

Hidden History: The Secret Origins of the First World War

Overview of Gerry Docherty & Jim Macgregor's Book

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Of the many myths that befog the modern political mind, none is so corrupting of the understanding or so incongruent with historical fact as the notion that the wealthy and the powerful do not conspire.

They do.

They conspire continually, habitually, effectively, diabolically and on a scale that beggars the imagination. To deny this conspiracy fact is to deny both overwhelming empirical evidence and elementary reason.

Nevertheless, for the astute observer of the 'Great Game' of politics, it is an unending source of wonderment to stumble across ever more astounding examples of the monstrous machinations of which wealthy and powerful elites are capable. Indeed, it is precisely here that authors Docherty and Macgregor enter the fray and threaten to take our breath away entirely.

*Thus, the official, **canonized history of the origins of the First World War**, so they tell us, is one long, unmitigated lie from start to finish. Even more to the conspiratorial point is the authors' thesis that - and to paraphrase a later Churchill who figures prominently in this earlier story - never were so many murdered, so needlessly, for the ambitions and profit of so few.*

In demolishing the many shibboleths surrounding the origins of the 'Great War' (including 'German responsibility', 'British peace efforts', 'Belgian neutrality' and the 'inevitability' of the war), Docherty and Macgregor point the finger at what they argue is the real source of the conflict: a more or less secret cabal of British imperialists whose entire political existence for a decade and a half was dedicated to the fashioning of a European war in aid of destroying the British Empire's newly emerging commercial, industrial and military competitor, Germany.

In short, far from "sleepwalking into a global tragedy, the unsuspecting world", Docherty and Macgregor contend, "was ambushed by a secret cabal of warmongers" originating not in Berlin, but "in London".

I must confess at this juncture to a certain bias in granting credence to such a striking thesis, this if only on general principle alone. After all, one straight look at present day political reality is to look square into the maw of Orwell's nightmare. Moreover, three decades of independent journalism have led me to conclude not only that virtually nothing of what is presented as 'news' is remotely true, but that the conventional writing and presentation of history itself is as phoney as a three dollar bill. Still, one does demand a credible argument or two. Let's look at a few of those contained in 'Hidden History'.

The Players

Before launching pell-mell into the argumentative labyrinth it is apropos that we first sketch the central cast of characters of this grim story.



Cecil Rhodes (Source: [Wikipedia](#))

In the beginning there was **Cecil Rhodes**, the prime minister of Cape Colony but who, the authors remind us, was "in reality a land-grabbing opportunist" whose fortune had been underwritten in equal parts "by brutal native suppression and the global mining interests of the House of Rothschild". Rhodes had, apparently, long talked of setting up a secret 'Jesuit-like society' in aid of furthering the global ambitions of the British Empire. In February of 1891 he did just that enlisting the services of his close associates, **William Stead**, a prominent journalist, and **Lord Esher**, a close advisor to the British Monarchy.

Two others were soon drawn into the inner circle of the clandestine group: **Lord Nathaniel (Natty) Rothschild** of the famous British and European banking dynasty, and **Alfred Milner**, a brilliant academic and colonial administrator who would quickly become the organizing genius and iron-willed master of ceremonies of the group.

These central four would later be joined by: **Lord Northcliffe**, the owner of 'The Times', who would complement Stead in propagandizing and softening up the British public for war with Germany; **Arthur Balfour** and **Herbert Asquith**, two future British Prime Ministers who would provide the needed parliamentary influence; **Lords Salisbury and Rosebery** who brought an additional wealth of political connections to the table; and **Lord Edward Grey**, he to whom, in the final analysis as British Foreign Secretary in 1914, it would fall to hammer the final nail in the coffin of European peace.

Of particular importance was the addition of **Prince Edward** (soon to be King Edward VII)

