

## FIFTY SHADES OF GREY : BRITAIN'S DIPLOMACY OF DUPLICITY IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Paul McGuill, Rúnaí, INC

*"Speech is silver, silence is golden: but to say first one thing and then another is Britannia metal."* - Otto Von Bismarck<sup>1</sup>

Many British historians like to depict the outbreak of the First World War as an 'avoidable accident' that somehow Britain sleep walked into war with Germany in 1914. This ignores the available facts that war with Germany was the inevitable and intentional outcome of policies pursued by Britain since at least 1895. Most of the active preparations for war particularly on the western front took place during the term of office of Foreign Secretary Edward Grey. In 1906 he gave approval to begin detailed military preparations for a war with Germany. The diplomatic encirclement of Germany had begun in 1904 with the secret alliance with France and continued in 1907 with Britain's alliance with Russia. But by early 1915 it was clear to both sides that their plans for a short decisive war were becoming bogged down in a morass of slaughter. Each side sought to tip the scales of war in their favour by enticing new allies to join them. The central powers won over Bulgaria while the allies persuaded Romania to their side with the promise of annexing the province of Transylvania (however According to historian John Keegan the allies secretly agreed that they would never honour this promise even before Romania entered the war) and eventually seduced Italy to change sides by offering her the Adriatic coast of Croatia and the south Tyrol in the alps in the Treaty of London of April 1915. However, none of these smaller allies were to play a decisive role, to win a major power would either have to be knocked out or a new major power join one side. The British failed to knock the Turks out of the war by using TE Lawrence's Arab uprising, while the Germans successfully knocked the Russians out of the war by smuggling Lenin and 30 other revolutionaries into Russia through Germany and Sweden in a sealed train in April 1917. General Ludendorff said " it is as right to attack Russia with Lenin as with poison gas".<sup>2</sup> Even this proved to be indecisive to the course of the war and one great power gradually came to be regarded by both sides as vital to the outcome of the war. America had since 1870 grown into a major financial and industrial world power. America more than doubled her population from 40 to 98 million between 1870 and 1914, while her steel production increased from 1.3 million tonnes in 1880 to 32 million tonnes in 1914.<sup>3</sup> Being neutral America was willing to sell her arms to both sides but Britain's naval blockade of Germany cut off this market from her. If she could be persuaded to commit her vast resources of money, industry and men to the allied side this would be decisive and if she could be persuaded to cut off her loans and arms supplies from the allies this could decide the war in Germany's favour.

To find virtue in the world of early 20th century international diplomacy is as fruitless a search as to seek a virgin in a bordello. Germany's actions helped to escalate a regional conflict between Austria and Serbia in to a European war but Britain's actions escalated a European war into a World War. It is inconceivable that without Britain's intervention lives would be lost on battlefields as far afield as

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<sup>1</sup> The Crime Against Europe, Roger Casement, Athol Books, Page 145.

<sup>2</sup> Europe & the Modern World 1870-1983, Stokes & Stokes page 123.

<sup>3</sup> ibid page 91

Namibia, China, the Falklands and Iraq. One of the principal architects of this 'Global war' to smash Germany economic and military power for a generation was a British liberal politician, Edward Grey.

Sir Edward Grey (1862-1937) was Britain's longest serving Foreign Secretary (1905-16), during his period in office the foundations of what would become known as World War One were laid an event which would determine the course of world history for at least the next century.

As Grey himself prophetically predicted on the outbreak of World War in 1914 "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall no see them lit again in our lifetime."<sup>4</sup>

Born into a privileged landed background, his family estate at 8.1km was four times the size of the Principality of Monaco. He was related to a former British Prime-Minister, Earl Grey and a future Prime Minister, Anthony Eden and Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax. After an uninspiring education at Oxford where he was deemed to be lazy he became Liberal MP for Berwick on Tweed at the age of 23. His attitude to German diplomacy was soured by their assertive offer to recognise the British annexation of Egypt in 1882 in exchange economic concession in the Ottoman Empire.

Under Kaiser William II Germany sought to move away from her traditional alliance with Russia and towards an alliance with Britain. In 1890 Germany traded her colonial island possession Zanzibar off the coast of Tanzania with Britain in return for the island of Helgoland in the North Sea.<sup>5</sup> By 1894 France had stepped into Germany's place and formed an alliance with Russia when Germany allowed her reassurance treaty lapse. With the prospect of Germany facing war on two fronts the first foundation stone of the 'Great war' was laid. Germany's prospect of an alliance with Britain took a blow with the discovery of gold in the Boer Republic of Transvaal in South Africa in 1886 which produced a quarter of the world's gold supply. Britain feared that the new wealth of the Boer Republic may lead to a unified South Africa under Boer leadership which may become an ally of Germany who in 1884 had set up a colony in nearby Namibia.<sup>6</sup>

If Germany were to dominate the cape this would endanger one of Britain's vital trade links the India and Australia. Britain's domination of southern Africa was now becoming a vital strategic interest. In December 1895 arch British imperialist Cecil Rhodes launched his abortive Jameson raid against the Transvaal which was quickly defeated by the Boers. Germany like many other nations saw thousands of her nationals flock to the gold rush in Transvaal to work as miners, believing them to be under threat by the unprovoked British invasion, the Kaiser considered sending troops to the Transvaal and making the state a German protectorate. Instead the Kaiser merely sent a telegram to President Kruger congratulating him on repelling the British invasion. This 'interference' by Germany led to a marked chill in Anglo German relations as well as anti German riots in London with mobs attacking German shops.<sup>7</sup> This potential German intervention led to the first British plan to cripple the German economy by imposing a naval blockade on the German coast in 1897. By 1905 under Admiral Fisher this plan had become the central plank of Britain's war strategy towards Germany. To counter act this British strategy of blockade and to promote its own global trade and military

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<sup>4</sup> Europe and the Modern World, 2nd ed. Stokes, John & Gwyneth, Longman, Page 96 & Chronicle of the 20th Century page 75.

