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A Snapshot in Time: English Reactions to the Franco-Prussian War

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The decade culminating in 1871 was filled with turmoil and forceful politics that united Germany under Prussian control. The major event that completed this process was the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. This war led to a change in the status quo. It both weakened France's power and strengthened the legitimacy of a unified Germany under Prussia.

In the 19th Century, Great Britain was the dominant country in European power politics. Because of this, the British constantly worked to maintain the status quo in Europe. One might think that a unified Germany under the leadership of Prussia would not be something that the British would support as it might threaten British power within Europe. In fact, British opinion was surprisingly favorable toward German unification. This investigation will show and analyze German unification with particular emphasis on the Franco-Prussian War. Newspapers and Parliamentary debates will serve as major sources of evidence to explain British reactions to specific events throughout the war and will convey different biases expressed by influential politicians and newspapers at that time.

The period from 1860-1900 is often considered to be the Golden Age of British newspapers. This was due to technical advances in mass production of newspapers and more effective information gathering agencies formed throughout Britain and many parts of Europe and the rest of the world. One notable news organization that sprang up in 1868 was the Press Association, which allowed local newspapers to obtain news from a government run agency. This allowed local newspapers to receive more reliable information for their local news articles. Newspapers found within Britain shifted from printing quarterly reviews, to Sunday weekly reviews, to daily reviews due to the enhancement of printing technologies during the 1860s and 70s. These technological innovations also led to the rise of many smaller newspapers that took on the duty of offering viewpoints from smaller communities throughout Britain. These more

local newspapers offered a different slant to the views expressed by the major publications at that time, but still mostly reflected the majority consensus of the nation.¹

While the public was receiving a majority of its news from its local newspapers, politicians debated contemporary events in Parliament. The British Parliament is a governing body that is made of two main branches, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The members of the House of Commons are elected by the electorate, which at the time of the Franco-Prussian war would have been mainly landowners within the United Kingdom. The members of the House of Lords are the nobles who had inherited lordships throughout the country, as well as bishops. During parliamentary meetings, members often discussed the day's current events and attempted to pass legislation for the nation. The debates often flowed from one member to another, usually of differing political parties, discussing a major event that recently took place. The two main political parties during the 1860s and 70s were the Conservative Party, led by Benjamin Disraeli, and the Liberal Party, led by Prime Minister William Gladstone. Both of these parties had members that were both "front-benchers" and "back-benchers." Front-benchers were usually the leaders of the party that spoke often in the debates using their party's rhetoric. Back-benchers were lesser known members of the Parliament that would occasionally speak during the debates but would not be used as figure heads for party opinion.² The newspapers and Parliamentary proceedings which dictated public

¹ Lee, Alan J, *The Origins of the Popular Press: 1855-1914* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976), 67-74. A brief discussion on the rise of smaller newspapers centered on suburban populations can be found here.

² Gardiner, Juliet & Neil Wenborn, *The Columbia Companion to British History*, 1997 edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 192-194, 237-238, 340-341, and 467-468. These pages provide brief histories of both conservatism and liberalism in Britain as well as brief summaries of both Disraeli and Gladstone in British politics.

opinion in Britain during the 1860s and 70s provide a rich source for British views on the Franco-Prussian War.

In order to truly interpret how Britain reacted to France and Prussia during the Franco-Prussian War, one must first understand Britain's history with both France and Prussia. France has often been a source of disturbance for European affairs. At many times it has caused massive uproars and waves of revolutions in Europe. Examples of this can be seen from the French Revolution that began in 1789, which led to Napoleon's domination of the continent, the French Revolution of 1830, and the French Revolution of 1848. When France underwent its revolutions, other nations in Europe followed suit, thus creating an atmosphere of instability in Europe. France has also had a history of violence and competition with Britain. Both France and Britain often vied over dominance of Europe and control of successful colonies. This historical pattern between France and Britain developed a tense relationship and relatively small amounts of trust between the two nations. Therefore, both France and Britain had aspirations of keeping each other in check within the European political sphere.

The German states and Prussia have often been the dividing line between Eastern and Western Europe. The German states were remnants of the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and were often used by other European powers as a neutral territories to act as a buffer zone. At other times, these states would serve as a war zone as they did within the 30 Years War. During the Reformation, some German states led the way in the development of Protestantism under Martin Luther and created close ties with England due to their similar act of breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church. From the late 19th Century to the mid-20th Century, a united Germany would have a major impact on the course of European affairs and conflicts.

