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**H-Diplo Article Review Forum on Heather Jones and Richard Smith, eds. "Sir Edward Grey and the Outbreak of the First World War." *International History Review*, Special Issue 38:2 (2016): 243-355.**

Reviewed by:

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Introduction by **Marc Trachtenberg**, University of California at Los Angeles

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“**B**ecause Sir Edward Grey was such a nice man, historians have followed his contemporaries in excusing the reality that he was such a disastrous minister: arguably the most incompetent foreign secretary of all time for his responsibility in taking Britain into the First World War, having failed in July 1914 to do all within his power to stop the conflagration.” So wrote Andrew Adonis, a former U.K. Cabinet Minister, in a May 2013 review of Michael Waterhouse’s biography of Grey.<sup>1</sup> But the British writer Philip Ziegler, reviewing the same book the following month, took a very different line. “No Englishman,” he wrote, “could have prevented the 1914-18 war,” but “Grey got as close to it as anyone could have done, and Waterhouse should be thanked for reminding us of his existence.”<sup>2</sup>

Academics, of course, tend to be more restrained in their judgments, but even among scholars Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary from 1905 to 1916, remains a controversial figure. What are we to make of his policy? What effect would a different policy have had? Could the war have been avoided if the basic approach had been different, or if Grey had acted differently in July 1914?

These questions relate in a very fundamental way to the great historical problem of the origins of the First World War. So it was natural, given the recent interest in that problem prompted by the hundredth

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Adonis, “Fatal Levity,” *The New Statesman*, 2 May 2013 ([link](#)).

<sup>2</sup> Philip Ziegler, “*Edwardian Requiem*, by Michael Waterhouse: Review,” *The Spectator*, 29 June 2013 ([link](#)).

anniversary of the outbreak of the war, that a conference was held in November 2014 on “Sir Edward Grey and the Outbreak of the First World War.” A number of distinguished scholars presented papers at that conference, and a collection of articles based on those presentations was published last year as a special issue of the *International History Review*.<sup>3</sup>

We present here comments on that collection by three scholars who have themselves produced important work in this area: Keith Robbins, author of many books and articles on British history, including a major work on Grey; Keith Hamilton, another leading student of British foreign policy in the twentieth century; and Andreas Rose, a younger scholar who recently published an important study of British foreign policy before the First World War (an English translation of which came out earlier this year).

Reading the papers in the collection, and the three comments as well, one is struck above all by the lack of consensus on all the key issues. Some of the contributors—especially Keith Wilson, F.R. Bridge, and (at least to a certain extent) Christopher Clark—criticize Grey. Other contributors—especially Thomas Otte, but also Annika Mombauer—take a more positive view. But where exactly do they differ? And what is the argument about Grey really about?

Grey used to be criticized mainly for waiting too long to make it clear in the crisis immediately preceding the war that Britain was going to stand with France; such an unambiguous warning, it was said, would have had a strong deterrent effect on Germany. But today Grey’s critics tend to argue not that Grey’s commitment to the entente with France and Russia was not strong enough, but rather that it was too strong—that Grey was too *ententiste*. Wilson, for example, says that Grey’s “known propensity” to remain on good terms with Russia gave the Russians “a degree of leverage which they exploited to the full in insisting on British support” during the July Crisis in 1914. It was Grey’s ability to bring the Liberal government down, and his determination to do so if Russia’s demands were not met, that “swung the British government from a neutralist stance to one of full participation in the Great War.”<sup>4</sup> For F.R. Bridge, it was Grey’s “overriding concern to avoid offending his Entente partners” that led him to pursue a policy that intensified Austria’s desperation and “soon proved fatal to peace.” Even during the Bosnian crisis, in 1908, Grey had issued what amounted to a “diplomatic blank check” to Russia “that betrayed a somewhat reckless devotion to the entente with St. Petersburg.” But it was the Austrians’ experience during the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, he writes, “that ultimately destroyed—irreparably” their “faith in concert diplomacy”; and it was “in Grey’s contribution to this development, and to the equally fatal accumulation of tension in the Near East, that his share of the responsibility lies for the collapse of the concert and the outbreak of war in 1914.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Heather Jones and Richard Smith, eds., “Sir Edward Grey and the Outbreak of the First World War,” special issue of the *International History Review* 38:2, published online in March 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Keith Wilson, “Grey and the Russian Threat to India, 1892-1915,” *International History Review* 38:2 (2016), 275 ([link](#)).

<sup>5</sup> F.R. Bridge, “Sir Edward Grey and Austria-Hungary,” *International History Review* 38:2 (2016), 264, 266, 268-69, 271-72 ([link](#)).

Clark takes a similar view. Grey, he writes, “did not inspect or weigh up the Austrian case against Serbia. Indeed, he showed no interest in it whatsoever.” This was not because he thought Serbia was innocent of the charges brought against it; “he clearly did not.” It was because in Grey’s view the rights and wrongs of the case did not really matter; regardless of who was to blame, the British would be pulled in because France would side with Russia, and Britain could not allow France to be crushed.<sup>6</sup> But Clark does not feel that the policy based on that kind of thinking was the only policy Britain could have pursued. The scenario Grey had in mind—what Clark calls the “Balkan inception scenario”—was not, he points out, “an immutable feature of the system.” It was instead “a fabric of partisan attitudes, commitments, and threats.”<sup>7</sup> The implication is that the assumptions on which Grey’s policy was built could easily have been different: the British could have shown a greater regard for Austria’s interests; they could have distanced themselves more from their Entente partners; their policy could have had more of a ‘concert’ flavor. What all this implies is that if they had gone that route, the story might have had a very different ending.

Of our three commentators, Andreas Rose seems most sympathetic to this general line of argument. He refers to Grey’s “ambiguous but nevertheless inflexible and one-sided foreign policy course” and feels Britain was strong enough to have pursued a more independent policy. He seems to regret the fact that Grey “never acted as the Foreign Secretary of the greatest imperial power, the greatest financial power, the greatest naval power, and the power that, due to its geopolitical position, was somehow predestined for the role of arbiter in Europe.” The British did not have to allow themselves to be pulled along in Russia’s wake. They could have done more to shape the course of events. Rose, in fact, finds it surprising that Britain made no serious attempt to restrain Russia during the July Crisis.

How do Grey’s defenders deal with criticisms of this sort? His main defender in the collection is Thomas Otte: indeed, as Hamilton puts it, Otte in his article mounts “a masterly and spirited defense of Grey against his detractors.” And one of Otte’s main arguments is that Britain had little control over what the continental powers did, and if war broke out on the continent, it had little choice but to intervene. The British government in 1914, he writes, concluded that “aloofness was not a practicable proposition”—that no matter who won, Britain’s position in the world would suffer if the British stayed out of the conflict. “The inherent logic of Britain’s geopolitical position,” in his view, “meant that, under the given circumstances, Britain had to enter the war and do so against Germany and Austria-Hungary.”<sup>8</sup>

Otte is not the only scholar in this collection to argue along these lines. Annika Mombauer also thinks that Grey had little room for maneuver. Given Germany’s “erratic and aggressive behavior” in the months and years before 1914, Grey had little choice, in her view, but to side with Germany’s adversaries. “In the end,” she writes, his “hands were tied”; a German victory, and with it German hegemony on the continent, was intolerable; and if France and Russia won, Britain’s relations with those two powers would be ruined if Britain

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Clark, “Sir Edward Grey and the July Crisis,” *International History Review* 38:2 (2016), 332-34 ([link](#)).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>8</sup> T.G. Otte, “‘Postponing the Evil Day’: Sir Edward Grey and British Foreign Policy,” *International History Review* 38:2 (2006), 259-260 ([link](#)).

stayed out of the war. And Britain could scarcely prevent a war from breaking out in the first place, no matter what policy that country pursued. In the final analysis, British policy did not matter much one way or the other. “The actual decisions for war were taken elsewhere,” she concludes, “and Britain’s attitude in the end did not make a difference to the outcome of the crisis.”<sup>9</sup>

But Mombauer’s interpretation differs from Otte’s in one very important way. While she thinks that Germany continued to pose a major threat to Britain even in early 1914, he points to a “growing sense of détente” between Britain and Germany on the eve of the war. The naval race was no longer an issue, and, as “France and Russia were gaining in strength,” Britain, in Grey’s view, could “revert to her traditional balancing role.” Grey, it seems, was even planning to send his private secretary, Sir William Tyrrell, “on a secret mission to Germany in the summer of 1914” to explore “the possibility of a rapprochement.”<sup>10</sup> And all this plays a key role in Otte’s defense of Grey. It means that Grey’s policy was not as rigid or as *ententiste* as his critics made out. Grey, he insists, “was not irrevocably ‘ententiste’”—certainly not in the sense that people like [Keith] Wilson had claimed.<sup>11</sup> But this was very different from the argument that Grey had little choice but to pursue the policy he did. It implies that a more independent policy could have been pursued, if not in July 1914 then certainly in the whole period from 1912 on. It implies that Grey’s room for maneuver during the prewar years was larger than people thought—that different policies might have been adopted, and that events might have run their course in a very different way. And, indeed, one comes away from this collection of papers with the sense that while the British might not have been able to adopt a radically new policy in July 1914, British policy in the years before the war could have been built on very different assumptions—and, indeed, that if it had been, it is by no means inconceivable that war could have been avoided.

