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## A Man for All Seasons: Woodrow Wilson, Transatlantic Relations and the War against Militarism.

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### Abstract

This paper investigates the role of transatlantic Wilsonian values in the entry of the United States into the First World War. Arguing that the offshore balancing thesis and economic rationalism are not sufficient to explain US entry and we must engage with Wilsonian explanations to understand this conflict.

### Introduction

In November 2016 President Barack Obama and Chancellor Angela Merkel published a joint opinion piece discussing the future of Transatlantic Relations. Arguing that the United States and Germany 'are working hard to ensure that international law and norms are respected around the globe – which remains a prerequisite for stability and prosperity. Our countries are committed to collective defense within the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO)' <sup>1</sup> Now as we mark a century since the end of America's first war against Germany it seems apt to revisit this concept of transatlantic values in the Wilsonian Tradition.

Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war against Germany in 1917 represents the United States' first commitment to a great power war on the European continent. This paper discusses the long-term legacy of Wilson's declaration of war and why we should view it not as a declaration of war against Germany but instead a war against German militarism. It is this paper's contention that Wilson viewed German militarism a distinct threat and one that did not fit with the norms of transatlantic society that had built up in the century since the end of the War of 1812. This paper will begin by identifying these key transatlantic values that were threatened by the actions of the Kaiserreich as it fought the Great War and why these values have more salience than a traditional strategic explanation for the conflict.

### Transatlantic Values

This paper will contend that what we today consider broadly "transatlantic values" are closely aligned with Wilsonian values. These values find their origin in the transatlantic relationship of the 19<sup>th</sup> century especially between the two main Anglo-Phone powers, The United Kingdom and the United States.

The traditional foundation on these values consist of two key pillars one is the promotion of democracy and the second the international rule of law. The democracy promotion element stems from the concept that democracy is the best form of government both domestically and internationally and as such is the interest of the transatlantic region to promote democracy in line with democratic peace theory.<sup>2</sup> The rule of law is also a key

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<sup>1</sup> <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/11/17/op-ed-president-obama-and-chancellor-merkel-future-transatlantic>

<sup>2</sup> For a further discussion of democratic peace see: Russett, B., Layne, C., Spiro, D., & Doyle, M. (1995). The Democratic Peace. *International Security*, 19(4), 164-184., Weart, S., & Russett, B. (1999). A Separate,

part of these values, for a civilized democratic society of states to function rules and international norms must be abided by. Walter Russell Mead in his description of Wilsonian tradition draws on what he calls an “Anglo-Saxon” heritage to the Wilsonian tradition:

*The particular set of ideas with which the United States has been most closely associated, and the cultural stratum from which the United States has been most closely associated, and the culture stratum from which they chiefly proceed, is closely linked to those that informed our predecessor at the apex of world power. In the nineteenth century, indeed British commentators often remarked on the instructive difference between the selfless altruism of British Liberal policy and the gratingly self-seeking activities of their Yankee cousins<sup>3</sup>*

This Wilsonian foundation of these foreign policy positions is important in the history of transatlantic relations as Mead identifies this tradition as a key element in Britain’s campaign against the slave trade. Thus, we can see with the victory of the Union in the civil war. The abolition of slavery becomes a consensus position between the two Anglophone powers. Mead goes further in extending this tradition to Canada and post imperial Britain. With the reform acts in Great Britain extending the franchise in the United Kingdom we can see that there was a consensus by the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that nations should behave in certain fashion, respect their treaties and elect their governments. Given these criteria it may seem odd to use the war against Germany as an example of a conflict to defend transatlantic values. After all the Germany of 1914 was not the totalitarian regime of the Third Reich. It had an elected parliament and had and did not disregard its treaties at the whim as we would see Hitler do in the 1930s. Yet it is because of this pre-war apparent respectability that the American decision to declare war in 1917 becomes particularly important. To this end the conduct of the war by Germany was a decisive element in the United States acting to defend these transatlantic values, Michael Doyle expressed this concept in his discussion of the role on liberalism in foreign affairs.

*Nowhere was this special peace among liberal states more clearly proclaimed than in President Woodrow Wilson's "War Message" of 2 April 1917: "Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power and to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth ensure the observance of those principles<sup>4</sup>*

Thus in this declaration of war that would make the world safe for democracy we can see this as Wilsons attempt to defend the norms of transatlantic values. By using American military power to defeat Germany. This is counter to the Realist logic of this conflict as one of strategic interest for the United States.

### Strategic Factors

In this section we will discuss the Realist analysis of this conflict and that the United States acted not in defence of a Transatlantic values but instead the defeat of a potential hegemonic state on the European continent. Germany had been a potential hegemonic power for most of the Twentieth Century with its high level of industrial development,

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Democratic Peace. *Foreign Affairs*, 78(3) and Doyle, M. (1983). Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 12(3), 205-235.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World*, (New York: Routledge, 2002) location 2581.

<sup>4</sup> Doyle, M. (1983). Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 12(3), p216

stable government, strategic position and powerful army supported by a large navy. The United States however had been able to outsource its containment to the Triple Entente before the war and in its first three years. This would allow the United States to remain the only regional hegemonic state whilst allowing Britain, France and Russia to shoulder the costs of German containment. By 1917 however this changes and from the perspective of the United States Germany looks as though it may prevail. In the event of a German victory it would be the dominant land power in Europe and perhaps more importantly replace Britain as the world's dominant naval power. As the United States, which owed its own success in the Western Hemisphere to the lack of peer competitors and the balance of power between European States<sup>5</sup>. John Mearsheimer contends that 'the United States entered World War One in good part because it thought that Germany was gaining the upper hand.'<sup>6</sup>

In February of 1917 the first revolution took place, although this did not result in Russian surrender as the Bolshevik revolution did later in the year it did show the weakness of the Russian State and its unreliability as a partner let alone a proxy to contain Germany. The battles of 1916 had taxed French manpower particularly at the battle for Verdun.<sup>7</sup> With its two major allies defeated Britain would have been unable to continue to its land war in Europe. At sea the German U-boat campaign was increasingly effective<sup>8</sup> and if Britain succumbed to starvation, France and Russia would lose their primary banker<sup>9</sup> and likely the war.

