

Roman Empire 211

Chapter 211: The Fight Between the Snipe and the Clam

Austria and Bavaria have gone to war. And as soon as this news came out, it sent shockwaves across the entire European continent.

Despite everyone knowing that relations between the two countries have deteriorated, the accumulated tensions were not thought to be sufficient for an outbreak of war. Therefore, the only plausible explanation was that Austria was aiming for the military unification of Germany.

The pretext for the war revealed many things. Many used their imagination, speculating that Austria's strategic plan to rebuild the Holy Roman Empire had been thwarted by Bavaria, prompting Austria to abandon diplomacy and resort to military force.

London

Upon receiving Bavaria's calls for aid, the British government was initially shocked, followed by a determination to intervene. Only then did the headaches come.

"Austria seeks military unification of Germany. They have taken the first step so we must stop them! The balance on the European continent must not be disrupted!"

Prime Minister George Hamilton-Gordon sternly proclaimed.

Foreign Minister Thomas analyzed: "Prime Minister, the current situation is indeed complicated. It must be acknowledged that Austria has chosen an opportune moment, with Russian forces diverting the main focus of both us and the French.

Even if we want to intervene, our support will likely remain verbal for the foreseeable future.

Austria, daring to act against Bavaria, might have reached a consensus with the Russians, making it challenging for diplomatic pressure to loosen their grip."

Britain, France and Russia ceasing hostilities? Such possibilities indeed existed, but that presumption was based on Austria successfully unifying Germany. Currently, with Austria only attacking Bavaria, it was insufficient to prompt an immediate compromise among the three parties.

Home Secretary Henry John Temple suggested: "There are numerous German states, and when these small states unite, their combined strength becomes formidable. Coupled with the Kingdom of Prussia, once these forces are mobilized, Austria does not have the capability to eliminate them quickly.

Intervening in Germany doesn't necessarily require our military involvement. As long as we unite these states, it will be sufficient to contain Austria.

After the conclusion of the Near East War, we can consider mediation. Perhaps using this opportunity to expel Austria from Germany is also a viable option."

Secretary of State for War Edward Smith-Stanley opposed: "That would be difficult. Just our alliance with France and the Ottomans has birthed many messy complications.

(TN: Due to an error in my research, I thought it was Sir Fox Maule-Ramsay but at this point in time it was actually Edward Smith-Stanley. Please forgive me for this error.)

In Germany, with so many states and deep-seated conflicts among them, uniting them is not a simple task.

The Balkan War demonstrated that without sincere cooperation, it's easy to be defeated separately by the enemy.

Austria holds significant influence in Germany, and their current attack on Bavaria is framed as a move for national unification, gaining support from Germanic nationalists.

In this scenario, even if the German states unite, the combat strength that can be mustered is significantly reduced.”

This was an unsolvable conundrum. If the soldiers were unwilling to fight, one shouldn't expect them to exhibit any combat effectiveness on the battlefield.

Prime Minister George Hamilton-Gordon said: “Regardless of whether they have combat effectiveness, let's organize them first. As long as we can hold off the Austrians, it will suffice.

The Foreign Ministry should communicate with European countries as soon as possible. I believe no one wants to see Austria unify Germany. Let's join forces to intervene and compel Austria to cease the war that undermines European stability.”

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Paris

In response to the military actions taken by Austria, Napoleon III's reaction was even more intense. If it weren't for the current lack of military strength, he would have immediately intervened with military force.

Interior Minister Persigny suggested: “Your Majesty, Germany is not so easily unified. The Austrians probably don't have the capability. We should wait until both sides are exhausted from the fighting before we seize the opportunity to intervene.

We can also take advantage of the situation to annex territories west of the Rhine. Now, we shouldn't stop Austria's actions; instead, we should encourage the Austrians to continue their campaign.”

Without much hesitation, Napoleon III made up his mind.

“Exactly, this war cannot stop immediately. Secretly send someone to negotiate conditions with Austria, reassuring them to boldly continue the fight.

Publicly, we should still maintain unity with other countries, exert diplomatic pressure on the Austrian government, and encourage the German states to fight Austria as much as possible.”

Interests would be the eternal theme between nations. Intervening in this war was inevitable. The timing of when to get involved all depended on interests.

Unlike the British, whose strategy is destined to prevent continental expansion and maintain a balance among European nations, the French aspire to dominate the European continent.

They have long had their eyes on the territories in Germany, and now that an opportunity has presented itself, how could they let it slip away?

Although the Germanic states were small individually, their combined strength was not negligible. If France doesn't let them and Austria mutually exhaust their strength, where would the opportunity for France be?

Napoleon III aims to be the fisherman, and from the perspective of interest, the positions of England and France are divergent. There is no possibility of close cooperation between them.

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Frankfurt

Whether or not to dispatch troops was a dilemma.

Who to assist was another dilemma.

Prime Minister Felix's sweet words were not without effect. At least, the capitalists in Frankfurt believed that the unification of Germany better suited everyone's interests.

In shallow waters, one cannot raise a dragon. If the capitalists in Frankfurt want to develop further, they must have a larger market.

Interests were always the best catalyst, and when it comes to rebuilding the Holy Roman Empire, these capitalists have no objections. Anyway, whether it becomes a free city or an autonomous city, it doesn't matter.

It was not just them. Most of the free cities in Germany were hesitating. The blueprint painted by Prime Minister Felix was too tempting, making the capitalists unable to resist.

Of course, there were also dissenting voices, and the reason was very practical: the status of the Austrian capitalists was too low, which did not meet their expectations.

Many people were skeptical of Felix's promises; they doubted whether these conditions could be fulfilled after the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire.

"They make for great things but grudges the necessary sacrifice. They lose sight of everything else in view of a little present advantage."

This phrase was most suitable to describe them.

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Baden

As one of Bavaria's staunchest allies, in 1830, the Baden royal family faced extinction, and Bavaria came close to annexing the Grand Duchy of Baden. Unfortunately, plans could not keep up with changes, and the intervention of the great powers led to failure.

This small episode did not affect the relationship between the two countries much, at most causing some minor dissatisfaction among the royal families.

Whether to send troops to help Bavaria became a dilemma for Louis II or, in other words, for his brother Prince Regent Frederick.

There was no other choice. In modern Europe, royal families seemed to be cursed, with a host of troublesome matters. Louis II was suffering from a mild mental illness.

Undoubtedly, once afflicted regardless of severity or mildness, none dared permit him to rule any further. No one could guarantee his mental soundness when making decisions.

“Bavaria has requested our aid. Should we dispatch reinforcements immediately?” Prince Frederick asked.

“Your Highness, now is not the opportune time to send troops. The Austrians are well-prepared, and solely relying on our strength won’t save Bavaria.

It’s best to take joint action with other countries; if we hastily participate in the war, we might incur heavy losses,” replied Prime Minister Waltz.

Bavaria must be rescued; they understood the principle of mutual dependence. However, the strategy must be skillfully executed. If not handled properly, they could end up causing harm to themselves instead.

Interior Minister Johannes added, “Not only that, we must also consider the attitude of the domestic population. Most citizens have no favorable opinions about Bavaria.

Since the Bavarian government proposed the Three-States Cabinet plan, many civil activist organizations have demanded the government cut ties with them.

The news hasn’t spread yet, but once it does, there is a high likelihood of public opposition to the government’s intervention.”

Austria’s deceptive plan to rebuild the Holy Roman Empire misled not only the public but also many governments of the various states, including the Baden government.

While the high echelons of the government could quickly change their views, the common people couldn’t. Many would be influenced by preconceived notions, believing that Austria launching this war was justified.

Undermining the Bavarian government was not solely Austria’s achievement; it was more of a spontaneous act by the people. The discontent stemmed from the Bavarian government’s proposal for German unification, which angered many nationalist factions.

In the eyes of numerous nationalists, German unification was inevitable, and the Bavarian government, opposing national unification, was seen as a malignant tumor. By eliminating them, the first step towards national unity could be taken.

The ideas Franz intentionally cultivated had already begun to ferment at this time. The Baden government couldn’t simply tell the people about the principle of mutual dependence; even if they did, it wouldn’t be effective.

Most citizens hoped for German unification, and the Grand Duchy of Baden, which wasn’t particularly popular, had even established a republican government at some point during the revolutionary period, relying on Prussian assistance to suppress it.

Of course social reforms were now implemented and governmental standing had risen in citizen views. But whether these exceeded yearnings for German unification or not, none could tell.

Foreign Minister Nikolaus proposed, “Your Highness, Austria’s plan for German unification will not succeed. Once the great powers intervene, it will be over. We have no need to seek advantages in the midst of chaos.”

Prince Frederick nodded in agreement. The financial resources of the Grand Duchy of Baden were not substantial. Engaging in a large-scale war with Austria could lead to significant losses, jeopardizing the foundation of their rule.

Without a standing army, how could they suppress domestic revolutionary forces?

In the end, with the intervention of the great powers, they had nothing to fear. The fate of the Bavarian government was not within their considerations.

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Berlin

Upon learning of Austria’s use of military force to unify Germany, Frederick William IV became excited, seeing a rare opportunity unfolding.

With Austria taking the lead, the difficulty for the Kingdom of Prussia to unify the German territories was significantly reduced.

“Gentlemen, Austria finally can’t restrain themselves. Now that they’ve broken the deadlock, should we send troops to rescue Bavaria?” Frederick William IV asked.

Prime Minister Joseph von Radowitz responded cautiously, “Your Majesty, now is not the time to send troops. We should avoid engaging the Austrians in battle until we form a coalition with the German states or until the great powers intervene.

Our domestic economic conditions have been poor in recent years, and our military development is constrained. Engaging in a war with the Austrians now carries too low a chance of victory.

Even if we win, we would still be losers. Hasty conflict with Austria would deplete our strength, only benefiting other German states.

If we suffer heavy losses in the war, we would lose the opportunity to unify Germany. The great powers won’t give us time. They oppose Austria’s and, likewise, Prussia’s unification of Germany.

The best option at this moment is to encourage other small German states to join the war, utilizing the opportunity to weaken their strength and reduce the difficulty of our own German unification.

As for Austria, leave them to Britain and France! They believe they’ve chosen the right time, thinking that no other countries can intervene in their military actions.

However, they forget that Europe is not limited to Britain, France, and Russia. Even if these three nations are at war, with their influence, they can still enlist other countries to organize an intervention army.”

In this era, the influence of the three countries, Britain, France, and Russia, was immense, especially with the formidable dominance of Britain and Russia. It was normal for Joseph von Radowitz to have confidence in them. Despite Austria being one of the four great powers, it couldn’t compare to the might of Britain and Russia.

Foreign Minister Otto Theodor von Manteuffel said: “Prime Minister, if we refrain from sending troops, it’s likely that the small German states in the German Confederation won’t dare to intervene. With their limited strength, they lack the qualification to interfere.

If no one intervenes, the Kingdom of Bavaria will be in jeopardy. By the time Britain, France, and Russia react, Austria will have already established a *fait accompli*.

Currently, the three nations are still fighting fiercely in the Near East, and Austria has a favorable relationship with Russia. If these two countries have reached a secret agreement, it’s not impossible.”

Otto Theodor von Manteuffel’s worries were reasonable. While the German states had numbers, powerful states were still few. At best each small state could field eight to ten thousand troops, hardly making any ripples on the battlefield.

With Austria’s substantial strength, once they established a *fait accompli* and gained Russia’s tacit approval, the pressure from Britain and France might not be sufficient to make them give in.

“Mr. Manteuffel, your assessment is plausible, so we must take action. At the very least, we need to organize the armies of the German states so that we can disrupt Austria’s conspiracy without incurring significant costs,” replied Prime Minister Joseph von Radowitz.

In short, fighting Austria in one-on-one battle was impossible. If the Kingdom of Prussia aims to play the fisherman, it couldn’t afford to have a head-on clash with Austria and risk losing precious military strength.

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Britain and France pinned their hopes on the German states to send troops to thwart Austria while the German states also pinned their hopes on the intervention of the great powers.

Everyone aspired to be the fisherman, leaving the Kingdom of Bavaria in a tragic situation, as they had to face the initial stages of the war alone.

As the various countries were embroiled in disputes, the battle had already begun. The Bavarian government, unaware that they were being sold out, received affirmative responses from various countries. With unwavering confidence, they mobilized their army, preparing to fight a defensive war on their home soil.

Chapter 212: We Must Remain Neutral

On the day of the declaration of war, Austria, which was well-prepared, dispatched 400,000 troops in three directions to launch an attack on the Kingdom of Bavaria.

The unprepared Bavarian government could only passively meet the enemy and naturally suffered a tragedy. Without any preparation, they were suddenly hit by the Austrian army.

Upon receiving the request for reinforcements from the front line, the Bavarian government was in chaos. Maximilian II knew that he was in big trouble. Austria’s speed was too fast, and the border was lost as soon as the battle began.

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When the news of the war between Austria and Bavaria came to Freilassing, people here were panicking. Colonel Andreas, the commander of the garrison, felt bad in an instant.

Looking at the intelligence in his hand, he didn't know how to fight this war. He didn't know how many people were in the Austrian army on the opposite side, but it was at least tens of thousands. He only had two garrison regiments under his command.

More than 3,000 Bavarian soldiers had to stop the advance of tens of thousands of Austrian troops, even if the God of War was reborn, they would not be able to withstand this too.

