

United States' Entrance into World War I:  
Woodrow Wilson and His Desire to  
Establish a New World Order

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When searching for a reason on why Woodrow Wilson took the United States to war in 1917, it is essential to understand two, often misunderstood points. First, in 1917 war was seen as glorious rather than repulsive and morally wrong. The latter view is held by most people today, and is a view that Woodrow Wilson certainly did not hold. Secondly, Wilson saw his mission in life as a prophet of God. He believed that his duty was to establish a new world order, thereby creating a lasting peace for all the people around the world and their descendents. Therefore, this paper proposes that Woodrow Wilson led the United States to war because he realized it was the only possible way to secure a leading role for the United States at the peace negotiations. A leading role was necessary for it would enable him to complete his mission. This mission would create a new world order that God ordained to exist, and would preserve everlasting peace.

When Woodrow Wilson was sixteen years old he arrived at the conclusion that he was chosen by God to become a prophet. It was then he experienced his great faith conversion and began to believe that God had predestined him to complete a great mission during his lifetime.<sup>1</sup> This belief did not fade away like a childhood dream, but continued to motivate him even when he was president. After his election he returned to the stable where his conversion took place and was recorded as saying, "I feel as though I ought to take off my shoes, this is holy ground."<sup>2</sup>

One may conclude that since Wilson felt he was a prophet, he would only act within the boundaries of Christianity. However, this was not always the case for he was known to rationalize his underhanded actions. Wilson believed that if these actions promoted the will of God then he was justified.<sup>3</sup> An example of this occurred with Colonel George Harvey, the first influential business man who strove to build up support for Woodrow Wilson's nomination. As the support started to spread, it was brought to Wilson's attention that in order to secure the nomination it would be necessary to receive the support of William Jennings Bryan. Because of Harvey's support, Bryan refused to support Wilson believing that here was a sure indication of Wilson's loyalty to big business. It soon became obvious to Woodrow Wilson that he had to make a choice between his loyalty to a dedicated friend or to the nomination for the Presidency of the United States. Wilson soon made his decision, and after six years of Harvey's devotion to Wilson's campaign he was asked to withdraw his services.<sup>4</sup> This incident is important to remember because it allows us to see through the "all moral image" of Wilson so that we may better understand how he reached some of his decisions in his later years.

Wilson believed that America's mission to the rest of the world was to promote peace.<sup>5</sup> Along with this concept of divine providence, Wilson saw himself as the Abraham of America. He felt destined by God to be the bearer of a new world order, establishing a situation where the possibilities of peace could exist.<sup>6</sup> Wilson saw it as his duty to create a new world order,

and he felt that the United States was to be both the tool to establish and the rod to enforce this universal harmony.

At the beginning of the war, Woodrow Wilson believed that the United States could best fulfill her obligations by remaining neutral. He assumed that if his country remained neutral he would become the mediator of the nations at war and through his leadership establish a New World order, thus promoting peace. Wilson publically announced three major reasons why America had an obligation to strive for peace. He first claimed that our origins could be traced back to all the nations at war, thus giving us a common bond to each side. Secondly, he claimed that we should be proud that our greatest achievements had been those of peace and humanity. Thirdly, he emphasized that the United States had a special destiny to become a leader by thought and example.<sup>7</sup>

Some historians question the legitimacy of Wilson's stand on neutrality. They built their argument on the fact that the bulk of the United States' trade was exported to the Allies, while trade with the Entente was basically non-existent. This issue does not succeed in proving that Wilson was anti-neutral; the following premise will be substantiated throughout this paper.

On August 10, 1914, Secretary of State Bryan informed the President that a request was issued by the Morgan Company. They asked if there would be any objections to making a loan to the French Government and the Rothschilds.<sup>8</sup> Emphasizing his deep belief that a policy should be established to refuse loans

to any nation at war, Bryan proceeded to claim that money was the worst of all contraband. He felt that it forced many undesirable consequences. Being a pacifist, the secretary was as devoted to peace and tried to encourage the president to pursue policies of peace. He claimed that an international agreement by neutral nations of war not to lend financial assistance to warring countries would do more to preserve peace than any previous peace efforts in history. Bryan felt that loans would increase divisions within the country. Further, they would tempt the people connected with them to use their influence in rallying support towards the country they backed. Bryan felt this could easily be done through the newspapers and many other forms of journalism. Finally he claimed that our refusal to loan money to these nations would force a conclusion to the war.<sup>9</sup> On August 15, 1914, President Wilson responded, "Loans made by American bankers to any foreign nation at war would be inconsistent with the true spirit of neutrality."<sup>10</sup>