The Zimmerman Telegram often seen to be the *Casus belli* exposes another threat to American hemispheric security. There had been concern in the United States over German influence in the Western Hemisphere before the war had started.<sup>10</sup> The Telegram below shows three key points that could influence American decision making:

*We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal or alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the*

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen R. Rock *Why Peace Breaks Out: Great Power Rapprochement in Historical Perspective* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) and Sam W Haynes et al *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansion* (Arlington: Texas A&M University Press, 1997). For further reading on Great Britain's attempts to prevent regional hegemony see Ephraim D. Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas 1838-1846* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1910) and H.C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954)

<sup>6</sup> John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York: Norton, 2001) p

<sup>7</sup> Sir Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1962)

<sup>8</sup> Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I*, (Annapolis: US Naval Institute Press, 1994) and V.E. Tarrant, *The U-Boat Offensive 1914-1945* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 198

<sup>9</sup> R. Trouton, 'Cancellation of Inter-Allied Debts' *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 121 (Mar., 1921), pp. 38-45 and Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison (eds), *The Economics of World War I*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

<sup>10</sup> Melvin Small, 'The United States and the German "Threat" to the Hemisphere, 1905-1914', *The Americas*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Jan., 1972), pp. 252-270 and Michael C. Meyer, 'The Mexican-German Conspiracy of 1915' *The Americas*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Jul., 1966), pp. 76-89 and Patrick L. Cox, "'An Enemy Closer to Us than Any European Power": The Impact of Mexico on Texan Public Opinion before World War I' *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (Jul., 2001), pp. 40-80.

*suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, invite Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace.*<sup>11</sup>

- 1.) Germany proposed threatening the United States territorial integrity
- 2.) The involvement of Japan implied a threat to American interests in the Pacific
- 3.) Germany is confident its U-Boat campaign will defeat Britain.

These strategic factors are rebutted by Galen Jackson who argues that “the prospect of the Entente powers’ imminent collapse cannot be considered a plausible explanation for America’s entry into the First World War in the spring of 1917”<sup>12</sup> Jackson also contends:

*Washington appears to have thought Germany was worse off than its enemies, due to domestic shortages and general weariness from the war effort. Thus, in mid-January the American embassy claimed the Germans’ situation was so desperate that even if they were “victorious in a military sense, [they] would probably be so far exhausted as to render a victory barren of results”.*<sup>13</sup>

As we can see it is clear we must go beyond the strategic factors and engage with other causes to fully understand American entry into the conflict.

### Economic Factors

This next section will engage with the economic motivations for the United States to go to war in 1917. David Reynolds writes that:

...with Wall Street and big business already scapegoated for the depression, attention now turned to their role in foreign policy. The 1934-6 Senate inquiry into the munitions industry encouraged the belief that bankers and arms manufacturers (the so-called ‘merchants of death’) had inveigled America into the war for their own financial gain.<sup>14</sup>

Fundamentally the economic argument posits that the United States went to war to prevent an allied default on the loans made by the United States to the allies and particularly Great Britain.<sup>15</sup> This argument was made vociferously in H. C. Engelbrecht’s *Merchants of Death*.

As Engelbrecht argues:

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<sup>11</sup> Text available at <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/zimmermann>

<sup>12</sup> Galen Jackson, “The Offshore Balancing Thesis Reconsidered: Realism, the Balance of Power in Europe, and America’s Decision for War in 1917”, *Security Studies*, 21:3, 455-489 P487

<sup>13</sup> Ibid p483

<sup>14</sup> David Reynolds, *America, Empire of Liberty*, (London: Penguin Group, 2009) p. 354

<sup>15</sup> This line of thinking would eventually lead to the US neutrality Acts of the 1930s see: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/neutrality-acts>

*Gradually other worries began to trouble American industry and finance. Suppose the Germans won—what then? No, that could never happen. We have the word of A. D. Noyes, financial editor of the New York Times, that Wall Street picked the Allies to win at the very start and never wavered in this firm belief. Still, one could never tell. The Germans were making an astonishing stand and in many ways they had a decided military advantage. Suppose the war should end in a stalemate, suppose a "peace without victory" should be concluded? Thoughts like that made Wall Street shudder. American finance had placed its bet on the Allied horse, and if that should fail to reach the post first, the stakes were so enormous that none dared even think of what might happen<sup>16</sup>*

That the Allies could not pay for the war directly and as such would need to borrow the money needed to purchase armament.<sup>17</sup> Englebrecht goes on to argue that although not the only factor “American commitments with the Allies were so enormous that only our entry into the war saved the country from a major economic collapse.”<sup>18</sup> Arthur Link has argued that ‘American material well-being had always depended upon world trade; in 1915 it depended upon trade with the allied world.’<sup>19</sup> It is not only important to note the size of the loans to the Allies ‘\$2.5 Billion between 1915 and 1917’ but that this was ten times the amount lent to the Central Powers. The Allied blockade of Germany was a key factor in this disparity as the Allies had limited the access German had to the American market. Meanwhile British Naval supremacy had led to a constant stream of arms and munitions to the allied cause.

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<sup>16</sup>16 H. C. ENGELBRECHT and F. C. HANIGHEN, *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Armament Industry* DODD, MEAD & COMPANY, NEW YORK 1934 p175

<sup>17</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, Economic Change and Military conflict from 1500 to 2000*, (London: Random House, 1987) p. 346

<sup>18</sup> H. C. ENGELBRECHT and F. C. HANIGHEN, *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Armament Industry* DODD, MEAD & COMPANY, NEW YORK 1934 p176

<sup>19</sup> Arthur S link, *Woodrow Wilson: Revolution, War and Peace*, (New York: AHM Publishing, 1979) p.35

The second factor to consider is the United Kingdom's role in acting as banker to the Allied cause.<sup>20</sup> London had been the centre of the world finance system for centuries<sup>21</sup> and as such had the facilities to support allied borrowing and the UK's financial standing could underwrite Allied borrowing. The United States had long objected to the mercantilist trade policies that had excluded it from colonial markets controlled by European powers. Indeed this was included in the 14 points under Point Three he argues for '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.'<sup>22</sup> This would be highly advantageous to American industry as by 1914 the United States had the highest per capita income of the major powers. Furthermore due to the damage caused to the belligerents' economies by the war the United States would be in a stronger position to dominate the post war world economy if it could prevent the imposition of tariffs by the belligerents. This objective would be best served by codifying it as part of the peace treaty and the United States could only influence this treaty as a combatant.

