

ACQUIRING AMERICA:
THE DIPLOMATIC BATTLE FOR THE UNITED STATES, 1914-1917

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Introduction

Shortly after war was declared in August 1914 the undisputed leaders of each alliance, Great Britain and Germany, found they were unable to win the war outright and began searching for further means to secure victory; the formation of a blockade, the use of submarines, attacking the flanks (Allied attacks in the Balkans and Baltic), German Zeppelin bombardment of British coastal towns, and the diplomatic search for additional allies in an attempt to break the stalemate that had ensued soon after fighting had commenced. Germany, having spent decades working with the Ottoman Turks, convinced them to join the Central Powers and in October 1915 they did, declaring war on the Entente powers. Italy, having withdrawn from the Central Powers and declaring its neutrality, was persuaded by France and Great Britain into joining the Entente in April 1915. Still, no breakthrough occurred and the eyes of both Britain and Germany fell on the United States, as the strongest remaining neutral, to provide the crucial support to break the deadlock.

The U.S. had established its place among the great nations of the world when it defeated the aging Spanish Empire in 1898. Together with an ever-growing economy, America had established itself as an international player just behind Britain and Germany.¹ As one of the strongest nations still maintaining its neutrality when Europe's mighty armies clashed in August 1914, the United States was seen as the missing piece to ensure victory by both Britain and Germany. Because the belligerent nations viewed the United States as a major factor in determining the outcome of the war a new theatre of the war opened – a battle between the belligerents for American support.

The United States, with its newly acquired status as a world power, was the strongest of the neutral powers. Despite the confidence of Europe's military and

¹ J.A.S. Grenville, *A History of the World in the 20th Century* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 5.

political leaders that the war would be short, the Foreign Offices of both Great Britain and Germany understood that they had to take into account America's response to actions taken by all of the participants in the war in Europe. It is the contention of this dissertation that from early in the war, Great Britain and Germany did not view America as a sideshow of the First World War. To these two countries the United States became an important potential feature in their respective arsenals almost immediately.

The diplomacy surrounding America's entry into the First World War has been studied from various angles with several historians focusing on German blunders, the apparent ineptitude of Germany's diplomacy, and the perceived success of Britain's diplomacy.² In the nearly one hundred years since the end of the war, scholars have written innumerable articles and books concerning every aspect of the war. Just as tactics change over time, so does the emphasis of historical thought. An approach that for fifty years has shaped the discussion of Anglo-American-German relations during the First World War is Ernest May's *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917*.³

May's work traces the policies of Britain's Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, Germany's Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, and America's Woodrow Wilson as they attempted to maintain America's traditional neutrality. He concluded that despite Bethmann Hollweg's efforts to harness his country's desire for unrestricted submarine warfare, it was Grey who successfully persuaded Wilson of the righteousness of his country's cause – it was Grey's success that led to the president's eagerness to tolerate Britain's violations of neutral rights and created and maintained a pro-Allied bias in America despite the blockade. May takes the position that Wilson's policy of watchful

² Examples include: Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971); Barbara Tuchman, *The Zimmerman Telegram* (New York, 1958); Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989).

³ Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963).

waiting coupled with Grey's diplomacy, along with Bethmann's loss of control in Germany led to a build-up of pressure among the three governments, finally leading to the end of American isolation.

More recent examples of multinational scholarship are David Stevenson's *The First World War and International Politics* and *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy*, and Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War*.⁴ The common view of scholars such as David Stevenson and Niall Ferguson, and consequently the view of many readers of history, is that the First World War was a European affair that America was drawn into by the German use of unrestricted submarine warfare.⁵ The idea has long been that after years of German submarines violating international law with immoral attacks on neutral merchant ships and their innocent crews, Germany's 1917 decision to allow its submarine force to indiscriminately sink merchant shipping is what finally drove the United States to break its neutrality.

This idea is closely followed by German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman's decision to offer an alliance with America's troublesome southern neighbour Mexico. The telegram proposing this German-Mexican alliance – intercepted by the British and passed on to the American government – is often seen as being the ultimate act of aggression by Germany towards the United States, and therefore also a cause of U.S. entry to the First World War. This view ignores the work of diplomats, intelligence

⁴ David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford, 1988); David Stevenson, *The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, 2004); Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York, 1999).

⁵ Authors who argue that it was Germany's use of submarines that led to Wilson's decision to involve the United States in the European conflict include: John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson* (London, 2002); Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, 2009); Kendrick A. Clements, *Woodrow Wilson: World Statesman* (Chicago, 1987); Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonian Statecraft: Theory and Practice of Liberal Internationalism during World War I* (Wilmington, 1991); J.M. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (London, 1988); Kendrick A. Clements, 'Woodrow Wilson and World War I', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34 (2004), pp. 62-82; Edward H. Buehrig, *Woodrow Wilson and the Balance of Power* (Bloomington, 1955).

officers, politicians, and in some cases even the decisions of German and British military leadership in their attempts to acquire America.

This thesis contends that the historian seeking a greater understanding of First World War diplomacy, and diplomacy in general, must look beyond the four years of war to understand why diplomats and politicians made some of the decisions that they did. The diplomatic policies Britain and Germany pursued to attempt to acquire American assistance during its period of neutrality followed the same patterns as those that had been formulated in previous decades. First World War diplomacy, I argue, is an extension of long established British and German diplomatic policy towards the United States, and that continuity of diplomacy played a determining role in the American entry into the war.

Woodrow Wilson's initial desire to remain neutral is not in question, nor is his desire to mediate a peace; nor for that matter is the fact that belligerents were able to manipulate Wilson, his closest confidant and unofficial chief diplomat, Colonel Edward M. House, and the rest of his cabinet. What this thesis is concerned with is how British and German diplomats were able to essentially dismiss his calls for both countries to adhere to U.S. policies, how German diplomats were able to maintain American neutrality for almost three years, and how after calling on his countrymen to remain neutral for almost three years he decided to enter the First World War as an associate power of the Allies.

Sources

In order to pursue an in-depth analysis of the mid-level diplomacy used during this time period it is important to carefully examine British, German, and American sources. Despite a large number of German documents being destroyed during the

Second World War, all three countries have a wealth of information available for inspection.

When dealing with British diplomacy towards the United States during the period of neutrality the National Archives in Kew contains the most complete collection of materials regarding diplomatic action toward the United States. Amongst the collections at Kew, are several which are of immense interest to those involved in understanding the diplomatic actions of Great Britain during the First World War. Of particular interest are the Records of the Foreign Office. These papers contain the communications of Foreign Office personnel including the Sir Edward Grey Papers, the papers of Sir Cecil Spring Rice, Admiralty and War Office papers, and papers relating to the United States. While these papers are generally used as sources for analysis of British diplomacy during the First World War, other less used files contribute to an understanding of why decisions were made.

Those files include the correspondence of the Foreign Office's Commercial Department, and particularly the United States Files. These files give an inside look at how the British Foreign Office was working with, and sometimes against, the Commercial Department when dealing with commercial decisions and attempting to placate the United States. The papers of the Foreign Office's Political and War Departments America General File, War file, contain information regarding the shipping of munitions from the United States to Britain as well as information about German telegrams that are being sent into America. The Foreign Office papers relating to the United States contains information relating to wartime issues and the Orders in Council involving the Blockade of Germany as well as the Political Intelligence Department's work in the United States.

The Cabinet Papers are important for the study of diplomacy because they quite clearly demonstrate the fact that Grey's policies towards the United States did not operate in a vacuum. Instead, Grey had to weigh the effects of decisions towards other neutrals on America as well as the effects of decisions towards the United States on European neutrals. Additionally, these papers offer some insight into the role of America on decisions made in War Council meetings. Because so much of the tension between the United States and Britain was due to British contraband rules in correlation to the blockade, the papers of the Foreign Office Contraband Department offers information on the tonnage of goods detained as well as economic deals struck with U.S. companies to limit or end the prospect of American retaliation, thus ensuring friendly relations between the two nations. These files also contain information relating to the effectiveness of the blockade, detailing the scarcity of items within Germany.

The letters, briefs, notes, and memoranda from all sources within the British government regarding both actions taken towards the United States and actions taken by the United States, as well as how actions towards other countries might influence the relations between the most powerful neutral and Britain, help form a more complete view of how these two countries dealt with one another and the situations that occurred due to war. This day-to-day communication between the different officials regarding decisions concerning British policy and the United States allows for comparison and analysis with memoirs and autobiographies of many of these same individuals.

Although German archives are spread out among several locations, when researching the diplomatic actions of the nation the place to begin is at the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt (Diplomatic Archive of the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs, generally known by its abbreviation AA). The Politisches Archiv holds extensive material concerning German-American relations up to the entrance of the U.S.

into the war, the personal papers of Johann Heinrich Count von Bernstorff, ambassador to the United States, and the personal papers of German Foreign Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, as well as documents concerning German intrigues in Mexico including the infamous Zimmerman Telegram. This archive also holds documents dealing with enterprises against German enemies that include the propaganda activities among Irish immigrants in the U.S., and rarely used series on the World War.

The Bundesarchiv, much like the U.S. National Archives, is situated at different locations throughout the country. The Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde holds a small portion of the estate papers for Foreign Minister Jagow which, while small, are important due to the fact that they contain many memoranda written by Jagow pertaining to the United States. Lichterfelde also holds some of the estate papers of Alfred Zimmermann, father of Undersecretary of the Foreign Office Arthur Zimmerman. It is unfortunate that these papers have been rarely used when discussing the diplomatic decisions of the German government during the First World War because they contain letters from son to father where the younger Zimmerman discussed some of the decisions made within the Kaiser's court.⁶

This thesis also draws on papers relating to the German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, which can be found at the Bundesarchiv Koblenz. Due to the destruction of Bethmann Hollweg's personal estate papers or Nachlass, during Soviet occupation of Germany, documents concerning the Chancellor's position and decisions must be pieced together by the use of other sources in correlation to the remaining papers from Bethmann himself. The Bundesarchiv Koblenz provides no less than six additional individuals' personal papers that should be viewed in order to gain a deeper

⁶ The personal papers of Arthur Zimmerman that are held by the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin at Potsdamer Platz contain correspondence, speeches and articles by Zimmerman before 1914, and while they would be of great value to someone studying the desire for colonies by Imperial Germany, they are of little value to the study of German diplomacy towards America during the war.

understanding, and therefore more accurate analysis, of Bethmann's decisions – the papers of Friedrich von Payer, adviser to the Kaiser, George von Hertling, Foreign Minister for the Bayern region, Rudolf von Valentini, Max Sering, Friedrich von Berg, minister for East Prussian, and Kurt von Lersner, Commander of the Political Section of the Supreme Military Headquarters. With so much of the historical debate surrounding German diplomacy during the First World War focusing on the decisions of Bethmann Hollweg, and so few of his personal papers to be found, it is surprising to find that these papers have been virtually excluded from published research. Bethmann's surviving papers contain correspondence with various ministers as well with his father, plus documents concerning German politics and the issue of unrestricted submarine warfare. All of these add to an understanding of Bethmann's decisions concerning the U.S.

As mentioned above, U.S. archives are spread out among several institutions, and locations. Because this analysis deals with the decisions of President Woodrow Wilson the obvious place to start is with the Papers of Woodrow Wilson housed at the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library at Princeton University. Along with the detailed organization and analysis of Wilson's papers by Arthur S. Link, this holding contains the papers of many of Wilson's cabinet members, including a small but important portion of Secretary of State Robert Lansing's papers, and some papers of William Jennings Bryan during his time as Wilson's Secretary of State. The largest collection of Bryan's papers can be found at the U.S. Library of Congress with duplicates found at National Archives.

More of Robert Lansing's files can be found at the U.S. Library of Congress, including his desk diary and correspondence to and from family members, the president, other cabinet members, and the general public. This collection also provides information from American officials who dealt with issues concerning both British and

German diplomacy, such as Chandler Anderson, counsellor for the State Department and Joseph Tumulty, secretary to the president. Tumulty's papers contain frequent notes and memoranda that were passed between the president and his secretary providing yet another view into the thoughts and actions of Wilson. Aiding in the understanding of actions taken in Wilson's cabinet meetings are the papers of Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, also in the Library of Congress. While Daniels rarely had any direct dealings with diplomacy, his participation in and recording of cabinet meetings and correspondence provides yet another account by which to deconstruct the development of U.S. policy.

It is also important to examine the many papers held at the Department of Manuscripts and Archives at Yale University. Of particular interest are the Edward M. House Papers, including Colonel House's diary. This diary is an important source for understanding U.S. diplomacy because House was meticulous at recording the facts surrounding events, even if he did tend to exaggerate his importance. The House papers, in conjunction with the Charles Seymour papers, which are essentially a narrated and edited version of House's papers, provide essential source of information regarding decisions made by the U.S. government during the First World War.

Yale University's other holdings on this subject include the Arthur Willert Papers, and the Sir William Wiseman Papers. Both are of importance to Anglo-American relations because, as in Willert's case, he was able to provide insight about American officials' attitudes as well as that of the American public to British officials as they formed pro-Allied propaganda for American consumption. Wiseman's importance comes from his work as a diplomat and liaison between the British government and Wilson's administration. Wiseman's association with House, due to his becoming the conduit through which many of the most important messages between

officials of Britain and the United States ran, demonstrates the value of these papers to the study of the diplomatic actions of both governments.

Four printed primary sources of immense value to First World War scholars have been utilized. *The Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* are 375 volumes of records from the U.S. State Department concerning foreign policy decisions from 1861-1960. These volumes can be found at the U.S. National Archives and on-line at the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections site. Also of interest are the *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*, the *Official German Documents Relating to the World War*, and *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*.⁷ These publications contain committee interviews with individuals associated with the events each publication is covering.⁸

Methodology

This thesis will begin with a brief examination of the diplomacy prior to the First World War, analysing how British and German construction of diplomacy regarding the United States laid the groundwork for the battle for America from 1914-1917. It will then proceed to analyse four key diplomatic battlegrounds where British, German, and American diplomats fought to determine what the United States would contribute: the first diplomatic battleground to be covered is the role of the British Foreign Office in developing the mind-set of neglect in the United States regarding the British blockade of Germany; the second battleground is how the German decision to

⁷ United States Senate Documents, Foreign Relations Committee, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs, Report and Hearings* (2 vols.), 66th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Document no. 62 (Washington, D.C., 1919); *Official German Documents Relating to the World War*, Published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (New York, 1923); Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt, eds., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print* (Frederick, 1987-1991).

⁸ In the cases of the *Official German Documents* and *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* the bulk of the volumes is devoted to reproductions of official letters, memorandums, and speeches all leading the reader to a greater understanding of events. Concerning the *Investigation of Mexican Affairs* by the U.S. Congress, as well as a large portion of the *Official German Documents* the publication is simply a transcript of hearings; what questions were asked and the answers given.

use the submarine affected German and American diplomacy focusing on Wilson's 'strict accountability' policy and why the United States remained neutral in the face of continued infractions; the third battleground covered deals with the policies of the Wilson administration towards Mexico and how they induced Germany into offering an alliance that would bring Mexico into the war against the United States. The final battleground to be examined by this dissertation is the peace initiative and how the hope of peace was used as a means manipulating the potential American intervention.

The focus of this thesis primarily surrounds Great Britain, Germany, and the United States. The reasoning behind this is largely due to the fact that Britain and Germany were clearly the leaders of their respective alliances; therefore France, Russia, and Austria-Hungary do not figure prominently in this analysis. This should not be seen as a reflection of the role these countries played in the war, or in their role in diplomatic decisions. It is, however, a reflection of the decision of each of them to defer to their more powerful ally. As members of the Triple Entente, France and Russia repeatedly claimed to follow Britain's lead when it came to recruiting the services of the United States. Additionally, France needed Britain's navy to protect its northern coast in case of war with Germany; France had also needed Britain's army to protect its northern flank in the land war; and finally, France needed Britain's money (as well as American money) to help finance its war effort. Perhaps most important, when discussing the acquisition of America, was the perceived American Anglophilia. France may have been loved for its service to the United States during the American Revolution, but Americans in the seat of power still looked to Britain, with its common language, for direction.⁹

⁹ One example of France deferring to Britain can be found their willingness to follow British directions to seize the freighter *Dacia* allowing the Anglo-American relations a reprieve from the ship-purchasing dispute.

There are various methods used by historians to analyse German, British, and U.S. diplomacy over the course of the First World War. Analyses have focused on the diplomacy surrounding particular periods from the assassination of the Archduke and the crucial first months while others have focused primarily on the diplomacy between European powers over the lifetime of the war. Still others tend to focus on the proceedings at Versailles. A few have looked at the impact of official propaganda on both population and government, and others have taken a look at specific events in the war and attempted to build a case on that one event.

This thesis argues that what has become lost in the research of First World War diplomatic history is the significance of the mid-level diplomacy, in the continuity of long-term policy employed by the British and Germans, as they attempted to shape U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's decisions. At the heart of First World War diplomatic exchanges were conversations and relationships developed between the Foreign Ministers, Ambassadors, and special envoys. It is precisely because it was these diplomats carrying the diplomatic load, and not the individual leaders of each nation, that an analysis of mid-level diplomacy is so crucial to understanding the success' and failures of the belligerent attempts to acquire American assistance. When Wilson requested that Congress declare war on Germany in April 1917, Great Britain and the Allies had clearly won the battle for American support, but this was far more complex than historians have considered. The objective of this project, therefore, is to examine the mid-level diplomacy between Britain, Germany, and the United States prior to the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914 and during the period of American neutrality in order to understand its full complexity.

Because this thesis concentrates on mid-level diplomacy, it will argue that the work of the diplomats was far more important – arguably decisive – than the role played

by non-state actors in the decisions regarding American entry into the war. Inevitably, non-state actors did weigh on the decisions of the politicians, but it is the decisions and actions of individual diplomats that, in the final account, affected American policy. Therefore the aim of this thesis is to increase the understanding of the degree of the efforts made by the diplomats of Great Britain and Germany to influence U.S. policy vis-à-vis the European war.

It was not until after May's 1963 work that the emphasis really shifted from the role of low- and mid-level diplomatic actions to the role of non-state factors such as economics, agriculture and race.¹⁰ Charles Tansill's *America Goes to War* published in 1938 was one of the first works to emphasise the influence of economic factors on U.S. decisions.¹¹ These accounts of the diplomacy surrounding the First World War continue to contribute to the base of knowledge about this discussion, but they also tend to focus on determinants other than diplomacy. Non-state actors, however, do not make decisions. People made the decisions that led to the death and destruction of the First World War, so therefore it is important to have an understanding of what those

¹⁰ Historians that have branched out from mid-level diplomacy to study how agrarian, social, and economic issues within countries affected diplomacy from Avner Offer, *The First World War, an Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford, 1989); Avner Offer, 'The Working Classes, British Naval Plans and the Coming of the Great War', *Past & Present* No. 107 (May, 1985), pp. 204-226; Avner Offer, 'The Blockade of Germany and the Strategy of Starvation, 1914-1918: An Agency Perspective', in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Washington D.C., 2000), pp. 169-188; Theo Balderston, 'War Finance and Inflation in Britain and Germany, 1914-1918' in *The Economic History Review* New Series, Vol. 42, No. 2 (May, 1989), pp. 222-244; David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford, 1988); Louis L. Gerson, 'Immigrant Groups and American Foreign Policy', *Issues and Conflicts: Studies in Twentieth Century American Diplomacy*, ed. George L. Anderson (Lawrence, 1959), pp.171-191; John Milton Cooper, 'The Command of Gold Reversed: American Loans to Britain, 1915-1917', *The Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 45, No. 2 (May, 1976), pp. 209-230; Marjorie M. Farrar, 'Preclusive Purchases: Politics and Economic Warfare in France during the First World War', *The Economic History Review* (1973), pp. 117-133; Roberta A. Dayer, 'Strange Bedfellows: J.P. Morgan & Co., Whitehall and the Wilson Administration During World War I', *Business History Review* (1976), pp. 127-151; Martin Horn, 'A Private Bank at War: J.P. Morgan & Co. and France, 1914-1918', *Business History Review* vol. 74, No. 74 (Spring, 2000), pp. 85-112; John Singleton, 'The Cotton Industry and the British War Effort, 1914-1918', *The Economic History Review, New Series* Vol. 47, No. 3 (August, 1994), pp. 601-618; Tor Egil Førland, 'The History of Economic Warfare: International Law, Effectiveness, Strategies', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 30, No. 2 (May, 1993), pp. 151-162; Alice M. Morrissey, *The American Defense Of Neutral Rights, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1939).

¹¹ Charles Tansill, *America Goes To War* (Boston, 1938).

individuals believed was occurring at the time they were making momentous judgements.

The research being done on the influence of non-state actors on leaders, politics and policy is important insofar as it set parameters within which diplomats could operate, and therefore cannot, and should not, be discounted. However, due to the constraints of time and space, this thesis is focused, primarily, on analysing the decisions of the diplomats and the impact those decisions had on American entry into the war. Although public opinion is a non-state actor it is important to the understanding of diplomacy. For both the British and German foreign offices U.S. public opinion was not decisive in the decision making process, but something to be exploited.

The scholarship of the interwar period covered both the military and diplomatic aspects of the war and was focused primarily on establishing arguments that would salvage the reputations of those involved.¹² Eventually, historians branched out, analysing the diplomacy involved in Europe's spiral into the tragedy and largely writing about the descent into the abyss of war, the diplomacy between the belligerents, and the Versailles Treaty. Those who have written about the period of U.S. neutrality tend to focus on President Wilson's view of the war, or the debate over the Versailles Treaty. Yet there has been no adequate discussion of the methods used by the British and German Foreign Offices as they attempted to direct U.S. policy. As discussed earlier, this leaves the topic needing to be re-examined with fresh archival research to fill gaps

¹² Memoirs of particular importance to this thesis include: Rear-Admiral, Sir Douglas Brownrigg, *Indiscretions of the Naval Censor* (New York, 1920); Alfred W. Ewing, *The Man of Room 40: The Life of Sir Alfred Ewing* (Hutchinson, 1939); Walter Görlitz, *The Kaiser and His Court: The Diaries, Note Books and Letters of Admiral Georg Alexander von Müller, Chief of the Naval Cabinet, 1914-1918* (New York, 1959); Grey of Fallodon, Viscount, *Twenty-Five Years* (London, 1925); Theobald Von, Bethmann Hollweg, *Betrachtungen zum Weltkrieg*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1919), trans. as *Reflections on the World War* (London, 1920); Stephen Gwynn, ed., *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice* (Boston, 1929); Count Bernstorff, *My Three Years in America* (New York, 1920); *Memoirs of Count Bernstorff* (New York, 1936); Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, four volumes (Boston, 1926); David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, 2 vols. (London, 1936); William Jennings Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia, 1925).

in the debate. The standard answer given in textbooks, scholarly books, and classrooms around the world is that the callousness of the German submarine blockade in the North Atlantic caused even a stern moralist like President Woodrow Wilson to grind his teeth and jump into the abyss.

As historical analysis caught up with the historiography already underway biographies began adding to the understanding of the forceful personalities involved in the decision making processes. Konrad H. Jarausch looks at aspects of First World War diplomacy in *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hubris of Imperial Germany*.¹³ While essentially a biography of the German Chancellor, *The Enigmatic Chancellor* covers many of the aspects of German diplomacy towards the United States during the war, as well as internal decisions, but amazingly does not deal with the problems created for German diplomacy by British diplomatic action.¹⁴ Burton Jesse Hendrick's two-volume study *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page* utilizes the ambassador's letters to give scholars a starting place from which to gain a perspective of the American ambassador to Great Britain's views on the war.¹⁵

¹³ Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hubris of Imperial Germany* (New Haven, 1973).

¹⁴ Reinhard R. Doerries delves into German diplomacy with the United States in his book *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989). Doerries details German-American diplomatic relations prior to Wilson's decision to break relations with Germany in 1917. By focusing on Germany's ambassador to the United States, Doerries limits the analysis of the period to Bernstorff's decisions, omitting decisions made in Germany and how they affected or were affected by Britain's diplomacy. *Bismarck: A Life* (Oxford, 2011) by Jonathan Steinberg and *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* (Bloomington, 2011) by Patrick J. Kelly take a look at the inner workings of the German Empire and two of its more forceful personalities. Steinberg's work gives readers a new look at Bismarck's decisions and the reasoning behind them. For the purposes of this thesis it provides important information concerning the creation of German foreign policy traditions and how they laid the foundation for the decisions and work of Bethmann Hollweg, Jagow, and Zimmerman. Adding to this, Kelly's book is an in depth look at the founder of the modern German navy, the power he wielded and the concerns his positions created for those responsible for Germany's foreign policy.

¹⁵ Burton Jesse Hendrick, *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page*, 2 vols. (New York, 1924); Other authors studying the impact of individual American diplomats include Ross Gregory's *Walter Hines Page: Ambassador to the Court of St. James's* (Lexington, 1970); Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006); Robert W. Cherny, *A Righteous Cause: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (Norman, 1985); Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 2006); Kendrick A. Clements, *William Jennings Bryan, Missionary Isolationist* (Knoxville, 1982); Daniel M. Smith, *Robert Lansing and American Neutrality, 1914-*

American diplomacy during the period of neutrality is most commonly discussed when dealing with the person most responsible for it, Woodrow Wilson. Studies dealing with the president have been churned out at an astonishingly high rate, the most obvious and longest study of which is Ray Stannard Baker's eight-volume biography *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*.¹⁶ This was followed by the sixty-volume compendium of Wilson's writings edited by Arthur S. Link and David Hirst, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, which contains a massive amount of material including Wilson's personal papers, but also includes select extracts from a few foreign archives.¹⁷ Other early biographies of Wilson and his diplomacy include more work by Link. His 1957 work *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look At His Major Foreign Policies* reasserts the idea that Wilson's ideals and ambitions were the keys to U.S. involvement in the war.¹⁸

Two important themes that are elemental to most accounts regarding Wilson during the First World War are American isolation and internationalism. From the time of George Washington through to Wilson the United States had avoided becoming involved in European troubles. This did not preclude the United States from expanding its holdings at the expense of nations such as Spain and France, or signing trade agreements with European powers. But American isolationism hamstrung diplomats as they attempted to utilize American force to gain diplomatic success, forcing U.S. policy to be one of neutrality.

1917 (Berkeley, 1958); Daniel M. Smith, 'Robert Lansing and the Formulation of American Neutrality Policies, 1914-1915', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. XLIII, No.1 (June, 1956), pp. 59-81.

¹⁶ Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*, 8 vols, (Garden City, 1927-39). This series is most noted because of the author's personal relationship with the president, but is also weak because of the uncritical nature of the study. While old, it is still considered a starting point for anyone who wishes to understand Wilson's decisions.

¹⁷ Arthur S. Link, et al., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton, 1966).

¹⁸ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look At His Major Foreign Policies* (Baltimore, 1957). Link, like so many others, does not look at the work of the British and German diplomats as crucial to American involvement in the war – he does not even mention either country's meddling in Mexican affairs as part of the diplomatic scheming that took place as they battled to acquire American assistance.

Wilson and internationalism are often paired in the sense that Wilson's intellectual background led him to believe that the countries of the world could work together to achieve a greater good. International law was, in Wilson's view, designed to maintain peace, prosperity, and morality among nations. Wilson desired the United States to be the driving force that would lead the rest of the world to a future of peace and harmony.

Leading modern Wilson historians, John Milton Cooper and Thomas J. Knock focus on U.S. neutrality and Wilson's internationalism during the various stages they went through before U.S. entry to the war.¹⁹ But neither Cooper nor Knock examines the impact of influence on Wilson's thought. Yes, Knock does point out in *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order*, that the ideas of Lillian Wald and Jane Addams influenced Wilson's ideas on the Fourteen Points, but they do not investigate the impact of House, or any of the diplomats who were working feverishly to guide American policy.²⁰ This is endemic of the scholarship on First

¹⁹ John Milton Cooper, *The Vanity of Power: American Isolationism and the First World War, 1914-1917* (Westport, 1969); John Milton Cooper, ed., *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War and Peace* (Washington, D.C., 2008). Cooper quickly followed this up with *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York, 2009) where he does an exemplary job of explaining the foundations of Wilson's thoughts. An odd aspect of Cooper's analysis of Wilson's diplomacy is that while consistently recognizing what he terms as 'the diplomatic fencing match' between Germany and the United States he, like so many others, does not allow American diplomacy to interact with that of the British or Germans. It is, instead, as if American diplomacy acts in a purely American vacuum as German submarine warfare drove Wilson to war. John Milton Cooper, 'The Shock of Recognition: the Impact of World War I on America', *The Virginia Quarterly Review* vol. 76 (2000), p. 574.

²⁰ Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, 1992). Knock points to left leaning organizations such as the Woman's Peace Party, as well as activists including Lillian Wald and Jane Addams as having communicated regularly with Wilson and whose ideas impacted the president's decisions on the role the U.S. would play in the war and his development of the Fourteen Points. Other authors who focus on isolationism and Wilson's desire to form a new world order are: Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe* (Kent, 2009); John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson* (London, 2002). Thompson's book is essentially an expansion of the article he wrote 'Woodrow Wilson and World War I: A Reappraisal', *Journal of American Studies* 19 (1985), pp. 325-348; Robert W. Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War, 1914-1917* (Charlottesville, 2007); For a good critical view of Wilson's alleged tendency to moralize issues there is, John Morton Blum, *Woodrow Wilson and the Politics of Morality* (Boston, 1956); Malcolm D. Magee, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* (Waco, 2008); Mark Benbow, *Leading Them to the Promised Land: Woodrow Wilson, Covenant Theology, and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1915* (Kent, 2010). Authors who tend to focus on Wilson's internationalism include: Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge,

World War diplomacy. It focuses on either the individual or the event, but rarely both, and never on the larger context of British and German strategic thought and diplomatic practice.

Charles Seymour's *American Diplomacy during the World War* gave readers a good initial look at Wilson's diplomacy but fell far short of explaining how British or German diplomacy was used to direct the American efforts, and perhaps more important, he did not have access to documents that would be declassified decades later.²¹ Ross Gregory's *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* focuses on Wilson and his desire to remain neutral.²² While Gregory does address some of the problems caused by both Britain and Germany, his research is limited to British and American archives. This does not allow for a more intricate view of German attempts to control the administration and therefore control America's movement away from belligerency. Additionally, Gregory maintains the common theory that Wilson was forced to bring the United States into the war as a result of his desire to play peacemaker to the world.

This narrow academic focus is continued in John W. Coogan's 'Wilsonian diplomacy in war and peace', published in *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890-1993*.²³ In his chapter, Coogan focuses on nuances within the historical argument about Wilson's intent. In doing so, he does not focus on the impact of British and

1987); *Wilsonian Statecraft: Theory and Practice of Liberal Internationalism during World War I* (Wilmington, 1991); *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York, 2002); N. Gordon Levin, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* (London, 1968); David M. Esposito, *Woodrow Wilson: American War Aims in World War I* (Westport, 1996); Robert D. Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900* (New York, 2002)..

²¹ Charles Seymore, *American Diplomacy During the World War* (Baltimore, 1934); Thomas A. Bailey's 1964 opus *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1964) offers a strictly American perspective on First World War diplomacy consisting of two and a half chapters covering America's neutrality. One chapter of which is devoted to Wilson's issues with Mexico. Bailey must be given credit for treating Wilson's issues with Mexico as more than a mere training ground for his diplomacy. That being said he fails to connect the Mexican-American issues with the war in Europe and as a major contributor to the United States' entry into the war.

²² Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971).

²³ John W. Coogan, 'Wilsonian diplomacy in war and peace', in *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890 – 1993*, ed. Gordon Martel (London, 1994), pp. 71-89.

German diplomatic acts or on the potential impact of non-state actors. Instead, he focuses on Wilson and his advisors' thought process as they blundered through neutrality and war, turning success into failure and failures into successes by both brilliance and luck.

In *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey, A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* Joyce Grigsby Williams takes an interesting view.²⁴ William's conclusions turn out to be two-fold: first that Colonel House was deliberately manipulating the president to direct U.S. support towards Britain during neutrality with an eye on entering the war on the side of the Allies, and secondly that Grey manipulated House in an attempt to direct U.S. foreign policy. While Williams' arguments ring true, neither takes into account the effects of German diplomacy on the situation.

Coogan and Williams' arguments, like those mentioned earlier, falls short of analysing the broader diplomatic thinking along with the role of the diplomat himself. This thesis places First World War diplomacy firmly into the long-term diplomatic strategies of Britain and Germany and then focuses on the impact individual diplomats had on the out-come of that diplomacy.

Often treated as a sideshow to the concerns in Europe, Mexico's role in the diplomatic actions concerning America's entry into the war is covered most in depth by Friedrich Katz in his 1981 masterpiece, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States and the Mexican Revolution*.²⁵ Katz masterfully covers how the rivalry between

²⁴ Joyce Grigsby Williams, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984); Another study dedicated to Colonel House's role in First World War diplomacy is: David M. Esposito, 'Imagined Power: The Secret Life of Colonel House', *The Historian* vol. 60, issue 4 (Summer 1998), pp. 741 – 756; Alexander L. George and Juliette George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (New York, 1956) is another unflattering look at the relationship between Wilson and House and rests more on psychoanalytic than historical insight.

²⁵ Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, 1981). Other works of relevance dealing with Mexican-American-European diplomacy include: Peter Calvert, *The Mexican Revolution 1910-1914: The Diplomacy of Anglo-American Conflict* (Cambridge, 1968); Robert E. Quirk, *An Affair of Honor: Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of*

Britain, Germany, and the United States led to a covert war in Mexico and how the activities of these outside nations affected the Mexican nation and the diplomacy of the First World War. What is important about this work is that recognizes the importance of the strategic thought of the European powers and how this affected the United States and eventually the outcome of the First World War.

So much of the literature dealing with the diplomacy of the war concerns its perceived failure leading Europe into the wasteland of trench warfare, its continued failure to end the slaughter, and the failure that becomes the debacle of Versailles.²⁶ But amongst all of the military maneuvers, battles, and blockades, amongst all decisions to widen the war and bring in new allies, the entry of the United States has been largely relegated to that of a sideshow and therefore written about in a very haphazard fashion. In most cases, British diplomacy is treated as a secondary theme when explaining the Wilson Administration's position on the British blockade of Germany, while German diplomacy – in relation to the United States – is primarily depicted as reflexive to their use of unrestricted submarine warfare.²⁷ U.S. diplomatic policy is quite often seen as an avenue for Woodrow Wilson to play the 'saviour' by mediating an end to the war.²⁸

However, in *Politicians, Diplomacy and War in Modern British History*, Keith Robbins spends a considerable amount of time covering Sir Edward Grey's reign as Foreign Minister and First World War diplomacy.²⁹ In doing so Robbins discusses

Veracruz (New York, 1962); Jack Sweetman, *The Landing at Veracruz: 1914* (Annapolis, 1968); William Weber Johnson, *Heroic Mexico: The Violent Emergence of a Modern Nation* (Garden City, 1968).

²⁶ Some examples of this are Marc Ferro, *The Great War, 1914-1918* (London, 1969); James Joll, *The Origins Of The First World War* (London, 1984); Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (New York, 1914); David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, 2004).

²⁷ A prime example is Daniel M. Smith, *Robert Lansing and American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (New York, 1972). More modern examples are Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989); Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006).

²⁸ Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (New York, 2003); David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, 2004).

²⁹ Keith Robbins, *Politicians, Diplomacy and War in Modern British History* (London, 1994).

British diplomacy over time, and how the British Foreign Office approached not only the coming of war in Europe, but the United States, the peace movement, and other neutral nations. In doing this, Robbins gives insight into how Britain dealt with the diplomatic issues it faced and how the Foreign Office utilized the same pattern of thinking over time.

Essays that are of particular interest to the establishment of policy and how it was implemented during the period leading up to the First World War and the war itself are John Charmley's 'Splendid Isolation to Finest Hour: Britain as a Global Power, 1900-1950', and T.G. Otte's 'Old Diplomacy: Reflections of the Foreign Office before 1914'.³⁰ Admittedly Otte spends a considerable amount of time refuting the claims that the Foreign Office was a place of play for the elite, but in the later portion of the article he does take the time to discuss the creation and tradition of British diplomatic strategy. Charmley's article looks at the Anglo-German antagonism and how British foreign policy worked in conjunction with the European continent and not in 'splendid isolation'.

Erik Goldstein and B.J.C. McKercher also look at the continuity of foreign policy in *Power and Stability: British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965*.³¹ Chapters such as Zara Steiner's 'British Power and Stability: The Historical Record' looks at the British Foreign Office in the build-up to both world wars, and while giving some insight into the issues facing British diplomacy in the early twentieth century she tends to focus on the post-First World War and pre-World War Two era.³² Brian Holden Reid's chapter

³⁰ T.G. Otte, 'Old Diplomacy: Reflections on the Foreign Office before 1914', in *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Gaynor Johnson (London, 2005), pp. 31-52; John Charmley, 'Splendid Isolation to Finest Hour: Britain as a Global Power, 1900-1950', in *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Gaynor Johnson (London, 2005), 130-146.

³¹ Erik Goldstein and B.J.C. McKercher, *Power and Stability: British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965* (London, 2003).

³² Zara Steiner, 'British Power and Stability: The Historical Record', in *Power and Stability: British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965*, eds. Erik Goldstein and B.J.C. McKercher (London, 2003), pp. 23-44.

'Power, Sovereignty, and the Great Republic: Anglo-American Diplomatic Relations in the Era of the Civil War' is a good discussion of how relations developed between the two nations up to the end of the nineteenth century and the British-American rapprochement that followed the Venezuelan crisis of 1896.³³ T.G. Otte also contributes a chapter, 'Almost a Law of Nature'? Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Office, and the Balance of Power in Europe, 1905-12'.³⁴ As the title suggests, the chapter is dedicated to the diplomacy surrounding the balance of power in Europe, but it also gives the reader insight into the inner workings of European diplomacy, something that one needs to understand in order to fully appreciate the diplomacy surrounding the U.S. period of neutrality.

Historians, such as Karl Birnbaum in his book *Peace Moves and U-boat Warfare*, focus on one country's diplomatic moves during a select period of time during the war.³⁵ Birnbaum focuses on the inner-workings of the German government as the military and diplomatic branches battled over the best method of bringing the war to a successful conclusion. But Birnbaum does not give the reader the ability to understand why so many of the German peace moves failed because he does not correlate them to what the British were doing. It is details such as those missing in Birnbaum's discussion about the diplomacy involved in both Great Britain and Germany's attempts to acquire

³³ Brian Holden Reid, 'Power, Sovereignty, and the Great Republic: Anglo-American Diplomatic Relations in the Era of the Civil War', in *Power and Stability: British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965*, eds. Erik Goldstein and B.J.C. McKercher (London, 2003), pp. 45-76.

³⁴ T.G. Otte, 'Almost a Law of Nature'? Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Office, and the Balance of Power in Europe, 1905-12', in *Power and Stability: British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965*, eds. Erik Goldstein and B.J.C. McKercher (London, 2003), pp. 77-118.

³⁵ Karl Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-boat Warfare* (Stockholm, 1958); Maurice Parmelee's *Blockade and Sea Power: The Blockade, 1914-1919, and Its Significance For A World State* (New York, 1924) is one of a handful of books that were published so close to the war's end that it is hardly able to discern historical fact from propaganda fiction. That being said, during its time, it served the purpose of introducing many Americans to some of the details surrounding Britain's interference in America's trade during the war. Other books that focus on the blockade are: Marion Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1914-1916* (Westport, 1957); A.C. Bell, *The Blockade of the Germany and of the Countries Associated with Her in the Great War, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey* (London, 1937; published 1961); Eric Osborne, *Britain's Economic Blockade of Germany, 1914-1919* (London, 2004).

American favour during The Great War that this paper intends to pull out of the periphery and into the spotlight.

John W. Coogan's unconventional look at the blockade in *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* addresses the diplomacy of maritime policies, astutely placing the Anglo-American fight over blockade into the context of long-term grand strategy.³⁶ In doing so Coogan expands the discussion of First World War diplomacy outside of the 1914-1918 time frame historians have confined it to for almost one hundred years. Much of Coogan's analysis surrounds the Declaration of London which came about as a result of the 1908 London Conference. The Declaration of London was a compromise between leading maritime powers to find a judicial means to end maritime disputes that was never ratified by any of the nations that had crafted it but was nonetheless held-out as legal by the United States during the early years of the First World War.

A much older look at U.S.-British relations during the first few years of the war is Richard W. Van Alstyne's 'The Policy of the United States Regarding the Declaration of London, At the Outbreak of the Great War'³⁷ Even though this article is considered out of date, it is often referred to as it is a well-written analysis of early war diplomatic attempts by Britain to use its strongest weapon and not lose U.S. support. That being said, it is limited in its scope and through the availability of sources.

Rodney Carlisle provides a fresh view of the cause of U.S. entry into the war in his book *Sovereignty At Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry Into World War*

³⁶ John W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithaca, 1981).

³⁷ Richard W. Van Alstyne, 'The Policy Of The United States Regarding The Declaration Of London, At The Outbreak Of The Great War', *The Journal of Modern History* 7 (1933), pp. 434 – 47.

I.³⁸ Carlisle's position focuses on the sinking of several U.S. flagged merchant ships after the United States had broken relations with Germany, citing Wilson's belief that an attack on these ships was an overt act of war. Carlisle's focus is on the diplomacy that surrounded the submarine war and on that he does an admirable job, but without a focus on other diplomatic work being done during this time period his narrow focus places other elements of diplomacy secondary (at best) to the submarine, and does not allow for the impact of British diplomacy in pushing Wilson to war.

A long term study of a mix of naval history and diplomacy is found in Holger H. Herwig's *Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Naval Planning, 1889-1941*.³⁹ In the midst of documenting the mounting issues that led to German-American mutual distrust, Herwig discusses internal German deliberations about the U-boat campaigns and the United States' reactions.

Along this same line of thought is Dirk Bönker's recent book, *Militarism In A Global Age: Naval Ambitions in Germany and the United States Before World War I*.⁴⁰ While clearly dealing with issues between the two nations prior to the outbreak of the First World War, Bönker's analysis of the issues stressing the bonds of friendship between the United States and Germany provides a base for understanding the continuity of policy Germany used in dealing with the United States.

This thesis will show that this is too simple an answer, too easy of a leap, and one that has been accepted far too often. In order to take a fresh look at the diplomacy of this time it is essential to analyse the careful management or 'handling' of Wilson, his confidante Edward M. House, and other members of the United States government

³⁸ Rodney Carlisle, *Sovereignty At Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry Into World War I* (Gainesville, 2009); Another book of interest on this subject is: Jeffrey J. Safford, *Wilsonian Maritime Diplomacy 1913-1921* (New Brunswick, 1978).

³⁹ Holger H. Herwig, *Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Naval Planning, 1889-1941* (Boston, 1976).

⁴⁰ Dirk Bönker, *Militarism in a Global Age: Naval Ambitions in Germany and the United States Before World War I* (Ithaca, 2012).

by the British Foreign Office (most notably Sir Edward Grey) in helping ensure that America would support Britain financially and eventually as a co-belligerent. Because this clearly did not occur in a vacuum the work of the German Foreign Office as it attempted to maintain American neutrality must be taken into account. The feverish work of Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, Ambassador Count Bernstorff and other members of *Auswärtiges Amt* cannot be discounted as simple ineptitude and event-driven diplomacy. After all, Germany was successful at appeasing American interests from August 1914 to April 1917, a span of nearly three crisis-filled years.

