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Woodrow Wilson: A Failure of Leadership - A Broken Middle East

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**International Perspective:
Which Leadership Model Works Best?**

**Viewing Academic Leaders:
Organizational Theory and Perspectives**

Demystifying How Effective Leaders Think

Ethical Perspectives of Systems Thinking

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Developing Student Government Leaders**

The Signature of Leadership

Leadership Through Customer Service



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ON THE COVER:
Leader Standing Tall

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Woodrow Wilson: A Failure of Leadership —A Broken Middle East

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"No one in America or in Europe either, knows my mind and I am not willing to trust them to attempt to interpret it"
--Woodrow Wilson, October, 1917

President Woodrow Wilson failed to engage and lead the Great Powers at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, thereby missing the opportunity to influence and shape the eventual outcomes of their far-reaching policy decisions. Had he been more effective there, many of the dysfunctions in the Middle East may well not exist today.

The history of the Middle East is at once complex, contentious, and convoluted. The image of a peaceful Middle East is hard to conceive today. Former president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, wrote, "The Middle East is perhaps the most volatile and coveted region of the world, one whose instability is almost certainly the greatest threat to world peace."² However, in 1914, at the height of a period of international struggles for power called the "Great Game," the Middle East was a quiet and, for the most part, calm area of the world.

It was during President Woodrow Wilson's administration that the modern Middle East came into existence at the end of World War I (WWI) (1918) with the Treaty of Versailles (1919), which dismantled the Ottoman Empire. This realignment, in conjunction with the establishment of the League of Nations, changed the world dramatically as it ushered in a new era of international relations. For more than eighty years, war, conflict, terrorism, and despair have marred the lands that are considered the cradle of civilization. Every American president since Franklin D. Roosevelt, in order to establish America's international leadership, has faced difficult public policy decisions related to the Middle East. The attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001 brought new interest,

attention, and more complex policy questions related to the Arab world in a quest to understand its apparent conflict with the West.

Volumes have been written on the diverse causes of the unrest in the modern Middle East. These range from Jimmy Carter's *Blood of Abraham*, a broad overview of the political, economic and religious climate, to Benjamin Shwadran's notable work, *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, focusing on the zeal for control of oil by the world's great powers, to the writings of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's Islamic fundamental religious ideological "fatwas" (holy orders) calling for a "jihad" (holy war) against the West. There are many questions and opinions as to the reasons for the conflict which are complex and lend themselves to empirical scrutiny. This article explores Woodrow Wilson's concepts, intentions, and diplomatic effectiveness at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Placed in a narrower context, it will examine the ramifications of Woodrow Wilson's foreign policy and actions regarding the Middle East. And, it will establish that Woodrow Wilson's actions, his policy, and his failure of leadership contributed to creating the foundation for the turmoil in the Middle East of today.

Woodrow Wilson and the Modern Presidency

To understand Woodrow Wilson and his policies, decisions, and leadership style, it is necessary to examine his background and the world in which he lived. Wilson was educated, erudite, boldly creative, altruistic, complex, and had a high sense of personal morality. These qualities would guide this minister's son in all he did and the manner in which he viewed the

world. Wilson was a deep political thinker, he was not a career politician and greatly disliked the give and take of political negotiation. In 1919, Wilson's official biographer, journalist Ray Stannard Baker wrote of him, "There is no man living in the world to-day who is such a master of the art of presenting ideas, ideals, arguments...no man more captivating."³

Wilson's political career was very short, having ascended to the governorship of New Jersey in 1910 after being President of Princeton University. After serving two years as governor, he was elected President of the United States in 1912, an election that author and historian James Chace called, "a defining moment in American history."⁴ Chace went on to write of the 1912 election that it recalled, "...the great days of Jefferson and Hamilton, when leaders did not shy away from tackling the central question of America's exceptional destiny."⁵ Wilson was elected in a four-way race, in large part due to a split in the Republican Party when former President Theodore Roosevelt opposed the incumbent Republican President William Howard Taft. Wilson, a Democrat, became the twenty-eighth president of the United States and would serve two terms. Arthur Stanley Link wrote that Wilson, "...was privileged to guide the destinies of his country during eight of the most critical years of the modern epoch."⁶ Woodrow Wilson is considered by many scholars, such as Jeffrey Tulis and James Chace, as the first of the "modern presidents."⁷

