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# Neo-Revisionism and the Origins of the First World War

*Dr. Robert C. Moore*

## ABSTRACT

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# Neo-Revisionism and the Origins of the First World War

Dr. Robert C. Moore

## I. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF NEO-REVISIONISM

An ancient ghost is going around the Western World promoting a 'novel' thesis that claims to be based on a 'fresh' look of the subject in question. Although the 'novelty' of this 'thesis' is meant to appear innovative and based on 'new' research, it can be easily traced back to its origins. The alleged 'new' thesis was invented by a reinvigorated revisionism<sup>1</sup> of the First World War unfolding an agenda of pushing the responsibility for its unleashing away from Germany and Austria-Hungary to France, Russia, Great Britain, and Serbia. A few historians in England<sup>2</sup> and Germany – with a different focus - are trying to leave the vast international historiography on the origins of the war behind and turn the conclusions, that once were a 'consensus' internationally, upside down.

In some cases, a 'new look' at events may be necessary and innovative, but in this case the 'new' thesis is simply trying to topple an existing consensus for other purposes, considering that it cannot provide any new sources or aspects that could change the picture.<sup>3</sup> From an American perspective this is comparable to the revisionism regarding the issues of slavery and civil war, and how these issues have shaped the division of the founding and subsequent events of the republic. In both cases, in Germany as well as in the United States, revisionism is projecting a glorified past<sup>4</sup> to forge a new consensus in the present that is based on a set of assertions that cannot be sustained by closer scrutiny.<sup>5</sup> This approach is trying to eradicate critical statements about each country's past, blaming it on 'other' states, groups and individuals, that have originated in the 1960s

<sup>1</sup> A selection of relevant studies, Stefan Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik in der Julikrise 1914. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Ausbruchs des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Muenchen, 2009), Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), idem., *July 1914. Countdown to War* (London, 2014); Nicholas A. Lambert, *Planning Armageddon. British Economic Warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers, How Europe went to War in 1914* (London, 2012), [German transl., idem., *Die Schlafwandler, wie Europa in den Ersten Weltkrieg zog* (Muenchen 2013)]; Herfried Muenkler, *Der Grosse Krieg, die Welt 1914-18* (Berlin 2013) and several articles that will be discussed further below; for a detailed overview, Alan Kramer, "Recent Historiography of the First World War, Part I", *Journal of Modern European History* 12 (2014): 5-27, Part II, 155-174 that is providing an in-depth discussion on the variety of new publications.

<sup>2</sup> English revisionism is typically focused only on Great Britain and its role in 1914, although the methodology is similar, Matthew Seligmann, "Naval History by Conspiracy Theory: The British Admiralty before the First World War and the Methodology of Revisionism", *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38 (2015): 966-984

<sup>3</sup> John F. V. Keiger, "The War explained: 1914 to the Present", in: *A Companion to World War I*, ed. John Horne (Chichester, UK 2010): 19-31

<sup>4</sup> As an example, see the recently published report of the Trump Commission, *The 1776 Report*, ed. The President's Advisory 1776 Commission (Washington, D. C., 2021): 10-16, that is trying to use certain portions of American history (leaving out the 'dark sides') to be taught affirmatively for the "Task of National Renewal" at present; James Grossmann, executive director of the American Historical Association has pointed out that this report is "not a work of history, but cynical Politics" in order to distort real events: "This report skillfully weaves together myths, distortions, deliberate silences, and both blatant and subtle misreading of evidence to create a narrative and an argument that few respectable professional historians, even across a wide interpretive spectrum, would consider plausible, never mind convincing." Quoted from, Michael Crowley, Jennifer Schuessler, "Trump's 1776 Commission Critiques Liberalism in Report Derided by Historians", *New York Times* (Jan. 21, 2021)

<sup>5</sup> Compare in contrast to the report the "1619 Project", Jake Silverstein, "Why we published the 1619 Project", in: *New York Times Magazine* (Dec. 20, 2019) and also the 12 essays published in the magazine on August 14, 2019

and are deemed negative and destructive.<sup>6</sup> Revisionism is all about evading critical issues and blaming the messenger for the ‘inconvenient’ message, trying to deflect criticism about the past to avoid addressing it in the present.

In the case to be examined here, the German role in unleashing the First World War, the ‘new’ approach grew since the late 1990s<sup>7</sup> from a snowball to a small avalanche that sees itself as a reaction to the end of the Cold War and German reunification, suggesting a necessary change of view of the events of 1914. A new group of historians is claiming that Germany does not bear much responsibility for unleashing the war of 1914 and is therefore eligible for an exit from the ‘claws’ of the European Union and a return to the full ‘sovereignty’ of the *Kaiserreich* in 1914.<sup>8</sup> What is ‘novel’ about this tendency is the fact that the ‘new’ research is not arguing with an open ‘visor’ but is using a camouflage, pretending to be either a result of a ‘complex’ analysis of the international

system<sup>9</sup>, or based on cultural’ history<sup>10</sup> or both, or it is claiming an unorthodox thesis that was allegedly overlooked and is now established for the first time.<sup>11</sup>

This may sound novel and innovative, but as Stephen Schuker has pointed out in his review of Clark’s ‘Sleepwalkers’, it turns out to be “old wine in new bottles”.<sup>12</sup> The assertion of neo-revisionism, that their thesis is based on ‘new research’ is misleading, because what they call ‘new’ is crucially resting on materials that originated in the 1920s. The only ‘novel’ thing is

<sup>9</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, states on p. xxix: “This book strives to understand the July Crisis of 1914 as a modern event, the *most complex* of modern times, perhaps of any time so far”; Karen Rasler, William R. Thompson, “Strategic Rivalries and complex causality in 1914”, in: *The Outbreak of the First World War, Structure, Politics, and Decision Making*, ed. Jack S. Levy, John A. Vasquez (Cambridge, UK, 2014) give an overview regarding the different ‘models’; regarding ‘systemic’ causes: Keiger, “War explained”, 24-25; systems analysis seems to be a convenient retreat for revisionism, because its general perspective only allows an overall statement of the failure of the ‘system’ avoiding a closer look at its parts, Guenther Kronenbitter, “Diplomatisches Scheitern: Die Julikrise 1914 und die Konzertdiplomatie der europäischen Großmächte”, in: *Am Rande Europas? Der Balkan - Raum und Bevölkerung als Wirkungsfelder militärischer Gewalt*, ed. Bernhard Chiari, Gerhard P. Gross (Muenchen 2009): 55-65

<sup>10</sup> Dominik Geppert, Andreas Rose, “Machtpolitik und Flottenbau vor 1914, Zur Neuinterpretation britischer Außenpolitik im Zeitalter des Hochimperialismus”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 293 (2011): 401-437, based on the ‘new’ research of British historians, 403: “In the following, some new approaches from the military and diplomatic history as well as from the *cultural history* of politics will be used (...).” (*all translations by author*)

<sup>11</sup> As an example, Rainer F. Schmidt, “*Revanche pour Sedan* – Frankreich und der Schlieffenplan. Militärische und bündnispolitische Vorbereitung des Ersten Weltkriegs”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 303 (2016): 393-425, who claims that the French Government had ‘detailed knowledge’ of the Schlieffen plan that until this day was overlooked which was used to force Germany to unleash the war in 1914; Terence Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan: German War Planning 1871-1914* (Oxford, 2002), is advancing the thesis that the Schlieffenplan never existed and Germany’s posture in 1914 was defensive and supposed to be determined to answer an attack from the Franco-Russian Alliance; Annika Mombauer, “Of war plans and war guilt: the debate surrounding the Schlieffen Plan”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28 (2005): 857-885, called Zuber’s thesis, 879: “(...) a falsification of history”.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Schuker, “Old Wine in New Bottles”, *New Criterion* (January 2015): 83-85

<sup>6</sup> *The 1776 Report*, 29-33; in case of Germany it is Fritz Fischer and his pupils, Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 560

<sup>7</sup> See the review of Niall Ferguson’s ‘Pity of War’, Thomas G. Otte, “Neo-Revisionism or the Emperor’s New Clothes: Some Reflections on Niall Ferguson on the Origins of the First World War”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 11 (2000): 271-290

<sup>8</sup> See the ‘revisionist’ manifesto by German historians that is confirming and ‘celebrating’ the ‘paradigm’ shift in historiography, Dominik Geppert, Andreas Rose, Cora Stephan, Thomas Weber, “Warum Deutschland nicht allein schuld ist”, *Welt.de* (Jan. 4, 2014)

that the 'new' look wants to turn the established consensus upside down, negate the criticism that has been heaped on Germany and Austria-Hungary and throw old accusations against the Entente powers. The real origin of these allegedly 'new' assertions can be traced back to the propaganda of the German leadership in 1914 and the 'innocence' campaign<sup>13</sup> of the German Foreign Office against the Versailles Treaty in the 1920s, that has started, financed, and implemented the campaign with the goal of propaganda and manipulation aiming at the domestic and international audience to create sympathies for the 'German' cause.<sup>14</sup>

Although the neo-revisionist authors like to obscure the events of 1914 that led to war, and despite gaps<sup>15</sup> in the sequence of documents, we do know what has happened during those '39 days'.<sup>16</sup> All the Great Powers seemed genuinely surprised about the assassination of the Austrian heir to the throne on June 28, 1914, and nothing would have come of it, if not a change happened in the beginning of July 1914. While in 1913 the German leadership obviously was not ready for

the 'Great War', a year later they thought differently.

The *Reichsleitung* had shifted its posture and was now ready to support Austria-Hungary's request for a punitive expedition, a war against the state of Serbia, that easily could escalate in a war between the great powers.

The calculations of the German leadership in 1914 were two-fold. Not only were they trying to boost Austria-Hungary's status in the Balkans, but if the Entente powers would decide to prevent Austria's war against Serbia, the *Reichsleitung* was determined to take any intervention as a threat against the central powers, and would respond with war as long as they could put the blame on Russia and France, they were determined to eliminate as a Great power anyway.

It is important to note, that the real change – compared to the years before – happened in Germany, where the crucial decision-makers, Kaiser Wilhelm II. and the Chancellor, were suddenly in agreement over the 'necessity' to give its 'only' ally a blank cheque for a war against Serbia knowing very well that without their support Austria could and would not go to war against Serbia. Although in February 1913, roughly a year before, the German Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, had dismissed similar scenarios and had warned the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Berchtold, that Russia in case of an Austrian war against Serbia will not stand by idly and would probably intervene, signaling his non-approval.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hermann J. Wittgens, *The German Foreign Office Campaign against the Versailles Treaty. An Examination of the Activities of the Kriegsschuldreferat in the United States* (Ph. D. University of Washington, 1970); idem., "War Guilt Propaganda conducted by the German Foreign Ministry during the 1920s", *Historical Papers* 15, 1980, 228–247; Immanuel Geiss, "Die manipulierte Kriegsschuldfrage", *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 36 (1983): 31–60; idem., "The Outbreak of the First World War and German War Aims", *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (1966): 75–91; Ulrich Heinemann, *Die verdrängte Niederlage. Politische Öffentlichkeit und Kriegsschuldfrage in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen, 1983): 54–151; Wolfgang Jäger, *Historische Forschung und politische Kultur in Deutschland* (Göttingen, 1984): 46–68; Erich J. C. Hahn, "The German Foreign Ministry and the Question of War Guilt in 1918–1919", in: *German Nationalism and the European Response 1890–1945*, ed. Carol Fink, Isabel Hull, James MacGregor Knox (London, 1985): 43–70; Holger Herwig, "Clio Deceived: Patriotic Self-Censorship in Germany after the Great War", *International Security* 12 (1987): 5–44

<sup>14</sup> Geiss, "Outbreak", 75–78

<sup>15</sup> Herwig, "Clio deceived", 16–17, is pointing to several gaps in the German documents for the July Crisis caused by the *Reichsleitung* itself during the crisis and after the war.

<sup>16</sup> The term '39 days' was used as a title for a study in the 1920s, Eugen Fischer, *Die kritischen 39 Tage, von Sarajevo bis zum Weltbrand* (Berlin, 1928)

<sup>17</sup> *Die grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914, Sammlung der Diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes*, ed. Johannes Lepsius, Albert Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Friedrich Thimme, 40 Vol. (Berlin, 1922–1927) [cited from now on as GP with No.], Vol. 34 (1), Dok. No. 12818, "Der Reichskanzler von Bethmann Hollweg an den oesterreich-ungarischen Minister des Aeusseren, Grafen von Berchtold", 10. 2. 1913, 346–348; John C. G. Roehl, *Wilhelm II., Into the Abyss of war and exile, 1900–1941* (Cambridge, UK, 2014), 917–953; similar Moltke's letter to Conrad on Febr. 10, 1913 printed in, Conrad von Hoetzendorf, *Aus meiner Dienstzeit*, Vol. III (Wien, 1923): 144–151, where he is warning Conrad, if Austria is provoking a war in the Balkans it may be difficult to find an "effective motto" for the justification of war for the German people if the provocation is originating from Austria-Hungary.



But the chancellor had also told the Austrians that this was the wrong time and envisioned a better one later, when – according to Bethmann - there will be a chance to go into the conflict “with conditions that are much more favorable to us.”<sup>18</sup> Sixteen months later the Chancellor obviously thought that now the favorable conditions are met and supported the Austrian war against Serbia based on a scenario that can be called ‘indirect provocation’<sup>19</sup> stating now – contrary to his former insights - that this war could be ‘localized’ and Russia had simply no business to intervene. The rationale for this ‘indirect provocation’ scenario was based on the premise that the German leadership – from an official point of view - could not be identified as the instigator and supporter behind Austria’s claims towards Serbia hoping to show to the world that the decision about peace and war was up to the intervention of Russia, while Austria was just following its legitimate interests. Germany was ready to jump on this opportunity to sustain its self-assumed superiority over France and Russia, whose military potential was growing that has made a German ‘victory’ in the future – according to Moltke - more unlikely.

Specifically, in France the Government was weary about the German threat and had improved the armaments of the Entente powers to be ready to defend themselves. Initially, the German calculations proved successful, as the Russians mobilized their troops ‘first’ on July 30, 1914 and reacted as predicted. Germany could now point to the ‘Russian threat’ and start the war under the camouflage of a ‘forced war of defense’.

In the beginning, everything had been going according to ‘plan’, with the exception that

England did not stay neutral, which put the first dent in Bethmann Hollweg’s ‘indirect provocation’ scenario. Other setbacks followed and the ‘superiority’<sup>20</sup> calculations of the German leadership collided with the realities of war. In short, propaganda and manipulation to make the public believe in the German version of events started in 1914, and, repeating and clamoring to the statements of justification of the *Reichsleitung* in 1914 as part of the later campaign of deception, the German leadership created a special heritage for mainstream German historiography<sup>21</sup> that is lasting until today. The avalanche of studies that was published between 1914 and 1945 were all part of a campaign of ‘patriotic self-censorship’<sup>22</sup> that was focused on justifying the decisions of the German leadership that led to war in 1914.

The strong linkage between the interest of the *Reichsleitung* and historiography in creating a record that either pushed the responsibility for unleashing the war simply on the Entente (the radical ‘ambush’ version) or claiming “that Europe slid into war unknowingly”, that no “nation harbored aggressive tendencies” and “fate or providence designed this cruel course of events”<sup>23</sup> (the moderate version), was finally interrupted by the German historian Fritz Fischer<sup>24</sup>, who published a study in 1961 that cut the ‘umbilical cord’ of agreement between politics and historiography, stating that Germany carried the main responsibility for unleashing the war. Therefore, nationalistic minded historians in

<sup>18</sup> GP 34 (1), Doc. 12818, 347

<sup>19</sup> GP 39, Doc.15560, “Der Reichskanzler von Bethmann Hollweg an Kaiser Wilhelm II.”, 18. 12. 1912, 9-11, 9: “It is certain that a war with Russia would also mean for us a war with France. On the other hand, there are many indications that it is doubtful whether England would intervene actively if Russia and France appear as the ones who have directly provoked us (...) Statements such as from Haldane and the like only indicate that England would retroactively - initially only diplomatically – act in favor of a defeated France. Under these circumstances we have a chance if we *avoid any provocation.*” (emphasis by author)

<sup>20</sup> Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, *Betrachtungen zum Weltkrieg*, 2 Vol. (Berlin 1919, 1921), Vol. 2, 15: “The belief in German superiority was almost unlimited. This unconditional belief in a German victory [...] was [...] a moral factor of immense value and crucial importance.”