Britain's history with both France and the German states created an inherent bias toward each nation. Britain viewed France as a serious threat to their position in Europe and wished to make sure France would be weakened at all costs. This view of French hostility from the British was solidified at the time due to the competition amongst both nations to secure and develop successful colonies. This often pitted the two nations against each other and created antagonistic economic policies toward one another. At the same time, Britain had natural inclinations to want to ally with Prussia due to their close religious roots and common rivalry with France. There had never really been much strife between the two countries prior to the early 20th century and the First World War. It happened to be that Britain and Prussia's objectives lined up from 1870-1871. Britain wished France to weaken as a nation within Europe to help maintain their dominance over the continent and Prussia wished to defeat France in a war they were confident in achieving victory in to help unify all of Germany under Prussia leadership. For these reasons, the ground was set for a natural alliance between Britain and Prussia and a mutual enemy of France.

One of the triggered events at the onset of the Franco Prussian War was Prince Leopold's candidature to the Spanish throne. Prince Leopold was a cousin of the Hohenzollern King William I. Spain wished to offer their throne to cement ties between the Spanish and Prussian royal families. This event was vehemently opposed by the French government on the grounds that they would be flanked by Prussia and its allies on each side of their country. France could not believe they could allow this proposed candidature to occur if they wanted to maintain the security of their nation. However, because of this, France was forced to back itself into a corner they could not escape from. Count Benedetti, the French ambassador to Prussia, was tasked to deliver a message to William I about never again allowing a Hohenzollern to be considered for

the Spanish throne. William I allowed Bismarck to release this dispatch for the general public due to its importance of the events at the time. However, Bismarck used this opportunity to edit the dispatch and make it seem more aggressive toward the Prussians than it was intended to seem and sparked a backlash between the French and the Prussians over this telegram which would be known as the Ems Telegram. This sly political maneuver would ultimately ignite the war.³

Throughout Prince Leopold's proposed candidature to the Spanish throne and the creation and circulation of the Ems Telegram, British politicians and newspapers were discussing the issues at home. Some newspapers at the time appeared very critical of France's actions toward Prussia over the issue. One passage from *The Leeds Times* stated that they found, "Some surprise...at the rapid pace at which the French Government seemed to be proceeding."⁴ This British newspaper seemed confused why the French were acting on this matter in such a hasty and hostile manner. They believed that the French were being unreasonable with Prussia, that they should slow down and take this situation one step at a time rather than being aggressive toward Prussia. The editor of *The Leeds Times* developed this line further by stating, "I could hardly conceive that the French Government could really apprehend that after all that had occurred Prince Leopold would again offer himself as a candidate, or be accepted by the Spanish Government if he did."⁵ It seemed to *The Leeds Times* quite foolish to think that Leopold would try to seek out the Spanish throne again once he had backed down. This particular British newspaper was perplexed as to why the French thought that Leopold would do such a thing. This attitude not only demonstrates the severity of the reaction from France against Prussia, but also

³ Wawro, Geoffrey, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For a more detailed account of the Ems telegram see pages 36-38.

⁴ "England's Attempt to Avert War: The Official Correspondence," *The Leeds Times*, Leeds, England, June 30, 1870, p. 7, British Newspapers, Part 3: 1780-1950.

⁵ Ibid.

details an example of British attitudes against France. This newspaper felt that the French were acting in the absence of political reasoning when making their decisions, indicating that the French were inferior in their diplomatic skills.

There were also newspapers that expressed their dissatisfaction over the prospect of war. *The Essex Standard* expressed the hope that war could be avoided, "If the Spanish people should spontaneously reject the king whom it sought to thrust upon them, we shall no longer have anything to demand of Prussia, and order would be restored without any of the three powers having to grant or exact concessions. This is the only solution we desire."⁶ Britain wanted to maintain peace throughout Europe to ensure their dominance in Europe remained unchanged. Allowing a war between two major nations could risk tipping the scales of European dominance in favor of the French. Britain wished to keep this war from happening because they were worried that France would defeat Prussia and acquire more power.

