

## Roman Empire 291

### Chapter 291: Suez Canal Equity

Paris Royal Palace

Napoleon III asked uncertainly, Auvergne, are you sure the Austrian government really wants to join our canal project and isnt just trying to make trouble?

Foreign Minister Auvergne affirmed, Your Majesty, the Austrian government seems sincere. They are willing to invest and cooperate with us in excavating the canal. No one would joke around with millions of francs. Once they invest in the canal company, theyll support us for their own interests.

Its just that the Austrians have always been conservative. They are afraid that according to our plan, the final traffic volume will not meet the demand, so they are demanding that the depth of the canal be increased by four meters.

Napoleon III rubbed his forehead and asked, I remember that the canal companys design depth was nine meters, allowing the largest ships in the world to navigate freely. And the Austrians still think that is not enough? Dont they realize that with each additional meter, the investment increases significantly? Adding four meters now means that the budget will increase substantially.

The budget for the Suez Canal project was 200 million francs, a figure that already challenged the capacity of the investors. Before the canal is navigable, no one knows for sure how profitable this golden waterway will be.

Currently, most people dont believe that the Suez Canal will be profitable, considering that there are free waterways available, and the Suez Canal tolls cannot be set too high.

With such a large investment, no one can guarantee how long it will take to recoup the costs. Capitalists, of course, have little interest in long-term investments with uncertain returns such as this project.

Auvergne explained, We have discussed this issue with the Austrian government many times. However, they are more concerned with the strategic value associated with the emergence of ironclad ships.

The Austrian government believes that ship tonnage will increase significantly, and the newly established Royal Shipyard of Austria is already building 10,000-ton freighters.

It is said that there are even some designers who have increased the tonnage of ships to 20,000 tons. The Austrian government believes that future mainstream ships will exceed 20,000 tons, and there are no major technical problems.

The Austrian government also believes that the tonnage of warships will increase significantly. If investments are saved now and the future navigational capacity is insufficient, the strategic value of this canal will be non-existent.

Napoleon III fell into contemplation. With the advent of ironclad warships, the keel that limited ship size is no longer a problem, and theoretically, a significant increase in ship tonnage is inevitable.

But bigger ships arent necessarily better; market demand must also be taken into account. The million-ton behemoths of the future would be useless in this era; there simply wouldnt be enough cargo to fill them.

Nevertheless, 10,000-ton vessels were already competitive in this period. At least for Austria, which exported agricultural products, such large ships were necessary.

Minister of the Navy Ducos spoke up, Your Majesty, from a strategic point of view, it is indeed better for the Suez Canal to have a larger navigational capacity.

If Austria joins us and shares the financing of the Suez Canal, the problem won't be too great. Even if private funds cannot fully cover it, we can have government investment.

Undoubtedly, the French government's planning of the Suez Canal was driven more by its strategic value than its economic value; otherwise, they wouldn't have invested so heavily.

After hesitating for a moment, Napoleon III boldly declared, Let them join! Since the Austrians dare to invest so much, we have no reason to fear!

During this period, the strategic vision of the French was truly remarkable. They were the first to initiate projects such as the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal. Unfortunately, they were unable to maintain control of either.

On May 10, 1858, France and Austria signed the Suez Canal Cooperation Agreement. The treaty stipulated that both countries would contribute equally to the excavation of the canal, with France as the initiating country holding a 51% stake and Austria holding a 49% stake.

There's not much to say about that. Given France's significant initial investment in the Suez Canal, it was inevitable that they would have majority control.

With changes to the design plans, the canal's budget rose to 340 million francs. While this was an impressive figure, Franz was dismissive. Even if it were 540 million francs, it might not be enough.

Of course, the use of free labor would significantly reduce construction costs, and Franz was unsure of the final cost. After all, with both countries working together, there was no need to worry about the British sabotaging the project later and forcing a costly switch to paid labor.

Looking at the agreement in his hand, Franz smiled and said, Urge the French to begin construction as soon as possible.

Since they had joined the canal project, they couldn't afford to dilly-dally as the French had done in history, taking over a decade to complete the canal.

Yes, Your Majesty! Metternich replied.

Minister of Finance Karl asked, Your Majesty, should we follow the French and raise money for the canal company on the capital market?

The Suez Canal was a guaranteed profitable investment, but few could see it.

For most people, it was seen as a long-term investment with uncertain returns that was not highly favored in the capital markets.

Historically, the Suez Canal has faced construction disruptions due to a lack of funding. Without the support of the French government, the canal company would have gone bankrupt before the canal was completed.

Franz, accustomed to making a fortune quietly, would not, of course, announce it loudly to the world. If others were unwilling to invest, he could take advantage of that.

Considering the dangers of monopolizing the profits, Franz decided that it was still better for the government to take the lead. Otherwise, if all future wealth went directly into the royal coffers, it could easily lead to criticism.

The economic crisis is not over yet, and the markets capacity is limited. The government will subscribe to half of the shares and the rest will be floated on the market.

Clearly, all shares in circulation will have dividend rights only, while voting rights will remain in the hands of the Austrian and French governments.

It was a turning point in history where what was once a canal project led by private capital now had strong political implications.

London

The joint excavation of the Suez Canal by France and Austria dealt a severe blow to the British governments railway plans, as maritime transportation costs were lower.

Once the Suez Canal became navigable, Britains geographical advantage would diminish, as France and Austria would have a closer route to the Indian Ocean than the British Isles.

Prime Minister Grenvilles concerns were not just about the canal itself; rather, they centered more on the improvement of Franco-Austrian relations, which made the British government uneasy.

Unlike in history, where Russia had already lost its continental hegemony, both France and Austria were still potential competitors, not yet directly competing for hegemony.

Without sufficient interests, the governments of the two countries would naturally restrain each other. Austria was now much stronger than in the past, and the French became more cautious after their defeat in the Near East War.

Gentlemen, the warming of relations between France and Austria poses a significant challenge to our continental balance strategy. What do you think?

Chancellor of the Exchequer John Russell said, Mr. Prime Minister, you are too sensitive. While France and Austria are cooperating on the Suez Canal issue, they still have many conflicts elsewhere. The possibility of true cooperation between the two countries is not significant.

There are indeed conflicts between France and Austria. Not to mention the question of European hegemony, they have repeatedly clashed over colonial territories in Africa. However, these minor conflicts are present between almost all colonial empires and do not escalate to the level of hostility between the two nations.

Foreign Secretary Thomas analyzed: Under the Vienna System, relations between France and Austria have always been quite good in the past decades. It was only after the February Revolution that relations between the two countries gradually cooled. The rupture in relations between the two countries occurred during the previous war for German unification, and now they stand together again due to common interests.

But this does not yet affect our interests. As long as France and Austria harbor ambitions to compete for European hegemony, relations between them will break down sooner or later.

Even the currently close Russian-Austrian alliance will eventually diverge on the issue of European hegemony. I do not believe that the Austrian government lacks ambition.

This was a realistic issue; allies are unreliable when it comes to interests. Unless the strength of each country remains balanced, confrontation is inevitable sooner or later.

## Chapter 292: Desolate Stock Market

For ordinary people, an economic crisis is a disaster, but for capitalist tycoons, its an opportunity. Franz is now one of those tycoons, reaping the rewards of the capital market.

As the Emperor, he still paid attention to appearances, neither cheating people nor inflicting undue hardship upon them.

Money is never enough, but theres no need to sacrifice your reputation for profit. Acquiring companies will certainly invite hostility, but when it comes to investing in stocks, its a different story.

Nowadays, everyone is short of money, so how could they refuse investments? The concept of investment companies was pioneered by Franz.

Human energy is limited, even with a mature management team, unlimited expansion is not possible.

In such a situation, abandoning non-core industries becomes inevitable. After all, its all about making money. As long as theres proper oversight to safeguard interests, theres no need for controlling stakes.

Looking at the thick stack of acquisition proposals in his hand, Franz was filled with complex emotions. Every page contained goals commoners had fought for a lifetime to achieve but now does not arouse his interest.

After listening to the supervisors report, Franz calmly said: Lets stop investing in the textile industry. The British advantage in this field is too great, their position cannot be shaken for at least 20 years, no need to engage in vicious competition with them.

In the future, we will focus on metallurgy, shipbuilding, mining, machinery manufacturing, and other areas to increase our economic influence.

The shares of the canal company are about to be issued. Send people to secretly acquire them, both domestically and internationally. Well buy as much as we can as long as the price increase is less than double.

Making money is only one aspect of the imperial enterprise; its also crucial to increase its influence on the domestic economy, which is a form of preparing for the future.

Franz had even unconsciously gathered some nobles to form business consortiums, and there was more than one consortium.

Of course, on the surface, these consortiums have no connection to each other or to the public. They appear as ordinary commercial consortiums, even competing with each other.

Everyone was very professional at using fronts. There are many other ways to shine, so theres no need to stand out in this regard.

Jung was a retainer of the House of Habsburg, and his service to the royal family could be traced back seven generations. With strong personal abilities and loyalty that gave Franz peace of mind, he became one of the main supervisors of the imperial enterprise.

Jung cautioned, Your Majesty, investing in the canal company involves considerable risk. It is too early to get involved now, it would be wiser to wait a few years.

Once capital reaches a certain level, the importance of seizing opportunities begins to diminish. Even if you enter the market a step late, you can still pave the way with substantial financial resources.

The investment in the Suez Canal was massive, and whether it could be completed smoothly was a question in itself. Then there were the uncertain political factors.

The Egyptian government originally held a 15% stake. With Austrias involvement, however, its ownership rights were effectively converted into dividend rights. While the Suez Canal is nominally going to be jointly managed by France, Austria, and Egypt, in reality, the Egyptians have already been sidelined.

