Woodrow Wilson,
World War I,
and America's
Strategy for
Peace and
Security

Ross A. Kennedy

The
Will to
Believe

NEW STUDIES IN U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mary Ann Heiss, editor

The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and World Health Organization Changed the World, 1945–1965

AMY L. S. STAPLES

Colombia and the United States: The Making of an Inter-American Alliance, 1939–1960

BRADLEY LYNN COLEMAN

NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Intrabloc Conflicts

EDITED BY MARY ANN HEISS AND S. VICTOR PAPACOSMA

Caution and Cooperation: The American Civil War in British-American Relations

PHILIP E. MYERS

The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security

ROSS A. KENNEDY

The Will to Believe

*Woodrow Wilson, World War I,
and America's Strategy for
Peace and Security*

ROSS A. KENNEDY

The Kent State University Press
Kent, Ohio

© 2009 by The Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio 44242

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 2008035887

ISBN 978-0-87338-971-6

Manufactured in the United States of America

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Kennedy, Ross A.

The will to believe : Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and
America's strategy for peace and security / Ross A. Kennedy.

p. cm. — (New studies in U.S. foreign relations)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-87338-971-6 (hbk. : alk. paper) ∞

1. World War, 1914–1918—Diplomatic history. 2. National security—United States. 3.
United States—Foreign relations—1913–1921. 4. Wilson, Woodrow, 1856–1924. I. Title.

D619.K45 2009

940.3'2273—dc22

2008035887

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication data are available.

13 12 11 10 09 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	xi
1 Militarism and Power Politics, 1914–17	1
2 National Security, 1914–17	25
3 The Vision of Collective Security, 1914–17	43
4 Pursuing a Wilsonian Peace, 1914–15	65
5 Pursuing a Wilsonian Peace, 1915–17	80
6 Debating Wilsonianism	104
7 Wilson at War	128
8 National Security Debates, 1917–18	163
9 Wilson and the Versailles Treaty	182
10 National Security Debates, 1918–20	203
Conclusion	221
Notes	228
Select Bibliography	272
Index	286

Introduction

December 1918. Woodrow Wilson's train slowly rolled through Hoboken, New Jersey, its tracks lined with cheering crowds who had interrupted their morning work to wish their president farewell. Wilson was on his way to the USS *George Washington*, an army transport ship, which would take him to France, where he would begin a round of triumphant parades and speeches before attending to his main task, the writing of the peace treaty that would end the Great War and shape world politics for years to come.

Upon arriving at the ship's berth, Wilson ate breakfast in his train, then walked up the gangplank and went to an office that had been prepared for him. He was not in a good mood. He had a cold and was "surprised" by what he saw in the morning papers. Theodore Roosevelt, his old rival, had denounced Wilson's peace program, the Fourteen Points, as "thoroughly mischievous" and "so vague and ambiguous that it is nonsense to do anything with them until they have been defined and made definite." Roosevelt also stressed that Britain's navy and the Allied armies had done the most to defeat Germany. America's role in the peacemaking was therefore "to stand by our allies," not seek to dominate them.

Joined by three reporters in his office, Wilson rejected Roosevelt's statement. "He virtually says that England won the war and should have everything she wants," complained the president. "I don't believe our boys who fought over there will be inclined to feel just that way about it. We won the war at Chateau Thierry," insisted Wilson. He then objected to Roosevelt's naval views, asserting that "militarism is equally dangerous when applied to sea forces as to land forces." The idea that the United States and Britain should "act as the sea patrol of the world is only a new kind of militaristic propaganda," argued Wilson. "No power, no two powers, should be supreme. The whole world must be in on all measures designed to end wars for all time."

Wilson's emphasis on the equality of nations and the collective enforcement of peace abruptly diminished, however, when he was asked how the United States should deal with a refusal by Britain to reduce naval arms. In that case, Wilson declared, "the United States should show her how to build a navy." The president related how America had the ability to match Britain "or any other power" in naval

construction. “We now have greater navy yards, thousands more shipbuilders than we ever had before,” Wilson boasted, “and an abundance of raw materials such as would make it possible for us to have the greatest navy in the world.” On that note, the interview concluded.

A short time later, Wilson’s ship eased out of its berth and left New York Harbor, escorted by tugboats, launches, airplanes, and, at one point, a huge navy dirigible. It was a clear, cold day, and a bright sun shone upon President Wilson and his party. “In fact,” recorded Dr. Cary Grayson, Wilson’s personal physician, “no person could have wished for a more auspicious commencement of an eventful trip.”¹

The contradictory ideas expressed on that cold December morning—the endorsement of both a collective effort “to end wars for all time” and a unilateral arms buildup to coerce other states into naval disarmament—provide a glimpse into the complexity of American national security debates during World War I. Much more so than Americans after World War II, Wilson and his contemporaries engaged in a wide-ranging analysis of how to achieve American national security in the modern world. No consensus existed on fundamental issues such as the nature of the international system, the impact of security policies upon domestic freedom, the value of alliances and multinational organizations, and the relationship between democratic political systems and peace. All of these issues remain active today, as both Democrats and Republicans try to define the meaning of “Wilsonianism” for a post–September 11 world and to lay claim to its legacy.²

This book focuses on how three competing coalitions of American leaders dealt with these and other national security issues from 1914 to 1920, when the existing international system violently collapsed and a new world order had yet to be built. “Pacifists” were made up of four powerful political groups: agrarian Progressives led by three-time Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan; leftist Progressives and moderate Socialists such as Jane Addams, Lillian Wald, Paul Kellogg, and Crystal and Max Eastman; Republican Progressive insurgents including, most prominently, Sen. Robert La Follette; and mugwumpish liberals such as the manager of the *Nation* and the *New York Evening Post*, Oswald Garrison Villard. Through their speeches and media outlets, and through the Left’s two chief peace organizations, the American Union against Militarism (AUAM) and the Woman’s Peace Party (WPP), the pacifists reached a massive—and receptive—audience, especially among farmers and the urban working class. Woodrow Wilson and a diverse set of opinion makers outside the administration led a second group, “liberal internationalists.” These included the editors of the *New Republic*; Samuel Gompers, the head of America’s largest labor union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL); and members of the League to Enforce Peace (LEP), an organization of largely conservative businessmen, academics, and lawyers led by former president William Howard Taft. Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Elihu Root

best represented the views of “Atlanticists.” Their chief lobbying organization was the business-dominated National Security League (NSL), formed in December 1914 by S. Stanwood Menken, a lawyer from New York.³

Most of the leaders of these groups—and in particular of the pacifists and liberal internationalists—believed that the existing international system of “power politics” was inherently unstable and would never produce peace for any lengthy period of time. Perceiving the alliances, arms races, and coercive diplomacy of this system as essentially European phenomena, they also believed that active, long-term participation in great power politics by the United States would militarize American society and destroy America’s democracy and domestic liberties. They pointed to the outbreak of the world war as evidence for these assertions, and, indeed, events during America’s participation in the war reinforced these ideas still more. These political and military fears underlay both isolationism and varying efforts to build collective security. Chiefly designed by Woodrow Wilson, the program to create a new system of collective security dominated policy debates. It did so because it promised to preserve America’s safety in the modern world without the need for large-scale armaments that could lead to militarism at home. The president and his supporters had great difficulty distinguishing a collective security order from the balance-of-power system it was supposed to replace, however. Ultimately, because Wilson’s effort to end power politics depended on containing the power of Germany, such a distinction could not be made in practice—an outcome suggesting that his whole project of reforming world politics was deeply flawed.