In conclusion there are clearly economic factors that led to American intervention in the First World War but these factors alone do not explain the conflict.

### Trans-Atlantic Values and the declaration of War

As we have seen above traditional factors do not give an entirely satisfactory explanation for American entry into the First World War. This section will address the role Wilson's transatlantic values. By using this lens this paper will further our understanding of this conflict. This section will begin with a discussion of the role of submarine warfare in this conflict; it will then go on to discuss "making the world safe for democracy".

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<sup>20</sup> John Milton Cooper, Jr, 'The Command of Gold Reversed: American Loans to Britain, 1915-1917', *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (May, 1976), pp. 209-230

<sup>21</sup> E. L. Stewart Patterson, 'London and New York as Financial Centers' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 68, *America's Changing Investment Market* (Nov., 1916), pp. 264-277 and P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688-2000* (Abingdon: Pearson Education Limited, 2001)

<sup>22</sup> The 14 points available at <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=62&page=transcript>

This section will look at is the role of submarine warfare in demonstrating how Wilsonian thinking lead to the United States declaring war on Germany in 1917. This has two elements to it; first that Imperial Germany's disregard for international law and the role this played in the United States entering the conflict, the second how Germany's actions in conducting an unrestricted submarine warfare campaign lead to the view in the United States that Imperial Germany was not compatible with the Wilsonian vision of a democratic international order. As we discussed above Wilson's transatlantic values propagated the belief that the rules of the international law should be respected and are important in maintaining international peace. This section will show that the Wilsonian belief that these rules needed to be enforced are a factor that contributes to the United States decision to go to war.

At the outbreak of the conflict there was an assumption that the war would be fought in a similar manner to Nineteenth Century conflicts. This opinion was shared in the United States which expected its ships to be able to continue the trade with Germany without hindrance by the Royal Navy.<sup>23</sup> We see here the preferences of the United States which was that, provided the United States obeyed the rules of contraband laid out by the 1909 Declaration of London<sup>24</sup>, America's commercial interests would not be infringed by the conflict. It was also expected that both sides would obey the "cruiser rules"<sup>25</sup> during the conflict. As the war went on however it became clear that this conflict would be decided as much by the economic staying power of the alliances as it would on the battlefield. This necessity would lead Germany to the use of submarine warfare and as such is connected with the shift in American public opinion.

Woodrow Wilson, in his declaration of war said that 'the current submarine warfare against commerce is warfare against mankind.'<sup>26</sup> Clearly the sinking of American ships played an important role in the declaration of war by the United States. There were three key issues for the president in the use of German submarine warfare. The first was the rights of neutral nations to trade with belligerents and the violation of international law by Germany. The second was the indiscriminate attack on those Wilson saw to be non-combatants. The third issue was how America could remain neutral whilst allowing the United Kingdom to violate the rules of the high seas but protest so strongly at Germany's response. It is the Wilsonian School framework that gives us the most effective lens for understanding these factors.

As the Wilsonian School sees international law as a key component of the international system, those nations that violate these rules must be censured and if necessary forced to respect the rules. Wilson refers to submarines as 'out laws when used

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<sup>23</sup> L. S. Rowe, 'America as the Defender of Neutral Rights', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (1916), pp. 259-266 and Alice M. Morrissey, 'The United States and the Rights of Neutrals, 1917-1918' *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Jan., 1937), pp. 17-30

<sup>24</sup> The declaration of London was the declaration following the London naval conference of 1908 between the world's naval powers to govern the conduct of naval warfare with an emphasis on the rights of neutrals. For Further reading on this see James Brown Scott, 'The Declaration of London of February 26, 1909 Part 1' *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Apr., 1914), pp. 274-329, James Brown Scott, 'The Declaration of London of February 26, 1909: Part II' *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Jul., 1914), pp. 520-564 and Paul S. Reinsch, 'The Declaration of London' *The North American Review*, Vol. 190, No. 647 (Oct., 1909), pp. 479-487.

<sup>25</sup> Cruiser Rules were essentially a series of customs governing the behaviour of warships and there relations to civilian ships, such as allowing the crew time to disembark before sinking the merchant vessel.

<sup>26</sup> Woodrow Wilson, 'War Message, April 2 1917', *Our Documents*, last accessed July 21st 2013 available at : <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=61>

as the German submarines have been used against merchant shipping.<sup>27</sup> He goes on to argue that:

*...because of the very character of the vessels employed and the very methods of attack which their employment of course involves, incompatible with the principles of humanity, the long established and incontrovertible rights of neutrals, and the sacred immunities of non-combatants.*<sup>28</sup>

These arguments are ones that differentiate the Wilsonian approach from that of traditional realist interpretations of the events. Although Robert Tucker argues that Wilson's belief that international law protected American civilians on ships was spurious at best. He points out that as there would be no way to tell if there was an American citizen on board any given ship and as such this became 'indistinguishable from the claim that Germany could not destroy Allied merchant ships, without first exercising visit and providing for the safety of the crew.'<sup>29</sup> This may be true, but the above commentary from Wilson demonstrates that at least in Wilson's eyes Germany was not living up to its obligations under international law.

The next element of the submarine campaign that supports the argument that Wilsonianism is a real consideration in the United States decision to go to war is the effect civilian casualties caused by the campaign on the United States decision to enter the conflict. The loss of American civilian life was clearly disturbing to Wilson, he called it a:

*...wanton and wholesale destruction of the lives of noncombatants, men, women and children, engaged in pursuits which have always, even in the darkest periods of modern history, been deemed innocent and legitimate*<sup>30</sup>.