By using British, German and American documents this dissertation will present a more complete picture of British and German diplomacy used to influence American policy during the period of U.S. neutrality. This study of diplomacy does not cover absolutely every factor involved, but by utilizing the sources of the three major powers involved in American neutrality it goes beyond what has already been done, forcing scholars to re-examine existing conclusions as to the causes of the U.S. entry into the Great War.

Chapter one of this thesis is an analysis of how prior British and German diplomacy towards the United States laid the groundwork for the diplomatic battle for America that would occur during the American period of neutrality. Specifically, this chapter will focus on how the British Foreign Office was able to successfully blend America's decision to charge U.S. coastal shipping a different rate than that of the rest of the world's shipping (commonly known as the Panama Tolls controversy) and Wilson's obsession to remove Victoriano Huerta from the Mexican presidency in order to sway American policy to benefit British interests. This chapter will also focus on the pre-war German-American diplomacy surrounding the issues of Samoa and the

perceived German interference in the Spanish-America war, and how Americans began to view German as a result of those issues.

Chapter one goes on to analyse the first meetings between members of the Wilson administration, in particular Colonel Edward M. House, and members of the British and German governments. These initial meetings took place prior to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand and therefore represent an opportunity for a closer analysis of how the diplomats were staking out their positions with the United States. House's trip to Europe was ostensibly to help Europe avoid war and this chapter focuses on how Grey and Bethmann Hollweg attempted to down-play their countries role in heating up the tensions in Europe while at the same time exaggerating the role of the other.

Chapter two examines the role of the British Foreign Office regarding the American response to the blockade of Germany. In their attempt to keep supplies from reaching Germany, Britain's naval activities brought howls of protest from the U.S. government and businesses as Britain's blockade delayed and confiscated American cargos, potentially harming America's economy. In particular it analyses the policies put in place by Grey, and carried out with the help of Ambassador Spring Rice, to change the focus of U.S. complaints about the blockade from one of international legality, to a concern for American public opinion. This chapter will reveal the extent of the success the British Foreign Office had in creating a mind-set of neglect in the United States regarding the British blockade. In doing so, this chapter will effectively answer the question of why Wilson and Lansing responded so lightly to British interference of American commerce on the high seas.

The third chapter examines the use of the submarine and its effect on German and American diplomacy. The American response upon being notified of Germany's

intent to use the submarine to blockade the British Isles, resulted in Wilson declaring that the U.S. would hold Germany to 'strict accountability' in the event that U.S. lives or property were lost to submarine warfare. This chapter will demonstrate how the diplomacy of Bethmann Hollweg and Ambassador Bernstorff was used to frame the submarine war debate with the United States. The analysis will show that Bethmann's policy was effective in allowing submarines to operate while maintaining friendly relations between the two countries. Evidence in this chapter will also show that Wilson's 'strict accountability' policy turned out to be the American policy expected by German diplomats based on prior diplomatic interactions. To that end, this chapter provides evidence that German diplomats successfully blunted the threat of American entry into the war provided by controversies surrounding the sinking of merchant ships.

Chapter four is an analysis of the Wilson administration's policies towards Mexico and how the history between the two countries led German leaders to believe that a German-Mexican alliance could keep America out of the fighting European. The evidence provided will demonstrate that the long history of distrust in Mexican-American relations played a key role in creating an atmosphere of distrust that Germany sought to exploit through the use of her diplomacy. This chapter will analyze Wilson's policies towards Mexico and how they were perceived by the Mexican people. It will then demonstrate how Germany's consistency in diplomacy mixed with the Mexican reaction to American interference led to Germany's decision in 1916 to offer an alliance to Mexico. The analysis will show that Zimmerman's famous telegram of 16 January 1917 was a sound decision based on German diplomatic history and the needs of the German military.

The fifth and final chapter analyses how the hope of peace was used as a means of manipulating the Wilson administration by both the British and German Foreign

Offices. Beginning with the initial peace discussions that stretched from September 1914 into June 1915, and which created the framework for all future peace offers this chapter examines the belligerents' use of peace as a diplomatic strategy. This chapter also analyses the motivation behind the distinctly one sided peace initiative between the United States and Great Britain in the House-Grey Memorandum and examines the reasoning for Bethmann's peace initiative of 12 December 1916 that pre-empted President Wilson's long awaited call for peace.

Chapter One:

Pre-War Diplomacy

In his farewell address to the American nation on 17 September 1796 U.S. President George Washington cautioned the United States to 'steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.'⁴¹ According to Robert Kagan, Americans viewed Washington's speech as a call for the young American nation to isolate itself from the rest of the world and not entangle itself with foreign treaties.⁴² Henry Kissinger believes that the American people saw the phrase as an 'injunction against foreign entanglements' by America's most venerated Founding Father.⁴³ Although the United States acquired vast amounts of territory on the North American continent American leaders did create and maintain a commercial relationship and only a commercial relationship with the European powers, foregoing the use of any military alliances. But with its growing population and ever increasing industrial output, the United States' influence expanded and, correspondingly, its role in the world expanded.

As war clouds loomed and eventually unleashed a storm of unprecedented proportions in Europe, the vast majority of Americans were opposed to becoming militarily involved in what was termed a European war. During the early months of the war it was clear that they wanted their country to take action against attacks on U.S. interests at sea (by both Britain and Germany). It was also abundantly clear that outside of the American eastern seaboard and the eastern elites most Americans preferred that the United States remain neutral.⁴⁴ Historians such as David Stevenson, and L.L.

⁴¹ David Brion Davis and Steven Mintz, *The Boisterous Sea of Liberty: A Documentary History of America from Discovery through the Civil War* (New York, 1998), p. 273.

⁴² Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York, 2006), p. 3.

⁴³ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, 1994), p. 48.

⁴⁴ Daniel M. Smith, *The Great Departure: The United States and World War I, 1914-1920* (New York, 1965); Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent As Hero and Myth-Maker From The Crimea To Iraq*, (Baltimore, 2004), p. 127.

Farrar, Jr., when discussing the early months of the war and the potential American role, focus on the perception of a lack of involvement by the U.S. – assuming that because of the United States’ historical reluctance to intervene militarily in European conflicts, and its small military, that the country would be of little consequence in a short war.⁴⁵

Despite a belief that the war would be short, the reality was that British and German diplomats realized the potential impact of the U.S. on the outcome of the war and began immediately working to influence the United States for their gain.

Too often, America’s role during its period of neutrality is viewed in a vacuum as historians focus on individual events during the war years rather than tying the issues to events that preceded Germany’s invasion of Belgium.⁴⁶ Diplomacy, as eloquently explained by Charles Kegley and Gregory Raymond, is the recognition of events and trends as they are filtered through previous experiences.⁴⁷ Therefore, to effectively analyze how and why Britain and Germany wrangled diplomatically for America’s support during the First World War, the history of the relations among these three countries must be considered.

It was shortly after the end of the Spanish-American war that Britain and Germany fully recognized that the United States had the potential to be stronger than almost any of the European powers. It was this potential that scared Great Britain and Germany into taking steps to strengthen their ties with the United States.⁴⁸ Maurice Pearton notes that a fundamental problem in the diplomacy among these nations was the

⁴⁵ David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, 2004), p. 6; L.L. Farrar, Jr., *The Short-War Illusion: German Policy, Strategy and Domestic Affairs, August-December 1914* (Santa Barbara, 1973), pp. 61 and 67.

⁴⁶ Historians such as John Milton Cooper, Jr., Ross Gregory, and John A. Thompson to name only a few.

⁴⁷ Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Gregory A. Raymond, *The Global Future: A Brief Introduction to World Politics* (Belmont, 2005), pp. 2-3.

⁴⁸ Brian Holden Reid, ‘Power, Sovereignty, and the Great Republic: Anglo-American Diplomatic Relations in the Era of the Civil War’, in *Power and Stability: British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965*, ed. Erik Goldstein and B.J.C. McKercher (London, 2003), p. 51; Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, 1984), pp. 65-67.

Americans' rejection of the 'traditional European notion' of diplomacy.⁴⁹ He goes on to explain that the American view was that diplomacy was an evil that had to be dealt with; therefore each international event leading to a diplomatic crisis was seen by the Americans as a single episode to solve and move away from, while the European position was that foreign policy was fluid and continuous.⁵⁰ These differences would lead to some of the early confusion about agreements as well as distrust of Britain and Germany, as Americans became aware of the work being done by foreign diplomats on U.S. soil.

Britain, popularly viewed by Americans as a long time antagonist, and despised by the large Irish-American population, had the natural bond of a common language and culture with the United States. Nevertheless, it was Britain's history with, and policies toward, America that led to several minor quarrels between the two countries. It was not until after the Venezuelan Crisis of 1896 that the British government decided that the best policy for dealing with the United States was one which recognized America's importance in the Western Hemisphere in particular and the world in general, and began promoting friendship between the two countries.⁵¹

In contrast, Germany had a long and relatively pleasant history with the United States. In 1785 Prussia became one of the first countries to recognize the newly born nation. Friendly relations continued virtually uninterrupted until about 1877 when Germany and the United States would confront each other over the control of the tiny Pacific island nation of Samoa.⁵² Adding to the feelings of friendship were the large numbers of German-Americans living in the United States during this time. Germany's

⁴⁹ Maurice Pearton, *Diplomacy, War and Technology Since 1830* (Lawrence, 1982), p. 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵¹ Brian Holden Reid, 'Power, Sovereignty, and the Great Republic: Anglo-American Diplomatic Relations in the Era of the Civil War', in *Power and Stability: British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965*, ed. Erik Goldstein and B.J.C. McKercher (London, 2003), pp. 50-51.

⁵² Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, 1984), p. 16.

quick ascension to continental power status in Europe and her desire to become a world power at virtually the same time as America was entering the world stage brought about numerous confrontations between the two burgeoning powers. These confrontations and how the diplomats handled them would set the stage for the manner in which many of the diplomatic battles for America would be fought during the First World War.

This chapter will briefly examine several diplomatic clashes during the years preceding 1914, and analyse how the British and German construction of diplomacy regarding the United States laid the groundwork for the 1914-1917 battle for America. This will help explain why Britain and Germany approached the United States as they did and how this affected America's decision to leave the relative safety of neutrality. This chapter will provide a basis for explaining Britain and Germany's method of dealing with the United States. It will address the background and early manoeuvres of diplomats in the first few months of the war outlining the reasoning behind each Foreign Office's plan toward dealing with United States. Addressing this aspect of Great War diplomacy will help our understanding of why the belligerent governments worked so hard at appearing to appease the American government and her people.

The first section will be devoted to explaining the German attempts at rapprochement with the United States and how the two countries dealt with the growing rivalry associated with the two countries emerging as world powers at the same time. Section two describes how the British Foreign Office interacted with the United States in the years prior to 1914, focusing on the Panama Tolls controversy and the Mexican presidency. Issues concerning Mexico plagued the British-American relationship throughout the war. Section three is dedicated to an analysis of the initial problems faced by the German Foreign Office in their attempts to maintain American friendship while preparing their own economic war against Britain. The fourth section deals with

Grey's work to place the Wilson administration in a favourable position towards Britain's developing policy of economic warfare against Germany.

A Latent Animosity: German-American Relations

America's association with the German people began in earnest in September 1785 with Prussia's recognition of the young American nation by way of a commercial treaty that would last, in various forms, for almost a century. During the U.S. Civil War, the Frankfurt exchange supported the U.S. government by granting billions of Marks of American bonds, in contrast to Britain and France who refused to grant bonds to the Union.⁵³ By the end of the U.S. Civil War in 1865, Germany was in the midst of her wars of unification that ran from 1862 – 1870. The leaders of both countries saw their own ideals in the trials of the other.⁵⁴ Between the founding of the American republic and 1914 approximately 1.5 million Germans immigrated to the United States, of whom approximately 750,000 immigrated to the United States between 1848 and 1850, giving the two countries some common cultural roots.⁵⁵ It was not until the two countries were looking to expand outside of their continental regions that conflicts were to arise.

Since America entered the First World War in 1917 there has been considerable scholarship focusing on German military blunders but take little account of the greater diplomatic picture.⁵⁶ To be sure, Germany did make mistakes diplomatically as they dealt with the United States, but it was their incapacity to learn from those mistakes that would become Germany's downfall during the period of American neutrality.

⁵³ Letter, Jagow to 'W' at the home editorial office, Bundesarchiv Berlin – Lichterfelde.

⁵⁴ Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, 1984), pp. 18-19; Hans W. Gatzke, *Germany and the United States: 'A Special Relationship?'* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 38-39.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁶ Several authors that fall into this rut include: David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, 2004); David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford, 1988); Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York, 1998); Hans W. Gatzke, *Germany and the United States, 'A Special Relationship?'* (Cambridge, 1980).

Citizens of both the United States and Germany viewed the diplomatic groundwork displayed under Bismarck's Chancellery after Germany's unification in 1871 as the standard for which relations between the two countries would be conducted. To understand Germany's foreign policy during this time period it is necessary to understand Bismarck's position on Europe and European colonies. Historians such as Erich Brandenburg, Fritz Stern, and William Young point out that Bismarck's philosophy was that Germany's foreign policy was Europe centred – it must solidify Germany's place in Europe first and foremost – and colonialism was a private issue to be supported by the government.⁵⁷ Bismarck believed that foreign policy's role was to 'exploit and moderate' European adversaries in order to strengthen Germany's influence.⁵⁸ It is precisely because Bismarck's diplomacy was the basis, and the bar, for which all future Chancellors would rate their diplomacy that his philosophy is the key to the German diplomatic difficulties from 1890-1917.

Christopher Clark points out in *Kaiser Wilhelm II: Profiles in Power* that Bismarck had considerable influence on Wilhelm's development beginning in 1884, creating what was essentially a diplomatic tutelage.⁵⁹ William Young concurs with Clark's conclusion, noting that Bismarck was 'given the responsibility to train Prince Wilhelm in foreign affairs.'⁶⁰ With Wilhelm II's ascension to the throne in 1888 he envisioned having more direct influence on the foreign affairs of his country, and in 1890, with the removal of his former teacher from the Chancellor's office the Kaiser

⁵⁷ Erich Brandenburg, *From Bismarck To The World War: A History of German Foreign Policy, 1870-1914* (London, 1927), pp. 2-3; Fritz Stern, *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire* (New York, 1979), pp. 409-410; William Young, *German Diplomatic Relations, 1871-1945* (New York, 2006), pp. 43-44 .

⁵⁸ Fritz Stern, *Gold and Iron* (New York, 1979), p. 315.

⁵⁹ Christopher Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II: Profiles in Power* (Harlow, 2000), p. 12.

⁶⁰ William Young, *German Diplomatic Relations, 1871-1945* (New York, 2006), p. 72.

was assured of being the primary voice in the development and actions Germany took in its foreign policy initiatives.⁶¹

Edgar Feuchtwanger observes that Bismarck viewed colonialism as yet another means to embroil Germany's rivals in peripheral battles, weakening them on the European continent and allowing Germany to build or maintain alliances that would benefit Germany within the confines of Europe proper.⁶² Therefore the theory that it was not until Wilhelm II came to power that Germany began a frantic and undisciplined attempt to find its 'place in the sun' does not hold up under scrutiny. Bismarck began Germany's foray into colonialism in 1884-1885 by acquiring colonies in Africa and the Pacific, and Kaiser Wilhelm II continued this practice with the seizure of Kiaochow Bay in China in 1897.⁶³ Several of Germany's post-Bismarck foreign policies are absolutely Bismarckian in their practice, in particular the Kaiser's decision to remain neutral during The Boer War with the idea of enmeshing Britain in a distant and costly war.⁶⁴ It was Bismarck's penchant for embroiling others in conflict, mixed with his decision to dabble in colonialism, that set the stage for the future of German-American relations.

Because the United States was also seeking to expand its colonial holdings at the same time as Germany, conflict between the two was bound to occur, but it would be Germany's European centred foreign policy that would poison the waters of friendship. The Samoan affair that began in the 1870s and continued until 1889 is an excellent example of how Germany's foreign policy and American imperialism led to early cracks in the German-American relationship.

Germany's position in Samoa followed Bismarck's view of colonial holdings with German commercial interests establishing a foothold in South Seas. Thus by the

⁶¹ Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Imperial Germany, 1850-1918* (London, 2001), p. 106.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁶³ Andrew R. Carlson, *German Foreign Policy, 1890-1914, and Colonial Policy to 1914: a Handbook and Annotated Bibliography* (Metuchen, 1970), p. 106.

⁶⁴ William Young, *German Diplomatic Relations, 1871-1945* (New York, 2006), p. 89.

1860s Germans controlled approximately 70 percent of commerce in the region.⁶⁵ Problems arose after the United States, Britain, and Germany all secured rights in Samoa between 1877 and 1879.⁶⁶ Negotiations among the three powers ensued over how to solve the division of Samoa, with the British willing to cede control to Germany, and the United States lobbying for Samoan autonomy. In order to ensure German commercial interests were maintained German marines forcibly removed the Samoan King and installed a pro-German leader in his place. This action led to sensationalist articles appearing in several prominent American newspapers calling for war against Germany and complaining about the lack of action by the U.S. State Department.⁶⁷ This public pressure soon translated into a direct threat when Senator Carl Schurz sent Bismarck a letter threatening the destruction of Germany if war were to ensue over Samoa. In pressing its commercial interests in the Pacific, American citizens saw Germany's actions as jeopardizing U.S. interests.⁶⁸ Due to his position on colonial holdings and his belief that war with America would only weaken Germany, Bismarck worked to defuse the situation as much as possible, without giving up Germany's commercial interests in the islands.

Beginning in November 1887, Bismarck had numerous exchanges with American officials in which he attempted to dispel American worries by expressing his regret that 'the two nations should differ as to the affairs on those remote and unimportant islands.'⁶⁹ In January of 1888, German charge d'affaires in the United

⁶⁵ Fritz Stern, *Gold and Iron* (New York, 1979), p. 396.

⁶⁶ Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1964), pp. 422-423; Holger H. Herwig, *Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Naval Planning, 1889-1941* (Boston, 1976), p. 14.

⁶⁷ Mr. Pendleton to Mr. Bayard, 24 October 1887, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, United States Department of State/Index to the Executive Documents of the House of Representatives for the Second Session of the Fiftieth Congress, 1888-'90, (1888-1889), Germany, pp. 577-578.

⁶⁸ Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1964), p. 424.

⁶⁹ Mr. Coleman to Mr. Bayard, 4 November 1887, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, United States Department of State/Index to the Executive Documents of the House of

States, Baron von Zedtwitz, carried out Bismarck's directions by reminding Secretary of State Thomas Bayard that Germany had always recognized the rights of other countries in Samoa and 'aspired to no political advantage' in the country.⁷⁰ The Samoan issue was finally laid to rest in 1899 with Britain renouncing its rights to the Island in return for German territory in West Africa and the Solomon Islands, the United States maintaining its naval station at Pago Pago, and Germany acquiring Western Samoa and keeping its naval station at Apia.⁷¹ Bismarck's actions had helped ease tensions between the two countries for a time, but the stage was set for Americans to view Germany as a militaristic country that was interfering with America's growth. Germany's next run-in with the United States would do nothing to change this view.

The Spanish-American War began in 1898, less than ten years after the issues of Samoa in 1889, and brought about yet another disagreement between German and U.S. foreign policy. Germany's initial reaction to the Spanish-American conflict was to maintain neutrality, avoiding even the appearance of anti-American sentiments.⁷² The Kaiser did finally give Germany's support to the Spanish in an attempt to preserve continuance in their foreign policy and maintain the balance of power in Europe.⁷³ While the Kaiser's support was relegated to a tacit support of Spain, and matched that of the continental powers, to the American leadership it appeared as if Germany was once again taking a position contrary to America's.⁷⁴

Representatives for the Second Session of the Fiftieth Congress, 1888-'90, (1888-1889), Germany, pp. 578-579.

⁷⁰ Mr Bayard to Mr Pendleton, 17 January 1888, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, United States Department of State/Index to the Executive Documents of the House of Representatives for the Second Session of the Fiftieth Congress, 1888-'90, (1888-1889), Germany, pp. 594-595.

⁷¹ Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (New York, 1991), p. 261.

⁷² Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, 1984), pp. 55-56.

⁷³ Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York, 2006), pp. 412-413.

⁷⁴ Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1964), pp. 466-467; Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, 1984), pp. 56-57; Giles MacDonogh, *The Last Kaiser: The Life of Wilhelm II* (New York, 2000), p. 235.

Despite the supposed mistreatment of the Cuban people by the Spanish as the catalyst for the United States war with Spain, it was the German military actions in the Philippine Islands that really drew American ire. Shortly after the U.S. navy destroyed the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay, the German High Seas Fleet sailed a sizeable force in to the bay, ostensibly to protect its citizen's interests. The act of sending a large naval force to the Philippines is yet another example of Germany's European-based foreign policy leading to a misunderstanding with the United States. Manfred Jonas points out that Germany did not intend to take over the Philippines but they did expect a 'division of the spoils.'⁷⁵ To the German leadership this seemed to be a perfectly natural request by one world power to another, but many Americans saw this as yet another example of German aggression and interference in United States interests.⁷⁶

The American public's view of Germany as a militant bully was further fed by German actions in China in 1900 and Venezuela in 1902, when German warships bombarded the port of Maracaibo while involved in a joint blockade of the country with Britain in an attempt to force payment on debts owed. Confusion and misunderstanding concerning Germany's move in the spring of 1914 to ship weapons to Mexican President Victoriano Huerta also did not settle well with the United States. Not only did it seem that Germany was violating the Monroe Doctrine, but it occurred at the same time as America's spat with Britain over the Huerta presidency, giving the appearance that Germany was attempting to take advantage of the situation.

Britain and the U.S.: The Intimacy of Attraction and Repulsion

By the time Sir Edward Grey took over as Foreign Secretary in 1905, the desire for friendship between Britain and the United States had become a staple of British

⁷⁵ Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, 1984), p. 57.

⁷⁶ Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America As A Great Power* (New York, 1961), pp. 229-230; Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, 1984), pp. 56-57.

diplomacy.⁷⁷ During his tenure in office, Grey was determined to continue this policy, and as a result, he immediately began cultivating his American counterparts, setting the cornerstone for his future dealing with the country. Much has been written about Grey's character and abilities or inabilities, but Ross Gregory's description of Grey as 'wise and experienced in the ways of diplomacy...ideally suited to influence Americans...' depicts Grey as the embodiment of the type of person with whom Americans wanted to do business.⁷⁸ Grey's approach was to use his skills as a diplomat to get what he wanted from the United States without jeopardizing the two countries' budding friendship. A perfect example of this practice and often quoted utterance of Grey's is his remark during the First World War that 'The object of diplomacy...was to secure the maximum of blockade that could be enforced without a rupture with the United States.'⁷⁹ Experience had taught Grey that successful diplomacy required the use of his ambassadors and other agents of the British government to provide him with insight into other countries' actions, before that country could respond negatively to Britain. It had also taught him that friendly conversation often led to information.⁸⁰

Upon meeting Walter Hines Page, the new American Ambassador to St. James' Court in 1913, Grey turned on his charm and put his diplomatic expertise to work. Grey was intent on giving the impression that he would work with the United States as much as he could without putting his country's position at risk. The Foreign Secretary did so by holding frequent discussions with Page where both men seemingly withheld nothing,

⁷⁷ Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1971), p. 34.

⁷⁸ Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War*, p. 33.

⁷⁹ Grey, Viscount of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years: 1892-1916* (3 vols., London, 1925), Vol. II, p. 37; Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention the First World War* (New York, 1971), p. 34.

⁸⁰ Grey, Viscount of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years: 1892-1916* (3 vols., London, 1925), Vol. 1, p. 45.

while in reality Grey was gaining Page's trust and creating a friendship based on the Foreign Minister's needs.⁸¹

Before Wilson's election in 1912, Britain and the United States had come to disagree on two issues whose resolution would set the tone for the diplomacy between the two countries – the revolution in Mexico and the Panama tolls controversy. Both events flared into controversies between the two countries in 1913. In regards to Mexico, Grey had taken a wait and see attitude to the change in leadership – his main objective being to ensure the protection of British commercial interests in the country. The Panama tolls controversy began during the Taft administration, with the passage of the Panama Canal Tolls Act of 1912 exempting America's coastwise shipping from paying tolls when utilizing the Panama Canal.⁸² Grey dutifully lodged a stern and formal complaint with the United States, but deftly decided against submitting the matter for arbitration, leaving room for discussion between London and Washington.⁸³ As Wilson's administration came into the White House in the winter of 1913, these two diplomatic issues quickly came to the front burner.

President Wilson's position regarding who held the presidency in Mexico would be the catalyst for concern in both the United States and Britain. Due to the bloodshed and losses in American property caused by Victoriano Huerta's deposal of Francisco Madero, Wilson refused to recognize Huerta as the rightful leader of Mexico, and expected other countries to follow suit. Initially, Grey had promised U.S. Chargé d'Affaires in London, Irwin Laughlin that he would follow Wilson's lead, but because the British Navy was somewhat dependent on oil from Mexico, he had to take a more practical approach and, within only a few weeks of making his promise, recognized

⁸¹ G.M. Trevelyan, *Grey of Fallodon* (London, 1937), p. 114; Ross Gregory, *Walter Hines Page, Ambassador to the Court of St. James's* (Lexington, 1970), pp. 32-33.

⁸² In 1901 Great Britain and the United States signed the Hay-Pauncefote treaty, which established that the tolls for using the Panama Canal would be the same for all nations.

⁸³ G.M Trevelyan, *Grey of Fallodon* (London, 1937), p. 207.

Huerta – who promised stability and a continued flow of oil. This apparent about-face both surprised and rankled Wilson and his Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan.

Generally covered by historians as an issue unrelated to U.S. neutrality in the war years 1914-1917, the Panama Canal Tolls issue and the Mexican issue were very much tied together as part of Sir Edward Grey's diplomatic plan.⁸⁴ As early as 4 November 1912 Grey had stated to his Ambassador in America that if the United States was not willing to hold to the obligations of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, he was willing to submit the disagreement over the tolls to Arbitration, a threat he did not take lightly.⁸⁵ In October 1912, only a month earlier, Grey had confided to then ambassador to the United States Lord Bryce that he feared that if the U.S. refused Arbitration it would harm the general cause of Arbitration.⁸⁶ The change in Grey's attitude matched the change in the presidency of the United States. As Wilson took office, Grey's diplomatic pressure over the Tolls issue did not slacken, for in this case, a new administration did not mean a change in policy as Wilson had actively supported the Canal Act in order to win the Irish-American vote.⁸⁷

Grey was now seemingly battling with the United States over the Panama toll issue and the Presidency of Mexico. The importance of Grey's actions concerning Mexico and the Panama tolls was not apparent at the time, but it later proved to be a precursor to his actions towards and dealings with the United States during America's period of neutrality. The strategy Grey utilized was to press the U.S. as far as he dared

⁸⁴ Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York 1964); H.C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations (1783-1952)* (New York, 1955); Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006).

⁸⁵ The Secretary of State to the American Charge d'Affaires, 17 January 1913, United States Department of State / *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the president to Congress December 2, 1913* (1913) <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1913>, p. 540.

⁸⁶ G.M. Trevelyan, *Grey of Fallodon* (London, 1937), p. 207.

⁸⁷ H.C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States* (New York, 1955), p. 648. Because the Canal Act was so distasteful to Great Britain it was popular among Irish-Americans who actively called for an independent Ireland.

without provoking retaliation – a technique that would prove to be of immense value during the war. Grey's method was time consuming in that it tended to draw disputes out over a long period of time, thus allowing Britain to continue its actions while the United States attempted to formulate a response. Grey's offensive over the Panama tolls was a successful diplomatic tactic that also allowed him to gain knowledge of the power structure within Wilson's administration.⁸⁸

While seemingly unrelated to the issues of Mexico and Panama, Colonel Edward M. House, Wilson's most trusted confidant, had convinced Wilson of the need for a trip to Europe and in the spring of 1913, set out to use American prestige to quiet the rumblings between Germany and Britain. Within the United States House was considered a master at local politics and administration, and although he had absolutely no diplomatic experience he dreamt of diplomatic predominance.⁸⁹

Upon first meeting Colonel House in July 1913, Grey deftly dispensed with the European diplomatic pageantry so despised by Americans and talked freely with House about a wide range of items, just as he had with Page – all the time discreetly directing his conversation with House to the subjects of Mexico and the tolls.⁹⁰ House was so unaware of Grey's tactical move in the conversation that he mentioned in his diary that the two 'fell to talking of the Mexican situation' and again later that the conversation 'drifted to the Panama Canal tolls question.'⁹¹ Grey allowed House talk freely, simply asking questions, leading House and allowing him to unintentionally expose U.S. positions. In the case of Mexico, Grey led House into telling him that the United States was not as concerned with the fact that Huerta was in power as it was that he (Huerta)

⁸⁸ G.M. Trevelyan, *Grey of Falldon* (London, 1937), p. 209.

⁸⁹ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006), pp. 11, 43; Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (4 Vols., Boston, 1926-28), I, p. 177.

⁹⁰ Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (4 vols., Boston, 1926-28), I pp. 194-197.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, I p. 195.

had reneged on his promise to call for early elections.⁹² Grey intimated that Britain had only recognized Huerta provisionally, and that if the Mexican president did not keep his promise that recognition could easily change.⁹³

Simply put, Grey got House to tell him what the United States' position was, and then gave House what he wanted to hear – a tacit offer to withdraw British support for Huerta in exchange for Americas' repeal of the Canal Act.⁹⁴ In the midst of the conversation Grey was able to discern that it would be a prudent diplomatic move to set the Panama Toll's question aside for the time being and he told House as much.⁹⁵ This apparent friendliness and honesty gained House's trust.

Grey's manipulation of House was not to stop there. A few days later he would stop Ambassador Page for the expressed purpose of telling him how happy he was to meet House, thereby padding the inexperienced diplomat's ego and priming him for future meetings.⁹⁶ While this seems innocuous enough, to an inexperienced diplomat such as House, it is exactly the kind of adulation that makes a huge impression. To House, Grey's willingness to discuss items informally and to table some items until a future date seemed to be an indication that Grey was someone to be trusted and with whom the United States could work. House had no way of knowing that this was part of Grey's diplomatic agenda. Grey followed this up when he sent his personal secretary, Sir William Tyrrell – a man with whom House had spent considerable time while in London and with whom House felt he could discuss items candidly – to the United States in November 1913. It was also during this time that Grey became fully aware

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.196

⁹⁴ H.C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations (1783-1952)* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1955), p. 650.

⁹⁵ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006), p. 89.

⁹⁶ Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (Boston, 1926), p. 197.

that House had the President's ear – knowledge that would prove golden in the coming years.

Safe in the knowledge that the Wilson administration was favourable towards Britain, Grey took a position of opposition to that of the United States and held it only as long as he needed to get what he wanted. Grey gambled that the United States would help guarantee that Mexican oil would continue to flow to the Royal Navy, while at the same time giving Wilson and his cabinet the feeling that they had a true friend they could work with in the world.

By January 1914, House would secretly tell British Ambassador Spring Rice that there was a fair chance that the Tolls Act would be repealed.⁹⁷ Based on information that continued to pour in from Spring Rice, Grey learned that his Minister to Mexico, Sir Lionel Carden, had become very unpopular with members of Wilson's cabinet.⁹⁸ Grey intended to continue to pressure the United States over the issue of Panama Tolls by utilizing the American obsession with Mexico. Grey intentionally held Carden in London while the U. S. Congress was debating the Panama Tolls issue, and while he had not officially cut a deal with the United States, he let it become known to the President that Carden would not return to Mexico until after congress had reached a decision.⁹⁹ This action freed Wilson to browbeat congress into matching Britain's unselfish act and repeal the Panama Canal Tolls Act. Grey's tactics had proven successful, and what's more, he had learned an immense amount about how the Wilson administration would react to pressure and foreign policy.

The diplomatic tactics developed by Grey to deal with the United States and, in particular, the Wilson Administration set the stage for future engagements between the

⁹⁷ Telegram from Spring Rice to Grey, 29, January 1914. PRO 170, FO 800/84, Sir Edward Grey Papers, British National Archives.

⁹⁸ Telegram from Spring Rice to Grey, 12, January 1914, PRO 170, FO 800/84, Sir Edward Grey Papers.

⁹⁹ Letter from Grey to Spring Rice, 2, April 1914. PRO 170, FO 800/84, Sir Edward Grey Papers, British National Archives.

two countries. By dispensing with traditional European pageantry, using flattery, and speaking plainly with American Ambassador Page and presidential advisor Edward House, Grey had created a dynamic between the British Foreign Office and the Presidency of the United States based on a sense of friendship and frankness that seemingly aligned British and American interests. In dealing with Grey over the Mexican presidency and Panama Tolls issues Wilson, House, and Page all felt at ease with Grey and the way he handled diplomacy. As tensions in Europe began to boil over in the summer of 1914 Grey and the British Foreign Office would continue to cultivate the good feelings developed between the two nations in order to maintain U. S. support for British policy. Additionally, these experiences would provide a comfortable background for Grey to draw from as he worked to neutralize U. S protests over British policy during the period of American neutrality. Through a combination of discreet pressure, friendly conversation, and adulation Grey had successfully brought about a sense of concinnity between the United States and Great Britain. But amity with America was not solely a British policy, for Germany was also attempting to sow the seeds of friendship with America.

Rapprochement à la Kaiser Wilhelm II

As noted earlier, the simultaneous rise of the United States and Germany on the world scene led to a number of disputes between the two countries. Despite this competition, Kaiser Wilhelm understood that Germany was not in a position to confront the U.S. directly. Just as Britain was working diplomatically to create a closer relationship with the United States, so was Germany. Regardless of the reason behind negative views of Germany held by the non-German-American public, or the German misunderstanding of American views on foreign policy, the Kaiser understood the need to re-establish a positive German-American relationship. Although the Spanish-

American war marked the point that the United States was recognized as a power on the world stage, Germany had already begun a policy of détente.

When the Dominican Republic offered Germany a naval base in 1897, the Kaiser declined citing his desire to maintain good relations with the United States, and again in 1899, while negotiating the purchase of the Caroline Islands from Spain, the Kaiser instructed State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Bernhard von Bülow that 'it is the task of diplomacy to avoid difficulties and misunderstandings with the U.S. as long as it is compatible with the dignity of the Empire.'¹⁰⁰ In 1899 Germany started the construction of a cable link between the two countries that he hoped would break the one-sided flow of information the Americans were getting from Britain.¹⁰¹ An exchange program for professors from Germany and the United States was created in the hopes of producing an intellectual connection between the two countries.

In a further attempt to grow the bonds of friendship with America the Kaiser appointed Herman Speck von Sternburg, who had good relations with President Roosevelt, as Ambassador to the United States during Roosevelt's administration. Manfred Jonas describes Sternburg's diplomatic credentials as paltry at best and argues that he did little to represent Germany's views, failing at his primary purpose to improve German-American relations.¹⁰² Reinhard Doerries counters Jonas' claim by stating that Sternburg was 'very popular in the United States and thus well suited to prepare the way for establishing friendly relations between the two countries.'¹⁰³ While Sternburg was able to create a stronger personal friendship with President Roosevelt, he was not able to create a stronger bond between the two countries.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Balfour, *The Kaiser and His Times* (Boston, 1964), p. 221.

¹⁰¹ Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, 1984), p. 67.

¹⁰² Hans W. Gatzke, *Germany and the United States: 'A Special Relationship?'* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 45; Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, 1984), pp. 72-73.

¹⁰³ Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989), p. 4.

Upon Sternburg's death in 1908, Johann Heinrich Count von Bernstorff was appointed Ambassador to the United States. He was clearly dispatched to the United States to continue the work of Sternburg for as he left for his new post he was instructed by both the Kaiser and Chancellor to 'enlighten [American] public opinion...[as to the] friendly intentions of German policy.'¹⁰⁴ Bernstorff was able to maintain cordial relations with Roosevelt in the waning days of his presidency as well as with President Taft. With Wilson's move into the Oval Office cordial relations did not necessarily end, but they did change due to Wilson's penchant for seclusion. Nevertheless, Bernstorff strove to follow the wishes of his sovereign and worked tirelessly to understand the American mind while preaching the closeness of the two countries. German attempts at rapprochement with the United States were not limited to political circles.

With the understanding that there was much more to the United States outside of New York City and the Eastern seaboard, German officials, including the Kaiser's brother Prince Henry, criss-crossed the country meeting with German –American organizations and communities attempting to allay the fear of German aggression.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, constant newspaper reports of German naval activity around the world gave the average American the impression that Germany was bent on world domination. Regardless of how hard Germany tried to rebuild its relationship with America, it was unable to get past the steadily increasing American perception of a Germany bent on world hegemony.

At the same time that Germany was failing at creating a strong bond of friendship with the United States, Britain was succeeding. Following the advice of Sternburg and Bernstorff, the Kaiser did not put much faith in the apparent Anglo-

¹⁰⁴ Count Bernstorff, *My Three Years in America* (New York, 1920), p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, 1984), p. 68; Stewart Halsey Ross, *Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918* (Jefferson, 1996), p. 14.

American rapprochement that was occurring. Germany's friendship with the United States, he believed, would survive due to indifference towards Britain by the vast majority of people in the American Midwest and West and the large German-American population in those states.¹⁰⁶

As tensions began to rise in Europe Colonel House, personal advisor to President Wilson journeyed to the continent in an attempt to stave off disaster. As mentioned earlier he made his first stop in Germany before moving on to France and Great Britain. Godfrey Hodgson notes that in a meeting prior to the trip Wilson gave House his blessing stating 'The object you have in mind is too important to neglect.'¹⁰⁷ On 7 May 1914, about two weeks before House was to leave for Europe he had a brief run-in with German Ambassador Bernstorff in which he told the Ambassador of his impending trip to Germany. The Ambassador's reply points to Germany's desire to impress House and create a greater bond of friendship. Bernstorff told House that he already knew about the impending trip and had been asked to send a report on the Colonel to the German Foreign Office, then attempting to flatter House, stated that he would be sending two reports.¹⁰⁸

The German Foreign Office was playing the same game as the British Foreign Office – gathering information on the people they deemed most valuable to their own success and passing it on to the men at the top, in this case, Bethmann Hollweg and the Kaiser, in order to warn them about what was important to the American President.

Once House began his journey he had a chance meeting with the nephew of the head of the German Army, Count von Moltke. House and Moltke, met while aboard the

¹⁰⁶ Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 20.

¹⁰⁷ 28 April 1914, Edward M. House Diary, E.M. House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, Vol. 1-2, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁰⁸ 7 May 1914, Edward M. House Diary, E.M. House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, Vol. 1-2, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Imperator as they both travelled to Germany, established a good rapport enjoying each other's company during the cruise, and joined each other for lunch upon arriving in Hamburg.¹⁰⁹ The value of this accidental meeting rests with the perception von Moltke left with House who described the Count as progressive and stating that he received 'valuable information concerning the political conditions in Germany' from him.¹¹⁰

Once in Germany House had two prime engagements, the first of which was a dinner hosted by the U.S. Embassy and the second a luncheon with the Kaiser at his Potsdam palace. The guest list for the Embassy dinner included among others, Admiral Tirpitz, Foreign Secretary Jagow, and the very same Count von Moltke that House had found so enjoyable earlier. During the course of the dinner House found himself in deep conversation with Tirpitz. Historians have tended to focus on the bellicosity of Tirpitz when writing about this discussion, but in doing so they miss some valuable insight into House's view of diplomacy.¹¹¹

According to Colonel House's diary, the conversation covered everything from both countries' policies regarding Mexico to the anti-German feeling in U.S. newspapers.¹¹² In the course of the conversation House stated that he attempted to sooth Tirpitz' complaints of American anti-German feeling and at the same time set Wilson up as man of 'courage and inflexible will' in order to influence future German decisions should the need arise.¹¹³ House also claims to have made similar statements in

¹⁰⁹ 23 May 1914, Edward M. House Diary, E.M. House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, Vol. 1-2, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹¹⁰ 23 May 1914, Edward M. House Diary, E.M. House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, Vol. 1-2, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹¹¹ Joyce Grigsby Williams, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984), pp. 39-40; Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006)

¹¹² 26 May 1914, Edward M. House Diary, E.M. House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, Vol. 1-2, p. 86, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

conversations with Jagow, Zimmerman, and even the Kaiser at different points during his trip.¹¹⁴

What is interesting is House's complaint that while Tirpitz insisted that Germany wanted peace he was clearly anti-English, and at the same time the Admiral spoke of England, Germany, and the United States being the 'only hope of advancing Christian civilization', giving House the opportunity to speak to the point of his mission, a coalition of these three powerhouses and France to end war, and develop the 'waste places' of the world.¹¹⁵ The fact that House did not seize the opportunity can only be explained as yet another example of his lack of skill in the diplomatic realm.

House did not focus on the militant phrases that Tirpitz uttered during this conversation until his letter to the president on 29 May 1914 when he referred to 'militarism run stark mad' based in part, one would assume, on his discussion with Tirpitz.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, in June 1913 House commented to Page that if people knew that Wilson was not really averse to war it would almost certainly go a long way to ensuring peace but when Tirpitz defends Germany's need for a large military as 'the way to maintain [peace]...was to put fear into the hearts of her enemies' echoing House's message, House denounces it as unbridled militarism.¹¹⁷

The second engagement of House's time in Germany was the *Schrippenfest* luncheon at the Potsdam Palace outside of Berlin. The Kaiser honoured House by ensuring that he and U.S. Ambassador to Germany Gerard were the only two guests to attend the luncheon and having them seated opposite of him during the meal. Seated next to Colonel House, and therefore personalities the American would spend

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 86- 87, 91.

¹¹⁶ Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (4 vols., Boston, 1926-28), I, p. 249.

¹¹⁷ 19 June 1913, Edward M. House Diary, E. M. House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, Vol. 1-2, p. 238, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library; 26 May 1914, Edward M. House Diary, E.M. House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, Vol. 1-2, p. 86, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

considerable time with that afternoon, were Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Alfred Zimmerman, whom House found to be ‘quite responsive and sympathetic’ and General Erich von Falkenhayn, who House ‘enjoyed.’¹¹⁸

It was during this luncheon that House finally had the chance to speak directly to the Kaiser about the idea of a group of powers anchored by Germany, Great Britain, and the United States to prevent war. The Kaiser’s manner of speaking caught House off guard in the respect that the conversation was private, with no other government officials within ear-shot, and it was natural – the two men spoke quickly and with animation as if they were of equal stature.¹¹⁹ This manner of speaking deeply impressed House and the Kaiser’s charm and forcefulness reminded him of former U.S. President Theodor Roosevelt.¹²⁰

The two men spoke about the German naval program, and of Germany’s fear of being surrounded as well as the tensions between Britain and Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm assured House that Britain had a friend in him and had nothing to fear from German military might.¹²¹ In the course of the discussion Wilhelm agreed that America was in a position, as an outsider, to help ease tensions on the European Continent and supported House’s overture to take up the matter with England in a few days’ time.¹²²

House’s time in Germany had multiple effects. Initially House considered his time in Germany a success. Discussions with German leadership had given him valuable insight into the fears and therefore the policy decisions of the German nation. For the Kaiser, House’s time in Germany was also a success. The German diplomatic tactics were much the same as those of Sir Edward Grey in that they believed in the

¹¹⁸ 1 June 1914, Edward M. House Diary, E.M. House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, Vol. 1-2, p. 88, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-91.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

power of frankness, building trust and friendship in order to gain information. By instructing Ambassador Bernstorff to gather information on House before he reached Germany the Foreign Office was attempting to gain insight on the personal advisor to the president of the United States. By flattering House as a special guest at a military festival at the Kaiser's Potsdam Palace, German officials placed him in close contact with members of the Imperial government. More importantly, the Kaiser had made time to speak with House personally and in private. German hopes would be placed on the personal relationships House was building with German officials. House's final stop on his European trip would be Great Britain, where Grey and the Foreign Office would continue their relationship building.

