

PARTICIPATING IN THE WORLD: SELECT AMERICAN PRESS COVERAGE OF
UNITED STATES INTERNATIONALISM, 1918-1923

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the internationalist message in news coverage and editorial commentary of a select group of American newspapers in the last throes and years immediately after World War I. Some historians have misinterpreted this period as a “return” to isolationist sentiments throughout America. However, the articles and editorials in these papers presented a message that America was still concerned with the happenings of the world and willing to participate in ascertaining solutions to the problems confronting Europeans as well as other peoples around the globe. The first chapter looks at the late stages of the war through the Senate’s rejection of the Versailles Treaty. These papers initially presented a message of hope that the war could become the last war in history, spearheaded by President Wilson’s Fourteen Point program. However, these hopes were dashed when the Fourteen Points were largely overlooked in the treaty. In the ensuing fight between the administration and the treaty’s dissenters there were no threats of isolating the country from world affairs. According to these sources, those proposing reservations to the treaty were unwilling to commit the country to the League of Nations because they believed the League to be a permanent military alliance that violated the Constitution. The second chapter examines how the debate over the treaty and League membership became significant issues throughout 1920, reaching a climax with the presidential election in November. This section focuses on the coverage of Senator Harding’s message of continued U.S. international participation throughout the campaign. The coverage from these papers regarding the international affairs of and events during the Harding administration is investigated in the final chapter. This chapter focuses heavily on the reactions to the Washington Conference of 1921-1922 which established international naval arms limitations. Harding and his policies enjoyed significant popular support from many of these

papers because they believed he established a lasting peace. Throughout this period, the editorials and news coverage in these papers presented U.S. leaders as actively participating in global affairs rather than proposing the country step back from a leadership position in the world.

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Dedication

For Rachel, whose patience with and love for me is my life's greatest treasure.

INTRODUCTION

It is common that in some history textbooks that United States foreign policy after the First World War to be characterized as isolationist. Dennis Sherman and Joyce Salisbury, in their authoritative Western Civilization textbook *The West in the World* (2001), contend that after the Treaty of Versailles had been presented to Congress President Wilson “failed to persuade the isolationist American Senate to ratify the peace accords and join the League [of Nations]. What little faith Great Britain and France had in Wilson’s ideas quickly disappeared.”¹ John McKay, Bennett Hill, and John Buckler assert in their survey *A History of Western Society* (1995) that in the aftermath of the Senate’s rejection of the Versailles Treaty “America turned its back on Europe.”² Some scholars, especially from but not limited to the post-World War Two era, have created what historian Alan Brinkley has termed the “myth of isolationism” to characterize the sentiments of United States policy makers as well as the public at large after the First World War.³ This study, based on a survey of several different American newspapers, agrees with Brinkley’s characterization and argues that many in the press presented no overwhelming sense of isolationism in the nation. In fact significant exemplars in the American press, in the last throes of the war and soon afterward, exhibited a significant interest in political, military, and social events abroad. Newspapers from different regions of the country and

¹ Dennis Sherman and Joyce Salisbury, *The West in the World*, Updated Second Edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2001, 2004, 2006), 756. Other textbooks have this same general presentation; *see also* Marvin Perry et al, *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics & Society*, Fourth Edition (Boston and Toronto: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), 797.

² John P. McKay, Bennett D. Hill and John Buckler, *A History of Western Society*, Fifth Edition (Boston and Toronto: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 929. The entire piece on the development on American isolationism can be found on pages 927-930.

³ Alan Brinkley, *American History: A Survey, Vol. II: Since 1865*, Eleventh Edition (Boston: McGraw Hill Co., 2003), 730.

reflecting varying partisan biases present a nation deeply intrigued with, concerned about, and supportive of United States participation in international affairs.

When did this myth of isolationism become such a mainstay of American history? The theme of American isolationist has appeared regularly in American diplomatic, social, and political historiography since the 1920s. However, the myth of isolationism took on new significance in both academia and popular memory in the post-World War Two era. During this period historians, reflecting the times in which they were writing, began to see the United States' refusal to sign the Treaty of Versailles and join the League of Nations as the beginning of the destabilization of international politics that led to World War Two. For example, historian Selig Adler claimed in 1957 that "the isolationists have been willing to gamble on the destruction of friendly countries, preferring to fight only when confronted with immediate danger" while believing that the U.S. "can best serve the world by going-it-alone."⁴ Adler time and again returned to the idea that if the United States did not participate in world affairs in an assertive and preemptive manner then it would be impossible to stabilize the world political system. The collective security that Adler desired was not achieved after the First World War supposedly because isolationists in the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles or authorize joining the League of Nations, thus leading to another world war.

Historians during this period were not just concerned with military affairs; some scholars revisited economic affairs from the post-World War One era. In his book *The Revolution in World Trade and American Economic Policy* (1957), Samuel Lubell asserted that a return to "isolationist" ways of conducting economic relations through the gold standard, tariffs, and other policies precipitated the economic failure of the late 1920s and 1930s. He held that international

⁴ Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth-Century Reaction* (New York: Abelard-Schuman Limited, 1957), 29.

economic cooperation ought to be the “paramount concern of all Americans” because it was crucial to “strategic survival.”⁵ According to Lubell, without economic leadership, technological innovation, and military commitment, the United States would surely repeat the errors which led to World War Two.

This perception has not been unique to the work of American scholars. European historians also adopted the idea that isolation overtook America after the First World War and led to the outbreak of World War Two. In *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1952* (1955), British historian H.C. Allen opened a chapter titled “Isolationism (1921-1939)” by stating:

The policy of the United States between 1921 and 1937 may be described as one of deliberate withdrawal from the affairs of the world. If President Wilson had succeeded in one thing, it was convincing the American people that they had entered the war for moral reasons, so that when they repudiated him and all his works they naturally reverted with great fervour to their traditional belief that Europe, and European politics in particular, constituted a hopeless sink of antiquity which American were very fortunate to be clear of. They shook its dust off their feet with gladness and vowed never to become embroiled in its affairs again.⁶

The author went on to downplay or ignore the Harding administration’s involvement in European economic and military affairs. Allen claimed that the only way to avert international political instability was to promote strong Anglo-American cooperation, unlike what happened in the wake of the First World War. This failure, in Allen’s view, caused the instability that led to the rise of totalitarian leaders who threatened global security.⁷

However, not all historians have followed the track set out by these post-World War Two scholars. William Appleman Williams criticized the myth of American isolationism in his study

⁵ Samuel Lubell, *The Revolution in World Trade and American Economic Policy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1955), 10 & 27.

⁶ H.C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1952* (New York: St. Martin’s Press Inc., 1955), 724.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 788-794.

The Tragedy of American Foreign Policy (1955). Williams asserted that the myth, or “legend” as he termed it, of isolationism “not only deforms the history of the decade from 1919 to 1930, but it also twists the story of American entry into World War II and warps the record of the cold war.”⁸ Keenly, Williams also recognized that there were far more complex reasons for rejecting the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations than simple isolationism. He contended that it was various groups disagreeing over, among other things, the military commitment attached to the League of Nations in Article X that led to the rejection of the Versailles Treaty. This study was in opposition to previous accounts, which alleged that it was a single isolationist group of considerable size that was in absolute opposition to internationalism.⁹

Williams’s argument has remained relevant into the twenty-first century, partly because other historians continued to perpetuate the isolationist myth. *The Pursuit of Isolationism in the United States Senate from Versailles to Pearl Harbor* (1982) by Thomas N. Guinsburg was one such study. Guinsburg altered the argument for isolationism by claiming that the isolationists were a minority in the U.S. Senate but that they used a:

...series of campaigns that exploited all available opportunities. They provided the persuasive rhetoric, articulated the ideological bases of support, and capitalized on regional, ethnic, and partisan resentments to garner vital support from colleagues lacking deep isolationist convictions.¹⁰

The main problem with this argument is that it places all the rationale for major political decisions in a very small group within the U.S. Senate (13 Senators at best). Also, Guinsburg claims that isolationism prevailed throughout the entire thirteen-year period between Woodrow Wilson’s and Franklin Roosevelt’s terms as President. This argument is misleading in light of

⁸ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1959, 1962 & 1972), 110.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 111-118.

¹⁰ Thomas N. Guinsburg, *The Pursuit of Isolationism in the United States Senate from Versailles to Pearl Harbor* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1982), 18.

the Washington Naval Conference that established armament limitation agreements between Great Britain, Japan and the United States, as well as regulations for maintenance of open trade for all nations with China. It was also during these years that the Republican administrations reached out to the nations of Europe with economic aid strategies in the Dawes and Young Plans, which sought to alleviate the problems surrounding reparation payments from the former Central Powers to France, Great Britain, and the other Allied powers. Each of these negotiations brought the leaders of Europe and the U.S. together to negotiate very important international issues. Guinsburg, finally, covers and blurs the differences between two very distinct and dissimilar eras in American history, the post-World War I boom and the era of the Great Depression and the New Deal.

The myth of isolationism (or at least of the power of the few isolationists within the Senate) persisted. In *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (1987), Michael Hunt, for example, argued that President Wilson faced opposition to the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations on multiple fronts. Yet Hunt gave a large amount of credit to the very small group of isolationists or “irreconcilables” in Congress. Hunt failed to give due attention to the Republican leaders in the Senate, such as Henry Cabot Lodge, Elihu Root, and Philander Knox, who led the opposition to the treaty because they disagreed with the method of employing American power overseas, not because they wanted to keep the U.S. isolated from the world. The isolationists, both Republican and Democratic were in such a minority that they played a relatively insignificant role in the actual rejection of the Treaty of Versailles. Hunt also alleged that the nation rejected both Wilson and internationalism with Warren Harding’s landslide election as

president in 1920.¹¹ The 1920 election is often misinterpreted by historians because of the lopsided victory for the Republicans (61 percent of the popular vote went to Harding) and the rejection of the Treaty of Versailles, but Harding's campaign had an internationalist message, too. Once elected, Harding and a number of his cabinet members worked tirelessly and publicly for increased U.S. participation overseas, particularly in Europe and East Asia.

Ronald Powaski's *Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism, Internationalism, and Europe, 1901-1950* (1991) extended the myth into the post-Cold War era. Powaski claimed that Wilson's inability to command the political situation in the United States "made possible the return to American isolationism after the war."¹² In the second chapter, titled "Republican Isolationism, 1921-1933," Powaski asserted that the Harding administration intended to participate in international affairs more actively than it actually did. He held that the Harding administration failed to engage the world more fully because they feared that Congress would attack them vigorously and perhaps cause serious problems for their domestic agenda. Powaski alleged that the Washington Conference did little for European security and was a half-hearted measure to exercise American power in foreign relations.¹³ However, the duration or ultimate effectiveness of such agreements should not serve as measure of American sentiments during this period. In fact, as we will see, the Washington Naval Conference received a good deal of press coverage and was widely viewed as a positive international engagement on the part of the Harding administration. Powaski disregarded the importance of the conference as a means

¹¹ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Connecticut and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 135-138. Hunt also failed to consider that Cox was a very weak compromise candidate because the other Democratic candidates had knocked each other out of the race.

¹² Ronald E. Powaski, *Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism, Internationalism, and Europe, 1901-1950* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1991), 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

of setting international limits on costly armaments. In this interpretation there is also the risk of equating an effort to diminish war with isolationism, which would be an unfortunate mistake.

More recent studies of the war, Woodrow Wilson, the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations, and their legacies have returned to William Appleman Williams's interpretation of post-World War One isolationism as a myth. Thomas Fleming's *Illusion of Victory* (2003) and Thomas Knock's *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (1992) are studies that more accurately depict the complex arguments of Republicans who stood against the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations. In these works, the authors identify the various disagreements that Republican Senators Henry Cabot Lodge, Hiram Johnson, William Borah, and others had concerning encroachments on American sovereignty, particularly Congressional powers to declare war. Fleming and Knock present the United States as both accepting of its new role as a leader in world affairs and unwilling to sacrifice national interests to secure the economic and military security of European nations.¹⁴ These studies are a far cry from arguing that the United States embraced isolationism in the wake of the First World War.

This study builds on the work of historians, like Fleming and Knock, who take issue with the isolationist myth. As mentioned above, this project examines news coverage of U.S. international policy in the late war and post-war periods. The primary sources used for this study include the *New York Times*, *New York Herald*, *New York World*, *Kansas City Star*, *San Francisco Examiner* and *Los Angeles Times*. These newspapers represent not just a sampling from different regions but also competing political, market, and, in some instances, personal rivalries. These cases suggest that both intra-region and inter-regional news coverage applauded internationalism.

¹⁴ Thomas Fleming, *The Illusion of Victory: America in World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 449-470 and Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 232-240.

New York City was the main American distribution point for European news at this time. The telegraph cables that conveyed the news from mainland Europe to the United States went through London to New York. Access to the lines permitted the papers in New York to cover European news first. It was also common for smaller papers around the country to republish stories from the New York papers or the Associated Press in order to provide their readers with international news.¹⁵ Within this larger market with various newspapers, there were significant differences in partisan biases and competition between the *New York Times*, *New York Herald* and *New York World*, with each publishing its own perspective on the events of the day.

Historians Thomas Fleming and David Halberstam consider The *New York Times* one of the least biased news sources in the city at the time, but its editorial commentary was favorable to the Democrats, particularly with respect to Wilson's international policies.¹⁶ The *New York World* was regarded as a staunch voice for the Wilson administration. According to Fleming, the principal rival of the *Times* was the *New York Herald*, which during this period merged with or bought outright the *Sun*, *New York Tribune* and other papers, thus increasing its circulation. The *Herald* was a Republican paper, but largely put partisan issues aside once the U.S. entered the Great War. However, it resumed its pro-Republican stance as disagreements arose over the Treaty of Versailles and U.S. membership in the League of Nations.¹⁷

The *Kansas City Star* – and its morning edition, the *Kansas City Times* – provides a point of view from the Midwest. The *Star* was recognized as a leading regional paper with a large

¹⁵ Si Sheppard, *The Partisan Press: A History of Media Bias in the United States* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2008), 196-201 & 216-221.

¹⁶ Fleming, *The Illusion of Victory*, 181 and David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 210-214. Under the direction of Adolph Ochs, the *Times* became one of the most reputable papers nationwide and made significant strides in instituting objectivity standards in news reporting.

¹⁷ Fleming, *The Illusion of Victory*, 179 and Halberstam, *The Powers That Be*, 213-214. Halberstam claims that in the post-World War I era that the *Times* and *Herald* (later in the 1920s, the *Herald-Tribune*) widened their positions as most dominant news sources in New York.

circulation during this period.¹⁸ It had to balance regional political allegiances between Democrats, Republicans, and Populists, making its bias much less narrow than those of other papers. However, it is fair to suggest that the *Star* leaned toward the Republican Party at this time. The *Star* had consistently published editorials and commentary from President Theodore Roosevelt throughout the war and even ran material from him found after he died in 1919.¹⁹ The *Star*'s bias is perhaps best described during this period as progressive Republican.

In comparison to the east coast papers in this study, western newspapers were equally biased in their news coverage. Two important California papers demonstrated starkly opposed allegiances and interests. The *San Francisco Examiner* was the first paper owned by William Randolph Hearst and remained the west coast headquarters for his newspaper empire during the 1910s and 1920s.²⁰ Hearst was an adamant Democrat and his papers supported President Wilson vigorously throughout his time in office up until the post-war period in which the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations became volatile issues across the country. Hearst, while still supporting the Democratic Party, sided with those opposing permanent European alliances, which they viewed as unnecessary entanglements with European powers. The *Examiner* became the opposition press to Wilsonian Democrats. The paper regularly featured editorials from Republicans well-known in California and national politics, to gather support against agreeing to the Treaty of Versailles and membership in the League of Nations.

¹⁸ The *Kansas City Star*, under the ownership of the Nelson family during this period, published the *Kansas City Times* as well as two editions of the *Star* Mondays through Saturdays, with two weekly editions for Kansas and Missouri customers on Wednesdays and a single edition on Sundays during this period. For clarity, when I cite articles from the *Times* in this paper I will refer to them in the text as from the *Kansas City Star* even though the citation will identify the *Times* as the source.

¹⁹ Fleming, *Illusion of Victory*, 329.

²⁰ To call Hearst an isolationist, as many historians have, would have to discount his role in the Spanish American War with the Yellow Press and many other claims he made in his lifetime about U.S. involvement in foreign countries, particularly Latin American nations. Also, the *Examiner* regularly ran editorial commentary from Hearst which espoused his opposition to the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations but did not supporting isolationism.

The *Los Angeles Times* provides a counterbalance to the *Examiner* in this study. At the beginning of the war in 1914 the paper was published by Harrison Gray Otis. Otis was a living legend because of his participation in the Republican convention that had nominated Abraham Lincoln for president in 1860, his service in the Civil War, and his volunteer service in the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902. After the war he was referred to affectionately as “General Otis.” Before his death in July 1917, Otis passed formal control of the paper to his son-in-law, Harry Chandler. According to historian Dennis McDougal, under Chandler the *Times* was the unfettered cheerleader of the “Republican Oligarchy” in Los Angeles and the party throughout the nation. Chandler made enemies with William Randolph Hearst and any other political force seeking to take power away from the Republican Party in California. At the beginning of the war in 1914 both Otis and Chandler were supporters of U.S. intervention into Europe affairs before the country entered the war, even crossing party lines to support President Wilson in reaching out to the Central Powers for lasting peace. After the war, however, partisan hostility resumed between Chandler and his in-state publishing and political rivals.²¹ The *Times* launched an assault on Hearst accusing him of being a German operative during the war. Though nothing came of these claims, the event shows the hostility between the two papers.

