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ARTICLE

The Disappearance of Self-Determination from the League of Nations Covenant, January–February 1919

Scott L. Malcomson

History, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
Email: slm98@cam.ac.uk

Abstract

After Woodrow Wilson's speech to Congress in February 1918, 'self-determination' was expected to be a guiding concept for a post-imperial order once the Great War had ended. Yet when the Covenant of the League of Nations was negotiated at the Paris Peace Conference, the phrase was removed. Why and by whom? The existing literature offers little answer. This article argues that Wilson fought for inclusion of both the phrase 'self-determination' and the substance of it but was convinced to remove both by his own advisers and members of the British delegation. These men had an agenda at variance with Wilson's, one focused on solidifying wartime transatlantic co-operation into a post-war governance model that would strengthen the British imperial position and bring the US into support of it. That agenda could not accommodate Wilsonian self-determination. Its resulting disappearance effectively reversed the post-imperial sense of wartime statements on self-determination made by Wilson and David Lloyd George. Anti-colonial movements, as the Paris negotiators knew, had taken inspiration from those promises. Their hopes for an organized dismantling of the imperial order were disappointed. Only after four decades of political violence would the pre-war order be replaced by one that better resembled Wilson's abandoned vision.

I

After a century of periodic upheavals, scholarly opinion on Woodrow Wilson, imperialism, the First World War, and liberal internationalism seems to have settled into consensus. Wilson, driven by his racism and desire for US global dominance, is thought to have established at the Paris Peace Conference a peculiarly American variant of imperialism. Wilson's belief that the United States could be, at the moment of its global emergence, an exceptional type of great power, generous and disinterested, was a delusion at best. The Paris settlement was really a renovation of the pre-war imperial status quo minus

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the defeated Central powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman empire. Wilson had not meant self-determination to be implemented outside Europe and 'never specified' how it would apply to non-Europeans.[1] Colonial issues were a sideshow of limited interest to Wilson and the other lead negotiators.[2] With US approval, the Entente powers, France, Britain, Italy, and Japan, enlarged their empires at the territorial expense of the vanquished. A colour line was imposed on the world with Wilson's endorsement.[3] Wartime success validated a new Anglo-American hegemony at the core of global power politics, with the British empire at its height and the US prepared to direct world affairs alongside it.[4] The idea of national self-determination, associated to this day with Wilson, stood revealed as hypocrisy, and the liberal internationalism summarized as Wilsonianism was to be understood as deeply implicated in 'the racist, militarist, and imperialist features of Western power'.[5]

This article troubles and in places contradicts each of these assumptions. It examines in a new way the specific question of how self-determination, as a phrase and an idea, disappeared from the League of Nations Covenant, contrary to Wilson's wishes. The answer to that question has been missing from the historiography of Wilson, the League, and the Paris Peace Conference. The method used here is to revisit some primary sources already familiar to historians but also to introduce other primary sources that are less known or have not before been brought to bear in the mainstream of scholarship on Wilson, the war, and the League. The resulting view is not necessarily more flattering to Wilson, the US, Britain, the British empire, imperialism,

[1] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian moment: self-determination and the international origins of anti-colonial nationalism* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 62, 220–1. The recent scholarly focus on extra-European expectations was propelled by Manela's book. An excellent guide to the ensuing scholarship, and some of its other predecessors, is in the first section of Jamie Martin, 'Globalizing the history of the First World War: economic approaches', *Historical Journal*, 65 (2022), pp. 838–55. It is still important to note that the top negotiators in Paris themselves were aware of these global aspects and aspirations. Apart from the well-known controversies around Japanese imperialism in China and Korea, the question of Armenia had sharpened American debate on post-imperial orders for well over a decade. See Charlie Laderman, *Sharing the burden: the Armenian question, humanitarian intervention, and Anglo-American visions of global order* (Oxford, 2019), especially ch. 4. See also, e.g., in the Papers of Woodrow Wilson Project Records, MC 176, box 344, Mudd Library, Princeton: Egyptian Committee to Wilson, 4 Feb. 1919; Frank Polk to Wilson (on the Irish), 3 Feb. 1919. These records collect much of the documentation underlying Arthur Link's edition of the *Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), hereafter *PWW*.

[2] William Roger Louis, 'The United States and the African Peace Settlement of 1919: the pilgrimage of George Louis Beer', *Journal of African History*, 4 (1963), p. 413.

[3] Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and American internationalism* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 84–92.

[4] See the discussion and secondary-source citations in Duncan Bell, *Reordering the world: essays on liberalism and empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2016), ch. 8, 'The project for a new Anglo century', and Duncan Bell, *Dreamworlds of race: empire and the utopian destiny of Anglo-America* (Princeton, NJ, 2020), pp. 358–9.

[5] G. John Ikenberry, *A world safe for democracy: liberal internationalism and the crises of global order* (New Haven, CT, 2020), p. xiv. See also Jeanne Morefield's conclusion to *Empires without imperialism: Anglo-American decline and the politics of deflection* (Oxford, 2014), and Bell, *Reordering the world*, pp. 371–2.

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or liberal internationalism but it is certainly different to the current consensus.

The narrative here is essentially one of missed opportunity. Wilson, despite or, one might say, alongside his florid personal racism, did indeed believe in and fight for the self-determination and early democratic independence of African and Asian colonies. He resisted pressures for extending US imperialism itself and for reviving the pre-war imperial status quo. Wilson's views were unpopular with many on the US and British delegations, both of which were themselves riven with political dissensions. Anglo-American co-operation was not a smooth or natural occurrence; it was a fragile construction pieced together by a transatlantic policy community with its own agendas, which were sometimes contrary to Wilson's own. The British empire was not at all solid. Rather, Britain was struggling, sometimes desperately, to manage its strategic dependence on colonies that demanded greater self-determination, on its alliance with the Japanese empire, and on the US: three closely entwined strategic dependencies that were each in tension with the others. Liberal belief in the self-determination of colonized non-white peoples was indeed revealed, somewhat unevenly in the cases of Japan and India, as hypocrisy. Nonetheless, the self-determination concept, once introduced, could not be dislodged, even if it could be excised from the Covenant itself. An explicitly anti-imperial idea had been established at the highest levels of global politics. The Versailles negotiations, at least for Wilson, had offered an initial opportunity to manage the dissolution of the world's remaining empires. Wilson failed; the opportunity was missed.

This article looks first at the imperial, particularly the British imperial, world as perceived by the Wilson administration in the early years of the war. It then examines some important efforts to create networks of Anglo-American collaboration aimed at bringing the US into the war on Britain's side and uniting the two powers in shaping the post-war order. One of the main obstacles to this process was the concept of self-determination. The ways in which Wilson inserted this concept into the post-war negotiations, then let it go, are described in detail. A closing section discusses some of the argument's implications.

'What then occurred between late January and late April [1919]', Tony Smith asked in *Why Wilson matters* (2017),

> to cause the Covenant to abandon Wilson's provisions on eventual self-determination and self-government for the [League of Nations] mandates, complete with equal treatment of all religious and ethnic minorities in such areas? Although the records of the meetings of the various commissions on the Covenant are extensive, I was unable to find precise answers to these questions.[6]

The argument here is that this abandonment occurred in January and February 1919, particularly in the two-day period of 2–3 February, during negotiations

[6] Tony Smith, *Why Wilson matters: the origin of American liberal internationalism and its crisis today* (Princeton, NJ, 2017), pp. 89–90.

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over the draft Covenant that would be presented at the inaugural meeting of the commission on the League of Nations on 3 February.

The central issue was the disposition of Asian and African colonies seized from Germany. In this sense among others, and contrary to one stream of scholarship, the world war was about colonies and empire from its earliest months. Germany's former colonies were not of great global importance in themselves, but they came to act as a stand-in, particularly as viewed from the US (and Germany), for the larger question of what was to happen in the relationship between empire and world order after the war.[7] Wilson and his chief foreign-policy adviser, Colonel Edward House, had been aware from very early on that the Entente belligerents intended to secure for themselves colonial territories taken from the Central Powers, particularly Germany, as rewards in the event of victory. House wrote to Wilson on 23 February 1915, a little more than six months into the war, that British colonial leaders were already set on South Africa keeping 'German Africa' and Australia keeping 'the Carolines, Samoa, etc.'. House told Wilson that Britain's foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, had insisted to him that Britain did not itself want additional territory as part of a peace settlement: 'But, there again, he comes in conflict with [British] colonial opinion.'[8]

This fundamental dynamic of British colonial insistence on territorial expansion as central to any peace settlement, if necessary against the wishes of the imperial centre in London and of figures like Grey, would shape the war and, even more, the peace.[9] Japan likewise intended to stay in the German Pacific island colonies it had occupied very early in the war and those parts of the Chinese mainland that it took from Germany.[10] Italy's entry into the war in May 1915 was understood to be on the basis of its acquiring territories around the Adriatic and into the Alps. Italy also insisted on post-war imperial expansion in Africa as part of its price for joining the Entente.[11] Imperial Russia, with Allied acquiescence, nurtured its old dream of securing Istanbul and the Dardanelles and becoming a Mediterranean power.[12] Imperial France, as compared to Britain, made little economic use of its extensive

[7] For Germany, see 'Comments by the German delegation on the conditions of peace', pp. 45–8, in David Hunter Miller papers (hereafter Miller papers), Library of Congress, Washington, DC, box 86.