But he had no choice. The order from the country was to hold on to the garrisons across the country. Since national mobilization also takes time. In order to fight for this time, the frontline garrisons can only sacrifice themselves.

This was the intention of the Munich bureaucrats and also of Maximilian II. Munich is too close to Austria. If there is no obstruction, the Austrian army can reach the city within two days.

The guard reported: "Commander, Mr. Marcus is visiting."

Andreas was slightly surprised. At this time, those who were not prepared to evacuate were mostly some extreme nationalist youths who were ready to welcome the Austrian army.

Marcus is obviously not such a person. As a celebrity in the cultural circles of the Kingdom of Bavaria, he has a high reputation in Freilassing.

"Invite him in," Andreas said.

Anyway, the visitor is still a guest. Moreover, the two sides have known each other for a long time, and there is still some friendship, although the timing of the visit is quite inappropriate.

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Marcus directly said: "Andreas, this time I have come representing all the citizens of Freilassing."

To be honest, the idea of being a turncoat disgusted Marcus, but faced with so much pressure, it was difficult to refuse.

Apart from Austrians, it was mostly his relatives and friends. The majority of Freilassing's social elites did not wish for this war to break out.

War is the most terrible thing. Every war is a reshuffle of interests. For these interest groups, it is not yet known whether Austria can unify Germany. Anyway, Freilassing cannot stop the Austrian army's offensive.

Once the flames of war are ignited, they, as local overlords, would become the biggest victims.

If it was foreign invasion, then of course everyone would be patriotic. Surrendering without fighting was impossible for them to even entertain the thought of it.

Clearly, Austria was not a foreign invader. Cloaked in the banner of national unification, most could accept it; surrendering really held no pressure to them at all.

It wasn't even surrender. They could remain neutral, that's right, neutral. This was Franz's invention drawing from experiences of his past life, agitating Bavaria's local governments and militaries to remain neutral amidst the war.

Then everyone's interests and face would be taken care of. Regardless of whether Austria ultimately unified Germany or not, or what final outcome befell the Kingdom of Bavaria, they would stand their ground undefeated.

Through back channel maneuvering in German civil organizations, these people were brought together around shared interests — neutrality. And so the Freilassing local council passed a resolution of neutrality.

In order to convince Marcus to be their mouthpiece, even neighboring regions were stirred into action. Facing irresistible public sentiment and plagued by idealist thinking, Marcus naturally could not decline.

Andreas said angrily: "You want us to surrender to the Austrians? This is impossible! As a soldier, the word 'surrender without fighting' is absolutely not in my dictionary!"

In Germany, martial values are still favored, and surrendering without fighting is the greatest insult to soldiers which will accompany them throughout their lives.

Marcus shook his head and said: "No, Colonel Andreas, how could we do such a thing?"

I can't do such a thing as betray the kingdom. If it is an invasion from outside, I will fight side by side with you, but the current situation is somewhat special.

Now the Austrians are launching a war of unification, not an invasion. I may be loyal to the Kingdom of Bavaria, but I also am to Germany.

Now the kingdom's government and the empire stand opposed over unification. The people of Freilassing have decided to remain neutral in this war. I represent the people and hope that you and your subordinates will respect the people's choice."

Andreas was a little dumbfounded by a plan of this kind. After thinking about it, he found that it seemed to be very viable.

Fighting to the death was impossible. The gap between the strengths of the two sides is too great. Even if Andreas is willing to fight the Austrians with his army, it will not really change the outcome.

Andreas asked casually, "What will happen if I refuse?"

Marcus's face sank and he said seriously, "If you refuse the people's choice, then you will be banished.

The people of Freilassing have the right to make their own choices. Even if they cannot contribute to the unification of Germany, we cannot become sinners who obstruct its unification!"

Looking at Marcus's attitude, Andreas breathed a sigh of relief as he finally didn't have to fight the Austrians to the death.

No one wants to die. It's foolish to fight a war that you know you can't win. If it was an invasion by a foreign enemy, for the glory of the soldiers, Andreas could still inspire morale and fight together.

Forget about the country's civil war, he hasn't lived long enough yet! The war had just broken out and he'd already cursed the Munich bureaucrats down to their whole ancestry.

Isn't it good to establish the Holy Roman Empire? Why does it have to be like this? Andreas also had ambitions, eager to build military exploits.

However, to make contributions, there must be basic conditions, such as the Austrian army coming to attack having only one regiment or less.

In the current situation, even if all of Bavaria's military was concentrated, it would still be insufficient to counter the enemy. If he ordered resistance and his own troops betrayed him, where could he go to cry?

After the war, he might even be slapped with the charge of sabotaging national unification. Andreas thought: whoever wants to do this kind of thing can do it instead!

Andreas deliberately acted like he was in a dilemma and said: "Mr. Marcus, since it is the people's choice, I will of course respect it. But for such a major decision, I must convene a meeting of officers to unify everyone's stance."

Marcus thought for a while and said, "No problem, but our time is running out. You must make a decision quickly. The Austrians are about to launch an attack."

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The result was naturally no surprise. At the military conference, Andreas' proposal to respect public opinion was passed by an overwhelming majority.

Of course one could not blame them. With only two incomplete regiments holding the line, mustering the courage to resist tens of thousands of Austrian troops was truly difficult.

The so-called public opinion just solved their troubles. Anyway, this is a civil war. Neutrality is better than surrender, and surrender is better than death. Everyone hasn't lived long enough yet!

Then, after the outbreak of the war, a dumbfounding scene appeared. The border cities and defenders of Bavaria all declared neutrality.

Occasionally, if garrisons put up resistance, they would be quickly annihilated by the Austrian troops flooding in, unable to even buy time.

One could not blame them. Bavaria was unlike the militaristic Prussia. Their standing army barely numbered forty to fifty thousand men, with only around ten thousand spread along the Austrian border.

Just these ten thousand men, to guard a border line nearly a thousand kilometers long and face the attack of four hundred thousand attacking Austrians, they were truly powerless.

Under such conditions, the Munich bureaucrats ordering them to fight to the death pushed them onto the road of no return.

The local power factions, which was also the largest anti-war faction, together with radical German nationalists, naturally passed a resolution of neutrality in the local councils through their joint efforts.

For local leaders to handle the military instead, things naturally became much easier. It wasn't asking them to surrender anyway, merely to remain neutral.

As long as someone took the lead, there were more people willing to follow. The Bavarian government was unable to send reinforcements in time, and to some extent, this was good for them.

Otherwise, the dispatched troops would mostly be influenced to be neutral. The pressure of the trend of public opinion is very terrifying. The decision of the local councils made the officers think that this was the will of the Bavarian people.

They were involuntarily influenced, and the trend of public opinion was shaped. Even if someone wanted to criticize Austria for launching this war in the future, they would not be able to speak out.

Human hearts are very complicated. After these regions made a decision to be neutral, these people inevitably began to lean towards Austria. Under the guidance of pro-Austrian media, many people began to criticize the Bavarian government.

Under this influence, everyone unconsciously thought that the Bavarian government was unpopular, and the people were willing to support Austria's unification of Germany.

Munich is too close to Austria. Due to the poor quality of the frontline defenders, on the third day of the outbreak of the war, the Austrian army had already arrived at the city gates.

The choices before Maximilian II was to run away, resist, or surrender.

Prime Minister Karl von Abel advised: "Your Majesty, it's still possible to leave now. If you wait any longer, the Austrians will surround Munich, and it will be difficult to leave!"

Resistance was impossible. When the war just broke out, they still had some confidence that the Kingdom of Bavaria could resist until reinforcements arrived.

Since receiving a thick stack of neutrality declarations, the Bavarian government has completely lost confidence. In their view, the people have abandoned the government.

You can tell from the Austrian marching speed that there was no resistance along the way. Otherwise, how could they cover 180 kilometers of terrain in just two days?

It would have taken at least four or five days. Of course, a few more days would not solve the problem, but it could increase everyone's confidence.

Otherwise, it would be like now, making everyone suspicious and afraid that the defenders would sell them out.

Maximilian II smiled bitterly and said, "Would that work?"

This incident dealt him a big blow. He had previously believed he enjoyed great popular support, but reality was exceedingly cruel. Flying in from all directions, the neutrality declarations made it seem as if Bavarians universally wished him gone as soon as possible.

Finance Minister Karl von Schrenck comforted him, "Your Majesty, the people are just dissatisfied with this war. They have not truly defected to the Austrians..."

Maximilian II said disappointedly, "It's all the same. They have already made a choice with practical actions. They want to support the unification of Germany, but we are standing in the way, wanting to establish a Greater Bavaria!"

Run away?

Maximilian II still had some political acumen. If he ran away now, could he come back in the future?

Even if he had the support of the great powers, if he encountered resistance from the people, how could he maintain his rule?

If the Kingdom of Bavaria was annexed by Austria, it would be the same outcome whether he ran away or not. Anyway, the Austrians would not do anything to him as king, and they would even have to provide him treatment befitting his position.

Prime Minister Karl von Abel continued to persuade: "Your Majesty, things may not be so bad yet. Even if we lose Munich, we can still establish ourselves in the western region.

The infiltration of the Austrians in the east is too serious, which has caused the current situation.

As long as we hold the western region and wait for the arrival of reinforcements from various countries, the situation will change. They will not watch Austria annex Bavaria."

Before Maximilian II could make a decision, an attendant rushed in and said anxiously: "Your Majesty, something big has happened. The Munich City Council has just made a decision to remain neutral in this war, and the situation in the city is likely to change!"

Neutrality is contagious too. Who wants to fight in a doomed war?

The Munich Council said they had wanted to be neutral for a long time. If it weren't for the central government being in the city, would they have waited until now?

At this time, the Austrians had already arrived at the city gates. The people in the city were already panicking. If a fight broke out, the losses would be heavy, and might even lose their lives as a consequence.

At this point, neither capitalists nor nobles wanted to fight this war that was doomed to fail.

Directly persuading the king to surrender was too risky, and no one wanted to be the first to speak up. At this point, the council played a role, representing public opinion and telling the king that the war could not be won.

Anyway, there were so many neutral places, and almost half of Bavaria had declared neutrality. They were just following the trend and had no intention of betraying the king.

These people were still civilized, which fully demonstrated that the Bavarian government had done a good job in its daily work. Otherwise, the people in the city would have rebelled by now.

Maximilian II understood the implicit meaning, that everyone did not want to fight this war, and he could understand that he himself did not want to fight this war without a future.

The intervention of the great powers did occur. European countries such as Britain, France, Russia, and Spain condemned Austria's barbaric behavior and ordered them to stop the war.

Yet the Austrian army still appeared at the gates of Munich, while the joint intervention of various countries had not yet been organized. The Kingdom of Bavaria was about to be finished.

This means that Austria can ignore the threat of the great powers, and many implied possibilities hid behind that. If Maximilian II still cannot guess the reason at this time, then he really is a fool.

The Austrian government cannot withstand the joint pressure of all the great powers, and no country in the world can ignore such unified coercion.

The only explanation is that the great powers have been divided. With Austria's strength, as long as one great power lent support or even tacit consent, such threats could be brushed aside.

Chapter 213: Bluffing (BONUS)

When the war started, Franz and the entire Austrian government were too tense to relax.

Although the front advanced rapidly and more smoothly than anticipated, the Austrian government continued to mobilize the entire nation.

Perhaps in the eyes of many people, this was a bit of an overreaction. It took 400,000 troops to fight one Kingdom of Bavaria, and yet the country also mobilized a million reserve troops.

As someone involved, Franz can say clearly that this was not an overreaction, but a necessary strategy.

When a lion chases a rabbit, it still gives its all.

Sending out 30,000 to 50,000 troops could complete the task of dealing with Bavaria.

Anyway, Munich was close, so they could attack secretly with 30,000 to 50,000 troops. There was no need to make a big deal out of it.

That was only militarily. Politically, however, this war could not be dealt with using common sense.

For instance, several local governments and military forces in Bavaria opted for neutrality due to the power of 400,000 troops and political persuasion.

If there were only 30,000 to 50,000 soldiers, would the local leaders in Bavaria agree easily?

Without their help and absolute strength, could Austria make Bavaria's defenders neutral?

The actual situation is not that Franz is destined to rule or that the House of Habsburg is tremendously favored, but that strength yields public backing.

The people in Bavaria have observed Austria's power, and the region's ruling nobility has been intimidated. At this time, the lobbyists came forward, and they naturally made the choice that best suited their interests.

Whether they're capitalists or nobles, they won't stand in the way. Keeping close to the strong is their way of surviving.

But these people valued their faces too. Public opinion was the best way to disguise their defections, while "neutrality" was the perfect fig leaf.

Additionally, Austria needs their help to create a welcoming atmosphere to win the hearts of the Bavarian people.

There's no doubt that the current result is great. Public opinion is guided tacitly by everyone, using the unification of Germany as an excuse to justify the war started by Austria.

Additionally, they crowned themselves patriots, then gloriously declared neutrality, saying they couldn't betray the monarchy they served, nor sabotage national unification.

Since Austria has gained popular support and favor as a result of all the lies they've told, they have no choice but to believe them.

People in the lower classes didn't have as much to think about. The unification war started by Austria sounded good to them after they boasted a few times. At this point, anyone who considers themselves patriotic can't hinder national unification.

