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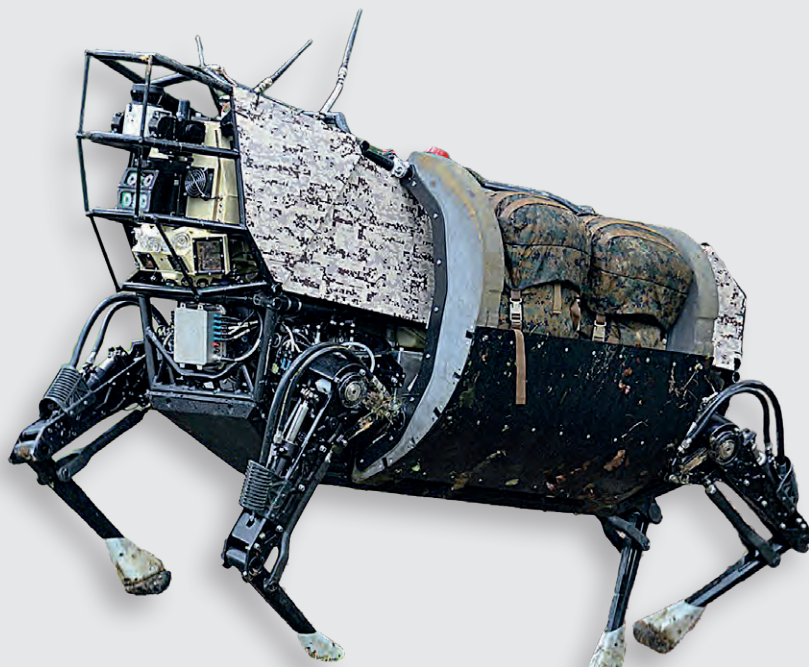
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Storia Militare Contemporanea

a cura di

PIERO CIMBOLLI SPAGNESI



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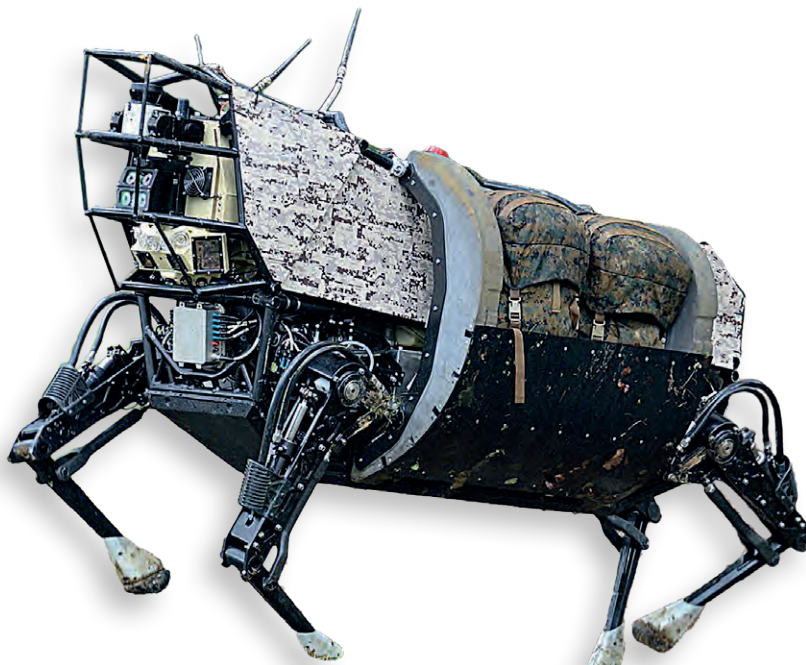
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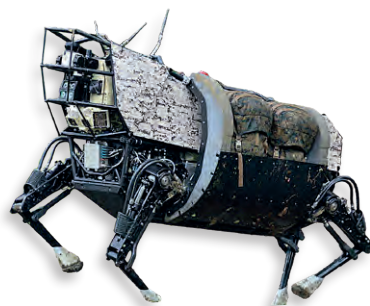
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Legged Squad Support System robot prototype, 2021, DARPA image.
Tactical Technology Office, Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency,
U.S. Department of Defense, 2012 (wikipedia commons)

The Goennert Plot:

An Attempted Entente-Sponsored Coup in Austro-Hungarian Tianjin and Shanghai in 1917

par MATHIEU GOTTELAND

THE GOENNERT PLOT: ABSTRACT: While the First World War had immediate consequences for China and the German presence in Jiaozhou Bay, the treaty ports (Chinese cities forcibly opened to trade) remained untouched, in appearance, until 1917, when China first broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, and then declared war to both Germany and Austria-Hungary. Nevertheless, China as a whole, and the treaty ports in particular, first and foremost Shanghai and Tianjin 天津, were the theater of a secret war between the Entente powers and the Central Empires. In the case of the Austro-Hungarian imperial presence in China, the so-called “Goennert plot” is the embodiment of this threat in both ports. Although eventually a failure, the endeavour compels us to reassess the importance of the Chinese theater in the First World War

KEYWORDS: CHINA, AUSTRIA-HUNGARY, SHANGHAI, TIANJIN, FIRST WORLD WAR, CONCESSION

Foreign Informal Imperialism in China 1842-1949: An Overview

China presents, during the century of humiliation (1842-1949), a multiplicity and diversity of ways in which foreign powers limited her sovereignty and independence¹. Wide but surrounded by colonial empires – Russian Turkestan and Siberia, British India, French Indochina, Japanese-controlled Korea at her land borders, American, German and Japanese colonies close to her maritime coast, China suffers heavy pressure on her “outer provinces” – Tibet, Chinese Turkestan or Xinjiang 新疆, Mongolia and Manchuria, and particularly so from the United Kingdom, Russia and Japan. A process begun with the Opium War (1839-1842),

1 I must express my grateful feelings for his aid and support to my PhD director Hugues Terrais (Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne / CHAC), as well as to the French Ministry for Defence (Direction de la mémoire, du patrimoine et des archives (DMPA)) for the funding of this research and Mátyás Mervay for providing the relevant archival material kept at the National Archives of Hungary. Austro-Hungarian – diplomatic – archives will be noted as OESTA HHSTA, French diplomatic archives as CADN, German archives as BA, and Hungarian archives as MNL.

gradually limiting her sovereignty – notably through the obtention of extraterritoriality privileges and the « most favoured nation clause », opens a number of her ports to foreign residence and trade, while also allowing for the British annexation of Hongkong香港.

This, in turns, gives birth to the concession system by which no less than eight foreign powers managed municipal areas in Chinese « treaty ports » at different periods. Some of these areas took, especially from 1895 onwards², a pronounced colonial character, notably in the cities of Guangzhou广州, Hankou汉口, Shanghai上海 and Tianjin天津. Britain held two further such « concessions » in the Yangzi长江 ports of Jiujiang九江 and Zhenjiang镇江. Eight powers – Austria-Hungary, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom – possessed such territories in Tianjin天津, in which city the colonial character of their presence was aggravated by the military and political consequences of the Boxer War (1900-1901). Those include the military occupation of certain points along the Beijing北京-Shanghai-关山海关 railway, notably the now fortified Legation Quarter in the Chinese capital as well as Tianjin天津 itself.