The Set Up

On the very day that Britain declared war on Germany, President Wilson declared American neutrality and offered his services to mediate an end to hostilities. American neutrality did not surprise either Great Britain or Germany, but both countries understood that any type of United States intervention could affect the outcome of the war. Britain's military leaders turned to their Navy to strangle Germany's war effort. Grey and the rest of Britain's political leaders sprang into action to subdue any problems that might occur with the United States due to the Royal Navy's actions, and even to enlist U.S. assistance if required. To understand Britain's decision concerning its prosecution of the war, one must first understand how she viewed herself.

L.L. Farrar claims in his book *The Short War Illusion* that all of the belligerents in 1914 believed that the war was going to be short and therefore none of them needed to take non-European neutrals, such as the United States, into consideration.¹²³ He goes on to identify this as the reason Grey made risky decisions regarding the United States,

¹²³ L.L. Farrar, Jr., *The Short War Illusion: German Policy, Strategy & Domestic Affairs, August-December 1914* (Santa Barbara, 1973), p. 60.

specifically the implementation of a blockade to cease the flow of supplies from around the world into Germany.¹²⁴ But he does not take into account British policy going into the war. By 1902 Britain considered herself more of a colonial than a European power, and as such she based her strength and foreign policy on the ability of the Royal Navy to protect the seaborne commerce that sustained Britain's economic growth and Great Power status. Under this policy there was no need for a large standing army by European standards, and if Britain were to find herself embroiled in a war, as she now did, it would be the Royal Navy to which the country would turn in order to win it.¹²⁵ The idea behind this policy was that Britain's political leaders had intended to stay out of continental affairs.

Unfortunately, what the Foreign Office planned and what the War Office planned were two entirely different strategies. While Britain's politicians had been designing policy based on the colonial power line of thought and staying out of continental affairs, in 1912 the military began secretly negotiating with the French military on how to defend against an attack from Germany. The plan called for the British Navy to safeguard the channel and for British troops to cover the French northern flank. And while these negotiations, upon coming to the attention of the politicians, angered many, Grey recognized the treaty with the caveat that England would not guarantee that it would support France in the event of war with Germany.¹²⁶ Grey's recognition of the treaty all but committed Britain to the support of France, and more importantly allowed him to maintain at least the impression that Britain was still looking to stay out of continental disputes.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹²⁵ John W. Coogan, *The End Of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 70-71.

¹²⁶ Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), pp. 52-53.

It was Germany's invasion of Belgium that brought Britain into the war, but it was the mass carnage of the war that made it evident that the Entente's armies would not, by themselves, be able to defeat Germany. In order to be victorious the Royal Navy would have to do more than merely guard the French coast and keep the channel open – Germany would have to be cut off from any outside supplies, such as those coming from the United States. In this respect, according to her policy and contrary to Professor Farrar's analysis, Britain was prepared for entanglement in continental affairs and put Grey in a position to have to deal with the United States. Consequently, the Royal Navy was immediately dispatched to stop the import of supplies to Germany, and the Foreign Office went to work on the United States.

The fact that Britain was reliant on its navy makes the Kaiser's desire for Germany to become a naval power problematic for both countries. It is perhaps an irony that the writings of an American naval officer influenced much of Imperial Germany's diplomacy under Kaiser Wilhelm II. The Kaiser was so taken by Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power on History* that by 1894 he wrote to a friend that he was 'not reading but devouring' the book and had ordered all of his naval officers to read it.¹²⁷ Mahan's writings coincided with Wilhelm's dreams for Germany, making the case that a country needed a strong navy, overseas colonies, and a large presence in the Pacific in order to be considered a world power.¹²⁸

What is more, it was not just the Kaiser that believed in what Mahan had to say. Patrick Kelly notes that Mahan's writings seem to have also influenced Admiral

¹²⁷ Captain Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (London, 1890); Holger H. Herwig, *Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Naval Planning, 1889-1941* (Boston, 1976), p. 40; Giles MacDonogh, *The Last Kaiser: The Life of Wilhelm II* (New York, 2000), pp. 2-3.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3, 232; Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (New York, 1991), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

Tirpitz's ideas of 'peacetime seapower ideology'.¹²⁹ Because Mahan's book did not deal solely with naval battle tactics but with the use of a navy to ensure that commercial shipping lanes were kept open during times of peace and war *The Influence of Sea Power on History* was read by leaders other than just those in the navy. Shortly after returning from his consular position in China in 1910 to become the Under Secretary of State in the German Foreign Office, Arthur Zimmerman commented in a newspaper article that Mahan's book was 'one of the few books in world literature [that] proved the importance of sea power.'¹³⁰ Mahan's writings were also very influential within the United States with American leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt, Congressman Henry Cabot Lodge, and Secretary of the Navy (in 1889) Benjamin Tracy among those listed as his most avid admirers.¹³¹

Advancing British Interests

Britain's diplomatic assault on America was an extension of the work that had been done in the previous two years. This new offensive began by addressing issues that Grey knew would drive President Woodrow Wilson to support the British cause. It was well known through Wilson's writings and speeches that he felt the United States carried a moral burden to 'serve mankind and progress' in the world.¹³²

With the knowledge of Wilson's beliefs, Grey had the angle he needed; next he needed a way to get to Wilson. The difficulty with attempting to sway Wilson was that outside of one or two trusted advisors, he kept his own council. His thoughts were enough of a mystery that it frustrated British diplomats who were trying to find a way to

¹²⁹ Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* (Bloomington, 2011), p. 93.

¹³⁰ Attachment to article written in 1910 by Arthur Zimmerman, Teilnachlass zu Alfred Zimmerman, Box 1, Mss. Ztgn., Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz Handschriftenabteilung: Manuscript Dept.

¹³¹ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *From Wilson to Roosevelt: Foreign Policy of the United States, 1913-1945* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 8.

¹³² Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look At His Major Foreign Policies* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), p. 16.

influence him. British Ambassador Sir Cecil Spring-Rice once complained to Grey that ‘...hardly anyone has access to him and no one seems to be consulted except those whose opinions are known to be the same as his own.’¹³³ However, as discussed earlier, it quickly became evident that there were chinks in Wilson’s isolationist armour – namely his love for England and Colonel Edward M. House.

Wilson’s love for England was relatively well known, but his comments to members of his own cabinet as well as British officials betrayed the depth of his Anglophile nature. Additionally, Wilson and Grey had several things in common, one of which was their reading list. In a discussion between Wilson and the British ambassador in early September 1914, Spring Rice alluded to Grey’s love for the writings of Wordsworth. The president responded by tearfully noting that he knew them by heart, to which Spring Rice cleverly stated, ‘You and Grey are fed on the same food and I think you understand.’¹³⁴ Spring Rice knew immediately that Wilson’s heart was with Britain and reported to Grey that he was confident that when the moment came, Britain could depend on Wilson. If this was not convincing enough, in a conversation with Spring Rice later that same month Wilson bluntly stated that while he would do everything he could to maintain absolute neutrality, he believed that in Britain’s war with Germany ‘Everything I love the most in the world is at stake.’¹³⁵

The importance of these statements tends to be overlooked by historians such as Ross Gregory, who claim the statements are of little importance outside of the fact that it shows Wilson as the Anglophile he was. While the statements do reveal his love for Britain they also and more importantly conveyed to Grey and the other members of the British Foreign Office a measure of safety, in that they knew they had some room to

¹³³ Spring-Rice to Grey, 13 May 1914, Sir Edward Grey Papers, Pro 170, FO 800/84.

¹³⁴ Telegram from Spring-Rice to Grey, 8 September 1914, Sir Edward Grey Papers, PRO 170 FO 800/84.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

manoeuvre when it came to dealing harshly with the United States. However, Wilson's determination to maintain United States neutrality despite his affinity for Britain forced the Foreign Secretary to continue to move cautiously.

The second, and possibly more important, link in Wilson's armour was House. The closeness with which these two men worked is evident in Wilson's much quoted statement that 'House is my second personality. He is my independent self. His thoughts and mine are one.'¹³⁶ House was the one man whose advice Wilson seemed to listen to when making decisions and he had his hands in all facets of U.S. foreign policy. Armed with that knowledge it was evident to Grey that in order to influence Wilson, he would first have to influence House, with whom he had previously created a good friendship.

House's previously mentioned second trip to Europe where he visited Germany, Paris, and then England, held special importance to Britain's diplomats.¹³⁷ A week after arriving in Britain, House lunched with Grey and Tyrrell to discuss the growing tensions in Europe, his conversation with the Kaiser, and to offer a plan to avert any possible disaster.

Because so many historians have not dealt with the continuity of Grey's diplomacy in regards to the United States the initial discussions Grey and House had during this trip are overlooked. As noted earlier, Grey preyed on House's ego by utilizing flattery to disarm the inexperienced diplomat, and when the two men sat down to discuss House's visit, Grey began by bringing up the Panama Tolls repeal bill and 'expressing pleasure to the fine way in which the President did it' and proposing that he pay tribute to Wilson in Parliament.¹³⁸ While seemingly innocuous, this bit of flattery directly referenced the successful work the two had done previously, essentially

¹³⁶ Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (4 vols., Boston, 1926-28), I, p. 114.

¹³⁷ 26 May 1914 – 1 June 1914, E.M. House, Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, vol. 1-2, pp. 85-92, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹³⁸ 27 June 1914, E.M. House, Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, vol. 1-2, p. 99, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

reminding House that he and Grey were working towards the same end. During the course of conversation House had commented on the militancy of Germany and the Kaiser's desire to maintain peace and his belief that a coalition of England, the United States, and Germany would be beneficial.¹³⁹ House recorded in his diary that a great many things were discussed and that Grey had been impressed, sympathetic, and candid.¹⁴⁰ Grey's charm and candour were, as always, a large part of his diplomatic repertoire and he used them skilfully to befriend House, even going so far as to have House stay with Tyrrell, for whom House had shown obvious affection, while waiting for the next lunch date between the two men.¹⁴¹

House's time on Tyrrell's country estate was spent with Sir William Tyrrell and Sir Cecil Spring-Rice discussing 'big and little affairs'.¹⁴² Aside from the obvious point of befriending House that was intended by the weekend, Tyrrell and Spring-Rice spent a good deal of the conversation relating stories to House about the Kaiser's diplomatic instability, effectively weakening House's opinion of the German leader.¹⁴³

Grey's wooing of House and Wilson played on the basic vanity of the men and placed House in the midst of the power brokers of British government. Each time Grey met with House, he listened quietly, never saying anything negative about whatever House was intent on discussing. Toward the end of House's visit Grey was able to mention almost off-hand how he planned to pay the president a tribute by mentioning on the floor of the House of Commons what Wilson had done for 'international

¹³⁹ 27 June 1914, E.M. House, Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, vol. 1-2, pp. 100-101, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁴⁰ Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (4 vols, Boston, 1926-28), vol I, p. 262.

¹⁴¹ 20 June 1914, E.M. House, Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, vol. 1-2, p. 105, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁴² 21 June 1914, E.M. House, Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, vol. 1-2, pp. 105-106 Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁴³ 21 June 1914, E.M. House, Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-1, vol. 1-2, p. 106 Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

morals.¹⁴⁴ When House returned to the United States shortly thereafter, he was stronger in his faith that the British were open to his ideas and that Grey was a man he could work with and trust. Now that Grey had strengthened his relationship with the most influential man in Wilson's White House, he went straight to work moulding House's mind.

Wilson's belief that the United States held a moral position in the world, and that in order to be effective he must listen to and follow the will of the American people was admirable, but it was Wilson's self-imposed isolation from advisors other than House, on which Grey played. As the wheels of the war chariots began to turn in Europe, Grey had successfully ingratiated himself, and the British people, with the one man capable of influencing the American president.

Conclusion

On the eve of the First World War Great Britain and Germany had an established diplomatic plan of action regarding the United States with both countries employing the same basic diplomatic tactics in attempting to befriend America. These tactics employed the building of personal relationships between the leaders of the countries, the gathering of information in order to facilitate the building of these relationships, and drawing out debates over issues in order to get the best possible outcome without harming the relationship with America.

Although he had inherited Britain's policy of cultivating friendship with the United States, Grey's wholehearted embrace of the policy made it an absolute success. As we have seen above, despite British opposition to Wilson's positions on Mexico and the Panama Tolls, the work done by Grey and the rest of the Foreign Office to create a

¹⁴⁴ Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* p. 263.

bond of friendship based on common goals and desires led to the strengthening of Anglophilic feelings with the United States leadership of the period.

Britain, under Grey, furthermore, had created a rapport with the United States that seemed to recognize America's potential, and the two countries' similarities. The strategy of pressing the United States and dragging out the debate on issues to gain an advantage had proven to be a reliable and relatively safe diplomatic method. Additionally, the seemingly unorthodox friendship the British Foreign Office had created with the U.S. Ambassador Page and House as President Wilson's closest advisor granted them insight into American foreign policy and allowed for a measure of safety in their dealings with the United States.

This chapter has also shown that relations between Germany and the United States gained intensity shortly after German unification in 1871, when German diplomats had to work against the idea of a Germany bent on world domination, and more importantly, a Germany that had designs on the Americas. Germany's biggest diplomatic failing regarding the United States was that it simply could not seem to break from the age old European diplomacy that had moulded the German states into the most powerful force on the European continent. German policy concerning the United States was based on the exact same principles as its policy involving the European powers, demonstrating Germany's lack of understanding of American foreign policy values. Nevertheless Germany attempted to create a diplomatic understanding, first under Bismarck and then under the auspice of the Kaiser. Like Britain, Germany believed in a continuity of diplomatic actions, but the Bismarckian and European-centred policies that the Germans doggedly followed had the tendency to put off American leaders.

Nevertheless, by the summer of 1914, German diplomats were diligently constructing relationships with American leaders based on flattery and frank discussions that they would build on in the coming years. The arrival of Colonel Edward M. House in Germany in May 1914 allowed German leaders from the Kaiser to Admiral Tirpitz the opportunity to befriend the one man that had the ear of the American president.

When fighting broke out across Europe the Foreign Offices of Britain and Germany felt they were in a strong position to navigate and direct U.S. policy to best suit their interests. As war-time events led to disagreements with the United States, both countries would put their faith in the relationships they had built with American leaders during the previous years, as well as the policy of consuming time to get the most out of the situation without harming relations.

Diplomatic histories of the First World War such as the works by John Milton Cooper, Ross Gregory, and John A. Thompson do not give the diplomacy of the war historical grounding. This chapter has established the background of the diplomatic relations Britain and Germany had formed with the United States in the decades prior to the outbreak of First World War. Grey's diplomatic tactics regarding the Panama Tolls and the Mexican Presidency created an atmosphere of cooperation between Britain and the United States that served the immediate British interests. The importance of this is to underline the fact that diplomacy does not work in a vacuum. This chapter has demonstrated that British diplomatic action prior to 1914 had laid the groundwork with the United States for the good relations and trust that Grey and Wilson were able to work with during the American period of neutrality.

By contrast, this chapter has also revealed that despite Germany's attempts to do the same, they were unable to break the perception that they were bent on world domination at most or violating America's Monroe Doctrine at the very least. A string

of issues involving the Samoan Islands, Venezuela, and the Philippines, while successfully brought to a close, continued to give Americans the idea that German interests were at odds with American interests.

This chapter has also provided documentation that on the eve of the First World War Britain and Germany worked diligently to sway U.S. envoy Edward M. House, and therefore President Wilson, to support their cause. Both countries used their previous knowledge of Wilson and House, as well as using past diplomatic events, in their attempt to garner favour. This thesis contends that from very early in the war Britain and Germany understood the impact the United States could have on their potential for victory. Having placed British-German-American relations in the proper context prior to the First World War in this chapter, the next chapter will focus on the role the British Foreign Office had in directing American policy regarding its blockade of Germany

Chapter Two

The United States and Britain's Blockade

This chapter will cover how Grey and Spring Rice were able to change the focus of U.S. complaints from one of international legality, to a concern for American public opinion in order to keep the United States from effectively challenging the blockade. In doing this, the chapter will reveal the extent of the success the British Foreign Office had in creating a mind-set of neglect in the United States regarding the British blockade.

H.C. Allen points out that since 1776, the time of Adam Smith and his masterpiece *The Wealth of Nations*, the majority of trade was maritime trade.¹ For the newly formed American nation this maritime trade was no-less important to its well-being than it was for the European based Empires, and by 1812 the United States was at war with Britain ostensibly due to British violations of maritime law. As Britain set the Royal Navy to its wartime task of strangling German commerce, and with it Germany's ability to wage a successful war, British policy once again came into conflict with American interests. Had it not been for the diplomatic actions of Foreign Secretary Grey, American insistence of freedoms of the seas could have seriously harmed British-American relations, and more germane to the issues of August 1914, it could have wrecked the British war effort.

Understanding why the United States dropped its objections to the rules by which Britain had chosen to prosecute the war is directly related to the extent of the influence Britain had over America. By the time Sir Edward Grey first took office in 1905, the promotion of friendship between the United States and Britain had become a staple of British foreign policy. Under Grey's direction, the British Foreign Office had

¹ H.C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States* (New York, 1955), p. 277.

gone from simply promoting friendship to influencing U.S. foreign policy decisions to support British interests.

By September 1914 British influence had reached, as Historian Ray Stannard Baker correctly characterised, 'the point of domination – over American diplomacy.'² Though domination does not guarantee victory, Britain wielded this diplomatic domination as yet another tool in its arsenal throughout the Great War. It was Foreign Minister Grey's understanding of this power of persuasion, his deftness at timing and his understanding of America's tendencies in diplomatic matters that led him successfully to assure U.S. complacency in British naval strategy.

Historians David Stevenson, Ross Gregory, and Robert W. Tucker tend to simplify the historical debate over the impact the Declaration of London had on international relations, particularly those between the United States and Great Britain, during the First World War. They comment on the slowness of America's response and the acquiescence to the British interpretation of the declaration as either U.S. fear of a confrontation with Britain or the largely anglophilic leanings of the Wilson administration.³ Gregory has given the debate over the declaration a bit more coverage than Stevenson, and while he makes brief remarks about Grey's approach toward the United States and the effect it had on Wilson and his advisors, he still limits the discussion to Anglophilia.

John W. Coogan, on the other hand, does a masterful job of discussing the American shift from the legality of Britain's modification of the declaration to concerns about public opinion, but does not address the role played by the British Foreign Office

² Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson Life and Letters: Neutrality, 1914 – 1915* Vol. V (New York: 1940), p. 211.

³ David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford: 1988); Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York: 1971); Robert W. Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War* (Charlottesville, 2007).

in developing the interest in this subject by Wilson and his cabinet.⁴ Instead, he too, places the onus for this change on pro-British sentiment within the White House. While not addressing the Declaration of London directly, John A. Thompson and Robert W. Tucker point out that Wilson, like many Americans, was educated in British classics, but was nevertheless intent on leading the United States based on public opinion and not as a result of any sympathy for Britain or her customs.⁵

This chapter examines the role of the British Foreign Office in developing a mind-set of neglect in the United States' policy regarding the British blockade of Germany. It does so by investigating why Wilson responded so lightly to the blockade, and why Lansing, who was initially vehement in his opposition to the blockade, changed his tone and dropped his battle over the strict legality of the action to focusing on the American public's perception of it. The first section deals with the U.S. neutrality, and the importance placed upon keeping it as a friendly neutral by Grey. The second section concerns Britain's modification of the Declaration of London, specifically looking at how Grey's diplomacy allowed Britain to manoeuvre the United States from being a strict opponent to the British scheme on legal grounds to opposing it due to the potential of public backlash. The third section addresses the issue of freedom of the seas, or the freedom of trade and how Grey was able to stymie American diplomats and their efforts as he detained U.S. ships and cargo. This section will also consider Grey's ability to not alienate the American public while at the same time interfering with their maritime trade.

Neutrality and the Declaration of London

At the outset America's sole interest in the war was neutral rights and the freedom of the seas. The decision to get all belligerent nations to accept the Declaration

⁴ John W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899 – 1915* (Ithaca, 1981).

⁵ John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson* (London, 2002).

of London, a treaty that had not been observed since its inception in 1909, as the code by which to resolve controversies on the high seas was merely an attempt at ensuring American neutrality and its ability to trade with all nations. It was this decision that led to the United States' first major controversy in the war – one with Great Britain and not Germany.

However, it was the British Foreign Office that was to set the tone and direction of the debate that followed. Wilson's response to Britain's blockade of Germany was timid at best. His declaration of neutrality was pointed but his defence of American maritime commerce was tempered by British diplomatic skill. It is because of Grey's understanding of both diplomacy and America's diplomatic history that he was able to manoeuvre the United States, a nation considered by many to be the defender of neutral rights, not to stand up to the nation that was a historical violator of neutral rights. It was here that the lack of diplomatic knowledge within the ranks of Wilson's cabinet both hindered and helped Grey.

By 1902 Britain considered herself more of a colonial than a European power, and as such she based her strength and foreign policy on the ability of the Royal Navy to protect the seaborne commerce that sustained Britain's economic growth and Great Power status. Under this policy there was no need for a large standing army by European standards, and if Britain were to find herself embroiled in a war as she now did, it would be the Royal Navy to which the country would turn to win it.⁶ In August 1914 the British Cabinet confirmed its continued belief in this policy by declaring, as David French so succinctly states, '...that Britain's main war effort would revolve around her navy and her economy.'⁷

⁶ John W. Coogan, *The End Of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithica, 1981), pp. 70-71.

⁷ David French, 'The Meaning of Attrition, 1914-1916', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 407 (April, 1988), p. 386.

The German army's rapid advance through Belgium and France, the slow deployment of the undersized British Expeditionary Force in northern France, and the bogging down of men and material in trenches by the end of second month of war led Grey to reassess Britain's policy regarding the conflict on the European continent. As a full supporter of the Cabinet's war policy, Grey understood that the British blockade would hinder the German economy and war effort, not to mention the morale of the Germany citizenry, but the simple fact that Germany was located in central Europe, meant it was not as dependent on seaborne commerce as Britain. Therefore the German military was less susceptible to strangulation by blockade.⁸ This led him to the dual conclusions that the war would be longer than expected and that in order to win, the United States would have to be brought into the war on the Entente's side.

Accordingly, Grey knew that while a longer war could enhance the effects of a blockade, it also meant a greater potential to rile neutrals. He also understood that the longer the war, the larger the potential that battlefield losses could compel the Allies into an unsatisfactory ending of hostilities. For those reasons, Grey knew that he had to maintain relations with the United States that could ultimately result in America's entry in the war on Britain's side.

Therefore, if Grey's conclusion was correct (and in this instance it is generally considered to be) that the U.S. would be the decisive factor in winning the war, then the tactics Grey established from the beginning of the war were the decisive element in the defeat of Germany and the Central Powers, and historians such as Robert Osbourne are incorrect to ascribe to the Admiralty's position in 1915 and 1916 that Grey was

⁸ There is, to some extent conflicting views on Germany's ability to wage war effectively while under blockade. For arguments for Germany's ability to survive a blockade see: Paul A. Papayoanou, 'Interdependence, Institutions, and the Balance of Power: Britain, Germany, and World War I', *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring, 1996), pp. 42-76; David French, 'The Meaning of Attrition, 1914-1916', (April, 1988), pp. 385-405. For arguments about Germany's problems as a result of blockade see, Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1998).

worrying too much about neutral rights. Grey's strategy is supported by Lord Kitchener's own war plan. As David French points out, although it was unknown by Grey at the time, Lord Kitchener's plan was to wait until the Germans were worn down by fighting and blockade before committing the bulk of the British Army.⁹

Even before Britain declared its intent to stop goods from arriving in Germany the United States was placed in a position to choose either remaining true to the President's pledge of neutrality or of succumbing to British demands. In spite of long-standing U.S. policies safeguarding the rights of neutrals during war, and the objections of European neutrals, the Wilson administration did not vigorously defend its right to ship to any belligerent. The United States suddenly found itself in a unique position. But how was it that the United States became cornered and forced to choose either to defend neutral rights or submit to British demands?

As a candidate, Wilson had run on a platform of reform at home 'never once mentioning a foreign issue that was not primarily a domestic concern'.¹⁰ He had, as a point of fact, wanted to focus on domestic issues so badly that at his inauguration he commented that it would be an 'irony of fate' if his tenure in office were hijacked by foreign policy.¹¹ Wilson's entire career had been dedicated to domestic politics with only casual attention being given to 'the mechanisms and history of foreign relations.'¹² As America's role in the world began to grow so did Wilson's thinking about the country's role in foreign affairs. His understanding of international law began to take shape as he taught a few courses and wrote articles on the subject during the early 1890s. Wilson's interpretation of international law as principles of law was not of a law designed to maintain peace and prosperity, it was, as Thomas J. Knock describes

⁹ David French, 'The Meaning of Attrition, 1914-1916', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 407 (April, 1988), pp. 386-388.

¹⁰ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist* (Baltimore, 1957), p. 11.

¹¹ H.W. Brands, *Woodrow Wilson* (New York, 2003), p. 42.

¹² Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist*, p. 5.

Wilson's interpretation, a '...system...[that] promoted a moral sense of community among states.'¹³

Almost immediately upon entering the White House, Wilson found his fear realized as events in Mexico forced him to deal with foreign policy from the outset of his presidency. Wilson's early attempts at diplomacy are characterized by John Milton Cooper Jr as 'fumbling' and 'ill-thought' while Arthur S. Link describes his policy regarding Mexico as 'blundering...[due to] his tendency to take insufficient account of hard realities and to oversimplify the complexities of international life.'¹⁴ It would be unfair to say that Wilson was not learning about the realities of diplomacy 'on the job,' but it would also be fair to state that once the war in Europe started and the belligerent nations began their assault on American neutrality Wilson found himself still in a world about which he knew very little. According to Godfrey Hodgson, in August 1914 President Wilson had become aware 'of how ill-equipped he was to deal with the war in Europe.'¹⁵ With his lack of realistic and concrete knowledge on international law and diplomacy, he was forced to rely on the thoughts of the even less experienced Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan.

Bryan's appointment was essentially forced upon Wilson as repayment for his political support during Wilson's run for the presidency. Ross Gregory characterizes Wilson's decision to appoint Bryan to the office of Secretary of State as finding a position where he 'could do the least harm.'¹⁶ Bryan's diplomatic skill was suspect enough that Wilson relied on his personal confidant Colonel Edward M. House, who

¹³ Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 8-9.

¹⁴ John Milton Cooper Jr., 'Making A Case For Wilson', in *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War, and Peace*, ed. John Milton Cooper Jr. (Baltimore, 2008), p.15; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist* (Baltimore, 1957), pp. 17-20.

¹⁵ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life Of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006), p.11.

¹⁶ Ross Gregory, *Walter Hines Page: Ambassador to the Court of St. James's* (Lexington, 1970), p. 22.

was not fixated solely on domestic politics, for most important diplomatic missions to Europe.¹⁷

Bryan's time as America's head diplomat was marred by criticism of his unorthodox and unsophisticated mannerisms and his decision to supplement his official pay by continuing his speaking on the Chautauqua lecture circuit. These lapses in judgement only fuelled the position of many European heads of state and foreign offices who, when referring to Bryan, referred to him as a 'jelly fish' or 'a bad smell.'¹⁸

According to Michael Kazin and Thomas J. Knock the area of Bryan's work as Secretary of State that truly deserves praise was his dealings with the Central and South American states as he worked toward the ultimately doomed Pan-American Pact, and the 'cooling off' treaties that he negotiated with nearly thirty nations ranging from El Salvador to Great Britain.¹⁹ The United States had worked to establish a hegemonic diplomatic relationship with the countries of Central and South America since President Monroe declared the Western Hemisphere the country's playground in 1823. Wilson and Bryan soon found that their knowledge of the diplomatic tact – proven to work so well with small countries under U.S. hegemonic control – was not sufficient when dealing with the great powers of the world. Due to this lack of knowledge, and the time the Secretary of State spent away from Washington on his speaking engagements, both men had to rely a good deal on Robert Lansing.

Lansing's credentials made him the clear candidate to advise on foreign policy issues. His twenty years of experience negotiating disputes regarding international law

¹⁷ Kendrick A. Clements, 'Woodrow Wilson and World War I', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol. 34, No. 1 (March, 2004), p. 64.

¹⁸ Letter from Wickham Steed to Arthur Willert, 11 May 1914, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, The Arthur Willert Papers, Correspondence, General Correspondence, Steed – Wrench; Group No. 720, Series No. I, Box No. 5; Spring Rice to Grey, 15 August 1914, Sir Edward Grey Papers, PRO 170, FO 800/84.

¹⁹ Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 2007), pp. 217-218; Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 21-22.

were unequalled within Wilson's administration at the time, and his lawyerly and scholarly approach combined with his distinguished look made him the ideal counterweight to Bryan.²⁰ Much of Wilson's foreign policy dealing with America's neutrality was a result of Lansing's interpretation and definition of international and maritime law.²¹ The combination of Wilson's lack of diplomatic experience with the pressing nature of the Mexican problem, and the death of his wife Ellen just two days after the war in Europe had started, meant that in August 1914 the American ship-of-state found itself sailing without a captain. This is a crucial point often touched upon but generally glazed over by historians concerned with the positions taken by the United States early in the war.

The depression that Wilson found himself in following Ellen Wilson's death due to kidney disease more often than not left the President broken, filling his time reading detective stories, and according to his most trusted confidant unfit to hold his office because he 'did not think straight any longer, and had no heart in the things he was doing.'²² While Wilson did make several speeches declaring U.S. neutrality, and was apprised of what his cabinet members were doing, he was generally out of the decision-making process during the early months of the war. Wilson seemingly allowed his cabinet to run things while he dealt with his grief. When Bryan initially requested permission to push for all belligerents to adhere to the Declaration of London, Wilson readily agreed and Bryan issued the request on 6 August, the same day that Ellen Wilson died.

²⁰ Kendrick A. Clements, 'Woodrow Wilson and World War I', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol. 34, No. 1 (March, 2004), p. 65.

²¹ Daniel M. Smith, *Robert Lansing And American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (New York, 1972), p. 17; John W. Coogan, *The End Of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithica, 1981), pp. 172-173; Robert W. Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War* (Charlottesville, 2007), pp. 30-31.

²² Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand*, (New Haven, 2006) p. 110; H.W. Brands, *Woodrow Wilson* (New York, 2003), p.65.

As Richard W. Van Alstyne and Marion Siney point out, the Central Powers realized that the declaration favoured their weak naval status, and, wisely, their reply was quick and to the point – if all other belligerents accepted the Declaration of London, Germany and Austria-Hungary would also respect it. The simple and deft stipulation was the request that all nations abide by the rules laid out in the declaration.²³ When Grey spoke to Ambassador Page regarding Bryan’s request he merely asked if Germany’s decision was known and what the decision was.²⁴ For Grey, this was a strategic move. If Bryan would tell him what the Germans were going to do, he could then attempt to find a way to make the issue work in his favour. In addition, the time spent in waiting for messages to be sent between Washington and Germany as well as the deliberations as to the wording of those messages would give Britain time to put their blockade into practice. The rest of the Entente powers followed England’s lead and plainly stated that they would observe the Declaration of London if England did.

From almost the first moment of the war the Royal Navy had begun to seize ships carrying goods to Rotterdam and other European ports and as Britain began to turn the screws on Germany’s commerce, Grey was working on the legality of the Order in Council that was to be delivered on 20 August, and carefully setting the stage for U.S. complacency in naval matters. While Grey was attempting to make the Order in Council appear appealing to the United States, he was also dealing with Bryan’s requests for all warring nations to abide by the Declaration of London. Two days before the Order in Council was announced Grey executed a pre-emptory move aimed at gaining time and American acquiescence to the Order in Council by having the

²³ Richard W. Van Alstyne, ‘The policy of the United States regarding the Declaration of London at the outbreak of the Great War’, *The Journal of Modern History* 7 (1933), p. 436; Marion Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1914-1916* (Westport, 1957), p. 21.

²⁴ Page to the Secretary of State, 19 August 1914. Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, p. 217.

Admiralty issue orders to treat U.S. ships as friendly neutrals when encountering them at sea. Grey followed this order with assurances to Ambassador Page that Britain would attempt to purchase 'innocent contraband' in American ships instead of confiscating it.²⁵ Grey also promised that '[all] due consideration [would] be given to American claimants.'²⁶ The effect this statement had was to give America a false sense of security in that U.S. maritime commerce would not be subject to severe interference while Britain conducted their strangulation of Germany. This sense of security was important to the United States because, as almost every historian of this time period has pointed out, the country had been on the verge of a recession and the onset of hostilities in Europe was looked at as an answer to the nation's economic woes. Because complaints from shipping companies, while numerous, were not flooding into the State Department, and Britain was purchasing perishable goods and agreeing to pay for losses incurred by their actions, Grey had seemingly kept his word.²⁷

The Order in Council of 20 August 1914

On 26 August Ambassador Page relayed England's response, in which Grey agreed to follow the laws of the Declaration of London with certain modifications.²⁸ Included in the response was the Order in Council of August 20 that Grey had laboured to get approved by Parliament. Grey's stance caught the State Department completely by surprise. As Ross Gregory has argued, Bryan and Lansing were so taken aback that they were unsure as to their next step; but he mistakenly claims that they simply let the subject drop for a month or more. What Gregory declares to be a pause in American

²⁵ Grey to Spring Rice, 29 August 1914, Sir Edward Grey Papers, FO 372/600.

²⁶ The Consul General at London (Skinner) to Secretary of State, 27 August, 1914, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, p. 307.

²⁷ Page to Bryan, 13 August 1914. Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, p. 305.

²⁸ Page to the Secretary of State, 26 August 1914. Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, p. 218.

diplomatic action is actually a flurry of internal action by Lansing and the Joint Neutrality Board aimed at attempting to formulate an effective diplomatic response to the new issues created by the Order in Council and modifications to the Declaration of London.²⁹

Gregory's argument is based on the fact that the United States government did not respond instantly. The reality was that the apparent lack of a U.S. response had more to do with Lansing attempting to find a legal response to what he deemed a legal issue. Instead of an immediate and rash reaction to Grey's answer, Lansing, along with James Brown Scott and Eugene Wambaugh of the Joint Neutrality Board, immediately began dissecting the British Order in Council to find a legal basis and therefore a legal rebuttal for it in international law.³⁰ Furthermore, as the United States was constantly attempting to assist U.S. shipping companies in dealing with the perils of wartime commerce, they continued to put pressure on Britain to recognize the rights of neutrals. This pressure began on 28 August 1914 as the U.S. State Department pressured Britain to release those ships and their cargoes that were already at sea when the war started.³¹

Lansing's opposition to Grey's modifications was initially aided by Germany's strict adherence to the Declaration of London. Conversely, his position was hindered by Grey's continued requests for information on Germany's position and repeated claims that Britain was following the Declaration of London.³² Germany pointed out that Britain was not following the Declaration, pointing out each instance in detail, and

²⁹ Coogan, *The End of Neutrality*, p. 173.

³⁰ Acting Secretary of State to President Wilson, 27 September 1914, United States Department of State / *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes)* Volume I (1914-1920), pp. 247-248.

³¹ Secretary of State to the Ambassador in London (Page), 28 August 1914. *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War* (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, pp. 306-310.

³² Page to Secretary of State, 1 September 1914. *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War* (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, p. 221. Grey to Page, 31 August 1914. *Ibid*, p. 224.

questioning whether or not the United States was going to allow such infractions to continue.³³ On September 18 Lansing issued a memorandum addressing contraband vessel and cargo policy. The importance of Lansing's memorandum comes from his statement that all belligerents had 'indicated their intention to abide closely by the provisions of the Declaration of London.'³⁴ Based on the understanding that Britain would follow a modified declaration Lansing's memorandum was an attempt to force the use of the Declaration of London's language in respect to the policy of putting into Prize Court and confiscating vessels and cargo. Gregory, Van Alstyne, and Smith all fail to discuss Lansing's memorandum in any capacity.³⁵ Instead they confuse Lansing not addressing Britain's decision to modify the declaration as simply dropping the ball, when in fact, he was working on maintaining the legal language of the declaration. The State Department continued to question the British Foreign Office about neutral rights and ships cargoes currently being detained, and while not directly confronting the Order in Council, one must still consider it a response.

Additionally, Lansing, in conjunction with the Neutrality Board, was drafting a response to Britain's note. In reality, it was Grey's diplomatic skill once again prevailing in dealings with the United States. The delay in direct action by the State Department allowed Britain time to implement its blockade with minimal U.S. interference. In fact, from the time Grey announced Britain's intent and the Order in Council on 20 August until Lansing's note was completed on 28 September, the only

³³ Gerard to Secretary of State, 28 August 1914. Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), p.221.

³⁴ Memorandum, 18 September 1914, The Papers of Robert Lansing: 1914, Aug 31 – Oct. 2, 1911 – 1928, Container 4, Library of Congress.

³⁵ Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971); Richard Van Alstyne 'The policy of the United States Regarding the Declaration of London at the outbreak of the Great War', *The Journal of Modern History* (1933); Daniel M. Smith, *Robert Lansing and American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (New York, 1972).

interference Britain had to deal with was the U.S. State Department's requests for information and a few protests by Bryan.

The fact that all policies coming out of Washington had to manoeuvre the maze of Wilson's administration before being acted upon soon led to another diplomatic victory for Grey. By the end of September Lansing had written a note, based on the findings of his work with the Joint Neutrality Board, to be presented to Foreign Secretary Grey by Ambassador Page in London outlining the United States' problems with Britain's actions, reiterating the United States' disappointment that the Declaration of London had not been accepted and criticizing Britain for their anti-neutral actions. Lansing went on to recommend to Wilson that the U.S. refuse to accept the Order in Council on legal grounds stating that the Order was so far out-of-bounds legally that it required America's 'unqualified refusal.'³⁶

In an article written for *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, and again in his book *Robert Lansing and American Neutrality, 1914-1917*, Daniel Smith states that based on the details of the note, Lansing clearly understood that the United States had to defend its rights as a neutral if it was going to continue its growth on the world stage.³⁷ It is also evident from the note that Lansing also understood that British friendship was an important aspect of that growth. It was due to his understanding that those items were not mutually exclusive that he wrote the note in the first place, and as counsellor to the Secretary of State and acting Secretary of State at the time, Lansing sent the note on to Wilson for his approval before sending a final copy on to Page.

³⁶ Acting Secretary of State to President Wilson, 27 September 1914, United States Department of State / *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes) Volume I (1914-1920)*, pp. 247-248.

³⁷ Daniel M. Smith, 'Robert Lansing and the Formulation of American Neutrality Policies, 1914-1915', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* vol. XLIII (1956), p.64; Daniel M. Smith, *Robert Lansing and American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (New York, 1972), p. 23.

Upon reading Lansing's note, House determined it to be 'exceedingly undiplomatic' and with Wilson's approval, met with Spring-Rice to discuss the issue.³⁸ As mentioned earlier, it was Spring-Rice's reaction to the note, described as 'thoroughly alarmed' and his comment that it was 'amounting almost to a declaration of war [against Britain],' that led House to not only re-write the note right then and there with Spring-Rice's input, but to construct a note to Grey concerning the subject as well.³⁹ Because he understood that the United States was at that time nowhere near ready to become involved in any war and had only the month prior stated that their goal was to remain neutral, Spring-Rice had only to mention the possibility of war between the United States and Britain in order to gain House's acquiescence in watering down the notes to Page and Grey.

The new note Lansing created made it clear that Wilson understood the reasoning behind the British position, but that the United States could not stand for violations of its commerce with neutral nations of this type, and therefore strongly urged the British to accept the Declaration of London without modification as well as mentioning that the president had not wanted to formally protest the matter. More importantly the telegram stated that if '...the matter becomes the subject of public discussion...it will arouse a spirit of resentment among the American people...'.⁴⁰

Grey noted his appreciation that Wilson had not formally protested the British Order in Council, but he refused to accept the Declaration of London without modification due to the fact that parliament had never ratified it; therefore it did not legally bind Britain to follow it as written. Grey then deftly declared that not one of the detained cargos had been confiscated. Each had, instead, been 'sold at full value with no

³⁸ Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (Boston, 1926), p. 307.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁴⁰ Lansing to Page, 28 September 1914, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), pp.232-233.

loss to the exporter.⁴¹ Grey's statement was a crushing blow to the United States's position. No longer could the Wilson administration claim that British practices on the high seas were harming American commerce. Despite the fact that goods were not reaching their intended destination shippers were receiving full value for their goods, something the most ardent supporter of neutral rights had to take into account.

Regardless of the tweaking done to Lansing's note by House and Spring Rice, the position of the Wilson administration and therefore of the United States was becoming one that would be dictated by the British. While Wilson's point was made – that the U.S. would not tolerate violations against its shipping – Grey's tactics had manoeuvred the discussion from the strict legality of the Order in Council to the how the American public would receive it. That was precisely what he wanted.

The very evening the telegram was sent to the American ambassador in London, Wilson requested that Lansing meet with Spring-Rice and discuss the issue directly with him. According to Lansing's own memorandum of the meeting, he began the meeting by pressing Spring-Rice about how the Order in Council was affecting American public opinion. Only once in Lansing's account of the meeting does he address the legal rights of neutrals, and only then in its relation to public opinion.⁴² Instead, he sticks to the directive given to him by Wilson – to discuss, with Spring-Rice, the issue as covered in the telegram in an attempt to come to a settlement. Historian Ray Stannard Baker criticizes Lansing's approach in this meeting, stating that the Counsellor set the stronger argument of legality aside and concentrated on the effect British actions were having and would have on U.S. public opinion.⁴³ But Baker got it wrong. While he places the

⁴¹ Grey to Spring-Rice (Handed to U.S. Secretary of State), 28 September 1914, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), p. 237.

⁴² Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State, 29 September 1914, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), pp. 233-234.

⁴³ Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters: Neutrality 1914-1915* (Garden City, 1940), pp. 210-11.

blame for U.S. acquiescence to the British blockade on Lansing's dropping of the legal argument he had set forth from the beginning of the war to a discussion of public opinion, Lansing complained directly to the president that he was 'not satisfied with [the letter]' because too much had been left out.⁴⁴

Based on Lansing's letter to the president on 28 September condemnation for American acquiescence to the British blockade should not be applied to Lansing, but instead must be given to Spring-Rice and House. Lansing's initial letter – which relied specifically on the illegality of Britain's Order in Council of 20 August according to international law and established practices of both the United States and Great Britain – was deemed a virtual act of war, and was re-written and softened by Spring-Rice and House. This new letter was based on the importance of public opinion in America – something the British had been working to control and guide since their declaration of war on August 5.⁴⁵ In contrast to Mr. Baker, Daniel Smith correctly asserts that the new letter 'threw away a good legal case.'⁴⁶

Clearly the British Ambassador's influence on the language of the telegram of 28 September explains Lansing's approach in the meeting with Spring-Rice that same evening, and the change in the United States' position. Even as he lays the blame at Lansing's feet, Baker does acknowledge, somewhat begrudgingly, that Britain's diplomats thoroughly dominated their American counterparts.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Acting Secretary of State to President Wilson, 28 September 1914, United States Department of State / *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes) Volume I (1914-1920)*, p. 248.