There's no doubt that Franz set the biggest trap in history, and everyone involved got caught in it.

There is a lot of talk around them about "German unification". As a result, they also involuntarily follow along to fit in. Little did they know that, like them, the people around them were not as knowledgeable about this concept as they claimed.

In reality, Germany's nationalists remain its true supporters. Ordinary people are only influenced by the environment and swept along by the rhythm, believing they are also German unification supporters.

The brainwashing of Bavaria has worked very well. Over one million Bavarian people have fallen for it. And it was precisely the local Bavarian leaders themselves who helped make this plan happen.

Now these leaders are stuck too. Once they supported these beliefs, they could not go back on them. It can be said that this war has deeply ingrained the concept of German unification in the Kingdom of Bavaria.

Franz knew all of this and wouldn't tell anyone about it. All anyone outside could see was that the people of Bavaria were supporting Austria in overthrowing the Bavarian government to support German unification.

This includes Maximilian II in Munich, who also believed that he had been abandoned by the people. Otherwise, there is no explanation for why the Austrian army encountered no obstacles and appeared right outside the city.

Vienna

Prime Minister Felix said optimistically: "Your Majesty, the first step of the strategy is stable. Under the banner of German unification, the people of Bavaria had no intention of resisting. It seems that our plan is still too conservative.

Public opinion in Germany is much better than we expected. Maybe we can take bigger steps, just..."

Franz shook his head. The direction of the people in Bavaria has been cultivated by Austria for many years, plus the combination of time, place, and people. Other regions of Germany cannot be compared.

If they continue to play this way, they will be exposed. It is better to stop now and let everyone think that all the people in Germany support unification, thus leading them to make false judgments.

"Prime Minister, greed is the original sin of the world. The more critical the situation, the more we must control our desires. What Austria needs is stability, not risk!"

Startled, Prime Minister Felix broke into a cold sweat. It was true that success could easily make people lose their way and become arrogant.

Foreign Minister Metternich spoke up: “That’s right. Even though public opinion in Germany is quite good, we can’t unite Germany now.

Austria cannot stand on the opposite side of all the great powers. What we must do now is settle down and digest these spoils of war and transform them into national strength.”

Franz nodded, then ordered: “Mr. Metternich, you will personally go to Berlin. The Prussian government should be frightened now and must be stabilized.

Prime Minister, you must also make a trip. Visit the German states again, this time starting with Saxony, and try to convince them by political means.”

Does this unification war have to happen? Franz knew that history could be used as a reference. Prussia was able to regain states through political methods, and Austria could do the same.

When dealing with domestic affairs, it is better to avoid military options if possible. Shedding rivers of blood may seem easier at the moment. But later, when it comes time to govern that region, it would be hard!

These small states have found ways to survive. This is why the German Empire left them intact in the past — for the sake of stability.

Throughout history, the central government of the German Empire has used appeasement to gradually erode the rights of the governments of the various states.

Now it is easier for Austria to do so. After all, the largest state in southern Germany, the Kingdom of Bavaria, has been defeated, and the remaining small states are not even worth mentioning.

As long as the status of the monarch and the ministers is settled, everything else will be easy. The central government has both strength and justice in its hands, so it is too easy to suppress the local governments.

If politics fails, doesn’t history also talk of transferring fiefdoms by force?

If it comes to that, Franz can be even more shameless — as long as he seizes their royal seals, he can swap the territories ruled by these so-called kings and grand dukes.

It’s impossible to control them in their long-standing ancestral nests, entrenched over decades or centuries. Better to relocate them somewhere unfamiliar, without home advantage. Stripped of their native land, how could they not become docile?

Franz could go even further in his shamelessness — he could offer them an empty title, like King of Jerusalem, and swap it out for some unlucky ruler’s actual throne.

The title has extraordinary prestige, but sadly, the territory sits within the Ottoman Empire’s control. Who knows when it might be taken back?

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In the Munich Palace, Maximilian II faces harsh truths. Perhaps now there is no escape.

Munich’s city defense army has declared neutrality. Except for his loyal palace guards, all that remains is a newly formed infantry division that has just been mobilized to defend Munich.

But can this unit be relied upon? The answer is no. Public opinion cannot be violated. Since the people of Bavaria have made their choice, they are naturally inevitably influenced.

Neutrality was not declared because the senior officers were still loyal to the king and had not been infiltrated by the nobles and capitalists, as had been the case with the City Defense Army.

On June 10, the second day of the Austrian siege, the Austrian representatives had already entered the Munich palace to demand surrender.

After a defeat, it was customary on the European continent to negotiate terms. This was not the first time in the history of the Kingdom of Bavaria.

However, unlike in the past, this time the Bavarian royal family's position is precarious. Maximilian II himself had little confidence that he would retain the throne.

But Prime Minister Karl von Abel assures him that the Austrians will not abolish his throne, and the only reason for this is appearances.

There are so many states in Germany, and everyone is still watching. The Austrian government cannot go too far.

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Foreign Minister Ludwig von der Pfordten said angrily: "Mr. Jonas, your country's demands are excessive. We have all agreed to join the Holy Roman Empire, and you have made so many unreasonable demands. This is an attempt to annex Bavaria!"

Austrian envoy Jonas shook his head and said: "Wrongdoing always has its consequences. The Bavarian government is not in a position to negotiate terms at this time.

Mr. Pfordten, whether you believe it or not, even if Austria withdraws its troops immediately, the Bavarian government will still be finished. The people out there would like to send you all to the gallows.

Now the situation in the Kingdom of Bavaria is no longer suitable for the royal family to continue to rule. An exchange of territories with Austria is the best choice.

At that time, His Majesty Maximilian II could become King of Serbia, and you could also serve as ministers of the Kingdom of Serbia.

This is the limit of what Austria can do. You have lost the basis of your rule. If you continue to rule the Kingdom of Bavaria, revolution is inevitable in the future.

The unified central government of Germany is no instrument to help you in case of revolution, Mr. Pfordten. I hope you understand that."

Bluff after bluff. Had the Bavarian government lost the support of the people? Franz knew it hadn't, only because the local government chose neutrality instead of defection.

But they don't know that. With a thick pile of neutral declarations, it seems that the people of Bavaria are all supporters of Austria.

From their point of view, this kind of neutrality is a betrayal. There is no need for direct defection. Austria does not need them to take action. They could save faces without disgracing themselves, right?

Foreign Minister Ludwig von der Pfordten argued further: "No, the Balkans are too far away, and Serbia is a wilderness. This is exile!

If you want to exchange thrones, you must exchange them for something of equal value. Austria must take out a rich territory to make it fair.”

This was not Maximilian II's bottom line, but a misconception that lowered his expectations. Naturally, the negotiator, Pfordten, also lost confidence.

In their view, the Bavarian royal family has lost the support of the people. No matter who supports him, he cannot continue to sit firmly on the throne of Bavaria. Originally, he was willing to abdicate to take responsibility.

Unfortunately, Austria did not agree and threatened them. If the royal family did not cooperate, they would incite the Bavarian people to revolution and send them to the guillotine.

Maximilian II is not afraid of such threats. As long as Austria is still an imperial country, it is impossible to send him, the king, to the guillotine. But for others it was different.

When it comes to killing ministers, Austria has no qualms. After all, isn't punishing traitors the best excuse? For their own lives and fortunes, the high-ranking officials of the Bavarian government had no choice but to convince Maximilian II.

Even the current negotiation was a show for Maximilian II to see. They are afraid that he will suddenly become suicidal. If he suddenly hangs himself, Franz will cry.

That means that this time Austria has worked for nothing. A king has died and they still dare to annex the Kingdom of Bavaria. There will be no peace in the future.

If they want to win the hearts of the people, they must work with Maximilian II. Only if he agrees to give up the throne can Franz legally gain the right to rule the Kingdom of Bavaria.

Maximilian II must survive, at least until Austria annexes Bavaria. He must survive.

He must also live very well and not allow the Bavarian people to see his misery and feel sympathy. That is why the proposal for the territory exchange appeared. The Austrian representative proposed to exchange Serbia for Bavaria.

This proposal led to a stalemate in the negotiations. Pfordten had to fight for the interests of his king, while Jonas was unwilling to make any concessions.

Chapter 214: Shifting the Blame

The negotiations were still at an impasse, but the gates of Munich had already been opened. At this point, Maximilian II was no longer in control of the situation.

From the beginning of the negotiations, everyone knew that there would be a change of ownership. Jonas had no obligation to keep it a secret, and now everyone in the city knows that Maximilian II is preparing to exchange territory with Austria.

Since this was the case, there was no pressure on the people to pledge allegiance to their new master. The exchange of territories was not uncommon in European history, so this was not a shocking new development.

However, the circumstances this time were nevertheless special. The Bavarian royal family was in a pretty sorry state, having lost all their bargaining chips. The only thing they could still rely on was legal justification.

Initially, most Bavarians felt some hesitation in their hearts. After all, Maximilian II hadn't committed any heinous crimes. To abandon him like that seemed somewhat unreasonable.

However, when the news of the territory exchange came out, everyone's mental obstacles disappeared. It was not that they wanted to betray the king, but that the king himself wanted to leave, which had nothing to do with them.

Everyone's conscience was now clear. As long as Austria did not mistreat the Bavarian royal family, people felt they had done right by Maximilian II.

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Baden

As a close ally of Bavaria, the Baden government was the first to know what was happening in their neighboring country. The Baden government was stunned - this was not how things were supposed to be. During the war, the local governments declared "neutrality", and their military soon followed suit, declaring "neutrality" as well.

Prince Frederick asked: "What should we do now? The Bavarians aren't resisting at all. The Austrians only had to stage an armed parade to reach the gates of Munich.

From the current situation, it seems that the Bavarians have abandoned their government. And Munich cannot hold out much longer. The Kingdom of Bavaria will collapse before reinforcements arrive."

Let alone waiting for reinforcements to come, there was no sign reinforcements would come at all! Prussia was currently working on organizing a coalition force from the various German states, while Britain and France were also calling on nations to intervene militarily in this conflict.

But all this would take time. There are so many small states in Germany. Even if they did it quickly, it would still take a month or two to organize the coalition forces.

Who would have expected Bavaria to be so spineless? After all, it was still the third-largest state in Germany. Even if they couldn't beat the Austrians, they should have held out for a while longer, or even resorted to guerrilla tactics if necessary!

At the time, Prince Frederick didn't know that the two sides had already reached a compromise and that Maximilian II was currently negotiating terms with Austria.

Foreign Minister Nikolaus analyzed: "Your Highness, the problem for Bavaria is that they have lost the hearts of their people. No matter how hard the government tries, it's useless.

It seems that we are still underestimating the position of unification in the hearts of the people. The Bavarians regard this war as a war for national unification.

Instead of saying that the Austrian forces fought their way into Munich, it would be more accurate to say that the Bavarians invited them into Munich.

Now our problems have multiplied. If our people have the same attitude as the Bavarians, it would be far too risky to intervene in this war."

Nikolaus was afraid, and so were many others. What if the people of Baden felt the same way? If they forcibly intervened in this war, would the people of Baden rebel?

Even if they didn't openly revolt, they might emulate the Bavarians by remaining "neutral" during the fighting. This would still spell doom for the Baden government.

Prime Minister Waltz added: "Your Highness, this situation is likely to occur. Most domestic public opinion is against sending troops to rescue Bavaria."

Prince Frederick fell silent. He understood the truth that "if the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold", but now the risk of intervening in the war was too great, and they might end up getting into trouble themselves.

After a moment's pause, he said slowly, "Forget it, let's stay neutral in this war!"

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It was not only the Grand Duchy of Baden that made this choice. Many of the frightened small German states also chose to remain neutral.

It seems that at this moment, everyone has become a supporter of public opinion. Austria's political offensive has begun to take effect.

As more and more small states declared neutrality, the unborn German Confederation Army died in the womb prematurely.

Berlin

As more and more states declared neutrality, the pressure on the Prussian government increased. At least 500,000 Austrian troops had already gathered in the Prussian-Austrian border area, and this number was still growing.

Whether these troops are capable of fighting remains unknown, but the Prussian government does not dare to make a move. With such numbers, who would dare be complacent?

What if the moment they send troops to rescue Bavaria, those troops invade their homeland? Even if these troops were useless, their sheer numbers could still overwhelm Prussia.

The Kingdom of Prussia has limited strength. It was impossible to mobilize millions of troops like the Austrian government.

Even if they worked themselves to the bone, they could only deal with one Austrian army at most. There would be no way to deal with another.

Whether troops were sent from their homeland or from the Kingdom of Bavaria, Austria would have no problem dealing with them.

Now that they are in the age of firearms, even if they want to take risks, they can't. As long as their logistical support was cut off, even the strongest army would be useless.

In addition to the military threats, the more vexing problem was political. The actions of the Bavarian people also frightened the Prussian government.

While Frederick William IV may have had confidence in his armed forces, believing that they would not emulate the Bavarian army by remaining neutral without firing a shot, he had no confidence in the civilian population.

The security of the armed forces is rooted in the fact that Prussia is a "military state," a treatment that no other country can match.

The civilians were different. Don't look at how future generations praise the Kingdom of Prussia. In truth, they were impoverished because of their military.

The current economic situation in Prussia was not good. To maintain the huge military expenditures, the government has to increase the burden on the people.

