

PART II

The Internationalization of Nationalism

Imagination fails to picture the wild delirium of joy with which he [Wilson] would have been welcomed in Asiatic capitals. It would have been as though one of the great teachers of humanity, Christ or Buddha, had come back to his home, crowned with the glory that the centuries had brought him since he last walked the earth.

–V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, *Woodrow Wilson's Message for Eastern Nations*

A new era unfolds before our eyes. The old age of force is gone and an age of justice is here. A humane spirit, nurtured through all the centuries of human experience, has begun to cast the brilliant light of a new civilized morality upon human history.

–Korean Declaration of Independence, March 1919

In the five weeks that passed between Woodrow Wilson's acclaimed arrival in France on December 13 and the opening of the peace proceedings on January 18, the president traveled around the continent and was everywhere received as a conquering hero. Ecstatic crowds surrounded him on his arrival in Paris as he drove past the city's great monuments through the Arc de Triomphe and down the Champs Élysées. He was received with much pomp at the Élysée Palace, made an honorary citizen of the city of Paris, and awarded a doctorate *honoris causa* in a splendid ceremony at the Sorbonne.

The president then spent the Christmas holiday with American troops at Chaumont, on the upper Marne, where the American Expeditionary Force was headquartered, and left for England the next day. In London, he met with King George V at Buckingham Palace. He traveled to Manchester, where he spoke at the Free Trade Hall, and to his mother's birthplace in Carlisle in the north of England.

There, he visited the Presbyterian church where his grandfather, the Reverend Thomas Woodrow, had preached. After a brief respite for the New Year's holiday, Wilson continued on a whirlwind tour of

Italy. He visited Rome, Genoa, and Milan, and met with Pope Benedict XV, a first for a U.S. president. Everywhere, he was greeted by large, cheering crowds. The people of Europe, Wilson thought, were firmly behind him.¹

The enthusiastic receptions notwithstanding, most of the president's travels during these five weeks had to be improvised at the last minute. Wilson had landed in France thinking that the inter-Allied consultations would begin within a week, but quickly discovered that the French had not even named their delegates and that the British representatives had yet to set sail for France. Lloyd George sent word that they were occupied with the general election in that country and that they could not arrive until after the new year. The election took place on December 14 and brought an overwhelming victory to the coalition of Conservatives and Liberals led by Lloyd George. Unlike Wilson, whose party had lost control of both houses of Congress in the midterm elections of the previous month and who had alienated many Republicans when he denied them any significant role in the peace negotiations, Lloyd George secured solid support on his domestic flank before he arrived at the table.

Before Wilson set out for Paris, many, including supporters, advised him to take along leading Republicans, such as former president William Howard Taft or Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge, in order to secure their party's support for the treaty that would emerge. But Wilson, determined to keep control of the negotiations in his own hands, refused and appointed to the American peace commission only men who had no independent political standing and could not contradict him. They included Secretary of State Lansing, whom he largely ignored; General Tasker Bliss, a former army chief of staff; and Henry White, a former ambassador to Italy and France, who served as the delegation's token Republican. All three passed their days in Paris in luxurious ineffectuality amid the chandeliers and red carpets of the Hôtel Crillon, the former palace on the northern edge of the Place de la Concorde that served as the headquarters for the U.S. delegation. The fifth delegate, Wilson's confidant Colonel House, was the only member to whom the president paid any heed, but as the negotiations went on even House eventually lost the confidence of his increasingly harried, ailing chief. Unlike Lloyd George and the French premier, Georges Clemenceau, who generally made effective