This study departs from the existing scholarship on Wilsonianism in several ways. Rather than examine only Wilson or only his critics, as most other historians do, I analyze the entire national security debate from 1914 to 1920, including all major perspectives from across the political spectrum. This comprehensive approach best illuminates the basic assumptions about national security affairs that pervaded American political culture in the early twentieth century. Unlike other scholars, I see the fear of arms races and militarism as a key component of that culture and as heavily influencing which national security policies rose and which fell in popularity. Although ideas about the moral and political superiority of the United States gave American leaders confidence that their policies would work, such notions of American exceptionalism, in my view, did not provide the key stimulus behind the drive by liberal internationalists to transform the international system. Finally, even some of the best literature on Wilson and his contemporaries understates the degree to which strategic desires to contain Germany’s power animated the president and both complemented and contradicted his efforts to reform international politics. By overemphasizing the role of missionary idealism and trade concerns in Wilsonian diplomacy, scholars have ended up paying too little attention to the paradox at the heart of Wilson’s national security strategy—that of practicing power

politics to end power politics. This book explores that dilemma in depth, revealing an American national security policy during World War I at once strategically prudent and tragically self-defeating.⁴

The chapters that follow are organized both thematically and chronologically. The first three analyze, respectively, how American leaders from 1914 to 1917 viewed the concept of militarism and the character of the existing international system, how they assessed the implications of the war for American national security, and how they envisioned the goal of international reform. The remaining chapters trace President Wilson's pursuit of a new world order through neutrality, war, and peacemaking, as well as examine how policy advocates outside the administration reacted to his diplomacy. The book then concludes with a brief look at how Wilson's approach to American national security cast a long shadow over American policymakers for the rest of the twentieth century and beyond.

Militarism and Power Politics, 1914–17

The outbreak of war in late July 1914 immediately provoked an intense debate in the United States about militarism, the nature of power politics, and the status of American national security. Pacifists, liberal internationalists, and Atlanticists all feared that under certain conditions militarism at home could undermine America's free way of life, but they disagreed about the specifics of those conditions and the likelihood that they would occur. The three groups also all believed that the system of power politics was unstable, but they differed in their analysis of the degree to which this was a problem as well as why it existed in the first place. Finally, as discussed in Chapter 2, they sharply diverged in their assessment of how the war's outcome might affect America's security. As the debate over these questions unfolded between August 1914 and January 1917, it became clear that, despite their differences, pacifists and liberal internationalists had more in common with each other than with the Atlanticists. United in their intense fear of militarism and power politics, pacifists and liberal internationalists managed to marginalize the Atlanticists—the only group in American politics with a relatively positive view of the balance-of-power system.

More than anyone else, pacifists raised dire warnings that any significant increases in America's military establishment above the levels that existed in 1914 might trigger an unraveling of liberty and freedom at home. Created after the Spanish-American War, the existing force structure—a standing army of professional volunteers numbering about 100,000 men, a navy ranked third in the world in warship tonnage, and a reserve force of about 112,000 active National Guardsmen—was safe from the standpoint of preserving America's domestic way of life. Any large-scale defense expansion, pacifists argued, any “big army and navy programs with their accompanying propaganda,” would be nothing less than “a menace to democracy.”¹

Pacifists outlined in some detail the logic that lay behind this position. Drawing on fears about professional standing armies dating back to the Revolution, they

asserted that military service, especially if made compulsory through a program of universal military training (UMT), would undermine the citizenry's democratic spirit. "Free minds, and souls undrilled to obedience," lectured Crystal Eastman of the American Union against Militarism (AUAM), "are vital to the life of democracy." The whole point of "military drill," however, was "to develop unquestioning obedience, so that the soldier will move forward in the face of danger and even certain death." At the same time, trainees confronted an organization that was "aristocratic" in nature, with a "fixed line between officers and men." "Cringing before men who abuse their power," taught to "stop thinking" and respond blindly to the will of others, it was no wonder to the editors of the *Nation* that a man exposed to military training became "an automaton."²

Pacifists also stressed that military officers harbored antidemocratic attitudes that led them into aggressively antidemocratic behavior. Officers were used to giving orders and, "clothed with power to gratify caprice," dominating others with arbitrary commands. Consequently, they showed little patience for civilian authority. Such officers, complained Oswald Garrison Villard of the *Nation*, arrogantly asserted that they alone had the wisdom to decide military and foreign policy, actively lobbied Congress to increase the armed forces, and pressed for new national defense councils to determine public policy in "secret session."³

The policies that military officers advocated added to their power. Any "expert" in any field, observed Villard, tended to get so absorbed in his specialty that he was likely to "subordinate everything to the development of that specialty." Military experts acted no differently. "Their entire training leads them . . . to fear the oncoming of the enemy and they habitually think of every possible combination that may be brought against them." They were therefore obsessed with organizing the country for war—an outlook that would "inevitably make for the subordination of everything civilian to the military." Jane Addams believed that she saw the outcome of military thinking already taking shape in war-torn Europe, observing, in mid-1915, that a "military party" had become ascendant in each of the belligerent states. Censorship of the press had become rampant, and, she worried, "the military power is breaking down all of the safeguards of civil life and of civil government." Fearing that excessive preparedness could spark a similar process in the United States, Addams became an early and central leader of the AUAM.⁴

If the "military-naval oligarchy" embodied dangerously antidemocratic ideals and policy aspirations, so too did its chief allies, the "capitalists, imperialists, and war traders" who profited from defense spending and aggression overseas. Nearly all of the major pacifist spokesmen charged that propreparedness movements were "stimulated by interests whose purpose was not entirely the undiluted welfare of the majority." To the pacifists, preparedness programs furthered the interests of those who "look down with undisguised contempt upon the masses" and who undermined the forces of democratic progressivism.⁵

Reactionaries benefited from preparedness programs in several ways. Most obviously, corporate munitions makers reaped huge profits from preparedness, as did bankers who helped to finance arms purchases made by the American government and by belligerents overseas. Their efforts to push defense increases through Congress by whipping the country into "a panic" distracted attention from economic and political injustices at home, and by identifying themselves with patriotism and security, reactionary preparedness advocates made passage of legislation aimed at curbing their power difficult.⁶

Perhaps most disturbingly, expansion of the military served the interests of America's "upper and leisure classes" by providing them with the means to pursue "class . . . aggression" at home and abroad. The "real basis for . . . preparationist propaganda," alleged a Progressive single-tax journal, the *Public*, was "to provide an army to over-awe labor unions" and to "repress" them. James Maurer, a Pennsylvania labor leader active in the AUAM, pointed out that stepped-up military forces could be used "to dragoon the working people of the country" into corporate America's "battles for trade" overseas. Imperialist adventures could only further stimulate demands for military forces—and thus further strengthen the hand of the reactionary plutocracy that advocated preparedness and imperialism in the first place.⁷

Pacifists were not alone in associating military preparedness with a threat to American democracy and liberty. Liberal internationalists agreed with much of their diagnosis. Like the pacifists, President Wilson associated militarism with the size and composition of America's armed forces. In his annual message to Congress in December 1914, the president argued that the ability instantly "to put a nation in the field, a nation of men trained to arms" meant an abandonment of "America's present political principles and institutions." A volunteer army supported by the National Guard was an appropriate force for the United States, and Americans should certainly consider ways to encourage men to join it. But anything "more than this," Wilson warned, "carries with it a reversal of the whole history and character of our polity."⁸

About one year after this speech, Wilson shifted course and proposed significant increases in America's defense forces. He called for increasing the army by about 40 percent, to 140,000 men, building a navy that by the early 1920s would rival Great Britain's, and creating a new 400,000-man force of army-trained federal reserves, the so-called Continental army. The motives behind this policy will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Here, though, it is important to note that Wilson's decision to expand America's military establishment in no way indicated that his fear of militarism had suddenly disappeared. Instead, it revealed his belief that America could tolerate a larger military establishment than the pacifists thought wise; his basic concerns about militarism, however, still remained fixed.⁹

Even as he advocated greater preparedness for the United States, Wilson did not support a program of UMT, the central plank of most propreparedness platforms.

