

Roman Empire 371

Chapter 371: The Failed Uprising

On February 15, 1865, the rebel army, unaware that they had been betrayed, launched an armed rebellion according to plan. Thus igniting the flames of revolution in Milan and Venice simultaneously.

Under the leadership of the core members of the Hungarian independence organization, a group of Italian mercenaries unwittingly became rebels, launching an attack on the Austrian government.

In Venice, the rebels attacking the police station were met with a fierce counterattack by the police. Rebellion in this era was not just about having many people; it also required having guns.

Unfortunately, the few guns possessed by the Hungarian independence organization were insufficient, while the police station had over a hundred heavily armed police officers at the ready.

Taft said in panic, Ottokr, the situation is not right. The enemy was already prepared and the ambush failed, we should retreat immediately.

Looking at the fearless rebels who had been captured, Ottokr knew they were doomed. Dont be fooled by their numbers; their combat capability was utterly poor.

Just imagine, a group of rebels armed only with cold weapons facing fully armed police forces; the inevitable outcome was self-evident.

Moreover, these Italian mercenaries were only dragged into the battlefield. They had no resolve to shed blood for the revolution.

Ottokr said anxiously, The news must have leaked. Immediately disperse and break through. Every man for himself.

From the leaders of the Hungarian independence organization to the enthusiastic masses drawn in, everyone betrayed them. In just over a month, the number of reports received by the Venice Police Department and City Hall exceeded three digits. How could the uprising possibly succeed?

Ottokrs decision was not wrong. Realizing the failure, dispersing and breaking through immediately was the best choice. Stubbornly resisting would lead to the annihilation of the entire army, while dispersing might allow a few to escape.

Unfortunately, this was Venice. As a city on water, their means of transportation were not horse-drawn carriages but boats.

When Ottokr ordered the breakout, the rebel army was already in chaos. Sirens blared, intermingled with the roar of steam engines. The marine police had arrived.

When ordinary small boats encountered gunboats, what could they do?

Escape was impossible. These small gunboats were not something they could deal with. The rebel army lacked cannons, and even guns were scarce.

Smart individuals immediately chose to land ashore, relying on surrounding buildings to break through for a chance at survival. Some exceptionally talented individuals had already jumped into the water, preparing to escape from there.

This relied entirely on luck and side characters should never attempt it. The arriving marine police directly targeted and killed those in the water, for the Austrians had never demanded that rebels be captured alive.

Attempting to swim away was tantamount to courting death. Unless one could stay submerged without surfacing, there was simply no evading pursuit.

Taft was a clever individual. He immediately led the people on his boat to land ashore at a nearby building and abandoned the boat to escape.

Bang, bang, bang

Gunshots rang out one after another, and the sharpshooters lurking in the surrounding buildings began to show their prowess. Taft and the others who had just landed immediately came under heavy fire.

The gunfire grew increasingly intense. Judging by the sound the bullets made, it was unlikely that all of it came from the regular Austrian army. After all, Austria had standardized its weapon equipment many years ago.

The sound of guns from various countries could only be explained by the local residents using illegal firearms against them.

Nothing was surprising about it. Since they attempted to land ashore, both sides were now enemies. If the rebels were allowed to enter their homes and confront the police there, wouldn't that be disastrous for them?

Anyway, the rebels were currently at a disadvantage and destined to fail. Assisting the government in suppressing the rebellion might even earn them some merit after the battle.

This was simply bullying Taft and his people because they lacked guns. Nobody was afraid of them. What Venice lacked the least was sailors, most of whom were armed.

Guns were an indispensable part of overseas colonization and trade in this era, and it was easier for them to obtain firearm licenses than for ordinary people. After all, overseas was not the same as the homeland; often, fists were more convincing than words.

Guns represented bravery, and many people believed that their opportunity to shine had arrived. Even if the military achievements were minimal, there would always be no problem getting rewarded after the battle.

The bullets issued by the police station were all numbered and accounted for, so enthusiastic citizens had no fear of their achievements being taken from them.

Taft's face was deathly pale. He had accidentally been shot in the knee, crippling his right leg.

Through gritted teeth, he said, Don't worry about me, just run, every man for himself.

They did not experience the revolutionary fervor of the Italian people; instead, they encountered opportunists. They had originally hoped to escape with the protection of local residents.

Reality told them that propaganda slogans were all lies. Not everyone wanted a revolution, especially one led by Hungarians.

Regional discrimination existed in many places. Compared to the bustling Venice area, Hungary was seen as a rural backwater, and many Italians looked down on Hungarians.

How could they expect these people to risk their lives and fortunes to help the Hungarian independence organization?

Although most of the rebels were Italians, these hired mercenaries did not represent the will of the people, as local residents showed through their actions that they were unwelcome.

As the gunboats approached, the Italian mercenaries shamelessly surrendered. No matter how much the commanders of the Hungarian independence organization persuaded them, it was useless.

Berbatov was one of the mercenaries, and now he cursed the revolutionaries bitterly. They had promised to go overseas, establish colonies, and get rich together, but these fuckers had rebelled instead.

If he had known that the employer was the Hungarian independence organization, he would never have participated. Now he was doomed, with no easy way out.

To take revenge on these scoundrels, Berbatov decided to surrender and tie up the Hungarian independence organizations leader on his ship to use as proof of his surrender.

Milan, the capital of the Kingdom of Lombardy, has been surrounded by the city guard.

As the capital of the Kingdom of Lombardy, it was heavily fortified.

To suppress the rebellion as quickly as possible, the Lombard government made thorough preparations. However, lacking confidence, the king immediately ordered the city guard to crush the rebellion.

The cornered rebels stood no chance. Even if they wanted to fight to the death, its now a battle of cold weapons versus firearms, a fight they cant possibly win.

In the Port of Venice, one of the leaders of the Hungarian independence organization, Paul, urged, Come on, Stephen. The rebellion has begun, a doomed one, no need to pay so much attention.

Stephen smiled bitterly and replied, We cant leave now. The timing isnt right. If we leave at this moment and it gets out, how can we hold our heads high for the rest of our lives?

Paul nodded in agreement. Running away when the outcome of the uprising is uncertain would tarnish their reputation and they would be labeled as cowards for the rest of their lives.

Chapter 372: Interrogation

The failed rebellion in the Austrian-controlled Italian territories had far-reaching impacts. The Austrian government was enraged, and Franz immediately ordered a nationwide investigation.

Upon investigation, authorities were shocked by what they found. Traces of unrest were discovered from Lombardy-Venetia to Hungary and Galicia.

Numerous individuals who had interacted with the Hungarian Independence Organization were summoned for questioning. While no arrests had been made yet, the atmosphere was already fraught with anxiety.

Those implicated couldnt help but curse Stephen and his entire family. Why did they have to write letters to them if they were going to rebel?

For something that has a high degree of difficulty, didnt they understand the importance of secrecy? Their actions had made the whole world know of it, no wonder the rebellion failed.

Many regretted not reporting them directly earlier. That momentary hesitation cost them the opportunity, and the rebels foolishness incriminated them, making the situation increasingly unclear.

Whether or not they participated in the rebellion, or were aware of it, became the key question. Without sufficient evidence, the authorities didnt arrest them, opting instead for routine questioning.

However, this was also highly troublesome. Once implicated in the rebellion, all social connections became useless.

At this moment, Atessa was filled with regret. He knew the Hungarian Independence Organization wouldnt amount to anything and had severed ties with them.

Unexpectedly, the police arrived at his door so quickly. As someone who had contact with the leaders of the insurgents and had exchanged letters with them before the uprising, he naturally became a prime suspect.

Atessa said nervously, Chief Partivat, please believe that I am innocent. I only coincidentally met the rebel Stephen at a banquet and I am not at all familiar with him.

He couldnt have dreamed that the Hungarian Independence Organization would actually launch a rebellion in the Italian region. Isnt this a trap?

Despite Stephen inviting him to join the uprising, there was only a time mentioned, but no specific location. Atessa naturally assumed that the Hungarian Independence Organization was planning the uprising in Hungary and that he was simply being approached for support.

If the rebellion had occurred in Hungary, limited by the communication methods of that era, his interactions with Stephen would have been untraceable by the Hungarian police.

Chief Partivat said expressionlessly, Mr. Atessa, theres no need to be nervous. No one is accusing you of being involved with the rebels, otherwise, someone else would be having this conversation with you.

You are merely a suspect now, and we are only conducting routine questioning. If you want to clear up this suspicion, please answer my questions truthfully.

Some witnesses saw you and Stephen having a pleasant conversation at the Mark Manor during that banquet. Your conversation lasted for over half an hour, which goes beyond the interaction of strangers.

To my knowledge, many of your friends also attended the banquet, but you did not speak as much with them.

Atessa hurriedly explained, At that time, the leader of the rebels, Stephen, concealed his identity. On the surface, he posed as a colonial merchant, and I had a keen interest in overseas colonization.

You already know, Chief. The simplest way to obtain a title of nobility now is to go abroad and establish colonies in exchange for military achievements. I was also planning to organize a colonial expedition to overseas territories.

Chief Partivat continued to ask, dissatisfied, From what I know, Stephen was recruiting mercenaries to cover the entry of the rebels into the country.

Most of these were Italians. I apologize, Mr. Atessa, I have no intention of discriminating against Italians.

However, Italian mercenaries are universally acknowledged to lack combat capability in mainland Europe.

Currently, there are over one hundred thousand mercenaries in the entire Austrian colonial territories, but Italians account for less than a thousand. This already speaks for itself.

From the beginning, Stephen surfaced as a laughingstock. It was precisely because of this anomaly that our police were able to deploy in time and suppress the rebels.

However, the leader of the rebels still managed to escape. It has been confirmed that someone sheltered them, allowing them to evade our search.

Dont be nervous, Mr. Atessa. I didnt say you sheltered them, but your answers to me are problematic.

If you truly wished to organize a colonial team, there were many others you could have consulted. Even a random sailor from the docks could have told you Italian mercenaries are unreliable.

Even among your friends, some have organized colonial expeditions before. Why didnt you consult with so many other people and instead choose to discuss this topic with someone who is considered a fool?

Atessa explained helplessly, Chief Partivat, believe me, there isnt much to it, just purely because its cheaper. Under the same conditions, you can hire two Italian mercenaries for the price of one German mercenary, which presents a significant manpower cost advantage.

We only need to deal with indigenous people, so theres no need for strong combat capabilities. With the same amount of money, I can hire Italian mercenaries and get more troops, giving us an advantage in the labor export business.

He was speaking the truth, but unfortunately, this didnt dispel Chief Partivats suspicion. The entrapment operation wasnt something he would be privy to at his level and position, so Atessas explanation only heightened his suspicion.

Chief Partivat frowned and said, Mr. Atessa, you should understand that this is your last chance. If you still refuse to tell the truth, the consequences will be very serious when you are eventually found out.

Atessa hurriedly vowed, I can swear to God that I have told the complete truth.

Chief Partivat asked in a cold tone, Mr. Atessa, according to intelligence, you received a confidential letter before the outbreak of the rebellion. It was a personal letter written by Stephen.

If youve only met once, why would he write to you? Dont tell me it was love at first sight. Youre not a beauty with such overwhelming charm.

As the leader of the rebellion, Stephen has always been cautious, minimizing contact with the outside world as much as possible. Why would he take the risk of writing to you?

Wouldnt he, as a fugitive for over a decade, know that any unusual behavior would attract attention and increase the risk of exposure?

