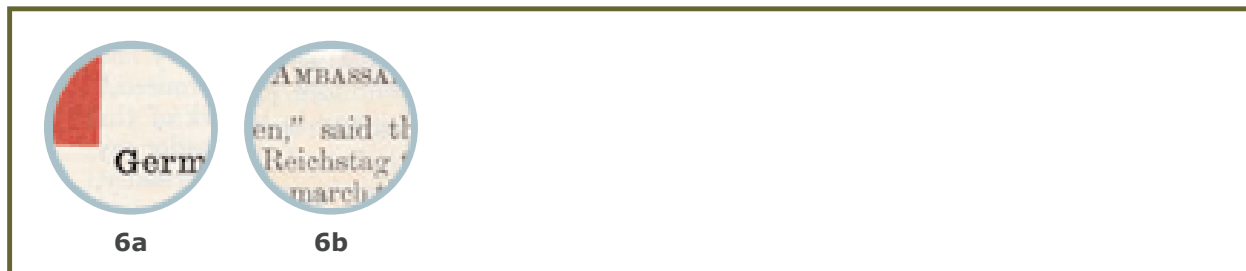




Source 6

German views on the events of 1914 concerning Belgium, reported in 1915

(Catalogue ref: FO 881/10520)




How to use this source:

Study this source carefully. There are details in this source that will help you to answer the key question. As you study the source, ask yourself:

- Who first used the phrase 'Scrap of Paper'?
- According to the Chancellor, how was the phrase misunderstood?
- Why did this misunderstanding happen?
- According to this document, what forced Germany to march through Belgium?
- What accusations does the German Chancellor make about Britain and Belgium?
- According to this document, was Britain concerned about the best interests of Belgium?



Source 6a



“ THE SCRAP OF PAPER.”

German Chancellor’s Explanation and Great Britain’s Reply.

German Field Headquarters of the German Armies.

“I am surprised to learn that my phrase, ‘a scrap of paper,’ which I used in my last conversation with the British Ambassador in reference to the Belgian neutrality treaty should have caused such an unfavourable impression in the United States. The expression was used in quite another connection and meaning from that implied in Sir Edward Goschen’s report, and the turn given to it in the biased comment of our enemies is undoubtedly responsible for this impression.”



Source 6b

THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

“My conversation with Sir E. Goschen,” said the Chancellor, “occurred on the 4th August. I had just declared in the Reichstag that only dire necessity, only the struggle for existence, compelled Germany to march through Belgium, but that Germany was ready to make compensation for the wrong committed. When I spoke I already had certain indications, but no absolute proof, on which to base a public accusation that Belgium had long before abandoned its neutrality in its relations with England. Nevertheless, I took Germany’s responsibilities towards neutral States so seriously that I spoke frankly on the wrong committed by Germany. What was the British attitude on the same question?” said the Chancellor. “The day before my conversation with the British Ambassador, Sir Edward Grey had delivered his well-known speech in Parliament, wherein, while he did not state expressly that England would take part in the war, he left the matter in little doubt. One needs only to read this speech through carefully to learn the reason of England’s intervention in the war. Amid all his beautiful phrases about England’s honour and England’s obligations we find it over and over again expressed that England’s interests—its own interests—called for participation in war, for it was not in England’s interests that a victorious, and therefore stronger, Germany should emerge from the war. This old principle of England’s policy—to take as the sole criterion of its actions its private interests regardless of right, reason, or considerations of humanity—is expressed in that speech of Gladstone’s in 1870 on Belgian neutrality from which Sir Edward quoted. Mr. Gladstone then declared