In part, the president steered clear of UMT because he knew it had little support in Congress. But he also genuinely believed that compulsory training risked generating militarism at home. His program, he emphasized in late 1915, stepped up the voluntary enlistment of "citizen soldiers," most of whom would only serve three years before retiring to their civilian pursuits. "What we all wish to accomplish is that the forces of the nation should indeed be part of the nation and not a separate professional force," he explained. America "does not want to be ruled by the spirit of any class," and certainly not by "the spirit of a military class"; "militarism," Wilson stressed, "is the end of progress. There cannot be any progress when the professionalism of the soldier dominates in a national polity."¹⁰

In addition to refusing to endorse UMT, Wilson resisted calls by propreparedness forces to increase the regular army up to 250,000 men. The House of Representatives would not support such an increase, but, in any event, Wilson considered it "much too large." "We are not asking for armies," Wilson informed a crowd in St. Louis, "we are asking for a trained citizenry which will act in the spirit of citizenship and not in the spirit of military establishments." That was why he limited his increase of the regular army to 40,000 men: it was the figure Wilson considered "adequate to the uses of peace" and faithful to the fact that he was "just as much opposed to militarism as any man living."¹¹

Wilson echoed pacifist anxieties about the reactionary potential of preparedness as well. To be sure, he did not explicitly address the idea that expanding the military establishment would sabotage Progressive reform, nor did he endorse the charge that munitions manufacturers manipulated defense programs for their own selfish power and profit. At one point, in fact, Wilson said that such a charge was "preposterous." But the president did not totally dismiss the pacifists' worries about the anti-Progressive character of preparedness either. Wilson avoided UMT, for example, in part because he believed voluntary training would spur the sense of civic virtue that most reformers associated with Progressivism; it would make Americans "a little less careless of the general interest of the nation, a little less thoughtful of their own peculiar and selfish interests." In addition, although he downplayed the notion that munitions manufacturers influenced preparedness planning, Wilson also assured Americans that he was not a "dupe" of the arms business. "I know the points of danger," he confided to an audience in Des Moines, and he therefore urged Congress to expand government ownership of armaments plants. In sum, while Wilson associated militarism more with the military itself than with reactionary corporate interests, he clearly harbored some fears on this score too.¹²

Wilson further signaled his desire to link preparedness with Progressivism by suggesting that voluntary military training could be accompanied by "a great system of industrial and vocational education." Under such a program, explained Wilson, "men will think first of their families and their daily work, of their service

in the economic fields of the country, of their efficiency as artisans, and only last of all of their serviceability to the nation as soldiers and men at arms." In this way, preparedness could work in the interests of the many instead of the few.¹³

Finally, the president went out of his way to defend his naval program in the language of antimilitarism. Again, this made good political sense, but Wilson had said the same thing before he had formulated and started campaigning for his preparedness plan. The navy's ships "have no suggestion of bluster about them," he asserted, and "are commanded by men thoughtful of the duty of citizens as well as the duty of officers." Americans had always supported a powerful navy "because they seem to think that, if you can keep your fighting men at sea, they are not in danger of disturbing your peace of mind or the character of the national life." In so defending his naval buildup, Wilson again revealed that while he judged the risks involved with military expansion differently than the pacifists, he nevertheless still shared their belief that, under certain circumstances, militarism could threaten America's domestic freedoms.¹⁴

The editors of the Progressive journal, the *New Republic*, the most articulate proponents of liberal internationalism in the press, essentially agreed with Wilson's perspective on preparedness. They especially stressed the idea that professional military forces possessed a political outlook at odds with democracy. An America that had "a small standing professional army which was really no more than a national police force," wrote chief editor Herbert Croly, had "no reason to fear the corruption of its democratic institutions and ideals by a military caste or spirit." But increasing that army to a size where it could instantly defeat any invader would be a different story. That kind of force, warned Croly, would "have a profound reaction on American domestic life, because as a consequence of its increased size and authority it will be constantly making imperative demands upon the civil authorities which they will be reluctant to grant and which will raise the issue between civil and military control over American policy."¹⁵

Like the pacifists, the *New Republic* also associated preparedness advocates with anti-Progressive elements in American life. Editor Walter Weyl in particular made this point. He argued that the "dominant classes" in Europe had long agitated for preparedness and had manipulated the "constant fear of war" to "allay domestic discontent and to oppose democratic progress." While he thought that American preparedness campaigns cut across more diverse groups, Weyl still believed, at least "to a certain extent," that conservative forces in America hoped to use military expansion to achieve "political quiescence and domination." Just as the pacifists did, Weyl perceived "a reactionary shape" in the preparedness movement.¹⁶

"If preparation for war meant only what it means to many of the defense societies and military agitators," agreed Croly and Walter Lippmann, then America could not pursue preparedness "without being false to national ideals as well as its traditions." Their concern about the character of the preparedness movement

did not lead the *New Republic's* editors to reject all types of military expansion, however. In line with President Wilson, they did not believe that military training per se would undermine a person's democratic character and "turn citizens into mere military automatons." On the contrary, the editors asserted, voluntary training could be a "stirring and illuminating episode" for an enlistee, teaching him "moral discipline," not in a "servile" way but "as part of a system, to which as a civilian he had given his consent."¹⁷

Compulsory training fell into a different category. If UMT was necessary to combat America's "prevailing tendencies towards faction and disintegration," and the editors thought it might well be, then it had to be combined with sweeping advances in Progressive reform. Specifically, the *New Republic* could only go along with UMT if it was accompanied "by the nationalizing of essential public services, like the railroads," by government ownership of vital natural resources, and by a "strengthening of the trades unions and their frank recognition as an independent member of the official industrial organization." Without an attempt "to make the American commonwealth better worth defending," warned the editors, an upgraded military featuring UMT "might be as demoralizing as an armament intended plainly for undemocratic aggression."¹⁸

The League to Enforce Peace (LEP), the most conservative component of the liberal internationalist coalition, represented a variety of views concerning militarism. Some members, such as the *Independent's* editor, Hamilton Holt, shared Wilson's conviction that a "large standing army" was "the greatest foe of liberty" and supported the president's defense program as the best way to achieve preparedness "in consonance with American spirit and American traditions." Other members, such as conservatives Edward Filene and William Wadhams, ignored the charges often made by Progressives that professional military forces possessed an antidemocratic outlook. But they did worry that excessive preparedness might lead to huge tax increases and "serious class strife" harmful to America's political stability. Still others, such as William Howard Taft, Theodore Marburg, and A. Lawrence Lowell, considered Wilson's defense program weak; indeed, Taft supported UMT.¹⁹

In adopting this position, Taft and other conservatives in the LEP tilted toward the Atlanticist perspective on the relationship between the military and American democracy. At first glance, the Atlanticist approach to military matters starkly contrasted with that of the pacifists and Progressive liberal internationalists. Roosevelt and his supporters demanded that preparedness go well beyond Wilson's plan. At a minimum, they wanted a standing army of 250,000 men supported by UMT and a faster naval buildup than the one proposed by the president. Atlanticists also tended to dismiss the proposition that munitions makers stimulated preparedness for profit; whenever speakers mentioned this charge at the 1916 convention of the National Security League (NSL), the audience always burst into laughter. Finally, Atlanticists had no hesitation in urging that Congress rely upon the advice of mili-

tary officers in making defense policy; they evidently were not concerned that this would undercut the principle of civilian control of the military.²⁰

Nevertheless, Atlanticists betrayed that they too believed that America was vulnerable to militarism. Repeatedly, they expressed deep reservations about relying solely upon professional forces for defense. "I do not believe in a large standing army," announced Roosevelt in late 1914. "Most emphatically, I do not believe in militarism." Roosevelt did not elaborate much on the reasoning behind this position, but he did suggest, as did pacifists and liberal internationalists, that it was dangerous to the Republic to withdraw "our population from civil pursuits, such as occurs among the great military states of the European Continent."²¹

Their fear of professional standing forces helps explain the Atlanticist endorsement of UMT. A system of compulsory training for all able-bodied young men, they argued, was the proper method of preparedness for a democracy. "If you put the son of the workingman and the son of the millionaire side by side in the ranks," explained Luke Wright, a former secretary of war and a member of the NSL, "it does not build up a military aristocracy, but it builds up a democratic body of men who love their country and its institutions." The UMT method of "democratic preparedness" would train a man "to realize that he is a partner in this giant democracy," added Roosevelt, "and has duties to the other partners." Echoing the claims of liberal internationalists about the moral and educational benefits of voluntary military training, Roosevelt also insisted that enlistees, and in particular immigrants, would "acquire habits of order, of cleanliness, of self-control" and learn how to provide for the growing families Roosevelt thought provided a cornerstone of national power. Universal military training thus amounted to a way of improving democracy while providing for preparedness without a large standing army and without isolating the armed forces from civilian life. In Roosevelt's words, it would allow for a military defense as effective as Germany's "without loss of our own democratic spirit."²²

