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BISMARCK AND THE CONCEPT OF LIMITED WAR

THE STRUGGLE FOR DOMINANCE BETWEEN THE DIPLOMAT AND ARMY
DURING THE WARS OF UNIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies and evaluates the foreign policy of Otto von Bismarck during the Wars of German Unification to determine what effect the doctrine of limited war had upon it. The basic conclusion that can be drawn from this paper is that limited war was a basic component of Bismarck's foreign policy. His diplomatic maneuverings before each of the three wars during the unification period were indicative of this idea. He isolated Prussia's potential enemies by neutralizing their potential allies and destroying or blocking any alliances which they might form. This diplomatic isolation not only insured military victory, but also enabled Bismarck to rearrange the European balance of power in Prussia's favor without destroying it by a general European conflagration.

The problem of keeping a war limited applies not only to foreign policy, but to domestic policy as well. Bismarck's struggle with the military establishment to exert his control over general policy was just as challenging and demanding as his foreign diplomacy. Keeping war limited proved to be just as difficult, due to the military's intransigence, as the diplomatic isolation prior to the outbreak of hostilities. The fact that he was able to unify the German states and still maintain the European balance of power are indeed a testimony to the success of his policy of limited war.

The principal sources used in the paper were Bismarck's Memoirs and Clausewitz's On War. Also, an extensive survey of secondary works in English dealing with Bismarck and this era were utilized.

PREFACE

This paper examines the foreign and domestic policies of the Prussian state during the period of German unification. The purpose of this study is to take one of the components of Bismarck's foreign policy, limited war, and then to attempt to see how he used it to its fullest advantage.

By developing the concept of limited war and the role it played both in foreign and domestic policy it has been necessary to present a fairly detailed account of Bismarck and his diplomatic activities during the unification era. It may seem that much of the diplomatic maneuverings, however, were either passed over or treated more lightly than their apparent importance would warrant. Only those diplomatic events are discussed which concerned the topic of limited war within the framework of Bismarck's foreign and domestic policy.

Acknowledgements are due to the staff of the library at Appalachian State University for their assistance in locating materials pertinent to my topic. Special thanks are due to the Interlibrary loan department.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of limited war was not new when Carl von Clausewitz espoused it in 1821 and Otto von Bismarck practiced it in the wars of 1864, 1866 and 1870-71, but they gave it a fresh meaning and impetus. Clausewitz defined limited war as a conflict that is controlled in the extent of its destruction and pre-determined in its political objectives. Its purpose is not so much the destruction of the enemy as the attainment of political objectives.¹ In other words, political objectives place limits on military activities.

The difference between the theory of limited war in Clausewitz's day and in the present day lie in this last definition. Because of the threat of nuclear holocaust, military capabilities now limit political objectives. Whereas Clausewitz's theory calls for an application of adequate force to obtain political objectives, present-day strategic thinking recognizes that the use of nuclear weapons might well destroy civilization. When Clausewitz formulated his basic principles in On War he was reacting to the totality of the Napoleonic Wars. Later, Bismarck was able to use these concepts to rearrange the European balance of power in favor of Prussia and Germany. No doubt, the military and political tactics of nineteenth century Europe

¹Carl von Clausewitz, On War, ed. by Anatol Rapoport (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Inc.), p. 423.

are no longer applicable to the modern world. As A. J. P. Taylor points out in "Rational Wars?," today there are considerable dangers in following Clausewitz's teachings.²

Indeed, by using the axiom that war is a continuation of diplomacy by other means, one can justify war by giving it a rational basis. War is no longer seen as a cruel and unnecessary cataclysm, but merely as part of the on-going political process. In addition, in viewing the totality of the two recent world wars, many present-day writers desire the return to the Clausewitzian principle. They believe that the application of his principle can somehow make present-day war less total. Taylor points out the folly of this belief by saying that Clausewitz was not laying out a blueprint for war, but merely rejecting a particular way of his day.³

One very interesting aspect of limited war is its interrelationship with diplomacy; limited war is almost impossible without successful diplomatic preparation. Alliance systems have made limited war practically obsolete in the present-day world, except perhaps in the "Third World," or between small nations. The emphasis today seems to be on reordering alliances and the solution of major problems facing humanity, not on military conquest. This reordering and rethinking has come about because the threat of nuclear war and its horrible consequences have exerted a new kind of restraint on world leaders.

Such far-reaching consequences were unknown to nineteenth century diplomats. But they, too, worked within the balance of power

²A. J. P. Taylor, "Rational Wars?," The New York Review November 4, 1971, p. 36.

³Ibid.

concept and saw it as a useful tool in controlling aggressors. Not even Bismarckian diplomacy challenged this concept. The Prussian statesman only sought to reorder the balance of power in such a way as to force his opponents to fight without active allies. The key to this diplomacy was isolation of the enemy. While believing in balance of power, he aimed at giving Prussia, and later Germany, a dominant position within the system; such predominance could, of course, only be accomplished by reordering it either by peaceful means or by a limited use of force which avoided a European conflagration.

Another interesting point about limited war is the difference its form has taken in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Taylor says that limited war is impossible at present. He reasons that the two world wars were fought against aggressors who sought domination of various parts of the world. The nations which opposed them had the rational goal of preventing this territorial rearrangement. Their dilemma was that they wanted limited wars, but that they could defeat their enemies only through total destruction. Taylor continues by saying that the modern world has escaped a third world war only because world conquerors are rare and that in the future, too, total war will be the only way to deal with them.⁴

Michael Howard also argues that limited war is an anachronism. According to him today's great powers are preparing for a war which will be total in every respect.⁵

⁴Ibid., pp. 36-37.

⁵Ibid., p. 37.

This writer tends to agree in part with both authors. Nineteenth century limited wars became outdated when man invented nuclear weapons; any confrontation between those who possess them must almost certainly be total. Although the world will continue to have Korean, Vietnamese and Mid-Eastern conflicts of a limited nature, these wars are potentially so dangerous that they may readily engulf the great powers. One might ask at this point if it is now possible for one nation to be isolated diplomatically and to be crushed by another nation or nations, in nineteenth century limited fashion. The answer is almost definitely no. If the nation in question has nuclear capabilities and if it feels itself in sufficiently difficult straits then all restraints for using such weapons would evaporate.

Thus the world has entered a precarious situation in which limited war is impractical and total war is undesirable. The problem of limited war versus total war should therefore no longer be an issue since both choices are equally disastrous. Bismarck still had the choice, however. In the nineteenth century, limited war was still a useful tool which, if applied skillfully, could reshape the international position of a country. This paper will try to show how Bismarck used limited war to this end.

CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BISMARCK'S CONCEPT OF LIMITED WAR

The Development of the Theory

When attempting to discuss the beliefs of Bismarck on the concept of limited war, it is necessary to examine first his unique background. The origins of his attitudes may best be determined by analyzing his family, his surroundings and his political background. No doubt, different individuals are affected by their early environments in varying ways, but modern psychology leaves little doubt about the close relationship between early environmental influences and later decision making. The following background information is not an attempt at a biography of the great German statesman's early life, but an effort to show the various components of his personality which helped to determine many of his later diplomatic policies.

Bismarck was born in Prussia on April 1, 1815, just prior to the final defeat of Napoleon I and the collapse of the French Empire; his heritage was "both bourgeois and aristocratic."¹ His father was a Junker, the noble class which composed the officer corps and leading civil servants of Prussia. His mother was a member of a merchant

¹Otto Pflanze, Bismarck and the Development of Germany: The Period of Unification, 1815-1871 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 49.

family of very high intellectual aspirations.² In his youth, Bismarck was therefore exposed to the conservative ideas of the traditional Junker class and to the progressive concepts of the middle class. As he grew up, he was more inclined to adhere to the former.

During his schooling, he came in contact with German nationalistic feelings and republican forms of government, but neither excited him enough to "expiate my innate Prussian monarchial sentiments."³ Throughout most of his life, he favored Prussian conservatism and remained a firm believer in the Hohenzollern dynasty and the right of kings to rule by divine right.⁴ As he put it in his Memoirs, "My historical sympathies remained on the side of authority."⁵

Following a brief and inglorious civil service career, he returned to his father's estate at Schönhausen in 1839 and resided there until 1847. During this period he read extensively, cultivating his interests in a variety of subjects, particularly history. As Otto Pflanze points out, he acquired much factual knowledge, but no interest in historical hypotheses or philosophies of history.⁶ He was evidently concerned with the more concrete aspects of history and rejected theory and romantic ideas as unessential and unimportant. During this period he also underwent a profound change in religious attitudes. The religious movement which he espoused was led mainly

²Charles Lowe, Prince Bismarck (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1895), pp. 9-12.

³Otto Furst von Bismarck, The Memoirs, Vol. I, trans. by A. J. Butler (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), p. 1.

⁴Pflanze, Development of Germany, pp. 55-56.

⁵Bismarck, Memoirs, p. 1.

⁶Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 52.

by Junkers and was pietistic in nature. The followers of this movement

rejected the rational, unemotional element which had penetrated the clergy during the Enlightenment. In place of reason they emphasized feeling; for⁷ theology they substituted divine and brotherly love.

As a consequence of this change, he matured from a wild, restless young adult into a purposeful and mature man. Religion, however, never became a "doctrinal basis for his politics."⁸ Convinced of the justness of the Prussian monarchy, mindful of his Junker heritage and imbred with a sense of purpose, he had grown ready for a successful governmental career.

Bismarck's entrance into public life came in February of 1847. At this point Frederick William IV summoned the United Prussian Diet to Berlin in order to deliberate on the constitution which Frederick William III had promised following the Wars of Liberation. Although the Diet failed to draft a constitution, it provided Bismarck with a chance to impress the Prussian public by opposing any possible restrictions on the king's constitutional powers. He was quite pleased with the status quo.⁹

His opinions became even better known in 1848. His reactions to the well-known wave of revolutions which swept over the continent bring out clearly his attitude on the role of the Prussian monarchy and explain in good part his rise to the position of a trusted advisor to Frederick William IV. Upon hearing about the first uprising in

⁷Ibid., p. 54.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Lowe, Prince Bismarck, pp. 22-23.

Berlin, Bismarck raised an army of peasants at Schönhausen and offered his services and his small army to the garrison commander at Potsdam as a means of subduing the rebellion.¹⁰ His fears of dramatic constitutional changes seemed justified when the Prussian national assembly in May of 1848 drafted a liberal constitution which called for the abolition of many of the king's rights and most of the Junkers' special privileges.¹¹ His fears were confirmed when the German national assembly, in the meantime, meeting at Frankfort, called for an end to German particularism and the establishment of a German national state.¹² His reaction is self explanatory:

I am a Junker and want the advantage of being one. . . History proved that only those states with an hereditary aristocracy attained lasting prosperity and power. The great victories of the Prussian army had been purchased with their blood. . . they were the great bulwarks of freedom in Prussian society.¹³

He felt that the king should use every means at his disposal to restore the old order. He declared in a speech in 1849

that the struggle between popular sovereignty and divine right would never be settled by parliamentary debate. The final arbiter between bourgeois and Junker, liberal and conservative, was force, not oratory. Victory lay not with the parliamentary majority, but with the mailed fist of the state.¹⁴

Thus Bismarck's main objections to the Revolution of 1848, and the proposed reforms emerging from it, concentrated on the threat it

¹⁰Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 62.

¹¹Ibid., p. 63.

¹²Walter M. Simon, Germany: A Brief History (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 166-67.

¹³Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 65.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 66.

posed to the Prussian state. Bismarck was a Prussian, not a German. He was adamant in his demand for a strong and independent Prussia. He viewed the power of the state as a means of self-fulfillment for Prussia. The power of the state should be used to advance Prussian influence in international affairs,¹⁵ and to protect the Junkers against a social revolution in domestic affairs.

His ultimate hopes were for the aggrandizement of Prussia, not of Germany; according to his conception, German unity could only take place under Prussian guidance.¹⁶ And only Prussian aggrandizement could guarantee the political and social balance extant in Prussia. Bismarck started to understand the complexities of unification in May of 1851, when he was appointed to represent Prussia at the Diet of the German Confederation. In his Otto von Bismarck Theodore S. Hamerow headed the chapter dealing with this experience "The Road to Damascus."¹⁷ The analogy is apt, since Paul's religious conversion before Damascus may readily be compared to Bismarck's secular conversion at Frankfurt to what he considered the correct path for Prussian foreign policy. While at Frankfurt, he lost his "state of political innocence,"¹⁸ underwent intensive diplomatic training and gained political maturity. By the end of this service, he had formulated his basic foreign

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 76-77.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 73-74.

¹⁷Theodore S. Hamerow, ed., Otto von Bismarck: A Historical Assessment, Problems in European Civilization (London: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), pp. 16-21.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 17.

policy goal: Prussia can only achieve hegemony in Germany by expelling Austria.¹⁹

Because of the way he understood the solution to Germany's internal difficulties, he was in constant conflict with the Austrian delegate. Just as Bismarck tried to use the Confederation for his purposes, so Count Karl Ferdinand von Buol-Schauenstein sought to use it as a weapon against Prussian growth.²⁰ Bismarck sought to thwart this policy by pursuing a policy of obstruction in the Diet. He summed up his stance when he said that "when Austria hitches a horse in front, we hitch one behind."²¹

Bismarck's major difficulty in attaining his goal was that the small and medium-sized German states in the Diet feared Prussia more than Austria. They usually sided with Austria and tended to keep Prussia in a minority within the Confederation.²² In order to check this opposition he proposed an internal reform of the Diet. Should this program fail, then Prussia could always aim for equality through participating in international power politics. In pursuit of his goal, Bismarck urged his king to exploit any Austrian foreign policy mistakes to the fullest. During the Crimean War, for example, when relations between Vienna and St. Petersburg were rapidly deteriorating,

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

²⁰ Enno Kraehe, "Austria and the Problem of Reform in the German Confederation: 1851-1863," American Historical Review (January, 1951), 276.

²¹ Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 93.

²² Heinrich Friedjung, The Struggle for Supremacy in Germany, 1859-1866, trans. by A. J. P. Taylor and W. L. McElwee (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), pp. 4-5.

he urged that the army not be mobilized at Lissa near the Russian border, but in Upper Silesia, where the troops would be in position "to cross either the Russian or the Austrian border with equal facility."²³ The king did not follow this suggestion because he believed in a policy of friendship with the Hapsburg dynasty.

