

Roman Empire 381

Chapter 381: Turning Point

On May 1, 1865, the Russian Navy launched a surprise attack in East Prussia, and Baltiysk quickly fell, marking a turning point in the Russo-Prussian War.

In Berlin, there was widespread lamentation within the Prussian government, prompting William I to urgently convene a military council.

The Minister of the Army and the Navy, Roon, analyzed, With the fall of Baltiysk, our strategy of keeping out our enemies from our borders has failed. To avoid being flanked from behind, we have no choice but to withdraw our troops to West Prussia.

Before the outbreak of war, to maintain stability in the colonies, we did not recall the fleet from the Far East. Now, our domestic fleet lacks the strength to confront the Russian Navy, so coastal defense must be strengthened.

This was just an excuse. Even if the entire Prussian Navy was concentrated, it would essentially be useless.

The Danish Navy could already rival them, not to mention the more powerful Russian Navy.

Just because the Russian Navy made a fool of itself, one should not ignore its strength.

From the start, Roon had not pinned any hopes on the navy. Facts proved that his assessment of Prussian naval strength was very accurate.

After the war broke out, the Prussian fleet skirmished a few times with the Danish Navy and then was blocked in the harbor. Its greatest contribution to the war was tying down the main Danish naval forces.

Even if the Far East fleet was recalled, at most it could contend with the Danish Navy. If there was a decisive battle, whether they could win was unknown.

The Kingdom of Prussia has developed its navy for too short a time. Whether it was shipbuilding technology, naval training, or officer commanding ability, it lagged behind the naval powers.

For now, they could use insufficient strength as an excuse for the domestic fleet to remain in port. But if the Far East fleet returned and they were forced into a decisive battle with the Danish Navy, it would be disastrous.

Even if they were to defeat the Danish Navy, they would absolutely be no match for the Russians. The total tonnage of the Tsars Baltic Fleet is 2.7 times theirs.

The navy was not the army. In the face of such a clear disparity in strength, hoping for a comeback was futile unless they resorted to ironclads against sailing ships. Otherwise, there was no chance.

The loss of Baltiysk was a mistake by the General Staff. They underestimated the Russians ability to attack fortifications and overestimated the defending forces combat capability.

The navy and the army are different. Just in terms of artillery, the two sides are not on the same level.

After the outbreak of the war, the Prussians placed great emphasis on the defense of Baltiysk and deployed three regiments of troops there.

According to the estimates of the General Staff, even if they were attacked by the Russian army, relying on the pre-built fortress fortifications, they could at least hold out for a week.

However, the empirical approach of the army staff led to fatal losses for the defenders. The fact that these fortresses could withstand artillery attacks from the land army did not mean they could resist attacks from naval artillery.

If it were regular Prussian troops, even if the fortress were damaged, with the strength of three regiments, they could still hold off the Russian army for 2-3 days.

Unfortunately, these were all newly recruited recruits, and after being hit by artillery fire, many soldiers morale was already shaken.

After engaging with the landing Russian troops, they quickly realized that the enemy was much stronger than the Russian army portrayed in propaganda. With casualties increasing continuously, the newly recruited units responsible for defense quickly collapsed.

William I said irritably, Regardless, you must quickly reverse the current unfavorable situation. Youve already experienced the consequences of abandoning East Prussia. If this continues, a revolution will erupt in the country.

Assign blame? Right now, William I still need the military to fight! Being able to gain the upper hand in combat against the Russian army and drive them out of Warsaw is enough to prove their capability.

If someone was replaced after one mistake, who could guarantee the replacements ability would definitely be stronger?

Anyway, if they eventually win the war, everything will be fine, and all problems can be resolved. However, if they lose the war, then the top military brass will be made scapegoats.

But if they were removed prematurely, wouldnt the blame fall on William himself in the end?

The Chief of the General Staff, Moltke, hesitated and said, At this point, our original strategic plan cannot be implemented. If we continue to delay, the Russians will use their naval advantage to continuously attack our coastal areas.

The Russian government is not short of soldiers; these conscripts are of little value, only needing a rifle and a few months of basic training before they can be deployed to the battlefield.

Once a large number of Russian troops land in Prussia, our homeland will inevitably suffer severe destruction. In such a scenario, we will be the first to collapse in this war.

Even strengthening coastal defenses would be futile. Currently, we simply cannot muster enough troops for defense. Everyone is aware of the combat capability of these newly formed units; they are essentially unreliable.

At this stage, we have no choice but to engage in a decisive battle with the Russians, as there is no room for other options.

A decisive battle this is exactly what the Berlin government had initially sought to avoid at all costs. What was a matter of life and death for them was just a regional conflict for the Russians.

The Russian government could afford to lose once, twice, three times... as long as they won once, they could crush Prussia into dust.

Given this situation, why bother with a decisive battle? Are they still hoping to win the war by simply killing Russian soldiers?

War is no game; there are 500,000 Russian troops on the front lines. While defeating them might be achievable, wiping them out entirely is just wishful thinking.

The most ideal outcome would be the victor sustaining 40,000-50,000 casualties, defeating the enemy's main force, and then annihilating a hundred thousand or so of them.

After all, with Prussia and the Polish rebels joining forces, the total forces on both sides are roughly equal. Even if they are confident, no one believes that the Polish insurgents possess the same combat power as the Prussian troops.

In a situation where their allies are not performing well, the strengths of both sides in combat are now brought to the same level. This decisive battle with the Russians not only tests strength but also the commanding abilities and luck of the officers from both sides.

How likely are we to win? inquired William I with concern.

After some thought, Moltke replied, Seventy percent!

This was just for this one decisive battle, not the Russo-Prussian War. Russia still had the ability to continue the war the only question was how much money they had.

The sudden turning point in the war immediately attracted the attention of the whole of Europe. Many people pessimistically believed that Prussian defeat was only a matter of time.

In St. Petersburg, the Russian government had already set up a victory banquet, as if they had won the war.

However, the situation on the battlefield was indeed tilting in favor of the Russian government.

The performance of the Russian navy in this battle was commendable; they quickly captured Baltiysk, proving to the outside world that they were not incompetent.

Chapter 382: Diverting Trouble Westward

The sudden seizure of Baltiysk by the Russian navy shocked the entire European world, and many people believed that the Kingdom of Prussia was doomed.

Just by looking at the map, it becomes evident that the coastline of the Kingdom of Prussia lies within the Baltic Sea, which falls within the sphere of influence of the Russian navy.

Since the outbreak of the war, the Danish navy has blocked Prussian maritime transportation channels, forcing strategic supplies donated by Britain and France to be transported by land.

Initially, the Russian government overlooked the role of the navy and did not attack the Prussian coastal areas, focusing solely on land-based combat, leaving the Kingdom of Prussia with some strength to fight.

However, the situation has changed now. With the frontlines on land remaining stagnant, the Russians shifted their focus to the sea, leveraging their naval advantage to deal a blow to the Kingdom of Prussia.

This poses an unsolvable problem, as the Russians can initiate amphibious operations at any point, while Prussia is unable to defend completely.

At the Vienna Palace, Foreign Minister Wessenberg remarked, Yesterday afternoon, the Russian envoy presented us with a new loan application. They are prepared to use the Saxon lands held by Prussia as collateral for a loan of 30 million guilders.

Using enemy territory as collateral for a loan is something only the Russian government could do. No, perhaps its not collateral; its more likely an outright sale.

Given the financial situation of the Russian government, the likelihood of repayment on time is very slim, and the probability of selling off the collateral to repay the debt is very high.

The premise is that the Russians win this battle and tear off this piece of flesh from the Kingdom of Prussia.

Franz inquired with concern, What is the opinion of the Saxon government? Do they have any interest in buying back this land?

The Prussian-held Saxon territories were ceded to Prussia at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Now, the Kingdom of Saxony is a part of the new Holy Roman Empire, and if this territory were to return, it would naturally be returned to the Kingdom of Saxony.

The Prussian-held Saxon territories made up 40% of the territory of the Kingdom of Saxony, and the Kingdom of Saxony has always wanted to reclaim it. When they joined the new Holy Roman Empire, Prime Minister Felix made such a promise.

Now that the opportunity has arisen, can the Saxon government resist?

Franz had grave doubts.

If the Saxon government cannot resist, then the Austrian government cannot stop them on this issue, as Franz also has to consider public opinion.

The price of 30 million guilders is not unbearable for the economically developed Kingdom of Saxony. As long as they are willing to find a way, they can raise it.

Prime Minister Felix responded, The Saxon government should be inclined to invest in purchasing the Prussian-held Saxon territories. Prime Minister Freyser will arrive in Vienna this afternoon.

Franz pondered for a moment and said, Lets appease them first. Currently, these territories are still in Prussian hands, so the promises of the Russians cannot be relied upon. We must have other collateral to reduce the risk of the loan.

We can promise the Saxon government that approval of this Russo-Austrian loan is contingent upon the Russians agreeing to sell the Prussian-held territories of Saxony, and the price must be agreed upon in advance.

This matter was very troublesome. One could say the Russians chose an opportune timing.

Now, most people believe that the Russians will win the war, and at this time, using the Prussian-held territories of Saxony as bait makes it hard for the Austrian government to refuse.

The collateral loan is a pretext the true aim of the Russian government is to raise funds to continue the war.

Once the news spread, the people of Saxony would demand to buy back this land, and the Saxon government would not be able to refuse, nor could Austria afford not to cooperate.

Franz did not wish to take the blame. If Russia had already won the war, he would pay not just 30 million guilders, but 50 million if needed.

But now it was an unknown. If the Russian government was defeated or failed to obtain these lands from Prussia, then this loan could end up in the water.

Moreover, a loan with collateral and an outright sale were two different concepts. Now the Tsar is in desperate need of money, so he naturally dares not make excessive demands, for fear of scaring away potential lenders. But the situation may change in the future.

By then, priorities may shift, and taking advantage of the public's eagerness to regain control of the Prussian-held territories of Saxony, won't they sell it for an exorbitant price?

Foreign Minister Wessenberg said with deep concern, Your Majesty, since the Russians have put forward the Prussian-held territories of Saxony, I am afraid they may also promise the Rhineland to the French in exchange for a loan.

Franz's expression changed abruptly. It wasn't just possible, it was highly likely.

Strapped for cash, what would the Russian government not do?

Moreover, this was sacrificing others' interests. Once the French are tempted, will the French government continue to support the Kingdom of Prussia wholeheartedly?

The Prussian government could not promise the same conditions. Not everyone was the same as Bismarck, daring to issue a blank check to the French.