So even if one agrees that Grey and the Foreign Office did their best in July 1914, the whole issue, as Hamilton points out, of “whether they might have done better during the preceding years is still open to question and debate.” And that debate is bound to be productive. While the articles in question “do not resolve long-standing differences of opinion and emphasis,” the contributions here, as Robbins notes, are of real value, and are all, to my mind at least, very much worth reading.

### Participants:

**Marc Trachtenberg**, an historian by training, is currently a Research Professor of Political Science at UCLA. He is the author of many works on twentieth century international politics. His most recent book, *The Cold*

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<sup>9</sup> Annika Mombauer, “Sir Edward Grey, Germany, and the Outbreak of the First World War: A Re-Evaluation,” *International History Review* 38:2 (2006), 316-319 ([link](#)).

<sup>10</sup> Otte, “Postponing the Evil Day,” 257-258. Otte had in fact published an important article on this subject in 2013. See T.G. Otte, “Détente 1914: Sir William Tyrrell’s Mission to Germany,” *Historical Journal* 56:1 (2013) ([link](#)).

<sup>11</sup> Otte, “Postponing the Evil Day,” 258. Otte refers (251) to “recent revisionist critics” who “blame Grey for the outbreak of the war”; in the footnote (n. 6) appended to that sentence, he refers to Wilson as “Grey’s most persistent academic critic.” On page 258, Otte questions “the descriptive accuracy and analytical value of the notion of a ‘policy of the ententes,’” an allusion to the title of Wilson’s main book on the subject, *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), which Otte had cited in his n. 6.

## H-Diplo Article Review

*War and After: History, Theory, and the Logic of International Politics*, was published by Princeton University Press in 2012.

**Keith Hamilton** is Visiting Professor of Contemporary British History at King's College, London. He was formerly a Senior Editor of *Documents on British Policy Overseas* and an Historian in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. His most recent book is *Transformational Diplomacy after the Cold War: Britain's Know How Fund in Post-Communist Europe, 1989-2003* (London: Routledge, 2013).

**Keith Robbins** was Professor of History at Bangor and at Glasgow Universities and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales. His publications include: *Munich 1938* (1968); *Sir Edward Grey* (1971); *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870-1992* (1994); *Britain and Europe 1789-2005* (2005); *Transforming the World: Global Political History since World War II* (2013); with John Fisher, eds., *Religion and Diplomacy: Religion and British Foreign Policy 1815 to 1941* (2010). He is currently editing *The History of Oxford University Press Vol. IV (1970-2004)*.

**Andreas Rose** is Assistant Professor of Modern History at the University of Bonn and visiting Lecturer for International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science (2017-2018). He took his Ph.D. at the University of Augsburg (2008). He is author of *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent – Britische Außenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (2011), which won much critical acclaim and is published in English by Berghahn books (2017). His publications include: *Deutsche Außenpolitik in der Ära Bismarck 1862–1890*, and *Deutsche Außenpolitik in der wilhelminischen Ära 1890-1918* (both 2013). He co-edited *The Wars before the War. Conflict and International Politics before the Outbreak of the First World War*, (2015). His work on “Readiness or Ruin” – *The Great War in British Military Journals 1880-1914/18*, first published in: *Der große Krieg in den Europäischen Militärzeitschriften*, ed. Stig Förster (2016), is currently being translated for an extended English book version. His current projects comprise an intellectual and transnational study of the Free Trade (1780–1880) and (with Dominik Geppert) an Edition of the Hans Delbrueck Papers (1868-1929). For Habilitation he is, as a Konrad Adenauer-Scholar, working on a major study about Neo-Conservatism, Neo Liberalism and the Politics of Privatization in Germany from the 1920s to the 1990s.

Review by **Keith Hamilton**, King's College, London

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James Headlam-Morley, the Foreign Office's first historical adviser, believed that the British government had acted honestly and honourably during the war crisis of July/August 1914. He was thus not unduly perturbed when the long-delayed publication in December 1926 of the volume of *British Documents on the Origins of the War* covering the crisis itself failed to generate much correspondence in the press. The silence of the letter pages of the newspapers he attributed to the public knowing that things were all right, "that Sir Edward Grey and the Foreign Office each did their best in their own way, and that they told the country the truth in 1914".<sup>1</sup> Grey and his role in the conduct of Britain's foreign relations were, however, by then well-established matters of public debate and almost nine decades on they remain subjects of historical controversy. They were taken up again when in November 2014, with a view to commemorating the centenary of the war's commencement, Headlam-Morley's successors, the Historians of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, joined with the London School of Economics' International History Department in hosting a one-day conference on Sir Edward Grey and the Outbreak of the First World War. Six of the papers then presented, along with an introductory essay by two of the convenors, Heather Jones and Richard Smith, comprise this special edition of *The International History Review*.

Several of the articles derive from their authors' previous publications. They are nonetheless succinct and stimulating pieces. T.G. Otte thus draws upon his extensive archival researches to mount a masterly and spirited defence of Grey against his detractors.<sup>2</sup> Grey favoured imperial consolidation through accords with France (1904) and Russia (1907), arrangements which mitigated the threat of an unfriendly continental combination and freed Britain from its dependence on German brokerage. During a period punctuated by international crises he pursued what Otte terms a "policy of constructive ambiguity" (253), seeking through carefully phrased assurances and warnings to France and Germany to maintain the Anglo-French entente, whilst restraining both powers from a resort to war. And, uncertain as to Germany's ambitions and motivations, he endeavoured to combine accommodation with "compellance" (256) in the pursuit of an understanding which would satisfy German aspirations without compromising either Britain's naval supremacy or its freedom to assist France in the event of war. Conscious of the dangers posed by a resurgence in Russian power, even in the summer of 1914 Grey may, Otte contends, have been preparing secretly to explore the possibility of an Anglo-German rapprochement. Yet, in the wake of Sarajevo, neither his suggestion for Anglo-German crisis management, nor his appeals to Russia to calm German concerns, and to France to moderate its ally's stance, sufficed: Berlin was not ready to listen and Paris and St Petersburg were not to be swayed. When war came Grey and the majority of his Cabinet colleagues decided that Britain could not remain aloof. According to Otte, the "inherent logic of Britain's geopolitical position meant that, under the given circumstances, Britain had to enter the war and do so against Germany and Austria-Hungary" (259).

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (Kew, London), FO 370/241, L802/24/402, minute by Headlam-Morley, 6 Jan. 1927.

<sup>2</sup> T. G. Otte, "Postponing the Evil Day": Sir Edward Grey and British Foreign Policy," *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 250-263.

Otte concedes that in July 1914 Grey might have done more to work directly with Austria-Hungary in trying to resolve the latter's differences with Serbia. That too is one of the charges made by F.R. Bridge in his essay on Grey and Austria-Hungary.<sup>3</sup> But Bridge holds that Grey's share of responsibility for the outbreak of the Great War lay not so much in his conduct in July 1914 as in his role in the revived concert diplomacy of the preceding Balkan Wars. Grey, he argues, always gave priority to relations with Russia over those with Austria-Hungary, and in the context of the London ambassadors' conference put the maintenance of concert unity before the enforcement of conference decisions. Too often the Russians declined to restrain Serbia and Montenegro from defying what had been settled in London, and too often did Grey seem ready to acquiesce. The one lesson that Vienna derived from this experience was that its ends were best achieved when it demonstrated its readiness to risk war. If, Bridge concludes, Grey "did not actually add to, he did little to diminish the accumulation of combustible material from which the war arose" (270).