It should be noted that the British opposed the digging of the Suez Canal. Who can guarantee that the Egyptian government, with John Bulls possible interference, wont sabotage the project for its own interests?

Without the cooperation of the local authorities, where would they find so many free laborers to build the canal? Even if they were to resort to capturing slaves in Africa, it would still incur costs.

Obviously, like most people, Jung is unaware of the determination of the French and Austrian governments to dig the Suez Canal, or he wouldnt have these concerns.

As long as France and Austria remain resolute, the Egyptian government wouldnt dare make trouble. If relations soured, the British would not be able to protect them.

John Bull is not a reliable ally; its impossible for him to directly betray his allies, but hes very likely to stab them in the back.

Franz explained: Theres no need to worry about the project; the Suez Canal is crucial to the future strategic interests of both France and Austria, and we will not abandon it.

Once the canal is open, our route to the Indian Ocean will be much shorter and we will no longer be dependent on the Strait of Gibraltar.

There is even less need to worry about profitability. Maritime trade is growing very rapidly currently. In the future, this golden waterway will be the most lucrative canal in the world.

Seeing that Franz had made up his mind, Jung didnt argue any further. Investing in the Suez Canal may seem like a big deal, but when you break it down, its not that significant.

For the royal family, its only a matter of a few million guilders, and even if something unexpected happens, they can handle it. Its also unlikely that they can buy a ton of shares as there are smart investors besides Franz.

Moreover, for some shipping giants, even if the Suez Canal doesnt make money, they still have to participate because it affects their future development.

The Vienna Stock Exchange, once bustling with activity, became deserted after the onset of the economic crisis.

For half a year, no new stocks were listed here, and the stockbrokers were dispirited; without trades, where would the commissions come from?

The exchange manager, Mark, shouted angrily, You lazy bunch, gather around me!

Jrgen, you fool, did you not hear me? Dont you dare fall asleep!

As he spoke, he gave them a push.

If you dont want to be unemployed, all of you better snap out of it.

As soon as he heard the word unemployed, the drowsy Jrgen woke up. In times of economic crisis like these, losing your job meant hard times ahead.

Seeing everyone regain their focus, Mark said sternly, Listen up, three days from now, the shares of the Suez Canal will be listed on the stock exchange. Now, get ready. If anyone messes up, Ill skin them alive.

Days without trading were hard. Not only were there no new listings, but even the existing stocks were mostly in a slump, falling into the category of having value but unsellable.

The upcoming listing of new stocks signaled the end of the cold spell, and the exchange couldnt afford to take it lightly.

Austria didnt just have one stock exchange; Vienna alone had four. Throughout the New Holy Roman Empire, there were dozens of exchanges, large and small, all competing against one another.

Jrgen asked with confusion, Boss, isnt the Suez Canal a government project? Why would they raise funds on the stock market?

Mark glared at him and said: That is not something you need to worry about. What you need to do now is inform the major clients of this news and then try to persuade them to buy the shares.

After realizing he was in for a bad time, Jrgen wisely decided to keep quiet. As a top-tier stock trader, he enjoyed many privileges, such as sleeping on the job or coming in late, but challenging the authority of his superiors was definitely not one of them.

In an era before phones and cars, communication relied on walking and shouting. Notifying all major clients within three days was no easy task.

During a bullish market, they wouldnt even need to personally inform clients; just publishing the news in the newspapers would attract customers in droves.

But things were different now. With the market in turmoil and countless stocks down, everyone was worried about making ends meet. Who had time to think about new stock listings?

This meant that Suez Canals shares were likely to struggle to fetch a good price in the market and may even fall below their issue price.

Under normal circumstances, nobody would choose such a time to list their stocks, and thats what puzzled Jrgen.

## Chapter 293: Major Deal

As expected, the newly issued shares of the Suez Canal Company didnt sell well. Everyone was holding on to a pile of underwater stocks, unable to liquidate them in time. Why would they want to jump into another pit?

Even for those with the foresight to see the future potential of the Suez Canal, it didnt mean they had money at their disposal.

Few people were interested in the Suez Canal shares, but every day the newly issued shares sold out. Astute as he was, Jrgen quickly realized that someone was buying in bulk.

However, he wisely chose to keep quiet, then dipped into his savings, quietly bought a batch, and prepared to make a fortune quietly.

Unfortunately, he miscalculated. This time, Franz wasnt manipulating the market; he was investing. The canal shares were to be strictly kept, with no intention of pumping up their prices.

Without any media hype or even basic announcements, everyone only knew this was an official collaborative project between France and Austria, and that was it.

There was nothing more to it. The project hadnt even started, and both sides were still in the fundraising stage. Except for a set of long-published design blueprints, there was nothing more.

Under normal circumstances, a project at this stage would not even qualify for fundraising in the market, how could it gain popularity?

Especially now, with investment in the canal far above that in history, the projects risks have increased significantly. The Paris stock market was equally cold, and if it werent for Franz buying up the shares, its questionable whether they could be sold at all.

In the eyes of many, this project is purely political, with the two governments joining forces to change their strategic disadvantage. Whether it will be profitable is a secondary concern.

This time the shares werent listed on the London Stock Exchange. With Austrias support, the French government abandoned its attempts to woo the London financial sector.

There were a lot of people like Jrgen. Even in this time of economic crisis, while investment firms are busy bottom-fishing, major investors are content to sit on the sidelines, waiting for the crisis to end before re-entering the market. With only a few small investors, theres hardly a ripple in the stock market.

Despite the still raging economic crisis, the Port of Venice remained as prosperous as ever, with thousands of people coming and going daily, departing from here to Austrias overseas territories.

In a small tavern, groups of people gathered, with barrels of beer and some side dishes, the most affordable entertainment.

Most of them are sailors from all over the world, earning a decent income but hardly saving any, making them the favorite customers of tavern owners.

Locals are rarely seen in these small taverns; they cant afford such extravagant spending. Even those with families would avoid this group.

Despite the decent crowd, tavern owner Buck wasnt happy, as he could tell something from the drinks and snacks on the tables.

Clearly, peoples spending had dropped more than just a notch. The drinks were the cheapest available, and the food was the cheapest, with some tables even skipping side dishes altogether.

Theres no way around it; with the economic crisis in full swing, business has plummeted. With fewer voyages, incomes have plummeted accordingly.

With less income comes less consumption. Formerly bustling businesses such as casinos and brothels are now deserted, not to mention small taverns.

Just then a man walked in and said, Owner Buck, business is booming!

Mr. Anthony, what wind blew you here, please come in! Hamm, quickly bring the best drinks and dishes.

Buck nodded and bowed, his whole face beaming with a smile. Obviously, the visitor was someone of importance; otherwise, Buck would not have taken care of them personally.

Having spent a lot of time on the docks, Buck had long practiced the art of adapting to different situations speaking appropriately depending on who he was dealing with. When it came to dealing with the big shots, he spared no effort to curry their favor.

When they entered the private room, Anthony sat down and got right to the point: Im not here for drinks today. Theres a huge business deal I want you to handle, but it depends on whether youre capable enough to take it on.

Bucks heart sank. As a prominent shipowner in Venice, Anthony never visited such humble establishments. Their acquaintance was superficial, so Buck didnt believe there could be any real business for him.

But being an old hand at the game, Buck still asked with a smile, Mr. Anthony, may I ask what this huge business is about?

Anthony said casually, Recruit for me a thousand brave and fearless young men and three hundred sailors. Ill give you a commission of one guilder per person.

Bucks expression changed for a moment but quickly returned to normal. Logically, someone of Anthonys stature wouldnt need him to recruit personnel, and if they did, they wouldnt need him as an intermediary.

Despite his doubts, he could not ignore such a lucrative deal. Acting as an intermediary was part of his business, and the tavern was a gathering place for all sorts of people, and sometimes it would double as a place for business for mercenaries.

Buck assured him, No problem, Mr. Anthony. Leave it to me, Ill gather the manpower for you within a month.

Anthony smiled and replied, Dont be in a hurry to agree. If I had a month, I wouldnt have come to you. Have the people ready in three days.

Bucks expression changed when he realized that recruiting 1,300 people would bring him 1,300 guilders in commission, a sum he couldnt earn in a year under normal circumstances. It was obvious that such a task couldnt be easily accomplished in just three days.

After some thought, Buck forced a smile and said, Mr. Anthony, this is really beyond my capabilities. The time frame is just too short.

Buck was self-aware; he never made promises he couldnt keep. He strongly suspected that Anthony was merely toying with him. How could he possibly gather so many people in three days?



Anthony promised, However many you can gather will do. Im doing a major deal this time, and Im short on manpower, so I have to ask for your help. As long as this succeeds, youll benefit in the future.

It was indeed a major deal; Anthony had his eye on a kingdom in Benin. With his current forces, it was clear that he couldnt carry out such an operation.

For this operation, they naturally found several partners to collaborate with, preparing to divide up this indigenous kingdom in Africa.

Their boldness was not unfounded; there were numerous examples from this era that proved that conquering an indigenous kingdom was not difficult.

To increase his say in the alliance, Anthony sought to increase his military strength. This endeavor required not only secrecy but also swift action.

With so many colonial forces on the African continent, they surely wouldnt be the only ones eyeing the fat piece of meat that was the Kingdom of Benin. If someone else beat them to it, all their efforts would be in vain.

Because of the short time frame, Anthony had to lower his standards and even accept the rabble he would normally disdain. No matter how useless they were, they could still follow him around.

After hesitating for a moment, Buck whispered, Mr. Anthony, a Swiss mercenary group of three hundred men arrived recently. If youre willing to pay a high price, I can arrange for them to join you.

