

THE AUSTRO-PRUSSIAN WAR OF 1866

- I. BISMARCK'S PLAN TO UNIFY GERMANY: "LET'S BAIT AUSTRIA INTO STARTING A WAR!"
Bismarck sought to unify Germany by force. He had two requirements: (1) France, Britain and Russia must remain neutral as Prussia beat Austria; and (2) the Prussian king must be induced to declare war on his brother-German Austrians. Solution: Prussia must sweet-talk the other European powers into not fearing Prussia, and must get Austria to start the war. Then Austria will stand alone, hence will be easy pickings; and the Prussian king will be outraged at Austria, hence will declare war on it.
- II. BACKGROUND TO WAR: EVENTS & CONDITIONS
 - A. Bismarck's deceptions:
 1. Regarding Prussian capability ("we're weak!")
 2. Regarding Prussian intentions ("we're benign!") Bismarck sent the Schweinitz mission to Russia to proclaim Prussia's limited aims.
 - B. British, French, and Russian indifference to containing Prussia.
 1. Britain: feared France more than Prussia, and was generally isolationist.
 2. France: saw advantage in what it thought would be a long Prussian-Austrian war. "We can demand the Rhineland as our fee for breaking the stalemate for the victor."
 3. Russia felt solidarity with Prussia against the Poles, whom they both cruelly oppressed and who hated them both. Russia also was distracted from central European affairs by its focus on revising the convention that demilitarized the Black Sea in 1856.
 - C. The Prussian-Italian offensive alliance, April 8, 1866.
 - D. Austria mobilizes its army, April 21, 1866--a fateful step. Why did Austria take it?
 1. Austria received false reports that Italy was mobilizing. Where did these false reports come from? (Maybe the Austrian military deceived its civilians; perhaps Bismarck deceived Austria.)
 2. Why did Austria mobilize against Prussia as well as Italy?
 - a. Austrian leaders assumed Prussia had already decided for war. They didn't realize that Prussia couldn't start a war if Austria didn't move first.
 - b. Austria had only one mobilization plan--positing a 2-front mobilization.
- III. WARTIME EVENTS:
 - A. Bitter civil-military conflict in Prussia over war aims. (The Prussian army: "Let's smash Austria completely! And perhaps France!" Bismarck: "Why not go all the way to Constantinople?") The military doesn't get its way--fortunately for Prussia.
 - B. Prussian war aims nevertheless do modestly widen: Prussia excludes Austria from Germany instead of dividing it with her at the Main.
- IV. CAUSES OF THE WAR? PERHAPS AMONG THEM:
 - A. Austria's false optimism.
 - B. Prussia's search for security; and Prussia's offensive opportunity.
 - C. Bismarck's baiting, and Austria's blunderous decision to take the bait.
- V. CAUSES OF THE PEACE? AN EMERGING DEFENSIVE ALLIANCE AGAINST PRUSSIA.
- VI. WAS A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS POSSIBLE? (PROBABLY NO--SCARY THOUGHT.)

THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR OF 1870

I. BACKGROUND

- A. Bismarck's continuing deceptions: "We're weak and we're benign!"
- B. Bismarck's provocations to France: he authored the Hohenzollern candidacy for the Spanish throne & the Ems telegram. They provoked France to mobilize, triggering war.

II. THE WAR: EVENTS

- A. The wartime widening of German aims to include Alsace-Lorraine.
- B. Bitter civil-military conflict in Prussia over war aims and military operations.

III. RELEVANT HYPOTHESES

- A. The Prussian and French militaries both (!) saw windows of opportunity.
- B. Prussia saw an offensive opportunity arising from Britain, Russia and Austria's unusual failure to counterbalance Prussia.
- C. France was falsely optimistic about the military outcome of the war.

IV. THE FALSE LESSONS GERMANS LEARNED FROM THE WAR OF 1870: "BISMARCK USED BLOOD AND IRON TO MAKE FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE. YOU CAN TOO!" QUESTION: WHY WAS THIS FALSE LESSON LEARNED?

V. THE CHANGE IN GERMAN POLICY AFTER 1890

- A. Germany moves from sated to expansionist.
- B. Germany pursues expansion by belligerence rather than stealth and deception.

VI. LESSONS OF BOTH WARS FOR U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

These wars suggest that when offshore balancers don't balance against Europe's continental aggressors, they get frisky and start wars. Does this lesson still apply?