

Roman Empire 331

Chapter 331: No Other Choice

Watching the major powers stirring up the winds and clouds, the newly crowned King William I of Prussia couldnt contain himself, or perhaps its more accurate to say that the Junker nobility couldnt contain themselves.

The butterfly effect is powerful. With Austrias resurgence, the Prussian government realized that their dream of a strong nation was quickly becoming just that a dream.

A sense of crisis was the driving force behind Prussias path to greatness. In the First Schleswig War (Prussian-Danish War), the performance of the Prussian army was not impressive, one might even say it was rubbish.

The call for military reform was loud within the Prussian army, and one of the main leaders behind it was one of Prussias three heroes Albrecht von Roon.

Roon was not well known, but his actions were earth-shattering. Not only did he oversee the reform of the Prussian army, but he also promoted Moltke and propelled Bismarck into the position of Chancellor.

Without him as the talent scout, while Moltke might have had a chance to rise, Bismarck, the enemy of the royal family, would not have had a chance to ascend to power.

General Roon is extremely frustrated right now. Not long ago, he was appointed as Minister of War and Minister of the Navy simultaneously, and now hes facing a big problem: the domestic calls for colonial expansion are growing louder and louder.

Roon doesnt know what others think, but hes adamantly against overseas colonial ventures for one simple reason lack of funds.

To dispel this unrealistic idea among the populace, he must obtain the support of King William I. However, William I also wanted to seize wealth from overseas colonies to change Prussias financial predicament, which complicates matters for Roon.

At the government meeting in the Berlin Palace, Prime Minister Franck reiterated the benefits of colonial expansion and proposed the establishment of a Prussian colonial empire.

With Portugal and the Netherlands already possessing vast overseas colonies, it doesnt seem like a big deal for the Kingdom of Prussia, given its strength, to open up overseas colonies.

Roon objected, saying, Prime Minister, I understand the importance of opening up colonies, which can provide cheap raw materials and markets for domestic industry, thus alleviating the governments financial predicament.

However, you seem to have overlooked a crucial issue. Any colonial empire requires a strong navy. With our navys limited capabilities, we may struggle to handle even large bands of pirates, let alone establish colonies overseas.

This is a fact. The mere fact that the Minister of War can also serve as Minister of the Navy indicates how feeble the Prussian navy is. Any country with a significant navy would not allow such a situation.

Prime Minister Franck explained, The government is prepared to expand the navy. The Kingdom of Prussia needs its own fleet of ironclad warships.

Roon, with a grim expression, asked, Where will the military funding come from?

Franck calmly replied, Now that the Vienna System has been rebuilt and tensions among nations have eased, the European continent is becoming more stable, and the likelihood of war breaking out is minimal.

In this situation, we do not need to urgently pursue military reforms. The army will make sacrifices for the nation this time, and well endure a few years of hardship.

We can even transfer some soldiers to the Navy to save on military expenses, and the government will find a way to raise some funds to establish an ironclad fleet.

Once colonies are established and the domestic industrial sectors raw material and market issues are resolved, and the domestic economy improves, then we can proceed with military reforms.

To address the rise of Austria and the impact of the rebirth of France, Roon recently proposed specific military reform measures:

Extending the military service period from two years to four years; abolishing the national reserve army; upgrading the equipment of the standing army, with an annual allocation of 17.5 million thalers starting from the next fiscal year.

These measures entail an increase in conscription from 40,000 to 85,000 troops, expanding the army from 102 regiments to 163 regiments, and increasing the peacetime strength from 208,000 to 327,000 troops.

These reforms, more radical than any in history, are primarily driven by the increased military pressure on the Kingdom of Prussia.

Currently, Russia maintains a standing army of 990,000 troops, the New Holy Roman Empires standing army is 580,000 troops, and Frances standing army is 500,000 troops.

With three such abnormal neighbors, if they did not expand their military, the Kingdom of Prussia would lose its status as a quasi-great power.

Moreover, its well-known that Franz desires to unify Germany, and Napoleon III openly covets the Rhineland. Represented by Roon, the conservative nobility of the Junkers naturally harbors a sense of crisis.

Without expanding the military, the Kingdom of Prussias forces amount to less than one-third of any potential adversary. If war were to suddenly erupt, they would be hardly capable of mounting any resistance.

The bourgeoisie, however, holds confidence in the Vienna System. They express concerns about the military expansion:

On one hand, the abolition of the reserve army and the extension of active service undoubtedly weaken their influence within the military;

On the other hand, with 2/3 of officers and 9/10 of instructors being Junkers within this vast army, there lurks a danger: the military might become a tool for the Junkers to oppose parliamentary authority.

Who can guarantee that the weapons they sharpened will be used for their purpose?

Thus, the bourgeoisie liberals, represented by the Progressive Party, utilized the powers granted to the parliament by the 1850 Constitution to negotiate with the government and delay the passage of the military expansion plan.

To avoid the worst-case scenario, capitalists began advocating the benefits of colonial expansion, enticing government officials with promises of development and attempting to weaken the power of the Junker nobility by promoting naval expansion.

Many people have been lured into this trap, with real-life examples right before their eyes. If colonial expansion had no benefits, why would countries like Britain, France, and Austria be engaging in it?

Even Austrias overseas colonies, which operate at a loss, have been spun by capitalists into profitable ventures through data manipulation. Using a plethora of economic terms, they managed to deceive the Prime Minister and the King, convincing them that Austrias colonies were only administratively unprofitable.

The Austrian government purportedly achieved profits through currency taxes, gold mining, cheap industrial raw materials, and other tax revenues brought by the market.

This is specifically reflected in the rapid development of the domestic economy and the rapid growth of government annual revenue. Additionally, it comes with the benefits of economic crisis resilience and reduced outflow of gold and silver.

After a mishmash of data, the conclusion was reached: Austrias colonies bring in a profit of 12 million guilders annually for the Austrian government.

This is no small sum; its nearly half of the Kingdom of Prussias fiscal revenue. Coupled with a plethora of other benefits, many people have been duped.

In reality, this account is impossible to calculate accurately. Austrias rapid economic development is indeed contributed to by its colonies. However, the involvement of too many industries and the complexity of economic cycles means that even a slight adjustment can result in astronomical differences in the end.

The reason people believe this is due to the Austrian governments vigorous efforts in colonial expansion. Judging others by ones own standards, if there were no profits to be made, they would not be investing so actively.

Including Britain, France, Spain, Prussia, and the Netherlands, capitalists have used these countries as examples to analyze and conclude that the greater the scope of the colonial empire, the stronger the nation; lose the colonies, and the nation will decline.

Listening to it once doesnt matter, but if various experts are whispering in your ears every day, over time it sinks deep into peoples hearts and becomes a recognized truth.

Roon insisted, No, the military reform of the army absolutely cannot stop. Just open the map and youll see how great the defense pressure were facing. If one day we get into conflict with any great power, with Prussias current military strength, we simply wont stand a chance.

Minister of Finance, Faber Adolf, scoffed, General, if your expansion plan is based on confronting the three major powers, even if its doubled, its probably still not enough.

However, Prussias financial resources are limited. Even if we were to allocate all our annual income to the military, we still wouldnt match any of the great powers.

Modern warfare is different from the past. During the Near East War, the Russians had a total force of over two million at one point; during Austrias campaign for unification, their total mobilized force approached that number too.

The Kingdom of Prussia has only 14 million people, and its human resources have already determined our limit for military expansion. Using the contradictions between countries to maintain the balance of Europe is the most suitable strategy for us.

Perhaps youre unaware, let me provide you with some economic data, and youll understand.

In 1850, Prussias annual income was 40.3% of Austrias, 28.2% of Frances, and 30.3% of Russias. By 1854, after Austria established the New Holy Roman Empire, Prussias annual income dropped to 31.1% of Austrias, 27.2% of Frances, and 27.6% of Russias. In 1860, Prussias annual income further decreased to 20.2% of Austrias, 21.3% of Frances, and 31.1% of Russias.

Because weve been allocating a large amount of funds to the military, our economy is almost stagnant. With our annual income at 20.2% of Austrias, weve been spending 43.2% of their military expenses.

Military expenditure doesnt just cover the military itself; it also includes supporting the military-industrial complex. Under conscription systems, this entire industrial chain is the most expensive.

Currently, only seven countries in the world have a complete military-industrial complex: Britain, France, Russia, Austria, Prussia, America, and Spain. Among them, France, Austria, and Prussia are at the forefront of army technology.

This is also why the Prussian military industry dominates, as its scale cannot support a second player. To reduce costs, countries are striving to sell military equipment abroad.

Franz even directly exported the military-industrial complex to Russia. Due to financial reasons, to save costs, Russian military-industrial enterprises imported production lines from Austria during the reign of Nicholas I.

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Over the years, the produced equipment has filled the entire army, making it difficult to reverse the situation.

The Kingdom of Prussia was tragic. Because it had too low a reputation in the world, it was difficult to sell weapons, and the military-industrial complex lost its ability to sustain itself. After all, they only sell weaponry, without any political leverage attached.

The era of industrialization is cruel. Due to the lack of markets and cheap industrial raw materials, Prussian capital naturally could not compete with opponents in the process of industrialization and could only defend the domestic market.

The Customs Union, which historically supported the development of the Kingdom of Prussia, had long ceased to exist due to interests.

Even the Russian market was seized by the Austrians due to the deterioration of Prussian-Russian relations.

With so many adverse factors affecting the economy, the outcome naturally is not optimistic. The stagnation of the Prussian economy is therefore not surprising.

Faced with this situation, capitalists seeking to open up overseas colonies to solve the problems of raw materials and markets have become inevitable.

Now that the Prussian government was in a state of desperation, they really had no better choice. If this continued, the Kingdom of Prussia would be directly dragged down.

Looking at the expressions of everyone, Roon hesitated to speak. Although the Kingdom of Prussia was accustomed to militarism, it really could not support it now.

In this era, the military expenditures of various countries are enormous, with percentages ranging from ten to thirty percent being quite normal.

The military expenses of several major powers can even exceed Prussia's annual revenue. How can they keep up with them?

If it was just a short period of hardship, the government would find a way to endure it. However, the Kingdom of Prussia's expansion of the army now had no visible value.

Roon was clear that if they continued to compete, it would not be long before the Kingdom of Prussia fell behind due to financial issues.

In this situation, the only solution is to wage war, annex more territories, and resolve internal conflicts through expansion.

Historically, this is how the Kingdom of Prussia operated, gambling its way forward, unifying the small German territories, and eventually losing the empire.

Unlike Iron Chancellor Bismarck, the ruling Prime Minister Franck was undoubtedly not as radical. He advocated temporarily abandoning the struggle for land power.

After much hesitation, Roon finally spoke up: Gentlemen, these issues are indeed very troublesome, but let's not forget to take a look at the map. The Kingdom of Prussia is currently divided, and without a sufficiently strong army, we are at risk of being swallowed up at any moment.

Relying solely on a treaty for our security is very unreliable. The Northern Three Courts System that once safeguarded us is no longer in place. Despite our efforts to repair relations with Russia and Austria, the results have been minimal.

Our attempts to join the Russo-Austrian alliance have been rejected by both countries. There are many reasons for this rejection; it's simply because we lack the strength to qualify for an alliance with them.

To change this situation, we must expand on the European continent. Otherwise, the Kingdom of Prussia will soon decline and become a small country struggling for survival amidst the great powers.

William I frowned. He also wanted to expand, but their strength did not allow it. Despite appearances that the Kingdom of Prussia could easily handle any neighbor besides Russia, Austria, and France, in reality, they dared not provoke any of them.

Denmark was Russias little brother. The Russian Empires prestige was still present, and with the Russo-Austrian alliance on its side, if they werent careful, they might not even get a bite of meat and instead invite disaster.

The German Federal Empire was also not to be trifled with. Not only did it have the support of Britain and France, but its economic strength also surpassed that of Prussia. If Prussia mishandled things, these states could easily defect to Austria, leaving Prussia in dire straits.

This was not an impossible scenario. From the perspective of interests, remaining in the German Federal Empire would allow them to preserve their rights to the greatest extent, while joining the New Holy Roman Empire would yield the most benefits. Meanwhile, aligning with Prussia would offer them nothing.

Both the Junkers and the capitalists in Prussia have had a tough time in recent years. Everyone is starving, so who cares about appearances?

As for the Netherlands and Belgium, theres no doubt that they have a big brother watching over them, and any slight move could have far-reaching consequences.