Coupled with the exploitation of the Junker nobility, life was not easy for ordinary Prussians during this time. Historically, this kind of hardship continued until after the Franco-Prussian War, when war reparations from France finally allowed them to escape this predicament.

Frederick William IV suppressed his anger and said, "What shall we do now? These free cities have long since declared their neutrality. Now Baden, Hanover, and Württemberg have also declared neutrality. Felix is about to visit Saxony, and unless something unexpected happens, Saxony will soon declare neutrality as well.

The remaining small states are not worth mentioning in terms of strength. If we want to continue organizing an intervention army, I'm afraid we can only rely on ourselves."

There are many states in Germany, but few of them have real strength. Except for those few that have some strength, the rest of the small states cannot even muster an army of 50,000 men.

Without these state armies as cannon fodder, Prussia would not dare to fight Austria. The loss of one hundred and eighty thousand troops would cripple them.

The reason the Kingdom of Prussia maintains such a large active army is to ensure the quality of its soldiers, as it cannot compete with others in quantity.

Prime Minister Joseph von Radowitz advised: "Your Majesty, the current situation is unclear, and we cannot act rashly. Although Austria is corrupt, its military strength has not diminished.

According to our intelligence, Austria has already mobilized one million reservists. Together with their 500,000 active troops, they have become the largest army in Europe.

With our current strength, we can no longer intervene in this war. It would be better to observe the situation for now and see how the other European countries react!"

Plans quickly changed. If Austria had not carried out full national mobilization, the Kingdom of Prussia, together with the German states, might still have had the strength to intervene in this war.

The present situation is obvious. The small states, either under pressure from public opinion or intimidated by Austria's strength, have withdrawn.

The coalition can no longer be organized. To fight against Austria alone, relying only on Prussia's 200,000 troops, Joseph von Radowitz had absolutely no expectations.

Even with full national mobilization, it would still be the same. Prussia cannot survive a war of attrition. One defeat would be her end as well. While Austria might not have the strength to swallow Prussia, the dismantling of the Kingdom of Prussia was quite possible.

After all, the Kingdom of Prussia was not without its flaws. Through the three instances of carving up Poland alone, they gained 141,100 square kilometers of land or 47% of Prussia's total territory.

This means that there is still a large Polish population in Prussia. Although these people are mostly assimilated, and it would not take long for them to be completely absorbed under normal circumstances, this assumes that there are no external forces.

Once the Kingdom of Prussia was defeated in the war and Austria forcibly divided Prussia, reunification would become difficult. With the odds of success too low and the risks too high, Prime Minister Joseph von Radowitz did not want to take this gamble.

Foreign Minister Manteuffel suggested: “Your Majesty, Metternich is about to visit Berlin. Let’s hear what Austria has to say before we make a decision. If the conditions are right, it is not out of the question to shake hands with them.”

In the end, relations between countries come down to interests. Prussia opposed Austria’s annexation of Bavaria because of its interests. If the interests are aligned, then selling Bavaria is not out of the question.

Manteuffel supported the idea of dividing the country into North and South Germany. He did not mind an exchange of interests with Austria. Of course, this did not mean that he did not want Prussia to unify Germany.

The main reason is that the strength of the Kingdom of Prussia is limited. Everyone has ambitions for the unification of Germany, but no one believes that it can be achieved.

Before Bismarck came to power, the Prussian government was not mentally prepared for the unification of Germany.

Even after winning three wars, most still had doubts about unifying Germany.

If it weren’t for Bismarck’s strong persistence and political means, which tricked many small states into joining together and achieving nominal unity, the magnificent German Empire would not have been born in later generations.

After some hesitation, Frederick William IV sent an apology to the Kingdom of Bavaria. It was not that he was unwilling to help, but his strength would not allow it.

“In that case, we will remain silent for the time being. The mobilization of domestic troops cannot be stopped, and we must remain vigilant to prevent Austria from launching a sneak attack on us.

After Metternich arrives and we understand Austria’s conditions, we will make a decision.

Before that, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should try to stabilize the small states as much as possible. Without them waving flags and shouting, we are politically very passive.

Gambling with the fate of the country also depends on the situation. There must be at least a 30-40% chance of success before they would place a bet. Frederick William IV is not a gambler and does not have the reckless abandon of a gambler that would make him blindly go all in.

After the high-level meeting ended, Frederick William IV immediately summoned the British, French, Russian, and Spanish ambassadors to inform the four great powers of Europe of the situation and to ask the four countries to send troops to intervene.

Undoubtedly, the Kingdom of Spain was already an empty shell by this time, maintaining its status as a great power only through the prestige of its ancestors. Currently preoccupied with internal conflicts, they were not enthusiastic about intervening in German affairs.

The ones who have influence are Britain, France, and Russia, or more specifically, France and Russia. Although Britain's influence is considerable, its army is limited and does not have the strength to intervene in Germany.

However, the three countries of Britain, France, and Russia are currently engaged in a war that cannot be easily stopped. Both sides have invested heavily; whoever admits defeat will be in deep trouble.

Russia cannot give up Constantinople. This is the will of the entire Russian population. The Russian government cannot back down at this critical juncture.

Neither can Britain and France back down. Britain had already made concessions, regardless of how great the losses to their interests were, and they had a change of leadership.

As for France, it goes without saying that if Napoleon III dared to admit defeat, his throne would be unstable, or rather, his throne was always somewhat unstable to begin with. He started this war precisely to divert domestic tensions.

Except for the Spanish ambassador, who explicitly refused to send troops, the ambassadors of the three nations did not answer, as they had to wait for decisions from their home countries.

London

The George Cabinet held another Cabinet meeting on the problems in Germany.

Foreign Secretary Thomas said: "Gentlemen, the situation in Germany has changed. The Kingdom of Bavaria has fallen without resistance. In this war, both Bavarian civilians and soldiers have chosen to remain indifferent spectators.

It seems for this fight against Austria, it's probably just that fool Maximilian II and his foolish cabinet.

Affected by this, most of the German states in Germany have chosen neutrality because public opinion supports German unification and these state governments could not dare to take any risks.

Last night I received word from our ambassador in Berlin that the Prussian government has also backed down.

Our original plan was to use the strength of the German states in Germany to contain Austria, but now we can no longer do so.

If we do not take strong measures, the unification of Germany will be inevitable. The Austrians are launching a political offensive, and it is estimated that most of the German states will be forced by popular sentiment to join the Austrian-led Holy Roman Empire."

Thomas looked down on Maximilian II's behavior, and everyone agreed. For a king to reach such a point truly reflects his ability.

If the Kingdom of Bavaria put up even a little fight, even if it resisted the Austrian troops only for ten days or half a month, even if it lost battle after battle, everyone would be able to accept it.

It all comes down to the difference in strength. No one would criticize them for their lack of ability if they had resisted. It can be said that as long as they resisted, the German Confederation Army could have been organized.

But now everyone has given in. They were intimidated not only by Austria's military power but even more by the behavior of the Bavarian people. Others lacked confidence and did not dare to go against the will of the people.

George Hamilton-Gordon thought for a moment and said: "It seems that we must join hands with the Russians. Relying only on our power and that of France, we can no longer force Austria to back down.

A united German Reich would be far too powerful. The Russians would not want to see such a monster either. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should communicate with the Russians. To demonstrate our sincerity, we can temporarily halt our offensive operations in the Crimean Peninsula."

"Prime Minister, if we stop our advance at this time, the advantages we have gained will be given up for nothing. As long as the Russians do not give up Constantinople, this war cannot end.

Unless we want to fight a defensive war along the Indus River against the Russians in India, we cannot retreat either," reminded Secretary of State for War Edward Smith-Stanley.

Retreat is impossible. Whoever dares to compromise on this matter will be nailed to the pillar of traitors and spat upon by the public for life!

George Hamilton-Gordon said coldly: "This level of loss is still within our tolerance. Even if we cannot compromise with the Russians on Near East issues, our positions are still consistent in wanting to prevent the unification of Germany.

As long as the three of us remain united, the Austrians will have to make concessions. Once the Russians put pressure on Austria, can their relationship as allies continue?

Once Russian-Austrian relations break down, the subsequent war will be easier to fight. For now, the first thing to do is to appease the Russians and let them obstruct Germany's path to unification."

When it comes to diplomatic tactics, John Bull does not flinch. Even if they have to join hands with Russia to intervene in Germany's war for unification, they will not fail to dig a large pit for Russia first.

Chapter 215: Everyone Has Their Own Plans

Saint Petersburg

The Russian government found itself in a difficult position. Austria was expanding too fast and they had to find a way to contain it.

However, the Russo-Austrian alliance could not be broken. Austria was the Russian government's only notable ally on the European continent. They could not afford to lose them.

At present, Austria had not exceeded the scope of the treaty of expansion, so they couldn't even find an excuse to interfere.

It had nothing to do with reputation. As long as it suited their interests, the Russian government did not mind selling out its allies.

Current interests were not enough to make the Tsar sell out his ally. Even if Britain and France abandoned the Ottoman Empire, the Russian government could not possibly tear up the Russo-Austrian alliance treaty.

The reason was simple. The Near East War was a wake-up call for the Russian government, making them understand that they were not as powerful as they thought they were. Since they were not strong enough, they needed allies.

Looking around the world, countries qualified to be allies of Russia were few and far between. Going through them one by one, Austria, their traditional ally, still seemed the most reliable.

Spain was internally unstable, and Isabella II was still preoccupied with internal struggles and unable to intervene in continental European affairs. Nicholas I would not want such an ally even if it were given to him.

As for Britain and France, they were powerful, but they were now at war with them. How could they become allies when they were currently enemies?

Looking at the remaining options, there was only the Kingdom of Prussia, a quasi-great power. Aside from the previous conflicts between the two sides, it was obvious that the Russians would suffer if they allied with the Kingdom of Prussia.

When help was needed, Prussia would be powerless; on the other hand, Russia would have to constantly support Prussia.

Alliances were based on common interests. If mutual needs could not be met, then there was no basis for even discussing an alliance. This was why the Northern Three Courts System had collapsed.

Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode said anxiously: "Your Majesty, the calls for German unification are very loud. Bavarian nationalism is not even the most fanatical, yet they have supported Austria's war for unification with actual actions.

The other states are probably not much better. Except for the Kingdom of Prussia, the other states may be persuaded by the Austrians to surrender by political means.

Even the Prussians are now frightened and do not dare to intervene militarily in this conflict. The German unification war we had envisioned has now become an Austrian military parade.

If we do not intervene, Britain and France may not be able to stop Austria's subsequent actions.

Even if they were allies, they had to be careful. Austria's rapid development was not good for Russia either.

Finance Minister Fyodor Vronchenko disagreed: "Your Majesty, we cannot directly intervene in this German unification war. The Russo-Austrian secret treaty has already defined the spheres of influence of the two countries. We cannot violate the treaty before Austria has crossed the agreed boundaries.

The Russian Empire's enemies are Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire. If we rashly intervene in this war, it will only benefit our enemies. Without Austria's support, we will not be able to continue the Near East War.

The threat posed by Austria exists only potentially, still assuming they unite Germany. Currently, the chances of them unifying Germany are still very small, at least the Kingdom of Prussia has not yet succumbed.

Moreover, this threat is not directed at us alone. The ones who should be most worried now are the French. Austria's unification of Germany is the greatest threat to them.

Geopolitics determines each country's strategic threats. With the British Isles isolated from continental Europe, Britain's threats could only come from the sea. After German unification, France would be the most directly affected, followed by Russia.

"No, you misunderstand, Mr. Vronchenko. There is no contradiction between intervening in this war and upholding the alliance. As long as we help the Austrians to get the land that was previously agreed upon, it is not a violation of the alliance.

The British and French can be seen as the villains in this matter. We don't have to come into direct conflict with Austria." Karl Nesselrode explained.

Fyodor Vronchenko asked uncertainly: "Are you saying that Germany should be divided, that the road to German unification should be cut off?"

Karl Nesselrode replied in the affirmative: "That is right. The facts have already proved that if Germany is divided after the awakening of nationalism, it will sooner or later reunite.

It's still possible to stop it now. If we wait any longer, the Kingdom of Prussia will also be influenced by public opinion, and it will be difficult for us to stop them from unifying by then!"

"What specific plans do you have?" Nicholas I asked with interest.

Karl Nesselrode analyzed: "Your Majesty, this plan also requires the efforts of Great Britain and France, and it cannot be proposed by us, as it will affect the relations between Russia and Austria.

According to the present situation, Austria's acquisition of Southern Germany should not be an issue. If Britain and France are willing to play the villain, let them do so.

Prussia may expand into Northern Germany. Schleswig and Holstein can be ceded to Denmark, while the Western States can merge with Belgium and the Netherlands.

Of course, we do not care what happens to the West German states. Let the British have a headache with that instead. Whether it's given to Prussia or its allies Belgium and the Netherlands, or even independence, it doesn't matter.

Unless these economically developed regions are annexed by Austria, their strength will not skyrocket. With Germany divided, Austria's path to expansion would be blocked. They would only be able to seek overseas colonies.

This would inevitably lead to conflict with Britain and France. After sharing common enemies, the future Russo-Austrian alliance relations could still have hopes of becoming closer."

A permanent solution to the problem was indeed the best choice. As long as Germany was completely divided, no country on the European continent could threaten the security of the Russian Empire.