Finally, Germany's insistence on obtaining her “place in the sun”, while responsible for the shift in imperial policies that gave foreign concessions their colonial character, also made way for a number of “leases”, proper colonies in all but name, notably in Jiaozhou胶州 Bay (to Germany), at Port Artur/Lüshunkou旅顺口 (to Russia), but also at Weihaiwei威海卫 (to the United Kingdom) and Guangzhouwan廣州灣 (to France). Further rights and privileges thus made China a “hypo-colony”, that is to say a nominally sovereign state fallen prey to numerous national imperialisms³.

2 After the Sino-Japanese War, Germany obtained two concessions in Hankou and Tianjin. The wording and spirit of the Sino-German treaties signed for this purpose are, for the first time in the history of foreign concessions, decidedly colonial. Japan obtains her first concessions in China in 1898, and follows Germany's examples in this regard.

3 Sun Yat-Sen, *San Min Chu I, The Three Principles of the People*, Ministry of Information of the Republic of China, 1943, p. 39

The Goennert Plot: Informal Imperialism in Time of War

That peculiar position of the Chinese state, situated somewhere between sovereignty and dependency, caused by the inflation of rights and privileges obtained by foreign nations and individuals, allowed the country to become a fertile ground for espionage and counter-espionage operations during the First World War. The concessions, particularly, neither colonies (legally speaking), nor Chinese territory (*de facto*), make perfect rear-basis as well as targets for such efforts. The Goennert plot – which details we develop further down – involved breaking and entering in the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Shanghai, as well as an attempted coup in the Austro-Hungarian concession of Tianjin by republican, socialist, Entente-back forces. It was one of the most publicized of those operations. It also repeatedly demonstrated the utility of those privileges – placing foreign agents virtually out of the reach of the law, depending solely on the attitude of their consuls for punishment, allowing a unique freedom of action for intelligence services. As such, and although a failure, it became a symbol of the secret war then raging in China between Entente and Central Powers, one to which informal imperialism gave higher stakes and a peculiar intensity.

Austria-Hungary: A Non-Colonial State?

Austria-Hungary is usually considered as one of the few European states and the only great power during the 19th century not to have obtained any extra-European colonies. Despite its most important sphere of interest laying in the Balkans⁴, this restrictive assertion has today been successfully challenged by a number of studies, most notably the works of Walter Sauer⁵. While he shows that

4 This article will not try to assess whether, and how far, Austrian policies in Central and Eastern Europe can be considered either “imperialistic” or even “colonial”. On this matter, see FEICHTINGER, Johannes, PRUTSCH, Ursula, CSÁKY, Moritz, *Habsburg Postcolonial, Machtstrukturen und kollektives Gedächtnis*, Innsbruck, Wien, München & Bolzano, 2003 ; KOMLOSY, Andrea, « Innere Peripherien als Ersatz für Kolonien? Zentrenbildung und Peripherisierung in der Habsburgermonarchie », in HÁRS, Endre, MÜLLER-FUNK, Wolfgang, REBER, Ursula, RUTHNER, Clemens (éds), *Zentren, Peripherien und kollektive Identitäten in Österreich-Ungarn*, Tübingen & Basel, 2006, pp. 55–78

5 SAUER, Walter, *Habsburg Colonial: Austria-Hungary's Role in European Overseas Expansion Reconsidered*, 2012 ; *id.*, « Habsburg Colonial: Austria-Hungary's Role in European Overseas Expansion Reconsidered », 2012, *Austrian Studies*, vol. 20, pp. 5-23

the Austrian government and public opinion had a colonial mindset, and that the lack of formal colonies was more a question of political strategy and military means than a proper lack of interest for colonial endeavours, he also shows that a number of projects of this nature were either contemplated or launched. A lack of success in these enterprises does not make a non-colonial state out of the dual monarchy.

In fact, the tenure of Count Agenor Gołuchowski at the common ministry for foreign affairs (1895-1906) – who was a close advisor to the emperor and king – at the high point of the colonial era, despite his policy being rashly judged as timid, lacking vision and ambition by most, can be rightly considered a time of consistent Austro-Hungarian imperialism. His *détente* policy with Russia, while being fully justified by the unwillingness on the part of Germany to support her Austrian ally in the event of a war with Russia, appeased tensions in Southeastern Europe, thus encouraging Russian ambitions in the Far East⁶ and strengthening Austria-Hungary's position in the Balkans. It made possible a proper Austro-Hungarian imperialistic policy to develop, as illustrated by his proposition for a common intervention in Crete in 1896-1897, when 16 Austro-Hungarian ships as well as 6,600 marines were deployed on the Mediterranean island⁷. Sadly, to date no comprehensive study has been undertaken to this day to investigate the question of Austria-Hungary's imperialistic policies under Count Agenor Gołuchowski (1895-1906).

Gołuchowski's China policy

The favourable conditions his *détente* policy created in Europe allowed Gołuchowski to develop further the relations between Austria-Hungary in China. Indeed and despite the expedition of the SMS Novara around the world (1857-1859) that called in Chinese ports, and the subsequent expedition to East Asia under Anton baron von Petz (1868-1869), the number of Austrian and Hungarian subjects residing and trading in the Middle Kingdom remained quite insignificant for decades to come, especially in comparison to the greater imperial powers

6 The construction of the Transmanchurian railway began in 1896.

7 BILGERI, ANDREAS, « Österreich-Ungarn im Konzert der Kolonialmächte, Die militärische Interventionen der Kriegsmarine », s.d., <http://www.kakanien-revisited.at/beitr/fallstudie/ABilgeri1/?alpha=b> (accédé le 14 décembre 2018), pp. 6-7

in the region. The Petz expedition still brought about positive results, in the form of a treaty signed in Beijing北京 on September 2nd 1869.⁸ While negotiations to conclude it were most difficult and long, and although it appears surprisingly reciprocal for a Sino-European treaty at the time, it still made of the dual monarchy a potential imperial power in China by giving Austrian and Hungarian subjects, between other rights and privileges, the right to settle and to trade in Chinese “open ports”⁹, as well as extraterritoriality and the famous “most favoured nations clause”¹⁰. It also allowed the opening of a Austro-Hungarian general consulate in Shanghai上海, which mandatee was also minister-resident for China, Japan and Siam.

