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Political Stance of the U.S. During the First World War

In an era where we are now witnessing global conflicts, there is significant importance in reviewing history especially when people experienced chaos globally. This paper examines how the American government acted during World War I, showing both the history before the war and the war's consequences .

Historical Contexts of American Diplomacy

The attitude of "isolationism" can be seen in the U.S. from its founding, as the following passage of George Washington's farewell address indicates: "*The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop.*" (1)

This isolationism, symbolized by mutual non-interference between the U.S. and European countries, was later articulated in James Monroe's seventh annual message to congress in 1823. Then American president, Theodore Roosevelt, was convinced by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams that he should claim an independent diplomacy in order to be unstrained from the foreign intervention. Nevertheless, the U.S. did send its military forces into other nations of the Western hemisphere. (2)

The U.S. had continued the policy position for a long time, but that began to change. John Hay issued "Open Door" from 1899 to 1900, seeing European nations dividing the territory of China, which had to compensate the loan after its defeat of the first Sino-Japanese War.(3) Aside from Woodrow Wilson's policy, the alteration of diplomacy can also be seen in around 1940, or when the World War 2 (WW2) started. It took Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941 that Americans generally thought of entering the war against the Axis Powers. (4) After the victory in WW2, to address to the Soviet, in 1949, the country joined the alliance outside Western Hemisphere for the first time, and that is, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). (5)

The United States in World War 1

July 28th, 1914, Austria-Hungary (6) declares war against Serbia as Imperial couple got assassinated, being a trigger of World War 1. Although countries were divided into the Allies or Central Powers, the U.S. initially did not state its standpoint. The incident of Ship Luistania happened, and this led to anti-german sentiments. However, Woodrow Wilson had stayed neutral until he finally decided to declare war on April 6, 1917.(7)

Wilson's actions, though different from previous presidents, still reflected a stable American ideology of exceptionalism in the following points;

- Wilson insisted on participating the war as "associated power"
- There was an aim to deal with the revolutionary government in Soviet
- The U.S. tried to achieve new order by destroying European order.

Considering the fact that he had won the election for his second term by stating not to intervene in a war, and announced The Proclamation of Neutrality in 1914,(8) the significant change in American position can be

seen. The extent of which the U.S. spread its propaganda during the wartime may be surprising after Wilson's strong message of neutrality. After the U.S. declared the war, the necessity of what it later became CPI, Committee on Public Information was discussed, and we can see that in a diary on April 9 that then-Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, wrote. In the diary, it was also written that the president would designate George Creel as a head of the committee. On the 13th, when the president provided authority in Executive Order 2594, CPI was created.(9) While the initial targets were the citizens within the country, it later started to provide posters and other sorts of propaganda outside. (10)

Globe after World War 1

Wilson declared, in 1918, the Fourteen Points, which necessitated the creation of "general association of nations" in the fourteenth point, and this idea gained strong popularity. However, when the League of Nations was actually formed(11), the U.S. itself did not join. The Treaty of Versailles, in which the plan for establishment of the League was included, was rejected by the Senate with 49 to 35 votes in March 1920, with opposition from isolationist.(12)

The Fourteen Points and the establishment of the League of Nations, together with The Four Freedoms and Atlantic Charter, presented in 1941, are the direct origin for the liberal world order people are used to today. (13)(14) Although there are debates concerning its justification - there is a viewpoint that challenges whether it was liberal or not, saying that it was the hegemony and national interests of the U.S. that was prioritized, and its military and economic powers was actually a threat to other nations - it is how the world has functioned.

Conclusion

Since American diplomacy had been isolationism for long, Wilson was a unique president who aimed to shift into internationalism. However, the continuation of such an attitude can be also seen in his words and actions. His reluctance to enter the war had changed after the public expressed an anger that he should fight, taking strategies such as spreading propaganda. After the war, although the U.S. refused to join after all, he proposed making an international body, suggesting the Fourteen Points, which became the foundation for peace negotiations. Further research on how the citizens at that time changed their ideas should be done, in order to understand how the public opinion was formed, as it remains unclear precisely when they began to have a unity as Americans.

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