Although Britain had maintained a responsibility to maintain peace and avoid war in Europe throughout the 19th century, the nation employed a system of laissez faire policies to deal with keeping France and Prussia neutral in 1870. These laissez faire policies led to unmitigated aggression and hostility between France and Prussia, which upset multiple newspapers within Britain. After the war had been declared, a resounding amount of newspapers viciously blamed France for the war. *The Times* called the war, "unjust and premeditated." *The Economist* stated that the war was, "one of those awful events which brings comment to a stand." *The Spectator* clamored that, "Europe must pass through a year, perhaps years of misery, in order that [Napoleon III] may secure the career and position of a...child." *The Daily News* went the furthest

⁶ "Foreign Intelligence," *The Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Countries*, Colchester, England, July 8, 1870. 19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II.

by describing that the actions of France as “a crime against civilization, against humanity, as well as against the peace and good order of the world.”⁷ Each of these articles clearly conveyed extreme dissatisfaction from multiple newspapers within the British populace on the war’s announcement. It is clear that many in Britain were upset by the war and exclusively blamed France for instigating it.

Several members of the House of Lords condemned these French actions. Lord John Russel, a leading member of the liberal party and former prime minister, had asked his colleagues, “I wish to ask why, if it was necessary in the view of the French Government that there should be a declaration to the effect that the Prince should never hereafter be a candidate for the Spanish throne, that demand was not addressed to Spain?”⁸ Russel was criticizing France for not addressing Leopold’s candidature with Spain. This issue was one to be discussed with Spain, not Prussia. Prussia did not actively offer Leopold to Spain asking if he could have a position in the government. Spain independently chose Leopold as a best fit for the Spanish throne. Russel argued that France did not recognize this and that they just assumed the Prussia was responsible for “pushing” Leopold into Spain. As an influential speaker for the liberal party within Britain at the time, this point of view can explain how the majority of liberals within Britain were thinking at this time.

Rather than blaming France for the war, as the liberals had done, Benjamin Disraeli, leader of Britain’s Conservative party, wished to keep the war from occurring in the first place. In this way, the laissez faire policy toward neutrality that were followed by the majority of British politicians at the time was challenged almost exclusively by Disraeli. He made it a point,

⁷ Raymond, Dora N, *British Policy and Opinion During the Franco-Prussian War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1921), 74.

⁸ Lord John Russel, “France and Prussia- Question,” July 18, 1870, Speech within the House of Lords.

both before and after the war, to complain about Parliament's lack of action to avoid the war. Disraeli wished to keep the war from happening so that France would not be allowed to have the opportunity to acquire new lands to tip the scale of European dominance over to France. After learning of the Ems Telegram Disraeli stated, "It seems to me somewhat absurd that the peace of Europe should be broken on a scale so vast, and in a manner so threatening as the present, and that Parliament should have really no conception of the causes of such an event."⁹ Disraeli was not only disappointed that France and Prussia wished to pursue a war, but also embarrassed and irritated that Parliament was not putting all of their effort into stopping this war from occurring. Disraeli also explained his disappointment toward the Ems Telegram by stating, "Europe is to be devastated on account of the publication of an anonymous paragraph in a newspaper."¹⁰ Disraeli was disgruntled by France's reaction to the telegram and wished that Britain had done a better job in avoiding the war.

Disraeli advocated the position of, "armed-neutrality"- not taking sides, but being prepared to fight if either warring party were to threaten Britain. Disraeli championed this view on his belief that the upcoming war, "[would] be a long and severe one."¹¹ Many of the British did not try to keep the war from happening. This most likely, was because some British wanted a war between France and Prussia to keep both powers occupied and at odds with each other, thereby supporting British dominance in Europe. If the two rival powers were to wage war with another they would only end up weakening each other. Disraeli's individual view helps reveal that some British politicians at the time were not easily swayed by the majority's opinions.

⁹ Benjamin Disraeli, "France and Prussia- Alleged Draft Treaty- Question," July 25, 1870, Speech within the House of Commons.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Benjamin Disraeli, "The War- Observations, August 1, 1870, Speech within the House of Commons. A more detailed description of armed neutrality can be found within his speech.

