

CONFEDERATION TO UNIFICATION TO THE 'GERMAN EMPIRE'

Prussia's Position in Relation to Austria and the German States after 1848:

- After the revolutions of 1848, Prussia's position in relation to Austria and the other German states was marked by tension and competition. Prussia and Austria were the two leading powers in the German Confederation, but they had different visions for the future of Germany. Prussia, under King Frederick William IV and later under King William I, sought to assert its dominance and leadership in a unified Germany, excluding Austria. On the other hand, Austria, under the leadership of Chancellor Schwarzenberg, aimed to maintain its influence and control over the German Confederation, including both the German-speaking territories and the non-German territories of the Habsburg Empire. This rivalry between Prussia and Austria set the stage for the conflicts and power struggles that would shape German unification.
- Bismarck's Significance in Prussian and German Politics: Otto von Bismarck was a highly significant figure in Prussian and later German politics. As the Chief Minister of Prussia from 1862 to 1890 and the first Chancellor of the German Empire from 1871 to 1890, Bismarck played a crucial role in shaping the course of German unification. He was known for his skilful diplomacy, realpolitik (pragmatic politics), and ability to manipulate international relations to achieve his goals.
- Bismarck was significant in Prussian and German politics because he successfully pursued a policy of consolidating Prussian power and achieving German unification under Prussian leadership. He implemented a series of domestic and foreign policies that aimed to strengthen Prussia economically, militarily, and politically. Bismarck skillfully used diplomacy and war to achieve his objectives, including the Wars of Unification against Denmark (1864), Austria (1866), and France (1870-1871).
 - The dispute over the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein created tension between Austria and Prussia.
 - Austria supported the Augustenburg claim to the Duchies, while Prussia had expansionist ambitions.
 - The London Conference failed to resolve the issue, and Denmark ultimately surrendered its rights over the Duchies.

The Convention of Gastein:

- In 1865, the Convention of Gastein was agreed upon, dividing the administration of the Duchies between Austria and Prussia.
- Austria administered Holstein, while Prussia administered Schleswig.
- The joint sovereignty over the Duchies created an ongoing tension between the two powers.

Bismarck's motives and the meeting at Biarritz:

- Bismarck aimed to strengthen Prussia's international position and avoid war.
- In 1865, Bismarck met with Emperor Napoleon III of France at Biarritz.
- The exact details of their agreement are debated, but Bismarck secured the Emperor's neutrality in the event of a war.

War with Austria:

- Prussian-Austrian relations deteriorated, and Austria's position weakened.
- In April 1866, a secret alliance was made between Prussia and Italy, with Italy agreeing to join Prussia in a war against Austria.
- Bismarck stoked tension over Holstein and proposed reforms to the German Confederation.
- Austria mobilised its forces, and Prussia responded in May.
- Proposals for a Congress to discuss the situation were rejected, leading to escalating tensions.

The Seven Weeks' War:

- Prussia had better preparations and efficient mobilization, thanks to advanced planning.
- Most German states supported Austria, and Austria had a larger army.
- Italy joined Prussia in the war but was defeated by Austria in the south.
- Prussia invaded Bohemia, and the Battle of Sadowa (Königgrätz) took place on July 3, 1866.
- The Prussian army's superior weaponry and tactics led to a decisive victory.
- Austria recognized the need to end the fighting and accepted Prussia's terms.

Prussian Dominance:

- Bismarck returned to Berlin as a hero and gained favour among wealthy Prussians.
- He was promoted to Major General, which ended his insecurity about wearing civilian clothes during military meetings.
- Prussia's victory established Prussian dominance and laid the foundation for Bismarck's future political influence in Germany.

Overall, the Austro-Prussian War marked a significant step in the process of German unification under Prussian leadership, setting the stage for Bismarck's subsequent efforts to create a united German Empire.

