

“President Woodrow Wilson and the Concept of Collective Security”

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“the nations of the world have become each other’s neighbours”

(Woodrow Wilson, address in Washington, 27 May 1916)

“There is coming a time....when nation shall agree with nation that the rights of humanity are greater than the rights of sovereignty”

(Woodrow Wilson, address in Chicago, 19 October 1916)

Thomas Woodrow Wilson (1856 – 1924), the 28th President of the United States of America, was President of that country for two terms between 1912 and 1920. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for his peace efforts. Despite his illustrious public career, he has not yet drawn as extensive and as detailed analytical attention and recognition¹ that some other US Presidents have done, such as F D Roosevelt. However there is an outstanding question whether Woodrow Wilson has left a legacy to the global community for which all humanity should be profoundly grateful. We may yet be too close to this aspect of history to draw any final conclusions in this respect. But as humanity continues to confront war, mass violence, genocide, terrorism, war crimes, gross abuses of human rights and other obscenities into the twenty-first century, and as more people search for lasting solutions and a permanent peace, the legacy of Woodrow Wilson may well come to be reconsidered and placed in proper perspective. This paper attempts some form of assessment in relation to Woodrow Wilson’s contribution to the search for an effective system of global collective security as a means to end war and mass violence.

Background

The rise of the sovereign nation-state in Europe in about the seventeenth century had both a beneficial and a detrimental effect. To the extent that the sovereign national power could impose its governmental will within its own borders, it had a beneficial effect in limiting violent conflict within those borders. But externally, the concept of sovereignty had within it the potential to give rise to large scale violent conflict between the new nation-states, with no countervailing power or deterrent to prevent or contain that conflict. National sovereignty had within it the seeds of war and destruction on a greater scale than ever before, a potential that only increased over the next few centuries as the weapons of war became more sophisticated and more deadly.

As a consequence of the Napoleonic conflict of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the great European powers were concerned to limit the destructive capacity caused (as they saw it) by revolutionary zeal. But at the same time, they did not wish to forgo their sovereign rights and powers. Hence the settlement of Europe that followed towards the end of this conflict provided an opportunity for a new system of containment to be adopted by those great powers. The settlement, known as the Congress

¹ It was recently said that a reconsideration of Wilson’s importance may be in the offing; see Thomas J Knock, *To End All Wars*, (1992, Princeton UP), 274.

of Vienna of 1815, gave rise to the “Concert of Europe”, whereby it was resolved to make a common cause the preservation of peace in Europe, using high level governmental meetings at fixed periods for the purpose of consulting on common interests. It was by all accounts a very loose political arrangement to try to achieve a balance of power.² But in it can be seen the birth of the idea of a European community of nations committed to peace, to be achieved by international diplomacy rather than by the use of force as envisaged by Napoleon.

The century that followed was largely a peaceful one in Europe, with more emphasis being placed on colonial expansion and exploitation rather than the aggressive assertion of power on the European continent. But the rapid development of military technology, together with instability in some autocratic Imperial regimes, and the political tensions generated between the great powers, including in their relations with smaller nation-states, caused concerns for the future.

It was the Tsar of Russia that took initial steps to seek a discussion of the issues among European powers with a view to reform. Thus was initiated the Hague Peace Conference system³, the first meeting of which Conferences took place at the Hague in 1899. Twenty six nations were represented and a number of important restrictions on methods of warfare were introduced and codified by treaty. In addition a standing system of international arbitration was inaugurated, with a commitment to seek the pacific settlement of international disputes before resort to the use of force. Further such conferences were envisaged, and the second Hague Peace Conference was held in 1907, with a wider representation of states. A third such conference was to have been held in 1915, but this was lost in the arms race and then the chaos of World War 1. The Hague system, although achieving some progress, had failed to prevent the rise of large-scale continental hostilities in Europe. There were some suggestions to revive the Hague process after the Great War, but these were lost sight of in the discussions on the formation of the League of Nations.

World War 1 was a watershed in many ways. Never before had humanity experienced devastation on such a scale over such a vast area of the globe. Some of the more autocratic empires in Europe were swept away in the conflict. The map of Europe was revised. Many new ideas emerged, often expressing a desire for a more peaceful global future. Old ideas for the prevention or resolution of international conflict were questioned, and new ideas asserting the interests of minorities and of humanity generally were advanced. While the conflict centered mostly on the European mainland, its effects extended to many other parts of the world, raising new interests and expectations. The USA became a central player in international politics, emerging from its global isolation (except for its previous concentration on the two American Continents) late in the War, and foreshadowing its future leading international role. It was against this scenario that Woodrow Wilson came to occupy the highest office in USA as President, initially as the

² R Albrecht-Carrie, *The Concert of Europe: 1815-1914*, (1968, Harper).

³ It was in fact not a peace conference to conclude any particular conflict; see generally G R Nicholson, “*To Summon the Nations*”, *Russia and the Hague Peace Conferences*”, in *From Poverty to Prosperity*, (1997), Proceedings from the 1996 National Conference of the ABS Australia, 184.

opponent of US involvement in the World War, and later as a leading instigator of US participation in that War. But it is his involvement with the idea of collective security that this paper is concerned.

Collective Security

This is a term capable of a variety of meanings, generally embracing ideas to do with collective state action to deal with threats to the international peace. It necessarily involves far-reaching commitments by states to work together and provide mutual support whenever there is a genuine threat to the peace of the world, including, if necessary, by the combined use of force. As a concept, it usually goes far beyond the right of self-defense incorporated in the United Nations Charter, either individually or collectively⁴. It also goes beyond the notion of a balance of states' power, which notion usually lacks the prior collective international obligation, publicly stated and legally binding, to support a common approach in opposition to any one state threatening the peace.

The concept of collective security was not a new one in the twentieth century. For example, there were examples in ancient history where rival powers made treaties of non-aggression between themselves and of mutual support if either were attacked by a third power. In the eighteenth century Rousseau proposed a General European Confederation, one of the articles of which specified that if any state was to break the Confederation treaty such as by making preparations for war, that state was to be banned and member states were to take collective military action at common expense until the state in breach repaired the breach⁵. In the nineteenth century, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, called for a new and peaceful world order based on a solemn and comprehensive pact amongst all the nations of the world, with the combined forces of the nations being available to deal with any breach of that peaceful order⁶. It is not proposed in this paper to attempt any sort of history of the concept. Sufficient for present purposes to note that no serious attempt was made to put the concept into practice on a broad international basis until the twentieth century.

It was Woodrow Wilson who played a leading role, when contributing to the establishment of the League of Nations after World War 1, in the instigation of the first global system ever attempted for collective security as part of the League Covenant. In this regard, the Covenant did not outlaw war as a method of international conflict resolution, but did provide for reference of differences to peaceful methods of settlement before resorting to war⁷. The provisions for collective security came into play if a state acted in breach of this requirement, placing a duty on the League Council to recommend

⁴ The United Nations Charter, Article 51. Note that in Chapters V – VIII of the Charter, it does provide for a form of collective security, and see Article 1.1, “effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace...etc”.

⁵ J J Rousseau, A Project for Settling an Everlasting Peace in Europe. First Proposed by Henry IV of France and Approved by Queen Elizabeth and Most of the Princes of Europe and Now Discussed at Large and Made Practicable, (Geneva, 1761).

⁶ See page 16 below.

⁷ Articles 12 - 15. See the text of the Covenant of the League of Nations in the Schedule to this Paper.

to member governments what armed services they should contribute to any proposed enforcement action, with a consequent obligation on those member states, arguably in an inadequately expressed form, to assist⁸. Thus for the first time an attempt was made by a multilateral treaty to put into operation a system of potentially global collective security to secure world peace. That it was not a great success, in particular given that it did not prevent the decline into World War 11, does not necessarily detract from the importance of this first step. Collective security had ceased to be an untested theory, and had been tried in practice, a most important precedent. It was perhaps inevitable that further attempts would be made later to revise the system and to try to make it work.