Anthony chuckled and said, If I could recruit mercenaries, why would I need you? With so many adventurous customers coming and going from your tavern, there must be some willing to take the risk. Just get them.

That was the truth; mercenary groups wouldnt honestly turn over the loot they plundered to their employer. Going through all the trouble for a big operation was all about getting rich.

If all the spoils were swallowed up by others, what would they gain? Rely on the sale of black slaves for profit?

Clearly, Anthony had his sights set on the century-old accumulation of the Kingdom of Benin, not just to become a slave trader.

Buck said worriedly, Mr. Anthony, this is not proper. Most of them have employers, and poaching on a large scale is taboo.

In this era, those who made a living at sea were all masters of living on the edge, not ones to swallow their pride.

If it was just the poaching of a few sailors, it could still be done; personnel turnover was normal and would not cause a backlash. But large-scale poaching was basically asking for retaliation!

The older you get in the game, the less courage you have. Buck was an old hand at the game, and he wouldnt dare do something like that.

Anthony remained calm as he said, I understand the rules too. Its because I dont want to break them that I came to you! Youve been around for so many years, that your information network must be fairly extensive, right?

With the current economic downturn, many small boat owners may already be struggling to stay afloat. Negotiate with them, and hire their men for a job; surely thats possible?

This matter can only be negotiated by you. Im only responsible for providing the money, and I must remain anonymous throughout.

Buck breathed a sigh of relief; he understood that Anthony didnt want to show his face, which was why he wanted him to be the middleman.

The details of the deal and the need for secrecy did not matter to Buck. He only cared about whether he could complete the transaction within three days.

#### Chapter 294: Assassination Attempt on Napoleon

On August 10, 1858, Napoleon III and his wife were attacked on their way to the Paris Opera House, causing a sensation throughout Europe.

Everyone still remembered the unfortunate Bismarck, who had been assassinated a few months earlier. The Russian government blamed the Polish independence movement for this, implying internal political struggles. However, the Prussian government did not dig deeper, and so the matter passed.

Unlike Bismarck, Napoleon III was not a minor figure. The assassination of a monarch was a serious matter, and this incident signaled troubles.

#### Vienna

Upon receiving this news, Franz's first reaction was holy crap. Under his butterfly effect, Napoleon III ascended the throne ahead of schedule, yet he still managed to encounter this assassination attempt.

Franz asked, Were Napoleon III and his wife shot?

Not because he was heartless, but historically the Orsini Assassination Attempt was full of doubts. After an assassination attempt by an Italian from Sardinia, Napoleon III then allied with the Kingdom of Sardinia to attack Austria together, which was quite abnormal.

The most normal course of action would have been to use this as a pretext to hold Sardinia directly accountable, forcing it to cede territory or pay reparations, or even to invade and occupy Sardinia directly.

However, Napoleon III not only sacrificed his own monarchical authority by pardoning the assassins but also went to help the Kingdom of Sardinia fight against Austria, thus contributing to the unification of Italy.

Its such a stupid move that even in third-rate novels, the author wouldnt dare to write it like that.

Unless the assassination was staged to lure Austria into a trap, otherwise Napoleon III's brain must have really been flooded.

Of course, if it was staged, Napoleon III's brain was still malfunctioning. It was because he didnt help out of goodwill; after the war, he was rewarded, and the Italians were not grateful to him.

The Franco-Austrian War left France politically isolated. At the same time, it made enemies with both Austria and Italy, and during the Franco-Prussian War, both countries retaliated.

Tyron replied, Its still unclear. The French have blocked the news, and there are bloodstains at the scene, but were not sure who got shot. According to the intelligence we have received through our back channels in the French government, the perpetrators appear to have been apprehended shortly after the assassination and are currently being interrogated, but their identity are still unknown.

Franz scoffed, First find out if something happened to Napoleon III. Since the French apprehended the assassin, they can easily conjure whatever identity and story benefits them!

Theres no way around it; Napoleon III has done a lot of crazy things, and Franz isnt sure whats going to happen next.

In the other timeline, without his selfless contributions, Germany, Italy, and America would not have unified so easily, if at all.

The successes of Bismarck, Cavour, and Lincoln were all built on the sudden mental lapses of Napoleon III. Otherwise, these three would not be associated with greatness and hanging from the gallows would be more likely.

Yes, Your Majesty! Tyron replied.

Berlin

News of the assassination attempt on Napoleon III sent shivers down the spine of the Prussian government.

French ambitions in the Rhineland were common knowledge. The deployment of 60% of Prussias troops in the Rhineland was enough to signify the seriousness of the situation.

At any other time, French aggression might have been met with interference from various European nations. But this time was different. If evidence emerged linking the assassination attempt to the Kingdom of Prussia, even the Vienna System would not be able to deter French actions.

In terms of motive, the likelihood that the perpetrator was German is very high, given that French intervention thwarted the chances of German unification. Retaliation by fervent nationalists would be entirely plausible.

Foreign Minister Manteuffel explained, Your Highness, theres no need to worry. We had no hand in this assassination attempt. Even if the French wish to cause trouble, they cannot pin it on us.

The Vienna System has just been re-established. If France starts a war on flimsy grounds, it will face hostility from all nations, unless they do not mind a second anti-French coalition.

Prince William Frederick Louis nodded. The chances of France making trouble at this time were not high. Disrupting the Vienna System now did not align with their interests.

Vigilance, however, was an instinctive reaction. It was a lingering effect of Napoleons domination of Europe, and despite the passage of time, there remained a deep-seated fear of France.

Yes, under normal circumstances the French would refrain from such actions. However, we cannot afford to be complacent. Order the troops at the front to reinforce their defensive lines and not give the French any openings.

Although Russia was currently the worlds foremost military power, the recent performance of the French army in the Near East War led many to believe that the French possessed the most

formidable fighting force in the world, with the Russians relying on numerical superiority to suppress them.

Theres also Franz's hand in this, deliberately exaggerating the strength of the French to keep everyone's perception of the French army rooted in the Napoleonic era.

This misperception kept the French diplomatically constrained. Faced with diplomatic pressure, Napoleon III rarely caused trouble on the European continent after he ascended the throne.

Although he had his eye on the Rhineland and Belgium, he took no concrete action.

It is impossible to expose this deception. The government of Napoleon III, entrenched in its own circumstances, is unaware of the current fighting capability of the French army, which is not as formidable as it was during the Napoleonic era.

It was not just a matter of training; it was the absence of the military spirit forged during the Napoleonic era. Especially after the brutal experiences of the Near East War, the morale that once inspired the French army had diminished considerably.

However, because of the high casualty exchange ratio, the French army was able to maintain its reputation.

The only way to expose this facade is to go to war with a great power. Losing such a war would, of course, reveal the truth. However, under the Vienna System, the likelihood of great powers directly engaging in conflict is very low.

It's not just the Prussian government that's on edge; the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Kingdom of Belgium are equally anxious. Everyone prayed that the perpetrators had no connection to their countries.

With the passage of time, the case of the attempted assassination of Napoleon finally received an answer. On August 15, 1858, the French government announced that the culprits were four Italians.

When he saw the names, Franz was speechless. They were the same four Italian heroes from history, but this time they were out of luck. They might not live long enough to be pardoned.

Although Napoleon III and his wife were unharmed, three of their escorts were shot and one died on the spot.

If Napoleon III pardoned the assassins again this time, his subordinates might feel disheartened.

Whether it was to consolidate royal authority or for strategic interests, he must cause trouble for the Kingdom of Sardinia, especially since they share a border.

Given the current international situation, it is very difficult for the French to expand on the European continent. Looking around, the Kingdom of Sardinia is the easiest target.

With a ready-made excuse presenting itself, the French government is unlikely to let this go easily.

Originally, Franz was prepared to order the frontline troops to be ready for battle, but he abandoned the idea. If Napoleon III acts irrationally and walks right into his doorstep, it couldn't be better.

In the great game of nations, worrying about one city or one piece of land is completely unnecessary. If the goal of the French is Austria, Franz does not mind luring them into a trap.

Due to transportation and logistical constraints, all-out war was out of the question. The power gap between France and Austria was not that great, so whoever fought on their own turf would essentially have the upper hand.

If Franz could lure the main French forces out, he wouldn't mind pretending to be weak first, then assembling an anti-French alliance to break the backbone of the French in one fell swoop.

## Chapter 295: Interests Determine the Truth

### Turin

Ever since the French government announced the identity of the assassins, the Sardinian government has been in a panic. This is like trouble falling from the sky into one's own home.

Everyone present would dare swear in God's name that they had nothing to do with this assassination attempt.

Even if they wanted to assassinate someone, it would be Franz, not Napoleon III. What was the point of assassinating Napoleon III?

King Victor Emmanuel II eagerly asked, Prime Minister, have you looked into the information about the assassins that the French have revealed?

Cavour, looking haggard, replied: We have. They are all radical Italian nationalists from the Italian region. Their aim in assassinating Napoleon III seems to be to provoke a conflict between France and Austria.

Before taking action, these four individuals had obtained citizenship in the New Holy Roman Empire, and one of them was even a public official in the Kingdom of Lombardy.

Framing others still depends on timing! If it happened at a time when Franco-Austrian relations were deteriorating, then whether it was true or not, the French government could take it as fact.

Clearly, these assassins were not professionals, did not choose the right timing, and succeeded only in angering the French.

Unfortunately, France and Austria were not yet at the point of breaking off relations. Under the Vienna System, where would the French government find the confidence to start a war?

From the perspective of interests, the French have been seeking expansion into the Italian region for quite some time. With this ready-made pretext, trouble has come knocking at the door of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

After a moment's thought, Victor Emmanuel II said resignedly: I hope those fools can hold out and stubbornly blame Austria. Otherwise, we will be in big trouble.

