

Bismarck: Defender of International Law

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By Brad A. Kromrie

Northwest Missouri State University
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Brad A. Kromrie

Northwest Missouri State University

Thesis Approved

Dr. Joel D. Benson

Thesis Advisor

Date

Dr. Gregory Haddock

Dean of Graduate School

Date

Abstract

The focus of the thesis is on Prussia's minister-president, Otto von Bismarck, and his relations with Britain during Germany's "Wars of Unification." The research is presented in an essay format that is constructed through research from journal articles, primary sources, and secondary sources. The study demonstrates the importance of Britain in Bismarck's foreign policy as he knew Britain could tip the balance in favor of Prussia's enemies. While enticing Denmark, Austria, and France with opportunities to alter international law to their advantage, Bismarck prevented Britain from influencing the outcomes of Prussia's three wars by defending international law. The minister-president understood that each power wanted changes to international law except for Britain.

Bismarck: Defender of International Law

Introduction

The foreign policy of Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck has been studied extensively. Bismarck's wars with Austria and France were the means by which he unified Germany. But a necessary condition for German unification, which has been often overlooked, was the peace Bismarck maintained with Great Britain during the "Wars of Unification." During Bismarck's career, Prussia, Britain, Russia, Austria, and France formed the powers that dominated international affairs. Bismarck strove to avoid war with Britain, and he aimed to eliminate Britain's ability to form a military or diplomatic coalition in order to exert its will on Prussia. He understood that each power, with the exception of Britain, harbored resentment for at least a portion of international law. Bismarck often dealt with the non-British powers by alluding to the possibility of eliminating certain onerous international burdens. With regards to Britain, however, Bismarck achieved his diplomatic goals by positioning himself as a defender of international law.

Other forms of law, such as criminal, constitutional, and civil, are more straightforward than international law. The relatively loose formation of international law depends on the way countries interact with one another, which then becomes an expected custom. Countries have employed various modes in order to finalize commitments between one another, such as declarations, agreements, conventions

and treaties. The adherence or the revocation of such arrangements depends on the countries and circumstances involved.¹

The aforementioned arrangements differ only slightly, and all possess roughly an equal amount of obligatory power. Generally, treaties are signed on behalf of leaders, and on occasion, conventions have been as well. At other times, conventions have been completed on behalf of the participating governments, which is the normal practice for declarations and agreements.²

Heads of state or monarchs often delegate the power of negotiation and completion of a treaty. In addition, sometimes agreements and conventions are conducted and concluded in the same manner as a treaty. An arrangement is considered more formal if it came about by a delegate or delegation who derives its power from a head of state or monarch.³

Throughout the nineteenth century, signed treaties formed the basis of international law, which could only be changed by a congress or a conference of the European powers.⁴ The 1815 settlement of Vienna, which contained multiple treaties, served as the primary international arrangement of the nineteenth century. This

¹ Sir Augustus Oakes and R. B. Mowat, *The European Treaties of the Nineteenth Century*. Introduction by Sir H. Erle Richards. First Published 1918 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), iii-iv and 1.

² Oakes and Mowat, iii-iv, 1.

³ Oakes and Mowat, iii-iv, 1.

⁴ David King, *Vienna, 1814, How the Conquerors of Napoleon Made Love, War, and Peace at the Congress of Vienna* (New York: Harmony Books, 2008), 309-311.

agreement settled a number of disputes and created the German Confederation.⁵ Four free cities and thirty-nine independent states formed the German Confederation, which included the states of Prussia and Austria. The Confederation's primary objectives included providing for the common defense for member states as well as protecting members against rebellion. A diet consisting of two assemblies ostensibly governed the Confederation and met at Frankfurt am Main. One assembly granted each state one vote, and the other weighted the vote according to the state's population. The Confederation based its membership on the late Holy Roman Empire, but it modernized certain aspects of the Germanies. History played an important role in the formation of the Confederation. For example, the Habsburg dynasty of Austria consisted of various areas, but only certain territories counted with Austria in its membership to the Confederation, such as portions of Galicia and Istria, as well as Trieste, Gorizia, Bohemia, and its hereditary territories. The portions of the Austrian Empire that did not join Austria in the German Confederation consisted of the Lombardo-Venetian kingdom, a large area of Ruthenia, and Hungary. In addition, Austria gained the honor of holding the perpetual position of president of the Confederation's diet. The honor irritated Prussia even though it contributed little real power to Austria.⁶

⁵ W.E. Mosse, *The European Powers and the German Question 1848-71* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 1-8, 129-130.

⁶ Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire: 1526- 1918*. Second Printing with Corrections, 1977 (Berkely, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1974), 233-235; and King, 309-311.

In addition to being the two strongest states of the Germanic Confederation, Prussia and Austria maintained positions as two powerful European countries. Each of the two powers operated its own foreign relations without having to answer to the Confederation or each other. Prussia asserted its equality with Austria, but Austria declared its hegemony in Germany. Alterations to the constitution required cooperation and concurrence, but the tension between the two countries contributed to difficulties in bringing about changes to the constitution.⁷ The dualistic system of Germany formed a pillar of international policy. A transformation of the German system meant changes for the rest of Europe. Nations feared additional competition and unwanted alterations to the established balance of power.⁸

The Confederation frustrated the dreams of a variety of people in Germany, such as opponents of particularism, supporters of a Germany headed by Prussia, businesses desiring an expansion of opportunities to sell their goods, and intellectuals influenced by ideas of romanticism and nationalism. Germans dissatisfied with the Confederation strove to increase the power of the political structure of Germany.⁹

Nationalists often held liberal views, and liberals often desired a unified Germany. In order to attain the entire potential of German culture, a *Volksgeist*, liberals wanted the Germanies to unify politically. Indeed, the aims of liberals and nationalists

⁷ Kann, 233-235; and King, 309-311.

⁸ Mosse, 1-8, 129-130.

⁹ Mosse, 1-8, 129-130.

often coincided, which included the goals of combating reactionary and particularist policies.¹⁰

Difficulties existed for the nationalists, however. Other countries had a stake in the Confederation. The Vienna settlement asserted the “perpetual” existence of the Confederation.¹¹ A state bound to the treaty reserved the right to act if an endeavor to abolish the Confederation presented itself. The Netherlands maintained an interest in the Confederation by way of Luxemburg, and Denmark had a tie to the Confederation by way of Holstein. In addition to outside interference, the interests of the individual member states served to frustrate change. For example, the Vienna settlement contained ways to alter the constitution of the Confederation, but it gave a great deal of power to the smaller members of the Confederation.¹²

In addition, the German nationalists faced strong opposition to their agenda. They even lacked support from the man who would later forge a nation out of the various German states. Otto von Bismarck’s political career began when King Frederick Wilhelm IV called for a diet during the year 1847. Having gained membership to the diet after a member had withdrawn due to sickness, Bismarck actively opposed liberal members and their policy proposals. The diet discontinued with the king unwilling to compromise with the liberals. Afterwards, Bismarck met King Frederick Wilhelm IV

¹⁰ Pflanze, 21-23.

¹¹ Pflanze, 21-23.

¹² Pflanze, 21-23.

while the future chancellor visited Venice on his honeymoon. During the encounter, the king praised Bismarck for his reactionary stance at the diet.¹³

The following year, however, the liberals gained the advantage, and in 1848 like much of Europe, Prussia faced “the year of revolution.”¹⁴ When fighting broke out in Berlin, the king decided to give in to the liberal demands for a parliament and new constitution rather than crush the uprising with the army. Bismarck went to Berlin, but he could not alter the situation. Later in the year, the king reneged on his promises, disbanded parliament, and called the military back to Berlin. He decided against returning completely to the status quo, however, allowing indirect elections with voting restrictions. He also agreed to grant a constitution that called for the creation of a new parliament, which possessed less power than its predecessor. Bismarck gained membership to the new parliament by way of indirect election.¹⁵

While Austria acted militarily against similar revolutionary activity in Italy and Hungary, liberals tried to unify Germany. The Austrian Prime Minister Felix Schwarzenberg opposed the nationalistic endeavor, and the Confederation diet in Frankfurt offered Frederick Wilhelm IV the opportunity to gain the title of emperor. He turned it down because a parliament, rather than the princes, had presented the proposal. When Prussia’s army subdued revolts in Baden and Saxony, Joseph von

¹³ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 22-29.

¹⁴ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 22-29.

¹⁵ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 22-29.

Radowitz advised the king to apply pressure upon Germany's princes while Prussia had the advantage over preoccupied Austria. Radowitz intended that Prussia establish military authority over a unified Germany that did not include Austria. In addition, he proposed limited elections for the purpose of forming a parliament. The Erfurt Union assembled during 1850 from Radowitz's efforts. Even though Bismarck disapproved of the Erfurt Union, he participated as a member.¹⁶

After Austria repressed the revolts in Hungary and Italy, Prime Minister Schwarzenberg decided to restore the Confederation's diet. Prussia succumbed to Austrian pressure to dismantle the Erfurt Union and to rejoin the Confederation. The two countries finalized the arrangement in 1850 by signing the Treaty of Olmütz, which angered nationalists in Prussia and galled one of the powers.¹⁷

Initially, Bismarck praised the decision at Olmütz. In parliament, Bismarck asserted, "The only healthy foundation for a great state is egoism, not romanticism, and it is unworthy of a great state to dispute over something which does not concern its own interest."¹⁸ After the dissolution of Erfurt's parliament, Bismarck accepted a position as a diplomat to the diet of the Confederation, which met in Frankfurt. Bismarck's

¹⁶ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 22-29.

¹⁷ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 22-29., and Count Friedrich Ferdinand Von Beust, *Memoirs*. Second Edition, Volume I and II. Originally published in London: Remington & Co., Publishers, 1887 (St. Clair Shores, Michigan: Scholarly Press, Inc., 1972), 93- 102.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 22-29., and Beust, 93-102.

experience in Frankfurt in 1851 marked a turning point in his practices.¹⁹ He went to Frankfurt because of his conservatism, his approval of Olmütz, and his willingness to work with Austria. Soon after his appointment, however, he experimented with other ideas and positions such as German nationalism, approval of France, and opposition toward Austria.²⁰

Bismarck explained the impact Olmütz had on his policy goals years later in his memoirs. He asserted that the events that occurred at Olmütz did not affect him as much as his reading of a dispatch regarding Austrian policy, written by Prince Schwartzberg. He developed his policy of building the military in order to enhance Prussia's power, and he insisted that Prussia needed to take the lead in the efforts toward German unification. Bismarck viewed the Treaty of Olmütz as an agreement that had been dictated by calculations of military strength.²¹ The treaty left a lasting impression on Bismarck that Prussia needed a strong military in order to unify Germany, and a unification that required the favor of the Prussian king.²² One may regard the

¹⁹ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 158-160.

²⁰ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 158-160.

²¹ Count Friedrich Ferdinand Von Beust, *Memoirs*. Second Edition. Volume I. Originally published in London: Remington & Co., Publishers, 1887 (St. Clair Shores, Michigan: Scholarly Press, Inc., 1972), 93- 102.

²² Beust, Volume I, 93-102.

reading of Schwartzenberg's dispatch as the beginning of Bismarck's plan to rewrite international law through the use of the military.²³

German unification concerned Britain, as well as Russia, in spite of their greater geographical distance from Prussia compared to Austria and France. Britain and Russia feuded with each other over differences in ideology and politics. Britain harbored liberal ideas while Russia possessed autocratic viewpoints. A unified Germany had the potential to play a key role in determining the arguments between Britain and Russia, such as disagreements regarding India, Central Asia, and Turkey.²⁴

Britain maintained a freer hand regarding the German states than France and Austria. Britain had the ability to be a deciding factor in the conflicts of Italy, France, Prussia, and Austria. Bismarck understood that Britain and Russia could potentially take action of immense importance concerning the German states.²⁵

Britain could tolerate German unification if Germany adhered to principles held by Britain. For example, Britain could benefit from another Protestant country that operated under a parliamentary system of government. A liberal Germany could help Britain protect itself from Russia, France, and Catholicism. Britain could gain assistance from a liberal Germany in its goal of providing aid to the Polish people, and a Germany

²³ Otto Von Bismarck, *The Memoirs: Being the Reflections and Reminiscences of Otto, Prince Von Bismarck*. Translated by A. J. Butler. Volume I. First published in New York and London: Harper & Row, 1899 (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), 318-324.

²⁴ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 158-160.

²⁵ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 158-160.

formed along liberal lines could side with Britain in disputes over Turkey. Britain stood to gain from a unified Germany as long as Germany shared Britain's goals and ideas.²⁶

The Vienna settlement remained an obstacle to German unification. For example, in 1849 British statesman, Henry Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston, advised Prime Minister Lord John Russell to turn down the offer to attend a European congress, insisting that setting up a congress for the revision of the Vienna settlement was unworkable. In his opinion, the circumstances surrounding the congress that met throughout 1814 and 1815 differed from those of the current situation. Similar to Bismarck's calculations, Palmerston observed the importance that armies and conquest had in legitimizing the Vienna settlement. Lacking a similar situation at the present time, however, he expressed doubt regarding the possibility of some countries yielding to the demands of others at a congress. In addition, Palmerston wanted to avoid validating clear violations of the Vienna settlement.²⁷

Not surprisingly, France did not hold the Vienna settlement in such high regard. For example, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, the French foreign minister, resigned rather than sign the settlement. His reasoning resembled that of Bismarck's years later. He argued that France could only

²⁶ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 158-160.

²⁷ Harold Temperley and Lillian M. Penson, eds., *Foundations of British Foreign Policy From Pitt (1792) to Salisbury (1902)*. "Document 60.: Palmerston's views on a Congress, 6 March 1849." First Edition, 1938 (New Impression, 1966. London: Frank Cass and Co. LTD., 1966), 207-208.

make concessions during “a state of war.”²⁸ According to Talleyrand, his nation could not be required to concede anything because it was at peace with the allies. He argued that the allies had waged war in opposition to Napoleon rather than France, and that France’s restored king participated as an ally of the victorious powers. The foreign minister viewed the settlement as “unjust.”²⁹

During the Crimean War, British diplomat Sir Alexander Malet had reported to his government that Prussia had refused to join Britain, France, and Austria in opposing Russia because Bismarck “had decisively influenced all different political circles in Berlin.”³⁰ As a result of the Crimean War, Emperor Napoleon III succeeded in damaging the 1815 international system by allying France with Britain against Russia. The Russian Empire sought to alter the 1856 Treaty of Paris rather than hold states accountable to the terms of the Vienna settlement. After the war, Russia avoided international confrontations and shifted its focus on its domestic agenda. Russia’s exit from active involvement in Europe increased the possibility of unifying Germany.³¹

The Crimean War altered Bismarck’s diplomatic agenda, but his goal of increasing the power of the Hohenzollern Dynasty remained the same. Bismarck no

²⁸ Temperley and Penson, eds., 207-208.