The early development of Woodrow Wilson's' ideas on collective security

Born in Virginia in 1856, there was not a great deal in Woodrow Wilson's upbringing as a child to indicate a later profound interest in issues of world peace and security, except for two main things. Firstly, from the age of 4, he retained the memory of the election of President Lincoln and the announcement that there would soon be a war in America. He thus experienced first hand the horrors of the Civil War, to the extent of seeing wounded soldiers dying in his father's church. These images were indelibly stamped on his mind for life, and he always had an abhorrence of war.

Secondly, he inherited a moral and spiritual approach to life based on his Protestant upbringing. His father was an eloquent and ambitious Presbyterian Minister, and his mother was the daughter of an English Presbyterian Minister. He was brought up in close connection with the Church, and was himself a firm believer in the Biblical God, the universalism of Christianity and Divine morality. He remained a Christian to the end of his life. It appears that he believed in the inevitability of a future time of peace on earth, no doubt drawing upon Biblical references such as in Isaiah⁹. Thus in his final public speech, he said that he had accepted as truth that the world would be lead out into pastures of quietness and peace such as the world never dreamed of before¹⁰.

He later developed an interest in politics during his education in Presbyterian and Wesleyan colleges, and undertook a law degree in preparation for a political career. A period of legal practice convinced him that he did not like the law as a profession, so he embarked on an academic career. It was in this capacity that he developed a national reputation as a prolific academic writer on political science, constitutional history and principles and related issues. But his interests were largely confined to domestic political theory and concerns, extending into the foreign affairs of the USA¹¹. In one of his writings he referred to a possible future world federation and a "league of nations", but this was not much more than a passing reference¹². He became deeply enamoured with the principles that had forged the diverse immigrant peoples of the United States into one

⁸ Article 16.

⁹ Eg: Book of Isaiah, Chapter 2.

¹⁰ Thomas J Knock, op. cit., 275.

¹¹ His interests did extend internationally in other ways, for example, he first wrote about the prospect of world federation in 1887.

¹² The State (1898), see David H Burton, Taft, Wilson and World Order, (2003, Rosemont Publishing), 49-50, 53-54.

federal nation, and was a strong supporter of the democratic principles underlying constitutional government in that country. In reliance on his Presbyterian inheritance, he saw the United States as having a special role in establishing those democratic principles in the world. He also became an eloquent speaker. He progressed to an academic position in Princeton University, lecturing in international law for a few years, during which it is said that he developed a theoretical rationale for a genuine community of nations under international law¹³. He took an interest in, and later joined, the American Peace Society, a factor that had an effect on his developing internationalism. At about this time, Theodore Roosevelt publicly advocated an international League of Peace, not only to keep the peace among the members, but also to prevent it being broken by others, if necessary by force¹⁴. But Wilson's mind was mainly on other matters. He became president of Princeton University, spending some years up to 1910 engrossed in matters of university administration and reform.

Difficulties within the University saw him leave academia to seek, and win, the Governorship of the State of New Jersey in 1910. He classed himself as a conservative Democrat, but he quickly demonstrated an interest in reform. Under his Governorship, much of the corruption and irregularities in the State were effectively controlled. It was an excellent basis from which to challenge for the position of President of the USA.

Having secured the democratic nomination for President in 1912, Wilson had the benefit of a split in the Republican Party between Theodore Roosevelt and President Taft. Wilson won with 43% of the vote. The campaign was fought largely on domestic issues, a fact later reflected in his first inaugural speech in 1913¹⁵. No real indication appeared in the public arena of the major role to be played by him in the future in world affairs. The concerns arising from the arms race and the threat of war in Europe still seemed very remote. The United States basked in its own growing prosperity and independence, largely free of the historic entanglements, quarrels and confrontations still on display in Europe, from where most of the immigrants had come. Wilson's mind was firmly on domestic reform.

The commencement of World War I in 1914 did not have an immediate impact on Wilson, other than to consolidate his view that the United States should stick rigidly to a position of neutrality. The United States should, in his view, avoid entangling alliances with any nation¹⁶. It should remain neutral in fact as well as in name¹⁷ to maintain national peace and the nation's capacity for impartial mediation and the giving of counsels of peace and accommodation. Wilson's understanding of history and his belief in a Christian brotherhood of mankind provided him with a vision of the future, relying on what he said was the accumulated moral forces that have made one age better than

¹³ Thomas J Knock, op. cit., 8-9.

¹⁴ *Advocate of Peace* (1909), LXXII.

¹⁵ 4 March 1913, see *Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, (2002, Uni of Pacific, Hawaii), 1.

¹⁶ Address of 16 May, 1914, see *Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, , 30.

¹⁷ Address of 18 August 1914, see *Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, , 44-45.

another in the progress of mankind¹⁸. At that time, this was a vision that again dictated non-involvement in the War. He looked forward to a time when, by this approach, the USA would be called blessed among the nations and a servant of mankind, because it had succored the other warring nations in their time of distress and of dismay¹⁹. But there was nothing in the public realm in the first part of the first presidential term to indicate that Wilson had formed any particular view on a post-War peace by way of some permanent concert of the nations.

Privately, several interviews indicate that Wilson, even by 1914, was already working over possibilities for a just and peaceful settlement, a “Peoples’ settlement”, with the possibility of an association of the nations to ensure the peace²⁰. This occurred against the background of a widespread growth of opinion among liberals and other groups that the War should be settled by mediation or other peaceful methods and that some sort of international system should be established to secure the peace. Leagues to Enforce Peace were formed in the USA and in Britain.

But there was a shift of public opinion in another direction, raising concerns about the military preparedness of the United States. This intensified with the beginning of the German submarine blockade of the North Atlantic, and grew even more in intensity after the sinking of the British liner “Lusitania” on 7 May 1915 with considerable loss of life, including that of Americans. This invoked a protest from the White House to the Germans, but otherwise Wilson was cautious, with some measures to increase defense spending. In early 1916 he was still publicly advocating a policy of neutrality.

By 1916, it had also become clear that the United States was planning for post-War involvement. In a speech to the Pan-American Scientific Congress at Washington, Wilson disclosed his plans for a peace pact among the nations of the two American Continents²¹, perhaps foreshadowing plans for a wider pact at a later time. In that speech he made some very interesting universalist comments, such as science and commerce both affording an international language, involving a universal plan of action, and that truth recognises no national boundaries or permits no racial prejudice.

At the same time, negotiations continued by the United States Government in an effort to secure peace in Europe. In another speech, this time to the Republican League to Enforce Peace, Wilson indicated that war in Europe was of direct concern to the United States as part of the common interests of mankind. He added²²:

“Only when the great nations of the world have reached some sort of agreement as to what they hold to be fundamental to their common interest, and as to some feasible method of acting in concert when any nation or group of nations seeks to disturb those

¹⁸ Address of 24 October 1914, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, , 55.

Whether there were religious influences other than Wilson’s Christian heritage is a matter discussed below.

¹⁹ Address of 8 January 1915, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, op. cit., 67, see also the White House Pamphlet of 20 April 1915 in the same work at 78-83.

²⁰ Thomas J Knock, op. cit., 34-35.

²¹ 6 January 1916, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 95-100.

²² 27 May 1916, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 121-125.

fundamental things, can we feel that civilization is at last in a way of justifying its existence and claiming to be finally established.”

Further, he said there should be:

“an universal association of the nations to prevent any war begun either contrary to treaty covenants or without warning and full submission of the causes to the opinion of the world, - a virtual guarantee of territorial integrity and political independence.”

A fuller edition of the relevant portions of this speech is set out in the footnote²³.

²³ *“..that the peace of the world must henceforth depend upon a new and more wholesome diplomacy. Only when the great nations of the world have reached some sort of agreement as to what they hold to be fundamental to their common interest, and as to some feasible method of acting in concert when any nation or group of nations seeks to disturb those fundamental things, can we feel that civilization is at last in a way of justifying its existence and claiming to be finally established. It is clear that nations must in the future be governed by the same high code of honor that we demand of individuals.*

.....If this war has accomplished nothing else for the benefit of the world, it has at least disclosed a great moral necessity and set forward the thinking of the statesmen of the world by a whole age. Repeated utterances of the leading statesmen of most of the great nations now engaged in war have made it plain that their thought has come to this, that the principle of public right must henceforth take precedence over the individual interests of particular nations, and that the nations of the world must in some way band themselves together to see that right prevails as against any sort of selfish aggression; that henceforth alliance must not be set up against alliance, understanding against understanding, but that there must be a common agreement for a common object, and that at the heart of that common object must lie the inviolable rights of peoples and of mankind. The nations of the world have become each other's neighbors. It is to their interest that they should understand each other. In order that they may understand each other, it is imperative that they should agree to cooperate in a common cause, and that they should so act that the guiding principle of that common cause shall be even-handed and impartial justice.