A settlement was proposed by Napoleon III at the time in an attempt to defuse the situation without resorting to war. This settlement, however, was, according to Disraeli's view, unacceptable as a means to foster peace in Europe and protection for Britain. The "projected treaty between Prussia and France...involves considerable modifications of the present arrangements of Europe, and among either provisions, it contemplates the military occupation, and finally the conquest, of the Kingdom of Belgium by the Emperor of the French."¹² The dissolution of Belgium in Europe would leave Britain more susceptible to invasion from other European nations due to its closer proximity to British shores than from other part of Europe's Western coastline. Belgium's erasure would be detrimental enough, not even to mention that France would be coming under the control of it. Disraeli even went far enough to state, "I must say that I should look upon the extinction of the Kingdom of Belgium as a calamity to Europe and an injury to this country."¹³ However, Britain never actually actively pursued alternate peace treaties for both France and Prussia. One reason for this could have been that enough members of Parliament expected France to be brought into a long war that would stifle its economy. If this were the case Britain would want to support the war to weaken France's diplomatic and economic control within Europe.

The proposed settlement was also set up for failure due to the recent railroad crisis that occurred between France and England prior to the war. In January of 1869, France pursued the purchasing of railways within Belgium. Due to this, Britain became agitated about France and warned her not to pursue these purchases. While France and Britain were arguing about these railway purchases, Prussia reached out to Britain, stating, "though [the Prussian Government]

¹² Disraeli, "France and Prussia- Alleged Draft Treaty- Question," July 25, 1870.

¹³ Ibid.

was not willing to defend Belgium single-handed, it would willingly make terms with England to join in her defense.”¹⁴ Prussia had slyly aligned themselves against France with Britain before the war began. This helped to shift the mindset of some British policy makers to the point where they would undoubtedly uphold Belgian neutrality and not allow Belgium to fall into the hands of the French.

William Gladstone, leader of the Liberal party in Britain at the time, also displayed a bias against France before the outset of the war. In one of his addresses to the House of Commons, he stated, “[France] was to be entitled to exercise a control over the passions...that might be entertained by particular states.”¹⁵ Gladstone believed that the French were prone to experience irrational emotional duress over Leopold’s candidature and the Ems Telegram. Gladstone wished that France kept its politicians under control and not allow them to criticize Prussia so harshly over Leopold’s candidature.

Previous historians have also documented this trend of Prussian favoritism in Britain. Historian Eugene W. Mosse believed that, “Under the conservative administration British Policy...was pacific and favorable to the further consolidation of Germany under Prussian Leadership.”¹⁶ This system of laissez faire politics from the British Government was what significantly irritated Disraeli in the summer of 1870. Mosse also believed that “British Statesmen regardless of Party sincerely desired...the emergence of a strong German power capable of checking the ambitious designs of France and Russia.”¹⁷ The unification of Germany

¹⁴ Raymond, 25. For a more detailed account of the railway crisis see pages 24-27.

¹⁵ William Gladstone, “The War- Observations,” August 1, 1870, Speech within the House of Commons in response to Sir Benjamin Disraeli.

¹⁶ Mosse, W.E., *The European Powers and the German Question: 1848-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 295.

¹⁷ Mosse, 359.

under Prussia would also help to secure Belgium's neutrality and establish Britain's safety.¹⁸

Ironically, however, Britain would come to realize their miscalculation during the two world wars where Germany aggressively assaulted Britain and did not uphold Belgian independence.

After the war had begun it was soon evident that Prussia would be in full control of the course of events during the conflict. Much of this was due in part to the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 which had allowed Prussia experience to prepare its army for a formidable opponent such as France. Prussia's firm control over the war is clearly seen through their drastic victories after a mere two months into the conflict. Late in August in 1870 Prussian forces led by Field Marshal von Moltke were able to besiege the French fort at Metz and push the enemy out into an engagement known as the battle of Sedan. The French forces were defeated and utterly humiliated after this battle. The French Emperor himself was captured and taken as a prisoner of war after the battle. In all logical sense the war should have ended after Napoleon's capture. Having their Emperor taken prisoner in battle should have shocked France's morale to a point of no return. However, the French populace would refuse to accept defeat in the war. Due to this drastic defeat and economic turmoil within the capital at that time, radical Parisians established a new government within the city, which would eventually lead to the formation of the Third Republic to continue to fight the war. The Paris Commune brought new leaders into the government of France, such as the fiery Leon Gambetta. This event would essentially send France into a state of disrepair that would cripple their efforts of maintaining a powerful position in European power politics.

