

## Roman Empire 221

### Chapter 221: John Bulls Diplomatic Means

#### Palace of Versailles

British Foreign Secretary Thomas said to Napoleon III: “Your Majesty, the Russo-Austrian alliance is too great a threat to us. Since the outbreak of the Crimean War, Russia would have collapsed long ago without Austria’s support.

Now an opportunity arose. Austria wanted to unite the German territories, which Russia would certainly oppose.

Based on the current situation, the Austrian government made concessions and supported Russia’s acquisition of Constantinople in exchange for Russian support for the annexation of Southern Germany.

Problems arose during the implementation of this seemingly mutually beneficial deal. Russia failed to take Constantinople, while Austria swallowed Southern Germany in one gulp.

Many in the Russian government hoped that Austria’s plans would not succeed, so their support for Austria would inevitably be limited.

Faced with the combined diplomatic pressure of all European countries, the Austrian government naturally could not withstand the pressure. They had already gotten the short end of the stick in this deal, and the discovery of Russia’s lack of effort would certainly upset Austria.

We can exploit this by offering to recognize their annexation of Southern Germany in exchange for Austria’s renunciation of the Russo-Austrian alliance. The probability of success is extremely high.”

The existence of the Russo-Austrian alliance severely threatened the core interests of Britain and France in the struggle for dominance of the European continent.

From the end of the Napoleonic Wars to the present day, Russia, having achieved European hegemony, has been unable to expand abroad. It wasn’t only because of the restrictions imposed by the Vienna System, but also because the diplomatic means used by the Russian government were not up to standard, and they were resisted by everyone’s combined efforts.

The situation is different now with the cooperation between Austria and Russia, whereas before Britain and France could look down on Russian diplomacy, now they could not ignore Austria’s diplomatic skills.

Metternich was hailed as the “Prime Minister of Europe” during this period. His diplomatic skills were experienced firsthand by Britain.

Although Austria was the weakest of the four Great Powers, it dominated the politics of continental Europe for thirty years through diplomacy alone.

“Suppressing France, expelling Great Britain, blocking Russia” is the culmination of the achievements of the Vienna System. By exploiting conflicts between countries, Metternich achieved his strategic goals by using weakness to control strength.

If Russian-Austrian strategic alignment and complementarity deepen through continued cooperation, it would fatally affect the core interests of Britain and France.

Napoleon III shook his head. “Mr. Thomas, we understand the Russo-Austrian threat and are happy to sabotage that partnership.

But your proposed plans have too low a success rate. That old fox Metternich is not easily fooled! I doubt he would fall into a trap so easily!”

The Franco-Austrian deal aside, splitting the Russo-Austrian alliance requires more reliable plans than mere speculation that Russia might resentfully reduce Austrian support and then casually sabotage Austria diplomatically.

They were all playing a political game. Dealing with international affairs requires consideration of benefits. As long as the benefits are reasonable, personal feelings can be suppressed.

Thomas calmly said, “Your Majesty, the Russian-Austrian alliance is based on mutual interests. Austria refuses to break the alliance with Russia just because the benefits are insufficient.

If Austria is willing to break off relations with Russia, we can support their annexation not only of Southern Germany but also of Central Germany, even of the present Austrian-occupied Ottoman territories.

If Austria refuses to give up Russo-Austrian relations, then we must prepare for the worst and intervene directly to limit Austria’s strength.

We will send 100,000 troops, and France will send 200,000 troops. Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland, Sardinia, and Spain will contribute 50,000 each. In addition, Prussia will also be sending 300,000 troops to form an intervention army to force Austria to stop expanding.

One must admit that the British were ruthless. Perhaps the benefits Britain could offer are even greater than what the Russo-Austrian alliance could achieve.

Napoleon III was in deep thought. Strategically, the Russo-Austrian alliance was no less a threat than the Austrian unification of Germany.

For the sake of world hegemony, Britain wanted to strike at its greatest rival, and of course, promise anything to achieve it.

Austria’s rear would be unstable after offending Russia, and French containment would be an obstacle to Austrian domination of mainland Europe anyway.

But for the French, it is a different matter. It is very important to break the Russian-Austrian alliance, but it is equally important to suppress the emergence of new opponents.

If they finally succeed in suppressing the Russians, only to see the Austrians regain the upper hand, won’t they have worked in vain?

The British want continental balance; as long as the balance is maintained, it doesn’t matter who is stronger or weaker. Finally, Austria’s geographical location makes it impossible for it to challenge the naval power, and it poses the least threat among the great powers.

It’s a different story for France. Napoleon III aspires to dominate the continent, and he cannot tolerate the emergence of a Southern European giant.

The power gap between Austria and France was not substantial, and even with the current Austrian Empire, Napoleon III was not confident that he could suppress it, let alone a stronger Austria.

Forgetting the secret agreement between France and Austria, he concentrates on preventing Austria from becoming too powerful. Effective measures must be taken to limit its development.

After a while, Napoleon III shook his head. "Mr. Thomas, your plans are too unreliable. What if Austria reneges after we recognize their expansion?"

The Russo-Austrian alliance could be shattered, and of course, it could be rebuilt. In the end, it comes down to interests.

Your European balance of power plan has essentially stifled Austria's development. To advance, they will inevitably join forces with Russia sooner or later.

If I were Nicholas I, the annexation of the Ottoman Empire would make the Austrian unification of Germany acceptable.

After German unification, Austria would threaten France first. Russia could easily start a Franco-Austrian war and reap the benefits.

Britain could also stay on the sidelines and watch the changing circumstances. Mr. Thomas, do you think I'm that easily fooled?"

Sensing murderous intent in Napoleon III's eyes, Thomas hastily remedied the situation, "Your Majesty is overthinking this. Nicholas I lacks your wisdom.

Nor will we stand idly by while Austria expands. No European country wants to see the emergence of a Central European hegemon.

Austria had no chance of uniting the German territories, at least not if Prussia had anything to say about it.

Although Austria appears militarily formidable now, once war breaks out, as long as it's not on their home turf, supplying a million troops would drain them to death."

Napoleon III stated firmly, "Mr. Thomas, however you phrase it, France cannot allow Austria to grow stronger just to dissolve the Russian-Austrian alliance!"

Having said this, Napoleon III immediately realized the implications. The British had no intention of allowing the Austrians to rise, and were only provoking him!

Recognizing their true motives, Napoleon III looked at Thomas with undisguised disgust.

Noticing the change in Napoleon III's complexion, Thomas casually remarked, "Your Majesty, since France intends to limit Austria's growth, we, as allies, will naturally coordinate with French actions.

For all righteous people, Austria's aggressive war to annex the German states was intolerable.

I propose that our two countries immediately join hands to thwart Austria's ambitions by permanently dividing Germany and creating an independent country out of the regions excluding Prussia and Austria, thus eliminating a European source of war."

Predictably, Napoleon III knew this was Britain's true goal, but was incredulous.

John Bull's diplomatic machinations were too damn good! His late uncle Napoleon Bonaparte once swept across Europe invincible until he fell to British diplomatic wiles.

Britain acquiesced to Austrian dominance of the Vienna System only because it needed Austria's help in stabilizing Europe amid global colonial expansion and could not at the time personally intervene in continental affairs.

When they could, they immediately returned to cause trouble, as evidenced by the current involvement in Crimea and the intervention in German unification, which was entirely orchestrated by the British.

Even now, when it's clear that the British want to contain Austria's growth, it has become a situation where France is the one who wants to contain Austria's development. The task of fostering enmity has been successfully passed on to the French.

Refusal? In his heart, Napoleon III desperately wanted to refuse, but he had no other choice.

Reason tells him that if France does not step forward to restrain Austria, Britain will allow a possible Austrian rise to sever Russian-Austrian relations.

This is a conspiracy, and Napoleon III cannot help but fall into it. Now that France has violated the agreement and blocked Austria's path to expansion, how do you think Austria will react when it tries to expand in the future?

With one scheme, Austria was not only kept in check, but France was forced to restrain Austria, preventing any alliance between them, while forcing French dependence on Britain internationally.

Napoleon III scoffed, "Mr. Thomas, isn't that your real goal? But do you think that Austria is an easy target? Where is the intervention of coalition forces from different countries?

Without military intervention, threats alone are unlikely to force Austria to make concessions. I don't think France is capable of that."

Is the coalition that easy to organize? Before the plan is revealed, it's no problem to trick Prussia into joining. Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Kingdom of Sardinia have always looked up to the British, and getting them to send troops is not difficult.

Why would neutral Switzerland needlessly offend neighboring Austria? The Spanish had no interest in whether Austria grew or not. Why should they wade into this quagmire?

Napoleon III did not want to be the scapegoat here. If Austria does not agree and war breaks out, where can he go to seek redress?

There are many deaths in war. Normally, Napoleon III would not be afraid, but to go to war with Russia and then Austria would be insane.

Thomas said confidently, "Your Majesty, please be assured that the matter of the intervention army is settled.

Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Belgium will be rewarded with territorial gains in some parts of the German territories, while Spain and Portugal will be rewarded with overseas colonies.

As long as our two countries are united, they will not dare to reject our goodwill.

Once Austria decides to go to war, the Royal Navy will blockade the Adriatic Sea, cutting off its overseas trade routes.

Under these circumstances, I believe the likelihood of the Austrian government capitulating is very high. The mere hint of organized intervention would force them to compromise.

Moreover, we don't intend to be ruthless. For example, regarding the Kingdom of Bavaria, which Austria has already occupied, we can allow them to annex it.

The British government only wants to break up the Russian-Austrian alliance, not strengthen it. Therefore, military intervention is only a worst-case scenario.

If we take military action, Your Majesty, how do you think the Russians will react?

Will they take the risk of joining Austria in attacking the Kingdom of Prussia, or will they confront us in the Near East while verbally supporting Austria?"

Listening to Thomas' explanation, Napoleon III felt only endless conspiracies. The British conspiracies tightly encompassed almost all European countries.

Almost all European countries have been forced to take sides, except for Denmark and Sweden in Northern Europe, which are too close to Russia and too difficult to win over.

Even if the Russo-Austrian alliance were to continue, most European countries would oppose it, such is the power that naval supremacy confers.

The collaboration of the world's first and second naval powers, along with the colonial nations of Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands, left little choice.

Belgium is geographically bound to ally itself with either England or France; Sardinia is out for revenge against Austria; Switzerland has historical grievances with the Habsburgs and cannot afford to offend either England or France.

Napoleon III coldly replied, "In that case, this plan can be proposed jointly by our two countries. Mr. Thomas can still visit Russia. As long as Russia's attitude is not firm, the plan will succeed."

Thomas remarked impassively, "Has Your Majesty forgotten that the plan to divide Germany originated in Russia? I'm sure the look on the faces of the Austrians will be fascinating when they learn of this."

Napoleon III replied, "It is essential that Prussia does not know our further plans, otherwise they might ally themselves with Austria to carve up Germany.

Until then, all plans are mere fantasies. With the double rise of Prussia and Austria, the German interests of your country are endangered, while at the same time, we are confronted with increased competition."

## Chapter 223: Schemes

A noble banquet was being held in a Parisian mansion. In a small, inconspicuous corner, British Foreign Secretary Thomas and Russian Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode met.

If this news were to get out, the headlines on the front pages of the Parisian newspapers could be booked in advance.

"Mr. Thomas, did you invite me here just for a drink?" asked Karl Nesselrode with a frown.

He had been busy at the wine party flirting with noblewomen and enjoying himself, only to be interrupted by Thomas looking for him, so his mood could hardly have been better.

As far as business was concerned, Karl Nesselrode thought there was nothing good for him and the British to talk about now. Besides, it was not the right occasion. This was done deliberately so that the Austrians would discover it.

Thomas smiled and said, “Mr. Nesselrode, don’t you think Austria has become a little too powerful after annexing Southern Germany?”

Karl Nesselrode’s complexion changed. Many in the Russian government felt that Austria was now too strong, and he was one of them. It was one thing to say this at home, but now that the British were on to them, he dared not admit it.

Who knew if there were Austrian spies here? Even if there weren’t, the British surely had ways of letting Austria know the contents of their conversation.

Karl Nesselrode’s political skills were at least passable. He knew that this was a political trap dug by the British, so of course he would not pursue the topic.

He casually said, “Mr. Thomas, if that’s what this is about, don’t bother sticking your nose in. We can handle our affairs without your input.”

Ignoring his unreasonableness, Thomas continued smiling and said, “Mr. Nesselrode, there are no eternal friends in this world, only eternal interests. Today you and Austria are allies; tomorrow you may be enemies.

