

II. THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

In November 1871 Bismarck rose in the Reichstag and delivered a speech that sounded like it was directed more at the Great Powers of Europe than at Germany's elected representatives. In it he discussed the doctrine of preventive war. The position he took on this subject so soon after the foundation of the German Empire is worth quoting at length as it is relevant to the study of the war scare in 1875 in a number of important ways:¹

I believe that defence through offence is in fact a quite common and in most cases the most effective strategy, and that it is very useful for a country that is in a central location in Europe and has three or four borders, across which it can be attacked, to follow the example of Frederick the Great at the start of the Seven Years' War who did not wait until the net, which was closing in on him, was completed but rather tore it to pieces through a lightning offensive. [...] In such cases it is the duty of the government, and the nation has the right to demand it from the government, if a war really cannot be avoided, to go to war at a point in time where it will have the least cost and least risk for both country and nation.

Bismarck's open and unequivocal endorsement of the doctrine of preventive war in such a public forum was certainly shocking for contemporaries and it left a lasting impression on all those who heard it and had not been forgotten in 1875 when the scenario described here appeared to be about to play itself out.

The statement quoted above raises some important questions that are critical to correctly understanding Bismarck's tactics in the spring of 1875. The first question, and one that his contemporaries could not clearly answer, was whether the threat implied in this speech represented a sincerely held conviction or whether it was uttered for purely tactical purposes. The fact that the German Chancellor had just successfully concluded his third war in a period of six years lent some credibility to the seriousness of his advocacy of this rather extreme stratagem. However, the public nature of this warning might have suggested to more cynical observers that this shockingly frank support for a pre-emptive strike likely had a more political, tactical purpose. If we accept this view of ulterior motives for this curious oration, the real challenge becomes identifying the reason for sending out such a strong message.

At first glance, the task of locating a convincing rationale for these belligerent remarks appears to be daunting. Superficially the position of the German Empire in November 1871 could hardly have been stronger. France lay prostrate and was still partly occupied by German troops; Germany was closely allied with Russia; and Austria-Hungary was still too weak after her defeat in 1866 to be a major factor in international relations and was aligning herself with the new German Empire. It is hard to imagine a situation more unlike that faced by Frederick II in

1 *GW*. Vol. 11. p. 204.

1756. Yet there must have been dangers lurking below the seemingly calm waters of international relations that triggered this declaration. Clearly Bismarck was already experiencing some early symptoms of his *cauchemar des coalitions* ('nightmare of coalitions') which was to haunt him until he was dismissed in 1890.

At a more fundamental level, attempting to understand the meaning of this speech raises some important questions about the constitutional significance of such far-reaching policy statements made in the Reichstag by the Imperial Chancellor. Unlike the famous Prussian soldier-king, who he held up as a role model, Bismarck was not the head of state and his relationship to the fledgling German parliament bore little resemblance to that of parliamentary democracies. In order to gauge the significance of this address and Bismarck's conduct of foreign policy in the mid-1870s, it is therefore necessary to explore its internal and external context. This will help to better understand the weight to be assigned to remarks such as those quoted above as well as the climate of international relations that gave rise to them. This will naturally lead to a consideration of what strategies the Chancellor devised to avoid being forced to make the same kind of desperate decision as Frederick the Great in 1756, which almost brought about the destruction of Prussia.

1. German Foreign Policy after 1871: The Internal Context

An often overlooked, but essential fact about the conduct of foreign affairs under Bismarck is that the German Emperor had the ultimate decision-making power. Constitutionally he was the head of state and appointed the Chancellor. With a stroke of his pen, Bismarck could be replaced. The Kaiser wielded considerable personal power. This constitutional reality is frequently forgotten in studies of this era. The power of the throne had to be taken into consideration in the formulation and execution of foreign policy. When examining the career of a dominant politician and statesman like Bismarck, there is a natural tendency to view his policies as if he were in complete control. In fact, there was a popular school of thought amongst Germany historians in the 1960s and 1970s that painted the German Empire under Bismarck as a Teutonic version of the system of 'Bonapartism' as practised by Napoleon III in France.² Bismarck himself contributed to this perception by stating openly that "he was the ruler in Germany in everything except name".³ This rather immodest claim had some truth in that William I was, for the most part, willing to leave the messy business of politics in the hands of his proven and trusted servant. But to use this circumstance to depict Bismarck as a kind of dictator in the tradition of Napoleon III – either explicitly or implicitly – is a gross simplification. For all his boasting, the Imperial Chancellor

2 For a recent summary of this debate see: Eley & Blackbourn. *The Peculiarities of German History*, pp. 150-151. Eley's conclusion that this classification of the system of government in Imperial Germany is still useful in a more general sense is not convincing.

3 *GW*. Vol. 8, p. 532.

remained keenly aware of where the real power resided and of the forces at court working to undermine his position.

The Kaiser had his own strongly held views and was surrounded by advisers who were passionately opposed to the German Chancellor. In fact, Empress Augusta was one of his most dangerous and inveterate opponents. When important matters of state were at stake, the ruler and his servant were quite often in violent disagreement. One only needs to recall the events before and after Königgrätz in 1866 or the protracted debates surrounding the conclusion of the Austrian alliance in 1879. Bismarck's freedom to manoeuvre in the realm of diplomacy was therefore limited both by the practical need to maintain his sovereign's trust and support, and by the constitutional requirement to secure imperial approval for any major policy initiative. So even when he was endorsing the doctrine of preventive war in front of the Reichstag in 1871, this was far from official or even sanctioned government policy.

At the time of the war scare of 1875 Emperor William was 78 years old. This basic fact had a number of important implications for German foreign policy. One of these was that it had become highly unlikely that a near octogenarian commander-in-chief would again mount his war horse to lead his country into battle. Another was that the question of the succession began to emerge as an increasingly important issue and posed a potential threat to Bismarck's power base. There was a general belief that Germany would pursue a pro-Western course under William's successor. As a result, it seemed to many that a change in ruler would likely also lead to the appointment of a new Chancellor.

According to Hohenzollern tradition, Crown Prince Frederick William was a trained and experienced soldier like his father. He had commanded armies in the field during the wars of unification. At the same time, he harboured strong liberal convictions, which were reinforced through his marriage to Victoria, the daughter of the Queen of England. As a result, the Crown Prince's court became a stronghold of liberal, anti-Bismarck forces that admired the English model of government. In accordance with his strong Anglophile sentiments, Frederick William also maintained close ties with Britain's diplomatic representatives in Germany. He had a particularly close relationship with the British ambassador in Berlin, Lord Odo Russell, and the British envoy in Munich, Sir Robert Morier. During the war scare of 1875, the activities of this circle were important for a number of reasons. Frederick William and his wife became, in effect, a secondary communication channel between London and Berlin that was used by both sides. From the perspective of posterity, the close ties of British diplomats with this circle of influential individuals at court meant that their reports and private correspondence offer an invaluable window into events within the Prussian royal house. Of course this intimate association with representatives of a foreign power posed considerable risks for all parties involved. Therefore, the letters and notes exchanged between the members of this group betray a keen awareness of

participating in clandestine activities. Code words and false names were frequently used out of fear that letters might fall into the hands of the Chancellor.⁴

The Hohenzollern court was not the only domestic factor, with which Bismarck needed to reckon when making key foreign policy decisions. Germany had a constitutional system of government with a parliament (the Reichstag), which was elected based on a system of universal male suffrage. Although the executive was not directly responsible to this body, it did exercise control over the budget. In terms of foreign policy, this meant that it would not have been possible to wage a major European war without the approval of Germany's elected representatives. The Reichstag also represented a forum for the expression of public opinion. Since even Bismarck had to ensure that his policies enjoyed popular support, he needed to pay some heed to parliament. Up until the "re-founding" of the German Empire in the late 1870s, this meant that the government worked closely with the two main liberal parties in the Reichstag, the National Liberals and the Progressives.

There is one other constitutional factor that needs to be considered when discussing German foreign policy after 1871. The German Empire was very much a federal entity. From a narrow legal perspective the actual executive power rested with the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*) that contained representatives from all of the constituent states. There was also a special federal committee on foreign affairs. Although this institution never became an important factor, its existence underlines that the German Empire was not a centralized state.⁵ The federal nature of the new empire was most visible in the manner, in which diplomatic representation was handled. Some of the larger states still retained the active and passive right of diplomatic representation. Even within Germany, the major states had envoys in each other's capitals. The representatives of the other federal states in Berlin acted as their delegates to the *Bundesrat*. Once again, the role of these diplomats was limited and largely ceremonial but an awareness of the federal basis of the German Empire provides further nuance to the simplistic view of absolute control of the instruments of power by Bismarck.

The federal structure of the German Empire is particularly important during the 1870s. At times during these formative years of the new federation, there seemed to be a real danger that its member states might begin to reassert their autonomy. The persistence of strong particularist, centrifugal forces created a security exposure. There was a risk that foreign powers might seek to ally with internal opponents to defeat the unconsolidated *Reich*. Doubts about the sense of unity within the new Empire probably contributed to Bismarck's sensitivity to any symptom of foreign interference into Germany's internal affairs. He was to use

4 Examples in: R. Wemyss (ed.) *Memoirs and Letters of Sir Robert Morier*. Vol. 2. (London, 1911). Morier signed one of his letters to the Crown Prince during the war scare as: 'Anna Sheik'. Morier to Frederick William. May 9, 1875. GStA. Hausarchiv. Rep. 52. Nachlaß Kaiser Friedrich III. EI Nr. 24.

5 Rudolf Morsey. *Die Oberste Reichsverwaltung unter Bismarck 1867-1890*. (Münster, 1957), pp. 108-109.

these anxieties as a rationale for his behaviour in the mid-1870s on a number of occasions. However, these fears were often exaggerated for political purposes.