Atessa realized that things were getting serious; Chief Partivat was now suspecting him. Under normal circumstances, Partivat should have inquired about the contents of the letter, rather than probing why Stephen would write to him.

As a prominent capitalist, Atessa had an extensive network of contacts; ordinarily, he wouldn't even bother with a low-ranking police chief.

However, the situation was different now; with the involvement in the rebellion, no one dared to speak up for him.

If he said the wrong thing at this moment, it could easily lead to an accusation of harboring rebels. Bureaucrats were not fools; the Austrian government had always shown zero tolerance for matters involving rebels, drawing lessons from the upheaval of the past revolutions.

Atessa replied with a furrowed brow, This question, you should ask Stephen. I have the right to refuse to answer.

Chief Partivat chuckled coldly and said, Of course, that is your right. Now I demand that you provide this confidential letter; its contents are relevant to whether you are involved with the rebels.

Atessa cursed inwardly; the letter had already been burned, so how could he provide it? Moreover, if the contents of the letter were exposed, he might not be able to leave today.

Sorry, these kinds of letters, I receive many of them every day and hardly ever read them. They are usually treated as junk. I can go back and look for it, but I'm not sure if I can find it.

Chief Partivat did not continue to dwell on this issue; instead, he brought up a new question: Mr. Atessa, someone has reported that you have connections with the Italian Independence Organization.

Your youth art and culture training center, established with friends, is said to be a propaganda arm of the Italian Independence Organization, attempting to divide the great Austrian Empire.

Now, please provide a reasonable explanation as to why the curriculum of the training center includes content related to the independence of Lombardy-Venetia.

Atessa was shocked, realizing the magnitude of the trouble he was in. If this issue had been discovered during normal times, he could have simply blamed the teachers at the training institution and dismissed them.

But now it had coincided with the rebellion, providing grounds to suspect him. Being targeted by the government would certainly not bode well.

As a wealthy capitalist, Atessa had many shady dealings that could land him in jail if uncovered. Things that could easily be smoothed over using his network of connections during normal times could now be a death sentence.

If he couldn't dispel the suspicion of Chief Partivat now, his tragic fate would be all but sealed.

When dealing with suspected rebels, the Austrian government had never shown any leniency; once they had a charge to imprison them, they never hesitated to do so.

Atessa hurriedly explained, Chief Partivat, this is all baseless. The curriculum of the youth art and cultural training center has never involved politics.

You can send someone to investigate; our materials are all professional courses. If anyone dares to propagate separatist ideas, we immediately expel them. These are all slanderous accusations.

He could never shoulder the charge of attempting to split the nation. If confirmed, he would be doomed.

Even if he had inclinations toward independence, he couldn't admit to it! The Austrian government dealt strictly with such matters; just uttering a slogan for independence could result in a life sentence.

Chief Partivat sneered, Mr. Atessa, given your lack of cooperation, we have no way to clear your suspicion. Therefore, I officially inform you that you are now being detained.

In the future, you may face charges of conspiring to incite rebellion and attempting to split the nation. Please confess the truth promptly and cooperate with the government's actions.

Atessa's face changed drastically, and he exclaimed, I want to see a lawyer, I want to file a complaint; this is unlawful detention!

He was truly panicked now. If the police detained him, even if he was ultimately proven innocent and unconnected to the rebels, any other crimes uncovered would still incriminate him.

Lawful conviction would be irrefutable. Especially at this critical moment, being involved in the rebellion, his social connections were useless so he couldn't even find anyone to help him.

Partivat said indifferently, Of course, that is your right. However, as you are suspected of the grave crimes of conspiracy to rebel and attempting to split the nation, we have the authority to prohibit you from contacting the outside world for one week.

Atessa looked ashen-faced; a week was enough time to change many things. Without him personally overseeing everything, who knew how many problems would be exposed?

Chapter 373: Killing Two Birds With One Stone

At the same time, as rebellions in Milan and Venice were being brought under control, the Austrian Empire was also enforcing public order very strictly. Firstly, a huge number of members of independence organizations were apprehended in Hungary before several heretical organizations were obliterated.

Just in one month, more than 150,000 people had been arrested and it was enough for Franz to quickly call a halt to it. It would have affected the country's economic progress adversely if it had continued to escalate.

Nevertheless, individuals and social groups that were suspected of involvement in the rebellion or with inclinations towards independence still couldn't go scot-free.

Their background was already tarnished, and the government could always find charges if it wanted to. As prime targets, this group would not even qualify for exile to the colonies but would join the road-building army instead.

The railway project spanning over 90,000 kilometers was not just a mere plan. Technological progress has made what appeared ludicrous a few years back now possible.

With the rapid economic development, many railway lines that initially lacked economic value turned profitable. After sustaining losses for over a decade, the Austrian railway company finally managed to turn the tide.

By this time, the Austrian government had become the largest shareholder. Naturally, contracts previously signed with the government still needed to be fulfilled, and the essence of the bundled business model had never changed.

In 1865, the railway mileage in the new Holy Roman Empire totaled 58,000 kilometers and was built at the expense of many batches and groups of free laborers working to exhaustion.

Under normal circumstances, there weren't as many criminals to fill the ranks; the number of people joining the road-building army each year was far less than the consumption.

After the 1848 revolutions, the number of labor reform troops once surpassed the threshold of 450,000, but then gradually declined annually, now totaling less than 100,000.

After all, not all criminals would be sent there; basically, as long as it didn't involve rebellion and the sentence was less than five years, most were banished to the colonies.

The road-building army was composed mainly of serious offenders whose threat to society was too great for exile to the colonies hence unified management was better.

Franz would never send political prisoners or nationalists to the colonies. Who knew if they would cause trouble there?

If these miscellaneous ideologies spread to the colonies, wouldn't that increase the cost of governance? Franz would never willingly invite trouble.

However, apart from the 1848 revolutions, these dangerous elements dwindled. Those entering the road-building army were no longer insurgents but rather ordinary serious offenders, resulting in a sudden decrease in their numbers.

Only eight thousand individuals were added each year, which simply couldn't keep up with consumption. This wasn't because the construction companies were exploiting them and disregarding casualties; in fact, everyone valued this free labor force.

The main factor was the limited medical technology of the era. One could hardly expect the Austrian government to provide doctors for criminals. Those who fell ill either recovered on their own or met their maker prematurely.

Austria's average life expectancy had just surpassed the age of 40. Most individuals entering prison were adults, and after experiencing over a decade of prison life, how many could survive?

To address the shortage of cheap labor and reduce the cost of railway construction, the Ministry of Railways proposed to the government last year to import indentured laborers from Africa, but Franz vetoed this idea.

In order not to shoot himself in the foot, Franz never did such a thing, which would have many consequences.

In a sense, this rebellion not only resolved internal hidden dangers and contributed to the long-term stability of Austria but also tackled the issue of insufficient cheap labor in railway construction.

Compared to this, the wealth confiscated was barely worth mentioning. Austria was no longer the impoverished nation it once was, and such a small amount of wealth mattered little now.

Investigations continued, and apart from Lombardy-Venetia where the rebellion erupted, making resolution simpler there, individuals implicated in other regions required solid evidence for conviction.

As an enforcer of the rules, Franz adhered to them as well. Under the circumstances, he would naturally act according to the rules.

However, members of the Hungarian Independence Organization and Italian revolutionaries were individuals who were bonafide insurgents and did not require in-depth investigation.

They would either be executed or thrown into the road-building army for lifelong reform. Undoubtedly, since railway construction now lacked manpower, they would fortuitously avoid execution.

The main instigators of the rebellion have fled, leaving behind accomplices who can be considered as ones who were coerced. In the spirit of cooperation, there is no need to resort to extreme measures.

If needed in the future, everyone can always try to rebel again. Politics is inherently about employing all means necessary to enforce the law, which is much more sophisticated than outright framing and entrapment.

Prime Minister Felix stated, Your Majesty, in the Milan rebellion, a total of 461 insurgents were killed and 2,986 insurgents were apprehended; in the Venice rebellion, 296 insurgents were killed, and 3,128 insurgents were captured, which can be described as a splendid achievement.

Unfortunately, all the ringleaders escaped, and we only managed to arrest a few minor figures, failing to completely eliminate the Hungarian independence organization.

Most of the captured insurgents are Italian mercenaries, with approximately 2,518 of them committing the crime of crossing the border, and another 864 being local mercenaries.

The remaining over two thousand insurgents mostly provided funding and intelligence support to the revolutionary party. The influx of so many mercenaries into the region was also facilitated by these individuals.

Undoubtedly, this was a foregone conclusion, pinning all blame on the rebels while the Austrian governments behind-the-scenes actions would forever remain buried in history.

In the wake of this operation, not a soul in the Austrian-controlled Italian territories dared to challenge the Austrian government. The handful that managed to slip through the net were hailed in the press as heroes for reporting on the rebels.

Even if just to save their own lives, they had to uphold Austrian rule. If the Austrian-controlled Italian territories gained independence, how could these traitors possibly live well?

Traitors were always more loathsome than enemies a truth that spans from East to West. Every Italian revolutionary organization stood in opposition to them.

This is the cost of betrayal; one must always bear responsibility for their wrongdoing. Since mistakes were made earlier, now its time to pay the price.

A single report letter could not prove their loyalty. Only by becoming traitors within the revolutionary parties, tying themselves to the Austrian governments war chariot, could the matter be settled.

Franz said calmly, Have the judiciary convict them as soon as possible and then send them to the road-building army. The Ministry of Railways has complained more than once about manpower shortages. Lets not keep them waiting.

What about other regions? I recall that this operation resulted in the arrest of over a hundred thousand individuals. Yet, its only a fraction. How were the other hundreds of thousands apprehended?

Prime Minister Felix explained, Your Majesty, the arrest of over a hundred thousand suspects dont all pertain to the rebellion.

Currently, evidence is still being gathered and reviewed. A significant portion of these individuals were not arrested for rebellion; they were apprehended by the police due to other issues uncovered during the investigations.

Apart from the heavily affected Italian region, in Hungary, we also arrested over two hundred core members of the independence organization and over five hundred individuals suspected of rebellion.

As the Hungarian rebellion was suppressed before it could fully unfold, it would take some time for convictions to be determined.

In other domestic regions, a total of 183 individuals suspected of rebellion were arrested. Due to insufficient evidence, their charges have yet to be officially determined.

This explanation relieved Franz if so many truly wanted rebellion, his reign would be unstable.

The facts proved that rebels were few. This was the result of entrapment; otherwise, the number could have been lower still.

Upon careful examination, after deducting the hired mercenaries, the actual number of dangerous individuals inclined towards rebellion was probably only 2,000-3,000. This was vastly different from the total number of arrests.

These individuals might not necessarily be plotting rebellion; most were likely coerced into it. Its just that their political ideologies were misled, causing them to stand against the Austrian government.

Franz pondered for a moment before saying, Then, according to the original plan, continue investigating these suspects. Everything must be done according to the law.

Chapter 374: North-South Negotiations

The decisive battle that would determine the fate of the Union and the Confederacy in the United States ultimately ended in a mutually devastating outcome.

From a tactical perspective, the Southern government achieved victory by suffering fewer casualties; strategically, the Northern government was victorious.

Had there been no external interference, the Northern government could have gradually gained the upper hand through its population and industrial advantages.