²⁹ King, 308- 312.

³⁰ W.A. Van’t Padje, “Sir Alexander Malet and Prince Otto von Bismarck: an Almost Forgotten Anglo-German Friendship,” *Historical Research* 72, no. 179 (Blackwell Publishers Ltd.: October 1999): 285-300, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=50dcba32-0cdd-41b4-8468-5c093e1b8a81%40sessionmgr114&vid=8&hid=113> (accessed July 26, 2012).

³¹ King, 308-312.

longer strove for an alliance that included both Russia and France. He started to place a greater value on Prussia's policy with Britain. During the Crimean War, Crown Prince Wilhelm also desired the adoption of a policy in support of Britain. Wilhelm maintained friendly relations and received the counsel of the Prince Consort of Britain, Prince Albert. Rather than pursue an alliance with Russia and France, Bismarck worked to acquire an alliance with Russia and Britain, even though he knew that such an alliance lacked the potential to materialize due to the competing interests of Britain and Russia in the East.³²

As a result of the 1859 Austro-Franco War, the *Nationalverein*, a German nationalist organization, began to favor Prussia over Austria.³³ The *Nationalverein* began as a movement that supported Austria against the French, but after Austria's defeats on the battlefield, the movement renewed an idea that had not been taken seriously since 1850; that of forming a Germany without Austria.³⁴ Friedrich Ferdinand Count von Beust, the Saxon Minister of Foreign Affairs and future Austrian President of the Ministry, put forth a plan suggesting that Austria and Prussia taking turns leading

³² Pflanze, 145-149.

³³ Count Friedrich Ferdinand Von Beust, *Memoirs*. Second Edition. Volume I. Originally published in London: Remington & Co., Publishers, 1887 (St. Clair Shores, Michigan: Scholarly Press, Inc., 1972), 196-203.

³⁴ Beust, Volume I, 196- 203.

the Confederation. According to Beust, Austria declined to adopt his plan because of its concern for “appearances.”³⁵

Furthermore, the Austro-Franco War resulted in Austria joining the list of “revisionist” states. Austria desired to reverse Italian unification, the ill effects of its dealings with Napoleon III at Villafranca, and the treaties that formed the Peace of Zurich. Austria continued as a power in Europe, but its reputation suffered as a result of its defeat. Therefore, it sought to strengthen its damaged status by asserting itself in Germany.³⁶

Meanwhile, Prussia’s King Wilhelm I supported improving Prussia’s military, and his efforts led to a struggle that pitted the Prussian diet against the crown during the “constitutional conflict” of 1862.³⁷ During the summer of that year, Bismarck took time off from his duties as ambassador to France and ventured to London. During his stay, Bismarck spoke with Lord Russell, Lord Palmerston, and Benjamin Disraeli, offering them a preview of his future policies as minister-president of Germany. He informed Disraeli of his plan to use national sentiment in order to find a cause to wage war on Austria. He told Russell and Palmerston that the Prussian government needed to support the *Nationalverein* in order to reduce liberal objections to increases in military spending.

³⁵ Beust, Volume I, 196-203.

³⁶ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 126-127; and Kann, 268-271.

³⁷ Pflanze, 178

After a September meeting with Wilhelm, the king appointed him to the post of minister-president.³⁸

At roughly the same time, Britain feared a decline in the power of the Confederation, which Britain viewed as an important check to ambitions of Napoleon III of France. The German states had the potential to protect British interests concerning Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands. For example, when tensions mounted between Prussia and Austria in 1862, Lord Russell declared, “Germany in the centre of Europe ought to be a solid security for European peace and a valuable element in European civilization.”³⁹

Bismarck realized that certain countries could not alter international law by negotiating and hashing out their differences at the bargaining table. Bismarck understood the other way to alter or abrogate treaties was by waging successful war. For example, in an 1862 speech supporting the king’s budget, Bismarck asserted, “Prussia’s frontiers, as fixed by the Treaties of Vienna, do not favour a healthy political existence. The questions of the day will not be decided by speeches and majority decisions—that was the mistake of 1848 to 1849—but by blood and iron...”⁴⁰

³⁸ Pflanze, 162, 176.

³⁹ Pflanze, 162, 176.

⁴⁰ Helmut Böhme, ed., *The Foundation of the German Empire: Select Documents*. Translated by Agatha Ramm (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 115-116; and A. J. P. Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1955), 56.

The Treaty of London and the Danish War

Bismarck viewed the German Confederation and the treaties that preserved it as an obstacle to Prussia's growth and development. Britain's policy regarding treaties also created a difficult challenge, as Britain's objectives ran counter to Bismarck's. The minister-president managed to use Britain's objectives, however, to his own advantage. First, he improved relations between Prussia and Russia. Next, he used British fears that Napoleon III wanted to abrogate portions of the Vienna settlement in order to avoid an Anglo-French alliance in opposition to Prussia. While luring Austria into an alliance over Denmark's succession, Bismarck also kept Britain out of the war by portraying Denmark, rather than Prussia, as the violator of the 1852 Treaty of London. Finally, he used war to revoke the treaty he supposedly fought the war to protect. Regarding the Danish War, Bismarck used the British desire to uphold the Treaty of London to keep Britain from cooperating diplomatically or militarily with a continental power against Prussia.

The Schleswig-Holstein dispute interested Britain for multiple reasons. Britain had played a role in setting up the German Confederation and joined the powers as a signatory of the 1852 Treaty of London, which protected "the integrity of the Danish Monarchy."⁴¹ Germany interested Britain in a variety of ways, such as sharing a "Teutonic" background and maintaining predominantly Protestant populations. In addition, if Germany managed to unite, Britain desired liberals from the middle-class to

⁴¹ Keith A. P. Sandiford, *Great Britain and the Schleswig-Holstein Question 1848-64: A Study in Diplomacy, Politics, and Public Opinion* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press 1975), 11, 26-30.

conduct the process in order to increase the likelihood of Britain expanding its commerce into Germany, especially into areas safeguarded by the *Zollverein*.⁴²

Bismarck understood British aspirations. In the past, German liberals supported closer ties with Britain, reasoning that Britain could use Prussia's army against Russia, while Prussia could receive help from Britain in the goal of German unification. Additionally, they had argued that Lord Palmerston, Britain's Prince Albert, and British public opinion could assist their cause. Bismarck rejected such a policy and the reliability of Britain. He noted Palmerston's rift with Prince Albert and doubted the prospect of Britain risking its wellbeing for German unification. In addition, Bismarck feared that giving too much support to France and Britain risked the security of Prussia's eastern territories.⁴³

Upon taking office in 1862, Bismarck managed to improve Prussia's relations with Russia and to damage interactions between France and Britain. Bismarck benefited from his first diplomatic crisis of his career as minister-president in January 1863 when Russia faced an uprising by Polish revolutionaries. Prussia sent troops to aid Russia, and General von Alvensleben went to St. Petersburg on behalf of Prussia in order to coordinate plans. Bismarck feared that a Polish state would pursue land in West Prussia and Posen that it lost in 1772, and he worried about the Poles looking to France for

⁴² Scott W. Murray, *Liberal Diplomacy and German Unification: The Early Career of Robert Morier* (West Port Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 102.

⁴³ Bismarck, Volume I, 120-121.

assistance with their goal. Even though the minister-president regarded German national sentiment as a tool for his agenda, he opposed the national aims of Poland.⁴⁴

Bismarck's actions countered Napoleon III's "national self-determination" goals, and the emperor asked Austria and Britain to join France in sending "identical notes" to Prussia, condemning its actions in Poland. When Austria and Britain declined this invitation, Napoleon responded by attempting to ally France with Austria. The Austrian Empire rejected Napoleon's offer, however, because of France's weakened military position following its involvement in Mexico. The events regarding Poland assisted Bismarck in improving Prussia's relations with Russia.⁴⁵

Next, Austria took its turn at improving its position, inviting the princes of the Confederation to Frankfurt in August of 1863 to work on restructuring the Confederation. Franz Joseph, the Austrian emperor, asked Wilhelm to attend his "congress of princes," while the king vacationed at Bad Gastein. Wilhelm wanted to attend, but Bismarck did everything in his power to change the king's mind. On one occasion, a confrontation between Bismarck and the king caused Wilhelm to cry and Bismarck to break a washbasin. Bismarck succeeded, however, and Wilhelm declined the Frankfurt invitation. When the princes of the Confederation pressed Wilhelm to accept Austria's plan, Bismarck countered with a plan of his own. Then unexpectedly,

⁴⁴ Pflanze, 194- 199.

⁴⁵ Pflanze, 194- 199.

Napoleon frustrated Austria further by proposing that the powers meet at a congress to ensure peace, as he no longer recognized the validity of the Vienna settlement.⁴⁶

Bismarck cautiously voiced his desire for agreement between the powers but realized that peace depended on the conformity of action by Prussia, Austria, Russia, and Britain. Bismarck announced that he planned to set a precondition of unanimity on the finalization of decisions. In addition, Bismarck communicated that he planned to pursue the same course of action taken by Russia and Britain, on the condition that they agree with one another. By taking such a stance, Prussia joined Russia and Austria in desiring to avoid the burden of wrecking Napoleon's plan. Instead the three powers deferred the job to Britain.⁴⁷

Bismarck foresaw Britain's negative reaction to Napoleon's plan and advised Wilhelm to offer the possibility of cooperation, but one that avoided committing Prussia's support for Napoleon's congress. Queen Victoria expressed her irritation with Napoleon's idea, and the cabinet of Britain flatly rejected the proposal. The British delay in informing France of its decision allowed the *London Gazette* to print Britain's rejection before France gained knowledge of it. As a result, Napoleon's scheme terminated the Crimean coalition and his chances of ever working closely with Britain. As Austria also sought to avoid grappling with nationalist ideas that it thought France

⁴⁶ Pflanze, 194- 199.

⁴⁷ Mosse, 137-143.

intended to advocate, another result from Napoleon's failed scheme included a greater Austrian willingness to work with Prussia.⁴⁸

Austria's opportunity to work with Prussia and to assert itself in German affairs arose out of circumstances that concerned the duchies of Schleswig, Lauenburg, and Holstein. The complex situation involved Danish and German national sentiment. All three duchies belonged to Denmark's monarchy. The duchies of Lauenburg and Holstein participated in the German Confederation, however, and European custom called for keeping Holstein and Schleswig together. In 1848, the Danes tried to merge Schleswig with Denmark, which provoked the German inhabitants of the Duchies. Prussia intervened with approval from the German Confederation, but the combined efforts of Russia and Britain proved strong enough to coerce Prussia into halting hostilities and to abide by the 1850 London Protocol.⁴⁹ In 1851, Denmark signed a treaty stipulating that Schleswig could not merge with Denmark. In order for Denmark to form closer constitutional ties with the duchies, the treaty forced the Danish crown to seek approval from the estates of the duchies. In addition, Prussia and Austria signed a treaty in London in 1852 pledging "to respect the integrity of the Danish monarchy."⁵⁰

At the time, it appeared that Britain had succeeded diplomatically. Britain had avoided war while gaining protection for its trade. Britain's diplomacy prevented the

⁴⁸ Mosse, 137-143 and Pflanze, 237, 194- 199.

⁴⁹ Sandiford, 11, 26- 30.

⁵⁰ Pflanze, 237, 194- 199.

Zollverein from enlarging and avoided the formation of a Scandinavian union, which Palmerston viewed as a threat to British trading interests. Russia and France failed to make significant gains, and Palmerston had convinced Prussia to withdraw from the duchies. The settlement caused difficulty for Britain in the long term, however, as both Germans and Danes desired to scrap the agreement. The treaties enabled Prince Christian of Glücksburg to claim the throne, which angered Danish nationalists, the Eiderdanes, because of the prince's pro-German attitude. In addition, Prussian diplomat Baron Christian von Bunsen disapproved of the Treaty of London. He considered resigning in order to avoid personal connection with the treaty. Bunsen viewed the treaty as a disappointment for Germany and a victory for the other European powers. The fact that the German Diet did not take part in the treaty, however, pleased Bunsen. It had the potential to benefit Germany.⁵¹

Controversy resurfaced again in March of 1863 when King Frederick VII put forth a constitutional plan known as the "March Patent." Without conferring with the estates, the king proposed blending Schleswig with Denmark. On November 15, 1863, the Danish monarch, Frederick VII died, which sparked a controversy over succession, as he had failed to produce a male descendent to succeed to the throne. Through the maternal line, Christian of Glücksburg claimed the throne, but Prince Frederick of Augustenburg also staked a claim on the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. The Treaty of London in 1852 contained an agreement by Augustenburg's father to give up his right

⁵¹ Sandiford, 11, 23-30.

to rule the duchies. Prince Frederick of Augustenburg insisted that his father's actions did not apply to him, and he styled himself as the "Duke of Schleswig-Holstein." Danish nationalists argued that Denmark possessed the right to rule Schleswig. In spite of Glücksburg's pro-German sentiment, German nationalists favored Augustenburg and desired the formation of the duchies into a state belonging to the German Confederation.⁵²

Christian IX started his reign in 1863 by confronting the difficult situation of deciding whether or not to sign a constitution drafted in November of 1863, extending Denmark's authority. Demonstrators outside of his palace caused Copenhagen's police chief to worry about maintaining the peace. Giving way to the pressure, Christian signed the constitution.⁵³

Bismarck supported intervention, but also realized that Prussian support of Augustenburg risked alienating other European countries. In addition, the Augustenburg case offered little in return for Prussia in spite of its popularity with German nationalists. Bismarck wanted tangible rewards for Prussia's intervention. He realized that Prussia could wage war with Denmark for the purpose of annexing the duchies, but Russia disapproved of Prussian annexation of the duchies, and Austria and Britain strongly rejected such a policy.⁵⁴

⁵² Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 523-526 and Pflanze, 237, 194- 199.

⁵³ Clark, 523-526.

⁵⁴ Pflanze, 240-247.

