Woodrow Wilson Still Fuels Debate on 'Who Lost Russia?'

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related to his decision to intervene in World War I. But the *current* foreign-policy controversy involving Wilson dwells upon a different set of questions on the issue of America's relations with Russia today.

The question is: could there be *something* in the Woodrow Wilson presidency itself that remains germane to the continuing debate about whether the United States and its Western allies "lost" Russia following the ending of the Cold War and disappearance of the Soviet Union? Is there a theoretical or policy link that connects a long

The Ongoing Debate over Wilsonianism

After the Cold War's end, NATO agreed at its 1994 Brussels summit to invite former members of the Warsaw Pact to join the Atlantic Alliance. This remains a project many regard as being profoundly "Wilsonian" in its inspiration and operation, an interpretation this article echoes, if only in a qualified sense.[4]

Although more than 20 years have passed since that Brussels summit, the debate continues over the decision made in the Belgian capital. That the alliance's membership has increased from 16 at the time of the Cold War's end to today's 28 has not quieted the criticism of those who, agreeing with George F. Kennan, comprehend NATO's expansion as a mistake of tragic proportions, largely because of what it portended for the future relationship of Russia with the West.[5] Countering this claim are those who insist that the past two decades have corroborated the wisdom of the enlargement decision, which they see as having led to a bigger and better NATO, as well as to a more peaceful and democratic Europe.

The Ukraine crisis that flared up in early 2014, with Russia's annexation of Crimea, highlights the stakes of this debate. For those in the Kennan camp, the bitter fruit of expansion has been harvested mostly, even if not exclusively, on Ukrainian soil. Presumably, had NATO not expanded toward the very borders of Russia,[6] relations between the erstwhile Cold Wa

impulse" and the "Versailles remedial."

World War II, the GOP featured its own "Wilsonians." Indeed, some analysts have claimed that George W. Bush is the most Wilsonian president since Wilson himself.[12]

A second source of contestation is more epistemological than ideological, for example, the objections launched against Wilson and all his works by E.H. Carr, one of the founding figures of realism, whose *Twenty Years' Crisis* made the case against a feckless, indeed "utopian," policy dispensation predicated upon an erroneous reading of recent political realities fortified by an equally misplaced confidence in a fallacious "doctrine of the harmony of interests."[13] After Carr's time, the era of the so-called first great debate in IR theory, it became a fairly common pattern for realists, whether "classical," "neo-classical," or "structural," to express a disdain for Wilsonianism, as representing a misguided departure from "rational" or interest-based policymaking.[14]

Yet a third source of debate arises from the policy consequences of whatever are considered Wilsonianism's core principles. Not surprisingly, when the "lessons" of history get revised and re-revised through an unavoidably "presentist" (some say, "Whiggish") employment of the past,[15] Wilsonianism's fortunes must wax and wane, reflecting a fluctuating cost-benefit ethical calculus: what works must *a priori* be good, what fails must be bad. From its initial highpoint, during the first few months following the Armistice, when it seemed that Wilson could walk on water and that his policy ideas were the only ones that made any sense in a confused world, the President's reputation and that of his foreign policy prescriptions plummeted swiftly, spiraling downward *pari passu* the burgeoning disillusionment, at home and abroad, with the postwar settlement.[16]

But those lessons of interwar revisionist historiography would find themselves being revised and annulled during World War II, when it was rare to encounter dissent from the proposition that Wilson had been right all along, and that

[12] An argument made, by Tony Smith, "Wilsonianism after Iraq: The End of Liberal Internationalism?" in *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy,* pp. 53-88; and John J. Tierney, Jr., "For America, 'The War to End War' Was Just the Beginning," *Brown Journal of World Affairs,* Fall/Winter 2014, pp. 219-29. For a strenuous denial that George W. Bush was a Wilsonian, see Peter Beinart, "Balancing Act: The Other Wilsonianism," *World Affairs*, Summer 2008, pp. 76-88.

[13] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1946.).

[14] See, e.g., Brian C. Schmidt, "An International

he *should* have been heeded when he warned about the iniquitous consequences of an international system continuing to be characterized by the balance of power.[17] Subsequently, with the outbreak of the Cold War and the inability of the United Nations to make much progress against the allegedly immutable realities of that balance-of-power system, a second period of disenchantment set in with Wilsonianism,[18] resulting in a long realist slumber from which there was no awakening until the Cold War had drawn to an end.