William I said, Roon, your ideas are too idealistic. We dont have the power to ignore the rules yet. If we make any rash moves, well likely face immediate suppression from other countries.

Its been rumored that the French have been plotting a plan to divide Prussia between Russia, Austria, and France. However, due to conflicting interests among the three countries, the plan hasnt progressed further.

Right now, the Vienna System is the best choice to ensure Prussias safety. If we dont favor growth during this peaceful period, were in real danger if the balance of power in Europe is broken in the future.

The most important thing now is to open up overseas colonies to solve the domestic industrial and commercial needs for raw materials and markets, and to complete industrialization as soon as possible.

Only when our country is strong can the Kingdom of Prussia make further progress in the next upheaval in Europe.

Its not just the French who have such a plan, but even the Austrian General Staff might have them, and who knows, maybe even the Russians have similar thoughts.

Roon nodded with a bitter smile. Reality was too harsh, and he didnt have Bismarcks eloquence to persuade everyone to unite.

The international situation had already changed; even if Bismarck were to come back to life, there would be no way to replicate the successes of history, and they wouldnt even have the opportunity to take the first step.

Chapter 332: Autonomous Province

The naval construction plan of the Kingdom of Prussia came as a surprise to Franz. He couldnt imagine that Prussia, which had been solely focused on its army, would suddenly shift its attention to developing its navy.

However, after reviewing Prussias development in recent years, Franz understood their approach.

The domestic industry needed cheap raw materials and markets, and with the European continent already stabilized, the Kingdom of Prussia could no longer see hope for growth.

Given the current situation, if the delay continues, even if Germany unifies, they will be the ones being unified rather than the driving force behind it.

No one was willing to passively wait for their demise. By leveraging the period of peace to strengthen their navy, they might have a chance to survive.

To get the Junker aristocrats to accept this cruel reality, William I even personally served as a lobbyist and promised benefits.

Whether the government could profit from overseas colonial expansion was unknown, but domestic capitalists would definitely profit.

If the nobles are willing to take on the main role in colonization, they will naturally have their share.

This is also why many colonial empires experienced financial losses. The vested interests take too much and are unwilling to pay taxes to the government while passing administrative expenses on to the government.

This situation is more pronounced in old imperial powers, where the government is unable to suppress these interest groups and collect taxes. Coupled with bureaucratic corruption, wealth is consumed, leading to losses in the long run.

Short-term losses can be tolerated, but if they exceed the governments financial limits over time, and domestic interest groups become unwilling to continue footing the bill, it would ultimately lead to the abandonment of colonies.

The most typical example is the British establishment of autonomous dominions. Who would have thought that colonial governments in places like South Africa, Australia, and India would incur losses?

The Americans initially suffered from this as well. The Philippines and Cuba, which could generate profits of tens of millions of dollars annually under Spanish control, were consistently losing money once they came under American rule.

In the end, they lost over a billion and couldnt bear it anymore, so they simply let go. It was the result of the combined influence of capitalists and bureaucratic groups.

After this lesson, the U.S. government clearly recognized its shortcomings. If they couldnt even control domestic capitalists, how could they manage overseas colonies?

This was also why Franz defined the African colonies as Germany's second homeland from the beginning.

Since it was a second homeland, it could not be a purely colonial rule. Once immigrants reached a certain number, it would become localized.

It was also good timing as telegraph technology had already made breakthroughs and submarine cables connecting to the African continent had been laid almost entirely.

Convenient communication is a necessary factor for local management. This is only effective for newly opened colonies, where there hasnt been enough time for local interest groups to establish and expand, and bureaucratic corruption hasnt yet taken root.

For old established colonies where interest groups have already formed, the only option is to suppress them by force or conduct a major purge.

To achieve this, a strong and capable government is necessary, along with the ability to suppress rebellions.

The head of intelligence, Tyron, handed Franz a document and whispered, Your Majesty, the French are extorting and purging many people who opposed them in the Balkans. Here are the detailed reports for your review.

After skimming through the documents, Franz had a puzzled expression. He couldn't fathom who came up with the brilliant idea for Napoleon III to utilize Balkan immigrants to develop overseas colonies.

It was indeed a clever idea. The Balkan Peninsula was known for its fierce people, who would be difficult to control if left in their homeland. However, once sent to colonies, their situation would change; being in unfamiliar territory, they would have no choice but to rely on the French.

Since the French had many colonies, dispersing these people and settling them elsewhere would prevent them from becoming a dominant force anywhere.

Franz was well aware of this aspect. The Balkan Peninsula was known for its diverse ethnicities, each with relatively small populations. Only Bulgaria and Romania had populations nearing one million, while the Greek population was also approaching that figure.

In addition to the major impact of warfare, the immigration policies of the Austrian government also contributed, allowing Bulgarians to directly become the predominant ethnicity in the Balkans.

The French Balkan Peninsula was even more lacking in a dominant ethnicity, with more than twenty ethnicities large and small, adding up to less than four million people. With heavy internal contradictions, it showed these people could not unite even if they wanted to.

Franz hesitated. He wasn't sure if he should stir up trouble now and cause some chaos for the French.

After all, the current French immigration methods were somewhat crude. Relying on head taxes to increase immigration could easily lead to a backlash. With a little push from behind, an armed riot would occur.

Continue monitoring the actions of the French. If there's an opportunity, we can provoke conflicts between them and Montenegro.

Franz was not John Bull, who did unprofitable harm. French immigration from the Balkans was also good for Austria, saving them from potential future upheavals that could affect Austria.

But he still had the instincts of a great power. Not destroying French immigration did not mean he could not stab them in the back.

Montenegro was not a peaceful country either. It was just that the two neighbors around it were too terrifying, so it had temporarily curbed its ambitions for now.

For the stability of the Austrian Balkan Peninsula, Franz decisively decided to divert the trouble eastward.

This was just a small problem that would not affect the French plans. Even if a conflict broke out, Napoleon III could handle it.

Perhaps there was no need to provoke at all. There were inherent contradictions between them. The arrival of the French deprived Montenegro of the opportunity to annex Albania, and the relationship between the two sides had always been bad.

Something shocking has happened on the island of Kalimantan, shaking the entire Southeast Asian region. On September 12, 1861, the flag of the double-headed eagle was raised over the skies of the Lanfang Republic.

Anyone with some international common sense knew what this flag meant.

The Lanfang Republic has also been downgraded to become the Lanfang Autonomous Province under the flag of the New Holy Roman Empire, with the title of the republic thrown into the annals of history.

No, the name Lanfang Republic was merely given by Europeans; within the Chinese community, it has always been referred to as the Lanfang Company.

Transitioning from a private company to an autonomous province can only be seen as being absorbed. Liu Aisheng, the President of Lanfang, has been appointed as the first governor.

Amidst the grand celebration outside, Governor Liu was unprecedentedly absent. He was still poring over the new laws of the Holy Roman Empire's member states. Despite having joined, he still harbors uncertainties.

The cultural differences between East and West mean that what may seem perfectly normal to Europeans can be shocking to Easterners.

In the eyes of many Easterners, weren't these states just feudal lords? The rights of the state governments were even greater than those of feudal lords, almost reaching the level of vassals enfeoffed by the Zhou Dynasty's Son of Heaven.

A young man smiled and said, Father, you're studying these laws again.

Governor Liu nodded and said, Chuner, the more I study these laws, the more alarmed I become. Won't the Emperor ever curtail these vassals?

The young man confidently said, Father, rest assured, Europe places great importance on the rule of law. During my studies in England, I learned about the history of the Holy Roman Empire, a system that has persisted for centuries.

Even during the recent unification war, where the King of Bavaria stood opposed to the Emperor, he was merely transferred to rule over Lombardy.

If the Emperor truly wished to limit the vassals, there would be no need for such actions. The might of Austria far surpasses that of these member states combined, yet Emperor Franz strictly abides by the law.

So, there's no need for us to worry. If such adherence is maintained domestically, how could the Emperor possibly violate his own laws for the sake of an overseas autonomous territory?

People are driven by self-interest. Without sufficient benefits, the senior leadership of Lanfang Company would not have joined the New Holy Roman Empire either.

Apart from the security provided, what's most important is that everyone's interests are protected. Aside from sharing military expenses and paying royal tax, their substantive interests have not been harmed.

When dealing with external affairs, it's actually advantageous to display the flag of the New Holy Roman Empire, deterring other colonial empires from coveting them.

At least the Dutch, who were pressing them relentlessly, have now halted their advance. Representatives from Austria have also made commitments that the privileges of all nations in Lanfang will be handled by the Imperial Foreign Ministry.

Governor Liu remarked, That would be best, otherwise we'd be paying protection money for nothing.

Mindsets aren't easily changed; in the eyes of the older generation, this is simply buying peace of mind, leveraging the strength of Austria to ensure their safety.

In any case, they handled all affairs by themselves, and still had their own army, with full autonomy retained.

It was just right to hand over diplomatic affairs. They were too lazy to deal with Westerners anyway, and they were the ones who suffered losses almost every time they made contact.

The younger generation who received a Western-style education knew how to use the rules to protect their own interests, so they were the most supportive of joining the New Holy Roman Empire.

Originally, they all wanted to join the Qing Dynasty, even accepting to be a tributary state. Still, unfortunately, the Qing government found this inconvenient and dared not accept it.

In this era, overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia all had a sense of crisis, for fear of provoking catastrophic destruction with the slightest carelessness.

Without strength, wealth was a source of calamity.

As the earliest to open their eyes to the world, they are well aware that the Lanfang Company is on the brink of collapse. Without a powerful backer, they cannot survive on their own.

So, after signing the agreement with the Austrian government, there was a grand celebration outside.

It was not that everyone was so happy to join the New Holy Roman Empire. Essentially, it was still about borrowing the tigers ferocity to awe others. The bigger the spectacle, the greater the benefits.

This time, the Lanfang government sent invitations to representatives from various countries in Southeast Asia just to inform everyone that the Lanfang Republic is now the Lanfang Autonomous Province of the New Holy Roman Empire. If they want to gain advantages from here, they should talk to the Austrian government.

Governor Liu's absence from the banquet also serves a political purpose. Through this method, he informed representatives from various countries that as a high-ranking official of the New Holy Roman Empire, he now had the authority to say no to them.

Chapter 333: To Take, One Must First Give

Holy Roman Empire

The addition of a new autonomous province barely caused a ripple in the New Holy Roman Empire, beyond a short notice in the Austrian newspapers.

There was little public reaction, but the Austrian government thought differently. Although the annual revenue of several hundred thousand guilders was not much, their investment was also small!

Despite Austria having numerous colonies, they hardly made any money from them.

By the end of 1861, apart from the West African region which was developed the earliest, yielding a profit of 126,000 guilders due to its gold mines and plantations, all other areas were running at a loss, varying only in the degree of deficit.

The Central American colonies ran at a loss of 2.164 million guilders;

The Nigerian colonial government lost 1.448 million guilders;

The Congo region colonies lost 684,000 guilders;

The Southeast Asia colonies lost 682,000 guilders;

Cameroon colony lost 342,000 guilders;

Libya lost 216,000 guilders;

The Sinai Peninsula lost 205,000 guilders;

Cyprus, Crete, and the other Mediterranean islands lost 186,000 guilders;

The Patagonian Plateau outpost lost 28,000 guilders;

Several other colonies in various regions combined lost a total of 128,000 guilders.

In total, Austria's colonies incurred a loss of 5.957 million guilders in 1861, even without significant military actions abroad. If a war were to break out, this figure could increase several times, or even tenfold.

The huge deficits were the key factor limiting Austria's colonial expansion, especially in the initial settlement stages which were pure expenditure.

Although the addition of the Lanfang Autonomous Province may seem insignificant, in the year-end assessment of 1861, they shouldered 580,000 guilders of military expenses.

The nominal sharing of military costs to protect member states was in reality no different from direct payments to the central government.

This is only the beginning. As time progresses, there will be circulation of guilders and potential revenue from a coinage tax.

With these revenues combined, starting from 1862, Southeast Asia will transition from the investment phase to the return phase.

Considering the added industrial and commercial markets, as well as the industrial raw materials provided for the domestic market, the value becomes even higher.

The Austrian government only needs to provide them protection, which goes without saying. Protecting their source of income is a natural necessity.

Finance Minister Karl excitedly proposed: “Your Majesty, should we change our colonial model? The returns from indirect rule are no less than directly controlling everything ourselves.

If we were to forcibly occupy Kalimantan, we may not see profits for at least five years, and the subsequent profits may not increase by much.”