In terms of the actual machinery of diplomacy, there was also a considerable amount of constitutional complexity. As German Chancellor, Bismarck was responsible for imperial foreign policy. But since Germany did not have a government that was responsible to parliament, there were no federal ministers. The equivalent roles were assigned to State Secretaries. So when a Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*) was created, it was assigned a bureaucrat of that rank to manage the imperial foreign service.⁶ During the period under consideration in this study it was Bernhard von Bülow (the father of the later Chancellor of the same name) who held this position. Bülow possessed the good fortune and skill to have established an exceptionally strong working relationship with Bismarck, which was not an easy task. He did not, however, exert any real influence on the formulation of foreign policy. Bülow's role was limited to supervising the administrative apparatus required to execute the will of the Chancellor.

Despite all of the external constraints on his ability to steer the German ship of state through often treacherous international waters, Bismarck was firmly in charge of the Foreign Office. His famous quote that his ambassadors were to march to his commands like troops on the parade ground is illustrative of his management style.⁷ In addition to diplomatic agents and the Secretary of State, his 'troops' included a group of Privy Councillors in the Foreign Office. The most important senior bureaucrats belonged to the prestigious Political Department. It was this elite group that was responsible for supporting the process of policy formulation and the day-to-day conduct of diplomacy – drafting dispatches, writing memoranda etc. Consistent with its focus on international politics, this department was divided into specialty areas that were split along geographical lines. It is also important to understand that Bismarck himself was a trained and experienced diplomat which meant that he was in a position to effectively monitor the activity of Germany's foreign envoys.

In terms of its available instruments of power and influence, the German Foreign Office controlled the standard network of diplomatic and consular representatives around the world. Much of this apparatus was inherited from Prussia. The German diplomatic corps was staffed primarily by members of leading aristocratic families. Due to their cosmopolitan background, they often possessed wide social networks that transcended national boundaries. During the period under consideration, the only major change of diplomatic representation occurred in Paris. Prince Henry VII Reuß was the German ambassador in St. Petersburg. He was a member of the ruling house for one of the smallest federal states (Reuß – Junior Line). Therefore his aristocratic pedigree and conservative views helped to give him a very strong position at the Russian court. General

6 Morsey. *Die Oberste Reichsverwaltung*. Lamar Cecil. *The German Diplomatic Service 1871-1914*. (Princeton, 1976). Karl-Alexander Hampe. *Das Auswärtige Amt in der Ära Bismarck*. (Bonn, 1999²).

7 [Harry von Arnim]. *Pro Nihilo!: Die Vorgeschichte des Arnim'schen Processes*. (Zurich, 1876), p. 40.

Lothar von Schweinitz, who was the German ambassador in Vienna, served for many years prior to this posting as Prussia's military agent at the Russian court. He was also a long-time friend of Reuß and they both shared similarly strong conservative views. In many ways, these key diplomatic posts were ideally staffed to support the emerging cooperation among the three Eastern Empires. But they were also a potential source of friction. For example, the assignment of these two pillars of conservatism to Vienna and St. Petersburg was not helpful in securing the desired endorsement of German efforts to back liberal causes in Western Europe. This contradiction was to lead to tensions with Bismarck's conservative ambassadors in the mid-1870s. His choices to fill the most important diplomatic positions in the West were also not always willing to completely subordinate themselves to the will of 'the boss'. In London, Germany's representative was Count George zu Münster. He was from a long-established Hanoverian family with his own strong views on the conduct of foreign policy and was not always willing to act only as Bismarck's mouthpiece.⁸

As useful as it was for Bismarck to have very capable, confident and cosmopolitan individuals manning all of his important embassies, it also created some interesting challenges for him. The independence and conservative views of his ambassadors often brought them into disagreement with the Chancellor's policies during this period. This was of course most famously the case with Count Harry von Arnim. Up until the spring of 1874 he was the German ambassador in Paris and had a tumultuous relationship with Bismarck. After he was drummed out of the foreign service, Arnim published a number of interesting revelations about life as an ambassador under Bismarck. One of his most damaging observations was that the Chancellor demanded that the reports from the German embassies abroad "aligned with the political views, for which Prince [Bismarck] wanted to gain the support of the Kaiser".⁹ Arnim's observation illustrates once again the importance of the Emperor in Bismarck's conduct of foreign policy. It also highlights the potential for conflicts with diplomatic envoys of aristocratic background, who were not always willing to censor their own thoughts and opinions in order to take into consideration the impact of their reports on the Emperor and the potential reaction of the Chancellor.

In addition to these traditional means of conducting international relations, there were also other methods of political influence outside of the realm of diplomacy available to the German Foreign Office. Most of these often clandestine activities were funded from the confiscated wealth of the King of Hanover who had been deprived of his kingdom as the result of the Prussian victory in 1866. The profits from the investment of these funds were considerable and the windfall from the 'Guelph Fund', referred to by the *vox populi* as the 'reptile fund', were used by Bismarck to finance activities not suited for parliamentary scrutiny. Although there was certainly a wide range of uses for this

8 On Münster see: Herbert von Nostitz. *Bismarcks unbotmäßiger Botschafter*. (Göttingen, 1968). On Schweinitz and Reuß: Jörg Kastl. *Am straffen Zügel*. (Munich, 1994). On Arnim: Gerhard Kratzsch. *Harry von Arnim*. (Göttingen, 1974).

9 *Pro Nihilo!*, p. 14.

money, the primary recipients of payments from this source were newspapers. This relationship quickly gave rise to the term ‘reptile press’ when referring to journals that opened their pages to government-inspired articles in return for financial compensation. Although most of the records of these disbursements were destroyed for obvious reasons, what has survived in the Prussian secret state archives shows that a lion’s share of this discretionary fund was used by the Foreign Office for the purpose of influencing the press.¹⁰

Bismarck’s use of journalists is a central problem in the events of 1875 so it is necessary to explore its inner workings in some detail. In terms of their relationship to the government, German newspapers of the time fall into roughly four categories. The first category can be designated as official government publications. These were newspapers that the government directly owned or controlled. The best-known of these was the *Reichsanzeiger* which was akin to a government bulletin. The *Provinzial-Correspondenz* was also often included in this group of official publications. The origin of materials printed in these journals was clearly the German or Prussian government. The second group of newspapers includes those that maintained a semi-official relationship with the government. These were journals that were not under the direct control of any state agency, but were known to have very close ties to senior officials. The existence of these connections was also more or less acknowledged by both parties. The most important newspaper in this category was the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*. It was known to take its orders from the Foreign Office and it was therefore viewed as an official organ. There was a further shade of semi-official newspapers that were under the influence of Bismarck, but the relationship was not as openly conceded. Two journals that fall into this third category, which will figure prominently in this study, were *Die Post* in Berlin and the *Kölnische Zeitung* in Western Germany. The former newspaper had been purchased in 1874 by the Free Conservative Party, a group of prominent liberal conservatives known more colloquially as “Bismarck’s party”. This party affiliation meant that this journal was immediately considered to be a mouthpiece for the Chancellor.¹¹ Together these three categories of newspapers constituted what was generally regarded as the “government-controlled press”. Opposition parties and even political insiders often referred to the second and third categories of papers as the ‘reptile press’ in reference to their readiness to sell their journalistic integrity for payments from the Guelph funds. The fourth category of journals were those that were either independent of the government or in opposition. Some of the independent liberal newspapers, such as the *National-Zeitung*, sympathized and supported government policies and may have occasionally received inspired news items. On the other extreme of the political spectrum, the conservative *Neue Preußische Zeitung*, known more generally as the *Kreuz-Zeitung* because of the iron cross displayed on its title page, was viewed up until about 1872 as a government-

10 Naujoks. “Bismarck und die Organisation der Regierungspresse”. *HZ*. Vol. 205 (1967), pp. 46-80. On the “reptile fund” in general: Robert Nöll von der Nahmer. *Bismarcks Reptilienfonds*. (Mainz, 1968).

11 Volker Stalman. *Die Partei Bismarcks* (Düsseldorf, 2000), pp. 256-257.

friendly newspaper, but it had taken up an increasingly hostile position towards government policies after that time. By 1875 it had become the main voice of the conservative opposition against Bismarck, most famously in the notorious ‘era’ articles of that year. Another prominent independent newspaper opposed to the government was the *Germania*. It took its marching orders from the Catholic Centre Party.

In order to control this complex set of relationships with the press, the Foreign Office had its own dedicated Press Section. It was responsible for managing the press. During the period covered in this study the head of this department was Ludwig Aegidi, a former law professor from Bonn.¹² He was appointed to the position in 1871. His reputation as a liberal made him an ideal choice at the onset of the *Kulturkampf*. The creation of the Press Section in 1871 also inaugurated a brief experiment with institutionalizing the mechanisms for influencing the press, which was to last until the weeks immediately following the war scare.

Although Aegidi at first appeared in many ways to be the ideal candidate for this position, there is evidence to suggest that he did not find any real satisfaction in his new role. In the months preceding the war scare, his relationship with Bismarck had deteriorated to the point where he considered his departure from the Foreign Office to be inevitable.¹³ The main reason for his dissatisfaction seems to have been that his expectations concerning his scope of control were not being met. Apparently he had hoped for a position where he would be able to work more independently in managing the press. Instead he found that he was more of an administrator responding to directives from above. Aegidi confided to a friend of his with regard to a series of articles, which had just appeared in the semi-official press, that they had been dictated to him verbatim by Bismarck who was pacing up and down in his office.¹⁴ This anecdote characterizes their working relationship and was probably indicative of how the famous ‘scare articles’ in 1875 came into existence. Aegidi’s actual function tended to be more of an administrative nature. Most of what was printed in the newspapers was what Bismarck approved and in many cases prescribed *ipsissimis verbis*.