⁴⁵ See John W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality* (Ithica, 1981), p. 185; Daniel M. Smith, *Robert Lansing and American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Los Angeles, 1958), pp 23-26; Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 56-61. For information regarding British attempts to change U.S. public opinion see Stewart Halsey Ross, *Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918* (Jefferson, 1996); H.C. Peterson, *Propaganda For War: The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Norman, 1939).

⁴⁶ Smith, *Robert Lansing and American Neutrality, 1914-1917*, p. 24.

⁴⁷ Baker, *Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters: Neutrality 1914-1915*, p. 211.

Spring-Rice played his role to perfection in the meeting, seemingly acquiescing and agreeing with Lansing on the idea that the public criticism was a danger. He stated that he would do what he could to assist in bringing the issue to an end, claiming that he had telegraphed the Foreign Office several times on the subject and would do so again. Spring-Rice then suggested to Lansing the means to solving the U.S. Government's problem with public opinion and keeping the 'blockade' intact: Britain could rescind the Order in Council of 20 August and add the items in question (copper, petroleum, and iron) to the absolute contraband list, thus removing the item inciting American ire.⁴⁸ For British purposes, this allowed Britain to continue to stop these items from making their way to Germany while appeasing the United States and her people without effectually giving up anything.

Based on this meeting and his previous meeting with House, Spring-Rice was able to send a telegram to Grey stating that Wilson would not object if Britain were to withdraw the Order in Council of 20 August, and add items to the unconditional contraband list with the acceptance of the Declaration of London.⁴⁹ Ambassador Spring-Rice's telegram reached Grey just as he met with Page the following day. Page went into the meeting with the impression that the ideas expressed in Lansing's telegram to him were the Counsellor's own thoughts, not those of the British Foreign Office, and when he broached the subjects of the order in council and a new list of absolute contraband, Grey immediately agreed with the understanding that the Declaration of London had never been ratified by parliament and therefore should not be mentioned, nor formally protested. Grey's purpose was to continue to follow the path he had already set, but now he had U.S. support to add more items to the absolute contraband list.

⁴⁸ Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State, 29 September 1914, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), p. 234.

⁴⁹ Spring-Rice to Grey, 28 September 1914, Sir Edward Grey Papers, PRO 170, FO 800/84.

Although debate continued within the American diplomatic corps as to the importance of the Order in Council in relation to the provisions already included in the Declaration of London, Grey acted decisively to minimize discussion and maximize his diplomatic victory. On October 9 the British Foreign Minister handed Page a draft Order in Council that rescinded the Order in Council of 20 August and clearly defined twenty-one items to be considered absolute contraband and another fifteen conditional contraband items.⁵⁰

Lansing seized on the added items as modification to the declaration as well as objecting to the fact that the new order in council did not rescind all offensive items. From this point forward Page, for all practical purposes, assisted Grey by constantly protesting Lansing's continued pressure for the acceptance of an unmodified declaration. Page continued to attack seemingly oblivious of the fact that Lansing's memos indicated that he felt the Declaration of London gave Britain all the protection it needed to legally strangle Germany, while satiating U.S. public opinion.⁵¹

For the next month Grey continued to kindly, but forcefully, turn down American requests to abide by the declaration without modification. Lansing's efforts were hampered by Page's decision that the United States was in the wrong on the issue. Not only did Page not fulfil his duties as Ambassador by vigorously pushing the declaration as instructed, but frequently he informed Grey that he did not support the avenue the United States had taken and had 'urged [the] President strongly to accept...[the British] Proclamation.'⁵² Page's hindrance of his government's attempt to get an unmodified Declaration of London to be used as the basis of naval warfare – and

⁵⁰ Ambassador in Great Britain to Secretary of State, 9 October 1914, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), pp. 244-45.

⁵¹ Telegram Lansing to Page, 5 October 1914, Correspondence File with Walter H. Page, Lansing Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵² Grey to Spring Rice, 17 October 1914, Sir Edward Grey Papers, PRO 170, FO 800/84.

Grey's resistance – eventually led the United States to stop pursuing the declaration altogether.⁵³

Regardless of the fact that Grey had won the battle over the Declaration of London, he continued to lay the groundwork for favourable responses from those making United States foreign policy and the majority of American public opinion while all the while not giving up the potential means of winning the war. In discussion with Page he listed items he was planning to add to the contraband list, and Page, unwittingly playing to Grey's tactics, suggested that the contraband list be published to ease the worries of the U.S. shipping industry.⁵⁴ But the debate over British interference with U.S. trade continued. The British Foreign Office did not consider the fact that the debate continued a failure. They had succeeded in turning the Wilson administration's protests from a question of the legality of British actions to one of U.S. public opinion. Because Britain used the pretext of German violation of law as a pretext for going to war – claiming to be the defender of the laws of civilization by having gone to war in order to preserve 'poor Belgium's' independence – she could not be seen as violating the very same laws of civility at sea. Grey understood that violations of international law gave countries the justification needed at home to go to war.⁵⁵ If the United States persisted to debate Britain's violation of law the possibility for hostile U.S. action, including the possibility of war, increased, but if Wilson's administration was spending its time arguing about the public's opinion toward the blockade then they were less likely to take aggressive actions.

To be sure, Grey still had to work to ensure that the majority of Americans favoured supporting Britain in one way or another, but he now had the U.S. government

⁵³ Lansing to Page, 22 October 1914, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, pp. 257-258.

⁵⁴ Page to Bryan, 24 October 1914, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, p. 259.

⁵⁵ Avner Offer, 'Morality and Admiralty: 'Jacky' Fisher, Economic Warfare and the Laws of War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (January, 1988), p. 111.

focused on it as well. This seemingly insignificant victory for Britain's diplomats loomed large as the war continued. With this change in focus, Grey now had more flexibility in administering the blockade because the focus would be on the impact on the American people and not on the legality of British actions. As long as the United States was committed to debate the merits of maritime rights, Grey would not have to seriously worry about the possibility of negative action by the American government. At this point in the war, debate and the appearance of negotiation ensured a benevolent and neutral United States.

Freedom of the Seas

American interests rested not in the Declaration of London, but in the hindrance of trade by the British. The crux of the matter was that Britain's list of contraband interfered with the United States' trade not only with the belligerent nations but with all European nations. For the Wilson administration it was still about the freedom of the seas – the same issue over which the United States had been fighting with Britain since 1812. Grey realized that while he wanted to choke off supplies from Germany, he still had to keep in mind his strategy of not alienating the American public. In his memoirs he states that he had to start his list small for the diplomatic reason of keeping the United States from challenging the list. Grey goes so far as to name the items he felt were of the most importance to the German military machine to which the United States might be opposed – copper, rubber, and cotton. It was Grey's skill as a diplomat that made him confident enough of U.S. reaction – or inaction – to make the decision to initially withhold cotton from the list.⁵⁶ The arguments that were to surround the placement of copper on the absolute contraband list would act as a mild precursor to the firestorm of cotton's placement.

⁵⁶ Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916 vol. II*. (London, 1928), pp. 39-40.

But at the time, Grey was more willing to have to deal with American complaints about copper shipments being held up than to allow copper to reach Germany where it would be converted into munitions to kill British soldiers.⁵⁷ A large part of Britain's problem lay in the fact that Germany was getting supplies from many of Europe's neutral states. Britain's issues over the United States association with neutral states such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark was that U.S. exports, such as copper, were shipped to these neutrals which then shipped much of it on to Germany. In an attempt to stop this trade, the Royal Navy was ordered to stop ships on the high seas that were not only destined for Germany, but for neutral nations as well. It was this attempt to stop these items that brought British policy into conflict with U.S. interests and caused, what seemed to many, undue pressure on the two countries' relations.

Listed as conditional contraband on 30 September, by 9 October Grey had moved copper to the absolute list. As expected, from the time it made its appearance on the absolute contraband list, Americans involved in the copper industry began pressing for it to be removed. As a conciliatory move to the United States, Grey did not place cotton on any of the contraband lists as he felt that the United States would almost certainly dispute it as contraband. Joseph Fuller and Marion Siney had both claimed that Grey's decision to withhold cotton from the lists was based on expediency and had little military value anyway.⁵⁸ Shortages in cotton had already forced Germany to substitute imported Swedish wood pulp for cotton in its munitions industry, therefore leaving cotton from the contraband lists was less of an expedient move than a diplomatic move

⁵⁷ Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years*, pp. 40-41.

⁵⁸ Joseph V. Fuller, 'The Genesis of the Munitions Traffic', *The Journal of Modern History* vol. VI (1934), p. 290; Marion C. Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1914-1916* (Westport, 1957), pp. 126-127.

designed to win U.S. public opinion as well as support within the American government.⁵⁹

Copper-producing states pressured Lansing to provide protection for their ability to have their product reach markets, claiming that copper production had been cut back by about fifty percent due to the war and the restrictions placed on the shipping of copper by the British. The copper industry claimed these cutbacks had had an adverse affect on approximately 500,000 individuals involved in the copper industry.⁶⁰ As would be expected, Lansing directed Page to address the issue with Grey in order to find a solution to the problem, to which Grey, in his usual diplomatic put-off, responded that the Foreign Office was studying the issue and would make a decision soon. As he had done when dealing with the Panama Tolls issue, the Mexican issue, and with the Declaration of London, Grey used his diplomatic skill to hold the United States at bay until events unfolded in his favour.

A large part of the debate over goods rested in the interference of American trade with other neutrals. The Royal Navy intercepted all ships travelling in the North Atlantic and, in particular, the North Sea. If vessels were found to be carrying items on either of the contraband lists, or items that Britain deemed could be transferred to Germany, they would be escorted to a British port and held over until a Prize Court could make a ruling on whether or not the cargo met the criteria of contraband. Lansing did not argue this interruption of trade until it began affecting the U.S. market, at which point copper, rubber, and cotton were the main items of discussion. In an attempt to strengthen his position, Grey ordered the sale of wool produced within the Commonwealth be prohibited to the United States. The Foreign Secretary understood

⁵⁹ H.J. Braun, *The German Economy in the Twentieth Century: The German Reich and the Federal Republic* (London, 1990), p. 25.

⁶⁰ Resolution of the American Mining Congress, forwarded to the Secretary of State by the Secretary of the Congress, 19 December 1914, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, p. 283.

that United States' industries were dependent on imports from the British Empire just as Britain was currently dependent on imports from the United States. By placing a ban on the sale of something vital to U.S. industry, ostensibly on the pretence that it would then be sold to Germany, Grey had given himself another piece to play in the negotiations over contraband with the United States.

This did not stop the immediate problem of U.S. protests over freedom of the seas and the effects of British policy on U.S. industrial output. As Lansing bowed to the copper industry's continued pressure to put an end to the amount of copper being held up in British Prize Courts, Grey gathered facts to strengthen his position. Grey gained information stating that the United States' copper industry, fearing the war would lower demand for their product, had voluntarily reduced its amount produced by fifty percent in August 1914, in an attempt to keep its prices high. Additionally, the copper industry had a hard enough time keeping up with demand as its New York stockpile of at least 100,000 tons had been sold.⁶¹ Francis Hopwood, then Civil Lord of the Admiralty, put it best in a letter to Grey's secretary William Tyrrell when he stated, 'It appears that the American copper producers have not suffered from the war, as yet.'⁶² So for Lansing to continue arguing that British actions were hindering the economic stability of any one section of the United States' economy, much less the economy as a whole appears to be a bit absurd. But Grey still had to deal with the complaints from the United States Secretary of State's office. Grey continued to hold the line and not allow anything through that would help Germany, so when the Royal Navy stopped many vessels carrying cargo to neutral countries he claimed that the country had not given assurances to not re-export those goods on to Germany, thus stopping the problem of continuous voyage.

⁶¹ Admiralty to Francis Hopwood, 13 January 1915, Sir Edward Grey Papers, Pro 187, FO 800/88, Admiralty, British National Archives.

⁶² Hopwood to Tyrrell, 15 January 1915, Sir Edward Grey Papers, Pro 187, FO 800/88.

The U.S. Secretary of State's office was being inundated with complaints from shipping companies about their vessels and cargo being held up in British ports either awaiting inspection or awaiting the decision of a British Prize Court. For the shipping companies, they were not only losing valuable time due to their ships being impounded by the British, but they were also losing money as their cargo sat in the harbour. If the cargo was perishable the company stood to lose money because it would simply rot while waiting for the Prize Court findings. Lansing beseeched Page to bring these matters to Grey's attention.

Page did speak with the Foreign Secretary on the subject but Grey rebutted his complaints by noting that because neutral countries bordering Germany were receiving shipments of contraband that exceeded their normal pre-war imports Britain was forced to detain these cargos until it was evident that the materials were not destined for Germany.⁶³

Within the Wilson Administration Grey's answer was not satisfactory. The Secretary of State's office was still adamant that Britain had no right to detain neutral ships carrying material to another neutral country without direct proof that the cargo was intended for a belligerent's military. They also argued that Britain was detaining ships without full disclosure as to the reason why. The British maintained that because they did not have the manpower to search each ship at sea that they had to force these ships to port in order to perform a more thorough search.

In response to U.S. complaints, Grey issued a series of notes concerning each of the ships detained in British ports stating that the ships in question and their cargo had been put into prize court so that ship owners could prove the neutral destination of their cargo. Since 1900 British law had stated that the burden of proof regarding the

⁶³ Page to Bryan, 13 November 1914, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, pp. 345-346.

destination of materials rested on the captor. This was reinforced with the Order in Council of 20 August. But Grey, whose negotiation with the United States led to the rescinding of the 20 August order and the issuing of the Order in Council of 29 October, had used the opportunity to shift the burden of proof to the owner of the goods.

In forcing the owners of cargoes detained in British ports to prove the neutral nature of the goods, Grey was putting pressure on the United States to do something about the contraband items leaving U.S. industry and heading for Germany via a circuitous route. Despite U.S. complaints about detained ships and cargo, Grey managed to maintain his position, and appeased the United States. His ability to manage both of these feats is based on the knowledge that while 773 ships left U.S. ports from the beginning of the war to the third of January 1915, only eight had been put into Prize Court.⁶⁴ The numbers show that American commerce had not been overly burdened by British search and seizure methods. Additionally, Admiralty records show that while the 10th Cruiser Squadron intercepted approximately 1,910 U.S., Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish ships from 1914 through 1915, only eighty-five were U.S. ships.⁶⁵ And of those nineteen hundred ships intercepted only thirty were sent to port for further examination. So while thirty ships from all Scandinavian nations and the United States were detained in ports, a mere eight ships were U.S. vessels. Grey had the facts to dispel the complaints of the shipping companies, and convince Wilson's administration that next to no harm was being done to commerce of the United States. As Lansing and Page argued over how to best handle the situation, Spring Rice took the opportunity to squash the issue and informed House 'no American exporter had suffered any loss.'⁶⁶

However divided the American public was on the issue of the war, Grey was cognizant of the need to appease the vast majority of it in order to achieve his goals. As

⁶⁴ Harris to Grey, 5 January 1914, Sir Edward Grey Papers, FO 800/88, Admiralty # 260.

⁶⁵ Charts and Graphs, 10th Crusor Squadron, ADM 137/300 Admiralty PRO, Folio #17.

⁶⁶ Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, p. 313.

complaints that hearings concerning detained cargoes were not progressing quickly came to his attention, Grey pushed to have the cases heard without delay. In a letter to Attorney General Simon, Grey made it clear that he felt that the postponement of hearings could cause 'serious trouble' with the American people and that it was 'most important' that cases be 'brought before the Prize Court without delay.'⁶⁷

In his book *Walter Hines Page: Ambassador to the Court of St. James's*, Ross Gregory states that the mood of the Foreign Office was that there was no real fear of an embargo by the United States.⁶⁸ Although in his memoirs Grey states that he would have ended the blockade if it meant a break in relations with the United States, Gregory's conclusion is supported by Grey's actions, which speak much louder than his words.⁶⁹

Through Ambassador Page, Grey stated that as far as Britain was concerned there was more than ample information that copper, among other items, was being shipped to neutral nations who then shipped it on to Germany. It was the British position that if the United States persisted in supporting 'fraudulent trade' with neutrals Britain would then cut off supplies to the United States from Britain and its colonies.⁷⁰ Due to the fact that the United States was rapidly becoming the main supplier of the British war effort, Grey had to consider any possibility of a U.S. embargo as retaliation for Britain's interference with their trade. Internal Foreign Office memos make it clear that these worries were tempered by the fact that Britain not only had the ability to completely cut America off from goods necessary for U.S. industry to function, but

⁶⁷ Grey to Simon, 18 May 1915, Sir Edward Grey Papers, FO 800/89, Attorney General: 1910, 1914, 1915.

⁶⁸ Ross Gregory, *Walter Hines Page: Ambassador to the Court of St. James's* (Lexington, 1970), pp. 78-9.

⁶⁹ Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years*, vol. II, p. 37. In his memoirs Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, supports this statement in his memoirs *The World Crisis, 1911-1918* (New York, 1931), p. 423.

⁷⁰ Page to Bryan, 6 December 1914. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914 Supplement, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, pp. 356-8.

were actively considering using it if the United States forced them to do so.⁷¹ And in fact they had tested this theory when Grey had earlier stopped the sale of wool to the United States. The Foreign Office's belief in the strength of this retaliatory measure was sufficient enough that other departments within the British government were informed of the potential. This threat was delivered to the United States as part of a proposed working arrangement and therefore wrapped in a less abrasive packaging.

What Gregory does not mention is that in addition to the leverage in commerce that Britain held over the United States, there had been a conversation between Spring-Rice and Colonel House earlier that month that allowed Grey to feel secure enough in his position to threaten the United States. In this conversation House made it clear that while the United States would need to protest British actions, the Administration was 'sympathetic' to the British cause.⁷² Again, Grey was able to look at the whole situation and manoeuvre Britain into a position of strength over the United States, allowing British interests and diplomacy to succeed in a situation that should have not ended in their favour.

Although Grey was in a stronger position than expected with regards to the United States, he still had to follow his plan to win direct American assistance – he had to win the support of a substantial portion of the American public. Although it was clearly not needed in a strictly diplomatic sense, Grey approached the commercial interests from two different angles. First he offered to have Britain purchase the cargoes of the ships being held over for Prize Court. Maybe more importantly Grey offered to purchase the entire American output of copper at a good profitable price – a fact that caught Page completely by surprise.⁷³ The mere fact that he had even offered to buy

⁷¹ Internal memorandum drafted by Mr. Sargent, 24 November 1914, Sir Edward Grey Papers, FO 368/1162.

⁷² Spring Rice to Grey, 10 November 1914. Sir Edward Grey Papers, FO 800/84.

⁷³ Churchill to Grey, 5 January 1915, Sir Edward Grey Papers, FO 800/88, Admiralty.

these commodities from the United States reassured the Wilson administration that Britain was not trying to harm U.S. commerce, and quieted, if only for a time, members of the American public allowing a sense of good-will to develop. As Alice Morrissey has shown in her work using articles from the *New York Journal of Commerce*, the *Wall Street Journal* and journals representing mining and trading industries, Britain's offer to purchase U.S. goods detained in British ports had the desired impact on American opinion – public sympathy was with Britain.⁷⁴ The fact that Britain did not immediately begin purchasing the detained cargoes did not matter; the Foreign Office would get around to purchasing the cargoes when it became essential to the war effort.

Grey's second means of satiating American public opinion was to allow U.S. ships being held in port to be released on bail. This action had a two-fold effect. The United States had long relied on other countries' merchant fleets to get its products to the rest of the world, and the war along with Britain's blockade was causing a major disruption in the United States' ability to trade. The disruption was enough that the United States Congress was debating the wisdom behind purchasing German made/German owned ships that were detained in U.S. ports for American commercial use.⁷⁵ Britain was strongly opposed to this idea, as it would provide Germany with much needed funds and put more ships out to sea for the Royal Navy to contend with. By allowing U.S. ships to be released, Grey was quelling the cries of the American shippers as well as keeping money out of German coffers. Grey corresponded with Attorney General Simon and Sir Samuel Evans, President of the British Prize Court, to arrange the release on bail of U.S. ships. He then instructed Spring Rice to make it

⁷⁴ Alice Morrissey, *The American Defence Of Neutral Rights, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1939), p. 44.

⁷⁵ Grey to Simon, 8 January 1915, Sir Edward Grey Papers, FO 800/89, Attorney General 1910, 1914, 1915.

known that Britain would work with the shipping companies that offered bail in order to increase the amount of shipping tonnage available to the United States.⁷⁶

Conclusion

The debate over British interference on the high seas was not coming to a close in early 1915, but its direction had been shifted from less of a strict legalistic argument to one that rested on the perceptions of the American public. The evidence presented shows that the skill by which Grey and Spring Rice directed the flow of debate between the United States and Britain allowed the British government to implement a blockade that, while crucial to their war effort, was illegal under international law and subsequently a violation of neutral rights. At the same time, the British Foreign Office had allowed the Wilson administration to believe that they were defending the rights of their citizens while remaining neutral, a fact that was only true in word. The fact of the matter was that the United States had become an accomplice in Britain's throttling of the German people, while the vast majority of the American public thought they were following their president's tone and maintaining their commercial practices.

Lansing's attempt to thwart efforts by Grey to win concessions based on American public opinion were countered by a lack of evidence of financial harm done to U.S. shippers and producers of goods such as copper. Grey's skill at continually outmanoeuvring Wilson's diplomats by purchasing detained cargo and by knowing the financial status of many U.S. industries, placed pressure on the Wilson administration to end contraband trade, and at the same time deflected public complaints about detained cargoes from Britain's violations of neutral rights.

An analysis of the available evidence aimed at understanding why the United States did not formally and vociferously protest Britain's illegal actions suggests that

⁷⁶ Grey to Spring Rice, January 1915, Sir Edward Grey Papers, FO800/89, Attorney General 1910, 1914, 1915.

Wilson and Lansing were placed in a position of protesting the blockade and the modification of the Declaration of London on the fickle ground of American opinion. As long as they protested many Americans felt they were doing their job against great odds. Thus it was not fear of confrontation with Britain, anglophilic leanings, or simply poor diplomacy that accounts for the Wilson administration's acquiescence to the British blockade. It was the skilful work of the British Foreign Office, led by Grey that helped Britain maintain the blockade of Germany and still retain the support of the United States. While American trade with Britain was fast becoming its life line, Grey knew that he had to maintain pro-British feelings in the United States in order to bring them in as a decisive instrument in winning the war.

This chapter has focused on the role of Sir Edward Grey and the rest of the British Foreign Office in order to give a clear representation of the pressure placed on the U.S. government to support the British blockade. This chapter substantiates the dissertations claim that the diplomatic practices Grey's established prior to August 1914 continued to be successful in guiding the policies of the United States during the period of neutrality. In the next chapter the success of German diplomacy will be analysed to determine if its pre-war policies were successful at maintaining U.S. neutrality. Because the economic war waged by the two belligerent navies is the portion of the war that affected U.S. policy the most, this dissertation will turn its attention to the impact of the German submarine war and how Germany's diplomats worked to blunt its effects.

Chapter Three

The Diplomacy of U-boat Warfare

This chapter will demonstrate how the diplomacy of Bethmann Hollweg and Ambassador Bernstorff was used to predetermine U.S. feelings about submarine warfare and frame the debate that followed. The chapter will also reveal that Wilson's 'strict accountability' policy did not confine the American response, but was instead part of the policy of protest German diplomats had expected. To that end, this chapter provides evidence that German diplomats successfully blunted the threat of American entry into the war provided by controversies surrounding the sinking of merchant ships.

By November 1914, merely three months into the war it was clear that Germany was unable to win simply by pure military might – the military situation had begun to dictate diplomacy. In addition to setbacks on land the German military was facing setbacks due to British naval policy. It is under these circumstances that the possibility of submarine warfare was first broached by Germany's leaders.

It is an unfortunate reality that the debate about German-American relations during the war is generally framed around how the United States reacted to the idea of submarine warfare, the sinking of neutral merchant ships, and the deaths of American citizens due to submarine attacks on all ships.¹ What has not been placed under the microscope is how the German decision to utilize the submarine drove the diplomatic response of the U.S. towards the belligerents and Great Britain's policy towards the United States. To that point, Wilson's 'strict accountability' policy is generally confused as a threat of war. In 1934 Charles Seymour argued that 'strict accountability' meant that if German submarine attacks continued U.S. entry into the war was

¹ Robert Carlisle, *Sovereignty At Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry into World War I* (Gainesville, 2009); Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare* (Stockholm, 1958).

unavoidable.² This line of thought is continued more recently by historians such as Robert W. Tucker.³ David Stevenson also continues to support the consensus that Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare drove the United States to enter the war against Germany but does not account for the almost three full years of submarine activity, along with other issues between the United States and Germany before President Wilson asked Congress for, and received, a declaration of war against Germany.⁴ Therefore a greater understanding of the 'strict accountability' diplomacy will lead to a greater understanding of the German-American diplomacy of the period.

From that perspective, this chapter analyses the German decision to use the submarine and how that decision, and its effects, changed Germany's diplomacy towards the United States. It also address how the members of Wilson's administration responded to these diplomatic moves, dealing with issues of sunken ships, and the deaths of its citizens instead of focusing on mediation and remaining neutral. The first section deals directly with Germany's decision to use the submarine and how the Foreign Office dealt with the pressures of the new economic warfare strategy. Section two examines the Wilson administration's response to the new threat of submarine warfare and the impact of the 'strict accountability' policy on German and U.S. diplomacy. The final section examines how British and German diplomats battled to gain the upper hand in their attempts to sway the Wilson administration. This section attempts to clarify the U.S. position of 'strict neutrality' and how American diplomacy as well as belligerent diplomacy formed around this policy. It aims to answer the question of why the United States remained neutral in the face of a continuance of perceived infractions of international law and morality by the Germans, despite pressure to become more involved by the British.

² Charles Seymour, *American Diplomacy during the World War* (Baltimore, 1934), p. 91.

³ Robert W. Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War* (Charlottesville, 2007), p. 96.

⁴ David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, 2004), p. 261.

The Chancellor's Challenge

Analysis of German activity in the United States must be tempered by the knowledge that early in the war (August to October 1914) most of Germany's leaders, both military and political, were very optimistic that victory would come relatively soon.⁵ Germany's plan of attack, the Schlieffen Plan, called for the war in the west to be over in about six weeks. While there was a general understanding amongst German military and political leaders that the United States must be kept neutral, the German war plan discounted U.S. intervention.⁶

To appreciate the decisions made by Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg it is important to understand that the German Government was organized so that military leaders had direct access to the Kaiser and that during the war they were able to exert considerable pressure on the direction foreign policy took.⁷ The Kaiser acted as the sole conduit through which information passed from the military to the political sector and from the political sector to the military. This was supposed to allow the Kaiser to understand and pass on information he deemed important, but as Edgar Feuchtwanger points out in *Imperial Germany 1850-1918* the reality was that it splintered the process and allowed a weak Kaiser to be manipulated by one side or the other.⁸ The military's influence over foreign policy was to be an on-going battle during the war.

According to Roger Chickering, the set-up of the German government created an 'absence of any institutional form to coordinate strategy and policy'.⁹ In *The Enigmatic Chancellor* Konrad Jarausch argues that the lack of coordinated strategy and policy at

⁵ Bethmann Hollweg to Ballin, 14 October 1914, Teil 2, General Affairs, R 17.355, Politisches Archiv, Auswärtiges Amt.

⁶ L.L. Farrar, Jr., *Divide and Conquer: German Efforts To Conclude A Separate Peace, 1914-1918* (New York, 1978), p. 116.

⁷ Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 8; Isabel V Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888-1918* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 236-237; Holger Afferbach, 'Wilhelm II as supreme warlord in the First World War', in *The Kaiser: New Research on Wilhelm II's Role in Imperial Germany*, ed. Annika Mombauer and Wilhelm Deist (Cambridge, 2004), p. 200.

⁸ Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Imperial Germany 1850-1918* (London, 2001), p. 107.

⁹ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 61.

the beginning of the war led the Foreign Office to begin doing 'the bidding' of the military leaders.¹⁰ But upon viewing Bethmann Hollweg's work under the light of continuous diplomatic policy it is clear that the Chancellor was supporting the military position in accordance with the Clauswitzian, and Bismarckian philosophies German Chancellors were schooled in.

Bethmann Hollweg did not take his tasks lightly and was very much involved in all issues concerning the diplomacy of the war. When making foreign policy decisions he worked very closely with Foreign Secretary Gottlieb Jagow and Undersecretary Arthur Zimmerman, as well as consulting the Kaiser. Additionally, Bethmann had to balance the pressures of dealing with the various political groups in the Reichstag with the whims of the Kaiser and the demands of the military.

At the outbreak of war, Bethmann called for the ambassador to the United States, Johann Count Bernstorff, to return to the United States at once with the instructions of simply talking to the American public about how peaceful and friendly Germany was towards America.¹¹ Writing about the role of Germany's representatives, Karl Birnbaum notes that ambassadors were expected to merely carry out orders and occasionally, if bold, make recommendations, but they most certainly did not influence Germany's foreign policy.¹² He goes on to point out that Bernstorff was not limited by this policy and is joined by Charles Seymour, and Reinhard Doerries in noting that the Ambassador was able to apply 'effective pressure upon Berlin.'¹³ Seymour correctly contends that Bernstorff was allowed to veer from the norm expected of German

¹⁰ Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hubris of Imperial Germany* (New Haven, 1973), p. 230.

¹¹ Johann Heinrich Count von Bernstorff, *My Three Years in America* (New York, 1920), p. 36.

¹² Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, April 18, 1916- January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 9.

¹³ *Ibid*; Charles Seymour, 'The House-Bernstorff Conversations in Perspective', in *Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography in Honour of G.P. Gooch*, ed. A. O. Sarkissian (London, 1961), p. 106; Reinhard Doerries, 'Imperial Berlin and Washington: New Light on Germany's Foreign Policy and America's Entry into World War I', *Central European History II* (March, 1978), p. 40.

diplomats because of the relationship he had created between House and himself.¹⁴ The diplomatic importance of this relationship would prove its worth to Germany in the years to come.

Like Britain, Germany understood the impact of positive press on their diplomatic aspirations in America. Prior to the war Bernstorff had built relationships with members of the American press that he fully intended to utilize upon returning to America.¹⁵ Upon finding that the propaganda office had been operating out of the Embassy during his absence, and in order to maintain a proper and positive working relationship with administration officials, Bernstorff promptly shut it down and moved it to New York City where it was reopened as the German Information Service.¹⁶ This shrewd move on Bernstorff's part displayed his understanding of the importance of the ambassador in the United States. If he was perceived to be nothing more than a mere propagandist for the German Government then he would have a much harder time convincing administration officials that he could be trusted.

Quite possibly the largest single dilemma faced by Germany in its attempts to influence American public opinion and therefore put pressure on the Wilson Administration, stems from the initial problem of little communication from Germany. On 4 August 1914 the British Navy had all but cut off the German Embassy and all German agents in the United States from Berlin, making any direct communication with superiors at the Foreign Office virtually impossible without delays of three or four weeks.¹⁷ This placed Bernstorff and the German Information Service in the unenviable

¹⁴ Charles Seymour, 'The House-Bernstorff Conversations in Perspective', in *Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography in Honour of G.P. Gooch*, ed. A. O. Sarkissian (London, 1961), p. 92.

¹⁵ Reinhard R. Doerries, 'Promoting Kaiser and Reich: Imperial German Propaganda in the United States during World War I', in *Confrontation and Cooperation: Germany and the United States in the Era of World War I, 1900-1924*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schröder (Providence, 1993), p. 136.

¹⁶ Johann Heinrich Count von Bernstorff, *My Three Years in America* (New York, 1920), pp. 39-42.

¹⁷ On 4 August the Royal Navy cut the German transatlantic cables that connected Berlin to America rendering direct communication from Berlin to its representatives in the Americas impossible. From this point on Germany's contact with the outside world would have to come via wireless communication,

position of not being able to direct the conversation in the American newspapers, only being able to respond to the British viewpoint that was being printed first.

By the time Bernstorff arrived in the United States the British had been filling American newspapers with a steady stream of propaganda. In *Propaganda For War: The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914-1917* H.C. Peterson points out that the British control of the news coming into the United States gave them an advantage in shaping the conversation.¹⁸ Stewart Halsey Ross adds that the majority of stories printed were of a distinctly British view of the war, adding that 'honest, unbiased news simply disappeared out of the American papers.'¹⁹ For the rest of the war, the Germans would be playing catch up to the British news services and their role in influencing America. But it would be the issue of submarines that would cause the greatest problems for the German embassy and propaganda machine in the United States. Despite this handicap Bernstorff and the German Foreign Office would arduously and successfully maintain United States neutrality for 26 months as unrestricted submarine warfare threatened the peace between the two countries.

The Chancellor's Decision

There are varying explanations of Germany's intended use of submarines provided by German naval leaders at war's end. In 'The German Naval Critique of the U-Boat Campaign, 1915-1918,' Philip K. Lundeberg claims, and Captain A. Gayer concurs, that prior to the war Germany had not even considered attacking Britain's food supply lines because it would have violated the Declaration of London, and while not ratified by most of the countries that had a hand in creating it, the Declaration was still

which is open to interception, and the good graces of neutral nations; Letter from Lansing to Mrs. Bingley, 1 September 1914, The Papers of Robert Lansing: 1914, Aug. 31-Oct. 2, 1911-1928, Container 4, In 62 Volumes, Library of Congress 1943.

¹⁸ H.C. Peterson, *Propaganda For War: The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Norman, 1939), p. 33.

¹⁹ Stewart Halsey Ross, *Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918* (Jefferson, 1996), p. 29.

regarded as a guideline to be followed.²⁰ However, Lundeberg notes in the same article that in May 1914, a full month before the Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne was assassinated and three months before the Great War was to begin, that a study had been developed and presented to the then Secretary of State for the Navy, Admiral Tirpitz, calling for the creation of 222 submarines for operations against British shipping.²¹ These statements indicate that while the submarine might have been considered a new weapon of dubious potential the German Navy understood its possibilities before going to war.

Nevertheless, German naval doctrine initially condemned the submarine to obscurity by ensuring that submarines were not to be used on their own, but to be used in conjunction with the High Seas Fleet and to defend the approaches to German ports against British attack, not because of fear of reprisals, but due to the lack of faith German naval commanders had in their ability to assist in offensive measures.²² Because of German naval policy, submarines had little impact on the outcome of the war until late September 1914 when a single German submarine sank three British cruisers off the Dutch coast.

According to Admiral Müller, Chief of the Naval Cabinet at the time, news of this success caused near euphoric enthusiasm for the submarine program at Wilhelmstrasse.²³ The fact that the cruisers were elderly and did not have anti-submarine defences was lost on the German command, for at that moment they only

²⁰ Captain A. Gayer, 'Summary Of German Submarine Operations In The Various Theatres Of War From 1914-1918', *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute*, vol. LII (April 1926), p. 625; Philip K. Lundeberg, 'The German Naval Critique of the U-Boat Campaign, 1915-1918', *Military Affairs; Journal of the American Military Institute* (1963), p. 105.

²¹ Philip K. Lundeberg, 'The German Naval Critique of the U-Boat Campaign, 1915-1918', *Military Affairs; Journal of the American Military Institute* (1963), pp. 105-106.

²² R.H. Gibson and Maurice Prendergast, *The German Submarine War, 1914-1918* (Annapolis, 1931), pp. 1-2.

²³ Walter Görlitz, *The Kaiser and His Court* (New York, 1961), p. 34; David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, 2004), p. 73.

saw the submarine's success.²⁴ In *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* Ernest May dismissed the German decision to utilize submarines as the 'accidental' work of a few naval officers 'in a fit of absence of mind', who worked unchecked by their superiors.²⁵ But this is an over simplification that leads to a misunderstanding about what really went on amongst the German leaders and how, even at this early stage, they worked to avoid problems with neutrals, particularly the United States.

The conventional wisdom, to which Ernest May, Daniel M. Smith, David Stevenson, and Christopher Clark all ascribe, states that the decision to utilize the submarine solely as a weapon against British shipping was the work of Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz and supported by Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg.²⁶ Clarification of the German leadership structure is needed at this point to understand who was really in a position to make decisions. According to Michael Epkenhans, Kaiser Wilhelm wanted to be his own Commander-in-Chief of the High Seas Fleet and therefore could not allow Tirpitz the power to unify command of the navy; he therefore placed Admiral Pohl in the position of Chief of the Naval Staff, making him the chief advisor to the Kaiser on naval matters.²⁷ Tirpitz's role as Secretary of State for Naval Affairs was therefore reduced to that of an operational advisor.²⁸ Simplified, within naval circles the Kaiser was the ultimate decision maker based on advice from Pohl who was to get advice from

²⁴ Rear Admiral Spindler points out in his article 'The Value of the Submarine in Naval Warfare', *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute*, Vol. LII (April 1926), p. 838, that Allied anti-submarine measures were weak in 1914.

²⁵ Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 113.

²⁶ Daniel M. Smith, *The Great Departure: The United States and World War I, 1914-1920* (New York, 1965), p. 51; David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 72-74; Christopher Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II* (Harlow, 2000), pp. 230-231.

²⁷ Michael Epkenhans, *Tirpitz: Architect of the German High Seas Fleet* (Dulles, 2008), pp. 59- 60; Karl Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, April 18, 1916-January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 6.

²⁸ Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial Navy* (Bloomington, 2011), p. 372.

Tirpitz. Still, Bethmann notes that Pohl and Tirpitz held equal weight when it came to advising the Kaiser on naval matters, much to the chagrin of Pohl.²⁹

While many historians such as those mentioned above simplify the situation by placing the decision for submarine use at the feet of Tirpitz, historians that focus on the naval history of the war such as R.H. Gibson, Maurice Prendergast, and Karl E. Birnbaum argue that it was Chief of the Admiralty Staff Admiral Hugo von Pohl, not Tirpitz, who began to campaign for unrestricted submarine warfare as a means to win the war.³⁰ Birnbaum states that it was Pohl who initially rationalized that the British declaration of the North Sea as a war zone was yet another illegal move by Britain and, buoyed by the perceived success of the submarine flotilla, believed that an immediate creation of a blockade by submarine of merchant ships headed for British ports was justifiable based on the repeated infractions of international law by the British.³¹ Philip Lundeberg adds that it was again Pohl who argued that the more vigorously the blockade was enforced, the quicker Britain would be forced to her knees and the quicker the war would end.³²

Tirpitz biographer Michael Epkenhans claims that the Admiral understood the political implications of using the submarine in a way that would also be considered illegal, and, commenting that the number of operational submarines in the German navy's arsenal numbered only about twenty, he questioned the effectiveness of a blockade of this sort.³³ Bethmann Hollweg and the Foreign Office were also opposed to the idea due to the risks posed by offending neutral countries, namely the United States

²⁹ Letter from Bethmann Hollweg to Jagow, 30 March 1919, Nachlass von Jagow, Packet 4/4 Band 7, Doc. 62, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

³⁰ R.H. Gibson and Maurice Prendergast, *The German Submarine War, 1914-1918* (Annapolis, 1931), p. 26; Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 23.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Philip K. Lundeberg, 'The German naval Critique of The U-Boat Campaign, 1915-1918', *Military Affairs; Journal of the American Military Institute* (1963), p. 109.

³³ Michael Epkenhans, *Tirpitz: Architect of the German High Seas Fleet* (Dulles, 2008), pp. 64-65.

and Italy, before the army had secured the German position on land.³⁴ Pohl adjusted his blockade request in December 1914 from an actual blockade of British ports to the creation of a war zone around the British Isles only to have Tirpitz again reject the proposal based on the potential political ramifications of a submarine campaign. Bethmann continued to oppose it on the grounds that it could turn neutrals against Germany.³⁵

The internal German discussions about the use of the submarine changed dramatically on 23 December 1914, when Tirpitz publicly defended Germany's right to utilize the weapon. What has become known as the 'Wiegand interview', named for the American journalist who interviewed Tirpitz, is notable because Tirpitz put a very public and powerful face on the question of utilizing a submarine blockade by explaining that Germany had enough submarines to 'play the same game' and starve England out.³⁶ Tirpitz's decision to support submarine raids on British commerce, despite any adverse effects a submarine war may cause with America, can be most easily found in his memoirs where he discusses his view that the United States had already become a partial player in the war due to its massive trade with Great Britain.³⁷

Generally overlooked in discussions about this interview is the role of Bethmann Hollweg. The Chancellor was, as Roger Chickering notes in *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, the type of leader who saw only diplomatic risk when considering military actions.³⁸ This is not necessarily a bad characteristic for a diplomat to have, and in this instance Bethmann was worried about how the implementation of the submarine against British commerce would antagonize the neutrals in general and

³⁴ Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 23.

³⁵ Letter from Bethmann Hollweg to Jagow, 30 March 1919, Nachlass von Jagow, Packet 4/4 Band 7, Doc. 62, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

³⁶ Charles Tansill, *America Goes to War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938), p. 227.

³⁷ Alfred Peter Friedrich von Tirpitz, *My Memoirs* (Leipzig, 1919), p. 392.

³⁸ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 63.

the United States in particular. Admiral Georg Alexander von Müller, Chief of the German Naval Cabinet during the war, notes in his diary that during a discussion between Bethmann and the Kaiser, the Chancellor stated that he had given permission for the publication of Tirpitz's interview in the United States because it had previously appeared in Dutch newspapers.³⁹ Bethmann knew what Tirpitz was going to say in the interview from the Dutch accounts. Needing to feel out the American reaction to submarine war, the Chancellor allowed Tirpitz to do the dirty work.

The possibility of submarine warfare undermining the goodwill Bethmann was attempting to maintain between Germany and the United States was common knowledge among German leaders, and if Tirpitz was adjusting his view of commercial warfare and the use of submarines, it would have been prudent to feel out the Wilson administration's attitude towards this new form of blockade before allowing momentum to continue to build both within German leadership and the public. While Tirpitz may have felt that his interview was a means towards gaining control of the naval program during the war, as Bethmann suspected he did, it was quite simply a measure, unbeknownst to Tirpitz, for Bethmann to feel out the American position.⁴⁰

Because Bethmann was under pressure from the navy and the public, his decision to allow Tirpitz to make his statements directly to the American people allowed him to ascertain the U.S. position on submarine warfare while maintaining a safe position from which to work to influence the impact of the submarine. At the same time, because Tirpitz had gone out on a limb when making this statement, Bethmann

³⁹ Walter Görlitz, ed., *The Kaiser and His Court: The Diaries, Note Books and Letters of Admiral Georg Alexander von Müller, Chief of the Naval Cabinet, 1914-1918* (New York, 1959), pp. 50-51.