Austria’s colonial expansion overseas may seem glamorous on the surface, but in reality, there are untold hardships.

As Minister of Finance, Karl can responsibly state that even with the calculation of increased tax revenues from various sources, the Austrian government is still operating at a deficit.

Of course, the nobles and capitalists involved in colonial activities have made money, and Austria’s domestic economy has benefited as a result.

The sudden emergence of a model where profits can be made without investment, only by providing protection, naturally interests Finance Minister Karl.

Franz shook his head and said, “Don’t daydream. Situations like the Lanfang Autonomous Province don’t happen every day.

There are many native kingdoms overseas, but most can barely govern themselves without going bankrupt, how can we expect them to aid us?

The Lanfang Autonomous Province itself is a company, mistakenly perceived as a republic by outsiders. It’s only able to assist us because Kalimantan Island produces gold.

Moreover, if we were to incorporate several indigenous kingdoms into the empire, are you certain that the member states and domestic nobles wouldn’t cause trouble?”

The hopeful crowd’s unrealistic idea was instantly dispelled. Even if several indigenous kings were to enter the empire, many wouldn’t agree to it.

The Lanfang Autonomous Province was originally a group of commoners, and Franz had only appointed a few low-level nobles among them to appease them. Their political status was limited, but they could provide financial support to the government, so no one minded.

If a few kings were to emerge, each with a higher status than these people, it would likely cause feelings of resentment.

This situation is different from the European context, where hereditary nobility is widely accepted and acknowledged.

Of course, there’s still a chance for government officials to become kings. As long as they had significant achievements, Franz wouldn’t mind appointing them as colonial kings.

However, these kings would mostly be in name only, as theoretically, every feudal lord could establish their own country. However, in reality, most nobles couldn’t afford to do so.

Only undeveloped, unclaimed lands would be given out, not existing colonies.

Good development meant a barony, marquissate, duchy, or even principality or kingdom, while poor development meant relying on state power to rule, remaining a noble fiefdom.

During this era, titles and even noble positions were tradable commodities. It was possible to purchase titles from the king, although at a very high price. Typically, only non-hereditary titles were available for sale.

For instance, the several non-hereditary titles granted to the Lanfang Autonomous Province were likely bestowed as a result of “gifts”. Otherwise, they might have received lower titles, such as honorary knighthood.

This was because their bribes were insufficient. If someone offers a high enough price, hereditary nobility titles could be granted as well.

Anyway, as long as Franz isn't granting territorial titles, everything is negotiable.

He's not the only one selling these titles; you can buy titles from almost every European king, provided you have enough money.

The price varies, though. For instance, titles in the New Holy Roman Empire are very difficult to obtain.

To ensure the nobility's honor, Franz imposed limits on the number of nobles each state's king could confer, and approval from the emperor was required.

People who haven't contributed to the state usually won't get approved. There are exceptions for those with good backgrounds, like a king's son, who would definitely get approved.

The people of the Lanfang Autonomous Province who obtained titles are considered to have contributed to Lanfang joining the New Holy Roman Empire, making them meritorious officials.

Those hoping to simply buy titles had to offer at least 1 million guilders before Franz would grant them an audience, and his standard kept rising as his net worth grew.

The direct consequence is that since Franz ascended the throne, no titles have been sold. Many believe this indicates the Emperor's profound respect for noble honor, showing disdain for mere wealth, thereby enhancing his reputation among the nobility.

People often pursue things that are difficult to attain. The principle of “no merit, no title” did not deter everyone's desire to become nobility but intensified it instead.

To obtain noble titles, many offsprings of Austrian nobles and capitalists organize expeditions to expand colonies, converting their achievements into titles.

Ordinary citizens lacking such wealth can only join the military and gain distinction on the battlefield.

Against this backdrop, Franz granted 286 noble titles in 1861 alone, including 61 with fiefs.

The fiefdoms were naturally overseas colonies as domestically, the Emperor did not have much land to spare and could not afford to divide them further.

Minister of the Colonies, Josip Jelačić, proposed, “Your Majesty, the Ministry of the Colonies has compiled basic data from various colonies and concluded that the Southeast Asian region is most suitable for colonization.

The land is fertile, abundant in resources, and requires minimal investment for substantial returns. Therefore, the Ministry suggests increasing expansion efforts there going forward.”

Franz hesitated after examining the map. In the short term, Southeast Asia did indeed appear to be the most suitable for colonization, with its abundant resources, favorable climate, and ease of governance.

However, its drawback was its distance and the presence of mixed influences from Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands, making further expansion likely to trigger diplomatic conflicts.

It's not that Franz is afraid of conflict; he's concerned about the balance between investment and returns. As long as Austria doesn't seize colonies from other nations and focuses on unclaimed territories, conflicts remain within manageable limits.

Austria's strength is not unlimited; it already has a significant presence, second only to the British and on par with the French.

To counter the rise of the United States, strategic control over Central America is essential, while from a long-term perspective, the nearby African continent must also be controlled.

The Southeast Asian strategy has always been at the bottom of the priority list. Even if there has been some recent effort, it has been limited in scale.

Franz directly raised all kinds of questions: "What are the areas the Ministry of the Colonies are eyeing? Who are the competitors? How much investment is required? What are the potential risks? And how long before we can expect returns?"

Minister of the Colonies Josip Jelačić responded, "There are many potential targets, including the Indochinese Peninsula, which comprises the Kingdom of Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, as well as the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and several smaller islands.

These areas are all promising; although various countries have begun infiltrating them, no colonial regime has been established yet, and according to international conventions, they are still in the stage of free competition.

The Netherlands, Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal are all potential competitors, including ourselves. All these countries have colonial outposts in these regions.

From our initial assessment, the Dutch seem to have set their sights on Sumatra; they have already occupied many areas on the island. However, their resources are limited, and they may face difficulties in establishing control over the indigenous regimes in the short term.

Due to the importance of the Malacca Strait, British influence has extended deep into Malaysia, posing perhaps the most significant challenge we may encounter there.

The French seem interested in the Indochinese Peninsula, so if we choose the same target, some conflict seems inevitable.

The level of investment and risk depends on the chosen targets. Generally, the more lucrative the area, the greater the investment required, and the fiercer the competition.

The return rates in these areas are promising. In theory, after establishing colonial rule, we can achieve a balance between revenue and expenditure within three years."

There's no way to accurately calculate costs when they're unsure how many competitors will join in.

Colonial ventures are inherently uncertain, and many seemingly promising areas could turn out to be mediocre at best.

After hesitating for a moment, Franz made a decision: “Our established strategy remains unchanged. While Southeast Asia may seem enticing, in reality, how much we can bite off is limited.

The Colonial Ministry can focus on unclaimed small to mid-sized islands. In other regions, we’ll explore opportunities as far as our resources allow, and we can engage in negotiations with other nations if conflicts arise.

We can’t have our hands on every pie. Once we exceed our limits, colonies cease to be a tonic and become deadly poison instead.

Wasn’t the Kingdom of Prussia looking to join the colonial fray? Let’s give them a hand and facilitate their entry into the Southeast Asian region, giving them a chance for a grand entrance.”

Overseas colonization isn’t just about national power; it’s more about investment. After Austria heavily invested in Central America and the African continent, its capacity to invest in Southeast Asia has significantly diminished.

With insufficient strength, blindly pushing ahead will only lead to losses. It’s better to be conservative from the beginning to avoid wasting resources and losing face.

As for helping the Kingdom of Prussia, it’s just something to do on the side, allowing the Prussians to advance further on the path of colonialism.

To take, one must first give.

If there’s no visible benefit, how can the Prussians be willing to invest heavily?

Prussia’s power is limited. If they heavily invested in the navy, naturally, there would be less investment in the army, which would decrease the difficulty of Austria’s unification of the region of Germany in the future.

Based on this, it’s worth it for Austria to sacrifice the benefits of the Southeast Asian region. After all, after the unification of Germany, the meat will still be in the pot, and there will be no loss.

Chapter 334: The American Anti-War Movement

Washington, the federal government is organizing an evacuation. With continuous defeats on the front lines, the flames of war have reached the federal capital.

Maryland ultimately couldn’t stop the advance of the Southern forces. With too many people unable to hold the line, and facing both internal and external threats, even the best efforts of the federal army would be futile.

Moreover, there are too many places for the federal government to defend. In comparison, the greatest value of Washington lies in its political significance, while the Great Lakes region is the core of the federal government.

It can be said that as long as the industrial zone of the Great Lakes is secure, the federal government has the confidence to suppress the rebellion. Otherwise, this war will be impossible to win.

President Lincoln asked cautiously, General Grant, I need a definite answer can Washington be defended?

Grant, the wars fastest-rising Union general, who led the Union Army to its first major victory, became the central figure in Washington's defense.

It was not an enviable task. With the federal army at a disadvantage, defending the capital was extremely difficult.

Losing other places is one thing; in the overall situation, where the federal army is continuously losing ground, the federal government cannot hold anyone accountable.

The so-called famous generals in history still have to yield to strength. The supposedly famed federal generals in the future were currently being beaten to a pulp on the battlefield, occasionally winning only through sheer luck.

It's not a matter of their command capabilities; it's mainly due to the inadequate execution ability of the federal army.

They were a bunch of farmers and workers who had just put down their tools, many of whom had received less than a month of training before being sent to the battlefield. Their combat effectiveness can be imagined.

If the army doesn't collapse halfway, it can already qualify one as a capable general. With such an army, losing battles is only natural.

Of course, after fighting a few more times, the rookies would become veterans with improved combat ability. Historically, the Northern government trained its armies through the fires of war before overwhelming the South with numbers.

In this context, if blame were to be assigned for military defeats, there would be no one left to command the troops.

However, Washington is different; its political significance is too great. Losing the capital would surely lead to someone taking the blame.

Grant responded, Mr. President, I cannot give you a definitive answer to this question. Whether Washington can be defended depends on the determination of the enemy.

The lack of a clear strategy is the biggest problem for the Confederate government. Due to the differing interests of the member states, everyone has different strategic objectives.

To balance internal forces, the Southern government appeared to be stretching in all directions without concentrating superior forces in one place, wasting opportunities.

Lincoln thought for a moment and said, Alright, if there's anything you need, you can just ask. I'll do my best to help you solve it. In any case, you must try your utmost to defend Washington. Even if it means fighting street by street in the alleys, as long as Washington isn't completely lost, I can accept it.

Using Washington as bait to attract the main forces of the Confederate army, buying time for the federal government to win the war.

These are all political propaganda slogans; if Lincoln had a choice, he would never do this. If even the capital is lost, what credibility does he, as the President, have over the federal states?

Grant pondered and said: The 50,000 reinforcements from the West Coast states of California, Oregon, and New Mexico have not departed yet.

I've sent telegrams urging the state governments, but apparently, they have not completed conscription quotas. If we lack these reinforcements, there's simply no way to defend Washington.

Not every federal state is actively participating in this war. The states on the West Coast are far from the battlefield and don't feel the pressure. Moreover, various European countries are exerting influence and hindering the war effort, so their enthusiasm for joining the war is naturally low.

President Lincoln asked, Mr. Seward, what's going on?

Secretary of State Seward replied with a furrowed brow, The population of the West Coast states is already small, and they've already provided 150,000 soldiers for the federal government. Most of the willing young men have already enlisted.

Not long ago, the Austrian ocean fleet visited the West Coast states, and Count Himmelfried received many German-Americans, encouraging them to leave the United States.

Many people have already left, and now these individuals, under the pretext of being against the civil war, are boycotting enlistment in the federal army. To avoid giving Austrians an excuse to interfere, we can't force them to serve.

This has triggered a chain reaction, with many people in the West Coast region joining the anti-war movement. The state governments are unable to complete their conscription quotas.

There are also other European countries behind this. The headquarters of the anti-war movement is around the various embassies, and as soon as there's any disturbance, these people retreat into the embassies.

To avoid causing diplomatic conflicts and inviting foreign intervention in this war, the state governments dare not take action rashly.

When the federal government advocated national unity, European countries launched the anti-civil war movement. This is a flaw in the American system. Whether it's feasible or not, they'll use righteousness to pressure you.

Since the government failed to resolve conflicts peacefully, it was deemed incompetent, and opposing the war became absolutely justified.

Many newspapers supporting the anti-war movement directly attribute the Lincoln government as the worst in American history, surpassing even the government of James Buchanan.

The armchair critics don't need to take responsibility so they're all just shooting their mouths off.