The Press Section in the Wilhelmstraße was not the only means through which influence over the press was exerted. Bismarck himself would frequently directly inspire articles. Often this was accomplished through parliamentary soirées, to which favoured members of the press were routinely invited. It was not always necessary that an explicit request be made to write an article with a desired political direction. News stories were often ‘inspired’ simply by sharing thoughts with guests at these events with a tacit understanding that his comments would be

12 Naujoks. “Bismarck und die Organisation der Regierungspresse”, pp. 67-68. Irene Fischer-Frauendienst. *Bismarcks Pressepolitik*. (Münster, 1963), pp. 33-34.

13 Based on Aegidi’s ‘short will’ to Bülow. Nov. 14, 1874. Quoted in: Naujoks. “Bismarck und die Organisation der Regierungspresse”, p. 68. Fischer-Frauendienst also emphasizes that strict obedience was the reigning culture in the Press Section. *Bismarcks Pressepolitik*, pp. 33-34. A friend of Aegidi’s confirmed that the head of the Press Section felt that he was on his way out before the scare. Morier to Derby. No. 30. Apr. 21, 1875. FO 9/226. PRO.

14 Morier to Derby. No. 30. Apr. 21, 1875. *Ibid*.

used discretely. There was thus a fair amount of interaction between the government and the news media that took place on an informal, even personal basis. One of these journalists with close informal ties to Bismarck, whose reputation as a talented writer lifted him above the normal paid scribes, was Constantin Rößler.¹⁵ In addition to the Press Section of the Foreign Office, there were also other government agencies in Berlin tasked with exercising control over the press. The Prussian Interior Ministry had its own 'Press Bureau' for providing directives to journalists and the Imperial Chancellery was also active in managing the print media. Count Arnim was therefore not exaggerating when he later proclaimed from his self-imposed exile: "Our country is the real home to and our age is the age of the centralized and monopolized manufacture of public opinion in the service of power."¹⁶

The *Kulturkampf* is another essential component of the domestic context of German foreign policy during the 1870s. It was to play a prominent role in the events of 1873/74 and 1875. The main contours of the conflict must therefore be briefly sketched here. The influence of this internal battle with the Catholic Church on German diplomacy and Bismarck's personal enthusiasm for this battle have both been the subject of much debate. It certainly seems doubtful that he had any genuine ideological commitment to this fight. Most of its dynamic came from the majority liberal parties in Prussia and Germany. It is therefore not just a historical curiosity that the combative term *Kulturkampf* was first used by a liberal delegate in the Prussian assembly (Rudolf Virchow). This was in fact a reflection of the paramount importance in the liberal political agenda given to removing the remaining incursions of the clergy into areas deemed to be the exclusive domain of the modern state. The main purpose of the famous Prussian 'May Laws' of 1873 and many of the other relevant *Kulturkampf* statutes was to achieve this liberal vision of a secularization of the state and to impose greater state control over the administration of the church.

However, this process of secularization was conducted in a way that created real hardships for Catholics in the German Empire and resulted in increasing levels of domestic strife in the mid-1870s. Bishoprics were left unfilled; parishioners were for long periods of time without a priest; and members of the clergy were imprisoned. Given the supranational character of the Roman Catholic Church it was inevitable that some of this internal turmoil would create an echo in neighbouring Catholic states and have an impact on Germany's international relations.

Just as historians have puzzled over the motives for Bismarck's actions during the war scare of 1875, so too has the question of his motivation for the battle against political Catholicism been the subject of some controversy. Of course, the two have – perhaps not coincidentally – the one important feature in common that they are both viewed as the Chancellor's most important political failures.

15 Naujoks. "Bismarck und die Organisation", p. 61.

16 *Pro Nihilo!*, p. 9.

However, a consensus has emerged amongst historians concerning the primary factors in Bismarck's decision to confront Roman Catholicism.¹⁷

On a number of occasions, the German Chancellor stated that it was above all the 'Polish question' that had spurred him to engage in this battle.¹⁸ There is also considerable documentary evidence that this was a major factor in pushing him to clash with the Catholic Church. Catholicism played a strong role in Polish nationalism as the church was very much involved in sustaining a distinct identity for Poles living in eastern Prussia. It is therefore highly plausible that a desire to end the church's role in performing state functions such as education and to have the ability to control the appointment of clerics were seen as necessary changes that would allow the Prussian government to reduce the vitality of Polish nationalism. It is also worth noting in this context that the *Kulturkampf* was primarily a Prussian phenomenon and one of its central pieces of legislation, the law regarding the supervision of schools, was undoubtedly directed at Prussia's Polish population. But the problem of Polish nationalism was not just a Prussian or even just a domestic German issue. This was a question which had far-reaching international implications. It represented a significant area of vulnerability for the new Empire and therefore the *Kulturkampf* undoubtedly can be understood in this respect as a component of a broad-based security strategy.

The other key motivation for the *Kulturkampf* was Bismarck's battle against Catholicism as an organized political force within Germany. The Centre Party had emerged as a strong voice for Catholics in both the Prussian Landtag and the Reichstag after 1871. What made this development appear especially dangerous was that it had also attracted strong particularistic forces into its ranks. The Centre Party's diminutive leader and Bismarck's primary parliamentary nemesis was the Hanoverian Ludwig Windthorst, who had remained a strong supporter of his former ruler. He and like-minded members of the Centre Party therefore represented forces that did not fully accept the Prussian-dominated German Empire. In the first years after 1871, the loyalty of the non-Prussian member states to the new federal entity was still somewhat in doubt. The existence of a party that encouraged the forces of particularism therefore posed a threat to the inner consolidation of the *Reich*. It appeared to represent those internal elements that might welcome foreign intervention to undo the work of unification. A strong Centre Party in Germany also gave the Pope an indirect voice in Germany's internal affairs which could also be used as a weapon by potential adversaries.

Despite these international dimensions of the problem, the causes and origins of the German *Kulturkampf* were essentially domestic in nature. The real significance of this period of internal turmoil becomes clearer when it is viewed in a broader European context. Almost all the countries in Europe with a sizable Catholic population underwent a similar struggle in the last quarter of the

17 Pflanze. *Bismarck*, pp. 179-206. For a solid and recent overview of the *Kulturkampf*: Erich Schmidt-Volkmar. *Der Kulturkampf in Deutschland 1871-1890*. (Göttingen, 1962).

18 Richard Blanke. *Prussian Poland in the German Empire (1871-1900)*. (New York, 1981), pp. 17-54.

nineteenth century.¹⁹ Each had features that were essentially the same as the Prussian-German experience: The predominance of the new secular ideology of nationalism; the drive of the modern state to establish a monopoly over institutions of socialization such as education and an exclusive claim to the loyalty of its citizens; and the predominance of liberal, progressive thinking. When events in Germany are considered in this wider context, the question of the peculiarities of the Bismarckian version of this European phenomenon becomes less important and the search for a *sui generis* cause appears to be somewhat redundant. For better or worse, the German Chancellor was being swept along by the currents of his age

A recognition of the essentially domestic nature of the *Kulturkampf* is important in understanding German foreign policy in 1873/74 and 1875. It is also not a point of view that has found universal acceptance amongst historians in the past. There is an opposing school of thought which views the *Kulturkampf* as largely or at least equally motivated by international considerations.²⁰ The adherents of this interpretation point to the Chancellor's fears of a faith-based coalition under the aegis of the Pope and the danger of French revisionists allying with 'fifth columnists' within Germany as motivating Bismarck's internal battle with the Catholic Church. Certainly there is a fair amount of anti-Catholic rhetoric in the documents of this period that appear to validate this viewpoint. In fact the events of 1873/74 and 1875 are often used as the primary examples of this so-called 'international *Kulturkampf*'. It will be a key objective in our examination of developments in German foreign policy during the 1870s to critically assess the ways, in which the conduct of international relations and Germany's domestic troubles became entangled. Upon closer scrutiny, it will become clear that much of the so-called internationalization of the *Kulturkampf* was in reality the exploitation of domestic problems to further goals that were really driven by the dynamics of traditional power politics.

In order to complete this sketch of the domestic basis for German foreign policy in the mid-1870s, it is necessary to briefly consider the notion of these years as being a 'liberal era'. Bismarck's tenure in office after 1871 is usually divided into two distinct phases. The first period, from 1871 to about 1877/78, was dominated by the pursuit of a liberal political agenda characterized by policies such as free trade, the *Kulturkampf*, and close co-operation with the liberal parties in the Reichstag. The predominance of liberalism in this first decade of the German Empire is usually contrasted with a switch after 1878 to a more conservative era (sometimes called the 're-foundation' of the empire), which was defined by an emerging reconciliation with the Catholic Church, high tariffs and an alignment with more conservative parties. Some historians have also portrayed German external relations during this period as having been coloured by liberal principles. And there is no question that Bismarck often acted as a powerful advocate of liberal causes in Western Europe between 1873 and 1877.

19 Winfried Becker. "Der Kulturkampf als europäisches und als deutsches Phänomen.", in: *Historisches Jahrbuch*. Vol 101 (1981), pp. 422-446.

20 In particular: Wahl. *Vom Bismarck*. Schmitt. *Bismarcks Abkehr*, pp. 1-3.

But once again, caution is required. Just as much of Bismarck's 'liberal' domestic policies were based more on pragmatic rather than ideological considerations, it can also be shown that it was exclusively the pursuit of Germany's perceived interests that caused him to adopt a foreign policy that aligned her with liberal forces throughout Western Europe in the mid-1870s. This essentially opportunistic exploitation of ideology becomes particularly clear when Bismarck's political posture in Eastern Europe is considered. In dealing with Austria and Russia he preached the benefits of monarchical solidarity and conservatism against the forces of 'revolution'.²¹ The German Chancellor was equally convincing when championing a conservative, distinctly anti-liberal philosophy within the Three Emperors' League when it suited German interests. In order to better understand the underlying political aims behind Bismarck's simultaneous and apparently contradictory alignment with liberal forces in Western Europe and conservative forces in Eastern Europe, the international context of German diplomacy in the mid-1870s must be considered in more detail.