¹⁸ Mosse, 366.

It is clearly evident from the newspapers and parliamentary proceedings at the time that Britain was biased toward Prussia. At many times there are clear insults toward the French and praises of Prussia's military successes. For example one British newspaper expressed how strong and mighty the Prussian army was compared to the French, "Macmahon knew he could not hope to contend alone with the overwhelming forces and superior generalship of the Germans."¹⁹ The British newspaper was clearly expressing a favoritism toward Prussia. They believed that the French Army was no match to the Prussians. They thought that Macmahon, one of the French generals leading the army during Metz and Sedan, would surely be defeated by the Prussian Army at Metz because he had no backup. This British newspaper expressed no faith that the French could recover after this devastating loss; it only praised Prussia for the victory. Later on the same newspaper goes on to state, "So complete does the defeat of the French appear, that we can scarcely believe that it will be thought necessary to carry out the original design of proceeding to Paris."²⁰ Again, this shows that this newspaper believed that there was no way that France could get back into the war after their devastating defeat.

The same newspaper also puts much of the blame for France's losses into Napoleon III's governmental policies. The newspaper clearly states, "Paris, strong and intelligent, is now suffering the consequences of her weak acquiescence in the decree of Provincial France, degraded by Napoleonic wars, ignorant, and weak."²¹ This British newspaper was primarily critiquing Napoleon III's policies while in office. The newspaper argued that, "The Parisians...are being blindly led by the Emperor's creatures in office."²² It can be inferred by

¹⁹ "The Great Battles," *The Northern Echo*, Darlington, England, September 3, 1870, 19th Century British Library Newspapers.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *The Northern Echo*, September 3, 1870.

²² Ibid.

these two statements that Napoleon's policies were in a state of disrepair and were not as strong as they should have been. In this way this British newspaper was blaming France for her own defeats. This newspaper believed that if France had had a stronger leader that they may have not gotten into this situation in the first place.

This idea of French incompetence can also be seen in other British newspapers at the time. Another example comes from *the Belfast News-Letter* which stated, "Countless stories are told of the incompetence and ignorance of the late government by the French Papers."²³ One example in particular that the paper brings up is that the French Government was, at the time, purchasing rice and potatoes for an exorbitant amount because they were so desperate for food. This conveys France's decline leading up to the war as they were underprepared to feed their troops and were not ready for a long and hard fought war.

The paper goes on to state that, "It would be extremely difficult for the French people, at the present moment, even to employ the means necessary for ascertaining the national will."²⁴ This British newspaper believed that France's government was in a state of disarray. There was no major consensus amongst its population and governmental officials as to how they should be running the nation. The government was not unified and showed weakness. The governance and decision making taking place in France at this time seemed to be in a state of disarray.

Other newspapers in Britain also conveyed the 'chaos' that was taking place in Paris at this time. One newspaper stated that, "English Life and Property in France will certainly not be safe."²⁵ This British paper believed that because of Napoleon III's capture, the Parisians would

²³ "The War," *The Belfast Newsletter*, Belfast, Ireland, September 20, 1870, 19th Century British Library Newspapers.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "The War," *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, Dublin, Ireland, September 3, 1870, 19th Century British Library Newspapers.

throw the city into pandemonium. This clearly conveys a biased view of the French from the British. The newspaper makes the French out as wild, irrational, and extremely emotional. It would be hard to believe that the French would cause so much hysteria over this single loss that the entire capital would be thrown into a state of a massive riot where occupants of the city would become severely injured. France was a dominant force in Europe at the time and should have been used to encountering one or two major losses during a conflict. It would most likely not be the case that Paris would revolt and riot after each French loss.

The Belfast News-Letter goes further than just describing French incompetency by conveying its clear biases toward Prussia. At points in the paper it compares Bismarck to an Englishman, “Count Bismarck prefers to speak with Englishmen, seeing that he speaks our tongue.”²⁶ This statement seems to make Bismarck out as a supporter of the British and one who wants to be allied with the British. The newspaper later justifies Prussia’s actions during the war by stating, “Count Bismarck disclaimed all desire of increase of territory or population for mere [increase’s] sake.”²⁷ This British source does not even question Bismarck’s statement and just takes it for fact. They fully trust what Bismarck is telling them. The strong Prussia bias goes even further when the paper states, “Providence is on the side of Bismarck;”²⁸ and, “[Bismarck] spoke of obtaining a durable peace for the peace loving German people. I feel convinced these are no empty words...Germany regards France as a threatening brigand at her gates, and this war as a summary and final way of turning the brigand into a harmless neighbor.”²⁹ This British newspaper praises every action of Prussia and Bismarck and aligns themselves with the

²⁶ *The Belfast News-Letter*, September 20, 1870.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *The Belfast News-Letter*, September 20, 1870.

