

A Conversation on Woodrow Wilson's Foreign Policies

Jane Harman:

Okay. Good afternoon. Please find a seat, everybody. Here we go. We have an overflow crowd. That is because this program will be so good. And the moveable feast continues. As many of you know, this is the third of a series of activities celebrating Woodrow Wilson's centennial as president of the United States.

Many of you were at the State Department, where we had a marvelous debate between Chris Matthews -- it wasn't a debate -- a conversation between Chris Matthews and Scott Berg, author of an upcoming biography of Woodrow Wilson, which will get great attention. It will be excerpted in Vanity Fair Magazine, but now I'm supposed to tell you that you can buy Vanity Fair Magazine but you have to buy the book.

[laughter]

I want to acknowledge that there are many key supporters and friends of the Wilson Center sitting right in front of me, including a number of board members. I especially want to recognize our board chairman, Ambassador Joe Gildenhorn. And I see other board members, but since I can't see everybody I'm not going there.

This is the first of two panels assessing President Wilson's legacy. This panel addresses foreign policy. Our keynote speaker is a dear and delicious friend whom the late Sidney Harman affectionately called Sonny.

[laughter]

Maybe he will explain. Few can call on such a distinguished record of service in the military, in government, and in academia. General Scowcroft served as the national security advisor to Presidents Ford and George H.W. Bush. The only person, I didn't know this, to hold the position under two different presidents. He spent 29 years in the military, was Chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, a member of the United Nations Secretary Generals high-level panel on threats, challenges, and change, widely recognized for his inside service and diplomacy. In 1991 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Bush 41, and in 1993 received an

honorary knighthood -- we can't call him sir, though, because he's not a British citizen -- from Queen Elizabeth II.

Some believe Woodrow Wilson was the greatest example of an idealist in U.S. foreign policy. General Scowcroft is one of the most distinguished realists. He says, quote, "I'm a realist in the sense that I'm a cynic about human nature." I actually don't believe that. You might have said that, but I don't think you're a cynic. He opposed the war in Iraq and paid a high price personally for that point of view. He has said, quote, "The U.S. isn't smart enough to solve the Syria crisis, and would pay a heavy price for intervention," but I'm sure we'll hear more, because he's also said, quote, "I'm not a pacifist. I believe in the use of force, but there has to be a good reason for using force and you have to know when to stop using force."

No doubt his views will stimulate a lively panel discussion, which follows his keynote, led by another rock star, doctor, professor, whatever else, and mother, Anne-Marie Slaughter, who will be joined by two professors of history, Erez Manela of Harvard and Michael Kazin of Georgetown, in addition to General Scowcroft. Professor Kazin, by the way, just published a piece in The New Republic suggesting that Wilson was as important as FDR or LBJ. Interesting. We'll hear about that.

Back to Anne-Marie Slaughter. She and I at separate times were research assistants to the legendary Abram Chayes, who then became legal advisor -- or, in fact, before us was legal advisor -- yes, well before us -- in the State Department. Chayes was at Harvard Law School, which we both attended. She is a professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton, where she was previously Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School. A lot of people confuse the Woodrow Wilson School and the Woodrow Wilson Center. We are surely informally related, but I'd like to think that Anne-Marie and I are formally related as sisters. In addition to her law degree, she picked up a PhD from Oxford, and happens to be the -- and was the first director of policy planning of the Department of State who happened to be a woman. After this summer, after she finishes a book, she will become the first president of the New America Foundation -- dot, dot, dot -- who happens to be a woman. So, my sister, welcome to you, and you will follow Sonny Scowcroft.

Please welcome General Brent Scowcroft.

[applause]

Brent Scowcroft:

Thank you very much, Jane, for that introduction.

[laughter]

I've been called a lot of things, but it's the first time one of them has been "delicious."

[laughter]

I can hardly wait.

[laughter]

Jane's dear late husband and I had a good relationship, and I introduced him at more than one speech as my daddy. That's where that come from. A wonderful, wonderful man.

It's a great privilege for me to be here with you all today. And I am not a student of Woodrow Wilson, but what I want to do is to paint a broad picture of U.S. foreign policy, in which Woodrow Wilson was one of the prime movers. And I want to -- there were really three broad episodes -- episode is not the right word. Three broad, all-encompassing eras of U.S. foreign policy. The first was the first hundred and so years of the country. The second was Woodrow Wilson years, and the last were sort of foreign-policy-with-the-sword years. And I want to talk a little about both of those, because Woodrow Wilson plays the middle role in that and a very primary role.

When we became independent -- shortly after we became independent, we were still figuring out who we were and what we were about, the French Revolution took place. And Citizen Genet came over here and he said to us, "Look, we helped you in your revolution. We need help now. Come help us." And we said, "Thank you very much. Good luck."

[laughter]

And that was -- that sort of set the pattern for the next hundred or so years, and it was I think most clearly

articulated by John Quincy Adams when he was secretary of state, not president, and he said, wherever -- and this is not a quote, but wherever the flag of freedom and independence is unfurled there will be our hearts, our prayers, and our good wishes, but we go not in search of monsters to destroy. We are the well-wishers of all who seek freedom and independence. We are the guarantee only of our own. And that was U.S. foreign policy, really until Wilson. And in some of the great movements of foreign policy, like the revolutions in 1848 in Europe -- the Hungarian revolutionaries came over here. They had erected statues of liberty and so on, and they said, you know, "We need help." And we said, "We wish you well." And that was our foreign policy. The Monroe Doctrine was a part of it. Stay out of other people's affairs and keep them out of our affairs.

Then came Woodrow Wilson, and Woodrow Wilson says, "That's not enough. We can't just sit back passively and be the city on a hill." That's good. We ought to be the example to the world, but we need to proselytize. We need to push democracy. And that's what he did, and starting primarily with the Peace Conference after World War I. He put together Yugoslavia as a -- really a great experiment. Here are all these little warring tribes and so on. Why don't you create a country, share power? You will be much better off. And it worked well. But, you know, the switch for the U.S. attitude didn't happen just because Woodrow Wilson said it. We did not join the League of Nations. He was a prime architect in a general sense of the League. The United States didn't join the League of Nations. Indeed, when it came down to World War II, FDR had a hard time pushing the U.S. into involvement in World War II. It's interesting to speculate, if the Japanese had not attacked Pearl Harbor, when the United States might have joined World War II.