2. German Foreign Policy after 1871: The External Context

Before sketching the salient features of German foreign policy in the mid-1870s it is important to understand some key structural aspects of European politics during this period. Here the focus will be upon the most important issues that were of a nature to potentially determine alliance configurations or that had the potential to trigger a conflict. And only those questions of direct relevance to German foreign policy will be considered. It will become clear from this short overview that, even at the pinnacle of German power in November 1871, Bismarck had good reason to look into the future with some trepidation in view of the many unresolved and potentially volatile issues that cluttered the European diplomatic landscape like unexploded landmines.

The most important of these problems was the direct result of the peace settlement between Germany and France. The annexation of Alsace and parts of Lorraine was to dominate European politics until the Treaty of Versailles returned these provinces to France in 1919. Although these former territories of the Holy Roman Empire had been ceded to the new German Empire in the Treaty of Frankfurt in 1871, there was a general feeling that it was only a matter of time until France would seek to re-conquer those lands. As a result the peace treaty seemed to many to represent more of an armistice in what was expected to be a protracted struggle. Looking back again to Bismarck's speech in November of 1871, it was likely implicit in his praise for Frederick the Great's behaviour in 1756 that the modern equivalent of Silesia was in fact these two former French provinces. The use of this historical metaphor reflected the Chancellor's own

21 Gustav Adolf Rein. *Die Revolution in der Politik Bismarcks*. (Göttingen, 1957), pp. 179-205. Rein argues that Bismarck followed a 'conservative' foreign policy after 1871. He overlooks the importance of the liberal orientation in Western Europe.

personal conviction that France would at some point seek to exact revenge for her defeat in 1871.

Given the importance of this issue for German foreign policy, it is worthwhile to look briefly at the reasons behind Bismarck's decision to annex Alsace-Lorraine. It is a step that contrasts sharply with the more conciliatory stance he took in 1866 when he granted Austria relatively generous peace terms involving no loss of territory. And Bismarck's motivation for taking this fateful step has generated considerable controversy.²² Some scholars point to the pressure of public opinion to take back former German territory that had been seized by France in past centuries as having forced his hand. Others emphasize the strategic imperative of securing a defensible border against France. But fundamentally the decision to annex was based on Bismarck's unshakeable belief that another war with France was unavoidable. With some justification he could point to the French cry for 'revenge' after the German victory at Königgrätz as evidence that this country could probably not be reconciled by any gestures of goodwill after the bitter national struggle in 1870/71. Bismarck's resignation with respect to the inevitability of French hostility and the likelihood of her seeking coalitions on the model of the one formed by Kaunitz in 1756 became, therefore, one of the central assumptions underlying his foreign policy after 1871.

The provinces of Alsace and Lorraine were not the only lands held by the new *Reich* that were a potential source of international dispute. Just as these provinces had been ceded by France by her ratification of the Treaty of Frankfurt, Prussia had agreed in the Treaty of Prague of 1866 to cede portions of Schleswig-Holstein to Denmark under certain circumstances. Article V of that tract had stipulated that the predominantly Danish population of northern Schleswig should be consulted as to whether they wished to become part of Prussia or would prefer to remain Danish citizens.²³ This was widely viewed as a moral obligation to conduct a plebiscite to determine the final border between Denmark and the North German Confederation – one that aligned more closely with ethnic boundaries. This article was not honoured by Prussia/Germany in the following years. It therefore represented a significant potential cause of diplomatic complications due to the dynastic connections of the Danish monarchy, especially with Russia. It also put a potential weapon into the hands of leaders in Vienna to use against Berlin. The question of North Schleswig represented a possible crystallization point for a hostile coalition.

As noted in the discussion about the motives for the *Kulturkampf*, the German Empire also encompassed territories which had been annexed by Prussia as part of the partitions of the Kingdom of Poland in the late eighteenth century. What made

22 On the subject see: Walter Lipgens. "Bismarck und die Frage der Annexion 1870: Eine Ewiderung", in : *HZ*. Vol. 206 (1968), p. 586. Eberhard Kolb. "Bismarck und das Aufkommen der Annexionsforderung 1870", in: *HZ*. 209 (1969), pp. 256-318. Lothar Gall. "Zur Frage der Annexion von Elsaß und Lothringen 1870", in: *HZ*. Vol. 206 (1968), pp. 265-326.

23 On this subject see especially: W. Platzhoff et.al. (ed.) *Bismarck und die Nordschleswigsche Frage 1864-1879*. (Berlin, 1925).

this circumstance into a major challenge for Germany's foreign relations was that Polish nationalism posed an on-going potential source of friction with both Austria-Hungary and Russia since both of these empires also ruled territories of the former Polish kingdom. As a result, anytime one of the three partitioning powers took any actions that favoured the Poles or provided them with greater autonomy, concerns were raised in the capitals of their neighbours that this might represent an attempt to exploit the 'Polish weapon'.

As important as all of these outstanding territorial questions were to Germany, the issue that was to come to dominate European relations starting in 1875 was the 'Eastern Question'.²⁴ This term referred in general to the future disposition of the territories of the Ottoman Empire, the 'sick man of Europe'. The Sultan's weakening hold over his domains created a long series of European crises during the nineteenth century which sparked rivalries among the other powers over the division of the prospective spoils. But it is not really accurate to speak of just one Eastern Question. This understates the complexity of the issue. In reality there were a series of difficult problems arising from the slow collapse of the Turkish Empire. Although Germany was not really directly interested in any of these questions, they did present a series of important opportunities and challenges for German foreign policy in the mid-1870s. We will therefore briefly consider each of these aspects in turn.

A critical facet of the Eastern Question from Russia's perspective was the problem of the Straits, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.²⁵ The vital importance of this seaway for Russia at the turn of the century can be gauged by the fact that 87% of Russia's agricultural exports passed through the Straits. In addition to this obvious economic importance, Russia also had a strategic interest in this waterway. As was humiliatingly demonstrated during the Crimean War, the inability to block the passage of warships into the Black Sea meant that her whole southern frontier was exposed to naval assault. There was therefore considerable justification when Russian leaders used the phrase 'the keys to their house' to refer to the Straits. What made this Russian strategic imperative into a particularly volatile issue is that it collided directly with an equally strongly felt British interest in closing the Straits to Russian naval vessels. For Great Britain, control of the Straits protected her vital sea lanes in the Mediterranean. So the potential for a major conflict always existed whenever the status of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles became the subject of international discussions. Since command of this seaway meant, in effect, control of the Ottoman capital of Constantinople the fate of the Ottoman Empire itself was inextricably linked to that of the Straits.

Russia's other important interest in this region was linked to the 'Slav question'. In the second half of the nineteenth century a strong culturally-based Slavophile movement had arisen in Russia creating a greater awareness of community amongst Slavic peoples. During the 1860s this sentiment gave rise to

24 For general background see: M.S. Anderson. *The Eastern Question 1774-1923*. (New York, 1966).

25 Barbara Jelavich. *The Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers, and the Straits Question 1870-1887*. (Bloomington, 1973).

a more militant, political form of this movement called Panslavism.²⁶ This Eastern European manifestation of popular nationalism increased pressure on the government to take up the cause of Russia's repressed 'brethren' in the Balkans, particularly in Serbia and Bulgaria, and to liberate them from the Ottoman Empire. The growing strength of Panslavist feeling led to an increased sense of obligation in St. Petersburg to intervene in Turkish affairs. This inclination to support the Christian subjects of the Sultan also had strong roots in Russia's traditional role as protector of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire.²⁷ However, the emerging Panslavist agitation had a more aggressive tendency than earlier forms of Russian involvement in the region and this change of tone seemed to herald the start of a more assertive posture in the Balkans.

Of course, the Russian interest in encouraging the emerging southern Slavic nations was not entirely unselfish or without political motivation. St. Petersburg had some very specific revisionist goals in the East. Russia, like France, was committed to reversing the results of a humiliating peace treaty. She had already taken the first steps to achieve this goal in 1870 by denouncing those terms of the Treaty of Paris which had restricted her sovereignty in the Black Sea. However, that treaty had also included territorial losses that Tsar Alexander II and his leading minister, Prince Alexander Gorchakov, were committed to reverse. Russian policy therefore continued to cast an eye towards opportunities to reclaim the region known as Bessarabia which she had been forced to cede to the Ottoman Empire in 1856.

