

Roman Empire 171

Chapter 171: Countdown

Constantinople

Since negotiations began, Abdulmejid I's mood had never improved. He had just been threatened by the Russians, and now the Austrian representative took the stage.

Stürmer was a pure diplomat and was not as overbearing as Menshikov. Austria's appetite was not as large as Russia's, so the talks naturally took place.

Abdulmejid I firmly said, "Mr. Stürmer, your demands are too excessive. The Principality of Moldavia and the Principality of Wallachia are sacred and indivisible parts of the Ottoman Empire, and absolutely cannot be ceded!"

However, he lacked confidence saying this. Who told them to be eyed by both Russia and Austria?

Facing one alone, with British and French support, they could still stand firm. Against two, not to mention Abdulmejid I being cowardly, even if Britain and France personally took the stage, they would still lack confidence.

Causing division between Russia and Austria became imperative. Otherwise once war erupted, the Ottoman Empire would be finished.

Stürmer calmly explained, "Your Majesty, these two small principalities are not your country's original territories and are merely vassal states. Why can they not be transferred?"

From the current situation, your country simply cannot hold these two principalities. If sold to the Austrian Empire, you can also reduce the defense line bordering Russia."

Saving face was not just a Qing Dynasty specialty. The Ottoman Empire was not one to concede easily either. "Transfer" and "Sale" were Stürmer's attempts to preserve Abdulmejid I's face as much as possible.

Influenced by European culture, selling land was no big deal. This was more acceptable than simply ceding territory.

If Austria really wanted to purchase these two principalities, Abdulmejid I did not mind selling them. After all, they could not be defended if war erupted anyway.

Although the terrain of these two principalities was flat and suitable for agricultural development, because they bordered Russia and Austria, the Ottomans had barely developed them. Selling them would not pain them.

"How much is your country willing to pay?" Abdulmejid I asked expectantly.

In any case, it was better to negotiate than not. Even if just to buy time for compromise, Abdulmejid I had to haggle with Austria.

Stürmer firmly said, "Your Majesty, the Austrian government is willing to pay 100 million guilders!"

This price was very sincere. After all, undeveloped land was worthless in this era.

Before Abdulmejid I could respond, Stürmer added, “But the Austrian government currently has financial difficulties, and cannot pay such a huge sum at once. We plan to pay it off over the course of 100 years.”

Paying it off over the course of 100 years, wasn’t that nonsense? Let alone inflation, given their respective strength, did the Ottoman Empire have the ability to receive the money?

Anyone with a bit of sense knew Stürmer was merely speaking of a purchase but had no plans to actually pay at all.

A 100 year payoff was a completely empty check. As long as the time did not come, Austria could not be said to be in breach of contract.

In such a long time, if the two countries had any conflict or even one war, not one guilder had to be paid.

Even receiving the money after 100 years would be useless. The 100 million that could buy this 200,000+ square kilometer territory now perhaps wouldn’t be able to buy even 20 square kilometers of land after 100 years.

It was too shameless to bully others like this. If they compromised after being threatened, wouldn’t that tell the whole world: the Ottoman Empire had declined, come carve up the remains quickly!

Abdulmejid I questioned, “Mr. Stürmer, are you not joking? There is no business so absurd in the whole world!”

Stürmer just smiled without replying. The Austrian government had no plans to pay at all. His proposal was merely a fig leaf for the Ottoman government.

Stürmer was not so naive as to think obtaining the two principalities in the Danube River Basin was possible through negotiations. If it were that easy, why mobilize troops?

Domestic stance was very clear—just go through the motions negotiating. Even if it comes to an agreement, a deal could not be reached immediately, or how could the play continue?

If they reconcile with the Ottoman Empire, should Austria halt war preparations? Stopping would render all prior preparations useless; not stopping would be worse, exposing strategic aims.

Then the Southern German States would be prepared, and with intervention by the powers, the westward strategy would basically be scrapped.

To stall negotiations, after the two principalities, Stürmer demanded even more Ottoman territory, all at once claiming half the Balkan Peninsula.

Even with Britain and France strongly mediating to resolve contradictions, it was futile. Of course, to play the full act, Sturmer also slowly began making concessions.

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As negotiations kicked off in Constantinople, Paris also livened up. The struggle between the Parliamentary and the Presidential factions had reached a boiling point, and was impossible to relieve.

After long preparation, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was finally ready.

With British backing, on June 12, 1851, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte launched a military coup in Paris, forcibly dissolving Parliament.

The unwilling Parliamentary faction also organized troops to counterattack, but failed due to traitors, allowing Louis Napoleon Bonaparte to seize power.

When news of the coup reached Vienna, Franz was not surprised at all, although the coup happened half a year early.

The butterfly effect was growing, even affecting France now. The future course of the world had become unrecognizable. The advantage of foreknowledge was slowly disappearing.

Franz was prepared. His arrival had changed many people's fates, influencing global affairs inevitably.

After this Paris coup, it would not be long before Louis Napoleon Bonaparte restored the monarchy. The Britain-France combo would also emerge on the historical stage.

Franz did not intervene, as the vainglorious monarch Napoleon III was still not too difficult to deal with compared to the alternative.

France has a strong foundation, and the presence of a monarch who enjoys making changes may not be as frightening. However, if a monarch who loves development were to appear, that would be a real disaster for Austria.

It's better to let the usurious empire (France) continue with their high-interest loans. Austria can take charge of industrial development.

After the Paris coup, the pressure on the British instantly lessened greatly. With France as a pawn, their say in European diplomacy grew heavier.

Abdulmejid I felt it most deeply. Support from France strengthened, and soon-to-be restored Napoleon III sent him military instructors to help train the Ottoman military.

However, this support was insufficient to change the current unfavorable situation. As time passed, Russian representative Prince Alexander Menshikov's attitude grew increasingly tough.

Rather than negotiations, it was more like Russia making demands and giving the Ottoman government a choice—accept or it is war.

Russia seemed fully prepared for war. On July 23, 1851, the British-Russian Saint Petersburg negotiations ended in failure due to the huge differences in bottom lines, and the countdown for the next Russo-Turkish war started.

Chapter 172: Napoleon III (BONUS)

In 1851, the world's focus was on Constantinople and Paris. The five-party talks in the first half of the year attracted attention, then everyone watched Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's performance in the second half.

After the Paris coup, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte did not stop, but accelerated the pace of restoration of the monarchy.

On August 2, 1851, a national referendum was held in France where Louis Napoleon Bonaparte obtained the right to amend the constitution, legitimizing the coup.

On September 26, 1851, he also ordered changing the national emblem to an eagle symbolizing the Napoleonic Empire, sounding the horn of restoration of the monarchy.

On October 3, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte ordered removing mottos of the French Revolution like Liberty, Equality and Fraternity from all buildings.

On October 15, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte amended the constitution, changing the presidential term to lifetime and unlimitedly expanding presidential power.

This was where Yuan Shikai learned from historically, just lacking a bit in ability and means...

In November, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte toured the country, giving speeches to win over the people, while exploiting his uncle's name to openly advocate imperialist thought.

This proved very effective. Even after over thirty years, Napoleon's standing among the French people remained unshaken.

In this era, the mainstream form of government in the world was still monarchy. As a republic, the French people also felt isolated and lonely. When their emotions got the better of them, they started shouting, "Long live the Emperor!"

Soon a hot topic appeared in France—imperialism, as newspapers controlled by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's faction also started getting busy.

While shaping public opinion, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte also bought military loyalty everywhere.

He was very tactful in buying loyalty, like inviting some officers to meetings to let them hear the public shout "Long live the Emperor!", creating the impression of universal support.

After experiencing this personally, these officers subconsciously drew closer to him.

In this aspect, the French military deserved praise for respecting public opinion and avoiding civil war.

While building up his own momentum, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte naturally did not forget to strike down his opponents, like smearing his competitors, abusing power... (10,000 words omitted)

With everything prepared, on December 21, 1851, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte had the French Parliament announce a referendum on the political system.

It had to be said, this operation was very slick. Anyone who knows France knew that even now, let alone after WW1, supporters of imperialism outnumbered supporters of republicanism.

France had a republican government only because the three main royalist factions restrained each other, and were quite unyielding and finally had no choice but to go their separate ways.

Against this backdrop, imperialism won with 7.899 million votes, while supporters of republicanism numbered less than 250,000.

Since it was imperialism, naturally an emperor had to be chosen—the House of Orleans, the House of Bourbon, and the House of Bonaparte, the three major families stood out.

The House of Orleans was eliminated first as they were deposed with a bad reputation and lowest support. The Bourbons had legitimacy and were Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's biggest competitor.

But it did not matter as after harnessing public opinion, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte directly took the throne without any discussion, not giving the Bourbons any chance to react. On January 1, 1852, Louis Napoleon became emperor in Paris—the era of Napoleon III had arrived.

After going through turmoil, the French people grew tired of infighting with public sentiment now steady. With the *fait accompli*, the Bourbons could only accept it begrudgingly.

Because some shady means were used to forcibly take power, Napoleon III's empire was flawed from the start.

Vienna

Watching Napoleon III's maneuvers during his rise to power, Franz expressed great admiration. Even if he was in his shoes, he did not think it could be done better.

It had to be said, the House of Bonaparte was the weakest of the three nominal French royal families. Unlike the other two with deep foundations, they could only be considered upstarts.

The House of Orleans had the backing of financial groups, the House of Bourbon had the backing of aristocrats and capitalists, while the Bonapartes' supporters were peasants.

In theory, they had the most supporters and advantage. But in reality it was the opposite—their supporters were mostly the lower classes with almost no political voice.

This could be seen from how Napoleon III still needed British funding during his rise to power. If it were the other two houses, there would be no lack of funding.

There was no choice, as they had risen late! If not for Napoleon's greatness with the French still remembering him fondly, calling themselves French royalty at this time would be a joke.

Even with the formidable Napoleon as his uncle, Napoleon III still lacked competitiveness.

Even if it were Napoleon II, the situation wouldn't be much different.

It was a pity Napoleon II died young. Europe valued bloodlines. Napoleon III was clearly inadequate, as he wasn't even French.

(AN: Napoleon III naturalized as Swiss in 1832)

If his political opponents were more cunning, they would have eliminated him during the presidential election. Letting a foreigner become president, the proud French people likely were not that open-minded yet.

That Napoleon III achieved ultimate victory was of course related to his opponents being out of sorts, but his own capabilities could not be ignored either.

All along, he was practically dancing on a tightrope. One wrong move would make him fall down the abyss.

In particular, utilizing contradictions between factions to have everyone acquiesce to him becoming emperor, it was simply peak political maneuvering.

Based on intelligence, Franz concluded that while not the most ideal choice for all parties, Napoleon III was one all could accept.

