated politics in the twentieth century were relatively recent responses to economic, social, and political changes whose most immediate origins lie in the eighteenth century but whose

pedigree can be traced farther back by the careful historian. A competitive European state system gave rise as early as the late sixteenth century to forms of nationalism and mass mobilization that would be accentuated as time progressed. The coming of the Industrial Revolution meant the empowerment or despoliation (the middle class on the one hand, the peasantry on the other, for example) of social forces new and old. The Renaissance and the Reformation engendered forms of thought that implicitly questioned a host of practices, from the basis of social order to the character of state legitimacy. Ultimately, the Enlightenment allowed the articulation of radically novel concepts of the nature of citizenship, the state, and the basis of international peace that were as troubling to domestic, regional, and global order as the challenges produced by a competitive state system and economic change.

In the process of what might be termed "the crisis of modernity," authoritarian and imperial states came one by one to their day of reckoning. It was not so much that these states were corrupt, immoral, decadent, and the like (although, of course, they typically were, from our current perspective) as that they were weak relative to states based on mass mobilization. In short order, a law of international life obliged other peoples in contact with the states where modern nationalism and economic development began either to imitate these new political forms or to perish. The result was a host of efforts at defensive modernization—undertakings by the Young Turks from central and eastern Europe to East Asia whose nationalist passion to modernize by reforming the state and society called forth tremendous domestic upheavals that quickly found their parallels in international life.

How were states and the international order to be restructured in an era of unprecedented economic and social change and modern nationalism? The American and French revolutions (as well as the evolution of Great Britain) initially suggested a natural affinity between liberal democracy and modernization. But the problems France later had in consolidating constitutional government, the failure of the "springtime of nations" in 1848, the deliberate attempts of conservative governments such as those in Japan, Russia, and Turkey to modernize without liberalizing or democratizing (although the former sometimes made headway without the latter), and the authoritarian aftermath of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917) all indicated the difficulties

in many lands of founding constitutional government with a liberal democratic base. Ultimately, World War I revealed that the progressive optimism of the fin de siècle was altogether mistaken in its confident assurances that nationalism and liberal democracy necessarily had much in common.

Both communism and fascism were born of the conflagration of 1914–1918, the most momentous period of that terrible century. Each of these ideologies answered the crisis of modernity by setting forth ways of organizing society, the state, and state-society relations, and each came to be championed by great powers and to appear to be a viable alternative to liberal democratic government, which was despised by both of these forms of totalitarianism.

For the communists, the state would be structured as "the dictatorship of the proletariat," dominated by a "vanguard party" working through the Third International (the Comintern) to liberate the wretched of the earth—oppressed peasantries and working classes especially. Fascism would counter communist mass mobilization by mass parties of its own, parties devoted to defending the traditional order (as they mythologized it), including property, royalty, and established religion (where these institutions existed), while raising popular support with brands of nationalism that were racist and militarist. Different as communism and fascism were from each other and from liberal democracy, what all three had in common was their modernity: their ability to deal with new ideas of citizenship, state power, and world order in ways that were decisively different from any ideologies or organization of power that had preceded them and that promised new forms of state power to those who embraced their blueprints. As a consequence, each of these ideologies came to be championed by class, ethnic, and political interests not only in their lands of origin but virtually everywhere in the world. As the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) revealed, a three-way contest thus was joined from which few could stand apart.

This overly brief review of twentieth-century politics indicates that the stark elegance of realist theory about international relations, which holds that there is a universal dynamic to states' behavior, based on their calculation of their relative power position with respect to other states, needs to be augmented by historical and domestic analysis of the great changes of our times. While there may well be eternal verities about the

human condition that we should honor whatever the differences of time and place (let us read and reread Thucydides and Machiavelli, by all means), these arguments should not give a license to overlook those verities that are specific to time and place, especially when they are of the fundamentally transformative kind we witnessed in the century just past. For what was occurring in the twentieth century was the birth pangs, on an international level, of the modern state, where more power was accumulated than ever before but where political actors often had opposing ideas as to the proper structuring of domestic and international life. In these circumstances, Wilsonianism, or liberal democratic internationalism, represented interests and values in fundamental opposition to those of communist and fascist regimes. The epochal struggle of World War II was over purpose as well as power, as Stalin's remark to the Yugoslav communist Milovan Djilas in April 1945 reveals: "This war is not as in the past. Whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise."

To be sure, ideologies were also camouflages in the age-old struggle for power that concerned personalities as well as states. Still, the reason to take ideological contests seriously is that these ideas sets represented large groupings of interests that gave them a material base in the struggle for supremacy in the twentieth century. In the event, it is not at all simplistic to maintain that it was not so much the United States and its European allies that triumphed in the struggles against fascism and communism as that what triumphed (at least by the end of the century) was liberal democratic internationalism, a set of ideas on the proper organization of the state, state-society relations, social structures from the family to the relative place of ethnic and religious minorities, and the structure of economic production.