Prussia and Austria had their own reasons for their cooperation during the dispute over Schleswig-Holstein. Austria's decision to involve itself in the duchies and to work with Prussia stemmed from its desire to preserve its leadership role in German issues. In addition, Austria sought to damage a nationalist endeavor, which Augustenburg represented, and to avoid the risk of Prussia acquiring land while Austria failed to gain territory. Conversely, Bismarck used the controversy as a way to gain territory for Prussia and to build his army for a future, potential conflict with Austria. Moreover, he used the Treaty of London to mislead Austria into concluding that he lacked an annexationist objective and fully supported the legitimacy of Christian IX. Instead of using the Schleswig-Holstein dispute as a way to resolve their differences, Prussia and Austria used it as a way to postpone a confrontation over German hegemony.⁵⁵

In order to strengthen Prussia's position in an upcoming conflict with Austria, Bismarck needed time. Prussia continued to engage in a domestic struggle over suggested changes to the military. Prussia's war minister, Albrecht von Roon, had presented his reforms in 1860, but liberals in the Prussian diet resisted due to fear that the restructuring of the military threatened to reduce the number of liberal voters. Prussia's minister of finance pledged that Roon's restructuring plan would not occur if the diet would consent to the increased expenditures. The diet assented, but Roon

⁵⁵ Kann, 270-271; Clark, 523-526; and Pflanze, 240-248.

implemented his changes nevertheless. When Bismarck came to power, he asserted that the king and both houses of the diet must agree on a budget. Lacking a settlement, the king possessed the authority to spend the increased expenditures until the reaching of an agreement. In addition to the money raised for the military, Bismarck needed a prolonged dispute in order to ensure the continuance of King Wilhelm's support, which allowed him to exert his influence in international affairs.⁵⁶

Of all the powers, Britain posed the largest risk of involving itself militarily. Britain worried about its status regarding the Baltic Sea and viewed the Danish crown as essential to preserving its position in the region. In order to engage in continental warfare, however, Britain sought the aid of another powerful ally. Britain could not rely on Russia. Therefore, Bismarck needed France and Britain to refrain from working together, and he needed Prussia to ally itself with Austria in order to prevent Austria's cooperation with Britain.⁵⁷

In November of 1863, the Whig leader, Lord Russell, wrote to Queen Victoria reminding her that the British public supported Denmark. He also pointed out criticism by Benjamin Disraeli, a Conservative parliamentarian, that Victoria's government gave the Germanies preferential treatment. The queen replied that she desired the disputants to act justly. She held that Denmark had broken its pledge and that she did not ever plan to force Holstein's people to adhere to changes it did not support.

⁵⁶ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 47-59.

⁵⁷ Pflanze, 240-248.

Palmerston wrote to Victoria at the beginning of December and offered his assessment. He did not think that the Germanies currently had justification for waging war against Denmark. According to Palmerston, the Germanies had to acknowledge Christian as the rightful ruler and needed to prove that the constitution broke a pledge by Denmark. Palmerston reminded Victoria that he considered the dispute as an international issue and that the implementation of the constitution did not begin until January 1, 1864.⁵⁸

In contrast to the wishes of the German nationalists, Austria and Prussia decided to intervene in defense of the 1851-1852 treaties. With a slim majority, the Frankfurt diet supported military action by the Confederation in Lauenburg and Holstein. Austria usually acquired support from the smaller German states at Prussia's expense, but in this case Austria's reputation among the smaller German states suffered. Not only did Prussia and Austria advocate the occupation of Lauenburg and Holstein, they also wanted the diet to vote for the occupation of Schleswig, but the diet declined. After the vote, Confederation troops from Hanover and Saxony invaded Lauenburg and Holstein.⁵⁹

Bismarck's policy of defending the treaties aided his British diplomacy. Public opinion in Britain, and Britain's Foreign Minister, Lord John Russell, favored Denmark; Britain tried on multiple occasions to resolve the crisis. In addition, Britain warned

⁵⁸ Queen Victoria, *The Letters of Queen Victoria*. Georg Earle Buckle, ed. Second Series: "A Selection from her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal Between the Years 1862 and 1878." Published by Authority of His Majesty the King. Volume I (London: John Murray, 1926), 120-129.

⁵⁹ Pflanze, 240-248.

Prussia against supporting Augustenburg. However, Denmark's refusal to abandon the March Patent and its constitutional aims alienated Britain, and Bismarck's support of the treaties over Augustenburg reduced the likelihood of Denmark receiving military assistance from Britain.⁶⁰

The "execution" by the Confederation attempted to hold Lauenburg and Holstein by force in order to pressure Denmark to abandon its constitution. After the occupation of the Holstein duchy, Austria and Prussia decided to act independently from the German Confederation and announced their plan to send troops to Schleswig. Russell and Palmerston disapproved, but Britain needed cooperation with France in order to stop the invasion, which France refused as Britain had not supported its Polish policy. Bismarck also held out the possibility of allowing France to acquire land along the Rhine River, although he refrained from making any promises. Contrary to Britain's goals, France welcomed the possibility of Prussia's annexation of German people from the duchies as well as the annexation of other German states. France viewed the potential destruction of the German Confederation as the first step to ending the Vienna settlement. Napoleon's goal of gaining territory on the Rhine increased Bismarck's chances of a free hand in the duchies while decreasing the likelihood of French cooperation with Britain. In order to separate France and Britain further, Bismarck

⁶⁰ Pflanze, 240-248.

advised the ambassador from Britain, Sir Andrew Buchanan, against pushing Prussia into an alliance with France.⁶¹

Before the invasion of Schleswig, Bismarck proposed a conference to discuss the issues regarding Denmark. Sweden, Russia, and Austria approved of the general idea, and Britain enthusiastically desired a conference, but the suggestion irritated France, as Napoleon hoped to assemble a congress to discuss a broader range of issues. France expressed multiple arguments against conducting a conference and indicated its willingness to attend only on the condition that all the other powers attend as well. Bismarck dropped the proposal.⁶²

Britain, however, attempted to persuade Sweden, Russia, and France into working together in order to urge the Germanies to attend a conference. These efforts failed, but Britain continued to work to gain partners in order to halt German aggression. Britain tried to gain approval for sending someone to Frankfurt to warn the German countries not to wage war on Schleswig, but this endeavor fell short as well.⁶³

Without consulting the diet, Austria and Prussia each sent ultimatums to Denmark. Britain continued its diplomacy by advising Denmark to rescind its constitution and urged Prussia and Austria to allow Denmark time to do so. The British government urged Prussia and Austria to delay military operations for six weeks in order

⁶¹ Clark, 523-526 and Pflanze, 248-249.

⁶² Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question*, 162-167.

⁶³ Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question*, 162-167.

to grant Denmark the time to annul its constitution. Three days later, Britain's foreign secretary sent a document to each of the powers with the goal of gaining a written agreement regarding the situation.⁶⁴

Britain failed in attaining support for its objectives. The British cabinet deliberated over the possibility of using military force, but Queen Victoria wanted peace, and the cabinet reverted to the policy of attaining foreign assistance before pursuing military action. In early January, rumors circulated throughout London that Britain planned to send its Channel Fleet to Denmark, but the idea failed to materialize due to the opposition of the queen and the lack of a cabinet majority. The queen continued to blame Denmark for the continuance of the dispute asserting that, "The sole impediment to a peaceful solution of this question appears now to exist in the refusal of the Danish Government to repeal the constitution of November."⁶⁵ Britain required aid from another power before deciding upon military action, but when British diplomat Sir Henry Bulwer attempted to talk France into joining Britain in coordinated action, France refused to comply.⁶⁶

After Denmark disregarded the ultimatums, Austrian and Prussian troops invaded Schleswig on the first of February. As the first civilian to conduct a war in the history of Prussia, Bismarck's efforts allowed him to use the war to serve his diplomatic

⁶⁴ Clark, 524-525 and Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question*, 162-167.

⁶⁵ G.P. Gooch, ed., *The Later Correspondence of Lord John Russell: 1840-1878*. Volume II (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925), 305-306.

⁶⁶ Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question*, 162-168.

objectives. The minister-president reassured the powers that Prussia did not seek Denmark or even a portion of it, as Prussian troops refused to pursue Danish forces into Jutland.⁶⁷

An unanticipated event happened, which nearly sabotaged Bismarck's primary diplomatic effort of avoiding an Anglo-French understanding. In February, Prussian troops under Field Marshal Count Friedrich Heinrich Ernst von Wrangel ventured past Schleswig's northern border and into the Jutland peninsula. In addition, Britain received word of a threat to Copenhagen by Austria's navy. Britain's cabinet ordered its Channel Fleet back to Britain and Lord Russell asked France and Russia to join Britain in naval operations. Russia declined due to frozen waters, but Napoleon and his supporters wanted to take action. The Austrian ambassador and the French Foreign Minister, Drouyn de Lhuys, managed to persuade Napoleon to refrain from accepting Russell's invitation, and a day after Russell's request; Drouyn announced that France had accepted the Austrian and Prussian clarification of events. In addition, Britain's cabinet impugned Russell's actions and directed him to notify France and Russia that Britain did not intend to engage in naval operations on behalf of Denmark. Meanwhile, an irate Bismarck complained to Roon about the mishap. In response, the war minister rebuked and later dismissed Wrangel.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Clark, 524-528.

⁶⁸ Taylor, *The Struggle for the Mastery in Europe: 1848-1918*, 148-149; Clark, 523-526; and Pflanze, 240-243, 253.

As soon as the war had begun, Lord Russell worked toward ending the conflict by attempting to set up a conference. Before Prussia's participation, Bismarck desired to gain an advantage by allowing Prussian forces enough time to achieve a victory at Düppel. Before the conference had begun, Britain sent Lord Clarendon to meet with Napoleon in Paris. Clarendon could not reach agreement with Napoleon due to the latter's insistence upon British approval for French acquisition of land along the Rhine in addition to France's policies regarding Venetia. In addition, Napoleon resisted because he had proposed a plebiscite to settle the situation, eliciting the will of the people involved. Austria, Russia, and Great Britain held the opinion that Napoleon's suggestion went too far. Bismarck differed in his approach to the proposal from other leaders. Instead of disapproving of the timing or the principle, he appeared more willing to cooperate by voicing concerns only for the details.⁶⁹

Bismarck let the government of France know of his interest in settling the dispute, and he suggested that the land marking the future Baltic-North Sea Canal serve as the border. The plan called for Denmark giving up Holstein, which Denmark had already conceded, and a little territory in Schleswig. Britain hesitated in supporting the Prussian plan due to the fear of an increase in Prussian sea power.⁷⁰

Although France and Prussia appeared to have come closer together, Bismarck knew that solving the problems of Schleswig-Holstein with France could alienate Austria,

⁶⁹ Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question*, 203-220.

⁷⁰ Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question*, 206-220.

and he feared pushing France and Britain closer together by refusing France's suggestion outright. Therefore, he delayed making any definite decisions. On one occasion, he promised French Ambassador Baron Charles Angelique Talleyrand-Périgord to speak "with the King that very day."⁷¹ Bismarck maintained working diplomatic relations by avoiding commitments that could potentially reduce his course of action in the future. Moreover, his maneuvers illustrate how he managed to keep France and Britain from drawing closer together.⁷²

When Wilhelm learned of the French offer, he bristled at the idea. The king feared alienating Europe, but he did not mind angering France. France, however, seemed likely to grant Prussia the best deal on the question of Schleswig's northern border. Prussia disapproved of the French plan of a plebiscite to solve the boundary dispute, as the people of Schleswig and the duchies as a whole wanted Augustenburg to rule, but Napoleon consented to Bismarck's objectives for the upcoming conference, hoping for gains at a later time.⁷³

At the anticipated conference, which convened in London to determine the conditions for peace, a truce of four weeks beginning on May 12 gained approval.⁷⁴ Prussia and Austria allowed Denmark the opportunity to retain "personal union" over

⁷¹ Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question*, 206-220.

⁷² Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question*, 206-220.

⁷³ Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question*, 206-220.

⁷⁴ Steefel, 227-230 and Clark, 528.

the duchies, but Denmark rejected the offer.⁷⁵ The conference's proceedings benefited Bismarck by ruining Austria's objectives, which included restricting Prussian territorial gains and eliminating the prospect of an Augustenburg reign. When forced to decide between the two goals, however, Austria supported Augustenburg. Bismarck now backed Augustenburg as well after obtaining a number of concessions for Prussia. Next, discussions began regarding where to mark the boundary between Denmark and Schleswig. Bismarck supported Napoleon's suggestion of placing the boundary in accordance with nationality. Denmark received the sympathies of Russell and Palmerston, but once again, with the backing of Queen Victoria, the British cabinet decided against engaging in war on behalf of Denmark.⁷⁶

The British cabinet based its decisions on several factors. Britain regarded France, not Germany, to be the greater risk to its security. Furthermore, Britain could only offer limited assistance due to its placement of roughly 100,000 military personnel in Canada and India.⁷⁷ Finally, Britain could not allow itself to bear the sole burden of defending a treaty that no other signatory desired to fight to maintain.⁷⁸

The London Conference ended June 25. After the conference, Prussia and Austria recommenced the Danish War. Fighting ended July 20, and Prussia and Austria

⁷⁵ Pflanze, 249-250.

⁷⁶ Pflanze, 240-253.

⁷⁷ Sandiford, 115.

⁷⁸ Sandiford, 115.

gained Schleswig, Lauenburg, and Holstein. While the ultimate fate of the duchies remained unresolved, Prussia and Austria agreed to share governing responsibilities of the acquired territories.⁷⁹

The fate of the duchies remained uncertain into 1865. During the summer, Bismarck and Wilhelm traveled to the spa at Gastein. On behalf of Austria's emperor, Count Gustav von Blome traveled to Gastein as well in order to persuade the Prussians to settle differences at a convention between the two powers. Bismarck supported the suggested convention, as he was not ready for a war with Austria. In August, Prussia and Austria came to terms and signed the Convention of Gastein. Prussia acquired the responsibility of administering Schleswig while Austria gained the duty of administering the geographically closer Holstein. Austria declared the situation to be of a temporary nature, while Europe and the smaller German states complained bitterly about the actions of the two powers.⁸⁰

Bismarck's awareness of diplomatic realities had allowed him to use the Danish controversy to Prussia's advantage. Austria's shame following Villafranca and the Peace of Zürich contributed to Austria's aggressiveness. Bismarck worked diligently to improve relations between Prussia and Russia, and he used the Vienna settlement to hinder a joint Anglo-French operation. Conversely, Bismarck portrayed Prussia as a reasonable power that devoted itself to the validity of treaties in order to avoid war

⁷⁹ Sandiford, 112-116.