In diplomacy, one cannot make reckless promises. If it weren't for Bismarck's strong leadership and good luck in the original timeline, the Rhineland would have fallen into French hands long ago.

As part of Germany, the Rhineland has long been seen as Austria's prized possession. How could it easily be handed over to the French?

It must be disrupted! The potential Franco-Russian deal must be disrupted!

This was Franz's first reaction, after which he got a headache thinking about how to disrupt the possible deal.

Leak the information to the British. Although the Rhineland has seen slower development in recent years, its rich resources and industrial infrastructure are still intact. Once it falls into French hands, it will quickly trigger a qualitative change. France is already formidable. If it grows stronger, the British government will not be able to sleep at night.

This was diverting trouble westward. The Russo-Austrian alliance is still in place, and there are many things that the Austrian government is not in a position to do against the Russians.

Prime Minister Felix proposed, Your Majesty, should we give them a little push and let the Russians lose this war altogether?

Making the Russians lose the war is quite simple. All it takes is for Austria to suddenly impose an embargo on supplies. Currently, most of the strategic supplies for the Russian frontline troops are produced by Austria.

Even if the Russian government wanted to buy elsewhere, there was no time. Moreover, they could not find sellers.

In Europe, only the three countries, Britain, France, and Austria, have this production capacity. If its possible to pull the Russians down from their dominant position, how could Britain and France possibly refuse?

A Franco-Russian compromise was only possible on the premise that Russia was poised to win. Napoleon III would not help Russia win the war and consolidate their enemys dominance.

This is also why various countries dread the Austro-Russian alliance. The two countries have complemented each other in resources, and the power they could unleash together is formidable.

Franz shook his head and said, No, we cant act at this time. The Prussians still have the strength to fight. As long as Britain and France are a bit more generous and allow the Prussians to arm all their able-bodied men, the Russians may not necessarily achieve victory.

Havent you noticed that Alexander IIs reforms have been suspended? After the war ends, does the Russian government still have the capacity to continue reforms?

To sustain this war, Alexander II had to compromise with the conservatives within the country to ensure domestic stability.

This compromise meant future reforms would be difficult. At least when facing similar issues, the difficulty of reform would increase significantly.

From a long-term perspective, the Russo-Prussian War has already achieved its strategic objectives. An imperfectly reformed Russian Empire is what Austria needs.

Now that the strategic objectives have been achieved, there is naturally no need to continue targeting the Russians. While the Russo-Austrian alliance has not yet come to an end, it is best to let others handle provoking resentment.

Plans can never keep up with rapid changes. While negotiating with Austria, the Russian government also initiated negotiations with the French.

At the Palace of Versailles, Napoleon III hesitated over the olive branch extended by the Russian government.

There can only be one hegemon in Europe, and Russia is Frances biggest competitor in this regard.

Lending money to the Russian government now undoubtedly aids their enemy.

From Napoleon IIIs perspective, the biggest challenge in obtaining the Rhineland does not lie in military matters but in politics.

Annexing the Kingdom of Sardinia was enough to prompt a united defensive circle by European countries against them. If military force is used to annex the Rhineland, it will inevitably provoke intervention from other countries.

At this point, France needs allies. Unlike the loan secured by using the Prussian-held territories of Saxony as collateral, the promise made by the Russian government was to support France in annexing the Rhineland.

This is a geopolitical decision. No matter how powerful the Russian Tsar is, he cannot leap across the German Federal Empire to occupy the Rhineland, so discussing collateral is out of the question.

With the support of the Russian government, France will not be politically isolated. By exchanging interests with other countries, the chances of successfully annexing the Rhineland are very high.

Foreign Minister Abraham proposed, Your Majesty, whether or not we should lend money to the Russian government, I believe the key is to consider the ultimate outcome of this war.

Currently, the Russians have a very high chance of winning, and I can't see how the Prussians can turn the tables. Even without our loan, the Russian government can still raise funds from elsewhere.

In that case, why not simply divide the Kingdom of Prussia with the Russians and maximize our interests?

Finance Minister Eren objected, No, the Russians have very poor credibility, and with their financial capability, they are simply unable to repay this loan.

Our money doesn't come from thin air; we can't just waste it like this. Dividing the Kingdom of Prussia without providing a loan to the Russians can still be achieved.

Once the Kingdom of Prussia is defeated, we can use the excuse of demanding debt repayment to temporarily administer the Rhineland, creating a *fait accompli*.

Then, through gradual public relations efforts and negotiations with various countries, we can make them recognize our occupation of the Rhineland.

The support of the Russians is irrelevant. With or without their support, we will still have to negotiate with other countries. Even if the Russian government opposes, they have no power to intervene. Isn't this a waste of money?

Foreign Minister Abraham countered, Count Eren, this is not a waste of money. With Russian support, obtaining tacit consent from various countries will be much easier.

If we don't have Russian support, when the time comes, all European countries will oppose us. Even if we swallow the Rhineland, we'll end up spitting it out in the end.

The support of various European countries may not be important, but support from great powers is essential.

Among the five major European powers, except for Spain, which is in internal turmoil and can be ignored, at least the support of one of the remaining powers must be obtained.

History has already taught the French that going at it alone is not viable, and recklessness is even less so.

Chapter 383: Alexander II

Soon, Franz witnessed the prowess of Alexander II. The news of the secret negotiations between Russia and Austria, unsurprisingly leaked out, albeit with some changes to the content.

These slight alterations directly led Franz to grit his teeth and approve the loan, with the amount negotiated up to 50 million guilders from the initial 30 million, and it was interest-free.

Of course, the Russians also presented new collateral the tariff revenue from Ukraine, avoiding a situation of total loss.

If, after the war, the Russian government obtained Prussian Saxon territories, then this debt would be written off, with the Russian government using these lands to pay off the debt.

There was no way around it. The Russians boasting was too effective. The Russian envoy, with a big mouth, spread propaganda everywhere, praising the efforts of the Austrian government to reclaim Prussian-held Saxon lands.

He even blatantly claimed that Franz had communicated with Alexander II via telegraph multiple times and that preliminary agreements had been reached, stating that after the war, the Russian government would sell Silesia and Prussian-held Saxon territories to the new Holy Roman Empire.

Without a doubt, this definitely obtained the tacit approval of Alexander II. The Russian envoy waved the banner of Russo-Austrian friendship, emphasizing Franz's contributions multiple times, which in the eyes of the common people appeared to be efforts towards the unification of the empire.

After all, the Paris Conference had divided the German territories, making reunification extremely difficult. Now, only indirect measures could be taken to slowly promote national unity.

Reclaiming territory was always a good thing, which delighted nationalists, who then began to sing praises.

With domestic opinion mobilized, Franz found himself over a fire, unable to back down without losing prestige, leaving him no choice but to swallow this bitter pill.

Now he understood that the Russian government's promise to give Silesia to Austria was merely bait.

If Austria recovered Silesia after the war but watched Russia annex the Prussian Saxon lands, what would be the consequence?

Franz was not only the Emperor of Austria but also the emperor of the Saxon people. If this situation was not properly handled, the loyalty of his subjects would dissipate.

Not only will the Saxon people be dissatisfied, but other states will also harbor discontent towards the central government. At that time, the newly unified Holy Roman Empire, which was painstakingly brought together, will once again fall into a state of disunity.

Franz cannot risk betting on the Russians losing the war; he must accept this loss.

After all, this Russo-Prussian War is entirely the result of his butterfly effect, and now that the Russians have the upper hand and possess substantial strength, under normal circumstances, they are most likely to win the war.

If it was just a matter of money, this transaction met the needs of both sides. The Russian government did not overcharge, even pricing it a bit low.

However, the Prussian-held territories of Saxony have not yet fallen into Russian hands, so the price seems reasonable.

However, Franz was well aware that the Austrian government had already guaranteed substantial strategic supplies for the Russians from the domestic front, all in exchange for Silesia. Now, with another loan of 50 million guilders, the Austrian government's best option to avoid total loss was to support the Russian government in winning this war.

Otherwise, these debts may take an eternity to recover.

Out of respect for their alliance, the Russian government probably won't directly default. However, they simply don't have the money to repay. Can the Austrian government forcibly collect the debt?

If the Russians are defeated, not only will the current debts become problematic, but also the old debts, which could all end up as bad debts. At least until the Russian government's finances improve, they won't be able to repay.

Not only was Austria economically held hostage, but Prussian-Austrian relations were completely shattered. Now, the Austrian government was blatantly supporting the Tsar, naturally putting itself at odds with Prussia.

Incidentally, it also fragmented the Anglo-Austrian alliance, placing the two countries at odds once again.

Since the establishment of the first Vienna System, Britain and Austria have been secret allies in maintaining the balance of power in Europe, lacking only a formal treaty of alliance.

After the outbreak of the Near East War, relations between the two countries dropped to the freezing point. However, due to shared interests, their relationship quickly warmed again, and both countries jointly promoted the establishment of the second Vienna System.

Provoking the Prussian-Austrian relationship and the Anglo-Austrian relationship is just the beginning; the Austrian-French relationship and the Anglo-French relationship are also part of Russian schemes.

Once the French take the bait offered by the Russians, the Anglo-French relationship will also rupture, and the Austrian-French relationship will be directly ruined. In any case, Franz cannot simply watch the French swallow up the Rhineland.

Even if he could endure it, domestic nationalists would push Austria onto the battlefield.

Franz wasn't afraid of war with the French. The alliance for mutual defense against the French was still intact, and if necessary, organizing an anti-French coalition had always been an option, an area where the Austrian government had experience.

The problem was that from the Metternich era onward, the situation of Austria having allies across Europe would change, leaving it diplomatically constrained.

Indeed, both France and Austria were in a quasi-alliance relationship now. Otherwise, Franz wouldn't have remained indifferent to Napoleon III's annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

A verbal commitment counts for little. Ultimately, it comes down to interests. Since the time of the Orleans Monarchy, France and Austria have maintained a quasi-alliance relationship, one where they can form an alliance at any time if needed.

There was a brief interruption during the period of the French Revolution. But with the emergence of the Franco-Austrian secret treaty, based on shared interests, relations between the two sides warmed again.

Especially after the French annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the relationship between the two countries reached new heights.

The pro-English faction in the French government was strong, but the pro-Austrian faction also wielded considerable strength. Politicians switched stances based on practical needs, so it was unsurprising to be both pro-English and pro-Austrian simultaneously.

Napoleon III was no dim bulb. As a skilled political strategist, how could he not prioritize a balance of power?