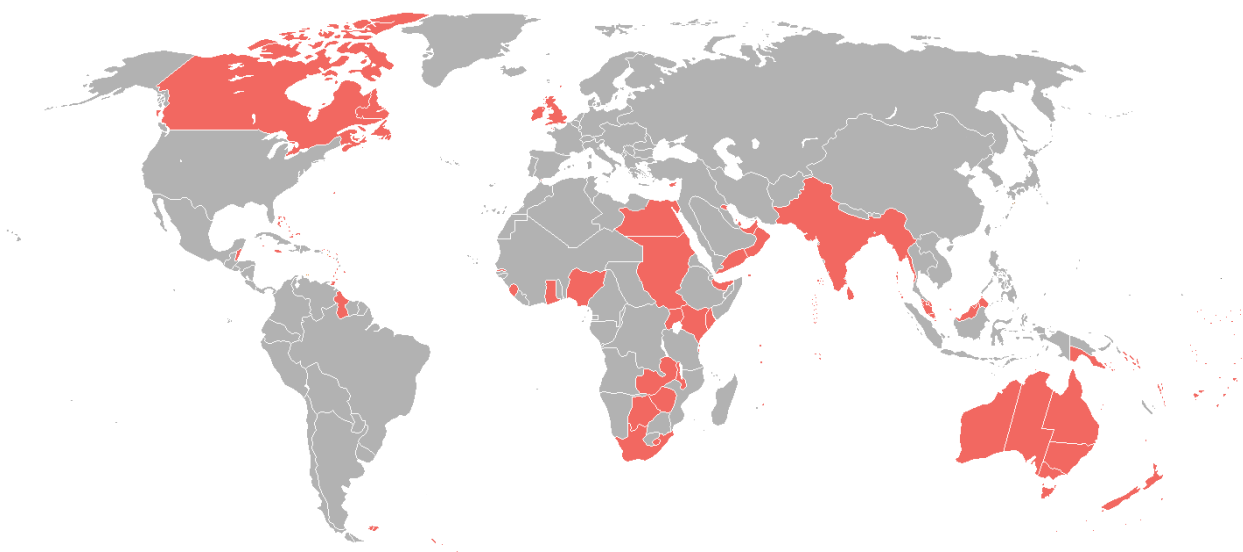
who, despite his playboy image, was, in fact, an astute political operative whose frequent international social forays provided the perfect cover for helping to forge the, often secret, military and political alliances between Russia, France, Britain, and Belgium.

This core Praetorian Guard then extended its tentacles to all reaches of the British (and eventually, international) power hierarchy by vigorously recruiting its 'Association of Helpers', the myriad of lower down bureaucrats, bankers, military officers, academics, journalists, and senior civil servants, many, as it turns out, hailing from Balliol and All Souls Colleges, Oxford.

And, too, the legendary Churchill, liberally inflated with his own bombast and well lubricated with Rothschild money, would rise to take his anointed place amongst the war-hungry secret elect.

Early Adventures

The first foray of this elite cabal played out in South Africa with the deliberate fomentation of the (2nd) Boer War (1899 - 1902). Gold had been discovered in the Transvaal region in 1886 and British imperialists were determined to grab it. After a number of failed machinations by Rhodes himself to topple the Boers, the secret elite was dealt an ace when **Alfred Milner** was appointed high commissioner for South Africa. Seizing the moment, Milner, without passing Go, proceeded straight to war and, in his infamous scorched earth policies and adamant demands for unconditional surrender, demonstrated the general martial philosophy that would later be deployed against Germany.



A map of the British Empire as it was in 1898, prior to the Second Boer War (1899-1902). (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Following the defeat of the Boers, Milner & Co. (Rhodes had died during the 'peace negotiations') quickly penetrated the main organs of British imperial governance including the Foreign, Colonial, and War Offices. Arthur Balfour went one better by establishing, in 1902, the Committee for Imperial Defence (CID). The latter proved especially significant in helping to almost completely bypass the British Cabinet in the years, months and days leading up to August, 1914. Indeed, Balfour would prove to be one of only two permanent members of this all-important imperial institution; the other being **Lord Fredrick Roberts**, commander-in-chief of the armed forces and close friend of Milner. It was Roberts who

would later appoint two tragically incompetent hangers-on, **Sir John French** and **Douglas Haig**, to their First World War posts overseeing the mass slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers.

The year 1902 also saw the establishment of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty. Britain had long feared for its Far East empire at the hands of Russia and sought to bolster Japan as a counterweight. The alliance bore fruit in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese conflict in which Russia was dealt a decisive defeat. Always with the long-term goal in mind, however, i.e. war with Germany, Milner et al adroitly switched bait and immediately began wooing Czar Nicholas II resulting in the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. In the same period (1904) Britain – with the crucial assistance of Edward VII – broke its near thousand-year enmity towards France and signed the Entente Cordial with its former rival.

During this same time frame (1905) a more or less secret agreement was made with King Leopold II allowing Belgium to annex the Congo Free State. This was, for all intents and purposes, an alliance between Britain and Belgium; one which was, over the next decade, to be continually deepened with numerous (mostly secret, meaning withheld from the British Parliament) bilateral military agreements and ‘memorandums of understanding’, and which unequivocally put paid to any notion of Belgium being some sort of ‘neutral’ party in the upcoming conflict with Germany.

