

Roman Empire 321

Chapter 321: Austria's Preparations

Due to the distance, it took over two months for news of the outbreak of the American Civil War to reach Vienna.

Looking at the intelligence in his hand, Prime Minister Felix exclaimed, It seems weve cultivated a pig teammate!

From the perspective of an observer, it was clear that the Southern governments decision to initiate the war was tantamount to shooting themselves in the foot. Regardless of whether they could eventually force concessions from the Northern government, it would be a case of more harm than good.

Foreign Minister Wessenberg sighed and said, No, the Southern government isnt foolish; they are acting with confidence. If they followed the previous script, the Southern government would find it difficult to escape the influence of other countries in the future.

For the sake of future interests, they decided to take a gamble, knowing they have the support of Britain, France, Spain, and us to fall back on.

Finance Minister Karl questioned, But the timing of the Southern governments initiation of the war is off. The Northern states are not prepared for war at all; they could have easily delayed the start of the war for a few more months.

Foreign Minister Wessenberg explained, After a few months delay, the Northern government would have capitulated. Despite the Lincoln administrations calls for war, the Northern government actually has very few troops at their disposal.

The political system in the United States is different from that of European countries; the states wield significant power, while the central governments authority is limited.

Each state has its own army, and without the consent of the state governments, the Northern government has no authority to command these armies.

Their control over the states is even weaker than our control over several constituent states. After the departure of Southern officers, the military strength of the central government is still inferior to that of some powerful federal states.

Before the South took action, most Americans were opposed to a civil war. While the capitalists do support the Northern government, they wont pick up arms and go to war themselves.

Under the intervention of various countries, many federal states have already defied the federal government. The number of federal states willing to send troops would not exceed ten. The Lincoln administration lacked the military power to resolve the strength of the Southern government through force.

Without engaging in battle to demonstrate their strength, how could the Southern government remain autonomous? The support of European countries to them is not without conditions!

Interests can lead people astray; even when they know the dangers, they will still proceed.

Franz interrupted, Alright, regardless of what the Southern government thinks, the war has already erupted. The life and death of Americans are not our concern.

For us, the primary goal is to divide the United States. Although the situation has gone beyond our control, it hasn't reached the worst-case scenario yet.

The geographical advantage of the United States is undeniable. They haven't experienced the devastation of a brutal war economically. It's time for them to experience it.

Franz couldn't help but remain vigilant, even if the country split in two. Both of these Americas have the foundations of a hegemon, and the division merely delays their growth.

The Southern government is easy to deal with; if they enjoy playing with plantation economies, then let them continue. An agricultural country wouldn't pose a threat, and Franz wouldn't mind helping them solve their labor issues.

The Northern government is different; once industrialized, it undergoes a qualitative change. Driven by interests, they would engage in expansionism. Who can stop them then?

Even if Franz was determined to intervene again, with Spain's decline, would Britain and France be willing to join forces?

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Using political means to divide America also concealed hidden dangers. Once America splits, the federal government will naturally lose its authority, and its influence over the federal states will decline.

Since the Southern states can leave the United States for the sake of their interests, other states can do the same.

Once the seeds of division are sown, the Northern government will have its hands full in the future. Just think about it, if federal states start clamoring for independence at the slightest disagreement, it's enough to make any government collapse.

For example, if a state finds itself disadvantaged within the federal government, it may demand negotiations with the central government. If their interests are not met, they may opt for independence.

Another example is if there are conflicting interests among the federal states, which side will the federal government take? If it supports one side, the other may demand independence. If not handled properly, several states might declare independence together.

When it comes to stirring up conflicts, the British are the experts; Austria doesn't even need to get directly involved. In less than twenty years, the American continent will be dotted with small countries just like the European continent.

Unfortunately, Franz's great plan came to a premature end just as it began. With the outbreak of the Civil War, the federal government undoubtedly gained command over the state armies. With military power in hand, the central government's control over the states will naturally increase.

It probably won't be long before President Lincoln revised the constitution again and eliminated the legal basis for states to freely secede from the Union.

Minister of the Interior Prince Windisch-Grätz suggested, Your Majesty, why not order the ocean fleet to proceed to the Americas as soon as possible, establishing a foothold in Central America to lay the groundwork for armed intervention?

This foothold could not simply be a port; it must be capable of accommodating tens of thousands of troops and ensuring the supply of basic necessities. A small location won't suffice.

Franz shook his head: No need to rush; let's proceed at a normal pace. First, let's discuss where we should establish our foothold.

Colonial Minister Josip Jelai replied, Your Majesty, in terms of resources, Nicaragua is the most suitable. We can acquire a piece of land there. If we intend future military intervention, we could also opt to start from the Western Pacific, attacking the US West Coast to compel the Northern government to recognize the independence of the Southern government.

Glancing at the map, Franz's eyes lit up. At this time, with the Panama Canal not yet open, America's geographical advantage hadn't fully manifested.

Currently, the main strength of the American Navy was concentrated in the core area of the Eastern seaboard, leaving the defense of the West Coast relatively weak. Once faced with the threat of war, regardless of whether the Northern government would compromise, the Western states would likely withdraw from the conflict.

Without these states, the population advantage of the North American government would be less significant. Without sufficient numerical superiority, winning the war would be nearly impossible.

The three countries of Britain, France, and Spain are not pushovers either. If their navies blockaded the East Coast or even bombarded it, the Northern government won't have a choice but to compromise.

At least the Eastern financial consortiums won't stand for it. They can't afford the cost of their foundations being destroyed while continuing to support the Northern government's cause.

Franz hesitated a bit before saying, The plan is good, but it means we'll have to station a naval fleet on the West Coast and coordinate with the British to obtain supplies from Canada.

Foreign Minister Wesenberg responded, Your Majesty, there are no diplomatic issues. We've already signed a secret treaty with Britain, France, and Spain, agreeing to jointly intervene in the American Civil War. Once America splits, the British will stand to benefit the most; they have no reason to refuse.

After examining the map, Franz made a decision: Withdraw five divisions from the domestic forces. Two of these divisions will be sent to the South Pacific region in batches, along with our flagship, the ironclad Vienna.

In the short term, expand our presence on the two major islands in the South Pacific and surrounding dependent islands. At the same time, prepare for the expedition to America.

The other three divisions will be deployed, one to Central America and two to the African continent, projecting an image of accelerating our overseas colonial process.

The ocean fleet will be split into two, with two ironclads and a portion of the auxiliary fleet remaining in Nicaragua, while the rest continues to visit various American countries.

There's no need to rush; the American Civil War won't be resolved in just a day or two. The army should be deployed within two years, and the navy will proceed at its regular pace.

What is false can seem true; what is true can seem false.

Franz's plan wasn't random; history had already changed, and no one knew what the outcome of the American Civil War would be.

Whether armed intervention was needed and when to intervene were both unknown. Austria's strategic plan couldn't revolve around the Civil War in the United States.

If the Civil War in the United States remains in a stalemate and the timing of the intervention never came, could the Austrian army continue to wait?

Armed intervention also needed to consider costs. So Franz decided to prepare for military intervention while colonizing.

As for the ocean fleet, they could sell it when visiting the Southern government. It's estimated that by this time next year, the Northern navy would be ready to blockade the South.

Take advantage of the fire and rob them blind if possible. Franz felt no pressure; he wouldn't let an opportunity to make money from the slave owners slip away.

Chapter 322: American Version of Hongmen Banquet (Bonus Chapter)

On the first day of the outbreak of the Civil War, Fort Sumter fell. The fleet sent by the Northern government for supplies could only watch helplessly from a distance.

The next day, President Lincoln ordered the enlistment of 75,000 state militia to serve for 90 days to suppress the Southern rebellion.

Obviously, the Northern government had not yet realized the seriousness of this civil war, believing that they could easily suppress it as long as there was no foreign intervention.

The Southern government took the initiative and achieved military victory but lost political advantage.

The initially undecided Northern states quickly united under the influence of capitalist manipulation of public opinion, with patriotic young men joining the army one after another.

Stephen Douglas, the Democratic leader who was initially inclined towards the South, also stood on the side of the Northern government at this moment, condemning the Southern government for provoking the civil war.

He publicly declared: There are no neutrals in this civil war, only patriots and traitors.

Almost every Northern state exceeded its enlistment quotas. Lack of training, insufficient weapons and equipment, lack of discipline, and shortage of officers were common problems in the Northern states.

However, none of this mattered much, as they were all considered cannon fodder; as long as they had a fervent spirit, it was enough.

Looking at the assembled armies from all directions, President Lincoln, in high spirits, was already prepared to embrace victory.

The Secretary of War exclaimed angrily, Mr. President, the states of Maryland and Delaware have refused the conscription order and have prohibited federal troops from entering.

These two states are quite interesting; some people support the South, while others support the North. The deadlock between them is why they remain part of the Northern government.

Especially with Washington still surrounded by Maryland, if this state were to lean towards the Southern government, it might not be long before the Northern government became surrounded.

President Lincoln asked, How many more troops do we have to defend Washington?

The Secretary of War replied, Including the newly mobilized militia, we currently have a total of 30,000 soldiers.

President Lincoln asked cautiously, What are our chances if we use force to resolve the situation in Maryland?

The Secretary of War responded, Maryland has already mobilized, with about 30,000 armed individuals supporting the Southern rebels and approximately 20,000 remaining loyal to the government.

Overall, the forces favoring the rebellion have the upper hand. With both sides mutually restraining each other, Maryland still maintains neutrality.

If there are no reinforcements from the South, our chances of victory are as high as ninety percent.

Without reinforcements from the South, how could this be possible? Its important to note that Southern states have long been preparing for war, while the Northern governments preparations have only just begun.

Fortunately, in this era, limited transportation and the vast size of the United States mean that mobilization and assembly take a considerable amount of time.

Otherwise, if the Southern government were to wage a blitzkrieg, the Northern government wouldnt stand a chance. Its likely that before they completed their mobilization, the central government would become surrounded.

Once theres chaos without leadership, the outcome of the war would be decided. As a nation of immigrants, patriotism among Americans during this era would last at most 1-2 months.

As people became rational again, many would not be willing to keep risking their lives. Historically, to win this war, the Northern government resorted to conscripting soldiers into service.

After hesitating for a moment, Lincoln made a surprising decision: I will personally go to Maryland to do some ideological work on them, while you prepare for military action. Once diplomatic efforts fail, you must immediately take military action in coordination with those who support us there, and speed is of the essence.

This was an unavoidable choice. Virginia, the neighboring state to Maryland, had already declared independence. Once the war erupted in Maryland, Confederate troops from the neighboring state would immediately come over.

Despite the Secretary of Wars confident assurance of a ninety percent chance of success, it was based on the enemy being isolated and without support. With the support of Southern government troops, Lincoln didnt believe victory would come easily.

Faced with slim military odds, he would turn to his expertise in political maneuvers.

The Secretary of State reminded: Mr. President, at this time, you must oversee the overall situation. It is not appropriate for you to leave Washington.

President Lincoln shook his head and said, But how can I solve the threat in Maryland without going there myself? As long as this threat remains unresolved for one more day, Washington will be under enemy threat.

