

## Roman Empire 471

### Chapter 471: Strategic Withdrawal

Watching the French's frantic diplomatic maneuvers, Franz merely smiled. Clearly, Napoleon III had not fully prepared for this sudden action.

Otherwise, he should have started preparing bargaining chips years ago, ready to be offered for an exchange of interests now.

In international politics, there's no problem that can't be solved with enough interests. If there is, it means the offered interests aren't big enough.

This time, the interests the French offered were rather insignificant, such as promising Austria the annexation of the Ottoman Empire, which was hardly enticing to Franz.

It wasn't that this piece of meat wasn't tempting, the key was that once swallowed, it wouldn't be easy to digest. The Ottoman Empire had at least ten million people, how could it be easily dealt with?

Even if they could be driven toward Central Asia, the political repercussions of destroying the Ottoman Empire would once again thrust Austria into the spotlight.

Franz could even set aside the nearby German Federal Empire, let alone the Ottoman Empire.

After much effort to let the French take the heat, why should Austria step in now to share the burden? Franz wouldn't engage in such a losing proposition.

As long as the banner of the Greater French Empire flew over the European continent, Austria could develop with peace of mind, without worrying about becoming the target of all.

Unless the French could truly assimilate Italy, the empire would remain a threat. No amount of winning hearts and minds would suffice. There were simply too many Italians, more than any ethnic group within France.

With a long cultural heritage, they were not inferior to the French in this respect. Except for Greece, no other European country could compare with Italy in terms of historical heritage.

As the birthplace of the Renaissance and the cradle of modern thought, Italians had their own pride, which wouldn't be easily extinguished.

Colonial Minister Stephen analyzed, "Your Majesty, with the French strategically withdrawing overseas, we are likely to face increased pressure.

Especially in the Americas and Asia, where our presence is weak and competing with the British is very difficult. We will need to contract our presence in these regions."

This is one of the downsides. Without the French to share the burden, facing the British in the Americas and Asia, Austria doesn't have enough confidence.

Asia is relatively better, as the Austrian colonies' neighbors are the Dutch, who pose a relatively smaller threat. Even if conflicts arise, Austria can still threaten their European homeland.

The situation in the Americas is different. Alaska is the worst off, with no risk mitigation capabilities. If the British decided to act unscrupulously, they could even masquerade as pirates to seize it.

In South America, the Austrian colony of Patagonia has low risk mitigation capacity. Both Argentina and Chile pose a threat.

A few years ago, both countries had approached Austria to buy this colony, but the Austrian government quoted an astronomical price of 100 million guilders, scaring them off.

Deterred by Austria's strength, they wouldn't normally dare to act recklessly. However, if John Bull gets involved, the situation might change.

The Central American colonies seem strong, but they face the greatest challenges. The Confederate States of America have their eyes on these territories and have repeatedly made tentative offers to buy them from Austria.

These plantation owners have an insatiable appetite for land. Most of America's land was acquired during the Democratic Party's rule, with plantation owners being the main force behind it.

It wasn't that they had become docile now, but mainly because they had suffered huge losses in the American Civil War, and European countries opposed their expansion.

Austrian Central America was not some wilderness. After the initial immigration and with the original residents, the local white population now exceeded one million.

With the addition of Native Americans and a large number of mixed-race individuals, the local population reaches 3.5 million, rivaling any country in Central and South America.

But that was about it. However, the potential for development in Central and South America is minimal. Without Austria as a backing, it wouldn't have reached this point.

To progress further, they would need to annex Colombia in South America or Mexico in North America. This isn't easy to achieve, as both the United States and the Confederate States pose obstacles.

It would require Austria to shift its strategic focus to the Americas and invest its entire national strength, which is almost impossible.

In reality, in recent years, Austrian Central America has not engaged in external expansion. Even in Panama, they mainly focus on infiltration.

Franz smiled slightly and calmly said, "No matter, when it comes to colonies, it is not necessarily better the more you have of them. By now, most of the areas suitable for colonization have already been divided up. It's time to halt our expansion.

Not only us, but the British have also reached their expansion limit, though they haven't realized it yet.

Now all the good places have been divided up. The remaining areas are either tough nuts to crack or worthless lands that are neither useful nor dispensable.

Next, the Colonial Ministry should focus on construction. As long as we integrate the African continent into our homeland, we can face any challenge."

With sufficient advantage, Franz remained composed. He didn't even bother with the ongoing Anglo-Boer War.

Strength is confidence. In the original timeline, even the Boers could keep the British busy. Now, Austria's strength on the African continent was equivalent to a hundred or so Boer republics. What was there to worry about?

The nobles who could establish themselves in Africa were no pushovers. The real incompetents had died along the way. Any one of these people had fought their way through fire and blood.

Franz even suspected their military skills surpassed those of the regular army. At least the regular army still had moral principles, while these people would do anything to win.

Humanity and bottom lines didn't exist; colonizers were equivalent to executioners. This wasn't a joke. If crimes were to be investigated, every colonizer in the world, without exception, could face execution.

Perhaps occasionally, there are those who are unjustly accused, but that's only because they haven't had the chance to commit crimes yet.

All crows under the sun are equally black, and the major European colonial empires are no exception. Naturally, no one is willing to uncover this truth.

Not taking action against the Ottoman Empire now didn't mean never taking action. The wishes of generations of Habsburg monarchs still needed to be fulfilled.

Moreover, Franz is very interested in reclaiming the Holy Land to gain political prestige.

Franz accepted the olive branch extended by the French, but that was the extent of it. With the promise from the French government, Austria would have the upper hand in future negotiations over the Middle East.

As for the British, they could be overlooked. The establishment of the Greater French Empire has already divided the Mediterranean in two. It's only a matter of time before John Bull's influence is pushed out of the Mediterranean.

Even if they hold the heart of the Mediterranean, Malta, what can they do?

Surrounded by the spheres of influence of both France and Austria, sandwiched between two great powers, the British would need to invest too much to maintain their influence.

If relations were to break down someday, this isolated island would be impossible to defend. The more resources invested, the greater the potential future losses.

The Royal Navy being the world's best doesn't mean it dominates every region. It's normal for other countries to have regional maritime supremacy.

Austria wasn't swayed by the French but still played a role in containing the British. France and Austria tacitly worked together to push the British out of the Mediterranean.

Such conflicts occur almost daily around the world. For instance, Austria was squeezed out of the Far East by Britain and France, losing its interests in Japan.

Similarly, the French were squeezed out of Southeast Asia by Britain, Austria, and the Netherlands, leaving only a few isolated islands struggling to support themselves.

In Australia, Austria had just extended its feelers when it was blocked by the British.

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Similar situations have happened countless times. Allies in one region could become enemies in another.

This era is one of simultaneous cooperation and confrontation. As long as outright conflict is avoided, anyone can be an ally.

Truly aligned interests among allies exist only in theory. In reality, as long as treaties are upheld, they are considered good allies.

Napoleon III wasn't surprised by the Austrian government's actions. Everyone acted based on their own interests.

Austria's annexation of the German Federal Empire is fundamentally different from France's annexation of Italy. The former has popular support and doesn't require taking risks.

The Austrian government's choice to proceed step by step was actually the best choice. Voluntary integration is far less problematic than forced annexation.

If possible, Napoleon III would also want the Italians to voluntarily join France, but that's clearly impossible.

Thus, he has to resort to the oldest method: the first-generation ruler unifies by force, and the second-generation ruler wins hearts and minds through appeasement. This was the most effective governance method in the feudal era.

With achievements during peaceful times, the throne becomes stable. By the third generation, the foundation is solid, and as long as they don't make grave mistakes, they will maintain their legitimacy.

Napoleon III was racking his brains to pave the way for his son.

The biggest victim of France's strategic retreat overseas is Maximilian I. With reforms underway, rebellions in Mexico have been incessant.

If the task of suppressing the rebels hadn't been contracted out to the French army, Maximilian I would have been overthrown by the rebels long ago.

It must be noted that this contract greatly burdened the French. Over the past few years, the French army has suffered at least 8,000 casualties while suppressing the Mexican rebels.

As compensation, most of Mexico's mineral resources and tariffs fell under French control. Unfortunately, due to the civil war, the revenue didn't cover the costs.

Unknowingly, the Mexican government accumulated a debt of 1 billion francs to the French, in addition to 8.6 million pounds to the British, and 30 million pesos to the Spanish.

Objectively speaking, Maximilian I's reforms had some positive effects on the country, weakening the conservative forces and promoting the modernization of Mexico.

The costs, however, were also clear. The emperor became isolated, with only a group of like-minded idealists, while the original royalists nearly turned into revolutionaries.

Now, as the French strategically withdraws from overseas to concentrate on potential changes in Europe, it means Mexico is about to lose its biggest support.

Even if Napoleon III, for the sake of appearances, doesn't abandon Mexico, the French forces in Mexico alone cannot deter the ambitious Americans.

An emperor calling for the reclamation of lost territory is never popular. Both the United States and the Confederate States wanted to overthrow Maximilian I's rule.

With the French backing them before, and the great powers maintaining the principle of unity on American issues, the Americans naturally didn't dare to act rashly.

Now it was different. The French could hardly protect themselves, and the crown prince established by Maximilian I made him fall out with the Habsburgs, the possibility of Austrian intervention was also small.

If the Americans fail to seize such an opportunity, they wouldn't have their current status. Since news of France's strategic withdrawal spread, both the Union and the Confederacy have begun to take action.

With external support, the Mexican rebels have become active again. Uprisings are erupting across Mexico, and Maximilian I's rule is once again precarious.

#### Chapter 472: Between a Rock and a Hard Place

In the French army's headquarters in Mexico, Lieutenant General Schiedel was staring blankly at the map. Recently, the rebels seemed to be on stimulants, becoming active once again.

The more than 20,000 French troops stationed in Mexico had already suppressed over a dozen uprisings in the past month. However, it was all in vain. As soon as one region's rebellion was quelled, another would emerge elsewhere.

It was like mowing weeds; you cut one patch down, and another would sprout up. Without uprooting them completely, they always come back. The Mexican rebels' persistence in resurging made Lieutenant General Schiedel ponder the root causes.

Ultimately, he concluded that the main culprits were Maximilian I's reforms and foreign intervention.

Deep down, he cursed his predecessor, who had signed the contract with Maximilian I, thoroughly.

Suppressing rebels by contracting it? Well, he admitted that the conditions offered by Maximilian I were indeed generous, but no matter how good the terms were, they couldn't withstand the relentless emergence of rebels!

The predecessor, who signed the contract and earned considerable benefits for France, had now returned home to enjoy his reward, leaving all the troubles to his successor.

For the sake of France's reputation, the contract still had to be fulfilled. The Greater French Empire had just been established, and abandoning Mexico at this moment would be too demoralizing and politically unacceptable.

It was easy to abandon Maximilian I, but once that step was taken, it would be difficult to find collaborators in the future.

In the original timeline, Napoleon III's abandonment of Mexico disheartened many allies, contributing to France's isolation during the Franco-Prussian War.

Now France's situation was much better. Despite the strategic retreat, the Greater French Empire appears intimidating, and its deterrent power is much stronger than before.

The Americans are causing trouble but are trying to hide their involvement, never openly supporting the rebels.

Lieutenant General Schiedel felt powerless against the international forces' interference. Given France's strategic retreat, it was not the right time to provoke the Americans.

This account could only be kept for now, waiting for an opportunity to settle scores later.

Without much hesitation, Lieutenant General Schiedel decided to confront Maximilian I. Continuing like this, even if France could endure it, he, as the Governor of Mexico, could not.

The right or wrong of the reforms was no longer important. What mattered was that France now needed a stable Mexico.

In Lieutenant General Schiedel's view, taking advantage of the chaos to continue expanding interests was not as good as securing what they already had. The most valuable industries in Mexico had basically fallen into their hands, and continuing to stir things up would be counterproductive.

In the palace, Maximilian I was still busy handling state affairs, his daily routine. Compared to most emperors, he could be considered a model of diligence.

The white hair on his head and the wrinkles on his forehead were proof. In just a few years of his reign, Maximilian I seemed to have aged twenty years.