[8] House to Wilson, 23 Feb. 1915, in Charles Seymour, ed., *The intimate papers of Colonel House* (Boston, MA, 1926), I, p. 382. It was actually New Zealand which took possession of German Samoa and Japan which took the Carolines from Germany. Australia seized German New Guinea.

[9] '[D]ans toutes les régions du monde intéressants les jeunes nations britanniques d'Outre-Mer, le point de vue des Dominions prime, aux yeux du Gouvernement Impérial[,] celui de la Métropole.' Philippe Millet, *Les intérêts coloniaux de l'Angleterre* (Paris: Ministère des Colonies, Commission d'étude des questions colonials posées par la guerre, 29 May 1918), p. 5, in Alfred Milner papers, Oxford (hereafter Milner papers), Dep. 388.

[10] Thomas Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: empire and world order, 1914–1938* (Honolulu, HI, 2008), pp. 1–6.

[11] Robert L. Hess, 'Italy and Africa: colonial ambitions in the First World War', *Journal of African History*, 4 (1963), pp. 105–26.

[12] Britain and France agreed to Russia receiving Constantinople/Istanbul in a secret treaty of 15 Mar. 1915.

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colonial possessions before the war, but the slaughter in the trenches eventually turned official attention (as distinct from that of the imperialist lobby) to the colonies, which by the end of the war would provide 135,000 workers for French factories and 450,000 soldiers.[13] France also took over some German West African colonial territory and had high hopes for further gains at the expense of the Ottoman empire, which had allied with Germany and Austria-Hungary in November 1914. Britain and France began negotiations on the division of Ottoman Arab territories in November 1915.

So while Edward Grey, whose long tenure as foreign secretary ran from 1905 to December 1916, liked to frame the war as 'one between democracy and something that was undemocratic and antipathetic to American ideals', there were strong competing interpretations of the conflict as being based on imperial territorial desiderata.[14] Imperial aggrandizement by victors through territorial annexation of colonies in Asia and Africa accounted for a good deal of the Entente's war aims, however undeclared publicly. This laid up problems for the future.

Grey's framing of the war as one between democracy and authoritarianism was meant to draw Wilson to the Entente side by playing to his well-attested high-mindedness. By the summer of 1915, after the German sinking of the *Lusitania*, Colonel House and Wilson's new secretary of state, Robert Lansing, were converted to the Grey doctrine.[15] (Lansing's predecessor, William Jennings Bryan, insisted on US neutrality.) Wilson remained unconvinced. His party's platform in 1912, in line with Progressive beliefs, had characterized America's own 'experiment in imperialism' as an 'inxcusable blunder'.[16] John A. Thompson has written that the Progressives' 'general outlook on world affairs…may be best characterized as anti-imperialist'.[17] Wilson was also acutely sensitive to public opinion and had no reason to think that American voters supported imperialism by the US or any of the Entente powers, perhaps especially Britain. After the *Lusitania* sinking, Wilson and House reached a type of compromise, with Wilson insisting that US policy on the war would not be shaped by 'territorial questions' such as the possession of colonies but would instead focus on 'the future peace of the world and the guarantees to be given for that', which were disarmament and 'a league of nations to secure each nation against aggression and maintain the absolute freedom of the seas'.[18] Such an approach retained the high-mindedness while avoiding, for a time, the 'territorial' question of empire.

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13 C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, 'France, Africa, and the First World War', *Journal of African History*, 19 (1978), pp. 11–23.

14 Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-five years, 1892–1916* (London, 1925), II, p. 120.

15 Seymour, ed., *Intimate papers*, I, p. 434 (House); Robert Lansing, private memorandum of 11 July 1915, Lansing papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

16 Quoted in John A. Thompson, *A sense of power: the roots of America's global role* (Ithaca, NY, 2015), p. 40.

17 John A. Thompson, *Reformers at war: American progressive publicists and the First World War* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 148. See also Roy Watson Curry, 'Woodrow Wilson and Philippine policy', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 41 (1954), pp. 435–52.

18 Charles E. Neu, *Colonel House: a biography of Woodrow Wilson's silent partner* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 219–20.

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However politically sympathetic Wilson was to Grey and the Liberal party under Herbert Asquith, he stuck to a policy of American neutrality when Asquith was in power. US foreign-policy traditions were on Wilson's side. The concepts of armed neutrality, abstention from intra-imperialist struggles, avoidance of involvement in European conflicts, rejection of imperial barriers to global free trade, and international arbitration of disputes to avoid war were all prominent during the American revolution, with each coming into focus chiefly in contrast to British imperialism.[19] They remained vital in Wilson's day, as in Theodore Roosevelt's 1905 mediation of an end to the Russo-Japanese war, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. American advocacy of international arbitration rather than war was then at its height, and Wilson's strategy since the first days of the war had been to press for US arbitration of the conflict.[20] Yet while his policy was consistent with US foreign-policy traditions, Wilson was an innovative president with a small State Department which he kept weak. Wilson believed in, and worked to create, a strengthened executive, which he legitimized in part by stressing that a president should channel public opinion beyond the constraints of partisanship. His policies on neutrality, arbitration, free trade, and imperialism were consistent with both American traditions and his perception of public opinion, but his concept of executive power and his political creativity also implied a capacity for changing course. Wilson expected to be the author of his own policies.

When Asquith's coalition was replaced in December 1916 by a more conservative coalition government headed by David Lloyd George, Wilson, who had himself just barely secured re-election on a platform of continued neutrality, again made it clear that he saw no decisive difference between the various belligerents in terms of their war aims, which in the case of the British empire as well as the other Entente belligerents continued to revolve around imperial growth and revival at the expense, principally, of Germany.[21]

Wilson's insistence on neutrality and 'peace without victory' put the British empire in an exquisitely difficult position. Lloyd George was himself no enthusiast of empire, although most of his core five-man war cabinet (notably Alfred Milner and George Curzon) and his foreign minister, Arthur Balfour, were. But the difficulty for the empire was not caused by British imperial beliefs per se or the lack of them. Rather, it was caused by the agreements on territorial expansion arrived at by the Entente's imperial partners, including Japan, and in particular by the strong expectations among the dominant parties in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa of retaining their respective German conquests after the war, the very sort of 'territorial questions' that Wilson sought to put to one side. Britain could not hope to prevail against

[19] Samuel Flagg Bemis, ed., *The American secretaries of state and their diplomacy* (New York, NY, 1927), I, pp. 30–2, 61, 155, 159, 183.

[20] Mary Ellen O'Connell, 'Arbitration and avoidance of war: the nineteenth-century American vision', in Cesare P. R. Romano, ed., *The sword and the scales: the United States and international courts and tribunals* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 30–45.

[21] War Cabinet minutes, 21 Dec. 1916, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), CAB 23.

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Germany without its allies and its dominions, all of whom (except Canada, and to a degree India) expected territorial gains as compensation for their wartime sacrifices. Lloyd George's call for an Imperial War Conference, which would come to include parallel meetings of an Imperial War Cabinet with executive powers, occurred within days of his taking office and was directed precisely at shoring up war-fighting support from India and the dominions. The price for that support was territorial aggrandizement – not by Britain but by its dominions, with some interest also from India – and a much enhanced political and economic role for India and the dominions in imperial governance, including foreign policy.