It's not that they don't want to conspire with the French against Austria; it's just that the likelihood of that happening is almost zero.

Historically, after Prime Minister Cavour convinced Napoleon III, he himself could not believe it for a long time.

The situation was even worse now that Austria was much stronger than it was in history. Whether it was the preservation of European stability through the Vienna System or the still robust Russo-Austrian alliance, France could not dare to make any reckless moves.

Cavour analyzed, Your Majesty, the British and the Austrians will not stand by and watch the French continue to expand. We can seek their assistance.

There was a hint of weariness in his expression, mixed with deep concern. Obviously, he had put a lot of effort into finding a way out of this predicament.

In politics, there are no eternal enemies, only eternal interests. To unify the Italian region, Austria is its greatest enemy; but to resist the French invasion, Austria becomes its ally.

Both France and Austria have ambitions to dominate the Italian region, and it is only through mutual suppression that the Kingdom of Sardinia has survived.

Under normal circumstances, there would never be an opportunity for the unification of Italy, as neither France nor Austria would tolerate it.

Napoleon III's lapse in judgment inadvertently contributed to Cavour's greatness. In reality, it was a gamble Cavour wagered that France and Austria would not partition the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Now he dared not gamble. The international situation had changed and relations between France and Austria were warming. The secret treaty that Franz had concocted to appease the French, which proposed the division of the Kingdom of Sardinia between the two countries, hung like a sword of Damocles over them.

Palace of Versailles

Napoleon III was in a terrible mood; this assassination attempt was not as simple as it appeared to the outside world.

Based on the information gathered, it was obvious that someone inside the country had helped the assassins. Otherwise, it would have been difficult for these amateurs to track his movements.

Napoleon III asked, Have we uncovered the mastermind behind the scenes?

Minister of Police Maupas replied, Your Majesty, the enemy is very cunning. These assassins do not know that they have been manipulated. The information was obtained from a person named Sobolev.

This person has disappeared, and their acquaintance with the assassins seems highly coincidental. They first met in a small tavern in Paris.

We have investigated related individuals and found no suspicious leads. Sobolev may be an alias, with no other information beyond his transaction with the assassins.

Napoleon III scolded angrily: Useless fools! Do you mean to tell me that domestic enemies happened to run into four idiots and then used them as assassins?

Your Majesty, that is indeed the truth! Maupas replied honestly.

Coincidences often happen in reality, sometimes even more bizarrely than in fiction. This assassination attempt occurred under coincidental circumstances, and the so-called mastermind behind it was simply a spur-of-the-moment decision.

Napoleon III waved his hand and said, Keep investigating. I don't care what methods you use, but you must find this Sobolev, who has suddenly appeared, for me.

Whether or not there is a mastermind behind the scenes, this overlooked Sobolev is a threat. The world is never short of extremists, and Napoleon III doesn't want to live in fear of assassination attempts every day.

Yes, Your Majesty! Maupas replied.

After calming down a bit, Napoleon III began to consider how to leverage this incident to maximize his interests.

The assassins were Austrian citizens. Can we take this up with Austria and demand accountability?

Foreign Minister Auvergne objected subtly: Your Majesty, what exactly can we demand from the Austrians?

This is the crux of the matter interests.

Extortion also depends on the target. If the Austrian government doesn't buy it, they can't just attack them on these grounds, can they?

Unless there is evidence that the assassination was planned by the Austrian government, international pressure can be used to make the Austrians pay a price.

Obviously, the current evidence is insufficient; even if one of the assassins was formerly a public official of the Kingdom of Lombardy, it's still not enough to incriminate the Austrian government.

From the motive for the crime, suspicions against the Austrian government have been ruled out. It's hard to believe that they would just send someone to assassinate a foreign emperor without a clear reason. No one would believe that.

Napoleon III's desire to attack Austria does not mean that he completely ignores the consequences. The cooperation between the two countries still outweighs any potential conflict. From the perspective of interests, it was not yet time for both sides to turn hostile.

Similarly, targeting the Kingdom of Prussia or Belgium is not feasible. Without sufficient evidence, simply trying to shift the blame could backfire disastrously.

Should this opportunity be used for a large-scale internal purge? As soon as this idea arose, Napoleon III quickly put it to rest.

The economic crisis is still ongoing, and internal stability must be maintained. Provoking internal strife at this time could easily lead to unpredictable consequences.

After much hesitation, Napoleon III spoke: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will send a note to the Kingdom of Sardinia holding it responsible for this incident.

Pressing a soft persimmon was one aspect, but more importantly, these assassins were members of radical Italian nationalist groups that had previously received funding from the Sardinian government.

Although it would be quite a stretch, this assassination could be said to have been orchestrated by Italian nationalist groups, making the Sardinian government partly to blame. Using this as an excuse to stir up trouble shouldn't attract interference from other countries.

Yes, Your Majesty! replied the Foreign Minister Auvergne.

Minister of the Interior Persigny spoke up: Your Majesty, it would be best to include the confessions of the criminals to prove that this assassination was orchestrated by Italian radical groups. We should also gather evidence of the Sardinian government providing funds to these radical groups.

Presenting all this evidence to the Sardinian government would be more convincing. At the same time, we can seek international support, using the assassination to garner sympathy and gain the upper hand in diplomacy.

The Austrians have promised in the past to support our annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia; now its time for them to fulfill their promises.

The more evidence provided, the more persuasive the case, and the more public support gained, the greater the benefits obtained.

Napoleon III exclaimed with delight, You mean the Austrian government will support our annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia?

Persigny replied without hesitation, No. Times have changed. During the war for the unification of Germany, Austria would have been willing to let us annex the Kingdom of Sardinia in exchange for our support.

But now that Germany is divided into three, the Austrian government no longer needs our support, so their promises are no longer valid.

But they wont oppose our expansion into Sardinia. In fact, the Austrian government is hoping for more aggressive action on our part to further aggravate the Anglo-French conflict.

Napoleon III nodded in agreement. Since the Austro-Sardinian War, Austria and the Kingdom of Sardinia have been in a political cold war, with Austria no longer having any interests in Sardinia.

Instead, British influence in Sardinia is rapidly spreading. If France were to act against Sardinia, the British would stand to lose the most.

If it could make Britain and France fall out, what would a mere Kingdom of Sardinia amount to?

## Chapter 296: Kicking Them While They Are Down

### Vienna Palace

Franz looked at the telegram sent to him by Napoleon III and said with a smile, The French want to take action against the Kingdom of Sardinia. Now they want us to fulfill our promise. What do you think we should do?

The Minister of the Interior, Archduke Louis, suggested, Your Majesty, the French have ambitious plans for Italy. Perhaps the Kingdom of Sardinia alone cannot satisfy their appetite.

Once the French influence penetrates Italy, the pressure on our national defense will increase. For the security of Lombardy, we should restrain such behavior.

Metternich objected, It is not that serious. The Vienna System has just been established, and the French will not violate the treaty now. At most, they may take some advantages, but they cannot swallow the Kingdom of Sardinia whole.

If the French really want to annex Sardinia, let them. Once the French take this step, a new anti-French coalition will be formed.



Prime Minister Felix scoffed and said, Indeed, France is no longer the France of the Napoleonic era. Since Napoleon III had such ambitions, we might as well let him fulfill them. The European countries have just relaxed their vigilance against the French, and now the French are coming out again. Lets give them a push and make them stand even higher.

Strength determines position. If Austria is not strong enough, it must of course prevent French expansion and take preventative measures.

The present situation is different. Even if the French were to annex the Kingdom of Sardinia, it would still be within Austrias tolerance.

With a strong Russia and a strong France, another strong Austria on the European continent would be insignificant in this situation.

Without them attracting attention, the increasingly powerful Austria will soon become a target.

In this situation, it actually serves Austrias interests to give the French a push and let them get a little fatter.

Franz made a decision: Tell the French that we will honor the agreement and support their annexation of Sardinia. But they must find a reason that everyone can accept; the Vienna System must not be undermined.

The Vienna System is Austrias national policy, and it will not change for at least ten years. In this situation, the French annexation of Sardinia would attract too much attention and could destabilize the Vienna System.

However, to divert attention to the French, Franz doesnt mind weakening the Vienna System. After all, it only serves to maintain balance on the European continent and has limited restraining power over the great powers.

Until the slow population growth problem is solved, France will not be a significant threat to Austria. Even if they annex Sardinia and cause a short-term population surge, it wont have any real effect.

The nationalistic Kingdom of Sardinia, where nationalism has become fanatical, is not easy to govern. It will be difficult to digest this region without decades of effort.

The Habsburg dynasty had been active in the Italian region for hundreds of years, and it was only after Franz came to power that a major purge was carried out in the region. In addition, the lower classes were won over through the emancipation of serfs and the redemption and purchase of land. Thus, the region was truly stabilized.

Because of the Austro-Sardinian War, Franz made the Kingdom of Sardinia the scapegoat, blaming them for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

Just look at the civil relations between the Kingdom of Lombardy and Sardinia today; even though they are neighboring territories, the people on both sides still harbor deep-seated animosity. This shows the power of hatred.

Without finding a scapegoat, would the French dare to conduct a major purge? And without conducting such a purge, how could they effectively suppress nationalism?

Metternich replied, Yes, Your Majesty!

Minister of Finance Karl reminded, Your Majesty, since the Italian radicals conspired to assassinate Napoleon III, its very likely that they might also try to harm you. We must conduct a public security crackdown and eliminate any potential threats.

Franz was very fearful of death and never hesitated to eliminate any potential threats to his life.

