

Analysis of the Success or Failure of Bismarck's System

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Abstract: *As an indispensable figure in the history of the second half of the 19th century, Bismarck gathered the Little Germany under the flag of Prussia through war and political maneuvers, constructed a new diplomatic and military defense system for Germany by diplomatic means, and carried out drastic reforms at home. He is also known as "Germany's navigator" and "Germany's architect" for his political work in building modern Germany. This paper combs the diplomatic system established by Bismarck after the dynastic war -- The rise and fall of Bismarck's system, in order to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the policy system adopted by Bismarck for German diplomacy and military defense after the reunification of Germany in the 19th century.*

Keywords: *Germany; Bismarck system; The course of development; International relations*

1. Introduction

Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismarck became Minister of State for the King of Prussia in 1861 and eventually assisted William I in the reunification of Germany in 1871. In the following 20 years, he established a German-dominated diplomatic and military alliance system on the European continent, namely the Bismarck system, in order to maintain the rule of the emerging empire, deal with the problems that Germany was easy to be attacked in geography, and the difficulty and expense of national defense construction, which is also designed to isolate France.

2. The background of the Bismarck system

On January 18, 1871, William I, king of Prussia, was crowned Emperor of Germany in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles Palace, France. The Second German Empire was established and the reunification of Germany was declared complete. But Bismarck realized that the unification of Germany did not mean the end of the conflict, asking the parliament: "Since the end of the Great war in 1870, has there not been a warning of war? When we came back from the war in the early '70s, they already said: When are we going to go back to war? When are we gonna do "Revenge" again? Five years at the latest." He argues that a new system of diplomatic and military alliances is needed to deal with potential conflicts.

Before the reunification of Germany, Europe was governed by the Vienna system, which was initiated by Tsar Alexander I of Russia and constructed by Austrian Prime Minister Metternich, who played a major role. This system was designed to suppress internal Austrian uprisings, to contain Russia's westward advance, to prevent the resurgence of France, and to suppress European and world revolutions. It was based on the balance of power between Britain, Russia, Prussia and Austria at that time, with reactionary, historical retrogression and feudal color. For the collapse of this system, the author believes that there are mainly the following three reasons.

First, a broken balance of power. The Vienna system was established on the basis of the balance of power of the four countries, and at the same time, the German region was divided for a long time. The Prussians seeking unification constantly attacked this system in the continuous industrial and military innovation and expansion, and broke the balance of power maintained by the system.

Second, the impact of the European revolution. With the rapid development of the industrial revolution in the 19th century, the feudal ruling class was losing ground in the confrontation with the industrial bourgeoisie. The European revolutions of 1848 dealt a fatal blow to the Vienna system.

Third, the divisions within the Holy Alliance. After the establishment of Vienna system, contradictions and differences within the Holy Alliance became more and more obvious, among which

Prussian Austria, Britain and Russia had the most intense conflicts. The Vienna system collapsed in 1853 with the end of the Crimean War amid Great power conflicts.

The collapse of a system will inevitably lead to the birth of a new system, and the task of building a new system fell on the newly born Germany and its chancellor Bismarck.

The dilemma of German national defense and diplomacy at that time lies in its geographical environment and political environment at that time. Geographically, the German region is located in Central Europe. In the 19th century, Germany faced powerful France on the western front, Russia on the east, Denmark on the north, Italy and Austria on the south. It would require a huge army and an incalculable amount of money, which would be extremely difficult for Germany or most other countries to achieve. Moreover, Germany and France had drifted apart after the Franco-Prussian War, and France was ready to take revenge on Germany for the humiliation it had given them. In response to French anger, Germany needed to isolate France by trying to win over neighboring powers like Russia and Austria-Hungary. As the prime minister of the German Empire at the time, Bismarck had to construct a reasonable strategic system in the face of the dilemma that Germany might face at any time in national defense and diplomacy.

3. The initial formation of Bismarck's system

Bismarck's Germany's diplomatic and military system is one of the purposes of isolated France, so Russia and Austria two European powers has become its targets. On September 6, 1872, the German, Russian and Austrian Emperors met in Berlin and reached a consensus against the socialist International revolutionary movement, which is pushed by Bismarck and Wilhelm I. Later, in June 1873, Russia and Austria signed the "Xingbolong Agreement", which agreed that if a third country invaded Europe and threatened peace, the two countries should immediately discuss a common course of action. In October of the same year, Germany also joined the agreement, and the first Triple Royal Alliance was formally formed.^[1] The First Triple Imperial Alliance enabled Germany to achieve the goal of isolating and containing France on the basis of meeting the strategic requirements of Russia and Austria.