The anti-war faction has also put forward a bunch of proposals that seem capable of resolving conflicts peacefully on the surface but are not feasible in reality. They criticize the federal government's inaction and accuse it of being manipulated by arms dealers to incite civil war for profit.

Whether others believe it or not, it doesn't matter as the anti-war faction believes it. Those who don't want to go to the battlefield, and those who want to evade military service, also believe it.

Conscription evasion is looked down upon, but there's no moral risk in being anti-civil war. In fact, because of political correctness and public opinion support, state governments cannot hold them legally accountable.

Ultimately, these issues stem from the low level of national identity among the people, limited patriotism, and many not even consider themselves Americans.

In this era, people of German, Irish, Italian descent, etc., are at the bottom of society and often face discrimination politically.

The entrenched interests of the upper echelons of society simply don't leave them room to rise. These immigrants often have to exert several times the effort to achieve the same rewards.

Given this situation, why should everyone still sacrifice for the federal government? Winning the war has nothing to do with them, but their lives would be at stake.

Hummel could lure people away because he offered real monetary incentives: every immigrant heading to Central America received 50 hectares of free land with full property rights after 5 years of cultivation, plus 300 guilders in 2-year interest-free loans from the colonial government.

This is also why, within just a few months of establishing the Central American colonies, they incurred a loss of two million guilders.

President Lincoln frowned and asked, "Didn't we order the prohibition of any anti-war activities? Why has the anti-war movement still developed?"

Secretary of State Seward explained: This prohibition is only being enforced by half of the federal states. The Western states believe it violates the Constitution and goes against the spirit of liberalism, so they refused to comply with this law.

Lincoln was troubled. In this era, each of America's federal states was like an independent mini-kingdom, often in conflict with the federal government.

Even though he had support from capitalists behind him, because everyone had different interests, American capitalists also divided into different interest groups.

Generally speaking, the East was strong while the West was weak. Most of the major financial groups were concentrated in the eastern coastal states, controlling the vast majority of America's wealth. Meanwhile, the capitalists in the West mostly depended on them.

When the civil war broke out, driven by their own interests, capitalists in the West wished they could destroy the East Coast, break free from their shackles, and gain greater benefits.

They didn't dare to confront them directly, but undermining them from the shadows was fair game. Whenever trouble arose, they'd rely on foreign powers for support. After all, the positions of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain were well-known, and they didn't mind taking the blame.

Internal troubles were far more troublesome than external ones. Political intervention from foreign countries was only effective when there were collaborators within the country.

If there weren't people within the United States waving flags and cheering, unless Britain, France, Austria, and Spain directly intervened with military forces, it wouldn't even be considered a problem.

Lincoln hinted, saying, Send someone to communicate with the governments of the Western states. Regardless, we must ensure an adequate number of troops. The federal government is facing its most critical moment. If we suffer defeat due to insufficient manpower, nobody will have good days ahead.

Clearly, this was directed at those who were undermining the war effort. It implied that they shouldn't push their luck too far and should consider the bigger picture while undermining their competitors.

Raising tariffs to protect the domestic market and abolishing slavery to obtain cheap labor were common interests shared by most capitalists.

If the federal government lost the war, the South's cheap raw materials and markets would all be lost. Without these, nobody would have a good life in the end.

This was the aftermath of the butterfly effect. The Confederacy gained three states, and the Union lost the same three. The balance of power was inevitably changed.

The first challenge to face was the issue of manpower. Faced with a more severe situation than in history, the shortage of troops became a problem for the federal government.

The support of troops from the Western states became particularly important. Without the support of these states, the manpower advantage of the Northern government would no longer exist.

With armies of similar sizes, the Northern army couldn't necessarily defeat the South. The quality gap could only be compensated by quantity for now.

Chapter 335: The Turning Point

After a year of civil war, the federal government suffered casualties of over two hundred thousand, and the brutal losses fueled a growing sense of war weariness among the soldiers.

This was not an external invasion but an internal conflict. The patriotic fervor that had been stirred up had long been worn down in the fires of battle.

It wasn't just the western states that failed to meet their recruitment quotas; even the core states of the federal government faced difficulties in recruiting.

As of now, the total military strength of the federal government has surpassed 1.1 million, yet it still isn't enough.

The warring states, or federal states near the frontlines, prioritized ensuring their own safety first, making battlefield coordination difficult and preventing them from leveraging their numerical advantage.

These issues are unsolvable dilemmas. State officials are elected, and if they can't guarantee the safety of their own state, the voters will kick them out.

Talking about the bigger picture is easy for those who aren't directly affected. When it comes to personal interests, whether it's the capitalists, politicians, or the public, everyone chooses what's best for themselves.

Secretary of State Seward rushed into the presidents office and said, Mr. President, we have a major problem. Illinois just sent another plea for reinforcements. Theyre threatening to withdraw from the war if the federal government doesnt send help.

Withdraw from the war? There is no doubt that the federal states would dare to be so reckless. To prevent their homeland from turning into ruins, surrendering is an option, let alone withdrawing from the war.

Anyway, this is a civil war, not a war of annihilation. Once Illinois announced its withdrawal from the war, the South wouldnt launch any more attacks against them.

The downside was that the federal government would be doomed. If one state took the lead, a chain reaction could easily follow.

Capitalists want markets and cheap raw materials, thats true, but not at the cost of their own interests. If their industries are on the front lines and the enemy breaches their defenses, compromise might be the only option.

They cant sacrifice their family legacy for the sake of class interests, right? And these losses, the federal government cant possibly compensate for them.

Upon hearing this news, Lincoln was so infuriated that he threw the document in his hand and cursed loudly, Those bastards are actually threatening us!

Then, much to his regret, he found himself having to accept this threat.

Nearly all of Maryland and Ohio had fallen, Indiana was reduced to just a few pockets of resistance, and Kansas had lost a third of its territory. If Illinois were to withdraw from the war as well, the numerical advantage of the Union would vanish, and they would be strategically on the defensive.

After a moment of silence, Lincoln spoke slowly, saying, Ive decided to immediately implement the Homestead Act, to win over the people who desire land.

Secretary of State Seward responded coldly, Are you sure youve thought this through and its not just a momentary impulse? Once you take this step, theres no turning back.

Lincoln spoke with determination, At this stage, if we cant win this war, my fate might be even worse! So why not take a gamble? Besides implementing the Homestead Act, I cant think of any other way to solve the problem of inadequate manpower.

Just look at the Austrians, he continued, In just a year, theyve managed to entice two hundred thousand immigrants away from our shores. Its almost catching up to our annual immigration from Europe.

Of course, we cant burn all the bridges. We need to leave them a back door in case they become desperate.

Secretary of State Seward nodded in agreement. They were both in this together, and there was no escaping it. Of course, he wasnt the president, so he wouldnt suffer as much blame.

Under the pressure of the war, on May 1, 1862, Lincoln issued the Homestead Act, resolving the Unions manpower shortage dilemma.

The Homestead Act stipulated: Every head of a family or person over the age of 21, who has never engaged in rebellion against the United States, upon swearing to obtain the land for the purpose of

cultivation and paying a fee of ten dollars, may register to receive up to 160 acres of land (1 acre = 0.4 hectare). After residing on and cultivating the land for five years, the registrant could obtain a land patent and become the owner of the homestead.

The Homestead Act also included a provision for compensation, stating that if the registrant applied for preferential purchase, they could buy the land for \$1.25 per acre after six months.

The preceding content was primarily aimed at enticing individuals desiring land ownership. Though not explicitly stated, it resembled a variation of the practice of granting land as military rewards.

To pledge allegiance to the federal government, individuals were required to serve in the military. This also included the sentiments of the populace in Southern states; proving loyalty to the federal government was as simple as taking up arms against the rebels.

The federal governments practice of using land to recruit people to fight undoubtedly harmed the interests of the land speculators.

The subsequent compensation provision was the back door left for them. However, due to the limitations of time and the quantity of land registration per person, the operation became more difficult.

Historically hailed as a turning point, the Homestead Act naturally had a significant effect. The enlistment points, which everyone had previously avoided, now saw long queues once again.

In comparison to the armys shortcomings, the achievements made by the federal government in the navy are much greater. Of course, with the Confederate government controlling hundreds of ports in its territory, it was naturally impossible for the federal government to blockade them all.

However, they still performed quite well. In 1861, approximately ten percent of the vessels heading to Confederate ports were intercepted.

Dont think of this percentage as small; in reality, achieving this with the strength of the United States Navy is already quite difficult.

The interventionist Royal Navy often lurks around. Many times, during cotton shipments, British fleets are watching the federal navy closely nearby.

The issue isnt about whether they can win a fight but rather that they simply cant fight at all. The agreement among Britain, France, Austria, and Spain on intervening in the American Civil War has been reached. Once the war breaks out, it would be four against one.

Each country now lacks only a pretext to intervene in the civil war. In this context, the achievements of the federal navy are already quite remarkable.

To break the blockade, the Confederate government also established a navy. Due to the vast difference in the number of warships between the two sides, the Confederacy secretly constructed ironclad warships, while at the same time, the Union was also building them.

In March 1862, naval forces from both the North and South engaged in a fierce battle at Hampton Roads, marking the beginning of the ironclad warship warfare.

Unfortunately, American naval artillery technology was not very advanced. The Confederate vessel Merrimack and the Union vessel Monitor engaged in a standoff without either side achieving any significant results.

Against this backdrop, at the end of May 1862, the Austrian ocean fleet visited the Confederate government.

Count Himmell and President Jefferson Davis engaged in friendly discussions and reached an agreement to strengthen bilateral trade cooperation, primarily focusing on labor export services.

On June 7, 1862, the two parties signed the Labor Importation Treaty, which stipulated that over the next ten years, the Confederate government would import three million laborers from Austrian colonial territories. The Southern government would bear all immigration expenses and pay Austria 60 guilders per person for the immigration fee.

Without a doubt, this is a lucrative deal. The prerequisite is for the Confederacy to win the war to fulfill the treaty.

To court Austria, the Confederate government spared no expense.

It was a decision enforced through strength of arms. The Austrian ocean fleet may number just over seventy ships, but among them sail five ironclads, making it currently the most formidable fleet on the East Coast.

Count Himmell proposed, Mr. President, I believe you need a strong navy to suppress the Unions fleet and ensure smooth overseas trade.

He was not the first to sell them warships. Major European naval powers have all offered warships to the Confederacy, and the Confederate government has indeed ordered many. Unfortunately, distant waters cannot quench nearby thirst.

Jefferson Davis replied lacklusterly, Yes, Count, we have indeed ordered many warships from Europe, but they will not arrive in the short term.

Count Himmell smiled slightly: Mr. President, you need ready-made vessels, orders take too long. Battlefield conditions change constantly, time is life itself.

If your countrys navy had the upper hand now, perhaps this war would already be over. If you were to blockade the overseas trade of the New England states, the Union government would have no choice but to compromise.

President Jefferson Davis eyes lit up at Himmells implication, and he asked incredulously, Is your country willing to sell this fleet?

Count Himmell replied affirmatively, Under normal circumstances, we would not sell active equipment, but exceptions can be made for friends.

After some consideration, President Jefferson Davis said cautiously, Count, please name your price. We will not let our friends suffer losses!

There was no choice; even if he knew he would be fleeced, he had to ask. Even if the price was high, it would not compare to the losses incurred from ships intercepted by the Union.

On the surface, it may seem that these ship losses belong to the capitalists, but in reality, its the Confederate government that bears the burden. The blockade by the Union government has raised prices in Confederate states and restricted commodity exports.

The most typical scenario is that merchant ships, to ensure sufficient speed to escape pursuit by the Union Navy, have to leave a large amount of cargo space empty. When encountering the Union Navy, they often have to dump their cargo into the sea to reduce weight and increase speed.

Count Himmell quoted: 46 million guilders for the ocean fleet as a package deal, with enough ammunition for three major battles thrown in plus free training services.

This is clearly an exorbitant price. 46 million guilders is equivalent to about 23 million pounds. If we only calculate the cost of shipbuilding, it could build a Royal Navy.

However, even doubling that amount wouldnt be enough to buy a Royal Navy. Building a Royal Navy from scratch would cost at least 100 million pounds.

The Royal Navys dominance in the world is not solely reliant on warships; it also involves a series of supporting facilities, a vast industrial chain, and well-trained soldiers.