So this was -- Woodrow -- this was a new foreign policy. It is our duty to help countries who want freedom, independence, democracy. We had some troubles with that in World War II, especially in the Cold War, because we had to debate then -- now how about a dictatorship that opposes the Soviet Union? Is it all right to support them? Well, we sort of decided, yes, that was the exception. But, you know, we weren't completely at ease with that, but that was sort of during the Cold War. That was the big debate over U.S. philosophy of exporting our values, if you will.

Then came President George W. Bush, who basically said, "We support Wilsonianism with the sword. We're prepared to force people to be free." And the issue, for example, on Iraq was we're going to make -- we're going to turn Iraq into a democracy and that will be a beacon for the rest of the Middle East. Now, we stepped on a certain number of other things to do that, like Woodrow Wilson's successor League of Nations to the U.N. We knew we couldn't get a vote in the U.N. so we didn't go there, because the vote would have been -- is it okay to simply inaugurate the use of force against a foreign country?

So that really is the thrust of U.S. foreign policy. And we're now in a -- I would say in a position where the first hundred years is not really an option for us, because while we are not, if you will, the single super power in the world the way we were maybe 20 years ago, so on, we're still the only country who can rally people around us on behalf of great adventures like Woodrow Wilson and spreading democracy. The Chinese can't do it now, the Russian can't do it. The Europeans eventually might be able to, but they're not in that position. So the U.S. still has this unique position, and I think we are likely to have a more extended debate on what is the extent to which Wilsonianism ought to be the driving force of U.S. foreign policy? Thank you very much.

[applause]

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

You're not done. You're not done. We're -- you're right here next to me. Thank you. So, I'm Anne-Marie Slaughter, Jane's sister. And Jane definitely knows how to throw a party for Woodrow Wilson or for anybody else. So it's terrific to be back in -- here at the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Professor Manela and I actually met here, I don't know if it was exactly these desks, but it was a version thereof at a celebration of Woodrow Wilson sometime in the last decade where we had John Milton Cooper and a very lively discussion. And this will be a chance to continue this conversation at a moment, whereas General Scowcroft has said, the questions of what Wilsonianism means and what it dictates for us in the 21st century are essentially being

presented to us on a daily basis on the front pages of our newspapers.

So this is going to be very active moderation, which basically means I'm going to talk, too, and engage our panel. I'm going to start with just a couple of reflections of how I come at the legacy of Wilsonianism, and I should say that I was yesterday at the Princeton graduation where Woodrow Wilson was quoted. I was there over the weekend. We had reunions, many of them on Wilson. So Wilson is very much present in my mind. And so I'm going to speak for a little bit, and then ask Professor Manela and Professor Kazin to open with some brief remarks, and then we will engage on some of the subjects that General Kazin -- I'm sorry. General Kazin.

[laughter]

That would be quite something.

Michael Kazin:  
It would.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
[unintelligible]

Michael Kazin:  
Works for me.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
So I think -- there are a couple of things that I would -- that I attribute to Woodrow Wilson, and one of the things that's remarkable about Wilson is he really is a many-splendored figure. I mean, he is an academic, and his academic writings are extraordinary. He was a remarkable domestic president, as you're going to hear. He was a international president who was very loath to go to war initially, but then of course played the role in pursuing World War -- prosecuting World War I for the United States, and then had this vision of peace. One thing that, at least in the Academy, we think of when we talk about being a Wilsonian: is it somebody who thinks that what happens within a country is directly connected to how that country behaves in the world? So the -- as we were talking about, realism, as Jane Harmon said, and General Scowcroft is a realist, one way of differentiating that: it's not people who are realistic versus people who are not, even though

that's the way realists would like to paint those of us who are not realists, it is that either you believe countries in the end are driven by considerations of power and interest regardless of what form of government they have, or you believe that democracies behave differently than dictatorships, that different kinds of dictatorships behave different from each other. And that is a very important fault line. And Woodrow Wilson, if you go back and read his speech to Congress asking for a declaration of war, says, "Look, you know, the Prussians behave the way they do because they have no domestic democracy, they have no representative government." And he says, "The Russians are equally a dictatorship, and we need to factor that in to what their foreign policy is likely to be." And so that's the first thing I would just say, is that, really, when I look back at Wilson I see this is one of the first people - - and you're quite right, there's a line there between Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush, but also, frankly, between Woodrow Wilson and Ronald Reagan, and Woodrow Wilson and Bill Clinton, and we'll see about Obama. But I think that's an important point. He really thought -- he was, after all, a domestic political scientist originally. Right? He's a domestic political scientist and he thinks what happens domestically cannot be separated from what happens in the world. That politics do not end at the water's edge, that a representative democracy will behave differently than a government who need not answer to its people, although might answer to a small group of people. That's the first point I would raise.

The second is -- and I know we're going to debate this. The last time we were here, John Milton Cooper was here, who is one of the great biographers of Woodrow Wilson, in addition to Scott Berg, and I -- if you haven't read Scott Berg's biography, I strongly recommend it. I remember very clearly on this stage John Milton Cooper saying Woodrow Wilson knew how to write. And if you doubt that, just read the quotations carved into the stone of this building. He knew how to write, and he certainly knew the difference between the active and the passive voice. And he did not write the "United States should make the world safe for democracy." That is not what he said. He said, "The world must be made safe for democracy." And John Milton Cooper makes a very persuasive case, in my view, that Wilson was saying in the first place it wasn't just up to us, by any means. And he actually says, you know, this isn't just up to us. But also he was not saying the United States should

go out there and create democracy. In fact, he's a domestic political scientist. He knew just how hard that is. What he was saying is that we, with others, must create the conditions under which democracy is possible. "The world must be made safe for democracy." And what he meant by that was you must stop dictators. You must stop war. You must create peace and the conditions for political liberty, which again he says in his speech to Congress. Then it's up to the nation itself to determine its own fate, because, of course, he was the great champion of self-determination. And I've emphasized that because it so often gets lost. You know, we think the world must be - - you know, we must make the world safe for democracy. Wilson thought we should go out there and create democracies. He didn't. He said we need to create the conditions under which democracy can flourish, and if we don't we will pay the price for what dictators do, because dictators at home are often very aggressive and very dangerous internationally.

The last thing I will just add -- and we heard from Scott Berg about how Woodrow Wilson believed in the power of rhetoric, and he truly did. He believed in the power of rhetoric because it could elevate individuals, and I think he thought nations, to higher purposes, to a sense that our lives are lived in the service of greater projects, of purpose and meaning. and that that brought out the best in human beings. He's the son and grandson of preachers. That is, after all, what the Sunday sermon used to do: it elevates us and, of course, when we used to listen to speeches, not sound bites, we actually -- when you really hear a great speech, you do feel elevated.