These newspapers suggest that isolationism did not permeate American society between 1918 and 1923. This study focuses on them in three sections, each of which deals with a specific issue as America made its transition into its new role as a world power in international affairs. The first main chapter examines the initial release of President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, which highlighted his formula for lasting world peace in January 1919 and how the press came to expect the Fourteen Points to be an outcome of the war. When the Fourteen Points

²¹ Dennis McDougal, *Privileged Son: Otis Chandler and the Rise and Fall of the L.A. Times Dynasty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Perseus Publishing, 2001), 84-87.

“program” was mostly overlooked as Wilson and other Allied leaders largely made the terms of the Treaty of Versailles a conquerors’ settlement, the press became less enthusiastic about the outcome of the war. This section also examines how overwhelming media optimism about the future of world peace with Wilson at the helm gradually faded upon learning of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. However, these diminished hopes in parts of the press did not immediately turn into general rejection of the treaty or membership in the League of Nations. The chapter concludes with the Treaty of Versailles’s fate in the U.S. Senate. The newspapers examined in this study suggest that the Senate ultimately rejected the treaty not because of isolationist sentiments but because “reservationist” Senators, led by Republican Senator Lodge, had a different notion of the president’s ability to commit military support for international conflicts without the approval of Congress. The conflict between the reservationist Republicans, whose willingness to accept the treaty might have been resurgent had Wilson accepted revisions to it, and the administration were also exacerbated by the stubbornness of President Wilson.

The second chapter opens with the ratification of the Treaty by the European powers and subsequent efforts to resurrect the peace plan in the Senate in early 1920. It then examines the 1920 presidential race between Democratic candidate James Cox and Republican nominee Warren Harding. The Treaty of Versailles, its ratification, and membership in the League of Nations became pivotal issues in the election, which was an overwhelming electoral success for the Republican Party across the country. Historical accounts frequently describe the 1920 election as a victory of isolationism over Wilsonian internationalism, but this was not the case. As the election reached its climax, the newspapers used in this study published stories and editorials presenting the differing internationalist messages of the two candidates. When Americans went to the polls in November, they were not choosing between internationalism and

isolationism, but between two distinct visions of where and how the United States would participate in the post-war world.

The third section examines the Harding administration's international negotiations that received significant media interest. This section pays particular attention to the Washington Conference that took place between November 1921 and February 1922. The Washington Conference, guided by Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, confirms that the Harding administration was not isolationist in its approach to foreign relations.²² At the conference the United States took the reins of international discussions on an unprecedented scale by gathering world powers in hopes of reaching a general agreement on naval arms limitations. Many in the press viewed the call for arms reductions and limitations as the most effective way to limit the possibility of future wars and to reduce their scope if they did break out. The vast majority of the coverage of the Washington Conference by these papers reveals clear support for an administration that appeared to be untroubled about taking the lead in negotiations with many other nations in hopes of deterring another war. This section concludes with the Paris Conference in January 1923 as the focus of U.S. involvement in European affairs turned away from military discussions and arms reductions toward financial and economic concerns, a process that led to the Dawes and Young Plans later in the 1920s.

Although Wilsonian internationalism was rebuffed by both the Senate and segments of the press in the years after the First World War, this study shows that it is a mistake to assume that the United States adopted an isolationist posture during this period. It also suggests that, even when critical of measures taken by President Wilson, elements of the media did not think of

²² Hughes was the Republican presidential candidate in 1916. The Republican Party platform in 1916 was built against President Wilson's unwillingness to intervene in the European war sooner. Hughes was an ardent supporter of a strong US foreign policy and was named Harding's Secretary of State especially for this reason, in Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920 -1941* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 14-16.

themselves as isolationists. The U.S. continued to increase its global participation during this period by actively pursuing its national trade and security objectives abroad, even with Harding's refusal to join the League of Nations. Although the government was not prepared to make what many leaders believed to be overreaching sacrifices of self-interest by joining an association of nations with a preventative and permanent military commitment, the papers examined in this study remained confident in the country's position as one of the foremost commercial and military powers actively seeking to preserve peace throughout the world.

CHAPTER 1 - From Optimism to Outrage: The Fourteen Points and the Rejection of the Treaty of Versailles

In January 1918, the United States had been at war with Imperial Germany for nearly nine months. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson had previously extended peace overtures to both Entente and Alliance powers since the war's outbreak in 1914, but he had not made such a proposition since the U.S. entered the conflict on the side of the Allies in April 1917. In the preceding months there had been increased governmental communication for peace negotiations coming out of Great Britain while Soviet Russia was preparing to agree to a separate peace agreement with Germany.²³ After four years of war in Europe, ending the war was certainly on the minds of the citizens of many countries. Wilson joined in these peace efforts with the declaration of America's war objectives in the Fourteen Points. The Fourteen Points proposal was well received by many American newspapers and these papers encouraged a belief that Wilson would guide the world into a lasting peace. When Wilson's Fourteen Points were largely disregarded by the Allies in the writing of the Treaty of Versailles, some hope for a lasting peace dwindled, but the rejection of the treaty by the Senate in November 1919 was not due to the abandonment of the Fourteen Points or a growing desire for isolation from the happenings of the world. The treaty and U.S. membership in the League of Nations were rejected in November primarily because of President Wilson's unwillingness to accept any of the reservations that Senators had proposed to the pact.

²³ From the "October Revolution" in November 1917, which solidified Bolshevik control of the Russian government, through December 1922, Russia and the surrounding territories were formally called the United Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (USFSR). In December of 1922, the various Soviet councils came together to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), also known as the Soviet Union. For the purpose of consistency throughout this work both the USFSR and the USSR will be referred to as Soviet Russia.

The peace plan which the President thought a lasting peace could be brought about was initially received by the press with a sense of enthusiasm and hope. The hope in the papers was for a lasting peace around the world, with a belief that the Great War could be the war to end all wars. The *San Francisco Examiner* proclaimed: “Wilson Defines U.S. Terms for World Peace.” In the article, the paper proclaimed the “14 Conditions Wilson Names as [the] Only Peace Basis.”²⁴ An editorial in the *Kansas City Star* held that these terms differed from what Wilson had proposed in earlier addresses, most notably the “peace without victory” speech given in January 1917. The *Star* reported that “The program removes the chief provocations to war.... This pronouncement should be...understood as one of war aims rather than peace aims.”²⁵ Sections of the media praised the President’s peace program, and noted that it was gathering global attention. The recognition Wilson received in the public and in the press appeared to give him a reputation not only as an advocate for Allied victory but also as a spokesman for a just and lasting world peace.

The news coverage of the Fourteen Points also highlighted the growing desire that the Allies unify their objectives and prevent Soviet Russia from agreeing to a separate peace. The *San Francisco Examiner* reported that according to sources obtained from a number of foreign ministries “no other incident of the war has so solidified the allies as has to-day’s address.”²⁶ The *Los Angeles Times* wrote that Wilson’s speech came at the exact “psychological moment” when the world needed leadership to unify the Allied cause and deter the “resumption of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations by the Russians” with Germany.²⁷ Fear was growing in some of the

²⁴ “Wilson Defines U.S. Terms for World Peace; Germany’s Challenge to Russia Answered,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 9 January 1918, 1.

²⁵ “America’s War Aims: A Program of Fourteen Articles,” *Kansas City Star*, 8 January 1918, 1.

²⁶ “Wilson Puts Solidarity into Allied Ranks,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 9 January 1918, 2. When quoting sources directly, the original text as it appeared in the sources, even when grammar and spelling are incorrect by contemporary standards is left altered.

²⁷ “America’s War Aims in Definite Terms,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 January 1918, 1-2.

newspapers examined here that other nations would sue for a separate peace if the Russians did indeed bow out of the war with terms that appeared reasonable. Though reviving the Russian war effort under the Bolshevik leadership never materialized, these papers expressed a belief that Wilson's message could have rallied the Russian people back into the fight.

Questions persisted about the increasing threat to democracy posed by the authoritarian regimes in Germany and Soviet Russia, along with increased censorship and secrecy in the Allied nations. In response to these concerns the *New York Herald* declared in its headline that all Americans should "Hail [the] President's Message as [the] Model of Democracy." The *Herald* reported that leaders of other countries were ignoring their responsibility to the democratic principles that they claimed to have because they would not state their war aims to the public as President Wilson had in the Fourteen Points. The article held that British labor groups along with the peoples of other nations were adopting the principles of the Fourteen Points and demanding of their leaders the same type of transparency that Wilson had demonstrated. Claiming that American principles, as expressed by President Wilson, were superior to those of other countries, the *Herald* urged European countries to become more like the United States.²⁸

With unity within the Allied ranks remaining an important issue in the press, several of these newspapers also claimed that the major U.S. political parties were in agreement with the President's statement as well. The *New York Herald* reported, "If there remained any doubt of the complete approval with which the country has received the message it has now been dissipated. All political parties and all sections of the country have hailed the President's statement with acclamation."²⁹ Nonpartisanship, or at least the semblance of it, was crucial to

²⁸ "British Labor Men Greet President's Speech," *New York Herald*, 10 January 1918, 1-2.

²⁹ "Peace for Germans, Defiance to Kaiser, The Wilson Message," *New York Herald*, 10 January 1918, sec. 2, p. 1.

the promotion of Wilson's message. Astonishingly, even the *Herald*, a newspaper known for its Republican sympathies, endorsed Wilson's policy while many Republican leaders were questioning how the American war effort had been prosecuted. The pro-Democratic *San Francisco Examiner* featured comments of support for the Fourteen Points from notable and influential Republican Senators like Republican Warren Harding of Ohio and William Borah of Idaho.³⁰ These articles show the breadth of support for Wilson's plan that the press and political leaders offered, regardless of partisan affiliation.

Bipartisan cooperation was terminated by the congressional elections in November 1918. Wilson's administration and the Democratic Party came under fire from Republicans for not finding a way to deal a final blow to the German war effort. The *New York Times* ran editorials in support of the President's war program in hopes that the Democrats would retain control of the House of Representatives and the Senate, which they had held since 1912. In an article titled "The Chief Issue: Support of the President Necessary for a Successful Foreign Policy" the *Times* held that a Democratic Congress was required so that the President's influence and strength in foreign affairs would not be diminished.³¹ However, this support for Wilson and the Democrats did not materialize.

The vote counts revealed that the Democrats had suffered significant losses throughout the country, yielding control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate to the Republicans. This loss of power had significant long-term implications for the President's ability to push through foreign policy decisions at home, but Wilson was about to receive a political boost as the war approached an end. Late in the evening of 11 November 1918, word reached the American press that Germany had negotiated an armistice with the Allies in

³⁰ "Washington Comment is Favorable," *San Francisco Examiner*, 9 January 1918, 2.

³¹ "The Chief Issue: Support of the President Necessary for a Successful Foreign Policy," *New York Times*, 3 November 1918, sec. 2, p. 2.

expectation of a formal end to the war. The papers used in this study immediately turned to President Wilson to champion the United States' war objectives in the peace agreement. The *New York Herald* once again supported the President when it proclaimed that all Americans should "forget partisanship in ovation to Wilson" and that the "general verdict in Congress is that all American war aims have been achieved."³²

Several papers hailed Wilson as the moral leader of the Allied cause as well as the man who had brought about peace. An editorial in the *San Francisco Examiner* proclaimed that:

It is our great President to whom they [the leaders of Europe] have looked since our entry into the war for moral guidance, and it is to him they still look, more than any other man, to work out the plan for the world's political salvation.... There is no prouder title in the world now than the title of American Citizenship.³³

The paper not only praised Wilson as the deliverer of peace but also applauded the American people because of their determination, ingenuity, and democratic idealism. Other papers shared the belief that Wilson would lead the world to a lasting peace. The *New York Herald* reported that "President Wilson's Statements [the Fourteen Points] Regarded as Offering Basis for Allies' Decisions." The article went on to assert that the president's influence abroad was growing and surely the leaders of France and Great Britain would recognize that the U.S. government's solution was the only way to establish a righteous peace.³⁴

The promotion of democracy in Europe became a major point of concern within this select group of papers. Even before the cease fire was signed, the *New York Times* published an editorial written by Idaho Senator William Borah that highlighted what he believed would be the main concerns in dealing with Germany after the war. Borah claimed that "we [Americans] are

³² Donald A. Craig, "Germany Army, Navy and U-Boats Virtually are Surrendered and Belgian Reparation Agreed To," *New York Herald*, 12 November 1918, sec. 2, p. 1.

³³ "The World Has Been Saved for Democracy, Our Land Glorified," *San Francisco Examiner*, 12 November 1918, 20.

³⁴ "Peace Conference Awaits Order in Teuton States," *New York Herald*, 12 November 1918, sec. 2, p. 3.

deeply concerned in our own security, and have been compelled to take an interest in the world's security – therefore we would be recreant to duty if we did not treat with these and those [nations] alone who can give some assurances that their treaties will be observed.”³⁵ Borah concluded that unless the German people withdrew their support from aristocratic and militaristic leaders they would not be able to participate in new international organizations, such as the proposed League of Nations.

Germany was not the only nation targeted for the spread of democracy; the situation in Russia was also on the minds of many editorial writers. The *New York Herald* published an editorial titled “America the Sole Hope For Russia's Restoration.” The article reported that “Seldom is it given to a people to develop a continent.... To us of America, however, this great privilege has been given; our task now is on the way to completion; and we have profited much.” The *Herald* asserted that the United States had a duty use the skills acquired when developing North America to help the Russians realize the potential of their massive nation.³⁶ The *Herald* alleged that the United States would be best fit to rebuild Russia because it could not have “political designs” on her like the European powers, and the U.S. would bring the Russians up to their own level of prosperity through fair trade practices and democratic government.

To ensure the spread of American democratic principles several media outlets began a campaign to support the President's planned attendance of the Paris peace conference. As of 1918 no President had ever traveled to another continent while in office. The *San Francisco Examiner* made the event front-page news with a headline reading “Wilson Urged to go to Europe.” The article asserted that summons from the Allied powers as well as the newly formed

³⁵ William E. Borah, ““This Dynasty, Buttressed Around by Serried Ranks of the Military Hierarchy, Must Give Way to Some Responsible Representative of the German People’: No Place for it in Any League of Nations,” *New York Times*, 13 October 1918, sec. 8, p. 1.

³⁶ “America the Sole Hope for Russia's Restoration,” *New York Herald*, 17 November 1918, magazine section, p. 7.

democratic German government required Wilson to come, take the lead in the peace negotiations, and restore order to the chaotic European scene.³⁷ The *Los Angeles Times* also hailed Wilson's willingness to break precedent by planning a European tour but posed questions of executive power when Wilson would be away. Since no one knew what the protocol would be for a president spending much time away from the continent, the paper suggested that Vice-President Thomas Marshall might assume the position as chief executive, but this idea was frowned upon even by the *Times*. The article also foreshadowed future problems for the Wilson administration. Well known Republican politician Elihu Root was included in the list of representatives the *Times* expected to be included in the U.S. delegation going to France.³⁸ Root was a former Senator, Secretary of War for Presidents McKinley and Roosevelt, and Secretary of State under Roosevelt. He had also been dispatched by President Wilson to Europe in 1917 to aid and build support for Alexander Kerensky's Provisional Government in Russia. The eventual exclusion of Root and any other prominent Republican from the American delegation in Paris led to much ill will between the Grand Old Party leadership and Wilson's administration.

When President Wilson arrived in France in December 1918 he and the American military leaders who accompanied him received an ovation unlike any other in recent memory. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, many Europeans hailed Wilson as the messenger of humanitarianism and the man who would forge a lasting peace. This reception was covered with much fanfare in many American papers. The *Times* reported that the papers in Paris, Rome, and Madrid all praised Wilson when he came to Europe, referring to him as "the most humane man of the century."³⁹ The *New York Herald* reprinted a British newspaper story that praised Wilson's international influence in an article titled "Precedents Fall When President Starts to

³⁷ "Berlin Asks Hasty Peace, Fears Rebels," *San Francisco Examiner*, 16 November 1918, 1.

³⁸ "Wilson Going to Europe for Peace Conference," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 November 1918, 1-2.

³⁹ "Press Lauds President," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 December 1918, 3.

Work.” The article asserted that Wilson’s energy and diligence guaranteed the answers to questions and solutions to problems that other European leaders, especially the French, could not provide.⁴⁰ Wilson’s positive reception abroad spread optimism at home about how he would help achieve peace in Europe.

Several newspapers expanded their commentary on the President’s role as all eyes became fixed on events leading up to the Paris gathering. The *San Francisco Examiner* proclaimed Wilson to be the “ONE MAN to make the first draft of the final peace,” and it speculated that he would be chosen to lead the world into a time of peace “by an overwhelming popular vote” at the conference.⁴¹ A story published by the *Los Angeles Times* called Wilson the “Caesar of America.” The author proclaimed that the President had been “cheerfully granted autocratic powers for the time being by an enormous, powerful and wealthy people.”⁴² Wilson’s status abroad was matched by support from the press at home. Many of the papers examined here believed that the Allied powers would come to an agreement based on Wilson’s Fourteen Points.

Of the Fourteen Points, the proposal for a “general association of nations” received significant attention in several papers before the start of the peace conference in France. The *New York Times* established itself as one the League of Nations’ biggest supporters. The *Times* published three articles in its 22 December 1918 edition that reflected the enthusiasm the paper had for the League. A front-page story focused on Wilson’s message that an international dialogue “Would Have Averted War.” Many League supporters believed, like Wilson, that discussion and international arbitration could have solved the Serbian problem that triggered the

⁴⁰ “Precedents Fall When President Starts to Work,” *New York Herald*, 17 December 1918, sec. 2, p. 1.

⁴¹ “How the President’s Treaty Making Power Actually Works,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 9 December 1918, 14.