Maryland hasnt declared independence yet. As the President of the federal government, they will not do anything to me.

Political strife in the United States was still relatively mild. Even if he went to a Southern-leaning territory, there wasnt much concern about danger.

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History has proven this point. After the defeat of the Southern government, hardly any top officials faced repercussions and remained wealthy.

The Secretary of State wasnt concerned about the Presidents personal safety. Even if the President were to perish, the Vice President would step in. After all, they were all representatives of the capitalist interests, and whoever took office would serve the same purpose.

He was only worried that if the President went to do ideological work and failed to win back support from those leaning towards the Southern government, alienating Maryland, it would tarnish the governments reputation.

Despite the high praise Lincoln received in history books, his abilities were not widely recognized during his time. Particularly in handling Southern issues, his performance left much to be desired.

Of course, those supporting him behind the scenes were satisfied. Many capitalists believed they held the winning hand; once they suppressed the rebellion, they could obtain cheap industrial raw materials and markets.

Essentially, the Northern capitalists wanted to turn the South into an economic colony. Otherwise, the Southern states would not have reacted so intensely.

However, there was no need to clarify this misunderstanding. Politicians were adept at recognizing but not revealing the truth.

On April 20, 1861, just a week after the outbreak of the Civil War, Lincoln hosted a banquet for local social elites in Maryland.

Naturally, the event began with a passionate speech, but while half the crowd applauded, the other half merely watched, creating a very awkward atmosphere.

Such a minor incident couldnt faze President Lincoln; he remained unperturbed even amid such commotion. He had personally experienced situations where banana peels were thrown onto the stage during his speeches.

Americans are very open in this regard; if they dont like something, theyll show it, even if it means disrespecting the President.

Lincoln casually remarked, Gentlemen, to prevent the Southern rebellion from affecting the stability of Maryland, the federal government has decided to temporarily suspend parts of the writ of habeas corpus. We hope everyone will cooperate with the governments efforts.

This was essentially a form of martial law; without the writ of habeas corpus, the governments authority greatly increased, while the influence of these social elites would be significantly diminished.

With this protective order in place, even if they openly supported the Southern government, the government couldnt touch them.

Just prior, a man named John Merryman was arrested for organizing activities supporting the Southern government, then released without charge because of the writ of habeas corpus.

A middle-aged man vehemently refused, Impossible, without approval from the Maryland legislature, the federal government has no authority to abolish the writ of Habeas Corpus.

Thats right! The Constitution stipulates that the president has no right to directly repeal laws!

He doesnt even have a basic understanding of the law, how did he become president?

You ignorant fool, go home and study some more!

People inclined towards the Southern government spoke out one after another, condemning the federal governments interference in Marylands internal affairs as a violation of the federal constitution. Some even resorted to direct insults.

There were even individuals who openly declared that if the federal government dared to interfere in Marylands internal affairs, they would declare independence.

When their own interests are at stake, who cares about the president? Insulting the president was just a part of everyday life for the American people. As for the federal government, who were they trying to scare? Havent they seen people treating government ordinances like toilet paper before?

Just by observing the situation, Lincoln knew that there was probably little hope of persuading these people to abandon the Southern government and switch sides.

Interests determined their stance. Despite the decline of Marylands slave industry, as a state known for exporting agricultural products, the interests of farmers and plantation owners aligned.

Lincoln quietly asked a middle-aged man nearby, Is everyone here?

The middle-aged man replied in a low voice, Most of the influential figures from Maryland are here.

Lincoln nodded in satisfaction, then calmly said, Seeing that everyone is quite agitated, I believe its necessary for everyone to calm down and think things through.

How about we stay here for the night and continue our discussion tomorrow? The host has arranged rooms. I wish you all a good nights rest!

After saying that, Lincoln quickly left under the escort of his bodyguards. Sensing something amiss, the crowd, just stepping out the door, found that the federal troops had already surrounded the place.

Damn it, weve been detained. That bastard dares to disregard the rules!

Its obvious, todays banquet was a trap. The so-called discussion of national affairs was just bait. Lincoln himself came out to lure us!

Its too late to say anything now. Weve become prisoners.

No, he wouldnt dare to do anything to us. The US President doesnt have that much power. If he pulls something like this, lets see how it ends for him!

Lincoln couldnt hear the curses of the crowd anymore. If he had a choice, he wouldnt want to do this. But the situation was dire, and to resolve the Maryland issue as quickly as possible, he had to break the rules.

Today, Lincoln had offended all the social elites of Maryland, including those who supported the Northern government. Now, they would definitely have no goodwill towards him as the president.

It wouldnt be long before he became the most unpopular person in Maryland. If he still wanted to participate in the next presidential election, there was no need to think about the votes from this state.

But for the sake of reuniting the United States, he had no choice. If the Maryland issue couldnt be resolved quickly, once the Southern rebels came over, with the help of these traitors, they would soon be at the gates of Washington.

The federal government still needed time. Before reinforcements from various states arrived, the federal government had to withstand the first wave of pressure.

Chapter 323: Sabotage

Reality has proven that people are afraid of death. Faced with bayonets, even the influential figures who were originally inclined towards the Southern government compromised. The federal government then implemented martial law in Maryland.

These were prominent figures; Lincoln could detain them temporarily, but not indefinitely. After integrating the Maryland militia, the federal government had no choice but to release them.

During this era of inconvenient communication, alongside taking over Maryland, Lincoln also ordered the takeover of the telegraph system for external communications.

Otherwise, news of this would have caused an uproar in Northern states long ago. Its possible that impeachment proceedings against the president would have long entered Congress.

Declan, the leader of the pro-Southern faction in Maryland, left the scene with a grim expression. Yielding to the federal government under the threat of bayonets was a complete insult to him.

In this era, morality had not completely deteriorated; these prominent figures still cared about their reputation. For things they were forced to compromise on, they could only pretend to swallow the humiliation for now.

Declan was not rash; he was acutely aware that now was not the time for retaliation. Agents of the federal government were closely monitoring their every move.

Under normal circumstances, he would not fear the federal government; within the framework of the rules, the federal government could not touch him. However, facing a president who did not play by the rules changed things.

Upon returning home, Declan did not immediately take action. Instead, he calmly pondered, distinguishing between allies and enemies.

The butlers neither servile nor overbearing voice sounded: Mr. Declan, Mr. Edward and Mr. Pirlo are here for a visit.

These two individuals were Declans friends and sometimes comrades-in-arms, ranking among the top ten farmers in Maryland. Like him, they were also among the disappointed attendees of the banquet.

Declan casually replied, Invite them in.

Yes! the butler responded.

They were all old friends, so there was no need for such formality. If it werent for etiquette, they might have skipped even the announcement.

Because they were looked down upon by European nobility, being called nouveau riche and lacking in manners, wealthy Americans in their daily lives actually placed great importance on etiquette.

Being looked down upon by European nobility was one thing, but Americans of this era were not to be trifled with. They absolutely could not tolerate being looked down upon by their own kind, so Declans estate was entirely modeled after the English aristocratic style.

Both the butler and the servants had received specialized training, and compared to any European minor noble, they were not inferior in the slightest.

In an instant, the butler escorted the guests inside.

Declan asked, My friends, what would you like to drink?

Pirlo interrupted, saying, Declan, do you really have the leisure to drink coffee here? That lunatic Lincoln is shitting on our heads, and if we dont teach him a lesson, how are we going to get by?

Pirlos words instantly ruined the atmosphere. Declan could no longer be bothered about etiquette either. After all, he wasnt really nobility himself.

Casually imitating etiquette now and then was acceptable, but keeping absolute composure in the face of harm to his interests, as Washington elites could, demanded greater personal depth and cultivation.

Declan retorted directly, What do you propose, send someone to take him out? Right now, the federal government is watching us like hawks, searching everywhere for our slightest slip-up. One wrong move and well all be in hot water.

With a gloomy expression, Pirlo replied, Of course not, Im not that foolish. Even if I want him dead, now is not the time. But we cant just sit idly by, can we? Our armed forces are now under the control of the federal government, and even if we want to join the Confederacy, we wouldnt be able to.

Having said that, Pirlo began to regret it a little. If they had known earlier that the federal government would disregard the rules, they should have been more resolute in their stance during the vote back then.

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Now, the Northern government was dominated by capitalists, and their influence as farmers in the government was too low. A president even dared to use coercion against them to make them compromise.

Declan said calmly, There's no need to rush; there are plenty of people who are dissatisfied with him. Throughout history, few have had good endings after breaking the rules.

Surely those capitalists who support the federal government are feeling uneasy too, aren't they? A president who dares to brandish a knife at everyone is destined not to last long.

This is a fact: since its inception, the United States has been dominated by big capitalists, plantation owners, and large farmers.

Now, various factions have united and are at odds due to conflicting interests, with domination shifting to capitalist conglomerates. Regardless of the changes, these individuals do not want to see a president who dares to challenge them.

Today, Lincoln threatened Maryland. Who can guarantee that tomorrow he won't use the same tactics against other states?

Edward inquired with concern, Declan, are you planning to unite with the capitalists to impeach the president?

Declan shook his head and replied, It's not that easy. Lincoln, that bastard, is the mouthpiece for the interests of the capitalists, and he's currently upholding national unity.

Based solely on this matter, it's still difficult to make a move against him. Besides, you don't want to expose this ugly incident to the American people, do you?

This is the most realistic issue. As long as everyone's interests are guaranteed, the capitalists won't care whether the president's actions have crossed the line.

Even if they did want to make trouble for him, now wouldn't be the time for it. It wasn't suitable to rashly replace a president, at least not until the Civil War ended.

Edward pondered for a moment before saying, Indeed, although I detest him, I have to admit that from the country's standpoint, he is indeed upholding national unity.

The capitalists don't want to give up the Southern market and cheap industrial raw materials. Lincoln, this useful pawn, won't be abandoned by them in the short term.

But from our perspective, this isn't a good thing. If we don't bring him down, it's hard for us to establish ourselves in this circle.

Declan sneered, Then what if we make him lose this war? A president who triggers a civil war between the North and the South, causing America to split, will be reviled for centuries.

Making him a universally despised failure is the best revenge. And if you don't want to see him, we can even arrange for someone to send him off his way when the time comes.

Winners become kings and losers become villains. A failed leader who disregarded rules would naturally face a miserable end.

Whether for their own interests or their reputation, these people have every reason to undermine the federal government.

Pirlo asked with concern, Do you have a plan?

Declan responded somewhat awkwardly, Weve only just begun, and youre already rushing in. But I do have a preliminary plan. Directly confronting the federal government isnt wise. Its much simpler to trip them up in the shadows.

Currently, theres hardly anyone in Maryland who doesnt dislike Lincoln. On this issue, we can unite with the capitalists. For example: we can have the state legislature enact a law declaring him persona non grata and prohibiting the President from entering the state.

We can instruct Marylands public officials to fully exploit their expertise and let the federal government experience bureaucratic red tape. If the federal government calls for people to enlist, we can prevent those who want to enlist from doing so and push the troublemakers and ruffians who dont want to join, into the military.

Lincoln abolished the writ of habeas corpus, didnt he? Then, well continue to enforce it. If hes capable, let the federal government send its own officers to enforce it.