The modern presidency bears little resemblance to the one the framers of the Constitution envisioned. The term "modern presidency" emerged as the policy making powers of the Executive grew in a changing world. Throughout the nineteenth century, Congress dominated the administration of government, and the president, with few exceptions like Abraham Lincoln, was in essence a ceremonial position operating in the background. During the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, a stronger Executive began to emerge with the expansion of the president's role in proposing desired legislation and involvement in foreign affairs (e.g. Roosevelt's use of the U.S. naval presence in foreign ports with his "gun-boat diplomacy"). Further, it was in this time that the media emerged and their influence increased, changing how presidents would be viewed and interpreted. Contributing to this, Wilson would be the first president to have regularly scheduled press conferences.⁸ While Roosevelt began the transition of expanding presidential power, it

was Wilson who revised the perception of the Executive. Tulis wrote, "...Franklin Roosevelt... would be credited by many scholars with founding the 'modern presidency,' but the practice began with Theodore Roosevelt, and the legitimizing doctrine was uttered by Wilson."⁹

Wilson believed that the president's role was much like that of a prime minister in a parliamentary system of government and could be as large as the president desired.¹⁰ This notion has not been lost on some of his successors. In 1908, four years before being elected president, Wilson wrote in his revised edition of *Constitutional Government*:

*His capacity will set the limit; and if Congress be overborne by him, it will be no fault of the makers of the Constitution—it will be from no lack of constitutional powers on its part, but only because the President has the nation behind him, and Congress has not. He has no means of compelling Congress except through public opinion.*¹¹

Wilson believed the president had the mandate of the people and that the president was beholden only to the people. He became the first president since John Adams to deliver the State of the Union as a verbal address to Congress instead of a written report. In doing this, he believed himself to be addressing the people, and through the people he would reach and influence Congress. Tulis wrote, "Wilson self-consciously changed nearly 150 years of practice because he thought that the Constitution provisions, though arguably intended to promote leadership through rhetoric, had not in fact enhanced energy in the Executive."¹²

As a presidential candidate and immediately following his election, Wilson viewed himself as a president who was most interested and comfortable with domestic affairs. He was the first to propose a large block of legislation called the "New Freedom," which included measures for labor, reform of tariffs, and protection for consumers. Wilson proposed the legislation that would become the Federal Reserve System and his other domestic proposals included the Adamson Act, the Clayton Anti-Trust Act, and the Federal Trade Commission.¹³

Ironically, it would be in the foreign policy arena where Wilson would have the opportunity to leave his most lasting mark. Wilson had never given much thought to foreign affairs and on the way to his first inauguration in 1913, Wilson stated, "It would be an irony of

fate if my administration had to chiefly deal with foreign affairs, for all my preparation has been in domestic matters.”¹⁴ He was the first president to participate in summits with foreign leaders and he held the central idea that the United States would take over the role of world leadership that Great Britain had held for decades. Once circumstances dictated that he become heavily involved in foreign affairs, he saw his role as the promoter of well-being for all peoples. Wilson conceived the notion of an organization to ensure world peace and protect natural rights that came to be known as the League of Nations. The historian Lloyd E. Ambrosius credited him as being the architect of this international league that was designed by the many plenipotentiaries, and their staffs, to the Paris Peace Conference and was a product of the Treaty of Versailles.¹⁵ Although the United States never joined the League, Wilson believed adamantly in its purpose, stating, “There is only one possible standard by which to determine controversies between the United States and other nations, and that is compounded of these two elements: our own honor and our obligations to the peace of the world.”¹⁶

Wilson became president at a time when the majority of Americans did not realize how interdependent the world really was. He believed that international morality coincided with American liberal values. Wilson wrote that “just government,” which rested “upon the consent of the governed” was not only a fundamental element of democratic theory, but it was also a fundamental part of good foreign relations.¹⁷ Arthur Stanley Link wrote, “He believed that all peoples were capable of self-government because all were endowed with the inherent character and capacity for growth.”¹⁸ From these thoughts came the basis of his foreign policy and his convictions relating to the concept of “self-determination.”

The Concept of “Self-determination”

The concept of “self-determination” was an integral component of Wilson’s vision of world peace. The concept justified the emergence of ethnic and cultural groups and provided a method to establish for themselves their own nationalistic compositions, including self-selection of government form and leadership. The writings of the Irish born, British statesman Edmund Burke inspired Wilson as a student. Burke’s writings on “free government” helped Wilson develop the concept of “self-determination.” Burke wrote, “If any ask me what free government is, I answer that, for any

practical purpose, it is what the people think so; and that they, and not I, are the natural, lawful, and competent judges of this matter.”¹⁹ Although Wilson, as a young scholar, had been thinking about the concept as early as 1897, he first used the term “self-determination” on February 11, 1918 when he stated, “Peoples may now be dominated and governed by their own consent. ‘Self-determination’ is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of action, which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril.”²⁰ In discussing “self-determination,” writer and political commentator Walter Lippmann wrote in 1922 that countries, “...had to meet the national aspirations of each people, and yet to limit those aspirations so that no one nation would regard itself a catspaw of another.”²¹