<sup>21</sup> See the initial contributions from leading German historians at the time like Marcks, Darmstaedter, Oncken, and Uebersberger, *Deutschland und der Weltkrieg*, ed. Otto Hintze et. al. (Leipzig, 1915), that is an example for the close connection regarding the ‘ideas of 1914’ between the political leadership and historiography to justify unleashing the war; also Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Erhebung von 1914, Vortraege und Aufsaezte* (Stuttgart 1915); Rudolf Kjellen, *Die Ideen von 1914, eine weltgeschichtliche Perspektive* (Leipzig, 1916)

<sup>22</sup> Herwig, “Clio deceived”, 5

<sup>23</sup> Herwig, “Clio deceived”, 7-8

<sup>24</sup> A move that revisionist historians are still grumbling about, Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 560

Germany cried foul still defending the German leadership in going to war, which – as Holger Herwig has pointed out – has raised “basic questions concerning the role of the historian in society, scholarly integrity, decency and public morality.”<sup>25</sup>

In its ‘new’ appearance, revisionist historiography has always avoided closer scrutiny of primary documents, basically pushing a reinterpretation of the events of 1914 and before, that is not based on ‘new’ or any archival sources (except for anecdotal evidence), as Christopher Clark, a major representative of the new direction, admitted in 2013 during a public discussion with other historians on German TV. In fact, as Stephen Schuker has pointed out, Clark in his study ‘Sleepwalkers’ may have dipped into original sources, but only “enough to sprinkle archival holy water on his footnotes” while “his synthesis rests upon the work of others.”<sup>26</sup> During the discussion on German TV, it was also admitted that the real reason for Clark’s attack on the Entente powers is his crusade against the issue of the German *Sonderweg*, that he was fighting in his earlier books on Kaiser Wilhelm II. and Prussia, providing a ‘cleansed’ picture of the *Kaiserreich*<sup>27</sup> before 1914, demanding – based on his re-interpretation on the origins of the First World War - a change of direction in German schoolbooks<sup>28</sup> - similar to the Trump-Commission

in its report regarding the ‘teaching’ in American classrooms, promoting a “patriotic education”<sup>29</sup> to avoid what they call “destructive scholarship” that “shatter the civic bonds” of society.<sup>30</sup>

Looking at the events in Europe between 1914 and 1918, we can summarize them as follows: instead of acknowledging and admitting the ‘mistake’ of the German leadership unleashing a war in 1914 - taking responsibility for it - and negotiating a serious settlement with the Allies after the defeat in 1918 (accepting the end of monarchy), the representatives of the old elites in the Foreign Office and the General Staff did the opposite and betted on the proposition of denying any responsibility of unleashing the war. They initially thought to invoke the usual ‘oblivion’ clause<sup>31</sup> that was used previously insisting that it doesn’t really matter who initiated the war and Germany should be welcomed again at the ‘concert’ of the great powers after the closure of the Versailles peace conference. They obviously did not understand that times had changed and – considering the millions of victims and the destruction they had caused in France-nobody was willing to do ‘business as usual’. Instead, the representative of the Allies insisted on the causation principle: those countries who had unleashed the war in 1914 had to pay restitution.<sup>32</sup> This principle was not entirely new, as Germany in 1871 made France for unleashing the war in 1870 pay a restitution of 5 billion Francs (200 million German Franken).<sup>33</sup>

The ruling elites in Germany demonstrated that they were more interested in trying to conserve their old, privileged positions, signaling that they would not accept the fact that Germany had – together with its allies – the main responsibility

<sup>25</sup> Herwig, “Clio deceived”, 7: “And is a nation well-served when its intellectual establishment conspires to obstruct honest investigation into national catastrophes, upon which past, present and future vital national interests can be reassessed?”

<sup>26</sup> Schuker, “Old Wine”, 85

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Clark, *Wilhelm II* (Harlow, 2000); in a positive review Geoff Eley, *German History* 20 (2002): 251-253, is noting the ‘cleansed character’ of this ‘biography’ admonishing John Roehl for pointing out the Kaiser’s antisemitism and the implied thesis of German continuity; idem., *Iron Kingdom, The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (London 2006); [German transl., idem., *Preussen, Aufstieg und Niedergang 1600-1947* (Muenchen, 2007)] In his introduction, 9-16, Clark is criticizing the Allies for their ‘ending’ of Prussia in 1947 and is complaining about the thesis of the German *Sonderweg*, that is supposed to have falsely showed the history of this ‘fabulous’ state in the wrong light, whose real legacy is that of a lasting feeling of ‘vulnerability’ in the middle of Europe

<sup>28</sup> The discussion was broadcast on Phoenix TV and is available on U-Tube; Michael Grandt, “Kriegsschuldfrage

1914: Historiker fordern das Umschreiben von Schulbüchern”, [www.koppverlag.de](http://www.koppverlag.de) (Nov. 4, 2013)

<sup>29</sup> *The 1776 Report*, 19

<sup>30</sup> *The 1776 Report*, 18

<sup>31</sup> Fritz Dickmann, “Die Kriegsschuldfrage auf der Friedenskonferenz in Paris von 1919”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 197 (1963): 1-101; Eckart Conze, *Die Grosse Illusion* (Muenchen 2018): 383-385

<sup>32</sup> Philipp M. Burnett, *Reparations at the Versailles Peace Conference. From the Standpoint of the American Delegation*, 2 Vol. (New York, 1965): Vol. I, 67-70

<sup>33</sup> Franz Gutmann, *Das Franzoesische Geldwesen im Kriege, 1870-1878* (Strassburg 1913), 193-419

for unleashing the war in 1914. Although they had reluctantly offered a 100 Billion Marks as restitution for the damages (without any interest starting in 1925) tied to the territorial integrity of Germany, they wanted to separate any reparations from the claim of the Entente towards the causation of war. Schizophrenic as it is, it was acceptable to pay damages but not to address the issue of causation.<sup>34</sup> But only if Germany was responsible for unleashing the war, it made any sense to also pay reparations.

Instead of focusing on a peaceful development of a new, democratic Germany, in an act of 'national' defiance, representatives at the Foreign Office decided to start an 'innocence' campaign over the alleged 'sole guilt'<sup>35</sup> issue against the Versailles Treaty for domestic and international purposes. Domestically, because the old elites in Germany – having lost the monarchical order and now forced to deal with a republic – did not want to admit that they caused an unnecessary war, and internationally they chose to undermine the validity of the Treaty and minimize the obligation to pay reparations. In doing so, they turned the accusations<sup>36</sup> against Germany around towards the Entente creating a conspiracy myth over the alleged war aims of the Allies to use them as a weapon against France, Russia, Great Britain and

Serbia.<sup>37</sup> A specifically established 'guilt section'<sup>38</sup> in the Foreign Office was heading the campaign and was determined to fight these accusations with a reversal of arguments that are still used – with modifications – by revisionist historians today.<sup>39</sup>

Its strategy was twofold: first of all – it was crucial to appear 'objective' and stay under the radar screen of the public and the Allies – the 'guilt section' decided to run their 'innocence' campaign<sup>40</sup> through 'front' organizations with neutral sounding names, founding the *Zentralstelle fuer Erforschung der Kriegsursachen*<sup>41</sup> ('Center for the Study of the Origins of the War') and its pseudo-scientific journal *Die Kriegsschuldfrage* ('the War-Guilt Question', renamed in 1929 to *Berliner Monatshefte*), to be able to agitate an international audience and disguise the campaign's real origins. For domestic purposes they founded the *Arbeitssausschuss deutscher Verbaende*<sup>42</sup> ('Working committee of German associations') to coordinate propaganda activities in Germany to make sure that all the political parties, trade unions and other associations agreed to support the 'national' cause to create a

<sup>34</sup> Conze, *Illusion*, 359-360; Eberhard Kolb, *Der Frieden von Versailles* (Muenchen 2005): 91-110.

<sup>35</sup> See the discussion between the Foreign Minister Brockdorff-Rantzau and General Groener in April 1919, Doc. 79, "W. Groener an U. v. Brockdorff-Rantzau", April 4, 1919, in: *Quellen zum Friedensschluss in Versailles*, ed. Klaus Schwabe (Darmstadt, 1997): 212-218, where Brockdorff-Rantzau is telling Groener about his commitment to the 'innocence campaign'.

<sup>36</sup> These accusations were gathered by the Versailles Commission on responsibility, *Violation of the Laws and Customs of War, Reports of Majority and Dissenting Reports of American and Japanese Members of the Commission of Responsibilities at the Conference of Paris*, ed. Carnegie Endowment for Peace (Oxford, 1919).

<sup>37</sup> See the German answer to the accusations of the Versailles commission advanced in the so-called 'Professor's memorandum' in: *Deutschland schuldig? Deutsches Weissbuch ueber die Verantwortlichkeit der Urheber des Krieges*, ed. Auswaertiges Amt (Berlin, 1919): 56-68, that became one of the central texts of revisionism that contains almost all the arguments to be found in 'Sleepwalkers'.

<sup>38</sup> Werner Frauendienst, "Das Kriegsschuldreferat des Auswaertigen Amtes", *Berliner Monatshefte* 15 (1937): 201-214; Alfons Fonck "Die Schuld der Deutschen am Kriege", *Berliner Monatshefte* 15 (1937): 224-233.

<sup>39</sup> Regarding the details on the 'guilt section', Heinemann, *Niederlage*, 54-73; Wittgens, *German Foreign Office campaign*, 1-50; compare this with the arguments in the revisionist manifesto, Geppert et. al., "Warum Deutschland nicht allein Schuld ist", *Welt.de* (Jan. 4, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Friedrich Stieve, "Der Kampf gegen die Kriegsschuldfrage von 1922-1928", *Berliner Monatshefte* 15 (1937): 194-201; also 35 *curriculum vitae* of so-called 'war guilt researchers' on their own behalf, "Deutsche Kriegsschuldforscher 1919-1929", *Berliner Monatshefte* 7 (1929): 552-590; Herwig, "Clio deceived", 7.

<sup>41</sup> August Bach, "Die Zentralstelle fuer Erforschung der Kriegsursachen", *Berliner Monatshefte* 15 (1937): 272-282.

<sup>42</sup> Hans Draeger, "Der Arbeitsausschuss deutscher Verbaende", *Berliner Monatshefte* 15 (1937): 258-271.



domestic ‘unity’ against the new international order, suppressing any possible dissent that dared to follow a different approach that could have minimized the impact of the campaign.<sup>43</sup> The Foreign Office even managed the ‘findings’ of the investigating committee of the *Reichstag* to avoid a real examination of the role of the German leadership in 1914 that were in contradiction to the ‘innocence’ campaign.<sup>44</sup>

And secondly, the German Foreign Office decided to publish special ‘documentations’<sup>45</sup> on the Entente powers with certain materials either captured during Germany’s invasions between 1914-18<sup>46</sup>, transmitted by the spy Benno von Siebert in the Russian embassy in London before

1914<sup>47</sup>, or simply bought after the defeat from willing collaborators at embassies in former Entente countries.<sup>48</sup> These materials were collected and designed to support the German thesis about France and Russia’s war aims and its ‘initiative’ for unleashing the War in 1914<sup>49</sup>, issuing the core materials used affirmatively by revisionist historians in the 1920s and again in the present. In addition, the German Foreign Office campaign solicited ‘welcome’ help from former Russian generals<sup>50</sup> and translated selective Bolshevik ‘publications’ of documents allegedly demonstrating the ‘will for war’ of the Tsarist regime, creating a common political interest between the two countries that culminated later in several agreements and secret armament activities on Russian soil that were forbidden in Germany by the Versailles Treaty.<sup>51</sup>

All this would not have to be mentioned, if the accusations of neo-revisionism today would not

<sup>43</sup> Heinemann, *Niederlage*, 95-151; an example for this strategy is the *Gutachten* of Hermann Kantorowicz that contained a different approach that was suppressed until the author emigrated in 1933 and his ‘appraisal’ was published later in 1967, Hermann Kantorowicz, *Gutachten zur Kriegsschuldfrage 1914*, ed. Immanuel Geiss (Frankfurt/M., 1967).

<sup>44</sup> Ulrich Heinemann, “Die Last der Vergangenheit. Zur politischen Bedeutung der Kriegsschuld- und Dolchstoß Diskussion”, in: *Die Weimarer Republik 1918-1933*, ed. Karl Dietrich Bracher, Manfred Funke, Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (Bonn, 1987), 371-386.

<sup>45</sup> A good example is the German Whitebook of 1919 that contained documents of Russia and Serbia almost in its entirety to boost the claim of the Russian-Serbian plot suggested in the ‘professor’s’ memorandum, in: *Deutschland schuldig*, 56-68.

<sup>46</sup> For example the Belgian dispatches from Entente capitals between 1910 and 1914, ‘captured’ during the German invasion of Belgium in the archives of Brussels in 1914, which were published as examples on the ‘dangerous’ policies of France and Russia, *Zur europäischen Politik 1897-1914, Unveröffentlichte Dokumente im amtlichen Auftrag*, ed. Bernhard Schwertfeger, 4 Vol. (Berlin, 1919); Clark has picked up on that and laced ‘Sleepwalkers’ with commentaries from dispatches in the archives in Belgium and Holland that point in the same direction; also see the reminiscences by Bernhard Schwertfeger, “Belgische Dokumente, belgische Neutralität, deutsche und französische Aktenpublikation”, *Berliner Monatshefte* 15 (1937): 234-247.

<sup>47</sup> *Diplomatische Aktenstücke zur Entente politik der Vorkriegsjahre*, ed. Benno v. Siebert (Berlin, 1921), [engl. transl., *Entente Diplomacy and the World*, ed. idem. (New York 1921)]; regarding Siebert’s role as a spy for the German leadership and the background of these ‘documents’, Stephen Schroeder, “Ausgedehnte Spionage’ - Benno von Sieberts geheime Zusammenarbeit mit dem Auswärtigen Amt (1909-1926)”, *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 64 (2005): 425-463

<sup>48</sup> Herwig, “Clio deceived”, 20

<sup>49</sup> In the case of the Isvolsky correspondence, *Der diplomatische Schriftwechsel Iswolskis, 1911-1914*, ed. Friedrich Stieve, 4 Vol. (Berlin, 1924); also Friedrich Stieve, *Iswolski und der Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1924); Bernadotte E. Schmitt, “July 1914”, *Foreign Affairs* 5 (1926): 132-147, stated already back then about Isvolsky, 133 “(...) in all his correspondence there is not one document, save a telegram of very doubtful authenticity, in which he speaks of war as meditated or desirable or quotes M. Poincare on Alsace-Lorraine. Throughout, Herr Stieve carefully ignores any French documents - and there are many - which would invalidate his argument.”; regarding the origins of the Isvolsky correspondence; Wittgens, *German Foreign Office campaign*, 175-186.

<sup>50</sup> Sergei Drobrorolski, “Die Mobilmachung der russischen Armee”, *Beitraege zur Schuldfrage*, ed. Zentralstelle fuer die Erforschung der Kriegsursachen, Heft 1 (Berlin, 1922) [predecessor of the journal *Die Kriegsschuldfrage*]; Wladimir A. Suchomlinow, *Die russische Mobilmachung im Lichte amtlicher Urkunden und der Enthuellung des Prozesses* (Bern, 1917); idem., *Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1924): 353-421.

<sup>51</sup> Manfred Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee* (Muenchen, 1994): 171-246.

be similar to the arguments of the ‘innocence’ campaign in the 1920s.

What the revisionist historians today do not want to realize is that their (re-)interpretation of the origins of the war in favor of Germany goes back to the political campaign for territorial revisions during the 1920s<sup>52</sup> that was later used by Hitler to violently turn the new international order upside down and unleash the Second World War.<sup>53</sup> From the very beginning, the German protagonists of the revision of the Versailles Treaty were longing for a war of revanche that included the recapturing of the so-called ‘lost’ territories. Even before Hitler was appointed Chancellor in 1933, the doyen of the German ‘innocence’ campaign, Alfred von Wegerer (editor of the journal *Die Kriegschuldfrage*), subtly threatened war, stating, if the Versailles Treaty would not be revised a nation (he meant Germany) “will resort to the old method of war”, and “things some day will explode of themselves”, because the danger of war, “has in reality scarcely diminished”.<sup>54</sup> Although several treaties (for example the Kellogg Pact) had been signed in that respect, it was no surprise, that Wegerer and his colleagues of pseudo-scientific ‘war-guilt’ research anticipated and predicted the belligerent events of the late 1930s, because this was – if all else failed (in their

view) - the only possible way to restore German sovereignty and its status as a great power.

Thereby, the neo-revisionist historians - by trying to revive the old paradigm<sup>55</sup> of the ‘Initiative of the Entente’<sup>56</sup> – are at the same time trying to revive the legitimacy of full German sovereignty, that was taken away by the Allies not after 1918 but after World War II in 1945. It was no accident, that in the early 1960s a new paradigm of the ‘Initiative of the central powers’<sup>57</sup> as an adaption to the new international situation after 1945 emerged, considering that this was the consensus internationally but unacknowledged by historians in Germany, who were still clamoring for the ‘lost’ territories beyond the Oder-Neisse river, that today are part of Poland.<sup>58</sup> To revive the paradigm of the ‘Initiative of the Entente’ after 1990, is a step back to the 1950s (or 1920s), from a political as well as historiographical viewpoint. Today, some moderate historians<sup>59</sup> use the ‘shared’

<sup>52</sup> Without mentioning the campaign, Andreas Hillgruber, “Revisionismus – Kontinuität und Wandel in der Außenpolitik der Weimarer Republik”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 237 (1983): 597-621, but pointing out the continuity of territorial revisionism that Hitler picked up and continued to launch his own policies.

<sup>53</sup> Regarding the connection between the campaign and the Nazis: when Hitler had officially pulled the German signature from the Versailles Treaty in January 1937, the members of the guilt-section of the Foreign Office were in a celebratory mood and published several articles that were bragging about how the campaign became successful, August Bach, “Zur Einführung”, *Berliner Monatshefte* 15 (1937): 177-178 and defended and justified Hitler’s foreign policy.