Gołuchowski went one step further by establishing an Austro-Hungarian legation in Beijing北京 (1897), but also by participating in the small occupation corps sent to Beijing by the European powers following the 1898 coup, and by conceiving a colonial project similar to what Germany achieved in Jiaozhou胶州 Bay (1899). He managed to obtain that Austria-Hungary should participate in the suppression of the Boxer movement in Northern China (1900-1901) despite opposition from the Hungarian vice-minister for foreign affairs count Szécsen von Temerin, thus creating the conditions for the claim to a concession in Tianjin天津 (claim: 1900, treaty signed: 1902) and for a small marine corps to stay in Beijing北京, Tianjin天津 and Tanggu塘沽 up to 1917. Obstacles remain, but these six years truly give Austria-Hungary her status as one of the colonial powers on the Chinese stage¹¹.

8 JÓZSA, A., « Bemerkungen zu den ostasiatischen Beziehungen der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie », *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 1960, vol. 11, n° 1/3, p. 236 ; DONKO, Wilhelm M., *Österreichs Kriegsmarine in Fernost. Alle Fahrten von Schiffen der k.(u.)k. Kriegsmarine nach Ostasien, Australien und Ozeanien von 1820 bis 1914*, Berlin, 2013, p. 62

9 The open ports are a number of Chinese cities opened to foreign trade, the first of which were opened in 1842 by the treaty of Nanjing as a consequence of the Opium War.

10 Austria-Hungary is the first foreign power to have bestowed the famous “most favored nation clause” to China as well. It gave to any country in China (imperial) privileges, as they were given to others before the signature of the treaty, but also as they might be given to others in the future, and which was the legal basis for foreign imperialism in the country. She was only imitated in this attempt at reciprocity by Peru in 1874 and Sweden in 1908.

11 Moritz baron von Czikkann, Austro-Hungarian minister in Beijing, to Agenor count Gołuchowski, foreign minister, Nov. 6th 1898, OESTA HHSTA PA XXIX 5 ; *id.*, April 14th 1899, OESTA HHSTA PA XXIX 6 ; *Präger Abendblatt*, 1899, n° 8 (Jan. 11th 1899), p. 1 ; *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 22nd year, n° 9 (Jan. 12th 1899), p. 4 ; *Österreichische illustrier-*

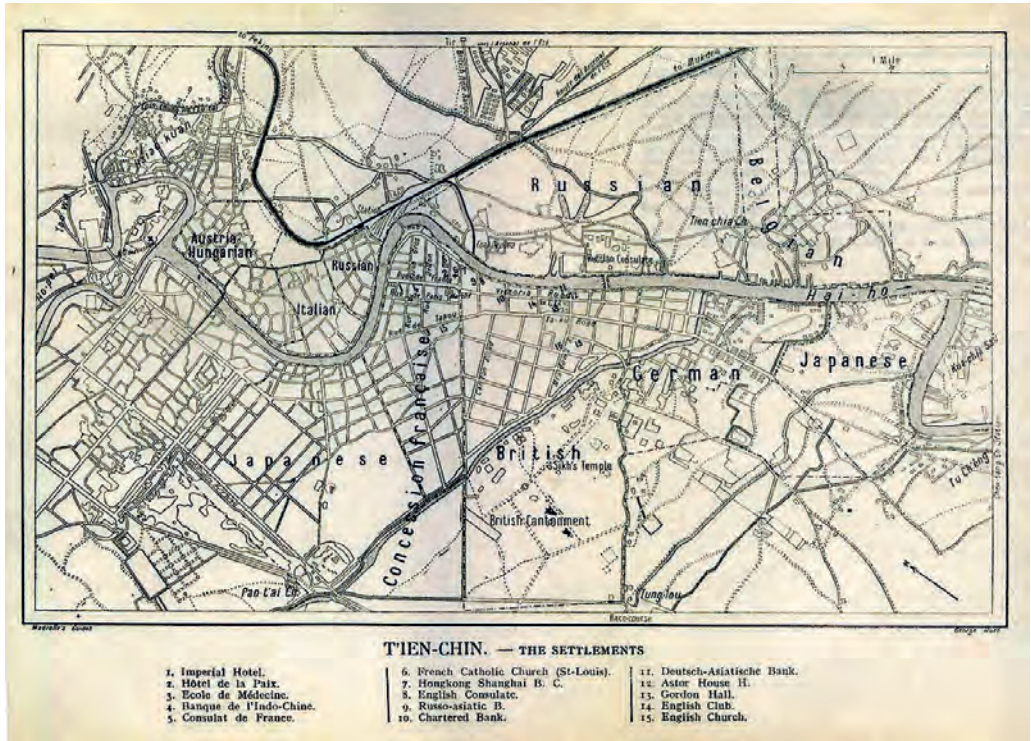
Austria-Hungary's imperial presence in China and the First World War

The departure of Gołuchowski from the ministry for foreign affairs in 1906 causes Austrian interest for its Chinese achievements to wane. The concession receives no subsidy from the metropole, the marine corps dwindles, and bilateral trade is very limited, at least up to the Škoda loans of 1912¹². The world war puts to light the fragility of the system of informal imperialism established by all foreign powers in China. The case is stronger still in the case of the Central Empires, as Germany evacuates her colonies in the Pacific ocean and loses Jiaozhou 胶州 Bay to Japan in the autumn of 1914. And while Germany manages to salvage some of her bilateral trade thanks to neutral states in America and Asia, Austria-Hungary does not have the means to imitate her ally. Three ships of the Austrian Lloyd, the Bohemia, the China and the Silesia, are seized by the Chinese authorities. Communications with Europe are difficult. Funds lack and refugees from the Siberian prisoner camps, who escape through Manchuria to Beijing 北京 and Tianjin 天津 are hit simultaneously by the Entente's blacklisting, which prevents them from either finding employment or setting a company and engage in trade, and by the inability of the metropole to come to their aid.

The occupation corps of the dual monarchy as well as Austrian and Hungarian reservists and the ship Kaiserin Elisabeth do participate in the battle of Qingdao 青島, although naturally in much smaller numbers than the Germans, but doing so undermines military capabilities which were already symbolic before the war. In 1913, the Austro-Hungarian marine corps counted sixty-four men in Beijing 北京 as a legation guard, twenty-one men in Tianjin 天津 and two in the small outpost of Tanggu 塘沽. In Tianjin, the mission of the marine corps is to repel any threat to

te Zeitung, 8th year, n° 3 (Jan. 15th 1899), p. 8 ; *Südsteirische Post*, 19th year, n° 6 (Jan. 21st 1899), p. 5 ; KAMINSKI, Gerd, *Von Österreichern und Chinesen*, Europaverlag, Wien, 1980, pp. 19-22 ; LEHNER, Georg, LEHNER, Monika, *Österreich-Ungarn und der « Boxeraufstand » in China*, Studien-Verlag, Wien, 2002 ; LEHNER, Monika, « Die Errichtung des k.u.k. Gesandtschaftspalais in Beijing 1896-1900 », *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs*, vol. 46, 1998, p. 126