It must be considered what Wilson meant exactly by the term “self-determination.” His writings seem to indicate that “self-determination” was acceptable as long as it applied to democratic “self-determination.” After the Armistice was signed in 1918, Wilson proclaimed to a joint session of Congress that “the establishment of democracy throughout the world” was the American mission. This policy, however, could have violated the very notion of “self-determination” itself. Wilson’s Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, expressed his opposition to Wilson’s concept saying it was, “a calamity that Wilson had ever hit on the phrase.”²² Further, he went on to state, “It will raise hopes which can never be realized. It will, I fear, cost thousands of lives. In the end it is bound to be discredited, to be called the dream of an idealist who failed to realize the danger until it was too late to check those who attempt to put the principle into force.”²³ Another Wilson critic, economist John Maynard Keynes wrote that the concept of “self-determination” did not make sense, “...except as an ingenious formula for rearranging the balance of power in one’s own interest.”²⁴

Today, more than eighty years after Wilson conceived the notion, the concept of “self-determination” is still discussed and debated as the world, most notably the war stricken lands of the Middle East and the republics of the former Soviet Union, grapple with the problems that affect emerging nations. “Self-determination” is one of the principle tenets of the United Nations Charter (Chapter I, Article I, Number 2): “To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and “self-determination”

of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace..."²⁵

"The Fourteen Points"

Prior to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, where the conditions for peace would be negotiated for the ending of WWI, Wilson delivered a speech to a joint session of the United States Congress on January 8, 1918, outlining his "Fourteen Points" (Appendix I) as the guide for negotiation of "a just peace" for WWI.²⁶ The first five points delineated concepts, including no secret side treaties, freedom of navigation, removal of economic barriers, arms reduction, and "self-determination." The next eight addressed political and territorial issues. And, the fourteenth point called for the establishment of an organization "...for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity..."²⁷ This last point would be the basis for the League of Nations.

Lippmann wrote of the "Fourteen Points" that they represented, "the idea of stating 'peace terms' instead of 'war aims'..."²⁸ There was great enthusiasm for the "Fourteen Points" because everyone could find what they wanted in them. Further, Lippmann wrote, "The phases, so pregnant with underlying conflicts of the civilized world, were accepted. They stood for opposing ideas, but they evoked a common emotion. And to the extent they played a part in rallying the western peoples for the ten months of war which they still had to endure."²⁹ The points could inspire all peoples to develop their own expectations and hopes concerning the future peace.

The "Fourteen Points" were translated into many languages and widely distributed. They were hailed and praised in many countries, including Germany, because they demonstrated a broad desire to resolve conflicts and understand "why the war was being fought."³⁰ They were transmitted via radio, printed in newspapers, and as leaflets dropped from planes and balloons. Ingenuity prevailed when leaflets, "...were even stuffed into empty artillery shells and lobbed over the German lines."³¹ As a result of his work on the "Fourteen Points," and their wide distribution, very high expectations were set for Wilson and he was viewed as the great peacemaker, visionary, and philosopher whose leadership would establish world peace.

While hailed and praised, the "Fourteen Points" were also controversial. David Fromkin wrote that some viewed them as, "...simply a unilateral American pronouncement rather than a

declaration of Allied policy."³² Each of the Allied Powers had their own specific desires and motivations that did not necessarily coincide with the "Fourteen Points." Ambrosius wrote that it was believed they represented a "Utopian scheme" by establishing the vision of a new world order.³³ Further, according to Ambrosius, Wilson believed that the world should be made safe for democracy.³⁴

Wilson, the first American president to go to Europe while in office, traveled to the Paris Peace Conference first by ship, the *George Washington*, and then by rail to Paris. Upon landing at Brest, France on December 13, 1918, his popularity was evident as he received a hero's welcome, with ships of the American, British, and French navies firing salvos in salute and the city was awash with signs proclaiming "Vive l'Amérique!" and "Vive Wilson!" The French Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon, indicating his approval of Wilson's concept of peace, officially welcomed him with, "We are so thankful that you have come over to give us the right kind of peace."³⁵

The Paris Peace Conference

The Paris Peace Conference was convened in January 1919 for the purpose of establishing the conditions to which the defeated enemies would conform at the end of WWI, the war to end all wars. This great international war involved conflicts with and within many nations and it appeared that the entire world had uncontrollably slipped into total chaos. Baker wrote, "The clear issue at Paris was between organization and anarchy."³⁶

The protagonists who comprised the "Big Four" Allied Powers at Paris were, along with Wilson, Premier Georges Clemenceau of France, Prime Minister David Lloyd George of Great Britain, and Premier Vittorio Orlando of Italy. Upon Wilson's arrival in Paris, the leaders of the Allied Powers, principally Clemenceau and Lloyd George, did not greet him as had the citizenry because they did not agree with his concept of peace without victory. Their agendas for negotiations, reparations, and distribution of territory were designed to cripple the defeated enemies, and they found Wilson's anti-imperialistic rhetoric was troublesome. France desired total annihilation of Germany since it feared future aggression from Germany, while Great Britain did not want to lose any realized territorial gains from the war, and Italy seeking greater relevancy in world affairs wanted control over the Adriatic ports.

