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Sir Edward Grey, Germany, and the Outbreak of the First World War:

A Re-Evaluation

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Abstract

Historians have variously condemned British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey for contributing to the escalation of the July Crisis of 1914, and praised him as an heroic advocate of peace. Addressing this conundrum, this article first assesses historiographical debates around the significance of Grey's policy towards Germany in the events that led to the outbreak of the First World War. It then traces Grey's foreign policy vis-à-vis Germany on the one hand, and the Entente on the other. Finally, it provides an innovative analysis of Grey's policy from the vantage point of Berlin, arguing that in July 1914 decisions taken by the governments of other countries escalated the crisis and were taken regardless of Grey's position. The article concludes that current historiography overestimates British agency in July 1914 and that Grey was not as important to the outcome of the crisis as both his critics and his defenders have claimed. His actions could not change the minds of those on the continent who were bent on war.

Introduction: the 'men of 1914'

While there remains much dispute about the origins of the First World War, many historians agree that people, the so-called 'men of 1914'², rather than structures or impersonal forces, unleashed this war. War came as a 'result of a series of deliberations by a handful of men.'³ While not everyone agrees on the origins of the war, or even whether there is still a need to attribute 'war guilt' at all, it is undisputed that key decision-makers (indeed all of them men) took the fateful decisions of 1914. As Gordon Martel notes:

It was the choices that men made during those fateful days that plunged the world into a war. [...] The choices they made were rational, carefully calculated, premised on the assumptions and attitudes, ideas and experiences that they had accumulated over the years. Real people, actual flesh-and-blood human beings, were responsible for the tragedy of 1914 [...].⁴

Even those who emphasise the crucial role played by contingency attribute agency and significance to key individuals, arguing that '[i]f any one of these leaders had acted differently [...], he might well have interrupted the slide into war'.⁵ This view is not new;

contemporaries also addressed the role of individuals in their assessments of the war's causes. In his *War Memoirs*, for example, David Lloyd George declared that it was 'a mistaken view of history to assume that its episodes were entirely due to fundamental causes which could not be averted, and that they were not precipitated or postponed by the intervention of personality.'⁶

Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary from 1905 to 1916, is one of the leaders of whom it is often said that he should have acted differently in the summer of 1914, or indeed that he should have steered British foreign policy along a different path before the final crisis. Within the Cabinet, and supported by the Prime Minister, 'Sir Edward Grey dominated the scene. By the summer of 1914 friend and foe alike referred not to the government's foreign policy, but to Grey's,'⁷ and indeed to this day British foreign policy in 1914 seems synonymous with Grey's own.

In trying to evaluate the role played by Grey in the events preceding the outbreak of war in 1914, this article first provides a historiographical overview and examines some of the criticisms levelled at Grey, in terms of his pre-war anti-German foreign policy and his handling of the July Crisis in 1914. Part 2 traces Grey's and Britain's developing relationship with Germany in the years 1905 to 1914 and uncovers some of the 'assumptions and attitudes, ideas and experiences' that informed Grey's views.⁸ In the final part, Grey's decisions and his decision-making options are examined from the German perspective. While Grey appeared crucial to the decision-making process from an Anglo-centric viewpoint, it is argued here that he was marginal among the 'men of 1914' when viewed from Berlin, and that arguably he could not have affected a peaceful outcome to the July Crisis, whatever his intentions.

1. Grey in the historiography of the war's origins

Contemporaries and historians have been divided in their assessments of Sir Edward Grey's role as Foreign Secretary. Over the last hundred years Grey has variously been portrayed as 'a clever Machiavellian politician' or 'a baffled and groping minister...'.⁹ Even before the war had begun, there were disagreements about his role and ability, as interventionists and non-interventionists found plenty to criticise in Grey. For some, he was the civilian donkey

who led his country into a war that had perhaps been avoidable, and like Sir Douglas Haig he would be blamed when that war did not go to plan.¹⁰

After the war, Grey was frequently targeted in the booming British memoir literature. As the debate on the origins of the war continued throughout the twentieth century, so too did disagreements about Grey. Common to all assessments, however, was the view that he was central for the British decision for war, and that he had the potential to affect a different outcome to the crisis. The arguments centre on two main aspects of Grey's role: his pre-war leadership and his role in the July Crisis. For the former, the question is to what extent his anti-German stance affected Anglo-German relations in the years before the First World War, and more recently whether perhaps a German threat was invented or even provoked because this was a useful ruse for strengthening British ties with the Entente. For the latter, it has been debated whether Grey could have acted differently in July 1914 to avoid a British entry into the war, perhaps even stop a continental war by restraining Germany with a clear message about British intervention, and whether his mediation proposals during the crisis were genuine.

More recently, the charge that his decision, and Britain's entry into the war, turned this European war into a world war has been added to a long list of reprimands. Thus it has been argued by German historians recently that in 1914, Britain was the only great power which *could* have stayed neutral. Her own interests were not directly affected by a local conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia (a somewhat disingenuous argument given that by August, the conflict had shifted from the Balkans to the Channel coast), and that she was not bound by a formal alliance which would have forced her to intervene. 'Only Britain's entry into the war turned the original conflict into a global disaster', it is claimed in the most recent instalment of the long debate on the origins of the war.¹¹

There is certainly agreement that Grey, faced with Germany threatening Britain's international position on the one hand and the strengthening Russia becoming an ever more frightening potential future enemy on the other, was 'compelled to walk a dangerous tight-rope'.¹² But more recently historians have questioned the view that Germany challenged the international status quo and that Britain had no choice but to react to this threat. Instead, they have highlighted the perceived threat that Russia posed to the British Empire and that influenced British decision-making before and during the July Crisis.¹³

At the time, German views were less divided. German decision-makers and historians who attempted to show that Germany had fought a defensive war in 1914 almost universally blamed Grey's alleged duplicity vis-à-vis Germany for the outbreak of war. However, views on Grey shifted over time, and by the 1960s, when a new consensus about the origins of the war was reached, Grey was portrayed as one of the few honest men of 1914 who had attempted to prevent the outbreak of war. This view has, however, been revised more recently, with more critical interpretations of Grey coming once again to the fore. The following section provides a chronological overview of this shifting historiography.

Even before war had broken out, the view from Berlin in early August 1914 was unequivocal, as summarized by some of Kaiser Wilhelm II's infamous angry marginal notes: 'Herr Grey is a false dog who is afraid of his own baseness and false policy, but who does not wish openly to take position against us.'¹⁴ Sir Edward Grey was variously 'a false rascal', 'mad or an idiot', or a 'scoundrel'. This vitriol had its roots in misunderstandings during the July Crisis when the German leaders hoped for British neutrality in a continental war. Their bitter disappointment led to feelings of betrayal, and Sir Edward Grey became one of the focal points of this German resentment.

At the same time in Britain, Grey's conduct during the July Crisis also had his fair share of critics.¹⁵ They claimed that a firm stance early in the crisis would have changed Berlin's resolve, and deplored his perceived indecisiveness and his desire to keep the peace until very late in the crisis. Sir Eyre Crowe, not known as a lover of Germany, considered Grey to have acted in a cowardly way. In December 1919, he complained to General Sir Henry Wilson about 'the hopelessness and timidity of Grey.' Wilson recorded that Crowe's 'stories showed what a futile useless weak fool the man was – and is. In 1914 he was determined not to go to war if by any conceivable means he could shirk his duties.'¹⁶

On 25 July, even before the Serbian reply to the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum was known, Crowe noted that Britain would be dragged into a war regardless, but that Germany would give way if Britain declared her solidarity with France and Russia. 'There is still the chance that she can be made to hesitate, if she can be induced to apprehend that the war will find England by the side of France and Russia.'¹⁷ Crowe had changed his mind on this by 31 July, but, as Herbert Butterfield points out, in his earlier views 'he has been followed by a number

of historians, who feel that Grey ought to have made the Germans realize Britain's determination to act with the other Entente powers.'¹⁸

Lord Lansdowne's post-war assessment sums up what many thought. 'I have always believed that war might have been avoided if Grey had been in a position to make a perfectly explicit statement as to our conduct in certain eventualities.' However, he conceded that the blame was not necessarily Grey's, who 'would himself have been ready enough to make such a statement.'¹⁹ He lacked the support of the Cabinet and therefore his hands were tied. Others who worked closely with Grey in 1914, like his assistant private secretary William Tyrrell, looked back in 1934 to Grey's 'terrific dilemma, knowing what was at stake, desiring to bring in a united country, desiring to avoid an internal crisis lest the Germans should slip into Paris before Great Britain had made up her mind.'²⁰

Any critics of Grey had to consider the fact that highlighting his failings would play into the hands of German apologists who portrayed the war as having been caused by the Entente powers. In a 1919 publication, and in view of the fact that 'the German militarists are never tired of saying that Great Britain planned this war', Lord Loreburn asserted that in 1914 Grey had 'exhausted every effort he could think of to convince all the nations concerned of the danger that was at hand.'²¹ Nonetheless, he concluded in 1919 that Britain's focus on the Entente was at the heart of its inevitable entry into the war:

we were brought into the war because Mr Asquith and Sir Edward Grey and their confidants [...] had placed us in such a position toward France, and therefore also toward Russia, that they found they could not refuse to take up arms on her behalf when it came to the issue, though till the end they denied it to Parliament, and probably even to themselves.²²

David Lloyd George used his *War Memoirs* to enhance his own reputation while launching a merciless attack on Grey. He was among Grey's most vociferous critics, blaming both the personality of the Foreign Secretary ('He altogether lacked that quality of audacity which makes a great Minister') and his mistakes for the outcome of the crisis (Grey hoped 'that war could be averted by quieter and more conventional methods').²³ His central role was not in doubt: 'In the policy which led up to our participation in the War, Sir Edward Grey, amongst the British statesmen, played the leading part.'²⁴ Nor was there any doubt that 'he failed calamitously in his endeavours to avert the Great War.'²⁵

As George W. Egerton explains, '[p]art of this savaging of Grey can be better understood if the foreign secretary is seen as representing for Lloyd George British Liberalism's broader failure to generate effective leadership in face of the challenge of modern war.'²⁶ Whatever his motivation, Lloyd George's cutting critique of Grey had a lasting effect on the Foreign Secretary's reputation.

