

The impact of political speeches on the international relations in 20th century

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Abstract

In this paper the analysis of impact and meaning of political speech is given to fulfill the understanding of this variable in the context of international relations. The framework of speech research is also provided with three dimensions used: informative, motivational and consequential. Seven most influential political speeches are analyzed and two conclusions are made: motivational and consequential parts are mostly up to speaker, while informative is the constant factor; impact of a speech cannot be precisely provided as there is no statistical or real-number data which can be used, however it is about motivation and enlightening audience that is the real result of the speech, after which the subsequent events happen with the direct influence on international relations.

Introduction

The international relations are influenced by the wide range of factors: economic interdependence, military power, political will, ideological concepts, and even subjective decisions. Within this complex bunch of incentives, there is one that is often underestimated in terms of its effect on the international sphere and foreign policy of a state. It is a political speech. Speech exists in three dimensions: informative, motivational and consequential. Namely, speech itself deals directly with motivational part, through which the idea is expressed. Informative dimension answers the question “why this speech should be given?”, as it relates to the current situation in which speaker lives at the moment. Consequential part encompasses the long-term and short-term results of the speech, and there is a big problem to define them strictly, due to many factors which lead to one or another result. In most cases speech just proclaims ready-made policy changes or decision that was taken, yet there are a few examples of speeches in the history of international relations which made the difference themselves. These examples are presented in this paper, but first the closer look at three dimensions should be taken, because they define the framework for analysis.

Informative dimension, or, in other words, the particular situation that gives an incentive to make a speech. Through giving a speech a politician can give his audience a brief overview on

the current situation, or on the events that lead to this situation. Also, he imparts the audience his own or his political party's view on the situation. He tries to answer the questions: what is this situation about? Why is it important for population to know about it? What are the reasons for the situation and the speech itself? Why is it necessary to react on the situation and what steps should the audience take to provide the proper action?

Motivational. Any speech must consist of three parts: an aim or a higher goal, which has to be achieved; the roadmap of objectives to be done and the call for action to be announced. The last part is a crucial point especially for a political speech, as it touches the very heart of the decision-making process. The necessity to change policy on particular area has to be proclaimed publicly, or it would never take place in political practice, as it would have no feedback from the population on whether to implement the new program or not. During the speech, an orator presents the current state of affairs alongside with the new policy, or the new idea, providing arguments why it should be done, why is it crucial for people or international community, and then calling for action in order to motivate audience to make the right decision. The targeting audience, therefore, could be different. If the speech touches the domestic policy the audience would be politicians and local population. If it touches the international sphere, thus the target for incentive is the international community.

Consequential dimension. It covers all the changes, actions and consequences, in short and long term, which a speech has actually made. It means that speech is successful, that it has virtually motivated targeting audience to take announced steps to change the current situation. It also shows that the goal of the speech is achieved and necessary objectives are done. The change can be in different spheres, depending on the sphere that speech covered – international relations, ideology, economics, politics, etc. Results can be short-term, alongside with the prolonged consequences – there is no actual timing, but the result of the speech is so enormous, that it actually changes the whole subsequent history of humankind. Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream"¹ is a perfect example of a global change in the sphere of racial equality in rights and freedoms. It is possible, that only because of the changes the speech has brought in the USA, Obama has become the president.

Therefore, in the current paper this three-dimension structure is used to analyze the most influential speeches in the 20th century in the field of international relations. Specifically, a brief overview of the circumstances under which the speech was given is provided. Secondly, the

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "I have a dream!" speech. 28 August 1963, Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C. URL: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm>

main idea and goal of the speech is analyzed. Finally, the consequences, which this speech made in the history, are tried to be reviewed.

The goal of this paper is to analyze the level of impact of political speeches of the 20th century on IR. **Objectives:** 1) Provide the framework of analysis. 2) Analyze 6-7 examples of the most influential speeches. 3) Give the estimation of the impact of each speech and the importance of political speech as a whole.