Shortly after the formation of the First Alliance of the Three Emperors, Europe's "Oriental crisis" reappeared. In 1875, uprisings broke out in the Ottoman North of Herzegovina and Bosnia, which was supported by the Slavs of the Balkans. Othman then sent troops to suppress it, but with little success. The Balkan situation quickly attracted the attention of Russia, Austria, Britain, Germany and other countries. Russia supported the Pan-Slav movement and the independence movement of the Slavs in the Balkans, so as to achieve the goal of abolishing the restrictions of the "Paris Peace Treaty" of 1856, controlling Constantinople and constructing the Straits system in favor of Russia, while Britain and Austria advocated maintaining the status quo. The Russo-Turkish War broke out in 1877 when Russia declared war on Ottoman Turkey after diplomacy proved fruitless. In 1878, Turkey was forced to sign the "Treaty of San Stefano" with Russia: Turkey recognized Montenegro, Serbia and Romania as full independent states; Russia got the southwest part of Bessarabia; Turkey pledged reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina; The Principality of Greater Bulgaria, covering Bulgaria, all of Eastern Rumia and most of Macedonia, was established under Russian military occupation for two years. The "Treaty of San Stefano" greatly expanded Russia's power in the Balkans. But the treaty provoked strong opposition from Britain and Austria-Hungary, who did not want to see Russian power expand in the Balkans. They forced Russia to hold an international conference that same year to sign a new treaty as a correction to the "Peace of San Stefano". This conference was held in Berlin, Germany, and Russia was forced to make concessions. The "Treaty of Berlin" was finally signed, which forced Russia to cough up some of the spoils it had won. The conflict between Russia and Germany intensified, and the first Triple Imperial Alliance began to collapse.^[2]

Although the Berlin Conference of 1878 formed a balance of power between Britain, Russia and Austria in the Balkans, for Germany, it was a failure of coordination between the two Allies it was trying to win over -- Russia and Austria-Hungary. At the same time, after the Berlin Conference, German-Russian relations also went backward, and the first Triple Imperial Alliance began to collapse. In the face of the collapse of the alliance, Bismarck decided to establish an alliance with Austria-Hungary first, while Austria-Hungary, which had increasingly bad relations with Russia, also intended to establish an alliance with Germany to reduce the threat posed by Russia. Therefore, on October 7, 1879, the two countries signed the "German-Austrian Alliance Treaty", the formal formation of the German-Austrian alliance. The German-Austrian alliance was a great pawn for Bismarck. On the one hand, an alliance between Germany and Austria could force an isolated Russia back into the Triple Imperial Alliance, and even if

Russia were to move away from the alliance with Germany and Austria and instead align itself with France, the existence of a German-Austrian alliance would allow both countries to withstand shocks from the eastern and western fronts. At the same time, if France unilaterally went to war with Germany, the German-Austrian Agreement would guarantee the neutrality of Austria-Hungary. The alliance greatly reduced the pressure on Germany to face war. On the other hand, in the face of deteriorating relations between Russia and Austria, Germany did not have to undertake the obligation to assist the Austro-Hungarian Empire when it took the initiative to attack Russia, so as to avoid the danger of being involved in the war with Russia due to the expansion policy of Austro-Hungary.

After the formation of the German-Austrian alliance, Bismarck set his sights on Russia, his long-sought ally in the East. Bismarck once said in Parliament: "Whether we will have a war and whether we will win it now depends entirely on Russia. The decision is in Russia's hands alone." In Bismarck's eyes, he would enlist Russian support if he could. After the formation of the German-Austrian alliance, Bismarck also saw an opportunity to gain Russia's support. Russia wanted to gain as much as possible in the Near East, but the isolated Russia's greatest rival in the Near East was the Great Britain, which made Russia's interests in the Near East repeatedly frustrated and even lost some of its original interests. Facing difficulties in the Near East, Russia soon showed a willingness to continue its alliance with Germany and Austria. In 1881, Bismarck and the Russian and Austrian ambassadors in Berlin signed a three-year treaty of the "Triple Royal Alliance Treaty". The treaty states that when one of the contracting states is at war with a fourth, the remaining two states shall remain neutral in good faith with the Allies and try to localize the war; Any change in the status quo of the European part of Turkey's territory is subject to joint consultation among the three States Parties; The States Parties recognize that the closure of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles is a universally binding European principle and that Turkey, in violation of this principle, will be considered to be in a state of war with the victim State and will lose its right under the "Treaty of Berlin" to guarantee the security of its territory. In addition, the three countries signed an additional protocol, which stipulated that: Austria-Hungary reserves the right to merge the two provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina at any time; The three countries are not opposed to the merger of Bulgaria and East Rumilia.^[2] The signing of the "Triple Royal Alliance Treaty" and its additional Protocol marked the formal establishment of the second Triple Royal Alliance, and Bismarck also took a very important step in the construction of Germany's own continental alliance system.