⁴² Gertrude Atherton, “Democracy Autocrat: Three Nations Rule World’s Fate,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 December 1918, 1.

outbreak of the war in 1914. Miscommunication between the European powers certainly played a role in the outbreak of the war, but many policy makers and civic leaders also believed that more would have been needed than just a place of communication. Some League supporters believed that sacrifices of self-interest and secrecy also needed to be made by the nations of the world to ensure an enduring peace.⁴³

The second *Times* editorial advocating the establishment of an international association attempted to draw a comparison between the forming of the U.S. and the proposed League of Nations. The author claimed that “the United States and the Allies have been in a league of friendship similar to that of the colonies up to the adoption of the Article of Confederation, since the United States entered this war, and that league is in existence at this moment.” The author asserted that the Allied governments should enhance their relationship and create a more formal union. While this was an inaccurate comparison between the past and the present, the piece reflected the desire of some members of the media to see the creation of a League of Nations.⁴⁴

The third *Times* article was written by President Darwin Kingsley of New York Life Insurance, an active supporter of Woodrow Wilson’s policies. Kingsley made a case for a “close federation instead of a loose League of Nations in order to safeguard [the] world’s future.”⁴⁵ He stated that the Allies, having won a “complete victory over the enemies of ordered liberty,” were responsible to fix the errors of the political system by changing the structure of international relations. He claimed that the way to achieve a lasting peace was through a union of nations who do not view all others as enemies but as “partners” in the most important of matters, collective

⁴³ “Publicity Forced by a League of Nations Would Have Averted War,” *New York Times*, 22 December 1918, 1.

⁴⁴ Samuel J. Graham, “A Working League: The United States as a Living Example of Peoples Brought Together by Common Ideals and Common Dangers,” *New York Times*, 22 December 1918, sec. 3, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Darwin P. Kingsley, “Sovereignty and Future Peace,” *New York Times*, 22 December 1918, sec. 4, p. 3.

security and prosperity. Kingsley clearly believed that collective security and prosperity were possible only through an international league of cooperation.⁴⁶

Though several of these selected newspapers held high hopes for the League, there was also growing dissent in the other papers to Wilson's proposal. In an article titled "Lodge Assails Wilson's Aims," the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge was building resistance to Wilson's peace program with a particular focus on the proposed military and political commitments required for membership in the League of Nations. The article highlighted Lodge's main questions surrounding the nature of the League and how much the United States would have to change its policies, particularly the Monroe Doctrine.⁴⁷ Many Republicans feared that increased international and diplomatic commitments under Wilson's lead might diminish Congressional authority and could disregard long standing national interests.

The *Kansas City Star* published an editorial questioning the plans for the League, too. The editorial, titled "League of Nations a Snag," chronicled early opposition to the League from English and French leaders. The article asserted that there was support in Europe for increased American involvement on the continent, but those same Europeans did not want to cede any power without adequate guarantees of safety from aggressors.⁴⁸

When the Versailles peace conference opened in January 1919 the first issue on the Allied agenda was the formation of a League. The *Kansas City Star* called the League of Nations the "Big Issue" that needed to be sorted out first before the finer details of the peace treaty could be worked out between the Allied powers.⁴⁹ The *San Francisco Examiner* held that

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Lodge Assails Wilson's Aims," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 December 1918, 4.

⁴⁸ "League of Nations A Snag," *Kansas City Star*, 8 December 1918, 16C.

⁴⁹ "League Plan First," *Kansas City Star*, 19 January 1919, 1.

Wilson's program should be "adopted as [the] basis for negotiations" at the peace conference.⁵⁰

To many in the media the belief that Wilson's principles and the league concept were to serve as the basis for the peace settlement was a matter of national pride and honor.

Americans were not alone in hoping for Wilson's message to prevail upon the other Allies. Some of these newspapers claimed that the German government also hoped that the Allies would pursue the President's peace terms. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that the "German delegation will oppose demands of the Allies which go beyond the programme outlined by Wilson." Hope for a peace based on Wilsonian principles seemed to radiate into both sides of the trenches at this point. Also, there was clear German recognition, echoed in the *Times*, that an excessively punitive peace agreement would hinder not just Germany but global markets as well.⁵¹

The U.S. public and politicians were still very much focused on forging a workable League of Nations, and many Republicans had crossed party lines to support the President's call for such an international organization. Several newspapers in this study presented bipartisan support not just for any international organization but for a strong alliance including security commitments among world powers to which the U.S. would furnish significant military support. The *Los Angeles Times* ran an editorial from former President William Howard Taft, then leader of the League to Enforce Peace, an organization he established to work towards establishing a lasting world peace. Taft stated that the larger powers would provide a police force for the League, while the "safety and security of the lesser nations, which cannot be expected to share to burden of military contribution, will be found in the judgments of an impartial international

⁵⁰ "World League Made First Parley Task," *San Francisco Examiner*, 19 January 1919, 1.

⁵¹ "Wilson Peace Terms is Germany's Stand," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 January 1919, 2.

court.” Taft specifically desired a strong commitment from the United States to provide military aid to an international league.⁵²

Even with Taft’s support, Wilson still came under attack from Congressional Republicans two weeks into the peace negotiations. One of the foremost complaints, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, was that the President was violating his own Fourteen Points by not communicating with members of the Republican-dominated Senate about the peace negotiations. Republican Senator Hiram Johnson of California denounced the president for violating his “first peace principle,” which was for “open diplomacy” as the basis for effective communication between powers. Johnson’s statements ironically reflected his strong belief in the Fourteen Point program itself, though he used its logic to attack its author. The *Times* claimed that Senator Johnson and others in Congress mentioned in the article expected Wilson to champion the Fourteen Points in Paris, not just as his own message but that of the American people.⁵³

By May 1919, the Allied powers faced another crisis as the Italian government disputed claims to Fiume and the Dalmatian coast. The *Kansas City Star* published an editorial from political observer and regular contributor Frank Simonds that addressed the growing tension with Italy. Simonds argued that Italy’s claim to Dalmatia could not be considered because the agreement it had made with France and Great Britain was no longer valid due to the United States’ entry into the war. Although territorial acquisition of the coast was Italy’s prime reason for entering the war, the Allied powers could no longer simply award it in good faith. The Italians did not like the fact that they would not receive the territory they believed was theirs, and Simonds declared that the controversy with Italy was just another example of a “peace built on compromises.” The author asserted that “in the past five months shock after shock between Mr.

⁵² William Howard Taft, “Taft on League of Nations; Functional Divisions Stated,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 January 1919, 2.

⁵³ “Oppose Secret Peace Parley,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 January 1919, 2.

Wilson's conceptions of peace under the League of Nations and the European conception of peace based upon historical traditions and geographical conditions" had led to a lack of understanding of the "doctrine of the League of Nations." To Simonds, Italy's complaint demonstrated how Allied powers had gotten away from a just peace treaty based on the Fourteen Points. Some members of the press were growing concerned that the peace settlement would produce little that was different from the ways the Europeans would conduct politics.⁵⁴

Later that May the German government received a draft of the proposed peace terms. The *San Francisco Examiner* quickly pointed out that Wilson's Fourteen Points had been largely ignored in Paris by publishing the claims of one U.S. Senator who stated: "How any man can read the summary of the treaty and still think it was based upon the high principles for which President Wilson said we went to war is beyond all understanding." The article reported that the United States had no obligation to agree to peace terms that did not reflect American principles. Some newspapers were beginning to feel uncomfortable about supporting the League of Nations and the treaty which were about to be drafted. However, not all papers were pessimistic about the terms.⁵⁵

The *New York Times* published an editorial contribution from influential Republican politician Henry Stimson who argued that America's international reputation was on the line with the Treaty of Versailles. Stimson claimed that the President was being unfairly attacked by the press because "the burdens that have been upon him are quite unequal to any his predecessors have borne, and, in the main, have involved vaster and more complicated issues." According to Stimson, the country must decide "whether we shall destroy our prestige in the eyes of a world weary of war or live up to the reputation for unselfish and honorable character which has been

⁵⁴ Frank H. Simonds, "Simonds Explains Italy's Challenge to Wilson's Plan: How the Controversy over Fiume Began and Where it will Probably End," *Kansas City Star*, 4 May 1919, 22C.

⁵⁵ Justin McGrath, "U.S. is made Party to Ally Greed, is View," *San Francisco Examiner*, 10 May 1919, 2.

won for us by the splendid service of our troops and the unanimity of the patriotic ardor that sent them forth.”⁵⁶ In the opinion of Stimson and the sympathetic *Times*, the United States needed to accept the peace pact Wilson had brokered to prove the nation’s prestige to the Allies and the world.

The Hearst newspaper empire was clearly opposed to the Treaty, regularly featuring editorials from its publisher and owner William Randolph Hearst. The *San Francisco Examiner* published one of Hearst’s editorials, titled “America Has Won for England the Hegemony of World,” upon the announcement of the Treaty of Versailles’s terms. He attacked the treaty for making “England mistress of the world.” Hearst claimed that “the United States has the satisfaction of having won the greatest war in the history of the world after it had been lost by the Allies; but England has the material advantage of immense increases in territory, of the complete control of the seas, and of a very much enlarged relative position of power and importance among the nations of the world.” He contended that “we [America] should keep free of foreign alliances and the expensive and exhausting conflicts which such alliances are almost sure to precipitate.... America is the most idealistic, the most altruistic nation in the world, and America should lead the world for the benefit of the world.” Hearst was particularly harsh toward Britain, claiming its leaders had manipulated the treaty to strengthen the British Empire’s position over the other Allies.⁵⁷

The commentary in the *Kansas City Star* echoed some of Hearst’s concerns about the terms of the treaty while also suggesting the need for some kind of international association. The *Star* reported that several Senators were suggesting a policy which placed the United States

⁵⁶ Henry L. Stimson, “The Treaty In the Senate: History Shows What Obstructive Tactics May Be Expected,” *New York Times*, 25 May 1919, sec. 3, p. 2.

⁵⁷ William Randolph Hearst, “America Has Won for England the Hegemony of World,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 10 May 1919, 22.

in a “Triple Entente” with France and Great Britain rather than agreeing to Article X of the League covenant, which pledged military support to resist and reverse any unwarranted aggression against League members. The problem, according to the *Star*, was that a simple alliance of so many nations could not possibly protect the interests of all nations involved. The *Star* sensed that the Senate would not accept the treaty as it existed and that changes were needed.⁵⁸ Several of the newspapers examined for this study, including the *Star*, remained hopeful that President Wilson would be willing to consider mild changes the treaty terms to make a more agreeable association of nations a possibility.

The *Kansas City Star* ran an editorial from Frank Simonds that addressed some of the growing concerns over the League of Nations and the political situation in Europe. Simonds claimed that the League “represented before all else the conviction of the President and those Americans who share his views that all men of all nations, without regard to the new gospel, vow to overturn their governments if their governments refused to heed the new voice and pursued the old pathways.” Simonds added that the “last four months have demonstrated that the peoples of Europe quite as much, and perhaps more than their governments, are controlled by old conceptions of national unity, political security, individual economic existence, and development.”⁵⁹ Simonds’s continued support for the President and condemnation of the political scene in Europe were not uncommon among observers at this time. Many papers examined here still viewed the President as the ideological and moral leader who would hopefully lead the world to lasting peace. The Treaty of Versailles and the politicians of Europe were becoming unpopular in segments of the American press.

⁵⁸ “Don’t Like New Alliances,” *Kansas City Star*, 8 May 1914, 1B.

⁵⁹ Frank H. Simonds, “The League a Mockery,” *Kansas City Star*, 4 May 1919, 5A.

In June, the Allied heads of state finalized the Treaty of Versailles and animosity toward the pact came out of the U.S. Capitol, led by Pennsylvania Senator Philander Knox. The *Kansas City Star* sympathetically highlighted the amendments proposed by Senator Knox. The Senator's primary concern with the treaty was that Wilson wanted the Senate to immediately accept both it and membership in the League of Nations without debate. The *Star* claimed that the treaty-making power of the Senate must not be neglected in such an important document, which could reshape the way the U.S. participated in world affairs. The article also supported Knox's claims that the treaty did not make peace secure and was "destructive of human progress and liberty" because it did not protect popular sovereignty.⁶⁰

The *New York Times* was quick to use its editorial page to defend the President against Knox's attacks. The *Times* published an editorial from a well known fiction author, historian, and Republican from Pittsburgh, Samuel Harden Church. Harden backed the treaty and challenged fellow Pennsylvania Republican Philander Knox's opposition to the President. Church claimed that the "League of Nations is not only necessary in the prevention of future wars but it is indispensable in the enforcement of the present peace." In response to the naysayers, he stated that:

it is a shocking disappointment, therefore, when the world is still in flames, and when the organization of peace and justice is coming to its slow but logical conclusion, to find Senator Knox using the prestige of his eloquence and reputation to accomplish the certain destruction of all the great work that has been done at Paris during the last six months.⁶¹

Church's editorial showed that a certain amount of bipartisan enthusiasm still remained for Wilson's efforts to bring about a lasting peace through the treaty and membership in the League of Nations.

⁶⁰ Arthur Sears Henning, "'Let the People Say:' Senator Knox Says League Must Not Be Foisted Upon Them Under Pain of Delaying Peace," *Kansas City Times*, 18 June 1919, 1.

⁶¹ Samuel Harden Church, "The Knox Resolution," *New York Times*, 15 June 1919, sec. 3, p. 2.

Support for the Treaty of Versailles did not just come from pro-Democratic papers like the *New York Times*. The *Los Angeles Times* joined the defense of the treaty with an editorial from William Howard Taft. Taft tried to rally his party's skeptics to support the League with a reference to past foreign policy achievements by Republican leaders:

Then, too, we heard much of the radical departure from our traditional American policy of isolation and the surrender of the Monroe Doctrine. But the Republican Party, recognizing its world responsibilities, and with courage born of past achievements, and with a traditional constructive ability and energy, carried its Philippine policy through and the awful prophecies of ruin are forgotten.⁶²

Taft also tried to remind the Republican dissenters of the party's reputation for participating in world affairs, which had been the hallmarks of his and Theodore Roosevelt's administrations. He claimed that support widespread partisan support for Senator Knox's resolution would be neglecting their party's legacy. The former President recommended patience with the treaty.⁶³ Also, Taft's article exhibited a message of bipartisanship and belief that accepting the treaty would ultimately benefit the nation more than refusing to do so.

The *Los Angeles Times* was not alone in expressing support for the President and the treaty. Two editorials from the *New York Times* and *Kansas City Star* illustrate the typical commentaries that were being published in support of President Wilson. Several newspapers supported the treaty by alleging that Wilson had done as well as could be expected when dealing with the old world politicians of Europe. George Wickersham, Attorney General in the Taft administration, writing in the *Times*, asserted that the Republican objectors were "not willing to recognize any responsibility in America for the future preservation of world peace," while Wilson and his Democratic administration were doing their best to represent the moral

⁶² William Howard Taft, "Blow at G.O.P. in Treaty Fight," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 June 1919, 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

perspective in the negotiations.⁶⁴ Frank Simonds, writing in the *Star*, claimed that “Mr. Wilson believed when he arrived in Europe that the people of all Allied countries would support him and his fourteen points against their governments.... There came a time, then, when Mr. Wilson had to choose between the best he could and coming home and leaving Europe to fight it out.”

Simonds argued that:

Wilson’s gravest mistake lay in his original misapprehension of the real facts. He thought, he believed, that there would be a peace of conciliation. He believed the mass of the plain people of the world were prepared to make any sacrifice to bring about peace and he believed that the fourteen points and the League of Nations would take care of everything.⁶⁵

Simonds shared Wickersham’s and Taft’s assertions that this peace was better than a continuation of the war, which would certainly damage world commercial markets and political systems more than it already had.

As Wilson returned from Paris to present the treaty and League covenant to Congress, some of the newspapers hoped that the Senators would understand the President’s call for urgency. The *New York Times*’ editorial page was littered with letters of unfettered support for the quick ratification of the treaty and the League of Nations. The letters proclaimed that the Senate should permit Wilson a free hand in the matter and approve the treaty as he asked.⁶⁶ Support for both the peace agreement and the passage of the unaltered League pact by the Senate also came from the *Los Angeles Times*, which proclaimed that Wilson “pleads for acceptance of international leadership” while claiming that there was a “universal demand for [the] League of

⁶⁴ George W. Wickersham, “Wickersham Answers League Obstructionists,” *New York Times*, 22 June 1919, sec. 3, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Frank H. Simonds, “Simonds in Defense of Mr. Wilson,” *Kansas City Star*, 29 June 1919, 14C.

⁶⁶ Carman F. Randolph, “Ratify the Treaty” & Jesse Rockman, “The Only League,” *New York Times*, 6 July 1919, sec. 3, p. 2, and R.J. Caldwell, “Clear Case for the League: No Longer Any Reason for the Senate to Withhold Ratification,” *New York Times*, 18 July 1919, sec. 3, p. 2.

Nations.”⁶⁷ Both papers saw limited compromise as a possibility, but overwhelmingly their editorials expressed hope that the Senators would retract their earlier threats against amending or rejecting the treaty.

In July, a surprising twist occurred in the editorials published by the *San Francisco Examiner*. The *Examiner*, which had up to this point balanced its loyalty to the President because he was a Democrat and its opposition to the treaty, launched a personal attack against Wilson. In one of his personal editorials in the paper, William Randolph Hearst argued that the Treaty of Versailles was not the only issue that concerned him; his distrust had begun to run deeper. He accused Wilson of being a liar because of his 1916 campaign promise to continue keeping the United States out of the Great War. Then, five months after winning his second term in the White House, Wilson declared war against Germany and plunged America into a fight that was, according to Hearst, not to its own benefit. Hearst added, “In campaigning for his League of Nations Mr. Wilson declares with great positiveness that the adoption of the League is the only way to keep us out of war. If this were true, everybody would be for the League.”⁶⁸ In the article Hearst expressed his belief in the Fourteen Points, but he agreed with the dissenting Republican leaders that the treaty did not guarantee an end of war for the United States or the world. His continued belief in the original Fourteen Points and Wilson’s abandonment of those principles at the peace conference left Hearst and others like him feeling betrayed.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee under the leadership of Henry Cabot Lodge wanted more time to review the Treaty of Versailles in general and the issue of League

⁶⁷ Arthur Sears Henning, “President Pictures New World Regime in Speech,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 July 1919, 1. Other editorials and stories supporting the President such as “America To Take Lead,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 1919, 1-2 & “Paris Waits on Senate to Act,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 1919, 2, reflect the continued support of the *Times* for the League of Nations as the best guarantee for peace or, at least, a restrictive international law.

