

The background of the cover is a light yellow-green gradient. It is decorated with several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across the surface. These motifs consist of a small stem with two leaves, appearing to grow or drift across the page.

THE WILSONIAN IMPULSE

U.S. Foreign Policy, the Alliance, and
German Unification

Mary N. Hampton

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*For my mother,
Mary Nelle Feathers Hampton,
and in memory of my father,
James Webb Hampton*

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PREFACE

I started research for this book some time before the seismic changes that began occurring in international politics in 1989. I sought to explain why realism, the dominant approach in international relations theory, overlooked crucial aspects of the Western Alliance that allowed West Germany so much influence on American and Western security policy. As the events of 1989 and 1990 unfolded, it became evident that fifty years of Allied relations had helped clear the way for the peaceful unification of Germany. How and why the Alliance was so important to that event, and why the role of U.S. foreign policy has been critical to the success of the German quest for unity, are the focus of this book.

In preparing this book, I have had tremendous help. I am grateful to a number of people who have helped me during the course of the research project. First and foremost I would like to thank Ronald Rogowski, whose constant support and insightful comments have been crucial throughout the course of my research and the many incarnations of this project. I would like to thank the following people for their helpful comments on earlier versions of the work: Jeffrey Frieden, David Cattell, Hans Schulhammer, Scott Sagan, David Calleo, Robert O. Keohane, Lilly Gardner-Feldman, Anne-Marie Burley, and Richard Eichenberg. Most recently, I thank Robert O. Keohane, Robert Putnam, Celeste Wallander, Chris Kruegler, Gillian Price, Lawrence Broz, Phil Williams, B. George Thomas, Steve Jones, Mary Reddick, and Robert Paarlberg for their excellent suggestions.

I am grateful to the Fulbright Commission for awarding me a Fulbright Fellowship in Bonn, Germany during 1984–85. During my stay in Germany, the Konrad Adenauer and Friedrich Ebert Stiftungs were of great help. I also thank the approximately fifty current and former West German policymakers and academics who allowed me to interview them. I have used these interviews in the work, often as background. I appreciate as well the participation of the handful of former American foreign policymakers who engaged in written interviews with me.

Also crucial to my work was the assistance of the staff people at the Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Baines Johnson Libraries. The people at the Kennedy Library have repeated their help on three research trips.

My department at the University of Utah has been especially supportive. In particular, I thank the chair, Don Hanson, and Lori Sather.

I also acknowledge *Security Studies*, where an earlier version of the ideas in this book was published in spring of 1995. I especially thank the reviewers and the editor, Benjamin Frankel.

Finally, I thank the Center for International Affairs (CFIA) at Harvard University, where I have twice been able to spend time working on versions of this manuscript, first as a Ford Fellow and most recently as an Associate of the Center.

INTRODUCTION

In 1990, in an unprecedented historic moment, Germany reunited in peace and at peace with its neighbors. The factors that contributed to the successful completion of that event were many. Central among them was the influence of U.S. foreign policy, through what I call the Wilsonian impulse. The impact of the specific set of American political beliefs that constituted the Wilsonian impulse was decisive for trans-Atlantic relations and allowed West German policymakers to gain much advantage for their own national interests, including an Allied guarantee to promote German reunification.¹ The Allied pledge to “the achievement through peaceful means of a fully free and unified Germany” played a more significant role in constraining American security policy through the Cold War years than is usually acknowledged.²

A component of the Wilsonian impulse, what I call the Versailles remedial, directly informed U.S. postwar policy toward Germany. As I will develop later, the remedial reflected the widespread belief of American policymakers that Germany must not be treated as harshly after WWII as it had been at Versailles in 1919.

The influence of the Wilsonian impulse and Versailles remedial constituted a prism through which American policymakers viewed and acted on their security interests. Beliefs were therefore a causal force in the evolution of Allied relations. An important result was the enhancement of West German leverage in Allied and East-West relations. Thus, in this study, I

answer in the affirmative the question posed by Robert Keohane and Judith Goldstein: "Do ideas have an impact on political outcomes, and if so, under what conditions?"³

I focus heavily on the early years of the Alliance. As the clearly predominant power at the close of World War II, the United States was able in large part to specify the design of the postwar system, or at least of its Western half. The study shows that the Western Alliance evolved in ways that do not conform to the realist understanding of alliances.⁴ While all alliances may serve the minimal function of collective defense, they are not necessarily limited to that function and the realist concern with it, nor have they all been created for that purpose exclusively. The Wilsonian impulse and Versailles remedial constructed American beliefs and expectations concerning the Western Alliance in ways that the Munich lesson and realism overlook. Realism has emphasized the lessons learned by postwar American policymakers concerning the West's appeasement of Hitler in 1938. These lessons, it has been argued, directly influenced the American approach to the Soviet Union, and to potential aggression by dictators around the world. I argue that the Wilsonian impulse presented an alternative set of beliefs regarding international relations, specifically concerning Europe.

