Main cause of german unification

Abstract

This essay discusses and explains how and why Otto Von Bismarck was the main reason that Prussia was the most dominant and influential force in German Unification. It also discusses how Bismarck was able to utilizes many of his forward and progressive strategies to his advantage in politics and warfare. Additionally, the essay explains the three main wars culminating in German Unification: The Danish War, The Austro-Prussian War, and The Franco-Prussian War. These wars were the driving factors for German unification and were orchestrated by Otto Von Bismarck. There are also other mentions of important factors that Bismarck utilized in his quest for German Unification. One of which is explained is his use of Nationalism to rally support for his cause for unification. The factor is Bismarck's successful Alliance system which was able to Europe relatively out of major conflict and turmoil until 1914, the start of WWI.

Keywords: Wars of Unification, Nationalism, Alliance System

Completely separated for most of history, unable to find common ground among its own people, Germany had difficulty uniting into an independent nation. Germany had been separated for most of European history. Their territories had been exploited and decimated by other countries due to devastating wars. Despite the pain and hardship, one person was able to rise up to help bring Germany together as a whole. Otto Von Bismarck of Prussia was the driving force that lead Prussia to help Germany become independent and unified from the 18th through the 19th century.

Bismarck was one of the first Chief Ministers/Chancellors who practiced the idea of Realpolitik. He looked at what was concurrently occuring at the time and made decisions based on those certain observations. Also, he understood that Germany needed a boost of fighting spirit to accomplish the goal of becoming an independent country. Bismarck realized that the only way that this fighting spirit could be obtained was through nationalism, which is identification with one's own nation and support for its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations. This ideology was a crucial factor for Bismarck's success in unifying Germany. This success with nationalism is explained by Caroline Ford's segment in the *Encyclopedia of European Social History* "…the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, both of which laid the groundwork for German unification, have often been seen as an expression of Prussian patriotism."(Ford, 2001, p. 499). This is one of the many examples of how mastermind Bismarck was able to bind Germany together and further expand it through nationalism. Another way that Bismarck was able to bolster nationalism in Germany and Prussia was through speeches. One of Bismarck's most famous and important speeches that created a strong sense of nationalism and union was *Iron and Blood* . In this speech Bismarck capitalized on recent history to explain and drive home his stance on the argument at hand, " Not by speeches and majorities will the great question of the day be decided-that was the mistake of 1848 and 1849-but by iron and blood." (Sherman, 2011, p. 114). Bismarck's articulate language, as can be seen here, is able to create a sense of pride and urge to fight. This speech is important because it later in turn accomplished exactly its goal and led to three great wars that defined Prussia and put Germany on the map.

Bismarck also displayed military and political genius which was another factor as to how Prussia ultimately had the most influence in German unification. The war that started the push for German unification was the Danish War. Bismarck tried to find peaceful settlements before the war, but realized that the Prussian military force seemed week so he decided to go to war to prove to other european powers that the Prussian army was in fact strong. This is explained more in detail by Christopher Clark " Having tried without success to divide and win over the opposition, Bismarck opted for a program of head-on confrontation. In February 1864 he took Prussia into war (at Austria's side) against Denmark." (Clark, 2006, p. 1899). Bismarck understood that nothing was to occur by waiting and took action alongside Austrias, which aided in the push towards German Unification. The Danish war was a very crucial war in German unification; without Bismarck and his leadership, this war may never have occured. Bismarck used this war to stake his claim on being a prominent leader of Prussia. "… AndOtto von Bismarck, the Prussian minister-president (prime minister), saw an opportunity to propel his state into a position of leadership inGermany." (Showalter, 2006, p. 607 source 7). Bismarck utilized this war to build a stance for himself in Prussia and to explain to the world that Prussia is on the rise. This war also saw that Austria would become allied with Germany, which was soon to change drastically in Bismarck's next war of German unification: the Austro-Prussian war.