This touches on the belief that Wilsonian School is an essentially moral philosophy that seeks to improve the world through the spread of democracy. This morality does not seem compatible with the targeted attack on civilian targets. Wilson argues that these deaths are clearly unjustified:

*The lives of non-combatants, passengers and crew, have been sacrificed wholesale, in a manner which the Government of the United States cannot but regard as wanton and without the slightest color of justification. No limit of any kind has in fact been set to the indiscriminate pursuit and destruction of merchantmen of all kinds and nationalities within the waters, constantly extending in area, where these operations have been carried on*<sup>31</sup>

Newspaper reporting of these deaths heightened the shock of unrestricted submarine warfare, as Gregory argues, 'no person who read of these events could fail to experience thoughts of distress and astonishment; few could avoid feeling hostility for the

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<sup>27</sup> Kendrick A. Clements, 'Woodrow Wilson and World War I' Presidential Studies Quarterly, Vol. 34, No. 1, Going to War (Mar., 2004), pp. 62-82

<sup>28</sup> Woodrow Wilson, 'War Message, April 2 1917', Our Documents, last accessed July 21st 2013 available at : <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=61>

<sup>29</sup> Robert Tucker, Woodrow Wilson and the Great War: reconsidering America's Neutrality, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007) pp. 132-133.

<sup>30</sup> Woodrow Wilson, War Message

<sup>31</sup> Woodrow Wilson, 'Address on Unrestricted Submarine Warfare, 19 Apr. 1916', Woodrow Wilson E-library, last accessed March 3rd 2014 available at:

<http://wwl2.dataformat.com/Document.aspx?doc=30461>



nation responsible.<sup>32</sup> Link argues that Wilson was forced to go to war in 1917 because the assault upon American lives and property was so overwhelming and so flagrant a denial of national rights that armed neutrality was both ineffective and inappropriate.<sup>33</sup> The Wilsonian framework shows that civilian lives of all nations are a consideration in the decision to act in a way these factors are not for the Realist School.

The third factor that the submarine blockade brings to light which supports the argument that Wilsonianism is an important and real consideration can be seen if we compare the American response to the allied and German blockades.<sup>34</sup> We can see far less objection -to the Allies' methods- despite the violations of international agreement. By March 1st 1915 the Allies had resolved to prevent all goods entering or leaving Germany. This was clearly a violation of America's rights to trade non-contraband goods with Germany, although Britain argued that, given the nature of the conflict, all goods would in some way aid the enemy war effort. Further this process was extended to include the process of stopping and searching neutral ships bound to other neutral nations bordering Germany. Gregory argues that this was of 'dubious legality and almost certainly injurious to some American economic groups.'<sup>35</sup> Gregory goes on to argue that even though the U.S. would have had a solid case for objection it made very little fuss: 'the administration chose not to stand up to the Orders in Council.'<sup>36</sup> Tucker argues that:

*...the United States had acquiesced in the British blockade; its protests notwithstanding, it had neither taken nor threatened to take those measures that were in its power and that might have led to Britain's abandonment of the blockade.<sup>37</sup>*

A key issue to address here if we are to understand how these actions drew the United States into World War One, is why the United States reaction to Germany and Britain was different. It could be argued that the methods rather than the ends were the deciding factor. The deaths caused by the German blockade contrasted with the British seizure of property- one appeared callous<sup>38</sup> the other a gentlemanly method to prevent supplies reaching the enemy. Independent of the results it was clear that there were stark differences in methods which were reflected in public opinion.

Others such as political scientist Robert Tucker demonstrate that the responses were different because the relations between the United States and Britain, and the United States and Germany were fundamentally different.<sup>39</sup> Many in the U.S. administration harboured pro-British sentiments; as shown from Colonel House's remarks regarding the Anglo-

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<sup>32</sup> Gregory, *The origins of American Intervention in the First World War* p. 59

<sup>33</sup> Link: *Woodrow Wilson: Revolution, War and Peace* p. 69

<sup>34</sup> Marion C. Siney, 'British Official Histories of the Blockade of the Central Powers during the First World War', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Jan., 1963), pp. 392-401

<sup>35</sup> Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War*, (New York: Norton and Company, 1971) p. 55

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* p. 56

<sup>37</sup> Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War* p. 133

<sup>38</sup> This was demonstrated by the outrage that surrounded the sinking of the *Lusitania* see: Thomas A. Bailey, 'The Sinking of the *Lusitania*' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Oct., 1935), pp. 54-73 and its long lasting effects in: Frank Trommler, 'The *Lusitania* Effect: America's Mobilization against Germany in World War 1' *German Studies Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (May 2009), pp. 241-266

<sup>39</sup> This is not an uncontested opinion for alternative opinions see: David Reynolds 'Rethinking Anglo-American Relations', *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 65, No. 1 (Winter, 1988-1989), pp. 89-111

American relationship to the German Ambassador, in which he emphasized that the relationship between Britain and America 'are quite different from our relations with Germany; that war with Germany would be possible, whereas, war with Great Britain would be more or less out of the question.'<sup>40</sup> Why this was the case can be seen through the lens of Wilsonianism. It is the Wilsonian School that highlights the differences in the domestic character of Britain that sets it apart from Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany. Britain was, domestically a constitutional monarchy. This to the Wilsonian School is an important distinction that sets it apart from Germany.

The use of unrestricted submarine warfare is often seen as the "smoking gun" in the United States entry into World War One and is perhaps the most important factor in persuading the population of the United States of the need to oppose Germany. Although less clear-cut than the attack on Pearl Harbor would be in the next great conflict, it presented Wilson with a *casus belli*. The reason this form of attack was unacceptable can be best viewed through the Wilsonian lens.

The role that the democracy promotion element of the Wilsonian framework plays in America going to war is highlighted by the change in the government of Russia. One of the key changes to the nature of the conflict occurred in 1917 when revolution broke out in Russia.<sup>41</sup> Previously the conflict had been viewed by many in the United States, and to some extent Wilson himself, as a conflict between imperial powers. In March of 1917 the Russian revolution broke out and the Tsar was overthrown and replaced by a democratic government.<sup>42</sup> This event was important to the administration and the Wilsonian School of thought as it was, as Gregory writes, a:

*...removal of the blight that had burdened the Allied cause since the beginning of the War. Joining the Allies heretofore had also meant fighting alongside the most backward and autocratic of all belligerent nations, including Germany. It was now possible to say that the Allies in all major respects were fighting the battle for democracy.*<sup>43</sup>

In a letter written to Woodrow Wilson in 1917 shows concern for the future of Russian democracy 'We must expect that the German Imperial Government will not spare their best talent in men and money in dealing the newly established Russian democracy a crushing blow.'<sup>44</sup>

This was a battle that the Wilsonian School could more enthusiastically take up, as opposed to a battle of classical imperial powers the conflict had looked like at the beginning of the war. Wilson clearly thought these events were of import as in his war message he comments:

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<sup>40</sup> Tucker, Woodrow Wilson and the Great War p. 142

<sup>41</sup> For further reading on the February revolution see: Robert Bruce Lockhart, "'The Unanimous Revolution": Russia, February 1917', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Jan., 1957), pp. 320-333, Michael C. Hickey, 'Discourses of Public Identity and Liberalism in the February Revolution: Smolensk, Spring 1917', *Russian Review*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Oct., 1996), pp. 615-637, David S. Anin, 'The February Revolution: Was the Collapse Inevitable?', *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Apr., 1967), pp. 435-457 and Boris Ivanovich Kolonitskii, "'Democracy" in the Political Consciousness of the February Revolution', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 95-106.

