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The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871

And How it changed Europe's Balance of Power

Graduate thesis in Historie
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Sammendrag

Den Fransk-Prøyssiske krigen, som varte fra 1870 til 1871, er en konflikt som i stor grad forsvinner i bakgrunnen til fordel for de større og mer kjente krigene opp igjennom verdenshistorien. Eksempler på slike kriger er Napoleons krigene, Andre Verdenskrig og Første Verdenskrig. Men legg merke til Første Verdenskrig, hvorfor brøt den ut og hvorfor endte Frankrike og Det tyske keiserriket på hver sin side under Første Verdenskrig? Jeg tror at den Fransk-Prøyssiske krigen var med på å legge til rette for utbruddet av Første Verdenskrig, samt den politiske retningen i Europa. I tillegg til å undersøke det diplomatiske skiftet som fant sted på slutten av 1800-tallet, vil denne oppgaven prøve å besvare hvorvidt den Fransk-Prøyssiske krigen påvirket Europas maktbalanse og la til rette for utbruddet av Første Verdenskrig.

Abstract

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, is a conflict that largely remains hidden in the “background” in contrast to more famous and important wars, such as the Napoleonic Wars, the First World War, and the Second World War. However, one should take notice of the correlation between the Franco-Prussian War and the First World War. Why did it occur and for what reason did France and the German Empire end up on opposing sides later in WW1? I believe that the Franco-Prussian War helped facilitate the outbreak of WW1 and its alliances, in addition to altering the European diplomacy of its time. Furthermore, in addition to examining Europe’s diplomatic policies at the end of the 19th century, this study will attempt to answer to what degree the Franco-Prussian War affected Europe’s balance of power and how it facilitated WW1.

THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR OF 1870-1871

And

HOW IT CHANGED EUROPE'S BALANCE OF POWER

According to Britannica Encyclopædia, the term *balance of power*, in international relations, defines as: “(...) *the posture and policy of a nation or group of nations protecting itself against another nation or group of nations by matching its power against the power of the other side*”. Furthermore: “(...) *States can pursue a policy of balance of power in two ways: by increasing their own power, as when engaging in an armaments race or in the competitive acquisition of territory; or by adding to their own power that of other states, as when embarking upon a policy of alliances*”¹. The term “balance of power” will, throughout this study, function as a central theme to expound The Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871 and its importance in 19th century Europe.

Keywords: Balance of power; Great Power politics; the Franco-Prussian War

¹ Britannica. 2020

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

As mentioned above, this paper will delve into The Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. The reasoning and thoughts behind this certain selection stem from, among others, a genuine interest in 19th-century European history and especially the discipline around the elevating and de-elevating of Great Powers. Furthermore, I believe that my research question and study will delve into a social justification since the correlation between the Franco-Prussian War and World War One could contribute to new knowledge and understanding of the period.

When taking into account the current ‘balance of power’ and particularly that of Europe, one could argue that a German military power resurgence is already taking place. Ever since the conclusion of The Second World War, Germany has, in contrast to several other influential nations, restrained its military growth and capabilities. This form of structure has, until recently, been continuous, and has now been altered in favor of a more defensive stance. The cause of this alteration of strategy is the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, between The Russian Federation and the nation of Ukraine. Even though Germany just recently had begun to commence its military-resurgence stage, one should be wise to remember that the German state has been and still is considered a Great Power, particularly when regarding its importance within The European Union and its influential economy and industry.

The fact that the German nation lost both World Wars constitutes or has led to, a common misconception that Germany has been seen as the agitator or the “bad guy” in both conflicts, especially when regarding The Second World War. The first World War, on the other hand, depicts, in the aftermath, Germany as the sole party to blame for the outbreak of conflict, even though the conflict was initiated by other parties. Another important aspect during WW1 was the rivalry, or to some extent the animosity, between the nations of France and Germany. The history behind this animosity and its effect on Europe as a whole is quite interesting, and I believe that the context of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 in many ways facilitated the outbreak of The First World War and that Germany rightfully so could be equally blamed for the development of the conflict as France or any other great power.

1.2 Research question

Therefore, as a result of the current political situation, one could arrive at the question of how Germany first became a Great Power, by what means it was achieved and how the old balance of power was affected by the establishment of the German Federation. Furthermore, one could analyse the correlation between the old and new balance of power and how the creation of a unified Germany paved the way for further conflicts, such as The First World War.

I believe that the prelude-, the conflict-, and the subsequent peace settlement of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, affected Europe's balance of power and that the previous tendency of moderation and restraint was gradually replaced by self-interest, which in turn helped facilitate the First World War.

1.3 Disposition

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1.2. Research question

1.3. Disposition

1.4. Introduction of the conflict

2. Main section

2.1. Method

2.2. Theory

2.2.1. Moderation and restraint

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2.2.3. Background of the conflict

2.2.4. Different perspectives

2.2.5. The peace

2.3. Discussion

3. Conclusion

1.4 Introduction of the conflict

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 differs from the extremes of 19th-century warfare. While similar conflicts, such as the Italian War of 1859 and the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, predominately lasted until a clear winner was selected, the Franco-Prussian War, on the other hand, continued until the forced surrender of France in 1871, as a result of the bombardment of Paris. The conflict was not too extraneous either, as the Crimean War of 1853-1856. Nevertheless, it altered the political balance of power in Europe and facilitated a pan-European moderation process that emphasized equilibrium.² Furthermore, the conflict accelerated the German unification process, which in turn, led to the creation of a new world power.

2.1 Method

After several consultations with my designated mentor, I eventually chose to center my study around the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. I struggled at the beginning with narrowing down a thesis and what the thesis would encompass. Furthermore, I began utilizing Oria in my effort to acquire and dispel relevant sources connected to my study and subsequently gathered more than a few secondary sources before my first consultation. After meeting with my designated mentor, I was advised to search for primary sources, especially sources that my secondary sources commonly had referred to. Moreover, after examining my secondary sources, I stumbled upon two works that are known for being the colossuses in the field of the Franco-Prussian War. Both Sir Michael Howard and Professor Geoffrey Wawro are renowned for their scholarship and storytelling and the level of detail they possess of the conflict. Moreover, I deliberately chose Wawro's "The Franco-Prussian War – The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871" as the main source of my study. The cause stemmed from two distinct reasons. Firstly, Wawro's work is the newest addition to the field and the most up-to-date. Furthermore, Wawro has previously authored an exemplary history of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, which is quite relevant regarding the prelude to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Secondly, and the main reason for my choosing, was that Wawro's work already was available to rent at the NTNU library, which made the decision quite simple.