12 Austro-Hungarian ministry of War to foreign ministry, Dec. 29th 1909, OESTA HHSTA PA XXIX 27 ; Austro-Hungarian consul in Tianjin to foreign ministry, April 5th 1910, OESTA HHSTA Peking 87 ; Austro-Hungarian consul in Tianjin to Ritter von Kuczynski, Austro-Hungarian minister in Beijing, 15 avril 1910, OESTA HHSTA Peking 87 ; Ritter von Kuczynski, Austro-Hungarian minister in Beijing, to prince Qing, presiding the Wai-wu-pu, 15 avril 1910, OESTA HHSTA Peking 87 ; Wai-wu-pu to Austro-Hungarian minister in Beijing, 22 avril 1910, OESTA HHSTA PA XXIX 27



1. The map of foreign settlements (concessions) in Tianjin, as of 1912. Originally titled “T’ien-chin - The Settlements 1912”, From “Madrolle’s Guide Books: Northern China, The Valley of the Blue River, Korea.” Hachette & Company, 1912. Public domain, wikipedia commons

the concession – in the case of a Boxer-like scenario – but it also acts as a police force to the 35 to 40,000 Chinese inhabitants of the territory. They are assisted by an equally small number of “shimbo”, that is to say Chinese auxiliaries¹³.

In an apparently contradictory fashion, the war marks the high point of the short lives of the German and Austro-Hungarian concessions in China. Far from dealing a fatal blow to all German and Austro-Hungarian informal imperialism in the country, the loss of Qingdao青島 and the economic sanctions from the

13 Austro-Hungarian legation in Beijing to count Leopold Berchtold, foreign minister, Nov. 30th 1914, ciphred, OESTA-HHSTA PA XXIX 13 ; Trade report of the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Shanghai for the year 1914, OESTA HHSTA Peking 71 ; Trade report of the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Tianjin for the year 1916, OESTA HHSTA Peking 72 ; *The North China Herald*, May 22nd 1915, p. 524

Entente powers give their concessions momentum, thanks to the refugees from Jiaozhou 胶州 Bay and Manchuria as well as the relocation of individuals and companies from other concessions. European-style houses are built at an unprecedented rate during these few years. Half of the Austro-Hungarian concession is leveled, paved, rebuilt. Thousands of former owners are relocated, and the lots sold to Chinese “of a higher class”¹⁴.

The take-over of the Shanghai 上海 consulate and the murder of Marascek

On August 5th, 1917, shortly after 5 a.m., a man presents himself to the Austro-Hungarian general consulate in Shanghai 上海. He says he has to see the consul urgently. The guardian opens the building and finds, not one, but four men. They are Anthony Brazzianovitch¹⁵ a.k.a. Antonio Brazzano, Heinrich Kremla, Joseph Marascek¹⁶ and Joseph Schubert. The guardian is gagged and tied up. The wires for the alarm and the phone are cut. Three of the men then attempt to find and break the consulate’s safe, but fail. To find the key, Kremla and Marascek climb upstairs, where the officials are lodging. Once in the room of one Ludwig Peter, student interpreter, they stand next to the bed and point their guns to the man. To their demand, Peter answers that another employee – Franz Winkler – has the key. After Marascek threatens to kill Peter, Kremla shoots Marascek twice, ending his life. Marascek stumbles on the veranda and shouts “Kremla! Kremla!” thus prompting Brazzianovitch and Schubert to run¹⁷.

14 Trade report of the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Tianjin for the year 1915, OESTA HHSTA Peking 67

15 His name is often reported as “Anton Brazzanovitch” in the Austro-Hungarian archives. We follow the writing used by *The North China Herald*.

16 His name is often reported as “Marecek” in the Austro-Hungarian archives. We follow the writing used by *The North China Herald*.

17 To reconstitute the facts of this Shanghai chapter of the Goennert plot, we used the proceedings of the Kremla trial, published in *The North China Herald*, March 24th, 1917, p. 637; Aug. 18th, 1917, pp. 358 et 380-382 ; Aug. 25th, 1917, pp. 1 and 442-444 ; Sept. 1st, 1917, pp. 501-502 ; Sept. 8th, 1917, p. 550 ; Sept. 22nd, 1917, pp. 668-673 ; Sept. 29th, 1917, p. 731 ; Oct. 20th, 1917, p. 162 ; Oct. 27th, 1917, pp. 224-226 ; Nov. 3rd, 1917, pp. 256-257 and 285-286; as well as further elements found in French and Hungarian archives: Statement of Emmanuel Skalicky at the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Shanghai, Aug. 3rd, 1917, MNL KM 672; Statement of Walter Bernhardt at the Austro-Hungarian general consulate in Shanghai, Aug. 13th, 1917, MNL KM 672; Phone report of Heinrich Kremla’s statement, August 13th 1917, MNL KM 672 ; Note of the *sûreté* service in Shanghai, Aug.



2. Troops of the Austro-Hungarian naval corps in Tianjin c. 1903–04 *Vasarnapi Ujság* by the printing press inc. *Franklin Irodalmi és Nyomdai Rt.* in 1904. Photos taken and owned by Head engineer of Ganz Enterprises Geza Szuk while being commissioned in Tianjan between July 1903 and February 1904.

After stating “I am Kremla. Kremla did this.”, the shooter surrenders without resistance to the Austrian officials. What follows is a delicate matter of law and justice, for the day before China declared war to Germany and Austria-Hungary, which in turn confided their interests in the country to the Netherlands, and on August 5th, at 7 a.m., the Dutch flag is raised at the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Shanghai上海. At 5:30 a.m., a loaded gun is found by a Chinese detective of the police of the international concession in the vicinity of the Austro-Hungarian consulate. Detective Sergeant J. Sullivan then visits the consulate, where he finds two Austrian employees, the Austrian vice-consul, the Dutch vice-consul and

Kremla. Kremla admits to killing Marascek, although he did so to save Peter's life, and is supported in his account by the Austrian and Dutch officials, who refuse to surrender him to the international police. The Dutch vice-consul – Quist – asks it for men to guard the grounds of the consulate, but refuse to let two men enter the consulate itself. A conflict looms, until the Dutch official declares foregoing his responsibility in case Kremla would evade. During those negotiations, he evades indeed¹⁸. As a consequence, Quist declares he recognizes the jurisdiction of the international police and the mixed court¹⁹, which starts instructing the case as soon as the 15th. The court summons Peter and Winkler, but Quist orders them not to go, and the international police has to bring them by force – on the 17th. Simultaneously, four arrestations occur on accounts of complicity: Alexander Kellermann, Emmanuel Skalicky²⁰, Walter Bernhardt and Carl Erwin Stark. The next day, Brazzianovitch, Schubert and Dr. Max Kindler are arrested in Shanghai上海, and Kremla in Tianjin天津, at the train station, after a fierce resistance. A last man, a Josef Goennert, arrested by the Austro-Hungarians in Tianjin on August 13th, is given by the Dutch legation in Beijing北京 to the Chinese, and by them to the international police. Both him and Kremla arrive in Shanghai上海 by steamboat on August 29th.