The American-led international order that evolved reflected American ideological as well as material interests. As Stephen Krasner has argued, the power capabilities achieved by the United States after World War II allowed it to go beyond pursuing narrowly defined particularistic interests and enabled it to focus as well on projecting its ideological preferences into the world.⁵ G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan have written insightfully on the phenomenon of emerging hegemonies creating their own normative orders in the international system and the socialization process of secondary powers that this process entails.⁶ At the moment of American hegemonic innovation, the role of historical learning was pivotal in creating American expectations concerning the postwar international system.

Much has already been written by analysts of international political economy concerning the lessons learned from the economic consequences of American isolationism after World War I. These are in large part Keynesian lessons. Aside from the Munich analogy, there has been little systematic treatment concerning American responses to the security and political lessons that followed the Versailles and interwar experiences. That is the focus of what I call the Wilsonian impulse and the accompanying Versailles remedial.

In defining the Wilsonian impulse, I emphasize three aspects. First, Wilsonians make a number of assumptions concerning the nature of international politics and the kind of behavior that states ought to pursue because of it. To be brief, such beliefs include the rejection of traditional balance of power alliances and the behavior they produce. Second, the real

historical experiences of leading American foreign policymakers in the immediate postwar period lent a cognitive predisposition to view the particular context of West Germany and the Western Alliance through the eyes of the failed Wilsonian experience at the end of World War I. My study confirms the significance of the cognitive approach to international relations. Third, the institutionalization of the Wilsonian impulse guaranteed its longevity. The power of the Wilsonian impulse and Versailles remedial were bolstered by the fact that they resonated with the American historical tradition and quickly became institutionalized into the American policymaking process, especially at the State Department.⁷ This process assured that the policy prescriptions would remain a significant force over time. Subsequent American policymakers who sought to change course, such as President John F. Kennedy, were eventually constrained by it.

The Versailles remedial demanded the successful socialization of West Germany into the Alliance. West German policymakers influenced heavily the direction and concerns of American security objectives and the substance of Allied security policy through their persistent appeal to American Wilsonianism. This phenomenon confirms the observation of G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan that "socialization is a two-way process."⁸

The U.S. interest in establishing a trans-Atlantic community that included a peaceful Germany preceded the American drive to balance against the Soviet threat. While the widely recognized Munich lesson may have influenced the U.S. disposition toward the Soviet Union once that threat perception clearly emerged, the distinctly Wilsonian lessons of Versailles 1919 and the chaotic interwar years were even more operative and immediately so for early postwar American decisionmakers. Therefore, the realist claim regarding balancing behavior explains only a part of the American push to create the Western Alliance. That is, while it is true that the emergence of the Soviet threat galvanized American foreign policy and the Western community in a way that the initial expression of the Wilsonian impulse did not, it is not true that the threat created the drive for Western unity and German rehabilitation.

Further, I will show that the Wilsonian impulse is better at explaining the evolution of Allied relations over time than is a strict realist reading that remains focused on U.S.-Soviet relations. That West Germany's enhanced position far exceeded its role as a so-called junior partner was largely a product of that influence. The Versailles remedial led key American policymakers to look through the lens of 1919 at the failed Wilsonian project they experienced. The influence of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) became especially pronounced as the political goal of Alliance cohesion often dominated narrowly defined military objectives for Washington. The FRG would also directly influence the East-West relationship.

I will also examine throughout the study the policy choices of West German decisionmakers and show how their menu was largely constructed by the Wilsonian bargain. The findings are important because they transcend the tautological realist position that West Germany increased its influence in the relationship because it was an important player. My argument is that the manner in which Bonn chose to enhance its influence abroad and consider options domestically was colored heavily by the Wilsonian impulse and produced historically important outcomes both in intra-Allied affairs and in international relations generally. I will argue that the Wilsonian impulse led the West Germans to choose undermining the Cold War system peacefully and from within the Alliance in order to achieve unity. The consequence was monumental: The international system was radically altered by 1990, no systemic war ensued, and the Alliance still stood.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I concentrate first on the historical origins of the Wilsonian impulse and its influence on the formation of the Alliance. I define in more detail the constituent elements of the impulse and the Versailles remedial.

The second chapter focuses on the Eisenhower administration's approach to West Germany and the Alliance. Specifically, I examine the unification issue and the nuclear sharing idea. John Foster Dulles and his relationship with Konrad Adenauer, the first and perhaps most important of West Germany's postwar leaders, play a prominent role in this section.

