

Roman Empire 341

Chapter 341: Rebellious Mentality

Does Maximilian have the capability?

The answer is: Yes!

As long as there is no congenital deficiency, a person raised by the royal family undoubtedly has abilities that far exceed most ordinary people.

However, abilities are often accompanied by arrogance, and this arrogance needs to be tempered. Only after restraining its sharp edges can one truly unleash their potential.

Maximilian simply hadn't encountered any setbacks. Under Archduchess Sophie's pampering, the first half of his life was smooth sailing, which bred his idealistic tendencies.

Idealism is a monarch's greatest enemy. Once tainted by it, the best outcome is to become a rubber stamp (figurehead). For a worse example, refer to Maximilian in history.

Franz sneered, saying, Is this the plan you prepared? My foolish brother, have you lost your mind?

With your governance plan, do you think Mexico isn't chaotic enough? Are you planning to set it ablaze, bathe it in blood, and then send yourself to the guillotine as emperor?

Franz wasn't just spouting nonsense. Maximilian's plan was indeed unreliable, with its core governing philosophy being liberalism.

Can liberalism be implemented in any country? Even in Austria, Franz dares not touch liberalism. In fact, no monarchy in the world would dare implement such liberalism.

Maximilian said unhappily, My brother, what gives you the right to say my plan will not work?

Instead of directly answering, Franz asked, Good, you've learned to question things, that's progress. Unfortunately, it's still far from enough.

Since you have a plan to govern Mexico, tell me, what is Mexico's primary social contradiction? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

Also, what's the distribution of resources in Mexico, and which regions are suitable for developing which industries?

It was Maximilian's turn to be dumbfounded. Such affairs were loosely handled by appointed bureaucrats in each country, leaving the rest of the people typically uninformed.

Being in faraway Vienna, Maximilian naturally couldn't have such detailed information. What Franz had provided him was only the basic domestic situation, and even the Mexican government hadn't conducted detailed statistics.

But in Franz's view, these fundamental aspects were essential for an emperor to grasp; otherwise, how could they formulate development plans?

For example, if you wanted to develop heavy industry and planned to build a steel mill, being ignorant of everything could lead officials to randomly choose a location. And then only to find later that the raw materials were thousands of miles away.

After hesitating for a moment, Maximiliano responded with a furrowed brow, Mexico's primary social contradiction is the conflict between reformists and conservatives, mixed with conflicts between republicans and constitutionalists.

As long as the political system issues are handled properly, these conflicts can be resolved. The subsequent questions are too tricky; I refuse to answer them.

Franz rubbed his forehead and said helplessly, It seems, my foolish little brother, you've truly been misled.

Systems exist because of people, and the perpetually problematic aspect is always the people, not the system. As long as you solve the issue of people, these issues cease to be issues.

There is no right or wrong in the face of interests. As a qualified emperor, you don't need to distinguish them so clearly.

You just need to understand who are your own people, who are the neutrals, and who are the enemies.

Your own people can be delegated power, neutrals can be persuaded, and enemies just need to be eliminated. It's as simple as that.

The fundamental social conflict in Mexico is interests, conflicts of interest between various classes, and conflicts of interest between different ethnic groups.

Only by thoroughly untangling the web of interests and resolving the root problems can other contradictions be easily resolved. If you can't solve the problems, then solve the people creating the problems.

This is just the basic condition for securing the throne. Ultimately, it depends on the country's development. At the very least, you must ensure that the people have enough to eat.

After saying so much, do you still think my questions are unimportant?

This is a lesson in political manipulation, the dark art of imperial power. Before this, Franz hadn't taught Maximilian, and no one in the House of Habsburg could have taught him either.

After listening to Franz's words, Maximilian was completely stunned. He never expected Franz to speak such words, overturning his worldview.

According to Franz's implication, to secure the throne of Mexico, the first thing to do is not to ease conflicts but to stimulate them instead, to use a civil war to resolve the people causing the problems.

Recalling the rebellion of 1848, the Austrian government used this opportunity to permanently solve the Hungarian problem, and incidentally resolved domestic social conflicts, introducing labor protection laws and abolishing serfdom.

Maximilian instantly understood many things, and the more he understood, the harder it was to accept. His elder brother who was hailed as the greatest monarch of the House of Habsburg in the past century actually did so many things secretly.

What rendered his objections ineffective was Franz's success. As a successful ruler, he should not be criticized. From 1848 until now, Austria's comprehensive national strength has more than doubled.

The country has become stronger, and the lives of the people have improved. Every industry has achieved significant development.

The shaken Maximilian didn't know Franz had already left. His mind was still filled with the echoes of Franz's words, wavering between affirmation and denial.

Seeing her husband's distracted state, Princess Charlotte asked with concern, "What's wrong, Maximilian? Are you feeling unwell?"

Awakening from his daze, Maximilian sighed and said, "Charlotte, do you think I'm not suitable to be an emperor?"

Princess Charlotte was taken aback. She had aspirations to become an empress! She had put in a lot of effort to persuade Maximilian to accept the position of Emperor of Mexico. Yet, in just a short time, he had become like this.

Princess Charlotte didn't think being an emperor was particularly difficult. Just look at Franz. On average, he only worked three to four hours a day, spending most of his time reading, keeping up with the news, drinking tea, and taking care of the children, and Austria was still developing very well.

"Why would you say that? You should believe in yourself, you're the best!"

Maximilian shook his head and said, "No, maybe I really am not cut out to be an emperor. I don't even know the basic elements of being one."

Princess Charlotte tried to reassure him, "What happened to make you so dejected? The Maximilian I know isn't like this. A little setback and you're beaten down already?"

Maximilian calmed himself down and said, "Just now, I went to see my brother with my future development plan for Mexico, hoping to gain his support."

Charlotte asked uncertainly, "He didn't agree to you becoming Emperor of Mexico?"

It's worth noting that the relationship between Franz and his brothers was very good. Normally, if Maximilian wanted to be an emperor, Franz would definitely support him.

That's also one of the reasons they dare to take on the mess that is Mexico. After all, Austria's influence extends deep into Central America. With just one telegram, Austrian troops could come over to provide them with military support.

Maximilian shook his head and said, "No, he didn't. He just told me some basic knowledge about being an emperor, which was quite shocking to me."

Maximilian didn't divulge the specifics. He still wanted to save face and didn't want his wife to know about these upsetting things.

Hearing this news, Princess Charlotte breathed a sigh of relief. As long as Emperor Franz didn't oppose it, the opposition from other members of the House of Habsburg was irrelevant.

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The only support they needed in Mexico was from the Austrian troops stationed in Central America, which just required Franz's approval.

Dont worry, there have been so many successful emperors throughout history, and each achieved success in different ways. Some of Cousin Franz's experiences may not be suitable for you, and that's normal.

As long as you govern diligently and love your people, I believe things will get better! Princess Charlotte continued to encourage him.

Maximilian said with a bitter smile, But the facts are staring me in the face, he has indeed succeeded. Austria was revitalized under his leadership, and the glory of the Habsburg dynasty was restored by him.

And all of this happened in just over a decade. Everyone gave him very high praise, and you could hear people shouting Emperor Franz in the streets and alleys.

As for governing diligently and loving the people, the latter two words might have some connection to Franz, but I can't quite associate the former two words with him.

If there was an election for the least diligent monarch in Europe, Franz would undoubtedly make the top three, along with perhaps Queen Victoria.

That's awkward because Britain operates under a constitutional monarchy, where the monarch's powers are restricted. Queen Victoria didn't involve herself much in politics, which is understandable.

But Franz is different. Whether as Emperor of Austria or Holy Roman Emperor, he ruled over monarchies. Despite being cloaked in the guise of constitutional monarchy, the emperor's power remains supreme.

Because political parties were too weak, this form of constitutional monarchy actually granted stronger imperial powers than most absolute monarchies.

In any case, Franz had succeeded. Austria's influence radiated to every civilized corner of the world, and the Habsburg flag was planted across the four oceans and seven continents.

From now on, the two words governing diligently are probably going to be crossed out on the list of royal virtues. At least in the Habsburg dynasty, everyone only cared about success. Who cared if the emperor was diligent or not?

In fact, this was just Franz's self-awareness. If he really had to manage everything, working himself ragged, he would only end up with a mess on his hands.

Instead, it was better to manage only the top hundred or so officials of the government and let them govern the country.

This principle is simple to state but difficult to implement. It took Franz a few years to forge this team of bureaucrats before finally finding the right balance.

Princess Charlotte said sternly, Maximilian, this is jealousy. That's not a good quality. Jealousy will make one lose their way.

Maximilian vented, You're right, I admit there is that element. From childhood until now, I've always lived in Franz's shadow. He is simply too outstanding.

His academic achievements had always left me feeling hopeless, except for marksmanship, which was an exception. Just when I thought I could finally breathe easy when his grades dropped, he started acting as regent and then became emperor.

Everyone knows the rest; Austria before his reign was just a European power, and now its a world power.

If he wanted to, he could follow the example of the British and declare that on Austrian soil, the sun never sets.

You have no idea how much pressure Ive felt having such an outstanding older brother. From childhood to now, Ive had to imitate him and learn from him.

But now, I find that the gap between us hasnt narrowed; instead, its widened even further.

I really wish he could be mediocre in some aspect, just to help me regain a bit of confidence!

Princess Charlotte, who knew her husband very well, understood that Maximilian speaking these words meant he was feeling better. She teased, At least your marksmanship is better than his.

It seems thats the only thing I can be confident about now, Maximilian said in resignation.

Charlotte broke into a radiant smile and asked, Then would you like the opportunity to challenge yourself?

Maximilian replied without hesitation, Of course, Ill prove myself in my own way, and show that Im not inferior to him!

Princess Charlotte joked, Really? Maximilian, are you that confident?

Maximilian confidently replied, Of course! Well, there might be a slight gap, but definitely not much. Please believe me!

Clearly, the royal education was not wasted. At the very least, efforts had been made to cultivate self-confidence, allowing one to regain it in the shortest time possible.

This was also due to cultural traditions; the majority of Europeans tend to have an overabundance of confidence. In such cases, while it can indeed unleash potential, it also makes one prone to foolish actions.

As a result, all of Franz's efforts went to waste, as Maximilian remained determined to venture into the massive pit that was Mexico, and nothing could stop him.

Upon receiving this news, Franz didnt know what to do.

Forcibly preventing him would likely ruin their brotherhood. Watching him go to his doom was also something Franz couldnt bear to do.

As for cleaning up after him, Franz made it clear he wasnt a nanny. Moreover, being so far away from Mexico, he couldnt really manage things even if he wanted to.

In a final effort, Franz urged, You need to think this through, Maximilian. Mexico isnt a good place, and if becoming an emperor was that easy, it wouldnt have easily fallen into your lap.

From what I know, many members of the Bonaparte family coveted the position, but Napoleon III blocked them all. He didnt even have the confidence to put his own brother in power.

Now, I can tell you definitively, the Austrian government won't invest heavily in supporting you because they won't see a return on investment.

Maximilian replied confidently, The Bonaparte family is indeed interested in the Mexican throne, but they lack legitimacy. The Mexican constitutionalists don't support them at all. Brother, please trust me, your investment won't be in vain. I will become a great emperor just like you.

Franz said sternly, Enough. As your elder brother, let me give you one final piece of advice: between nations, there are only interests, do not mix in personal feelings.

Don't expect much help from me. Austria won't support Mexico; it doesn't align with our interests.

As for the support you seek, I'm sorry, but all I can offer is moral encouragement at best, maybe verbal support.

With little confidence in Maximilian, Franz wasn't willing to allocate resources to fill that bottomless pit. The chances of recovering the investment were too low.

Since Austria has troops stationed in Central America, the Mexicans probably wouldn't dare to harm this unlucky brother. If push comes to shove, Austria could even send troops to rescue him.

Although Maximilian wasn't sure what Franz was thinking, he felt a chill in his heart. It was clear that Franz's decision indicated no confidence in him.

With collective opposition from family members and opposition from his brother who was Emperor, it meant that besides bearing the name of the Habsburgs, he would struggle to gain support from any family forces.

An emperor with family support and one without were entirely different concepts.

Given the strength of the Habsburgs, if they were to fully support him, Maximilian could become emperor with the backing of a military force and support from Austria's forces in the Americas.

With those resources, he could have easily overwhelmed domestic opposition without being beholden to the French. Unfortunately, none of that was available, so he still had to rely on the French.

It was pointless to say anything now; the Habsburgs had already concluded that he would fail and wouldn't invest heavily in him. Even his mother, who loved him dearly, didn't support him this time.