Unfortunately, this was not possible. From the start, this civil war was conducted under the intervention of European powers.

With numerous mediators involved, the industrial advantage of the Northern government was never fully utilized. During the Age of Discovery, maritime trade between Europe and America flourished. No matter how hard Northern capitalists tried to produce, they couldn't compete with the European mainland.

Furthermore, the longer the war persisted, the greater the debts accrued by the Southern government, making it increasingly difficult for foreign governments to let go.

The power of the butterfly effect was indeed formidable. Now, the Southern government not only issued cotton bonds but also accrued enormous loans from various countries. The three major creditor nations, Britain, France, and Austria, have been ensnared.

It's worth mentioning that a significant portion of the Northern government's war funds also came from loans obtained from these three countries. Regardless of which side collapses, the three major creditors will suffer heavy losses.

They were exploiting the North and South alike with no scruples. If not for the financial circles of the three nations instigating trouble, this war would not have escalated to this point.

President Lincoln said helplessly, We can no longer continue fighting. Let's negotiate with the Confederate government as soon as possible!

They truly could not go on. At this point in the war, the Northern government was exhausted. If they continued dragging on until the Southern government collapsed, they would be in a similar dire situation.

Surrounded by a pack of wolves, if they were to exhaust themselves just to defeat the South, they would become easy prey for others.

The capitalists supporting Lincoln did not want to see the annihilation of the United States, as it went against their interests. As pragmatic people, since success was impossible, it was better to cut losses in time.

They should resolve this while the attention of the Great Powers was focused elsewhere. Once those nations turned their gaze back, the situation would become far trickier.

Secretary of State Seward considered and said, Mr. President, isn't this too hasty? We have a lot of unfinished work, and public opinion is still being shaped.

Lincoln took out a telegram he had just received and handed it over, saying, There's no time to waste. This is the latest intelligence from Europe. Take a look! Those fools are even more useless than we imagined. Not only have they failed to overthrow any regime, but they haven't even sparked a new wave of revolution.

Seward glanced briefly at the intelligence but didn't comment on it. From these reports, it seemed that the performance of the revolutionary parties had merely met the minimum requirements, but it fell far short of Lincoln's expectations.

Even the crumbling Hungarian Independence Organization had only kept the Austrian government busy for months. Other revolutionary groups didn't lag far behind, buying precious time for the federal government.

However, in Lincoln's view, these few months were too short. They were so short that he didn't even have the desire to continue waging war.

After fighting for so long, he had gained a deep understanding of the strength of the Southern government. Without several years of effort, victory would be difficult to achieve.

Clearly, this was impossible. Once European countries regained their senses, not only defeating the South would be challenging, but also the remaining territories of the federal government might come under their gaze.

Lincoln had initially hoped that the revolutionaries would incite a new wave of revolution, destabilizing the European continent and diverting the attention of various countries from the American Civil War, thereby creating an opportunity for national unity in the United States.

Now the Hungarian independence uprising had failed; the Irish independence movement led by separatists had been crushed by the British government; the French revolutionaries were still struggling for a free France but lacked combat skills, merely engaging in a war of words with the French government.

The only group that had accomplished its mission was the Spanish revolutionaries, which was still in conflict with the government and would not end soon.

However, among the nations in the intervention alliance, Spain was the weakest. As long as the three great powers decide to intervene militarily, they would also take action accordingly.

The Italian revolutionaries had also achieved some results. At least, they have occupied half of Sicily in Naples and are striving to take over the entire island.

Unfortunately, this was not what the United States needed. They wanted the Italians to revolt in Sardinia, Lombardy, and Venetia to divert the attention of France and Austria.

Evidently, the Italian revolutionaries were no fools and did not choose to attack the toughest nuts. After their success in Garibaldi's uprising, everyone switched support to the Sicilian revolution.

If things continue like this, all three countries, Britain, France, and Austria, can solve their internal issues within at most half a year. By then, the federal government, which sparked this chaos, will surely not have a good outcome.

Lincoln did not believe the nations would remain oblivious to the role they had played. In politics, evidence was often unnecessary merely taking into account benefits and drawbacks sufficed.

By compromising now, the federal government could still occupy an advantageous position in the negotiations. If they dragged it out until the nations had the energy to retaliate, the situation would be entirely different.

There was no need to consider further. It was obvious which side the European nations would support. If the Southern government swallowed up a few more states, wouldn't the federal government fare even worse?

Currently, several free states had been occupied by the Southern government, and they all needed to be reclaimed. Failure to do so would earn Lincoln the wrath of his backers.

Not only could the Northern government not persevere, but the Southern government was equally unable to endure. The current casualties on both sides far exceeded those in history, while military expenditures had skyrocketed to astronomical figures.

Even before the decisive battle erupted, the Southern government had proposed negotiations with the North, but Lincoln and others pinned their final hopes on this battle, delaying giving a response.

Only now were they forced to acknowledge that with the European powers acting as backers, they had merely been sacrificing lives.

While the Northern government might have a larger population, a significant population was also held by the Southern government. Alongside the stronger combat capabilities of the Southern army, the gap in strength between the two sides was not that significant.

This was the aftermath of the butterfly effect. If there hadnt been intervention from various countries before the outbreak of the Civil War, so many states wouldnt have been able to be attracted by the Southern government to join them.

Politics had always been the Achilles heel of the Southern government. Otherwise, as long as the anti-war banner was raised, neutrality would have been chosen by many federal states. Even if the Lincoln administration wanted to use force, it wouldnt have been supported by the public.

Historically, neutrality was initially held by most states in the United States. Southern independence was believed to be legitimate by many Americans, and the use of force to resolve it was opposed.

It wasnt until the first shot was fired by the Southern government that the stance of these people changed, and they sided with the Northern government.

Reality is cruel. Years of war awakened many, while the political ability of the Southern government improved through the conflict.

While the European nations slumbered, the North and South initiated secret negotiations.

Chapter 375: The Laughingstock of the Naval Circle

The vast azure ocean stretched endlessly, wave after wave surging forward, crashing against the rocks with a ground-shaking roar, spraying snow-white foam.

Russian Rear Admiral Popov stood proudly on the ships deck, listening to this captivating melody. Over the past few days, he had led the Russian navy to eradicate many pirates, swelling his personal purse.

The Californian government was quite generous to this guardian, not only allowing him to keep all the spoils for himself but also offering enticing bounties.

Fifty dollars for killing a pirate, five hundred dollars for capturing one alive. It seemed the Californian government was still worried the Russians might kill indiscriminately, so they adjusted the bounty amounts, using high rewards to encourage the Russians to capture pirates alive.

U.S. Naval Captain Magill exclaimed excitedly, Admiral, ahead is San Clemente Island. Three days ago, a group of pirates suddenly occupied it, posing a serious threat to our maritime security. Please, you must eliminate these troublemakers.

Captain Magill harbored a deep hatred for pirates, and it was not without reason. The United States Navy had limited numbers of warships on the West Coast, gradually depleting in the fight against pirates.

Being unable to defeat pirates at sea became a source of shame for the U.S. Navy, as well as a personal embarrassment for him in his military career. To make matters worse, the main forces of the United States Navy were stationed on the East Coast, and the federal government dared not divide its forces.

The few shipyards on the West Coast had not escaped pirate attacks, leaving ship repairs difficult and the construction of warships out of the question.

Now, hope had to be pinned on the Russians. Although the fleet led by Popov was somewhat outdated, it was still superior to the ships Magill commanded.

Before the outbreak of the Civil War, the U.S. government did not prioritize military preparedness, and the limited navy was stationed primarily on the East Coast. The West Coast, undeveloped at that time and without external threats, naturally received less attention.

Adding up all the large and small warships of the US Navy on the entire West Coast, there were not even twenty ships in total, with an average age of over ten years their combat effectiveness need not be mentioned.

However, the navy was still the navy, always stronger than pirates. Even though there was support behind these pirates, they had not yet gone mad enough to sell warships to them.

In the initial stages of the war, they could still suppress the privateer fleets (pirates). But as the number of battles increased, these warships were gradually depleted in the fighting, until the pirates eventually gained the upper hand.

Now, with Russian assistance and under strong demands from the Californian government, the U.S. Navy and Russians formed a coalition, preparing to eradicate the pirates entrenched in the Channel Islands.

With a disdainful glance at Magill, Rear Admiral Popov nonchalantly remarked, Rest assured, they're just a bunch of pirates.

Brimming with confidence, Popov did not yet know what enemy he would soon face, as he strode step-by-step into the gates of hell.

A pirate underling said ingratiatingly, Lieutenant Commander, our men are ready and just waiting for the Russians to take the bait.

Shut up, Will. Don't be an idiot. You will call me Captain now. If you leak our identities, you'll be facing a court martial! the British Lieutenant Commander Gurney berated him sternly.

This is no joke; if the Royal Navy were to be exposed masquerading as pirates, it would undoubtedly cause a major incident.

In any case, those bigwigs backing them would absolutely never admit to the roles they played in this. This mess would be solely theirs to deal with.

If it weren't for the arrival of the Russians cutting off their source of wealth, they wouldn't have gone to such extremes.

To annihilate a Russian fleet under the guise of pirates not only humiliates the Russian government but also arouses suspicion from the outside world.

Most of the pirates on the West Coast were driven there by the Royal Navy from the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, so their combat capabilities were naturally poor.

If they actually had the strength to annihilate this Russian fleet, they would have long ago landed ashore and plundered San Francisco, instead of being content with raiding passing merchant ships.

Realizing his mistake, Will quickly corrected himself, Yes, Captain!

Gurney glared at him, then said irritably, Send someone to notify the other captains to prepare; they are indispensable to this farce. Without professionals participating, how can the strength of our pirate alliance be demonstrated?

The Pirate Alliance was the scapegoat contrived by the British for this operation. If a scattered group of pirates destroyed the Russian fleet, no one would believe it.

To prevent suspicion from the outside world, the puppeteers behind the scenes put forth the Pirate Alliance. This explanation sounded much more plausible although the pirates strength was limited, many ants can still bite an elephant to death.

As long as no clear evidence was left behind, even if the Russians suspected they had fallen victim to their plot, John Bull could still cover it up.

Through his telescope, Lieutenant Commander Gurney could see the Russian fleet approaching. Waiting to greet them were the real pirates, while his Royal Navy pirates lying in ambush on the far side of the island dared not reveal themselves prematurely.

As long as the battle started, Gurney wasn't worried about the Russians escaping. After all, why would they? The Russian government was broke. Since the outbreak of the Near East War, the Russian Navy had essentially stagnated.

Of course, General Menshikov, with his background in the army, deserved much credit for this.

Ever since he had introduced army tactics to the navy, the Russian Navys ability to conduct land operations had soared. Moreover, thanks to the better provisions in the navy, the sailors were in great shape, with combat capabilities surpassing those of most of the Russian army.

In terms of naval land combat capabilities, only Prussia, which had essentially turned its army into a navy, could rival them. Other countries would need to deploy marine units.

Fortunately, the British were prepared to engage the Russians at sea. If the Russians decided to fight it out after landing ashore, they would soon realize what true naval land combat capabilities were.

What gave Lieutenant Commander Gurney confidence was the speed of the Russian ships. The Russian government could not afford to refit all their warships with steam engines, as this required a significant investment and was economically inefficient.

Even John Bull, with his deep pockets, only upgraded some of the warships. Sails remained one of the primary means of propulsion in this era, and generally, unless pressed for time, people preferred using the cheaper power source.