A pro-British faction dominating completely does not serve the interests of this emperor. If someday he finds himself in conflict with the British, and all his subordinates are pro-British, who will he send to the front lines?

Although Napoleon III appears as a pro-British figure, in reality, most of the people he promotes are not pro-British; instead, they are mostly anti-British individuals.

This dynamic applies similarly in Austria. Under the Russo-Austrian alliance, the anti-Russian faction has always remained powerful within the Austrian government.

Many politicians don't genuinely oppose Russia. Rather, they politically need to oppose it. This is about taking sides, or rather, political opportunism.

Having unraveled the schemes of the Russians, Franz could only sigh. Figures who left a glorious legacy in history couldn't possibly be ordinary!

Since ascending to the throne, Alexander II had been focusing on domestic matters, exhibiting mediocrity in diplomacy.

Such performance aligned with everyone's perception of the Russian government. After all, past Tsars were generally more brawn than brains.

Over time, Franz relaxed his vigilance against him. Diplomacy also required talent, which had always been a weak point of the Tsars, and no one in later generations claimed that Alexander II possessed strong diplomatic skills.

By not acting, this storm would not have erupted. But now, with just a single move, the effect was earth-shattering with Britain, France, Austria, and Prussia all factored into Russia's calculations, along with a host of smaller European nations dragged in.

If the plan proceeded smoothly, the ultimate result would be the rupture of Austro-Prussian relations, the rupture of Franco-Prussian relations, the rupture of Austro-French relations, the rupture of Anglo-Austrian relations, the rupture of Anglo-French relations...

Shattering the diplomatic ties between all the nations, the opportunity for the isolated Russian Empire would arise.

The Russian government's ambitions had never been small. How could they defeat the Kingdom of Prussia without biting off a chunk of flesh first?

Against this backdrop, dividing the European nations became important. This gambit, starting with France and Austria, was to sever the potential for intervention in the Russo-Prussian War.

Apart from the deep-seated conflict between Britain and Russia, which concerned core interests and left no room for compromise, the alliance between Russia and Austria and the relationship between France and Russia were not irreconcilable.

As long as these two countries were pacified, the European continent would no longer be able to organize intervention with a coalition.

The British strength was indeed formidable, but unfortunately, it was mostly concentrated in the navy. With the pitiful strength of the British army, there was no country foolish enough to form a coalition with them and go to war against the Russians.

This determined that on continental issues, John Bull had to have an ally, otherwise they could hardly wield influence matching their national power.

After the Near East War, the British made efforts to minimize interference in European conflicts, which also played a role in this regard.

In this context, even though the English, French, and Austrian civil organizations often clashed overseas in colonial disputes, Anglo-Austrian relations and Anglo-French relations could still be maintained.

Despite this setback, Franz did not become angry, nor did he immediately retaliate. After so many years as emperor, his temperament had long been tempered.

Chapter 384: Prussia's Counterattack

Europe was in turmoil, and the first to become restless was not Austria or John Bull, but rather the Prussian government caught in the whirlpool.

There was no way around it. No matter how many people the Russians had schemed against, once their plan succeeded, they would definitely be the ones most affected.

No matter what, we must disrupt the Russians borrowing plan, William I said gravely.

He did not want to be ousted just yet. The Kingdom of Prussia has already staked its national destiny, and the people cannot tolerate failure.

Once the Russians obtain loans from France and Austria, this war will truly be unwinnable. Even if victory is achieved in the impending decisive battle, the Kingdom of Prussia will still be unable to change its inevitable defeat.

The Russian government lacked not soldiers, but money! No matter how devastating the losses, it was nothing to Russia.

This was a matter of historical record. Centuries ago, Russia waged wars year after year until eventually, they ran out of male soldiers, yet they went on to organize female soldiers to continue fighting.

Times have changed, and now the Russian Empire has a truly large population, numbering as much as eighty to ninety million. William I did not believe they could be bled to the point of the Russian government being unable to bear it.

Foreign Minister Mackeith suggested, Your Majesty, I suggest adopting different measures against France and Austria to obstruct their issuance of loans to the Russians.

To deal with the French, we can start with the joint defense plan. Utilize the fear of various European countries towards the French and apply diplomatic pressure.

Austria's ambition to unify Germany has never been extinguished. If the French aim to seize the Rhineland, they are automatically placed in opposition.

The British are also very apprehensive of the French. If the French attempt to annex the Rhineland, the British government is likely to intervene.

What we need to do is make Napoleon III believe that if they annex the Rhineland, they will face joint resistance from Britain and Austria.

Austria and Britain will cooperate with us in this diplomatic performance. They just need a strongly worded diplomatic statement, and the French will hesitate.

To deal with the Austrians, I suggest using nationalists to create public pressure by accusing the Austrian government of colluding with foreign enemies and betraying the interests of the German people.

Originally, this loan was the result of Russian schemes, and the Austrian government agreed under public pressure. Now, we will similarly utilize nationalism to give the anti-Russian faction an excuse to sabotage this loan.

The stances of politicians have always shifted as needed. Initially, for the sake of expansion, the Kingdom of Prussia embraced German nationalism, advocating for the unification of the German territories to establish a grand empire.

With the resurgence of Austria, they realized that the unification of the German territories was no longer feasible and, in fact, there was a significant possibility of becoming the target of unification. To safeguard their interests, they once again embraced Prussian separatism.

Now, to sabotage the Russian loan from Austria, Mackey did not hesitate to resurrect German nationalism, intending to utilize its influence to affect the decisions of the Austrian government.

Prime Minister Christian pondered for a moment before saying, These plans can only delay the inevitable. Unless we achieve a major victory on the battlefield to dispel the notion that the Russians are destined to win, their schemes will ultimately succeed. In the face of interests, all contradictions are insignificant.

There is no room for compromise between France and Austria. All it takes is one pretext, and the three parties can partition Prussia.

Nationalism may influence the decisions of the Austrian government to some extent, but it cannot dictate their actions. Their opposition to the French occupation of the Rhineland is not solely driven by nationalism. It is more about preventing French expansion and avoiding losses in the proposed division of spoils.

This was the crux of the issue. The unification of Germany was merely Franz's political slogan. It was called upon when needed and set aside when not.

This was different from when Austria annexed Southern Germany previously. Now Austria's ethnic issues were no longer as severe, with integration efforts progressing steadily. Unifying Northern Germany was no longer the only choice.

Ultimately, the core issue goes back to the battlefield. If they lose this war, the Kingdom of Prussia will naturally meet its end, unable to escape the fate of being partitioned.

What they were actually considering now were the issues after winning the war. The Russians were formidable if they lost one battle, the Russian government could organize another.

The only thing that can restrain the Russian government is its finances. They are currently considering how to cut off the Russian governments sources of funding.

After hesitating for a moment, William I made up his mind and said, Foreign Ministry, move forward bravely! Weve already come this far, it couldnt possibly get any worse.

If necessary, we can issue blank checks to both France and Austria. If the Russians can promise, so can we.

As long as we can get more from the Russian Empire, then selling these lands to them is not out of the question!

This is William I comforting himself. Even if they win the war, how much they can gain from the Russians remains uncertain.

Regarding the promises to France and Austria, since they are blank checks, he has no intention of honoring them.

Unless absolutely necessary, William I would not trade away the well-governed Prussian lands for Russian lands.

Looking at the map, it was clear that the areas bordering Prussia and Russia were largely Russian territories. While the geographical conditions are favorable and resources are abundant, the issue lies in governance!

There are many Poles in the Kingdom of Prussia. Once they annexed Russian Poland, Prussia would transition from a German nation to a Polish one.

If not for the Vienna Congress of 1815, where Prussia relinquished Warsaw in exchange for the Rhineland and parts of Saxony, the Germanization movement wouldnt have easily succeeded.

Its worth noting that after the partition of Poland by Prussia, Russia, and Austria, out of the 10 million Polish people, 4.5 million ended up in Prussia, 1.5 million in Austria, and 4 million remained in the Russian Empire.

It can be said that the first Vienna System saved the Kingdom of Prussia, freeing them from the awkward situation of being dominated by Poles.

Continuing to involve themselves in Poland is clearly not the best choice. Unfortunately, William I doesnt have the luxury of choice. The Junker nobility could not tolerate Prussia becoming a second-rate country.

Of course, the Kingdom of Prussia has experience in assimilating Polish people. William I was not prepared to annex the core Polish territories. Their goal was to capture Lithuania, and if possible, also capture the Baltic States.

Given the ambitious nature of their objectives, whether they can achieve them remains uncertain. But goals must still exist, how else will they know the outcome without attempting?

This is also part of the strategic plan of the British: Polish independence, Prussian occupation of most of the Baltic Sea, and weakening the power of the Russians.

Political actions require military cooperation. While the Prussian government was taking diplomatic actions, the Prussian army also began its counterattack.

Moltke abandoned his previous strategy of staying still to bleed the Russian government, instead taking the offensive to seek opportunities for a decisive battle with the Russians.

This change caught the Russians off guard. Unprepared, the Russian troops suffered heavy losses upon entering East Prussia, losing 30,000 soldiers in just one week.

In terms of the overall situation, with both sides having a total manpower of over a million, the loss of 30,000 troops might seem insignificant, but it had a significant impact.

The power of the breech-loading rifles in the field battles was astonishing, with the exchange ratio between the two sides reaching an astounding 1:2.7.

This was not a siege. Such a disparate exchange ratio in a field battle undoubtedly indicated that the combat capabilities of the two armies were not on the same level.

Chapter 385: Stimulus of Interests

Outside the city of Venice, a few kilometers away in an ancient castle, Viscount Orabi was hosting a lavish welcome banquet, the guest of honor being the recently returned Baron Falkner.

This wasn't Baron Falkner's first visit here, but unlike the previous one, the scale of the welcome banquet was much grander.

It was evident that Viscount Orabi was very enthusiastic this time, unlike the last time, which was merely a perfunctory reception.

As the saying goes, When you're poor, no one cares about you even in a busy city; when you're rich, you have distant relatives even in remote mountains.

Baron Falkner deeply felt the truth of this saying. Ten years ago, when he went into debt to develop colonies, he was often mocked. But now, those former mockeries had turned into praises.

Even though he was far away on the African continent, this was no obstacle for the well-informed nobles.

Times had changed. Ten years ago, the African continent was seen by everyone as a place infested by venomous insects and ferocious beasts, ravaged by disease and plague. Now, the African continent has become a land of hope.

Successful individuals are exempt from criticism. As a success story, Falkner was enjoying the treatment accorded to one, satisfying his vanity.

There were many Austrian nobles involved in the development of Africa, but once they spread across the vast African continent, they became few and far between.