Next, we can mobilize our congressmen to give him a hard time and oppose anything he supports.

At the first opportunity, well impeach the President. We cant attack him directly now, but making him sick of it all will let us vent our anger a bit.

After that, its up to us. The capitalists wont switch to the Confederacy just because they dislike Lincoln.

For instance: we can provide cover and guide young people who support the Southern government to enlist in the South.

We can also engage in smuggling and trade with the Southern government in private, and even involve the capitalists in it

There is no doubt that Declans skill at sabotage is at a professional level. By rallying Marylands upper-class society to obstruct the federal government, even if their actions are exposed, the federal government will be powerless against them.

Utilizing the state government to oppose the federal government is a common occurrence in the United States. Many times, the federal government has been left embarrassed and frustrated.

Yet, these actions have not crossed any lines, as long as they havent directly aided the Confederacy themselves.

As for smuggling, all the influential capitalists will have participated. For the sake of profit, theres nothing they wouldnt dare to do.

In history, after the Confederacy was blockaded, a significant portion of weapons and ammunition were contributed by Northern capitalists. Otherwise, the Southern government couldnt have held out for so long.

Edward sighed and said, Declan, how do we explain this to our friends in the South? We promised them beforehand that Maryland would temporarily remain in the Union to aid their attack on Washington.

Declan replied calmly, They will understand our predicament. No one could have foreseen encountering a leader who doesn't abide by the rules. Currently, we are equally striving for the independence of the South.

The strongest fortresses are always breached from within. Currently, we are causing chaos internally for the federal government and the enemy. I believe the ultimate effect of our actions will be no less significant than directly joining the war.

Faced with a group of nonviolent saboteurs, the federal government is utterly powerless. The rights of each state in the United States are substantial, and state governments are elected, not appointed by the central government.

For local government officials, offending the president or the federal government is inconsequential. These individuals cannot be dismissed or promoted by them.

The only ones they cannot afford to offend are the local powerful figures these capitalists and farm owners hold the local votes, and their stance reflects the stance of the American people.

Any policy requires people to implement it, and once local governments indulge in bureaucracy, the federal government is powerless.

Implementing martial law in local areas may sound easy, but it's challenging without the cooperation of local influential figures. Maryland in this era is not small; it cannot be managed without a hundred thousand troops.

Chapter 324: Short on Troops and Generals (Bonus Chapter)

The backlash brought by his strong-arm tactics was no longer Lincoln's concern. Since he had not resorted to massacring people, it meant there was still room for maneuver, and in the future, after suppressing the Southern rebellion, he could find ways to mend relationships.

The worst-case scenario would simply involve losing the votes of one state. If they lost this war and America split into two, no matter how well he handled relationships, he would still have to resign.

Upon returning to Washington, President Lincoln received bad news: neighboring Delaware was still not settled.

What's going on? Why hasn't Delaware been dealt with yet?

It's no wonder Lincoln was upset. Delaware was only nominally a slave state; in reality, slavery was virtually extinct there.

The state had just over 20,000 Black residents, with fewer than 1,800 being slaves.

The most prosperous Wilmington and surrounding areas were already economically integrated with Pennsylvania. This state is very small, with an area of just over six thousand square kilometers, so the power of plantation owners is naturally not significant.

The Secretary of State in charge of coordinating Delaware wore a grim expression. While the previously difficult situation in Maryland had been resolved by the President, the supposedly easier task of persuading Delaware had yet to yield results.

Originally, Delaware was loyal to the Union, and we had an absolute advantage in the January state legislative vote. However, the intervention of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain has complicated matters. The suppressed Southern faction has become active again with their support.

These people cannot make Delaware lean towards the South, but they have caused the states preparations for war to stagnate.

Under the guise of opposing the Civil War, they organized demonstrations and protests, demanding that the state government remain neutral. Not long ago, they even gathered twenty thousand people and briefly occupied the state council.

Lincoln frowned and asked, Why not suppress it? I remember the Governor of Delaware is loyal to the federal government.

Journalists from multiple European countries have appeared in Delaware, and envoys from Britain, France, Austria, and Spain have sent notes to the state government, expressing close attention.

The Delaware government is concerned that using forceful suppression may lead to unforeseen consequences and trigger intervention from the great powers, the Secretary of State replied, his expression grim.

This wasn't the first time that the four nations had interfered in American internal affairs. Without the intervention of European powers, the Southern government wouldn't have been able to sway so many states toward independence.

Especially in the case of Kentucky and Missouri, two populous states in the west, which historically were brought into the Northern governments fold but now leaned towards the Southern government.

It's worth noting that among the fourteen states in the Confederate government, Missouri ranks first in terms of white population, and Kentucky ranks third.

The white population of these two states exceeds the combined population of the six least populous states in the United States, undoubtedly bolstering the strength of the Southern government.

Historically, even after these two states joined the Northern government, forty thousand people still enlisted in the Southern army. However, after their allegiance shifted to the Southern government, there were now less than a thousand willing to fight for the Northern government.

The reasons are quite practical: plantation owners are unwilling to suffer losses and are fighting for their own interests.

On the other hand, capitalists are different. After being tempted by the Southern government, they happily joined the Confederate cause.

It was all trouble caused by interests. The plantation economy of the South may hinder the development of a capitalist economy, but it doesn't prevent capitalists from making money.

With access to cheap industrial raw materials and a market of ten million people, a quarter of whom belong to the middle class, it's undoubtedly a lucrative market.

The domestic capitalists in this market are few in number, and far less competitive than within the large family of the federal government. For capitalists who aren't particularly powerful, the allure is strong.

Supporting the side where it's easier to make money, they feel no guilt when it comes to their interests.

Public opinion has shifted. The Southern government heavily propagandized that the Northern government wanted to turn the South into an economic colony, and blindly obedient citizens naturally supported the Southern government.

With the addition of three states, the Confederacy gained three million in population, while the Union lost the same amount. This change in numbers altered the balance of power between the two sides.

Lincoln naturally doesn't know about these changes. He maintains full confidence in defeating the South, but he's concerned about possible intervention from European countries.

It has not been that long since the day the British burned down the White House. Lincoln has lived through that era, and now with the addition of France, Austria, and Spain, it's impossible for him not to feel any sense of fear.

Lincoln asked with concern, Mr. Seward, what do the Russians say? Are they willing to support us?

Directly confronting the British, French, Austrians, and Spanish is extremely unwise. Before the outbreak of a world war in Europe, the United States could not ignore the combined intervention of European countries.

If it weren't for the vast ocean separating them, any of these four countries could easily defeat the United States.

This was already proven during the time the British burned the White House. Just a few tens of thousands of British troops caused the United States to lose its capital. The Federal government's military was indeed unreliable.

Secretary of State Seward replied, The Russian government is willing to support our war of unification, but only diplomatically. They have limited strength in the American region and cannot provide substantial support.

Verbal support is useless. The British, French, Austrians, and Spanish are practically asking to intervene personally. Seeking help from the Russian government was naturally hoping that the Russians could take some action to restrain one or two of the major powers.

Britain, France, and Austria are all bordering Russia. It would already be a great diplomatic victory for the Union to restrain any one of them.

Lincoln said indignantly, Are we supposed to support their expansion in the Far East just to get verbal support in return?

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Currently, the federal government has too few chips to buy off the Russian government. Apart from mutual diplomatic support, the actual assistance that the United States government can provide to the Russian government is very limited.

The Russians are currently in dire need of money. If the federal government had the funds, investing a few hundred million pounds could certainly allow the Russians to make a big splash and distract the attention of Britain, France, and Austria.

Unfortunately, the United States is not the wealthy empire it would be, and simply cannot afford such a large sum of money.

The Russian government is also not one to act without seeing benefits. Without sufficient incentives, why would they bother to help the United States stir up trouble?

Secretary of State Seward defended, Mr. President, this topic is meaningless. Russia is undergoing reforms, and they need a stable international environment. They can't help us in our time of need.

It's not that he's not trying; it's just that the resources are too scarce. He has already gone to great lengths just to secure Russia's verbal support.

Seeing the topic could progress no further and no solution in sight, there was no need to continue discussing it.

Secretary of War Simon Cameron rushed in, saying urgently, Mr. President, there's an urgent telegram from the front lines.

President Lincoln calmly replied, Go ahead, what's the bad news this time? I can handle it.

Just by glancing at Simon Cameron's expression, he knew another defeat had occurred somewhere. It seems that the Northern army hasn't won a battle since the war began.

Secretary of War Simon Cameron said grimly, On May 1, 1861, the rebels launched an attack on Cincinnati. Our forces fought bravely for three days and nights but ultimately lost due to being outnumbered. Ohio is in urgent need of assistance.

Lincoln immediately stood up, snatched the war report, and began to read it carefully. Cutting through the embellishments, the summary was straightforward: 50,000 Confederate troops attacked Cincinnati. The federal government dispatched a single infantry division of 12,000 soldiers, along with 32,000 militia from Ohio and 21,000 from Indiana to defend. Despite their efforts, they were defeated.

Indeed, they were outnumbered. Excluding the militia from two states, the federal government had only one infantry division, a quarter of the enemy's forces. Holding out for three days was already a significant feat.

Lincoln was not concerned about the details of the battle; he only knew that less than a third of the federal infantry division remained, with many killed or captured. The militia from the two states also suffered heavy losses, though the exact numbers were unknown.

If the rebels occupy Ohio, the federal government will be split in two from the mainland with the Great Lakes above. No matter what, the War Department must find a way to hold onto this state. While we may be able to afford military losses, politically, we cannot afford to lose a state, Lincoln made a judgment based on his limited military knowledge.

Secretary of War Simon Cameron replied with a bitter expression, Yes, Mr. President. However, we need more reinforcements now. The original plan is no longer feasible.

This battle made it clear to the War Department that the enemy was not a ragtag force. The original plan was to establish a blockade with militia from surrounding states, supplemented by 75,000 militia and regular troops mobilized by the government to crush the rebellion.

With the blockade now torn open, if Ohio falls, neighboring Pennsylvania will become a battleground, and the heart of America's steel industry in Pittsburgh will be exposed to the Confederate forces.

Even if the Confederate governments strength was limited and they could not hold this area for long, causing one major destruction would wipe out much of the Northern governments industrial advantage.

Theres no way around it; the Great Lakes region is the core industrial area of the United States, and they really cant afford to lose it. Just having Ohio become a battlefield would already be a heavy blow.

Lincoln responded without hesitation, I will issue another national call for volunteers, summoning 300,000 militia from all states to serve. But this will take time, so for the short term, youll have to figure something out yourselves.

The consequences of inadequate preparation were now being exposed. If any front suffered defeat, the federal government would lack sufficient forces.

Population and industrial advantages were just potential in war. If they couldnt be translated into military strength, then the potential would always remain potential.

Secretary of War Simon Cameron boldly declared, The federal governments military forces are limited, and there are too many places to defend. In the short term, we can only order the militia from nearby states to rush in for reinforcement.

Considering the possibility of attacks from all sides, disrupting our troop deployments, we need to have at least 700,000 mobile troops to quell this rebellion.

