

THE THRESHOLD OF THE NEW WORLD ORDER: THE WILSONIAN VISION AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1990'S AND BEYOND (Senate - June 29, 1992)

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Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I will this week, on three separate occasions, seek the indulgence of the Senate to speak for the better part of an hour on each occasion. The reason is that I believe we are on the threshold of a new world order, and the present administration is not sure what the order is. But I would like to suggest how we might begin to reorganize our foreign policy in order to realize the full potential embodied in the phrase `new world order.'

Two years ago, an act of aggression by an Arab despot against a tiny Arab sheikdom led the President of the United States to invoke a magisterial phrase.

He spoke, in rare visionary terms, of a `new world order' in which wrongs would be put right through collective action.

My purpose today is to examine that phrase and to elaborate on the immense potential--and still more, the imperative--I believe it holds for American foreign policy in the 1990's and beyond.

AN UNCERTAIN BEGINNING

Although President Bush called the new world order a `big idea,' circumstances surrounding his proclamation of this august concept were less than auspicious.

Indeed the crisis that occasioned the President's use of the phrase resulted from a sustained act of appeasement constituting a colossal foreign policy blunder--

Having propped up Saddam Hussein with loans;

Having disregarded evidence that Saddam illegally used American aid to buy arms;

Having ignored Saddam's genocidal slaughter of his own Kurdish citizens;

Having fostered trade with Iraq even as Saddam provided safe haven for the world's most infamous terrorists;

Having overlooked Saddam's manifest quest for chemical and nuclear weapons;

Having supplied Saddam with military intelligence almost until the eve of his invasion; and

After first responding that the United States contemplated no military action--

The Bush administration suddenly summoned itself to assemble a multinational coalition under U.N. auspices to evict Saddam from Kuwait and restore the Kuwaiti Emir to his royal throne.

Unfortunately, as it basked in the heroic light cast by men and women of the American Armed Forces, who performed the assigned task with gallantry and pride,

The administration failed to realize the fruits of their brave endeavor in two critical respects.

First captivated by a bizarre concern to maintain Iraq's territorial integrity, the President failed to drive Saddam from power, instead ordering our forces to stand idle while Saddam--whom the President had equated to Hitler--regrouped his defeated army to massacre tens of thousands of Kurds and Shiites who had been inspired by our President's rhetoric to rise in rebellion.

The administration then failed further, and far more sweepingly by doing nothing in the many months thereafter to give even preliminary meaning to the grand concept of a new order, which it had used so fervently as a rallying cry for war.

One may surmise that the President did not follow through with the concept of a new world order because he had not thought it through--

just as the administration has consistently lacked any guiding principle that would give coherence to its policy toward Iraq.

The new order may have been characteristically no more than an expedient slogan--a rhetorical device as useful and expendable as a Willie Horton Commercial.

Nonetheless as a consequence of its double failure, the Bush administration has betrayed its own express policies and achieved, in each case a result opposite to what is both possible and necessary.

Saddam's heinous and still-dangerous regime lives on while the promise of breathing new life into world institutions of collective action has been allowed to wither.

Both failures must eventually be reversed. But my focus today is on the larger question of American purpose in the world.

It is I believe, imperative that the gulf war's ambiguous outcome not be allowed to jeopardize the momentous concept the President associated with the war.

Instead, I shall urge that we revive the concept of a new world order, rescue the phrase from cynicism, and invest in it a vision that should become the organizing principle of American foreign policy in the 1990's and into the next century.

AN AMERICA READY FOR RENEWAL AND CHANGE

To be more than merely utopian the American agenda for a new world order must not only aspire to realistic goals internationally;

It must also be grounded in the only feasible foundation for the foreign policy of our democracy, a sound base of public support.

We must begin, therefore, by asking do we have a base of public understanding that will with resolute leadership sustain such a policy?

My answer is emphatically in the affirmative;

Indeed, I believe the American people stand ready today for far more visionary change than the current administration is capable of providing.

