

How did bismarck unify the warring german states history essay



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Otto von Bismarck was a Prussian-German statesman whose actions unified Germany, made it a major player in world affairs, and created a balance of power that kept Europe at peace after 1871. He is praised as a statesman of moderation and balance who was primarily responsible for the unification of the German states into a nation-state. He promoted government through a strong, well-trained bureaucracy. He created a new nation with a progressive social policy. The aim of this investigation is to determine how Bismarck, as powerful as he was, united all the warring German states into a united Germany. The scope of this investigation is to provide further clarification of the nature of Bismarck's ideals and his fortitude towards unifying Germany. This investigation will cover the reasons why Germany was at war with itself before Bismarck, how Bismarck came to power in the depleting Germany, and how he managed to unite all of Germany into a nation-state. An analysis of these topics should indicate the extent of Bismarck's responsibility for the unification of Germany and the major point on why German states were at war with each other. Much of the research will be from Internet sources, while a small part will come from books about Bismarck, including Jonathan Steinberg's *Bismarck: A Life*.

B. Summary of Evidence

The people of the German-speaking areas of the old Holy Roman Empire had common linguistic, cultural and legal traditions which were further enhanced by their shared experience in the French Revolutionary Wars and Napoleonic Wars. Emerging modes of transportation eased business and recreational travel, leading to contact and sometimes conflict between and among German-speakers from throughout Central Europe¹. The model of

diplomatic spheres of influence resulting from the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15 after the Napoleonic Wars endorsed Austrian dominance in Central Europe². The negotiators at Vienna did not take into account Prussia's growing strength among the German states; they failed to predict that Prussia would challenge Austria for leadership within the German states. This "German dualism" presented problems for their fight towards unification: the smaller (without Austria) and larger (with Austria) solutions. Military successes in three regional wars generated enthusiasm and pride that politicians could harness to promote unification for the German states⁴. By establishing a Germany without Austria, the problem of dualism would soon disappear. Otto von Bismarck was a Prussian-German statesman whose actions unified Germany, made it a major player in world affairs, and created a balance of power that kept Europe at peace after 1871³. He is praised as a statesman of moderation and balance who was primarily responsible for the unification of the German states into a nation-state.

Bismarck had recognized early in his political career that the opportunities for national unification would exist and he worked successfully to provide a Prussian structure to the nation as a whole. German unification had been one of the major objectives during the prevalent revolutions, when representatives of the German states drafted a constitution creating a federal union with a national parliament to be elected by universal male suffrage⁵. Germany prior to the 1860s consisted of a multitude of principalities loosely bound together as members of the German Confederation. Bismarck used both diplomacy and the Prussian military to achieve unification, excluding Austria from unified Germany. Not only did he

make Prussia the most powerful and dominant component of the new Germany, but he also ensured that Prussia would remain an authoritarian state, rather than a liberal parliamentary regime⁶. Military success brought Bismarck tremendous political support in Prussia. Bismarck had unified his nation and now he devoted himself to promoting peace in Europe with his skills in statesmanship.

C. Evaluation of Sources

Two of the sources used were:

Hoffman, J. H. (May 30, 1998). Bismarck, Otto von. November 25, 2011.

This source originated from an online document implemented by Ohio State University and its instructors and students. It provided an entire overview of Bismarck's rule in Prussia and of him becoming the Chancellor of Germany. It explains how he came to be in that position and how he intended to overcome Germany's fears of the inter-wars they were having and unite Germany to a society. It focuses on three main points of Bismarck's rule: his general ideological orientation and political commitments, his position on constitutional issues and representative government, and his views on the place of Prussia in Germany and in Europe. The website expressed the reasons why Bismarck unified Germany and the problems he was experiencing while coming in power of Germany. Although it provided me with all the reasons for Germany's unification, it does have its limitations. It fully explains Bismarck's view on Germany, but does not further expand on what he precisely did to unify Germany nor what he did after the unification.

Also, it does not further explain what happened to Prussia as a result of Germany's unification and what Prussia did as a result of it.

Duffy, Michael (August 22, 2009). Who's Who – Otto von Bismarck. November 22, 2011.

