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Introduction by Thomas J. Knock

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Introduction by Thomas J. Knock, Southern Methodist University

By any fair reckoning Woodrow Wilson occupies a secure position within the pantheon of great presidents. The legislation he signed into law—including the Federal Reserve System, tariff reform, and the first federal laws to establish the eight-hour day and to restrict child labor—has been matched only by that of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson among all presidents. As for the realm in which he carved out his greatest legacy, no chief executive has ever communicated more effectively to the peoples of the world the ideals of democracy or, through the Covenant of the League of Nations, set in motion a more creative proposal for reducing the risk of war. This, according to Senator J. William Fulbright, was “the one great new idea of the 20th century in the field of international relations, the idea of international organization with permanent processes for the peaceful settlement of disputes.”¹ Yet, owing to the nature of his aspirations and his tragic reversal of fortunes after having accomplished so much, Wilson remains one of the most controversial presidents. Since the 1920s, he has continued to compel the attention of scholars and practitioners of American foreign policy, cyclically, with contemporary concerns always a part of the driving force.

Thus so, in the centennial year of the United States’ direct involvement in the First World War (and coinciding with the advent of President Donald Trump’s challenges to long-standing international commitments and standards of behavior) Tony Smith’s enormously stimulating *Why Wilson Matters* reminds us that the twenty-eighth President did not utter idle words when he said to an anxious senator at a critical juncture during the Armistice negotiations in October 1918, “I am now playing for 100 years hence.”² Though not uncritical, all four of the reviewers in this roundtable are deeply appreciative of Smith’s achievement, which analyzes the erratic applications of Wilsonian internationalism over the course of a century in the light of its crisis today.

None of the reviewers is more appreciative than John Milton Cooper, Jr., the dean of Wilson scholars. Cooper observes that the President’s reputation has been roughed up in the past decade by pundits and some historians who characterized George W. Bush’s war in Iraq as ‘Wilsonian,’ and more recently by students at Princeton demanding the removal of Wilson’s name from the university’s school of government and one of its residential colleges for his regrettable role in expanding segregation in the federal workplace far beyond what it had been when he entered the White House. But, Cooper counsels, for anyone interested in Wilson “and the unfolding of the United States’ role as a great power and superpower,” Smith’s “painstaking reconsideration” of the statesman “deserves full honors.” Thereon he lauds the analysis of Wilson’s thought and writings on democracy, a paramount concern in Smith’s comprehension of his subject’s actual purposes, which occupies about half of the book. Cooper in particular credits the author for restoring the following words to their centrality in understanding the President, spoken in April 1918 but never published until 1984, in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*: “Now, there isn’t any one kind of government under which all nations ought to live. There isn’t any one kind of government which we have the right to impose upon any nation. So that I am not

¹ Quoted in Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright, A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 647.

² Diary of Henry F. Ashurst, Oct. 14, 1918, in Arthur S. Link *et al.* (eds.) *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 69 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966-1996), vol. 51, 338.

fighting for democracy except for the peoples that want democracy. If they want it, then I am ready to fight until they get it. If they don't want it, then it is none of my business."³

Patrick J. McDonald emphasizes that Tony Smith's "careful and illuminating reexamination" of Wilson is intended to address the ongoing debate about the role of American "Liberal Internationalism" in twenty-first century. He outlines his fellow political scientist's argument that liberal internationalism has developed in three main stages—the "classical" stage of the interwar period, a "hegemonic" stage of the Cold War ("the golden era for Wilsonianism," due in part to U.S. successes in postwar Germany and Japan), and the unfortunate post-Cold War "neo-Wilsonian" stage that gathered intensity after the invasion of Iraq. McDonald is most interested in Smith's support of democracy promotion—for Smith, an essential part of Wilson's project, albeit mitigated by the President's sense of restraint and respect for local conditions—while remaining critical of the neo-Wilsonians' incorporation of responsibility to protect, democratic peace theory, and democratic transition theory. Both McDonald and Smith would agree that this became a formula for recent presidents to undertake and rationalize dubious, high-risk unilateral interventions. Yet McDonald questions Smith's embrace of democracy promotion and wonders how this form of liberal internationalism can survive in the wake of the Iraq war. He also argues that shared democracy is no absolute guarantee of peace. McDonald cites the example, during the interwar period, of the ultimate failure of the efforts of the United States, Great Britain, France, and Weimar Germany (democracies all) to prevent the violent revision of the Treaty of Versailles, and of the Americans' decision not to stay the course in European politics under the weight of the Great Depression.

Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard, a Danish scholar who writes about democracy promotion and human rights, provides the most detailed exegesis of the four reviews. He admires *Why Wilson Matters* for its "nuanced understanding of Wilson's vision" and declares it "a significant and highly original contribution" to the field. Smith defines Wilsonianism, Søndergaard explains, as a coherent concept made of four interconnected components—democracy, free trade, collective security, and American leadership. Smith sees the first element as by far the most important, whereas some historians would stress that the key for Wilson was collective security in tandem with machinery to avoid armed conflict in the first place (of the sort Fulbright referred to). Søndergaard, like Cooper, considers the first half of book the more important for its "excellent survey" of the scholar/President's speeches and writings, "rich opportunities to examine Wilson's statements firsthand." He underscores that Smith's crucial purpose is to demonstrate the significance of the educative statement that Cooper quotes. For, indeed, Wilson at length did not believe the U.S. should actively, certainly not forcefully, promote democracy. In the book's second half, Smith cites Germany and Japan as illustrations of efficacious Wilsonian endeavors during the Cold War period, where local conditions were especially favorable to a democratic makeover. But things went terribly wrong in the new century, when neo-Wilsonians attempted by force to impose democratic transition theory upon situations that objectively were not even remotely conducive to success. For Smith, and I would agree, Bush's war in Iraq was "the greatest break in the history

³ Wilson, speaking to Foreign Correspondents, 8 April 1918, *ibid.*, vol. 47, 288.

of the Wilsonian tradition.”⁴ Sondergaard seems to concur, but he definitely parts company with the author in his argument that President Barack Obama, too, was a neo-Wilsonian.

Trygve Throntveit is a reviewer fresh from the fields of Wilsonian inquiry who has just published an important, well-crafted book himself on this broad subject.⁵ He agrees with Smith’s assessment of Wilson as the essential lens through which to apprehend “America’s proper role in an interdependent world.” Although *Why Wilson Matters* makes “a compelling case deserving a wide hearing,” Throntveit takes it to task on several points. For instance, he observes that Smith errs in asserting, with regard to the League of Nations, that the President insisted “on American global hegemony as the guarantee that this ambitious program might succeed.”⁶ If this was so, he asks, then why did Henry Cabot Lodge see League membership “as a crippling relinquishment of national sovereignty,” and why did Wilson insist that the United States be bound “by judgments of the international community”?⁷ The questions are not unfair. Throntveit seeks also “to splinter” Smith’s notion that Franklin Roosevelt was a true Woodrow Wilson Wilsonian. After all, Roosevelt’s concept of postwar internationalism was based overtly on the ‘Four Policemen’ and hardly conformed to his mentor’s version; it probably was closer to Lodge’s and President Theodore Roosevelt’s thinking than to Wilson’s. Then, too, Throntveit challenges the assertion that Cold War globalism was something Wilson would have embraced. Here he cites the United States’ support for rightwing tyrants and its “toppling uncooperative governments” during the Cold War. “Wilson’s ostensibly ‘internationalist’ heirs,” he states, “were more likely to view world order through the lens of American interest rather than the other way around.” This also is a reasonable criticism.⁸ (He points out as well that Smith conflates what Wilson’s contemporaries decried as

⁴ Tony Smith, *Why Wilson Matters, The Origins of American Liberal Internationalism and Its Crisis Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017) 236.

⁵ Trygve Throntveit, *Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

⁶ Smith, *Why Wilson Matters*, 140.

⁷ I have stressed in my own work that ratification largely foundered on the shoals of sovereignty. Wilson said many times, “some of our sovereignty would be surrendered,” and believed that Americans had to accept the risk that they might “lose in court” from time to time in order for the League to work properly. Conversely, conservative internationalists in the Senate readily grasped the implications for national sovereignty (and unilateral action) and thus insisted on reservations that, as Lodge put it, would “release us from obligations that might not be kept” while “preserving rights which ought not be infringed.” See Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars, Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 232-33 and 266-67; and Thomas J. Knock, “‘Playing for a Hundred Years Hence’: Woodrow Wilson’s Internationalism and His Would-Be Heirs,” in G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Tony Smith, *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 43-45.