Looking at Lieutenant General Schiedel's ultimatum, Maximilian I was devastated. At that moment, he truly understood what politics was.

It had nothing to do with right or wrong, only interests mattered.

From a long-term development perspective, Maximilian I's reforms in Mexico were clearly positive.

However, this had no value to those whose interests were harmed by the reforms. Even if they understood this, they would still rebel to protect their interests.

Now, the French were also standing on the opposite side of him, simply because France needed a stable Mexico, and Maximilian I's reforms were the source of instability in this country.

To put it simply, if he stopped the social reforms and introduced a few laws to protect conservative interests, 80% of the rebels in Mexico would disappear immediately.

Maximilian I glared at Lieutenant General Schiedel and said sternly, "General, mind your place. You are overstepping your authority."

Maximilian I had no fondness for the French either. To him, they were like a parasite attached to Mexico, sucking out its nutrients.

If it weren't for the fact that he had no choice and still needed French support, the two sides would have fallen out long ago.

Mutual dislike was their way of getting along. The French didn't take this emperor seriously either. Apart from the necessary etiquette on the surface, they never gave Maximilian I face in private.

Lieutenant General Schiedel retorted sharply, "Your Majesty, I am aware of that but your actions are truly hard to believe. Stop this nonsense, the Mexican people can no longer tolerate a disruptive emperor."

With these two casual sentences, he completely negated all of Maximilian I's reforms, directly defining them as "making a mess."

This infuriated Maximilian I. He was still a high-ranking aristocrat and had never been treated like this in his life.

Since becoming Emperor of Mexico, things had changed, and his special status had vanished.

Not only did the French disrespect him, but the envoys from various European countries often gave him a hard time too. In this era, weak countries had no dignity.

Although he had become an emperor, the status he now possessed seemed even lower than when he was an archduke in Austria.

At least back then, no one dared to boss him around, and he could act as he pleased without having to endure this kind of treatment.

After years of tempering, Maximilian I had grown. If this had happened a few years ago, he would likely have flown into a rage and drawn his gun for an aristocratic duel, but now he could suppress his anger and continue the conversation.

"This is Mexico's internal affair and has nothing to do with your country. Also, Lieutenant General Schiedel, don't forget you are a soldier; politics is not your concern."

This faint threat was all Maximilian I could muster. Military interference in politics could cause an uproar in France.

There was no helping it, the French public loved such a scandal. Even Napoleon III, who had risen to power through the military, prohibited soldiers from interfering in politics.

Lieutenant General Schiedel said calmly, "This is Mexico. Besides, this is just my personal suggestion and does not constitute interference in French politics.

Your Majesty, it's up to you whether to listen or not. However, you must bear all the consequences. I am just informing you.

From now on, every time our troops are deployed, your country must pay a mobilization fee in advance. Otherwise, we will refuse to undertake any suppression tasks."

After saying this, Lieutenant General Schiedel left without looking back. Clearly, the conversation had ended on a sour note.

Lieutenant General Schiedel tried to use the suppression of the rebellion as leverage to force Maximilian I to compromise and stop the social reforms to ease relations with the conservatives.

The sound of objects being thrown could be heard; Maximilian I was deeply agitated. At that moment, the dignity of an emperor was completely gone. Compromise would not come without a price.

Once he made concessions, the emperor would become a figurehead. The already fragile reform faction would dissipate due to the failure of the reforms, leaving the emperor completely isolated.

Maximilian I was now truly caught between a rock and a hard place, where any choice he made would lead to a bad outcome.

Patience and seeking an opportunity to make a comeback were concepts absent from the dictionary of this idealistic young emperor.

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Vienna. This time, Franz did not reply to Maximilian I. Putting himself in Maximilian I's position, he also did not know what to do.

Was the current situation all because of the reforms? Probably not entirely. The French colonial plundering also exacerbated the social contradictions in Mexico.

Even though the French government lost money in Mexico, French capitalists profited. These profits were not simple as many were stained with blood.

If, from the beginning, Maximilian I had allied with the conservatives and carried out limited social reforms to ease social tensions, there might have been a chance.

But now it was too late. The reformists had not yet grown strong, while the rebels had. Using the French to suppress the rebels was only a temporary solution.

Limited by finances, Maximilian I did not establish a loyal army of his own. At this critical moment, he couldn't even flip the table.

Stepping back might not lead to a broader horizon but more likely to a bottomless abyss. After the failure of the reforms, Maximilian I would inevitably be completely sidelined, never to regain power.

Under the rule of conservatives, Mexico would again be plundered by the French, and such an empire obviously wouldn't last long.

When the empire collapses, the figurehead emperor won't fare well either. If it weren't for his high birth, which could provoke the Habsburgs to seek responsibility, someone might already have sent Maximilian I to meet his maker.

Historically, there were quite a few monarchs who died due to reforms. The backlash from vested interest groups has always been bloody.

There is no correct answer to this question; whatever choice is made will lead to the same result. For Franz, the best option is for Maximilian to save himself at the expense of others—directly pass the throne to the crown prince and abdicate back to Europe.

After all, it wasn't his own son and there wasn't much emotional attachment. If he ended up being sacrificed, so be it.



For the conservatives, having a young emperor as a puppet was easier to control than an adult emperor. Everyone could get what they wanted.

Franz didn't need to offer this solution; Maximilian I could think of it himself. At this point, only Maximilian I could make the right decision.

#### Chapter 473: The Rule-Abiding Falkner

The setting sun bathed the earth in its bloody light, casting its glow over the remnants of the battlefield. The air was thick with the stench of blood and gunpowder.

Occasionally, dark brown buzzards swooped down from the sky, snatching pieces of flesh from the ground. The atmosphere was eerily surreal as if one were in the depths of hell.

The soldiers, busy clearing the battlefield, paid no heed to the grim scene. Having just endured a brutal battle, they were physically and mentally exhausted, simply wanting to gather their fallen comrades' bodies and send them back to God's embrace.

As for the enemy's corpses, the soldiers didn't bother. They handed them over to the conscripted Zulu workers, who would bury them in shallow graves.

There was no other way. Unexpected incidents always happened on the battlefield—such as someone fainting from an injury or being knocked unconscious by a bullet. If such cases were left to the unreliable Zulu workers, they might end up burying the wounded alive.

If it was the enemy, no one cared if they were buried alive. But if it were their own comrades, it would be a tragedy.

Thus, when clearing the battlefield, soldiers from the "Boer republics" always supervised the Zulu laborers. The former inspected and commanded, while the latter carried the stretchers.

Not far away, a "Boer" officer approached with a few soldiers. He was a middle-aged man, around forty to fifty years old, tall and slightly thin, with golden hair and a pair of striking, vigorous eyes.

The newcomer was Viscount Falkner, inspecting the battlefield. To play the part completely, everyone participating in the battle had changed into Boer military uniforms.

These uniforms had been hastily made. Due to the tight schedule, many of them were just ordinary clothes dyed in the right colors.

Don't underestimate this small change. On the battlefield, bright uniforms were easy targets. The yellow-green uniforms of the Boer republics might not be aesthetically pleasing, but they were practical.

One could easily blend in by lying on the ground, as the color was similar to the local environment, making it easier to conceal oneself.

In contrast, the British army across from them was much more eye-catching. Their red uniforms were certainly attractive but completely unsuitable for the local environment, turning them into easy targets.

For Viscount Falkner, who had spent years in Africa, what use was aesthetics? Could it be eaten?

As a pragmatist, Viscount Falkner never cared about the appearance of uniforms. Even in daily life, except for attending banquets or certain events where he would wear formal attire, he always wore a military uniform, specifically camouflage suitable for the African jungle.

This preference was born from years of experience in Africa: the closer your clothing was to the natural environment, the better your chances of survival.

In fact, Austrian military uniforms at this time varied by region. For example, troops stationed in Libya and the Sinai Peninsula wore tan uniforms, while those in Congo wore various camouflage patterns.

In the South African theater, the yellow-green uniforms of the Boer republics were quite suitable. They might be a bit ugly, but they were practical, and there was no need to stand out.

Viscount Falkner had even exploited the British uniform's glaring weakness, repeatedly ambushing them in the jungles.

After several skirmishes, the British had learned to avoid the forests, retracting their lines to engage only on the open battlefield.

Viscount Falkner knew this was just the beginning. Before long, the British might not even come out to fight at all.

This was determined by the exchange ratio between the two sides on the battlefield. In open battles, it was usually seven to one or eight to one, while in the jungles, it could easily be more than ten to one.

If things continued this way, it wouldn't be long before the British lost their numerical advantage. Governor Delf was already trying his best, and the British soldiers were fighting valiantly.

Unfortunately, the combat effectiveness of the native troops was quite limited. On the battlefield, they were little more than cannon fodder, contributing nothing substantial besides adding to the casualty count.

If not for the presence of British soldiers, even the current exchange ratio would not have been possible. It wasn't that these soldiers lacked bravery; in fact, they were often braver than most British soldiers.

However, bravery did not equate to combat effectiveness in the era of firearms. Their military discipline was lax, they often ignored orders, and they would frequently fire aimlessly into the air without checking for enemies.

This issue was not exclusive to the 19th century; even in the 21st century, many African armies fought this way. When two armies exchanged fire, they often didn't aim properly, and their bullets would fly into the sky.

During a charge, they would rush en masse without any formation. Although there were no Maxim machine guns, Austria still had plenty of Gatling guns, which were perfect for dealing with such chaotic assaults.

Since they didn't value their own lives, British commanders cared even less about the casualties among these cannon fodder troops. From the start of the war, the British used native soldiers to absorb the brunt of the losses.

Compared to European wars, this conflict was more like a farce. Although the war was fought fiercely, the majority of casualties were among the native troops.

If not for concerns about wasting ammunition and increasing logistical pressure, Viscount Falkner would have also formed a cannon fodder unit against the British to wear them down.

Viscount Falkner had experience with this sort of thing. When clearing native tribes earlier, to minimize losses, he had formed native armies to do the fighting.

These people showed no mercy when killing their own. Viscount Falkner was certain that the number of Africans who died at the hands of colonizers didn't even amount to a fifth, perhaps not even a tenth, of those who died at the hands of their own people.

After all, labor was money, and the colonizers valued their wallets. Only these native armies didn't care. By the time the war was over, these native armies would be mostly depleted as well.

Despite this, Viscount Falkner still formed a native melee army. Whenever there was close combat, he would send them in.

If you find two black regiments fighting each other in the Anglo-Boer War, with two white armies watching from behind, don't be surprised—this is a normal tactic.

It was a tacit agreement between both sides. The British also hoped to balance out the casualty ratios through such battles, to avoid unfavorable statistics.

Viscount Falkner did not want to end the war immediately. Merely expelling the British from the Boer republics was not enough to satisfy his ambitions. His eyes were now set on British South Africa.

These gradual, small victories weren't enough to make the British concede. Leaving them with hope for victory would keep the war going.

The time for a decisive battle would come once the fighting reached deep into British South Africa. By then, the new troops from the Boer republics would have become seasoned veterans. They could then launch a decisive offensive to capture Cape Town and create a *fait accompli*.

At that point, it would be up to the diplomats from both countries to negotiate. Regardless of the outcome, the participating nobles would have earned their military accolades. On this matter, all the nobles involved in the war were remarkably united.

Since adopting this new combat strategy, the casualty ratios between the sides quickly converged. From an initial seven or eight to one, it rapidly narrowed to within two to one, occasionally even reversing.

Since none of their own people were dying, neither side felt any pressure.

Neither Governor Delf nor Viscount Falkner included the casualties of the native troops in their reports. The existence of these units could be glossed over entirely.

Within just a few months, the total casualties of the Anglo-Boer War exceeded 100,000. If all these losses were white soldiers, no one could endure it.

This way, everyone could save face. Losing a battle didn't matter; they'd just find some expendable troops to thrash and gather enough heads to write a report.

Using diplomatic euphemisms, a significant defeat could be presented as a stalemate. Retreating could be framed as a strategic withdrawal to prevent giving the enemy an opportunity.