The next war of unification was the Austro-Prussian war. This was Bismarck's first war that saw monumental gain in not only land, but also influence and power in favor of Prussia. Prior to this war, Prussia had a mutual alliance with

Austria, but Bismarck understood that the only way for Germany to have influence among the other nations in Europe was by establishing its own authority. With this in mind, Bismarck was able to utilize Realpolitik to manipulate other countries to stay out of Prussia's affairs, which in turn isolated Austria. "…He secured French neutrality through discussions of compensation, and Italian cooperation, using as a lure the Austrian-controlled province of Venetia." (Showalter, 2006 p. 147 source 6). The benefit of these cooperative alliances was that Prussia was able to take on Austria head on with no other sources of aid isting t; Austria. Bismarck was able to accomplish what may have seemed unrealistic at the time. Even though initially he did not want to go to war, he understood that it was the only way possible to assert Prussian dominance. And after all was said and done, Bismarck was able to defeat the Austrians, which supplied Prussia with a boost of mental strength, but more importantly physical strength in unification. This point is well demonstrated by Dennis Showalter, " It convinced the Austrian government to request an armistice on 22 July." (Showalter, 2006, p. 147 source 6). This defeat of Austria gave monumental spiritual and moral strength to the Prussians and Germans. This confidence would also more vividly be depicted in the third and final war of Unification: The Franco-Prussian war.

The Franco-prussian war was the final unifying war of Germany. France was not exactly excited about having a powerful neighbor such as Prussia to the east. Bismarck understood this tension and used it to his advantage. Bismarck received a telegram from the king of Prussia which contained the requests of the French king at the time. Bismarck realized that he could use

this to his advantage and manipulated the contents of the telegram to be more insulting to the French. Bismarck was able to lure the French into a war with this action. In the French people's eyes, this war was to be quick and easy, as evidenced by the French prime minister explained that the french go to war " with a light heart." This however was not the case. The Franco-Prussian war saw Prussia as a dominant force, which lead to their victory. This war concluded the Three Wars of Unification and saw Germany become completely unified. This is further explained by Dennis Showalter, " The Franco-PrussianWar, in reality a war pitting the French Second Empire againstPrussiaand its south Germanallies, completed the process of German unification and fundamentally altered thebalance of powerin Europe." (Showalter, 2006, p. 867 source 8). This monumental victory in Bismarck's career was the final and decisive factor for German Unification; it clearly shows and explains why Prussia was the most dominant and influential force in German Unification. These victories also shifted the balance of power in Europe. These three wars allowed Germany to have a massive sphere of influence on its neighboring countries. Bismarck was able to do this through his use of Realpolitik and his political genius. Another aspect of his career where this genius was also put to use was in his Alliance system.

Bismarck's network of alliances had many short term effects as well as long term ones. The short term effects of the Alliance System were that it helped Germany stay safe among the other great powers. Bismarck was able to utilize these alliance to make sure that no other power, such as France or Austria, build an alliance among themselves and attack Germany. " Underlying this policy, however, was Bismarck's desire to keep Germany

allied to at least two other major powers and to prevent alliances from being forged against Germany. His particular concern was to keep France isolated and prevent it from forming closer ties with any of the othergreat powers."(Mombauer, 2006, p. 47). This goal behind the alliance system was crucial because it helped Germany establish its power among other European powers, without huge conflicts or military actions, which it did. While these were the short term effects, the long term effects had a much more drastic impact. The alliance system that was created under Otto Von Bismarck essentially created the alliances in 1914 (start of WWI). Even though this Alliance System had influence on WWI, it still elicited the genius of Bismarck, as he did not want to go to war and believed it was a last resort. He would rather have peace, as he stated in his own words, "…we had to avoid leaving behind in her any unnecessary bitterness of feeling or desire for revenge; we ought rather to reserve the possibility of becoming friends again with our adversary of the moment…" (Bismarck, 1866, p. n. d). This statement by Bismarck exemplifies his ability to see around short term rivalries and look beyond to understand what will benefit Germany.

Germany had many conflicts throughout history. This state has been divided for most of history due to devastating wars and its struggle to unite the German people. This was vastly changed when Otto Von Bismarck of Prussia came into German politics. He was able to utilize Realpolitik and create a strong unified Germany, through his Three Wars of Unification. Otto Von Bismarck was able to grow nationalism and maneuver his way through politics at the time to unify Germany. Bismarck was able to accomplish many

of his goals and is the sole reason for why Prussia was the driving force for German unification through the 18th and 19th centuries.

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