Before getting to the essence of the first section, there is one note that must be proclaimed. The international relations are characterized by three features: anarchy, order and constraint². In the following two sections the speeches will be analyzed, which had a prominent, yet different impact on these sphere. In the first chapter there are the speeches that at their times provided more order, mitigated anarchy, decreased tensions in the world and were up to build peace. Their aim was to increase cooperation, to set up new world rules and organizations, to make politicians take final step to change situation for the better future. The second chapter covers the opposite – the speeches, also given at the turning-point of history, but aimed at escalation of ideological clash, criticism of former allies, praising one system and vilifying another. The consequences of these speeches were, on the one hand, cohesive for some people, while disjunctive and aggressive for others.

Chapter 1

“Cooperative Speeches”

1) “Fourteen Points” by United States President Woodrow Wilson³, delivered on January 8, 1918. *Situational:* 10 months before the end of the World War I, Russia is negotiating with Germany in Brest-Litovsk which means the possibility of its withdrawal from the war, and therefore losing of an ally at the turning point of the war. It was clear that the peace agreement and the new world order and international rules should be provided after the Versailles international relations system collapsed with the beginning of the World War I. *Motivational:* first of all, the address was a reaction on Vladimir Lenin’s “Decree on Peace”⁴ and negotiation process between Russia and Germany. Secondly, the speech proclaimed the main goals, specifically moral ones, of the USA participating in this war. Thirdly, it was a project for the future peace agreement with Germany and layout of the new world order, particularly the ideas

² Kenneth Waltz, *The Theory of International Politics*, 1979. Chapter 1, p. 21, 33, 42.

³ Woodrow Wilson, “Fourteen Points” speech. Joint Session of US Congress, 8 January, 1918. URL: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp

⁴ Vladimir Lenin, Decree on Peace. Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, October 26 (November 8) 1917. URL: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/oct/25-26/26b.htm>

of the international organization (League of Nations), promotion of national interests alongside with cooperation, free trade and marine logistics rules. *Consequential*: the “Fourteen Points” became basis for the terms of the German surrender as was later negotiated on Paris Peace Conference, 1919, though France and Britain changed the terms and the Treaty of Versailles⁵ was different from Woodrow Wilson’s speech. Also, the idea of setting up the new world order with specific international rules, managed by the international organization actually took place with the creation of the League of Nations and acceptance of free trade and marine logistics proposals. Though, one may argue that these institutions were ineffective, they made an important precedent in the international relations sphere and laid out the basis for the future world order improvements and proposals.

2) “Tear down this wall!” by United States President Ronald Reagan⁶, delivered on June 12, 1987 at the Brandenburg Gate, West Berlin, commemorating the 750th anniversary of Berlin. *Situational*: there were outstanding economic, social and political reforms of liberal character in the USSR⁷, conducted by the new generation politician the General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. Also it was a start of the massive liberalization wave throughout the Soviet bloc (Eastern and Central Europe) and the ideological shift in these countries. The achievements of economic and technological progress in the Western bloc made it more attractive than socialists’ model. *Motivational*: the main idea was to give an additional push and incentive for the Soviet countries to make their choice toward the western model of socio-political organization, the core concept of which is universal freedom. The argument was based upon the comparison of the results of the West and the Eastern systems, thus Reagan praised economic, technological and social progress of the western world, and West Germany in particular. The Western countries were aware of the ongoing reform in the USSR and were ready to cooperate with Gorbachev, on the condition if he proved that the changes were real. The proof had to begin in Berlin, by opening the Brandenburg Gate, by tearing down this wall, which symbolically separated the West from the East. *Consequential*: this speech had the most profound impact ever expected – the Western countries were united and inspired as never before, the Eastern bloc realized that there were virtual possibilities for them to be integrated into prosperity and freedom, and therefore started the processes of rejection the Soviet system, which led to the breakdown of this bloc and the USSR itself. In the essence, “Tear down this wall!” speech was the last and the most

⁵ Treaty of Versailles, 28 June 1919. URL: <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/versailles.htm>

⁶ Ronald Reagan, “Tear down this wall!” speech. West Berlin, 12 June 1987. URL: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganbrandenburggate.htm>

⁷ Siegelbaum, Lewis. "Perestroika and Glasnost." Seventeen Moments in Soviet History. 14 May 2010. URL: <http://www.soviethistory.org/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1985perestroika&Year=1985>

prominent factor, in terms of ideology and motivation, for ending the Cold War. Besides, the Wall was dismantled and East and West Germany were reunited.