Governor Delf's reports were written in this manner: continuous victories on one hand, and constant requests for reinforcements on the other. There was no problem with this approach; he would just find an excuse, such as the enemy reinforcing their troops.

This was the African continent, and the lawmakers back home in Parliament couldn't inspect the front lines personally. The British government was on their side. If they lost a battle on the front lines, the Cabinet would face inquiries from Parliament.

A burly young officer with a cheerful demeanor ran over to report to Viscount Falkner, "General, the casualties have been counted. Our forces have 76 dead and 84 wounded. We defeated over 3,000 enemies, killing 156 and capturing 98."

This data automatically filtered out the casualties of both sides' native troops. Even if recorded, it wouldn't matter as the Austrian government wouldn't recognize it.

Killing white soldiers counted as military merit; eliminating native troops was just a bonus, roughly equivalent to a ratio of 100 to 1.

Even this data, after subtracting the casualties of their own native troops, amounted to almost nothing.

This wasn't the Austrian government being harsh, but a practical necessity. Without this restriction, these nobles could create records of millions of casualties within a year, resulting in field marshals everywhere and dukes walking the streets.

Integrity? That didn't exist at all! Even if it meant turning all local indigenous people into military achievements, these colonizers would do it.

With this constraint, things were different. To earn a title by killing natives, they would need to eliminate hundreds of thousands, which was nearly impossible for a few hundred colonial troops to achieve.

No way to fabricate achievements? No problem. Besides military achievements, seized spoils of war and conquered lands could be converted into military merits.

Most nobles were granted titles through territorial expansion, and naturally, they kept the spoils of war for themselves, as converting them to military merits was too expensive.

This was legal. In colonial activities, all seizures could be handled personally. They could either exchange them for military merits with the government or keep them for themselves.

Because of this, the Anglo-Boer War became highly sought after. This time, the achievements were genuine, not only granting titles but also offering opportunities for military rank advancement.

Don't underestimate military ranks. In Germany, they are symbols of honor, especially those earned through real combat, which are the most respected.

Even a commoner who rises through military achievements will gain respect. In contrast, nobles without military merits are often looked down upon by the old aristocracy.

As the war progressed, more nobles reported to Viscount Falkner's command, some individually and others with private armies from noble families. If the war continued, this number would keep increasing.

Without these new recruits, it was uncertain when this fledgling "Boer Republic Army" would become combat-ready.

After all, soldiers can be trained in months, but it is much harder to cultivate officers. A unit without qualified officers cannot effectively wield its combat power.

The outcome of the battle did not surprise Viscount Falkner. The British were as slippery as ever, using native troops as rearguards while they themselves retreated.

With enthusiasm, he ordered, "Understood. Send out the orders: all units should first take care of the wounded, then the main force will rest for a day before continuing forward."

The young officer replied, "Yes, General!"

Viscount Falkner frowned slightly but spoke calmly, "Don't call me General. I'm only a Colonel now. It would be embarrassing if word got out."

There was no choice. Despite commanding tens of thousands of troops in battle, his rank was still Colonel. Even if he were to be promoted, it would have to wait until after the war when he returned to Vienna.

Until then, he could only command the entire army as a Colonel. These were the rules. If he impatiently called himself a General prematurely, it would spread and he'd be mocked for lacking manners and not understanding protocol.

Viscount Falkner was of noble birth, albeit from a minor noble family. However, his family had a history spanning hundreds of years, making them an old nobility of sorts.

He had always placed great importance on protocol, especially when it came to the family's reputation. There could be no compromise in this regard.

#### Chapter 474: The British Plan

The raging conflict in South Africa had the British government deeply concerned. At one point, they suspected that Austria and France had reached a secret agreement to target the German Federal Empire.

Fortunately, the worst-case scenario did not materialize, as Austria did not take any action. Otherwise, Britain would have faced an additional threat.

Although Austria, nestled in the Mediterranean, was formidable, it did not pose a direct threat to Britain. However, if Austria were to unify Germany and gain access to the Atlantic, the dynamics would change, bringing the two nations closer.

Of course, this threat was relative. Franz also worried about the British threat, as the Royal Navy was the strongest of the era.

Since the feared scenario did not occur, Prime Minister Benjamin became even more puzzled. He could not discern Austria's intentions at all.

Ignoring the French threat? Impossible! The Habsburgs and the French had been entangled on the European continent for centuries, so they were well aware of the French threat.

France's annexation of Italy was not merely territorial expansion. It also solidified France's dominance in the Mediterranean and on the European continent.

On this issue, Austria had no reason to compromise. Even if they were worried about directly confronting France and letting others benefit, they should have taken action after the British government agreed to an alliance.

Concerned, Prime Minister Benjamin asked, "Have we figured out the inside story of the Franco-Austrian deal?"

The more incomprehensible it seemed, the more suspicious it became. To uncover the details of the secret deal between France and Austria, the British government spared no effort, even activating their highest-level moles.

As a result, many spies embedded in France and Austria were exposed, yet the information they sent back remained fragmented and required thorough analysis and interpretation.

Foreign Secretary Maclean thought for a moment and said, "We lack sufficient intelligence and can only make preliminary judgments.

Roughly, it seems that Austria has tacitly accepted France's annexation of Italy in exchange for France's recognition of Austria's unification of Germany.

There may also be other exchanges of interests, such as the two countries jointly dividing the Mediterranean and squeezing us out, as well as secretly partitioning the African continent.

In recent years, the relations between France and Austria have been very close, and during their overseas colonial expansions, they seem to have an understanding, with each taking different paths and rarely clashing directly.

This time, the French acted suddenly, catching the Austrian government off guard. Austria had no time to prepare, and they could not bypass the Kingdom of Prussia in their quest to unify Germany.

Initially, the Austrian government likely intended to weaken Prussia through the Russo-Prussian War. They did not anticipate that the Russians would be so incompetent and lose the war.

If not for this unexpected outcome, nationalists would have forced the defeated Kingdom of Prussia to join the Holy Roman Empire, and by now, Austria would have unified Germany.

One unexpected event caused the Austrian government's plan to fail completely. Now, they might be contemplating whether to unify Germany by force."

Speculation is often the most frightening. Mixed true and false information successfully misled the British, with Maclean choosing the most logical inference.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief, seemingly accepting this explanation. The unknown is always the most terrifying. Once the ins and outs of a situation are understood, solutions can be found.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Molitor analyzed, "In recent years, the Austrian government has invested a large portion of its financial revenue into economic development and has not made military preparations.

The Kingdom of Prussia is not weak, and with the lesson from the Russians, the Austrian government will not rashly move against them without sufficient preparation.

However, we still need to prepare for the worst. Austria holds significant advantages over Prussia, and once the Austrian government decides to take action, their war preparations won't take long."

War is not a game, especially modern warfare, which heavily depends on logistics. When two countries go to war, they must inevitably prepare a series of supplies. This requires a significant investment of financial and human resources, making it impossible to keep such preparations secret.

Judging whether a country is preparing for war by observing the flow of supplies is quite reliable.

"We indeed need to be vigilant. One Greater France is already troublesome enough. We absolutely cannot allow a unified Holy Roman Empire to emerge.

After so many years of development, the gap in strength between Prussia and Austria has not narrowed but has instead widened further.

Although the Prussians won the Russo-Prussian War, these spoils of war still need time to digest and can't be fully converted into strength in the short term.

Currently, Austria's standing army is as large as 580,000. If war breaks out, they can mobilize an additional 2,000,000 to 3,000,000 troops in the shortest time possible.

More than ten years ago, Austria set a record by mobilizing 1,800,000 troops in a month. Austria is already at the forefront of the world in terms of mobilization mechanisms.

Perhaps even Austrian Africa could mobilize a million troops. Moreover, these forces are not weak in combat. Now, a group of nobles' private armies can even fight on par with us in South Africa.

While Prussia's standing army numbers 360,000, due to financial and human limitations and the impact of the Russo-Prussian War, it is estimated that their maximum mobilization capacity is only around 700,000.

The Prussian government is now increasing reserve training. According to the Prussian General Staff's plan, they aim to train 1,000,000 reserves within ten years, and their future mobilization capacity is expected to exceed 1,500,000.

Since the Near East War, the mode of warfare on the European continent has changed. Future wars will inevitably involve large-scale operations, and our army's size is already falling behind the times."

The speaker is Secretary of War Brandt, who felt frustrated as he watched the rapid development of European armies while the "lobster backs" (a reference to their bright red uniforms, as well as the fact that lobsters are bottom-feeders) remained stagnant.

The era of large-scale operations has arrived, a reality many have foreseen. In the recently concluded Russo-Prussian War, the Russian Empire, fighting against multiple adversaries, amassed a total force that once exceeded two million.

This number was previously unimaginable for them. If it weren't for transportation limitations and the corruption of the Russian government, the Russians would have won the war simply due to their numerical advantage.

Having experienced this firsthand, everyone had to admit that modern warfare could involve far more troops than in the past. When the quality advantage is not significant, human wave tactics become the simplest and most effective strategy.

Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli rubbed his forehead and said, "We'll discuss the army's issues later. For now, let's focus on how to respond to this challenge."

Expanding the army is out of the question. The country's resources are already stretched thin. Maintaining the Royal Navy consumes most of the British government's financial resources, and adding another money pit is unsustainable.

The annual military expenses of France and Austria were no less than theirs, and in some years even exceeded them. The Royal Navy maintains its absolute superiority because it receives the lion's share of the military budget.

Typically, the Royal Navy takes 70-80% of the budget, and in some cases, even 90% is not unheard of.

In contrast, if the navies of Austria and France even receive half of their countries' military budgets, it's already considered generous. Most of the time, the army receives the majority.

In Austria, for example, the army usually gets 55-60% of the annual military budget, with the remainder going to the navy.

France was the same. Unless there's a naval arms race, it's challenging for the navies of Austria and France to secure more funding than their armies.

Against this backdrop, the Royal Navy's dominance at sea was solidified. For the army to expand, the military budget would have to increase, or the navy's share would have to be reduced.

These two solutions are impossible to achieve. Substantially increasing military expenditure would overwhelm the British government's finances, and reducing the Navy's budget would be tantamount to slow suicide.

Once the Royal Navy's advantage is gone, Britain's good days would be over. If they showed any sign of decline, European countries would pounce to divide up their colonial empire.

Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, knowing that the army's issue couldn't be resolved, didn't let Brandt continue and directly shut down the discussion.

Aware of the gravity of the situation, Foreign Minister Maclean picked up the topic, "Austria is already very powerful. We absolutely cannot allow them to unify Germany.

Prussia is under immense military pressure, facing threats from both Russia and Austria. I suggest continuing to strengthen Prussia, and if necessary, allowing them to annex the Kingdom of Poland.

However, this timing shouldn't be too early. The Russian Empire hasn't recovered yet. If we let them swallow Poland prematurely, they might join hands with Austria to first finish off the Russian Empire.

We need a balanced European continent. The current phenomenon of frequent emergence of strong nations is not a good sign. If we don't change this, the continent will eventually be unified again.

Therefore, Greater France must also be dismantled. If strong countries keep annexing weaker ones, it will become a big problem."



The idea of a unified European continent is terrifying. A unified Europe would spell the end for Britain.

John Bull has always had a strong sense of crisis. Whenever a European country shows signs of unifying the continent, Britain immediately suppresses it.

In the later stages, it developed to the point of suppressing whoever was powerful. A dozen years ago, when the Russian Empire was domineering and pressuring the European continent, John Bull worked hard to suppress the Russians.

Now that the Russians were down, France and Austria had emerged. Fighting two against one wasn't their style. After some initial attempts, they decisively chose the strategy of hitting whoever rose first.

Originally, the British government had selected Austria as the target and was formulating plans to implement this, but then France arose.

Not only did they rise, but after annexing Italy, they also pushed British influence out of the Mediterranean.

This couldn't be tolerated, and the British government had to change targets. However, plans couldn't keep up with the changes and Austria wasn't cooperating. Without a henchman, John Bull couldn't find a way to attack the French.

Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli solemnly said, "Italian revolutionary leaders Garibaldi and Mazzini have arrived in London, hoping for our support in restoring their nation.

They met with the former Sardinian king, Victor Emmanuel II, and reached an agreement to unite against French rule.

Additionally, some Italian nobles have contacted us, hoping we can convene an international conference to stop the French aggression.

However, these forces are too scattered. Even with our support, it will be difficult to shake French control in Italy in the short term. We need support from more allies."

After speaking, he turned his gaze to Foreign Secretary Maclean, hoping he could provide a satisfactory answer.

Foreign Minister Maclean's response did not disappoint. He said, "At this time, all of Europe stands against the French, but everyone is wary of their power and doesn't want to provoke them too much.

Even the Austrians don't want to see the French easily annex Italy. They may not intervene openly, but the Austrian government certainly won't mind causing trouble for the French.

The Foreign Office has already contacted various countries, and everyone is willing to support the Italian independence movement to break France's ambition to dominate the European continent.

Austria is an exception. They feared the Italian independence movement could affect Lombardy and Venetia, so they refused to support the Italian revolutionaries.

That old fox Felix suggested we contact the French revolutionaries and encourage the French people to rise up against colonial invasion.

He also proposed supporting an anti-French Spanish king to create more trouble for the French.

These ideas are theoretically feasible. The only issue is maintaining a balance. If France falls, Austria will become overwhelmingly powerful.”

Everyone was doing these overt strategies, all causing trouble for the French. However, Austria refused to take the lead this time, pushing all the responsibility onto the British.

Knowing is one thing, but things still need to be done. If Austria was a potential threat, the Greater French Empire was a tangible one.

If they don’t act quickly, the British will lose their foothold in the Mediterranean. Future overseas trade to the Indian Ocean will then be at the mercy of the French.

Prime Minister Disraeli sneered, “Let the Austrians enjoy their moment. They’ll have their turn to cry. Ignore their schemes. Follow the original plan and suppress France first.

After dismantling Greater France, we’ll slowly settle accounts with them. The Foreign Office should use anti-French sentiment as a cover to secretly contact various countries and prepare to establish an anti-Austrian alliance.”

Anti-Russian alliance, anti-French alliance, and anti-Austrian alliance. These were carefully prepared by the British for their three competitors: Russia, France, and Austria.

At present, the anti-Russian alliance has been successful, and in the recent war, the anti-Russian alliance defeated the Russians, burying the Russian Empire’s continental hegemony.

The anti-French alliance wasn’t the first time, but Napoleon III changed the diplomatic policy of Napoleon’s era of being enemies with the world, choosing to mend relations with European countries, which led to the anti-French alliance failing to establish for a long time.

Now the situation had changed. With the establishment of the Greater French Empire, the foundation for re-establishing the anti-French alliance was laid.

If it weren’t for the lack of the crucial link, Austria, the anti-French alliance would probably be openly raising its flag by now. Faced with this alliance, Napoleon III would find it difficult not to compromise.

The long-dormant anti-Austrian alliance was actually something the British had been preparing for a long time. Looking at the map, one would find that Austria’s neighbors—Poland, Prussia, Switzerland—all harbor anti-Austrian sentiments.

If the situation changed, it would not be impossible for the Russian Empire to stand in opposition to Austria. And if Italy successfully gained independence, this newborn country would naturally be a member of the anti-Austrian camp.

It could be said that as long as the Austrian government made one wrong move, they would fall into the trap set by the British, finding themselves isolated and helpless.

#### Chapter 475: Getting Ready for a Decisive Battle

During this era, John Bull’s influence was still quite significant. Although not as overwhelming as in the same period in original history, his call to arms could still rally many to respond.

The Italian revolutionaries, the French revolutionaries—any organization with a recognizable name sent representatives to London.

Looking at the intelligence in hand, Franz's first reaction was: The British sure have money!

In other countries, forget about whether these revolutionary organizations would give them face, it would be difficult just to find them.

Revolution was a matter of losing one's head. If they weren't careful and cautious, Napoleon III would have eliminated them long ago. For the British to find them all in such a short time, they must have maintained contact all along.

Beyond the "power of money," what else could make these revolutionaries cooperate? The Italian revolutionaries could be understandable, but the British and the French are old enemies—why would the French revolutionaries listen to the British?

In any case, Franz couldn't afford this kind of expenditure. Rather than supporting these ragtag groups, he preferred investing in domestic economic development to strengthen his own power.

It's not that he looked down on the revolutionaries. In this era, French revolutionaries were mostly tools of the bourgeoisie, existing primarily to serve bourgeois interests.

Apart from a few individuals, most were merely failed power-seekers striving for their own gain. Though they carried the banner of revolutionaries, they weren't true revolutionaries.

The Italian revolutionaries were relatively better; at least they fought for national independence. Despite their internal chaos and mixed composition, they could be considered genuine revolutionaries.

As a monarch, Franz naturally couldn't align with revolutionaries. In the face of national interests, discussing justice or injustice was meaningless.

Thus, the sacred mission of supporting the revolutionaries was handed over to the British. Originally, the Americans were also involved, as they were actively spending money to promote republicanism.

After the Civil War ended, having experienced a harsh beating, both the Federal government and the Confederate government settled down and no longer dared to extend their hands to Europe.

With one fewer financier, the revolutionary momentum in Europe decreased significantly compared to the same period in history, and social order was noticeably better than in the original timeline.

It was an exception in Italy where the Italian populace, unwilling to accept French rule, continued to resist. The French were preoccupied with suppressing the rebellion, and it was understandable that they neglected social order.

It takes a thousand days to raise an army, but only one day to use it. British money didn't come without strings attached, and now it was time to fight for the British.

Perhaps they were willing to do so anyway. After all, it wasn't their own blood being spilled, and with British support, their chances of success were higher. If they succeeded, they would reap great rewards.

In contrast, the reactions of various European countries were much more reserved. Perhaps French diplomatic efforts had worked, or maybe Austria's non-intervention led them to have other thoughts.

In any case, everyone was vocally condemning the French, with slogans loud enough to shake the heavens. But when it came to taking actual action, each country found numerous excuses and reasons not to send troops.

Franz wasn't surprised by the choices of these countries. The French weren't easy targets, and Napoleon III had already shown a readiness to fight. All governments were weighing the pros and cons, and no one wanted to be the first to stick their neck out.

In essence, everyone wanted to be the fisherman reaping the benefits without losing their own strength. Ultimately, it came down to interests—if Britain, the leader of the anti-French faction, wasn't taking the lead, how could they expect their followers to be enthusiastic?

Their current approach was merely isolating France. To attack the French homeland and dismantle the Greater French Empire, a main force was still lacking.

In this regard, the French had chosen an opportune time. Russia and Prussia were recovering, Austria had an alliance with the French government, and there was no capable force among the remaining countries.

As the situation in Europe gradually stabilized, the situation in Africa changed. To support the war in South Africa, the British reinforced their troops three times, and as of now, the number of British troops in the Cape Colony has exceeded 180,000.

Of course, if you exclude the cannon fodder units, this number is reduced by half, but it's still quite impressive.

After the Near East War, this was the largest deployment of British troops in any battle. Austria's total forces were similar, and Franz directly treated this war as a training ground.

No, it should be called an officer training camp. Regular troops couldn't appear on the battlefield. Otherwise, Austria's neutral status would be compromised.

While soldiers couldn't go to the front lines, officers could. By taking off their uniforms and participating in the war as individuals, it had nothing to do with the Austrian government.

Even the nobles who voluntarily joined were actually part of the Austrian reserve officer corps. According to the rules in the German region, nobles were required to enlist unconditionally during wartime.

Improving these individuals' combat capabilities was also enhancing Austria's strength in national defense. Opponents like the British were hard to find, so of course, they had to make full use of it.

The native cannon fodder units formed on the spot were there for the officers to practice with. Currently, many battles were directed by the general staff's officer corps, who commanded these native units in tactical experiments.

Although these data weren't fully representative—since different armies would achieve different results—anything was better than theoretical exercises.

If they could command cannon fodder units to win, wouldn't that further prove their command abilities?

Reality was a slap in the face, as over ninety percent of the tests ended in failure. Often, the cannon fodder units were defeated, and then Viscount Falkner would lead the "Boer Republican Army" to clean up the mess.

At this point in the war, the combat effectiveness of the Boer Republican Army and the Austrian troops was about the same. They were trained in the same system, including the source of troops and officers, which were all from the German region.

This unit now had about 38,000 soldiers, and when combined with more than a hundred thousand cannon fodder troops, they were able to fight the British to a standstill, proving their combat effectiveness.

Of course, this is also related to the fact that the British army was a mixed bag; many white units from the colonies were just there to get by.

In the original timeline, the Boers had fewer troops, and the British launched their attacks with ten times their strength. The two sides fought for 2-3 years. If supplies were cut off, the Boers would have been unable to continue, and the war might not have lasted long.

This time, the situation in the Anglo-Boer War was entirely different. It was impossible for the British to enforce a blockade, no matter how skillfully the British government maneuvered. The Austrian African colonial government wouldn't cut off supplies to its own people.

Additionally, the high cost of the war was not an issue for Emperor Franz, so why should the officers on the front lines be worried? Many viewed this as a strategic game between the British and Austrians, affecting Austria's hegemony on the African continent.

By the end of 1870, the casualties in the Anglo-Boer War were so high they couldn't be fully accounted for; even the exact number of their own casualties was unclear.

In the South African battlefield, Franz gave maximum autonomy. All officers were allowed to recruit cannon fodder units, and the losses of indigenous units were only roughly estimated.

Regardless of losing ten thousand, they could recruit twenty thousand more. If there weren't enough recruits within the Boer republics, the colonial government in the rear would send more.

The British, on the other hand, were facing a shortage of cannon fodder units. Many young and able-bodied men were sent to the battlefield, leading to the potential extinction of numerous tribes.

Christmas was approaching, and by this time, the "Boer Republican Army" had pushed the front line deep into British South African territory, only about 200 kilometers from Cape Town.

Viscount Falkner didn't intend to drag it out any longer; everyone wanted to finish the war and celebrate Christmas. If the war dragged on, British reinforcements would arrive, making the war harder to fight.

Advancing from the interior, logistics were always the biggest constraint. If not for the few rivers in South Africa, the war would have ended long ago.

Pointing at the hand-drawn military map on the wall, Viscount Falkner said, "Gentlemen, this is the British troop deployment map. As we push the front line forward, British resistance is becoming increasingly fierce.

If we can't end the war within the year and it drags on until next spring, then the British fourth wave of reinforcements will arrive, making it difficult for us to capture Cape Town.

Our time to act is running out. If we can't achieve a swift victory, it will be hard to occupy all of South Africa before the negotiations between the two countries."

There's no way around it. At this stage of the war, one side needs to concede to end it. The British aren't the type to give up easily. John Bull has never been afraid of anyone.

It was only a local war. How determined the Austrian government was to take South Africa was unclear, including Emperor Franz, who was only preparing to take the gold mining area first.

How much land would eventually be taken from the British wasn't of much concern to everyone. The main point was that only by capturing Cape Town and fully occupying South Africa could they maximize their military achievements.

Despite the war dragging on for over half a year, with everyone boasting of their battle achievements, the actual gains have been limited.

Apart from wiping out cannon fodder units, British troop losses have not exceeded ten thousand. In every engagement, they were only defeated but not completely annihilated, so naturally, the war gains couldn't increase.

This situation is unavoidable. The British commander-in-chief, Governor Delf, is a cunning old fox, always ensuring white soldiers retreat first while using cannon fodder units to cover the rear.

If ten thousand isn't enough, he throws in twenty thousand more, as cannon fodder units are expendable. These remnants pose a threat; if they reach populated areas in the rear, the damage could be significant. Viscount Falkner would then have to send troops to clear them out.

Even rounding up over ten thousand pigs takes time, let alone people. By the time these remnants are dealt with, the British main forces could have constructed another defensive line.

Without annihilating the main British forces, this war won't end anytime soon.