For Austria-Hungary the Eastern question also had both an ethnic and strategic dimension. When viewed from the vantage point of Vienna the 'Slav question' had a completely different connotation than for Russia. This national movement, like most forms of nationalism, posed an existential threat to the integrity of the multi-national Habsburg Empire. Austria contained a very large Slavic population, particularly in the Hungarian half of the empire. So the emergence of Slavic nationalism in the Balkans, and Serbia in particular, was a major concern in Vienna and Budapest.²⁸ In the event that independent Slavic states were to be created on her South-eastern borders, there was a real danger that they would give rise to secessionist movements amongst Austria's Slavs. Clearly the Panslavist movement in Russia and Austria's vital interest in suppressing Slavic nationalism placed both countries on a collision course in the Balkans. Like Russia, Austria also harboured some territorial claims in the event of changes to the *status quo* in the Ottoman Empire. In particular, the Austrian military were very concerned about the exposed position of the Dalmatian littoral. This thin strip of territory, it was argued, could only be effectively defended if Austria acquired additional territory to the east, in the Turkish hinterland. Habsburg strategists therefore coveted the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

26 B.H. Sumner. *Russia and the Balkans 1870-1880*. (Oxford, 1937), pp. 56-80.

27 *Ibid.*

28 See for example: M.D. Stojanović. *The Great Powers and the Balkans 1875-1878*. (Cambridge, 1939).

Just as Russia had used the Franco-German war to force a revision of existing international arrangements, Italy had also taken full advantage of French military setbacks to seize control of the last vestiges of the Papal State around Rome. French troops garrisoning Rome since 1861 were withdrawn in August 1870. Close on the heels of the departing French soldiers, Italy occupied Rome and declared it to be the new capital of Italy; Pope Pius IX, for his part, declared himself to be a 'prisoner' of his residence in the Vatican. This triggered an international outcry which forced the Italian government to quickly provide assurances to the other European powers. In May 1871, the Law of Guarantees was passed by the Italian parliament which granted the Pope a special status within the Italian state amounting to a kind of extraterritoriality.²⁹ Its purpose was to guarantee that he would retain the freedom to exercise his spiritual office. This move certainly helped to reduce the outrage felt by large segments of the European Catholic population, but certain factions within these countries continued to reject the diminution in the Pope's status. In the immediate aftermath of the seizure of Rome, there was even talk of foreign military intervention to restore the Pope's position as a worldly ruler. Encouraged by this sentiment, Pope Pius IX remained intransigent and refused to acknowledge his change of status. As a result, there was a real possibility throughout the 1870s that one or more of the Catholic powers might heed the calls of the Holy Father for assistance and intervene in Italy to restore the Papacy's temporal power. Neutralizing the danger that France or Austria might support Pius IX's efforts to regain his lost domains became, therefore, a major priority for Italian foreign policy.

Although the Italian state took a major step towards completing the process of unification with the seizure of the last remnants of the Papal States, there was also a feeling that the national struggle was not yet over. There were still territories in the Austro-Hungarian Empire that were predominantly Italian. Although the region around Trentino in the south of Austria was a relatively small enclave, it still was a powerful issue with Italians who wanted to deal with the question of the *irredenta* – the 'unredeemed' territories – and complete Italy's unification. This meant that there continued to be a significant potential for a renewed appeal to arms between Italy and Austria.

To many European statesmen, even the question of German unification did not appear to be definitively resolved after 1871. This never became a major factor in the foreign policies of either Berlin or Vienna, but it was certainly part of the general context of international relations in the mid-1870s. There were two potential scenarios, in which the German question might be reopened. In Vienna, there existed an influential group around Archduke Albert, which throughout the early 1870s still hoped to exact revenge on 'Prussia' for the defeat suffered in 1866. The sentiments of this faction were well-known in Berlin and caused considerable anxiety there. On the other extreme, there was also a considerable amount of mistrust amongst the other European powers about the true intentions of the new German Empire. Many statesmen believed that Bismarck had not yet

29 S.W. Halperin. *Italy and the Vatican at War* (Chicago, 1939).

completed his ambitious and highly successful bid to expand the size and power of the Prussian-German Empire. One specific concern was that Bismarck had, like Italy, not yet finished unifying all Germans in one state. The German-speaking parts of the Dual Monarchy still remained outside of the newly united German Empire so suspicions lingered in many quarters after 1871 that the incorporation of these territories might still be on Bismarck's political agenda. One of the most vocal proponents of this point of view was the British ambassador in Berlin during the 1870s, Lord Odo Russell.³⁰ His belief in Berlin's alleged designs on the ethnically German provinces of the Habsburg Empire was to play an important role in the war scare of 1875.

3. Foundations of German Foreign Policy 1871-1873

What emerges clearly from this overview of the European situation after 1871 is that there were numerous unresolved issues and questions that could easily lead to serious international complications. Despite the fact that Bismarck lost no opportunity to reassure the other Great Powers after 1871 that the German Empire no longer had any territorial ambitions and that the retention and consolidation of her existing possessions was now her only goal, the attainment of this seemingly modest objective was threatened on many sides. Most of the other powers had foreign policy objectives that were not consistent with the maintenance of the *status quo*. With all the various revisionist agendas in play the potential existed for a wide-range of international alignments which could pose a direct threat to Germany or seriously constrain her freedom of action. The fact that Prussia had within the span of only four years waged wars against both France and Austria meant that there was a strong constituency in both countries looking to reverse the outcome of those conflicts. Russia remained a close ally of Germany, but she had been nevertheless left with little in the way of material compensation for the huge accretion of power for Prussia in 1871. She was therefore also not entirely satisfied with the results of German unification. Given these potential dangers, the necessity of Bismarck's warning to Europe in November 1871 that he would not passively allow hostile coalitions to form becomes clearer. But the focus of his foreign policy was not to rely on force to deal with an overpowering hostile coalition similar to the one formed by Kaunitz in 1756. It was rather to proactively ensure that such a coalition was never formed. This was the overriding objective of the political system which Bismarck constructed in the years 1871-1873.

The highest priority in German foreign policy after 1871 was the diplomatic isolation of France. Achieving this goal presented a number of difficult challenges. At a high level, there were two paths Bismarck took to reach this

30 A few examples: Russell to Granville. Private. Feb. 21, 1874. Paul Knaplund (ed.) *Letters from the Berlin Embassy 1871-1874, 1880-1885*. (Washington, 1944), p. 125. Russell to Derby. No. 130. Mar 18, 1875. FO 64/826. PRO. Russell to Derby. No. 163. Apr. 10, 1875. FO 64/826. PRO.

desired end. One was to make France less attractive to the other powers as an ally. In the parlance of the time this meant ensuring that Paris did not become *bündnisfähig* ('alliance-worthy'). The other was to make the other powers less motivated or interested in seeking to align themselves with France. Both routes leading to the achievement of this ambitious goal were full of risks and required a considerable expenditure of power and influence. The first aspect of Bismarck's strategic roadmap, reducing France's attractiveness as an ally, was to dominate German policy towards France in the mid-1870s and was to play a critical role in the war scare of 1875. It shall therefore be considered first.

The difficult task of making France less attractive as an ally for other powers forced Bismarck to turn French domestic politics into a central factor in his foreign policy. This was inevitable since France's desirability as a potential coalition partner rested primarily on her internal stability. Viewed from the Spree, a French monarchy was considered to be synonymous with internal unity and military strength; in contrast the republic was considered to offer a guarantee for the continuation of internal divisions and paralysis.³¹ There was also a very important ideological dimension to this problem. The Emperors of Austria and Russia could be relied upon to reject the notion of an alliance against one of their own with a form of government, which traced its origins to France's revolutionary heritage. At the same time, they would be likely to embrace a fellow French monarch. The form of government in France, monarchy or republic, appeared therefore to be the key to ensuring that France remained unattractive as a potential ally for the other European monarchies. A French republic, it was hoped in Berlin, would remain an international pariah.

The history of France in the nineteenth century showed that she was deeply divided over the question of her preferred form of government. This ongoing internal debate created an opportunity for external forces to influence its outcome. In the century prior to her defeat in 1871 France had gone through a series of regime changes. It had become a virtual kaleidoscope of different constitutional configurations. The French Revolution in 1789 paved the way for the First Republic in 1792; this in turn was replaced by the Empire under Napoleon; the restored Bourbon monarchy under Charles X was replaced in 1830 by the 'citizen king' Louis-Philippe of Orléans; he in turn had to give way to the Second Republic in 1848 which ended with a restoration of the Second Empire under Napoleon III; the Second Empire was then replaced by a republic following the defeat at Sedan in September 1870. In short, the volatility of French domestic politics offered the German leader an irresistible temptation to intervene in the internal development of France to ensure that she did not become attractive as an ally. And support for the establishment of a republic appeared the best means to achieve that goal.

Initially, Bismarck's primary interest in exploiting France's internal dissensions was geared towards quickly concluding peace on his terms. For example, he undertook negotiations with the deposed Bonapartist leaders and used

31 *Pro Nihilo!*, p. 76.

these discussions to pressure the republican Government of National Defence.³² But as peace drew closer the question of what regime in France would be more beneficial to German interests in the longer term moved to the forefront. The final step required to end the war was the election of a constituent assembly whose first task would be to ratify the terms of peace. The elections held on February 12, 1871, for the French National Assembly resulted in an overwhelming victory for the forces of peace. The Government of National Defence, personified by the energetic and dictatorial Léon Gambetta, had been perceived as the party that advocated '*la guerre à outrance*' ('the fight to the bitter end'). The French electorate, a large segment of which had already felt the effects of the war directly, voted overwhelmingly for peace and against republican candidates. They elected a body with a strong monarchist, anti-republican majority. As a result, the National Assembly that convened in Bordeaux was dominated by political factions who rejected the republic as the permanent form of government for France.

The composition of the National Assembly provides an interesting cross-section of the various regime options that had competed for predominance in France over the last century. The group of delegates furthest to the right were the legitimists who supported the Bourbon pretender, Count Henry of Chambord. He was the heir to the French throne that had been vacated by Charles X after the revolution of 1830. The Count of Chambord and his supporters represented the most reactionary colour in the spectrum of political parties gathered in Bordeaux. Their world view remained anchored in the era of absolutism and the tradition of close ties between throne and altar. The second major political party in the Assembly supported the Orléanist cause. These delegates were the partisans of the claimants to the French throne from the house of Orléans, who were the next in line of succession from King Louis-Philippe. Their candidate for the throne was Philippe, the Count of Paris. The Orléanists reflected a more liberal brand of monarchism oriented on the English model. Their real political leader was the brother of the Orléanist pretender, Duke Henry d'Aumale. He had been elected to the National Assembly and commanded a corps in the French army. The Duke was therefore very active in French politics and was frequently touted by his supporters in the Assembly as the preferred candidate for the presidency. The third important faction in the National Assembly, the Bonapartists, consisted of the followers of the deposed French Emperor. Their standing in the country had been severely shaken by the disastrous results of the war against Prussia, but they still possessed a loyal popular base. This faction advocated a return to the Empire. Finally, there were those representatives who strongly supported a republican form of government for France. They could look back to the brief republican periods during the revolutions of 1789 and 1848 for inspiration. Their leader remained the fiery Léon Gambetta who had made a name for himself as the patriotic and charismatic leader of the French war effort.