⁸ The architects of containment forged multilateral alliances and international economic institutions that helped to stabilize great power relationships and engender prosperity in the West. In retrospect, these initiatives were broadly ‘Wilsonian.’ But the US also reserved the right to undertake unilateral interventions, in violation of the UN charter and international law, often with disastrous results. The Eisenhower administration overthrew functioning democratic governments in Guatemala and Iran and replaced them with dictatorships. Republican and Democratic administrations alike spurned multilateral solutions to Vietnam and instead unilaterally inflicted death and destruction upon the people and the land on a staggering scale. Such “realism” hardly suggested that Wilsonian principles were alive

“Wilsonism” and what decades later has come to be called “Wilsonianism,” when a considerable divide separates them.) Even so, like the other three reviewers, Throntveit regards this a valuable work of history, not the least for encouraging others “to consider the unfashionable notion that a sometime racist and chauvinist . . . and even an unapologetic idealist might have something to teach us.”

Participants:

Tony Smith is Cornelia M. Jackson Professor of Political Science Emeritus, Tufts University and is the author of a number of books. Those on American foreign policy include *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Harvard University Press, 2000); *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy* (Princeton UP, expanded edition, 2012), *A Pact with the Devil:*

Washington's Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of the American Promise (Routledge, 2007). He welcomes contact at tony02108@gmail.com

Thomas J. Knock is Professor of History and Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He is the author of *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Oxford University Press, 1992; Princeton paperback 1995) and *The Rise of a Prairie Statesman, The Life and Times of George McGovern* (Princeton University Press, 2016). In addition, he is co-author (with G. John Ikenberry, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Tony Smith) of *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the 21st Century*; and co-editor (with Jeffrey A. Engel) of *When Life Strikes the President, Scandal, Death, and Illness in the White House* (Oxford University Press, 2017). Knock serves on the Editorial Board of *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. He is currently writing *Come Home, America, The Life and Times of George McGovern*.

John Milton Cooper, Jr., taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for forty-three years. Of his books, three deal directly with Woodrow Wilson, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Harvard University Press, 1983); *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), and *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2009). He also served on the Editorial Advisory Committee to *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, and as Chief Historian for the American Experience television series on Wilson.

Patrick J. McDonald is an Associate Professor in the Department of Government at the University of Texas at Austin. His first book, *The Invisible Hand of Peace: Capitalism, the War Machine, and International Relations Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), examined how the institutions associated with capitalism promote peace among states. His current book project, *Priming for Peace: Great Power Bargaining, Hierarchy, and Democracy in International Politics*, challenges the claim that democracy promotes peace among states.

and well. See Knock, *To End All Wars*, x and 272-74, and Knock, “Playing for a Hundred Years Hence,” 35-36 and 46-48.

Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard is a part-time lecturer at the University of Copenhagen. During the academic year 2017-2018 he will be a “Carlsberg Foundation” postdoc at Georgetown University, examining democracy promotion as a U.S. foreign policy objective during the 1980s. Søndergaard holds a PhD in American history from the University of Southern Denmark (2017) and has been a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley (2014-2015). His publications include “Bill Clinton’s ‘Democratic Enlargement’ and the Securitisation of Democracy Promotion,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 26:3 (2015) and “The Domestic Politics of U.S. Human Rights Policy,” *Passport: The Newsletter of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations* 46:3 (2016). He is currently working on a book on the role of human rights in U.S. foreign policy during the 1980s as well as book chapters for edited volumes on democracy promotion and human rights.

Trygve Throntveit, PhD, is Dean's Fellow for Civic Studies at the University of Minnesota College of Education and Human Development, where he is the incoming editor of *The Good Society: A Journal of Civic Studies*. He is the author of *William James and the Quest for an Ethical Republic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and, most recently, *Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment* (University of Chicago Press, 2017). His current projects include *The Essential Woodrow Wilson*, co-edited with John Milton Cooper, Jr. (Princeton University Press), and a book-length project tentatively titled *The Last Internationalist: Quincy Wright and the Alternative American Century*.

Review by John Milton Cooper, Jr., University of Wisconsin-Madison, Emeritus

The last decade has not dealt kindly with Woodrow Wilson's reputation. He has taken flak from the left, right, and race. Recoil from the mess in Iraq swept him up in the tide of blame for overreach and foolish notions about promoting the United States' version of democracy where and when it pleased. Wilsonianism "on steroids" is the way one historian described George W. Bush's foreign policy.¹ Meanwhile, back at the right-wing ranch, Glen Beck discovered that the menace of big government began, not with Franklin Roosevelt, but with Wilson. Finally, "the most unkindest cut of all" [*sic*, Shakespeare] came at his alma mater, Princeton, where some black students demanded that he be effaced from the public affairs school and a residential college that bore his name. Others in the public arena joined in and piled on with excoriation of his as the worst enemy of racial justice since the Civil War.

Against this tide, a few people took Wilson's side. Thomas Knock rebutted charges that Wilson fathered unilateral interventionism to promote democracy, while such neoconservatives as David Brooks, William Kristol, and Robert Kagan long ago pointed out that Theodore Roosevelt properly deserves credit as the father of that approach to foreign policy.² As for big government, Beck grudgingly conceded that this Roosevelt deserved blame, too, and others looked further back in the history of the Republican Party. Two writers, Scott Berg and I, produced large-scale biographies that viewed Wilson in a favorable light. Knock and I weighed into the racial debate, pointing out that segregation and demotion of African-Americans in the federal workplace did not begin or end with Wilson and that he properly belongs among racially indifferent and callous northern whites rather than among racially obsessed southern whites—who included the more genteel racists in his cabinet as well as virulent demagogues such as Tom Watson and James K. Vardaman.

Now, with the centennial years of American intervention in World War I, the tide shows signs of turning in Wilson's favor. A few weeks from now will come publication of Trygve Throntveit's incisive treatment of this man's mind and intellectual milieu as they shaped his internationalism and its aftermath.³ Now, complementing that study and extending the examination of how Wilson's thought and actions did and did not shape this nation's conduct in world affairs during the last century we have the book under review here, Tony Smith's *Why Wilson Matters*. At the outset, let me, as the lawyers say, "declare my interest." The book's jacket carries a blurb from me calling it "a major contribution" and praising the author for looking so carefully at Wilson and following "the threads of his legacies" down to the present time. That blurb is based on having read the manuscript and strongly recommending its publication, which has come to pass in a most timely fashion.

¹ Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk* (New York: Random House, 2007), 89.

² See David Brooks, "Bully for America: What Teddy [*sic*] Roosevelt Teaches," *Weekly Standard* 2 (23 June 1997), 14-23; William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 75 (July/August 1996), 18-32.

³ Trygve Throntveit, *Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

What I would like to do in this review is comment on the aspect of the book that I know best, namely Wilson himself. I leave it to others better versed in the later decades of our diplomatic history to speak about the legacies—except to say that Smith alone and soon in tandem with Throntveit are driving the stake through the heart of not only Wilsonianism “on steroids” but also of earlier allegations of woolly headed idealism and prettied-up imperialism, à la William Appleman Williams and his followers.

Evaluating Smith’s accomplishment in examining Wilson requires a bit of background. The origins of this book date back eleven years, to a symposium at the Wilson School at Princeton, which marked the sesquicentennial of his birth. The panel on his foreign policy featured an introduction by John Ikenberry and papers by Knock, Smith, and Anne-Marie Slaughter; these were later published as a book.⁴ Although not staged as a debate, the panel and the volume came off as one. Smith then took a starkly different view of Wilson—as an unrealistic democracy promoter—and found himself sandwiched between Knock’s historical dissection and Slaughter’s lawyerly deconstruction. My own part consisted of later pointing this out somewhat harshly here in H-Diplo (*mea culpa*).⁵

The sequel to that first encounter is enough to restore even the most hardened skeptic’s faith in self-critical scholarship. Rather than firing back with guns blazing, as is only too sadly common, Smith went back to the sources and began a painstaking reconsideration of Wilson. He has studied the man’s thought, going back to his student days more thoroughly and insightfully than anyone except Throntveit and such earlier writers as Knock, John Mulder, and the late Niels Thorsen. This is a remarkable achievement, and it deserves full honors from all those who care about Wilson, intellectuals in politics, the ideological underpinnings of American foreign policy, and the unfolding of this nation’s role as a great power and then a superpower.