After the establishment of the Allies of the Three Emperors, the Cabinet of Italy Depretis also sent an olive branch to Bismarck. In the 1870s and 1880s, Italy tried to reclaim Trantino and Trieste from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and colonize the neighboring lands in North Africa. However, Italy had been thwarted in many ways, so it hoped to gain support from Germany and Austria-Hungary. In the face of signs of growing goodwill between France and Russia, Bismarck knew that the Three Imperial alliance might soon break up, and the olive branch of Italy was a safety net. So in 1882, Germany, Austria and Italy signed a treaty of mutual assistance in Vienna. The treaty stipulated that if Italy was attacked by France without direct provocation, Germany and Austria must aid Italy with all their troops; If Germany were invaded by France, Italy would have the same obligation; If war broke out between Russia and Austria, Italy remained neutral.^[2]

4. The adjustment and final formation of Bismarck's system

After the Russo-Turkish War of 1878, Russia expanded its influence in the Balkans, and even though the Congress of Berlin allowed Russia to part with its spoils, large areas remained under Russian oppression, while Grand Duke Alexander of Bulgaria sought to free himself from Russian control. In September 1885, an anti-Turkish uprising broke out in East Rumia, which self-declared a union with Bulgaria, which Czar Alexander III could not tolerate, and he asked the Great powers to exert pressure to force Bulgaria to dissolve this union. The next month, at the Conference of Constantinople, Russia proposed a return to the status quo stipulated in the "Treaty of Berlin". Bismarck supported Russian-Austrian cooperation at the conference. In August 1886, Russia took advantage of Pro-Russian forces in Bulgaria to stage a coup to abolish the Archduke Alexander. However, Britain and Austria supported Bulgaria to resist Russia, and in 1887 elected the new Archduke Ferdinand, who was pro-German and Austrian. This "Bulgarian crisis" thwarted Russia's attempt to regain control of Bulgaria, Russia lost its political advantage in Bulgaria after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, and intensified the conflict between Russia and Austria in the Balkans, leading to the failure to renew the "Triple Imperial Alliance Treaty".

During the Bulgarian crisis, the outbreak of the Boulanger movement in France, German-French relations were once again strained. Bismarck was worried that France would attack Germany and hoped

to use the means of strengthening the German military threat to deter France. Bismarck focused on the Triple Alliance of Germany, Italy and Austria to strengthen the military threat, and Italy hoped to benefit from the renewal of the Triple Alliance treaty. On February 10, 1887, the three countries signed and passed the "Renewal of the Triple Alliance": If Italy took the initiative to fight against France when conditions permit, it would get Germany's aid. The Triple Alliance evolved into an aggressive military alliance.^[2]

Bismarck hoped to draw Britain into the strategy of containing France and Russia through the treaty link between Britain and Italy and Britain and Austria. Britain and Italy had a common interest in containing France in the Mediterranean, and Britain and Austria also had the same position in containing Russia in the Balkans. If they could ally with Britain, it would be a great help to Germany. However, although Britain had conflicting interests with France and Russia, it did not trust Germany, and advocated signing agreements with Italy and Austria without explicit obligations, and defined the scope of the agreement to maintain the status quo in the Mediterranean area. In March 1887, Britain, Italy and Austria reached the first "Mediterranean Agreement" in the form of mutual exchange of notes. In December, a second "Mediterranean Agreement" was reached. Although Germany did not participate in the two agreements, it was able to unite with Britain indirectly through the participation of Italy and Austria. The "Mediterranean Agreement" reached an alliance between Britain and Germany on the surface, but the provisions of Britain's obligations were vague and the cooperation between Britain and Germany was limited.