The proposal itself is illuminating, however, since it clarifies the policy Bismarck was now pursuing. He had begun to realize that Prussian aggrandizement could only be gained along certain fairly determined lines, that is, either by an agreement with Austria concerning spheres of influence in Germany,²⁴ or by force of arms resulting in the expulsion of Austria from Germany. The latter alternative had an advantage in that it would permit Prussia to join her eastern and western provinces and to "reorganize the rest of Protestant Germany into a federation under her own domination."²⁵ Nevertheless as long as Prussian aggrandizement was achieved, either means was acceptable to Bismarck.²⁶

Bismarck had opposed the German nationalists in the Revolution of 1848 because he had felt that they were a threat to the Prussian monarchy and to the Junker class. During his years at the Frankfurt Diet, however, he began to realize how the force of German nationalism could be transformed for his purposes. Following its failure during the revolution, the liberal movement in Germany had become dormant;

²³ Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 98.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ For a thorough study of Bismarck's foreign policy goals at the Diet at Frankfurt see "The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck" by Henry A. Kissinger in the Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, XCVII (Summer, 1968), 888-924.

it even began to show signs of surrendering its liberal ideology in return for German unification. Bismarck was quick to see that the liberals might be willing to condone his expansionist policies, if they eventually led to unification. If peaceful expansion proved impossible, German nationalism could be used as a moral shield to cover Prussia's expansion by force.²⁷ After the unification, it could provide "the centripetal force with which to consolidate the new state."²⁸ In line with these insights, Bismarck proposed in March, 1858, that

Prussia exploit the moral power of German nationalism in the interest of the state, that a conservative monarchy deliberately employ the sentiment for national unity to reinforce its foreign policy at the cost of a conservative foe.²⁹

What a difference between his actions of 1848, when he had offered to lead an army against the Prussian liberals who advocated national unity, and his proposals of 1858! The fact is, however, that both proposals though different in nature, advocated the expansion of Prussian power. Had it been in the interest of Prussian policy for Germany to remain disunited, Bismarck would almost certainly have resisted unification with all his energy and ability.

Just as Bismarck's work at Frankfurt seemed to be ready to produce definite results, two events occurred. First, he was appointed ambassador to St. Petersburg. William (later William I) and his advisors were not yet ready to accept Bismarck's foreign

²⁷ Otto Pflanze, "Bismarck and German Nationalism," American Historical Review, LX (1955), 550-51.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 551.

²⁹ Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 124.

policy proposals. He was therefore removed from his position at Frankfurt and "put in cold storage on the Neva."³⁰

Second, a "new era" began in Prussian politics when Prince William was appointed as regent for his ailing brother. Upon gaining control, he replaced his brother's ultra-conservative cabinet with a moderate one. Liberal hopes soared; many felt they had a friend on the throne. Furthermore, the elections of 1859 returned a liberal majority to the Lower House of the Landtag, thus ending the decade of reaction.³¹

The honeymoon between William and the liberals ended quickly. This shortlived era of harmony was in reality only a prelude to one of the most intense constitutional conflicts in Prussian history. This crisis lasted until after the Austrian War in 1866 and helped bring about Bismarck's ascendancy to power. At its base were reforms which William thought necessary for the army.

The new Prussian leader felt that a strong army was an absolute necessity, and that only extensive reforms could bring the army "to a position of dominance in Europe."³² The inefficiency of the army had been demonstrated during the mobilization related to the Franco-Austrian War. In response to this weakness, William wanted the term of service for the regular army increased to three years and the militia (Landwehr) associated more closely with the army. To see

³⁰ Ibid., p. 125.

³¹ Simon, Germany, p. 187.

³² Michael Howard, Studies In War and Peace (10th ed.; New York: The Viking Press, 1970), p. 68.

these proposals carried out, William chose Albrecht von Roon as his minister of war.

Roon presented the government's proposals to the Landtag in February of 1860.³³ The liberals opposed them from the outset; they argued that the cost of the increased length of service was excessive and that the envisioned change in the status of the Landwehr was politically motivated. The increased cost would either create a deficit in the budget, or necessitate an increase in taxes. They also objected to the three year service term because they felt that the military wanted to have sufficient time to turn recruits into professional soldiers who would obey the monarchy at the expense of the nation.³⁴ Many liberals had not forgotten that in 1848 the professional army of the king had opposed them. At the same time many of them were members of the Landwehr, which was civilian first and military second. Thus the attack on the Landwehr seemed to reflect William's determination to "destroy the bulwark of the people's liberty."³⁵ In essence then, the liberals feared a professional army, which could be used against them, while William feared the political unreliability of the Landwehr.³⁶

The conflict between crown and parliament soon transcended the military bill and turned into a struggle for supremacy in the government.³⁷ In February, 1861, the Progressive Party, (Deutsche

³³ Ibid., pp. 69-78.

³⁴ Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 146.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 138-41.

³⁷ Howard, War and Peace, pp. 74-78.

Fortschritts Partei), even broke away from the old Liberal Party because it wanted stricter parliamentary control over the military budget and was unwilling to compromise on the issue.³⁸ In the elections of December, 1861, and May, 1862, liberal representation increased in the Lower House, and as a consequence the government ministries were unable to gain majorities and collapsed after each election. After another government resigned in September, 1862, the military appropriations outlined in the budget were also rejected by the liberals.³⁹

Under these trying circumstances, William I called upon Bismarck to serve as minister-president. William was in desperate straits and Bismarck understood the politico-social situation better than most. He realized that if the Lower House triumphed in the constitutional conflict, royal absolutism would be severely restricted and the Junkers would lose much of their influence to a parliamentary-controlled state.⁴⁰ In his proposed solution to the crisis, he thought of using German unification, that is, Prussian aggrandizement at Austrian expense. He hoped that internal politics could be adjusted to this foreign policy goal. He felt that a vigorous initiative in German affairs would increase Prussian power externally and could thereby help to resolve the constitutional confrontation. Already in 1858, he had said: "Exalt his self-esteem toward foreigners and the Prussian forgets whatever bothers him about conditions at home."⁴¹

³⁸ Craig, Prussian Army, p. 154.

³⁹ Howard, War and Peace, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁰ Pflanze, "German Nationalism," p. 551.

⁴¹ Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 232.

The force of nationalism, which he hoped to use for Prussian expansion, could now be brought to bear against domestic opposition as well. He realized that he had to identify the Prussian monarchy with German nationalism if he wanted to upstage the liberals and reconcile them and the ordinary citizen to monarchical rule.⁴²

Bismarck had seen from his observation of Napoleon III that nationalism and liberalism did not necessarily go hand in hand. He knew, too, that German liberals believed that unification could be achieved only through popular sovereignty. If he could bring about unification under the leadership of the monarchy, then nationalism could possibly be separated from liberalism and aligned with conservatism.⁴³ Such an accomplishment would then "justify and perpetuate the social and political position of the Junkers and the autocratic powers of the Hohenzollern dynasty."⁴⁴

In September, 1862, he gave a hint of his aspirations for Prussia and for his use of nationalism in a report to the Budget Committee of the Lower House.

Germany does not look to Prussia's liberalism, he said, but to its power. Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden may indulge in liberalism; therefore, no one would attribute to them Prussia's role. Prussia must concentrate its power for the favorable moment which already has several times been missed. Prussia's frontiers, as set by the Vienna treaties are not favorable to a sound statehood. The great questions of our time will be decided not by speeches and majority decisions----that was the great mistake of 1848 and 1849----but by iron and blood.⁴⁵

⁴²Pflanze, "German Nationalism," p. 551.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 554-55.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 555.

⁴⁵Eugene N. Anderson, The Social and Political Conflict in Prussia, 1858-1864 (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), p. 143.

One point that should be brought out now is that when Bismarck referred to unification, no matter what motive he had in mind concerning its advantage, he did not mean the unification of all Germans. In a nation of all Germans, Prussia and the Junkers would have been restricted to one faction in many; their position of dominance would have vanished. Furthermore, and this was very important to the devout Lutheran Bismarck, such a nation would have been predominantly Catholic. Thus his scheme for unification had definite geographic limits: while limited unification could enhance Prussian expansion and control, unlimited unification might relegate Prussia to a secondary role.⁴⁶

The constitutional conflict did not end with Bismarck's ascension to power. Nevertheless, he was able to run the government without parliamentary support by using Article 109 of the Prussian Constitution of 1850 which gave the government the authority to manage the state finances on the basis of former tax grants in the event that an agreement on the budget could not be reached.⁴⁷ He used foreign policy not only to silence the criticism of the liberals, but also to win over the majority of parliamentary representatives, as well as the military, to his point of view. It is with this approach that this paper is concerned, since it is hoped that an investigation of his methods will reveal the genius of the man and help to elaborate his attitudes and beliefs.

⁴⁶A. J. P. Taylor, The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of Germany Since 1815 (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), p. 102.

⁴⁷Hajo Holborn, A History of Modern Germany, 1840-1945 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 159.

The use of violence, or war, to achieve political goals, or advantages, did not originate in nineteenth-century Europe. There is no doubt, however, that few have used war, or the threat of war to such an advantage as Bismarck during the 1860's. He understood Clausewitz's principle, "War is. . . a continuation of political intercourse,"⁴⁸ particularly well. One may even argue that his diplomacy and concepts on war are closely linked to Clausewitz's interpretation of limited war. Limited war is best described as a conflict

deliberately and voluntarily limited in the total amount of damage threatened, planned, and done, as well as the kinds of targets attacked. . . limited strategic war. . . is primarily a contest of resolve. The military actions are part of a bargaining process. They are designed to precipitate bargaining in order to bring about an agreed termination of hostilities before these escalate to a less controlled,⁴⁹ or perhaps uncontrolled, cataclysm of destruction.

In other words, war should have an objective valuable enough to risk war. At the same time, it should be limited to the extent that its conclusion must follow the attainment of the objective.⁵⁰ In studying Bismarck's policies, the close affinity between Clausewitz's theories and Bismarck's application emerges clearly. Clausewitz advocated the primacy of political considerations over military operations; Bismarck struggled through three wars to assert this concept.

⁴⁸Carl von Clausewitz, On War, ed. by Anatol Rapoport (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 402.

⁴⁹Klaus Knorr and Thornton Read, ed., Limited Strategic War (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), pp. 3-4.

⁵⁰A. J. P. Taylor, "Rational Wars?" The New York Review, (November 4, 1971), p. 36.

It is interesting in this context that Bismarck said in 1889 that he had "never read Clausewitz"⁵¹ and that he knew "little more about him than that he was a meritorious general."⁵² Although this statement cannot be refuted with known evidence, its veracity is doubtful. Bismarck was well read, particularly in history, and his duties as ambassador and minister-president brought him into constant contact with military personnel who had read Clausewitz. It is therefore almost inconceivable that he should not have been exposed to Clausewitz through either of these two channels. It is well known, too, that he rarely gave credit to another individual for ideas he meant to claim as his own. Knowingly or not, during the wars of German unification Bismarck used Clausewitzian ideas on limited war and political control of the military.

Carl von Clausewitz served in the Prussian army during the wars against Napoleon I. It is said today that he had been taken aback by the totality of the Napoleonic Wars and wished to present the alternative of limited war. His book, On War, describes military tactics and elaborates his philosophy on war and its relationship to the other functions of state. Basically he argued that war could not be isolated from other forms of human activity; and unless the rational forces within a society modified it, war tended to become all encompassing. According to his interpretation, these rational interests are political in nature, and only their objectives can

⁵¹Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 458.

⁵²Ibid.

restrain wars from becoming total.⁵³ Reality, he felt, modified "the ideal of total violence."⁵⁴

The principle of political supremacy over military activity constitutes another important aspect of Clausewitz's theory on limited war. Since he saw war only as a continuation of diplomacy by other means, those who determine overall policy must control the extent of the war and its objectives. Military control of policy is only permissible in a war of attrition in which the very existence of a state is threatened.⁵⁵ Diplomacy must play a crucial role in limited wars. The shifting balance of power and the creation of new alliances are the major diplomatic realities that can change during the course of a war. Diplomats must expect and should encourage these changes; generals should concern themselves with the conduct of war.⁵⁶

Bismarck grasped the essence of Clausewitz's theories much better than the Prussian military leaders; they tended to use some of Clausewitz's suggestions and to discard others. As might be expected, they overlooked those concerning the subordination of the military leadership to the political decision makers. When On War was reprinted in the 1850's, for example, the pro-military editor

⁵³ Peter Paret, "Clausewitz and the Nineteenth Century," in The Theory and Practice of War, ed. by Michael Howard (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), pp. 28-29.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵⁵ Clausewitz, On War, pp. 404-05.

⁵⁶ Gerhard Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany, Vol. I: The Prussian Tradition, 1740-1890, trans. by Heinz Norden (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1969), pp. 61-62.

altered the passages concerning civilian supremacy to reflect this military thinking.⁵⁷

As a consequence of his direct or indirect knowledge of Clausewitz, Bismarck's policy goals had an amazingly clear outline. He believed in an European balance of power, but he wanted to rearrange it. He had certain aims for Prussian power which he wished to reach and was perfectly willing to use war as a means of attaining them. But he did not desire absolute war. He hoped to isolate potential enemies through diplomacy and to attain the more difficult foreign policy objectives by restraint on the military. To him limited wars fought for limited objectives seemed to lend themselves most readily to the achievement of Prussian aggrandizement.

His views on war also gave an insight into his personality. He believed strife to be one of the main elements of life. He saw nature, from plants to man, involved in constant struggles for survival and he felt that these struggles were necessary for the different life-forms to advance to a higher state of perfection. He believed strife "to be a condition of human progress and hence an intentional part of the divine plan."⁵⁸

The Setting

Bismarck's first opportunity to apply his concepts on foreign affairs came soon after he took office in 1862. Only a few months after becoming minister-president, he said that he had

⁵⁷Howard, ed., Practice of War, p. 30.

⁵⁸Pflanze, Development of Germany, pp. 87-88.

not the smallest doubt that the whole Danish business can be settled in a way desirable for us (Prussia) only by war. The occasion for such a war can be⁵⁹ found at any moment we consider favourable for waging it.

The favorable moment for settling the Danish problem arrived when the Danish monarch, King Frederick VII, died in 1863. His death came at a very inopportune time for the Danish Rigsraad (Parliament) since it had just passed a new constitution, which called for the incorporation of Schleswig into the Danish kingdom. Frederick died before signing the constitution, and his successor, Prince Christian of Glücksburg, signed only under pressure from parliament, knowing that such an act was forbidden by the London Treaty of 1852.⁶⁰

Christian's relationship to the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein was personal, not political, in nature. In Germany his action was regarded as unlawful, and public opinion was highly critical of his move. To complicate the situation further, Prince Frederick, the eldest son of the Duke of Augustenburg, claimed that the duchies should be under his control and that he was the lawful successor to the Danish throne.⁶¹

The Schleswig-Holstein question had been a diplomatic problem for many years. The Danes and Germans had lived together peacefully for centuries, but the rise of nationalistic feelings in the nineteenth century created tensions which expressed themselves adversely in regard to this question. Any cooperative spirit remaining between

⁵⁹ Erich Eyck, Bismarck and the German Empire (3rd ed., London: Unwin University Books, 1968), p. 81.

⁶⁰ Eyck, German Empire, pp. 81-82.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 82.

Danes and Germans had disappeared by the time of the revolutions of 1848. German nationalists desired that both Holstein and Schleswig be included in a German national state. Danish nationalists in Schleswig wanted their province united with Denmark.⁶² These different points of view led to open conflict and a tentative resolution in May, 1852, with the Treaty and Protocol of London. The treaty insured Danish territorial integrity and recognized the right of Prince Christian to succeed to its throne.⁶³ The Great Powers agreed, in addition, that the Danish government should not take steps to incorporate the duchy of Schleswig.⁶⁴

Although the Treaty of London recognized Prince Christian as the successor to the throne, it failed to resolve the difference in the succession laws in Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein. Since women were excluded from the line of succession in the duchies and since Frederick VII had no children, the question of his successor was important not only to Denmark proper, but to the duchies as well.⁶⁵

Because of the complexity of the situation, Bismarck saw an opportunity to achieve several of his goals. The duchies were important to Prussia because they would afford her access to the North Sea, an absolute must if she wanted to become a great seapower.⁶⁶

⁶²Lawrence D. Steefel, The Schleswig-Holstein Question (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), pp. 5-6.