Even a review as generous in length as H-Diplo allows cannot do justice to Smith’s intellectual achievement in his reconsideration of Wilson. At the risk of oversimplification, let me observe that Smith gives full faith and credit to Wilson’s early and continued absorption in the thought of Edmund Burke. From that he developed an approach to politics that was not conservative but, as Wilson liked to say, ‘organic.’ For him, the right way to practice politics was through experience and attention to circumstances, not as a matter of grand theoretical design. Wilson developed these views in the early 1890s, thereby anticipating by six decades the “end of ideology” argument of the mid-twentieth century.

Early in his presidency, Wilson explained to an interviewing journalist that he could be both a Burkean and a progressive democrat in domestic affairs. Unfortunately, the journalist did not elaborate on how the president squared that circle. Fortunately, however, Wilson did elucidate how his grounding in Burke guided him in foreign affairs. In April 1918, speaking to some visiting foreign journalists, he mentioned Burke by name and quoted from memory Burke’s definition of a free government: “A government which those living under it will guard.” This was “the only possible definition of a free government. There may be all sorts of free

⁴ John Ikenberry, Thomas Knock, Tony Smith, and Anne-Marie Slaughter, *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁵ H-Diplo Roundtable Review X, 27 on G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Tony Smith. *The Crisis in American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), at <https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-X-27.pdf>.

governments but the fundamental and essential element of it is that the people like it and believe in it. . . . Now, there isn't any one kind of government under which all nations ought to live. There isn't any one kind of government which we have the right to impose upon any nation. So that I am nor fighting for democracy except for the peoples that want democracy. If they want it, then I am ready to fight until they get it. If they don't want it, then it is none of my business."⁶

Unfortunately, Wilson was speaking off-the-record. Those words would not see the light of print for more than six decades, until the editors of *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* deciphered the stenographer's shorthand transcript and published it. If those remarks had been made public earlier, a lot of ink might not have been spilled about democracy promotion, either naïve or hypocritical. It is to Smith's great credit that he restores these views to their centrality to Wilson's thought and action.

Equally to his credit is the way he combines the disciplines of history and political science. 'Interdisciplinary' has been a hallowed buzz word in academia for over half a century. It has been far easier to preach such approaches than to practice them. It is slow, demanding work to operate faithfully in more than one discipline. It is far easier either to cherry pick for alluringly attractive nuggets of evidence and interpretation according to preconceived ideas or to mount quick raids to seize what look like treasures. The results are too often intellectually inferior to solid work in one discipline or the other. This is what the sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld jibed at as 'cross-sterilization.' By contrast, Smith shows how this kind of enterprise ought to be pursued. He is a distinguished political scientist who has written widely about international relations. Now he has made himself equally at home as an historian, examining his subject fully and patiently evaluating a great deal of evidence. His accomplishment reminds me of Robert Osgood's classic work, and that is the highest compliment I know how to give.⁷

The publication of this book, together with the impending publication of Throntveit's, should impel a major reevaluation and fresher appreciation of Wilson. I may be excessively hopeful. The World War I centennial may also bring a revival of 1930s-style 'revisionism,' in which American intervention yet again looks like a fatal error of foreign policy, committed for biased motives and leading to lasting evils at home and abroad. I hope that does not happen. The point is not to glorify Wilson or fail to question the wisdom of going to war in 1917 (Wilson himself did). The point is to evaluate the major actors, of whom this man stands paramount, for who they were and what they thought they were doing. As a scholar and our only professional academic to become president, Wilson would have wanted nothing less. Tony Smith's book takes us a long way down the path to a true understanding of this man and these events.

⁶ Wilson, Remarks to Foreign Correspondents, 8 April 1918, in Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* 47 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 288.

⁷ Robert E. Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations: The Great Twentieth-Century Transformation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

Review by Patrick J. McDonald, University of Texas at Austin

Why *Wilson Matters* fits within a larger ongoing debate, sparked in large part by recent wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine, about the degree to which American grand strategy should continue to rest on principles associated with Liberal Internationalism. Like the calls for greater restraint in American foreign policy found in Barry Posen and John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, for example, it condemns the wave of American military interventions in the post-9/11 period.¹ It breaks from these realist critiques by reaffirming a central role for democracy promotion, open global markets, and multilateralism in U.S. grand strategy. This embrace of Liberal Internationalism requires a return though to its classical formulation first articulated by President Woodrow Wilson.

These claims proceed outward from a careful and illuminating reexamination of Woodrow Wilson's academic writings and some important foreign policy decisions of his presidency, including American interventions in the Mexican Revolution and World War I. Smith argues that Liberal Internationalism has evolved through three variants since the onset of Wilson's presidency: a classical stage that lasted through up to the start of World War II, a hegemonic stage during the Cold War, and a neo-Wilsonian phase that has existed since the end of the Cold War.

While the core of Liberal Internationalism continues to rest on democracy promotion, open markets, multilateralism, and American leadership, neo-Wilsonianism has incorporated the responsibility to protect (R2P) along with academic insights from democratic peace theory (DPT) and democratic transition theory (DTT). These additions have encouraged post-Cold War presidents to pursue a dangerous form of liberal imperialism that minimizes the challenges associated with successfully engineering a democratic transition through American military intervention. Alternatively, Wilson maintained a robust respect for local conditions—including an educated middle class and a civic culture based on a set of common values or collective consciousness (47, 200)—that could complicate external efforts to effect regime change abroad by simply removing the top political leadership. By implication, these arguments hold that the United States could have averted the waves of domestic and international pushback to its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had it upheld Wilson's recognition of the limits of American power. Echoing the concerns raised by Edmund Burke about the French Revolution, Wilson believed that successful democratic transitions proceeded gradually and depended on internal conditions instead of external prompting.

Smith argues that democracy promotion should continue to guide American grand strategy because of the positive political and economic benefits attributed to democracy--like peace, respect for human rights, economic openness and growth, and reliable multilateral cooperation among independent states. However, the United States may have to redirect its efforts toward deepening, rather than broadening, democracy around the world (278), particularly when local conditions are not conducive to a peaceful democratic transition.

The Cold War stands out as the golden era for Wilsonianism, providing its greatest successes in the reconstructions of Germany and Japan, the Bretton Woods institutions, NATO, the United Nations (UN), and the Soviet collapse. The United States also successfully practiced restraint during the Cold War by

¹ Barry Posen. *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*. Cornell University Press, 2014. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt. "The Case for Offshore Balancing." *Foreign Affairs* 95:4 (July/August 2016): 70-83.

temporarily foregoing democracy promotion to engage with autocratic leaders who could serve as allies in the struggle to contain communism and, by extension, to defend the existing community of democracies (161-176). Smith notes that Wilson would have endorsed this realistic liberalism.

These Cold-War successes and their relationship to failures of classical Wilsonianism during the interwar period, though, raise larger questions about the intellectual core of Liberal Internationalism and its potential to be salvaged in the aftermath of the most recent war in Iraq. The reconstructions of Germany and Japan and the Bretton Woods institutions emerged from the failures of the Wilsonian order that had been temporarily created at Versailles. Obviously, these failures have been debated extensively by the field of international relations, perhaps most prominently by E.H. Carr in the *Twenty Years Crisis*.² Relatively more recent extensions of these critiques carry continuing relevance for the two of the foundational implications of this book: that democracy promotion should remain a component of American grand strategy because shared democracy promotes peace; and American restraint or retrenchment will not necessarily stabilize international politics.

The outbreak of World War II has long been held up as relatively straightforward case that confirms the democratic peace. The genocidal nationalism that emerged from Germany depended first on German Chancellor Adolph Hitler's destruction of the Weimar democracy. All of Germany's resulting wars occurred between autocracies or between an autocracy and a democracy. Quite simply, the transition to autocracy in Germany ultimately helped trigger World War II. The democratic peace thesis also implies a counterfactual that European peace might have continued if Weimar democracy had been preserved. Such claims beg a prior question, however: Did the repeated attempts to revise the Versailles settlement in the 1920's support or undermine democracy in Germany?