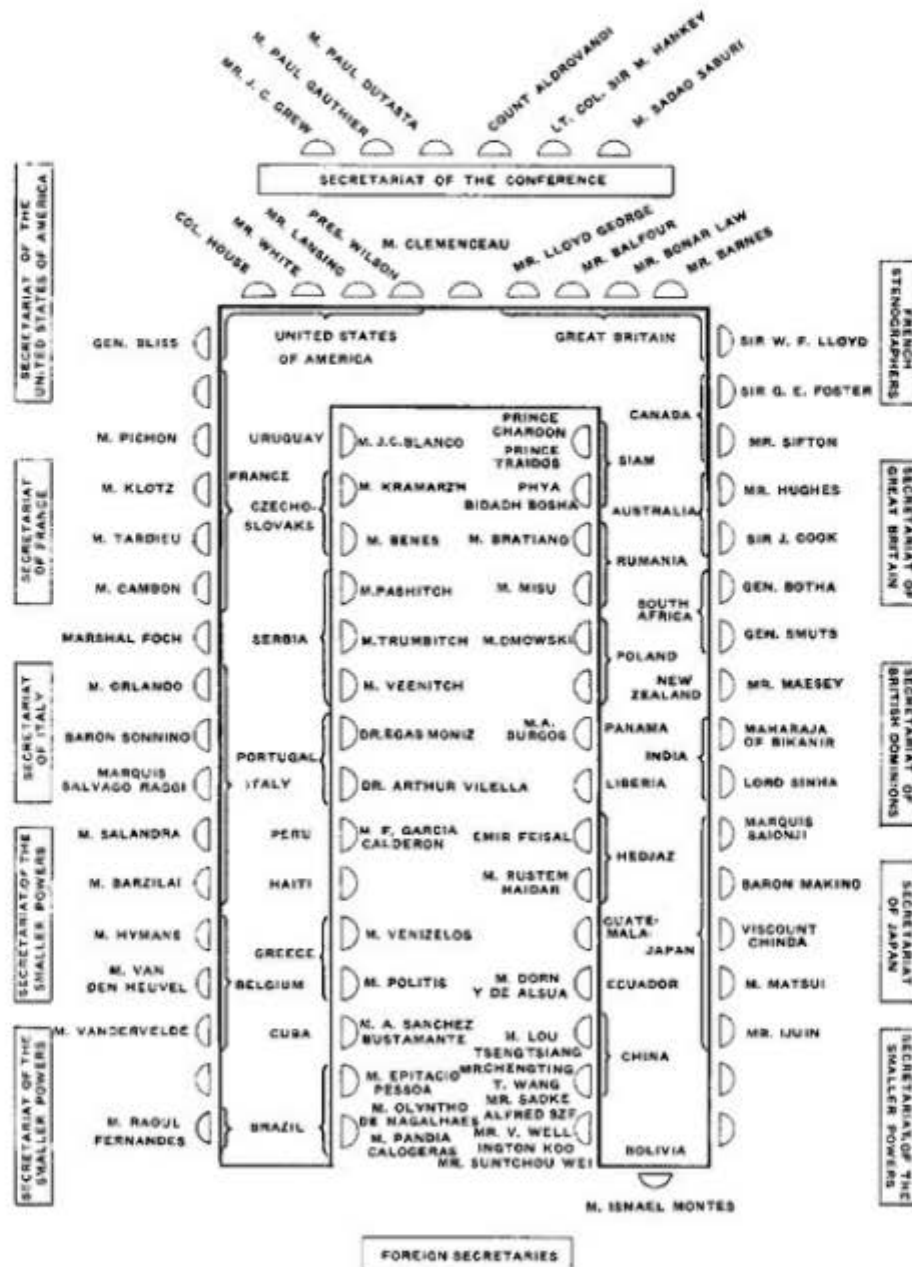
use of their advisers and experts in Paris, Wilson, convinced that none of his subordinates could understand his vision as clearly or advance it as forcefully as he could, largely did battle alone.²

The proceedings that began in Paris on January 18 were not actually intended to be part of the peace conference at all. Rather, they were planned as a preliminary consultation among the victorious Allies, in which they would discuss and prepare their peace proposals and then bring them before the representatives of the Central Powers at the official peace conference. The conference plenary, officially the central organ of the proceedings, included the countries that had declared war on Germany or severed relations with it, each represented by delegates whose number reflected the country's relative power and contribution to the war. The major Western Allies—Britain, France, Italy, and the United States—each had five seats in the plenary. So did Japan, despite its relatively minor contribution to the war effort; as Britain's main ally in East Asia, and with Lloyd George's support it, too, was recognized as a major power. The British also demanded and received separate representation for each of their self-governing dominions—Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand—as well

as for India, though the Indian representatives were selected by the British. Serbia and Belgium, which among the small nations had suffered the most in the war, were recognized for their sacrifices with three delegates each. The rest mostly got one or two. They included small European nations that fought alongside the Allies, like Portugal, Greece, and Rumania; new nations emerging from the wreckage of fallen empires, like Poland and Czechoslovakia; a number of Latin American countries; and representatives from Liberia, Siam, and China. The Chinese, as we will see, strongly protested their relegation to the ranks of the small nations, especially given Japan's recognition as a major power. Their protests, however, were ignored.