A middle-aged staff officer frowned and said, "This might be a bit difficult. To occupy Cape Town, we still don't have enough troops in our hands. These indigenous troops can't be relied upon at all.

When we reach the port of Cape Town, the British will still have naval fire support. We lack heavy artillery and it will be difficult to conquer the city in a short time. Once the war drags on, the situation will change again.

The British's nearest reinforcements only need a week to come from Ethiopia, and reinforcements from their homeland will only take a month."

This was a real problem. Austria didn't lack troops, but the forces that could be deployed to the South African front were very limited.

On one hand, it's due to logistics. Regular troops are not like native cannon fodder. They can't just be given a mouthful of food and equipped with machetes and spears.

The food problem was easy to solve. South Africa was rich in resources. The Boer republics could provide some, the rear could supply some, and they could also plunder some.

If necessary, they only needed to ensure the logistical supply of regular troops and let the cannon fodder troops seize from the enemy. This was not impossible.

But weapons and ammunition must be supplied from the rear, and this supply line is very long. Some of it goes through the Congo, while another part is sent via the Nile from Egypt.

On the other hand, this war is fought under the guise of the Boers. The small Boer republics can only field an army of 38,000, which is already remarkable. If they were to field 100,000 or even just 80,000 troops, it would be unreasonable.

Although the great powers were shameless, the Austrian government's face wasn't that thick. If they really angered the British, everyone would suffer.

Now both sides were still maneuvering within the rules of the game. Suffering defeats on the battlefield only proved that the British army's combat effectiveness was poor. If they were incompetent and still started a war, they couldn't blame others for retaliating.

Viscount Falkner enticed them, "Even if it's difficult, we must continue the fight. Surely everyone would prefer the post-war summary to read that we annihilated 100,000 British troops and seized British South Africa.

Rather than reading that we thwarted the British plot against the Boer republics, killed 10,000 enemies, and forced the British to concede! Winning this crucial battle means promotions and titles for everyone. If we stop now, most of us will only receive a commendation."

#### Chapter 476: Testament of Friendship

Franz was pleased to see his subordinates' fighting spirit. Success or failure was irrelevant. What mattered most was the positive and proactive attitude, which deserved encouragement and promotion.

Austria had grown significantly, increasing its margin for error. The outcome of the Anglo-Boer War would not affect the nation's overall situation anyway.

Of course, success was preferable, as it would crush British ambitions and prevent another war once the gold mining commenced. These days, colonizers had no resistance in the face of profit and needed to experience failure to understand their limits.

Finance Minister Karl handed Franz a report, saying with a troubled expression, "Your Majesty, this is the military expenditure for the past two months of the Anglo-Boer War, totaling 12.486 million guilders."

War is indeed a gold-devouring beast. Even for a local conflict, the average monthly expenditure was six million guilders. The cost of a full-scale war would be astronomical.

Saving on military expenses was impossible. Weapons and ammunition were transported directly from the homeland, with transportation alone being a significant cost.

In reality, the current military expenditure was already low. At least Franz did not have to pay salaries or pensions for the cannon fodder units. Otherwise, the cost would have been several times higher.

But no matter how much was saved, these people still needed food and clothing. Replacing outdated muskets and equipping them with new sabers and spears also incurred costs.

Franz looked at the report. The expenses for the tens of thousands of cannon fodder units accounted for approximately 23% of the total military expenditure, while the remaining costs were for the few thousand “Boer Republic” troops.

Even in defense of their homeland, soldiers still needed to be paid. Even the nobles’ private armies who brought their own supplies still had a share of the military pay. Pensions were also distributed uniformly according to the Austrian regular army standards.

Franz did not skimp on these expenses. He personally vetoed the government’s cost-saving plans. In theory, soldiers could be recruited without pay, with war spoils divided afterward as compensation, as had been the practice in Europe for centuries.

However, Franz understood that times had changed. Occasionally recruiting feudal nobles for combat might work, but after a few instances, the emperor might find himself without support.

Loyalty can be worn down, and people’s hearts can change. If the war was won and there were enough spoils to distribute, it would be acceptable.

But if the war resulted in losses and the spoils were insufficient to cover everyone’s expenses, complaints would be inevitable. After suffering a loss once, people would only pay lip service the next time.

The Anglo-Boer War naturally doesn’t have the problem of insufficient spoils; once the gold mines are opened, there will be enough for everyone. However, this means the government won’t have much say in the matter.

If nobles provided the funds and fought the battles, what right did the government have to interfere? At least during the tax exemption period stipulated by colonial law, the Austrian government could not benefit from it.

In their situation, oblivious to the underground treasure trove of gold, scarcely any aristocrat would be bold enough to stake so much.

With a monthly expenditure of six million guilders, even the high-ranking nobles of the Holy Roman Empire would not take that risk.

If the money runs out before the war ends, they’d be left to cry on their own. There have been many such cautionary tales in continental Europe, where many noble lords started wars only to run out of money halfway through.

The Habsburg dynasty had experienced this in the past. Even as emperors, they were forced by creditors to avoid returning home. Of course, it was mainly due to caring too much about face. If they simply refused to pay their debts, what could a few merchants really do?

Half of the anti-Semitic movements in Europe originated from this. Nobles unable to repay debts, unwilling to bear the stigma of defaulting, simply turned against Jews, eliminating their creditors in one fell swoop.

Now with the government backing them, everyone’s risk is reduced to a minimum, and they don’t have to worry about unexpected losses leaving them penniless.



In recent years, many nobles have succeeded on the African continent, but even more have failed. Those who didn't know how to manage risks and were overly ambitious now had grass growing over their graves.

Any colonial empire is built upon a vast pile of bones. In later periods, the collapse of colonial empires was primarily due to the unwillingness of people to continue shedding blood for the colonies.

Ultimately, it all comes down to the distribution of benefits. The bureaucratic elite and capitalists took almost all the benefits, leaving the rest with barely any scraps. Who would want to continue risking their lives for that?

Looking at the major colonial empires, it was rare to hear about colonial losses in the early stages of their establishment. Instead, it was after several decades, or even centuries, of operation—when the empire started to decline—that losses became frequent.

Was it because the wealth created decreased? Or did the costs of governance really skyrocket to the point where income could no longer cover expenses?

Obviously, colonies that had been operated for decades were capable of creating more wealth. However, the government's revenue barely increased because most of the money went into private pockets.

Meanwhile, various expenses continued to rise. The declining Portuguese are an example of this. As far as Franz knew, the Portuguese colonial system no longer brought wealth to their government.

It's not just Portugal; the governance costs of all major colonial empires are constantly increasing. It's just that the tax revenue from most colonies can still bear these expenses.

The growing decay of the bureaucratic elite and the greed of interest groups are almost insoluble problems. Similar issues exist even in the homeland, so how could they not exist in the colonies?

Now, the rise of free trade advocates has begun to criticize the colonial system, claiming it brings a heavy financial burden to the government.

This isn't necessarily foresight; these people mainly don't benefit directly from the colonial system and thus criticize it from a moral high ground.

To Franz, this is a typical case of "biting the hand that feeds you." They enjoy the benefits of the colonial system yet refuse to acknowledge it and claim that maintaining colonial rule is costly.

They fail to realize that the Industrial Revolution is exploitative, and the primitive accumulation of capital is bloody. It is merely a choice between exploitation at home or abroad.

There was no such thing as free trade in the 19th century. The British merely touted it as a slogan, hoping other countries would open their markets to them.

Of course, as long as they maintained a competitive edge, they didn't mind opening their markets to other countries as well. But once that advantage disappeared, they would turn their backs without hesitation.

Otherwise, why would the Germans in the original timeline challenge the old world order? It was because they lacked industrial raw materials and markets for their products, driven by capital to start the war machine.

When the free trade advocates in Britain and France finally got their wish and freed themselves from the decaying colonial system, it didn't bring about a renaissance but rather a rapid decline.

With a small land area and poor resources, industrial development is inherently limited. Faced with cruel reality, they have no choice but to de-industrialize, drinking poison to quench their thirst.

These issues are not troublesome for now. Before the colonial system enters an era of massive losses, such calls won't gain traction.

No matter how loudly free trade is proclaimed, it still requires everyone to cooperate. Nowadays, everyone practices trade protectionism. If you alone switch to free trade, aren't you afraid of a quick demise?

Franz calmly said, "Don't worry. We have a basic understanding of South Africa's geological conditions.

The land there is fertile, the climate is pleasant, and mineral resources are relatively abundant. The potential for future development is still promising.

After a comprehensive evaluation, South Africa should be the most promising land on the African continent. The current investment can be recouped in the near future."

Franz didn't mention the issue of gold. Until the dust settles, it's best not to stir up additional trouble. After all, driving the British out of the African continent is also one of Austria's national policies.

Finance Minister Karl explained, "Your Majesty, regardless of the development potential, that is a matter for the future. We are not in need of another piece of land with unlimited potential.

In fact, such land, abundant in resources, might not necessarily be a good thing. If we do not prepare in advance, it might become too big to handle in the future.

The urgent task is to end this war as quickly as possible. Now that the French have stabilized the situation in Italy, our purpose of alleviating pressure for them has been achieved. There's no need to continue this stalemate with the British."

This is a valid point. Having too many resources isn't necessarily beneficial. With everything at hand, the dependency on the empire diminishes.

Franz nodded thoughtfully. It seems that fragmenting South Africa is inevitable. The provincial system should be implemented quickly to replace the current South African Governorate to prevent regional unity in the future.

"We don't need to worry about the war anymore. The soldiers on the front lines want to finish the war quickly and celebrate Christmas. It's just a month's time; there's no need to add more pressure on them.

The Foreign Ministry should find an opportunity to remind the French that we have fulfilled our agreement by holding up half of the British Army."

This statement is not wrong. In terms of numbers, the troops the British have invested in the South African region have exceeded half of their total army strength.

Doing good deeds also requires recognition. If you don't mention it, how will others know? The more you contribute, the more you should gain. This is an era of equivalent exchange.

Even close brothers need to keep clear accounts, let alone allies. It's better to be transparent about such matters.

Even if countries only speak of interests, when talking about Franco-Austrian friendship, this is also a testament to the friendship between the two countries.

It may not seem to have much effect now, but it might be needed in the future. It's enough to use to impress the idealistic youth. When cultivating pro-Austrian factions in France, this kind of propaganda material will be needed.

#### Chapter 477: Industrial Tuition Fee

There are many types of mineral resources, but coal, iron, and oil are the most important.

Russia, Brazil, China, Australia, India, Canada, and the United States are the seven countries with the highest iron ore reserves;

China, the United States, and Russia have the largest coal reserves, with Asia, Europe, and North America having the best quality coal;

Oil is highly concentrated in specific regions, namely the Middle East, Russia, the United States, China, Mexico, and Britain.

...

Franz remembered this passage from his geography class in his past life clearly. In summary, Europe lacks minerals.

On one hand, early development had exhausted many resources by the 21st century. On the other hand, the actual reserves were quite limited.

Russia is the only exception, as all other European countries are poor in minerals, and their mineral resources are quite limited. A typical example is Germany, which, apart from coal and iron ore, lacks almost everything.

Even so, many countries envy Germany for having these two essential elements of the industrial age, while their neighbor France lacks coal.

In comparison, Austria was relatively fortunate, perhaps due to its larger territory, as it possessed almost all kinds of mineral resources. However, the reserves were not very impressive.

Of course, this is relative. Compared to other European countries, excluding Russia, Austria's mineral resources were advantageous.

These resources laid the foundation for Austria's industrial development. By 1870, Austria's steel production surpassed that of Britain for the first time, reaching 6.48 million tons of annual output and becoming the world's leading steel producer.

However, the advantage was not significant, only surpassing Britain by 20,000 tons. The main factor driving the rapid growth in Austria's steel production was the increase in domestic market demand.

A domestic market of 30 million people compared to one of 70 million people—both having completed industrialization—clearly results in a greater demand for steel in the latter.

In fact, this production still cannot meet market demand. Besides the domestic market, the African colonies are also major consumers of steel.

According to data provided by the Ministry of Industry, Austria's steel demand will double over the next decade, with steel demand reaching 1.5 million tons.