This meant a relative diminution of Britain's dominant position within its own empire. India also demanded more of an equality with the 'white dominions'.[22] The India Office thus advocated an 'unrestricted opening to Indian enterprise of any territory acquired from the enemy in East Africa'. (Philip Kerr, a key adviser to Lloyd George on foreign affairs, saw the advantages in 'a colony for India in Africa' although he worried 'you must protect the native against exploitation by the Indian': 'People seem to think that race prejudice exists only between white people and black; it is, I believe, nearly as strong between black and brown.'[23]) Indian equality and colonization in East Africa would later be principal concerns of British Under-Secretary of State for India Satyendra Sinha, one of two Indian representatives at the Paris Peace Conference.[24] Britain had little choice but to take seriously such demands from within its own empire, even after the US in April 1917, partway through the first Imperial War Conference/Cabinet, reversed position and joined in the war. Britain's commitments to French, Italian, and Japanese imperial gains after the war likewise remained intact. American entry into the war was due principally to Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, which threatened American lives. It did not change American policy assumptions about empire.

[22] India Office, 22 Mar. 1917, 'Note on emigration from India to the self-governing dominions', presented to the Imperial War Conference. Draft in Philip Kerr papers, National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh (hereafter Kerr papers), GD 40-17-34.

[23] Kerr to Austen Chamberlain (then secretary of state for India), 7 Mar. 1917, following up on Kerr to Chamberlain, 28 [?] Feb. 1917. Kerr shared these letters with Colonial Secretary Walter Long and War Cabinet Secretary Leo Amery. Kerr Papers, GD 40-17-34.

[24] George Beer diary, entries for 23, 24, and 31 Jan. 1918, in James T. Shotwell papers, Columbia (hereafter Beer diary and Shotwell papers); Amery diary, Amery papers, Cambridge (hereafter Amery diary), entry for 26 Feb. 1919 ('Sinha pressed me very strongly on the question of absolute equal rights everywhere' in colonizing ex-German East Africa). See James T. Shotwell, *At the Paris Peace Conference* (New York, NY, 1937), p. 159; Lawrence F. Gelfand, *The inquiry: American preparations for peace, 1917–1919* (New Haven, CT, 1963), p. 237; Louis Herbert Gray, ed., *African questions at the Paris Peace Conference, with papers on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the colonial settlement, by George Louis Beer* (New York, NY, 1923), pp. 61–4, 439–42. See also Eugene J. D'Souza, 'A background to the Indian colonization of German East Africa (Tanganyika)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 62 (2001), pp. 838–50; Herbert Luthy, 'India and East Africa: imperial partnership at the end of the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6 (1971), pp. 55–85; Nirmal Singh Grewal, 'Demand for Indian colonization in Tanganyika?', *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 24 (1963), pp. 125–8.

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Britain's post-war imperial and sub-imperial commitments were hardly calculated to build sympathy for the British among Americans. The lack of American support for Britain, its empire, and its allies in the First World War from 1914 to the spring of 1917 had been a source of constant and increasing anxiety for Britain. Americans, in the main, were assumed to be hostile toward Britain and suspicious of British intrigue and manipulation. This assumption inspired counter-measures. Historians have not always appreciated the extent and importance of British intelligence and propaganda activities aimed at ending US neutrality and building pro-British sentiment – two sides of a single, loosely organized programme. Soon after hostilities began, Britain had mounted a secret propaganda and influence campaign in the US to combat German propaganda there and to encourage American entry into the war alongside Britain.[25] Some of this operation was financed by the Secret Service (MI1c, later MI6), which had opened a New York station under William Wiseman in October 1915.[26] Initially dedicated to counter-espionage and tracking of Indian and Irish anti-imperial activists as well as Germans, Wiseman's station was redirected to political work at the end of 1916. Wiseman soon became a close confidant of Colonel House and, to a significant degree, of Wilson, and the principal node of communication between the Lloyd George and Wilson administrations, very much including on questions of the post-war settlement.

The propaganda and intelligence efforts were part of an unevenly co-ordinated set of initiatives aimed at converting Americans to the support of Britain and its empire in war. In co-operation with the London *Times*, Wiseman worked at shaping American public opinion, as did the Canadian

[25] Philip M. Taylor, 'The Foreign Office and British propaganda during the First World War', *Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), p. 891; 'British propaganda during the war 1914–1918', marked secret, declassified in 1972, TNA, INF 4/4a, p. 5; Robert Donald, 'Report on propaganda arrangements', 9 Jan. 1917, pp. 5–6, TNA, INF 4/4b; [C. F. G. Masterman], 'Report of the work of the bureau established for the purpose of laying before neutral nations and the dominions the case of Great Britain and her allies', 7 June 1915, TNA, INF 4/4a, p. 5. See also Arthur Willert to Geoffrey Robinson, 29 Aug. 1914, Arthur Willert papers, Yale, MS720.

[26] 'Copy of statement made by the Rt. Hon. C. F. G. Masterman on Friday Nov. 9th, 1917 relative to the work done at Wellington House', p. 1, and 'Copy of report of proceedings at Wellington House on Wednesday, November 14th, 1917', p. 4 (on Secret Service funding), in 'Propaganda Department, evidence taken at Wellington House', TNA, INF 4/11. On Wiseman, the main published sources are Richard Spence, 'Englishmen in New York: the SIS American station, 1915–1921', *Journal of Intelligence and National Security*, 19 (2004), pp. 511–37; Thomas F. Troy, 'The Gaunt-Wiseman affair: British intelligence in New York in 1915', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 16 (2003), pp. 442–61; W. B. Fowler, *British–American relations, 1917–1918: the role of Sir William Wiseman* (Princeton, NJ, 1969); Arthur Willert, *The road to safety: a study in Anglo-American relations* (London, 1952); Arthur C. Murray, *At close quarters: a sidelight on Anglo-American diplomatic relations* (London, 1946); Matthew Erin Plowman, 'The British intelligence station in San Francisco during the First World War', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 12 (2013), pp. 1–20; Daniel Larsen, *Plotting for peace: American peacemakers, British codebreakers, and Britain at war, 1914–1917* (Cambridge, 2021); Mark Stout, *World War I and the foundations of American intelligence* (Lawrence, KS, 2023); Christopher Andrew, 'Intelligence collaboration between Britain and the United States in World War II', in Walter T. Hitchcock, ed., *The intelligence revolution: a historical perspective* (Washington, DC, 1991), pp. 111–21.

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George Parkin, a close friend and collaborator of Alfred Milner's who, with Rhodes Trust money, spent most of 1917 and some of 1918 lecturing across the US to gain support for Anglo-American co-operation.[27] In his reports home, Parkin stressed the interest Americans had in the question of the former German colonies, including whether the native peoples in them would be consulted about their own government. (Parkin assured his audiences they would, saying that, in the case of South-West Africa, South African general Jan Smuts had told him that he was 'perfectly willing to leave the question to native opinion and decisions'.[28]) Parkin found it an uphill battle to direct American opinion away from the ingrained conviction, '[p]artly as a result of the Revolution of 1776', that Britain is 'a tyrant nation and the Empire a kind of octopus reaching out its dangerous tentacles to all quarters of the globe'.[29]

These and other operations required sizable resources and entailed considerable risks, particularly the risk of exposure and backlash. Charles Ascherson, Wiseman's brother-in-law and MI1c liaison, told Wiseman in September 1917 that Colonel House was broadly happy with arrangements although 'the really predominating position of ENGLAND makes it incumbent on us to avoid all display of exercising influence'.[30] American fear of British manipulation made it necessary for these operations to be less than overt. They in turn indicate the depth of the British need to combat American distaste for England, Britain, and the British empire. When House and Wilson, assisted by Wiseman, sent a report to the inaugural meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet in March 1917, while the US was still neutral, it opened with '[i]t would be wrong to assume that there is any pronounced pro-Ally feeling on the part of the great mass of the American people. It would be certainly wrong to assume any pro-British sentiment.'[31] Wilson reiterated this point when he met in London immediately after the war with Britain's deputy postal censor, who, in contravention of both law and diplomatic custom, had been a fertile source of intelligence for the US: 'You must not speak of us who come over here as cousins', Wilson said,

> still less as brothers; we are neither. Neither must you think of us as Anglo-Saxons, for that term can no longer be rightly applied to the people of the United States…If I know anything of people, it is of the people of the United States. They cannot be said to be anti-British, but they are certainly not pro-British. If they are anything, it is pro-French.[32]

[27] On the *Times* connection, see Willert, *Road to safety*, ch. 7. On Parkin, Parkin to Milner, 24 Oct. 1894; Milner to Parkin, 26 Oct. 1894; Albert Grey (4th Earl Grey) to Parkin, July 1902: Parkin papers, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa (hereafter Parkin papers).

[28] The Smuts reference is in the third folder of the subcategory labelled 'Imperial memoranda, notes and outlines for addresses', p. 22305, Parkin papers.

[29] 'Memorandum by G. R. Parkin', n.d. [1918], p. 22582, Parkin papers.