The real decisions at Paris, in any case, were made not at the plenary, which convened only infrequently and ceremoniously. They were made by the leaders of the great powers, who met in an increasingly smaller group as the conference stretched on, crises mounted, and decisions became more urgent. Initially, there was the Council of Ten, where each of the five major powers had two representatives. By March, it had shrunk to become the Council of Four, which included only the leaders of Britain, France, and the United States and the

Italian prime minister, Vittorio Orlando. Finally, in April, Orlando withdrew and there remained only the “Big Three”—Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Wilson. They, in the end, decided all of the major questions alone.



The number and location of the seats allotted to each delegation in the plenary of the peace conference reflected its relative power. The Chinese

representatives protested in vain the decision to designate China a “small power” and allot it only two seats, while Japan was recognized as a great power and received five. *Charles T. Thompson, The Peace Conference Day by Day (New York: Brentano's, 1920), after p. 118.*

Beyond the members of the official delegations—the plenipotentiary delegates who represented their countries and the long retinues that included hundreds of advisers, experts, and secretarial staff—there were thousands of others who streamed into Paris for the conference. They fell into several groups. The first group included hundreds of journalists, at least one hundred from the United States alone, who converged on the city to report on the historic proceedings of the peace conference to their readers back home. The second group, less easily defined but buzzing with activity and expectation, included hundreds of men and women who would in a later era be referred to as representatives of NGOs—non-governmental organizations—and who arrived, usually uninvited, to plead to the conference on behalf of a diverse range of causes and constituents. Labor leaders wanted the conference to promote the rights of workers;

activists for female suffrage asked for recognition of their cause. Black leaders from the United States, led by the African-American scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois, joined with delegates from the Caribbean and from several African colonies to convene a Pan-African Congress that met in Paris in February and passed very moderate resolutions asking the peace conference to lay down regulations for good colonial governance in Africa.³ More esoteric causes also had their advocates, such as the British Esperanto Association, which called on the conference to adopt that language as the medium of international communication, or Jerome Internoscia, an Italian-Canadian lawyer who wrote to propose himself for the job of secretary general of the nascent League of Nations.⁴

Most of all, however, there were dozens of representatives of oppressed nations who, either in person or by petition, demanded recognition of their right to self-determination. A few of them, like the Poles, Serbs, and Czechoslovaks, had their delegates officially admitted to the conference. Also present at the peace table was the Emir Faisal of the Hijaz, who was invited by the British and who asked the conference to establish a federation of Arabic-speaking peoples of the former Ottoman Empire

under the leadership of his father, the Sharif Hussein of Mecca. Zionist leaders were also invited to speak before the conference, and they presented their claim for a Jewish national home in Palestine, which received the support of the British government and of Wilson himself.⁵

Most claimants for self-determination, however, never received an official hearing from the conference. Some were European: Albanians, Croats, Estonians, Ukrainians, and others. Catalan nationalists petitioned Wilson for freedom from Spanish rule, and Sinn Fein leaders demanded independence for Ireland, quoting long excerpts from President Wilson's speeches in support of their demand even as the president's British allies were engaged in a brutal campaign to suppress the Irish movement.⁶ Many petitioners, however, came from outside Europe, like the foreign minister of Persia, Moshaver al-Mamalek, who arrived in Paris to ask that the conference condemn the meddling of foreign powers in his country and recognize its right to full self-determination.⁷ Delegations representing Georgians, Armenians, Syrians, Lebanese, and Assyrian Christians, among others, submitted petitions, laying before the conference their peoples' long histories of civilization and asking for

self-determination.⁸ Others who could not come in person sent their demands by cable, like the imam of Yemen, who wrote Wilson pleading for self-determination, and the Tunisian nationalists and Vietnamese revolutionaries who demanded freedom from French colonial rule.⁹ All praised President Wilson's vision for a new world, noted the support that his principles gave to their claims, and often quoted at length from his speeches.

Wilson, however, made it clear early on that the specific territorial settlements to emerge from the conference mattered less to the United States than the establishment of an international mechanism that would prevent future wars and adjudicate claims that the conference could not. At his insistence, the League of Nations and its covenant dominated the discussions for the first four weeks. Wilson brought with him to Paris a draft of the covenant that he had written himself, which he kept secret to forestall any early opposition and which included a provision that explicitly established the principle of self-determination as a central instrument for adjudicating disputes that would come before the league.¹⁰ General Bliss wondered incredulously when he saw this text whether it contemplated "the possibility of the League of