To completely annihilate the Russians, the vessels dispatched by John Bull this time were naturally fast ships fitted with steam engines. When operating at full speed, most of these warships could achieve speeds of 14 to 17 knots.

On this fine day with a gentle breeze, Russian warships could reach a speed of ten knots at best. Even with divine intervention, this represented a clear technological disparity of the times.

Seeing the panicked pirates preparing for battle, Rear Admiral Popov ordered confidently, Attack!

Witnessing the scattered pirates fleeing, Rear Admiral Popov felt a sense of accomplishment, as if this was the happiest moment of his life.

Without any hesitation, the Russo-American joint fleet pursued in the direction where the pirates were fleeing, unaware of the danger approaching them.

Soon they rounded the bend of the island, and a signal came from the pirate ships. The pirates lying in ambush to the north suddenly attacked.

The thunderous roar of cannons momentarily bewildered Rear Admiral Popov. How could the enemy have set up an ambush?

Before he could ponder this question, the Russo-American joint fleet found themselves at a significant disadvantage on the battlefield. The pirates, who had previously fled, now joined the fray.

Formation and tactics were out the window. While chasing the pirates, the Russo-American joint fleet gathered together and was now in disarray after the sudden ambush.

Sensing something amiss, the experienced American warships spontaneously began to retreat. This was a lesson learned over the past few years: if you couldn't win, simply run away.

Seeing his comrades fleeing, Popov was infuriated. They were helping the Americans fight, yet when danger arose, the Americans fled without a word.

Retreat! Popov ordered through gritted teeth.

Now that they were retreating, if half the fleet could escape it would be fortunate. The cannons still thundered, and the Moscow warship was hit five times in a row, finally sinking slowly.

No orders were needed from Popov; the crew spontaneously began to abandon the ship. Crowding into lifeboats, they raised white flags and slowly left the battlefield.

Chapter 376: Intervention in the American Civil War

London

Ever since the Austrian government proposed to deal with the issue of America first, it immediately attracted the attention of the British government.

As the world's leading colonial empire, British presence could be found everywhere. Not to mention North America, where Canada lay, British interests in North America were among the largest among European countries.

As significant as the American interests were, they still paled in comparison to those in Europe. John Bull's national policy had always prioritized maintaining the balance on the continent. With the

outbreak of the Russo-Prussian War, the British government had no choice but to divert more resources to the European mainland.

Foreign Secretary Raistlin analyzed, The situation on the European continent has become very dangerous. Once the Russians concentrate all their efforts, the Prussians may not be able to withstand them. We must be prepared to intervene in this war.

Now the Prussians and Russians are still in a stalemate, but this does not mean that the Prussians have the strength to resist the Russians. Three main factors are causing the deadlock on the battlefield:

Firstly, the Russian government does not regard the Kingdom of Prussia as a significant adversary. Until now, the Russians have not exerted their full strength;

Secondly, the Russians have encountered financial problems and cannot afford the huge military expenditures. The Russian government wants to win the war with as little military spending as possible;

Thirdly, the Prussians, who hold the upper hand, are reluctant to engage in a decisive battle with the Russians. They cannot afford to lose this war. The Prussian government plans to exploit the Russians financial weaknesses to force the Russian government to compromise.

If any of these three factors change, significant changes may occur on the European continent, and so we must remain vigilant.

If the Prussians win the war it is still acceptable, but if the Russians win, Russia, France, and Austria will likely divide up the Kingdom of Prussia.

In recent decades, the strengths of France and Austria have developed rapidly, with their respective land and naval forces ranking second or third globally, making them our biggest enemies after the Russians.

If we allow them to continue expanding, they will inevitably threaten us sooner or later. Fortunately, Russia, France, and Austria are all squeezed into the European continent, which creates an opportunity for us.

Currently, the European continent is generally balanced among the three powers, with Russia having the strength to suppress only one adversary at a time, unable to simultaneously dominate both of them.

To maintain its dominant position, Nicholas I chose to ally with Austria, reducing one enemy.

However, as the balance of power between the two countries changes, the importance of the Russo-Austrian alliance to Austria is gradually diminishing, presenting an opportunity to dismantle this alliance.

In comparison, the American Civil War is of secondary importance. Although the geographical location of the United States is incredibly advantageous, they are only a newly established immigrant country whose people lack strong cohesion, and it will take a very long time for them to catch up.

Moreover, due to the Civil War, we have an opportunity to divide the United States. Originally, we planned to split the United States into five countries, but due to the turmoil in Europe and the limited resources available to each country, this is no longer feasible.

However, given the current situation, with a little push from us, the division between the North and the South will become inevitable, and we can even support the independence of the Native Americans.

After the split, it will take even longer for the United States to develop. We can also support the Southern government to counterbalance the Northern government, maintaining the balance on the American continent.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Agarwal questioned, The plan sounds good, but is it really feasible? What if there are unexpected changes on the Russo-Prussian battlefield?

Foreign Secretary Raistlin calmly replied, No one can guarantee that these plans will succeed, but what we can do now is act quickly.

We must force both the North and the South to the negotiating table before the end of the Russo-Prussian War. On this point, Austrias position aligns with ours.

The Austrian government is very eager to intervene in the American Civil War. Austrian flags have already appeared in Central America, and there is even a member of the Habsburgs serving as emperor in Mexico.

For whatever reason, the leader of the Habsburg restoration needs a divided America.

The Austrian government is now eager to end the American Civil War, mainly to reclaim its resources. The impact of the Russo-Prussian War on Austria is much greater than it is on us.

Currently, Spain is constrained by internal turmoil and has lost much of its influence in the Four-Nation Intervention Alliance. As long as we and Austria have a united front, we can already influence the alliances decisions.

In fact, the Four-Nation Intervention Alliance has now become the Three-Nation Intervention Alliance. Problems have arisen within Spain, and the extent of the governments determination to intervene in the American Civil War has become unknown.

Even if they wish to intervene in the American Civil War, whether they can fulfill their commitment to sending troops remains uncertain.

However, the Four-Nation Intervention Alliance would still have more influence than the Three-Nation Intervention Alliance. While Spains strength is already at the bottom among the great powers, its political influence still remains.

Especially in the Americas, where there is a large population of Hispanics. The stance of the Spanish government can influence the choices of many people.

Of course, John Bull cannot simply kick the Spanish out of the Intervention Alliance. But inevitably, Spains say has been diminished.

After a moment of silence, John Russell said slowly, Lets end the American Civil War as soon as possible; waiting any longer could lead to unforeseen changes. Lets also settle accounts with the Americans for their support of the Irish independence organization this time.

Dont think John Bull only cares about interests. They are also good at holding grudges.

Lincolns final counterattack did disperse the attention of various countries and bought time for the federal government to avoid being divided into five, but it also fueled animosity.

Evidence? Sorry, since when have the great powers needed evidence to act? As long as they perceive it to be true, thats enough.

Franz didnt send anyone to find evidence of American support for the Hungarian independence organization, and neither would the British bother with such futile efforts.

Only the weak look for evidence to protest with. As the kings of this era, Britain, France, and Austria did not make any protests to the Americans, but directly began preparing to retaliate.

This is the basic play of power politics in the 19th century. Only when there is no other option do people choose to protest; most of the time, they retaliate directly.

After all, conflicts between nations were too frequent in those days. You stab me in the back one day, and I stab back in secret the next. They have gone back and forth so many times that its impossible to tell whos right and whos wrong.

Of course, having evidence would be better; it could exert pressure using public opinion. But ultimately, the game is about strength and means.

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After a round of emergency consultations, on March 7, 1865, the Four-Nation Intervention Alliance of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain finally reached a consensus. The four nations issued diplomatic notes to both the North and South under the pretext of maintaining peace in the Americas.

The British, with the strongest presence in the Americas, naturally assumed the role of leader. The British envoy to the United States, Mark Oliver, represented the intervention alliance in negotiations with both sides.

On March 8, the four powers conducted joint military exercises in the eastern and western Pacific regions simultaneously.

Over two hundred warships from the four nations assembled for the exercises along the coastal areas of the United States, with residents in some coastal areas hearing the thunderous sounds of cannon fire.

Meanwhile, the ongoing secret negotiations between the North and South reached an impasse due to issues of interest distribution, hindering any consensus.

At this juncture, the intervention of the four countries prompted President Lincolns immediate concern that the secret negotiations had been exposed, triggering dissatisfaction among the involved nations.

To intervene in the American Civil War, these countries had invested a great deal of manpower and resources. What if the two sides reached a compromise privately? How could the interests of these countries be guaranteed?

Secretary of State Seward analyzed, Mr. President, including you and me, no more than ten people are aware of the secret negotiations, and these individuals hold high positions. There is no reason for any leakage of information.

The sudden intervention of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain is most likely due to the European situation. They are unwilling to wait any longer, which is a good thing for us.

The plan was successful, but Lincoln did not feel much joy. The current negotiations have reached a stalemate, with both the North and the South unwilling to back down over the control of Maryland.

Maryland is also one of the slave states, and the Confederacy has already occupied it. The slave owners in the state shed blood for the Confederate government, with over 60,000 people joining the Confederate army.

Abandoning this territory would undoubtedly damage the reputation of the Confederate government and weaken the cohesion of the member states.

The Confederacy cannot afford to give up, and neither can the Union. Washington is adjacent to Maryland, and without Maryland as a buffer, Washington would be exposed to the enemy at any moment.

No, its already exposed to the enemys eyes. The neighboring state of Virginia joined the Confederate government early on.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, parts of Virginia near Washington remained loyal to the Union, which spared Washington from immediate pressure on the frontlines.

However, this was of no use, as most of Washingtons urban areas have now fallen, and the federal government is only holding onto a few strongholds, indicating that the defense of Washington is still ongoing.

Since the secret negotiations have begun, both sides have tacitly ceased large-scale combat. Otherwise, everyone would have heard news of the fall of Washington by now.

Regardless, Lincoln still does not want to give up on Maryland. Even if he is not popular in Maryland and may not win many votes there.

This is indeed good news, but it also comes with great trouble. With the intervention of the four nations, we will not be able to force the Confederate government to make concessions.

If the interests were enough, I dont think the Confederacy would mind inviting the intervention of the British, French, Austrians, and the Spanish into the negotiations. By then, we will become passive.

Lincoln didnt entertain the illusion of gaining support from the four countries; it was impossible to achieve. A powerful United States does not align with the interests of various nations. Moreover, following recent support for revolutionary organizations in those countries, both sides have already taken opposite positions.

Knowing is one thing, but it doesnt mean he will concede to the Confederate government. As a politician, he must consider the political implications rather than just looking at surface-level benefits.

Perhaps, superficially, relinquishing Maryland to prematurely end this civil war may incur smaller costs than the repercussions of foreign intervention. However, politically, can the federal governments various states accept it?

Its worth noting that Maryland supports the federal government, albeit this support is the result of Lincolns coercive methods. But this should not overshadow Marylands status as one of the many federal states.

Now, abandoning this state will further diminish the loyalty of the states to the federal government, inevitably weakening its authority.

In contrast, relinquishing Maryland under the intervention of the great powers may yield even greater benefits, with higher public acceptance.

At that time, it will be possible to whitewash the situation, framing it not as the governments lack of effort but rather the overpowering strength of the enemy, leaving no choice but to compromise.