Immediately, the police but also the press and thus a much wider audience – the proceedings are publicized in the British *North China Herald* – realize there is much more to this case than just breaking and entering. The police finds another gun at Kellermann's, a rifle at Skalicky's, and at Bernhardt's a Japanese named Tatsumi Yoshima立見芳松. Tatsumi立見 is protected by extraterritoriality contrary to the accused, given to his consulate, which frees him. There is talk of a

18 During the trial, Kremla will state he was not arrested by the Austrians or the Dutch because the consulate didn't have a jail. The Austro-Dutch seem to have let him come home on his word of honour he would come back to the consulate later in the day.

19 The hybrid judicial system in China is complicated by the foreign jurisdiction over concessions and other privileges, as well as their evolution over time. As a matter of principle, foreigners entitled to extraterritoriality, as well as *protégés*, were tried by consular courts. In Shanghai, a "mixed court" was established in 1864, which tried criminal cases against Chinese, in which a foreigner was interested; against foreigners not entitled to the privilege of extraterritoriality; and of civil cases between Chinese; or by foreigners against Chinese. Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 2, Longmans, Green & Co., 1918, pp. 132-134

20 His name is often reported as "Skalitzky" in the Austro-Hungarian archives. We follow the writing used by *The North China Herald*.



3. Count Agenor Maria Gołuchowski (1849-1921), Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria-Hungary from 1895 till 1906. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bildarchiv Austria, Inventarnr. Pf 159524 : C (4) Foto Ludwig Grillich (1856-1926). Public domain, wikipedia commons

revolutionary organization, political conspiracy and espionage. Thus and while Marascek is tried separately for murder, all nine men stand accused of conspiracy.

Heinrich Kremla, employed at the municipal orchestra of the international concession of Shanghai上海, meets Goennert, accompanied by Marascek, on July 23rd, 1917. He already knew Marascek, a refugee from the prisoner camps of Siberia, having shared a flat with him in Tianjin天津, as he was a pianist for the Empire Theatre, in 1916. This first meeting is eventful. Goennert soon leaves to see Kellermann, his intermediary with the sailors of the SS Bohemia, one of the steamboats of the Austrian Lloyd. Marascek then takes Kremla along to Chinese dealing in opium, who asks him to carry 20,000\$ worth of the drug to Tianjin天津. Not that the organization both characters belong to deals itself in this kind of profitable business: most members are penniless. Such is Kellermann, who probably belongs to this society for food and shelter. Without any means to sustain himself, he had to resort to breaking a shop window in January 1917, in order to be convicted to three months in jail where such worries would be superfluous. The ship being seized in March, he had to be set free, and is said to have sworn to break another window, in order to get this last month of jail time he felt was due to him.

A few days after this meeting, Goennert, we learn at the trial, goes to Tianjin in order to organize a takeover of the Austro-Hungarian concession – matter until then kept under wraps by said concession authorities. Having failed in this other endeavour, he writes the – British – chief detective-inspector of the international police a letter asking him not to interfere, for his Shanghai上海 set-up is in the interest of the Entente. CDI Armstrong states at the trial he immediately launched an investigation, which was ongoing as the events unfolded in Shanghai上海.

Kremla, suspected of being an *agent provocateur* loyal to the Austro-Hungarians – and he indeed gives several reports to the Shanghai consulate on the conspiracy prior to the break-in – is not meant to be part of the squad which took over the building on August 5th. But having met quite coincidentally Schubert and Marascek in the tramway, the day before at 11 p.m., he interrogates them on the Tianjin天津 affair, to which Marascek answers that the failure was due to Gonnert not waiting for his arrival and not following the plan. They, along with Brazzianovitch, are in fact on their way to the train station, as they are

expecting Goennert along with ten men as reinforcements, including an American interpreter.

Goennert does not show – he has been arrested on the 13th. Unsure on what to do next, the gang goes from bar to bar, showing off and speaking more than they should. At the Archangel, Brazzianovitch shows to Kremla two telegrams written in Italian, one telling them to expect reinforcements on the same night, and the other ordering them to take the consulate, to keep for themselves any valuables, but to give the documents found in the safe to the international police. Schubert says the Japanese consul has received “a letter” from Tianjin天津. He asked him for a boat in order to board the seized Austrian vessels, but the consul refused, on the grounds that those could soon be bought at auction. At the Golden Eagle, Brazzianovitch gifts a red armband to a bargirl. Eventually, they end up at Kremla’s flat, where they debate whether to board the ships anyway – but they are guarded by Chinese war vessels – and end up deciding on taking over the consulate as scheduled. Kremla does his best to avoid the event, or at least to convince Schubert not to participate, in vain.

A burglary, a conspiracy, a revolution

While the trial helps uncover some of their probable motives, the rationale behind the attack remains unclear. As we have seen, money is certainly an important incentive for at least some of the members of the “conspiracy”. Coincidentally, the resentment felt by the refugees from Siberia, many of them meeting a fate similar to Kellermann seems a potent factor. The authorities also seem to have been unable to pay the salary of the sailors in the employ of the Austrian Lloyd – such as Brazzianovitch. Fifteen marines have to be sent from Beijing to the ships seized in Shanghai to maintain order amongst unpaid, poorly fed sailors of the Austrian Lloyd; Austro-Hungarian authorities also need to ask for Chinese cooperation in maintaining order and avoiding a mutiny²¹.

As a counterpoint, Kremla, who seems to act as an Austrian *agent provocateur*, seems to have been treated fairly well by the officials of the Shanghai gen-

21 Rosthorn, Austro-Hungarian minister in Beijing to foreign ministry, ciphered, Nov. 29th 1915, ÖSTA HHSTA PA XXIX 13 ; ARIGA, Nagao, *la Chine et la Grande Guerre européenne du point de vue du droit international*, A. Pedone, Paris, 1920, pp. 62-63

eral consulate. Having been ill and destitute, he had to leave the hospital for financial reasons and has been unable to pay for his medicine. Without friends to turn to for momentary support, he found in the Austrian vice-consul – Kunz – a sympathetic hear, was given enough money to survive, both from the official *Hilfsfonds* and from Kunz himself, who also allowed him to register at the consulate as being of Russian nationality, which gesture made it possible for Kremla to find employment at the municipal orchestra.

