

## Introduction

### Woodrow Wilson, the Bush Administration, and the Future of Liberal Internationalism

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**W**as George Bush the heir of Woodrow Wilson? This is a question of some importance. In the years since September 11, the Bush administration pursued one of the most controversial foreign policies in American history. It articulated a sweeping new doctrine of national security based on provocative ideas about American global dominance, the preventive use of force, coalitions of the willing, and the struggle between liberty and evil. In the spring of 2003, this doctrine provided the intellectual backdrop for the invasion of Iraq—a costly and contested war that has now gone on longer than America’s military involvement in World War II. As the invasion turned into a protracted war, the Bush administration increasingly invoked liberal internationalist ideas to justify its actions. In his now famous Second Inaugural address, George W. Bush stood on the steps of the U.S. Capitol and proclaimed that “We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands.” The echoes of Woodrow Wilson and the Cold War liberal internationalism of Truman and Kennedy were unmistakable. Bush wanted Iraq to be seen ostensibly as part of America’s historic commitment—reaching back to Wilson—to advance the cause of freedom and democracy worldwide.

But is this true? Did Bush foreign policy reflect continuity with America’s liberal internationalist past or a radical break with it?

As the Iraq war has turned into a crisis of global significance, answers to this question become critical because we want to identify the causes of this debacle. We want to know not just “who” is responsible for the Iraq

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war but “what” is responsible—“what” in the sense of ideas and ideological impulses. Did Bush foreign policy—and the Iraq war in particular—grow out of the Wilsonian tradition or was it actually an aberration or even the antithesis of this tradition? This is another way of asking if liberals share the blame for the Iraq war. After all, many liberals did in fact support the invasion. Was the Iraq war an outgrowth—at least indirectly—of an evolved Wilsonian worldview that is widely shared across the political spectrum in America, or was American foreign policy hijacked by a group of ideological outliers who hid behind Wilsonian ideas but were ultimately wielding a very different vision of America and the world?<sup>1</sup>

The essays in this book debate these questions.<sup>2</sup> Tony Smith argues that the Bush administration and the neoconservative architects of the Iraq war were the natural heirs to the Wilsonian tradition. Wilson and post-1945 liberal internationalists blazed a trail that Bush followed. In this view, it is America’s commitment to promote democracy worldwide—a sort of liberal imperial ambition—that is at the core of Wilsonianism, and it was the animating vision behind the Bush Doctrine. Thomas Knock and Anne-Marie Slaughter disagree, each arguing that the Wilsonian vision was not directly concerned with the spread of democracy but rather with the building of a cooperative and rule-based international order—an idea that the Bush administration actively resisted. Knock emphasizes the centrality of the League of Nations itself—the embodiment of conflict resolution and the collective security idea—to Wilson’s own conception of enlightened international order. Slaughter emphasizes the inherent multilateralism of the Wilsonian vision. For Tony Smith, the Bush administration’s foreign policy was a natural extension of the ideas that liberal internationalists have developed over the decades, including in the 1990s by the Clinton administration. For Knock and Slaughter, the Wilsonian tradition and postwar liberal internationalism are about building rules and institutions that advance collective security and cooperation among democracies.

This debate is joined on five key questions. One question is about the actual character and logic of the Bush foreign policy “project.” Was it really about the spread of freedom and democracy—a goal to be pursued when necessary by the force of arms? Or was it about something else, a sort of neoimperial effort to assert American global rule in which

democracy promotion is decidedly less important, perhaps even a sort of fig leaf to cover more hard-nosed geopolitical ambitions? Was the Iraq war really pursued as part of a global campaign to spread democracy and transform the Middle East, or was this a secondary rationale that was emphasized only after the war faltered?

The second question is about Wilsonianism and its essential logic. What precisely was Wilson's vision? How much was the global spread of democracy at the heart of Woodrow Wilson's approach to international relations? Is the promotion of democracy the cutting edge of Wilsonianism, or is it international law and collective security? Wilson clearly believed that a world—or at least a core grouping—of mature democracies was a necessary feature of a peaceful and cooperative international order. But how important was the promotion of democracy—and what role did Wilson see for the use of force and regime change in the promotion of democracy? Likewise, was multilateralism—embodied in his beloved League of Nations—simply a means to an end for Wilson or was multilateralism an end in itself, the indispensable essence of the new system of liberal global order that Wilson sought? If the United States abandons multilateralism in favor of the unilateral and unfettered use of American power to foster democracy worldwide, is this simply taking Wilsonianism, as Henry Kissinger argues, “to its ultimate conclusion,” or is it a deep violation of the letter and spirit of the Wilsonian tradition?<sup>3</sup>

Third, how has liberal internationalism evolved since the days of Woodrow Wilson? The liberal internationalist tradition has not stood still over the course of the twentieth century; it has taken on new ideas and adapted to shifting global realities, particularly in the early decades after World War II and again in the 1990s. During the Cold War, a wider array of institutions was seen as necessary for the progressive governance of world order, and America's role in the running of the system also expanded. The postwar human rights revolution also expanded the commitments and obligations of the international community, loosening the norms of state sovereignty and nonintervention. By the late 1990s, expansive notions of liberal interventionism had emerged—pursued under the auspices of the United Nations or by the United States as the “indispensable” nation. The question, then, is whether this evolved liberal internationalism or what Tony Smith calls *neoliberalism*—which is more encompassing and

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interventionist than the original Wilsonian vision—cleared the way and set the stage for the Bush security doctrine.