Even though the Versailles settlement had been imposed on a democratic Germany in 1919, Germany was invited to participate in the Treaty of Locarno (1925) and the negotiations over the Dawes Plan. Germany's change in political status—from a defeated pariah to an active democratic participant—altered the domestic political underpinnings of the resulting European political order. Democratic regimes in Germany, France, Great Britain, and the United States successfully revised the Versailles system to sustain and strengthen peace among them.³ By the logic of the democratic peace, these adjustments should have been particularly enduring. Instead, this democratic peace collapsed within a decade because its external terms, perhaps most prominently those over reparations, helped undermine democracy in Germany. The Allies had initially sought to support democracy in Germany, first by demanding the removal of Kaiser Wilhelm II as a condition for the armistice and then by pressing France for concessions in the Dawes negotiations to relieve some of the internal political pressure on the Weimar coalition.⁴ However, they withdrew this support by adopting an increasingly hard line over reparations just as the Great Depression began.

² Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919-1939* (New York: Harper, 1939).

³ See, for example, Patrick O. Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain, and the Stabilisation of Europe, 1919-1932* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁴ Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace after World War I*.

This interwar failure of democratic peacemaking challenges the core of classical Wilsonianism that rests on the political benefits of democracy and democracy promotion. In many ways, it would be hard to identify a more theoretically and historically significant template for the democratic peace. Four democratic great powers constructed a revised set of international agreements to preserve peace among them. Those agreements collapsed in part because their terms—which reflected a democratic process within each of them that incorporated distributional concerns from society over the costs of reparations, war debts, and war debt relief—could not simultaneously preserve a domestic order that was both stable and democratic in all of them.

This case also raises questions about the balance between local conditions and external pressures in successful democratic transitions. To emphasize that local conditions in Germany played an important role in stabilizing democracy there after World War II, Smith looks to Wilson and suggests, “it is critical not to overstate the American role in the transition of Japan and Germany as they became...free market democracies” (159). One wonders, however, why a series of internal attributes, like a large middle class and a shared civic culture, enabled a successful democratic transition in Germany after World War II while failing to do so after World War I?⁵ It would have helped to see additional evidence that these internal characteristics became more supportive of democracy over this two-decade period. Again, Smith’s discussion of West Germany is designed to illustrate the limited role that external powers can play in fostering democratization while calling for greater restraint in American democracy promotion efforts. A comparison of these cases suggests instead that American intransigence on war debt relief and its progressive withdrawal from European politics after the onset of the Great Depression may have destabilized international politics by insufficiently supporting democracy in Germany before 1933.

The broader American pullback from the Versailles settlement, begun with the Senate’s rejection of this treaty, also illustrates some political risks posed by the retrenchment of the leading power.⁶ American entry into the war shifted the military balance of power in Europe and created the conditions for Germany’s defeat. The political order negotiated at Versailles, including Weimar democracy, reflected and depended on American power. The withdrawal of American military and economic influence in the subsequent decade then deprived the order of an important set of enforcement tools that may have prevented its violent revision.

Moreover, this change in American grand strategy from 1917 to 1928 emerged from democratic decision-making in the United States. Republicans helped torpedo American participation in the League of Nations and continually resisted the fiscal costs of war debt relief throughout the 1920s that might have stabilized the reparations agreement. Adam Tooze argues that Wilson pushed the American public further than it was willing to go with respect to the international commitments pledged at Versailles.⁷ His administration failed

⁵ Clearly, the Great Depression distinguishes these two eras and stands out as a powerful shock that helped undermine the Weimar Democracy. This possibility reinforces the importance of external conditions, namely the collapse of international cooperation in economic matters, in stabilizing democracy. The intimate connection between these internal and external causes of the Great Depression can be seen in Barry Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters: The Gold Standard and the Great Depression, 1919-1939* (New York: Oxford, 1992).

⁶ An excellent illustration of these claims can be found in Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the World Order, 1916-1931* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

⁷ Tooze, *The Deluge*.

to engage in sufficient state building during the war to sustain its position of international leadership after the war.

The possibility that American withdrawal destabilized European politics in the interwar period by altering the distribution of power there provides at least two important lessons for the broader reassessment of liberal internationalism conducted here. First, the capacity of democracy to support robust multilateralism and peace depends on its ability to bind different groups within a polity to the international commitments its government makes. Ultimately, Wilson failed in his attempt to transform American society so that it was willing to leave its isolationist past behind in support of his larger bid to transform global politics. His personal leadership and restraint, lauded by Smith, insufficiently institutionalized domestic support for the new international order constructed at Versailles and later revised in Locarno.

Second, while this book adds theoretical diversity to a larger debate critiquing American grand strategy under the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, it also overlooks some of the risks posed by a deeper retrenchment of American foreign policy. Once American military power is deployed to win wars or facilitate regime change, its presence becomes intimately connected to any status political order that emerges. A subsequent withdrawal can be similarly destabilizing by shifting regional distributions of power again. These risks do not undermine the need to evaluate critically the costs of American democracy promotion efforts in the post-Cold War era. However, they caution that a rapid reversal of them might raise a whole new set of foreign policy challenges. The rise of the Islamic State following a significant withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, prompted in large part by public opposition inside the United States to the war in Iraq, illustrates these risks.

Review by Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard, University of Copenhagen

In this book Professor Tony Smith delivers an apt and original examination of the legacy of President Woodrow Wilson within the context of contemporary American liberal internationalism. The book consists of two main sections, of which the first traces the development of Wilson's thoughts and the second examines the fate of American liberal internationalism, or Wilsonianism, in the period from World War II to the present day. The two sections reflect Smith's dual purpose with the book. First, he seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of Wilson's vision for America's mission in the world. Second, it is his hope that such an understanding of Wilson can help deliver present-day Wilsonianism from what Smith perceives as the concept's mutation by so-called Neo-Wilsonians since the 1990s.

Before embarking on his empirical examination of Wilson and Wilsonianism, Smith intervenes in an ongoing discussion of definition by posing the question: "What is Wilsonianism?" Recognizing the considerable disagreement over the answer, Smith stresses the importance of grappling with the question because a better grasp of the meaning of Wilsonianism is essential to "provide clarity and purpose to American thinking about world affairs today" (7).

Smith proposes that Wilsonianism should be defined as consisting of four separate, but interrelated, elements: democracy, free trade (economic openness), collective security (multilateralism) and American leadership. These four elements, Smith argues, are mutually reinforcing and combine to form a synthesis with the purpose of securing international peace. In line with his previous work, Smith argues for the primacy of democracy promotion among the four components of Wilsonianism in both theoretical and historical terms.¹ The discussion about which elements constitute Wilsonianism and their relative importance is, as Smith acknowledges, a familiar academic debate for which there is no consensus. As a reference, Smith refers to an edited book by political scientist G. John Ikenberry with contributions by political scientist Anne-Marie Slaughter, historian Thomas Knock and himself. In this book, *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first Century*, the four scholars failed to agree on a conclusion on the relative importance of democracy promotion and multilateralism.² Others, such as historian John A. Thompson, have argued that the tension between the components of Wilsonianism makes it such a conflicted concept that it does not constitute a coherent ideas set.³ To Smith, however, Wilsonianism constitutes a coherent worldview, although he speculates that Wilson might not have approved of attempts to turn his ideas into a blueprint for foreign policy decision-making.

In the first section of the book, Smith progresses thematically and partially chronologically in three chapters as he traces the development of Wilson's ideas during the period 1885-1920 before summarizing this section with a succinct synthesis in chapter four. In the book's preface Smith professes that he considers this first

¹ See, for instance: Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy*, expanded ed. (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012).

² G. John Ikenberry, et al., *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

³ John A. Thompson, "Wilsonianism: The Dynamics of a Conflicted Concept," *International Affairs* 86:1 (2010).

section to be the book's most important contribution. I am inclined to agree with him; the first section certainly is an excellent survey of Wilson's writings and speeches as scholar and president. The chapters quote Wilson extensively, and often to great length, providing the reader with rich opportunities to examine Wilson's statements firsthand.