Now, for the sake of your alliance, you allow Austria to expand into Germany. Tomorrow you may find yourself facing a unified Central European empire.

Making some preparations beforehand and taking precautions can never be wrong.

Russia and Austria are too close to each other. With Austria’s path of expansion in Europe blocked in the future, they would only be able to develop towards the Near Eastern regions. Sooner or later, conflicts would inevitably arise between the two...”

Before Thomas could finish speaking, Karl Nesselrode directly bid farewell and left. He already regretted the rash contact with the British.

The Russo-Austrian alliance was Russia’s most important foreign policy. How could it be changed so easily? One cannot abandon an alliance just because of potential threats.

This open provocation to sow discord was so obvious. If he could not see it, then there would be real problems.

This seemingly unfortunate meeting had already undergone a qualitative change in the eyes of the interested parties.

Karl Nesselrode, of course, did not notice these problems. He had to admit that the British sowing of discord was very effective. In his heart, he was also extremely wary of Austria, just as the Austrian government was wary of the Russians. You have to be careful even with allies!

This was Thomas’ brilliance. Once things were provoked, it became difficult not to be affected.

The dilemma for Karl Nesselrode was whether or not to cut Austria's legs off. Since this was a matter of great national importance, he hesitated.

Sleepless all night, the grand meeting took place the next day as planned. Thomas went on the offensive right away, and Karl Nesselrode involuntarily reduced his speaking time.

Originally, it was Britain and Prussia on one side, Russia and Austria on the other, with France mediating in between. The Spanish representative was in charge of presiding over the meetings, standing out to announce adjournment when deadlocks occurred.

Now the French attitude had changed, and Karl Nesselrode's support was also insufficient. From the beginning, Metternich was under enormous pressure.

However, negotiations were not about having a larger number. Otherwise, all countries could be included and those who are against the Austrian expansion would be even more. There is no need to explain the reasons.

Metternich, a seasoned veteran of the diplomatic arena, was not easily intimidated. No matter how righteously the representatives of Great Britain, France, and Prussia warned, he remained unmoved as a mountain.

Thomas threatened: "Mr. Metternich, if your country is not willing to give up the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire, then the various nations will have to impose sanctions on you."

Metternich said impassively: "All right, we can make concessions and not re-establish the Holy Roman Empire. It should be all right if we found the New Holy Roman Empire instead!"

This was a complete avoidance of the key issues. The effort was not only to get Austria to change its national title to settle the matter but also to get them to give up the interests they had gained.

Further intimidation and inducement would not be openly stated by Thomas at the meeting. This required private communication. One could not expose things in front of the Russians and have Austria change sides!

The Russians were no fools either. As long as there was a hint of the spearhead, they would react immediately and take action.

All of Thomas' work so far was just to create rifts between Russia and Austria in preparation for splitting the Russo-Austrian alliance.

Flies never visit an egg that has no cracks. If there were no cracks between Russia and Austria, the British would have no place to start!

The secondary objective was to suppress Austria. Thomas made this primary-secondary strategy very clear. Now it seemed to be working quite well. The Russians' inaction had become a thorn in Metternich's side.

At the end of the meeting, without leaving Metternich any time, Thomas laid his cards on the table.

Either abandon the Russo-Austrian alliance, and Austria could swallow all the interests gained, or keep the Russo-Austrian alliance and spit out the interests that were eaten, or welcome the allied forces of the nine-nation intervention alliance.

If it were an ordinary person, he would have been frightened long ago. Metternich, too, was not calm inwardly, but outwardly he did not show the slightest fault.

He mocked directly: “Mr. Thomas, this joke is not funny at all. The Nine-Nation Alliance Army, are you sure you’re not joking with me?”

The Netherlands and Belgium are at odds with each other, and relations between Spain and Portugal are not much better; if your country and the French could cooperate closely, the Near East War would have ended long ago.

If you can make this alliance full of contradictions become intimate, then I have nothing more to say, Austria does not have the strength to resist nine countries.”

If they could achieve that, Thomas would not need to babble here. As soon as the allied forces are dispatched, the Austrian government will surely admit defeat.

Nobody was a fool here. Intervention in Austria still depended on interests. If the interests were not sufficient, even if the British forced them together, their participation would be superficial.

Perhaps in many people’s eyes, attacking Austria was not as cost-effective as sabotaging allies. At least they could borrow the knife to kill without spilling blood and draining the enemy’s strength.

The British had done too much of this sabotaging of allies. It could be said that they lowered the level of ethics between allies. Now everyone followed their example, and there was no longer any close cooperation.

With the weaknesses exposed, Thomas calmly said, “Mr. Metternich, the problems you mentioned do exist, but even with all the contradictions, the superiority in the strength of the Nine-Nation Alliance cannot be ignored.

Even if only France and Prussia were allied, your country might not be able to withstand it.

Do not doubt our resolve. At worst, we will withdraw the allied forces from the Crimean Peninsula. As long as Constantinople remains in our hands, the initiative will still be with us.

If we make some concessions and recognize Russia’s occupation of Bulgaria and the Danube region, how likely do you think Russia would compromise?

Would Russia care about the Russo-Austrian alliance in view of its interests? Everyone knows the credibility of the Russian government. Do you need to test it again?”

Metternich said without changing his expression: “Mr. Thomas, I admit that what you have said makes a great deal of sense. Unfortunately, while you can make concessions to Russia, France cannot!

Mr. Thomas, I suggest that you take a walk in the streets of Paris to see the attitude of the French public towards this Near East War.”

There was no way around it. The French public of that time had been pent up for too long and was ready to explode.

When Napoleon III launched the war against Russia, it was not only his will but also the desire of the French public to take revenge on Russia, which was dissatisfied with the failure of the Napoleonic War.

From this point of view, getting the French government to compromise would be tantamount to overthrowing Napoleon III.



When it came to his interests, Napoleon III could not give in, no matter how much the British cajoled him.

Future threats were matters for the future. If concessions were made now, the French public would not have such foresight and would immediately overthrow him.

At this point, Napoleon III might not be able to defeat Russia in the Near East War, but he could not admit defeat. Even if the losses of the French military on the battlefield were huge, he would still have to end it with the appearance of a great victory.

You cannot make the Russian government put on a show and deliberately manufacture a huge defeat! As someone from the military, Nicholas I could not do such a thing even for greater interest.

The Russian government could not afford to lose either. If it lost its status as Europe's hegemon, its repressed internal contradictions would immediately explode. They were incapable of putting the interests of others before their own.

### Saint Petersburg

Franz was partying with a group of Russian nobles in Saint Petersburg. Every day was spent eating, drinking, and having fun, living a very extravagant life.

Diplomatic public relations? Apart from communicating with Nicholas I about the future strategies of both countries and further political coordination, the rest of the business was handled by subordinates in discussions.

As for the question of German unification, Franz mentioned it only symbolically, and Nicholas I also gave a formulaic answer — everything would be handled according to the alliance agreements.

Afterward, he was received mostly by the later famous Alexander II of Russia. The Tsar was also very busy, he had to deal with state affairs every day, without much time to come out and mess around.

Touring the sights and antiquities of St. Petersburg, attending noble banquets, taking advantage of opportunities to flirt with noble ladies... In short, Franz had a great time in St. Petersburg.

A servant whispered in Franz's ear: "Your Majesty, there is a telegram from the Paris Conference, forwarded from Vienna, please check it."

Thanks to the establishment of the Russo-Austrian alliance to strengthen communication between the two countries, the telegraph line from St. Petersburg to Vienna was finally connected.

Franz was a responsible emperor. Although he was far away in St. Petersburg, he had not forgotten to keep an eye on domestic affairs, especially this Paris Conference, which was the focus of attention.

After receiving the telegram and briefly reading it, Franz got a headache. He had not expected the British to make a move at the most critical moment.

The interference of the allied forces was not a matter of winning or losing, but of not being able to win!

This was not a simple battle where they could just end things. Once the flames of war were ignited, the power to stop it would be beyond anyone's control.

Should they stand together with the Russians and confront the entire European continent? This thought had just arisen when Franz tossed it out of his mind.

Thanks to its geographical advantage, Russia could afford not to submit. Austria could not. Once the fighting started, it would become the front line. To lose would be to surrender sovereignty; to win would also be catastrophic. Franz would not make such a gamble.

Looking at the map of Europe, Franz made his decision.

“Telegraph back internally, advise the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to communicate with the French. You can also pull Russia together to take the position that we are dividing the Kingdom of Prussia, and see how the British deal with it.”

It’s not a matter of seeing how the British deal with it, it’s a matter of seeing how the Prussians deal with it. The British can still sit firmly in the British Isles, as long as no single power dominates the European mainland, they can continue to maintain the balance of power.

Things were different for the Kingdom of Prussia. The division of Prussia by France, Russia, and Austria would kill them. Even one on one, they couldn’t win; if it was one on three, this battle couldn’t be fought.

France would get the territory west of the Rhine, Russia would get Russian Poland, and Austria would get the Berlin area; on the surface, this seemed perfect.

No one had to worry about Austria getting bigger because France and Russia would also expand. Relying on the relationship of sharing the spoils, the Near East War could also end, and after receiving the Rhineland, Napoleon III could also have something to tell the public.

Franz very much wanted to see how Frederick William IV would react to this news. Unable to hold on to Southern Germany, compensating with the interests of the Kingdom of Prussia also seemed acceptable to Austria.

The only problem was that the Kingdom of Prussia was a tough nut to crack. For Russia, it was easiest to take Russian Poland; for France, it was not difficult to conquer the Rhineland. For Austria, a move on the Berlin area meant a fight to the death with the Kingdom of Prussia.

The worst thing was that if the fighting became too intense, and both sides ended up covered in each other’s blood, then governing afterward would be hell.

One could refer to Switzerland, originally the ancestral land of the House of Habsburg. Because the original ancestors failed to promptly suppress the rebellion of the Swiss nobles after prolonged fighting, both sides were covered in too much blood and became lifelong enemies.

## Chapter 224: On the Necessity of Buffer Zones

### Berlin

Austria’s ostentatious actions were not meant to be kept secret, so the Prussian government naturally received the news as well.

Frederick William IV was still hesitating whether to join the intervention alliance, but now he didn’t have to think about it anymore. If they didn’t find a way to respond, the Kingdom of Prussia would be history before the alliance could even be formed.

Foreign Minister Manteuffel analyzed: “Your Majesty, Austria is trying to intimidate us. To divide us between Russia, France, and Austria is not to their advantage. Once we are finished, Austria, caught between France and Russia, would be in an awkward position.

The gains they could make by dividing us would not be any greater than the annexation of the Southern German States, but the price they would pay would be much higher.”

This was inevitable. The Russians can mobilize about two hundred thousand men, while the French can muster at most a little over a hundred thousand. The main offensive burden would still fall on Austria.

Prussia’s military strength was not weak. In a life-or-death situation, they could field an army of five to six hundred thousand.

Even if they couldn’t defeat the three countries combined, they could still knock out some of Austria’s teeth in a fight to the death.

After paying such a high price, most of the post-war gains would be taken by France and Russia. A Prussia without Poland Prussia and the Rhineland would be worth no more than the Southern German States that Austria had already taken.

It would also be much more difficult to govern. The Junker nobility would not accept Austrian rule, while the local population of Southern Germany welcomed the Austrian army.

Frederick William IV said indignantly, “Theoretically you are right, but the danger still exists. Austria dared to be so blatant precisely because they determined that we would not dare to take the risk.”

This was not a risk, it was suicide. As long as Austria attacked Prussia with full force, France and Russia would certainly seize the opportunity.

Would Austria do that? No one knew the answer. However, Frederick William IV could confirm that this was the easiest way for Austria to get out of the mess.

Prime Minister Joseph von Radowitz thought for a moment and said, “Your Majesty, we can leave this problem to the British. If they cannot guarantee our safety, we will not join the nine-nation intervention alliance.

Austria still needs us to contain France. If we are gone, they will face the threat of France directly. As long as we withdraw now, they will stop.”

The choice was simple. The Prussian government had joined the intervention alliance for interest, and could likewise withdraw for interest.

The nine-nation alliance looked very strong, but in reality, only France and Prussia were the main forces, the rest were just there for numbers. As long as either France or Prussia faltered, the British plan would fail.

Manteuffel shook his head and said, “Prime Minister, I’m afraid the British will not be able to accomplish this task. They can persuade the French, but they have no way of persuading the Russians.

According to Austria’s plan, they will attack us before the alliance army is organized. The British will not be able to save us.