<sup>5</sup> For Britain's later naval bombardment of this African colony in 1896 see 'Britain's Forgotten Wars, Ian Hermon, Sutton Publishing, Pages 396- 404.

<sup>6</sup> The Rise and Fall of the British Empire, Laurence James, Abacus, Page 259.

<sup>7</sup> Europe since 1870, Mark Tierney, CJ Fallon Page 81.

influence Germany embarked on a naval race with Britain in 1898, just as Britain claimed to want a 'balance of powers' in Europe Germany hoped to establish a 'balance of power at sea'. However Germany faced a monumental task .In 1896 Britain had 33 battleships and 130 heavy cruisers while Germany had only 4 battleships and 4 heavy cruisers.<sup>8</sup> By the outbreak of war in 1914 Germany had failed to bridge the gap of British Naval supremacy as Britain possessed 49 battleships and Germany only 29. Britain embarked on a diplomatic policy of encirclement of Germany. Britain entered into an alliance with Japan in 1902, an entente cordial with France in 1904, which settled various African colonial disputes and laid the foundations for any future partition of Thailand, and finally and most shockingly in 1907 Britain entered into an alliance with Russia the 'mother of despotism'. France had earlier formed an alliance with Russia in 1894. The threat of a possible invasion from both east and west outweighed Germany's fear of British blockade and starvation and she switched her military budget away from building up the navy to reinforcing the army. Britain introduced a new type of Battleship, the 'Dreadnought' and by 1906 by Germany was forced to admit defeat in the naval race. In 1914 Britain was the world's preeminent superpower and the Royal Navy was the equivalent of her nuclear arsenal. In total she had 648 ships and 709,000 sailors who could be deployed anywhere in the world at a few weeks' notice, Germany by comparison had a mere 79,000 sailors and 280 ships.<sup>9</sup>

Britain and Germany had flirted with each other over the possibility of an alliance for some time, in 1898, 1899 and 1901 Joseph Chamberlin the Colonial secretary had proposed an alliance with Germany. From 1898 to the outbreak of war in July 1914 Britain and Germany had been engaged in secret negotiations over the possible partition of the colonial possessions of Britain's oldest ally, Portugal, particularly her colony of Angola<sup>10</sup>. In 1901 with Lord Lansdowne and in 1912 with Lord Haldane Germany engaged in fruitless negotiations with Britain to bring to an end their hostile rivalry. In the latter Haldane mission Germany offered to end the naval race and accept British naval supremacy in exchange for British neutrality in any European war in which Germany was not the aggressor, this offer was rejected by Britain as it did not propose any advantage which Britain did not already possess.

But although on the surface diplomatic relations between Britain and Germany seemed to be improving behind the scenes Britain was devising ulterior plans. In 1906 Germany tried to split apart Britain and France's new entente cordial by opposing French colonial expansion in Morocco at the Algeciras conference in Spain. This policy backfired when Britain backed France's claims and Foreign secretary Grey gave the green light to secret Anglo French military cooperation.<sup>11</sup> Britain was terrified by the rapid rise of German Economic power in many sectors Germany either had or was poised to overtake Britain and relegate what was once 'the workshop of the world' into the 'dustbin of history.' In 1871 Germany produced 1.5 million tons of pig iron while Britain produced 6.5 million tons but by 1910 Germany produced 14.8 million tons and Britain only 10.2 million tons.<sup>12</sup>

'Sir Henry Wilson's War'

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<sup>8</sup> Europe since 1870, Mark Tierney Page 82

<sup>9</sup> Wikipedia 7 chronicle of the 20th century Page 193.

<sup>10</sup> Britain ,Europe and the World 1871-1971, David Arnold, pages 77 &88 & Europe Since Napoleon, David Thompson, Page 514

<sup>11</sup> Britain Europe &the World Arnold, page 78.

<sup>12</sup> Europe Since Napoleon, David Thompson, Pelican, Page 380.

One of the central figures in the Anglo French military cooperation and one of the chief architects of the infernal quagmire of slaughter that would become the western front was a native of Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, Field Marshal, Sir Henry Hughes Wilson (1864-1922). 'Ugly Wilson' earned his nickname and reputation as the 'ugliest man in the British army' after he was wounded in the face in the 3rd Burma war, a colonial conquest fought in 1885-6 where Britain engaged in 'collective punishment' of rebellious natives such as mass executions and burning villages. An inveterate careerist and gossip, Wilson ingratiated himself and alienated himself from most of the political and military elite of the period. It was claimed that merely being in the presence of senior politicians would bring him to full sexual arousal. In 1906 he became a general he owed his promotion to friends in the Liberal party establishment. By 1908 he was sent to France to make preparations for any future war with Germany, he surveyed what would in years to come be the battlefields of Flanders. In July 1909 he and the Committee of Imperial Defence planned to send a British Expeditionary Force of 150,000 to France as soon as war broke out. He also lobbied for the introduction of conscription before the war broke out. Unusually for a senior British officer of this period he was an ardent Francophile, spoke good French and was a friend of French General Foch. From 1910-1914 he was commander of Camberley Staff College. In 1911 he made preparations for any invasion of Belgium. In October 1913 he visited Constantinople and the future battlefields of Gallipoli, he was completely unimpressed by the Turkish army and military preparations and remained a firm 'westerner', believing that any future war would be won or lost on the western front. He would strongly oppose the Gallipoli landings of 1915 falling out with Churchill over this, he openly hoped that the campaign would be a fiasco and that Churchill should be tried for murder. On his return in November 1913 he was promoted to Major General.<sup>13</sup>