The initial plan only required a hundred thousand troops to suppress the rebellion. However, after one battle, Simon Cameron became more conservative.

Lincoln asked in surprise, Do we really need that many troops?

Secretary of War Simon Cameron explained, Mr. President, based on the enemys troop deployments, it wont be long before Maryland, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and other areas become battlegrounds.

The political trouble caused by the loss of even one state would be immeasurable. Without sufficient forces, it would be difficult to mount a counterattack while maintaining a comprehensive defense.

The United States is different from other countries. If the federal government dares to abandon any state, it will suffer severe consequences. In the worst-case scenario, under extreme pressure, these state governments might surrender directly to the South.

Lincoln said helplessly, Well, youre the expert in this area. Is there anything else that needs my attention? Feel free to bring it up.

Secretary of War Simon Cameron awkwardly replied, We have a shortage of military officers in reserve. We must recall retired officers to return to service. I know weve already called for volunteers, but it's still not enough.

I propose to recruit those veterans who have seen combat to serve as junior officers, and we can extend the age limit to 55.

Indeed, these veterans are quite old for this era, where the average life expectancy is less than 55. However, Simon Cameron felt compelled to resort to this measure due to the shortage of available options.

While its possible to promote new recruits to higher officer ranks, the demand is not significant, and there are likely suitable candidates among the ranks of the federal army.

The demand for company-level and platoon-level officers is at its peak, and theres simply no alternative. The U.S. Army was already relatively small, and many officers of higher ranks, particularly those above the rank of major, hailed from the South. After the outbreak of the Civil War, many of these individuals left.

Now, with the need to expand the military several times over, even if all active-duty veterans were promoted to officers, Simon Cameron would still fall short.

Given these circumstances, the only recourse is to recall retired officers beyond the retirement age back into service.

Lincoln proposed, Has the situation deteriorated to this extent? Cant we expedite the graduation of military academy students and enlist them?

Secretary of War Simon Cameron cautioned, Mr. President, all cadets in their second year or higher at the military academies are already enlisted in the military. As for first-year cadets, theyve only recently enrolled and havent received much training yet.

Chapter 325: Duped Arms Dealer

The Northern government found itself in a predicament, and the Southern government wasnt faring much better. Firstly, there were internal power struggles. The newly formed Confederate government was a result of compromises and balancing acts among the states.

As an interim administration, its effectiveness was limited. Most actions had to be carried out with the cooperation of state governments.

Under this dual leadership, various forms of chaos were inevitable.

After the victory at the Battle of Cincinnati, there should have been a pursuit to capitalize on their victory, concentrating forces to seize the Northern industrial center. However, the Southern government launched attacks on multiple fronts instead.

They successively attacked bordering regions such as Maryland, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa.

While this multi-pronged approach appeared grandiose and extended beyond enemy borders, it also missed the opportunity for a swift end to the war.

This kind of stalemate is what the great powers love the most. Arms dealers from all over the world are now flocking to North America, hoping to share in this feast.

Inside a mansion in Missouri, the owner, John Casey, asked with a smile, Fickell, how did the negotiations go?

Fickell replied with a dejected tone, Dont even mention it, my friend. This deal cant be done. The state government actually wants to purchase breech-loading rifles.

Good heavens, the mainstream weapons in the world right now are muzzle-loading rifles. Whats the difference between bullets being loaded in the front or the back, arent they shot out the same anyway?

For this war, Fickell had procured two hundred cannons and thirty thousand rifles, ready to make a profit. The cannons naturally sold at a high price, but for the rifles, he wasnt as lucky.

In times of war, people are the most pragmatic. They use whatever weapons work best. Undoubtedly, breech-loading rifles, which can be fired from a prone position, are more competitive than muzzle-loading rifles.

The Southern government was already at a manpower disadvantage. Although their ratio had improved from historical levels of 1:2 to 2:3, they still couldnt afford heavy casualties. The state governments wanted to minimize soldier casualties as much as possible.

John Casey shrugged and said, Sorry, I cant help you with this issue. Convincing the state government to purchase a batch of weapons wouldnt be difficult during peacetime, but now its wartime.

We have to consider the militarys opinion, and winning the war is everything. The breech-loading rifles provided by the Austrians were indeed effective. Ive personally tested them.

Both the rate of fire and accuracy are greatly improved. The only weakness might be their range, but thats not much of a drawback.

On the battlefield, most soldiers can only hit targets within two hundred meters, so an effective range of eight hundred meters is sufficient.

Fickell complained, Damn it. If you knew, why didnt you tell me? Youve made me waste my energy. If I had known, I would have gone to the North. I only came here because of you.

John Casey remained unfazed and said, You brought this upon yourself. Who told me that his weapons were the most advanced in the world, again?

Fickell, dissatisfied, replied, My rifles are indeed the most advanced in the world, at least among muzzle-loading rifles.

John Casey, feeling helpless, responded, Well, even if thats the case, it doesnt matter now. Whose fault is it that you were late? If you had come a month earlier, the government would have gladly purchased this batch of rifles.

But its too late now. Its been proven true that muzzle-loading rifles are being phased out. The government wont joke with their soldiers lives by procuring outdated equipment like these.

Why dont you consider modifying this batch of rifles? Ive seen that converting them into breech-loading rifles isnt difficult. Although it may incur some additional costs, you can surely recover them later, right?

Fickell frowned, his displeasure fleeting. While modification seemed simple in theory, this wasnt Europe but the Southern United States, and there werent many factories capable of rifle modification.

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And one of them was John Caseys arms factory. Although called an arms factory, it had just been recently converted.

Before the split between North and South, it was merely a factory for machinery. However, John Casey was astute; as soon as the South declared independence, he ordered equipment from Europe and poached personnel from several domestic arms factories, transforming the mechanical plant into an arms factory.

It was impossible for the hastily assembled team to develop new weapons.

The production capacity also didnt meet John Caseys expectations; currently, they could only produce three cannons, eight hundred rifles, and fifty thousand bullets per month.

To fully utilize the production lines capacity, it would take at least one to two years.

Clearly, this was something John Casey couldnt wait for. Who knew how long the civil war would last? Once the war ended, survival for the arms factory would be a challenge.

The emergence of breech-loading rifles was a turning point for John Casey. Converting old muzzle-loading rifles into breech-loaders was undoubtedly much faster than manufacturing new ones.

With his connections in Missouri, he had no trouble selling the converted old rifles to the government at the price of new ones.

However, not all rifles were suitable for conversion; some were easy to convert, while others would not be cost-effective to modify.

The tens of thousands of rifles from Fickell were undoubtedly suitable for conversion. Although the relationship between the two men was decent, when it came to interests, relationships were the least reliable.

John Caseys arms factory equipment was purchased from Fickell, and now the tables had turned. This time, he was ready to make a killing off Fickell.

As for whether Fickell would refuse, its natural that he wouldnt. Just using common sense, its clear that these rifles wouldnt sell in the South, and they wouldnt sell in the North either.

You cant expect Austrian arms dealers to only sell weapons to the Southern government and not to the Northern government, right?

Breech-loading rifles arent some high-tech products. It would only take a couple of months to copy them once theyre obtained as samples. If Austria doesnt sell, other European countries will.

Moreover, the Northern government can also produce its own knockoffs. Currently, the United States is the worlds leading imitator, so wouldnt it be easy to copy a rifle?

Without the American market, it would be difficult to sell these tens of thousands of rifles elsewhere. And thats not to mention the increased transportation costs. Its better to choose cooperation as he can still make some profit.

Fickell directly said, Alright, my friend, name your price. As long as the price is right, Ill sell them to you.

As a qualified arms dealer, since Fickell had guessed John Caseys intentions, he naturally wouldnt choose to be duped out of money again by agreeing to the modification.

John Casey chuckled and quoted, Twenty-five thousand pounds.

Hearing this figure, Fickell immediately became angry, stood up, and said, Why dont you just rob me instead?

John Casey reassured, No need to overreact, my friend. In business, such outdated weapons are no longer worth much.

Besides being modified, you can only sell them to indigenous tribes. How many years will it take to sell all these guns?

There are risks involved in purchasing these rifles for modification. It takes time, and if the civil war suddenly ends, Ill be left holding the bag.

As a gesture of goodwill, Ill add another three thousand pounds. This is already the highest price.

You should know that the Southern government has just signed a massive military order with Austria. They sold two hundred thousand breech-loading rifles to the Southern government in one go.

Fickells expression changed drastically; this was undoubtedly bad news. But soon, he regained his composure. Two hundred thousand rifles might seem like a lot but when divided among the fourteen Confederate states, each state would receive less than fifteen thousand rifles on average.

This wouldnt come close to meeting everyones needs, especially for border states like Missouri, where it would be a drop in the bucket.

Muzzle-loading rifles werent easy to sell because many Americans already owned them. In a country where gun ownership was widespread, not having ones own gun was embarrassing.

Fickell bargained, One hundred thousand pounds. This is already the lowest price in the international arms market.

After some contemplation, John Casey countered, Twenty-nine thousand pounds. After all, were old friends!

Ninety-five thousand pounds and thats as low as it goes.

Ill add two thousand more pounds, and thats my final offer.

Chapter 326: Fanciful Plan

Washington

Secretary of State Seward calmly said: Mr. President, these are quotes from arms dealers from various countries, as well as from domestic capitalists.

Of course, this doesnt mean much to us. In this war, the preparations made by the federal government were too hasty. Both the government troops and the militias in various states are now lacking weapons.

Currently, many of our troops are still equipped with hunting rifles they brought themselves. In terms of weapons and equipment, there is simply no way to compare with the Confederate army.

Even if we were to buy up all the inventory of these arms dealers, it still wouldnt meet our needs. So the notion of having a choice is nonsense.

President Lincoln rubbed his forehead. He was very suspicious that the Secretary of State was deliberately looking for trouble. Since there's no choice, they'll just have to make do with what they can get. There's nothing more to be said.

Send someone to negotiate with them, try to negotiate the price down as much as possible, and kick out the ones quoting the highest prices.

Seward shook his head and said, I'm afraid that won't work. The highest quote is from the Austrians. Their product is the breech-loading rifle, which is superior in performance.

The most crucial point is that they have the most inventory on hand. They can provide us with a hundred thousand breech-loading rifles, a hundred and fifty thousand muzzle-loading rifles, and eight hundred various types of cannons in one go.

Not long ago, they just sold two hundred thousand breech-loading rifles, a thousand cannons, and some ammunition to the Southern government. If it weren't for the fact that those Southern folks are too foolish, we wouldn't even have a chance to get these weapons.

In the eyes of the Secretary of State, the Confederate government is just too foolish.

During wartime, if you don't take advantage of the good relations with other countries to sweep up weapons and equipment at the first opportunity, allowing these arms to flow into the hands of the enemy, then what else could it be if not foolishness?

As for the cost, no matter how much money is spent on purchasing weapons and equipment, it cannot compare to the losses on the battlefield.

If the Confederate government had swept up weapons and equipment at the first opportunity, then at least for the next six months, the Union government would not have been able to obtain sufficient weapons and equipment.