After being taught a lesson by Napoleon III, Franz couldn't help but reflect on himself and found his weakness was adhering too much to ethics.

Of course, Franz did not plan to change. As emperor of the House of Habsburg, his throne could not be more legitimate. He completely did not need those crooked means.

As for domestic political opponents? Franz was not boasting, but he could subdue them easily with one hand.

Austria's opposition compared to France's was pathetically weak. How could fireflies compete with the bright moon?

Metternich smilingly said, "Your Majesty, Napoleon III has risen to power and now needs international recognition. This is an opportunity."

If Napoleon III had ascended the throne through normal means, naturally there would be no concerns about recognition.

Unfortunately, his throne was inherently inadequate with many points of criticism, so international recognition was important now.

Let alone other things, the European nobility basically did not attend Napoleon III's coronation. Though it looked grand, the actual attendance and prestige were much lower.

Even with British backing, the British royals did not send any prominent members to attend either, with the cold attitude of aristocratic circles indicating the issue.

Franz indifferently said, "We can try. The Austro-French treaty is over. It would not be bad to now sign a friendship treaty between our nations."

If the stakes were not too big, for the sake of gaining Austria's diplomatic recognition, Napoleon III might make some concessions.

Unfortunately, there currently were no such well-timed mutual interests between Austria and France. Austria also had its own plans, so Franz did not mind doing this small favor.

Felix gleefully said, "Your Majesty, Napoleon III has just taken power. Even for the sake of the Emperor's prestige, he still won't back down this time on the Holy Land Crisis. It looks like trouble for the Russians."

Russia and Austria being allies did not mean Austria hoped to see Russia continue growing stronger.

Only when the disparity of power was not too great could they be allies. Once the gap widens, it becomes a big brother-little brother relationship.

Austria naturally did not plan to become Russia's little brother. While developing itself, they also hoped Russia's strategies would suffer setbacks.

If Russia really annexed the Ottoman Empire, then the honeymoon period between the two countries would end. Between nations, strength and interests ultimately prevailed.

Historically, one important factor in the Crimean War breaking out was that Napoleon III had just ascended and needed to divert domestic contradictions and establish prestige.

Now Napoleon III's rise to power happened earlier, but this did not change anything much, so the ultimate outcome naturally would not change either.

Franz thought for a moment and said, “Then let’s add some fuel, but be careful not to burn ourselves. The show must go on.

If Britain and France realize our true aims, the situation may go out of control. At crucial moments, Russia will definitely reveal the secret treaty.

We must prepare diplomatically and let Britain and France know at key moments that even with a Russo-Austrian alliance, Austria will at most remain neutral and diplomatically support them in the Russo-Turkish War!”

This was no joke. If Austria was set on advancing and retreating together with Russia, perhaps Britain and France would be frightened away. A Russo-Austrian partnership in the Near East would be invincible, fearing no challenge.

Without giving Britain and France reassurance, how could they embark on a distant campaign to strike at Russia? Without Russia tying them down, how could Austria have a chance to make preparations?

Austria was using Russia, and was Russia not using Austria either? As soon as Austria makes a move, a part of Britain and France’s forces will also be diverted, reducing pressure on them on the battlefield.

Besides, for Russia to annex the Ottoman Empire, they needed material support from Austria. Their domestic industry could not sustain a modern war alone.

From the beginning, this was a collaboration where each party took what they needed and harbored their own ulterior motives.

Chapter 173: The Cost

Saint Petersburg

Russian Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode frowned and said, “Your Majesty, our envoy in Paris sent news that Louis Napoleon Bonaparte restored the monarchy on January 1, 1852, proclaiming himself Napoleon III.”

Hearing the news of Napoleon III’s restoration, Nicholas I became angry. In his view, the upstart House of Bonaparte was unqualified to act as French Emperor.

This was not just his personal opinion, but based on real interests as well. Napoleon coming to power through election broke the tradition of “divine right of kings”, shaking the foundations of all monarchist countries in Europe, which led to the Napoleonic Wars.

They had just suppressed this heretical absurdity, and now Napoleon III was restored, which was undoubtedly insulting to all participants of the Congress of Vienna. Most importantly, it insulted Alexander I.

What infuriated him even more was that Napoleon III even dared challenge the might of the Russian Empire. After the Holy Land Crisis erupted, the French government intervened, shaking Russia’s control over Orthodox Christianity.

With new and old hatreds combined, Nicholas I naturally could not acknowledge the legitimacy of Napoleon III. If the two were not so distant, he would have already taken action to show France the might of the Russian Empire.

Nicholas I disdainfully said, "Sure enough he's just a nobody only capable of some petty tricks. Order our envoy in France to deliver a diplomatic note to the French government, condemning the shameless usurpation by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, and demanding he abdicate immediately."

Napoleon III's restoration was naturally a swift decisive action. To avoid interference by international powers, the exact timing was kept secret.

In Nicholas I's view, this was petty, without any imperial majesty, unworthy of being part of the group of monarchs.

Karl Nesselrode advised, "Your Majesty, isn't such a firm response not good? This will further deteriorate relations between our nations."

Not recognizing was one thing, but specially delivering a diplomatic note to upset Napoleon III would undoubtedly further worsen Franco-Russian relations.

Due to distance, Russia's influence over France was not great either. This diplomatic reprimand would only embarrass Napoleon III a little at first.

In any case, no matter how fiercely the Russian government roars, Napoleon III could not possibly abdicate now. Having come this far, no matter what lay ahead, he had to continue.

Nicholas I disdainfully said, "What's there to fear? If we offend them, then we offend them. Franco-Russian relations are like this already. How much worse could things get?"

This was Nicholas I's attitude. It was not him being rash, but that on the Ottoman issue, Franco-Russian contradictions had become white-hot, with neither side conceding and little to no chance of reconciliation.

Facing the resolute Nicholas I, Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode naturally would not try to dissuade him. What does the life and death of the French have to do with him?

"Yes, Your Majesty," Karl Nesselrode replied.

Then he shifted the topic, "Your Majesty, it is now certain the Constantinople negotiations will bear no fruit. With British and French backing, the Ottoman Empire will not concede this time. We can now initiate the next phase of our plans."

In other words, war was coming. Now, they needed a seemingly reasonable pretext. Influenced by European culture, the Russian government was no longer so reckless, and knew the importance of proper justification.

Nicholas I nodded, then said, "Order Prince Menshikov to deliver an ultimatum to the Ottoman Empire. If they still refuse our goodwill, the Foreign Ministry can fabricate a pretext!"

Goodwill? Who felt the Russian government's "goodwill"? With such a huge appetite, even a weak Ottoman government had to firmly resist!

Compromise was slow suicide. Strong resistance still held a sliver of hope. With British and French backing, the Ottoman Empire was not completely without a chance.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Karl Nesselrode replied.

There were thousands of possible excuses or justifications and they would surely find one. The Ottoman Empire itself was already rotten with countless messy scandals everywhere. Finding fault with them was too easy.

Constantinople has been the dream of the Russian government for generations. This was not purely because of military and economic value, but also contained tremendous political and religious significance.

In short, as long as the Russian government could successfully seize Constantinople, no matter how great the losses, it was acceptable.

In this regard, Nicholas II in history was too foolish to have fought against Germany and Austro-Hungary.

If he had bullied the Ottoman Empire first and seized Constantinople, relying on the political and religious bonuses, he could have overwhelmed all domestic contradictions.

In this respect, Nicholas I's strategy was completely correct. Retaking Constantinople and relying on tremendous prestige, reforming domestically afterwards would have been much easier.

The internal contradictions in Russia had long caught the Russian government's attention. It was just that the opposition was too powerful and Nicholas I did not dare act rashly.

Including Nicholas I himself, many top Russian leaderships opposed serfdom. Unfortunately, faced with the entire group of aristocrats, they cowered.

Now, the Russian government pinned their hopes on this Russo-Turkish War. As long as Constantinople is taken, everything could be easily discussed after. Failure meant having no choice but to take risks and reform internally.

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Paris

After Napoleon III's successful restoration, the country did not immediately stabilize. The opposition forces remained powerful, and an anti-imperialist uprising erupted in Paris on January 12.

Half a month later, the uprising spread to over 20 provinces including Toulouse, Marseille, Limoges, Périgueux, Béziers, Toulon, Bordeaux.

This was when buying over officers paid off. Napoleon III's response was much stronger than the July Monarchy's, immediately ordering crackdowns.

32 provinces nationwide entered martial law. In just one month, over 26,000 people were arrested, with over 10,000 more exiled. White Terror pervaded France.

Lacking effective organization and scattered nationwide, the uprising was soon suppressed.

After securing the throne, Napoleon III's troubles came too. First was the financial crisis. To win hearts during his rise, Napoleon III had massively raised salaries.

For example: senators had annual salaries of 30,000 francs; the annual salary for councilors of state was 25,000 francs; cabinet ministers started at 40,000 francs annually, with multiple salaries for concurrent posts.

Napoleon himself had an annual salary of 26 million francs. Compared to France's annual fiscal revenue of 1.2-1.3 billion francs, the emperor's annuity was only 2.1%, which did not seem to be too high.

But the accounts could clearly not be calculated this way. With higher pay at the top, could lower civil servants' wages not rise?

Undoubtedly, Napoleon III was a good leader caring about living standards, so French civil servants became happy. A "high salary" era had arrived.

After raising officials' pay, Napoleon III naturally did not forget the army that fought alongside him, with promotions and raises.

Even the Catholic Church that supported him received 42.8 million francs in 1852. Compared to Franz cutting the Church immediately upon ascending, Napoleon III was clearly a good kid.

On the celebratory day of the new emperor's ascension, Napoleon III also considered the people's interests and abolished a series of harsh taxes.

Then everyone was happy and shouted "Long live the Emperor!". The only problem was with finances.

With expenditure up and revenue down, the French government finances neared bankruptcy.

Napoleon III's strength was manipulating hearts, but he was still a novice at governing a country and had just started.

To consolidate power, Napoleon III also expanded the civil service, increasing from 470,000 to 620,000 administrative officials.

It was worth noting that to address the Near East Crisis, Napoleon III also planned to expand the army further, but this was shelved due to fiscal woes.

Looking at the bankrupt financial reports, Napoleon III asked in anguish, "Rouher, do you have any ideas to resolve the fiscal crisis?"

Rouher smiled bitterly and replied, "Your Majesty, negotiate with financial groups. We need their support to overcome difficulties."

Who knows who disparagingly titled him "Vice-Emperor", but from then on Rouher became more restrained before Napoleon III.

Fortunately, this was mainland Europe. If it were the Eastern world, he would have died miserably already.

Although he still held a high position, Rouher knew the crowned Napoleon III was different from the pre-ascension Louis Napoleon Bonaparte.