Fourth, does liberal internationalism have within it the principled and institutional safeguards to prevent liberal imperialism? There are few observers today who do not think moments arise when the international community—or, if necessary, the Western democracies—should intervene in troubled countries to prevent genocide, alleviate humanitarian crises, and thwart transnational terrorists. There is also a good deal of support across the political spectrum for international assistance in support of struggling democracies. But how do these Western democracies distinguish between enlightened and legitimate interventions and liberal imperialism? Tony Smith argues that the contemporary “neoliberal” incarnation of liberal internationalism is a slippery slope for American policy makers, built on optimistic assumptions about democracy promotion and peace, that leads inevitably to imperialist adventures. There is much to be admired in the Wilsonian tradition, Smith asserts, but the problem is that it cannot contain its own excesses. In contrast, Thomas Knock and Anne-Marie Slaughter argue that Woodrow Wilson’s original conception of liberal international order—in which member nations would consult, cooperate, and constrain one another through a sort of “international common counsel”—provides the corrective mechanisms to prevent abuses.

Finally, how relevant is the Wilsonian tradition for the twenty-first century? What the essays agree on is that liberal internationalism is in crisis today—or at least it stands at an intellectual and political juncture—and the direction of American foreign policy after Bush hangs in the balance. Whether Smith is correct or Knock and Slaughter are correct, all agree that the Iraq war has put in jeopardy America’s long commitment to some form of liberal internationalism or another. At one level, the crisis of liberal internationalism is political—endangered by a domestic and global backlash against the Iraq war and the perceived dangers and failures of Bush administration foreign policy. Bush, at least to some extent, has wrapped himself in Wilsonian clothing and so—even if he has not appropriated the full set of liberal internationalist ideas and even if his embrace of these ideas, such as they are, is only cynical—the liberal internationalist agenda is in trouble. By association, the crisis of Bush foreign policy has become a crisis of liberal internationalism. Thus the political question is

about how liberal internationalism reconstitutes and asserts itself in the post-Bush era.

But there are also deeper intellectual questions about the liberal international “project” as such. These are questions about how the international community actually makes good on its commitments to support democracy and human rights around the world. The United States has the military power to act on behalf of the international community, but it alone does not have the legitimacy. As Slaughter suggests, the problem is the weakness of the authority structures at the global level to carry out evolving liberal international goals. What the essays in this volume make clear is that there are really no good options for international order other than to try to rebuild multilateral institutions and strengthen cooperative mechanisms to tackle twenty-first-century global problems. In a fundamental sense, there is no turning back to pre-Wilsonian ideas about international order, such as those associated with the old classical balance of power system. For better or worse, we are all Wilsonians now.

In this introduction, I will set out some orienting ideas about these five questions—and thereby set the stage for the essays that follow.

### **George W. Bush’s Foreign Policy and Liberal Internationalism**

The Bush administration did herald a remarkable turn in American foreign policy: a conservative American president—perhaps the most conservative in the postwar era—who campaigned for office seeking a return to a “realist” philosophy of foreign policy but who, in the course of events, invoked liberal internationalist ideas to justify a controversial war and an expansive global agenda.

In one sense, this might not be surprising. American presidents from FDR and Truman to Kennedy and Reagan to Clinton have made the championing of democracy and freedom a centerpiece of their foreign policy. At the very outset of the Cold War, President Truman called on the United States to “support free peoples who are resisting subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” President Kennedy proclaimed in his inaugural address that America “shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in

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order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” In his 1982 speech before the British Parliament, President Reagan portrayed the struggle for liberty and democracy as the central drama of a bloody twentieth century: “Let us now begin a major effort to secure the best—a crusade for freedom that will engage the faith and fortitude of the next generation. For the sake of peace and justice, let us move toward a world in which all people are at least free to determine their own destiny.” In the aftermath of the Cold War, President Clinton made “enlargement” of the democratic world America’s guiding goal.

Indeed, the history of American diplomacy in the twentieth century is the repeated encounter of American liberal ideas with the tough and often unyielding realities of the wider world. Across the decades, these ideas continue to find their way into American diplomacy.<sup>4</sup> No less than Henry Kissinger—an icon of the realist alternative to Wilsonianism—concedes that Wilsonianism is the dominant tradition of American foreign policy. “Though Wilson could not convince his own country of its merit, the idea lived on. It is above all to the drumbeat of Wilsonian idealism that American foreign policy has marched since his watershed presidency and continues to march to this day.”<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, the Bush administration’s embrace of Wilsonian ideas is actually quite surprising. President Bush brought to office the rhetoric of a traditional realist. His national security advisor and future secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, had famously written during the 2000 presidential campaign that a Republican administration would return foreign policy to its traditional emphasis on the management of great power relations and the realist pursuit of the national interest.<sup>6</sup> Candidate Bush himself had argued that, “I don’t think our troops ought to be used for what’s called nation-building. I think our troops ought to be used to fight and win war.”<sup>7</sup> Three years later, Bush would be engaged in the most ambitious nation-building experiment since the 1940s, asserting that bringing democracy to Iraq and the Middle East was critical to world peace and American national security.<sup>8</sup>