After months of negotiating and diplomatic maneuvering, the Treaty of Versailles, and contrary to what the concept of "self-determination" called for, the Allied Powers decided how the concept would be implemented. In so doing, they violated the very notion for which it stood. The term "self-determination" and the concept itself were omitted from the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations Covenant. The Allied Powers did not consider their colonies and protectorates candidates for "self-determination" and took it upon themselves to determine the fates of these vanquished nations. In order to ensure their continuing control of territory, they negotiated secret side treaties for those groups considered less desirable or not useful.

There were many secret side treaties, some negotiated prior to the Paris Peace Conference. The Sykes-Picot Treaty, the secret understanding between the governments of Britain and France that defined their respective areas of control in the post-WWI Middle East, was negotiated in 1916 when the war was going badly for the allies and promises were easy to make.³⁷ Later, in a more complicated time in 1920, Britain and France negotiated the Treaty of Sevres, impacting the same area.³⁸ When the Treaty of Sevres was deemed unacceptable and unworkable, a new treaty, the Treaty of Lausanne, was negotiated in 1923.³⁹ Wilson was very troubled by the existence of these side treaties and viewed them as obstacles to the new world order and global peace.

Wilson, expecting the Treaty of Versailles to be based on the "Fourteen Points," came to the peace conference leading the United States' negotiating team composed of four other commissioners, dozens of scholars, diplomats, bureaucrats, and clerks. The other American commissioners or plenipotentiaries, as they were called at Paris, were Colonel Edward House, whom Wilson referred to as "my alter ego," Secretary of State Robert Lansing, General Tasker Bliss, and retired diplomat Henry White. In essence, Wilson had assembled a team of the best experts available to him along with large quantities of reference materials.⁴⁰

In assembling the American delegation, Wilson made the strategic error of only including political allies and excluded any members of the opposing Republican Party. Even his staunchest Democrat supporters had urged him to include the likes of former President William Howard Taft, former Secretary of State Elihu Root, or the most senior Republican member of the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. MacMillan wrote that, "Wilson's selection caused an uproar in the United States at the time and has caused controversy ever since."⁴¹

In leading the American negotiation team, Wilson put himself in a polemical and difficult position, being a head of state while his peers were all heads of governments. This would raise the expectations of Wilson's bargaining strength for many of the interested parties, but in reality would leave him little room for negotiation or maneuvering. On leading the delegation, Secretary of State Robert Lansing stated that he believed Wilson was, "making one of the greatest mistakes of his career and imperiling his reputation."⁴² Wilson made the decision to lead the team for several reasons, the primary reason being personal. Historian Kendrick Clements wrote:

He wanted to be remembered as the author of a new international structure that could abolish war; such an achievement was worth taking chances for. Wilson really believed that he alone had a clear vision of 'a world organized for justice and democracy,' and that the other nations joined to defeat Germany had far less noble aims.⁴³

The Treaty of Versailles officially ended WWI. The "Big Three," Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau, controlled the negotiations and set out to redraw the political map of the world. The four key points of the Treaty were: revised boundaries, the setting of reparations, disarmament of Germany, and the creation of a League of Nations. After six months of negotiations, Wilson signed the Treaty of Versailles and returned to the United States bringing this new document that not only delineated the peace, but created a new organization to promote a lasting peace, the League of Nations.

The Constitution of the United States bestows on the Senate the power to ratify all treaties. There was bitter disagreement concerning the Treaty of Versailles amongst the senators. Many senators believed that Wilson had negotiated a policy of appeasement and would be placing America's power under international control. Others were suspicious of "entanglements" in Europe and demanded changes in the Treaty in exchange for its ratification. Wilson had personal and philosophic differences with senators from both parties that

were never bridged. However, Wilson refused any sort of compromise to gain passage of the Treaty. Ambrosius wrote, "Wilson's intransigence forestalled any compromise between Republican and Democratic senators, thereby preventing them from approving the Versailles Treaty."⁴⁴

When faced with the reality of certain defeat in the Senate, and with control of his own party slipping, Wilson decided to take his plight directly to the people and began a tour of the western United States to promote public support for the Treaty. Americans, in general, had an isolationist tradition and Wilson's rhetoric seemed to answer the objections posed by his critics. Popular support appeared to be growing on his side when his health forced the cancellation of the tour. Wilson's health never returned completely.