His preparations for the 'Great war for civilisation' were distracted by events closer to home. Wilson played a central role in the 'Curragh mutiny' of March 1914. Wilson split with the Liberal party political establishment over their plans to introduce Home Rule for Ireland and began to dine daily with the Conservative leader Bonar Law to whom he leaked information on the refusal of senior army officers in Ireland to take any action against loyalist opposition to Home Rule. Sixty senior British officers threatened to resign their commissions rather than obey an order to move against Ulster loyalists. The Conservatives promised to reinstate any officer who resigned over Ulster. Wilson also leaked military plans to the UVF who on the 24th April 1914 smuggled 20,000 rifles and 4 millions rounds of ammunition from Germany to Larne. These acts of treachery embittered the political establishment of the Liberal Party from Wilson but they were already exposed as men of straw.<sup>14</sup>

Turning his attention back to preparations for the 'great war', Wilson by now director of Military Operations from January to May 1914 visited France four times to finalise British war preparations. Wilson's careerist intrigues alienated him from Kitchener and Archibald Murray the new Chief of Staff. But when Britain finally declared war on Germany in August 1914 Kitchener was proved right in his belief that Wilson had underestimated the size of the German force and it was only the French 'Miracle at the Marne' in September 1914 which stopped the victory of the German Schlieffen Plan. The only option now for Germany was to prevent more British men and supplies reaching the front by seizing the channel ports. But this German advance was halted by the combined efforts of

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<sup>13</sup> Wikipedia

<sup>14</sup> Ireland Since the Famine, FSL Lyons, Fontana, 1973, Page 308-9

Belgium, Britain and France in the first battle of the Ypres from 14th October- 20th November 1914. Out of Britain's 'contemptible' little expeditionary force of 80,000 this one battle cost her 60,000 casualties of which 8000 were killed, by comparison, Britain's largest conflict of the 19th century, the Crimean war of 1855, had cost Britain 60,000 casualties.<sup>15</sup> With the German plan of a swift victory over the French now off the rails, some German generals admitted that the war was lost as they ordered trenches to be dug from the channel to the alps.

Britain had two immediate military objectives in World War One, firstly to stop the Germans defeating the French in the first few months of the war and secondly to use their overwhelming naval superiority to slowly strangle the German economy and starve German's civilian population into abject submission. The British elite was divided between 'easterners' who wanted to attack the Turkish Empire, steal her oil rich colonial possessions and help resupply their Russian Allies via the black sea and 'Westerners' like Wilson who wanted crush the German empire beyond recovery by bleeding her white on the western front and starving her at home. While Wilson intrigued to undermined his colleagues like Haig and Robertson, urged Bonar law to bring down the government in December 1915, was considered for the role of suppressing the 1916 rising and fell out with Lloyd George at Versailles his career continued to prosper, he was promoted to Lieutenant General, knighted in 1915, appointed to as Britain's representative to the supreme allied war Council In November 1917 and in February 1918 was appointed Chief of Staff, He retired as a Field Marshall and was elected as a Unionist MP for North Down. Although the World War One was a bad career move for Britain's 702,000 dead and 1,670,000 wounded it certainly was 'great' for Henry Wilson.<sup>16</sup> However, the war was to have an unexpected sting in its tale for Wilson. After the war Wilson promoted himself as Britain's would be Fuhrer and saviour of the Empire<sup>17</sup>. He virulently opposed Irish independence and advocated draconian repression of all dissent believing it to be Bolshevik inspired, he was even appointed as Stormont's military adviser. But on 22nd June 1922 having returned from a War Commemoration Wilson was gunned down on his doorstep by two IRA volunteers, Reggie Dunne and Joseph O Sullivan, both were ex servicemen, and O Sullivan had lost a leg at the battle of Ypres. Wilson was the first British MP to be assassinated since Spencer Percival in 1812 and the last until Airey Neave in 1979. The men were captured and beaten by an angry mob, sentenced to death and executed on the 16th August.<sup>18</sup> Even in death Wilson would contribute to more misery in Ireland as his killing was one of the principal reasons for Britain's threatened reoccupation of Ireland which prompted the outbreak of the civil war.

### 'The Yellow Peril'

Not only had Britain been making detailed and longstanding military plans for the utter destruction of her greatest economic rival, Germany, which had absolutely nothing to do with the violation of Belgian neutrality she and her allies had detailed plans for the premeditated violation of other countries neutrality and Sovereignty. In 1902 Britain was more worried by Russian expansionism in Asia than German 'world domination'. She found her Navy spread too thinly around the globe in 1898 she had tried and failed to form an alliance with Russia, then she turned to Germany and was

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<sup>15</sup> Europe Since 1870, Mark Tierney page 112-113, Europe and The Modern World 1870-1983 John & Gwyneth Stokes Pages 97-8, Europe Since Napoleon, David Thompson, Page 250.

<sup>16</sup> The Rise and Fall of the British Empire, Lawrence James, Abacus, page 367.

<sup>17</sup> ibid Page 384

<sup>18</sup> Michael Collins, Tim Pat Coogan, Hutchinson, pages 272-5

also rebuffed but in January 1902 Britain entered into an alliance with Japan. The German Kaiser had a nightmare which he shared with other European leaders of an Asiatic conquest of Europe which he named the 'Yellow Peril'. Japan's plans for imperialist expansion into China and Korea came into conflict with Russia's plans to do the same. Japan had since 1876 tried to flex her imperialist muscles. With the reassurance of her new alliance with Britain, on the 8th February 1904, the Japanese navy launched an unprovoked attack which wiped out the Russian navy anchored at Port Arthur in China. She then invaded Korea and Manchuria, and in May 1905 a second Russian fleet which had sailed from the Baltic lost 38 out of its 40 ships to the Japanese at Tsushima. By September 1905 both sides signed a peace treaty in New Hampshire in which both sides withdrew from Manchuria, although Japan was allowed to lease Guangdong and annex southern Sakhalin. Manchuria was divided into spheres of influence, Russian in the north and Japanese in the south. The Japanese 'special position' in independent Korea was recognised which allowed Japan to annex the country in 1910 and impose Japanese as the official language<sup>19</sup>. Britain's reaction to such naked imperialist aggression was very different from what it would be to a similar attack in Pearl Harbour in 1941. In 1904 The Times of London reported "The Japanese have opened the war by an act of daring which is destined to take a place of honour in Naval annals".<sup>20</sup> In 1904 her allies pre-emptive strike (like Britain's own in Copenhagen in 1804) had been courageous and daring but her enemies unprovoked aggression in 1941 was cowardly and dastardly. The head of the British Navy Sir John Fisher wanted to copy the Japanese attack against the German navy in the north sea.

