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## DEBATE ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE USA IN THE SYSTEM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (WOODROW WILSON - THEODORE ROOSEVELT)

**Abstract:** This paper concentrates on the debate that largely determined the direction of the foreign policy vector of the United States of America. The 26th and 28th presidents of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, understood well that the United States had the power to mingle in the world's superpowers and set the world's foreign policy agenda. Both presidents tried during their respective presidential offices to finally free the United States from the all pervasive tyranny of isolationism, which had plagued US foreign policy and prevented it from attaining superpower status. The unprecedented scale of industrial development prompted the United States to conduct a larger-scale foreign trade expansion that went beyond the southern hemisphere of the world and reached the remote corners of the planet that were still unknown to Americans. Naturally, trade interests needed protection, which was quite unimaginable under the outdated isolationist foreign policy, so neither Theodore Roosevelt nor Woodrow Wilson had any doubts about overcoming the isolationist framework to protect American interests. It was another matter how, by what methods, and on what scale the state interests of the United States should be presented next to the superpower states. Holding such a debate regarding the US foreign policy was a special event for the United States of that time. The public, cut off from the world politics for many years, was not used to a qualified debate regarding the country's foreign priorities. Thus, the verbal fray between these two titans of American politics was closely watched in the United States. This debate can be compared to the debate between the realist Theodore Roosevelt and the idealist Woodrow Wilson to some extent. The realist Theodore Roosevelt felt that the United States could exert a powerful influence on shaping the agenda of world politics alongside other superpowers, while the idealist Woodrow Wilson believed that the providence had prepared the United States for a special role in building the great family of free nations. Proceeding from these two different views, the methods of implementing the foreign policy of the United States were also different. Therefore, this paper provides for the discussion of these different views and methods of the 26th and 28th presidents.

**Key words:** USA, isolationism, debate, foreign trade expansion, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson.

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### Introduction

Eliot Cohen, Professor at the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, Counselor of the Department of State from 2007 to 2009, in the Article "The Return of Statecraft" published in the Foreign Affairs N3, 2022 notes that the foreign relations of the United States should be based on the principle and pragmatism that

emerges from Theodore Roosevelt's 1905 inaugural address: "Much has been given us, and much will rightfully be expected from us. We have duties to others and duties to ourselves; and we can shirk neither. We have become a great nation, forced by the fact of its greatness into relations with the other nations of the earth, and we must behave as befits

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a people with such responsibilities".<sup>1</sup> During Roosevelt's presidency, there were many different types of forces operating in the international arena, and the United States was a powerful but not dominant power. Eliot Cohen believes that the US is unique in many ways: national identity, vast territory, favorable geographic location, overwhelming military power, and 250 years of imperfect but successful democracy. The researcher notes that: "The country is approaching a period full of severe challenges, where a grand strategy of action with its characteristic simplistic approaches will not be useful. The United States will have to navigate a troubled world, manage crises, create good where possible, and oppose evil where necessary. Such challenges cannot be counterbalanced by the principle announced by John F. Kennedy in his inaugural address in 1961 - *bear any burden, meet any hardship*."<sup>2</sup> Idealistic and pragmatic approaches alternated, but disputes and disputes over the methods of implementing the superpower's foreign policy never changed its basic essence, established by Theodore Roosevelt and refined by Woodrow Wilson.

### Discussion

The transformation of the United States of America is linked to its 26th and 28th presidents: Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. It is hardly too much to say that these presidents brought the United States to the international arena and turned a country on the periphery of international relations into a superpower. Why does American historiography consider Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson as epoch figures? How did they save the country from the yoke of provincialism? What was driving the United States' growing foreign ambitions at the turn of the century? According to our reckoning, During the 19th century, expansionism nurtured under the guise of isolationism brought boldness, risky decisions, and insatiable appetite for spreading the American national interests with global reach. was in the 19th century that the justifying theory of American expansionism called "Manifest Destiny" was created and reached its zenith. According to Kakhi Kenkadze, "This concept appeared in 1845, when the New York Democrat publisher L. O'Sullivan summed up the nationalist feelings and aspirations of the time of the Americans in a way and put it in front of his compatriots in the form of an action plan. In his essay he outlined that any attempt by the Europeans to prevent the Americans from annexing Texas was an act against God, and that the opposition could themselves check:

*"the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."* .. already two years later, the United States Minister of Finance, Robert J. Walker (Rober J. Walker) in his State of the Union address explained America's history and future as follows: American expansion was driven by a *"higher than any earthly power"* and *"still guards and directs (the God) our destiny, impels us onward, and has selected our great and happy country as a model and ultimate centre of attraction for the all nations of the world."*<sup>3</sup>

The famous thesis "Significance of the Frontier in American History" by the prominent American historian Frederick Jackson Turner, published in 1993, was imbued with a similar expansionist spirit. Turner noted that the history of America is largely the history of the western colonization of the continent. It is the so-called The "moving frontier" shaped the American character, reinforced American values, and created effective civic structures. The constant westward-moving frontier, or continental expansion, ensured the rapid progress that set the United States apart from the rest of the world. Furthermore, this development was not only manifested in the rapid growth of the economy. Practically all spheres of public life have undergone a far-reaching process of development. At the same point of time, the continental expansion of the United States ended at the end of the 19th century. There was no free land left on the North American continent that could be subject to Washington's control. Turner's concept was the impetus for further expansion, and - his "moving frontier" thesis brilliantly conveyed the powerful charge of expansionism that had accumulated in American society.

The spirit formed in the concept of Frederick Jackson Turner was echoed by the famous speech delivered by the U.S. Senator Albert Beveridge in 1898 in the city of Indianapolis (Indiana state). Beveridge's speech was entitled "March of the Flag", in which American expansionism was presented as a "divine mission": *"It is a noble land that God has given us; a land that can feed... "It is a mighty people that He has planted on this soil; a people sprung from the most masterful blood of history; a people perpetually revitalized by the virile workingfolk of all the earth; a people imperial by virtue of their power, by right of their institutions, by authority of their heaven-directed purposes, the propagandists and not the misers of liberty. It is a glorious history our God has bestowed upon His chosen people; a history of statesmen, who flung the boundaries of the Republic out into unexplored lands and savage wildernesses."*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cohen. E, The Return of Statecraft, Foreign Affairs N3, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Cohen. E, The Return of Statecraft, Foreign Affairs N3, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Kenkadze. K, The History of US Foreign Policy. Tbilisi, 2008. P. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Beveridge. Albert J, March of the Flag, 18 September, 1898, [Indiana](#).

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Senator Beveridge voices the questions that were pressing in contemporary American society and urgently needed to be answered: “*Shall the American people continue their resistless march toward the commercial supremacy of the world? Shall free institutions broaden their blessed reign ... until the empire of our principles is established over the hearts of all mankind? shall we occupy new markets for what our farmers raise, new markets for what our factories make, new markets for what our merchants sell—aye, and, please God, new markets for what our ships shall carry?*”<sup>5</sup> Albert Beveridge tries to answer these questions when he notes: “*Hawaii is ours; Porto Rico is to be ours; at the prayer of her people Cuba finally will be ours; in the islands of the East, even to the gates of Asia, coaling stations are to be ours at the very least; the flag of a liberal government is to float over the Philippines, and may it be the banner that Taylor unfurled in Texas and Fremont carried to the coast ... Will you remember that we do but what our fathers did - we only continue the march of the flag? In 1789 the flag of the Republic waved in thirteen states, and their savage territory which stretched to Canada, to the Floridas...but Jefferson, who dreamed of Cuba as an American state; Jefferson, the first Imperialist of the Republic—Jefferson acquired that imperial territory, and the march of the flag began! And, now, obeying the same voice that Jefferson heard and obeyed, that Jackson heard and obeyed, that Monroe heard and obeyed, that Seward heard and obeyed, that Grant heard and obeyed, that Harrison heard and obeyed, our President to-day plants the flag over the islands of the seas, outposts of commerce, citadels of national security, and the march of the flag goes on!*”<sup>6</sup> Beveridge foresees that: “*....For the conflicts of the future are to be conflicts of trade—struggles for markets—commercial wars for existence.. We (the United States) can not fly from our world duties; it is ours to execute the purpose of a fate that has driven us to be greater than our small intentions. We can not retreat from any soil where Providence has unfurled our banner; it is ours to save that soil for liberty and civilization.*”<sup>7</sup> As we can see, at the end of the 19th century, American isolationism was transformed into expansionism and, moreover, the foreign policy vision of the United States was imbued with messianism. We have deliberately reviewed Senator Beveridge's famous speech in detail because we believe it typifies the spirit of the era that engendered Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