The only power that can help us is France, but for their interests, the French will probably just wait for us to be defeated and then annex our territories west of the Rhine.

At this point, we cannot pin our hopes on the British. History has shown that their promises are usually unreliable.

If we cannot get enough benefits from the intervention alliance, then allying with Austria to divide the German states might also be a good option.

At worst, we will join the Russo-Austrian alliance and rebuild the Three Northern Courts System to jointly dominate the European mainland. Britain and France would be powerless to prevent this.”

Frederick William IV hesitated. Austria’s annexation of the Southern German States had caused concern among the powers, but the immediate loss of interest was not great. Prussia’s loss was the greatest because of its smaller market.

It would be different if Prussia annexed the Northern German States. Offending Britain would be a small problem; the biggest problem would be cutting off the financial resources of British capitalists.

Historically, after Prussia annexed the Northern German states, it had already undergone considerable industrial development and joined the free trade system, so it did not fear British competition at that time.

Things were different now. If the Prussian government dared to join the free trade system at this time, its domestic industries would die in their infancy.

There was no way around it. In this era, the Kingdom of Prussia had no highly competitive core industries. Its industry was completely dependent on copying the British, or rather, the whole world was copying the British.

One reason the Prussian government opposed Austria was the fear that once Austria controlled the Southern German States, it would raise import duties on Prussian goods and use administrative means to drive them directly out of the market.

This was not only a possibility, but a certainty. For the industrializing Kingdom of Prussia, the lack of sufficient markets had obvious consequences.

On the question of Northern Germany, the British government could not compromise at all, or Prime Minister George would have to resign early, possibly with a free ticket to heaven.

This was one reason why the British wanted to divide Germany into three parts. The interests of the domestic capitalists influenced the actions of the British government.

As for the argument that the British had many colonies and large markets, that was bullshit. At that time, most colonial markets were undeveloped; the main markets were still in mainland Europe.

The risks of overseas trade were much greater than those of local trade. Besides, what kind of capitalist would complain about making too much money?

Southern Germany was different. Bavaria was the textile center of Germany. In this era, textiles were Britain’s biggest export. There was an element of eliminating competitors behind Britain’s actions of not forcing Austria to cough up the Kingdom of Bavaria.

By the mid-19th century, international politics was no longer limited to the political and military spheres. The influence of economics was growing, especially in capital-rich countries like Britain.

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Austria's counterattack was both within and beyond the expectations of the British government. Originally, the British government thought that Austria would intimidate and induce the Prussian government, but they did not expect the Austrian government to go all out.

Of course, the effect of this big move was tremendous. The Prussian government expressed its attitude subtly — it no longer dared to take a risk.

Reality told the British that sometimes national interests could not be fully considered. The personal interests of high-level government officials could also determine a country's policy.

Once the position of Napoleon III was determined, the Austrians took advantage of the loophole in the intervention alliance and were able to retaliate ruthlessly.

“The situation has changed. The Prussian government is threatened by Austria and plans to withdraw. If we don't find a way to prevent this, I'm afraid it won't be long before the Three Northern Courts Alliance reappears in Europe,” Prime Minister George Hamilton-Gordon said seriously.

The Russo-Austrian alliance had not yet dissolved. If it were to become a Russo-Austrian-Prussian alliance again, nothing more needed to be said, they would have to reduce their influence to the British Isles.

Home Secretary Henry thought for a moment and said, “Prime Minister, I'm afraid the Prussians haven't made up their minds yet, otherwise they'd be taking military action to annex Northern Germany at this time instead of communicating with us.

We can't do anything about Russia and Austria, but we can still deal with the Prussians. A month's blockade of the North Sea by the Royal Navy would cause an economic crisis in the Kingdom of Prussia. They cannot ignore the consequences.

Even if Prussia were to ally with Austria to divide the German states, that would not mean that all of Northern Germany would belong to them. I am afraid that many states would not give them a chance to act and would instead throw themselves directly into Austria's arms.

In this situation, the Prussian government must consider that this expansion does not eliminate the crisis but only delays it.

With Russia to the east, France to the west, Austria to the south, and the remaining side surrounded by the sea, the geographical location of the Kingdom of Prussia is simply terrible.

In this they are similar to Austria, both squeezed in the middle by France and Russia. The difference is that Austria can develop in Italy and the Balkans, while Prussia can only colonize overseas.

This is probably the reason why Frederick William IV did not dare to make a decision. Without our consent, they can only be trapped at home, watching the other countries grow stronger and stronger.”

This was the main reason for the collapse of the Three Northern Courts Alliance. The alliance could not bring Prussia greater benefits. To pursue industrialization, they relied on overseas markets, so they had to maintain good relations with Great Britain.

After hesitating for a moment, George Hamilton-Gordon made a decision: “Tell Thomas that the probing plan has failed. Activate the second plan.”

This was the ideal plan, but not the only one. The British government did not think that everyone else was a fool and, of course, prepared contingency plans.

The reason the British chose this unreliable plan was simple: the cost of implementation was low and the benefits were high!

Complete success would be perfect, of course, while failure would mean they had lost nothing, so why not give it a try?

Had they really failed?

Of course not!

The British drove a wedge between Russia and Austria, worsened Prussian-Austrian relations, provoked the French, and damaged Austria's relations with other European countries.

What did it cost to the British? By simply having the Foreign Secretary work more diligently and by balancing Austria strategically, they achieved a lot.

Due to the deterioration of the diplomatic situation, Austria would have to repair its international relations for a long time to come. After all, the annexation of the Southern German States this time irritated the sensitive nerves of the other powers.

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Paris

The Prussian government withdrew from the intervention alliance, and the British plan naturally changed as well. Negotiations resumed.

Thomas suggested again: “Gentlemen, considering the stability of the European continent, there must be a buffer between the great powers. I propose that Baden, Hanover, Hamburg, Bremen... and other German states form a new country.

Considering the actual situation, the Kingdom of Prussia can exchange land with this newborn country and leave enough buffer space between Prussia and France and France and Austria.”

The proposals of this meeting were much more reliable, at least that was what Metternich thought. Except for the Grand Duchy of Baden, the British didn't bring up any other states in Southern Germany.

In Metternich's opinion, paying the price of the Grand Duchy of Baden was also worth considering to maintain a certain buffer with France and to gain recognition from all sides.

While Metternich was considering it, the French representative, Auvergne, was the first to support it: “What Mr. Thomas proposes has merit. It is necessary to leave a buffer between the great powers for the sake of peace and stability on the European continent.”

The reason, of course, was that it was beneficial to everyone's strategic security. The French now had neither the dominating power to conquer the world nor the strength to fight alone.

Since they could not go on a conquest, it was necessary to avoid conflicts with the great powers as much as possible. As one of the interest groups, a stable European continent was in the interest of Britain and France.

If the home country was unstable, even if colonies were developed overseas, one would not feel comfortable, right? Don't look at how often the British provoked contradictions between European countries. What they wanted most was a stable Europe.

Of course, this kind of stability had to be based on the situation where the powers of different countries were balanced. The mutual restraint of the European countries at that time made it impossible for any one country to dominate, so stability was necessary.

In addition, this new country led by the British would inevitably lean toward them politically, thus increasing their voice on the European continent.

At the same time, it retained its market in the German lands, allowing the government to reap a wave of gratitude from the capitalists, which was simply a win-win situation.

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Karl Nesselrode was also somewhat eager to give his support, but seeing that Metternich had not expressed his position, and considering that Austria's interests were at stake in places stipulated in the treaty, he also did not dare to give his support prematurely.

There was nothing strange in this. Russia's current strategy was to march south to Constantinople, and they could not be bothered with Europe for the time being. A stable Europe was what they needed as well.

Metternich thought for a while and said, "This question concerns the Grand Duchy of Baden and the Palatinate Province of Bavaria. We must consider this question carefully."

Seeing that the Austrians had no objections either, the Prussian representative, Rottluff, could not hold back. He knew that if they did not come out now to fight for their interests, they would suffer greatly.

"No, the Rhineland is Prussia's most important industrial region. We can't give it up like this!"

#### Chapter 225: The Dark Days

The changes at the Paris Conference were passed on to Franz. Metternich explained his views, and the top government officials stationed in Vienna also made their suggestions.

In general, the idea was to give up while one was ahead. Austria's original plan was to annex the Southern German States. Now Baden could not be kept, but Saxony was gained.

In terms of territorial area, the two were almost equal. Saxony was slightly more important to Austria. Leaving aside industry, the population was at least several hundred thousand more than the Grand Duchy of Baden.

The plan for a tripartite division of Germany was part of Austria's plans for unification, first proposed by Metternich years before the preparations began.

However, the original plan was to unite the small states in Northern Germany and create a new country to block Prussia's unification of the Northern German States.

No doubt, if this plan had been proposed by Austria, it would have failed 100%. The Prussian government probably wouldn't have even bothered to think before deciding to act and get involved.

This important task could only be accomplished by the British. In the early stages, the Austrian government also had to be sufficiently spineless to make the Prussian government believe that Austria would admit defeat and withdraw from German territories under international pressure.

Once Austria was out, there would be no doubt that Prussia would unite the German states. Under such a temptation, Frederick William IV would not be able to resist. He would not miss the opportunity for a twofold division of Germany.

Franz could not command the British. He could only make the British believe that the tripartite division of Germany was most in line with their interests, or rather, make the British capitalists believe that the tripartite division of Germany could preserve their market.

Austria could not yet interfere with the decisions of the British government. At best it could buy some experts and scholars and shape public opinion.

It couldn't even be traced back to Austria. From the beginning to the end, it was done by the Bavarian government, with Maximilian II providing the money and the effort.

Maximilian II was the first to be deceived by the theory of the tripartite division of Germany. Historically, it was also the Kingdom of Bavaria that put forward the concept of the tripartite division of Germany, but it lacked the strength to succeed.

On the surface, the Austrian Foreign Ministry seemed to have done nothing. But in reality, Metternich did a great deal.

To convince the Bavarian government that the tripartite division of Germany could succeed as long as the powers supported it, the Austrian government had to spend millions of guilders on propaganda every year.

Austria was in control at the beginning but had no control over the end. Trying to control a country's decision-making was unreliable to begin with. Trying to control the rhythm was merely wishful thinking.

Franz did not hesitate long before making a decision: "Send a telegram to the Austrian government that concessions can be made, but don't make it too obvious. We still need to use pressure from various countries to force the Prussian government to give up the Rhineland."

The original purpose of creating a new country was to contain the Kingdom of Prussia. Now the British had the wild idea of proposing a strategic buffer, allowing the Kingdom of Prussia and this new country to exchange land.

This had to be supported! Throughout history, most famous diplomatic anecdotes have started as wild ideas. If there were no surprises, how could it be considered a classic?



Rhineland does not seem to be well-known. But if you use the term Ruhr or Rhine-Ruhr, everyone would know it.

It contained 80% of Germany's coal, 90% of its coke, and 60% of its steel, and was also the most important center of mechanical manufacturing in the German lands, known as the "Heart of German Industry".

Without the Rhineland, would the Kingdom of Prussia still be able to rise as it has historically?

Obviously not.

Of course, the Rhineland was not as important at that time as it would be later. Local industry had only just begun in the mid-19th century.

Otherwise, when Austria annexed Southern Germany, Napoleon III would have rushed in long ago.

Even if the proposal failed and Prussia refused to exchange territory, it didn't matter. In the future, when France ran out of coal, Napoleon III would start the Franco-Prussian War.

Even if he didn't want to fight, the French capitalists would find a way to start a war. As a last resort, Austria could add fuel to the fire.

If Prussia won, Austria would partition this new country with them. If France won, even better — Austria could annex this new country all at once, making up for France annexing the Rhineland industrial area!

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Berlin

Since the British proposal was made public, the Prussian government had exploded. Frederick William IV cursed up a storm. No one was a fool. Isn't their main purpose to follow the British for their interests?

So what happened? Austria was kicked out, but it took a huge inheritance with it. The Kingdom of Prussia not only received no benefits but was kicked out of Germany along with Austria.

There was no need to think about why — he also knew it was because of interests.

The new regime would definitely be pro-British in the future. After Belgium, the British government had gained another foothold on the European continent.

Under the beautiful name of a strategic buffer, this buffer not only restricted Austria but also cut off the Kingdom of Prussia's path to becoming a great power.

Frederick William IV angrily asked, "What about Austria? What was their reaction? Did they just acquiesce in the British acting so terribly?"

