

**Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities**

Doctoral Thesis

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Trends of military policy in the United States between 1914 and 1917

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I.

When the United States joined the group of superpowers around at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries it was considered to be unique from many aspects. United States was undeniably more lucky than the others, since no matter which direction it turned to, it had to face competitors, who were either weak or tied down in other fields. By the end of the 1890ies the period of continental expansion ended, since its last territories (Utah, New Mexico) obtained the state status in that period. As a result of the war fought with Spain in 1898 it extended its zone of influence to the region of the Caribbean Sea, then starting with the beginning of the 20th century it viewed with increasing interest the happenings of East Asia, with special regard to China and the significantly strengthened Japan.

The period lasting from 1871 until 1914 entered history as the “Period of Happy Peace”. In the case of Europe it is obvious that this is nothing else, but the embellishing of the past, since numerous diplomatic tensions were burdening this period, and at the same time the forced development of the armed forces and its accompanying intensive propaganda infiltrated into the everyday life of the people. The couple of decades history of the United States, as a regional power was a history rich in successes, and United States achieved this in a way that there was nothing that would have reminded the everyday people of the army. Militarism and the “cult of power” were concepts unknown to them. In spite of this, not much later – both in the areas of foreign policy and military policy – the United States had to face greater challenges than ever before.

After the attack committed against Franz Ferdinand, heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne on June 28, 1914, following a one month diplomatic rope pulling, World War I started with Austro-Hungarian Monarchy’s war message sent to Serbia. At the time when the military operations started probably nobody though yet that the map of Europe will be significantly re-drawn four years later, and the club of the great powers will be also reshuffled. However it seemed very likely that the United States will undertake a great role in the success of the Entente Powers, moreover it will swing the balance in the fights that will decide the war, and both the winner and the loser will seek the favours of the United States after the ending of the military operation. The United States entered the war only in April 1917, but the assistance provided by the United States was felt by the countries of the Entente – primarily Great Britain and France - practically from the start of the hostility. Without American assistance it is possible that the latter one would have been forced to capitulate already in 1917.

World War I was a turning point for the United States practically from all aspects. From an ill-equipped army of hardly more than one hundred thousand soldiers they organised a modern mass army that stood its ground in the biggest war of military history of the time. The military policy of the United States may be divided into two big phases in this regard. While in the period that lasted from the end of the 18th century till 1917 the overwhelming majority of the military events were limited to the North American subcontinent. However after 1917 until our days they undertook military roles on other continents, with big armies on several occasions. World War I was the opening of this second era; this is the reason why the military policy of the period that preceded the military operations is also very important. They paid great attention to the European events in the United States already before entering the war. However, when World War I broke out, practically nothing indicated that the previous practice of the country may change. The 28th President of the United States, Thomas Woodrow Wilson emphasised on several occasions that the only possible scenario may be strict neutrality. Due to these statements it seemed that everything will remain unchanged even as regards the military policy, therefore nothing supported the significant strengthening of the army of hardly more than 100 thousand men. However already a couple of months after the war broke out voices could be heard that criticised the backwardness of the army, then as time progressed these voices became louder and not much later an intensive propaganda unfolded, which they called the Preparedness Movement.

Since the navy of the United States was strong and its army was weak, without developing the latter one, they could not have provided assistance to the Entente Powers on the European military grounds, even if there would have been a majority political will. Exactly because of this, starting with the beginning of 1915, they urged the strengthening of the land forces, and then of the air force in an increasingly harmonised way. They kept this topic continuously on the agenda starting with the sinking of Lusitania on May 7, 1915 until the time when the United States entered the war (April 4, 1917).

II.

The attention of the author turned gradually towards the history of the United States. In year 2006 – still as a university student – in **his** thesis **he** summarised the country's World War I related history, with paying special attention to the military and diplomacy happenings. **He** had also the chance to carry on more specific research activities as a Ph.D.

student, starting with 2007. The documentary sources of the World War I military history of the United States were proven to be far the best, and this led to the recognition that it is worthwhile to study this topic deeper.

