

G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter & Tony Smith. *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008. 168pp.

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John G Ikenberry, in the opening page of *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy*, poses the question: “Was George Bush the heir to Woodrow Wilson?” (1) Through this he frames the following essays in simple, but complete terms. The contributors to the book debate the impact of Wilson’s legacy on the Bush doctrine, what remaining integrity Wilsonian liberal internationalism has and more so the very meaning of Wilson’s presidency in American foreign policy. The more pertinent question of what currency Wilson’s vision still holds post-Bush appears to be the most significant. During Bush’s presidency America failed to sign the Kyoto Agreement, rejected the International Criminal court (62) and with an “ad hoc coalition” (114) unilaterally invaded Iraq; whether these actions represent the natural evolution of Wilsonianism or not is contentiously debated in *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy*.

In considering what Wilsonianism meant to the Bush doctrine and in the post-Bush era, Knock, Smith and Slaughter weigh and measure Wilson’s own terms of office and his legacy. All four contributors allude to Wilson’s military invention in aid of the Mexican revolution against the dictator General Huerta in April 1914 (32). All the contributors trace the origins of Wilsonianism to Immanuel Kant (58), whose concept of a cooperative of nations was not dependent on a lasting peace, but on the belief that such a peace would be the natural by-product of cooperation between market democracies. For Wilsonianism this concept evolved and became interwoven with “democratic peace theory” (68), the understanding that democracies do not war with one another during the 1990s (67) setting the stage for Bush’s ascent to office and his foreign policy.

The opening chapter by Knock engages with Wilson in a more tempered manner than the other contributions; rather than making distinct claims on Bush’s status as heir apparent to Wilsonianism, Knock’s strength lies in focusing on the time between Wilson and Bush. In doing so Knock illustrates the evolution of liberal internationalism through successive presidents, deftly illustrating Wilson’s influence without becoming too entangled in what Wilsonianism is. The final chapters by

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Smith and Slaughter are by far the more dynamic due in no small part to the complete discordance between their conclusions on both Wilsonianism and what it meant to the Bush Doctrine.

Smith, the most polemic of the four, traces the locus of the Bush doctrine in neoliberal influences based on the faith that the spread of democracy is good for national security, an assertive aspiration he traces to Wilson. Multilateral co-operation for Smith would amount to a veiled American hegemonic leadership in the current global community (62). Because of this, unilateral intervention in Smith's estimation is interchangeable with multilateralism, be it in NATO or the League of Nations. The problem of "American power," as Knock puts it (22), appears central to Smith's approach; in effect America cannot help but be and act unilaterally when it remains the last super power.

Whereas Smith locates "the importance of the democratisation project" (57) in the Wilsonian legacy, Slaughter contrasts this by asserting that "Wilson sought not democracy but self-determination" (92). Slaughter's return to the very semantics of Wilsonianism in the context of "self determination" to some extent fails to recognize the primacy of "regime change" in the current lexicon of foreign policy. Furthermore the extent to which military intervention can indeed spread "self-determinism" without constituting a regime change is left unconsidered. By arguing for a return to what Wilsonianism was Slaughter fails to consider the extent to which liberal interventionism has fallen in estimation abroad as well as in American standing.

For Smith, Wilsonian foreign policy has always existed in crisis (88) and the evolving process Wilson sought has been irrevocably bankrupted by the Bush doctrine. Slaughter on the other hand considers the Wilsonian project to be not only contemporarily relevant but also something to aspire to. To achieve a truly Wilsonian vision Slaughter suggests reform of the current international institutions in order to ensure that the "basic trade off" (113) of surrendering some American sovereignty is not only palatable but possible. Slaughter's assertion that "Wilson would look today at the expanded European Union and see his own vision of self-determinism and democracy for so many countries finally realized" (115) presents a vision in which America is removed. The character of the "trade off" as Slaughter sees it and how much sovereignty would be surrendered to share in the successes of Europe remains insufficiently measured in this chapter. Nonetheless it poses a dynamic question for the future wherein a renewed engagement with the world is very much on America's agenda.

Slaughter's allusions to reform appear more hopeful than as a mandate for change. In citing Rwanda and Kosovo (116) as reasons for avoiding a rejection of force Slaughter advocates the ability for multilateral military intervention legitimated by the

Security Council. However, if the war in Iraq was and is illegitimate then the legitimate conditions for recourse to armed intervention remain vague in Slaughter's appraisal. It would seem a "responsibility to protect" (101) on an international scale is necessary but not in any form previously seen.

The contributors omit addressing the extent to which the rest of the international community is willing to contribute to a renewed multilateralism. It appears in all estimations that the global community could not consider international co-operation without the presence or leadership of America.

Regardless of the different conclusions drawn, it is evident that all writers realise, like Wilson originally, that America is now playing for "a hundred years hence" (30). The meaning of Wilson's place in American history is at stake here just as much as his impact on and after the Bush doctrine. This makes excellent reading for those interested in both Wilson and Bush. The book is too short to allow space for policy predictions by the contributors but in any case it should encourage the reader to seek out more insights from Knock, Smith and Slaughter.

In the post-Bush euphoria of President Obama's victory the timing of this book could not be better. Like Wilson, President Obama may be at the start of a new epoch and the stakes which America is playing for in the global community are greater than ever.