<sup>54</sup> Alfred von Wegerer, *A Refutation of the War-Guilt Thesis. Introduction by Harry E. Barnes* (New York, 1930): Preface, IX, stating, XI: “With Germany eliminated as a World Power, her military and naval armaments destroyed, and her monarchical form of government overthrown, the delusion was propagated, that the possibilities of future war had not been removed or at least reduced to a minimum. That this dictum was false is as plain today as sunlight.” [German version, *Die Widerlegung der Versailler Kriegsschuldthese* (Berlin, 1928): 5-10].

<sup>55</sup> Regarding the term ‘paradigm’ and its meaning as a ‘guideline’ and ‘model’ for scientific research, Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Encyclopedia of Unified Science, Chicago 1970, 2<sup>nd</sup> enlarged Edition): 10

<sup>56</sup> Samuel R. Williamson, jr., “July 1914 revisited and revised, the erosion of the German paradigm”, in: *The Outbreak of the First World War*, 30-64 is welcoming the shift of ‘focus’ towards the Entente pointing out the crucial role of Clark’s Sleepwalkers, 39: “None of the European states faced as much domestic turmoil as Serbia. Clark’s recent study, the Sleepwalkers, once again (...), reminds scholars that Serbia bore significant responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War.”

<sup>57</sup> This paradigm was originally represented by Pierre Renouvin, *Les Origines immédiates de la Guerre* (Paris, 1925) [engl. transl., *The immediate Origins of the War* (Yale, Ct., 1928)]; Bernadotte E. Schmitt, *The Coming of the War of 1914*, 2 Vol. (New York, 1930); Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War*, 3 Vol. (London 1953-57); Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Duesseldorf 1961); idem., *Krieg der Illusionen* (Duesseldorf 1969); John C. G. Roehl, “Goodbye to all that (again)? The Fischer thesis, the new revisionism and the meaning of the First World War”, *International Affairs* 91 (2015), 153-166, calls it the ‘German’ paradigm.

<sup>58</sup> For more details, Immanuel Geiss, “Die Fischer Kontroverse. Ein kritischer Beitrag zum Verhältnis zwischen Historiographie und Politik in der Bundesrepublik”, in: idem., *Studien ueber Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft* (Frankfurt/Main, 1972): 108-222.

<sup>59</sup> The ‘moderate’ revisionism was originally represented by Sidney B. Fay, *The Origins of the War*, 2 Vol. (New York 1928), who distanced himself from the radical version of Stieve and Barnes (Vol. I, 524-534); and Alfred von Wegerer, *Der Ausbruch des Weltkrieges 1914*, 2 Vol. (Hamburg, 1939).

responsibility thesis, others prefer the radical<sup>60</sup> version, stating that France, Russia and England assaulted and ambushed Germany in August 1914, just like the Kaiser had stated in his address on August 4, 1914 and before.<sup>61</sup> The slightly softer version of the latter avoiding explicitly the ‘ambush’ thesis was Bethmann’s assertion in 1914 that the Entente powers had ‘forced’ the war on Germany, and Germany had to ‘defend’ itself, but the result amounted to the same ‘defensive’ posture, that Germany “did not want war”<sup>62</sup> which became later the mantra of revisionism.

Therefore, the following article is focusing on the heritage of the revisionist assertions but will also

demonstrate, that the thesis of neo-revisionism is based on the sources that were published in the 1920s or secondary literature of revisionist origin, and that the alleged ‘novel’ scenarios like the ‘Balkanization of the Franco-Russian Alliance’<sup>63</sup> or the ‘Balkan inception scenario’<sup>64</sup>, are *deus-ex-machina*<sup>65</sup> inventions (like in a theatre play, a novel or a movie), to boost and justify the paradigm of the ‘Initiative of the Entente’. These ‘inventions’ are designed to solve a serious problem for revisionism: attempting to close the empirical gap for the ‘initiative’ between the history preceding the July Crisis of 1914 and the crisis itself.<sup>66</sup>

In general, it is well-known that the ‘initiative’ fomenting the crisis came from the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia that served as a justification for the demands of the Austrian government, attaching the assassination to the state of Serbia.<sup>67</sup> That’s why from the beginning in 1919, the gap had to be filled by conspiracy myths<sup>68</sup> stating or insinuating<sup>69</sup> that the Russians had somehow helped the Serbians to initiate the assassination of the Archduke.<sup>70</sup> And, countering the charge (in a reversal scenario<sup>71</sup>) that Germany had unleashed the war in 1914, the Foreign Office and the revisionist historians (like Hans Delbrueck) launched the conspiracy myth that the Franco-

<sup>60</sup> The radical version was originally represented by Harry E. Barnes, *The Genesis of the War* (New York, 1926), who relied heavily on the Isvolsky correspondence of Stieve; regarding Barnes’ collaboration with the ‘guilt-section’ of the German Foreign Office, Wittgens, “War Guilt Propaganda”, 228-243; in Germany this version was promoted by the German ‘innocence’ campaign and by the head of the ‘guilt section’ of the Foreign Office, Stieve’s, *Iswolski und der Weltkrieg* and countless books and pamphlets against ‘Poincare and Iswolski’ at the height of the French Ruhr occupation starting in 1923

<sup>61</sup> Kaiser Wilhelm propagated the active scenario of the *Ueberfall* (‘ambush’) of the Entente powers, *Die politischen Reden Kaiser Wilhelms II*, ed. Michael A. Obst (Paderborn, 2011), Dok. 208, S. 362: “During the most peaceful period, we have been *ambushed* in an outrageous way. In the just defense of our interests, having maintained peace for 25 years the sword has been pressed into my hand”; a similar scenario was propagated by Moltke, who predicted an ‘ambush’ for 1917 by the Entente with Russia as instigator, Ansgar Jansen, *Der Weg in den Ersten Weltkrieg, das deutsche Militair in der Julikrise* (Marburg 2005): 496; in 2014 the ‘ambush’ metaphor by the Kaiser was used by Stefan Scheil, “*Mitten im Frieden ueberfaellt uns der Feind*”. *Vergessene Wahrheiten des Ersten Weltkriegs – Die Schuld der Sieger in den Debatten der zwanziger Jahre* (Berlin, 2014) to revive the radical approach of the German leadership of 1914 and the campaign in the 1920s

<sup>62</sup> Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, *Kriegsreden*, ed. Friedrich Thimme (Berlin, 1919), is emphasizing the defensive character of the war avoiding the ‘ambush’ metaphor, but nonetheless creating the myth of the ‘forced war of defense’ as a way to justify the war domestically and internationally, asserting the ‘initiative’ of the Entente powers, see his speech on July 31, 1914, 1: “Should the sword be forced into our hand, we will be fighting with a clear conscience and the knowledge that *we did not want war*.”; and on August 4, 1914 he is pointing towards the Entente before the German *Reichstag* (Parliament) directly, 4: “Russia has put the fire torch on the house (...) We are in a forced war with Russia and France.”

<sup>63</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 293-301

<sup>64</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 349-358

<sup>65</sup> A *deus-ex-machina* is latin for ‘God from the machine’, a term for a certain intervention (from above) in classical Greek theatre, that was supposed to push the plot in the ‘right’ direction.

<sup>66</sup> That the Balkan scenario has an essential meaning for Clark’s study demonstrates the fact that he has also published it separately, Christopher Clark, “The Balkan Inception Scenario: Serbia and the Coming of War in 1914”, in: *Bid for World Power?*, ed. Andreas Gestrich, Hartmut Pogge von Strandtmann (Oxford, 2017): 262-287

<sup>67</sup> Wegerer, *Refutation*, states the opposite, 320

<sup>68</sup> An example for the ‘Russian-Serbian conspiracy’, Hans Delbrueck, *Kautsky und Harden* (Berlin, 1920): 37-40, that we will address further below

<sup>69</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 411-412

<sup>70</sup> Delbrueck, *Kautsky und Harden*, 37-40; Wegerer, *Refutation*, 325-327

<sup>71</sup> Wegerer, *Refutation*, 324: “Consequently, the charge of deliberate plotting in the Austro-Serbian conflict applies not to the Dual Monarchy but rather to the Belgrad Government and to the organizations upon which this government depended and from which it derived its support.”



Russian Alliance was supporting Serbian claims towards Austria-Hungary looking for a 'pretext' to start a war against Austria-Hungary following the motto that 'offense is a better defense'.

Considering the limited space available here, we will take a few crucial examples from Clark's study 'Sleepwalkers' as the new 'revisionist synthesis', as William Mulligan<sup>72</sup> has called it, to demonstrate how the new revisionism is operating. Thereby, discussing major issues to demonstrate that Clark's core arguments are typically resting on 'like-minded' literature from the 1920s that also was used and supported by the 'innocence' campaign, which is following and confirming a similar viewpoint to support the paradigm of the 'Initiative of the Entente'. A closer look at this study is revealing that behind its 'complexity' façade, Clark's inquiry is not only reviving all the *topoi* of the German innocence campaign and its materials but is also - through relentless agitation - consistently trying to shift responsibility for all the crisis and the wars before 1914 and the World War to France, Russia, England and Serbia.

## II. THE 'AMBIGUITIES' OF UNLEASHING THE WAR IN 1914

Before we will examine the revisionist *topoi* in more detail, we need to address a central ambiguity regarding the unleashing of the war in 1914 that has been exploited by the German leadership in 1914 and revisionist historiography ever since<sup>73</sup>, confusing the issue of who was the aggressor that has started the war and who was the defender.<sup>74</sup> Both want to make it look like that

<sup>72</sup> William Mulligan, "The Trial continues: New Directions in the Study of the Origins of the First World War", *English Historical Review* 538 (2014): 639-666, 658.

<sup>73</sup> The author is basing the following presentation on, *Julikrise und Kriegausbruch 1914. Eine Dokumentensammlung*, 2 Vol., ed. Immanuel Geiss (Hannover, 1963/1964), that is presenting roughly 1,200 documents of all the participants and is providing an overview for each period of the crisis.

<sup>74</sup> Another attempt in this area was Terence Zuber's attack on the Schlieffen plan that basically tried to 'prove' that the plan didn't exist, that Germany's posture was defensive and that the real 'offensive' war plan came from the Franco-Russian Alliance, Terence Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan: German War Planning 1871-1914* (Oxford, 2002): 264-265; this was successfully refuted by German historians at a

the war was started by the Entente powers or leaving it open in the sense that nobody 'wanted' war and that the war simply 'broke out' like a plague that had descended on Europe.

Although this does not make any sense (wars do not break out like volcanoes), it is meant to be a serious explanation that emphasizes a 'catastrophe'<sup>75</sup> avoiding the necessary clarity in pointing out whose activities has caused and started the war.<sup>76</sup> Clark calls it the "familiar paradox", and attaches the start of the war to the Entente powers: "The war that needed to be fought defensively in the West *had* to begin aggressively in the East"<sup>77</sup> to counter the obvious fact, that the German army through an offensive invading Luxembourg and Belgium first had started the war in order to defeat France. Not only is this a reversal of the chain of events, but Clark is omitting several issues, that would run counter to his paradigm.

First, it was Germany who in its support of Austria-Hungary had 'indirectly provoked' Russia and started the crisis, while the Russian Government answered with a compromise solution regarding the conflict between Austria and Serbia and only announced mobilizing its forces as a reaction to the Austrian declaration of war against Serbia on July 28, 1914. And secondly, it was Germany - after issuing an ultimatum - that declared war on Russia on July 31, 1914 initiating the beginning of the war through

conference in 2004, demonstrating that Zuber's thesis were not based on primary documents but on distortions and false assertions, Gerhard Gross, "There was a Schlieffen Plan", in: *Der Schlieffenplan. Analyse und Dokumente*, ed. Hans Ehlert et. al. (Paderborn, 2006): 117-160 [engl. transl., *The Schlieffenplan, International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I* (Lexington, KY, 2014): 85-135], Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, signals agreement with Zuber's distorted interpretation of the Schlieffen plan, 216 (note 123, 603).

<sup>75</sup> The first to use the term 'seminal catastrophe' was George Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875-1890* (Princeton, 1979): 3, which was afterwards constantly repeated by other historians.

<sup>76</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 553, calls it "defensive patriotism" trying to 'equalize' the enthusiasm to go to war between the different countries, leaving out the specific reasons for each case.

<sup>77</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 504.

violating the Eastern border to Russia first.<sup>78</sup> This move may have been widely criticized internally by Tirpitz and others<sup>79</sup>, foreseeing that this declaration of war – as a contradiction to Bethmann’s ‘indirect provocation’ scenario – would later mess up (as Clark has called it) the “complexities of the war’s causation”<sup>80</sup>, but nonetheless is demonstrating who took the initiative to implement the attack. The ‘indirect provocation’ scenario was based on the premise that Austria would do the ‘direct’ provocation of Russia threatening war against Serbia, while the German leadership was in the background and offered being the ‘peaceful’ mediator. In addition, the German leadership made a move that haunts the depiction of the history of the July Crisis until today: it avoided creating documents (or destroyed them), that could reveal their true motives to give Austria a blank cheque, so there is only one account of the meeting at July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1914. Everybody knew that in case Russia had to defend Serbia against Austria-Hungary’s attack, the *casus foederis* would kick in and Germany was going to engage with Russia and France to support Austria. With Austria’s ultimatum to Serbia, the game was on and Austria had created the *casus belli* that was desired by Germany, being ready to take on France and Russia, although both claimed that it was Russia that had made the decision regarding peace and war.

And then, after Germany and Austria had turned down all proposals for compromise (as the only measures to prevent war), Germany incited Austria to declare war on Serbia on July 28, 1914 to create the desired *fait accompli*, while Russia –

taking this as a serious challenge – implemented a ‘countervailing’ strategy and announced the mobilization of its forces, but also proposed – at the same time – ceasing it would require Austria modifying its ultimatum and give up its war against Serbia. The German leadership now had the choice to decide about peace or war. Russia had resisted their scheme and now the second part of its ‘indirect provocation’ scenario was kicking in: either they would accept a compromise (they only favored further ‘talks’ between Russia and Austria) or had to go to war.

In deciding the latter, it was the German leadership that had initiated the conflagration with its declarations of war on Russia, three days later on France<sup>81</sup> and through the invasion of Belgium it was cutting off any chances of a peaceful compromise. After the German military decided to mobilize on July 29, Bethmann Hollweg, following his scenario of ‘indirect provocation’, convinced the General Staff to wait until Russia announced their mobilization making sure it looked like Germany was forced to respond to the ‘Russian threat’, creating the ‘mythology’ we still have to deal with today.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the war was started ‘aggressively’, but not in the East by Russia, but in the East and West by Germany, although in the East an offensive against Russia was temporarily on hold because the German General Staff had a different priority: defeating France first.

The war was started, as even the Chancellor admitted in his memoirs in 1919, because Germany and specifically the General Staff had claimed ‘superiority’ towards the other great powers<sup>83</sup>, pointing out how *inferior* France and

<sup>78</sup> Alfred von Tirpitz, *Erinnerungen* (Leipzig, 1922): 241 [engl. transl., idem., *My Memoirs*, 2 Vol. (New York, 1919), Vol. I, 365, Jansen, *Weg in den Ersten Weltkrieg*, 427

<sup>79</sup> Detailed discussion, Jansen, *Weg in den Ersten Weltkrieg*, 427; Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*, Vol. I, 364-368, is not criticizing Bethmann Hollweg for his declarations of war against Russia and France but is also admitting “it was madness to give the enemy pretexts for war.”

<sup>80</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 527, 551; Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*, 350, is admitting that the German leadership has given “the enemy pretexts for war” and is confirming indirectly the provocation scenario, although he is conceding only ‘missteps’ and ‘incompetence’ that “is our guilt” (p. 358) and is sticking to the thesis that the Entente powers have caused the war

<sup>81</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, is omitting – among other events – the declaration of war and the fake news about French border violations as a justification for the German declaration of war towards France.

<sup>82</sup> Holger Afflerbach, *Falkenhayn. Politisches und militärisches Handeln Im Kaiserreich* (München, 1996): 150-168; idem., “Die militärische Planung des Deutschen Reiches”, in: *Der Erste Weltkrieg. Wirkung, Wahrnehmung, Analyse*, ed. Wolfgang Michalka (Weyam, 1997): 280-318; Annika Mombauer, *Helmuth von Moltke and the Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, UK, 2001): 200-226.

<sup>83</sup> Bethmann Hollweg, *Betrachtungen*, Bd. 2, 15: “The belief in German superiority was almost unlimited. This unconditional belief in a German victory [...] was [...] a moral



Russia really were and that this was the guiding moral principle for unleashing the war. It also was the major source of confidence already displayed during the crisis that had fired up the civilian leadership to take the risk of war. The Russians – on the other hand – knew about their shortcomings because their mobilization would last almost four weeks, while the German mobilization was completed in 12 days or shorter.<sup>84</sup> As part of the Moltke-Schlieffen plan, Germany had ‘special forces’<sup>85</sup> stationed close to the border to Belgium and Luxembourg, which were immediately ready to start the attack on France, focusing on the *Coup de Liege* as the assumed gateway to victory, when they trespassed the Belgian border violating its neutrality on August 4, 1914.<sup>86</sup> This is also the reason, why Germany was not in a hurry to mobilize any forces during the July Crisis. Crucial army units were ready to strike and could move forward by a days’ notice.<sup>87</sup>

It is part of the ambiguity of the beginning of the war that until this day there are hardly any studies on the German mobilization<sup>88</sup> in 1914 and how the invasion of Belgium ties in with German war aims and the strategic objectives of the Moltke-Schlieffen plan<sup>89</sup>, while there are plenty of studies

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factor of immense value and crucial importance.”; Afflerbach, “Militarische Planung”, 283.