Chapter 342: Secretly Crossing the Wei River at Chencang

Unable to convince Maximilian, Franz directly ordered for his two other younger brothers to be sent to the military camp for closed-door education. Perhaps having learned her lesson, Archduchess Sophie did not intervene.

Up until Franz's rise to power, the Austrian military existed as a venue for aristocratic idlers to parade their affluence. Now, although still the landing place for these playboys, it was no longer about flaunting wealth, but about enduring grueling years of service.

Closed management was a given; once in the barracks, they bid farewell to the vibrant city life and train in the depths of the Alps day in and day out.

Due to strict management, many families saw the military as a school to educate the next generation. The number of playboys in Vienna also dropped to its lowest point in history.

The mandatory military service period was only two years. Due to population growth, ordinary soldiers typically served one year before transitioning to the reserves.

Noble sons were an exception, with their service starting at three years. Training officers took more time than training ordinary soldiers, so their service was naturally longer.

The training for noble officers is much stricter than for ordinary soldiers, with far more subjects covered. Typically, the first year is spent in the Alps or the Balkan Mountains.

With each days grueling training leaving them half dead, they naturally lacked the energy for unruly thoughts. Over time, many bad habits would be corrected in the military.

The difference in age between Maximilian and Franz was just over a year initially. Yet, when the military reforms took place, Maximilian had already completed his aristocratic grooming to become a commissioned naval officer, forgoing this chance for tempering.

With the relentless training preventing him from visiting home throughout the year, the doting mother Archduchess Sophie demanded that Franz open a backdoor for her Maximilian. However, when her plea was rejected, she kept delaying the matter.

Fortunately, there was a tradition of military service among the German nobility. Nobles who had not served in the military could not establish themselves in society.

Therefore, Archduchess Sophie can only delay time at most, as she didnt dare to let the two boys avoid military service altogether.

One could reference how each year, idlers were being tied up by their families and sent off to the military camp, occasionally accompanied by scenes of tearful farewells as if facing a life-or-death separation.

Of course, such scenes mostly occur among the nouveau riche. This is also why theyre looked down upon by the old aristocracy, seen as a lack of refinement.

To some degree, Franz's military reforms also relied on this tradition.

Although Austria did not reach the level of Prussia where the military owns the state, most high-ranking government officials did come from the military.

If a region requires total mobilization, government officials can quickly transform into military officers and form an army in the shortest time possible.

Due to the nobles sense of honor, none of them have complained to Franz about the harshness of the training, which has pleased him immensely.

Rights and obligations go hand in hand. If they refused to fulfill their own obligations, then this class had truly degenerated.

According to statistics from the Ministry of War, over 95% of Austrian noble offspring serve in the military, with the remaining few being those with physical disabilities or congenital deficiencies which prevented them from serving in the military.

Before the reforms, this number was 100%. The cultural tradition in Germany was to view military service as an honor, and this fine tradition was naturally preserved.

From the compulsory education stage, there were basic military training courses. In areas with limited resources, training may only involve drills and endurance exercises, while noble schools resemble junior military academies.

St. Petersburg

After years of struggle, the reformists finally overcame the conservatives and gained the upper hand. On March 25, 1863, Alexander II issued the Statutes Concerning Peasants Leaving Serf Dependence.

It stipulated the abolition of serfdom, with serfs gaining the status of free citizens and personal freedom along with general civil rights, including the right to own property, hold public office, litigate, and engage in commerce and industry.

Under the condition that all land remained the property of the landowners, peasants were allowed to use a certain amount of land but were required to pay redemption fees to the landowners.

Before signing the redemption contract, peasants still had to perform labor service or pay quitrent to the landowners.

Obviously, this Russian reform was imperfect. The land redemption fees were set by landowners, far exceeding the market value of the land, and in some places even several times higher than the market price.

The exorbitant prices for land redemption laid the groundwork for future social conflicts. In fact, conflicts erupted in many areas after the redemption prices were determined.

Alexander II was also greatly troubled. On one hand, he desired to undertake more thorough social reforms to propel the Russian Empire swiftly into a capitalist society. On the other hand, he was unwilling to rupture ties with the landowning nobility.

There is a distinction between different types of landowners in the Russian Empire, with the term predominantly referring to the nobility, as ordinary free citizens rarely owned land.

Carrying out social reforms would obviously harm the interests of the aristocratic class that ruled this country. These nobles naturally didn't want that, intending to shift the losses elsewhere.

This sentiment was not limited to the conservative faction; many individuals within the reformist camp were also prepared to sacrifice the interests of the peasants in exchange for the success of this social reform.

As for the potential social conflicts that might arise from such actions, they had been overlooked by them. After all, one cannot truly expect them to cut their own flesh, can they?

Minister of Interior Valuyev said in a low voice, Your Majesty, there were a total of 38 peasant uprisings in the country last month, all of which have been suppressed.

Peasant uprisings in the Russian Empire are nothing new; if there aren't a few outbreaks in a year, that would be news.

But dozens in a single month gave Alexander II pause. The Emancipation Manifesto had been issued, but this reform could not satisfy the serfs.

The revolutionaries had not been idle either, inciting the serfs to revolt and proclaiming that overthrowing the Russian government would allow everyone to own land for free.

The liberals were not as radical, at least they did not intend to overthrow the Tsar. The liberals believed the government should enact laws to regulate the price of land, not allowing the nobles to exploit the peasants.

The current serf uprisings in the country were largely instigated by these two factions.

Alexander II said, Continue to be vigilant. We cannot let them cause chaos at this critical juncture and disrupt this reform.

Yes, Your Majesty! the Minister of Interior hastily replied.

Fortunately, the Russians had won the Near East War. Taking advantage of the opportunity to reward those who contributed to the victory, Nicholas I liberated a batch of serfs.

These people were now the main force of the Tsars army. Although mostly in the lower ranks, as long as they remained loyal to the Tsar, it would still be the Tsars Russia.

Otherwise, the nobles who had been stirred into a frenzy would not have so readily compromised with the Tsar. Russias conservative forces had always been the strongest in Europe.

This is different from Austrias abolition of serfdom amid widespread rebellion. At that time, the Austrian nobility was frightened by the revolution, watching one aristocratic house after another being annihilated, fearing when their turn might come. They had no choice but to agree to abolish serfdom.

In the face of survival, everyones expectations naturally lowered. Lowering land prices was accepted. To preserve their lives and property, they had to choose compromise.

Currently, the Russian nobles did not feel any pressure to survive. Although there have been serf uprisings in Russia, they have not reached a significant scale. Without pressure, people naturally seek to make up for losses and even prepare to seize the opportunity to profit further.

Minister of Finance Knyazhevich said anxiously, Your Majesty, due to the reforms, it is projected that our tax revenue will decrease by another five percent this year, while fiscal expenditures will increase by fifteen percent.

If this continues, our finances may go bankrupt even before domestic reforms are completed. The Ministry of Finance suggests delaying the abolition of the tax farming system in some remote areas to reduce fiscal expenses.

The tax farming system is also a challenge faced by the Russian government. The Russian Empire was too vast, and before this, due to communication and transportation issues, the Russian government had no way to manage this vast empire and had to implement the tax farming system.

Now, with the emergence of the telegraph, communication issues can be resolved. The Russian government was prepared to abolish the tax farming system to remove barriers to the development of a capitalist economy.

However, this will greatly increase administrative expenses. Many taxes collected in remote areas may not even cover administrative expenses.

Alexander II asked, Just delaying the abolition of the tax farming system probably wont solve the problem, right? Our funding gap cannot be resolved with just a few million rubles each year.

Finance Minister Knyazhevich replied, That's correct, Your Majesty. This year's annual deficit is expected to exceed forty million rubles, and delaying the abolition of the tax farming system could save eight million rubles.

After some thought, Alexander II said, Even if we delay the abolition of the tax farming system, what about the remaining shortfall?

The regions where the tax farming system is primarily implemented in the Russian Empire are Siberia, the Far East, and Central Asia. Due to transportation reasons, the economies of these regions are not very developed, so delaying the reform would not have much impact.

Finance Minister Knyazhevich then proposed, Your Majesty, personally, I suggest selling Alaska to save on administrative expenses and at the same time obtain funds to cover the financial shortfall.

Alexander II shook his head and said, Selling Alaska is not an issue. Besides its large size, that land doesn't actually bring us any income.

Due to our relations with the British, if a conflict were to arise in the future, we would not be able to defend it anyway.

But the problem is, we cannot find a buyer. The only possible buyer, the United States, is currently mired in civil war and unable to extricate itself.

Indeed, before the discovery of gold, Alaska was a barren land. Within one million square kilometers of territory, there were barely ten thousand Russians settled there.

Even though the central basin had some arable land, in this era, land was not that valuable, especially undeveloped land.

Finance Minister Knyazhevich suggested, Your Majesty, let us seek buyers worldwide. If we cannot find a buyer, we can at least use it to pay next year's loan interest to Austria!

Alexander II shook his head, No, that would affect relations between our two countries. Austria is not only our ally but also our largest trading partner.

This had nothing to do with principles; it was entirely driven by interests. The existence of the Russo-Austrian alliance allowed the Russian Empire to maintain its hegemonic position in Europe. Even though they were busy with internal reforms now, no one had challenged their position.

However, if this alliance dissolved, the situation would be different. Not only would the French challenge their dominance, but Austria itself would become a challenger.

Turning a potential enemy into an ally was the greatest diplomatic achievement of the Russian government in recent decades.

When Austria was mired in revolution, Nicholas I did not take advantage of the situation. As a result, the Russian Empire gained Austria's support and won the Near East War, seizing Constantinople.

Nicholas I repeatedly emphasized the importance of the Russo-Austrian alliance before his death. Alexander II wasn't foolish; he knew this was a mutually beneficial alliance. It would be unwise to affect relations between the two countries for some minor gain.

Finance Minister Knyazhevich explained, Your Majesty, there is no need to affect relations between our countries. You only need to write Emperor Franz a letter explaining our difficulties and asking for his help.

Back then, when the Austrians were suppressing the Hungarian uprising, the late Nicholas I also prepared to send troops to help. However, as soon as they arrived at the border, the Austrians managed to handle it themselves.

In any case, the Habsburgs owe us this favor. Therefore, during the subsequent Near East War, the Austrian government has always stood on our side.

Knyazhevich was subtly reminding Alexander II to value the relationship between the two royal families and not to ignore national interests because of his pro-Prussian stance.

Alexander II nodded. Personally, he might lean towards Prussia, but he wasn't as foolish as Peter III to disregard the interests of the country.

Can't everyone see the Russo-Prussian relationship still hasn't improved?

After Bismarck's death, William I of Prussia, feeling deeply humiliated, never again bowed to Russia. Similarly, Alexander II never extended any goodwill towards Prussia either.

All of this was determined by national interests. On one hand, as the hegemon of Europe, the Russian Empire could not afford to bow down voluntarily. On the other hand, the sentiments of Denmark, this little brother, also needed to be considered. Just based on the fact that the Kingdom of Denmark had provided successive loans of twenty million rubles to the Russian government over the years, their closeness was evident.

Alexander II calmly responded, No problem, I will write this letter as soon as possible.

Seeing Alexander II accept this suggestion, Finance Minister Knyazhevich breathed a sigh of relief, feeling this money was indeed not easy to earn.

His earnest persuasion of Alexander II was not merely to deepen the relationship between Russia and Austria, although that was certainly a factor.

More importantly, he had received 100,000 guilders in lobbying fees from the Austrian ambassador to Russia. Knyazhevich was a smart man who knew what money he could and could not accept. Having taken the money, he had to deliver results.

If the Austrians wanted to further deepen the relationship between the two countries, Knyazhevich naturally would not refuse, as it was also in line with Russia's interests.

As for the issue of Alaska, he decisively ignored it. This was merely a pretext to continue deepening relations between the two countries, it was just a wilderness after all.

Chapter 343: Falling Into A Pit

On April 15, 1863, the Kingdom of Sardinia passed a nationwide referendum, electing Napoleon III as their king, marking the beginning of France's annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Undoubtedly, this referendum could not have been truly nationwide. Only the social elites who supported France were eligible to vote.

Over six hundred representatives of the Kingdom of Sardinia unanimously elected Napoleon III as their king. If this vote count were magnified by ten thousand times and rounded off, it would represent the entire population of Sardinia electing Napoleon III as their king.

Before this, all those implicated in the regicide case had been tried. Those sentenced to death were executed, those imprisoned were jailed, and those who fled were declared wanted.

In any case, regicides must be punished severely; this was the shared will of all monarchies.