It is of interest to note that while advising bankers against policies that would jeopardize America's "true spirit" of neutrality, Wilson himself was accused of authorizing policies contrary to this initial directive. One example of this was the unlimited trade of munitions and other commerce to the nations at war. This trade created tension because the Neutral European nations placed an embargo on shipments of war materials. As result of this embargo, the United States became the only major neutral nation that traded war supplies to warring countries. This policy seemed controversial for in 1913,

Wilson remarked,

"I shall follow the best practice of nations in the matter of neutrality by forbidding the exploration of arms or munitions of war of any kind from the United States to any part of the Republic of Mexico."<sup>11</sup>

Wilson agreed with the philosophy of the European neutrals in 1913, but was able to find reason for the United States' exemption in 1914. Some historians claim that one of the reasons for this exemption centered around the economic situation of the United States in 1914.

At the time Wilson took office an intensifying business depression seemed to be restraining the United States, and it increased at the immediate outbreak of the European war. It was reported that unemployment was close to one million people. The report includes the fact that close to one hundred thousand of these people were near starvation.<sup>12</sup> The Bradstreet Journal on January 30, 1915, reported that in 1914 over sixteen thousand businesses failed. This was a serious problem for it was the largest number of business failures in the nation's history.<sup>13</sup> Although this crisis took a while to completely fade out of sight, the increase of trade came as a result of the war, and gave a boost to the economy. Historians even go so far as to claim that the rapid growth of the munition trade rescued the United States.<sup>14</sup>

This trade of war materials soon became a major source of the United States' exports. This business reality has more to do with Wilson's intentions than a theoretic dispute over the

meaning of neutrality. Influential representatives of banks across the nation began pressuring the administration to abort their previous rulings on loans or compromise by allowing credits.<sup>15</sup> This became evident on October 23, 1914 when the vice-president of the National Bank of New York wrote to Lansing stating that the manufacturers were pressuring the bankers to allow temporary credits. The letter predicted that if means of financing these countries were not made available, business would flow to other nations. If this were to happen, it would be a blow against the American economy during its brightest future.<sup>16</sup> Wilson began to realize that a denial of credit would most likely force the country back into another economic crisis, so a few days later he set up a meeting with Mr. Lansing to discuss the differences between loans and credits. After the meeting Wilson decided in favor of the credits and asked Lansing to see to it that the appropriate people were made aware of his decision. Lansing noted in his memoirs that the president gave him strict orders to convey his message orally and if questioned to state that it was his own interpretation, and that he was not speaking with authority from the government.<sup>17</sup>

It became clear that Wilson saw a need to cast aside previous definitions of neutrality (i.e. Mexico 1913) in order to allow the United States to become economically stronger. His policy of open trade and credit extensions are examples of his foregoing the neutrality norm so as to promote the economic dominance of the United States. In this way the United State would be in a position at the conclusion of the war to hold a

significant seat in any peace conference.

Great Britian took advantage of both the open door policy and the credit approvals of the United States. The quantity of trade was enormous since she could not receive war materials from the European nations.<sup>18</sup> When other nations questioned the policies of the United States, Bryan explained that any embargo on war supplies would interfere with the country's position of strict neutrality.<sup>19</sup> Germany especially complained because the munition trade soon became one sided thereby showing favor to the Allies. This situation mainly came about after the Royal Fleet established a navy blockade refusing Germany and her surrounding neighbors the right of trade by sea. The United States protested this new British policy complaining that it denied her rights as a neutral nation by limiting trade.<sup>20</sup> Great Britian did not seem to worry much about this complaint and the protest from the United States quickly faded. On April 4, 1915, Secretary Bryan received a letter from the German Ambassador containing his country's grievances against the United States. He expressed concern that America was the only neutral nation supplying the Allies with war materials. The United States justified the present trade situation claiming that she would gladly continue trade with Germany as soon as transportation was possible. The Ambassador's letter made it clear that the German Government did not accept the American explanation. He stated that biased trade was unjustified for a neutral nation. If the United States really wanted equal trade it would have found a means of achieving its goal.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, the United States sought no other means.