<sup>42</sup> Although this government was itself to fall to the communist revolution in October/November at the time of the American declaration of war all of the major allied powers were democracies. Also it is important to note that the term "democratic" in reference to the provisional government is a liberal interpretation of the term

<sup>43</sup> Gregory, *The origins of American Intervention in the First World War*, p. 127

<sup>44</sup> G. J. Sosnowski, 'Letter to Woodrow Wilson', Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library, last accessed May 1st 2014 available at:<http://wwl2.dataformat.com/Document.aspx?doc=35544>

*...does not every American feel that assurance has been added to our hope for the future peace of the world by wonderful and heartening things that have been happening within the last few weeks in Russia?*<sup>45</sup>

Wilson expressed further support for the change of government in Russia in his correspondence to Cyrus H. McCormick in 1917:

*The object of the commission is, primarily, to show our interest and sympathy at this critical juncture in Russian affairs and, secondly, to associate ourselves in counsel and in all friendly services with the present Government of Russia.*<sup>46</sup>

It is clear that the defence of democracy and democratic ideals was important to Wilson. In his own work on the constitutional government of the United States Wilson argues that people 'a constitutional government is one whose powers have been adapted to the interests of its people and to the maintenance of individual liberty.'<sup>47</sup> In this he uses Tsarist Russia as an example of a state that is undemocratic 'The population which is ruled by a limited class who are its conquerors is apt, if we may judge by the case of Russia, to stand still until the polity rots.'<sup>48</sup> Even if he did not believe in the virtuousness of the Allied cause, it was clear the Allies were the lesser of two evils. The Wilsonian framework gives us an understanding of how these important factors should be interpreted, highlighting the role of democracy and, in particular, Wilsonian ideas in the decision for war.

### What does Wilsonianism add to the debate?

The Wilsonian framework gives us several important insights into the debate. Making the "world safe for democracy" has become synonymous with Wilson and the American declaration of war upon Imperial Germany. The role this ideology plays in this declaration is an important one. This section will revisit the conflict through the Wilsonian framework and show how it helps us interpret the war.

The United States alone, out of all the great powers, had time to deliberate its decision to enter the conflict with knowledge of what type of war it was getting into. When

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<sup>45</sup> Woodrow Wilson, War Message

<sup>46</sup> Woodrow Wilson, 'letter to Cyrus H. McCormick, 27 Apr. 1917', Woodrow Wilson E-library, last accessed March 3rd 2014 available at:  
<http://wwl2.dataformat.com/Document.aspx?doc=36387>

<sup>47</sup> Woodrow Wilson, Constitutional Government in the United States, Kindle Edition. (New York: Quid Pro Quo Books, 2011) p. 1

<sup>48</sup> Ibid p. 17

addressing the question of why the United States chose to enter the war in April 1917, it would be of benefit to us to look at why the U.S. did not declare war in 1914 when the other great powers rushed into the conflict.<sup>49</sup> This section will argue that if we revisit the conflict through the Wilsonian framework it will better identify the changes that occur and weigh their importance between the outbreak of the conflict in 1914 and the American entry in 1917.

The first reason that the United States remained at peace in 1914 was that it was not part of the alliance system that had built up in Europe over the preceding decades. The United States therefore had no commitment to any of the belligerents and no American territory had been attacked. As a result of not being attached to an alliance America had a degree of freedom of action in foreign affairs, and was not constrained by its allies. This is important in understanding why the Wilsonian School can be used as a framework- if the United States had been dragged in unwillingly, then the factors the Wilsonian school discusses would not have relevance. America's freedom of action on the other hand adds credence to these factors.

A second factor contributing to America remaining at peace was that American public opinion did not support entering the war.<sup>50</sup> With the exception of a few, the bulk of public opinion in the United States was to remain neutral. Arthur Link points out, that 'in

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<sup>49</sup> In 1914 the U.S. had the economic power to warrant great power status but had been reluctant to take on the other aspects of great power status such as a large standing military. For further reading on the United States rise to Great Power Status see: Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, and Paul Kennedy, 'The First World War and the International Power System', *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Summer, 1984), pp. 7-40.

<sup>50</sup> Indeed Wilson ran on a peace platform during the 1916 election: see Arthur S Link, *Wilson: Confusion and Crisis*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), Edward Cuddy, 'Irish-Americans and the 1916 Election: An Episode in Immigrant Adjustment.' *American Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Part 1. (Summer 1969), pp. 228-243 and James Allen Beatson, 'The Election the West Decided: 1916' *Arizona and the West*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring, 1961), pp. 39-58.

between the two extremes were probably the majority of the American people and their leaders in church and state.<sup>51</sup> Much of the American population thought that the affairs of the old world were none of their concern, because whichever side won it would not threaten the United States. In the words of a contemporary writer 'the United States is remote, unconquerable, huge without hostile neighbors or any neighbors at all of anything like her own strength.'<sup>52</sup> This coupled with the tradition of avoiding entangling alliances, led to a widespread belief that this was not America's war. Link argues:

The dominant American sentiment from 1914 to 1917 can be summarily characterized by the single adjective, "neutral." Americans, to be sure, had decided opinions and reactions. Probably, substantial minorities were sentimentally pro-Ally and reacted sharply to particular events like the German invasion of Belgium, the burning of Louvain and the sinking of the Lusitania. On the other hand, the sizable German- and Irish- American populations tended to be strongly pro-German, as did many Jews on account of Russian membership in the Triple Entente. Nonetheless, however the scales of American public opinion tipped, the preponderant majority of Americans did not believe that their interests and security were vitally involved in the outcome of the war.<sup>53</sup>