As for the truth of the matter, it was no longer important; all traces had been eradicated by the French, making any attempt to overturn the verdict impossible.

Those who managed to escape from prison were all clever individuals who immediately cooperated with the French.

To put it bluntly, everyone understood that the so-called suspects were simply a fallacy. Those who truly got involved either fled or were executed.

Now that the French sought to annex the Kingdom of Sardinia, they inevitably needed to eliminate dissidents. However, this required a pretext; they couldn't just go around killing people arbitrarily. Fabricating false accusations provided a convenient solution.

With all the international delegations having left the Kingdom of Sardinia, leaving France as the sole power, they naturally had the final say in all matters.

After the referendum results came out, the international community was naturally in an uproar. Although other countries tacitly accepted France's annexation of Sardinia, it did not mean they would support it.

In public opinion, the French were heavily criticized. Many international figures also called for vigilance against French expansionism to prevent the outbreak of a second European war.

As the victims, the Italians organized a petition group, seeking help from European countries and hoping to use international pressure to force the French to abandon their annexation of Sardinia.

As one of the major European powers, the Austrian government also received petitions. After reading the heartfelt pleas submitted by the Italians, Franz had to admit they were touching, but unfortunately, they were of little use.

Franz sneered, Tell them that we regret this incident, but it was a disaster brought on by the Sardinian government itself.

Everyone must take responsibility for their actions. When the Sardinian government supported extremist groups, they should have considered the consequences it may bring.

After the incident, the Sardinian people also sided with the extremists, harboring the culprits who escaped. Now it's time for the Sardinian people to pay the price for it.

In a sense, the annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia by France is also a good thing.

From now on, the greatest enemy of Italian nationalists would no longer be Austria, but the ambitious French.

Annexing Sardinia was just the beginning. Once Pandora's box was opened, it could not be closed again.

Emboldened by the successful annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the French radicals would surely become more arrogant, and Napoleon III wouldn't be able to suppress them.

The proud French have always dreamed of world domination.

Without this stimulation, Napoleon III could barely keep things under control. Now, he was about to be pushed onto the warpath by nationalists!

Prime Minister Felix proposed, Your Majesty, should we support the Italians a bit and make trouble for the French, lest they get carried away?

Clearly, after annexing Sardinia, the French had become conceited, behaving as if they were the world's rulers.

Prime Minister Felix naturally felt very annoyed seeing this, wanting to teach them a lesson.

Franz smiled faintly and said, There's no need. Italian nationalists are also our enemies. Let the French deal with them now. Since the French have become arrogant, let them continue to be so for a while. The dominant power on the European continent is now the Russians and the maritime power is the British. If neither Britain nor Russia intervenes, why should we join in the fray?

Currently, Britain and Russia jointly dominate the world, with France and Austria being secondary challengers. Since their strengths are too close, France and Austria naturally refuse to accept inferiority.

Franz had no intention of initiating a challenge, as the odds of success were too low and the potential gains insufficient.

The most lucrative opportunities were at sea, but unfortunately, Austria could not compete with Britain, so they could only bide their time. On land, the profits are not high, and with so many countries on the European continent, any action could set off a chain reaction, making it easy for the Russians to drag Austria down.

France faced a similar situation, but even more trouble. Being the world's second power is not easy, especially when both on land and at sea, they are second best, inherently drawing the hatred of the top dogs.

Add the name Napoleon and no one dares ignore it. Napoleon III inherited the legacy of Napoleon, including the hatred that came with it.

If they had kept a low profile, it would be tolerable. But acting so arrogantly was bound to provoke a backlash from other countries, especially those of the older generation who had experienced the Napoleonic Wars.

Prime Minister Felix objected, Your Majesty, I'm afraid that won't work. In the current situation, even if Austria wanted to avoid it, we likely could not.

French influence has already reached deep into central and southern Italy. If we don't intervene, who knows what the overconfident French might do?

Simply put, there's already a conflict of interest between France and Austria in the southern regions of Italy, and a clash is just a matter of time.

Franz calmly said, It doesnt matter, that is a problem for the future. The Kingdom of Sardinia is not so easy to integrate. The French will likely remain calm on the European continent for the next three to five years.

After three to five years, the reforms of the Russian government will also be basically completed. The balance of power among the three major European powers will remain, and then we can move on to the next step of our plan.

Its not arrogance on Franz's part; its just reality. Is it so easy to annex the Italian region? Austria has been promoting ethnic integration for so many years, and the Austrian-Italian regions have made the slowest progress.

This is a cultural issue. Dont be fooled by the appearance of Italy as fragmented and weak; culturally, their heritage is very rich and not inferior to French culture.

Now in Lombardy and Veneto, locals have learned German and use it for writing every day, but the traditional Italian cultural heritage has not disappeared.

Over a period of more than ten years of effort, the only achievement was bringing back the Italianized Germanic peoples, while the goal of integrating the Italians themselves remained just a goal.

In comparison, Austrias efforts in Bohemia, Hungary, Croatia, and the Balkan Peninsula to promote ethnic integration have been much more successful.

Many smaller ethnic groups without cultural legacies have now been completely Germanized. Of course, the long-term management of the Habsburgs also played a role. Originally, these populations all recognized their rule.

What was the essence of ethnic integration?

The answer was: identification!

Once this was achieved, subsequent issues became easier to resolve.

If observed carefully, it could be seen that many minority ethnic groups within Austria shared very similar lifestyles and customs to the Germans.

Some groups were even called Slavic-speaking Germans, meaning their way of life, folklore, and customs had become Germanized apart from their language.

The main reason for this was that the aristocratic landlords came from German territories. The commoners unconsciously followed and imitated them, or under the feudal system, the aristocratic landlords ordered them to change their lifestyles.

These unique national conditions facilitated smooth ethnic integration. Even if the native ethnic languages still existed, they had become mere dialects.

This generation still largely spoke the dialects, but the next generation would only vaguely understand them. Especially for those living in cities, the heritage would likely be severed.

Even in rural areas, after two or three more generations, these languages and scripts would likely die out because there is no use learning them. People are inherently lazy. If a language was not used in the society they were born into, why bother learning it?

In this era, life expectancy is short, and people marry and have children at a relatively young age. Many people have children by the age of 17-18, and they become grandparents before they reach forty, which is very advantageous for ethnic integration.

As of now, German has become widespread. The generation that received compulsory education from a young age has embraced German culture.

In any city or town of the empire, German is used for communication and writing, except in the Italian regions. 70-80% of Italians still use Italian for communication in their daily lives.

Of course, due to the influx of other ethnic groups, the proportion of people who insist on using Italian has decreased to sixty percent of the total local population.

There was no way around it. Italian cultural heritage was not lagging behind. Coupled with frequent trade with the states of central Italy, this led to the current situation.

In rural areas, many had learned German but still habitually used Italian in daily life.

If not for initially freeing the serfs and using land grants to win over the peasants, cultivating their sense of belonging to Austria, the Italian territories under Austrian rule would not be so stable now.

The same cannot be said for the French, as the liberation of serfs had already been accomplished in the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Apart from courting local power brokers, the French government has no way to buy off the numerous common people, leaving room for nationalist movements.

Throughout history, the main force behind every revolution has always been the common people. When have you seen capitalists charging into battle?

Normally, as long as the common peoples lives were tolerable and their identification with the government was high, large-scale uprisings would not occur.

Ironically, gaining public identification was precisely Napoleon III's biggest weakness. The main reason the French people accepted him was because of his great uncle, not out of love for him personally.

Italians were delighted to see the Bonaparte family become the French royal family. However, asking them to pledge allegiance to the Bonaparte family is another matter entirely.

Initially, there was already a lack of recognition based on bloodline, and now being annexed by France? If their interests are further harmed, they will definitely revolt.

Promote ethnic integration? Sorry, France doesn't even have compulsory education. How could they provide compulsory education to the Kingdom of Sardinia first?

When their own interests were involved, the French people were highly sensitive. Even if the French government wanted to promote linguistic and cultural integration, they would have to start with compulsory education at home.

This raised a whole series of issues. In short, the French government could not accomplish it in the short term.

During the military administration period, the Kingdom of Sardinia would certainly remain obedient. But once normal order was restored, there was no telling what could happen.

Chapter 344: Emperor of Mexico

Schnbrunn Palace

The intelligence chief Tyron reported: Your Majesty, Archduke Maximilian and his wife left Vienna yesterday, heading for France.

Franz took a sip of tea, suppressing his displeasure, and said: Do not mind them, let them go!

Going to France at this time clearly indicates Maximilian intends to become the Emperor of Mexico with French support.

There's probably Napoleon III's involvement in this. The French need a noble puppet monarch, making it convenient for them to secretly control Mexico.

Maximilian stood out as there were no better options for the French. Any candidate would be accepted by the Mexican constitutionalists, except a member of the House of Bonaparte.

Initially, the only candidates were from the Houses of Habsburg and Bourbon. Undoubtedly, Napoleon III could not support a Bourbon Emperor of Mexico, as that would be awkward for him.

If the Bourbon dynasty revived in Mexico and did well, some might want them to replace the ruling French dynasty, which would be disastrous.

After all, the Bourbon dynasty is widely recognized as legitimate, much more so than the Bonaparte family, making the possibility of restoration very high.

Thus, the Habsburgs became the only choice. Napoleon III supported Maximilian not because of his outstanding abilities, but precisely because of his immature political thinking.

If he were truly outstanding, neither the Mexican constitutionalists nor Napoleon III would allow him to become the Emperor of Mexico.

What everyone needs is a puppet, not a capable ruler. The Habsburg dynasty is powerful, and if Maximilian were truly capable, he could easily turn the tables.

Now that the family is unwilling to invest in him, it shows Maximilian's lack of ability and low chance of success. If he were truly capable, Franz wouldn't mind giving him a hand.

The facts prove that this delusional youth cannot be taken seriously, even though Maximilian is no longer young.

Refusing to travel to Mexico on an Austrian warship to protest the family's lack of support, what kind of bizarre mind could conceive of such an idea?

He should know that such an escort also has political implications, showing the Habsburgs still back him.

With this, he could easily rally the support of Germans in Mexico and gain the support of the Central American colonies, while deceiving a bunch of old people and youngsters.

At this point, Maximilian went off to France, which was not only a slap on his elder brother's face but also a rejection of the family's political resources in the Americas.

Without these resources, he would only be able to rely on French support to ascend to power, making it much harder for him to break free from French control in the future.

For Franz, this was also a good thing, as he did not need to invest resources for the familys glory.

With Britain, France, and Spain eyeing Mexico, Austrias intervention would easily provoke everyones hostility. With the current situation, Austria can easily extricate itself.

Rather than joining the struggle for Mexico, it would be better to develop Central America. At least by consolidating this area, Austria could have a say when the Panama Canal opens.

If possible, Franz would delay the excavation of this canal as much as possible. Without it, the east and west oceans of the United States would be separated, forced to take a long detour by sea, and unable to link its two coasts easily.

This would greatly impact both its commercial trade and national defense.

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Paris

Napoleon III held a grand welcoming ceremony for Maximilians arrival. It was evident he was delighted, as a Mexican emperor free from Habsburg support was exactly what he needed.

Dealing with an idealist would be too easy for Napoleon III. He wasnt born into high status; Napoleon III had climbed his way up through struggle and effort to become Emperor of France.

This alone set him apart from all the monarchs of his time. If it werent for losing himself gradually in a series of victories later on, he might have become one of the greatest emperors in French history.

The day after the banquet, Napoleon III gathered with his advisors to discuss matters.

Though lacking historical prominence, it was this group, along with Napoleon III, who created Frances splendor in the mid-19th century.

Historically, Frances Second Colonial Empire was established during this period, its Industrial Revolution was completed under their leadership, and this was the era of Frances fastest economic growth and improvement in peoples living standards.

Napoleon III asked, What do you all think of Maximilian? Is he worth supporting?

Pelissier replied, Your Majesty, Maximilian is like a spoiled child. He actually ran off to Paris just like that! I bet the one in Vienna must be furious.

Napoleon III chuckled, Even better if hes furious. Otherwise, with the political maneuvers of the Habsburgs, we might end up suffering losses.

Under Franz's butterfly effect, Austria was reborn from the ashes, naturally becoming a mandatory lesson for monarchs of all countries.

Combined with the development history of the Habsburgs, this was compiled into a book titled Habsburg Family Politics.

Building an empire is not merely achieved through marriage alliances; it requires a lot more political maneuvering.

Otherwise, Europe wouldnt have just one Lower Half Empire like the Habsburgs.

(TN: Lower half iykyk)

The intricate web of marriages among the nobility involves more than just the Habsburgs. Yet only they managed to consolidate an empire, showcasing their political acumen.