The Treaty of Prague

- July 1866: Prussia and Austria signed an armistice
- August: Concluded the Treaty of Prague, which primarily reconfigured North German borders:
 - Prussia annexed swathes of territory, including Schleswig and Holstein, Hesse-Cassel, Hanover, Nassau and Frankfurt
 - All other German states north of the River Main, including Saxony, were now part of a North German Confederation under Prussian leadership
- Bismarck was still cautious about moving too fast with an all-out unification; and threat of French intervention, and worried keeping control might be more trouble than worth
- The four Catholic states south of the River Main – Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden and Hesse-Darmstadt – retained their independence
 - These four states agreed to sign a secret military alliance with Prussia: would have to place arms under the Prussian King's command in case of war
- Germany was now divided into three distinct territories:
 - (1) the North German Confederation
 - (2) The Four Southern German States
 - (3) The Austrian Empire
- The question of the vacant Spanish throne arose in 1868, which drove the Spanish queen out.
- In 1870, Bismarck provoked France by attempting to place a Hohenzollern prince, Leopold, on the Spanish throne.
- The Ems Telegram incident occurred on July 13-14, 1870, which further escalated tensions between France and Prussia.
- France blundered into war on July 19, 1870, and the war turned out to be disastrous for France.
- Franco-Prussian War:
 - The German armies, led by Prussia, were highly disciplined, well-trained, and outnumbered the French forces.
 - The French were outgunned, outmanoeuvred, and suffered defeats in major battles, including the Battle of Sedan in September 1870 and the Battle of Metz in October 1870.
 - The Siege of Paris from September 1870 to January 1871 forced the city to surrender due to starvation.
- Bismarck's Plans and France's Concerns:
 - After Prussia's victory over Austria in 1866, the main challenge to Prussia's expansionism and the emergence of a powerful German Empire came from France.
 - Napoleon III had ambitions to restore France's influence over Europe but was war-wary and lacked the ruthlessness of his uncle, Napoleon I.
 - Bismarck and Napoleon III had several meetings, including one in 1855 in Paris and an important encounter in October 1865 at Biarritz.
 - The exact nature of their discussions and any promises exchanged is a matter of speculation, but it is believed that Bismarck might have hinted at French territorial expansion opportunities after a Prussian victory over Austria.
- However, Bismarck did not commit to any specific agreements, and there was a general show of goodwill and support between the two leaders.

Relations between Bismarck and Napoleon III:

- Napoleon III's expectations from the Austro-Prussian War were shattered by Prussia's swift and comprehensive victory.
- Bismarck declined Napoleon's offer of mediation and instead sent a message that Prussia's expansion would be limited to the north.
- Bismarck was aware that a rapidly unified Germany would be seen as a threat to France, so he presented the division of Germany (under the Treaty of Prague) as a reward to Napoleon.
- Prussia's dominance over the German states, including through the Zollparlament, was perceived as a symbol of its political ascendancy, which concerned France.

Overall, the Franco-Prussian War marked the culmination of Bismarck's efforts to unify Germany and solidify Prussian dominance.

The war had disastrous consequences for France, leading to the establishment of the German Empire and the subsequent unification of Germany under Prussian leadership.

Luxembourg Crisis:

- In the late 1860s, Bismarck began encouraging nationalist sentiment in Luxembourg and declared that surrendering it to France would be a humiliation to German national feelings.
- Bismarck disclosed secret military alliances with the southern German states, indicating that the North German Confederation was not as independent as it appeared.
- Napoleon III pursued negotiations with the Dutch King to acquire Luxembourg. Still, the King agreed to sell it to Prussia, subject to the approval of the Prussian King, which was unlikely to be given.
- Bismarck threatened the King of the Netherlands not to give up Luxembourg, using German patriotic fervour as an excuse.
- The Luxembourg question was eventually settled in a conference in London, which guaranteed Luxembourg's independence and neutrality, but France had no territorial gain.

Franco-German Relations and Bismarck's Intentions:

- Franco-German relations became strained from 1867 to 1870, with a tense peace prevailing.
- Bismarck feared French military strength and the possibility of Napoleon III finding allies against Prussia.
- Efforts by Napoleon III and Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph to reach an agreement came to nothing, as most German Austrians opposed a pro-French and anti-Prussian policy.
- The Luxembourg crisis is seen as the point where Bismarck shifted from being a Prussian patriot to a German one, but his motivations were more cynical.
- Bismarck stirred up German national feelings to increase Prussian influence over the other German states and use it against France.
- He wanted to unite Germany under Prussian influence but understood that it would not happen easily or quickly.
- Bismarck believed that a war with France would raise national consciousness and bring all Germans together, accelerating the process of German unification.

Bismarck's Public Image:

- In a September 1867 interview with a British journalist, Bismarck presented himself as a peaceful actor and expressed a desire for peace.
- He aimed to allay British fears about Prussian intentions and prevent a British alliance with France.
- Bismarck was skilled in public relations and understood the value of presenting himself and his policies in a favourable light.
- It is difficult to judge his true intentions from his public statements, as he often said things he did not believe or believed things he did not say.

