



CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT
for International Peace

Event Summary

What War in the Philippines *Should Have Taught* George Bush September 27, 2004

On September 27, 2004, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosted a discussion with John Judis, visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment and a senior editor at *The New Republic*, about his new book, *The Folly of Empire: What George W. Bush Could Learn from the Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson*. Michael Lind, Whitehead Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation and author of *Made in Texas: George W. Bush and the Southern Takeover of American Politics*, and Jim Mann, author of *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* and former diplomatic correspondent and foreign affairs columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, provided commentary. Jessica Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment, moderated the session.

John Judis began his presentation with the observation that various defenders of the Iraq war have claimed that President Bush's foreign policy is based in the intellectual tradition of Woodrow Wilson. In his view, this is profoundly wrong. If anything Bush's policy have more in common with the United State's pre-Wilsonian era, dating back to the 1890s. In fact, the current administration's policy can be seen as the result of *not* adhering to the lessons that Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt learned in the early part of the last century.

There is a common thread in American foreign policy that can be traced as far back as the 17th century. One part of it is the belief that Americans are a chosen people with a special mission to perform on Earth. There is a straight line between the Puritans's reference to themselves as "chosen people" and former Secretary of State Madeline Albright's claim that the U.S. is the only "indispensable nation." The second aspect is what the mission consists of – which is the notion that the United States must transform the world in its image. In the 17th century this meant transforming the world into the early Christian communities that the Puritans envisaged as an ideal community. By the 19th century the goal had shifted to the creation of an Anglo-Saxon civilization. McKinley, for example, talked about civilizing and Christianizing the Philippines. But people also talked about liberty, freedom and democracy as essential American features that should spread to other parts of the globe. There is a direct line from the very early visions of America as having a mission to create a worldwide Christian community to the present-day discussions of transforming the world into a global democracy.

It is the question of means – how to transform the world in the American image – that has created debates in American foreign policy. We can identify three main alternatives. The first goes back to John Winthrop. According to this view, America should become a "city on a hill" and a model for others to follow. Americans should not intervene overseas. Instead, others should be influenced by America's example. This was the basis of American foreign policy for the first hundred years of its existence. The United States was an anti-imperial power – opposed to colonialism and intervention in the affairs of other nations for the purposes of subjugating them. Americans believed they should lead by example, not by force.

In the 1890s a minority faction comprised of American intellectuals, clerics, politicians and public officials advocated that the U.S. should get involved in the worldwide struggle for colonies and actively impose its way of life on others. To use Theodore Roosevelt's phrase, the United States should seek "the domination of the world" through overseas expansion. As one contemporary intellectual put it, Americans should create the United States from pole to pole.

The third alternative was the Wilsonian view that embraced the notion that the United States should transform the world in its image, but that it should not be achieved by directly dominating other countries. Rather, leading countries should work cooperatively to create a new world order that would extrapolate to the rest of the world the same kinds of principles that governed the United States. Just as all Americans were created equal, a world should be created in which all states were equal. This was not intended to be interpreted in the sense of equal natural resources or political systems, but in the respect that none would be subjugated by the other.

Bush's foreign policy and the foreign policy of the neo-conservatives and nationalists dates back to the 1890s. It does not embrace the Wilsonian view and it ignores the particular lessons that Americans learned during their short experiment with imperialism from 1898 through WWI.

In the 1890s the 'imperialists' were a minority faction intellectually – somewhat analogous to the neo-conservatives in the 1990s. The coalition consisted of Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, the publishers of the New York Herald and the Atlantic Monthly, and protestant evangelicals, such as Josiah Strong, who advocated the evangelization of the world. It was not a group that commanded a great deal of influence. Roosevelt was an assistant secretary of the navy, not the secretary of state.

But the United States' unexpected victory in the Spanish-American war proved to be a turning point for the imperialists. It was a victory that created a sense of euphoria among Americans and an illusion of omnipotence. This exaggerated view of America's capabilities led to the triumph of imperial foreign policy and of the idea that the United States should not merely act as an example to the world, but should try to actively transform the countries that had come into its possession. Soon afterwards the United States undertook to civilize and Christianize the Philippines. And it did so with the view that it would be welcomed. Just like the modern-day exiles from Iraq, there were businessmen in Manila writing to McKinley to assure him that there would be no nationalist reaction to an American invasion. In fact, the U.S. provoked a war that lasted in its most concentrated form for three years, and in a less concentrated form for 14 years. At its height, the U.S. had 70,000 troops in the Philippines, which in terms of percentage of population is roughly equivalent to the numbers the U.S. had in Vietnam. The U.S. lost over 4,000 men and killed over 200,000 Filipinos.