Upon seeing this data, Franz had a headache. The steel production in Bohemia had already hit a bottleneck, with the growth rate slowing down. Rapidly expanding production capacity would require another technological revolution.

However, this was unrealistic. The steel industry had just undergone a revolution not long ago, and achieving another breakthrough in the short term with the current industrial technology was almost impossible.

The second steel production base in Bosnia, although developing rapidly, still had a long way to go before filling this gap. It wouldn't be able to meet the demand within ten years.

Currently, Austria's main steel enterprises are concentrated in Bohemia (modern-day Czech Republic), accounting for 63% of the country's steel production.

In addition to this, there are also steel plants in other regions like Bosnia, Linz, Bavaria, Württemberg, Saxony, Galicia, and Silesia.

Several factors caused this situation. In Bavaria, Württemberg, and Saxony, the steel plants were historical legacies, limited by resources and unable to develop further.

Bosnia had started industrializing too late, and the government was still busy building roads. Although steel enterprises had settled there, their production capacity was limited by transportation in the short term.

In Galicia, the government did not place enough importance on steel production, making it unable to compete with Bohemia. In Silesia, the Prussians had left a mess when they fled, which the Austrian government had just cleaned up.

Human factors can be overcome, but the most troublesome issue is resource distribution. Austria has plenty of coal and iron ore, but they are not concentrated.

For the development of steel enterprises, it is essential to move closer to raw material sources, resulting in a scattered pattern of development.

In Franz's view, the capitalists' choices were correct. Since the main purpose of investment is to make money, if the enterprises are far from the raw material sources, the competitiveness of their products cannot be guaranteed.

By now, the concentration of heavy industry is no longer suitable for Austria. Each region's resource supply is limited. If you can only provide raw materials for one million tons of steel, you cannot produce two million tons.

To meet the growing domestic demand, the establishment of multiple industrial bases has become inevitable. Except for Germany, where resources are concentrated, almost every industrialized nation has multiple industrial bases.

After carefully reviewing the data, Franz made a decision, “We don’t need to choose. Considering the current development situation in the country, the demand for steel will only increase.

Instead of adding one heavy industrial base today and another tomorrow, we might as well develop them simultaneously.

Regions like Serbia, Silesia, and Galicia all have the potential to become heavy industrial bases, so let’s list them all this time!

Other regions that simultaneously have coal and iron mines, with relatively convenient transportation, can also be developed.

The government should formulate appropriate policies, find ways to solve transportation issues, and leave the final development to enterprises and the market.”

In this era, most governments took a laissez-faire approach to industrial development, with the market economy primarily determining the industrial landscape.

Austria’s approach of solving infrastructure issues through government intervention is already a form of administrative interference in the market economy, albeit subtly.

One only needs to look at neighboring Russia, which, despite being the most resource-rich country in Europe, has a steel production capacity less than one-twentieth of Austria’s.

This isn’t because Russian capitalists didn’t see the business opportunities; the main issue was the poor transportation. If the Russian government doesn’t solve the transportation problem and expects them to build the roads themselves, who will dare to take on such a business?

It was only after the Russian government began to focus on transportation that Russian industry truly started to develop. Unfortunately, the Russian Empire was too vast, and building roads was incredibly difficult.

In the original timeline, before World War I, the Russians had only built over seventy thousand kilometers of roads, which was already the result of the efforts of successive tsars.

Before crossing over, Franz often criticized the transportation in Russia. However, after coming to this world, his perspective changed.

Building roads in the Russian Empire is indeed challenging. Constructing railways in a land of ice and snow requires much higher technical difficulty and construction costs than in other European countries, and the Russian government was perpetually short of funds.

The saying “If you want to be rich, build roads first” holds true. However, when you don’t even have money to build roads, it’s a tragedy.

What’s even more tragic is that the construction costs for Russian railways were not only high, but the maintenance costs were also far higher than those in other European countries. Even if the railways were built, it couldn’t be guaranteed that trains could run year-round.

To ensure the railways remained open, railway companies had to invest a lot of labor in winter maintenance. Many sections could be covered in snow in just a few hours.

This increased the operational costs of the railways, leading to higher freight charges. Originally cheap industrial raw materials became less affordable after being transported over long distances.

Starting late and facing such harsh conditions, coupled with the corruption of the Russian government, it's no wonder Russian industry did not develop.

Alexander II probably didn't have time to consider these problems yet. He was still busy leading the Russian people in large-scale land reclamation.

No, the land reclamation had already been going on for nearly two years now. Now, he should be worrying about how to handle the increased grain production.

To sell the grain, it first has to be transported. The grain from Ukraine doesn't need mentioning as most of the Russian Empire's grain exports come from here.

Grain from Moscow can also be managed, as it can be transported via rivers. As for the grain from the Caucasus, first, they need to build roads. Without railways, it's really a headache.

The most tragic situation is in the Siberian plains. The Russian people opening up new lands there are in for a tough time. The harsh climate is one thing, but since the Tsar gave them plenty of land, they can still endure it.

The transportation problem is what's truly troubling. Rivers do exist, but the prerequisite is that your land must be along the riverside, and the river must be navigable.

Fortunately, Alexander II exempted newly reclaimed land from taxes, otherwise, tax officials would be at their wits' end. The people have no money; if they pay taxes with grain, should the tax officials accept it or not?

Perhaps for the Russian people, this is a fortunate problem. They no longer need to worry about starvation. In a few years, everyone's warehouses will be full of grain.

It's still early, so the effects of large-scale land reclamation aren't fully visible yet. However, looking at the data, Franz knew that Alexander II's reform was already half-successful.

More grain means lower prices. Besides filling the farmers' stomachs, it also means feeding a large number of workers at the lowest cost.

When everyone is well-fed, the country remains stable. At least for several decades, most Russian citizens will feel content.

The only issue is whether they can withstand the backlash from the conservatives. With so much new land reclaimed, how could the Russian nobles not be tempted?

Once the reclamation is complete, someone will come forward to reap the benefits. If land consolidation isn't curbed, the Russian Empire will fall into crisis once again.

Land consolidation is a problem for the future. The immediate concern is the sale of grain. If this much grain can't be sold on the international market, there will be big trouble.

This situation won't take long. By next year or the year after, the Russian Empire will face an oversupply of grain.

Up until now, the Russians have reclaimed at least 200 million mu (approximately 13.3 million hectares) of farmland, which is nearly half of Austria's domestic arable land area.

Fortunately, the newly developed Russian land is relatively poor, with low grain yields. In many places, only one season of potatoes can be grown.

If the yield was according to Austrian standards, this amount of grain could flood the international grain market.

To cope with the impact of Russian grain on the international market, Austria has already started destocking, and many smart farmers are preparing to switch to cash crops.

As for the grain processing industry, it remains dominated by Austria. Utilizing the advantage of self-production and sales, Austria has defeated many competitors over the years and controls the end pricing of the grain market.

Even if the Russians export grain, most of it is first exported to Austria, where it undergoes further processing before being sold to other European countries.

The advantage of proximity and established infrastructure will not change in the short term. Unless the Russians complete industrialization and develop their own processing industry, this will remain the case.

This brings us to the issue of industry. Such changes are not achieved overnight. Take the flour processing industry, for example. Russian enterprises produce flour that is not only expensive but also of poor quality.

Currently, much of the flour sold in Russian cities is still produced in Austria, highlighting the weak competitiveness of Russian products.

The machinery of this era is not as user-friendly as modern milling machines, which are easy to operate and can be managed by almost anyone.

The current machinery is considered high-tech, and without professional technicians, it is challenging to operate. And this talent gap cannot be easily bridged.

Training technical workers is not easy. In this era, countries exporting machinery often embed numerous pitfalls.

For example, the instruction manuals for Austrian-exported machinery are all in German. At critical points, they might even include some local dialects.

Even professional translators might not fully understand the instructions. So, what can be done? Naturally, you have to hire experts, providing another revenue stream for the exporting companies through post-sale services.

Some unscrupulous companies even plant traps in certain areas, deliberately causing the buyer to make operational errors due to ignorance, leading to additional maintenance fees.

This is why even after importing the most advanced European equipment, buyers often have to go through repeated troubles before they can smoothly commence production. Manufacturers make sure to earn enough money first from post-sale services.

Some dishonest sellers sell machinery at a low price initially to entice buyers, then tamper with the equipment, relying on subsequent maintenance to earn exorbitant profits.

Without these invisible barriers, in an era without technical limitations, the industrial production levels of countries around the world could be brought to a similar standard.

In the industry, this is no secret. Many buyers are aware of the potential pitfalls in transactions.

However, they have no choice. This is the tuition fee for latecomers. If not paid now, the cost will be even higher in the future.

Hoping to directly acquire the industrial technology of the great powers and quickly reach world-leading standards is unrealistic.

The great powers are not doing charity. To ensure their technological lead, planting traps is a routine practice.

Otherwise, catching up with industrial powers would simply require replicating their technology to quickly close the gap.

How could such a good thing be possible? If it were that easy, France and Austria wouldn't have been chasing after Britain for so many years.

If not for the Second Industrial Revolution, the British advantage might have been maintained for a much longer time.

#### Chapter 478: Inevitable Mistakes

Industrial planning is not just about the steel industry. With the advent of the Second Industrial Revolution, the uses of copper have become more widespread.

In 1870, Austria's copper production reached 580,000 tons, while market demand was as high as 720,000 tons, creating a shortfall of one-sixth.

The main reason for this situation is the arrival of the electric age. As the pioneer of the electrical revolution, Austria's demand for copper naturally increases daily.

To adjust the market supply-demand relationship, the Austrian government resorted to administrative orders to increase production in state-owned enterprises. However, this supply-demand relationship cannot be changed in a short time.

There is no alternative. If there is a shortage of steel, it can be procured on the international market, but copper is not as easy.

Austria's copper production exceeds the total of all European countries. Even the British, in this era, produced only a meager tens of thousands of tons of copper.

It wasn't that others didn't want to increase production. The problem was that they didn't have mines in their country so raw materials needed to be imported. To increase copper production, they first had to solve the problem of the supply of copper ore.

Unfortunately, Europe's copper ore reserves are really not high. Otherwise, in the original timeline, Chile wouldn't have become wealthy by exporting copper ore.

This situation is very inconvenient for Austria. The domestic reserves are insufficient, and importing copper ore from abroad is difficult, increasing transportation costs and thinning company profit margins.

The Ministry of Industry was now preparing to search for copper mines in the African colonies to make up for the shortage of raw materials. While many copper mines have been found, transportation remains a significant issue.

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Franz put down the report and shook his head, saying, “Smelting copper ore locally in Africa is too ambitious of a plan. Now is not the time to develop industry in Africa. At least until its integration is complete, the African continent cannot have industry.

Moreover, will smelting copper ore in Africa really reduce costs? I recall that the recent energy reserves report from the Ministry of Industry mentioned that the African continent lacks coal mines.

Currently, the large coal mines we have discovered are concentrated in South Africa. If we smelt ore locally, we would still need to transport the ore, and the costs may not be lower than smelting it domestically.”

Undoubtedly, this is another political challenge. In recent years, more and more capitalists have ventured into the African colonies. Many are no longer satisfied with just providing raw materials for the domestic market. They want to develop industries locally to reap greater profits.

However, due to inherent deficiencies, the resource distribution in Africa is extremely uneven. Coupled with the suppression by the Austrian government, they have not succeeded.

Now these people want to leverage the power of the Austrian government to develop industry locally and make more profits.

Such amateurish political maneuvers did not escape Franz’s notice. If it were regions like the United States or Australia, which are rich in resources, it would be difficult to suppress local industrial development.

But the situation is entirely different on the African continent. More than 90% of the coal mines are concentrated in South Africa. The rest of the regions would need to solve the coal supply issue first to develop industry.

This requires building roads, yet Austria’s African railway project is still progressing slowly. The initial plan was to connect Guinea to Congo, and although additional routes have been planned, they will not be completed overnight.

Without the main railway lines, there is no need to consider the branch lines. Without railway transportation for raw materials, Africa’s industrial development will naturally be stunted.