[30] Ascherson to Wiseman, 2 Sept. 1917, William Wiseman papers, Yale (hereafter Wiseman papers), Group 666, box 1. On Ascherson's role at MI1c, see for example Wiseman to Ascherson, 24 Aug. 1917; Ascherson to Wiseman, 15 July 1918; Ascherson to Wiseman, 21 Sept. 1918, Wiseman papers, Group 666, box 1.

[31] Edward House papers, Yale (hereafter House papers), box 5.

[32] Edward Bell to Lanier Winslow, 31 Dec. 1918 (enclosure), records kept by Leland Harrison, general correspondence, 1915–18, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter

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Britain did, however, enjoy a close and cordial relationship with House, who was discussing intelligence co-operation with Britain while the US was still neutral, and House's core group (Gordon Auchincloss, David Hunter Miller, and Frank Polk), all of whom worked alongside Wiseman on anti-German intelligence operations in the US once the US entered the war.[33] Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare had at last converted Wilson, somewhat haltingly, to the Grey doctrine, but earlier converts like House and Lansing had already set their own neutrality aside. After Wilson charged House on 2 September 1917 with assembling a team of experts, called the Inquiry, to prepare the US for post-war talks, Wiseman, leveraging his relationships with House and his team, made sure to have access to Inquiry documents and personnel. He also arranged that the Inquiry would receive as much help as possible from British agencies, including the 'British Inquiry' (the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department, or PID), which became operational, complementary to MI1c, in March 1918.[34]

An additional important channel for sharing political intelligence ran from Captain Reginald Hall, the head of British naval intelligence, and postal censor Worthington through Edward Bell at the US embassy in London to Leland Harrison at the State Department's new (1916) Bureau of Secret Intelligence. Harrison answered to Frank Polk and Secretary Lansing, with House protégé (and son-in-law) Auchincloss, Polk's number two, also part of the circuit.[35] The Bell channel, like the Wiseman one, predated US entry into the war.[36] Robert Cecil, Balfour's number two at the Foreign Office, also established his own direct channel to House with a view to co-ordinating US and British approaches to the post-war order.[37] By such means, the American and

NARA), RG59, box 1. On illegality, Bell to Winslow, 17 Jan. 1919, classified case files of Edward Bell, 1917–19, NARA, RG59, box 3. This second letter was declassified in 1995.

[33] Fowler, *British–American relations*, p. 24, citing Polk's diary; Willert, *Road to safety*, pp. 26–7; House diary, 11 Mar. 1917: 'Sir William Wiseman followed [Franklin] Roosevelt to talk of better coordination of the Secret Service'; Lanier Winslow to William Phillips, 25 Jan. 1921, records of the counsellor, NARA, RG59, box 3; Mark Stout, 'World War I and the birth of American intelligence culture', *Journal of Intelligence and National Security*, 32 (2017), pp. 378–94. The version of the House diary used here is the typescript at Yale's Sterling Library, available online.

[34] House diary, 4 Sept. 1917 (on beginning the Inquiry). On Wiseman's involvement, Wiseman, 'Memorandum on Anglo American relations August 1917'; Wiseman to House, 12 Aug. 1917; Wiseman to House, 26 Sept. 1917; Wiseman, 'Some thoughts on war-aims and peace', Sept. 1917; untitled memo by Wiseman for Wilson and House, 10 Oct. 1917. All in House papers, box 5. See also Arthur Murray to Wiseman, 29 May 1918 (marked Secret, enclosing seven PID reports for 'H.'s organisation'); 'List of publications received from the Admiralty intelligence war staff', 1 July 1918 (received by David Hunter Miller); Murray to Wiseman, 3 July 1918; Wiseman to Murray (memorandum), 19 July 1918; Wiseman to Hubert Montgomery, 29 July 1918; Wiseman to Miller, 5 Aug. 1918; Murray to Wiseman, 10 Aug. 1918; Wiseman to Murray, 27 Aug. 1918; Wiseman to Miller, 5 Sept. 1918; Miller to Wiseman, 10 Sept. 1918: all in Wiseman papers, box 2.

[35] Harrison to Bell, 13 Mar. 1918, records kept by Leland Harrison, general correspondence, 1915–18, NARA, RG59, box 5; Stout, *World War I and the foundations of American intelligence*, pp. 97–9.

[36] Bell to Harrison, 25 Oct. 1916, records kept by Leland Harrison, correspondence of Leland Harrison with Edward Bell, 1916–18, NARA, RG59, box 1. This letter was declassified in 1993.

[37] Cecil to House, 3 Sept. 1917, 16 Feb. 1918, 13 July 1918, 22 July 1918; House to Cecil, 2 Oct. 1918. House papers, box 3.

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British sides were in regular contact on the consideration of post-war questions, as they had been to some degree since House's meetings with Foreign Secretary Grey and others in the earliest months of the war.

As might be expected, the Inquiry immediately tackled the vexed questions of former German colonies and imperialism more generally. One powerful voice was that of Walter Lippmann, late of *The New Republic*. As secretary of the Inquiry, Lippmann authored early documents analysing the dynamics of imperialism and emphasizing its ill effects. To address these challenges in any post-war settlement, Lippmann proposed an international body that would make colonial and potentially colonizable areas resistant to what he called 'economic penetration'.[38] Lippmann believed that Wilson was against any 'incipient American imperialism' as well as 'economic penetration' by others.[39] Lippmann corresponded regularly with British friends such as Alfred Zimmern and Eustace Percy, but efforts to get Lippmann to embrace post-war imperial annexations or American acquisition of colonies – the two were closely linked in British policy-makers' minds – did not not gain traction.[40]

However, Lippmann was losing his influence within the Inquiry by the late winter of 1917–18, while George Beer, an independently wealthy historian of the British empire who believed in its civilizing mission, became the Inquiry's sole colonies and Africa expert, consolidating his own position as Lippmann withdrew. (Beer deeply admired Lord Milner and was the American correspondent for Milner's pre-PID analogue to the Inquiry, the imperial-renewal body called the Round Table.[41]) Specifically, Beer, contrary to Lippmann, rejected any international body that might manage current, former, or potential colonies.[42] Rather, he believed that existing major powers should administer such areas, including Indian administration of Mesopotamia (for Indian Muslim colonizers) and some formerly German parts of East Africa (for Hindus). Beer also pushed hard for a greatly expanded American role in direct colonial administration, notably, after the war, of the colonies of Central powers such as Germany.[43] Beer's imperialist views were circulated within the British government in July 1918 as what might be hoped for from the Americans in post-war talks.[44]

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[38] Lippmann, 'Economic penetration', p. 6, Miller papers, box 82.

[39] Ibid., p. 5.

[40] See, e.g., Zimmern to Lippmann, 16 May 1917, in Walter Lippmann papers, Yale, MS326, series 1, box 35.

[41] See George Louis Beer, 'Lord Milner and British imperialism', *Political Science Quarterly*, 30 (1915), pp. 301–8. Milner returned the esteem in his contribution to Edith C. Beer, ed., *George Louis Beer: a tribute to his life and work in the making of history and the moulding of public opinion* (New York, NY, 1924), p. 128. On connections to the Round Table, Alexander C. May, 'The Round Table, 1910–1966' (Ph.D. thesis, Oxford, 1995), pp. 103, 176, citing correspondence between Beer and Curtis from 1914. Beer's friend Louis Herbert Gray believed that Beer had got to know the Round Tablers during his several months-long residences in London in 1903–12. Gray, ed., *African questions*, p. xvii.

[42] Beer to Mezes, 31 Dec. 1917, Sidney Mezes papers, Columbia, box 1.

[43] Beer to Curtis, 11 July 1918, Kerr papers, GD 40-17-33.

[44] Lionel Curtis, 'Circular letter', 31 July 1918, Kerr papers, GD 40-17-33. Curtis sent Beer's letter with comments to seven officials including Alfred Zimmern, Eustace Percy, and Philip Kerr.

