

The Triple Entente: the British-led conspiracy that sparked World War I

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On June 28, 1914, Archduke Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne, was gunned down by Serbian assassins in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. The assassins were members of the "Black Hand," which claimed to be dedicated to liberating Serbians from foreign oppression. Bosnia had been annexed by Austria from the Ottoman Turkish empire six years before, and Serbia claimed the land to be rightfully hers. Austria was an ally of Germany; Russia, France, and England were patrons of the Serbs. The chain of events provoked by the Balkan assassination led to the Russian czar ordering his army to mobilize; Germany responded. Within weeks, the most destructive war of the twentieth century was unleashed.

Just how Britain triggered the war is a study of the imperial method of divide and rule, and of the creation and manipulation of nationalist-chauvinist movements that have characterized modern Europe especially since the 1848 revolutions directed by British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston. The British exploited their Balkan assets (in league with a destabilized France) to block Eurasian economic development. This was their plan in the early years of this century, as it was to be again following the reunification of Germany in 1989. Then, as now, the strategy was to forge, first, an Entente Cordiale with France (1903-04), and then, a Triple Entente, drawing Russia into the web of British manipulation (1907).

The strategic setting

The Triple Entente and World War I were the response of Britain's King Edward VII to a series of challenges to the continued world domination of the British Empire, which at the beginning of our century embraced about one-quarter of the land area and population of the entire planet. The threat profile against the British Empire and its brutal colonial exploitation was not a matter of military aggression, but rather involved the extension of European railroad and other infrastructural technology into the colonial sector, breaking the monopoly of British sea power.

During the 1890s, each of the leading continental States possessed a more or less prominent institutional grouping

which was seeking to implement proposals for infrastructural development. In France, there were such figures as Foreign Minister Gabriel Hanotaux and Ferdinand de Lesseps, the builder of the Suez Canal. In Russia, there was Finance Minister Sergei Yulevich Witte, the builder of the Trans-Siberian Railway, and his ally, the eminent scientist Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleyev. In Germany, there was Georg von Siemens of the Siemens concern and the Deutsche Bank, who was laying track for the Berlin to Baghdad Railway. Some of these groups were also in touch with railroad-building industrialists in the United States and other countries. Some, like Hanotaux, cooperated with the anti-oligarchical Pope Leo XIII.

The strategic thinking of Witte and Hanotaux converged on a continental European coalition of France, Germany, and Russia, based on a community of interest in world economic development, capable of reaching out to the United States and other powers, and above all capable of putting an end to the divide and conquer "balance of power" machinations of the British imperialists. There were a number of occasions during the 1890s when this continental league could have been assembled; one golden opportunity came in the wake of the 1898 British-French Fashoda confrontation, at a time when the British aggression in South Africa, commonly called the Boer War, exposed both the malicious evil and the stunning military weakness of London. The 1899-1902 Boer War united the governments of the world in their abhorrence of British policy. By this time Hanotaux was out of office, replaced by the raving anglophile Théophile Delcassé. A more serious obstacle was posed by Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, not because he was the bloodthirsty monster of Entente propaganda, but rather because he was a pathetic fool obsessed with his personal inferiority complex in regard to the British monarchy. The Kaiser's track record was one of erratic duplicity, with the constant danger that he would succumb to the next overture from London.

The failure to bring Germany into a community of principle with the France of Hanotaux and the Russia of Witte by 1902 at the latest amounts to a great lost opportunity, a turning point of world history in the sense of Friedrich Schiller's *punctum saliens*. Lost here was the chance for the twentieth century to become a true renaissance age of reason and world economic development. What came instead, courtesy of London, was symbolized by the bloody stalemate of Verdun.