This demonstrates that though there were both pro-Allied and pro-Triple Alliance forces at work, neither of these groups was strong enough at the beginning of the war to bring the United States into the conflict on either side. The shift in public opinion toward the Allies by 1917 was a key factor in the United States deciding to enter the conflict. The Wilsonian framework gives us an understanding of why this shift in opinion was important to the decision to go to war. The change in the perceptions of the war, as we discussed above,

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<sup>51</sup> Arthur S Link, *Wilson the struggle for neutrality 1914-1915*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979) p. 25

<sup>52</sup> Sydney Brooks, 'The United States and the War: A British View' *North American Review* (Feb 1915) p. 237

<sup>53</sup> Link, *Wilson the struggle for neutrality 1914-1915* p. 25

were from that of an imperial conflict that was typical of the European great powers to one of a conflict between the democratic and civilized allies and autocratic Germany. The combination of the change in government in Russia and the events of submarine warfare were key contributors to this change in perception. The Wilsonian framework gives us a strong tool for showing why this perception of domestic regimes is an important one; after all it is the Wilsonian School that has been at the vanguard of American efforts to defend democratic ideals and defeat autocracies with military force if necessary.

To the Wilsonian School, American entry into the First World War was a once in a generation chance to reshape the international system along Wilsonian lines. If other nations would adopt a democratic form of government they would be richer and more successful and their governments would be accountable. It was obvious by 1917 that the international system would not be the same at the end of the war as it was at the beginning. At the end of the conflict one of the power blocks would be defeated and the other would dictate terms to the other. In this situation it was clear that the United States would prefer an allied victory. When viewing the conflict through the Wilsonian framework, however it was vital the United States was a key player in presenting those terms. To the Wilsonian School America was exceptional and it was the only nation that could reshape the international system and bring a just peace to Europe. Again Wilson endorsed this idea in his war message, declaring that America is 'seeking nothing for ourselves but what we shall wish to share with all free peoples.'<sup>54</sup> Lloyd E Ambrosius comments that:

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<sup>54</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *War Message*

Wilson believed that the United States, unlike other great powers, played an exceptional role in world politics. It served the common welfare of mankind rather than its own imperial ends.<sup>55</sup>

Further evidence of this belief can be found in America's status once it had entered the war, as the United States fought as an associated rather than an allied power.<sup>56</sup> This decision is clearly in line with the Wilsonian School's belief that the United States is uniquely qualified to shape a more peaceful world.

In his speech asking for a declaration of war upon Germany, Wilson makes clear that the war against Germany is at least in part because Imperial Germany was an autocracy. 'Our object now, as then is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power.'<sup>57</sup> He also argues that only democracies can ensure a peaceful world, 'a steadfast concert for peace can never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations. No autocratic government could be trusted to keep faith within it or observe its covenants.'<sup>58</sup> From this it is obvious that Wilson wanted to present the war to the American public, and possibly the German people, as a war for democracy against autocracy. This is supported by Wilson's closest friend, Colonel House, in a letter to Wilson saying that:

What is needed, it seems to me, is a firm tone, full of determination, but yet breathing a spirit of liberalism and justice, that will make the people of the Central Powers feel safe in your hands. You could say again that our people had entered this fight with fixed purpose and high courage, and would continue to fight until a new order of liberty and justice for all people was brought about, and some agreement reached by which such another war could never again occur. You can make a statement that will not only be the undoing of autocratic Germany, but one that will

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<sup>55</sup> Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p. 37

<sup>56</sup> As an associate power the United States retained more independence of action than the Allied powers. The United States was not at war with the Ottoman Empire and could conclude a separate peace with Germany if it chose to do so.

<sup>57</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *War Message*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*

strengthen the hands of the Russian liberals in their purpose to mould their country into a mighty republic. I pray that you may not lose this great opportunity.<sup>59</sup>

In this passage House argues that America is fighting for a new liberal and democratic international order. As defending democracy is one of the key pillars of the Wilsonian School, this shows that the Wilsonianism is having an effect on the policy that Wilson is pursuing. Liberal democracies come in many varied forms but they all display several key features of democratic government, such as the constraints on the power of the executive branch and civilian control of the military. If the great powers of Europe adopted these features then following Wilsonian logic wars are less likely.

Connected to the belief that democracy was the most pacific form of government, was the idea that democracies behaved themselves in certain ways within the international system. Germany's behaviour during the conflict had lent support to those who believed that democratic and autocratic governments could not function together collectively. Since the war began many Americans had taken a dim view of German tactics. Starting with the invasion of Belgium and culminating in the U-boat campaign. If we look at these events using the Wilsonian framework, the reasons given for this aberrant behaviour was that Germany was not a democracy. This belief that nations should act in certain ways and Germany was breaking those norms was reinforced by the text of the Zimmerman Telegram. Many were outraged at Germany attempting to incite war between the United States and Mexico through covert deals and promises of territorial aggrandisement.

These kinds of bargains were exactly what Wilson had been trying to avoid in his call for open diplomacy in his fourteen points, and it surely did not help matters that Germany

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<sup>59</sup> Edward M. House, 'Letter to Woodrow Wilson, 17 Aug.1917', *Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library*, last accessed May 13<sup>th</sup> available at: <http://wwl2.dataformat.com/Document.aspx?doc=36121>



had sent this communication using an American telegraph line, which had been made available to Germany in the interests of neutrality. Quinn argues that, although the submarine attacks were the initial cause of the war, 'Wilson's political case for war was the argument that that aspect of German behaviour was merely a symptom of the deeper threat posed by that nation and its desire for the domination of Europe.'<sup>60</sup> If we revisit the collective security element of Wilsonianism it highlights the importance of the rule of law in democracies which in Mead's opinion 'leads to increasing degrees of agreement over the proper constitution and rules of international society'<sup>61</sup> These rules did not allow for the use of unrestricted submarine warfare nor a conspiracy to incite a nation to attack its neighbour.