UMT, moreover, was a cheaper way to defend America than reliance upon professional forces. This benefit attracted Atlanticists to UMT because they worried about Americans' "wasting our substance in continual readiness for war." Even Henry Cabot Lodge, who did not discuss the threat of militarism as much as the other Atlanticists, alluded to this problem, observing in 1915 that "the grave objections to overwhelming and exhausting armaments are economic." From this perspective, large-scale professional forces threatened America's economic stability, a threat that UMT could counter by providing a way "to secure an economical and inexpensive army."²³

The different shades of antimilitarism among American leaders were matched by varied analyses of great power politics. Pacifists emphasized that the international system that produced the war was inherently unstable. In the existing system,

they explained, nations strove above all else to maintain a “balance of power” between each other. In theory, international law, “the conscience of mankind,” as the *Nation* called it, restrained nations from pursuing power politics with unlimited force. But in practice nations paid little attention to international law as they struggled to maintain a balance of power. The Europeans and Japanese focused instead on negotiating “secret and open alliances,” concentrating foreign and defense policymaking in the hands of executive authority, and building massive military establishments. By maintaining a balance of power, the world’s leading states hoped to deter aggression; they believed, as Bryan put it, that “fear is the only basis upon which peace can last.”²⁴

This hope was a delusion, argued the pacifists, as the outbreak of the Great War obviously demonstrated. First, power politics exacerbated emotions of anger, suspicion, and hate that made the peaceful settlement of disputes difficult. Bryan elaborated on this problem at length. Power politics, he perceived, “presupposes the existence of an enemy who must be hated until he can be overcome.” Hatred, however, “begets hatred” and pervaded the whole system. Twisted by their rage and fear, nations in the balance-of-power system succumbed to “the spirit that expresses itself in threats and revels in the ultimatum.” Genuine negotiations became virtually impossible, as was clearly shown, Bryan thought, in the crisis that led to the war. “Firmness, supported by force,” had ended in disaster for all concerned.²⁵

Pacifists also saw a logical flaw in the proposition that a balance of power could preserve peace. Suffused with “an atmosphere of fear” and built on the “doctrine that force must rule our affairs,” power politics encouraged arms competitions and preemptive surprise attacks. In the logic of the existing system, argued Samuel Danziger of the *Public*, “adequate defense” meant creating “an armament more powerful than any possible combination of foes could bring against us.” But that would only be a start, “for our potential foes might suspect that we were planning to attack them, just as we suspect them of planning to attack us. They would attempt to outstrip us in building armaments.” To stop such a “race” in arms, one side either would have to quit, which made little sense given the assumption that only a balance of power could maintain peace, or “would have to find some pretext to attack the other when conditions for victory would seem most favorable.” The behavior of the Europeans showed all too clearly which alternative was likely to be chosen; “preparations for war,” concluded Danziger, “only lead to war.”²⁶

If they easily agreed on the nature of power politics, pacifists somewhat varied in their analyses of its sources. The dominant position attributed the balance-of-power system to the ability of undemocratic, reactionary, militaristic groups to influence—indeed, to control—the foreign and defense policymaking of the major powers. Frederic Howe, a prominent social reformer and the commissioner of immigration at Ellis Island, provided the most in-depth treatment of this thesis in his 1916 book *Why War?* The foreign policies of the European great powers, Howe

believed, were run by an alliance of three reactionary groups: the "old aristocracy of the land," who dominated the diplomatic and officer corps; the "new aristocracy of finance," who sought investments and concessions overseas; and the "munitions makers," who made "colossal" profits from armament sales. "These classes," Howe claimed, "own or control great portions of the press. They mould public opinion. They control political advancement. They are society. These forces are the state." Operating "in the dark behind closed doors," they promoted and practiced the power politics—"the preparations for war, the irritations and the jealousies, the suspicions and the controversies"—that caused modern war in general and the Great War in particular.²⁷

The reactionaries embraced power politics for various reasons. The old aristocracy saw itself as "a caste apart," considered war its special "calling," and thought "almost exclusively in terms of its profession." "It is a mind which views democracy with contempt," argued Howe, "which thinks of the state as something separate and apart from the people, and for the preservation of which the peasant and the workman are but fodder for guns." The new aristocracy of the financial classes promoted power politics as a means to protect their imperialistic investments overseas. They pressed the policy that "the flag follows the investor," thus transforming the state, with its "narrow militaristic psychology," into the "insurance and collection agency for the investing classes." Their ultimate goal was "to secure a complete and exclusive monopoly" in their overseas concessions or territory "from which all other financiers and countries can be excluded," a goal that inevitably led to international conflict when it was pursued, as Howe thought it was, by each of the great powers. Finally, munitions makers fomented power politics because they made money out of it. To Howe, they, more than anyone except the "great financiers," were responsible "for the agitation for armament and 'preparedness' and for the increase in war expenditures which has taken place during the last twenty years."²⁸

In contrast to the old and new privileged classes, ordinary people gained nothing from power politics and war. Instead, they suffered "in lower wages, in higher costs of living, in burdensome taxes." Laboring classes suffered the most; they bore the cost of war and preparedness, according to Howe. "Labor really gives its all," he lamented. "It gives life; it gives health; it gives home, family, and the few comforts which labor enjoys. And labor enjoys none of the profits." At the same time, war and war scares gave reactionaries an opportunity to reverse social legislation, cut money for "social needs," and whip up emotions of hate and vengeance that "shattered the foundation of the democratic mind and entangled the high-ways of democratic advance." Ultimately, Howe suggested, reactionary influences promoted power politics more for political than economic reasons: to maintain their power at home.²⁹

Over the course of 1914-17, leading pacifists embraced all or most of Howe's argument about the origin of power politics. Although the leaders of the Woman's

Peace Party (WPP) emphasized that male aggression and ambitions were a primary cause of power politics, they alluded to Howe's analysis in their platform, condemning "the economic causes of war" and calling for "democratic control of foreign policies." *Survey*, a leading social welfare journal, printed one of Howe's many articles, as did *La Follette's Magazine*, and La Follette himself praised *Why War?* as a "very able work." Even Villard, probably the least progressive of the leading pacifists, blamed arms races and the war on munitions manufacturers, military officers, and "small ruling cliques, who, apart from the masses of the people, . . . cling to the old shibboleths and still lust for conquests."³⁰

In sum, pacifists believed that power politics and militarism were twins born of the same reactionary parents. Military officers, plutocratic imperialists, decadent aristocrats, and greedy munitions makers conspired together to provoke war scares, propagandize for preparedness, and defend exclusive spheres of interest around the globe. They either operated in secret, with little democratic oversight, or, when necessary, by manipulating the normally peaceful masses through fear and appeals to patriotism into supporting their schemes. Their intrigues both enhanced their power at home at the expense of democratic progress and militarized international diplomacy, thus making war almost inevitable. And war, of course, could only further perpetuate their power and wealth, both domestically and in international relations. Which came first—domestic militarism or power politics—was not clear. The way pacifists described it, the two were cause and consequence of each other, feeding on each other to put the world on a road toward dictatorship and destruction.