.....In the dealings of nations with one another arbitrary force must be rejected and we must move forward to the thought of the modern world, the thought of which peace is the very atmosphere.

.....If it should ever be our privilege to suggest or initiate a movement for peace among the nations now at war, I am sure that the people of the United States would wish their Government to move along these lines: First, such a settlement with regard to their own immediate interests as the belligerents may now agree upon. We have nothing material of any kind to ask for ourselves, and are quite aware that we are in no sense or degree parties to the present quarrel. Our interest is only in peace and its future guarantees. Second, an universal association of the nations to maintain the inviolate security of the highway of the seas for the common and unhindered use of all the nations of the world, and to prevent any war begun either contrary to treaty covenants or without warning and full submission of the causes to the opinion of the world, - a virtual guarantee of territorial integrity and political independence.

But I did not come here, let me repeat, to discuss a programme. I came only to avow a creed and give expression to the confidence I feel that the world is even now upon the eve of a great consummation, when some common force will be brought into existence which shall safeguard right as the first and most fundamental interest of all peoples and all governments, when coercion shall be summoned not to the service of political ambition or selfish hostility, but to the service of a common order, a common justice, and a common peace. God grant that the dawn of that day of frank dealing and of settled peace, concord, and cooperation may be near at last!”

The Wilson plan for a system of post-War international collective security was now, at least in very broad terms, open to public scrutiny.

Woodrow Wilson formulates his peace plan

As the pressure intensified for the United States to become involved in the War, so correspondingly was the attention of the President directed more towards the post-War peace and the arrangements to be put in place to provide for the future. It was natural that this consideration would be global in scope, given the global spread of the War. By inclination, Wilson was a peaceful man. By force of circumstances he was now having to address war and mass violence, and to search for alternatives to further wars and mass violence. He was in a sense chosen to undertake this task by virtue of his occupation of the office of President at the critical time. Wilson had come to accept that sometimes force has to be used by states, as he did in the case of the armed US invasion of Mexico, which he authorised. But force was only justified, in his view, to uphold right and to establish peace on the right principles.

At about the same time, Wilson had to undertake the arduous task of re-election, as his first term as President was coming to an end. The campaign took place in the second half of 1916. The plan for a League of Nations was given a central place in the campaign. Added to this there was Wilson's extensive domestic reform program, which had been carried out with considerable success. These two factors, plus the fact that the United States had been kept out of the War, attracted more support for Wilson than he received in the previous election. He was re-elected as President with a majority of votes and the League of Nations plan was now on the public agenda. The concept of the League was put forward by Wilson, not as a mere "vote catcher", but because Wilson was becoming genuinely committed to it. He was a skilled politician, an ardent American, but he was also a sincere man of vision with an international perspective. Thus in one speech at about this time he said:

"No nation can live without vision, and no vision will exalt a nation except of real liberty and real justice and purity of conduct"²⁴.

He expressed a belief in self-denial and self-sacrifice in the service of humanity²⁵, and demonstrated this belief in his own life of service. Moreover, he was prepared to stress in his public addresses the need for solutions to go beyond the legal to embrace the moral and spiritual²⁶. His vision for the future extended to the whole planet and to mankind, and was capable of transcending the sovereign rights of the USA²⁷, a remarkable position for a sitting President of that country to take.

²⁴ 13 July 1916, address at Washington, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 143.

²⁵ 4 September, 1916, address at Lincoln's birthplace, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 153-154.

²⁶ Eg: 8 September 1916, address to Suffrage Convention, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 156.

²⁷ In a speech of 19 October, 1916 at Chicago, he said:

"There is coming a time, unless I am very much mistaken, when nation shall agree with nation that the rights of humanity are greater than the rights of sovereignty." See introductory quotes to this paper.

Wilson's major speech in the electoral campaign on collective security was delivered in Cincinnati. It was a profound speech. He spoke of America as being a member of the family of nations, concerned with the common rights of mankind. He condemned the balance of power theory and prophesied that if it was reestablished after the War it would sooner or later lead to another such war. He said that we must have a society of nations to establish the peace. But the world's peace should be disturbed if, and only if, the fundamental rights of humanity were invaded. America must be ready as a member of the family of nations to use its whole force, moral and physical, to the assertion of those rights around the globe²⁸. The text of this address is set out in the footnote²⁹.

²⁸ 26 October, 1916, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 162-164.

²⁹ "A Society of Nations

.....*What I intend to preach from this time on is that America must show that as a member of the family of nations she has the same attitude toward the other nations that she wishes her people to have toward each other: That America is going to take this position, that she will lend her moral influence, not only, but her physical force, if other nations will join her, to see to it that no nation and no group of nations tries to take advantage of another nation or group of nations, and that the only thing every fought for is the common right of humanity.*

A great many men are complaining that we are not fighting now in order to get something – not something spiritual, not a right, not something we could be proud of, but something we could possess and take advantage of and trade on and profit by. They are complaining that the Government of the United States has not the spirit of other Governments, which is to put the force, the army and navy, of that Government behind investments in foreign countries. Just so certainly as you do that, you join this chaos of competing and hostile ambitions.

Have you ever heard what started the present war? If you have, I wish you would publish it, because nobody else has, so far as I can gather. Nothing in particular started it, but everything in general. There has been growing up in Europe a mutual suspicion, an interchange of conjectures about what this Government and that Government was going to do, an interlacing of alliances and understandings, a complex web of intrigue and spying, that presently was sure to entangle the whole of the family of mankind on that side of the water in its meshes.

Now, revive that after this war is over and sooner or later you will have just such another war, and this is the last war of the kind or of any kind that involves the world that the United States can keep out of.

I say that because I believe that the business of neutrality is over: not because I want it to be over, but I mean this, that war now has such a scale that the position of neutrals sooner or later becomes intolerable. Just as neutrality would be intolerable to me if I lived in a community where everybody had to assert his own rights by force and I had to go around among my neighbors and say: "Here, this cannot last any longer; let us get together and see that nobody disturbs the peace any more." That is what society is and we have not yet a society of nations.

We must have a society of nations, not suddenly, not by insistence, not by any hostile emphasis upon the demand, but by the demonstration of the needs of the time. The nations of the world must get together and say, "Nobody can hereafter be neutral as respects the disturbance of the world's peace for an object which the world's opinion can not sanction." The world's peace ought to be disturbed if the fundamental rights of humanity are invaded, but it ought not be disturbed for any other thing that I can think of, and America was established in order to indicate, at any rate in one Government, the fundamental rights of man. America must hereafter be ready as a member of the family of nations to exert her whole force, moral and physical, to the assertion of those rights throughout the round globe...."

Wilson's re-election is said to have thrust the proposition of a League of Nations into the vortex of political debate on both sides of the Atlantic, and marked the first important culmination in the quest for a new world order based on the League of Nations³⁰. The German Chancellor gave public support to the proposal, as did Russia. The Allies were more circumspect. The War continued with great devastation. Wilson corresponded with the Germans and other belligerents endeavouring to elicit some plan for considering in conference a permanent international concert on security once the War was over³¹. He addressed the Senate in optimistic terms³², stating that the peace treaty must create a peace that is worth guaranteeing and preserving, and that it must win the approval of humanity, including those in the "New World". But mere peace agreements were not enough, he said; they had to be backed up by force as a guarantor of permanency. The settlement must also include multilateral disarmament and freedom of the seas³³.