⁶⁸ William Randolph Hearst, “Can We Trust League of Nations to Keep America Out of War,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 13 July 1919, 1.

membership in particular. The treaty and League membership were presented to the Senate as a package deal. Acceptance of the peace agreement meant automatic participation in the world association. In September, Wilson decided to take his proposal directly to the people of the United States with a nationwide train tour. However, he was not the only one appealing to the public. Ex-president Taft was busy writing editorials in support of the treaty, some of which appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. In his commentary on the treaty, Taft claimed that the “League is necessary to enforce the peace” and that Lodge’s main claims against the treaty were unwarranted because “unlimited power was not conferred upon the alliance.” He also reassured readers that the Monroe Doctrine would not be disregarded and, more importantly, the Constitution would not be overstepped at any instance.⁶⁹ With editorials like this and others in pro-treaty newspapers, the major points of disagreement over ratification of the peace pact began to take shape.

Some papers hesitated to become too excited about the President’s tour. The *Kansas City Star*, while pleased that the President was going to be making many stops in the Midwest, remained skeptical of the proposed treaty. One editorial was titled “Wilson to Deal in Facts,” and that was exactly what the piece called for. The article applauded the President’s desire to debate the exact obligations of the treaty and League of Nations. However, the author remained suspicious because of Wilson’s desire for an unquestioning acceptance of the unaltered treaty.⁷⁰ The article in the *Star* expressed hope that the peace settlement could be worked out between the President and Senate opposition. However, cordial meetings and pleasantries between opposing sides on the treaty would not last.

⁶⁹ William Howard Taft, “Treaty Foe Objections are Riddled by Taft: Former President Effectually Replies to Arguments of the Senator from Massachusetts,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 September 1919, 1-2.

⁷⁰ “Wilson to Deal in Facts,” *Kansas City Star*, 8 September 1919, 2.

By month's end Wilson was no longer on his stumping campaign. On 25 September 1919, he collapsed while giving a speech at Pueblo, Colorado. Admiral Cary T. Grayson, Wilson's personal physician, ordered an end to the President's national tour. Later, it was discovered that Wilson had suffered a severe stroke, but at this time no one outside the President's immediate circle knew the specifics of the illness. The cancellation of the tour and uncertainty about the extent of the President's illness further complicated the debate. Wilson limited (and in some instances discontinued altogether) communication with opponents of the treaty and increased his resolve in the belief that the American people desperately wanted the treaty to pass without interference from Congress. In the press, concerns arose about how the debate between the Senate Republicans and the administration was being viewed in the United States and Europe.⁷¹

Unease over the President's illness and its effect on the dispute over the treaty made headlines in the *New York Times*. The *Times* reported that Wilson's "physical condition will have, of course, a bearing on the matter to the degree that he will or will not be able to participate in the effort of his senatorial supporters to have the treaty and the League of Nations ratified without amendment or even interpretive reservations." The article claimed that Wilson's tour was a tremendous success and expressed confidence that the President was in excellent health, and would be back in Washington shortly to lead the campaign for ratification. The editorial continued to criticize the Republicans for dangerously wasting their political popularity over the issue.⁷² Because he was the treaty's greatest champion, Wilson's questionable health directly affected the treaty's future in Congress. Papers like the *Times* attempted to conjure sympathy and continued to support the President, his message, and the treaty.

⁷¹ Fleming, *Illusion of Victory*, 418-423.

⁷² "Wilson's Illness Disturbs Senate: Speculation as to Effect it May Have on Fight Against Peace Treaty," *New York Times*, 27 September 1919, 1-2.

The growing distaste for the President's message was evident in the editorials of several papers. The *San Francisco Examiner* continued to criticize the President and the treaty in an editorial titled "Surely This Great Matter of the Treaty should be Debated Only with Utmost Candor and Honesty." The paper attacked Wilson and the other Allied leaders, alleging that at the Paris peace conference the Fourteen Points "flew out the window and never came back." The editorial claimed that the "terms of the treaty do not make certain the destruction of autocratic powers," but the terms "make the power and despotic authority of the Japanese autocracy PERMANENT." The piece also criticized Wilson's earlier promise to free all people from oppression, claiming that the treaty and the League of Nations "MAKE PERMANENT the subjugation of the oppressed peoples of Ireland, India, Egypt, Persia, Syria, Korea, Shantung, and all those other smaller territories which have been torn from their fatherlands." Throughout the editorial, the author called the League the "British League of Nations" because of the perceived advantage it provided for the preservation and protection of the British Empire. The *Examiner* article also attacked President Wilson when it stated that "He hurts his own reputation and makes the country feel uncomfortable and embarrassed" because the paper believed him to be unaware of how the specifics of the treaty would affect the nation's autonomy in the long run. Even as it was tearing apart the treaty and the League programs, the article remained adamant that the United States had a duty to bring only American principles of liberty and democracy to people around the world.⁷³

The *Kansas City Star's* editorial page expressed serious concern regarding international reaction to the treaty fight in the U.S. Frank Simonds claimed that the actions of Italy and France were and would continue to be "entirely dependent upon the course of the United States

⁷³ "Surely This Great Matter of the Treaty should be Debated Only with Utmost Candor and Honesty," *San Francisco Examiner*, 29 September 1919, 24.

Senate in adopting or rejecting the treaty of alliance.” As long as the Senate wavered, according to Simonds, the peace process would continue to “de-Americanize,” leading to decreased U.S. credibility internationally as well as to an increase in the chaos already spreading into war-torn France, Belgium, Germany, and other Balkan countries.⁷⁴ Other editorials like this one claimed that U.S. delay in approving the treaty was negatively affecting the world, which was supposedly waiting for American aid for the reconstruction process.

In November, many papers that had previously supported the uncompromised acceptance of the treaty and membership in the League began to urge the administration to compromise. The *Los Angeles Times* published an editorial from William Howard Taft, who addressed the group known as “irreconcilables” in Congress and their reservations, specifically the amendment presented by Missouri Senator James A. Reed, a Democrat. Reed had proposed that all matters up for general League discussion be subject to U.S. approval before they could be openly debated in conference. Taft claimed that “Senator Reed’s bitter opposition to the whole treaty is well known, and this reservation is, in effect, a repudiation of the treaty, both in spirit and substance.” Taft explained that at least the “other reservations leave a most valuable advance in the matter of international arrangements to avoid war.” Taft stated that “the reservations leave a great deal that is most valuable in the treaty. It will be yielding to politics and personal feelings for the Democrats to kill so much of a good for the world.”⁷⁵

The *New York Times* also published editorials urging the Senate and administration to work out a deal on the treaty. One editorial stated that “seventy-five members of the Senate who wanted some kind of treaty ought to be liberal enough to come to an agreement whereby they can put the treaty through and not allow their wishes for a treaty and a League to be defeated” by

⁷⁴ Frank H. Simonds, “Italy at Fiume: How D’Annunzio Stands in Garibaldi’s Shoes and How Several European States Ignore the Dictum of the Paris Conference,” *Kansas City Star*, 5 October 1919, 20C.

⁷⁵ William Howard Taft, “Taft Scores 15th Reservation,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 November 1919, 2.

fewer than twenty Senators who were against the treaty altogether. The author also proclaimed that “from the present outlook, in order to bring about a compromise, the broadest concessions must be made by the President.”⁷⁶ Clearly, as shown in Taft’s shift in position and the *New York Times* editorial on the topic, many in the press believed that the acceptance of some form of Versailles Treaty was desirable. Even with significant bipartisan support for both League of Nations membership and some form of treaty, Wilson was still unwilling to consider compromise.

When the Treaty of Versailles failed to pass the Senate both with and without reservations in mid-November several papers, like the *Kansas City Star*, placed the blame squarely on President Wilson. Front-page headlines in the *Star* proclaimed “Treaty is Defeated” and “Blame on Wilson.” The latter *Star* article reported:

Responsibility for the defeat of the Peace Treaty and League of Nations by the United States Senate tonight rests squarely with President Wilson for it was the votes of the Democratic senators, obeying his orders, that gave it its death blow. The last two votes taken in the historic fight tell the story – two of the [most] momentous ever cast in the Senate chamber – told the story. On the final vote on the resolution with the Lodge reservations, the senate stood 41 for, 51 against. Of the fifty-one against only thirteen were Republican anti-leaguers, two were Democratic anti-leaguers, and thirty-six were Democrats supposed to be friendly to the league but voting against it because some of the changes did not suit the President. . . . The country probably will never hear the end of passing of the blame back and forth as to who really did the “killing.” President Wilson unquestionably will issue a statement tomorrow denouncing the treaty foes in the Senate and Senators on both sides were busy tonight on their last speeches setting forth their cases to the country. There are two sides to the argument, of course. But in the last analysis, in the closing hours tonight, when the vote the whole world was waiting for was being taken, the fact stood out that the peace pact and the league were going down to defeat because of the President’s unwillingness to accept two changes that had been made in the pact.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “Treaty’s Chances in December,” *New York Times*, 23 November 1919, sec. 3, p. 2.

⁷⁷ “Treaty is Defeated,” & “Blame on Wilson: The President Refused to Accede to an Americanized Pact and it All Failed,” *Kansas City Times*, 20 November 1919, 1.

Similar statements, citing the President's unwillingness to compromise as the reason for the treaty's defeat appeared in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, too.⁷⁸ In the debate that had captured a significant amount of these papers' attention for months, Wilson had become the main factor preventing the passage, albeit in altered form, of the Treaty of Versailles and membership in the League of Nations.

Even though the treaty had not passed the Senate either with or without reservations, a discussion about further American international participation was hardly over. The *New York Times* reported that "Without a compromise the treaty fight is likely to go over into the next Presidential campaign as the central issue."⁷⁹ In an article titled "Treaty to be Issue in Next Big Campaign," the *San Francisco Examiner* added that "mild reservationists may be persuaded to accept compromise on ratification...but they [democratic leaders] have small hopes of making it successful" without Wilson's support. The article concluded with an expression of hope that the war would finally end the way it had begun, with a "joint resolution" from the "constitutional authority of Senators."⁸⁰

Throughout the entire period leading up to the defeat of the Treaty of Versailles in the U.S. Senate, Wilson had been the face of the peace treaty and American international relations. However, Senate opposition to the Treaty of Versailles and unqualified membership in the League of Nations was not based on isolationist sentiments. The majority of Senators, as shown in the articles and editorials above, believed that the treaty was acceptable on most points and that membership in the League would be advantageous to American foreign policy. Even the most adamant opponents of the treaty and the League, such as William Randolph Hearst, were

⁷⁸ William Howard Taft, "Wilson Blamed for Treaty Mixup," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 November 1919, 1 & "Treaty's Chances in December," *New York Times*, 23 November 1919, sec. 3, p. 2.

⁷⁹ "Treaty as Campaign Issue," *New York Times*, 23 November 1919, sec. 3, p. 2.

⁸⁰ "Treaty to be Issue in Next Big Campaign," *San Francisco Examiner*, 21 November 1919, 1-2.

not opposed to participation in world affairs. In one editorial before the Senate votes in November, Hearst expressed sincere concern over the treaty because he believed it granted too much power and authority to Great Britain and Japan, while continental nations like France and Italy were left in “utter ruin” by the terms.⁸¹ Also, the voting in the Senate showed that the irreconcilables, who refused any type of international pact, had little effect on the result.

The treaty ultimately failed in November 1919 because Wilson had poorly negotiated the political situation that confronted him in the preceding months. First, when negotiating the peace treaty it was apparent that he and the Allies had abandoned the Fourteen Points, which many in the American press believed was the only just plan for the war’s outcome. Wilson sacrificed a good measure of political credibility at home in making concessions to get European leaders to accept the League of Nations as a major objective. Second, Wilson’s failure to negotiate with the Republican leadership in the Senate played a crucial role in the President’s defeat. Wilson failed to focus on the politics of the possible when a potential coalition, at the low cost of slight compromises, presented itself.

By the end of 1919 the optimism and hope that had surrounded Wilson and his Fourteen Point program had been squandered. The moral arguments that had carried the United States to war and into the Paris peace conference were now gone, but a message of isolationism did not arise. Even though Wilson had rallied popular support for membership in the League of Nations and an increased role for the U.S. in international affairs, the primary problem remained that he was unable and unwilling to recognize the need for occasional compromises to the nuances of domestic politics. Even though these papers did not appreciate Wilson’s stubbornness, they did not begin circulating a message of isolationism. Actually, in these papers there was plenty of

⁸¹ William Randolph Hearst, “Gentlemen of the Congress, Kill the Whole Treaty and Let Us be Independent Americans Again,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 17 November 1919, 28.

active discussion in editorials on how the United States should conduct international affairs and there was no mention of withdrawing American support or interest from Europe and the rest of the world.

CHAPTER 2 - Continued American Internationalism and the 1920 Election

The November defeats in the Senate did not mean the end of the Treaty of Versailles. Due to the determination of both President Wilson and the reservationists in the Senate, ratification of the treaty and membership in the League of Nations remained volatile issues throughout 1920, not just because of the November elections, but also because there was a definite concern over the ways in which the country would continue to participate in world affairs. The continuing debate between supporters of the unaltered treaty and the reservationists played a significant role in developing the shape and style of United States foreign policy well into the November election. A survey of several press outlets' coverage of the campaign presents the election as a choice between differing visions of how the United States should participate in world affairs. The country was to choose either the Democratic plan with membership in the League of Nations or the Republican approach that focused on maintaining multiple avenues of diplomatic activity with the countries of the world.

In January, Great Britain, France and Italy ratified the Treaty of Versailles, formally establishing the League of Nations. Most of the media outlets looked at in this study continued to believe that some form of compromise over the treaty could be reached in the U.S., even after the defeat it had suffered in November the previous year. The *New York Times* published a lengthy editorial from American diplomat in Europe and author Isaac Marcossin in support of the treaty. Marcossin argued that the commercial instability in Europe in 1920 was the result of "the flat failure of the United States to ratify the treaty and clear the deck for real stabilization." He blamed President Wilson as well as Senator Lodge for diminishing the global prestige of the United States, saying that both were needlessly delaying the nation's acceptance of the pact.

Marcosson remained hopeful that a settlement and quick ratification of the treaty would be possible. The covenant, as far as he was concerned, was an imperfect, yet necessary, step in reversing the “desperate situation” developing in Europe. He concluded that the Treaty of Versailles should be agreed upon in the Senate or else the U.S. would be left settling on less satisfactory grounds with Germany at a later date, which would lead to certain “world ruin.”⁸²

Editorials in the *Los Angeles Times* also proposed that the treaty might be agreed upon in the near future. These sentiments showed themselves in two editorials, the first by the paper’s own editorial board and the second by former-President Taft. The first editorial claimed that Wilson had misjudged the popular support for the unaltered treaty. The editorial read: “The *Times* fully agrees with the mild reservationists in the Senate, and with Taft and other eminent Americans outside it, that the objection to the reservations was removed when the Allies announced that they were perfectly willing to accept them.” The *Times* also asked the Republican-dominated Senate to approve the ratification promptly with reservations and let Wilson shoulder the burden for neglecting the nation’s global responsibilities.⁸³ The Republicans, according to the *Times*, were actively seeking a way to work around the President either to get their way or else to allow the entire blame for failure to ratify the treaty to settle on him.

In the second article, former President Taft scolded both Wilson and Lodge for their actions. Taft proclaimed that neither had the support of the people, and he asserted that overwhelming support was for mild reservations to the treaty and League covenants. Also, Taft accused the two men of placing “politics above the benefit of solving the present exigency for

⁸² Isaac F. Marcosson, “World Ruin in Treaty Delay,” *New York Times*, 4 January 1920, magazine section, 1-2.

⁸³ “No Referendum on Treaty,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 January 1920, sec. 2, p. 4.

the country and the world.”⁸⁴ Taft’s words suggest that the ratification of an amended peace agreement and membership in the League of Nations were both possible and were looked upon favorably by many in 1920. Now, what Taft and others needed was the Senate to reconsider the treaty and Wilson, along with his Senate supporters, to agree on some form of concession.

In March, a movement to debate the treaty again took shape in the Senate, this time with the help of nationally known Democratic Party figure William Jennings Bryan. Bryan brought to the table the support from moderates and progressives in both parties in hopes of working out a deal. The *Kansas City Star* asserted that the “Great Commoner,” as Bryan was affectionately nicknamed, would enter the treaty debate bringing some common sense and the ability to forge an alliance, focusing on the Democratic Senators who followed the orders of the President in November. The article stated that “After a day of consultations with Democratic senators the Commoner was confident that he would win in his contest with the White House, and thereby repeat his feat of 1899 when he saved the peace treaty with Spain from the defeat by the Democrats.”⁸⁵ The *Star* hoped that with Bryan’s help the country would finally and formally be at peace.

The *New York Herald* expressed hope that Wilson and the Democrats would seek a compromise with the reservationist Republicans. The *Herald* claimed that Wilson’s unwillingness to allow any concessions on the military commitment clause of the League of Nations covenant, Article X, would likely seal the failure of the Treaty of Versailles. The *Herald* urged a compromise but reported that Wilson had refused to set aside any more time to

⁸⁴ William Howard Taft, “Taft Demands a Bi-Partisan Defeat of Wilson and Lodge,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 January 1920, 1.