As number two of this group, he had to watch his words and actions. Too cautious was no good either, as it would affect their sovereign-subject relations. But too arrogant was also bad, as it would make Napoleon III displeased.

Seeking financial group support was a middling proposal—nothing innovative yet still very effective.

The French government was poor, but French financial groups were very wealthy. After years of capital accumulation, the label of usurious empire had emerged.

But this was not a long-term solution either. Gaining financial group support also required compromises. Without sufficient interests, they would not fund him.

Chapter 174: The Outbreak of the Near East War

On February 21, 1852, the Ottoman Empire rejected the Russians' rude demands, ending the Constantinople negotiations in failure, and the Russo-Turkish War became inevitable.

This was not unexpected. No one could have agreed to the Russians' demands.

If it was just nibbling at some scraps, the rotten Ottoman government might have endured it. But wanting to swallow them whole, there was no room for compromise.

A week later, the Ottoman government also rejected Austria's conditions, and the countdown to war began.

From a military perspective, fighting a two-front war was foolish.

In theory, if Austria occupied Moldavia and Wallachia, it would separate the Balkans between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, greatly reducing military pressure on the Ottoman Empire.

But politically, the Ottoman government could absolutely not compromise. Showing any weakness now might jeopardize British and French support.

If Britain and France were to come to a compromise with Russia, then the four powers could jointly carve up the Ottoman Empire together, which would be truly disastrous.

Although the Ottoman Empire was declining, they were still a "strong country" on the surface. As long as their inherent weakness was not exposed, Britain and France will still have confidence in them.

The four powers of Europe split into two camps while other countries naturally maintained neutrality, following their respective leaders in lip service. Participating in the war? They were civilized people, how could they engage in violence?

The Ottoman Empire's reputation in Europe was very poor. Of course, Russia's reputation was not much better either. They were both rotten and unpopular in Europe.

It was just that the Ottoman Empire's reputation was even worse. Franz also dug up the Ottomans' old misdeeds, so Russian public support was slightly higher.

The public response emboldened Russia. Nicholas I styled himself the liberator of Christendom, a banner Franz also took up.

On March 27, 1852, the Russian Empire formally declared war on the Ottoman Empire, marking the outbreak of the ninth Russo-Turkish War.

On March 28, under Nicholas I's orders, Russia launched an offensive against the Ottoman Empire.

The Russian government was very rule-abiding this time, strictly following international conventions without any sneak attacks.

Vienna

Before the Russo-Turkish War erupted, Russia had notified Austria according to their treaty. Franz immediately ordered the entire army to prepare for war, while also convening an expanded meeting of the military and cabinet.

Marshal Radetzky pointed at the military map and analyzed, "Everyone look. According to the judgment of our general staff, the Russians have three possible routes of attack this time.

One, attack from the Caucasus. Two, attack from the Balkan Peninsula. Three, attack from the sea.

A Russian attack from the Caucasus does not concern us much, we can ignore it.

If they attack from the Balkan Peninsula, then they would have to occupy the two principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia first. According to our agreement, this is our sphere of influence.

Then we must take action, otherwise the westward strategy would fall apart. If Russia reveals the secret treaty, Britain, France and Prussia would watch us like hawks.

If they attack from the sea, then there are many more potential landing points, any Black Sea port city of the Ottoman Empire is possible.

Militarily, all three routes of attack are feasible. Russia may choose one or two, or attack all three simultaneously."

With no British or French intervention, Russia had too many options. The decaying Ottoman Empire was full of holes everywhere, impossible to defend.

Once Britain and France intervened, seaborne attacks would cease. The Black Sea Fleet could still bully the Ottoman Navy, but could only submit to the British and French navies.

What troubled Austria the most was Russia attacking down the Balkan Peninsula. If Russia occupied the Danube River Basin, it would be difficult to make them withdraw.

The treaty was made to be torn up from the moment it was signed. As long as the stakes were big enough, any alliance was unreliable.

Metternich thought for a moment and said, "The westward strategy must absolutely not be exposed. If it draws the attention of other countries, unifying Southern Germany would become difficult for us."

Everyone nodded. Austria had paid too high a price for the westward strategy already. Exposure at the critical moment would mean massive losses.

Austria's goal of unifying Southern Germany was not to devastate the region.

If they ambush them, with collaborators' help, occupying Munich at once would basically mean declaring the war over.

Essentially, the westward strategy was "30% military, 70% political". Austria would mainly induce the Southern German States to surrender politically, with military force only assisting.

If the plan was exposed, and the Southern German States resisted desperately with support of the powers, even achieving victory would be pyrrhic.

If too much blood was shed on both sides, ruling these lands later would be difficult. Austria was annexing Southern Germany to increase national power, not to add internal troubles.

Marshal Radetzky thought for a moment and said, “Then we only have two options. One, immediately launch the westward strategy and catch them unprepared.

However, French intervention would be very likely then, so we must prepare to fight France first.

Two, continue executing the contingency Balkan strategy to release smoke screens externally.

As long as we ignite the flames of war in the Balkans, even if the secret treaty leaks, Britain and France would still be misled by us.”

Clearly, taking action now did not align with Austria’s interests. That would just be playing the scapegoat for Russia. If Austria provoked France, even with British support, the Ottoman Empire would still not be able to withstand Russia.

Releasing smoke screens was not easy either. Starting a war was easy, but ending it was hard. Perhaps the British-French coalition would vent their anger on Austria before seeking out Russia.

Prime Minister Felix said solemnly, “We anticipated this situation long ago. Once Russia takes military action, we will also follow up immediately. They can attack down the Balkan Peninsula if they want.

But we must also send troops to occupy the two principalities in the Danube River Basin. We cannot let Russia swallow them whole.”

As long as the Russo-Turkish War could not be swiftly decided, they would need Austria’s support and Russia would not violate the agreement.

Franz nodded in agreement. That would do. No strategy could guarantee perfection. As emperor, he naturally could not rush ahead, but had to leave room to maneuver.

In case something happened midway leading to failure, someone had to take the blame! The cabinet was the most suitable choice. Politics was just that cruel.

Of course, Franz was a good boss. Taking the blame for him will cause no issues. At most they would be dismissed for a few years until the storm passes before coming back.

Such things happened far too often in history. Almost every successful emperor had done this.

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On March 28, 1852, following Russia, Austria also delivered a declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire, expanding the Near East War.

Constantinople

After receiving the declarations of war from Russia and Austria, the Ottoman government abandoned their last shred of hope. Abdulmejid I also reciprocated with declarations of war against both countries.

In terms of courage, Abdulmejid I was still a competent emperor, not shrinking back at this time.

In theory, Abdulmejid I now commanded an army of a million after reforms, and with British and French support and modernized weapons, as defenders they were not without a chance.

“What did the British and French representatives say? When can they send reinforcements?” Abdulmejid I asked concernedly.

The Foreign Minister replied, “Your Majesty, the British and French representatives have stated their support, but sending reinforcements will still take some time.

If we agree, the British and French navy can immediately enter the Black Sea to contain the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

Britain and France also agree to let the military instructors helping us train the army participate in this war, but they must fight as commanders.”

Inviting gods in is easy, seeing gods off is hard. Letting the British and French fleet enter the Black Sea was easy, but making them leave would be difficult.

Containing Russia’s Black Sea Fleet was one aspect. For Britain and France, controlling the Black Sea Straits also increased their influence over the Ottoman Empire, accompanied by tremendous economic benefits.

Abdulmejid I frowned. He knew British and French aid was hard to obtain. Not making demands before the war erupted, weren’t they just waiting for this?

How could concessions the Ottoman Empire could make before the Near East War erupted be greater than after it started?

Now that they were desperate, the British and French military instructors participating as commanders were seizing control of the Ottoman military.

Once the Ottoman government compromised, it would be hard for the Ottoman Empire to shake off British and French control in the future. This was an unconcealed plot, yet even knowing it was a pitfall ahead, Abdulmejid I still had to jump in.

“Tell them, as long as the British and French reinforcements can arrive early, I agree!” Abdulmejid I said through gritted teeth.

To him, agreeing to such conditions was undoubtedly humiliating, but reality left him no choices.

With the out break of the Near East War, the Ottoman Empire needed British and French support. They needed Britain and France to provide weapons, funds, and reinforcements to win the war.

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On March 28, 1852, Russian forces attacked from the Caucasus region. On March 29, Russian forces attacked the Danube River Basin, with Austria also invading the Danube River Basin on the same day.

Facing simultaneous Russian and Austrian invasion, the autonomous governments of Moldavia and Wallachia simply surrendered.

There was no thought of fighting for the Ottoman Empire. The Romanians certainly had no intention of dying for the Sultan as they had been going against the Ottoman Empire for a long time already.

Chapter 175: Crisis in the Ottoman Empire

It was the third day since news of the outbreak of the Near East War had reached London. Even though they were mentally prepared, the British government was still worried after receiving this news.

Even Queen Victoria, who rarely intervenes in politics, could not sit still, and convened a high-level meeting at Buckingham Palace.

Queen Victoria asked: “With the outbreak of the Near East War, the Russians and Austrians are both getting involved, which makes things very difficult for the Ottomans this time. To protect our interests in the Near East, what is the government planning to do?”

The Ottoman Empire had accumulated power over a long period of time. Even though it was declining in this era, it still commanded some prestige. On top of that, the Ottoman government had just completed reforms, making it appear superficially like a modernized empire.

In Queen Victoria’s view, even if the Ottoman Empire could not match Russia and Austria, with such a large territory and millions of troops, at most they would lose some land, but would not collapse immediately.

This was also the mainstream view in Europe—no one knew just how weak the Ottoman Empire really was.

Prime Minister John Russell, who was prepared, answered: “Your Majesty, we have already joined hands with France, and are preparing to jointly intervene in this war.”

Prince Albert questioned: “Prime Minister, this Russo-Turkish war is different from previous ones with Austria also participating.

Even joining hands with France, I’m afraid we cannot compel them to compromise, otherwise this war would not have broken out in the first place!”

Queen Victoria disliked getting involved in politics, unlike Prince Albert, who had a hand in many major British decisions.

John Russell explained: “Your Highness, Russia and Austria’s alliance is only temporary. Due to their conflicting interests, they will eventually part ways.

Our enemy now is Russia. Austria can be put aside for the moment. Their appetite is limited—even giving them the Balkan Peninsula would be too much for them to swallow.

The government is prepared to join hands with France to support the Ottoman Empire against Russia, while Austria’s Foreign Ministry can be easily dealt with.”

Send troops to intervene in the Near East War? Historically, the British were not prepared to personally take the field from the start.

The reason the British sent troops to participate in the Crimean War in history was that the Ottomans could no longer hold on, and France was willing to be the main force and only then did they dispatch forces to fight.