⁸⁰ Grenville, 254-257.

with Britain. Regarding the Danish War, Lord Palmerston sums up the British position in a letter to future British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone asserting, "It would be well not to be too hard on the Danes. It is true that they were wrong in the Beginning and have been wrong in the End, but they have been most unjustly used by the Germans and the sympathies in the Majority of the House and in the Nation are Danish."⁸¹

⁸¹ Phillip Guedalla, ed., *The Palmerston Papers: Gladstone and Palmerston being the Correspondence of Lord Palmerston with Mr. Gladstone 1851-1865*. Introduction and Commentary by Phillip Guedalla (London and Southampton: The Camelot Press Ltd. and Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1928), 290.

The Gastein Convention and the Austro-Prussian War

During the Vienna Congress of 1814-1815, Austrian statesman Prince Klemens von Metternich strove for justice and a balance of power in creating stability. Although the Danish War did not end Metternich's system or the Vienna settlement, the war demonstrated for the first time the soundness of Bismarck's *Realpolitik* diplomacy. The ideals of fairness and justness, which the Metternich system espoused, extended beyond international relations to include the formation of alliances based upon similarities in domestic policy. Bismarck broke with tradition by not allowing Prussia's institutions to limit his options. He understood revolution posed less of a threat to Prussia than it did in most other countries, but if it did occur, Prussia could squelch it on its own. *Realpolitik* allowed Bismarck to turn on conservative Austria and seek new alliances elsewhere.⁸²

Britain's foreign policy changed after the Danish War. Division existed among the cabinet members. Palmerston remained in power even though Parliament criticized him. After Prussia and Austria's war with Denmark, British foreign policy vacillated. Britain began to shy away from continental affairs, although it did participate in the 1867 Luxemburg guarantee and the 1870 treaties regarding Belgium.⁸³

The Gastein Convention of 1865 irritated both France and Britain. Victoria disapproved of the actions of Prussia and Austria, and she condemned Prussia in

⁸² Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 78-79, 122-130.

⁸³ Millman, 5- 16.

particular. Palmerston agreed with his queen regarding Prussia's actions, although he complained that Victoria changed her opinion from approval to disapproval only because of her concern for the potential for poor treatment of Coburg and other small German states. Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's late husband, originated from the German duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.⁸⁴

Meanwhile, the Gastein Convention bought Bismarck additional time to prepare for the forthcoming showdown with Austria over dominance in the Germanies. Prussia's war with Denmark led Bismarck to believe that he did not have to fear military interference by Russia and Britain. Bismarck also needed France to stay out of the war, and he welcomed the possibility of gaining Italy as an ally.⁸⁵

In October of 1865, Napoleon visited with Bismarck at Biarritz, France. The minister-president wanted to find out who directed French foreign affairs, Napoleon or his conservative Foreign Minister, Drouyn de Lhuys. Bismarck wanted to avoid an Austro-French alliance and feared Drouyn could persuade Napoleon to side with Austria in a war against Prussia. Napoleon, on the other hand, wanted to know whether or not Bismarck had promised Austria the Venetia, which Bismarck claimed that he had not. Therefore, Napoleon promised to refuse an Austro-French alliance. In addition, Bismarck and Napoleon talked about "advantages which might offer themselves

⁸⁴ Mosse, 220-222, 221 n.

⁸⁵ Grenville, 254-257.

unsought.”⁸⁶ The two leaders may have been referring to Luxembourg, Belgium, or territory in the north of Germany. The meeting at Biarritz resulted in Napoleon and Bismarck agreeing to remain unbound to Austria.⁸⁷

After Palmerston’s death in 1865, the position of prime minister went to Russell, while the post of foreign secretary fell to George Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon. Consequently, Britain’s foreign secretary, prime minister, and queen desired to avoid duplicating the mistake of making obligations that could not be fulfilled adequately. After Denmark’s dispossession of the duchies, Britain no longer deemed the issues regarding the duchies as relevant.⁸⁸

Britain continued, however, to give Bismarck difficulty. The so-called “Coburg intrigue” sought peace between Austria and Prussia by causing friction between Wilhelm and Bismarck. Queen Victoria, Wilhelm’s sister, and Duke Ernst of Coburg sought the dismissal of Bismarck. Prussia’s queen dowager, crown princess, and crown prince concurred with their sentiments. Even several of Bismarck’s subordinates, such as Count Albrecht von Bernstorff and Count Albrecht von der Goltz, despised him.⁸⁹

Bismarck had long known of animosity toward him. According to Bismarck, Crown Prince Friedrich disliked him for his advocacy of the Junkers, absolutism, and

⁸⁶ Taylor, *The Struggle for the Mastery in Europe: 1848-1918*, 158-159.

⁸⁷ Taylor, *The Struggle for the Mastery in Europe: 1848-1918*, 158-159.

⁸⁸ Millman, 5-16.

⁸⁹ Pflanze, 294-295.

Russia. The prince married Queen Victoria's daughter, Victoria, in 1858, and within a short time, Bismarck concluded that she lacked confidence in him and disliked him as an individual. The negative view of him by the princess did not entirely surprise him, as he admitted to not adhering to English customs.⁹⁰

The Austrian Empire attempted to gain Britain's favor by reminding Britain of its Eastern commitments. Austria suggested that British neutrality benefited Prussia and warned of the consequences of an Austrian defeat. A Prussian victory, Austria warned, threatened to tip "the balance of power" adversely for Britain. A weakened Austria could not help Britain in preserving the Ottoman Empire or give assistance to Britain regarding Eastern issues. Austria's arguments failed to sway Clarendon. Moreover, he told Austria of his indifference to Bismarck's scheme of annexing the duchies due to Austria's lack of compliance to British wishes during the Danish War.⁹¹

Although Clarendon relished the idea of Austria defeating Prussia in war, he instructed the British ambassador to Berlin, Lord Augustus Loftus, to persuade Bismarck to allow a settlement to occur in a similar fashion as had been done following the Crimean War. Clarendon informed Loftus of his desire to preserve the peace and appeared ready to place the blame on Bismarck if war erupted. He also suggested the possibility of an unfortunate situation where Britain would be forced to engage in war with Prussia. In his characteristic manner, Bismarck did not make any commitments

⁹⁰ Bismarck, Volume I, 163-164.

⁹¹ Millman, 5-16.

regarding the idea of mediation and asserted “that in his opinion there were no means of deciding the difference with Austria but by the sword, and the present was the most favorable opportunity for Prussia, an opportunity which might not again offer itself for a century.”⁹² Clearly, Britain’s foreign policy attempted to frustrate Bismarck’s plans.⁹³

Wilhelm I regarded the British plan to negotiate a peaceful solution between Austria and Prussia more favorably than Bismarck. Lord Loftus informed London that Wilhelm thought better of mediation than war. In his communication with Loftus, Bismarck relented a bit and informed the ambassador that he planned to direct the minister in Britain for Prussia, Count Albrecht von Bernstorff, according to Wilhelm’s wishes. Wilhelm asked his son to write Queen Victoria to persuade her to perform the task of mediation. Clarendon hesitated, however, due to his fear of Prussian intransigence. The memory of British feckless foreign policy during the Danish War affected Clarendon, and he desired to avoid any further damage to Britain’s image in foreign affairs.⁹⁴

Queen Victoria recorded in her journal that she had received a letter from Prussia’s Prince Friedrich seeking her assistance in preserving the peace between Prussia and Austria. In addition, she noted that she had received a letter from her

⁹² Millman, 5-16.

⁹³ Millman, 5-16.

⁹⁴ Millman, 5-16.

daughter in which the princess had described Bismarck as “the wicked man.”⁹⁵ She informed her mother that Wilhelm’s insistence on Friedrich asking Queen Victoria to help resolve the dispute caused Bismarck enormous displeasure.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, Britain continued to pursue peace through conventional diplomatic means. For example, Russell suggested that the Duke of Oldenburg be recognized as the Duke of Schleswig-Holstein. The prime minister desired to maintain the peace because he feared that France stood to gain as a result of a war between Austria and Prussia. Clarendon, however, disagreed and did not think that war was unavoidable. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Gladstone expressed his desire to let Prussia know that Britain disapproved of its actions. Once again, Clarendon refused advice and counted on Wilhelm’s peaceful ambitions.⁹⁷

Bismarck understood that Britain desired peace and attempted to persuade Britain that Austria needed to be blamed for the increased likelihood of war. He did not alter his position, however, of demanding the incorporation of Holstein and Schleswig into Prussia. Bismarck argued that Prussia needed the duchies for military and political purposes. Bismarck failed to change Russell’s mind, who advised Queen Victoria to appeal to an influential person in Prussia to persuade the king to dismiss Bismarck. Victoria relayed the message to her daughter in Prussia, Crown Princess Victoria and her

⁹⁵ Queen Victoria, Second Series. Volume I, 305.

⁹⁶ Queen Victoria, Second Series. Volume I, 305.

⁹⁷ Millman, 5-16.

husband, Crown Prince Frederick, but did not succeed in her efforts. Queen Victoria also received complaints about Bismarck's belligerence from Clarendon. He advised the queen to write to her brother-in-law, the Duke of Coburg, to persuade the Austrian emperor to convey Austria's case to Prussia's king. Clarendon desired to prevent war by working toward Bismarck's removal.⁹⁸

Britain's efforts succeeded in causing friction between Wilhelm and his minister-president. Wilhelm asked Bismarck's advice regarding the letter he had received from the Duke of Coburg. After Bismarck gave the king advice, he went to the newspaper, *Kreuz Zeitung*, which in turn wrote a scathing article about the duke. The king had shared the information with just three people, his son, his wife, and Bismarck. An infuriated Wilhelm reacted by sending a letter to Bismarck accusing him of leaking information to the newspaper. In addition, Wilhelm also accused Bismarck of misleading him into believing that Prussia's government did not hold any power over the *Kreuz Zeitung*. Bismarck defended himself in a letter to the king by asserting that the paper had run a number of negative stories about the duke. He admitted that he went to the *Kreuz Zeitung* but assured Wilhelm that he and his colleagues lacked the power to censor the paper. Bismarck accused the duke of poisoning Britain against

⁹⁸ Millman, 5-16.

Prussia, siding with liberals, and opposing Prussia's army reforms. Wilhelm relented and sent Bismarck a letter accepting his explanation.⁹⁹

On 8 April 1866, Bismarck concluded a "secret alliance" with Italy, completing his political preparations for the looming war with Austria. The alliance expired if three months lapsed after the signing of the alliance and war had not yet commenced. Napoleon attempted to benefit from the outcome of the war by gaining assurances from both German powers. Napoleon wanted the borders that existed before 1815, but he failed to tie down either side. He thought that France could acquire more promises after the war had begun.¹⁰⁰

Bismarck's treaty with Italy not only assisted Prussia militarily, it helped diplomatically as well. Britain required help from the French army in order to force Prussia to acquiesce to its demands for peace. Once again, Britain's reverence for treaties eliminated any chances for British military action. As part of the Vienna settlement, the Venetia had been placed under the rule of the Austrian Empire.¹⁰¹ Britain feared that an understanding with Napoleon required approval for the transfer of the Venetia to Italy, which would be a clear treaty violation. Lacking sway over France or Prussia, Clarendon decided to pressure the Italians into pursuing peace. Italy

⁹⁹ King Wilhelm I, *The Correspondence of William I. & Bismarck with other Letters from and to Prince Bismarck*. Translated by J.A. Ford. Volume I (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company 1903), 60-63.

¹⁰⁰ Grenville, 254-257.

¹⁰¹ King, 316-318.

rejected Clarendon's efforts and responded that it planned to act according to future events.¹⁰²

Shortly after the completion of the secret arrangement between Prussia and Italy, Queen Victoria advocated peace in a letter to King Wilhelm blaming Bismarck for the escalation of tension within the Germanies. She pleaded with Wilhelm, "You are deceived, you are made to believe that you are to be attacked, and I, your true friend and sister, hear your honored name attacked and abused for the faults and recklessness of others—or, rather more, of *one* man!"¹⁰³

Once again, Wilhelm appeared ready to acquiesce. He informed Bismarck of his intentions to disarm. Bismarck wrote to Wilhelm multiple times attempting to persuade him to stand strong claiming Austria wanted a conflict when it had judged itself adequately prepared. Additionally, he argued that Austria's defenses continued to grow, and at the beginning of June, Bismarck wrote Wilhelm claiming Austrian disregard for the Gastein Convention.¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile, Napoleon gained a concrete assurance from Austria and managed to acquire a treaty. Austria pledged to support the establishment of a Rhineland state and France's acquisition of Belgium. Furthermore, Austria agreed to give France the Venetia regardless of the outcome of a war with Prussia and Italy. In return, Austria received a

¹⁰² Millman, 18-20, 24-25.

¹⁰³ Queen Victoria, Second Series. Volume I, 317- 318.

¹⁰⁴ King Wilhelm I, Volume I, 63- 67.

vow of neutrality. In addition, France committed to Austria's objectives regarding Germany as long as "the European equilibrium" remained undisturbed; France declined, however, to guarantee approval for Austria's designs on Silesia.¹⁰⁵

Regarding the other states of Germany, Bismarck did not attempt to gain allies and reasoned that Prussia would possess greater justification in annexing territory from states if they stood in opposition. Bismarck proposed changes to the Confederation, such as the creation of a parliament for the Germanies with members selected by way of universal voting rights. Bismarck's plan threatened to undermine the power of the princes of the Confederation.¹⁰⁶

Bismarck advocated universal voting rights for several reasons. It could yield pro-government majorities by pacifying nationalistic liberals. It could weaken the particularism of the other German states as well as diminish their incentive to take up arms against Prussia. Diplomatically, it could cement the secret understanding Bismarck had with Napoleon III as well as the covert agreement Prussia maintained with Italy. Most importantly, Bismarck sought to embrace nationalism by instituting universal manhood voting rights as he knew the multinational Austrian Empire could not support such a policy. In the event of war, Bismarck intended to use the nationalistic sentiment of Slavs, Hungarians, and Italians against the Austrians.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Pflanze, 301-302.

¹⁰⁶ Grenville, 254-258.

¹⁰⁷ Pflanze, 306-309.

Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Alexander von Mensdorff, judged Bismarck's plan of equal, direct, and universal suffrage for males to be "either revolutionary or an unworthy toying with the German reform question."¹⁰⁸ British statesmen worried about the ramifications of Bismarck's suggestion regarding the British debate on Gladstone's own plan of reform, which did not go as far as Bismarck's proposal. Prussia's ambassador to Britain reported that the British assessed Bismarck's move to be "completely revolutionary."¹⁰⁹ The Germanies and Austria feared the masses and decided to put off any call for "a national parliament" by demanding that the states of the Confederation come to an understanding in advance over what issues could be debated in such a parliament.¹¹⁰

Austria, on the other hand, courted the other German states, seeking to repair the distrust created by its disregard of the Confederation in its handling of the duchies. After gaining an agreement with Napoleon, Austria resigned itself to war. Austria planned to gain allies by granting the Confederation the right to decide the future of the duchies. In addition, Austria went further in its attempt to gain support for its cause by planning to inquire the opinion of Holstein. Bismarck feared that an assembly of Holstein's Estates would likely choose the Duke of Augustenburg as its ruler eliminating Prussia's plan for the duchy. Before the Danish War, Prussia and Austria signed a treaty stipulating that the duchies' future would be decided by the two signatories, which the

¹⁰⁸ Pflanze, 306-309.

¹⁰⁹ Pflanze, 306-309.

¹¹⁰ Pflanze, 306-309.

Gastein Convention later fulfilled. Austria's actions assisted Bismarck in swaying Wilhelm to abandon his pursuit of peace. Bismarck distributed a notice denouncing Austria's actions, and the *Staatsanzeiger* printed the portion of the 1864 treaty, which maintained that Austria and Prussia planned to act together in respects to the duchies. The scheduling of 11 June for the assembling of the Holstein Estates convinced Wilhelm to halt his peace efforts. Wilhelm concluded:

Austria has torn up the Treaty of Gastein and handed over the Diet the question of the Duchies, which ought to be settled by us and not by the Diet at all; she has laid herself open to the charges of perfidy, lying, and breach of treaty . . . I have wrestled with my God in prayer in order to know His will and at every step I have acted as my conscience dictated and for the honor of Prussia.¹¹¹

Queen Victoria recorded in her journal that Clarendon informed her of the inevitability of war due to Austria's actions regarding Holstein, but she seemed more concerned for her daughter in Prussia than the implications that war might have for Britain.¹¹² Finally, Wilhelm acted and authorized the military to occupy Austrian-held Holstein.¹¹³

During the war, the Conservatives won power in Britain. The post of prime minister went to Edward Smith-Stanley, 14th Earl of Derby. His son, Edward Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby became the new foreign minister replacing Clarendon. In July, the foreign

¹¹¹ Heinrich Friedjung, *The Struggle for Supremacy in Germany 1859-1866*. Translated by A. J. P. Taylor and W. L. McElwee (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 186-190.

¹¹² Queen Victoria, Second Series. Volume I, 332-333.

¹¹³ Friedjung, 186-190.

secretary accepted a French offer to advocate an armistice but reserved the right to decline if the action aggravated Prussia. In addition, Austria asked Britain to help in establishing an armistice. Furthermore, Russia did not want to be left out and wanted a congress in order to validate alterations to the Vienna settlement, which it had been apart. Stanley, however, refused any more connection to the conflict. After the war began, Britain hoped the war would be over quickly to keep Russia and France from participating and strengthening their positions. A strengthened Prussia could serve as a buffer to Russia and France. A “Seven-Weeks’ War” satisfied British objectives.¹¹⁴

In addition to her Prussian connections, Queen Victoria had other relatives in Germany as she belonged to the House of Hanover and was a cousin of that German kingdom’s ruler, George V. The Vienna settlement had turned Hanover into a kingdom, which made the Hanoverian elector, King George III of Britain and Ireland, king of Hanover as well. When Victoria ascended the British throne, she could not take the throne of Hanover as Hanover barred women from ruling. A son of George III, Ernest Augustus took the throne of Hanover and kept his former title, allowing his son to ascend to the throne as George V.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Millman, 30-37.

¹¹⁵ Hans A. Schmitt, “Prussia’s Last Fling: The Annexation of Hanover, Hesse, Frankfurt, and Nassau, June 15 – October 8, 1866,” *Central European History* 8, no. 4 (Brill Academic Publishers: December 1975): 316- 348, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=21c0d9b4-39e1-438b-ae4-d3217fe33dee%40sessionmgr112&vid=3&hid=110> (accessed August 2, 2012); and “A Broken Link,” *Time* 2, no. 13 (November 26, 1923): 10, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?sid=e36ce54b-9bd7-4698-a5c9-479b3e60e638%40sessionmgr114&vid=4&hid=119&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWVhc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=a9h&AN=54744105> (accessed August 4, 2012).

Another cousin to Queen Victoria, Prince George, Duke of Cambridge, wrote to the British queen attempting to persuade the queen to do something to protect Hanover. He reminded her relatives and friends in the German lands and that he was behind Hanover's heir apparent in the line of succession. Unfortunately for the duke, Queen Victoria wrote back the next day on July 8th that even though she agreed with him regarding the appalling actions by Prussia. She advised him to appeal to Lord Stanley and Lord Derby assuring him that Prussia did not plan to add Hanover to its kingdom.¹¹⁶

Prussia defeated Austria in a matter of weeks with a decisive victory at the Battle of Königgrätz. Despite the assurances from Napoleon, during the war Bismarck worried about intervention, especially from France. His fear may have led to his leniency with Austria in concluding the war. Italy and Prussia received an invitation from Napoleon to allow him to mediate, informing both nations that Austria had given the Venetia to France. Later in the month, Bismarck participated in a raucous meeting with the generals and the king that left Bismarck crying in another room. Bismarck did not want to force Austria to relinquish territory to Prussia. The king and the generals wanted to annex territory, especially Austrian land in Bohemia. However, Bismarck succeeded in persuading the king to accept his lenient policy of refraining to force Austria to

¹¹⁶ Queen Victoria, Second Series. Volume I, 356-357.

relinquish territory and only requiring the Austrians to agree to exit the Germany Confederation.¹¹⁷

Bismarck limited Prussian gains after the war with Austria due to diplomatic considerations with France. Napoleon desired Prussian expansion, but he did not desire a unified Germany with which to compete. Before the war, Bismarck conveyed to France his wish to halt Prussian expansion at the Main River, and that he desired Prussia to gain dominance over the rest of northern Germany. Stopping at the Main River allowed Napoleon to claim some consolation in 1866.¹¹⁸

General Helmuth von Moltke's quick defeat of Austria enabled Bismarck to gain larger rewards for Prussia as a result of the conflict. France, Britain, and Russia lacked time to plan a military or a diplomatic intervention. Time also factored in France's failure to occupy land along the Rhine. The army's speed in defeating Austria allowed Prussia to avoid intervention from Britain and Russia, despite the fact that both powers regarded Prussia's annexations as violations of the Vienna settlement. Bismarck understood that Britain was preoccupied with other areas of the world, especially areas pertaining to its empire, lessening the likelihood of British intervention.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Grenville, 258-263.

¹¹⁸ Pflanze, 367-379.

¹¹⁹ Geoffrey Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War: Austria's War with Prussia and Italy in 1866* (New York and Cambridge, 1996), 282-283.

British economist John Maynard Keynes commented that German unification resulted “more by coal and iron than by blood and iron.”¹²⁰ Prussia improved its financial situation as a result of the 1834 establishment of the *Zollverein*, and the prosperity allowed Prussia to gain key advantages over Austria, which did not belong to the *Zollverein*. Prussia’s rail lines grew rapidly in the years following the *Zollverein*’s establishment, and its railways assisted in the rapid mobilization its army. Railways, banks, and the *Zollverein* assisted in increasing Prussia’s coal production, which generated money for Prussia’s government. The increased funds and Bismarck’s support of Roon’s reforms assisted Prussia in financing an army that enlarged dramatically and gained efficiency. Additionally, Prussia financed the “Dreyse needle-gun,” which Austria declined to do because “of cost.”¹²¹

After the Austro- Prussian War, Britain lacked the will to exert itself on the continent, except to protect the independence of the Low Countries from foreign encroachments. Outside of the ordinary means of diplomacy, however, Britain attempted to frustrate Bismarck through its royal connections on the continent. Britain failed in its efforts against Prussia’s minister-president, but it could gain satisfaction

¹²⁰ Robert Pearce, “The Austro-Prussian War,” *History Review* no. 66 (March 2010): 26-31, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?sid=a5bd20d6-a2aa-4535-b0a1-bbe9366cb042%40sessionmgr115&vid=7&hid=110&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=a9h&AN=48351837> (accessed August 2, 2012).

¹²¹ Robert Pearce, “The Austro-Prussian War,” *History Review* no. 66 (March 2010): 26-31, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?sid=a5bd20d6-a2aa-4535-b0a1-bbe9366cb042%40sessionmgr115&vid=7&hid=110&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=a9h&AN=48351837> (accessed August 2, 2012).

from the fact that neither France nor Prussia gained territory at the expense of the Low Countries. Prussia's defeat of Austria ended the German Confederation, and those relevant portions of the Vienna settlement. Britain and the other non-combatant powers expected to have a say in establishing changes in the European power structure. Compared to other countries, France had the most to lose by an expansion of Prussia due to its sharing of a border with Prussia. Prussia's victory over Austria led France to seek the acquisition of Luxemburg and Belgium. Bismarck allowed France to believe that Prussia supported France's acquisition of Luxemburg and Belgium, while managing to avoid commitments.¹²²

¹²² Pflanze, 367-379.

Conferences, Guarantees, and the Franco-Prussian War

Shortly before becoming minister-president in 1862, Bismarck told Disraeli, "As soon as the army shall have been brought into such a condition as to inspire respect, I shall seize the first best pretext to declare war against Austria, dissolve the German Diet, subdue the minor States, and give national unity to Germany under Prussian leadership."¹²³ Prussia won the Austro-Prussian War and annexed Frankfurt-am-Main, Nassau, Hesse-Kassel, Hannover, Holstein, and Schleswig. Additionally, Bismarck ended the German Confederation, which had been set up by the Vienna settlement. He formed the North German Confederation out of Mecklenburg, Hesse-Darmstadt, Saxony, Bremen, Lübeck, Hamburg, and the duchies of Thuringia. Furthermore, the Austro-Prussian War pleased Prussian liberals, which allowed Bismarck to request and receive a vote acknowledging the crown's illegal expenditures and to end the constitutional dispute.¹²⁴ While Bismarck's efforts gained him support among Germans, he angered Napoleon III who called on Prussia to approve France's 1814 frontiers and to scrap the remainder of the Vienna settlement. In order to isolate France, Bismarck sought to damage Anglo-French relations by dangling the possibility of territorial expansion before Napoleon.¹²⁵

¹²³ Count Charles Frederick Vitzthum von Eckstaedt, *St. Petersburg and London in the Years 1852-1864*. Edited with a Preface by Henry Reeve, C. B., D. C. L. Translated by Edward Fairfax Taylor. Volume II (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1887), 172.

¹²⁴ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 90-91.

¹²⁵ Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14-18.

Even though Britain and France fought together during the Crimean War, treaty obligations had continuously caused ill will between the two powers. Napoleon III had complained about the Vienna settlement before becoming emperor, and he continued to rail against the self-interested foreign policies of Britain. He argued that Britain had required France to “recognize the treaties of 1815,” among other demands, in return for its support of Louis Philippe in 1830.¹²⁶

In addition, Napoleon’s seemingly harmless title change undertaken at the end of 1852, from President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte to Emperor Napoleon III, challenged the Vienna settlement. The 1815 Quadruple Alliance had stipulated that it planned to oppose France if Napoleon Bonaparte, a member of his family, or his descendants gained power in France. His claim to be an emperor, in spite of the fact that Napoleon had initially gained power via election, contributed to the alienation of European monarchs. France’s recognition of the Duke of Reichstadt as Napoleon II caused additional displeasure, as it implied that France did not recognize the dynastic restoration of the House of Bourbon.¹²⁷

In contrast to France, Britain worried little about Prussia. Before Bismarck ascended to the post of minister-president, the *Times* claimed, “Prussia unaided would

¹²⁶ Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, *The Political and Historical Works of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, President of the French Republic. Now First Collected with an Original Memoir of his Life, Brought Down to the Promulgation of the Constitution of 1852; and Occasional Notes*. Volume II (New York: H. Fertig, 1972), 175-177.

¹²⁷ J. A. S. Grenville, *Europe Reshaped, 1848-1878* (Oxford, UK; Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 148-150.

not keep the Rhine or the Vistula for a month.”¹²⁸ In spite of the *Times*’ assessment, Prussia gained control over a vast amount of territory as a result of the Austro-Prussian War. Moreover, the acquisition of about seven million people added to Prussia’s power.¹²⁹

Following the Austro-Prussian War, the King of the Netherlands, William III, agreed to give Luxemburg to France for five million gulden, pending approval by Wilhelm I of Prussia.¹³⁰ Bismarck sought the assistance of Russia and Britain in pressuring William III to refuse signing a treaty with France. Lord Stanley, Britain’s foreign secretary managed to refrain from creating any obligations for London. Count Albrecht von Bernstorff, Prussia’s ambassador to Britain, received instructions from Bismarck to learn Britain’s intentions if war broke out between France and Prussia. Bismarck warned that if Britain failed to support Prussia, Britain faced the possibility of Belgium’s loss of independence, and Prussia allying with France against the wishes of public opinion in Germany. Belgium’s security bothered Stanley, but he nonetheless avoided pledging support to either Prussia or France.¹³¹

Fortunately for Bismarck, William III decided against signing the treaty. Having failed, France desired a quick resolution to the matter and suggested that Luxemburg be

¹²⁸ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 14-18.

¹²⁹ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 14-18.

¹³⁰ Pflanze, 367-379.

¹³¹ Pflanze, 377-388.

neutralized and for Prussia to remove its garrison, in return for France's giving up its pursuit of Luxemburg. Once again Bismarck delayed coming to a final agreement. He knew he had scored political points with German nationalists, and he wanted to keep the momentum while he worked with governments of the southern German states and the Reichstag. He used neutral Britain as a way to buy the time he desired, letting it know that he approved holding a conference of the powers to settle the dispute.¹³²

Bismarck finally agreed to the conference twenty-one days after the decision by William III. Even so, the Luxemburg situation and the buying of time fell short of generating the gains Bismarck expected in his work with the other German governments. The four-day conference in London recognized William III's sovereignty and ordered the destruction of the Luxemburg fortress, the removal of Prussia's garrison, and the neutralization of Luxemburg.¹³³

Following the spat over Luxembourg, France and Prussia focused their attention on the region south of the Main. Prussia dominated the North German Confederation by operating a large portion of the domestic activities for members as well as directing members' military and foreign decisions. Not surprisingly, Napoleon wanted to restrain Prussia from drawing closer to the south German states of Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria. The three states could increase Prussia's resources, soldiers, and population as well as give Prussia a geographic advantage. If Prussia gained southern Germany, it

¹³² Pflanze, 377-388.

