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**THE UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD
ORDER: FROM WOODROW WILSON
AND FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT
TO DONALD J. TRUMP****

The book *World Order: From Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Donald Trump (Second Edition)*, by Dragan R. Simić, professor and former Dean of the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Belgrade (2015–2024), founder and director of the Center for the Studies of the United States of America, represents an extraordinary event in Political Science not only in Serbia but across the former Yugoslavia. It opens up important questions and provides in-depth answers to the origin, development and destiny of the international order which we live in, as well as the role of the most powerful country in the world, the United States of America, in all of that.

Namely, it is now quite clear that when Henry R. Luce, the famous American journalist and publishing magnate, called the twentieth century the “American Century” in his *Life* magazine editorial on February 17,

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1941, he was voicing a profound truth. Not only did the United States (in less than half a century, from entering the ranks of great powers during the 1898 War with Spain to the end of World War II) manage to become the world's most powerful state with a global presence and global obligations, but it also actively participated in creating the World Order and left its distinctive mark on the world.

Historically, this was entirely logical, considering that the nations possessing the greatest power also determine the order we live in: in short, a set of values, rules, and constraints, as well as a specific framework within which various actors in international relations move and act. From Athens, which in Pericles' words was the "school of all Hellas," through Ancient Rome, Byzantium, Habsburg Spain, France, and Great Britain, each of these powers shaped the era in which they dominated. The United States was no exception. On the contrary, the strong missionary spirit upon which the country was founded and the belief in exceptionalism perfectly overlapped with the immense power they acquired. Some might call this "self-consciousness" (Hegel), while others would say that "capabilities shape intentions" (Zakaria 1998, 5).

Nevertheless, as the dominant power of the twentieth century, the United States naturally participated in the creation, shaping, and management of the World Order. Although every President of this country has left a mark on both domestic and foreign policy, it seems that in the twentieth century, no one did so more decisively and with more consequences for the World Order than the two presidents who led the United States through two World Wars: Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In a similar vein, President Donald Trump has done so in the century we currently live in. Even though there are 12 years and three Republican presidents (Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover) between Wilson and FDR mandates, there is a strong thread connecting them. Thus, in the patterns of history, their ideas and achievements seem more complementary than diametrically opposed. The author of this brilliant book, Professor Dragan R. Simić, who, alongside international relations, is an authority on painting (and art in general), brilliantly utilizes this deep knowledge to present his key arguments.

Namely, in the language of painting, the author compares Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt (ingeniously, in my opinion) to Verrocchio and Leonardo, who worked together as master and pupil on the famous painting *The Baptism of Christ*. The strong

strokes and straight lines used by Verrocchio laid the foundation, but it was Leonardo (this being his first painting) – using his *sfumato* technique in painting Jesus, the angel on the left, and the water – who went much further, depicting all those swirling figures with far more vitality than his teacher. The achievements of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt can be compared in a similar light. Wilson's extraordinary effort in creating the League of Nations failed largely due to the President's character, his deeply religious and black-and-white worldview, and his unwillingness to compromise, both externally with other statesmen and internally with the U. S. Senate.

In that sense, Roosevelt, by “using” the *sfumato* technique and all those gradients and compromises life mostly consists of, brilliantly succeeded in upgrading this idea and creating the United Nations, which stood on more realistic and firmer foundations than the League of Nations. Not only did he gradually build domestic support for such an endeavor, but he also managed to include those important states that had been excluded during the League's creation, such as the Soviet Union, which contributed to the stability and sustainability of the new, refined system of collective security. This system did not forget the element of power (embodied in the veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council) but also retained Wilson's ideals regarding the preservation of international peace and security, as well as universality of membership. Since there is no political stability without economic stability, the creation of the Bretton Woods institutions in 1944 gave the architecture of the New World Order the necessary second pillar (if security is the first), intended to prevent a future economic crisis of the catastrophic proportions seen in 1929.

WOODROW WILSON AND THE WORLD ORDER: THE TEACHER

The biography of Woodrow Wilson possesses many hallmarks of an ancient Greek tragedy: from the heights of stardom and power to an inevitable fall at the end. Born into a Presbyterian Pastor's family in Virginia, he was a brilliant intellectual who, besides his professorship and presidency at Princeton University (1902–1910), authored the bestseller *Congressional Government*. Due to disagreement, or rather, the inability to reach a compromise with his colleagues at the University, he found himself in the world of practical politics. First, in 1910, Wilson was

elected Governor of New Jersey, and then two years later, in November 1912, he was elected the 28th President of the United States.