Currently, the Ottoman Empire’s millions of soldiers are still there. No one knows if these troops are just for show before fighting starts.

Many in the British government believed that just providing loans to the Ottomans, and selling some weapons and equipment to them would be enough.

Of course, sending the navy to help was possible. Extending their reach into the Black Sea Straits was also in line with British interests.

They did not have confidence in confronting the Russians on land, but they were not afraid to use their navy to contain the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

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Paris

Compared to the British, Napoleon III was much more proactive. In his view, the Near East War was the perfect opportunity to divert domestic issues.

If he could defeat the Russians and avenge his uncle's Waterloo, he would gain tremendous political points.

If they lost, it would not matter either. After all, the war is being fought in the Ottoman Empire, and they could always blame their allies. As long as the French army could win some victories to take home for propaganda, it would be enough.

Napoleon III asked with concern: "Rouher, what did the British say? Are they prepared to send troops with us?"

Rouher replied: "Your Majesty, the London government is still hesitating. Their preliminary judgment is to support the Ottoman Empire behind the scenes without sending troops themselves."

However, if we send troops to assist the Ottomans, the British will also be supportive. They also want to teach the Russians a lesson on the battlefield."

This conclusion was quite rash. With the Ottoman Empire not yet defeated, of course the British could choose not to take the field.

If the Ottoman army suffers a major defeat, could the British still sit idly by?

If the Ottoman Empire collapses, not only would their initial investments be in vain, even their interests in the Mediterranean would be threatened.

The reason Napoleon III dared to send troops to intervene in the Near East War was also based on the Ottoman Empire having a certain amount of strength. Otherwise, if they were to take on Russia alone, the French would be afraid to do so.

There was no other reason than the sheer number of Russian horsemen. Quantitative change leads to qualitative change. Even Napoleon had been overwhelmed by the Russian numbers back then, not to mention there was also the Austrian Empire. They had no choice but to take this seriously.

"Humph!"

Napoleon III let out a cold snort, expressing his dissatisfaction. The British were clearly making them be the spearhead.

"Tell the British not to forget that there is also Austria. If they don't send troops to support the Ottoman Empire, I'm afraid we'll soon hear news of their defeat."

Napoleon III said after thinking for a moment.

Using diplomatic means to divide the Russo-Austrian alliance was very important for the British, and it was worth paying some price for.

But for Napoleon III, it was different. The stage was already set, the audience waiting to watch the show. They can't suddenly stop performing.

Since Napoleon III took the throne as Napoleon's heir, avenging his uncle was natural and justified. The French people were closely watching him so he could not back down.

After all, the French people of this era were quite demanding. Since Napoleon III made promises before taking the throne, he had to keep them.

This was how Napoleon III acted historically. The Crimean War ended Russia's hegemony over Europe, and won him public support.

"Your Majesty, if the Russians and Austrians truly ally, we will be hard pressed to defeat them in the Near East." Rouher cautioned.

The Vice-Emperor title was not for nothing. If they lost, he would take the blame, so preventing problems was a must.

"Don't worry, they cannot truly ally. With Russia's appetite, Austria would not dare let them take control of the Black Sea Straits." Napoleon III affirmed confidently.

An overwhelmingly strong Russian Empire was not in Austria's interests. If Russia swallowed the Ottoman Empire, it would increase pressure on Austria.

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Balkan Peninsula

On April 11, 1852, after negotiations between the Austrian and Russian governments, the Balkan Treaty was signed.

The treaty stipulated that Russia would hand over Moldavia and Wallachia to Austria; Russia obtain rights of free passage; Austria would provide logistical support for Russian forces in the Balkans.

The two sides took what they needed. Austria obtained the pre-agreed territory, successfully masking its westward strategy. Russia gained the chance to continue attacking from the Balkan Peninsula, increasing the odds of victory in this war.

Looking at a map makes it clear that without Austria's material support, after occupying the two countries along the Danube, logistical constraints would have deprived Russia of the ability to continue the offensive.

Russia's sudden concession left the Ottoman government, prepared to watch a Russo-Austrian conflict, dumbfounded.

With no time to hesitate, 250,000 Russian troops set off along the lower Danube, heading straight for Bulgaria.

Anyone with some military knowledge knows that once Bulgaria falls, the Ottoman capital would be in danger.

In fact, if not for the Ottoman government timely inviting the British and French navies into the Black Sea, Russia's offensive would have proceeded even more smoothly. Transporting supplies by sea is much easier than by land.

With Russia's military strength, if they did not lose naval supremacy, they could have chosen multiple landing sites, leaving the Ottoman Empire overwhelmed.

Just as one wave subsided, another one rose.

The Russians were also prepared. Using connections through the Eastern Orthodox Church, Bulgarians were now eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Tsar's forces.

Not just Bulgarians, other ethnicities within the Ottoman Empire were also ready to rise up. It was just that they still lacked effective organization at this time, nationalism had not yet spread, and they could not unleash much combat power.

In short, the Ottoman Empire now faced gathering storms, and with Austria added to the mix, they will face even greater troubles.

Chapter 176: It All Depends on Contrast

After declaring war on the Ottoman Empire, Austria entered a state of war. Large amounts of strategic materials were transported along the Danube towards the Balkan Peninsula, and 200,000 Austrian troops also marched grandly over.

On the surface, it looked like Austria was going to take revenge on the Ottoman Empire. The two sides' hatred could be traced back hundreds of years. If not for the Ottoman Empire's meddling, the House of Habsburg would have long unified Germany.

This time, Franz deceived the whole world. With troops and strategic materials continuously pouring into the Balkan Peninsula, even within Austria, it looked like they were determined to defeat the Ottoman Empire.

Only a few high-level officials knew that the Balkan offensive had already ended for now. Austria's troops and strategic materials gathering along the lower Danube were mainly to facilitate rapid troop redeployment after the westward strategy was launched.

The strategic materials sent to the Balkan Peninsula, weren't they still needed by the Russians? Even though the Russian government prepared for two years for this war, they were still unable to resolve domestic transportation issues.

Originally, the Russian government planned to rely on seaborne supplies to resolve logistical issues. They concentrated strategic materials at Black Sea coastal ports in Ukraine, with the Black Sea Fleet escorting, it was foolproof.

But plans could not keep up with changes. Once the British and French navies arrived, sea routes were cut off.

Now, they needed their ally's help. Austria had the Danube passing through it, allowing direct access to Bulgaria. Supplying logistics was no issue.

It could be said that the Danube was a treasure gifted by heaven to Austria. Before railways were completed, water transport was the most reliable method.

The Danube originated in Baden, passed through Württemberg and Bavaria into Austria, through Wallachia and Moldavia into the sea. This was the logistical lifeline for Austria's western advance into Southern Germany and southern advance into the Balkan Peninsula.

Of course, completing the railways would still be best. After all, the Danube could not cover every region. Having an east-west railway would be even more convenient.

Vienna

At the Austrian General Staff headquarters, war-seeking petitions from the military had piled up like a mountain. Soldiers needed battle merits. Merely occupying the two Danubian principalities was hardly any fighting at all. How could they get promotions and titles?

If not for Marshal Radetzky's high prestige able to restrain the war faction in the military, these chaotic war petitions would have reached Franz's desk.

According to the Archives Bureau's statistics, the General Staff received over 100,000 war petitions in 1852. Almost every officer and soldier's name appeared in the war petitions.

A middle-aged officer held a thick stack of documents and said with a wry smile: "Marshal, these are war petitions from the 19th Division."

He had lost count of how many times he had brought documents over. Ever since the war with the Ottoman Empire broke out, the Austrian military was itching for action, gearing up for a big fight.

Every day, the General Staff had to receive large amounts of war petitions, as well as countless battle plans. In short, everyone was very impatient, afraid that the Russians would destroy the Ottomans too quickly, leaving them no chance to perform.

Marshal Radetzky thought for a moment and said: "Give them to the archives. From now on, bring me no more such petitions."

At the start, he was very pleased. An aggressive military was a good thing! But over time, Marshal Radetzky had become numb to it.

Ever since easily occupying the two Danubian principalities, many saw this war as an armed parade, as if the Ottoman Empire would collapse at a touch.

Not just active officers got excited. Even debauched noble youths everywhere sought connections, wanting to gild themselves in the military.

Wanting to join at this time was naturally impossible. To execute the westward strategy, Austria's top leadership were keeping a close eye on this, allowing no carelessness.

"Yes, Marshal!" The middle-aged officer replied.

But after speaking, the officer did not leave, instead seeming rather urgent, as if he had something to say.

Noticing this, Marshal Radetzky asked in puzzlement: "General Lafite, anything else?"

"Marshal, the mood down below is feverish, we can barely restrain them." Lafite said apprehensively.

Marshal Radetzky said solemnly: "There's nothing we can't handle. Tell them to be prepared, and they don't need to worry about when we'll go to war.

Whoever has objections can be ordered to immediately retire and return home. The Austrian military has no room for such undisciplined rabble!"

“Yes, Marshal!” Lafite hurriedly answered.

The Austrian military had no tradition of lower ranks superseding higher ones. Such important national affairs were not for lower officers and soldiers to decide.

If ordered to retire now, they would miss this war. For those eager to win glory on the battlefield, this was a huge loss.

After suppressing the voices of those below him, Marshal Radetzky sighed. This was indeed a once in a millennium chance to head south into the Balkan Peninsula, but reality did not allow it.

Currently, the main forces of the Austrian army are active in the two principalities downstream of the Danube. Ostensibly, they are there to suppress rebel forces and establish effective local governance, but in reality, it’s all for the convenience of concentrating forces.

Even the warships in the Austrian Navy capable of navigating the Danube had been stationed in the Black Sea before the outbreak of the war. At this time, they are all providing escorts in the Danube River Basin.

With so much preparation, they could not possibly abandon the westward strategy just to gain some advantage in the Balkan Peninsula, right?

Dispersing the army was easy, gathering them back was difficult. With just one order, combined Austrian and Russian forces could occupy the Balkan Peninsula before long.

But once the Balkan Peninsula was occupied, Austria would be stuck there, and it would be hard to extricate themselves.

Being far away from the Danube River Basin without water transport, by the time they gather hundreds of thousands of troops and transport them from the Balkan Peninsula to Southern Germany, even the yellow flowers would have wilted.

Sch?nbrunn Palace

Franz inquired with concern, “Mr. Steiner, at what stage is the construction of the domestic main railway lines, and when can it be completed?”

Austrian railway network construction began in 1849. Three years had passed since work started, and some flatland sections were already operational.

However, for the entire transportation network, it’s like a drop in the bucket. Not to mention the railway crossing the main ridge of the Alps, it might not be successfully completed even if they spend another three years on it.

Franz did not have urgent requirements for mountain railways. What was most important now was the Vienna to Salzburg railway. It had to be opened ahead of schedule.