So I want to leave you with one quote from Woodrow Wilson. It actually is the quote Shirley Tillman [spelled phonetically] mentioned yesterday in her last graduation address at Princeton. This is why I have this up here. I'm not actually planning to do my email during the panel. So he said -- and this is actually a graduation address at Swarthmore College. He says to the undergraduates, "You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, and a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget that errand." Woodrow Wilson, he was a teacher, he was a college president. He believed that deeply about individuals. I think he believed it also

about nations. That nations, when they fought in a cause they believed in, when they lived their values, they were enriched as nations, in addition to the causes they were pursuing.

So I'm going to leave it there. We're going to have multiple perspectives, and I know then a lively debate, so I'm going to then turn to Professor Manela, who is a -- you have his bio. I know he's a professor of history at Harvard. He has a wonderful book. It's a prize-winning book called "The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anti-Colonial Nationalism". He also has a book that's not on Wilson, I think I should mention that: "The Shock of the Global: the 1970s in Perspective". I'm still -- 1970s don't seem quite long enough ago to have history books written about them, but we'll just leave that there. So he is now actually working on a third book, and, again, in a quite different direction, entitled "The Eradication of Smallpox," which actually focuses on the World Health Organization's role in smallpox eradication. And I mention that because, of course, Woodrow Wilson did not get the League of Nations through, but the U.N. does -- would never happen, I think, but for the effort to get the League of Nations through, and all of our international organizations are part of Wilson's legacy. So, Professor Manela, let me turn to you and then I will turn to Professor Kazin and introduce him a little further.

Erez Manela:

Thanks very much, Anne-Marie. It's a pleasure to be here. Anne-Marie ended with a quote from Wilson and I want to open with a quote from Wilson. This is something he is said to have said on the way back from the Paris Peace Conference in June of 1919 on the boat on the way back. As I'm sure you know, he spent more than six months in Paris negotiating the Peace Treaty, which is far and away the longest period of time that a sitting President had been out of the country, either before or since. So quite an extraordinary event. And on the way back, one of the most memorable things that he said, in my view, is the following: "When I gave utterance to those words, I said them without a knowledge that nationalities existed which are coming to us day after day. You do not know and cannot appreciate the anxieties that I have experienced as the result of many millions of people having their hopes raised by what I've said."

Now, what were those words that he was talking about? Of course, he was referring to his advocacy of the right to self-determination. And those words have remained since very closely identified with Wilson's involvement in World War I, in the Peace Conference, and beyond. Now, if you look at the actual history of how he came to advocate self-determination, which I have, you see he came to it fairly slowly, by a roundabout route, and really initially as a tactical response to the Russian Revolution. It was actually Lenin and Trotsky who began -- who were first to advocate self-determination immediately after the Revolution, and Wilson felt that he had to keep up, that he couldn't let them take over the agenda, if you will.

Nevertheless, despite this kind of roundabout path to this advocacy, it -- these words, this term, this principle, quickly came to be and to be seen as a central component of the world order for which he stood and for which the United States stood. And not only did it come to be seen as such, but it very quickly came to be acted upon, as he was saying about all these peoples coming to him. His perceived advocacy of the rights of small nations, of the rights of self-determination, was repeatedly cited by dozens of groups advancing claims for self-government both at the time in 1919 and since. You see Poles and Czechs, Irish, Indians, Egyptians, Turks, Persians, Armenians, and Kurds, Arabs, and Jews, Chinese, Koreans, Vietnamese, many others, all of them at the time were citing this principle and citing Wilson by name as the origin. And -- well, as you can see if you -- in those people's -- names of nations of peoples I've listed, some of these claims were incompatible with each other. I remember doing research in the archives and coming across a map submitted by an Armenian delegation for the future Armenian state as the Ottoman Empire was coming apart, and a map submitted by a Kurdish delegation for a future Kurdish state as the Ottoman Empire was coming apart, and the two maps were basically the same territory. So -- and there are other examples, of course.

Now, these mobilizations, though most of them did not achieve much in the short-term, had wide-range long-term implications. Many of them, I'm sure you know, are still with us today.

So what are the lessons that I take beyond 1919, beyond that moment itself, from those episodes, from that dynamic?

First of all, I think it's important to remember that U.S. foreign policy and U.S. foreign policy rhetoric has -- not just has -- we know it has impacted other peoples, but not just impact in the sense of other peoples being passive beneficiaries or passive victims, if you will, of U.S. policies, but also in terms of other people's actively responding to U.S. policy rhetoric, actively shaping, if you will, because of American preponderant power in the 20th century, their goals and strategies in response to American-declared principles. Ann Marie talked, I think very rightly so, about Wilson's belief in the power of rhetoric. I think that's absolutely right, but I think that the thing to remember is that rhetoric, once it comes out of your mouth, it also leaves your control and you can no longer decide what it means for all those who hear it and what they will do with it and what conclusions they will draw from it for action.

And that leads me to my final point, which is we know, of course, that American foreign policy has unintended consequences, but I think we don't always remember that it also has unintended audiences, that sometimes things that are said by American leaders with a certain purpose in mind, with a certain audience in mind, are heard by a completely different audience, unexpected, unanticipated, who then act upon it. And just -- this is the last word. Just very recently I heard that, you know, Hezbollah has now joined the Syrian government in fighting the rebellion there and the -- I think it was either the prime minister or president of Lebanon accused Hezbollah of adopting the Bush Doctrine because they were taking preemptive action.

[laughter]

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
Oh, God. [laughs]

Erez Manela:  
So I thought that was a really interesting use of the Bush doctrine --

[laughter]

-- and I don't think that Bush had this in mind when he articulated the doctrine. So that's just one example, which I think is quite interesting and quite important to keep in mind. Thank you.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Thank you. I have to say, as your wonderful point about, you know, rhetoric -- once you've said it, it leaves your control -- of course, this is never more true than in the age of social media; the minute you have, you know, uttered a 140-character message it can go anywhere for any purpose. So I'm thinking -- for Scott Berg, I think actually there ought to be a Woodrow Wilson's tweets. You should be sending out on a regular basis what Wilson would have thought of that. It's interesting to imagine what a grand rhetorician would do with the format of our communication today.