Examining Wilson's academic scholarship prior to his political career, Smith demonstrates how Wilson was far from the ideological crusader he is often portrayed as. Rather, Smith argues that, as much as Wilson would have liked to see democracy spread internationally, he was profoundly skeptical about the possibility of such an occurrence and did not advocate that the United States promote democracy. In fact, Smith's examination of Wilson's academic writings leaves one wondering how Wilson could possibly develop into the president who declared in 1917 "the world must be made the world safe for democracy."⁴ Smith provides the explanation for this in the following chapter as he investigates Wilson's attempts to promote democracy through what Smith labels "progressive imperialism." In the period from the Spanish-American War to the United States' entry into World War I, Wilson both argued for and acted to promote democracy through the use of force. Smith's key argument here is that "Wilson followed a form of progressive imperialism under which direct American military intervention in the affairs of foreign peoples was intended to bring about a democratic form of government" (91). Yet, Smith points out that Wilson was keenly aware of the limits to American power to shape other countries, an awareness that was shaped greatly by his involvement in the Mexican Revolution during his presidency. Moreover, Smith emphasizes, Wilson did not rely on American power alone but rather sought to promote democracy through the creation of multilateral institutions. Smith traces the development of this element of Wilson's thinking in chapter four along with his commitment to economic openness as he investigates Wilson's struggle to establish the League of Nations. Again, Smith points out that although Wilson saw American leadership as absolutely essential to the success of a multilateral order, he was highly aware of the limits to American power. Smith ends the book's first section with a synthesis of the previous three chapters in the appropriately titled chapter "Wilson's Wilsonianism." Here, Smith stresses the coherence between Wilson's ideas, arguing "what later came to be called Wilsonianism should be understood as an integrated cluster of arguments that evolved in sequence, and so in force, over time" (133).

The second section of the book traces the development of Wilsonianism from World War II to present-day. Chapter five examines the reemergence of Wilson's ideas during the Cold War in what Smith calls the "hegemonic" form of Wilsonianism (181). According to Smith, the Cold War years demonstrated the benefits of a wisely applied Wilsonianism with the democratic transformations of Germany and Japan as the "gold standard" (156). Smith notes how a range of local circumstances conducive to democracy in these countries were the key causes for their successful democratization. Attention to such local circumstances combined with a healthy dose of skepticism about American ability to promote democracy, Smith argues, were in line with Wilson's thinking and essential to a successful Wilsonianism.

In chapter six Smith examines what he sees as the theoretical transformation of Wilsonianism into its current 'imperialist' form among scholars and pundits during the long 1990s. In explaining this transformation, Smith identifies three theoretical concepts: democratic peace theory, democratic transition theory, and the

⁴ Woodrow Wilson, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress Requesting a Declaration of War Against Germany," 2 April 1917. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=65366>.

doctrine of responsibility to protect. When these three concepts are combined, Smith argues, “they become a new form of high-octane liberal internationalism representing a sea change in the character of Wilsonianism” (189). Smith detects three stages in this process of transformation, which combined to remove reservations about the possibility of democracy promotion. The first stage simplified the process of democratization into a set of political variables that were detached from historical, socioeconomic or cultural factors. The second stage elevated ideas and ideals beyond anything else, leading to the perception that democracy had a universal appeal. The final stage abandoned any preconditions for democratization and focused exclusively on the importance of American determination to force through the advance of democracy. Smith leaves no doubt about where he stands on the resulting neo-Wilsonianism, which he describes as “an intellectual failing of the first order” (223) and denounces as “a danger to the very values it professed to champion” (232). The chapter thus presents Smith’s key critique of the theoretical components of neo-Wilsonianism and is essential to understanding his overall argument about the need for a return to a more prudent Wilsonianism.

In chapter seven Smith investigates neo-Wilsonianism elements of the foreign policies of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Smith’s main argument in this chapter is that the Bush Doctrine, as expressed in National Security Strategy document that was published in 2002, and the subsequent invasion of Iraq, represent “the greatest break in the history of the Wilsonian tradition” (236). Smith extends his claim to argue that the Bush Doctrine “stands alone in the annals of the history of American foreign policy since the Republic’s founding for its daring act of imperialist aggression” (236). This criticism of the Bush Doctrine can be found in greater details in Smith’s previous book *A Pact with the Devil*.⁵ Smith acknowledges that further research is required to better grasp the rise of neo-Wilsonianism, stating “I do not know exactly how neo-Wilsonian thinking moved to the highest levels of the American government” (241). Fortunately, with the declassification of archives for the 1980s, diplomatic historians are increasingly turning their attention to U.S foreign policy during the decade, including the development of democracy promotion.

Perhaps more surprisingly Smith argues that Obama too was a neo-Wilsonian at least until his normalization of relations with Cuba and the nuclear accord with Iran in 2015. In support of this claim, Smith demonstrates Obama’s commitment to American exceptionalism. Smith, however, does not mention Obama’s April 2009 statement that “I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism [...] we’re not always going to be right.”⁶ Moreover, Smith shows that Obama made frequent assertions about democracy as a universal value. Yet, when comparing these statements to those of Bush, Smith simply states, “If in his first term as president Obama made these assertions fewer times than his Republican predecessor in office had done, I would be surprised” (251). Furthermore, Smith speculates that Obama was converted to neo-Wilsonianism by people he labels “neo-Wilsonian Democrats” as well as neoconservatives Republicans during his years in Washington and only escaped their ideas after he experienced the failure of the resulting policies in places like Afghanistan and Libya. Plausible as this claim may be, the available sources do not provide compelling evidence for it, which Smith implicitly acknowledges through his word choice. “It was *likely* there that Senator Obama met the likes of Susan Rice, Samantha Power, and Peter Beinart or their associates – from

⁵ Tony Smith, *A Pact with the Devil: Washington’s Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of the American Promise* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁶ Barack Obama, “The President’s News Conference in Strasbourg,” 4 April 2009. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=85959>.

whom he *could* have easily picked up basic concepts of the new liberal internationalist vernacular. [...] Obama well *may* have met with articulate neoconservative Republicans as well” (264). The absence of evidence to support such claims make the section the least convincing part of an otherwise very convincing book. Smith concludes the book by summarizing his argument for redeeming Wilsonianism and offering a wide-ranging set of policy recommendations for future administrations.

As evident from this book and Smith’s other works, Smith clearly holds a favorable view of Wilson, and he leaves no doubt about his perception of the importance of Wilson’s legacy, calling him “the most important president the United States has ever had with respect to its conduct in world affairs” (143). While Smith is not blind to Wilson’s shortcomings on issues such as women’s equality and race, he partially downplays these, arguing, “That racism was part of those presidential administrations that preceded and followed his does not exonerate him from this failing. Yet, neither should the fact of his racism blind us to his administration’s extraordinary achievements” (284). Smith continues to argue that Wilson’s “color line” in domestic politics did not extend to his foreign policy (285). On this point, Smith is in disagreement with the works of other scholars such as historian Mary A. Renda, who sees an underlying racism in United States (U.S.) foreign policy towards Haiti under Wilson and subsequent presidents.⁷ Smith, however, manages to convincingly demonstrate that although Wilson certainly entertained the idea of a racial hierarchy, he firmly believed that all people were capable of self-government (see for instance, 73, 81).

In the introduction, Smith points out that he is likely to face criticism for putting too much emphasis on human rights and democracy promotion relative to Wilsonianism’s other components. Undoubtedly, such criticism will surface as part of the longstanding debate over the relative significance of Wilsonianism’s different components. However, another criticism worth posing is Smith’s failure to define human rights and his tendency to mention democracy and human rights together as if the two concepts are interchangeable. Moreover, Smith ignores the rapidly growing scholarship on the role of human rights in U.S. foreign policy.⁸ An engagement with this literature could help clarify the relationship between democracy and human rights and how their roles in U.S. foreign policy changed over the course of the 1980s and 1990s along with the transformation of Wilsonianism.

In conclusion, it is beyond any doubt that Smith has made a significant and highly original contribution to the scholarship on Wilson and Wilsonianism. The book manages to offer new insights to our understanding of Wilson as well an original critique of contemporary U.S. foreign policy—a major accomplishment that deserves praise. Moreover, the book is well written, engaging, and persuasive. Smith provides the reader throughout with extensive guidance of the book’s structure and frequent summaries of his arguments, which makes it easy to follow his argumentation and understand how the individual parts contribute to the whole. As a reader one feels in good hands as Smith guides one through both Wilson’s ideas and their subsequent

⁷ Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti : Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁸ See, for instance: Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia : Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War : A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network*, Human Rights in History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue : The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Harvard University Press, 2014); Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World : America’s Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

development and implementation in U.S. foreign policy. The book deserves a wide readership not only by scholars but by anyone concerned with the practice of U.S. foreign policy.