⁸⁵ “Bryan Fights for Treaty,” *Kansas City Times*, 18 March 1920, 3.

discuss his reasons for not bending on the terms of the treaty.⁸⁶ It is very likely that Wilson's illness was one of his prime motivations for pushing the treaty ahead without giving regard to the Senators' concerns. In an accompanying article, featuring commentary from former German Ambassador to the U.S. Count Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff, the *Herald* claimed that Wilson had failed to deliver a just or workable peace. The article concluded that Wilson's status abroad had diminished and the Germans were awaiting the coming presidential elections for more productive action from the United States.⁸⁷

The day before the Senate vote, the *Los Angeles Times* continued to show its support for the treaty. It published an editorial from well-known Republican and one time Wilson administration member as head of the U.S. Food Administration during World War I and immediately afterward, Herbert Hoover. Hoover asserted that the Senate should approve the treaty with reservations and the President should accept the terms. He suggested that failure to participate in the league would prove detrimental to American economic growth abroad. Continued international political participation, alleged the author, would be the key to continued American economic growth in foreign markets in Europe as well as Asia. He predicted that, if the U.S. did not reach out to Europe and the rest of the world, the economy would eventually grow stagnant.⁸⁸ In Hoover's view, neither American nor European markets could afford such a catastrophe so soon after the war.

⁸⁶ "Wreck of Treaty is Near; Article X. The Obstacle; Wilson Admits No Change," *New York Herald*, 7 March 1920, 1-2.

⁸⁷ "Says U.S. Left Job To Berlin: Bernstorff insists Germans Must Finish Task in Which Wilson Failed," *New York Herald*, 7 March 1920, 1-2.

⁸⁸ Herbert Hoover, "Hoover For Immediate Treaty Ratification: Declares Senate Should Agree Upon Pact with Reservations and President Should Accept It," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 March 1920, 1-2.

The *San Francisco Examiner* also paid close attention to the coming Senate vote and identified what it believed was one of the major issues with the peace pact. The *Examiner* reported:

We would have had a treaty of peace negotiated, signed, ratified and proclaimed a full year ago if Mr. Wilson had not insisted upon interweaving the terms of peace his scheme for a perpetual entangling alliance involving the United States in future quarrels between nations in all parts of the world. The sensible procedure... would have been to make and proclaim peace terms, and afterward to have summoned the nations to a congress in which a sound and durable League of Peoples could have been established.⁸⁹

The editorial reported that “There will be plenty of time after American problems have been settled to discuss proposed alliances and leagues for the future government of the world.”⁹⁰ This piece shows that even newspapers opposed to the treaty and league covenants did not believe that the United States should discontinue participation in international affairs. What the *Examiner* refused to support was an alliance that it believed disproportionately benefited other nations, like Great Britain, and did not serve the United States’ primary interests.

In March, the Treaty of Versailles was once again voted down both with and without reservations. David Lawrence of the *San Francisco Examiner* probably summed up the vote best when he wrote:

Technically the United States is still at war with Germany. America’s foreign policy is undefined. And the deadlock in the Senate will be carried into the presidential and congressional elections for final settlement next November. Briefly, that tells the story of what has happened after nine months of wearisome debate. But the effect on the future... is not simple analyzed.... Any campaign orator or writer of political text books who tries to fix the responsibility in the Senate upon either the Democratic or Republican parties as such will have about as much chances of carrying conviction as the man who attempts to blame the failure of the treaty upon the disagreeable winter.... But there is no escaping one outstanding fact – President Wilson has suffered the third defeat in eighteen months. His loss of Congress in November, 1918 was

⁸⁹ “The War is Over and the Senate Should Say So and Let the Nation Get Down to Business,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 13 March 1920, 24.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

followed by the defeat of a ratification resolution in November, 1919, and now in March, 1920, the treaty is formally sent back to him with the Democratic Party split in twain.⁹¹

Lawrence also held that Wilson must accept a majority of the blame for the treaty's second failure because he was unable to rally the majority of his party's Senators behind his cause and he failed to see the wisdom in compromising so as to get at least part of the agreement accepted. In the author's view, the direction of American foreign policy was to be the foremost election issue in November 1920.

In the same vein as the *San Francisco Examiner*, other papers sought to assign blame for the treaty's rejection in their editorial pages. The *Los Angeles Times* reprinted editorial commentary from several papers in cities all across the United States that overwhelmingly placed blame on either of two persons. According to the *Times*, culpability was being placed on both President Wilson as well as Senator Lodge for the failure of a treaty to pass into law, but the majority of these commentaries especially assailed President Wilson for his unwillingness to compromise on the treaty. The majority of comments fell on partisan lines, each side hoping to make the more convincing case against the other for delaying or rejecting American international participation in the League of Nations.⁹² In the wake of the second defeat of the treaty, a rivalry began over which party's foreign policy would be adopted by the majority of the public in the upcoming elections.

There was also evidence of partisan commentary in some papers aimed at Wilson and the Democratic Senators of the South. The *Kansas City Star* nicknamed them "Wilson's Death

⁹¹ David Lawrence, "Wilson Beaten in the Treaty Fight, Other Results of Vote Confusing, Effect on Election Hard to Predict," *San Francisco Examiner*, 21 March 1920, 2.

⁹² "Blame Wilson and Lodge: Editorial Comment on Treaty in Defeat is Filled with Grave Censure," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 March 1920, 1-2.

Battalion” and claimed that the Senators followed his orders through all the votes on the treaty.⁹³ The *Star* claimed that the “obstinate refusal of Woodrow Wilson to accede to the reservations to the league covenant” and blatant partisanship were among the main reasons why the treaty failed. The *Star* asserted that the Democrats of the South, who were obedient to the President’s orders, were the main culprits in leading to the defeat of the treaty. It also stated that a few Southern Senators who were up for re-election and feared the unpopularity of the President’s stubbornness wisely sided with the Republicans to maintain their own standing in the Senate. Using the Senate vote as evidence, the *Star* showed that there was little patience left for a bipartisan solution. The paper returned to its pro-Republican stance, hoping that a suitable treaty would be passed without the Democrats.⁹⁴ Without increased support in the north and Midwest, where Wilson had made significant inroads during the elections of 1912 and 1916, the Democrats would likely suffer a congressional defeat similar to the one in 1918 based largely on their failure to agree upon a workable foreign policy. The treaty and the League, which had been quite popular, were being abandoned by some of the papers in this study that had previously supported the measures.

In early June the Republican Party gathered in Chicago to pick their presidential candidate. The frontrunners going into the convention were Army General Leonard Wood, who was backed by party conservatives, moderate Illinois Governor Frank Lowden, and progressive California Senator Hiram Johnson. After the first few ballots, the three frontrunners had fragmented convention delegates permanently between them, and party leaders began to seek a middle ground between the competing views. It was ironic that Johnson lost support at the

⁹³ “The Treaty Fails: Ratification Lacks Seven Votes of Necessary Two-Thirds in Second ‘Showdown,’” *Kansas City Times*, 20 March 1920, 1.

⁹⁴ “Still There is No Peace: Treaty Back Where it Came From, The White House,” *Kansas City Times*, 20 March 1920, 1.

convention because of his unrelenting campaign against membership in the League of Nations. Ohio Senator Warren G. Harding, a declared yet unlikely candidate coming into the conclave, became the Republican nominee on the ninth vote. Harding was selected as the compromise candidate because he was a near opposite of Woodrow Wilson. He was not an activist, a crusader, or advocate of great change. Harding was a “joiner,” promising “normalcy,” and he was non-confrontational with most of his political foes. His convivial nature and handsome appearance provided the Republicans with an appealing candidate.⁹⁵ As Harding’s running mate the delegates selected Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge. He became nationally known the previous year when he dealt with striking police workers in Boston because they were attempting to unionize. Republican Party officials perceived that he had handled the situation to their liking and that he would be an excellent Vice-Presidential candidate.⁹⁶

No matter who the Democrats ran in 1920, it was assumed they would not be able to escape the shadow of Woodrow Wilson. Heading into their convention, the Democrats had narrowed their field down to three men: Attorney General Mitchell Palmer, William Gibbs McAdoo the wartime Director General of Railroads and former Secretary of the Treasury as well as Wilson’s son-in-law, and Ohio Governor James A. Cox. As the convention progressed, Palmer and McAdoo lost delegates over a variety of issues, none of which included altering the approach to international affairs that Wilson had laid out in the preceding years. Party leaders awarded Cox the candidacy after the forty-fourth ballot. The party chose a rising political star, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt from New York, as Vice-Presidential

⁹⁵ Nathan Miller, *New World Coming: The 1920s and the Making of Modern America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: De Capo Press, 2003), 74-76.

⁹⁶ David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 44-45.

candidate in an effort to capture support from his home state as well as to capitalize on his family name.⁹⁷

The Democratic ticket had the potential, though unlikely, to take the campaign in a different direction from the Wilson administration, but the President wanted to make sure they understood and stuck to his position. Soon after their nomination, Wilson summoned Cox and Roosevelt to the White House for a discussion. There the three men discussed the campaign and Cox, disarmed at the sight of the ailing Wilson, pledged to support the President's policy of no compromise on the treaty.⁹⁸ This aligned the Democratic candidates with President Wilson and his position on the treaty.

Cox's plan to follow in Wilson's footsteps concerning the treaty received significant attention from this select group of papers throughout the campaign. Reactions to this were mixed. The *New York Times*, which had been a stalwart supporter of Wilson's treaty policy, positively portrayed Cox's commitment to the President. The *Times* reported that Cox's message of renewing the debate over membership in the League if he were elected was drawing "prominent members" (offering no examples) away from the Republican Party to support the Democrats. According to the editorial, this was because the defectors believed that membership in the League of Nations was the "Greatest Moral Issue."⁹⁹ The *Times* attempted to motivate more Republicans to stand against Harding, who opposed joining the league unless there were revisions to the pact.

Pro-Republican newspapers, like the *New York Herald*, also commented on Cox's strategy. The *Herald* reported that the League of Nations was the "Big Issue" for the Cox-Roosevelt ticket. One article highlighted Governor Cox's charge that Harding was not popularly

⁹⁷ Goldberg, *Discontented America*, 45-46.

⁹⁸ Fleming, *The Illusion of Victory*, 459-461.

⁹⁹ "Hamilton Holt Now in Harding Revolt," *New York Times*, 3 October 1920, 4.

elected by party representatives but was merely a puppet of the “Senatorial oligarchy” that had caused the treaty to fail in March. The author claimed that Cox’s comments were overly partisan in nature in a public climate that was growing tired of personal assaults on candidates’ backgrounds and credentials.¹⁰⁰

Though Cox made membership in the League and approval of the treaty the imperative issues in his campaign, Harding did not take the polar opposite view. The *New York Times* reported that Harding repeated the claim that President Wilson had ruined the chances for membership in the league. According to the *Times*, Harding was prepared to enter into an international association with Great Britain and France but not “Wilson’s League of Nations.” The paper added that this association of nations, parallel to the League, would upset the European powers because they were already committed to the League of Nations.¹⁰¹ Though the *Times* negatively portrayed Harding’s foreign policy in its hope of building support for Governor Cox, the paper did not suggest that Harding would withdraw the United States from international affairs.

Throughout the campaign, the *San Francisco Examiner* maintained its opposition to the League of Nations, focusing steadily on what it saw as the problems with the covenant while continuing to pledge American support for international affairs. One editorial claimed that the current covenant was a folly because it circumvented the Constitutional process in the United States, which required the Senate to approve all diplomatic agreements. The editorial rejected the notion that Article X of the covenant should be accepted, while suggesting that, if it was rescinded, U.S. membership in an international association might be possible.¹⁰² Another *Examiner* editorial proclaimed that the treaty must be “flatly rejected.” The editorial explained

¹⁰⁰ “Cox Puts Wilson’s League in the Lead,” *New York Herald*, 4 October 1920, sec. 4, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ “Declares Wilson ‘Scrapped’ League,” *New York Times*, 3 October 1920, 2.

¹⁰² “Too Great a Power to Be Put Under Foreign Control,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 18 October 1920, 18.

that the treaty, which created an “Imperial Foreign Syndicate” over the U.S. government, would force Americans to fight compulsory wars for European interests. But this was not a call to isolationism. The editorial, citing the comments of Senator Knox of Pennsylvania, claimed that the United States would intervene in any war under a “compelling moral obligation” to the world.¹⁰³ It is significant that the *Examiner* backed neither Cox nor Harding. The importance of these articles is that they show that even adamant opponents of the peace plan still believed that the United States had a moral obligation to fight in wars if its interests were at stake.

Several of the pro-Harding papers examined in this study also used commentary from notable opponents of the League to persuade voters to support their candidate instead of the Cox-Roosevelt ticket. An editorial in the *New York Herald*, featuring remarks by Republican Senator William Borah of Idaho, claimed that fear and suspicion toward the League were growing because of Wilson’s unwillingness to compromise. The editorial held that the league, in its current condition was the “supreme creed of imperialism” bolstering the European elite.¹⁰⁴ The *Herald* focused on the fact that Wilson’s one time supporter and powerful Congressional voice Borah were standing against his proposed peace plan, by default driving more voters into the Harding-Coolidge camp, which was reluctant to pledge support for or against the league with clarity.

Another editorial in the *New York Herald* stated that “only some unforeseen circumstances can halt the trend of Republicanism. The people, turned against the Wilson administration and suspicious of the League of Nations, are almost unanimous in their demand for a Republican President.” The article claimed that Cox’s alignment with Wilson and the

¹⁰³ “Why Mr. Wilson’s Covenant Must Be Flatly Rejected,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 19 October 1920, 24.

¹⁰⁴ “Says League is Supreme Creed of Imperialism: Senator Borah Declares it Sanctifies Every Kind of Secret Treaty,” *New York Herald*, 17 October 1920, 4.

staggering inflation rate were causing the Democrats to continue losing the support of the general public.¹⁰⁵

Editorials in the *Kansas City Star* identified the poor economic situation and the League issue as hurting the already damaged Democrats. The paper claimed that there appeared to be a “sweeping rebuke of the Wilson Party” due to its apparent failure to handle the rising food prices at home and due to the poor economic situation in Europe. The *Star* proposed that voters think of “America first” in the coming elections. This idea, according to the editorial, meant “more than the preservation of a free republic against the overlordship of the Geneva government.” It signified a return to conducting affairs the “American way” and not under an “international tribunal” that would bankrupt the country with policies that failed to reflect the nation’s interests.¹⁰⁶ According to the *Star’s* editorials, the Democrats were being blamed for sacrificing too much national interest for membership in the League of Nations.

Dissension in the ranks of the Democratic Party also became a topic of concern in some pro-Harding papers. The *Kansas City Star* reported that Missouri Senator and opponent of the treaty James Reed would not meet with Governor Cox when he visited Kansas City, Reed’s hometown. The *Star* said the Senator’s office claimed he was planning a “duck hunting trip,” leaving him unable to meet with the party’s candidate. The paper noted Reed’s unrelenting opposition to the league as the likely reason why the Senator would not meet with Cox. Bound to an unpopular position on the League, an unsteady economy, and discord within the Party, the *Star* believed the Democrats had much to worry about.¹⁰⁷ Pro-Republican papers in this study, like the *Star*, had their readers believing that Harding was sure to defeat the splintered Democrats.

¹⁰⁵ “Forecast G.O.P. Landslide in 13 States in West,” *New York Herald*, 2 October 1920, 3.

¹⁰⁶ “A Drift to Americanism,” *Kansas City Star*, 30 October 1920, 1.

¹⁰⁷ “Will Reed Meet Cox,” *Kansas City Star*, 2 October 1920, 1.

Papers supporting the Republicans also found Harding's character, personality, and message easy to sell to the public. For example, in an editorial appearing in the *New York Herald*, he was shown as an ordinary man, looking to make the world a better place. The author asserted that Harding treated his political opponents with particular fairness and he only desired to unite the nation after the fragmentation that had occurred over the League dispute. Also, he proclaimed that in reference to the League itself, Harding was wisely prepared to join an international association. But he would not join this one because he opposed Article X. Clearly, in the *Herald's* view, Harding had a likeable personality as well as persuasive stance against what it believed was the most disagreeable part of the League covenant.¹⁰⁸

Other sympathetic papers presented the Ohio Senator as internationally minded as well. The *Los Angeles Times* published many editorials bolstering Harding as an internationalist. The *Times* proclaimed that "Harding says he favors the principle of the League of Nations, but he desires the establishment of an international court, founding a league on justice and not military force." The editorial concluded that:

The *Times* sincerely believes that the election of Harding is the only possible solution to the present controversy [over the league]; and for that reason it advises all friends of the League, who place country over party, to work and vote for the election of Harding as the surest and safest way to our entrance into an association to promote the preservation of future peace.¹⁰⁹

This editorial appealed to the public in hopes of reviving a bipartisan spirit that had previously existed under Wilson before the Paris peace conference. The *Times* wanted to focus on the fact that under Harding, national interests and resources would not be placed in a secondary position

¹⁰⁸ Edwin C. Hill, "Harding Reveals Himself as a Real Human Sort; Seeks to Make this World a Friendlier Place," *New York Herald*, 31 October 1920, Magazine and Books (sec. 7), p.1.