It is also important to take into account the moral values associated with the Wilsonian School and how this combines with its mission to make the world safe for democracy. Quinn argues that 'Wilson himself believed that America could better attain greatness through the pursuit of grand historic projects for the moral uplift of civilisation rather than through the pursuit of mere treasure.'<sup>62</sup> It was this moral approach that led Wilson to deny that the economic motivation, although real, was important in Wilson's eventual intervention in the conflict. Wilson could see that there was an economic case for intervention but he maintained that it was not part of his deliberation. Quinn argues:

Wilson was generally open in arguing that there was a case based on economic self-interest to be made for U.S. participation. But he always insisted on expressing at the

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<sup>60</sup> Adam Quinn, *U.S. Foreign Policy in Context: National ideology from the Founders to the Bush Doctrine*, (London: Routledge, 2010) p. 95

<sup>61</sup> Mead, *Special Providence* p. 163

<sup>62</sup> Adam Quinn, *U.S. Foreign Policy in Context* p. 89

same time his view that such a justification lowered the tone of the American debate, and exhorted the people to share that sense.<sup>63</sup>

This is a classical position for the Wilsonian School, arguing that the focus should be on how the United States can spread the values for which it stands to others who are denied them by tyrants. If we return to the arguments regarding the different responses to the blockade of Britain and Germany, Link argues that one of the key reasons that Germany and Britain were treated differently was that they had different forms of government. Link argues that 'one result of destroying the British blockade would have been the wrecking of the friendship between the United States and the only other important democracies in the world, Great Britain and France.'<sup>64</sup> Also returning to Colonel House's comment that war was not possible with Great Britain because of the different relationship it had with the United States when compared to Germany. Part of that difference was that the Great Britain was a democracy and Germany was not.

The Wilsonian belief that only the United States could bring a just settlement to the war and this just settlement would involve the spread of democratic ideals was an important factor in bringing America into the war. Wilson had tried to negotiate a peace from the side-lines and had failed.<sup>65</sup> He could bring pressure on the Allies to negotiate but using that pressure could result in a German victory. The only way to exert influence on the peace was to have leverage over the Allies and the Central Powers. With America an active combatant Wilson could bring pressure to bear with the U.S. army on Germany and the U.S. economy on the Allies. Robert Hannigan quotes one of Wilson's advisors:

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 90

<sup>64</sup> Link, *Woodrow Wilson: Revolution, War and Peace*, p. 34

<sup>65</sup> Esther Caukin Brunauer, The Peace Proposals of December, 1916--January, 1917, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Dec., 1932), pp. 544-571

Our becoming a belligerent would not be without its advantages in as much as it would strengthen your position at home and with the Allies, It would eliminate the necessity for calling in the conference any neutral because the only purpose in calling them in was to invite ourselves. Your influence at the peace congress would be...enhanced... we could still be the force to stop the war when the proper time came.<sup>66</sup>

Colonel House shares a similar sentiment in his correspondence with Wilson:

I believe you have an opportunity to take the peace negotiations out of the hands of the Pope and hold them in your own. Governmental Germany realizes that no one excepting you is in a position to enforce peace terms. The Allies must succumb to your judgment and Germany is not much better off. Badly as the Allied cause is going, Germany is in a worse condition. It is a race now of endurance, with Germany as likely to go under first as either of the Entente powers. Germany and Austria are a seething mass of discontent. The Russian revolution has shown the people their power, and it has put the fear of God in to the hearts of the Imperialists.<sup>67</sup>

It is clear from this quote that the role the United States would have in shaping the peace was an important part of Wilson's decision to go to war in 1917.

The importance to Wilson of reshaping the international system is further demonstrated by his publication of his Fourteen Points.<sup>68</sup> Although some of these points are specific to the circumstances of 1914, many suggest important changes to the way the international system functions. These changes are concurrent with the Wilsonian School's plan for how the international system should be structured. It is important to note that the first issue Wilson addressed in his Fourteen Points is how states should deal with one

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Hannigan, *The New World Power: American Foreign Policy 1898-1917* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) p. 250

<sup>67</sup> House, 'Letter to Wilson August 1917'.

<sup>68</sup> Woodrow Wilson, 'Fourteen Points, 8 January, 1918', *Avalon Project*, last accessed May 6<sup>th</sup> 2014 available at: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp)

another. It is also an indication of Wilson's belief that World War One was in part caused by the system of secret clauses in alliances that had built up in the run up to the war<sup>69</sup> and that changing the way diplomacy was conducted would create a more peaceful world.<sup>70</sup> He also addressed the issue of arms limitations treaties that would reduce the amount of arms possessed by nations.<sup>71</sup> Wilson understood however that in an essentially anarchic system, states would continue to build arms and negotiate treaties, often with secret clauses<sup>72</sup> because in the self-help system of international relations there would be no recourse if attacked. Thus Wilson proposed a League of Nations, which would act as a guarantor of security in what would essentially be a worldwide mutual defence pact designed to deter aggression. Smith argues that these points were 'envisioned as a comprehensive framework for world order.'<sup>73</sup>

This world order was inextricably linked to the spread of democracy as Wilsonians intended that the states in the League of Nations would be democratic. Smith supports this view arguing that the 'foundation of Wilson's order was the democratic nation-state.'<sup>74</sup>

Wilson himself states that:

No peace can last, or ought to last, which does not recognise and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the

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<sup>69</sup> Also the Zimmerman Telegram was essentially a proposal of a secret alliance with Mexico.

<sup>70</sup> On this point Wilson was successful as it is now received convention that treaties should be public see G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 72

<sup>71</sup> It was popular at the time to blame the European arms race and the failure of deterrence for the conflict. For discussion of the validity of this idea see: Theresa Clair Smith, 'Arms Race Instability and War' *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Jun., 1980), pp. 253-284

<sup>72</sup> Indeed on the run up to World War Two we see secret clauses in the Ribbentrop-Molotov packed to divide Poland between the USSR and Nazi Germany. Gabriel Gorodetsky, 'The Impact of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact on the Course of Soviet Foreign Policy' *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1990), pp. 27-41

<sup>73</sup> Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the World Wide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) p. 84

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 82

governed, and that no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property.<sup>75</sup>

As we can see, the Wilsonian framework shows us why Wilson believed that the only way to prevent another war was to reshape the international system in America's image. This new international system would be democratic; believe in free markets, and be governed by the rule of law. It would be one in which 'democracy is the most peace loving and only legitimate form of modern government.'<sup>76</sup> Thus we can see that Wilsonian motivations in making the world safe for democracy and the opportunity to improve the international system came together to motivate the United States to war in 1917. The Wilsonian framework however shows us the importance of the events of 1917 and how they presented a unique opportunity to affect the political system of Europe. It was clear that the only way Wilson could ensure democratic ideals were an important part of the peace settlement was to ensure he was there; and the only way he could be sure he was there was as a victorious belligerent party.