According to Lloyd George, Grey was 'a pilot whose hand trembled in the palsy of apprehension, unable to grip the levers and manipulate them with a firm and clear purpose.'²⁷ He was certain that the Foreign Secretary could have affected a different outcome during the July crisis:

Had he warned Germany in time of the point at which Britain would declare war – and wage it with her whole strength – the issue would have been different. [...] And he could have uttered this warning in sufficient time to leave the German authorities without any excuse for not changing their dust-laden plans.²⁸

However, it was clear to contemporaries that such vicious attacks on the former Foreign Secretary could have unintended, but serious, consequences. Thus, for example, a worried Jan Christian Smuts, former member of the War Cabinet and South African prime minister, warned Lloyd George that his portrayal of Grey would 'shatter very much all the British case' on the coming of the war, which rested on 'Grey's honesty, and good faith, and ability.'²⁹ By this time, however, a new consensus had moved away from blaming individual governments for the outbreak of war in favour of seeing the war as an act of fate rather than the result of deliberate intention. This meant that both Germany, the country blamed for starting the war, and Grey, the leader accused of mishandling the crisis, were off the hook. The shift was encapsulated in Lloyd George's often-quoted memoirs which claimed that Europe's nations had 'slithered over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war'.³⁰

The many negative assessments of Grey echoed what the German government had argued all along: Britain, not Germany, had caused this war by virtue of the underhand game she had played in 1914. Proving Germany's innocence and blaming others, including Britain, for the outbreak of the war had been of paramount importance to German innocence accounts from the summer of 1914 onwards, and to the national revisionist agenda that shaped German views of the origins of the war after 1919. The German disappointment about a perceived British betrayal began during the July Crisis, and their anger focused on King George V and Sir Edward Grey whose foreign policy they considered duplicitous. The German government

had hoped, against the odds, for British neutrality until the last days of the crisis, and felt it had been led astray by Grey's unwillingness to commit Britain one way or the other, i.e. to decide in favour of neutrality and abandon its Entente partners, or to decide to back France and Russia and send an unequivocal signal to Berlin. In the post-war years, this negative view of Grey was further cemented in the revisionist literature which argued against German 'war guilt' and sought to place blame for the outbreak of the war on Britain's foreign policy during the July Crisis, much like Smuts had feared. Eventually, however, this was no longer an overriding concern as revisionist interpretations had become the accepted orthodoxy.³¹

British views of Grey were not universally negative. In an article of 1934, written in response to Lloyd George's damning indictment, Arthur Murray presented a more favourable impression of the former Foreign Secretary. Among his 'most outstanding' character traits he listed 'sympathy, tolerance, a sense of fair play and justice, and an ardent desire for peace between the nations'.³² And he cites the United States' wartime Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, who declared that 'if any human agency could have prevented the World War, Sir Edward Grey would have prevented it.'³³ According to another more well-meaning assessment, Grey had 'enjoyed tremendous honor as an elder statesman, a living symbol of Britain's reluctant but righteous entry into the war.'³⁴ Certainly most contemporary commentators agreed that he occupied a position of considerable influence. He used his 'enormous personal power', in the words of editor H.A. Gwynne from the *Morning Post*, to 'force his views on the Cabinet and the country, and was, according to Charles Hobhouse, the Postmaster-General, 'the author of our rupture with Germany'.³⁵ While his influence and role were thus disputed, his importance was never in any doubt.

During and immediately after the Second World War, there was little appetite for revisiting the origins of the First in general, or for examining Grey's role in this in particular. One notable exception is the work of the Italian historian Luigi Albertini, who produced a detailed study of the diplomatic origins of the war in which he interrogated the actions of all the pre-war leaders, among them Grey. His was neither a damning nor a particularly complimentary portrayal of Grey. Albertini was critical of Grey's decision-making around the infamous 'misunderstanding' of 1 August, when it appeared as if Grey was offering the prospect of British and possibly even French neutrality. 'Grey's blunder [...] is inexplicable,' Albertini charged.³⁶ However, as regards Grey's refusal to promise British neutrality in return for a German assurance that she would not violate Belgium, 'a capital charge against him by writers and historians hostile to him', he concludes that 'Grey acted perfectly rightly.'

Albertini's view of Grey is that he was honestly striving towards maintaining peace: 'while Germany on 1 August was blowing up bridges and setting her course for war, Grey up to the last moment worked for peace even when refusing to promise English neutrality in return for Germany's respecting Belgian neutrality.' While honourable, this attitude was, however, based on the hope for 'bogus resumption at the eleventh hour of direct conversations between Vienna and St. Petersburg.'³⁷ Moreover, Albertini's detailed study of the documents suggests to him that, in early August, 'Grey was not frank with Lichnowsky.' Here was 'another instance of the way he always failed to speak plainly to him, thus misleading the German Government one may truly say, right up to the very last moment.'³⁸

A pronounced shift in the historiography of the origins of the war occurred with the publication of Fritz Fischer's work in the 1960s, and the subsequent new debates. Fischer's publications pointed once again at evidence for Germany's responsibility for the outbreak of the war.³⁹ In this interpretation, Britain and Grey were seen as having played a much more benign role. According to Fischer, there could not have been any doubt in Germany as to Britain's likely attitude in a future war. As early as 1912, there had been clear warnings from London. Kaiser Wilhelm's many angry marginal notes on this subject make it plain that it was known in Berlin that Britain had declared its solidarity with France in the event of a war between Germany and France, 'but nonetheless he was willing to have a warlike confrontation with them even under this constellation.'⁴⁰ In this interpretation, in 1912, as again in 1914, the German government's mind was made up, regardless of Grey's actions.

As to Fischer's assertions about the aggressive nature of German foreign policy, based on their detailed study of British foreign policy making, Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson concluded more recently: 'Little that Fritz Fischer has written would have surprised Nicolson or Crowe, or General Wilson. But their views were not shared by Grey or the Cabinet. These men believed that peace was the natural condition of man and that it could be maintained by rational decisions.'⁴¹ If Fischer was correct in identifying a desire to 'grasp world power' on Germany's part, then arguably Grey's diplomacy was powerless, however well-intentioned it may have been.

As a result of the shifting views concerning Germany's significant role in the events that led to war during and after the Fischer controversy, Grey became widely regarded as having acted with honest intentions, but from an unenviable and ultimately impossible position.⁴² Thus, for example, Steiner and Neilson assert that 'Grey could not concede that any government could knowingly unleash such a catastrophe and hoped that Britain's naval

margin and diplomatic disposition would deter the Germans', and they ask '[w]hat alternative policies, if any, existed that might have proved superior to the one that Grey followed? Had Grey committed Britain [...] to France and Russia, would this have prevented Vienna and Berlin from going to war in 1914?' In their assessment, that was 'debatable'.⁴³

Others concur that events were beyond Grey's control. Samuel R. Williamson and Ernest May conclude that Grey 'never appreciated the rapidity with which decisions were being made, nor that unspoken assumptions, preexisting military plans, and internal politics in all continental capitals dramatically limited his opportunities for success.'⁴⁴ It would appear that some of his contemporary critics also failed to understand the limitations that were placed on him.

In the historiography of the last decades of the twentieth century, Grey's actions in July 1914 have generally been seen as an expression of a genuine desire to prevent an escalation of the crisis. Among the most important 'men of 1914', he emerged as the least responsible for the outbreak of war. In an historiographical landscape that was until recently dominated by a watered-down Fischerite view, Grey was portrayed as one of the very few 'men of 1914' who honestly worked for peace, along with Germany's Ambassador in London, Prince Lichnowsky.⁴⁵ Both of them have been seen as attempting to prevent the escalation of the crisis and trying to mediate for peace. In his recent account of the July Crisis, Thomas Otte reiterates this view: among the key players of the crisis, Grey and Lichnowsky were 'the two honourable men'.⁴⁶

However, with the advent of a post-Fischer revisionist literature, Grey's role has once again been revised. On the eve of the centenary of the war's outbreak the debate took yet another new turn with the publication of Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers*.⁴⁷ Clark advances a different interpretation of the well-meaning advocate of mediation who had emerged post-Fischer, and considers his often praised proposal for a four-power conference to have been 'half-hearted' and 'founded upon a partisan indifference to the power-political realities of Austria-Hungary's situation.'⁴⁸ Moreover, he proposes that a different development to Anglo-German relations might have been imaginable:

Had Grey and his associates failed to secure so many influential posts, less intransigent voices [...] might have found a wider hearing. Instead, the Grey group gradually tightened their grip on British policy, setting the terms under which relations with Germany were viewed and understood.⁴⁹

Similar criticism have previously been raised by Keith Wilson who considers ‘Grey’s personal responsibility for the British decision for war’ to have been ‘considerable’.⁵⁰ He has argued that the German threat was an ‘invention’ and that ‘some of the claims made about Germany were so remarkable as to be quite hysterical,’ suggesting that Grey could have pursued a less anti-German foreign policy in the years before 1914, perhaps with a different outcome.⁵¹ Some conspiracy theorists have even suggested that Grey was a member of a secret elite plotting war, though this extreme view is not widely shared in the historiography.⁵²

For another recent contributor to the debate, Sean McMeekin, Grey committed what he calls ‘sins of omission, not commission’.⁵³ He was sending ‘misleading positive signals’ to Berlin, and McMeekin accuses Grey of ‘feigning neutrality and yet clearly taking the Franco-Russian side’. For McMeekin, ‘Britain’s role in unleashing the First World War was one born of blindness and blundering, not malice.’⁵⁴ It is, however, hard to find evidence of these alleged misleading positive signals in the correspondence between Lichnowsky in London and the *Auswärtiges Amt* in Berlin. Rather, the German Ambassador repeatedly expressed his concern about the possibility of a British involvement in the war, based on his frequent conversations with Grey. Regardless of clear evidence to the contrary, Bethmann Hollweg speculated in March 1914 if there were to be a war between Austria-Hungary, Germany, France and Russia, ‘then England would probably initially remain neutral,’ and that she ‘would intervene if France [were] defeated.’⁵⁵ In July, this hope still remained despite clear warnings from Lichnowsky.