On the 16th August 1914, 12 days after Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality caused Britain to declare war on Germany, Britain and her Japanese ally violated Chinese neutrality when 23,000 Japanese and 1500 British troops marched through China to bombard and besiege the German colony of Tsingtao . Although outnumbered 6:1 the Germans held out for two months, but after the deaths of 199 Germans, 236 Japanese and 12 British the German colony surrendered on 7th November 1914 . The German garrison stood to attention for the Japanese victory parade but turned their backs on the British troops such was their disgust at their cynicism. Japan went on to conquer other German possessions in the Pacific such as Palau, Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. The German fleet escaped China to destroy a smaller British squadron at Coronel off the coast of Chile before finally being defeated by the British off the coast of the Falkland Islands. Japan felt herself the victim of the racism of her western allies. On the 4th March 1913 despite of Japanese government protests California passed a law prohibiting Japanese nationals from owning or leasing land in the state. However, in late January 1917 with America was poised to enter the war alongside Japan and eager to prevent Japan from switching sides following protests by the Japanese ambassador the State Department pressurised Idaho and Oregon into withdrawing two similar alien land bills in their Legislatures.<sup>21</sup> At The Versailles peace talks in 1919 she proposed a racial equality clause for the treaty. Japan herself had not demonstrated a great deal of racial equality in Korea and China and in April 1915 she had imposed her humiliating '21 demands' on China which turned China into a Japanese vassal state. The Japanese intended this racial equality clause to apply only to Japan in effect re-designating them honorary whites. Of course the idea of racial equality was anathema to the imperialist powers, Australia who had recently adopted its 'white Australia policy' vigorously

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<sup>19</sup> Europe & the Modern World, Stokes & Stokes, page 20-1

<sup>20</sup> ibid page 89

<sup>21</sup> The Zimmerman Telegram, Barbara Tuchman, 1958, pages 35 & 129

lobbied Britain to reject the clause.<sup>22</sup> Even American President Wilson who had championed his 'fourteen points' had to bow to pressure from his own southern and mid westerns pro segregation Democratic voting states and oppose the clause. When a vote was taken at the Paris conference it was passed 17 votes to 11 but Wilson intervened to assert that a unanimous vote was needed and the proposal was thrown out. Japan was so shocked by this hypocrisy of her allies that when her Alliance with Britain was due to be renewed in 1923 she refused.

### Strange Bedfellows

In 1906 Grey negotiated an end to Britain's 'Great game' with Russia by dividing neutral Persia into spheres of influence and secretly entered into an alliance with Russia an autocracy, which one year before on the 22nd January 1905 had shot down at least 500 peaceful protesters in the streets of St Petersburg on 'Bloody Sunday'.<sup>23</sup> In suppressing the ensuing revolt the Russian state killed 15,000 people and arrested 70,000 by April 1906.<sup>24</sup> Russia under Tsar Nicholas II became a state of repression and intolerance, his wife Tsarina Alexandra assured him that "Russia loves to feel the whip"<sup>25</sup> In 1907 Prime Minister Stolypin had 3500 people hanged and in some villages every 10th man was flogged, 100,000 were sent into exile and beginning in Kishinev in 1903 there were frequent state sponsored anti Semitic pogroms. Russia's 5 million Jews weren't the only minority to be suppressed, 1000 Armenians were massacred in Baku in September 1905, the Poles, Latvians, Estonians, Ukrainians and Lithuanians all had their culture and language suppressed. In June 1910 Finnish autonomy was ended. Muslims were forced to convert to Christianity while non orthodox Christians faced religious discrimination.<sup>26</sup>

In order to win over the Russians Britain was prepared to jettison a former longstanding but equally bloodstained ally, Turkey. The old order in the Ottoman empire was overthrown by the westernised and progressive 'young Turk' revolution in 1909 who opened schools and universities to women, expanded public works and public transportation and modernised the army with 40 German officers. This raised the suspicions of Britain and her allies who successfully insisted the senior German general be moved to a less sensitive post. The Young Turk triumvirate were strongly Anglophile and on six separate occasions from November 1908 to June 1914 proposed alliances with Britain and her allies only to be rebuffed.<sup>27</sup> Britain's strategy needed a Russian steamroller against Germany in the east more than a Turkish ally who had already been beaten by the Italians in 1911 and the Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians in 1912. Britain thought Turkey would remain neutral but secretly hoped she would join Germany as this would give her a pretext to annex her more valuable provinces. Britain also feared that reforms in the Ottoman Empire would be used as a precedent for her Muslim subjects. Fearing aggression from Britain's ally Russia Turkey signed a secret treaty with Germany on 2nd August 1914. Ironically in 1913 Britain, France, Italy, Austria and Germany held talks to establish zones of economic influence in the Ottoman Empire which could act a political blueprint for the future partition of the 'sick man of Asia'<sup>28</sup>. In August 1914 Britain further sought to provoke

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<sup>22</sup> The storey of Australia, A.G.I. Shaw, Faber & Faber, page 230.

<sup>23</sup> Europe & the Modern World 1870-1983, 2nd ed. John & Gwyneth Stokes Longman Page 42.

<sup>24</sup> Europe Since Napoleon, Thompson, page 405.

<sup>25</sup> Europe & the Modern World, Stokes & Stokes (1975)Page 86

<sup>26</sup> Europe Since 1870, Mark Tierney page 62.

<sup>27</sup> The Ottoman Empire, Lord Kinross, 1977, pages 599-613

<sup>28</sup> ibid Page 606.