The core alliance was now complete, i.e. Britain, Russia, France and Belgium, and all that was needed was to secure the fealty and obeisance of the British colonies. In aid of the latter Milner convoked The Imperial Press Conference of 1909 which brought together some 60 newspaper owners, journalists and writers from across the Empire who hobnobbed with another 600 or so British journalists, politicians and military figures in a grand orgy of war-mongering propaganda. The martial message was then duly delivered to the unwitting colonial multitudes. The success of the Conference could be seen most visibly in Canada where, despite the extreme divisiveness of the issue, the nation would eventually send more than 640,000 of its soldiers to the killing fields of Europe, this all on behalf of a tiny handful of British imperialists.

The Moroccan ‘Crisis’

Docherty and Macgregor duly remind us that renowned historian **Barbara Tuchman**, in her Pulitzer-Prize winning book, ‘The Guns of August’, “made it very clear that Britain was committed to war by 1911 at the latest.” Indeed, preparations for war had proceeded apace since at least 1906.

Still, 1911 marked a turning point when the secret elite first made bold in attempting to ignite war with Germany. The pretext was Morocco. Now, truth to tell, Britain had no direct colonial interests in Morocco, but France and Germany did. By this time the cabal in London – with **Edward Grey** as Foreign Minister – had inducted a key French minister, **Theophile Declasse**, into their confidences and were able to engineer what was essentially a false flag operation in Fez. France then followed this up with an army of occupation. Germany posted a minimalist response by sending a small gunboat to Agadir whence the entire British press – reflecting Britain’s ‘deep state’ interests – went into high hysteria condemning German ‘threats to British sea-lanes’ etc. The fuse to war was only snuffed out in the final hour when France’s (recently elected) socialist Premier, **Joseph Caillaux**, initiated peace talks with the Kaiser. War with Germany would have to wait.

In the meantime, Britain, under the direction of its secret mandarins – i.e. almost entirely beyond Parliamentary review or approval – continued their preparations for war. To this end, for example, Churchill, who by 1911 had been appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, redeployed the British Atlantic fleet from Gibraltar to the North Sea and the Mediterranean fleet to Gibraltar. Simultaneously, the French fleet was moved from the Atlantic to cover Britain's absence in the Mediterranean. These maneuvers were all strategically aimed at Germany's North Sea navy. The pieces on the global chessboard were being positioned.

In France the leftist peacenik Caillaux was, in 1913, replaced as Premier with one of the British elites very own 'helpers' in the person of Raymond Poincare, a right-wing, rabid Germanophobe. Poincare quickly acted to remove his anti-war ambassador to Russia, **George Louis**, and substitute him with the revanchist Declasse. Meanwhile in America the secret cabal, acting largely through the Pilgrims Society and through the Houses of Morgan and Rockefeller, machinated to have an unknown but pliable democrat, Woodrow Wilson, elected over the publicly-controlled central bank advocate, President Taft. It was from this lofty perch that the Anglo-American 'deep state' launched the US Federal Reserve System, a private central bank dedicated from the get-go to funding the war against Germany.

The Balkan Sting

The simple tale repeated ad nauseam regarding the circumstances surrounding the assassination of **Archduke Franz Ferdinand** on June 28, 1914, so Docherty and Macgregor tell us, contains as little veracity as, say, the official version of the assassination of JFK two generations later. Indeed, the structural similarities between the two – from the virtual total stand-down of security through to the clear evidence of state complicity (in this case, starting in Serbia, but leading straight to London) – are remarkable. Suffice to say that there was a domino-like chain of events that then ensued – it's just that the events weren't driven by base human instincts and ineluctable forces beyond all human control as is commonly proffered, but rather by calculating minds and conspiratorial design.

Thus, immediately following the assassination, there was widespread international support for Austria-Hungary which was widely perceived as the aggrieved party. Nevertheless, the usual suspects, having helped stage the murder in the first place, were able to deftly turn the propaganda tables against both Austria and Germany by means of an ingenious ruse. Having secretly obtained the contents of the 'Note', which contained Austria's (reasonable under the circumstances) demands for Serbian contrition, the secret cabal were able to gain direct input into the crafting of the 'Serbian Reply'. The 'reply', of course, was designed to be unacceptable to Austria. Simultaneously, France's President, Poincare, decamped to Moscow to assure the Czar and his generals that, should Germany act to uphold its alliance responsibilities towards Austria, France would back Russia in launching a full scale European war. France, naturally, knew that England – or rather its elite imperial clique – was similarly committed to war. It was during this opportune moment, in fact, when Grey and Churchill connived to purchase the Anglo-Persian Oil Company so securing the necessary oil supplies for the British navy.