Ultimately, the differences between Wilson and the United States Senate would lead to the defeat of the Treaty. These differences would eventually affect American foreign relations in a very profound manner. Historian Lloyd Ambrosius wrote, "Wilson's conception of a League was irrelevant to the real task of peacemaking..."⁴⁵ In the end, the United States never joined the League of Nations and negotiated its own peace agreement with Germany. Over the course of its existence, from 1919 to 1946, the League counted approximately sixty member countries had been members of the League. In 1946, at the end of World War II, the League of Nations was dissolved and the United Nations was created to address the needs of a world dramatically changed yet again by conflicts between nations around the globe.

Concerning the Middle East, as a result of authoritarian rulers, the influence of extremist religious leaders, the meddling of the Europeans, the meddling of the United States, and the violation of the concept of "self-determination," much of the region has become a haven for terrorism and religious fanaticism. Any lasting peace must take into consideration the "self-determination" of those who still struggle to determine their own destinies.

Conclusion and Analysis

Woodrow Wilson, a brilliant thinker, brimming with imagination and idealism, conceived a grand ideological panacea embodied in the "Fourteen Points" and the concept of "self-determination." However, despite his commendable imagination, idealism, and intentions, his failure of leadership, which includes the failure of effective diplomacy and

the failure of trust, is a primary cause of today's "Broken Middle East."

Wilson's noble concept of "self-determination" was not the problem; the problem was how the concept was applied. Instead of allowing ethnic and cultural groups to develop their own identities and destinies, Wilson compromised with and allowed the Allied Powers, most notably Britain and France, to dissect their defeated enemies' empires according to their desires and decide for themselves how the concept of "self-determination" would be applied. In so doing, the policy was not implemented equally or fairly. For instance, colonies and protectorates of the Allied Powers were not considered candidates for "self-determination" and secret side treaties were negotiated for those groups.

Once these new nations came into being, the concept of "self-determination" was abused because the major powers did not relinquish their control, nor did they depart the territory. For example, Egypt became a sovereign nation in 1922, but the British did not leave until the 1950s, more than thirty years later. The state of the region is embodied in the words of author Martin Walker, "Eighty years on, pan-Arabism has faltered, discredited by the recurrent failures and authoritarian rule, and by the rivalries between the various Arab nations the British and the French carved from the Ottoman corpse."⁴⁶

Wilson's complicity is at the root of the failure of effective leadership. His leadership failure is evidenced in several areas: a failure to lead at Paris, a failure to lead in the Senate treaty fight, and his failure of overall leadership by refusing to take advice, compromise, and delegate authority. Leadership is at once an abstract and esoteric quality and ability. In writing on leadership, Kevin Cashman stated, "We see it only as something people do... Leadership is a process, an intimate expression of who we are. It is our being in action."⁴⁷ Part of being an effective leader is having the ability and will to affect policy by negotiation with parties and taking them to the desired destination through logic, persuasion, and compromise.

In Europe, Wilson was initially hailed as a visionary and thus seen as a strong leader. In other words, he was a strong leader as long as he limited himself to expressing high ideals of foreign policy through inspirational prose. Wilson could not master the gritty reality of politics and lacked the ability to influence and

control two masters of the trade, Clemenceau and Lloyd George. Compared to these two, Wilson was a provincial amateur. He made compromises with them which set the conditions for the dysfunctions seen in the Middle East today. By being a weak leader and poor implementer, he failed to control the machinations of Britain and France along with their agendas, with the result being that secret side-treaties were made which cynically corrupted the concept of "self-determination" in the service of national self-interest.

The Paris Peace Conference took place at a time when world thinking had begun to change, and at that time the leaders of the Allied Powers had the ability to re-create the world's political divisions. They, with the possible exception of Wilson, had little understanding of the new world they had entered as the emerging world was one in which people believed they had the right to exist without the limitation of boundaries. As a result, a "clash of cultures" ensued as Samuel P. Huntington later argued in his landmark work, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Wilson, possibly more than any other American president before or after, had the unique position of being able to wield tremendous power and influence in the re-mapping of the world, yet failed by not upholding his own principles.