The characters of Carl Erwin Stark and Dr Max Kindler seem to also point to that direction. Stark, without known legal profession, seems to have trafficked arms and ammunition in Tianjin, before opening a bar in Beijing under a false identity. In 1911, he was sought by the German authorities of Shanghai上海 for breaking and entering as well as pointing a gun to a Chinese driver. He is later arrested in Qingdao青島 before being “extradited” to Shanghai上海, at which point he seems to have become a German intelligence agent. Arrested later this same year for a brawl and for proxenetism, he is delivered to his consulate, which immediately sets him free. After being kicked out of the German intelligence service, he seems to have sold his services to the international police, as well as to the Chinese government, and is again arrested in 1916 on the French concession of Shanghai上海 for breaking in entering, attempted fraud, carrying arms and unlawful exercise of activities, apparently while under orders from Beijing to hunt Zhonghua Gemindang 中華革命黨 revolutionaries²².

Dr Max Kindler is a double agent in the employ of the German and British intelligence services, and responsibly for the falsifying of passports. He stars in the Ettinger trial, one of the more important espionage trials in China during the war, and is tried himself shortly after the Kremla trial, but on the basis of a confession that supposedly occurred on June 1917. To make matters worse, Kindler is addicted to gambling²³.

22 Sun Yat-Sen's party (1914-1919) : Note on Charles Erwin Stark by the interim head of the municipal guard of the French concession of Shanghai G. Xavier, Jan. 31st 1914, CADN Shanghai 57 ; Report on the arrestation of Charles Erwin Stark on May 16th 1916, CADN Shanghai 57 ; Note of the *sûreté* of the municipal guard of the French concession of Shanghai, May 15th 1916, CADN Shanghai 57 ; H. Knipping, general consul of Germany in Shanghai, to Th. Sammons, general consul of the United States in Shanghai, June 3rd 1916, CADN Shanghai 57

23 *The North China Herald*, June 9th, 1917, pp. 568-573 ; *id.*, June 16th, 1917, pp. 633-639 ; *id.*, Sept. 15th, 1917, pp. 607-608 ; *id.*, Sept. 22nd, 1917, pp. 664-667

Despite the strength of this argument, ethnic and political motives seem to be other important causes, especially in the case of the leaders Goennert *alias* Krempasky – a Hungarian – and Marascek – a Czech. Kremla and Skalicky are also Czechs, while Brazzianovitch *alias* Brazzano is a Dalmatian registered at the Italian consulate, and thus probably an irredentist. Schubert, who pretends to be Russian, may also be of Czech ethnicity. The minutes of the trial do not clarify whether this large number of Czechs in the organization is the consequence of independentist or panslavistic feelings or communautarism, the latter being common in Chinese “open ports”.

Another lead comes from the search of the conspirators’ hotel room and lodgings. There are found red flags and armbands, such as the one gifted by Brazzianovitch to a bargirl on the night from August 4th to 5th. This line of questioning brings another stunning revelation, the existence of an underground revolutionary, socialist and republican Austro-Hungarian secret society, led by Goennert/Krempasky and Marascek. Founded on the 5th or 6th of August, it then gathered around twenty men, who were sworn in by pointing a gun to each other’s heads. The main goal of the society seems to have been already the take-over of the Austro-Hungarian concession, consulates and ships. Goennert himself does not deny the fact – or the foreign support he seems to have received – and simply justifies himself by the necessity to free the political prisoners held by the marine corps in Beijing北京 and in Tianjin天津. While he tells of frequent beatings, cases of torture and euthanasia, his own physical state – he just spent several days in an Austrian jail before being “extradited” to Shanghai上海 – certainly gives weight to his account. He also cautions the ethnic explanation, while stating his revolutionary commitment ever since he left his homeland, seventeen years prior.

While the trial concludes on the successive acquittal of nearly all of the accused, both members of the Goennert organization and Heinrich Kremla, except for Goennert, Brazzianovitch and Schubert, who are found guilty avoid any condemnation by a pledge to pay a sum between five hundred and a thousand dollars, should they appear before the court within the next two years.

The attempted coup on the Austro-Hungarian concession of Tianjin天津

Besides the Shanghai affair, the Kremla trial reveals another chapter of this

Entente-led secret war against Austria-Hungary in China²⁴. Either on July 22nd or 23rd, 1917, Goennert stays two nights at the hotel Continental, on the international concession of Shanghai上海, from there, he passes through the French concessions to throw any surveillance off his tracks, before taking a train to Tianjin天津. There, at 26, Cousins Road, Goennert's place on the British concession, takes place a ceremony much like the one taking place later in Shanghai. Goennert and Kindler give speeches, calling for the takeover of the Austro-Hungarian concession and the consulate, but things remain there until the night from July 29th to 30th. Between 25 to 30 Austrians, Hungarians and foreigners attend this second meeting at 26, Cousins Road (according to Goennert). At 3 a.m., Kindler arrives with ten guns. At the Kremla trial, Skalicky implies they were given by the French. Kindler then declares: "We are revolutionaries. We want to take over the Austrian concession. Who doesn't come shall be shot." causing an uproar. At 4:30 a.m., nothing is settled. Kindler then decides it is too late to act, and the assembly should reconvene on the following evening. Goennert, who fears such a delay will give time for any dissenters to betray the party, first attempts to lock everyone at his home until the evening of the 30th, but Kindler dissuades him. Events will justify Goennert's fears nonetheless, for at least three sailors of the Austrian Lloyd and two marines of the Tianjin corps will testify at the consulate a few hours later ; moreover, some four men do not return in the evening, informing Goennert his plans are no longer a secret to the Austro-Hungarian authorities.

During the previous night (July 29th to 30th), the marine corps notices strange behaviours and coming and going during the night. Some few men, European

24 To reconstitute the facts of this Tianjin chapter of the Goennert plot, we used the proceedings of the Kremla trial, published in *The North China Herald*, quoted earlier, notably Sept. 22nd, 1917, pp. 670-671; as well as further elements found in Austrian, French and Hungarian archives: Statement of Emmanuel Skalicky at the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Shanghai, Aug. 3rd, 1917, MNL KM 672; Phone report of Heinrich Kremla's statement, August 13th 1917, MNL KM 672; Schumpeter, Austro-Hungarian consul in Tianjin, to the Austro-Hungarian legation in Beijing, July 31st, 1917, OESTA HHSTA Peking 83 ; *id.*, Aug. 5th, 1917, OESTA HHSTA Peking 83 ; Austro-Hungarian consul in Tianjin to Austro-Hungarian minister in Beijing, Aug. 5th, 1917, OESTA HHSTA Peking 83 ; Statement of Hugo Accurti at the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Tianjin, Aug. 6th, 1917, OESTA HHSTA Peking 83 ; PÁLVÖLGYI, Balázs, « l'Autriche-Hongrie et l'aventure de Tientsin en 1917 ou l'assassinat d'un policier chinois », in Peres, Delacasse, Hornyák, Juhász (eds.), *Turning Points and Breaklines: 4th Yearbook Young Legal History*, Martin Meidenbauer Verlagsbuchhandlung, München, 2009, pp. 354-355 ; *The North-China Herald*, 22 septembre 1917, p. 671



4. View of the Peiho River and the bridge of the Austro-Hungarian Concession. https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Concessions_in_Tianjin?file=Tientsin._Peiho_River_and_Austrian_Bridge%252C_c._1910.jpg CC-BY-SA

and Japanese, seem to lurk around the consulate, the barracks and the yamen – the building of the municipality. Around 4 a.m., another group is spotted at the border between the Austrian and the Italian concessions. Questioned on their motives, they run away. Around the same time, the Austrian police notices around 20 to 25 people – with an automobile – gathered on the Chinese quay facing the concession. When the Chinese police tries to interrogate them, most run but three men, including one Italian, who give this ludicrous answer, that they are here to watch the water level rise. According to the Chinese police, among the runners were a British inspector, a Japanese inspector, as well as some French unknown individuals.