¹⁰⁹ "Why Harding and Not Cox," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 October 1920, sec. 2, p. 4.

during international negotiations as they supposedly had been by Wilson during his last two years in office.¹¹⁰

The *Kansas City Star* also published pro-Harding editorials that highlighted the candidate's internationalist message. In an editorial published within weeks of the election, the *Star* asserted that Harding was the ideal candidate to lead the United States in a new international association. According to the editorial, Wilson had soured not just domestic politics, but also American relations overseas, driving the French and other European nations to support Harding's bid for the presidency. The *Star* believed there was a clear desire worldwide for a change in the United States' approach to the world.¹¹¹ In another piece, from Reverend Charles Aked of the First Congressional Church of Kansas City, the *Star* unleashed another volley at Wilson's international policy. Aked declared that:

No man living is more profoundly convinced than I am that a League of Nations is imperiously demanded by the necessities of mankind. No man living is more profoundly convinced than I am that the league as planned by the Versailles conference fails to meet these imperious needs.¹¹²

Aked held that the League became a pack of vain conquerors once the leaders of the Allied powers barred the vanquished nations from the league; he believed that including them would have provided the world an opportunity to heal politically and thrive economically. He claimed that, since some important nations of the world were excluded from the peace table, no real agreement could be reached that would not needlessly damage Germany and her wartime allies. Aked concluded that the pact as then conceived was an illegitimate alliance that America would one day be glad the Republican Senators rejected.¹¹³ These and other editorials showed a feeling that the Democrats and Wilson had led the nation astray with deep commitments to a League of

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ "Wants U.S. to Lead Way," *Kansas City Star*, 16 October 1920, 2.

¹¹² Charles F. Aked, "Dr. Charles F. Aked on the League of Nations," *Kansas City Times*, 30 October 1920, 3.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Nations that did not actually represent the country's best interests. The *Star* presented a message that Harding and the Republicans would conduct international relations in a manner that better represented the interests of the American people and aided the world, too.

The *New York Herald* also published editorials that presented Harding as reaching out to aid the world. One editorial applauded Harding's position that he would not commit the nation to the league unless "serious revisions were made to the covenant," if at all. The editorial alleged that the current association would act as a "war breeder" because not all nations were welcome to join and it did not protect the self-determination of nations. The piece argued that people in the Balkans, Middle East and Ireland were living unfairly under imperial oppression from France, Great Britain, and other European powers, something the Americans could not actively support.¹¹⁴ This editorial shows the way in which some pro-Republican newspapers used the debate over the treaty to make inroads with first generation immigrant voters in northeastern cities who usually voted for the Democratic Party.

In the late stages of the election, the pro-Democratic *New York Times* began acknowledging Senator Harding as an internationalist. An editorial titled "Harding Closes His Campaign" reported Harding's views on why the League had remained such a major issue in the campaign. The editorial read:

Touching upon the League of Nations Senator Harding charged that his opponents had stressed this issue in the campaign to draw the attention of the voters of the country from the inefficiency of the Democratic Administration in the handling of domestic affairs. He then restated his attitude toward the Treaty of Versailles, reviewing his position as a Senator voting for the Lodge reservations.¹¹⁵

The article highlighted the fact that Harding's stance against Article X of the covenant had remained. This article ran just a week after Cox declared that he would accept reservations to the

¹¹⁴ "Harding Will Lead Bitter Ohio Fight," *New York Herald*, 23 October 1920, sec. 4, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ "Harding Closes His Campaign," *New York Times*, 31 October 1920, 3.

Treaty with particular focus on the issue of Article X, if he were elected President.¹¹⁶ His shift in position was clearly too little too late. Impending defeat certainly served as the motivation for Cox to adjust his stand away from Wilson's rigidity, but his efforts were too little too late. The papers examined here were not going to shift their support for Cox after Harding had remained opposed to Article X since the beginning of the campaign.

The presidential election on 2 November 1920 produced one of the most lopsided victories in U.S. electoral history. The Republican ticket of Harding and Coolidge defeated Cox and Roosevelt by approximately six million votes, with a total voter turnout of twenty-six million voters. Also, the Democratic "Solid South" broke by sending the electoral votes of Texas and Tennessee to the Republicans.¹¹⁷ The election was certainly a turning point, but not one away from U.S. international participation.

An editorial from William Randolph Hearst in the *San Francisco Examiner* illustrated one anti-Wilsonian perspective on the Democrats' defeat. Hearst proclaimed the Republican victory as one against "the Wilson Party and that party's pro-British, un-American policies." He emphasized that the United States was no longer a "crown colony" performing the orders of the King in England. America, Hearst claimed, had returned to being "the Land of the Free." According to the Hearst, the election was more about rejecting Wilson and the policies of the Democratic leadership than anything else. To him, Harding had demonstrated a more acceptable approach to international affairs. In addition, Hearst's anti-British sentiments were not hostile to general participation by the United States in international affairs.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ "Gov. Cox Will Accept Reservation on Article X; No Use of Army or Navy Unless Congress Approves," *New York Times*, 24 October 1920, 1.

¹¹⁷ Fleming, *The Illusion of Victory*, 469. The result put approximately 15 million votes for Harding, 9 million for Cox and just under a million for Socialist candidate Eugene Debs, who ran his campaign from his federal prison cell in Atlanta, Georgia. He was prosecuted under the Espionage Act of 1917 for a speech given in Canton, Ohio.

¹¹⁸ William Randolph Hearst, "The Nation Has Returned to the Americanism of the Republic's Founding Fathers," *San Francisco Examiner*, 3 November 1920, 24.

The *Los Angeles Times* drew attention to the approval of Harding's election in the foreign press. One editorial claimed that the election was a rebuke to the "one man rule" of Wilson and claimed that "Wilsonism is alien to American traditions." According to this editorial, Wilson's brand of internationalism was rejected in the election and that Europeans were generally happy about the defeat of the Democrats.¹¹⁹

The *New York Herald* focused on the belief that Harding would revive U.S. international leadership. A selection in the *Herald* titled "U.S. to Become Real Leader in World Affairs" claimed that:

Diplomats in Washington apparently are a unit in admitting that the United States is about to assume real leadership in the world of international thought. Because the electorate has voiced its objections to the League of Nations as elaborated by President Wilson, world attention is centered now upon the part the next Administration will play in the international politics. This fact is regarded as the sincerest answer to those who contend that rejection of the Wilson league would mean a policy of isolation for the United States.¹²⁰

It is apparent by reading this editorial in the *Herald* that many believed he would take steps to make the United States a world leader like never before. The *Herald* presented Harding's message as a rejection of Wilson's commitment to unqualified acceptance of the League, which the paper believed too tightly bound the United States to the interests of European nations.

In the wake of Harding's election, the once pro-Cox *New York Times* expressed its belief that the President-elect would to rejuvenate U.S. foreign relationships. One *Times* editorial reported read:

It is felt here that it will be America's destiny to play again a great role in approaching settlements. The American Government is directly concerned and interested, politically and economically, in the settlement of the question of securing peace and stability. President-elect Harding's speech at Akron, containing expressions of the principles that illuminated American policy at the close of the war,

¹¹⁹ "Foreign Interests Keen: Press of European Countries Generally Pleased at Harding Election," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 November 1920, 2.

¹²⁰ "U.S. to Become Real Leader in World Affairs," *New York Herald*, 7 November 1920, 9.

has given renewed hope to friends of peace in international circles that the incoming Administration will not fail, in its own way, to exercise the moral authority and strength which the United States possess for procuring such settlements as will contribute toward security of the civilized world.¹²¹

The idea that Harding was not an isolationist had spread to some pro-Democratic papers. Even advocates of Wilson's policy, such as the *New York Times*, were coming to view Harding's proposed method of international participation in a positive light.

The debate over the League of Nations and the Treaty of Versailles throughout 1920 certainly made the newspapers in this study assess where they believed the nation fit into the global community. The Democratic papers in this study that supported the League through the campaign asserted that the firm alliance of the League of Nations would best American ideals in world affairs. The pro-Harding papers seen here appeared to desire a less pre-committed and more flexible disposition for the United States in international relations. Another certainty of the Republican message was that there would be no permanent military alliances to interfere with American interests. The sources cited above show that during the campaign, these pro-Republican newspapers did not present Harding as a candidate who wanted to pull the United States out of world affairs. They showed him quite interested in creating new and different types of international relationships than the ones President Wilson had worked to create. The papers used in this study presented the election not as a choice between isolationism and internationalism. Rather, the election was viewed by these sources as a referendum on how the American people believe the United States should pursue their international objectives, through Wilson's League of Nations or through more independent channels of national diplomacy.

¹²¹ "See Renewed Hope of Our Leadership," *New York Times*, 28 November 1920, 3E.

CHAPTER 3 - Taking the Lead Even Without the League: American Internationalism During the Harding Administration

With the election of Warren Harding the voters of the United States did not just select a new chief executive. They also chose a different way of conducting international relations than Woodrow Wilson had envisioned with U.S. membership in the League of Nations. The Harding administration is often perceived as the first of several isolationist Republican Presidents to sit in the Oval Office.¹²² However, these newspapers presented Harding's administration as quite active in world affairs and effective in finding solutions to the world's problems. Several of these papers praised the new Republican administration's approach to international affairs, presenting Harding and his cabinet members as committed to preserving American international interests and preventing a future war while maintaining the nation's responsibility to aid the world.

Before Harding took office, there were several new issues that roused the attention of these papers. Disarmament or at least negotiated arms limitations by the major industrialized nations of the world to secure a lasting peace was one of the foremost topics in the press. A long-term peace accord may have seemed more difficult to be obtained when the United States Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles for the second time, and membership in the League of Nations became even less possible when Wilson's ideological successor, James Cox was defeated in the 1920 election.¹²³ But that is not the case. These events did not deter many of these press outlets from believing that the United States would continue to play an active role in

¹²² For one example, see Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse*, 112-115.

¹²³ Thomas H. Buckley, *The United States and the Washington Conference, 1921-1922* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 9-10.

global negotiations through proposed armament cutbacks. Many of the papers expressed faith in the incoming Republican administration to solve both the military and economic issues facing the United States and the world so as to secure a lasting peace. In December 1920, the *Kansas City Star* published several editorials expressing hope that Harding would take up the cause of international disarmament. The *Star* claimed that under Harding the U.S. “could properly assume leadership in formulating a new scheme of international relations” focusing on a better disarmament policy than that of the League of Nations. This article also reported that Harding was planning to call another meeting of the world powers so as to work out a “create and entirely new structure” of international relations that would be more acceptable at home and abroad.¹²⁴ In another article the *Star* proposed that Harding would bring about harmony in the government so as to solve economic problems at home and in Europe as well suing for a separate peace with Germany. A separate peace, the paper held, would provide the United States the opportunity to begin building international support for a disarmament conference that would get the global economy back on its feet and provide the world with a policy that would work towards the “preservation of world peace.”¹²⁵ The *Los Angeles Times* also promoted the idea that Harding was to begin a campaign for international disarmament. The *Times* reported that the President-elect was already busy working on a plan to gather world leaders in hopes of establishing a new association of nations that would be based on law and strive for decreasing the possibilities of war through armament reductions.¹²⁶ Hopes were high in these two pro-Republican papers that disarmament would become a reality when the Harding administration took office in March.

The pro-Democratic papers also believed that disarmament would be the way to truly achieve world peace, but it would not only be the administration leading the way. In January, the

¹²⁴ “May Call Peace Parley,” *Kansas City Star*, 16 December 1920, 2.

¹²⁵ “A Big Diplomatic Task,” *Kansas City Star*, 12 December 1920, 18A.

¹²⁶ “Urge World Tribunal: Idea Growing Upon Harding,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 December 1920, 1.

New York World reported that disarmament legislation was being advanced in the U.S. Senate in legislation proposed by adamant opponent to U.S. membership in the League of Nations Republican William Borah. According to the *World*, Borah was taking the lead by introducing to the Senate an amendment that would take leadership of the arms limitations and disarmament away from the League of Nations. The paper claimed that the League of Nations had not addressed the issue directly or effectively because the United States had failed to join the association. And without the United States there could be no discussion of world disarmament or arms limitations.¹²⁷

The *World* also praised President-elect Harding for becoming an active advocate for stopping another arms race. The paper said that Harding and other world leaders were planning to take up important disarmament issues to “show the way for other nations to save themselves from bankruptcy and the menace of future wars.” The *World* also stated that there was a growing conviction in the public that, if disarmament was to become a reality, the first military cuts would have to come from the navies of the world, which, the paper claimed, “justified themselves by war.”¹²⁸ The paper presented naval arms limitations as one of the most important issues the country would have to deal with to secure a prominent position in international relations. The *World* continually suggested that the Democrats would work with the President-elect and the Republican majorities to promote an international policy centered on building a lasting peace.

While some of the papers here offered praise and support for President-elect Harding’s proposed international policies, others took the opportunity to assail the effectiveness of the

¹²⁷ “Senate Committee Takes Up Disarmament To-Day with Borah’s Resolution Leading,” *New York World*, 3 January 1921, 1.

¹²⁸ “A Flood of Telegrams of the Heartiest [E]ndorsement Comes from All Over the World, With Earnest Protests Against the ‘Crime of Competitive Armament,’ Which Can Lead to Nothing But Ruin,” *New York World*, 26 December 1920, 1.

League of Nations. The *San Francisco Examiner*, long-time opponent of the League, argued that at Geneva “politicians waste the world’s time in politics and talk while millions suffer and millions die.” The paper asserted that “it would be a blessing, indeed, if the whole tribe of international politicians could be shipped to the North Pole for a year’s voyage” rather than allowing them to meddle in the affairs of every nation. The *Examiner* alleged that all nations in economic turmoil would regain their financial stability not by following the League of Nations but rather by turning to open market participation with the United States and the rest of the world.¹²⁹ Although the *Examiner* did not mention disarmament or arms limitations as the solution to the world’s problems as the other papers had, this editorial clearly conveyed the *Examiner’s* message that the United States must stay involved in world affairs so as to ensure its own as well as the world’s prosperity.

The *New York Herald* published editorials expounding on its criticisms of the League of Nations. In one editorial, titled “League of Nations Becoming an International Soviet,” political commentator Frank Simonds, who also contributed articles to the *Kansas City Star*, stated that the political disputes between the European nations were causing many problems within the League. He claimed that the most significant conflict existed between the leadership and the representative council, diminishing any chance the League had at aiding the world in its time of need. Simonds alleged that this constant conflict was not just a sign of the League’s inability to get anything significant accomplished. The conflict between the representatives and the leadership also indicated to him that the League was becoming “world parliament or Superstate” that would be run by Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks, who were in collusion with the League leaders. Also, Simonds asserted that disarmament under the guidance of the League would be

¹²⁹ “The Way to Aid Mankind is to Resume Communication and Trade with All Peoples,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 10 December 1920, 20.

impossible because no major power really believed in its authority and they could not be trusted.¹³⁰ Though Simonds's claims were sensationalized to say the least, his article shows that even those who were adamantly opposed to U.S. membership in the League still believed that the nation must take the lead in international arms reduction discussions or else nothing would come of it.

In March, when Warren Harding took the oath of office to become the twenty-ninth President of the United States, the *Kansas City Star* hailed the event as the coming of a new era for American foreign policy. The *Star* alleged that "a solemn warning that America stands ready to resist any reversion of civilization was sounded" with the inauguration of Harding as President. It claimed that his policy, as laid out in his inaugural address, "seeks no part in directing the destinies of the Old World, but she is ready to enter an association of nations for conference and counsel which will not impair the sovereignty of the United States." The *Star* also asserted that the majority of the President's inaugural address was aimed at international affairs, which the paper applauded because, according to the paper, the "minds of the entire country" had been focused on how the United States would pursue international relations under his leadership. Another major point of Harding's speech that the *Star* praised was his new military policy, which was claimed to focus on no permanent military alliances, "resistance of assaults on civilization," and "the formation of an association of nations for conference" in hopes of bringing about "approximate world disarmament."¹³¹ The *Star* presented Harding as being quite focused on international affairs and added plenty of commentary to suggest that the paper supported the new President's policy goals.

¹³⁰ Frank H. Simonds, "League of Nations Becoming an International Soviet," *New York Herald*, 5 December 1920, sec. 3, p. 4.

¹³¹ "A New Policy," *Kansas City Star*, 4 March 1921, 1 & 6.

The *Los Angeles Times* also offered its praise for the inaugural policies of President Harding. In its front-page story, the *Times* identified what it thought to be the “salient features” of Harding’s inaugural address. The top five points from the speech listed in the article listed were (1) Harding’s pledges to provide freedom from foreign entanglements, (2) the rejection of the League of Nations as a military compact, (3) readiness to join an association of nations, (4) a desire to pursue a course for international disarmament and/or arms limitation, and (5) a “desire for the establishment of a world court to adjudicate justifiable international disputes.” It is important to note that none of the top five points of the speech highlighted in the article suggest that Harding had planned to withdraw the U.S. from international relations. Even Harding’s rejection of the League of Nations was tempered by the *Times* when they claimed that the refusal of the League was because Harding had no desire to place the U.S. in a permanent military alliance. According to the *Times*, Harding was very much focused on developing an active role for the United States in international affairs upon taking office.¹³²

The *Los Angeles Times* printed an official reaction from its editorial board to Harding’s inaugural address. The *Times*, which had supported American membership in the League since its inception, was slightly saddened by Harding’s announcement that he would not commit the country to the League of Nations. However, it supported Harding’s decision to reject the League in its current form because, the *Times* believed, no one wanted to get involved in another war that would only benefit certain powers in Europe. The paper backed Harding’s call for a “return to normalcy.” It also asserted that Harding’s proposed “normalcy” was intended to address industrial strife affecting the country at the time, not a turn towards political or economic isolationism. The *Times* alleged that Harding’s administration “will consider all questions of

¹³² Arthur Sears Henning, “Era of Good Feeling, New Era Under Way: Harding Takes Oath of Office Amid Scenes of Enthusiasm, Promise of Return to Normalcy,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 March 1921, 1 & 4.

foreign policy” on the basis of national security and interests, but would also remain cognizant of the global concerns. The *Times* held that Harding was planning to move to make peace with Germany on separate terms because, as far as it was concerned, a “military peace had already been secured” and it was time work toward “the attaining of an industrial peace.”¹³³ The *Times* presented Harding’s arrival as the coming of a new way of conducting foreign negotiations that would reflect more national self-interest than Wilson’s policy had. But, at the same time, the *Times* asserted that Harding would not reject the United States’ economic or military responsibilities to the world.