Leadership is also necessary in bringing legislators together on a piece of legislation. Wilson had the ability to propose and gain passage of large blocks of legislation, as evidenced by his "New Freedom" proposals, when his own party controlled the Congress. However, he did not like the give and take of political negotiation and once he arrived at a decision, he was not willing to change his mind and seldom compromised. Ambrosius wrote, "Wilson stood virtually alone in his adamant refusal to compromise with Republicans to save the Versailles Treaty."⁴⁸

In the 1918 elections, the Republican Party won control of the United States Senate, which would become a key obstacle in Wilson's ability to pass any of his desired legislation, especially the ratification of Treaty of Versailles. Wilson's nemesis, Henry Cabot Lodge, who would prove to be a formidable opponent, became the Senate Majority Leader and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Lodge defined the direction the newly elected Senate would take. Wilson would allow the personal animosities between them to prove to be a tremendous obstacle to any

compromise possibilities or ability to work together, exacerbating this leadership failure.

The Foreign Relations Committee recommended numerous amendments and changes to the Treaty, however, they were all rejected by Wilson. Senators from Wilson's own party expressed reservations that Wilson rejected. He mistakenly thought he could pressure, rather than negotiate with the leaders of the Republican controlled United States Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations Covenant. Link wrote that this flaw, "...revealed his temperamental inability to cooperate with men who were not willing to follow his lead completely."⁴⁹ Faced with an opposition party majority, Wilson mistakenly believed he could take his cause directly to the people rather than negotiate with Senate leaders to gain passage. Of this folly, Tulis wrote, "...Wilson's intransigent refusal to compromise with the Senate...was irrational and was the decisive cause of the defeat of the Treaty."⁵⁰ And, Ambrosius wrote, "The paranoid style of Wilson's politics reinforced the rigidity of his all-or-nothing stance in the treaty fight."⁵¹

Ironically, the Republicans held only a two seat majority. In facing this fact, Wilson could have built his own coalition to pass the Treaty in the Senate, but this would have required some compromise. Numerous changes and compromises were put forward by members of both parties in the Senate; however, all were rejected by Wilson. He insisted that the Treaty not be changed in any way and be approved completely as he brought it to the Senate from Paris. His inability or un-willingness to compromise caused multiple defeats of the Treaty of Versailles in the United States Senate, with the final vote coming on March 19, 1920, nine months after Wilson had signed the document in Paris.

A failure of effective leadership is evidenced by Wilson's misstep in not seeking counsel. Wilson, a loner, remained independent from his advisors and distrusted advice from people with whom he did not agree. He did not have an inner circle of advisors and did not establish a close working relationship with the members of his cabinet. He would eventually shut out even his closest advisor, Colonel House. At the Paris Peace Conference, Wilson overestimated his ability to shape international policy when he bypassed the State Department to lead the negotiating team. Ambrosius wrote, "He used his presidential power in a vain endeavor to reshape the world."⁵² Had Wilson

not been the head plenipotentiary, and remained away from the direct negotiations, he could have taken credit for the successes and distanced himself from the failures in Paris.

Finally, Wilson made a poor political move by not including any members of the opposition party or members of the Senate on the negotiation team. Concerning this failure, Link wrote that Wilson had not lost the habit, "of making his political opponents also his personal enemies, whom he despised and loathed. He had to hold the reins and do the driving alone; it was the only kind of leadership he knew."⁵³

Leadership placed in the context of a nation can have failures. In rejecting the Treaty of Versailles and later negotiating a separate peace with Germany, the United States received all of the benefits it would have under the Treaty, with none of the obligations. If the United States had taken the leadership in the League of Nations, the organization may well have survived. MacMillan wrote, "American exceptionalism has always had two sides: the one eager to set the world to rights, the other ready to turn its back with contempt if its message should be ignored."⁵⁴ Years later, the United States would learn through the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 that neutrality and isolation in world affairs was not a reasonable or viable option in an ever increasingly interdependent world.

Wilson's failure of leadership led to a failure of effective diplomacy. Lloyd E. Ambrosius wrote, "Wilson's failure in the treaty fight left the United States without clear direction for its foreign policy."⁵⁵ Although the League of Nations did provide a framework for foreign relations, contradictions were written in the articles on whether to enforce or revise the Treaty of Versailles. Further, Ambrosius wrote, "Rather than decide in 1919 whether to seek peace through collective sanctions or appeasement, the president wanted to retain both options for the future. The covenant thus embodied his paradoxical idea of 'progressive order' through international social control."⁵⁶ This inability to make a decision contributed to his failed diplomacy. In a situation where taking a strong stance and a strong leadership role using strong diplomatic skills early on was vital to future successes, Wilson wanted it both ways, thus setting a dangerous precedent for future administrations.