King Edward VII: an evil demiurge

The Triple Entente was the personal creation of King Edward VII. It was he who set up the British alliance with Japan, the Russo-Japanese War, and the 1905 Russian Revolution. It was King Edward VII, acting as the autocrat of British foreign policy, who engineered the Entente Cordiale between Britain and France in 1903-04, and who then went on to seal the fateful British-Russian Entente of 1907. It was King Edward who massaged Theodore Roosevelt and other American leaders to help bring about the U.S.-U.K. "special relationship," which dates from the time of his reign. This diplomatic work was masterminded and carried out by King Edward VII personally, with the various British ministers, cabinets, round tables, and other apparatus merely following in his wake. Edward had a geopolitical vision in the Venetian tradition, and it was one of brutal simplicity: the encirclement of Germany with a hostile coalition, followed by a war of annihilation in which many of Britain's erstwhile "allies"—notably France and Russia—would also be decimated and crippled.

Edward VII died in May 1910, before he could see his life's work carried through to completion. But he had created the war alliance of Britain, France, Russia, and Japan, with support from the United States, that would take the field in August 1914. He had created the nightmare world of crossed mobilizations among Germany, France, and Russia. And he had created a network of cothinkers, agents, and dupes in every chancery in England, Europe, and America, who would, when the time came, push the mobilization buttons and launch the war.

Edward VII's role as dictator of British foreign policy before the war, although denied by recent biographers, was a matter of common knowledge through the 1920s. During the last months of Edward's life, Robert Blatchford, the editor of the *Clarion*, wrote in the *Daily Mail* of Dec. 14, 1909 that "the king and his councillors have strained every nerve to establish Ententes with Russia and with Italy; and have formed an Entente with France, and as well with Japan. Why? To isolate Germany."

The leading ambassadors and ministers of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs clearly recorded their understanding of Edward's project. Here is the view of Baron Greindl, the Belgian ambassador to Berlin, as expressed in April 1906: "One is driven to the conclusion that British foreign policy is directed by the king in person . . . there is undoubtedly in



Britain's King Edward VII: World War I was caused by him, his geopolitics, his diplomacy, his agents, and his system of alliances. The same strategy is being used by the British oligarchy today, with the Balkans being, once again, a principal flashpoint.

England a court policy pursued outside and alongside that of the government."

The Witte-Hanotaux alliance for progress

To better understand the enormity of Edward's crimes, let us first examine more carefully what the opposing continental European factions were doing, which constituted such a threat

to the British oligarchy.

From 1892 the prime architect of the rapid industrial development that occurred in Russia during the last decade of the last century, was Sergei Witte, who for 11 years, until his dismissal in 1903, would serve as Russia's finance minister. During the Witte years, the Russian economy would experience a more rapid rate of growth than it had ever experienced previously.

Witte began his service in the Russian bureaucracy as a railroad manager. During the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), he was the sole manager of the Odessa Railway, over which all traffic to the front passed, his work bringing him to the notice of the czar. After serving in various capacities in the railroad administration, Witte was appointed in 1892 Minister of Ways and Communications. At the behest of Czar Alexander III, Witte set up a Siberian Railroad Committee to begin the task of building a railroad to the Pacific. When he was appointed in October of that year to the post of finance minister, Witte was given the means of realizing that program.

As finance minister, Witte reformed the entire state of Russian finances and transformed the Finance Ministry into a veritable chancellery of the realm, establishing extensive intelligence networks in all the major political and financial capitals of the world. His aim was to transform Russia from a backward peasant country, into a major industrial power.

The Franco-Russian rapprochement at the end of the previous decade helped to lay the basis for the Witte-Hanotaux economic collaboration during the 1890s. Putting Russian finances on a sound footing, and working closely with Hanotaux, Witte found French capital markets open to Russia. Under the guiding hand of Witte, major loans were negotiated, that were earmarked for expanding the Russian rail system. Between 1879 and 1892, only some 5,466 miles of new rail lines had been opened up. Between 1892 and 1901, under Witte's lead, some 14,814 miles of new rail lines were constructed, nearly triple the earlier amount. This was a more rapid rate of railroad construction than any other country except the United States had ever experienced.