Turkey by in breach of international law, seizing two Turkish warships being built in Britain. Germany offered to sell Turkey two of her warships instead, Churchill wanted to sink these ships and seize the Dardanelles but was overruled by Kitchener who wanted to maintain Turkish neutrality until British troops were safely transported from India to the western front through Suez. On 27th September 1914 without any justification Britain's navy ordered a Turkish torpedo boat back into the Dardanelles to which Turkey replied by closing and mining the straights. On the 28th October 1914 Turkish ships attacked Russian Navy in Odessa and Sebastopol. Forgetting the same actions of his Japanese allies against Russia in 1905 Sir Edward Grey commented "never was there a more wanton, gratuitous and unprovoked attack by one country on another" and one week later Britain and her allies declared war on the Ottoman empire.<sup>29</sup>

So far from God !

"Poor Mexico, So far from God and so near the United States." - President Porfirio Diaz <sup>30</sup>

Like many other third world Countries Mexico's natural resourced were to become her greatest curse as the country was to become a pawn an a geo political game between the worlds 'great powers'. The power play would lead to revolution and civil war from 1911 to 1917 which would leave a quarter of a million people dead.<sup>31</sup> Oil was first discovered in Mexico in 1869 but it wasn't commercially exploited until the turn of the 20th Century. Sir Weetman Pearson a Yorkshire business tycoon, Privy Councillor and Liberal Party MP later to be known as Lord Cowdry set up the Mexican Eagle Petroleum Co which began commercial exploitation Mexican oil in 1899. soon It was the biggest oil field in the world producing 110,000 barrels a day. By 1913 Mexico supplied one quarter of the world's supply of oil and Lord Cowdry owned the entire Royal Navy's supply of oil.<sup>32</sup> Despite its oil riches Mexico was a land of illiteracy and extreme poverty where 85 % of the population were landless peons. From 1876 until 1911 Mexico was ruled by the dictatorial and corrupt President Diaz until he was overthrown in a revolution led by the reformist Francesco Madero. However, In February 1913 to the delight of foreign investors Madero was overthrown in a counter revolution by the drunken, Amerindian, reactionary General Victoriano Huerta . One of his first acts was to have Madero and his former Vice President Pino Suarez assassinated while in custody this act alienated him from the newly inaugurated idealist, President Woodrow Wilson of the USA who insisted Huerta not run for President. In response Huerta dissolved congress arrested 110 of its members and was predictable elected Mexican President.<sup>33</sup> Cowdrey's friend British ambassador to Mexico Sir Lionel Carden urged Britain and 16 other nations to recognise President Huerta which they did on the 3rd of May but despite the urgings of his ambassador ,Henry Lane Wilson President Wilson refused to recognise the new Mexican regime and backed an insurrection in the north led by General Carranza and his 'constitutionalists' lifting the arms embargo on him in February 1914.

Japan's Imperial ambitions collided with those of the USA in Hawaii (where Japanese immigrants were a majority), the Philippines and Guam which the USA had conquered from Spain in 1898. Many in both countries believed that war was inevitable. So Japan looked towards Mexico as the soft

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<sup>29</sup> ibid page 612.

<sup>30</sup> Zimmerman Telegram, Page 58.

<sup>31</sup> Stokes & Stokes, Europe and the Modern World 2nd ed, Page 261.

<sup>32</sup> Zimmerman, page 37

<sup>33</sup> ibid Pages 32-39



underbelly of the USA. on the 28th October 1908 Japan and Mexico signed a secret treaty. In February 1911 a German spy in Paris , Horst von der Goltz got the Mexican finance minister , Jose Yves Limantour, drunk and stole a copy of the Japanese Mexican treaty and passed a copy to the US ambassador to Mexico Henry Lane Wilson.<sup>34</sup> The Japanese fleet visited Mexico, the Mexican foreign minister Mr De la Barra visited the Emperor and the Japanese agreed to supply the new Huerta regime arms to defeat the US backed insurrection. In this they were not alone, Germany who had long desired to set up a naval base on the Mexican coast, Ambassador Admiral Von Hintze offered to supply arms the new Huerta regime if he would cut off Britain's supply of oil in the event of war. In early 1914 Germany sent three ship loads of weapons from Hamburg the Ypiranga, Bavaria, Kronprinzessen Cecilie destined for Veracruz in Mexico. However, on 6th April 1914 8 sailors from the USS Dolphin, flagship of US admiral Mayo, went to the Mexican port of Tampico to seeking supplies. As the port was under martial law due to the rebellion the US sailors were detained and returned to their vessel. The Admiral took offence and demanded a 21 gun salute from the Mexican authorities, but as the US did not recognise the Mexican government they refused. Washington saw this insult as an opportunity for 'regime change' and to prevent German arms reaching Mexico and issued an ultimatum. With the passing of the deadline President Wilson arranged for a midnight telephone conference of his cabinet in which they agreed to invade the Mexican port of Veracruz and illegally seize the German arms ship Ypiranga . The following morning of the 22nd April 1914 saw the first unprovoked attack of that momentous year. Under orders of from the idealist President Wilson and his pacifist Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels the USS Prairie shelled the city of Veracruz while US marines seized key buildings resulting in 19 American dead and 71 injured and 126 Mexicans killed and 95 wounded.<sup>35</sup> Although the US Secretary of state was forced to apologise to the German ambassador and allow the German ships off load their cargos of 200 machine guns, 16.8 million rounds of ammunition and 8327 rolls of barbed wire the American attack succeeded in undermining the rule of President Huerta who fled into exile in Spain on the German ship Dresden on the 17th July 1914 to be replaced by Wilson's protégé Carranza. Nine days later Austria would declare war on Serbia and Mexico would again find herself a pawn in a game of geopolitical intrigue.