However events were taking a more immediate turn for the worse. Disagreement broke out with the Germans over the policy of unrestrained submarine warfare in specified zones of the high seas. Wilson broke off diplomatic relations in response. His second inaugural address shortly afterwards was quite different from his first. In it, he called for national unity in supporting certain specified common political principles, including national equality, a rejection of the balance of power concept, democratic government as a global principle, freedom of the seas, disarmament, and non interference in other countries by way of fomenting revolution³⁴. It was an outward orientated speech compared with his first address, although still focussing on the role of America in the world.

Any euphoria derived from the inauguration of the President soon dissipated as the news became even worse with the sinking of American ships. Wilson was very low in spirits as he contemplated his few immediate options. He faced the inevitable and recommended a state of war against Germany to Congress in April 1917. His speech in justification drew a line between democratic and autocratic governments. Now it was time to prepare in earnest for war. But at least it meant that history had handed him another opportunity, this time a place at the table in negotiating the future peace. Fate had destined him to be the primary instrument for attempting the first experiment in global collective security.

War and Peace

With the onset of War between USA and Germany, it would have been reasonable to expect the President to be fully concentrated on the prosecution of hostilities. But Wilson was not to be put off his pursuit of a Wilsonian solution in the peace process that would

³⁰ Thomas J Knock, op. cit., 103.

³¹ Wilson thought he had an electoral mandate to pursue the peace; see Josephus Daniels, The Wilson Era, (1944, Uni of North Carolina Press), 583.

³² Some would say over-optimistic terms.

³³ 22 January 1917, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 172-179; Uthara Srinivasan, "Woodrow Wilson's "Peace without Victory" Address, January 22 1917; A Continuity of Thought", (1991) The Concorde Review, 131.

³⁴ 5 March 1917, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 184-187; Woodrow Wilson, War and Peace (2002, Uni Press of the Pacific), Vol 1, 1-5.

in time surely follow. His further references to the proposed concert of the nations continued to be short on detail to avoid criticism but positive about the future peace. Thus in a speech to Congress, he said that a steadfast concert for peace could never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations, because only they could be trusted to keep faith and observe the covenants. A concert of free peoples and nations would bring peace to all nations³⁵. When the Pope called for a cessation of hostilities and a concert of the nations based on arbitration, Wilson replied in terms justifying United States intervention against the militarist German Government, but not directed against the German people. Peace must be based upon justice and fairness and the common rights of mankind³⁶, not upon the ambitions of particular autocratic governments. In his annual address to Congress, Wilson spoke of a permanent partnership of the world's peoples to guarantee the peace³⁷.

In the meantime, Wilson's staff had been working up specific proposals for his consideration as to the future peace. The occasion on which to make these proposals public arose in the speech to Congress in early 1918. It has become famous as the "Fourteen Points" speech. In it, Wilson reflected on the inadequacies of the recent Bolshevik proposals for peace with Germany, and put forward his fourteen points for a future settlement of the world's peace, in the interests of all humanity. These points included:

- *open covenants of peace, no secret settlements,
- *freedom of the high seas,
- *equality of trade among nations,
- *multilateral disarmament,
- *impartial adjustment of colonial claims,
- *specific provisions for certain countries, including the adjustment of boundaries,

and

*"XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike."*³⁸.

Wilson expressed similar views in his 4th of July address, the "Four Points" speech:

"IV – The establishment of an organization of peace which shall make it certain that the combined power of free nations will check every invasion of right and serve to make peace and justice the more secure by affording a definite tribunal of opinion to which all must submit and by which every international readjustment that cannot be amicably agreed upon by the peoples directly concerned shall be sanctioned."

³⁵ 2 April 1917, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 188-197; Woodrow Wilson, War and Peace, Vol 1, 6-16.. Also 26 May 1917 on friendship with Russia in Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 206-208.

³⁶ 27 August, 1917, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 219-222; Woodrow Wilson, War and Peace, Vol 1, 93-96.

³⁷ 4 December 1917, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 241-244; Woodrow Wilson, War and Peace, Vol 1, 128-139.

³⁸ 8 January, 1918, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 249; Woodrow Wilson, War and Peace, Vol 1, 161.

.....*What we seek is the reign of law, based upon the consent of the governed and sustained by the organized opinion of mankind.*"³⁹.

But all of Wilson's public statements on the proposed League continued to lack detail as the end of the war approached following US intervention on the side of the Allies. Work done by him and his assistants behind the scenes was deliberately not made public⁴⁰. His general proposals attracted both support and criticism. His assertion that the "*common will of mankind has been substituted for the particular purposes of individual states*"⁴¹ as a result of the War, was attractive to those with a vision of future global peace and unity, but the source of suspicion for nationalists concerned to preserve national sovereign powers and security. Wilson was not altogether unaware of the problems lying ahead in negotiating what he saw to be the terms of a permanent peace, but he remained optimistic. His problems were compounded by a loss of Democrat majorities in both Houses of Congress. He took the unusual and controversial step of departing the United States to Europe to participate in the negotiations of the peace settlement, confident that his proposals based on the fourteen points had the support of the Allies, including the provision for a League of Nations.

The Peace Negotiations

Wilson was received with popular acclamation as a prophet of peace in many centres of Europe. He continued to push the League proposal. He attempted several drafts of a League "Constitution", on the second occasion with the assistance of General Smuts and Lord Robert Cecil. But many others in high political positions in foreign countries felt less enthusiasm for the idea. They did not have the vision of Wilson and were more concerned with the more immediate political realities from their own national perspectives under the existing world order. Prime Minister Billy Hughes of Australia was positively scornful.

The Paris Peace Conference opened early in 1919, with Wilson in attendance.⁴² Wilson sought, and obtained, that the League proposal be the first order of business. A resolution was passed for the establishment of the League of Nations, and a Commission of 19 was appointed to draft its Covenant, with Wilson as chair. But debate soon bogged down between the broader Wilsonian approach to the League and the more conservative British approach. Wilson was forced into defensive mode and had to use all his skills to retain most of his proposals. Of considerable contention was whether only the victorious Allied powers should comprise the Council of the League on a permanent basis, or whether it should also include some lesser powers in rotation. Wilson favoured the latter,

³⁹ 4 July 1918, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 269; Woodrow Wilson, War and Peace, Vol 1, 234.

⁴⁰ Thomas J Knock, op. cit., 152-154.

⁴¹ Fourth Liberty Loan public speech, 27 September 1918, see Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 276; Woodrow Wilson, War and Peace, Vol 1, 254.

⁴² For a description of the events at Paris see Margaret MacMillan, The Peacemakers, (2002, John Murray), Parts I and II.

and was eventually successful on this point. It foreshadowed the future composition of the Security Council of the United Nations, but without the permanent member veto. Under pressure, he later accepted the principle of the requirement of unanimity for substantial Council decisions.

Agreement was reached on Wilson's proposal for a mutual guarantee of territorial integrity and political independence, but he conceded that it was for the Council to decide on any breach or threat thereof and to advise on measures to be taken, as incorporated in Article 10 of the Covenant.

Agreement was also reached on the disarmament clause, as incorporated in Article 8, but without a total ban on the private armaments industry.

Agreement was also reached on the arbitration/judicial settlement of disputes clause without first resorting to war, but without expressly making these forms of conflict resolution compulsory (even if it was implied). Wilson agreed to this knowing that otherwise the Covenant would not get through the Senate in Congress. Agreement was also reached on the establishment of the Permanent Court of International Justice, a landmark decision advocated in the earlier Hague Peace Conferences but never achieved, and advocated by Wilson. A new era of international institutional justice was thereby inaugurated.

The Covenant as finally adopted became Part I of the Treaty of Versailles. It was now up to the various countries to adopt the Treaty.

It is of interest that Wilson did not agree to some more ambitious suggestions in Paris, such as the establishment of a League standing army. Wilson saw what he considered to be the practical limits of the League concept at that time, and sought to rely more on the mutual good faith of the members to act appropriately when threats to international peace arose, supported by world public opinion, rather than prescribing the sanctions to be imposed. His desire to see the scheme for the League adopted sometimes overrode his ideas and convictions.