However, conversely, it has also been argued that Grey was ‘misinformed’ or even ‘disinformed’ by Lichnowsky about Germany’s plans during the July Crisis.⁵⁶ Indeed, it is clear that in July 1914 the ambassador was kept in the dark about Berlin’s real intentions. The *Auswärtiges Amt* in Berlin did not trust its own ambassador because it was known that Lichnowsky wanted to preserve peace at all cost. On 7 July, for example, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg complained that Lichnowsky was ‘much too blue-eyed [*vertrauensselig*]. Was being duped by the English.’⁵⁷ This ‘disinformation’, Keith Wilson argues, led to ‘Grey’s misplaced confidence in Berlin’ which in turn enabled him to ‘ignore the increasingly alarmist reports from Vienna that an unacceptable ultimatum was being prepared.’⁵⁸

Grey may also have sent confusing signals unwittingly. As Jörn Leonhard explains, it was, tragically, his very willingness to negotiate and mediate which fed German belief in

neutrality even though Grey's Foreign Office had actually sent clear signals to the contrary throughout the crisis, and indeed throughout his period in office.⁵⁹ Moreover, in July 1914, the mediation proposals caused uncertainty which 'fed hopes on the side of the Reich-leadership, particularly with Bethmann Hollweg personally, that Britain would remain neutral'.⁶⁰

Despite such criticism, it is important to note that clear messages about Britain's attitude were given, for example during the Agadir Crisis and again in July 1914. Consequently, the German government should have been in no doubt about Britain's attitude in July 1914, and yet, they indulged in illusions of British neutrality until the very last days of peace. They simply did not believe the warnings. Their decisions did not depend on Britain's neutrality, they merely hoped for it as it would guarantee a more favourable outcome of the crisis – an almost certain defeat of France.

However, even allowing for the possibility that Grey's mediation sent the wrong signal to Berlin, when by the end of July the message from London was clear, there was in any case, as Gerd Krumeich puts it, no evidence that Germany was 'particularly impressed' by Britain's attitude.⁶¹ And while Grey's hands were tied by the Cabinet's indecision, Germany's decision-makers were actually unaware of this. An example of this is reaction in Berlin to news from London which followed the Cabinet's decision, of 29 July, essentially not to decide anything. As a result of the discussions that day, the German ambassador Lichnowsky was told not to reckon with British neutrality, and France and Russia were told that Britain was under no obligation to intervene. Grey would later be blamed for this alleged duplicity, 'entirely unfairly', finds Gerd Krumeich.⁶² Crucially, Berlin took Britain's declaration of that day at face value and did not consider the British government to be as yet undecided. Of course it would not have known of the contradictory advice given to Paris and St Petersburg. This explains the Kaiser's angry outbursts in the marginal notes he penned on Lichnowsky's telegram from London of that day.⁶³ Wilhelm II and Bethmann did not know that at that stage only two Cabinet members favoured intervention - Churchill and Grey - and that a firm decision had not been taken (it would not be taken until 2 August). Wilhelm's 'seemingly crazy' marginal notes, including his long notes on a telegram from German Ambassador in St Petersburg Friedrich von Pourtalès of 30 July in which he accused Britain of pursuing 'anti-German *Weltpolitik*' are further evidence of the fact that in Berlin the assumption was that British neutrality was not really an option.⁶⁴ In other words, seen from a different vantage point, Grey's alleged or actual indecisiveness in the July Crisis was immaterial for decisions

taken in Berlin, and therefore for the outcome of the crisis. It is interesting to see that Grey appears to have understood this, even if later critics did not: 'We [are] not deciding factor', Grey stated in the discussions of 29 July when the Cabinet discussed whether the 1839 treaty was indeed a binding agreement.⁶⁵ Even though this 'critical Cabinet' meeting had 'decided not to decide', as John Burns recorded,⁶⁶ Keith Wilson points out that at least 'the worst-case scenario' had been avoided: having 'to announce to the world at the present moment that in no circumstances would we intervene.'⁶⁷ For Berlin, it seemed in any case a near certainty that London would not stand aside. However, this simply did not alter the course that it had determined on.⁶⁸

Other recent attempts to re-evaluate Britain's pre-war policy and with it Grey's role in the years before the outbreak of war include Andreas Rose's account of British foreign policy before the First World War. He presents much evidence of contemporary criticism of Grey's anti-German foreign policy, and shows that there was no overall agreement in Britain that Russia was the less dangerous of the two continental powers. The liberal weekly *The Nation* became a mouthpiece of critics within the party. In 1909, for example, it declared:

It is not Germany which is looking at her "places in the sun". It is France which is quietly attempting to absorb Morocco, and Russia which is intriguing. [...] It is easy to talk of the danger of Germany "hegemony" in Europe. The expansive ambitions of other Powers are certainly more in evidence.⁶⁹

In Rose's view, Whitehall's foreign policy in the pre-war years, and during the Bosnian Annexation Crisis in particular, 'did not have a de-escalating effect', and London's foreign policy was not solely aimed at maintaining the balance of power.⁷⁰ The example of the 1908 crisis shows, in Rose's words, 'that with their continuing declarations of loyalty vis-à-vis France and now also vis-à-vis Russia, Grey and his ministers increasingly robbed themselves of further options for peaceful crisis mediation.'⁷¹ Rose thus sees Grey as 'one of the most responsible for the increasing frequency of crises, the loss of legitimacy of the system with the Central Powers, and eventually also the outbreak of war'.⁷²

In contrast with such recent critiques, and focusing on Grey's actions in 1914 rather than the diplomacy of the pre-war years, T.G. Otte is unequivocal in his reinstatement of Grey: 'there is no reason to doubt his genuine intentions' when he put forward 'an internationally guaranteed settlement rather like the 1913 Treaty of London, but based on "Halt in Belgrade"

and incorporating the Sazonov formula', he asserts.⁷³ Grey was a 'man of action' and there 'was nothing half-hearted or meandering about his policy.'⁷⁴

After a hundred years of debate on Grey's role we are left with two diametrically opposed positions. If Grey's responsibility for the outbreak of war is assumed by some and dismissed by others, it is undisputed that his resolve was essential for Britain's entry into the war; against his opposition such a move would have been impossible. But it remains contested whether the Government under his leadership in the Foreign Office secretly committed Britain to France to such an extent that neutrality had become impossible. Did Grey fear Russia more than Germany, and did he deliberately invent a German threat? To answer these questions, the next section will look at Grey's pre-war policy and his actions in July 1914.

2. Grey and Germany, 1905 to 1914

Throughout Grey's time in office, Britain found herself in a precarious position vis-à-vis Germany on the one side, and France and Russia on the other. Even though there is no 'identity of opinion' when it comes to Sir Edward Grey,⁷⁵ under his leadership an anti-German attitude was fostered, with a simultaneous commitment to the Entente and a growing apprehension of Russia. To what extent the German government was aware of this, and how much it influenced the way Germany perceived of its own predicament, is more difficult to ascertain.

There is little doubt, however, that although a number of Cabinet members favoured a more pro-German line, '[d]issenting voices within the Foreign Office were marginalized.'⁷⁶ Being pro-German in the Foreign Office in the years before the war was, in R.T.B. Langhorne's words, 'an unenviable position'.⁷⁷ Clark argues that Grey's accession to the Foreign Office 'consolidated the influence of an emergent anti-German faction within the British Foreign Office', and that anti-German dispatches from abroad were favoured over more positive ones which would be 'plastered with sceptical marginalia'.⁷⁸ The overwhelming view of Germany in the Foreign Office was negative, and Grey even attributed to himself 'anti-German prejudices'.⁷⁹ In November 1909, Sir Charles Hardinge considered Germany 'the only aggressive Power in Europe'.⁸⁰ According to Clark, this 'new virtual reality', in which anti-German assertions were repeated 'mantra-like', formed the background to Grey's foreign policy in the years 1905-1914.⁸¹

However, even though there is agreement that the Foreign Office was dominated by anti-German opinion, not everyone concurs that a German threat was invented by anti-German members of the Foreign Office, with predictions of the future which ‘would cross the threshold of the absurd’.⁸² Rather, Steiner and Neilson conclude that the ‘Foreign Office view of the German menace was entirely realistic.’ Moreover, ‘while Grey may have given Germany more attention than the other powers, this was not due to any ‘invention’ of a truculent Germany; that was created in Berlin.’⁸³

It is undisputed that France, not Germany, was the cornerstone of Grey’s foreign policy. Shortly before taking office in 1905, he outlined among his goals improved relations with Russia as well as with Germany, as long as such improvements did not ‘impair our existing good relations with France’.⁸⁴ For Grey, maintaining the Entente with France remained a constant concern. He was keen to show that he had understood the importance of a British focus away from the concerns of Empire, and towards its continuing and increasing involvement on the continent.⁸⁵

By necessity, this commitment to France required cordial relations with Russia, while Germany’s aggressive and erratic foreign policy did not do her any favours. As Steiner and Neilson show, when Grey took office, ‘he had identified Germany as the threat if not the enemy; his anxieties were more pronounced than those of his political colleagues, as was his enthusiasm for a future Russian agreement.’⁸⁶ All this stood Germany in bad stead, and any German hopes for British neutrality in a future war should have considered the reality of Britain’s increasingly precarious foreign policy position. Not being in a formal alliance with any European power made Britain potentially vulnerable, but it also restricted her choice for independent action. Arguably, however, the German government was unable to put itself in Britain’s position, just as Britain did not see international politics from the vantage point of Berlin. Both designed their foreign policy based on fear, while projecting onto the other an image of a threatening and envious enemy.