Bush foreign policy passed through several phases. The early “realist” emphasis of the Bush administration was matched with a resistance to the liberal multilateral emphasis of the Clinton years. This was signaled early in the administration by its resistance to a wide array of international

agreements, including the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Germ Weapons Convention, and other arms control agreements. It also unilaterally withdrew from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which many experts regard as the cornerstone of modern arms control agreements. Unilateralism, of course, is not a new feature of American foreign policy. In every historical era, the United States has shown a willingness to reject treaties, violate rules, ignore allies, and use military force on its own. But many observers saw the unilateralism of the Bush administration as something much more sweeping—not an occasional ad hoc policy decision but a new strategic orientation or what one pundit touts as the “new unilateralism.”<sup>9</sup>

The most systematic statement of Bush strategic thinking came after the September 11 attacks with the 2002 National Security Doctrine and the Iraq war, articulating a vision of America as a unipolar state positioned above and beyond the rules and institutions to the global system, providing security and enforcing order. It was a strategy of global rule in which the United States would remain a military power in a class by itself, thereby “making destabilizing arms races pointless and limiting rivalry to trade and other pursuits.”<sup>10</sup> American preeminent power would, in effect, put an end to five centuries of great power rivalry. In doing so, it would take the lead in identifying and attacking threats—preemptively if necessary. America was providing the ultimate global public good. In return, the United States would ask to be less encumbered by rules and institutions of the old order. It would not sign the land mine treaty because American troops were uniquely at risk in war zones around the world. It would not sign the ICC treaty because Americans would be uniquely at risk of political prosecutions. In effect, the United States was to become the unipolar provider of global security and order.

The leading edge of this new conception of America’s role and rule in the world concerned the use of force. The Bush administration’s security doctrine was new and sweeping. The United States asserted the right to use force anywhere in the world against “terrorists with global reach.” It would do so largely outside the traditional alliance system through coalitions of the willing. The United States would take “anticipatory action” when it determined the use of force was necessary. Because such action would be taken to oppose terrorists or overthrow despotic regimes, it

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would be self-legitimizing. Countries were either “with us or against us,” or as Bush announced, “no nation can be neutral in this conflict.” Moreover, this new global security situation was essentially permanent, not just a temporary emergency. There could be no final victory or peace settlement in this new war, so there would be no return to normality.<sup>11</sup>

The Bush administration was, in effect, announcing unilaterally the new rules of the global security order. It was not seeking a new global consensus on the terms of international order and change, and it was not renegotiating old bargains. The United States was imposing the rules of the new global order, rules that would be ratified not by the support of others but by the lurking presence of American power. This grand strategic move was a more profound shift than is generally appreciated. The Bush administration was not simply acting a bit more unilateral than previous administrations. In rhetoric, doctrine, and ultimately in the Iraq war, the United States was articulating a new logic of global order. The old liberal hegemonic rules, institutions, and bargains were giving way to new American-imposed global arrangements.

The grandiosity of the Bush vision—as articulated in the 2002 National Security Strategy—had elements of the “one-world” vision of Woodrow Wilson. The first page of the Bush strategy document proclaims: “Today, the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence. In keeping with our heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press unilateral advantage. We seek instead to create a balance-of-power that favors human freedom.” American dominance would be put in the service of ending arms races and centuries of great power rivalries. The world would be united under American leadership. As Fareed Zakaria noted at the time: “It is a breathtaking statement, promising that American power will transform international politics itself, making the millennia-old struggle over national security obsolete. In some ways, it is the most Wilsonian statement any President has made since Wilson himself, echoing his pledge to use American power to create a ‘universal dominion of right.’”<sup>12</sup>

The Bush administration’s vision of a world order favoring freedom and protected by American power was the backdrop for the Iraq war and the promulgation of a “global war on terror.” Initially, this war on terror was aimed at an enemy that was “evil” and who “hated us for who we



were.” But as the Iraq war turned into a protracted and costly struggle, both the rationale for the American presence in Iraq and the aim of the war on terrorism shifted substantially. The Iraq war was less about relinquishing Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction than about bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East. Likewise, the war on terrorism slowly became less a battle against evil than a struggle to overturn tyranny. This was the theme of Bush’s Second Inaugural address, in which the president said that only the “force of human freedom” could “break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and the tolerant . . .” The underlying argument was given more elaboration several weeks later in Bush’s State of the Union address. “In the long run,” he said, “the peace we seek will only be achieved by eliminating the conditions that feed radicalism and ideologies of murder. If whole regions of the world remain in despair and grow in hatred, they will be the recruiting grounds for terror, and that terror will stalk America.”<sup>13</sup>

The Bush administration had moved from fighting “evil” to combating the socioeconomic conditions that encouraged terrorism. The implication was that the United States would not just need to use military force to destroy terrorists but to engage in a long-term transformation agenda aimed at overturning tyranny and spreading freedom and democracy. Democracy promotion and American national security were one and the same. This new emphasis on ending tyranny fit with the larger global role of the United States. It would not merely be the world’s policeman; it would be the vanguard force that would extend the reach of liberty and democracy into troubled regions. America was doing the world a favor by taking the lead—but its mission was tied directly to creating a safer and more secure environment for the United States. In effect, America would not be safe until the world was fully democratic. As Robert Jervis has noted, Bush was going beyond the Wilsonian vision. Woodrow Wilson wanted to make the world safe for democracy. George Bush wanted to “make the world democratic so the United States could be safe.”<sup>14</sup> In effect, Bush was pessimistic that democracy will triumph over tyranny without the exertion of American power—including use of force—and optimistic that the resulting democratic transitions will create the conditions for stable peace.