All the while **Kaiser Wilhelm** and **Chancellor Bethmann** were conspicuous in being the only statesmen genuinely seeking peace. Their subsequent vilification by hordes of appropriately housebroken historians thus rings with the same Orwellian tone as the present-day establishment demonization of nations and individuals resisting the American Imperium.

Grey Hits It Home

Having contrived to fan the flames of a local Balkan fire into a general European inferno, British Foreign Minister Grey and Prime Minister Asquith subsequently deployed every dirty trick in the diplomatic playbook to vitiate any possibility of peace and, instead, to guarantee war.

On July 9th, for instance, the German ambassador to London, **Prince Lichnowsky**, was repeatedly reassured by Grey that Britain had entered no secret negotiations that would play into war. This, of course, was an outright lie. On July 10, Grey then deceived Parliament into believing that Britain had not the slightest concern that events in Sarajevo might lead to a continental war. Meanwhile, the Austrian Prime Minister, Berchtold, was similarly deceived by all three Entente governments that their reaction to the 'Note' would not go beyond a diplomatic protest. However, by the 3rd week of July all of these self-same governments did an about-face and declared a complete rejection of Austria's response.

On July 20, as already noted, the French Prime Minister, Poincare, went to St. Petersburg to reaffirm their two nations' respective martial agreements. On July 25, Lichnowsky arrived unannounced at the British Foreign office with a desperate plea from the German government imploring Grey to use his influence to halt Russian mobilization. Incredibly, no one was available to receive him. Russia had, in any case, secretly begun mobilization of its armed forces on July 23, while, on July 26, Churchill quietly mobilized the British fleet at Spithead.

None of the foregoing, of course, was subject to democratic oversight. As Docherty and Macgregor put it,

"As far as the [British] public was concerned, nothing untoward was happening. It was just another summer weekend."

On July 28th, Austria, despite not being in a position to invade for another fortnight, declared war on Serbia. Meanwhile, the British Foreign Office began to circulate rumours that German preparations for war were more advanced than those of France and Russia even though the exact opposite was, in fact, the case. Matters were quickly racing beyond Wilhelm's control.

On the 29th, Lichnowsky again begged Grey to prevent a Russian mobilization on Germany's borders. Grey's response was to write four dispatches to Berlin which post-war analysis proved were, in truth, never sent. The dispatches turned out to be merely part-and-parcel of the elaborate charade to make it look as if Britain (and, specifically, he, Grey) was doing all it could in the effort to avert war. Also on the evening of the 29th did Grey, Asquith, Churchill, and Richard Haldane meet to discuss what Asquith called the 'coming war'. Docherty & Macgregor once again here emphasize that these four men were virtually the only people in Britain privy to the impending calamity, i.e. not the other Cabinet members, not the members of Parliament, and certainly not the British citizenry. But then, they were its architects.

On the 30th, the Kaiser wired Czar Nicholas a heartfelt appeal to negotiate the prevention of hostilities. Indeed, Nicholas was so moved by Wilhelm's plea that he decided to send his

personal emissary, General Tatishchev, to Berlin to broker a peace. Unfortunately, Tatishchev never made it to Berlin, having been arrested and detained that very night by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sazonov, who, as 'Hidden History' cogently evinces, had long been an asset of the secret cabal in London. Under sustained pressure from senior members of his military Nicholas finally relented and on the afternoon of the 30th ordered general mobilization.

The official announcement of Russian mobilization effectively closed all doors to peace. The Germans, realizing that they had been set up, and also realizing that they were about to be attacked on two fronts – from the west by France, and from the east by Russia – finally, on Aug. 1, ordered their own mobilization; tellingly, the last of the continental powers to do so. Here, however, Germany made a crucial tactical error: it elected to follow up its mobilization with a formal, honour-bound declaration of war on France. By doing so it fell deeper into the trap laid by Grey & Co. who had, all along, machinated to do everything possible to guarantee war without, however, being seen to have officially caused the war.

Still, Grey had one last card to play in order to convince both a war-leery Cabinet and House of Commons to abandon their common sense and plunge headlong into a full-scale pan-European war. For just as the myth of 'weapons of mass destruction' would, in a later era, serve to advance American imperial aggression, so here did the myth of poor, benighted little 'neutral Belgium' carry the banner for British imperialism.