Hohenzollern Candidature Crisis:

- In 1868, the Queen of Spain was driven out, and the Spanish government sought a new monarch from the royal houses of Europe.
- In February 1870, Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern received an official offer to become the King of Spain.
- King William I of Prussia, as head of the Hohenzollern family, initially wanted to refuse consent to avoid French hostility.
- Bismarck convinced William to change his mind, arguing that it was in Germany's political interest for the House of Hohenzollern to gain esteem and an exalted position.
- Bismarck secretly sent envoys with bribes to Spain to push Leopold's candidacy, and under pressure, Leopold accepted.
- The news of Leopold's acceptance leaked, leading to outrage in France, as they saw it as a threat to their interests and the European balance of power.
- French demands for an official renunciation from William on behalf of Leopold were deeply insulting, and William refused to give additional guarantees.
- Bismarck received a telegram from Ems, which he edited to make it appear as an uncompromising response to French demands.
- The edited Ems telegram, published in newspapers, caused eruptions in France, and public opinion favoured war.
- On July 19, 1870, Napoleon III declared war on Prussia.

Bismarck's Role and French Blunders:

- Bismarck played a significant role in manipulating the crisis to provoke a war with France.
- He ensured that the amended version of the Ems telegram was published, knowing it would provoke France.
- Bismarck wanted a defensive war against France, brought about by French aggression, to unite the south German states with Prussia.
- French diplomatic blunders and a readiness to fight among the French Emperor and people also contributed to the escalation of the crisis.
- Bismarck called on the southern German states for support, citing France as the aggressor, and they agreed to support Prussia.

Overall, while Bismarck manoeuvred the Hohenzollern affair to create an opportunity for war, the French diplomatic blunders and readiness for war played a significant role in the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War.

Early German Success:

- The combined Prussian-German army mobilized quickly and had superior transportation infrastructure.
- General Moltke led the German troops, while Napoleon III and Marshal Bazaine faced initial defeats.
- French troops initially fought well, but the firepower of the Prussian Krupp artillery proved decisive.
- German armies crossed the Moselle River, cut off the French escape route to Paris, and besieged the French Army of the Rhine in Metz.
- The French forces in Metz remained trapped and out of action until they surrendered in October.
- Napoleon and General MacMahon formed a new army, the Army of Chalons, to relieve the besieged Army of the Rhine.
- However, the Prussians outmanoeuvred the French at every turn and drove them back towards Sedan.

- The Prussians encircled the French forces and took up positions on the hills surrounding Sedan.
- The French attempted to repel the Prussians but faced superior artillery and found themselves in an unwinnable situation.
- The battle of Sedan began, with German leaders observing from a hill, and the French repeatedly failed to break out of the encirclement.
- Prussian reinforcements arrived, tightening the noose around the French.
- The German guns bombarded Sedan, and despite severe losses, MacMahon refused to consider a retreat.
- Napoleon hoped for a bullet or shell to spare him the disgrace of surrender but found none.

These events marked a significant turning point in the war, leading to the eventual capture of Napoleon III and the collapse of the

French forces at Sedan

- After the Battle of Sedan, Napoleon III surrendered to the German forces led by Bismarck and Moltke. The French Army of Chalons was defeated, and Napoleon remained a prisoner until 1872.
- The news of the defeat and the capture of Napoleon III led to the abolition of the Second Empire and the proclamation of the Third French Republic.
- The war continued for another six months, with the German forces surrounding Paris and starving the city into surrender.
- In January 1871, the French government finally accepted an armistice.
- Bismarck had worked towards his goal of Prussian ascendancy in German affairs and ensured that King William I of Prussia became the Emperor of Germany.
- The four southern German states joined the German Empire, strengthening Bismarck's negotiating position.
- The German Empire was established as a federal state, with constituent states retaining their monarchies and having extensive power over internal matters.
- King William I was proclaimed Kaiser, or German Emperor, in Versailles, which added to the humiliation of the French.
- The peace treaty between France and Germany, known as the Treaty of Frankfurt, was signed in May 1871. It imposed heavy fines on France, annexed Alsace and the eastern half of Lorraine to Germany, and caused consternation in France.
- Bismarck aimed to ensure that France posed no future threat to Germany and believed in punishing France for its defeat.
- The annexation of Alsace and Lorraine had strategic importance, and the German press portrayed France as the guilty party during the war.
- The war upset the existing balance of power in Europe, with the newly created German Empire wielding significant territorial, political, and economic influence.
- The political cohesion of the German Empire enabled economic growth and expansion.