⁴⁰ Letter from Bethmann Hollweg to Jagow, 30 March 1919, Nachlass von Jagow, Packet 4/4 Band 7, Doc. 62.

was able to solidify his position of influence with the Kaiser who was initially opposed to submarine warfare and sensibly adverse to provoking the United States.⁴¹

Based on the American reaction to Tirpitz's interview, Bethmann Hollweg continued to oppose the use of a submarine blockade on the grounds that, although as a response to the British blockade it could be justified, it would cause problems with all neutral countries, including Italy and the United States.⁴² His argument centred on America's ability to influence the outcome of the war through economic pressure, and, more worrisome, Bethmann believed, its influence on other neutrals, which could easily affect the outcome of the war on land.⁴³ But by February 1915, Pohl and Tirpitz had successfully lobbied the Kaiser to create a war zone around Britain in an attempt to bring an end to the war by cutting off Britain's supplies from the outer regions of her empire and, most importantly, from the United States.⁴⁴ Pohl countered Bethmann's argument about neutral shipping by proclaiming that the mere threat of submarine warfare would scare neutral shipping from the waters thus allowing Germany to strangle Britain without the worry of a negative reaction.⁴⁵

In a sound diplomatic move to quell the complaints that were sure to come once the submarine blockade was declared German officials decided that the official proclamation would clearly outline the illegality of Britain's blockade, noting the neutrals' inability to, or decision not to, force Britain to end the blockade as having compelled Germany to take measures against neutral shipping in and around the

⁴¹ Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* (Bloomington, 2011), pp. 403-405.

⁴² Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 23.

⁴³ Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hubris of Imperial Germany* (New Haven, 1973), p. 272.

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that initially, Kaiser Wilhelm II was not a supporter of the submarine and on the day Germany announced the war zone around Great Britain and Ireland he spoke to the officers of the submarine wing asking them to save the crews of merchant ships if possible. Tansill, *America Goes To War*, p. 230.

⁴⁵ Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 25.

territorial waters of the British Isles.⁴⁶ This rationale was based on necessity since as early as December 1914 the British blockade and Grey's policy of strangulation was beginning to be felt in German homes and it became necessary for Germany to rely not only on diplomacy to end the starvation of its population but also on the submarine to bring the war to an end or force the British to end their immoral campaign. In *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, Roger Chickering points out that prior to August 1914 Germany was reliant on imported food and workers from Eastern Europe, both of which were no longer available due to the war, and that loss combined with losses due to the British blockade quickly led to a substantial drop in food supplies produced inside Germany.⁴⁷

The first attempt to frame the discussion of submarine blockade came on 10 December 1914, when Ambassador Bernstorff asked Secretary of State Bryan if the United States was willing to prevent the British from seizing foodstuffs.⁴⁸ Recognizing the immorality of starving a civilian population Secretary of State Bryan noted to President Wilson 'the bitterness' in the tone of three separate notes he had received from the German ambassador regarding the food situation in Germany and the starvation of non-combatants.⁴⁹ These notes would seem to indicate the severity of the food situation in Germany early in the war and, just as important, cast the shadow of immorality over Britain.

⁴⁶ Memorandum of the German Government concerning retaliation against Great Britain's illegal interference with trade between neutral and Germany, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 96-97; Doerries, *Imperial Challenge*, p. 80.

⁴⁷ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 41-44.

⁴⁸ The German Embassy to the Secretary of State, 10 December 1914, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914, Supplement, The World War* (1914), p. 362.

⁴⁹ The Secretary of State to President Wilson, 15 February 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920* (in two volumes), (1914-1920), vol. I, p. 353.

In attempts to assuage the concerns of Bethmann and the Kaiser, Pohl claimed that the fear of being sunk would scare neutral ships away from the war zone, thus negating the fear of neutral, more specifically American, retaliation. Additionally, Zimmerman claimed that U.S. Ambassador Gerard had assured him that the United States' protests would be a mere formality.⁵⁰ This, coupled with the fact that the United States, along with other neutrals, had up to this point been happy to 'satisfy themselves with theoretical protest' indicated to Germany that they could expect the same treatment.⁵¹ These arguments along with positive German public opinion towards the use of the submarine influenced Bethmann's position; he dropped his opposition, and consented to submarine warfare.

Continuing to lay the diplomatic groundwork for submarine warfare, Undersecretary Arthur Zimmerman notified Ambassador Gerard early on 2 February 1915 that because the British were immorally attempting to starve German civilians, it was quite possible the German navy would have to respond by officially blockading the British Isles by submarine.⁵² Importantly, Gerard was also notified that Germany would blockade the North and West coasts of France in an attempt to stop the flow of troops and ammunition from Britain.⁵³ In making these statements Zimmerman had started to frame the debate in moral terms – terms they felt Wilson would respond favourably too.

Ernest May surmises that Wilson's response to a submarine enforced war zone was based on 'moralistic and legalistic sentiments' that the submarine would 'shred'.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 25; Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hubris of Imperial Germany* (New Haven, 1973), p. 273.

⁵¹ John W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithaca, 1981), p. 221.

⁵² The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 2 Feb. 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, p. 93.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge 1963), p. 138.

He is joined by other historians including Reinhard Doerries who base their argument on the economic warfare aspect of the war zone that was laid out in the German proclamation of 7 February 1915, which focuses on British violations of maritime law and uses the term 'merchant ships'.⁵⁵ What has been dismissed, and in fact rarely discussed, is that Germany's initial attempts, as found in the letters from U.S. Ambassador Gerard to the Secretary of State, were to frame the submarine blockade as stopping the tools of war from making it to the battlefields.⁵⁶ By warning the United States and specifying that Germany was most interested in stopping the flow of weapons, the notification of which completely followed guidelines set by the Treaty of Paris and the Declaration of London, Germany was attempting to place itself in a superior moral position to the British, thereby playing to President Wilson's well known morality – while the British violated international law by starving Germany civilians. Germany, on the other hand, was merely attempting to stop troops and weapons.

On 7 February 1915, the official German announcement declared the creation of a war zone around Great Britain and Ireland, including the English Channel. The proclamation made it clear that any vessel in those waters, neutral or not, stood the chance of being attacked, and cautioned neutral vessels to take an alternate course around Scotland.⁵⁷ Because the German Foreign Office gave notification to the United States prior to the proclamation, and detailed the many British violations of

⁵⁵ *Ibid*; Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989), pp. 80-81; Memorandum of the German Government concerning retaliation against Great Britain's illegal interference with trade between neutral and Germany, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 96-97.

⁵⁶ The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 2 Feb. 1915 (Dated 1 Feb. 1915), United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, p. 93.

⁵⁷ The German Ambassador (Bernstorff) to the Secretary of State, 7 February 1915 (Received 8 February), United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, p. 95; Information to the United States regarding safe passage was also relayed via Ambassador Gerard via a note. This can be found at: The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 2 Feb. 1915 (Dated 1 Feb. 1915), United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, p. 93.

international law, Germany's naval staff fully expected that the American protest would follow the pattern set in their dealings with Great Britain as per Zimmerman's discussion with Gerard. When the U.S. Ambassador delivered a menacing note of protest to the German Foreign Office that threatened that the United States would 'hold the Imperial Government to a strict accountability' if American ships or lives were lost at sea, they were both surprised and irritated.⁵⁸

It is quite clear that the news of the war zone and the use of the submarine to enforce it caught American officials off guard. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan as well as the Counsellor of the Secretary of State's office Robert Lansing are both noted as initially being shocked and angered by this development, and while a great deal is made about this initial reaction to the news, Daniel Smith's *Robert Lansing and American Neutrality, 1914-1917*, while forty years old, is still one of the few accounts to discuss what he called 'belligerent necessity'.⁵⁹ Smith explains that while Lansing was initially appalled at Germany's war zone declaration he voiced his doubts to Wilson partially based on the fact that the United States had acquiesced to Britain's illegal actions and therefore Germany should get the same consideration. Germany's complaint about the British use of neutral flags alleviated Lansing's doubts and gave the Counsellor the opportunity to appear impartial by sending a note to Britain at the same time the 'strict accountability' note was delivered to Germany.

While there was no real fear in August 1914 of U.S. military action against Germany, the Foreign Office fought the submarine issue for months for the sole purpose of keeping neutrals, primarily Italy and the United States, out of the war. Now that Bethmann had been forced to allow the submarines to be used, he had to work

⁵⁸ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Germany (Gerard), 10 Feb. 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 98-99.

⁵⁹ Daniel M. Smith, *Robert Lansing and American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (New York, 1972), p. 50.

feverishly to apply restrictions that he hoped would prevent a break with the United States. As Karl Birnbaum notes, it was from this point forward that Germany's foreign policy towards the United States was to prevent them from entering the war.⁶⁰

Bethmann Hollweg and the Foreign Office never had any misconceptions about the danger submarine warfare posed to Germany by creating a strain on relations with the United States. Bethmann, having lost Tirpitz as an ally, turned to the Chief of Staff Falkenhayn for assistance in restricting the use of submarines. Upon seeing the U.S. note of 10 February, Falkenhayn agreed that the letter was a threat, and as a result lobbied the Kaiser to soften the German stance on the use of submarines in order to reduce the risk of U.S. entry into the war.⁶¹ In Germany, the weeks immediately following the United States' 'strict accountability' note were to see arguments among the navy, Bethmann Hollweg and the Kaiser as they 'quarrelled about how to answer American protests against the declaration of the war-zone and whether there was a way to observe maritime law, which would alleviate neutral fears.'⁶²

Historians have placed the importance of these challenges on the fact that Wilson's reply to Germany was much more stern than the note he sent to Britain.⁶³ But what needs to be addressed is how the note of 10 February was received in relation to the discussion between Ambassador Gerard and Zimmerman in which Germany was informed that the United States would protest simply for the sake of maintaining appearances. Once that statement is taken into account the German reaction makes more sense. Having decided to allow submarine warfare against shipping around the British

⁶⁰ Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 26.

⁶¹ Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hubris of Imperial Germany* (New Haven, 1973), p. 274.

⁶² Michael Epkenhans, *Tirpitz, Architect of the German High Seas Fleet* (Dulles, 2008), p. 66.

⁶³ Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963); Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971); John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson* (London, 2002), p. 109.

Isles based, in part, upon Zimmerman's assurances that there was nothing to fear from the United States, Bethmann was left to decide if Wilson's note declaring that America would hold Germany to 'strict accountability' if American lives or property were harmed was another mere 'scrap of paper' or if it needed to be taken more seriously.⁶⁴ Now the Foreign Office was faced with deciding which message they must refer to when dealing with the United States. Bethmann, for his part, chose to address both.

As noted, the Chancellor was caught between the navy who wanted unrestricted submarine use and the conventional wisdom that their use in this way could cause problems with neutral nations. Now, with contradictory information coming from the United States (Gerard's comments and Bryan's letter), he was forced to deal with both U.S. positions. The American 'strict accountability' note helped him defend his position against the navy, while taking his time to reply to the United States, in the same fashion that Grey in Britain was doing to hold up American diplomatic actions. David Stevenson suggests that the policy Bethmann developed regarding the United States was to mirror that of British Foreign Minister Grey's policy, 'to seek the maximum that was possible short of a confrontation with Wilson.'⁶⁵

The President's Protest

The German declaration of a war-zone around the British Isles came at a time when President Wilson was preoccupied with Britain's undeclared blockade and discussions about lifting the arms embargo to Mexico as he continued to find ways to oust Mexican President Huerta. The addition of submarine warfare would simply muddy the American neutrality issue, particularly since Britain had been the only country to antagonize the United States up to this point. As Wilson was attempting to be

⁶⁴ Upon hearing that Britain intended to defend Belgium neutrality and therefore go to war with Germany Bethmann Hollweg infamously claimed that Britain was going to war 'just for a scrap of paper', a phrase that would be used by the Entente's propaganda machine for the duration of the war.

⁶⁵ David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford, 1988), p. 72.

neutral in deed as well as in thought with the British and their violations of international maritime law, the introduction of submarine warfare into the mix was to prove troublesome for all parties. In addition, early February 1915 found Secretary of State Bryan away from Washington on a speaking tour of the Western United States, leaving Councillor Robert Lansing as acting Secretary of State.

In *The United States and the First World War* Jennifer Keene states that President Wilson 'immediately protested' the German war zone declaration.⁶⁶ In a strict sense this is true, but it is important to note that the president took the time to listen and discuss the issue with his cabinet. According to Robert Lansing's Desk diary he met with the president and Secretary Bryan approximately eight times from 5 February to 10 February on this issue alone.⁶⁷

Lansing's initial reaction to the German proclamation led him to write a short note to Wilson, advising the president that the German decision to use submarines against all shipping in and around Great Britain and Ireland 'presents a most delicate situation which [would] have to be handled with extreme care.'⁶⁸ Later that same day Lansing penned a sharply toned letter to Germany stating that in the event of the destruction of U.S. ships or the lives of U.S. citizens, that the United States would view the attack as a violation of its rights as a neutral nation. The following day Wilson and Lansing met to discuss the difficult situation they now found themselves in – when the British declared their military zone in the North Sea in November 1914, 'not a word of official protest came from the United States.'⁶⁹ It is precisely because they had not vigorously protested the British decision to declare the North Sea a military area that Wilson and Lansing found themselves having to either accept the German war zone, as

⁶⁶ Jennifer D. Keene, *The United States and the First World War* (Essex, 2000), p. 14.

⁶⁷ Robert Lansing Desk Diary and Papers, Library of Congress, Reel 1.

⁶⁸ Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson Life and Letters: Neutrality 1914-1915*, vol. Five (New York, 1940), p. 247.

⁶⁹ Thomas Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1964), p. 577.

they had done with the British or, if they took a harder line, place the United States in a position distinctly unfriendly to Germany.

As noted earlier, Lansing had a change of heart upon reading the German memorandum claiming the same necessity to justify the violation of neutral trade as Great Britain. Daniel M. Smith and Ray Stannard Baker both point out that Lansing recognized the fact that because the United States had done little more than protest Britain's violation of neutral rights – illegal actions including its war zone declaration and interference with foodstuffs – Germany was simply requesting the same consideration.⁷⁰ Ross Gregory continues this line of thought, pointing out that Germany was simply demanding the same rights the British had already forced on the world – to change the rules of naval warfare to meet the needs of a modern navy.⁷¹

While Lansing had changed his mind on the tone of the letter to Germany, Secretary of State Bryan wanted nothing more than to avoid a diplomatic exchange with Germany that could lead to the possibility of a break in relations with Germany. Upon his return to Washington, the Secretary argued against too strong a response to Germany in light of the firm responses had taken to the British war zone. Bryan's position was that when a belligerent violated international law, or otherwise harmed neutral rights a protest should be sent, regardless of which belligerent it was.⁷²

On 10 February 1915 Ambassador Gerard was directed to pass on a final draft of the note to Germany, which he dutifully delivered to Jagow on 12 February. The note reminded Germany that legally, belligerent rights were limited to visit and search of neutral ships unless a blockade was declared and effectively maintained. This was followed by statements proclaiming the use of submarines to be 'unprecedented in naval

⁷⁰ Daniel M. Smith, *Robert Lansing and American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (New York, 1972), p. 50; Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters; Neutrality, 1914-1915* (New York, 1940), p. 248.

⁷¹ Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971), p. 58.

⁷² William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia, 1925), p. 395.

warfare', 'indefensible violation of neutral rights' and that 'the United States would...hold the Imperial German Government to a strict accountability.'⁷³ Baker points out that Wilson and Lansing found it more palatable to send this note to Germany in conjunction to a similar note being sent to Britain. This would maintain the appearance of impartiality on the part of the United States, and appease Bryan's equalitarian desires. It would also appear that the dual notes also appealed to Bryan as they went out under his signature.⁷⁴

It is no small point that the American response to Germany was coupled with a letter to Great Britain. While the note to Germany has received the bulk of the historical scrutiny the two notes must be looked at in conjunction. Many histories written about this time period mention the dual letters and point out that the British letter was not as stern as the one sent to Germany.⁷⁵ Despite the fact that the note to Germany dismisses the British use of neutral flags as merely a suspicion, the letter to Britain, at best a polite protest, pointed out the problems to be incurred by the United States and her citizens under the official British policy flying neutral, and in particular American, flags to avoid detection by German naval forces, and requested that Britain refrain from such decisions in order to protect American lives.⁷⁶ Often not addressed is that in the letter to Germany the United States claims that Germany only suspected the use of neutral flags by Great Britain, however, in the note to Britain, sent the very same day, they not only acknowledge their use but also refer to the British Foreign Office having previously defended the policy.

⁷³ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Germany (Gerard), 10 Feb. 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 98-100.

⁷⁴ Ernest May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 142.

⁷⁵ Kendrick A. Clements, *Woodrow Wilson, World Statesman* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 156-157; Daniel M. Smith, *The Great Departure: The United States and World War I, 1914-1920* (New York, 1965), pp. 52-53, are but two.

⁷⁶ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Great Britain (Page), 10 Feb. 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp.100-101.

It would appear that Zimmerman was correct when he notified Bethmann that the United States would limit its reaction to the war zone to paper protests. Germany had observed the extent to which Wilson was willing to go not get involved in the war; despite repeated violations of American neutrality by the British, America had simply protested, leading German officials to believe they too could press the president.⁷⁷ In the case of the German war zone, Wilson surprised Germany not only by the fact that he protested at all, but also by issuing a protest that was more strongly worded than anticipated. Nevertheless, it was still only a protest and would be handled as such. Wilson also surprised both the German leadership and the British by sending a note to Britain directly concerning one of the items pointed out by Germany for the creation of a war zone. In doing so Wilson was tacitly admitting that the need to maintain at least the appearance of unbiased neutrality required that the United States address aspects of British policy.

Ray Stannard Baker suggests that the German decision to create a submarine enforced war zone was not unexpected by Wilson, a theory he based on telegrams from Ambassador Gerard in Germany.⁷⁸ The Ambassador's telegrams describe the bitterness of Germans, leaders and public alike, towards the United States due to what they consider un-neutral conduct, explicitly the selling of munitions to the Allies.⁷⁹ This does not, however, take account of Wilson's or his administrations feelings toward Germany at that time. Much of the discussion within Wilson's cabinet brought them to the conclusion that the loss of an American life, no matter if it was on a U.S. vessel or a

⁷⁷ Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971), p. 54.

⁷⁸ Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters; Neutrality, 1914-1915* (New York, 1940), p. 246.

⁷⁹ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Great Britain (Page), 10 Feb. 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 93-94.

belligerent vessel, was an affront to U.S. neutrality.⁸⁰ Still, while the president may have already had pro-Allied tendencies he was not vehemently anti-German. It was the idea of placing the lives of American citizens and other non-combatants at risk that Wilson felt was intolerable.

The Belligerents' Responses

Although Wilson seemed to have taken a more stern approach to Britain, he had become decidedly more pro-British in his general stance. It was true that Americans had become irritated by the British blockade. In fact they were bordering on being incensed by it, but the German submarine campaign was so morally despicable in Wilson's eyes that he felt he was being forced into the British camp. John Coogan sums up Wilson's differing views on the British and German blockades well when he states 'The real difference between blockade and submarine in Wilson's view was not that the former took property and the latter took lives, but that the former was British and the latter was German.'⁸¹ In a discussion with his secretary Joseph Tumulty, Wilson allowed his position on the war to show when he stated 'England is fighting our fight [and]...I shall not...place obstacles in her way.'⁸² Nevertheless, over in the next several months British-American relations would be pushed to the limit, and had it not been for German gaffes Wilson may have been forced to hold a more firm line against the British.

Unwittingly, the United States note to Germany had helped strengthen Britain's diplomatic position. By making the note to Germany seemingly more hostile, Wilson and Lansing sent a subtle message to Grey as to where the United States stood in relation to Britain's blockade and Germany's threatened submarine warfare. While

⁸⁰ Robert Lansing to Dr. Gallaudet, 2 June 1915, Container 9, Robert Lansing Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸¹ John Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithaca, 1981), p. 236.

⁸² Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson Life and Letters: Neutrality, 1914-1915* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1940), p. 328

always careful of potentially alienating the United States, Grey now had more freedom to continue pushing his blockade without worrying too much about U.S. reaction.

Germany's war zone declaration also played directly into Britain's hands. While British naval action played havoc on American trade, and raised many complaints from American businessmen, Germany's decision to sink ships without warning caused moral outrage in America. Spring Rice immediately understood the impact of Germany's decision on the American psyche, commenting in a telegram to Grey that the mood in the United States was such that if German submarines harmed U.S. ships or citizens that a serious situation was sure to follow, and that it was in Britain's best interest to do nothing more than avoid inciting incidents that might cause American public opinion to swing against Britain.⁸³

In response to the American letter of 10 February Grey employed his normal delaying tactics, seemingly ignoring the American letter and continuing the use of neutral flags. David Stevenson notes that British naval tactics made submarine warfare riskier while Ross Gregory takes the matter a step further in declaring that Grey viewed submarine warfare as a 'stroke of good fortune.'⁸⁴ By delaying, Grey was giving German submarines the opportunity to make a mistake that could ensure the Allies of America's full support and possibly its entry into the war. Grey was certain that his defiance of American demands would pay off in the end, but he always maintained that if he had miscalculated and the United States threatened retaliation, he would drop the naval action against neutral shipping.⁸⁵ But until that time, the Royal Navy would continue stopping neutral ships and Grey would continue slowly expanding the list of

⁸³ Telegram from Spring Rice to Grey (104), February 20, 1915, PRO 170, FO 800/85 Microfilm, British National Archives.

⁸⁴ David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, 2004), p. 210; Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971), p. 54.

⁸⁵ John W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithaca, 1981), pp. 223-224.

contraband items. Grey finally responded to the United States' request to stop the use of neutral flags on 19 February, defending the use of neutral flags as a ruse de guerre and as necessary due to the German use of submarines.

Just as Grey had delayed the British response to the United States, so did Bethmann. Responding on 16 February, three days before Britain, Germany complained bitterly that the United States was not acting in a truly neutral manner. To the German mind, Wilson was allowing the British to continue to use an illegal blockade based on dubious argument while threatening 'strict accountability' of the Germans due to their submarines. The German reply pointed out that not only was the United States acting in a non-neutral manner by allowing England to restrict U.S. trade with Germany and mine the North Sea without protest, but that, at the same time, they were selling munitions to Britain.⁸⁶ Germany added that if the U.S. could convince Britain to allow foodstuffs and raw materials for civilian use through the blockade they would be willing to suspend submarine activity.⁸⁷ This statement allowed a brief moment of hope to filter through the smoke of the war.

On February 20, based on the mention of Britain's mining of the North Sea, Lansing, after long discussions and thorough editing by and with Bryan and Wilson, sent identical notes to both Britain and Germany encouraging them to restrict their use of all tactics that would be considered immoral, including mines, submarines, and neutral flags.⁸⁸ The notes also called for American direction of foodstuffs delivered to Germany.

⁸⁶ The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 17 February 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War* (1915), pp. 112-115.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 115.

⁸⁸ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Great Britain (Page), 20 February 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War* (1915), pp. 119-120.

Unbeknownst to Germany, their tactics played directly into the hands of British diplomacy. The motives of Germany's diplomacy remained to try and create a situation by which it could break the stalemate on the battlefield and win the war; now, however, in regards to the United States, German diplomacy had the added task of attempting to keep them out of the war long enough for the military to achieve a decisive victory.

First Contact: The Impact of U-Boat Warfare

The first casualty of the submarine enforced war zone was recorded on 28 March 1915 when the German submarine U-28 sank the British ship *Falaba* off the Irish coast with the loss of 104 crewmembers and passengers including one American. This was followed by an aerial attack on the U.S. ship *Cushing* on 29 April, and then on 1 May the American steamer *Gulflight* was torpedoed. All three of these attacks were overshadowed in a matter of days with the sinking of the *Lusitania* off the coast of Ireland on 7 May 1915. Then, with a brief period of respite, the British steamer *Arabic* was sunk on 19 August, bringing about a pledge from the Kaiser himself that no ocean liners should be sunk without full warning. Often viewed as individual incidents by historians, what is truly needed to understand the work done by the diplomats to ease tensions is a look at the initial submarine crisis as a whole and within the framework of the U.S. threat of strict accountability.

In *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War*, Ross Gregory expresses the common theory concerning the meaning of 'strict accountability' when he states that it most likely meant the United States would go to war if U.S. ships were attacked.⁸⁹ Holger Herwig supports the theory by stating that the United States would 'defend [its] right with force'.⁹⁰ But the note to Germany never uses the words force or war, and on 29 April 1915 Lansing wrote that too strong of a policy would 'close the

⁸⁹ Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971), p. 54.

⁹⁰ Holger Herwig, *Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Naval Planning, 1889-1941* (Boston, 1976), p. 117.

door to all compromise', and that is precisely what Wilson wanted to accomplish – a compromise peace.⁹¹ In a letter to Bryan on 5 May 1915, Lansing clearly states that 'Strict Accountability can only mean that the German Government must make full reparation for the act of their naval force and must also repudiate the act, apologize for it, and give ample assurance that it will not be repeated.'⁹² This does not mean that Lansing did not see the pitfalls of strong language, for he often writes to Wilson and Bryan that it is possible that too strong a protest could lead to a break in diplomatic relations and possibly war.⁹³ But to represent Lansing's position of 'strict accountability' as being directly related to the use of force is a slight misrepresentation of the facts.

Diplomats watched with great interest as submarines began sinking ships and the initial American diplomatic moves seemed to bear-out Zimmerman's assertion that the United States would limit itself to a paper protest of the use of the submarine. For days after the sinking of the *Falaba* the Wilson administration's debated about the proper response to the sinking. As the facts of the case were not clean cut – the citizenship of the dead American and whether or not the ship had attempted to evade capture were in question – there was much consternation over the direction the U.S. protest should take.

In his book *The Will to Believe* Ross Kennedy argues that Wilson took weeks to draft a protest to Germany and then, under pressure from Bryan and Lansing about the potential German reaction, he changed his mind and didn't send it.⁹⁴ According to

⁹¹ Memo, 29 April 1917, The Robert Lansing Papers, 1914-1920, Private Memoranda (Typed Copy), DM 15347, Reel 1 (Lansing Diary Blue Box 2: Confidential Memoranda and Notes from 15 April 1915 – 30 December 1918, Inclusive), Library of Congress.

⁹² Letter from The Counsellor for the Department of State (Lansing) to the Secretary of State, 5 May 1915, The United States Department of State/ *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes)*, Vol. 1, p. 384.

⁹³ Memo, 29 April 1915, Robert Lansing Papers 1914-1920, Private Memoranda (Typed Copy), DM15347, Reel 1 (Lansing Diary Blue Boxed Box 2: Confidential Memoranda and Notes from 15 April 1915-30 December 1918, Inclusive), Library of Congress.

⁹⁴ Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, 2009), p. 91.

Kennedy, Wilson's fear of a strong German reaction coupled with the fear that intervention would harm his desired position of mediator were part of the calculation to maintain America's moral position in the world leading to his decision against protesting the initial sinking by submarines.⁹⁵ Kennedy's assertion simplifies the complex situation that was in play at this time. By arguing that Wilson was not truly beholden to the strict accountability statement, he admirably bucks the trend of most historians of this time period, but in doing so he does not do the diplomacy that had been taking place the justice it deserves.

Like others, Kennedy assumes that the strict accountability letter of 10 February 1915 set the tone for all future conversations dealing with submarine warfare, but this is not the case. In fact, it was upon being notified that an American citizen had died due to the actions of German submarines that Wilson's advisors, in particular Lansing and Bryan, began formulating an outline for future U.S. policy – the groundwork for any and all future incidents involving the deaths of U.S. citizens by submarine warfare. Wilson's policy toward submarine warfare did indeed begin with the strict accountability phrase but this was neither an outline nor a plan of action. As Ernest May and John Milton Cooper assert, Wilson had yet to define 'strict neutrality'.⁹⁶ The cabinet discussions surrounding the *Falaba*, gave his administration the opportunity to do just that.

In a letter to Bryan, Counsellor Lansing outlined the case against Germany in regards to the *Falaba* noting that if a merchant ship did not abide by the rules of naval

⁹⁵ Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, 2009), pp. 90-91.

⁹⁶ Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 145; John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York, 2009), p. 275.

warfare, America would have no legal standing to protest the loss of life.⁹⁷ At the time Lansing wrote this letter, he admitted that he was lacking information about the sinking, but he understood the need for the United States to clarify what it meant by strict accountability.⁹⁸

What Kennedy sees as fear by Wilson is really good, cautious, diplomacy on the administration's part. Wilson, Bryan, and Lansing were in constant contact as they worked to clarify America's position regarding the war at sea.⁹⁹ Although President Wilson recognized the potential for more problems to arise between Germany and the United States due to the death of this lone American citizen it was not Wilson's intent, as John Milton Cooper suggests, to take a harder line against Germany for its infractions on U.S. trade than he had against Britain.¹⁰⁰ In a letter to Bryan dated 3 April 1915, Wilson again expressed his desire to clearly define the U.S. position, asking that Lansing formulate a new and more 'mature' letter towards that end.¹⁰¹ The President and his Secretary of State continued to discuss the situation and wait, impatiently, for further information to help clarify the situation.¹⁰²

On 5 April 1915, Lansing sent a draft response to Bryan for the President's approval accompanied with a note clearly outlining the issues facing the United States with respect to its response to the sinking of the *Falaba*. The Counsellor pointed out that if the letter to Germany were too soft there would be no reason for Germany to heed America's warning and drop their submarine tactics, while at the same time

⁹⁷ Letter from The Counsellor for the Department of State (Lansing) to the Secretary of State, 2 April 1915, The United States Department of State/ *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes)*, Vol. 1, p. 365.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 366.

⁹⁹ Letter from The Counsellor for the Department of State (Lansing) to the Secretary of State, 2 April 1915, The United States Department of State/ *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes)*, Vol. 1, pp. 365-366.

¹⁰⁰ John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York, 2009), pp. 277-278.

¹⁰¹ President Wilson to the Secretary of State, 3 April 1915, The United States Department of State/ *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes)*, Vol. 1, p. 368.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 372.

acknowledging that if the letter was too harsh it could be seen as American support for Germany's enemies, leading to German hostility and possibly war.¹⁰³

True to Wilson's personal style he mulled over his options for several weeks before he landed on what he felt was the best approach. On 22 April he directed Lansing to draft a new note that was less harsh, but still firm.¹⁰⁴ The key to this new note was, much like Lansing's original draft, focusing on the rights of neutrals, the violations of international law, and pushing Germany to adhere to the laws of visit and search.¹⁰⁵ If Germany had done as asked there would have been no further issues; they would be acting in the same manner as the British in regards to neutral merchant shipping, and the Wilson administration recognized that if the belligerents acted in the same manner, America could treat them the same.

Before the United States had a chance to send this letter, reports arrived that on 29 April a German Plane had bombed the American steamship *Cushing* with no loss of life. And then on 1 May, the *Gulflight* became the second U.S. flagged ship to be attacked by German forces. While these events caused a stir amongst some members of Wilson's cabinet, the *Cushing* incident did not involve the loss of life, and in the case of the *Gulflight*, the ship had failed to sink and was travelling with British trawlers making it hard to protest. Regardless of the fact that an American flagged ships had been

¹⁰³ Letter from The Counsellor for the Department of State (Lansing) to the Secretary of State, 5 April 1915, The United States Department of State/ *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes)*, Vol. 1, pp. 369-370.

¹⁰⁴ President Wilson to the Secretary of State, 22 April 1915, The United States Department of State/ *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes)*, Vol. 1, pp. 377-378.

¹⁰⁵ President Wilson to the Secretary of State, 22 April 1915, The United States Department of State/ *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes)*, Vol. 1, pp. 377-378.

attacked, the lack of injuries forced Wilson and his advisors to virtually ignore this incident as a case for protest.¹⁰⁶

While still debating the specifics of the protest letter, and whether or not the incidents of the *Cushing* and *Gulflight* should be included or dealt with separately, news arrived that the British luxury liner *Lusitania* had been sunk with the loss of 1,198 lives, 128 of which were American. U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain Walter Page and presidential advisor Edward House believed that the incident would usher the United States into the war, and, accordingly, both Page and House – whom the president had sent to Europe for a third time to attempt to bring the warring sides to some type of peace agreement – sent notes to the President declaring that if the United States wanted to maintain the respect of the world it would have to declare war; if Wilson were to refrain from acting, he would have ‘no voice or influence in settling the war nor in what follows for a long time to come.’¹⁰⁷ Page’s comment was designed to strike a chord with the president. He knew how desperately Wilson wanted to be the deciding voice in bringing the war to an end and the crafting of a lasting peace.

House’s role in the stance the United States was to take in this matter draws deeply on the timing and work of Sir Edward Grey. As noted earlier, House was in London at the time of the German declaration of a war zone and during the sinking of the *Falaba*, *Cushing*, *Gulflight*, and *Lusitania*. Immediately upon his arrival in London in January 1915, House met with Grey and spent the next three and a half hours discussing everything about the war from the challenges of the Allies with the European neutrals, to Russia’s transportation problems, to the expectations and demands of all

¹⁰⁶ Letter from The Counsellor for the Department of State (Lansing) to the Secretary of State, 1 May 1915, The United States Department of State/ *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920 (in two volumes)*, Vol. 1, pp. 381-382.

¹⁰⁷ The Ambassador in Great Britain (Page) to the Secretary of State, 8 May 1915, United States Department of State/ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 385-386.

the allied nations. They even exchanged gifts, House giving Grey a book that Wilson had written, and Grey returning the favour with a book he authored on angling. Grey continued the course he had begun during his previous meetings with House – he listened carefully, and spoke with House as if they were old friends simply catching up on things. As had happened before, House was deeply impressed with Grey, later commenting on Grey’s ‘frankness’ and lack of reservation during the discussion, even going so far as to compare it to the type of conversation he had with Wilson. Grey reinforced House’s perception of him by stating that while he was a government official of a nation at war he had been ‘talking...like a neutral.’¹⁰⁸

Wilson was now placed in a situation where he would have to reconcile his desire to maintain U.S. neutrality with his desire to mediate an end to the war. It is at this point that the outline created by Wilson and Lansing on what the 10 February letter and its ‘strict accountability’ phrase meant becomes crucial in understanding the American diplomatic reaction to the German submarine war and the British blockade.

Despite the outrage expressed by Page and House; despite the outrage expressed by the American east coast press; and despite the outrage expressed by the British press, the outline created, but not sent, due to the *Falaba* case was the driving force behind Wilson’s reaction to the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Leaders in the United States as well as among the belligerent nations misinterpreted the time it took Wilson to determine the proper response to the sinking of the *Falaba*. Ross Gregory indicates in *Walter Hines Page: Ambassador to the Court of St. James’s*, that American representatives abroad were being reminded that ‘Wilson had not protested the *Falaba* and *Gulflight*.’¹⁰⁹ Ross A Kennedy notes that on the home front Wilson was being attacked by former president

¹⁰⁸ Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (Boston: 1926-28), 4 volumes, vol. I, pp. 363-4.; Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years* (London, 1928), 3 volumes, vol. III, pp. 58-59.

¹⁰⁹ Ross Gregory, *Walter Hines Page: Ambassador to the Court of St. James’s* (Lexington, 1970), p. 97.

Teddy Roosevelt and Senator Elihu Root for ‘failing to respond to Germany’s initial attacks’ and for issuing ‘ultimatums that fail to ultimate.’¹¹⁰

The impact of the *Lusitania* was a mix of intense emotions fanned by the eastern press and British propagandists. Ross Gregory observes that ‘the reaction to the sinking of the *Lusitania* was so intense that [Wilson] had no choice but to do something’.¹¹¹ Reinhard Doerries remarks that ‘America’s entry into the war on the side of the Entente had become a serious possibility.’¹¹² These two historians base their prognosis of potential American belligerency on the writings from the eastern press, and media outlets controlled by the British propaganda machine of the time. And although members of Wilson’s cabinet, in particular Walter Page and Edward House, expressed outrage, the President had effectively secluded himself from the emotion while he continued to focus on the outline begun after the sinking of the *Falaba*.¹¹³ Additionally, it must be noted that the majority of Americans outside of the east coast cared little for news about the *Lusitania* or of its importance; with the *Cleveland Press* going so far as to downplay the incident as early as 10 May 1915.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the *San Francisco Chronicle* described the sinking as Germany’s ‘largest individual triumph in the war on British Commerce.’¹¹⁵

Prior to the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and in an attempt to ease the possibility of a conflict with the United States, Ambassador Bernstorff had taken the unusual step of

¹¹⁰ Ross A Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America’s Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, 2009), p. 111.

¹¹¹ Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971), p. 60.

¹¹² Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989), p. 97.

¹¹³ Report of Observations made on tour in the United States (East and Middle-West), G.M. Trevelyan to Foreign Office 22 May 1915, FO 371/2558, 1915, Political, Miscellaneous General (News) Files 21874-31834.

¹¹⁴ Dale E. Zacher, *The Scripps Newspapers Go to War, 1914-18* (Urbana, 2008), p. 61.

¹¹⁵ Consideration and Outline of Policies, 11 July 1915, Robert Lansing Papers, 1914-1920, Private Memoranda (Typed Copy) DM15347, Reel 1 (Lansing Diary Blue Boxed Box2: Confidential Memoranda and Notes form 15 April 1915-30 December 1918, Inclusive); also noted in, Stewart Halsey Ross, *Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918* (Jefferson, 1996), p.126.

publishing a notice in major American newspapers warning American citizens about the risk involved in travelling on British and allied ships in the war zone. Reinhard Doerries describes this attempt by Germany to avoid conflict with the United States as inconsequential due to the lack of attention paid by the Wilson administration up to that point.¹¹⁶ But the notification is significant in that it is directly related to the German mission in the United States; to clarify the German position and maintain American neutrality in the war. Bernstorff substantiates this in his memoirs when he notes that the warning was motivated by both policy and humanity, two ideas that were sure to grab the attention of President Wilson.¹¹⁷

In the wake of the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the German government quickly moved to placate the U.S. government. On 9 May, Bethmann sought and received assurances from the Kaiser that neutral shipping would be spared in the submarine war on Britain's commerce.¹¹⁸ Later that same day, U.S. ambassador Gerard was handed a circular that Bethmann had sent to all neutral governments, calling the attack a regretful mistake and contrary to the instructions repeatedly given to German submarines; furthermore, the circular stated that upon investigation of the facts, Germany would compensate those harmed.¹¹⁹ The next day Ambassador Bernstorff also made a point of calling on the State Department to express his 'deep regret...to the loss of the so many American lives.'¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989), pp. 83-84.

¹¹⁷ Johann Heinrich Graf von Bernstorff, *My Three Years in America* (New York, 1920), pp. 137-139.

¹¹⁸ Walter Görlitz, ed., *The Kaiser and His Court: The Diaries, Note Books and Letters of Admiral Georg Alexander Von Müller, Chief of the Naval Cabinet, 1914-1918*, translated by Mervyn Savill (New York, 1961), p. 77.

¹¹⁹ The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 9 May 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 387-388.

¹²⁰ Memorandum by the Secretary of State, 10 May 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, p. 387.

The idea that the note of 10 February hindered the president's ability to manoeuvre diplomatically, as proposed by Ross Kennedy, does not take into account the meaning of the 'strict accountability' phrase.¹²¹ As noted earlier, while most people outside of Wilson's cabinet misunderstood this phrase to mean 'war' as the only option, inside the cabinet the definition had become more clear. At the time of the *Lusitania's* sinking, Wilson and his advisors had been working for almost three months to create a clarifying outline on this point. Events had simply outpaced their ability to put their thoughts into a cohesive, understandable policy.

What did hinder the president's abilities was the British propaganda. From very early in the war the British had been inundating Americans with messages designed to turn public opinion firmly against Germany by demonizing Germans as uncivilized, brutal Huns, and the sinking of the *Lusitania* benefited all areas of British propaganda.¹²² It is true that most Germans supported the sinking of ships coming from the United States to Britain and France because it was well known that munitions were being shipped from America, but, as Ross Gregory notes, while Bethmann understood the popularity of the sinking, he was deft enough to understand the potential ramifications associated with provoking the United States.¹²³ Karl Birnbaum, in support of this point, argues that in May 1915, Germany's greatest fear concerning the United States was not its military, but that a declaration of war by the world's most powerful neutral would lead to other neutrals joining the Entente as well.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, 2009), p. 82.

¹²² Stewart Halsey Ross, *Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918* (Jefferson, 1996), p.18; H.C. Peterson, *Propaganda For War: The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Norman, 1939), p. 125.

¹²³ Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971), p. 64.

¹²⁴ Karl Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), pp. 27-28.

True to form, and with his closest advisor in London, Wilson secluded himself from the outside world for three days as he contemplated his response.¹²⁵ When Wilson finally emerged from his self-induced sabbatical on 11 May, he shared a draft of a diplomatic note he had written with his cabinet. Wilson's note was firm in its recounting of the earlier note of 10 February, and events between the two countries at sea including the attacks on the *Falaba*, *Cushing*, *Gulflight*, as well as the *Lusitania*, and called for Germany to pay reparations, as well as taking steps to ensure that future incidents of this same kind did not occur.¹²⁶

When the final letter was delivered to German Foreign Minister Jagow on 13 May, it was the culmination of months of thought and policy work by Wilson and his advisors. In the letter, Wilson reiterated his point that the United States simply did not accept Germany's claim that British measures forced them to bypass the visit and search procedures, internationally recognized as legitimate rules of naval warfare, and as a result they would be expected to disavow the actions of the submarine commanders at fault.¹²⁷ The note continued along the exact phrasing used by Wilson in his draft, calling for the payment of reparations and for the German government to take the actions necessary to ensure that there would be no further incidents of this type.¹²⁸

Despite the internal bickering that occurred between Lansing and Bryan, and despite the disagreement over the tone of the letter, the Wilson administration had finally and clearly outlined the policy by which the United States would wage its neutrality against the pressures of submarine warfare – that the submarine issue was a diplomatic question, and not a military matter.

¹²⁵ G.M. Trevelyan to Grey, 22 May 1915, FO 371/2558, 1915 Political, Miscellaneous General (News) Files 21874-31834, UK National Archives.

¹²⁶ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Germany (Gerard), 13 May 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 393-396.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Bethmann did not immediately respond to Wilson's note of 13 May, employing instead the well-used diplomatic tactic of dragging out the discussions and the wrangling over the sinking of the ship, payments of reparations, and disavowing the actions that would last well into the summer. Through frequent meetings with representatives of the German Foreign Office, particularly Jagow and Zimmerman, U.S. Ambassador Gerard kept the Wilson administration abreast of the thoughts and discussions of the German leadership and the German people with reports detailing the German position.¹²⁹ Again, Bethmann was using the tactic of discussion and friendship in an attempt to convey the German position to Wilson and his advisors to draw out the debate without making an official statement. Reassurance was given to Bethmann about the sternness of the note when Zimmerman passed on information that U.S. Secretary of State Bryan had said that the note was for public consumption only.¹³⁰ The fact that Bryan later denied the conversation is inconsequential to the German diplomatic position.¹³¹ Bethmann had the reassurance he needed via a non-official conversation which he knew Americans put more faith in.