Now, taking advantage of the domestic copper shortage, many people are becoming restless again. However, they overlook the general distribution of resources in Africa, with which Franz is more familiar than anyone.

He might not know the specifics of each mine, but the general resources in each large region are not a secret in the future. Anyone with a bit of interest could find this information online.

There are indeed areas on the African continent suitable for industrial development, with South Africa being the best choice, as it has almost all the necessary resources.

However, isn’t there still a war going on? Once the war is over, the gold rush will begin. With the discovery of large gold mines, who would be interested in investing in other industries?

Capital always chases profit, naturally flowing to areas with high profits. Once gold mines are developed, resources will be snatched up, making it difficult to invest in other industries.

The fact that South Africa didn't develop industry in the future was, to some extent, because its resources were too abundant. They could get rich by selling minerals, so who would want to risk investing in industries?

Minister of Industry, Kaschin-Kubek, explained aggrievedly, "Your Majesty, the integration assessment period for Guinea is about to end. Continuing to suppress local industrial development might cause controversy.

We are all aware of the resource distribution issues. These people are in Africa and are likely aware of these issues too. The fact that they still made the request is probably to test us.

Even if one or two coal mines are found and are suitable for industrial use, it would only result in 1-2 additional factories.

As long as the government doesn't solve the transportation issues, no matter how much they try, they won't be able to establish an industrial system without sufficient raw materials. Why should we obstruct them?"

The African continent isn't just lacking an industrial system, it's essentially lacking everything. Not only are raw material resources insufficient, but there's also a shortage of manpower.

In the vast and sparsely populated African continent, trying to find hundreds of thousands of workers to establish large industrial complexes combining mining and smelting would deter any capitalist due to the exorbitant costs.

Franz asked uncertainly, "Are you suggesting opening up the mining industry but deliberately setting obstacles when building railways?

Creating a situation where raw material production areas cannot directly connect, thus increasing transportation costs for industrial development?"

If this were truly the case, Africa's industry would likely be doomed. Developing mineral resources isn't the issue; governments in resource-rich regions would construct railways to transport mined ores.

However, these railways primarily consist of single lines and do not form a comprehensive rail network. Especially between iron and coal mines, there's no direct railway connection, effectively stifling indigenous African industrial development from the outset.

One must admit that this approach is more effective than outright banning industrial development in Africa. In the future, excuses can still be found, such as inadequate exploration technology or erroneous estimations of resource reserves.

A mega-mine with a reserve of 100 million tons might only be reported as one million tons, making it seem insignificant for government attention until railway planning is needed.

Or perhaps, technological advancements were overlooked. Due to the limitations of the era, misjudgments of the mining development's value, and oversight during railway construction, can be considered somewhat understandable.

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Anyway, it's all due to special circumstances, definitely not the central government suppressing industrial development in Africa. In the end, if industrialization doesn't take off on the African continent, it's beyond human control.

After several decades, once integration is achieved, Austria's dominion over the African continent will be deeply rooted. By then, it won't be too late to correct these special historical mistakes.

Minister of Industry Kaschin-Kubek responded, "Yes, Your Majesty. Now, we need to focus on developing the homeland. It's unavoidable for the colonies to make sacrifices."

Kaschin-Kubek emphasized the term "colonies," indicating that colonies naturally cannot be equated with the homeland. Lower treatment is thus inevitable.

If they didn't extract resources from the colonies, Austria's economy couldn't maintain long-term rapid growth. Before the era of free trade arrived, colonies were always sacrificed.

This "mistake" limited by the era thus ceased to be a mistake, and the flaws in Africa's railway network construction became inevitable.

Franz finally understood why the railways in the original timeline's India had so many flaws—the seeds of trouble were sown during the colonial era.

It wasn't that the designers' plans were inherently flawed, but rather that reality demanded irrationality. What seemed illogical in the future was the optimal choice of this era.

Franz nodded thoughtfully and said, "Accelerate the construction of colonial railways. Use the asymmetry of information to create a fait accompli without arousing public attention."

The Austrian government held a map detailing resource distribution, but its imperfections were inevitable. Still, it was more comprehensive than what the public knew.

Industrial development relied heavily on coal, and in Africa, coal mines were concentrated in South Africa. This predetermined that any real design errors would also occur in South Africa.

This was very simple to achieve; they could use gold mines as a cover. The railway network would prioritize gold mining and smelting, understandably neglecting other areas.

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Such covert schemes naturally required utmost secrecy, with implementation falling squarely on the Ministry of Railways.

In the Ministry of Railways, Stein, who received this special order, was left dumbfounded. This task was far from easy, and it was clear he'd have to be prepared to be scolded.

No matter how well-prepared the excuses were, the public would still blame the railway designers in the future. Who would take the blame became an issue.

#### Chapter 479: The Importance of Presentation

The war rages on, but Franz is already laying out plans for post-war development in Africa. At this juncture, the Anglo-Boer War has morphed into a full-blown clash between Britain and Austria.

In the grand tapestry of shifting international dynamics, the South African battlefield is merely a single thread. With the world now fully divided, the possibility of continued restraint among the powers is becoming increasingly improbable.

Future colonial skirmishes are inevitable. This South African conflict is just a prelude, a warm-up match to test new ways of resolving international disputes.

Survival of the fittest has become the world's prevailing theme, with competition among the great powers intensifying. The strong seize more of the pie, growing ever more powerful, while the weak are further oppressed, their survival space shrinking more and more.

Victoria West, South Africa

Endless supply wagons kicked up clouds of dust, enveloping the landscape in a dense haze. The vehicles creaked and groaned as they wound their way along a makeshift road, stretching for dozens of miles.

Bathed in the morning light, blankets tossed over the wagons gleamed with a red hue. Rakes, shovels, and small wooden barrels stood upright, like sentries...

In the distance, people labored to clear obstacles from the road. In this era, South Africa was vast and sparsely populated, with only a few native tribes scattered along hundreds of miles, and road infrastructure was almost nonexistent.

The path they traveled had been carved out by the British in their campaign against the Boer republics, with many sections now in disrepair.

Infantry could navigate these obstacles, but supply wagons could not. The road had to be cleared first.

The once disposable troops had now transformed into engineers, toiling away with determination. Overseers wielding whips occasionally urged them on, pushing for faster progress.

Viscount Falkner, traveling with the main force, checked his timepiece and asked, "How long until the supply convoy arrives?"

As with most wars, the "Boer Republic Army" was now waiting for their supplies. In deep enemy territory, it was necessary for the main force to lead the way while the supply convoy followed closely behind.

However, the rapid advance of the front lines had caused logistics to lag behind.

The original plan was to transport supplies via the river, but it was now the dry season, and the British had sabotaged the waterways during their retreat, rendering river transport a distant dream.

In this war, time was the greatest enemy. Viscount Falkner's forces had already reached Worcester, and they were now close to Cape Town, only two days away from laying siege.

The war had reached a point where the British had abandoned their defensive lines along the way, focusing all their efforts on defending Cape Town.

Cape Town was now heavily fortified, with British reinforcements continuously arriving. If the war wasn't concluded by year's end, the entire operation would be considered a failure.

This was the power of naval supremacy. John Bull relied on sea transport for supplies, making logistics a non-issue.

Austria, on the other hand, had to rely on wagons and ox carts for transportation, severely limiting the number of troops they could deploy for this siege.

If they couldn't capitalize on the time gap and end the war before the British main force fully assembled, the roles of attacker and defender would reverse.

"The first batch of supplies will arrive by tomorrow night; the second batch is expected in a week."

The one who answered was a young officer, around twenty years old. His voice was clear and strong, and combined with his military uniform, he looked especially spirited, as if it was tailor-made for him.

After calculating in his mind, Viscount Falkner ordered, "Urge the logistics department once again. At all costs, get the supplies here as soon as possible."

Command the 2nd Engineer Regiment to clear the riverways along the route. They are authorized to recruit local labor on the spot and must complete the task during this dry season!"

Viscount Falkner was no longer a naive youth. The glory of capturing Cape Town was certainly tempting, but this war was not easy to fight.

If it weren't for the previous battles that had shattered the British morale, he wouldn't have launched this winter offensive.

Now, the British were concentrating their forces around Cape Town, amassing a force of over 85,000 troops in this small area of just over a thousand square kilometers.

Most of these troops were white soldiers, as the cannon fodder units had been nearly depleted in earlier battles and hadn't been replenished.

From this perspective, Governor Delf was competent. Although he lost cities and territories, he preserved the main force.

For Viscount Falkner, this was not good news. The enemy on the other side was a seasoned veteran who refused to engage in a decisive battle.

In war, early victories aren't the deciding factor; only the final victor matters. To prevent the British from turning the tables, Viscount Falkner was also preparing for the aftermath.

Clearing the riverways was part of these preparations. As long as logistics were secured, even if the British won the Battle of Cape Town, they would only retain control of the Cape of Good Hope.

If they wanted to launch a counteroffensive, they would need to expand the British Army by 2-3 times. Otherwise, their current small army wouldn't be enough to fill this gap.

"Yes, Commander."

As soon as the words left his mouth, a young officer stood up, walked several dozen meters away, and picked up the phone to relay the orders.

That's right, telephones had already made their way into the military. Like in many countries, the most advanced technology was usually first used in the military before being introduced to the public.

Due to the war, telephones were also introduced into the "Boer Republic" army. However, since they were relatively new, they were only used for short-distance communication, while long-distance communication still relied on telegraphs.

Within the command center, telephones had already replaced runners. What once required a messenger to deliver was now communicated directly by phone.

After the “beep beep beep” sound, the logistics department answered, and the young officer quickly conveyed the orders. He then connected to the engineers’ headquarters...

After a brief pause, an army staff officer suggested, “Commander, the battle for Cape Town won’t be easy. To minimize our losses, I recommend gathering as many cannon fodder units as possible.

If our attack is obstructed, we’ll have to use sheer numbers. We can draw from the Russians’ experience when they attacked Constantinople.”

It’s not the best approach, but it’s the most effective. The heavy artillery from the Austrian government was already en route.

In addition to using heavy artillery for the siege, sacrificing lives would be inevitable. Even though they bore the insignia of the “Boer Republic” army, they were essentially Austrian troops.

Sacrificing these units was out of the question, especially since their numbers weren’t sufficient. Even now, they only have around 40,000 soldiers.

Fortunately, the British army wasn’t in much better shape. Although they appeared numerous, their regular troops numbered only 20,000 to 30,000.

The remaining forces were either hastily recruited young men or various colonial troops, with a severe situation of incompetent people in important positions.

The string of defeats they suffered earlier had completely shattered their morale, allowing Austria to gain the upper hand.

Without hesitation, Viscount Falkner issued the order, “Order the Third Division to recruit soldiers. Conscribe all able-bodied men from every tribe within their sight. Those who resist are to be killed on the spot. Also, seize some of their grain to ease our logistical burden as much as possible.”

Ruthlessness is an essential trait for a colonizer. Viscount Falkner didn’t care about the consequences of his orders; all that mattered was winning the war.

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In Cape Town, panic was spreading. Governor Delf’s repeated speeches to boost morale were ineffective given their recent defeats.

With the “200,000” Boer Republic troops closing in on the city, the residents were understandably terrified. The wealthy had already fled by ship.

Those who couldn’t afford to leave by boat were preparing to escape with their families to the Cape of Good Hope. Although the two places were not far apart, the fall of Cape Town would likely spell doom for the Cape of Good Hope as well.

But putting some distance between themselves and the enemy seemed like the safest option for now.

The Pringer family was among those fleeing. Too poor to afford a carriage, they had to push a wheelbarrow laden with their belongings.

There were many such families on the road, carrying their meager possessions as they fled Cape Town for the Cape of Good Hope.

“Pringer, you’ve been conscripted! Report to our unit immediately!”

A familiar voice echoed, and Pringer felt as if he had fallen into hell. This was the same voice that had sent his three sons to the battlefield, their fates now unknown.

Pringer hurriedly explained, “Respected Sheriff Amber, I’m already 48 years old, well past the age for military service. I’m not within the scope of conscription.”