In my search for relevant sources for the study, I intentionally gathered sources that were either peer-reviewed, a primary source, or a prominent bibliography, in order to avoid factual misinformation and deviation. Earlier curriculum from my master's study was also utilized to

² Barber. 2014: 1

help discern different facts and figures. Furthermore, by collecting reliable sources, I can guarantee and reassure any potential reader that the level of authenticity is sufficient. In addition, I utilized Leidulf Melve and Teemu Ryymin's "Historikernes Arbeidsmåter" as a guide in my search for relevant literature. Regarding the primary sources that I gathered, I employed the Hathi Trust – Digital Library and the Internet Archive to research old documents and correspondences from 19th century Europe, before and at the time of the conflict.

As my primary sources, I chose "Journal of a staff-officer in Paris during the events of 1870 and 1871" and "Correspondence respecting the Negotiations Preliminary To The War between France and Prussia: 1870". These sources made it possible to examine and discern facts and statements made in my secondary sources and to create a discussion regarding the different views of the conflict, from both a German and a French perspective.

The primary sources are supported by several secondary sources, such as the beforementioned work of Wawro. In addition, there are Lloyd Kramer, R. R. Palmer, and Joel Colton's "A History of Europe in the Modern World", and Christopher Ernest Barber's "Nineteenth-century statecraft and the politics of moderation in the Franco-Prussian War. The most important take from the secondary literature is the difference of opinion between Wawro and Barber, regarding the future of European politics, which will feature later in the study.

The prior research in this field is already quite comprehensive and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 is well covered. However, when regarding the relationship between the outcome of the Franco-Prussian War and the subsequent outbreak of the First World War, together with a change in great power politics, there exist few studies that emphasize this correlation. Furthermore, by utilizing the works of Barber and Wawrow, one can debate their two differentiating opinions on the matter of the conflict's implications.

2.2 Theory

2.2.1 Moderation and restraint

In Christopher Ernest Barber's *Nineteenth-century statecraft and the politics of moderation in the Franco-Prussian War*, he seeks to highlight the place of moderation in diplomacy to obtain an enriched perspective of nineteenth-century statecraft (Barber, p.1). Furthermore, he examines how moderation and restraint were utilized by both belligerent and non-belligerent states, and the impact the Franco-Prussian War had on Europe's balance of power. His study, combined with primary sources from the time of the conflict, will be applied to differentiate and compare the impact the Franco-Prussian War had on European states and governmental officials. Furthermore, throughout his study, Barber points out the other Great Powers' proclivity for solving the crisis through diplomatic channels. These efforts were influenced by elements of restraint and moderation. Moreover, it was essential that these efforts hinged on the active participation of disinterested powers to mediate and counsel the disputant parties.³

As mentioned before, Europe during the 19th century was influenced by both moderative- and restraining policies and forces, which in turn facilitated the general consensus of preventing large-scale conflicts. The European states, with the destruction and chaos brought on by the Napoleonic Wars fresh in mind, wished to safeguard the equilibrium of Europe and therefore came together at the Concert of Vienna in 1815 to debate the matter.⁴ Furthermore, during the concert, the representatives of the great powers agreed to work in concert to achieve this objective. The nineteenth-century jurist Pasquale Fiore clarified the concert's aim as 'to reconcile the past and present', and that the great powers were responsible for mediating, restraining, and organizing any international events that affected Europe, however small or divisive. By diminishing the chance, or the scope of, wars and revolutions, the great powers could augment a more stable and peaceful Europe.

The concert of Vienna in 1815, facilitated a genuine hope for a stable and prosperous Europe. However, it also functioned as a restraining tool to keep France in check and prevent future expansions as seen during the Napoleonic Wars. Nations such as Prussia and Austria were enhanced both geographically and politically in order to prevent potential French expansion. Furthermore, with the establishment of the smaller states, like the Netherlands and Belgium, France's avenues for expansion were greatly hampered and France's focus shifted for a time outside Europe instead of within. One example of France's shift of focus was its involvement

³ Barber. 2014: 3

⁴ Barber. 2014: 2

in Mexico during the 1850s-60s, which would later come back to haunt Napoleon III's regime.

The discussion around the non-belligerent European state's practice of moderation during the German unification process and how the norm, regarding its usage, had gradually altered in favor of self-interest rather than a peaceful and stable Europe, will additionally be raised later in this paper. The previous equilibrium, concerning the European balance of power, was under threat and all eyes turned to Bismarck and Prussia to how events would unfold.

Otto Von Bismarck was a renowned conservative who frequently clashed with his peers regarding the new policies and ideas stemming from a gradually more enlightened Europe, in particular after the turmoil following 1848 and its revolutions. Nevertheless, Bismarck's priority was to create a unified Germany ruled by Prussia and its king, and achieved it through the means of scheming politics, calculated wars, and excellent strategies. However, rather than purposefully demolishing the former European equilibrium and upsetting the balance of power, Bismarck instead favored advocating restraint. Notably, after Prussia's victory over the Austrian army at Königgratz, Bismarck initiated peace talks rather than pursuing Prussia's victory by occupying Vienna, which contradicted the king and his office's wishes. By initiating peace talks early, Bismarck believed that the other European nations would not interfere, since the European equilibrium was yet not at risk.⁵ Simultaneously, the lesser German states were incorporated into the new North German Confederation and the Southern German states were left isolated.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Bismarck favored a more moderate and restrained approach to the Austro-Prussian peace settlement. However, as we will discuss later, this approach did not come to pass during the peace settlement that concluded the Franco-Prussian conflict. Therefore, in the next chapter, the paper will examine more closely the difference of opinion between the quarrelling nations.

The "two Prussias"

In 1870, there existed two Prussias. Theodor Fontana and Karl Marx both formulated different views on Prussia at the time, in; *Rambles through the Brandenburg March* and *Revolution to Unification*. In his travel book, Theodore Fontana illustrates Prussia as a "backwater state", which was crowded with swamps and forests. He emphasizes Prussia's poverty, squalor, and

⁵ Kramer, Palmer & Colton. 2020: 560

the lack of modern culture, which he describes as a “virginal wilderness”. Fontana also provides the general opinion of a Viennese at the time, when regarding the state of Prussia: *The Viennese – always condescending where the Prussians were concerned – derided their northern cousins as having “two legs rooted in the Bible, two in the soil”*. He further describes and concludes with Prussians as being knuckle-dragging and evangelical philistines, which, according to Wawro, were a conclusion that Fontane was at pains to avoid.⁶