When the British steamer *Arabic* was sunk on 19 August 1915, the German Foreign Office and the U.S. Secretary of State's office were still in negotiations over the sinking of the *Lusitania*. The sinking of the *Arabic* threw a kink in the negotiations in large part because the ship was heading to the United States and therefore could not have been carrying contraband or supplies for Britain. But the question for leaders on both sides of the Atlantic would be if – despite earlier German assurances that neutral

¹²⁹ The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 15 May 1915; 17 May 1915; 18 May 1915; 18 June 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 396, 398, 400, 442, 443.

¹³⁰ The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 22 May 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, p. 407.

¹³¹ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Germany (Gerard), 24 May 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, p. 407.

shipping would be spared from submarine attacks – the United States would continue with paper protests only. Almost immediately, Bernstorff issued a request to Bryan for the U.S. government to hold off on any decisions until all information was available.¹³² This would allow Germany to gauge the mood of the American leaders and public as they moved forward with their plans for submarine war.

According to the diaries of Admiral Müller, Chief of the Naval Cabinet as compiled by Walter Görlitz, there was ‘great anxiety’ over American actions, so much so, that after a meeting between the Kaiser, Bethmann, and Tirpitz, the decision was made to send a mollifying note to the United States.¹³³ While the Foreign Office was busy crafting its note to the United States it also continued its work on the personal level. In a series of meetings between Gerard and Jagow, the Foreign Minister reiterated that if the attack had occurred as reported it was contrary to instructions issued by the Kaiser.¹³⁴ Ambassador Gerard was also made privy to the behind-the-scenes fight between Tirpitz and Bethmann over the direction the submarine war would take. The leaking of this internal battle, done by Jagow, assisted in the Foreign Offices attempts to draw out negotiations over the use of the submarine. As Gerard passed this information on to Bryan, Lansing, and the rest of the presidential advisors, he was unintentionally buying time for Bethmann’s diplomacy to work. On 30 August 1915, two days before Germany issued its official statement regarding the sinking of the *Arabic*, Gerard was notified that Germany was preparing to express regret and offer reparations.¹³⁵ As was

¹³² The German Ambassador (Bernstorff) to the Secretary of State, 24 August 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, p. 524.

¹³³ *The Kaiser and His Court: The Diaries, Note Books and Letters of Admiral Georg Alexander von Müller, Chief of the Naval Cabinet 1914-1918*, ed. Walter Görlitz (New York, 1959), p. 102.

¹³⁴ The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 24 August 1915; 25 August 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 526-527.

¹³⁵ Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 30 August 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, p. 529.

then expected in the White House, on 1 September 1915, German Ambassador Bernstorff delivered the official German note that would become known as the 'Arabic Pledge'. The note simply restated the instructions given to submarine commanders after the *Lusitania* was sunk; that liners would not be sunk without warning and without safety being provided for non-combatants provided the liners do not attempt to escape or resist.¹³⁶ Ross Gregory sees this episode as a diplomatic victory for President Wilson on the evidence that Germany backed away from unrestricted submarine warfare.¹³⁷ But taken in the context of the overall diplomatic and military situation, the victory clearly belongs to Bethmann. Germany would still be using submarines to blockade the British coast; they could still sink liners carrying contraband, and they could still sink liners that resisted search and seizure visits by submarines. Add to the equation that by February 1915 German submarine commanders had found that they had more success sinking ships while 'operating under international prize rules' and the concessions made by Germany in the 'Arabic Pledge' prove to be no concessions at all.¹³⁸

This is not to say that the fear of a break with the United States due to submarine warfare had disappeared from Bethmann's mind. In early March the Chancellor was still standing firm on the subject despite pressure from Falkenhayn, Holtzendorff, and Tirpitz.¹³⁹ Within the ranks of German leadership the fight over how the submarine was to be used would continue into late 1916, claiming Admiral Tirpitz and Bethmann Hollweg as casualties along the way.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ The German Ambassador (Bernstorff) to the Secretary of State, 1 September 1915, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, Supplement, The World War*. Part II: Neutral Rights, pp. 530-531.

¹³⁷ Ross Gregory, *The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War* (New York, 1971), p. 69.

¹³⁸ Karl Lautenschlager, 'The Submarine in Naval Warfare, 1901-2001', *International Security*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Winter, 1986-1987), p. 111.

¹³⁹ Bethmann Hollweg to Jagow, 5 March 1916, Theobald v. Bethmann Hollweg – N. 1549 (Nr. 342-1), Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

¹⁴⁰ Bethmann Hollweg to Jagow, 5 March 1916, Theobald v. Bethmann Hollweg – N. 1549 (Nr. 342-1), Bundesarchiv Koblenz; Michael Epkenhans, *Tirpitz: Architect of the German High Seas Fleet*, (Washington D.C., 2008), p. 68.

When the French steamer *Sussex* was sunk in the English Channel on 25 March 1916, it appeared that submarine activity would once again be the catalyst for a break in relations between Germany and the United States. The so called crisis that followed the sinking of the *Sussex* revolved around the fact that the ship had been sunk without warning and its passengers had not been provided for, leading many in the Allied and neutral camps to the conclusion that the German's had violated their earlier 'Arabic pledge'.¹⁴¹

The diplomatic exchange that followed resembled earlier exchanges in that the United States protested on 18 April 1916 by decreeing that unless Germany agreed to the 'abandonment of its present methods of submarine warfare' the U.S. would break relations.¹⁴² The ultimatum and the subsequent German decision to again restrict submarine warfare, has been seen by historians such as Arthur S. Link and John Milton Cooper as another diplomatic victory by Wilson.¹⁴³

On 4 May 1916, Germany responded to Wilson's letter essentially reaffirming the 'Arabic pledge' and on 8 May 1916 a second letter was sent apologizing for the attack on the *Sussex*.¹⁴⁴ Despite the apparent back-sliding by Germany on its use of submarines, Bethmann Hollweg had once again been able to mitigate the potential damage to German-American relations and maintain the navy's use of the submarine simply by following the rules initially laid down by Wilson in his note of 10 February 1915 – repudiation of the sinking and reparations.

¹⁴¹ Armin Rappaport, *The British Press and Wilsonian Neutrality* (Stanford, 1951), p. 85.

¹⁴² The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Germany (Gerard), 18 April 1916, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1916, Supplement, The World War*, p. 234.

¹⁴³ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson The Diplomatist: A Look At His Major Foreign Policies* (Baltimore, 1957), pp. 47-48; John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York, 2009), p. 325.

¹⁴⁴ The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 4 May 1916, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1916, Supplement, The World War*, p. 257; The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 8 May 1916, United States Department of State/*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1916, Supplement, The World War*, pp. 265-266.

Although the submarine issue would continue to be a sticking point in the relations between Germany and the United States during the war, with other incidents causing friction from time to time, German diplomacy had achieved a measure of success. Submarine warfare would continue, albeit with restrictions, but it would continue nonetheless to attack the lifeline of the British war effort.

Conclusion

Though the *Arabic* and *Sussex* pledges far from settled the issue of submarine warfare between the United States and Germany, the two nations now had a policy on which to base their future diplomacy. Having placed Tirpitz as the public face of the pro-submarine officials, Bethmann could deflect diplomatic criticism from the United States while at the same time appeasing his fellow countrymen who wanted to put the weapon to use. Using Tirpitz to sound out the United States on the issue allowed Bethmann the best chance to direct the policies the submarines would operate under, and therefore mitigate the diplomatic damage that could occur.

The German Foreign Office's campaign to frame the use of the submarine on moral grounds, before the proclamation was officially made, effectively stunted the U. S. response, as evidenced in Lansing's acknowledgment of the 'belligerent necessity' as well as the strategy developed by the Wilson administration towards submarine warfare.

While fault could be found in the length of time Wilson took to respond to the initial sinking of passenger liners, the importance of his action lies in the misunderstanding of the 'strict accountability' phrase. Yes, the note of 10 February 1915 took a more firm line against Germany than had previously been taken towards Great Britain, and yes, the first *Lusitania* note was also firm as were the *Arabic* and *Sussex* notes, but the message was clear – the United States would defend the right of freedom of the seas from all violations. But both notes fell well short of a direct threat

of war. Lansing, at most, called for the breaking of diplomatic ties with Germany and Wilson threatened it in his *Sussex* letter of 18 April 1916, but as Wilson was to prove in 1917 this was by no means an automatic invitation to declare war. Until the sinking of the *Lusitania* no one outside of Wilson's cabinet had any idea what the phrase really meant, but as the negotiations with Germany proved, the phrase meant only repudiation and reparation.

Due to military concerns Bethmann was right to continue to worry about provoking the United States, but the time between American deaths on the seas and the American entry into the war indicates that Gerard's initial reaction to Zimmerman concerning the U.S. response to submarine warfare was spot on. The United States would indeed protest each incident at sea, but diplomatically there was very little in the way of direct threats of war until well after diplomatic relations were broken.

To this point, this dissertation has established the diplomatic tactics that both Britain and Germany used with the United States. It has also revealed that Britain used its diplomacy to secure American acquiescence to their blockade of Germany. This chapter has analysed a variety of sources concerning German diplomatic tactics as they gained American diplomatic acquiescence for their use of the submarine. This chapter has established that Bethmann's role in maintaining American neutrality was greater than had been previously recognized by historians such as Roger Chickering. The evidence supplied in this chapter reveals that the Chancellor was able to gain an understanding for America's feelings on submarine warfare, and in doing so, prepare the Foreign Office to calm U.S. concerns.

By using U.S. and German archives this dissertation has established that Bethmann was successful and dulling American outrage by framing the submarine issue before any attacks on American shipping occurred. What has also been clarified was the

intention of the American notes protesting the sinking of the *Lusitania*, *Sussex*, and *Arabic*. Emotions may have been running high among Wilson and his advisors but, as this chapter has demonstrated, Bethmann was able to ensure that the American reaction would consist primarily of protests and verbosity mainly for public consumption.

The following chapter will take what appears to be a step back to discuss the animosity between the United States and Mexico, but in doing so it will establish the basis for German diplomatic discourse with Mexico and in particular the decision to offer an alliance between the two countries.

Chapter Four

Diplomatic Acquisition via Mexico

Mexico is rarely viewed as having a role to play in First World War diplomacy, this chapter seeks to change that attitude. The role Mexican-American relations played in creating an atmosphere of distrust and therefore a place that Germany could use her diplomacy to influence the wars outcome cannot be over-estimated. In chapter one this dissertation established that German diplomacy was based on the Bismarckian tradition of exploiting opponents' weakness in order to gain the advantage. This chapter focuses on the diplomatic tensions between the United States and Mexico to reveal the reasoning behind the German decision to offer an alliance to Mexico.

The history of Mexican-American relations is long and violent. The secession of Texas in 1836 had left enough bad feelings between the two nations that they went to war in 1846. That Mexican-American conflict led to the United States gaining the present day territories of New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, and parts of Colorado, nearly one-third of Mexico's territory, as the spoils of war. Disorder along the U.S.-Mexican border in the late 1870s/early 1880s led many American leaders to call for intervention, followed by more than twenty instances of American troops pursuing Mexican bandits into Mexican territory.¹ U. S. concerns over the stability of its southern neighbour eventually led it to assist in the overthrow of French installed dictator Maximilian and the instillation of the dictator Porfirio Díaz.²

During the thirty years Díaz led Mexico, relations between the two countries became comparatively good, thanks in large part to Díaz's policy of encouraging foreign investment in order to bring Mexico into the world economy.³ It was in this

¹ Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1964), p. 392.

² Robert D. Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900* (New York, 2002), p. 51.

³ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006), p. 86.

period that the United States was joined by the British, Germans and other European nations in investing in Mexico, particularly in railroads and oil.

When Francisco Madero overthrew Díaz in 1910 he continued his predecessor's policies of bringing in foreign investors, while attempting to end the disparity between rich and poor created by these same policies.⁴ Even though Madero attempted to undo the systems of injustice in Mexico he was not able to quell the indignations of the Mexican people and was himself overthrown and eventually murdered in early 1913. The man that led this bloody coup was Madero's trusted General, Victoriano Huerta.

The murder of Madero occurred three weeks before Woodrow Wilson took office. Wilson was so disgusted by the unsavoury circumstances of Huerta's rise to power that he refused to recognize the legitimacy of the regime.⁵ The battle between Wilson and Huerta over the Mexican presidency hinged not only on Wilson's outrage over Madero's murder, but also on American fears of European interference in Mexican affairs, particularly from the British and Germans.⁶

Wilson's decision to force Huerta out led to rising anti-Americanism in Mexico, and to deepening fears of European intrigue by Wilson and his advisors. America's fear of European influence in Mexico was justified, and in the run up to American entry into the First World War Germany, in particular, was attempting to exploit the fault lines in Mexican-American relations in order to solidify their position militarily as they attempted to bring the war to a successful conclusion. The German decision, led by Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmermann, to offer an alliance to Mexico was based on

⁴ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006), p. 86; Robert D. Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900* (New York, 2002), p. 52.

⁵ Secretary of State to the American Ambassador to Brazil, 31 May 1913, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the president to Congress, 2 December 1913, p. 806.

⁶ Peter Calvert, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1914* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 19; Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand* (New Haven, 2006), pp. 86-88.

standard European diplomatic practice of alliances based on need, honour, and a perception that countries desired additional territory.

With the exception of Rodney Carlisle's *Sovereignty At Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry Into World War I*, there is almost universal agreement among historians that the Zimmermann telegram was a determining factor in Wilson's decision to break relations with Germany and eventually ask for a declaration of war.⁷ An excellent and in depth look at how Britain, Germany and the United States were involved in the decision and issues concerning the Mexican revolution is *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States and the Mexican Revolution* by Friedrich Katz, and while it does come the closest to covering the issues that brought about Zimmermann's decision to create an alliance with Mexico, it does not go into great detail about how this diplomacy affected the entry of the United States into the First World War.⁸

The intent of this chapter is to clarify the role Wilson's policies towards Mexico played in inducing Germany into offering the prospect of a secret alliance if the United States broke neutrality and entered the war. This will be done by comparing the issues created by Wilson's Mexican policy and German diplomatic objectives in relation to the United States. The German perception of how Mexico was responding to American interference in their internal matters is crucial to understanding Zimmerman's decision to send his famous telegram and his equally famed decision to not deny responsibility for it when it became public.

⁷ Rodney Carlisle, *Sovereignty At Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry Into World War I* (Gainesville, 2009); Some examples of historians that view the Zimmerman telegram as the determining factor include, Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917*(Cambridge, 1963); Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Zimmermann Telegram* (New York, 1958); John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson: Profiles in Power* (London, 2002); John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson, A Biography* (New York, 2009).

⁸ Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, 1981).

To effectively accomplish this, it is necessary to examine Wilson's policy on the issue of the Mexican presidency, the fiasco at Veracruz, and the decision to send U.S. troops into Mexican territory. Once the background events are established this chapter will discuss the diplomatic reaction by Germany to these events and how it led to the proposal of an alliance between Mexico and Germany. In doing so this chapter will specifically cover the German diplomacy concerning support of the presidency of Victoriano Huerta, and American reactions to this; the German reactions and diplomacy concerning Pershing's punitive expedition into Mexico to capture Pancho Villa; and finally, how this culminated in German Foreign Minister Zimmermann's decision to send his telegram offering an alliance to Mexico in case of war with the United States over submarine attacks.

Entering the Fray

As Laura Garcés has noted, despite the fact that Mexican leaders may have seen the investment by European nations in their country as a means of bringing the country on par with the great nations of the world, the Wilson administration saw it as a violation of the Monroe Doctrine.⁹ Garcés argues that Wilson's cabinet felt that Mexico was doing the bidding of European nations who were fostering anti-American feelings for economic gain. Because Wilson believed that the United States had a duty and a right to warn off the European agitators by invoking the Monroe Doctrine, he fashioned a diplomatic memo on 24 October 1913 that enumerated the right of the United States to ensure that Mexico 'maintained...independence of foreign financial power.'¹⁰

By positioning himself as a guardian of the Monroe Doctrine, Wilson hoped to involve the United States in the internal matters of Mexico without alienating the

⁹ Laura Garcés 'The German Challenge to the Monroe Doctrine in Mexico, 1917', in *Confrontation and Cooperation: Germany and the United States in the Era of World War I, 1900-1924*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schröder (Providence, 1993), pp. 284-285.

¹⁰ Woodrow Wilson draft diplomatic note, 24 October 1913, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur S. Link et al, 69vols. Princeton University, 1966-1994.

majority of Americans who were generally apathetic to the whole episode. Wilson eventually decided against sending this diplomatic note, but its theme underlines Wilson's and his administration's belief that the problems in Mexico were the machinations of European powers and therefore a threat to American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1913 the European country that Wilson and his advisors felt was most threatening to the predominance of the Monroe Doctrine was Great Britain.¹¹ According to Mark Gilderhus, Wilson viewed the extent of Britain's connection with Mexican President Huerta as making him 'a creature of British imperialism.'¹² With controversy between the United States and Great Britain over the Panama Tolls issue, and now with Britain's decision to recognize Huerta, Wilson assumed British economic interests had trumped their moral indignation concerning the circumstances of Huerta's rise to power. Sir Edward Grey pitted Wilson's desire to see Huerta removed from power with congress' desire to charge Britain a higher toll when using the newly completed Panama Canal. This did not do much to dampen the idea that European powers still had designs on Mexico. Just as importantly it did nothing to change the effect Wilson's policy was to have on decisions made in Berlin regarding Mexico.

To an extent, Germany, along with Britain, did have designs on Mexico dating since the turn of the century. Warren Schiff notes that the German Minister Edmund Freiherr von Heyking was sent to Mexico with direct instructions from the Kaiser to strengthen Díaz, and shortly thereafter the Germany military began assisting in the

¹¹ Laura Garcés 'The German Challenge to the Monroe Doctrine in Mexico, 1917' in, *Confrontation and Cooperation: Germany and the United States in the Era of World War I, 1900-1924*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schröder (Providence, 1993), pp. 284-285; Frederick S. Calhoun, *Power and Principle: Armed Intervention in Wilsonian Foreign Policy* (Kent State University Press, 1986), p. 42.

¹² Mark T. Gilderhus, 'Revolution, War, and Expansion: Woodrow Wilson in Latin America', in *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson*, ed. John Milton Cooper Jr. (Washington D.C., 2008), p. 171.

modernization of the Mexican military's weapons and tactics.¹³ Germany, it seemed, saw the economic impact Mexico could have on the German armaments industry and they were prepared to take full advantage. Even as Wilson was in negotiations with Britain to withdraw their recognition of Huerta he was presented with a series of choices that would lead Germany to believe that Mexico would make a reasonable counter-weight if the United States were ever to pose a threat.

On 9 April 1914 a small group of American sailors were arrested in the Mexican port city of Tampico, creating the opportunity for a diplomatic firestorm. Wilson seized upon the arrests to place pressure on Huerta despite the quick decision of the Mexican commander to release the Americans and apologize. But, as Frederick Calhoun explains, it was not so much the arrest of U.S. sailors that touched off events as it was Admiral Henry T. Mayo's (the senior officer at Tampico) perception of the arrest as a national insult worthy of a twenty-one gun salute.¹⁴ The Admiral dutifully notified the Secretary of State's office of his demands and gained the full support of both Secretary Bryan and President Wilson.¹⁵ Wilson's support, according to Mark Benbow, came down to the president being mentally spent by the death of his wife and simply 'looking for a fight.'¹⁶ Following the form that he would use in the coming years, Wilson sent diplomatic letter after letter, and threatened armed intervention in an attempt to convince Huerta to give the salute. Receiving no satisfactory response (insult as Huerta agreed to give the salute only if the United States did that same for the Mexican flag),

¹³ Warren Schiff, 'German Military Penetration into Mexico During the Late Díaz Period', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 39 (1959), pp. 568-569.

¹⁴ Frederick S. Calhoun, *Power and Principle: Armed Intervention in Wilsonian Foreign Policy* (Kent State, 1986), p. 45; Admiral Mayo to General Zaragoza, 9 April 1914, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 8 December 1914, pp. 448-449.

¹⁵ The Secretary of State to Chargé O'Shaughnessy, 11 April 1914, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 8 December 1914, p. 452.

¹⁶ Mark Benbow, *Leading Them to the Promised Land: Woodrow Wilson, Covenant Theology, and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1915* (Kent, 2010), p. 62.

on 20 April 1914 President Wilson informed both houses of Congress about the situation in Mexico asking for their approval to use the U.S. military 'in such ways and to such an extent as may be necessary to obtain from General Huerta...the fullest recognition of the rights and dignity of the United States.'¹⁷ Congress granted Wilson the power to 'force a showdown.'¹⁸

World events developed further while Wilson and Huerta argued over the demand of a salute. In particular, a shipment of weapons that Huerta had ordered in early 1914 moved ever closer to the port of Veracruz during the incident at Tampico.¹⁹ The weapons were being carried on the *Ypiranga*, a ship owned by the German shipping firm the Hamburg-America-Lines. Wilson and his advisors were certain that Mexico was falling prey to European powers, and although Britain was Wilson's initial worry in Mexico, Germany had a recent history of interfering in which the the U.S. was involved: Samoa, Philippines, and Cuba. With weapons arriving on a German ship from a German port, it seemed that Germany was involving itself once again in American affairs by shipping weapons to a Mexican leader whom the United States wanted to oust.

Late in the evening of 20 April 1914, after Wilson had been granted the authority to utilize U.S. forces as he saw fit, American Consul Canada relayed a message to Secretary of State Bryan about the *Ypiranga*, its cargo, and its imminent

¹⁷ Address of the President delivered at a joint session of the two Houses of Congress, 20 April 1914, on 'The Situation in our dealings with General Victoriano Huerta at Mexico City', United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 8 December 1914, pp. 474-476.

¹⁸ Mark T. Gilderhus, 'Revolution, War, and Expansion: Woodrow Wilson in Latin America', in *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War, and Peace*, ed. John Milton Cooper Jr. (Washington, D.C., 2008), p. 172.

¹⁹ Thomas Baecker, 'The Arms of the Ypiranga: The German Side', *The Americas* 30 (1973), p. 2.

arrival at Veracruz.²⁰ Orders went out for U.S. troops to seize the customs house in Veracruz in an attempt to keep the weapons from reaching Huerta.²¹

The Wilson administration confused the name of the ship with the seller of arms, which led to further misunderstandings in future years. Wilson's decision to seize the Veracruz customs house came at a very high toll, not only in lives lost but in the nationalistic backlash the action created.²²

The overwhelming condemnation by Mexicans of Wilson's intervention and attack on Veracruz included Huerta, his enemies, and peasants, adding weight to the view emerging in Germany of Mexican hostility towards the United States. .²³ This would be the first in a series of events that would eventually give German leaders cause to see Mexico as a potential ally should war with the United States become unavoidable. The occupation of Veracruz also led to concern in Britain where the Foreign Office deemed Wilson's policy in Mexico as being 'quite careless' and lacking in 'responsibility or humanity.'²⁴

On 15 July 1914 Huerta's opponents forced him to resign and go into exile in Spain. Venustiano Carranza, the leader of the Constitutionalists (responsible for Huerta's downfall) assumed the presidency which, for the time being, gave Wilson a

²⁰ Consul Canada to the Secretary of State, 20 April 1914, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 8 December 1914, p. 477.

²¹ The Secretary of State to Consul Canada, 21 April 1914, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 8 December 1914, p. 477.

²² Accounts put the number of Mexican dead somewhere between 152 and 175 dead and upwards of 250 wounded, and American losses of 17 dead and 61 wounded. John Milton Cooper Jr., *Woodrow Wilson, A Biography* (New York, 2009), p. 243.

²³ John Milton Cooper Jr., 'Making a Case for Wilson', in *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson*, ed. John Milton Cooper Jr. (Washington D.C., 2008), pp. 13-14; Mark T. Gilderhus, 'Revolution, War, and Expansion: Woodrow Wilson in Latin America', in *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson*, ed. John Milton Cooper Jr. (Washington D.C., 2008), p. 172.

²⁴ Letter to Wickham Steed from Arthur Willert, 11 May 1914, The Arthur Willert Papers, Correspondence, General Correspondence, Steed-Wrench; Incomplete; Illegible; Microfiche, Group No. 720, Series No. 1, Box No. 5, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

small sense of victory.²⁵ Unfortunately for Wilson that victory would be short lived as Carranza proved to be no more accommodating than Huerta. The Mexican revolution and indeed several revolutionary leaders refused to accept Carranza's rule well into 1920.²⁶

Punitive Measures

As the dispute between Wilson and Carranza continued the United States became ever more involved in Mexican affairs. The details of the dispute do not need to be covered here in much depth as a general understanding is all that is required to appreciate how the United States' involvement/interference in Mexico played out in the diplomacy between Germany and the United States.²⁷

Friedrich Katz argues that Wilson never really had any intention of allowing Carranza to maintain the Mexican presidency because the decision on who ruled Mexico was too 'momentous [a] choice' to leave to the Mexicans.²⁸ To that end, Wilson convened a Pan-American conference made up of the so called ABC nations of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile – along with other Latin American nations – to appoint a new government for Mexico.²⁹ According to a telegram from British Ambassador Spring Rice to Grey, Wilson's advisor Edward House had informed him that the plan was a means to 'pacify [Mexico] without using force.'³⁰ Carranza refused to accept the conference as legitimate and refused to hold elections, placing the United States in in

²⁵ Robert E. Quirk, *An Affair Of Honour: Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of Veracruz* (New York, 1962), p. 157.

²⁶ John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson: Profiles in Power* (London, 2002), p. 85.

²⁷ For a more in-depth analysis of Wilson's continued problems in Mexico see, Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 298-326, and Lloyd C. Gardner, *Safe for Democracy: The Anglo-American Response To Revolution, 1913-1923* (New York, 1984), pp. 45-69.

²⁸ Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 299-300.

²⁹ Note, 6 July 1915 and 7 July 1915, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 8 December 1914, p. 722.

³⁰ Telegram, Spring Rice to Grey, 3 August 1915, PRO 170, FO 800/85 Microfilm, UK National Archives.

the position of utilizing a secondary means of pacifying Mexico.³¹ The secondary means turned out to be the two other revolutionaries and former Constitutionals, Francisco 'Pancho' Villa and Emiliano Zapata, who, while not supporting each other also refused to support Carranza, with Villa in particular going so far as to curry favour with the Americans who he believed would help him gain power.³²

The Wilson administration's paranoia about European interference in Mexican affairs had not ceased during this time; it had increased. And while the Wilson administration saw the end of British influence in the end of the Huerta regime, they also feared that it was being replaced by German influence in the form of Carranza.³³

As early as 11 July 1915, Robert Lansing noted that he believed German agents had been to blame for America's problems in Mexico, and that in order to frustrate German plans it would be important to remain on friendly terms with Mexico even if that meant recognizing Carranza as President.³⁴ Recognizing Carranza could possibly have interfered with German plans but Wilson did not deem it as an acceptable course of action due to the way he deposed Madero and his belief that because Villa was seemingly more 'amenable to American influence' he was the right man for the job.³⁵ Reports reached the White House confirming Villa's attitude towards the United States

³¹ The Confidential Agent of the Constitutionalist Government of Mexico to the Secretary of State, 10 August 1915, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 8 December 1914, pp. 734-735.

³² General Villa to Messrs. Llorent and Bonillia, 5 August 1915, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 8 December 1914, p. 733.

³³ Laura Garcés, 'The German Challenge to the Monroe Doctrine in Mexico, 1917', in *Confrontation and Cooperation: Germany and the United States in the Era of World War I*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schröder (Providence, 1993), p. 285.

³⁴ Consideration and Outline of Policies, 11 July 1915, The Robert Lansing Papers, 1914-1920, Private Memoranda, DM 15347, Reel 1, Confidential Memoranda and notes from April 15, 1915-December 30, 1918, Inclusive, U.S. Library of Congress.

³⁵ Frederick S. Calhoun, *Power and Principle: Armed Intervention in Wilsonian Foreign Policy* (Kent State, 1986), p. 52.

and increasing Wilson's desire to support him, despite information that Villa was a 'flatterer' and 'unreformable'.³⁶

Additionally, February 1915 saw the reappearance of Huerta as a player in the Mexican revolution.³⁷ George J. Rausch correctly argues in 'The Exile and Death of Victoriano Huerta' that the fear of U.S. entry into the European war precipitated the German decision to take a heightened interest in Mexican-American affairs in order to divert U.S. attention.³⁸ Regardless of German attempts to keep their moves in Mexico quiet none of Wilson's advisers had any doubt that the move to re-establish Huerta in Mexico was backed by Germany.³⁹ According to Michael C. Meyer, Germany was also developing a relationship with Pancho Villa in the event that their gamble on returning Huerta to power proved fruitless.⁴⁰ This assumption is supported by the comments of the Mexican Minister to Great Britain, Covarrubias, who, in a conversation with U.S. Ambassador Page pointedly noted that there was a German among Villa's advisors.⁴¹

By 1915 Germany was in some way involved with three of the four contenders for the Mexican presidency – Huerta, Villa, and Carranza. This would not only indicate that Wilson and his advisers were correct to worry about German influence in Mexico but that Germany understood the importance of the role Mexico played in U.S. policy and how American preoccupation with their southern neighbour could influence U.S. policies toward the war in Europe.

It became apparent that Wilson, in supporting Villa, had backed the wrong man.

Pancho Villa may have seen the U.S. as the support needed to defeat Carranza's forces

³⁶ Unsigned Memo, Mexico: Political Situation, 1914, Clifford N. Carver Papers, Box 7, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University Library.

³⁷ 10 October 1915, Lansing Notes I, 1915-1916, Lansing Private Memoranda, Container 63, U.S. Library of Congress.

³⁸ George J. Rausch, Jr., 'The Exile and Death of Victoriano Huerta', *Hispanic-American Historical Review* 42 (1962), p. 134.

³⁹ Michael C. Meyer, 'The Mexican-German Conspiracy of 1915', *The Americas* 23 (1976), p. 85.

⁴⁰ Michael C. Meyer, 'The Mexican-German Conspiracy of 1915', *The Americas* 23 (1976), p. 88.

⁴¹ Unsigned Memo, Mexico: Political Situation, 1914, Clifford N. Carver Papers, Box 7, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University Library.

but by late 1915 Carranza's forces had unmistakably triumphed over Villa's army leaving him capable of no more than guerrilla raiding and with 'little chance of overpowering Carranza's forces.'⁴² To add to the administration's fear over Mexican affairs were the increasing reports of German involvement in Mexico.⁴³ Most worrisome at the time were the confidential letters coming from Italian Ambassador Collere to Lansing. While the content essentially amounted to hearsay it fuelled the worries of German influence in Mexico. The ambassador stated that the Italian representative in Mexico had been told that Carranza had made plans with Germany to recognize his government and have German citizens in Mexico fight alongside Mexican forces in the event of intervention by the United States.⁴⁴

This information, along with Villa's poor military performances led Wilson to pre-empt formal German recognition of the Mexican President by extending de facto recognition to Carranza on 19 October 1915 in an attempt to settle the situation.⁴⁵ The timing of the this settlement is important because at the time the United States was also heavily involved in negotiating with Germany over the sinking of the *Arabic* by a German submarine. With tensions between Germany and the United States high at the time, Wilson saw the need to assure himself the freedom to manoeuvre. Because Wilson saw the European war as needing his attention more than the troubles in Mexico it was an easier decision to push Mexico off by the de facto recognition of Carranza and thus the easing of tensions with Mexico. The administration's fear of German involvement in

⁴² John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson: Profiles in Power* (London, 2002), p. 85; Mark Benbow, *Leading Them to the Promised Land: Woodrow Wilson, Covenant Theology, and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1915* (Kent, 2010), p. 109.

⁴³ 8 October 1915, Edward Mandell House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-2, Vol. 3-4, p. 251, Yale University Library.

⁴⁴ Letter from Lansing to Wilson, 10 September 1915, Microfilm – M 743-1 Roll, Personal and Confidential Letters, From Secretary of State Lansing to President Wilson, 1915-1918, U.S. National Archives, Washington D.C.

⁴⁵ The Presidents Message transmitting to the Senate a Report of the Secretary of State, 17 February 1916, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 5 December 1916, pp. 469-470.

Mexico continued to pervade their thoughts as Robert Lansing noted that he believed Germany would try to involve the United States in military activity in Mexico in order to distract the United States from the war in Europe.⁴⁶

Villa's reaction to Wilson's recognition of Carranza was measured and swift. He began placing high taxes on American citizens and property in the area under his control and even murdered several American citizens in Mexico. Yet Villa had not given up hope of utilizing the United States as a means of gaining power. According to Frederick Calhoun, the means by which Villa hoped to utilize the United States was by inciting war between the United States and Mexico.⁴⁷ On 9 March 1916 Villa crossed the U.S.-Mexican border and attacked Columbus, New Mexico, killing several Americans. Wilson's cognisance of the distraction Mexico could provide to his desired work of mediating an end to the European conflict was a factor that Villa could not have foreseen.⁴⁸ That being said, the attack on Columbus could hardly have been a total surprise to the Wilson administration due to the fact that for over a year they had an agent travelling with Villa.⁴⁹ In addition, for three days prior to his cross-border attack they had kept constant tabs on Villa and his forces, knowing that he was crossing the border with ease and regularity.⁵⁰

Upon learning of Villa's attack on Columbus, Carranza immediately began laying the ground work to mitigate the damage and ensure the integrity of his government and Mexico. The Carranzista General in charge of the Chihuahua district

⁴⁶ 10 October 1915, Lansing Notes I, 1915-1916, Lansing Private Memoranda, Container 63, U.S. Library of Congress.

⁴⁷ Frederick S. Calhoun, *Power and Principle: Armed Intervention in Wilsonian Foreign Policy* (Kent State, 1986), p. 52.

⁴⁸ Letter to Wilson, 15 March 1916, Box 47, Folder 13, Joseph P. Tumulty Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁹ The Secretary of State to Special Agent Crothers, 12 January 1915, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 5 December 1916, p. 479.

⁵⁰ Collector Cobb to the Secretary of State, 6-8 March 1916; Special Agent Carothers to Secretary of State, 8 March 1916, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 5 December 1916, pp. 479-480.

informed the American Consul of the attack and requested that he inform the U.S. Government that they had sent substantial forces to intercept Villa, even expressing a 'willingness to cooperate' with the United States to capture Villa.⁵¹ That same day another Carranzista General stated that he did not resent the fact that U.S. troops had crossed into Mexico in pursuit of Villa but if they remained too long his view would change.⁵² The frankness with which the General spoke about his feelings towards American troops on Mexican soil was an early and clear warning to Wilson as to how the Mexican people felt about American intervention.

Wilson received a second warning about sending troops into Mexico on 10 March 1916 when Secretary of State Lansing was notified that Carranza was rushing troops to the area and that he would 'resent American troops entering Mexico.'⁵³ Because Germany was attempting to create closer ties with Carranza as well as Villa they were privy to the fears, resentments, and hatred created by American interference with Mexican affairs. This would add to their belief that the United States could be tied down in a war with Mexico if necessary.

While Wilson did eventually decide to intervene in Mexican affairs in order to punish Villa, it was his ability not to allow the situation to get out of hand that thwarted not only Villa's plans but Germany's as well. It was with incredible bravery that Wilson decided to publicly announce that the U.S. would 'get Villa' once congressional backing had been obtained, despite the very real possibility that resistance by the Mexican government would dramatically change the situation in Mexico and therefore

⁵¹ Consul Fletcher to the Secretary of State, 9 March 1916, 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., United States Department of State/Papers relates to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 5 December 1916, pp. 481-482.

⁵² Consul Edwards to the Secretary of State, 9 March 1916, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 5 December 1916, p. 482.

⁵³ Collector Cobb to the Secretary of State, 10 March 1916, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 5 December 1916, p. 484.

impact U.S. influence on the European war. American prestige was on the line in Mexico and Latin America, Wilson did not want to be diverted from his goal of influencing the outcome of the war in Europe.

Calhoun points out that the military believed that intervention in Mexico meant – a full scale war – but Wilson was adamant that intervention was a political question not a military one.⁵⁴ This decision should be no surprise to Wilson scholars because it follows the same pattern as his decision on submarine warfare. Many members of the eastern elite, as well as Wilson's own advisors and the British, had hoped to use German submarine warfare to bring about the United States' entry into the war, but Wilson had refused to allow it. He steadfastly stuck to his decision to protest American deaths because he believed the issue to be political, not military.

For her part, Britain understood the potential consequences of the United States becoming deeply involved in a war with Mexico for quite some time and had continued its work on guiding the United States towards the Allied camp. A particular worry for the British military was that if the U.S. were to intervene in Mexico it would mean an end to their supply of munitions from America.⁵⁵ From the British point of view it had to ensure the America did not get side-tracked by Mexican affairs. Grey was worried enough about this prospect that he instructed Spring Rice to impress upon Colonel House the seriousness of the situation as it pertained to British interests.⁵⁶ The British Ambassador dutifully pressed the chief presidential advisor for assurances of a continued supply of arms and no intervention in Mexico.⁵⁷

According to Spring Rice, House stated that they were well aware the Germany was attempting to 'trap them into invasion of Mexico' and that they were working to

⁵⁴ Frederick S. Calhoun, *Power and Principle: Armed Intervention in Wilsonian Foreign Policy* (Kent State, 1986), pp. 54-55.

⁵⁵ Sir Edward Grey to Spring Rice, 4 June 1915, PRO 170, FO 800/85 Microfilm, UK National Archives.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Spring Rice to Grey, 4 June 1915, PRO, 170, FO 800/85 Microfilm, UK National Archives.

‘avoid armed intervention, except within [the] narrowest limits possible.’⁵⁸ By qualifying his statement to the ‘narrowest limits possible’ House was giving the United States the latitude to intervene but not to the extent that it harmed their support of the British war effort. Wilson understood the need to appease the American public and while New Englanders may have been clamouring for war, the American Mid-West was not.⁵⁹

On 16 March 1916 the United States sent a military force into Mexico with the express purpose of capturing Pancho Villa. Because Wilson viewed intervention from the viewpoint of policy and not from a military point of view he felt that he could limit intervention to meet his policy goals by ordering U.S. troops to avoid Carranzista soldiers and if avoidance was not possible they were to extend every courtesy possible.⁶⁰ Wilson clearly did not want war. Nevertheless this action would increase the possibility of outright war between the two countries and, just as important to the leaders in Berlin, it encouraged the German belief that it was possible to distract the United States from the war in Europe.

Among the conflicting views on why U.S. troops were allowed into Mexican territory, the one unifying thread is that Carranza did not wholly oppose the action even if he did not sanction it. According to John A. Thompson Carranza had refused permission for U.S. forces to cross the border between the two countries and Kendrick A. Clements adds that Carranza ‘denounced the incursion.’⁶¹ But Friedrich Katz notes, importantly, that Carranza neither agreed to nor denied the request, instead urging the revival of an anti-Apache agreement that allowed U.S. and Mexican forces to pursue

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12 August 1915.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ The Acting Secretary of State to Special Representative Rodgers, 20 March 1916, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 5 December 1916, p. 499.

⁶¹ John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson: Profiles in Power* (London, 2002), p. 85; Kendrick A. Clements, *Woodrow Wilson, World Statesman* (Chicago, 1987), p. 129.

bandits across the border.⁶² Katz goes on to contend that Carranza had intended the agreement to apply to any future attacks and when U.S. troops entered Mexico he hesitated to protest, but as days turned into weeks and the number of U.S. troops increased with the amount of territory they were covering he was forced to act.⁶³ Katz's conclusion that Carranza viewed the anti-Apache agreement as applying towards future attacks is supported by a letter suggesting the reinstatement of the agreement sent to Lansing on 10 March 1915 in which Carranza is crystal clear that the agreement applied if the raid 'should unfortunately be repeated.'⁶⁴ The explicitness of the letter denudes the idea that Wilson could have misinterpreted it to believe that it applied to the 9 March raid. This would seem to indicate that Wilson was taking a huge gamble on the belief that he could control the situation.

In letter after letter Carranza issued warnings about the possibility of war between the two countries if U.S. forces entered Mexico, reminding Wilson that it was the enemies of the two countries that were seeking U.S. intervention.⁶⁵ This statement can be viewed to have several different meanings, the first applying to Villa as an enemy of Carranza and recently abandoned by Wilson, and the second applying to Germany. This idea is reinforced by the fact that the United States had been receiving reports that Villa was being encouraged by Germany to attack the United States in order to force intervention.⁶⁶ It is possible that some of those reports came from British agents in the United States who noted the fear that intervention could provoke an all-out war

⁶² Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, 1981), p. 310.

⁶³ Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, 1981), p. 310.

⁶⁴ Special Agent Silliman to the Secretary of State, 10 March 1916, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 5 December 1916, p. 485.

⁶⁵ First Chief Carranza to Mr Arredondo [Read to the Secretary of State], 12 March 1916, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 5 December 1916, p. 486.

⁶⁶ Kendrick A. Clements, *Woodrow Wilson, World Statesman* (Chicago, 1987), p. 129.

between the two nations, and cautioned that it was the Germans who were behind the anti-American mood in Mexico.⁶⁷

If this were the case, Wilson was playing into the hands of the Germans by sending troops into Mexico. The Italian Embassy continued to stoke the fires of anti-German fear in Wilson's administration when it notified Lansing that Germany intended to establish a submarine base in the Gulf of Mexico, most likely at Vera Cruz.⁶⁸ While this may not have played into Wilson's decision to send troops into Mexico, it certainly gave credence to his long held belief that Germany had designs on Mexico. Nevertheless, American forces continued to stream across the Rio Grande and into Mexico.

Carranza's predictions turned out to be correct to a point. As the American expedition pushed deeper into Mexico in search of Villa the Mexican people became so irritated with the presence of U.S. troops that Villa's ranks began to swell, applying massive pressure to Carranza to end the incursion. On 19 March 1916 Carranza condemned the entry of U.S. forces, and the occupation of Mexican towns along the border, calling for the withdrawal of the American expedition, but his requests seemingly fell on deaf ears.⁶⁹ It was not very long after U.S. troops started their expedition to find Villa that they began to run into issues with the Mexican population as well as with some direct confrontations with Carranzista soldiers – war looked to be imminent.

⁶⁷ Letter to Hohler from Willert, 14 March 1916, Arthur Willert Papers, Correspondence, General Correspondence, Drummond – Myers, Group No. 720, Series No. I, Box No. 3, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁶⁸ Confidential note from the Italian Embassy to Lansing, 27 March 1916, The Robert Lansing Papers, 1911-1928, In 62 volumes, Library of Congress, 1943, Container 17.

⁶⁹ Mr Arredondo to the Secretary of State, 19 March 1916; Special Representative Rodgers to the Secretary of State, 19 March 1916, United States Department of State/Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the address of the President to Congress, 5 December 1916, p. 497.

Wilson's actions towards Mexico from 1913 to 1917 gave Germany hope, albeit unintentionally, that the United States could be distracted from the war in Europe long enough for them to win, or at the very least force the Entente to agree to a plan for peace that the German leadership felt was worthy.

