



Wilsonianism in U.S Foreign Policy: A Review

An Analytical Study of the U.S Philosophical Wilsonian Root in Foreign Policy

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Abstract— The book, “Do It as Wilson says”¹, examines the enduring impact of Woodrow Wilson’s idea on American foreign relations from the perspective of Wilsonian precepts as an American principle in international politics. In other words, the text authored by Ellias Aghili Dehnavi and Mobin Karbasi integrates historical studies and modern political theory. This reveals that Wilsonianism has been the only framework for American diplomacy throughout the twentieth century until now. This review will cover the book’s structure of the content, central arguments, methodological contributions and the way it contributes to the attempts of repositioning the liberal internationalism and American foreign policy scholarship.



Keywords— Foreign Policy Analysis, U.S foreign policy, multilateralism, Democracy.

Literature Studies

Description: This book examines the interplay of key U.S. foreign policy doctrines, with a central focus on Wilsonianism. The following review of the book approaches U.S. foreign policy through the lens of liberal internationalism, emphasizing its evolution and practical application.

Structural Overview and Methodological Approach

Published by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, the book offers a detailed exploration of Wilsonian foreign policy, dividing its contents into parts that scrutinize its philosophical underpinnings, ideological framework, and real-world manifestations. It starts with a discussion of Wilsonianism, distinguishing it from the other traditions of U.S. foreign policy — Hamiltonianism, Jacksonianism², and Jeffersonianism. This transparent structural organization provides readers clarity on the ideological lenses that converge, and at times clash, in determining US foreign policy. In terms of methods, the work of Dehnavi

and Karbasi is generally descriptive-analytical which is primarily based on historical sources³, presidential statements, reviewing the literature on policies. Relied on primary and secondary sources, including political memoirs, archival data, and scholarly commentary⁴ which adds strength and credibility to their arguments. The authors navigate many different historical and contemporary sources that allow the reader to understand how aspects of Wilsonianism evolved and what ideas were responsible for its evolution.⁵

A) Central Themes and Theoretical Analysis

The book’s thematic depth offers valuable insights into Wilsonianism’s principles and their practical consequences. Each major theme explores both the motivations and ramifications of Wilsonian policies, establishing the authors' position that Wilsonianism is not only an idealistic framework but also a deeply influential force in U.S. geopolitical strategy; besides, the book also sheds light on the recent discrepancies arising from the hard politics of the

¹ Do it as Wilson says: Ellias Aghili Dehnavi, Mobin Karbasi; August 11, 2020

² Clarke, M., & Ricketts, A. (2017). Donald Trump and American foreign policy: The return of the Jacksonian tradition (page 368-370)

³ The Covenant of the League of Nations | The United Nations Office at Geneva. (n.d.). The United Nations Office at Geneva.

⁴ Jefferson and Jackson in the Front Seats: US Foreign Policy under Trump: Jan Niklas Rolf; March 2017

⁵ Thompson, J. A. (2010). Wilsonianism: the dynamics of a conflicted concept.

world and different geopolitics; the city on the hill or the lantern in the chaotic waters can't no longer be solely looked upon from a Wilsonian perspective; this philosophy has experienced a metamorphosis and transfigured into something of a more practical phenomenon.⁶

1. *Wilsonian Mission: Global Democratization and Moral Leadership*

According to the authors, Wilson domination emerges as the second New World ideology owing to its globalization of American national interests. Wilsonianism holds that the United States possesses a duty to pursue democracy everywhere and protect human rights. This book explores further the idea postulated by Wilson that the US can and should be the world's foremost champion of freedom. In this regard, Wilson and his contemporaries in the Democratic Party eloquently articulated their visions through such speeches as the Fourteen Points as to why America had a moral obligation to be a liberating force in the world. Thus, the authors argue that Wilson's beliefs were deeply embedded in other administrations, enabling them to restore and initiate politically motivated actions aimed at establishing democratic regimes in numerous countries beginning from Europe after the First World War through Iraq and Afghanistan in the twenty first century.⁷

2. *Ethics and Legal Foundations in U.S. Foreign Policy*

A prominent focus in the book is an emphasis on morality and international law, in the sense that the authors say it is a form of Lackan idealism. Wilson's concept of international relations is perhaps best illustrated in his intentions to see the League of Nations formed. This reinforces his linear argument where international order based on rules is an ingredient of stable peace. The authors' critique in this case is the shortcomings which this idealistic approach manifests, especially its over-emphasis on fairness and justice without considering the intricacy of global and area interests, and its resultant political effects.

B) Index Analysis

1. *Rejection of Realpolitik and Embrace of Collective Security*

In contrast to the 'Realist' doctrines, Wilson repudiated the classical "balance of power" and rather endeavored in constructing a world order based on collectivism and international peace.⁸The authors elaborate on this theme by

analyzing Wilson's establishment of the League of Nations and his aspiration for a permanent international structure that would prevent conflicts because of reliance on collective economics rather than realpolitik. This principle, according to the authors, was reemphasized in subsequent multilateral initiatives including the UN and NATO where Wilson believed that peace can be attained through joining forces and not through brawls.

2. *Wilsonianism and Interventionism across Administrations*

The passage studies to what extent Wilson's ideals have been understood and modified by presidents of the United States, including Clinton, Bush and Obama. According to the authors, Wilsonianism's moral dimension allowed leaders to create justification for interference in the lives of others. For example, they view Clinton's promotion of international democratization and respect for human rights, Bush's wars in the name of democracy or many-sided internationalism of Obama as Wilson's principles in other forms. This commentary accentuates how Wilsonianism has enabled and limited presidents of the United States at the same time by providing moral burdens while still containing pragmatic demands.