There were attempts, however, to break this stalemate. In 1905, there was potential for more cordial relations with Berlin as a result of the new liberal government with a pro-German Minister of War, a fact that was not lost on Germany. Moreover, there were a number of public meetings and rallies which in favour of an Anglo-German détente.⁸⁷ At the beginning of December 1905, the German ambassador Metternich wrote from London: ‘We are at the turning point in our relations with England’. And he warned: ‘If we [...] now coolly reject significant and spontaneous demonstrations of conciliatory attitudes, then we must give up

forever any hope of improving our relationship with England.’⁸⁸ He appealed directly to the Chancellor to explain to the Kaiser that it could ‘only be beneficial to the German fatherland if the dangerous tension between the two nations is eased’ and urged that Germany should ‘grasp the proffered hand’. But the Kaiser rejected this idea and would not believe ‘that England wants to keep on friendly terms with us.’⁸⁹

Grey’s proposal in May 1906, against the background of the forthcoming Peace Conference at The Hague, to discuss limiting the spending on naval expansion was seen by Wilhelm II as a trick ‘to prevent *us* building a big fleet.’ He would ‘certainly not’ agree. In response to the suggestion that the powers should communicate their naval programmes to each other before the conference he commented: ‘Oh, how cute.’ ‘So that England can always be warned in time to remain the strongest naval power.’⁹⁰ As John Röhl shows, ‘[e]very initiative to halt the trend towards bigger and more expensive warships through international or bilateral agreement was rejected with fury by Wilhelm II’.⁹¹ He felt confident enough to turn down the détente feelers from London as well as the suggestions from President Roosevelt to limit all battleships to 15,000 tons in order to reign in the naval arms race: ‘Refuse!’ he ordered in October 1906. ‘Every state can build what suits it! No business of anyone else!’⁹²

It is impossible to say whether Britain’s motives really were as duplicitous as Wilhelm suspected, but with a prevailing attitude in Berlin that Grey could not be trusted, and an anti-German attitude among influential members of the Foreign Office, what chance did any policy of conciliation ever have? Détente was only possible on Berlin’s terms, and these were incompatible with London’s focus on the Entente and with Britain’s own international role.

Following the Algeiras Conference there was considerable anxiety in London that Germany might yet succeed in breaking apart the Entente, as had been its suspected (and actual!) intention during the Moroccan Crisis. This was reflected in high sensitivity about public evidence of an Anglo-German détente, e.g. with various official and royal visits in 1907.⁹³

An example of this sensitivity was a proposed visit of the Coldstream Guards band to Germany in 1907 which the Foreign Office feared might upset French sensibilities, as several different Anglo-German visits had already occurred that year. The King remarked on this occasion, as D.W. Sweet has put it, ‘that the Anglo-French *entente* must indeed be a fragile connection if it could be ruptured “on such a trumpery point”’.⁹⁴ As Sweet has observed, Grey was convinced that ‘too much Anglo-German cordiality would make the French nervous about Britain’s commitment to the *entente*.’⁹⁵ Anglo-German foreign policy was thus

conducted in a ‘climate of [...] nervousness’,⁹⁶ and increasingly also one of diminishing options. In February 1909, Grey summarized his position thus: ‘Real isolation of Germany would mean war: so would the domination of Germany in Europe. There is a fairly wide course between the two extremes in which European politics should steer.’⁹⁷

In 1911, Asquith set up a Cabinet Committee to discuss the question of a political agreement with Germany and naval expenditure reduction.⁹⁸ Sir Arthur Nicolson worried that ‘there are in the Cabinet several members who desire to come to what they term a “friendly understanding” with Germany at almost any cost’.⁹⁹ Following an ill-fated (and his last) visit by the Kaiser to England in May 1911, and based on what they could observe in the *Wilhelmstrasse*, there was little doubt in the Foreign Office that Germany was intent on achieving ‘hegemony in Europe’, as well as doubts about the Kaiser’s mental state. Asquith considered his ‘the workings of a disordered brain; but (even if that is so) they are none the less dangerous.’¹⁰⁰ Wilhelm II had offended British sensibilities with his usual lack of tact, as well as making clear that Britain’s entry into a war on the continent would not make any difference to Germany:

If we wish to fight, we will do so with or without your leave. And why? Because we Continental powers dispose of armies counting millions. Of what possible use would it be for you to land your 50,000 men anywhere? I am convinced you would never attempt anything so foolish [...]. As to those French, we have beaten them once & we will beat them again.¹⁰¹

In the light of such statements - and there were many more - it is difficult to sustain the argument that the Foreign Office invented a German threat. Judging by the rhetoric from Germany, the threat was indeed real.

Following the announcement of the latest German naval laws in February 1912 Grey was convinced that the German navy might suddenly attack the British fleet.¹⁰² Relations had been made worse by the Agadir crisis and by the Mansion House Speech of 21 July 1911 – considered another ‘Olmütz’ in Germany which aroused widespread public condemnation.¹⁰³ On both sides of the channel the feeling was wide-spread that a major confrontation would sooner or later be unavoidable. Admiral Lord Fisher expected it to break out ‘in September 1914’.¹⁰⁴ Kaiser Wilhelm was convinced that as long as Grey was in post, ‘a proper political agreement cannot be achieved!’ In one of his typical angry marginal notes he lamented that Grey was not willing to come to an amicable arrangement with Germany. ‘He *just will not!*

and would only be forced to do so by the weight of hard facts.¹⁰⁵ Forcing Britain into a friendly attitude was also at the heart of the Tirpitz Plan, but London would not be bullied into more cordial relations. The effect of Wilhelm's and Germany's posturing was only to strengthen the anti-German bias in London.

As the example of the Haldane Mission of February 1912 reveals, the German government felt strong enough to be able to reject out of hand any tentative advances that did come from London. The negotiations failed because Germany demanded more than Britain felt able to offer – ideally neutrality – and because there was little appetite among members of the Foreign Office for 'a so-called "understanding"' with Germany, as Nicolson put it dismissively.¹⁰⁶ In Berlin, there was no desire to come to anything but the most favourable agreement on Germany's own terms.

At various crucial junctures Grey made Britain's attitude clear to the German government – the same position that he would maintain during the July Crisis. In March 1912 he informed the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir William Goschen:

That day might come when a German Government might desire to crush France. If such a contingency arose, though our hands were quite free, as they were now, we might not be able to sit still: for we should feel that, if we did sit still, and allowed France to be crushed, we should have to fight later on.¹⁰⁷

Two days later, the British proposal for an agreement (the result of the so-called Haldane Mission) was received in Berlin – and it did not find imperial favour. Britain had made it clear that there could be no neutrality agreement. Indeed, Grey explained that he wanted to avoid that term altogether because it might provoke unwarranted expectations. At the same time Grey made clear what great confidence he had in Bethmann Hollweg's desire for peace. 'We believed genuinely that he wished to pursue a straightforward policy of peace: and, as long as he remained German Chancellor, he might rely upon our co-operating with him to preserve the peace of Europe [...]'.¹⁰⁸

Grey had not been keen on the convention and had hoped, in Otte's phrase, 'to kick the matter into the long grass of diplomacy.'¹⁰⁹ For Bethmann Hollweg, the consequences of the failed talks were doubts about 'Grey's reliability, indeed his honesty.'¹¹⁰ This in turn, as Otte argues, made Austria-Hungary an even more important and indeed the only reliable ally for Germany and emphasized Germany's perceived and actual isolation. In July 1914, such fears would play an important part in German decision-making.

Such tentative negotiations with Berlin notwithstanding, it must be remembered that Germany was not the only focus of Britain's continental woes. J.A. Pease's diary of March 1912 makes clear how vulnerable the British government felt because of a lack of firm alliances on the continent:

Grey's recent interview with Metternich. Lloyd George and I pressed Grey to alter our words and introduce neutrality to please the Germans and play up to Bethmann. It was agreed we should invite the Germans to criticise and make suggestions. Grey and Churchill wanted no further weakening of our words. The Germans would be obviously at an advantage over us in a neutrality basis subject to existing treaties, as they had a triple alliance and we had nothing...¹¹¹

That this was indeed the case was brought home to Grey when on 1 August 1914 the shocked French Ambassador in London reacted with dismay to the possibility of British neutrality: 'If you stay out and we survive, we shall not move a finger to save you from being crushed by the Germans later', he threatened.¹¹² He was stating what many had feared all along: Britain could not afford to abandon France and risk her wrath, and she could not afford to antagonize Russia and risk her victory against Germany. Even one of the most notorious anti-Germans in the Foreign Office, Sir Eyre Crowe, confessed in his famous 1907 memorandum, that there was one thing which would frighten him more than Germany, namely to have both France and Russia against us.¹¹³ In Herbert Butterfield's assessment,

Britain [...] was adopting a special attitude to the aggressions of Russia because she was "on our side". This enabled her to [...] avoid comparing power with power, aggression with aggression [...]. It left Germany standing as simply the supremely wicked ogre, the condemnation of which was not to be offset by any proofs that Russia had dangerous ambitions and meant to achieve them by military force. For the same reason, British diplomats (and later historians) were unwilling or unable to see that Germany might have a genuine fear of Russia, and that this might account for some elements of intransigence in her policy that seemed unreasonable.¹¹⁴

British decision-makers realised that Russia was a serious potential threat for Germany. For example, in March 1914 British Ambassador Sir George Buchanan reported from St Petersburg that once Russia's army increases were complete in 1917, 'the days of [Germany's] hegemony in Europe will be numbered'. Until then, Germany 'may be tempted

to precipitate a conflict before Russia is fully prepared to meet it.' He used this opportunity to urge Grey to commit to helping Russia: 'During these crucial years, therefore, Russia will stand in need of our support; and, should we fail to give it when she appeals for it, England will no longer be numbered among her friends.'¹¹⁵ Consequently, there were voices in the Foreign Office who considered that 'the first principle of our foreign policy must be genuinely good relations with Russia.'¹¹⁶ It was also not lost on London that Germany also had much to fear from Britain, whose role in a future war could prove decisive. A letter from Loreburn to Runciman of April 1912 illustrates this point.