With the end of the cold war, a great awareness has swept the United States: A powerful, national realization that a time of decision is upon us and that profound change is both possible and essential.

The American people recognize that we are poised at a great turn in history and that we are urgently in need of renewal, both in our domestic life and our international role.

On the one hand, the end of superpower rivalry--through the swift collapse of our superpower rival--has inspired hope for a less dangerous and burdensome era in world affairs.

But more deeply and less optimistically, Americans share a painful recognition that the path they once assumed our Nation to be upon--a path of ever-broadening prosperity, of ever-increasing cultural harmony and racial unity, of unchallenged supremacy on the world stage--has not carried us to the expected destination.

Thus, for reasons both grim and hopeful, Americans today understand that we must chart a new direction at home and abroad.

Victory in the cold war has freed us to see our current plight more clearly.

Beset by foreign competition and our own economic mismanagement, the American standard of living has stagnated.

Despite White House efforts to divert us, we can no longer ignore mounting evidence of the multiple, menacing stresses that our own Nation and others are placing on the natural environment.

Despite major strides, we have failed to reconcile the seething differences among our own people.

Rather than narrowing, income disparities and racial divisions have widened over more than a decade in which selfishness and social neglect became implied themes of Presidential leadership.

But most worrying, we seem paralyzed in taking necessary political decisions within a democratic system that has long been our pride.

Many among the American people now share the harsh judgment of Walter Lippmann, who in his 1955 book, 'The Public Philosophy,' observed that:

With exceptions so rare that they are regarded as miracles and freaks of nature, [our] politicians are insecure and intimidated men.

They advance politically once as they placate, appease, bribe, seduce, bamboozle or otherwise manage to manipulate the demanding and threatening elements in their constituencies.

Perhaps, in recalling that such observations have a long American lineage, we can draw mild consolation. A healthy skepticism about politicians is an American strength, ingrained in our people.

It is a skepticism embodied by our Constitution in a system that is intended to grind slowly, precisely in order to protect us against the foibles of both our leaders and our led.

But prolonged inaction in the face of clearly needed change--still worse, a prolonged failure of our Nation's Chief Executive to articulate even a compelling set of goals, much less a path to their attainment has today carried skepticism to the brink of despair. We have reached a national crisis of confidence.

To surmount this crisis, and launch a new era of American success, will require both a vision of renewal and the will to bring concept to reality.

Central to this vision of renewal, I submit, is a clear conception of a new world order, though not because foreign policy is our preeminent concern--domestic renewal must be the highest American priority.

But the purpose of foreign policy is to promote an international environment in which our Nation may conduct its affairs in security and in harmony, and without unnecessary diversion of scarce and vital resources.

When circumstances change dramatically as they now have, we must reconsider, and revise, how best to advance our interests in the world arena.

For the past half-century, American foreign policy has been dominated by a single imperative: the containment of an expansionist, antidemocratic ideology centered in Moscow and Beijing--the one, headquarters of the world's last empire; the other, capital of the world's largest Nation.

The containment strategy shaped the lives of two generations of Americans and its success will remain a source of legitimate national pride. We did what had to be done, and for the most part well and honorably.

But a half-century of anticommunism has taken its toll. It gave us the Korean war; at least one brush with Armageddon in the Cuban missile crisis; the Vietnam war with its searing divisions and pain; a myriad of costly overseas commitments; and, still today an enormous nuclear and conventional arsenal sustained by a vast military-industrial complex that we will convert to civilian ends only after severe economic and social dislocation.

The cold war also extracted a domestic cost in eroding political civility and skewing our politics, sometimes to the point of perversity.

This distortion appeared not just in the excesses of McCarthyism, but more pervasively.

After the Vietnam war, conservatives devised a demonology of liberal pacifism that allegedly reposed in the democratic party.

For their part, liberals looked to their right and saw a dubious interventionism, fervidly advocated with what Hemingway called `that beautiful detachment and devotion to stern justice of men dealing in death without being in any danger of it.'

Over time, as the lines of domestic battle hardened, support for a particular weapon system or the dispatch of United States troops to a Caribbean Island came to be portrayed as definitive litmus tests of American patriotism.