There was no choice. Due to his butterfly effect, the Near East War erupted a year earlier than the historical Crimean War, reducing preparation time for the westward strategy by one year.

One year is enough to change many things. Vienna is just over two hundred kilometers from Salzburg, and Franz isn’t worried at all about completing this railway in four years.

Losing a year in the schedule would make things difficult. For the sake of secrecy, Franz couldn’t inquire specifically about this section of the railway. It would be troublesome if it attracted the

attention of those with ulterior motives. Now, they can only push the entire national main railway lines to meet the deadline together.

According to the General Staff's plans, once the westward strategy was launched, Austrian forces would attack in three prongs. One prong would head along the Danube, one prong would depart from Salzburg overland straight for Munich, and one prong would enter Bavaria along the Rhine.

It had to be said, developed water systems were great. Even entering Bavaria from Salzburg, there was still the Salzach River connecting to the Rhine.

In this era, Bavarians had yet to build a canal linking the Rhine and Danube, otherwise supplying Vienna for this war to unify Southern Germany would have been easy.

Now, Salzburg was added as a logistics supply point. Therefore, completing the Vienna-Salzburg railway before war erupted was critical.

Railway Minister Steiner handed Franz a document, saying: "Your Majesty, this is the railway construction schedule and estimated completion timetable. Please review it. Currently, domestic railway companies have all sped up construction.

The main railway lines' overall completion will require at least two more years. Within this year, one-third of the sections can become operational, while the opening of some mountain railways may be postponed until 1856."

Franz nodded. Austria's railway construction speed was not slow for this era, especially after the government's stimulus policies were introduced, with railway companies racing to meet deadlines.

Starting this year, Austria's railways would usher in an opening up period, with many sections successively becoming operational, greatly improving domestic transportation.

Franz smiled and said after casually flipping through and seeing the answer he wanted: "I'm very satisfied with this speed. Minister Steiner's efforts are appreciated, you may go about your duties now."

"Yes, Your Majesty!" After speaking, Steiner immediately left. The subsequent meeting was not something a technical bureaucrat like him could participate in.

Franz had no plans to groom versatile bureaucrats. Government officials were mostly talents specializing in one area. If they were proficient in everything, they could pack up and go home, as Austria's government had no need for polymaths.

If there really were such geniuses, Franz felt it would be better to send them into scientific research. Politics was too dangerous, even he as Emperor was afraid.

After seeing Steiner off, Franz said: "Gentlemen, if nothing unexpected happens, the railway to Salzburg can be opened before the year's end.

The railway roadbed construction is already complete. The original plan remains unchanged. We must still delay for at least half a year. Mr. Metternich, any issues?"

Called out by name, Foreign Minister Metternich thought for a moment before answering: "Your Majesty, this depends on the war situation at the Balkan front.

According to the intelligence we've gathered, the Russian army has deployed 251,000 troops here, while the Ottoman army is officially listed at 450,000, but in reality, they are short by at least one-fifth, and their combat readiness is likely not very optimistic.

If Russia achieves a quick victory before British and French intervention, capturing Constantinople, then our original plans will be very difficult to continue."

Despite the Ottoman army appearing to have greater numbers on the surface, Metternich still favored the Russians more. The Ottoman side having more troops did not mean more were necessarily deployed to the battlefield.

Now, Russia had handed the two Danubian principalities to Austria, in effect also handing over responsibility for securing the rear, including logistical transportation in the region, to Austrian forces.

The Ottoman Empire was fighting at home, but unfortunately Russia held greater sway over the Bulgarians in this region. With Russian support, local guerrilla numbers had already exceeded five digits. The Ottoman advantage of fighting at home became a disadvantage.

Marshal Radetzky very confidently commented, "Mr. Metternich, you don't need to worry. This is a poorly fought war. From contact with Russian forces entering the Balkan Peninsula, we can basically judge that the Russian army's combat strength is far weaker than we imagined.

Firstly, the Russian army's force composition is very chaotic, unit organization still dated from the war against France, corruption within the army is severe, weapons and equipment are backward, and the logistical system is disorderly.

Secondly, Russian military discipline is loose, the Cossack cavalry are especially locusts, bringing calamity wherever they go. They can still fare well in opportunistic battles, but will immediately collapse when encountering failure.

The Ottoman army learned superficial knowledge from French instructors, but the actual system remains outdated.

Regarding corruption, the Ottoman army is even more egregious. At least the Russians can fill the ranks, while Ottoman officers directly pocketed phantom pay, with severe roster shortfalls.

Many soldiers were forcibly conscripted just to fill numbers, dragged in without any expectation of combat ability.

In conclusion, the Ottoman army's combat strength is even worse. Without foreign intervention, they will most likely lose this war, though holding Constantinople should be no issue."

Franz agreed with Marshal Radetzky's assessment. In history, the combat effectiveness displayed by the Russians in the Crimean War can be described in one word—poor. As for the Ottomans, they taught everyone that there's no such thing as the worst; there's only worse!

Overall, both Russia and the Ottoman Empire were overestimating themselves. Not just them, but France, Austria, Spain and Prussia were also thus. Except for Britain, European powers were collectively not in top form.

Under Franz's butterfly effect, Austria was rescued, allowing Marshal Radetzky to gain confidence relying on Russia and the Ottoman Empire's bluffing.

Chapter 177: Choices Made by All Parties

London

The course of the Near Eastern War left the British astonished. The Russians actually agreed to give up the two duchies in the Danube River Basin in exchange for Austria's logistical support.

This means that the Russians have a voracious appetite this time, as only greater benefits could make them abandon Moldavia and Wallachia.

John Russell's expression was gloomy as he said: "Our previous plans have failed. Austria and Russia have reached an agreement. If we don't make a move now, the Ottoman Empire will definitely not be their match.

Mr. Palmerston, does your foreign ministry have any way to quickly break up the alliance between Russia and Austria?

With these two nations working together, they are simply invincible in the Near East. Even if we and the French take joint action, victory would still be difficult."

The British Prime Minister's words were not unfounded. The only regions bordering Russia and the Ottomans were the Balkans and Caucasus.

Due to terrain constraints, large-scale military operations would face major logistical issues in the Caucasus.

Given Russia's poor domestic transportation infrastructure and the complex terrain of the Caucasus, they can't sustain a battle with over two hundred thousand troops.

Of course, if they maintain control of the Black Sea, they can use the coastline for logistical support without any issues.

Now, the only remaining land route for Russian troops is the Balkan Peninsula. Both Moldavia and Wallachia in the Danube River Basin are major grain-producing regions, and food supplies can be sourced locally, significantly reducing the logistical burden on the Russian army.

Even so, Russia lacked the ability to advance all the way to Constantinople. After occupying the two principalities, their offensive reach was basically maxed out, with strategic materials transported from Russia unable to keep up with frontline consumption.

However, with Austria on their side, it's a different story. The Danube River provides a swift means to transport strategic resources, ensuring that supporting several hundred thousand troops on the Balkan Peninsula poses no issues.

Palmerston calmly replied: "Prime Minister, it was very simple to divide the Russo-Austrian alliance, we previously proposed it. As long as the Ottoman Empire agreed to cede the two Danubian principalities to Austria, it would have been enough to satisfy the Austrians. With Austria separating them from Russia, the current situation would not be so dire."

To contain Russia, the British Foreign Ministry did have this plan, but ceding the two Danubian principalities to Austria was only part of it.

Historically, the British had proposed: giving the Åland Islands and Finland to Sweden; ceding the Baltic coast to Prussia; making Poland independent; giving Moldavia, Wallachia and the Danube

Delta to Austria, with Austria giving up Lombardy and Venice, to be occupied by the Kingdom of Sardinia as part of the deal; Crimea and the Caucasus would return to the Ottoman Empire...

In theory, once implemented, this plan would greatly weaken Russia, depriving them of the ability to compete with Britain for world hegemony.

However, the plan failed to keep up with fast-changing circumstances, as it hadn't even begun implementation before it fell apart. Not only did the Russians reject the plan, but Austria was also unwilling to accept it.

Although the two Danubian principalities were sizable with fertile land, these regions were still undeveloped, with less economic value than Lombardy and Venice.

Now, occupying these regions requires Austria to invest substantial human and material resources for development, and it has also put Austria on the frontlines as the vanguard against Russia, which is strategically disadvantageous.

Given this situation, it might be more practical to form an alliance with the Russians. Austria could still obtain control over these territories, albeit at the expense of the Ottoman Empire's interests.

Franz has always adhered to the principle that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." He wouldn't sacrifice his own interests for the sake of countering the Russians' ambitions.

The butterfly effect was still useful. Austria's performance in the Russo-Turkish War proved the great powers' strength to the outside world. Palmerston's new strategy no longer proposed giving Lombardy and Venice to Sardinia.

Reading opponents was a British specialty. With Austria stronger than historically, their treatment was naturally better than history as well.

To cajole Austria into opposing Russia, they were willing to promise significant benefits. Unfortunately, their plans failed to persuade the Ottomans before war erupted.

"But the foolish Ottoman government failed to see this point. They only saw that ceding the two Danubian principalities would result in heavy losses, and they didn't recognize the potential benefits of doing so.

I believe that after this Russo-Turkish War, reality will make the Ottomans a little more clear-headed to make the right choice." John Russell grumbled incessantly.

Clearly, matters with the Ottoman Empire had already irritated this British Prime Minister.

Palmerston sneered: "Prime Minister, the Ottoman government is now clear-headed already. I believe they will make the right choice. But that is a matter for the future.

The most important thing now is to swiftly persuade Parliament to dispatch troops to the Balkan Peninsula. If we delay, the Ottomans may not be able to hold on."

This is the British national strategy: prioritize dealing with the most significant threats. Until the Russians are defeated, they won't change their focus.

In terms of threat level, Austria was still inferior to France at this time. Its terrible geography already demonstrated Austria's inability to threaten Britain's core interests.

John Russell pondered and said: “There won’t be big issues with Parliament. To safeguard our interests in the Mediterranean region, we must contain the Russians.”

Interests were eternal. Russia’s annexation of the Ottoman Empire seriously damages British interests. Interest groups will naturally support government intervention in the Near East War.

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Constantinople

Abdulmejid I regretted it. If he had known that the Russians and Austrians would come to an agreement so quickly, he would have accepted the British suggestion.

There are no regrets in politics. At this point, Russian and Ottoman forces have already engaged in combat in Bulgaria. Even more tragically, despite having more troops, they seem to be at a disadvantage on the battlefield.

“How much longer before our reinforcements can reach the front lines?” Abdulmejid I asked concernedly.

“Your Majesty, there are too many guerrillas in Bulgaria. Our reinforcements will take three more days to arrive.” The Minister of War answered in a lowered voice.