While Fontana’s description of Prussia carried an overwhelming critical and negative approach/method, Karl Marx, on the other hand, describes Prussia quite differently. Where Fontane portrays Prussia as a “backwater state”, Marx depicts Prussia’s economic- and industrial capabilities and declared the nation as “a mighty center of German engineering”. Even though Marx’s statement could be considered biased, based on the fact that he originated from the western provinces of Rhineland and Westphalia, he nonetheless compares these industrial areas with their British counterparts, namely Lancashire and Yorkshire. He continues by recognizing the provinces of Rhineland and Westphalia as the centers of German industrialization. It was during Marx’s lifetime that Germany, or at least parts of Germany, gradually transformed from being sleepy and bucolic into becoming an industrial nation with the characteristics of belched smoke and fumes from the expanding coal-fired factories.⁷

2.2.2 The German question

Some scholars tend to categorize the timespan between 1815 to 1871 as “The German Question”. In the course of this short period, Prussia went from being a large German state into becoming a new world power. Firstly, during the period from 1815 to 1866, there were 39 German states which constituted the German Confederation. Simultaneously, the movement to create a unified Germany also gave rise to opposing nationalist groups at the time. The first group, the Great Germans, favored an all-German union, which would include Austria in the German fold. The second group, the Little Germans, on the other hand, excluded Austria’s participation in a unified Germany and adhered to Bismarck’s anti-Austria policy. The Little Germans and Prussia prevailed in their struggle against the Great Germans, and Austria was forced out of the unifying process of the German people.⁸

⁶ Wawro. 2003: 1

⁷ Wawro. 2003: 1-2

⁸ Kramer et al. 2020: 561

Secondly, throughout this period, Bismarck achieved to enlarge Prussia both politically and geographically. Prussia's territory was enlarged as a result of its victory in 1866. In 1867, German states such as Mecklenburg, Saxony, and other northern regions, entered with Prussia into the North German Confederation. Then in 1871, the Southern German states of Bavaria, and Württemberg, accompanied by an addition of smaller states, combined with the North German Confederation into forming the German Empire. Furthermore, the province of Alsace-Lorraine was conquered and made a part of the new German Empire, whose borders remained unchanged until 1918.

In the next chapter, the paper will go more into depth regarding the background of the conflict, which provides the reader with a greater understanding of its prelude, and more importantly, the intricate geopolitical situation Europe faced.

2.2.3 Background of the conflict

Causes

There exist several important causes for the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. Geoffrey Wawro, in his "*The Franco-Prussian War – The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871*", argues that the conflict was initiated because of Prussia's rapid development following their victories in the Second Schleswig War and the Austro-Prussian War (Year?). Particularly the battle of Königgratz fought on 3 July 1866, which Wawro depicts as a turning point in history. Firstly, Prussia became the dominant German power and mitigated Austria's influence both within the German borders and in European politics. Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria had to relinquish the Habsburg held dominion in the Holy Roman Empire, then through the German Confederation, a power which they have held since the sixteenth century. Furthermore, Prussia under Otto Von Bismarck then abolished the remaining thirty-nine German states and incorporated them either into Prussia itself or into the newly established North German Confederation, which was predominantly controlled by Berlin.⁹

Secondly, it proved that wars still could be decided through great battles and that the outcome of a single event could alter history, one way or another. In Prussia's case, they went from being a second-class great power to becoming an influential great power. However, this did not go unnoticed by the other great powers, such as the UK, Russia, and France. Notably,

⁹ Wawro. 2003: 16

France gaped in astonishment over Prussia's recent success and became gradually more concerned regarding their new neighbor, who went from being "a rather small and manageable neighbor, into an industrial and military colossus". France reacted to the new "threat" by demanding a response from the then French Emperor, Napoleon III, to counter the rapid German development. The emperor's privy counselor warned: "Grandeur is relative," "A country's power can be diminished by the mere fact of *new* forces accumulating around it". The French minister of state furthered this sentiment by urging a French occupation of the Rhine as well as defeating Berlin in a war. Furthermore, even the Emperor's opposition, who historically opposed such militaristic approaches, urged the Emperor into making war.¹⁰

The French reaction

The French emperor, Napoleon III, did partially heed his counselor's advice regarding impeding Prussia and its development. There were several instances where hostility and cunning politics from both sides augmented the possibility of war, however, neither side aspired to be the declaring party. France did attempt to demand several ultimatums from Prussia regarding previous border disputes, although they did not possess the necessary military means at the time to support their demands, which again led to the demands being dropped. Even though Bismarck, personally, could accept and agree to some of these demands, he nevertheless had to reject the demands in fear of losing popular support at home. The new 'unified' German people could not begin its unified national history by acceding to French demands and Bismarck needed to consolidate Prussia's new holdings before any rash decisions were made. As it happens, the speed at which the Austro-Prussian War was fought and ended, impeded France and Napoleon III's planned strategy, which was to weaken both states while France acquired both strategic territories and maintained its unchallenged position as the most powerful mainland nation. Before the battle of Königgratz, Napoleon III had boasted in a speech at Auxerre that he would use the Austro-Prussian war to enlarge France and wring concessions from the two German powers. As a result, the emperor faced increased political pressure and criticism from within and one of his most persistent critics declared after a failed mission to incorporate Luxembourg that: "When a hunter is ashamed of returning from the chase with an empty bag, he goes to the butcher, buys a rabbit, and stuffs it into his bag, letting the ears hang out. *Voilà le Luxembourg!*."¹¹

¹⁰ Wawro. 2003: 4

¹¹ Wawro. 2003: 18

Concerned regarding Prussia's rapid rise in power, Napoleon III vowed that the Southern German states, Bavaria, Württemberg, and Baden, would not face the same fate as their northern counterparts. By incorporating the Southern states, Prussia would add an additional 8 million Germans, 200,000 well-drilled troops, strategical geographical areas that would function as a springboard into French territory, and substantial resources into its fold.¹² During a meeting with the Prussian ambassador after the battle of Königgratz, the French empress commented: "The energy and speed of your movements have (made it clear) that with a nation like yours as a neighbor, we are in danger of finding you in Paris one day unannounced. I will go to sleep French and wake up Prussian." These fears spurred Napoleon III into action, and in 1868 he warned the British foreign minister that: "I can only guarantee the peace of Europe so long as Bismarck respects the present state of affairs. If he draws the South German states into the North German Confederation, our guns will go off of themselves."¹³

The beforementioned criticism of the emperor and his recent political shortcomings continued to gain support among the French people throughout the 1860s. Furthermore, it placed the Second Empire in a position where its survival was dependent on diplomatic and military victories. France and its population felt that its "national dignity" was at stake and that German progress came at France's expense. In addition, France and Napoleon III felt that their dominant role in central Europe gradually faded into obscurity and that the rise of one state often coincided with the decline of another. The European balance of power was changing and the question at hand became not so much as to what would happen, but how it would unfold, and if Europe had additional room for the emergence of another great power.