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These were not Wilson's views. He wanted smaller powers, along with some international body as advocated by Lippmann, to manage the end game of imperialism. He rejected, for example, Australia's intention to retain formerly German New Guinea. Auchincloss described the president as 'most opposed' to it and noted that the British response was 'not vigorously pressed'.[45] (Wilson had irritably allowed Australian premier Billy Hughes to lobby him on the German-colonies question in Washington at the end of May 1918 in a brief and frosty meeting.[46]) Wilson also opposed South Africa's absorption of German South-West Africa. As Jan Smuts wrote to a friend, Wilson 'is entirely opposed to our annexing a little German colony here or there, which pains me deeply'.[47] One month after Beer's letter advocating a colonial career for the US, both Lord Reading, as British ambassador to the US, and Canada's prime minister, Robert Borden, told the Imperial War Cabinet that, however desirable it would be for the US to join with the British empire in an enlarged post-war colonialism, such a move would have to overcome 'the reluctance of the Americans themselves to depart from their historic policy' (Borden). Reading stressed that 'as long as President Wilson remained at the head of affairs, America would not stand at the Peace Conference for direct annexation either by herself or by others'.[48]

Colonel House, typically, took a middling, and somewhat eccentric, approach, seeking a common purpose for the British empire and the United States in working together toward a 'liberal' imperialism while also advocating 'Asia for the Asiatics'.[49] Like Wilson and many others, including influential Japanese, House saw the world dividing into racial blocs, most importantly a 'white' bloc, to be led by the British empire, the US, and the European Entente powers, and an 'Asian' bloc led by Japan.[50] House, and in a different way Milner, saw this emergent colour bar as highly problematic, in strategic terms, although possibly inevitable. Milner feared that, if Germany were to prevail on the continent, white racism in the US and Australia ('American

[45] Auchincloss diary, retrospective entry for 2 Jan. 1919, in Gordon Auchincloss papers, Yale (hereafter Auchincloss diary and Auchincloss papers). This Wilson intervention, on 28 Dec. 1918, was conveyed in a secret telegram from Auchincloss to Polk, reproduced in the diary.

[46] Peter Spartalis, *The diplomatic battles of Billy Hughes* (Sydney, 1983), pp. 58–9; Donald Horne, *The little digger: a biography of Billy Hughes* (Melbourne, 1983), pp. 314–15.

[47] 'To M. C. Gillett, Vol. 22, no. 197', in W. K. Hancock and Jean van der Poel, eds., *Selections from the Smuts papers* (Cambridge, 1966), IV, pp. 46–9.

[48] Imperial War Cabinet minutes, 13 Aug. 1918, TNA, CAB 23.

[49] House, who had no foreign-affairs experience prior to Wilson's presidency, had adhered to these views since he published them in 1912 in *Philip Dru: administrator: a story of tomorrow, 1920–1935* (Wildside Press, Cabin John, MD, n.d. [1912]), pp. 146–7.

[50] The Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department cited at length Japanese writers on this topic. Political Intelligence Department, 'Memorandum on Japanese pan-Asiaticism and Siberia', 16 Sept. 1918, enclosure (three copies) with note from Murray to Wiseman, 24 Sept. 1918, Wiseman papers, box 2. The report was sent on to House. On Wilson's view, see David F. Houston, *Eight years with Wilson's cabinet, 1913 to 1920* (Garden City, NY, 1926), p. 229; John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson* (London, 2002), p. 146; Lloyd C. Gardner, 'The geopolitics of revolution', *Diplomatic History*, 38 (2014), p. 739; and Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonian statecraft: theory and practice of liberal internationalism during World War I* (Wilmington, DE, 1991), pp. 83–4.

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and Colonial prejudice') would, by alienating Japan, leave Britain vulnerable to German conquest.[51] House, who had hoped to sell the Philippines to Japan, believed anti-Asian feeling in the western US was dangerously provocative: 'I see difficulty in our future unless our Western States cease insulting Asiatics.'[52] House also believed, at least in the crucial months of late 1918, that a US-led League of Nations would quickly result in the departure of the dominions from the British empire, as such a league would remove the dominions' strategic need for imperial protection. 'The component parts of the British Empire', he wrote that September, 'can at any time become autonomous; and India cannot be held indefinitely as she is.'[53] He added the next month that Britain 'was not to be feared for the reason that in time she would be reduced to the British Islands. Her Colonies, I thought, would be bound to her by ties so light that they would scarcely be ties at all, just as soon as they found safety in the world's reorganization.'[54] The dominions would nonetheless remain within the 'white' bloc and their desires for their own colonies, taken from Germany, should, in his view, be accommodated.

II

Just prior to the Paris conference, House reassured Lord Derby that Wilson's ideas about the former German colonies would not be put into effect by the peace settlement.[55] The American Commission to Negotiate Peace, nominally led by Wilson but set up by House – with House as a dominant member – also rejected Wilson's approach in a meeting in late December of 1918, saying that 'some one of the great powers must retain the administration of the colonies'.[56]

House had good reason to assure the British that he, rather than Wilson, would be able to control the process of appeasing Japan and the dominions on the question of their ex-German colonial acquisitions. From 1917 through December 1918, he had constructed an impressive body of institutions all aimed at strengthening the US hand in post-war talks: the Inquiry itself, the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, and a political-intelligence operation managed by the State Department's Joseph Grew and Frank Polk, among other initiatives.[57] All of these structures, although sometimes built with the advice and approval of Wilson, were overseen by House.

However, all of them were effectively vitiated with the Americans' arrival in Paris. House's network of overlapping fiefdoms was unworkable. Leland

[51] Milner to Lloyd George, 9 June 1918, Milner papers, Dep. 355, VII.

[52] House diary, entries for 29 Apr. 1917 (selling the Philippines) and 2 May 1917.

[53] House diary, entry for 19 Sept. 1918.

[54] House diary, entry for 28 Oct. 1918.

[55] Derby to Balfour, 24 Dec. 1918, *PWW*, vol. 53, p. 498.

[56] House was present at this discussion; Wilson was not. 'Minutes of the daily meetings of the commissioners plenipotentiary', 27 Dec. 1918, Joseph Grew papers, Harvard (hereafter Grew papers), Ms. Am. 1687.2, box 36.

[57] The political-intelligence plans are discussed in Grew's diary entries for 19 and 27 Nov. and 2 and 3 Dec. 1918, Grew papers. The project was not included by Grew in the published version of his diaries, *Turbulent era* (New York, NY, 1952).

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Harrison of the State Department Bureau of Secret Intelligence, for example, who came to Paris as diplomatic secretary to the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, considered Sidney Mezes, House's brother-in-law and head of the Inquiry, 'the most unapproachable person I have ever seen'. Harrison told Polk that Joseph Grew, as American Commission general secretary, 'had done a great job' in setting up the operation in Paris, but once Wilson and the main US delegation arrived 'the troubles immediately began with Mezes and his crowd'.[58] Wilson tried initially to have Harrison and State's Philip Patchin, executive secretary of the American Commission, sent home.[59] Wilson in any case ignored the American Commission and his own secretary of state. Wilson had a deeply held view of presidential primacy. He did not wish to share negotiating power with the State Department or any other organization or individual. Rather, he tended to negotiate, as the phrase of the time went, with a 'lone hand', although he continued to rely heavily on House.

On the nagging question of former German colonies, amply foreshadowed since February 1915 as a major obstacle to any post-imperial world order, Wilson seized on a pamphlet, *The League of Nations: a practical suggestion*, authored by the South African politician, intellectual, and general Jan Smuts, then a valued member of Lloyd George's War Cabinet. Smuts had positioned the proposed League as 'the successor to empires', a phrase Wilson adopted.[60] Contrary to Smuts, however, Wilson, in his drafts of the League Covenant, written at Paris, insisted that direct responsibility for the former German colonies be undertaken by the League as an international body, not by the dominions, France, and Japan.[61] This was consistent with all of Wilson's earlier statements and confirmed the worried expectations of the British and the dominions. Lloyd George had tauntingly pointed out to Billy Hughes in July 1918 that when Australia sought its ex-German territory in peace talks while the US had 120 divisions compared to Britain's 23, 'President Wilson would look down his nose and say: That he had entered the War with quite different ideas in view.'[62] That is just what happened.

Wilson introduced articles in his first and second Paris drafts that prioritized colonial self-determination, framing the League's role as one of tutelage aimed at the single goal of colonial autonomy and eventual independence. Wilson's first draft of the League of Nations Covenant included the former German colonies within the general League mandate scheme:

> in respect of the colonies formerly under the dominion of the German Empire, the League of Nations shall be regarded as the residuary trustee

[58] Harrison to Polk, 9 Feb. 1919, Frank Lyon Polk papers, Yale, MS656, series 1, box 7.

[59] Grew, *Turbulent era*, I, p. 366.

[60] Jan Smuts, *The League of Nations: a practical suggestion* (London, 1918), pp. 26–30.

[61] Wilson had a typescript made of Smuts's proposals (as distinct from the rhetoric and analysis of the larger *Practical suggestion*) for reference. Unlike the full pamphlet, this typescript did not have the German colonies carveout; it did not mention them at all. 'A memorandum', *PWW*, vol. 53, pp. 515–19.