Pacifists, however, sometimes suggested that other forces might lie behind power politics too. Bryan at one point noted that fear of invasion rather than internal militarism "led the European nations to convert themselves into armed camps." In August 1916, the editors of the *Nation* asserted that "no nation can make itself so strong as to avoid all risk of attack," and they connected this danger to a condition of "anarchy among nations." They also frequently hoped for "a better world where national security is written into international law, rather than propped on bayonets." Similarly, Edward Devine of the *Survey* wanted the United States to help put some sort of "law in place of anarchy in international relations," a goal endorsed in general terms by the WPP, the AUAM, and *La Follette* as well. These comments implied that the structure of the international system, and not simply reactionary political groups, had something to do with the development of power politics. More specifically, they implied that anarchy—the lack of a ruling authority over states—and uncertainty—the fact that states could never take their security for granted—provided the environment that gave rise to balance-of-power behavior.³¹

But pacifists did not pursue this line of analysis. They recognized that the anarchical structure of the system was a factor in alliance building, arms racing, and war, but they focused their analysis of the cause of power politics on the presence

of antidemocratic forces operating within the various great powers. Thus David Starr Jordan of the AUAM began one of his analyses of the war by asserting that "the great conflict of our century is that between law and anarchy." Yet he went on to blame armies for "the spirit of international hate" and "privileged classes" in the officer corps for keeping alive "the idea of the righteousness and necessity of war." Anarchy as a cause of power politics faded from view, just as it did in the writings and platforms of other pacifists.³²

Liberal internationalists shared much of the pacifist assessment of the international system. They certainly agreed with the pacifists on its basic characteristics. President Wilson summed up the prevailing outlook on the system in his famous "peace without victory" address to the Senate on 22 January 1917. In the existing order, nations sought to achieve "equipoises of power," and in so doing, they pursued an array of policies that enmeshed them in "a net of intrigue and selfish rivalry." They handed "peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property," closed off the free flow of international trade, based international rights on the "individual strength" of nations, built "great preponderating armaments," formed "entangling alliances" that drew them into "competitions of power," and constantly "planned for war and made ready for pitiless contest and rivalry." Pacifists could not have described the system of power politics any better.³³

Liberal internationalists also agreed with the pacifists that the system was profoundly unstable. International law provided some measure of security for nations, but not much. It had failed to prevent the war, which broke out precisely because the world lacked any real mechanism for upholding international order. "Have you ever heard what started the present war?" Wilson asked an audience in Cincinnati. "So far as I can gather, nothing in particular started it, but everything in general." The intrigues of power politics, combined with the "powder magazine" of large-scale armaments, generated "a mutual suspicion, an interchange of conjectures about what this government and that government was going to do"—a mix of emotions Wilson suggested was bound to end in conflict. The maintenance of "great preponderating armaments" in itself left nations with "no sense of safety and equality," added the president, thus making peaceful relations difficult to maintain. If power politics persisted after the war, warned Wilson in October 1916, "sooner or later, you will have just such another war."³⁴

Arms races and the prospect of preemptive attacks especially troubled liberal internationalists; Wilson, in fact, called the issue of armaments "the most immediately and intensely practical question connected with the future fortunes of mankind." To the president, "preparing a great machine whose only use is for war and giving it no use to which to apply itself" was a formula for disaster. The "men who are in charge of edged tools and bidden to prepare them for exact and scientific use grow very impatient if they are not permitted to use them," he feared. Thomas Raeburn White, a member of the LEP's Executive Committee, perceived

the same danger in arms competitions. Nations engaged in a “struggle for supremacy in armaments,” he argued, were “only waiting a favorable opportunity to strike the first blow.” Convinced that attacks could come “without warning,” nations involved in the balance of power kept themselves “on edge,” maintaining forces in an “instant readiness to repel attack.”³⁵

Liberal internationalists had a more complex view of the origins of power politics than did the pacifists, however. In part, they agreed with the pacifist thesis that antidemocratic groups within states promoted the existing system for their own narrow purposes. Wilson believed that autocratic structures of government brought on wars: “They are never brought on by peoples.” “Democracy,” he added, was “the best preventive of such jealousies and surprises and secret intrigues as produce wars among nations where small groups control, rather than the great body of public opinion.” As revealed in his analysis of militarism, Wilson thought that professional military leaders, in particular, had aggressive, self-aggrandizing tendencies. At home, this led the military to view civilians and civil institutions as objects of, or obstacles to, military efficiency. In facing the outside world, it led to a paranoid, warlike foreign policy. “The purpose of militarism,” as the president maintained to the 1916 graduating class of West Point, “is to use armies for aggression.” Autocratic, military-dominated groups, he agreed with one correspondent, “may easily be led into ordering mobilization and entering upon war out of mere apprehension of danger from their neighbors.” Wilson also suggested more than once that he agreed with Howe’s argument that “privileged interests” promoting imperialism were a factor in the “countless irritations, conflicts and diplomatic contests” of power politics. Finally, the president, as discussed earlier, was wary of the influence of munitions makers in government. He therefore not only called for greater public ownership of American munitions plants but also thought that other nations should do the same thing with their own munitions industry. In fact, Wilson initially included government control of the manufacture and sale of munitions in his proposal for a pan-American peace pact.³⁶

Other liberal internationalists indicted reactionary forces within nations for power politics as well. Franklin Giddings of the LEP thought that “the monstrous egotism and the medieval-mindedness of the absolute monarchs” and the “manufacturers of artillery and powder” helped to bring on the war. Theodore Marburg, another leading figure in the LEP, suggested that “autocratic government” had something to do with the cause of war, while Weyl, more broadly, identified power politics with the political ambitions of “financial-military” elements in society. Imperialism and power politics, argued Weyl, were due in part to the “dominant classes” using “the constant fear of war” as a means to “allay domestic discontent and to oppose democratic progress.” Lippmann described similar groups lurking behind imperialism and arms races, as did Samuel Gompers. The *New Republic* even applauded Howe at one point, claiming his “main thesis that competition

for investment opportunities is at bottom responsible for most of the aggression and international strife that have occurred since 1880, will be disputed by hardly anyone who has made a expansionistic study of recent history.”³⁷

In line with this argument, liberal internationalists blamed autocratic states for tensions and conflict in the international system. At times, they singled out autocratic Russia for condemnation. But Germany was the target of most of their criticism. To all of the leading liberal internationalists, Germany appeared to respond to the international system's anarchical character with an especially aggressive, irrational form of power politics. At the same time, its domestic militarism was more pronounced than that of any other state. Soon after the war broke out, Wilson condemned Germany's attack on Belgium and complained that “German philosophy was essentially selfish and lacking in spirituality.” On 14 December 1914, Wilson suggested that although Germany was “not alone responsible for the war,” it did bear more responsibility than others, and he implied that the militarized, autocratic character of its government helped explain its aggression. He continued to express this view in 1915 and 1916, to the point of explicitly denouncing “Germany's responsibility for this world-wide calamity” to his chief advisor on foreign policy, Col. Edward M. House.³⁸

Other liberal internationalists also scorned Germany. The *New Republic* considered Germany's autocratic leadership “the aggressive party” in the war, who planned and prepared for it “not to resist but to conquer.” The German regime, declared Croly, embodied “autocratic militaristic aggression,” and it seemed bent on a “headstrong career of . . . militarist nationalism.” Its attack upon Belgium, argued the editors, was an “assault on international morality,” its submarine warfare a “revolting” and “barbarous” challenge to international law. Similarly, Holt thought that the German kaiser wanted to be “the dominant power in Europe” and that the Germans and the Austrians had “no just occasion for the war on which they have embarked.” Marburg's language was even stronger. Belgium, he exclaimed in a letter to Wilson, “is being trampled to death simply because it lay in the path of a war-mad government.” Germany was “dominated by a heartless military class” with an “utter disregard of the international code . . . and of the moral law.” Taft agreed with these views, as did Gompers.³⁹

While they saw autocracy, military officers, and corporate reactionaries as important generators of power politics, however, liberal internationalists put even more emphasis on other factors. First, they identified the anarchical structure of the international system as a central cause of balance-of-power behavior. Wilson perceived that the governments contesting the war “believe the very life and political integrity of the nations they represent to be involved.” They felt they had to fight the war to its conclusion “in order to make themselves secure in the future against its renewal and against the rivalries and ambitions which brought it about.” They fought, in other words, for their national survival and their future security.⁴⁰

Other leading liberal internationalists agreed with Wilson's analysis. Lippmann, as noted, thought that "special interests" in nations helped to provoke imperialism and power politics, but he ascribed the system and its instability fundamentally to the deep anxieties nations had about their place in the world's hierarchy of power. Weyl shared the views of his colleague. Narrow imperialistic motives emerging from the influence of reactionary groups in government certainly influenced the behavior of states, but more basically, Weyl argued, nations sought resources and territory to preserve their "physical well-being and economic ambition." They struggled to find and to monopolize resources for survival, which brought them into explosive conflict with each other around the globe. "A nation in danger of annihilation cannot indulge in the luxury of sentiment," Weyl observed. "Each nation is compelled to enter into offensive and defensive alliances, and these alliances, perpetually suspecting each other, are compelled to prepare for instant war." The lack of democracy contributed to but did not cause this dynamic—the "prevailing circumstances" of anarchy did.⁴¹