The Germans are really afraid of us, lest we be trapped into joint action against them with France and Russia. We are afraid of their fleet policy – no wonder. And this fearful element of distrust will poison our relations. [...] for God's sake let us be civil and let anybody understand that nothing will induce us to join in war, unless Germany outrages fair play.¹¹⁷

A counter-factual question begs to be asked in this context. What if Germany had not put in place the 'Schlieffen Plan' with its violation of Belgium in 1914 and thus demonstrated to those doubting the wisdom of a British intervention on the continent that Germany did indeed 'outrage fair play'? The violation of Belgium united the British public and the Cabinet, even if Belgium was not a key concern for Grey and his advisers in their July discussions. As Grey remembered after the war:

the Cabinet was [...] up to the time when violation of Belgian neutrality became imminent, unable to give any pledge to anybody, and in that it reflected the state of feeling and opinion in Parliament and the country. By 1 August, after Germany had evaded the request to respect Belgium's neutrality, this period of indecision [...] was coming to an end.¹¹⁸

The German government not only speculated that a localised war would be of benefit to the Dual Alliance, and that a European war, should it break out, would still be winnable – it also saw the crisis as an opportunity to implore Grey to mediate and perhaps to effect a breach of trust between Britain and Russia.¹¹⁹ Thus Bethmann Hollweg mused on 8 July: 'If war does not come, if the Tsar does not want it or concerned France counsels peace then we still have the chance to break the Entente apart over this.'¹²⁰

However, despite this Entente cornerstone and a distinct Germanophobe tendency among many in the Foreign Office, continuing tensions with Germany were not inevitable. During

1913, Anglo-German relations improved. According to Lloyd George, in an interview in January 1914, this was due to the ‘wise and patient diplomacy of Grey’.¹²¹ The Cabinet was not without advocates of a more positive policy towards Germany, among them Lord Loreburn, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Haldane, the Secretary of State for war, and James Bryce, the Chief Secretary for Ireland,¹²² but they were outnumbered by the anti-German faction. Could an Anglo-German rapprochement in 1914 have changed the course of history? Certainly, Otte goes as far as to speculate: ‘Had the fatal crisis come a year later, the decision might well have been a different one.’¹²³

A significant part of the explanation for this new *détente* was that the naval race had essentially been decided – and in Britain’s favour. ‘I am firmly convinced that one of the reasons why Anglo-German relations are now more cordial [...] is that we have entirely ceased to discuss the question of a limitation of armaments,’ commented Crowe in February 1913.¹²⁴ Instead of the navy, Germany had started to concentrate its efforts on military expansion. Expanding her army and keeping pace with the military build-up of Russia was the priority, and the navy played little part in the war planning of the General Staff, or indeed once fighting had begun.

But given the importance of the Entente for Britain, friendly relations with Germany were not really a possibility, as Grey undoubtedly knew. Ambassador Goschen summed this up perfectly: ‘I am sure we cannot have it both ways: i.e. form a defensive alliance with France and Russia and at the same time be on cordial terms with Germany.’¹²⁵ Consequently, British foreign policy rested on the premise that it was best to try and avoid making ‘a definite choice’.¹²⁶ To some contemporaries, however, there was no real choice to be made. When in May 1914 Crown Prince Wilhelm discussed the possibility of an Anglo-German rapprochement with junior members of the British Embassy in Berlin (‘The future was to the Anglo-German race, and if England and Germany were wise they would join together in a regular Alliance and keep the other nations to order’¹²⁷), Nicolson commented:

I am quite sure that if we broke away from Russia and embarked on such an engagement we should bitterly rue the day. Russia would be able to make herself exceedingly disagreeable to us in regions where we are unfortunately very weak and where German assistance, even if willingly offered, would be of no avail, - indeed could not be operative.¹²⁸

One reason for the failure of *détente* was the secret Anglo-Russian naval negotiations in the spring of 1914 which – due to the activities of a spy in the Russian embassy in London – did not remain a secret, and which killed ‘that tender plant of Anglo-German *détente*’.¹²⁹ Grey approved the talks because he was ‘haunted by the fear that Russia might become tired of us and strike a bargain with Germany.’¹³⁰ The news of the secret talks poisoned any hope in Germany of more cordial relations and only heightened the sense of encirclement and despair in Berlin. They destroyed what little trust Bethmann Hollweg had in Grey – based in large part on Lichnowsky’s optimistic reports from London, and confirmed Wilhelm II’s paranoias. If the Chancellor, and more so the Kaiser, had previously suspected Grey to have been a liar, now they were convinced of it. The rumours of Anglo-German naval talks caused near panic in Germany. Kurt Riezler’s diary is testament to the devastating impression the news had made in Berlin:

The secret news which he [Bethmann Hollweg] tells me gives a devastating impression. He considers the Anglo-Russian negotiations about a naval convention, the landing in Pomerania, as very serious, the last piece in the chain. [...] Russia’s military power increasing fast; if strategic expansion of Poland, the situation can be held in check. Austria increasingly weaker and immobile [...]. In any case unable to go to war as our ally for a German cause. The Entente knows that we are entirely paralysed as a result. I am shocked, I had not regarded [the situation] as that serious.¹³¹

However, the fact that more cordial relations were not achieved cannot be explained by just looking at London and at the power-play between those in favour of a pro-German policy and those bent on maintaining the Entente with France at all cost. The failure was also due to Germany’s attitude. Before the July Crisis, she had not missed any opportunities to provoke enmity and suspicion among the Entente Powers with her erratic and aggressive behaviour. In the summer of 1914, the German government was not willing to compromise even when the signs from London were clear. As Otte explains: ‘The problem [...] was not what Grey said; the problem was that Berlin did not listen to its own ambassador.’¹³² Lichnowsky’s frequent warnings, during and before the July Crisis, were simply ignored. In February 1914, for example, Jagow urged the constantly cautioning Lichnowsky to be

a little more optimistic in the assessment of our English friends. I would like to think that you sometimes see things too negatively, also when you express the

view that England would in any case be found on the side of France against us in case of war. We did not build our fleet for nothing, and it is my conviction that when it comes to it they will consider very carefully the question in England whether it really is all that easy and devoid of danger to play France's guardian angel.¹³³

In the months and years before the summer of 1914, Germany's erratic and aggressive behaviour and posturing affected the actions of the governments of the other great powers. It therefore seems clear that Britain's foreign policy makers did not need 'effectively [to] invent [...] for [Germany] designs of a hegemonial character upon Europe', as Keith Wilson has argued.¹³⁴ Germany posed an actual threat to the established order. Britain's anti-German foreign policy did not help, but it was arguably not the only cause of the international tensions that resurfaced repeatedly. Whether the threat was real or invented, it did not help make Germany more popular with Grey and his entourage, but it made the Foreign Office more forgiving of Russia.

As for Grey's alleged duplicity and his failure during the July Crisis to warn Germany sufficiently of his resolve to defend France, there were in fact plenty of early warnings, and it seems disingenuous for Germany's leaders to feign surprise and outrage at the British 'betrayal'. On 9 July, for example, Grey had made it clear to Lichnowsky that 'in no case would Britain be found on the side of the aggressor in the event of continental complications.'¹³⁵ However, Germany's military leaders weighed up the relative certainty of a war which involved Britain, but which Germany could win, with the fear of a future in which Germany would no longer be able to defend itself. 'In a few years Russia will, in all competent assumptions, be ready to strike. Then she will suffocate us with the number of her soldiers, then she will have built her Baltic fleet and her strategic railways. In the meantime our group is getting weaker.'¹³⁶ A mixture of fear and aggression motivated Germany's government to take steps towards a European war in 1914. But it is important to state clearly that neither Grey's secret commitment to France (which the Cabinet and Parliament were unaware of), nor his attitude during the crisis made the slightest difference to Germany's resolve. They would have preferred Britain to be neutral, without a doubt, but they were going ahead with their war regardless.

'There is something very crude and almost childlike about German diplomacy', H.H. Asquith commented on 30 July in response to Germany's desperate bid for British neutrality.¹³⁷ Grey called it a 'policy of political blackmail' and acknowledged that this had been the reason for

Britain's change of foreign policy since the 1890s.¹³⁸ During the July Crisis, Grey realised the gravity of the situation before anyone else, and Otte's defence of Grey is unequivocal: much of the criticism levelled at Grey is 'quite unjustified'.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, it seems also clear that the German decision-makers' distrust of Grey and of Britain undoubtedly worsened matters. Neither country's foreign policy developed within a vacuum and neither country's foreign policy makers trusted the other. But in 1914, the threat from Germany was current and real, while Russia's potential enmity was a more distant, if much dreaded, prospect.

It is easy to see why there has been so much debate about Grey and the origins of the war. It is possible to make convincing cases both for and against his culpability. Leaving aside the question whether a less anti-German policy might have helped prevent a war, it seems without doubt that Grey's decision-making in 1914 was pragmatic. He was restricted by conflicting domestic and foreign policy constraints on his ability to manoeuvre, and motivated to accept the necessity for war because he feared the consequences of a German victory for Britain's future security and for the future of the Empire.¹⁴⁰ However, it is clear that a war was not in Britain's interest in 1914 and that Grey was sincere in his hopes and efforts to stop it from breaking out.