None of these are possessed by the Confederate government, and likewise, the Union government lacks them as well. Before the outbreak of the Civil War, the US Navy had no more than ten thousand personnel. Currently, the Confederate governments navy consists mainly of retired personnel and merchant sailors.

It can be said that the quality of naval officers and soldiers on both sides of the North and South are among the best in the world if they were to be ranked in reverse.

Jefferson Davis thought for a moment and said, Count, your offer is too high. How about this: we hire the ocean fleet for combat. As long as we can suppress the Union Navy in the ports, we will pay a commission of 46 million guilders.

Count Himmell shook his head. He didnt dare to take such a deal. Although it might be easy to suppress the Union Navy in the short term, in reality, the major shipyards of the Union government were producing ships at a rapid pace. As time goes on, the size of the Union fleet will only increase.

If the Confederacy could not win within a year, the balance would shift. Even relying just on numbers, the North would gain the upper hand eventually.

Hoping to eliminate the enemy in naval battles is just wishful thinking. If the enemy were to lose, couldnt they just escape? Once the enemy goes inside the port with coastal artillery covering them, they would be helpless.

If the Confederacy is willing to hand over command of the army to Austria, then there is still some hope. At worst, they can land from Canada and attack the Great Lakes region.

The British probably wouldnt mind turning a blind eye. After all, John Bull is shameless and can play rogue.

Sorry, we are a neutral country and cannot participate in the war.

Jefferson Davis was about to roll his eyes. Which neutral country sells weapons so blatantly? Apart from not personally entering the battlefield, everything else that can be done and cannot be done, theyve already done it.

Those sarcastic remarks are best left unspoken. Saying them out loud might sour relations with Austria. Anyway, Austria is still supporting them, so they can be considered half-allies.

25 million guilders. At this price, you can at least double your profit.

This is Jefferson Davis estimate based on the Southern shipyards factory price, assuming the capitalists profit and adding the cost of ocean transportation.

Himmel calculated and said: Mr. President, in normal times that price could perhaps be discussed, but these are extraordinary circumstances requiring over double the profit margin to avoid a loss.

On July 1, 1862, Austria signed a military procurement agreement with Nicaragua, selling the ocean fleet for 38 million guilders to the Nicaraguan government.

The news caused a stir throughout the Americas. Many were surprised: Did Nicaragua have the money to buy an ocean fleet?

Before everyone could recover from the shock, on July 5, 1862, the Nicaraguan government resold the giant fleet to the Confederacy for the same price.

Of course, it was only possible to sell at such a high price as the result of Count Himmel agreeing to accept half the payment in bonds. The Confederate government spared no effort to bind Austria.

The news had not yet reached Vienna, but Austrias shipyards were already bustling.

Out with the old, in with the new. Since the ships were to be sold, Franz couldnt leave the Austrian navy without vessels. Naturally, new ships had to be built.

Interfering in the American Civil War in the future would still require a navy, and overseas colonization would also depend on it. By the time news of the transaction reached Europe, the new ships would likely be ready for service.

Chapter 336: The Emancipation Proclamation

To a certain extent, Austria played the role of the troublemaker this time. Normally, this is something the British would usually do.

However, the British were apprehensive, worried that after selling a large number of warships, they would not have the ability to suppress the challenges from various European countries.

For a maritime power, the navy is the core. Once the Royal Navy shows weakness, challengers will pounce on the opportunity.

Dont be fooled by the fact that France is currently ruled by a pro-British faction. Once an opportunity arises, the French would not hesitate to take over. This is usually the reason why the worlds number one power suppresses the number two.

Historically, the British supported the Confederate government, but most of the ships they sold were old warships. The core warships of the Royal Navy were never brought out.

Franz had more conscience. Although he also mixed in many old warships, those ironclads were all masterpieces of Austrias modern industrial technology. He didnt give them a weakened version.

Technically speaking, Austria was still ahead of the Americans by at least a dozen years. Two warships engage each other at a distance of several hundred meters, firing until ammunition is exhausted with zero hit rate, only the American Navy could achieve such a feat.

Of course, the human factor is also a major reason. One cannot have high expectations for two novice navies. However, substandard artillery technology is also an important factor.

Austria is not a maritime power, so even if the Confederate government reverse-engineered the warship technology, it wouldn't matter much. Without sufficient industrial capacity, it would be difficult to replicate.

As for devising corresponding countermeasures based on the construction of the warships, that's thinking too much. If they're already building new ships, why worry about old ones being targeted?

Don't be fooled by the short time span. In this era, technological advancements happen rapidly. The technology behind Austrian ironclads has been improved multiple times. The warships still on the slipway now are completely different from the original ironclads.

The same firepower that once required ironclads weighing eight or nine thousand tons can now be achieved with ships weighing just over seven thousand tons.

Having larger warships doesn't necessarily mean greater combat power. It's more about the firepower installed. Generally, warships with more powerful and more numerous cannons have greater combat capabilities.

Armor thickness is also a measuring standard, but currently, it's not a priority. Since it's for a colonial empire, consideration must be given to long-range operations. A defensive navy isn't suitable for Austria.

New York, where the federal government has just relocated from Washington, has once again been struck by lightning from a clear sky.

They had just mobilized the people, taking advantage of everyone's enthusiasm for land to obtain enough soldiers to gain a numerical advantage over the Southern government.

The Department of War was planning a counterattack, preparing to use their numerical superiority to wear down the rebels. Unfortunately, before this plan could be implemented, news arrived that the Southern government had purchased a fleet.

This meant that the plan to blockade the South by sea had completely failed. Moreover, for some time to come, the federal government's navy will be at a disadvantage, and there's a possibility that the Southern government might even turn the tables and blockade them instead.

There's no doubt that the key to the Southern government's naval strength lies in their investment and the support of the Great Powers.

If Austria could sell a fleet to the Southern government, then Britain, France, and Spain could do the same. The Northern government cannot compete with the industrial strength of those four countries. They are simply not in the same league.

President Lincoln forced himself to remain calm, looking at the Secretary of the Navy with an inquisitive expression. He asked expectantly, "If this fleet were to join the Confederate Navy, can the Navy Department guarantee the smoothness of our maritime transportation?"

Clearly, he had given up on using the navy to blockade the Southern states. Lincoln had the self-awareness to understand that rather than dwelling on unachievable tasks, it was better to consider whether the federal government itself might be blockaded.

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles pondered for a moment before responding, "There may be some minor difficulties, but the enemy does not have the capability to blockade our coastal areas."

The fleet sold by Austria is powerful because they have five state-of-the-art ironclad ships at its core, accompanied by more than thirty sailing warships.

However, their number of warships is not large, and apart from these main battle vessels, the rest are auxiliary ships.

Our shipbuilding capacity is limited, and if we rely solely on our own resources, it would take at least two years to surpass the rebels.

But war cannot wait that long. To quickly gain maritime superiority, we can only purchase or lease warships from abroad.

Shipbuilding takes time, and the American shipbuilding industry cant construct hundreds of warships in just a few years.

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Historically, during the American Civil War, the Union Navy primarily relied on purchasing and leasing ships, with only a portion being self-built.

After all, warships are not that easy to build. Not to mention ironclads, which are a manifestation of the new eras industrial capabilities, even wooden sailing battleships have high requirements.

Even obtaining the necessary wood poses a challenge. A single sailing warship often requires the felling of thousands of trees, and the processed timber typically needs several years to dry out.

The most critical component, the keel, can only be made from oak or teak, demanding trees of exceptional quality.

Fortunately, with the advancement of shipbuilding technology, many of these components can now be replaced with steel. Otherwise, after years of deforestation, it would be a mere dream for Americans to find enough timber.

When it comes to steel, there is undoubtedly a need to import from the British. For many consecutive years, the United States has held the illustrious title of the worlds number one steel importer. Now that the war has broken out, the steel demand is even greater.

This is also the reason why Lincoln is worried about being blockaded. If their supply of materials is cut off, they might as well admit defeat and acknowledge the independence of the Southern government.

President Lincoln said fiercely, Proceed according to your plan. We have reached the point of pitting our financial strength against the Southern governments, to see who can persist longer.

War is fought with money. In this era, many things can be bought with money, including warships.

Any European country would gladly accept such a deal. As long as theres enough profit, who cares which side the warships are sold to?

Secretary of State Seward said, That might not be enough. The European powers are supporting the Confederate government. Even if theyre willing to sell warships to us, at most itll only balance the scales between the two sides.

The naval blockade has already failed, and the key to deciding the outcome of this war has returned to the army. Only by winning on land can we win this war and maintain national unity.

This is a very realistic issue. Despite the Union government having economic advantages, in a contest of financial strength, they might not necessarily be able to match the Confederate government.

During this era, the power of the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) wasn't as strong, and naturally, capitalists wouldn't obediently pay taxes. In contrast, it was easier for plantation owners in the South to collect tariffs when exporting their goods.

To raise funds, the federal government issued multiple bonds domestically. Unfortunately, these were in US dollars which no one would accept internationally.

The Confederate government, on the other hand, issued bonds overseas backed by cotton, which brought in foreign currency directly. Occasionally, in major commodity transactions, they could also pay a portion of it through bonds.

As for seeking support from various European countries, the federal government has already attempted it, but with no effect. Even if some people support them, it's merely lip service.

Currently, Napoleon III was busy annexing the Kingdom of Sardinia and was unlikely to offend the three countries of Britain, Austria, and Spain for the sake of the federal government's interests, losing the opportunity to expand on the European continent.

President Lincoln tentatively asked, What if we abolish slavery?

Secretary of State Seward immediately opposed, saying, Private property is sacred and inviolable, which goes against the US Constitution and would push the slave states loyal to the Union towards the Confederacy.

The sanctity of private property not only protects the interests of slave owners but also safeguards the interests of capitalists.

Everyone has concerns about losing what they have. If the federal government were to open this door, capitalists would also worry that the government might one day turn against them too.

Lincoln explained, What I mean is to emancipate the slaves in the rebellious states; the other regions will remain unchanged.

Secretary of State Seward still shook his head. Currently, out of the 16 slave states in the Union, 15 have joined the Confederacy, and the institution of slavery in the remaining state, Delaware, has long been practically nonexistent.

The effectiveness of this decree remains uncertain, but the negative consequences it may bring are extremely serious.

If the people in the Southern states perceive that the federal government wants to deprive them of all their property and push them into a corner, it would be disastrous.

Even if the slaves are excluded, there are still 7 to 8 million people there, and with the support of the great powers, if they are united in their desire for independence, the federal government will never have a chance for unification.

President Lincoln added, We have no choice. A large number of black troops have emerged among the rebels. If we cannot divide them, the rebels will use these cannon fodder to consume our elite forces.

As far as I know, the rebels have also signed a labor importation treaty with the Austrians, averaging three hundred thousand strong laborers per year.

What are they trying to do? Nothing more than compensating the slave owners for their fight for independence now and using these laborers to compensate them in the future.

Anyway, once they are in their territory, whether they end up as laborers or slaves, in the end, its all up to them.

Not to mention the plantation owners in the South, even the capitalists in the North had some people who wanted to bring in a batch of cheap labor to work in the mines.

People were driven to this out of desperation. Due to insufficient population, the Southern governments military forces could not rival the numbers of the Northern government, so using slaves to fight was another option.

Secretary of State Seward did not continue to oppose. According to the current situation, to gain an advantage on the battlefield, it is necessary to divide the relationship between slaves and slave owners.

Otherwise, the Southern rebels using two or three black slaves to kill one Union soldier would be a cause for concern.

Despite the heat of the war, the business of labor export companies has never stopped. The rebels could afford the losses.

In September 1862, President Lincoln submitted the Emancipation Proclamation to Congress. After a heated debate, it passed with a narrow majority due to President Lincolns insistence.

The proclamation stipulated the abolition of slavery in rebellious states from January 1, 1863, and allowed slaves to enlist in the Union Army as free men.

The Emancipation Proclamation immediately caused a sensation in the United States. There was even a wave of slave escapes in the Southern states, and black figures began appearing at Union government recruitment points.

It even affected the Confederate governments army. To maintain the morale of the army, the Confederate government had to grant freedom to black soldiers.

With the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation, the Confederate government found itself in a politically disadvantageous position. To change this situation, they took action.

Following the suggestions of representatives from various countries, the Confederate government began to court Native Americans and promised to support their independence and establishment of an independent country.

Chapter 337: An Open Conspiracy

On October 11, 1862, the Kingdom of Prussia launched its first ironclad warship, the Frederick, with King William I personally presiding over the ceremony to demonstrate their commitment to developing the navy.