The purpose of the dissertation is to introduce the different military policy thoughts and concepts of the United States, covering the period of 1914-April 1917. After electing President Thomas Woodrow Wilson it seemed that there will be challenges awaiting the managers of foreign policy only in the direct spheres of interest of the United States. However the breaking out of World War I created a completely new situation, since already after the first months the political elite and the majority of the intellectual class was divided as regards how to proceed. The official standpoint was Wilson's Neutrality Statement of August 19, 1914. As the time went by more and more people expressed their contrary opinions, moreover they even tried to force their will on the President. The supporters of change fostered two main directions, on one hand the changing of the foreign policy approach and on the other hand the changing of the structure of the armed forces. According to their opinion it is not possible to separate these two directions from each other, therefore we also introduce those events of the eventful diplomacy history of this era that influenced the military policy recommendations. In other words: we primarily focus on military policy, and we cover foreign policy only when it is of outstanding significance from the aspect of our subject or according to the referred sources.

The pro-peace and the isolationist politicians also acted similarly to the pro-preparedness people. Starting with 1915 they tried to convince public opinion about their truth in many publications and lectures. It is essential to analyse their programs in more detail in order to understand the events. Therefore we discuss their programs under separate chapters. It is also very important to introduce the disputes and suggestions that were connected to the development of the navy, although this task is far easier, since the related debates were far less fierce than the army related ones. Many people explained the need to develop the army with the events of World War I from the start. They used these events to support their own military policy arguments. This led to the recognition that in these cases we cannot omit discussing the military events either.

It is important to note that in the course of writing the dissertation we did not try to exclusively introduce the military policy issues and the events of the World War, but we also tried to analyse in more detail the arguments and debates of the politicians. With this method hopefully we also succeeded in presenting new results as regards the political culture of the United States. The issues of military power development have to be also

examined from the aspect of the “history of concepts”, since previously the target of the United States was to sustain the sufficient minimum, and therefore they had to find an appropriate reason for the large scale developments.

There are wide ranging printed sources related to this topic. Since the development of the army became one of the most important issues of dispute of the American public life of the time. Practically everybody involved in American public life and in the political arena issued his/her thoughts in the form of a pamphlet or a book. This makes life both easier and more difficult for the researcher: since the aim has to be to include the most standpoints possible in the dissertation, with avoiding overlaps as far as possible. This means that the innumerable suggestions have to be sorted according to a certain kind of priority order.

III.

Several military policy suggestions were presented before the breaking out of the world war, and in addition to this several publications were also issued. Starting with 1914 it is already worthwhile to give a collective name to all those, who were speaking up for developing the armed forces. It is the most practical to use the expression Preparedness Movement for covering these activities, since the camp of those supporting the changes was very heterogeneous. The leading personalities included active politicians, a former President, a former military staff leader, military attachés, historians, military historians, and finally there were also disguised supporters of this issue among the consultants of President Wilson and the members of the government. Ultimately getting prepared for the war became one of the most significant issues of debate of the American public life and of the American political arena of the time. Practically there wasn't any politician or public personality, who had not taken either a supportive or an opposing standpoint in respect of this issue.

The most important argument of the members and sympathizers of the Preparedness Movement was the fact that the United States had to always face weak or unorganised enemies in the past. They explained with the series of random events and luck that all the previous hostilities ended with American victories. According to their views the American success in the case of the bigger battles was only due to the self-sacrificing attitude of the volunteers. They also recalled that these battles involved unreasonably great losses of blood, which could have been avoided without exception if there would have been a larger permanent army. However, the lagging behind of the United States increased multiple

times by the turn of the century due to the development of military technology and the existence of the modern European mass armies, which represented a great danger.