The Prussian problem

On the other side, in Prussia, the situation was quite different compared to their French counterparts. Prussia was in control over the Northern German states in the North German Confederation and had successfully thwarted Austrian influence in the prior Austro-Prussian War. With the influx of new territories and a soaring population, Prussia had begun to even out the odds when comparing itself with its neighbors. Prussia was no longer a medium great power, now it could, in theory, go toe to toe with other great powers such as France. While France's situation at the time seemed bleak, Prussia and Bismarck were not 'perfect' either.

¹² Wawro. 2003: 19

¹³ Wawro. 2003: 20

The beforementioned aim was to unify the German states into one entity under Prussian dominion, and in order to achieve this goal, they required foreign intervention, more precisely war. The reason behind this line of thought stems from the dissimilarities between the Northern- and Southern German states. While the north predominantly was Protestant, the south, on the other hand, was Catholic. The process of bridging the political and cultural obstacles would take time and could constitute future problems, therefore Bismarck began to contemplate other solutions to achieve his goals. The solution presented itself as a war with France, or as Bismarck would have coined it, the defense against another Napoleonic invasion.¹⁴

Owing to the previous Napoleonic Wars, Francofobia was still lingering within the German people's minds. The German population still had vivid recollections and memories of the previous conflict, and how France taxed and looted the German states, in addition, to forcefully conscripting 250,000 Germans into French military service. Bismarck believed that in the scenario of war with France, the Southern German states would put their armies at Bismarck's disposal.

Another predicament that troubled both participants, and especially Bismarck and Prussia, was the fear of international intervention. Given that European politics was influenced by moderation and restraint at the time, Bismarck feared that the other great powers, such as the British, Austrians, or Russians, would intervene in a Franco-Prussian conflict if they felt the European equilibrium was at stake. This fear led Bismarck into creating an image of equality, between France and Prussia, which he also successfully applied during the previous Austro-Prussian War. By creating an image of equivalence, Bismarck could mitigate the possibility that a non-belligerent great power would interfere in the conflict and could then focus primarily on the conflict itself.¹⁵ Furthermore, France and Napoleon III had, from an early stage, been seen as the provocative party due to their previously published desire for Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Rhineland. Bismarck is renowned for his political intellect, and he deliberately stoked France and Napoleons III's appetite for new territory. By doing this Bismarck made France appear significantly more threatening than Prussia in the eyes of the non-belligerent nations and increased the chance that they would sit on the side-line as in the Austro-Prussian War. Furthermore, when regarding the future of the Southern German states, Bismarck believed that they would mimic their northern counterparts, who after the Austro-

¹⁴ Wawro. 2003: 21

¹⁵ Wawro. 2003: 21

Prussian War, had willingly (mostly) voted themselves out of existence in favor of the North German Confederation. Bismarck believed in the emotive power of German nationalism and that a patriotic war against their arch-nemesis would facilitate a unified Germany.¹⁶

If one were to summarise, the Franco-Prussian War was a conflict both nations sought for different reasons. While France under Napoleon III felt the obligation for teaching Prussia a lesson in great power politics, the North German Confederation under Bismarck, on the other hand, required a war with France to complete the process of German unification. In addition, due to several failed policies and diplomatic conflicts, Napoleon III's power base was gradually crumbling, and he was relying on a political victory, a political victory through war. Both parties wanted to buy time before an eventual outbreak of war, which is the main reason for the conflict not breaking out sooner. France and Napoleon III needed time to complete vital army reforms, whilst the North German Confederation and Bismarck wanted to buy more time for the spread of German national ideas in order to prepare for the oncoming ordeal.¹⁷

The calm before the storm

Considering France and Prussia's mutual aspiration for war and the subsequent predicaments such a war could and would resolve for both parties, meant that war was looming in Europe. According to Wawro, there were three successive crises in 1870 that finally commenced the conflict. The first crisis, the *Kaiser-Titel*, represented Bismarck and the nationalist's desire of crowning King Wilhelm I of Prussia as the new German *Kaiser*, which in turn aggravated France and Napoleon III. The French government viewed the potential coronation as a major threat to French interest, and in an ironic twist of fate, the once liberal and the previous supporter of "national principle" and a "United States of Europe", Napoleon III, reversed his previous stance and gradually began to utilize Metternichian conservatism as an alternative. Furthermore, Napoleon III threatened Bismarck with statements such as: "No more violations" and in February 1870 "If Prussia moves again, France will strike".¹⁸

The second crisis encompassed a Swizz railroad route that would connect Prussia with Italy, which Bismarck deliberately had funded to spite France and Napoleon III. The French interpreted this act as a strategic action to drive a wedge between France and Italy. France

¹⁶ Wawro. 2003: 21-22

¹⁷ Wawro. 2003: 22

¹⁸ Wawro. 2003: 32

feared, as in the Austro-Prussian War, that Italy would align itself with Prussia in a potential war against France. This fear stemmed from the gradual distancing between France and Italy during the 1860s, facilitated by Napoleon III's annexation of Nice and Savoy, and his stubborn defense of Papal Rome. Furthermore, the construction of the railway and the previous diplomatic clashes led to an internal crisis within France. It became apparent that France under Napoleon III had repeatedly reacted inadequately to these crises and revealed that it existed a lack of initiative in general. His ministers were not projecting the necessary commitment to challenge an up-and-coming Prussia and in May 1870, Napoleon III replaced the current foreign minister, Napoleon Daru, with the more aggressive Duke Antoine Agénor de Gramont. The previous foreign minister, Napoleon Duru, was in contrast to Gramont an advocate for peace, appeasement, and disarmament, which functioned ineffectively along with France and Napoleon III's policies. According to Wawro, Gramont, on the other hand, considered himself more than a match for Prussia, and promised Napoleon III and the French people that he would manufacture a war from almost *any* pretext to humble Berlin and smash the treaties of 1866. Alongside the chief minister, Emile Ollivier, Gramont agreed that "the next rebuff (from Prussia) must mean war" – *un échec c'est la guerre*.¹⁹

Even though Gramont and Ollivier shared the same feelings toward the German problem and that only a war could resolve the issue, Ollivier lacked the same support from his peers. His government was unable to push legislation through parliament, and as such had lost the *ear* of the emperor, which in turn led him to fear his unstable position in government. Napoleon III considered replacing Ollivier with a member of the opposition, a well-known and respected liberal with the name of Ernest Picard. It is rumored that, while reacting to this threat, Ollivier confirmed that he "would do *anything* to remain minister", which in turn helped lay the foundations for the outbreak of war.²⁰