Of course, adeptness in politics doesn't necessarily translate to military prowess; these two abilities often seem inversely proportional.

During its peak, the House of Habsburg controlled nearly half of the European continent, including Spain, most of Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, the Holy Roman Empire, Hungary, and more.

The Habsburg colonial empire stretched from North Africa to Mexico, being the world's first empire on which the sun never set, claiming to occupy half the globe.

This was no exaggeration. At their zenith, half the globe fell within the Habsburgs sphere of influence, though they could not directly rule it all due to the times.

Yet this massive behemoth was ultimately defeated by the French. Forced to divide in its later years to preserve itself.

Their ability to squander such strong cards proved that political strength did not equate to military prowess.

Back when the French were surrounded, any mistakes short of catastrophic ones would have allowed the Habsburgs superior strength to prevail.

Unfortunately, Charles V made numerous strategic blunders. Despite trading blows evenly due to their substantial power, he performed poorly in terms of strategy.

Of course, with their immense power, the Habsburgs could afford such losses, but Charles V depleted too much wealth, leaving his successors in dire straits and gradually losing their dominance.

Advisor Patti analyzed, Your Majesty, even if the one in Vienna Palace is willing to lend support, Maximilian might not necessarily appreciate it.

Having an outstanding elder brother might be a good thing for ordinary people, but not necessarily for a spoiled child.

Having lived his whole life in his brother's shadow, what Maximilian wants most right now is to achieve something great to prove his abilities.

Staying in Austria will never afford him that opportunity, and Franz cannot possibly be unaware of his brother's nature, which is why all of Maximilian's positions over the years have been merely empty titles.

Napoleon III frowned and said, This doesn't seem like a good situation for us either. Even with our support, if Maximilian is too incompetent, it will be very difficult for him to secure his position as the Emperor of Mexico.

The current state of Mexico is a mess that an ordinary person cannot clean up. Let's hope Maximilian can inherit some of the talents of the Habsburg family; otherwise, we'll have big problems ahead.

This was the contradiction. On one hand, the French needed a puppet emperor to easily manipulate Mexican politics for their maximum benefit.

On the other hand, they also hope the emperor has some capability to stabilize the situation in Mexico. After all, if there are constant internal conflicts, how can they profit?

After a discussion and considering various factors, the French concluded that Maximilian was still worth supporting.

Although there was a significant risk of failure, it was unavoidable; high investment often yields high returns.

Even if Mexico changed rulers, they would not be held accountable. But if they supported a capable leader who turned against them, they could lose everything.

At the end of 1863, Maximilian and his wife boarded a French warship bound for the Mexican Empire.

Franz, far away in Vienna, chose to ignore it all. Apart from Archduchess Sophie sending a scathing telegram berating Maximilian, the rest of the Habsburgs opted to watch from the sidelines.

From the moment he left Vienna, Maximilian and his descendants were tacitly renounced from succession rights in the House of Habsburg.

However, Maximilian, busy drafting court etiquette guidelines aboard the warship, seemed unaffected. It was as if leaving the support of the Habsburgs was inconsequential.

Princess Charlotte felt somewhat uneasy, but immersed in the prospect of becoming Empress, she didn't voice her concerns to her husband.

Chapter 345: Intervention Alliance Forces

Maximilian's intention to take the throne as Emperor of Mexico irked quite a few people.

While domestic republican opposition is expected, given that it was the French who facilitated his rise, even within the constitutionalist faction, there are concerns about the continued expansion of French influence prompting many to adopt a wait-and-see approach.

Before Maximilian arrived in Mexico, Lincoln had already made his stance clear, opposing French interference in Mexican affairs and condemning the French for violating the Monroe Doctrine.

These are all minor issues. They even interfered in the internal affairs of the United States, who would still care about the Monroe Doctrine? The French simply ignored Lincoln's protest.

The Spanish have already occupied the island of Hispaniola, Austria has extended its hand into Central America, and the British are keen on reclaiming the western territories. Naturally, the French don't see anything wrong with coveting Mexico.

They didn't directly annex Mexico but would merely support a puppet government to rule which was already quite a restrained approach. At least it looked better than Austria's plan to turn the Central American countries into autonomous provinces.

Not only did the Union government oppose it, but even the Confederate government also objected to Maximilian assuming the throne of Mexico. They feared that the development of the Mexican Empire would harm their interests.

Against this backdrop, in March 1864, Maximilian ascended to the throne of Mexico, known in history as Maximilian I.

With everyones attention focused on the American Civil War, there was little interest in the newly ascended Emperor of Mexico. This coronation ceremony could be said to be the worst in the past century.

The guest list was unimpressive. Given the distance, one couldnt expect European nobles to make the journey personally, and even sending representatives would require expenses, wouldnt it?

The setting was austere, but that didnt matter much since it was just a formality. Ultimately, it all depended on performance; failure would be considered austere, while success would be seen as a prudent use of resources.

The key issue was the Republican Party causing trouble. On the day of the coronation, they organized a massive parade, demanding the Emperors ousting.

At the coronation venue, a few delusional teenagers even tried to disrupt the ceremony, though the guards reacted quickly to prevent this malicious act.

This was a warning from the Mexican hardliners telling Maximilian I in this unique way: Youre not welcome here. If youre smart, youll cooperate with us.

Shortly after Maximilians coronation, both the North and South launched a major decisive battle.

In mid-April 1864, at the border between Pennsylvania and Ohio, the Northern government assembled an army of 420,000 troops, while the Southern government gathered 340,000 troops.

The outcome of this battle would directly affect the future course of America.

If the Northern government lost the battle, Pennsylvania would fall, and the industrial region of the Great Lakes would be under the control of the Southern government, leaving the North virtually powerless.

Conversely, if the Southern government lost, they would lose the advantages they had painstakingly accumulated thus far.

The Northern government could then capitalize on their victory to reclaim Ohio and Maryland, and with their numerical superiority, crush the Confederacy.

The attention of all nations gathered here, and as bystanders, they all hoped to see neither the North nor the South emerge victorious, which was the ideal outcome.

Since the outbreak of the Civil War, the industrial output of the United States has declined by 43%, and agricultural production has dropped by 37%.

States like Ohio, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, and Kentucky, which became battlefields, suffered the most severe losses.

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The total population of the United States has dropped below 30 million, and the war has inflicted serious wounds on the nation. It would take at least ten years to recover to pre-war levels, and the states involved in the conflict would continue to bear the scars for the next 20-30 years.

The more devastating the war was for the Americans, the greater the benefits obtained by European countries. Arms dealers, in particular, made a fortune.

Other industries also reaped rewards. Take Austria, for example. With the absence of the United States as a major grain exporter, international grain prices rose by 13%. As Europe's largest agricultural exporter, Austria naturally emerged as the biggest winner.

In addition to agricultural products, Austrian industrial and commercial products also appeared in the American market. The total export trade to the United States increased by 46% compared to before the war.

Britain and France were also not to be outdone, seizing the opportunity to expand their presence in the Americas. Especially in the industrially weak Southern government, most of the industrial and commercial products used now came from various European countries.

The Northern states didn't fare much better either. After transitioning their economies to support the war effort, the production of other civilian industrial and commercial products naturally decreased significantly, with European-made goods flooding the market.

Despite France seizing the opportunity by stockpiling weapons early on, the British benefited the most economically.

As the world's industrial powerhouse, John Bull surpassed the total exports of all other countries in industrial and commercial products, naturally becoming the biggest beneficiary.

Since Britain, France, Austria, and Spain decided to reach a consensus on the American issue, the envoys of the four nations frequently met to exchange views, occasionally with some disagreements.

Austrian representative Drucker proposed, Gentlemen, the critical moment has arrived. Regardless of the outcome of this battle, we must intervene.

If we act too late and the sides determine a winner, the cost of intervention will be much higher. I propose organizing an intervention alliance immediately and directly intervening in the American Civil War.

French representative Alfredo opposed, Mr. Drucker, it is too early for us to act now. Regardless of who wins this battle, both sides will suffer heavy losses and will not have the ability to launch a full-scale counterattack in the short term.

This war will continue for a long time, and the best option is to use the civil war to exhaust American strength as much as possible.

If we intervene now, both the Confederacy and the Union will retain significant military strength, which is not conducive to our subsequent activities in North America.

These are just excuses. The key issue is that the French are concentrating on handling Mexican affairs, and they have too few troops available to intervene in the American Civil War now.

Interests are always tied to strength. The greater their deployable forces now, the larger their potential gains after the war.

As old major powers, none wanted to invest effort without reaping benefits. It was unrealistic to dream of taking advantage without contributing.

What Alfredo really wanted was to buy time. Once France had freed up its forces, it could intervene in the American Civil War while maximizing their interests.

In his view, a joint intervention by the four nations of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain would face no difficulties against the United States. Not just the presently battered America, but even the United States at its full strength would be unable to simultaneously resist all four.

The British representative Mark Oliver spoke: The American Civil War has dragged on to this point, and both sides are already exhausted, with little possibility of continuation.

If not for both sides being on the verge of collapse, this decisive battle would not have occurred. From the battlefield situation, it is clear to all that the preparations of both North and South for this battle were very hasty.

If we continue to wait, nobody can guarantee what will happen next. What if, after determining a victor, both sides agree to a compromise?

As the third party, if we miss the best opportunity for intervention, how can our interests be ensured after the war?

I support Druckers proposed plan. We must organize an intervention force immediately to prevent the situation from escalating and damaging our interests.

With a vote of two to one, the Spanish representatives decision became the deciding factor. If they sided with the French, the issue would remain unresolved at two to two; otherwise, it would be a case of the minority yielding to the majority, and the proposal would pass.

The Spanish ambassador Francisco said: To my knowledge, communications between the Northern and Southern governments have never been completely severed. To avoid the worst situation, I support forming an intervention force.

It was not surprising that the Spanish ambassador, Francisco, made the decision that best served Spains interests.

If this intervention plan were to fail, the major powers of Britain, France, and Austria could afford the losses, but not Spain.

The Americans had long cast covetous eyes on Cuba, which happened to be Spains wealthiest colony, bringing them substantial wealth every year. Faced with a unified United States, Spain did not have confidence in retaining control over it.

In the face of core interests, the Spanish were not willing to take risks. Therefore, they showed great enthusiasm for intervening in the issue of dividing the United States. Even with numerous internal conflicts in Spain, they joined the intervention alliance.

British envoy Mark Oliver continued, Three to one, the proposal passes. Now lets summarize the number of troops each country will deploy to ensure the smooth progress of the intervention.

Great Britain can mobilize its American fleet, including five ironclad ships, 16 sail battleships, and another 38 various types of warships, along with 80,000 troops.

This represented almost all of Britains mobile armed forces in North America, indicating they were prepared to spare no expense in thoroughly dividing the United States.

The Austrian envoy Drucker considered and said: Our American fleet can also be deployed. On the West Coast, we currently have 3 ironclads and over 30 other naval vessels. We can also deploy 50,000 ground troops.

This represented most of Austria's current military forces in the Americas. Had they not received reinforcements from home recently, they could not have mustered so many troops.

After all, the situation in Central America was still unstable, and it was clear that local militias couldn't be relied upon. If they intervened in the United States and lost control of their own colonies, it would be a disastrous outcome.

The Spanish envoy Francisco lacked confidence as he spoke: We can mobilize the Cuban fleet, comprising over 50 warships, including one ironclad ship. As for the army, we can deploy 70,000 troops.

Unfortunately, Spain was truly in decline. If not for keeping up appearances, that single ironclad would not have existed either. As for the seventy thousand troops, this included forces composed of local indigenous peoples, whose combat effectiveness was uncertain.

The three turned their gazes to Alfredo. As the main ground force contributor in the intervention alliance, France had not been shy about boasting previously. Now it was their turn to perform.

After a moment of hesitation, Alfredo made a decision: We can deploy the American fleet comprising over 50 warships, including 3 ironclad ships. Additionally, our army can deploy 60,000 troops.

Regardless, France could not lose face. If needed, the Mexican issue could be postponed as this operation directly impacted the post-war division of interests in the Americas.

America was everyone's backyard, and it wouldn't be long before it became a hunting ground for the four nations. In fact, it was already everyone's hunting ground; they just needed a treaty to formally delineate each nation's sphere of influence.

Chapter 346: Joint Defense Treaty

As the intervention coalition was being secretly formed, the American Civil War continued unabated. If the warring factions knew that whoever emerged victorious would face pressure from the four major powers, it's doubtful that they would be as enthusiastic about the conflict.