⁶³Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁴Eyck, German Empire, p. 80.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 78-79.

⁶⁶William Harbutt Dawson, The German Empire 1867-1914 and the Unity Movement, Vol. I (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), p. 162.

The solution of the Schleswig-Holstein question could thus provide him with a way of using the influence of German nationalism to bring about a forcible settlement which would add needed territory to the Prussian kingdom. As already indicated, a major diplomatic victory would also tend to weaken domestic opposition.

Knowing that the Danish army was no match for the Prussian army, Bismarck set out to lay the diplomatic groundwork for limited war (the pattern was to be repeated in the next two wars.) Since German national sentiment favored the claim of the Duke of Augustenburg over that of Prince Christian, it seemed advisable to couple German protest against the Danish constitution with a recognition of Augustenburg's claim to the throne. But he shunned the support of the majority of Prussian and German nationalists and surprised everyone by basing his case against Denmark on the violation of the Treaty of London. His reasoning was that if Augustenburg were to be established in the duchies, they would become sovereign German states unavailable to Prussian annexation.⁶⁷

By basing his complaint against the new Danish constitution on the Treaty of London, Bismarck placed himself in a good legal and moral position. And, by using this legality as a pretext, he hoped to isolate Denmark diplomatically. The power most likely to come to Denmark's aid was Great Britain who needed a strong Denmark in order to protect her interests in the Baltic. He had recognized from the outset that as long as he used the London Treaty as his basis for action, Britain could not intervene on moral grounds. And he saw in addition that Britain was not likely to intervene actively without

⁶⁷ Pflanze, Development of Germany, pp. 236-37.

a continental ally. Since Bismarck could be sure that Russia would not support her, he directed his attention to France and Austria, the other possible allies. He determined to secure Austrian aid in Denmark and to keep Britain and France apart.⁶⁸

Austria's position in regard to the situation was difficult. It was imperative that she take some sort of stand concerning the Danish question, but she could not support the cause of Augustenburg since such a course of action would have meant an endorsement of a "national" solution for Schleswig-Holstein. The multi-national Hapsburg Empire could not afford to endorse such a solution. Bismarck resolved this dilemma by using the London Treaty as "the rope with which he took the Austrian government in tow."⁶⁹ Austria could readily join Prussia in objecting to the Schleswig-Holstein problem on grounds of violations of the London Treaty.⁷⁰ Thus any action against Denmark became a joint venture by Prussia and Austria.

An item of interest needs to be interjected at this point. Even as Bismarck was negotiating with Austria concerning war with Denmark, he was thinking about a war with the Hapsburg empire. He wrote to the Prussian ambassador to France, Count Robert von der Goltz.

You do not trust Austria. Neither do I. But I consider it the correct policy at present to have Austria with us. Whether the moment of separation will come and on whose initiative, we shall see. . . I am by no means fighting shy of war, quite the reverse. . . Perhaps you will very soon convince yourself that war is also included in my programme.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 240-41.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 241.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Eyck, German Empire, p. 87. This letter was written December 24, 1863.

The separation of France from Britain, her only potential continental ally, was not very difficult since British leadership distrusted Napoleon III. Already earlier in 1863, the emperor had tried to get England embroiled in a war with Russia over the Polish revolt. Also, while Britain was content with the status quo, Napoleon wanted to reorder the European chessboard.⁷² Thus, when the two German powers indicated their intentions to invade Schleswig in 1864, the French government announced that it would not aid Britain. Denmark was effectively isolated.⁷³

The actual conflict between the two German powers and Denmark and the beginning of the struggle in Prussia between the political and military leaders for wartime supremacy will be dealt with later. Here it will suffice to say that the Danes were defeated in a struggle which had two distinct phases, interrupted by an international conference in London which provided breathing space for the three antagonists and reordered international alignments. The conference, which lasted from April 20 to June 25, 1864, is significant for several reasons.⁷⁴ First, the London Treaty of 1852 was revoked.⁷⁵ Second, Augustenburg's candidacy to an independent Schleswig-Holstein was defeated due to Danish intransigence. The revocation of the London Treaty made it

⁷²W. E. Mosse, The European Powers and the German Question, 1848-71, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 150.

⁷³Pflanze, Development of Germany, pp. 243-44.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 245.

⁷⁵Chester Wells Clark, Franz Joseph and Bismarck: The Diplomacy of Austria Before the War of 1866 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. 69.

possible for Prussia to disavow her legal obligation to keep her hands off Schleswig-Holstein, and the rejection of the duchies becoming independent under Augustenburg created a vacuum which Prussia was ready to fill.⁷⁶

The second phase of the Danish War began on June 28, after the failure of the conference at London, and the war ended on July 20. The terms of the peace treaty stipulated the separation of the duchies from Denmark under the joint administration of Prussia and Austria.⁷⁷ Bismarck's goal of Prussian aggrandizement was coming into sight. He only had to see to it that the duchies became Prussia's property. He saw quickly how the joint occupation could be turned to attain an important goal of his German policy: Prussian hegemony in northern Germany at Austria's expense.

There has been much debate concerning Bismarck's intentions at the end of the Danish War. Did he use the problem of the duchies as a pretext for a later war against Austria? Erich Eyck believes that he "would have been willing to do without war if he had been able to achieve his aims through diplomatic means."⁷⁸ The difficulty was, of course, that Austria was bound to resist forcibly Bismarck's aim of Prussian hegemony in Germany.

Between the end of the Danish War and the outbreak of the Austrian War, tension between Prussia and Austria over the administration of the duchies reached ever increasing intensity. The Austrians wanted the duchies either to be made independent under Augustenburg, or to

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 71-79.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 84-88.

⁷⁸ Eyck, German Empire, p. 125.

be annexed by Prussia, with territorial compensations for themselves. Bismarck rejected both proposals. By the summer of 1865, war appeared to be imminent, but it was averted by the Gastein agreement.⁷⁹ This compromise stipulated that the duchies were to be divided, Prussia receiving Holstein and Austria acquiring Schleswig.⁸⁰

The Gastein convention convinced Bismarck that Austria's present usefulness had been exhausted. He redirected his policy towards isolating Austria from any possible allies in an upcoming war.⁸¹ He reasoned that in a conflict between the two German powers, the key to success would be the position of France. Knowing that Russia would not aid Austria and that England was helpless in any continental struggle without a continental ally, he sought to ensure French neutrality. Italy was a potential ally since it wished to acquire Venetia from Austria and could thus be helpful as a potential threat in Austria's rear.

Bismarck assured himself of French neutrality at a meeting with Napoleon III at Biarritz in October, 1865. This meeting is still surrounded by much controversy. Many historians claim that Bismarck hinted at the possibility of France obtaining some German territory on the Rhine in return for neutrality.⁸² Whether he made his promise or not is really not important since Napoleon believed that war between

⁷⁹Pflanze, Development of Germany, pp. 254-57.

⁸⁰F. Darmstaedter, Bismarck and the Creation of the Second Reich (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1965), p. 266.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 268.

⁸²A. J. P. Taylor, Bismarck: The Man and the Statesman (New York: Random House, Inc., 1955), p. 80.

Austria and Prussia would be long and costly for both, with Austria winning eventually. In view of this analysis, the French emperor concluded a treaty with Austria prior to the outbreak of war in June of 1866. He thought in effect that in order for France to benefit from a war, Austria must be victorious.⁸³ This evaluation was quite obviously based on miscalculations and, since the war was of short duration, Napoleon's hesitancy assured Bismarck of French inaction.

Bismarck was able to sign a treaty with the Italians on April 8, 1866, which obligated them to aid Prussia militarily in case of war. The treaty also stipulated that the agreement was void unless the war began within three months after its signing.

Bismarck had to act quickly.⁸⁴

The war began on June 2, 1866, and ended, for all practical purposes, on July 3 with the Austrian defeat at Königgrätz. The success of Prussian arms in the Seven Weeks War made the achievement of the second of Bismarck's goals possible: Prussian hegemony in northern Germany and Austrian expulsion from German affairs. The German Confederation, which had been dominated by Austria, was now replaced by the North German Confederation, which would come to be dominated by Prussia.

Another important aspect of the Prussian victory was its effect on Prussian liberals. One liberal wrote that

the trophies of war exercise a magic charm upon the child of peace. One's view is involuntarily chained and one's

⁸³Herman Oncken, Napoleon III and the Rhine (2nd ed.; New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), p. 43.

⁸⁴Eyck, German Empire, p. 114.

spirit goes along with the boundless vows of men who acclaim the god of the moment - success.⁸⁵

Following the war, the Progressive Party split; the more conservative members formed the National Liberal Party which became the mainstay of Bismarck's support. It "abandoned the fight against Prussian authoritarianism in exchange for the achievement of German unity by blood and iron."⁸⁶ Nationalism and liberalism had been separated and the former united with conservatism. The constitutional conflict ended when an indemnity bill was passed by the Lower House, with over half of the Prussian liberals voting in favor of it.⁸⁷ Bismarck was triumphant in both his foreign and domestic policies. He had achieved all of his aims, except the unification of all of Germany under Prussian auspices. This was his next goal, and true to form he was already formulating his plans when the guns grew silent at Königgrätz.

The First Application of the Theory

Bismarck was as successful in his struggle for civilian control of the military as with his foreign policy. In the Danish and Austrian wars he kept war limited, whereas the military demanded more total warfare. Although the conflict between Bismarck and the generals reached its climax during the Franco-Prussian War, the earlier wars set the stage for the final struggle.

⁸⁵ Remarks of Gustav Mevissen, cited in Gordon R. Mork, "Bismarck and the "Capitulation" of German Liberalism," Journal of Modern History, XLIII (March, 1971), 59.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

During the 1860's, the general staff and its leader, Count Helmuth von Moltke, became the main military consultants of William. This shift in the arrangement of the influence groups at court must be attributed mainly to Moltke. He had changed the role of the general staff from an advisory body to an agency responsible for the planning and execution of military campaigns.⁸⁸ As a consequence of this change, the general staff, instead of the ministry of war, began to issue the orders to field commanders. This rearrangement within the military structure occurred during the Danish War, when Moltke was placed in charge of operations and was able to bring order out of the chaotic situation in the army. As a result of this improvement, he became Prussia's leading military spokesman and William's chief advisor.⁸⁹

The emergence of Moltke may be seen as the principal indicator of a new rivalry between the military and civilian branches of government over the control of war policy. While Roon adhered to the principle of civilian control, Moltke did not. Moltke felt that

Politics. . . was to be decisive before the beginning and after the end of hostilities, but not in between. In his linear logical way Moltke thought that he had solved the problem in the form of a simple division of function between the politician and the strategist.⁹⁰

In other words, Moltke recognized the supremacy of the civilians in deciding on war, its aims and its conclusion; but he felt that the

⁸⁸Dennis E. Showalter, "Diplomacy and the Military in France and Prussia, 1870," Central European History, IV (December 1971), 350.

⁸⁹Craig, Prussian Army, pp. 194-95.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 196.

military must take precedence from the beginning of hostilities to the re-establishment of peace.⁹¹

For reasons noted earlier, Bismarck disagreed. The military historian, Gordon A. Craig, states that although Bismarck was able to uphold the principle of civilian control over the direction of war, many soldiers remained unconvinced of his approach.⁹²

It is wrong to assume, however, that Bismarck was hostile to the military. His coming to power in 1862 had been due partly to "his willingness to guarantee the army's autonomy."⁹³ He continued to feel that he should not interfere in military matters unless they affected overall state policy. The main reason for the military's inability to understand his position was that he saw ways to attain war aims through diplomatic moves which were not always clear to them.⁹⁴ The best examples of this divergence of opinions may be seen during the course of the Danish and Austrian wars.

As indicated, during the Danish War it was imperative for diplomatic reasons that Bismarck keep the Austrians as allies. It was vital, therefore, that the war be limited to the province of Schleswig and not spread to Denmark. At the outbreak of the war, however, the Danish army fell back to the fortress of Düppel, thus presenting the Prussian and Austrian armies with the choice either of a frontal attack on the fortress, or an encircling maneuver into Denmark, which the

⁹¹Ritter, Sword and the Scepter, p. 196.

⁹²Craig, Prussian Army, pp. 215-16.

⁹³Showalter, "Diplomacy and the Military," 351.

⁹⁴Ibid.

Austrians opposed because it might enlarge the war.⁹⁵ The Prussian commander of the Austro-Prussian army, Field Marshal von Wrangel, disregarding their reservations, advanced into Danish Jutland. As a result, General Edwin von Manteuffel had to be sent to Vienna to convince the Austrian government that in order to capture Düppel it had been necessary for the army to enter Jutland. Manteuffel's mission was successful; the Austrians did not withdraw from the war, and foreign intervention was averted.⁹⁶

Another conflict between Bismarck and the military arose over the actual capture of Düppel. Bismarck knew that his bargaining power would be considerably enhanced by a decisive Prussian victory there against the Danes. Although most Prussian commanders firmly opposed any assault on the stronghold, Bismarck managed to convince William that victory would strengthen his position in regard to the constitutional conflict. The assault and capture of Düppel followed on April 18.⁹⁷

The capture of Düppel had two major consequences. First, as Bismarck had predicted, Prussia's negotiating power at London was enhanced; she came to the conference table as a victorious power. Second, the victory frightened the military into believing that Bismarck might give away their hard-won gains. They did not understand most of Bismarck's diplomatic moves and the concessions he appeared ready to make.⁹⁸ Even Roon, who usually supported Bismarck,

⁹⁵ Craig, Prussian Army, pp. 181-83.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 184-87.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 188-91.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 190-92.

wrote that the army did not regard itself as "a political instrument, a lancet for the diplomatic surgeon."⁹⁹ In the end, though, the negotiations broke down, the war resumed, and the Danes were defeated.¹⁰⁰

In comparison with the later clashes between Bismarck and Moltke, these early conflicts seem minor. They are useful to demonstrate a trend, however. In the Danish War, Bismarck was successful in firmly establishing the principle of civilian control over the military. But just as his successful foreign policy enhanced his prestige, so the victories of the Prussian army increased the influence of its leadership. Because of their success both parties grew more intransigent in their diverse beliefs and the conflict was more intense by the time of the Austrian War than it had been two years earlier.

This intensity was related to the mobilization and deployment of troops at the outset of the war and to the best policy to be pursued after the Prussian victory at Königgrätz. Moltke sought to divide governmental responsibilities for the war effort into two separate spheres. He felt in particular that the proper timing of mobilization was a military function. Bismarck's diplomacy, called for various alternatives to be kept open until the last possible moment before hostilities opened in order to pursue the most favorable course of action.¹⁰¹ He was mainly concerned whether the French would mobilize and wanted some troops to remain in the Rhine provinces. Moltke wanted these troops sent to Bohemia to participate in the

⁹⁹ Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 458.