3) “United States of Europe” by Sir Winston Churchill⁸, delivered on September 19, 1946, in Zurich. *Situational*: after the World War II population of European countries lived in destruction, hunger and fear. Cities, architecture, railways and infrastructure were severely damaged; farms, agriculture fields and industry put a real danger of starvation and economic disaster upon the continent; the peril of the new war, atomic bomb proliferation and inter-European conflicts which would separate its nations entirely, was not a tale, but visible reality. *Motivational*: the core of the speech touches the idea of prevention the new war from bursting out and overcoming destruction and hunger by implementing the European cooperation project: the United States of Europe. Based on the past common experience, religion and history, the European family had to be re-united as fast as possible to restore prosperity and maintain peace on the continent. The basic idea was to begin the reunification process with two key players: France and Germany. Churchill believed that this project would tie Germany to the European community and suspend its attempts to act aggressively, and therefore, Germany could become, with all its industry power, a locomotive for the European economy and integration. *Consequential*: the idea found its support and implementation few years later with the creation of the Council of Europe, the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community⁹. These institutions, as history showed us, in fact helped to rebuild peace and cooperation among European nations. In essence, Churchill revived some unification ideas from 1920’s, though for the United States of Europe the circumstances were more reassuring and fruitful than in the Interwar period.

4) “New world order” by the Secretary General of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev¹⁰, delivered on December 7, 1988, in the United Nations Headquarter, 43rd U.N. General Assembly Session. *Situational*: there were prominent shifts in the international relations such as ideological changes and liberal reforms in the USSR, new global trends and events of the international concern, namely ecological and social dangers, the growing world interdependence. Thus, there was necessity to highlight these changes, get the international community’s attention to the new circumstances and react properly. *Motivational*: the appeal for creating a “new world order” based on the human values and freedoms, with the rejection of ideological clashes. Gorbachev’s speech was aimed at raising the awareness of international problems, such as

⁸ Winston Churchill, “United States of Europe”, 19 September, 1946, Zurich, Switzerland. URL: <http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/astonish.html>

⁹ Enrico Spolaore, What Is European Integration Really About? Tufts University and NBER, June 2013, p.3

¹⁰ Mikhail Gorbachev, UN Address, 7 December 1988, UN Headquarters. URL: http://astro.temple.edu/~rimmerma/gorbachev_speech_to_UN.htm

ecological protection and social inequality, expressing deep concern about the increasing processes of militarization of cosmos and people's thinking, claiming the firmness of the international law and the key role of international institutions in the world administration, especially its influence on the Afghanistan issue resolution. *Consequential*: the Western countries started to consider claims and reforms by Gorbachev as real changes in the Soviet Union, so the relations between two blocs began to warm up. Gorbachev gained the Nobel Peace Prize¹¹ for "his leading role in the peace process which today characterizes important parts of the international community", as his ideas were believed to be progressive and crucial for the conflict atmosphere to deescalate.

Chapter 2

"Conflict speeches"

1) **"Iron Curtain" by Sir Winston Churchill** ¹², delivered on March 5, 1946, in the USA's Fulton. *Situational*: it was the aftermath of the World War II, characterized by deep recession in Europe, economic boost in the USA with some fears still existed for coming back of tyranny and war. The USSR at that time increased its influence in the world, specifically in Central and Eastern part of Europe due to strong positions of Communist parties. That fact also posed a question of maintaining peace on the continent. *Motivational*: Churchill in his speech declared two missions of the international community: the first was protection of families and households from new war through creation of the UN armed forces and non-proliferation of nuclear weapon. The second aim was to defend countries from Communist parties¹³, as from totalitarian peril, by setting up the fraternal association of English-speaking peoples, which meant a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and the United States, namely in the military sphere. Also, apprehension of Soviet "Iron Curtain, spreading across the Europe", was expressed, which showed a renew way of confrontation with the former ally – the USSR. *Consequential*: Churchill gave the very descriptive phrase that surprised the United States and Britain, "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent." Before this speech, the U.S. and Britain had been concerned with their own post-war economies and had remained extremely grateful for the Soviet Union's proactive role in ending World War II. It was Churchill's speech that changed the way the democratic West viewed the Communist East. Churchill's "Iron Curtain speech" is considered to be the beginning