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Taken together, the Bush administration advanced a set of ideas about American dominance, security threats, political transformation, and the governance of international order. Many observers see echoes of Woodrow Wilson in the vision of a unified world order organized around democracies and inspired by American ideals. Others also see aspects of Wilsonianism in the emphasis on the promotion of democracy and active efforts to speed the forces of history toward a triumph of Western institutions worldwide. But we need to look more closely at the ideas of Woodrow Wilson and the evolution of liberal internationalism during the twentieth century.

### The Wilsonian Tradition in American Foreign Policy

Woodrow Wilson had a grand liberal vision of world order, but, ironically, he did not bring a developed view of world affairs or an ambitious foreign policy agenda to his presidency in 1913. Nor did he expect to be consumed by foreign affairs. “It would be the irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs,” is what he told a Princeton University colleague before he went off to Washington to take the oath of office.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, Wilson became the founding father of the liberal tradition of American foreign affairs. He did it initially in speeches—speeches during the period of American neutrality and, later, in his justification of war with Germany. It was in a speech before a joint session of Congress in the spring of 1917 that Wilson declared that war against Germany was necessary so the world could be “made safe for democracy.” Indeed the entering intellectual wedge of Wilson’s liberal vision was the conviction—felt most emphatically about Germany—that the internal characteristics of states are decisive in matters of war and peace. Autocratic and militarist states make war; democracies make peace. In retrospect, this is the cornerstone of Wilsonianism and, more generally, the liberal international tradition.

Wilson’s famous Fourteen Points speech to Congress, delivered on 8 January 1918, is arguably the most important statement of American foreign policy in the twentieth century. It was Wilson’s statement of American war aims, but it was also a blueprint to reorganize world politics. The

actual drafting of the speech occurred on 5 January 1918, at the White House when Wilson and Colonel House hammered it into shape. Colonel House records in his diary: “We actually got down to work at half past ten, and finished remaking the map of the world, as we would have it, by half past twelve-o’clock.”<sup>16</sup> The Wilsonian tradition of American foreign policy was born.

Six ideas make up Wilsonianism. First, the foundation of a peaceful order must be built on a community of democratic states. War was the product of antiquated social systems. Accountable governments that respect the rule of law are essential building blocks of a peaceful and just world order. As Wilson articulated the idea: “A steadfast concert of peace can never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations. No autocratic nation could be trusted to keep faith within it or observe its covenants. . . . Only free peoples can hold their purpose and their honor steady.” Democratic states are not just less likely to go to war with one another, they also have capacities to engage in more elaborate and far-reaching forms of cooperation. On 4 July 1918, Wilson went to Mount Vernon and described his vision of postwar world order: “What we seek is the reign of law, based on the consent of the governed and sustained by the organized opinion of mankind.”

Second, free trade and socioeconomic exchange have a modernizing and civilizing effect on states, undercutting tyranny and oligopoly and strengthening the fabric of international community. This was the third of Wilson’s fourteen points: “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.” Wilson was simply bringing forward the well-understood idea that trade had a positive impact on relations among states, promoting prosperity and encouraging commitment to peaceful, rule-based relations among nations.

Third, international law and international bodies of cooperation and dispute settlement also have a modernizing and civilizing effect on states, promoting peace and strengthening the fabric of international community. As Wilson put it, “the same law that applies to individuals applies to nations.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, if Wilson championed a world ordered by international law, he had a very nineteenth-century view of international law. That is,

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Wilson did not see international law primarily as formal, legal-binding commitments that transferred sovereignty upward to international or supranational authorities. International law had more of a socializing dynamic, creating norms and expectations that states would slowly come to embrace as their own. As Thomas Knock notes: “Wilson emphasized that international law actually was ‘not made,’ as such. Rather, it was the result of organic development—‘a body of abstract principles founded upon long established custom.’”<sup>18</sup>

Wilson did not see the great liberal “project” involving a deep transformation of states themselves as sovereign legal units. States would just act better, which for Wilson meant they would act in less selfish and nationalist ways. So international laws and the systems of collective security anchored in the League of Nations would provide a socializing role, gradually bringing states into a “community of power.”

Fourth, a stable and peaceful order must be built around this “community of power.” This was a new concept that Wilson introduced by which he essentially meant collective security, a system of peace sustained by commitments to arms control and disarmament, self-determination, and freedom of the seas. The embodiment of this notion was to be the League of Nations, or as Wilson urged in the last of his Fourteen Points: “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.” Despite the vagueness of the notion of a “community of power,” Wilson was clear that this new international creation would replace older forms of order based on the balance of power, military rivalry, and alliances. In the Wilsonian view, power and security competition would be decomposed and replaced by a community of nations.