They were truly determined. Seeing neighboring Austrian nobles making fortunes in overseas colonial ventures, the Junker nobles couldnt help it.

Especially the younger generation, who had long been dissatisfied with the governments conservatism. Its worth noting that Austria had only been opening overseas colonies for less than a decade, yet already possessed territories five to six times the size of its own territory.

Many people optimistically believed that by joining the colonial movement, they could quickly get rich, earn noble titles, and reach the peak of their lives.

The future of the world lies in the oceans who first said this cannot be reliably traced, but it has gained widespread recognition in European society.

At the onset of overseas colonial expansion, Franz also contributed to the promotion of this theory, which has now become widespread in the German region.

The ironclad was recognized as a naval technological revolution. Within just a few years of its introduction, naval powers such as Britain, France, the United States, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands all constructed their own ironclads.

Now that the Kingdom of Prussia finally has its own ironclad, many people are celebrating. Only the top echelons of the government understood the gap between their ironclad and those of the major naval powers.

After all, they were like ducks out of water. For a long time, the Prussian navy had been a marginal presence, mostly serving as a coast guard, even inferior to neighboring Denmark.

The grandiose promotion of the ironclad warship is still aimed at boosting morale. After all, in recent years, the Kingdom of Prussia has faced significant challenges in its development, and the people need good news.

William I inquired with concern: How is the navys training going? When can we begin establishing overseas colonies?

Roon, the Minister of War who also served as the Minister of the Navy, changed his expression and replied with a wry smile, Your Majesty, our navys foundation is too weak. Before the expansion, the Navy had only around 1,300 officers and soldiers, including all the civilian personnel in the Naval Department.

It will take at least two to three years to develop combat effectiveness. Of course, if the enemy is just indigenous people, these wont be issues.

Roon continued to serve as both the Minister of War and the Minister of the Navy, which was a compromise among various factions. Despite the nobles desire for the benefits of overseas colonial expansion, they were unwilling to relinquish control over the military.

Having the army lead the navy posed no problems, as the navy personnel were all directly transferred from active army units. They even skipped establishing a Marine Corps; they are absolutely the strongest navy in land warfare, second to none.

Roon, who had initially led the army reform, tragically found himself leading the development of the Prussian Navy. While in other countries, inexperienced leaders may lead experienced ones, here, he was essentially an amateur leading a bunch of rookies.

Previously, the Prussian Navy was just the coast guard of the Kingdom of Prussia, with its normal duties being to crack down on smuggling activities.

Now, with the addition of thousands of army personnel, it became even more amateurish. From top to bottom, they were all amateurs, and Roon naturally felt immense pressure.

The Navy is not the army, you cant just train for a few months and then go into battle. Even for ordinary sailors, it takes years of training.

Clearly, Roon realized this only after delving deeper into the matter. The upper echelons of the Prussian government still had an army-centric mindset. This includes William I who had yet to fully grasp the difference between the army and the navy, or else he wouldnt have asked such a question.

William I asked in surprise, It takes that long? Then how did the Austrians expand their navy? Or is it that their officers and sailors are simply not properly trained?

Indeed, the Austrian Navy has expanded rapidly in recent years. Since 1850, the tonnage of the Austrian Navy has increased several times, propelling them to become the worlds third-largest naval power.

Roon explained, Your Majesty, although the Austrian Navy has traditionally operated in the Mediterranean with a relatively low profile, they actually have very solid naval foundations, especially in Venice, which has a strong maritime tradition.

They possess a complete system for inheriting naval technology and cultivating talent. During the Metternich era, naval development was neglected, which led to the Austrian Navy fading into obscurity. Now that the Austrian government has begun to prioritize it, they have quickly caught up.

In reality, the rapid development of the Austrian Navy also involved luck. During the era of sailing ships, naval technology had reached a bottleneck, and even British technology wasnt significantly superior to that of other countries.

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With the advent of the ironclad era, sailing ships were directly phased out, and past experiences and technologies became obsolete, necessitating a fresh start.

In a sense, now is the easiest time for other countries to catch up with the British. After all, the technology of ironclad ships is still in its early stages of development for everyone, and the gap hasnt reached a despairing level.

After hearing this explanation, William I sighed. He had initially thought that Britains century-old naval dominance was just propaganda, but now he realized it was true.

If there were no foundations, establishing a powerful navy from scratch would require decades, if not a full century.

Not long ago, the Austrians proposed to us a joint venture for the development of Southeast Asia. This is a rare opportunity.

If the cooperation goes smoothly, we can directly utilize the Austrian colonial outposts to obtain supplies and establish our first colony in the Southeast Asian region.

Logistical supply is also an obstacle set by colonial empires for newcomers. While everyone welcomes ships from various countries for supplies, obtaining supplies for naval warships requires prior communication.

If its just about visiting other countries, its easy and everyone is willing to do business. But if you want to establish overseas colonies, in-depth communication is needed.

In any case, dont expect to get help from others without paying a sufficient price.

This is quite inconvenient for latecomers, as establishing overseas colonies is not feasible if everything must be shipped from the homeland. Procuring locally is the best way to reduce costs.

To obtain logistical support, Austria signed agreements with Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands, promising not to seek their colonies in any way, thus gaining everyones understanding.

Franz has already fulfilled these agreements. In overseas colonial activities, Austria did not seize any countrys colonies, only claiming unclaimed territories.

Now the Kingdom of Prussia faces the same issue. If the problem of logistics supply cannot be resolved, the cost of colonization could directly cause anyone to despair.

Signing a similar agreement? Dream on. The Kingdom of Prussias political influence is waning, so why should anyone give them face?

In this world where fists do the talking, with the strength of the Prussian Navy, the various countries simply disdain to pay them any heed. Even the Portuguese could wipe out the Prussian navy two or three times over.

Especially with the army directly transitioning to the navy, it has become a joke in Europe. Many dont even believe Prussia is developing its navy; many newspapers directly ridicule the Prussian navy as an army fleet.

Roon asked with concern, Your Majesty, what do we need to give in return?

Theres no such thing as a free lunch, and if it did fall from the sky, it might be dangerous. Roon didnt believe Austria would help Prussia without something in return; such a big favor certainly wouldnt come without strings attached.

William I sneered and said, They still see themselves as the big boss in Germany, ready to recruit us, their little brother, as a thug.

Various powers are gathering in Southeast Asia. In recent years, Austria has expanded its influence too much, and the resources available for the Southeast Asian region are limited.

To ensure their interests in Southeast Asia, the Austrian government has invited us and the German Federal Empire to join.

Of course, they also have the intention of courting our domestic nobility. That little brat Franz talks about a unified Germany every day, as if afraid others might not know.

This is an open conspiracy, and even if William I knows the bait might be poisoned, he would still swallow it.

He cant avoid opening overseas colonies just because of potential hidden dangers, can he?

This is not the first or second time Austria has tried to win over people in Prussia. In recent years, over 150,000 Prussian immigrants have entered Austrian colonies.

Many Prussian overseas colonial teams are now affiliated under the Austrian flag. If these people had not defected to Austria, the Austrian government would have been crazy to shelter them.

William I is aware of the crisis. He's very concerned that if things continue like this, he might be betrayed by his subordinates at any time. Bavaria serves as a good example.

After joining Austria, Bavaria has developed quite well. This traditional textile center in Germany has once again flourished.

To resolve the issue of industrial raw material supply, the Austrian government has even opened cotton plantations in West Africa.

In contrast, Baden, which remained in the German Federal Empire, has tragically declined. As another center of the cotton textile industry in Germany, it gradually declined due to an insufficient supply of raw materials.

With the power of this example, William I has no confidence in his subordinates. He does not even dare trust the Junker nobles.

After all, a change in leaders does not change the fact that nobles are nobles and capitalists are capitalists. Their core interests will not be harmed, and they may even gain more.

To prevent the worst from happening, William I has to find a new way out, or sooner or later, Prussia will be swallowed by Austria.

William I was not willing to engage in political games with the Habsburg dynasty as it was not his forte.

Chapter 338: Dream of Being a Great Power

It's not just William I who is having a tough time; the real tragedy lies with George I, the Emperor of the German Federal Empire, who is truly struggling.

Because he was supported into power by the British, and he himself holds the title of Duke of Cumberland in England, he is jokingly referred to by the public as Cumberland I.

From the outset, George I's position as emperor was unstable. There are countless lords below him who simply ignore him. Even with the support of the British, he finds it difficult to deal with these lords.

As an elected emperor, his powers are as great as those of the Holy Roman Emperor in the Middle Ages. Apart from being a nominal co-ruler, his powers are largely limited to presiding over the federal assembly.

That was one thing, at least he could still govern Hanover. George I had no expectation that the member states would obey him.

As a buffer between major powers, as long as the European situation remains stable, the German Federal Empire is relatively secure.

What gave him the biggest headache was his extremely low sovereign prestige. Many civilians called the German Federal Empire the Comedy Empire, viewing this empire imposed on them by other countries as a disgrace.

Despite many years of effort, George I hasn't been able to change anything. The people don't even identify with the empire, let alone recognize him as emperor.

The member states within the empire were worried that George I would learn from Franz and use public opinion pressure to consolidate the power in their hands, so they tacitly suppressed his prestige.

George I felt extremely wronged. He hadn't done anything, yet was scolded by the people until his reputation was in tatters to the point that even his rule in Hanover was no longer stable.

If he had known that being emperor would have such serious consequences, he would rather not have worn the crown.

But now it was too late. He had already become a laughingstock; if he abdicated again, his family's entire reputation would be ruined.

To restore his reputation, George I had also been governing diligently in recent years, ruling Hanover quite well.

Unfortunately, there was no way to compare. The New Holy Roman Empire had also been making waves recently, periodically coming out to assert its existence, eclipsing his achievements in comparison.

Ultimately, Hanover is just a small country. No matter how well it's governed, the achievements are only economic. Politically, he cannot satisfy the people's dream of being a great power.

Even if he were to integrate the German Federal Empire, it would still only be a medium-sized country with a population of over ten million. The dream of being a great power is just that a dream.

Of course, George I's goals aren't so lofty. If he could integrate the various small states within the country and turn the German Federal Empire into a medium-sized power, similar to neighboring Prussia, he would already be satisfied.

Achieving this would be extremely difficult. European society placed great emphasis on the rule of law. The nobles and capitalists relied on laws to protect their interests, and any existence that disrupted the rules would be rejected by all.

This rules out George I resorting to force to solve the internal issues with the states. Even if the Kingdom of Hanover had the strength, he wouldn't dare to take military action.

Regarding Austria's invitation to colonize Southeast Asia, he's not particularly interested. George I has his backers. As a pawn of the British Empire on the European continent, there was no need for him to follow Austria in colonizing.

The power of the British isn't infinite, so they've become picky. John Bull has long since disregarded areas with low economic value and little strategic significance.

These remaining regions can be divided among lesser powers. Look at the Netherlands and Portugal for example; they've taken shares of the territories that John Bull isn't interested in.

Unfortunately, the German Federal Empire was not governed solely by George I. Many member states and free cities were interested in opening overseas colonies in the Southeast Asian region.

Paul, do you think it's necessary for us to wade into those troubled waters of Southeast Asia?

As George I's Chief of Staff, Paul pondered for a moment before replying, Your Majesty, it depends on what you want. The Austrian government's move is an open conspiracy. At this point, most of the

fertile lands in the world have been divided up, and territories in Southeast Asia that are rich in resources are scarce.

While the Austrians certainly want to win over domestic interest groups in preparation for unifying Germany, this is also an opportunity for us.

Though we have many member states domestically, their individual strength is limited. To establish overseas colonies, we'll need to band together.

Colonial expansion is inseparable from naval power. If we collaborate to build a navy, as the central government, we have a good chance of taking the lead.

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George I was tempted. If he could control the navy, the central government would no longer be merely nominal, and he, as the emperor, would escape the embarrassment of being a figurehead.

If substantial returns could be gained from overseas colonial activities, his prestige as emperor would undoubtedly soar.

Regardless of whether he could ultimately unite the empire, at least he wouldn't be subject to daily criticism anymore. Why should he bear the blame alone when the division of the German region was a collective effort?

If the member states were determined to merge with Austria, not even Britain and France could stop it.

George I hesitantly said, This may not be easy. Even if we successfully establish colonies, the distribution of benefits afterward will be troublesome.