32 Eberhard Kolb. *Der Weg aus dem Krieg*. (Munich, 1990).

This configuration of political parties virtually guaranteed that the question of France's final constitutional structure would remain a divisive issue. In order to avoid internal strife until the country was fully liberated, the parties agreed in the 'pact of Bordeaux' of March 1871 to defer the determination of France's form of government until a later date. In the interim France was ruled as a provisional republic with an assembly, whose majority opposed this form of government as a permanent solution. This paradoxical situation gave rise to the popular designation of France during these years as the 'Republic of Dukes'.

Bismarck himself quickly reached his own conclusions regarding the most desirable form of government in France. He came down strongly on the side of supporting a permanent republican solution and opposing the restoration of a monarchy. This decision was driven primarily by the need to prevent France from becoming 'alliance-worthy' in the eyes of the other Great Powers. The German Chancellor believed that the re-establishment of a monarchy in France would increase her attractiveness as an ally to the conservative empires of Russia and Austria since it would remove their reservations about making a pact with the 'revolution'. As noted above, the Wilhelmstraße also believed that a strong monarchy in France would enable that country to restore her internal strength faster and thus increase the chances that she could break out of her diplomatic isolation.³³ Bismarck felt that the greatest danger stemmed from an Orléanist restoration since this more liberal kind of monarchy would undoubtedly have a better chance of survival and would probably be welcomed in England as well as in Eastern Europe.³⁴ The primary challenge for Bismarck was to find ways to ensure that the republican path was chosen by France.³⁵

Bismarck discovered the best solution to this problem in the person of Adolphe Thiers. He was selected by the National Assembly as Chief Executive and later President. France's first head of state after the war appeared to be an ideal compromise for the competing factions and their incompatible visions of the future. He was an experienced and respected politician, over 70 years old at the time of his election, and had been a prominent minister under Louis-Philippe. At the same time Thiers was known to favour the republic as a form of government. For these reasons he could count on some support from both the Orléanist and republican factions. Compared to the alternatives, Bismarck viewed Thiers as close to his ideal French leader. He offered the best guarantee that the French government would meet its commitment to pay the indemnity of 5 billion francs imposed by the Treaty of Frankfurt and his preference for a republican constitution seemed to promise that France would remain internally weak and externally isolated. His views on the reorganization of the French army also met with approval in Berlin. The French President advocated the creation of a long-serving professional army and opposed adopting the Prussian model of universal

33 Kent disagrees with this line of argument and believes that it was fears of French interference in the *Kulturkampf* that drove his battle against the French monarchists. Kent. *Arnim and Bismarck*. (Oxford, 1968), p. 73.

34 See for example: Bismarck to Manteuffel. Private. Feb. 20, 1871. *GW*. Vol. 14, p. 815.

35 Mitchell. *The German Influence*. Pohl. *Bismarck's 'Einflußnahme'*.

military service.³⁶ Thiers' vision of a future French army as a small and politically reliable standing force suggested that seeking revenge for the defeat of 1871 was not his highest priority. For all of these reasons, the French President and the republican form of government became the central pillars of Bismarck's political system in the years 1871 to 1873.

Until the autumn of 1873, Germany's position as an occupying power offered a number of highly effective means to support Thiers and thwart the efforts of his opponents. One of the most important political levers available to Bismarck in the first years after 1871 was the French obligation to pay off the war indemnity. Until that huge sum was fully paid, Germany retained the right to occupy French territory. France was also required to pay for the costs of stationing these troops on her soil. This arrangement meant that the government in Paris was highly motivated to regain full sovereignty over the country as quickly as possible. Although the Treaty of Frankfurt specified that the indemnity had to be paid in full by March 1874, the efforts of the French nation in the years 1871-1873 were focused on shortening the payment schedule in order to re-establish full control over its territory sooner than had been agreed.³⁷ The priority given to reaching this goal increased the dependency of the parties in the National Assembly on Thiers. He was known to enjoy the backing of Bismarck so that he was viewed as indispensable to secure a speedy liberation of France. Until the final accord conceding an accelerated payment of the indemnity was signed in March 1873, Thiers' position in France seemed unassailable.

Another mechanism employed by Bismarck to prop up Thiers during this period was the threat of preventive war. Early in Thiers's administration, when it appeared that his presidency might be brought to an early end by his opponents, Bismarck instructed his representative in Paris, Count Alfred von Waldersee, that Germany might be forced to consider military action if Thiers were to fall from power.³⁸ The threat of war was also used again during the debates surrounding the Law of Recruitment in the summer of 1872. Once again this was done to support Thiers against his opponents who were advocating, ironically, more closely imitating the Prussian military model.³⁹ It was hoped that some well-timed sabre-rattling might silence the conservative opponents to Thiers's more modest vision of a new French army. This clear signal from Berlin was to set a pattern for the coming years: The threat of preventive war would be repeatedly employed to influence French domestic politics.

The spectre of a German attack was, however, not the only means at Bismarck's disposal to support Thiers and the French republic. The Chancellor had other political, journalistic and diplomatic devices at his disposal to combat the royalist cause. A central and on-going component of this programme to steer

36 Douglas Porch. *The March to the Marne*. (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 23-28. Richard Challener. *The French Theory of the Nation in Arms, 1866-1939*. (New York, 1965), pp. 45-48.

37 Hans Herzfeld. *Deutschland und das geschlagene Frankreich*. (Berlin, 1924).

38 Bismarck to Waldersee. No. 5. Aug. 28, 1871. *GP*. Vol 1, p. 73. Bismarck to Waldersee. Tel. No. 11. Aug. 27, 1871. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

39 Mitchell. *Victors and Vanquished*, pp. 25-26.

the course of French domestic politics was government influence over the German and French press. A recurring theme of a long series of government-inspired news items was that a French monarchy represented the least desirable solution for France. In its most extreme form these articles argued that a French king would inevitably plunge the country into another war with Germany.⁴⁰ Bismarck could also call upon more traditional diplomatic methods to intimidate Thiers' rivals. The leading monarchist candidate to replace Thiers was the Duke d'Aumale. Since he was a prominent member of the Orléans family and a potential candidate for the throne, his election would have transformed the office of the president into a kind of *de facto* regency. When the election of the Duke as president appeared to be a real possibility in 1871, Bismarck made it very clear that Germany might not agree to grant diplomatic recognition to a government led by a monarchist and would view such a step as equivalent to a change of regime.⁴¹

Even under ideal circumstances the business of attempting to interfere in the internal affairs of a foreign country represented a very risky proposition. There was always the potential of triggering a patriotic backlash against this kind of meddling that might achieve exactly the opposite result.⁴² Bismarck's efforts to influence French internal affairs were further complicated by a number of challenges from within the German government. In order to comprehend his tactics and the setback he suffered in May of 1873, it is therefore important to consider some of the obstacles he had to overcome to promote the consolidation of the republic in France. A key impediment was that this approach was not endorsed by Germany's head of state. The policy of opposing a monarchical form of government was something that did not sit well with the old Kaiser. He had always believed in the principle of legitimacy (although he was willing to temporarily set it aside in 1866) and was fundamentally conservative. Although this hurdle was considerable, it was not the only roadblock Bismarck faced. There was also strong opposition within conservative party circles to this policy.⁴³

But it was in Paris where he faced his greatest opposition. In August 1871, Count Harry von Arnim became the new German ambassador to France after having previously been Prussia's representative to the Holy See. Arnim proved to be a very unfortunate choice for this critical assignment. He shared the strong reservations of many of those in Prussia's aristocratic class towards Bismarck's backing for a republic. Arnim was also unwilling to put aside his views in the execution of his instructions. In fact, he made no secret of his opposition to German policy in Paris society and thereby doubtless reduced the effectiveness of Bismarck's attempts to support Thiers.⁴⁴ In fact, his words and actions probably

40 Arnim to Balan. Nov. 10, 1874. Quoted in: Kent, *Arnim & Bismarck*, pp. 94-95. Balan to Arnim. No. 239. Nov. 23, 1871. *GP*. Vol. 1, p. 155.

41 Bismarck to Fabrice. June 4, 1871. *GP*. Vol. 1, pp. 47-48. Mitchell. *German Influence*, p. 77.

42 Bismarck to Arnim. No. 99. May 12, 1872. *GP*. Vol. 1, pp. 117-118.

43 Manteuffel to Bismarck Nov. 1, 1872. *Stenographischer Bericht ueber den Process Arnim: Verhandelt in Berlin am 9. December und den folgenden Tagen*. (Berlin, 1874), p. 79.

44 Bismarck to Arnim. No. 103. June 19, 1873. *GP*. Vol. 1, p. 190. *NFA*. Vol. 1, pp. 551-553.

encouraged Thiers's opponents to doubt the strength of German support for the French President.