## Conclusion

We have seen there were numerous factors contributing to America's entry into the First World War. Once the war began, it became clear that the world economy had become far more integrated than it had been in Napoleonic period<sup>77</sup> and these economic links would put strain on America's ability to stay neutral in the conflict. America's defence of the rights

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<sup>75</sup> Woodrow Wilson, 'Address to the United States Senate: January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1917', *First World War*, last accessed July 21st 2013 available at:

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/peacewithoutvictory.htm>

<sup>76</sup>Smith, *America's Mission*, p. 85

<sup>77</sup> The Napoleonic period gives a good comparison as this was the last major European conflict which leads to American belligerence with a European great power since the War of 1812 discussed previously. Spain having fallen out of the great power ranks by the time of the Spanish American War. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars can be consider to have been between 1792 and 1815.

of neutrals to trade with belligerents during wartime and attempt to maintain freedom of the seas was a reflection of the disagreements that the United States had during the War of 1812. However, the submarine presented new problems for the United States in defending these rights and as the casualties among American civilians began to rise we see the tolerance for these continuous provocations by Germany decline. It is however more accurate to view the submarine campaign as a catalyst which lowered the barrier for the United States' entry into the conflict rather than a deciding factor in and of itself.

The economic ties between the United States and the Allies provided the U.S. with a strong motivation to enter the conflict and secure its investment. It is also important to consider that the submarine campaign threatened to cut this economic link and cause a great amount of hardship for American exporters, many of whom were reliant solely on the arms trade to the Allies for their sales. The sheer scale of the loans and trade make it appear as though an Allied defeat would lead to the collapse of the American economy. It is essential to remember however that the quantities of arms sold would decrease at the end of the conflict even in the event of an Allied victory. The issue of the recuperation of loans and the fear in the United States that if Britain were defeated she would default on the debt was a serious one, especially as the only allied power to be defeated by Germany –Russia– did default on its debts.<sup>78</sup> We should also note that the amount was so high that even in victory there would be no guarantee that the Allies could pay the debt.<sup>79</sup> American economic motivations were clearly an important factor, but it would have been difficult to

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<sup>78</sup> it is a fair assessment that that takeover of the communist government was the most important factor in the default

<sup>79</sup> This is of course what happened when the debt was effectively written off by the Hoover moratorium in 1931. Herbert Hoover, 'Statement on the Moratorium on Intergovernmental Debts and Reparations. July 6, 1931', *The American Presidency Project*, last accessed June 20<sup>th</sup> 2013 available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=22735>

sell this to the American public at large as a rallying call for conflict against Germany. More importantly this argument does not withstand major scrutiny as there is little documentary evidence that Wilson was motivated by this and although there were clearly powerful groups within the United States government that may have lobbied for intervention because of the loans, Wilson was notorious for keeping his own counsel.

A German hegemony in Europe would create severe strategic problems for the United States. Although it remained unlikely that Germany would assimilate the defeated Allies, it would certainly gain territorially and ensure that France and Russia were no longer threats to its borders. Without the threat of the Royal Navy the German Navy would be free to operate around the globe and threaten U.S. interests in the Pacific and South America. This also explains America's entry in 1917 and the lack of intervention beforehand as it was the prevailing opinion in Washington at the beginning of the conflict the Allies would be victorious and as such there was no motivation to intervene. As the situation worsened, America acted.

As compelling as the realist argument is, it is based on the assumption that German power was viewed as the primary motivator for Wilson's declaration of war. Wilson however viewed the problem differently; it was not German power that was the threat to the United States but German militarism and the increasing power of an autocratic state which posed a threat to American democracy much as it was threatening democracy in Britain, France and now Russia. As Woodward argues, even after the declaration of war it was Wilson's:

...continued hope was that once it was understood in Germany that American participation made a victors peace impossible, the liberal elements in that country

would triumph over the autocratic and military clique, making it possible for the United States to be the peace broker between the Allies and a new liberal Germany<sup>80</sup>

It is for this reason that the Wilsonian framework gives a strong augmentation of the reasons for American entry into the conflict. The events leading up to the declaration of war had persuaded Wilson that Germany as it was constituted could not be trusted as a partner because of its domestic political character. Further he had decided that the only way to prevent another conflict was to encourage the spread of democracies, which in his opinion were more peaceful. It is for this reason that the Wilsonian School takes his name. It is the conviction that the internal political organisation of a state does affect international relations and that in the long run you could only trust democratic governments that formed a core part of this ideology. Ensuring that democracy was the dominant form of government in the international system and the post war world would be one that was to America's liking could only be done with the defeat of Germany. It is because the Allies appeared unable to do this in 1917, due to battlefield events and the risk of losing access to U.S. supplies caused by the submarine campaign. It was for these reasons that direct American intervention was the only option left to Wilson, particularly if he wanted to see a peace which reshaped the international system along the lines Wilsonians had envisaged. These considerations must be taken seriously if we are to gain a complete understanding of the conflict.

In the eyes of Wilsonians the only world in which the United States could be safe and a long-term peace established was one in which militarism was defeated and that was safe for democracy. The belief that only the United States could bring about "a world safe for

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<sup>80</sup> David R Woodward, *Trial by Friendship: Anglo-American relations 1917-1918* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993) p. 80



democracy”, that without American guidance and intervention this opportunity to make an inherently Wilsonian world would be lost clearly had an effect on Wilson’s decision to go to war. By using the Wilsonian framework we can understand why Wilsonian considerations have a real effect on taking the United States to war in 1917. Thus the United States went to war because ‘God helping her, she can do no other’<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *War Message*