Paul said with confidence, Your Majesty, it is precisely because of these troubles that opportunities arise. When conflicts emerge among the member states, they will no longer join forces against you. Only by dividing and weakening the alliance of states can you truly control this empire.

The word empire always sounded jarring to George I's mind, but as an emperor, he still yearned for power.

As for the threat from Austria, they tacitly avoided mentioning it throughout their conversation. Unlike William I, George I never entertained the idea of confronting Austria with military force.

The German Federal Empire was originally an artificial state with limited strength. Its best path for survival was to serve as a buffer between the great powers. As long as no single power dominated the European continent, they would be safe.

Following this philosophy, the military of the Kingdom of Hanover hardly developed. Instead, its economy advanced to the forefront of Europe, forming a stark contrast with the Kingdom of Prussia.

Vienna Palace

Foreign Minister Wessenberg said, Your Majesty, both Prussia and the German Federal Empire have accepted our invitation. We can now proceed with the next step of the plan.

Upon hearing this news, Franz immediately produced a map of Southeast Asia with clear markings indicating the spheres of influence of various countries.

Where do you think would be suitable for them?

Since it was bait, naturally there had to be some profit. Otherwise, the ambitions they had painstakingly nurtured would quickly deflate.

As long as they profited from the first colony, Franz would no longer need to intervene further. Under the influence of interests, they would venture further and further down the path of colonialism.

Foreign Minister Wessenberg proposed, Your Majesty, it might be a good choice to let the German Federal Empire colonize Malaysia and Prussia colonize Sumatra or the Indochinese Peninsula.

Without a doubt, this arrangement carries significant implications. Despite these regions still being considered unclaimed territories, in reality, the British have already set their sights on Malaysia. However, they currently lack the capacity to fully claim it.

If Austria were to occupy Malaysia, it would pose a threat to the security of Singapore. John Bull would certainly not tolerate this due to the Strait of Malacca. However, with the German Federal Empire being a small state and a British ally, there's a good chance John Bull would turn a blind eye given their numerous colonies, which they struggled to manage.

Even if the British intervened, Austria would suffer no losses. Instead, they could use this conflict to drive a wedge between the British and the German Federal Empire.

Having the Prussians choose Sumatra or the Indochinese Peninsula also had political motives.

In the case of the former, the Dutch have long had their eyes on it. Over a decade ago, Britain and the Netherlands reached an agreement, whereby Sumatra would fall under Dutch control. It would serve as their compensation for relinquishing claims to the Strait of Malacca.

Once the Prussians seize Sumatra, the relations between Prussia and the Netherlands will undoubtedly deteriorate. The Dutch have waged several wars for Sumatra already, and they currently occupy parts of the island.

While the Indochinese Peninsula may appear unclaimed, the French have long had their eyes on it. However, the French government is currently preoccupied with annexing the Kingdom of Sardinia and has not taken action yet.

Once the Prussians entered Indochina, it would plant another nail for future Prussian-French conflicts. Unless the Prussians pulled off a miracle and fully occupied Indochina before the French acted.

Franz nodded in satisfaction and then asked, The bait is set well, but they can see these issues too. How can we ensure they take the bait?

Foreign Minister Wessenberg explained, Your Majesty, this is a conspiracy from the start. The tentacles of the British and French extend all over the world. We can't just let everyone give up just because those two might be interested, can we?

Currently, both Britain and France are occupied with their own affairs, making it an opportune moment to act. As long as we maintain secrecy, by the time they realize, it will already be a fait accompli.

Interests sway peoples hearts. We can arrange for people to advocate for it, letting them know this is a risk that must be taken in overseas colonialism.

Franz nodded in agreement.

Conflicts between various countries overseas colonies are common. For example, conflicts between Britain and Portugal in South Africa, between Britain, France, and the Netherlands in Southeast Asia, between Britain and France in Australia, and between Britain, France, and Austria in West Africa...

There are plenty of existing examples. In these conflicts, the victor isnt necessarily the stronger nation. At least in Southeast Asia, the Dutch hold the dominant position.

Moreover, these conflicts would not break out immediately. The French were still making a final push to annex the Kingdom of Sardinia, while the British were scheming to divide the United States.

By the time they finished those preoccupations and turned their attention to Southeast Asia, there would already be enough time for Prussia and the German Federal Empire to open their first colonies.

After tasting that first slice of the pie and gaining benefits, the capitalists and nobles of the two countries would then drive them racing madly down the path of a colonial empire.

However, they would soon discover that the world had already been largely divided up, with only scraps left over.

Yet they lack the strength to seize even those scraps. Spurred by interests, the dream of becoming a great power would once again become the mainstream aspiration of society.

Chapter 339: Brutal War

At the end of 1862, the regicide case that had lasted for years finally came to a close. After consolidating all the evidence, the evidence pointed to the Sardinian government as the mastermind behind the scenes.

Whether others believed it or not, the French government certainly did, and the Austrian government also accepted this explanation.

The protests from the Sardinian government were ignored. Before the assassination attempt happened, the Sardinian government had secretly provided funds to the Carbonari Party, which became the most damning evidence against them.

Most crucially, the French had eyewitness testimony. The arrested suspects confessed to the assassination attempt without reservation and came forward to accuse the Sardinian government.

The former Prime Minister Cavour was also imprisoned because of this. If unlucky, he could even be sent to the gallows.

The Prime Minister and other high-ranking officials were directly implicated, and King Victor Emmanuel II also could not escape blame. He announced his abdication two days ago.

The subsequent trade-offs in interests need not be detailed. In short, the French paid a heavy price to make all countries tacitly accept what happened.

Franz exclaimed in surprise, Did the British sell out the Kingdom of Sardinia just like that?

Initially, he thought that around the Kingdom of Sardinia, there would be a fierce struggle between Britain and France, but he didnt expect the British government to compromise so quickly.

Foreign Minister Wessenberg explained, Your Majesty, we tacitly accepted the actions of the French. The Russians are preoccupied with internal reforms and have no interest in Italian affairs. The British are incapable of interfering even if they want to.

Besides, the balance of power on the continent has not been disrupted. Even if the French annex the Kingdom of Sardinia, it still cannot change the tripartite balance of the continent.

The losses suffered by the British in terms of interests have been compensated for by the French elsewhere. The assets of the suspects seized by the investigation team are almost enough to repay the British loans.

Now that the obstacles to the French annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia have been largely cleared, its just a matter of when the French government will act.

Franz sneered, So is Napoleon III planning to rely on elections to obtain the throne again?

No matter how compelling the French reasons seemed, they were still not enough for them to legitimize their annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Conspiring and plotting regicide is unquestionably a grave crime, and the Austrian government is also holding those responsible accountable. But before annexing the Kingdom of Sardinia, they should first ask whether the Sardinians are willing.

Especially forcing Victor Emmanuel II to abdicate is a political blunder. If they were to exchange territories, it would still appear more palatable.

France has so many overseas colonies; they could have simply ceded one to Victor Emmanuel II in name, which would have been better than kicking him off the throne.

Ascending to the throne through popular election is the lowest form of legitimacy. Put simply, if one day the people are displeased with him, they can use the same method to kick him out.

Wessenberg replied, Based on the intelligence we have collected, the French are indeed preparing for elections.

Franz responded calmly, Then lets lend them a hand, and let the agents weve planted also support Napoleon III in concurrently holding the title of King of Sardinia, boosting his image in public opinion.

It is crucial whether the Kingdom of Sardinia will directly join France or whether Napoleon III will serve as King of Sardinia as well.

In the former scenario, the people of Sardinia would surely not agree. However, it aligns most with French interests. Undergoing short-term pains can ensure that the Kingdom of Sardinia will not try to become independent.

However, doing so would look bad. But they have already reached this point, so their appearance will be difficult to uphold regardless. Either dont do it or if theyre doing it, go all the way.

In the latter scenario, they are banking on France remaining perpetually strong, capable of forever suppressing the Kingdom of Sardinia. Yet, the moment France encounters any problem, the Sardinians will clamor for independence.

The Italians do not see themselves as the same family as the French, so there is essentially no basis for rule. Napoleon III would have no way to buy the support of the commoners to accept his reign.

While Napoleon was formidable, unfortunately, the Bonaparte family's foundations were too shallow. The political legacy left behind was insufficient for Napoleon III to realize his own political ambitions.

Franz had a deep understanding of this matter; Austria's successful expansion in Europe was largely due to the political legacy left by the Habsburgs.

Looking through history books, many regions in Europe had been ruled by the Habsburg dynasty for centuries. Even if they were defeated, they could still rally under the banner of restoring the dynasty, even if the legal basis was somewhat shaky.

Without ancestral political legacy, which of the German states would accept him? This included the Italian territories belonging to Austria. Legally, he had legitimacy there.

Legitimacy is valued in both Eastern and Western cultures. In the East, many rebels raise the banner of the former dynasty, not necessarily to gain supporters but mainly to prove that they are not mere rebels but to uphold a righteous cause.

Having a righteous cause is to strive for hegemony, and without it, one is just a bandit. In the end, those who succeed are basically the ones striving for hegemony. Meanwhile, it's unheard of for a mere bandit to seize supreme power.

As the ancients taught, one who does not scheme for eternity cannot scheme for the moment; one who does not contemplate the whole cannot contemplate the part.

This was Franz's motto, constantly reminding himself to stay vigilant.

On January 15, 1863, with the support of the Confederate government, the region of Indian Territory, inhabited by Native Americans, declared independence and established its own nation.

This area served as a resettlement zone for Native American tribes by the U.S. government, with dozens of tribes forcibly relocated there starting in the 1830s.

Due to a lack of effective federal governance in the region, and due to historical animosities, there were few white settlers in the area until after 1889.

The war continues to the present, with both sides competing based on their overall national strength. To win the war, the Southern government had to rally more allies.

In any case, they had already declared independence, so betraying the federal government's interests to buy allies put no pressure on them.

To enlist Native American participation in the war effort, the Confederate government provided the newly independent Cherokee Nation with fifty thousand rifles, one hundred cannons, and ammunition.

After acquiring weapons, the Native Americans began their path of revenge. Kansas became the first victim.

Originally pressed by the Confederate army from Missouri, they suddenly faced attacks from the rear by Native Americans, causing them to collapse instantly.

Harboring deep resentment like a sea of blood, the Native Americans launched the fiercest retaliation, massacring locals until blood flowed like rivers.

Its not just this particular battlefield; as the war progressed, both the North and South became blinded by killing. Some areas have devolved into killing for the sake of killing, with civilians becoming the biggest victims.

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Conflict zones like Ohio, Maryland, Kentucky, and Virginia have all turned into hell on earth.

The nature of the war has changed; fueled by propaganda from both governments, hatred has become one of the primary factors driving the conflict.

The various countries that were originally planning to intervene were all stunned by the Americans madness and chose to stand by and watch.

Dont misunderstand; its not that they were scared. The main reason was they wanted the Americans to continue massacring each other, mutually exhausting their strength, ideally both sides being crippled in the end.

For this reason, Britain and Austria were exploring how to engage the Confederacy in diplomacy, with rallying the Native Americans as one of their ploys.

In New York, President Lincoln couldnt even bring himself to look directly at the casualty reports submitted by the federal government.

With the involvement of the Native Americans, the state of Kansas fell, and nearly the entire federal army of seventy thousand troops was wiped out. Civilian casualties exceeded three hundred thousand, with the remaining population turned into war refugees fleeing westward.

What this meant was crystal clear to him. The scope of the war had once again expanded, with the flames reaching into the central region. The political and military pressure on the federal government had escalated further.

If the Union couldnt gain the upper hand soon, many states might consider withdrawing from the war for their own safety. In the face of life and death, interests do not matter anymore.

Even when painting a rosy picture, there had to be visible hope of fruition. Otherwise, even the capitalists supporting the federal government would waver in their stance.

At the very least, the capitalists in Kansas were left with nothing, with many sacrificing even their lives. The capitalists in the frontline states, similarly, emerged as losers in this reshuffling.

Whether the federal government could gain victory or not, they had already been eliminated.

If it werent for the inadequate diplomatic abilities of the Confederate government and the desires of Britain and Austria to see the war continue, intentionally leading them astray, at least several states would have already withdrawn from the war.

The carrot and the stick was the most appropriate strategy. If the Confederacy had not targeted the Union from the beginning but instead employed a political offensive state by state, adjacent states would likely have chosen neutrality by now.

Going up against the entire federal government, the Confederacy had no guarantee of victory. But dealing with one or a few federal states would have been effortless.