[62] Imperial War Cabinet minutes, 31 July 1918, TNA, CAB 23 (volume 1a).

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> with sovereign right of ultimate disposal of or continued administration in accordance with certain fundamentals hereinafter set forth; and this reversion and control shall exclude all rights or privileges of annexation on the part of any Power…[I]n the future government of these peoples and territories the rule of self-determination, or the consent of the governed to their form of government, shall be fairly and reasonably applied.

Any governance of these territories other than 'their own self-determined and self-organized autonomy shall be the exclusive function of and shall be vested in the League of Nations'. If the League appointed a mandatory agent, Wilson's draft continued, whenever possible it 'shall be nominated or approved by the autonomous people'.[63] The language was kept in Wilson's second Paris draft, printed on 21 January 1919.[64] These passages, entirely Wilson's own initiative – and, it must be said, at variance with the views of House, Beer, the American Commission to Negotiate Peace and others on the US delegation, as well as the British, French, Japanese, Belgians, and Italians – led directly to what Lloyd George later described as 'the only unpleasant episode of the whole Congress'.[65]

Wilson did not care about the ex-German colonies themselves. He clearly did care about the larger policy of self-determination and the League as a successor to empires rather than a perpetuator of them. In part, as always, he had the American public in mind. On the day his second Paris draft was printed, Wilson discussed the colonies question with the writer A. G. Gardiner. The possibility of post-war colonial annexation brought out 'the principal objection from America. Ingrained in us was our national dislike to acquiring new territory that is outlying and he [Wilson] instanced the Philippines as a case of which the American national thought that we were impatient of the time when we could give them autonomy.'[66]

Wilson's presumption that he could divine the American 'national thought' had served him well politically in pushing through domestic Progressive legislation. The same presumption, when applied to the entire world, lacked credibility, but he still made the attempt, stressing in negotiations that 'the people of the world would not permit the parceling out among the Great Powers of the helpless countries conquered from Germany' and that direct League supervision of mandates, leading to effective self-determination by former colonial peoples, was essential: 'to hand over distinguishable people to a mandatory in perpetuity', Wilson explained, 'and to say: "You never shall have a voice in your future; you are finally disposed of", would be contrary to the principles of that [Paris] Conference and contrary to the principles of self-determination accepted by it'.[67]

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[63] The covenant draft with David Hunter Miller's suggestions in David Hunter Miller, *The drafting of the Covenant* (New York, NY, 1928), II, pp. 65–93. It can be seen in typescript with Wilson's edits in *PWW*, vol. 53, pp. 655–76.

[64] The second Paris draft is in *PWW*, vol. 54, pp. 138–48.

[65] David Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Paris Peace Conference* (New Haven, CT, 1939), I, pp. 359–360.

[66] Edith Benham diary, 21 Jan. 1919, *PWW*, vol. 54, p. 197.

[67] *PWW*, vol. 54, pp. 326, 353.

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When the British came back with a compromise that seemed to give Japan, France, and Britain's dominions the powers they wanted, Wilson knew that it amounted to a memorialization of several days of fraught discussions that were 'a negation in detail – one case at a time – of the whole concept of mandatories'.[68] The French, Japanese, and Italians left it to the British imperial delegation to wear Wilson down. (The French, Cecil wrote, 'had made the impression of being pure imperialistic and the Americans were much disillusioned about them'.[69]) Wilson continued to insist that 'world opinion', like American opinion, would not endorse a League that ratified colonial annexations and the division of spoils.[70] He even suggested that a League erected on this basis would return the world to the pre-war system of competitive arms races and chronic global conflict, leading him to raise, not for the first time, the prospect of a US that would build a fleet even greater than that of Britain in order to enforce global stability.[71] The choice he posed was between a negotiated dismantling of empire and American global military hegemony. It is worth noting that this bitter struggle in Paris had nothing to do with European territory itself. It had entirely to do with European and Japanese imperialism, and it was entirely driven by Wilson.

But Wilson's 'lone hand' style was not working in these secret talks. He was not only alone in facing the four other great powers. On this issue, he was alone on his own team, whether it was the American Commission to Negotiate Peace (which he ignored), the State Department (also ignored), the Inquiry and other experts (such as colonies expert George Beer, who disagreed with Wilson on colonial self-determination, or David Hunter Miller, who thought the annexations–mandates distinction meaningless), or Colonel House, who was pressing Wilson to accept a compromise.[72]

Wilson yielded on 30 January. The counter-proposals and other initiatives, authored by the British team, either removed Wilson's offending passages on self-determination without replacing them, thus solving the problem through omission, or carved out exceptions. In the compromise arrived at by the Supreme Council on 30 January, dividing ex-colonies into three categories of mandate on a spectrum from eventual independence (A) to indefinite quasi-annexation (C), the main exceptions being carved out were the very ex-German colonies Smuts, in his pamphlet, had sought to keep free of League control. The dominions and Japan were to get their colonies, although not in name. The British empire delegation's proposed squaring of the circle accepted the mandate system in principle but insisted that the desired ex-German territories be administered 'under the laws of the mandatory state as integral parts thereof', something hard to distinguish from annexation. To this document Wilson apparently added just one word, 'if': 'as if integral

[68] *PWW*, vol. 54, p. 323.

[69] On the French, *PWW*, vol. 54, p. 322, and Cecil, Paris diary, entry for 13 Jan. 1919, Chelwood papers, Hatfield House, Herts., CHE 75 (hereafter Cecil, Paris diary).

[70] *PWW*, vol. 54, pp. 296, 308, 325–6.

[71] *PWW*, vol. 54, p. 325.

[72] Miller, *The drafting of the covenant*, I, pp. 46–7 (on mandates and annexations).

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parts thereof'.[73] The 'if' is written in by hand on a copy of the empire delegation's proposal. A later compiler (Arthur Link?) in turn wrote by hand that the attribution to Wilson is 'probable'. The change would be incorporated into Wilson's next, third, and final Paris draft.

Wilson regarded the Supreme Council's compromise of 30 January as provisional.[74] The formal award of the mandates, and the drafting of their terms, was yet to be done. House, Cecil, and their teams withdrew to put together a consensus version of the League of Nations Covenant that incorporated the British empire delegation's 'Resolution in Reference to Mandatories'. This draft, known as the Hurst-Miller draft, removed all the self-government language that had been such a feature of Wilson's first and second Paris drafts. The provisional settlement of 30 January and the resulting new Hurst-Miller draft of the Covenant accepted the territorial annexations that had been at issue since early 1915 while reframing them as League mandates, the actual nature of which was yet to be determined. Whether this was statesmanlike compromise (as Louis Botha said at the time), deft Wilsonian manoeuvring (as Arthur Link would influentially argue), or capitulation may be debated.[75] What is clear is that Wilson himself viewed it, on reflection, as capitulation.

Having yielded on the term 'self-determination', Wilson now tried to restore its substance. On the evening before the first meeting of the official League of Nations drafting commission, Wilson met with House and David Hunter Miller to compose a third Paris draft. Wilson reinserted language on the equality of majority and minority races and for enhanced representation of smaller powers on the League's executive council. But the main restoration was of language to promote colonial self-government: the object of League oversight

> shall be to build up in as short a time as possible…a political unit which can take charge of its own affairs, determine its own connections, and choose its own policies. The League may at any time release such people or territory from tutelage and consent to its being set up as an independent unit.[76]

Wilson had also written in by hand an application of the principle of self-determination to apply to all not-yet-autonomous states.[77] Miller compiled

[73] The amended document is in the Papers of Woodrow Wilson Project Records, MC 176, box 344, Mudd Library, Princeton.

[74] George Egerton, *Great Britain and the creation of the League of Nations: strategy, politics, and international organization, 1914–1919* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1978), p. 113; Wm Roger Louis, *Ends of British imperialism: the scramble for empire, Suez, and decolonization* (London, 2006), p. 234.

[75] Arthur Link, *Woodrow Wilson: revolution, war, and peace* (Wheeling, IL, 1979), pp. 92–3. On Link, Wilson as diplomatist, and the place of both in the main historiographical traditions, see Robert D. Accinelli's review essay, 'Link's case for Wilson the diplomatist', *Reviews in American History*, 9 (1981), pp. 285–94.

[76] The text of Wilson's third Paris draft is Document 284 in David Hunter Miller, *My diary at the Conference of Paris, with documents* (New York, NY: printed for the author by Appeal Printing, 1924), IV, pp. 380–6, and in *PWW*, vol. 54, which has the hand-corrected version of the second Paris draft on pp. 441–8 and the printed version on pp. 449–58.