¹³³ Pflanze, 377-388.

could invade France along a wide line stretching from Luxembourg to Alsace-Lorraine. After all, Prussia had defeated Austria in a similar manner. Aware of France's predicament, Napoleon informed Britain: "I can only guarantee the peace of Europe so long as Bismarck respects the present state of affairs. If he draws the South German states into the North German Confederation, our guns will go off of themselves."¹³⁴

Meanwhile, Bismarck attempted to use Britain to extend Prussia's influence in the south by way of the elections to the parliament of the *Zollverein*. This development angered Napoleon, as he viewed it as a flagrant violation of his 1866 demand that Prussia abstain from consolidating the south with Prussia.¹³⁵ The war with Austria left a need to renegotiate the *Zollverein* treaties with the governments of the south. Bismarck had hinted at ending the *Zollverein* treaties with the south in the treaties ending the Austro-Prussian War. The south needed the economic benefits of the *Zollverein* and desired a restoration of the treaties. Bismarck hoped to benefit from the south's need to remain in the *Zollverein*, allowing him to acquire an agreement with the south German governments on the creation of a *Zollverein* parliament. Bismarck strove to affect the Württemberg elections in a way favorable to Prussia and appealed to Russia, France, and Britain complaining of the "revolutionary" nature of the situation, but his efforts fell short, with his "German party" failing to gain a single seat out of

¹³⁴ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 14-18.

¹³⁵ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 23.

Württemberg's seventeen, a significant setback in exerting Prussian influence over the south.¹³⁶

In addition, Bismarck received another setback after the British elections of 1868. The Liberals defeated the Conservatives, and Lord Stanley's position as Britain's foreign minister reverted to Lord Clarendon. Though not publicly, Queen Victoria had opposed the selection of Lord Clarendon due to what she perceived as his negative attitude toward the unification of the Germanies. Lacking a suitable alternative, however, Victoria ended her protest against Clarendon and allowed him to take office. Potentially disruptive to Bismarck's plans, Clarendon favored France over Prussia.¹³⁷

Clarendon's support of France derived from his goal of frustrating Russia in the East. Even on Eastern matters, the potential for British and French antagonism existed. France favored the khedive in Egypt, while Britain supported the sultan of the Ottoman Empire. The foreign minister sensed that the sultan feared Russian ambition and that any Russian support for the sultan over the Egyptian khedive could not endure for long. He also understood that Britain needed France to oppose Russia. Therefore, Clarendon valued France's cooperation more than sustaining Britain's close association with the Ottoman Turks.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Pflanze, 388-395.

¹³⁷ Milman, 110-114.

¹³⁸ William Mulligan, "Britain, the 'German revolution', and the fall of France, 1870/1," *Historical Research* 84, no. 224 (Blackwell Publishers Ltd.: May 2011): 310- 328, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=15576dcc-27ba-47ed-8806-3cced44e0534%40sessionmgr115&vid=3&hid=110> (accessed August 2, 2012).

In the first international controversy for the new British government, Clarendon frustrated Bismarck. Tension between Turkey and Greece arose over Crete, and Clarendon wanted peace by working with Russia and France in resolving the problem. Not wanting to be left out, Bismarck suggested a conference attended by six countries. To Clarendon's chagrin, French Foreign Minister Gorchakov and French Foreign Minister Charles La Valette approved of the idea. Clarendon finally agreed after Turkey failed to voice its disapproval, as Austria and Italy also consented. The conference that deliberated in Paris concluded at the beginning of 1869, but contrary to Bismarck's strategy, Britain and France appeared to improve their working relations.¹³⁹

Nevertheless, Bismarck once again attempted to use Britain in his unifying efforts. In order to help his efforts at unifying Germany, Bismarck pushed Wilhelm to use "Kaiser" as his title.¹⁴⁰ Starting January 1, 1872, under the constitution of the North German Confederation, the "iron budget" could be evaluated by the Reichstag.¹⁴¹ Voters had two opportunities to go to the polls in 1870, and Bismarck needed majorities in the Reichstag. After Lord Clarendon found out about Bismarck's plan for Wilhelm to adopt the title of Kaiser, he told Bernstorff that he approved the idea and planned to persuade France to accept the new title as well. Clarendon, however, failed to keep his word. Later in January, he wrote to Berlin and commented that the Kaiser title would

¹³⁹ Millman, 110-114.

¹⁴⁰ Pflanze, 388-395, 431-433.

¹⁴¹ Pflanze, 388-395, 431-435.

anger France and that any threat of war should be avoided over something that would eventually occur, namely, German unification.¹⁴²

Bismarck continued to fear an alliance between Britain and France because he wanted to keep Britain's superb navy from joining France's strong army. Prussia's relationship with Russia continued on amiable terms. France's Foreign Minister, Duke Antoine Agénor de Gramont, counted on military assistance from other countries, but he failed to gain anything binding or meaningful. His false suppositions included Russian desire to frustrate German unification, Italian appreciation for the Franco-Austrian War, and Danish desire for the reclamation of Schleswig. In addition, Napoleon clung to the idea that an alliance existed between Austria and France, although the two countries lacked common concerns and failed to possess anything in writing.¹⁴³

Meanwhile, Belgium played a key role in the strategy of both Britain and Prussia. Bismarck attempted to gain British support by claiming that France intended to take Belgium. Even though Lord Clarendon favored France, Belgium played an essential role in British planning and thwarted Clarendon's pro-French inclinations.¹⁴⁴

Prussia also worried about Belgium, as General Helmuth von Moltke wrote about Belgium's importance to Prussia's defense in 1860. The general asserted that France needed Belgium in order to regain Rhine territory, which Napoleon wanted. Moltke

¹⁴² Pflanze, 388-395, 431-435.

¹⁴³ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 33-40; and Pflanze, 434-445.

¹⁴⁴ Millman, 110-114.

maintained that Prussia needed to prepare for an attack by France through Belgium. By the time of the Franco- Prussian War, his assessment had changed, and he considered an attack through Belgium by France as unlikely. He asserted, “Not counting political difficulties with England, the violation of Belgium’s neutrality offers too little hope of success to be probable.”¹⁴⁵ Both assessments, however, display Prussia’s knowledge of Belgian importance to the making of British policy.¹⁴⁶

Moltke’s shift may be attributed to a dispute in Belgium involving rail companies. Belgium enacted a law concerning railways in 1869 out of fear that the French government wanted to control lines in Luxemburg and Belgium by funding a private French line, the Compagnie de l’Est. Therefore, Belgium outlawed transactions involving rail companies that lacked its approval. La Valette told Britain’s ambassador in France, Lord Richard Lyons, that he blamed Bismarck for starting the crisis. The episode concluded during the summer of 1870, as France succumbed to the tactful pressure applied by Clarendon, and France peacefully settled its dispute with Belgium.¹⁴⁷

The death of Lord Clarendon on June 27, 1870, appeared to be a fortunate break for Bismarck. Clarendon had opposed Bismarck and the unification of the Germanies. In early July, Lord George Granville replaced Clarendon. Even though Britain’s Prime

¹⁴⁵ Helmuth Karl Bernhard, Graf von Moltke, *Strategy; Its Theory and Application: The Wars for German Unification, 1866- 1871*. A reprint of a compilation of three different monographs published in translation (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971), 27-39, 159.

¹⁴⁶ Moltke, 27-39, 159.

¹⁴⁷ Millman, 123-144.

Minister William Gladstone approved of Clarendon's replacement, Granville tended to act with caution and to concern himself with propriety.¹⁴⁸

Shortly thereafter, another scheme Bismarck had been concocting exploded. In July, Prince Leopold von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen accepted Spain's offer to assume the throne. Spain had been without a monarch since 1868 when Queen Isabella fled the country, and in 1869, an agent for Spain asked Prince Leopold to accept the Spanish crown. Regarding Spain, Britain had worried more about Portugal's autonomy and the security of Gibraltar than it did about the Hohenzollern controversy.¹⁴⁹ Spain viewed the Hohenzollern prince favorably for multiple reasons. Leopold had married a princess from Portugal, and he belonged to the Catholic Church. In addition, Leopold possessed family connections to both Napoleon III and Wilhelm I. The prince could trace his ancestry back to Napoleon Bonaparte through an adoption the emperor had made, and Leopold's uncle continued to reign as Wilhelm I of Prussia.¹⁵⁰

Both Wilhelm and Leopold initially questioned the wisdom of assenting to the Spanish proposition. The king and prince wanted to protect the Hohenzollern prestige and viewed the offer as risky due to the disgraceful example set by Spain and its previous ruler. Bismarck, however, viewed it as another opportunity to antagonize Napoleon by surrounding France with Hohenzollerns in Spain and Germany. During the

¹⁴⁸ Millman, 174-179.

¹⁴⁹ Millman, 174-179.

¹⁵⁰ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 33-40.

spring of 1870, the minister-president wrote to the father of Prince Leopold encouraging him to consent to the offer on his son's behalf. Leopold acquiesced, and France learned of his decision in early July.¹⁵¹

Bismarck departed Prussia's capital on July 5th to vacation at his Varzin estate. An ambassador from America, Elihu Washburne, noted that day, "Never did the peace of Europe seem better assured."¹⁵² During the morning, however, Berlin's ambassador to France, Baron Karl von Werther, met with Foreign Minister Gramont, who angrily accused Prussia of "intolerable malice and recklessness," regarding Spain's monarchy and by the acceptance by Prince Leopold.¹⁵³ The news of Prince Leopold's decision shocked Wilhelm as well. When he received the news while vacationing at Bad Ems, the king exclaimed, "I owe this mess to Bismarck," and he continued by asserting, "He has cooked it up like so many others."¹⁵⁴

Napoleon had appointed Gramont in order to take a firm stand against Bismarck and Prussia. Gramont had indicated his desire to eradicate the treaties Prussia had entered into in 1866, by war if necessary. Gramont wanted to reverse the decision of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen princes and requested diplomatic support from the Italian and British governments. Much like it had done during the Austro-Prussian War,

¹⁵¹ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 33-40.

¹⁵² Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 33-40.

¹⁵³ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 33-40.

¹⁵⁴ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 33-40.

Britain wanted to preserve peace on the continent, and its efforts played a role in the rejection of the Spanish throne by Prince Leopold and his father. In addition, Werther and Wilhelm exerted their influence over Leopold's father who eventually rescinded the assent on behalf of Prince Leopold. The British ambassador to Paris, however, warned Gramont about pursuing the matter further and claimed, "I pointed out [to Gramont] that the Prussian renunciation wholly changed the position of France. If war broke out now, all Europe would say that it was the fault of France, that France rushed in from pride and resentment."¹⁵⁵

The reversal displeased Bismarck who learned of the news on a train headed back to the capital. Fortunately for the minister-president, Gramont refused to let go of the crisis, as he pressed for a diplomatic victory over the Prussians. The foreign minister ordered Benedetti to obtain from Wilhelm a guarantee and a signature that Prussia agreed forever to refrain from influencing any other searches of a Spanish monarch and for Wilhelm to admit to his role in reversing Prince Leopold's decision. In addition, Gramont wanted to publish the document. Lacking knowledge of Gramont's scheme, Wilhelm approached Benedetti on the morning of July 13 to applaud what he thought had been the peaceful conclusion of the Spanish affair. Predictably, Benedetti

¹⁵⁵ Lawrence D. Steefel, *Bismarck, The Hohenzollern Candidacy, and the Origins of The Franco-German War of 1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.), 121-122, 171-172; and Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871*, 33-40.

upset and shocked Wilhelm, and after the encounter, the king refused to meet anymore with Benedetti for the rest of the day.¹⁵⁶

Bismarck learned of the episode after he had returned to Berlin from Varzin, and the news uplifted his disheartened spirits. Bismarck received the Bad Ems telegram from Wilhelm, while sharing a meal with Roon and Moltke. In the event of war, Bismarck wanted to defer the job of declaring war to France in order to restrain the powers from taking action and to take advantage of the alliance agreements he had hammered out with the German governments in the south. Bismarck took the “Ems dispatch” and eliminated much of the tactful wording.¹⁵⁷ When Moltke read Bismarck’s finished product, he said to Bismarck, “Now the telegram has a different ring...[not] a parley, but a response to a challenge.”¹⁵⁸

The minister-president sent the Ems dispatch to newspapers in Germany and to the foreign embassies of Prussia. Bismarck’s action produced what he wanted. Napoleon called out the reserves, and Prime Minister Émile Ollivier delivered a bombastic speech in the French state house. After approving military expenditures, France issued a declaration of war on July 19, 1870.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 33-40.

¹⁵⁷ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 33-40.

¹⁵⁸ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 33-40.

¹⁵⁹ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 33-40, 65.

Soon after war ensued, Prussia tried to exert influence on Britain. Bismarck pointed out to British newspapers the disadvantages Prussia faced as a result of British neutrality. He complained that even though Britain sold supplies to both countries, France possessed the advantages of shipping and geography. Therefore, due to British neutrality, France had an edge over Prussia in obtaining British ammunition, coal, and horses. On July 30, however, Prussia received a report from its ambassador in Britain that warned not to exert too much pressure on Britain, in particular, Granville. He lacked adverse bias, but if Prussia continued to badger the foreign minister, he might turn hostile. Additionally, in the unlikely event of his fall, his replacement had a high probability of holding a more belligerent position toward Prussia than Granville.¹⁶⁰

Shortly after Prussia received the report on Britain, the issue of Belgium resurfaced. Prussia informed Britain of the treaty Benedetti had supposedly drawn up and left with Prussia to contemplate. Bernstorff informed Granville and Gladstone that Benedetti had offered the treaty to Prussia on two separate occasions, the second occurring as recently as 1869. Granville and Gladstone doubted the story. In a letter to his cousin, Queen Victoria, King Leopold II of Belgium, suggested that France and Prussia proclaim publicly their intention to abide by the 1839 treaty in order for Britain to remain neutral. She received another letter from the Belgian king when Bismarck

¹⁶⁰ Dr. Moritz Busch, *Bismarck: Some Secret Pages of his History*, Volume II. Republished by Scholarly Press, Inc., 22929 Industrial Drive East St. Clair Shores, Michigan 48080. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1898 (London: Macmillan & Co., LTD, 1898), 40-43.

informed Belgium's diplomat in Prussia about the draft treaty. Leopold's tone had shifted decidedly against France, claiming that it wanted "to dominate the world."¹⁶¹

Bernstorff failed to sway Gladstone and Granville, as both distrusted Bismarck as well as Napoleon III. Bismarck continued maneuvering and casting aspersions on France by instructing a Prussian diplomat to relay the story to a newspaper in London, the *Times*. The paper's editor judged the treaty as genuine and published Benedetti's treaty. The queen desired answers from France, but once again Granville and Gladstone remained unmoved. In addition, Wilhelm wrote to Britain asking for military assistance but to no avail. The *Times'* story, however, affected Parliament, and Disraeli demanded a policy of "armed neutrality."¹⁶²

The cabinet wanted to do something without involving itself in war. It decided upon a compromise policy, requesting each of the warring countries to inform Britain of their intentions toward Belgium in addition to vowing to participate in its defense if attacked. France hesitated, but after its military setbacks at Worth and Weissenburg in early August, the French attitude shifted. On the ninth, Prussia signed a treaty with Britain securing Belgium, and France entered into a similar treaty with Britain on the eleventh.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Millman, 199-218.