Arnim's unwillingness to act in accordance with directives from his superiors represented only one aspect of the threat he posed to Bismarck. He was also quite ambitious and well-connected at court. Arnim probably even harboured some hopes of succeeding Bismarck and constituted therefore a dangerous leadership rival. It is therefore difficult at times to separate the debate between both men about the most desirable form of government for France from their personal rivalry. For example, since Arnim's criticism of the Chancellor's French policy was usually received favourably by the Emperor, it was interpreted by Bismarck as an attempt to weaken his standing with the royal family. As a result, the increasingly acrimonious rivalry between Arnim and Bismarck became a major distraction and ultimately undermined efforts to keep Thiers in power.⁴⁵

This domestic opposition to Bismarck's French policy found a strong echo with Germany's closest allies, Austria and Russia. Neither could be brought to endorse his attempts to strengthen the forces of 'revolution' in Paris. Consequently the Iron Chancellor had to be very cautious about how he exerted influence over French domestic politics. His policy of supporting 'radicalism' had to be implemented in a manner that would avoid alienating the Emperors of Germany, Russia and Austria. Bismarck also had to take into account the fact that neither William I nor the other Great Powers would tolerate any overt German interference in French affairs. This would have violated accepted rules of international conduct. It was also not in their interests to see France further weakened through obvious efforts to undermine her internal stability. In order to deal with all of these problems, Bismarck strove to carefully position his support for French republicanism so that it appeared to be consistent with the maintenance of the monarchical principle and could not be construed as overt German interference in France's domestic affairs. It was a challenging task and accounts for some of the indirect methods Bismarck was required to adopt to achieve his goals. The need to camouflage his meddling in French politics must be considered when examining his tactics in the war scares of 1873/74 and 1875.

The Chancellor developed a number of standard rationalizations to deal with conservative opposition to his advocacy of a republican form of government in France. He devised an ingenious argument to counter accusations that it betrayed the principle of monarchical solidarity. Bismarck pointed out that the existence of a republic in France would actually benefit the cause of monarchism in the rest of Europe. The spectacle of a radical republic in France, he argued, with the associated chaos and internal turmoil would convince the subjects of legitimate sovereigns of the benefits of their own stable form of government. The recent Paris Commune served him well as an example of how French anarchy had already contributed to shoring up the cause of monarchism in the rest of Europe. Bismarck strongly opposed the notion that republicanism was like a disease that might spread eastward from France with reference to the inherent strength of

45 On the details of this conflict: Kent. *Arnim & Bismarck*. (Oxford, 1968).

monarchism in Germany.⁴⁶ The German Chancellor was also careful in official correspondence to properly rationalize his support for republicanism in France. His preference for the Thiers regime was usually couched in terms of specific German interests. Before the indemnity was paid off, he could argue that the retention of Thiers as president was essential to ensure its prompt payment. He also argued that a legitimist restoration with an ultramontane agenda would inevitably lead to French exploitation of tensions within Germany caused by the *Kulturkampf*.⁴⁷ This tactic of justifying interference in French internal affairs as a purely defensive reaction was to be a recurring theme in Bismarck's foreign policy. During the mid-1870s he would repeatedly defend his attempts to influence the internal affairs of other countries by arguing that he was not in fact interfering at all, but rather merely trying to defend Germany against foreign plots to disturb her own domestic peace and security.

While strongly supporting republican forces in order to reduce French attractiveness as an ally, Bismarck did not neglect his efforts to ensure that the other powers did not feel a need to move closer to France. Once again the form of government of a foreign state was at the heart of this strategy. A key component of Bismarck's political system after 1871 was a rapprochement with Austria-Hungary. Like France, Austria was a power recently defeated by Prussia which meant that she might be inclined to seek closer ties with France to form a coalition against Germany. And there were groups at court in Vienna that passionately advocated pursuing this course of action. But a major stumbling block had been placed in the path of these Austrian revisionists in the immediate aftermath of the defeat of 1866. In 1867, the constitutional structure of the Habsburg Empire had undergone a major change through the Compromise (*Ausgleich*) with Hungary.⁴⁸ This constitutional realignment conceded an equal status to the Hungarian half of the monarchy and created Austria-Hungary, the Dual Monarchy.

The introduction of dualism within the Habsburg Empire had profound foreign policy implications. Hungary now had a greater say in imperial affairs and her priorities in external affairs aligned closely with those of Germany. With a Slavic population of almost 55%, Hungary's essential interests lay in the Balkans and she could therefore be relied upon to use her increased influence over imperial policy to oppose any further adventures in Germany. She was also a strong advocate of shifting Austria's external ambitions towards the South-east since she had an existential stake in what transpired in the Balkans. So the domestic foundations for closer ties between Berlin, Vienna and Budapest were already established in 1867. The natural allies of Germany in the new Dual Monarchy were clearly the Hungarians and in particular the supporters of Ferenc Deák, who had been the main architect of the Compromise of 1867. One of the key members of the 'Deák party' was Julius Andrassy, who would become

46 Bismarck to Arnim. No. 271. Dec. 20, 1872. *GP*. Vol. 1, pp. 159-161.

47 Balan to Arnim. No. 239. Nov. 23, 1871. *GP*. Vol. 1, pp. 155-156.

48 L'udovit Holotik et al. (ed.) *Der österreichisch-ungarische Ausgleich 1867*. (Bratislava, 1967).

Hungary's first Prime Minister and retain that office until he was given the post of imperial foreign minister in November of 1871.

Bismarck's wish to come to an understanding with Vienna based on a shift of her political centre of gravity towards the Balkans was not new. Even before 1866 he had sought at various times an arrangement with the Habsburg Monarchy on this basis. By offering moderate peace terms in the Treaty of Prague, he had kept the possibility of an entente open. After 1867 Hungary became an important ally supporting efforts to bring Vienna and Berlin closer together. But a rapprochement between both powers based on the system of dualism was delayed in the period between 1867 and 1871 by the policies of Count Frederick von Beust. Beust, who had been Prime Minister of Saxony until that kingdom had ceased to exist as an independent state following her defeat alongside Austria in 1866, became Austrian Chancellor after the war and had not given up the struggle against Prussia. He sought to construct an anti-Prussian alliance in the years before the Franco-Prussian war.⁴⁹ Between 1867 and 1870, Beust initiated discussions with Paris and Rome about creating a triple alliance, but these negotiations did not produce a concrete result. Furthermore the circumstances of the French declaration of war in 1870 made it impossible for Austria to intervene against Prussia. The sympathies of the Austro-German population were clearly with the German cause in a defensive war against an ancient foe. The Hungarian Prime Minister, Julius Andrassy, also threw his considerable political clout into the debate by opposing military intervention which illustrated in a practical manner the value to Germany of the Hungarian influence over the affairs of the empire.

The improvement of relations between both countries progressed rapidly after some key decisions were made in Vienna in 1871. Although Beust himself inaugurated a policy of reconciliation with Berlin after France's defeat, his continuation as Imperial Chancellor was likely viewed as an impediment to a closer relationship with Germany. When Beust was finally dismissed in November 1871 this was a clear sign of a stronger Austrian commitment to a foreign policy reorientation towards Berlin. The appointment of Julius Andrassy as Beust's successor as the minister for foreign affairs in November 1871 personified the increase in Magyar influence and was probably motivated by a desire to gain Bismarck's confidence. It seemed to also indicate a shift of Austria's diplomatic focus towards the Balkans.

In addition to Beust's removal and Andrassy's appointment there was also a simultaneous change in the government in the Austrian half of the empire in 1871 that signalled a renewed commitment on the part of Francis Joseph to dualism and closer ties with Berlin. Prior to Beust's dismissal, a change in the constitutional structure of the empire had been contemplated that would have led to a broader kind of federalism. A conservative ministry under Karl Hohenwart had been considering a plan to give Czechs and other Slavs a greater say in the affairs in the

49 Heinrich Lutz. *Österreich-Ungarn und die Gründung des Deutschen Reiches*. (Frankfurt, 1979).

Austro-German domains. This was a direction that was not in Germany's interest and Berlin made its opposition to this proposed new constitutional experiment known in Vienna. These German concerns seem to have made an impression on the Austrian Kaiser. At almost the same time as Andrassy was appointed, Count Adolf von Auersperg was asked to form a new liberal ministry in Austria that promptly put an end to plans to modify the system of dualism.⁵⁰ This seemed to demonstrate a strong desire on the part of the Viennese court to placate the German Empire. The first German attempt to support dualism had succeeded.

Even before his appointment as foreign minister, Andrassy had been very much involved in the improvement of relations with Germany.⁵¹ He was in attendance at the meeting of the monarchs and leading ministers in Gastein and Ischl in August of 1871, which inaugurated the reconciliation between Vienna and Berlin. Already under Beust the contours of the Austro-German entente had started to emerge. Bismarck frankly stated his readiness to back a policy of Austrian expansion into the Balkans.⁵² This offer was in fact nothing new. In the preceding years he had often tried to convince Austrian statesmen that they should switch their focus to the Balkans. At the same time he made every effort to offer reassurances of Germany's friendly intentions. He laid particular emphasis on the fact that he had no plans to annex Austria's German-speaking provinces. However Germany's leader also made the limits of his willingness to align with the Habsburg Empire quite clear. He left no doubt that he could not allow the improved relationship with Vienna to jeopardize Germany's close ties to St. Petersburg and stressed that he intended to pay the debt of gratitude for the Tsar's support during the Franco-Prussian war.⁵³ Andrassy's early overtures regarding an alliance directed against Russia were therefore politely rebuffed with the sincere assurance that even without an alliance Germany would not allow Austria to be destroyed by her rival in the East.

Bismarck's commitment to the long-standing informal alliance between St. Petersburg and Berlin formed a critical component of his strategy to isolate France. As long as this cordial entente continued and France remained a republic, there was little likelihood that Russia would have any interest in a French alliance. The close relationship between both countries was based on two foundation stones. On a personal level, there was a strong bond of friendship and family between both rulers. The Kaiser was Alexander II's uncle and they were on the friendliest terms. Given the absolute power of the Tsar, the importance of these dynastic ties should not be underestimated. Due to the strong support provided by Russia in 1870 with her threat to mobilize 300,000 soldiers if Austria showed any sign of supporting France, this friendship was reinforced by a strong sense of personal obligation. At the level of *Realpolitik*, Bismarck had in the past given

50 "Directive for Handling the Austrian Constitutional Conflict in the Press". Aug.21, 1871. Österreich 41/15. PAAA. Bagdasarian, pp. 101-102.