Review by Trygve Throntveit, University of Minnesota

President Woodrow Wilson vacated the White House more than ninety years ago, yet his words and ideas continue to shape both his historical reputation and his still-evolving legacy. And understandably so: Few statesmen of the American past directed their thought, speech, and writing more frequently than Wilson did to such eerily modern questions. What is America's proper role in an interdependent world, and what practical responsibilities does it carry? What are their implications for democracy at home?

These were major themes of Wilson's presidency as well as his scholarly career, and they resonate as powerfully today as in his time. Indeed, Tony Smith's new book, *Why Wilson Matters*, argues that today's combination of instability in global affairs and confusion in international policy is as dangerous and unpredictable as at any time since the end of the Second World War, when Wilson's political heirs established a liberal-internationalist order that organized and stabilized world politics for more than fifty years. In Smith's view, Wilson's vision of an America prepared by history for both exceptional leadership and exceptional service anchored that order, and must be revived to sustain it in the face of resurgent nationalism and borderless threats. In other words, to save the "American liberal internationalism" of the book's subtitle requires understanding and appreciating the origins and character of its healthy growth and function—and that, for Smith, means understanding and appreciating the ideas and policies of Woodrow Wilson (xii).

Smith makes a compelling case deserving a wide hearing. His book is a welcome addition to a growing literature on the positive as well as negative lessons of Wilson's presidency for scholars, policymakers, and citizens alike.¹ Like many provocative arguments, however, Smith's is as productive in its exaggerations and omissions as in its revelations. In what follows I hope to demonstrate this virtue through a sort of magic trick, knocking out two legs of Smith's stool yet sitting proudly alongside him on what remains.

Let me first take a swipe at Smith's characterization of Wilson as an American "exceptionalist" (xiii)—an interpretation with a long and venerable pedigree.² Enumerating the basic elements of the "liberal agenda" Wilson bequeathed to world politics, Smith argues that its aims of economic openness, multilateralism in pursuit of collective security, and democracy promotion are inextricable from its call for "American leadership"—a responsibility "ordained" by history and first hallowed as such by Wilson (15-16). In Smith's relatively nuanced account, Wilson's belief in America's special role did not reflect moral arrogance so much as his practical calculus that "multilateralism unqualified by the character of its membership" was a poor guarantor of peace, and that the world therefore required some compelling, instructive model of "a

¹ Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Thomas J. Knock in G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Tony Smith, *The Crisis in American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Anne-Marie Slaughter in Ikenberry, Knock, Slaughter, and Smith, *Crisis in American Foreign Policy*; John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009); Trygve Throntveit, *Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

² See, most recently, Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and American Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

democratic society working through a democratic state” to cooperate with “like-minded peoples” worldwide (20).

Smith grounds his interpretation in sources encompassing Wilson’s very earliest writings on the historically contingent character of political regimes. He correctly concludes that, in Wilson’s view, it was America’s unique course of political development, as well as its material power and imaginative influence, which made it the obvious leader of any quest to democratize world politics. Smith errs, however, when stating that in the “final stage of his thinking” on these matters—his conceptualization and promotion of a League of Nations—Wilson came to “insist on American global hegemony as the guarantee that this ambitious program might succeed” (140). If global hegemony was his aim, what explains the concerted campaign by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and his allies in 1919-1920 to portray League membership as a crippling relinquishment of national sovereignty? What explains Wilson’s multiple efforts to prevent and then circumvent efforts by both the U.S. Senate and the French and British governments to ensure a great-power veto over League decisions and directives?³ What, finally, explains Wilson’s refusal to countenance membership in a League that did not bind the United States by the judgments of the international community or the responsibilities of membership in it?

Smith elides such questions—gracefully, I might add—in order to fashion the second interpretive leg I intend to splinter: namely, that Wilson’s ‘classic’ version of liberal internationalism was revived by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and “used to good effect from the half century that stretches from Pearl Harbor to the implosion of the Soviet Union” (7).

It is true that Wilson believed in the duty of “the world’s paramount democracy” to “identify its national security not with narrow self-interests but instead with a world-order agenda assuming the protection of the democratic way of life,” and thereby lead other ostensible and aspiring democracies to the same appreciation of their privileges and obligations. It is also true that despite the “differences” between them, “Wilson’s ‘classical’ Wilsonianism, ‘hegemonic’ Wilsonianism of the Cold War years, and ‘imperialist’ neo-Wilsonianism born of the triumph of the United States over the Soviet Union” all emphasize “the primacy of democracy and the need for Washington’s leadership in the liberal equation for peace” (131). But leadership of what sort?

Smith’s own modifiers—“hegemonic” and “imperialist”—denote attitudes Wilson rejected (and perversions of his legacy that his closest sympathizers of the 1940s resisted).⁴ Again, the League fight of 1919-1920 was so bitter precisely because Wilson promoted international constraints on U.S. foreign policy that hawks in the Senate deemed crippling. One need not trash the whole complex of institutions and policies built and pursued by the United States after 1945 to argue that Roosevelt, and most of his successors, adopted a form of ‘leadership’ far more domineering than Wilson advocated in 1919. Whether pushing for a Security Council veto, sponsoring anti-communist dictators, or toppling uncooperative governments in economically enticing

³ See F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 43-53.

⁴ Christopher D. O’Sullivan, *Sumner Welles, Postwar Planning, and the Quest for a New World Order, 1937-1943* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Trygve Throntveit, “A Strange Fate: Quincy Wright and the Trans-War Trajectory of Wilsonian Internationalism,” *White House Studies* 10.4 (2011): 361-377.

regions, Wilson's ostensibly 'internationalist' heirs were more likely to view world order through the lens of American interests rather than the other way round.

Put briefly, the flaw in Smith's book is its frequent conflation of what Lodge termed 'Wilsonism'—a program to foster the gradual development of a genuinely democratic system of global governance—with what came to be called 'Wilsonianism'—a program to promote global political and economic conditions favorable to American interests.⁵ Many of Smith's own distillations of Wilson's thought—especially those emphasizing the obligations as well as advantages of power in an age of interdependence—betray the gulf between these two.

Consequently, despite the objections raised above, Smith's book should be read—albeit critically—by anyone concerned with the present and future course of U.S. foreign policy.

The very conflation of Wilsonism and Wilsonianism reflects the wisdom of Smith's political analysis, which emphasizes the national and global benefits of political and economic cooperation as well as the folly of imposing such values on others by force. If he sometimes downplays the costs of a foreign policy largely defined by one illusively monolithic threat (international communism during the Cold War) as opposed to another (global terrorism since 2002), Smith nonetheless highlights the dangers of a foreign policy inattentive to transnational concerns and contemptuous of the plural perspectives that resolve them most clearly. A small but growing number of readers, like myself, might object that Wilson's most important function is to provide a radical critique of the liberal-internationalist tradition that Smith seeks to redeem. They should maintain their equanimity, and seek what is worth preserving as well as dismantling in the American diplomatic tradition since 1945. As Smith quotes Wilson (289):

The world's memory must be kept alive, or we shall never see an end to its old mistakes.... I need not tell you that I believe in full, explicit instruction in history and in politics, in the experiences of peoples and the fortunes of governments, in the whole story of what men have attempted and what they have accomplished through all the changes both of form and purpose in their organization of their common life....

No scholar can completely excavate the 'world's memory' of even one person, let alone an entire intellectual and political tradition. But as growing numbers of Americans reject even the trappings of internationalism, Smith's refusal to consign its greatest advocate to the ash heap of history is valuable. It should encourage other scholars to consider the unfashionable notion that a sometime racist and chauvinist, an inconsistent pragmatist, and even an unapologetic idealist might have something to teach us.

⁵ Henry Cabot Lodge to Vance C. McCormick, 13 November 1920, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (microfilm), reel 67.

