



THE USA AS A GLOBAL POWER: MONROE DOCTRINE OR WILSONIANISM

Tornike Samakashvili

Master of Security Studies Ministry of Defense Tbilisi. Georgia

***Corresponding Author: Tornike Samakashvili**

Abstract:

This essay explores the interplay between the Monroe Doctrine and Wilsonianism as two foundational yet contrasting paradigms of United States foreign policy. The Monroe Doctrine, established in the early 19th century, asserted American dominance in the Western Hemisphere through principles of isolationism and deterrence against European intervention, later evolving into interventionist policies that consolidated U.S. regional power. In contrast, Wilsonianism, developed in the aftermath of World War I, promoted international engagement, democracy, self-determination, and collective security through institutions such as the League of Nations, embodying America's role as a moral leader in global governance. Although these approaches reflect differing orientations—regional isolationism versus global internationalism—their interaction has been pivotal in shaping U.S. foreign policy across centuries. From the Cold War to contemporary challenges, elements of both doctrines have been combined to balance regional stability with global leadership. The essay concludes that the adaptability of these doctrines underscores the United States' ability to navigate evolving geopolitical realities, ensuring its position as both a regional protector and a global power.

Key words: Monroe Doctrine, Wilsonianism, Isolationism, Internationalism, U.S. foreign policy.

DOI:-10.5281/zenodo.17139614

Manuscript ID# 346

Introduction:

When discussing the Monroe Doctrine and Wilsonianism, it should be noted at the outset that these approaches reflect the evolving identity of the United States as a regional protector and global leader, which has played and continues to play a critical role in shaping its foreign policy strategies. On the one hand, the Monroe Doctrine, which is associated with the name of the president, emerged in the early 19th century as a fundamental element of US foreign policy. Although the doctrine emphasized non-interference in European affairs, it drew clear boundaries between the European world and the Western Hemisphere, which laid the foundation for American regional dominance. By isolating itself from European conflicts, the Monroe Doctrine emphasized American influence in the Western Hemisphere. In contrast, Wilsonianism, which President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed in the aftermath of World War I, advocated active global engagement. Wilson's principles emphasized democracy, self-determination of nations, and the establishment of international institutions such as the League of Nations to maintain collective security. This approach was a departure from earlier isolationist tendencies, which had presented the United States as the moral leader in shaping a new world order based on peace and cooperation. Although the Monroe Doctrine and Wilsonianism represent opposing strategies of isolationism and internationalism, they played a major role in the emergence of the United States as a global power, as they had alternated throughout this period.

As Spain's imperial control waned in the 19th century, many of its former colonies in Latin America gained independence. Other European powers, most notably the so-called "Holy Alliance" (Prussia, Austria, and Russia), sought to replace Spain by restoring monarchical rule in those countries. The United States, which prioritized the strengthening of its sovereignty, therefore declared the colonial moves of European countries as a direct threat to its security and interests. Therefore, President James Monroe, under the leadership of Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, declared that the United States was no longer open to European colonial aspirations and called on them not to interfere in the affairs of the hemisphere. The doctrine firmly declared that any European attempts to colonize or interfere in the affairs of nations in the Americas would be considered acts of aggression against the United States. This position emphasized the United States' commitment to supporting the sovereignty of newly independent nations in Latin America in order to protect its sphere of influence. The Monroe Doctrine asserted that the United

States would remain neutral in European conflicts and affairs. This isolationist principle emphasized America's limited military and economic resources at the time. However, on the other hand, these principles laid the foundation for a foreign policy that allowed the United States to focus on its regional priorities.

The Monroe Doctrine helped establish the United States as the leading power in the region. By asserting its claim to the Western Hemisphere, the doctrine strengthened U.S. dominance in the Americas and served as a deterrent to European encroachment. This was particularly important because it allowed the United States to increase its influence during a period of rapid territorial expansion. The doctrine's legacy was further enhanced by subsequent reinterpretations, such as the Roosevelt Declaration (1904). Theodore Roosevelt expanded the Monroe Doctrine to provide a fair framework for U.S. actions in the region. He argued that it could act as a "policeman" in the Western Hemisphere to maintain economic and international peace. All this meant a transformation from a defensive political agenda to an interventionist policy, which contributed to the emergence of the United States as a global superpower. Critics argue that the Monroe Doctrine paved the way for the US to become the dominant power in its region, often by hexing up the countries present there. Through these political actions, the United States prioritized economically important and immediate strategic interests, which led to discontent and a perception of neo-imperialism in Latin American countries.