So fundamentally did cold war politics deform our priorities that eventually we found ourselves consumed in debt and still placing greater budgetary priority on the fantasy of an antinuclear umbrella called star wars than on salvaging our desperate cities or housing our Nation's poor.

Today, as we look to a new era, our pundits and pollsters tell us that the American people seem weary of international involvement and are tempted by a so-called neo-isolationism.

But this is a false construct. The slogan `America first' no doubt holds appeal--it does to me. But, as most Americans well understand, we could not hide from the world if we tried.

The last 50 years have yielded a technological revolution in information, communication, transportation, medicine, manufacturing, and world trade.

For better or for worse, this revolution has transformed the elemental character of civilization on our planet.

Within and among nations, people today are interconnected by fast and affordable travel, instant electronics, shared images, and standardized products.

All of us, meanwhile, encounter an overwhelming flood of data--news, facts, opinions, advertising, and entertainment which we must struggle to interpret with an unchanged allotment of human wisdom and judgment.

For Americans, who for much of our history enjoyed a sense of separateness from the world, global interdependence is no longer an academic abstraction; we experience it daily.

The imperative America learned from World War II--that we cannot preserve our own well-being in isolation from the world's--has now been compounded by technology.

No longer is it sufficient to band together with other nations solely to resist the designs of an expansionist dictator.

The full panoply of threats to our future security and prosperity, the proliferation of deadly high-tech weapons, the accelerating degradation of our planetary environment, economic protectionism and unfair competition, overpopulation and migration, narcotics and AIDS all require global solutions.

Fortunately, the American people comprehend the reality; and precisely for that reason, they expect to see the strong hand of American leadership in world affairs.

The great choice facing us then is not between isolationism and internationalism. Our challenge is to determine the nature of American internationalism.

Must we continue to relate to the world as we recently have with a stumbling myopia, a denial of real and looming problems and a fear of bold commitment?

Or can we, with the cold war behind us, discern a coherent and principled new agenda that will guide our conduct, and successfully serve our Nation's global interests, as we move toward the third millennium?

My answer is that the moment is upon us to define a compelling concept of a new world order to commit ourselves to it, and to lead the world in its realization.

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AMERICA AND `NEW ORDERS'

The founding of a new order is daring business, no doubt. But it is hardly an unfamiliar role for the American people.

It is in fact the very role by which, for more than two centuries, we have defined ourselves as a nation.

It is a role which traces to our national origins and in which we have an illustrious, though still incomplete, record in this century.

To this generation of Americans it now falls to build upon that legacy of our forefathers by leading the world once again in a constructive reordering of human affairs.

The first new order was the revolution of American democracy.

Our Founders were assuredly modest in their expectations of human nature, but there was nothing meek in their aspiration for the democratic nation they envisaged.

The great seal of the United States declared our goal: E Pluribus Unum, the creation, from diverse peoples, of a nation in unity.

Our great seal announced, too, the unprecedented means by which the Founders determined to pursue that goal: Novus Ordo Seclorum, 'a new order for the ages.'

The new order proclaimed by the American Constitution concerned nothing less than the cardinal principles on which a nation should be founded. The essence of this new order was liberty:

Political liberty to protect men and women against the abuse of power;

Economic liberty to unleash human creativity;

Spiritual liberty to permit man's moral fulfillment.

Looking back to 1787, we find a remarkable, though unremarked coincidence that captures exquisitely just what this new order meant.

It was in that year that the dominant statesman of imperial Russia, Prince Potemkin, decreed that thousands of serfs be conscripted for forced labor.

Potemkin's purpose was to erect false but impressive facades to adorn towns that Catherine the Great and visiting European royalty would pass during a boating excursion into the Crimea.

With this act of supreme monarchial arrogance Potemkin gave birth to a perfect metaphor for Europe's old order of privilege, illusion, brutality, and deceit.

He created too a powerful symbol of contrast for at that very moment in history the American framers were assembled in Philadelphia to found a new order of democratic freedom based upon the principles of human equality and inalienable human rights.

