*The following excerpt is taken from a March 2019 Carnegie Council podcast entitled “*[*The Crack-Up: Egypt & the Wilsonian Moment, with Erez Manela*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20190326-crack-up-egypt-wilsonian-moment-erez-manela)*.” The podcast is based off* The New York Times *opinion piece “*[*Woodrow Wilson and 'the Ugliest of Treacheries*](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/09/opinion/egypt-revolution-wilson.html)*” written by historian* [*Erez Manela*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/people/erez-manela)*.* ***This transcript has been edited for classroom use.***

**EREZ MANELA:** [W]hen Wilson started using the term self-determination he was using it in a way that's very different from the way it was perceived by many others at the time—and certainly the way it has been perceived since by a lot of people around the world. From his perspective he was simply using the term as a synonym to this notion of consent of the governed, which is a central piece of rhetoric that undergirded [was a basis of] the American Revolution…

[Wilson] picked up on the term self-determination because the Bolsheviks (Lenin, Trotsky) used it and injected it into the conversation in international affairs….[O]ne of the things he [Wilson] wanted to do, of course, was contain and hopefully roll back the Bolshevik Revolution. One way in which he tried to do that was by co-opting[[1]](#footnote-1) their rhetoric…

From his [Wilson’s] perspective the importance of government by consent was that it was more stable than the alternative, which he saw as autocratic government.[[2]](#footnote-2) So he was looking at the Russian Empire before the Revolution, the tsar; he was looking at the German kaiser, and what he saw was militarism and autocracy. That was his analysis and his word. The antidote to that was government by consent, that is to say, government that was answerable to the people. [Wilson’s] basic instinct was that the people as such were on the whole less likely than elites or militarists to get into conflicts and war because they were more likely to pay the price…

1. Why did Wilson choose to promote the concept of “self-determination”?
2. Manela speaks about Wilson using the term “self-determination” as a way of “co-opting” the language of the Bolsheviks. What is the purpose of doing this?
3. Did Wilson use the term “self-determination” expecting that ethnic groups within states would want to develop ambitious plans for greater freedom afterwards? What evidence is there in this excerpt for or against your argument?

1. Co-opting means to adopt something for one’s own purpose. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. An autocracy is a government ruled by a single leader with absolute power [↑](#footnote-ref-2)