Not to mention pardoning the assassins, even if someone only had the motive to assassinate him and hadn't acted yet, they would be swiftly sent to the gallows. Austrian law was much stricter in this regard.

After thinking for a while, Franz said murderously, Hmm, indeed, we must conduct a thorough investigation. This matter will be handled by the Ministry of the Interior. Root out every rat hiding in the corners. Investigate thoroughly every person and organization associated with these rats. I want to see how many rats are hidden in Vienna.

Undoubtedly, someone would suffer misfortune. No matter what their status or background, once they were found guilty of the crime of regicide, they would be doomed. Even though they had not yet acted, the result would be the same.

The first to suffer will undoubtedly be the gangsters and street thugs. After Franz ascended the throne, they became the governments scapegoats in any crackdown on public security.

Once caught, they faced a minimum of ten years, and up to now, people have only been going in, with no one coming out.

Vienna is now free of prominent underworld organizations. Those who manage to evade capture are timid old-timers who keep a very low profile.

Making money quietly in the gray area is one thing, but those who dare to come out and declare themselves lords are doomed to die young.

London

Since the outbreak of the Indian rebellion, the British government has had a hard time with the great powers causing trouble one after the other.

As for the Russians, its to be expected; theyre already enemies, and the two sides have long since torn off any semblance of civility. The Russian government is openly supporting the Indian insurgents, and its almost as if the two nations are on the brink of war.

Austrias expansion of its influence in the Mediterranean and Africa is within their tolerance range; after all, it doesnt harm their own interests.

At first, it was thought that the pro-British French government would behave, perhaps content to gain a few colonial advantages. But Grenville reluctantly discovered that French ambitions in Italy remained undiminished.

Whats even more infuriating was that the pretext was provided by the Italians themselves. Even if the British government was willing to support the Kingdom of Sardinia, it lacked the confidence to do so.

Being a bully also depends on the target, and France is no pushover; theyre the type you have to reason with.

Unfortunately, the French still hold the moral high ground at the moment. Members of the Italian Carbonari conspired to assassinate Napoleon III and the perpetrators were caught on the spot.

The more Grenville thought about it, the bigger his headache became. He cursed angrily, Damn these radical extremists, do they have shit for brains? Trying to assassinate Napoleon III, they can even come up with such a stupid idea. I wonder if someone will try to assassinate Franz too!

Grenville was unaware that he was right. The Carbonari did indeed have plans to assassinate Franz, and they've already taken action.

Unfortunately, they encountered the reclusive Franz, who rarely leaves the palace, so there was no chance to make a move at all.

It wasn't until the crackdown, when someone reported them for suspicious behavior, that police found bombs during a search of their residence, exposing their plans.

Of course, Grenville would rather have been wrong; dealing with just one France is difficult enough, adding Austria to the mix would be truly overwhelming.

Foreign Secretary Thomas analyzed: Prime Minister, it's too late to say these things now. The French are holding the Kingdom of Sardinia accountable. If they cannot give Napoleon III an explanation, they may not let the matter rest.

The European countries will not support Sardinia on this issue. For now, it's up to the Sardinian government to hand over the radicals and not to give the French a reason to act.

Handing over the perpetrators sounds easy in theory, but in practice, it is a challenge. The Carbonari wield considerable influence in Sardinia, with a strong presence and deep roots in society, making it far from easy to take action against them.

Amid nationalist fervor, the Sardinian people evidently remained fervent and are unlikely to carefully consider right and wrong; they will simply choose to resist.

Under public pressure, would the Sardinian government dare to take action against the Carbonari? Or do they even have the ability to take action against them?

Chancellor of the Exchequer John Russell shook his head and said, At this point, simply handing over a few scapegoats is not going to solve the problem. The main objective of the French demanding that Sardinia hand over the perpetrators is still driven by interests, otherwise they wouldn't accuse the Sardinian government of being involved in this conspiracy.

If the benefits offered by the Sardinian government do not satisfy them, this suspicion can easily become a reality. Once the French define the perpetrators as agents of the Sardinian government, war becomes inevitable.

The perpetrators must certainly be handed over; if the French are not appeased, the matter will not be resolved. Interests are also indispensable. Without paying a price that satisfies the French, Napoleon III will not let it rest either.

After all, he is the emperor of a nation, and even for the psychological trauma caused by the terror attack, territorial concessions, and reparations are necessary to make amends. The details of territorial concessions or reparations will depend on the actual situation.

Grenville thought for a moment and said, The Foreign Office should intervene to mediate this conflict, but we must first see what the French want. It would be best to involve the Austrians as well to pressure the French together, as Austria would also not want to see French expansion continue.

The British government has never relaxed its vigilance against the French. Containing French expansion has long been the national policy of the British government.

The centuries-old enmity between Britain and France is not to be taken lightly. Just because the current French government is pro-British doesn't mean that the conflicts between the two sides have diminished. In fact, Britain and France remain each others biggest competitors in overseas colonial activities.

#### Chapter 297: A New European Balance of Power

Franz asked in surprise: Did they really catch the assassins?

In his opinion, these people should have gone into hiding after the failed assassination attempt in Paris. How could they still be there, waiting to die?

However, he overlooked the communication difficulties of the time; the government received intelligence early, but that didn't necessarily mean these assassins had the same information.

The news published in the Vienna newspapers still revolves around the assassination attempt on Napoleon III, the capture of the assassins, and France holding Sardinia accountable. News of these events hasn't spread as quickly.

The Carbonari were powerful in the Kingdom of Sardinia, but not in Austria. In fact, they were considered a heretical organization in Austria, and their tentacles reaching deep into Lombardy and Venice had long since been severed.

Even if the organizations within Sardinia received the news, they didn't have the ability to tell these assassins to retreat. Even the assassination itself was decided on a whim by lower-level members, with the top echelons of the Carbonari having no knowledge of it.

The Carbonari operates as an alliance, with nominal leadership over its members. In reality, everyone does their own thing, and there is no coercive authority over the members.

Archduke Louis laughed and replied: Yes, Your Majesty! After they were caught, these assassins insisted that they were French and that Napoleon III had sent them to kill you.

It's truly amusing that someone would make such a crude attempt to frame others. Did they really think that changing nationalities would make people believe them?

Franz chuckled coldly and said, Then keep an eye on them. Don't let them die too soon, they might still prove useful later on.

With a ready-made excuse handed to them, the Austrian government now had a reason to support the French. Even assassins who had not yet acted were still assassins, and in a situation where they could sympathize with each other, there was nothing wrong with France and Austria joining forces against a common enemy.

Whats even more amusing is that in this era, the Carbonari are an organization that operates openly, with the identities of its members a matter of public knowledge. Trying to find scapegoats was futile; when it comes to regicide, no one can escape.

Giuseppe Mazzini, Giuseppe Garibaldi, and Camillo Cavour the three heroes of Italian unification were all members of this organization. There were even rumors that Napoleon III had previously joined this organization.

What can the government of Sardinia do? Hand over all these people? Unfortunately, apart from the King, all the top officials of the Kingdom of Sardinia are involved. Even if they wanted to, its not easy to cut off ones own arm; its an unsolvable dilemma.

Archduke Louis replied: Yes, Your Majesty!

Franz was also thinking about how to incite the French to annex the Kingdom of Sardinia. Even the opportunity to blackmail the Kingdom of Sardinia was temporarily abandoned.

Saint Petersburg

Whatever the Russian government was doing, whenever something happened in Europe in that era, they would always be involved. As a hegemon of Europe, it was their responsibility and duty to mediate conflicts between nations.

Of course, this responsibility and obligation are self-perceived by the Russians, since the European nations have never recognized it. The hegemonic position of the Russian government in Europe is based entirely on military power.

Nicholas I found himself in a dilemma. On the one hand, he detested the Italian radical organizations that were plotting to assassinate the emperors, and on the other hand, he did not want to see the French expand their influence.

It was not just Nicholas I; all monarchs of the entire European continent, with the exception of the outlier Franz, faced the same dilemma.

Whether Napoleon III was a nouveau riche or not, he was recognized as an emperor, so he was a member of the monarchical clique. Any ordinary political assassination would be met with collective resistance, let alone the assassination of a monarch.

When Bismarck was assassinated, the Polish Independence Organization suffered greatly as a scapegoat. Not only did they face brutal repression from Prussia and Russia, but they also encountered opposition from various European countries.

Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode righteously said, Your Majesty, this evil organization plotting regicide must be punished and all its leaders sent to the gallows.

This is politically correct, even the allies of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the British, have demanded that they hand over the assassins. No monarchical state can tolerate the existence of such an evil organization plotting against monarchs.

Nicholas I nodded and said, Yes, this evil organization must be eradicated. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will send a diplomatic note to the Kingdom of Sardinia demanding that they arrest the assassins immediately.

The current problem is how to prevent French expansion. We cannot allow the lessons of the Napoleonic era to be repeated. We must prevent the enemys expansion.

Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode confidently said, Your Majesty, curbing the French expansion is not just our problem alone. French expansion in Italy poses the foremost threat to the British and Austrians.

We need not worry about this at all. Even if the French grew stronger, there would still be Prussia and Austria to block them.

Today is different from those times. Napoleon III is not Napoleon. He does not have his uncles natural talents. If the French were to invade Central Europe, they would face united opposition from everyone.

With the current strength of the French, they cannot sweep across the European continent. If the French expand into Central Europe, we will form an anti-French coalition and thoroughly eliminate this enemy once and for all.

It is instinctive to be wary of the French. After all, Napoleon once marched all the way into the Russian heartland. If it werent for the harsh winter saving Russia, the Russian Empire would have been doomed.

Therefore, in the struggle for continental hegemony, the Russian government has always seen the French as its main competitor, and of course, the French also see the Russians as their main competitor.