Due to the number of objections concerning the United States policies dealing with the trade of war supplies, Mr. Lansing a major advisor of President Wilson, encouraged the administration to issue a statement related to this matter. Lansing claimed that the neutral European nations refused to sell munitions not for reasons of morality, but rather because they needed to save them for their own protection.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the United States had an obligation to supply munitions to other nations. Lansing reached this conclusion arguing that since the United States was a nation of peace and did not store a large supply of war materials, she would also depend on the other neutral nations to supply her with arms in order to protect her freedom if ever attacked.<sup>23</sup> These arguments, did little to quiet the nations that were not receiving the benefits of the United States' trade, mainly Germany. A German periodical captures the spirit of the nation. "Are we actually fighting England, France, and Russia, or are we in reality only fighting America . . ." <sup>24</sup>

Germany felt that she had appeased a strangely neutral America long enough. The British were receiving the essential trade needed, and Germany was not.<sup>25</sup> On February 18, 1915, Germany announced unrestricted submarine warfare against England by issuing a blockade. The blockade affected waters surrounding Great Britian, Ireland, and included the English Channel.<sup>26</sup> Germany was hoping to bring the British Empire to her knees by striking at the entire British economy, just as Britian was

trying to do to Germany.<sup>27</sup> The United States issued a warning to the German Ambassador stating that the United States would hold the German government responsible for any American lives lost in such warfare.<sup>28</sup> America tolerated some American lives being lost on British merchant ships, but the Wilson administration had to draw the line when one hundred twenty-eight American citizens lost their lives after a German torpedo struck the British passenger ship, the Lusitania, without warning. President Wilson insisted on writing a harsh response to the German government, a note that forced Bryan to resign because of his uncompromising belief that a letter of such magnitude should not be sent by a country wishing to remain neutral. It is significant that the truly "neutral" Bryan disagreed with Wilson in such a fundamental way. The Germans, meanwhile responded to the American complaint by arguing that the Lusitania was not an ordinary commercial steamer. The German government pointed out that the Lusitania was in fact a ship of war because she was carrying ammunition, reportedly had mounted guns on board, and was given instructions to ram enemy submarines. Germany concluded that British ships could not expect to hid behind American passengers, for safety.<sup>29</sup> A second communication was sent by Lansing claiming that there was no evidence of the ship being armed and that it was foolish even to suggest that a quick-moving submarine was afraid of being rammed by a huge ship.<sup>30</sup> Two weeks later, on July 21st, the United States eased off by sending a third note stating that the Wilson administration would accept U-boat warfare as long as the laws of humanity

were followed and no American lives were lost.<sup>31</sup>

Germany sent instructions to the commanders of the submarines not to sink liners without warning and to provide safe evacuation for the passengers on board unless resistance was offered or efforts were made to escape. However, before all of the captains received their notices, the Arabic was sunk and more Americans lost their lives. Germany accepted full responsibility and paid indemnity for the American lives lost in the attack.<sup>32</sup> Germany watched her actions closely, so as not to reach an encounter with the United States after February 4, 1915.<sup>33</sup>

The whole issue became very important because some historians said that it was the sinking of the Lusitania that caused the neutral policies of the United States to become undermined in two ways. First, the event forced Bryan to resign. The influence he had on the President, being a pacifist, helped the country remain neutral and unbiased. Second, President Wilson appointed Lansing to fill Bryans' position. After the war, Lansing stated he felt America should have joined the allies after the sinking of the Lusitania. Clearly, it was impossible for him to pursue neutrality to the same degree as Bryan.<sup>34</sup>

While the one sided trade to England tended to increase tension with Germany, England began to question the intentions of the United States. The increase tension was a direct result of the expanded American trade to the Latin American countries. Wilson believed that in order to speak with force at any peace negotiations, the economy needed to improve in order to bring the United States up to the strength of other nations. Wilson

rejoiced that the war was making the country a creditor nation for the first time in history.<sup>35</sup> In his speech Wilson proclaimed, "Not only when the war is over, but now, America must take her place in the world of finance and commerce upon a scale that she has never dreamed of before."<sup>36</sup> As early as December 1914, Wilson was urging Congress to fund construction of American ships in order to seize markets that were being abandoned by the European powers fighting in the war.<sup>37</sup> It was becoming obvious that these plans were being made only in American interests and were excluding the rest of the allies. In order to prove the force behind the establishment of these new trade routes notice that in American exports to Brazil in 1915 were \$48,000,000 compared to \$79,000,000 one year later.<sup>38</sup> Congress passed the Merchant Marine Act which Wilson strongly supported. The new law provided funds to build, buy, and own Merchant Ships. It established a government shipping board to operate the government ships and to establish trade routes and rates for all ships with the American flag. Wilson was serious in not allowing British sentiment to hamper the operations. He adopted a method of only appointing anti-British members to the board so that they would be anxious to expand ports.<sup>39</sup> This push for expansion did not go unnoticed by Britian, for in 1916, Col. House, an advisor to President Wilson warned him that the British were beginning to see the United States as way they had viewed the Germans in 1912.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time the United States was in the process of opening up new markets, her economy became very dependent on