Especially for individual politicians, choosing the former may lead to accusations of collaboration with Southern spies and eventual downfall, whereas opting for the latter could at least garner some sympathy.

Even if their political careers come to an end, its still better than facing universal condemnation, isnt it?

Secretary of State Seward nonchalantly said, Anyway, weve reached this point, and the situation is already beyond our control. If we can safeguard the core interests of the federal government, then well have fulfilled the voters trust.

Indeed, overall they have performed well, and one might even say excellently. The fact that they managed to integrate so many federal states and fight with the South for so many years is proof enough of their capabilities.

No matter how capable they are, it cannot conceal the fact that they are, in essence, failures. Secretary of State Seward has come to terms with this; after all, their term is about to expire.

In the upcoming elections, Seward has no intention of participating to avoid potential embarrassment. Whoever the unlucky individual elected next time is, let them deal with the mess left behind by their predecessors.

No, if it werent for the war delaying the election, the next government would already have been elected.

Nobody is foolish enough to step forward as a scapegoat before a ceasefire treaty is signed.

Hence, both the Republican and Democratic parties have consistently argued that during times of war, many citizens of federal states are unable to participate in voting, rendering the elections unable to represent the will of all the people.

Naturally, the elections were postponed until after the war, extending the Lincoln administrations term.

Otherwise, Seward and the others would have felt relieved immediately. With less than a month left until the end of their term, they could have easily waited it out.

The Lincoln administration must bear the responsibility for the division of America before they can pack up and leave; this is a shared desire among all parties.

Of course, Lincoln could also participate in the next presidential election. However, as a failure, his public approval rating is extremely low, with virtually no chance of winning.

Chapter 377: Influence

Without exception, representatives from Britain, France, Austria, and Spain appeared at the negotiating table. Unable to get what they wanted in the secret negotiations, the Confederate government unhesitatingly invited the great powers to intervene.

Balancing the strength of both the North and the South was a shared desire among the four nations. Given that the comprehensive national power of the Union was stronger than that of the Confederacy, it naturally became the target of suppression by all parties.

Even representatives of the native Americans were present at the negotiating table. Disregarding racial conflicts and white supremacy, these issues were pushed aside in the face of interests.

However, the native Americans, with the weakest power, were only present as observers, awaiting the outcome. They still lacked a say at the negotiating table.

As a large alliance of tribes, the native Americans power was too weak, equivalent only to that of a federal state, and could not be compared to either the North or the South.

From the very start, the North and South bickered endlessly over legal issues. Matters of secret contact behind the scenes were concealed by both sides.

Making unauthorized private contacts with the enemy, without parliamentary approval these were things that could not see the light of day. Once exposed, it would be a political crisis.

At the same time, news also came out about the results of the Russo-American joint fleets operation in eradicating pirates in the U.S. Channel Islands. Its unclear how many pirates were eliminated, but the Russo-American joint fleet was almost annihilated.

The navy losing to pirates is not groundbreaking news. Occasionally, when they are caught all alone, its understandable for the navy to lose to pirates. In the age of sailing warships, the power gap between pirates and navies was not insurmountable.

However, this time, a combined fleet consisting of Russian and American vessels, totaling twenty-three ships, went to hunt down pirates but only two small boats returned, effectively resulting in the total annihilation of the fleet. This was major news.

If it was the navy of a small kingdom like Ryukyu or Hawaii that was wiped out by pirates, people could understand.

Even if the U.S. West Coast Fleet was to be pressed hard by pirates, such an outcome would be acceptable. After all, they are upstarts, and it is normal for their naval strength to be lacking.

Coincidentally, the protagonist happened to be the Russian Navy, and this incident occurred precisely during the Russo-Prussian War, exacerbating the situation.

After such an incident, the federal government of course could not turn a blind eye to it.

Nevertheless, the Russians also suffered casualties while helping to eradicate the pirates, prompting President Lincoln to immediately order a fleet to withdraw from the East Coast and head for the Channel Islands to eliminate the pirates.

Since negotiations were already underway and the Great Powers had intervened, anyone who tried to continue the war would be considered an enemy of the Anglo-French-Austrian-Spanish coalition. With war no longer an option, diverting forces to the West Coast was not a significant problem.

Simultaneously with the military deployment, the federal government immediately notified the Russian government by telegraph. Of course, the message was also relayed to various European countries as the telegraph lines passed through them, leading to the inevitable leakage of information.

Currently, there is only one telegraph line between Europe and America, with no direct telegraph line from the United States to Russia. Messages must be relayed through various European countries, making it impossible to avoid interception.

During the outbreak of the American Civil War, a news blockade by the federal government meant that other countries could only rely on ships for communication. News of the naval defeat, even if the Americans wanted to keep it secret, could not be concealed for long.

Moreover, the current situation is different. The importance of the Russians to the federal government has decreased, so President Lincoln naturally does not care about the trouble caused to the Russians by this leakage of information.

Turning a blind eye to past friendships is a common tactic used by American politicians. To gain the friendship of Americans, they should speak in terms of interests; everything else is nonsense.

In history, the support of the federal government by the Russian government facilitated national unity. However, as soon as the Americans recovered from the Civil War, they immediately became fervently anti-Russian.

The supporters behind the Russo-Japanese War were not just the British; Americans also made a major contribution.

Unfortunately, the term of office for a US president is only four years, and re-election is limited to two terms. No matter how good the relationship is, once a new administration takes over, all previous investments go down the drain.

Almost all republics perform very poorly in terms of policy continuity. Often they reverse course just for the sake of reversing the previous policies.

As opposition parties overthrow their political rivals in elections, it is imperative to overturn the policies of the previous administration. This was what was considered politically correct.

Even if it is known that the previous administration was correct, it still must be undone. Otherwise, how can the politicians justify their actions to the electorate? Or rather, how can they justify them to their backers behind the scenes?

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Upon receiving the news of the near-complete destruction of the Russian Navy, Franz at the Vienna Palace simply laughed it off.

Knowing full well how hostile relations were with the British, yet still going to the Americas to cause them trouble wasn't that just asking for death?

An ambush by pirates?

Who doesn't know the British Navy's ancestors were pirates themselves? It's just that they were legalized pirates. Despite the recent whitewashing of the British Navy's image in recent decades, occasionally reverting to their old trade of piracy is still inevitable.

Even into the early 20th century, rumors persisted of the British Navy engaging in piracy, though the British never admitted to it.

After a moment of silence for the Russians, Franz began to take pleasure in their misfortune.

He had heard plenty of jokes about the Russian navy before, but hearing it firsthand was different.

But these were minor issues; after all, the Russian government always relied on the army to make a living. When has the Russian Navy ever been powerful?

The size of the Russian Navy was not insignificant, ranking only behind those of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain in terms of total tonnage. It has also been in existence for two centuries since the 17th century.

However, this did not mean that the Russian Navy was powerful. On the contrary, the current Russian Navy lagged far behind the navies of European countries.

While major naval powers were constructing ironclad ships, the Russian navy was still relying on sailing vessels. There was no other reason for this other than the simple fact that they lacked funds.

First, there was the Near East War, followed by the reforms of Alexander II, and now the Russo-Prussian War. Where would the Russian government find the financial resources to develop the navy?

From this perspective, Nicholas I's decision to appoint Menshikov to be in charge of the navy showed considerable foresight.

Even though they hadn't developed their capabilities in naval warfare, at least their abilities in land warfare had improved, right? At least they had developed specialized skills, so the military expenditure wasn't entirely wasted.

Franz was considering whether to advise Alexander II to send the navy to launch a surprise attack on the coastal areas of Prussia.

If they couldn't achieve results in naval battles, they could make up for it in land battles. The elite Russian navy could easily defeat the hastily recruited militia of the Kingdom of Prussia without any pressure.

After hesitating for a moment, Franz decisively abandoned this tempting idea. It wasn't the right time now. Bringing it up at this moment would be extremely humiliating for Alexander II.

But there was no hurry; it could wait until later. Despite the inadequate combat capabilities of the Tsar's navy, there was no pressure when it came to bullying the Prussian navy in naval battles.

Even though the Kingdom of Prussia had constructed an ironclad ship, its technological capabilities were limited, resulting in the creation of a pseudo-ironclad. There was no need to worry about insufficient firepower to sink them.

When it came to land warfare, it was uncertain. They were at the pinnacle of naval land combat capabilities in this era. Before engaging in battle, it was unclear who would have the upper hand between them.

In St. Petersburg, Alexander II was furious upon receiving news of the near-total destruction of the main fleet of the Far East Fleet during its visit to the United States.

The humiliation had spread all the way from the Americas. Although he suspected British involvement behind this, there was no evidence.

In this regard, the British Navy was professional. After taking off their uniforms, they could easily convert their warships into pirate ships. Even the Americans, who were the overlords of the area, hadn't noticed anything suspicious.

Now that the era of ironclad ships had arrived, the phasing out of sail-powered warships was inevitable. Yet, the pirate ships that raided the Russian Navy were still entrenched in the Channel Islands.

The men may have left, but the ships remained.

Clearly, the British had sold these soon-to-be decommissioned warships to the pirates, completely separating themselves from this ambush on the Russian fleet.

My Minister of the Navy, can you tell me what's going on? Since when has the Russian Empire's navy been unable to defeat even pirates?

The current Minister of the Navy, Lawrence Lvovsky, replied nervously, Your Majesty, these pirates possess numerous warships and cannot be treated as ordinary pirates.

According to the information provided by the Americans, we can preliminarily conclude that this is the work of the British, as the cannons on their ships are of British make. It's even possible that the British Navy disguised themselves as pirates and ambushed us.

But rest assured, the Navy Ministry has already prepared to dispatch a fleet to the Pacific to wipe out these pirates and wash away our humiliation.

Alexander II cursed angrily, Fool! You know it was the British behind this, yet you still want to send warships over there. Do you think our losses are not great enough already?

Retaliation, of course, crossed Alexander II's mind, but their strength didn't allow for it. If the enemy were the British, no matter how many warships they sent, the outcome would be the same.

He dared not overestimate British integrity. If the Royal Navy posed as pirates, few countries could withstand them.

Foreign Minister Clarence Ivanov proposed, The dignity of the Empire must not be profaned; these pirates must be eradicated.

However, dispatching fleets from our homeland is out of the question, especially with the ongoing Russo-Prussian War. We should deal with the pirates through diplomatic means instead.

Whether its urging the Americans to dispatch troops or seeking assistance from the Austrians, both are viable options. The British, for the sake of their own reputation, will not stick up for these pirates.

This was inevitable. No matter how shameless John Bull was, he would not openly collude with pirates. From the start, these pirates were sacrificial pawns.

The British only aimed to strike a blow at the Russians and had no intention of actually falling out with them. The current Russian Empire is not so easy to provoke if pushed to the brink, they may have to fight another war to defend India.

Leaving behind this band of pirates is just to let the Russians vent. It prevents the Russian government from having no way to back down and going to look for trouble with the British.

The Russian government has no money? Thats true, but it doesnt mean the Russian nobles are also penniless. If pushed to desperation, Alexander II could promise India as collateral and raise funds from the domestic nobility to put together the budget for a war, which would not be much of an issue.

The Russians are now extremely arrogant, confident that their army is the best in the world and can stomp anyone in their path.

Alternatively, they could seek funds overseas. As long as the interests are sufficient, theres no fear of being unable to borrow money.