Foreign Minister Manteuffel replied, "Your Majesty, Austria's attitude is very contradictory, apparently hesitant and indecisive. They neither want to give up the Grand Duchy of Baden nor do they want the negotiations to fail because of it.

All the pressure is on us now. Whether we agree to the exchange of territory or not, this new state will be born."

In simple terms, this country would be created per the interests of the Great Powers, but the Kingdom of Prussia could refuse the exchange proposal because the countries did not force them to agree.

“What would be the chances of success if we were to join forces with Austria and divide up the German states?” Frederick William IV asked anxiously.

Forget Britain, in the face of interests, Frederick William IV mustered the courage to take a risk.

“Your Majesty, the premise is that the Austrians are willing to join hands with us. Now the situation has changed. Except for the Grand Duchy of Baden, the Austrians have gotten almost everything they wanted this time.

At this point, what interest do they have in cooperating with us? Unless we make major concessions in the distribution of interests!” Foreign Minister Manteuffel replied.

Frederick William IV remained silent. If concessions were made and Austria annexed Central Germany, the foundations of the Kingdom of Prussia would be greatly weakened.

A small territory and a small population meant that the potential for development would be limited. To dream of becoming a great power, you must first be big enough!

According to Austria’s original proposal, Prussia would annex Northern Germany, which had a population of over 20 million and a land area of nearly 380,000 square kilometers. The price was to offend Britain and France.

Now, starting a war would still offend Britain and France, but the benefits would be much smaller. Naturally, Frederick William IV was unwilling.

“Your Majesty, we missed the opportunity. It would be better to wait for the next opportunity! The European continent cannot remain in balance forever. As long as the balance of power between Great Britain, Russia, France, and Austria shifts, war will be inevitable,” Joseph von Radowitz thought for a moment before saying.

After hesitating for a while, Frederick William IV finally said, “Then what about the land exchange? Shall we refuse it?”

“Your Majesty, strategically speaking, after we exchange the Rhineland, our territory will be more concentrated, and national security will be better ensured. We also avoid bordering France.

But the resources of the Rhineland are also very important to us. Even if we were to exchange it for the economically developed Hamburg region, we would still suffer a loss,” replied Prime Minister Joseph von Radowitz.

It was a dilemma. Joseph von Radowitz suspected that the British proposal was made in bad faith. Of course, the target was not necessarily the Kingdom of Prussia, it was more likely to provoke a conflict between France and Austria.

Once the Rhineland fell into the hands of this new country, France would definitely set their sights on it in the future. Austria would certainly not accept this. With Britain adding fuel to the fire, the two sides would begin to fight.

If the Prussian government refused the exchange, then the situation would change. The one charging ahead might not be Austria but the Kingdom of Prussia instead.

This is just his speculative guess based on intuition; reason tells him it's not reliable. Thanks to the reputation of the late Emperor Napoleon, any French external expansion would now provoke a strong reaction from everyone. Napoleon III wouldn't act so rashly.

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While the Prussians were hesitating, Metternich was also getting a headache. Many German states were waiting for Austria's answer.

Theoretically, the German Confederation had not yet been dissolved. The governments of all the states were waiting for Austria to announce its position on the dissolution of the Bundestag (Federal Parliament).

Britain's proposal for a tripartite division of Germany was not kept secret and was now almost universally known. For these state governments, the formation of a new country would naturally better protect their interests.

However, they were all old foxes and would not show any surprise at this time. On the contrary, their faces were full of gloom, pretending to oppose the dissolution of the German Confederation.

Faced with a group of talented actors, Metternich could only feel annoyed. Knowing that they were just putting on a show, Metternich still had to play along.

If the acting was not done properly, how could they explain it to the people in their countries?

The unification of Germany failed, but we tried our best. Don't you believe it? Look at how we tried to visit government officials every day, even though we can't meet them in the end.

Anyone could refuse to meet with these people, but Metternich couldn't get away with it. He could only reluctantly receive them. Together they would lament the hardships of German unification, then angrily condemn the interfering countries before leaving.

In short, everyone here was a supporter of German unification, there were absolutely no selfish people, at least on the surface.

Under these circumstances, Metternich still had to visit the representatives of various countries every day and try to win everyone's support.

So far, Austria has gained the understanding and support of countries such as the Kingdom of Naples, the Papal States, Tuscany, and others.

Even the attitudes of countries like Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands had changed. From a religious point of view, everyone recognized the unification of Austria with the Southern German States.

As the saying goes, "First comes the ebb, then the flow, and finally the exhaustion". The yet-to-be-formed intervention alliance has already fragmented and disintegrated while no one was paying attention.

On October 1, 1853, the curtain fell on the month-long Paris Conference. At Metternich's insistence, Austria had successfully annexed Bavaria, Saxony, Württemberg, Frankfurt, Hesse-Darmstadt, and other regions.

It added some 12.2 million square kilometers of land and some 9.5 million people, taking the first step toward German unification.

Under the principle of consensus among the great powers, the remaining German states, except for the Kingdom of Prussia, merged to form the German Federal Empire, restoring the old traditional electoral monarchy.

The question of the exchange of territories between the Kingdom of Prussia and the German Federal Empire has reached an impasse. The Prussian government's appetite was too great, and it faced resistance from many states, especially the governments of the territories to be exchanged, which strongly opposed it.

If it was just government opposition, the countries could still push it through. The problem was that the public reaction was even stronger. Most of the Prussian embassies in Germany were besieged by civilians.

This intense reaction directly shook the Prussian government's determination to exchange territory. Frederick William IV did not want to rule over a mob, the lessons of the Berlin Revolution were still fresh in his mind.

National strategy could take a back seat to governmental stability. Moreover, the Rhineland had great development potential, and the Prussian government was reluctant to give it up.

If the benefits were too great, they could still be exchanged. Clearly, this was now impossible. The German federal government only agreed to exchange equivalent territories, which the Prussian government naturally did not agree to.

If everyone hadn't taken the face of the great powers into account, the negotiations might have ended long ago.

Upon receiving the final resolution of the Paris Conference, Franz breathed a deep sigh of relief, though he did not show his joy outwardly.

To outsiders, Emperor Franz was currently furious. To protest the unfair treatment of the Paris Conference, he pretentiously wrote an essay "The Dark Days".

"These are the darkest days of my life. The German lands have been forcibly divided by a group of shameless thieves and a traitor.

Even God frowned. The sunlight shining on the ground was reduced to a few faint rays.

The storm came and the wind howled. Great Germany, are you ready?

Ready to welcome the wind and rain, and face this dark moment.

This is a world of the strong. My people, you must be strong. The high winds cannot blow us away, and the storms cannot crush us.

The only thing that can defeat us is ourselves! Only by being strong and bravely facing everything, the dark days will pass and a rainbow can be seen after the storm..."

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Franz had not yet returned to Vienna, but his article was already being circulated throughout Germany. Although the cost of telegrams was exorbitant at the time, he was not the least bit stingy.

Of course, it was essential to take the initiative in the propaganda of public opinion. Franz was quite experienced in this field. At that time, few people in the German lands would have been in good spirits, so Franz naturally stood together with the public.

For their future plans, he had to call on everyone to persevere and not to give in to reality. The division was only temporary, and the unification of the German lands was only a matter of time.

Every person was deceived once more. As long as the banner of unification did not fall, it was tantamount to opening a back door for Austria's future expansion.

Influenced by Franz, the Austrian government also canceled the originally planned celebrations. From the top to the bottom of the government, everyone mourned the division of Germany.

#### Chapter 226: The Birth of a Comical Empire

At the end of the Paris Conference, Franz bid farewell to Nicholas I and left. It was always easy to get lost in the decadent life of revelry; Franz did not want to test his willpower.

Seeing a leaf tells of autumn; looking at the lives of the top officials of the Russian government, Franz knew that the Russian Empire was already sick.

Many people were addicted to past glories and could not free themselves. Even the disastrous situation of the Near East War could not awaken them.

The affliction of the skin is not worthy of concern.

Since the Russian government felt this way, Franz had no obligation to remind them. An ally addicted to past glories was a good ally.

On the way back, Franz had turned into a literary youth and embarked on the path of literary creation. The influential works "The Emperor's Poems" and "The Emperor's Prose Collection" began to take shape at this time.

In this respect, Franz still had integrity, at least not to get someone else to ghostwrite for him. Therefore, the output was naturally not high. From St. Petersburg to Vienna, only two doggerel poems were produced. It was really embarrassing to show them to others.

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A national misfortune becomes a poet's fortune.

Influenced by the forced division of Germany at the Paris Conference, German literature flourished during this period.

A large number of literati and writers emerged during this period, such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Emanuel Geibel, Paul Heyse, Ferdinand Freiligrath, Georg Herwegh, Georg Weerth, Theodor Fontane, Franz Grillparzer, Adalbert Stifter...

In the few months of the second half of 1853 alone, the literary works produced in Germany exceeded the total of the previous five years.

Criticism became the mainstream of literary creation at this time. The new German Federal Empire was sprayed with criticism. Of course, the Prussian government was not spared, nor was the Austrian government.

The facts proved that some showmanship was indeed effective. Compared to the first two nations, the Austrian government received much less criticism. After all, it was the land of hope for German unification; people were more lenient in their portrayals.

The new German Federal Empire was tragic in contrast. No one recognized it as an empire. The main reason it was called an empire was that the states below it were kingdoms.

The central government could not be on an equal footing with the local governments which was why the Paris Conference artificially elevated it to an empire. This idea of the “necessity of an empire” proved unpopular.

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Bremen

A middle-aged man said angrily, “Korbes, look at the newspaper. The world’s greatest farce of an empire is about to be born, and we are about to become part of it.

God, when did we agree to join this empire? How come I don’t know about this? This is just terrible!

I can’t imagine the consequences of telling someone in the future that I am a citizen of this empire. It’s too terrible!”

The birth of the German Federal Empire was originally a farce. After being satirized by Weerth as the “Comical Empire,” it was called that by everyone.

A ‘great empire’ with a population of less than ten million and a territorial area of no more than a hundred thousand square kilometers — how can it not be a farce?

Although it was called a comical empire, in reality, its overall national strength was not weak, ranking just below the major European powers, with economic strength comparable to the Kingdom of Prussia.

But this was not enough to make it a real empire. If it had become the German Federal Kingdom instead, there would probably be no objections.

The middle-aged man with a beard took the newspaper, scanned it, and then calmly said, “Feitler, is this little fuss worth getting worked up about?

The decisions made at the Paris Conference were unanimous among European countries. Do you expect the government to dare refuse?

What’s there to laugh about? Even with Germany divided into three, we still have two empires and one kingdom — something that no country in the world can compare to!”

It was clear from his expression that Korbes was not as relaxed as his words suggested. He was deliberately suppressing his anger, not letting it erupt.

In terms of overall national strength, a unified Germany would have been the number one power in the world, unmatched even by Great Britain.

This was impossible. The European countries were no fools; who could tolerate the emergence of a Central European behemoth?

After the outcome of the Paris Conference, the German nationalists fell silent.

The blow that reality dealt them was unimaginable. Although everyone knew that the European countries would oppose the unification of Germany, the fact that so many countries joined together to put pressure on them was still beyond their expectations.

Nothing gives greater cause for sorrow than despair. Many people despaired and became indifferent to politics. Korbes was one of them.

But this indifference was only superficial. When he learned that the German Federal Empire had been established, he could not help but scoff a few times.

Feitler glared at Korbes, then said coldly with a sneer: "Enough, you coward, shut up. As long as there are still Germans alive, Germany will one day be united."

Both were past their passionate youth. After Germany was forcibly divided, they, unlike the young students, did not take to the streets to protest.

As the newspapers said, even if all the German people went out together to protest, the enemy would not see it. They could only make trouble from their caves.

Oh, that was probably said by capitalists, after all, it affected their business.

Ever since the foreign powers intervened in the German unification process, there has been endless groaning from the businessmen. Southern Germany was still fine, the Austrian market was big enough, and there were also the Italian and Russian markets.

The northern capitalists felt the malice deeply. After losing the South German market, they would have to face competition from British goods in the future. This simply forced them into a dead end.

Prussian businessmen felt the same way. Since Austria had accelerated industrialization, they had already lost a great deal of market share. Everybody's days had gotten harder since then.

It was even worse now. The northern market would suffer the impact of British goods, while trade barriers existed in the southern market.

Affected by the market conditions, Prussia's economy had shown no significant improvement since the reforms of 1848. On the contrary, there were signs of further deterioration.

It wasn't due to a lack of effort on the part of the capitalists but was forced by reality. Historically, Prussia, while reforming, also cut military spending, keeping military spending below 25%, and invested the funds in national development.