This is the advantage brought about by unchanging communications; it allows for a time difference in actions. Although international arms dealers are flocking to North America, the reality is that everyone's available stock is still limited.

Tens of thousands of rifles, hundreds of cannons, thousands of tons of ammunition those are all significant quantities. Unless one is a cheater like Franz who crossed over, who would know the scale of the Civil War?

If too much stockpiling occurred and both sides of the North and South suddenly ceased hostilities and compromised, then all the investment would be lost, and the costs would not be recovered.

Besides Americans, no other suckers in the world would buy their excess stock.

Emptying the warehouses of arms dealers active in America wouldn't even cost ten million pounds. Trading ten million pounds for the enemy's insufficient weapons and equipment for half a year was an extremely profitable deal.

After hearing Seward's explanation, President Lincoln nearly broke out in a cold sweat.

Half a year is enough time to decide the outcome of a war. Fortunately, the Southern government didn't do this; otherwise, the Union would have been miserable.

Having adjusted his mood, Lincoln asked, Secretary Seward, you didn't summon me just to discuss these matters, did you?

Secretary of State Seward calmly explained, Of course not. Currently, the four major powers of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain support the Confederate government. Under their influence, most European countries are leaning towards the Confederacy's side.

These arms dealers mostly have political backgrounds. Under similar conditions, they would certainly prefer to do business with the Confederacy.

However, if we offer higher prices, the situation changes. In matters of interest, arms dealers don't care about the government's preferences.

Therefore, I plan to raise the prices of weapons and equipment, especially for some advanced weapons. The industrial capacity of the Southern states is weak, and their own production capacity is limited. They can only follow suit and increase prices along with us.

Unlike the traitors in the South, our industrial capabilities are not lacking. The shortage of weapons and equipment is only temporary for us.

If all goes well, our self-sufficiency rate in weapons should exceed eighty-five percent starting from next year, while the Southern government is unlikely to reach even thirty percent.

Since we cannot achieve victory militarily, let's economically drain them.

This is the advantage of the Union, but President Lincoln couldn't feel happy at all. He saw that the Secretary of State's plan was preparing for a prolonged war.

Frowning, Lincoln asked, Do you really have so little confidence in our military?

Seward replied earnestly, Mr. President, it has been over three months since the outbreak of the war, and the total losses suffered by the federal government's forces have exceeded eighty thousand.

I admit that the military has been working hard, and they have achieved decent results, but we are still at a disadvantage.

If anything unexpected happens on the battlefield in Maryland, the federal government will immediately face a defense battle in Washington. In the short term, I believe the federal government does not have the possibility of winning the war.

The Secretary of State's attitude, to some extent, also represents the attitude of the internal officials of the federal government. Since they are preparing for a prolonged war, it also implies that everyone has lost confidence in quelling the rebellion in the short term.

But that's not the worst part. If the war drags on, the voices of the domestic peace factions will grow louder.

As a qualified politician, Lincoln knew that internal enemies were the most terrifying. These people lurked in the shadows, and he didn't even know who they all were.

After hesitating for a moment, Lincoln spoke up, saying, Alright, let's go ahead with your plan! But first, we need to address the financial issue. The Southern government is using cotton as collateral to issue bonds overseas, but we don't have collateral.

The federal government does have collateral, but the problem is that they dare not use it as collateral. Otherwise, the domestic population would rise up first.

The island of New Guinea has now been renamed New Bavaria. It seems to be a European habit to name places at will, and Franz has become accustomed to it.

This second-largest island in the world now belongs to the Habsburg dynasty, yet Franz feels no particular excitement.

In terms of resources, New Bavaria can be considered abundant, with various mineral resources and the fertile plains of the southern delta, which are among the most fertile in the world.

There are no powerful indigenous kingdoms on the island. A rough estimate suggests that the indigenous population on the island does not exceed one million, and may even be lower than three hundred thousand.

However, this land has not received the attention of European colonizers. Clearly, this is very abnormal.

Previously, Austrias colonial activities involved first seizing the islands surrounding New Bavaria such as the Melanesian Islands, the Solomon Islands, and the Aru Islands

This was a way to delineate spheres of influence and assert sovereignty. If they claim all the surrounding areas, others naturally cannot come and snatch the central region, otherwise, they would break the rules.

Now, with the colonization pace accelerated, colonial teams have entered New Bavaria Island in large numbers, and problems have arisen.

The island has a tropical rainforest climate with heavy annual rainfall;The downstream terrain is flat, leading to poor drainage;The rivers have a long flood season, causing surrounding areas to flood easily;The coast is affected by tides, leading to seawater intrusion and many mudflats;The island is mountainous with many marshy areas, and the population is sparse.

In summary, developing this island will require a substantial investment.

At the very least, they should solve the drainage problem, convert the marshy areas into farmland, and preferably build seawalls to protect coastal areas from tidal effects.

Franz asked, How does the Colonial Department plan to proceed?

Colonial Minister Josip Jelai replied, Your Majesty, we plan to temporarily suspend the development of New Bavaria Island and focus on developing some areas, establishing several cities to assert sovereignty in appropriate areas.

The focus will still be on developing the surrounding islands, as the South Pacific region is truly very wealthy. The indigenous people here are not engaged in agriculture at all and rely solely on the gifts of nature for sustenance.

These islands abound with tropical fruits and are suitable for growing economic crops such as coffee, cocoa, copra, palm oil, tea, and rubber.

This was the wisest choice. Colonization is for profit, and blindly investing is very unwise.

Anyway, with the sparse population on the island not engaged in agriculture, if left untouched, it will remain the same even after a hundred years.

The islands are still there and wont go anywhere. After the worlds colonies are divided, the Austrian government can develop them later.

Franz nodded and said, So be it for New Bavaria. And what about the Lanfang Republic?

If it werent for the mention of the Lanfang Republic in the documents, Franz would have almost forgotten that there was also a Chinese republic in the South Pacific region.

Josip Jelai explained, Your Majesty, Kalimantan Island is rich in gold mines, so a group of Chinese people gathered there and established the Lanfang Republic.

Not long ago, our fleet visited this country and Count Hmml even signed a friendly agreement with them. We cannot afford to confront them directly.

This small country is very weak, and the colonial government is looking for a pretext for war. It shouldnt be long before we can destroy them.

After hesitating for a moment, Franz still relented.

Lets not rush into action. Send someone persuasive to coax them into joining the New Holy Roman Empire.

We can grant them autonomy, following the standards of our domestic kingdoms, and even be a bit more lenient.

The South Pacific region is too far away, and our capacity to provide settlers is limited. Developing so many areas would also be very challenging.

If we forcibly eliminate the Lanfang Republic, not only would it incur additional military expenses, but it would also be difficult to gain much profit in the short term.

Its better to directly incorporate the Lanfang Company; that way, we can profit directly without even needing to bear the costs of governance.

In Franz's view, the Lanfang Republic was nothing but the Lanfang Company; even its rulers didnt treat it as a country.

In history, it was because the rulers of the Lanfang Company allied with the Dutch for their own interests that led to the demise of this country.

Franz wasnt underestimating the might of the Dutch military; it truly wasnt that impressive.

The Lanfang Republic, situated in the South Pacific, could attract sufficient immigrants and had ample land for development. If the ruling class didnt become corrupt and worked on developing their own strength, unifying the South Pacific region wouldnt be just a dream.

If they could ally with the Dutch, they could naturally ally with the Austrians as well. Bestowing a few noble titles to them, its likely these people wouldnt be able to resist the temptation.

This could be seen as mutually beneficial: the Lanfang Republic could gain protection from Austria, and the Austrian government would increase its income.

Yes, Your Majesty!

Although Franz's demeanor seemed different today, Josip Jelai didnt oppose it; it was in line with Austrias interests.

The essence of overseas colonization is profit, and the means to achieve it are irrelevant.

This is different from the situation in Africa. The Austrian government intends to establish a second German homeland in Africa, so arbitrary rule is out of the question.

While Franz's plan may seem fanciful, the costs involved are very low, so it's worth a try.

If successful, no further action is needed, and the Austrian government gains additional income, while Austrian industry and commerce gain a new market.

If it failed, at most some time was wasted.

Chapter 327: Poaching from America

On June 18, 1861, the Austrian Ocean Fleet departed from Japan and sailed into the Pacific. Count Himmel stood on the deck, gazing into the distance, sighing from time to time.

The fleet commander, Vice Admiral Aleister asked, puzzled: Count, it seems like you're not in high spirits?

Count Himmel sighed and said, Admiral, it may not be so easy for us to establish a foothold in the Republic of Nicaragua. We may even have to resort to the use of force.

Vice Admiral Aleister asked doubtfully, Sorry, Count, I haven't noticed any problem. Nicaragua is just a small country, with a total population of only 300,000 to 400,000, and less than ten percent of them are white. There's hardly any industry. How could they pose a threat to us?

This was a fact; there were no powerful countries in Central America. Even if they were all combined, Aleister would not feel any pressure. The rulers here now, rather than being called a republic, are more like a few mine owners and plantation owners.

These people can bully the local natives, but if they encounter a regular army, Vice Admiral Aleister can guarantee that the force of a single regiment can deal with them.

Count Himmel shook his head and said, What about the pretext for war? If we attack Nicaragua without sufficient reason, what about the planned state visits that follow?

This reflects the different perspectives of politicians and military personnel. The military only sees the ease of occupying Nicaragua, without considering the political consequences.

Otherwise, the Austrian government's orders to them would not be about finding a foothold but rather occupying Nicaragua or the various countries of Central America.

Vice Admiral Aleister bluntly said, It's simple. We can directly confront the Nicaraguan government. Tell them what we want. If they don't cooperate, we'll wipe them out. There will always be someone willing to cooperate with us.

Count Himmel explained, Admiral, we don't have enough immigrants to govern this place. Ruling by force is not stable. Once the large army leaves, local rebellion will occur sooner or later.

Deploying a heavy amount of troops to suppress it is too costly, and abandoning the area is easy to trigger a chain reaction which will impact our colonial system.

The shortage of immigrants is an unsolvable problem. Africa lacks immigrants, the South Pacific lacks immigrants, and even the Americas lack sufficient immigrants. Unfortunately, Austria's

human resources are limited, and unlimited immigration is not feasible, even with the addition of the German countries.

The Colonial Department can mobilize tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the European continent each year, but that's already pushing the limit.

Count Himmelpflug not only heard about plantation owners personally working the fields due to labor shortages but also heard reports of some directly purchasing serfs from Russia.

As for using local labor, it's mainly the mine owners, not the plantation owners. It's not that the plantation owners have higher moral standards; it's mainly because management is too troublesome.

Austria prohibits slavery, so there are no slave training institutions. Untrained natives are prone to rebellion.

In this regard, mine owners are different. Almost every mine owner has a group of thugs. On one hand, they combat gold thieves and protect the security of the mines, and on the other hand, they suppress labor riots.

After some unfortunate incidents resulting in deaths, for the safety of everyone, the colonial government banned plantation owners from using unsafe native labor.

Vice Admiral Aleister thought for a moment and said, If it's just a shortage of immigrants, we can actually look to the United States for a solution. It is said that the United States already has three million Germans.