Moreover, everyone was busy getting rich. How many of them would have had the leisure to hold banquets every day?

Baron Falkner's attendance at the banquet was not without purpose. To promote the integration of the colonies, the support of local nobles was indispensable.

Currently, aside from those involved in Africa's development, local capitalists are also a significant force supporting colonial integration. However, this is still far from sufficient.

Austria was not like England or France capitalists had very little political say. Even nobles like Baron Falkner developing in Africa had greater political influence than capitalists.

The main force behind promoting colonial integration this time would be these nobles.

It might be an exaggeration to say that by connecting with five individuals, one can establish connections with everyone in the world. However, it is not difficult to connect with all the nobles in Austria through five nobles.

Baron Falkner said with a smile, Orabi, its been ten years since we last met. I didnt expect Harrington, Gardner, and Dewington to have all grown big now. You can tell they will all become excellent soldiers.

Viscount Orabi responded naturally, Yes, I am proud of all of them.

Joining the military was an Austrian noble tradition. Noble children received strict military training from a young age, and becoming excellent soldiers was the pursuit of many of them.

Modesty was not considered a virtue in Europe. It only makes people perceive it as a display of hypocrisy.

Since Viscount Orabi believed his sons would become outstanding soldiers, he would openly admit to it. It was his true inner thoughts.

Baron Falkner inquired with concern, Are you planning to send them to serve in the army or the navy?

In recent years, the status of the Austrian navy has been significantly elevated, almost on par with the army.

Many noble children who initially chose to join the navy seized the opportunity of its expansion, rising swiftly and making remarkable progress.

Now, for noble children entering service, there was an additional option the navy.

Orabi proudly said, Harrington and Dewington are joining the army, while Gardner is going to the navy. They have all been accepted into military academies.

Harrington studied at the Vienna Artillery Command Academy and has already graduated. Hell be enlisting in the army in a little over a week. Gardner and Dewington have come back this time to see him off.

Dewington is in his third year at the Munich Infantry Command Academy, while Gardner is studying at the Austrian Naval Academy right here at home, just starting his first year.

Falkner, youve come back just in time. If you had come any later, you wouldnt have been able to see them.

This is a typical case of hedging bets on both sides. With the continuous expansion of overseas colonies, the aristocrats who were well-informed recognized the importance of the navy.

In the face of uncertainty over the nations future strategic focus, many nobles were hedging their bets on both fronts. Since there is little conflict between Austrias army and navy, there is no harm in doing so.

Having all three sons admitted to military academies did give Orabi reason to be proud.

Although aristocrats have a naturally higher starting point, Austrian military academies are not easy to enter either. There are a total of nine national military academies for both army and navy, with an annual admission of just over 3,500, while the number of applicants has never been less than one hundred thousand.

This is the impact of compulsory education. With the increase in basic education, students with good grades who are admitted to secondary schools can apply for student loans to continue their studies, leading to a sharp increase in the number of secondary school students.

Admissions for Austrias military academies and universities were separate processes. Applicants could apply to both, as there was a three-month gap between them which would not affect the outcomes of admissions.

Undoubtedly, this is an era where thousands of soldiers are crossing a narrow bridge. Whether its the university or military academy, students apply first and then decide.

Commoner students who manage to emerge from this competition are not much inferior to academic elites, at least in terms of cultural subjects.

Even though they are limited by resources and their education cannot compare to that of aristocrats, but there are always geniuses and lucky ones who stand out.

If it were just competition among commoner students, it wouldnt be much of an issue. The problem is that competition among aristocratic children is also intense. In this era, only-child families were not popular in Austria; most households had at least three to five children.

There are also numerous children from branches of noble families. Although they dont inherit titles, it doesnt mean their childrens education is lacking.

Nowadays, Austrias middle class is largely composed of these people. Doctors, teachers, lawyers, small businessmen, most of them have noble ancestry.

True commoners who can rise to prominence are very few. Without a solid knowledge base and social connections, those lucky enough to grow despite this are truly children of destiny.

Currently, in Austrian universities, the proportion of noble students is only 31.1%, while students from ordinary families are a mere 1.2%. The rest belong to this middle-class group.

In military academies, aristocratic children still dominate, accounting for about 64.8% of the total student population, while the middle class comprises 34.3%. Students from ordinary families are negligible, even fewer than international students.

Unfortunately, this is the result of fair competition. Reality is just that cruel; starting from public compulsory education, they are already at a disadvantage from the very beginning.

In primary school, students from ordinary families are the majority, but by the time they reach secondary school, they become the minority. On the surface, the probability of Austrian primary school students transitioning to secondary school is about 8%.

However, once compulsory education ended, children of the wealthy progressed to higher education almost 100% of the time, skewing the percentage upwards.

Unless they were top students, children from common backgrounds basically had no opportunity. They had to place in the top 1 percentile in entrance exams to qualify for scholarships.

This is originally intended for geniuses. In an era of limited educational resources, Austria adopted an elitist education system.

This is most evident in military academies, where students who undergo rigorous military training from a young age naturally have an advantage. However, this requires significant investment, which ordinary families cannot afford.

No matter how high the cultural scores of ordinary students are, when all the scores from various professional exams are added together, they still face the fate of elimination. It can be said that the more subjects they are examined, the fewer opportunities ordinary students have.

Unfortunately, improving the quality of public education and increasing the number of these specialized courses seems to be an unattainable ideal.

Adding a new course means increasing education expenditure. Implementing compulsory education standards based on those of children of nobles would bankrupt the Austrian government ten times over.

Unless there was greater societal demand for commoner talent, university expansion was impossible. Higher education in this era was just too costly.

Currently, even aristocratic children who can afford university education or military academy education do not exceed 35%.

Of course, there are no restrictions on attending second-tier technical colleges or mediocre universities as anyone with money can enroll.

Baron Falkner said calmly, Is that so? It seems I truly am fortunate!

Viscount Orabi replied confidently, Of course!

Baron Falkner took a small sip of wine and continued, In which unit will Harrington be assigned, and is he planning to develop in the African continent? The opportunities to distinguish himself there are much greater.

This was Baron Falkner laying out the groundwork. There was no other choice. To gain the support of local nobles for colonial integration, it was natural to speak in terms of interests.

Most nobles faced a common problem: they had many descendants, but only one title. If the eldest son inherited the title, then what about the younger sons?

According to the customs of Germany, those with wealth could allocate a portion of their estates to them. For those without wealth, either they were left to make their own way in the world or they were sent to the church to become priests.

After the religious reforms, the church's profits weren't as plentiful. Churches in economically prosperous areas fared better. Some had lucrative businesses, but if luck was not on their side and they were assigned to impoverished areas, they could only make do with meager resources.

Going out to seek one's fortune was only suitable for the destitute nobility. Most relied on family connections to secure them respectable positions. This was how nobles from lateral branches or those who bought their way into the middle class came about.

Opportunities are scarce and competition is fierce in the homeland, but it's a different story in the colonies. If one has a substantial fortune, one can invest resources to secure a title.

If they gained the cooperation of the local powers, then this difficulty could be further reduced. After all, for the colonies, war was something that occurred every few years.

Apart from gaining military accolades, one can also pursue a career in colonial government. Once colonial integration is achieved, these positions will rise in importance.

Alternatively, engaging in business or establishing plantations in the colonies are viable paths, and the chances of success are quite high.

Orabi was enticed. In receiving Baron Falkner at such a grand scale, apart from their relationship as cousins, he was also prepared to invest resources to acquire noble titles for his sons.

Do not just look at his sons entering military academies, with seemingly bright futures ahead. In reality, Orabi understood that in peacetime, very few could truly rise to prominence.

Not to mention the descendants of viscounts, even those entering the military with the title of duke might not necessarily rise to the rank of general upon retirement.

Without military accomplishments, everyone could only accumulate seniority.

After all, they all received military education from a young age, and no ones abilities were too lacking. With no way to prove outstanding capabilities, on what grounds would they promote you first?

The military is a place where strength matters the most, and the best way to assert oneself is through military achievements. Unfortunately, the wars of this era at most involved bullying natives in the colonies opportunities were few and far between.

Orabi pondered for a moment and said, Its not confirmed yet. Right now, hes just a recruit who hasnt been assigned to a unit, and it will be at least another six months before that happens. If he ends up in the African colonies, then Ill have to trouble you, his uncle, to look after him.

Without a doubt, Olabi hasnt made up his mind yet.

As an old-line aristocrat, he still has quite a few connections in the military, and its not difficult to use these relationships to decide which unit his son will serve in.

However, pushing for the integration of the colonies is not that simple. Like many others, Orabi is also worried that the integration of the colonies will impact his own estates.

After all, the colonies had little else besides abundant land. Once so much land was developed, agricultural products would likely be driven down to dirt-cheap prices.

Not receiving a definitive reply, Baron Falkner still responded with grace, Of course, I am his uncle after all!

Inwardly, he could only lament not catching an opportune timing. If only Orabis sons were a bit older, that would be better.

It would be best if they had just retired from the military and were worried about their futures. Then without him having to say anything, these fellows would help persuade their father.

At this banquet, Falkner had already successively persuaded three nobles to support colonial integration. Basically, all of them only supported it for the sake of the next generation.

The concern about the colonial impact on local agriculture was only shared by nobles with abundant land. If they had no land left, why worry about such matters?

After the land redemption, the amount of land in the hands of Austrian nobles had actually diminished significantly. By now, the land held by nobles had decreased to less than 20% of the total national land area.

Since the overseas colonies were opened up, many prominent nobles including the royal family had been gradually selling off their land holdings.

This was determined by interests. With the funds from selling land, opening plantations overseas often resulted in obtaining several times, or even dozens of times, the land area they previously held.

Although colonial land was not valuable, it did not affect the economic value of the agricultural produce from these lands. Perhaps the per-acre income was lower than in the homeland, but with so much land, the quantity made up for it!

With the increase in quantity, the income also increased. The emergence of large plantations also drove advances in agricultural cultivation techniques.

Mechanized agriculture was becoming increasingly widespread in Austrias African territories. Unfortunately, the internal combustion engine had not yet been invented, and steam-powered machinery was too cumbersome and inconvenient.

Under the stimulus of interests, the actual driving force behind the integration of the colonies was still the prominent nobles led by Franz.

It was just that everyone was mindful of political implications, not directly declaring their stance. Instead, they pushed forth minor nobles like Falkner to test the waters and gauge domestic public opinion.

Chapter 386: There Are Pits You Must Jump Into

In London, Prime Minister John Russell is extremely dissatisfied with the current situation in Europe.