By 1907, Theodore Roosevelt, now in his second term, had become disillusioned with overseas expansion. Roosevelt did not turn against imperialism, but he turned against the idea of American imperialism. He still favored the British policy in Egypt, but he was wary of any further expansion on the part of the United States. From that point on, he envisaged a mediating role for his country.

Wilson went further than Roosevelt, and this had much to do with his experience in Mexico. Wilson was also a supporter of the Spanish-American war and the annexation of the Philippines. He talked about it in the same terms of bringing Christianity and democracy to a benighted people. Once in office, he promised "to teach the Latin American republics to elect good men." He got his chance in Mexico. Shortly before Wilson took office, the president of Mexico, Francisco Madero, was overthrown and assassinated by General Victoriano Huerta, who installed himself as dictator. Wilson set out to overthrow Huerta, sending troops to Veracruz and Tampico in 1914. Wilson expected at the time that American troops would be greeted as liberators. He also expected that a civil war that pitted Venustiano Carranza and Pancho Villa against Huerta would work in his favor. Wilson was confident that Carranza and Pancho Villa would take the American side. Instead, he

found himself facing a virtually united population. Eventually Argentina, Brazil and Chile had to be called in to mediate the crisis.

Wilson concluded from this experience that imperialism doesn't work. There is a telling quote from Wilson in which he expressed the fear that "successful intervention would unite against the invading party all the patriotism and all the energies of which the Mexicans were capable. To put such a government into power would be to substitute for a government which people could not trust a government which they must perforce hate." He clearly saw that imperialism and intervention bred nationalism. Therefore, any attempt by the U.S. or other countries to impose its way of life on others would provoke a nationalist reaction, incite war, and thwart American designs. The effort to civilize and Christianize through overseas expansion was bound to fail.

But Wilson didn't give up America's millennial project. He still thought that Americans had a special role in bringing democracy to the world. But he made two qualifications. The first was that Wilson, as a follower of Edmund Burke, came to believe that democracy itself had to emerge organically within countries. There had to be conditions within a country and its institutions for democracy to arise. It could not be imposed the way, for example, currency reform might be imposed. Second, in order to encourage democracy in the world, it had to be done outside the context of imperialism and colonialism. This could only be achieved by working multilaterally through international organizations. Out of this idea came the League of Nations, and later after WWII, the World Bank, the United Nations, and others. All these institutions came out of the basic idea that the U.S. had an important role in the world, but that it had to act multilaterally to be effective.

The U.S. did not always heed this lesson – Cuba and Vietnam stand out as two examples. But in the 1990s it did so with some success in the first Gulf War and in the Balkans. With the advent of the Bush administration, however, we encounter a kind of blind ignorance. The Middle East is the one part of the world that still suffers from the wounds of the age of empire. It is the one part of the world where the experience that begins in the 1870s is still not over. Within the Middle East there is a combustible mixture nationalism, pan-Arabism, and Islam that goes back to the 1880s. There is still the view of the West as a hostile occupying power. To go into one of its countries and install a government of America's liking was bound to fail.

Why did this mistake occur? There are certain parallels between the neo-conservatives of the 1990s and the imperialists of the 1890s. They are very similar in their faith and fervor, and in their dogmatic view of what is possible for the United States to achieve. Josiah Strong's view that the world should be evangelized through American power is similar to the neo-conservative view that it is possible to create a global democracy.

The precipitating factors were also similar. On the one hand there was Sept. 11, and on the other hand, there was the explosion of the battleship Maine. The United States undertook a war in Afghanistan that was initially thought to be extremely difficult, but appeared to succeed in the space of months. It created by December 2001 a sense of exhilaration very similar to the sense of elation experienced at the end of the 19th century. This feeling overcame the resistance of those who had previously been very reluctant to contemplate overseas intervention.

Michael Lind began his presentation by praising John Judis' book for destroying the conventional wisdom among scholars for several decades that there were two traditions in American history – the realists and the idealists, and that Wilson was a naive idealists, while Theodore Roosevelt was a hard-headed realist. In Lind's view, this was a myth that was created largely by continental émigré scholars after WWII, who wanted to contrast the allegedly sentimental, soft-minded American foreign policy tradition with the tough-headed European *Realpolitik* tradition. In fact, the distance between Roosevelt and Wilson was not so dramatic, and was largely a difference over tactics. Both were progressives that had similar views of the world. The general outline of their thinking can be summed up in four features.