¹¹ The Nobel Peace prize 1990. The Official Web-site of the Nobel prize. URL:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1990/

¹² Winston Churchill, "The Sinews of Peace" speech, 5 March 1946, Fulton, USA. URL:

<https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/sinews-of-peace-iron-curtain-speech.html>

¹³ Silvio Pons, Stalin and the European Communists after World War Two (1943–1948), Past and Present (2011), Volume 210(suppl 6): 121-138.

of the Cold War. Therefore, after this speech, the relations between the West and the East started to worsen rapidly.

2) “Ich bin ein Berliner” by United States President John F. Kennedy¹⁴, delivered on June 26, 1963 in West Berlin. *Situational*: the Germany was literally separated by the Berlin Wall, which was built by the Soviet side due to geopolitical reasons. This happened because of the escalation of the disputes on the fate of Berlin between NATO and the Eastern bloc, increased number of provocations and growing danger of militarization of both Germanies. *Motivational*: Kennedy in his speech expressed support and loyalty to Western Germans, while comparing Free World and Communism, not in favor of Communism. It was the rhetoric of ideological clash and the idea of re-uniting Germany, praising the ideas of self-governing and democracy. *Consequential*: speech reflected and enhanced the climate of mistrust and antagonism of two systems. Comparison of values provoked new wave of unity in both bloc: in the western – people started to believe in freedom and democracy supremacy over totalitarian regimes, in the eastern – the belief in a common enemy – the West. It was also due to propaganda machines which worked in both directions.

3) “Evil Empire” by United States President Ronald Reagan¹⁵, delivered on March 8, 1983 in the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, US. *Situational*: the Cold war confrontation was growing, as the new missiles and armament were implemented in both blocs. Ideological, cultural, technological and political encounters intensified as Ronald Reagan took the Office and declared the Reagan Doctrine¹⁶. *Motivational*: the speech was dedicated to many topics, which were unified by one idea – comparison the American, free world way of life to the Communist one, entangled with human rights and religion suppression. Morality, democracy and religion were proclaimed to be the key stones of America’s greatness. The USSR was shown as a threat, the “Evil Empire”, and because of that Reagan appealed to the idea of finding peace through strength and no freeze of nuclear weapon build-up in the USA. *Consequential*: the USA started new round of building up their armament and nuclear weapon reserves¹⁷, which led to the counter-reaction from the USSR, and conflict intensified even more in military complex, as well as in ideological and political dimensions.

Conclusion

¹⁴ John F. Kennedy, “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech, 26 June 1963, West Berlin. URL: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkberliner.html>

¹⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Evil Empire” speech, 8 March, 1983, Orlando, USA. URL: <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/reagan-evil-empire-speech-text/>

¹⁶ Stephen S. Rosenfeld, The Reagan Doctrine: The Guns of July, Foreign Affairs, spring 1986 issue.

¹⁷ For example, start of Strategic Defense Initiative, on 23 March, 1983. URL: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/568214/Strategic-Defense-Initiative-SDI>

Having analyzed seven most prominent and influential speeches in the sphere of international relations, we could conclude two tendencies: the content of speech is heavily defined by the situation, yet the motivational, and therefore, consequential parts are left to the speaker. The vivid example – Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech – he described (not as a current politician, but a private person) the situation in such dark colors, so the Communist parties started to be considered a threat to the West. Although, it could have been presented as a possible, but not as inevitable, threat, it could have turned out totally different, for example, the sides could have made some sort of agreement through negotiation process. Yet, history is not the place for speculation, though the conclusion is still present – speaker decides for himself (or political powers behind him) on how to show situation and what steps to take. The second tendency is that the political speech has an impact, smaller or bigger, on the forthcoming events. It is difficult to estimate in figures, as there is no system or statistics to rely on and also because speech deals with people and their decision, which cannot be constant all the time. Speech can reflect an opinion, or an already-made political decision, which has influence on audience and thus on consequences. The key moment is that speech motivates to take action and that is the real power that speech can bear.

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