The French government has actually provided a loan to the Russians. While for the British, the amount is not too large, just a meager 100 million francs, the political implications behind this are very alarming.

Originally, it was agreed that Britain and France would jointly provide funds and support to the Kingdom of Prussia in a proxy war against the Russians.

Now on the battlefield, just as the Kingdom of Prussia has run into a crisis, the French cant wait to kick them while theyre down.

Perhaps in the eyes of the French government, this is a timely cutting of losses to gain a greater return. From the British standpoint, however, Prime Minister John Russell cannot tolerate it.

The situation in Europe is deteriorating. France and Russia are getting closer, and the French governments position has changed. They intend to join hands with Russia to partition Prussia.

Perhaps Austria will also join in. As long as France and Russia are willing to support Austria in annexing the German Federal Empire, it will become a three-way division of the European continent between Russia, France, and Austria.

This is the worst situation. Each of the three powers of Russia, France, and Austria has the strength to challenge us. If we allow them to carve up Europe, it will become even harder to restrain them.

For the strategic security of Britain, we must prevent all of this from happening.

John Russell possessed a strong sense of crisis, which seems to be a common trait among island nations and a source of their success.

The policy of the British government is to maintain the balance on the continent. While the balance still holds, the growing power of the Russia-France-Austria trio poses a serious threat to their dominance.

Originally, the British government planned to first suppress the Russians and then use the Italian question to provoke conflicts between France and Austria, thus keeping them mutually restrained on the European continent.

But plans couldnt keep up with the ever-changing situation in reality. The conflicts between France and Austria have not been ignited, and the Russian Empire is about to break through the limits and control the Baltic Sea.

Foreign Secretary Raistlin analyzed, Prime Minister, this recent rapprochement between France and Russia began with concessions made by the Russian government.

Supporting the French annexation of the Rhineland, the Russians also have their own agenda. Its important to note that there are agreements in place among Austria, Belgium, Prussia, the German Federal Empire, Spain, and other nations. If any one of them faces a French invasion, they will unite in defense.

Even if the Russians support the French, Austria and Russia are still allies. The Russian government is unlikely to send troops to help the French in battle, right?

Nationalism is a double-edged sword. If we can stir up nationalism in the region of Germany, Austria wont be able to turn a blind eye to the French annexation of the Rhineland.

With the defense treaty in place, although the French are powerful, Austria is equally strong. Along with Spain, Belgium, the German Federal Empire, and other countries, the French have slim chances of success.

Napoleon III is not a fool. He wouldnt embark on such a risky venture without a chance of success.

The possibility of Russia, France, and Austria jointly partitioning the European continent, I believe, is almost zero, primarily due to the unequal distribution of spoils.

What the Russians can get is too little, since Austria cannot give up Germany. After the Russians gain the Prussian-controlled areas of Poland, their path forward would be blocked by Austria.

Of course, if the Russian government is willing, they could expand towards the Nordic regions. But Sweden is no soft persimmon either, success would not come without paying a price.

Moreover, if the Russo-Prussian War is already proving difficult, do the Russians have the capability to attack Sweden?

This was indeed a problem. Although the Russian Empire is powerful, signs of fatigue have already emerged. If it were the pre-Near East War Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia would have been defeated long ago.

The primary reason the Russian government did not rely on the tactic of overwhelming numbers to defeat Prussia was the lack of funds. Increasing the number of troops on the front lines also meant increasing military expenditure.

Fighting on the North German Plain, with rivers available for transporting strategic supplies, theoretically, even if the Russian government deployed a million troops, they could ensure the supply of resources.

In their current state of exhaustion, attempting to partition Europe with France and Austria would clearly result in significant losses for them. Just controlling the Prussian-controlled Polish territories would be sufficient. There's no need to take such a dangerous gamble.

No, Raistlin. These are all theories, you must understand that the Russian Empire is a dictatorship. As long as the Tsar deems it feasible, it could become a reality.

We cannot treat rational deductions the same as the Tsars decision-making process. In fact, most Russian Tsars are irrational.

Russia, France, and Austria are all autocracies, as long as the emperors make the decision, they can ally immediately. We cannot give them any opportunity to draw closer.

This isn't pessimism from Prime Minister John Russell, but rather something that leaders of a country must consider. For Great Britain, there's no need for any risks right now; stability is the most important thing.

No matter what stage the Franco-Russian relationship has reached, disrupting their relationship is never wrong.

Being the troublemaker in Europe, half of the continent's conflicts over the past century have been stirred up by them, and now it's time for another performance.

The Prussian government is obstructing, and the British are also causing trouble, so Franz naturally can't remain idle.

He had been schemed against, so he certainly had to retaliate. However, since the loan contracts have been signed, they naturally cannot be torn up. The real issue now is where to strike back.

Alexander II also knew to use civilized means to scheme within the rules. Of course, Franz could not violate the rules either.

Supporting the conservatives in the Russian Empire?

Not appropriate!

That would be interfering too deeply in Russia's internal affairs, which would only worsen relations between the two countries without any benefit. Franz did not think those people could prevail against Alexander II.

Secretly support the revolutionaries?

This was even more impossible. As an emperor, Franz naturally stands in opposition to the revolutionaries, and supporting the enemy is out of the question.

Moreover, the Russian Empire is in a terrible state. What if it gets overthrown?

The decadent Russian government is Austria's best ally, while a new Russia is Austria's biggest threat. Franz cannot afford to take such a risk.

Sow discord between the Russians and various European countries?

It seemed there was no use in doing that, as the Russian government was already isolated even without Franz's intervention.

After much contemplation, Franz finally concluded with resignation: under the Austro-Russian alliance, there was no way to undermine Russia in the short term.

Foreign Minister Wessenberg said, Your Majesty, the Russian government has requested our help in modifying a batch of rifles into breech-loading rifles.

In times of war, even the Russian government placed great importance on weapons and equipment. Having personally experienced the power of breech-loading rifles, they had no choice but to abandon muzzle-loading rifles.

Modifying muzzle-loaders into breech-loaders was naturally to save costs. In this sense, the Russo-Prussian War also contributed by making the Russian government learn to economize carefully.

Converting hundreds of thousands of rifles was just a small business deal. If it weren't for the political significance of the arms trade, there would have been no need for intervention by the foreign ministries of the two countries.

Franz pondered for a moment and said, Hmm, let them negotiate with the capitalists, we won't interfere with free trade.

Send people to promote breech-loading rifle production lines to the Russians, and take the opportunity to sell them the refurbished old stock from our warehouses.

Remember to tell the Russians that breech-loading artillery also has superior power, and recommend they purchase a batch for trial.

Converting muzzle-loading rifles takes time, so the troops at the front certainly cannot wait. In such circumstances, they could only purchase from Austria.

This was the benefit of promoting Austrian equipment to the Russian government during the Near East War. Not only would they earn service fees, but when purchasing equipment from abroad, the Russians would also have to choose Austria.

After the Russo-Prussian War broke out, the Russian government immediately placed orders with Austria to purchase strategic materials, mainly because their standards system was the same.

With the path already paved, Franz naturally couldn't allow the Russians to escape the influence of Austrian equipment in this arms revolution, as it was related to future strategies.

In peacetime, the Russians could slowly upgrade their weapons themselves. The breech-loading technology was not that advanced so it would just take them a few more years.

No major power was willing to be dependent on others for long in terms of weaponry. Alexander II was also no slacker. If not for lack of funds, he would have probably overhauled the military-industrial complex long ago.

Unfortunately for the Russians, the last time they upgraded weapons was during the Near East War. To save time, Austrian equipment became the mainstream in the military.

This time, with another weapons upgrade coinciding with the Russo-Prussian War. War waits for no one and Franz was again preparing to forcibly sell Austrian equipment to the Russians.

They want to avoid being dependent on other countries, but doesn't Russia have a million-strong army? Outfitting so many troops and changing weapon production lines, how much money would that require?

If they had no money, then they would just have to keep using the old equipment. From a cost perspective, directly purchasing the Austrian system would not be much more expensive than independent research and development.

As for whether this approach might lead to the loss of independent research and development capability, that's not something the Russian bureaucrats care about. Instead of considering all that, they'd rather think about how to make money.

With two to three generations consecutively adopting the Austrian military-industrial system, the Russian weapons research and development personnel are almost obsolete. To break free from this situation in the future, they will have to retrain talent.

Franz could understand why Alexander II had always been unhappy with Austria. In a situation like this, no one would be pleased.

Unfortunately, this was a trap, just like his schemes against Austria. Despite knowing it was a trap, Franz would still pour real money into it, and now the Russian government was doing the same.

It couldn't be that they would ignore the frontline war needs just to ensure military-industrial independence, letting soldiers carry outdated muzzle-loading rifles and offering themselves as targets to the enemy, could it?

That would truly be sending troops to their deaths. Breech-loading rifles could fire from a prone position, while muzzle-loading rifles could only be used for volley-firing tactics.

Just imagining it made it clear how brutal the slaughter would be on the battlefield if they encountered each other.

Foreign Minister Wessenberg explained, Your Majesty, we actually don't need to actively promote it. Just delaying the pace of modification would be sufficient.

Recently, the Prussians have been performing remarkably well, exploiting their superiority in weapons and equipment to repeatedly inflict heavy casualties on the Russian army in field battles.

While the Russians have naval superiority and continuously strike the coastal areas of the Kingdom of Prussia, their preparations are inadequate to capitalize on their gains.

This is the crux of the problem. In theory, as long as the Russian navy covers the landing of the army and launches attacks from all sides within the Kingdom of Prussia, the kingdom would collapse in a matter of months.

However, the Russian government was not prepared. While the navys attacks on the coastal areas of the Kingdom of Prussia were successful, unfortunately, the army did not follow up to take advantage of this.

The distance between Prussia and Russia is not far, so it cannot be considered a distant expedition, but necessary logistical support is still required.

There was no doubt the Russian government currently lacked sufficient strategic materials, or rather, no way to transport so many strategic materials.

To supply the troops at the front, the Russian government had to keep buying and buying. This was not just because the Russian Empires production capacity was insufficient, but more critically, the transportation was too poor.

The Russian-controlled Polish territory is one of their granaries. Most of the food supply in St. Petersburg comes from there. Now that this land is lost, the Russian government naturally has to draw grain from other areas.

With the railways not functioning smoothly, transportation via horse-drawn carts or ox carts from regions like Ukraine and Moscow to the front lines would take at least a couple of months.

And that was with favorable weather. This situation worsens during winter, where transportation could take 2-3 months or more. Such poor transportation not only increases costs but also limits the amount of material that can be transported.