The first is the belief in international law. Theodore Roosevelt in particular was a champion of international courts of arbitration. In the late 19th and early 20th century, countries routinely went to war over economic purposes. For example, if a country defaulted on a loan, it was common practice for the government representing the lenders to invade the country in order to take over its customs machinery and repay the lenders. It is a symptom of success that Roosevelt, Wilson and others succeeded in reforming world politics to the point that it would be unthinkable to do this today. Secondly, both supported international organizations. They disagreed over specifics, but they were generally very enthusiastic. Roosevelt was even a supporter of international courts, which is strongly opposed today by American unilateralists. Third, they both believed that a concert of great powers was necessary to enforce international law and direct international organizations.

Finally, they both envisioned a two-tiered world. Here there is a profound difference between the early 21st century and the early 20th century. Wilson and Roosevelt took for granted what historians of international law called the “standard of civilizations” – that the world was divided into two kinds of countries – the civilized and the uncivilized. Roosevelt sometimes added a third category of “savagery”. Enlightened opinion on both sides of the Atlantic took for granted that there was a civilizational scale. They didn’t have modern doubts about Western superiority or modern notions of cultural relativism. The civilized nations were represented by the U.S., Britain, and other European states (before WWI Imperial Germany was considered one of the leading civilized nations). In the middle were the older, non-Western literate agrarian empires such as Japan, China, and the Ottoman Empire. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the Australian aborigines and the plains Indians, who occupied the realm of savagery, meaning that they were pre-literate and pre-civilized.

Neither Wilson nor any other American imagined the immediate decolonization of the European empires in such a way that would grant pre-literate inhabitants immediate independence and immediate self-government. Both Wilson and Roosevelt took for granted that this would be a gradual, evolutionary process. To some degree, this was due to the racist assumptions they shared with their European counterparts. But one didn’t have to be a racist and believe in Caucasian superiority to accept the logic of this. Self-determination was only for communities that were sufficiently literate, sedentary and prosperous that they could form modern bureaucratic states capable of taking part in this international system. They envisioned a two-tiered world in which the core would initially be the great European powers, plus North America, plus possibly Japan.

America’s anti-imperialism got more complicated over time. There was national self-determination within Europe, but outside Europe – in Africa, Asia and the Middle East – there was the mandate system. Under this arrangement, imperial powers were to adopt paternalistic responsibilities for gradually training subject peoples for eventual independence. But by the time FDR became president, Americans had soured on the mandate system. They had determined that it was impossible to trust imperial powers to govern subject areas fairly. But FDR was no more willing than Wilson to grant immediate and unconditional independence, particularly to the less-developed areas of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. So FDR tried to substitute the mandate system with the trusteeship system, which proved very important to the early designers of the UN. It involved multiple great powers supervising a single area, such as Indochina. The premise was that it would be a matter of decades or generations before some of these areas were granted full sovereignty by the international community. But by the late 1950s and early 1960s, the whole trusteeship system was in collapse. The British and French were liquidating their overseas possessions and there was no desire on the part of the non-imperial powers to become trustees. A UN General Assembly resolution in the early 1960s stated that the inability of a population to govern itself should not be a barrier to its legal, juridical recognition as a sovereign state.

The progressive project of a concert of great powers assumed that the great powers would share a common culture. To a large degree, the Western powers before WWI did. French was still the international language of diplomacy. And the elites, if not the general populations, were fairly

similar in outlook and lifestyle. But even by 1945, this feeling of similarity was unraveling. With the rise of Stalin's Soviet Union and Nationalist China, the sense of the "civilized great powers" was lost, and power alone became the main factor. Finally, the early 20th century progressives assumed that North Americans and Western Europeans, who shared similar views on the proper role of state, private enterprise, religion and civil society, would dominate international law and international organizations. But in a world with Iranian theocracy, communist market authoritarianism in China and military juntas in various Africa states, that cultural affinity is missing. One of the ironies of progressive internationalism is that it depended on a high degree of cultural community in terms of the great powers. Decolonization and anti-imperialism subsequently eliminated it, bestowing on us a much more heterogeneous international environment than the world's leaders contemplated 100 years ago.