In addition to diverting attention from the domestic crisis, the French joining with John Bull to launch the Near East War was more of a continuation of the Franco-Russian rivalry for hegemony in Europe.

Finance Minister Vronchenko reminded, Your Majesty, Austria has developed rapidly in recent years. Although they are our ally, we must still be vigilant. Now that the French have shown their hand, it might be wise to let Austria and them counterbalance each other! We can also learn from the British and Austrians how to maneuver the balance of power in Europe.

The Russians maneuvering the balance of power in Europe sounded unbelievable. But it was also inevitable.

Of the three major players in the Near East War, Britain and France had already regained their vitality. Russia, the victor, was still recovering.

This shocked the Russian government, which was forced to undertake institutional reforms. Indeed, Nicholas I was growing old, lacking the vigor of his youth. Facing strong opposition from conservatives, he chose a cautious approach.

Moreover, the Russian Empire was too vast to be easily governed.

While the telegraph was becoming widespread on the European continent, it covered only a few major cities in Russia, with nationwide coverage still a distant prospect.

In such a situation, the central governments control over the regional governments was naturally inadequate. Reform measures that had been painstakingly passed were ultimately compromised when it came time to implement them.

The reforms had little discernible effect and failed to address the financial difficulties. The Russian Empire had lost its power to intimidate other nations, forcing a change in national policy as a last resort.

Nicholas I sighed deeply. The balance of power in Europe had always been maneuvered by Great Britain and Austria. Unexpectedly, Russia, which had always sought to disrupt the European order, would now also become a supporter of the continental balance of power policy.

Very well, let it be so!

Having made this decision, Nicholas I suddenly seemed to have grown much older.

Once the policy of European balance is initiated, it means that the Russian Empire has completely abandoned its expansion on the European continent, and the Russian government will have even fewer strategic options in the future.

But faced with reality, they have no choice. Even if they do not abandon expansion on the European continent, the Russian government cannot find any land to expand into. Their neighbors are all tough nuts to crack, and there is simply no way to move forward.

In fact, the Russian government had already been working on this before. Rebuilding the Vienna System was part of a balance of power policy, albeit with different motivations at the time.

Initially, the Russian government was only aiming to consolidate its own hegemony and buy time for domestic reforms. Now, due to financial constraints, it is forced to adopt the policy of European balance to save the costs associated with maintaining its hegemony.

#### Chapter 298: Storm

As is customary on the European continent, its time for negotiations. Especially since the Vienna System was reinstated, the French had no choice but to abide by these rules.

Since the delivery of the French diplomatic note, Cavour had rushed to Paris, trying to lobby everywhere with gifts.

But it was all in vain. The French bureaucrats were not stupid; they knew which gifts to accept and which to reject. Its better to stay out of matters related to the attempt on the Emperors life.

Foreign Minister Clio complained with a bitter face, Prime Minister, the gifts have all been returned. These people wont even let us through the door.

This was still relatively tactful; others went so far as to accept the candy coating, only to throw the shell back.

In other words, they took the gifts, stuffed some random things into the gift boxes, and then threw them out grandly.

Dont expect them to accomplish anything. At best, these things might help to douse their fire a bit, so that they clamor a little less loudly for war.

There was no way around it. To show their loyalty to the Emperor, slogans had to be shouted. Even the anti-war faction was now clamoring to teach the Kingdom of Sardinia a lesson.

The investigation results showed that someone had aided the assassins and leaked the Emperors whereabouts. And that person had not yet been caught.

To avoid suspicion, no one dares to make this political mistake.

Cavour said helplessly, I haven't gotten any results on my side either. Napoleon III used the excuse of recovering from an injury to avoid receiving guests. I'm afraid this matter will be difficult to resolve.

However, we have no choice. Since the French won't accept them, let's give gifts to representatives of other countries. This is not the time to be stingy. If we give them something, even if they just say a word for us in the meeting, it will be worth it.

It's the crudest method, but the most effective. Currently, the Kingdom of Sardinia lacks the ability to exchange interests with other countries, let alone influence their diplomacy.

In this context, the only option is to bribe representatives of other countries. Now, governments all over Europe are very angry about this assassination attempt, but at the same time, no one wants to see France continue to expand.

Even Cavour himself was extremely angry about the assassination attempt and had no sympathy for these so-called patriots.

If possible, he wouldn't mind simply getting rid of those guys to end it all. As for the French demand to punish the perpetrators, Cavour didn't even want to argue; as long as it didn't escalate any further, it was fine.

However, he couldn't tolerate the French government's demand for territorial concessions. The prospect of Italian unification was already slim, and if they were to give away more land now, there would truly be no hope left.

Clio whispered, Prime Minister, the French are also doing public relations, and it may be difficult for us to compete with them. The Austrian representative this time, Marti, is from Lombardy and represents the anti-Sardinian faction in the Austrian government.

His appointment by the Austrian government may be related to the secret agreement between France and Austria. This time, we can't count on the Austrians in the negotiations. We even have to worry that France and Austria will reach an agreement to divide us.

Lombardy is in Italy, but Lombards are not synonymous with Italians. Specifically, they are a distinct ethnic group, considered a branch of the Germanic peoples originating from southern Sweden.

During the independence movement of 1848, the Lombards were divided, with some supporting the Austrian government and others siding with the revolutionaries.

Marti's high position undoubtedly indicates his support for the Habsburg dynasty. As a beneficiary of the status quo, he is naturally opposed to the unification of the Italian region.

In the previous Austro-Sardinian War, the invasion of the Sardinian army had devastated his homeland. With such personal suffering, hostility towards the Kingdom of Sardinia became inevitable.

Facing such an opponent also gave Cavour a headache. He wouldn't even know where to start in trying to trick him.



Talk about unifying the Italian region? The other party didn't even see themselves as part of the Italian ethnicity to begin with, even with Lombard cultural tradition having been influenced by Italian culture.

This was also useless. All of Lombardy was in the process of being de-Italianized, receding back into the larger Germanic cultural circle.

After some thought, Cavour said carefully, This intelligence is extremely important. We must inform the British immediately. I will personally go to the British Embassy tonight to discuss countermeasures.

France alone was bad enough, but add Austria to the mix and there was really nothing they could do. Other than turning to the British, Cavour was powerless.

It's not that he lacks personal ability, it's just that the enemy is too powerful and the Kingdom of Sardinia is too weak to even qualify for equal dialogue.

Now the British were desperate to defend Sardinia, not only for strategic reasons but even more because they were tied to the loans they had granted to them.

After the Austro-Sardinian War, the economy of the Kingdom of Sardinia collapsed and relied entirely on British capital to stay afloat. Naturally, the Sardinian government borrowed heavily, and today the Kingdom of Sardinia can almost be considered a semi-colony of Great Britain.

Customs duties, salt taxes, tobacco and alcohol taxes, railways and ports were all mortgaged to the British. If the Kingdom of Sardinia were to collapse, the tens of millions of pounds lent by the British would be lost.

Unless the British government is confident that it can make France and Austria repay the money, the British financial consortium will not tolerate the downfall of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

There is no doubt that neither Napoleon III nor Franz would want to be the scapegoat in this situation.

That would be invasion, not inheritance. Only the heirs had ever inherited debts. No one had ever heard of invaders needing to bear the debt as well.

With such an astronomical sum of tens of millions of pounds involved, British prestige could not be relied upon either. In fact, whenever interests were involved, British prestige became useless.

On the other hand, Martini and the French Foreign Minister, Rouvieu, had a very pleasant conversation. Given Austria's support for France's annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia, it was difficult for the two not to reach an agreement.

In return, the French government promised to open up several overseas colonial ports to them and provide supplies to the Austrian navy.

Previously, the Austrian government had made agreements with Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands. With this agreement with the French, the Austrian navy had the ability to enter any ocean in the world.

Strategically, this was a step further in the Austrian Navy's globalization strategy.

Of course, the French stood to gain more. Now, as long as Napoleon III could withstand the pressure from various European countries, they could swallow up the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Then they could gradually crush the rebellion. After all, the French had plenty of experience in suppressing rebellions, and by exchanging ideas with the Italians, they might even spark new flames.

Failure to withstand the pressure would also be fine. At least the path to an Anglo-French alliance was cut off. The proud French cannot continue to play second fiddle to the British indefinitely.

Especially after damaging their core interests, even if Napoleon III was pro-British, the two countries would still end up confronting each other politically and diplomatically.

The atmosphere in the British Embassy in France was very strange at the moment.

To show his support for the Kingdom of Sardinia, the British Foreign Secretary Thomas had come in person to attend the Paris Conference, having arrived early.

Thomas asked seriously, Prime Minister Cavour, are you sure what you just said is true?

He couldn't afford to be careless; if France and Austria agreed to divide the Kingdom of Sardinia, they would be in a passive position. The British government, apart from shouting, would be powerless.

The only method was to take action in advance either to sabotage this Franco-Austrian cooperation or to pressure both countries into concessions by allying European nations.

Neither outcome was something the British government wanted to see. As for Sardinia itself, its fate was already very clear the only question was how much it would lose.

If diplomacy fails, they will lose everything; if it succeeds, they will end up bleeding heavily. Attempting to assassinate the Emperor cannot come without a price. The French still have to save face.

Cavour said with a sad expression, Mr. Thomas, how could I joke about such things?

This was the worst-case scenario. He didn't want to see this either. How could he make something up out of thin air? They didn't even know about the news of the arrest of the Carbonari assassins in Vienna, otherwise, the two men wouldn't have felt confused about Austria's actions.

Without this excuse, even if Franz wanted to outsmart the French, it wouldn't have been so smooth.