As a comparison, I then focus on John F. Kennedy and his tendency to ride roughshod over the American–West German relationship established in the previous administrations. In part, this change represented Kennedy's generational and personal deviation from the Wilsonian past, a deviation that had tremendous implications for the West German perception of its relations with Washington. More important, he was more predisposed to follow the lessons of Munich than the paradigm reflecting the Wilsonian impulse. His outlook tended to conform to a realist reading of U.S.–West German and East-West relations. Because the Wilsonian impulse was already institutionalized at State, still resonated with the public, and was continuously promoted by Adenauer, he would be constrained in his ability to forge change.

Chapter four examines the Johnson administration's efforts to repair relations between the two countries. Through its acceptance in 1967 of the West German–inspired Harmel Report, the United States allowed the consequences of the Wilsonian impulse to be codified into the Alliance. The institutionalization therefore continued. It represented an important turning point both in Western and in East-West relations, and paved the way for the sea-changes in international relations that started in 1989.

In the final chapter, I trace the influence of the Wilsonian impulse through to German reunification. From Ostpolitik onward, West Germans were able to undermine the Cold War order legitimately and peacefully from within the Alliance. By adhering to its Wilsonian bargain with Bonn, the United States nurtured the demise of the bipolar order it had led. I place my claims within the context of the ongoing debate concerning the "long peace" of the last half century. My work specifically addresses realist arguments like John Mearsheimer's. He claims that "bipolarity, an equal military balance, and nuclear weapons have fostered peace in Europe over the past 45 years."⁹ I argue instead that a set of ideas that guided American and West German foreign policy, and that were separate from bipolar considerations, contributed immensely to the peace.

NOTES

1. A number of recent and important works concerning the impact of beliefs on policy include Judy Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), esp. their "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework," pp. 3–30, and G. John Ikenberry, "Creating Yesterday's New World Order: Keynesian 'New Thinking' and the Anglo-American Postwar Settlement," pp. 57–86; Judith Goldstein, *Ideas, Interests, and American Trade Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); David Fromkin, *In the Time of the Americans: The Generation That Changed America's Role in the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995). For works on the importance of domestic politics to foreign policy, see Robert O. Keohane, *International Institutions and State Power* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989); David A. Lake, *Power, Protection, and Free Trade: International Sources of U.S. Commercial Strategy, 1887–1939* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); G. John Ikenberry, David A. Lake, and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *The State and American Foreign Economic Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42 (Summer 1987), pp. 427–61; Peter B. Evans, Harold K. Jacobson, and Robert D. Putnam, eds., *Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

2. This pledge was given in the Final Act of the 1954 London Conference that prepared the way for West German entry into NATO. Department of State, Documents on Germany, cited in Dennis L. Bark and David R. Gress, *A History of Germany*, Vol. 1, *From Shadow to Substance 1945–1963*, 2d ed (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), p. 331.

3. Keohane and Goldstein, "Ideas and Foreign Policy," pp. 3–30, quotation on p. 11.

4. For an excellent review of the alliance literature, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), esp. the Introduction. For a sophisticated recent discussion, see also Arthur A. Stein, *Why Nations*

Cooperate: Circumstance and Choice in International Relations (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), ch. 6; an insightful examination of the realist interpretation of alliances is found in John Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," *International Security* 15 (Summer 1990), pp. 5–56.

5. Stephen D. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), esp. p. 15. See also John Gerard Ruggie, "Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution," in his edited volume, *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 3–47. On p. 8, Ruggies says of the postwar creative moment that "it was less the fact of American *hegemony* . . . than of *American* hegemony."

6. G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, "Socialization and Hegemonic Power," *International Organization* 44 (Summer 1990), pp. 283–315, esp. p. 284.

7. I especially thank B. George Thomas for his help and suggestions in developing these points. On the importance of institutionalizing ideas, see Goldstein, *Ideas, Interests and American Trade Policy*, and Ikenberry, "Creating Yesterday's New World Order." Regarding the Wilsonian impulse's resonance with the American public, Ninkovich observes that "Wilsonian ideology became 'sedimented' as part of American political culture." Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 67.

8. Ikenberry and Kupchan, "Socialization and Hegemonic Power," p. 293.

9. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future," p. 187.

Chapter 1 ---

THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE WILSONIAN IMPULSE AND THE WESTERN ALLIANCE

America's outward projection of the set of political beliefs that constituted the Wilsonian impulse during its hegemonic moment at the end of World War II heavily influenced the evolution of Washington's most important security relationship, the Western Alliance. The result was not a traditional alliance as understood by realist balance of power thinking, but something quite distinct. As will be shown, the interjection of bipolar Cold War hostilities that informed American containment policy did not destroy the American Wilsonian pursuit; it regionalized it to the Western Alliance.¹

Further, in addressing realism, I argue that rather than creating America's desire to build a Western community that included an equal and democratic Germany, the Soviet threat galvanized the effort. The Western Alliance therefore evolved as a hybrid between a collective defense pact that targeted the external Soviet threat and a Wilsonian collective security community, wherein interstate relations among the Allies became more domesticated, interdependent, and routinized. The Alliance was highly successful in developing the political culture of a security community, although only partially so in handling the important issue of managing community conflicts. I will focus on the former in the study and return in the conclusion to consider the latter.