By early 1915 it was clear that the war on the western front was bogged down in a stalemate, to defeat the French, the British would have starved out of the war by cutting off her supplies by U boat attacks. Such a strategy risked provoking the massive power house of the United States into war with Germany. However, if the US were embroiled in a war in Mexico she would be unlikely to have the resources or wish to become embroiled in European affairs, also if Japan could be tempted by more territorial gains in China to switch sides and declare war on Russia this would take the pressure off the Central powers in the East. When Germany approached Japan with this offer she leaked it to her ally Russia.<sup>36</sup> In February 1915 German Captain Franz Von Rintelen offered support a military coup to restore General Huerta to power in Mexico. Germany arranged for Huerta to travel to the USA, paid for his services and those of his supporters and bought arms for his insurrection, however when the US became aware of his plans to cross into Mexico to lead a revolution he was arrested and died in custody amid accusations of poisoning on 14th January 1916.

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<sup>34</sup> Zimmerman, page 30

<sup>35</sup> Zimmerman, Page 44

<sup>36</sup> ibid page 53.

However, Huertas was not the only rebellion in Mexico at this time. In the north a former potential ally of the USA, Pancho Villa who believed he had been betrayed by the USA in their support for Carranza and massacred 16 American engineers at Santa Ysabel on 10th January 1916. On 9th March 1916 400 of Villa's men invaded the town of Columbus, New Mexico killing scores of its residents. The ensuing political and media frenzy forced President Wilson to sanction a punitive raid into Mexico led by General Pershing and 6600 men<sup>37</sup>. Germany found herself in the ideal position of encouraging Villa to provoke a US invasion while encouraging President Carranza to assert Mexican sovereignty. On 21 June 1916 12 US troops were killed and 23 captured when Mexican Government troops opened fire on them at Carrizal. German investment and propaganda in Mexico increased and President Carranza once the puppet of America moved ever closer to Germany and her diplomat in Mexico, Eckhardt. By November 1916 80% of the US regular army or 12,000 troops were tied down in Mexico, Britain warned Mexico not to allow her ports harbour German U Boats or there would be 'drastic action'. Japan who had agreed only to sell arms to her allies now openly courted Mexico and offered to sell her arms. At this crucial moment Arthur Zimmerman a 50 year old bachelor who drank 3 bottles of Moselle wine each day at lunch was appointed Germany's first non aristocratic foreign minister he favoured the policy of all out U boat warfare even if this provoked America into the war. He had a misplaced faith in the power of America's 1.3 million German born citizens to keep the USA out of the war, he once warned "in case of trouble there are half a million trained Germans in America who will join the Irish and start a revolution." to which US Ambassador Gerard retorted "in that case there are half a million lamp-posts to hang them on"<sup>38</sup>

In December 1916 President Wilson was re-elected under the slogan 'he kept us out of the war'. He immediately made a peace proposal asked the combatants to state their war aims. The war was at this stage costing Britain alone \$10 million a day, most of which she was spending on supplies and munitions manufactured in the US with massive loans from American banks like JPMorgan who in October 1915 alone granted France a half a billion dollar loan. President Wilson thought he could use the Allies dependence of US supplies to force peace however as far as the US banks were concerned their bet on an allied victory was 'too big to fail', any outcome other than an allied victory would cripple the US economy. Britain's national debt increased twelvefold from 1914-1918 and the total cost of the war for all belligerents was estimated at \$186 billion,<sup>39</sup> US exports increased from \$824 million in 1913 to \$2.25 billion in 1917. The allies of course did not plan on repaying their debts out of their own resources but from crippling reparations imposed on the vanquished foe. Therefore the allies rejected Wilson's peace proposal on the 12th January 1917. Germany was willing to risk all on one last gamble, at a conference in the Castle of Pless in Poland the head of the German Navy Admiral Von Holtzendorff outlined in a meticulously detailed 200 page report how if German U boats could sink 600,000 tons of allied shipping a month Britain could be brought to her knees before the next harvest in six months time. It was impossible for the US whose standing army was little more than 20,000 men could recruit, train, equip and transport enough men to Europe within that time frame to prevent defeat and certainly not if she was embroiled in a war with Mexico. Germany knew well how effective hunger was as a weapon Britain had imposed a naval blockade on Germany and her allies since the outbreak of the war. In 1915 Britain had extended her blockade to the neutral Netherlands and seized Dutch ships in allied ports. By 1915 bread rationing had been

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<sup>37</sup> ibid page 81.

<sup>38</sup> ibid page 96

<sup>39</sup> Europe Since Napoleon, Page 601.

introduced in Germany and her imports and exports had fallen by 55% of their pre war level, by 1918 the German meat ration was only 12% of the pre war level, the supply of cheese , rice, eggs and cereals was only 20% of the pre war level and fish supplies were nonexistent. Although Germany sought to counteract these shortages with 'Kriegssozialismus' or Walter Rathenau's war socialism. Turnips and potatoes were mixed with flour to make bread, Germans went without meat two days a week and were compelled to invent ersatz materials like cellulose and rayon.<sup>40</sup> Shortages ,even of coal, were exacerbated by Germany's imprudent conscription of experienced farm workers and miners. In all 424,000 German civilians would die of malnutrition and 209,000 more from flu during the war and another 100,000 in the six months of continuing blockade after the war's end. Germany proposed to Mexico that if the US joined with the allies in the war Germany would back a Mexican invasion of the USA to re-conquer the states of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Zimmerman originally planned to send this message on the German merchant submarine 'Deutschland' but this plan was cancelled at the last minute and it was decided to send the message by coded telegram instead. On the 16th January 1917 this fateful proposal was sent by Foreign minister Zimmerman to his diplomats Bernstorff and Eckhart in Mexico.<sup>41</sup> On the 31st January 1917 Germany told the USA that unrestricted U boat warfare would commence in eight hours. On the 3rd of February America broke off diplomatic relations with Germany. On the 5th of February Zimmerman sent a second telegram which proposed German support for a Mexican invasion even if the USA did not join the allies. On the 25th of January Wilson ordered the withdrawal of all US troops from Mexico which was completed on the 5th February.<sup>42</sup>

Even still Germany had reason to be hopeful, on 13th February Carranza called for all neutral nations to embargo war supplies to belligerent countries and toyed with the idea of taking back sub soil oil rights for Mexico this in effect would cut off the Royal navies oil supply bringing it to a halt. The oil fields themselves were defended by an Indian bandit warlord Palaez who services went to the highest bidder. <sup>43</sup>On the 26th February the liner Laconia was sunk by U boats with the loss of two American lives while Congress was debating a bill to arm American merchant ships, this bill was passed by 403 votes to 13. The future of the war and world history hung in the balance. Would America fight Mexico at home or join the allies against the German's in Europe?