The foreign policy of the United States has suffered from an identity problem in that it has had a difficult time in dealing with an ever-

increasing pluralistic and interdependent world. As a result, America has vacillated between isolationism and internationalism. While the United States often speaks of collective security, it has acted unilaterally, at times, in places like Iraq. Each American president since and including Wilson became a prisoner of a world view that fundamentally misdiagnosed the central challenges of the Middle East during his time.

Wilson's failure of leadership led to a failure of trust. The failure of a lasting trust between the West and the Middle Eastern countries can be traced back as far as the middle Ages and the Crusades, more than 1,300 years ago. The failure of trust in the modern Middle East is rooted in how the United States and other western nations have viewed their roles there. Today there is a blend of nationalism with radical religious fundamentalism sweeping across the Middle East. Woven through this lack of trust is the view by many of the peoples of the Middle East that the West only desires access and control of their oil reserves. Oil had not yet become the globally traded commodity that it is today.⁵⁷ The majority of oil traded came from other areas, namely the United States. In 1913, Persia, now Iran, was the largest producer of Middle East oil and in that year the United States produced 140 times more oil than Persia.⁵⁸ Today, much has changed and the largest producers of oil are the countries of the Middle East.

Wilson violated the trust he espoused in the "Fourteen Points" and in the concept of "self-determination" through his complicity with Britain and France, allowing them to make secret side agreements concerning the Middle East and carve it up without regard to the desires of its peoples and countries. Wilson was dissatisfied with this arrangement and, as a result, he created the Commission of Inquiry in the summer of 1919, also known as the King-Crane Commission, named after its leaders, Henry King and Charles Crane. The Commission was charged with the mission of determining what the peoples of the Middle East desired in the form of their own governance. The Commission concluded, "Dangers may readily arise from unwise and unfaithful dealings with this people, but there is great hope of peace and progress if they are handled frankly and loyally."⁵⁹ The Commission's findings assembled in the King-Crane Report were suppressed by the United States government until 1922, after all the negotiations were completed because its contents

were considered "explosive" and contrary to what was decided by the Allied Powers. Had the report been published promptly, America's foreign responsibilities and diplomacy with the Middle East might have developed differently.⁶⁰ Wilson knew through the King-Crane Commission what the people of the Middle East desired. He chose, however, to suppress the results of the study. In so doing, the West--and ultimately Wilson himself--continued to impose and extend its own way of life on the Middle East and its peoples.

The United States had no presence or involvement in the Middle East prior to the Treaty of Versailles and the Arabs did not view the United States as a colonial power, as they did Britain and France. However, with the dissection of the Ottoman Empire and the other decisions made at the Paris Peace Conference, the United States suddenly seemed to be thrust forward to play a colossal role in world affairs and in the Middle East. The last twelve American presidents have made policy decisions, good and bad, that have affected the Middle East and the role of the United States in that region. Each decision has in one way or another contributed to the animosity of the Arab world towards the United States. Although there were many characters involved, Wilson's key failure of leadership set the stage for the policy decisions that affect American foreign relations in the modern Middle East.

Today, the most prominent problems affecting the Modern Middle East are rooted in those decisions made at the Paris Peace Conference and laid out in the Treaty of Versailles at the end of WWI. The list includes, but is not limited to, the endless struggle between Arabs and Jews over land each thought was promised to them, the ongoing quest for Kurdish "self-determination," the assembly of opposing cultural groups that are still struggling to become a cohesive civil society, the establishment of disputed national borders, and the current entanglements of the United States in Iraq. Ironically, Clemenceau perhaps said it best, "...this treaty will bring us burdens, troubles, miseries, difficulties, and that will continue for long years."⁶¹

Woodrow Wilson is considered by many historians to be one of the most intelligent men to ever occupy the Oval Office. He was one of the most educated and is certain to be included among the best of American political thinkers. Although a gifted thinker and conceptualizer, he lacked the ability to implement his foreign

policy. Wilson was elected president at a crucial time in the history of the world when America was coming of age. Its population centers had grown to extend from one coast to the other and it was beginning to venture into the uncharted areas of foreign wars and diplomacy. America, by this time, had established itself as an industrial power, providing both goods and financing to foreign nations. It was an originator and developer of life changing inventions, the land where all seemed possible, and the land of "exceptional destiny."