Regarding foreign policy, Wilson's mandates were certainly marked by the Great War. While he managed to keep America out of war during his first term, in his second term, just a month after his inauguration, he led the country into the conflict and decisively shifted the balance of power in favor of the Entente. After the war, he arrived in Paris, where, as the greatest star of the era, he played the leading role at the Peace conference. In short, his vision of the World Order could be reduced to this: the world can no longer function the way it did before the war. In that sense, the balance of power system should be replaced by a system of collective security, and the main organization tasked with maintaining international peace and security, which should "make the world safe for democracy," was to be the League of Nations.

However, it was easier to conceptualize than to implement, and this is where the problems began for Wilson the Idealist. Not only was the Senate unwilling to relinquish part of its prerogatives to an international organization, but Wilson himself, being unwilling to compromise, suffered a severe stroke in October 1919 during a nationwide campaign for the ratification of the League Covenant. This occurred after traveling 13,000 kilometers in 22 days and delivering almost forty speeches. The remainder of his second term was marked by severely impaired health and limited capacity to govern the state and himself. By the following year, in March, the Senate definitively rejected the League of Nations Covenant, and in the November 1920 elections, the Democratic Party, led by Ohio Governor James Cox and his vice-presidential candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt, suffered a defeat. All this combined would, in Wilson's warning words to the Senate a few years before, indeed "break the heart of the world."

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT AND THE WORLD ORDER: THE PUPIL WHO SURPASSED THE TEACHER

If Wilson transitioned from a theorist to a practitioner of politics, one could say Roosevelt lived for politics. Born into a prominent, aristocratic family of Dutch origin that had already produced one President in his distant cousin, Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt, Franklin was groomed for politics from the start. At just the age of 28, in 1910,

FDR was elected to the New York State Senate, and three years later, in the Wilson administration, he became Assistant Secretary of the Navy. During the next seven years in this prestigious role, he had the opportunity to see firsthand what governing a country looked like in both peace and war, an experience that would later prove invaluable.

After the defeat of the Democratic Party candidates in 1920, he realized it was time to move from a supporting role to a main protagonist. Thus, in 1928, FDR was elected Governor of New York, and in 1932, he won his first presidential term (of the four he would eventually serve). All of this he accomplished despite Polio, which completely paralyzed his lower body and which he lived with from 1921 until his departure from the historical and life stage on April 12, 1945.

Two essential features contribute to Roosevelt being perceived as the greatest American President of the 20th century and one of the greatest in history (alongside Lincoln and Washington). The first is the *New Deal* program initiated to overcome the consequences of the “Great Depression,” and the second is the victory in World War II. However, his equally important achievement, which survived the challenges of the second half of the twentieth century, including the Cold War era, is certainly the creation of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions (the IMF and the World Bank Group). Learned from Wilson’s unsuccessful example and understanding the dangers of a World Order where cooperation among great powers is absent, Roosevelt succeeded in including all major states in the emerging post-war order, including those whom he ideologically disagreed with. Like Leonardo da Vinci, he understood that life is often not black or white but exists in shades of gray, and that must be considered when dealing with politics, especially at the highest level. In this way, he achieved what Wilson failed to do, merging ideals and the real world in the best possible way.

DONALD JOHN TRUMP AND THE WORLD ORDER: THE CHALLENGER

Although the 45th and 47th American President, Donald John Trump, cannot boast about a scientific or political career before moving into the White House, like his famous predecessors, he seems to attempt to rival them in terms of the consequences of his actions (and in International Relations, that is almost the only thing that counts). His first term began in January 2017, and during the following four years,

Trump went through various phases- from the first two years under the relative control of the so-called “Axis of adults” when the Republican establishment acted as a stabilizing force, to the second half of his first mandate where loyalists increasingly displaced career civil servants and Trump increasingly acted on his own intuition rather than advice.

Simić correctly notes that Trump intuitively and instinctively understood the “deep changes in the structure of the world order,” much as he “sensed the processes and anticipated the consequences of cultural wars and divisions in American society” (Simić 2026, 185). Trump also understood the dark sides of globalization, the return of the balance of power in world affairs, great power politics, potential new divisions of the spheres of influence, and ultimately that the world is different from what it was during America’s unipolar moment and the dominance of liberal ideas in international affairs. According to the author, there are two pillars of Trump’s political and foreign policy credo: the first relates to the “restoration and strengthening of the sovereignty of the nation-state as the primary actor of International Relations,” and the second is a “proportional, fairer burden-sharing, meaning defense and security costs, in American relations with Allies” (Simić 2026, 188).