Author's Response by Tony Smith, Tufts University, Emeritus

I would like to thank Tom Maddux and Diane Labrosse for inviting these comments on my book *Why Wilson Matters*. I know that H-Diplo does its best to encourage diversity in its reviews. The diversity in our group is one of age: John Milton Cooper and I are “of a certain age,” but the three other contributors are younger than us by at least a generation. Whether or not they are liberals, they share the possibility of clarifying the logic of liberal internationalism and its evolution over time. Perhaps this younger generation will deliver a death warrant. But my expectation is that if, unlike fascism and communism, liberal internationalism is rehabilitated as a form of ‘realistic liberalism,’ its future may be secure. It would then be safe from the excesses of neo-Wilsonianism, which contributed so much suffering to the world by its self-righteous self-confidence that it could make the world anew through democratization by force of arms; and it might survive as well the depredations being wrought on this tradition by President Donald Trump.

President Woodrow Wilson left the White House in 1921 with his concepts for world order apparently in ruin. But with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who, with many other leading officials of his time (and especially Secretary of State Cordell Hull), had worked with Wilson, liberal internationalism made a comeback. I call the 1940s Wilson’s Decade and the achievement of the Washington leaders of that period a golden age. Can we find some comfort in the tale and work for another comeback in the near future?

I am grateful to Cooper not only for his essay but for his suggestions before and after my book was written. He was correct years ago to warn me against the idea that despite Wilson’s dedication to the protection and, if possible, expansion of democratic ways, he would never have been a proponent of the invasion of Iraq. There was a time after March 2003, given all the democratic flag waving of the George W. Bush administration and its supporters among liberal democrats, when I came to believe that 2003 could be traced back to Wilson’s thinking in 1918-1919. My view was widely, indeed almost universally, shared, at least among political scientists and some historians,¹ and still is today.

My opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq under the code-named Operation Iraqi Freedom with the nonsense surrounding it with respect to a democratic transformation of the ‘Broader Middle East’ almost turned me against Wilsonianism. But given my loyalty to so many of its values, I decided to look into matters by reading Wilson himself. Doing so, I came to appreciate his prudent restraint that made him a realistic liberal, not at all the ‘utopian messiah’ he is far too often depicted as being. The purpose of this book is to try to save the liberal internationalist, or Wilsonian, argument from destruction by demonstrating that the 28th President would surely never have countenanced the invasion of Iraq in 2003 nor the ‘surge’ in Afghanistan in late 2009 (so making this ‘Barack Obama’s War’) nor liberal enthusiasm over the Arab Spring in 2011-2012, all this in the name of a democratic transformation of this part of the world.

What I learned from looking at Wilson more closely was that what he hoped for, and what he expected to see emerge historically, were distinct. The democratic project could be threatened at home, even in its strongest redoubts, as in the United States, just as it might fail to sink roots abroad (his favorite whipping boy from his early twenties until the end of his life was the French Revolution). There was therefore a deeply prudential element to his thinking, one that made him resist appeals that he march on Mexico City in 1914 or on

¹ Tony Smith, *A Pact with the Devil: Washington’s Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of the American Promise*. Routledge, 2007.

Moscow and Berlin in 1918. That he attributed his convictions to his reading of Edmund Burke explains a part of his viewpoint, but more importantly, as a professor of comparative politics (as it is still called today), Wilson had a healthy appreciation of the strength and variety of the world's governments. Foreign capitals would be democratic or not depending on the way the values, institutions, and historically endowed cultures of these peoples expressed themselves. Wilson called this the 'organic' character of a people. America might work as it could on the margins, but the idea that it could conduct democratizing nation- and state-building for peoples as culturally formed and as politically potent as those of Mexico, the Soviet Union, and Germany was to partake in a fool's paradise—one that seized Washington and a good part of the academia from 2001 to 2015.

If my argument on Wilson is correct—and I thank the historians Tom Knock and Cooper for their support on this matter—then liberal internationalism may yet be able to survive the terrible events that began with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and remain with us today in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan. But to preserve liberal internationalism means to save it from the perversion it underwent at the hands of what I call the neo-Wilsonians with their cult of democratic peace theory, democratic transition theory, and R2P, the 'responsibility to protect.' That these beliefs were as much the work of neo-liberals among the Democrats as neo-conservatives within the Republicans shows how root and branch these convictions became.

My own exclusion from the club of comparative political development experts and the reigning intellectuals of liberal internationalism, where I once enjoyed a position of respect, is a testimony to the problem of rehabilitating a tradition they have done so much to damage. In addition to Professors Cooper and Knock, I have also been supported by Realists such as political science Professors Michael Desch, Stephen Walt, and John Mearsheimer. But where is the debate among comparative political development specialists, the most prominent of whom, almost to a person, embraced imperialist wars dedicated to the democratization of peoples who no serious comparativist before the late 1980s would have ever thought had the ingredients for a successful transition to democracy?

How do liberal internationalists explain their role in creating a policy toward the Middle East that has failed? An example is at hand in a current publication by two influential liberal internationalists, Professors John Ikenberry and Daniel Deudney, titled "Realism, Liberalism, and the Iraq War." Its abstract states simply: "Of the many conventional wisdoms of American foreign policy, none is more misleading than the notion that the Iraq War was the product of liberalism."² The authors then go on to review the logic of Realist thinking, applying it to certain decision-makers in calling for the invasion of Iraq in 2003, while attributing to liberal internationalism only the slightest of responsibilities, like a candle atop a cake of realist ambition in a world where the United States finally had become the only superpower.

This understanding is seemingly at odds with earlier liberal internationalist publications. Consider as Exhibit One *The Princeton Report*, published in 2006 under the direction of Ikenberry and then Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School Anne-Marie Slaughter. Here was an influential study based on countless interviews

² John Ikenberry and Daniel Deudney, titled "Realism, Liberalism, and the Iraq War," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 59:4 (August–September 2017): 7-26.

and conferences that its co-authors expected to be no less than another X Telegram for American foreign policy.³

A single clearer and more forceful statement of what I call neo-Wilsonianism than this *Report* has not been penned. In the sharpness of its concepts for democratizing nation- and state-building through the multilateral use of force, the *Report* far surpassed the Bush Doctrine of 2002 in the clarity of its blueprint for action. It combined democratic peace theory (that democracies are very unlikely to use force against one another) with democratic transition theory (that countries can move from being authoritarian to democratic if they undertake certain nation- and state-building measures), with an imperialist agenda that was a “just war” theory called “the responsibility to protect” or “R2P,” that upended the guarantees of state sovereignty that had existed since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. That it was drawn up at Woodrow Wilson’s home institution, Princeton University, is underscored by its subtitle, surely meant as homage to him, for it well-expressed his wishes for the League of Nations: “Forging a World of Liberty under Law.” That it contravened basic tenets of “classic” liberal internationalism born of Wilson’s thinking, as well as the practices of ‘hegemonic’ liberalism of the cold war years should be evident. However, as democratic peace theory was in line with Wilson’s beliefs, the new liberal internationalist agenda could be called “neo-Wilsonianism.” In these beliefs lay the justification for the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the surge in Afghanistan of 2009, and the enthusiasm for the Arab Spring in 2011. Herein as well—and not in Realism—lay the concepts that wrought the series of disasters that are all too evident today. In a word, the Bush Doctrine and the *Princeton Report* are cut of the same cloth: neo-Wilsonianism.

Who will then help liberals understand their tradition? One of the younger scholars who may serve as an example is Rasmus Søndergaard.⁴ He is doing necessary work on questions I lacked the time to investigate. By studying the evolution in liberal internationalist thinking from Presidents Ronald Reagan through Bill Clinton, Søndergaard is filling in what I call ‘missing links’ in the fashioning of liberal internationalism into an imperialist doctrine the likes of which Wilson never anticipated and surely would never have embraced.

Søndergaard is correct to say that I do not trace exactly how the intellectual argument I call neo-Wilsonianism materialized. I can define its conceptual terms as they emerged from the academic seminar rooms of our greatest universities beginning in the late 1980s, and I can demonstrate that the concepts were readily picked up in Washington policy-making circles after 2001. What we nonetheless need is a clearer picture of what I call the ‘food chain,’ involving academics, think tanks, and policy-makers (at the top of this carnivorous ‘chain’) working out the ideas that in 2003 would legitimize what I consider to be the worst mistake in the entire history of American foreign policy: the belief that not only Iraq, but indeed the states of the Arab world in general, could be transformed into democracies, and thus play their role in the fight against al-Qaeda.

I must leave it to Søndergaard to do the important work of giving a more precise accounting not only as to the process by which these concepts were generated but then how they moved up to become national security

³ *Princeton Report*, “Forging a World of Liberty under Law,” Princeton Project on National Security, 27 September 2006, available as a download in different formats. See 4-5 for this expectation.