Now, under the influence of the international situation, Prussia's military spending had increased instead of decreasing to protect itself from Russia and Austria. In this context, not to mention domestic investment, one would be lucky if arbitrary taxation and extortion did not occur.

Faced with an increasingly difficult economic situation, Frederick William IV had a constant headache. Unfortunately, he was not good at developing the economy. If it were military development, he might have more say.

With a Cabinet full of soldiers, economic development would be difficult. The word “reform” once again came to Frederick William IV’s mind.

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Vienna

Franz, who had just returned to the country, was faced with three difficult problems.

The first was the settlement of the royal family of Bavaria;

The second was the name of the country;

The third was the governance of the newly added territories.

Since his return to the Vienna Palace, his mother, Archduchess Sophie, had often walked in front of him, and from time to time she had brought up the subject of marriage.

Although she didn’t directly mention the affairs of the Bavarian royal family, her intentions were already very clear. In any case, an explanation must be given!

Now, by keeping them under house arrest like this, what kind of message does it send? Where does it leave the Archduchess’ face?

Even the two lolis often came over to bother him, with the attitude: “If you don’t give us an explanation, we’ll cry in front of you.”

Well, what Franz had done to them has been unjust. He had promised to give them another throne, but he had dragged the matter out to this day without settling it.

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To escape the days of harassment, Franz reluctantly said at the national affairs meeting, “Gentlemen, we can put aside other matters for now. Let’s first find a good place for the Bavarian royal family, shall we?”

Prime Minister Felix thought for a while and said, “Your Majesty, the Kingdom of Bavaria also has a province called Palatinate, which was also lost to the German Federal Empire. We might as well restore the status of the Grand Duchy of Palatinate and let the Bavarian royal family go there to inherit the title of Grand Duke.”

Metternich objected: “It is improper. We have promised to guarantee the throne of the Bavarian royal house. Now we must reassure the hearts of the people. To go back on our word could easily lead to problems.”

Prime Minister Felix shook his head and said, “I don’t want to go back on my word either. The problem is their refusal to be heirs to the Serbian throne, even though we gave them the opportunity.

Maximilian II is currently fearless and wants to continue being a king in a prosperous country. How is this possible?”

Metternich replied: “Serbia is a barren country, not even comparable to the Kingdom of Greece. Considering the Bavarian royal family’s investment over the years for the Greek throne without any return, how could they possibly accept the Serbian throne?”



Today's Serbia was not a nice place at all. Due to the effects of war, the local population had dropped to less than 700,000, mostly old, weak, sick, and disabled. The Ottomans had already taken away all the able-bodied men between 16 and 40 years old.

The economy was entirely based on agricultural production. It could be said that this nominal kingdom was not as good as a Bavarian province.

If he becomes the King of Serbia, it is estimated that their financial income will remain negative there for a very long time.

Maximilian II's ambitions have already been completely extinguished, and he doesn't want to endure hardship any longer.

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Looking at the arguing crowd, Franz suggested: "What if we split the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia and restore the Kingdom of Lombardy so that Maximilian II can inherit the throne there?"

Finance Minister Karl objected: "Your Majesty, the region of Lombardy has a developed economy and accounts for nearly one-tenth of our tax revenues. If it becomes independent, our losses will be enormous."

Franz shook his head and said, "It is not a question of allowing this place to become independent. First, we'll trick Maximilian II into inheriting the throne there, to give the Bavarian people an explanation.

Then the central government will use constitutional means to gain power over the appointment of personnel and finances there so that he can just sit back and collect his pension."

Founding an independent nation? Keep dreaming! As an outsider without Austrian support, on what basis can Maximilian II rule this place?

Franz doesn't believe that Maximilian II has enough personal charm to win the support of the Italians, given his current miserable state.

After thinking about it, Finance Minister Karl said, "If Lombardy does not become independent and we just provide upkeep for Maximilian II, then it will not be a problem."

The matter of 1.8 million guilders was indeed not worth mentioning. For the long-term stability of Bavaria, it was necessary to spend this money.

Metternich worriedly said, "Your Majesty, if Maximilian II becomes the King of Lombardy, countries like Britain and France may incite independence in the future."

Independence? Frankly, Franz never cared if the Italian regions became independent. In terms of development potential, these places can't become the core of Austria.

There were currently over six million Italians in the Austrian Empire. The proportion of this population was already very high. Italian nationalism had already been awakened. Trying to govern these people in the long term was also becoming an enormous challenge.

The reason why the Austrian government does not give up Lombardy-Venetia now is mainly because of interests. That's why the government has spent a lot of money on assimilation there.

If the costs of governance exceeded the returns, Franz would have let them become independent long ago. After all, these regions lacked resources and their industrial products were gradually becoming uncompetitive.

Before the westward strategy was launched, the Austrian government had prepared for the worst-case scenario of giving up the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia in exchange for everyone recognizing Austria's annexation of Southern Germany.

Unexpectedly, Britain and France launched the Crimean campaign, leaving them powerless to interfere with Austria's actions, which allowed these regions to be held for the time being.

Franz shook his head and said, "Even without a king, our enemies have not forgotten to plot independence there.

According to our plan to replace wheat with mulberry, it won't be long before local grain will be completely dependent on Austria.

As time goes by and the local textile industry grows in the future, where else can they turn to for markets other than Austria?"

If long-term stability was to be achieved in the Italian region, the Austrian government did some research, and the answer was food control and economic dependence.

## Chapter 227: The New Holy Roman Empire

### Vienna Palace

Upon learning that Franz had offered the throne of the Kingdom of Lombardy in exchange for the throne of the House of Wittelsbach, Archduchess Sophie breathed a sigh of relief. This deal could appease most of her family members.

The relationships between European nobles are complex and intertwined. Pulling one thread affects the whole cloth. If the Austrian government were determined to force a Serbian crown on the House of Wittelsbach, Archduchess Sophie would have lost too much face to see anyone.

It should be known that during the war, Franz made promises to the Bavarian royal family, and Sophie was also brought out as a guarantor.

Munich was then won by negotiation, partly because it couldn't be won by force, and partly because everyone's interests were guaranteed, so naturally no one would stubbornly oppose Austria.

Had it not been for the decision of the royal family to abandon the centuries-long rule of the House of Wittelsbach, it would not have come to the point where even the defense of Munich could not be launched.

The title of Duke of Palatinate can only be seen as a figurehead. This was originally a place ruled by the Bavarian royal family anyway. Even without Austrian support, the title would most likely still be theirs in the end.

The foundation of a major noble was thus preserved. Politically, Lombardy could not be compared to Bavaria, but economically, the Bavarian royal family did not suffer any losses.

Even if the central government takes away the most important powers, turning the king into a figurehead is impossible, at least not in the Austrian system.

Being sidelined is only temporary. As long as the king has some ability, he can regain most of his power. As Emperor Franz would not tolerate the bureaucracy being arrogant.

Otherwise, if today they can put a king on the sidelines, tomorrow these people might have the audacity to put the emperor on the sidelines.

Suspicion is an emperor's instinct. Things that cause offense must be dealt with decisively, leaving no room for bureaucracy.

In the Munich Palace, the Bavarian royal family was in the process of moving out because they were no longer welcome. Neither the people nor the officials wanted them to stay.

Everyone agreed that the Bavarian royal family exchanging thrones with Austria was the best choice for everyone to get along.

Those who declared neutrality during the war no longer had to worry about the royal family settling scores with them. Now that the royal family has a good place to go, they can rightfully swear allegiance to the Habsburgs.

Looking at the slowly closing palace gates, Maximilian II sighed. The reign of the House of Wittelsbach over the Kingdom of Bavaria had come to an end. He would soon become Maximilian I of the Kingdom of Lombardy.

As if cursed, the House of Wittelsbach ruled many places, but never lasted long anywhere, the Kingdom of Bavaria being only one of them.

But the House of Wittelsbach still had some foundations. Even after their departure, many people continued to follow them. Soon, they gathered a force of several thousand people and, under the protection of the royal guards, marched toward the capital of the Kingdom of Lombardy, Milan.

That was why the Austrian government did not want to use force. Deep-rooted royal families are not easy to deal with. It is much better now that they have taken the initiative to leave.

If they turned hostile, these people could cause chaos and instability in Bavaria for three to five years if they wanted to.

Paris

Napoleon III smashed countless vases in anger. The reason was very simple. There was a problem with his marriage. Most European royal families looked down on him as a nouveau riche.

Not long ago, his attempt to marry Princess Carola of Sweden, a member of the abdicated royal family, was rejected. Now, when he proposed to Princess Adelheid of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, he was rejected again.

This was not limited to him, even the famous Napoleon was worried about this problem. The major nobles look down on them as nouveau riche, since the European continent is a world that cares about lineage.

If the lineage is not noble enough, the legitimacy of the rule is questioned. If one's lineage is not noble enough, it can be compensated for by political marriages.

Napoleon III felt this deeply. Since he was only a nephew of Napoleon, his domestic popularity was not high, and he desperately needed a political marriage to consolidate his position.

He has been troubled by this issue since 1851. So far there has been no result; the major nobles do not like him, and he does not like the minor nobles.

No wonder he's angry. After all, he is the Emperor of France. Even if he can't marry a princess from a direct line, can't he at least marry a princess from a collateral line? But the result is that, not to mention legitimate princesses, even princesses from abdicated royal families look down on him.

Since he has been rejected repeatedly, it would be strange if he could tolerate such a thing.

Perhaps after letting off steam, Napoleon III asked coldly, "Are there any other candidates?"

The palace minister whispered: "Your Majesty, the status of the later candidates is somewhat low to match your status!"

Napoleon III glared at him. Isn't that rubbing salt in his wounds? Those that match his status don't want him either!

In this context, the Spanish noblewoman of Scottish descent, Eugénie de Montijo, appeared at the French court.

Napoleon III didn't want to continue to struggle over this problem. If he couldn't marry someone of equal status, he might as well marry someone he liked.

On December 1, 1853, Napoleon III announced to all senior officials that he was about to marry. At the same time, he emphasized that he wanted this marriage to be free from the constraints of the French people and foreign royal families:

"I prefer a woman I love and respect to a woman who gives me advantages and disadvantages through a marriage of political convenience."

The pioneer of free love has emerged, and it can be said that Napoleon III set a good example that many others followed.

This tea-time gossip among the nobility quickly spread to Vienna, drawing the attention of the Vienna Court. The direct consequence is that Franz's days of being single are about to come to an end.

Metternich reminded him, "Your Majesty, do we not need to prepare for the grand ceremony? It will be an object of ridicule otherwise!"

A new empire is about to be founded, and a new crown will be placed on Franz's head. Of course, a grand ceremony is essential.

Franz now unexpectedly ordered them not to prepare in advance, suggesting that a simple ceremony would suffice. Many people took this as a joke.

Franz smiled bitterly and said: "It's not going to happen. Although months have passed, people are still heartbroken over the division of Germany.

If we make it grand at this time, it's easy to provoke public discontent. It's better to keep it simple to show our protest against the results of the Paris Conference."

His image cannot collapse. To the outside world, he is seen as a passionate and benevolent emperor, so he should be dissatisfied with the Paris Conference.

Whether it is giving speeches criticizing the conference or directly writing articles for showmanship, it all revolves around this image.

There is no problem for the young and impulsive emperor to make this decision in anger. He can win the approval of the people and avoid unnecessary disasters this way.

Ernest Augustus I, who had just been promoted from King of Hanover to Emperor of the German Federal Empire, was one of those unfortunate souls. He did nothing from beginning to end, yet German writers and poets badly scolded him.

The country is a comical empire, so of course the emperor is the comical emperor. This nickname will probably stick with him and be passed down forever.

Certainly, his accession to the throne was quite comical. Seventeen years ago, during the joint reign of Hanover and Britain, in the same year that William IV died, Queen Victoria ascended the throne. The situation changed because of the misinterpreted Salic Law, and the throne fell on his head.

The reason it's called a comedy is that everyone at the time overlooked the fact that the Pragmatic Sanction of Emperor Charles VI had previously served as the legal basis for female succession to the throne. That's how the legitimacy of the Empress Maria Theresa was established.

By the time people found out, the throne had already been decided. Those who are unhappy with Ernest Augustus I often bring up this issue. Now it has escalated to the level of "Comical Emperor".

Unfortunately, his role as emperor comes with limited powers, and he has no control over public opinion in the various states. When people are in a bad mood, they take out their frustrations on him.

In fact, Ernest Augustus I was very docile and rarely caused any trouble, including how he came to have this imperial title, which was the result of maneuvering by various parties.