So, Professor Michael Kazin is a professor in the Department of History at Georgetown and is an expert on many different things, on -- in U.S. politics, on social movements. His most recent book is "American Dreamers," and that, without more, I think would qualify him to sit on a panel of -- for Woodrow Wilson. But it's "American Dreamers: How The Left Changed A Nation," published in 2011, and it was named as a best book by The New Republic, a best book of 2011. He is also the editor of Dissent, which has been one of the leading magazines of the American left for many, many decades. He is currently at work on a new book entitled "War Against War: The Rise, Defeat, and Legacy of the American Peace Movement," currently under contract. And as Jane said, he's written a marvelous piece called "The Forgotten President" in The New Republic. "Woodrow Wilson was as important as FDR or LBJ, why aren't we celebrating his 100th anniversary?" Well, we are. So -- but he raises some important points there, a couple of which I hope we can engage on in the course of the panel discussion. But let me start with Professor Kazin's remarks.

Michael Kazin:

Thanks a lot, Ann-Marie, and thanks a lot for inviting me, Jane, and others here. I -- like Erez, I'm going to not so much celebrate as try to understand Wilson's legacy -- air conditioning was not among them, I don't believe. Unfortunately, perhaps. It was pretty hot in the White House back then.

I want to talk just a little bit about Wilson's decision to enter World War I and some of the legacies of that. And one of the things I -- as I've been working on this book on

the anti-war movement during World War I, which Anne-Marie mentioned, that struck me is a wonderful book by Thomas Knock, a great Wilson scholar some of you probably know of. He said in that book -- he said, "Wilson is neither very fondly remembered nor well understood by most Americans." And that struck me because, you know, if you're a baseball fan, you go to National's Park, and you see the President's race with the men on Mount Rushmore, and William Howard Taft has been thrown in there this year. You can't quite imagine Woodrow Wilson running in that race somehow. Americans don't really have a fix on who he is, I think, and hopefully these events will help that to change, at least a little bit. Ironically, of course, Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, the two men he defeated in 1912, are in that race.

So, I think part of the reason for that is because Wilson is full of contradictions. In some ways, he might be the most complicated and contradictory president we've ever had. A couple remarks about that. He was a conservative throughout most of his public life, I think, and became a progressive by the time he ran for governor of New Jersey. He was an admirer of Edmund Burke and parliamentary government, who oversaw the greatest expansion of presidential power and federal taxation to that point in U.S. history. He was a crusader for democracy and self-determination, as we've been hearing, but he also was a firm believer in, and I think practitioner, of white supremacy.

And in no aspect of his policy were contradictions more evident than in his conduct during the first World War. And that conduct, I think, has probably done more to influence the history of the world -- it did, of course, during the war and also into the future -- than anything else he did as president. On the one hand, Wilson tried to take very seriously the admonition to Americans that he made soon after the war began, to be neutral in both word and deed. He believed, a couple years later, as you said, that this war was brought on by rulers, not by the people. "I thank God there's no man in America who has the authority to bring war on without the consent of the people." And he kept holding meetings until very early in 1917, really by the -- up until the point that he decided the U.S. had to go to war, he kept holding meetings with -- very friendly meetings with people in the anti-war movement, even members of the Socialist Party, and most of

them supported him for reelection in 1916 because they believed that he would keep us out of war, as the slogan of that campaign had.

When he called for peace without victory, this glorious, wonderful speech he gave in late January, 1917, in which he declared famously and perhaps fatefully, "Only a peace between equals can last," every American was on his side: those who opposed the war and those who supported it. On the other hand, the contradiction was clear. Wilson was an Anglophile; he was horrified by the thought that Germany might win the war. As he told his friend and adviser, Colonel House, in late August, 1914, just a month after the war began, "A German victory," quote, "would change the course of our civilization and make the United States a militarist nation." He abhorred that possibility. And throughout the war, especially after William Jennings Bryan, his secretary of state, resigned in June 1915, there was really no key adviser who opposed the idea that the Allies should win the war, that eventually the United States would have to get into the war.

And I think that the most critical step in the U.S. getting into the war was Wilson's decision to protest and eventually go to war to resist only one side's violation of mutual rights, that is Germany's U-boat warfare, and not the other side's: Britain's blockade of Germany. So this meant that by law the U.S. was following the law of neutrality as has been set down in various international agreements going back to the late 19th century. But Wilson was not impartial. Impartiality is not the same as neutrality. Given the superiority of the British Navy, there's only one response I think the Germans could have made to the blockade of their country militarily, and that was U-boat warfare. And so it was only a matter of time before the U.S. was going to be provoked into declaring war, which of course it was by April of 1917.

And U.S. intervention played a significant, and I think critical, role in ending the war the way it did. What turned the tide was not the actually fighting U.S. troops did, but -- which really only -- U.S. troops really only were fighting in a serious way in the last six months of the war. What turned the tide was the fact that 2 million fresh American troops were coming over to Europe, something the Germans just could not withstand. And so in March of 1918, knowing these U.S. troops were coming, the Germans

threw pretty much all they had into this final offensive -- they hoped the final offensive in France and Belgium, and that offensive failed. Now, we know the tragic consequences which ensued. There was no peace between equals. As Wilson might have predicted, the punitive settlement made in Versailles did not last. Most historians I think now agree that Wilson actually could have won Senate approval for the peace treaty if he had accepted some of the reservations, which Henry Cabot Lodge and his allies in the Senate demanded. But U.S. membership in the League of Nations, as important as it might have been, would not have stopped the rise of fascism, the rise of Nazism, or the rise of communism, all of which sowed the seeds of the next world war.

So the terrible irony I think that people who think about Wilson's legacy have to understand and debate about, is that U.S. entry into World War I may, in fact, have made the next war more likely. As historian John Coogan wrote several years ago, "It was the genius of Woodrow Wilson which recognized that a lasting peace must be a peace without victory. It was the tragedy of Woodrow Wilson that his own unneutrality would be a major factor in bringing about the decisive Allied victory that made a healing peace impossible."

So one final contradiction about this great, but I think also flawed man: World War I was very good to the United States, except, of course, for those Americans who died in the war and their families. The U.S. emerged from the bloodshed as the leading economy on the planet and the only major country whose young generation was not totally alienated from the establishment in his country. That U.S. troops did not engage in serious combat until the last year of the war saved the U.S. from the awful toll, material and social, that was suffered by the other great powers. But were the consequences worth it? That's not an easy question to answer.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Thank you. And as I -- professor, you've done the wonderful job, of course, not answering the question and posing a very hard one.

Michael Kazin:

I don't know the answer, Marie.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
I know. Exactly.

