
THE UNITED STATES AND CENTRAL EUROPE IN THE AMERICAN CENTURY

THIS BOOK – drawn from lectures in a course at Warsaw University’s Centre for East European Studies – was inspired by the 100th anniversary of Poland’s reestablished independence in 1918 and the emergence of other new or renewed nation-states from the Baltic to the Black Seas. Those events coincided with (and were advanced by) the rise of the United States and its first articulation of a Grand Strategy: President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points presented in January of that year. The Fourteen Points were an early, incomplete, and unsuccessful – but also a visionary and influential – attempt to set out a rules-based global order that favored democracy.

The Fourteen Points were about more than Central Europe. But they called for Poland’s independence and treated all of Central Europe as an integral part of an undivided Europe whose security would be guaranteed by the United States.

The Fourteen Points set the stage for the best American strategic thinking that followed. The Atlantic Charter of 1941, the Marshall Plan and Truman Doctrine of the early post-Cold War era, President Reagan’s advocacy of democracy, e.g., in his Westminster speech of 1982, and the foreign policy strategy of the subsequent US Presidents until

Donald J. Trump, all sought to advance as far as practical the objective of what came to be known as the Free World. All were inspired by the Fourteen Points.

Wilson was a flawed advocate for the Free World. His racism, bad even for his times, is a hard mark against him. But, like America's Founders, Wilson's best ideas were at odds with his worst ones and, in the end, the good ideas proved more lasting.

This Grand Strategy for a Free World was not the only US foreign policy approach over the past 100 years, however. Another tradition, rooted in power politics and a version of the doctrine of realism, has also played a major part. This approach, among other things, does not regard Central and Eastern Europe as an integral part of an undivided Europe and further holds that the US had no core interests in it; that Central Europe can be treated as a function of US policy toward other powers, especially the USSR and later Russia. This view played a large part in US thinking in the run-up to Yalta and in the US policy of "détente" with the Soviet Union in the early 1970's.

The essays that follow review US policy toward Central Europe from Wilson to the start of President Joe Biden's Administration, a history that illuminates larger debates about fundamentals of US foreign policy. Some of the most consequential choices of US foreign policy over the past century were about Central and Eastern Europe. As President George H. W. Bush said in his 1989 speech to the Polish Sejm, the Cold War began and ended in Poland.

I am grateful to Professor Jan Malicki, Director of the Studium Europy Wschodniej, who invited me to teach at Warsaw University and commissioned this book, now translated into Ukrainian and Bulgarian. For this third edition, I have revised the final chapter, updating it to include a discussion of the Trump Administration's engaged, often productive, but inconsistent policy toward Central Europe

and expectations about the Biden Administration's approach.

I have learned much from the students who have taken the course over the past three years: Poles, Ukrainians, Armenians, Belarusians, Georgians, and others from the former Soviet Union. They, like previous generations from Central and Eastern Europe, have experienced the consequences of the successes and failures of US policy in this part of the world. For them, the themes of the course are not abstractions.

This book, therefore, is dedicated to Poles and other Central and East Europeans who, over the past century, pushed the United States to remain true to its best values, who recalled Americans to themselves when we strayed from them, and who worked with us to advance policies consistent with the old rallying cry of Polish patriots and fighters for freedom

“Za Waszą i Naszą Wolność”
“For Your Freedom and Ours”