Two years later as George Washington took office with the simple title 'President,' the French Revolution sent the first tremors through Europe's old order.

And in the ensuing two centuries that order would crumble and succumb to the democratic ideals the American Constitution had enshrined

In Russia where czar gave way to commissar the democratic revolution would come slowest.

There in a new form arose the Potemkin villages of Soviet Communist utopia and not until Christmas of 1991 would a man named Boris Yeltsin finally proclaim a Russian democracy.

When this son of peasants and communism came before the U.S. Congress 6 months later to extend the hand of democratic partnership his outstretched arm represented the closing of a great circle of history.

Americans in the 19th century felt no need for a new world order holding instead to a proud but limited concept of world purpose. In the words of Daniel Webster America's `true mission' was:

Not to propagate our opinions or impose upon other countries our form of Government by artifice or force, but to teach by example and show by our success, moderation and justice, the blessings of self-government and the advantages of free institutions.

Such world order as did exist was shaped by two seminal events in Europe.

The first, in 1805, was Britain's naval victory over the French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar. Lord Nelson's triumph gave Britain an unchallenged supremacy on the seas that was to last a century.

During this period of relative calm among the major nations--the `Pax Britannica' which followed the Napoleonic wars--the British empire became the largest in history comprising one-quarter of the world's land surface and one-quarter of its population.

The second seminal event resulted from Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815. Led by Austria's Metternich the ensuing Congress of Vienna served to delineate on the European Continent a landscape of nation-states.

That would, for the most part, hold for 99 years--until the fateful events of 1914.

But if this was a world order, it was a tenuous one. The continental balance of power, from which Britain stood aloof in `splendid isolation' offered far less than a guarantee of full tranquility.

It could not suppress the domestic revolutions of 1848, which heralded an end to rule by monarchs and forced Metternich himself to flee his country.

Nor could it suppress major war. In 1871, as Otto Von Bismarck headquartered in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles while German guns pounded Paris into submission, no Frenchman could have vouched for the `balance of power.'

To be sure, Europe's two alliances--Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy counterpoised against France and Russia--gave Europe some semblance of stability.

But the interlocking gears of these alliance systems also held the potential for a grim and terrible momentum.

In August 1914 those gears went into motion. Four years later, the old order--the 'proud tower' of the European monarchs--lay in blood-soaked ruin.

Throughout the 19th century, America had concerned itself primarily with westward expansion, fulfilling what many saw as our 'manifest destiny.'

We had paused but once: to wage, among ourselves, the first modern war--as the devastating price of purification from the Nation's original sin of slavery.

Only at the century's end had we surged briefly into overseas adventure, in an exuberant but minor war with Spain.

But Europe's monumental act of self-annihilation drew America fully and inexorably onto the world stage.

Now grown to continental size, and possessed of commensurate strength and rising confidence, the United States came to the war in Europe reluctantly. But eventually with strong purpose.

At war's end the American President Woodrow Wilson, was determined that the grievous failings of the past--

the system of international rivalry that had turned Europe into a sprawling graveyard should never be allowed to recur.

When the peace conference convened at Versailles in 1919, Woodrow Wilson presented, to a world desperately eager to hear it, America's second vision of a new order.

The first American vision--the Founders' vision--had concerned the establishment of a just new order within nations through institutions of democracy.

The second American vision--Wilson's vision--concerned the establishment of a just new order among nations through institutions of cooperation.

Wilson's vision of involvement diverged from America's prevailing philosophy of the 19th century, but was not at odds with the vision of the Founders. Rather, the two visions were harmonious.

The Constitution had affirmed the law of nations as integral with American law. Now, in Wilson's view, it was imperative that the United States embrace new commitments under the law of nations.

In building upon the vision of the Founders, Wilson's vision was no less revolutionary.

To Wilson and the millions of Americans who supported him, it was clear that the growth of nations and technology, and the shattering horror of the great war, had ended any reasonable belief that the world's nation-states could live separately and securely in isolation.