the exports purchased by the nations at war. These nations were falling deeper and deeper into debt and their credit was reaching its limit. Questions reappeared over the ban on loans. It was pointed out to the president that if the credits dried up, America would loose business to Canada, Australia, Argentina and elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> Lansing explained the differences between government bonds which are sold on open markets to investors and the agreement available for easy exchange in meeting debts between the United States Government and American Merchants.<sup>42</sup> The latter of the two would allow the merchants to extend the much needed credits to their customers and was quickly implemented.

On August 17, 1915, J.B. Forgan, President of the First National Bank of Chicago, wrote the Wilson Administration asking for the attitude of the government on financing loans to the Allies. Secretary of the Treasury, McAdoo, explained to Wilson that the American economy was dependent on foreign trade and the only way to continue this practice was if it was financed.<sup>43</sup> Wilson was now in a predicament. By allowing credits, the economy had improved. If he were to continue to deny loans then there was a strong possibility that the economy would fall apart, a concept that was unthinkable in Wilson's mind for God's nation. On August 25, 1915, Wilson wrote Lansing, "My opinion in this matter, compendiously stated, is that we should say that parties would take no action either for or against such transaction, but that this should be orally conveyed, so far as we are concerned, and not put in writing."<sup>44</sup>

Although the submarine issue had been suppressed since the sinking of the Arabic the whole issue was opened again when on March 24, 1916, an unarmed French steamer, the Sussex, was torpedoed by a German submarine. The German U-boat commander explained that they fired upon the Sussex because they were unable to determine if she was an armed or unarmed enemy merchant ship.<sup>45</sup> Some Americans drowned shortly after the torpedo struck and the incident forced the Wilson Administration to send the German Government an ultimatum. The Kaiser decided to accept the ultimatum after Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg convinced him not to risk American entry into the war since Germany did not have enough U-boats to maintain a blockade.<sup>46</sup> Because of this incident, Germany promised not to sink any types of merchant ships in the future, without warning. She also made an overwhelming concession to cease her operations of unrestricted submarine warfare against commerce around the British Isles.<sup>47</sup> Even though the Kaiser backed down on this issue, Germany implemented a considerable intensification of her development of U-boat operations.<sup>48</sup>

The risk of attempting unrestricted submarine warfare was so large that Bethmann-Hollweg was not prepared to take action towards implementing it. He hoped to gain time to try to create peace while Germany intensified her U-boat operations. Bethmann-Hollweg hoped that the build up period would give him enough time to create a reasonable peace that would prevent the implementation of unrestricted submarine warfare.<sup>49</sup> The hope for peace negotiations could not have been better between the

United States and Germany. Wilson looked favorably upon Germany for her decision to stop the blockade around the British Isles.<sup>50</sup>

Although relations with Germany were improving the Paris Economic Conference in June of 1916 tended to make peace an unreachable goal. At this meeting the Allies made plans for the future when Germany would be defeated. They planned to exploit indefinitely the Central Powers after the war. This would economically cripple the Central powers.<sup>51</sup> The Allies also planned to use the raw resources of the conquered land for themselves and if anything would be left over it could then go to the United States and other outsiders.<sup>52</sup>

The Paris Economic Conference took Wilson by surprise. After hearing about the plans made at the conference, Wilson began to think that the Allies might be more in his way of establishing a lasting peace than the Germans.<sup>53</sup> He saw the economic ambitions of both sides as a threat to the United States. This conference shattered Wilson's hopes to establish a new world order by serving as a neutral mediator for both sides. Wilson took this realization to heart. He realized that as long as either side had an advantage on the other a campaign for total victory would be launched. Wilson replied to the conference by warning the Allies against holding to peace terms that would cripple some nations such as the Central Powers and embarrass the United States.<sup>54</sup>

Woodrow Wilson began to prepare for a possible conflict with England. Seeing the Royal Fleet as a threat, he pushed for the United States to build the greatest navy in the world. In

this push he did not build anti-submarine boats that were needed to defeat the Germans or even the Japanese fleet, the two countries that more than likely posed the most immediate threat. Wilson rather pushed for surface vessels that he believed would be necessary to defeat the Royal Navy, which Wilson believed to be America's greatest threat.<sup>55</sup>

Wilson's belief that the British posed the strongest threat to the United States was soon challenged by the Germans. By December 1916, the German government began to review the Sussex pledge that they began at the beginning of the year. The Germans accepted this pledge because there were few alternatives open to them since they did not have a sufficient number of submarines to continue the British Blockade.<sup>56</sup> That was months earlier, however, and now that the Germans were near completion with their submarine build up, the situation became much different.