On the morning of the 30th, the first countermeasures are taken: some 25 to 30 men are brought from Beijing北京 to reinforce the marine corps, one third of the police force is protecting the official buildings, the marines are armed and the

number of guardhouses increased.

According to the information provided by Heinrich Kremla in Shanghai上海, the plan was for 40 men to come near the official buildings of the concession by boat and make some noise by firing their guns, thus giving the Japanese an excuse to invade the concession and “restore public order”. An estimate of the actual number of men under Goennert’s command is difficult. If we take for basis the party’s meeting described by Skalicky at the Kremla trial, they are 20 ; according to the Austro-Hungarian consul in Tianjin, they are 20 to 25 ; according to Kremla, they are 40 ; according to a letter from Goennert to Marascek and found in Shanghai, they are 150 ; Goennert also claims, in a probable exaggeration meant to impress the secretary of the Austrian concession, he has around 200 men under his command.. The difficulty is also a reflection of the disparity of characters within the party. There are deserters and reservists from the marine corps from Beijing北京 or Tianjin天津, unpaid sailors of the Austrian Lloyd, former prisoners of war who fled from the Siberian camps, businessmen ruined by the war, adventurers, revolutionaries or secret agents from the Entente powers – such as Kindler.

The Richter incident

Another incident, on July 31st, definitely dooms any further attempt to invade the concession²⁵. The rickshaw of Edmund Richter, Austrian marine on his way from the Austro-Hungarian to the German concession, is halted on Victoria Road, in the British concession, by Goennert and three of his men: Henzel, Mikula and Jozzip. Goennert and Henzel point their guns at him, ordering him to come along with them. Richter asks what this is about, to which he’s answered: “You will come to our place, you will eat and drink, nothing bad will happen to you. We just want to ask you a few questions!”. And as an answer to his protest:

25 On the Richter incident, see Statement of Edmund Richter to the Austro-Hungarian marine detachment in Tianjin, July 31st, 1917, OESTA HHSTA Peking 83 ; Austro-Hungarian consul in Tianjin to Austro-Hungarian minister in Beijing, July 31st, 1917, OESTA HHSTA Peking 83; *id.*, Aug. 5th, 1917, OESTA HHSTA Peking 83 ; *Tageblatt für Nord-China*, Aug. 1st, 1917, cité in PÁLVÖLGYI, Balázs, « Zwischenfall in Tientsin – ein Stück der Doppelmonarchie in China im Jahre 1917 », in Radovan David, Jan Neckář, Martin Orgonik, David Sehnalek, Jaromir Tauchen, Jiří Valdhans (eds.), *COFOLA Conference for Young Lawyers*, Masarykova Univerzita, Brno, 2008, pp. 1100-1118

“I’m a soldier and you’re a soldier, we’re good friends, but the commander is a pig, he always says Hungarians don’t know how to fight and are deserters.”. Around a corner, Richter jumps from his rickshaw and runs to the English-German border. He manages to reach a police office on Mummstraße, and there to call for the Austro-Hungarian consulate. Meanwhile, the four kidnappers shoot on sight, miss him, but hit a Chinese bystander, who dies on the spot.

A British police officer arrives on the scene, lets everyone go – on the ground Goennert committed a political crime, although they first stated their prisoners escaped. He also seems to suspect Richter for the murder... although the sailor is unarmed. Without revealing the larger plot of the Goennert organization, the incident gives the Austro-Hungarian authorities an excuse to issue an arrest warrant against Goennert and his accomplices. At this point, they have not the slightest doubt about Goennert and Kindler both being spies in the employ of the United Kingdom and supported by Japan. Kindler was indeed tried in Shanghai by the German authorities for high treason and sent to jail, but freed on the intervention of the Austrian minister in Beijing. The latter acted on a matter of principle, as he considered a matter of national dignity that an Austrian citizen should be tried by no other authorities but his own country’s. The kidnappers seem to have fled on the Italian concession, and then spent a night in a hotel of the Russian concession, before their trail is lost.

A last roll of the dice

Still Goennert makes a final attempt to turn his chance. On August 5th, 1917, at 2 p.m., Goennert, along with two of his men, visits Hugo Accurti, secretary of the Austro-Hungarian concession. The latter is an Italian-speaking Hungarian national, who has been at odds with his country’s authorities over the management of the concession for many years. Goennert probably hopes to find in him a sympathetic ear, and decides to lay out his cards on the table. He says he has 200 men under his command. He acts on behalf of the United Kingdom and France. According to him, the plan was to take over the consulate and the official buildings, to seize the arms of the marine corps and to raise the red flag. The Japanese were meant to “invade” in order to avoid a Chinese intervention. Despite his failures, he states having the intention to attack with bombs and hand grenades, as soon as August 6th. He says he has at his disposal some 5,000\$ to

buy the loyalty of the Austro-Hungarian marines, and has detailed information on their number and equipment (37 men with 4 machine guns).

About the Richter incident, Goennert justifies his attempt by his suspicion of the marine being an Austrian spy. He also confirms what is then general knowledge, that is to say Kindler is a British agent. The latter, having learned a radio was on board the Bohemia, had sold the information to the British. Goennert's visit is meant either to convince or to buy the aid of the concession's secretary. He offers him 50,000, a British passport, as well as the title of president of the new Republican Austro-Hungarian concession, which would side with the Entente in the world war. Goennert's own salary, would the attack succeed, was 3,000\$. He seems in fact to believe in his Republican cause, and intends to use the takeover to exchange the consul for a Liesner, kept in jail at the legation in Beijing, suspected to be a Russian spy, and who Goennert is convinced was tortured by the Austrian marines. As for the motives of his men, Goennert confirms they are first and foremost ethnic and financial: they are promised fifty dollars a month each, as well as safe passage to the United States. The day after, Accurti testifies at the consulate, prompting a trial for high treason against Goennert.

The latter stays in Tianjin for one more week, although the archives or the press hold no further information on his whereabouts during this time. As he tries to catch a train to get to Shanghai and participate to the takeover of the consulate, he is arrested by shimbos of the Austrian police, stunned, and beaten on his way to the concession. Gagged and tied up, he is brought to the legation in Beijing by train and under military escort. There, the commander of the guard meant to kill him on the spot. The Austro-Hungarian minister being away, the execution is delayed until the next day, at which time China declares war to Germany and Austria-Hungary.