¹⁶² Millman, 199-218.

¹⁶³ Millman, 199-218.

After Sedan, France continued fighting under a new provisional government, and its new foreign minister, Jules Favre, wanted an armistice but without the loss of French land. Britain requested Prussia to enter into negotiations with France, but Bismarck declined, replying that he needed assurance of the intentions of the French military to comply with any agreements entered into by Prussia and France's provisional government. In addition, France's new Prime Minister, Adolphe Thiers, went to London in order to ask Britain for help in obtaining an armistice, but Granville declined, pointing to Prussia's lack of desire for mediation. Thiers did manage to persuade Granville to set up a meeting between Bismarck and Favre. At the meeting, Bismarck requested Verdun, Toul, and Strasbourg before he would agree to an armistice, but Favre rejected the minister-president's terms.¹⁶⁴

At the end of September and shortly after Favre's meeting with the minister-president, Bismarck asked for Alsace-Lorraine. Favre demanded the powers to back France militarily, and three days later, on September 30, the British cabinet convened to consider the matter. The cabinet refused Favre's request, but the cabinet continued to deliberate as a result of memorandum presented by the prime minister. Gladstone opposed the transfer for the sake of the people living in the area and wanted the non-combatant powers to unite in condemning the annexation, but the foreign secretary

¹⁶⁴ Millman, 199-218.

could not be moved. Granville and the cabinet rejected the prime minister's proposal.¹⁶⁵

Military events continued to shape diplomacy as the Prussians defeated the French and captured Napoleon III at Sedan in early September. At the end of September, Italian troops took Rome, and by plebiscite, the Romans voted to join Italy and complete its unification.¹⁶⁶

Following the battle of Sedan, however, Britain faced a new problem. Russia decided in September to proclaim an end to Russian adherence to the Black Sea Clauses of the 1856 Treaty of Paris; which Russia did on Halloween. Bismarck had wanted Russia to build ships and wait for a reaction by the powers, but Russia simply desired to announce its disavowal of the clauses. Whether the announcement concerned Britain or not, Russia's action awoke Britain to fact that their primary partner in upholding the Treaty of Paris, France, no longer held value. Furthermore, Gladstone had never approved of the restrictions placed on Russia regarding the Black Sea, but he did support the idea that changes or the elimination of an international agreement required the consent of the international community. In addition, Gladstone wanted to uphold his party's position within the cabinet, which opposed "the unilateral breaking of treaties."¹⁶⁷ In a memorandum by Gladstone on November 10, the prime minister warned against the

¹⁶⁵ Millman, 199-218.

¹⁶⁶ Mosse, 355 n.

¹⁶⁷ Barbara Jelavich, *The Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers, and the Straits Question, 1870-1887* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973), 33.

establishment of a dangerous “doctrine” and suggested that Russia’s action would lead to “the certain destruction of Treaties in their essence.”¹⁶⁸ Even though Gladstone desired to avoid war, British diplomat Lord Odo Russell informed Bismarck of Britain’s intent to take military action “for the sanctity of treaties with or without allies.”¹⁶⁹

Russia’s demands assured Britain of its policy of “strict neutrality” for the remainder of the Franco-Prussian War. After ensuring Belgium’s protection, Britain worried about the possibility of other countries joining the hostilities. After the early Prussian victories, the chances of Austria, Italy, or Denmark entering on the side of France diminished. More than Gladstone, Granville wanted to avoid intervention. Unlike the prime minister, Granville feared the United States joining Prussia in a war against Britain. Granville’s concerns led Britain to safeguard itself by addressing American grievances resulting in the signing of the Treaty of Washington in 1871, which called for arbitration to settle mutual concerns and acknowledging Britain’s “violations of international law.”¹⁷⁰

In his diary entry of November 19, Lord Stanley commented on British public opinion and asserted, “We don’t wish to fight, but if this announcement is meant as a

¹⁶⁸ Agatha Ramm, ed., *The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville 1868-1876*. Volume I, 1868-71 (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1952), 154-156.

¹⁶⁹ Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, 210-216; Jelavich, *The Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers, and the Straits Question, 1870-1887*, 33; and Millman, 199-218.

¹⁷⁰ William Mulligan, “Britain, the ‘German revolution’, and the fall of France, 1870/1,” *Historical Research* 84, no. 224 (Blackwell Publishers Ltd.: May 2011): 310- 328, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=15576dcc-27ba-47ed-8806-3cced44e0534%40sessionmgr115&vid=3&hid=110> (accessed August 2, 2012); and Millman, 199-218.

challenge we cannot refuse it.”¹⁷¹ He also observed that several British newspapers, *Pall Mall* and the *Standard*, urged Britain to wage war, and the *Standard* more specifically urged Britain to side with France. Stanley also worried that Russia could gravely endanger Britain by embarking on a program of building American-style ironclads.¹⁷²

Because of the Black Sea controversy, another conference convened in London in 1871, and it began by proclaiming, “that it is an essential principle of the law of nations that no Power can liberate itself from the engagements of a treaty, nor modify the stipulations thereof, unless with the consent of the contracting Powers, by means of an amicable arrangement.”¹⁷³ A day after the conference’s announcement, on 18 January 1871 Wilhelm I assumed the title, *Deutscher Kaiser* (German Emperor). The following month France acceded to the Prussian request for Alsace-Lorraine at the conference in London. In March, the London Conference produced a treaty eliminating the Black Sea Clauses fulfilling a dream of Tsar Alexander II of Russia.¹⁷⁴ The Franco-

¹⁷¹ John Vincent, ed., *A Selection from The Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826-93) Between September 1869 and March 1878*. Printed and bound in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society University College London, Gower Street WCI, 1994), 70.

¹⁷² Vincent, ed., 70.

¹⁷³ Mosse, 355-358.

¹⁷⁴ Mosse, 355-358.

Prussian War officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt on May 10, 1871, and Prussia gained Alsace-Lorraine and “the indemnity of five milliard francs.”¹⁷⁵

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Even though the powers worried that Prussia’s annexation of Alsace-Lorraine created a perpetual point of contention between France and Germany, both Russia and Britain held optimistic positions regarding the creation of a strong continental power. Britain hoped to gain a valuable ally against Russia, and Russia wished for assistance with its Near East issues. Essentially, Britain hoped German unity meant the assurance of “the balance of power.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918*, 216-218.

¹⁷⁶ Millman, 217-218 and Mosse, 355-358, 374.

Conclusion:

“The day of reckoning,” Bismarck asserted shortly after the Crimean War, “is sure to come even if a few years pass.”¹⁷⁷ Bismarck clearly understood the war’s ramifications and possibilities for Prussia and acted ruthlessly on his intuition. Years later, Britain realized the implications of the Franco-Prussian War as Disraeli commented:

The war represents the German revolution, a greater political event than the French Revolution of the last century....There is not a diplomatic tradition which has not been swept away. You have a new world....The balance of power has been entirely destroyed.¹⁷⁸

Bismarck gained and kept power by assuming the role of the “indispensable man.”¹⁷⁹ He played the part so well that Europe and Germany suffered terribly without him. After Bismarck, nations and their governments chose to rely on arms production rather than succeeding at the intricate diplomacy Bismarck perfected.¹⁸⁰

Before Bismarck’s unification of the Reich, Britain did not necessarily view Germans in entirely negative terms. In fact, the Britain, Prussia, and the various German states often cooperated. For instance, England often found acceptable suitors for its

¹⁷⁷ Kissinger, 131.

¹⁷⁸ Kissinger, 134.

¹⁷⁹ Taylor, *Bismarck, The Man and the Statesman*, 208.

¹⁸⁰ Kissinger, 131-134.

monarchs in the Protestant areas of Germany in order to insure Protestant heirs to the throne. Queen Victoria married a German from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and her daughter married a German from Prussia. England often formed alliances with such German

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dynasties as the Habsburgs, Hohenzollerns, and the Hanoverians. In war, Frederick the Great received funding from Britain, German Hessians fought under the Union Jack against American colonists, and the Prussian army tipped the balance at Waterloo in favor of Britain and its allies.¹⁸¹

Lord Palmerston generalized the Germanies as a “country of damned professors,” and Germans often thought of themselves as living in a “land of *Dichter und Denker* (poets and thinkers).”¹⁸² Shortly after the Napoleonic Wars, however, British statesmen, Viscount Charles Canning and Lord Castlereagh, feared a united Germany ruled by militaristic Prussia. Palmerston died with the conviction that Prussia’s increasing strength could counterbalance Russia and France, and Stanley operated with a similar perspective. Clarendon, however, conducted foreign policy by adopting a Canning and Castlereagh approach. While Clarendon favored France over Prussia, Granville despised both powers. Though the philosophies may have differed between

¹⁸¹ Patrick Major, “Britain and Germany: A Love-Hate-Relationship?” *German History* 26, no. 4 (Oxford University Press 2008) 457-468, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=9a6f94d3-8535-4d01-97bd-998875028103%40sessionmgr110&vid=4&hid=127> (accessed July 27, 2012).

¹⁸² Patrick Major, “Britain and Germany: A Love-Hate-Relationship?” *German History* 26, no. 4 (Oxford University Press 2008) 457-468, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=9a6f94d3-8535-4d01-97bd-998875028103%40sessionmgr110&vid=4&hid=127> (accessed July 27, 2012).

the British statesmen, none of them managed to hinder Bismarck's unification process either diplomatically or by war.¹⁸³

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Bismarck possessed a key advantage over his British counterparts as he only had to persuade Wilhelm I of his policies, whereas the British statesmen had to deal with elections, a multi-member cabinet, and a monarch. Lord Palmerston summed up British foreign policy when he wrote to the tsar in 1841. Elaborating on what Lord Robert Stewart Castlereagh had asserted in 1820, Palmerston explained that Britain took military agreements seriously as those particular agreements required Parliamentary approval. Therefore, Britain avoided entering into military commitments that would require it to relinquish a certain amount of control in making future decisions regarding war. Lord Palmerston continued to assert that written documents bound future ministers, but if a minister merely offered his own word, the promise only lasted as long as the particular minister held his post. Essentially, Britain viewed the obligations and the wording in a treaty as critical because Parliament maintained the right to debate treaties. Therefore, treaties needed to be in written form. Any changes or variations in interpretation in a treaty needed the approval of Parliament.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Millman, 219-228.

¹⁸⁴ Harold Temperley and Lillian M. Penson, eds., *Foundations of British Foreign Policy From Pitt (1792) to Salisbury (1902)*. "Document 33.: Palmerston instructs Nicholas I in the obligations of the British Constitution, 11 January 1841." First Edition, 1938 (New Impression, 1966. London: Frank Cass and Co. LTD., 1966), 135-138; and Harold Temperley, "British Secret Diplomacy from Canning to Grey," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 6, No. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1938): 1-32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3020846> (accessed July 22, 2012).

Unlike the tsar, Bismarck did not need a lesson on British policy making, as evidence by his statement that “England is one of those powers with which not only no lasting alliance can be achieved but no security either, because the basis of all her political relationships is more volatile than in all other states—namely dependent on

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elections and their consequent majorities.”¹⁸⁵ Bismarck blamed Britain’s 1832 Reform Bill, which gave Britain’s middle class power at the expense of its nobility, for its lack of dependability, asserting that opposing factions had weakened Britain’s policies at home and abroad.¹⁸⁶

The weakness of Palmerston’s successors, Granville, Clarendon, and Stanley, stemmed from Bismarck’s diplomatic maneuvers during the Danish War. As a result, Britain’s Liberals and Conservatives pursued a cautious foreign policy in order to prevent any further damage to its image. After the Danish War, Britain avoided foreign entanglements, with the exception of its involvement in the 1877- 1878 Russo-Turkish War.¹⁸⁷ Britain’s prudence also derived from its volatility at home. Both Disraeli and Gladstone struggled to hold their respective parties together. Gladstone wanted to dedicate more effort to the Reform Bill but failed due to the demands of foreign policy. Britain debated Reform bills in the same years as the Austro-Prussian War and the Luxemburg controversy. Similarly, deliberations regarding the Land Act and the Irish

¹⁸⁵ Van’t Padje, 285- 300.

¹⁸⁶ Van’t Padje, 285- 300.

¹⁸⁷ Sandiford, 162.

Church Bill corresponded with the controversy over rail lines in Belgium and the vacant throne of Spain.¹⁸⁸

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Nationalism served to upset the status quo of Europe during the “Wars of Unification.” German nationalists wanted a strong and unified Germany, but they needed alterations to the Vienna settlement that set up the German Confederation. In addition, Italian nationalists wanted out of the Vienna settlement that legitimized Habsburg rulers in Italy. Nationalists from other areas of Europe, such as Hungary and Poland, desired independence as well, which threatened the territorial agreements of the Vienna settlement.¹⁸⁹

Bismarck often simultaneously used Britain’s objectives with the often contradictory goals of other countries to Prussia’s advantage. For example, Bismarck knew that Napoleon wanted out of the restrictions placed upon France by the Vienna settlement. During the crisis in Poland, Bismarck’s actions caused greater distrust between Britain and France. Britain rejected Napoleon’s Congress idea out of fear that the topic of treaty revision might be discussed.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Millman, 219-228.