The Speech That Sealed The Fate of Millions

On the 2nd of August, 1914 Prime Minister Asquith convened a special Cabinet meeting to discuss the (manufactured) crisis. Though the Cabinet was in no mood to countenance British involvement in a continental war, they soon found themselves pressured and hedged about by revelations of a 'web of [military and political] obligations, which they had been assured were not obligations, [and] had been spun around them as they slept'. Moreover, Grey crucially kept from them the fact that the German ambassador, Lichnowsky, had, only the day before (Aug. 1), specifically offered to guarantee Belgian neutrality. Indeed, Grey's deception might never have come to light but for the fact that Chancellor Bethmann exposed the offer in the Reichstag on Aug. 4th.

With the Cabinet sufficiently brow-beaten, confounded – and deceived, i.e. Asquith, without Cabinet approval or knowledge, had already issued orders for the mobilization of the Army and Navy – it now only remained to hoodwink Parliament. And so, on Aug. 3rd, Sir Edward Grey took to the pulpit and began what was to be an epic panegyric to the follies of peace and the virtues of war. Here too the audience was not particularly receptive, but the sermon soon gathered force.

Having first set the tone by announcing that peace in Europe 'cannot be preserved', Grey then moved on to a stunning series of lies and misrepresentations concerning the intricate and long-formulated military agreements between England, France, Russia and Belgium. According to Grey, they didn't exist. But what of the dense skein of diplomatic agreements? There were no such agreements, there were no such entanglements. Parliament was 'free' to vote its conscience, to exercise its democratic mandate. Just as long, of course, as it didn't vote for peace.

All of the foregoing was, in any case, mere preamble to the centerpiece ploy of Grey's

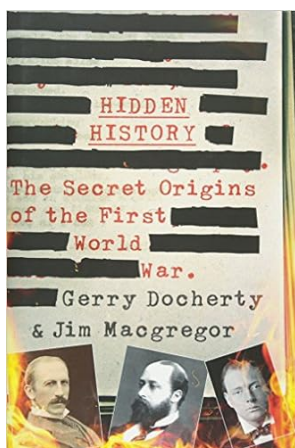
speech: Belgian neutrality. That the latter was an out-and-out sham was only surpassed in duplicity by Grey's concealment, not only from Cabinet but now from Parliament, of Germany's offer to guarantee exactly the point under contention, i.e. Belgian neutrality. Instead, Grey produced, for dramatic affect, an emotional telegram from the King of Belgium to King George pleading for assistance. The timing couldn't have been more perfect if it had been deliberately designed for the occasion. Which, of course, it was. Also pre-planned were the post-sermon affirmations in favour of war by the various opposition party leaders. They had all been vetted and brought onside by Churchill prior to the day's session. Only Ramsay MacDonald, head of the Labour Party, swam against the well-orchestrated tide of 'inevitability' that was the constant and unerring motif of Grey's martial peroration.

The day's session ended without debate; Asquith had not allowed any to occur, though he had been pressured by the Speaker of the House to reconvene later that evening. In between Grey sealed the deal, i.e. war, by firing off an ultimatum to Germany demanding that it not invade Belgium even though he, Grey, knew that such an invasion had already begun. As Docherty and MacGregor phrase it, this was a "masterstroke". War could not now be avoided. And though the night session witnessed a vigorous and substantive debate which largely demolished Grey's stance, it was all for nought. At the appointed moment Arthur Balfour, "former Conservative Prime Minister and a member of the Secret Elite's inner circle, rose menacingly. He had had enough." Using the full weight of his magisterial authority he condemned, ridiculed and dismissed the naysayers' anti-war arguments as, the 'very dregs and lees of the debate'. With the Commons thus emotionally bullied into silence, so ended the last chance for peace in Europe.

Plus Ca Change

What strikes one again and again whilst reading 'Hidden History' is the ring of truth that resonates from every page, from every revelation. That such a tiny, elite group of individuals, completely beyond democratic control, could determine the fate - and deaths - of millions should shock us. It should, but it doesn't really. It doesn't because we see the same phenomenon occurring now, repeatedly, before our very eyes. Indeed, the current state of 'permanent war' is, more or less, the unconscious condition of modernity itself.

Docherty & Macgregor have made a fine contribution here. They have gone beyond what **David Irving** so aptly labelled as the 'court historians', i.e. those historians essentially prostituted to elite / establishment consensus, and given us a glimpse of what it really means to write history. And if there is any lesson - or rather counter lesson - we can take from it, it is that we are doomed to repeat history only so long as we listen to those dedicated to obscuring and inverting it. In short, to those who lie to us.



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