In this war, the Ottoman army’s speed was slower than they anticipated, naturally sapping the Minister of War’s confidence as he spoke.

Abdulmejid I let out a cold snort: “Humph!”

He added: “I don’t care how you do it, but we absolutely cannot lose Bulgaria. You all know what this place represents!”

Everyone hung their heads in silence. In modern times, the Ottoman Empire had relatively enlightened national policies.

Unfortunately, even the best policies require capable execution. The decaying Ottoman government was undoubtedly lacking in efficient execution, leading to public discontent.

The aftereffects emerged now. Not only did the local population not support the military operations, but they also suffered attacks from guerrilla forces, slowing down the march of reinforcements.

Fortunately, the Russian response was also slow, otherwise decisive battle would have already erupted at the frontlines, leaving the Ottoman government truly only able to cry.

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Athens, Greece

The outbreak of the Near East War brought joy to the Greeks as their opportunity to achieve their goals had arrived.

But Otto I now had a headache, facing the wooing of four great powers at once, he was unsure which side to take.

Ever since the 1850 conflict with Britain erupted, Greek nationalism had surged. At the beginning, Otto I believed nationalism benefited his rule, and thus supported this ideology.

Otto I believed he had grasped the key to gaining popular support, placing himself at the forefront of the patriotic movement.

How to prevent the patriotic fervor of the masses from cooling became Otto I's conundrum.

After nationalism erupted, reclaiming lost lands became Greeks' shared goal, as well as Otto I and Queen Amalia's "great ideal".

The Greek demands to reclaim territories seemed never-ending. The theoretical basis for these demands dated back to the Byzantine Empire, as Greeks aimed to recreate the territorial expanse of that era.

When the balance between power and ideals is lost, tragic days are not far off. During this era, the Kingdom of Greece covered an area of only a little over 50,000 square kilometers and had a population of less than a million. They simply couldn't support their "ideals."

"Gentlemen, which side should we take now?" Otto I asked with a frown.

For a small nation, the most sensible approach is to stand with the victors. However, in nations where nationalism is thriving, such a rational choice is often eschewed in favor of aligning with the side that offers the greatest benefits.

At this moment, Otto I was unaware that his rule was about to face a new crisis. Regardless of which side he chose, it was impossible to satisfy the Greek people's appetite for reclaiming lost territories.

In idealism-prevailing Greece, the masses cared little for such details. They would only make demands of the government based on their ideals.

Throughout history, in the more than one hundred years from Otto I onwards, no Greek monarch was able to enjoy peaceful days because none of them could fulfill the ideals of the Greek people.

The Minister of Finance answered with a complex expression: "Your Majesty, the British and French navies have already controlled the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. For national security, we can only stand with them."

This is the most rational course of action. Regardless of who wins or loses, Greece, surrounded by the British, French, and Ottomans, has no real choice.

The Minister of War rebutted: "What can we gain by siding with the Ottoman Empire? Can we expect them to return our homeland out of charity?"

The Russians have already promised that as long as we declare war on the Ottoman Empire, they will support us in reclaiming Thessaly and Epirus after the war.

The Austrians have even agreed to support us reclaiming however much territory we can conquer. Can we really give up such a once in a millennium opportunity?"

There was no helping it, Russia and Austria made generous promises using others' resources. Naturally they did not mind giving promises to the Greeks. Britain and France were currently allies with the Ottoman Empire. How could they choose to sacrifice Ottoman interests to satisfy Greek demands?

Even if only to win over allies, the Kingdom of Greece was still unqualified!

Britain and France also had their pride, not just anyone could stand equal with them.

The Prime Minister chimed in: “That’s right, if we give up this once in a millennium opportunity, the public outside will not agree either. For the great revival of the Kingdom of Greece, it’s worth taking a little risk!”

It wasn’t that he wanted to side with Russia, nor that he failed to see the risks of doing so, but that the Greek people outside had already made the choice for them.

Nationalism is a double-edged sword; it can harm the enemy, but it can also hurt oneself. Now, King Otto I’s government has been hijacked by popular opinion.

Otto I pondered and said: “Since the masses have made their choice, our government should respect their choice.

But considering Britain and France’s positions, we also cannot openly declare war on the Ottoman Empire. Does anyone have good suggestions?”

There are no good ideas, but there is a bad one.

The Minister of War proposed, “Your Majesty, we can organize civilian militias to launch an attack on the Ottoman Empire. This way, we can give an explanation to both Russia and Austria while maintaining the face of Britain and France.”

In his view, British and French support for the Ottoman Empire was solely to counter Russia and did not necessarily mean that these two countries were genuinely supporting the Ottomans.

As long as the Kingdom of Greece maintains a balance, striking the Ottoman Empire without harming the prestige of Britain and France, they would not interfere.

A bad idea was still better than no idea. With no better solutions, this bad idea could only be used to muddle through.

Seeing the unanimous support from the others, Otto I finally made a decision, “Then give a response to the Austrian and Russian representatives. In this war, we support them!”

Chapter 178: War Loans (BONUS)

The Greeks were pulled in, but Franz didn’t take them seriously at all. In this Near Eastern War, the main characters were the Russians, and Austria was just playing a minor role, at most causing a few problems for the beleaguered Ottoman Empire.

Even though the two countries had declared war, there was still ample room for maneuver. Austria merely occupied their two vassal states then stopped, keeping conflict within controllable bounds.

The decrepit Ottoman government was actually quite tolerant, but it had previously overestimated its own strength, and Austria needed this war to happen for various reasons.

Whether the Ottoman Empire should be destroyed or not was a matter of indifference to Franz. With the support of Britain and France, at the very least, the Ottoman Empire could hold onto the Anatolian Peninsula.

As for the Greeks, to be honest, Franz didn’t have any expectations of them.

Their geographical location made clinging to the British the best choice, while their lack of strength meant that the Ottomans could easily suppress them with one hand.

If they openly joined the alliance and declared war on the Ottoman Empire, then for political reasons, responsible figures like Franz and Nicholas I would undoubtedly lend them a hand.

Even if they were defeated on the battlefield, post-war negotiations wouldn't leave them at a disadvantage.

Sneaking into the conflict couldn't be considered allying with any of the major powers. If they won, Franz was a man of his word, and the Austrian government would certainly support their demands, and the Russians would likely uphold their promises.

If they lost, then they were on their own. It was the civilian militias at play, and it had nothing to do with the Greek government, nor with Austria or Russia. Franz remembered that in history, the Greeks had lost and were brutally defeated by the Ottoman Empire.

Compared to the Greeks, another Balkan small country, Montenegro, or as it was known then, Crna Gora (the Black Mountain), had a much firmer stance.

Originally, Bishop Danilo had aimed for neutrality. Montenegro, a small country with a population of less than 200,000, had launched three wars against the Ottoman Empire in 1821, 1829, and 1835, all ending in failure, in an attempt to gain access to the southern sea.

Bishop Danilo was a pacifist. He was pessimistic about this war. With Montenegro completely surrounded by the Ottoman Empire, he feared being overrun before Russian reinforcements arrived.

Unfortunately, the pro-Russian Montenegrin people did not agree with him. A belligerent spirit was a characteristic of all Balkan nations, and Montenegro was one of the most prominent examples.

The Ottoman Empire had ruled over the Balkan Peninsula for hundreds of years but still had not been able to conquer the Principality of Montenegro. The Ottoman government had grown weary of this.

Thus, they made a proposal to the Montenegrin government: if they were willing to cease hostilities with the Ottoman Empire, acknowledge the Ottoman Empire's suzerainty, they would grant Montenegro the city of Scutari, an outlet to the Adriatic Sea, and a portion of Herzegovina.

The tough Montenegrins firmly rejected this enticement. They would rather conquer these lands with their own hands than submit to the Ottoman Empire.

Hatred had seeped into the bones of every Montenegrin. With the opportunity at hand and both the Russians and Austrians declaring war on the Ottoman Empire, how could they possibly abstain from this conflict?

It should be known that in the Crimean War, pro-Russian Montenegrins had all wanted to participate.

However, Bishop Danilo understood the situation clearly. He believed that the Russians were too far away, and if a war broke out, Montenegro would be isolated without support. So, he chose neutrality.

For this, Bishop Danilo nearly got overthrown.

Now, there was no need to worry about isolation. They were not far from the Austrian province of Dalmatia, and this left Bishop Danilo with no choice but to compromise.

To be able to marry, Bishop Danilo made a compromise. He agreed to support the war, but in exchange passed the bishopric to someone else and crowned himself “Prince of Montenegro and the Brdas”.

As a traditional Russian ally, the Principality of Montenegro received considerable care. Russia communicated with Austria to have them provide assistance to Montenegro.

Franz naturally would not reject this little request from Russia. It was just weapons, equipment, and strategic supplies. As long as they were willing to pay, everything could be discussed.

At times like this, the advantages of state enterprises became apparent. With just an administrative order from the government, enterprises began early production of strategic materials.

Considering Montenegro’s limited financial resources, Franz also considerably offered a loan service to address the urgent needs of their customer.

Providing such loan services was unavoidable, and it wasn’t just Montenegro; even the Russians had limited financial capabilities.

Currently, they haven’t completed internal reforms yet. The wealth that a feudal dynasty can amass simply cannot compare to capitalist countries.

The Russian government didn’t anticipate British and French intervention, and now, with no access to sea routes, the strategic supplies stockpiled along the Ukrainian coast can only be transported by land. This clearly can’t ensure the needs of the front-line military, so they have to procure goods from Austria, which is closer.

The costs of launching an expedition to the Balkan Peninsula are much higher than those in history during the Crimean War. Due to the Russian government’s corruption, even without Austria driving up prices, they still rose.

Franz certainly can’t prevent Russian bureaucrats from getting rich, right?

In the end, it’s a win-win situation, and the only entity that is harmed is the Russian central treasury. After all, they have a big operation to support, and if they run out of money, they can always take out a loan.

The Austrian government is very eager to take on this business. These loans are earmarked, which means they can only purchase Austrian goods, and they don’t even have to provide real money. In any case, giving loans to the Russians for payment is better than letting the Russians default on the payment.

Political loans were never simple, carrying additional trade conditions. Even if Russia’s government defaulted, Austria’s government would not lose out.

Austria’s central bank is the only entity with the capacity to handle this deal. Otherwise, loans in the hundreds of millions wouldn’t be feasible, not even if you combined several major commercial banks domestically.

With Franz’s command, the Austrian central bank started up the printing press and gathered the first tranche of funds in the shortest time.

The Russians borrowed 100 million guilders, the Principality of Montenegro borrowed 5 million guilders, while the loan request from the Greeks was vetoed by Franz.

The reason is that Austria is unable to provide them with material assistance. They don't share a land border, and relying on sea routes for deliveries is quite challenging when the British are involved, isn't it?