The vagueness of Britain's obligations in the "Mediterranean Agreement" made Bismarck aware of the limits of Anglo-German cooperation. Therefore, He hoped to make a treaty with Russia to obtain a guarantee of neutrality in the Franco-German war. Tsar Alexander III was also interested in getting German support in the Balkans and the Straits. On June 18, 1887, Russia and Germany signed the Reinsurance Treaty. At this point, Bismarck basically completed the adjustment of his system, checked the power of France and Russia, prevented the combination of France and Russia, and ensured Germany's dominant position in the European continent.

5. The End of Bismarck System and the future of Germany

In 1890, Bismarck stepped down and Kaiser Wilhelm II assumed sole power, and Germany gradually embarked on a path of colonial expansion. William II advocated the strategy of anti-Russian alliance with Britain, refused to renew the "Reinsurance Treaty", and signed the "Helgoland-Zanzibar Treaty" with Britain in 1890, which was designed to draw Britain into the Triple Alliance. The treaty stipulated that: Germany received the island of Helgoland, which had been held by Britain since 1814, in return for giving up its claim to Zanzibar, facilitating British control of East Africa. However, Britain does not want to lose its independence and flexibility in foreign policy, and has reservations about the commitment and obligation of the Triple Alliance.^[2] In 1897, Wilhelm II abandoned the "continental policy" and gradually promoted the "world policy", which intensified the arms race in Europe and formed two hostile military blocs.

A secret agreement between France and Russia was signed in 1893 amid intense French efforts and growing political and economic tensions between Germany and Russia after Kaiser Wilhelm II came to power. Provisions: if Germany and Italy attack France, Russia should attack Germany with all its strength; If Germany and Austria attack Russia, France should attack Germany with all its might; If the Three Allies mobilize their troops, France and Russia mobilize all their troops and move them to the border without consultation. There shall be no separate peace between the parties or disclosure of the secrets of the agreement; The agreement also stipulates that the two countries maintain regular military cooperation and exchange information, and the validity of the agreement is the same as that of the trilateral alliance.^[2] Thus the Bismarck system officially came to an end.

With the demise of Bismarck in German politics and the disintegration of the Bismarck system, Wilhelm II, the Emperor of the Second Reich of Germany, began his quest to build a world empire. In 1896, at the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Second German Empire, Kaiser Wilhelm II ambitiously instructed: "The German Empire should become a world empire, in the distant parts of the earth, everywhere should be inhabited by our compatriots. German goods, German knowledge, German industry to cross the sea..." . He even declared that "beyond the narrow borders of old Europe there is much to be done, and the world can only be saved by relying on Germany". Later, under his rule, the Second German Empire endured four long years of war. The brutal and long war made the German people embarrassed, and on November 10, 1918, the uprising in Berlin forced Kaiser Wilhelm II to accept

Hindenburg's suggestion to abdicate and go into exile in the Netherlands. After the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the Second German Empire fell and the new German Republic was formed in 1918 with an armistice signed inside a train carriage in the Gombiene Forest. The First World War ended in defeat for Germany. Looking back at the war, more than 2 million German people paid their lives, the German high seas fleet ranked second in the world was forced to sink itself, the war reparations paid to the German economy was overwhelmed, the glory of the second German Empire came to naught with the war.

6. Conclusions

Bismarck system is a strategic conception carefully designed by Bismarck, which is an alliance system centered on Germany and adhering to the diplomatic principle of continental balance of power. The system united Russia and Austria, drew Britain together, isolated and attacked France, avoided France and Russia from clipping Germany, consolidated and protected Germany's hegemonic position in the European continent and the stability of the European international system. After the initial construction and later adjustment of this system, there was no total war in Europe in 20 years. During this period, there were few direct conflicts between European powers in Europe. Germany also got a stable development environment, developed its industrial economy rapidly and stood out in the Second Industrial Revolution. At the same time, Germany took advantage of this period to develop its military power and secure its continental supremacy. But it is important to note that no matter how this embodiment is adjusted, it is still contradictory and fragile. British wariness of Germany, Russian-Austrian rivalry for the Balkans, and economic incompatibility between Germany and Russia all affected the survival of the system, which eventually collapsed under the growing ambitions of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Generally speaking, the Bismarck system was a diplomatic and military alliance system built by European powers with Germany as the center for a period of time. It was the product of a specific period and played a positive role in the stability of the European situation and the development of Germany at that time. However, due to its internal contradictions and the subsequent change of the ruler's strategy, it did not have continuity. At the same time, this system showed a certain aggressiveness in the later period, which also laid hidden dangers for the outbreak of large-scale wars after its disintegration.

References

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