¹⁸⁹ Pflanze, 21-23; Mosse, 1-8, 129-130; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, 126-127; and Kann, 268-271; and Denis Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), 11.

¹⁹⁰ Mosse, 137-143 and Pflanze, 237, 194- 199.

Bismarck managed to use the varying objectives of Austria and Britain to his advantage during the Schleswig-Holstein affair. He took advantage of Austria's desire to crush nationalism and assert itself in Germany while backing Britain's desire to maintain the 1852 Treaty of London. He allowed Britain to believe that he desired to uphold the treaty long enough to keep it out of the Danish War. He used the war, however, as a

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means to eradicate the treaty he led Britain to believe he fought the Danish War to protect.¹⁹¹

The minister-president used war again to alter international law to Prussia's advantage when Prussia engaged in a war with Austria. The threat of British obstruction decreased significantly after the Schleswig-Holstein affair, but Britain, nonetheless made several efforts to preserve peace and to exert influence. The results of Austro-Prussian War created new difficulties for Bismarck. In order to avoid foreign intervention, Bismarck attempted to limit Prussia's gains, but he needed to avoid angering the British by acceding to Napoleon's demands for lands along the Rhine.¹⁹²

The threat of British influence in the settlement of Prussia's European conflicts presented Bismarck with diplomatic challenges. During the years of German Unification, Britain hosted multiple conferences. Prussia's victory over Austria, the elimination of the German Confederation, and the Franco-Prussian War, however, allowed Bismarck to

¹⁹¹ Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, 126-127; Kann, 268-271; Smith, 11; and Pflanze, 240-248.

¹⁹² Millman, 5- 16; Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 14-18; and Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War*, 282-283.

unite Germany on Prussia's terms. Bismarck's foreign policy reduced British influence in the formation of the new German empire that Prussia dominated.¹⁹³

Unlike British statesmen, Napoleon III actively engaged in international affairs. Napoleon III attempted on various occasions to eliminate the Vienna settlement and

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reclaim France's lost territory by bargaining with the powers. For example, Napoleon pursued his goal by summoning five congresses between 1856 and 1866, and every occasion either coincided or preceded a war. The emperor used war in order to set up international meetings, which he hoped would decide questions favorably for him and France. Bismarck, on the other hand, used conferences and congresses to sanction what he had already won militarily.¹⁹⁴

After the Franco-Prussian War Britain practiced "splendid isolation," and France remained vengeful toward Germany. Therefore, Bismarck needed to join Austria and Russia in order to have the advantage in a Europe dominated by five countries. In fact, Bismarck sought common ground with many foreign countries and attempted to appease all the powers. Bismarck even supported the emergence of a French colonial empire in Africa in order to divert its attention from Alsace-Lorraine and Europe more generally, where Bismarck refused to give ground.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Pflanze, 377-388; Millman, 5-16; Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War*, 282-283; Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 14-18; and Mosse, 355-358.

¹⁹⁴ Kissinger, 106-136.

¹⁹⁵ Kissinger, 136-167

Following the Franco-Prussian War, Bismarck proclaimed that he now desired peace and that Prussia's wars had left Germany "satiated."¹⁹⁶ He attempted to revive the Holy Alliance in the form of the Three Emperors' League of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia in 1873. The Iron Chancellor struggled in maintaining the alliance due to the other two powers competing ambitions in the Eastern Europe. Following

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troubles in the Balkans, the Three Emperor's League disintegrated in 1878, with Britain playing a role in the demise of the alliance. Disraeli, then Prime Minister, continued British worries about Russia's expansion southward, which could endanger British interests in India. When Russia sent troops to Constantinople, Britain sent a naval fleet to the straits. In response, Russia quickly settled with Turkey and entered into the Treaty of San Stefano. Britain rejected the treaty's stipulations, and Bismarck succumbed to Russian pressure to summon a congress.¹⁹⁷

For the most part, the Congress of Berlin merely certified to what Russia and Britain had previously agreed, but Bismarck's function of "honest broker" chafed the Russians. For instance, on a minor issue involving the passes in Turkey's mountains, Bismarck sided with Turkey after Disraeli had warned he would walk out if Turkey failed to maintain control of the passes. The Iron Chancellor managed to avoid a total split with Russia by conferring with Tsar Alexander II before opposing the Russian diplomat at the congress, but the damage had been done, thanks in large part to Disraeli. Russia

¹⁹⁶ Kissinger, 136-167.

¹⁹⁷ Kissinger, 136-137.

directed its ill will toward Germany rather than on Britain as British opposition failed to surprise Russia.¹⁹⁸

After this setback, Bismarck strengthened his connections with Austria-Hungary, as the two countries formed the Dual Alliance. The following year, in 1880, Gladstone replaced Disraeli as prime minister, which placed a greater burden on Austria and

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Germany to restrain Russia in the East. Nonetheless, Gladstone's anti-Turkish stance drove Austria away from Britain enabling the Iron Chancellor to reconstruct the Three Emperors' League. Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia formed the Three Emperors' Alliance in 1881, and it essentially provided each of the powers security against a coalition and the prospect of conducting a war on two fronts. The following year Germany and Austria gained the partnership of Italy forming the Triple Alliance.¹⁹⁹

One aspect of Bismarck's strategy remained constant, to maintain friction between France and Britain, which he did by encouraging them to build their empires. Out of respect for Britain's pursuit for "equilibrium" among the powers, Bismarck sought to maintain Europe's *status quo*, and he initially avoided seeking colonies for Germany.²⁰⁰

Nonetheless, Bismarck succumbed to internal pressures and began pursuing colonies for Germany in 1884, which annoyed Britain. One reason for Bismarck's policy

¹⁹⁸ Kissinger, 136-137.

¹⁹⁹ Kissinger, 136-167.

²⁰⁰ Kissinger, 136-167.

reversal dealt with placating the Hamburg business community. Hamburg's scheduled entry into the *Zollverein* meant that it had to give up its free trade practices. New markets in Germany's colonies served to placate the merchants' concerns. In addition, colonies provided another nationalistic goal, which could divide his domestic opponents. Ever conscious of the future, Bismarck also sought to weaken the maneuverability of

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Germany's future emperor who favored liberalism and Britain by potentially conjuring up a colonial dispute with Britain.²⁰¹

Even toward the end of his chancellorship, Bismarck's fundamental view of Britain remained unchanged, as a message written by Britain's Prime Minister Lord Salisbury in 1887 illustrates. The prime minister expressed his frustration over the relative weakness of his country's political system due to "the uneducated masses" control over foreign policy and the "lack of conviction and selfish opportunism" of British politicians.²⁰² Salisbury maintained that the objective of winning elections rather than conducting foreign policy assertively had weakened Britain's role in foreign affairs. Bismarck agreed with the prime minister's assertion and wrote the word "Correct" within the document.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Taylor, *Bismarck, The Man and the Statesman*, 214-217.

²⁰² Francis Neilson, "Bismarck's Relations With England," *American Journal of Economics & Sociology* 9, no. 3 (April 1950): 293- 306, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=91b12917-217f-47c9-9c57-c2e06edb6bc1%40sessionmgr111&vid=3&hid=110> (accessed August 2, 2012).

²⁰³ Neilson, 293- 306.

Wilhelm's son ascended the throne in 1888 as Kaiser Friedrich III but died in the same year. The liberalism and pro-British attitude of Friedrich, which Bismarck feared, disappeared in favor of something more harmful to Bismarck and Germany. The new emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, pursued a policy of European domination by Germany. The process weakened Germany's position, however. The unraveling of Germany's foreign policy began in 1890 with the Kaiser's firing of Bismarck and Germany's rejection of the

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tsar's proposal to continue the Reinsurance Treaty, which Bismarck concluded with Russia in 1887. As a result, Russia and France formed the "fateful alliance" in 1891, fortified by "a military convention" three years later.²⁰⁴

In regards to Britain's leading statesmen, Bismarck favored Disraeli over Gladstone. Bismarck respected Disraeli, and the Iron Chancellor's enjoyment of Disraeli's novels may have contributed to his sentiment. Gladstone, however, garnered vitriolic contempt from Bismarck, and on one occasion, the Iron Chancellor quipped, "a useful suggestion would be the removal from office of that inept manager of British Affairs."²⁰⁵

Even though Bismarck displayed coolness towards Britain and its government at times, he often maintained excellent working relations with its diplomats. Bismarck worked closely with Sir Alexander Malet during their time as diplomats at Frankfurt, and

²⁰⁴ Kissinger, 164-183.

²⁰⁵ Alec Randall, "Lord Odo Russell and Bismarck," *History Today* 27 Issue 4 (April 1977): 240-249, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=7c6de8e8-8f6d-4e43-8c5a-db3372b7023d%40sessionmgr13&vid=13&hid=13> (accessed July 22, 2012).

the two continued a friendship that lasted until Malet's death in 1886. After the death of Lord Odo Russell in 1884, Britain filled the vacancy of British ambassador to Germany with Malet's son, Sir Edward Baldwin Malet. Bismarck treated Edward well, especially at first, but the relationship between the Iron Chancellor and Edward cooled over the issue of colonies.²⁰⁶

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In addition, Bismarck worked cordially with Lord Odo Russell, who worked as a diplomat in Berlin from 1870-1884. Russell performed well at the Congress of Berlin, as he encouraged Disraeli to speak English rather than attempt to communicate to the attendees in his less-than-fluent French. Russell's use of the French language, however, helped Britain to put forth compelling arguments. He also offered sound advice to Britain's foreign minister, Lord Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury. For his efforts, he earned the title 1st Baron Ampthill, and when he died, Bismarck affectionately asserted, "England might give a successor to the Ambassador she has lost but could not expect to replace him."²⁰⁷

After Bismarck left office, Anglo-German relations worsened. Kaiser Wilhelm II lacked Bismarck's understanding of the necessity for Germany to maintain Britain's neutrality. Germany could dominate the continent as long as Britain refrained from siding with Germany's enemies. Wilhelm badgered Britain in 1895 by stating that, "she must abandon her non-committal policy and provide continental type guarantees or

²⁰⁶ Van't Padje, 285- 300.

²⁰⁷ Randall, 240-249.

treaties”²⁰⁸ Contrary to subsequent German leaders, Bismarck refused to attempt to impose his worldview on Britain. For example, before the Danish War, Bismarck chastised one of his subordinates,

You may call the convention of London revolutionary if you like; the Vienna treaties were ten times more unjust towards many princes, estates, and countries; it is only by European treaties that European law
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is established. If, however, you want to apply the standard of morality and justice to these latter they must well-nigh all be abolished.²⁰⁹

Even though Bismarck refused to discard international law, he grasped the changing circumstances regarding the purpose of treaties and asserted,

Nevertheless the plain and searching words of a treaty are not without influence on diplomacy when it is concerned with precipitating or averting a war; nor are even treacherous and violent governments usually inclined to an open breach of faith, so long as the *force majeure* of imperative interests does not intervene.²¹⁰

In 1897, Bismarck rebuked the Kaiser by stating, “Jena came twenty years after the death of Frederick the Great; the crash will come twenty years after my departure if things go on like this.”²¹¹ The successors to the Iron Chancellor lacked his insight into international law, which led to the German calamities of the twentieth century. For example, German Chancellor Theobald von Bethman Hollweg failed to grasp Britain’s

²⁰⁸ Kissinger, 164-183.

²⁰⁹ Bismarck, *The Memoirs: Being the Reflections and Reminiscences of Otto, Prince Von Bismarck*, Volume II, 7.

²¹⁰ Bismarck, *The Memoirs: Being the Reflections and Reminiscences of Otto, Prince Von Bismarck*, Volume II, 270-271; and Kissinger, 164-183.

²¹¹ A. J. P. Taylor, *Bismarck: the Man and the Statesman*, 264.

deference to treaties and complained that Britain based its war decision on only one term, “neutrality.”²¹² He could not understand that Britain planned to wage war in order to protect a treaty. Germany ignored the 1839 treaty regarding Belgium and invaded it in 1914 provoking a British response, and after the Great War Germany

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sought to eliminate itself from the shackles of the Treaty of Versailles, an effort which left Germany in ruins and Bismarck’s native Prussia abolished.²¹³

From among the powers, Britain posed the greatest challenge for Bismarck’s diplomacy during the years of German unification. Each power, except for Britain, desired a way out of a disagreeable treaty. Britain, on the other hand, viewed treaties as a way of protecting its interests. Bismarck understood Britain’s high regard for the preservation of treaties and that Britain’s position stood in stark contrast to his goals. The minister-president skillfully used Britain’s policy of treaty preservation in order to wreck the treaties Britain attempted to maintain in the first place. Bismarck succeeded in foreign policy due to his keen sense of knowing what other countries wanted and then using that knowledge to his advantage.²¹⁴

²¹² Joackim Remak, *The Origins of World War I, 1871-1914* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), 128-130.

²¹³ Remak, 128-130; Paul K. Davis, *100 Decisive Battles: From Ancient Times to the Present* (Oxford, New York, and Santa Barbara: Oxford University Press, 1999), 372-377; and Clarke, xxi.

²¹⁴ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 22-29; Beust, 93- 102; King, 308-312; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, 126-127; Kann, 268-271; and Smith, 11; and Pflanze, 240-248.

Except for Britain, Bismarck knew that Prussia shared a common interest with other powers. France wanted the return of land it had lost in the Vienna settlement, and Russia desired an end to the restrictions of the 1856 Treaty of Paris. The Peace of Zurich reduced Austrian power in Italy, and it motivated Austria to tighten its grip on its multi-national empire. Prussia wanted to extend its power by eliminating the Vienna settlement that set up the German Confederation, which Prussia perceived as favorable to Austria and the other states of Germany. In addition, Bismarck wanted to reverse the

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limitations placed on Prussia that the 1850 Treaty of Olmütz and the 1852 Treaty of London set. Bismarck's goal of improving Prussia's position required alterations in treaties and agreements that formed international law. When Bismarck took power in Prussia, Britain served as the staunchest defender of international law, while the other powers bristled at certain aspects of the status quo. Therefore, Bismarck's task consisted of persuading Britain of Prussia's respect for treaties while simultaneously convincing other countries to free themselves from certain treaty restrictions. Bismarck's success in mastering the delicate balancing act allowed Prussia to isolate Britain and win each of the "Wars of Unification."²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman*, 22-29; Beust, 93- 102; King, 308-312; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, 126-127; Kann, 268-271; and Smith, 11; and Pflanze, 240-248.

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