

Woodrow Wilson's Influence on WWI and the Paris Peace Treaties: Assessing the Impact and Challenges of a Visionary Leader

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Abstract: World War I (WWI) had a big impact on territories in Asia, Africa, and Europe and led to the fall of some monarchies, resulting in the rise of empires like the British and French. WWII broke out despite these changes and established a new world order, with the Soviet Union and the United States becoming the dominant global superpowers. The United States played an important role in ending WWI and later in the peace negotiations through President Woodrow Wilson (Cooper Jr, 2008). In this passage, I will assess Woodrow Wilson's influence on the war aims and the Paris peace treaties.

Keywords: WWI, League of Nations, Treaty of Versailles.

1. Introduction

Since Wilson became president in 1913, Wilson's goal has been to keep the United States out of WWI and to become a peacemaker for other nations. Firstly, it introduces "Fourteen Points" proposed by Wilson in 1918 to restore international peace and focuses on the establishment of the League of Nations in the Fourteen Points, which is of great significance for further strengthening world peace and security. Further, the paper discusses Wilson's international influence, such as the creation of the United Nations and international security agencies. Wilson's impact on the World War went beyond creating the League of Nations. He was influential in negotiating the Treaty of Versailles, which marked the end of WWI. Wilson also played a pivotal role in the formation of the International Labor Organization (ILO). Then this paper elaborates on Wilson's war against Germany. The reason is that Germany adopted unrestricted submarine warfare by attacking U-shaped submarines close to Italy, Britain, and England, and did not spare American ships. In order to protect the power of Americans, the president chose to carry out a war with Germany. Despite declaring war on Germany, President Wilson remained committed to a strategy of peace, advocating for all nations to end the war through equal terms of trade, adjustment of colonial claims, and a League of Nations. After the end of WWI in 1919, the Paris Peace Conference was held in Versailles, Paris. The meeting was held to determine the conditions for peace after the end of the war. At the end of the paper, some controversies about Wilson's foreign policy are further discussed.

2. The "Fourteen Points" Principle and the League of Nations and Its Influence

Wilson is majorly known for the fourteen points that outlined post-war peace. Wilson envisioned restoring international peace through the fourteen points in 1918 (Tucker, 2007). Wilson identified secret treaties, armaments, and interest in the overseeing colonies as the leading causes of the war [1]. Wilson proposed the abolition of secret treaties,

championed the reduction in armament, and controlled the desire to oversee colonies. While making the address, President Wilson proposed the removal of economic barriers across the nations and promoted the existence of a world organization that would promote security for all nations. Wilson's fourteen points also included the establishment of a League of Nations, which was intended to enforce the peace and security of the world. The League of Nations was to be formed by all nations to resolve disputes, prevent wars and ensure freedom of foreign trade (Tucker, 2007). The League of Nations was to be a collective security body that would ensure that no nation would resort to war to resolve disputes [2]. The League of Nations was also to have a charter that would promote economic cooperation between the nations and ensure that all nations, including the smaller ones, would be treated equally. Wilson's fourteen points also recommended the creation of a just and stable peace that would ensure self-determination, free seas, disarmament, the reduction of trade barriers, the settlement of colonial claims, and the protection of minorities (Tucker, 2007). In addition, Wilson proposed that all peace treaties should be open and just and not be imposed on any nation. He also advocated for freedom of the seas and removing economic barriers [3].

Wilson's influence should be considered immense despite facing some criticism. During that time, WWI was the most destructive war observed, and peace was needed. Wilson took the initiative and announced his fourteen points intending to restore peace to the world (Wertheim, 2011). Within the fourteen points, Wilson called upon the creation of the League of Nations, an international body that could help restore peace to the world. The proposed framework by President Wilson created a strong foundation for today's United Nations. According to Knock (1992), Woodrow made a considerable achievement by leading the U.S. into WWI and advocating for the creation of the League of Nations. Creating the United Nations and international security agencies fulfills President Wilson's global vision. Wilson's influence on the world war extended beyond creating the League of Nations. He was influential in negotiating the Treaty of Versailles, which marked the end of WWI. Wilson also played a pivotal role in the formation of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The ILO was established to improve the working conditions of workers and ensure that they were treated fairly. The ILO is still a viable organization today, and it helps to promote the rights of workers around the world.