While the troops at the front could import strategic materials from neighboring Austria for operations, it would not work for cross-sea operations. Even if supplies are imported from Austria, they must be transported in a roundabout manner.

This was Russias own doing. If they had deployed the navy to attack Prussian coastal areas from the start of the war, then they could have used Polands rivers to transport materials imported from Austria.

Now there was no point thinking about it, as most of Russian Poland had fallen into enemy hands. To transport materials now, they would either have to go overland through Belarus or make a huge sea detour along the European continent.

Either route limited the transport volume.

The Russians could have purchased strategic materials from other European countries, but no one was selling what they were buying. Unless they paid in hard currency, no one would do business with them.

Due to financial constraints, the Russian government could not massively procure materials from various countries, which was why Alexander II was in such a hurry to borrow money.

Only by resolving the financial issues could they gather enough strategic materials to fully utilize their naval advantage.

Chapter 387: An Unrealistic Strategy

After putting down the African Strategy, Franz could only lament that everyones goals were too grandiose, aiming to encircle over half the African continent in one swoop.

Yes, encircle, not occupy. Currently, Austria has not even completed one-third of the aforementioned plan, with the actually controlled area possibly less than one-fifth.

Even though Franz had made efforts at immigration, the current population of Austrian African territories was still less than five million.

Controlling such a vast land of 7,000,000-8,000,000 square kilometers with so few people illustrates the extent of how sparsely populated the land is.

Of course, this does not account for the local indigenous populations, or else the number would have long surpassed tens of millions.

If the next strategic steps were to be completed, a population of several tens of millions would be required. However, the entire population of the new Holy Roman Empire had just crossed the 60 million threshold.

By now, the world has almost been completely divided, and the last piece of unclaimed land will certainly not be exempt from fierce competition.

Currently, France and Austria have advanced to the forefront of colonizing Africa, followed closely by the British, Portuguese, and Dutch, who also have a few colonies.

This macro strategy from the Colonial Ministry would be better described as an ideal strategy.

As long as countries are not foolish, they will not allow this plan to become a reality.

After a rough look at the map, Franz estimated that the area stretching from Guinea and Mali in the west, to Libya in the north, the Boer Republics in the south, and Somalia in the east, despite the lack of satellite positioning in this era, would likely total around 20 million square kilometers when added up.

After some thought, Franz picked up a pen and began crossing out parts of it, intending to send it back to the colonial ministry for them to redo it.

This unrealistic strategy simply lacked feasibility. Unless a world war were to be provoked and Austria emerged as the ultimate victor, there would be no chance of realizing it.

However, Franz was not a warmonger, and Austria was not the Second Reich of history, which felt compelled to challenge the world.

While many believed that the Second Reich started wars due to economic development, and needing resources and markets, Franz believed it was primarily about resources, as market issues could be resolved.

The world economy operates in a large cycle, while national economies operate in smaller cycles. In theory, as long as this cycle continues to operate normally, the economy can sustain development.

At the core of this economic cycle are population and resources, and currently, the global population is only around one billion.

Of this, Europe has around 275 million, with the four major powers of Russia, Austria, France, and Britain totaling over 200 million.

Asia has around 820 million, with the two populous Eastern nations accounting for 700 million, leaving the rest of the regions similarly sparsely populated.

Africa has around 60 million inhabitants, with colonial activities influencing local population growth. However, due to significant emigration in recent years, many areas are experiencing negative growth.

The Americas have around 60 million inhabitants, illustrating the true sparsity of population. North and South America combined have such a small population, with the two American nations alone accounting for half of it.

Currently, international trade volume is not significant. The economies of various countries primarily rely on domestic factors. Taking Austria as an example, the proportion of international trade in the economy is less than 5% of the total.

If colonial trade volume were included in the domestic economy, then the significance of international trade in the Austrian economy would be even less noteworthy.

This is determined by productivity. With limited total wealth and overly homogeneous exportable goods, trade volume simply cannot be increased.

Currently, the largest export commodities on the international market are textiles, followed by foodstuffs. There is virtually no significant market for industrial products or machinery and equipment.

On the whole international market, the total value of all export commodities combined is less than one billion pounds, and in fact, it is less than seven hundred million pounds.

With such a small market, the domestic market is the main force driving each country's economy. Whether its Britain, France, or Austria, the total economic output of their domestic markets cannot be measured by a mere billion. It would require at least two to three billion.

In an era dominated by domestic economies, the most important factor is still internal circulation. As long as there are sufficient resources, theoretically, the economy can develop normally.

Specifically, one can look at the United States. Many people believe that Latin America is the backyard of the United States, a dumping ground for American industrial products.

However, the reality is that Latin America has a total population of only two million, with 60-70% still comprised of native American tribes, which have minimal purchasing power.

Furthermore, South American countries do not buy American products; they prefer to import European goods rather than American junk.

Yet from the late 19th century, the US economy still grew by leaps and bounds, increasing ninefold in forty years.

This is the power of resources. Despite a lack of sufficient export markets for goods, while the Germans were driven to the battlefield by capital, American capital was able to hold steady, relying on its own abundant resources.

In Franz's view, resources are the core of colonization. Under this philosophy, there is a movement towards the integration of the colonies.

After much hesitation, Franz did not directly reject this unrealistic strategy. He was very averse to making grand promises but found that doing so was highly effective.

Otherwise, history would not have seen so many fanciful and unrealistic plans, such as the British Cape to Cairo plan which goes from Cairo to South Africa directly from south to north.

This plan included Egypt, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, and Tanzania.

Although this plan was very ambitious, it was eventually realized by John Bull. However, it did not last long before the colonial empire collapsed.

As latecomers to the party, the Germans also came up with the Teutonic Africa Plan, which was not as ambitious, only including Namibia, Angola, Congo, and Tanzania.

The success of a strategy depends on strength, not on the scale of ambition, so this strategy failed.

The French Senegal to Somalia Plan was somewhat extreme; after occupying North Africa, the French planned to advance from Senegal to Somalia.

This plan was similar to Austrias strategic plan. The difference between Guinea to Somalia and Senegal to Somalia was not significant.

As for Austrias goal of reaching the Boer Republics in the south, this had already been tenuously achieved, with a 1,000-strong settler outpost in Zimbabwe.

Reaching Libya in the north also posed no difficulty, as that was an inland area of Africa that competitors could not yet access.

The only part still a long way off was reaching Somalia in the east, blocked by Sudan and Ethiopia in between. Of course, it was also possible to take a detour through Uganda and Kenya.

In practice, it is definitely not as simple as that. Because Austrias colonial strategy includes all these regions.

Regardless, it is commendable in spirit. Since this plan has been submitted, it represents the Colonial Ministrys belief in the possibility of its success.

Of course, this success does not mean that all objectives will be achieved. It simply means that the plan is strategically completed, with a few colonial territories inevitably left out.

Considering that it was a critical moment for the integration of colonies, Franz tacitly approved the existence of this plan. Of course, when it comes to the specific implementation, it cannot be rigidly applied.

For example, priority should be given to areas connected to rivers, while desert regions should be considered later. Areas with strong indigenous presence should be temporarily set aside, and expansion in areas that may provoke conflict should be restrained...

In this era, there were no national borders in Africa. It was mostly just a collection of indigenous tribes, so the concept of a nation was rather unclear.

Naturally, this colonial strategy wouldnt adhere to the borders of later times, and in fact, Franz couldnt even identify those future borders on the map.

After some modifications, Franz successfully condensed this strategic plan.

For example, they wouldnt compete with the French for the desert regions in North Africa, as they were practically unmanageable during this period anyway.

Specifically, much of Mali was relinquished, and the Niger region was essentially abandoned. Franz was even prepared to abandon Chad if not for its strategic connection to Libya; its retention was a reluctant compromise.

Ethiopia and Somalia in the east were also placed at the very end of the priority list by Franz, and would not be targeted until other regions were occupied.

Namibia and Tanzania were relegated to the second-to-last priority, essentially falling into the category of abandoned areas. The remaining territories would depend on the capabilities of Franz's subordinates to seize as much territory as possible.

As a result, this plan was reduced by about one-third, significantly increasing its feasibility.

Occupying more than half of the African continent would breed resentment, but Franz believed that controlling one-third or around forty percent of the continent could be achieved.

This was determined by a combination of strength and strategic advantage. Once the colonial integration strategy succeeded, it would mark another peak in immigration. With a sufficient population, Franz would not fear any challenges on the African continent.

For instance, in the current situation of West Africa and Congo, with millions of local inhabitants, who would have the capability to seize control of these areas?

War also requires costs, and without sufficient benefits, it is not enough to compel colonial empires to initiate wars.

On the African continent, apart from the gold mines in South Africa, no other regions are significant enough to provoke wars between great powers.

In reality, the gold mines of South Africa are also not worth a bloody battle by two great powers. Although the gold reserves are high, before being extracted, it is nothing special.

Despite the annual production of hundreds of tons, the extraction of gold also incurs costs. Franz doesn't believe that he will be able to recoup the costs of war with gold in his lifetime.

Chapter 388: Justice Is Impartial

After several months of negotiations in Ottawa, in September 1865 the preliminary results of the multi-party talks were finally reached.

Under the intervention of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain, the U.S. federal government recognized the independence of the Confederate States of America and the Native American tribes. The United States was officially divided.

In the disputed states of Maryland and West Virginia, areas that supported the Union government were integrated into the Union, while the areas supporting the Confederate government joined the Confederacy.

It should not be surprising if the territories of the Union and Confederate governments overlap in some places. The people were allowed to freely choose which government to join, with the smallest unit being the town.

There is no doubt that this was the handiwork of the British, who are professionals at this. They have now buried the contradictions between the North and South, and one can imagine the future of the Americas will be quite lively.

The Confederate States of America included: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri, and Kentucky, as well as parts of Maryland and West Virginia.

The states of Arizona and New Mexico were also incorporated into the Confederate government. (Roughly equivalent to today's Arizona and New Mexico.)

The Native American chiefdom found itself in a rather unfortunate position, sandwiched between the Union and Confederacy, with only a modest territory consisting mainly of Native American settlements. (Roughly equivalent to today's Oklahoma.)

After the division of the United States, the overall national strength still favored the Union government, which had a population of 17.645 million, inheriting nearly two-thirds of the country's industrial capacity and 63.2% of its territory.

The Confederate government followed closely behind with a population of 11.984 million, inheriting approximately one-third of the country's industrial capacity and 34.1% of its territory.