In July 1921, a formalized peace with Germany was signed by United States. Several newspapers proclaimed this event as a major victory for the administration as well as the nation. The *New York World* reported that the Senate vote to ratify the separate peace plan would open the door for the resumption of “friendly relations between the United States and Germany,” a step the paper believed would surely help improve the economic situation of both countries.¹³⁴ The *Kansas City Star* also hailed the opportunity wrought by the peace agreement, claiming that the United States may finally “open the way for the resumption of diplomatic relations with Germany and Austria.” The *Star* alleged that only some Democrats in the Senate stood in the way of this proposal, with the Republican leadership taking the initiative and pushing though the program Harding had desired of them.¹³⁵ These papers acknowledged the signing of the peace with Germany was a mere formality since the nation had not been involved in military engagements with Germany since 1918, but the treaty was still significant. Both papers recognized the necessity of moving on with this peace settlement, separate from the Treaty of

¹³³ “The Inaugural,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 March 1921, sec. 2, p. 4.

¹³⁴ “Peace Plan voted in Senate, Harding May Sign it To-Day,” *New York World*, 2 July 1921, 1-2.

¹³⁵ “Peace is in Sight,” *Kansas City Star*, 1 July 1921, 1.

Versailles so that the United States could begin aiding Germany in the reconstruction process, something Harding voiced his commitment to since his inauguration.

In the wake of the news about the finalization of a peace agreement with the Central Powers, the *Kansas City Star* published an editorial from official British war correspondent and prolific writer about the war, Sir Philip Gibbs. Gibbs proposed that the United States had taken the lead in world affairs after the war, regardless of its status with the League of Nations. He argued that a conference between the great naval powers (the U.S., Great Britain, and Japan) would be the only way to secure the peace for at least a generation, and the United States would be the only power to bring together such a conference.¹³⁶ It was clear in the *Star*'s earlier publications and this editorial from Gibbs that they believed the United States would certainly play a decisive role in world affairs.

Also that July, the U.S. government took another step towards advancing one of the most critical parts Harding's international policy, a global naval arms limitations conference. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that with the passage of the 1921 naval appropriations bill, Congress had attached a clause deeming it necessary for the Harding administration to begin working on an international arms limitations conference. The paper reported that "President Harding sent a special communication to Republican leaders, approving the amendment and giving assurances that the administration has already been seeking information with regard to the attitude of foreign nations on the general subject." The *Times* also commented on the agreeable relationship between the President and Congress claiming: "It is interesting to note that the President did not make any overtures to other nations concerning disarmament before he was formally backed by

¹³⁶ Sir Philip Gibbs, "Present Awakening of Rulers to World Perils a Turning Point in History," *Kansas City Star*, 3 July 1920, 22C.

action of Congress. This is a marked departure from the policy of Woodrow Wilson.”¹³⁷ The *Times* viewed Harding’s action as both necessary and proper; necessary to discuss limiting naval arms with the leaders of the world and proper because he waited for Congress to provide its official backing. Again, this shows the desire in some of the papers examined here to abandon the methods of the former President while keeping the United States involved in world affairs.

In November the naval arms limitations conference became a reality as world leaders gathered in Washington to negotiate a settlement on the subject. However, before the Washington Conference commenced the nation would take a moment to remember its contribution to the World War with the entombment of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. Many newspapers took this opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the American war effort and specifically what it meant for Americans to fight wars on foreign soil. The *New York Times* reprinted the entirety of Harding’s dedication speech in the 12 November 1921 edition but published a three-paragraph excerpt on its front page that the paper perceived to be heart of President’s address. The first two paragraphs of this selection read:

The loftiest tribute we can bestow today – the heroically earned tribute – fashioned in deliberate conviction, out of unclouded thought, neither shadowed by remorse nor made vain by fancies, is the commitment of this Republic to an advancement never made before. If American achievement is a cherished pride at home, if our unselfishness among nations is all we wish it to be, and our influence and strength, yea, of our aspirations and convictions, to put mankind on a little higher plane, exulting and exulting, with war’s distressing and depressing tragedies barred from the stage of righteous civilization.

There have been a thousand defenses justly and patriotically made; a thousand offenses which reason and righteousness out to have stayed. Let us beseech all men to join us in seeking the rule under which reason and righteousness shall prevail.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ “International Disarmament,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 July 1920, sec. 2, p. 4.

¹³⁸ Warren G. Harding, “President Harding’s Plea for Barring War, From the Stage of Righteous Civilization,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1921, 1. This was a special excerpt from President Harding’s speech at the entombment of the Unknown Soldier from the First World War at Arlington National Cemetery.

These words from the President show that he believed (and the *Times* agreed with him) that the United States had a duty to aid the world in ending the threat of what many believed to be excessively destructive modern war. In an accompanying article, the paper claimed that the soldiers had valiantly done their duty for the world and now the government must do their best to ensure that civilization would not have to endure such a tragic and unnecessary event again.¹³⁹

The *New York Herald* featured a poignant statement about the dedication of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from well-known political correspondent and 1921 Pulitzer Prize winner for newspaper reporting, Louis Seibold. Seibold asserted that “To-day the American people bowed in reverence before the body of the warrior and paid tribute to the heroism of the American Soldier in the great world war.” The author contended that the entire country embraced the sacrifices of the Unknown Soldier and all American soldiers who protected the world from tyranny, militarism, and injustice. Seibold added that the soldier also signified the moral commitment of the United States to defending what was righteous in the world.¹⁴⁰ Seibold clearly stated that he and the *Herald* did not believe the United States would, could, or should back away from global affairs.

The entombment ceremony provoked an emotional editorial from the *San Francisco Examiner*. The *Examiner* reflected on what the end of the fighting meant, it stated that:

There would be no more war, no more oppression of the weak by the strong. No people [were] to be governed any more without consent. The abominations of diplomacy and militarism and naysayers were to disappear. The law of right was to displace the law of might. Henceforth the world was to be safe for democracy. All the fine phrases with which the millions had been led to the slaughter were repeated

¹³⁹ “Unknown Warrior Buried, the World Honoring Him; Harding Pleas for a Ban by Civilization on War; Delegates Enter Arms Parley Today in Hopeful Spirit,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1921, 1-2.

¹⁴⁰ Louis Seibold, “President Officiates as Impressive Ceremonies at Capitol and Tomb: His Tribute Stirring,” *New York Herald*, 12 November 1921, 1.

as though their authors were honest men who meant to make good the glittering words they had dinned in the ears of the credulous world. That was the thought and the confident expectation of the peoples of the world three years ago this day. And now look upon the world and see how that thought and that expectation have been disappointed?¹⁴¹

The paper also claimed that the total repudiation of the Versailles Treaty by the world would be “the only road that will lead the world to real peace.” The *Examiner*’s disappointment with the way the war’s settlement had played out over the preceding three years was tempered with hope for the coming disarmament conference. The paper concluded by stating that “on this anniversary of the armistice, and this eve of another conference of the victorious Powers here on our own American soil, every patriot and friend of humanity ought to do all that he can do to bring about such a wise and salutary and necessary result.” In the wake of the entombment of the nation’s “unknown warrior,” the *Examiner*, remaining adamantly opposed to the League of Nations, expressed its confidence in the United States’ ability and continued commitment to lead the world in formulating a lasting peace agreement.¹⁴²

Before the conference started, the *Kansas City Star* claimed that the nation and the world were desperately seeking a peace agreement that was different than the other pacts that had come since the war. Conveying a message much like the above article from the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *Star* claimed that the League of Nations proposal had ruined the potential peace that could have been attained at Versailles. The paper also expressed its sincerest hope that the Washington Naval Conference would not seek a type of pact that attempted to link a peace agreement with an international association like the League. What the *Star* desired was a peace negotiation that might lead to the foundation of another international association based on democratic principles and legality unlike what it believed the League of Nations to be. The

¹⁴¹ “Shall the World’s Tremendous Sacrifices be in Vain?,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 11 November 1921, 22.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

paper alleged that the League was primarily a military alliance that favored certain countries like Japan and Great Britain over other nations in less fortunate situations, such as China.¹⁴³ Though its assessment of the League as principally a military pact was misguided, it was apparent that the *Star* wanted to see the formation of an international organization that would address the issues of national sovereignty and equal representation better than the League of Nations agreement had.

When the Washington Naval Conference opened the day after the ceremony for the Unknown Soldier at Arlington, these papers had another important international event to report on. Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes declared the administration's ambitions for naval cutbacks to the attending nations. All of the media outlets examined in this study reacted favorably to this news, assuming it was a sign that the U.S. was taking the lead in the pursuit for a lasting world peace. The *New York Times* reported: "Bold, direct, and clear, the American Government plan for the limitation of naval armament was laid before the world today." The *Times* claimed Hughes's message possessed "a positiveness and an aggressiveness seldom known in international negotiations." The paper also asserted that the opening sessions of the conference appeared to be full of potential for clearing up global concerns over armaments. According to the *Times*, this hope seemed to create a "wave of optimism" over the entire delegation.¹⁴⁴ In another article in the same edition, the *Times* stated that "the essence of the proposal is this: That the United States offers to go far beyond what she asks Great Britain or Japan to do" to preserve international armament limitations. The United States, according to the *Times*, would be forced to suspend production of more ships already under construction than either Great Britain or Japan. The paper supported the view that all three nations, along with the

¹⁴³ "China is the Real Issue," *Kansas City Star*, 11 November 1921, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Edwin L. James, "American Plan a Surprise," *New York Times*, 13 November 1921, 1.

rest of the world, needed to take a naval building holiday in order to ensure that some sort of peace could last.¹⁴⁵

The *Los Angeles Times* also focused on the belief that the country would have to cut back its military ship building far more than its former allies. The paper agreed with Hughes's assertion that the United States must take the lead by arms control as a measure of good faith, too. The *Times* was enthusiastic, claiming that "seldom has a conference of nations assembled in an atmosphere of greater cordiality than that which enveloped the opening feeling here [in Washington]." The *Times* alleged that Hughes's speech did little to upset any of the delegates, even from Great Britain and Japan, a sure sign in the paper's opinion that there was general acceptance, at least in principle, for the U.S. program to control naval armaments to prevent another arms race that could potentially upset already struggling commercial markets.¹⁴⁶

Louis Seibold, writing in the *New York Herald*, also praised Hughes and Harding for their proposed limitation ratios of capital ships (5-5-3) between the U.S., Great Britain, and Japan. Seibold reported that "the President of the American Republic and his Foreign Secretary revealed the determination of the American people to demand action to correct the hardships from which all peoples suffer due to unnecessary and expensive armaments." Referring to the previous Anglo-Japanese agreements concerning interests in the Pacific Ocean as "archaic diplomacy," Seibold attacked the way agreements on arms limitations had been handled. He claimed the old agreement could not preserve rational and democratic principles, but he believed the United States' entry, as one of the foremost world powers, into these negotiations with the Washington Conference would give hope to the region and the world for peace. To round out his

¹⁴⁵ "Outstanding Features of Mr. Hughes's Proposal for 3-Nation Agreement to Cut Navies, Stop Building," *New York Times*, 13 November 1921, 1.

¹⁴⁶ "Concrete Naval Armament Cut Proposed by America: Sweeping Challenge Issued to World by United States; Favors Ten-Year Naval Holiday; Willing to Scrap Ships, Shoulder Financial Loss," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 November 1921, 1 & 3.

argument, Seibold asserted that the delegates were so enthusiastic about Hughes's speech that he regularly paused during his speech for the cheers and applause from the delegates to dwindle before continuing with his "enlightened proposal."¹⁴⁷ The *Herald* also expressed its belief in the urgent need for an agreement at the Washington Conference by titling the reprinted text of Secretary Hughes's speech "More Wars Are Seen Unless Nations Act."¹⁴⁸ Clearly, the *Herald* viewed the Washington Conference as the prime opportunity for the Harding administration and the United States to change the direction of international relations for the better.

The *Kansas City Star* also issued its support for the measures proposed by the Secretary Hughes and President Harding. The *Star* claimed that the United States was once more taking the lead in international affairs. One article reported:

Mr. Hughes sought to convince the world of America's good faith and intentions as to armament reductions in the most forcible way possible. He sought to show the United States was ready for action. Whatever happens to the plan in conference, whatever modifications experts insist upon, the United States has shown her willingness to do business. It is out in the open, plain and understandable, not only to the people of the United States, but to the world.¹⁴⁹

The paper went on to assert that the moment was right for the administration to make such an overture, claiming that only slight progress had been made in achieving a "real peace" since the signing cease fire of the World War just over three years prior. The *Star* expressed its approval for the administration's departure from Wilson's style of diplomacy, which the paper accused of being "secretive" and "too willing to compromise with foreign powers." The paper also claimed that the conference would be successful if the United States and England came to a greater understanding for parity between their two navies.¹⁵⁰ The *Star* presented to readers as fact that

¹⁴⁷ Louis Seibold, "New Plan to End War Proves a Big Surprise," *New York Herald*, 13 November 1921, 1 & 5.

¹⁴⁸ "More Wars Are Seen Unless Nations Act," *New York Herald*, 13 November 1921, 1.

¹⁴⁹ "Hughes Hit the Line: Smashing, Open Style of Diplomacy Marks Bid for Backing of World Opinion," *Kansas City Star*, 13 November 1921, 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

the nation's foreign policy was moving in a different direction than it had under Wilson but certainly not towards isolationism. It presented Harding's foreign policy as embracing a new way of conducting foreign affairs that focused on preserving peace and preventing war in a different way than Wilson had.

In February 1922, when the Washington Conference drew to a conclusion, all of the newspapers examined in this study expressed a sense of enthusiasm about the agreements being finalized. The reaction in these media outlets to this conference had a significantly different feel than the conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. In the wake of the post-war conference many of these newspapers generally supported the proposed pact from the conclave in Paris, but they also questioned the long-term ramifications of some of the finer points in regards to the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations. In the case of the *San Francisco Examiner*, there was significant opposition to the Treaty of Versailles altogether, but this was not the case after the Washington Conference. The *New York Times* approvingly reported comments from Lord Arthur James Balfour, then Lord President of the Council and head of the British delegation. Balfour claimed that "the Conference on Limitation of Armaments had accomplished things that the League of Nations could not have hoped to do." The *Times* also reported that Balfour, along with other prominent politicians around globe, supported President Harding's call for a new association of nations that would supplant the League of Nations. According to his statements in the article, Balfour desired a less cumbersome and overarching association between nations.¹⁵¹ In another article, the paper alleged that there was overwhelming support from the United States Senate for the agreements reached at the conference, with Henry Cabot Lodge strongly supporting the accords. The *Times* claimed that Lodge was one of the first

¹⁵¹ "Says Conference Did What League Couldn't: Balfour Declares the Washington Body 'Epoch Making' in Its Achievements," *New York Times*, 5 February 1922, 1-2.

to express his acceptance of the proposed armament limitations and promises to guarantee the Open Door trade policy with China.¹⁵² It is fair to suggest that the *Times* believed that the world had been made a safer place and American interests had been protected as a result of the meeting.

The *New York Herald* also presented the conference as an overwhelming success, but the paper chose to focus on the aid provided to struggling China in its front-page article. Louis Seibold, preparing to wrap up his reporting at the conference for the *Herald*, proclaimed that “solemn pledges were made to-day by the nine most important Powers to cooperate for the maintenance of peace on land and sea.” He alleged that as a result of the agreements made at Washington the “shackles had been taken off” China and that the entire world would once again respect the Open Door policy proposed by United States. This had particular implications for the Japanese who had claimed Manchuria, the Korean Peninsula, sections of Siberia, and parts of Mongolia as their rightful possessions as part of the Treaty of Versailles. Seibold claimed that the accords forged at Washington cancelled out previous Japanese incursions into Chinese affairs, delivering the Chinese a “new bill of rights.”¹⁵³ Seibold stated in his report that the most important results of the Washington Conference were the rights and privileges granted to China. He certainly believed that the Harding administration had done well to reach out to protect liberty and freedom not just for Americans but for other peoples on the other side of the globe, too.

Also reporting on the closing ceremonies of the conference, the *Los Angeles Times* praised the administration’s achievement of supposed international peace and security. In

¹⁵² “Senator Lodge Sees Good Results As the Conference Ends Its Labor: Declares Limitation of Battleship Tonnage and Gun Calibers Its Outstanding Achievement – Balfour, Schanzer, De Cartier and Borden Also Find Much to Praise at Final Outcome,” *New York Times*, 5 February 1922, 1-2.

¹⁵³ Louis Seibold, “China Obtains New Bill of Rights; Nine Powers in Parley Give Pledge to Maintain Peace in Far East,” *New York Herald*, 5 February 1922, 1-2.

one article of the several reviewing the outcomes of the peace parley, the *Times* contended that:

A way has been provided for the fulfillment of a great hope. The conference has blazed a trail. Treaties have been negotiated limiting armaments, righting ancient wrongs and removing potential causes of future wars. These treaties must not only be ratified, but must be honorably observed by all the signatories in order that the spirit which animated the conference may go forth, like the beams of the sun until it has encircled the world.¹⁵⁴

The *Times* also claimed that after the conference placed “international relations on a higher and nobler plane than they occupied before the World War.” The article closed with an allegation that true global friendship had been secured and that the *Times* “could not have reasonably hoped for more.”¹⁵⁵ For the *Times*, the hope for world peace, or at least a good chance at it, seemed to have been achieved at the conclusion of the conference.

With media reactions to the events of Washington Conference being so positive, it is no wonder that none of the papers reviewed for this study called for the Harding administration to reconsider joining the League of Nations. It appeared that the Republican leadership was doing all that could be expected, and in some papers’ opinions more than expected, in pursuing a successful foreign policy. In many of these papers, the administration was considered to be doing more to preserve the peace with naval armament limitations and guaranteeing economic freedom for the nations of the world than the League had done in its three-year existence.