The real core of that system was the planned Trans-Siberian road which, at its completion in 1902, would stretch some 5,542 miles from Chelyabinsk in the Ural Mountains to Vladivostok on the Pacific coast. But the Trans-Siberian was more than simply a rapid transit through the vast Siberian spaces. It was what Lyndon LaRouche would characterize as a "land-bridge" to Asia. By rail, the overland journey from London to Shanghai would be twice as fast and two and a half times cheaper than the sea route. The prime vehicle for trade with the Orient would rapidly shift from the slower sea routes, always under the guiding eye of the British Navy, to the land-based routes through continental Europe and the Russian Far East.

Gabriel Hanotaux, French foreign minister for a large part of the 1890s, had worked closely with his mentor, Prime Minister Jules Ferry, to establish a colonizing policy for Africa based on the principle of development through infrastructure.

He collaborated closely with Pope Leo XIII's loyal friend Cardinal Lavigerie in building the Cathedral of St. Louis in Carthage, and in projects in Africa. Eventually, Hanotaux was promoted to the rank of foreign minister in 1894 by President Sadi Carnot, grandson of the great Lazare Carnot.

As foreign minister, Hanotaux pursued a threefold policy: 1) strengthening the Franco-Russian alliance begun by President Carnot; 2) continuing the policy of détente with Germany initiated by Jules Ferry; and 3) orchestrating a series of international agreements to consolidate the French position in Western and Central Africa around Lake Chad, and to prevent the British from seizing the entire eastern side of Africa, from Egypt to South Africa, from the Cape to Cairo, as their exclusive domain.

In 1895, Witte and Hanotaux succeeded in pulling together a coalition of Russia, Germany, and France, to prevent the Japanese seizure of the Liaotung Peninsula, an area of Chinese Manchuria which Japan had won as booty for its victory over the Chinese in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895. As a result of the show of unity on the part of these three continental powers, Japan agreed to renegotiate its treaty with China, renouncing any annexation of Chinese territory and thereby maintaining the territorial integrity of that country—a prerequisite for the Witte-Hanotaux development plans in the region.

Witte and Hanotaux then set up, largely with French capital, the Russo-Chinese Bank, to provide China with a substantial loan with which it could pay off its war indemnity to Japan, and thereby assuage Japanese anger at their loss of the Liaotung Peninsula. Russia also signed a mutual defense treaty with China, by which it would come to China's assistance if it were again attacked by Japan.

On the basis of the Chinese good-will thus engendered, the Russo-Chinese Bank was allowed to lease the necessary territory for building the last leg of Trans-Siberian line, through Manchuria, creating for that purpose a new company, the Chinese Eastern Railroad. France was also able to sign a series of agreements promoting its commercial expansion in Indochina and in China, opening up China to increased trade over the border with French-controlled Indochina and building new rail lands in the south of China.

Japan, however, was not meant to be a loser in Witte's complex plan for Asian development. It was Witte's intention to engage the Japanese in a treaty by which both nations would profit from the commercial benefits of the new rail access to the European markets. To do this, Witte was even willing to sacrifice Russian commercial interests in Korea, acquired during the Sino-Japanese War, in deference to Japanese interests in that nation. But an alliance with Japan found strong opponents in the coterie surrounding the czar.

On the other side of the Pacific was another power, fast becoming a Pacific power, the United States of America. With the establishment of a Russian-U.S. alliance during the American Civil War, it was generally understood by nationalist

groupings in Russia and in the United States that this alliance would become of great value as a trans-Pacific alliance, as both nations began to “railroad their way” to the Pacific Ocean. This would effectively squeeze the British out of Asia.

But in order for Witte’s Far East policy to succeed, the situation in Europe had to remain stable. The formation of what Witte called the “continental league,” comprising France, Germany, and Russia, was a prerequisite for that policy.

In an appeal to Kaiser Wilhelm in 1897 to help him create such a league, Witte said: “In order to attain this . . . we must first make all haste toward the establishment of solid united relations between Russia, Germany, and France. Once these countries stand together in a firm and steady union, undoubtedly all the other countries on the continent of Europe will join this central union and thus form a union of the whole continent which will free Europe from the burden which she imposes on herself on account of reciprocal rivalry.”

Although the German Kaiser would often pay lip-service to the notion of the “continental league,” he never really understood, to his—and the world’s—great misfortune, the overriding significance of such a concept.