Austria, of course, argued that Franz should serve at the same time as Emperor of the German Federal Empire, on the grounds that he had the greatest support of the people.

This was obviously unacceptable to all parties. If Franz became emperor, German unification would probably take place within a few decades.

The Habsburgs have experience in this regard, as the Austrian Empire was integrated similarly. What's the difference between Franz being emperor at the same time and the revival of the Holy Roman Empire?

The British supported the House of Hanover. The newly formed German Federal Empire was centered around Hanover. They were also quite competitive, with the only drawback being that the King of Hanover lacked prestige among the German states.

If Franz were to nominate an underling to compete for the throne, given the reputation of the House of Habsburg, coupled with the fact that the state governments did not want to see Hanover's influence grow, the likelihood of that underling being elected would be almost one hundred percent.

However, this was impossible. Austria still aimed for the unification of Germany. Allowing an underling to become the Emperor of the German Federal Empire would only complicate matters for Austria.

With the Habsburgs out of the picture, the remaining royal families of the various states vied for the position. Naturally, the Hanoverian royal family, supported by the British, defeated numerous competitors and emerged victorious.

At Franz's insistence, he was crowned "Emperor of the New Holy Roman Empire" at the Vienna Palace on December 22, 1853.

The coronation ceremony was a simple affair to which no guests were invited. It was attended only by individuals associated with the New Holy Roman Empire. After the oath of allegiance was taken by representatives of several states, the ceremony ended.

From the beginning to the end, everyone maintained a solemn expression without any sign of joy.

After the ceremony, Franz gave a self-deprecating speech in the National Assembly:

"Today another crown has been put on my head, and the burden on my shoulders grew heavier.

To be honest, I'm not happy at all. Instead of calling it the New Holy Roman Empire, it's more appropriate to call it the Southern Holy Roman Empire.

Regardless, the Holy Roman Empire has been reestablished. Even if we become the laughingstock of the world, it's still better than nothing.

There is still a long way to go and we have to keep moving forward. Today we have gone one step further than yesterday. Can we go one step further tomorrow than we did today?

Having been given this historic mission, we must fulfill it.

Someone asked me when Germany will be unified. My answer is: when we become the number one power in the world, then we can finally consider that!

We are close to this goal because there are only two countries ahead of us. Yet, we are far from it because the disparity in national strength is truly significant.

The path lies before you. Are you afraid?"

Fortunately, Franz was self-disciplined enough to know that certain words should not be uttered casually. Otherwise, phrases like "neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire" would have almost slipped out.

The current New Holy Roman Empire, though lacking the Holy and Roman aspects, can still be considered an empire, right? As for the first two, unfortunately, they are forever unattainable.

Franz is not God, so where would the "holy" come from?

As for "Roman," apart from its great reputation, what practical use does it have?

It seems that Franz's self-deprecation has struck a chord with everyone, or perhaps the Austrian government is actively shaping public opinion to prevent the New Holy Roman Empire from becoming a target of ridicule.

Chapter 228: Preparing For Rainy Days

The Holy Roman Empire has been re-established, and there is a lot of confusion along with it. The administrative institutions are being reorganized, and the division of rights and duties between the state and central governments even requires Franz's personal involvement.

The governmental reorganization essentially transformed the Austrian central government into the central government of the New Holy Roman Empire, with the central government directly governing the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Bavaria.

Given the problems of domestic stability, Franz exercised restraint in the distribution of power, taking command only of the military and foreign affairs, leaving other powers untouched.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the central government can't interfere in local affairs. It's just that under normal circumstances, the central government will not interfere in the internal affairs of a state.

Of course, if problems arise in a state, such as a local rebellion or a coup d'état and other major changes, the central government can naturally intervene.

Aside from these issues, the most problematic was the allocation of fiscal revenues. State governments would have to submit a portion of their fiscal revenues to the central government, with the exact percentage becoming the bone of contention.

Of course, state governments hoped to submit only a few percent to cover central finances, and the rest could be allocated freely. The central government, on the other hand, hoped to get a larger share before allocating to the state governments based on actual needs.

At the heart of the fiscal dispute was a power struggle. The issues became increasingly complex and difficult to resolve in a short time.

The specifics would have to wait until the constitution was drafted for final clarification. Franz advocated governance by law, and he would not make unfounded moves without a legal basis.

Even if there's a power struggle between the central government and the state governments, it must be done legally. Franz absolutely forbids any actions that would break the rules.

Schönbrunn Palace

Prime Minister Felix reported: "Your Majesty, all reserve forces have been fully demobilized, the wartime economy system has been terminated, and the domestic economy is returning to normal.

In general, the westward expansion strategy has been completed satisfactorily. However, many problems have come to light, and fortunately, a major war was avoided, or our troubles would have been much greater.

The main problems are reflected in the lack of organizational experience and weak coordination between different departments.

By the end of the Paris Conference, we had mobilized a total of 1.247 million reservists, in addition to the 542,000 active-duty personnel, for a total of 1.789 million.

The logistical challenges of mobilizing forces on this scale far exceeded the estimates of various departments. Fortunately, the war did not escalate; otherwise, with so many troops in action, our preparations would have lasted three or four months at most.

This is the final statistical report. Please review it."

After speaking, Prime Minister Felix still had a lingering feeling of trepidation. Of course, the sudden eruption of the Austrian Empire demonstrated its strength to other nations, but it wasn't as glamorous as it seemed on the surface.

With that many troops, at 15,000 bullets per ton, firing just one bullet per person would consume 119 tons of ammunition.

Not to mention actual combat, just the routine training during those months would consume an average of thousands of tons of ammunition per month, and that doesn't even include the artillery.

In reality, after Austria mobilized so many troops, there was a severe shortage of artillery. While it's relatively easy to build up infantry reserves, technical branches like artillery are not so easy to replenish.

It's not just a matter of firing shots; to be considered artillery is to hit the target. Competent artillery units rely on a steady supply of ammunition as well as a certain amount of expertise.

Franz nodded and thought to himself: The current consumption is still relatively low. If we go on like this for a few more years, after the weapons have been upgraded and the consumption of ammunition has increased many times over, it will become a significant problem.

Franz took the report, glanced at it briefly, and understood the reason for Prime Minister Felix's sighs. The expenses were indeed enormous.

After an armed parade and demonstration, military expenditures have risen to a staggering 137 million guilders. Taking into account the mobilization of domestic reserves and the consumption of various materials, the total expenditure reached a whopping 211 million guilders.

Seeing this data, Franz suddenly understood why, after the Crimean War, European countries did their best to avoid further conflict.

And that is without even engaging in actual warfare. If a real conflict were to break out, final military expenditures could skyrocket to unknown heights.

Of course, the 211 million guilders listed in the report are not all cash expenditures. Most of it is in the form of material expenditures; it's just that, for convenience, it's been converted directly to a cash equivalent.

Franz asked with concern, "Did the Cabinet consider the real situation before granting feudal estates in the Balkans to deserving individuals?"

The absence of direct conflict does not mean that there are no individuals who earn merit. In such a large-scale military mobilization, there are bound to be those who distinguish themselves, though the lack of full-scale war limits the number of such heroes.

For those who have earned merit, rewards are in order. While Franz may not grant titles to major nobles, he is generous in awarding titles to knight-level individuals, especially those from the ranks of small landowners — many of whom enlisted in the hope of earning such recognition.

Prime Minister Felix replied, "Your Majesty, in this westward expansion strategy, the war hasn't escalated, so everyone's military achievements are quite limited. Obtaining titles and land within the country is virtually impossible for most.



In principle, it is impossible to obtain domestic titles and land. The Cabinet proposes to grant fiefs in the Balkan Peninsula, where conditions can be relaxed accordingly.

In addition, we propose to encourage the domestic nobility to exchange their estates and relocate to the Balkan Peninsula to strengthen control over the region.”

Are there any nobles willing to exchange? The answer is no!

No one is foolish; who would willingly give up well-established estates to venture out and start anew?

There is, however, one group that is willing to go — newly emerging quasi-aristocrats of merit whose military exploits have fallen just short of the threshold of nobility and have been stuck there.

In this era, it is extremely difficult to become a noble. For example, in this war, the number of soldiers who can cross the threshold of nobility is unlikely to exceed double digits, and in the vast number of armies, there may not even be one in an entire division.

Since Franz’s military reforms, there have been many individuals who have been stuck in this situation. Even some who have risen to the rank of general through their military exploits have yet to receive a noble title.

Noble titles signify social status, and the Balkan Peninsula borders Austria. Whether in the two principalities of the Danube or Serbia, the regions boast fertile plains but lack effective development.

People with vision and ambition would take advantage of such an opportunity. Once these people go over, Austria’s ruling foundation would take shape over there.

For their own interests, these individuals will voluntarily uphold Austrian rule and suppress the remnants of the Ottoman Empire.

As for whether Austria can obtain sovereignty over these lands, this problem can be ignored. Even if sovereignty is not obtained, it won’t affect the actual status of everyone. The Ottoman Empire did not have the capability to regain its lost territories.

If you want local independence and you want to prop up a puppet regime, there has to be someone to prop up first! The Austrian military hadn’t been idle in the region; their first target was the existing ruling class.

The nobles of the Ottoman Empire have been arrested, the Ottoman officials have been arrested, the merchants of the Ottoman Empire have been arrested, and even those who support the Ottoman Empire have been arrested...

In summary, anyone associated with the Ottoman Empire who posed a threat or potential threat to Austrian rule was thrown into prison.

In other words, the local upper class has been completely wiped out. What’s left are either serfs or commoners. If these people could write their own names, they would be considered intellectuals already.

To incite them to rebel for independence, they would first have to know what the word “independence” means. This is not something that can be accomplished in a short period.

Franz was certain that if Austria were to end its military rule in the region now, social order would immediately collapse.

As a liberator, the old system has been overthrown. Of course, a new system must also be established. Establishing control through one's own people would have a much higher loyalty level than using outsiders.

Franz thought for a moment and said, "Then do it that way, and establish a ruling foundation there as soon as possible.

If the Anglo-French alliance loses the Near East War, that's one thing, but if they win or the conflict ends in a stalemate, then our troubles begin.

They would not stand by and watch us swallow such massive gains. If Russia doesn't get Constantinople, they too would be jealous of our gains.

In the face of interests, even alliances may not be reliable. If British influence incites the Russian government, they may end up doing something foolish."

This was not Franz's small-mindedness. The bad reputation of the Russian Bear was not unfounded; it was based on countless facts that made it impossible to be careless.

The British betray their allies, the French betray their allies, and everyone has a few tricks up their sleeve, but they usually keep it within limits. The Russians, on the other hand, go overboard when it comes to betraying their allies, and it's nothing short of earth-shattering.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Prime Minister Felix replied.

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Balkan Peninsula

Since the conclusion of the Paris Conference, the British have found time to discipline their unruly lackey, Greece.

Do they think they can escape punishment by not flying government flags and operating under the guise of civilian militias? Dream on! Do they not know who they are trying to deceive? If they want to play tricks, do they even know who the experts are in this field?

Since the Greeks were trying to be smart, the British decided to teach them a lesson, and this time it was a lesson delivered through violence.

By October, British reinforcements had arrived, consisting of three infantry divisions and a reorganized division formed from the remnants of defeated troops from the Balkan Peninsula. In all, there were 51,000 British troops.

With the addition of 16,000 Sardinian troops and 12,000 Ottoman troops, they formed a tripartite coalition that set out to bring misfortune to the Greeks.

The result was obvious; even the Greek "civilian militias" that the Ottoman troops couldn't defeat were easily overwhelmed.

Greece was quite impoverished, having diverted resources to its ill-fated navy, and as a result, there was no budget for upgrading the equipment of its army. After blindly expanding its forces, the Greek army couldn't even afford to equip each soldier with a rifle.

Initially, the Greeks caught the Ottomans off guard, as their forces were tied up on the front lines. However, when the Ottoman Empire reacted by diverting some troops from the front lines, the Greek offensive was halted.

Now that the British had turned their attention to them, apart from wanting to discipline the Greeks, the more important aspect was that Greece was seen as an easy target.

Even John Bull cares about face. Having fought for so long, they know that tangling with the Russian Bear is no easy task, and achieving a brilliant victory in a war with them is quite challenging. Better leave the tough nuts to the French; the British Army is limited in size and couldn't risk everything.

To repair the reputational damage caused by the Battle of Sofia, the British War Office ordered Major General Oliver to redeem himself and restore honor by dealing with the Greeks.