¹⁰⁰ Craig, Prussian Army, p. 192.

¹⁰¹ Pflanze, Development of Germany, pp. 91-92.

fighting against Austria. At Bismarck's insistence, William revoked the orders which would have sent these troops to Bohemia, thus incurring the wrath of Moltke. In actuality, the problems caused by this and other acts of interference were not serious, but they were irritating to Moltke and the general staff.¹⁰²

The campaign against Austria was very brief and Bismarck saw the decisive battle at Königgrätz as the fulfillment of his goal to achieve Prussian hegemony in Germany. Moltke, however, saw Königgrätz as a preliminary to a campaign for the capture of Vienna. Bismarck knew that his principal goal could be jeopardized by further military action which might invite foreign intervention, especially from the French emperor.¹⁰³ In fact, two days after Königgrätz Napoleon offered to negotiate between the two belligerents, an offer that could not be refused unless Prussia wanted to risk French disfavor. Bismarck's reasoning prevailed; William agreed to cease hostilities and conclude peace.¹⁰⁴

Bismarck had again asserted his dominance over the military in time of war, but it had been a more difficult task than in 1864. During this war, the prestige of both Bismarck and the military, represented by Moltke, soared to new heights. Antagonisms rose in proportion, and the general staff vowed that political interference would not be tolerated in future conflicts. Bismarck disagreed.

¹⁰²Craig, Prussian Army, p. 196.

¹⁰³Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 459.

¹⁰⁴Craig, Prussian Army, pp. 198-99.

The final resolution of the principle of political control of the military was about to be decided as Bismarck headed towards the ultimate goal of his foreign policy: the unification of Germany in the image of Prussia.

CHAPTER II

TOWARDS LIMITED WAR: BISMARCK'S PREPARATIONS

BETWEEN 1866 AND 1870

In order to study any aspect of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, it is necessary to go back in time beyond the opening of hostilities, even beyond the mobilization of the armies and the direct causes for the mobilizations. In order to trace the background to the Franco-Prussian War, one must go back to the Prussian victory at Königgrätz.

Bismarck was thinking ahead already then to a possible war with France. He immediately began to activate plans to isolate France; in any possible war he wanted only two active participants: Germany and France. The diplomatic isolation of France was essential if the war was to be kept limited and it was imperative that all foreign relations be coordinated in order to facilitate this task. Every potential ally of France either had to be neutralized through diplomacy or else cowered into neutrality by the threat of Prussian force. Any potential pro-French entente had to be met by the threat of an even more powerful pro-Prussian entente. Bismarck said in his Memoirs that he thought at that early stage that war with France would have to be fought before Germany could be unified.¹ By his own account, he realized that all

¹Otto Fürst von Bismarck, The Memoirs, Vol. I, trans. by A. J. Butler (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), p. 57.

domestic and foreign relations must keep this reality in mind.²

There is much controversy over Bismarck's intentions between 1866 and 1870. Some historians feel that he contrived the various crises during these years in order to fulfill his foreign policy goals. This point of view agrees with his Memoirs written after he had left office in 1890, in which he indicated that he had a master-plan for the unification of Germany, including war with France.

However, in an interview with Heinrich Friedjung in 1890 Bismarck rejected this contention by saying that it was not possible for a statesman to follow a set plan of action over a period of years. He likened the statesman to a person wandering in a forest who knows how to get out, but not "the point at which he will emerge from the woods."³ Some authors, particularly Taylor, go along with the Friedjung interview and contend that Bismarck had no plan, that he just used events before the war to his best interests.

A majority of writers take a more moderate view and believe that Bismarck had a loose idea of what he wanted, and that he adapted to situations as they arose. This writer agrees with this viewpoint, even though the other two merit attention.

At the conclusion of the Austro-Prussian War, the international situation was potentially dangerous to the new North German Confederation. As indicated, the Austrians agreed to terminate the war

²Ibid.

³Lawrence D. Steefel, Bismarck, The Hohenzollern Candidacy and the Origins of the Franco-German War of 1870 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 243. This interview was given in 1890.

immediately after Königgrätz. But William I wanted to punish them. He felt that they should be forced to give up some territory and agree to a Prussian parade through Vienna. Bismarck opposed this program. His terms required only that Austria withdraw from South Germany and acknowledge Prussian hegemony north of the Main River.⁴ These terms were acceptable to the Austrians and William gave in two days later. The peace treaty was signed at Prague shortly thereafter.⁵

Bismarck's reasoning behind this mild peace treaty was the beginning of his far-reaching policy of neutralizing all possible enemies of German unification. He described this approach much later;

We had to avoid wounding Austria too severely; we had to avoid leaving behind in her any unnecessary bitterness of feeling or desire for revenge; we ought rather to reserve the possibility of becoming friends again with our adversary of the moment, and in any case to regard the Austrian state as a piece on the European chessboard and the renewal of friendly relations with her as a move open to us. If Austria were severely injured, she would become the ally of France and of every opponent of ours; she would even sacrifice her anti-Russian interests for the sake of revenge on Prussia.⁶

France was Bismarck's immediate concern after Königgrätz. As shown, Napoleon III had tried to play Austria and Prussia off against each other. According to the French foreign minister, Drouyn de Lhuys, Napoleon had attempted to sign treaties with both Prussia and Austria in the hope that the Rhineland would fall to France in return for neutrality.⁷ France and Prussia never signed a formal treaty, however.

⁴Alan John Percivale Taylor, Bismarck, The Man and the Statesman (New York: Random House Inc., 1955), p. 85.

⁵Ibid., pp. 86-87.

⁶Bismarck, Memoirs, p. 50.

⁷Hermann Oncken, Napoleon III and the Rhine (2nd ed.; New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), p. 43.

Napoleon only met with Bismarck at Biarritz, where, according to A. J. P. Taylor, "both men talked vaguely of their future plans; but neither succeeded in tying the other down."⁸

The battle of Königgrätz had a great impact on the French people, an impact that caused Napoleon to look desperately for compensatory evidence of gain or achievement. According to Lawrence D. Steefel, the French public felt that it had been cheated at Königgrätz and at Prague. They had anticipated that the war would be long and bloody, and that Napoleon would be able to step in and claim lands along the Rhine. The quick Prussian victory had united all of Germany north of the Main River and deprived them of compensation. The French also seemed to have suffered an international setback. This was the last in a series of diplomatic defeats, but the Prussians had gone from victory to victory, both militarily and diplomatically. No doubt Prussian power was increasing without an equivalent adjustment in French strength.⁹

After Königgrätz, the French press clamored for compensations from Prussia; it believed that France could not remain the principal power in Europe without them. Bismarck, however, refused to surrender any German territories. He was not bound by any formal treaty to do so, and he saw no reason for helping Napoleon quiet his political enemies.¹⁰

The events after Königgrätz show Bismarck's ability to adapt his plans to situations. Using Napoleon's demands as a lever, he

⁸Taylor, Bismarck, p. 80.

⁹Steefel, Bismarck, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 3.

persuaded the South German states to accept secret offensive and defensive alliances with Prussia.¹¹ Thus Napoleon failed to gain compensations and drove the German states closer to unification. By aiding German unification, he created a profound dilemma since it had been French policy ever since Richelieu to keep Germany weak and divided.¹²

Even though Napoleon did not know of the German treaties, he discontinued his demand for compensations when Bismarck refused to discuss them. Napoleon now decided upon a different plan of action. In August of 1866 he proposed a treaty between the two countries which he thought would benefit both: France would acquire Belgium, and Prussia would gain South Germany. Negotiations about this proposal continued throughout 1866 and into 1867, with Napoleon's demands gradually increasing. Through Count Vincent Benedetti, his ambassador to Germany, he went from advocating the restoration of the French borders of 1814, to demanding German lands on the left bank of the Rhine.¹³ Since Bismarck refused these demands, Napoleon quickly dropped them. He was not yet ready to yield, however. Benedetti was now instructed to try to obtain the Saar, Luxemburg and an alliance that would enable France to annex Belgium. If Bismarck was still hesitant, then the demands for the Saar were to be dropped, and as a gesture to England, Antwerp was to be declared a free city. As expected, Bismarck demanded that the Saar issue be dropped and that a clause be

¹¹Oncken, Napoleon III, p. 74.

¹²Ibid., p. 10.

¹³Steeffel, Bismarck, p. 4.

included whereby France would not oppose a "common parliament for the North German and South German Confederations."¹⁴ He persuaded Benedetti to write the terms out in his own hand and then put them away for later use, even though a treaty was never ratified.¹⁵

Elsewhere in Europe the international situation was also potentially dangerous after Koniggratz, but Bismarck knew how to handle it. Italy was of no immediate danger to Prussia. The two countries had been allied in 1866 against Austria, Italy having acquired Venetia as a result. But Italian policy was responsive to Napoleon. Victor Emmanuel II, the King of Italy, respected Napoleon, and Italy usually followed the French lead. Bismarck gives an example of this affiliation in his Memoirs when he recalls an incident with an Italian general in Berlin.

He was horrified when I expressed the wish that he should inquire at home if we could rely on Italy's loyalty to her engagements even against Napoleonic ill-humor. He replied that a question of this kind would be telegraphed to Paris the very same day with the question: 'What answer shall be given?'¹⁶

Thus, although unlikely, it was not outside the realm of possibility that Italy and France would form a coalition against Prussia.

The situation between Prussia and England was more favorable. Richard Cobden, a member of parliament, summed up English policy during this time when he said that "non-intervention is the policy of all future governments in this country."¹⁷ Put differently, British

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Bismarck, Memoirs, p. 60.

¹⁷ Raymond James Sontag, Germany and England (New York and London: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1938), p. 81.

foreign policy was oriented more toward its empire than the continent. Benjamin Disraeli said that England was no longer just an European, but a world power.¹⁸ Its policy concerning Central Europe was to wait and see what would develop. The government did not even try to determine what changes in this area would be beneficial to Britain. In other words, England was not seriously concerned with European politics, and she did not want to be an active participant.¹⁹ Thus, although Prussia could not rely on active British support against France, she did not have to fear an Anglo-French coalition against her.

Up to the battle of Sedan in 1870, the English felt that Napoleon III, not Bismarck, should be watched and curbed.²⁰ A case in point was the British guarantee of Belgian integrity. In 1867, the Luxemburg Crisis made Britain fear that Belgian security might be endangered. Since Napoleon had his eyes on Belgium and had even proposed to annex her, Britain was justifiably concerned over the Belgian situation and remained so throughout the period prior to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War.

In July of 1870, after the declarations of war had been delivered in Paris and Berlin, Bismarck made certain that British public opinion would not support the French by producing the proposed treaty that Benedetti had offered him in 1866.²¹ He had the text of the proposal

¹⁸Sir A. W. Ward and G. P. Gooch, ed., 1866-1919, Vol. III of The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783-1919 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971), p. 9.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Sontag, Germany and England, pp. 79-80.

²¹Otto Pflanze, Bismarck and the Development of Germany: The Period of Unification, 1815-1871 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 461.

published in The Times in London on July 25, 1870.²² British public opinion reacted furiously. William Gladstone, the British prime minister, proposed a treaty to France and Prussia which would guarantee British support for either party, if the other violated Belgian neutrality. Both Prussia and France signed the treaty, and Belgian neutrality did not become an issue during the war.²³ England's neutrality and Bismarck's duplicity combined to prevent France from receiving any aid from Britain.

In Bismarck's mind, the most important power in Europe after the Austro-Prussian War, was Russia. He had little doubt that Russia would support Prussia in the upcoming struggle. The Romanovs, the Russian ruling house, and the Hohenzollerns, the Prussian ruling house, were dynastically allied.²⁴ Bismarck had advocated an active pro-Russian policy for years. Already during the Crimean War, he had exerted his influence on King Frederick William IV to press policies favoring Russia. Then, during the years from 1859 to 1862, he served as the Prussian ambassador to Russia and befriended Emperor Alexander II.²⁵

The political objective during his residence in St. Petersburg was to present a united front of Prussia and Russia towards the Western nations and to weaken Napoleon III's policy of gaining Russian support against Prussia.²⁶ Later, in 1863, Bismarck supported Russia in her

²²Ibid.

²³Ward, ed., Cambridge History, pp. 40-41.

²⁴Stephen Graham, Tsar of Freedom (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 133-34.

²⁵Bismarck, Memoirs, p. 60.

²⁶Ibid., p. 135.

suppression of the Polish revolt. Austria, France, and England had opposed Russia. This support strengthened the bonds between the two countries. Alexander II said openly that Russia and Prussia would not come into conflict during his lifetime.²⁷

Bismarck had good reason to be confident of Russia's support against any anti-Prussian coalition. Other European powers did not miss the point either. Austria, for one, became hesitant to join any alliance against Prussia since entering such an alliance would have meant that she would be surrounded on three sides by hostile forces and would certainly be defeated before any aid could be received from France or England.²⁸ Even though Bismarck felt confident of Russian support, two things concerned him. First, he felt that in the event of war, active Russian support would probably come only after Prussia had been defeated several times and the threat of a victorious allied army on Russia's Polish frontier became a reality. In his view Russia would offer no interference or aid until the danger of total Prussian defeat became certain.²⁹ From this perspective it was imperative that the Prussian army be strong enough to defeat whomever it encountered and be prepared to deal with one nation at a time.

Second, Bismarck was vexed over the influence that Prince Alexander Gorchakov, the head of the Russian cabinet, might exert on Alexander II. According to Bismarck, Gorchakov warned Alexander about the disadvantage of an increase in Prussian power. In the Memoirs

²⁷Ibid., p. 148.

²⁸Bismarck, Memoirs, pp. 60-61.

²⁹Ibid.

Bismarck says that Gorchakov invited France in 1866 to protest the overthrow of the German Confederation, but he was rebuked.³⁰ Fortunately for Bismarck and Germany, Russia retained its friendship for Prussia in the period from 1866 to 1870.

In summary, the international situation confronting Bismarck after the Austro-Prussian War was both potentially dangerous and potentially advantageous. His job now was to prevent France from gaining any allies, to maintain his own allies and to provoke France, if necessary, into the role of aggressor at an opportune time.

Bismarck knew how much Napoleon needed a diplomatic victory for internal consumption. Since Königgrätz his demands for compensations had not ceased. Bismarck eventually thought of giving him Luxemburg. This would steer him away from the Rhineland and would satisfy his needs for compensation. Bismarck's generosity must have appeared hollow even to Napoleon; after all Luxemburg was ruled by the King of Holland and no longer a part of the German Confederation.