Bridge's analysis is persuasive and dovetails nicely with Keith Wilson's interpretation of Britain's relations with Russia.<sup>4</sup> As might be expected by those familiar with his earlier writings, Wilson uses his contribution to emphasise the extent to which Grey's diplomacy was shaped by his anxiety to maintain the Anglo-Russian understanding for the sake of India's security. This gave the Russians a degree of leverage which they exploited to the full in order to secure British support in the war crisis. In Wilson's opinion, the warning delivered by the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Sazonov, on 25 July 1914 that if Britain failed to back Russia it could not hope to retain its friendly cooperation in Asia was crucial in persuading Grey to change tack, so that the Austro-Serbian quarrel was henceforth seen as inseparable from the Austro-Russian one. Yet, Wilson asserts, even without this "blackmail, ... it is difficult to imagine what else Grey could have done without being utterly inconsistent and at variance with views held and expressed for over twenty years" (280).

As Wilson reminds us, Paul Cambon, the long-serving French ambassador in London, also resorted to *chantage*, threatening Grey on 2 August 1914 with the end of the entente and, whatever the war's outcome, a very uncomfortable situation should Britain stand aside. But in a fascinating essay, in which he draws an analogy between Cambon's diplomacy and the advice offered by Grey in his book *Fly Fishing*, John Keiger<sup>5</sup> relates how the ambassador persevered in his efforts to transform the Anglo-French entente into a more binding relationship, playing in his dealings with Grey upon the virtues of "honesty, honour, and loyalty" (287). In truth, the latter were fairly fluid concepts and the stock-in-trade of French diplomats of the era. Moreover, Cambon seems to have suffered from a delusion common to anglers, that of overestimating the size of the fish that got away. When in the spring of 1905 Lord Lansdowne, Grey's predecessor as Foreign Secretary, requested consultations in anticipation of any complications which might arise with Germany, Cambon misconstrued this as an offer which would lead to an alliance. During the following nine years he devoted much time and energy to trying to regain what he believed himself to have been denied by the failure of politicians in Paris to appreciate the value of his prospective catch. His skill and patience were eventually rewarded with an exchange of notes with Grey in November 1912. These served, however, to clarify, rather

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<sup>3</sup> F.R. Bridge, "Sir Edward Grey and Austria-Hungary," *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 264-274.

<sup>4</sup> Keith Wilson, "Grey and the Russian Threat to India," *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 275-284.

<sup>5</sup> John Keiger, "Sir Edward Grey, France, and the Entente: How to Catch the Perfect Angler?," *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 285-300; Edward Grey, *Fly Fishing* (London, 1899).

than extend, the meaning of the entente. And, whilst Grey may have felt morally obliged to stand by France in the event of German aggression, in August 1914 it was, as Otte and Wilson suggest, the perceived national interest that ultimately determined the British decision for war.

A clearer and earlier statement of Britain's intent might, it has frequently been claimed, have prevented the outbreak of war. This Annika Mombauer contests in her survey of Anglo-German relations and the relevant historiography.<sup>6</sup> "All of the other Great Powers", she observes, "proceeded as they wished without any reference to British counsel" (318). Like Otte, Mombauer also rejects the notion, first floated by Keith Wilson more than thirty years ago, of a British "invention" of a German threat to the balance of power in Europe.<sup>7</sup> The weakening of Russia as a result of its military defeat by Japan and subsequent internal disorder offered Germany the opportunity to regain that quasi-hegemony that Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had once known, and Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz's *Flottenpolitik* posed an obvious menace to Britain's national security. Meanwhile, the German emperor's penchant for public undiplomacy, the Wilhelmstrasse's efforts, first to exploit Britain's differences with its other imperial rivals and then to undermine its entente with France, fostered the growth of anti-German sentiments. None of this, however, wholly explains that degree of germanophobia which so afflicted British diplomacy from the late 1890s onwards and which, when combined with Britain's new alignments, lent substance to German fears of encirclement. Already in 1899 Germany was regarded by the Foreign Office as a "very pushing and successful rival," whose merchants had successfully challenged British commercial pre-eminence in the world,<sup>8</sup> and from 1906 Grey endeavoured to engage actively with France in containing Germany's peaceful economic penetration abroad.

Perhaps one clue to understanding British animosity towards Germany may lie in the final article in this collection, Richard Smith's delightful essay on the less than happy private life of Grey as foreign secretary.<sup>9</sup> After recounting how Grey had difficulty in coming to terms with a twentieth-century political culture spurred on by the rise of consumerism, imperialism and patriotism, Smith speculates that he "was less the archetypal Edwardian statesman than the last of the Victorian politicians" (351-52). Many of Grey's senior officials and diplomats were likewise of a generation which had reached maturity in the late Victorian era, and who found themselves ill at ease with a Germany which in all things, save its governance and social order, epitomised modernity. Its achievements in the manufacturing, scientific and technological spheres were immense, and even without the rhetoric of *Weltpolitik*, the dynamism of Wilhelmine Germany threatened the *status quo*. Grey and the Foreign Office may, as these essays imply, have come close to doing their best in the war crisis of 1914, but whether they might have done better during the preceding years is still open to question and debate.

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<sup>6</sup> Annika Mombauer "Sir Edward Grey, Germany and the Outbreak of the First World War: A Re-Evaluation," *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 301-325.

<sup>7</sup> K. M. Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904-1914* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 100-120.

<sup>8</sup> See Keith Hamilton, *Bertie of Thame: Edwardian Ambassador* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1990), 22.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Smith, "Sir Edward Grey: The Private Life of a Foreign Secretary," *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 339-355.



Review by **Keith Robbins**, Independent Scholar

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The centenary of the outbreak of the First World War has quite properly produced a fresh crop of books, articles, and conferences which have been devoted to reconsidering old questions from many different perspectives. It has particularly been diplomats who have been the focus of special attention as historians again wrestle with agency and structure. The tendency too has been to attempt to apply a broad cultural analysis to illuminate the presuppositions of decision-makers. This approach has taken further, the approach adopted decades ago by James Joll when he talked about ‘unspoken assumptions.’<sup>1</sup>

It is appropriate and welcome that there should have been a conference specifically devoted to the role of the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, co-hosted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science in November 1914. The articles in this special issue grow out of that event and constitute an admirable examination of his personality and policy from different points of view. The contributors have all written on cognate matters elsewhere and, as a summary of the present state of debate, it would be difficult to find a more useful and stimulating collection. That is not to say, however, that the puzzle which Grey has presented to historians has at last and finally been cracked. This reviewer, in his biography of Grey (1971) spoke of him as an enigma and it remains very difficult to pin him down.<sup>2</sup> A man who held such high office for eleven consecutive years cannot be dismissed as a stray fly-fisherman or absentee birdwatcher. So it is right that an essay by Richard Smith takes a fresh and sensitive look at his private life.<sup>3</sup> He has no doubt that Grey was a serious and successful politician but one who also sought to detach his politics from his private life, private thoughts, pleasures, and friendships. ‘Work/Life balance,’ now urged on all of us, was fundamental for Grey, but rarely achieved to his satisfaction. Smith’s wider contention is that Grey felt out of step with increasingly professionalized politics, that he is, in short, better seen as one of the last of the Victorian politicians rather than an archetypal Edwardian statesman. It is a point of view echoed elsewhere. Grey’s universally cited comment in August 1914 – that the lamps were going out all over Europe – can therefore be seen as a comment not just on the war but also as the acknowledgement that an entire European order was drawing to an end, and would not return. That Grey was himself part of that order is true, but painting an age cohort with too broad a stroke may be overdone. It is part of the puzzle of his personality that while he may have felt increasingly out of step with his times, he also had a radical streak on social issues.

It would be quite wrong to see this essay as a sentimental aside while other contributors get down to the hard-nosed diplomatic documents. Analysis of his temperament and character is relevant at every point in considering his way of working. His secretiveness in his conduct of foreign affairs, sometimes criticized, may be as much an aspect of his self-containment as a deliberate and calculated withholding of information.

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<sup>1</sup> James Joll, *1914: The Unspoken Assumptions* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Keith Robbins, *Sir Edward Grey: A Biography of Lord Grey of Fallodon* (London, Cassell, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Smith, ‘Sir Edward Grey: The Private Life of a Foreign Secretary,’ *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 339-355.

Contributors venture here and elsewhere into considering deep-seated codes of conduct: obligations of honour being only one such well-known example.

One other contributor, T.G. Otte, also starts with the man and defends him from the malicious slings and arrows to be found in former Prime Minister David Lloyd George's memoirs.<sup>4</sup> Mandell Creighton, Grey's learned local vicar in Northumberland, who went on to become the Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Cambridge, and then Bishop of London, taught him at the vicarage and encouraged the young man to undertake serious reading. Otte suggests that Grey was strongly influenced by J.R. Seeley's *Expansion of England* in thinking about Britain's place in the world. However, he was no ideologue: principle and pragmatism, for Otte, characterize Grey's approach throughout and his examination of particular episodes reiterates points he has made in greater detail elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> He concludes that Grey was not a priggish amateur out of his depth but a shrewd and subtle operator who conducted policy with great skill and sound common sense. There are glimpses here, one supposes, of the new biography on which he is engaged.