With the surprise ending of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, Wilsonianism came back into favor among analysts and policy advocates alike, in Ronald Steel's words, getting "[d]usted off after decades of neglect and ridicule."[19] Prominent among the many wielders of feather-dusters was such an inveterate anti-Wilsonian as George Kennan, now able to confess himself as being fond, after all, of the twenty-eighth President's policy wisdom.[20]

Other realists joined in, if somewhat more cautiously than Kennan. Writing in the early 1990s, a decade when it was still possible to imagine that even Russia could be enfolded within the comforting geostrategic embrace of the U.S. and its allies,[21] Robert W. Tucker observed that the climate rarely had been so propitious for erecting a "new international order" predicated upon the taming of the balance of power. Likewise, he added, "the prospects of a progressively more democratic world, one in which the demands of freedom are reconciled with the requirements of order, have never seemed more promising. These are the developments that presumably have vindicated Wilson's vision. Scoffed at and dismissed during much of the Cold War years by self-proclaimed realists, that vision is now seen as largely borne out at the close of the century."[22] Coming from one of America's leading "self-proclaimed realists," Tucker's assessment might have seemed shocking, had he not injected a note of caution that the current Wilsonian mood might alter in the face of changing circumstances, as had happened with previous bursts of Wilsonian optimism.

We now know that Tucker's caution was well placed, for today's Wilsonians are more modest than those of the heady post-Cold War dawn. To be sure, even before the end of the 1990s, Cassandra-like voices warned against the will-o'-the-wisp of a Wilsonianism that, to critics such as Walter McDougall, had put its stamp on

[17] Richard W. Leopold, "The Problem of American Intervention, 1917: An Historical Retrospect," *World Politics*, April 1950, pp. 405-425; Charles Seymour, "Woodrow Wilson in Perspective," *Foreign Affairs*, Jan. 1956, pp. 175-86.
[18] Richard L. Watson, Jr., "Woodrow Wilson and His Interpreters, 1947-1957," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Sept. 1957, pp. 207-236.
[19] Ronald Steel, "Mr. Fix-It," *New York Review of Books,* Oct. 5, 2000, http://www.nybooks.com.proxy.queensu.ca/articles/archives/2000/oct/05/mr-fix-it/.
[20] David Steigerwald, "Historiography: The Reclamation of Woodrow Wilson?" *Diplomatic History*, Winter 1999, pp. 79-99.
[21] For an example, see James E. Goodby, *Europe Undivided: The New Logic of Peace in U.S.-Russian Relations* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, and Stanford: Institute for International Studies, 1998).
[22] Robert W. Tucker, "The Triumph of Wilsonianism?" *World Policy Journal*, Winter 1993/94, pp. 83-99.

policy formulation of Bill Clinton's Administration, chastised for being excessively concentrated on spreading democracy and not paying enough attention to the "national interest." In the memorable simile of one such critic, America's foreign policy under Clinton had become an aspect of "social work," more befitting an altruist like Mother Teresa than a titan like Uncle Sam.[23]

That critic, Michael Mandelbaum, may have erred in his assumption that Clintonian foreign policy *was* based on a rejection of the national interest, but he was correct to detect therein a Wilsonian leitmotif, something that some writers lampooned as being generative of "meliorism."[24] All of this merely restates a point raised earlier: it is very far from self-evident exactly *what* Wilsonianism is supposed to connote, as a doctrinal source of inspiration, either in U.S. foreign policy or in IR writ large. For instance, it is often used interchangeably with the notion of "liberal internationalism," which subsumes such concepts as collective security, democracy promotion, self-determination, multilateralism, cooperative security, and disarmament (to say nothing of meliorism).

Wilsonianism as Cooperative Security

Some students of Wilsonianism prefer to regard it as a series of logically sequential policy ideas, such that the whole ends up being more than the sum of its parts. Others, however, question the core tenets of Wilsonianism, when placed alongside other core tenets. In one scholar's apt words, "[m]ischaracterizations of Wilson have proven sustainable because Wilsonianism itself is elusive and indeterminate. It destructs more readily than it constructs."[25] Consider just one of the logical discrepancies that is characteristic of Wilsonianism: democracy promotion as self-determination. Obviously, they cannot always co-exist easily. Indeed, there is good reason to doubt that Wilson himself thought that self-determination would always lead to democracy—or even that it *must*.[26] A similar discordance shows up when we juxtapose two other items: collective security and disarmament. For as

[23] Michael Mandelbaum, "Foreign Policy as Social Work," *Foreign Affairs,* Jan/Feb 1996, pp. 16-32.