There was still no sign of any country possessing the power to threaten Russia. Even France, the country most feared by the Russian government at present, was no longer as terrifying as it had been during the Napoleonic era.

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Paris

The situation was changing too fast. Napoleon III's plan to sit on the sidelines had failed before it even began.

All the states in Germany had become ostriches as if the Bavarian government had committed monstrous, unforgivable sins, and it was the wish of the people that Austria should overthrow its rule.

Well, intelligence from Bavaria forced Napoleon III to admit that Austria's actions this time were the will of the masses.

This meant that Austria's annexation of Bavaria would be very easy. It was an armed parade from start to finish, with total casualties on both sides not exceeding three figures. With excellent support from the people, there will be no problem ruling there in the future.

Napoleon III cursed: "Everyone already knows the news from Germany. The situation is completely out of control. If we don't act soon, Austria may be able to rebuild that damn Holy Roman Empire.

If you do not want to see the monster that has plagued France for hundreds of years come back to life, then think of a way to strangle them now!"

Interior Minister Persigny suggested: "Your Majesty, given the current situation, we must prepare for armed intervention. Given the situation in Germany, these states will not be our allies.

Austria's strength is considerable. To be on the safe side, it would be best if we could cooperate with Great Britain and Russia. The most important thing now is to coordinate diplomatic relations to ensure that the positions of the great powers are aligned."

Persigny was Napoleon III's strategist, personally formulating plans including the monarchy's restoration. He may not have been good at governing the country, but he was a master of power politics.

He persuaded Napoleon III not to rush into this war, but when it came out of his mouth, it became a diplomatic necessity.

He also subtly reminded Napoleon III that the main force of France was still on the Near East front and that the domestic military strength was weak. Sending a small number of troops would only contribute to the enemy's achievements.

There was no alternative; the universal conscription of the Napoleonic era was already a thing of the past. At present, France's mobilization speed could not yet match Prussia's.

Without enough troops, it would be a joke to intervene with military force, wouldn't it?

Napoleon III asked with concern: "How long will it take for us to have enough troops to intervene in this war?"

The Minister of War, Jacques Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, thought for a moment and said: “Your Majesty, because of the Near East War, our standing army has exceeded 800,000 men, and a large number of reserves have been conscripted.

There are 280,000 troops on the Crimean Peninsula, 200,000 in Constantinople, 154,000 in overseas colonies, and less than 170,000 troops domestically.

Now we can mobilize 150,000 youths to join the army every month. These recruits require at least three months of training before they can be sent to the battlefield.

If we want to intervene in this war alone, it will take at least half a year before we have enough troops.”

Napoleon III completely abandoned the idea of unilateral intervention. This was the legacy of the July Monarchy. During the reign of Louis Philippe I, France’s standing army typically numbered no more than 200,000 men, and the system of universal conscription was abandoned.

After Napoleon III came to power, the army was expanded to 800,000 men, and there were not so many reserves that could be called up directly.

France has no shortage of young people of military age, but these people cannot go to the battlefield just by picking up weapons. They have to be trained.

Three months of basic training could only produce cannon fodder among cannon fodder, with pitifully low combat skills. Napoleon III did not dare to send such an unreliable army into battle.

And it was not the case that France’s ability to mobilize was really poor. The same was true of other countries during this period. Before Franz’s military reforms, Austria’s mobilization capability was about the same as France’s.

In this era, the countries that could quickly mobilize 800,000 troops were Russia, France, and Austria. Of course, many countries could gather enough people, but their combat effectiveness couldn’t be guaranteed.

Recognizing the crux of the situation through a minor detail, Napoleon III quickly concluded that military intervention would likely prove impractical this time around.

Unless, of course, Austria intended to unify Germany and thoroughly annoy everyone in the process. Britain, France, and Russia would have to withdraw their frontline troops. Otherwise, no one would have enough military forces to intervene at this time.

His judgment was not mistaken. Britain was the first to abandon plans for military intervention, precisely because the British Army could not produce an operational force of sufficient size.

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While all the countries were preparing, Franz was also busy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs began a public relations campaign throughout the European continent.

Even Switzerland, which had a long-standing feud with the Habsburgs, was not spared. Hatred was a thing of the past. Since the announcement of permanent neutrality at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, relations between the two countries had normalized.

Of course, this was not the focus of Austria’s public relations. It was just a routine matter of expressing its attitude to the Swiss government.

Unless Switzerland was willing to abandon its neutral position, it would not participate in this war, and in fact, it could not participate.

At that time, Switzerland was not yet the developed country of later generations. As a mountainous country, it was naturally poor before industrialization was complete.

Aside from tricking the states in Germany, the biggest public relations target was the French. The Russians could not be counted, as they had been taken care of in advance, and were now just keeping the lines of communication open.

It wasn't that Franz was unwilling to work on Britain, the problem was that John Bull was too cunning and Austria had no interests to buy them off.

On the other hand, there were common interests with the French, and a certain price could be paid to buy them over. Since it would be painful for Franz to cut off his flesh, he could only be bold with other people's resources.

Chapter 216: Intervention

On July 1, 1853, Prime Minister Felix made another visit to the Grand Duchy of Baden for a historic meeting with Prince Regent Frederick.

Prime Minister Felix continued to persuade: "Your Highness, German unification is the common aspiration of all the German people. The Bavarian government, which blocked the way, has been abandoned by the people.

History has given us the mission to achieve national unification at this time. As the nobility of Germany, we have to fulfill this obligation."

Faced with the slick-tongued Prime Minister Felix, Prince Frederick had an enormous headache. At the moment, "unification" was politically correct in the Grand Duchy of Baden. Having learned his lesson from the fall of the Bavarian government, he dared not make any mistakes on this issue.

In addition to persuasion, Felix was accompanied by the threat of Austrian military might.

With the Kingdom of Bavaria already pacified, the Austrian troops inevitably moved slightly toward the border of the Grand Duchy of Baden. There were not many of them, only over 100,000.

This number had already caused Prince Frederick to lose sleep. In his opinion, even if it was only 10,000 Austrian troops, it would still be a serious threat.

Fortunately, the Austrians knew to use diplomacy before force, so there was still room for maneuver. Even if they were annexed, they would have to sell for a good price, right?

Prince Frederick expressed his doubts: "Mr. Prime Minister, as a German nobleman, I am also willing to contribute to the unification of Germany. The current problem is that European countries are not willing to see German unification.

Britain, France, and Russia have all expressed their attitudes. Once Germany is unified, they will intervene with troops, and the Prussians are also colluding with them.

If we cannot handle this problem well, the unification process is likely to escalate into a large-scale war if we proceed hastily."

Nobility was not only a privilege but also a responsibility. For this reason, European nobles were respected.

Prince Frederick could not outright reject German unification. Instead, he conveniently brought up the difficulties of unification, while also badmouthing Prussia.

If Austria couldn't solve this problem, then unification was impossible. At worst, Austria might swallow Bavaria, and that would be the end of it.

Prince Frederick was not inclined to sympathize with the plight of the Bavarian royalty. After all, it was better to have an estranged ally than a formidable enemy. Besides, the Austrians were already treading carefully, publicly promising a territorial exchange between the two royal families as compensation.

Although the exact location was not announced, this was already the best choice for the Bavarian royal family. As a royal family abandoned by the people, it was impossible to remain on the throne by staying in Bavaria, so it was better to change territory to preserve their heritage.

Prime Minister Felix said confidently: "Your Highness, you can rest assured on this matter. If we cannot solve the diplomatic problem, we would not dare to talk about unification at this time.

I'm sure Your Highness understands the current world situation very well. Britain, France, and Russia are involved in a fierce war in the Near East. Even if they want to intervene now, they are unable to do so.

As long as everyone agrees, the unification of Germany will not be a problem. The current problem is the Kingdom of Prussia, which has always been ambitious and wants to annex all of Germany's territories.

We will do our best to fight for it. If the Prussian government resists and colludes with the great powers, we will unify Southern Germany first.

This is Austria's bottom line. Anyone who dares to obstruct it will see war!"

Prince Frederick understood — the previous words were all routine, and the last sentence was Austria's real purpose.

After careful calculation, he found that Austria's plan seemed to have a very high chance of success. The Kingdom of Bavaria was finished, and the Southern German States no longer had the strength to resist them.

If Germany were unified, Britain, France, and Russia would not tolerate it. If it were divided into North and South Germany, it would be a different story.

Austria was growing in strength, but this expansion barely touched the bottom line of the other powers without threatening their survival.

For the British, there would be no fear of the European balance of power getting out of control. An empowered Austria would be just as strong as France, or at best slightly stronger than the French, but still below Russia.

Anyway, Austria was surrounded by Russia, Prussia, and France. At this point, it could not expand any further. Even if it was stronger, it was still within the acceptable range.

As for the Russians, there was no need to mention them. The Austro-Russian alliance was known to everyone. As long as it was not the unification of all German territories that would make the Russians feel threatened, they could accept anything.

Prince Frederick suspected that Austria and Russia had long since come to an understanding, otherwise, the Austrians would not dare to act now.

Just France alone seemed unable to frighten Austria. Who is afraid of whom when they fight? Unless Napoleon was reborn, a united Austrian Southern Germany would be utterly fearless.

In his heart, Prince Frederick unconsciously assumed that the people supported unification. Therefore, when calculating Austria's military strength, he included the strength of several southern German states.

This calculation was not wrong. If the French come to invade, these states will have no choice but to fight, whether they want to or not. How could anyone cry neutrality in the face of foreign invasion?

After much thought, Prince Frederick said: "Prime Minister, I am in favor of the unification of Germany in principle. The Grand Duchy of Baden will not stand in the way, but we must discuss the details."

There was no room for retreat in the struggle for interests. Of course, Prince Frederick now had to fight for the interests of the Grand Duchy of Baden, or rather, for his interests.

Felix showed a look of joy. Having received a positive answer, he knew that the Grand Duchy of Baden was now in their hands, so what was there to be afraid of in discussing the specific terms?

Note that there was a law called "constitution" in the world, and the central government could completely restrict local governments' rights by law.

Austria had a dominant position in the new regime. What can these small states do to resist?

Felix magnanimously persuaded: "No problem at all. Considering that the different German states all have their independent systems, we are basically in favor of state autonomy.

Apart from the fact that everyone has to obey the common constitution, the central government usually does not interfere in the regional government."

These all had one stipulation, which was — temporarily.

Prince Frederick was satisfied. Even if he was not satisfied, he had no choice. Prime Minister Felix's stance was too firm — to refuse was to face military threats, so he could not refuse.

As for leaking Austria's plan, Prince Frederick was not so foolish. It was a thankless task.

Even if the British and the French knew, it would not change the result that the Grand Duchy of Baden would be swallowed. Now, selling the Grand Duchy of Baden for a good price was the best choice.

If they are at odds, they could point to the treatment of the Bavarian royal family. Swapping territories may sound good, but in practice they suffered great losses, generations of hard work gone at once, having to start all over again.

What if the Austrian government becomes shameless and gives them trouble again in eight to ten years? What if they find an excuse to take away their throne?

In the new territory, they would lack the support of the people. If the royal family were abolished, they would be finished and would not be able to make any waves.

After a week of negotiations, on July 9, 1853, Prime Minister Felix, representing Austria, and Prince Frederick, representing the Grand Duchy of Baden, jointly signed the “Declaration of German Unification”.

In simple terms, the Grand Duchy of Baden and Austria would now be considered one country, even though the fledgling Holy Roman Empire had yet to be formally established.

Earlier, the Duchy of Saxony had already signed an agreement. In the face of Austria’s combined fists of coercion and temptation, along with the domestic masses blindly following, they really could not refuse to compromise!

German nationalism had already been ignited. The Bavarian government, which was hindering national unification, was removed by Austria. The Duchies of Saxony and Baden also reached an agreement with Austria, so it seemed that the day of German unification was not far off.

By the time Prime Minister Felix arrived in Württemberg, the welcoming crowds had already filled the streets. Negotiations had to be held in a villa outside the city instead.

When Austria declared war, everyone thought that war was inevitable. However, the Bavarians successfully turned the war into an armed parade, and the dawn of peaceful unification appeared once again.

Even before the negotiations began, the Württemberg government was under great pressure. Previously, many people had publicly stated that they would not help the government fight if war broke out.

To avoid the fate of the Bavarian government, the Kingdom of Württemberg naturally surrendered. As long as Austria can withstand international pressure, everyone will become one big family.

On July 11, 1853, the fledgling Holy Roman Empire, though not yet formally established, consisted of five states: Austria, Bavaria, Baden, Saxony, and Württemberg.

Southern Germany was now essentially unified. On his way to Hesse-Darmstadt, Felix announced that the Free City of Frankfurt had joined the Holy Roman Empire.

By this time, Britain, France, Russia, and other countries planning to intervene had reached an agreement. On July 6, Britain, France, and Russia issued a joint statement announcing a one-month cease-fire in the Near East.

The next day, twelve European countries, including Britain, France, and Russia, issued a joint memorandum demanding that Austria cease its actions to unify Germany.

Without any military threats, just this one memorandum forced Austria to abandon its unification efforts. Fortunately, by this time Franz had already achieved his goal.

The fledgling hopes for unification that had just arisen in Germany immediately plunged into mourning. Many people helplessly realized that unification was still a long way off.