Pay in hard currency? That was obviously impossible. The Austrian government was not an open purse, how could they expect Greece's finances to repay loans?

It should be known that since the Kingdom of Greece's establishment, their finances relied on borrowing from powerful backers. When had they ever cleared their debts?

After loans to Russia and Montenegro were completed, this money flowed into the Austrian market, stimulating economic growth.

Anyway, it's wartime now, so rising prices are normal. As long as they don't overdo it, there shouldn't be any major issues.

After unifying Southern Germany, with a larger currency pool in the market, inflation issues would be readily solved.

As long as funds did not flow out, increasing money issuance along with greater wealth creation in society was normal operation, and would not lead to serious inflation.

As for the economic pains from the market returning to normal after the war ended, there were still Russian repayments. As long as hard currency flowed in, any crisis could be readily solved.

This opportunity could be used to link the Austrian and Russian economies more closely, using interests to consolidate their alliance.

The French could influence the Russian government by controlling Russian finances. Austria lacked the power to control Russian finances, but influencing a bit should still be achievable, right?

Franz was very conscientious, with loans to allies only 0.2% monthly interest, absolutely no unequal additional conditions whatsoever.

It just promoted some economic exchange between allies. With Britain and France as enemies, Austria seizing their markets was not excessive, right?

At this point, Britain and France won't even have the opportunity to protest; they became enemies of the Russian government the moment they blockaded the ports.

Chapter 179: How to Raise A Pig Teammate

On April 25, 1852, the governments of Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire held a high-level meeting in Paris to discuss the Near East War. The impatient Napoleon III, eager to return France to the world's center stage, personally hosted the conference.

"The Russians are launching fierce attacks towards Bulgaria and the Caucasus. Our troops have repeatedly pushed back their offensives.

But to defeat the Russians, our strength alone is still insufficient. Plus the Austrians are eyeing us closely, tying down large numbers of our forces.

If we are facing just one enemy, we could still cope. Now confronting two powerful foes at once, we are truly hard-pressed." Ottoman Foreign Minister Fuad Pasha said somewhat wearily.

This rhetoric really troubled him. He had to both persuade Britain and France to swiftly send troops to assist, yet also not expose the Ottoman Empire's internal weaknesses.

Walking this tightrope was not easy; it was easy to make mistakes. If Britain and France believed that the Ottoman Empire could hold its own and delayed their intervention, it would be disastrous for them.

On the other hand, if the weakness of the Ottoman Empire were exposed, and Britain and France deemed it not worth the investment, they might join Austria and Russia in partitioning the Ottoman territories, which would be equally disastrous.

Aside from diplomatic troubles, the Ottoman government's internal power struggles also gave Fuad Pasha endless headaches. Abdulmejid I was not an easy man to get along with.

Not long ago, Abdulmejid I had dismissed this pro-British and French Foreign Minister due to Russian pressure, replacing him with the pro-Russian Rifat Pasha.

With the failure of Constantinople negotiations, the pro-Russian Foreign Minister seemed to have lost value, immediately getting dismissed again, with the pro-British and French Fuad Pasha returning.

This could only happen in a country like the Ottoman Empire. If a European country so casually swapped personnel, disregarding the Foreign Minister position, they would have quit long ago.

In reality, Fuad didn't want to carry out this difficult task. Doing the job well is one thing, but messing up could spell doom for his whole family.

Yet he had no choice. Abdulmejid I's will was not to be defied. The position of minister held little sway in the Ottoman Empire compared to European countries.

"Mr. Fuad, there's no need to worry. According to the intelligence we've received, the Austrian government has already secured its interests. They are currently preparing to conclude their efforts.

Although we're not certain about the specific terms of their agreement with the Russians, based on the current situation, it appears that the Russians may have offered support in the form of the two Danubian principalities in exchange for Austrian material aid.

Not long ago, the Austrian government provided Russia with a low-interest 100 million guilders loan, with virtually no additional conditions.

Everyone knows of Russia's ambition. The Austrian government surely does not wish for their continued expansion. Providing material support now is already the limit." British Foreign Secretary Palmerston analyzed.

His message was clear—he was warning Fuad not to attempt to utilize their power to resolve both enemies at the same time. The reason was quite simple: the Russians were the biggest threat to the British Empire, so it was essential to prioritize dealing with them.

As for Austria, they could be dealt with after defeating the Russians. John Russell's foreign policy had always been adjusted based on the perceived threat level of their enemies.

Simultaneously facing Russia and Austria, in Palmerston's view, it was highly irrational.

Britain-France-Ottoman vs Austria-Russia fighting in the Near East was clearly evenly matched.

Such fights generally resulted in mutually assured destruction, with neither side better off.

Undoubtedly, he had tremendously overestimated the Ottoman Empire's strength, not realizing this teammate was already crippled.

Napoleon III nodded and said, "Mr. Palmerston is right. We need to set aside Austria for now and deal with Russia first. Then we can consider how to handle Austria."

Although brimming with confidence, he wasn't only confident in the strength of France but also had great faith in the power of the British.

In his view, Britain and France were far ahead of Austria and Russia in strength. Plus the quasi-great power Ottoman Empire, victory in this war was assured.

While confidence was essential, there was no harm in weakening the enemy further and employing strategies to divide and conquer.

Fuad Pasha smiled and casually said: "Of course, it's best to defeat the enemies one by one. The Russian reinforcements are continuously streaming to the front lines. To win the war with minimal cost, we must take action immediately. Delaying too long would inevitably increase uncertainties."

He didn't care much about how England and France planned their actions. His primary goal was to get English and French reinforcements onto the battlefield. If he could achieve that, he'd consider his mission half-complete.

Battlefield victory or defeat was not something for this Foreign Minister to worry about. Tying Britain and France onto the ship allowed the Ottoman Empire to at least weather the present crisis.

Napoleon III meaningfully said: "Mr. Fuad Pasha, please be at ease. The French army is ready. We will dispatch within a week. France is a responsible nation, and we won't stand by and let our allies bleed on the front lines without taking action."

Hearing Napoleon III's words, Palmerston's expression was unchanging, as if this had nothing to do with him at all.

With a smiling face, he said, "We are currently persuading our Parliament, and we will have results by next month at the latest. By then, the British army will also appear on the Balkan Peninsula battlefield."

Fuad Pasha's complexion was somewhat ugly, seemingly very dissatisfied with Britain's stance. But in truth, he felt relieved inside. This result could already be explained domestically.

With the issue of deploying troops resolved, the matter of loans became easier to handle. It primarily revolved around interest rates and the number of additional conditions.

In this aspect, the Ottomans had no bargaining chips at all. Fuad Pasha did not haggle over it. As long as conditions were not too harsh, he readily agreed.

If conditions were truly too harsh, he could always send it back for Abdulmejid I's approval. After all, the Ottoman Empire had no choice at this time.

Without British and French support, this Near East War could potentially doom the Sultanate. At this life and death juncture, concepts like principles and integrity no longer existed.

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On May 9, 1852, with aid from Bulgarian guerrillas, the Russian main force captured the Ottoman's important military fortress—Ruse.

The fall of Ruse signified a breach in the Ottoman Empire's Bulgarian defense line. After nearly a month of fighting over Bulgaria, the Russians finally achieved a strategic breakthrough.

Unfortunately, due to the disarray in the Russian command structure, their surrounding units couldn't coordinate immediately after capturing Ruse, failing to capitalize on their gains. By the time the expeditionary force's command realized, it was too late.

After missing this opportunity, the Russians lost their chance to deal a severe blow to the Ottoman main army, and the war continued.

Coincidentally, at this time, the first wave of French reinforcements had already arrived in Constantinople, and after a brief period of preparation, 50,000 elite French troops were committed to the war.

After being accustomed to fighting the disorganized Ottoman forces, the Russian expeditionary army made a mistake when encountering a well-disciplined French army, leading to an unexpected situation.

On May 11, 1852, during a pursuit of the Ottoman army, the rashly advancing 16th Infantry Division of the Russians coincidentally collided with the French 6th Infantry Division. They were soundly defeated by the French, suffering heavy casualties.

If not for timely reinforcements, they would have been the first division-level unit to suffer annihilation since the war began.

Perhaps to avenge the Napoleonic Wars, these elite French division troops had very high morale, displaying extraordinary combat power on the battlefield.

After landing a heavy blow on the Russians, on May 13, 1852, the French forces, numbering less than 50,000 soldiers, engaged in a head-to-head battle with the 90,000-strong Russian army near Razgrad. In this encounter, both sides were relatively evenly matched.

Unfortunately, the outstanding performance of the French army did not change the overall situation. Their numbers were too few, and in the face of increasing Russian forces, the French suffered a steep rise in casualties.

After seven days of intense fighting, with 15,200 French casualties, they were ultimately forced to break through. The Battle of Razgrad ended with the defeat of the French.

However, they could still take some pride in their defeat. Even in defeat, they maintained an exchange ratio of approximately 1 to 1.3 with the victorious Russian forces, which suffered nearly 20,000 casualties.

This was naturally partly due to French weapons and equipment advantages, but also closely related to their strict training and high morale.

As for the Ottoman army, there was no hope for these pig teammates. After one defeat, it was as if the Russians had scared them witless, their morale collapsed as they fled wildly from the Russians.

If they had a more effective ally to help hold back the main Russian forces, the French might have avoided being heavily surrounded, and the outcome of the Battle of Razgrad would have remained uncertain.

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Paris

News of Ruse's fall arrived on May 12th. The weakness of the Ottoman Empire was exposed, but by this time, there was no room for England and France to reconsider.

Loans given out were a small issue. At worst they could shamelessly tear up the agreements.

The key was that the first batch of French reinforcements had already reached the Ottoman Empire and entered battle. At this stage, Napoleon III couldn't retreat, no matter how treacherous the path ahead. The political necessity demanded that he press on.

Palmerston was also unhappy. At this time, Prime Minister Russell had already persuaded Parliament. The British government had even declared war on the Russian Empire two days ago.

War was no game. At this time, unless the British government wanted to be ousted, they had to grit their teeth and fight the Russians. This concerned the world hegemon's prestige and influence.

The British could not back down on this issue. It concerned their influence worldwide. If they were to lose to the Russians, it would undermine the foundation of their colonial empire.

If this news only left Britain and France vexed, then subsequent news enraged them even more.

Especially Napoleon III. With the French army bitterly fighting the Russians ahead, the Ottoman army was actually retreating all the way. Whose territory were they defending?

Of course, as an outstanding politician, Napoleon III still knew to maximize interests. He immediately brought out the French army's battle achievements, boasting everywhere, indirectly flaunting his martial valor.

Lost the battle? That was the Ottoman's fault, what did it have to do with the heroic and valorous French army? Despite disadvantageous numbers, they had achieved astounding exchange ratios.