3. Wilson's Efforts to Achieve International Peace in WWI

In 1916, Wilson tried to convince Germany and England through diplomacy to end WWI. Later while speaking in the U.S. Senate, Wilson talked about his peace initiative to end the war under the slogan "peace without victory." However, in 1917, Wilson was caught in a series of events that turned him from a peacekeeper to a wartime president. The president's position turned the U.S. from a neutral country in the war to a world power (Ninkovich, 1999). Germany had adopted unrestricted submarine warfare by attacking U-boats that approached Italy, Britain, and England. Despite being neutral, German submarines did not spare the U.S. boats, upset President Wilson and joined the war by attacking Germany. Though the president was persuaded to use negotiation during the mishap, Wilson declined and opted for the war with Germany to protect the rights of Americans.

Wilson had kept his word of not engaging in WWI until April 2, 1917, when he asked Congress to declare war on Germany. Though the Americans were not ready to join the fight, it was clear; president Wilson understood the limits of when to engage in peace talks and when to join the war, mainly when the country was provoked. Despite declaring war on Germany, President Wilson remained committed to the peace strategy by advocating for the general association of all nations to end the war through equal trade conditions, adjusting colonial claims, and establishing the League of Nations (Ambrosius, 2002). Other critical areas pointed out by Wilson to attain peace included the readjustment of Italian borders, the creation of an independent Polish state, and the redraw of the borders within the Balkan region. The president's peace strategy won him the Nobel Prize for peace in 1919, as he had worked hard to ensure that WWI ended through peaceful means. He had also been actively involved in the peace negotiations, and his commitment to a lasting peace was remarkable. The president had also proposed several ideas to foster international cooperation, such as the Fourteen Points, which outlined a plan for world peace. This plan included the idea of open diplomacy, freedom of the seas, and the reduction of armaments. President Wilson's efforts were unsuccessful in establishing a lasting world peace as WWII began just two decades after the end of WWI. However, his ideas remain relevant today, as many countries still strive to attain peace through diplomatic means rather than engage in wars. His legacy of advocating for peace and international cooperation has helped to shape the world into a more peaceful and cooperative place.

4. The Influence of the Paris Peace Treaty

The Paris peace conference was convened in Versailles, Paris, in 1919, after the end of the first world war. The conference was set to determine the peace terms after the war's end. Although many nations participated in the peace negotiations, the big four nations, including Italy, the United States, the United Kingdom and France, actively participated in the treaty that ended WWI (Lentin, 2001). Wilson's idea of the League of Nations was among the critical components of

the treaty. Cooper et al. (2001) stated that the treaty included a plan for the League of Nations, as advocated by Wilson, to serve as an international forum to address global issues affecting the countries. The League of Nations was set to comprise an international security organ to address conflicts. According to Wertheim (2012), President Wilson strongly advocated for the League of Nations as it could prevent future world wars. The Paris Peace Conference resulted in the Treaty of Versailles, which was signed in June 1919. The treaty included the following significant points: the reduction in the size of the German military, the payment of reparations to the Allies by Germany, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, the cession of German colonies to other countries, and the creation of the League of Nations. The Treaty of Versailles was meant to punish Germany for its actions in WWI and to prevent it from ever becoming a threat to Europe again. The treaty's main provisions included restrictions on the size of the German army and navy, limitation of armaments, the payment of reparations to the Allies, and the acceptance of full responsibility for the war by Germany. The treaty also outlined the creation of the League of Nations, which was intended to provide a forum for international cooperation and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

During the Versailles treaty [4], President Wilson's fourteen points were highly captured. During the treaty signing, Wilson advocated for the end of secret diplomacy, which resulted in constant disagreements and later wars. Engaging in treaties not scrutinized by the public created a massive problem for the countries. Wilson advocated that ending the secret diplomacy would reduce tensions across the countries, minimizing the occurrence of another war (Throntveit, 2011). Wilson strictly called for an end to armament, a critical problem that led to the outbreak of WWI. The momentum of the war was sustained through the massive production of arms, whereby Britain had a massive production of over four million rifles. President Wilson advocated that national armaments should be reduced to guarantee domestic safety and any instances of war outbreaks. The treaty put severe restrictions on Germany, which had massive weapons [5]. The German army was reduced to one hundred thousand soldiers. Ammunitions prohibited by the German forces included heavy artillery, submarines, tanks and poisonous gas. The treaty members highly supported the advocacy on disarmament Wilson and Germany were given two months to surrender all the prohibited war material.