<sup>84</sup> Mombauer, *Helmuth von Moltke*, 228

<sup>85</sup> That is how Germany was able to implement a surprise attack of Belgium to cross over to France, Mombauer, *Helmuth von Moltke*, 226-250

<sup>86</sup> Regarding the *Coup de Liege*, T. H. Thomas, “Holland and Belgium in the German War Plan”, *Foreign Affairs* 6, (1928): 315–328; Mombauer, *Helmuth von Moltke*, 95-100, points out that the coup de Liege was necessary, because Moltke did not want to violate Dutch territory; Jansen, *Weg in den Ersten Weltkrieg*, 494-495

<sup>87</sup> Details see, Jansen, *Weg in den Ersten Weltkrieg*, 156-157

<sup>88</sup> See the rare, somewhat ‘detailed’ account by Arden Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen and Prussian War Planning* (New York, 1991), 300-312, who seems mesmerized by technical details but is missing the point on a strategic level that makes his presentation of the planning for and the actual event of mobilization appear incoherent and confusing; one of the few exceptions, Jansen, *Weg in den Ersten Weltkrieg*, 123-176, regarding Bucholz’ confusion, 170-172

<sup>89</sup> Annika Mombauer, “German War Plans”, in: *War Planning 1914*, ed. Richard F. Hamilton, Holger H. Herwig (Cambridge, UK, 2009): 48-79; idem., *Helmuth von Moltke*, 182-225; Afflerbach, “Militarische Planung”, 279-285

on the Russian mobilization. These studies typically emphasize how Germany was ‘forced’ to react, not having made any ‘war’ preparations at all.<sup>90</sup> In short, until today, historiography is still influenced by the agenda of the German leadership and their scenario of ‘indirect provocation’ that typically is omitted by revisionist historians, who, like Clark, are still defending the *Reichsleitung* in stating that the German strategy in July 1914, “was not, strictly speaking, a strategy centered on risk, but one that aimed to establish the true level of threat posed by Russia.”<sup>91</sup> Clark – according to his paradigm – is making sure whenever it’s possible throwing the initiative for escalation and war on the side of the Entente (and away from Germany) – typically through a ‘side wipe’<sup>92</sup> – following the goal of his study to question the established consensus between historians that Germany carries the main responsibility for the war.<sup>93</sup>

Until today, the calculation of the German leadership and their scenario of ‘indirect provocation’ has achieved its main goal: maintaining the ambiguity of the war’s beginning that leaves enough room to push the responsibility onto the Entente powers specifically Russia and Serbia, making sure that not the action but the reaction gets blamed for its initiative. In reaffirming the legitimacy of the Austro-Hungarian war against Serbia, revisionism is renewing the justification of the activities of the *Reichsleitung* in 1914 even today. That Germany had their own blueprint since 1905 in the

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<sup>90</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 503, 509: “The Russian general mobilization was one of the most momentous decisions of the July Crisis. (...) It came at a moment when the German Government had not yet even declared the State of Impending War (...)” Clark is omitting that Germany – as part of their ‘indirect provocation’ scenario did not have to make obvious war preparations, as their ‘special’ forces were ‘ready’ at a days notice to strike at the border to Luxembourg and Belgium

<sup>91</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 419

<sup>92</sup> In discussing several ‘preventive’ war scenarios (implying the intention for war on the other side) of the German General staff, Clark is trying to transport his paradigm through a question attached to a speculation, 417: “(...) why would St. Petersburg risk launching a continental conflict now, when it was half-prepared?”

<sup>93</sup> As the cover text of the German edition, Clark, *Schlafwandler*, is pointing out; Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 560.

Schlieffen-Moltke plan that was designed to ‘wrestle down’<sup>94</sup> and defeat France first and deal with Russia later, goes – in revisionist accounts – widely unnoticed. The German leadership knew that trying to achieve a decisive victory in the East was for several reasons impossible, and therefore it decided to seek victory first in the West. It was Moltke’s answer to the ‘two-front’ war dilemma, understanding that they could not deal with both fronts at the same time. For Moltke, seeking a quick victory in the East seemed impossible due to the large spaces on Russian territory, its swamps and fortified crossings that a German offensive like in the West against France was considered pure “folly”.<sup>95</sup> They understood that Russia considering its vast space might be pushed back and the Baltic States and the Ukraine could be turned into vassal states of Germany, but Russia could not be defeated like France.

In short, Moltke decided to follow Schlieffen<sup>96</sup> in his belief that the war would be decided in the West and the emphasis of the German war plan was clearly focused on the defeat of France, while Moltke expected that a few divisions in the East were enough to put the Russians on hold and – considering the delay in Russian mobilization – there would be enough time to counter any possible attack, while additional divisions could be transferred from the Western theatre of war. This was based on the calculation that the Russians were not a real threat and that Germany and Austria could start an offensive later that would drive the Russian army far back with the option of negotiating a favorable peace after France was eliminated.<sup>97</sup> In fact, being at first

defensive in the East helped the German leadership with their claim of the Russian threat and the later ‘attack’ on East Prussia confirmed the official ‘ambush’ propaganda, besides any other motivation of the German General Staff to scrap the *Grosse Ostaufmarsch* in April of 1913.<sup>98</sup>

Clark, who does not deal with the actual war or the Eastern Front, is trying to exploit the ambiguity of the Russian mobilization as an alleged threat to Germany. That the war started for Germany on the ‘defensive’ in the East with only a few divisions, was a deliberate choice of the German General staff and helped to make it look like as if the Russians were the attackers, while the crucially deemed victories were first sought in the West.<sup>99</sup> If Russia would have been a real threat as it was asserted for propaganda purposes, Schlieffen and Moltke simply would have had to implement a different ratio of the available forces, rather than throwing most of them to the West for the offensive against France. The discrepancy in numbers was discounted anyway: Moltke did not consider ‘inferiority’ in numbers as crucial and favored quality over quantity.<sup>100</sup> Although Clark is trying hard to insist on the “complexity of the war’s causation”<sup>101</sup>, asserting that Russia began the war ‘aggressively’ in the East, war was declared and started by Germany before Russia had even mobilized any soldiers (and by now permitted any military action by either party), whose slow implementation also contributed to their first loss at the battle of Tannenberg.<sup>102</sup> Russia’s loss was Germany’s gain and confirmed Moltke’s estimate that the Germans were qualitatively superior to the Russians. In the words of Bruce Menning, for Russia the “result

<sup>94</sup> The term in German at the time was “*niederwerfen*”

<sup>95</sup> Dennis E. Showalter, “The Eastern Front and German Military planning, 1871-1914, some Observations”, *East European Quarterly* 15 (1981): 163-180, 171; Grawe, *Feindaufklärung*, 431-436

<sup>96</sup> Regarding the original Schlieffen plan, Gerhard Ritter, *Der Schlieffenplan. Kritik eines Mythos* (Muenchen, 1956)

<sup>97</sup> Afflerbach, *Militaerische Planung*, 281-284, regarding Germany’s goals, 285: “The goal was to achieve continental hegemony. Politicians had fully relied on the military and on its assurance of total military victory (...) and no one doubted that this would be achieved. (...) The German government wanted more than annexations, it wanted to break up the Entente and achieve hegemony. In terms of this goal, annexations were only details.”

<sup>98</sup> Mombauer, *Helmuth von Moltke*, 101-105

<sup>99</sup> As Moltke had told Conrad already in February 1913, Conrad, *Aus meiner Dienstzeit*, Vol. III, 145: “On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of mobilization considerable parts of these forces are able to provide aside of the protection issue an *offensive* posture.”

<sup>100</sup> The ratio for deployment between West and East was 73:9, Mombauer, *Helmuth von Moltke*, 228-229

<sup>101</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 551

<sup>102</sup> David Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War, the Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (Laurence, KA, 2015): 54-80; Paul Robinson, “The Pre-war Origins of Russia’s Defeats in 1914 and 1915: Re-examining Norman Stone’s *Eastern Front*”, *War in History* 22 (2015): 47-65

during the initial period of conflict was catastrophic failure (...)."<sup>103</sup>

Beyond exploiting the ambiguities of the beginning of the war, neo-revisionism outlook in pushing the responsibility for unleashing the war on the Entente powers is still where it was in the 1920s: in the case of Russia, historians like Clark are still asserting that its primary goal was capturing the Turkish Straits and Constantinople<sup>104</sup> and in the case of France it was retrieving Alsace-Lorraine<sup>105</sup>, while from this viewpoint Germany had no political agenda and – logically in reverse to the threat of ‘encirclement’ of the Entente powers – was basically on the defensive.

That Germany had a clear agenda for starting the war, trying to eliminate France and Russia from the equation of international relations as a factor that had ‘disturbed’ and caused ‘problems’ for German *Weltpolitik* to seek political hegemony in Europe<sup>106</sup>, is typically ignored and the Entente is burdened with causing the war.

### III. THE REVISIONIST METHODOLOGY AND ITS ‘CITATION CHAIN’

Clark’s program in ‘Sleepwalkers’ may be somewhat disguised but should be obvious to the informed reader: through his narrative he is trying to make it look like as if the Entente powers had caused all the crisis and wars before 1914 and beyond, having transferred the initiative from the central powers to France, Russia, England and Serbia. Thereby, he follows a special technique. For example, pointing out all the available anecdotal evidence of potential misdeeds and the war preparations of the Entente emphasizing the ‘documentations’ of the 1920s issued by the ‘guilt’ section of the German Foreign Office, while the ‘initiatives’ of the central power are nowhere to be found. Clark’s narrative is just turning the known events upside down and are retold from a

different angle that suits his paradigm. It is easy to imagine, how excited revisionist authors<sup>107</sup> must have been, when in 2012 Clark’s study was published considering that the paradigm of the ‘Initiative of the Entente’ has not been revived through a large study since 1939, when Alfred von Wegerer’s *opus magnum*<sup>108</sup> had been released.

The playbook they are all using is quite simple: gather the usual revisionist materials from the 1920s, see what the non-revisionist literature might reveal for the paradigm, combine these to provide the impression you are not only depending on the former and see what you can find in the different archives that may contain ‘dispatches’ (from Belgium and Holland) regarding certain war-mongering allegations about France and Russia. It does not matter that these are merely third-party opinions, they will create the right ‘atmosphere’ and disposition that will enhance the allegations against the Entente powers as such. It also may be helpful to invent new ‘speculations’ that could explain gaps in the record like the ‘Balkan inception scenario’ that will sound novel and innovative. Look for specific statements by decision-makers like Poincare and Izvolsky to make France, Russia, England and Serbia look determined to go to war and point towards controversial details to detract the reader insinuating that during the course of events something ‘must be wrong.’

Then, pick up the usual topics from current revisionist sources and repeat them to create a quotable ‘record’ for the present which can be used by other historians, who may have a propensity towards your paradigm, but are not necessarily fully convinced, looking for empirically valid ‘evidence’. Create in this respect as many ‘auxiliary hypotheses’<sup>109</sup> as you can, to

<sup>103</sup> Bruce Menning, “War Planning and Initial Operations in the Russian Context”, in: *War Planning 1914*, 80-119, 80-81

<sup>104</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 348, 486; like Wegerer, *Refutation*, 232

<sup>105</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, is talking about the French aims more indirectly, 167

<sup>106</sup> Afflerbach, *Militaerische Planung*, 285

<sup>107</sup> As we can see with Samuel Williamson, “July 1914 revisited and revised, the erosion of the German paradigm”, who is welcoming Clark’s study to shift the focus from Germany and Austria (p. 42-47) to France, Russia, England and Serbia (p. 47-56), praising a “more nuanced and complex assessment” (p. 34)

<sup>108</sup> Wegerer, *Ausbruch des Weltkrieges 1914*

<sup>109</sup> Fort his term and its use, Imre Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programs”, in: *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos, Alan Musgrave (Cambridge, UK, 1965): 117

possibly underline your point how manifold France and Russia have tried to ‘encircle’ and force the war upon the central powers. In addition, avoid any crude allegations<sup>110</sup> that may sound improbable and eschew the German documents<sup>111</sup> (they could be still dangerous) that could put your paradigm into question. Just use those ‘sources’ that genuinely incriminate the Entente powers and be easy on Germany and Austria-Hungary. Clark has demonstrated that revisionist arguments will thrive better through ‘insinuation’ and ‘indirect presentation’ avoiding simple or crude assertions as much as possible. Only when dealing with the personnel of the Entente, a few negative anecdotes will create the ‘right’ environment and put their actions in the appropriate context.<sup>112</sup> All revisionist studies follow the motto ‘the more dirt the merrier’, but it is crucial how it is presented. The playbook of neo-revisionism to excuse the central powers is simple: turn away the focus from Germany and Austria-Hungary and all the ‘bad’ things, that led to war in 1914 and put the focal point on the Entente powers and their preparations for war, a playbook Clark has implemented in his study quite efficiently.

A recent example of the ‘citation chain’ of neo-revisionism will demonstrate how the ‘chain’ is working. In 2016, in a major journal in Germany, the historian Rainer F. Schmidt, published an article trying to pin the

responsibility for unleashing the war in 1914 on the Franco-Russian Alliance and Poincare making it look like France took revenge for the defeat in 1870, thereby relying heavily on Clark’s study and other recent revisionist literature. One of his ‘auxiliary hypotheses to prove his point – besides taking over all the ‘radical’ *topoi* Clark has advanced including the ‘Balkan inception scenario’<sup>113</sup> – is that France allegedly had offered Russia ‘unlimited’ loans to finance their armaments in 1912, an assertion, that Schmidt has picked up from Clark.<sup>114</sup> Clark in turn has picked it up from a Soviet source<sup>115</sup> from 1961 (we will address further below), but nonetheless Clark’s allegation through Schmidt has now become part of the official record and can be quoted with a reference to Schmidt’s article.<sup>116</sup> Nobody is worried that this allegation might be wrong (the loans were limited to 500 Million Francs per year for five years, as even Clark has pointed out<sup>117</sup>), and that Schmidt has indirectly corrected it in the next sentence, but the reader is supposed to remember that France has offered Russia ‘unlimited’ financial support to build up its arms against Germany. For the sake of throwing dirt at the Franco-Russian Alliance it serves its purpose, even more so when it comes from a ‘respectable’ and ‘new’ study where the reader is assuming that its sources are solid taking these statements at face value. Also, it is not accidental that Rainer F. Schmidt in his essay has picked up all those items from Clark he needed to support his radical thesis that France has ‘forced’ the World War on Germany.

<sup>110</sup> See the ‘recommendations’ for revisionism by L. L. Farrar, *American Historical Review* 95 (2000), 1695-1696, in his review of Edward E. McCullough, *How the First World War began. The Triple Entente and the Coming of the Great War of 1914-1918* (Montreal, 1999), 1696: “McCullough’s book provides a case study of *how not to write revisionist history*. It demonstrates that provocation is a stimulating but crude game whereas revisionism is a subtle art, more rapier than hammer. A more measured approach might have won over more scholars than his take-no-prisoners style.”

<sup>111</sup> *Die deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch*, ed. Max Graf v. Montgelas, Walther Schuecking, collected by Karl Kautsky, 4 Vol. (Berlin 1919) [engl. transl., *The Outbreak of the World War, German Documents collected by Karl Kautsky*, translated by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (New York, 1924)]

<sup>112</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 433-450 where he – as an example – characterizes Maurice Paleologue as a liar, fantast and war monger but exploits his writings for his crusade as much as he can

<sup>113</sup> R. Schmidt, “Revanche pour Sedan”, 405

<sup>114</sup> R. Schmidt, “Revanche pour Sedan”, 409, is quoting ‘Sleepwalkers’ several times, Note 39, 40, 42, 46, 47, 55, 58, 72

<sup>115</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 307, note 233, 622

<sup>116</sup> R. Schmidt’s article is quoted by Lukas Grawe, “Report from Paris. The German Military Attache in France, Detlof von Winterfeldt, and his views of the French Army, 1909-1914”, *War in History* 26 (2019): 470-494, 483 (note 75), 486 (note 89) regarding Poincare’s ‘war preparations’ in connection with Plan XVII, that was allegedly underestimated by the German General Staff

<sup>117</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 308, is admitting the ‘truth’ on this subject on the next page, but for agitative purposes is also advancing the ‘unlimited’ version without any qualifications



To assert dubious allegations like this, is not only typical for Clark's study. It is part of the program of revisionism to uncritically pick up third party 'opinions' that are supposed to serve the purpose of agitation to demonstrate how the Entente powers have operated. In a way, all revisionists follow the motto that the ends justify the means (if there are 'quotes' available), and the truth of these allegations does not seem to concern its authors. They only reflect critically on sources which do not fit their paradigm.<sup>118</sup> Although sometimes there are problems that are difficult to overcome. Take the treatment of the German 'innocence' campaign of the 1920s: leave it out or mention it on the side to preempt potential criticism?