Since Bismarck knew that William would not agree to let the French have Luxemburg, he advised Napoleon to present him with a fait accompli.³¹ But, in the spring of 1867, word of the French plan leaked out to the public. There was an immediate uproar in the German press. The French followed suit. Both sides talked of war. Bismarck appeared to be trapped. If he backed down before France, he would lose the support of the German public; if he refused to back down, war became a distinct possibility. Since he was not yet prepared to fight, he

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Erich Eyck, Bismarck and the German Empire (3rd ed.; London: Unwin University Books, 1968), p. 154.

began to extract himself on March 19, 1867, with the publication of the secret defensive alliances between the North German Confederation and South Germany in a German paper.³² He also played upon the fears of the King of Holland, who did not want to arouse German anger against Holland.³³ And he called on the major European powers to help settle the matter. As a result of this last effort, a conference met in London at which the participants decided that Luxemburg would become an independent state the neutrality of which would be protected by them; the Prussian troops were to be withdrawn.³⁴

The results of this crisis represented a setback for Napoleon and a victory for Bismarck. The emperor felt that Bismarck had lured him into a trap, but evidence indicates the contrary. Bismarck had not intended for word to leak out about the French offer to purchase Luxemburg. He had been taken by surprise, but had turned the situation into a gain for Prussia.³⁵ This crisis determined a change in French policy since Napoleon realized that the only way to deal with Bismarck was by a show of force. From then until the summer of 1870, French policy was therefore designed to gain allies so that this show of force would be successful.³⁶

Immediately following the Luxemburg crisis, in the summer of 1867, the World's Fair was held in Paris. In terms of the developing

³²Grant Robertson, Bismarck (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1919), p. 255.

³³Ludwig, Bismarck, p. 305.

³⁴Taylor, Bismarck, p. 106.

³⁵Robertson, Bismarck, p. 256.

³⁶Oncken, Napoleon III, pp. 89-94.

confrontation, it had importance for two reasons: one directly related to Prussia; the other to Russia. Since it was an important international event, all the major European statesmen attended. When William visited Paris, he was accompanied by Bismarck and Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the Prussian General Staff, F. D. Morrow calls their arrival "the Prussian version of the Israelite mission to spy out the Promised Land."³⁷ While Bismarck was in Paris sounding out French opinions and sizing up Napoleon, Moltke was taking long walks in the surrounding countryside: on his return to Berlin, Moltke produced a map indicating where Prussian gun placements should be placed for the bombardment of Paris.³⁸

When Alexander II visited Paris, he was treated rudely by the Parisian crowds. Shortly afterward, a young Pole attempted to assassinate the Russian emperor. These events did nothing to aid Franco-Russian understanding and may have enhanced Russo-Prussian friendship.³⁹

In 1868 an event occurred in Spain which had a profound effect on Franco-Prussian relations; in September a revolutionary upheaval drove Queen Isabella II from the throne. Spain had been a friend of France under Isabella and from the French point of view this friendship had been worth cultivating. France did not have to worry about its rear and in case of a war in Central Europe it could concentrate all its forces on the eastern front. Also, in case Napoleon needed more reinforcements in a war with Germany, he could use Catholic

³⁷Ian Morrow, Bismarck (New York: Collier Books, 1967), p. 62.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Graham, Tsar of Freedom, p. 148.

Spanish troops to replace the French garrison in Rome. All this was now thrown into doubt. Indirectly France had suffered another setback.⁴⁰

The major importance of the Spanish revolution was that a new monarch had to be found for the Spanish throne. The provisional government with Duke Francesco Serrano as regent and Juan Prim as president of the council of ministers set out immediately to find a suitable candidate. Their first choices were the former king, Ferdinand of Portugal, or his son, Louis. Either of these men would have furthered the goal of an Iberian union which many Spanish patriots wanted,⁴¹ but neither wanted the throne. The government then approached two Italian princes, but they declined as well. As a last resort the candidacy of Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern was considered.⁴²

Even though Leopold had not been the provisional government's first choice, he was well qualified for the vacancy. He was Catholic, his brother was the head of a constitutional government in Rumania, and his wife was a Portuguese princess, thereby bringing an Iberian union into the realm of possibility through their heir. Leopold was also related to Napoleon III, another point in his favor. Prim and Serrano seem to have felt, until French reaction informed them otherwise,

⁴⁰Robert Howard Lord, The Origins of the War of 1870 (2nd ed.; New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 12.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁴²Ibid.

that this blood relationship would make Leopold acceptable to the French emperor.⁴³

Bismarck was under no illusion from the outset about Napoleon's willingness to accept Leopold as the Spanish king. When reviewing the Hohenzollern question years later, he said that he had felt that Napoleon would accept Leopold because they were related.⁴⁴ But at the time Bismarck knew better than anyone that Leopold was not acceptable because he was a Hohenzollern and sympathized with Prussia. Napoleon's change of policy since the Luxemburg crisis left no doubt about his feelings. Bismarck did not know, however, how far he would be willing to go in order to prevent Leopold's candidacy.⁴⁵

The earliest indication of Bismarck's interest in the Hohenzollern Candidacy dates from December, 1868, when Colonel Karl von Stranz of the Prussian General Staff and Prince William of Putbus went to Madrid. This interest found new expression several months later in May of 1869 when Theodor von Bernhardi arrived in Spain; he stayed until the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War.⁴⁶ Bernhardi was an eminent military writer, economist, and politician with a reputation for diplomatic intrigues. In an essay, "The Causes of the Franco-Prussian War,"⁴⁷ Lord Acton wrote that Bernhardi had been sent to Italy in 1866, just before the Austro-Prussian War. Acton believed that

⁴³ Steefel, Bismarck, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁴ Lord, Origins, p. 15.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁷ Harold Temperley, "Lord Acton on the Origins of the War of 1870, with some unpublished letters from the British and Viennese Archives," The Cambridge Historical Journal, II (1926-1928), 63-73.

Bernhardi was there to bribe a majority of Spanish parliamentarians to vote for Leopold. His reason for this contention is that fifty pounds of Prussian bonds were sent to Spain, passing through London to be negotiated; they were thrown away when Leopold withdrew his candidacy.⁴⁸

In September, 1869, Don Eusebio de Salazar, an advocate of Leopold in the Spanish parliament, came to Germany to interview the candidate. The mission was not successful. Leopold and his father, Karl Anton, were hesitant about accepting the candidacy because of conditions in Spain and expected opposition from France.⁴⁹ While in Germany, Salazar also tried to persuade Leopold's brother, Charles (already head of the Rumanian government), to accept the Spanish crown; he refused as well.⁵⁰

In view of Salazar's failure to persuade either Hohenzollern candidate to come to Spain, Prim decided to approach the Duke of Genoa, a fifteen-year-old. After three months of negotiations Prim notified the Spanish ambassadors throughout Europe in December to prepare public opinion for the announcement of the accession of the Italian prince. In the meantime, however, opposition to the Genoan had become intense in Madrid and in the temporary Italian capital of Florence.

⁴⁸Lawrence Steefel, Bismarck, The Hohenzollern Candidacy and the Origins of the Franco-German War of 1870, pages 15-16, argues that although nine volumes of Bernhardi's diary have been published, his family refuses to publish the sections dealing with his mission to Spain. Any suggestions concerning Bernhardi's purpose in Spain are therefore conjecture, but it seems fairly certain that he was there to further Leopold's candidacy.

⁴⁹Lord, Origins, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁰Steefel, Bismarck, p. 43.

King Victor Emmanuel announced at the end of December that the duke's mother had decided against her son's acceptance of the Spanish offer.⁵¹

In February, 1870, Salazar returned to Germany to sound out Leopold once more. The letters he carried from Prim for Leopold, King William, and Bismarck advocated a policy of secrecy in regard to the renewed negotiations. Prim thought that secrecy was necessary because of the objections that might arise from France. Because of the possibility of French disapproval, he suggested that the Spanish and Prussian foreign ministers and King William have nothing to do with the negotiations. These letters leave no doubt that Prim was aware of Leopold's unacceptability to Napoleon. Prim wanted to make Leopold king before the French found out, presenting them with a fait accompli.⁵²

Bismarck began to work intensively for Leopold's acceptance during Salazar's second visit. He could see nothing but gain in Leopold's candidacy and expressed this viewpoint in a letter to William. First, he argued, the candidacy would improve relations with Spain, and thus place a country with pro-Prussian sympathies in the rear of France. In case of war, France would have to hold a large force in reserve to deal with any Spanish movements. Second, the candidacy would increase the prestige of the House of Hohenzollern and this was bound to have a favorable effect upon German public opinion.⁵³ Third, should Leopold refuse, the Spaniards might have to look to a Bavarian prince for their monarch. Undoubtedly such a candidate would seek

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 45-46.

⁵²Lord, Origins, p. 19.

⁵³Steefel, Bismarck, pp. 57-58.

support in Paris and Rome; instead of being an ally of Germany, Spain would then become a potential aid to the other three Catholic powers: Austria, France and Italy.⁵⁴

Karl Anton although opposed initially to his son's candidacy, now changed his mind. He wrote to Leopold that the affair should be decided by William.

If he wants it for reasons of high politics and of state, it will be for us to make world history with him - if he does not want it, it would be folly for us to enter a situation in which we would have to dispense with Prussia's support and good will.⁵⁵

Even after Bismarck's letter, William was still doubtful. On March 15, he held a dinner party and invited the Crown Prince Frederick; Leopold, the leading Prussian ministers (including Bismarck) and the two chief Prussian officers, Moltke and Roon. After discussing the candidacy at length, all the king's advisors recommended that Leopold accept. William remained hesitant, however, and insisted that Leopold make his own decision. Leopold again refused the offer several days later.⁵⁶

At this point Bismarck showed just how much he was interested in the Spanish candidacy. He summoned Leopold's younger brother, Frederick, home from abroad and urged him to accept the crown. Bismarck also dispatched two secret agents to Spain. But all of these plans went to naught when, at the end of April, Frederick declined as well.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 58-59.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 53.

⁵⁶Lord, Origins, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 21.

Events now took an unexpected turn when Leopold, after listening to the pleadings of Major von Versen, one of Bismarck's secret agents who had just returned from Spain, announced he would accept the crown if it were offered again. Bismarck sent a letter to Prim inviting him to renew the offer and sent Lothar Bucher, his other agent, to Spain to arrange the matter. Salazar came to Germany once again, and on June 19, Leopold asked William to approve his acceptance. William gave his approval two days later.⁵⁸

Immediately after William's approval, Salazar telegraphed the good news to Prim. A code had been worked out whereby the Spanish parliament was to be held in session to ratify the election of Leopold if the telegram read that Salazar would return before July 1. Salazar said he would return on June 26, but the code was deciphered in Madrid to read July 9. Therefore, when Salazar arrived on the twenty-sixth, parliament had been sent home. The hope of keeping secret Leopold's candidacy was shattered. Rumors began to spread, and the news reached Paris on July 3.⁵⁹

Since the Luxemburg Crisis of 1867 French policy makers had also been very active. Following the crisis, Napoleon had determined to develop an alliance system to halt Prussian advances. The first step in this effort came after the Paris World's Fair. In August of 1867, Napoleon visited Emperor Francis Joseph at Salzburg. Ostensibly this meeting was arranged to let Napoleon offer condolences to Joseph on the violent death of his brother Maximilian in Mexico. But, in fact,

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁹Steeffel, Bismarck, pp. 99-100.

the two emperors considered an alliance against Prussia.⁶⁰ The Austrian foreign minister, Count Ferdinand von Beust, later stated that Napoleon had offered Francis Joseph South Germany in return for the left bank of the Rhine.⁶¹ But the Austrian could not accept this offer. The Hapsburg Empire had not yet recovered from the war of 1866 and was not prepared to aid any foreign country in any overt act of aggression.⁶²

The Austrian government faced severe problems in its negotiations with the French government. First, it had to contend with Russian aid to Prussia against any Franco-Austrian alliance. Second, it could not afford to oppose German national interest too forcefully because of the large number of German liberals in the Empire. For the same reason it could not promise German lands to Napoleon. Third, Austria, since her defeat and expulsion from German affairs in 1866, had begun to direct her attention to the Balkans. She needed France's aid in this area, but France could not offer it for fear of further alienating Russia, who also wished to expand in this area. If, therefore, France could not aid Austria could Austria aid France against Prussia?

Italy was another source of concern for Austria in its relations with Napoleon. Austria insisted that Napoleon guarantee the entry of Italy into any Franco-Austrian alliance. In case of a war with Prussia, Austria did not want to worry about an attack from Italy.⁶³

⁶⁰ Oncken, Napoleon III, pp. 99-101.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 101.

⁶² Ibid., p. 102.

⁶³ Barbara Jelavich, The Hapsburg Empire in European Affairs, 1814-1918 (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1969), p. 103.

While Napoleon continued his negotiations with Austria, he began to make overtures to Italy. His goal was clear. He wanted a Triple Alliance with Austria and Italy in order to be able to wage war with Prussia and halt the German unification movement.

An alliance between France and Italy would have seemed quite natural under the circumstances. But the Roman Question was a major obstacle to a treaty. Italy was adamant that France must remove its troops from Rome before an agreement could be signed. Although other problems arose during the negotiations, this demand continued to be the major stumbling block to an agreement.⁶⁴

Napoleon might have evacuated the French troops; but the Pope still felt he needed protection against the anti-clerical sentiment prevalent in Italy. Abandoning the Papacy would have aroused the wrath of the French Catholics and Napoleon was not willing to risk their enmity. Thus he could not obtain a treaty with Austria unless Italy joined also, and Italy would not agree until Rome was evacuated. Once again Napoleon was in an impossible situation.⁶⁵

Negotiations continued between the three countries far into 1870, even though the Roman Question remained unsettled. Napoleon retained his conviction that Austria and Italy would come to his aid in case of war. This optimism was based in part on the role of the Austrian and Italian ambassadors to Paris, Prince Richard Metternich

⁶⁴Lillian Parker Wallace, The Papacy and European Diplomacy, 1869-1878 (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), pp. 18-21.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 21-23.

and Costantino Nigra, who are said to have strung Napoleon along with promises of an alliance.⁶⁶ Whether they were doing so, or whether Napoleon refused to accept other, more realistic, information is difficult to say; probably it was a combination of both. His failure to achieve the Triple Alliance he needed was one of his greater diplomatic setbacks.

Bismarck had, no doubt, a lot to do with Napoleon's disappointments. All this time, the Prussian minister had been busily at work trying to counter the emperor's diplomatic maneuvers. He realized that in order for the Prussian army to be successful, it must be able to fight the French army on the western front and not have to contend with a combined Austro-Italian army on its southern flank. The success of the army depended on whether or not he could isolate France from any of her potential allies, thereby limiting the war and avoiding a general European conflagration. In April of 1868, he obtained an agreement from Alexander II to the effect that if Prussia were threatened, Russia would concentrate an army on Austria's borders.⁶⁷ Austria was now surrounded on three sides by potential enemies. Bismarck was also active diplomatically in Italy. Since many Italian republicans opposed co-operation with France, Bismarck encouraged them to resist their government's pro-French policies. Prussia sent money and after the outbreak of war in 1870 there was even talk of an Italian legion fighting for Prussia. They were not needed, however.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 27. Napoleon's cousin, Jerome, later said "that they were deliberately deluding Napoleon."

⁶⁷Werner Eugen Mosse, The European Powers and the German Question (Cambridge: C. U. Press, 1968), pp. 286-89.

⁶⁸Wallace, The Papacy, p. 35.