The point of no return

The third and final crisis, that facilitated the outbreak of war, was the affair of the Spanish throne. Compared to the earlier crisis, the third and final crisis did not differ in magnitude or importance. Nevertheless, it accelerated the steadily growing hostility between the nations and involved both populaces through the presses. Both nations printed newspapers on the issue and gathered widespread support from their respective people. The issue regarding the third

¹⁹ Wawro. 2003: 33

²⁰ Wawro. 2003: 33

and final crisis was to whom would inherit the Spanish crown. Throughout the autumn of 1869, Spanish representatives approached Prince Leopold von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen and offered him the Spanish throne, which had been left vacated since the deposing of the Bourbons in 1868. The reasoning behind the decision to appoint Leopold as the new Spanish king was both logical and strategic. The Spanish valued Leopold's Catholic heritage and the fact that he was married to a Portuguese infanta. Furthermore, he was the nephew of the Prussian king and a descendant of an adopted daughter of Napoleon Bonaparte, which in all made him an attractive candidate from a Spanish point of view. Yet, the Hohenzollerns did not reciprocate the offer in the beginning as they were concerned to inherit the Spanish crown. It was well-known that the Spanish monarchy was in a precarious situation. The former queen, Queen Isabella, had been deposed in 1868 and King Willhelm I of Prussia feared that the Hohenzollern family could potentially share the same fate as the Bourbons. If so, the Hohenzollern family would lose face and at the same time face embarrassment in Prussia. Therefore, both King Willhelm I of Prussia and Leopold displayed inadequate interest in the Spanish proposition. However, before the offer was rejected, Bismarck stepped in and took advantage of the opportunity that presented itself. He believed that he could deeply compromise the French by placing Leopold on the Spanish throne before France and Napoleon III could react. Additionally, if accepted, France would be surrounded by Hohenzollern monarchies and run the risk of fighting a two-front war, which would not be ideal.²¹

To ensure the crisis would escalate into a full-scale conflict, Bismarck convinced Leopold to accept the Spanish proposition and awaited in suspense how Europe, and especially France, would react. Another important element of the crisis was its secrecy, and only a handful of people knew of the impending danger this decision would give rise to. Even the Prussian King, Willhelm I, was left in the dark, and when the news was broadcasted throughout Europe, he was among the first to blame Bismarck for the current situation. He famously stated at the Hessian spa of Bad Ems: "I owe this mess to Bismarck" and "He has cooked it up like so many others".²²

However, in contrast to the Spanish sentiment toward their potential new king, France, and Napoleon III, understood the potential dangers that loomed. Gramont and Ollivier convened the legislative body and began to discuss how they would react to this blatant German

²¹ Wawro. 2003: 34

²² Wawro. 2003: 34

provocation. They knew that Prussia and Bismarck had committed themselves and as such the possibility of the war they all sought after could arise. This placed France in a peculiar situation. If they managed to force the Germans into withdrawing their candidature for the Spanish throne, Prussia and its leaders would lose face. Additionally, if the Prussians forged ahead with the coronation, Gramont and Ollivier could make true their long-time desire, namely a war with Prussia.

In the hectic days that followed the Spanish affair, Napoleon III was enfeebled by a gout attack that indisposed him during this vital period. It was rather Empress Eugénie, Ollivier, Gramont, and the military who oversaw France's reaction to the crisis. The common denominator amongst them was their wish for war with Prussia, and that for entirely different reasons. The Empress sought to protect France's position as a great power and was worried that "France was losing her place among the nations, and must win it back, or die". Furthermore, she genuinely disliked Prussia and particularly that of Bismarck after his meddling with Madrid. Adolphe Thiers, who at the time was close to the emperor, commented that the real push for war was orchestrated by Empress Eugénie, Gramont, Ollivier, and the military. He further remarked the reasoning behind the perpetrator's wish for war as "the generals in the hope of becoming marshals and the marshals because they desired to be dukes and princes"²³

France's reaction to the German provocation came in the form of demands, demands for King Wilhelm I to compel his nephew into renouncing the Spanish throne. In the interim, France sent its ambassador into action, and he met with the senior foreign ministry official, Baron von Werther to discuss the current crisis. In comparison to Bismarck, Werther advocated peace and restraint, which was the political norm in 19th century Europe. Bismarck himself was unavailable due to his vacation at Varzin, and could therefore not attend the negotiations. This led to Leopold, under pressure from his father and Werther, withdrawing his candidacy for the Spanish throne, to the great dismay of both Bismarck and Gramont who both believed that war was inevitable.²⁴

Even though it seemed that the war was averted, both Bismarck and especially Gramont continued to fuel the flames of war. Before the outbreak of hostilities, France under Gramont, had during the 1860s cultivated diplomatic relations with other European powers that "had a

²³ Wawro. 2003: 35

²⁴ Wawro. 2003: 35-36

bone to pick with Prussia". The nations in question were predominantly nations that recently had suffered Prussian defeats, such as Denmark and Austro-Hungary, who already held a grudge against Prussia's rapid development and expansion. Furthermore, Gramont believed that the Italians would join their side in the conflict because of France's recent aid against the Austrians at Magenta and Solferino in 1859. However, as previously mentioned, France's foreign relations did not quite live up to Grammont's expectations, together with France's earlier handling of the conflicts prelude, which in turn left the nation almost isolated. Even though talks and arrangements regarding the issue had taken place, it was still not made official, which again gave Gramont a false sense of security. This false sense of security led Gramont to rekindle the crisis by demanding further German concessions, which aimed at thwarting any future Prussian involvement in the Spanish succession order. By forwarding such demands, Gramont would succeed in either humiliating Prussia or escalating the conflict, where the latter seemed the most unlikely.²⁵

The "Ems dispatch"

Moreover, before Bismarck had the chance to assess the situation, the king, Wilhelm I of Prussia, was approached by the French foreign minister who informed him of Gramont's new demand. This methodology seemed to have appalled Wilhelm and made him realize that Gramont wished for something more than security, he desired to humble Prussia in the eyes of Europe. However, Bismarck had finally arrived back in Berlin and went to work regarding the new state of affairs. Furthermore, after accepting the withdrawal of Leopold's candidacy, he sought to facilitate a war in which France would be seen as the aggressor. That France was seen as the aggressor was paramount for Bismarck's plan of German unification and would almost certainly placate the Southern German states into a German union.²⁶

Bismarck contemplated his room for actions, and by which means he could taunt the "Gallic bull" into action. The answer came in the form of a letter, more precisely the "Ems dispatch". Originally, the telegram was only a report of the frosty meeting between King Wilhelm I of Prussia and the French ambassador Benedetti. However, due to a little rewriting, whereas the diplomatic phrases were exchanged for a more direct language, the new telegram was distributed to all the German embassies and newspapers in the hope of discrediting the original telegram. This new altered version became headlines even before the original