Of course, this was just speculation. At this stage of the war, both the North and the South had no choice but to continue fighting.

Looking at it from another perspective, with the backing of the four major powers, even if one side lost, they wouldn't lose everything, which probably kept their morale relatively stable.

At the outset of the war, all nations supported the Southern government. However, as the Southern government gained the upper hand, suddenly everyone was selling weapons to the Northern government.

It was this delicate balancing act between the North and the South that allowed the war to continue until now. Otherwise, if the four nations had fully supported one side, the outcome might have been decided within the first year.

With a patchwork of efforts, the English, French, Austrian, and Spanish amassed over a hundred warships and 260,000 troops. No one would believe this was made without prior preparations.

These are just the mobile forces, not the entirety of the four nations' strength in the Americas.

If they really went all out, not to mention the well-established powers like Britain, France, and Spain, even Austria, which has only recently established itself in the region, could muster hundreds of thousands of troops.

Universal military service in the colonies is the reason these major European colonial empires were able to develop and expand. Otherwise, relying solely on the government troops to defend the colonies, the British would be in dire straits.

With only a standing army of a few hundred thousand, how could the British Empire defend its 30 million square kilometers of territory?

Including the 80,000 troops Britain deployed this time, most of them came from the Canadian colonies. The cost of mobilizing domestic troops would have been too high.

Upon receiving news of the intervention alliances establishment, Franz in Vienna canceled plans to mobilize troops from Africa and Southeast Asia.

The strength of the intervention alliance is already sufficient to overturn the balance of power between the warring sides. After all, regardless of who wins, neither can eliminate the other swiftly.

With four major powers cheering on the loser, the opportunity to turn the tables is right in front of them. No matter what, they won't simply concede!

Historically, the rapid collapse of the Confederacy in the later stages was mainly due to the absence of the anticipated intervention forces. Without seeing any hope of victory, they surrendered to the Union.

This point is evidenced by the fact that the Southern governments top leadership faced no repercussions after the war, which indicates the role they played in the latter stages of the conflict.

Do not assume that after years of civil war, the elite troops of the North and South became formidable forces.

In reality, this elite status is relative. While there has been significant progress compared to before the outbreak of the war, on a global scale, the US military is still not formidable enough.

Unfortunately, the losses in the war have been too great, and soldiers are being replaced one after another. There has always been a shortage of junior officers, and with the rapid rate of losses, there is no time to train new ones.

The issue of unqualified junior officers and an influx of new recruits is a common problem faced by both the North and the South. Initially, the Southern government had the advantage in terms of military strength, but that advantage gradually diminished throughout the war.

At this point, it doesn't matter who wins or loses between the North and the South. In any case, neither side will emerge as a true victor.

Franz considered and said, Send an order to Governor Himmell to accelerate organizing immigration from the United States as quickly as possible. It won't be as easy once the war ends.

Yes, Your Majesty! replied Colonial Minister Josip Jelai.

The endeavor to lure immigrants away from America is not exclusive to Austria; Britain, France, and Spain are also enticing immigrants, although perhaps not with as much intensity.

Before the enactment of the Homestead Act, Austrias efforts to lure immigrants were almost always successful. The main reasons limiting the speed of immigration at that time were a shortage of ships and the time needed for settlement.

During this era, with vast expanses of land and sparse populations in the Americas, colonial empires who knew better followed suit in attracting immigrants.

After Lincoln issued the Homestead Act, many people hesitated. Since they could obtain land by staying in America, why take the risk of going elsewhere?

Even if they were required to serve in the military, they could have someone else take their place, right? Many labor companies offered services for replacing soldiers, for a fee of just two hundred dollars, sparing individuals from personally having to go to the battlefield.

By this stage of the Civil War, there were already over 500,000 Black soldiers on the battlefields, as both North and South organized massive Black military units.

Of course, the poor who couldnt afford substitutes were still the main force of immigration. Not only can they not afford to hire someone to take their place in military service, but they also lack the funds to develop land.

After all, farming required money. Without money, one cant even afford seeds, but Austria at least provides interest-free loan services.

If someone were to tally the numbers, they would find that paying to hire replacements for military service had quickly become mainstream since 1864. In some states, the number of Black soldiers among newly enlisted troops has already surpassed that of white soldiers.

If in a certain battle, its observed that both sides mainly consist of Black soldiers, theres no need to panic; this is simply normal.

The extensive organization of Black soldiers by state governments is not without reason. The biggest advantage is that they can sign employment contracts with labor companies, sparing themselves the headache of conscription and the worry of heavy casualties, while also avoiding causing unrest among constituents.

Since they are elected by the people, governors and legislators, faced with the harsh reality of casualties, are reluctant to enforce conscription and cant force the populace to serve unless they want to lose votes.

As good governors and legislators serving the people, they could turn a blind eye. And if they still fell short of the numbers needed, state governments could simply hire from labor companies.

Both the Union government and the Confederate government have limited authority. When states are willing to muster enough troops, its already giving face to the central government. If they still want to be picky, believe it or not, everyone will resort to nonviolent non-cooperation.

For reference, during the cruelest times of the American Civil War, prisons in various states were already empty. To muster enough troops, officials were willing to go to great lengths.

Foreign Minister Wessenberg spoke up: Your Majesty, according to the intelligence weve received, European countries are all planning to colonize the African continent. Napoleon III is preparing to convene an international conference to partition Africa.

The partition of Africa was happening ahead of schedule. This was not good news for Austria. Before this, only France and Austria were focusing on Africa.

Moreover, with France expanding its colonization along North Africa, separated by deserts, conflicts between France and Austria on the African continent had been minimal.

But if an international conference were convened, attracting countries from around the world, Austria would no longer be able to quietly amass wealth.

Franz asked doubtfully, Do you know Frances intent behind this?

Due to historical factors, the African continent has always been dubbed the Dark Continent, and European countries have not attached much importance to it, considering it as a wild and uncivilized land.

If there were better options available, Franz would also prefer not to colonize Africa. Unfortunately, the world has already been partitioned, leaving only this last continent.

Currently, France and Austria are the countries with the largest investment and greatest gains in Africa.

Convening an international conference now, tearing the veil, and attracting European countries to the African continent, is clearly not in the interest of the French.

No one wished to see more parties vying for the same pie. If France and Austria tacitly cooperate and exclude competitors, it is not impossible for them to divide the African continent between themselves.

Wessenberg analyzed: We cannot be certain yet. The Foreign Ministry speculates this may relate to the Italian issue.

After annexing the Kingdom of Sardinia, the French have had a hard time internationally, and all countries have increased their vigilance against them.

Now, by bringing up the African continent, its highly likely that the French government wants to shift everyones diplomatic attention and reduce their wariness against them.

This is the aftermath of being too aggressive. Napoleon III merely annexed a small kingdom like Sardinia, yet it caused unease in the international community, a greater impact than Franz's resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire.

One wonders if Napoleon should feel proud or distraught. Being watched so closely makes everything difficult!

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The Anti-French Alliance has always been a sword hanging over their heads. Once they cross the line, this alliance, which has long been dissolved, could revive at any moment.

Just look at the neighbors reactions, and it will all make sense.

Spain has deployed 100,000 troops on their mutual border, which is 60% of their domestic force.

Belgium has deployed 30,000 troops to guard against the French, which is nearly 70% of their total national force as if they're already prepared for a French invasion.

As a neutral country, Switzerland also has a large number of reserves stationed on its border with France, without even as much vigilance against their archenemy, the Habsburg monarchy.

The Kingdom of Prussia has deployed 120,000 troops in the Rhineland, with about 150,000 reservists ready locally, more than the combined forces on the Russian and Austrian borders.

Austria has deployed 100,000 troops in Lombardy and 50,000 troops in Württemberg, with the combined militia reserves of these two kingdoms exceeding 500,000.

Because the German Federal Empire's armies belonged to the governments of the various states, the federal government lacked the authority to mobilize troops, so only the border states had troops stationed on the French border. However, they have signed a joint defense treaty with Austria, Belgium, Prussia, and Spain. Once the French invade, everyone will join forces to fight them.

Reportedly, even Switzerland intended to join this joint defense treaty, only hesitating over concerns of losing its neutrality.

Seeing this situation, it's evident how tough the French have it. Their neighbors are all guarding against them like they're bandits. How far are they truly from facing an anti-French alliance?

All of this was the lingering impact of France's annexation of Sardinia, with surrounding nations forming a solid wall to deprive France of any path for further expansion.

And undoubtedly, the mastermind behind the establishment of this alliance is the British. As the troublemaker of Europe, how could they not stir things up?

Originally, France wasn't planning to join. With Austria's strength, even without uniting with other countries for defense, they wouldn't fear the French.

Later, considering the possibility of Napoleon III acting irrationally, it would be beneficial to have a few more allies to share the pressure in case things escalate.

The British not only initiated a joint defense treaty against the French but also extended the same treatment to Austria. However, the contracting parties were limited to Prussia and the German Federal Empire.

Linking the European powers in joint defense was Britain's way to restrict the expansion of France, Austria, and Russia.

However, due to the Russo-Austrian alliance, the two escaped this constraint, leaving France to uniquely enjoy this treatment of being encircled by wary neighbors.

Disbanding this alliance wouldn't be easy. Everyone is focused on defense, without any plans for aggression. Any rash action could potentially provoke a strong reaction and lead to unpredictable consequences.

Franz asked uncertainly, Are you suggesting that the French are planning to use the interests in Africa to provoke conflicts among the various countries and thus break through the encirclement?

Foreign Minister Wessenberg responded, No, I believe the French are just sending us a signal. The interests in Africa are so significant that I don't think the French would easily give them up.

Moreover, there aren't many powerful countries among the contracting parties of the joint defense treaty that are capable of carving up Africa. Even if there are conflicts of interest in the colonial issue, they are insignificant compared to the security of our homelands.

While the encirclement of this joint defense looks formidable, in reality, if we withdraw, the remaining countries cannot threaten the French even if they unite.

Instead of exerting great efforts to deal with the surrounding countries, it would be easier for them if we simply withdrew, and the French must know this too.

By releasing this signal now, they likely intend for us to proactively approach and negotiate these issues.

This was a gambit. The French are betting that the Austrian government cannot abandon its interests in the African continent.

Despite Austrias rapid expansion in Africa, it still only occupies a small portion relative to the entire continent, controlling less than one-fifth of Africas actual territory.

This was very much like Napoleon III. Having advanced this far, he has not shied away from gambles.

In the current situation, this kind of sure-win gamble isnt much. Austria indeed cannot afford to relinquish its interests in Africa. It doesnt require much; with just another five years, Franz can complete Austrias strategic layout in Africa.

In that case, the Foreign Ministry will initiate contact with the French. As long as the interests are suitable, there is nothing we cant negotiate, calmly stated Franz. He was not a sore loser. Besides, Austria is not a loser yet. As long as the desired interests are obtained, the process is not important.

The joint partitioning of Africa by France and Austria is also a good choice. As for the joint defense treaty, its effectiveness depends on interests. If necessary, it can be canceled when the time comes.

Chapter 347: Not The Fault of The War

Plans can never keep up with rapid changes. The American Civil War, originally thought to end soon, was still in a stalemate by 1864.

Battles involving hundreds of thousands of troops could not be concluded in just a day or two. Neither the North nor the South could afford to lose the war, and the commanders on both sides were experienced and prudent, turning the battle into a war of attrition.

While the Confederate army had slightly stronger combat capabilities, the Union army had greater numbers. Along the frontline spanning over a hundred miles, numerous fierce battles took place resulting in victories and defeats on both sides, making the overall situation evenly matched.

The butterfly effect exerted its powerful force. With assistance from other nations, the Confederacy was strengthened while the Union was weakened, directly reflected on the battlefield.

In New York, President Lincoln was on the verge of collapse as he looked at the requests for reinforcements. It was the nth time they had asked for reinforcements. Since the decisive battle began, he would receive three or four pleas for reinforcements basically every week.

If anyone dares again to suggest using the nations strong power to engage in a war of attrition and wear out the rebels, Lincoln will definitely go up and give them a few good slaps.

Industrial advantage? Does the North really still have an industrial advantage, especially with the support of the great powers?

The industrial manufacturing capacity of the Southern rebels is limited. But cant they simply buy what they need?

The Union could no longer blockade Confederate ports. The two navies had already engaged in numerous fierce battles, but the Union navy still could not achieve victory.

Economic advantages were even more nonsensical. Did they really think the capitalists were all patriots willing to selflessly sacrifice for the nation?

Class interests dont equate to personal interests; making money comes first. As long as theyre making profits, who cares if the United States splits apart?