Nations being called upon to consider such questions as the independence of Ireland, of India, etc., etc.?” David Hunter Miller, the U.S. delegation’s expert on international law, warned the president that such a provision would make “dissatisfaction permanent,” compelling “every power to engage in propaganda” and legalizing “irredentist agitation.” For the British, too, it was unacceptable, challenging as it did the legitimacy of their imperial rule in India and elsewhere in Asia and Africa.¹¹

For several weeks, Wilson, who headed the commission that drafted the league covenant, insisted on preserving the principle of self-determination in the covenant despite the opposition of his advisers and allies. By early February, however, as the work of the commission was drawing to a close, he was clearly growing more worried about the great expectations that his wartime emphasis on self-determination had aroused. On February 2, George Creel joined the president for a Sunday lunch and told him of his recent trip through the newly emerging countries of Central Europe, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. The people there, he told Wilson, had hung his portraits in many windows, considered him a “popular Saint,” and told Creel that they wanted Wilson to “reign over

them.” All this, Wilson responded, made him “very nervous,” fearful of the “revulsion” which would come when those people discovered he could not do all they hoped he would.¹² The next day, Wilson, perhaps with this fear still in mind, amended the draft of the covenant, deleting the clause that promised the application of the principle of self-determination to future claims for territorial readjustment. The final text consecrated the rights of existing states to “territorial integrity” and “political independence,” but it offered little recourse for ethnic minorities or colonial populations that demanded self-government.¹³

When Wilson emerged on February 14 to present the text of the League of Nations covenant to the awaiting world press, the term “self-determination” was no longer there. The provisions that he outlined, however, were not entirely without promise for colonial nationalists. The long article in the covenant on the “mandate principle” for the governance of colonial possessions of the defeated powers did appear to envision their eventual independence, at least in some cases. The former Turkish possessions in the Middle East, deemed to be at “the highest stage of the development of the people,” were declared in the text to be essentially

independent nations subject only to the “administrative advice” of a mandatory power until they could “stand alone” in the “strenuous conditions of the modern world.”¹⁴ In subsequent years, with the league controlled by imperialist powers, the mandate system became not much more than a shadow of what it was intended to be.¹⁵ At the time of its inception, however, it appeared that the league might exercise effective oversight over colonial territories and guarantee that they were governed according to the interests of their populations. When Wilson left Paris for a brief sojourn in the United States immediately after presenting the covenant, he was no longer the prophet of peace he was received as two months before, but he still cut a commanding figure in the international arena. To many colonial nationalists, he remained the world leader most likely to give effective support to their fight for self-determination.

The four chapters that comprise Part II narrate the responses to the Wilsonian moment of Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, and Koreans down to the beginning of March 1919, tracing in the process how anticolonial nationalism was internationalized during this period. Internationalization occurred

in two distinct but related spheres, one of principle and the other of practice. First, the right of self-determination, which Wilson had advocated as a central principle of legitimacy in the new international order, was appropriated and interpreted by colonial nationalists as a challenge to the logic of imperialism in international relations, one that required the recognition of the international equality and sovereignty of hitherto “dependent” peoples. The principle of nationalism, which rejected the legitimacy of empire and took the self-determining nation-state as the sole legitimate entity in international relations thus became a central component of the new international order that anticolonial activists saw emerging. Second, taking the right of self-determination as now an established principle of international relations, colonial nationalists moved to leverage Wilson’s rhetoric, his perceived power in the international arena, and the opportunities for international action presented by the peace conference to launch international campaigns for the recognition of their own right to national independence and sovereignty. In so doing, they brought the practice as well as the principle of anticolonial nationalism into the arena of international relations.

Once the peace conference began, however, the advocacy of self-determination for colonial peoples collided with the stubborn realities of the imperial international order, in which hierarchies of race and civilization defined the extents to which different peoples were accorded the right to self-government. At the center of the anticolonial nationalist wave of 1919 lay the claim that non-European, nonwhite peoples had an equal right to self-determination—not to be governed without their consent—as did the peoples of Europe, whom Wilson had largely in mind when he incorporated the principle enunciated by Lenin into his own wartime rhetoric. Unlike Wilson, Lenin did attribute the right to self-determination specifically to ethnically defined nations and used the term with the intention of asserting the right of immediate secession from imperial rule. But he, too, did not quite imagine that the implementation of self-determination would extend much beyond Europe for the time being. Colonial nationalists, however, saw clearly how the language of self-determination could be used to challenge the relationships between race, civilization, and sovereignty that underlay the prewar international order, and moved to do just that. It is to this story that we now turn.