But in this situation lay the inherent weakness of the League. There was no real sense of unity established by the Covenant to bind the member-states and their peoples together, and members could on prior notice resign from the League⁴³, or never become members by not joining in the first place⁴⁴. The real underlying problem of a world divided by "sovereign" nation-states, without any supra-national form of unity and governance that incorporated power to impose unavoidable and effective sanctions, was simply not addressed. The League was never created in a manner that it could adequately express the "common will of mankind", as Wilson had said it should⁴⁵. It was only to be expected in such a scenario that member states and their leaders would continue to put their own perceived national interests first, rather than be primarily motivated by a

⁴³ Covenant, Article 1.3.

⁴⁴ As did USA, supra.

⁴⁵ See page 12, infra, and footnote 41.

broader Wilsonian sense of good faith, the wishes of the people as distinct from the politicians, and the wider interests of humanity as a whole. Members of the League were still free, legally and otherwise, to use all traditional techniques to advance that national interest, including in the final analysis to go to war with one another. And apart from the bare statement of Wilsonian principles concerning human rights in Article 23, the Covenant in its final form did not deal with the possibility of international intervention in cases of internal violent conflict and domestic abuse of those rights⁴⁶. By accepting the limitations within which Wilson thought he had to operate and making the corresponding adjustments, Wilson was effectively consigning his grand vision to ultimate failure.

It is useless to speculate on what might have happened if Wilson had been insistent on adherence to his views and principles rather than entering into the compromises he did. It is even more illusory to contemplate what would have happened if Wilson had not been the President during the War. Wilson himself said that the League was an inevitable consequence of the Great War⁴⁷. It may well have eventuated in some form or other, with or without Wilson. The War was such a watershed that it inevitably caused a major readjustment of world affairs. Wilson just happened to be President of the USA at the time these issues had to be addressed by the world community of nations. Questions of the boundaries between free will and predestination arise here. In one sense, Wilson was the right man at the right time in being in large measure responsible for first seriously envisaging, discussing and then testing in practice the principle of collective security on virtually a global basis⁴⁸.

The League rejected and later dissolved

Wilson returned to the United States for a brief period feeling triumphant. He was not prepared for the mounting domestic criticism of the League at home. He fought back vigorously, before returning to Paris for further negotiations. He was prepared to make some concessions to achieve Senate acceptance of the Covenant, such as to eliminate compulsory arbitration, to permit withdrawal from the League on two years' notice, and to exclude domestic issues from the League⁴⁹. He also accepted a suggestion to require all substantive decisions of the League Council to be unanimous. These changes were incorporated in the draft Covenant by the Commission when he returned to Paris. But disputations on the terms of the peace, reparations and settlement of boundaries plagued the other negotiations. Wilson returned to the United States a second time very tired, his work on the drafting of the Covenant finished. His own mark was indelibly stamped on the document, more so than anyone else. But it did not accord in all respects with his wishes. He nevertheless continued to support it. In a varied career of great distinction, it was his life's major work. He wanted to be remembered as the author of a new international structure that would abolish war⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ Article 10 of the Covenant in its final form only applied to "external aggression", and the Covenant did not deal with violent conflict short of "war"; ie: war between nation-states. See also Article XV.8.

⁴⁷ 19 June 1919, address at the American Legation, Brussels, see War and Peace, Vol 1, 512.

⁴⁸ Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, (1974, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 191-192.

⁴⁹ Covenant, Article XV.8

⁵⁰ Kendrick A Clements, Woodrow Wilson, (1999, Ivan R Dee), 197.

He ran into even more domestic criticism of the League as soon as he returned a second time, from both right and left. For some the League went too far in limiting the sovereign powers of the USA. For others it was a sell-out and did not go far enough. Wilson was caught in the middle. He embarked on a strenuous speaking tour of the States in appealing directly to the people. During this tour he had a massive stroke and the promotional exercise lost momentum from then on. It soon became a foregone conclusion that the Senate would reject the Covenant⁵¹. That effectively ended the participation of the USA in the League. It never became a member, a further grave weakness in the effectiveness of the League.

Wilson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919 notwithstanding this unhappy ending. He died a few years later after he ceased to be President⁵². He was a man of grand global vision and intellect, a man of principle, in advance of his contemporaries in many ways. And he was not afraid to try the great untried. He himself said of the League:

*“No such sudden and potent union of purpose has ever been witnessed in the world before”*⁵³.

He was deeply aware that he had failed in achieving his greatest goal in the sense of not securing US participation and leadership in the League. He never lost his belief in the rightness of that goal⁵⁴, a goal which he saw as being of benefit for all mankind.

But he was also a dedicated American politician with an intense loyalty and sense of duty towards his country. He tried to reconcile these two perspectives by asserting what he saw as the unique role of the United States in the world in achieving peace, but this was a reconciliation that cannot be said to be fully justified by the political history of that country. Despite Wilson's reliance on the goodwill and moral standards of the American people, they failed to sufficiently support him at the critical time of ratification of the Covenant. And the record of the United States Government since then in foreign affairs has not always demonstrated the world leadership and selfless interests that Wilson said were necessary for world peace. It is said that Wilson was caught in the struggle between the concepts of the old and new worlds⁵⁵. Perhaps Wilson can also be said to have been handicapped by his involvement in partisan national politics at the same time as he was trying to assert the best interests of all mankind.

The League of Nations operated from Geneva up until World War II with a membership that omitted the USA and, later, other great powers that withdrew. It had some successes, but it was not successful in preventing the slide into the global catastrophe of that War. The first exercise in global collective security had been tried and found wanting. It was a

⁵¹ Under the Constitution of the United States of America, Article 2 Section 2.2, The President can only make treaties with the advice and consent of a two-thirds majority of the Senate present and voting. For a detailed discussion of the events leading up to rejection, see Knock, op. cit.; Kendrick A Clements, op. cit.; Arthur Walworth, Wilson and his Peacemakers, (1986, W W Norton and Co).

⁵² Woodrow Wilson died on 3 February 1924.

⁵³ 28 December, 1918, address to the Lord Mayor of London, see War and Peace, Vol 1, 343.

⁵⁴ Arthur Wallworth, op. cit., 561.

⁵⁵ Herbert Hoover, The Ordeal of Woodrow Wilson, (1958 and 1992, Woodrow Wilson Center Press and John Hopkins Uni Press), 300. See also the Introduction at xxvii.

bitter lesson in international politics and law, but a lesson from which much can be learnt. It is clearly wrong to write off the League as unimportant in the historical chain of events leading up to the eventual establishment of a truly permanent and effective global peace. As a necessary consequence, it is also impossible to write off Wilson's critical contribution to this process as being unimportant.

The Permanent Court of International Justice survived, becoming the International Court of Justice under the United Nations⁵⁶. A number of other agencies of the League were taken over by the United Nations. But the provisions of the Covenant disappeared, including those on collective security, to be replaced after World War II by new provisions in the Charter of the United Nations. The League ceased to exist.

Were the Baha'i Teachings influential on Woodrow Wilson?

This paper has discussed the main influences on Woodrow Wilson in the formulation of his belief in the concept of collective security. But there has been an ongoing debate as to whether this belief was in any way influenced by his knowledge of the Baha'i Writings on the subject. This debate has not yet reached any finality.

In this regard, the Founder/Prophet of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, had advocated a comprehensive system of universal collective security in His Writings in the nineteenth century. He wrote:

*"The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundation of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquillity of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purposes of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation. We fain would hope that the kings and rulers of the earth, the mirrors of the gracious and almighty name of God, may attain unto this station, and shield mankind from the onslaught of tyranny."*⁵⁷

These statements find endorsement in the Writings of Baha'u'llah's son and successor, Abdu'l-Baha, both before and during his journeys to the West before the Great War. He wrote:

⁵⁶ Charter of the United Nations, Chapter XIV, and the separate Statute of that Court that follows the Charter.

⁵⁷ Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, (1983, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 249; The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah, (1972, Universal House of Justice), 115; The Tablets of Baha'u'llah, (1978, Universal House of Justice), 165. See also Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of Wolf, (1976, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 30-31; Universal House of Justice, The Promise of World Peace, (1986, Baha'i Publications Australia), 22; Peace: More than an End to War, (1986, Baha'i Publishing Trust), Chapter 5.

“True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns- the shining exemplars of devotion and determination – shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the cause of peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. This supreme and noble undertaking – the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world- should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure.