With his sons already serving in the army, he couldn’t go himself. Without the pillar of their family, what would happen to his three young grandchildren?

In these times, women earned much less than men, and it was difficult for them to support children on their own.

Sheriff Amber sighed, suppressing a twinge of conscience, and sternly reprimanded, “With 200,000 enemy troops at our gates, Cape Town is in crisis.

To defend Cape Town, the Governor’s Office has just issued a new decree extending the service age to 55.

If you don’t want to serve, you can pay 50 pounds to avoid conscription. If you can’t pay, don’t waste your breath complaining to me.”

This was clearly not an order from Governor Delf. As a shrewd politician, he would never issue such an outrageous order.

In these times, people aged quickly, and the older ones were of little use on the battlefield. The Governor’s conscription orders targeted only able-bodied men aged 18-40, with no interest in the old and weak.

However, the officials below had altered the rules for their own gain. Wealthy individuals could pay to avoid conscription, and someone had to fill the gaps left by them.

Pringer, unable to pay, was thus forced into service. It was simply bad luck; had he fled faster, he might have avoided this fate.

In these chaotic times, if it wasn’t Pringer, it would be some other unfortunate soul filling the ranks. As long as they got the required numbers, it didn’t matter who served.

The “200,000” figure was Governor Delf’s claim. With a population of less than 200,000, it was unclear how the Boer republics could muster such a large army.

Anyway, Governor Delf confidently assured everyone that the enemy had 200,000 troops. Yes, it was the overwhelming numbers of the Boers that had defeated them and this was beyond doubt.

He reported the same figure to the British government, and it was no different in the Cape Colony. If he didn’t want to be the scapegoat for the war’s failure, he had to make this number real.

The British public could tolerate failure, but only if it was against overwhelming odds. Occasional defeats were forgivable when the enemy was clearly stronger.

This was where propaganda came in, and Governor Delf was clearly adept at self-promotion. He had already shifted much of the blame for the war’s failures.

Otherwise, the British government would have replaced him long ago. No one could tolerate a governor who continuously failed, especially one who actively provoked the war.

A middle-aged officer reported, "Governor, the new round of conscription is complete. This time, we've conscripted 8,000 men."

Governor Delf nodded, compassionately saying, "Very good, you've done an excellent job. It's unfortunate that the people of Cape Town have to make such sacrifices for the Empire."

At this moment, Governor Delf didn't seem like a cunning politician but rather a compassionate saint.

An official immediately chimed in, "There's no other way. The enemy is pressing hard, and if Cape Town falls, no one will escape unscathed. By enlisting now, the people are protecting their families from the horrors of war.

Governor, don't be too sad. The people's sacrifices are worthwhile, and they will understand your intentions."

As if possessed by an award-winning actor, Governor Delf shook his head and said, "The public's opinion of me doesn't matter. This is all for the Empire.

As long as Cape Town can be saved, even if I were to die right now, I wouldn't furrow my brow.

I've already made up my mind to live or die with Cape Town. Here's my prepared farewell letter. If I should fall in battle, I ask that you kindly deliver it to my family."

The scene was quite moving, and everyone was touched. But beneath the surface, everyone understood that if Cape Town fell, Governor Delf, who had initiated this war, would be finished anyway.

Even if he returned to London alive, he wouldn't avoid facing a military tribunal. He would spend the rest of his life in prison, and his family would never be able to hold their heads high again.

The best option was to die on the battlefield. Then the situation would instantly change. Even if only for the need of political propaganda, the British government would turn him into a "tragic hero."

Governor Delf understood all of these circumstances clearly. He knew that even if Cape Town were saved, he wouldn't have a good ending.

To mitigate his responsibilities, he now had to perform this tragic act and mold himself into a "hero."

#### Chapter 480: Hurting Others at One's Own Expense

No matter how much political posturing is done, it cannot change the fact that the situation continues to deteriorate. The once-hidden conflicts are now surfacing.

Crime in Cape Town is rapidly worsening, with murders, robberies, rapes, and various heinous acts becoming rampant, creating widespread panic.

The colonial government in Cape Town appears powerless in the face of this. The bureaucratic police force does nothing substantial, focusing instead on protecting the interests of the elite.



The worsening security is a smaller issue compared to the overall unrest. Although the violent clashes have increased, the colonists are not easily intimidated. Even with the men drafted into the army, women have taken up arms.

After the initial chaos, people have started to band together for mutual support. Given the colonial tradition of everyone owning guns, most households possess at least a hunting rifle.

Without external intervention, Cape Town is likely to become a haven for gangs. After this wave of unrest, it will be hard for gangs not to grow.

A middle-aged official reported anxiously, “Governor, since the outbreak of the war, the price of grain in Cape Town has tripled, now beyond what many ordinary people can afford. It’s not just grain, the prices of most daily necessities have risen to varying degrees, and some items are even out of stock.”

Profiteering in times of crisis is a hallmark of adept capitalists. However, this time, the capitalists are not entirely to blame for the skyrocketing prices.

Due to the war, Cape Town has lost access to South African grain and must rely entirely on imports. This naturally drives up costs, making price increases inevitable.

Governor Delf’s expression changed, and he sternly ordered, “Issue an order to stabilize prices immediately. Grain prices must not rise any further. Forget it. I won’t make this your burden. I will handle it personally.

Tomorrow evening, I will host a banquet at the Governor’s Mansion. I will invite these bastards, and whoever does not cooperate with the government’s efforts to stabilize prices will be made an example of.”

In normal circumstances, Governor Delf would never resort to such extreme measures. However, these are not normal times.

His backers in the British government have made it clear that if he loses this war, Delf faces certain death. The only question is how he will die—either in battle or by someone else’s hand.

With his life on the line, Governor Delf naturally isn’t afraid of offending people. Even if he wins this war, as the instigator of the conflict, he’ll have to retire anyway, so he’s not afraid of their retaliation.

There are still bottom lines in political struggles within the British government, and situations of extermination rarely occur. With his connections, it wouldn’t be difficult for Governor Delf to extricate himself.

A middle-aged man in military uniform spoke up, “Governor, our military supplies are critically low. Due to insufficient preparation, we only have enough supplies for twenty thousand men for three months.

Given the current situation, these supplies will last at most a month. The new recruits can only be issued outdated rifles, which they’ll have to make do with.”

Due to the war, most of the British South African colony’s population, aside from the native tribes, gathered in Cape Town and the Cape of Good Hope totaling around 400,000 to 500,000 people.

Taking care of the needs of so many people is no small task. Even if sea transport can meet the material needs, the pressure remains immense.

Before Austria's arrival, the Cape Town colonial government did not anticipate threats from the interior. The Royal Navy, as the world's dominant force, ensured secure sea routes.

Under such conditions, the Cape Town colonial government saw no need for strategic reserves, as the native tribes posed no threat.

Governor Delf was one of the first to foresee the Austrian threat. This offensive against the Boer republics was primarily aimed at eliminating Austria's advantage in South Africa.

Unfortunately, the plan couldn't keep up with the changes and they fell right into the enemy's trap, pushing the Boers to align with Austria.

Governor Delf responded calmly, "I've already requested aid from the country for the supply issue. It won't be long before it's resolved."

But how long is "not long"? This is where the integrity of British bureaucrats is put to the test—it might be as fast as three to five days or as slow as three to five months.

The British government's processes are extensive, and any of these steps going awry could lead to indefinite delays.

It's important to note that not everyone wants to see Delf win this war. Many in the British government would rather see him lose.

In political struggles, internal enemies are often more dangerous than external ones. To many, Cape Town is just a backwater, and the outcome of this campaign seems inconsequential.

Frankly, the British South African colony's primary value lies in holding the Cape of Good Hope and providing logistical support for the Royal Navy.

If sacrificing Cape Town could induce a change in the government in London, many of the opposition wouldn't mind.

Things lost on the battlefield can often be regained at the negotiation table. The overly confident British don't believe anyone would dare challenge their supremacy.

Of course, those with such views are not in the upper echelons of government, otherwise, Governor Delf would truly be doomed.

If Britain and Austria reach a compromise, the war would end. However, as the scapegoat for losing cities and territories, Delf would face a military tribunal with no chance of redemption.

Even his backers would be implicated. With the colony's fall, the Colonial Office would naturally be the first to bear the brunt. If he loses his backing, Delf would truly be finished.

Fortunately, this dire scenario hasn't unfolded. The politicians in the British government are still rational, not swayed by the loudmouths.

Austria is a formidable presence on the African continent. If Cape Town is lost, whether it can be reclaimed in the future is highly uncertain.

If the Austrian government doesn't cooperate, could they really take it back by force?

Not to boast, but at sea, even if the Austrian navy doubled in size, the Royal Navy could still crush them. On land, however, it's the opposite. Even if the British army doubled and was sent to Africa, it wouldn't be enough.

Relying on "naval deterrence" to force Austria to make concessions is an idealistic notion. Even if the British government gave it their all, they might only capture a few unimportant Austrian colonies and can't conquer the African continent.

Sending the Royal Navy to block the Adriatic Sea used to be the most intimidating strategy. However, times have changed. If the Royal Navy dares to enter the Mediterranean, they must be prepared for a one-way trip.

The French controlled Sicily, effectively dividing the Mediterranean. Sending the Royal Navy into the Mediterranean now is much riskier. If France and Austria ambush them, the Royal Navy would be doomed.

This possibility is not just a question of if, but when it will occur. The only reason France and Austria haven't joined forces against the British is that they haven't had the right opportunity yet.

Otherwise, in the face of mutual interests, they would have acted long ago. The alliance between France and Austria has always been aimed at Britain and they've had such plans from the start.

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The thunderous roar of artillery marked the beginning of the battle. After the artillery barrage, a dense crowd armed with an assortment of weapons charged toward the British positions.

The sound of gunfire filled the air, and the advancing masses fell one by one. The heavy casualties quickly sapped the morale of the attackers, causing many to turn and flee.

Putting down his binoculars, Viscount Falkner's brow furrowed deeply. It was evident he was very dissatisfied with this probing attack.

After sighing, Viscount Falkner issued the most cruel order, "Send out disciplinary squads to supervise their attack. Those who cower before the enemy or flee the battlefield are to be executed without exception.

From now on, the assault will continue day and night. The attack does not stop until all our expendable troops are depleted."

This was the most typical attrition tactic, often called the worst strategy.

Using this method to capture a city was essentially self-destructive. Even if the war was won, the victory would be tarnished by the immense losses.

Viscount Falkner was not worried about this issue at all. Since he was using expendable troops, he was indifferent to their losses.

In his view, as long as Cape Town could be captured, the loss of all one hundred thousand expendable troops would be worth it.

A young officer immediately responded, "Yes, Commander."

This probing attack wasn't entirely fruitless; at least it exposed the enemy's firing points.

Without needing Viscount Falkner's orders, the frontline commanders made adjustments for the second artillery barrage.

This time, instead of a scattered bombardment, the focus shifted to concentrated shelling, targeting the areas with the heaviest firepower.

The British positions suffered significant losses, with the Colonial Sixth Division, stationed in the northern part of Cape Town, becoming the first victims.

Hiding in the fortress, Colonel Belding furiously cursed, "Have our artillerymen gone to eat shit? Why the hell aren't they returning fire?! Guards, connect me to the central command. Request immediate fire support. We need it fast. At this rate, the Sixth Division will be wiped out."

Saying the Sixth Division would be wiped out was an exaggeration. Even after two rounds of bombardment, their casualties were only around a hundred or so men.

However, being on the receiving end of the bombardment was severely damaging to morale, which was what infuriated Colonel Belding.

The British artillery did attempt to counterattack, but they suffered a minor setback in the initial exchange of fire.

Given the limited area of Cape Town and its numerous buildings, suitable locations for artillery placement were scarce.

In contrast, the attacking "Boer Republic" forces had plenty of space, allowing their artillery positions to be widely dispersed.

Although this dispersion made command more challenging, the presence of telephones mitigated the issue. Considering the increased safety of their artillery positions, it was entirely worth it.