Revisionist authors<sup>119</sup> typically leave it out, while Clark has found a clever, although insufficient solution for the problem: he is trying to 'preempt' criticism towards the 'uncritical' use of his sources by banning this subject to a note in his introduction. Therefore, he can avoid dealing with the campaign head on and can avoid revealing to his readers the affirmative connection between the official publications of the campaign and his study. He obviously thinks creating an 'alibi' through a note will prevent others from finding out that he is using these one-sided 'documentations' to 'prove' his core arguments. In short, he is mentioning it but downplaying the real significance of the campaign in general and for his study, stating in the spirit of *Selbstverharmlosung* (making oneself appear as harmless as possible) that the Foreign Office just 'sponsored' the 'activities' of some alleged 'scholars'.<sup>120</sup>

But, contrary to Clark's statements, the guilt-section of the Foreign Office was the instigator of the campaign, has founded and financed the 'front' organizations, was the central

motor for all the publications against the Entente powers and has tried to influence leading German and American historians (Fay and Barnes), a circumstance that is obviously too damaging for Clark to admit. It is understandable that everybody in Germany after 1945 – specifically its historians – wanted to forget about a campaign where several of their colleagues were involved that was part and parcel of the process of territorial revisionism in the 1920s and 1930s, which has mobilized and prepared the country for another war. It was common in the 1950s – as a convenient explanation – to stick to the myth that the Allies and the Versailles Treaty were responsible for all the subsequent events justifying the rise of Hitler and the Second World War.

Clark's overall strategy in his study (following L. Farrar's recommendation) is typically avoiding statements that could out him as a radical revisionist or citing claims that the Entente powers are responsible for the war. But, here and there, he cannot help reminding the reader of his viewpoint, and what his study is all about, stating: "The Triple Entente that went to war in 1914 still lay beyond the mental horizons of most statesmen." And alluding to their alleged war aims in an 'indirect' way: "It was hard to imagine the circumstances in which France might be willing to chance its arm for the Russians in the Balkans and even harder to imagine Russians marching to Berlin for the sake of Alsace and Lorraine."<sup>121</sup>

The following example will demonstrate Clark's methodology reviewing one of the most indispensable pillars of revisionism: Poincare and the alleged change in French foreign policy between 1912 and 1914.<sup>122</sup> According to Clark, Raymond Poincare, the new Prime Minister of France in 1912, was ready to support Russian adventurism in the Balkans and a more aggressive military policy that culminated in a proposal that France would join Russia trying to pre-empt an Austrian intervention in Serbia. In short, Clark is suggesting that Poincare proposed to Russia and England a "preemptive"<sup>123</sup> military intervention

<sup>118</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 298-299, where he is refusing Poincare's explanation for Isvolsky's simplifications, stating that, "These are plausible suppositions, but the evidence suggests that they are wrong."

<sup>119</sup> Williamson for example (and many others), "July 1914 revisited and revised, the erosion of the German paradigm", 31, is not mentioning it

<sup>120</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, xxiii, note 2, 564; as a contrast to Herwig, "Clio deceived"

<sup>121</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 167

<sup>122</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 294

<sup>123</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 298



towards Austria to stop them from attacking Serbia in 1912. This statement – improbable as it seems – is meant to be an allegation that shows France and not only Germany would contemplate a ‘preemptive’ strike before 1914 or during the July Crisis, although if we look at his source, nothing can be found that would confirm this charge.<sup>124</sup>

In fact, this assertion comes close to the ‘holy grail’ of revisionism of the World War: being able to show that even beyond the Izvolsky<sup>125</sup> correspondence France and Russia were not only “capable of escalating a Balkan crisis into a continental war”<sup>126</sup> but also had the *intention* to do so even before July 1914, countering the statements of the Versailles Commission on responsibility. Although Clark should know better than promoting such an improbable scenario, it seems evident that he has done so to harm France and Russia making Germany and Austria look better. His study follows the mantra, if you think the central powers are bad, France, Russia, England and Serbia are worse. On the other hand, if this can be clearly demonstrated, revisionism would be able to prove its paradigm of the ‘Initiative of the Entente’ and could be closing the ‘evidence’ gap between the alleged aggressive activities of France and Russia in 1912 and the unleashing of crisis and war in 1914 that Clark wants to shift to the Entente.

The only problem with this scenario is that it is unconfirmed by any documents: Clark has picked it up from a source, that is a late Soviet indictment of France from the early 1960s.

Everybody knows that politically sensitive literature published in the Soviet Union had to

follow the official line by the Communist party that was still set on confrontation with the West. But even if we discount that, the study by itself is in its essential conclusions not based on primary sources from France and Russia, instead it is based on Soviet and Western revisionist literature including the Izvolsky correspondence of the 1920s, that is trying to blame France and Tsarist Russia for its aggressive policies.<sup>127</sup> Unfortunately, the Soviet author, Valerie I. Bovykin, twenty years later, when Russia pursued Détente with the West, took the opposite route and retracted these unproven accusations against France and Poincare with a large *mea culpa* in an article, that was published in 1979 in a British journal, where he confessed that all these accusations are not based on facts and need to be acknowledged as a ‘false’ version of the origins of the First World War.<sup>128</sup>

In short, Clarks allegations against France and Russia, Poincare and Izvolsky, based on this study, were effectively retracted by its author in 1979, but nonetheless he repeated them in 2012, treating Bovykins accusations still at face value and using them as a major source for his study.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Valerie I. Bovykin, *Is istorii vosniknovenija perwoi mirowoi woyny; Otnoshenija Rossi I Franzii w 1912-1914 gg.* (Moscow, 1961); (engl. transl., *The history of the development to the First World War, relations between Russia and France, 1912-1914*); see also the review, Georg von Rauch, “Neue sowjetische Literatur zur Vorgeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges”, *Jahrbuch fuer die Geschichte Osteuropas* 12 (1965): 572-582.

<sup>128</sup> Valerie I. Bovykin, “The Franco-Russian Alliance”, *History* 64 (1979): 20-35, 34-35: “In the course of the struggle over the question of responsibilities for the outbreak of the First World War, which began to develop already in its first days, many false versions were put out. I will refer only to one of them. As a result of the efforts of Poincare, who not without foundation acquired the nickname of ‘Poincare-War’, the interpretation has found currency in the historical literature, that France was drawn into the war by the Russian clash with Germany, in spite of the pacificatory steps of French diplomacy. I myself have been concerned with the study of Russo-French Relations on the eve of the First World War and was able to convince myself that *this version is contradicted by the facts.*” (*emphasis by author*)

<sup>129</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, is using Bovykin’s study as a source over 15 times in the notes of chap. 5 (609-623), note 84, 89, 110, 197, 198, 201, 208, 226, 233, and chap. 6 (623-634), note 39, 99, 105, 129, 133, 149

<sup>124</sup> Narodny kommisariat po innostram delam (Hg.), *Materialy po istorii franko-russkich otnoshenii sa 1910-1914 gg: sbornik sekretnych diplomatitscheskich dokumentow bywshego Imperatorskogo ministerstwa inostrannyh del*, Moskau 1922, S. 297

<sup>125</sup> Regarding the role of Izvolsky in non-revisionist literature, Robert H. Allshouse, *Alexander Izvolskii and Russian Foreign Policy, 1910-1914* (Ph. D. Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH, 1977); Carol D. Taylor, *The troubled Entente, Alexander Izvolsky and Russia’s diplomatic Relations with France and Great Britain, 1906-1910* (Ph. D. State University of Albany, NY, 2008)

<sup>126</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 293

It is no surprise, that Clark is not mentioning Bovykin's later retraction, because this would have invalidated one of his crucial sources for bashing the Franco-Russian Alliance.

Similarly, he is refusing Poincare's explanations over the correct rendering of his conversations with Izvolsky in his memoirs, pointing out that his statements have no credibility whatsoever<sup>130</sup>, even asserting that Poincare his manipulated his diary (without any proof)<sup>131</sup> following the accusations of other revisionist authors.<sup>132</sup>

The story of the alleged 'aggressive' Franco-Russian Alliance may be one of the 'high' points of 'Sleepwalkers', where Clark has gathered against Poincare and Izvolsky all the available arguments from like-minded sources<sup>133</sup>, but aside of several contradictions that remain unresolved<sup>134</sup>, these mixture of false assertions, assumptions and speculations is based on Stieve's *Iswolski und der Weltkrieg* and other revisionist literature that reaffirmed similar statements.<sup>135</sup> Despite the fact, that Clark is spreading the sources for his unproven accusations between different authors

of revisionist origin,<sup>136</sup> it confirms our thesis that his assertions are not based on primary documents but on the opinion of others, that are following the same line like the original source by Stieve. Another example will illustrate this point further, considering this is a scenario that can be found in every revisionist account that deals with France and Poincare.

It is an alleged conversation between Alexandre Millerand, the French minister of war at the time and the Russian military attache in Paris, Count Ignatiev, on Dec. 19, 1912, that is supposed to show that France was inciting Russia on Serbia, while the Russian representative was defending the official line of caution. This is a scenario, coming right out of the 1920s, demonstrating its political 'use' for Germany and Russia, who were both agitating against France and Poincare for different reasons. Germany agitated against the Versailles Treaty and the new Bolshevik Government was trying to keep the same distance from 'old' France and Tsarist Russia, justifying its refusal not to pay back the loans borrowed from France by their predecessors before the war. As odd as it is, the dubious Millerand-Ignatiev conversation, which was first published by the official Soviet newspaper 'Izvestia' in 1922, never became part of any other documentary publication.

It can only be found in revisionist literature, first reported by Stieve, *Iswolski und der Weltkrieg*<sup>137</sup>,

<sup>130</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 294, note 183, (619); Raymond Poincare, *Au Service de la France, neuf annees des souvenirs*, 10 Vol. (Paris, 1926-1933), Vol. 2, 334-339, is pointing to his contemporary dispatches to his Ambassador in Russia, George Louis, with whom he clarified his understanding of the *casus foederis* that Clark is leaving out

<sup>131</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 503-504, note 51, 655; as Strachan has stated in the case of S. Schmidt, the 'absence of documents counts as the proof of guilt'

<sup>132</sup> S. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik*, 256-258

<sup>133</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 293-313

<sup>134</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 298; if Poincare really had made the offer for pre-emption why would Sasonow in mid-November have to ask "London and Paris, how they would react to an armed response by Russia" already knowing the answer through Poincare's alleged proposal, when he was supposed to have incited the Russians

<sup>135</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, Chap. 5, note 77 (613), 182 (619), 190 (619),

<sup>136</sup> Besides the already mentioned studies of Bovykin and Stieve, Clark's allegations in crucial areas are resting on George F. Kennan, *The Fateful Alliance, France, Russia and the Coming of the First World War* (Manchester, 1984)[*Sleepwalkers*, note 177, 619], who also needs to be located in the revisionist camp, stating, 249: "(...) the only two that had what might be called clear expansionist motives were the two parties to the Alliance – France and Russia", and regarding the Central Powers, 253: "Germany was, after all, a satiated power (...) and stood to gain little from a major war on the Continent."; Stefan Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik in der Julikrise* (Muenchen, 2009), to whom Clark feels his "account is substantially indebted", is also promoting the 'change' thesis, which Clark is quoting from him in *Sleepwalkers*, note 181 (619), on Poincare's talks with Izvolsky on Nov. 4 and 7, quoting Kennan and Stieve (S. Schmidt, *Frankreich*, 246-259, note 590, 593, 596, 604, 615, 619, 626, 629, 639)

<sup>137</sup> Stieve, *Iswolski und der Weltkrieg*, 118 who is quoting the 'Izvestija' report

being part of S. Schmidt's, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik*<sup>138</sup> and is also carried by Clark, who is quoting it not from Stieve, but from the Boyykin study, bearing in mind the necessity for the diversification of his 'sources'.<sup>139</sup> As the last example demonstrates: the 'quotation chain' is alive and well and there is no revisionism without Stieve's *Isvolsky editions* which mainly contain the crucial assertions for all the allegations against France and Russia. Failing to show any sources, Stieve has invented the thesis of 'change' in French Foreign Policy (to offset the change in German policy in July 1914), that Poincare has 'incited' the Russians, that a World War was very much alive in Poincare's and Isvolsky's thinking and that they had included this in their "willingness to go to war".<sup>140</sup> In other words: all these allegations are – for political reasons - made up by Stieve and the German campaign and have nothing to do with the policies of Poincare.

In November 1912, after disagreeing with Isvolsky's depiction of the conversations between the two, Poincare notified his ambassador in St. Petersburg, George Louis, to relay his version of the talks with Isvolsky to the Russian Foreign Minister, Sasonov. It was an attempt to correct the Ambassador's statements, pointing out that he is opposing Isvolsky's simple-minded *casus foederis* interpretation ('if Russia goes to war, France will follow'). In his dispatches, Poincare stated that France was only committed to its obligations contained in their alliance agreements no more and no less.<sup>141</sup> The real issue with Poincare and his policies is that he was one of the few politicians who were steadfastly in opposition to the Germans, on the question of

responsibility<sup>142</sup> and on reparations, and - through his opposition before, during and after the war - became their main target of negative propaganda in the 1920s.<sup>143</sup>

The difference between the two interpretations of the *casus foederis* is crucial. While Isvolsky wants Poincare to commit to a simple formula following Russia at every step (irrespective of the real Russian Foreign Policy), Poincare, who wants to avoid any Russian adventures and prefers the status quo (in the Balkans and at the Turkish straits), is pointing out, that France' commitment according to their military convention will get them only involved, if Germany will attack France. This means if Austria-Hungary would attack Serbia and Germany would not get involved France would not be engaged in any warlike activities. Isvolsky knows this but in his crusade to convince Sasonov, he is hoping to get France to commit to more, meaning, that France will help the Russian Government, even if an Austrian attack on Serbia is provoked by Russia. This may be Isvolsky's thinking but not Poincare's nor the Russian leadership's, who never showed (as even the Isvolsky correspondence suggests<sup>144</sup>) any interest in a scenario like that. Russian Foreign Policy wanted to protect the integrity of Serbia but

<sup>138</sup> S. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik*, 258, note 639

<sup>139</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 301-302, note 208 (621)

<sup>140</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 297-301, 304-308; Stieve, *Isvolski und der Weltkrieg*, 45, 81, 85, 97, 99, 107, 109, 119, 138, 147, 159, 160, 177, 178, 189, 205

<sup>141</sup> Poincare's reports and dispatches are published in, *Documents diplomatiques français relatifs aux origines de la guerre de 1914*. (Paris, 1929-1959). Première série: 1871-1900, 16 Vols., Deuxième série: 1901-1911, 14 Vols., Troisième série: 1911-1914, 11 Vols. (hereinafter cited as 'DDF' with series and vol. no.), Poincaré's report about his meetings in Russia, DDF, Sér. 3, Vol. 3, Doc. 264; his exchange of dispatches with Ambassador Louis in November 1912, DDF, Ser. 3, Vol. 4, Doc. 361, 468, 469, 487, 494

<sup>142</sup> Raymond Poincare, *Les Origines de la Guerre* (Paris, 1921) [engl. transl., *The Origins of the War* (London, 1922)]; idem., "The Responsibility for the War", *Foreign Affairs* 4 (1925): 1-19; the German answer, Bernhard Schwertfeger, *Poincare und die Schuld am Kriege* (Berlin, 1922)

<sup>143</sup> John F. V. Keiger, *Raymond Poincare* (London, 1997): 193-311; idem., "France's unreadiness for war in 1914 and its implications for French decision-making in the July Crisis", in: *Outbreak of the First World War*, 252-272, is openly criticizing the accounts of S. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik*, and Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, pointing to their lack of documentary evidence, that neither Poincare or anybody else in his cabinet, "was willing to risk war or encouraged Russia recklessly." (p. 254)

<sup>144</sup> Stieve, *Der diplomatische Schriftwechsel*, Vol. 2, Doc. 549, 558, 562; for the official Russian documents, see *Die internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus* (hereinafter called 'IBZI' with Vol. No.). Series I-III, ed. Otto Hoetzsch (Berlin, 1942), Series III, Vol. 4/1, 18.10.-4.12.1912; regarding origins and issues of the edition, Derek W. Spring, "The unfinished Collection. Russian Documents on the Origins of the First World War", in: *Forging the Collective Memory: Government and International Historians through Two World Wars*, ed. Keith Wilson (New York, 1995): 63-86



did not want to become the locomotive for Serbia's expansion towards the South or any other direction.

Sasonov and the Russian leadership were rather putting the brakes on Serbia's ambitions towards an Adriatic port as much as they could, opting – as a great power – conservatively for the status quo and against any changes, also understanding the resistance of Austria-Hungary.

In fact, Sasonov is asking France and England in November 1912 what they will do, if Austria would use violence against Serbia, and their answer is stating that this is first up to Russia to make that decision and not up to them, demonstrating again that this decision – just like in 1914 – would solely depend on the Austro-Hungarian treatment of Serbia and military intervention would not be a goal by itself. In short, the crucial action to start a conflict would be coming from Austria-Hungary and not from Russia, although revisionist accounts are trying to insinuate the opposite. Izvolsky is acting on his own when he is trying to get a commitment from Poincare that goes beyond the military convention of the alliance and seems to have involved an offensive scenario by Russia or France.