German Military and Naval leaders began to make a common demand in favor of returning to submarine warfare.<sup>57</sup> There were three issues that convinced them that Germany had no other option. First, they realized that the German army could not penetrate the land stalemate and would have to rely on the navy. Second, the Paris Economic Conference raised German sentiment against the Allies on hearing of their plans to nullify the German state after the war. Third, the one sided trade of the United States to their enemies disturbed the German government for it gave large amounts of supplies to the Allies which allowed them to continue a strong defensive.<sup>58</sup>

German concern over trade was valid. Between the years 1911-13 the allied countries purchased \$3,445,000,000 worth of munitions from the United States as compared to \$9,796,000,000 between 1915-1917.<sup>59</sup> Exports of nonwar materials likewise increased dramatically between the years 1914-1917: wheat-683%, flour-205%, sugar-3,883%, and meat-240%.<sup>60</sup> All this added to German feelings against the passive attitudes of their policies and called for a re-examination of their policy. Military and Naval leaders pushed for a German peace with victory because they felt that submarine warfare would promise victory over England.<sup>61</sup> These leaders reached their decision to push for submarine use in 1917 because the Allies had a short wheat crop which would make a blockade all the more successful and Germany now had enough submarines to do the job effectively.<sup>62</sup>

The German Government realized that with the earlier ultimatum of the United States issued after the Sussex crisis, Woodrow Wilson would have little choice but to carry out his threat if Germany renewed submarine warfare.<sup>63</sup> The German government however, decided that it would be worth the chance of American intervention to implement the submarine policy. The Germans concluded that the United States was already pro-Ally because of her trade and therefore all hope of winning over the United States to the Central Powers had vanished.<sup>64</sup> With the German philosophy that their actions would cause the States to join with the Allies, Germany started planning a diversion that would hold the United States out of the war until it was too late to assist the Allies.

One of the German diversions was simply to offer a peace that the Allies would not accept and on their refusal implement full submarine warfare. They hoped it would appear as if the Allies refused a sincere German peace and maybe that the United States would side with Germany and remain neutral.<sup>65</sup> The Kaiser hoped that Wilson would agree with the German peace and force the Allies to stop fighting. If this did not take place, however, then Germany would be forced to resume U-boat warfare.<sup>66</sup> Wilson was in the middle of his re-election campaign when Germany announced her peace proposal, and he refused to respond until after the election. He did not want to be forced into accepting a peace agreement because he felt that a rushed peace would not survive. Woodrow Wilson also wished to postpone peace talks until after his re-election for fear of not being able to speak with force, fearing the chance of not being re-elected.<sup>67</sup>

After Woodrow Wilson was re-elected he continued his efforts to gain peace. Wilson firmly believed that the only peace that would survive would be a negotiated peace settlement.<sup>68</sup> In his efforts to gain peace, Wilson allowed the German Ambassador the use of the government telegraph system in order to communicate with his government so peace negotiations would move quickly. This was a clear violation of American neutrality; however, Wilson justified the German use since it was an effort for peace.<sup>69</sup> On December 21, 1916, Woodrow Wilson asked Germany for her terms for peace. The German government realized that Wilson planned to participate in the peace negotiations and responded to the American request stating that they did not

intend to have the input of the United States at the peace negotiations.<sup>70</sup> Germany responded harshly to Wilson's peace proposal because it felt that the American government was pushing for a peace that would benefit the Allies.<sup>71</sup> Germany, however, believed that the best way to keep the United States neutral was to keep Wilson talking. The Wilson Administration, on the other hand, felt the best way to prevent a return to the German U-boat policy was to keep her at the peace table.<sup>72</sup>

When Germany decided to continue her submarine warfare she felt the United States would break diplomatic relations. Some German officials argued that by the time the United States would be ready to fight, Great Britian would be defeated. Some even felt that a break with the United States would be helpful since she would need supplies for her own troops in training and this would reduce her exports to the Allies. However, it was agreed that the best insurance of keeping the United States out of the European war would be another war in her own hemisphere. Efforts were already taking place to nudge Mexico into a conflict with the United States but now renewed efforts would be adopted to push Mexico.