The British have become ruthless, and the Greeks, of course, can't stand the pressure. First, they were driven out of Thrace and retreated to Veria. It won't be long before they have to retreat to their homeland.

Otto I was worried because no matter what happened to these troops, they could not return home. This was not only a failure in the war, but more importantly, their "neutral status" was at stake. The flames of war were quickly reaching the Greek mainland.

In this grand chessboard of the great powers, the Kingdom of Greece was but an ordinary chess piece about to be abandoned.

Otto I asked anxiously, "How is it going? Is General Menshikov sending troops?"

The Russians are notorious for holding grudges. During the critical moments of the Second Battle of Bulgaria, the Greeks were more concerned with seizing territory for themselves and did not follow Russian demands to attack the vulnerable Constantinople. Otherwise, the Near East War would have ended much sooner.

No matter how many reasons the Greeks may have had, in the eyes of the Russians it was considered betrayal, and holding a grudge was inevitable.

Besides, the Russians are busy right now; on the one hand, they are advancing toward Constantinople, and on the other hand, they are engaged in fierce battles with the British and French on the Crimean Peninsula. Whether they will be able to save Greece is a question in itself.

The Foreign Minister replied, "Your Majesty, the Russians have set conditions. Unless we formally declare that we are joining the alliance and declare war on countries like Great Britain and France, they will not send troops to help us."

Seeking help from an ally? Well, first they have to be recognized as an ally. The Kingdom of Greece only has agreements with Austria and Russia, and even those gentlemanly agreements haven't been fully honored by the Greeks themselves. Hoping that the Russians will take them seriously is merely wishful thinking.

Otto I's face darkened and he said angrily, "Haven't you explained our difficulties to the Russians? Greece's geographical position determines that we cannot afford to be enemies with Great Britain and France. If we do, we will immediately face a catastrophe."

As he uttered these words, Otto I's confidence seemed somewhat lacking. The tables have turned. Previously, it was the Greeks who were afraid of offending Britain and France while trying to seize territory, neglecting the bigger picture. Now they need others to look at the bigger picture.

"Your Majesty, the Russian stance is very clear. Since we joined the war, we are already in opposition with Britain and France in their eyes.

General Menshikov stated that if we still consider them allies, we should join the alliance directly." The Foreign Minister explained.

It is a fact that Greece sent troops to attack the Ottoman Empire, which not only tied up the Ottoman forces but also disrupted their ability to gather supplies locally.

These gaps had to be filled by France and Great Britain. Although Greece has not formally declared war on France and Britain, their actions have already caused them losses.

Otherwise, the British wouldn't have come over personally to give them a beating. The reason for not attacking mainland Greece directly was not that the British were afraid but because of political reasons.

A reckless invasion of a sovereign country could easily draw public criticism. The British also care about saving face. Anyway, Greece was so weak that the British army could only use them to pad their record. They don't think Greece is worth tearing off their facade for.

Otto I found himself in a dilemma. If Greece joins the alliance, mainland Greece will soon face the onslaught of the British and French navies, and numerous port cities may be destroyed in the war.

However, if they refuse to join the alliance, the Russians will not come to their aid.

Given the current situation, it won't be long before the Greek forces at the front lines retreat all the way back to the mainland, with the enemy following close behind.

In this case, Greece will inevitably be drawn into the war. Otto I cannot simply abandon the frontline troops and prevent them from returning home, as this is likely to cause the populace to rebel.

Otto I, in a somewhat unrealistic inquiry, asked, "If we, as a neutral country, disarm the troops retreating to the homeland, is there any possibility that the British might stop their advance?"

## Chapter 229: Marriage

Otto I's fantasy did not last long before it was shattered. He knew that it was impossible without others reminding him.

Domestic public opinion aside, the invasion and surprise attack on the Ottoman Empire, which resulted in the defeat of the allied forces in the Second Battle of Bulgaria, placed an undeniable responsibility on Otto I's shoulders.

In this battle, the British forces suffered heavy casualties, and even Downing Street changed hands. If they let this happen, would the British have any face left?

Failure to defeat the Russians might still be acceptable to the British government. After all, the British didn't have high expectations for the army, and losing to the Russians wouldn't be too humiliating.

However, having participated in a war, the British cannot just stand by and become mere spectators while the French show their strength, can they?

In any case, the British Army desperately needed a major victory to prove its strength. Unfortunately, Greece was the easy target they had chosen.

Otherwise, the Greek government, which had invested so much in public relations with the British government, would not have come out empty-handed.

Otto I said in resignation, “Can the army really not fight? Even if it’s only a draw, we would have leverage in negotiations!”

The Minister of War replied evasively, “Your Majesty, since the defeat at the hands of the British, the morale of the army has completely collapsed, with people deserting every day. Without military discipline to keep them in line, who knows how many soldiers would be left at the front?”

There’s no way around it. This force has been hastily assembled, relying entirely on nationalistic and patriotic sentiments. Their true nature will be immediately revealed as soon as this spirit dissipates.

Hoping that this motley crew can defeat the enemy is simply wishful thinking.

“Deserters?”

Otto I’s eyes lit up as if he had thought of something but couldn’t quite grasp it. He kept muttering, “Deserters,” “deserters”...

Seeing the king in a dilemma, everyone tacitly chose to remain silent.

After a moment of silence, Otto I spoke in a low voice, “What if we disband the troops, break them up into smaller groups, and make a scattered breakout? As long as the British have no evidence, they will do us no harm!”

It must be said that Otto I was still a wise man; he didn’t foolishly ally himself with the Russians.

Greece’s geographic location determines its strategic choices. Even if the Russians win this war, they cannot escape the influence of Britain and France.

If they sought refuge with the Russians now, they might be doomed before the war is over.

The Prime Minister reminded him: “Your Majesty, if we do this, the losses would be enormous. Once those soldiers fall into Ottoman hands, I’m afraid few would survive.”

Since these were civilian militias, there was naturally a lack of military discipline at the outset, leading to resentment and grievances. As the war had progressed to this point, the seeds of hatred between the two sides had long since taken root and sprouted.

At this point, a scattered breakout is essentially admitting defeat and everyone running away!

Moreover, they cannot return directly to the Kingdom of Greece, or the enemy will follow and attack. They must disperse and take a detour through other regions to return home.

Given the condition of the Greek army, an orderly retreat seems impossible. A single order would likely turn it into a complete rout, and those who managed to return alive would undoubtedly be few and far between.

The Kingdom of Greece does not have deep reserves, and this army is a significant portion of their young and able-bodied population. If they suffer heavy losses, it would cause a situation of mourning and wailing in every household.

“Do we have any other options? We cannot win on the battlefield, the Russians are unwilling to send reinforcements, and we certainly cannot rely on the neighboring Principality of Montenegro to come to our aid, can we?” replied Otto I.

They couldn't bring this war to the negotiation table, otherwise, they wouldn't be able to handle the repercussions from the British. Stirring up domestic nationalism was also risky. These people would refuse to give up until they saw the coffin and were sore losers.

Since they are destined to lose, Otto I naturally wants to find a way out.

If the frontline army can't win and everyone scatters in a breakout, regardless of the extent of the losses, on the surface it won't be directly linked to the king. At least he won't have to bear the political responsibility for the failure.

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Vienna

Archduchess Sophie gave Franz an ultimatum: whatever the circumstances, the marriage must be arranged immediately. Even if he didn't marry her niece, he would still have to find a suitable match of equal social standing.

This was not only her personal will, but also the will of the House of Habsburg and the people of the Empire. They couldn't tolerate the Emperor remaining unmarried any longer.

Free love? Unfortunately, Franz hadn't even had the chance to fall in love yet!

Since that's the case, he might as well get engaged to someone he knows. It's better than marrying someone he knows nothing about; what if he ends up being cuckolded?

On the day after Christmas of 1853, Franz was engaged to be married to Helene, Princess of Wittelsbach. The entire process had been arranged by Archduchess Sophie, and Franz was merely going through the motions.

Beauty was indeed a virtue, and given the “buy one, get one free” situation, Franz was quite satisfied.

How chaotic was the European nobility? There was no way to answer that. In any case, apart from not diluting the purity of their bloodline, there was a whole heap of sordid affairs, and the concept of chastity was surprisingly lax.

Although this marriage was not a match of equal social status, they were childhood sweethearts. His fiancée entered the Vienna Palace early on, ensuring her “purity”.

After the engagement, Archduchess Sophie placed restrictions on Franz and Princess Helene's intimate interactions, absolutely forbidding any occurrence of premarital pregnancy.

Faced with a matter of trust and confidence, Franz felt a great sense of injustice. He repeatedly asserted that he was not someone who disregarded decorum.

But Archduchess Sophie did not believe in his character and bluntly pointed out things he had previously thought to be secret. Apparently, not much in this palace could be hidden from the matriarch of the house.

Previously, it had been to deceive Franz and betroth him to her niece, so of course she didn't mind these little things. Now that the whole situation has been settled, it is imperative to guard against any possible embarrassment.

Franz began to suspect that he had been tricked by his mother. But after repeated confirmation, he had no choice but to admit that he lacked the willpower to resist the temptation.

He was confident that this was not his fault; it was undoubtedly the aftermath of his trip to St. Petersburg, where the Russian nobility led him astray and weakened his willpower.

These were all minor issues and he took responsibility for them anyway. Franz was not intimidated at all. Even if he was irresponsible, he wouldn't be intimidated. After all, the status of a son was higher than that of a niece.

Against the background of the marriage alliance between the two families, all discordant elements must be nipped in the bud. Franz was not worried about the outbreak of any kind of chaos.

This marriage alliance was far more important to the House of Wittelsbach than to the House of Habsburg. Maximilian II, who had just arrived in Milan, needed the support of the Habsburgs to stabilize his reign on the throne.

In agreeing to this marriage, Franz took political factors into account, in addition to his good relations with Princess Helene.

The annexation of the Kingdom of Bavaria caused some concern among the newly joined royal houses of Saxony, Hesse, and Württemberg. Even the transfer of the Lombard throne to the House of Wittelsbach was not enough to reassure them.

Had it not been for the lack of marriageable princesses from these royal houses, the choice for the bride might have been different. Do not doubt Franz's principles; in politics, one's choices are often limited.

Unable to win them over through marriage, forming an alliance with the House of Wittelsbach could also be effective. While the Kingdom of Lombardy's political influence had diminished, it was still nominally a peer in terms of diplomatic matters.

In this matter, negotiation was essentially the key. The Habsburgs had not become enemies of the Wittelsbachs. Therefore, marriage was a viable option for resolving any unpleasantness.

With common interests, they became allies once again. This also reassured the Saxon, Hessian, and Württemberg royal families; the Habsburgs had their limits and wouldn't swallow them up completely.

Franz could say with confidence that they were thinking too much. Besides reducing the difficulty of unification, the more decisive factor for not annexing these states was that forced unification by military means would result in poor assimilation.

National unification, unlike external expansion, cannot rely on extreme measures. In the absence of a massive purge, if the hearts and minds of the people cannot be won back, stability in the region won't be achieved in the next ten or twenty years.

Overthrown royal families and interest groups may seek restoration. If restoration is not possible, they may turn into revolutionary parties, overturn the table, and everyone goes their separate ways, with no one having an easy time.

You can look at the French Revolution of 1848 in France for specifics. Even Napoleon III could be elected president, indicating the role the Bonapartists played in that uprising.

The so-called usurpation of the fruits of the revolution was actually inaccurate. They were the leaders of the revolution from the beginning to the end, hiding behind the scenes and pulling the strings, and only stepping forward at the critical moment. Otherwise, how could Napoleon III have seized power so easily?

As emperor, Franz did not want to leave any hidden dangers to the security of his reign. Stability was paramount.

In history, during the Second Reich, Bismarck advocated leaving many sovereign states intact, not only because he lacked the strength to forcibly annex them, but more importantly for long-term stability.

This approach proved to be very effective. Regardless of the conflicts between state governments and the central government, they operated within the established rules, and there were no reports of any sovereign state rebelling.

The greatest gains from annexing these German sovereign states were not resources, strategic advantages, or political benefits. The most important benefit was the population and a high-quality population at that.

According to population statistics from two years ago, the total population of the Austrian Empire exceeded 37 million, second only to the Russian Empire on the European continent. The main ethnic group, however, numbered just over 8.7 million.

To make the data look more favorable, the Austrian government, at Franz's suggestion, directly classified some persons of mixed descent with Germanic ancestry as Germans.

The main ethnic population then rapidly expanded to over 10.3 million, rising from 23.5% to 27.8% of the total population.