This source originated from a multimedia template that exemplifies the events that caused World War I and the effects it had on Germany to allow Bismarck to come to power. The main value of this source is that apart from introductory material it covers events relating to Bismarck's foreign affairs before Germany's unification. It explains that in foreign affairs, he, as a master of alliances and counter-alliances, presided over the Congress of Berlin (1872) and this seemed to symbolize his paramount position as mediator between the then great powers such as Russia, Austria, France, and Great Britain. An alliance with Austria-Hungary (1879) marked a new period of conservatism in Bismarck's foreign policy. The source explains his greatest achievements and many other things that don't deal with his unification of Germany. It provides some background research about himself as an individual. Its limitation could be the fact that most of the website's bibliography are from other online resources, and online resources are not always correct or out of date.

D. Analysis

The first area to analyze is Bismarck's actions that led to the unification of Germany. German unification had been one of the major objectives during the widespread revolutions of 1848-49, when representatives of the German states met in Frankfurt and drafted a constitution creating a federal union with a national parliament to be elected by universal male suffrage. 7

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As Minister President of Prussia from 1862-1890, he oversaw the unification of Germany. In 1867 he became Chancellor of the North German Confederation. Bismarck designed the German Empire in 1871, becoming its first Chancellor and dominating its affairs. He created a new nation with a progressive social policy, a result that went beyond his initial goals as a practitioner of power politics in Prussia. Bismarck promoted government through a strong, well-trained bureaucracy with most decisions in the hands of Junker elite representing the rural aristocracy in the east. Bismarck had recognized early in his political career that the opportunities for national unification would exist and he worked successfully to provide a Prussian structure to the nation as a whole. ⁸ Although Bismarck had led the transformation of Germany from a loose confederation into a federal nation state, he had not done it alone. Unification occurred by building on a tradition of legal collaboration under the Holy Roman Empire and economic collaboration through the Zollverein. ⁸

The unification of Germany made it a major player in world affairs. Bismarck had unified his nation and now he devoted himself to promoting peace in Europe with his skills in statesmanship. He was forced to contend with French revanchist - the desire to avenge the losses of the Franco-Prussian War and Alsace-Lorraine. Bismarck therefore engaged in a policy of diplomatically isolating France while maintaining cordial relations with other nations in Europe. ⁹ He had little interest in naval or colonial entanglements and thus avoided discord with the United Kingdom. The League of the Three Emperors having fallen apart, Bismarck negotiated the Dual Alliance with Austria-Hungary, in which each guaranteed the other against Russian attack.

10 Bismarck had opposed colonial acquisitions, arguing that the burden of obtaining, maintaining and defending such possessions would outweigh any potential benefit. He felt that colonies did not pay for themselves, that the German bureaucratic system would not work well in the easy-going tropics, and that diplomatic disputes colonies would distract Germany from its central interest, Europe itself. 11However, in 1883-84 he suddenly reversed himself built a colonial empire in Africa and the South Pacific.

Bismarck created a balance of power that kept Europe at peace after 1871. A balance of power exists when there is parity or stability between competing forces. The concept describes a state of affairs in the international system and explains the behavior of states in that system. 12 He used balance-of-power diplomacy to keep Europe peaceful in the 1870s and 1880s. He created a new nation with a progressive social policy, a result that went beyond his initial goals as a practitioner of power politics in Prussia. Bismarck's policy had a positive effect on the balance of power in Europe as serious open conflicts between Germany and France was avoided. In other words, it had a stabilizing effect. 13

European liberalism offered an intellectual basis for unification by challenging dynastic and absolutist models of social and political organization; its German manifestation emphasized the importance of tradition, education, and linguistic unity of peoples in a geographic region.

E. Conclusion

The political genius of Bismarck embraced the nationalistic sentiment of Germans and created a state. The swift changes in domestic and foreign

relations, economic, military and technology gave Bismarck the opportunity to unify Germans under one nation. Although Germans were pleased with unification, the rest of Europe felt that Germany was going to offset the European balance of power. By Germany gaining power it allowed Bismarck to control most of Europe. Germany economically had a major impact and Bismarck's foreign policy created an intricate map of alliances preventing Germany to enter any wars after unification. One of the effects of the unification policies was the gradually increasing tendency to eliminate the use of non-German languages in public life, schools and academic settings with the intent of pressuring the non-German population to abandon their national identity.

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End Notes

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5 Otto Pflanze. Bismarck and the Development of Germany. 3 vol. (1990).

6 Jonathan Steinberg, Bismarck: A Life (April 6, 2011), 17

7 Blackbourn, Long Century, pp. 255-257.

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