Against this background it is difficult to conceive how Napoleon could have thought that Italy and Austria would assist him. Even though negotiations continued, and Austrian and French military men met to work out a co-ordinated offense against Prussia in case of war, Francis Joseph had opted for a policy of neutrality. Victor Emmanuel had also decided not to fight unless the Roman question was settled.

After news of Leopold's candidacy reached Paris on July 3, there was a popular outburst clamoring for immediate war. On July 6, the French foreign minister, Gramont, speaking before the Corps Législatif said that France would not allow Leopold to accept the throne of Spain and that should he persist in his plans, "we shall know how to fulfill our duty without shrinking and without weakness."⁶⁹

From the perspective of this essay it is interesting that the uproar over the Spanish crown was directed at Prussia, not at Spain. Bismarck contended that Leopold's candidacy was a Spanish matter not concerning Prussia. The French were not deluded, however. Benedetti was sent to meet William and demand that Leopold renounce the Spanish throne. On July 9, Benedetti met with William at Ems and presented his demands. William replied that he would not use his authority to force Leopold to refuse the Spanish offer, but would not object if he did so on his own. He also told Benedetti that he was in touch with Leopold and his father and would inform him when he heard of any new developments. The next day William received a letter from Karl Anton saying that Leopold would withdraw at William's request. William then telegraphed Bismarck asking whether he should write Napoleon a letter in order to ease the situation, or if he should ask the neutral powers

⁶⁹Bismarck, Memoirs, p. 93.

to mediate a solution. Bismarck said no to both inquiries. He was already preparing for war and opposed any moves that might avert it. In the meantime, William sent Colonel Strantz to Karl Anton to explain the delicate difficulties which Prussia was facing.⁷⁰

On July 12, Karl Anton telegraphed William that Leopold was withdrawing his candidacy. An explanatory dispatch was released to the newspapers. William was overjoyed. He commented later that, "a stone had been lifted from my heart."⁷¹ Only a concluding meeting with Benedetti now posed a problem. William did not want to appear to have had anything to do with the renunciation. He decided, therefore, not to confer with Benedetti until he was sure the ambassador had learned of the news from Paris. In that way he could simply acknowledge the news and express his approval.

Bismarck, returning to Berlin from Varzin on July 12, was immediately informed of Leopold's announced decision. That the withdrawal had been undertaken in the face of French threats seemed to Bismarck "a second Olmütz."⁷²

Meanwhile, word of Leopold's renunciation had arrived in Paris. At last Napoleon had won a diplomatic victory. But he did not leave well enough alone. Not content with this victory and urged on by his ministers, he telegraphed Benedetti to demand from William that he would never again let Leopold renew the candidacy. Benedetti confronted William early the next morning during his walk. He stated

⁷⁰Lord, Origins, pp. 48-53.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 67.

⁷²Ibid., p. 70.

Napoleon's demand, but William rejected it. A dispatch was wired later that afternoon describing the incident and giving Bismarck permission to publish it.

That same night Bismarck, Moltke and Roon were dining together. According to Bismarck's later, colorful account in his Memoirs, all three men were very dejected; Bismarck was even talking of resigning. When William's telegram arrived during the meal Bismarck read it aloud, and their "dejection was so great that they turned away from food and drink."⁷³ Bismarck examined the document after reading it and asked Moltke several questions concerning Prussia's preparations for war. Moltke replied that there was no advantage to delaying war since Prussia could be mobilized and be ready to fight faster than France.⁷⁴ Bismarck then set down and deleted some words from the telegram. The difference in the two versions of the telegram was that Bismarck's "appeared decisive," while the other "would have been regarded as a fragment of negotiation still pending."⁷⁵ Bismarck said that his version would "have the effect of a red rag upon the Gallic bull."⁷⁶ Because of the war fervor of the French, they would now be impelled to become the aggressors, and Prussia would appear as the victim.⁷⁷

Bismarck's prediction was correct. There was an outcry for war in the French press. Napoleon began to search desperately for allies.

⁷³Bismarck, Memoirs, p. 97.

⁷⁴Frederic Hollyday, ed., Great Lives Observed (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), p. 32.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 32-33.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

He asked the Austrian foreign minister, Beust, if Austria could be counted on. Beust's reply was that everything depended upon the Russian attitude, but that Austria was still loyal to France. The Italians gave a similarly dubious answer. Yet on July 16, Gramont reassured a special legislative committee that France had allies in Austria and Italy. France declared war on Prussia the next day.

After their declaration of war, Austria and Italy declared their neutrality. Both decided, although for different reasons, to wait and see how the French troops would perform. If they could win a few battles, both could still consider an alliance. But the French were defeated on August 6 and all possible hope for alliances were ended; France had to fight alone.⁷⁸

Bismarck succeeded in isolating France for two reasons. First, he was able to obtain the friendship and backing of Russia. This alliance effectively discouraged Austria from forming a pact with France. Second, Napoleon was unable to form an alliance with Italy because of his position in regard to the Roman Question. Austria did not want an alliance with France unless Italy was included. As a result, no formal agreement was ever signed, even though Napoleon felt that Italy and Austria would aid him in case of war. Bismarck's policy, unlike Napoleon's, was based on reality, not on hope.

In case of war, the isolation of France was important for two reasons. First, the Prussian army could concentrate all its resources against the French army without having to worry about an attack from any other pro-French nation. Second, a war between Prussia and France need not escalate into a general European war. No doubt the

⁷⁸Wallace, The Papacy, pp. 37-44.

concept of limited war gave Prussia a military advantage, and one wonders if the great Prussian statesman would have advocated a more total war if it had been to Prussia's advantage.

While Bismarck was preventing France from obtaining allies, he was consolidating his position in Germany. He used the 1866 French demands for compensations to sign offensive and defensive treaties with the South German states. He turned the Luxemburg Crisis of 1867 into a Prussian diplomatic victory and a French defeat.

The difficulties with the Spanish succession provided further possibilities for the period from 1868 until 1870. Taking the opportunity offered by the vacancy on the Spanish throne, Bismarck attempted to place a Hohenzollern prince there. Although the attempt was thwarted and a Prussian setback appeared certain, he made the best of a potentially dangerous situation. After assuring himself that the Prussian troops were ready, he edited the Ems telegram, bringing about the war which ensured German unification. Thus he was able to manipulate the international situation to Prussia's advantage and to provoke France into declaring war. Prussia could thus call France the aggressor and unite all Germans in defense of their homeland. All that lay between German unification and mastery of Europe was France, and her position seemed perilous.

CHAPTER III

BISMARCK'S LAST LIMITED WAR

As war between France and Germany became a certainty, the military of both nations began to mobilize all their resources. Diplomacy receded into the background. In both states the rhetoric of the politicians, and the war hysteria of the citizenry demanded action. The French people were overwhelmingly in favor of war.¹ The German reaction was just as enthusiastic about the rapidly approaching war. This popular enthusiasm buoyed the spirits and morale of political and military leaders. Both sides were confident of a quick victory.

In order to get a clear picture of the combatants' armies, it is necessary to review the development of the two armies prior to 1870. In France, the Jacobin concept of a citizen army had gradually been replaced by conscription. Following the battle of Waterloo in 1815, the French people were tired of war and military service no longer held the exalted position it had enjoyed earlier. In 1818,

an elaborate lottery system was set up to determine which young men should form the annual contingent and who would serve in the active army. The young man who was fortunate drew a "good number" and was exempted from all military obligations for the remainder of his life, but the

¹Lynn M. Case, French Opinion on War and Diplomacy During the Second Empire (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), p. 268.

individual whose lot was a "bad number" soon found himself subject to seven years of service with the regulars.²

Provisions were made, however, for a man to hire a substitute in case he drew a "bad number." In 1855, Napoleon III added another provision: in lieu of active duty, or the hiring of a substitute, a man could fulfill all his military obligations by paying the government a fee, usually between 2,000 and 2,500 francs. Under this system the poor peasantry composed the bulk of the army, while the wealthier classes pursued other endeavors.³

Following the battle of Königgrätz, Napoleon proposed a major reorganization of the French army. He wanted all men to be subject to some form of military service; that is, all men of service age were to enter either the active service, the reserves, or the garde mobile.⁴ His proposal ran into immediate opposition. Because of the opposition of many military and political leaders, provision for a lottery and substitution were added. Since public opinion also did not want any changes in the present system, the legislators were able to alter drastically many of Napoleon's suggestions. As one deputy remarked, "Of course we shall be obliged to pass this bill, but we shall fix it up in such a way that it will never work."⁵ His words were prophetic, for the French army which marched out to meet the Germans in 1870, was basically the same kind as had existed in 1866.

²Richard D. Challener, The French Theory of the Nation In Arms, 1866-1939 (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1965), p. 12.

³Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁴Ibid., p. 19.

⁵Ibid., p. 21.

The organization and make-up of the Prussian army differed markedly from that of the French. Whereas the French had gradually moved from the concept of a nation-in-arms to one of a professional army, the Prussians had moved from that of a professional army to that of a nation-in-arms. The Prussian system, which was founded by Gerhard von Scharnhorst, "was an answer to the limit to her standing army imposed upon Prussia by Napoleon I."⁶ Scharnhorst's principle was

to make the standing army the school for the war training of the nation, and to pass through the school the largest number of men, compatible with sound teaching, with the object of creating an enormous potential reserve.

Furthermore, the Prussian system had been adopted in northern Germany and, following the Seven Weeks War, had begun to be incorporated into the South German armies. Germany was, in effect, a nation-in-arms. The army was territorial in that most of its units drew its recruits from the area in which the unit was stationed. When these recruits returned to their area following their active duty, they became the reserve. This reserve was required in order to bring the standing army to full strength in case of war.⁸

All males, with very few exemptions, were required to serve in the army. The period of active duty was short in order not to keep individuals away from their vocations for an extended time and in order to pass the largest number of men through the army. By 1870, the time of service was two and one-half years for active duty,

⁶ Sir A. W. Ward, Sir G. W. Prothero and Sir Stanley Leathes, ed., The Growth of Nationalities, Vol. XI of The Cambridge Modern History (London: Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. 579.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

four years for the reserve and five and one-half years for the militia, or Landwehr. This system enabled Germany to place an army of 500,000 men in the field at the beginning of the war.⁹

The German army was controlled by a General Staff headed by Helmuth von Moltke. It was well organized and efficient and attracted Germany's best brains. Its main function was to assist in the army's scheme of organization and to prepare campaign plans. Members of the staff were kept in touch with the regular army through tours of duty with fighting units. By this means, Moltke had taught most of the military "to exchange the old rigid compliance with orders for an intelligent interpretation of general instructions."¹⁰ By the outbreak of the war in 1870, a spirit of initiative had developed throughout the ranks and they held "an intense belief in the advantage of adopting the offensive."¹¹

The plan of campaign for the two armies was essentially the same. Each expected to mobilize before the other, strike into the other's territory and end the war quickly. Moltke had prepared the German plan in 1867, and had constantly revised it. His plan was so detailed that information concerning the capacity of the French railroads was better known by his General Staff than by the French army. The German army was also issued better and more detailed maps of eastern France than the French army, who expected to fight in Germany, not in France.¹²

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 580.

In addition, Moltke's plan utilized effectively the German network of railroads. He was one of the first strategists to realize the possibilities of railroads for the military. Campaigns could be conducted at greater speed by rapid concentrations of forces. He realized, too, that such rail use required close co-ordination between railroads and military. He accomplished this by bringing together officers of his staff and railway officials; a separate section of the general staff gradually developed out of this team.¹³ This kind of teamwork made it possible to convert the railways into an effective instrument for the mobilization of the army. Individual men joined their units and formed battalions, which were then transferred to other concentration points where the various battalions joined their regiments, which were then brought together to brigade strength and so forth, until three armies had formed and advanced towards the Rhine.¹⁴

The first and second armies were composed of men from the North German Confederation and were commanded by General Carl von Steinmetz and Prince Frederick Charles, respectively. The third army was made up mainly of South Germans and was commanded by Crown Prince Frederick. The reserve was Prussian and under the orders of the king. The total number of men in this invading force was 385,000.¹⁵

The General Staff estimated that the French could field about 250,000 men and, by studying the French railroads, realized that they

¹³Herbert Rosinski, The German Army, ed. by Gordon A. Craig (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 115-16.

¹⁴Ward, ed., Cambridge History, p. 579.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 580. The strength of the three armies and reserve were: first army, 60,000 men, second army, 131,000 men, third army, 131,000 men and the reserve, 63,000 men.

would have to be brought to the front in two bodies concentrating around Metz and Strasbourg, thus being separated by the Vosges mountains. Moltke reasoned that the French would neither attack through Switzerland or Luxemburg, nor from the South for this would leave Paris uncovered. He decided, therefore, to deploy his three armies behind the middle Rhine with the first army on the lower Moselle River, the third in the Bavarian Palatinate, and the second and reserve filling the area between the other two.

Thus a superior force could be brought against the French, should they invade Germany, without waiting to complete their mobilization; for either flank or the centre could be reinforced more quickly than the parts of the French army, divided by a mountain range, could be brought together. Moltke's plan was simplicity itself; Paris was his ultimate objective, but his immediate intention was to seek out and crush the enemy's field armies.¹⁶

The French War Minister, Marshal Edmond Leboeuf, calculated that France could mobilize 300,000 men in three weeks.¹⁷ Napoleon based his plan of action on these figures. He knew that the German forces would outnumber him, but felt that if he could advance quickly and divide Germany, the southern area would break away from the north. He even thought it possible that South Germany might then join Austria, maybe even Italy, and move against northern Germany.¹⁸

Napoleon's plan was good, but it had to be carried out rapidly if it was to succeed. Unfortunately for France, this rapidity of movement was lacking. There were several reasons for this slowness.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 581.

¹⁸ Theo Aronson, The Fall of the Third Napoleon (New York and Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970), p. 103.

First, the French army was not localized, the various French units being garrisoned throughout France. They could not mobilize from unit to batallion, and so on, and then proceed to the front fully mobilized. Instead all units proceeded directly to the front to be mobilized there. This arrangement could only create confusion. Second, the railroads which were so vital to this system of mobilization had not been efficiently organized by the high command. The resulting confusion was unbelievable. Some units did not arrive at their regiments until after they had been committed to battle, weeks after mobilization. Third, as a result of the inefficiency of the railroads, many supplies either failed to reach the front or were sent to wrong places. This problem led to pillage, which in turn led to a breakdown of discipline and morale. Speed of mobilization, the basic requirement for Napoleon's plan of action, was lacking; France was placed in a perilous situation even before the actual outbreak of fighting.¹⁹

The French army was divided into corps. Marshal Patrice MacMahon commanded the first corps in Alsace. Napoleon III commanded the second, third, fourth, fifth and the Guard Corps--the Army of the Rhine--in Lorraine. The sixth corps, commanded by Marshal Canrobert, was at Chalons and acted as a reserve force. The total number of men in these forces was 198,000.²⁰

The first engagement of the war was won by the French, but practically all the other encounters were won by the Prussians.

¹⁹Howard, Franco-Prussian War, pp. 67-71.