Zimmerman's Gamble

On 16 January 1917, German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman sent a telegram via American diplomatic cables to Mexican President Carranza offering an alliance against the United States if America did not remain neutral in the current war.⁷⁰ Most historians tend to focus on the arrogance of Zimmerman, the use of American diplomatic lines to send the message, and the interception of the message by the British.⁷¹ In many cases this is understandable as these historians are focused on other aspects of the war, but diplomatic histories of the war such as Reinhard Doerries' *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* dismiss the entire affair as 'absurd' and 'unusual.'⁷² Just as dismissive is Justus D. Doenecke who calls the proposal 'absolutely ludicrous'.⁷³ David Stevenson notes in *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* that ties between German and Mexico had been growing, but here again the origins of the proposed alliance are dismissed while still marvelling at Zimmerman's arrogance not only in

⁷⁰ Zimmerman to Bernstorff, 13 January 1917, Politisches Archiv, Nr. 16 secr., IA Mexico, R 16919-1, Bd. 1, Auswärtiges Amt.

⁷¹ Kendrick A. Clements, *Woodrow Wilson, World Statesman* (Chicago, 1987); Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006); David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall* (Cambridge, 2011); Malcolm D. Magee, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* (Waco, 2008).

⁷² Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989), pp. 225-226.

⁷³ Justus D. Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of Americas Entry into World War I* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), p. 264.

making the offer, but then admitting it when he could have just as easily attempted to dismiss it as a hoax.⁷⁴

Apart from dismissing the plan's origins these historians offer no answers as they continue to question Zimmerman's reasoning for sending a message that the United States was bound to find blatantly offensive. An understanding of German diplomatic history, Mexican-American history, and more to the point, the early twentieth century history between Mexico and the United States should help clarify Zimmerman's reasoning that Carranza would find an alliance between Germany and Mexico appealing and is certainly not based on a flawed, and 'blundering' German policy as Niall Ferguson claims in *The Pity of War*.⁷⁵

Friedrich Katz and Michael C. Meyer have already pointed out that the combination of American forces occupying Veracruz in 1914, the Pershing expedition in 1916 that had U.S. forces penetrating deep into Mexico, and the vehement complaints of Mexican leaders, added weight to the various Mexican groups that had been pitching German-Mexican alliance to German leadership for years, led to Zimmerman's confidence in the successful conclusion of this plan.⁷⁶ So while it appears that the idea may have originated in Mexico itself, Katz and Reinhard Doerries point out that despite the lack of archival evidence regarding specific discussions among German leaders, the final proposal originated from within the German Foreign Office with the support of the Kaiser.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, 2004), pp. 256-258.

⁷⁵ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York, 1999), p. 286.

⁷⁶ Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 339-349; Michael C. Meyer, 'The Mexican-German Conspiracy of 1915', *The Americas* 23 (1966), p. 76.

⁷⁷ Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 352-354; Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989), pp. 225-226, 362.

Zimmerman's decision to offer an alliance with Mexico in the event that the United States entered the war, can be seen as being based on Bismarckian diplomacy that dictated the use of counterweights to potential enemies, a fact that is supported by Zimmermann's defence of the offer which he defined as a 'defensive measure' when asked if the telegram was truly sent by him.⁷⁸ Rodney Carlisle addresses this point when he notes that Zimmerman saw the acquisition of allies as a 'natural' concept in the course of war.⁷⁹ Additionally, Karl Birnbaum points out that by January 1917 the goal of German diplomatic actions toward the United States was 'to prevent war with America as a consequence of the impending ruthless U-boat campaign.'⁸⁰ Birnbaum's position is supported by a letter from Bethmann Hollweg to Gottlieb von Jagow in which the German Chancellor notes that in a discussion with General Falkenhayn in March 1916 that the role of Germany's diplomacy regarding submarine warfare was to 'resolve the terrain.'⁸¹

The reality of Zimmerman's proposed alliance against the United States, if they were to join the war, was that of diplomatic necessity. The near seventy years of animosity between Mexico and the United States coupled with Mexican proposals for a war against America to regain lost territories led the German Foreign Office to believe that Carranza's support was a safe bet.⁸² Add to the decision making process that once the decision to wage unrestricted submarine warfare had been made and the date for its commencement set, Zimmerman was tasked with finding a way to prevent war with America. In theory, if Mexican forces had attacked the United States, Wilson would

⁷⁸ German Official Explanation, p. 7, HW 3/180, UK National Archives.

⁷⁹ Rodney Carlisle, *Sovereignty At Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry into World War I* (Gainesville, 2009), p. 96.

⁸⁰ Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, 18 April, 1916- 9 January 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 336.

⁸¹ Letter to v. Jagow from Bethmann Hollweg, 5 March 1916, Nachlässe Theobald v. Bethmann Hollweg, N. 1549 (Nr. 342-1), Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.

⁸² For an in-depth study of early Twentieth Century Anti-Americanism in Mexico see Frederick C. Turner, 'Anti-Americanism in Mexico, 1910-1913', *Hispanic-American Historical Review* 47 (1967), pp. 502-518.

have been forced to resolve that issue, pulling men, money, and arms from the allies in order to defend America from a direct attack from Mexico, giving the German submarines time to starve England into submission and German armies time to wear down allied troops to the point that they sue for peace.⁸³ An alliance with Mexico as a means of keeping the United States from sending troops to Europe fit Bismarckian diplomacy and seemingly met the needs of the German military.

Once the decision was made Zimmerman had to decide the best means of communicating the proposed alliance with Carranza. The initial act of the war by the British government was to cut the communication cables between Germany and the Western Hemisphere. This left Germany with only wireless communication and the use of the American diplomatic cables as a means of communicating with its representatives in the Western Hemisphere.⁸⁴ It is also necessary to understand that British Naval Intelligence had broken both the German military and diplomatic codes as early as 13 October 1914, allowing the British to read German telegrams almost before the ambassador himself had a chance to read it.⁸⁵ While the general story about the telegram is well known, the diplomatic tactics that were employed by all sides stayed true to the patterns established years before.

With the interception of the message on 19 January 1917, Britain did not immediately pass the information on to the United States. The reasoning behind this was quite solid: The British wanted to protect the fact that they could break German code, and in the battle to acquire America it would not do for the United States to find out that Britain had been, as Robert Carlisle puts it 'tapping their own [America's]

⁸³ Letter from Professor Max Weber to Friedrich v. Payer, N 1020, Politisches Nr. 10, Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

⁸⁴ The use of American diplomatic cables had been provided as a courtesy to Ambassador Bernstorff as the means of communications with German officials in Berlin. Additionally, Germany was hampered by the lack of a transmitter in Mexico strong enough to send messages to Germany.

⁸⁵ Patrick Beesly, *Room 40: British Naval Intelligence, 1914-1918* (New York, 1982), pp. 3-6, 213.

private diplomatic line.’⁸⁶ More to the point, Britain needed to hold the information until they knew it would force American’s into action.

Despite Germany’s announcement on 31 January 1916 of its intention to renew unrestricted submarine warfare, the United States did not enter the war. Wilson merely handed Bernstorff his papers and sent him packing. Frustrated with Wilson allowing yet another opportunity pass without joining the war the British turned to Zimmerman’s telegram as a means of applying pressure on Wilson.⁸⁷ Britain finally released the message to Page for delivery to Wilson on 24 February 1917 and while it led to increased anti-German feelings throughout most of the United States, Wilson still did not ask Congress for a declaration of war against Germany.

When Zimmermann’s note was first made public many Americans thought that it was a forgery or some form of British propaganda, but when Zimmermann assumed full responsibility for the note a tide of indignation among the American public rose dangerously high. Carranza, maintaining his innocence, denied any knowledge of the offer both publicly and in private discussions with the British Ambassador.⁸⁸

Conclusion

In scholarship on First World War diplomacy such as Doenecke’s *Nothing Less Than War* and both of David Stevenson’s works, *Cataclysm* and *The First World War and International Politics*, the prominence of Mexico as a key figure in the drama of the First World War is either entirely overlooked or more often viewed as a sideshow to the great powers clashing over Europe.⁸⁹ But its importance to the diplomatic conflict between Britain and Germany as they vied for American support should not be

⁸⁶ Telegram, 1 March 1917, Admiralty to British Council General in New York, HW 3/178, UK National Archives; Rodney Carlisle, *Sovereignty At Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry into World War I* (Gainesville, 2009), p. 91.

⁸⁷ Telegram, 26 February 1917, Bayley to Admiralty, HW 3/178, UK National Archives.

⁸⁸ Telegram, 27 February 1917, HW 3/179, UK National Archives.

⁸⁹ Justus D. Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War* (Kentucky, 2011); David Stevenson, *Cataclysm* (New York, 2004), *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford, 1988).

minimized. From almost the moment Woodrow Wilson took office, his interest in Mexico was almost obsessive. His hatred of Mexican President Huerta, fear of growing European influence in the region, and use of American military forces to stop German ships from delivering weapons to the country clearly preceded the start of the First World War, but they sowed the seeds of future German-American discord over Mexico.

Wilson's constant meddling in Mexican affairs, particularly his use of force in Veracruz and later Pershing's punitive expedition, led to a palpable rise in Mexican hostility to the United States. The seizing of Veracruz was met with such strong repudiation from all corners of Mexican society that it surprised the Wilson administration and gave notice to the world that Mexico was not an American stooge. Despite Wilson's attempts to limit U.S. excursions into Mexico his decisions fed the German belief that if the United States were to break neutrality entirely, Mexican anger towards its northern neighbour would make it a valuable ally tying up American men, material, and money long enough for Germany to win the war outright or, at the very least, force the Entente to sue for peace on Germany's terms.

The growing German belief that the submarine was the only weapon that could challenge British supremacy on the sea and guarantee victory led its leaders to gamble that anti-American feelings in Mexico could be translated into a counter-weight and therefore the creation of an alliance based on Germany's long held beliefs in diplomacy. Zimmermann's calculation that Mexico could distract the United States long enough for victory was not an absurd idea, but instead a well thought out, diplomatic manoeuvre. German arrogance about their ability to communicate freely would be what ultimately doomed Zimmermann's planned alliance with Mexico, but this too can hardly be considered the crucial failure of German diplomacy during the war.

The events in Mexico lead inexorably to the fact that American actions in dealing with Mexico clearly led to the German belief that Mexican hostility made the country a perfect counter-weight should the United States enter the war on the side of the Entente. As damaging as it was to German-American relations, the disclosure of Germany's proposed alliance with Mexico was not seen by Zimmerman and Germany's leadership as an embarrassment. A view vindicated by the fact that it was not the straw that broke the camel's back.

The impact Mexico had on German-American diplomatic relations cannot be underestimated. The turbulent relationship between the two countries combined with the troubles Wilson had with Mexico led German leaders to see the Central American nation as a potential ally in their bid to keep the United States neutral. This chapter has shown that Zimmerman's fateful telegram of 1917 was not reckless and arrogant as has been stated by historians such as Reinhard Doerries, but instead, it was a diplomatic tactic that had a long record of being successful in European diplomacy. Germany had not gambled with the offer of alliance to Mexico, instead they had looked at the relations United States actions had created with Mexico and judged that there was an opportunity to tie American money, supplies, and forces down in Mexico.

This chapter has demonstrated that German diplomacy followed the established trend of exploiting others troubles, in this case American disputes with its southern neighbour, in an attempt to create a favourable position for Germany. By attempting to lure Mexico with the promise of lost lands German diplomats saw Mexico as a means to break the stalemate and bring the war to a swift and successful end. This chapter reveals that Zimmerman and the German Foreign Office made a calculated decision based on diplomatic tradition, poor American policy, and a need to maintain American neutrality.

In the previous chapter this dissertation revealed the intense diplomatic and political battle surrounding the use of submarines to break the deadlock, and the resulting diplomacy needed to maintain American acquiescence. This chapter concentrated on how German diplomacy expanded from attempting to hold the American government at bay concerning submarine warfare, to utilizing outside pressure on the Wilson administration, in the form of Mexico, in maintain American neutrality. Chapter five will engage the question of peace and how the belligerent nations were attempting to use the prospect of peace to influence American support for their cause.

Chapter 5

The Peace Option

To this point this dissertation has focused primarily on how belligerent nations used diplomacy to guide U.S. policies to favour them. In each case the intent was to gain U.S. support for their position, either through maintaining American neutrality or in bringing the country closer to joining the war on the side of the Allies. In each case the diplomats built their policies to appeal directly to Wilson's desires. The evidence provided in this chapter will reveal that the discussions of peace held between Britain, Germany, and the United States were once again, diplomatic ploys to gain an advantage.

President Wilson declared that the United States would remain neutral in the European war on 18 August 1914. But before he established American neutrality, he had extended an offer to the belligerent nations to help bring either an immediate end to the conflict or to mediate 'at any other time that might be thought more suitable.'¹ Though none of the warring nations chose to accept his offer, leaders in Berlin and London quickly came to understand the importance Wilson placed on mediating an end to the war in large part because Colonel House spent the balance of 1914 attempting to coax them into mediation.²

Despite having had his offer refused Wilson would hold on to the possibility of American led mediation for the next three years. Having already attempted to prevent a general European war by sending House to Europe in the months preceding the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne, the president was not entirely naïve to the difficulties of bringing nations to the negotiating table. Throughout the war there

¹ On 4 August and 5 August 1914 the United States extended this offer to all the belligerent governments, Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Austria-Hungary, 4 August 1914, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1914. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, p. 42.

² Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonian Statecraft: Theory and Practice of Liberal internationalism during World War I* (Wilmington, 1991), p. 36.

would be on-going discussions about bringing peace to Europe all seemingly falling upon deaf ears as one or the other belligerent government backed away from the mediation efforts of the United States. Despite the repeated attempts of the United States to end the war and despite the repeated troubles between the belligerents and the United States – including blockade issues by Britain and submarine issues with Germany – Wilson and his cabinet continued to talk about peace with whoever would listen.

Historians in general, and diplomatic historians specifically, have not viewed mediation and peace offers as a diplomatic tool. Instead they discuss the peace offers as a means of exploring the personalities of those involved or as part of a larger, separate issue. For instance, Fritz Fischer is one of the earlier historians to examine the German motive for peace in his ground-breaking and controversial book *Germany's Aims in the First World War*.³ But Fischer was describing what Germany wanted to gain when the war had ended, not what they would gain from the offer itself. Malcolm D. Magee addresses American attempts at peace in his book, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* but here again, discussions are not so much about the diplomatic tactics involved as they are about how Wilson's peace initiatives were wrapped up in his religious ideology.⁴ Magee's focus on Wilson's individual beliefs is nothing new to this genre of writing as seen in Godfrey Hodgson's biography of Colonel Edward M. House, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand* which follows the same pattern as Magee by discussing First World War American diplomacy through the lens of House's personality.⁵

³ Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York, 1967).

⁴ Malcolm D. Magee, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* (Waco, 2008).

⁵ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M House* (New Haven, 2006).

Some historians, such as John Coogan, have charged that Wilson's inability to bring about mediation is, in part, a result of his ineptitude as a leader at communicating his ideas to those responsible for the foreign relations of the United States in a way that clarified his decisions, and in some cases 'deliberately misleading' them.⁶ Others claim that it was the belligerents' stance and war aims, or lack thereof that did not allow room for negotiations that scuttled peace plans before they could even come to fruition, as Ross A. Kennedy does in *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security*.⁷ Ernest R. May does examine the overall peace initiative from the perspective of Germany, Britain, and the United States, claiming that Germany 'made no effort' to use American mediation efforts to their advantage, and that while Grey 'handled...the Americans,' Colonel House worked more to preserve Anglo-American relations than he worked to negotiate peace.⁸ But in his final analysis, May misses the point behind German diplomatic tactics regarding peace. And while one must note that May makes glancing remarks about Grey's ability to manoeuvre American diplomats to his line of thought, he does not draw a connection between the policy of delay and peace within Grey's diplomacy. In the cases of Coogan, Kennedy, and May, the use of a peace offer by the belligerent nations to gain a strategic position has not been examined in any real detail.

Key to understanding why a peace settlement through American mediation was not reached until 1918 is Wilson's desire to lead a charge for peace. His speeches proclaiming that 'America must be the example, not merely of peace because it will not fight, but because peace is the healing and elevating influence of the world' and of 'Peace without victory' are but two examples he gave to the world that he believed the

⁶ John Coogan, 'Wilsonian diplomacy in war and peace', in *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890-1993*, ed. Gordon Martel (London, 1994), pp. 72-73.

⁷ Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, 2009), p. 79.

⁸ Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge 1963), pp. 72-73, 90.

United States must remain above the pettiness of war and bloodshed in order to provide the world with a beacon of light.⁹ His offers of the good offices of the United States to help stop the war were not mere lip service but were followed up with letter upon letter and visits of his most trusted advisor not only with the ambassadors from belligerent nations but to the warring Capitals as well. Often this played straight into the delaying tactics of the Foreign Offices in London and Berlin.

Historians such as Ernest R. May have clearly understood that Wilson saw the ideal role for himself and America regarding the war in Europe as that of mediator – a sort of messiah who would bring about a lasting peace not only to Europe but to the world.¹⁰ Others such as Arthur S. Link agree, stating that ‘Wilson’s supreme objective...was peace through his own mediation.’¹¹ Thomas J. Knock writes that the desire to mediate an end to the war was a ‘critical factor in Wilson’s foreign policy,’ and Joyce Grigsby Williams notes that from August 1914 ‘Wilson’s major activity in foreign policy had been to promote peace.’¹² Kendrick A. Clements adds to this line of thought by stating that early in war Wilson declared mediation and the need for a lasting peace ‘the goal of his diplomacy.’¹³ Lloyd C. Gardner adds that the idea of mediation as the aim of U.S. foreign policy was as much a product of Wilson’s most trusted advisor Colonel House as it was Wilson’s, because it was House that helped develop the policy that Wilson’s role in the war should be that of directing the peace-making process and not one of direct involvement.¹⁴

⁹ President’s speech, 10 May 1915, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 33, pp. 147-49, Princeton University; Ray Stannard Baker and William E. Dodd, eds., *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson* vol. II (New York, 1925), President’s speech, 22 January 1917, pp. 407-414.

¹⁰ Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 347.

¹¹ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look at his Major Foreign Policies* (Baltimore, 1957), p. 58.

¹² Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, 1992), p. 34; Joyce Grigsby Williams, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984), p. 53.

¹³ Kendrick A. Clements, *Woodrow Wilson: World Statesman* (Chicago, 1999), p. 152.

¹⁴ Lloyd C Gardner, ‘The United States, the German Peril and a Revolutionary World: The Inconsistencies of World Order and National Self-Determination’, in *Confrontation and Cooperation:*

Wilson scholar John Milton Cooper places more emphasis on the president's aspiration to keep the United States out of the war without placing too much weight on the president's wish to play a major role in mediating a peace deal.¹⁵ This is somewhat countered by Ross Kennedy who argues in *The Will to Believe* that Wilson's desire to keep the United States out of the war and his desire to mediate are in fact one policy aimed at bringing about peace.¹⁶ Yet while it has been determined that Wilson wanted to avoid U.S. involvement in the war, and that he wanted to lead the movement for peace, the various peace offers from the belligerent governments are not examined as part of a larger diplomatic strategy of the belligerents to drive America into the position required by the belligerents.

The idea of peace in the context of diplomacy, such as the House-Grey Memorandum, have been discussed in conjunction with the general peace movement as Thomas J. Knock does in his book *To End All Wars*, or as an agreement born out of misconceptions and obfuscation among diplomats attempting to out-manoeuvre each other as Joyce Grigsby Williams claims in *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey*.¹⁷ The various peace parlays attributed to Germany in conjunction to the work of Ambassador Bernstorff have been examined by Reinhard Doerries in *Imperial Challenge* and Z.A.B. Zeman in *The Gentlemen Negotiators*.¹⁸ Once again none of these discussions analyse the efforts at peace within the broader context of diplomatic manoeuvring.

Germany and the United States in the Era of World War I, 1900-1924, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schröder (Oxford, 1993), p. 268.

¹⁵ John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson, A Biography* (New York, 2009).

¹⁶ Ross A Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, 2009), p. 90.

¹⁷ Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, 1992); Joyce Grigsby Williams, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984).

¹⁸ Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989); Z.A.B. Zeman, *The Gentlemen Negotiators: A Diplomatic History of World War I* (New York, 1971).

The British position on American peace initiatives was based on the diplomacy of delay, conciliation, and vagueness. It was the distinct desire of the Foreign Office to keep peace plans at bay long enough for the United States to lose patience with Germany and go to war. Grey's fear of Germany led to his desire and the desire of almost all of Britain's leaders to 'above all...defeat Germany.'¹⁹ With that intent, Grey could not sincerely entertain the possibility of peace before Germany no longer posed a threat to British interests.

German diplomacy regarding American peace initiatives was not much different from that of Great Britain. The peace moves that came out of the German Foreign Office were vague, conciliatory, and employed delaying tactics as a means of stalling U.S. entry into the war in the belief that German military prowess could force a peace thoroughly on Germany's terms. In his ground-breaking book, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917*, Karl Birnbaum writes that 'the principal object of Germany's policy towards the United States was to prevent America from joining the Entente....'²⁰ This being the case, Bethmann would entertain the possibility of peace if that were sufficient to keep them out of the war. Despite hardships imposed by the British Blockade and fighting a multi-front war, Germany's leaders held fast to the belief that the German Army could still emerge victorious. By policy design, both Britain and Germany held out the hope of peace as a means to draw out negotiations with the United States in order to exact a favourable military decision that would force the other to sue for peace on the victor's terms.

¹⁹ John Charmley, 'Splendid Isolation to Finest Hour: Britain as a Global Power, 1900-1950', in *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Gaynor Johnson (London and New York, 2005), p. 135; V.H. Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, 1914-1918* (London, 1971), pp. 2-3.

²⁰ Karl Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 26.

Focusing on three specific instances, this chapter examines the belligerents' use of peace as a diplomatic strategy, beginning, in the first section, with the initial peace discussions that stretched from September 1914 into June 1915, which created the framework for all future peace offers. The second section analyses the motivation behind the distinctly one sided peace initiative between the United States and Great Britain in the House-Grey Memorandum. The final section examines the reasoning for Bethmann's peace initiative of 12 December 1916 that pre-empted President Wilson's long awaited call for peace.

Posturing for Peace: 1914-1915

Having turned Wilson's initial offer of the good offices of the United States down, both Britain and Germany continued to discuss various peace options with the U.S. throughout the war, each one ending with no concrete offer acceptable to the opposing side. Yet Foreign Secretary Grey worked with Colonel House and Ambassador Page on several occasions to create possible peace options that were clearly not going to be accepted by the Germans. Equally, Ambassador Bernstorff, and Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg worked with House, Lansing, and Ambassador Gerard to create peace offers that would just as clearly not be acceptable to the Allied nations or the United States but nevertheless kept Wilson's attention. One theme developed in the peace discussions from both camps: Whatever form peace took, it had to be an enduring peace that would prevent another war.

Although Wilson offered the good offices of the United States, the first diplomatic exchange regarding peace – often overlooked when discussing the First World War—was initiated by Germany in September 1914 and lasted well into 1915.²¹ According to Armin Rappaport both sides had a litany of excuses to rebuff the

²¹ Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989), p. 91.

president's early offers to mediate, with Britain going so far as to express 'no interest' at all in peace talks.²² According to Robert J. Young, the French appeared to be no closer to accepting a peace offer as Ambassador Jusserand found the idea to be 'inconceivable'.²³ Yet on 5 September 1914 the British were notified by U.S. Secretary of State Bryan and Counsellor Lansing that Germany was open to peace talks.²⁴ Bryan's and Lansing's knowledge is based on comments made by the German Ambassador during a dinner he attended on 5 September 1914.²⁵ That American officials jumped on this possibility to bring peace is in itself uninteresting; more germane to the point is that Grey was alerted to the possibility of a German peace demarche by anglophilic members of the American government, giving him time to formulate a response that would, in theory, not place Britain in a negative position for rejecting the German peace overture.

In a flurry of notes between Spring Rice and Grey on this subject, the Foreign Minister noted that the U.S. Ambassador Walter Page had voiced his concern over the potential for Germany to request mediation. Page pointed out that the recent declaration by the Allies that they would carry on the war in common in conjunction with a German request for mediation would give the impression in the United States that Germany wanted peace while Britain and her allies wanted to continue the war.²⁶ Page's worries were a precursor to the effect the diplomatic game involving peace would have for the duration of the war.

²² Armin Rappaport, *The British Press and Wilsonian Neutrality* (Stanford, 1951), p. 103.

²³ Robert J. Young, *An American By Degrees: The Extraordinary Lives of French Ambassador Jules Jusserand* (Montreal, 2009), p. 79.

²⁴ Telegram Spring Rice to Grey, 5 September 1914, FO 371/2223, Political, America General (war) files 39619-53594, 1914, National Archives.

²⁵ Armin Rappaport, *The British Press and Wilsonian Neutrality* (Stanford, 1951), p. 103.

²⁶ Letter, Sir Edward Grey to Spring Rice, 9 September 1914, , FO 371/2223, Political, America General (war) files 39619-53594, 1914, National Archives.

Although Grey dismissed Page's worry with tact and common sense – noting that the agreement with France and Russia was an obvious one since they were all three fighting the same enemy – the point remained that if either Germany or Britain were to reject a peace out of hand they could alienate the United States.²⁷ Page clearly attempted to convey the seriousness of potential diplomatic manoeuvres regarding the question of peace and America when he told Grey that he considered the German peace offer as 'a move in the game.'²⁸

Despite a conversation already in full swing regarding a possible German peace offer, Bernstorff surprised House by taking the initial step for peace by asking for a conference with House on 18 September 1914 and then agreeing to meet with Spring Rice to discuss peace.²⁹ Regardless of the fact that Page viewed the German peace offer as a move in the diplomatic game, House saw an opportunity to have the United States play a leading role in ending the war quickly.³⁰ Therefore the Colonel's next step was to attempt to use his influence to begin confidential talks between the ambassadors of Germany and Great Britain.

Meeting with Spring Rice, House was surprised for a second time when the ambassador refused to meet with Bernstorff on the grounds that the Germans were 'unreliable' and 'unmoral' and that any negotiations would have to include all the Allies.³¹ Contrary to Charles Seymour's conclusion that 'the diplomatists [were] taking orders from the quietly persuasive Colonel,' the timeline of events suggests that the British were following the same pattern of dealing with the Wilson Administration

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Letter, Sir Edward Grey to Spring Rice, 9 September 1914, , FO 371/2223, Political, America General (war) files 39619-53594, 1914, National Archives.

²⁹ Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989), p. 90; Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* vol. I (Boston, 1926), p. 326.

³⁰ 5 September 1914, House Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, Vol. I, p. 152, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

³¹ Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* vol. I (Boston, 1926), p. 327.

established by Grey during his first meetings with House. Having already discussed the potential for a German peace note two weeks earlier, Spring Rice took to using the guise of discussion to direct the conversation from why he would not meet with his German counterpart to suggesting what was the 'best thing' Wilson could do regarding the 'situation.'³² Based on House's version of events and his perception of Spring Rice during this conversation as being 'frank and honest, and...a high-minded scholarly gentleman' one could only conclude that the Foreign Office's tactics were continuing to dictate the direction of American policy. In essence, this rejection was a clear headed decision to avoid discussing peace based on Britain's plan to wear the German people and military down while not alienating America.

Prior to Spring Rice's meeting with House, the Ambassador had exchanged many telegrams with Grey discussing the rumoured German peace offer. In doing so, he clarified their position based, in part, on news that the German Kaiser had told Wilson that Germany only wanted peace if it would be a lasting peace, but he would not agree to a cession of territory or compensation to Belgium or France.³³ German leadership was unified in the feeling that Germany was forced to fight for her life and that their campaign had, to date, been wildly successful.³⁴ Additionally, Bernstorff had informed House that Germany would not go into detail about her terms for mediation without first knowing the terms the Allies were seeking.³⁵

Although it could be argued that Germany remained in a militarily strong position, having occupied most of Belgium and Eastern France, historians such as Paul Sweet, Karl Birnbaum, and Roger Chickering agree that leaders on both sides

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 326-328.

³³ Spring Rice to FO, Telegram No. 360, 18 September 1914, FO 371/2223, Political, America General (war) files 39619-53594, 1914.

³⁴ Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York, 1967), pp. 98-99.

³⁵ Spring Rice to FO, Telegram No 371, 19 September 1914, FO 371/2223, Political, America General (war) files 39619-53594, 1914.

recognized the problems inherent in the German position only a month into the war.³⁶ The fact of the matter was that Germany's armies had been turned back at the battle of the Marne on 9 September and intimates on both sides of the war realized that the strength of Germany's position had been significantly compromised. Combining the Germany military's situation with the British plan to wear the German's down via her naval power, and the desire for a conclusive victory over Germany, Grey could afford to brush off German peace feelers that did not meet British demands. Justus Doenecke, C.J. Lowe, and M.L. Dockrill conclude that it was this reasoning that allowed Grey to determine that House's peace efforts were not needed.³⁷

Conversely, German leaders were increasingly worried that their worst fears were being realized. Without a quick victory in the West, they were facing a war on multiple fronts that had been their pre-war goal to avoid. With this new twist, Germany was forced into a war of attrition with the Allied nations which would bring on new problems and the chance of alienating neutral nations. Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase points out that it was at this point that German diplomacy towards America determined that keeping Britain and America apart would facilitate maintaining U.S. neutrality and was therefore necessary.³⁸ Correspondingly, German leaders recognized the importance of American goodwill towards Germany and were discussing the importance of working

³⁶ Paul R. Sweet, 'Leaders and Policies: Germany in the Winter of 1914-1915', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, Vol. XVI, No 3 (October 1956), p. 29; Karl Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare* (Stockholm, 1958), pp. 11-12; Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 52.

³⁷ Justus D Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of America's Entry Into World War I* (Kentucky, 2011), p. 96; C.J. Lowe and M.L. Dockrill, *The Mirage of Power: Volume 2, British Foreign Policy, 1914-1922* (London, 1972), p. 237.

³⁸ Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase, 'The United States and Germany I the World Arena, 1900-1917', in *Confrontation and Cooperation: Germany and the United States in the Era of World War I, 1900-1924*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schröder (Oxford, 1993), p. 56.

with the United States and specifically with Secretary of State Bryan's arbitration pacts as a means of demonstrating German willingness to work towards world peace.³⁹

What is clear is that only a month into the war the belligerents had an understanding as to the role the President of the United States wanted to play, and they were beginning to employ diplomatic strategies using the peace initiative to garner support from the President. According to Edward Buehrig it was not until the end of 1914 that House finally realized the ambassadors were giving him the run-around and he convinced the president to allow him to journey to Europe in order to bring about peace.⁴⁰ But it was towards the end of September 1914 that House, discussing his frustration with the constant excuses each of the belligerents had for not making peace, mentioned to Wilson that the German Ambassador had suggested that House's presence in Europe could encourage the belligerents to come to the peace table.⁴¹ Bernstorff may have initiated the peace conversation and been the first to encourage House to go to Europe to broker a peace deal, but, as Lowe and Dockrill point out in *The Mirage of Power*, the British Officials felt that it was in their best interest if House visited London and Berlin.⁴² According to Reinhard Doerries and supported by House's notes, the president's initial response was to counsel his friend to continue to apply pressure to Grey on the basis of their long standing fear of Russian dominance in Europe.⁴³

Despite House's attempt to apply pressure to Grey, by mid-January he and Wilson decided that his going to Europe gave them the best chance to bring about

³⁹ Ballin to Bethmann Hollweg, 14 October 1914, Allgemeine Angelegenheiten, Teil 2, USA and Deutschland, R.17355, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt.

⁴⁰ Edward H Buehrig, *Woodrow Wilson and the Balance of Power* (Bloomington, 1955), p 193.

⁴¹ 28 September 1914, House to Wilson, Edward Mandell House Papers, Vol. 1, p. 147, Manuscript and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁴² C.J. Lowe and M.L. Dockrill, *The Mirage of Power: Volume 2, British Foreign Policy, 1914-1922* (London, 1972), pp. 237-238.

⁴³ Reinhard R Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989), p. 91; 28 September 1914, House Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, Vol. 1, p. 147, Manuscript and Archives, Yale University Library.

peace.⁴⁴ On 30 January 1915, House began yet another long journey to Europe in the hopes of negotiating peace. He left with the knowledge that getting all the belligerent nations to agree to mediation would be a long and difficult task but it was his goal, and Wilson's fervent desire, that the United States be the driving force in ending the current slaughter, and possibly, ending war entirely. The amateur diplomat's first stop was London.

By December 1914 the war had clearly stagnated and the hopes of a quick conclusion to the war faded on both sides. Militarily the stalemate was a virtual death blow to the Germans. Stalemate did, however, play directly into the hands of the British. Britain's established war plan revolved around the Royal Navy and its ability to blockade Germany, while Lord Kitchener's battle plan was to allow the blockade and attrition to wear down the superior German forces before the bulk of the British army was committed to the field. Stalemate also suited President Wilson as he was quite candid about his desire for there to be no clear winner in the war in order to guarantee that another war of revenge would not occur.⁴⁵

As has already been stated, Britain turned down Wilson's initial offer to mediate an end to the war in 1914, but the pressure to come to the peace table by America allowed Foreign Secretary Grey to utilize American desires to meet British ends. From Grey's point of view, Britain had to utilize its greatest weapon, the Royal Navy, while at the same time not alienating the United States. One means of doing this was to seemingly pursue the same positions America espoused.

⁴⁴ 12 January 1915, Edward Mandell House Papers 1885-1938, HM 236-2, Vol. 3-4, Yale University Library.

⁴⁵ H. B. Brougham, 'Memorandum of Interview with the President,' 14 December 1914, in WWI Document Archive, 1914 Documents, [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Brougham%27s Memorandum of Interview with President Wilson](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Brougham%27s_Memorandum_of_Interview_with_President_Wilson) (7 January, 2012).

House biographer Godfrey Hodgson states that House travelled to Europe in such 'great secrecy' that not even his closest of friends knew of his mission.⁴⁶ It is of course possible that many people did not know what House's exact plans were for this trip, but to claim that it was utterly unknown is a stretch. It is more likely that Joyce Grigsby Williams was closer to the actual facts when she wrote that the trip was taken with the 'air of secrecy', as this clearly suited House's vision of himself.⁴⁷ Undoubtedly, each of the governments he intended on visiting had been alerted to his plans.⁴⁸ Charles Seymour noted in *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* that the Colonel had received letters from old friends, who though professing their lack of knowledge as to his mission, wished him luck.⁴⁹ House also notes in his diary that he met with several people immediately before leaving who knew 'something of [his] mission.'⁵⁰ Additionally, upon arrival in Britain, House notes that he was met by Page and 'representatives of nearly every New York paper.'⁵¹ House's agenda may not have been public knowledge but with Wilson's desire for peace widely known it is hardly a leap of faith to think that the press had an idea as to the purpose of the presidential envoy's visit.

Ernest May and Joyce Grigsby Williams point out that the importance of convincing House about the British desire for peace while at the same time not giving up positions important to the overall war effort was not lost on Grey.⁵² British officials

⁴⁶ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006), p. 107.

⁴⁷ Joyce Grigsby Williams, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984), p. 59.

⁴⁸ 5 September 1914, House Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, Vol. 1, p. 152, Manuscript and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁴⁹ Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* Vol. I (Cambridge, 1926), p. 360.

⁵⁰ 25 January 1915, House Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, Manuscript and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5 February 1915.

⁵² Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 84; Joyce Grigsby Williams, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984), p. 60.

set upon House with the same tactics they had used the previous summer. Grey changed his schedule so that he could meet with the Colonel almost immediately after he set foot on British soil, and inviting him to lunch with Englishmen of note, including an hour with the King himself.⁵³ As before, this wooing of House was designed to inflate the ego of a man who longed to be an international power-broker, and it worked to perfection. House may have felt that many of the individuals he met were not receptive to his message of peace, but he was nonetheless impressed.

As for the reason for House's visit – to bring the warring sides together for peace talks – Grey continued to play the same game with House that Spring Rice had worked with such skill in America. As before, Grey allowed the conversation to cover a wide range of topics and spoke with House as if they were old friends simply chatting over lunch.⁵⁴ When the topic of peace was finally brought into the discussion, Grey stated that Britain would only bargain if Germany withdrew from Belgium, agreed to pay an indemnity, and there was a guarantee of a lasting peace – the *status quo ante* would no longer be acceptable.⁵⁵ On the off chance that Germany did agree to those demands, Grey deftly shifted responsibility for any additional possibility of problems in coming to a peace squarely at the feet of his allies, Russia and France. Grey pointed out that France and Russia both had territorial demands that would need to be met. Due to previous conversations between House and Spring Rice, Grey was already aware that the United States did not relish the idea of Russian domination of Europe.⁵⁶ He was also aware that the vast majority of Americans still had a very favourable view of France.⁵⁷

⁵³ 25 January 1915, House Diary, Edward Mandell House Papers, Manuscript and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁵⁴ 9 February 1915, Edward Mandell House Papers 1885-1938, HM 236-2, Vol. 3-4, Yale University Library.

⁵⁵ C.J. Lowe and M.L. Dockrill, *The Mirage of Power: Volume 2, British Foreign Policy, 1914-1922* (London, 1972), p. 236.

⁵⁶ 20 September 1914, Edward Mandell House Papers 1885-1938, HM 236-2, Vol. 1-2, Yale University Library.

⁵⁷ Grey, Sir Edward, *Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916* vol. 3 (London, 1925), p. 43.

Charles Seymour characterised the inclusion of Allied territorial demands as an embarrassing moment for Grey, indicating that Grey and Britain tried to seem above mere territorial pettiness.⁵⁸ By placing France, and Russia's territorial demands squarely into the peace equation Grey was setting up his allies to take the brunt of American anger if Allied war aims were to cause the peace process to break down. This strategy seems to have been a successful one because House later writes Wilson that at that moment France was the major obstacle to peace.⁵⁹

Knowing that House was in Europe to broker a peace deal that Britain was not going to agree to, Grey's strategy was simple: allow the conversation concerning peace to happen on his terms. Grey's terms were safely wrapped in the cloak of desiring peace but insisting on the peace being a lasting one. In order for peace to be a lasting peace it required the end of German militancy and American support in the form of a treaty involving the availability of U.S. forces to enforce the peace. Grey knew that traditional American political practice considered any military or political treaty as an unwanted entanglement and would therefore be a fairly safe bet as an on-going obstacle against an 'unfavourable' (to the British) actual negotiated peace settlement.

Just as he had done when Spring Rice broached this subject in Washington D.C., House refused to guarantee U.S. involvement on the grounds that American tradition made it impossible for Wilson, or any administration, to entangle the United States with foreign governments.⁶⁰ During the entirety of House's visit to London Grey kept pushing for a 'league of peace' that the United States would be a part of as key to any peace discussions. Although he permitted the conversation to take different avenues, allowing House to feel as if he were getting his points across, Grey was safe in the

⁵⁸ Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* Vol. I (Cambridge, 1926), pp. 364-5.

⁵⁹ 20 March 1915, House to Wilson, Edward Mandell House Papers 1885-1938, HM 236-2, Vol. 3-4, Yale University Library.

⁶⁰ 2 January 1915, Grey to Spring Rice, FO 800/85; Grey, Sir Edward, *Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916* vol. 3 (London, 1925), p. 61.

knowledge that as long as he conveyed that Britain was only interested in a lasting peace he would be able to maintain U.S. peace hopes while not conceding any of his own goals.

House was to spend considerable time with members of the Foreign Office during his month long stay in London. During his conversations, British officials continued to perpetuate the idea that Germany's peace overtures were insincere. As part of their strategy, Grey and the other Foreign Office officials noted that France also believed that Germany would not be serious about peace until they were in a better military position to force their version of peace upon the Allies. As Joyce Grigsby Williams notes at this point, House was receiving far more diplomatic direction from Grey than he was from Wilson.⁶¹ Facing this pressure from Grey, Tyrrell, and other diplomats from the allied nations, House continued to be surprisingly up-beat about the sincerity of Germany's desire for peace. According to C.J. Lowe and M. L. Dockrill, members of the Foreign Office and the ambassadors from the Allied nations found House's view to be 'very naïve.'⁶² Yet, despite his naivety or perhaps because of it, House continued to follow Grey's direction and postponed his trip to Berlin until the Foreign Minister deemed the time right for travel to Germany.⁶³

House started out for Berlin on 11 March 1915, making a short stop in Paris first. Godfrey Hodgson's examination of House's time in Paris is sorely lacking as he claims that 'the French were too preoccupied by the war and too confident of victory to think of peace.'⁶⁴ But Hodgson neglects to understand the French position on the war at this time. He disregards the French requirements for reclamation of Alsace-Lorraine that

⁶¹ Joyce Grigsby Williams, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984), p. 63.

⁶² C.J. Lowe and M.L. Dockrill, *The Mirage of Power: Volume 2, British Foreign Policy, 1914-1922* (London, 1972), p. 238.

⁶³ Ernest R May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 89.

⁶⁴ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006), p. 108.

he noted a few pages earlier with their resistance to peace parlays. Hodgson also neglects to note that as early as 10 November 1914 French Minister for Foreign Affairs Théophile Delcassé had declared that the Entente would not accept U.S. mediation in any form.⁶⁵ Delcassé reiterates this position when he informed Grey that House would be welcomed in Paris but he would not discuss U.S. intervention or mediation because the French people were not inclined to accept it.⁶⁶ What Hodgson missed was that the French were simply sticking to the policy they had set at the outset of the war – territorial acquisition, no *status quo* peace, and no U.S. interference in the peace process. The plan for House's trip had been to spend the bulk of his energy working with officials in London and Berlin anyway; therefore the lack of time spent in Paris during this trip should not be confused with French intransigence as much as it should be noted for the inexperience House showed by not giving credence to French peace demands. House had apparently felt that the Allies would follow Britain's lead.

According to Ernest May, by the time House had arrived in Berlin Germany's leaders could not even pretend to be in favour of peace.⁶⁷ This is a statement that May repeatedly makes based primarily on public statements made by Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and meant to calm the annexationist fringes of the German public. In this instance May misses the larger picture of diplomacy. In *The Quest for Peace through Diplomacy*, Stephen D. Kertesz explains that because historically successful diplomacy depended on knowledge of the enemy's domestic politics, 'highly emotional patriotism' was the internal countermeasure used to ensure internal unity.⁶⁸ Kertesz goes on to say that during the First World War aspects of diplomacy were likewise kept secret in order

⁶⁵ 10 November 1914, Bertie to Grey, FO 800/181, UK National Archives.

⁶⁶ 12 March 1915, Bertie to Grey, FO 800/181, UK National Archives.

⁶⁷ Ernest R May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 108.

⁶⁸ Stephen D. Kertesz, *The Quest for Peace Through Diplomacy* (Englewood Cliffs, 1967), pp. 11-12.

to guarantee domestic harmony.⁶⁹ This basic understanding of diplomacy clarifies Germany's persistent pursuit of peace terms they would likely never agree to.

Some historical approaches place the emphasis on the question of public pressure on German foreign policy. Hans-Ulrich Wehler points out that an aggressive foreign policy had long been the means of placating the German public.⁷⁰ Following this line of thought allows the two ideas to be tied together. Bethmann's hard-line utterances, ostensibly made for public consumption, were part of his diplomacy as he needed to placate the German public while he privately negotiated a peace deal. The importance here is that he was not looking for a true peace settlement as much as he was attempting to maintain American neutrality and separate Britain.