Michael Kazin:  
If I knew it I would have answered it.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
That's our prerogative. So, there's -- we -- there's much there. General Scowcroft has talked about sort of the broad strokes of American foreign policy and where Wilson fits in, and Professor -- Erez has talked about the -- Professor Manela has talked about the self-determination dimension, and then Professor Kazin has talked more about the contradictions -- the many, many contradictions of Wilson's legacy.

I guess I want to start with a much more direct question, since we're debating Wilson's legacy. So let us assume I'm the president and I am a devoted Wilsonian, and I want to channel Woodrow Wilson. So, I turn to you, my national security adviser, and I say, "What would Woodrow Wilson have done about Syria?"

[laughter]

Female Speaker:  
That was my question.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
Well that should be all of our question, because -- but really. I mean -- so, with all this and, General Scowcroft, as you pointed out, you know, the country we are today, with the responsibilities we have, given who he was and what he did, as best you can, if that's simply the question, I want to know what would he have done? What would he have done?

Brent Scowcroft:  
You know, I'll be honest, I don't have a clue --

[laughter]

-- because I think, as my two learned colleagues have said, he was in many respects a contradictory person. And I think you can draw from his comments on different things completely opposite answers, because, in a way, he was a pragmatist, too. He had ideals, he had principles, and so

on, but he dealt with the issues of the moment. And I think that in one respect one can say, you know, Syria is a Wilsonian moment. We need to engage and turn it into a democracy, if you will.

[applause]

Brent Scowcroft:  
The other --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
Or make it -- make the Middle East safe for Syria to become a democracy.

Brent Scowcroft:  
The other is that Syrian struggle is a struggle without outcomes that one can see and applaud, and therefore we shouldn't get involved in it, the way his initial attitude toward World War I was. And, you know, I have personal views, but I have no idea of where Woodrow Wilson would have come down on that.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
Well, thank you. Other views?

Erez Manela:  
Well, the first answer is exactly as General Scowcroft said: I have no idea. But I will say this: if we asked ourselves what would Wilson have done about Syria, we can simply ask what did he do about the Armenian massacres that happened during his presidency? And the answer is he did nothing. And the reason he did nothing is that he perceived there was nothing within his reasonable power to do. He was well aware of the situation. The ambassador to the Ottoman Empire at the time, Henry Morgenthau, who was the father of FDR's secretary of the treasury, reported back very clearly and actually urged action on -- some action on the part of the United States. Military intervention -- direct military intervention would not really have been an option at the time, but he urged them action. And Wilson simply perceived that that was not possible within the context of the war. So I agree with General Scowcroft, he was a pragmatist.

When we see -- he did intervene. He intervened in Mexico. He intervened in Haiti. He obviously intervened in the first World War. I think he had a tendency to intervene

only when the side on which he thought he was intervening was clearly the good side in his perspective. And I think it -- in fact, it's no accident that he only makes the decision to enter the war -- well, he makes a decision to enter the war one month after the Russian revolution, that is -- not the Bolshevik revolution, but the republican revolution that removed the Czar and brings in the provisional government. That, I think in his mind, purifies the Allies, makes them untainted by dictatorship and allows the move that comes the next -- the very next month, which is the intervention.

So, to summarize, had he identified, I think, today in Syria a good side clearly, he might in the current relations of power do something. But had he not identified it, I think he probably would do nothing.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Interesting. So he might have intervened in, say, November of 2011, after you've had six months of the regime shooting down unarmed protestors. I mean, that -- we do have to go back to November of 2011, right? There were six months before the Free Syrian Army was even started, so, I mean --

Erez Manela:

I think it's conceivable. If you look at Mexico as an example, he does intervene militarily in Mexico for what he perceives to be the --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Right.

Erez Manela:

-- side of democracy, the side of liberal democracy versus the reaction versus autocracy.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Professor Kazin.

Michael Kazin:

Yeah, I'm sure that's the problem he would have. Well, who knows; he's not with us to tell us. But he was a good historian as well as a political scientist who would have learned something from the last hundred years, I hope. I'm sure he would have. But, you know, I get back -- I keep thinking of the concept without victory, which is amazingly utopian, but, like most utopianisms, it's utopian. That

is, it's a wonderful ideal to work towards, but -- and I'm not sure he would have -- if you think about Syria, what side do we want to win -- we want to win? He knew, as Erez said, in Mexico we thought he wanted to win. He wanted Carranza to win, he wanted Huerta to lose. Later on, he wanted Pancho Villa to lose and so forth. But he kept choosing people he wanted to win, similar with Haiti and similar with World War I, in effect, I think, as I was saying. So, there I think you'd have that problem; who do you want to win in Syria? And clearly Obama's having that same problem. And I think that, as the general was saying and we all pretty much know, every president since Wilson, in most senses, has been a Wilsonian, I think in one way or another. Calvin Coolidge was a little bit of an exception, but otherwise pretty much everybody, I think. And -- but that's -- they had the same problem with -- when you can't root for somebody and when you don't have the wherewithal practically to support the people you're rooting for, what do you do? Do you just stay out? And I think that's the problem Obama has right now.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

So let me ask another version of the question, not in terms of what Wilson would have done, because I agree, A, his -- he himself was so rich and we are talking about 100 years later, but let's look at this issue of self-determination because I do think, you know, if you poke a well-educated undergraduate in the middle of the night and say, "Woodrow Wilson," they're likely to say "League of Nations" on a good day.

[laughter]

But if you push them further, I think people would think self-determination. These are the sort of the things in the popular mind that are associated -- perhaps the rather elite popular mind -- are associated with Woodrow Wilson, but what do we do with self-determination today?

So let me lay out another vision of what's happening in the Middle East. It's not a war in Syria. It's the Middle East war; it's going to be the Middle East war that is going to look a lot like the 30 Years' War of -- in Europe in the 16th -- in the 17th century between the Protestants and the Catholics. It took 30 years, it killed millions of people, and changed the borders of Europe. So if we now think this is a war in which the Shia and the Sunnis are

going to fight each other in Lebanon, in Syria, in Turkey, Iraq, and even it's spilling into Jordan and possibly Israel, and this is actually something people are actively talking about -- the borders drawn after World War I are gone or are going to be brushed away -- what -- how do we think about self-determination now? All right? We still -- the Armenians got their state. The Kurds didn't. But how do we think about this? Let's assume we're not on the ground, but nevertheless there's a war that is changing borders that is religiously and ethnically driven and, indeed, as you said, Wilson said all those millions of people who want to apply this principle, how do we as a responsible great power, think about that principle today?