### The Secret War

Germany foolishly believed that their codes were unbreakable, however as early as 1912 the British committee of Imperial Defence had a plan to leave Germany without direct cable communication with the outside world and force her to transmit her diplomatic and military communications by wireless from Nauen were they could be intercepted by British naval intelligence. Britain declared war on Germany at midnight on the 4th August 1914 before the sun rose the following morning Germany's five transatlantic telegraph cables were cut by the British ship Telconia off the Dutch coast at Emden. Her remaining transatlantic cable from West Africa to South America and her cables in the Mediterranean were owned by the British firm Eastern Telegraph. From this moment on all German encrypted communications were intercepted by 800 wireless operators and 80 cryptographers and clerks in 'Room 40' of the British admiralty who intercepted 200 radio messages

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<sup>40</sup> ibid page 576

<sup>41</sup> Zimmerman pages 124-125

<sup>42</sup> ibid pages 128- 131

<sup>43</sup> ibid page 35-6

a day. The decryption team was led by a Scot, Alfred Ewing. The encrypted code was wrapped inside a cipher if they could break the code they could read Germanys messages before the intended recipient. Until then Britain had every German message but couldn't understand them. In August a German cruiser the Magdeburg was accompanying mine layers when it ran aground near the island of Odenholm off the coast of Finland. Despite an order to destroy their code book it was recovered by the Russian Navy and passed to the British admiralty on the 13th October 1914 who now set about cracking the German codes. In December 1914 another code book recovered from a German destroyer sunk by the British on the 13th October was also recovered.<sup>44</sup> All of this was overseen by Admiral Sir William Reginald 'blinker' Hall, a man who looked like a demonic Mr Punch and earned the nickname 'Blinker' because of an involuntary facial twitch. On the 5th February the Anglo Persian oil pipeline was cut by a German spy and ex consul to Bushire called William Wassmuss who was on a mission to get Persia to join with Germany and throw off their Anglo Russian yoke. In the provincial capital Shiraz he had led an attack which captured the British Consul and killed the Vice consul. He had been captured by the British but escaped after they learned his identity. In violation of Persian neutrality and sovereignty the British raided the German Consulate in Bushire and seized Wassmuss's documents including his diplomatic code book which was brought to Hall in London and provided another piece of the puzzle. By April 1915 Britain had the final piece of the puzzle thanks to Alexander Szek a 20 year old radio engineering student, born in Britain of Austrian parents and living in Brussels he had repaired the damaged powerful Belgian radio transmitter on Rue de la Loi after the invasion and worked in the station with access to the German codes. British intelligence put pressure on his family members still living in England to persuade him to steal the codes. This he did over a period of three months only to disappear never to be seen again, his father accused British intelligence of his murder so that he would take his secret to his grave.<sup>45</sup>

Hall was also instrumental in the failure of the 1916 rising, John Devoy's dispatch sent to the German general staff from America was intercepted and decoded by Room 40 it revealed that the rising would be around Easter.<sup>46</sup> In early 1915 British intelligence used a yacht the 'sayonara' to survey possible landing sites for German arms along the west coast. Hall's code breaking led to the capture of the Aud and of Roger Casement. Hall even played a role in interrogating Roger Casement and in smearing him with the 'black diaries'.<sup>47</sup>

Germany too was fighting a secret war, Captain Franz von Rintelen was a German spy who arrived in New York on 3rd April 1915 his mission was to deny the allies vital supplies of American manufactured munitions, the American Bethlehem steel company produced 20.1 million artillery shells for the allies, 40% of the shells used in the war. Germany planned to achieve their objectives by sabotage, industrial unrest and embroiling America in a conflict with Mexico, Japan or both which would divert resources away from Europe. Rintelen funnelled \$500,000 into 'Labour's National Peace Council' run by David Lamar who organised strikes and slowdowns at ports and munitions factories. He also had a German chemist Dr Scheele make time bombs to be placed in the holds of allied munitions ships.<sup>48</sup> Germany assisted Indian nationalists living in America which led to a mutiny of Indian troops in Singapore. Germany was also funding former President Huerta to stage a coup in

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<sup>44</sup> Zimmerman, Pages 9-15

<sup>45</sup> Zimmerman, Pages 14-18

<sup>46</sup> Roger Casement, 16 lives, Angus Mitchell, O'Brien Press, Dublin 2013, Page 335

<sup>47</sup> ibid page 270

<sup>48</sup> Zimmerman, pages 57-66

Mexico, €800,000 was deposited in his German bank account in Havana and \$95,000 in his account in Mexico. The British were able to learn this information from their intercepts but also from the 'Bohemian Alliance' spy ring led by former Czech President Masaryk and a Czech Socialist called Voska who had 80 agents acting as mail clerks in the Austrian consulate, the maid to the German ambassadors wife, a chauffeur in the German embassy. This group also bugged the German spies favourite meeting place the Manhattan Hotel. All of this information was passed to the British naval attaché, Captain Guy Gaunt who in turn passed it to Admiral Hall who passed much of it to the Americans. This led the American President to instruct Secretary of the Treasury Mc Adoo to order the head of the Secret Service, William J Flynn to bug the phones of the Austrian and German embassies. Much of the information uncovered by the British would be published in an American newspaper the 'Providence Journal' edited by an Australian- British agent, John R Rathom in an attempt to turn US public opinion against Germany. On the 24th July 1915 a German diplomat Dr Heinrich Albert forgot his brief case on the sub way. It was recovered by Secret Service agent Frank Burke and contained details of German sabotage in America. In August 1915 the British arrested an America courier for the Central powers, John J Archibald on board the ship ' Rotterdam'. He had 110 documents detailing the German plot to install Huerta in Mexico , plots to stir up strikes, payments to saboteurs and propagandists when this information was published President Wilson expelled the Austrian Ambassador Count Drumba.<sup>49</sup>