Otte reiterates, however, that if other states were determined to act differently, no British Foreign Secretary had the power to halt the descent into war. On this analysis it is futile to be pursuing ways in which, allegedly, Grey could have prevented the war. Nevertheless, when the other contributors – F.R. Bridge on 'Sir Edward Grey and Austria-Hungary', Keith Wilson on 'Grey and the Russian Threat to India, 1892-1915', John Keiger on 'Sir Edward Grey, France and the Entente: How to Catch the Perfect Angler?', Annika Mombauer on 'Sir Edward Grey, Germany, and the Outbreak of the First World War: A Re-Evaluation' and Chris Clark 'Sir Edward Grey and the July Crisis' – examine Grey's policy bilaterally or generally.<sup>6</sup> They all implicitly or explicitly ponder the points at which courses were set in foreign policy, and whether they might have been set differently. Mombauer, for example, contributes a three-part analysis: Grey in the historiography of war origins, Grey and Germany 1905 to 1914, and the view from London and the view from Berlin. She concludes that whatever Grey's intentions, he could not have brought about a peaceful outcome to the July Crisis. Where perceptions are concerned, so much, it seems, depends on place. She accepts that it is feasible to argue, as does Keith Wilson, that the Foreign Office hysterically exaggerated a German threat, but she argues that in conjuring up such hostile images Grey was by no means fighting windmills, as she puts it.

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<sup>4</sup> T.G. Otte, 'Postponing the Evil Day': Sir Edward Grey and British Foreign Policy, *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 250-263.

<sup>5</sup> T.G. Otte, "Almost a Law of Nature": Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Office and the Balance of Power, 1905-1912' in E. Goldstein and B.J.C. McKercher (eds), *Power and Stability: British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 77-118. T.G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865-1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> F.R. Bridge, 'Sir Edward Grey and Austria-Hungary', *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 264-274; Keith Wilson, 'Grey and the Russian Threat to India, 1892-1915', *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 275-284; John Keiger, 'Sir Edward Grey, France and the Entente: How the Catch the Perfect Angler?', *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 285-300; Annika Mombauer, 'Sir Edward Grey, Germany and the Outbreak of the First World War: A Re-Evaluation', *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 301-335; Christopher Clark, 'Sir Edward Grey and the July Crisis', *International History Review* 38:2 (2016): 326-338.

Wilson's own article reiterates his conviction that it was for reasons to do with 'repose' on the Indian frontier and with safeguarding the British Empire in India from a more hostile Russia, and perhaps France, that Grey was determined to participate fully in war on the continent of Europe. Bridge, for example, takes the view that it is an open question whether British interests were best served by Grey's participation in a bipolar balance-of-power system. Yet he also admits that all the other foreign offices of Europe did likewise. He thinks Grey's devotion to the ententes was single-minded. Otte, however, is more circumspect in his treatment of their significance. They were not meant to commit Britain unconditionally to France and Russia. Keiger, however, in looking at what he calls the nine-year contest between Grey and Paul Cambon, French Ambassador in London, concludes wisely that while both men shared a commitment to the *Entente Cordiale*, that commitment was a source of confusion. Each man had a different view of its purpose and future. Each, at different points in their relationship, seemed to be getting the upper hand in trying to crystallize its significance. Is diplomacy always inherently ambiguous and sometimes fatally so? At what point, if at all, did Grey's attempt to warn Germany that Britain might intervene and at the same time caution France that British support could not be guaranteed, become vacuous? Clark, in a succinct version of his well-known book, thinks this strategy amounted to a contradiction<sup>7</sup>.

This review cannot hope to give full scope to the carefully argued details in these articles. A sufficient amount of their content has been suggested, however, to indicate the areas of debate that continue to be lively. Taken in the round, they do not resolve long-standing differences of opinion and emphasis, but the stature of the contributors ensures the value of this special issue. Yet, while they sometimes allude in passing to certain underlying aspects of foreign policy decision-making in Edwardian Britain, the contributors do not tackle them directly. They have written analyses of policy making at the top rather than pieces which try to relate it to the kind of world in which, domestically, a Liberal Foreign Secretary had to operate. What was 'public opinion'? Did it matter? The Foreign Secretary was in the Commons: what difference did that make? Where does Parliament as a whole sit in the consideration of war and peace? Everybody knows that Grey never flitted in and out of the capitals of Europe and was substantially monolingual. Would he have formed different opinions if he had 'known Europe' at first hand? Was Grey too good a civilian, that is to say, when crisis came, he did not grasp the full implications of mobilisations? Such questions have of course been asked elsewhere and are indeed difficult to answer but since, as the editors duly point out, Britain was the only belligerent to hold a parliamentary vote on going to war and since it is also still widely believed that Grey's skilled performance in the Commons on 3 August 1914 consolidated opinion, we do need to know more about the political world beyond the Foreign Office and how Grey was either constrained by or ignored his Cabinet colleagues and the wider Liberal Party.

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers* (London, Penguin, 2013).

Sir Edward Grey certainly belongs to the most important and best researched Foreign Secretaries in British History. Three biographies and numerous collected volumes and articles have so far dealt with the liberal statesman and especially his role in the upcoming of the Great War in 1914. Nevertheless, views about Grey are still controversial. A century after the outbreak of war, opinions reach from blatant critique resembling David Lloyd George's polemic accusations of co-responsibility for the Great War<sup>1</sup> to exculpation of any responsibility.<sup>2</sup> Currently we are awaiting a fourth Biography by Thomas G. Otte which promises to present us with a balanced view on Grey. In the meantime, this special issue of the *International History Review* tries to make up the balance with a view to the centenary historiography on the origins of the war.

At first glance, the editors, Heather Jones and Richard Smith, rightly state in their introductory words, that the discussion about the British Foreign Secretary or any individual decision-maker of the July Crisis mirrors fundamental doubts about structural failings, the inevitability of war, or Grey's own testimony "that he himself had no power to decide policy"<sup>3</sup> and that "no human individual could have prevented" the war.<sup>4</sup> Recent historiography on the war's origins not only emphasizes the complexity of the July Crisis, the pre-war states system and the failings in the Foreign Offices of all participating countries but also tries to merge individual responsibility with general developments, structural deficiencies and the cultural mentalities of the key figures of 1914 involved. Questions of how the war came about, the long or medium term pre-war developments, and the sequence of interactions that produced certain outcomes and triggered new developments have recently complemented, if not replaced, the search for guilty parties and the mere question as to why it happened. And Sir Edward Grey, not least because of his long tenure in office and the whole range of opinions about him and his policies, one is tempted to say, seems to be a perfect starting point for such an approach.

According to the editors, the articles present in this invaluable special edition, all by known experts in the field, focus on three main issues: First, as Keith Robbins stated in his biography from 1971, that Grey was the last of Britain's great Victorian foreign secretaries.<sup>5</sup> Although the Empire and Grey himself had to cope with numerous new tendencies, Grey still should be understood as a late Victorian elder statesman, with all the 'culture of honour codes' that this implies rather than as a pessimistic Edwardian figure as Keith Neilson described Grey's generational cohort in his groundbreaking volume on British policy towards Russia.<sup>6</sup> Second, and this bears some contradictory potential

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<sup>1</sup> David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Vol. 1, (London: Odhams Press, 1938), 67, 88-100, esp. 90. For a most recent example see Douglas Newton, *The Darkest Days. The Truth behind Britain's Rush to War, 1914*, (London: Verso, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Otte's and Annika Mombauer's account in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Grey im Mai 1915, zit. nach: Cameron Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War—July 1914 to May 1915. A Prologue to the Triumph of Lloyd George* (London: Knopf, 1971), 52.

<sup>4</sup> George Trevelyan, *Grey of Fallodon* (London 1937), 250.

<sup>5</sup> Keith Robbins, *Sir Edward Grey. A Biography of Lord Grey of Fallodon* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Keith Neilson, *Britain and the last Tsar 1894-1917* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

to the first theme, Grey became Foreign Secretary at a point of enormous change concerning external challenges as well as internal professionalization and the birth of modern bureaucracy. The third question the articles tackle refers to Grey's self-assessment of being ultimately impotent to prevent the war and question British foreign policy in terms of the international context.