For the LEP, likewise, the root of power politics lay not in the domestic sphere but in an "international realm . . . in which each nation is equally sovereign." In this system, asserted Holt, "the only way for a nation to secure its rights is by the use of force," a fact that led to arms races, coercive diplomacy, and war. Lowell, one of the key leaders of the LEP, likened the existing system to a lawless frontier, where nations frantically tried to protect themselves with ad hoc vigilante committees. Filene also made this analogy and asserted that the alliances that emerged in the system were inherently unstable given clashing "national interests" and the lack of "some method other than war to deal with the differences that are bound to arise." Indeed, argued Marburg, "the central idea" of the LEP "is that wars are the result of the condition of international anarchy out of which the world has never yet risen." In the eyes of these commentators, the structure of the system explained the balance of power much more than the internal politics of the various states.⁴²

Liberal internationalists also perceived that the lawlessness of the existing order allowed people free rein to self-destructive emotions. Wilson pointed to the consequences of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 as an example. France, "hopelessly beaten," desired revenge; Germany, victorious, "began to dream greater dreams of conquest and power." Both sides proceeded to arm heavily for another round of fighting. Given the lawless structure of the system, there was nothing to restrain their fears and ambitions and no incentive not to arm to acquire the means to get what they wanted, be it vengeance or more territory.⁴³

These self-defeating insecurities and ambitions were not confined to anti-democratic elites or autocratic governments. Wilson implied that they infected whole peoples. In his private memorandum on the war, the president did not distinguish between peoples and their governments. He instead referred to the emotions and behavior of "nations." He also wrote, in describing the psychologi-

cal consequences of victory, that "the victorious nation, as the man, gets 'cocky' again, places another chip on its shoulder and becomes unendurable as a neighbor." Here the president clearly seemed to universalize the emotional dynamic under discussion; it applied not just to leaders or to particular groups but to everyone. According to Wilson, even the American people had been guilty in the past of aggressive "selfish passion" in their conduct toward other nations, most notably in their war against Mexico in the 1840s. Human nature, combined with the anarchical character of the system, encouraged grasping, militaristic power politics, not the internal political character of states.⁴⁴

Wilson's conception of political leadership also ran counter to the idea that the balance of power could be traced to the machinations of authoritarian-minded groups at home. Wilson believed in the merits of strong executive decision making, emphasized that few peoples had attained the maturity needed for successful popular government, and doubted the ability of ordinary people to form sound opinions on complex issues. As Wilson's brother-in-law Stockton Axson recalled, the president's "faith in the people has never been a faith in the supreme wisdom of the people, but rather in the capacity of the people to be led right by those whom they elect and constitute their leaders." In line with this philosophy, and with what his leading biographer calls his "egotism, secretiveness, and urge for dominance," Wilson believed "that the President alone must make and control foreign policy, governed only by public opinion and his conception of what was the right thing to do." Indeed, Wilson told Colonel House in November 1914 that "when newspaper men asked questions involving his foreign policy, he felt entirely justified in lying to them." This elitist outlook on politics was perfectly consistent with Wilson's belief that the democratic masses were only marginally more likely than autocrats or plutocrats to tolerate the insecurity and resist the lust for power inherent in an anarchical world.⁴⁵

Similarly, the *New Republic* and the leaders of the League to Enforce Peace questioned the wisdom of common people on national security matters. "When the war fever is on," observed Marburg, "the people are the last to be trusted." Mass emotions, agreed Lippmann and his colleagues, were volatile and easily shaped by leaders—facts that complicated the argument that selfish elites alone were to blame for the war.⁴⁶

To a significant degree, Atlanticists shared the view of the international system put forward by Wilson and his supporters. They, too, closely connected power politics with international anarchy. "In international matters," Roosevelt asserted, "we are still in the stage that individuals were in certain western communities where . . . I lived thirty years ago, that is, there is no international police and there are certain nations which can be withheld from wrongdoing only by fear of the consequences." With "no real homology between international law and internal or municipal law," states could not trust in treaties to protect them from attack, feared

for their security, and therefore had no choice but to be prepared to defend their rights and interests themselves. They had to develop their military strength; "a nation must be strong," preached Roosevelt, "otherwise it can neither preserve the friendship of friendly nations or the respect of possibly hostile nations." Liberal internationalists would not have disagreed with this description of the existing system at all.⁴⁷

Atlanticists also perceived that some of the worst impulses of human nature found expression in the lawless environment of the existing international order. With nations competing "for trade and wealth, for honor and prestige," as they sought to protect themselves in the jungle of the existing system, sometimes "selfishness and greed" and incendiary posturing overcame them. In 1905, for example, during the first Moroccan crisis involving Britain, France, and Germany, Roosevelt thought that "wild talk, . . . inflammatory and provocative talk" about war, especially by the British public, had greatly aggravated tensions. He saw the same dynamic at work during his second term as president, when popular hostility and discrimination directed at Japanese immigrants in California so irritated Japan that Roosevelt worried that war could break out. Pressed into a corner by his own peoples' "fatuous policy of insult and injury" toward another nation, Roosevelt had to combine a variety of military and diplomatic moves to defuse the crisis.⁴⁸

Prior to 1914, Root developed in the most detail the idea that popular self-righteousness stimulated power politics. He noted that wars could arise out of a logic of preemption: the "suspicion by one country that another intends to do it wrong, and upon that suspicion, instinct leads the country that suspects the attack, to attack first." According to Root, this "suspicion" came from "exasperated feeling" produced "of the acts and the words of the people of the countries themselves, not of their governments." Apparently unable to control the base instincts of "man's original savage nature" that Root saw as the ultimate cause of war, the ordinary masses—"the men on the farms and in the shops, the men with the pick and shovel in their hands"—reacted to international disputes with "race and local prejudice, . . . exaggerated national *amour propre*, . . . [and] the . . . assumption, often arrogant, often ignorant, that the extreme claims of one's country are always right are to be rigidly insisted upon as a point of national honor." This warped patriotism produced preemptive attacks and, at least in part, the arms racing and alliance building that preceded them.⁴⁹

While both the anarchical structure of the international system and the primitive aspects of human nature were largely behind power politics, Atlanticists agreed with other American leaders that the internal character of nation-states played a role as well. They in particular saw autocratic governments as fomenters of the insecurity intrinsic to the existing system. In part, autocracies suffered from the same deficiencies as the mass public: they were emotional and impulsive in their approach to foreign policy. Because autocracies centralized power in one person,

it followed that if that leader was incompetent, power hungry, or paranoid, the foreign policy pursued by that leader's government would be too. Moreover, unlike democracies, autocratic governments were based on the idea that the leader had a "God-given right to govern the people." An autocracy, stressed Root in late 1915, protected itself and ruled largely by "arbitrary power" rather than by "the rule of law." And law, including international law, was a fundamental constraint upon humanity's "powerful, innate tendencies which survive from the countless centuries of man's struggle for existence against brutes and savage foes"; law was "the only means yet discovered by man to limit those tendencies." Unrestrained in their use of power at home, unfamiliar with the need to reach accommodations with others "based upon justice," autocracies like Germany did not think twice about repudiating "every element of fundamental right upon which the law of nations rests," including "the right of every nation to continued existence."⁵⁰

Despite the dangers of war generated by anarchy, aggressive autocracies, and the belligerent masses, Atlanticists, in sharp contrast to pacifists and liberal internationalists, did not see the existing world order as inherently unstable. Before 1914, in fact, Lodge, Root, and especially Roosevelt developed an elaborate theory of why the international system was becoming increasingly peaceful. The "civilized" nations, as Roosevelt called the United States, Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Germany, maintained world peace, first of all, through military preparedness. Strong military establishments deterred attack, argued Atlanticists. "So far from being in any way a provocation to war," asserted Roosevelt in 1901, "an adequate and highly trained navy is the best guaranty against war, the cheapest and most effective peace insurance." America's navy secured the Western Hemisphere against attack, just as the navies and armies of the other powers safeguarded their interests too. Arms races imposed an unfortunate economic and budgetary burden upon states, but, in and of themselves, they had little to do with the outbreak of war. In fact, warned Roosevelt in 1905, "at present there could be no greater calamity for the free peoples, the enlightened, independent, and peace-loving peoples, to disarm while yet leaving it open to any barbarism or despotism to remain armed." Thus arms races did not cause war. Weakness did.⁵¹