⁴ See, for example, Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard, “Bill Clinton’s ‘Democratic Enlargement’ and the Securitisation of Democracy promotion.” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 26:3 (2015): 534-551, and my November 2016 review: <https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/ar657.pdf>.

policy. Many scholars have failed to see the virus working in the world view of President Barack Obama until mid-2015. Students of the subject should look at those close to Obama, not only after he became president, but more especially after he arrived in Washington early in 2005 as a young, ambitious man, inexperienced in world affairs. It is a mistake to take one of Obama's citations out of context, as Søndergaard does, to be evidence that that he did not become a star-gazing liberal. In speech after speech, year after terrible year, Obama remained on point as a neo-Wilsonian. There never was an Obama Doctrine; until the summer of 2015, his mantra remained the Bush Doctrine.

Those who doubt Obama's commitment to American exceptionalism as being tied to democracy promotion, he might look at a legion of Obama's statements cited in my book. Consider for one the address the President gave at the West Point Commencement on 28 May 2104. Here President Obama pointed to Somalia, Yemen and Libya as places the American military might have to be deployed, and Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq as needing additional assistance. His justification:

The upheaval of the Arab world reflects the rejection of an authoritarian order that was anything but stable and now offers the long-term prospect of more responsive and effective governance... I believe that a world of greater freedom and tolerance is not only a moral imperative; it also helps keep us safe. I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being... Here's my bottom line: America must always lead on the world stage... America's support for democracy and human rights goes beyond idealism; it is a matter of national security. Democracies are our closest friends and far less likely to go to war. Economies based on free and open markets perform better and become markets for our goods. Respect for human rights is an antidote to instability and the grievances that fuel violence and terror (259).

Such assertions made President Obama a member in good standing of the neo-Wilsonian brigade (as did his salute to the work of the neo-conservative, neo-Wilsonian Robert Kagan). When we turn to his associates, the mind boggles. Almost all were pickled in this rhetoric, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her closest advisors, as well as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power.

To this I should add how striking President Obama's support was for economic globalization of the sort that Nobel Prize Economics Laureate Joseph Stiglitz denounced in terms that sounded as if Woodrow Wilson had been reincarnated.⁵ Here again was a clear mark of his association with neo-Wilsonianism, this time expressed in his blind faith in the ability of free market liberal internationalism to engender not only prosperity but also to promote democracy.

Søndergaard also thinks I might have discussed the relationship between human rights and democracy. The two are obviously distinct but just as obviously linked. In my chapter on President Jimmy Carter in *America's Mission*,⁶ I lay out just how seriously that president failed to see the linkage. Personally, I favor the non-governmental human rights groups like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty, and Transparency International,

⁵ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Great Divide: Unequal Societies and What We Can Do About Them* (New York, W.W. Norton, 2015).

⁶ Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy* (Princeton University Press; expanded edition, 2012).

while in domestic matters I champion the American Civil Liberties Union. I discuss this a bit in the conclusion of *Why Wilson Matters*, for I think here lie some of the seeds of a Wilsonian revival. I feel this is something of a side issue, and do not view my failure to go into depth on the question as a problem.

I also fail to see the blemishes on the two of my three propositions on Wilson that Trygve Throntveit says he will demolish. He is surely right that I am mistaken when he cites my phrase that Wilson sought a “global hegemony” for the U.S. through its leadership of the League (140). The entire argument of my book argues *against* any such belief, one touted again and again by those who link the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 to Wilson in 1919. What I try to convey instead in *Why Wilson Matters* is Wilson’s clear understanding of the fragility of the League he proposed, his concern that the democracies themselves would fall out with one another, and his recognition that whether it was Germany or the Soviet Union, major actors might not join the League, or might do so only to pollute its ambitions (as indeed turned out to be the case). Throntveit is right to call me out on this phrase, but I can only maintain that my argument is otherwise a full (and I would like to think clear) disavowal of any pretension to “global hegemony” on Wilson’s part. His was a defensive, not offensive, posture in 1919. I think that Throntveit and I are on the same page.

I also agree with him on a second point, which again I do not see as damaging my argument: that it has been all too easy for American leaders to deck out national self-interest as for the good of the world. I say precisely this in the opening paragraph of chapter five (147-148). A matter bedeviling Wilsonianism has always been the danger that instead of serving the interests of protecting democratic peoples worldwide, it would be used hypocritically to serve more narrow American interests instead. Here is a major charge repeatedly made by Realist critics of liberal internationalism and I agree they are often on target. I could cite example after example of French leader Charles de Gaulle pointing exactly this out (a reason he ultimately took France out of NATO). Athens’ management of the Delian League in the fifth century BC might also be cited. Throntveit is again criticizing me for a charge which does not correspond to any assertion I have made, nor would I make. Indeed, I make exactly his point on 147f.

At its best, Wilsonianism is a genuine concern for democratic peoples worldwide: united we stand, divided we fall. Today German Chancellor Angela Merkel embodies this conviction far better than Donald Trump, who called NATO ‘obsolete,’ saluted the British for voting for Brexit, and was seen by right-wing nationalists in Europe from Hungary to France as a good choice for America to have made last November. To date, Trump has been more the ‘anti-Wilson,’ than any other president since Wilson left office in 1921.

Throntveit has recently published a fine book indeed, *Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment*.⁷ My hope is that with his work and mine, plus the support, as mentioned before, of Cooper and Knock and a growing team of young scholars, we can see a rebirth of liberal internationalism, an approach to world affairs purged of the mistakes of neo-Wilsonianism, but capable of providing a platform for American leadership of the liberal democratic world. I regret that he criticizes me for two shortcomings which I cannot acknowledge: the first because it was a semantic slip contradicted by the argument of the book; the second because the other point he makes is one I agree with, as indeed almost anyone acquainted with American foreign policy would do as well. I look forward to working with him on a

⁷ Trygve Throntveit, *Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

common ambition, not losing ourselves in quibbling about truly minor matters especially when in fact we are in agreement.

Patrick McDonald's essay is exactly on point that more study needs to be done to revitalize the Wilsonian tradition—its successes but also its failures. McDonald suggests that we investigate the interwar period—perhaps especially the 1920s—to see why what the German historian Klaus Schwabe has called “the Wilsonian Peace” failed to jell after the Versailles Peace Conference.⁸ The conclusions McDonald comes to are precisely the kind of arguments from which we need to learn.

Could the rise of Adolf Hitler have been prevented had the United States taken over leadership of the League of Nations and been possessed of the spirit Wilson hoped for? Counterfactuals are notorious for their inability to come to fully convincing conclusions. Yet, as McDonald says, issues from the past most certainly can illuminate dilemmas we face today. Analyses such as he proposes require careful historical scrutiny. But if well done, they can inform today's world, exactly as Wilson expressed it in his most famous public lecture “Princeton in the Nation's Service,” delivered in October 1896.⁹

McDonald does not say so, but President Trump's spin on ‘America First’ is much the kind of policy that later generations may come to see as being as seriously damaging to liberalism as the interwar period was. If the neo-Wilsonian mistake was to see everyone, everywhere as a potential democrat, by contrast today's mistake is to suppose the desirability of splintering of the European Union, of down-grading of NATO combined with the refusal to join either expanded international economic groupings that exclude China (the Trans-Pacific Partnership), or to support efforts to minimize the damage the United States is doing to the environment (the Paris Climate Accords), such as we see with those who support the agenda of the Trump administration.

I appreciate McDonald's sense of the main ambition of my book—to re-energize liberal internationalism from the terrible mistakes of the last twenty years (or more, if Søndergaard's work reveals, as I think it will, that the alterations in liberal thinking set in as early as the 1980s). But I especially enjoyed McDonald's own contribution to this effort with his important discussion of the interwar period, one damaged by the failure of the Wilsonian Peace to hold. His points constitute a model of how we might raise our awareness of the history of this tradition that I find encouraging for future thought.

⁸ Klaus Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany and Peacemaking, 1918–1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). See also Schwabe's later account in “President Wilson and the War Aims of the United States,” in English in Holger Afflerbach, ed., *Der Sinn des Krieges (The Purpose of the First World War)* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2015).

⁹ http://infoshare1.princeton.edu/libraries/firestone/rbsc/mudd/online_ex/wilsonline/indn8nsvc.html