.....

A few, unaware of the power latent in human endeavour, consider this matter as highly impracticable, nay even beyond the scope of man’s utmost efforts. Such is not the case, however.....”⁵⁸.

Abdu’l-Baha went on to state that Baha’u’llah had called for the establishment of a Supreme Tribunal, with wide compulsory jurisdiction to rule with finality on all issues of peace referred to it, and to be enforced through this system of collective security described above⁵⁹.

Abdu’l-Baha traveled to the USA for an extended period in 1912⁶⁰ during the end period of the Presidency of Taft and the first Presidential campaign of Wilson, meeting many

⁵⁸ Abdu’l-Baha, The Secret of Divine Civilization, (1975, Baha’i Publishing Trust), 64-67, a paper written in Persian in 1875 and first published in English in London in 1910. Similar comments are found throughout his Writings and talks. See also The Promise of World Peace, op. cit., 23.

⁵⁹ Abdu’l-Baha, Foundations for World Unity, (1972, Baha’i Publishing Trust), 32-33. This quote must have been from a letter written by Abdu’l-Baha after the Great War as he refers to the League of Nations in it. But his comments were not new, having been made in similar terms before that War; see, for example, Paris Talks, (11th Ed., 1979, Baha’i Publishing Trust), 155, a talk given by Abdu’l-Baha in Paris in November 1911. The frequently used summary in point form of Baha’i principles often contains a reference to “an international tribunal” – see Abdu’l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, (1982, Baha’i Publishing Trust), 440.

⁶⁰ From 11 April 1912 to 5 December 1912.

dignitaries and creating considerable publicity with his many talks and other functions⁶¹. He arrived and left via New York and visited New Jersey. But there is no record that he ever met Woodrow Wilson. Abdu'l-Baha frequently spoke publicly on the themes of world peace and collective security, disarmament, the need for an international tribunal, and the great future role to be played by the United States in establishing these principles⁶², the latter being quite prophetic. It is most likely that Wilson did read about Abdu'l-Baha and his views in the media, if not elsewhere. Abdu'l-Baha did meet Theodore Roosevelt⁶³, just missed meeting William Jennings Bryan at the latter's home⁶⁴, and much later corresponded with one of Wilson's school and cabinet colleagues⁶⁵.

Abdu'l-Baha, on the other hand, was conversant with the work of Wilson. He wrote:

*"The President of the Republic, Dr. Wilson, is indeed serving the Kingdom of God for he is restless and strives day and night that the rights of all men may be preserved safe and secure, that even small nations, like great ones, may dwell in peace and comfort, under the protection of Righteousness and Justice. This purpose is indeed a lofty one. I trust that the incomparable Providence will assist and confirm such souls under all conditions."*⁶⁶.

Again he wrote:

*"As to President Wilson, the fourteen principles which he hath enunciated are mostly found in the teachings of Baha'u'llah and I therefore hope that he will be confirmed and assisted. Now is the dawn of universal peace;...."*⁶⁷.

It has sometimes been asserted that Woodrow Wilson was, or may have been, influenced by the Baha'i Writings. Certainly the Faith came to his attention as President when the US National Convention sent him encouraging messages in 1915 and 1916. Wilson cordially acknowledged the latter in writing. But did Wilson actually study the Faith and was he influenced by it in his work as President? There are several anecdotal indications that his eldest daughter Margaret did attend a Baha'i meeting and took Baha'i literature in this period, discussed in an article by Pearsall⁶⁸. This literature could easily have made its way into the White House and come to the attention of the President. But there is no written record that this did occur. Margaret was particularly influenced by Indian religion and left the United States for self exile in India after her father ceased to be President. One story told by Pearsall is allegedly derived from comments made by

⁶¹ Allan L Ward, Abdu'l-Baha's Journey in America, (1979, Baha'i Publishing Trust); also The Promulgation of Universal Peace, op. cit.

⁶² The Promulgation of Universal Peace, op. cit., 102-103, 120-122, 301-302, 317, 376-377, 388-389, 396-397, 446-447.

⁶³ H M Balyuzi, op. cit., 184.

⁶⁴ The future Secretary of State in the first Wilson Administration, see Balyuzi, op. cit., 279 and footnote 183 to that work; see also Mirza Mahmud-i-Zarqani, translated by Mohi Sobhani, Mahmud's Diary, (1998, George Ronald), 281, 437.

⁶⁵ Horace Holley, "The Assurance of World Peace", The Baha'i World, Vol 10, 652.

⁶⁶ Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, (1978, Baha'i World Centre), 109.

⁶⁷ Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, op. cit., 311.

⁶⁸ Paul Pearsall, "President Wilson and the Baha'i Connection", Herald of the South, (October 1988), 33-34.

another daughter of Wilson, asserting that the President did read Baha'i literature and did glean his 14 points from it.

The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi, wrote in a letter dated 16 March 1925: *"With regard to Ex-President Wilson...., it seems fairly clear that (he was)...considerably influenced by the Baha'i Teachings; but at the same time it is well to avoid making dogmatic statements that (he).. got all (his).. principles from Baha'u'llah, or the like as we are not in a position to prove such statements, and to make claims which we cannot prove weakens instead of strengthening our position."*⁶⁹.

Those other published aspects of Shoghi Effendi's writings that refer specifically to Wilson do not state that Wilson was directly influenced by any reading of the Baha'i Writings.

Some Baha'i writers have asserted or suggested that there may have been some direct link between Wilson and the Baha'i Faith. Thus Hand of the Cause William Sears stated that Wilson's daughter had shown a keen interest in the Baha'i Revelation, although he falls short of categorically asserting a direct link with the President as a result⁷⁰. In a talk by Universal House of Justice member Douglas Martin, he stated that a few people like Woodrow Wilson caught the Baha'i vision, but he gives no details or authority⁷¹. In another talk by Universal House of Justice member Glenford Mitchell, he said that Woodrow Wilson's 14 points were inspired by Abdu'l-Baha's Tablets of the Divine Plan⁷². These 14 Tablets were penned by Abdu'l-Baha in the dark days of the Great War in 1916-1917, addressed to the Baha'is of the several regions of the United States and Canada, expressed in elevated spiritual terms and calling on them to arise for the furtherance of the Cause of God. Five of them were published in the US-based *Star of the West* magazine on 8 September 1916⁷³, but the remainder did not reach the United States until 1919 due to war conditions⁷⁴.

In an article by Baha'i Guy Murchie, he asserted that Wilson's daughter was an ardent student of the Baha'i teachings, and that it was said that she was instrumental in influencing her father to include the Baha'i principles in his 14 points⁷⁵. Critic of the Faith William McElwee Miller quotes a grandson of Wilson, one Francis Sayre, as saying that his aunt had no interest in the Baha'i movement and that there was no foundation for this claim by Murchie⁷⁶. But it is unlikely that Miller thoroughly researched the matter to be able to fully support this latter assertion.

The matter remains inconclusive. Certainly Wilson had a good understanding of the principles of international law and international politics, and was aware of the concept of

⁶⁹ Helen Hornby, *Lights of Guidance*, (2nd Ed., 1992), 452; see also Pearsall, op. cit.

⁷⁰ William Sears, *Prisoner and the Kings*, Chapter 14.

⁷¹ 22 September 2001, talk on the *Century of Light*, Lowell, Massachusetts.

⁷² 11 October, 2001, talk at the Atlanta Baha'i Unity Center.

⁷³ *Star of the West* compilation, (1978 and 1984, George Ronald), Vol 4, 87-91.

⁷⁴ See now *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, (1977, Baha'i Publishing Trust).

⁷⁵ "I am a Baha'i", Chicago Sunday Tribune, 3 July 1958, 4.