The Native American chiefdom was negligible in comparison, with an unrecorded population that likely did not exceed one million and a territory of less than 200,000 square kilometers, with almost no industrial capacity.

(Authors Note: The United States in 1865 did not include Alaska and Hawaii, and most of the overseas islands of future years were also not included.)

Of course, this was just the preliminary agreement reached, and the specific details still needed to be worked out further, especially the issue of border demarcation, which would take time to finalize.

However, this did not prevent the signing of the treaty. Under the urging of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain, the Lincoln administration reluctantly signed the ceasefire treaty on September 30, 1865.

The signing of the treaty also marked the end of the Lincoln administration's term. Without needing further prompting, Lincoln submitted his resignation to Congress the next day.

This went very smoothly, without a single hitch. Lincoln had already taken on the biggest blame, so naturally someone would come to take over. They just had to wait for the election to end, and the Lincoln administration could then leave.

With the end of the Civil War, the Federal government returned to Washington. Regardless of the circumstances, this remained the capital of the Union.

Even though it had been reduced to ruins, they had to return. This was what was politically correct as it was a symbol of the legitimacy of the federal government.

Stepping back into the White House, Lincoln seemed to have aged 20 years. Everywhere were the remnants of shattered walls and ruins, and the former political center had turned into a pile of rubble.

Alas!

A sigh escaped, conveying the helplessness of life.

The responsibility for the Civil War did not lie with Lincoln. It began with the Northern capitalists taking the lead in the government, marking the countdown to war.

Unfortunately, Lincoln had the misfortune of being in office at this critical time and ended up shouldering the blame.

In history, the Northern government won the war, and Lincoln, who was assassinated shortly after the war's end, garnered sympathy from the public, thus becoming one of America's greatest presidents.

Naturally, the blame fell on the previous president. With the situation changing now, while the former president couldn't escape scrutiny, the current president faced even greater blame.

Political opponents would not miss this opportunity to rise to power by stepping on the defeated; this was as normal as could be.

Certain individuals who were unhappy with the Lincoln administration were preparing to sue them for violating the Constitution, inciting the Civil War, and causing the deaths of over a million people.

The Civil War had been devastating. The losses for the Northern government included: 572,000 soldiers killed or critically wounded, 267,000 soldiers disabled due to injuries, 23,000 soldiers dead from diseases, and 12,000 soldiers who died in various incidents, such as assassination, drowning, or execution for violating military discipline.

These are merely military losses and do not include civilian casualties. Although it hasn't reached the point where every household is in mourning and everyone is weeping, it's not far from that.

While the losses for the Northern government may appear similar to those of the Russians in the recent Near East War, the Russian government officially claimed victory and occupied Constantinople and Bulgaria.

Despite Constantinople now being in ruins and the Bulgarians still aspiring for independence, this did not diminish the political success of the Russian government.

The same cannot be said for the federal government as they had failed strategically. There was no way for them to shift the blame.

Why are you so reluctant?

At some point, Secretary of State Seward appeared behind Lincoln.

Shaking his head, Lincoln said, "It's not that. When I first came to be in this position, I knew it was a mess. I just thought I could handle it and reunite this country."

However, I overestimated myself and underestimated the enemy. Now, I have to leave in disgrace, and perhaps I'll be the first president to end up in prison.

Seward comforted him, "That might have been a possibility before, but from the moment you submitted your resignation, that possibility ceased to exist."

At worst, the next president will issue a pardon. The Republicans won't let us go to jail, that's the nature of the game.

The President of the United States has the power to grant pardons. Apart from impeachment, the president can pardon anyone without requiring approval from any agency, including former presidents.

According to the rules of the game of politics, a president can resign early in exchange for the next president granting them a pardon.

A pardon means all previous charges are wiped clean. By resigning early, the subject of impeachment naturally becomes moot.

Before signing the ceasefire treaty, Lincoln needed to shoulder the blame, so Congress naturally wouldn't impeach him. Once the ceasefire treaty was signed and he resigned, with approval from the Republican-dominated Congress, impeachment was no longer an issue.

Due to the secession of the Southern states, the Democratic Party was severely weakened and had no chance to compete with the Republican Party in the short term.

The next president will most likely still be from the Republican Party. No party wants their president to be convicted and imprisoned and make history, so the Republicans will naturally work to protect Lincoln.

Even if the Democratic Party were to win the election, they would also pardon him for political considerations.

This is the nature of American politics; even into the 21st century, no American president has been imprisoned for crimes.

Under normal circumstances, even prosecution would not occur. Presidents like President Harding (Poker Cabinet), the corrupt President Grant, and President Nixon (Watergate Incident) all got out scot-free in the end.

Now, some are clamoring for prosecution, but it's mainly for electoral propaganda. The radicals are merely being used. Politicians won't break the rules of the game.

Even with Lincoln's resignation, it doesn't mean the Lincoln administration can leave immediately. They still have to wait until the transfer of power is completed.

This is because his term has ended. Otherwise, if a president resigns, the vice president takes over. With an ally still in power, the pardon would have already been issued.

Franz had no interest in the internal power struggles within the United States. He was still immersed in the joy of the country's division, unable to extricate himself.

Once divided, the possibility of a second division arises. From the moment the Federal government recognized Southern independence, it meant that Lincoln's patchwork had become ineffective.

The Constitution is the Constitution precisely because of its authority. If it can be easily amended, can it still be called a Constitution?

Although Lincoln enacted laws prohibiting federal secession, these laws were not recognized by state governments. Many federal states refused to acknowledge this law.

After experiencing one civil war, if certain federal states were to push for independence again, would the Federal government be able to organize a military force to suppress it?

After all, if the Southern government hadn't struck first, it's doubtful whether the Federal government could have even organized an army.

During this era, the states in the United States had too much power, each possessing the ability to disregard the Federal government. For example, they could prohibit federal troops from entering their territories.

Without cooperation from the states, the Federal government found it difficult to even mobilize domestic troops, let alone organize a military.

Now, due to the Civil War, the prestige of the Federal government has greatly diminished, further reducing its influence over the states. This means that for a considerable period into the future, the United States will no longer pose a threat.

If the Federal government can be seen as a loose alliance, then the Confederate government takes it a step further. The rights of each joining state in the Confederacy exceed even those of the vassal states under the new Holy Roman Empire.

The Confederate government can be understood in this way: each state is an independent mini-kingdom, and together they form an alliance, which is the current Confederate government.

Chapter 389: Continuing to Dig Pits

At the Schenbrunn Palace, Franz was in high spirits and found everyone agreeable lately. With the dust settled from the American Civil War, this meant that Austria wouldnt have to worry about threats from the United States for the next 50 years.

Such a long time would be sufficient for him to develop the African continent. Although the natural conditions might not match the chosen land, it still provided the foundation of a great country.

Compared to this long-term plan, the European strategy became secondary. Franz didnt believe he had the protagonists halo to unify the European continent and rebuild the Roman Empire.

The Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Empire might seem to differ by just a single word, but they are vastly different in reality.

Since the failure of Napoleon the Great, European countries had given up the idea of unifying the European continent. Even the stubborn Russian government dared not entertain such thoughts.

Even if Franz could unify Europe, he wouldnt pursue it. It is a bottomless pit that can bury any empire. One cannot dig a pit to show off only to end up burying oneself in it.

Africa might not be the optimal choice, but it is the most suitable option for Austria. If possible, Franz wouldnt mind focusing on South America.

The reasons are straightforward: South America boasts superior natural environments, abundant resources with low development difficulties, lacks major powers and has vast territories with sparse populations.

With 17.84 million square kilometers of land, there are merely 20 million people, most of whom are indigenous.

If Spain could undergo a revival, then South America would be their promised land.

Most South American countries gained independence from Spanish colonies, but it has only been a few decades, so the royalist faction has not disappeared. They can easily regain control.

Knowing this, Franz harbored plans he didn't have any intention of voicing out. The Spaniards are preoccupied with internal conflicts and hardly can consider much else. By the time their internal strife settles, Spain won't have the strength to return to South America.

Just because the Spaniards couldn't achieve it doesn't mean other countries couldn't either.

The British need not be mentioned, they have too many colonies, and if they want to focus their efforts, North America is the best choice.

The period of the American Civil War was the opportune moment for them to act. Using Canada as a base to seize the American West Coast.

There is no doubt that the proud British are still immersed in the glory of the Victorian era. Apart from concerns about the balance on the European continent being disrupted, they lacked a proper strategy.

What truly worried Franz was the French. The France of Napoleon III's era was not the passive republic that followed.

Many may think that luring France to South America would benefit Austria's African strategic advancement. In fact, the opposite is true, as it would prematurely expose Franz's African plan.

The European countries are not fools, they will certainly not stand idly by and watch a colossus rise. Once the hidden strategy is exposed, all the European countries will try to obstruct it, making the plan impossible to implement.

Maintaining absolute secrecy is impossible, but the longer the delay, the stronger Austria's presence on the continent becomes. If Austria's African territories had tens of millions of people, even if the strategy were exposed, other countries would be powerless.

Eliminating threats is certainly important, but the cost must also be considered. Did the European countries not see the rise of the United States in history?

But what if they saw it? As long as it does not threaten the core interests of everyone, who would start a war regardless of the consequences?

Wars are costly, a lesson the Russian government deeply understands. First, the Near East War, then the Russo-Prussian War, and now a continental hegemon is on the brink of collapse.

Historically, when the British didn't intervene in the American Civil War, was it truly a strategic mistake by the British government?

Perhaps not entirely. After the failure to form the intervention alliance, many in the British government were worried about being dragged into another quagmire of war.

In this timeline, if Austria hadn't intervened and actively meddled in the American Civil War from the outset, causing both sides to suffer losses, and had also bound British interests so they couldn't withdraw, the British government might still hesitate to consider armed intervention.

The financial resources of any country are not limitless. Franz could clearly sense that since suppressing the Indian Rebellion, the pace of British overseas colonization had slowed.

Or, one could say that after the conclusion of the Near East War, the rate of British colonial expansion decelerated. French colonial activities in Africa also lagged behind Austria, and there's a clear causal relationship with the Near East War.

No ones money just falls from the sky; the wealth of the British and French financial sectors doesnt equate to government funds.

Perhaps during wartime, they could raise more funds, but in peacetime, government fiscal revenues remain limited.

Money spent on war naturally leads to budget cuts in other areas.

Overseas colonization is also an industry that requires substantial financial investment. When governments reduce funding, it inevitably has an impact.

One cant endlessly borrow to fund colonization, as loans need to be repaid. During this era, currency was tied to gold and silver, hardly depreciating, making debt repayment not so easy.