Prussia had also appeared among the intervening countries this time, though Franz did not find this unexpected. What does it matter if they have to bear a little infamy for the sake of their interests?

In any case, their reputation was already ruined, and Frederick William IV didn't mind being scolded a few more times.

Had the Kingdom of Prussia not participated in this move, it would certainly have had nothing to do with the current division of Germany.

Support Prussia against Austria? Such a sweet deal existed only in dreams!

Britain said: Hanover is under us and therefore cannot be abandoned, otherwise where would their face be? Together with France and Russia, is it not enough to hold Austria back?

France said: I'm not stupid. Isn't Austria enough of a competitor? Do we need to add another one?

Russia said: Okay, we support you spiritually, but you have to fight for your interests. Russia is not stupid.

Europe's total interests were only this much. If Prussia took more, it meant others would have less.

What kind of fool would willingly sacrifice his own interests to support a competitor?

Geography had already dictated that once the Kingdom of Prussia rose, it would become everyone's competitor. Now that there was no meat left for them, they could only snatch and seize from others.

Restrain Austria? With Germany divided, Austria's path to expansion was already blocked.

To the west was France, to the east was Russia, to the north was Prussia, and to the south were the Balkans. The Kingdom of Sardinia in the southwest was under Britain, and the other states in Italy were under Austria. They were completely unable to make any moves.

What options did Austria have? Oh, there's still Switzerland, which had nothing to offer. Unless the Austrian government collectively lost its mind, it would have no interest in the backbone of Europe.

According to the plan proposed by the Russians, Austria either stays put or goes out to grab colonies if it wants to expand!

Britain and France did not fear it. Austria was not their opponent in the competition for overseas colonies. The passive strategy of colonization was determined by geography.

At least until the Suez Canal was dug, Austria's overseas development would be at the mercy of Great Britain and France. It lacked competitiveness.

Chapter 217: Transaction

The sudden pause in the Near East War has awakened many in the Austrian government. Not surprisingly, the powers are no fools and will not allow a unified German Empire to emerge and compete with them.

This was in line with Franz's expectations. In contrast to the historical existence of the Reich, Austria now seems much stronger.

While deterring the European countries, it was natural to arouse their concern. At that time, diplomatic means became very important, and the blind use of force was not what the wise would do.

Berlin

Metternich proposed to the Prussian government to divide the German territories. There is no doubt that the Prussians are no fools and it would be very difficult for the two sides to reach an agreement.

It was easy for Austria to annex Southern Germany, but it was very difficult for Prussia to annex Northern Germany. This is a question of soft power.

***nist Prussia is only militarily strong, but culturally it is left behind by most of the German states.

This is also the reason why the Kingdom of Prussia easily attracted criticism. They have no voice in the cultural world and are not culturally recognized by everyone.

Of course, they can also use force to force everyone to agree, just like in history. However, the current government of Frederick William IV is cowardly and does not dare to take this step.

All countries have called for a halt to German unification, and Austria has encountered unprecedented difficulties in diplomacy. If Prussia jumped out at this time, Austria's pressure would be relieved, but Prussia itself would suffer.

Northern Germany is different from Southern Germany. Most of the southern countries are subordinates of Austria and have been influenced by Austria for a long time. This is also the reason why Franz advocated the use of political means to unify.

There is also British involvement in Northern Germany. Hanover is a hurdle that Prussia cannot cross if it wants to annex this region.

After the matter with Denmark, the Prussian government knew not to provoke the powers, even if the British would not directly storm the city like the Russians did, their navy coming out to block the door was also very frightening.

Metternich calmly said, "Your Majesty, Northern Germany is the most prosperous region in Germany. Although its land area is a little smaller, its economic strength is not weak at all."

The economic power of Northern Germany is indeed not weak. It even exceeds half of the Kingdom of Prussia, which is why Frederick William IV longed for it.

Frederick William IV shook his head and said, "Prime Minister, although Northern Germany's economy is good, it still cannot catch up with Southern Germany in terms of population or land area, the gap is huge.

Considering the complex situation in Northern Germany, it would be very difficult for the Kingdom of Prussia to annex these states, which is very unfair. Prussia must receive Saxony as compensation."

The Prussian government had already realized the importance of population by this time.

Metternich replied coldly: "Your Majesty, strength determines influence. Once this line is crossed, it means disaster!"

Fairness, how is that possible? Why would the Austrian government allow the Kingdom of Prussia to receive equal benefits after Austria had paid such a high price? Did they think that the Austrian government was stupid?

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Prussia did not dare to provoke the British but hoped to get compensation in Central Germany. This is unacceptable for Austria. The last negotiations between Prussia and Austria ended in disagreement, as expected.

Metternich has achieved his goal — Prussia is tempted to divide Germany amid its continuing division. This means that they cannot work closely with Britain and France.

What good would the British and French proposal to divide Germany into three parts, with a new country formed by combining the states outside of Prussia and Austria?

Surely Prussia cannot give up its military power just to contain Austria! Once this new country is established, the losses to the Kingdom of Prussia would be great.

Without Southern Germany, Austria would still be a European power; without Northern Germany, Prussia could not even maintain its current status as a quasi-great power.

The entire industrial system would be gone, as would the German Customs Union, which is vital to Prussia's economic lifeblood.

The Kingdom of Prussia with 13-14 million people would not have been able to support an independent economy even in the 19th century.

Although Northern Germany is not large in area, its population is considerable. Once annexed, Prussia's population would exceed 20 million, already surpassing Great Britain, and its total economic volume could increase by 60-70%.

The bait is set. Metternich is confident that Prussia will take it. Whether Prussia ultimately benefits or suffers is not his concern.

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In 1853, Paris still retained some of its medieval appearance. In the corners of the classical city, new forces were emerging. A large number of immigrants with dreams of making a living poured into Paris.

The booming population brought not only economic development, but also mountains of garbage and feces, and roads that were congested at all times.

A wide ditch cut the road in half and blocked the roads on both sides. After a light rain, rickety bridges had to be built over the roads.

Slaughterhouses were in the center of the city, blood flowing like streams into the streets, congealing under the soles of shoes, and turning leather shoes crimson.

This was the Paris Metternich saw, accustomed as he was to the cleanliness of Vienna. Seeing the dirty and chaotic Paris, he found it hard to like the place.

Most unacceptable were the occasional dead babies in the stinking ditches — society's cruelty forced the public's moral collapse, and the lower classes had no choice but to artificially control the birth rate to survive... The large peasant families with rooms full of children and grandchildren had already disappeared here.

This was the bustling world metropolis, the landmark city of Europe, and also the sea of sin — the Paris of the 19th century.

Palace of Versailles

Metternich and Napoleon III met in secret. Interests have always been the best catalyst for relations between nations. Before the French Revolution, Franco-Austrian relations were in a honeymoon phase.

After the French Revolution, the situation changed dramatically. After Napoleon III acceded to the throne, Franco-Austrian relations warmed up for a time, but with the outbreak of the Near East War, relations between the two countries froze again.

Now the two can get together and talk and laugh, still because of interests. As continental powers, France and Austria have many interests in common.

There is nothing that interests cannot solve. If interests cannot solve the problem, then the interests are simply not big enough.

Napoleon III is not a saint without desires. Therefore, he had great expectations for Metternich's arrival, which meant interest.

Metternich cut right to the chase: "Your Majesty, France and Austria can cooperate on the European continent for mutual benefit.

The conflict between our nations is what is needed for the British policy of continental balance, which does not correspond to the interests of our two countries.

I came to Paris this time to have in-depth communication with your country and to resolve the disputes between the two countries."

"What do you want from us, and what can we get in return?" Napoleon III asked bluntly.

The higher the level of negotiations, the simpler they often are. Everyone is very busy and there is not a lot of time to quibble.

High-level meetings are usually very short. To achieve results in a limited time, it is easier to reach a consensus by discussing interests directly.

Metternich stated the condition directly: "Your Majesty, Austria hopes to obtain your country's recognition of the new Holy Roman Empire. In return, Austria will support your country's expansion in the Kingdom of Sardinia and Central Europe."

Napoleon III thought for a moment and said: "It seems that the unification of Germany is just a cover. Your real goal is to annex Southern Germany. Now you have achieved your goal, have you not?"

Metternich replied gravely: "Yes, Your Majesty! The unification of Germany is too difficult. Nobody wants us to succeed. Austria has no plans to challenge the world."

Napoleon III was thinking. The call for the unification of Germany was very loud, and Austria had already taken over Southern Germany. It is not easy to get them to give it up.

From France's point of view, of course, he did not want Austria to get stronger, but now it is very difficult to intervene.

Although there has been a temporary truce in the Near East War, Napoleon III is very clear that the contradictions between Britain, France, and Russia have not subsided. Until the Russians stop, they cannot make concessions.

Can Austria be forced to withdraw by diplomatic pressure? Napoleon III can say with certainty that it is impossible. Nowadays, everyone speaks with strength. Austria has already shown its strength. Without the strength to overwhelm them, one cannot expect them to compromise.

He had to admit that Austria had chosen a good opportunity, taking advantage of the fighting between Britain, France, and Russia to take Southern Germany in one fell swoop and create a fait accompli.

Napoleon III said carefully: "Your country must cede the land west of the Rhine to France, and your country must also withdraw from Italy.

The sphere of influence of the new Holy Roman Empire will be limited to the present member states and must not expand further in Germany.

In the Near East War, your country must stop supporting the Russians. If your country can do all this, we can recognize the legitimacy of the new Holy Roman Empire."

It was impossible to agree to Napoleon III's demands. After paying such a high price, Austria would only gain Southern Germany. Wouldn't Austria's efforts be in vain?

Metternich shook his head and said: "Your Majesty, your appetite is too great. It has exceeded Austria's bottom line.

Apart from the fact that the new Holy Roman Empire will not expand further into Germany, we cannot accept the other conditions.

First of all, there is an alliance between Russia and Austria. We cannot betray our allies. There is no need to discuss this issue.

Secondly, it is impossible to withdraw from Italy. At most, we can promise not to expand further in Italy.

The German land to the west of the Rhine can be negotiated, but not at this time. We must consider the feelings of the people.

We do not have a great deal of territory to the west of the Rhine, and its value is not very high. Your country may be better off making up for it elsewhere."

After Metternich admitted that there was an alliance between Russia and Austria, Napoleon III's heart sank. This meant that intervention was no longer possible.

Don't be fooled by the fact that all European countries are involved. Most countries are just trying to increase their international presence. If they are asked to send troops, they will back down one by one.

As long as Russia supported Austria, the intervention forces could not be organized. Unless the Near East War was stopped immediately and Britain and France withdrew their frontline troops, there would be no strength left to intervene in Austria.

Whether the British would do it, Napoleon III did not know. In any case, he would not do it himself. After paying such a high price and fighting the war to such an extent, he simply could not end it without a major victory.

This was about his own political life. Napoleon III could not possibly risk his throne just to intervene in Austria. It was not worth it.

Since there was an agreement between Russia and Austria, and Metternich secretly appeared in Paris, what about London? If the Austrians persuade the British, then whether France recognizes it or not is irrelevant.

Thinking about this, Napoleon III reluctantly realized that he had little choice at this time. Unless France does not expand in the future, exchanging interests now is the best choice.

France's mineral resources are inadequate. The mineral resources in the Rhine area of Germany have always been coveted by France, especially the rich coal resources in the area.

Most of these areas are currently under the control of the Kingdom of Prussia, which is one of the causes of the Franco-Prussian War in history. Because the Prussians did not fulfill their previous commitments, Napoleon III provoked the war.

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Maximizing interests was the essence of every politician, and Napoleon III was no exception. Now he needed to gain advantages from Austria to consolidate his still unstable rule.

After some negotiations, on August 6, 1853, at the Palace of Versailles, Metternich and Napoleon III signed the "Franco-Austrian Outline for the Solution of the Italian Question", the "Franco-Austrian Treaty on the Division of Spheres of Influence in Central Europe" and the "Franco-Austrian Secret Treaty on Mutual Assistance".

The first two treaties only defined the spheres of influence between the two countries. The treaties also defined many potential points of conflict.

The secret treaty after those two was the core of this negotiation. According to the agreement: France would support the establishment of the new Holy Roman Empire, while Austria would support France in obtaining the territories west of the Rhine and some regions of Italy. (Including Belgium, Luxembourg, the Rhineland, the Kingdom of Sardinia, and Sicily).

When it came to making promises at the expense of others, Franz was always very generous. If the French dared to ask, even if they included the Netherlands and Northern Germany, Metternich would not refuse.

After all, this verbal promise of support would remain only verbal, without any real exchange of interests.

Didn't Napoleon III know? Impossible. But he had confidence in France's strength and believed that taking these regions would be no problem at all.

As long as the Austrians fulfilled their obligations and gave verbal support, without joining other countries to intervene, they would have a high chance of success.

One should always have ideals. What if they were realized?

If action needs to be taken in the future, making arrangements in advance would eliminate an opponent early on.

Of course, Napoleon III was no fool either. He would not believe the commitments made by the Austrian government. With so many goals, even if they were to take action, it would be impossible to accomplish them all at once.

The road must be taken step by step, and the meat must be eaten bit by bit. As long as they do not rush, the French can still achieve these goals.

In short, everything depended on strength. As long as France was strong enough, these small goals could be achieved. Otherwise, even if the Austrians fulfilled their obligations, France would have no appetite to swallow them.