[77] *PWW*, vol. 54, p. 446.

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the new draft overnight and had it printed by the early morning. It included, Miller wrote to Wilson, 'in accordance with my understanding of your directions', the two reinserted paragraphs Wilson insisted on, which covered self-determination without using the term.[78] The handwritten addition was not there. Perhaps they had agreed orally to delete it; the written records are very sparse. Wilson thanked Miller for the rapid work, adding, 'I hope with all my heart that it will serve as the basis of the work of the Drafting Commission.'[79] The inaugural meeting of the commission on the League of Nations was that same day, Monday, 3 February, at 2:30 in the afternoon.

But this new draft never made it to the drafting commission. Wiseman had learned of it, probably from House. Wiseman told Cecil.[80] Wiseman then told House that Cecil was 'greatly perturbed'.[81] House proposed that he and Wilson meet with Cecil fifteen minutes prior to the inauguration of the drafting commission. House went to work on the president, telling him that he could not afford to alienate Cecil, 'the only one connected with the British Government who really had the League of Nations at heart'.[82] Cecil records that after 'one or two agitated interviews with Wiseman, Smuts and others, I went down at 2:15 to the [Hotel] Crillon to meet House and the President. I did not conceal my severe disappointment.'[83] Cecil writes that the president, 'who was a little apologetic in manner', backed down and agreed to revert to the old Hurst-Miller draft.[84] House thought the president 'showed considerable nervousness both during the conversation with Lord Robert Cecil and afterward in the general meeting over which he presided'.[85] Wiseman recorded in his diary that the president, chairing the opening of the commission at 2:30, 'had then to keep the meeting going with a speech while Miller went round to his office and got enough copies of the old draft to be handed round'.[86]

Miller, who had arrived at the meeting with printed copies of Wilson's third Paris draft in his dispatch case, was taken by surprise when House asked after the earlier version.

> I had supposed that this [new] draft was to be the basis of discussion from the American point of view and had not the slightest idea that the so-called Hurst-Miller draft would even be presented. Consequently, I was very greatly surprised at Colonel House's inquiry, to which I replied that I had no copies of that paper with me. He thereupon said that I

[78] *PWW*, vol. 54, p. 449.

[79] *PWW*, vol. 54, p. 458.

[80] 'Note on League of Nations', Wiseman diary, Wiseman papers, Group 666, box 7.

[81] House diary, entry for 3 Feb. 1919, *PWW*, vol. 54, pp. 459–60; Seymour, ed., *Intimate papers*, III, p. 302.

[82] Thomas J. Knock, *To end all wars: Woodrow Wilson and the quest for a new world order* (Oxford, 1992), p. 216.

[83] Cecil, Paris diary, entry for 3 Feb. 1919; *PWW*, vol. 54, pp. 460–1.

[84] Cecil, Paris diary, entry for 3 Feb. 1919.

[85] House diary, entry for 3 Feb. 1919, *PWW*, vol. 54, pp. 459–60.

[86] 'From the peace conference diary of Sir William Wiseman', entry for 3 Feb. 1919, *PWW*, vol. 54, p. 461.

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> had better get them as quickly as I possibly could, for they were to be read at the meeting as a basis of discussion. This was in the room where the meeting was held, but before the meeting commenced. I rushed over to my office and got the copies of the Hurst-Miller draft, but in the meantime the meeting had commenced, and the President had taken the chair and was almost concluding his opening speech when I returned out of breath. He then directed me to distribute the copies which I had.[87]

Unfortunately, and rather unusually, the available sources do not include the text of Wilson's speech. It is at least clear that House, Wiseman, and Cecil, having also consulted with 'Smuts and others', and to the surprise of Miller, talked Wilson out of using the revised Covenant whose main distinction was a rejection of annexations and a defence of the League's prerogative to steer mandated colonial territories to effective self-determination 'in as short a time as possible'. When Wilson returned to the US later in February to promote the Covenant, he hit strong protests, as described in an intelligence report sent by Wiseman for internal government circulation: 'Opposition to the League has to some extent taken an anti-British aspect, idea being that Great Britain stands to gain most. This idea is encouraged by President's statement that the Draft Covenant selected was of British origin and that American and other drafts were rejected.'[88] Wilson told the Democratic National Committee on 28 February that 'the American draft was better'.[89] He tried to walk the fine line between acknowledging the draft Covenant's flaws while advocating its acceptance:

> I can see that the hope entertained by the people of the world with regard to us is a tragical hope – tragical in this sense, that it is so great, so far-reaching, it runs out to such depths that we cannot in the nature of things satisfy it. The world cannot go as fast in the direction of ideal results as these people believe the United States can carry them, and that is what makes me choke up when I try to talk about it – the consciousness of what they want us to do and of our relative inadequacy.[90]

Based on the available records, however, Wilson does not appear ever to have explained that, substantively, what was missing from the British draft was colonial self-determination.

[87] Miller papers, Part Two, box 90. This is a typed and hand-corrected draft of Miller's diary of the conference, recovered from Miller's desk at the Council on Foreign Relations in 1932. The version in his published *Diaries* is: 'Somewhat to my surprise Colonel House, just before the meeting commenced, sent me back to get the copies of the paper which Mr. Hurst and I had agreed upon' (I, p. 106). This short version corresponds to what was in Miller's original diary. The fuller version was added by Miller when he was drafting the expanded version of his diary but was not included in the final version.

[88] Wiseman memo, 'from a reliable source in NEW YORK' (perhaps Norman Thwaites), 10 Mar. 1919, Kerr papers, GD 40-17-54.

[89] Woodrow Wilson, 'Remarks to members of the Democratic National Committee', 28 Feb. 1919; see also Jacob Dickinson to Wilson, 28 Feb. 1919. Both in the Papers of Woodrow Wilson Project Records, Princeton, MC 178, series 1, box 348.

[90] Ibid.

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The agitation of British–American relations continued when Wilson returned to Paris and took the negotiating reins back from House. But House and Milner, with Beer and Cecil as their seconds, were the joint heads of a mandates commission (sometimes called a committee) charged with drafting the actual mandate texts. House's aide Stephen Bonsal believed that Milner was 'the Colonel's favorite of all the English'.[91] In March, Milner had delivered his own memorandum on A, B, and C mandates, asserting that 'the commercial and fiscal system prevailing in the existing territory of the mandatory Power may be applied to the mandated territory without reservation or restriction', which Cecil later affirmed meant that the British dominions' new acquisitions did not have to observe the 'open door'.[92] On 7 May, the German colonies were abruptly shared out while Italy was boycotting the proceedings.[93] On 23 May, Beer learned that the British wanted to nominate him to be head of the League's eventual Permanent Mandates Commission.[94] By his actions, Beer seemed to be doing the job already, exchanging models with Cecil and Milner for the B and C mandates and stressing to visitors that 'it was absolutely impossible and impracticable at this late date to consult the wishes of the Africans either as to who their mandatories should be and as to the nature of the mandates'.[95]

When the mandates commission finally held its first meeting on 28 June, although Milner and House were co-chiefs, House left Beer to represent the US on his own. Milner pressed ahead with ensuring that the open door would not apply to the dominions' mandates, something even Beer thought a 'reactionary proposal'.[96] The Japanese took two more runs at gaining equal access to formerly German C-mandate markets in the Pacific and thereby undermining the White Australia policy. This threatened to, as Milner and Cecil stressed, reopen the debate with the dominions that had so disrupted the conference at the beginning of the year and been patched over by the compromise of 30 January. The Japanese settled for recording their reservations.[97] The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, an international human rights organization whose roots reached back to the early years after the Abolition of Slavery Act (1833), presented its views to the commission on 12 July, with three main points: native peoples in the mandates needed some means of participating in their own government; tribal boundaries ought to be taken into account; and there needed to be language defending the open

[91] Stephen Bonsal papers, Library of Congress, box 20.

[92] British Empire Delegation minutes, 13 Mar. 1919 (Milner), 21 Apr. 1919 (Cecil), British Library, Mss. Eur. F281/102.

[93] Louis, *Ends of British imperialism*, pp. 240–5.

[94] See Drummond to Kerr, with Kerr's handwritten note, 20 May 1919, and Curtis to Kerr, 23 May 1919, Kerr papers, GD 40-17-45. Beer died before he could take office.

[95] Beer diary, entries for 23, 30, and 31 May and 6 June, 1919.

[96] 'Notes of a meeting of a special commission on mandates, held at the Ministry of the Colonies, Paris, on Saturday, June 28th, 1919, at 10:30 a.m.', Milner papers, Dep. 390.