Brent Scowcroft:

Well, let me start by giving what I think is a quintessential Wilsonian answer to it. Wilson essentially created Yugoslavia. In 1991, Yugoslavia was sort of falling apart. Secretary of State Jim Baker went over there and gave a speech to the Yugoslavs and said, "Hey, you know, it doesn't make any sense for you to be doing this. It's a small country. Don't break it up." He was bitterly attacked in the United States by denying self-determination.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

There we go.

Brent Scowcroft:

And I think that's part of the dilemma. You know, in the Middle East, the Arab Spring to me was a call for dignity; we're human beings, we have certain rights. It wasn't for Shiism, Sunniism. It wasn't necessarily for democracy, it was --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Dignity.

Brent Scowcroft:

-- we want to be treated like people, not chattel by somebody who buys us and sells us. And now the war is transforming -- the war -- the conflicts are transforming this into a more typical kind of a conflict.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

So, we create Yugoslavia?

Erez Manela:

The question of self-determination is just so complicated. Wilson's own secretary of state, Robert Lansing, was on record at the time saying that he thought that Wilson's advocacy of self-determination was a terrible idea. And he explicitly said, "Well, what sort of ideas will this give the Irish, the Indians, and the Egyptians?" all at the time fighting for freedom from the British Empire. He perceived this as -- he was an international lawyer, that's how he was trained, and he perceived this as a radically destabilizing idea for international order.

And, of course, the problem with self-determination is that it's impossible to argue with in principle, and it's impossible to implement in practice because it doesn't actually solve any political problem. It doesn't actually tell you who the self is that gets to determine. And, you know, the American Civil War is perhaps the classic example. Is the American south a self that gets to determine? Or is the entire nation the self that gets to determine? Therefore the south cannot secede. And Wilson, you know, was well aware of the history of the Civil War.

And I think we have to go back to this notion that he adopted the term self-determination not so much, I believe, as a declaration of principle, but, as I said before, as a tactical move to try to coopt those in Europe who would take up the Bolshevik cause, because the Bolsheviks knew exactly what they were saying when they said self-determination. They knew the point was to break up first the Russian Empire and then the other empires. They had a very clear political goal in their advocacy. Wilson only started to think about what the practical implications of self-determination were after he adopted the phrase, rather than before, and I think that accounts for some of the difficulties that they had at the peace conference and after. It's -- I have no clear answer on self-determination. It doesn't -- the nature of the phrase is that it doesn't allow for clear answers, I think.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

It's really a set of Russian dolls, right? And then, you know -- I mean, of course, you know, the minute you make Kosovo independent, then the Serbs within Kosovo want to determine themselves and then the minority within the -- every smaller group wants self-determination. And as an international lawyer speaking, Robert Lansing was right, it

is not a concept that has any legal weight for the reasons you say. But, you know, difficult as it is, as you said, it's out there and plenty of states have managed -- or peoples have managed to determine themselves. And, again, this is not a hypothetical question. It's a very real one. How do we think about who is entitled to have a state in the Middle East, other than to say, you know, it's whoever's got the biggest guns and can get one?

Michael Kazin:

And, of course, who's enabled? Are the Scots --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Yes. The Catalonians?

Michael Kazin:

-- and the Welsh? I mean, I think clearly the important distinction there is every powerful nation throughout history is opposed in practice to all -- to every kind of self-determination. They want certain self-determinations and other self-determinations. And, you know, Yugoslavia, which General Scowcroft was mentioning, of course, it didn't just break up in 1991. It was put back together again after World War II. It had broken up in World War II, as well, because the Croats supported the Axis and the Serbs supported our side in the war. So it was only Tito and communism and the anti-Russian, anti-Soviet unity which kept it together, I think, as long as it stayed together.

You know, I've got no great insights. We should probably move on to questions. I just think democracy is dangerous. It's wonderful but it's also dangerous because, you know, who is the demos? Who gets to decide? And, you know, this is a matter of politics. It's not a matter -- there's not some ideal sense in which there are nations which have always existed. A great scholar, people probably know, has talked about imagined communities -- a nation is an imagined community. And people imagine communities all the time. At one point there were a lot of African Americans who wanted a separate nation in the black belt in this country, and so forth. So, it's like many things Wilson said and tried to practice, it's a wonderful ideal. The practice is a lot messier.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

So, we are going to turn to questions, but here's a very short question. What would Woodrow Wilson have thought of

the United Nations? Would he have thought that it actually was the realization of his vision? I mean, of course, the League of Nations was a very different thing. It was a -- an affirmative pact that, you know, an attack on one is an attack on all. So it -- really more like NATO, right? That you all had to come to each other's defense. The United Nations is quite different. It's a negative, right? It says every state must refrain from the use of force against the territorial independence -- territorial integrity or political independence of any other state. But it is this global organization, and, indeed, General Scowcroft, you know, you were in the White House when Kuwait -- when Iraq invaded Kuwait, something that in Wilson's time would have pretty much been fine. I mean, there was no international law against invading another state, but something that by 1991, because of the United Nations and the UN charter, had become unthinkable. And we mobilized the world against us very quickly. So I'm just interested -- there's no right answer here. I'm just interested in your sense of what Wilson might have thought of the United Nations.

[laughter]

Brent Scowcroft:

I think he would have applauded it. Had he lived through the League of Nations and the experiences of the League of Nations, this was a way for the major powers who had the only ability to do something about the international order to act in unity. So I think he would have thought it was a useful step on what he had already started.

Erez Manela:

Just very briefly, I think when you look at what he says about the League of Nations, it's very clear he was a student of political development, of political history, and he had what some have called an organic view of political development. He thought you take an -- you found an institution, you set it on what he saw were more or less reasonable principles, and then it evolves in response to changing circumstances. And so I don't know what he would have said about the United Nations as it is now, but I think he seemed to have understood --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

That it would change.

Erez Manela:

-- that organizations, once founded, take a life of their own --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Interesting.

Erez Manela:

-- and adapt to circumstances.

Michael Kazin:

But also it's important to remember that Franklin Roosevelt was a Wilsonian, and he begins his national political career, of course, in the Navy Department. And when he runs for vice president in 1920, he gives these forgotten speeches, but actually quite eloquent speeches, in support of the League of Nations at the time, without any reservations, of course, which is what -- how Wilson wanted it. So there's a clear legacy there --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

A direct legacy. That's lovely. Well that is a perfect note on which to turn to the audience. I would ask you, if possible, to direct a question to an individual on the panel so we don't have one question and four answers or three answers, and to please keep things as succinct as possible. There in the front row.