As Henry Kissinger says about Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson in his essay

“Diplomacy”: “*These men held the reins of government when world affairs were drawing a reluctant nation into their vortex. Both recognized that America had a crucial role to play in world affairs though they justified its emergence from isolation with opposite philosophies. Roosevelt was a sophisticated analyst of the balance of power. He insisted on an international role for America because its national interest demanded it, and because a global balance of power was inconceivable to him without American participation. For Wilson, the justification of America's international role was messianic: America had an obligation, not to the balance of power, but to spread its principles throughout the world. During the Wilson Administration, America emerged as a key player in world affairs, proclaiming principles which, while reflecting the truisms of American thought, nonetheless marked a revolutionary departure for Old World diplomats.*”<sup>8</sup>

As early as 1897, Theodore Roosevelt remarked to the cadets of the Naval Academy in Newport that *Peace is a goddess only when she comes with swordgirt on thigh*. The future president began step by step to gather around him people imbued with the spirit of American expansionism: Senators Lodge and Beveridge, Deputy Secretary of State William Rockhill, Secretary of the Navy in President Chester Arthur's cabinet William Chandler, Senator from the state of Maine William Frey, Secretary of the Navy in President Harrison's cabinet Benjamin Tracy, historian and geopolitician Alfred Mahan. Roosevelt and his associates were less concerned with the abstract, universal theses of early American ideologues. Roosevelt and his associates considered Jeffersonian ideas about equality between people and peaceful coexistence between nations to be remnants of provincial and agrarian America. The future president of the United States believed that the country should be freed from the provincialism of its rulers - until now they were colossus of industry, but pygmies of world politics. In fact, from the very first days of his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt managed to transform the ideological foundations of American foreign policy. The country's foreign course, which was focused on maintaining independence from Europe and American isolationism, changed and acquired a strongly European orientation. At the same time, in the hands of the 26th president, the foreign vision of the United States acquired a global dimension. From his point of view, the United States should be everywhere - in Latin America, where the European empires were to be finally driven out, in Asia, where the American positions were to be

(<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/empire/text5/beveridge.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2zaUck1YIk5Tzsd0lnT7vu5gsyASH9ajYOCJwDSPVao2h-0Bz2zTT23kk>)

<sup>5</sup> Beveridge, March of the Flag.

<sup>6</sup> Beveridge, March of the Flag.

<sup>7</sup> [Beveridge, March of the Flag.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Kissinger, H, Diplomacy, Publishing Intellect, Tbilisi, 2021 P. 25-26.

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strengthened in China and to contain the Japanese Empire, and in Europe, where they were to strengthen their influence, in order to obtain guarantees for world domination. As Henry Kissinger notes: *“As a first step, Roosevelt gave the Monroe Doctrine its most interventionist interpretation by identifying it with imperialist doctrines of the period. In what he called a Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, he proclaimed on December 6, 1904, a general right of intervention by some civilized nation which, in the Western Hemisphere, the United States alone had a right to exercise: ...in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrong-doing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.”*<sup>9</sup> The transformation of the Monroe Doctrine was an event of epochal importance for the foreign policy of the United States. It is difficult not to agree with Kakhi Kenkadze, who notes: *“...he [Roosevelt] made conclusions based on the Monroe Doctrine (Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine), which throughout the 21st century determined the independence of the USA towards the countries of the Caribbean and Latin America. In the second way, historians called them “the big stick”. This happened for several reasons: 1. Monroe supported the Latin American revolutions, and Theodore Roosevelt stood up to them; 2. Monroe demanded that no outside power, including the US, intervene in those revolutions, while Roosevelt directly stated that he would intervene directly to establish a “civilized” order; 3. Monroe agreed to invade with prices set by the host country, while Roosevelt used his economic power to control prices in Latin American markets. 4. Monroe was against interfering in the domestic affairs of Latin American countries. Therefore, he did not need to use military force either. Roosevelt’s “big stick” policy was in the use of the US armed forces.”*<sup>10</sup> As Kissinger acknowledges, the “Roosevelt Annex” was a kind of expansion of the Monroe Doctrine, which gave the United States the right to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations of the Western Hemisphere for preventive purposes. Roosevelt described these postulates as follows: *“If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized*

