

# Bismarck's foreign policy 1871-1890 events

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Bismarck's Foreign Policy 1871-1890 Events 1873 Formation of the Dreikaiserbund 1878 The Congress of Berlin 1879 The Dual Alliance 1881 The renewal of the Dreikaiserbund 1887 The Reinsurance Treaty. Key point: Diplomatic genius guided by the principles of keeping France isolated and remaining on good terms with both Austria and Russia. Introduction: Bismarck had defeated each of his enemies — Denmark, Austria, and France — in isolation. He realised that a powerful united Germany could not expect to fight another carefully insulated war. After 1871 Bismarck was committed to preserving the peace of Europe. There were five powers in Europe: Germany, Britain, France, Austria and Russia. France was bitter at her loss in the recent war and Britain did not wish to get involved in European affairs. A resurgent France, powerful and allied to another European power haunted Bismarck. The main aims of Bismarck's foreign policy were based around the need to keep France isolated and prevent this from happening. To achieve this aim he needed to keep on good terms with both Austria and Russia. This would prevent a two-front war in the future. The key in Bismarck's view to German interests lay in good relations with Russia and Austria. As he said " you forget the importance of being a party of three on the European chessboard. " This would deprive France of a potential ally. This was a difficult task as Austria and Russia were rivals in the Balkans. The friendship with both, Bismarck hoped, would reduce tensions between both over the Balkans. The Dreikaiserbund In 1873 the formation of the Dreikaiserbund (the League of the Three Emperors) between Germany, Austria and Russia was an example of Bismarck's policy of isolating France. This was an alliance of three conservative monarchies designed to stop the spread of revolution

in Europe and preserve the status quo in Europe. However the alliance had little substance. There were no military features to it as Austria refused to agree to any. It did however ensure co-operation among the three Eastern powers rather than rivalry which was Bismarck's primary objective. The War in Sight Crisis France had recovered quickly after the Franco—Prussian war. In 1875 the " War-in-sight" crisis resulted from an attempt to bully France into abandoning her rearmament programme. The export of horses to France was forbidden (usually a sign of preparation for war). Then an article appeared in the influential Berliner Post entitled " Is war in sight? " It was almost certainly inspired by Bismarck. There was talk from leading German officials about the possibility of a preventative war. The episode resulted in a German diplomatic defeat as Russia backed a British protest to Berlin. The Dreikaiserbund had been weakened. The affair brought home the dangers of a two front war to Bismarck. After this episode he proceeded with the utmost caution. Crisis in the Balkans The Dreikaiserbund was destroyed as a result of events in the Balkans. The Balkans was of no interest to Bismarck. (He remarked that the area was not " the healthy bones of single Pomeranian musketeer. ") However he was worried about Austrian-Russian rivalry in the region. In the Balkans there was a series of revolts against the Ottoman Empire among the Sultan's Christian subjects between 1875 and 1876. In 1877 after attempts to impose reforms on the Turkish Empire failed, the Russo-Turkish war broke out. Russia was acting in her role as the traditional protector of the Sultan's Orthodox and Slav subjects. Before the war, Russia had promised Austria that she would not create a big Bulgaria if she won. After fierce resistance the Turks surrendered and signed the Treaty of San

Stefano in March. The treaty proposed the creation of a big Bulgaria. This would be dominated by Russia. This development was totally unacceptable to Britain who always opposed Russian ambitions in the Mediterranean as it threatened the Suez Canal. The British sent warships to the region. The Austrians were also enraged as the Russians had broken their promise not to create a big Bulgaria. War seemed imminent. The Congress of Berlin The turn of events greatly alarmed Bismarck. He was also eager to prevent a war between Austria and Russia which could involve Germany. In June 1878 Bismarck agreed to host a conference in Berlin to discuss the differences. He offered to act as an "honest broker". The results of the "Congress of Berlin" left Russia very disappointed especially at Bismarck's role (Bulgaria was divided into three small states), Russia withdrew from the Dreikaiserbund. Tension grew between the two as Russia strengthened her frontier garrisons and Germany introduced tariffs against Russian grain imports. The Dual Alliance It was against this background that the Dual Alliance was signed with Austria in 1879. This secret defensive alliance became as Carr pointed out "the very corner stone of German foreign policy". Bismarck saw two benefits of this alliance: - It would secure Germany's southern frontier in the event of a war with Russia - It would frighten Russia into seeking a closer relationship with Germany. Kaiser William strongly opposed this alliance as he saw it as anti-Russian. Bismarck threatened to resign before he reluctantly signed. This alliance was enlarged into the Triple Alliance when Italy joined in 1882. Although Bismarck did not think much of Italy's military or political power, it deprived France of a potential ally. The Renewal of the Dreikaiserbund Russia was worried by her diplomatic isolation and sought to