They extended their program by the era of World War I with already envisioning the enemy setting their feet on the shores of the United States. They emphasised that a country that has an army of medium size may lead a successful war campaign in North America, therefore they argued that a significantly larger army has to be organised exclusively for defence reasons. Therefore they emphasised in many cases that their program supports peaceful purposes, and they themselves are pacifists. They often referred to the influential Presidents of the United States, to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. According to their views in spite of the fact that they maintained a small army in line with the American traditions, they never risked the security of the United States. They often used the means of psychological warfare. This meant that with the aid of different propagandistic metaphors they presented the backwardness of the army, and simultaneously with this they emphasised the great significance of European military developments. From this it was only one more step to criticise the military organisation and the army of their own country. They reached the conclusion that lagging behind Europe had been continuously increasing since the end of the civil war.

As regards political parties the fundamental members of the Preparedness Movement were republicans, since the decisive majority of the democrats lined up behind President Wilson. On the side of the democrats two colleagues of the President – Lindley Miller Garrison Secretary of military affairs and William Franklin Houston Secretary of agriculture – represented the exception.

Although the works of the prominent representatives of the movement became wider known after the turn of 1914/1915, they had close relation with each other already earlier. For example both Henry Cabot Lodge and Augustus Peabody Gardner came from Massachusetts to the Senate and the House of Representatives, while Leonard Wood was the immediate superior of Theodore Roosevelt in the Spanish-American War. At the time when he was the head of military staff (1910–1914) he co-operated with numerous believers of military development. It has to be mentioned that all of them were thinking in developing all the military branches, therefore according to them it was important to strengthen also the navy - including the increasing of the number of battleships and submarines - in addition to strengthening the weak land forces and air forces.

IV.

The dissertation consists of three chapters and several main sub-chapters. The first part introduces the unique features of the military policy of the United States covering the period that starts with the ending of the American War of Independence and lasts until 1914. By the eve of World War I the first suggestions had already been phrased in their final form, therefore we discuss these also in this chapter. Practically all the papers that discussed military policy in the era of World War I paid special attention to the previous military history of the country, at the same time only few results had been published in Hungarian language. The basic works of the military thinking of the United States were created in the second half of the 19th century. The relation system of politics and armed forces, which had been continued in the future as well, also evolved in this period.

The second chapter covers the more than one year period that lasted from the breaking out of World War I and the autumn of 1915. This was the first phase of the preparedness debate. The Congress became the field of clashing of the opinions in the autumn of 1914, and subsequently several dozens of publications of military topics were issued in the coming years. The analysis and critical examination of these latter ones may significantly contribute to understanding the arguments of the Preparedness Movement. The changes of the American-German relations also influenced significantly the military policy debates; therefore these aspects cannot be neglected. President Woodrow Wilson both due to his position and thinking is of special importance, since the criticisms directed against him had to be neutralised in two areas. The pro-peace camp at this time still did not co-operate closely together, however at the same time they published attention deserving writings and they held attention deserving lectures.

The third chapter of the study discusses the period that started with the autumn of 1915 and ended with the United States entering the war. The final conclusions and the overview of the 20th century are also included in this chapter. Starting with the autumn of 1915 both the pro-preparedness and the pacifists were able to increase the groups of their sympathisers and supporters, for this reason the growth of the two camps had to be covered thoroughly. The prolonged duration of World War I led to recognitions that had deep impacts. The previously frequently quoted statement – according which Germany was the best prepared from among the countries at war – became a general principle shared by the different approaches by the spring of 1916. By this period already some of the colleagues of President Wilson also shared this view. As a result of the above discussed developments

the elbow room of the President gradually narrowed. The campaign of 1916 belongs under this chapter. The fight of the pro-preparedness republicans and the less keen democrats was closed with the victory of the latter ones. The summary of the study primarily focuses on the military political debate covered in this paper, and after evaluating this issue, we compare it with the subsequent American preparedness proposals of the 20th century.