Capital knows no borders is not a joke but a reality. As long as they make money, even if they leave the United States, they can still live very comfortably.

On the contrary, those who selflessly supported the federal government to win the war, when it came time to divide the spoils: Sorry, this is an era where strength speaks for itself.

Although the Union had a larger economic scale, in reality, the wealth it could mobilize was not much different from that of the Confederacy.

At least the Confederate cotton bonds were more favored in the international capital market than the Union war bonds. Britain, France, Austria, and Spain all accepted many bonds from the Southern government to support them.

But for the Union government, they had to pay either in foreign exchange or gold and silver. Who would recognize the US dollar?

In the end, the tragic discovery was that the real advantage of the Union government was its larger population, allowing them to compete with the Confederate government in terms of manpower.

However, this advantage is not without limitations. With the losses becoming increasingly devastating, public war-weariness began to rise.

Since the beginning of the decisive battle, on average, the Union governments army loses the equivalent of one regiments worth of troops every day on the battlefield, and handling requests for reinforcements from the front lines has become President Lincolns daily routine.

President Lincoln, looking weary, asked, My Secretary of War, please tell me, how much longer will this battle last?

Secretary of War Simon Cameron pondered for a moment before responding, Im sorry, Mr. President, but only God knows the answer to that question. What I do know is that we cannot afford to take risks right now; the federal government cannot afford to lose this battle.

Secretary of State Seward added, Then can we at least reduce the casualties? At the current rate of losses, its estimated that if we dont suppress the rebellion soon, the Union will have no future.

Due to the butterfly effect caused by Franz's actions, a large quantity of weapons and equipment was sold to both the warring Union and Confederate governments shortly after the outbreak of the war. Both sides were expanding their armies at a rate that exceeded the same period in the original timeline.

Correspondingly, training times for soldiers were drastically reduced. On average, each soldier received less than 40 days of training. At the most critical times, soldiers of the federal government were sent to the battlefield with less than a week of training.

The consequence of this is the casualty situation on both sides, exceeding what was in history for the same period. The loss of a large number of young and able-bodied individuals has already threatened the federal governments rule.

Secretary of War Simon Cameron explained, State governments are enlisting criminals, thugs, and numerous colored soldiers to bolster numbers, and we have not objected. The subpar quality of these soldiers inevitably leads to increased casualties, although we have managed to reduce the mortality rate among white soldiers.

President Lincoln immediately interjected, Secretary of War, such remarks are unnecessary. They are all federal soldiers; there should be no distinction based on race! Do you understand?

Some things can be done but not said. Political correctness has become a point of contention even in this era of the United States.

In Richmond, Confederate President Jefferson Davis also faced the same problem. The brutal casualties had exhausted the Confederate government.

The scarcity of human resources became the biggest challenge for them. Although labor export companies were active, the cheap laborers from Africa they provided were not readily usable; they required rigorous training to become qualified laborers.

If the Union government were willing to compromise, Davis wouldnt mind stopping the war immediately. Continuing the conflict with the limited manpower of the Confederate government would make it difficult to contend with the Union.

Of course, they were not afraid of the Union. If it came down to a fight to the bitter end, they believed they could drag the Union down with them. At least they perceived themselves capable of doing so.

In less than four years, the Civil War had reduced Americas total population by five percent despite the influx of large numbers of Asian and Black immigrants.

The Union, spanning the East and West coasts, had the advantage of receiving Asian immigrants, while the Confederacy, due to its geographical position, mainly received African immigrants.

Currently, at least 400,000 active-duty Black soldiers are fighting for the Confederacy, with the total number of Black soldiers killed in action exceeding 250,000.

To incentivize slaveowners to bring their Black slaves to the battlefield, the Confederate government even offered double compensation. Trained Black slaves were seen as excellent cannon fodder, whereas newly arrived Black laborers were often unruly.

To boost the morale of black soldiers, at Robert E. Lees insistence, the Confederate government released black slave soldiers from slavery. Huge rewards were also offered, for example: for every two enemy soldiers killed, a black slave, or equivalent wealth, would be rewarded.

A direct consequence of this policy was that hardly any prisoners were taken in the armies composed of Black soldiers.

President Jefferson Davis inquired with concern, Mr. Lee, have the British agreed to intervene?

A snake cannot move without a head. As the member exerting the greatest effort in the intervention alliance, Britain was deservedly the leader.

Now that the North and South are in a stalemate, it's the perfect time for intervention. The intervention of the coalition forces would instantly break the balance of power between the two sides.

Even if just one country intervenes, it could be the straw that breaks the camels back, disrupting the power balance between the North and South.

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General Robert frowned and said, The British still seem content to watch us tear each other apart. Anyway, at this stage of the war, there are no winners.

In this decisive battle, our casualties have already reached 380,000, including 110,000 killed. The Union is approaching 600,000 casualties, with at least 180,000 killed.

Even if we win this battle, we won't have the ability to expand our gains in the short term, and the Union won't fare much better. Everyone is already reaching their limits.

Vice President Alexander objected, That may not necessarily be the case. The greatest impact of the battle lies in the morale of the troops, not just in the number of casualties.

No matter how severe the casualties, as the victor, we will still have several hundred thousand mobile troops. With high morale, we can continue to fight.

At that time, the losers will have no choice but to rely on the intervention forces. Only by intervening in the most critical time can they maximize their benefits.

This is a fact. A highly motivated army often defeats a much larger but demoralized force. After this major battle, a force of several hundred thousand troops can already influence the outcome of this civil war.

However, this still doesn't pose a threat to the intervention forces. With two hundred thousand fresh troops joining, they can instantly turn the tide on the battlefield. For greater benefits, the British are naturally willing to wait until the outcome is clear before intervening.

This is the difference between reality and theory. In theory, the Union has a total force of around two million, while the Confederacy has one million. The intervention forces, at only two hundred thousand, would not have much impact.

In reality, total force does not equal the force that can be deployed for combat. States first prioritize their own security rather than committing all their forces to combat.

Secondly, there are combat-ready units. Taking the Northern government as an example, if half of the two million troops are considered main forces, they could crush the South two to three times over.

However, in reality, not even one-tenth of the main force is available. Except for the few hundred thousand relatively capable troops, the rest are an unorganized mob.

You cannot really expect a rookie army of sixteen thousand to split into two waves and train a million elite soldiers in less than four years.

Historically, the outcomes between the North and South were often decided by battles involving tens of thousands of combatants. If both sides had been cautious and unwilling to commit their elite troops in a gamble, such large-scale battles would not have occurred.

After a period of silence, Jefferson Davis spoke, Secretly contact the Union government and explain the situation to them. If they dont want the British to take advantage of us all, they should acknowledge our independence and end this war.

General Robert shook his head and said, I dont think theres much hope. While negotiating privately could minimize losses, the politicians in the Union government cannot afford to take on this responsibility.

I dont believe they would be willing to stake their own political lives for patriotism, or even face retaliation from the capitalists in the future.

This is a matter of reality; selfless individuals are always in the minority. In history, after being in a disadvantageous position, didnt these people from the Confederate government also become traitors for their own interests?

Hoping the Northern politicians would all be selfless patriots was about as likely as winning the lottery.

Under the military intervention of the great powers, causing a split in the federal government, the politicians could still shift the blame.

In this era, the European powers were formidable. Failure was not due to their own incompetence, but to overwhelmingly powerful enemies, it was truly a case of it not being the fault of the war itself.

Footnote: - It is not the fault of the war itself. Generally used to excuse the failure of the war; Failure is the will of the heavens. It is based on a saying from the Historical Records - Annals of Xiang Yu: Yet now my soldiers are stuck in this predicament, this is Heavens abandonment of me, not the fault of the war/battle.

Chapter 348: The Most Valuable and The Least Valuable

In Central America, after three years of operations, Governor Hmml had more or less dealt with the local power brokers.

Those willing to accept incorporation naturally remained in high positions, while those who resisted obstinately were naturally harmoniously dealt with. Austria had already accumulated rich experience in this regard.

Take Nicaragua as an example. The country has a total population of 300,000, with the majority being indigenous people. There are only tens of thousands of white immigrants and mestizos. What do they have to resist against Austria?

The other Central American countries are largely similar, not very large geographically, yet sparsely populated. If they tried to go to the mountains for guerrilla warfare, Austria wouldnt even need to act. The local Native American tribes would simply crush them.

The Habsburg monarchy used to be their co-rulers as well; their ancestors had even sworn allegiance to Charles V. Stretching the point a bit, they can just about claim some legitimacy, coupled with the iron fist that could suppress dissent, the remaining people simply supported Emperor Franz's rule.

Since the interests of the common people have not been harmed, there is naturally no resentment.

The main reason for the independence movement back then was because Spain was weakened by the French, and mine owners and capitalists didn't want to pay taxes to Spain. Bureaucrats wanted more power, so they went along with the independence movement.

Perhaps it's not appropriate to use them; how could small countries have so many capitalists and mine owners? In reality, it was one or a few families who wanted independence. Otherwise, Central America wouldn't have split into so many countries.

It is all irrelevant now. With the influx of immigrants, even if some are discontent, they cannot make big waves.

Within the Governors Palace of San José, Central America, Foreign Affairs Officer John Radford of the Immigration Bureau reported: Governor, Colombia has rejected immigrants from entering the Panama region. They also require immigrants to be dispersed and not concentrated in one place.

Undoubtedly, ever since Mexico paid an intelligence tax to the Americans, everyone has learned their lesson and become cautious of incoming immigrants.

Colombia naturally lacks immigrants, and Panama has not yet become independent. Its current territory covers an area of 1,200,000 square kilometers, with a population of just over two million including around 100,000 people in Panama.

If there were no restrictions on immigrants, who knows when the Republic of Colombia might change hands?

This is also the reason why the various South American countries have not developed. Because the native population is simply too small, they dare not rashly accept large numbers of immigrants.

Taking the Republic of Colombia as an example, only 400,000 to 500,000 immigrants are needed to turn them into a German country.

In this context, it's natural for everyone to be cautious. Rejecting German immigrants from entering Panama is a concern that one day Austria might turn this area into a colony.

There's nothing to criticize about this; Governor Himmel indeed has given attention to Panama. He can't expect them not to resist, right?

The Panama region is the most suitable for digging a canal in Central America. This is an essential part of Austria's strategy for America and must be kept in their grasp.

Governor Himmel asked, Did the congressmen we bribed not help speak up?

In this era, corruption was common in all countries, especially the emerging republics like Colombia which were truly a confusing mess.

Immigration official John Radford explained, Our public relations activities have been met with interference from external forces. It's been preliminarily assessed that the British are behind this, and the French may also be involved.

Many pro-British congressmen openly opposed it, putting forth the Austrian threat theory, arguing that once we gain a foothold in Latin America, we will inevitably seek to expand, with Colombia being the first target.

Hmmel had nothing to say. He admitted to having an interest in Colombia. Although there were no definite plans yet, the voices for expansion into the Colombian region had already emerged.

There was no other reason than Colombias weakness. In this era of the strong preying on the weak, it was no surprise that they became everyones target.

Of course, directly attacking the Republic of Colombia was impossible. For Austria to send an expedition force all the way to South America and wage such a war, the exorbitant war costs alone would deter the Austrian government.

Austria is not Spain. If Franz were the King of Spain, then there would be no question that he would definitely try to reconquer South America.

In this era, the feudal remnants have not been completely eradicated yet. Pro-monarchy factions exist in various South American countries. With these people in place, as long as the enemy is defeated militarily, they can re-establish their rule.

So even if the war costs were a bit high, it would be worth it to gain greater development space.

But Austria should forget about it. Hispanics and Germans are completely different ethnicities. To gain their acceptance, it would require the same approach used in Central America.

First, cripple them by force, establish control forcibly, and then organize a large number of immigrants to dilute them into minority groups to manage them.

After hesitating for a moment, Governor Hmmel made a decision: Bribe local officials in Panama to create a fait accompli for immigration.

Forge immigrant identities. It can be from France, England, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and so on. Send someone to arrange it. These immigrants must be settled.

If Panama cannot accommodate them, then settle them inland in Colombia. The government will fund the purchase of land for them.

If anyone tries to disrupt our plans, find a way to deal with them. This concerns our future national policy, and no one should be allowed to sabotage it.

This isnt Austrias first batch of immigrants sent to Colombia. However, previously it was a minor activity, with a few thousand sent each year. Due to the American Civil War, everyone treated it as normal immigration, and it didnt attract the attention of the Colombian government.

With time passing, the number of immigrants sharply increased, and this covert immigration activity was eventually exposed.