[97] 'Notes of the second meeting of the committee on mandates held on Tuesday, July 8th, 1919, at 3:30 p.m.' and 'Notes of the 5th meeting of the commission on mandates held at Sunderland House on Thursday, July 10th, 1919, at 11 a.m.', House papers, box 4.

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door in mandate territories, otherwise the mandatory power might 'try to introduce its own fiscal system', just as Wilson had anticipated and Milner had gone to such lengths to ensure.[98]

All too true, but it was too late. Wilson had somehow been convinced, presumably by House, that the main obstacle in the mandate talks was likely to be Lloyd George, who Wilson suspected wanted the mandates to be 'only a means of distributing the spoils', and that House and Wilson would have to rely on Milner to oppose his chief and act with a 'liberal hand'.[99] House had skipped the meeting with the anti-slavery society and kept it and the group's accompanying memorandum out of his reports to Wilson. Instead, he sent the president a sanitized (and secret) version of events which stressed how he was 'agreeably surprised to find that…there was general unanimity of purpose to protect the natives in every way possible. I had no difficulty with Milner.'[100] Assured by House that all was well, Wilson signed off on the B and C mandate texts on 18 July.[101] Wilson did make one last attempt at preserving some shred of self-government in the ex-German colonies in a letter to House on 15 August:

> I wonder if it would be possible to get your colleagues to assent to putting in each mandate an express provision that the mandate is revocable by a majority vote of the [League] Council, or at least such a vote as would not necessarily include the Power exercising the mandate. If a unanimous vote were required in this matter, it would of course always be possible for the Power exercising the mandate to veto any revocation or even alteration of the mandate.[102]

This was possibly Wilson's last, oblique attempt at institutionalizing some mechanism for ex-colonial self-determination. It took several years for the League members and their Permanent Mandates Commission to consolidate rules and procedures. The permanent commission was by no means a rubber stamp for mandatory powers, but the expansive menu of means for colonial empowerment that Wilson relented on in early February 1919 never returned.[103]

[98] 'Notes of the seventh meeting of the committee on mandates held at Sunderland House on Saturday, July 12th, 1919, at 11 a.m.', House papers, box 4.

[99] Wilson to House, 9 July 1919, House papers, box 4.

[100] House to Wilson, 14 July 1919, House papers, box 4. In his earlier dispatches about the commission to Wilson on 8 and 10 July, House alluded only once and briefly to the Japanese protest, and otherwise only to the debate with the French on troop levies. The rest of the extensive discussion on the shortcomings of the mandates did not appear in the letters or cables in the House papers. House to Wilson, 8 and 10 July 1919, House papers, box 4.

[101] Wilson to House, 18 July 1919, House papers, box 4.

[102] Wilson to House, 15 Aug. 1919. Copied in Ray Stannard Baker papers, Library of Congress. US officials continued to try to apply open-door principles to the C mandates into 1925, without success. See Andrew J. Crozier, 'The establishment of the Mandates System 1919–1925: some problems created by the Paris Peace Conference', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14 (1979), pp. 483–513.

[103] The best discussion of how the Permanent Mandates Commission came to operate is in Susan Pedersen, *The guardians: the League of Nations and the crisis of empire* (Oxford, 2015).

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III

This, in outline, is what occurred to, in Tony Smith's words, 'cause the Covenant to abandon Wilson's provisions on eventual self-determination and self-government for the mandates'. It cannot be said to reflect well on Wilson's skills as an executive or a diplomatist. He did indeed make a strong and consistent stand for colonial self-determination. But Wilson advanced this position without building any support for it within his own team and with an ineffective tactic of moralistic posturing punctuated by tergiversation when faced with opposition from his Entente partners, whether the belligerent Hughes, the dismissive Clemenceau, the artful Smuts, Cecil, and Wiseman, or the playfully indifferent Lloyd George.[104] Following the initial compromise of 30 January, the judgement of Leo Amery, then Milner's number two at the Colonial Office, was too harsh: he considered Wilson 'less intractable and unreasonable but even stupider than I had imagined'.[105] The summary assessment of Cecil, who was much closer to the talks and uncomfortably aware that Wilson had redirected Britain's own language on colonial self-determination – 'It is no use concealing the fact that though on broad principle we agree with the Americans most of their details seem to us now wrong, though a large proportion of them have been taken from our previous suggestions' – was closer to the mark though not much kinder:

> He is, if one may say so, a trifle of a bully, and must be dealt with firmly, though with the utmost courtesy and respect – not a very easy combination to hit off. He is also evidently a vain man, and still with an eye all the time on the American elections. He was very anxious therefore that the scheme which we should work on should be, nominally at any rate, his scheme, and did not mind that in actual fact it was very largely the production of others.[106]

The irony here is that the parts of the Covenant that were very much Wilson's own, and not the production of others, were the self-determination passages Cecil worked so hard to remove. Wilson did demonstrate, at the very least to Cecil, Wiseman, House, Miller, and Smuts, that he could be undermined, brow-beaten, and almost humiliated, even while he appeared to the outside world as the single most powerful, imaginative, and progressive politician on the planet – the role he wanted to play, but which he was unable to fulfil.

Self-determination for colonial peoples in Africa and Asia did not disappear from the League of Nations Covenant because of Wilson's racism, as many historians have asserted, or because of US imperialism or Anglo-Saxon solidarity, or because the great-power negotiators ignored colonial issues, or because liberal internationalism was actually illiberal, or because the League was an exercise in excessive idealism. Fundamentally, it disappeared because the

[104] For Lloyd George, see Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, I, pp. 363, 367–8, and Cecil, Paris diary, entry for 25 Jan. 1919.

[105] Amery diary, 1 Feb. 1919.

[106] Cecil, Paris diary, entries for 19 and 24 Jan. 1919.

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victorious imperial powers, France, Japan, Italy, and Britain, wanted it to. As Parker Moon of the Inquiry put it, '[s]elf-determination and empire were irreconcilable foes'.[107]

The most complex and important case is that of Britain – important because Britain was by far the leading imperial power of the era, a determined cultivator of American alliance, the dominant negotiator at Versailles, and closely involved, for years, in shaping the US's emergence as a world power. The British case was complex because Britain had strong domestic forces that were anti-imperial – Lloyd George himself had preceded Wilson in pushing for 'self-determination' – and had become dependent on its own, sub-imperial dominions for strategic survival. It was additionally complex because Britain had also grown dependent on imperial Japan, which was at odds with the Australasian dominions and their policies of White Australia and White New Zealand, similarly to how India was at odds with them (and with South Africa). Ultimately, it was the dominions that succeded in imposing the global colour line, in partial or full contradiction of both British and American policy. It was a triumph of colonial agency, but the colonies with agency in the war and at Versailles were white British colonies and, to a much lesser but real degree, India. How did this happen? The obvious reason is British dependence on them. That gave them power.

The less obvious reason, which has received too little attention from scholars, is that key figures in the process – Cecil, Milner, Wiseman, and Balfour, among others, together with British intelligence and propaganda agencies – had for several years been constructing a transatlantic network of day-to-day co-operation with American counterparts, principally House and Beer but including the State Department (Harrison, Bell, Polk, Auchincloss, Miller). Unlike Wilson, not to mention the American electorate he represented, the men in this policy community believed in an Anglo-American condominium. They worked hard to build it, and in the prosecution of the war after the advent of the Lloyd George government in December 1916 it had been successful in enabling victory and thereby advancing world peace. Biography will have played a role: House's father was English, for example; Harrison was an Etonian. But the defining quality of these underestimated actors was bureaucratic skill and determination exercised below the level of the principals and far from public view. They shaped options, which is what policy and intelligence operatives do. Apparently, in their view, self-determination, Wilsonian or otherwise, had to be suppressed because it was incompatible with their goal, novel at the time, of Anglo-American joint control of global power politics. As it happened, achieving that goal required contravening the will of the American president. It is yet another irony that US perceptions of excessive British imperial influence in shaping the Covenant became central to Congressional rejection of the League.[108]

[107] Parker T. Moon, *Imperialism and world politics* (New York, NY, 1939 [1926]), p. 473.

[108] Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and peril: America at the dawn of a global age* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), pp. 254–7.

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The historiography of Wilson, the war, the Peace Conference, the League, and modern internationalism needs to take these factors more into account than it has. The crisis of (mostly) European imperialism came surprisingly close to issuing in a structured reordering of power along lines of colonial self-determination without regard to race. The intricate processes through which it failed to do so should provide valuable avenues for further research, not least because the decades-long unwinding of empire, at tremendous human cost, may be considered the principal fruit of that failure.

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