But this is exactly what the neo-revisionist thesis used by Clark, R. and S. Schmidt and others is alleging. They want to demonstrate that it was France and Poincare in 1912, as well as in 1914 who have incited Russia to support Serbia and – through a conspiracy against the central powers – are responsible for unleashing the war in 1914.<sup>145</sup> Clark is even going beyond that, trying to alter a scenario that we know from the Riezler diary, which is demonstrating how the German leadership has calculated: on July 8, 1914 Bethmann Hollweg is explaining to his young advisor what a great opportunity the crisis is

offering, because – if the war comes from the Balkans – Austria-Hungary will be involved and Germany will automatically have its support.<sup>146</sup>

Therefore – in the revisionist scenario – Clark is reversing Bethmann Hollweg's explanation and is projecting it on France and Russia, stating, that this was the only opportunity where France was in the driver's seat knowing that Russia was involved counting on their support to initiate the conflict against Germany and Austria-Hungary they were allegedly both envisioning.<sup>147</sup>

The crucial difference is that for Bethmann's German-Austrian calculation we have a primary document with the Riezler diary, while Clark in his reversal scenario has nothing to show for: his allegations regarding the French leadership are pure speculation and only based on the overall thesis that Poincare had an interest to incite Russia because he 'wanted' the war against Germany, which is unconfirmed by any primary sources. Instead of acknowledging that the crucial point for this scenario was the German support for Austria, the Chancellor withheld in 1912 and 1913, but turned into a commitment on July 5, 1914, Clark and his followers are sticking to the assertion that it was France's support for Russia that has caused the war. In short, the real change in foreign policy that caused the war did not occur in France during Poincare's reign, but happened in Germany during the July Crisis in 1914. Since 1919 revisionism is trying to establish the fact, that Germany's 'blank cheque' for Austria was no big deal, but in reverse Poincare's support for Russia – of course already given in 1912<sup>148</sup> – has made the conflict possible and the war inevitable.

It is no accident, that Poincare and Isvolsky became the perfect target of German propaganda in the early 1920s – already under attack by German-friendly groups in France ('Poincare-la-guerre'<sup>149</sup>): it started already in 1914 and was

<sup>145</sup> As Hew Strachan, "The Origins of the First World War", *International Affairs* 90 (2014): 430-439 is stating in his review of the publications of Stefan Schmidt and Sean McMeekin, 437: "Schmidt clearly wanted to uncover a conspiracy when writing his book but could not produce sufficient evidence to do so. McMeekin finds himself in the same position but is not daunted in his determination to shift the primary responsibility. (...) He construes the absence of papers as the proof of guilt."

<sup>146</sup> Kurt Riezler, *Tagebuecker, Aufsaetze, Dokumente*, ed. Karl D. Erdmann (Goettingen, 1972): 184

<sup>147</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 422-423

<sup>148</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 409

<sup>149</sup> John F. V. Keiger, *Raymond Poincare* (London, 1997): 193-239

enhanced by French revisionism<sup>150</sup> during and after the war. These were people, who were on the 'payroll' of the German Foreign Office trying to establish a separate peace to get out of the two-front situation.<sup>151</sup> The forces in France that blamed the war on Poincare were inclined to strike a deal with the Germans, but were too weak to deliver (compared to 1940) while there was another hurdle too large to overcome: the German conditions for a separate peace, that seemed steep and were even refused by German- friendly people in France, who were bent on ending the war they had blamed on Poincare.<sup>152</sup> In contrast to that, Poincare was steadfast and never held back to point out German responsibility<sup>153</sup> for causing the conflict and came across as a very uncompromising defender of the Versailles Treaty.<sup>154</sup> This culminated in the event, when Germany refused to pay reparations, that Poincare invoked France' power by the treaty and – together with Belgian forces - occupied the Ruhr area to exert pressure to collect Germany's obligations.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Fernand Gouttenoire de Toury, *Poincare a-t-il voulu la Guerre? Poincare et Isvolsky contre Georges Louis* (Paris, 1920); Gustave Dupin, *Considerations de la Responsabilite de la Guerre* (Paris, 1921); Alfred Pevet, *Les Responsables de la Guerre* (Paris, 1921); *Les Carnets de Georges Louis*, ed. Ernest Judet, 2 Vol. (Paris, 1926); Ernest Judet, *Georges Louis* (Paris, 1925); Alfred Fabre-Luce, *La Victoire* (Paris, 1924); Emile Laloy, *Les documents secrets des Archives du Ministere des Affaires Etrangere de Russie, publies par les Bolshevik* (Paris, 1919); Matthias Morhardt, *Les Preuves, le Crime de droit commun, le Crime diplomatique* (Paris, 1922); *Un Livre Noir, Diplomatie d'avant Guerre et de Guerre d'apres les document des Archives russe*, ed. Ernest Marchand, 5 Vol. (Paris, 1919-1922)

<sup>151</sup> The documents regarding German-French relations during the war, *L'Allemagne et les Problemes de la Paix pendant la Guerre Mondiale, Documents extraits des archives de l'Office allemande des Affaires Etrangeres*, ed. Andre Scherer, Jacques Grunwald, 4 Vol. (Paris 1962-1978): Vol. 1, Doc. 133, 148, 264, 268, 282, 287, 300

<sup>152</sup> *L'Allemagne*, Vol. II, Doc. 160, 162, 164, 172, 198, 227, 231, 295, 298

<sup>153</sup> Poincare, *Les Origines*; Schwertfeger, *Poincare und die Schuld*.

<sup>154</sup> This is not supposed to mean that the Treaty was flawless, Sally Marks, "Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany, and the Versailles Treaty, 1918–1921", *Journal of Modern History* 85 (2013): 632–659

<sup>155</sup> Keiger, *Poincare*, 274-311

In the historical context of the fall of 1912 Austria-Hungary's threat to attack Serbia in the Balkans (to counter their territorial gains in the First Balkan War and their demand for a port on the Adria coast) was a realistic concern of all the powers, but was mitigated by peaceful measures. For example, what was proposed by Poincare many times, was a conference of the great powers to deal with the issue putting pressure on Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey, proposals which were implemented later by the Ambassador's conference in London starting in December of 1912, which could have also served as a model for the solution of the crisis in 1914.<sup>156</sup>

The Izvolsky correspondence, blown up by revisionists, is – closely examined - only a partial source for Russian Foreign Policy before the war that is as a stand-alone source not only one- sided but – besides any contradictions - an expression of Izvolsky's politics. The case is obvious: the revisionist authors have taken the politics of the Russian Ambassador in Paris as the official line of Russian Foreign Policy because it satisfied the political needs of the German campaign.

Izvolsky was striving to extend its influence towards the Russian Foreign Office considering that he had been a former Russian Foreign Minister, who was downgraded to an Ambassador in 1910, constantly trying to use his 'clout' and connections to sway and impress the central office in St. Petersburg.<sup>157</sup> To utilize the correspondence

<sup>156</sup> It also does not seem accidental, that there are only a few studies regarding the concert of Europe that could have been an arbiter of the crisis in 1914, R. J. Crampton, "The Decline of the Concert of Europe in the Balkans, 1913-1914", *The Slavonic and East European Review* 52 (1974): 393-419; Richard Langhorne, *The Collapse of the Concert of Europe* (New York, 1981): 97-121

<sup>157</sup> See as examples for the non-revisionist literature, Eugenia C. Kiesling, "France", in: *The Origins of World War I*, ed. Richard F. Hamilton, Holger H. Herwig (Cambridge, 2003): 226–265; Keiger, *Poincaré*; idem., *France and the Origins of the First World War* (London, 1983); Gordon Wright, Raymond Poincaré and the French Presidency (Stanford, 1942); Eugen Weber, *The Nationalist Revival in France, 1905–14* (Berkeley, 1959); M. B. Hayne, *The French Foreign Office and the Origins of the First World War, 1898–1914* (Oxford, 1993); Robert A. Doughty, "French Strategy in 1914. Joffre's Own", *Journal of Military History* 67 (2003): 427–454; Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2014)



of an Ambassador without any other documents, whose credibility is already dubious, when the real decisions are made at the central office, may be a politically clever move but certainly not a scientifically sound research approach.

In short, the revisionist assertion, that France under Poincare had assumed an offensive posture, that changed the *casus foederis*, incited the Russians and even got ahead of them when it came to aggressively pursuing Austria-Hungary<sup>158</sup>, is based on pure speculation and a wishful interpretation of the Izvolsky correspondence that was edited by the German propaganda campaign for political purposes to agitate against France and the Treaty of Versailles. Therefore, it is not a surprise that no serious historian – except the revisionists - has used this ‘documentation’ as an affirmative source after 1945.<sup>159</sup>

#### IV. THE BALKAN INCEPTION SCENARIO – A CONSPIRACY MYTH

One of the special highlights of Clark’s ‘Sleepwalkers’ is his ‘Balkan inception scenario’<sup>160</sup>, a ‘linguistic’ solution that probably Lakatos had in mind when he talked about saving a “theory with the help of auxiliary hypotheses” that “represents degeneration”.<sup>161</sup> The Balkan scenario is pure speculation without any sources, but nonetheless

<sup>158</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 293-299

<sup>159</sup> One of the examples is Keiger, *Poincare*, and the other non-revisionist literature cited above.

<sup>160</sup> Regarding the situation in the Balkans, Andrew Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans* (Toronto, 1981): is showing the ineffectiveness of Russian foreign policy, 207-212; Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913* (London, 2000): also demonstrates the failure of the Russian Balkan Alliance policy, 139-143; Ronald P. Bobroff, *Roads to Glory. Late Imperial Russia and the Turkish Straits* (London, 2006); Dominic Lieven, *The End of Tsarist Russia. The March to World War I and Revolution* (New York, 2015): 245-290; Edward C. Thaden, *Russia and the Balkan Alliance of 1912* (University Park, PA, 1965), has criticized the German studies until 1945 and Soviet literature for their handling of Russian foreign policy in the Balkans, being ignorant of important documents that appeared in the ‘IBZI’ series between 1938 and 1940; Thaden is also pointing out, that German writers until 1945 have, 9: “often accepted uncritically the subjective judgements of contemporary non-Russian diplomats and journalists” (...) and, 11: “exaggerated the influence of Isvolsky and Hartwig.”

<sup>161</sup> Lakatos, “Falsification”, 117

an ‘invention’ that can claim a certain novelty. Clark defined it as an active pursuit of the Franco-Russian Alliance:

“By the spring of 1914, the Franco-Russian Alliance *had constructed* a geopolitical trigger along the Austro-Serbian frontier. They had tied the defense policy of three of the world’s greatest powers to the uncertain fortunes of Europe’s most violent and unstable region.”<sup>162</sup> (*emphasis by author*) By this definition it seems clear what Clark had in mind: France and Russia are actively using Serbia as a ‘geopolitical trigger’ and have automatically tied their fortunes to whatever happens in the Balkans, that was not meant to be accidental. It means in case of an ‘incident’ (like the assassination of the Archduke) that the trigger is finally pulled which could become the ‘pretext’ for war in a subsequent crisis. Thereby, the scenario has several components: on the one hand, Clark is tying in France and Russia with Serbia, which in his mind is responsible for the assassination of the Archduke anyway. On the other hand, he is alluding that Russia is also a part of this, being linked through the Russian military attache in Belgrade, Colonel Artamonov, to the “Serbian underground networks”, covering up the Russian support for the ‘Black Hand’ by Artamonov<sup>163</sup>, who - according to Clark – later denied having anything to do with “the plot to kill the archduke.”<sup>164</sup> Clark is not saying directly that the Russian General Staff was involved or had the idea for it (he thinks the idea for the plot came from Colonel Dimitrijevic, chief of military intelligence of the Serbian General Staff) whose activities in Bosnia were financed by Russia through Artamonov, alluding to a Russian-Serbian collusion leaving it up to the reader to draw the ‘right’ conclusions.

<sup>162</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 350

<sup>163</sup> See his statement regarding these events on invitation of the Berliner Monatshefte, Victor A. Artamonov, “Erinnerungen an meine Militaerattachezeit in Belgrad”, *Berliner Monatshefte* 16 (1938): 583-602

<sup>164</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 411-412 is referring to a report regarding interviews he conducted with a few former decision-makers of 1914 in the late 1920s, Bernadotte E. Schmitt, “Out of their Own Mouths”, in: idem., *The Fashion and Future of History, historical Studies and Addresses* (Cleveland, OH, 1960): 43-64

Also, Clark is admitting that there may be no documents to prove it, but his scenario has “a line of maximum plausibility for it”, considering that “virtually all those who took part were habituated to a milieu that was obsessed with secrecy” and that the “collusion between the Serbian state and the networks implicated in the plot was by design furtive and informal.”<sup>165</sup> In short, if the background of the scenario is considered in all its aspects, for Clark it is not implausible, that the Russians (together with the French) not only laid the ‘trigger’ but may have also had their ‘invisible’ hand in pulling it, because of their interest in the Turkish straits, looking at the Balkans as their *hinterland* where Russian influence could become crucial to “securing ultimate control of the Ottoman choke-point on the Bosphorus.”<sup>166</sup> Although it is pure speculation, creating a connection between the Balkans and the Turkish straits Clark is hoping to raise the credibility of his scenario, because now he can present a familiar sounding motive, some assumed ‘evidence’<sup>167</sup> and a ‘line of plausibility’ that is supposed to appear logical to the reader.

Clark has invented the ‘Balkan inception scenario’ as an event, that serves as the ‘trigger’ as well as the ‘missing link’ that connected the Entente powers with the assassination of the archduke and the beginning of the actual July Crisis in 1914. In establishing that, he also wants to justify one of the general *leitmotivs* of his study, that Austria Hungary (like Germany) – already weakened through Serbia’s pan-slave propaganda - was beleaguered by its enemies and had to defend itself against the onslaught of Serbia and the Entente powers. That’s why it is surprising that - after he has confirmed his ‘Balkan inception scenario’ in all possible variations at least six times previously<sup>168</sup>, he – in his last chapter – is denying that this scenario was meant to be an

active “plan or plot” or that there was “any necessary or linear relationship between the positions adopted in 1912 and 1913 and the outbreak of war in the following year” leaving his readers puzzled with the explanation that the scenario only “supplied the conceptual framework within the crisis.”<sup>169</sup>

In his conclusions, Clark is issuing – like a politician – a statement of ‘plausible deniability’. First, he is affirming, then he is denying it and then reaffirming his scenario again, which seems to signal his true attachment to his ‘invention’. Now he gives the reader two options: either the ‘Balkan inception scenario’ is valid (“France and Russia, at different paces and for different reasons, constructed a geopolitical trigger along the Austro-Serbian frontier”), or is not valid (no active “plan or plot”) and just a “conceptual framework”, but right after this limitation he is repeating the second part of the original scenario (“Russia and France thereby tied the fortunes of two of the world’s greatest powers (...) to the uncertain destiny of a turbulent and intermittently violent state.”<sup>170</sup>) confirming again its active part.<sup>171</sup>

Clark could have been more cautious and added the words ‘probably’ or ‘presumably’, but he chose not to do that, because that might confirm to the reader that this scenario is somewhat based on speculation, that would go against his intentions. In an interview in 2014 in Germany where his study made the biggest ‘splash’, Clark confirmed the active version of the ‘Balkan inception scenario’ and its role as a ‘link’ (*Verzahnung*) between the events before and during the crisis that led to war. Thereby, he stated that on the “geopolitical border an ignition charge was constructed” and “in doing so, *they created a linkage that led to the World War*”.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 47-48

<sup>166</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 347

<sup>167</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 346-349, is basing his thesis on the Russian ‘special conferences’ as a reaction to the Liman v. Sanders crisis that have “revealed how urgent the Russian preoccupation with the straits have become”, while the ‘hinterland’ speculation is derived from Bovykin (347, note 129, 631)

<sup>168</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 350, 364, 412, 450, 497-498, 504, 536, 559

<sup>169</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 558-559

<sup>170</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 559

<sup>171</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 350

<sup>172</sup> Clark in an Interview with Andreas Kilb, “Diese Staaten waren alle Boesewichte”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ.de, July 28, 2014): “Der Kriegsrat zeigt gerade, wie stark sich die Briten auf eine ententistische Politik im Balkan eingelassen haben. Sie lassen zu, dass an dieser geopolitischen Grenze eine Zündladung installiert wird. Damit schaffen sie die *Verzahnung*, die zum Weltkrieg

This clarification by the author is a validation that his *dementi* in the last chapter is not serious and must have had a different function. The contradiction does not appear accidental: Clark is using this scenario six or seven times to remind the reader that France and Russia created a 'geopolitical trigger' at the Austrian-Serbian border as an *active* scenario<sup>173</sup> without any restrictions or qualifications and would even repeat it in the last chapter. In his other 'affirmations' he is also confirming the crucial relevance of the scenario for the crisis: that it was "central to the outbreak of the war"<sup>174</sup>, that the "Austrian threat to Serbia constituted a 'pretext' (...) for activating the alliance" and if the "trigger [had] not been pulled"<sup>175</sup> the "Balkan inception scenario" would not have become "an imminent possibility."<sup>176</sup>

To resolve these inconsistencies, we need to consider the overall posture of his study and its contradictions that are not limited to the case of the 'Balkan inception scenario'. Clark's whole study is a mix of political agitation against the Entente powers (and Serbia) and the *Verharmlosung* (downplaying) of the activities of Germany and Austria-Hungary. That means the reader on the one hand is exposed to a barrage of propaganda and threat analysis about the Entente, while the central powers are considered harmless and speculations by the author about France and Russia - in an unusual and uncommon procedure - are made and then retracted or restricted through a qualifying *dementi*. In fact, there is a pattern that goes through his study like a common thread: whenever the author thinks that he has pushed his alarmistic analysis of the danger of the Entente powers and their alleged 'war scenarios' *vis-a-vis* Germany and

Austria-Hungary too far, when he is coming to close to the radical position that only the Entente had an interest in the war and probably forced it upon the central powers, he is issuing a *dementi* that is supposed to function as a verbal counterweight to absorb the shock of his previous statements.<sup>177</sup>

Clark is making a verbal concession but - after that - will immediately continue to furnish a qualification of the *dementi* avoiding that the reader will take the original *dementi* too seriously, understanding that a *dementi* that is too strong could harm his paradigm. The danger is obvious: if the alleged threat by the Entente powers is reduced to 'zero' his whole scenario might not be valid anymore. The following example is a case in point: after a statement that the Russian Government has realized achieving their goal to capture the Turkish straits is only possible during a general European war ("which in effect meant a war begun in the Balkans"), and in which they could only be assured of the support of its Western allies, he is trying to restrict his speculative inclinations just like he has done in his conclusions with the 'Balkan inception scenario', issuing a *dementi*, that is trying to deny what he has just laid out: "We need to draw an important distinction: at no point did the French or the Russian strategist involved a plan to launch a war of aggression against the central powers. We are dealing with *scenarios*, *not plans* as such."<sup>178</sup> (*emphasis by author*) With this *dementi* the effect of this statement is two-fold. First, Clark has 'equalized' the playing field between all participants how the war has started, giving Germany a free pass downplaying its initial aggression against Luxembourg, Belgium, and France in the West, and secondly, he is denying that he has assumed the radical position that would suggest a plan for war by the Entente powers.<sup>179</sup> But, he is also limiting the *dementi* in the next sentence reminding the reader, that the

führt." (*emphasis by author*); also, he argued similarly in another interview with the same newspaper, Andreas Kilb, "Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs. Die Selbstzerstörung Europas", (FAZ.de, Sept. 9, 2013) where he asserted - after confirming the Balkan scenario - that the Franco-Russian alliance only existed, "to collectively make war against a third party: the German Reich."