²⁵ Wawro. 2003: 36

²⁶ Wawro. 2003: 37-38

telegram reached Paris, and as such gave France the *casus belli* she desired. Rather than reacting to French provocation with force and violence, Bismarck kept his head cold and managed to reverse the situation in regards to who became the aggressor and defender. Furthermore, it created the global picture of France as the aggressor and the British ambassador in Paris noted this in a conversation with Gramont: “I pointed out (to Gramont) that the Prussian renunciation wholly changed the position of France. If a war took place now, all Europe would say that it was the fault of France, that France rushed in from pride and resentment.”²⁷

In response to the “Ems dispatch”, Napoleon III ordered the French army to call on its reserves. Throughout the streets of Paris, uplifting shouts were heard everywhere chanting “*à Berlin! À bas Guillaume! À bas Bismarck!*” – “On to Berlin! Down with Wilhelm! Down with Bismarck!” The French legislative body responded by, almost unanimously, declaring support for war with Prussia. However, 16 republicans spearheaded by their party leader, Léon Gambetta, opposed the majority and tried in vain to delay the declaration of war by filibustering the legislative body. Nevertheless, cracks were beginning to appear in the French nation and that was even before the outbreak of war, with liberal republicans and conservative Bonapartists representing the political extremes. The conservatives were pro-war and felt that the republicans betrayed their nation by opposing the declaration of hostilities. The republicans and some of the moderate liberals, on the other hand, felt that the conservatives pursued conflict with Prussia on the wrong premises and that they feared a new “Mexican adventure”. They drew parallels with the previous Mexican conflict and how the legislative body had been deceived once and could be deceived again.²⁸ Furthermore, when Ollivier, as the last option, struggled to convince the legislative body into declaring war, he provided evidence of Bismarck’s tampering with the telegram and hoped to prove Bismarck’s pro-war stance and to show that both sides were to blame for the repeating crisis. Additionally, he claimed that such “pieces of theatre” – *coups de theatre* – could not be reconciled with the dignity of France.

Even though Ollivier’s pretext for war was quite slim, he nonetheless commented: “Yes, yes, from this day forward, my ministers and I face a great responsibility. We accept it *with a light heart*.” Both Wawro and the legislative body remarked on Ollivier’s choice of words, and a republican deputy at the scene retorted: “The blood of the nations will bleed from your light

²⁷ Wawro. 2003: 38

²⁸ Wawro. 2003: 39

heart". This was one of the last occurrences before the floor was yielded to the war minister, who began the final preparations for war.²⁹

The paper will briefly, in the next chapter, explore the different perspectives acquired from the primary sources, and will later, in the discussion, discuss the difference in opinion between the French staff officer and the British Foreign Secretary.

2.2.4 Different perspectives

In "*Journal of a staff-officer in Paris during the events of 1870 and 1871*", there is possible to acquire an insight into the conflict from a French perspective, which also functions as a primary source of the conflict. Captain d'Herrison d'Irisson was on a diplomatic mission in the United States of America during the outbreak of hostilities. In a conversation between him and the Minister Plenipotentiary of France in the United States, Prévost-Paradol, he is alerted of the imminent outbreak of war back in Europe. Even though d'Irisson first downplays the possibility of war and compares the current situation with the previous Luxembourg affair, which did not escalate into open conflict, he is gradually convinced by Prévost-Paradol reasoning. He argued that the imminent outbreak of war was inevitable due to two reasons. The first reason was: "(...) *is that Prussia wants to go to war with us*". He further explains by informing d'Irisson that indirectly for the last 16 years, and directly for four, Prussia has been preparing for this conflict and argues that Prussia's military necessitates war as much as a train is dependent on being used to avoid the development of rust. The second reason, which is more absolute, is that: "*the Empire needs a war, it wishes for one, and it will make one*", according to Prévost-Paradol.³⁰

D'Irisson then accepts Prévost-Paradol's line of thought and insists on returning to fight for his country, and in bravado expresses the convenience of his lingual capabilities for the up-and-coming invasion of Germany. In stark contrast, Prévost-Paradol opposes d'Irisson's bravado by clarifying his thoughts regarding the outcome of the conflict. He comments d'Irisson's boldness by stating: "*What a grand thing it is to be young and to believe*", and supplementing it with: "*But, unhappy youth, not only will you not go to Germany, but you will be overwhelmed in France. Believe me, I know the Prussians. We are deficient of everything that we need in order to struggle against them-generals, men and supplies. We shall be*

²⁹ Wawro. 2003: 40

³⁰ D'Irisson. 1885: 3-4

ground to powder". He later adds that: "*France will be in a state of revolution before six months are over, and the Empire will be in the dust. Ah!*"³¹

Furthermore, in his journal, both D'Irison and Prévost-Paradol established that Prussia was to be seen as the aggressor. However, even though Prévost-Paradol is quite honest regarding the inequality between the warring nations, they both underplay France's role as a belligerent party. Therefore, later in the discussion part, this paper will contemplate in conjunction with other literature whether they were correct in their statement regarding aggression.

Nevertheless, before any discussion, we will delve into the final part of the conflict in the next chapter.

2.2.5 The peace

That a large-scale conflict, such as the Franco-Prussian War, ended in a swift German victory, surprised all parties and in particular Bismarck. No one predicted that the experienced French marshals would blunder into defeat after defeat, ultimately resulting in the total collapse of the French army. After the French surrender in 1871, Bismarck faced a crucial dilemma, should he persist in his moderate diplomacy, which had so successfully concluded previous conflicts, or should he alter his stance in favor of a more revengeful approach? He chose the latter, and Wawro argues that Bismarck's stance during the peace talks stemmed from his earlier memories of Prussia as a second-hand power and its treatment and bullying by the other great powers. Furthermore, he largely feared republics on account of his belief that they were bound to clash with monarchies. Therefore, Bismarck changed his political stance from a *Realpolitik* point of view to a more *Idealpolitik* point of view. Moreover, during the peace talks with his conservative counterpart, Adolphe Thiers, Bismarck intentionally attempted to humiliate the French representative by demanding an unpopular treaty. Bismarck also desired to isolate France and its republic, so as to thwart any future French war of revenge and to ensure it would fight the said war alone.³² Another important aspect of the harsh negotiations was to buy time for the consolidation process of the new German territories.