Fifth, these conditions—democracy, trade, law, collective security—were possible because the world was moving in a progressive and modernizing direction. A “new order of things” was emerging. The world could be made anew. The old world of autocracy, militarism, and despotism could be overturned and a new world of democracy and rule of law was over the horizon. America had a leading role to play in this progressive world-historical drama, but the forces of history were already moving the world in this direction.

Wilson's proposals at Versailles were premised on a belief that the world was in the midst of a major democratic revolution. The crowds who cheered him in Europe in the winter of 1918/19 seemed to be confirmation of this fast-developing global revolution. Russia's revolution was initially seen in this light. With the assumption that Europe and the wider world would embrace American democratic principles, Wilson could pass over otherwise thorny issues of the postwar settlement. His view that a democratic revolution was gaining strength—not an altogether silly idea when he headed for Paris in December 1918—meant that history was on his side and its forces would bring leaders to power in Europe who would buy into his new vision. Alas, in retrospect, the winter of 1918/19 was a democratic high tide rather than a gathering flood—at least as world-historical events mattered for the peace treaty and League of Nations.<sup>19</sup> But Wilson would not be surprised that in the century to follow the forces of history would again push the world toward democracy, trade, and the rule of law.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the United States was at the vanguard of this movement, and it had special responsibilities to lead, direct, and inspire the world due to its founding ideas, geopolitical position, and enlightened leadership (which meant Wilson himself). America was the great moral agent in history. America was God's chosen midwife of progressive change. Thus, Wilson was not advocating American hegemonic dominance of the global system. Indeed, he was directly rejecting traditional geopolitical dominance by the great powers—America and the European state—of the international system. This vision of America leading the world to a better place is captured in one of Wilson's last speeches in support of the League of Nations, delivered in Pueblo, Colorado, on 25 September 1919. In the final sentences of his address, Wilson said: "There is one thing that the American people always rise to and extend their hand to, and that is the truth of justice and of liberty and of peace. We have accepted that truth and we are going to be led by it, and it is going to lead us, and through us the world, out into pastures of quietness and peace such as the world never dreamed of before."

Woodrow Wilson's vision embodied impulses toward both "liberal internationalism" and "liberal imperialism" (or "liberal interventionism"), an awkward and problematic duality that persists today within the liberal

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tradition. The liberal internationalist impulse was embodied in Wilson's Fourteen Points address and his ambition to forge a postwar order built around law, the consent of the governed, and the organized opinion of mankind.

The "liberal imperial" impulse was on display in Wilson's earlier interventions in Mexico in 1914 and 1916. Wilson said that America's deployment of force was to help Mexico "adjust her unruly household." Regarding Latin America, Wilson said: "We are friends of constitutional government in America; we are more than its friends, we are its champions. I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men." Indeed, Wilson used military force in an attempt to teach Southern republics, intervening in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua. But Wilson's enthusiasm for these sorts of adventures did seem to wane during his presidency.<sup>21</sup>

Thus one can identify a relatively coherent set of ideas that form the core of Woodrow Wilson's liberal vision. But there are also tensions and ambiguities. As Anne-Marie Slaughter argues in her essay, Wilson's liberal imperialist impulse was evinced early in his presidential term, but by the time the United States was entering the European war his conception of international order was decidedly built around collective security and self-determination.<sup>22</sup> The promotion of democracy did not play a prominent role in Wilson's agenda to remake the world. This might be partly due to his sobering experience with military intervention in Mexico in particular, as well as a general rethinking of America's proper role in the world. It was almost surely also due to the optimistic view Wilson had of the coming world democratic revolution.

### **From Wilsonianism to Liberal Internationalism**

Woodrow Wilson did not have the last word on how to build a liberal international order. His vision of order was expanded and deepened in the 1940s when America again had an opportunity to shape the world system. FDR and Truman were young admirers of Wilson, and later, as leaders, they built on and modified the earlier ideas and designs. Sobered by the failure of the League of Nations and years of economic upheaval and war, the postwar liberal internationalist project was transformed. Liberal order

was now to be anchored by a core of Western democracies bound together in a security alliance, and the United States became more integral to the functioning of the economic and security architecture. Along the way, the postwar human rights revolution was set in motion, and by the 1990s it had created aspirations and obligations for the international community well beyond anything Wilson could have imagined.

FDR shared Wilson's vision of an enlightened peace, as he made clear in the Atlantic Charter in 1941. Truman's belief in the necessity of the United Nations was shaped by his earlier devotion to Wilson's proposal for a League of Nations. FDR and Truman also learned lessons from Wilson. They cared much more about getting the postwar international economic system organized in an open and orderly manner, and indeed the Roosevelt administration started working on this part of the postwar agenda even before the United States entered the war. More importantly, they saw that Wilson's vision of a world democratic order was a bridge too far. Postwar order would need to be built around a Western core of states that formed a natural political community. Atlantic community came first. Collective security would be built around traditional alliance partnership and a reformation of the balance of power in light of the ascendance of the Soviet Union. Specific strategic bargains—political, economic, and security—were also part of the post-1945 liberal international order. A broader array of institutions was built and capacities deployed to manage and sustain liberal order. Finally, American power—or hegemony—was built into the postwar liberal order. All of these innovations updated or altered the Wilsonian vision.