Germany attempted to acquire more secure and reliable methods of transmitting secret messages. The Germans bribed the Mexican Minister for Telegraphs, Mario Mendez, for \$600 a month to illegally send coded messages to her agents in America. The Swedish charge de affairs in Mexico, Folke Cronholm, was bribed with a German decoration the Kronenorden, second class to transmit messages over the Swedish diplomatic cable to Stockholm where they were relayed to Berlin this method was known as 'the Swedish roundabout'. However as Britain also intercepted Swedish diplomatic cables it was of no use. In December 1916 President Wilson attempted to negotiate peace in Europe offering 'peace without victory, and only a peace between equals can last'. Germany offered to send their terms for peace to the Americans but asked if they would be allowed to transmit communications to their embassy over the American diplomatic cable in German code, this permission was given on 28th December. On 12th January 1917 the allies rejected the US peace offer and on the 16th January Germany sent the infamous Zimmerman telegram offering a German alliance with Mexico in the event of an invasion of the USA to Ambassadors Bernstorff and Eckhart in Washington and Mexico over the American cable. British intelligence intercepted this message by all three routes and had it fully decoded by 19th February. The British Foreign Secretary and former Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour was afraid that unless Britain revealed that they had cracked the German codes the Americans would think the telegram a fraud. He gave the telegram to the Pro British US ambassador Page on 23rd February who passed it to the President and allowed Americans to decode it for themselves on the condition that they do not reveal that Britain had cracked the codes. The Mexican foreign minister lied by denying knowledge of the Zimmerman telegram. The telegram was now circulating among US politicians and in the media but most Americans believed that it was a fake until the 3rd of March when inexplicably Zimmerman admitted at a press conference that he wrote it. The American public was outraged that Germany would secretly plot with Mexico using their own telegraph lines to invade the USA the West and Mid West now joined the East coast in demanding war on Germany, on the 9th March without congresses backing Wilson

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<sup>49</sup> ibid Pages 62-75

issued an executive order to arm US merchant ships. Yet he still resisted the demand for war until the Russian revolution of the 19th March in which Kerensky overthrew the Tsar. The following day the US cabinet voted unanimous for war (with Wilson abstaining) and on the 2nd April 1917 the US congress voted by 373 to 50 for war. In the coming months the USA was able to use its overwhelming economic power, to recruit train and transport up to 10,000 troops a day plus supplies to Europe where they would give the allied powers the will to hold on, break the will of the German army and people and overwhelm a German army which at that point had been forced to conscript 15 year olds.

In the world of early 20th Century international diplomacy there are very few 'heroes' . Little except scale separates the Turkish genocide of 600,000 in Armenia from Belgian genocide of 2 million in the Congo, German imperialist massacres in Namibia from British Imperialist massacres in Sudan or Russian suppression of her nationalities from those of Austria the cynical auction diplomacy and side changing of Italy and Portugal. Britain's hypocritical diplomacy of duplicity turned a crisis in the Balkans into a worldwide catastrophe which apart from the 10 million killed led directly to the Second World War, the Russian revolution and civil war, the breakup of the Ottoman empire and ensuing chaos in the middle east, the rise of insatiable Japanese and Italian imperialism in Asia and Africa and totalitarian regimes in Germany, Russia and China. She declared war on Germany for violating Belgian neutrality yet she and her Japanese ally did exactly the same to China, weeks later and America's violation of Mexican sovereignty months before was not a cause of concern. She declared war on Turkey for an 'unprovoked' attack on the Russian navy yet less than 10 years before she had praised her Japanese ally for a much larger 'pre emptive strike'. She accused Turkey of genocide in Armenia yet her ally Belgium had slaughtered at least three time as many people in the Congo and her other ally Russia had killed thousands in state sponsored pogroms against her Jewish and Armenian minorities years before. Britain cynically held out the prospect of improving relations, benevolent neutrality or even an alliance with Germany and Turkey up to a few weeks before war was declared while for many years she had secretly devised detailed plans for war and the dismemberment of her adversaries. She lured countries like Italy, Romania and Japan into the war with promised of territorial aggrandisement she never had any intention of honouring. Britain made secret contradictory promises to Zionists and Arab nationalists to encourage them to support the war with the intention of deceiving both and paid lip services to President Wilson's 14 points including freedom of the seas which she never intended to observe. Britain hypocritically accused Germany of seeking 'world domination' yet this was exactly the position Britain possessed both before and after the war.

The British media and their Irish lapdogs will seek to glorify this inhuman carnival of catastrophe as OUR 'great war.' Myles Dungan may shed a sentimental tear and Kevin Myres' voice may croak with emotion as they recount tales of individual suffering or bravery, but these histrionics should not be mistaken for history. They will offer no analysis of the causes or consequences of this conflict but instead serve us a draft of 'history light', focusing not on the big picture but on individual tales of valour and horror. The First World War was not a 'war to end all wars' or a war for the 'freedom of small nations' it was a war to maintain the status quo of British world domination through the utter destruction of her closest rivals, friend and foe alike. That the war lasted longer and cost more in blood and treasure than Grey and his comrades originally envisaged only served to raise the stakes to a point where they could not afford to loose. These are the points we must keep in the front of

our minds in the decade of commemorations for 'those who forget their history are doomed to repeat it.'