The Austrian financial sector dares not lend to the Russian government mainly due to concerns over their repayment ability. However, if Alexander II were willing to offer collateral that would entice Franz, these concerns would disappear.

The vast Russian Empire has abundant capital. As long as Alexander II was willing to sell out the country, obtaining a loan from the French would not be difficult, let alone the Austrians.

Things that would not normally happen may not be so unthinkable for the Russian Empire.

Peter IIIs remarkable maneuvers, documented clearly in history books, serve as a precedent. Who can guarantee that Alexander II wouldnt take a similar gamble?

Just as Nicholas I did back then, winning the gamble would establish Alexander II as one of Russias greatest Tsars; losing would merely mean meeting God a bit sooner.

After hesitating for a moment, Alexander II made a decision, Lets have the Americans handle it. This whole affair started because of them in the first place, so its only natural for them to take care of the aftermath.

This was the wisest choice. The strategic value of Russo-American relations was not high, to begin with, so there was no need to invest too much capital.

Using this incident as an excuse to draw a line on the relationship between the two countries would be beneficial for everyone.

The federal government was not yet the America of later generations; it couldnt offer assistance in European affairs, and couldnt even provide a loan for aid.

Likewise, they couldnt provide the assistance the Americans wanted. This tragic naval incident was a warning from the British, telling them not to meddle in American affairs.

Alexander II, who had originally planned to secure a seat in the negotiations between the North and South, was completely woken up.

The Russian Empire was indeed powerful, but only on land. They wielded significant influence in Europe, Central Asia, and the Far East, but in the distant Americas, no one would take them seriously.

Of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain participating in this mediation, which one was not a major naval power? Which one doesn't have a fleet in the Americas or the capability to mobilize tens of thousands of troops?

Strength is what determines influence. Don't you see, the federal government that has a good relationship with them is not even inviting them to participate now?

Chapter 378: The Integration Process

The negotiations between the North and the South have not concluded yet, but the American Civil War has effectively ended. Neither the European powers nor the American public want this war to continue.

This was not something that could be reversed by individual will; all that remained was to negotiate terms.

To demonstrate sincerity, both sides have ceased military actions, including ongoing military mobilizations.

Strategically, the goal of weakening the United States has essentially been achieved. All that remains is the final treaty to formalize the division of the United States.

However, this is not just a positive development; it also brings along a series of issues. For example, Austria's cotton and cotton textile industry will be impacted.

Taking advantage of the reduced cotton production during the American Civil War, the Austrian cotton textile industry, which had sufficient cotton supply, rose unexpectedly, seizing market share from the British in Europe.

In Eastern, Southern, and Central Europe, British cotton textile products were gradually squeezed out of the market.

Previously, due to insufficient cotton supply, cotton textile products were in high demand, and the British were powerless when Austria seized market share.

Now, things are different. With the end of the Civil War, cotton production in the United States will quickly recover. With sufficient raw material supply, British capitalists will naturally seek to regain the market.

The market is the lifeblood of every industrialized nation. As the first country to undergo the Industrial Revolution, the British have accumulated enough advantages, with industrial strength once surpassing more than half of the global total.

As France and Austria completed their industrialization, the proportion of British industry in the global industrial output decreased, but it still remains the world's number one.

However, an embarrassing fact is that the British Empire, the world's factory, has long been in a trade deficit.

In 1864, Britains total exports were worth 215 million pounds, while imports totaled 275 million pounds, resulting in a trade deficit of 60 million pounds.

During the same period, Frances total exports amounted to 2.963 billion francs, while its total imports from abroad were 2.523 billion francs, resulting in a trade surplus of 440 million francs (approximately 17.6 million pounds).

Meanwhile, Austrias total exports amounted to 285 million guilders, with total imports totaling 226 million guilders, resulting in a trade surplus of 59 million guilders (approximately 29.5 million pounds).

Not only were France and Austria in a state of trade surplus, but Russia also found itself in a similar position. In 1864, Russias total exports amounted to 187 million rubles, with imports totaling 175 million rubles, resulting in a trade surplus of 12 million rubles.

During this era of relatively small international trade volumes, Russias agricultural exports alone exceeded half of its total exports, allowing it to achieve a trade surplus through this advantage.

Austrias significant trade surplus can also be attributed to its agricultural exports, as food is a basic need, and Britain is one of Europes major grain-importing countries.

To address the issue of trade deficits, successive British governments were deeply concerned. However, the inherent shortage of domestic resources meant that Britain would remain in a state of trade deficit.

Fortunately, John Bull had many colonies, allowing it to plunder colonial wealth to fill this gap. Otherwise, an ordinary country would have crumbled long ago.

Historically, the Opium Wars were started by the British precisely to offset their trade deficits.

Now that the Austrian capitalists had seized market share, the British would certainly not accept this lying down. Overturning the table was still too extreme this level of conflict did not require the two countries to completely break off relations.

Of course, turning hostile would be futile; this was fair competition in business. It was the British insufficient supply of cotton textile products at the time that allowed Austria to take advantage of the situation. John Bull couldnt make the market wait.

Now that the American Civil War had ended, cotton production in the South might return to normal next year. Thanks to the benefits of labor exports, production might even increase further.

The Confederate States of America enjoyed uniquely advantageous geographical conditions, and their cotton yield per acre was usually higher than in other regions.

Of course, the insufficient yield per acre could be compensated by expanding the planting area, but it would inevitably lead to an increase in corresponding labor input.

Historically, the North emerged victorious, causing the Southern plantation owners, as the defeated party, to lose access to cheap labor. This severely impacted cotton production, compounded by competition from Indian and Egyptian cotton in the market.

However, the primary reason was the Northern capitalists need for cheap industrial raw materials. They utilized methods such as raising tariffs and railway freight rates to render American cotton less competitive in the market.

Currently, Indian cotton production has not yet increased significantly. In efforts to compete for labor in the excavation of the Suez Canal, British attempts to promote cotton cultivation in Egypt faced obstruction from France and Austria.

At present, the only competitor of the Confederate States of America in the cotton market is West Africa.

As the global cotton supply had not yet exceeded demand, such competition was unwise in the short term, as Austria itself could absorb most of West Africa's cotton production capacity.

However, with the entry of Indian and Egyptian cotton in the future, this competition will intensify.

Facing competition with the British in the cotton textile industry and competing in the cotton market with the United States, Egypt, and India, Franz had to consider these economic issues in advance.

Schnbrunn Palace

Today's agenda consists of only two items. Firstly, how to maintain our market share for cotton textile products on the European continent; secondly, how to safeguard the interests of cotton farmers?

During this period, industrial and commercial products were relatively scarce, with the textile industry dominating the economy. Although the cotton textile industry was not one of Austria's core industries, due to the impact of the American Civil War, it experienced a sudden rise and thus could not be abandoned.

Currently, regions like Bavaria, Württemberg, Lombardy, and Venetia have a combined workforce of up to 1.2 million in the cotton textile industry, with over 2.5 million employees across the industry chain.

With so many people dependent on the textile industry for their livelihoods, it directly dictates that the Austrian government must protect this industry, making the ongoing Anglo-Austrian trade dispute inevitable.

Ensuring the interests of cotton farmers goes without saying. Currently, the majority of plantation owners in the colonies are nobles.

This is determined by Austria's national situation. Ordinary people are limited by their economic strength and cannot expand plantation areas significantly, even if they want to. Meanwhile, capitalists lack interest in farming.

Due to land redemption within the country, many nobles have lost their land but gained redemption money, which obviously cannot sit idle.

After the establishment of the colonies, many conservative nobles turned their investment targets to plantations. Perhaps in later years, farming profitability might not be high, but in this era, the return on investment in plantations is not much lower than in other industries.

Cotton plantations are no exception, attracting a large number of nobles. As the spokesperson for the nobility interest group, Franz naturally had to consider their interests.

This also related to peoples enthusiasm for opening up colonies. Under profitable conditions, the ruling class would certainly strive to maintain the colonial system; otherwise, the opposite would be true.

Minister of Economy Andrew replied, Your Majesty, our Ministry of Economy has prepared contingency plans. When necessary, we can use political means to maintain the domestic and Russian markets without much trouble.

Southern Italy is in the midst of a civil war, and the already limited market there is further shrinking, so it will not be the focus of British counterattacks.

The remaining battleground is in Central Europe, including the German Federal Empire, Prussia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and other regions, which are the main theaters of this trade war.

French capital may also join in. The French economy has developed quite well in recent years, and with raw material supply guaranteed, their cotton textile products are also competitive in the market.

To enhance the market competitiveness of cotton textile products, the Ministry of Economy believes that it may be necessary to provide tax rebates and subsidies to these frontline production enterprises when necessary.

Simple and crude, yet highly effective. The production technologies of everyone are almost the same, and there is no discernible difference in product quality. With no significant advantage in production costs, to gain an edge in market competition, one can only resort to policies.

Historically, it was through the subsidies of various countries that the British cotton textile industry was eventually crushed. In manufacturing, the competition comes down to cost and quality. Once the technological advantage is lost, the competition becomes brutal.

In this regard, Franz was also powerless. They could only seize a portion of the British market by taking a lead, but now the real competition had arrived, and everyone could only rely on their strength.

The only advantage was that the British cotton textile industry was larger in scale. If financial subsidies were used, for every 1 million spent by Austria, the British would have to pay 3 million.

This kind of mutually damaging approach was not something that would normally be played out. After all, a country has so many industries, and it was impossible to concentrate resources on just one industry.

Minister of Agriculture Christian said, Cotton and the cotton textile industry are closely related. As long as the domestic cotton textile industry does not collapse, the cotton plantation economy in West Africa will not collapse.

To enhance the competitiveness of West African cotton, we can consider tax measures, such as reducing or even abolishing trade tariffs between colonies and the homeland.

Throughout Europe, Austria is definitely the country that places the highest emphasis on the development of colonial economies. However, no matter how much emphasis is placed, it still cannot surpass that of the homeland.

To avoid the impact of cheap agricultural products from colonies on the domestic agricultural market, trade tariffs have existed between the homeland and colonies from the beginning, albeit slightly lower than foreign tariffs.

There has always been a call for economic integration within the Austrian government. The nobles who invest in plantations have always wanted to integrate the colonies into the homeland for their own interests.

Currently, the governance model in West Africa, Congo, and Nigeria is beginning to converge with that of the homeland, and some colonial cities are adopting laws similar to those of the homeland.

As the first generation of colonizers, people still have very strong feelings toward the homeland. Many are pushing for the process of integration, and Franz himself is one of the supporters.

However, due to the involvement of various factors, the Austrian government still dares not hastily announce the integration of colonies into the homeland. Nonetheless, the best-developed colonies have already begun to implement the provincial system.

Compared to the homeland, these colonial provinces have greater rights and even have some military authority. Lowering trade tariffs between colonies and the homeland undoubtedly advances the process of integration further.

After a moment of contemplation, Franz raised a question, In theory, there are no issues. However, lowering tariffs between the homeland and the colonies also involves the integration process between the second homeland of Germany and the mainland.

Lets first leak this issue to gauge the reactions of various sectors domestically. At the same time, organize economists to conduct comprehensive analyses. We must understand the extent of the impact this will have on the homeland.

This issue has been brought to the surface. Prior to this, the legal basis for promoting the integration process between the colonies and the homeland was Franz's proposal to recreate the second homeland of Germany.

Since the African colonies were the second homeland of Germany from the beginning, merging them with the first homeland should not be a problem.