The general thrust of the postwar liberal international project was that the United States and its partners would need to take a more comprehensive approach to building an open, stable, and secure global environment. This postwar liberal international vision updated Wilsonianism in a variety of ways.

First, liberal order would again be built around free trade and open markets, but it would be a more managed openness. Capitalism would be organized internationally and not along national, regional, or imperial lines. In many ways, this is what World War II had been fought over. The Smoot-Hawley tariff, the imperial preference system, and the nationalist and imperial ambitions of Germany, Japan, and other great powers were

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all seen as sources of instability and war. Accordingly, American liberals—starting with FDR and Truman—were convinced that an open system of free trade was an essential precondition for all other progressive international steps. Wilson and the architects of the Versailles settlement had given short shrift to economics, setting the stage for the economic calamities of the 1930s, according to John Maynard Keynes.<sup>23</sup> So in the 1940s, Truman emphasized the need for an “economic peace,” which would involve tariff reductions and rules and institutions of trade and investment. Conflicts would be captured and domesticated in an iron cage of multilateral rules, standards, safeguards, and dispute resolution procedures. According to Truman, “this is the way of a civilized community.”<sup>24</sup>

Further, a new social bargain would underlie the liberal economic order. Progressive notions embedded in New Deal liberalism were brought forward into America’s vision of postwar arrangements. This was the message that Roosevelt and Churchill communicated to the world in the Atlantic Charter of 1941. The industrial democracies would provide a new level of social support—a safety net—under the societies of the Atlantic world. If the citizens of these countries were to live in a more open world economy, their governments would take steps to stabilize and protect market society through the welfare state. Job insurance, retirement support, and other social protections were to help the industrial democracies operate in a free trade system. An open system would provide both winners and losers. Economists argue that in such a system, the winners always win more than losers lose, and if there is a compensation mechanism it is possible for the whole of society to benefit. It was the building of such a compensation mechanism—the modern welfare state—that provided a fundamental support to an economically integrated Western democratic order.<sup>25</sup>

New permanent multilateral institutions would be deployed to manage a widening array of political, economic, and social relations. It was not enough simply to open the system up. There would need to be an array of transgovernmental and international organizational institutions that would bring government officials together on an ongoing basis to manage economic and political change. This was the conviction of the economic officials who gathered in Bretton Woods in 1944. Many of them took the lesson from the heightened role of governments during the economic



downturn of the 1930s. Governments would need to play a more direct supervisory role in stabilizing and managing economic order. New forms of intergovernmental cooperation would need to be invented. Indeed, it is no accident that the most ambitious era of international institutional building took place after 1945—bilateral, multilateral, regional, global, economic, political, and security-oriented. The democratic countries would enmesh themselves in dense institutional relationships.

Faced with the incipient Cold War and fearing a renewal of European instability, the new Western liberal order would also be tied together by a system of security alliances. Wilson's collective security would be replaced by cooperative security. This was a very important departure from past security arrangements, and it was something that Wilson himself had resisted. The idea was that Europe and the United States would be part of a single security system. Such a system would ensure that the democratic great powers would not go back to the dangerous game of strategic rivalry and balance of power politics. It helped, of course, to have an emerging Cold War with the Soviet Union to generate this cooperative security arrangement. But the goal of cooperative security was implicit in the other elements of Western order. Without the Cold War, it is not clear that a formal alliance would have emerged as it did. Probably it would not have taken on such an intense and formal character. But a cooperative security order—embodied in a formal alliance institution—provided a framework for the reintegration of West Germany and ensured that the power of the United States would be tied to Europe and rendered more predictable. Power would be exercised within alliance institutions, thereby making American dominance more reliable and connected to Europe and to East Asia.

The United States would be the hegemonic leader of the new liberal order. The United States took the lead in organizing and running the order, but it did so on terms that were more or less mutually agreeable to states that were inside it. In effect, the United States had a special functional-operational role. America was positioned at the center of the liberal international order. It provided the public goods of security protection, market openness, and sponsorship of rules and institutions. The American dollar became an international currency, and the American domestic market became an engine of global economic growth. Alliance institutions and an array of formal and informal intergovernmental institutions

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provided the international order with mechanisms and channels for consultation and collaboration. The security of each became the security of them all. The resulting order was hierarchical—the United States was most powerful and led the order. But the rules and institutions that it promulgated gave the order its liberal character.<sup>26</sup>

Implicit in this vision of liberal international order is the view that the West could serve as the foundation and starting point for a larger postwar order. The West was not fundamentally a geographical region with fixed borders. Rather it was an idea—a universal organizational form that could expand outward, driven by the spread of liberal democratic government and principles of conduct. In this sense, the postwar West was seen as a sort of molecular complex that can multiply and expand outward. The most explicit and radical version of this view was perhaps Clarence Streit and his proposal for a union of the North Atlantic democracies—and in his proposal was the idea that these countries would form a “nucleus” of a wider and expanding world order.<sup>27</sup> But the idea that a unified West could provide a stable and expandable core for postwar order was widely shared by American officials in the 1940s.