reach an understanding with Germany and Austria. In 1881 a new Dreikaiserbund was formed between Russia, Germany and Austria. Bismarck hoped that this agreement would help to reduce tensions between Austria and Russia in the Balkans. It was agreed that the Western Balkans would be dominated by the Austrians and the Eastern half by the Russians. The Reinsurance Treaty Again events in the Balkans were to disrupt Bismarck's aims. Between 1885 and 1887 the Bulgarian crisis saw relations between Austria and Russia deteriorate. Alarmingly there was growing pro-French feeling in Russia. In 1887 the Dreikaiserbund ended as Russia made it clear she would sign no further agreement with Austria. Bismarck then negotiated "his final diplomatic masterpiece." (Massie) - A "Reinsurance Treaty" was signed between Russia and Germany. It was a defensive alliance: Germany promised to stay neutral if Russia was attacked by Austria Russia would stay neutral if France attacked Germany. This secret treaty reduced the possibility of a Franco-Russian alliance. In 1888 in order to prevent war between Austria and Russia he published the terms of the Dual Alliance. Austria would fight on her own if she attacked Russia while Russia would have to face Germany if she attacked Austria. Events were beginning to move against Bismarck as it was very difficult to keep on good terms with Russia. The new emperor, William II, was more anti-Russian while French loans were funding Russian industrialisation. In 1890 when Bismarck resigned as Chancellor one of Kaiser William's first acts was to refuse to renew the Reinsurance Treaty. Only four months later a French naval flotilla called at the Russian naval base at Kronstadt. Bismarck's policies were in ruins. The nightmare of a two front war was now a distinct possibility.

Bismarck and Colonies Bismarck was at first very wary of any involvement in the "Scramble for Africa". He did not want to disturb the balance of power in Europe. Colonial expansion could involve Germany in disputes with Britain a power with which he wished to remain on good terms (although he disliked Gladstone intensely.) In 1882 the German Colonial League was formed and pressure from the press and the public mounted. This pressure was driven by hopes of vast wealth, prestige and a channel for German emigration.

Reluctantly Bismarck agreed, possibly to embarrass the pro-British Crown Prince, Frederick. Between 1884 and 1885 Germany acquired Togo, the Cameroons, German East Africa (Tanzania) and South West Africa (Namibia). The colonies in total were about five times the size of Germany. However most of them were of little value as the rich pickings were already gone. The Berlin Conference of 1884 hosted by Bismarck settled many colonial disputes especially over the Congo that was awarded to Belgium. It also prohibited the slave trade. During the same period Bismarck encouraged French colonial expansion. He hoped that this would weaken French desire for revenge over Alsace and Lorraine and get them involved in disputes with other countries. By 1886 the process of colonialism was ended as Bismarck, the reluctant Imperialist, turned his attention back to Europe. Famously he said to an African explorer "my map of Africa lies in Europe. Here is Russia and here is France with Germany in the middle; that is my map of Africa."

Assessment - Bismarck has long enjoyed a formidable reputation in the field of foreign affairs. He prevented the formation of any hostile coalition against Germany and obtained for his country recognition of her great power status.

- His foreign was based around the principles of keeping France isolated and

Russia and Austria on good terms. The first of his principles he largely achieved although this were beginning to unravel by the time of his resignation in 1890 as Russia and France moved closer together. - His handling of the Congress of Berlin and the Bulgarian crisis helped to prevent war in Europe. The Congress of Berlin in 1884 helped to solve many colonial disputes between the great powers. - He restrained Austrian ambitions in the Balkans while his successors did not and this contributed to the outbreak of World War I. - He failed however to neither keep both Austria and Russia on good terms nor could he reconcile France to the loss of Alsace Lorraine. - The biggest criticism of Bismarck (and of his contemporaries) was his disregard for the interests and wishes of the peoples of small nations who were seen as pawns in a great game of chess between the great powers. At the Congress of Berlin the actual wishes of the people living in the Ottoman Empire were ignored.