[24] In particular, Walter A. McDougall, whose "bible" of American foreign policy traditions makes an effortless transition from the antecedent of Wilsonianism to the consequent of "global meliorism." See his *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

[25] See Stephen Wertheim, "The Wilsonian Chimera: Why Debating Wilson's Vision Hasn't Saved American Foreign Relations," *White House Studies,* 2011, pp. 343-359.

[26] See Michla Pomerance, "The United States and Self-Determination: Perspectives on the Wilsonian Conception," *American Journal of International Law*, Jan. 1976, pp. 1-27; Allen Lynch, "Woodrow Wilson and the Principle of 'National Self-Determination': A Reconsideration," *Review of Inte1976, pp. 0 0 b969.21 - 1jETGS1 gsBTT2 1 Tf10.0sB 0 10.046 266.762 157.777l*

Richard Betts has argued so persuasively, if one takes seriously the obligation of all members of a collective-security organization to respond vigorously, if need be with military means, to cases of interstate aggression, then it follows that the organization and its members must be endowed with enough offensive firepower to make it possible for them to dislodge an aggressor from its ill-gotten territorial gains. This, in short, means that disarmament really should not find much of a home in Wilsonianism.[27]

This leads us to the most important defining characteristic of Wilsonianism, at least as the twenty-eighth president saw things: collective security. No one has parsed the concept of Wilsonianism as skillfully as John Thompson, who notes that among the numerous methods of categorizing it, two stand out from the rest: collective security and democracy promotion. For Thompson, the first of these represented Wilson's own vision; as for the second, it has become the default option for Wilson's latter-day admirers. "For Wilson himself," writes Thompson, "the establishment of a League of Nations, envisaged as a universal organization superseding more partial alliances and alignments, was clearly the overriding goal. […] It was his association with the League of Nations ideal that kept Wilson's memory alive and powerful through the interwar period and the 1940s. Only in recent years has the promotion of democracy in the world come to be seen as the essence of 'Wilsonianism.'"[28]

It is not difficult to understand the migration of Wilsonianism's "essence" from the one to the other policy goal; both the League of Nations and, more tellingly perhaps, the United Nations, failed to fulfill the role for which they had been invented, to foster collective security as properly understood. This is as an *alternative* to the balance of power, rather than as simply another way of expressing the notion of collective action on behalf of security organizations *rooted* in the balance of power, for instance by an alliance such as NATO.[29] To fail to come up with a replacement essence would have stripped Wilsonianism of most of its normative appeal, rendering it more of a historical relic than an ongoing policy inspiration, a curio along the lines, say, of the Olney Doctrine or other defunct corollaries of the Monroe Doctrine. Thus, it was no coincidence that Wilsonianism shifted away from collective security toward democracy promotion. As a result, another key understanding of Wilsonianism surfaced: cooperative security.

[27] Richard K. Betts, "Systems for Peace or Causes of War?

Cooperative security is sometimes employed as a loose synonym for the vague category "multilateralism."[30] In turn, this latter has sometimes been said by contemporary Wilsonians, such as Anne-Marie Slaughter, to represent the "true" nature of a modern-day Wilsonianism emphasizing the centrality of "common counsel."[31] All of this may be a tad recherché, given that Woodrow Wilson personally tended to rely, as time went on, upon the counsel of fewer and fewer people other than himself and his second wife, Edith.[32] Nor does the irony dissipate much if taking guidance from public opinion is said to be the litmus test for "common counsel," since Wilson was well-known for having great confidence in public opinion—but only so long as it agreed with him.[33]