As early as 1914, Germany had her hand in Mexican politics trying to stir trouble against the United States. Mexico was America's main difficulty in foreign affairs and at the same time was the foreign country with the largest American investments.<sup>73</sup> Wilson, who had a real desire to relieve the exploitation of the Mexican people, felt it was his duty to force the Mexican people from the control of Huerta, who recently gained

power by the assassination of the previous leaders.<sup>74</sup> Huerta resigned after the Veracruz incident, a conflict where the United States embarrassed herself by invading a city over a petty issue.<sup>75</sup> There were many factions of Generals in Mexico, and Germany supported the group that wanted Huerta back in power so he could keep the United States busy while he sought his revenge.<sup>76</sup> The Wilson Administration in the meantime decided to support Carranza by recognizing him as the President of Mexico.<sup>77</sup> After Huerta's death, Germany decided to support Villa who they felt the United States had betrayed by recognizing Carranza. Villa accepted the German offer and made raids across the border, putting much pressure on the Wilson administration to respond to this Mexican threat. Wilson was reluctant to involve the United States in light of the Veracruz incident, but with pressure from the people he received permission from Carranza to send General Pershing after Villa.<sup>78</sup>

Zimmermann, the German Foreign Secretary, sent a telegram to Count von Bernstorff stating the German government's decision to resume unrestricted submarine warfare on February 1 and instructing him not to inform the Wilson Administration until the first day the policy was to go into effect.<sup>79</sup> Also, he was instructed to transmit a top secret message to the Imperial Minister in Mexico.<sup>80</sup> This message contained a proposal asking Mexico to ally with Germany if a conflict should break out between Germany and the United States. This alliance would demand that Mexico attack the States and make a strong effort to enlist Japanese assistance in this cause. In return, the

German government would see that Mexico would have her lost territories of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas returned.<sup>81</sup>

Germany viewed Japan as an important country to gain as an ally, but was having difficulty trying to obtain her cooperation. The German government had learned that Japanese troops were training in Mexico.<sup>82</sup> With this new knowledge, Germany felt that the Mexican government might be the tool needed to persuade the Japanese to become an ally by offering them the control of the Panama Canal.<sup>83</sup> The Germans hoped to recruit the Japanese for two reasons. First, such action would keep the United States occupied by war. Second, it would frighten Russia out of the war by convincing her enemy, Japan, to leave the Alliance.<sup>84</sup>

American relations with Japan were not solid at this time because of the prejudicial treatment the American people were applying to the Japanese living in the country. On two occasions the Japanese Government had protested to the Wilson Administration, and both incidents had been eased by government intervention.<sup>85</sup>

The Japanese issue died down and it was later believed that the Japanese were more concerned with opportunist motives than open aggression.<sup>86</sup>

When Zimmermann sent his telegram, the German government was unaware that the British had broken their code and were tapping the cable. His vital message was intercepted and placed in a pile with the rest of the messages waiting to be decoded. After it was translated, a problem arose about how to pass the telegram on to the Wilson Administration without

letting it out that the British had deciphered the German code, a breakthrough that could not be jeopardized.<sup>87</sup> The British knew that this message was the ticket to bring the United States into the war and searched for a method to release the information. A decision was reached that the information would be transmitted through the American Embassy office in London so that the Message would be accepted as being authentic. The content of the telegram was soon given to Ambassador Page and he relayed it to Washington. The code book was brought over to the Embassy to assure Page of its authenticity.<sup>88</sup> Page explained to Washington that if proof were needed, they could simply check the past incoming telegrams to Bernstorff or go through the Western Union office to find the telegram that Bernstorff relayed to Mexico.

When the telegram from Page reached Washington it was received by Polk, the acting Secretary of State while Lansing was out. Polk was furious after reading the telegram for it soon became clear to him that all the past weeks when Germany had been negotiating peace had been only a game in order to buy time to prepare for the submarine policy.<sup>89</sup> Wilson was also outraged when he realized that the cable he had made available for the Germans to negotiate peace was actually being used to plot a war against the United States. Part of his anger was probably also caused by his embarrassment in knowing that the British knew he was breaking neutrality by allowing the Germans the use of the cable.<sup>90</sup>

Wilson instructed Polk to inform the American Ambassador to

Mexico of the situation and have him approach Carranza asking for his position. He also addressed Congress urging them to establish a law to arm merchant ships in hopes that this move might frighten Germany. Furthermore, Wilson decided to allow the information contained in the telegram to be published in the papers.<sup>91</sup>