However, these were all speculations from the public, as the official stance had not been expressed. The main force behind the integration process was also in the civilian sector, with groups and individuals involved in colonial interests driving the plan forward.

The push was substantial, while opposition from various groups was more robust. Primarily consisting of small and medium-sized nobility and farmers from the homeland, they feared that cheap colonial agricultural products would flood the homeland, damaging their interests.

However, the current situation was somewhat unexpected. Agricultural products from Austrian colonies were not inexpensive, at least not competitive compared to those from the homeland.

On one hand, the lack of labor in the colonies has led to high labor costs; on the other hand, the main reason is that these are newly developed lands with initially low yields.

Most crucially, Austria's two major grain-producing regions currently have very fertile land, and infrastructure such as water conservancy and transportation is already well-established, which the colonies cannot match.

As for the future? Franz can say with certainty that once chemical fertilizers emerge, the profit from farming will further decline.

Regardless of whether there was competition from colonial agricultural products, domestic agriculture would be affected. Many grain-importing countries would be able to increase their grain production using these fertilizers, leading to a short-term sharp contraction in the international grain market.

From this perspective, Austria cannot develop chemical fertilizers, or even if it is developed, they cannot put them into production.

The longer it is delayed, the more beneficial it is for Austria. Making changes rashly before the industry has developed to a certain level can easily lead to disaster.

More grain production is not necessarily better; the market capacity is limited. Once the threshold is exceeded, one can only lament over surplus grain.

This point can be illustrated by the fact that the inventor of chemical fertilizers was German. Would it not be self-inflicted misery for the major grain exporters like the United States, Austria-Hungary, and Russia to invent chemical fertilizers?

Of course, the Germans could never have dreamed that their invention of chemical fertilizers would benefit the French the most, directly allowing the French to escape the grain dilemma and become one of the main grain exporters in Europe.

Chapter 379: Safety First

Tax policies are still only an intention, and the extent to which they will ultimately be implemented depends on the actual circumstances. Apart from the parties involved, the majority of people are indifferent.

However, when it comes to the integration of colonies and the homeland, it's a different story. The Austrian governments mere hint at it has swiftly sparked widespread social debate.

Supporters and those opposed to it quarreled in newspapers daily, even overshadowing hot topics like the Russo-Prussian War, U. S. negotiations, and the Russian Navy being bullied by pirates.

Public opinion was not one-sided, with supporters and the opposition equally fervent. This made Franz feel relieved. It seemed the chances of integration passing in the Imperial Parliament were quite high.

As the emperor, although Franz can forcibly pass a decision, he has never done so.

On the surface, such actions may appear authoritative, showcasing the monarch's absolute power, but in reality, they bring significant potential political threats. It is expected that decisions be correct, and if they are not, the emperor must take responsibility.

No one can guarantee they won't make mistakes. Moreover, even correct decisions at the wrong time and place are also mistakes.

The Imperial Parliament is the highest legislative body of the new Holy Roman Empire, and it typically plays the role of a scapegoat. Major political decisions usually require its approval.

This is a political contingency plan prepared by Franz. In the event of major problems, and to prevent the dismissal of the cabinet, the Imperial Parliament can be held accountable instead.

After years of restructuring, the current Imperial Parliament is no longer composed of the original few individuals; the number of members has significantly increased. However, the system remains based on states representation.

Even the smallest free city has at least one seat, and then one seat is added for every 3 million people, with an additional seat added directly once the population exceeds three million to accommodate small states.

Regardless of how its arranged, Austria still occupies half of the seats. However, if one-third of the legislators oppose, they can veto a proposal. To amend the constitution, at least 95% of the legislators must agree.

Its worth mentioning that the part about the constitution was not created by Franz, but actively demanded by the various states.

Because the Imperial Constitution guarantees their autonomy, to prevent Austria from intervening in their internal affairs, they directly proposed conditions that were nearly impossible to meet.

Of course, the favorable provisions protecting the emperor and king in the constitution also contributed to the adoption of this provision. Everyone is intelligent, so naturally, they support terms that are advantageous to them.

The authority of the central government is naturally restricted, and regardless of how influential bureaucratic groups may be, their rights are legally constrained.

Each state government has its own team, and now the power of the new Holy Roman Empire governments cabinet is substantial, predicated on their simultaneous appointment to the Austrian cabinet.

If one day Franz becomes unhappy, he can directly disband them. Then the Imperial Cabinet would awkwardly find that without the cooperation of the state governments, they would be unable to accomplish anything.

The army belongs to the emperor and the kings below him and the cabinet has no authority to mobilize it. The states have a high degree of autonomy, and the central government has no authority to intervene in internal affairs.

Only a portion of financial power remains, where the central government can print money, but this also requires approval from the Imperial Parliament. The central government collects coinage taxes and tariffs, which are used to cover administrative expenses, military expenses, royal pensions, etc. Any shortfall is then jointly shouldered by the state governments.

Of course, the authority over foreign affairs rests with the central government, as does the administration of colonies. However, all of these depend on the cooperation of the states.

Especially when it comes to the internal affairs of the state governments, all policies are contingent upon the cooperation of the state governments before they can proceed.

For example, if the government plans to provide tax rebates to textile factories, it must obtain the cooperation of the state governments.

If a state government opposes, it can still proceed independently and continue to levy taxes according to its own laws, disregarding the decisions of the central government.

This is only theoretical; in reality, the economy of the new Holy Roman Empire is already integrated. Many economic issues require coordination by the central government, and there is no reason for anyone to reject terms that are advantageous to themselves.

This also reflects Franz's positioning of the central government as an organizer, connecting all the states together.

It bears some resemblance to the historical Second Reich, albeit with the current emperor holding much greater power. The central governments lack of authority to intervene in the internal affairs of the states does not mean that the emperor lacks the right to intervene.

Having the right to intervene is one thing; choosing whether or not to do so is another.

Unless a state government becomes outrageously unpopular and the populace rises up in protest, necessitating the emperor's intervention, Franz will refrain from involvement.

Since the establishment of the new Holy Roman Empire until now, such a situation has not occurred, so Franz has consistently abstained from actively engaging in affairs, merely collecting his salary.

He's not a power-hungry maniac so why bother with thankless tasks? As the emperor of the new Holy Roman Empire, being a good referee is sufficient.

Moreover, Franz also held the titles of Emperor of Austria and King of Bavaria, so even if he had a strong desire for power, there were outlets for it.

If necessary, he can still stir things up in the colonies; after all, there's always work to be done there. If he's not afraid of sudden death, he could easily work twenty-four hours a day.

Having multiple roles isn't without its benefits. In a society like Europe with clear property divisions, Franz naturally receives a higher salary.

With the royal annuity from the titles of the Holy Roman Emperor, the Emperor of Austria, and the King of Bavaria, and if the integration of the colonies is completed in the future, he will likely acquire several more titles, bringing in even more income.

As for merging the colonies into Austria? That was completely impossible.

Establishing overseas colonies was very costly, and Austria alone clearly could not afford it; ultimately, it was the finances of the new Holy Roman Empire that had paid for it.

In other words, it's all the states contributing money together that established the current colonial empire.

If all were handed over to Austria, the financiers who provided the money would surely not agree. Dividing it among the states is even more impossible. The distant colonies overseas are destined for autonomy.

Each state gaining economic benefits is already sufficient. Even if they theoretically obtain nominal administrative authority, they would have no means to administer them.

Franz had even encouraged everyone to establish overseas colonies. If state governments wanted to establish colonies, they could do so independently.

However, considering the terrifying capital investment and risks involved, everyone unanimously decided to let the central government take charge! If we were going to profit, we'll do it together; if we were going to incur losses, we'll do it together.

The most crucial aspect is that even if states go at it alone, they cannot disregard the central government. Without the protection of the Imperial Navy, how can the security of the colonies be ensured?

Didn't you see how the Prussian and German Federal Empire capitalists who previously established colonial outposts overseas voluntarily requested to join?

Even now, when Prussia and the German Federal Empire are joining the colonial movement, they still rely on the support of the new Holy Roman Empire.

This cannot be resolved by simply relying on hugging someone's thighs; overseas colonies represent a completely different realm. Each country possesses a large number of private colonial groups overseas, which are not entirely under the control of their respective governments.

In the event of conflict, each country's government will side with its own people.

In the end, it comes down to strength. Whichever wields greater strength in a region can dominate that area, rather than simply looking at national strength.

This is also why the Netherlands and Portugal were able to retain large colonial territories, despite not being powerful nations; their strength was sufficient in certain regions.

Since the colonial empire was established through collective financial and labor efforts, ownership of the colonies naturally belonged to the empire. How they are to be incorporated into the empire is also a matter of study.

Autonomous provinces, autonomous cities, autonomous territories, direct provinces, states, noble fiefs...

These are all options under consideration, with different names representing different systems.

Autonomous cities imply fragmented colonies, while autonomous territories suggest larger territories retained by the colonies, and direct provinces indicate direct control by the central government. States would be similar to the current situation of various states...

From a standpoint of interests, Franz would certainly prefer the colonies to be incorporated into the empire as states, as this would help consolidate imperial power.

In essence, regardless of whether they are principalities or kingdoms, Franz can directly assume the title of king. The bond of the empire primarily revolves around the emperor, followed by economic integration.

The more roles he holds, the more secure his throne becomes; unless all the states revolt against the emperor together, his position is safe.

In terms of policy, no one dares to risk national division by deposing the emperor. Moreover, before disposing of the emperor, a civil war must first be fought.

It is necessary to use force to subdue opposing states, otherwise, the Imperial Parliament will not approve. Without amending the constitution, the new regime cannot gain legitimacy.

Legitimacy is crucial within the European cultural system; typically, the lower the legitimacy, the shorter the lifespan of a regime.

For regimes lacking legitimacy, they should be prepared to suppress rebellions every day! Wait, without legitimacy, such actions cannot be considered rebellions; they can only be seen as efforts to restore order.

When it comes to revolutions, Franz is very confident. As long as the military doesn't rebel, everything can be easily dealt with.

Just look at Vienna; it lacks the foundation for revolution. Even if all of Europe were in revolution, Vienna would not erupt in turmoil.

Since Franz ascended to the throne, Vienna has not experienced any major protests. Even if protests occur, they are limited to a scale of no more than a hundred or so people, which is sufficient to indicate many things.

This is not without reason. Over a decade ago, the Austrian government prohibited the establishment of any factories in Vienna and gradually relocated existing factories.

A city without industry naturally does not experience large-scale demonstrations.

Nowadays, Viennas economy is primarily driven by the service industry, research, and finance. The economic structure determines the superstructure and the income of workers in these industries is relatively decent.

Without industrial pollution, Vienna has become Europes most beautiful city and the first major city in Europe without slums.

Small towns don't count; in this era, small towns themselves are large slums, so there's no need for distinction.

As a trade-off, Viennas population growth rate is slow, and the citys development lags far behind London and Paris.

Even within the new Holy Roman Empire, many cities now surpass Vienna in population, such as Milan and Munich.

Of course, population does not equate to economy; currently, Viennas total population is only 680,000, with the population in the city center being only 310,000. However, its economic output ranks just below that of London and Paris.

With a small population and a developed economy, the standard of living for the people ranks among the top in Europe, naturally resulting in fewer social conflicts. With fewer social conflicts, the desire for revolution among the populace naturally decreases.