Male Speaker:

Hi. Thank you very much, everyone. I guess this question is directed to you, Ms. Slaughter and General Scowcroft. I was struck by your comments that Wilson thought that -- not that we're supposed to mandate democracy but we're supposed to -- we have a duty to foster the conditions for democracy. And I'm wondering if he would approach the Arab Spring from the perspective of the Helsinki Accords, which created a framework which did not specify specifically what the elements of democracy are but rather had an emphasis on the freedom of the individual, the freedom of the individual to practice their own religion, thought, conscience, free speech. It was not so specific. It was more general, but it did at least create a framework for our relationship with these countries that then enabled those societies to self-determine for themselves what their government would look like.

Brent Scowcroft:

Go ahead.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

I would just say, you know, the second line after, "The world must be made safe for democracy," is, "Its peace -- the world's peace must be planted on the tested foundations of political liberty," which is exactly the Helsinki framework. It really -- that's what I meant. He really believed that, you know, if individuals were free within the framework of respect for minority rights in a liberal democracy, then you had the framework for peace, and that's why the democratic peace theory is regarded as a -- you know, having Wilsonian roots. So I like to think he would have exactly agreed with General Scowcroft that the Arab Spring is fundamentally -- was the desire of individuals to be recognized as individuals with the basic rights of all other individuals and that that's what you stand for, and that we would have tried to intervene -- not the United States, but collectively -- in every way possible to keep that momentum going forward. That's much easier said than done, but I do think that's -- he would have been very supportive of the Helsinki framework.

Brent Scowcroft:

Yes, I agree with that. I think that the Arab Spring is in part a manifestation of a new element in world politics, and that is the effect of globalization, because I think for most of the world's history most of the people in the world didn't -- weren't involved in matters of empire, governments, anything else. They lived just like their parents lived. They thought their children would live just like they. There was a certain order to life that was fixed, couldn't be changed. Now, come the age of television, cellphones, and so on, they look at the TV and they say, "It's not that way at all." And so I think the world's people have been politicized now, and that makes this in some parts a unique phenomenon that we're trying to grapple with, what's going in the Middle East today.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

And you leave out the idea that parental authority is in tatters. Every time I say anything, my kids say, "No, that's not the way it is at all." [laughter]. There in the center, and then here. Yep. Yes. Okay. Well. It was this center, but that center seems to have taken -- go ahead.

Male Speaker:  
Okay. My question --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
He who has the mic gets to ask the question.

Male Speaker:  
My question is for General Scowcroft. I just was wondering, because I know you were a national security advisor during the first Gulf War, do you have -- and you mentioned the Arab Spring briefly -- do you have any thoughts about the subsequent developments in Kuwait, including, like, during the Arab Spring?

Brent Scowcroft:  
Well, yeah, I do. I think the Arab Spring is a manifestation of a series of events. First of all, you know, with the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, the British and French came in and sort of, with pencils, drew borders without regard to much anything else other than their own compromises -- system. And that broke down when the colonial period was replaced by strongman monarchies, so on and so forth, and that is breaking down now. And on top of it comes this notion of the Arab Spring. And I think we're having a fundamental circumstance develop in the Middle East now, because on top of it all -- you know, 10 years ago, 15 maybe, most people wouldn't have understand if you said Shiism versus Sunni. Wouldn't have known what you were talking about. It was not a big issue. In the Islamic world, the Sunnis are the dominant social class, if you will, in most of the world, and the Shias were an inferior class. But it was not a big geopolitical element like it is now. So I think we're seeing new forces in the region creating heaven-only-knows-what.

[laughter]

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
Yes. So, there in the -- what -- did you have the microphone? No? Okay. And please identify yourself, and then I'm coming to you. I promise.

Female Speaker:  
Well, I'm Olag Hamid [spelled phonetically], I'm a Syrian activist. I live here in D.C., and I left Syria in 2005 because of Assad death threats to my family. Right now my question is actually -- is about how to protect Syria,

because I believe the U.S. is a superpower country and it can help the Syrian people, because the Syrian people never had the chance to practice the right to self-determination. We were under the control of colonial powers, and then the Assad family dictatorship for 40 years, for more than 40 years. And now we're asking for freedom and dignity, and we need the U.S. help. And I believe that the U.S. can do that. We are a nation that has the right to live freely. I believe that the U.S. should have acted two years ago --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Whoa, whoa, whoa. You're going to ask us a question about how to do it.

Female Speaker:

So my question is that I think it's not too late. How about the -- you know, if we don't want to arm the rebels because we don't know who are the good guys and who are the bad guys, how about, you know, establishing a no-fly zone, a safe haven for the people to protect them from Assad's daily airstrikes and massacres. We have over 200,000 deaths today and, because I don't rely on the official numbers, you can easily triple that number. So thank you very much.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Thank you.

[laughter]

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

I agree. I think we should establish a no-fly zone. I actually from -- I will say, from my point of view, and actually Mike -- Professor Kazin, I can engage you on this because in your -- the end of your piece you say that, you know, one of -- part of Woodrow Wilson's legacy was a great liberal legacy. And I agree with you that Franklin Roosevelt continued and then Lyndon Johnson continued and that what destroyed it was the Americanization of the Vietnam War, and that -- so -- because Lyndon Johnson immersed himself in Vietnam, it destroyed, in the end, his domestic liberal reign -- I think that's a fair characterization -- and that this president has at least learned that lesson and is not going to make the same mistake and is going to protect what I also hope will be a great liberal record. And he has started by not getting involved, and I think that is exactly how President Obama

sees it. I think he sees that Syria can only be a world of hurt. That there's no -- there's very little we can do and there's a great deal that would drag us down.

My own view is it's sort of the flip side, that as much as you want to focus on domestic issues as a president, the world has a funny way of dragging you down. And I fear that unless we act, no matter how awful it -- and difficult and challenging it is, and I'm not talking about ground troops -- as I said, I think this will become the Middle East war, and that will consume him one way or another. And will ultimately destroy -- it will overshadow anything else he's able to accomplish. So I will just say I think we should be working with others to use enough force to both protect people and to signal that we are not prepared to let the entire Middle East go up in flames.

Michael Kazin:

I do think it's important -- I mean, I'm not a military person. I can't judge what the impact of a no-fly zone would be, especially over months, even years, perhaps, because this war is probably not going to end any time soon, but I do think, you know, it's important that as much as possible, as with Libya, it be multi-lateral --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Yes.