Finally, the postwar liberal international order went beyond the Wilsonian vision in its more expansive embrace of universal human rights. This commitment was foreshadowed in FDR’s Four Freedoms speech and in the promises laid out in the Atlantic Charter in 1941. They were later enshrined in the United Nations in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1948, which launched the postwar human rights revolution. Championed by liberals such as Eleanor Roosevelt and others, this document articulated a notion of universal individual rights that deserved recognition by the whole of mankind and not simply left to sovereign governments to define and enforce.<sup>28</sup> A steady stream of conventions and treaties followed that together constitute an extraordinary new vision of rights, individuals, sovereignty, and global order.<sup>29</sup>

This human rights revolution is deeply rooted in a progressive liberal vision that emerged in the 1940s. Roosevelt and Truman were clearly sobered by the failure of Wilson but convinced that a new global order committed to human rights, collective security, and economic advancement was necessary to avoid the return to war. This point is made by

Elizabeth Borgwardt, who traces the intellectual breakthrough back to 1941:

The Atlantic Charter called for self-determination of peoples, freer trade, and several New Deal–style social welfare provisions. It also mentioned establishing “a wider and permanent system of general security,” arms control, and freedom of the seas. But this Anglo-American declaration was soon best known for a resonant phrase about establishing a particular kind of postwar order—a peace “which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want.” To link anti-fascist politics and economic well-being was unusual in an international instrument. But to speak explicitly of individuals rather than state interests—to use the phrase “all the men in all the lands” in place of a more traditional reference to the prerogatives of nations—was positively revolutionary. The phrase hinted that an ordinary citizen might possibly have some kind of direct relationship with international law, unmediated by the layering of a sovereign state. Though oblique, this hint that ideas about dignity of the individual were an appropriate topic of international affairs was soon to catalyze groups around the world committed to fighting colonialism and racism as well as nazism. It marked a defining, inaugural moment for what we now know as the modern doctrine of human rights.<sup>30</sup>

This postwar evolution in underlying norms of state sovereignty became particularly clear after the Cold War—sovereignty was not absolute and the international community had a moral and legal claim on the protection of individuals within states. Indeed, in the 1990s, this “contingent” character of sovereignty was pushed further. The international community was seen as having a right—even a moral obligation—to intervene in troubled states to prevent genocide and mass killing. NATO intervention in the Balkans and the war against Serbia were defining actions of this sort.

Overall, as Wilsonianism evolved into postwar liberal internationalism, two logics of liberal order emerged. One logic concerned the organization of liberal order within the West. Pacts of restraint and commitment bound the Western democracies together, providing a framework for integrating

Germany and Japan, opening the world economy, and fighting the Cold War. Under the cover of the Cold War, a revolution in relations between the Western great powers took place. The other logic was the liberal internationalist agenda for spreading liberty and democracy worldwide. These two impulses—to deepen and expand liberal order—were evinced during the early postwar years in the Truman administration’s two hallmark initiatives—the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine. One sought to save and unite Western Europe, while the other advanced ambitious ideals for coming to the assistance of nations and peoples struggling to be free.<sup>31</sup> Both impulses were present in the thoughts and actions of Woodrow Wilson. The struggle over the legacy of Woodrow Wilson is in part a struggle between these two parts of the larger liberal vision.

### **Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century**

The end of the Cold War seemed to be a vindication of the Wilsonian vision. Democratic transitions and economic integration had ushered in what some saw as a global Wilsonian era. Indeed the 1990s were in many ways the greatest “liberal moment” of the twentieth century. The Cold War ended; democracy and markets flourished around the world; globalization was enshrined as a progressive historical force; and ideology, nationalism, and war were at a low ebb. NAFTA, APEC, and the WTO signaled a strengthening of the rules and institutions of the world economy. NATO was expanded and the U.S.-Japan alliance was renewed. Russia became a quasi-member of the West, and China was a “strategic partner” with Washington. President Clinton’s grand strategy of building post-Cold War order around expanding markets, democracy, and institutions was the triumphant embodiment of the liberal vision of international order.

But the end of the Cold War also set in motion shifts in the global system that generated new challenges for liberal internationalism. The liberal international order was no longer simply the West or the “free world”—it was now truly global. As a result, dilemmas and tensions within the liberal international tradition that had remained mostly out of sight now appeared in the full light of day. Questions about the ability of the international community to make good on its expanding normative commitments to human rights and the responsibility to protect emerged. With

the end of the Cold War, the role of the United States as a hegemonic leader became more problematic—and contested. The rules on great power intervention and the role of the United Nations as a site for legitimating the use of force were also newly debated around the world.

Clearly, the debate is not simply the question of whether Bush is a Wilsonian—it is about the future of liberal internationalism in the twenty-first century. The essays that follow speak to these challenges.