<sup>173</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 350, 364, 412, 450, 497-498, 504, 536, 559

<sup>174</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 558

<sup>175</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 364

<sup>176</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 412

<sup>177</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, examples for this strategy, 63, 353, 558-559

<sup>178</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 353

<sup>179</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 486, uses the term 'designs' on the straits that were a reinforcing factor to "stand firm over the threat to Serbia" in July 1914, which was translated in the German version as 'Plaene' (plans), *Schlafwandler*, 622.

Entente powers were careless in their arms policies and did not consider “to which the balance of ‘military threat’ had tilted against Germany” quoting British and French assessments that noted “that the military situation has altered to Germany’s detriment”, revealing the real motive for his study that France and Russia are the ones that had threatened Germany insinuating that they – through their behavior – may have caused the war.

In addition, he is trying to blame Britain – as the posterchild for the ‘Triple’ Entente acquiescing to the Balkan scenario – that England was fully “aware of the risks posed by the ‘Balkanization’ of the Entente security policy” understanding that “if triggered in the right way”, a “Balkan quarrel” could be transformed “into a European war”.<sup>180</sup> With this qualification he has brought the scenario to the forefront although limiting his *dementi* to the intentions of the strategist of the Franco-Russian Alliance. The restrictions of the *dementi* are significant: simply because there was no ‘plan’ to start a war that he can prove on the side of the Entente– from his point of view – does not mean the alleged threat regarding Germany had a lesser impact, because Russia’s aggressive ‘designs’ in the Balkans to capture the straits, need to be considered the ‘real’ cause for the July Crisis and war.<sup>181</sup>

In general, while his introduction and his conclusions are designed to be ‘reasonable’, Clark wants to appear being a moderate (revisionist) who asserts in his last chapter that “the crisis that brought war in 1914 was the fruit of a shared political culture”<sup>182</sup>, distributing the responsibility for the war somewhat between all participants. With this vague and inaccurate statement, Clark is maintaining that the central powers were not the ones that unleashed the war in 1914. But his main text (through constant agitation against the Entente including the ‘Balkan inception scenario’) has all the features of radical revisionism that

wants to show – following the Kaiser’s verdict<sup>183</sup> – that the Entente powers including Serbia have caused the war in 1914. Germany and Austria-Hungary – although they may have made a ‘few mistakes’ (‘panicking over the Russian mobilization’<sup>184</sup>) – were the ‘real’ victims, while France and Russia forced the war on the central powers. Not accidentally, an American expert on Germany, has told Clark in a discussion in 2014, that his study reminds him of the revisionism of Harry E. Barnes, an assertion that Clark has refused and called ‘absurd’.<sup>185</sup>

Although a detailed comparison between the ‘Sleepwalkers’ and Barnes ‘Genesis’ is difficult to do in a few pages, there is ample evidence that this judgment is completely justified. If we leave certain specifics related to the different times aside and examine the core similarities between the two studies, the common ground is striking. All the main accusations by the ‘Sleepwalkers’ against the Entente powers and Serbia are also part of Barnes ‘Genesis’, who received most of his clues regarding Poincare and Isvolsky from the same source Clark is dwelling on: Stieve’s *Iswolski und der Weltkrieg*.<sup>186</sup> Although Clark is not mentioning Barnes or his study at all, the most crucial *topoi* of revisionism, that Clark has revived in his study are also part of Barnes’ ‘Genesis’ and can also be found in certain publications of the German campaign<sup>187</sup> which kept in close contact to Barnes in the 1920s and – after the publication

<sup>183</sup> See Clark’s quote of the radical position of the Kaiser as an explanation for the crisis supported by Bethmanns reflections, *Sleepwalkers*, 420-421.

<sup>184</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 525

<sup>185</sup> The discussion was reported in the German Press, Patrick Bahners, “Geopolitischer Fatalismus ueberall”, *Franfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Sept. 24, 2014): N 3

<sup>186</sup> For the publication of the Isvolsky editions, Barnes is basically devoting a eulogy to Stieve, Barnes, *Genesis*, note 9, 151: “The reader may well be reminded here that Dr. Stieve is the world’s foremost authority on the Russian documents involved in the question of pre-war diplomacy. His five-volume edition of these documents, *Der diplomatische Schriftwechsel Iswolkis*, 1911-1914, has superseded the earlier collections by Laloy und Marchand.”

<sup>187</sup> For example, Count Max Montgelas, *The Case for the Central Powers. An Impeachment of the Versailles Verdict* (New York, 1925): [German original, *Leitfaden zur Kriegsschuldfrage* (Berlin, 1923)]; Wegerer, *Refutation*; Stieve, *Iswolski und der Weltkrieg*

<sup>180</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 353

<sup>181</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 346-349

<sup>182</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 561



of Genesis - invited him to Germany twice to lecture about the origins of the war.<sup>188</sup> Needless to say, that Barnes study was also translated with funds from the Foreign Office and published in Germany in 1928.<sup>189</sup>

A few examples should suffice to demonstrate the core similarities: almost all the crucial topoi of revisionist origin are present. From the alleged 'change' in French Foreign Policy after Poincare became Prime Minister in January 1912 and the new *casus foederis* definition in relation to Russia<sup>190</sup>, the Balkans as the preferred place of war to achieve the Entente's objectives<sup>191</sup>, the secret cooperation between Colonel Dimitrijevic, and the Russian military attache, Artamonov, to assert or at least insinuate the involvement of Russia and Serbia in the assassination of the Archduke<sup>192</sup>, the already mentioned dubious Millerand-Ignatiev conversation<sup>193</sup>, the alleged 'blank check' France gave to Russia in 1912<sup>194</sup>, the same Poincare quotes used by Izvolsky regarding the *casus foederis*<sup>195</sup>, France' alleged war preparations in 1912 that Clark extended even to a preemptive strike against Austria-Hungary<sup>196</sup>, the war aims of the Entente - 'recovering of Alsace-Lorraine' and the 'capturing of the Turkish straits' - which were only possible to be realized by a general European war that finally happened as a result of the July Crisis<sup>197</sup>, that Poincare was relying on the 'victory' outlook for the Triple Entente to prevail in a war against the central powers to redraw the map of Europe<sup>198</sup>, to Clark's 'Balkan inception scenario' that Barnes described - as a plan of Poincare's - the "spark to be lighted in the Balkans and the world war would be certain", assuming - as Clark has pointed out -

that Russia "effectively held a trigger" in his hands and was "free any time to instigate a continental war in support of their Balkan objectives."<sup>199</sup>

During the actual crisis in 1914 the explanation why the crisis has escalated and turned into war is also similar, and for revisionism old and new the only viable solution would have been either that Serbia would have accepted Austria's ultimatum or the Franco-Russian alliance and Britain - as the Kaiser had suggested in a telegram to the Tsar - should have become 'neutral' spectators<sup>200</sup> in a war between Austria and Serbia. That a compromise solution could have saved the peace, as Britain, Russia and Italy had suggested, does not seem an option: both Barnes and Clark prefer the explanation that the diplomatic talks between Russia, Austria and Germany were just a ruse "to lull to sleep as much as possible the enemy's fears"<sup>201</sup>, Grey's proposal for a conference of the remaining four powers - as Clark is stating - was a "non- starter"<sup>202</sup>, and they both quote the Russian General Dobrorolski (in 1914 in charge of mobilization), who has afterwards asserted his opinion - Clark and Barnes take as 'fact' - that at the meeting of the Russian Council of Ministers on July 24 and 25, 1914 "war was already a decided thing" and that all the diplomatic

<sup>199</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 293, 350; Barnes, *Genesis*, 388

<sup>200</sup> *Outbreak of the World War*, Doc. 359, Wilhelm II. to Tsar, July 29, 1914, 315: "I therefore suggest that it would be quite possible for Russia to remain a spectator of the Austro-Serbian conflict without involving Europe in the most horrible war she ever witnessed."

<sup>201</sup> Both quote the same Russian secret protocol dated Nov. 8, 1912, *Sleepwalkers*, 483-484; Barnes, *Genesis*, 362, (without any source) under the heading of "Bogus Nature of Sazonov's Diplomatic Proposals" (358-364); the secret protocol in question was captured by the German troops in the East and was originally published by Gunther Frantz, *Russlands Eintritt in den Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1924): Doc. 82, 236-237; but already in this edition the next two documents (No. 83, 84) demonstrate, that the protocol Barnes and Clark are quoting was later replaced by order of the Chief of the Russian General Staff, Shilinskly, that a telegram, signed by him is the only valid procedure to open war like activities, stating that even border provocations by the enemy are not to be considered a pretext for war, 237-239; needless to say - despite it was replaced as a document back then - revisionists like Clark are quoting it even today

<sup>202</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 495; Barnes, *Genesis*, 503-508 is trying to make it look like as if France and Russia have refused Grey's conference proposal

<sup>188</sup> Wittgens, "German War-Guilt Propaganda", 238-247

<sup>189</sup> Harry E. Barnes, *Die Entstehung des Krieges* (Stuttgart, 1928); regarding the background, Wittgens, "German War Guilt Propaganda", 242-243

<sup>190</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 294-298; Barnes, *Genesis*, 98-99

<sup>191</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 297; Barnes, *Genesis*, 103

<sup>192</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 411-412; Barnes, *Genesis*, 141, 169, 170, 314

<sup>193</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 301-302; Barnes, *Genesis*, 112

<sup>194</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 409; Barnes, *Genesis*, 113

<sup>195</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 298; Barnes, *Genesis*, 114

<sup>196</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 298; Barnes, *Genesis*, 97-99

<sup>197</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 348-349; Barnes, *Genesis*, 111

<sup>198</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 300; Barnes, *Genesis*, 391



telegrams exchanged later “were nothing but the staging for a historical drama.”<sup>203</sup>

For both authors, the Balkans is the crucial area from where the ‘spark’ is flying that finally ‘ignited’ the ‘Balkan inception scenario’, which led to crisis and war, creating an automatism to avoid a precise rendering of the July Crisis in 1914 pointing towards Russia and France, who allegedly had caused it. In fact, that there is a ‘crisis’ at all, is the product of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, and not just the assassination of the Archduke, which did not have to turn into a crisis between the great powers at all. As a cause for the crisis Barnes and Clark both assert the assassination of the Archduke (‘an assault of the dual monarchy’), using almost the same term for the policies of the Franco-Russian alliance. It is about Serbia and the Balkans when they either call it “Balkanizing” (Barnes<sup>204</sup>) or “Balkanization” (Clark<sup>205</sup>), considering that these slightly different terms mean the same: in both cases it is supposed to signal the importance of the Balkans as a place “over which a European war might be provoked”<sup>206</sup> (Barnes) or - as Clark has put it as a transfer of Bethmann Hollweg’s thinking in July 1914 from Germany to France as a reversal of sorts - emphasizing the French initiative “that a war of Balkan origin was the scenario most likely to trigger a full Russian participation in a joint campaign against Germany”.<sup>207</sup>

In either case Barnes and Clark want to demonstrate that the commitment of the Franco-Russian alliance to Serbia was the cause of the war (not the German support of Austria-Hungary), pretending it was caused by the assassination plot that probably was initiated by the Entente to create a pretext for an intervention. What Barnes calls the “Balkanization of the plot”<sup>208</sup>, Clark calls the “Balkanization of the Franco-Russian Alliance”<sup>209</sup> or – with more

sophistication - the ‘Balkan inception scenario’<sup>210</sup> that for both works is the ‘missing link’ to explain the escalation of the crisis 1914, because France and Russia created the ‘spark’ or ‘trigger’ as the means to start a war. Both scenarios resemble a baseless conspiracy allegation founded on assertions by Clark and Barnes without any primary sources that would either connect France or Russia with the assassination or as ‘starters’ of the war for the control of the Turkish straits or the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine. Barnes’ and Clark’s presumptions are based on the allegation that France and Russia wanted war, while Germany and Austria were trying to prevent it.

Barnes in 1926 as well as Clark in 2012 are laying out assumptions speculating about a possible connection between the ‘spark’ in the Balkans and the unleashing of the war.<sup>211</sup> The real difference between Barnes 1926 and Clark 2012 is their methodology: while Barnes did not mince any words and openly embraced conspiracy scenarios like his constant references to the ‘Russian-Serbian plot’ and the ‘Poincare clique that has started the war’, Clark is cautious in his wording and prefers more indirect accusations and the insinuation of a plot. Clark’s ‘Balkan inception scenario’ is one of the very few explicit statements in this regard, that he has also republished separately to underscore its importance.<sup>212</sup> As we have pointed out before, Clark has probably learned from other cases, how not to write revisionist history that may transport the same message but prefers a different packaging smoothing out the ‘radical’ allegations around the edges.<sup>213</sup>

Clark’s ‘Balkan inception scenario’ is definitely a re-issuing of the conspiracy myths of the 1920s,

<sup>203</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 486; Barnes, *Genesis*, 337

<sup>204</sup> Barnes, *Genesis*, 98, 103, 110

<sup>205</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 293

<sup>206</sup> Barnes, *Genesis*, 111-112

<sup>207</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 297, 422

<sup>208</sup> Barnes, *Genesis*, 110

<sup>209</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 293

<sup>210</sup> The German translator created the term ‘Balkan Katalysator Szenario’ (Balkan catalyst scenario), that seems closer to the intended meaning, Clark, *Schlafwandler*, 452

<sup>211</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 346-349, 484: “The robustness of the Russian response fully makes sense only if we read against the background of the Russian leadership’s growing anxiety about the future of the Turkish straits.”

<sup>212</sup> Clark, “The Balkan Inception Scenario”, in: *Bid for World Power*, 262-280

<sup>213</sup> See L. L. Farrar review, *American Historical Review*, 1695-1696, that has pointed out “how not to write revisionist history”

which can also be deduced from the fact that in connection with the ‘scenario’ he is quoting extensively from the same letter cited by Hans Delbrueck in 1919, the doyen of the German historians at the time and a supporter of the German campaign, who has been a constant propagator of a “Russian-Serbian plot”<sup>214</sup>, topoi that were also used in the Professor’s memorandum<sup>215</sup> and by other propagandists of the German campaign like Stieve<sup>216</sup>, Montgelas<sup>217</sup> and Wegerer<sup>218</sup>. The crucial difference between them is the sourcing: while Delbrueck and others are quoting from the original source in the German Whitebook in 1919<sup>219</sup>

Clark is using the same document but is quoting from Stieve’s *Iswolski und der Weltkrieg* <sup>220</sup>, bearing in mind the need for the diversification of his sources. It is a letter, that Sazonov has supposedly written to the Russian envoy in Belgrad, Nikolai Hartwig, in May of 1913, which seems dubious to begin with, because it never appeared in any other documentation since, German or Russian (like the Millerand-Ignatiev conversation), aside of the issue that we do not know if and what Hartwig related to the Serbian Government. The content of the letter is supposed to be a link between Russia and Serbia and an encouragement for the Serbs to claim certain lands from Austria-Hungary in the future, while

the letter is a request by Sazonov the Serbs should avoid any war with the Bulgarians, because this would mess up the Russian strategy in the Balkans. To base a full-fledged conspiracy scenario to start a war on this document, even if it would be authentic, is more than a stretch.