The First World War and the secret war in China

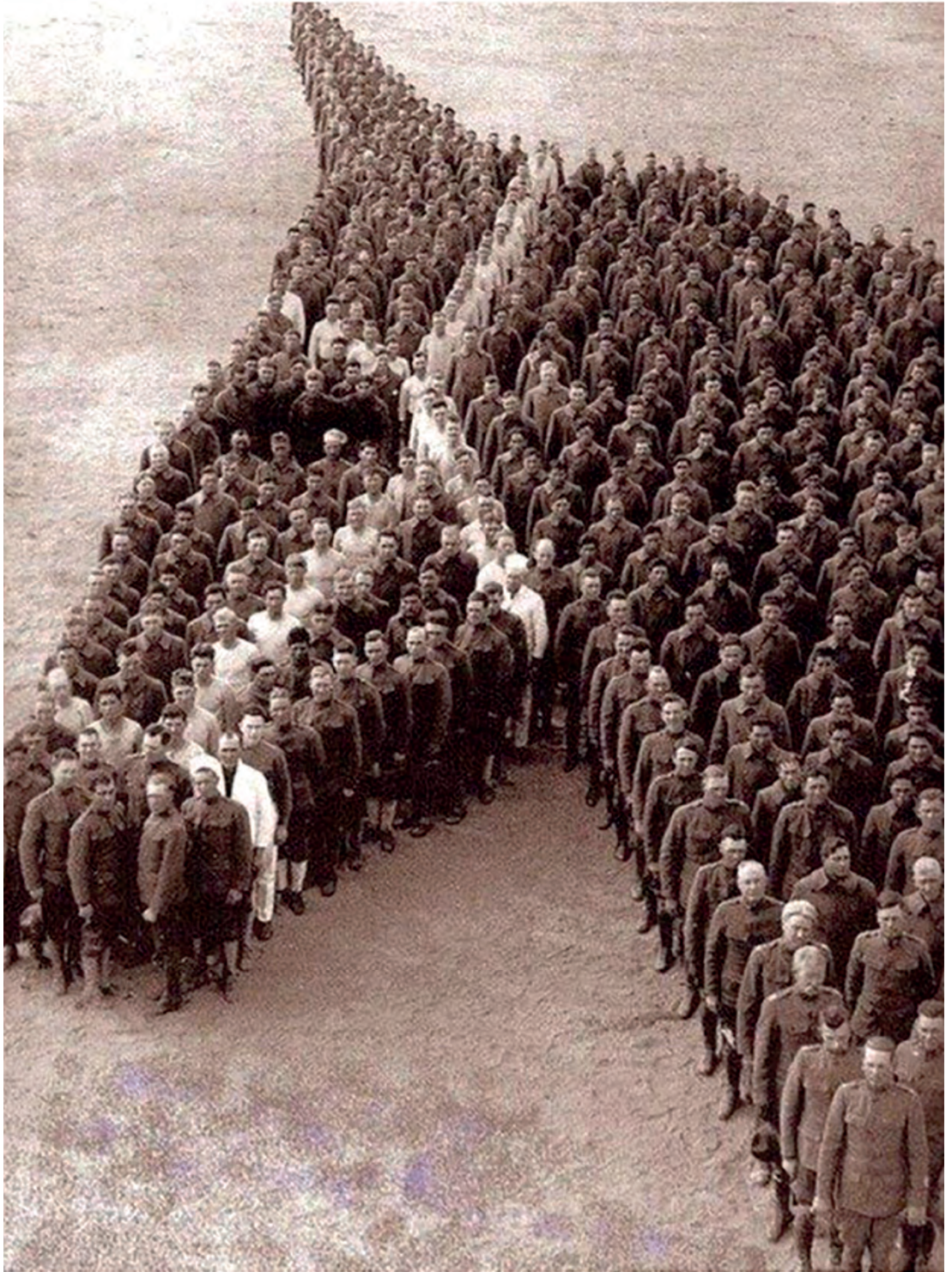
The Goennert plot, if a failure, still presents a number of interesting facets to the historian. At the example of the world war itself, the episode reveals a fragile and strained informal imperialism on the part of Austria-Hungary. The symbolic size of her marine corps in Tianjin, while it allowed to prevent further action from Goennert and his party, still proved weak enough that reinforcements had to be called in urgency from Beijing.

Even so, the plot was probably thwarted, more because of betrayals in the midst of the Goennert organization and cooperation with the Chinese police, than any operational efficiency on the part of Austria-Hungary. Moreover, it puts in a dim light several lingering issues linked to her imperial presence in China, mainly the lack of autonomy from her Northern Chinese microcolony from the metropole as well as ethnic resentment among the many nationality of the dual monarchy. Both the Shanghai and the Tianjin incidents show those elements were crucial in the setting up of Goennert's plans. The refugees escaped from the Siberian camps, who fought for their country, were captured by the Russians and still managed to regain their freedom on their own, but also the business owners and the sailors of the Austrian Lloyd, who lost their livelihood in consequence of the war, all feel abandoned by their motherland. The critical situation in which Austria-Hungary finds herself in China, in the apparent indifference of both the metropole and her European ally – the only action taken by Germany during the whole affair was to try and jail an Austrian citizen for high treason, is very telling of her ambiguous status since 1906 and the end of Gołuchowski's tenure at the common foreign ministry.

The Goennert plot also appears to be but one piece of a larger, until then relatively unknown issue, and one of many teachings to approach this period in a world history perspective, that is the secret war between the Entente and the Central Empires in China, most notably in Shanghai and in Tianjin, such as show the profiles of Goennert/Krempasky himself, but also Carl Erwin Stark and Dr Max Kindler, as well as the British, French and Japanese support (or command) the revolutionary party enjoyed in his endeavours. The open attempt to replace the Austro-Hungarian presence in China by a republican, socialist, Entente-friendly party, in the consulates as well as on the several ships interned in Shanghai and on the Tianjin concession, demonstrates the eagerness and nervousness of a side until then considered hegemonic in the Asia-Pacific region from the fall of Qingdao onwards, as it risks the destabilization of the then fragile multinational imperialistic regime in China, and thus the weakening of the British, French, Japanese and Russian imperial positions in that country after the war. This is certainly one of the reasons for which the First World War marks a turning point in the history of foreign imperialism in China, opening an era (1917-1940) of waning European domination.

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650 Officers and Enlisted Men of Auxiliary Remount Depot N° 326 Camp Cody, N. M., In a Symbolic Head Pose of "The Devil", Saddle Horse ridden by Maj. Frank Brewer, remount commander / Photo by Almeron Newman, *Rear 115 N. Gold Ave., Deming, N.M.*.(1919)
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA

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