Regarding sovereignty, Trump made this concept, at least in his first administration, the central front of his activities. As the author precisely states, in Trump’s address to the UN General Assembly in September 2017, he used the term “Sovereignty” 21 times. Two months earlier, in his famous Warsaw speech (July 6, 2017), Trump said that “Americans, Poles, and the nations of Europe value individual freedom and sovereignty. We must work together to confront forces, whether they come from inside or out, from the South or the East, which threaten over time to undermine these values and to erase the bonds of culture, faith, and tradition that make us who we are” (Simić 2026, 191).

As for a fairer distribution of the burden with Allies regarding leadership and management of the International Order, Trump succeeded in his intent. According to the latest data, all 32 NATO members now allocate a minimum of 2 percent of GDP to defense costs – a major success considering that barely 10 did so at the start of Trump’s first Presidential term. Quite simply, in Trump’s Jacksonian-Hamiltonian approach to foreign and security policy, there is no room for “free riders,” and economics is just as important as political and military issues.

Given all this, the author concludes the book by addressing Trump’s influence on the future of the World Order. He correctly

observes that Trump is not the cause, but rather a consequence of the crises within American society and the International Order (Simić 2026, 198). As the author points out, although Trump has mostly seen success on various open fronts in his second term so far, he rightly warns us of inevitable Clausewitzian “friction,” because “the world is not, of course, a punching bag that silently endures the boxer’s blows” (Simić 2026, 202), as the latest war between Israel, the US, and Iran clearly demonstrates. In short, Simić, in the manner of a skilled foreign policy realist, does not approach Trump normatively (looking at how he *should* behave), but realistically (observing him as he *actually* behaves).

The book ends with several essential questions that time will answer, but which can also be found by reading this excellent work: “1. What does Donald Trump really want? 2. What can he do? 3. What is he permitted to do? 4. And finally, what shouldn’t Donald Trump do?” (Simić 2026, 206). Additionally, he adds three broader questions: “First, what does America want to change in the World Order regarding the content and modalities of its functioning; second, what is the current total power of the United States, with a prediction of its future compared to challenger-rivals? And third, is it reasonable to expect the continuation of President Trump’s policies after he leaves power?” (Simić 2026, 206).

CONCLUSION

This book was published by respectable Serbian publishers (CLIO and FPN), and already in its first edition from 2022 (Simić 2022) it received the highest marks from both experts and the wider public. This book also “hit the momentum,” appearing at times that were very challenging for the World Order created by Wilson and Roosevelt. In that sense, this expanded second edition appears at even more dramatic moments for the Liberal International Order. The author’s decision to add a chapter on Donald Trump is entirely justified and logical, both scientifically and in terms of wider audience significance. The book opens up many questions that the world is trying to answer, primarily regarding the future of the dominant global power’s relationship with the order it created. Whether the rest of humanity will continue as “The World-minus one” (USA), as Amitav Acharya (Acharya 2026) put it recently, or if the United States will realize that this order brings substantive advantages alongside its costs, remains to be seen.

However, “the ruptures” in the World Order, of which Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney spoke so convincingly at this year’s Davos summit (Carney 2026), are becoming deeper and more visible. Nevertheless, this order has shown a surprising degree of resilience, making it difficult to say whether we live in the times of its end or merely of (minor or major) changes within it. As the author brilliantly concludes, “in our time, the International Liberal Order has become structurally ‘too tight’ to continue regulating the relations of increasingly opposed Great Powers within existing institutions, norms, and processes” (Simić 2026, 174). Whether there will be more maneuvering space for small and medium-sized states (and even the weakest) in some kind of new or reformed old order is the “million-dollar question” but it is certainly worth mentioning and considering.

This book is written in the clear and fluid language of a refined and mature writer. Although he spent his entire career in academia, Simić’s rich and lavish literary gift is evident here as in his previous works. Also present is his deep and fundamental knowledge of World and US political and social history, human nature and philosophy, American presidents and their characters, geography and geopolitics, military science and strategy, literature, painting, and music. In short, all that is necessary to perceive and understand life in its full complexity. A reader returns to Simić’s sentences “again and again” not because they are difficult to understand, but because they are so well-crafted that one tries to memorize them like verses of a great poem. It is, as Ivo Andrić would say, a “dense weave” that leaves a powerful impression long after reading.

In the era of Donald Trump, when international situations can change overnight depending on what is “on his mind” that specific day, it is more than useful to have a work that provides a thorough overview of previous American attempts (unsuccessful and successful) at reforming and creating new world orders. Through comparative analysis and intuitive insights into “history being made before our eyes,” this book serves as an excellent guide for the world we live in and the one that awaits us.

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