During the July Crisis, Grey's attitude was characterised by his conviction that neutrality was not an option for Britain, and by his determination to mediate and to avert the outbreak of war if at all possible. The second concern was undoubtedly motivated by the first – the only way to keep Britain out of a war was to avoid that war breaking out altogether. So his mediation proposals, however much they may have been based on naivety or wishful thinking, were very much genuine. Many would agree with this interpretation. Grey 'hated the idea of war between any of the great powers: "that any of them should be dragged into a war by Servia would be detestable."' ¹⁴¹ He 'could not concede that any government could knowingly unleash such a catastrophe and hoped that Britain's naval margin and diplomatic disposition would deter the Germans.'¹⁴² Consequently, Grey pursued a policy of 'constructive ambiguity' throughout the crisis.¹⁴³ He knew that Britain's best option to preserve peace was to try for mediation, and he was in no doubt about Britain's unenviable position: 'We are going to suffer, I am afraid, terribly in this war, whether we are in it or whether we stand aside.'¹⁴⁴

3. The View from London and the View from Berlin

In this final section, it will be argued that Grey was ultimately not in a position to prevent the outbreak of war, no matter what he, or his later critics, believed. If we change the lens through which we view his actions, the limitations to his agency become readily apparent. The view from London naturally overemphasizes British agency. However, if Germany's foreign policy did actually threaten the European balance of power (i.e. the threat was not invented, but real), then arguably Grey did not have potential to be either a hero or a villain. He was able to attempt to broker peace – whether half-heartedly or genuinely – and his suggestions may have been based on 'partisan indifference to the power-political realities of Austria-Hungary's situation'¹⁴⁵ or may have aimed at a 'far-reaching settlement' which amounted to 'a diplomatic triumph on a silver salver' for Berlin.¹⁴⁶ Regardless, the actual decisions for war were taken elsewhere, and Britain's attitude in the end did not make a difference to the outcome of the crisis.

All of the other great powers proceeded as they wished without any recourse to British counsel. Germany attacked Belgium and France, regardless of clear British warnings not to do so. Russia mobilised before a British decision on intervention had been taken and 'threatened to undermine British diplomacy'. France had not restrained Russia although Britain had requested it.¹⁴⁷ For Austria-Hungary, Britain mattered even less – she had decided to make a diplomatic settlement of the crisis impossible by bombarding Belgrade immediately after declaring war on Serbia on 28 July, even when Grey was still attempting to arrange mediation. Only Italy's decision for neutrality was affected by Britain's intervention; once it was clear that Britain would be involved, Italian neutrality was a foregone conclusion, as she could not risk a hostile British Navy on its shores. This suggests that Britain played a far less important role in July 1914 than British diplomats (and later historians) have assumed, for their actions were of little consequence to the decisions taken by other great powers.

The view from London, while illuminating, cannot provide the answers for the long debate on the origins of the First World War. Decisions taken in Vienna, Berlin, St Petersburg and Paris were far more instrumental and were taken regardless of London's position and regardless of Grey's resolve. Grey could not prevent the war once the decision was taken in Austria-Hungary and Germany to use this crisis 'for a final and fundamental reckoning [...] with the Serbs' and 'to solve the Serbian question' (in Vienna) as well as to test the Entente (in Berlin).¹⁴⁸

It is not enough to condemn Grey's apparent intransigence vis-a-vis Germany and the anti-German stance in the Foreign Office without due reference to Germany's erratic and threatening behaviour which produced the anti-German attitude in the first place. The war of 1914 could only have been avoided if all sides had favoured a peaceful outcome. War did not break out because of the decisions taken by Grey and the British Cabinet during the July Crisis. The decision for war and peace in Europe was not Grey's to take.

Equally it is not enough to condemn Bethmann Hollweg's or Kaiser Wilhelm's stubbornness in rejecting any suggestions of limiting the naval arms race in exchange for more cordial relations, and to deny that Germany also felt threatened by other countries around her. Each side acted within the confines of their own domestic and foreign policy concerns and limitations, and within real and imagined scenarios which threatened the future of their country. In other words, Germany's aggressive posturing may have been the result of deep-seated insecurities or of belligerence. Historians would do well to agree to disagree on this contentious point, for in the end, it matters little to the outcome. Germany *appeared* aggressive to its neighbours, and the motivation for this aggressiveness was of no concern to Grey and others who reacted to the perceived threat from Berlin.

In the context of Germany posturing, the Entente with France really was the only reliable constellation for Britain. To jettison it would risk the country's total isolation. Germany had a triple alliance, we had nothing', as Pease recorded in his diary in 1912. This was an unenviable position at the time when many expected a European war to be a likely future scenario.¹⁴⁹ Britain had as much, if not more, to fear from a hostile Russia than from Germany. After all, as Butterfield put it, there were 'two giants in Europe: Germany and Russia', both of them 'monsters'.¹⁵⁰ But when faced with the real and current threat emanating from Germany the British government was willing to overlook that Russia, too, posed a potential future threat.

It is a pointless counterfactual to ask whether a pro-German attitude in the Foreign Office might have prevented the war. Russia may well have been a danger in future, but Germany was the current threat. A pro-German attitude would most likely have spurred the Germans on to believing that their blustering foreign policy actually worked, making them more rather than less dangerous. An example of this thinking is Alfred von Tirpitz's astonishing observation that 'the risk-theory is working' when it looked for a brief moment as if British neutrality had been secured on 1 August.¹⁵¹ It had long been the intention of Germany's leaders to bully Britain into friendlier relations with her.

But being in an alliance did not provide much comfort for Germany. She found herself in an unenviable *Mittellage*, surrounded, possibly encircled, by potential enemies, with Austria-Hungary as her only reliable friend. And for how much longer? It was widely considered that Austria's great power standing was waning, and the assassination of Franz Ferdinand was seen as further evidence of this. Italy had long been known to be unreliable, particularly of course if Britain were to intervene in a continental war. Anti-German sentiments in London, of which Berlin was only too aware, contributed to feelings of insecurity in Germany. All the while, Russia was becoming an increasingly formidable power which terrified German political and military decision-makers. Britain acknowledged that Germany had much to fear from her eastern neighbour, a fear that was palpable and often-expressed by Germany's military and political leaders. For example, on 20 July Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg confided in this private secretary: 'Russia's increasing demands and incredible explosive power. In a few years no longer possible to fend off, particularly if the current European constellation remains.' A few days earlier, he had worried that 'the future belongs to Russia which grows and grows and lies on us like an ever-heavier nightmare.'¹⁵²

Whether Grey really negotiated honestly for peace in July 1914 will remain a matter of dispute. But the fact remains that those who precipitated the crisis and deliberately escalated it were not interested in mediation, however half-hearted or sincere. As Grey bemoaned in his memoirs, 'although the suggestion of settling [the crisis] by the same machinery as in 1912 was made, it was dismissed peremptorily by Germany and Austria.'¹⁵³

In the end, Grey's hands were tied as Britain found herself having to choose between an almost certain Germany victory which would see her gaining a position of hegemony on the continent, and losing her only near-allies, France and Russia. When Grey managed to sway the doubters in the Cabinet, it was because Germany committed the Belgian outrage which was necessary to convince them, and the public, that Britain could not remain on the margins.

It has been argued that British foreign policy 'had always depended on scenarios of threat and invasion'.¹⁵⁴ If that was so, then Germany was only too happy to oblige. The scenarios did not have to be invented.¹⁵⁵ When examined from a British perspective, it is perfectly feasible to argue that the Foreign Office was 'quite hysterical' about the perceived 'ridiculous' (and 'invented') German threat.¹⁵⁶ However, the view from Berlin leads to a different interpretation. If there was near hysteria in London, there was also a very real threat from Berlin. Even German contemporaries realised this. For example, Gottlieb von Jagow alluded to the period of more cordial relations between Britain and Germany in 1913, when he

thought that the ‘era of misunderstandings’ which had characterised Anglo-German relations since 1889 had come to an end. These misunderstandings he put down largely to German actions and mistakes.¹⁵⁷ It might well be true that this threat usefully underlined the kind of foreign policy Grey wanted to pursue anyway – but in conjuring up images of a hostile Germany, he was by no means fighting windmills.

Conclusion

Contemporaries and historians have levelled harsh criticisms at Sir Edward Grey, and even after a hundred years he remains central to debates around the causes of the war. Criticism has focused on his anti-German policy in the pre-war years and his conduct during the July Crisis.

It has been argued here that while Grey’s and the Foreign Office’s anti-German stance appears to have contributed to the international tensions which culminated in the war of 1914, a German threat to British security was real, rather than invented. As to Grey’s role in the July Crisis, it has been shown that while Grey undoubtedly played an important role as one of the ‘men of 1914’, and while he was sincere in trying to prevent the outbreak of war, there were limits to what he could actually achieve. In terms of Grey’s ability to prevent international conflict and the outbreak of a major war, he was peripheral. Regardless of his anti-German stance, and whether or not he favoured the Entente or perhaps dreaded Russia more than Germany, he was in no position to prevent a war that was seen in Vienna and Berlin as a last chance to break the Entente apart or to achieve a quick victory against France and Russia. Even if a clear announcement from London early in July had pitted Britain firmly against the Triple Alliance, the resolve in Vienna for a ‘reckoning’ with Serbia would not have changed, and neither would the determination in Berlin to support its only reliable ally and to test the Entente’s readiness for war.

Berlin’s decision-makers were unaware of the divisions in the Cabinet, but they had in any case plenty of evidence to suggest that Britain would not stay neutral in a future war. It did not matter to them either way. They proceeded with their ‘dust-laden’ plan regardless. Thus it was not necessary for the anti-German faction in the Foreign Office to invent a German threat, though it would appear that they were very willing to conjure it up whenever it suited.

Germany constituted a threat to the European balance of power, while at the same time Germany considered herself threatened by hostile powers around her. Both of these fears were valid and could exist simultaneously.

But why did Germany risk it all, when the stakes were so high and the risks so great? In an attempt to address this conundrum, Jonathan Steinberg refers to Friedrich Meinecke's revealing assessment of Radowitz's defeat at Olmütz.