51 Bagdasarian. *The Austro-German Rapprochement*. Also: Bascom Harry Hayes. *Bismarck and Mitteleuropa*. (Rutherford, 1994).

52 Bagdasarian, p. 97.

53 Károlyi to Andrassy. No. 2 A-C. Jan. 13, 1872. PA III/104. HHSStA.

Russia proof of his willingness to provide diplomatic support for Russian aims in the Balkans in return for reciprocal assistance in Western Europe as a basis for political cooperation between the two powers. This collaboration had been demonstrated most recently by Prussia's backing of the Russian position during the London Conference in 1871 leading to the removal of restrictions on Russian sovereignty in the Black Sea.⁵⁴

Although there was never a regime factor as such in Bismarck's relations with Russia, it is important to keep in mind that he was keenly aware that Alexander II did not make policy decisions in a vacuum. The Russian ruler was subject to the influence of his closest political advisors. Berlin therefore closely monitored developments amongst the various factions at the Romanov court. Of particular importance to Germany was a group of individuals clustered around the minister for internal security, Peter Shuvalov, who supported closer ties with Germany. These individuals were generally of a very conservative political orientation and had considerable influence over the Russian Emperor. But there were other forces at work much less friendly to the new German Empire. According to reports from the German embassy in St. Petersburg, the influential Russian Minister of War, Dmitri Miliutin, was convinced of the inevitability of a military conflict between the Russian and German Empires.⁵⁵ There were also other, less extreme parties that were not committed to an exclusive alliance with Germany. This standpoint seemed to prevail in the Russian foreign ministry where there was a pronounced inclination to seek closer ties with France in order to offset the German Empire's new and powerful international position. Prince Alexander Gorchakov, the Russian Chancellor, led this group and was the guiding force in formulating foreign policy on the Neva during the 1870s. He belonged to a Francophile faction within the Russian government that looked to France as a useful counterweight against the German Empire. The fact that French hostility to Germany appeared to be a permanent fixture of the new international landscape after 1871 appeared to members of this group to offer opportunities to increase Russia's influence in international affairs. In view of the existence of these opposing factions at the Russian court, Bismarck took an active interest in identifying and supporting those forces in St. Petersburg which favoured a policy of cooperation with Germany. There was a particularly heavy reliance on the 'German party' around Shuvalov to assist in maintaining a strong relationship between Germany and Russia.

The rapprochement with Austria-Hungary and the existing strong ties between Berlin and St. Petersburg helped to ensure that neither power had any incentive to seek an alliance with France. However, this did create something of a conundrum for Bismarck. Since both of these friendly powers were traditionally rivals in the Balkans, there was a danger that if Germany showed too much favour to one of them, this might push the other into the arms of France. This dynamic became clear during the planning for the visit of Emperor Francis Joseph to Berlin in

54 Dietrich Beyrau. *Russische Orientpolitik und die Entstehung des deutschen Kaiserreiches, 1866-1870/71*. (Wiesbaden, 1974).

55 Reuß to Thile. No. 109. July 12, 1872. Rußland 461. PAAA.

September 1872. Tsar Alexander II, feeling excluded by the growing intimacy between Austria and Germany, in essence invited himself to that gathering changing it into a meeting of all three emperors. Bismarck was also forced to dampen some of the ardour of his own emperor for creating a binding military and political alliance with his uncle. During a visit to St. Petersburg in May 1873, a Russo-German military convention was signed that would have committed each of the powers to mobilize 200,000 men in support of the other in the event of war with a third party. Although this arrangement was potentially very advantageous to Germany, Bismarck refused to acknowledge that it was legally binding unless Austria-Hungary joined the pact.⁵⁶ This episode illustrates clearly the challenges inherent in the Chancellor's diplomatic balancing act between Vienna and St. Petersburg.

In September 1873, the Three Emperors' League was formalized through the accession of the German Emperor to the Schönbrunn agreement of May 1873. This loose alliance between Europe's continental Empires provided Bismarck with a useful framework for managing this complex three-way relationship. Although the underlying agreement did not really obligate any of the powers in a meaningful way, it created a formal relationship amongst all three that allowed the German Chancellor to avoid having to choose between the two potential rivals by referring to this tripartite arrangement. Austria and Russia agreed in the terms of the treaty not to resolve any "special questions" of mutual interest such as the Eastern Question without mutual consultation. Similarly the signatories agreed to consider collective action if one of them were to be attacked by a third power. Beyond what was written in this agreement, the Three Emperors' League also had a clear ideological dimension. All three powers were committed to defending the monarchical principle against the forces of revolution. In this regard, analogies between this treaty and the Holy Alliance following the defeat of Napoleon had some justification. Certainly Bismarck hoped to exploit this ideological dimension of the League to exclude 'revolutionary' France.

However, the Three Emperors' League papered over the fact that the political leaders of all three countries joined this pact with agendas that were not compatible with each other. Andrassy's objective remained to find a way to build a separate alliance with Germany that could be used against Russia. Cooperating with Russia was viewed by him more as a necessary evil to improve his bargaining position but he never lost sight of his long-term goal. He continued to work towards achieving an exclusive bilateral relationship with Germany. Gorchakov, always jealous of Bismarck, no doubt welcomed the League as a way to ensure that the relationship between Berlin and Vienna did not become too intimate. For his part, he no doubt hoped that closer ties with Austria would reduce his dependence upon Germany and perhaps allow him to achieve the goal of shaking off the last vestiges of the Treaty of Paris with the assistance of Andrassy.⁵⁷ Bismarck certainly wished to reduce the animosity between both

56 Text of the convention in: *GP*. Vol. 1, pp. 203-204. Reuß to Bismarck. Feb. 10, 1873. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

57 Schweinitz to Bismarck. No. 133. Apr. 26, 1874. Österreich 63/2. PAAA.

powers so that neither would feel the need to seek backing from France. At the same time, he had an equally strong interest in ensuring that the relationship between both allied empires did not become too intimate. The Chancellor would have preferred that they continue to rely on him to resolve their differences. In this regard he was not above occasionally sowing distrust between both powers when it suited his purposes.⁵⁸

The creation of the Three Emperors' League undoubtedly helped Bismarck to ensure that statesmen in St. Petersburg and Vienna did not feel compelled to look to France as a coalition partner. However, it did create a risk that Great Britain might be forced to seek closer ties with Paris to avoid finding herself isolated. Although England was not a major factor in Bismarck's political calculations in the early 1870s due to her recent history of abstention from any involvement in continental affairs, he still sought to avoid the re-emergence of the Crimean alliance of the Western powers after its eclipse following the Treaty of Paris. A major area of British concern during this period was Russian expansion into Central Asia. The apparently inexorable advance of Russia in that region posed a potential threat to the security of British India. Bismarck had an interest in reducing these tensions so as not to push London closer to Paris.⁵⁹ Consequently he repeatedly offered his services to both parties to help avoid a conflict. His interest in acting as a mediator was also motivated by the expectation that both powers could be made to recognize the indispensability of Germany as an enabler of that *détente*.

In summary, Bismarck responded to the major challenges confronting him after the unification of Germany with a political system that was quite subtle and complex. A key aspect of Bismarck's diplomatic paradigm was the support of specific forms of government in Paris and Vienna. After 1871 his primary goal in Western Europe was to keep France weak and diplomatically isolated. He saw the most effective means of achieving this goal in the establishment of a liberal, preferably radical, republic. The Chancellor foresaw that a republican government would find all roads leading to continental alliances blocked by this ideological barrier. For this reason, he attempted to ensure that Adolphe Thiers, a pragmatic republican, continued to lead France. In the case of Austria-Hungary, Bismarck wished not only to prevent that state from allying with France but also to avoid a situation, in which it was in a position to form an alliance with Russia independent of German control. He believed that the system of dualism created by the *Ausgleich* in 1867 offered the best means of achieving both of these objectives. After 1871 Bismarck therefore encouraged stronger Hungarian influence over Austrian foreign policy. The appointment of the Hungarian Prime Minister, Julius Andrassy, as foreign minister in November 1871 represented the first major success of this strategy and offered Germany additional guarantees for a lasting friendship with Austria.

58 Bagdasarian, p. 119.

59 On Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia see: Holborn. *Bismarcks europäische Politik*.

Looking beyond the substance of Bismarck's grand strategy, a certain underlying style and approach to managing foreign relations emerges from this study of some of his central foreign policy axioms. He clearly had a distinct preference for securing a position as a mediator between the other powers from where he could more effectively exercise control over their relationships. This is certainly evident in his management of the Three Emperors' League. It was also an important facet of how he sought to deal with Anglo-Russian tensions in Central Asia. Many scholars, who have examined Bismarck's entire political career more closely, have also noted that this striving to take on the role of a middleman reflected a fundamental principle governing his political actions both internationally and domestically.⁶⁰ It is important to keep this aspect of the Bismarckian 'style' of conducting politics in mind when analyzing his tactics. His penchant towards divide and conquer, towards ensuring that there was a certain minimum level of tensions present amongst the other powers offers important insights into how he conceived of Germany's relationships with other countries and provides an important clue for solving some of the mysteries surrounding the war scare of 1875.

60 See: Gall. *Bismarck*. Egmont Zechlin. *Bismarck und die Grundlegung der deutschen Großmacht*. (Stuttgart, 1930).