*nation... however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.”*<sup>11</sup> When you analyze the steps taken by Theodore Roosevelt in the foreign direction, you get the impression that he tried to do in his presidency what the United States failed to do during the entire 19th century. Adhering to Secretary of State John Hay’s “Open Door” Policy for China and holding the Portsmouth Peace Conference to end the Russo-Japanese War (for which Theodore Roosevelt won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1906), resolving the Panama crisis, and acting as an active mediator at the conference held at the Algeiras - all this indicated that Roosevelt turned the United States into one of the determining factors of the balance of world. *“In his perception of the nature of world order, he was much closer to Palmerston or Disraeli than to Thomas Jefferson. . . . To him, international life meant struggle, and Darwin’s theory of the survival of the fittest was a better guide to history than personal morality. . . . To Roosevelt, America was not a cause but a great power—potentially the greatest...”*<sup>12</sup> This is how Henry Kissinger interpreted Roosevelt’s ideas about the role and function of the United States in international relations. And, although Theodore Roosevelt completely changed and put a different complexion on US foreign policy, we will borrow the same Kissinger and note that: *“...it was Wilson who grasped the primary driving factor of American motivation, the central principle of which was that America did not consider itself like any other nation ... Wilson grasped that America’s instinctive isolationism could be overcome only by an appeal to its belief in the exceptional nature of its ideals.”*<sup>13</sup>

On 27 May 1916, the 28th President of the United States of America, Woodrow Wilson, delivered address at the Assemblage of the League to enforce Peace. The President began his speech by explaining the impact of World War I on America. Now America could no longer wait for events in Europe to escalate into world agony. The USA, having reached an unprecedented height in its development, had the opportunity to intervene in the solution of the issue of war and peace. The traditions and laws of the past could no longer be the basis of the world order and in the future it would rely on a new and wholesome diplomacy. The President presented to the gathered audience the principles of changing the Eurocentric system, which in the future should be methodically crushed by the European superpowers. Woodrow Wilson said: *“ We believe these fundamental things: First, that every people has a right to choose the sovereignty under which*

<sup>9</sup> Kissinger. H, Diplomacy, 37-38.

<sup>10</sup> Kenkadze. K, The History of US Foreign Policy, Tbilisi 2008. P. 93.

<sup>11</sup> Kissinger. H, World order, Publishing Intelect. Tbilisi 2020. P.352-353.

<sup>12</sup> Kissinger. H, Diplomacy, 38-39.

<sup>13</sup> Kissinger. H, Diplomacy, 44-45.