Therefore, Franz decided to dig a few more pits to drain the financial resources of Britain and France, hoping to curb their activities.

Just like the Russians, after the Near East War, they remained subdued for a decade. Just as they were beginning to recover some strength, they faced the Polish Uprising and the Russo-Prussian War.

Needless to say, the Russian government should remain well-behaved for the next 20 years. During this period, even if they wanted to wage war, theyd find it challenging to raise funds for it.

The top-secret document on the table was pointed to by Franz as he issued the order, Tyron, deploy according to the plan outlined in this document.

Picking up the document and briefly scanning its contents, Tyron responded expressionlessly, Yes, Your Majesty.

His greatest strength was never questioning orders; whatever Franz commanded, he would execute immediately.

The current intelligence organization is no longer the loose entity it once was. The intelligence organization is now divided into three parts, three data analysis divisions, affiliated with the National Security Bureau but they report directly to Franz.

The first data analysis division is a publicly known intelligence organization formed from a network of nobility. It primarily collects low-level confidential information and occasionally guides public opinion.

This division serves to attract attention openly and relies mainly on the cooperation of local nobility. They investigate ordinary issues and occasionally suppress revolutionaries.

The latter two are the core of the intelligence organization. Their operations are quite extensive, including collecting domestic and foreign intelligence, assassinations, causing disturbances

The second division focuses primarily on domestic intelligence, while the third division focuses on overseas intelligence. The scope of operations for both divisions is similarly broad. Their authorities overlap significantly, suggesting mutual oversight between them.

Tyron, as the head of intelligence, primarily works to coordinate the relationships among the three intelligence divisions and ensures the implementation of Franzs orders.

This is dictated by practical needs; intelligence work demands high levels of secrecy. Franz wouldnt dare to treat others as fools. If he were to directly interact with the three intelligence divisions, wouldnt that imply that each of them is an independent intelligence organization?

To minimize the visibility of the intelligence organization, when operating domestically, they merely collect information. Even in special circumstances requiring action, they employ individuals embedded within government departments.

On the surface, law enforcement within the country is handled by the police, and the intelligence organization has never appeared in public view.

Ordinary people are completely unaware that Franz commands an intelligence organization, and even the governments top echelons are unfamiliar with the intelligence organizations internal structure. To the outside world, the three divisions operate as a single entity.

Chapter 390: The Decisive Battle

After entering the 19th century, the international society became more and more interconnected, and the international situation became intertwined.

With the end of the American Civil War, the attention of Britain, France, Austria, and Spain shifted to Europe, increasing pressure on the Russian government.

The British government has begun planning to intervene in the Russo-Prussian War, attempting to use diplomatic means to force concessions from the Russian government and undermine Russian prestige.

It must be acknowledged that John Bulls diplomatic tactics were formidable. The recently courted French government once again wavered, and the French loans to Russia were withheld.

This cant be entirely blamed on the French. The performance of the Russian army on the battlefield was disappointing.

Initially, it was believed that the Russian government, with its maritime advantage, would mobilize troops to land and attack the Prussians from behind. However, due to issues with strategic materials, the Russian government was unable to organize a proper offensive.

Military observers around the world are now criticizing the Russian governments strategy, belittling them as worthless.

Alexander II was greatly wronged. This war broke out too suddenly, and they really didnt have time to prepare.

In St. Petersburg, faced with the increasingly dire international situation, Alexander II made a decision: to end the war swiftly.

The Russian governments capability for secrecy was limited to fewer than ten people. Once the number of those in the know exceeded this, it was akin to a sieve.

Upon receiving this news, Franz's first reaction was to be worried. Given the current situation, the eventual victor would absolutely be the Russians.

While the Prussians may have the advantage in exchange ratios, they still suffered significant losses over the past six months of war. They incurred casualties of 82,000 men, with 43,000 killed in action, 39,000 wounded or retired due to injuries, or captured.

The losses of their Polish allies were even more severe, with at least 150,000 troops lost. Due to internal chaos within the Polish provisional government, they couldnt determine the exact losses, so Franz naturally couldnt know either.

The combined losses of the Russians and the Danes were roughly equivalent to those of the Prussians and Poles.

If the war continued for at most another six months, the Polish uprising would collapse, leaving the Kingdom of Prussia to fight alone.

If Franz had been in command of this war, he would have targeted the Polish insurgents aggressively, used the navy to strike the Kingdom of Prussia, and weakened their war potential.

A decisive battle? After retaking Warsaw, controlling several rivers within Poland, and establishing a waterway connection to Austria, they could fight in any way they chose.

As long as there was sufficient logistical supply, the combat capabilities of the Russian army wouldnt be lacking at all. With numerical superiority, they could easily defeat the enemy.

Now, rushing into a decisive battle would be very unwise militarily. Of course, the decision made by Alexander II was mainly for political reasons.

Under great pressure from domestic conservatives, rampant anti-Russian forces internationally, and financial constraints, the Russian government was under immense pressure.

Foreign Minister Wessenberg proposed, Your Majesty, the Russians have approached us seeking assistance, hoping we can expedite the delivery of their order.

If all goes as planned, after delivering this batch of weaponry and equipment, it will be time for them to engage in a decisive battle with the Prussians.

The Foreign Ministry believes we can allocate a portion from our current stock of equipment and deliver it to the Russians ahead of schedule, facilitating this decisive battle to erupt before the onset of winter in Poland.

Franzs eyes lit up. This winter came just in time. Regardless of the outcome of this war, both sides would lose the ability to continue their offensives after winter sets in.

By the time they resume fighting the next year, everyone will have almost regained their strength. No, it should be said that it was the Russians that could regroup, while a defeat in this decisive battle would leave the Prussians in a tough spot.

Allocating equipment from the current stock was merely to maintain appearances. Reserve equipment also qualifies as current equipment, so theres no issue.

Franz asked with skepticism, Is there enough time? Its already September. By the time it reaches the Russians in October, will they still have time for a decisive battle?

Foreign Minister Wessenberg replied, Indeed, time is a bit tight, but it should be sufficient with some effort.

The Russian troops near our border can be the first to receive the new equipment, enabling them to launch a counterattack. The troops in East Prussia will receive the equipment a bit later; casualties are not a concern as long as they are willing to endure it.

The pressure on the Russian frontline commanders is immense. Unable to withstand domestic pressure, the decisive battle will surely erupt before the end of the year.

When winter comes, at worst, this decisive battle will end inconclusively. Regardless, they must fight a battle to appease the conservatives back home.

Franz began to mourn for the Russian troops at the front. Even if they win the war, their losses will be devastating. If they lose, the losses would naturally be even more severe.

Alexander II's choice for a decisive battle at this time is likely out of desperation. If they had fought two months earlier and lost, the enemy could have advanced deeply into their territory, causing immense losses.

Now, it doesn't matter anymore. Many regions of the Russian Empire have already entered winter. By the time this battle concludes, it would likely be November or December. Launching an attack on Russia during this season would certainly be suicidal.

Since the Russian government was not in danger, the losses of the Russian army were not within Franz's considerations. He immediately made the decision.

Deliver it at the fastest speed possible, and give the Russians an additional one million rounds of ammunition to express our stance.

The adoption of Austrian equipment by the Russians also has its advantages, as Austria has long unified the caliber of ammunition. Even if the Russian army switches equipment now, the bullets can still be used interchangeably, so there's no need to worry about sending the wrong ammunition by mistake.

The efficiency of the Austrian government was indeed very high. In just two days, they had mobilized three hundred thousand rifles from reserve equipment and quickly delivered them to the Russian-Austrian border.

Such a significant move couldn't be concealed. Upon receiving the news, the Prussian Army Commander-in-Chief, Moltke, made a prompt decision to strike first.

On October 2, 1865, before the Russians could switch their equipment, the Prussian-Polish coalition launched a full-scale counterattack against the Russian forces on the Eastern Prussian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian fronts.

The decisive battle broke out ahead of schedule, drawing the attention of all European countries to this campaign.

If the Russians win, there is no doubt that the Kingdom of Prussia will be doomed. If the Prussian-Polish coalition emerges victorious, then the European landscape will be reshuffled.

In Sweden, King Charles XV resolutely rejected the Kingdom of Prussia's proposal to jointly fight against the Russians.

While Sweden was also against Russia and even stood against them during the Near East War, supporting the alliance of Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire, it did not mean they favored Prussia.

During the outbreak of the Prusso-Danish War, King Charles XV prepared to send troops to assist Denmark in defending Schleswig-Holstein to curb the ambitions of the Kingdom of Prussia.

Apart from the concern about being left isolated, this decision was also related to the prevailing Pan-Scandinavianism of the era.

(Pan-Scandinavianism advocated for a united Nordic state. Initiated in the 1840s in Skene, it peaked in the mid-19th century. With Sweden and Norway already united under the Treaty of Kiel, only Denmark was left.)

Charles XV was one of the supporters of this plan, always wanting to merge Denmark, Sweden, and Norway into one country. If possible, he wouldn't mind having Finland join as well.

During the First Schleswig War, Sweden sent troops to assist the Kingdom of Denmark. However, they were a step too late. By the time they arrived, the Russians had intervened, and Sweden was not able to participate in the war.

For the Second Schleswig War, Charles XV had also prepared to intervene with military force. Unfortunately, Denmark was defeated too quickly, and many in Sweden opposed military intervention. As a result, the interference came to nothing, dealing a heavy blow to Pan-Scandinavianism.

The Prussians' desire to woo Sweden into the war was not without reason. The enmity between Sweden and the Russian Empire has a long history, and their relationship has always been hostile.

Furthermore, the Finns have long wanted to break free from Russian rule. They have proposed that if Sweden assists them in gaining independence, they are willing to join Sweden.

Efforts to promote a Prusso-Swedish alliance were also being vigorously pursued internationally by the British. The British government had long made promises, supporting Sweden's annexation of Finland.

The French government also hoped for Sweden to absorb Finland, which would serve as a thorn in the side of Russia, and they were willing to assist in achieving this.

To weaken the Russians, even the Austrian government was willing to offer loans to Sweden. It can be said that the entire European continent wanted to see the Russians suffer.

Now that the Russian government has shown signs of fatigue, the main force of the Russian army has been tied down on the front lines. With support from the Finns, Sweden has a very high chance of successfully seizing Finland.

Both Finland and Sweden are easy to defend but hard to attack. Even if the Russians were to attempt a counteroffensive in the future, achieving any military success would be very difficult for them.

Despite all these favorable news, one fact cannot be concealed: the Russians are too powerful.