Many people left the European continent and immigrated to the United States to escape wars. Now that the North and South are at war, these cowards probably want to flee again.

If we can entice a hundred thousand of them, the problem of insufficient immigrants will be solved. We can even promise them a little more benefit. After all, Central America is vast and sparsely populated.

Immigration cannot be haphazardly introduced, as the consequences can be extremely severe. A case in point is Mexico: initially, the United States sent immigrants to the Mexican region, and the Mexican government even introduced many favorable policies.

However, once the number of immigrants became dominant, Americans immediately plotted for the locals to seek autonomy and independence.

Naturally, the Mexican government couldn't tolerate it. They extended their hospitality and offered numerous favorable conditions, and yet, these people still wanted to rebel.

The Mexican government was also incompetent; they failed to suppress the rebellion. There was no second chance, and the long-prepared Americans swiftly invaded.

As a result, the Mexican government paid the price of 2.3 million square kilometers of land as a lesson fee. With this cautionary tale, countries henceforth must consider carefully when accepting immigrants.

Currently, Austria's colonies strictly control the proportions of various ethnic groups. They mainly attract immigrants from the German cultural sphere with a small number from other countries, primarily consisting of lower-class people with much cultural background.

After pondering for a moment, Count Himmell made a decision: Admiral, your idea is brilliant. If we can recruit enough immigrants from the United States, Central America will be ours.

He continued, Inform the Hawaiian government that our visit will last only one day and have them wait at the port. After resupplying the fleet, we will directly visit the United States. I want to visit each state along the West Coast one by one.

Its no wonder Count Himmell was excited; this plan was highly feasible from the outset.

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During this era, unlike in later times, German-Americans were marginalized in mainstream American society. The upper echelons of American society were dominated by the English, who held the majority of the countrys wealth.

Ethnic segregation applied to every group; the elite German-Americans who couldnt enter the upper echelons of American society did not yield and continued to resist.

The German immigrant enclaves still use German, and local schools continue to teach in German, reflecting their dissatisfaction with the dominance of the English in the upper echelons of American society.

German-Americans truly integrated into American society after the two World Wars. They were dispersed during the war period, taking advantage of the opportunity to counter espionage.

This created an opportunity for Austria to poach them. Once they become beneficiaries of the system, it becomes difficult to undermine them. Its the immigrants at the bottom of society who are the easiest to manipulate.

Central America has plenty of lands, and leveraging others generosity has always been Franz's specialty, inevitably influencing Austrian government officials as well.

As for whether the US government would hinder the immigrants from leaving, there was no need to worry at all. If the American government really did that, they would no longer be a threat.

A country that people can enter but not leave, how else could it attract immigrants? Without enough immigrants, relying solely on natural population growth, by the time they developed the nuclear age would have arrived.

Dividing up the world also depended on timing. Once the opportunity was missed, even paying ten or a hundred times more would not necessarily gain anything.

The status a country attains in diplomacy depends on its actions. Without a doubt, Hawaii, already a semi-colonial country, is not worthy of Himmell's attention.

If there was ample time, he wouldnt mind paying a customary visit as diplomacy required. But now that they were pressed for time, shortening the visit to Hawaii made sense.

Hawaii's kingdom probably wont welcome him either; in this era, visits from great powers are often unwelcome for many small countries.

Himmell had experienced it more than once. Most countries reacted like they were welcoming the plague, with officials desperately trying to get him to leave with the fleet as quickly as possible.

Their behavior is evident; they receive cramps in their hands just from shaking hands. Even the fleets supplies are sponsored by these countries, and there are special local products presented to the fleets high command as gifts.

Newport Harbor, Oregon

The scorching sun roasted the earth, and not far away, the roar of warships could be heard.

The dock was crowded with people, ranging from elegantly dressed dignitaries to common folks in coarse linen clothes, all waiting under the blazing sun.

As the fleet appeared in the distance, accompanied by the deafening roar of steam engines, many people showed joyful smiles.

However, among the smiles, some wore frowns, as if anticipating a colossal trouble.

Being away from the homeland, one may never truly understand the importance of a powerful motherland.

Despite being a nation of immigrants, the United States also had a social hierarchy among immigrants, and those of British descent undoubtedly occupied the top.

On the one hand, the dominance of the British-Americans shaped the mainstream of society, and on the other hand, the worlds foremost Royal Navy provided the British with abundant confidence and assurance.

In this regard, the German-Americans were rather tragic. With the German region fragmented, although each country had its own strength, there was no world power to support them.

Under Franz's butterfly effect, Austria experienced a rebirth, leaping to become the worlds third naval power and naturally becoming a pillar of support for overseas Germanic peoples.

In fact, the Austrian government also made significant efforts in this regard. Overseas embassies were open to all Germanic peoples, providing them with reasonable assistance.

By taking practical actions, they gained their recognition. Therefore, when the fleet visited the United States, so many German immigrants gathered.

Many people hoped for Austrian government intervention to gain higher political status. Thus, the arrival of the fleet was seen by many as an opportunity.

In this world, its all about strength. A powerful nation naturally commands respect overseas, while a weak nation is inevitably bullied.

Seeing the densely packed crowd on the docks, Count Himmelm smiled with satisfaction. His confidence in this plan grew stronger.

Chapter 328: Intimidated

Austria was on the move, and neither Britain, France, nor Spain remained idle. Firstly, the Spanish seized the Spanish Island (Hispaniola), and then the three powers accelerated their expansion in Mexico.

The British had just suppressed the Indian Rebellion, and the French focus was still on Italy. So, this time, Mexico was luckier than in history; the expansion of the powers mainly involved economic and political penetration.

If they weren't concerned about provoking the two American governments in the midst of the Civil War, they would probably have penetrated into the various states of the United States as well.

Reestablishing a colonial system in North America had always been the dream of British, French, and Spanish colonizers. The American Monroe Doctrine had blocked everyone's path, so now they naturally wanted to remove this obstacle.

London

As the world's foremost naval power, the British deservedly took the lead in this joint intervention plan in the United States.

No one contested their dominance as the British had the strongest presence in the Americas. If the Americans didn't mobilize, even John Bull's garrison in Canada could handle them.

However, this wasn't something to be proud of. The small size of the American army didn't truly reflect their strength; the majority of the federal states' militias were more potent than the federal government's forces.

In the Prime Minister's office at 10 Downing Street, the newly appointed British Prime Minister, John Russell, was convening a meeting.

Gentlemen, that fellow Lincoln has ordered the blockade of the Eastern coast. Ensuring the continuity of trade with the Confederate government has become our current challenge.

Undoubtedly, the capitalists in the cotton textile industry had exerted pressure on the British government. If the blockade was only temporary, everyone could endure it for a while.

If the blockade persists long-term, or if the Northern government wins the war, then Britain's dominant position in the cotton textile industry will be shaken.

This is absolutely unacceptable. It's crucial to understand that the cotton industry is the cornerstone of the British economy; any problem in this sector would severely damage the entire British economy.

The Secretary of the Navy, Edward, said calmly, Prime Minister, there's no need to worry too much about this issue. The Confederacy has a lengthy coastline, and I doubt the American navy has the strength to blockade it all.

Currently, the Northern government is still working hard on building ships. When they do amass enough strength, we can coordinate with other countries to intervene and designate the coastal areas of the Confederacy as safe zones.

At present, Austria's fleet has already reached the west coast of America, while the French fleet is on its way, and when combined with our fleet and the Spanish fleet in the Americas, the Americans simply won't stand a chance.

This isn't baseless speculation; during this era, American military power truly was lacking.

Let's not even talk about the tiny size of the Federal Army, numbering 16,000 men. After the outbreak of the Civil War, it instantly decreased by a third. (Translator Note: The U.S. Army underwent an enormous expansion during the Civil War (1861-65), growing from a peacetime strength of about 16,000 troops in December 1860 to a maximum size of 1,000,000 by 1865.)

The United States Federal Army was scattered across the country, and the army stationed in the Southern states naturally operated independently from the federal governments command.

If the army wasnt up to par, neither was the navy. When President Lincolns blockade order was issued, the American Navy, which had long been complacent, discovered that, for various reasons, only 42 out of its 90 warships were operational, with only three suitable for coastal missions.

There was no way around it. The American Navy had been trained for deep-sea combat but lacked any experience or training in coastal operations.

Historically, despite gaining naval superiority, the Northern government did not launch a large-scale coastal attack on the South, mainly due to a lack of familiarity with coastal defenses and fortifications.

Bureaucrats, they all understand. Most of the funds were in the hands of the Southern states themselves, with no backup from the federal government. No one had foreseen the day when they would attack their own territory from the sea.

Secretary of State Agarwal said, Things arent that simple. The three nations of Austria, France, and Spain each have their own agendas and wont simply follow our commands.

Currently, the Royal Navys strength in the Americas is insufficient. If we intervene in their actions, it means handing over the leadership of the intervention alliance. If were not in charge, how can we ensure Britains interests?

In this era where might makes right, power equals influence. Just hoping for benefits without contributing wont work.

The great powers arent fools. While British strength could intimidate smaller indigenous nations, fellow powers like Austria, France, and Spain wouldnt be intimidated.

If Britain just stands by, theres a risk that the three nations might join forces and divide North Americas interests among themselves, leaving them in a dire situation.

The likelihood of such an event is very small, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. When it comes to interests, anything is possible.

Prime Minister John Russell turned to Foreign Secretary Gladstone, hoping he would present a reliable plan, as this issue was seven parts diplomacy, two parts politics, and one part military.

Gladstone analyzed, From the current situation, Austrias goal should be Central America, while France and Spain target Mexico. All three nations aim to carve out a piece of flesh from the Americans.

The American rabble is difficult to govern, so our main goal should be economic interests. Currently, Austria has the upper hand, seizing most of the American arms market.

Preliminary estimates suggest they have earned around three million pounds in profit. Our arms dealers have been too short-sighted and slow to react.

Prime Minister John Russell shook his head and said, This is just a minor issue. Arms sales are a one-off deal, and theyll dry up after the civil war ends. Lets focus on maximizing our benefits!

Three million pounds might seem like an astronomical figure to an individual, but for the government in London, its just so-so.

If it were a long-term income, it might have caught the attention of Prime Minister John Russell, but this one-off deal is hardly enough to pique his interest.

The money has already lined someone else's pockets. There's no way to snatch it back, is there? Even if they were to resort to thievery, it would be easier to rob the Americans directly than to rob Austria.

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Gladstone furrowed his brow. He didn't like being interrupted, especially after becoming the Foreign Secretary of the British Empire. However, this was the Prime Minister's office, not his own, and it was the Prime Minister who interrupted him. That is why Gladstone refrained from showing his displeasure.

Prime Minister, the arms trade actually relates to our upcoming plans. Austria's intentions are quite clear; they want the North and the South to continue fighting.

Upon closer examination of their arms exports, it's evident that the mastermind behind it is the House of Habsburg, although it's unclear whether it's a specific member or Emperor Franz himself.

Since Austria can play a balancing act between the North and the South, we can do the same, albeit with some favoritism towards the weaker Southern government.

However, this approach carries significant risks; a misstep could tip the scales in favor of one side. If the South wins, it's manageable, as they lack the capacity to unify the country. But if the North emerges victorious, it will spell trouble.