The treaty also guaranteed freedom and open navigation across the seas, as advocated by the president (Wilson Pierce, 2017). Undermining freedom of movement across the territorial waters was a huge barrier that undermined international businesses and the movement of people across the world. Countries that had protected waters retaliated by attacks to any trespassers that crossed the territorial water borders. The treaty indicated that international covenants could curtail the freedom of movement for the safety and interest of the people. Under the treaty, freedom of navigation was guaranteed across the big European rivers. President Wilson's contribution to the treaty was immense regarding disarmament and free navigation [6]. Wilson was committed to ending the war and ensuring peace reigned afterward. Although the position of the U.S. slightly changed after entering into war with Germany, the fourteen-point speech delivered by President Wilson declared the peace objectives that were highly considered in the Versailles treaty (Throntveit, 2011).

Concerning the League of Nations, the treaty required Germany to renounce sovereignty over its colony states so they could join the League of Nations. Overseas German colonies such as Cameroon and Togo were given to France. Many other reorganizations regarding the overseas colonies were made to end WWI. President Wilson understood that peace was needed, primarily due to the new states that emerged. The president represented the American position on international peace and was committed to ensuring the war ended and peace was regained. Although it was difficult at the beginning, President Wilson remained resilient and believed that for the rebuilding of the European economy, the creation of a powerful league of nations and the promotion of free trade required the signing of a treaty that would end WWI (Hodgson, 2006). The League of Nations was created to help maintain peace between countries and prevent future wars; its main objectives were to encourage countries to cooperate, protect small nations' rights, enforce international law, and reduce the arms race. The League of Nations also provided a forum for countries to discuss their differences and settle disputes peacefully. Germany was one of the major countries that participated in the League of Nations and were required to renounce its rights and sovereignty over its colony states to join the League of Nations.

5. Comments on Wilson's Foreign Policy

Here I add some critics of Wilson. Wilson was full of contradictions. His foreign policy was puzzling. Specifically, Wilson both wanted the United States to continue the special benefits of isolationism and proposed an open-door policy that would integrate the world into a new system with the United States at its head. As Macmillan says, Wilson was full of contradictions and often self-denial. Wilson fought wars in the name of world peace and sent troops to Latin American countries in the name of the right to self-determination (Macmillan, M, 2003). Wilson interfered in Soviet Russia under the banner of liberalism and democracy. Despite proposing the principle of democratic self-determination, Wilson agreed to the transfer of Germany's imperialist interests in Shandong to Japan and to the division of German and Ottoman colonies by commissioner rule by other nations. Wilson proposed the principle of collective security, shocking the once balance of power model, but he had to compromise with the demands of Britain and France and other countries. Wilson's policy was full of contradictions and suffered constant setbacks in its implementation. It was clear to Wilson that the Versailles Peace Treaty could not fully implement the Fourteen Points Principles, and he had to compromise the interests of many parties. The most important and

representative of Wilson's diplomatic activities was his advocacy of the League of Nations, which was an important product of the Paris Peace Conference. Ironically, however, Wilson failed to get the Senate to ratify the Versailles Peace Treaty, leaving the United States itself out of the system it had created. It is also important to emphasize that Wilson was a Christian and his foreign policy was very strongly idealistic. Of all the ideas Wilson brought to Europe, the right to self-determination was so controversial that, as Lansing put it, "it would provoke hopes that could never be realized, and probably cost the lives of thousands, and would be called an idealist's dream." Wilson's vague definition of the right to self-determination has created a great deal of confusion. No specifics are given as to whether the unit of nationhood refers to a race or a territorial area (Macmillan, M, 2003).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Wilson used the fourteen points as the critical basis for negotiating the Versailles treaty. Wilson and the U.S. aimed to end WWI and restore peace. However, due to the warring countries' conflicting interests, the peace treaties' signing required a reasonable basis that captured all the key components. Although the Versailles treaty did not fully capture the aims proposed by Wilson, the main goal of ending WWI was achieved. However, it should be noted that his self-denials, optimistic political views, and contradictions bring potential troubles during practice.

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