The newspapers jumped at the opportunity of publishing such a controversial story. They soon began spreading across the country like fire and as the Americans read of the German threat, they steamed. Previously, the American sentiment over the war varied in different parts of the nation. The citizens that lived in the heartlands really could not relate to the loss of American lives on British steamers, nor could pro-German Americans who maintained that people should have had more sense than to travel on a British vessel in the middle of the war.<sup>92</sup>

Controversy arose when people began to wonder if the Mexican plot was nothing more than a British lie trying to draw the country into the war. However, this question was answered by Zimmermann himself, who admitted that he was the author.<sup>93</sup> The German government always counted on the German-American population to help their cause, but after Zimmermann made it clear that the German government was truly striking against the United States German-Americans became pro-American.<sup>94</sup> This news about the German threat tended to unify the American people more and more as it became clear that it was a slap in the face and that the German government was a definite threat to the

United States.<sup>95</sup>

On January 31, 1917, Bernstorff informed Lansing of Germany's intent to continue submarine warfare. This notice surprised the Wilson Administration because it had anticipated a continuation to come much later. Since the administration had been informed by its advisors that the North Sea and the North Atlantic would be dangerous for submarines during the winter months.<sup>96</sup> As a result of this notice, President Wilson broke relations with Germany, on February 3, 1917. Trying desperately to avoid war, Wilson informed Congress that if no American ships were sunk or lives lost the German policy of submarine warfare would be accepted.<sup>97</sup>

With the diplomatic relations of America and Germany at loose ends, Zimmerman on February 5 sent a message urging the German Ambassador to Mexico, Eckhardt, not to wait until war broke out but to approach the Mexican Government as soon as possible.<sup>98</sup> Shortly before Eckhardt contacted Carranza, the relationship of Mexico and the United States tended to improve with the withdrawal of General Pershing's expedition.<sup>97</sup> When the American Ambassador approached the Mexican government, they seemed to be very uncooperative, denying knowledge of the telegram.<sup>100</sup> At the same time that the American Ambassador was meeting dead ends, Zimmermann was also running out of patience trying to finalize an alliance between Germany and Mexico.<sup>101</sup> The commotion over the telegram tended to frighten Carranza and on April 14 he telegraphed Zimmermann stating Mexico's wish to remain neutral.<sup>102</sup>

Meanwhile, debate was taking place in Congress over the President's request to arm merchant ships. Time ran out for Congress before a decision could be made. Woodrow Wilson decided to order all merchant ships to be armed later during the month of March. <sup>103</sup>

By the year 1917, President Wilson had reached the conclusion that neither side would accept peace as long as a slight hope existed for them to triumph. He felt that both sides were a threat to the United States and other smaller nations as long as they strove for a war of revenge. <sup>104</sup>

Wilson realized that after the Paris Economic Conference he would not be able to work hand in hand with the British. He started to contemplate a strategy to force the English to drop their selfish plans and accept his plan if the United States would ever go to war.

The German plans to become self sufficient frightened Wilson and forced him to do everything in his power to prevent this from happening. This threat continued to grow stronger with the German seizure of a Romanian oil field and other key territories. <sup>105</sup>

Wilson concluded that in order to lead the United States to a position that would enable her to enforce a new world order, he would have to allow both sides to weaken each other while America waited and saved her strength. He believed that if America could retain her strong economy then she would definitely be in the position necessary to establish a new world order. <sup>106</sup>

On March 19, 1917, Woodrow Wilson became excited over the news of the overthrow of the Czar and the establishment of the parliamentary Kerrensky government. This revolution tended to change Wilson's outlook on war because he felt that it could now become a war to save democracy.<sup>107</sup>

Shortly after three American ships--The City of Memphis, Illinois, and Vigilancia had been torpedoed, Woodrow Wilson decided to ask Congress to declare war with Germany, which it did on April 2, 1917.<sup>108</sup>

Before concluding, it is necessary for the reader to understand a little about the actions Woodrow Wilson pursued during the war years. One of the most important was the fact that Wilson placed trade expansion above supplying aid to the Allies.<sup>109</sup> This practice is clearly seen by examining the United States' exports to the Latin American countries between the years 1916-1919. In 1916 the United States exported \$490,000,000 worth of supplies to the Latin American countries, an amount that increased to \$940,000,000 in 1919.<sup>110</sup> Not only did Wilson expand trade but he also continued to withhold needed military, maritime, and financial aid to the Allies, thus forcing them to grow weaker.<sup>111</sup> Although Wilson allowed the Allies to become feeble, it was never to the extent of allowing a German victory. If the threat of a German triumph was at hand, Wilson would rescue the Allies with American contributions.<sup>112</sup> The President also viewed the Royal Navy, as a possible threat to the United States in the future years and allowed it to be weakened by refusal to destroy the German fleet and by not

providing the British with much needed anti-submarine boats.<sup>113</sup>  
These actions allow us to understand that Wilson was pursuing a policy of self interest.