Preparedness by the great powers also allowed them to dominate and to "police" undeveloped nations—the "barbarous or semi-barbarous peoples" in Roosevelt's lexicon. Imperialism backed by military power was a force for peace, Atlanticists contended, because it tended to spread "law, order, and righteousness." Undeveloped nations lacked political stability and the capacity to fulfill international financial and political obligations to other states. Such areas of the world benefited from the guiding hand of a stronger, civilized power—and, with the uplift of more and more peoples on the "scale of civilization," the world benefited too.⁵²

Prior to 1914, Roosevelt and other Atlanticists had little doubt that civilization was on the march. "The last century has seen a marked diminution of wars between

civilized powers,” Roosevelt reported to Congress in 1902. “Wars with uncivilized powers are largely mere matters of international police duty, essential for the welfare of the world.” Increasingly, he asserted, “the civilized peoples are realizing the wicked folly of war and attaining that condition of just and intelligent regard for the rights of others which will in the end, as we hope and believe, make world-wide peace possible.” International conferences of the world’s leading powers at The Hague “gave definite expression to this hope and belief and marked a stride toward their attainment.” Gradually, Atlanticists thought, an international moral code was developing, expressed in international law, treaties, and arbitration agreements. A “great nation must often act,” Roosevelt affirmed in 1906, “and as a matter of fact often does act, toward other nations in a spirit not in the least of mere self-interest, but paying heed chiefly to ethical reasons; and as the centuries go by this disinterestedness in international action, this tendency of the individuals comprising a nation to require that nation to act with justice toward its neighbors, steadily grows and strengthens.” Such gradual moral advancement was a force for peace, as peace, Roosevelt was certain, “is normally the hand-maiden of righteousness.”⁵³

Preparedness and an increasing sense of morality merged together as forces for peace in Roosevelt’s axiom “speak softly and carry a big stick.” The aim of all “enlightened nations,” he argued in his fourth annual message as president, should be “the attainment of the peace of justice, of the peace which comes when each nation is not merely safe-guarded in its own rights, but scrupulously recognizes and performs its duty toward others.” In part, this meant that nations should refrain from and condemn “wanton or useless war, or a war of mere aggression—in short, any war begun or carried on in a conscienceless spirit.” But it also meant that a nation should never make threats, promises, or treaties that it would not or could not keep. To do so would be to destroy a nation’s credibility, as well as, if treaties were broken, the momentum of international morality the Atlanticists thought was advancing throughout the globe. The fabric of international peace would consequently be threatened. As Lodge discerned, “The nation that disregards its treaty obligations will soon find the world unwilling to enter upon agreements with it and, what is far worse, will also find itself constantly embroiled with other nations in regard to questions of good faith and upright dealing which are more likely than any others to bring on war.” The “just man armed,” the nation that most contributed to peace, was the nation that shunned hypocrisy, respected the rights of others, and delivered on what it said it would do, with force if necessary.⁵⁴

Balance-of-power politics and the development of an international “golden rule” might not guarantee the stability of the international system, but they appeared to offer the best hope of doing so over the long run. The outbreak of the world war thus came as a shock to Atlanticists. “What occurred in Europe is on a giant scale like the disaster to the *Titanic*,” mourned Roosevelt. The war was a “horror,” a “hideous event” that left him “inexpressibly saddened.” For one thing, the war obviously

called into question the idea that international moral development was a force for peace. The “very foundations of international law,” the code of ethics the Atlanticists thought helped to diminish the chances of war, had been “rudely shaken,” Root admitted, if not destroyed. Lodge, deeply distressed at the destructive spectacle of modern battle, was more blunt. “The veils of what we call civilization have been torn away,” he moaned. “Primitive man” had been reborn.⁵⁵

Atlanticists also began to doubt the efficacy of power politics as a means to peace. Both Root and Lodge speculated that arms competitions had led to the war. Roosevelt, for his part, concluded days after the war started that it had been “inevitable.” The various belligerents, he thought, “are, each from its own standpoint, right under the existing conditions of civilization and international relations.” Ensnared in anarchical world politics, “each nation has cause for the fear it feels,” and each felt compelled to protect itself in the July 1914 crisis that led to the war. “Under existing conditions,” asserted Roosevelt in late 1914, “each nation was driven by its vital interests to do what it did.” Roosevelt even suggested that mutual fears of preemptive attack might have triggered the conflict. “The power sending the ultimatum and making the attack,” he wrote in an allusion to Germany’s assault upon Belgium, “may do so merely because it is so obvious that the other side is preparing to strike first.” The whole logic of competitive power politics, including especially that of arms races, Roosevelt appeared to say, caused the war.⁵⁶

Yet Roosevelt, Root, and Lodge drew back from fully embracing this conclusion. Despite their evident uncertainty about the fundamental stability of balance-of-power politics, they still clung to their prewar argument that military preparedness could virtually guarantee a state’s national security. Just as criminals attacked “the helpless” whenever they could, “aggressive and militarist nations attack weak nations where it is possible. Weakness always invites attack.” Preparedness might not always deter assaults, Roosevelt conceded, but “unpreparedness for war has invariably invited smashing disaster, and sometimes complete conquest.” After all, he pointed out, Belgium and China made little effort to maintain a robust military establishment—they “inspired no fear” in others—and look what had happened to them. Germany occupied Belgium while Japan, like other powers before it, brutally violated China’s integrity and neutrality. Britain’s failure to keep up in the pre-1914 arms race with Germany had contributed to the outbreak of fighting as well, in Roosevelt’s view. “Because you had the Channel,” he wrote Rudyard Kipling, “your people have not thought it worth while to arm when Europe was arming.” If Britain “had had an army as effective in preparation to your size, as Switzerland has had, there would have been no war, for Germany would not have entered upon the war.” Britain might have been armed, but it did not arm enough. Its *failure* to practice power politics—its failure to balance Germany’s power prior to 1914—brought on the war, not any defect in the system of power politics itself.⁵⁷

The other key cause of the war lay in Berlin, in the immorality and stupidity of the Reich's leaders. "I am sure," Roosevelt conceded in commenting on the German invasion of Belgium, "that nine tenths of the German people have acted primarily from fear—from an honorable fear . . . that German civilization would be wiped out if they did not strike their foes." But the other 10 percent, "including the bulk of the men high up," were another matter. "The Government of Prussianized Germany for the last forty-three years has behaved in such fashion as inevitably to make almost every nation with which it came in contact its foe," Roosevelt charged, "because it has convinced everybody except Austria that it has no regard for anything except its own interest, and that it will enter instantly on any career of aggression with cynical brutality and bad faith if it thinks its interest requires such action." Belgium had never threatened Germany or any other nation, and its neutrality was guaranteed by all of the major European powers, including the Germans. Yet Germany had "carefully planned for a score of years" to attack Belgium anyway; Germany's leaders took "the ground that in matters of national moment there are no such things as abstract right and wrong." All Germany's "intelligent and despotic upper class" cared about was ruthlessly maximizing their country's power. It was this attitude—the imperial government's amoral aggressiveness—that started the war, not any fundamental flaw in the balance-of-power system.⁵⁸

The Atlanticists' analysis of power politics and of militarism did not gain them many allies in the debates over those topics that began after August 1914. First, pacifists and most liberal internationalists had very similar ideas about the nature of militarism and how it could undermine American democracy. They both perceived that professional military officers possessed attitudes and ambitions fundamentally at odds with America's free way of life. Most of them also associated military preparedness agitation with reactionary elements in American society. In their view, professional military officers and reactionaries sought to manipulate national security fears to enhance their own power. Both groups wanted to militarize American life to suit their own agendas—the military to prepare the country for all-out war against every conceivable opponent, the reactionaries to snuff out democratic reforms and organizations that might threaten their wealth and political dominance. Pacifists and liberal internationalists did disagree over the precise military force structure that might begin to generate militarism. Their differences here were important, as pacifists objected to any sizable defense increase while liberal internationalists argued that American democracy could withstand a significant military buildup, especially if it featured voluntarism. Still, in the context of their shared anxiety about military officers and reactionary preparedness groups, this disagreement did not loom very large.