This said, obvious reasons remain for wanting to construe Wilsonianism in such a way as to apply it to the analysis of contemporary Russian-American relations. Admittedly, holding it synonymously with collective security does not help; nor does equating Wilsonianism with most of the other stipulated traits mentioned above advance understanding. Self-determination, if taken as a lodestar of Wilsonianism, would not have had much of an impact on U.S. ties with Russia between 1991 and the summer of 2008. As for disarmament, it is even more remotely associated with the trajectory of the bilateral relationship since the Soviet Union's disappearance, because while arms-control initiatives were hardly an unknown feature of U.S.-Soviet relations prior to 1991, just as they have been evident in U.S.-Russia relations since 1991, there is no reason for thinking of them as particularly Wilsonian in inspiration—unless, of course, one wants to make every administration since Dwight Eisenhower's day ae whi8 day aeSe9 whr851 Tw[(6.tgs)-7lsBT10.9702 Tm r23 toycl 8y Wilsonian in

diminution—if not outright abolition—of "power politics," as mediated through the balance-of-power system, cooperative security is an arrangement intended to work *within* the balance of power, relying especially upon an alliance, NATO, to effect its

highlighted—dialogue and crisis management.[35]

fellow peacemakers (David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and Vittorio

Communist countries but believed that the situation was nevertheless retrievable

it could logically deliver, and this because the analogy suggested in the heuristic was flawed. How so?

Consider the nature of the defeat Germany suffered in World War II: its cities were in ruins; its leaders were either in their graves, in cells, or hiding in Argentina; and its people were profoundly impoverished, spiritually and physically. Could it be that this "zero hour" of national existence, the famous *Stunde null* of May 8, 1945, marked such a qualitatively different experience from that suffered either by Imperial Germany in 1918 or the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 as to obviate *any* availability heuristic's employment? The answer must be in the affirmative. True, there was at least one similarity to be found between the pair of "postwar" dispensations, 1919 and 1991: the Soviet Union after the Cold War *was* a bit like Germany at the end of World War I, in that it had not been territorially overrun and largely occupied. However, unlike the Kaiser's Germany, which faced the certain peril of an invasion by 1919 spearheaded by an U.S. army swollen to nearly four million soldiers,[52] no one menaced post-Soviet Russia with an invasion, much less any devastating military defeat. Neither did Russia have to dig itself out of the rubble, as Germany was forced to do, after 1945.

This accounts for John Ikenberry's wry observation that "[i]n the years that followed the end of the Cold War, more than a few Russians remarked—only half-jokingly—that reform and reconstruction in the former Soviet Union would have been more successful if Russia had actually been invaded and defeated by the West."[53] Less sardonically, Victor Israelyan observed that for Russia after 1991, there was no equivalent to what the Marshall Plan did for Germany after 1947; while there was, obviously, American aid proffered to Russia in the Cold War's aftermath, it was but a fraction of the assistance that the United States supplied to Germany and other European countries following World War II.[54] With the end of the Great War in mind, Williamson Murray acknowledged that because Germany, however reluctantly, accepted the Armistice and chose not to prosecute the fighting until its inevitable end, there was an undeniable—and catastrophically lamentable—impact upon the country's perceptions during the in

problem with the Versailles analogy, and hence the extrapolated remedial, inheres in its awkward contextual fit, either for the post-1945 or the post-1991 order.

The second demerit of the Versailles (and, therefore, Wilsonian) analogy

anything fundamentally ill-c

are *convinced* that it was America and the West that pushed post-Cold War Russia into a stance of implacable opposition would benefit from remembering that their own argument is resolutely, albeit implicitly, a counterfactual one. For their argument boils down to a simple expression: "if *x*, then *y*"—with the terms here representing the counterfactual antecedent of NATO non-enlargement (*x*), and the counterfactual consequent of Russian liberal democracy (*y*).

Anyone tempted to think that in the absence of NATO enlargement, Russia would have blossomed into a full-bore liberal democracy, can hardly be said to be a committed realist, if by the latter we assume some strong correspondence between theory and reality. Indeed, it could even be remarked of this "if *x*, then *y*" thesis that it truly is, not unlike the Wilsonianism many of its proponents profess to condemn, utopian—and possibly even delusional.

Security Studies, July-Sept. 2015, pp. 378-402; and Daniel Nolan, "Why Historians (and Everyone Else) Should Care about Counterfactuals," *Philosophical Studies,* March 2013, pp. 317-35. For an intriguing application of counterfactual epistemology to inquiry into the causes and consequences of the First World War, see Richard Ned Lebow, *Archduke Franz Ferdinand Lives!: A World without World War I* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).