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they shall live; Second, that the small states of the world have a right to enjoy the same respect for their sovereignty and for their territorial integrity that great and powerful nations expect and insist upon. And, third, that the world has a right to be free from every disturbance of its peace... The United States is open to membership in the League of Nations that will be formed to achieve these goals. 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....”<sup>14</sup> But before this famous speech there was a period of almost two years of neutrality, which seemed to be compatible with the tried and tested American isolationism. The neutrality of the United States was determined by several fundamental facts: 1. The US armed forces neither quantitatively nor qualitatively corresponded to the level of the brutal war waged in Europe; 2. The leadership of the United States brilliantly understood that the involvement of weak defense forces in the battles fought on the fields of Europe would end with a catastrophic result for the country; 3. The United States quickly realized from the beginning of the war that the form of neutrality that the country chose would bring the greatest profit to the state. The United States of America turned into a kind of reliable backbone for the Entente countries, from which all kinds of aid flowed freely. This was due to the fact that the idea of a single Anglo-Saxon nation was still alive on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. From August 1914 to April 1917 (that is, until the time when the USA maintained the status of a neutral state), the military purchases of the Entente countries reached USD 5 billion, and the volume of credits given to them by the Americans approached USD 2 billion. It was then that the foundation was laid for the US to become the number one creditor in the world, which dramatically increased its influence on the international arena. It was becoming clear that for President Woodrow Wilson's administration, the issue of neutrality had a dual purpose: 1. Domestic purpose - "He kept us out of War." This slogan brought success to Woodrow Wilson in the 1916 close presidential election. Neutrality within the country was very useful for achieving political success. 2. Foreign Purpose - It was clear that President Wilson's administration was waiting for the right time to become involved in the ongoing world war. Pacifist and idealistic appeals bought valuable time for the United States and convinced future allies that the conditions for US involvement in the war would be completely different from the driving mechanisms of the European superpowers. Henry Kissinger believes that: "Because of America's faith

in values higher than the balance of power, the war in Europe now afforded it an extraordinary opportunity to proselytize for a new and better approach to international affairs... What Wilson was proclaiming was not America's withdrawal from the world but the universal applicability of its values and, in time, America's commitment to spreading them. Wilson restated what had become the conventional American wisdom since Jefferson, but put it in the service of a crusading ideology:

- America's special mission transcends day-to-day diplomacy and obliges it to serve as a beacon of liberty for the rest of mankind;
- The foreign policies of democracies are morally superior because the people are inherently peace-loving;
- Foreign policy should reflect the same moral standards as personal ethics;
- The state has no right to claim a separate morality for itself.<sup>15</sup>

Here it will be useful to quote an excerpt from President Wilson's annual address: "Dread of the power of any other nation we are incapable of. We are not jealous of rivalry in the fields of commerce or of any other peaceful achievement. We mean to live our own lives as we will; but we mean also to let live. We are, indeed, a true friend to all the nations of the world, because we threaten none, covet the possessions of none, desire the overthrow of none."<sup>16</sup>

### Conclusion

When studying the years of administration of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, the common feature that characterized both presidents jumps to the eye: they presented the United States as a country freed from the shackles of isolationism. They saw the states not as a state locked in its own shell, but as a country that everyone in the world listens to and is accountable to. What set these leaders apart was that they had different visions of America's path to greatness. Wilson relied on inner peace and intellectual strength on this difficult path and always tried to increase the ranks of supporters when making his foreign policy decisions, while Theodore Roosevelt (as a rule) made unilateral decisions and had to adapt political forces to his ideas. It was this that gave Theodore Roosevelt a reason to berate Woodrow Wilson for his less-than-prompt decisions. Roosevelt demanded that the American military units be subordinated to the joint command of the French and the British, while Wilson rebuffed the demands to amalgamate American troops in Allied units and ordered to maintain "a separate and distinct component of the combined

<sup>14</sup> Utkin. A, The Diplomacy of Woodrow Wilson, International relations publishing house, Moscow, 1989, P. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Kissinger. H, Diplomacy, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Link. A, The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Volume 31, 1979, Princeton University Press.

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forces". Roosevelt wanted close ties with the Entente, while Wilson preferred some kind of association with the Entente without binding close ties. Roosevelt demanded an immediate declaration of war on Germany's allies, while Wilson thought of using pressure on Germany's allies for his own purposes. In wrapping up, it would be remiss to use Henry Kissinger's iconic comparison here: "Roosevelt could not have imagined such comprehensive global interventionism even in his bold dreams. But he was a militant politician, and

Wilson was a prophetic priest. Politicians and warriors think about the world they live in, and prophets think about the world they want to build." We can't but agree with this comparison of Henry Kissinger, but here, it should be noted that the image of the 26th US President Theodore Roosevelt, along with Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, is carved on Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, among the four great US presidents at that time.

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