²⁰Ward, ed., Cambridge History, p. 582. The strength of the six corps and reserve were: first corps, 35,000 men, second, third, fourth, fifth and Guard corps, 128,000 men and the reserve, 35,000 men.

The efficiency of their army may be seen in the fact that only a month was required from the first battle at Saarbrücken to the capitulation at Sedan. Even though there was almost continuous fighting for six months after Sedan, the war was lost at this town. Any further efforts of the French were delaying tactics with the hope that either new armies could be raised or the neutral powers would intervene. To the dismay of the French government, however, the new armies were so ill-trained that they could only delay the final outcome of the war and the neutral powers stayed out of the war.²¹

Even though the defeats of the army were disastrous to France, the unwillingness of the other powers to come to her rescue was even more harmful. Napoleon had not given up hope for an alliance with Austria and Italy, and even though Bismarck had successfully isolated France prior to the war, success of the French armies might still have assured their intervention. The French defeats ended any hope for military aid from these two powers.²²

As a result of the military reverses and the dissatisfaction of the legislature, the ministry of Emile Ollivier was overthrown and replaced by an administration headed by Count Cousin de Montauban Palikao. Marshal Bazaine was made commander-in-chief of the French armies in a rebuff to the emperor.²³

²¹For details on the various armies' movements see Grosser Historischer Weltatlas, Part 3: Neuzeit, ed. Josef Engel (Munich: Bayrischer Schulbuchverlag, 1957).

²²Sir Denis W. Brogan, From the Fall of the Empire to the Dreyfus Affair, Vol. I of The Development of Modern France, 1870-1939 (New York: Harper and Row, 1866), pp. 25-26.

²³Ibid., p. 26.

The days following August 6 also troubled General Helmuth von Moltke. After the battles of Worth and Spicheren, the Germans had lost contact with the retreating French. Moltke assumed that the French were retreating westward to the Moselle river and ordered the third army, "instead of wheeling inwards, to continue advancing along a southerly circuit to the Moselle."²⁴ At the same time, the German first and second armies were moving towards the Moselle in a line south of Metz. West of Metz they confronted a well entrenched French army, not a retreating one. The collision of the two armies led to the battles of Vionville on August 16 and Gravelotte on August 18. Although the battles were inconclusive, they were strategic victories for the Germans since Bazaine's army was now cut off from MacMahon's army at Châlons. Bazaine was forced to retire to Metz. Instead of having one large army, the French now had two small armies, one under siege at Metz and one at Châlons.²⁵

Napoleon was with MacMahon's army at Châlons and in desperate straits. From a military point of view, the best solution would have been fall back on Paris. But from a political standpoint this maneuver would have grave implications: Napoleon's empire would fall. This political consideration and Bazaine's desperate plight, persuaded Eugenie, the acting regent, and Palikao to forbid the army to make this retreat. Since Bazaine intended to break out of Metz and join

²⁴The Zenith of European Power, 1830-1870, Vol. X of The New Cambridge Modern History, ed. by J. P. T. Bury (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 326.

²⁵Ibid.

MacMahon's army on August 19, they departed on August 23, in the general direction of Sedan.²⁶

While the French decided on their course of action, Moltke ordered the third army to pursue MacMahon. But since it was inferior in numbers to the opposing French force, he divided the second army into two equal parts. He now had two forces of equal strength with the advantages that one army would be paired with MacMahon's army, while the other could handle the siege of Metz.²⁷ Moving in a north-easterly direction, the French were overtaken by the German encirclement; Napoleon, MacMahon and 80,000 men surrendered the day after.²⁸

Sedan marked the beginning of the end of the two French armies which had been gathered to invade Germany five weeks earlier. One of them was captured and the other was being besieged at Metz, soon to be eliminated as an effective force. As for Napoleon, he was sent off into captivity at Kassel. Many Germans felt that the war was over, but "for the revolutionists (French republicans) the war was far from over; it had, in fact, just begun."²⁹ As news began to filter into the capital concerning the French surrender at Sedan, the legislature was thrown into confusion. The monarchists were thrown into a state of absolute shock. The republicans showed mixed emotions. Although most were happy over the prospect of the empire's collapse, many were

²⁶Howard, Franco-Prussian War, pp. 183-89.

²⁷Ibid., p. 190.

²⁸Brogan, Development of France, pp. 29-30.

²⁹Pflanze, Bismarck, p. 462.

reluctant about assuming the reins of government at such a perilous moment. Lord Lyons, the British ambassador to France, stated that:

No party wishes to come into office, with the risk of having to sign a disadvantageous peace. It is this which has hitherto kept the left within bounds. They wish³⁰ the peace to be made by the Emperor before they upset him.

The republicans wanted an orderly transfer of government, but this was to prove impossible because of the uncontrollable Parisian crowds.³¹

While the disruption in the streets grew, the various parliamentary parties attempted to effect a workable government. In the Salle des Pas Perdus, "the ordinary meeting place of petitioners and discontented people,"³² crowds were clamoring for action. Aided by several members of the leftist parties, one group siezed the legislative chambers.³³ At this point, Leon Gambetta, a member of the Left, rose from his seat and declared that Louis Napoleon ceased to rule France and dismissed the assembly to the Hotel de Ville, where provisional governments had been established in 1830 and 1848.³⁴

Thus on September 4, the third republic was proclaimed, with the name Government of National Defense. The new government was headed by General Louis Trochu as president, Jules Favre as foreign minister and Leon Gambetta as minister of the interior.³⁵

³⁰Thomas Wodehouse Newton, Lord Lyons: A Record of British Diplomacy, Vol. I (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), p. 308.

³¹J. P. T. Bury, Gambetta and the National Defence: A Republican Dictatorship in France (London: Howard Fertig, 1970), pp. 46-48.

³²Ibid., p. 57.

³³Ibid., p. 54-59.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 59-61.

³⁵William Harbutt Dawson, The German Empire 1867-1914 and the Unity Movement, Vol I (Hamden Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), p. 355.

The establishment of the republic lifted the spirits of the people. Paris was described as a city transformed.

Gone was the atmosphere of depression and suspense which had hung about the capital like a pall during the last days of August. . . Two days after Sedan, one of the greatest disasters which had even befallen French arms, they were as gay as at the celebration of a glorious victory.³⁶

The Parisians felt that:

The mere proclamation of the Republic was as good as a rout of the enemy, and the Revolution alone seemed to be the solvent of every trouble. The Parisians. . . forgot the advance of the German legions, forgot that the German press was howling for the destruction of their city. . . that one French army was on its way to internment in the land it had expected to invade, and the other immured far away in Metz, forgot that their country was without an ally in the world, and had only a poor remnant of regular troops to oppose to the most powerful and efficient army in Europe.³⁷

Whether the people of Paris fully recognized their perilous position or not, the members of the new government grasped France's desperate situation quickly. Immediately after they took office, there was hope that Germany would agree to favorable peace terms. But as the German armies closed in on Paris, the government realized that the war continued with or without Napoleon. Overtures were made to Bismarck who consented only after some hesitation to a meeting with Jules Favre. Bismarck's hesitation was based on the belief that the new French government had no mandate and, therefore, any agreement would not be binding.³⁸

³⁶Bury, Gambetta, p. 73.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 73-74.

³⁸Dawson, German Empire, pp. 355-56.

Favre felt that France had two alternatives in the negotiations with Bismarck. First, he could indicate that France "would fight to the death rather than make any undue concessions to Prussia."³⁹

Second, and more practical, he could

accept cordially the intervention of Foreign Powers with the object of restricting French sacrifices within endurable limits.⁴⁰

These limits were that France would probably agree to pay for the cost of the war, but refuse to "cede one inch of our territory or one stone of our fortresses."⁴¹

Bismarck's attitude toward the negotiations and future Franco-German relations is expressed well in this statement.

We cannot seek guarantees for the future in French feeling. We must not deceive ourselves; we must soon expect a new attack; we cannot look forward to a lasting peace, whatever the conditions we might impose. It is their defeat which the French nation will never forgive. If now we are to withdraw from France without any accession of territory, without any contribution, without any advantage but the glory of our arms, there would remain in the French nation the same hatred, the same spirit of revenge,⁴² for the injury done to their love of power.

When Bismarck and Favre met on September 18, Bismarck demanded the province of Alsace and part of Lorraine, including Metz and Strasbourg. Favre was appalled and the negotiations broke down. This meeting revealed to the French the price of peace and the leadership resolved to continue the struggle. This continuation became largely the responsibility of Gambetta, the minister of interior,

³⁹Newton, Lord Lyons, p. 310.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Dawson, German Empire, p. 356.

⁴²Ibid.

and involved partisan and guerilla warfare of bitter intensity. The meeting gave Bismarck the opportunity of dealing either with the Government of National Defense, or with the old regime of Napoleon III. He skillfully played one off against the other, letting it be known that he was willing to deal with the party that could meet his demands.⁴³

Bismarck reasoned that the Government of National Defense was not a legally constituted entity since Napoleon had not abdicated, even though he was a prisoner of war. He felt, therefore, that he should deal with the imperial regime, rather than the provisional government. He realized, at the same time, that in order for the imperial government to function as a negotiating entity, communications had to be re-established between the imprisoned emperor, Bazaine, commander of the imperial army at Metz, and Eugenie, Napoleon's wife and exiled regent.⁴⁴ He knew that Napoleon had no chance of regaining power unless he commanded a loyal military force which was strong enough to defeat the Republicans. Bazaine's army could fill this assignment and Bismarck tried to work out a solution through a series of diplomatic missions whereby this army would be released from Metz in order to make it possible to reinstate Napoleon. In return for this help he wanted Napoleon to sign a peace treaty on Prussian terms. His proposals fell through because neither Napoleon nor Eugenie would sign a "blank check" agreement and because the German military was

⁴³ Aronson, Fall of Napoleon, pp. 216-17.

⁴⁴ Otto Pflanze, Bismarck and the Development of Germany; The Period of Unification, 1815-1871 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 464.

firmly opposed to anything other than the dismemberment of Bazine's army.

An example of this military obstructionism may be seen through the following incident. Bismarck allowed General Charles-Denis-Sauter Bourbaki, a French officer in Metz, to depart for England to see Eugenie concerning a possible restoration plan. Upon his return to Metz, however, the Prussian commander, Prince Frederick Charles, refused to allow him to reenter the city even though he carried a safe-conduct pass signed by King William.⁴⁵ In spite of such mishaps, Bismarck continued for some time to use dubious methods to gain concessions from the republicans. But the fall of Metz on October 24 ended all practical hope for a restoration.⁴⁶

As mentioned, the military's attitude was one of the reasons for Bismarck's failure in regard to the restoration of Napoleon. He confirmed this in his Memoirs when he writes that the ill-feelings which had existed between himself and the military leaders during the Austrian War lasted throughout the French War.⁴⁷ He was convinced that Moltke and the general staff were determined to isolate him from any active participation in the war. For example, he was not allowed to attend the planning conferences held each morning at German headquarters and at the beginning of the war he was not kept informed about the progress of the armies and their commander's intentions.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 106-07.

⁴⁶Aronson, Fall of Napoleon, p. 219.

⁴⁷Otto Furst von Bismarck, The Memoris, Vol. I, trans. by A. J. Butler (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), p. 1.

⁴⁸Craig, Prussian Army, pp. 204-05.

Until the battle of Sedan, he does not seem to have objected too strenuously to his isolation from military affairs. He had laid the diplomatic groundwork for the war, and the swift German advances made intervention unnecessary. The war had gone according to plan, and he seemed content to play a secondary role as the battles raged. Following Sedan, however, the overall situation changed considerably. The possibility of a peace agreement came and military movements had to become responsive again to overall considerations. He objected to being excluded from military planning and tactics, and he requested that Moltke provide him with the same communications that were being released to the press in Berlin.⁴⁹

In contrast to Bismarck's flexible approach, Moltke felt that the next objective of Prussia's efforts should be Paris. "Within half an hour of signing the capitulation of Sedan,"⁵⁰ he had already issued orders for the advance on Paris. In part he reflected an anti-French feeling which permeated the entire upper echelons of the military. Officers on all levels felt a desire to humiliate and weaken France so that "it will not be able to breathe for a hundred years."⁵¹ Such sentiments were not only confined to the army, however, they also permeated the general public, especially the press. One result of these attitudes was that demands for the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine became more and more numerous. After all, these

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 205.

⁵⁰ Howard, Franco-Prussian War, p. 229.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 228.

territories had been part of the Holy Roman Empire and their acquisition would serve to strengthen Germany's western defenses.⁵²

This wide-spread hostility produced a feeling of sympathy for France at many of the European courts. Before Sedan, many non-Germans felt that Germany had a just cause for war. Following Sedan, France was at the mercy of Germany and German talk of punishing her brought about strong feelings of revulsion among many neutrals. The military ignored these feelings and their possible consequences; Bismarck did not.⁵³ From Sedan until the end of the war, he was constantly concerned with the effect of military actions on public and governmental opinion in other countries and he used all his energy and cunning to keep the war limited to the two belligerents. He saw his duty to be one of judging

Whether and with what motives other Powers might be inclined to assist the adversary, in the first instance diplomatically, and eventually by armed force; what prospect the representatives of such a combination have of obtaining their object in foreign courts; how the parties would group themselves if it came to conferences or to a congress; and whether there is danger of further wars being developed from the intervention of neutrals.⁵⁴

He continued by saying that he considered it his main function to determine the correct time for changing from war to peace; a judgment that could only be made with a diplomatist's knowledge of European conditions. His implication was explicit: the military, with its restricted views, was incapable of determining overall German policy.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Dawson, German Empire, pp. 356-57.

⁵⁴ Bismarck, The Memoirs, p. 106.

Since they rarely understood his diplomatic and political activities his success in preventing foreign intervention is a tribute to his vast abilities.⁵⁵

The first serious confrontation between Bismarck and Moltke occurred after Sedan. Moltke ordered the advance on Paris, but Bismarck felt that it would be more advantageous for Germany to consolidate its hold on Alsace and Lorraine and "let the people there (Paris) fry in their own fat."⁵⁶ He believed that if it were left alone, "the quarrelsome republic would fall apart of itself."⁵⁷ His advice was ignored and the Germans reached Paris on September 15 to settle down for the siege.

Bismarck felt now that Paris must be taken quickly. A long siege was out of the question, Paris must be bombarded into submission; peace had to be reestablished before the neutral powers could intervene.

The longer the struggle lasted, so much the more would one have to reckon with the possibility that latent ill-will and wavering sympathies would admit of one of the other Powers, alarmed at our success, being found ready to take the initiative in a diplomatic intervention, and this would then bring about the accession of others or of all the others.⁵⁸

Moltke disagreed declaring "that great cities surrender without a blow if they are encircled."⁵⁹

Bismarck was well justified in his fear of a possible intervention. He requested a bombardment in the middle of September,

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 106-07.

⁵⁶ Pflanze, Bismarck, p. 466.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Bismarck, The Memoirs, p. 109.