THE WILSONIAN IMPULSE: BELIEFS MATTER

In defining Wilsonian beliefs here as an impulse, I take that set of beliefs to have induced a certain kind of behavior or set of responses. Similar to J. David Greenstone's definition of persuasion, I take the term *impulse* to be a set of beliefs shared by a group that "at a given social moment . . . acquire a compelling importance."² The ideas that shaped the Wilsonian impulse were derived from the historical experiences of Versailles and the interwar years. As Yuen Foong Khong has pointed out, when behavior is influenced by reasoning based on historical lessons or analogies, the lessons or analogies may "exert their impact on the decision-making process" and "make certain options more attractive and others less so."³

Insofar as the Wilsonian impulse produced a set of ordering principles concerning international relations that followed from a historical lesson, it helped shape decisions and thereby played a causal role. The idea that policymakers responded to external reality according to these ordering principles is illuminated especially by the Wilsonian guideposts that so influenced prominent members of the Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower administrations, who were Wilsonians both in outlook and by experience.⁴ In David Fromkin's insightful study that focuses on this generation of policymakers, he argues that "their encounter with Woodrow Wilson" and the experiences of World War I and the interwar years "left a decisive impression on them."⁵

The Wilsonian impulse therefore provided the lens through which many leading postwar American policy makers viewed the U.S.–West German–Allied relationship and competed with the lessons of Munich. The Wilsonian impulse presented to those policymakers a limited range of available alternatives. It then proved enduring over time by becoming institutionalized at the State Department.

The Wilsonian Experience and Wilsonian Assumptions

The first component of the impulse was the actual historical experience of the failed Wilsonian vision. The harsh victors' peace of 1919, the chaos of the 1920s, and the repetition of world war in Europe during the following decade confirmed many of Wilson's warnings regarding the effects of the European balance of power system, the treatment of defeated Germany, and American isolationism.

As Frank Ninkovich argues, Wilson's rejection of the European balance of power system arose from his progressive roots and was "based not so much on idealism as on a historical understanding" of that system.⁶ The devastation and unlimited nature of World War I were pivotal to Wilson's analysis and the set of ideas and beliefs that emerged as the Wilsonian impulse. From this experience, Wilson determined: "There must be some-

thing substituted for the balance of power."⁷ In order to avoid the horror of another world war based on the dysfunctional and outmoded balance of power system, the time had arrived for building a community of nations.

His critique of balance of power behavior that was dominated by the great powers in international politics reflected Wilson's criticism of *laissez-faire* and monopolistic tendencies in the American context.⁸ Wilson and his political descendants favored a jointly managed or regulated international system that emphasized "the values of community and individualism."⁹ An objective in international politics was therefore to build a transnational community, or to construct a "healthy society . . . through the moral, regulated pursuit of individual interests," and according to universally accepted principles and rules.¹⁰ Entailed are the domestication and routinization of international politics. Economic interdependence and advances in technology were necessary components in making this process possible, although they were by themselves not sufficient for establishing the community.

To this end, a shared culture needed to evolve.¹¹ Ninkovich states of the Wilsonian position: "With the destruction of traditional mentalities, the construction of genuinely human values was for the first time becoming politically feasible."¹² The collective security community concept emphasized shared values and agreed-upon rules that would help establish a common political culture. First and foremost was the recognition that for historical reasons, such as the advances in technology and communication, great power war had become an anachronistic institution and could no longer be supported as a means for settling differences among states—especially among democratic states. Obviously, many of the ideas had progenitors other than Wilson. However, he constructed them into a set of assumptions that addressed a particular set of historical circumstances. Current analyses in international relations continue to emphasize these ideas. John Mueller's argument that war is now obsolete as a power management resource among the great powers is one example.¹³ The body of literature claiming that democracies do not go to war against one another is yet another.¹⁴

For Wilsonians, the process of community-building was also to help establish the appropriate pool of world public opinion so important to their conception of democracy. Although Wilson intended to include a diversity of cultures and political systems in his global vision, it is also clear that he accepted the possibility that the West might be the first to create such a community.¹⁵ Tony Smith argues persuasively that in other regional contexts during the Cold War, American Wilsonianism was often unsuccessful.¹⁶ As will be discussed in the next chapter, regionalization of the impulse in fact occurred with success in the Western Alliance.

Akin to the advocacy of greater cooperation through regulatory politics of the modern American state under progressivism, more institutionaliza-