⁷⁶ W M Miller, *The Baha'i Faith: Its History and Teachings*, 353 and footnotes 3 and 4.

collective security before becoming President. He was clearly influenced by various peace movements that proliferated in the period up to and including the Great War, and became a member of one of them. He must have read about Abdu'l-Baha's visit to America in 1912 before he became President. He was also greatly influenced by his childhood experiences with the Civil War and by his Christian heritage, as already noted. That these influences were extended or consolidated in any way by Wilson making reference to the Baha'i Writings is an open question, and will have to be left to future Baha'i scholarship⁷⁷. If he was, his understanding of those Writings would have been limited. But he could well have read enough that he was able to reflect this in his peace proposals, in which there was a significant correlation with the relevant Baha'i teachings. Those teachings contain a goal of a genuine system of collective security and world peace, put with great inspirational force and clarity. One has to ask why he consistently pursued his global vision for humanity with such vigor and determination on the national and world stage in the face of such ignorance and opposition, until health problems defeated him. Bear in mind that this is the early 20th century, when the country was just bursting onto the international stage for the first time as a significant international power, and such views by an American President would have seemed to most Americans as being way in advance of the times and public thinking. And Wilson created the public debate; he did not just respond to it. Without being dogmatic, it is clearly possible that the answer lies in whole or part in the spiritual inspiration and guidance provided to him by the Baha'i Faith. If so, it is not surprising in the circumstances that he did not admit this. The position of Shoghi Effendi, as quoted above, was no doubt an accurate statement of the position at the time it was made, and would still seem to be accurate in relation to the position today.

In so far as the Baha'i Faith represented or captured the emerging spirit of the age, Wilson was clearly influenced by it in an indirect way, whether or not it was a conscious exercise⁷⁸.

Abdu'l-Baha, who lived until 1921, was critical of the inadequacies of the League of Nations and stated that it would not be able to achieve peace⁷⁹. But this view did not diminish his very high regard for Wilson⁸⁰.

Baha'i and other views on Woodrow Wilson

Abdu'l-Baha had nothing but praise for Wilson and his ideas. It was only the method of implementation of those ideas in the political setting of the times that Abdu'l-Baha thought was inadequate to the task Wilson had set himself. In this respect, Abdu'l Baha said that the time of Wilson was the "*...dawn of universal peace; my hope is that its morn*

⁷⁷ Foad Katirai, Global Governance and the Lesser Peace, (2001, George Ronald), 65.

⁷⁸ This is the point made by William Sears, op. cit.

⁷⁹ See footnote 54, Foundations for World Unity. See also Abdu'l-Baha's Tablet to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at the Hague, 17 December 1919, extracts of which are set out in H M Balyuzi, Abdu'l-Baha, (1987, George Ronald), 438-439, where he states that the League of Nations is incapable of establishing universal peace, but that the Supreme Tribunal that Baha'u'llah has described will have that capacity.

⁸⁰ Discussed under the following heading.

*will fully break, converting the gloom of war, of strife and of wrangling among men into the light of unity, of harmony and of affection.”*⁸¹. He expressed the hope that Wilson would be confirmed and assisted. In another passage, Abdu'l-Baha said that President Wilson was serving the Kingdom of God and that his purpose was a lofty one⁸².

The Guardian of the Faith Shoghi Effendi, referred to these comments in his letters. He referred to Wilson as the “*immortal Woodrow Wilson*”, and he ascribed to him the unique honor among all statesmen at that time of voicing sentiments akin to the principles animating the Cause of Baha'u'llah, and of Wilson being foremost in the creation of the League of Nations⁸³.

Shoghi Effendi also referred to the “*high endeavors*” of Wilson, who was “*tragically unappreciated*”, and whose efforts were nullified by a visionless generation⁸⁴. But he added that neither the force the framers and guarantors of the peace treaties had mustered, nor the lofty ideals of the author of the League Covenant were a sufficient bulwark against the forces of internal disruption. They were not sufficient instruments, either in conception or practice, to ensure the integrity of the Order they sought to establish⁸⁵. After referring to the deficiencies of the League, Shoghi Effendi added:

*“Be that as it may, the significance of the steps already taken cannot be ignored. Whatever the present status of the League, whatever the trials and reverses which, in the immediate future, it may have to face and sustain, the fact must be recognized that so important a decision marks one of the most distinctive milestones on the long and arduous road that must lead it to its goal, the stage at which the oneness of the whole body of nations will be made the ruling principle of international life.”*⁸⁶

Some of these Baha'i comments are later referred to by The Universal House of Justice, which categorized Wilson as “*that extraordinary man*”⁸⁷.

But views expressed by others outside the Baha'i Faith have not always been so kind. He has been accused of being too idealistic and moralistic, a dreamer, reserved, autocratic, stubborn and obstinate⁸⁸, impatient with lesser minds, naive, divorced from the reality of the ways of the world. Link wrote of Wilson that there had always been a tendency to see him as:

“a well-intentioned idealist, a man good by ordinary Christian standards, but essentially a destructive force in modern history because he was visionary, unrealistic, provincial, and ignorant of European problems, and zealous and messianic in conceit but

⁸¹ Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, op. cit., para 232.

⁸² Ibid, para 71. Abdu'l-Baha also spoke of the qualifications required for the election of the President in a talk given on 14 October, 1912 - see Mahmud's Diary, op. cit., 327.

⁸³ Citadel of Faith, (1965, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 36. See also at 32.

⁸⁴ The Advent of Divine Justice, (1939, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 74. See also at 75.

⁸⁵ The World Order of Baha'u'llah, op. cit., 30.

⁸⁶ The World Order of Baha'u'llah, op. cit., 193.

⁸⁷ Century of Light, (2000, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 32-34.

⁸⁸ Hoover says it was not obstinacy but insistence on moral principles of justice and right, op. cit., xxvii.

devoid of either practical knowledge or the humility to follow others better informed than he."⁸⁹.

Freud said that Wilson suffered from an unresolved Oedipus complex that subconsciously caused him to identify his father with God and himself as Jesus Christ⁹⁰.

Wilson is said to have created fears for the future by his prophecies of dire consequences if his plans were not implemented.⁹¹ He is accused of having been interventionist in Latin America and as a result inconsistent in the application of his high ideals⁹². His reversal from isolationism and non-intervention in the Great War, to justifying direct American involvement in that War, has been a continuing source of criticism by some of pacifist orientation. His willingness to compromise on the League Covenant has also drawn much criticism⁹³.

Those of a nationalistic bent generally felt that his ideas were dangerous and not compatible with the security and best interests of America⁹⁴. Writers since then have often characterised Wilson's ideas as a convenient symbol of what they see as an unfortunate American tendency to sacrifice national interests in favour of unobtainable ideals⁹⁵.

He is also said to have left a lasting impression on United States foreign policy throughout the rest of the twentieth century, an approach that leads to US global involvement and intervention in world affairs based on the perception of the existence of external threats to that country in a newly interdependent and dangerous world that have to be dealt with⁹⁶. Wilson is said to have understood the growing interdependence of the world but failed to take into account its diversity and pluralism⁹⁷. As a result, his views were said to be divorced from realism and could not work. Wilson's rejection of the "balance of power" doctrine is said to have been a fault.

Secular commentators have ascribed to Wilson a vision that was incapable of accomplishment; it was a vision of international organization which in itself could not

⁸⁹ Arthur S Link, The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson, (1971), 128, cited in John A Thompson, Woodrow Wilson, (2002, Longman), 4; see also Margaret MacMillan, op. cit., Chapters 1 and 2.

⁹⁰ Sigmund Freud and William C Bullitt, Thomas Woodrow Wilson: A Psychological Study, (1967), cited in John A Thompson, op. cit. 5. Bullitt was in Paris with Wilson until he resigned in protest.

⁹¹ In this there were some parallels with the Baha'i Writings, which also forecast future global conflict if the principles of Baha'u'llah were not implemented.

⁹² The author understands that there are still popular songs in circulation that pick up this criticism.

⁹³ This in fact lost Wilson support among advocates of peace at the time, and may have contributed to the defeat of the Democrats in the 1920 Presidential election.

⁹⁴ This was a factor in the defeat of the League in the Senate and the subsequent loss by the Democrats of the 1920 Presidential election. See Frank Ninkovich, The Wilsonian Century, (1999, Uni Chicago Press), 75.

⁹⁵ David M Esposito, The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson, (1996, Praeger), 3, citing Robert E Osgood, Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations, (1953 Uni of Chicago Press), 262-263; George F Kennan, American Diplomacy 1900-1950, (1951, Uni of Chicago Press), 87.