The next major international event that caught the attention of these papers was the Genoa Conference in April 1922. The summit was called so that European powers could meet with Germany and Austria to reassess the reparations payment schedule. Though the United States was not itself a recipient of reparations from Germany and Austria, the conference proved to be of significance in the U.S. Before the conference several papers noted with regret that the

¹⁵⁴ “What the Conference Did,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 February 1922, sec. 2, p. 4.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

United States would not be participating directly in the conference, but remained hopeful that the Harding administration would become active at later conferences. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that “enough already has appeared to indicate how keenly the delegates from every country miss the presence of America from the negotiations but all of them are convinced this is simply a preliminary to another conference with wider scope wherein the United States will participate.”¹⁵⁶

The *San Francisco Examiner* on the other hand lamented only in jest the fact that the United States was not sending a delegation to the European conference. One editorial alleged that the “Prodigal Sons” (Europe) needed their wealthy father (the United States) to come and once again bail them out of trouble. The *Examiner* ended up praising the administration’s decision to not attend because the paper claimed that nothing of importance would come out the conference, unlike what had happened in Washington just months earlier. This was so, the *Examiner* claimed, because Europe was not ready to begin a serious peace process in the manner that the United States had aptly demonstrated at Washington.¹⁵⁷ There were sentiments both for and against U.S. participation at the conference, but important international news was about to come out of Italy.

The other European powers learned from their diplomats that representatives from Germany and Soviet Russia had met at Rapallo, a seaside town outside of Genoa, to negotiate a separate trade agreement. At Rapallo, the Soviet Russia and Germany agreed to nullify the territorial claims in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and to normalize diplomatic relations between their two countries. The agreement did little to ease the discord between Germany and the western European nations. They disapproved of the pact primarily because it threatened the

¹⁵⁶ Arthur S. Draper, “Peace Looms for Europe: Lloyd George Dominant,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 April 1922, 1-2.

¹⁵⁷ Politicus, “Genoa Mourns Absence of U.S.; Prodigal Sons Need Rich Father; Still Hope for American Aid,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 10 April 1922, 2.

newly created nations in the Baltic States as well as Poland, which were established in territory ceded in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.¹⁵⁸ However, in some of the newspapers used in this study the Treaty of Rapallo was perceived as a positive event. The *Los Angeles Times*, for one, reported that the Allies were wrongly planning to exclude the Germans from the rest of the Genoa Conference because of the measures they had taken by formalizing an agreement with the Soviets.¹⁵⁹ The *Times*, though concerned about the reactions from the Allied Powers, proclaimed in an accompanying article that the U.S. should not worry about the German-Soviet Pact. The *Times* praised Harding's "hands-off policy" because it believed that the treaty would assist the struggling economies of Europe, something the *Times* believed the Soviets could assist in.¹⁶⁰

Two particular articles, one from the *Los Angeles Times* and the other from the *San Francisco Examiner*, illustrated the acceptance some in these papers had for the Treaty of Rapallo. The *Times* proclaimed that any reports coming out of Genoa that presented the treaty as a bad thing came from merely "reactionary correspondents" who either hated the Soviet Union or wanted to see the European powers slip back into a state of war. The paper reassured any concerned readers by declaring:

As a military alliance there is nothing for western nations to fear for the present, in a rapprochement of Russia and Germany. Modern wars are economic conflicts. They are won and lost behind the lines. Russia and Germany could not support a formidable military force for a single summer campaign. An army without supplies is little more than a mob. It was economic weakness that caused their attack on Poland to collapse when it appeared on the eve of success. Until they are again economically and industrially strong they will not constitute a military menace. Whatever the alarmists may write about it, the immediate peace of Europe is not threatened by a commercial treaty between Russia and Germany.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Richard Bessel, "Germany from War to Dictatorship" in *20th Century Germany: Politics, Culture and Society, 1918-1990*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (New York; Cambridge University Press, 2001), 25.

¹⁵⁹ Arthur S. Draper, "Allies Exclude Germany: Won't End Conference," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 April 1922, 1-2.

¹⁶⁰ "America Not Worrying: Administration Betrays No Anxiety Over Russo-Germany Pact; 'Hands-Off' Policy Continues," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 April 1922, 1.

¹⁶¹ "The Russo-German Treaty," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 April 1922, sec. 2, p. 4.

The *Times* concluded that only nations who did not want to see the economic recovery of Germany and the Soviet Union should be concerned, but according to the paper this did not include the United States. As far as the *Times* was concerned the agreement between Germany and Russia was something the United States should be happy to observe because it meant that Europeans were taking the initiative to rebuild their war torn countries without direct U.S. support.¹⁶² The *San Francisco Examiner's* coverage of the German-Soviet pact was similar to that of the *Los Angeles Times*, but the *Examiner* added that the European powers could learn a lesson from the pact. The paper claimed that the Allies, who had continued to be exceedingly punitive towards the German government even after they had overthrown the aristocracy, adopted democracy, and were doing its best to repay the outrageously large reparations placed upon it, had driven the Germans and Soviets together. The paper concluded that if the European powers wanted true economic stability and revival they needed to ease their pressure on the Germans for reparations payments.¹⁶³ It was apparent in both of these articles that some in the media believed that if there was any blame to be assigned over the Treaty of Rapallo it should be given to the Allies themselves. Also, they show that some of the papers in this study were still very concerned with European affairs, even in instances that did not directly involve the U.S. government.

The last major international event that occurred during the Harding administrations came in January of 1923 with the Paris reparations conference. This conference ultimately failed to settle on a program for reparations payments because the French and the British could not agree on how reparations from Germany should be collected, which led to the French military occupation of the Ruhr region of Germany. A number of the newspapers used here covered the

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Karl H. Von Wiegand, "Bomb in Germany's Easter Egg; Diplomatic Blast Jars Nations; Betrayal Cry Echoes at Conference," *San Francisco Examiner*, 18 April 1922, 2.

proceedings in Paris assuming that economic concerns were becoming paramount in global affairs and that military matters had been settled for the time being. However, the Russian-German agreement did raise concern for the United States. Although the U.S. was not receiving reparations from the former Central Powers, it was collecting on wartime loans from the Allied countries. This put U.S. leaders in a tenuous situation because the French needed the reparations to pay back loans to the U.S. but those reparations payments were also handicapping the German economy. The *New York Herald* reported that the Harding administration was well abreast of the situation and was attempting to avoid choosing sides between the French and Germans. The *Herald* claimed that Harding was attempting to satisfy both nations' positions because he was sympathetic to the demands of the French leaders, considering their economic situation, but he was also all too aware of the potential damage that increased payments could mean for both German and world markets.¹⁶⁴

The *Kansas City Star* expressed its disappointment with the French unwillingness to compromise on a new reparation scheme in an article titled "THE ALLIES SPLIT." The *Star* claimed that the French had driven apart the Allied camp with their "wholly unreasonable demands" against the German government. The paper also expressed regret over the French threat to occupy the Ruhr region of Germany, which was a major industrial production region. The French intended to confiscate the raw materials and any other valuable goods in the region to provide a supplement the reparations payments, which they believed were insufficient from the German government.¹⁶⁵ After France deployed its army of occupation, the *Star* reaffirmed its position that economic problems needed to be solved in Europe before any type of reparations restructuring could be reached. The paper stated that the French military action was not going to

¹⁶⁴ "America to Press Reparations Plan," *New York Herald*, 4 January 1923, sec. 4, p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ "THE ALLIES SPLIT: Reparations Conference Breaks Up with France and Britain at Odds," *Kansas City Star*, 4 January 1923, 1.

solve any problem. The *Star* remained confident that the Republican administration, while staying on “friendly terms” with both nations, would begin working on a financial program with American bankers and congressional leaders to resolve the situation.¹⁶⁶

The *Los Angeles Times* issued its repudiation of France’s occupation of the Ruhr in an editorial titled “A Hazardous Venture.” The *Times* blamed France for taking unilateral and dangerous measures to solve their financial problems. The paper suggested that Germany’s newest ally, Soviet Russia might be able to offer them some assistance if they were petitioned. The paper claimed that American banking interests would likely assist the country through financial hard times in the near future. In another article, the *Los Angeles Times*, sharing the sentiments of the *Kansas City Star* and *New York Herald*, expressed its confidence that the Harding administration would create a program to assist the French and German governments out of their economic hard times.¹⁶⁷

The Harding administration did indeed begin working on a program that would assist the nations of Europe with the problem of reparations payments. However, it would not be Harding initiating the program but his successor Calvin Coolidge. Throughout this period, these newspapers presented the Harding administration as more than willing to negotiate with world powers and keep the United States quite active in world affairs. When reporting on the most notable international event during the Harding administration, the Washington Naval Conference, every one of the newspapers examined in this study expressed a belief that this meeting had achieved significant results in securing world peace. According to the sources presented here, had it not been for conference, the world may have been a far different place with

¹⁶⁶ “U.S. Has Gone Limit: Can Do No More Toward Pointing Way to Solution to Reparation Problem,” *Kansas City Star*, 5 January 1923, 1.

¹⁶⁷ Arthur Sears Henning, “Next Moves America’s: Capital Stirred by Breach, Solution to European Snarl Occupies Attention of Administration,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 January 1923, 1-2.

Germany facing even more wretched terms from the Allied Powers and some kind arms buildup occurring among the British, Japanese, and Americans in the mid- to late-1920s. The accounts of the events presented by these select newspapers clearly portrayed Harding and his administration as interested and active in world affairs. These papers showed no inclination that the United States government and the American people wanted to, or were going to, withdraw from the political processes of world affairs.

CONCLUSION

In July 1923, President Harding was in the midst of a nationwide tour that had started the previous month. His tour was similar to Woodrow Wilson's stumping tour in September 1919 in that the focus of the tour was to build more for his administration's foreign and domestic policies. The difference was that Harding's policies were already more popular than Wilson's were on his tour in 1919. However, some historians speculate that the tour was really directed at preparing the way for his re-election campaign in 1924.¹⁶⁸ Like Wilson, Harding experienced health problems as his train was in the western part of the United States. The President was rushed to San Francisco where he took up rest at a local hotel. Unlike Wilson, however, Harding did not survive his bout of ill health. On 2 August 1923, President Warren Gamaliel Harding died at the age of 57. No autopsy was ever performed but it has been speculated that the cause was either a heart attack or a stroke. Right before his death, however, reports were coming out of Washington concerning scandals within his administration that would eventually lead to the dismissal of a cabinet member as well as several lower level administration officials. His administration is closely associated with the Teapot Dome scandal, which produced the first member of a Presidential Cabinet, Secretary of the Interior Albert P. Fall, to be prosecuted for federal crimes.¹⁶⁹

These scandals along with supposed "isolationism" have become the popular memory of the Harding administration. However, this study addresses only the issue of foreign relations during the Harding years. It would be misguided and overly simplistic to suppose that Harding's presidency had reduced the concerns of the chief executive to criminal acts and isolating the country from the world. In actuality, the period of 1918 through 1923 was a time in which the

¹⁶⁸ Miller, *New World Coming*, 117.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 116-120.

United States was very interested in and concerned with international affairs and how they would be conducted.

Late in the war and into the immediate post-war period, the papers in this study circulated editorials and news stories that applauded continued American interest in foreign affairs. Worthy of particular interest is the fact that pro-Republican papers, like the *New York Herald*, *Kansas City Star*, and *Los Angeles Times*, actively presented a message promoting continued U.S. involvement and interest in the dealings and relationships with the world. This is particularly significant because many of the Republican leaders during this period, such as Henry Cabot Lodge and Warren Harding, are often labeled “isolationists.” The data presented above suggests an entirely different view of what several Republican newspapers in larger cities presented as the goals of the Grand Old Party. If one thing can be certain when examining these sources it is that these Republican newspapers, along with the pro-Democratic papers used in this study, did not want the U.S. to shirk international involvement and consistently encouraged and praised continued interest in the events of the world.

After Wilson’s announcement of the Fourteen Points, the situation only became more complex because he had provided a public definition of American war aims. Though this was certainly a good public relations decision in the short term, the proclamation in some ways hurt the President’s image as time went on. This is because these papers expected him to deliver all the provisions of the policy in the peace settlement. However, when the objectives enunciated in the Fourteen Points program were not achieved in the Versailles Treaty, many of these papers remained general supportive of the treaty and the League covenants. Problems only arose when the President returned to the United States to push through the ratification of the treaty without Senate debate. Aware of the concerns several Senators had with the terms of the treaty, several

of these papers began seeing compromise between the President and the Republican-dominated Senate as the most likely and, in most instances, favorable outcome. When the President refused to negotiate with the Senate Republicans, whose majority support he needed to pass the treaty by a two-thirds margin, the majority of these papers returned to their partisan leanings in assessing who was right and wrong in the treaty debate. The Senate Republicans, Henry Cabot Lodge, and President Wilson all were vilified for being too obstinate in their positions and thus failing to come together to find a solution to keep the United States in line with the Allies. However, according to these sources, the fight was not between isolationist Republicans and internationalist Democrats. The pro-Republican papers were careful to identify their prominent party leaders as favoring international relationships with the other Allies but resistant to a permanent military alliance in the League. When the vote for the Treaty of Versailles resulted in rejection both with and without reservations, these papers blamed either the President, the Republican reservationists, or, in the case of the *Los Angeles Times*, both for failing to reach some sort of compromise. Neither the pro-Republican nor the pro-Democrat papers examined here described the debate between internationalists and isolationists; the contest they presented was between treaty reservationists and those advocating an acceptance of an unaltered peace settlement.

Though the treaty was defeated in the Senate in November 1919, the fight for its passage was not over. By the beginning of the 1920, there was a renewed hope in all of the newspapers used in this study that the rivaling factions in the U.S. government could reach a compromise as long as the Senate leadership would reconsider the treaty for a vote. The new vote happened in March, leading several papers reviewed here to believe the President along with the Senate Democrats loyal to his orders and the Republican reservationists would be able to compromise

on the treaty. The debate once again focused predominantly on Article X, the military commitment clause of the League of Nations covenant. When a deal again failed to be realized in the Senate, many believed it was because of either Wilson's or the Republican Senators' unwillingness to compromise with the other. The treaty and League membership then became important issues in the 1920 presidential campaign.

When the newspapers went to support their candidates in the election it was once again not a competition between isolationist Republicans and internationalist Democrats. In the months preceding the election, pro-Republican newspapers presented Harding as a man deeply committed to involving the United States in international affairs. Some of the papers in the study even went so far as to suggest that Harding would have the U.S. join the League of Nations so long as the disputed Article X of the agreement was vetoed. Throughout the campaign there was a belief in many of these papers that some form of membership in the League was possible with either candidate and that American involvement in international affairs was assured with both Cox and Harding. As the campaign drew to a close, several of these papers reflected historian Thomas Fleming's assertion that "the main issue was not the League but Wilsonism."¹⁷⁰

The result of the vote was a lopsided victory for Harding, leaving many in the pro-Republican press excited because their party had regained the White House. The victory to many of these papers signified that the country had rejected the policy of Woodrow Wilson and the military commitments that were imbedded in his League of Nations.¹⁷¹ Whether the country had truly grown tired of Wilson is something for another study to consider more thoroughly than this one, but what can be deciphered in these newspapers is that their coverage leading up to the result of the 1920 election does not depict Harding as running a campaign that sought to

¹⁷⁰ Fleming, *Illusion of Victory*, 466.

¹⁷¹ Knock, *To End All Wars*, 230-244.

segregate the United States from European or global affairs. His sympathies for the internationalist cause can also be seen in his nomination of former President and staunch advocate for U.S. membership in the League of Nations William Howard Taft to the position of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in 1921. Harding could not have believed Taft was totally wrong-headed if he nominated him and rewarded him with appointment to the Supreme Court.

When Harding took office all of these papers were full of hope for potential American influence abroad, particularly concerning the issue of international disarmament. Harding and members of his administration, led by Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, took the initiative and held a successful conference to reduce naval armaments and secure peace especially in the Pacific Ocean and parts of East Asia that were not just approved by well over two-thirds of the Senate but were also approved by nearly all the conference's members.¹⁷² Many newspapers stated that the United States' goals were achieved at the conference and that international security had been secured with promises to establish naval ratios between the United States, Britain, and Japan. Also, several of these papers argued that the agreements also established safeguards for nations wanting to trade with China, which was becoming even more of a power vacuum during this period. However, the conference was not the end for the Harding administration's or the press's interest in international dealings. As reparations payments became a more apparent problem, national attention once again turned to trying to solve the problems of the world.¹⁷³ These concerns for world affairs cannot possibly leave observers of

¹⁷² Buckley, *The United States and the Washington Conference*, 184. Only the French rejected one of the three treaties agreed upon at the Washington Conference. The French government spurned the Four-Power Agreement which sought to protect the established territories of Britain, Japan, France, and the United States in the Pacific. According to Buckley, French rejection of this agreement was virtually meaningless, and the accords did succeed in ending the Anglo-Japanese pact of 1902.

¹⁷³ Miller, *New World Coming*, 348-351.

this period thinking that these American papers or United States government wanted to remove itself from international negotiations or affairs.

What can this selected group of papers tell us about the United States in the late stages of World War I and the years immediately following it? Though these papers cannot prove what all news papers said at the time, they are sufficient to suggest that a far more complex model than that of isolationism is needed. It can also be said with confidence that none of these papers suggested that the United States, under the leadership of either political party, should attempt to distance the nation from international affairs in general. It is fair to suggest that these papers would not have likely advocated an isolationist program from any politician. When examining these sources, it is clear they all recognized that the U.S. had a vested interest in the economic, political, and military interest in the affairs of the entire world. Although each of these papers chose to focus on their own specific issues at times, their messages were largely in unison claiming that the United States was willing and able to participate on the world stage in the years immediately after World War I.

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