²⁹ Ibid.

mentality that France was the aggressor in the situation and deserves to be defeated by the Prussians who claim to be trying to uphold European peace by weakening France.

British biases toward Prussia and against France were also seen throughout Parliament. Mr. Edward Horsman, a liberal within the House of Commons, in one of his speeches in the House of Commons stated, “What would Count Bismarck say to us if we were to tell him he must consent with moderate terms of peace? ‘Who is to define what moderation means? He would say...France began the war; France invaded Germany-not the Emperor only, not the Government only; the chamber, the press, the populace all cheered on the war, [‘To Berlin’] was the cry.”³⁰ Mr. Horsman conveyed the attitude of British politicians at the time regarding Bismarck. Horsman was somewhat intimidated by Bismarck and did not want to let him down. According to Horsman and Bismarck, France was completely responsible for the war, so why should Britain try to interfere in Prussian affairs? Horsman goes on to state,

“[France] has been the victim of her own delusions...The war was practically concluded at Sedan: and the question is often asked- why was not peace concluded at Sedan...Why did the King of Prussia re-commence the war, and, at that time, against the French people? Because, before he could even speak of peace the Government was changed, and, through the mouths of its two most eminent members, declared the war should go on...M. Jules Favre’s first act was to declare that ‘not an inch of territory should be ceded.’”³¹

He clearly believed that France’s defeats were caused by France herself and that it is wrong for France to want to continue the war after Sedan. France should have given it up after losing Prussia so drastically at the beginning of the war and should not have pursued it further.

³⁰ Edward Horsman, “France and Germany- Terms of Peace- Resolution,” February 17, 1871, Speech within the House of Commons.

³¹ Horsman, “France and Germany- Terms of Peace- Resolution,” February 17, 1871.

After the creation of the Third Republic, France continued its spiral into defeat at the hands of Prussia. By January of 1871, King William I was crowned at the palace of Versailles and France had been officially defeated. After this, Britain underwent many debates within parliament over how to appropriately go about working with Prussia over a peace treaty. There were many newspapers and politicians in Britain at the time that were completely on the side of Prussia and were willing to do all that they could to ensure that France would be weakened and allow Prussia to flourish. There were also others that felt more cautious toward Prussia and wanted to make sure the terms of peace were not too disastrous toward France. If they were, peace may not be gained and a feeling of revenge may be fostered in France, similar to the events of 1815 after the defeat of Napoleon I.

After William I's coronation at Versailles in January of 1871, one British newspaper reported the event as, "a very brilliant scene."³² It went on to state that, "Kaiser William was cheered with extraordinary enthusiasm by the victorious soldiers who thronged the gallery."³³ William I's coronation taking place within Versailles clearly conveyed the level to which France had been defeated by Prussia. The Prussians had invaded France to the point where they could use their enemy's most splendid palace to crown their emperor as Emperor of a unified Germany. The newspaper also showed its Prussian bias when it stated, "Thereupon arose such a shout as the gallery has seldom heard. Helmets and caps were waved aloft; the band struck up the National Assembly; the enthusiasm was irresistible."³⁴ The shout that was heard throughout the gallery was, "long live Kaiser Wilhelm!" The English writer could not help but feel inspired and awestruck by the Germans' enthusiasm toward their emperor. The fact that this newspaper even

³² "The War," *The Western Times*, Exeter, England, January 23, 1871, p. 4, British Newspapers, Part III: 1870-1950.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *The Western Times*, January 23, 1871.

published this view of the coronation also reveals a level of satisfaction for the event by the newspaper. If they were not happy with the way the war had turned out, they would have taken a more negative view of William I's coronation as Emperor of Germany.