Edward’s encirclement of Germany

Edward proceeded on several fronts to encircle and neutralize Germany and to prevent the consolidation of a continental bloc oriented toward Eurasian development:

- He incited the Russo-Japanese War, and his agents fomented the 1905 Russian Revolution. Britain signed a treaty with Japan, which gave Japan a free hand for Admiral Togo’s sneak attack on the Russian base of Port Arthur in early 1904.

- With Russia destroyed by the war and racked by social unrest (stirred up by British agents), Edward moved to ensnare the French. Hanotaux’s attempt to limit British expansionist aims in Africa had been sabotaged by the ill-fated mission of French Captain Marchand to Fashoda, Sudan, in 1898, ordered by Hanotaux’s chief rival, Delcassé, during a short period when Hanotaux was out of power. French society had been weakened by the Dréyfus affair, which had triggered rampant Germanophobia in the French population. With the help of Delcassé and British stooges Georges Clemenceau and Paul Cambon, a deal was struck, bringing the French back into the British fold. In 1904, the two countries signed the Entente Cordiale.

- Edward incited two Franco-German conflicts over Morocco.

- Edward left no stone unturned in his efforts to isolate Germany, drawing Norway, Sweden, Spain, and Portugal into the British orbit.

- On the same day in April 1904 on which the Anglo-French Entente came into effect, Edward VII met with his agent, Russian Foreign Minister Alexander Izvolski, to propose an Anglo-Russian combination. The result was the Anglo-Russian Entente, signed in September 1907.

The ring around Germany had been closed. Bismarck’s old “nightmare of the coalitions” and a two-front war was now reality. With the help of Izvolski, Edward embarked at once on a new attempt to start a general war. This began with Izvolski’s Buchlau bargain with Austria, made in September 1908 and revealed a month later. By this deal, Austria was given the go-ahead to formally annex Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had been occupied by Austria after the Congress of Berlin, but not annexed. But when Austria did this, Serbia, which wanted Bosnia-Herzegovina, protested. Austria and Serbia went to the brink of war, mobilizing their armies. Germany restrained Austria, and Russia felt too weak for war at that time. Germany actually mediated the dispute. But Edward’s agents soon concocted a legend that Germany had humiliated Russia with the threat of war.

As a result of this Balkan crisis of 1908-09, the Russian slavophiles turned their rage more and more against Germany, which they saw as blocking their desired path of expansion into the Balkans. The Greater Serbia agitators went wild. The Austrian government concluded that Serbia was a threat to its existence, and had to be crushed. This was the pattern which, after a second Moroccan crisis of 1911 and after the Balkan wars, led to war in 1914.

If Edward VII had had his way, it would have been five powers against an isolated Germany. Edward VII never abandoned an Austrian option, which, if it had succeeded, would have left Berlin with no allies at all.

For a few moments during early August 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm realized what had happened:

“England, Russia, and France have agreed among themselves . . . after laying the foundation of the *casus foederis* for us through Austria . . . to take the Austro-Serbian conflict for an excuse for waging a war of extermination against us. . . . *That is the real naked situation slowly and cleverly set going by Edward VII* and . . . finally brought to a conclusion by George V. . . . So the famous encirclement of Germany has finally become a fact, despite every effort of our politicians and diplomats to prevent it. The net has been suddenly thrown over our head, and England sneeringly reaps the most brilliant success of her persistently prosecuted purely anti-German world policy against which we have proved ourselves helpless, while she twists the noose of our political and economic destruction out of our fidelity to Austria, as we squirm isolated in the net. A great achievement, which arouses the admiration even of him who is to be destroyed as its result! *Edward VII is stronger after his death than am I who am still alive!* And there have been people who believed that England could be won over or pacified, by this or that puny measure!”

France, Russia, Japan, the United States, and other great nations were used by Edward VII as geopolitical pawns, and they have suffered immeasurably as a result. Ninety years after Edward’s ententes, citizens and statesmen must learn the lesson of how the British monarchy and oligarchy orchestrated the catastrophe of 1914.