As the base of power of the Habsburgs, Franz holds Vienna in high regard. As the capital of two empires, Vienna enjoys unparalleled advantages and does not need to develop any industries.

While London and Paris may appear prestigious, they are aware of their own difficulties. London has become a city of fog, and Paris has become a city of revolution.

Moreover, large cities themselves are not suitable for industrial development; land prices and living costs far exceed those of small and medium-sized cities, raising industrial production costs from the outset.

Using Vienna as an example, if one were to invest in building a factory here, land prices would be three times higher than those in smaller cities, and labor costs would increase by at least one-third.

This doesn't even consider the issue of raw material transportation; if we consider various factors comprehensively, the production costs of these factories usually increase by 10-30%.

Franz can only lament that competition is not fierce enough in this era, and capitalists are unaware of optimizing industrial allocation, let alone making every effort to save costs.

You see, capitalists in the future will move their factories wherever production costs are lowest. If anyone insists on staying in a big city, they will either be driven out or go bankrupt.

Of course, Franz is well aware that everyone is keen to flock to the capital mainly because it's close to the centers of power, allowing them to gain political benefits.

However, Franz, who dislikes capitalist interference in politics, overturned the table from the start and didn't give them this opportunity.

Vienna already has enough resources and doesn't need these industries, but many small and medium-sized cities do. Under this policy, Austria gained seven or eight industrial cities.

As a result, while Austria's overall industrial output may not have increased much, industrial competitiveness has improved, which is very beneficial for long-term development.

In this era, large cities are prone to protests, often because capitalists shift these increased costs onto workers to ensure their own interests.

The worse the economic situation, the more frequent the demonstrations, and the more intense the social conflicts.

From a ruler's perspective, as long as Vienna remains stable, Franz's rule is secure. If problems arise in other areas, troops can be deployed to suppress them.

This is a lesson from history; the vast majority of successful revolutions in Europe occurred in the capital. There may be exceptions, but Franz can't recall any from his memory.

In any case, whether for industrial development or to maintain rule, Franz achieved de-industrialization in Vienna.

This was also prudent preparation. With a stable capital and a sound system in place, it can be said that Franz took safety first to the extreme. As long as no reckless actions are taken, there truly will not be any issues.

Chapter 380: The Challengers and The Maintainers

In the early morning, the rumble of steam engines echoed continuously. No one was surprised about it. This was the Port of Venice, the largest trading port of the new Holy Roman Empire, with over a hundred ships entering and leaving daily.

The roar of steam engines had become a part of peoples lives here. Workers on the docks had already gathered, waiting for the ships to dock.

Life wasnt easy; in this era of limited productivity, even filling ones stomach wasnt an easy task.

Arnault was an ordinary dockworker, having worked here for three years already. His youthful dreams had faded in the face of reality. He had contemplated going abroad several times, but thinking of his wife and children, he ultimately gave up.

The work on the docks was exhausting and arduous, demanding significant physical strength. Those unable to carry loads of hundreds of kilograms couldnt handle this job.

For Arnault, none of this was a problem. He wasnt afraid of hardship or fatigue. He just wanted to take on more work, earn more money, and provide a better life for his family.

It would be best if his children could be sent to school to get some education. Despite Austria implementing compulsory education, Arnault was excluded.

This was simply because he wasnt a local resident and didnt have Austrian citizenship. In his daily life and work, this didnt have much impact.

After all, he was doing manual labor, and no one cared about the nationality of the bottom-level laborers. Additionally, when it came to social welfare benefits, Arnault was out of luck.

Over a decade ago, he had moved from Ancona to Venice with his father to make a living. In all these years, he had only returned to his hometown three times; once for his wedding and the other two times he was on a ship.

Austria had strict nationality regulations. For people of Germanic descent, as long as they had no criminal record, obtaining citizenship was very simple.

However, it was different for other ethnicities. Even though Arnault had been in Venice for over a decade, he still didnt meet the requirements.

Except for scientists, designers, engineers, and doctors, other professions faced numerous restrictions for immigrating to Austria.

Arnault memorized the criteria clearly:

First, no criminal record and correct political ideology;

Second, residing in Austria for a minimum of 20 years, or being born in Austria and having lived here for an extended period;

Third, making a certain contribution to society (significant contributors can be directly naturalized);

Fourth, holding a university degree (outstanding students in the fields of science and engineering may have other criteria reduced);

Fifth, being proficient in German, and inheriting Austrian cultural traditions;

Sixth, personal assets are not less than 8000 guilders.

It wasnt a deliberate exclusion of immigrants by Franz; rather, at the time of his accession, there was a significant imbalance in the ethnic composition of Austria, with the main ethnic group accounting for less than a quarter.

Given this context, accepting immigrants from other ethnicities would have exacerbated the situation, which was deemed undesirable.

To prevent such a scenario, the Austrian government established immigration criteria that were almost impossible to meet.

This policy proved to be very effective in improving the ethnic balance of the main ethnic groups.

Without such restrictions, Austria would have seen the addition of hundreds of thousands of Italians. Currently, the number of foreign Italians living in Lombardy and Venetia alone exceeds five hundred thousand.

It's not just Italians; there are also large numbers of foreign Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, Bulgarians, and others within Austria.

Faced with this situation, Franz, as the gatekeeper of immigration restrictions, dared not open the floodgates further. Ethnic integration was already challenging enough, and adding millions more people would only exacerbate tensions.

In any case, Austria did not lack labor and did not need these ordinary immigrants.

As for the high-quality immigrants Austria needed, they were no joke. Those individuals could live comfortably in any European country.

Arnault became a victim of this policy. Unless God suddenly favored him, the likelihood of obtaining Austrian citizenship was almost zero.

Currently, Austria's social welfare system is very limited, and aside from compulsory education, Arnault didn't feel much of a difference.

Regardless, his income in Venice far exceeded what he could earn in his hometown. It not only allowed his family to have enough to eat but also provided some savings.

The food at the dock was quite good, at least by the standards of the time. Dark bread was plentiful, and there was meat every day.

Do not misunderstand, this meat is fish. Here in Venice, the price of fish isn't much higher than that of dark bread and certainly lower than that of white bread.

To ensure the workers' physical strength, meat consumption is indispensable. The capitalists who contract the docks aren't foolish; they understand well that only with strong workers can they earn more money.

On the surface, dock labor may seem devoid of any technical expertise; however, those in the know understand that skilled labor can reduce the loss rate during handling.

Don't look at the small loss rate as inconspicuous, this is the docks' competitiveness. Austria has numerous ports and even more docks.

Most of these docks are government-owned, and when contracted to individuals, deliberate splitting occurs to break up regional monopolies.

If losses during loading and unloading at a dock become too significant and disputes arise with customers, the most critical consequence is a ruined reputation, resulting in fewer ships in the future.

In this regard, Arnault is fortunate. This competition increases their importance in the eyes of the capitalists, even if it remains insignificant. At least they aren't treated as disposable.

For example, they've managed to ensure timely payment of wages, provided the legally required overtime pay, and complied with the national standards for industry catering.

Arnault, do you recognize that flag?

The one asking was Arnault's fellow countryman Faccero. He had just come from his hometown and was full of curiosity about everything.

Looking over, Arnault said enviously, I don't recognize it, but it seems to be a noble family's crest.

Ships flying the coat of arms of noble families are typically privately owned vessels that do not engage in commercial transportation. This was the standard for affluent aristocrats.

Of course, there are exceptions occasionally, with some unconventional members of the nobility displaying their own coat of arms on merchant ships.

Faccero sighed, When will I be able to have such a ship!

Arnault rolled his eyes and didn't join in daydreaming. Such dreams had been dreamed by him many times already, yet they proved futile.

A well-dressed middle-aged man had approached to negotiate with the ship owner. If they agree to a price, then Arnault and the others would have work.

Respected Baron Falkner, Manale is honored to serve you!

Baron Falkner nodded wearily and instructed, Manale, arrange for the crew to unload everything from the ship and then transport it to the train station.

Will, accompany them and assist them with their work. I am now going to visit Viscount Orabis house. We will return to Vienna together in three days.

After speaking, Baron Falkner closed his eyes to rest. As one of the earliest to discover gold mines in the colonies, Falkner had now returned home with glory.

When he went to the colonies years ago, Falkner was so destitute that he had mortgaged even his family's ancestral land and incurred substantial debts. Now, he was a multimillionaire with a fortune worth several million guilders.

Over the years, most of the gold mines had been depleted. However, Falkner hadn't been idle while mining for gold.

Whether it was due to innate talent or not, initially he had only established farms to meet the needs of the miners working in the gold mines, but later they expanded rapidly and it snowballed.

Now, his farms and plantations combined covered a total area of over 4,800 hectares, making him a renowned landowner in the area.

Looking at the vast expanse of land, Baron Falkner helplessly realized that he couldn't leave anymore! The main purpose of his return this time was to promote the integration process between the colonies and the homeland.

With so many Austrian colonies, it's well known that it's impossible to incorporate all of them into the homeland. However, it's highly likely to merge the developed land into the mainland.

To advance this plan, many nobles who had established plantations in Africa have recently returned home to conduct public relations.

Once the integration of the African colonies was approved, Baron Falkner planned to convert the farms and plantations he had developed into family estates.

During his years on the African continent, he has also accumulated numerous merits. If he exchanges the local estates for African land, he can not only transform his own land into estates but also incorporate the land of the people who followed him initially.

When combined, the land area was more expansive than many counts' demesnes on the European mainland. With this vast estate, if managed carefully for several generations, the family can enter the circle of the greater nobility.

Baron Falkner was not the only one with such plans. Many nobles had similar intentions. Competition in the homeland was too fierce, and it was impossible to produce more major nobles.

But Africa was different. As long as they invested enough over generations, a new great noble house could emerge.

Many colonial capitalists were preparing to capitalize on this opportunity for transformation. Once integration is approved, their chance will come.

In Europe, these nouveau riche capitalists simply cannot enter the upper echelons of society. Even if they use money to become nobles, they cannot gain true recognition.

But the African continent was different. Apart from the old-established nobility, many upstarts could have their own aristocratic circles.

The capitalist era? In reality, it was the nobility not allowing capitalists to enter high society, so the capitalists wanted to overturn the table and drag the nobles down from their pedestals.

Now with the opportunity to join, naturally no one would overturn the table. After all, they had already obtained noble titles and were transitioning from challenging the rules to maintaining them. Once the colonies were integrated into the homeland, their status would be solidified.

This was what Franz hoped to see. Capitalists had never been his enemy; only those capitalists opposed to him were enemies.

If he merely suppressed them without leaving any path for upward mobility, even rabbits would be driven to bite when desperate, not to mention the increasingly powerful capitalists.

By leaving a path open, the originally fragmented capitalists could no longer unite.

Of course, this was just one part of colonial integration. In reality, it presented an opportunity for all levels of society.

Austrias colonies were ten times the area of the homeland. Just Austrias African territories alone were 7,000,000-8,000,000 square kilometers. Even if only a small portion was incorporated into the homeland, this would greatly increase opportunities.

At this point, if one dared to struggle and venture forth, there was a great possibility of overcoming the class restrictions.

If represented numerically, the existing chance of effort translating to upward mobility is approximately 1 in 10, yet once class structures become solidified, that probability would diminish to less than 1 in 100.

Of course, this only meant transcending their current class and taking a small step forward.

If one wanted to ascend to the heavens in a single step, then dont even dream about it. Apart from rebelling, there were no such shortcuts in this world.