So the defeat he suffered was probably certain from the beginning, and we know that he went into the struggle with a premonition of defeat. Yet there are battles in history which have to be fought out quite unavoidably even if defeat stares you in the eye.

Published in 1913, it is likely that Germany's leading statesmen would have read, and doubtless shared, Meinecke's assessment. Steinberg points out that for the purposes of understanding Germany before the war, it pays to remember that many Germans at the time thought it was worth fighting certain battles even if defeat was likely. 'That itself', concludes Steinberg, 'would be enough to set limits to the achievements of British diplomacy in its relations with the German Empire.'¹⁵⁸ With this in mind, Henry Wilson was far from the truth when he mused in March 1919 that '[w]e know for a certainty that if Germany had thought for a moment that Great Britain would go in with France and Russia, she would never have undertaken the enterprise.'¹⁵⁹ Even if the view from London could attribute such importance to British decision-making and such agency to Grey, from the perspective of Berlin, neither Britain nor Sir Edward Grey were of such central importance.

¹ I would like to thank the organisers of the 2014 conference 'Sir Edward Grey and the Origins of the First World War', in particular David Stevenson, Heather Jones, and Richard Smith for their kind invitation to present at the conference and to contribute to this special issue. Further thanks are due to the two anonymous peer reviewers, to Daniel Anders for sharing his knowledge of Grey with me, and to T.G. Otte for rescuing me from some errors of detail that occur when a historian of Germany attempts to write about British history.

² The phrase first coined by James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, London 1984, p.205: 'In order to understand the men of 1914 we must understand the values of 1914'.

³ Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2003, p.276.

⁴ Gordon Martel, *The Month that Changed the World*, OUP, Oxford 2014, pp. 420-21.

⁵ Samuel R. Williamson and Russel van Wyk (eds), *July 1914. Soldiers, Statesmen, and the Coming of the Great War*, Bedford St Martin's, Boston, New York, 2003, p.259.

⁶ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Odhams Press, London, 1933, I, (1938), p.55.

⁷ Martel, *The Month*, p.45.

⁸ Ibid, pp.420-21.

⁹ David S. Muzzey, Review of Edward Grey, *Twenty-Five Years*, in *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.41, 2, 1926, pp.287-91, p.288. For a recent account of the radicals' opposition to Grey, see Andreas Rose, *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent. Britische Außenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, Oldenbourg, Munich 2011. For a shorter

English version, see Andreas Rose, 'From "illusion" and "Angellism" to détente – British radicals and the Balkan Wars', in Dominik Geppert, William Mulligan and Andreas Rose (eds), *The Wars before the Great War. Conflict and International Politics before the Outbreak of the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp.320-342.

¹⁰ According to Egerton, 'Lloyd George hinged his indictment of the British military elite on the case he builds against Haig, in much the same way that he had made Grey the sacrificial lamb for the sins of Asquithian Liberalism.' George W. Egerton, 'The Lloyd George "War Memoirs": A Study in the Politics of Memory', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol.60, No. 1, March 1988, pp.55-94, p. 79.

¹¹ Dominick Geppert et al, *Die Welt*, 4 January 2014

<http://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article123516387/Warum-Deutschland-nicht-allein-schuld-ist.html>. Jörn Leonhard counters this idea by pointing out that the war was already no longer just a European war when at 8 o'clock in the morning on 4 August German troops began their advance into Belgium. Moreover, when on 2 August the British cabinet was still undecided and met twice to resolve the existing stalemate German troops had already occupied neutral Luxembourg (Jörn Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora. Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Beck, Munich 2014, p.109). For an overview of the latest state of the debate see e.g. Annika Mombauer, 'Guilt or Responsibility? The Hundred-Year Debate on the Origins of World War 1', *Central European History*, 48, 2015, pp.1-24.

¹² Herbert Butterfield, 'Sir Edward Grey in July 1914', *Historical Studies*, 1965, 2, pp.1-25, p.14.

¹³ On the counter-factual speculation that Britain could, and should, have kept out of the war, see Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, Penguin, London 1999 and John Charmley, *Splendid Isolation?*, Sceptre, London 1999. Historians who highlight the imperial dimension to British foreign policy concerns include Keith M. Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente. Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904-1914*; Keith Neilson, "'My beloved Russians": Sir Arthur Nicolson and Russia, 1906-1916', *International History Review*, 11, 4, 1987, pp.521-554; idem, *Britain and the last Tsar. British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995; Rose, *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent*.

¹⁴ *Die Deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch 1914 (DD)*, Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, Berlin 1922, No.596, 2 August 2014.

¹⁵ For much of what follows on Grey's British critics I have relied on Keith M. Wilson's excellent and detailed analysis in which much archival evidence is cited, some for the first time. Wilson, 'Britain', in idem (ed.), *Decisions for War, 1914*, London, UCL Press 1995, pp.175-208.

¹⁶ Henry Wilson's diary cited in *ibid*, p. 200.

¹⁷ Crowe's minutes on Buchanan to Grey, 24 July 1914, G.P. Gooch and H. Temperley (eds), *British Documents on the Origins of the War (BD)*, London 1926, vol. XI, No.101.

¹⁸ Butterfield, 'Grey', p.13.

¹⁹ Lansdowne's comments cited in Wilson, 'Britain', p. 201.

²⁰ Cited in *ibid*.

²¹ Lord Loreburn, *How the War came*, Methuen & Co, London 1919, p.5.

²² *Ibid*, p.183.

²³ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, I, p.59.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.57.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶ Egerton, 'The Lloyd George "War Memoirs"', p.75.

²⁷ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, I, pp.57-8.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.58. Lloyd George did not take into account the fact that Germany could not change its deployment plan, as there was by the summer of 1914 no alternative to the so-called 'Schlieffen Plan'.

²⁹ For this argument, see Egerton, 'The Lloyd George "War Memoirs"', p.89.

³⁰ Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, I, p.32.

³¹ For details of the interwar historiographical debates on the origins of the war see e.g. Annika Mombauer, *The Origins of the First World War. Controversies and Consensus*, Longman, London 2002.

³² Arthur Murray, 'Lord Grey of Fallodon', *The Quarterly Review*, No.519, January 1934, pp.1-19, p.9.

³³ Cited in *ibid*, p.9, who also quotes Le Temps: 'If Lord Grey did not succeed in preventing the catastrophe, nobody could have prevented it.'

³⁴ Egerton, 'The Lloyd George "War Memoirs"', p.74. For example, Grey's own memoirs, and Trevelyan's more positive assessment of Grey, 'would attempt to place Grey firmly in the national pantheon'.

³⁵ Gwynne and Hobbhouse cited in Wilson, *Entente*, pp.144-5.

³⁶ Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, 3 vols, Engl. tr. Oxford University Press, Oxford 1952, 2nd edn, Enigma Books, New York 2005, vol. 3, p.385.

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp.389-90.

³⁸ Albertini, *Origins*, vol. 3, p.479.

- ³⁹ Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, Droste, Düsseldorf 1961 and *Krieg der Illusionen*, Droste, Düsseldorf 1969.
- ⁴⁰ Fischer, *Griff*, p.33.
- ⁴¹ Steiner and Neilson, *Britain*, p.265.
- ⁴² An example of a more favourable assessment of Grey is Zara Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1969.
- ⁴³ Steiner and Neilson, *Britain*, pp. 263, 274.
- ⁴⁴ Samuel R. Williamson Jr. and Ernest R. May, 'An Identity of Opinion. Historians and July 1914', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (June 2007), pp. 335-387, p.379.
- ⁴⁵ On Lichnowsky's role and his subsequent reputation, see John Röhl (ed.), *1914: Delusion or Design? The Testimony of Two German Diplomats*, Elek, London 1973.
- ⁴⁶ T.G. Otte, *July Crisis. The World's Descent into war, Summer 1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2014, p.521. Other examples of more favourable portrayals of Grey include Steiner, *The Foreign Office*; Keith Neilson, "'Control of the Whirlwind": Sir Edward Grey as Foreign Secretary, 1906-1916, in T.G. Otte (ed.), *Makers of British Foreign Policy. From Pitt to Thatcher*, Basingstoke 2002; T.G. Otte, "'Almost a Law of Nature?": Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Office, and the Balance of Power in Europe, 1905-1912, in Erik Goldstein and B.J.C. Kercher (eds), *Britain and the Problem of Europe, 1900-1970: Diplomacy, Finance and Strategy*, Westport, Conn, 2002. A recent biography of Grey portrays the Foreign Secretary in a more sympathetic light than his many critics, but fails to engage with the disputed issues around his pre-war diplomacy: Michael Waterhouse, *Edwardian Requiem. A Life of Sir Edward Grey*, Biteback, London 2013.
- ⁴⁷ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe went to War in 1914*, Allen Lane, London 2012. The book was much more controversial in Germany than in Britain when it was published in German translation in September 2013. For details of its reception in Germany, see Mombauer, 'Guilt or Responsibility?', *passim*.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.559. A similar view about Grey's indifference to Austria-Hungary is made by Andreas Rose: 'The continuation of the Dual Monarchy as well as the status quo on the Balkans played a minor role for Grey in comparison with the Russian friendship.' *Empire*, p.589. Some commentators have even referred to Grey's 'charade of mediation'. Gerry Docherty and Jim MacGregor, *Hidden History. The Secret Origins of the First World War*, Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, London 2013, chapter 24.
- ⁴⁹ Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, pp.165-66.
- ⁵⁰ Wilson, *Entente*, p.143.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.101, and chapter 6: 'The Invention of Germany', *passim*.
- ⁵² 'The real purpose of the Entente [...] was war with Germany.' More startlingly still: 'The difference between Sir Edward Grey and the kaiser was that only one of them [i.e. Grey] was plotting war.' Docherty and MacGregor, *Hidden History*, p.257. This position is unusual in the recent historiography, though it echoes war-time and post-war assessments, particularly by German apologists. For example, Edmund von Mach's address to the German University League in the US in April 2015 accused Grey of pushing Germany and Austria-Hungary 'slowly but surely' into the war, and was in 'no doubt that the present war is the result of a gigantic conspiracy against Germany'. 'Sir Edward Grey's Evidence. An Address delivered before the German University League', 24 April 1915, p.20.
- ⁵³ Sean McMeekin, *July 1914. Countdown to War*, Icon Books, London 2013, p.402.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 403.
- ⁵⁵ Carl von Weizsäcker's notes, 23 March 1914, in Mombauer, *Documents*, No.76.
- ⁵⁶ Wilson, 'Britain', p.183
- ⁵⁷ Riezler's diary, 7 July 1914, in Mombauer, *Documents*, No.135.
- ⁵⁸ Wilson, 'Britain', p.183.
- ⁵⁹ See Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora*, p.118.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.118.
- ⁶¹ Gerd Krumeich, *Juli 1914. Eine Bilanz*, Schöningh, Paderborn et al, 2014, p.135.
- ⁶² *Ibid*.
- ⁶³ *Ibid*.
- ⁶⁴ See *ibid*, p.158. In the margins of the telegram Wilhelm raged: 'the famous 'encirclement' of Germany has finally become a complete fact, despite every effort of our politicians and diplomats to prevent it. The net has been suddenly thrown over our head, and England sneeringly reaps the most brilliant success of her persistently prosecuted purely anti-German *Weltpolitik*.' Pourtalès to Jagow, 30 July 1914, in Mombauer, *Documents*, No.322.
- ⁶⁵ Cited in Wilson, 'Britain', p.189.
- ⁶⁶ Quoted in Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace. How Europe Abandoned Peace for the First World War*, London, Profile Books 2014, p.568.
- ⁶⁷ Cited in Wilson, 'Britain' p.189,