George Washington's warning against entangling alliances still held--if alliances meant nothing more than American participation in a cynical game of nations.

But Wilson and his followers recognized that if a nation wished to protect itself and its way of life in the 20th century, its defenses must consist not merely in its own armed strength but also in reliable mechanisms of international cooperation and joint decision.

For a world in dire need of a new order, the Wilsonian promise was sweeping:

That rationality might be imposed upon chaos and that principles of political democracy, national self-determination, economic cooperation, and collective security might prevail over repression and carnage in the affairs of mankind.

This was, it seemed, an idea whose time had come.

When Woodrow Wilson went to Paris in 1919, the tens of thousands who cheered him represented the millions worldwide for whom America's President embodied a transcendent hope.

For one extended and luminous moment, he became the best known most popular leader the world had ever seen ascending to a political stature attained by no other person before or since.

A future Republican President, Herbert Hoover, described it thus:

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For a moment at the time of the armistice Mr. Wilson rose to intellectual domination of most of the civilized world.

With his courage and eloquence he carried a message of hope for the independence of nations the freedom of men and lasting peace.

Never since his time has any man risen to the political and spiritual heights that came to Woodrow Wilson.

Modern-day conservatives who are instinctively frightened by the Wilsonian vision have propounded a mythical image of Woodrow Wilson as a dangerously naive idealist.

Idealist he was. But there was no naivete in the Wilsonian vision. As history soon proved the danger lay in a failure to implement what Wilson proposed.

Summarizing the aspirations Woodrow Wilson embodied for the world, William Butler Yeats wrote these words in a poem called 1919:

We pieced our thoughts into a philosophy and tried to bring the world under rule.

Wilson himself spoke similarly to the nations assembled at the Paris Peace Conference, when he said:

What we seek is the reign of law based upon the consent of the governed and sustained by the organized opinion of mankind.

How is it, then, that the United States failed so conspicuously and so fatefully to join the League of Nations that woodrow Wilson himself had designed and advanced as the ultimate protection against future cynicism and future cataclysm?

This question is distinctly pertinent today as we confront a comparable test of world leadership.

Some attribute the failure to Wilson's unwillingness to compromise but this is misleading because Woodrow Wilson did compromise.

He compromised with allied leaders on many issues, boundaries, colonies and even reparations, which he rightly feared could prove excessive.

He compromised with critics at home, obtaining changes in the draft document that former President Taft assured him would make Senate approval certain.

Where Wilson could not compromise was on the most fundamental question embodied in article 10 of the covenant of the League of Nations.

This was the commitment to collective security: A commitment by all parties to defend the territorial integrity of each. It was an obligation the United States would eventually accept but not until 30 years later in NATO.

Wilson called this commitment the backbone of the whole covenant. Without it he said, the League of Nations would be hardly more than an influential debating society.

Wilson's defense of article 10 was born of intellectual conviction and something more.

He felt a powerful moral obligation--in his words, 'eternal bonds of fidelity'--to those whom he had sent to war. He had told them they were fighting not just for peace but for a certain kind of peace.

What later would seem a cliché tinged with irony--a war to make the world safe for democracy, was for that American President no mere slogan.

If this was moralism it was far from pacifism--in fact the opposite. Woodrow Wilson was convinced that a collective security system must be backed by a willingness to use military force.

In the absence of a system that would reliably employ that ultimate sanction he believed that another great war would follow.

That is why he could not accept the so-called Lodge reservations proposed in the Senate, of which the most important was the removal of any American commitment to act against aggression.

One of history's most compelling questions is what might have happened had Woodrow Wilson not, in the fall of 1919, suffered a paralytic stroke. We know only what did happen.

Warren Harding ran for President in 1920 on a Republican platform that favored American membership in some kind of association of nations for the maintenance of peace.

This pledge was formally endorsed by the major Republican leaders of the day, including Herbert Hoover, who asserted that carrying through on that promise was nothing less, in his words, than 'the test of the entire sincerity, integrity and statesmanship of the Republican Party.'