As for Wilsonianism, it emerged during a transformative period in global history, when the devastating consequences of World War I highlighted the dangers of unrestrained nationalism and militarism. The unprecedented scale and brutality of the war led to a re-examination of traditional power politics and the creation of a new unified political vision aimed at avoiding future conflicts. This political approach emphasized the free will of nations to make their own political decisions without interference from external forces. All this would contribute to the disappearance of existing empires and the emergence of free states, including in Europe after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian empires. Wilson emphasized the importance of the League of Nations, where countries would have the opportunity to cooperate to resolve conflicts through political negotiations. Wilsonianism helped to strengthen the global power of the United States by creating an image of democracy and peace. This approach helped the United States influence the global norms that existed in the world. Commitment to international security, human freedom, human rights, and economic cooperation became the defining

features of US-led global governance in the second half of the twentieth century. However, the idealistic framework of Wilsonianism often clashed with the realities of global power politics. The US Senate's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles and the "League of Nations" determined internal conflicts over the issue of global involvement. Without US participation, the League was significantly weakened, unable to prevent aggression, which led to World War II.

The Monroe Doctrine and Wilsonianism refer to contrasting approaches to United States foreign policy, reflecting the tension between isolationism and internationalism, as well as regional dominance and global engagement. Although rooted in different eras and responding to different challenges, these paradigms often overlapped. Their interplay has shaped the evolution of the United States as a global power. A good example of this is the US approach during the Cold War. As the United States sought to balance regional primacy with global responsibilities, the principles of the Monroe Doctrine were combined with Wilsonian ideals. The influence of the Monroe Doctrine was clearly evident in US policy as it sought to maintain regional power and contain communism. A prime example of this is its intervention in Cuba (e.g., the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis). At the same time, the United States continued to pursue the principles of Wilsonianism through alliances such as NATO and the Marshall Plan, which sought to rebuild Europe and combat Soviet expansion.

Conclusion:

As we have seen, understanding the interaction between the Monroe Doctrine and Wilsonianism is crucial to understanding the evolution of U.S. foreign policy. These doctrines not only reflect the nation's changing priorities, but also underscore their enduring influence in shaping the modern world. The Monroe Doctrine and Wilsonianism have often appeared at odds, but their interaction underscores the adaptability of U.S. foreign policy. The legacy of the Monroe Doctrine emphasizes the importance of regional stability, while the ideals of Wilsonianism continue to resonate around democracy, human free will, and multilateralism. What they all have in common is a political approach that can be used to consider the successes, limitations, and challenges of the United States on the global stage. The confrontation between "Wilsonianism" and "Monroe Doctrine" remains an important issue today. Regional problems, such as immigration, drug trafficking, and foreign interference in the region, require greater efforts to stabilize the hemisphere.

Global challenges, such as global warming, pandemics, and great-power conflicts, require global cooperation and leadership. For these reasons, balancing these dual imperatives is not an easy task.

The United States must balance its regional interests with its responsibilities as a global power. In doing so, it ensures that its policies are consistent with both the pragmatic needs of its region and its commitment to democratic ideals.

As history has shown, over time, U.S. policymakers have combined elements of both doctrines. This hybrid approach has allowed the United States to maintain its power as a regional dominant and a global power. Therefore, given these political approaches, their ability to adapt to contemporary realities remains an important issue for the US role in shaping a complex and interconnected world.

Bibliography

1. ქენჯაძე კ., ამერიკის შეერთებული შტატების საგარეო პოლიტიკის ისტორია, 1750-1933, წიგნი პირველი.თბილისი, 2009
2. ქენჯაძე კ., ამერიკის საგარეო პოლიტიკის ისტორია, 1933-1993, წიგნი მეორე. თბილისი, 2009
3. Brius W. Jentlson, American Foreign Policy. Fourth Edition. Duke University. Norton & Company Inc, New York, 2010
4. Cox, Michael, and Doug Stokes, eds. US foreign policy. Oxford University Press, 2018.
5. Hunt, Michael H. Ideology and US foreign policy. Yale University Press, 2009.
6. Cunningham, Noble E. The Presidency of James Monroe. University Press of Kansas, 1996.
7. Erikson, Daniel P. "Requiem for the Monroe Doctrine." Current history 107, no. 706 (2008): 58-64.
8. Pires, Marcos Cordeiro, and Lucas Gualberto do Nascimento. "The Monroe Doctrine 2.0 and US-China-Latin America Trilateral Relations." International Organisations Research Journal 15, no. 3 (2020): 202-222.
9. Ninkovich, Frank. The Wilsonian century: US foreign policy since 1900. University of Chicago Press, 1999.
10. PODRAZA, ANDRZEJ. "THE BIRTH AND DEMISE (?) OF THE AMERICAN ERA WILSONIANISM AND ITS LEGACY VS. THE US INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY." Przegląd Zachodni (2021).
11. Calhoun, Frederick S. Uses of Force and Wilsonian Foreign Policy. No. 6. Kent State University Press, 1993.
12. Stivachtis, Yannis A. "US foreign policy and international order." International Order in a Globalizing World (2007): 39-66.