There was considerable opposition within the Austrian government to accommodating the French. Even Franz couldn't ignore everyone's outcries.

After the assassins were arrested, things changed. For political correctness, everyone now stood in opposition to the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Thomas paced a bit and then said, The Austrian government must have undergone some changes. Not long ago, our ambassador in Vienna sent word that the voice for restricting French expansion still held the dominant position within the Austrian government.

With Metternich, that old fox, around, he couldn't possibly be unaware of the threat posed by allowing French expansion.

In the last Austro-Sardinian War, Austria had the opportunity to annex the Kingdom of Sardinia, but they backed down. This is sufficient proof that the Austrian government has no ambitions against you.

Now, there hasn't been any change in the Austrian government; not a single member of the cabinet has been replaced, and political stances don't shift so quickly.

Thomas' analysis was very insightful; political stances cannot change arbitrarily, especially when they are accompanied by governing philosophies. Under the stable framework of the Austrian government, sudden policy reversals are even less likely.

#### Chapter 299: 48th Hell Dungeon

Even though Thomas couldn't figure out the reasons behind the change in the Austrian government's stance, he still took action immediately.

At this point, if he didn't step in personally, it would probably be a one-sided situation as soon as the conference began.

Just because everyone doesn't want to see French expansion doesn't mean that all countries will automatically oppose France.

The assassination attempt had already put the Kingdom of Sardinia at a disadvantage. Moreover, the Sardinian government still hadn't taken any action to punish the assassins as the countries wanted.

Perhaps from the perspective of the Sardinian government, the Carbonari are powerful and widespread, and this assassination attempt was simply the result of a few impulsive, zealous individuals, with no mastermind behind the scenes.

But in the eyes of foreign governments, whether it was premeditated or not, when such an event occurs, the senior members of the Carbonari cannot escape blame.

The best course of action the Sardinian government should have taken was to first arrest the high-ranking Carbonari members to show everyone their determination to crack down on the evil organization.

How could Cavour not see this? However, as a member of the Carbonari, he cannot turn the blade on himself.

The end result was that the Sardinian government arbitrarily arrested a few individuals in an attempt to deceive others. In the eyes of the outside world, this showed a lack of sincerity.

Initially, Thomas advocated that the Sardinian government eradicate the Carbonari, provide an explanation to the French, and then downplay the incident.

After understanding the political framework of the Kingdom of Sardinia, he rejected this impractical idea. It would be beyond the capabilities of the Sardinian government; if they remained passive, it would be one thing, but if they took action, it would be disastrous.

If they push too hard, they could become the architects of their own demise, and the Kingdom of Sardinia could collapse any minute.

At Schnbrunn Palace, Franz was too preoccupied to worry about the diplomatic battles raging in Paris. As a result of his tireless efforts, Empress Helenes belly began to swell again.

Compared to the next generation of Habsburgs, the fate of the Kingdom of Sardinia was clearly of secondary importance. No matter how persuasive Cavour might be, his offer could never surpass that of Austria.

Initially, the value of the Kingdom of Sardinia lay in its role as a buffer between France and Austria. Later, the British realized their fighting spirit and decided to support their unification of Italy to keep both France and Austria in check, thus balancing the power of various countries in the Mediterranean.

However, the Kingdom of Sardinia had the misfortune to meet Franz and was left crippled after the last Austro-Sardinian war. Otherwise, Sardinia, with its strength retained, wouldnt be so easily swallowed by the French.

Franz said affectionately, Frederick, slow down!

Ever since he learned to walk, the little boy had been restless. Filled with endless curiosity about the world, he was always causing trouble.

Of course, Franz was not worried about trouble. For a toddler less than two years old, making mischief could only look cute.

However, considering the medical standards of the time, he had to be careful. According to the rules of the Habsburg dynasty, the little boy only had four more years of carefree childhood before he had to start training on hell instance mode.

This was the responsibility and duty of being born into royalty. As long as one wasnt a fool, completing this training regimen would ensure that whoever was nurtured wouldnt end up as a waste.

Reality isnt like fiction; playboys are more likely to be found among the nouveau riche. Truly distinguished families have a much higher success rate in raising their offspring.

This kind of education may not produce geniuses, but it can certainly produce competent individuals in large numbers. For example, Franz's younger brothers, though perhaps unremarkable within the royal family, would undoubtedly be outstanding young men if placed in the outside world.

Franz currently still had headaches over arrangements for his younger brothers. In his view, it would be best to send them out to temper themselves.

Unfortunately, because of their status, such actions could easily attract unfavorable speculation from the outside world.

After years of living together, he was well aware that these younger brothers were no pushovers. While not yet on the level of the Almighty Eldest Brother, their proud and arrogant airs were already plain for all to see.

Last year, his second brother, Maximilian, got married and still lives at home, seemingly idle. The young couple had recently returned from a tour of Europe.

If he were truly a worthless wastrel like their father, spending his days in pleasure and pastime, hunting and horse racing with friends, it would be easier to deal with. But Maximilian is an idealist who wants to make something of himself.

A few years ago, based on Maximilian's interests and hobbies, Franz threw him into the Royal Academy of Sciences, allowing him to study plants with several botanists.

Of course, this was only a temporary measure. Now there are those within the House of Habsburg who are proposing that Maximilian be appointed regent of the Kingdom of Bavaria, but at Franz's instigation, the Cabinet strongly blocked this proposal.

Tyron said quietly, Your Majesty, members of the Mexican Constitutionalist Party have entered Vienna. Preliminary assessment suggests that they are seeking a Catholic prince to assume the Mexican throne.

Franz said plainly, Have people keep an eye on them and see who they have contacted.

Yes, Your Majesty! Tyron answered.

In the European cultural system, emperors and kings are all determined by bloodline. So when a country's royal family is extinct or exiled, they often go to other monarchs to find a royal to bring back.

Mexican emperors have always had a tragic fate. The first Mexican emperor, Agustín I, ended up on the guillotine. There's no way around it; he decided to follow Napoleon's example and crown himself emperor!

Although he led the Mexican independence movement and was highly respected within his own country, he lacked royal lineage, so no one recognized him as emperor.

In this respect, Washington was wise not to step on this landmine.

Having learned this lesson, no one in Mexico dared again to rashly claim the title of emperor. But for the constitutionalists, without an emperor, what constitution could they establish?

Following tradition, they once again look to the Germanic lands to find a king. After all, almost all kings in Europe came from the German region.

Now, with the prestigious Habsburg dynasty, known supporters of Catholicism, they naturally caught the attention of Mexican constitutionalists.

Historically, Franz's ill-fated younger brother, Maximilian, was tricked into becoming Emperor of Mexico under similar circumstances.

Franz ordered, Jenny, have someone bring me the information on Mexico.

Yes, Your Majesty, the maid replied softly.

There was no right to speak without investigation. Without understanding the specifics of Mexico, Franz also did not dare to enter this minefield recklessly.

Frankly, in this era, Mexico's foundation is quite solid. It is second only to the United States in strength in the Americas.

The total population approached eight million, of which more than half were of mixed race, 16% were white, and 30% were indigenous.

However, racial tensions in Mexico are not severe, and mestizos (mixed-race people) often identify as white.

Mexico is blessed with fertile land that, while not on par with its neighbor the United States, can easily support tens of millions of people.

Its mineral resources are particularly abundant, making it suitable for industrial development. Before the sharp devaluation of silver, this silver empire was quite prosperous, with no shortage of funds.

In theory, with such favorable conditions, even if Mexico's development lags behind that of the United States, the gap shouldn't be too wide.

The reality, however, is ruthless, with a stark contrast between heaven on one side and hell on the other.

Mexico, which should have developed, is now nothing more than an agricultural country that shows no signs of industrialization.

Everyone is busy fighting among themselves, who cares about national development? If they want to put this country in order, a great purge is inevitable. You have to get rid of the vested interests before you can talk about development.

Franz somewhat understands why the Habsburg dynasty was opposed to Maximilian serving as Emperor of Mexico.

It was really for his own good. In a situation where the Habsburg dynasty is unable to provide assistance, an idealist like him would not be able to handle such chaos.

Starting at a Hell Dungeon is only suitable for godly heroes to play. Even if it were Franz himself, he would rather go to Africa to establish colonies and start from scratch than deal with this mess.

#### Chapter 300: Peacekeeping Force

On November 26, 1858, the Franco-Sardinian conflict triggered by the assassination attempt officially began negotiations.

As host and victim, the French representative, Auvergne, said angrily, I believe everyone is aware of the situation. His Majesty, the great Emperor Napoleon III, was almost assassinated by an evil organization.

The perpetrators remain at large, but the peace-loving France sent a diplomatic note to the Kingdom of Sardinia immediately after the incident.

The results revealed a much deeper relationship between the Sardinian government and the evil organization than we had anticipated. Instead of apprehending the perpetrators, they sheltered them, disregarding France's well-meaning advice.

We hereby declare that if the Sardinian government is unable to apprehend the perpetrators, we do not rule out the possibility of taking strong measures.

Auvergne was clearly not a simple man. He refused to discuss compensation and insisted on apprehending the criminals to gain public sympathy and support.

The use of force was merely to demonstrate their determination. There was no mention of demanding territorial concessions or reparations from the Kingdom of Sardinia, which was completely different from their previous private communications.

Prime Minister Cavour was worried. Their opponent was obviously a professional, and on the issue of punishing the perpetrators, the positions of various governments were generally in agreement.

Cavour reluctantly replied, Mr. Auvergne, the perpetrators have been apprehended and their identities have been verified. This incident has nothing to do with the Kingdom of Sardinia.

This was agreed in advance with the British. The government of Sardinia could not admit any connection with this assassination attempt. Only a firm denial would give them a chance to get through this.