Chapter 218: End Without a Breakthrough (BONUS)

London

In any case, the British government was an obstacle that could not be bypassed. Since they had been prevented from taking the first step towards German unification, Prime Minister Felix had turned to London.

The joint intervention plan had been in the works for some time. The fact that it could be dragged out until an agreement was reached with the Southern German States was because the Russians helped to hold things back.

In this respect, the Russian government still had credibility. Of course, Austria's public relations efforts also played a role.

Otherwise, the joint declaration would probably have appeared as soon as the Kingdom of Saxony had been dealt with. Then it would have been very difficult for Austria's subsequent plans to proceed.

Without a *fait accompli*, it would have been almost impossible to achieve these goals through negotiations.

The joint declaration had been published for so long and yet no international conference had been convened. This was to allow time for Austria's public relations.

In other words, Austria had gained advantages that made others envious. If the others could not get enough compensation from them, they would stir up trouble.

This was Franz's view. If the international conference were to be convened immediately, Austria would have no time to act at all. No, it should be said that there would be no time to go to London.

At the insistence of Napoleon III, this international conference would be held in Paris. The nearby French government had the opportunity to lobby.

Not to mention the Russians, without the support of the Bear, Austria would not dare to act rashly. The two sides have already made a deal. How could the shrewd John Bull tolerate such a thing?

The conference was originally scheduled for July, but at the request of the British, it was forcibly postponed until the end of August.

Faced with this situation, the Austrian government naturally had no choice but to send Prime Minister Felix to London in person.

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Prime Minister Felix replied, “Mr. George, you can’t be unaware of the importance of the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia to Austria. Its economic value is still greater than that of Southern Germany.

Venice is Austria’s largest foreign trade port, and most of Austria’s naval ports are in the Venetian region. Do you think we can let it go?”

British Prime Minister George Hamilton-Gordon smiled and said, “Mr. Felix, your country is not lacking in ports. Rijeka and Trieste are excellent ports, and your country has many ports to develop in Dalmatia.”

Felix shook his head and said, “Mr. George, theoretically, as long as it is near the sea, it can be turned into a high-quality port, but what about the development costs?

Dalmatia is the poorest province in Austria. The local traffic there is enough to make any port worthless.

So we should stop talking about giving up the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia. We can’t agree to that.”

The British wanted Italian unification to contain both Austria and France and to balance power in the Mediterranean.

On this issue, however, Austria, France, and Spain jointly opposed Italian unification, making it a remote possibility.

The Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia was the compensation Austria received for giving up the Austrian Netherlands. It has a land area of 46,991 square kilometers and a population of about 5.16 million, mainly Italians, with some Germans.

This was the most fertile land in Italy, with the Po Valley, Italy’s largest plain. More than half of Italy’s industry was concentrated here, along with the busiest port in the Mediterranean, Venice, which once accounted for 30% of Austria’s tax revenue.

With such huge economic interests, the Austrian government could not easily let go. Even now, when the British promised recognition of the new Holy Roman Empire in exchange, Prime Minister Felix refused outright.

British Prime Minister George Hamilton-Gordon, who was unable to achieve this goal, put forward another condition: “Mr. Felix, since your country cannot give up the Italian region, stopping support for the Russians should be no problem!

Surely you don’t want to see the Russians swallow up the Ottoman Empire, reach deep into the Mediterranean, and upset the balance of Europe, do you?”

After arriving in London, Felix had a feeling that what the British wanted was to break the Russo-Austrian alliance. Now it was confirmed.

“Mr. George, I think you have misunderstood. We have always been neutral in the Near East War and have never supported the Russians.

From the outbreak of the war until now, the Austrian government has always maintained neutrality and has only done business with the Russians on the principle of free trade.”

Free trade was proposed by the British and is one of the policies of the British government. British Prime Minister George Hamilton-Gordon, of course, cannot slap himself in the face.

British Prime Minister George Hamilton-Gordon asked, “So has your country decided to join the free trade system?”

Felix bluffed, “Mr. George, the situation in Austria is different from that in your country. Many people in our country are worried that once we join your country’s free trade system, our economy will suffer.

After all, your country’s industrial strength is too strong. All the countries in the world put together may not be able to compete with you.”

Yes, the industrial strength of the British Empire is outstanding in the world at present, and no country can compare with it.

However, when all the countries complete industrialization, the weaknesses of the British Isles’ small territory and scarce resources will be exposed, and then there will be a different result.

Can’t the British see this problem? The answer is that they can’t.

The present British Empire is so big that they couldn’t even recognize the possible crisis. Otherwise, they would start preparing now. At least they could extend the time of being the world hegemon, if not forever.

Theoretically, the best choice is to shift the focus of development to Canada, compete with the Americans for the Americas, and use the strength of the British Empire to defeat the United States of this era.

The second is to develop Australia and swallow up the South Pacific. With the support of such regions, a superpower can still be maintained.

Third, develop the African continent. At present, the total population of the African continent is no more than 20 million. Due to the prevalence of the slave trade, the African population is still declining.

The Americans managed to turn Indians into ethnic minorities. The even more capable John Bull could also turn blacks into a protected species.

Each of these three options would require a massive investment of manpower, resources, and money. Unless the British elite were all time travelers, there was certainly no chance.

It was flattery, but at the time it seemed like praise to George Hamilton-Gordon, who was very happy to receive Felix’s compliment. However, this did not affect the negotiations that followed.

George Hamilton-Gordon was sure that the Austrian government would not mind joining the free trade system immediately, as long as they softened their stance on the German question.

This was not Austria’s bottom line. George Hamilton-Gordon continued to probe, “Mr. Felix, since your country has remained neutral in the Near East War, shouldn’t the Ottoman territories you now occupy be returned after the war?”

Felix could only sigh. As one might expect from a man who was in charge of the continental balance of power, he had already thought about what would come after the end of the Near East War so quickly.

“We must negotiate this issue with the Ottoman government. If they can pay a sufficient ransom, we do not mind returning the currently occupied territories to them.”

This “ransom” was unaffordable to the Ottoman Empire. It was merely intended to get the British to compromise on Austria’s re-establishment of the Holy Roman Empire.

In terms of territory, the few large German states Austria was eyeing totaled less than 140,000 square kilometers, still less than half of the current Ottoman territories occupied by Austria.

The Kingdom of Bavaria: 75,865 square kilometers

The Kingdom of Württemberg: 20,682 square kilometers

The Grand Duchy of Baden: 15,070 square kilometers

The Kingdom of Saxony: 14,993 square kilometers

The Grand Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt: approximately 10,000 square kilometers

The Free City of Frankfurt: 248.31 square kilometers

However, the account cannot be calculated that way. Austria’s annexation of Southern Germany is not for land, but mainly for population. The population of these German states exceeds 10 million.

This population could effectively remedy Austria’s weakness of insufficient major ethnic groups and turn the seemingly powerful Austrian Empire into a truly great empire.

As for the Balkans, what was the point of returning the land to the Ottoman Empire? Could the present Ottoman Empire even hold on to it?

To take the example of the two principalities along the Danube, as long as Austria insisted on opposing their independence, the Ottoman Empire could only send them back, unless they wanted the Russian Bear as their neighbor.

If Russia won the Near East War, or at least fought the Ottomans to a draw, the Ottoman Empire would suffer miserably, caught between Russian and Austrian enclaves. It would be a joke to get them to govern this area.

Austria might give up the Balkan Peninsula, but only if Britain and France won the Near East War would Prime Minister Felix’s promise come true.

George Hamilton-Gordon soon recognized this problem. Britain had too little influence in such landlocked regions.

Although Austria now seemed to attach great importance to them, Russia’s vote was still the greatest, followed by France’s.

London’s recognition was certainly good, but the opposition would not change the outcome. As long as France and Russia support Austria, the reconstruction of the Holy Roman Empire will not be a problem.

In the end, no agreement was reached. Unable to extract sufficient benefits from Austria and unable to force the Austrian government to compromise, John Bull naturally could not give a definitive answer.

While they could not intervene in Southern Germany, they could not give up Northern Germany. Only in the coastal areas could they find Britain's prestige.

These questions were giving the British a headache. Felix would not worry about them. In any case, Austria's goodwill had been conveyed.

Carrying the ambiguous answers with him, Prime Minister Felix set out on his return journey. For the upcoming Paris conference, it was still best to leave it to Metternich. It had to be admitted that he was the most professional in this respect.

Chapter 219: Poor Franz

Since the twelve countries jointly intervened in the German unification process, all of Germany has fallen into a slump, as if the sky had fallen. Even the most radical nationalists have given up hope of unifying Germany.

To reassure the people, the Austrian government continued to post reassuring notices in the areas under its control, stating that the Austrian government was still making the final diplomatic efforts to realize the unification of the German territories as much as possible, while incidentally criticizing the Kingdom of Prussia for being an opportunist.

This, too, was futile. Everyone could only curse the Prussian government and wait for the final verdict of the Paris Conference.

Campus of University of Munich

One young student said indignantly: "We can't just wait, we have to do something!"

A young man beside him quickly grabbed his right arm and comforted him: "Bayer, don't do anything stupid. At the moment we can only rely on the Austrian government for diplomatic mediation. Now Prime Minister Felix has gone to London, and Mr. Metternich has also gone to Paris.

It is said that His Majesty Franz will also visit St. Petersburg. The Austrian government is making great efforts to unify Germany.

What can you do now? Besides making trouble, can you make these countries change their attitude?"

Bayer wrenched his arm from his companion's hand and said, "Schwarz, I can't help it. Even if we can't do anything, we can organize a demonstration to show them our determination to unite!"

"Hmph!"

Schwarz snorted coldly and said, "Don't be stupid, Bayer. Even if, as the newspapers say, all the people in the German territories came out to protest together at this time, it would not have the slightest effect.

The British government cannot see it, the French government cannot see it, and the Russian government cannot see it. All the European governments cannot see it.

What we have to do now is to make Germany stronger, strong enough so that they don't even dare to interfere in our internal affairs, and then the German territories can achieve unification.

Even now, Austria, the most powerful state in the German territories, cannot muster the courage to fight against the intervention of the European countries!

Protest marches cannot increase national strength. They have no practical significance except to slow down our development and disturb social order.

They all "hated" that the German territories were not strong enough. Even with the many states added together, they could not withstand the collective pressure of the great powers.

Bayer cursed angrily, "It's all because of those Prussian barbarians. If they hadn't acted like a bunch of idiots, the situation wouldn't be so passive now.

Great Britain, France, and Russia are at war. This is the best opportunity for Germany to unite, but these bastards sided with Britain, France, and Russia and betrayed the interests of the German territories!"

After Austria occupied this territory, the Kingdom of Prussia became a daily propaganda tool. Especially after Prussia appeared on the list of intervening countries, they could never clear their name again.

As discontent simmered, Prussia became a convenient target for venting anger. Traitors, after all, have always caused more outrage than enemies.

The Prussian government should have been prepared to be scolded for this decision. Anyway, they didn't have any plans in Southern Germany anymore, so it didn't matter if they had the support of the people or not.

There was no need to explain it at all because there was no way to explain it. They cannot say: If the Kingdom of Prussia does not join the Intervention Alliance, the remaining North German States will merge into one country, and they will not benefit at all, right?

What about cooperating with Austria to unify the German territories? Frederick William IV was no fool. Playing politics with the Habsburgs is just asking for trouble, isn't it?

What the House of Hohenzollern did best was martial strength. If each brought an army to train, Frederick William IV could proudly say that he was miles ahead of Franz at leading troops into battle.

It had to be admitted that genetics sometimes played a role. The House of Hohenzollern had produced several famous generals, and the Prussian kings were generally quite good at fighting.

Because he was not very good at political struggles, Wilhelm II was soon deposed by his subordinates after the outbreak of World War I, while the House of Habsburg was brought to ruin by their heirs.

Even the last emperor, who was a clown, almost saved the empire, but Wilson's "Fourteen Points" stimulated the outbreak of nationalism and caused the downfall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

This could also be seen now. Since the Kingdom of Prussia had joined the ranks of the intervening countries, nationalist dissatisfaction with the Prussian government had reached its peak.

If it were Franz, he would rather choose to join with Austria to invade and carve up the German territories together. After that, he would have to give the appearance of uniting with Austria before splitting up under pressure from the Great Powers.

If they take advantage of this opportunity, they can swallow Northern Germany in one bite under the banner of unification, and if they offend the British, they can drag Austria along with them to share the blame.

In any case, it will happen sooner or later. For the Kingdom of Prussia to develop, it would inevitably have to annex Northern Germany, so Hanover could not be left alone.

Hanover was important. Apart from interests, as the Queen's hometown, it was also a matter of face for Britain. How could the already arrogant John Bull stand to be slapped in the face?

Since this was the case, it would be nice to share some of the pressure, what a wonderful excuse German unification would be!

This would increase external pressure, but internally it could win the support of the people and make the government more stable. While the pros and cons for the country were still difficult to determine, it was the best choice for the king.

Napoleon III was an expert at this. To consolidate his throne, he did not hesitate to fight the Russians in the Near East.

From the point of view of national interests, the French needed only to defend Constantinople. There was no need to continue fighting in the Crimean Peninsula.

After winning several battles on the Crimean Peninsula in history, Napoleon III resolutely negotiated with the Russians after receiving personal political benefits.