As previously mentioned, one of Prussia's main objectives of the war was to facilitate the acceleration of German unification. Bismarck believed that "a great national war" would expedite the unification process. However, due to stiff resistance from the remaining independent German states of Saxony, Baden, Hessa, Bavaria, and Württemberg, Bismarck

³¹ D'Irison. 1885: 4

³² Wawro. 2003: 301

had to balance the war effort simultaneously as negotiating around German unification. According to Wawro, *Einheit* – unity – was achieved at the expense of *Freiheit* – freedom, and Karl Marx further criticizes the newly formed German Empire as: “a military despotism cloaked in parliamentary forms with a feudal ingredient, influenced by the bourgeoisie, festooned with bureaucrats and guarded by police.” Furthermore, as a consequence of all the internal-political contradictions forged by Bismarck in the aftermath of the war, several historians believe that it was a decisive factor behind Germany’s participation in World War I.³³

Returning to the beforementioned Southern German states, they were gradually less inclined into entering a German Empire, which differed in both religious- and political aspects. The smaller German states wished instead of a ‘looser’ alliance and advocated for a German Confederation with an emphasis on equality among its members. Prussia and Bismarck, on the other hand, expressed the desire for a German Empire with Prussia and its king as overlords. In order to achieve this objective several threats were directed against the smaller German states, and one by one they entered the Prussian fold.³⁴

Furthermore, in the next chapter, the paper will discuss to what degree the conflict changed the European balance of power, and how it facilitated future conflicts such as the First World War.

³³ Wawro. 2003: 302

³⁴ Wawro. 2003: 302

2.3 Discussion

As mentioned earlier, regarding this work's literature, there exist some irregularities that contradict each other, namely the aspiration for war and the question of guilt. In the "*Journal of a staff-officer in Paris during the events of 1870 and 1871*", both D'Irrison and Prévost-Paradol point to German aggression as the cause of the conflict. However, according to both Wawro and Barber, there is ample evidence to shut down such a claim. Furthermore, since D'Irrison found himself in the US at the outbreak of war, he claimed on his journey back to France that the popular opinion was to the benefit of Prussians. On his route home, he traveled through both Ireland and England, and he commented that only the Irish seemed to be supportive of the France cause, even though he suspected that the Irish support stemmed from anti-British sentiments. He further comments: "I hope, I may say I am convinced, that the day will come when the English will regret having been passive spectators of the overthrow of their rivals, so long resigned to the thankless role of allies of Great Britain. But we can hardly ask nations to display perspicacity, and in this month of August, 1870 — it is a fact — the subjects of Queen Victoria had but one fear, that of seeing us in Berlin. Their anxiety was destined to be short-lived."³⁵

Regarding D'Irrison sentiments toward the British, one would be wise to remember that merely 60 years had passed since his nation and the British last fought each other. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the Concert of Vienna's main goal was to create an orderly and stable balance of power, which could deter any possible threats to the European equilibrium. Nevertheless, during the escalation of hostilities, both Prussia and France attempted to create alliances and non-belligerent allies in an effort to mitigate the chance of defeat. Additionally, even though France and Prussia mitigated the policies of moderation and restraint in their foreign policies, the other non-belligerent great powers, on the other hand, tried their best to adhere to the diplomatic norm of 19th century Europe. In "Correspondence respecting Negotiations Preliminary To The War between France And Prussia: 1870", there are several important correspondences that give the reader an insight into European politics before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. Moreover, in correspondence No. 114, the Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Her Britannic Majesty applauds Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern for his declination of the Spanish throne, which consequently contradicts D'Irrison's belief in an anti-French Europe.³⁶ Besides correspondences

³⁵ D'Irrison. 1885: 11

³⁶ Correspondence. 1870: 67

surrounding the prelude of the conflict, the document also contains France's disclosing of war with Prussia. In the declaration, communicated to Earl Granville by the Marquis de La Valette, the French Senate, and the Corps Législatif informs both Britain and Prussia of the following: "I have invited the Chargé d'Affaires of France to notify to the Cabinet of Berlin our resolution to seek by arms the guarantees we have failed in obtaining by discussion".

Earlier in this study, it was established that European politics during the 19th century, was influenced by the principles of moderation and restraint and that Bismarck was renowned for his ability to take advantage of this political environment. He had previously embraced these principles effectively during Prussia's previous wars with Denmark and Austria. By adhering to the principle of moderation and restraint in his foreign policies, Bismarck managed to create situations where non-belligerent nations stayed neutral, and conflicts remained local. Furthermore, he utilized both propaganda and diplomatic channels to help keep the conflicts private, and at the same time adhere to the principles of moderation and restraint. However, as beforementioned, during and at the conclusion of hostilities, Bismarck embraced a harsher policy towards France and its government, and in contrast to the Austro-Prussian War, demanded harsh concessions to end hostilities. The concessions consisted of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, as well as huge monetary demands. However, as Barber points out, Prussia had its own internal problems to deal with, which was a conflict between the civilian and military arm of the Prussian state.³⁷ The root of the problem was that each party, mainly Moltke and Bismarck, both meant that they had precedence over one another in times of war. This struggle affected Prussia's decision-making and made any efforts of moderation or restraint quite difficult.

However, one should avoid blaming the lack of moderation and restraint solely on Prussia's internal strife. The French- and German peoples have historically been at each other throats and the severe repercussion brought on by the Napoleonic wars were still fresh in mind from the German perspective. Furthermore, both France and Prussia longed to become the dominant great power in Central Europe. With the balance of power in mind, Bismarck made an earnest effort in making sure that the great power of France was spared its planned destruction and dismantlement, and that the non-belligerent great powers continued their neutral stance. Therefore, Bismarck had to balance between appeasing the German High Command while at the same time making sure that Prussia did not overextend its war efforts.

³⁷ Barber. 2014: 8

Following the battle of Sedan on 1 September 1870, which ended in a decisive Prussian victory, the conflict was in theory over (Barber, p.9).³⁸ France had little hope of regaining its footing and could only offer resistance through guerrilla tactics, which in turn steered the conflict into a brutal war of attrition. Even though the conflict had been decided at Sedan, neither party wished to back down for various reasons. The French sought to hinder any territorial losses and fought on to achieve similar settlements as in the Austro-Prussian War, where moderation and restraint ensured a preserved status quo. The Prussians, on the other hand, continued the hostilities for several reasons. Firstly, they were on the verge of achieving national glory, which again helped to strengthen the unification process. Secondly, Prussia and its leaders sought to diminish France's position as a rival power, which is one of the reasons behind the harsh German demands.