And yet, when elected, Harding interpreted the result as a mandate against any league membership.

His administration, and the two that followed, would carry America backward--from bold commitment to dangerous complacency.

With that turn of history, the League of Nations was doomed, a new world was born, but not a new world order.

Within two decades, the nations had descended again--this time into an even greater conflagration that spanned the entire globe, produced the ultimate horror of the Holocaust, and ended at Hiroshima in the inferno of a mushroom cloud.

Mr. President, I believe history summons us to dwell on the events of 1919.

For it was then that the United States faltered as it must never again at a crucial moment of world challenge and responsibility.

As we reflect on that moment I believe we can see today a clear and present mission: to finish the job that Woodrow Wilson began for America and the world three-quarters of a century ago.

The first steps toward fulfillment of the Wilsonian dream came 25 years later.

By then, President Franklin Roosevelt, a giant in his own right and a Wilsonian in world view, had revived and nurtured among the American people a widening acceptance of the concepts of collective security and collective responsibility.

As America emerged from the Second World War, the supreme legacy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt was an economic and military superpower with a will to lead.

Those in the Truman years who sought to resume Wilson's work the work of building a true world order brought historic statesmanship to the task--the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary fund, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the Marshall plan, the World Health Organization and a host of other worthy U.N. agencies, the Fulbright Exchange Program, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization the Organization of American States and later the European community--became their monuments.

But the founders of these postwar structures succeeded in realizing the Wilsonian promise only in partial measure because Europe, much of the rest of the world and even the new institutions of multilateral cooperation, feel prey to the polarizing effects of the cold war.

For two full generations, international cooperation has been weakened by a global clash of ideologies that brought with it a militarist orientation and a steady drain on precious human and material resources.

As we emerge from this period of history, we need allow no implication that its travail was somehow the result of a grand misunderstanding, as recently suggested by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Whose contribution to history--in ending the Soviet empire--must be respected more than his contribution to historical analysis.

In the great test between communism and free-market democracy, there never was moral symmetry between the adversaries.

Nor, one must add, was there every in America a common view to that effect, notwithstanding the persistent distortions of our assiduous conservative myth makers.

The nations of the west had no sound alternative other than to stand together against the power and ambition of the Soviet empire until inevitably, it disintegrated under the accumulated weight of the human depredations it so brutally imposed.

That collapse came slowly, painfully and then in a pent-up rush to freedom.

Our task today--the duty of the western democracies, led by the United States--is to see, and seize upon, the implications of that collapse.

For with the dissolution of Soviet communism. And as the Chinese Communist leadership counts its numbered days, we see evaporating before us what should be the final barrier to the Wilsonian dream.

This opportunity, thought it has arrived more quickly than any of us could have imagined, comes none to soon.

For across the planet today, we find ourselves confronted not by an ideological threat or the expansionist designs of a military power.

By a rising tide of global problems that threaten mankind's very survival.

We face a tidal change we can hope to manage only through the spirit, and mechanisms, of international cooperation that Woodrow Wilson first urged upon the world.

We stand now at this century's third Wilsonian moment, inspired by the legacy of Woodrow Wilson's vision; warned by the consequences of our earlier failures to realize that vision and the dangers if we should fail again; strengthened by the work of latterday Wilsonians, who in the wake of the Second Great war, struggled to lay foundations for international cooperation; and sobered, as we look to the future, by the gravity and complexity of the problems that loom before us.

We stand challenged to resume, and this time to complete, the building of a world in which cooperating democracies will face their problems together.

Our challenge demands that we conceive a new world order that encompasses, and builds upon, the concept of collective security that Woodrow Wilson first advanced to a nation and a world not yet ready to comprehend its necessity.

Our circumstances today leave no choice: America must propound a new and expansive form of the Wilsonian vision and then lead the world in bringing that vision to reality.

Tomorrow, I shall outline what I conceive to be a sound and compelling American agenda for this new world order.

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Mr. CRANSTON. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BIDEN. I will be happy to yield to my friend from California.

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