Needless to say that any choice of topics could be extended and it appears rather parsimonious to question this selection. Nevertheless, from the point of view of a reviewer and as a thought-provoking contribution to an ongoing debate, it seems a pity that especially the domestic side, the liberal party, the parliament as well as the modern public sphere of foreign political debate, fields that have recently been rich veins of current historiography, are unfortunately neglected. While the introduction openly regrets that apart from Thomas Otte's path-breaking study of the Foreign Office's "Official Mind"<sup>7</sup> we still need more studies of the so-called 'unspoken assumptions' of the pre-war years, this volume somehow missed the chance to place Edward Grey in a broader domestic context, including his relationship with senior diplomats, his attitude towards military questions, advisors, and the London press, and/or his role within the liberal party.

These questions notwithstanding, the present volume is forcefully opened by Thomas Otte, who is certainly one of the most brilliant diplomatic historians of his generation. His well-crafted and confidently argued piece about 'postponing the evil day' argues persuasively against David Lloyd George's admittedly unfair verdict and polemic condemnation of Grey as one of the most responsible persons for the outbreak of war in 1914 (250-251). Essentially Otte reconstructs Grey's career, his policy motives and aims and places his stewardship within the broader international context. By drawing on substantial archival research, Otte describes Grey as a "curious combination of the old-fashioned Whig and the Socialist...of principle and pragmatism" that also "characterised his approach to foreign policy" (253).

In line with recent research, though not necessarily always mentioning it, Otte concludes from Grey's earlier statements and correspondents in the 1890s, especially with the editor of the *National Review*, Leopold Maxse,<sup>8</sup> that the Foreign Secretary by no means was solely focused on Germany or the European balance of power. Rather, contrary to those historians who were looking for geopolitical premises either on the Continent<sup>9</sup> of Europe or the world,<sup>10</sup> Grey perceived Britain as being simultaneously confronted with both, European as well as global challenges. He thus reflected on Germany and Russia as other contemporaries judged them as two sides of the same coin, or as Emile Dillon once stated, as "two seeming bits of threats wholly disconnected in appearance but one and the same

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind. The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011).

<sup>8</sup> For this see also Andreas Rose, *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent. Britische Außenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011), 58-81; Andreas Rose, *Between Empire and Continent. British Foreign Policy before the First World War* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books 2017), 23-42.

<sup>9</sup> For the continental perspective see e.g. Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London: Ashfield Press, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> For a global approach see e.g. Jennifer Siegel, *Endgame. Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

threat not cut at all.”<sup>11</sup> British Foreign Policy under Grey therefore was far more complex than has hitherto been thought. Contrary to other recent works, however, for Otte, Grey “had not nailed his colours to the French mast” but it was especially his ambiguity and unwillingness to commit oneself that marked his foreign policy (253-254). Though Grey had repeatedly and publicly confirmed his loyalty to the entente with Paris for example in November 1911,<sup>12</sup> even when as in the case of the second Moroccan crisis, France had openly challenged international law and the status quo, until 1914 Grey kept his hands free and London was not bound by any treaty neither to France nor to Russia, as Otte thus again emphasizes, in accordance with the traditional viewpoint. At the same time, the author correctly states that Grey had given ample warning to Berlin that an “onslaught on France” could not be tolerated by Britain. Otte even goes so far as to suggest that these foreign policy tactics aimed at restraining Britain’s partners as well as Germany “a form of neo-Bismarckianism” at work (253), giving the Edwardian generation leverage over France.

An obvious problem with this rather anachronistic comparison to Chancellor Otto von Bismarck is, however, that Bismarck certainly would never have communicated his warnings to potential enemies to his allied partners in an attempt to ensure them of his loyalty. And this is exactly what Grey, in contrast to his predecessor, Lord Lansdowne by the way,<sup>13</sup> repeatedly did and what decisively weakened the alleged leverage over France and Russia.<sup>14</sup> One of the most decisive of many differences between Grey’s and Bismarck’s approach, was that the German Chancellor’s strategy to gain control over his allies was rather to warn them directly instead of only leaving them in the dark about the consequences or rejecting a written guarantee. During the west-eastern crisis in 1887, for instance, Bismarck, instead of backing Austria-Hungary, he explicitly threatened Vienna that Germany would drop the dual alliance in case of an Austro-Russian war over the Balkans.<sup>15</sup> A typical Bismarckian strategy was to use and promote contradictory alliances with opposing parties simultaneously just to ensure that the *casus foederis* would never take place. Edward Grey, by contrast, was only prepared “to make new friends without losing old ones”<sup>16</sup> and thus even permitted Paris or St. Petersburg to have a leverage over British foreign relations.<sup>17</sup> Another decisive difference, one that naturally prohibits reference to a “neo-Bismarckianism” in the case of Grey’s diplomacy, is that Bismarck had

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<sup>11</sup> Dillon to Spring Rice, 9 Oct. 1909, Churchill College Archive Centre Cambridge, Spring Rice Papers, CASR 1/33, cited in Rose, *Empire und Kontinent*, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Grey in the House of Commons, 27 Nov. 1911, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, Vol. 32, col. 60.

<sup>13</sup> Metternich to Bülow, 28.6.1905, *Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette (1871-1914)*, ed. by J. Lepsius et al., (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1926), Vol XX/2, No. 6860, 168-170; Lansdowne to Lascelles, 5.8.1905, The National Archives, FO 800/130.

<sup>14</sup> Grey, *25 Years*, Vol. 1, 72-74; Grey to Bertie, 10.1.1906, *British Documents on the Origins of the War (1898-1914)*, ed. G.P. Gooch, (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1928), Vol. III, No. 210(a), 170-171.

<sup>15</sup> Bismarck to Deines (Military Attaché in Vienna), 16 Dec. 1887, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 10877.

<sup>16</sup> Grey to Law, 25 Nov. 1911, Parliamentary Archives, Bonar Law Papers, LAW 24/4/80.

<sup>17</sup> See now Rainer F. Schmidt, “*Révanche pour Sedan*”–*Frankreich und der Schlieffenplan. Militärische und bündnispolitische Vorbereitung des Ersten Weltkriegs*, in *Historische Zeitschrift* 381 (2016), 393-425.

constantly tried to divert international tensions from central Europe to the periphery. While this increased the risks of conflicts in distant regions, these were far easier to localise than great-power conflicts of existence in the centre of Europe. The Anglo-Russian rapprochement of 1907, however, had deliberately shifted Russia's attention back to south-eastern Europe and thus brought Russia directly into conflict with the multiethnic Dual Monarchy.

Notwithstanding these qualifications, Otte's account is highly intriguing and will certainly lead to further discussion, especially as concerns Britain's dual role as a European as well as imperial power. One of the most important perspectives in his essay is the assumption that Britain's foreign and defence policy by 1912 had far more options than has hitherto been thought, and that Britain "was faced with alternatives, not necessities". (254) While this leads us away from the general paradigm of imperial overstretch and British decline, this is also in line with those recent works that have challenged the traditional view that sees alternative options as being available only to the Central Powers whereas the entente powers and particularly London were solely ruled by constraints and inevitabilities.<sup>18</sup> Great Britain definitely was a major power within the system of great powers and not only a merely reacting force. According to Otte, Britain's powerful position was a direct result of Grey's ambiguous foreign policy. Hence, Grey was a very able and skilled Foreign Secretary who "steered the Boat of British diplomacy through the shallows and eddies of Great Power politics before 1914". (260)

There is no doubt that from the British point of view, and, in the context of the July Crisis, only a few historians would disagree with this assessment. However, since historical research is more and more concerned with whole international situation in the two decades before 1914, and, given that Britain's (imperial) interests were not necessarily congruent to those of continental stability, the question concerning Grey's diplomacy, as well as about the foreign policies of the other powers, is whether it was used only to serve particular interests or to serve the international order. The former Prime Minister Robert Salisbury apparently knew about the systemic implications of what German historians call the "Crimean War constellation" of international relations.<sup>19</sup> In short, this constellation describes the antagonism or at least the separation of the two corner states of the states system, Britain and Russia, as the prerequisite of the German unification in 1871 and the further existence of the Central Powers. Although Salisbury had been perfectly aware of the ongoing clumsiness and even aggressiveness of the German parvenu, in 1901 he nevertheless warned against an Anglo-Russian rapprochement because this would place all the other powers in a dangerously inferior position and cause a serious security dilemma for the whole states system.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, he understood that whereas the Central Powers depended heavily on the continental status quo, both, France and Russia, though with different means and aims, pursued revision. Whether former Prime Minister Balfour and his foreign secretary Lansdowne still believed in these implications is still open to question. Grey, as the essays by Francis Roy Bridge (264-274) and Keith Wilson (275-284) in this volume, among others, assume, at least thought these to be of secondary importance. Given London's bargaining position by 1912, it seems all the more surprising

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<sup>18</sup> See Konrad Canis, *Von Bismarck zur Weltpolitik. Deutsche Außenpolitik, 1890-1902* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997); Konrad Canis, *Der Weg in den Abgrund. Deutsche Außenpolitik, 1902-1914* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Klaus Hildebrand, *Die "Krimkriegssituation". Wandel und Dauer einer historischen Konstellation der Staatenwelt. Eine Skizze, in Deutschland und Europa-Kontinuität und Bruch*, J. Dülffer et al., ed. (Frankfurt: Propyläen, 1990), 37-51.