To counter this, the Austrian government has dispatched its fleet. This fleet likely serves as their tool to maintain balance between the North and the South, allowing them to intervene immediately if the North gains the upper hand.

I propose dispatching a fleet capable of overwhelming the American navy and increasing the number of troops in the Canadian region to assert dominance when necessary.

Chancellor of Exchequer James objected: Hold on, Foreign Secretary, don't forget that deploying troops also costs money. We've just suppressed the Indian rebellion, which has already cost us a staggering 280 million pounds in military expenses.

The government's finances simply don't allow us to launch another major war. I don't believe the Americans are pushovers. If they were easy to deal with, they would still be our colony.

Foreign Secretary Gladstone chimed in discontentedly, Chancellor, don't always view things from a financial standpoint. As Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer, you must consider the bigger picture.

The investments we make now can yield double returns in the near future. A strong America is not in our interest, especially when Canada is constantly under threat.

The Americans have always harbored intentions of driving us out of the Americas. If we miss this opportunity, it'll be much harder to rally allies in the future.

With the four nations sharing the military expenses, the actual burden won't be too significant. If Austria dares to dispatch a fleet, why shouldn't we?

Chancellor of Exchequer James shook his head and said, The Austrians are doing this for Central America; they joined the colonial movement late, and the worlds most fertile regions have already been divided up.

The Austrian government can exploit the African continent regardless of cost, let alone the even more favorable natural conditions in Central America.

However, we dont need to. Britain now needs to rest and recuperate. Launching another large-scale war that would be difficult to control is completely not worth the cost.

This is the impression Franz's development of the African continent has left on the outside world. In many peoples eyes, Austrias African colonies were losing money badly.

In fact, thats true; except for the West African region with gold mines, which barely breaks even, the remaining areas have been consistently losing money, and not small amounts at that.

This was completely different from other countries concepts of managing overseas colonies. In this era, everyone was trying to generate returns as quickly as possible, with minimal investment in developing the colonies.

Secretary of the Navy, Edward, spoke up, saying, Chancellor, the more prepared we are for this intervention plan, the less likely it is for a full-scale war to break out.

Lets not forget the strength of the intervention alliance, which far exceeds that of the Federal government. What gives them the audacity to engage in war with us? Even if a conflict does arise, I dont see it as a bad thing.

The Southern Confederate government has already tied up much of their strength, allowing us to join forces with the Austro-French-Spanish trio and strike directly at these rebels, effectively dividing up the North American continent again.

As for wiping out the Federal government, thats wishful thinking. Unless the British are willing to overextend themselves, at most theyll only take control of the coastal regions.

Americas territory was massive. Once they entered the inland regions, military spending would flow out like water. Historically, America was able to gain independence precisely because Britains finances could not endure.

In the War of 1812, when the British even burned down the White House, they still eventually gave up on their plans to subjugate America due to excessive military expenditure.

Prime Minister John Russell intervened to ease the tension, saying, Gentlemen, youre getting off track. The most critical issue now is ensuring the smooth flow of maritime transportation to guarantee the normal supply of cotton domestically.

Due to the extensive damage caused by the Indian Rebellion, our plans to establish a second cotton center in India have had to be postponed.

Additionally, efforts to promote cotton cultivation in Egypt have faced obstacles. On one hand, there is local resistance to cotton cultivation among the Egyptian populace; on the other hand, the construction of the canal has absorbed a significant portion of the workforce.

Therefore, the debate over whether to increase troops in North America is meaningless.

Currently, we must increase our military presence. If the cotton supply chain is severed by the Northern government, how will we justify ourselves to Parliament?

This is a real problem. Cotton cultivation also takes time. Without several years of promotion, its impossible to scale it up.

Unfortunately, the scope and duration of this Indian rebellion far exceeds that in history. The cotton plantations previously established by the British have also been destroyed by the rebels.

Within three to five years, it will be difficult to have large-scale cotton production in India. Cotton cultivation in Egypt is also facing difficulties in promotion. The domestic cotton textile industry cannot afford to wait.

As for other cotton-producing regions in the world, the British government doesnt even consider them, as their production capacity is insufficient to meet their needs.

Without new sources of cotton, the British governments options are limited. Domestic cotton merchants just want to make a profit, but theyre not prepared to ruin the domestic textile industry.

The cotton theyve hoarded can only support them until the first half of next year at most.

If they didnt obtain enough cotton this year, the British cotton textile industry would face closure starting in the middle of 1862.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer chose to remain silent decisively. Bringing up financial constraints at this point would be too shortsighted, and it would likely draw the ire of capitalists.

If the industry collapses due to a lack of raw material supply, it would truly be catastrophic.

Just thinking about the quarter of the population involved in that industrial chain, no one could dare to undertake such dire consequences.

They didnt even trust the intervention alliance; who knows if Austria, France, and Spain might compromise with the Northern government and betray them.

For such a life-and-death matter, its best to take matters into their own hands.

The Secretary of State frowned and said, Prime Minister, its imperative to establish a cotton-producing region fully under our control. We cant afford to have our lifeline constantly under someone elses thumb.

Even the Austrians, disregarding costs, have established a cotton plantation to meet domestic demands. Theres no reason why we cant do the same.

John Russells face changed color, exclaiming, This is bad. We must immediately dispatch a fleet to the Americas to deter the Austrians. We cant let them lean towards the Northern government.

Everyone realized the urgency; with cotton supplies dwindling across European nations, Austrias textile industry was poised to capitalize on the market.

Even just for the sake of dominance of the cotton textile industry, the Austrian government had every reason to stab them in the back. As for diplomatic agreements, they were made to be torn up.

The British had done this many times, so they naturally believed Austria might act the same way.

It would make total sense to abruptly shift support to the North in exchange for a cotton embargo which would greatly benefit them.

Secretary of State Agarwal added, The Austrians are indeed likely eyeing our dominance in the cotton textile industry. Based on their cotton consumption in previous years, the cotton output in West Africa has already exceeded their needs by a good margin.

However, they haven't exported any, instead shipping it all back home. Due to the American Civil War, this year's global cotton production decrease has become a certainty, but cotton plantations in West Africa are still increasing.

We can send someone to attempt a tentative purchase; if they insist on not selling externally, then we'll have a big problem on our hands.

Chapter 329: Cotton Crisis

The British concerns are naturally unknown to Franz, who is currently troubled by the Suez Canal project.

There were two main issues:

Firstly, the Canal Company extensively employs slave labor, which has sparked condemnation in European public opinion;

Secondly, the cost of canal construction has exceeded the budget, requiring additional investment.

The second issue is easily resolved; the Canal Company has decided to issue additional shares to raise funds externally, which should solve the problem before long.

Under normal circumstances, it would not be difficult for France and Austria together to suppress European public opinion. In this era, there weren't many saints, and few would stand up for a group of Egyptian slaves.

Moreover, all these laborers are being provided by the Egyptian government, and the Canal Company has paid the Egyptian government for them.

Previously, even if there were newspaper reports, they were all directed towards the Egyptian government. After all, they are the ones who organized the laborers and withheld their wages.

Anyway, Egypt isn't a European country, so European public opinion, whatever it is, doesn't affect them. Let them take the blame.

But now things are different. To promote cotton cultivation in the Egyptian region, the British had to compete with the Canal Company for labor.

The British-built Suez Railway is also in competition with the Canal Company.

Conflicts of interest between the two sides are unavoidable, leading to contradictions. To strike at the Canal Company, John Bull incited public opinion to pressure the company.

Once the troublemaker made a move, even fig leaves were not enough. France and Austria aren't charity organizations; the Canal Company needs to cut costs, inevitably reducing labor costs.

Currently, the Canal Company pays the Egyptian government one million guilders annually, which might seem like a lot, but when divided among 150,000 workers, it's only about 6.66 guilders per person.

This amount is less than the monthly salary of an ordinary worker in Austria. What's more, this amount includes compensation for land acquisition, labor management fees, and so on.

John Bull not only exposed all these inside details but also attached several photos, including pictures of the workers living and working conditions.

The bloody photos, coupled with artfully crafted textual descriptions, even stirred Franz's sympathy.

Upon closer examination, one would notice that the overseers inflicting violence are Egyptians, which is somewhat of a silver lining.

The benefits of outsourcing labor have emerged, along with providing scapegoats. Had John Bull not purposefully manufactured public opinion, and had the Canal Company foisted accountability onto the Egyptian authorities, the matter could have been easily dismissed.

Franz asked: How do the French plan to handle this?

The French were currently leading the canal construction and were also the focus of public opinion, so the pressure was greatest on the French government.

After all, the French people are rich in internationalist spirit. Newspapers in France are all criticizing the Canal Company, with some even directly targeting the French government, demanding accountability from them.

The same thing happened in Austria but public opinion was much more restrained. The newspapers analyzed responsibility fairly and objectively, resolutely avoiding assumptions of blame.

Naturally, the first to be criticized was the Egyptian government, with mainstream opinion holding them primarily responsible for not fulfilling their duties.

Next comes the inadequate supervision of the Canal Company, which is seen as the responsibility of the company's management.

When problems arise in publicly traded companies or multinational corporations, it's naturally not related to the Austrian government. If even small shareholders are to be held accountable, then aren't all shareholders responsible?

Foreign Minister Wessenberg replied, The French are still hesitating and have not given a clear stance. The domestic public opinion has put great pressure on them.

Reports from the embassy indicate that people in Paris have taken to the streets in protest. The headquarters of the Canal Company in Paris has also been surrounded by protesters multiple times, making normal operations impossible.

Our representatives have proposed to the board of directors of the Canal Company to relocate the headquarters to Vienna to ensure that operations can proceed smoothly. Currently, the matter is still under discussion.

Franz had no doubts about the issue of relocating the headquarters. Historically, companies driven away by French protesters are not few. If a company cannot conduct its operations normally, relocating becomes inevitable.

As an investor, Franz also does not wish for the French government to give in and interfere in the operations of the Canal Company.

The reputation of the Canal Company is not within the considerations of investors. Unless there is government intervention, the management of the canal will surely hold out until the end.

The current situation is much better than in history, no matter how you look at it. Everyone knows that the Suez Canal is a joint project of France and Austria, but despite harsh criticism in the newspapers, governments of various countries have not expressed their opinions.

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Politicians are not fools; whats currently happening is a political game between Britain, France, and Austria, and expressing attitudes is equivalent to taking sides in diplomacy.

The British are indeed powerful, but in Europe, France, and Austrias words carry more weight. Even Britains henchmen understand that silence is golden.

Franz thought for a moment and said, Lets do this: since the British have broken the rules first, theres no need to be polite.

Lets find an opportunity to sell the dirt weve collected on Britain to the Canal Company. Lets have the people in the Canal Company take action and drive this counterattack.

This isnt the best method, but its the most effective one. In this era of colonial empires, no one is cleaner than anyone else.

If the British can expose the Canal Companys dirty laundry, then naturally the Canal Company can also expose the Britishs misdeeds.

Anyway, behind the Suez Canal Company are France and Austria, so facing off against the British government is no big deal. Theres no need to be timid.