In contrast, the Atlanticists' stated concerns about massive professional forces undermining democracy appeared disingenuous given their calls for UMT and a

standing army of 250,000 or more. Moreover, unlike the other two groups of commentators, Atlanticists dismissed the argument that corporate interests helped to promote preparedness for their own selfish reasons. These positions made it easy to mark Atlanticists as outside the mainstream of thought on the issue of militarism, all of their protests notwithstanding.

Indeed, Atlanticists seemed out of step not just with the existing political center on the question of militarism but also with dominant American opinion on the topic stretching back to the Revolution. From the first days of the Republic, American leaders expressed a grave suspicion of professional military forces, which they associated with European monarchical tyranny. Alexander Hamilton, for example, believed that professional forces were at best a "necessary evil" that citizens had to strive to limit. A large army and the fear of foreign attack that gave rise to it in Europe "enhances the importance of the soldier and proportionably degrades the condition of the citizen," he warned. "The military state becomes elevated over the civil." Throughout the nineteenth century, Americans scorned the regular army as "dangerous to our civil and political institutions, not only on account of its physical force, but also on account of its moral effects, its contaminating influence over our principles, feelings and habits." They therefore kept the army very small relative to the size of those in Europe and relied on a mixture of regulars, militiamen, and temporary volunteers, along with naval forces, to fight America's wars.⁵⁹

Even after the Spanish-American War, which revealed glaring deficiencies in the nation's military establishment and resulted in a commitment to defend a new colonial empire, Americans still remained wary of a professional military. Prodded by the Roosevelt administration, Congress created a general staff but refused to set up a new federal reserve force, as it would put "a part of the citizen soldiery" under control of "the standing army of the country." Although lawmakers raised the army's authorized ceiling from about 28,000 men to about 90,000, they failed to appropriate the funds to maintain it and refused to give the president authority to increase the army on his own without their specific approval. "The importance of an army in any government, and most of all in a republican government," argued one congressman, "is so great that it is a dangerous grant of power, and I believe one that can not be paralleled even in the constitutional monarchies, to bestow upon the Executive such authority in fixing the number of the Army." Despite the military's expansion at the turn of the century, traditional suspicions about its role in domestic politics remained intense—a fact that worked against Atlanticists in the national security debates of 1914-17.⁶⁰

The argument that preparedness agitation reflected and promoted hostility toward Progressivism also hurt the Atlanticists. At a time when rapid industrialization, mass immigration, urbanization, political corruption, and the rise of populism and socialism all led to widespread apprehension about America's ability to adapt its democratic institutions to the demands of modern life, the conservative

character of the preparedness movement deeply alarmed most of the leading advocates of pacifism and liberal internationalism. They worried that military expansion could become, in the hands of reactionaries, a weapon to thwart Progressive reform—and Progressive reform, to them, offered the best hope of reconciling social stability and democracy with modern capitalism. With America struggling to adjust its democracy to modernity, militarism, especially as a vehicle of anti-Progressivism, thus loomed as a larger potential threat than ever before. And Atlanticists, from this perspective, seemed not just indifferent onlookers to militarism but supporters of it.

Theodore Roosevelt's presence in the front ranks of the Atlanticists did little to assuage the fears of pacifists and Progressive liberal internationalists. Although he claimed that he still supported the Progressive Party platform of 1912, Roosevelt, by 1914, was no longer in the forefront of the fight for Progressive reform. Partly this reflected his belief that anything he did on domestic issues would be construed as a bid for power and would hurt the cause of reform. But it also was due to his own sense that the Progressive movement had moved in directions he had trouble supporting. In late 1914, Roosevelt accused Progressives of going "every which way" and denounced La Follette and other Republican insurgents as part of "the lunatic fringe." A year and a half later, Roosevelt found reasons to oppose two of the most important Progressive legislative achievements of 1916, the Adamson Act, mandating an eight-hour day for railroad workers engaged in interstate transportation, and the Keating-Owen Act, restricting child labor. More basically, by late 1914, Roosevelt simply no longer had much interest in promoting domestic reform, as his attention was focused almost entirely on the war and preparedness. For all of these reasons, Roosevelt's leadership of the Atlanticists did nothing to blunt the politically damaging charge that preparedness forces aimed to sabotage the reforms that America needed to preserve its democracy.⁶¹

In addition to their fundamental agreement on the issue of militarism, pacifists and liberal internationalists also held similar views about power politics. Despite their different analyses of why the balance of power existed, pacifists and liberal internationalists both believed it was a fundamentally unstable and self-defeating way of conducting international politics. They argued that arms races, alliances, and imperialism generated warlike emotions and, most crucially, incentives for preemptive attack that made the peaceful resolution of disputes virtually impossible. They pointed to the outbreak of the war—a war preceded by imperialism, arms races, and intrigue and precipitated by a crisis in which military calculations apparently short-circuited diplomacy—as irrefutable proof of their case. Atlanticists, in contrast, did not think balance-of-power behavior necessarily always ended in war. On the contrary, they argued, so long as a nation kept up its military defenses and maintained its international credibility, it could almost always deter attacks upon it, no matter how foolish or aggressive its foes. It was this thesis—the

idea that arms races led to peace, so long as the competitors stayed even with each other and matched their actions to their words—that most alienated pacifists and liberal internationalists from the Atlanticist position on the balance of power.

The outlook of the three groups on the cause of power politics overlapped and diverged in a more complex manner. In the broadest sense, pacifists, liberal internationalists, and Atlanticists all agreed that the more democratic a state, the less likely it was to engage in power politics and outright aggression. But on the specific details of this issue there was marked disagreement and uncertainty. Pacifists attributed power politics almost entirely to the lack of democracy within states; if democratic social, economic, and political reforms went forward, they suggested, power politics would fade away. But even as they asserted this argument, they betrayed some doubts about it. At times they indicated that international anarchy was related to power politics. In addition, by portraying ordinary people as easily whipped up by “war scares” and patriotic appeals into supporting arms races and imperialism, pacifists implied that the spread of democracy might not ensure peace after all. They clearly wanted to believe that a democratic world would be a peaceful one, free from the balance of power, but their own analysis suggested otherwise.

Liberal internationalists and Atlanticists ranked the factors behind power politics in a different way. Like the pacifists, most liberal internationalists tended to see corporate reactionaries and military-dominated autocracies as aggressive practitioners of power politics. Atlanticists said little about corporate interests causing international strife, but they too thought that autocracies were guilty of aggression and of foolish strategic overreach. Both liberal internationalists and Atlanticists also put much of the blame for the war on the imperial regime in Germany, as did some pacifists. Still, neither Wilson’s nor Roosevelt’s supporters believed that the spread of democracy would guarantee an end to power politics. Ordinary people might be relatively less susceptible to the lust for power that appeared to grip autocratic elites, but they were hardly free from bellicose emotions that could lead to war. Moreover, both liberal internationalists and Atlanticists believed balance-of-power behavior derived, fundamentally, from international anarchy. The lawlessness of the existing system drove states to act as they did, not a lack of democracy within them.

Overall, the Atlanticists’ perspective on militarism and power politics put them in an awkward position. Their position on military issues made them unpopular, but, at the same time, they actually reinforced the idea that America, under certain conditions, could be vulnerable to militarism. It was their different estimation of how exactly militarism might be triggered that estranged them from their rivals, not any clear rejection of the proposition itself. In addition, while Atlanticists questioned the notion that democratic public opinion was a force for peace, they simultaneously lent support to this idea by portraying autocracies as aggressive and autocratic Germany as the primary culprit for the war. Finally,

despite their repeated insistence that military preparedness preserved peace, their comments about power politics causing the war pointed to a different conclusion. As the debates over militarism and power politics demonstrated, the Atlanticists did represent an alternative perspective on international security affairs—but in crucial ways they buttressed an emerging framework of beliefs deeply hostile to any American national security strategy based on active involvement in the balance of power.