Even Sidney B. Fay, a moderate revisionist who is also using Stieve’s ‘Izvolksy’ correspondence extensively, is criticizing Stieve and Barnes and their radical conspiracy scenarios like the “Balkanizing of the Franco-Russian Alliance” or the “Franco-Russian war plot”, asserting that the radical revisionists like Stieve and Barnes have exaggerated Poincare’s and Isvolksy’s influence, and having taken the latter’s dispatches too much “at his own valuation.”<sup>221</sup> In addition, Fay is also pointing towards a typical procedure of revisionism, that is practiced by Stieve and Barnes (as well as by Clark): quoting a document selectively and leaving out those passages that do not fit their preconceived thesis. In this case, Fay is criticizing that Stieve<sup>222</sup> and Barnes<sup>223</sup> have both suppressed Sazonov’s statements at the ‘special conference’ in December 1913, where he is saying that he wants to preserve peace and the status quo in the Turkish straits and the Balkans, and only intervene, if somebody else would do so before them, pointing out Barnes’ and Stieve’s “misleading and unwarranted conclusions”. These conclusions presume that Russia and Sazonov were pursuing their goal to ‘secure’ the Turkish straits, having been converted to the idea of a World War by Poincare and Izvolksy.<sup>224</sup> Due to his careful line of arguing Fay is not discussing his findings and the impact for historiography any further, but has established a record that radical revisionism through its threat analysis is striving to manipulate its readers with the selective use of crucial documents and ‘misleading’ and ‘unwarranted’ conclusions.

The reason why Clark is hiding his radical inclinations and his knack for conspiracy explanations has several reasons: he wants to appear as a ‘neutral’ observer who is basing his

<sup>214</sup> Hans Delbrueck, *Kautsky und Harden* (Berlin, 1920), Appendix, “Die russisch-serbische Verschwörung”, 37-40 quotes from the original publication in the German Whitebook; idem., “Did the Kaiser want the war?”, *Contemporary Review* 119 (1921): 322-332; answer by J. W. Headlam-Morley, “A Reply to Professor Delbrueck”, *Contemporary Review* 119 (1921): 333-345; also the answer by Karl Kautsky, *Delbrueck und Wilhelm II* (Berlin, 1920): 9-12, who has disputed that there ever was a ‘Russian-Serbian plot’ and stated that Delbrueck’s accusation that France, Russia, England and Serbia had agreed upon war against the central powers beforehand is nowhere to be found and must be considered an unproven allegation

<sup>215</sup> Weissbuch 1919, *Deutschland schuldig*, 65

<sup>216</sup> Stieve, *Iswolski und der Weltkrieg*, 178

<sup>217</sup> Montgelas, *Case for the Central Powers*, 77-78

<sup>218</sup> Wegerer, *Refutation*, 326-327

<sup>219</sup> The letter appeared in full length only in the German *Weissbuch* edited by the Foreign Office, *Deutschland schuldig*, “Sazonow to Hartwig”, May 6, 1913, 98-101.

<sup>220</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 349-350 (note 137, 632) quotes from Stieve, *Iswolski und der Weltkrieg*, 178, who quotes from the Whitebook 1919, 99.

<sup>221</sup> Fay, *Origins*, Vol. I, 524

<sup>222</sup> Stieve, *Iswolsky and the World War*, 189

<sup>223</sup> Barnes, *Genesis*, 139

<sup>224</sup> Fay, *Origins*, Vol. I, note 299, 527

statements on primary sources, delivering 'scientifically sound' judgements, and - despite obvious similarities - he wants to avoid being compared with Harry E. Barnes, whose mission to "whitewash"<sup>225</sup>

Germany extended even to Hitler, the Second World War<sup>226</sup> and the Holocaust<sup>227</sup>, which made him a 'taboo' person in the historical sciences. In the early 1960s, Barnes not only published a defense of the thesis of David Hoggan on the Second World War excusing Hitler and Germany<sup>228</sup>, but he even appealed to the German Government not to accept the 'victory tale' of the 'winners' of the war suggesting that they should start an 'innocence' campaign just like in the 1920s, that he deemed successful in every respect.<sup>229</sup>

Harry E. Barnes, consistent in his 'love' for Germany - not even immune to Hitler and the Holocaust - became the negative posterchild of revisionism, although his main arguments against the Entente powers are still very much alive in the writings of neo-revisionist historians today. Clark is trying to bridge an obvious dilemma: on the one hand he wants to adopt the radical thesis of Barnes, but on the other hand he is trying to avoid naming him considering that Barnes has extended his 'excuses' for Germany far beyond the

acceptable consensus that may include unleashing a war but not the Holocaust.

## V. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is also important to note that revisionist attempts to distort the activities of the German Government and Hitler unleashing the Second World War in 1939 and afterwards were - also in Germany in the 1960s - clearly refused and given an unambiguous answer, thereby revealing that both revisionism's were operating with the same technique.<sup>230</sup> In the mid-1980s, a dispute again between historians about National Socialism, World War II and the Holocaust demonstrated that a majority in Germany would not tolerate excuses or absurd 'offsets' about the victims of certain countries in World War II in order to make Germany look better.<sup>231</sup> Only when it comes to the origins of the First World War, German historians do not seem to care about the distortions of revisionism, which suggests that there are other considerations that drives the silence.<sup>232</sup> For example, when one of the first revisionist challenges was issued by Terence Zuber regarding the Schlieffen plan in 1999,

<sup>230</sup> Gottfried Jasper, "Über die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkriegs. Zu den Büchern von A. J. P. Taylor und David L. Hoggan", *Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte* 10 (1962): 312-340; also see the different contributions in, *Kriegsbeginn 1939. Entfesselung oder Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, ed. Gottfried Niedhart (Darmstadt, 1976); and *The Origins of the Second World War*, ed. Esmonde M. Robertson (London, 1971)

<sup>231</sup> Regarding the dispute of the historians in Germany in 1986-87 and their contributions to the debate, *Historikerstreit. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, ed. Piper Verlag (Muenchen, 1987); Charles Maier, "Jenseits des Historikerstreits. The significance of the controversy", *German Politics & Society* 13 (1988): 3-8; idem., *The unmasterable past: History, Holocaust, and German national identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1988)

<sup>232</sup> In a review of the 'Sleepwalkers' in Germany, the historian Gerd Krumeich suggested that Clark is finally providing a narrative that does not accuse Germany of any misdeeds and is excusing it for 'unleashing' the First World War, Gerd Krumeich, "Die deutsche Sehnsucht unschuldig zu sein", *TAZ.de* (March 3, 2014): "In the long run it is unbearable that only we should have had a terrible, destructive past.", repeating afterwards the 'topoi' of the German campaign Clark is basing his statements on; It seems like Krumeich prefers German 'innocence' over the real events of unleashing the war in 1914

<sup>225</sup> Barnes, *Genesis*, 296: "Many will doubtless allege that this chapter constitutes a well-nigh complete 'white-washing' of Germany as far as immediate responsibility for the World War is concerned, and the writer frankly admits that such is the case."

<sup>226</sup> Harry E. Barnes, "Revisionism and the Historical Blackout", in: *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace. A critical Examination of the Foreign Policy of Franklin D. Roosevelt and its aftermath*, ed. Harry E. Barnes (Caldwell, Id. 1953): 1-78; idem., "Pearl Harbour after a Century", *Left and Right* 4 (1966): 1-132

<sup>227</sup> Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust. The Growing assault on Truth and Memory* (New York, 1993): 49-83

<sup>228</sup> David Hoggan, *The forced War. When peaceful Revision failed* (Costa Mesa, CA, 1961) [first published in Germany, *Der erzwungene Krieg* (Tuebingen, 1962)]; Lipstadt, *Denying*, 137-156

<sup>229</sup> Harry E. Barnes, *Revisionism and brainwashing: a survey of the war-guilt question in Germany after two World Wars* (1962) [German transl., idem., *Die deutsche Kriegsschuldfrage. Eine Rechtfertigung David L. Hoggans* (Tuebingen, 1964)]



stating that the plan did not exist and Germany in 1914 invaded Belgium only for defensive purposes to thwart the war plan of the Franco-Russian alliance, German historians initiated a conference in 2004 and published the results to refute Zuber's thesis.<sup>233</sup>

When Clark's 'Sleepwalkers' was published, a major revisionist challenge to the international consensus far more serious than Zuber's regarding the Schlieffen plan, no conference was held and all that could be heard from German historians was ominous silence if not tacit approval.<sup>234</sup>

There has been a discussion in Potsdam at the *Militaergeschichtliches Forschungsamt* (where the conference on Zuber occurred) after Clark's study was published, and German historians voiced their dissent, but this can hardly be counted as a serious answer to Clark's "entdeutsche Anklageschrift"<sup>235</sup> ('de-Germanized indictment') of the Entente countries.<sup>236</sup> If Zuber's "falsification of history"<sup>237</sup> focusing on the Schlieffen plan demanded an answer through a conference and a publication, Clark's study would require something similar considering that his distortions apply to the complete preceding

history and the July Crisis based on similar techniques like Zuber's.<sup>238</sup>

In addition, a conference with a clear rebuttal of Clark's thesis in all areas (item by item) would have made clear that Clark's attempt for a revival of the paradigm of the 'Initiative of the Entente' throwing the debate back to the 1950s or worse to the 1920s and 1930s<sup>239</sup> would not be accepted, considering that he is on the same level like Zuber whose thesis seem to fit very well into Clark's concept of excusing the central powers and specifically Germany.<sup>240</sup> There were certainly some voices, who at the centennial of the war in 2014 spoke up and criticized the new tendency<sup>241</sup>, but the pendulum in Germany regarding the views of the responsibility for unleashing the war in 1914 has swung back again and today it seems more like it is accepted – like in the 1920s – that France and Russia are responsible for the war.<sup>242</sup>

In a recent answer to his critics in Germany<sup>243</sup> Clark is trying to defend himself against the main charge that in his study he has excused the *Reichsleitung* unleashing the war in 1914. To refute these allegations, he is stating that regarding Germany he has at least attached a co-responsibility mentioning German plans for 'preventive' war up to 1914. Also, he seems

<sup>233</sup> *The Schlieffen Plan. International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I*, ed. Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, Gerhard Gross (Lexington, KY, 2014): 13 [German original, *Der Schlieffenplan*, ed. idem. (Paderborn, 2006)]

<sup>234</sup> The only professional summary of the discussion in 2014, Michael Epkenhans, "Der Erste Weltkrieg – Jahrestag Gedenken, neue Forschungen und Debatten einhundert Jahre nach seinem Beginn", *Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte* 63 (2015): 135-165, shows the triumph of revisionism, 153: "On the whole, one can agree with Clark here (...); and is downplaying the revisionist publications in general; reviews of Clark's study in 2014 in Germany were overwhelmingly positive

<sup>235</sup> Roger Chickering, "Deutschland im Ersten Weltkrieg, Betrachtungen zur Historiografie des Gedenkjahres", *Archiv fuer Sozialgeschichte* 55 (2015): 1-50, 3

<sup>236</sup> Berthold Seewald, "Besessen von der deutschen Kriegsschuld", *Welt.de* (Oct. 25, 2013), whose short article is written from Clark's perspective 'demonstrating' that he was able to answer any criticism from the 'experts' in Potsdam with 'charm' and 'rhetorical foil'

<sup>237</sup> Mombauer, "War plans and war guilt", 879

<sup>238</sup> As Mombauer, "War plans and war guilt", 857-885, has shown in detail

<sup>239</sup> As Hew Strachan, "Origins of the First World War", has correctly claimed, 438: "In many ways, Clark and others have taken the debate back to where it stood then [the 1920s and 1930s] – and where it remained until the 1960s."

<sup>240</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 216, emphasizes the Zuber thesis that the Schlieffen plan, "was not a 'war plan'" (Zuber cited in note 123, 603) omitting the fact that Zuber's thesis was summarily refuted at a conference and through a publication that Clark is not mentioning at all

<sup>241</sup> Volker Ullrich, "Zuendschnur und Pulverfass", *Die Zeit* (Sept. 26, 2013); Heinrich A. Winkler, "Und erloese uns von der Kriegsschuld", *Zeit Online* (July 31, 2014), John Roehl, "Erster Weltkrieg. Jetzt gilt es loszuschlagen", *Die Zeit* (June 1, 2014); Michael Hesse, "Der Krieg war im Oktober 1914 verloren, Interview mit Hans-Ulrich Wehler", *Frankfurter Rundschau* (Dec. 18, 2013)

<sup>242</sup> An example for this is the publication of R. Schmidt, "Revanche pour Sedan", who blames France and Poincare for unleashing the war in 1914

<sup>243</sup> Christopher Clark, "Von Nationalisten, Revisionisten und Schlafwandlern", idem., *Gefangene der Zeit* (Muenchen, 2020): 287-304



concerned about the criticism that his study is a step backwards to the 1950s or worse to the revisionism of the 1920s<sup>244</sup>, denying that his depiction of the events of 1914 has anything to do with it. Although Clark is trying to mend fences and is even ‘thanking’ his critics for their ‘seriousness’ suddenly kowtowing to the ‘self-critical’ historical culture in Germany<sup>245</sup>, he is increasing his complexity scenario for the July Crisis in 1914 to “ultracomplex”<sup>246</sup> and is praising the neo-revisionist literature<sup>247</sup> he so heavily relied on in his study. Clark is still insisting that these ‘novel’ inquiries have thoroughly refuted Fritz Fischer’s paradigm of the ‘Initiative of the central powers’, pointing out that Fischer’s thesis that Germany has ‘planned’ to go to war has been disproven by these new studies.<sup>248</sup>

In fact, he is pointing out that the historians who have created the neo-revisionist literature (including himself) are not “revisionists”, because they are not members of an “organization” or a “gang”<sup>249</sup>, trying to refute a negative label that – in his mind – should only be used for the denial of the Holocaust.<sup>250</sup> Clark’s answer to his critics shows a familiar picture: through his strategy of *Selbstverharmlosung* he is again downplaying the revisionist ‘contours’ of his study denying the fact that his thesis has originated in the German campaign and his publications<sup>251</sup>, emphasizing the assumed ‘novelty’ of his secondary sources but omitting the fact that his study is only a summary of the opinions of others while he has no primary sources to show for. The only novel thing is a statement regarding his motive: according to him ‘Sleepwalkers’ has originated over the “annoyance at the slick and selfish Anglophone commemoration of 1914”<sup>252</sup>, while Germany

seems to have become the country, where he can enjoy a “foreigner’s bonus” and a certain degree of “fool’s freedom”.<sup>253</sup>

As we have demonstrated in this paper, the revival of the revisionist enterprise is a replacement of science and its methodology with arbitrary assertions, selective sourcing, and conspiracy scenarios just like the Trump Commission has shown in its ‘1776 Report’. If this type of inquiry would become the norm, it would be the end of the discipline as we know it, only subject to arbitrary whims of the individual historian and the political interests the author is trying to promote.<sup>254</sup> The result would be a ‘free for all’ where everybody could invoke science as a cover to propagate their individual opinions. Specifically, historical sciences, which seem under the pressure to conform<sup>255</sup>, need to be independent from any political currents and should be able – as a German historian has pointed out 50 years ago, “to understand to acknowledge, but not to hold harmless or being evasive or apologetic, but also not to accuse or condemn *cum ira et studio* (...)”, going beyond “a mere opinion” and becoming an overall guidance that science needs to be.<sup>256</sup>

<sup>244</sup> Clark, “Revisionisten und Schlafwandler”, 292

<sup>245</sup> Clark, “Revisionisten und Schlafwandler”, 304

<sup>246</sup> Clark, “Revisionisten und Schlafwandler”, 302

<sup>247</sup> Clark, “Revisionisten und Schlafwandler”, 297-300 is mentioning like-minded historians like Geppert, Kiessling, McMeekin, S. Schmidt, Williamson, Kronenbitter, and others, whose works we have cited previously

<sup>248</sup> Clark, “Revisionisten und Schlafwandler”, 300

<sup>249</sup> Clark, “Revisionisten und Schlafwandler”, 300

<sup>250</sup> See his Interview, “Kollektive Emotionen”, *Der Spiegel* 28 (2014): 42-43

<sup>251</sup> Clark, “Revisionisten und Schlafwandler”, 292

<sup>252</sup> Clark, “Revisionisten und Schlafwandler”, 302

<sup>253</sup> Christopher Clark, “Preussenbilder im Wandel”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 293 (2011): 307-321, 308

<sup>254</sup> Like the authors of the revisionist manifesto in 2014, Geppert et. al., “Warum Deutschland nicht allein Schuld ist”, *Welt.de* (Jan. 4, 2014)

<sup>255</sup> William H. McNeil, “Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History, and Historians”, *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1-10

<sup>256</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, “Quellen und Quellenkritik zur Vorgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges”, in: *Kriegsbeginn 1939*, 369-395, 369-370

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