The number of Germans has sharply increased, occupying one-fifth of the white population. If not restricted, they will soon outnumber the rest.

Oh, dont be misled by the one-fifth figure; in reality, its just a few tens of thousands. With such a small population base, theres no other way around it.

In just the Panama region, there are now twenty thousand Germans, prompting the Colombian government to intervene.

You see, the total population of the Panama region is only a hundred thousand, and Germans make up nearly one-fifth. This represents one-fifth of the total population, not just one-fifth of the white immigrant population, but surpassing the sum of other white immigrants.

In theory, local power will fall into German hands within a decade. This is a characteristic of democratic countries; the ethnic group with the most votes naturally has the advantage.

John Radford replied: Understood, Governor. The immigration bureau will go all out to complete this mission.

Governor Himmell nodded and sighed. If it weren't for the fact that the American Civil War was nearing its end, he wouldn't have wanted to make such a big move.

Immigration was easy to arrange but difficult to settle. Land in the Americas wasn't valuable, but it wasn't just a matter of dividing a piece of land; it was also necessary to ensure the normal lives of the immigrants.

In less than four years, 380,000 immigrants were settled in Central America, with over 60,000 more sent to Colombia. This was a remarkable achievement.

Now it was the last wave of immigration. Once the Civil War ended, with various industries in the United States ready to flourish, opportunities would arise, and the desire to leave would undoubtedly decrease significantly.

Forced by circumstances, Himmell had to make a big move. But just as it started, it was discovered by the Colombian government.

Nevertheless, the immigration strategy was successful. Austria established its rule in Central America, and the settled population became the foundation of its governance.

After the final wave of immigration ends, the local German population will exceed half a million. This figure already surpasses 20% of the total population and is 1.5 times the number of other white immigrant populations.

If the Austrian government was willing, they could immediately establish a Central American kingdom.

Of course, Franz would definitely not do such a thing. Even if he were to support a kingdom, it would be a matter for the future.

Having just experienced a civil war, it's enough to make the American people reflect for twenty years. During this period, they should remain quite subdued.

Governor Himmell asked, Mr. Klaus, how much is our fiscal revenue this year, and how much will the fiscal deficit increase?

Strategically successful yet economically a heavy loss. Even though the colonial government was very hardworking and Central America was quite prosperous, the bottomless pit of immigration meant government annual revenues were simply inadequate.

Finance Minister Klaus calculated and replied, This years revenue is approximately 7 million guilders, which is a 21% increase compared to last year. The main sources of revenue are still minerals and tariffs, with transaction taxes also showing rapid growth.

As for this years deficit, it depends on the number of immigrants going forward. Essentially, all immigrants have applied for interest-free terms, and although they repay the principal, we still bear the interest.

Preliminary estimates suggest that this years fiscal deficit will be between 6 to 7 million guilders. If we are to launch an attack on the indigenous tribes, there will be an additional military expenditure of 700,000 guilders.

With a fiscal deficit as high as a hundred percent, there are probably not many countries willing to take on such a colony. Unfortunately, this is the cost of mass immigration.

An interest-free loan of 200 guilders per person, would be 20 million guilders for 100,000 immigrants. Even if the banks cut the government some slack with a three-year interest calculation, thats still 600,000 guilders in interest expenses per year.

Without considering other expenses, the interest costs alone are astronomical. Fortunately, its only for two years. If it were any longer, the colonial government would certainly not be able to bear it.

Hmmel calculated and said, Large-scale immigration will only last for this final year, and the loan interest expense will be at most two years.

Starting next year, there will be no more expenses for immigration and settlement. Mr. Klaus, please calculate when we can break even and how long it will take to recoup our investment.

Hmmel could not help but be concerned. For the sake of the Central American colony, the Austrian government had invested tens of millions of guilders and was still investing more.

It could be considered Austrias most expensive colony established, yet the returns were not so optimistic.

Apart from being able to extract a few tons of gold and about a hundred tons of silver each year, the only other viable option is to sell timber and export some agricultural products.

Resources like copper, iron, lead, zinc, aluminum, and others dont hold much value in extraction currently, as raw ore is difficult to sell at a good price on the international market.

As for refining industrial products, its better to forget about it. It would require substantial capital investment, something the colonial government cannot afford.

The correct path for the colonial economy lies in cultivating cash crops, extracting precious metals, and selling industrial raw materials.

Klaus thought for a moment and said, After the immigration work is completed, it will take another five years to achieve a preliminary balance between income and expenditure.

However, to recover the cost of investment, it will take quite a long time. It may require twenty years, or even longer.

This is a major dilemma facing the colonial government. The high investment in the Central American colonies has sparked a lot of opposition domestically.

Unlike developing African colonies where there were many domestic beneficiaries and losses were not so severe, in the Central American colonies, only a minority of immigrants came from Austria, with most coming from the United States. These immigrants are the ones benefiting.

Many within the government were criticizing the Central American strategy, demanding that forces invested in Central America be withdrawn and redirected to the African continent instead.

However, under Franz's insistence, these voices were suppressed. But attacks on the Central American colonial government never ceased. Himmel urgently needed to produce results to prove to everyone the correctness of establishing the Central American colonies.

This is extremely difficult to achieve. Firstly, the strategic value is not yet evident in the short term; otherwise, there wouldn't be so many dissenting voices.

Economically, it's still unfortunately a net loss situation. Even after calculating the implicit benefits, the colonial government is still in a deficit.

It could not even provide industrial raw materials to Austria, as the industrial raw materials produced in these regions were not lacking in Austria itself.

Chapter 349: The Junkers' Machinations

At the Schönbrunn Palace, Franz was still anxiously awaiting the outcome of the American Civil War. As for the controversy surrounding the high expenses of the Central American colonies, he simply didn't pay it any mind.

Where the wool is, there the sheep must be sheared. Without the Central American colonies, Austria would not have been able to profit significantly from the American Civil War. Now, these profits were being spent on the development of the Central American colonies.

Since the Americans were footing the bill, why should he feel distressed?

Obtaining control over Central America and establishing a foothold in America's backyard was already a significant gain.

While the Panama region was not acquired, Austria's influence had already begun to spread. Franz's goal was simply to delay the opening of the Panama Canal and cause some disruption; actually acquiring territory was not necessarily the objective.

With different perspectives, the way of viewing problems naturally differs. Franz's definition of overseas colonies had always been: a source of raw materials in the current stage, and a future sphere of economic and political influence for Austria.

Actually, the British did quite well in this regard, and the strategic concept of the British Commonwealth was quite successful. The only problem was that the United States and the Soviet Union were too powerful, while Britain was in decline.

Weakness is the original sin; with Britain's diminished strength, the British Commonwealth naturally couldn't fulfill its intended role. However, it still retained some economic and political benefits, which can be considered better than nothing.

Austria could completely emulate this model. The unique system of the Holy Roman Empire was naturally prepared for such a situation.

Enfeoffed principalities or autonomous provinces, both considered the interests of all parties while maintaining national unity. As long as the central government was strong enough, this empire would be unbreakable.

Foreign Minister Wessenberg said, Your Majesty, we have just received news that a large-scale rebellion broke out in Russian Poland three days ago.

A rebellion in the Russian Empire could only be considered a trivial matter. Ever since the reforms of Alexander II, such incidents have occurred several times almost every year.

However, if the rebellion is in the Polish region, the situation is different. Since the partition of Poland among Russia, Austria, and Prussia, the Polish question has become a matter of great concern for the three powers.

Poland had once been formidable, but arrogance often leads to downfall. Undoubtedly, Poland became arrogant, treating the German and Russian lands as their hunting grounds.

When Poland was powerful, it didn't matter much. Unfortunately, in the late 18th century, the Kingdom of Poland declined, while its neighbor, Russia, became stronger.

Motivated by hatred and self-interest, the three powers Russia, Prussia, and Austria decided to partition Poland, permanently resolving the issue of this adversary. The once powerful Poland thus met its demise.

As the leading power, Russia seized 62% of the Polish territory, occupying approximately over 460,000 square kilometers; Prussia seized 20%, approximately occupying 141,100 square kilometers; Austria seized 18%, approximately occupying 121,800 square kilometers.

Given its illustrious history, the Polish people naturally could not tolerate being ruled by the three powers. In the 19th century, the Polish independence movement became an important part of European history.

This was when the governing abilities of each nation were put to the test. Undoubtedly, after decades of Germanization efforts by the Prussians, and Austria also pursuing ethnic integration, Russia, which had done nothing, became the primary target.

Having obtained the most land and population in Poland without digesting it, coupled with the corrupt rule of the Russian government, Russian-occupied Polish territories became the headquarters of the Polish independence movement.

However, rebellion was also contagious. Although Austrian Poland had remained stable, close monitoring was still necessary.

Franz asked, Are there any foreign powers involved?

No European power wants to see the success of reforms by the Russian government, and Austria is no exception. A decaying Russian Empire serves the interests of all parties.

The most typical example was when the Russian government was raising funds for reforms from abroad, it faced obstruction in the capital markets. Besides the Russian government's poor credit, the political stances of various nations were also an important factor.

With the existence of the Russo-Austrian alliance, Austria would not directly stab Russia in the back, but other European countries might, especially Russia's archenemy, John Bull.

Foreign Minister Wessenberg replied, Yes, and more than just one nation. According to our intelligence, we can preliminarily determine that both Britain and France have funded the Polish independence movement, and the Prussian government has also provided them assistance.

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Additionally, multiple other European countries have covertly provided conveniences to the Polish independence movement.

Recently, the Polish independence organization has been very active, seeking diplomatic support everywhere. There have even been sightings of them within our borders, with the anti-Russian faction providing them cover.

Franz rubbed his forehead. Indeed, it was so. One cannot help but admire the Russians ability to sow hatred. Even with the Russo-Austrian alliance in place, the anti-Russian sentiment within Austria remains strong.

It could be said that if he were to change his pro-Russian foreign policy stance today, the anti-Russian faction could become mainstream in Austria tomorrow.

This is Russias own fault. Since the Russo-Austrian alliance was signed, they have often acted as the boss, naturally causing dissatisfaction among many. Especially as Austria grew stronger, the voices of discontent grew louder.

Franz pretended to be oblivious, knowing well that the Russo-Austrian alliance couldnt be torn apart now. Likewise, he wouldnt foster any so-called pro-Russian faction.

Needless to say, Franz knew that among the multiple European countries covertly supporting the Polish independence movement, Austria was also included. As long as it did not openly undermine the Russo-Austrian alliance, Franz encouraged everyone to exercise their subjective initiative.

Were it not for concerns that an emboldened Polish independence organization could threaten the security of Austrian Poland, the Austrian governments supporters of Polish independence would likely be even more numerous.

Franz pondered and said, Warn the domestic anti-Russian faction to restrain themselves and not give the Russians any excuse. Even if we must undermine the Russians, its best to arrange some proxies we cannot get directly implicated.

Yes, Your Majesty, Wessenberg replied.

He was the one who least wished to cause trouble. Once a diplomatic conflict erupted, he as the Foreign Minister would be the one responsible for cleaning up the mess.

In Berlin, Roon, who served as both the Minister of War and the Minister of the Navy, had been feeling restless lately. Ever since he learned about the Junkers plot to instigate Polish independence, he had been extremely uneasy.

Since the onset of the revolutions, the anti-Russian faction within the Kingdom of Prussia had gained the upper hand. The plan for Polish independence had been proposed at that time, with the main objective being to create conditions for the unification of Germany under Prussian rule.

However, it was suppressed by Frederick William IV and the plan was indefinitely shelved. This delay led to a change in the European situation, and with Austrias revival, the opportunity for Prussian unification of Germany went up in smoke.

To change the passive stance in diplomacy, there were voices within the Prussian government advocating for improved Russo-Prussian relations, among whom Bismarck was one of the leaders.

Unfortunately, Bismarck was assassinated in St. Petersburg, and the Russian government brushed it off, conveniently blaming the Polish independence organization, sparking another wave of anti-Russian sentiment.

Of course, these reasons were insufficient for the Junker nobles to provoke the fearsome Russians. The outwardly strong but inwardly rotten Russian Empire was still frightening at least Prussia could not afford to provoke them.

The main reason that prompted them to make this decision was the opening up of colonies in Indochina. Although they only occupied the Kingdom of Cambodia, it still brought considerable benefits to the Prussian government.

At this time, there was a division within the Junker aristocracy. A faction, consisting of those nobles who had gained substantial returns from overseas colonial activities, stood together with the capitalists, advocating for increased investment in the navy.

This pro-overseas colonization faction of the Junker nobles was mostly capitalist Junker nobles, also known as the Maritime Junkers.

