



ENGLAND'S INTRIGUES BEFORE WORLD WAR I

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In a less ideological cultural world, Helmut Roewer's investigation of the crucial role of the English government at the outbreak of World War I would be taken for granted. What Roewer [diligently uncovered](#) should not astonish any expert. The trick is that the author reveals to us what the anti-German intelligentsia has hidden or pushed aside for decades.

It has long been clear that [Fritz Fischer](#) and his followers could only prove the thesis of the belligerent German Second Reich, which triggered a Europe-devouring war for world domination, only by disregarding numerous sources. When the quirks attached to the Fischer thesis became apparent, anti-German historians like [Hans-Ulrich Wehler](#) and my dissertation supervisor, [Hajo Holborn](#), tried again and again to patch up the fabric of the usual narrative. At least for me the measure was too high when I encountered an assessment of this kind by the German-American historian [Fritz Stern](#) forty years ago, who was serious when he said: Even if the Fischer thesis is not uniformly consistent, decency demands that we accept his botch-up out of moral considerations, in order not to let German nationalism out of the bottle.

How The Sole Guilt Thesis Began To Falter

In the meantime, numerous younger historians around the world have dispelled the sole guilt thesis. The burden of guilt was thus shifted to the Tsarist Empire and France, without dropping the position as a whole, that the Central Powers were most to blame for the outbreak of war. Every now and then the Serbian government is brought up and its connections with the assassination attempt on [Franz Ferdinand](#) and his wife are properly noted. It is also permissible to address the mobilization of the Russian armed forces along the German-Galician border on August 1, 1914. That was a pathogen that brought about the German declaration of war against Russia and the attack on Russia's ally, France.

It is also permissible to point out that the French and Russian governments discussed war measures against Germany and Austria-Hungary in June 1914. On June 22, 1914, French President Raymond Poincaré assured the Russian Foreign Minister that if the Russians took up the fight first, they would enter into disputes against the [Central Powers](#). The Australian historian [Christopher Clark](#) also added that neither the Central Powers nor the [Entente](#) allies could have imagined the extent of the devastating war. At most, the armed forces expected a "short, limited war" at the beginning.

In addition to this post-Fischer pattern, the Austrians allowed the outbreak of war through the

enormous demands placed on Serbia. And the German government went catastrophically astray when it issued the Austrians a "blank check" to proceed against the hostile Serbs. The Central Powers are far from being absolved of all guilt.

Why England Has Received So Little Attention Thus Far

Helmut Roewer (here in the BN interview) now looks at the English way into the First World War in *On the Way to World Domination*. The contribution of the government of [Sir Edward Gray](#), the British Foreign Minister, to the start of the war is under-emphasized for two reasons. The English are typically portrayed as partial outsiders in relation to the approaching storm. While they were allied with France and Russia against the Germans, the impression still exists that England was forced to make war on Germany because the neutrality it guaranteed for Belgium had been violated by the German armies. Until now, England's concern has been recognized that a defeated France would have given Germany preponderance of power in Europe. Despite its initial wavering, England threw itself into the breach to ward off the aftermath of a devastating German victory. In addition, "liberal democratic" England enjoys a higher political value than the German Second Reich, which for the leading intelligentsia was already considered an authoritarian regime at that time.

England Wanted To Isolate Germany Since 1905

Historians, such as, [Harry Elmer Barnes](#) and Christopher Clark, who emphasize the shared responsibility of the armed forces on both sides for the outbreak of war, are somewhat sparing of the English government. They consider the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Gray, to be a minor player in the events that took place in August 1914. But because the Germans got the ball rolling, illegally overran Belgium and threatened France, did the English feel pressured to plunge into the fray. Roewer, on the other hand, focuses on the precarious foreign policy of the Gray government of 1905, which was aimed at isolating the Germans from the other European powers. Enemy encirclement was known to be successful and England benefited economically and politically from it.

To confirm his thesis, Roewer expands his field of vision retrospectively, from the run-up to the war to the long road leading to the outbreak of war. From this point of view he tries to measure the extent of the responsibility of Gray and his government confidants. It would be misleading, according to Roewer, to examine the war crisis that intensified in the summer of 1914 without a background that included the British government. Since the creation of his coalition government, the key figures in Gray's cabinet had

been trying to forge an anti-German front with the French and Russians. Influential press barons and the warring party in the cabinet discussed the “war in sight” behind the scenes, without the knowledge of the less contentious cabinet ministers, who were left in the dark.

Did England Plan World War I Together With The USA?

Immediately after the first act of war, Gray made the decision to weigh his country into the fray. He admitted this in his memoirs published after the war. On the other hand, Roewer's attempt to assign the American government and the banking industry in the USA a steering role in the anti-German intrigues of Gray, Churchill and the like, is less convincing. The American elites of the time were determined to ensure an English victory. But that in no way justifies that something like divided war planning was going on.

Despite the participation of the American upper class in the English cause, it cannot be inferred thereby that the two countries forged a war plot with each other before the shooting started. If one wants to paraphrase the foreign policy of the Wilson government from 1914 until the declaration of war against Germany, then one can say that it was capable of doing everything possible to ensure that the British gained the upper hand over the Germans—but without entering the war directly. That was definitely not true neutrality. However, as Justus Doenecke abundantly demonstrates in his balanced treatment of Woodrow Wilson's neutrality policy, the American president, who was admittedly pro-British, wanted to maintain a middle course between the war—inducing WASP Republicans and the anti-war elements in the Democratic Party.

Either Way, The US Was The Big Winner Of The First World War

Wilson never contained the wave of pro-British or anti-German sentiments of his colleagues; but he was willing to favor the British side without sending American forces to Europe. The German re-use of submarine weapons in 1917 to relieve the British hunger blockade allowed the American interventionists to force Congress to join the war. Without glossing over these machinations, it is fitting to make a distinction between American participation in British preparation for war and pro-British partisanship.

There is no question that the United States had many alternatives during the First World War that

would have allowed it to maintain its position of power without using armed forces against the Central Powers. The American government was able to mediate peace, a prospect that the British, more than the Germans and Austrians, let slip away. Even a negotiated victory in favor of the Central Powers would hardly have brought the USA to its knees. They would have stood out brilliantly as the world power of the future, regardless of which side in Europe had better weathered the atrocities.

English War Propaganda Extremely Effective

How the ruling class was attuned, however, had to be taken into account. The committed Morgan banking house extended piles of bonds to the British, while the American ammunition manufacturers supplied arms to the Allies as often as possible. But that was hardly a coincidence. Those involved acted in this way because they were inclined to the anti-German or pro-British side. One has to come to this conclusion without treating the Central Powers as the more morally blameworthy side.

It was just as relevant that the English were more proficient with their war propaganda than the Germans. Common language, sensible use of the transatlantic telegraph wire, and the ability to effectively address the sensitivities of American elites and to shape them appropriately were inexhaustible advantages for the English advertisers. This in no way means to justify the American government's course of war. The aim is to explain why the American involvement in the war happened. And there is no need to point out a conspiracy to understand this urge to intervene in war.

It was different with the English. A bustling cabinet cabal managed to enflame feelings on the continent. Roewer's treatment of the history of American development up to the American entry in World War I therefore lags qualitatively behind his presentation of the English cabinet's schemes. In the latter case, he limits his investigation to the actual warmongers without, as Fritz Fischer did with the Germans, degrading an entire nation. With the English, Roewer differentiates between the guilty and the rest who had been duped and lied to. With the Americans, on the other hand, he is not so careful with the innocent.

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The featured image shows, "General Officers of World War I," by John Singer Sargent, painted in 1922.