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A light breeze brushed Franz's face as he poked his head out of the window to enjoy the beautiful weather.

At this time, he was on his way to St. Petersburg, ostensibly to ask the Russian government for diplomatic support in the unification of the German territories.

His visit to Russia this time had nothing to do with these negotiations. It was purely political.

Although he knew that German unification was impossible this time, Franz, as Emperor of Austria, still had to do his utmost to at least let the German people see that he had tried.

In mid-July, Franz set out on his journey from Vienna, traveling by coach to St. Petersburg. Austrian domestic transportation was still barely adequate, and Franz even took a train.

After entering the Russian Empire, he didn't bother to complain. If it were not for his healthy body, he might not even have made it to St. Petersburg, having been shaken from side to side on the way.

What Franz missed most at this moment was the era of airplanes and trains. In later times, the trip from Vienna to St. Petersburg would take two or three hours at most by plane and only a day by train.

But in this era, it would take months to travel 1,583 kilometers.

Fortunately, after crossing Poland, he could travel by ship to save a lot of time. Otherwise, if he went all the way by carriage, he would still be halfway there by the time the Paris Conference began.

He could have gone through the German territories to get to St. Petersburg, whether he sailed up the Rhine to get through or down the Elbe to the North Sea.

Unfortunately, both routes had to pass through the Kingdom of Prussia. At the time, politics required that Austria and Prussia be at odds with each other, so Franz could only go through Poland.

It happened to be the flood season on the Vistula, and navigation was very dangerous. For the sake of his life, Franz decided to take it slow.

After all, it was his first and last time doing this. Before railways spanned across the two countries, he would not visit St. Petersburg again. This distance was simply murder.

When would the railroad from St. Petersburg to Vienna be ready? He would have to ask the Russians; at Austria's rate of development, the national rail network would probably be completed in another 20 years.

As for the Russian Empire, it was impossible to complete the railroad network in this century, perhaps it could be achieved in the next century.

Although the journey was bumpy, the scenery along the way was very good. It was full of nature, especially in Russia, where there were not many factories spewing black smoke around.

Occasionally, when they passed a scenic spot, Franz would stop and take a look. It served as a pastime during the trip.

Franz's entourage would now advance 30 kilometers a day, stopping to rest on rainy days. Continuing in the rain was out of the question. He was a benevolent emperor who would not arbitrarily make life difficult for the people.

When receiving guests, the Russian government was still very attentive to etiquette, strictly adhering to arrangements befitting the treatment of an emperor. Although Franz brought with him a regiment of guards, the Russians did not raise an eyebrow.

On that day, the accompanying Russian representative, Count Medemis, went to the front of the carriage and asked: "Your Majesty, the Vistula River ahead is now navigable. Do you think we should take the water route?"

The change was a must. Whoever was willing to sit in that carriage should do so!

Franz casually found an excuse and said, "You make the arrangements. We're in a hurry!"

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Franz soon regretted it. It turned out that traveling by water was no fun in this era, especially since he was seasick.

Sailing along the river was still okay. Franz did not feel much as they stopped frequently in harbors. Once they were out at sea, it was a different story. The wind and waves at sea were worlds apart from the inland rivers.

The first day at sea went well. He managed to get through it with his strong physique. On the second day, his complexion turned pale. On the third day, he began to vomit.

After he threw up, the tour was delayed again while everyone hurried to the nearest port. By this time, the entourage had already arrived in Estonia. The distance to St. Petersburg was not far.

It couldn't be helped. The Emperor's life was precious, so no one dared be careless. Even though the accompanying doctor knew that this was just a normal reaction to seasickness, he still stopped so that Franz could recover for three days before setting off again.

For the rest of the journey, they had to slow down, of course. They had to dock at almost every port. Franz would rest on land every night.

After all the twists and turns, Franz finally arrived in St. Petersburg, having lost a lot of weight.

Chapter 220: Hidden Murderous Intent

Paris

On August 28, 1853, the long-awaited negotiations finally began, with representatives from various countries, including many small German states and free cities, gathering together.

The conference room was immediately flooded with over a hundred people, making it as noisy and chaotic as a marketplace. After a few days, no agreement had been reached.

On September 2, Russian Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode suggested to the conference: "Gentlemen, at this rate of endless bickering, an agreement will probably not be reached even by this time next year. Why don't we reduce the number of countries participating in the negotiations?"

Public relations fees were at work here. Karl Nesselrode still had considerable credibility and upheld the principle of money for service. This proposal was bought with 500,000 rubles.

Watching the deadlock in the negotiations, Metternich was worried. If it dragged on, problems would surely arise that would be very detrimental to Austria.

At this point, it was inappropriate for Austria to take the lead in excluding other countries' representatives. Only the representatives of Britain, France, and Russia had the standing to propose a reduction in participation.

The British, of course, were happy to watch Austria's troubles unfold. The French, too, were not easily bought under the watchful eyes of Napoleon III, which made any trickery difficult.

That left only Karl Nesselrode, who could be bought because, with the Russian-Austrian alliance, the Russian government had already decided to support Austria at the conference.

How much support they could give was up to Karl Nesselrode. To avoid long-term problems, Metternich naturally spent money on public relations.

Metternich said coldly, "Mr. Nesselrode's suggestion is a good one. Everyone's time is precious. There is no need for irrelevant people to take part in the subsequent negotiations.

He had no affection for these bystanders, who had only brought chaos to Austria. Now they were just making trouble.

"All right, from now on, only the directly involved countries need to participate."

After some consideration, the Foreign Minister Auvergne also expressed his support. Prolonging this brought no benefit to France.

With three votes to one, British Foreign Secretary Thomas had no choice but to nod in agreement. His time, too, was precious, and he could not be trapped here while affairs at home still needed to be attended to.

Under the consensus of the Great Powers, participation in the conference shrank to 15 countries:

Britain, France, Russia, Austria, Prussia, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, plus the southern German states slated for annexation.

This was only the beginning.

On September 5, under Metternich's manipulation, the number of participants shrank again, depriving the German states of any right to attend the conference and leaving them passively at home awaiting the results.

By September 10, with these smaller countries being kicked out one by one, only six remained: Britain, France, Russia, Austria, Spain, and Prussia, somewhat reminiscent of the Paris Peace Conference.

The world is still run by power.

A multi-country negotiation ended up as a closed-door meeting of Britain, France, Russia, Austria, Spain, and Prussia.

The Spanish representative was there only to be present. As a European power, it retained conference rights but no speaking privileges.

The final decision still rested with Britain, France, Russia, Austria and Prussia. Negotiations could finally proceed normally.

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In the German territories, the idea of dividing Germany into northern and southern halves grew with time.

Many experts and scholars published newspaper articles elaborating on the feasibility of the "Division of Northern and Southern Germany."

Even optimists no longer believed that German unification was possible. Have you not seen the clear opposition expressed by the flag of the Kingdom of Prussia?

In addition, two other North German state governments had responded to the Prussian proposal, believing that Austria had disturbed the peace and stability of the German territories and should be expelled.

These two foolish state governments soon paid a painful price, being denounced by their citizens to the point where they were the subject of verbal abuse.

Had the Prussian army not intervened, they would have become republics. With this precedent, the remaining German state governments all became more cautious.

German nationalist sentiment was still mostly limited to verbal attacks, but it had the power to overthrow one or two small states.

To put it bluntly, their verbal barrage alone was enough to drive governments from power, which naturally frightened leaders from defying public sentiment.

The German territories consisted of 39 states and various free cities. Aside from the two major powers, Austria and Prussia, the remaining 37 states and free cities occupied over 200,000 square kilometers.

Excluding Bavaria, Hanover, Württemberg, Saxony, Hesse, Baden, and so on, the thirty or so other states and free cities were crammed into just 40,000 to 50,000 square kilometers of land.

Excluding the two duchies occupied by Denmark, each state or free city averaged less than 1,000 square kilometers in area, with an average population of less than 150,000.

With such limited governmental authority, a rural rebellion could overthrow them. Of course, they did not dare to violate public opinion.

When the “Division of Northern and Southern Germany” was announced, public opinion exploded with both support and opposition, throwing the entire German territory into turmoil.

Inside the University of Munich

One excited student said: “It’s impossible, Bayer. Apart from the division of Germany, have we any other choice?”

With foreign intervention and the traitorous Kingdom of Prussia in our region, you want to unify the German territories by force under these circumstances. Do you know the consequences?

You’re simply mad. Once war breaks out, tens of thousands of Germans will be displaced, and the great German nation will sink into oblivion like the Poles.”

The world has never lacked idealists, and Bayer was one.

Bayer replied, “Stein, don’t make a fuss. The intervention coalition may seem strong, but the only ones capable of intervening militarily in German unification are Britain, France, and Russia.

Now, there are many contradictions between the three countries, and the possibility of forming a coalition is almost zero. If they fight separately, we may not be without a fighting chance.”

Someone nearby sneered, “That’s right, we do have the strength to fight. But after that, Germany would fade into history, or we can learn from the Prussian savages and become traitors who bow down to the enemy.”

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Not everyone liked war. Even among German nationalists, most still hoped for peaceful unification.

In the face of combined foreign intervention, many were rational enough to know that the German Confederation was incapable of resisting the common will of Europe, leaving compromise as the only choice.

The North-South division idea, rather than an Austrian government conspiracy, was something these rational minds needed.

Since unification was impossible, this was the second option everyone was forced to choose.

Things were fine in Southern Germany. With annexation by Austria, they would still be one of the world's greatest powers, acceptable to most citizens.

Northern Germany was a different story. No one liked traitors. Unification with the Kingdom of Prussia was unacceptable to many.

Moreover, the combined northern states would barely enter the ranks of European powers, still far from the true great power status they desired.

Against this background, a new idea spread from the Kingdom of Hanover to Northern Germany and then to Southern Germany:

“Expel Austria and Prussia, and let the remaining German states form a new country.”

This idea had great appeal in Northern Germany among those who did not want to unite with Prussia and would rather join this new country.

The country created in this way would be only a medium-sized country of about 220,000 square kilometers and 17-18 million people, far from their envisioned dream of a great power.

Undoubtedly, British interference was evident here. With three competing German nations, whether Austria, Prussia, or this potential new nation, none would retain the ability to unify Germany.

In such a balanced system, the European continent will become more stable. It will not only satisfy the interests of the British but also alleviate the concerns of the French. Even the Russians are very interested in this system.

This idea has been around for a long while, and the Bavarian government has been a strong proponent of the tripartite division concept. Unfortunately, such thinking lacks supporters in Germany, and even the Bavarians oppose it.

Now the situation had changed. The northern German states, unwilling to unite with Prussia, became supporters of the idea.

Franz, far away in St. Petersburg, still did not know that John Bull had already made his move, and a deadly one at that.

A theory with the backing of the people was no longer just a theory but had the potential to become a reality.

While the southern German masses might not support it, their governments thought otherwise. Subordination to Austria offered limited influence.

Influence meant interests. With so many small states coming together, no one could dominate, necessitating a federal system!

In a federal state, the limited power of the central government ensures that everyone's interests are protected to the greatest extent possible.

Attracted by the prospects, these smaller governments eagerly promoted the theory domestically and quietly mobilized currents throughout Germany.

Baden

Prince Frederick hesitated whether to join the federation that Great Britain was organizing. According to the British, joining would maximize the benefits.

“Gentlemen, what do you think of the British proposal?”

After a moment of silence, Prime Minister Waltz replied: “Your Highness, if the British plan succeeds, joining the Federation will of course better suit our interests.

The Kingdom of Bavaria is still under Austrian control, and they are unlikely to spit it out.

In the new federation, no one could dominate. We, Hanover, Württemberg, Saxony, Hesse, and others would control the country together.

But while the potential benefits are substantial, so too are the risks.

The fledgling Federation would still be far weaker than Austria or even France. With limited development potential, we might not even surpass Prussia.

If the European balance of power is disturbed, we will be in great trouble. If Britain does not succeed in forcing Austria to voluntarily abandon the new Holy Roman Empire after turning traitor, we will surely face retaliation in the future.”

Not to mention the future, even now Austria could crush the Grand Duchy of Baden with one hand. This was their hesitation to betray Austria.

Foreign Minister Nikolaus said after careful thought: “As for the question of Austrian retaliation, it’s easy to handle. We can simply appoint a member of the Habsburgs as emperor, and that should be enough to appease their anger.

The problem at hand is whether the British will be able to subdue Austria and Prussia. If they can’t, this new federal empire will forever exist only in theory.”

Prince Frederick nodded. He wanted the benefits, but not the risks. If Britain’s plans failed, the enraged Austrian government might abolish the royal house of Baden. There was a ninety percent chance of that.

In contrast to other monarchs, Louis II was mentally ill, and his reputation among the people was close to zero. Most of the people living in Baden did not care much for the Grand Duke.

“In that case, reply directly to Great Britain that we agree in principle, but will make no public statements before the final decision of the Paris Conference.

Propaganda at home must be carefully controlled so that nothing can be traced back to us. These ideas circulate freely among the people and must have no connection with the government.” Prince Frederick remarked.

There was no other way. The way for small countries to survive was to be opportunistic fence-sitters. They could not afford to offend either the British or the Austrians. Being caught between two great powers and trying to take advantage of the situation was like skating on thin ice.