<sup>20</sup> Salisbury to MacColl, 6 Sept. 1901, cited in George W.E. Russel, ed., *Malcolm MacColl. Memoirs and Correspondence* (London: Smith, Elder, 1914), 282-283.

that Grey's course still ignored the systemic repercussions of the rapprochement with Russia and that he missed out on any serious attempts to restrain Russia even during the July Crisis.<sup>21</sup>

Concerning France it also seems open to debate whether the diary of the French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré is a better source to prove this alleged British leverage over France than the Anglo-French naval arrangements in autumn 1912 or the transition from France's war plan XVI to XVII.<sup>22</sup> By Grey's consistent pledges of allegiance to the entente<sup>23</sup> and his intonation of the importance of British public opinion as concerned British support in case of war, he was giving not only the French ambassador to London, Paul Cambon, and Raymond Poincaré but also the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergej Sazonow, a blueprint for how British support could be secured in the event of a crisis.<sup>24</sup> The French and Russian perspectives and decisions may help to clarify how far Grey truly had a leverage over his partners and whether the legal fact that Britain was never bound by a formal alliance had any real political impact.

All the decision-makers of July 1914 were driven by their experiences and their expectations for future developments. For Grey it was the perceived rising Germany and the falling Russian power after 1905 that had guided his diplomacy. From 1912 onwards it was a particular problem for him that Russia was still recovering from its defeat in the Russo-Japanese war. Otte, as becomes clear throughout his article, aims at and succeeds in rehabilitating Grey from Lloyd George's truly unfair and selfish attacks after the war. Still, there are well-founded nuances in the more critical views of British foreign policy before 1914 that do not flow "from Lloyd Georgian fabrication" after the war or a new form of "Little-Englanderism" that would assume that England "could have determined the policies of others" (260). On closer scrutiny, however, the difference between Otte's account and other more critical approaches to Grey has less to do with a pre-determined view influenced by Lloyd George's assessment after the war than with the importance given to Grey's own pre-determinations from the 1890s when entering Whitehall in 1906, with the oft-cited dependence on his senior diplomats like Charles Hardinge or Arthur Nicolson, with his ambiguous but nevertheless inflexible and one sided foreign policy course that pleaded for an international understanding but that was constantly afraid of any arrangements that did not include Britain, with the

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<sup>21</sup> Newton, *The Darkest Days*, 108-114.

<sup>22</sup> Stefan Schmidt, *Frankreichs Plan XVII. Zur Interdependenz von Außenpolitik und militärischer Planung in den letzten Jahren vor Ausbruch des Großen Krieges*, in *Der Schlieffenplan. Analysen und Dokumente*, Hans Ehlert et al., ed., (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 221-256, 224.

<sup>23</sup> See Christel Gade, *Gleichgewichtspolitik oder Bündnispflege? Maximen britischer Außenpolitik (1909-1914)* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Poincaré to Iswolski, 16 Nov. 1912, *Documents Diplomatiques Français (1871-1914)*, ed. by Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. Commission de Publication des Documents relatifs aux Origines de la Guerre de 1914. 2. Sér., 14 Vols. (1901-1911), (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1930-1955), Vol. 4, No. 468, 480-481; Iswolski to Sazonow, 5.12.1912, cited in F. Stieve, ed., *Schriftwechsel Iswolskis. Aus den Geheimakten der Russischen Staatsarchive*, (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1924), Vol. 2, No. 608, 377; Poincaré, Note sur l'Action militaire de la Russie en Europe, August 1912, cited in Schmidt, *Revanche pour Sedan*, 406; see also: Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe went to War in 1914* (London: Alan Lane, 2012), 350-351.



impact London's diplomacy had on the diplomacy of his partners and potential enemies, and, last but not least, with the criticism he had to face from the ranks of his own party even before the war.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, Otte argues, Grey made mistakes, but it seems that these were only of minor importance, as, for example, his suggestion of mediation in the July crisis the quartet of power not directly involved in the Serbian crisis or his misreading of Austrian diplomacy (258). But "the problem," Otte concludes, "was not what Grey did or did not do. The problem was that Paris and St. Petersburg were not to be swayed and that Berlin did not listen to its own ambassador" (259). "Unlike Grey," the other statesmen in Berlin, Vienna, Paris and St. Petersburg "were prepared to risk collisions." This is why the author finally agrees to Grey's own self-assessment, that in July 1914 he "had no power to halt the descent into war" (260). Concerning the obstinate Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin, especially in the summer of 1914, one cannot but agree to this well-founded reasoning. Yet, what happened to Grey's alleged leverage over France and Russia? And what about Grey's policy towards the Habsburg Monarchy and Russia?

That Grey himself was quite aware of his difficulties especially with Russia can be gathered from another intriguing fact, namely that Grey by 1914 was obviously on the brink of an Anglo-German general understanding when the July crisis prevented any further attempts by Grey's private secretary, William Tyrrell (257-258). This will undoubtedly trigger new research as to why it seemed impossible for both powers to restrain their allies/partners as they had done during the Balkan Wars or why Grey, although he thought Anglo-Russian naval talks unnecessary, in spring 1914 agreed upon them. Grey very early aimed at eliminating the "dishonest German broker" in Britain's relations to its traditional rivals France and Russia and kept to this course until 1914 (253) because it seemed impossible for him to combine imperial and continental interests. But did this policy not automatically imply the risk of creating new brokers that would determine Britain's relations to the Central Powers? By the time he clearly understood the danger of an "isolation of Germany", but still he and his senior diplomats found it difficult to read Germany and were far from "inventing a German threat."<sup>26</sup> "Germany" as Zara Steiner has concluded, "was an enigma wrapped in the apparently blatant truth of unbridled Weltpolitik rhetoric" (256). Grey and Tyrrell, Otte shows, seemed to be prepared by 1914 to leave aside this rhetoric and rather to concentrate on international facts. One of these was that apart from "Weltpolitik rhetoric" and clumsy diplomacy, the pre-war crises had finally shown, and Grey's radical critics repeatedly emphasized this, that all in all it was Germany that was being controlled by the entente powers rather than on the brink of becoming a Napoleon-like hegemon.

While Otte is prepared to give Edward Grey the benefit of the doubt, Francis Roy Bridge makes plain his doubts about Edward Grey's ignorance towards Austria-Hungary. Bridge questions the long- and medium-term effects of Grey's diplomacy. For him, Grey throughout his tenure ignored the Dual Monarchy's traditional systemic function

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<sup>25</sup> For this see Andreas Rose, *From 'illusion' and 'Angellism' to détente—British radicals and the Balkan Wars*, in Dominik Geppert, et al., ed., *The Wars before the Great War. Conflicts and International Politics before the Outbreak of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 320-342.

<sup>26</sup> Keith Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente. Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 100-120.

within the European order of states and its independence within the dual alliance with Berlin (266).<sup>27</sup> Contrary to Otte, Bridge is convinced that Grey's obsessive fear of endangering the ententes with France and Russia (267, 271) had disastrous side effects upon the general belief in the legitimacy of the old order.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Bridge emphasizes particularly Britain's role during the Bosnian Annexation Crisis in 1908/9, a still rather neglected topic, that better than any other crisis reveals the continental repercussions of the Anglo-Russian convention (266). Although it was the then Russian foreign minister, Alexander Iswolsky, who had sought a horse trade with his Austrian colleague, Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal, about Bosnia and Herzegovina, Grey, and the British leading diplomats Hardinge, Nicolson and Crowe together with Iswolsky blamed solely Aehrenthal for the Balkan crisis. It furthermore was not least due to British encouragements concerning the Straits question that Iswolsky expected support from Whitehall. Only when Britain declined this support in October 1908 did Iswolsky blame the Dual Monarchy, thus intensifying and the crises. Vienna, so it seems, had somehow to pay not only for the Anglo-Russian rapprochement but also as Berlin's ally for German diplomacy. Instead of mediating between Vienna and St. Petersburg and settling the Balkan question, Grey repeatedly feared negative impressions in France or Russia (267-268). In siding with Serbia during the Bosnian Crisis, Grey not only acted "more Russian than the Russians,"<sup>29</sup> he also turned the European concert upside down. Until then it was a common rule that minor states like Serbia had not been able to claim compensation by great powers. Together with the experience of the Balkan Wars and the London conferences, Austria-Hungary gained the impression that the concert of Europe was as dead as a doornail while especially Serbia felt encouraged to become a south-eastern great power itself. (269) Thus, it was not to the least extent Grey's diplomacy that brought back the international tensions to central Europe which Bismarck had used to diverge to the continental periphery. Although London was not actively assisting France and Russia in forming an anti-Austrian Balkan League, the British foreign policy makers, especially Nicolson and Hardinge but also Grey did nothing to prevent this and let things go. Thus Roy Bridge mirrors recent historiography that "the case against Grey must rest, not so much in his behaviour in the July Crisis, but on his sins of omission in the preceding years" (270).