- ⁶⁸ Except, it must be added, briefly during the infamous ‘misunderstanding of 1 August’ when Grey seemed to be offering British neutrality if Germany did not attack France. This turned out to be based on Lichnowsky’s misreading of a conversation with Grey, but it did lead to a momentary alteration to the German deployment plan. For details of these events, see e.g. Annika Mombauer, *Helmuth von Moltke and the Origins of the First World War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, pp.216-226; K.M. Wilson, ‘Understanding the “Misunderstanding” of 1 August’, *Historical Journal*, 37, 4, 1994, pp.885-889.
- ⁶⁹ ‘The Two European Camps’, *The Nation*, 16 January 1909, p.597, cited in Rose, *Empire*, p.562. See also Rose, ‘From “illusion” and “Angellism” to détente’.
- ⁷⁰ Rose, *Empire*, p.568.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.569.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*
- ⁷³ Otte, *July Crisis*, pp.455-6.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.520.
- ⁷⁵ Williamson and May, ‘An Identity of Opinion’.
- ⁷⁶ Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, p.160. For further evidence of the ‘predominance of the anti-German party’, see Butterfield, ‘Grey’, p.4.
- ⁷⁷ R.T.B. Langhorne, ‘Great Britain and Germany, 1911-1914’, in F.H. Hinsley (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of Sir Edward Grey*, Cambridge, CUP 1977, pp.288-314, p.288.
- ⁷⁸ Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, pp.160-61.
- ⁷⁹ Cited in Butterfield, ‘Grey’, p.3.
- ⁸⁰ Wilson, *Entente*, p.100
- ⁸¹ Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, p.161.
- ⁸² Wilson, *Entente*, p.101.
- ⁸³ Steiner and Neilson, *Britain*, pp.264, 276.
- ⁸⁴ Cited in D.W. Sweet, ‘Great Britain and Germany, 1905-1911’, in Hinsley, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 216-235, p.216.
- ⁸⁵ See also Steiner and Neilson, *Britain*, p.43.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁷ John Röhl, *Wilhelm II. Into the Abyss of War and Exile, 1900-1941*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2014, pp.408-9.
- ⁸⁸ Cited in *ibid.*, p.409.
- ⁸⁹ Cited in *ibid.*, pp.409-10.
- ⁹⁰ Cited in *ibid.*, p.492.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.491-2.
- ⁹² Cited in *ibid.*, p.493.
- ⁹³ Sweet, ‘Great Britain and Germany’, p.219.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.220.
- ⁹⁷ Minute by Grey on Rodd to Grey, No.47, 10 February 1909, FO 371/599, cited in *ibid.*, p.226.
- ⁹⁸ Wilson, ‘Notes on the Non-Interventionists, 1911-1914’ in *idem*, *Directions of Travel*, The Isis Press, Istanbul 2014, p.94.
- ⁹⁹ Nicolson to Hardinge, 2 March 1911, BD, vi, No.440, cited in *ibid.*, p.95.
- ¹⁰⁰ Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, p.793.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.792.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.836.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.808.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.836.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.841.
- ¹⁰⁶ Cited in Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p.364.
- ¹⁰⁷ Grey to Goschen, 15 March 1912, BD, vi, 539, cited in Langhorne, ‘Great Britain and Germany’, p.298.
- ¹⁰⁸ Cited in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, p.864.
- ¹⁰⁹ Otte, *July Crisis*, p.95.
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹¹ Pease Diary, 29 March 1912, cited in Wilson, ‘Notes on the Non-Interventionists’, p.100.
- ¹¹² Cited in Martel, *The Month*, p.368.
- ¹¹³ Butterfield, ‘Grey’, p.18.
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.21.
- ¹¹⁵ Buchanan to Grey, 18 March 1914, *BD*, X, II, No.528.

- ¹¹⁶ George Clerk's memorandum of 23 July 1914, cited in T.G. Otte, 'Entente diplomacy v. détente, 1911-1914', in Geppert et al, *The Wars before the Great War*, pp.264-282, p.278.
- ¹¹⁷ Loreburn to Runciman, 2 April 1912, Runciman MSS, cited in Wilson, 'Notes on the Non-Interventionists', p.101.
- ¹¹⁸ Grey, *Twenty-five years, 1892-1916*, Frederick A. Stokes, London 1925, vol. I, 334-42.
- ¹¹⁹ For this point, see Keith Robbins, *Sir Edward Grey*, Cassell, London 1971, p.289.
- ¹²⁰ Riezler's diary, 8 July 1914, in Mombauer, *Documents*, No.138.
- ¹²¹ Cited in Otte, *July Crisis*, p.142.
- ¹²² Wilson, 'Notes on the Non-Interventionists', p.93.
- ¹²³ Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p.392.
- ¹²⁴ Cited in *ibid*, p.381.
- ¹²⁵ Cited in *ibid*, p.382.
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p.392.
- ¹²⁷ Goschen to Nicolson, 15 May 1914, *BD*, X, II, No. 508
- ¹²⁸ Nicolson to Goschen, 18 May 1914, *BD*, X, II, No.510.
- ¹²⁹ Otte, *July Crisis*, p.451. For details of the negotiations, see Stephen Schröder, *Die englisch-russische Marinekonvention. Das Deutsche Reich und die Flottenverhandlungen der Tripleentente am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2007.
- ¹³⁰ Nicolson and Buchanan's fears as cited in Rose, 'From "illusion" and "Angellism" to détente', p.341.
- ¹³¹ Riezler diary, 7 July 1914, in *Mombauer*, *Documents*, No.135.
- ¹³² Otte, *July Crisis*, p.520.
- ¹³³ Mombauer, *Documents*, No.73.
- ¹³⁴ Wilson, *Entente*, p.115.
- ¹³⁵ Lichnowsky to Bethmann Hollweg, 9 July 1914, in Mombauer, *Documents*, No.143.
- ¹³⁶ Jagow to Lichnowsky, 18 July 1914, *DD*, 1, No. 72.
- ¹³⁷ Michael Brock and Eleanor Brock (eds), *Margot Asquith's Great War Diary*, Oxford, OUP, 2014, p.7, n.5.
- ¹³⁸ See Wilson, *Entente*, p.109
- ¹³⁹ Otte, *July Crisis*, 142.
- ¹⁴⁰ See also Steiner and Neilson, *Britain*, p.258.
- ¹⁴¹ Martel, *The Month*, p.150
- ¹⁴² Steiner and Neilson, *Britain*, p.263.
- ¹⁴³ Otte, *July Crisis*, p.485.
- ¹⁴⁴ Grey's 3 August speech, in *Hansard, House of Commons Debates*, vol.65, cc1809-32.
- ¹⁴⁵ Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, p.559.
- ¹⁴⁶ Otte, *July Crisis*, p.456.
- ¹⁴⁷ See also *ibid*, p.460, on these points.
- ¹⁴⁸ Heinrich von Tschirschky to Bethmann Hollweg, 30 June 1914, in Mombauer, *Documents*, No.108; Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf's diary entry of 29 June 1914, in *ibid*, No.105.
- ¹⁴⁹ Pease Diary, 29 March 1912, cited in Wilson, 'Notes on the Non-Interventionists', p.100.
- ¹⁵⁰ Butterfield, 'Grey', p.18.
- ¹⁵¹ For Tirpitz's 'very out of place' statement, see Admiral von Müller's diary entry, 1 August 1914, in Mombauer, *Documents*, No. 373.
- ¹⁵² Riezler's diary entries for 20 July and 7 July, cited in Mombauer, *Documents*, No. 181 and No. 135.
- ¹⁵³ Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years 1892-1916*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, vol.1, p.267.
- ¹⁵⁴ Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, p.166.
- ¹⁵⁵ For a similar argument, see Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p.406.
- ¹⁵⁶ Wilson, *Entente*, p.101.
- ¹⁵⁷ Otte, *Foreign Office Mind*, p.382, citing Rodd to Grey Mss, 6 January 1913.
- ¹⁵⁸ Jonathan Steinberg, 'The German background to Anglo-German relations, 1905-1914, in Hinsley, *Foreign Policy of Sir Edward Grey*, pp.193-215, p.215.
- ¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Loreburn, *How the War came*, p.18.