⁵⁹ Emil Ludwig, Bismarck: The Story of a Fighter, Trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1928). p. 379.

but siege guns could not be brought from Germany until December 27. During this three month period, Bismarck had to deal with several potentially explosive situations.⁶⁰

First, while Paris was under siege, Gambetta, soon to become France's resistance leader, fled from Paris in a balloon. Almost overnight he was about to form new, though ill-trained armies by arousing the public in areas not under German control. Although these units never became a serious threat to the Prussians, they were a potential means of lifting the siege of Paris and a considerable threat to German supply lines. The fall of Metz on October 27 was a severe blow to these new armies since an additional 173,000 French soldiers were imprisoned and almost 200,000 German troops released. These troops were used immediately for campaigns against the raw French armies and as replacements of the men surrounding Paris. Thus the war continued in the eastern provinces and around Paris.⁶¹

Second, Thiers left France in October to visit a number of European capitals in order to encourage them to exert moral influence on Germany so that France could attain a more generous peace. Although he received much sympathy, promises of assistance were not offered in London, Vienna and St. Petersburg. His statement, "Europe was not to be found,"⁶² pleased Bismarck, but he warned that this sympathetic neutrality was merely a feeling of the moment; the longer the war lasted, the more susceptible it became to change.⁶³ On November 1

⁶⁰ Craig, Prussian Army, p. 211.

⁶¹ Dawson, German Empire, pp. 354-59.

⁶² Bismarck, The Memoirs, p. 110.

⁶³ Ibid.

Thiers also visited Bismarck at Versailles and for three days they discussed the possibility of an agreement. Negotiations finally broke down over the question of whether or not Paris . . . would be provisioned from the outside if there was an armistice.⁶⁴ An interesting note here is that Thiers later reported that he believed that there was a political party, headed by Bismarck and a military party, headed by Moltke, at the Prussian headquarters. The political party apparently wanted to end the war on moderate terms, while the military party sought to destroy France. He also noted that he could find no one, even among the moderates of the political party, who did not demand part of Lorraine and all of Alsace.⁶⁵ Bismarck reminded Thiers that he could deal with two governments in France and was ready to use either to attain his goal.

The third crisis that confronted Bismarck during this three month period was Russia's denunciation of the Black Sea clauses. Russia's action took Bismarck by surprise. He was not surprised at the move itself, since he had urged Russia to do so for years, but over the timing. Although it was perfect for Russia, it was inopportune for Bismarck. Ever since the end of the Crimean War, these clauses, which forbade Russia the right to maintain warships in the Black Sea, had been a source of humiliation for her leaders. The Franco-Prussian conflict provided Russia with an ideal opportunity for denouncing them. As late as September 1870, Bismarck had assured Russia of his support in any endeavor to revoke them. Now, however, this action placed

⁶⁴Newhouse, Lord Lyons, p. 331.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 332-34.

him into a perilous situation. On the one hand, he had to support the Russians as his most valuable ally. On the other, France would be represented in any possible conference concerning the Russian renunciation and would certainly raise the question of the war.⁶⁶

Bismarck decided to support a conference. After weighing the major alternatives, including war between Russia and England, the country most favored by the clauses because they kept Russian warships out of the Mediterranean, he decided on the route of least possible risks. Since Austria had also renewed talk of intervening in the war, he feared that "the Franco-German struggle might easily. . . develop into an European cataclysm."⁶⁷ The conference entailed lesser risks, and Bismarck hoped that the war would end before the conference began.

The French chose Favre as their representative, but he happened to be in Paris. Bismarck intercepted the invitation sent by the conference's organizing committee and held it up for two weeks. After that, he kept Favre bottled up in Paris by refusing him a safe-conduct pass through German lines. Thus Favre remained in Paris until after the conference's start on January 17, 1871. When he did depart on January 23, it was not, however, for the English capital, but for Versailles to begin peace negotiations with Bismarck.⁶⁸

Bismarck had thus successfully met every challenge, but he became thoroughly convinced as a result of them that the war had to

⁶⁶Werner Richter, Bismarck, trans. by Brian Battershaw (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), p. 186.

⁶⁷Pflanze, Bismarck, pp. 465-66.

⁶⁸Bury, Gambetta, pp. 214-17.

come to a rapid conclusion. To him there was no military reason for a postponement of this political necessity. Paris was firmly surrounded; Gambetta's armies, while being a menace, were being crushed piecemeal by the German armies, and the demands for Alsace and part of Lorraine were well known as peace terms.

Paris was the key to the end of the war. As long as the city held out, the French retained a symbol of resistance and a sense of hope. A final struggle between Moltke and Bismarck now had to decide the fate of the capital. Bismarck saw its capitulation as the beginning of peace negotiations on his terms. Moltke felt that its fall meant the "release of troops for further military operations."⁶⁹ As in the Austro-Prussian war, William decided for Bismarck's approach and authorized him to begin negotiations with the French.⁷⁰

As indicated, Favre arrived at the German headquarters on January 23. Bismarck started out by telling him that, in order for any agreement to be binding, it must be negotiated and signed by an authorized government, not a self-appointed one. In view of this reservation, the two representatives signed an armistice on January 28, not a peace treaty. The armistice called for a three week truce during which the forts around Paris were to be evacuated and the French people were to elect a national assembly. This body was to meet at Bordeaux and to decide whether to end the war or to continue the fighting.⁷¹

⁶⁹Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 468.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Dawson, German Empire, p. 361.

Gambetta was determined to continue the struggle against the Germans. But while he was trying to rally the French for still another effort, Bourbaki, the commander of France's remaining large army, was being driven toward Switzerland.⁷² The armistice had not included this army since Favre felt that if it won a victory in the field, his bargaining power would be increased. And since Moltke was confident that he could defeat it, Bismarck agreed to its exclusion from the terms. Unfortunately for Favre, the army was defeated and driven into Switzerland;⁷³ further French resistance was futile.

Gambetta, refusing to accept the inevitable, continued his struggle by other means. For example, he attempted to exclude all former Napoleonic leaders from the new assembly. But the older politicians resisted this effort and he resigned his office on February 6. Elections were held two days later.⁷⁴ Four days later the assembly met, and Thiers was elected provisional head of state.

Most of the responsible leaders of France now recognized that to defend the national cause any longer by arms was hopeless and that what remained to be saved must be saved by diplomacy, and that speedily.⁷⁵

Thiers and Favre, foreign minister once more, were chosen peace plenipotentiaries and left for Versailles.⁷⁶

⁷²D. W. Brogan, From the Fall of the Empire to the Dreyfus Affair, Vol. I of The Development of Modern France, 1870-1939 (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 54.

⁷³Howard, Franco-Prussian War, p. 442.

⁷⁴Brogan, Fall of the Empire, p. 54.

⁷⁵Dawson, German Empire, p. 362.

⁷⁶Ibid.

The two French plenipotentiaries were fully aware of Bismarck's demands, but they tried to gain as many concessions as they could. When their resistance became too stubborn, however, he restrained them with the mention of a Napoleonic restoration.⁷⁷ Bismarck demanded almost the whole province of Alsace and one third of Lorraine, including Metz. He also demanded the fortress of Belfort, but since Thiers refused to give it up, Bismarck gave him a choice between Belfort and entry of the German army into Paris. Thiers relinquished Belfort. The French indemnity was set at five milliards (billion) German marks, or two hundred million pounds.

The treaty itself was signed on February 26, and the assembly at Bordeaux ratified it by a vote of 548 to 106 on March 1, 1871.⁷⁸ The war was over. Germany had crushed the supposedly strongest army in Europe. The German army had fought seventeen major and 156 minor battles. It had captured twenty-two fortified places, 385,000 French soldiers, 7200 cannons and 600,000 small arms.⁷⁹ If these statistics tell of the totality of the French military defeat, they allow some militarists to overlook that it was Bismarck's diplomacy combined with the military achievements which made for German supremacy in all aspects of European affairs.

The difference in the degree of harshness with which Bismarck treated Austria in 1866, and France in 1871, is glaring. The main reason for this is that in 1866, Bismarck was thinking in terms of a

⁷⁷ Pflanze, Bismarck, p. 478.

⁷⁸ Dawson, German Empire, p. 363-64.

⁷⁹ The History of Nations, ed. by Henry Cabot Lodge, Vol. XVIII, Germany (6th ed., New York: P. F. Collier and Son Company, 1928), p. 426.

possible war with France. His magnanimity towards Austria was a diplomatic necessity, a means to an end; the objective being the isolation of France. No such restraint was necessary once France was defeated. As he put it

An enemy, whose honest friendship can never be won, must at least be rendered somewhat less harmful. Under the circumstances, this is the only correct policy.⁸⁰

The most important outcome of the Franco-Prussian War was the completion of the last of Bismarck's foreign policy goals; the unification of Germany. His major aim of the war had never been the acquisition of more territory, but the hope that the war would "produce a flood of German sentiment which would overflow the barriers of southern particularism."⁸¹

In August German soldiers, north and south, underwent a common baptism of fire on the fields of France. . . . As Bismarck anticipated, war with France produced an upsurge of German national feeling which helped to fill the chasm of time. In sharing the same dangers, experiences, and hatreds the Germans established a psychological bond which, if it did not extinguish, at least diminished, the significance of the tribal sentiments, dynastic loyalties, customs, and mores which had previously divided them.⁸²

Once again Bismarck was using foreign affairs to settle a domestic problem and, once again he was successful. Negotiations between the southern states and himself were carried on throughout the war. And, although there were some objections, particularly in Bavaria,⁸³ by the middle of January, the opposition of the

⁸⁰Remarks of Otto von Bismarck, cited in The History of Nations, ed. by Henry Cabot Lodge, Vol. XVIII, Germany (6th ed., New York: P. F. Collier and Son Company, 1928), p. 426.

⁸¹Pflanze, Development of Germany, p. 479.

⁸²Ibid., p. 480.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 481-82.

particularists had been overcome. On January 18, William was crowned German emperor at Versailles.⁸⁴

The Franco-Prussian War was Bismarck's last limited war. His foreign policy objectives were attained and all that remained to be done externally was to consolidate Germany's position in a newly re-ordered European balance of power. He had been successful in isolating France diplomatically in the years prior to the war and had been able to maintain her isolation throughout the war. His successful dominance of military matters also worked toward the same end. The war, therefore, remained a limited conflict between Prussia and France and did not develop into a general European war. As before, Bismarck's objectives had remained tangible and when they came within grasp war was no longer necessary, and he began to make preparations for peace. The military leaders, by contrast, saw their duty in the complete annihilation of the enemy no matter what the consequences. Bismarck was able to assert his will in matters of overall war policy, however, and thus the war was kept limited. Later German civilian leaders were not as capable or as successful as Bismarck in containing the military; Germany suffered as a result.

⁸⁴Dawson, German Empire, pp. 379-80. In his book Bismarck and the Development of Germany, Otto Pflanze points out (pp. 496-497) that William had balked over the idea of being called German Kaiser. He felt the title Kaiser of Germany expressed his authority more clearly. The issue was resolved when the Crown Prince Frederick William introduced him as Kaiser William.

CONCLUSION

Bismarck has held a fascination for historians for many years. His incredibly successful foreign policy and his skillful diplomatic maneuvers have been the subject of countless scholarly works. His dominance of German and later, European affairs, for almost three decades makes him one of the most studied figures in modern European history. This paper, however, did not attempt to tell the story of Bismarck's entire public life, instead it limited itself to the time between his ascension to power in 1862 and the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. Even during this restricted period it would be almost impossible to make an indepth study of Bismarck and his foreign and domestic policies. The writer has therefore limited himself to a look at him during the unification period and to an examination of one aspect of his external and internal policy. Within this framework, the political and military was highlighted in terms of the Clausewitzian theory of limited war.

As with all individuals, Bismarck's background and the environment were important in shaping later attitudes. The main lesson learned from his early life was that he rejected the liberal teachings of his day, emerging as a conservative from his childhood. He was a fierce advocate of the Junkers and a loyal supporter of the monarchy. He opposed the revolution of 1848 and the attempt by the German liberals to achieve unification under their auspices. When he was assigned, in 1851, to represent Prussia at the Frankfurt Assembly he

was still a relatively unknown personage. When he left this post in 1859, he was known by nearly everyone. More importantly, however, he had formulated the basic foreign policy goals he thought in the best interest of Prussia. As most important he saw the aggrandizement of the Prussian state, the expulsion of Austria from German affairs and a limited form (Kleindeutsch) of German unification under the leadership and dominance of Prussia.

In 1861, when Bismarck became minister-president, Prussia was in the midst of a constitutional conflict over the military budget. He sought to alleviate this problem through a vigorous and successful foreign policy. He began vigorous diplomatic activity in order to rearrange the pieces on the European chessboard and to place Prussia in a more advantageous position in the process. So as to have the full benefit of the rearrangement, he applied the Clausewitzian theory of limited warfare. Limited war was the only vehicle that permitted the attainment of his foreign policy goals. Although he was not a warmonger and would have been content to obtain his goals peacefully, the immensity of their impact made their attainment by peaceful methods unlikely. The main problem with limited war was that it ran counter to the prevalent belief in total war among military men. The struggle over this difference in approaches began in 1864 with the start of the Danish War and lasted through 1871 with the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War. Bismarck was able to defend successfully his principle and to assert his dominance over the military leaders. As a result, the three wars remained limited conflicts that did not enlarge into a general European conflagration.

Bismarck had achieved his foreign policy goals and rearranged the European balance of power without destroying it. This was an accomplishment that shows the brilliance, the skill and the luck with which he was able to carry out his policies.

At the conclusion of the Austro-Prussian War, Bismarck had achieved two of his three foreign policy goals. He was now able to concentrate entirely on his third goal, the unification of all of Germany under Prussian auspices. He believed that a national war with France would bring the South German states into the new state which he had formed in northern Germany. His job was now to isolate the French state for the inevitable showdown. He used diplomacy to isolate the potential enemy from her allies and thus make a limited war possible. He succeeded because of his masterly diplomacy and because of the ineptness of the French leader, Napoleon III, in countering his maneuvers. When the time was right, he was able to initiate action that led to a French declaration of war. The Franco-Prussian War is a fine example of a limited war and the problems involved in keeping it so. The Prussian army was able to handle the French army very easily due to the excellent planning and organizational skill of the general staff. Barely a month after the beginning of the conflict, the Prussians had crushed the French at Sedan and the war appeared to be concluding. The French, however, organized a new government and continued to fight for five more months. Paris was surrounded and, from September until the cease-fire agreement in January, the war was usually confined to ill-trained French armies trying to raise the siege of Paris.

The conflict between the Prussian political and military leaders reached its zenith during the Franco-Prussian War. Bismarck's diplomatic maneuvers were resented and thwarted by the military leaders and Bismarck became increasingly involved in purely military matters. He was able to assert his supremacy over the military leaders, however, and to bring the war to a successful conclusion. The end of hostilities also meant an end to an era in German history. Bismarck had done what nobody had accomplished before him: create a German Empire out of a politically fragmented nation. All of his personal goals had been achieved. The new German state was the strongest power on the continent, and the unification had taken place under an autocratic, conservative Prussian regime, not under the leadership of the Prussian and German liberals. Bismarck, the revolutionary in European politics, now became the champion of the status quo. The years 1871 to 1890 were spent consolidating and strengthening Germany's position in Europe.

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