Keith Wilson who is still one of the most critical historians as concerns Grey's diplomacy towards Russia. Here he again presents one of his typically intriguing accounts of Britain's pre-war diplomacy, but goes even further. For him, Grey was from the 1890s onwards obsessed with the Franco-Russian peril rather than with a possible German grip to world power (276-277, 281). The Empire rather than the continent mattered: The "real raison d'être" of the Anglo-Russian rapprochement, as Grey confessed in 1925, was "the security of the Indian frontier" (278). By repeatedly conveying to St. Petersburg that Anglo-Russian relations were "the corner stone of British foreign policy" (279), Grey appeared somehow as a sorcerer's apprentice rather than a great statesman and completely lost control over his Russian partner during the July Crisis (279). Wilson shows very convincingly how Grey's diplomacy between 1907 and 1914 had put Russia and France in a position to blackmail Britain in July 1914 (280). He thus directly contradicts Otte's view. Whether it really was the Indian frontier that mattered in 1914, as Wilson holds, or rather Grey's Victorian belief in honorable relationships or his lacking courage for a sea-change in his foreign policy

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<sup>27</sup> For this see e.g. Guenther Kronenbitter, „Krieg im Frieden“. *Die Führung der k.u.k. Armee und die Großmachtpolitik Österreich-Ungarns, 1906-1914* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003); Konrad Canis, *Die bedrängte Großmacht. Österreich-Ungarn und das Europäische Mächtesystem, 1866/67-1914* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> For this see Gade, *Gleichgewichtspolitik*.

<sup>29</sup> Dillon to Spring Rice, 28 Aug. 1909, Churchill College Archive Centre, Spring Rice Papers, CASR 1/33. For Britain and the Annexation Crisis see Rose, *Empire und Kontinent*, 505-570; Rose, *Empire and Continent*, 401-461.

immediately before the war, is therefore open to debate. Recent historiography suggests that British foreign policy under Grey was marked by rotating priorities between Empire and Continent and it was indeed the difficulty of coming to grips with both that matters. An interesting question would therefore be how serious the Russian peril on the North-Western frontier of India was perceived in comparison to the German peril.<sup>30</sup> As concerns Grey, an important aspect still missing in current research and also in this special volume is an evaluation of the role military expertise played in the formulation of his foreign policy (281-282).

Bridge and Wilson ultimately agree that it was especially Grey's repeated loyalty towards France and Russia that finally undermined the Central Powers' belief in the Concert of Europe. After the experiences of the Algeciras Conference (1906), the London Conferences (1912/13), and especially the rumors of Anglo-Russian naval talks in spring 1914, Grey had lost any credibility as an international arbitrator. While Thomas Otte ranges Edward Grey's diplomatic skills on the same level as Otto von Bismarck's though through a rather unfortunate and anachronistic comparison, Francis Roy Bridge and Keith Wilson are far more skeptical. In fact they explicitly deny Grey this quality. Bridge especially (272), therefore, seems closer to Lloyd George, who attacked not only Grey but the whole crisis management in July 1914: "Had there been a Bismarck in Germany, a Palmerston or a Disraeli, a Roosevelt in America, a Clemenceau in authority in Paris, the catastrophe might, and I believe would, have been averted; but there was no one of that visible quality on the bridge in any great State." According to Lloyd George, the decision-makers in July 1914 "were all able, experienced, conscientious and expectable mariners, but distinctly lacking in force, vision, imagination and resource [...]. They were all handy men in a well-behaved sea, but helpless in a typhoon."<sup>31</sup>

France, the second 'corner stone' of liberal foreign policy under Grey, is dealt with by John Keiger (285-300). Keiger's essay is particularly about the French perception of Edward Grey, his foreign policy and his understanding of the Entente and therefore promises to answer whether Grey had a leverage over Paris. The result is a very sophisticated piece that, as so often in historical research, allows no final and clear-cut assessment.

While the French Ambassador Paul Cambon hoped to obtain an alliance with London (286-289), Grey aimed at resisting any entangling commitment and retaining a free hand.

Although neither spoke the language of the other, "they doggedly pursued an alliance in all but name" (287). Keiger generally agrees with Otte's assessment that Edward Grey adopted a policy of "constructive ambiguity" towards France and Germany. (287) A very interesting fact discussed in Keiger's account is that Henri Cambon, the Ambassador's son, stated that already Balfour and Lansdowne had offered an "entente ... which would have constituted a veritable alliance" (287) which again leads to the question of continuity that has often been doubted.<sup>32</sup> During the Haldane Mission in 1912 Keiger shows how Grey got the better of the French Ambassador while the famous Grey-Cambon letters reveal how Paul Cambon got the better of Grey (292-297). Finally, however, Grey's ambiguous diplomacy was always at risk of becoming contradictory, especially as it increasingly depended on the motives in Paris how the French interpreted Grey's diplomacy for their own aims. This reveals on the one hand what Otte rightly states: that Grey of course cannot be blamed for France's perception. On the other hand, it also shows

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<sup>30</sup> Rose, *Empire und Kontinent*, 237-273; Rose, *Empire and Continent*, 182-215.

<sup>31</sup> Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Vol. 1, 35.

<sup>32</sup> Charmley, *Splendid Isolation? Britain and the Balance of Power 1874-1914*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999).

the difficulties of his ambiguous foreign policy, of his controlling the Entente but also that a statesman of his qualities should have been aware that Paris and St. Petersburg only drew conclusions to their own benefits. That may be the reason why Bismarck, for instance, preferred to deal with adversaries rather than allies and preferred to warn his partners directly rather than simply leaving them in the dark, a practice which naturally opens the sphere for interpretations.

Needless to say, Cambon played on the British, and in particular Grey's sense of honour and moral commitment and tried to hook Grey in the last days of the July Crisis. (288) At least from the time of the second Moroccan Crisis he knew that Grey was a "minister who personally associates himself with our policy" (289). Against this background it appears only of legal importance that Britain was not bound by any obligation. Politically this was rather irrelevant, not only so long as Cambon believed the contrary but also from a military point of view, as it was a completely unrealistic to agree to military consultations and naval talks on the one hand and to propagate "no formal entente" on the other hand. It was not only Winston Churchill who by 1914 had understood that Britain had "all obligations of an alliance" (295). It seems all the more important what the British ambassador to France, Francis Bertie, reported (291), that it was less Grey's diplomacy but rather the radical critique and the Cabinet that secured the ambiguity in Anglo-French relations. This seems a striking difference that alludes to the hitherto neglected importance of the domestic background to British foreign policy as well as to the role that Grey's diplomats played. His Permanent Under-Secretary, Arthur Nicolson, for example, appears at certain events to have been far more important for Anglo-French everyday relations than Grey, who was always worried about the Cabinet (295, 297).

What is doubtful, however, is Keiger's conclusion that it was not clear who came off best in the nine-year contest between Grey and Cambon. As a matter of fact, the French came off best, simply because London was on the side of Paris in 1914. That only the German invasion of Belgium saved Grey from leaving France in the lurch<sup>33</sup> and that Britain would have abstained intervention have recently been seriously questioned again.<sup>34</sup>

Annika Mombauer is known for her excellent compilation of documents on the origins of the war<sup>35</sup> and her deep conviction of German responsibility for the war.<sup>36</sup> As concerns British foreign policy, for Mombauer it is clear that it

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<sup>33</sup> It also saved Raymond Poincaré. See the diary of Poincaré, 3. Aug. 1914, cited in John Keiger, *Raymond Poincaré* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 186.

<sup>34</sup> Newton, *The Darkest Days*; Clark, *Sleepwalkers*. For a new evaluation of the impression Grey's diplomacy made on Poincaré see Rainer F. Schmidt, *Revanche pour Sedan*.