⁹⁶ Frank Ninkovich, op. cit.

⁹⁷ Lloyd E Ambrosius, Wilsonianism, (2002, Palgrave).

guarantee the peace, leaving people shocked who had founded their hopes on such a dream⁹⁸. Others more generous would simply assert that Wilson's mistake was to try to implement his vision when the world was not yet ready for it⁹⁹. But the hope in his vision has not died, notwithstanding the subsequent years of continuing turmoil and conflict. Commenting on this, it is said that never since Wilson's time has any man risen to the political and spiritual heights that came to Wilson¹⁰⁰.

Thus not all commentators have been that unkind. In a very balanced and well-researched analysis, Knock concludes that Wilson's significance continues to inhere in his inclusive comprehension of the unfolding epoch, in his eloquence, and in the enduring relevance of his vision, and that in this he remained unique among United States presidents¹⁰¹. As already stated, he noted that a re-evaluation of Wilson's role and importance was in the offing. The biographer Clements stated that he was "*a rare and special statesman whose life was dedicated to the service of the people.*"¹⁰². Pierce, although critical of Wilson in many respects, conceded that he had ushered in a new spirit and a new definition of "right". By championing various causes of peoples and mankind, not usually championed by leading politicians up to that time, he had given them a legitimacy and an authority which they would otherwise have lacked. He had also awakened a new consciousness in those peoples¹⁰³. In the recent work of Brands it is said that Wilson's legacy was his words, and although his words faltered at his journey's end, his words lived on, inspiring later generations to achieve what he never could¹⁰⁴. Brand added that by the late twentieth century, Wilson belonged to the world¹⁰⁵. Link was also kinder to Wilson, describing him not as a moralist, but a man who lived by faith in meeting the complex problems of a changing nation and world¹⁰⁶.

More recently, Robert S McNamara and James G Blight have adopted much of the Wilsonian thinking on international issues as part of a multi-faceted plan of action for the 21st century to ensure peace and security. Their plan includes a new system of collective security, a restructuring of the United Nations and the elimination of nuclear weapons¹⁰⁷.

Perhaps the most positive comments were made by General Smuts, who worked closely with Wilson in Paris:

"At a time of the deepest darkness and despair he had raised aloft a light to which all eyes had turned. He had spoken divine words of healing and consolation to a

⁹⁸ John Blum, Joe Tumulty and the Wilson Era, (1951, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston), 256-259, cited in Alfred B Rollins Jr., Woodrow Wilson and the New America, (1965, Laurel), 327.

⁹⁹ William Allen White, Woodrow Wilson: the Man, His Times, and His Task, (1924, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston), 436, cited in Alfred B Rollins Jr., op.cit. 332.

¹⁰⁰ Herbert Hoover, The Ordeal of Woodrow Wilson, op. cit., 300.

¹⁰¹ Thomas J Knock, op. cit., 276.

¹⁰² Kendrick A Clements, op. cit., 223.

¹⁰³ Anne R Pierce, Woodrow Wilson and Harry Truman, (1956 and 2003, Praeger), 111.

¹⁰⁴ H W Brands, Woodrow Wilson, (2003, Times Books), 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 138.

¹⁰⁶ Arthur S Link, op. cit., 139, cited in David H Burton, Taft, Wilson and World Order, (2003, Associated Uni Presses), 90.

¹⁰⁷ McNamara and Blight, Wilson's Ghost, (2001, Public Affairs).

broken humanity. His lofty moral idealism seemed for a moment to dominate the brutal passions which had torn the Old World asunder...

Without hesitation he plunged into that inferno of human passions....There were six months of agonizing waiting, during which the world situation rapidly deteriorated. And then he emerged with the Peace Treaty. It was not a Wilson peace....This was a Punic peace¹⁰⁸ ...

...The Paris peace lost an opportunity as unique as the great war itself. In destroying the moral idealism born of the sacrifices of the war it did almost as much as the war itself in shattering the structure of Western civilization.

...It was not Wilson who failed....It was the human spirit itself that failed at Paris....

...The hope, the aspiration for a new world order of peace and right and justice - however deeply and universally felt - was still only feeble and ineffective in comparison with the dominant national passions which found their expression in the Peace Treaty.

...And in the end not only the leaders but the peoples preferred a bit of booty here, a strategic frontier there, a coal field or an oil well, an addition to their population or their resources...

What was really saved at Paris was...the Covenant of the League of Nations...The Covenant is Wilson's souvenir to the future of the world. No one will ever deny him that honor.

The honor is very great, indeed, for the Covenant is one of the great creative documents of human history. The Peace Treaty will fade into merciful oblivion, and its provisions will be gradually obliterated by the great human tides sweeping over the world...And the leader who, in spite of apparent failure, succeeded in inscribing his name on that banner has achieved the most enviable and enduring immortality...¹⁰⁹.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that Wilson was an important figure in twentieth century history. His international actions put the USA on the international stage as a major actor for the first time. And the manner in which he did this, calling upon adherence to higher principles and decent standards of morality in the interests of all humanity, rather than that of narrow national and sectional self-interest, was bound to have an effect on future patterns of behaviour in that arena. How important a figure must depend on the commentators's perspective. An approach dominated by a belief in the pre-eminence of the national sovereign state, largely unimpeded by international controls and restraints, would tend to downplay Wilson's importance. An approach that places emphasis on the

¹⁰⁸ A reference to the three wars waged between the Romans and Carthagians between 264 BC and 146 BC, characterised by treachery.

¹⁰⁹ Jan Christian Smuts, New York Times, 3 March, 1921, cited in Herbert Hoover, op. cit., 301; see also John A Thompson,, op. cit., citing Walter Lippman, US War Aims, (1944), 170.

best interests of humanity and the need for a harmonious and just world order will correspondingly tend to place much more importance on Wilson's contribution. If to this is added a belief in the importance of the spiritual aspect as a motivator and guide in human affairs, then this would tend to cause Wilson to be regarded as being of even more importance.

At a time now when self interest and materialism have come to dominate more than ever in human affairs, and adherence to spiritual and moral principles and beliefs have tended to decline, it is not surprising that interest in Wilson has been relatively low in recent decades. To many he is of little importance, if known of at all.

But this is a time of great deal of uncertainty and concern. The privileged position of the Western nation-states is under challenge, and much of the world is in turmoil. Old views and assumptions are being challenged as never before. The world is not a peaceful place despite the collapse of the iron curtain. New dangers are emerging that are threatening the very fabric of society. Such a climate seems to be inviting a new look at ideas for human well-being that were formulated in the past but never adequately researched or implemented. Further trials and difficulties seem certain to lie ahead of the global community, but it often takes a descent into violence and despair to generate decisive action and critical change. There is also a revival of interest in the spiritual dimension of life and in ethics/morality. And a new perspective is emerging that is much more aware of the global dimension and of the processes of globalisation. It is a perspective that tends to be critical of the present world order and fearful of the dangers for humanity that it incorporates, both in the short and longer term.

In this situation, it is highly likely that this will lead to a widespread revival of interest in global political solutions, tailored to meet the needs of all humanity. A number of well known reports in the last decade or so have pointed in that direction¹¹⁰. There have been many proposals for reform of the United Nations in recent times to make it much more effective in maintaining the peace and security of the world. Equally, strenuous resistance to such suggestions and proposals can be expected, just as in Wilson's day. These signs of an awakening will necessarily lead to a revival of interest in the work of Wilson and his attempt to construct and institutionalise a new world order. This revival may have already begun. Once again, an entire generation may find hope in Wilson's confident vision of future world peace and global justice.

The last word should be left to Baha'u'llah, recorded on the occasion of the visit to him of Professor Edward G Brown in 1890 in Palestine, and expressing with confidence the ultimate vision that these things are destined by Divine Providence to be:

“..these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” shall come....Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country, let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.”¹¹¹.

¹¹⁰ Eg: The World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future, (1987, OUP); The Commission on Global Governance, Our Global Neighbourhood, (1995, OUP).

¹¹¹ J E Esslemont, Baha'u'llah and the New Era, (1974, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 37.