The other faction was the traditional Junker nobility, or Continental Junkers. They were concerned that if the strategic focus shifted to the oceans, their dominant position in the military would cease to exist.

After all, army officer positions were almost monopolized by the Junker nobles. From a young age, Junker nobles received specialized military training. In terms of professional competence, even with fair competition, it was not something civilian officers from ordinary backgrounds could compare to.

But it was different at sea. Although the current navy directly transferred from the army still had Junker nobles in dominant positions, in practice they found that excellent army officers did not necessarily make excellent naval officers. Many army officers who entered the navy were unable to perform their duties satisfactorily.

The Germans rigid characteristic came into play if they couldnt handle it, they were told to leave. Without waiting for others to act, they themselves drove these unqualified officers out of the Navy and back into the Army.

As some left, others naturally rose to take their place, and the number of civilian officers in the navy increased day by day. Once the navy became the focus of the Kingdom of Prussia, it became difficult to maintain their dominance over the military.

For their own interests, the Continental Junkers had no choice but to undermine the navys development. The navy could be allowed to develop, but their control over the military must be guaranteed.

Simply put, they wanted to slow down the navys development pace until they had cultivated the next generation into qualified naval officers.

This bizarre idea found considerable popularity among the Junker nobility. In their view, a few years of delay wouldnt make much difference in the grand scheme of things.

The plot for Polish independence was just the first step. Only by keeping the Russians preoccupied could they seize the opportunity to take Schleswig and Holstein.

This was a win-win opportunity. Seizing the two duchies would not only increase Prussian strength but also weaken the Russians, while conveniently resolving the domestic conflict between the army and navy factions.

Anyway, once the fighting starts on land, military spending will inevitably tilt towards the army, naturally delaying the development of the navy.

After dragging it out for a few years, naval officers from Junker backgrounds will also graduate from school. Allowing these insiders to enter the navy and wield power is the best choice to safeguard their own interests.

The plan seems perfect, but for safety, theyve also sought assistance from Britain and France. Even if the plan fails, Prussias apparent limited involvement would shift any Russian trouble towards Britain and France.

Roon asked, Moltke, do you think this plan has a chance of succeeding?

Chief of the General Staff Moltke replied, Mr. Roon, I cannot answer that question. The Russians have grand ambitions, and the trouble that just one Poland could cause them remains unknown.

While Britain and France have agreed to support the Polish independence movement, nobody knows how much they are willing to invest.

We also need to consider Austrias reaction. If they support the Russians, then the chances of success for the Polish independence movement are even lower.

We cannot wait until Polish independence succeeds before taking action; their odds of success are too low. The best option is to let the Poles tie down the Russians and provide cover for us to seize the two duchies.

As long as we occupy the two duchies before the Russians resolve the Polish issue, we will have established a fait accompli, and the Russian government will have no recourse against us.

This rough plan came from the Prussian General Staff. As a member of the Junker nobles himself, Moltke similarly did not wish to see the decline of the Junkers.

To prevent the bourgeoisie from gaining an advantage, they had to take a strategic risk. If executed well, it might even allow them to swallow the Kingdom of Denmark in one go, fundamentally altering Prussias passive position on the European continent.

It could be said that the French set an example for them, inspiring the ambitions of the Prussians.

Chapter 350: A Premeditated Uprising

After Alexander II ascended the throne, he initiated reforms domestically to gain the support of the Polish people. His governments ruling approach in the Polish region became more lenient.

The Russian government pardoned political prisoners in Poland and allowed the establishment of Polish medical schools and agricultural associations in Warsaw.

In 1863, Alexander II reinstated the Council on Religion and Public Education, which had been abolished twenty years earlier. Additionally, the Russian government permitted the convening of the State Council (in an advisory capacity).

(Authors Note: The timing of Alexander IIs accession and reforms has been delayed, with many dates differing from actual history.)

These concessions by the Russian government satisfied the Polish bourgeoisie and nobles. The convening of the State Council gave them a channel to influence domestic politics.

Happiness always comes from comparison. Compared to the Austrian reforms over a decade earlier, the Tsars reforms made the Poles much happier than their counterparts in Galicia.

During the 1848 European revolutions, half of the nobles and capitalists in Galicia were killed by rebelling peasants for being too active. The remaining few involved in the uprising were dealt with by the Austrian government.

Those who survived were either cautious or loyal supporters of the Habsburgs, firmly standing by the emperors side.

With this precedent in mind, the expectations of the nobles and capitalists in Russian-ruled Poland were lowered. They believed that if the Russian government decided to take action, the consequences would be far worse.

At least the Austrian government would find a reasonable excuse to act within the rules, while the Russian government might not need to do so.

Franz was a master of bullying the weak and fearing the strong. Those who were personally dealt with were mostly capitalists with no foundation and bad reputations.

As for the nobles, he typically only forced land redemption, stripping titles in severe cases but never personally wiping out entire families.

The compromise between the Russian government and the Polish people caught the attention of the governments in Berlin and Vienna, with many worrying that this was a prelude to Russian expansion in Europe.

The Austrian government, however, was not as concerned, given Austrias increased strength and the existence of the Austro-Russian alliance, making the likelihood of Russian aggression against Austria almost negligible.

The Prussian government, on the other hand, could not be as complacent. To the anti-Russian faction, the compromise between Russia and Poland was closely linked to the Russian governments plan to seize Prussian-ruled Polish territory.

It is uncertain when this plan was originally formulated. During the First Schleswig War, intentionally or not, the Russian government leaked the plan to seize Prussian Poland.

Because of the existence of this plan, Prussia hesitated to take action even after Austria launched the war of unification, missing the opportunity to annex the northern German territories.

At that time, the Russian government deployed two hundred thousand troops along the two countries borders, and Nicholas I even sent envoys to encourage Prussia to take action. However, the more the Russian government encouraged action, the more hesitant Frederick William IV became.

Unfortunately, the Russian Bears reputation is too poor. With the Russo-Austrian alliance in place, the Prussian government was concerned that if its main forces were deployed, it would face a joint attack from Austria and Russia.

Austria also had a plan for Russia and Austria to carve up Prussia, although it was just a smokescreen released by Franz, Prussia dared not gamble.

Fighting on home soil, whether facing an Austrian invasion or a Russian one, Prussia could endure for a long time while awaiting intervention from other European powers.

However, in cross-border warfare, Prussia has not yet displayed the invincible aura of later eras. Its performance in the First Prusso-Danish War has left the Prussian government uncertain.

Upon learning of the compromise between the Russian government and the Polish people, the Prussian government immediately began public relations efforts, hoping to change the Russian governments stance towards the Poles.

Prime Minister Franck privately said: I sympathize with the plight of the Polish people, but we also need to survive. Unfortunately, we can only let them perish.

His attitude also reflected the stance of the Prussian government, which spared no effort to sabotage the compromise between the Russian government and the Polish people, becoming the state policy of the Prussian government.

In the mid-1860s, the Polish society in the Congress Kingdom of Poland faced two options:

One was to cooperate with the Russian government, which could alleviate some national oppression and bring about incomplete social reforms.

The other was to cooperate with revolutionary organizations in Russia, striving together to overthrow the rule of the Russian government.

Obviously, although choosing the second option could attract support from various European countries, the success rate of rebellion has never been high, and the likelihood of becoming a martyr is much greater than that of becoming a hero, which is not the choice of the bourgeoisie.

Unable to gain support from nobles and capitalists, the Polish independence movement turned to workers and peasants instead.

Under the manipulation of the British, as early as the end of 1862, the Polish independence movement had signed an agreement with revolutionary organizations in Russia to jointly oppose the rule of the Russian government.

The agreement stipulated that once the Polish independence movement launched an uprising, the Russian revolutionary organizations would provide them with support, and at the appropriate time, would also launch uprisings domestically.

After the Russian governments compromise with Poland in 1863, the Kingdom of Prussia also joined the ranks of supporting the Polish independence movement. They secretly helped train

military forces for the Polish independence movement and allowed Prussian Poles to renounce their nationality and join the revolutionary organizations.

As for another supporter of the Polish revolutionary organizations, the French, they had been in cahoots since 1848. The internationally-minded French even considered organizing an expeditionary force to help Polish independence.

Alexander II's reforms also aroused concern in Britain and France. Under the butterfly effect of Franz's actions, the Russian government won the Near East War and captured Constantinople, elevating the threat posed by the Russians by more than one level compared to history.

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If even the still-feudal Russian Empire was so formidable, what would happen if they completed capitalist reforms?

The British were concerned that if Russia continued to grow stronger, it would threaten their position as world hegemon, especially with the constant threat posed to India by the Russians.

The French regarded Russia as the primary obstacle to achieving continental hegemony in Europe, considering that Austria next door was nothing compared to Russia.

This was an experience passed down from their ancestors; no matter how powerful the Habsburg dynasty became, the French always ended up victorious. The sense of superiority cultivated over centuries led Napoleon III to decide to deal with the Russians first.

Britain, France, and Prussia all wanted to deal with Russia, preferably by disrupting Alexander II's reforms and dividing the Russian Empire.

It was the consensus of all Europeans except Russians that a divided and weak Russia was the best kind of Russia.

With the support of Britain, France, and Prussia, the Polish independence movement rapidly grew in strength starting in 1863. Eventually, when everyone felt sufficiently prepared, the Polish War of Independence broke out.

This time, the Polish people were exceptionally confident, backed by what could be described as the most luxurious lineup in history.

Apart from Britain, France, and Prussia, the vast majority of European countries sympathized with or supported Polish independence. Even Russia's allies expressed sympathy for Poland.

A concrete example is that the Polish independence movement managed to raise one million guilders in donations in Austria, without facing any obstruction from the Austrian government.

Franz had no interest in knowing who were the backers behind the Polish independence movement. As far as he was concerned, it was just trouble for the Russians, no need for him to care.

Franz was completely unaware of the plans of the Junker nobility. It wasn't due to the incompetence of the intelligence agencies but rather because such matters, unrelated to Austrian interests, weren't deemed worthy of deploying the spies carefully planted within the Prussian government.

Due to the Russo-Austrian alliance, when conspiring, all countries unanimously avoided Austria's overt intelligence assets.

The undercover agents placed in secret were hard-won assets. Naturally, it was impossible to relay such intelligence as every transmission posed a risk.

From start to finish, Franz treated this Polish uprising as just an ordinary independence movement.

Foreign support was inevitable; in this era, any uprising within the Russian Empire wouldnt lack international backers offering selfless assistance.

Franz was unaware, and similarly, Alexander II in St. Petersburg remained oblivious. Having just eased tensions with influential figures in Poland, and having won over the capitalists and nobles, the outbreak of rebellion naturally didnt attract the attention of the Russian government.

Rebellions in Poland erupted almost periodically, and the Russians had long grown accustomed to them. If several years passed without an uprising, they would be on alert indicating that the Poles were planning something significant.

Under this habit, the Russian government simply ordered the local authorities to suppress the rebellion.

Alexander IIs reforms had already achieved interim results after abolishing serfdom, Russian industry and commerce achieved rapid development.

However, this rapid development mainly referred to quantity; industrial production capacity increased significantly. Yet despite the increase in industrial output, there was little quality improvement, leaving Russian products at a disadvantage in the market.

Russians would rather use expensive imported goods than domestic products. During this period, Russian industrial products suffered from the common problem of being crude, bulky, and difficult to use. They were not only poor in quality but prices were not cheap either.

Due to issues with domestic transportation, the cost of transporting raw materials in Russia remained high, leading to high production costs.

The trouble was that industrial products were being manufactured but were not selling in the market. This was particularly true for machinery and equipment, which remained unsold.

No matter how much the Russian government raised tariffs, it had no effect. Some even mocked that Russian industrial equipment could not even compete with handicrafts.

This is an exaggeration, as machinery is inherently more efficient than pure manual labor. However, considering Russias low labor costs and the high rate of defects in machinery equipment, the ultimate cost comparison between manual and mechanical production remains uncertain.

In Chekhovs literary works, its mentioned that screws produced by Russian machine tools often require manual polishing before use.

This might not be an exaggeration; during the Russo-Japanese War, certain artillery shells had size discrepancies, requiring soldiers to manually polish them before they could be loaded and fired.

If weapons in the military are made to such standards, civilian products are even more subpar. In short, Russian goods in the 19th century were synonymous with shoddy craftsmanship.

Unable to sell domestically and ignored in the international market, against this backdrop, the Russian government decided to use its military might to seek export markets for industrial products.

In the summer of 1864, Alexander II approved the Army's plan to expand into Central Asia, disregarding the newly erupted Polish uprising.