3. *Wilsonianism's Tension with "Isolationism" and "Realism"*

The authors delve into the persistent issue of U.S. foreign policy – the dichotomy of Wilsonianism and its idealist aspiration and the realist stance of isolationism or unilateralism.⁹Although Wilsonianism favors involvement in international relations, the book contends that its interpretation often proved to be at odds with the American streak of isolationism, especially in times of economic or military expansionism. The authors look at instances and periods during which such tension arose – for example, post-Vietnam war and post-Iraq withdrawal, as these moments of restraint show the boundaries of Wilsonianism in American foreign policy.

C) Scholarly Contributions and Impact on U.S. Foreign Policy Discourse

Dehnavi and Karbasi add value to the understanding of academic discourses on liberal internationalism by conceptualizing Wilsonianism as a sophisticated tradition where ethical idealism is complemented with practical

⁶ Dehnavi, E. A. (2024b). The Trump Doctrine: Redefining U.S. Foreign Policy through Immigration, Security, and Diplomacy. *Journal of Humanities and Education Development*, 6(5), 26–28.

⁷ Principles and positions of US foreign policy against terrorism: Ellias Aghili Dehnavi, Seyed Mohammad Tabatabaei; November 2021

⁸ Dehnavi, E. A., & Fiedler, R. (2024a). Adventures of Two Captains' Trilogy and U.S Exceptionalism in their Foreign Policy: Manifestation of Think Tanks in a literary work. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 9(3), 277–281.

⁹ Foreign Policy of the 50 Stars: Different Angles of the U.S Foreign Policy: Ellias Aghili Dehnavi; February 16, 2021

intervention¹⁰. As detailed in the article, engagement in foreign policy based on moral considerations has its advantages as well as its risks, and this enables Wilsonianism to be understood as a central notion within international political liberalism. This perspective also enables them to place Wilsonianism in historical context and understand its present-day relevance as it influences the current debates on issues like humanitarian intervention and the promotion of democracy.

D) Broader Implications for Contemporary Geopolitics

The Wilsonian ideology might not be a leading philosophy/school of thought when it comes to analyze the greater image of the geopolitical events and rivalries in different parts of the world; especially those in which the U.S plays a crucial role; this can be the U.S regions of influence (i.e., Middle East, East Pacific, East Asia) or the rivalry equations that are prominent for the American Foreign Policy (U.S-China rivalry) for the aforementioned cases, the democratic core aspects of Wilsonianism won't be effective and highlighted; rather, the feasible facets of Military and economic mercantilism are more concrete factors to be studied.¹¹

1. Critical Reflections on Wilsonianism's Paradoxes

Consequently, Wilsonism is indeed a distinctive school, but accepting its specific character also means being ready to accept its contradictions, especially those that appear to affect the values that its advocates espouse. They bring up the issue of attempting to democratize a country by means of military intervention, which has the potential of eroding the core objectives it seeks to attain.¹² Also, Singh and Wood remark that Wilsonianism has been abused in capitalist America for the purpose of securing permission to go against its very basics such as sectional coups against democratic regimes that do not support capitalist US; Such skepticism makes the case for Wilsonianism stronger as the recognition of its importance does not assume that the case for its effectiveness, as a viable model of peace, work properly in all situations.¹³

2. Limitations of Wilsonianism in Practice

The book's focus on the limits of Wilsonianism in the context of geopolitics is insightful. It is observed that sometimes Wilson's belief in the World Organizations has

not been effective with state aggression¹⁴; for instance, the League of Nations inability to stop the oncoming of the World War II. Also, the authors explain that the Wilsonian approach towards collective security is not always the case with real politics, particularly in areas where American interventions brought about long drawn and counterproductive wars. It further adds strength to their argument that Wilsonianism is an ideal at best which in reality has to deal with power politics intricacies.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Do It As Wilson Says is an important work which thoroughly explains the Wilsonianism as a concept and how it has influenced the foreign policy of the United States. In analyzing Wilson's ideals and their manifestation in different administrations, the authors provide a useful contribution to both history and policy. This book expands the boundaries of understanding the core values underpinning American foreign policy and urges people to perceive ethical issues surrounding diplomacy in the context of high globalization and low ideology.

In brief, the authors manage to project Wilsonianism as a well-defined set of ethics and just the right impulse for American expansion. This book is important for practitioners, researchers, and students in the field of international relations who want to appreciate the moral considerations, historical legacies and practical factors that motivate U.S. presence in global affairs.

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¹⁰ From Containment to Americanism: Eliias Aghili Dehnavi, Mohammad Alizadeh Jamal; May 2020

¹¹ Dehnavi, E. A. (2020). The reasons for the decline of American hegemony and its impact on China's regional policies in the Middle East.

¹² Mann, M. (2004). The first failed empire of the 21st century. *Review of International Studies*, 30(4), 631–653.

¹³ Fiedler, R., & Dehnavi, E. A. (2024). Navigating Engagement with Iran: Exploring US Strategies and Options: A Futuristic

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¹⁴ Dehnavi, E. A. (2024). An Analytical Examination of Iran-USA Relations Post-Islamic Revolution: Extended Scientific Review. *Journal of Humanities and Education Development*, 6(5), 23–25.

¹⁵ Dehnavi, E.A. (2022) Futuristic research of basic problems in the way of negotiations between Iran and the United States

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