Here, then, is a second persuasive reason why Wilsonianism should be taken seriously: it is not simply an American project for world order favorable to U.S. interests; it is also a formula (incomplete, vague, contradictory, and in constant evolution though it may be) that corresponds to the interests, values, and institutions of many other peoples around the globe. As Wilsonians realize, regime type matters. That is, it may well be a matter of concern for Washington whether powerful foreign governments are liberal democracies, for the historical evidence is clear

that when they are, then the likelihood of stable, cooperative relations is significantly increased.

The evidence of the uniquely complicated agenda of social and political reorganization in the modern era is apparent in the early twenty-first century, when liberal democratic capitalism is the only game in town. This monopoly of design should not disguise the fear and hatred that many around the world feel for it. Still, no other general form of political and social life has yet been devised that is as effective at the local and international level as the one enjoyed by the international liberal democratic community today—a system kept in place, it might be underscored, largely by the terms set out by a hegemonic America.

Of course, the set of ideas that we call liberal democratic has never been either fully coherent or static. It has shown itself to possess numerous internal contradictions and to evolve dramatically according to time and place. American hegemony is complicated, therefore, not simply by its external rivals but also by its internal organization, which ceaselessly works to bedevil the problems of leadership.

As we have seen, by the early twentieth century—the time Wilson was elected president—it was becoming increasingly apparent that nationalism itself was no guarantee that a stable political order would be born either locally or regionally. In these circumstances, liberal democratic government could be proposed for others as a tried and proven formula perhaps of universal applicability. Perhaps Wilson was ahead of his time for most of Latin America and eastern Europe. But it is noteworthy at the beginning of the twenty-first century that whatever the troubles these regions experienced in the twentieth century, the promise of liberal democratic government remains as relevant today as ever. Fascism and communism have not worked as models of government in these areas. Hence, the continuing promise of Wilsonianism as the form of organization most likely to provide peace and well-being.

Nevertheless, many parts of the world rejected the Wilsonian premise in the twentieth century. In the early twenty-first century, the anarchy of much of Africa, the hostility of much of the Muslim world, and the cultural pride of China suggest clear limits to the appeal of liberal democratic government. Such countries and regions must nonetheless be worked with by Washington in a search for mutual interest that a well-nigh religious fervor for human rights and

democratic government may fail to perceive at all adequately.

The record of the Clinton administration (1993–2001) suggests the limits of the Wilsonian argument. Initially, the administration believed that “the containment of communism would be replaced by the enlargement of democracy,” that a “muscular multilateralism” would prevail, and that the intensified globalization of the world economy not only would lead to general prosperity but also would help to integrate the world politically while fostering democratic governments in areas like China, where the future of regime types seemed up for debate.

In short order, the Clinton administration was chastened to learn how limited a Wilsonian policy could be. China successfully rebuffed efforts to link trade negotiations to its human rights conduct. The U.S. intervention in Somalia for human rights purposes backfired, stymieing efforts to duplicate such action in Haiti, Rwanda, and Bosnia. Later, Clinton oversaw a U.S. occupation of Haiti and an attack on Serbia so as to end its human rights abuses in Kosovo, but as the prospects for democratic government appeared stark in both regions, a certain soberness set in as to the centrality of Wilsonian thinking in the making of U.S. foreign policy.

In sum, Wilsonianism is a tried and proven formula for advancing U.S. interests in the world because of its correspondence both to the character of America as a country and to the needs of peoples around the world. But it is far from a complete or foolproof guide to what American foreign policy should be. The task for the future, as it was for the past, is to know when and how to make use of its recommendations, but also when and why to be skeptical of its relevance.

WHITHER WILSONIANISM?

Arguing the strength and the success of Wilsonianism in American foreign policy does not necessarily predict its role in the framework for American policy in the new century. The so-called realist critics of Wilsonianism have been cogent in the analysis of the shortcomings they see in liberal democratic internationalism. To realists such as George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, Walter Lippmann, and Henry Kissinger, Wilsonianism is “idealistic,” “utopian,” and “moralistic” for two essential reasons.

First, not all the world is ready for liberal

democratic government. The social, economic, cultural, and political preconditions for such a regime type are in many instances so lacking that for the United States to pursue global democratization is to engage upon a quixotic crusade sure to damage the national interest. From this point of view, Wilsonians may fail to cooperate with authoritarian governments when this is necessary for security reasons; indeed, they may raise tensions with such regimes by their hectoring, superior, self-righteous posturing. Or Wilsonians may intervene, trying to bend local conditions to their own types, in the process overextending American power and confusing national priorities.

Realists are thus correct to suggest that Wilsonians may suffer from a failure to recognize the objective limits to American power, to set clear priorities regarding American goals, to see the United States with the modesty that a reading of the country's history should reveal, and to sup with the devil when expediency demands it. Liberal democratic internationalists should learn from these counsels when they consider how to promote their agenda abroad.