Woodrow Wilson was determined to lead the peace negotiations in order to establish a new world order that would nurture peace, with America as the overseer. When he realized that he would not be able to accomplish this as a neutral country, he began to abandon his past position and adopt one that would satisfy his interests. After learning the motives of the Allies, hearing their plans at the Paris Economic Conference, and receiving the break through that occurred with the Zimmermann telegram, Wilson decided that the United States needed to force each side to accept his terms. The Zimmermann Telegram allowed Wilson to enter the war with the American people in full support. The increase of trade allowed him to use America's economy as a weapon. With these two forces, Wilson entered the war with the Allies in order to bring both countries to negotiate a peaceful agreement. He believed this agreement would rearrange the present world order and instate a situation where peace would have an opportunity to flourish.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>William Bullitt and Sigmund Freud, Thomas Woodrow Wilson, A Psychological Study, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 74.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>5</sup>Harley Netter, The origins of the Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson, (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1965), p. 501.

<sup>6</sup>Bullitt and Freud, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup>Notter, p. 325.

<sup>8</sup>Charles A. Beard, The Devil Theory of War, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1936), p. 33.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>11</sup>Charles Tansill, America Goes to War, (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1938), p. 64.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>15</sup>Beard, p. 40.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>18</sup>Tansill, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>20</sup>Edward H. Buehrig, Woodrow Wilson and the Balance of Power, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), p. 86,

<sup>21</sup>Tansill, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 59.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 60.
- <sup>25</sup>Buehrig, p. 90.
- <sup>26</sup>Daniel M. Smith, American Intervention, 1917: Sentiment, Self-Interest, or Ideals? (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), p. 91.
- <sup>27</sup>Buehrig, p. 90.
- <sup>28</sup>Smith, p. 91.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 105.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 112.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 94.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 120.
- <sup>33</sup>Karl E. Birnbaum, Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare, (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell, 1958), p. 328.
- <sup>34</sup>Herbert J. Bass, America's Entry Into World War I, (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 53.
- <sup>35</sup>Edward B. Parsons, Wilsonian Diplomacy, (Saint Louis: Forum Press, 1978), p. 7.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 8.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 7.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 9.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 9.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 14.
- <sup>41</sup>Beard, p. 44.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 52.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 56.
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 58.
- <sup>45</sup>Smith, p. 142.
- <sup>46</sup>Bass, p. 57. In Germany at this time there were two forces struggling for control. One was the civilian government of

Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg who favored a political policy that moved very carefully and diplomatically. The other was the naval military element which favored extreme military policy without concern for the diplomatic result.

<sup>47</sup>Birnbaum, p. 329.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>51</sup>Parsons, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>53</sup>Bullitt and Freud, p. 18.

<sup>54</sup>Parsons, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>56</sup>Arthur S. Link, Wilson the Diplomatist, (New York: New Viewpoints, 1957), p. 74.

<sup>57</sup>Birnbaum, p. 328.

<sup>58</sup>Link, p. 74.

<sup>59</sup>Buehrig, p. 88.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>61</sup>Birnbaum, p. 338.

<sup>62</sup>Link, p. 78.

<sup>63</sup>Smith, p. 142.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>65</sup>Birnbaum, p. 330.

<sup>66</sup>Barbara W. Tuchman, The Zimmermann Telegram, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. 120

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>70</sup>Birnbaum, p. 333.

<sup>71</sup>Tuchman, p. 126.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

- 97 Link, p. 82.
- 98 Tuchman, p. 152.
- 99 Ibid., p. 152.
- 100 Ibid., p. 173.
- 101 Ibid., p. 188.
- 102 Ibid., p. 195.
- 103 Ibid., p. 196.
- 104 Parsons, p. 5.
- 105 Ibid., p. 3.
- 106 Ibid., p. 6.
- 107 Tuchman, p. 196.
- 108 Parsons, p. 60.
- 109 Ibid., p. 70.
- 110 Ibid., p. 47.
- 111 Ibid., p. 2.
- 112 Ibid., p. 2.
- 113 Ibid., p. 14.

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