When everyone is brought to the same level and public opinion is distracted, they wont continue to focus solely on the Canal Company.

News only grabs attention because its new. Once the storm passes, if the Canal Companys management announces improvements in labor conditions, like adding an extra potato per day and buying off a few newspapers, it will all be forgotten.

This is a matter of strategy; now the Canal Company absolutely cannot back down. No matter what they do, they cant satisfy everyone, and it might even cause a bigger uproar.

In the West African region, Carlos plantation welcomed an unexpected visitor.

Mr. Carlos, our offer to purchase cotton this time is very sincere. We can increase the price by ten percent compared to last years cotton prices.

Carlos smiled faintly and replied, Im sorry, Mr. Max, but I havent felt the sincerity you speak of. With the outbreak of the American Civil War, this years cotton production decrease is already a certainty.

Coupled with the blockade by the Northern government, its uncertain how much cotton can be exported. Moreover, with last years abundant cotton harvest, prices were already relatively low.

Given these favorable conditions, cotton prices are bound to be guaranteed. As far as I know, cotton prices on the futures market in London have already risen by fifty-six percent.

Max nonchalantly explained, Mr. Carlos, cotton prices on the futures market are speculative. You should understand what a fifty-six percent increase in cotton prices means; the market simply cannot bear such exorbitant prices.

This was a fact: a fifty-six percent increase in cotton prices was simply unbearable for the cotton textile industry. Otherwise, even if cotton fabric were produced, it would ultimately be unsellable.

In this era, the market's capacity for bearing such increases was limited. The widespread popularity of industrialized cotton fabric was primarily due to its affordability. A sudden fifty percent increase in prices would render it unaffordable for the masses.

The two fell silent for a moment. After a while, Carlos quoted a price: Ill sell you all my cotton this year at a forty percent increase over last year's prices.

Max shook his head and responded, A twelve percent increase over last year's prices is already the highest cotton price in nearly a decade.

Carlos sneered, As far as I know, it seems that Felix Trading Company is also planning to increase their cotton purchasing price by twelve percent this year. If it's the same price, why should I sell to you?

Max made another offer, saying, Alright, Ill raise it by another two percent. Surely that's acceptable?

Carlos shook his head. Mr. Max, Felix Trading Company has been purchasing cotton in West Africa for a long time, while your Darville Company has always been buying cotton in America.

The choice is quite simple. I cannot afford to offend our longstanding partners for a slight gain, and neither would any plantation owner in West Africa.

If you only need to purchase a batch of cotton urgently, I suggest you buy directly from Felix Trading Company!

Max felt a headache coming on. This was the biggest trouble. It was precisely because the cotton supply in the United States couldn't be guaranteed this year that he had to resort to purchasing cotton in West Africa.

But the market here has long been occupied by others. They want to intervene, but apart from raising prices, they have no other means.

As for purchasing from cotton merchants, not being extorted would be unusual. Originally, he wanted to take advantage of the information gap, tricking the less-informed plantation owners, but the plan failed right from the start.

The headquarters of the London Darville Cotton Purchasing Company is currently discussing the news of the failure to acquire cotton from West Africa.

The procurement manager, Kenneth, said, The situation is clear now; news of the American Civil War has arrived. Unless we significantly raise the cotton purchase price, we simply can't compete with the Austrians.

We must remember that purchasing cotton from West Africa also entails paying import and export duties, which already makes our costs much higher than theirs.

Now, if we engage in a price war, even if we manage to purchase enough cotton in the end, we might not make any profit.

This is a real issue; whether the cotton from the United States can be transported back remains uncertain, and this impacts the price of cotton in the coming year.

If the Northern government blocks the South, cotton prices will surely skyrocket, and these hoarding cotton merchants will make a killing. Conversely, they will have to consider how to sell the cotton they hoarded if that doesn't happen.

Marketing manager Marty analyzed, Because of the civil war, cotton production in the United States has fallen by at least 30% this year, and due to the turmoil, cotton in India has been a complete failure for three consecutive years.

Even if cotton in West Africa has had a bumper crop, the overall international cotton production is still declining, and a rise in cotton prices has become inevitable.

The time for cotton harvest is not far away now. If we want to snatch enough cotton, we must act quickly.

Chapter 330: The French Are Good At Learning

It was not just the British who were affected by the cotton crisis; the French were also having a hard time. As a major industrialized nation, France had a very high demand for cotton.

The cotton textile industry was also an important part of the French economy. Napoleon III, who attached great importance to developing the domestic economy, naturally could not ignore this issue.

Seeing the success of the Austrians in promoting cotton cultivation in Africa, Napoleon III also wanted to follow suit and even chose a location.

At the Palace of Versailles, Colonial Minister Stern expressed his dilemma, Your Majesty, in our colonial territories in West Africa, we lack sufficient immigrants, making it very difficult to promote cotton cultivation.

Cotton is a labor-intensive industry, especially during harvesting which requires a large number of people.

The population growth rate in France is slower than the pace of a snail, almost stagnant. If they were to organize internal migration to develop the African continent, the domestic population might even experience negative growth.

This is clearly not feasible; a population decline would lead to a shortage of labor, inevitably causing an increase in labor costs, which domestic capitalists surely cannot tolerate.

Napoleon III inquired, If we were to implement preferential policies to attract immigrants from European regions, could this solve the problem?

Your Majesty, most immigrants leaving Europe annually come from Germany. Since Austria began colonizing Africa, most of these immigrants have entered Austrian colonial territories.

From 1854 to the present, the Austrian colonies in Africa have absorbed 1.4 million immigrants in just seven years.

Relying on these immigrants, the development pace of the Austrian African colonies far exceeds that of any other region on the continent. They promote the idea of recreating a second German homeland, making it difficult for us to compete with them.

Foreign Minister Auvergne directly shattered Napoleon III's illusions. Since the beginning of the 19th century, Germany had been the main source of immigrants in Europe, accounting for half of European immigrants.

This was followed by Ireland, Italy, and Southern Europe. Ireland was experiencing a peak in emigration, which had now passed.

Southern Europe was Austria's base, and even if there were immigrants, they would all go to the more developed Austrian colonies.

Because France invaded the Kingdom of Sardinia, it caused resistance from the people in Italy, and few immigrants went to French territories in Africa.

Napoleon III nodded; this was an undeniable fact. With a limited population, engaging in overseas colonization naturally poses significant challenges.

These difficulties did not scare Napoleon III but instead sparked his ambition to annex Italy. The Napoleon family originated from the Italian region and had a special affection for Italy.

Returning home in glory was a dream for many, and Napoleon III was no exception. Returning as the Emperor of France would certainly be prestigious. If he were to also assume the title of King of Italy, it would be even more perfect.

Finance Minister Pelissier spoke up, Your Majesty, if you wish to address the shortage of labor in Africa, there is a solution.

Napoleon III asked eagerly, Do tell me, what solution do you propose?

Pelissier suggested, Your Majesty, as far as I know, when Austria first began colonizing Africa, the earliest immigrants were refugees from the Balkans.

Although there may not be refugees now, we can still explore options in the Balkans to address the shortage of immigrants.

The Balkan Peninsula colony is also considered one of the best-developed French colonies. After years of recovery, the population of the French-controlled parts of the Balkans has reached 3.8 million.

However, due to its geographical proximity to Russia and Austria, it faces significant military pressure.

Russia and Austria were also secretly stabbing them in the back and the local people often revolted, making French rule in the area extremely challenging.

Previously, some in the French government proposed selling the French Balkan Peninsula colony, keeping only the Dardanelles Strait.

Unfortunately, no buyer could be found internationally. The British didn't want to be neighbors with Russia and Austria on land, Russia couldn't afford to buy it, and Franz thought the French were asking for too high a price and it might trigger a backlash from Russia.

After going around in circles, it eventually remained in the hands of the French. To hold on to this rich colony, the French government stationed 80,000 troops in the Balkans.

The huge military expenditure offset the income the French government gained from the Balkan Peninsula. This seemingly delicious piece of land had long since become a burden.

Napoleon III hesitated and said, The Balkan Peninsula is known for its fierce people, and the Russians are promoting Pan-Slavism. The locals may not be willing to go to the colonies.

This also reflects a mistake in the French governments colonial strategy. They failed to conduct a thorough purge at the start and didnt send immigrants to the Balkan Peninsula for ethnic integration.

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If there had been no external interference, relying on Frances past experience, ruling the Balkan Peninsula wouldnt have been a problem.

Unfortunately, Russia and Austria are formidable neighbors and happen to be allies. This makes life difficult for the French colonial government.

Fortunately, they were all imperial countries and did not promote any ethnic republican ideas; otherwise, the French would have had even more trouble.

Now, Pan-Slavism was the most popular ideology in the French Balkan Peninsula. Originally, Franz was also prepared to engage in cultural export, but the cruel reality told him that Germanic culture really had no market here.

Finance Minister Pelissier confidently said, We can impose a head tax and introduce immigration incentives. All we need is cheap labor and not local intellectuals.

For the colonys stability, we can start with a thorough purge, eliminating all the stubborn elements, and then slowly organize immigration.

Now is the best opportunity, with Alexander II and the nobility embroiled in internal struggles, they have no time to interfere with us.

Austrians also dislike Pan-Slavism; if we suppress these heretical ideas, the Austrian government will not intervene.

The starting points were different, and land-based countries looked at issues differently from maritime countries. Initially, everyone looked down on Austrias colonial policies.

By now, just because of cotton self-sufficiency, the French, also a land-based country, have come to understand Austrias approach.

Vigorously organizing immigrants to open up colonies, although it increases costs, strengthens control over colonies, and provides raw materials and markets for domestic industrial production.

The French originally aimed for direct control over African colonies, hoping to assimilate North Africa. Austrias approach has opened up new avenues for them.

The literacy rate among the Balkan Peninsula population is very low. If it werent for the Near East War, these people would still be serfs with no cultural tradition to speak of.

If industrial development were pursued, these people would be considered low-quality labor. But if agriculture were developed primarily, they would become high-quality labor.

Due to their limited awareness, hiring these people only requires paying wages equivalent to those in the Balkan Peninsula, which is less than half of the French wage level. This much would already make them work hard.

Due to the lack of cultural heritage and their lack of awareness of their own ethnicity, after entering French colonies, it wouldn't take long for these people to become French.

The previous batch of refugees organized by Austria is an example. After arriving in the African colonies, it only took a few years for them to be initially Germanized.

Even if there are still differences in their behavior and actions, these people identify themselves as Austrian. So why fear that they won't integrate?

Napoleon III made a decision: Let's give it a try. Order the Governor-General of the Balkan Peninsula to conduct a thorough purge, eliminating all our enemies and potential enemies.

I remember that when the Austrians annexed the Balkan Peninsula, they turned one-tenth of the local population into laborers which led to the stability we see now. We can follow suit.

As he said this, Napoleon III felt somewhat regretful.

The Kingdom of Sardinia had not yet been swallowed up. Otherwise, there would be more regions that could provide immigrants.

However, Italy is different from the Balkan Peninsula. It has a complete cultural heritage and wields much greater influence in the world. They must tread carefully and not act recklessly.