First, as we have noted, certain Wilsonian ideas evolved into a more encompassing liberal international “project” in the postwar decades. But also, of course, the world itself changed after the Cold War, and this has rendered problematic the older, Cold War–era liberal vision. During the Cold War, the liberal international order was built “inside” the larger bipolar global system. This bipolar framework provided the outside geopolitical beams and girders for building liberal internationalism within the West. When the Cold War ended, the “inside” order became the “outside” order; that is, its logic was extended to the larger global system. In one sense, this is a story of the triumph of an American-style liberal international order. The collapse of the Soviet bloc was a collapse of the last apparent great challenge to this order. But in another sense, the scale and scope of the open, capitalist system dramatically expanded—it became truly global, and this brought into the liberal system new states, peoples, and problems. The problem increasingly was not how to build binding relations among advanced democracies but how to integrate and strengthen weak or emerging non-Western democracies situated in troubled regions of the world. If liberal order is a political system designed to “do the business” of the community of democracies, there was suddenly a lot more business to do among a more varied array of states.

Second, the global “security problem” also shifted in the last decade from war among the great powers to terrorism and other transnational threats that emerge from weak states in the periphery. The Bush administration has stressed this new reality, as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice put it: “In 1945, the fear that strong, aggressive states—eager and able to expand their frontiers with force—would be the primary cause of international problems. Today, however, it is clear that weak and poorly governed states—unwilling or incapable of ruling their countries with justice—are the principal source of global crises—from civil war and

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genocide, to extreme poverty and humanitarian disaster.”<sup>32</sup> In these changed circumstances, the debates are now about the terms of action and intervention in weak and failed states. This triggers new controversies over who, where, and how to act and intervene.

It is here that the claim is most convincing that the Bush administration was following in the footsteps of Wilsonian and liberal internationalists. Building liberal order today must entail some systematic response to the problem of weak and failing states; globalization and the increasingly deadly technologies of violence makes this so, even if more idealist aspirations of democracy promotion do not. Tony Smith and Anne-Marie Slaughter both acknowledge that liberal internationalism has evolved a set of ideas about the terms and conditions of intervention in the post-Cold War era; their disagreement is about whether the Bush administration was acting in accord with these liberal interventionist ideas or not, and the implications for the principles and doctrines themselves.

There is also the growing problem of American power. The United States has emerged from the 1990s as a unipolar military power. It alone has the capacity to act on a global basis to support and enforce the evolving human rights and security norms. Implicit in the Wilsonian and post-war liberal vision is the notion that an “international community” exists that is the repository of global rules and norms, and it is this international community that is empowered to act on behalf of its members to uphold human rights and security norms. The United Nations is the institutional embodiment of the international community. The problem is that the international community is still divided into unequal nation states, and the United States alone has the capacity to act or stand in the way of action on behalf of the international community. This makes American power controversial, and even illegitimate, at least as it is seen in large parts of the world. In a multipolar or bipolar world, the United States is one among several great powers. But today it stands alone at the center of the global system, and the terms of authority and power within the wider global liberal order are thrown into question.

This situation is again central to the debate among the authors in this volume. Tony Smith argues that the fact of unipolarity makes Wilsonian-style multilateralism problematic, and it has given neoconservatives an

opening to champion the unilateral exercise of American power. Thomas Knock and Anne-Marie Slaughter argue that multilateralism is at the heart of Wilsonian internationalism. But the problem remains that in an era of American unipolarity, the ability of the international community to act collectively is particularly difficult. American power becomes a problem as much as a solution for many states and peoples within the system.

If, however, liberal internationalism is to promote international authority it must wrestle with the problem of democracy and the accountability of international organizations. This has always been a challenge of liberal internationalism: how do you build rules and institutions above the nation-state while remaining committed to democratic accountability? To be sure, much of the liberal order building of the postwar era actually strengthened the ability of states to serve and protect their societies. For example, the Bretton Woods rules and institutions provided tools for governments to pursue full employment and social security goals. Across the realms of economics, politics, and security, postwar multilateralism tended to be loose, accommodating state sovereignty. Today, however, more sophisticated and legal-binding sorts of international agreements appear to be placing more severe demands on governments. In areas as diverse as the environment, human rights, and arms control, multilateralism is becoming more demanding. If the world of the twenty-first century will require more complex and far-reaching sorts of multilateral cooperation, how can this be squared with state sovereignty and accountability?<sup>33</sup>

Finally, there is the challenge that is central to the debate between Smith and Slaughter. This is the question of how liberal internationalism can safeguard against abuses that turn enlightened intervention into imperialism. How can you get the progressive benefits of action by leading democracies that seek to strengthen and uphold collective liberal norms without falling prey to abuse? Smith sees that a slippery slope is embedded in postwar liberal internationalism. The “neoliberal” American grand strategy of the late 1990s had lofty intentions but, according to Smith, it also did the intellectual heavy lifting for neoconservatives who brought forward the Iraq war. Slaughter disputes this claim and advances the view that a mechanism does exist—or can be devised—to separate good interventions from bad. She suggests that it is a mechanism that grows out of

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the Wilsonian vision—a process of ongoing and institutionalized consultation among the leading democracies. In effect, the democracy community must be seen as a source of enlightenment and restraint in an era when action and intervention are necessary for the security and management of liberal order.

In the following essays, these issues are explored.