The more powerful capitalists, for the most part, would choose neutrality for their own interests. Especially after the tragedy in Kansas, everyone knows that the federal government is incapable of protecting them.

President Lincoln muttered to himself, Since the civil war began, our casualties have surpassed 3 million, right?

The Secretary of State outside the door replied, Not yet, but perhaps by next week. The total casualties of the federal governments army are 1.768 million, with 456,000 killed in action; civilian casualties are 1.182 million, with 382,000 deaths.

(Authors Note: Casualties are calculated by instances of injury, so theoretically one soldier could be counted as injured dozens of times)

Lincoln sighed and said, If we add the casualties of the rebels, for the sake of this war, our population loss may have already exceeded 1.5 million.

Clearly, he regretted starting this war. Its not just Lincoln; many Americans regret it. If everyone had known how brutal the war would be, they would have compromised before the war broke out.

Although the interests of capitalists and plantation owners cannot be reconciled, its different for capitalists and plantation owners in the warring states.

Class interests do not equal personal interests. For their own interests, the capitalists had no qualms about betraying their class.

Secretary of State Seward pondered for a moment and said, It depends on how you calculate it. If we consider the decrease in immigrants due to the civil war and those who left, then this loss may increase by another million.

No, its not accurate to say immigrants. In fact, our total immigration hasnt decreased much. Its just that white immigration has decreased, while Asian and Black immigration is steadily increasing.

The increase in black immigrants was also forced. Large numbers of able-bodied men had also joined the military, causing labor shortages across all industries.

Now, during wartime, immigrants from European countries simply arent coming. Consequently, everyone has no choice but to bring in labor from outside, leading to an inevitable increase in non-white immigrants.

Lincoln nodded and said, No wonder there are more and more black soldiers in the army. It seems that many people are using them to substitute for military service.

Not everyone is willing to go to the battlefield, especially the extremely wealthy capitalists who are even more averse to it. In this capitalist nation, the federal government naturally could not force the capitalists to serve.

Hiring people to serve in the military perfectly solves this problem; the federal government obtains troops, and the capitalists fulfill their military service obligations.

Secretary of State Seward said with a troubled expression, Mr. President, I don't think you need to worry about these trivial matters. Our major trouble is coming soon. How do you plan to handle next week's congressional inquiry?

From a strategic perspective, the federal government blocked the Confederate offensive, defended the core Great Lakes region, and also secured Washington, achieving a phase of victory.

Although Kansas is located in the center of the United States, geographically, it is surrounded by the Flint Hills to the east, the Smoky Hills and Red Hills to the west, and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains near the border with Colorado.

With the Confederacy controlling this area, they have no way to advance westward. Moreover, with Missouri in the east having already joined the Confederacy, there is no need to worry about that direction.

This tactical failure did not have a major impact on the overall situation. President Lincoln could still stay calm and consider future issues.

If it had been Pennsylvania that fell, he would not have been able to remain calm.

Lincoln nonchalantly said, At this point, what is there to be afraid of? Even if I was willing to immediately step down, there would need to be someone willing to take this mess.

Congress won't force us out before the war ends. And if the federal government loses the war, we'll still be needed to shoulder the blame for the division.

This was not giving up in despair, but rather his true understanding of American politics. The current situation is still very unfavorable for the federal government. The possibility of the country breaking apart is very high, and no one is willing to bear the blame for the division of the United States.

From the current circumstances, even if this war is won, dealing with the Confederacy afterward will similarly be a huge problem. No matter who sits in this position, the outcome will not be pleasant.

Chapter 340: The Thoughtless Younger Brother

Originally, Franz only used the pretext of colonial expansion to camouflage military preparations to intervene in the American Civil War. However, since the American Civil War did not require intervention, Austria's new round of colonial expansion happened first.

First, in Africa, despite the seemingly limited manpower of three infantry divisions, when invested in overseas colonization, they could easily sweep through numerous native tribes.

Opening up the map, one could see that from West Africa to the Congo region, the colonies had already been connected.

In the south, Austria's colonial influence has expanded along the rivers into Zambia; in the east, it has infiltrated into Uganda and Kenya.

In the Middle East, Austria used the Sinai Peninsula as a springboard, extending its tentacles deep into the Arabian Peninsula. They had already tricked multiple tribes into signing land purchase treaties, with Austrian colonial outposts appearing in the Persian Gulf.

All that's left is for the Suez Canal to open, and these areas will fall into Austria's hands.

In Central America, Austria mainly focused on infiltration rather than immediately waging wars of annihilation against nations. By settling the immigrants they had lured from the United States, no country could avoid Austrian control.

Take Nicaragua, for example, where the Germans constitute four-fifths of the white population, becoming the largest ethnic group in the area. With Austrian troops stationed there, the government had no choice but to be pro-Austrian.

The New Holy Roman Empire had even added a Lanfang Autonomous Province, and Franz did not mind adding a few more. Peaceful assimilation is also a good way of expansion.

Of course, this is only effective in sparsely populated areas like Central America. After all, the total white population there is only a few hundred thousand, spread across five or six countries.

Even if they are not incorporated into the imperial system, they can become pro-Austrian nations. For regions that are difficult to rule from the mainland, direct annexation may not always be beneficial, and a loose alliance is also acceptable.

As for Southeast Asia, Franz is not sure how many islands the Austrian colonial government occupies, but it's definitely in the thousands. Multiple island nations are under Austrian control, proving the extent of their influence.

Expansion in Southeast Asia had stopped for now, leaving it to Prussia and the German Federal Empire to perform next.

The German Federal Empire had been shamelessly galloping around and grabbing land in Malaysia, so it seemed George I had managed to placate the British government.

The Kingdom of Prussia, on the other hand, has chosen to confront the Indochinese Peninsula head-on, for a simple reason: the peninsula is fertile and offers ample expansion opportunities.

While Sumatra is also promising, it pales in comparison to the size of the Indochinese Peninsula, and much of it is already under Dutch control.

On the European continent, Prussia could bully the Dutch, but in Southeast Asia, this situation was reversed. Prussia's fledgling navy had no confidence at all.

Opening up the world map and carefully looking it over, Franz was surprised to find that this world was about to be completely divided up.

This was not a good thing, as it meant future conflicts between nations would frequently occur. Especially for emerging empires that would inevitably challenge the world order to seize living space.

However, Franz soon dismissed this idea. Under the current circumstances, it was too difficult for a new emerging empire to appear on the European continent.

With Russia, France, and Austria in a state of equilibrium, there's simply no room for a fourth pole to rise. Even second-tier power like Spain is mired in internal contradictions, and moreover, as an old empire, it still retains a substantial legacy from its past.

As for Prussia, they are even more constrained. Forced to turn to overseas colonization to resolve their industrial raw material and market needs, establishing the Second German Empire would require a miracle.

Another potential contender, the Kingdom of Sardinia, has unfortunately met an untimely demise. Forget about unifying the Italian region; they themselves had become nourishment for the French.

Schnnbrunn Palace

Franz was spending time with his children. To this day, he was already a father of three.

Although only seven years old, as the Crown Prince, Frederick had no opportunity to be lazy. Every day, there was endless homework and knowledge to learn.

Seeming to have been dealt a blow, the dejected Frederick walked up to Franz and asked, Father, why is it that only I have to study, while you and the others don't?

Franz patiently explained, It's simple. I've already completed these lessons and learned this knowledge, so I don't need to study anymore.

Your younger brothers are still too young. You see, William can't even speak clearly yet, so how can he study? When they grow up a bit more, they will study together with you.

Frederick complained, But my lessons are also too many. I've been outside and seen many other children only have three subjects.

That's right, in Austria, compulsory education includes only three subjects: German, Mathematics, and History. Other subjects are optional.

German and History come with some extras; German includes patriotic education, while History naturally follows the Greater Germany version, proving from the source that all ethnic groups in Austria are branches of the Germanic peoples.

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Whether ordinary people believe it or not, the nobility certainly does. Their ancestors mostly came from the region of Germany, and thus, they represent all the ethnic groups in Austria.

History cannot be verified, and the cultural circle is still endlessly debating. Franz did not intervene. In any case, after two generations of assimilation education, it would be impossible to undo it afterward.

If it was proven the textbooks were wrong, it didn't matter. Too much time would have passed, and materials being passed down could understandably have errors.

The government would then neither confirm nor deny it, letting historians in their field argue it out slowly. In any case, it would just become an academic issue.

They could discuss it behind closed doors since the masses wouldn't care about these things anyway. Without a unified answer being formed, the textbooks would not be revised.

Franz explained, That's just the basic education provided by the state. Those who have the means must study more subjects.

This world is cruel, Frederick. The amount of knowledge you acquire also determines your position in society.

As the heir to the empire, you were born standing at the very top of the world, so you must be the most outstanding and naturally have to learn more. This is the ability you must possess. I went through the same path.

Happy education? Being born into the royal family is innately at odds with happiness.

Cultivating interests and hobbies? Better not even dream about it. The Crown Prince's occupation is simply to be the emperor, with no need to consider employment at all.

This is the most enviable yet most difficult occupation.

As long as the emperor trained rigorously according to the process, perhaps it wouldn't produce geniuses, but it also wouldn't cultivate fools.

Franz did not need a genius heir, because geniuses tend to have eccentricities ill-suited for the emperor's role.

As the heir to the empire, it is enough as long as he can maintain the normal operation of the empire, has a basic level of knowledge, and cannot be easily deceived.

As for governing the nation, isn't there still the cabinet?

The margin for error in a great empire is very high. As long as the emperor doesn't mess around, even if the cabinet officials, who climbed the ranks step by step based on their achievements, are not very capable of governing the country, they won't provoke public outrage.

Besides, if the cabinet does not perform well, it can always be replaced. As emperor, one only needs to throw out the officials responsible when something goes wrong, letting them take the blame.

In summary, as long as the emperor does not rashly interfere, things will not go too badly. At the same time, putting some pressure on the officials and occasionally catching and executing a few corrupt ones as a warning would make for a good emperor.

Seeing Frederick's dejected look, Franz just smiled faintly without saying more.

A maid hurriedly ran over and said, Your Majesty, the Archduchess requests your presence.

Franz recognized this person. She was the most favored maid of Archduchess Sophie.

Elena, what's the matter? Why the rush?

Elena ran over in a hurry, a bit out of breath, and stuttered, Archduke Maximilian was preparing to go to Mexico to become emperor, but he faced strong opposition from the Archduchess. There was a fierce argument. You should go and see!

Franz instantly felt a headache coming on. He couldn't help but feel frustrated with his thoughtless younger brother.

Franz had already had someone pass the materials on Mexico to Maximilian, with the intention of making him back down from the idea. But now, it seemed he had still made the same choice as history.

Without further ado, as a responsible elder brother, Franz hurried to the scene.

From afar, he could already hear Archduchess Sophie's roaring voice. It seemed Maximilian had angered her greatly. As a member of the imperial family, Sophie still knew the basics of international affairs, and even with her amateur political vision, she could judge this to be a huge pitfall.

Upon seeing Franz enter, Archduchess Sophie ceased her tirade and softened her tone then said, Franz, enlighten your dear brother about the situation in Mexico. This fool actually wants to become emperor there.

Franz consoled her, Alright, Mother, leave this fool to me. You should calm down first.

Seeing Maximilian looking dejected, Franz knew he was feeling very aggrieved. Maximilian, who had always had things go his way, naturally developed a sense of arrogance. Just like now when he wanted to take on a hellish challenge.

Maximilian, who exactly is it that's sending you to Mexico to become emperor? Don't tell me you don't even have supporters, Franz asked.

Maximilian replied, It's the Mexican constitutionalists, and Napoleon III promised to support my ascension.

Clearly, Maximilian wasn't completely clueless. In theory, with the support of both France and Austria, plus the strength of the Mexican constitutionalists, securing the throne wouldn't be too difficult for him.

Franz sternly demanded, He who desires to wear the crown must bear its weight! Maximilian, what makes you think you can secure the Mexican throne? Present your governing policies to convince me, and prove your ability.

The House of Habsburg will not put an ignorant fool on the throne. Otherwise, one day if that fool ends up on the guillotine, we would lose face just by relation.

Stung by the provocation, Maximilian immediately replied, Just wait and see, I'll prove it to you!

Franz did not continue his taunts. The pit had already been dug. There has never been a perfect governing plan in this world. No matter what kind of plan Maximilian presented, Franz could pick out flaws in it.

If he could not even deceive an idealist, how could Franz have achieved the revitalization of Austria?