After the war had concluded, the terms of peace were being drafted by Prussia with the aid of neutral European nations. During this period, members of Parliament began to argue over what Prussia should gain due to her victory over France. Mr. Horsman actively supported Prussia during these debates and lobbied for her security for the future. Horsman, during one of the debates within the House of Commons in February of 1871 supported Prussia, stating, "Germany had the finest army the world has ever seen, in a perfect state of preparation...Every moment of the campaign was directed by a military genius unequalled in our time, and, perhaps, not surpassed in any other."³⁵ These statements from Horsman clearly display his Prussian bias. It is peculiar that Horsman would praise Moltke over any other British general in history and go as far to imply that Prussia's military was greater than Britain's. This clearly shows Horsman being enthused by Prussia's victory and wholeheartedly supporting the nation after the war. He goes on further to state, "Germany from a German view has a right to say- 'we must have security for the future'."³⁶ He concludes affirming that, "Bismarck has done great work for Germany...and the name of Bismarck will, in future times, be mentioned with honor throughout Germany and throughout the world. I myself believe that the unification of Germany is a guarantee of peace for Europe."³⁷ It is clear that some British politicians, like Horsman, completely accepted Prussia as a close ally and were excited to see her defeat France. However, Horsman takes his enthusiasm a bit too far by believing that Germany's unification will solve Europe's problems of

³⁵ Horsman, "France and Germany- Terms of Peace- Resolution," February 17, 1871.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Horsman, "France and Germany- Terms of Peace- Resolution," February 17, 1871.

peace. In fact, Germany would later cause more harm than good to Britain during the two World Wars. In this way, Horsman's over eagerness is a clear indicator of the Prussian bias that was overtaking some Englishmen throughout the war.

There were also other cases of members of Parliament that were outright bias toward a unified Germany under Prussian control. Lord Halifax, in a letter to the Queen, had explained, "the sovereigns of Germany and its people will have every reason to be grateful to him, an England in common with all of Europe will benefit by the creation of such a power, ruled in such a spirit, as will, by *God's blessing*, arise out of the present confusion."³⁸ Lord Halifax was in complete support of allowing Germany to become unified. He believed that this unification would benefit all of Europe and should be wholeheartedly supported. This belief most likely stemmed from Britain's desire to maintain their position of power in Europe. If Prussia was to unify the Germany states it would develop as a nation that would be friendly toward Britain and would be hostile to the French. In the words of historian Dora Raymond, "[Prussia] would check the aggressions of both France and Russia and prevent the necessity of England's doing police duty to protect the smaller states."³⁹

Other officials in Britain, including the Queen herself, were also in favor of Prussia's victory. According to Mosse, "The Queen [of England] rejoiced at the triumph of Germany. She completely identified herself with the German People."⁴⁰ The Earl of Lytton, "believed that with the German victory the world had entered a better period...marked in future histories...as the 'period of German Ascendency.'⁴¹ Mosse also goes on to state, "[Thomas] Carlyle's enthusiasm

³⁸ Mosse, 330.

³⁹ Raymond, 27.

⁴⁰ Mosse, 331.

⁴¹ Ibid.

over the German victories is well known and the ‘sage’ felt impelled to inform the Prussian ambassador: ‘that whatever our newspapers may say, the great body of solid English opinion on the subject is in agreement with my own.’⁴² These opinions further help convey the British attitude of joy over Prussia’s military success. Even the Queen of England was biased toward Prussia. The feelings of excitement and victory got the better of some officials in England and led them to have a false sense of Peace that would be gained through Prussia’s victory over France.

Other British politicians within Parliament, however, were more skeptical of Prussia’s victory and urged caution toward Prussian support. Viscount Royston, a conservative within the House of Lords, during the same meeting of Parliament when Horsman conveyed his Prussian Bias, reminded his fellow colleagues of Parliament’s attitude toward Prussia during the Danish Question some years earlier. “It was stated in the House at that time that if the King of Prussia and his troops went to Copenhagen and took the King of Denmark prisoner, this country must save him.”⁴³ Royston urged his fellow politicians to be wary of investing too much power into Prussia, which as recently as the time of the Danish Question, was seen as a threat to European peace. In this way, some British were more hesitant toward Prussia and viewed the nation with a watchful eye to keep it under control. The reason that these British shifted gears during the Franco-Prussian War was the fact the France was seen as the aggressor toward Prussia. Britain viewed Prussia as defending itself against an aggressive France. However, after France’s decisive defeats at the hands of Prussia, it altered their mindset toward Prussia and allowed them to develop a more biased point of view against Prussia.