Auvergne scoffed, Enough. At this point, you still want to argue. Do you really think that France is easy to bully? These four perpetrators are all members of your countrys radical organization. This organization aims to annex the entire Italian region, and its activities are funded by your government. You tell me if theres no connection!

Seeing Auvergnes murderous look, Cavour knew that this time the French were truly angry. At this moment, he could not admit any connection with this incident.

Cavour explained, Mr. Auvergne, please calm down. These four perpetrators were only former members of the Carbonari, but they were expelled long ago for inappropriate behavior and have even emigrated.

It cannot be assumed that the organization is evil just because they were once members of it. As far as I know, Emperor Napoleon III himself was once a member of this organization. Do you consider His Majesty to be an evil person as well?

Auvergne scoffed: Nonsense. When did His Majesty ever join such an evil organization? He only heard that this organization was involved in the slave trade and the drug trade.

Unfortunately, when His Majesty infiltrated the organization to investigate, the evidence he had painstakingly gathered was taken away by the government of your country.

When it comes to playing dirty, whos afraid of whom? Auvergnes accusations of them engaging in the slave trade and drug trafficking were not entirely baseless.

In a large group, youll find all kinds of people. It wouldnt be surprising at all if there were a few slave traders and drug dealers among the Carbonari.

While others might hesitate, Auvergne wasnt afraid to offend them. No matter how powerful the capitalists of the Kingdom of Sardinia are, they dont have the ability to cause trouble in France.

At that moment, the Austrian representative, Marti, also chimed in, mockingly, Mr. Cavour, you seem to be beating around the bush. It seems that your government is really willing to do anything to provoke a war between France and Austria!

Cavour hastily explained: Mr. Marti, this is a misunderstanding. We had absolutely no intention of sowing discord between the two countries.

Although he did want to provoke a war between France and Austria, there was no way he could say so openly. Doing things in the shadows was fine as long as one did not get caught. But once exposed, there would be hell to pay.

Seeing things going badly, Thomas knew he had to step in. He had already cursed Caviours entire family in his heart. Even if they wanted to sow discord, they should not have been so blatant.

The assassination attempt was too obvious; no matter how hard they tried to shift the blame, it couldn't be pinned on the Austrians. Even if they wanted to change the subject, they shouldn't provoke the Austrians!

None of the great powers are easy to bully, and once they retaliate, it will definitely be a headache for the Sardinian government.

All right, the incident has already happened, there's no need to dwell on these irrelevant matters. Let's just discuss the compensation directly!

Auvergne sneered, Mr. Thomas, we should first clarify the issues before rushing to discuss reparations. Punishing the criminals should be the priority, not compensation.

Marti chimed in, For an evil organization dedicated to disrupting the balance in Europe and provoking war, we absolutely cannot show any leniency.

Thomas was taken aback, then countered, Mr. Marti, what do you mean by provoking war?

Marti solemnly stated, Just a few days ago, our Vienna police arrested several assassins who were planning to assassinate His Imperial Majesty the Great Franz. These assassins happened to be members of this organization.

They had also acquired French citizenship. The goal was clearly to provoke a conflict between France and Austria, destroy the Vienna System, and realize the ambitions of the Kingdom of Sardinia to annex the Italian territories.

Of course, perhaps their ambition is not limited to annexing the Italian region; their slogan is to rebuild the Roman Empire.

Hearing this explanation, everyone's expressions changed as they looked at Cavour differently. They had seen reckless behavior before, but never someone so inclined to create trouble like this.

Thomas asked in disbelief: Mr. Marti, is this all true?

Marti took out a document and said: Of course, this is information sent from our homeland. Everyone can take a look. It contains detailed investigation results. Everyone can verify the identities of these people. This assassination attempt and the one in Paris were planned by the same group.

According to investigations, these people had been lurking in Vienna for more than half a year. The one who financed them was the Sardinian government.

When Prime Minister Cavour heard this news, he almost fainted. Bringing it out into the open like this clearly indicated irrefutable evidence. Even if it was not entirely true, it would be at least a convincing fabrication.

In particular, the accusation that the Sardinian government had financed the assassinations was downright incriminating. With this charge substantiated, there was nothing more to say Sardinia was doomed.

At that moment, Cavour felt a deep regret. If he had known that there were people of such caliber among the Carbonari, he would not have allowed the government to fund and support them.

Although the organization was contributing to the unification of the Italian region, its ability to cause trouble was truly frightening.



To assassinate the emperors of France and Austria, to instigate war between the two nations, and then to unite the Italian region. Such a brilliant idea could not have been conceived by an ordinary man.

Even if someone dared to think it, an ordinary person would not dare to try to implement it. The slightest mistake would cost lives.

Now both sides had caught them in the act. Cavour now understood why the Austrian governments attitude had suddenly changed anyone faced with such a situation would seek retribution.

If they had received the news beforehand, they could have found a way to resolve it. Now caught off guard, they were completely denied the opportunity to act.

After briefly examining the information, Thomas decided to remain silent. At this point, intervening would require being prepared to face the wrath of both France and Austria. Clearly, the British government was not prepared to do so.

If France and Austria were mistakenly led to believe that they were behind the assassination plot, that would be a real problem.

At present, given the overall balance of power among the four major European powers, no single country can afford to confront two of them alone. Diplomatically, everyone must tread carefully.

Even though Russia won the Near East War, it was still Russia and Austria against Britain and France. If Russia took on Britain and France alone, the end result would still be the same as history.

Ivanov, the Russian representative who had been silent all along, suddenly spoke up: Given the current complex situation, in which the Sardinian government is involved in the assassination cases, it is no longer realistic for them to arrest the criminals themselves.

I propose that everyone form a joint investigation team to temporarily take over Sardinia and conduct a comprehensive investigation to eradicate this evil organization.

Thomas eyes lit up. This idea was not bad. International supervision was still better than letting France and Austria divide Sardinia. As for investigating the criminals, that was just a secondary concern.

He was also very interested in the potential mastermind behind the scenes. If they did not capture such audaciously reckless people, Thomas was also worried that one day they might also be targeted.

Thomas immediately agreed: Mr. Ivanov is right. We cannot let our guard down against this evil organization. If we do not capture them all, then the peace of Europe will be threatened at any moment.

The representatives of the various countries present were all astute individuals and quickly recognized the benefits of the joint investigation team, so they naturally voiced their support one after another.

As for the attitude of the Sardinian government, it was no longer important, and Prime Minister Cavour was at a loss for words. Refusing the entry of the joint investigation team at this point would mean facing the combined forces of France and Austria.

Although the Austrian government wasn't interested in Sardinia itself, they wouldn't miss out on the opportunity to preserve their sovereignty.

Only France and Austria had yet to express their stance. Marti adopted an indifferent attitude, leaving the chance to perform to Auvergne.

It would be easy for a joint investigation team to enter the Kingdom of Sardinia. But given the role of the Sardinian government in this incident, we have reason to believe that they would engage in sabotage, destruction of evidence, and even the silencing of people.

To ensure the smooth progress of the investigation, it is necessary to send military forces to the Kingdom of Sardinia. These forces will support the actions of the investigation team.

As the most affected nation, the French government is willing to send 80,000 troops into the Kingdom of Sardinia to guarantee the smooth progress of the investigation.

It was clearly a conspiracy; it's easier to invite the devil in than to send him away. Once the French troops enter Sardinia, it won't be easy to get them to leave.

Marti said cooperatively, We have no objections. If this evil organization is not eradicated, the peace of the European continent will be forever threatened. The Austrian government is willing to send three thousand troops into the Kingdom of Sardinia to collaborate with the investigation team in eliminating this evil organization.

With one nation sending 80,000 soldiers and another sending three thousand, the huge difference in numbers made it clear to even the most simple-minded individuals about the positions of France and Austria.

If it was about dividing the Kingdom of Sardinia, Austria wouldn't send such a small force. This clearly indicates that the Austrian government has no interest in the Kingdom of Sardinia.

All eyes turned to Auvergne, and it seemed that the deployment of 80,000 French troops to occupy the Kingdom of Sardinia was more than enough. Even if they claimed it wasn't for annexation, few would believe them.

Thomas objected and said, Mr. Auvergne, your troop deployment is excessive. We only need enough to ensure the smooth running of the investigation, and such a large force is unnecessary.

Moreover, with so many countries present, how can we allow one nation to bear all the obligations? Here's my proposal: the British government will send five thousand soldiers to help the investigation team and ensure the stability of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

It's not that Thomas didn't want to send more troops, but the British government couldn't muster more at the moment. Even if they could, it wouldn't be practical. It costs money to send troops.

The French wanted to annex the Kingdom of Sardinia, so it made sense for them to send more troops, as they could eventually recoup the cost. In contrast, this deployment of troops from England was more of a volunteer effort, fulfilling international responsibilities while balancing against the French.

Things got lively after that, with various countries chiming in with numbers 100 here, 200 there, until a 1,000-strong peacekeeping force was put together.

This fully demonstrated the spirit of internationalism. As for keeping France in check, everyone generously gave the British the opportunity to take the lead.

Feeling the pressure from the stares, Auvergne made some concessions: He cut 30,000 from his original number. However, this adjustment didn't change much in the end.

With the last-minute promise of one thousand troops from Russia, the combined forces barely reached ten thousand. It was clear that it would be almost impossible to counter France.

With none of the other countries willing to contribute more, Thomas was also helpless.

This military deployment was essentially voluntary. Other than gaining international prestige and visibility, there was little tangible benefit.

Unable to achieve military deterrence, they turned to political and diplomatic deterrence. Thomas immediately decided to play to their strengths and avoid their weaknesses.