Jim Mann pointed out that there are two main aspects of Wilsonian thought. John Judis focused on one aspect in his presentation, which is belief in international law, international organizations, and working multilaterally. But there is also an emphasis in Wilsonian thought on self-determination and democratic principles, and it is in relation to this second feature that neo-conservatives are sometimes referred to as Wilsonian. In the 1970s the neo-conservative movement argued that the United States should provide whatever support is necessary to any leader, including authoritarians and dictators who were allied with the United States. The Carter administration was viciously attacked for pushing the Shah of Iran to liberalize too quickly and pressing Nicaragua's Somoza. It was this debate that formed the basis on which Ronald Reagan courted the neo-conservatives. It was fundamental to neo-conservative thinking at the time that friendly dictators should be supported. In the 1980s there was a serious debate about what to do about Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. In the mid-1980s Secretary of State Shultz and Paul Wolfowitz argued that the U.S. should begin to withdraw support from Marcos. The opposing side was led by Reagan, who wanted to support him. But in the end, the U.S. paved the way for Marcos to leave.

In retrospect, this was a fundamental moment for the neo-conservatives. In the late 1980s, the U.S. encouraged Chun Doo-hwan of South Korea to step aside too. And a new doctrine of 'we believe in democracy' began to develop. It has been a consistent strand in neo-conservative thinking ever since. Of course, it is 180 degrees opposite to where neo-conservatives were in the 1970s. This represents a Wilsonian streak, but with two crucial differences. First, the Iraq policy calls for spreading democracy by force of arms – something that is not only not Wilsonian, but anti-Wilsonian. It is nonetheless crucial to the neo-conservative vision in the Middle East. The second is that it is difficult to tell where neo-conservative idealism starts and how genuine it is. In the case of Paul Wolfowitz, for example, his interest in Iraq dates back to the 1970s when he was an official in the Pentagon. He and his close associate Dennis Ross were asked to look at how and when American force might have to be used around the world in the years following Vietnam. They started with the conventional exercise of how to protect the oil fields of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait if the Soviet Union moved south. Then they took it one step further and ask what would happen if Iraq were to invade Saudi Arabia or Kuwait. This led to a long study about a possible Iraqi invasion. That is the origin of Paul Wolfowitz's first interest in the Middle East. It is important because it pre-dates Saddam Hussein's repression of the Kurds and virtually predates Saddam Hussein's rise to power. As Paul Wolfowitz recites the long genesis of his interest in Iraq and talks about Saddam Hussein's abuses, it is important to remember that his original interest had to do with preserving access to oil in the Middle East.

In the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, we see small steps towards unilateralism by the previous two administrations, and a dramatic lurch by the current one. Going back to 1999 or 2000, Europeans were already complaining about American unilateralism and it important to remember that the U.S. did not get UN Security Council approval for the Kosovo war. The Clinton administration took a number of actions on international treaties that Europeans perceived as in the direction of unilateralism. Some of these were in deference to the Republican Right on Capitol Hill. For example, the Clinton administration cannot be blamed for the failure to pass the

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. In other cases, the Clinton administration was deferring to the Pentagon. For a long time the Clinton administration did not support the International Criminal Court or the Landmine Treaty.

Going back to first Bush administration, the crucial unrecognized debate was over America's defense budget and overseas deployment after the Cold War. This debate can be tracked from 1989 to 1991 or 1992. The Berlin Wall came down and immediately there were discussions in Congress about a peace dividend that never materialized. The Pentagon (the key figures working together were Dick Cheney, Colin Powell and Paul Wolfowitz) first argued that the Berlin Wall had come down but that the Soviet Union was still a threat. As the first argument began to run out, it changed into the need to maintain military and defense budgets because the Soviet Union's weakness posed a threat. Finally, Colin Powell admitted that he was beginning to run out of threats. At that point, the first Bush administration developed a number of new theories for why the United States should keep its defense budget anyway. There were a number of different formulations for America's role in the world that were imaginable then, but the United States opted to maintain its military power.

Jim Mann concluded with his opinion that the Iraq war has been a disaster – even for the neo-conservatives on their own terms. Neo-conservatives care about augmenting American power and American military power, but the net effect in the long run has probably been to weaken it. They care about spreading democratic ideals and principles, but once again the net effect has been to weaken those principles by eroding support for them both at home and overseas.