Upon House's arrival in Berlin on 19 March 1915 he met almost immediately with German Undersecretary of State, Arthur Zimmerman. As Germany had done during the summer of 1914, House met with a multitude of German officials that came to the American Embassy. After Zimmerman came meetings with Foreign Minister Jagow, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, and a host of other Germans of high reputation and position.⁷¹ All of which reflected the importance Germany placed on House as the confidant of President Wilson and Bethmann's knowledge of the importance House placed on himself.

In his meetings with Bethmann, Jagow, and Zimmerman House heard a virtual repeat of what he had been told in London – any settlement must guarantee a permanent peace.⁷² House indicated that he believed that Germany was 'sympathetic' towards U.S.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871-1918* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 195-197.

⁷¹ Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* Vol. I (Cambridge, 1926), pp. 404-405.

⁷² 20 March 1915, House to Wilson, Edward Mandell House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-2, Vol. 3-4, Yale University Library.

ideas and that his discussions had ‘accomplished much of value’.⁷³ As House left Berlin for a return trip to London he was ‘optimistic’ about the chances for peace.⁷⁴ But according to Lloyd Ambrosius, House’s experience in Berlin had led him to believe that ‘Germany desired peace only on the basis of victory.’⁷⁵ How was House optimistic about peace while at the same time believing that Germany was the one nation that did not desire it? It was evident that both Grey and Bethmann were open to a lasting peace. It was also evident that both Grey and Bethmann were not willing to discuss a peace conference until they had won a decisive military victory in the field. And according to Ambrosius, although Grey professed a desire for peace, he favoured an Allied victory over American mediation.⁷⁶ As for Bethmann, he stated in separate letters to Foreign Minister Jagow and Austrian Foreign Minister Leopold Berchtold that they could not reject American offers out of hand and would instead find a way to give the impression that Germany was open to peace.⁷⁷

The primary factors in creating House’s view that only Germany was opposed to peace were Grey’s insistence that if mediation was to work it would only work because the United States pushed it, his belief in collective security as professed to House during their discussions, and the information he passed on to House that recent speeches given by the Kaiser and Bethmann were unfavourable towards peace.⁷⁸ In the end it was Grey’s diplomatic tact that fed House’s known Anglophilic tendencies combined with a lack of German support for a reduction in weapons and the militancy of its population towards the United States that led House to believe that peace would be difficult to

⁷³ *Ibid.*; 26 March 1915, House to Wilson, Edward Mandell House Papers, 1885-1938, vol. 3-4, Yale University Library.

⁷⁴ Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, 1992), p. 46.

⁷⁵ Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonian Statecraft: Theory and Practice of Liberal Internationalism during World War I* (Wilmington, 1991), p.41.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.43.

⁷⁷ Jagow to Foreign Ministry, 15 November 1914, Auswärtiges Amt; Bethmann to Berchtold, 23 November 1914, Auswärtiges Amt.

⁷⁸ 22 April 1915, Telegram from Spring Rice to Grey, PRO 170, FO 800/85, UK National Archives.

achieve. To add to matters, on 7 May 1915 the British steamer *Lusitania* was sunk by a German submarine resulting in the death of 1,200 passengers including 124 American citizens. The sinking of the *Lusitania* as well as continued issues with the British blockade along with the intransigence of both Britain and Germany sent U.S. attempts at peace negotiations temporarily to the back burner while the Wilson administration spent the summer of 1915 wrestling with its citizen's rights to travel the high seas as citizens of a neutral nation.

The House-Grey Memorandum

Peace negotiations may have no longer been at the forefront of American foreign policy as Wilson, House, and Lansing wrestled with the multitude of issues the war had brought to their doorstep, but peace continued to be a topic in letters that House and Grey continued to exchange. The design of the House-Grey Memorandum has its origins in the trip House had completed in June 1915. During that visit, House and Grey had laid the foundations for a post war League for the Preservation of Peace.⁷⁹ But Grey began influencing Wilson and House before the Colonel was sent to Europe in February 1915. Although some historians claim that House only discovered Grey's desire for a league of nations to guarantee peace in February 1915, Grey's management of this episode of American foreign policy started months earlier when he sounded out the Wilson administration about the possibility of America joining an agreement to preserve future peace as indicated in a letter to Ambassador Spring Rice on 2 January 1915, where Grey clearly discusses the Colonel's reluctance to agree to the U.S. becoming a party to guarantee peace.⁸⁰

In attempting to establish Wilson's reasoning for joining in negotiations with Britain to create a league of nations, Arthur S. Link inadvertently outlines Grey's

⁷⁹ Grey to Spring Rice, 2 January 1915, FO 800/85, UK National Archives.

⁸⁰ Joyce Grigsby Williams, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984), p. 62; Grey to Spring Rice, 2 January 1915, FO 800/85, UK National Archives.

reasoning for pushing a league of nations.⁸¹ In *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look At His Major Foreign Policies*, Link points out that Wilson's early writings demonstrate his desire for what he called a 'parliament of man'.⁸² In addition, Wilson and House had as early as December 1914 proposed the creation of a Pan-American treaty that would essentially create a league of American nations. By May 1915 the President had spent five months negotiating with Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, the so called ABC countries, and he was hosting a meeting with eighteen American states to strengthen commercial ties en route to creating a Pan American league. It is hardly a surprise that Grey would seize upon Wilson's ideas for a league of nations and attempt to use that to his advantage. It is with this information in hand that Grey's tactic of pushing for a League of Nations begins to make sense. Adding to the knowledge base that Grey was working from, Wilson had conversations dealing with a 'community of nations' with 'British radicals' as Thomas Knock points out in *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order*.⁸³

The common belief involving the development of the House-Grey Memorandum, as aptly expressed by a number of historians, revolves around House as the driving force in the development of the idea and his work to convince the British to support a U.S. led end to the war and a post war league of nations.⁸⁴ Ernest May concludes that House and Wilson were attempting to lure Britain into accepting American mediation with the promise of armed intervention, while Armin Rappaport

⁸¹ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look at His Major Foreign Policies* (Baltimore, 1957), pp. 94-95.

⁸² Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look at His Major Foreign Policies* (Baltimore, 1957), p. 94.

⁸³ Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 34-35.

⁸⁴ Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006), pp. 114-115; Joyce Grigsby Williams claims that House 'initiated plans for his specific plan for peace in, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984), p. 81.

claims that House had been 'laying the foundation for the secret House-Grey agreement' since his return to the United States in the spring of 1915.⁸⁵

These historians have taken the view that Grey was following the U.S. lead and that House and Wilson, because of the need for American financial and industrial support, were able to cow the British Foreign Minister into following their lead. Indeed, to House it surely seemed that he was directing the diplomacy between the countries as it was he who would travel to London, Paris, and Berlin in an attempt to fashion together a bargain. And it was he who would put forth what he considered the initial ideas for a pact to mediate and for a league to enforce peace after the war. But it was the work done by Grey and the British Foreign Office that placed the seeds of these ideas, and, as Lloyd Ambrosius points out, effectively 'fostered' and 'nurtured House's conception.'⁸⁶

Grey accomplished this by persistence and patience. During House's discussions with Spring Rice after the outbreak of war, the Ambassador had made it clear to the Colonel that Britain needed a guarantee of peace once the war had reached its conclusion before they could make any decisions regarding mediation.⁸⁷ Sir Edward Grey notes in his memoirs that during House's trip to London during the Spring of 1915 he had prodded the envoy about the likelihood of American entry into the war, only to be told that any attempt would be 'premature and unsuccessful.'⁸⁸ This, as Arthur S. Link points out, was Grey initiating the idea of a post-war league of nations and for the idea of U.S. intervention by pushing House on how far the United States would be

⁸⁵ Ernest R May, *The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 351; Armin Rappaport, *The British Press and Wilsonian Neutrality* (Stanford, 1951), p. 109.

⁸⁶ Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonian Statecraft: Theory and Practice of Liberal Internationalism during World War I* (Wilmington, 1991), pp. 42-43.

⁸⁷ Spring Rice to House, 12 September 1914, Edward Mandell House Papers, Vol. I, p.158, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁸⁸ Grey, Sir Edward, *Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916* vol. 3 (London, 1925), p. 60.

willing to go in order to mediate an end to the war and guarantee a lasting peace.⁸⁹ In a letter to House on 22 September 1915, Grey asked if the United States would be prepared to bind itself to a league of nations.⁹⁰ Robert Tucker points out that Grey had 'found a willing listener' in the President who, accordingly, jumped at the chance to guarantee peace sending House to Europe on a second peace mission.⁹¹

Despite House's best intentions it was clear that the war was going to continue until one side or the other achieved a military breakthrough. According to Joyce Grigsby Williams and Godfrey Hodgson, Germany's submarine campaign coupled with their animosity towards the United States for its lack of genuine neutrality furthered House's thoughts that the world would benefit from a German defeat; contending that the submarine war, and the sinking of the *Lusitania* in particular, had radically changed House's view on the war, leading him to believe that the United States must take an active role in the war.⁹²

It is perhaps unfortunate that House did not understand where the Allies stood regarding peace proposals at the time of his arrival in Europe in January 1916. Since November 1914 France had made it clear on multiple occasions that they did not want to encourage the United States to mediate the war.⁹³ For its part, Britain seems to have demurred, with Grey notifying House that mediation would be discussed among the Allies if Germany made a promising overture.⁹⁴ From March 1915 to January 1916 little

⁸⁹ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look at His Major Foreign Policies* (Baltimore, 1957), pp. 94-95.

⁹⁰ Grey to House, 22 September 1915, the Papers of Edward M. House, Yale University Library.

⁹¹ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look at His Major Foreign Policies* (Baltimore, 1957), pp. 94-95; Robert W. Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War: Reconsidering America's Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Charlottesville, 2007), p. 147.

⁹² Joyce Grigsby Williams, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984), p. 73; Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven, 2006), p. 112.

⁹³ Bertie to Grey, 10 November 1914; Bertie to Grey, 12 March 1915, FO 800/181, UK National Archives.

⁹⁴ Grey to Bertie, 15 March 1915, FO 800/181, UK National Archives.

had occurred that would change Allied minds. Yet Grey continued to manoeuvre the United States closer to the Allies by his encouragement of House's propositions.

Shortly after arriving back in the United States in June 1915, House began developing a plan of action that would, as Joyce Grigsby Williams describes it, 'either...compel a peace settlement or bring the United States into the war on the Allied side.'⁹⁵

The key to understanding House's desire to create what would become the House-Grey Memorandum is his belief that in order for his plan to work the United States would have to remain neutral. House expressed his belief during a meeting with Grey and Arthur Balfour that was held in 6 June 1916, but the idea was plainly a base from which the Colonel was working during his time at home in America; House explained that in his view the United States gained more flexibility of action by maintaining neutrality with Germany than they would otherwise have, thus allowing the U.S. to manoeuvre into a position to go to war over something besides the use of the submarine.⁹⁶ House believed that he was placing the United States in a win-win situation. If his manoeuvre worked and Germany agreed to come to the peace table, Wilson would be hailed for ending the war. If Germany refused to come to the table, the United States would be able to join the Allies and crush Germany militarism once and for all, with Wilson having a seat at the peace settlement at the end of hostilities.

It is this idea – that House was looking to set-up the United States to bring all the warring nations to the peace table or go to war with Germany – that is of importance. His plan did not count on British intransigence, only German because, unbeknownst to House, Grey's diplomacy was working. Grey had noted on several

⁹⁵ Joyce Grigsby Williams, *Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy* (Lanham, 1984), p. 74.

⁹⁶ Diary entry, 6 January 1916, Edward Mandell House Papers, Vol. 4, pp.6-8, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

occasions that he believed that mediation was only possible with American guidance, going so far at one point out that peace negotiations would have begun in February 1915 if proposals had been ready to make.⁹⁷ On 22 September 1915 Grey's diplomacy, in the form of a letter to House, brought the United States ever closer to joining the Allied war effort in total.⁹⁸

Grey's letter was the equivalent of throwing a gauntlet down at House's feet. How far was the President of the United States really willing to go in order to eliminate navalism and militarism? How far was the President willing to go to bring an end to this war, to bring about a league of nations? Though the letter was in response to House's question about timing for peace proposals, Grey's tact was impeccable. It implied first and foremost that Britain was willing to make huge changes to its centuries old axiom about having the strongest navy in the world (a problem faced by Americans since the early 1800s), but clearly required the United States to break its life-long national policy of not becoming entangled in European military affairs.

With Wilson's support, House responded with a letter on 17 October 1915 that laid bare the Colonel's support for Britain and his willingness to go to war with Germany. When it comes to this letter most historians focus on the word 'probably' that Wilson inserted into House's original letter in the sentence 'If the Central Powers were still obdurate, it would [probably] be necessary for us to join the Allies and force the issue....' The importance given to 'probably' by historians is fair in that the word changes the entire meaning of the sentence, thus giving rise to the idea that while Wilson supported the general theory that House was working on, he was still, at heart, committed to remain neutral.

⁹⁷ Grey to House, 26 August 1915, Edward Mandell House Papers, Yale University Library; Grey to House, 10 August 1915, Edward Mandell House Papers, Yale University Library.

⁹⁸ Grey to House, 22 September 1915, Edward M. House Papers, Yale University Library.

To the diplomacy being practiced at the moment the importance of the insertion of 'probably' is much less relevant because it did not change Grey's position. The Foreign Minister continued his insistence that the United States essentially put-up or shut-up. Grey told House that without knowing precisely where the United States stood he could not in good faith counsel him to return to Europe and begin peace negotiations.⁹⁹ According to House's diary, the President and House were in agreement – the Colonel would have to return to Europe to hammer out the plan for peace.¹⁰⁰ This was much like the fly coming into the spider's parlour.

While there has never been any question that House had been hoping for a German defeat for some time (on 16 June 1915 he told the President that if the United States helped the Allies they could 'turn the world into the right paths. '), there is equally no question that he had supported Britain from the beginning.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, during House's previous visits to Britain he had actually become more like minded with Grey when it came to taking a strong line of against Germany. Each time he returned to the United States he seemed to revert to a more neutral stance. Grey recognized this in great part because House's tone changed from the time he was in Britain to the letters he sent to Grey from America. The Colonel's return to Britain would allow Grey to guide him back into a 'British' state of mind.

While in London House approached Grey with the outline that would come to be known as the House-Grey Memorandum. Almost all discussion leading up to the creation of the Memorandum were initiated by House and initially, Grey and other British leaders pressed him about the President's determination and desire to actually break neutrality and enter the war if Germany were to refuse peace terms. House had

⁹⁹ Grey to House, 11 November 1915, Edward M. House Papers, Yale University Library.

¹⁰⁰ Wilson to House, 24 December 1915, Edward M. House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-2, vol. 3-4, p. 6, Yale University Library.

¹⁰¹ House to Wilson, 16 June 1915, Edward M. House Papers, 1885-1938, HM 236-2, vol. 3-4, Yale University Library

planned to spend only a few days in London before traveling to the continent again, much as he had the previous spring.

Here again, Grey played a skilful diplomatic hand as he encouraged House to visit Germany, knowing full well that because of events on the field of battle Germany would not accept peace mediation. With House's plan firmly in mind – that if Germany did not accede to mediation the United States would enter the war on the side of the British – this was a plan with which Grey could hardly lose. If Germany happened to agree to mediation, House's plan called for everything the Allied nations wanted short of a complete Germany defeat.

House's visit to Germany, a grand total of four days, was extremely short for such an important meeting. Although the Colonel had ostensibly gone to Berlin in order to feel out the German attitude towards peace, he seemed to have arrived with his mind already made up. It could easily have been that discussions with British officials before House headed for Germany had swayed him. It could also have been his experience on the way to Berlin when he travelled, and stayed with British soldiers as they moved to and from the front lines. House's diary entry from 26 January 1916 is blunt about the Colonel's view that everyone he met on that day, from the Dutch Minister to his old friend Count von Moltke, he found to be unreasonable and anti-British.¹⁰²

House refused to meet with anyone unless the meeting was held at the embassy, ostensibly because he wanted to control with whom he would meet. After unsatisfactory conversations with Bethmann Hollweg, von Jagow, and Zimmerman, House did not feel that much had been accomplished, yet according to House's diary the conversations had not involved navalism, militarism, a league of nations, or peace.¹⁰³ It seems that House travelled to Germany for the simple tactic of keeping up appearances of neutrality. He

¹⁰² House Diary, 26 January 1916, Edward Mandell House Papers, vol. II, Yale University Library.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 28 January 1916.

mentions in his diary that he wanted to avoid meeting with Tirpitz if at all possible and he declined to meet with the Kaiser to discuss items, stating that he felt the German Emperor was 'heartless' and possibly 'crazy.'¹⁰⁴ Thus House left for his return trip to London feeling that no one in Germany was reasonable enough to make peace negotiations a possibility. In fact, House left Germany with such animosity that he was convinced Germany wanted a war with the United States.

Upon leaving Germany House travelled to Paris where he met with French Prime Minister Aristide Briand and Foreign Minister Jules Cambon. House spent several days discussing plans with the French who communicated the bulk of their conversations with House to Grey before the American envoy was back in London.¹⁰⁵ Through the French and messages House sent to Wilson that British Naval Intelligence intercepted, Grey knew how House felt about his time on the continent and his state of mind even before they met to continue their discussions regarding U.S. intervention and a peace settlement.¹⁰⁶

Almost from the moment House arrived back in London British leaders began calling on him. Lord Reading was first on the scene inviting him to meet with Lloyd George. This meeting was quickly expanded to include Grey, Arthur Balfour, and Prime Minister Asquith. Although the meetings were spent discussing the benefits of House's plan and the possible repercussions, Grey was safe in the knowledge that the United States was firmly in the Allies' corner. From his correspondence with the French he knew that none of the Allies were willing to agree to peace terms with Germany, and he was safe in the knowledge that the President of the United States and his principal

¹⁰⁴ House Diary, 27 January 1916, Edward Mandell House Papers, vol. II, Yale University Library.

¹⁰⁵ Secret Memorandum, Cambon to Bertie, 7 February 1916, FO 800/181, UK National Archives.

¹⁰⁶ David M. Esposito, 'Imagined Power: The Secret Life of Colonel House', *Historian* (Summer, 1998), vol. 60, Issue 4, p. 745.

advisor were pro-Ally and willing to go to war with Germany if they turned down the mediation proposal.

Much of the historical discussion surrounding the House-Grey Memorandum focuses on the President's second insertion of the word 'probably' in a document House prepared for the British Government. Wilson's insertion of this one word again changed the meaning of the entire document. Instead of the document reading 'the United States would enter the war against Germany in the event it refused to negotiate', it now stated that it was possible that the United States would enter the war against Germany.

The emphasis here should be placed on the fact that even with Wilson's caveat of 'probably' Grey had obtained from the United States approval for the Allies to attempt to destroy Germany militarily and if they failed, to invite American assistance in the process. According to the agreement American assistance would only come at the Allies' request. From the American point of view, things were set. Peace was possible and on request of the Allies the United States would request peace terms from the belligerents. If Germany refused negotiations the possibility of American entry to the war against the Central Powers was likely; if by chance Germany agreed to take part in a peace conference there would be no need for America to join the war, Wilson would become the man who ended the slaughter on the European fields, and all would be well.

Grey's understanding of the situation is laid bare in a letter to British Ambassador to France Lord Bertie shortly after the House-Grey Memorandum was created. In this letter Grey notes that as long as the Allies believed they could achieve a military victory without U.S. military assistance there was no harm in the American proposal, but if the war were to begin to develop into a stalemate then American

assistance would be required in order to gain a favourable peace.¹⁰⁷ From Grey's point of view then, the United States was falling into line where he could be assured that they would not break relations with Britain over the blockade. It seemed that the acquiescence of the United States to Britain's desired destruction of Germany was on course.

The German Peace Offer of 1916

On 12 December 1916 Bethmann Hollweg proposed that immediate peace negotiations with the Allied powers begin.¹⁰⁸ Here again, peace was not offered for the sake of peace alone, but as a means to an end. Bethmann's attempt at peace was designed to create an opportunity for Germany to win the war, but the essential question that seems to be lost amongst the bevy of issues in late 1916 is what Bethmann expect to gain by not waiting for Wilson's expected mediation.

Often Bethmann's peace proposal is seen as his attempt to assuage the military leaders about the necessity of unrestricted submarine warfare.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, in the months preceding the peace offer Germany's military leaders had been pressing for greater freedom for the submarines in order for the war to be winnable for the army, in part because they were no longer sure Germany could continue fighting another winter. When Bethmann pushed back citing a possible break with the United States, as well as the possibility of breaks with Holland and Denmark as only a few reasons why unrestricted submarine warfare should be avoided, he was forced to defend his case in a meeting with the Kaiser. This meeting took place on 4 March 1916, and upon hearing the arguments for and against unleashing the submarines the Kaiser agreed that

¹⁰⁷ Grey to Bertie, 5 March 1916, FO 800/181, UK National Archives.

¹⁰⁸ The Chargé in Germany (Grew) to the Secretary of State, 12 December 1916, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1916. Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, pp. 87-89.

¹⁰⁹ Z.A.B. Zeman, *The Gentlemen Negotiators: A Diplomatic History of World War I*, (New York, 1971), p. 114.

unrestricted submarine warfare was not a viable option at that time.¹¹⁰ He did, however, issue instructions to Bethmann to begin laying the diplomatic ground work in neutral countries, and in the United States particularly, for the Kaiser agreed with Bethmann that it would be 'stupidity to provoke a war with America.'¹¹¹

Despite the Kaiser's decision not to provoke a war with the United States, Bethmann was still under considerable pressure to clear the way for unrestricted submarine warfare. The year 1916 saw several changes in the war that forced Germany to adapt her approach. The military assault on Verdun had not forced France's collapse and the battle of the Somme had come to pass, both battles taking a tremendous toll on the number of soldiers lost by both sides. In the east Romania had been defeated and the Brusilov offensive had petered out leaving both the Russian and Austro-Hungarian armies wrecked and discontented, and in spite of the Austro-Hungarian position, there was some room for positive thought on the part of Germany's leadership. Nevertheless, by mid-1916 Germany was feeling the pressure of the British Blockade and knew that they would need to create an opportunity for the military to put Germany in a more favourable position for peace.¹¹² Because it was the feeling amongst Germany's military leadership that restricted submarine warfare limited the success of the submarine it was decided that the diplomats should clear the way for unrestricted submarine warfare.¹¹³

If Bethmann agreed with the assessment that Germany's position was becoming more precarious by the day, and most historians agree that he did, then it becomes easy to understand why he would give up his attempts to keep the U.S. out of the war and

¹¹⁰ 10 March 1916, Zimmermann to Bethmann Hollweg, Recording/Chronicle, Theobald v. Bethmann Hollweg, Nachlass 1549, Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*; Walter Görlitz, *The Kaiser and His Court: The Diaries, Note Books and Letters of Admiral Georg Alexander von Müller, Chief of the Naval Cabinet 1914-1918* (New York, 1959), pp. 141-142.

¹¹² Z.A.B. Zeman, *The Gentlemen Negotiators: A Diplomatic History of World War I*, (New York, 1971), pp. 111-112.

¹¹³ Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 139.

look towards the possibility of peace, presented as an opportunity to occupy America's interest while the military forced a decision in the war.¹¹⁴ It is with this in mind that Bethmann's diplomatic initiatives toward the United States in 1916 inadvertently took the same lines as House's agreement with Grey – if peace terms were met, great, if not Germany would hope to create an environment that would make it difficult for the U.S. to break neutrality by means of appearing to have wanted peace only for the British to shun the opportunity to end the destruction.¹¹⁵

On 25 September 1916 Jagow notified Wilson that Germany would accept general terms of peace immediately if the President would only make the offer.¹¹⁶ The offer never came but the promise to make a peace offer after President Wilson had won re-election.¹¹⁷ Germany's leadership was growing tired of Wilson's lack of action towards peace, and because Bethmann had been charged with clearing a path for the unrestricted use of submarines, it was apparent that Germany would have to make an appeal for peace. Jagow was also consistent in his discussions with Ambassador Gerard regarding Germany's willingness to welcome Wilson as a mediator in peace efforts. Following a more traditional view of First World War history, Z.A.B Zeman writes that Bethmann was working on the hope of peace being near in order to stave off unrestricted submarine warfare.¹¹⁸ Viewed through the idea that there was a continued battle between the civilian and military forces in Germany this is a valid conclusion. But

¹¹⁴ Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm, 1958), p. 141; Konrad H. Jarusch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hubris of Imperial Germany* (New Haven, 1973), p. 300; Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888-1918* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 283.

¹¹⁵ Birnbaum, *Peace Moves*, pp. 102, 125, 169.

¹¹⁶ Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 25 September 1916, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1916, Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, p. 55.

¹¹⁷ The Secretary of State to the Chargé in Germany (Grew), 29 November 1916, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1916, Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, pp. 70-71.

¹¹⁸ Z.A.B. Zeman, *The Gentlemen Negotiators: A Diplomatic History of World War I*, (New York, 1971), pp. 114-115.

viewing the German discussions with the United States as part of a larger diplomatic and military strategy – that was to clear the way for this type of submarine warfare, meaning that the United States would remain neutral because Wilson would have assumed that Germany had made a sincere attempt at peace only to have it rejected – it becomes clear that the German Foreign Office was working to placate the United States as the military worked to bring an end to the war on German terms.

Bethmann's peace proposal of 12 December 1916 has often been deemed a diplomatic blunder because it upstaged President Wilson's own plan that was delivered on 26 December 1916, demanding an end to hostilities and for all belligerents to come to the peace table. It is, however, important to note that it followed a clear pattern of using peace to maintain American neutrality and, according to Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase, Germany's peace offer was a 'highly opportunistic diplomatic move initiated to either secure peace...or to create a politically favourable situation for the return to unconditional submarine warfare.'¹¹⁹

In the days following the German peace offer, the Entente expectantly rejected the offer, and Wilson presented an offer of his own. This new offer was, in essence, rejected by all sides, but it is Germany's response that is so often misunderstood. All Allied governments had rejected both the German peace initiative and the American initiative and, from Germany's point of view, the United States had to recognize the fact that Germany had made an attempt at peace and that the Allies had shown their true intentions to destroy Germany, leaving Germany with no other choice but to utilize unrestricted submarine warfare.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, Zimmerman's response to Wilson's proposal clearly states Germany's willingness to meet with the Allied powers to discuss

¹¹⁹ Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase, 'The United States and Germany in the World Arena, 190-1917', in *Confrontation and Cooperation: Germany and the United States in the Era of World War I, 1900-1924*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schröder (Providence, 1993), p. 57.

¹²⁰ 16 January 1917, Foreign Office to Bernstorff, IA Mexico, Nr. 16 secr., R 16.919-1, Bd. 1, Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt.

the cessation of hostilities, going so far as to point out that Germany had already offered peace on 12 December and therefore was serious about bringing about an end to the war.¹²¹

Because Bethmann was not looking to simply create peace but to create an opportunity for the force of arms to create conditions beneficial to a German dictated peace it must be pointed out that Germany placed restrictions on how a peace conference would come about because Germany's leadership still believed that if the United States remained neutral they could win the war. The Allied camp made no bones about its desire to destroy Germany. In a letter to Lansing the American Ambassador to France William Sharp notes that the Allies believed they had the men and ammunition needed to drive Germany back across the Rhine and force them to 'yield or give better terms.'¹²²

The idea that maintaining American neutrality ended with the decision to utilize unrestricted submarine warfare is an overly simplistic view of First World War history. Bernstorff continued to work to maintain the Wilson administration's hope for peace and therefore American neutrality up to and after the point that he was sent home by Wilson and diplomatic ties were broken with Germany. The infamous Zimmerman letter to Mexico is another attempt at maintaining U.S. neutrality, as is indicated by the line in the letter stating that Germany would work to keep America neutral.

Conclusion

Talk of peace during the years 1914-1916 had become a means to an end, not the end in itself. In their attempts to position themselves to win the war, the belligerents did

¹²¹ The Ambassador in Germany (Gerard) to the Secretary of State, 26 December 1916, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1916, Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, pp. 117-118.

¹²² The Ambassador in France (Sharp) to the Secretary of State, 29 December 1916, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1916, Supplement: the World War (Washington, 1928), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1914Supp>, p. 126.

not hesitate to use the promise of peace in order to give their troops the time needed to win decisively. Influencing the United States to remain neutral was as important to Germany as American belligerency was to Britain. The tactical use of peace was extremely effective in influencing Wilson and his advisors.

From Grey's perspective, American intervention was only as needed as the military claimed it was. Because the U.S. provided a large portion of the war material used by Britain, the maintenance of American sympathy was of equal importance to the overall desire to bring the war to a successful conclusion. Due to Grey's seeming desire to have peace, and a lasting peace at that, Britain was able to maintain American affection. Wilson's well known desire for peace in this case actually prolonged the war, as the British were able to continue to drag out the need for American mediation based on events at the front and the intransigence of France and Russia. As it became more apparent that the war could not be won without American intervention, Grey used the issues of peace to guide Wilson firmly into the British corner.

Despite the anti-German feelings of so many members of the Wilson Administration, Bethmann Hollweg, Bernstorff, and the German Foreign Office were able to continually use the idea of peace to diffuse American angst. Germany's initial calls for peace led President Wilson and Colonel House to believe that there was at least a chance that they could end the war before being drawn in. Even when House was determined that Germany was being ruled by the militarists and navalists, Bethmann's appeal for peace stunted a potential break in relations between the two countries. Bethmann's 1916 peace proposal allowed Germany the time to manoeuvre in hopes of ending the war through military means before the United States was able to make a decisive impact. Despite precipitating Wilson's own peace initiative, the German peace

proposal should still be considered a success in that it bought Germany time to end the war on her terms.

The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that Britain and Germany were both attempting to use the idea of peace as a means of directing U.S. policy. Grey had established that Britain could not make peace with Germany while Germany still posed a threat to her interests. In Germany, Bethmann had been tasked with keeping America out of the war long enough for the military to finally win a decisive victory. This chapter has revealed that Britain and Germany spoke with the United States about peace only when they believe peace suited their purposes. If either country found itself in a position to dictate an end to the war they were willing to put forth a plan for peace that suited them. Peace would not be discussed by Britain if it had recently suffered a military setback, nor would Germany discuss peace if it felt the situation at the front placed it in a weaker position. Peace was only an option to either country if it were perceived to be in a position of strength and could dictate the terms. By the same principle, peace was not an option if dictated too. Peace, it turned out, was simply another weapon of war.

Conclusion

This analysis of British and German diplomacy during the American period of neutrality has demonstrated that both countries had similar approaches towards the United States. This dissertation has shown that the policy of British and German diplomats was one of delay, vagueness, and conciliation that had been established decades before the first shots were fired in August 1914. Both Britain and Germany strove to maintain friendly relations with the United States, but only as long as it did not interfere with their efforts to win a decisive military victory.

Using documents from British, German, and American archives this critique of Great Power diplomacy has interpreted First World War diplomacy as an extension of long established British and German diplomatic policies towards the United States. In doing so it has shown that continuity of diplomacy played a determining role in American entry into the war.

This essay has demonstrated that the decision made by British Foreign Minister Lansdowne in 1896 to chart a course building friendly relations with the United States, relations between the two countries had begun to see positive results. The friendship between the two countries grew after Sir Edward Grey took over the Foreign Office in 1905 as he was determined to maintain this policy and at the same time secure British interests. Using telegrams between Grey and Spring Rice found in the records of the Foreign Office at the British National Archives, and the Colonel Edward M. House Papers at Yale University, this critique has shown that Grey's success was based on his use of his Ambassador's and other agents of the British government to provide him with insight about the United States and its leaders.

In support of the thesis, this dissertation focused on the clash over the Panama Tolls controversy and the issue of the Mexican presidency as evidence of Grey's early

seduction of President Woodrow Wilson and his administration. The evidence provided created a clear picture of how Grey pressed the Wilson administration to meet its obligations under the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, and at the same time adroitly tied the issue to who Britain would support in for the Mexican presidency. The evidence shows that in doing so, Grey and his ambassadors worked closely with the American Ambassador as well as with Edward M. House to foster a sense of camaraderie and understanding. The groundwork laid by Grey during this period gave him insight into how the Wilson Administration worked, and it allowed him to influence members of the administration during the period of American neutrality.

This dissertation also argues that German diplomatic policy followed the same path as the British policy, although with a decidedly less favourable outcome. Evidence primarily from the Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States has shown that much of the animosity between Germany and the United States is due to misunderstandings over how diplomacy works. Germany's attempt to expand from a strictly European power to a colonial power coupled with American attempts to become a colonial power led the two countries on a collision course. What this essay has made clear is that how the two countries dealt with these events laid the groundwork for how they would deal with each other during the period of American neutrality.

Using the Samoan affair and the German interference in the Spanish-American War this critique has demonstrated how German diplomatic policy attempted to establish a feeling of cooperation and friendliness towards the United States. The evidence provided has shown that German diplomacy was never quite successful at bringing about a *détente* with the United States. It does, however, demonstrate that through careful nurturing of administration officials, the careful handling of events, and

the use of likable personalities, such as Sternburg and Bernstorff as ambassadors, Germany was able to decrease tension between the two countries.

The United States, on the other hand, haphazardly approached each diplomatic event separately as if they occurred in a vacuum. This dissertation demonstrates that America's distaste for diplomacy led to U.S. diplomacy being directed by the domestically adept and foreign policy inept Colonel Edward M. House. When comparing evidence from the British National Archives, the Library of Congress, Yale University, and the German Foreign Ministry (Auswärtiges Amt) it has shown that the professional foreign offices headed by Sir Edward Grey in Britain and Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg in Germany – and their respective array of long-standing ambassadors and Foreign Service officers – the United States found itself at a disadvantage when negotiating diplomatic policies to defend Wilson's policy of neutrality.

This essay has focused on a number of specific instances in which British and German diplomats out-manoeuvred the United States: Sir Edward Grey's decisions to work with the United States over the issues surrounding Britain's blockade of Germany; Bethmann Hollweg's attempt to allow the German submarine force to do as much damage to British shipping as it could without forcing a break with the United States; Germany's attempt to use Wilson's Mexican policy to create a distraction to events in Europe; and the use of the promise of peace to gain Wilson's support. The instances, it has been argued here, illustrate the diplomatic success of both Britain and Germany in their respective attempts to gain the maximum advantage in acquiring American assistance.

The United States and Britain's Blockade Diplomacy

This dissertation has applied the view that a continuing diplomatic policy allowed Grey to delay responses to American complaints about the effects of the blockade illustrating Grey's ability. It supports the claim that Grey was intent in maintaining friendly relations with the United States, and indeed it has gone to great lengths to show that it was this long-standing policy that the Foreign Minister sought to maintain throughout the period preceding American entry to the war.

In doing so it has shown that Grey was successful in blunting American concerns over the British blockade of Germany by purchasing confiscated American cargo. Evidence found in the Sir Edward Grey Papers at the British National Archives has also demonstrated that through the deft use of delay, Grey was able to temporarily confuse U.S. diplomats, and therefore gave British blockade policy the time needed to affect the war. By slowly adding articles to the list of items considered contraband and therefore illegal to ship to Germany, Grey had successfully forced the United States into accepting the British blockade. By promising to purchase U.S. cargo, and moving items on and off of the contraband list, he was able to change the American argument against Britain's distant blockade from one of legality to being a debate on U.S. public perception. The diplomacy surrounding this event gives a clear picture of how the diplomatic experience of the British Foreign Office was able to out-manoeuvre the inexperienced American diplomats.

Regardless of the event in question Grey would work to gain the most possible from the situation for Great Britain without alienating the United States. The British Foreign Office's work was clearly helped by the large number of anglophiles in Wilson's administration. It is to Grey's credit that he did not squander the good relations, not only maintaining but creating closer British-American relations. This

critique has demonstrated, however, that despite the advantage of anglophiles running the White House, Grey was not initially successful at creating a perceptible move towards war in the United States, and as this was the case at least some credit should be given to the German diplomats working just as tirelessly as their British counterparts.

The Diplomacy of U-boat warfare

Utilizing documents in Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, and the Politischen Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, this dissertation has shown that Bethmann's delay in response to American complaints about the establishment of a war zone around the British Isles, and ships lost to sinking by German submarines allowed more ships to be sunk while the United States waited for a reply. It has also argued that Germany successfully used its diplomatic corps in the United States to blunt the legalistic approach the American Secretary of State's office – initially used to decry the use of the submarine – by couching the need for the weapon in moralistic terms that President Wilson would understand and therefore dulling the effect of calls for war from the American press. While the immorality of lost lives eventually worked against the Germans in the court of public opinion, this essay has proven that they had succeeded in blunting the Wilson administration's legalistic attempts to stop the use of the submarine.

Just as important in understanding the diplomacy during America's period of neutrality is an examination of Wilson's 'strict accountability' statement – long held to mean that if Germany continued its unrestricted use of submarines the United States would break relations and declare war. By a careful analysis of documents from the Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, which contain letters and notes passed between German and American diplomats, this dissertation has shown that the American response was clearly different. It has shown that with the specific terms of

the statement outlined first in the *Arabic* pledge, seven months after the ‘strict accountability’ statement, and then later confirmed in the *Sussex* pledge, yet another seven months later, Wilson’s ‘strict accountability’ was limited to repudiation of the event and reparations paid. This assessment illustrates that Germany’s diplomacy regarding the use of submarines was designed to maintain American neutrality, while giving the submarines the widest range available to strangle Britain.

The use of delays, vagueness, and conciliation in the name of maintaining U.S.-German friendship created the situation from which Wilson’s ‘strict accountability’ statement became defined in the *Arabic* and *Sussex* pledges as simply making reparations and repudiating the action. Because the reality of the ‘strict accountability’ language was that it did not mean that war was the only course of action for the United States regarding submarine warfare, Germany was able to dismiss the most egregious sinking of ships as accidents, reprimand the commander of the submarine in question, and commit to paying reparations to the families of those who lost their lives, all while the submarine flotilla still operated around the British Isles.

Diplomatic Acquisition via Mexico

The diplomatic experience Wilson, Grey, and Bethmann initially had with Mexico began before the First World War, but due to the complexity of Mexican internal issues and the country’s location it played a pivotal role in the diplomacy of the war. Through diplomatic notes, memorandum, and letters found in the Woodrow Wilson Papers housed at Princeton University, this dissertation has established the continuity of policy the United States had with Mexico – intervention. Having done so, the evidence also shows that Wilson’s diplomacy towards Mexico fostered already present feeling of hatred toward the United States among the Mexican people.

The evidence presented has shown that Wilson's decision to intervene at Veracruz led to a further souring of relations between the two neighbours. Additionally, Wilson's insistence on influencing who was the president of the country led to condemnation by Mexicans from all sections of society, and, importantly, to the German view that the historical conflict between Mexico and the U.S. could support their efforts to maintain American neutrality.

Though Sir Edward Grey utilized Wilson's desire to remove Huerta in order to gain relief from higher tolls for British ships in the Panama Canal, he did so in a manner that elicited, and therefore established, feelings of friendship between Britain and the United States. By contrast, evidence presented such as letters between Bethmann Hollweg and Jagow found at the Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Germany's Foreign Office worked to secure Mexico as a means to tie up American war materials and attention. Therefore, the evidence presented shows that German leaders believed that in the event of a break in relations with the United States, Mexican-American relations were simply an opportunity to distract Americans from the events in Europe.

However, Zimmerman's decision to offer an alliance with Mexico if war with the United States became unavoidable has often been derided as one of the worst blunders in diplomatic history. By analysing available documents from U.S. and German archives, this dissertation concludes that these events were clearly part of Germany's continuing diplomatic policies and that Zimmermann's offer should be considered a shrewd attempt at negating America's potential impact on the war. Correspondingly, the evidence also demonstrates that were it not for the work of Britain's intelligence services and the decisions on how to utilize it by the Foreign Office, Zimmerman's telegram would not have been brought to the attention of the United States when it would have the greatest impact.

The Diplomacy of Peace

Having outlined his desire to mediate an end to the bloodshed and the importance of maintaining America's neutrality to that end, Wilson inadvertently gave the belligerents a weapon to add to their diplomatic arsenals. Employing evidence from the archives of all three countries, this dissertation has shown that both Britain and Germany seized the opportunity to utilize the peace process as a major tool in their quest to acquire American support for their cause, and in doing so turned Wilson's stated desire to bring the war to an end against him. Again and again Wilson sent House to Europe to attempt to broker a peace deal. Evidence found in the Colonel Edward M. House Papers at Yale University as well as evidence from the Foreign Office Political Files at the UK National Archives, and the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt demonstrate that in every case the Foreign Ministers for Britain and Germany continued the use of delayed responses to President Wilson's peace queries in hopes of finding themselves in better positions to dictate the outcome of any peace offer.

For her part, Germany used discussions of peace to position herself to win the war, either by utilizing submarines in a ruthless manner, or by delaying American entry into the war by attempting to frame the failure of peace as Allied insincerity and war mongering. If an acceptable peace came as a result, fine, but if not German authorities felt they would be positioned to keep the U.S. neutral. Britain, on the other-hand, used the potential of peace to attempt to bring about American intervention based on the premise that Germany, as the world's preeminent threat to peace, had to be conquered in order to save civilization and create a peace that would last. The common factor for both sides' diplomatic efforts was Wilson's desire for peace.

Final Thoughts

The fact that the United States joined the Entente in fighting against Germany does not preclude the fact that Bethmann Hollweg, Jagow, Bernstorff, and Zimmerman worked within their diplomatic belief pattern and successfully maintained American neutrality until April 1917. This dissertation has demonstrated that Bethmann's diplomacy has to be considered successful, for despite the multitude of issues Germany was able to maintain U.S. neutrality until April 1917, thereby extending the time the German military had to win the war. American intervention occurred only after German political and military leaders deemed that without the use of the submarine it could not fight another year.

British actions regarding issues surrounding their blockade could just as easily have led to a confrontation with the United States. As this paper has illustrated, however, it was Grey's well defined tactics that minimized issues with the United States and forced Germany to spend more time defending its actions to an increasingly pro-British administration and press. As this critique has demonstrated, Britain's experienced diplomats played heavily on the values of Wilson and his advisors – 'fighting her [America's] fight', 'fighting to save civilization', and 'being fed on the same food' – to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two nations. The ability of the British Foreign Office to create a sense of oneness with Wilson and those who helped shape American policy was crucial to the creation of the pro-Ally position the United States found itself in April 1917. Without the work of Grey, Spring-Rice, among others, Wilson would not have found himself viewing Germany as a threat to 'everything I [Wilson] hold dear in [the] world.'

Through the same diplomatic actions of delay, vagueness, and conciliation, German and British diplomats worked tirelessly in an effort to acquire America's

services. The services required were quite different in theory, with Britain needing to pull the United States into the war and Germany desiring continued American neutrality, but in essence the desired effect was the same – to utilize the U.S. for their own benefit. In the end it was a multitude of events that led to American entry into the First World War. The disclosure of the German offer to Mexico, and the declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare and the subsequent sinking of multiple U.S. flagged ships around the British Isles, all played a role in Wilson's decision to ask Congress for war. As is demonstrated in this essay, Wilson, his policies, and America were guided through the maze of events from August 1914 to April 1917 by belligerent diplomats, in particular those from Britain and Germany. Through skilled diplomacy Germany was able to hold off U.S. entry for two and a half turbulent years, but it was Britain's own skilled, and ultimately more successful diplomacy that was to gain the benefits that would come with acquiring America.

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