

## WOODROW WILSON AND THE RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION

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At the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the dichotomy between the diplomacy and propaganda of the United States was most apparent in the settlement of frontier questions in Central Europe. Diplomatic historians have undoubtedly reflected widespread popular disenchantment with Wilsonian idealism in their castigation of the American President for his presumably unrealistic approach to the problems of Great Power diplomacy. The phrase „national self-determination“ appears to have been exploited successfully as a weapon of psychological warfare against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but neglected as the basis for a just peace.

An analytical study presented within the scope of decision-theory places Wilson's effort to realize his ideal of self-determination for the peoples of the Danubian Monarchy in a perspective quite different from that of an historical narrative, which emphasizes the consequences of a decision more than its social and psychological origins. The policy-maker's perception of his institutional role and the information to which he is exposed are overriding considerations which lead to the adoption (sometimes by default) of a given course of action. Wilson's conception of his office encouraged him to act more as a Prime Minister backed by a disciplined parliamentary majority than a President faced with an often recalcitrant Congress. The „Inquiry“, a group of White House advisers organized by Colonel House, dominated the President's sources of information to the exclusion of area specialists from the Departments of State and War. As the negotiations progressed, Wilson grew suspicious even of the loyalty of the „Inquiry“ and dispensed with its services. In an atmosphere of personal and political isolation, he suffered a physical collapse which signaled the coming defeat of national self-determination.