Furthermore, due to the conflict's continuation, the other great powers began to take greater notice of the situation. The Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust, confided to his Berlin Ambassador the following message: "I cannot hide the feeling of apprehension that I feel when one day before the court of history part of the responsibility will fall on the neutrals; that they saw with indifference the silent danger of unheard of evils that was placed on the table in front of them."³⁹ The other powers began to fear for the European equilibrium and as such orchestrated several meetings with the belligerent parties, with the hope of reaching a peaceful conclusion to the conflict. However, due to their lack of influence over the warring parties, the effort seemed unachievable. Even Granville, who was renowned for his stubbornness, was shocked by the German continuation of hostilities and failed to comprehend Prussia's lack of moderation and restraint on the matter.

The German bombardment of Paris on 6 January 1871 marked a shift in international relations. As mentioned earlier, France had exhausted its "goodwill" within Europe due to its actions during the Hohenzollern Crisis. However, as a result of the shelling of Paris, the tables had turned, and Prussia had now, in the eyes of Europe, gone too far in its aspiration of victory. Nevertheless, the leading war party in France had begun to crumble due to the internal pressure for peace, and a new republican government took over the reins. Peace talks followed shortly, and it is here that the real shift in European politics took place and the foundation of a new form of diplomacy occurred. The French staff officer, D'Irrison, summarized the beginning of the new political era quite elegantly: "But all this appears to me to

³⁸ Barber. 2014: 9

³⁹ Barber. 2014: 9

be spoiled by their selfishness, which is both monstrous and somewhat unscrupulous in regard to ways and means. I admit that nations should be selfish; it is, we are told, their duty, and selfishness is, perhaps, only a species of patriotism. But let them be honestly selfish, for honesty spoils nothing, not even patriotism.”⁴⁰

The peace treaty that concluded the Franco-Prussian War, was signed on 10 May 1871 in Frankfurt and the rest of Europe could at last stop holding its breath. Even though the other great powers had failed in their efforts to call off hostilities and to lessen the war indemnity Prussia had forced on France, they nonetheless felt that Europe had acquired a new *status quo*. Furthermore, instead of demanding a more moderate war indemnity as was the norm, Prussia, on the other hand, went in for crippling France by demanding both territory and six billion francs. One should mention that some further negotiations regarding the scope of the war indemnity took place and that the monetary indemnity was lowered from six- to five billion francs.⁴¹

After the conclusion of hostilities, Europe began once again the effort of reinstating the pre-war tendencies of moderation and restraint. However, due to its failure in resolving the Franco-Prussian War by means of moderation and restraint, Europe would have to settle for a different kind of normalcy than it had before the conflict. Ironically, after having achieved his goal of Prussian expansion and German unification, Bismarck according to Barber, ‘would devote himself only to preserving the status quo and maintaining peace in Europe’.⁴² Furthermore, when regarding the policies of moderation and restraint, one would be wise to remember that all the non-belligerent nations in fact adhered to the diplomatic norm during the Franco-Prussian War. The only exception was the belligerent parties of France and Prussia, who viewed the employment of moderation as insufficient for their national aspirations.

Another essential point is how the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 created repercussions that helped facilitate future wars, such as the First World War that erupted in 1914. Even the British politician, Benjamin Disraeli, summarised this sentiment of change in the House of Commons: “This war represents the German Revolution, a greater political event than the French revolution of the last century”, followed by “there is not a diplomatic tradition which has not been swept away. You have a new world, new influences at work....The balance of

⁴⁰ D'Irisson. 1885: 9

⁴¹ Barber. 2014: 11-12

⁴² Barber. 2014: 13

power has been entirely destroyed.”. This sentiment was also present amongst the other great powers and the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Friedrich von Baust complained that: “I don’t see *Europe* anymore”. Europe was no longer shared by five equal great powers and the pre-war European equilibrium they all knew would have undergone major changes.⁴³

These changes constituted a political shift between France and Germany, and Europe as a whole. France and the other European nations were convinced that the Germans had become too formidable and feared a future dominated by tension and conflict. The Germans, on the other hand, feared French retaliation after their humiliating defeat, and the creation of a “revenge coalition” aimed at the German people.⁴⁴ Both sets of beliefs would later turn out to be partly true and would guarantee that in a future war, France and Germany would be on opposing sides, as in World War One.

Another important aspect of the Franco-Prussian War, which tends to be overlooked, is the evolution of modern military tactics. One should remember that, right up until the 19th century, European warfare had been accustomed to large-scale battles with huge infantry armies, such as in the previous wars before the outbreak of hostilities between the French and Germans. The new change came about in the form of modern artillery, which made the previous military tactics both obsolete and destructive. This new form of warfare would lead to increased casualties, improved defense tactics, and a general technological revolution in weapon manufacturing. Furthermore, the number of nations that had begun to adopt Prussian methods steadily increased after 1870, and though these military innovations would facilitate greater military power, it would result in, according to Wawro, mutual slaughter. Despite its obvious folly, the European nations nonetheless believed that after the Franco-Prussian War, the most effective military strategy would be that of offense rather than defense, which in turn would result in enormous losses of human life, as was later seen in World War I.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, I have delved into the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 and examined the various aspects surrounding the conflict and its repercussions on the European equilibrium. The circumstances surrounding the Franco-Prussian conflict are both comprehensive and complicated. There exists an immense variety of literature relevant to the

⁴³ Wawro. 2003: 305

⁴⁴ Wawro. 2003: 306

conflict and it is a well-known and researched chapter of 19th century Europe. Furthermore, it facilitated German unification and led to a change in the French form of government.

Moreover, it marked the beginning of modern military tactics, which would later cause the deaths of so many in the next great war, namely the First World War. Additionally, the paper has examined Prussia's plan and implementation of German unification and the subsequent consequence it had for both the European equilibrium and France.

Prior to the Franco-Prussian conflict, Europe's diplomacy was influenced by moderation and restraint, which sought to preserve Europe's balance of power. Even though most nations, including Prussia in the beginning, adhered to this form of diplomacy, it nonetheless brought about a major shift in the balance of power. Firstly, if one could conceal or deceive any form of unbalance during a local conflict, such as in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and likewise in the Franco-Prussian War, the non-belligerent powers were left powerless on the sidelines.

Moreover, the only avenues they could pursue in their desire for peace were either through diplomacy or military intervention, where the latter option was the least desired as it went against the policy of moderation. Secondly, in the event of war, the policies of moderation and restraint ascertained mild war indemnities while at the same time preserving the balance of power. However, due to the Franco-Prussian war and its repercussions, the European equilibrium and its policy of moderation were forever changed, even though the process was gradually replaced with a more selfish form of diplomacy. Furthermore, it facilitated future conflicts that would not adhere to moderative diplomacy, but rather adhere to the national self-interests, which is one of the main reasons for the outbreak of the First World War.

Moreover, I believe that the change of moderative diplomacy, combined with national self-interest and the dismantling of the European equilibrium, in truth expedited the downfall of the old European balance of power.

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