<sup>35</sup> Annika Mombauer, ed., *The Origins of the First World War. Diplomatic and military documents* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> During the controversy about Christopher Clark's *Sleepwalkers*, she has even seen the task of historical research and scholarship as a task of educating the people when she warns against an alleged "new dominance of German innocence for the outbreak of war in 1914" in the wake of Christopher Clark's *Sleepwalkers* that might all too easily include the German guilt for 1939. Needless to say that no serious historian would deny the decisive responsibility of Berlin or Vienna in July/August 1914 and that looking at the foreign policies in Paris, St. Petersburg or London does not mean a "new dominance of German innocence" but simply a progress, an internationalization and professionalization of historical research. Any political correctness or educational guideline with the view of possible public reactions, however, means a regression and is definitely not an

was mainly driven by Germany and when Grey took office “he had identified Germany as the threat” and that Britain was placed in a “precarious foreign policy position” (310). It is particularly striking how Mombauer generally assumes Britain standing with its back to the wall, because London had decided to stand aloof from any continental alliances. For the author it was this aloofness from any formal alliance which “restricted [Britain’s] choice for independent action” (311). There are certainly good reasons to believe that quite the reverse was true, and that not being tied to any formal alliance was the prerequisite for independent actions, for alternative options and mediation between alliance groups within a multi-polar states system.

More important for Mombauer is that both powers, Germany and Britain alike, “designed their policy based on fear” and both – with the exception of former Permanent Under-Secretary Thomas Sanderson’s often neglected counter-memorandum to the famous Crowe Memorandum<sup>37</sup> – were unable “to see international politics from the vantage point” of the other. For example, while Germany’s precarious geopolitical position speaks for itself, it is an interesting question as to why Edward Grey was on the defence. Was this due to actual facts or due to British self-perception? Although the South African War proved to be a very expansive adventure, Britain had finally asserted itself. The alliance with Japan and the Entente Cordiale secured the stability on the colonial periphery, and the Russian defeat protected Britain from any danger in the Middle East. Nevertheless for Edward Grey, one can easily argue, the glass was always half-empty and he never acted as the Foreign Secretary of the greatest imperial power, the greatest financial power, the greatest naval power, and the power that, due to its geopolitical position, was somehow predestined for the role of an arbiter in Europe.

When British diplomacy at The Hague Peace Conference failed, however, it was not, as Eyre Crowe remarked to the politician Charles Dilke, due to its poor preparations,<sup>38</sup> but to German bullishness, and when at Algeciras the Entente prevailed it was not seen as a success but as proof that Germany strove for hegemony (311). “Détente,” the author states, “was only possible on Berlin’s terms;” as for Britain, one might argue, it was only possible with French consent. Therefore Anglo-German foreign policy was conducted in a “climate of nervousness.” Concerning Britain, however, options were not diminishing because of a missing formal alliance with France but rather because it was Grey’s dogma to be always considerate of French feelings and only “to make new friends without losing old ones.”<sup>39</sup> Did this not restrict Britain’s choices of independent action more than isolation?

Although Mombauer confirms the long-term perspective that Britain feared the consequences of abandoning France and felt it necessary even to please Russia (313-314) with the secret Anglo-Russian naval talks that had a devastating effect upon Berlin and in particular on Bethmann-Hollweg’s politics of détente (315), she sticks to her argument that this policy had no decisive negative effect upon pre-war relations and that imperial threats counted for little because the German peril appeared as the most immediate danger (320). Mombauer is definitely right that in

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argument a serious researcher should adhere too. Annika Mombauer, *Der hundertjährige Krieg und die Kriegsschuld*, in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 65 (2014), 303-337, esp. 323.

<sup>37</sup> For a comparison of the two memoranda see Rose, *Empire und Kontinent*, 369-384; Rose, *Empire and Continent*, 287-306.

<sup>38</sup> Crowe to Dilke, 15 Oct. 1907, The National Archives, FO 800/243. See Crowe’s private reports from the conference: Bodleian Library Oxford, Eyre Crowe Papers, MS Eng. d. 2901.

<sup>39</sup> Grey to Law, 25 Nov. 1911, Parliamentary Archives London, Bonar Law Papers, LAW 24/4/80.

London, unlike in the other capitals, there was no intention of war. At the same time, she rightly agrees with Otte that Edward Grey was in no position to prevent the war in July 1914 (318). In the face of the evidence cited by the author as concerns Grey's Entente diplomacy in the decade 1914, his share in creating the dilemma of the states system in 1914 appears rather doubtful. The problems of British politics and their share in the outbreak of the First World War, however, become clear not so much in a single event or crisis but over a whole decade.

Moreover, Mombauer conveys that recent historiography overlooks German failures (302-303, 312) and given the fact that recent historiography has indeed changed its perspective also with respect to the other powers one might think she is right. On closer scrutiny however, it is too far to assume that this is done in order to exculpate Wilhelmine foreign policy (303). She is certainly right, and nobody would deny, that the failure of détente between 1912 and 1914 was due to both sides, London as well as Berlin. But it is equally true that historical research for decades was primarily concerned with the German background of the story. Much of the (now older) historiography on the subject, as Christopher Clark has remarked, has been marked by a "perplexing tendency" to "accept implicitly the notion that British colonial expansion and British perception of British rights constituted a 'natural order', in the light of which German objections appeared to be wanton provocations."<sup>40</sup> It is the great merit of recent scholarship that we now try to see pre-war international relationships from each vantage point and to combine the different results. That this automatically leads to a qualification of the German role is self-evident but not tantamount to exculpating Wilhelmine aggressiveness and foolishness or even to a "new history of German innocence."<sup>41</sup>

Historians on both sides of the Channel generally agree that for an understanding of the outbreak of war in 1914 we have to look beyond the question of guilt and beyond the mere analysis of the July Crisis, though without forgetting both of these perspectives. As to Edward Grey, Mombauer as well as Otte make a very persuasive point. I completely agree that it was indeed beyond Grey's capability to save the world from war by himself. The case of war and peace in late July and early August 1914 was certainly decided far more in the capitals of Vienna, St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Paris (with no intended order in this succession). All were ready to play *vabanque* in one of the most complex international crises the world had ever seen. There existed a great deal of purpose among many of the decision makers. Concerning London, the debate continues as to whether we detect only some minor mistakes or negligence or even gross carelessness in summer 1914 or over a whole decade, especially due to Britain's role as a global as well as a European great power. In any case, for Great Britain, the question as to whether Edward Grey was naïf or the most far-sighted Foreign Secretary Britain ever had leads not very far and is even beside the point.

Therefore, and given the complexities of the July crisis presented in the foregoing essays, it seems rather odd that the volume of essays is rounded off by Richard Smith's interesting character-sketch, as intriguing this may be. As a contribution to the question as to whether Grey was an 'ambitious political operator' or a 'gentlemen amateur' it should have been placed at the start and not at the end of the volume.

In his essay Smith confirms that an ambitious life that was shaped by politics and the London social season was not to Grey's taste. Nevertheless, he was aware of his duties and felt a special desire to satisfy the sense of public duty (341). Whenever possibly he tried to flee from London and enjoys shooting, grouse driving, or walking up his partridges at Fallodon (342). This ambivalence towards public life, however, was not unusual amongst the landed

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<sup>40</sup> Christopher Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II. A Life in Power* (London: Penguin 2009), 182-183.

<sup>41</sup> Annika Mombauer, *Der hundertjährige Krieg und die Kriegsschuld*, in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 65 (2014), 303-337, 323.

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establishment (343-344). For his politics it seems rather telling that he was from the beginning torn between the life of public duty and privacy (344). In office, especially after the tragic death of his wife, he was always at the apex of the decision-making process, although the Foreign Office reforms of 1906 had given officials greater responsibility in formulating policy and allowed a greater degree of delegation. Nevertheless, Grey's personal as well as professional relationship with his senior officials like Charles Hardinge, Arthur Nicolson or Eyre Crowe is still open to question.

Another important factor that needs further investigation and that Smith alludes to is Grey's tendency toward self-containment that manifested itself in a desire to avoid discussion not only in Cabinet but also with other departments, within his party, and to limit the circulation of papers (348). Grey, torn between duty and private life, represents for Smith less the archetypal Edwardian statesman than the last of the Victorian politicians (352). Perhaps it was his personal dilemma to be born fifty years too late in an age of transition, but perhaps it was also his personal lack of ambition that he only wanted to defend British interests and not to serve as an arbiter for the whole states system?

The debate, as all of these essays impressively show, will and needs to be continued not necessarily on the personal role of Edward Grey but mainly on three aspects of his foreign policy: first, on the question of Britain's leverage over France and Russia and the long term effects of entente diplomacy; second, on Britain's role concerning the so-called Balkan inception scenario; third, on the working together of imperial, foreign and domestic aspects of British Foreign Policy.

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