Michael Kazin:

-- and multi-national because that's how we got in trouble in Iraq, among other reasons because it wasn't --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

That's mine.

[laughter]

Michael Kazin:

-- so -- but -- I mean, as Wilson wanted to, you know, we would like to be able to go in everywhere and help the world be made safe for democracy. I wish President Clinton had sent troops into Rwanda or something into Rwanda. That was not a civil war, that was a massacre. That was genocide, and this -- but after the fact this might look like that, too. I hope it doesn't.

Brent Scowcroft:

Well, let me say just a word. I think intervening in the way we intervened in Iraq, for example, is -- I hope we would have learned something from it. But I think that the Secretary of State is on a good course now, and that is to try to get an agreement between the United States and Russia for a ceasefire.

This is an incredibly complicated conflict. And it seems to me the best we can do is to try to sort it out over the -- around the table rather than on the battlefield. And so I think -- you know, basically we and the Russians have a common interest in it. The Russians don't trust us at all now --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
And we don't trust them.

Brent Scowcroft:  
Well, that's another issue but --

[laughter]

-- but I think there is a joint interest here, which, if really exercise it, can stop the bloodshed, and then we can work on the Syrian problem over the, shall we say, decades?

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
Sir?

Male Speaker:  
Stewart Bernstein [spelled phonetically]. As a former ambassador, I was asked many times, "How do you do it in America? You're a combination of every kind of race and religion and you really seem to get along. You really seem to like each other." Is this just a religious thing or is it a dictator thing? A general question.

[laughter]

Michael Kazin:  
Is what?

Male Speaker:  
How does it work here in American and why is it so difficult everywhere else --

[laughter]

Michael Kazin:  
You want to take that?

Brent Scowcroft:  
Well, you know, I would say that that's been true for most of our history, although not all of it. But as I think now we go around the world saying, "You ought to behave like the United States." I hope not --

[laughter]

-- right now. I think we're representing an example to the world of all the things they worry about: unable to make the compromises to move the country forward, people fixed in their positions, unwilling to compromise and move. That, to me, is anti-American in the sense that the Constitution is a model of compromise. But that's my answer to your question.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:  
I would just add that we -- yes, we have plenty of conflict among our ethnic groups, right? If you study immigration, every 10 years there's another sort of uproar every 10 to 20, another anti-immigrant movement that is virulent and sometimes violent, but that -- oh, A, we had a frontier for a long time. That helped. People could move and make their fortune. But more broadly we have the same tensions. We have a framework within which a lot of that can be hashed out politically and not violently, and in the end -- you know, the saddest thing really is that if you look at Damascus, you look at Homs, as you looked at Sarajevo, these are societies in which ethnic groups intermarried and lived together. I mean, this is the lesson of Yugoslavia. We've looked at it and, you know, centuries of bloody conflict. Well, tell that to the people of Sarajevo who are actually living together and were intermarried until the violence started, and then once the killing begins it becomes very, very hard, and people who were moderate and suddenly find themselves in a very different position. But I would say our luck and our political good fortune has been to be able to channel those conflicts outside of violence, with the exception of one of the bloodiest wars in the world's history, speaking also as somebody who grew up in the south. We -- you were talking about Woodrow Wilson remembering this. We've had our wars, as well.

So the last question that --

Michael Kazin:

Can I just make one quick comment on that?

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Oh, yes, please.

Michael Kazin:

Yeah. I just think it's important to remember that it's taken a lot of struggle to get us to where we are.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Yes.

Michael Kazin:

I mean, if African Americans could have voted in the 1912 election, it's not necessarily likely, but possible that Woodrow Wilson would not have been elected because they would not have voted for a Democrat.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

Fair. Exactly.

Male Speaker:

Jim Mullen [spelled phonetically]. I wrote a book that treats Wilson at some time -- some length. My question is about Wilson, and that is --

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

That's a good one to end on. Why not?

Male Speaker:

I think you guys have been awfully kind to his idealism. I'm wondering exactly where is the idealism in his intervention on behalf of the whites in the Russian civil war and where is the idealism in his treatment of, for example, Vietnam vis-à-vis France?

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

All right, we're going to come down this way, and let me start with you.

Michael Kazin:

I agree with you. That's part of the contradiction.

[laughter]

No, I mean, obviously he thought -- he saw -- he thought -- he didn't in the end challenge the British hold over India, either. Of course, the British had won. Or the French over Indochina, as you know.

Erez Manela:

Well, I think he saw the Bolsheviks as seeking to set up a dictatorship, which they were quite explicitly doing. And that's the context, I think, of his support for the whites. I think, even so, his -- that was the point of their project, right? The -- even so, his intervention for the whites was very half-hearted and minimal and -- well, we could -- you know, there's a long history here. Sorry, what was the other one?

Michael Kazin:  
Vietnam.

Erez Manela:

Oh, Vietnam I'm not sure about. I mean, what was -- I'm not sure what the issue was in Indochina at the time. Yeah.

Male Speaker:  
[inaudible]

Erez Manela:

Right, I start my book with Ho Chi Minh's petition to Wilson, which he basically ignored. I think his perception was that there was nothing that the United States could do about French rule in the Vietnam and that there were several dozen other priorities. That was his view. He thought colonialism was probably not a great idea, but over time would dissipate. He didn't think that there was -- it was either desirable or possible to end it in 1919.

Anne-Marie Slaughter:

General Scowcroft? So I will just -- I'm not going to address that particular issue, except to say, you know, in terms of a foreign policy legacy, we live in the world that Wilson made. I mean, if you look at the world we are in today, it is a world in which there are international institutions, and nations do belong to them, and as imperfect as they are, everything from when disease -- the outbreak of disease to the outbreak of aggression, we have far less interstate war than ever before in human history

and we -- that's not all the U.N.'s doing by any means. I understand that. Nevertheless, we have laws, we have rules, we have institutions in international relations so much so that that is now fully half of what we study when we study international relations.

We also live in a world that has a human rights movement. You know, we forget, when Woodrow Wilson was President there was no such thing as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, much less the countless treaties that have since been passed, and that -- again, many of them imperfect and imperfectly enforced. But from the perspective of 1913, a man who saw in his presidency not only a very different domestic vision, and you will hear about that on the next panel, but was able then to articulate the principles of human dignity and human rights and peace and equal treatment of peoples through international institutions and through the power of democracy and human rights, I would say we live in the house that Wilson built.

Thank you very much.

[applause]

[end of transcript]