In many parts of the world (China, many Muslim countries), cultures hostile to the West or proud of ancient traditions equate democratization with Westernization, and any such process with cultural decadence and national disintegration. Like Slavophiles, Germanophiles, or groups of Japanese, Turkish, or Chinese reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the hopes of many in these lands are to duplicate the power of the West but in terms of local ways. Elsewhere, as in much of Africa, hostility toward the West may be less marked, but anarchy undermines every effort toward democratic consolidation.

The second criticism offered by realists is that even were the world to be dominated by liberal democratic states, the anarchy of international relations would soon pit them against one another. Consider, for example, that in world affairs both India and France rather consistently distance themselves from American policy. In other words, from the point of view of war and peace, whether governments are democratic or not is not of great moment.

Here, however, realists are on far weaker ground than in their first objection to Wilsonianism, or so liberal internationalists believe. Since the early 1990s, a compelling amount of data have been produced demonstrating that liberal democratic regimes are in fact more cooperative and

less conflictual in their relations with one another than other regime types would be. This literature argues the existence of a "democratic peace," maintaining that there is strong historical evidence that liberal democratic states do not go to war with one another, are likely to make superior economic partners, and are remarkably successful at making common institutions work. The Princeton political scientist Michael Doyle was the first to present empirical findings in this direction in the early 1980s, but with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the implosion of the Soviet Union two years later, Doyle's articles became subject to closer attention. The result was a string of empirical confirmations of the existence of the democratic peace and a variety of efforts to explain why it held true.

Seen from this perspective, the emergence of liberal democratic government in Russia, Turkey, and Mexico—to cite three examples of nations where such transitions seem possible in the early twenty-first century—could be argued to be of genuine importance to the national interests of the United States and its co-democracies in the European Union. Indeed, the character of the European Union is the most dramatic evidence of the kind of positive effects democratization may bring. Thanks to the democratization of Germany, European integration became a possibility. As the European Union grew in power, it drew into its institutions the countries of southern Europe, where the prospects for liberal democratic government had been relatively weak. The result was the consolidation of democratic regimes throughout this region, a development that would have been inconceivable without the European Union's insistence on democracy as a prerequisite for membership. The same process seems evident in central Europe, from Poland to Slovenia especially, where the prospect of joining the European Union offers a fillip for democratic forces and institutions there. And behind the integration of Europe on these terms stands the spirit of Woodrow Wilson, who was the first to maintain that this epochal event could occur only if Germany were democratized and Germany and France were to join together, creating what today is called the "engine of European unity."

Much the same positive outcome, so far as promotion of democracy and U.S. interests are concerned, can be said to have occurred with the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO's basic security mission should not conceal the fact that it has also been associated

with the liberalization of those countries that are members. To take but one example, civilian control of the military is obligatory on all member countries, and the reforms that this rule has entailed have contributed directly to the stability of democratic life in southern and central Europe. In these circumstances, it is worth noting that the most outspoken Wilsonian on European affairs at the turn of the century was Czech President Václav Havel.

To what extent have the lessons of history, as they are taught by Wilsonians, captured the mind of the American political elite? The vagaries of American political life are such that some individuals and parties stress the importance of liberal democratic internationalism more than others. Traditionally, the Democratic Party has been more Wilsonian than the Republican Party, but one should be careful not to overstate the differences. Republican Ronald Reagan was especially strong in his efforts to promote democratic government worldwide, while the dominant wing of the Republican Party has long favored open international markets and an active role for the United States in world affairs. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Democratic Party is far more likely to call for promotion of human rights and democracy abroad and to be concerned about U.S. participation in multinational institutions of a variety of sorts. The Republicans, by contrast, tend to be suspicious that promotion of democracy and excessive commitments to international organizations could muddle the priorities for the national interest while imprudently overextending the United States in situations where it has little at stake.

One problem for Wilsonians in the early twenty-first century is that public opinion polls show little interest in fostering human rights and democracy for others among the public at large. Meanwhile, powerful voices representing the working class warn of possible income decline among poorer Americans should economic globalization proceed apace. And a neo-isolationist sentiment, a concern about entanglements abroad where the United States has no evident stake, makes leadership in a host of multinational institutions difficult to assert.

In these circumstances, some liberal internationalists began to call themselves "national security liberals," meaning they argued that the promotion of Wilsonianism constituted what Arthur Link called a "higher realism," a way of defending vital U.S. interests around the world.

These modern Wilsonians stress that it is not only the degree of its power that allowed the United States to emerge as the world's leader at the beginning of the twenty-first century; there was a style to this power as well, a character that allowed it to create a security alliance and a world economic order unprecedented in history. They worry that lack of understanding of the purpose behind American power may cause this power to lack direction and confidence. But they comfort themselves with the notion that the package of programs liberal democratic internationalism calls for corresponds both to deep-set U.S. interests and to the needs of many foreign people. The result is that Wilsonian features of American foreign policy should remain an inescapable part of its character into the foreseeable future.

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See also ECONOMIC POLICY AND THEORY; HUMAN RIGHTS; MOST-FAVORED-NATION PRINCIPLE; THE NATIONAL INTEREST; REALISM AND IDEALISM; SELF-DETERMINATION; WILSONIAN MISSIONARY DIPLOMACY.