Woodrow Wilson was not able to make the lasting contributions to world peace of which he dreamed, in part because he could not deliver his concept of producing well-being for all peoples. William Appleman Williams wrote, "Despite the series of specific and general revolutions that occurred throughout the world between his election in 1912 and his death in 1924, Wilson never seriously altered his conception of the world."⁶² Further, Ambrosius analyzed, "The underlying problem of Wilson's legacy in American foreign relations stemmed from the fallacies of his intellectual framework. He hoped to achieve 'progressive order' around the globe through the League of Nations. His conception of international social control presupposed the analogy between history and nature."⁶³ Despite this shortcoming and to what he believed to be the best of his ability, Wilson stood on principle and worked diligently to perpetuate America's greatness and standing in the world. Ray Stannard Baker wrote that Wilson, "...never upon any occasion whatsoever, no matter how difficult, failed to represent America and the American people with distinction."⁶⁴

To paraphrase an earlier quote, the world is being swept by ideological, economic, and political changes today that are so profound there is little hope of controlling and channeling them. The attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001 fundamentally changed the world and further reinforced the necessity of global interdependence and cooperation. To state that current events are a struggle between good and evil is not only naïve, but overly simplistic. Perhaps it was said best by President John F. Kennedy, in his famous speech at American University, "...in the final analysis our most basic common link is the fact that we all inhabit this planet. We all breathe the same air..."⁶⁵ These words apply for all times and can certainly be applied to any foreign policy. Beyond the common links and thoughts lay actions and

policy decisions, successful and unsuccessful, good and bad.

All of the public policy failures concerning the modern Middle East cannot be laid at the feet of Woodrow Wilson. He did have, however, the opportunity to affect and direct great change at a key point in history. Robert Endicott Osgood wrote, "...no President was ever in more complete control of the conduct of the nation's foreign affairs than Woodrow Wilson."⁶⁶ His concepts and ideas were noble and genuine, however, altruistic and possibly unreasonable. Wilson's failure was not a failure of imagination; however, imagination without effective implementation and leadership is a losing proposition in the public policy arena.

² Clements, *Woodrow Wilson—World Statesman*, 198.

² Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 4.

³ Baker, *What Wilson Did At Paris*, 14.

⁴ Chace, "Progressivism's High Tide."

Smithsonian, 57.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶ Link, *The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson*, 73.

⁷ Chase, 1912, 283.

Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 136.

⁸ Link, "Woodrow Wilson," ed. Graff. *The*

Presidents—A Reference History, 436.

⁹ Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 136.

¹⁰ Edwards, *Presidential Leadership*, 70.

¹¹ Wilson, *Constitutional Government*, 70.

¹² Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 133.

¹³ Edwards, *Presidential Leadership*, 401.

¹⁴ Chace, 1912, 243.

¹⁵ Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the*

American Diplomatic Tradition, 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Clements, *Woodrow Wilson—World*

Statesman, 125.

¹⁸ Link, *The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson*,

77.

¹⁹ Notter, *The Origins of the Foreign Policy of*

Woodrow Wilson, 68.

²⁰ Temperly, *A History of the Peace Conference*,

266.

²¹ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 135.

²² MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Chace, 1912, 266.

²⁵ United Nations Charter, 2.

²⁶ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, 258.

²⁷

<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1918/14points.html>. Accessed 11-16-2004.

²⁸ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 135.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁰ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, 261.

³¹ American Experience, DVD.

³² Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, 259.

³³ Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the*

American Diplomatic Tradition, 51.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁵ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 15.

³⁶ Baker, *What Wilson Did At Paris*, 110.

³⁷ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, 536.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 403.

³⁹ <http://www.allaboutturkey.com/antlasma.htm>,

Accessed 11-16-2004.

⁴⁰ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴³ Clements, *Woodrow Wilson—World*

Statesman, 197

⁴⁴ Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the*

American Diplomatic Tradition, 211

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁶ Walker, "The Making of Modern Iraq." *Wilson*

Quarterly, 40.

⁴⁷ Cashman, *Leadership From the Inside Out*, 18.

⁴⁸ Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the*

American Diplomatic Tradition

⁴⁹ Chace, 1912, 128.

⁵⁰ Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 149.

⁵¹ Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the*

American Diplomatic Tradition, 180.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 291.

⁵³ Chace, 1912, 128.

⁵⁴ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 14.

⁵⁵ Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the*

American Diplomatic Tradition, 290.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, 29.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 406.

⁶⁰ <http://www.hri.org/docs/king-crane/introduction.html>, Accessed 11-23-2004.

⁶¹ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, ix.

⁶² Williams, *The Tragedy of American*

Diplomacy, 93.

⁶³ Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the*

American Diplomatic Tradition, 296.

⁶⁴ Baker, *What Wilson Did At Paris*, 13.

⁶⁵ Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 732.

⁶⁶ Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's*

Foreign Relations, 172.

Appendix No. 1—"The Fourteen Points"

I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.

III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.

VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations. No other

single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have themselves set and determined for the government of their relations with one another. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law is forever impaired.

VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.

IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development.

XI. Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.

XII. The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.

*Delivered to a Joint Session of Congress
January 8, 1918*

Source:

<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1918/14points.html>. Accessed 11-16-2004.

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