Well, that was a little bit of a stretch. Calling those with only a quarter or an eighth of German ancestry German was going too far, but Franz was not that rigid a man. A little flexibility with the data made it look much better.

This situation has finally been effectively addressed, and the number of the main ethnic population has finally exceeded 40%.

With economic development and increased population mobility, such interethnic marriages will undoubtedly become more common in the future.

It must be admitted that this oldest form of ethnic integration is, in fact, the most effective and least problematic form of ethnic amalgamation.



The actual driving force behind this ethnic integration was the gender imbalance in the German territories, with men significantly outnumbering women. This pressing social reality persisted until after World War II when it was reversed.

In Hungary, on the other hand, the situation was exactly the opposite, with more women than men. This was due not only to the local reduction in the number of young men caused by the war but also to geographical factors.

Of course, the situation was even worse in the Serbian and Danubian Principalities, where the number of young men was greatly reduced by the recent wars.

If nothing was done, Franz could be certain that these regions would experience a population decline over the next twenty years, especially in the more severely affected areas such as Serbia.

All these social backgrounds create favorable conditions for ethnic integration. Faced with such opportunities, Franz would not let them slip away so easily.

The current challenge is to figure out how to promote interethnic marriages, which is a headache. Franz had no successful experience to draw on.

#### Chapter 230: Good Idea = Bad Idea

The Crimean Peninsula remains a battleground as Britain, France, and Russia continue their fierce battle. To be precise, Britain and France were on the offensive while Russia was defending with all its might.

The inferiority of weaponry and equipment was a glaring weakness. In contrast to the Russian forces in the Balkans, which have uniformly switched to Austrian weapons, making them comparable to the British and French, the Crimean forces faced a more difficult situation in terms of equipment.

The Russian forces in Crimea were not so lucky. Originally considered a secondary force within the country, they were hastily mobilized for the conflict. In addition, multiple factors such as corruption within the Russian bureaucracy contributed to their tragic situation.

In fact, by this time Nicholas I had already decided to switch completely to Austrian arms. However, due to the establishment of production lines in the country, bureaucratic officials who did not consider the overall situation impulsively awarded production contracts to domestic military-industrial enterprises, thereby creating problems for their comrades.

It takes time for the production line to be tuned, and it also takes time to retrain workers. In peacetime and other circumstances, this may not be a significant problem. In wartime, however, this is a problem as Russian forces on the battlefield cannot afford to wait.

So far, the Russians have not been able to maximize their production capacity. At their current rate, it is impossible to fully equip the Russian forces in Crimea within a year or two.

General Gorchakov, who had recently been appointed commander-in-chief in Crimea, was furious. He didn't realize the extent of the problem when he was fighting in the Balkans, because everything that was lacking could be bought directly from Austria.

In Crimea, he had seen the dismal state of Russian military logistics, where not only was the replacement of modern weapons delayed, but even routine logistical supplies were prone to error.

Fortunately, the allied forces on the other side were not as formidable as those encountered in the Balkans. The siege of Constantinople was still important, as it had at least kept the French elite forces in check.

After some thought, General Gorchakov remarked: "Send a message to St. Petersburg with a detailed description of our situation and a request for immediate replenishment of our supplies from the motherland.

If logistical support cannot be provided, we will have no choice but to abandon the Crimean Peninsula and retreat to the coastal regions of Ukraine."

The lack of medical supplies and medicine could be overlooked; after all, cannon fodder wasn't that valuable, and he wouldn't feel remorse if they perished. But the lack of rifles and artillery was intolerable. How could they continue to fight without the necessary equipment?

Gorchakov no longer cared if he might offend someone. If he lost, it would be the end of him, so more serious consequences mattered little.

As a high-ranking military commander in the Russian army, as long as he wins this war, even if it means offending domestic interest groups, he can withstand the pressure.

The primary means of transportation for the Russian forces on the Crimean Peninsula were ox carts, which were relatively decent for the time and place. The Russians were also quite well prepared, stockpiling a significant amount of supplies in coastal areas, including Crimea.

Even if the bureaucrats siphon off some of it, they won't have any use for it and will eventually have to sell it back to the Tsar. So Gorchakov doesn't have to worry about food shortages.

There's nothing that can be done about the weapons and equipment. Since the Russian government has already decided to replace them, who knows where these junk goods will end up?

The same equipment made by Russian arms manufacturers will inevitably be a little heavier and have a slightly higher failure rate. But they can definitely withstand wear and tear.

Gorchakov wasn't picky; he just needed whatever was available. Now the pressure was on the Russian government to speed up the supply process. If domestic production can't keep up, they should quickly go and buy more!

In any case, Russia can't give up Crimea, or if the British and French get a foothold there, it's game over for Russian control of the Black Sea.

To strike a blow against their main competitor, the British probably don't mind footing the bill for military spending every year. As long as they blockade the Crimean Peninsula, not only would the Russian Bear's strategic influence in the Near East be finished, but half of the import-export trade would be in British hands.

It won't take much perseverance, three to five years at most, and the European hegemony of the Russian Empire will crumble. By instigating Polish independence, the British would successfully achieve their strategic goals.

Of course, it's not that easy for things to go so well. At least Franz won't agree to it. He's getting ready to make trouble for the British.

The Russians cannot fall, at least not until the internal consolidation of the New Holy Roman Roman Empire is complete. Otherwise, they would have to behave submissively.

Franz, worried, asked, “Marshal, is there any way to enable the Russians to take Constantinople?”

In Franz’s opinion, the easiest place to break the deadlock on the Near Eastern front is Constantinople. As long as the Russians capture it, this war will end.

The Bosphorus Strait is narrowest at about 750 meters and widest at only 3.7 kilometers. By providing the Russians with a batch of coastal artillery and strategically placing it along the coast, the maritime passage between the Black Sea and the outside world could be cut off.

Without a sea channel, the Ottoman Empire’s transportation would be comparable to that of Russia. If they had to transport supplies by land from the Anatolian Peninsula, the logistical support for the English and French allied forces on the Crimean Peninsula would undoubtedly run into problems, leaving them no alternative but to retreat hastily.

Marshal Radetzky analyzed, “Your Majesty, Constantinople is inherently a fortress city, easy to defend and difficult to attack. It is currently garrisoned by elite French troops, and the navy provides firepower support.

To attempt a direct assault, we would have to rely on overwhelming force. We need to push the French forces to their limits before there’s any chance of breaking through the city.

The wisest choice for the Russians now is to gather a substantial number of cannons and bombard Constantinople relentlessly. Even the strongest fortress has its limits.

The Ottoman Empire has long been in decline, and Constantinople has not faced a threat in a century. They have neglected to upgrade and modernize the city’s fortifications.

After the outbreak of the Near East War, the Ottoman government made some hasty repairs and reinforcements, but the time was too short. This is an opportunity for the Russians.

Most of these fortifications cannot withstand the assault of heavy artillery. If the Russians are willing to invest, deploying a few hundred heavy cannons and slowly chipping away could break through this turtle shell.”

This is a pure brute-force approach that relies entirely on overwhelming force, but it is currently the only feasible method.

The problem is that the British and French could also acquire a large number of cannons to engage in a bombardment competition with the Russians. In the end, both sides would resort to sacrificing lives. Without casualties reaching hundreds of thousands, it seems impossible to breach Constantinople.

In this era, the accuracy of cannons is low. The Russian army only needed to spread out its artillery positions and bombard Constantinople, a large target that could surely be hit by cannonballs. In contrast, it would be a challenge for the British and French to destroy the Russian artillery positions.

Franz believes that casualties won’t deter the Russians, and the military expenditure may even wear them down first. It would take millions of rubles to obtain several hundred heavy artillery pieces, not to mention the dozens of tons of ammunition needed for a single salvo.

Since the goal is a relentless bombardment, the firing of several thousand tons of ammunition in a single day is just standard procedure. To completely level Constantinople, who knows how much ammunition would ultimately be consumed.

However, if the operation is not carried out in this way, based on the current Russian approach, the exchange ratio would reach four to one. Even if cannon fodder isn't valuable, they can't withstand such a depletion.

Given the current situation, Franz can confidently say that the Russian government will hold out for at most another year or so before being forced to abandon the effort due to excessive casualties.

After some thought, Franz said, "Have the General Staff draw up a plan and present it to the Russian government. Whether they use it or not is up to them!"

He doesn't believe that there isn't a single smart person in the Russian government, who can see that blindly sacrificing lives to fill the colossal pit that is Constantinople without firepower superiority, is a suicidal endeavor.

According to the information received by Franz, since the outbreak of the Battle of Constantinople, the number of casualties in the Russian army has approached the total sum of the two Battles of Bulgaria.

Even St. Petersburg was preparing to replace Menshikov. Under the command of this "genius" commander, Russian casualties had always remained high.

This plan was not intended for the Russian government but for the Russian commander-in-chief of the Balkans, Menshikov. If he doesn't want to return to St. Petersburg in disgrace, he will undoubtedly consider Austria's proposal.

As a high-ranking military general in the Russian army, no one can resist the temptation to conquer Constantinople. Completing this great feat would elevate them to the status of "national hero" in Russian history.

It was not only the Russians who were interested. In fact, Franz also wanted to accomplish this great feat. The Habsburgs and the Ottoman Empire had long been mortal enemies, and the capture of Constantinople would bring them considerable political prestige.

Most European countries have a special sentiment toward Constantinople. Since the French were currently helping the Ottomans defend the city, Franz was confident that Napoleon III wouldn't mind taking Constantinople if he had the chance.

Completing this great feat would bring no less prestige than defeating the Russians. If the Battle of the Crimean Peninsula ended in defeat, Napoleon III would likely annex Constantinople outright to mitigate the political fallout from losing the war.

The British government would probably acquiesce in these developments. Constantinople falling into French hands would be preferable to it falling into Russian hands. If France and Russia were to engage in a protracted struggle, the British would undoubtedly be pleased.

If possible, Franz wouldn't mind adding fuel to the fire and deepening the hatred between France and Russia.

Unfortunately, the Russians are not up to the task. The bureaucrats of the Russian government are dragging their feet, and hopes for a Russian victory in Crimea are too slim.

Unable to achieve this, Franz could only hope that the Russians would suddenly erupt in strength and conquer Constantinople, drastically maximizing British-French enmity in one fell swoop.

Marshal Radetzky's approach was undoubtedly the most effective from the point of view of the Austrian government. For the Russians, however, it was a bad idea.

The reason was very simple. This method was too expensive for an agricultural country like Russia.

This approach easily exceeds the endurance limit of the Russian Empire. Even if they were to conquer Constantinople, they would be unable to continue strategically due to financial exhaustion.

After all, there is still the Dardanelles. Just controlling the Bosphorus Strait is not enough for the Russians to dominate the Black Sea Straits. Besides, after taking Constantinople, they would only control half of the Bosphorus Strait.

Strategically, diverting forces to capture the Gallipoli Peninsula and block the Dardanelles can also end the war.

Not every place has a Constantinople, and defending the Gallipoli Peninsula is undoubtedly much more difficult than defending Constantinople.

Even if they cannot capture this area, a diversionary attack can force the British and French to commit heavy forces to the defense, relieving the pressure on the Russian army in the Crimean Peninsula.

It's just that the lure of Constantinople is too great, and the Russians can't resist the temptation to rush in.

Of course, Franz would not remind the Russians of this. Ending the Near East War prematurely, without maximizing the depletion of British, French, and Russian forces, didn't serve the interests of the New Holy Roman Empire.

Moreover, even the best strategy requires capable execution, and Franz doesn't believe that the Russians have such strong execution capabilities, at least not under General Menshikov's command.

Considering the efficiency of the Russians, attempting a sudden attack against Britain and France is undoubtedly a pipe dream. Currently, the Gallipoli Peninsula is guarded by only a few Ottoman garrisons, making it easy to breach.

Once Britain and France react, the combined forces attacking the Greeks can immediately reinforce the Gallipoli Peninsula, leading to another major battle.

Britain and France have an abundance of national power. Even if they open another front, they can grit their teeth and hold out, but not Russia. Russia's domestic organizational capabilities are already approaching their limits.

If another front line is added, the Russians may feel the strain of insufficient forces. It's not that they lack troops, but rather their inability to move them quickly to the front lines.

Another challenge is logistics. Even if they can get supplies from Austria, the efficiency of transporting them to the front lines would likely be sluggish.

With one wrong move, good intentions could lead to unintended consequences. If logistical support fell short and the Russians lost the war, Franz would have no choice but to cry together with Nicholas I.