The equipment gap was directly ignored by Napoleon III. Anyway, the public did not care for details. As long as he emphasized heavily that Russian losses were greater, it was fine.

Chapter 180: Idealistic Strategy

Winter passed and summer came, and St. Petersburg had ended its bitterly cold days. Comfortable sunshine bathed every corner of this city, warming this land of ice and snow.

Battle reports from the Balkan Peninsula arrived. Reporting good news but not bad news has always been the shortcut for bureaucrats to advance themselves, and the Russian government was naturally no exception.

In this first round of the Balkan campaign, the Russians achieved complete victory. Even with the Russians suffering great losses at the Battle of Razgrad, adding a thread of flaws to this campaign, it did not diminish the bureaucrats' desire to report victory.

The battle reports received by Nicholas I naturally omitted any Russian losses. Frontline officers briefly glossed over them, inflating the Ottoman army's casualties, making it appear to be a great victory.

After receiving the news, Nicholas I held a celebratory banquet at the Winter Palace that very night. Unfortunately, the heroes were thousands of miles away, missing this glory meant for them.

The Russians had reason to celebrate. In the first round of the Bulgarian campaign, they achieved a major victory, advancing the front by over a hundred kilometers.

Starting from capturing Ruse, the Russians attacked the Ottoman army with a total force of 280,000, defeating nearly 500,000 Ottoman troops and 50,000 French.

The Russian casualties were just over 45,000, while they inflicted losses of 53,000 enemy soldiers and captured more than 38,000 of them.

Using half the forces to defeat double the enemies, trading 45,000 casualties to inflict 91,000 enemy losses, including over 10,000 French, this was clearly a major victory however you looked at it.

The Bulgarian guerrillas' contributions were briefly glossed over, and their casualties naturally also ignored. Anyway, they won, so the Russian government did not care about specifics. Caring was useless, deceiving superiors and misleading subordinates had seeped into every corner of the Russian Empire.

Since the Ottoman army was claimed to be a force of 500,000, the one they defeated must have a force of 500,000. Actual enemy troop numbers were deliberately disregarded.

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After the celebratory banquet, Nicholas I returned to the main topic. The fact that the French had deployed troops to join the war was not good news at all.

Even though the Russian government had been considering the possibility of British and French involvement in the war since the British and French fleets seized control of the Black Sea, the actual occurrence of it was still distressing.

Perhaps the frontline officers still had some principles, or perhaps they knew this war would continue and they still had to desperately fight the French, and were afraid of falling into pits themselves. At the end of the battle report, they still emphasized the threat posed by the French army.

In summary, if it weren't for the sudden appearance of 50,000 French troops on the battlefield, the decisive battle at Bulgaria would have spelled the Ottoman Empire's demise.

If not for French reinforcements, it would not be long before the great Tsar could hold a victory parade in Constantinople. Thus, the great Tsar must remain extremely vigilant against these wicked French.

Nicholas I chuckled and said: "Gentlemen, the French really sent troops to participate in war. News has just arrived from London that the British Parliament has also passed a resolution to send troops.

From now on, we have two additional enemies. Britain and France are not as easy to deal with as the Ottomans. This war is far from over. Everyone, speak freely if you have any thoughts on how to fight going forward."

With the frontlines achieving great victory, Nicholas I was in good spirits. Even knowing of British and French participation, he was furious but did not show it, fully confident of winning this war.

The strong had to maintain grace, especially when holding the winning hand.

This was no exaggeration. Judging purely by land forces, the Russians truly had such capabilities. At least in terms of population, the Russians have the numbers.

Russia's total population in 1852 was estimated between 65 million to 76 million, more than the combined total of the British and French population. The total British population was around 28 million, while France's was around 36 million.

(AN: Unfortunately, in this era, the Russian government did not have reliable population statistics, and historical data can vary significantly.)

The Ottoman Empire was automatically ignored by Nicholas I. The Bulgarian campaign had already exposed the Ottoman army's pathetic combat abilities.

In subsequent wars, the Ottoman Empire would slip from protagonist to supporting character, with Britain and France as the new leads.

"Your Majesty, since Britain and France have jumped in, let's make the Balkan Peninsula their grave, and let them know who is the world's number one land power.

We should immediately reinforce the front lines, and annihilate the Ottoman Empire in one go, reclaiming Constantinople." Minister of War Alexander Chernyshyov said murderously.

In a decisive battle with Britain and France in the Near East, the Russians did not have much advantage, nor would they suffer great losses. Geographically, both sides were evenly matched.

The Russians could be supported by Austria, transporting supplies via the Danube, while Britain and France could also ship in materials by sea. In terms of logistics, everyone is more or less on equal footing.

Sending reinforcements to the front line is inevitable. Winning this battle will come at a cost for the Russian army, and to continue the war, additional troops will be needed. Commanders at the front have already requested reinforcements from the homeland.

"Your Majesty, due to prior misjudgment, we did not expect direct British and French participation, and stockpiled massive amounts of strategic materials at Black Sea coastal ports.

Now that the sea routes are blocked, we can only transport supplies by land. Under current conditions, we can only supply 30% of materials required by the frontline army, the rest must be purchased from Austria." Finance Minister Fyodor Vronchenko reminded.

To supply their present forces, they had no choice but to purchase large quantities of strategic materials from Austria. If troops in the Balkans continued increasing, military spending would keep rising.

Fyodor Vronchenko was not opposing reinforcements, just raising the issue to avoid blindly making plans, only to end up without money to wage war later on—that would be embarrassing.

100 million Austrian guilders may seem like a lot, but in reality, it's just a drop in the bucket on the battlefield. The total number of Russian troops in the Balkans has now exceeded 300,000.

In a single Bulgaria campaign, the Russian army suffered losses of 45,000. Even if the lives of Russian soldiers are expendable, some compensation still has to be paid.

After winning the battle, rewards for merit cannot be avoided, and that also requires money.

The weapons and ammunition consumed on the battlefield, the damaged equipment that needs replacement—all of these cost money.

Even if there is no fighting, the monthly expenses for the 300,000 troops, covering their basic needs, exceed 4 million guilders. It's not that the Russian army has high standards, but the cost of transporting supplies during wartime is high. Once the war starts, the money flows like water.

In a single Bulgaria campaign, the Russian army used up thousands of tons of ammunition. On average, they consumed nearly a hundred tons of ammunition every day. Just this alone accounts for expenses of over ten million guilders.

With so many miscellaneous expenses added together, the month-long Bulgarian campaign cost no less than 40 million guilders for the Russians, not even including wages.

The bulk of war funding still had to be solved by Russia themselves. Austria's loans could only make up part of it. Naturally, the Ministry of Finance was under great pressure.

Nicholas I nodded. Making preparations for war in advance was still effective. At least in 1852, the Russian government didn't have to worry about financial problems.

If the war continues, that might be a different story. The cost of warfare in the era of firearms has far exceeded that of the era of cold weapons.

“Then find a way to quickly resolve the war. Try to defeat the enemy within the year, and don't give the British and French any chance! Minister of War, how many reinforcements do we need to end the war within the year?” Nicholas I asked with concern.

After pondering for a good while, Alexander Chernyshyov slowly replied: “Your Majesty, at least 300,000 more are needed. To be safe, 400,000 more would be best.”

In reality, Alexander Chernyshyov didn't have a clear idea either. The situation on the battlefield is unpredictable, and the strength of the British and French is not to be underestimated. Moreover, there's the desperate Ottoman Empire. Who knows how many troops it would take to end the war in a short time?

But since the Tsar asked, he had to answer, otherwise he would appear incompetent.

Alexander Chernyshyov still had some capability. He didn't believe that the Russian army could end the war within the year and directly stated an impossible number.

Previously, deploying 300,000 troops in the Balkan Peninsula was already the utmost effort of the Russian Empire. If they doubled that number, soldiers wouldn't be a problem, but logistics would be a disaster.

Even with the support of Austria, the combined forces of the two countries would struggle to sustain 600,000-700,000 troops in the Balkan Peninsula.

It wasn't a lack of supplies but rather the inability to support such a massive force in terms of transportation. If the operations were within the Danube River Basin, logistics could be secured.

However, as the war progresses, the supply lines of the Russian army will also become longer, distancing themselves from the Danube. The reliance on animal-driven transport and human labor would increase, naturally adding significant pressure to logistics.

Nicholas I was no military novice. Upon hearing his Minister of War, he knew that ending the war within the year was impossible.

With Britain and France holding naval supremacy, even if Russia occupied the Balkans, they could still land any time they wished. How could the war end so easily?

Moreover, although the Ottoman Empire was decayed, a broken ship still has three cabbies worth of nails. The combat effectiveness that could erupt in a critical moment was not to be underestimated.

Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode keenly said: "Mr. Chernyshyov, reality does not permit us to deploy so many troops to the Balkans. This plan seems feasible but is actually inoperable.

If we are unable to win the war in the Balkans, can we make a breakthrough in the Caucasus instead?

Victory on any front can shake Ottoman morale. As long as this decaying empire collapses, we will have won this war."

Achieving a breakthrough in the Caucasus? No problem! It's just that after conquering one mountain, there's the next one.

Persisting in these efforts, it might take three to five years or even eight to ten years. As long as they persevere, they will eventually wear down the Ottoman Empire.

The prerequisite is that the Russian government can sustain itself and not bury itself before the war ends.

Reality may be cruel, but ideals must still exist.

While launching the Bulgarian campaign, the Russians did not overlook the Caucasus. However, due to geographical constraints, their efforts there were somewhat limited.

With the worsening Balkan situation against the Ottoman Empire, the Sultanate would definitely transfer large numbers of reinforcements over from Anatolia. Then reinforcements to the Caucasus would decrease.

This was also an opportunity for the Russians. While it would be difficult to advance from the Caucasus all the way to the Bosphorus Strait, advancing into Anatolia might not be impossible.

Continuous defeats on any frontline would impact domestic stability for any country, let alone the crumbling Ottoman Empire.

Considering the influence of the Russians among the Eastern Orthodox population and the unpopular rule of the Ottoman Empire, orchestrating several nationalist uprisings doesn't seem too difficult amidst continuous failures on the front lines.

If a nationalist uprising were to succeed, it would spell the end for the Ottoman Empire. Without the support of the local tyrant, the idea of Britain and France defeating Russia in the Near East is simply a pipe dream.

Since this is an idealistic plan, perfection could not be demanded. As long as theoretically feasible, it was enough. Nicholas I approved Karl Nesselrode's proposal.

Success would undoubtedly showcase the wisdom of the Tsar, and in case of failure, they would only lose a batch of expendable soldiers, which the Russian government has in abundance.

Nicholas I had no reason to not undertake such a low-risk, high-reward venture.