⁴² Mosse, 331.

⁴³ Viscount Royston, “France and Germany- Terms of Peace- Resolution,” February 17, 1871, Speech within the House of Commons.

This same view of caution over the peace treaty was also seen through liberal Sir Henry Hoare's discussion of the matter in the House of Commons in March of 1871. Hoare was a strong supporter of lowering reparation payments to Prussia by France. He believed that this would keep Europe's peace to a greater extent. He stated, "This House having learnt the conditions of Peace imposed by Prussia on France, trusts that Her Majesty's Government will, in the interest of the future tranquility of Europe, use their good offices...to obtain from the Imperial Government some mitigation of the severity of these conditions."⁴⁴ The initial cost of reparation payments that were to be included in the peace treaty was six billion francs, which was eventually reduced to five billion francs.

This change of attitude toward mediating France's defeat was also seen in a speech given by the conservative Marquess of Westminster. He stated, "From our point of view the interests of future tranquility will certainly not be furthered by the annexation to Germany of Alsace and Lorraine or Metz. From no point of view...is it reasonable to expect that the interests of peace can be furthered by crushing a beaten and prostrate foe, or by the annexation of provinces whose people do not and are not likely to possess any sympathies with Germany...It is to be hoped that so great a conqueror as the German Emperor will show some generosity to a fallen rival."⁴⁵ The Marquess believed that France giving up territory to Prussia was not the answer to resolving France's defeat. By doing this, it is only exacerbating the issue at hand. It will leave disgruntled French territory under control of Prussia and lead to massive headaches further on down the line. Doing this gives France a desire for revenge against Prussia, just like the situation in 1815 after the fall of Napoleon I at Waterloo.

⁴⁴ Sir Henry Hoare, "Resolution," March 31, 1871, Speech within the House of Commons.

⁴⁵ The Marquess of Westminster, "Address to Her Majesty on Her Most Gracious Speech," February 9, 1871, Speech within the House of Lords.

Gladstone was also in agreement about mitigating the reparation payments on France. Gladstone, during the same meeting within the House of Commons as Hoare, stated, “We thought France wrong in the immediate cause of the war; and we have been sustained in the expression of that opinion...France was naturally the principal object of sympathy and concern, because she was the worsted power...In the endeavor to obtain some mitigation great good may be done...I think it was to the interest of Germany herself that a reduction should be made...We wish to feel the ties that unite us with those powers – to forget whatever may at any time have separated us from either of them.”⁴⁶ Gladstone in this statement was both expressed his opinion to keep Europe more stable by reducing the severity of the peace treaty on France but also covered his bases by acknowledging that he and many of his colleagues viewed France with a negative attitude during the onset of the war. He reminds the House of Commons that Britain should always try to keep peaceful ties with each other nation in Europe in case they should ever need their assistance in the future. Even though this may just seem the most logical thing to do, Gladstone might be putting this way to uphold a view of impartiality. Gladstone, as Prime Minister, should act unbiased whenever he can to maintain as broad support as possible from his fellow politicians. He cannot and should not take an extreme stance on the matter and needs to see both sides of the argument. However, just the fact that he made this point clearly conveys a shift in thinking from some of the British politicians after the war. No longer are they concerned about keeping France at bay through Prussia. Rather, they were now burdened by making sure Prussia did not become too powerful and France too weak after the war. Each of these actions had the main goal of keeping peace and parity throughout Europe to foster British dominance throughout the continent.

⁴⁶ Gladstone, “Resolution,” March 31, 1871, Speech within the House of Commons.

These altered viewpoints after the war conveyed a lot about why the British acted as they did during the outset of the war. Many British believed that France was either a major threat or on their way to becoming a major threat toward the British in late 1860s. Some of the British clearly wanted a way to bring France back down to a controllable position and make them weaker within Europe. Prussia's recent struggles to gain power in the continent at the expense of Denmark and Austria were seen and viewed by some British as somewhat troublesome. It could be assumed that the British believed that by supporting Prussia, they could get France and Prussia to fight a war they hypothesized Prussia would win, due to her recent victories over the Danish and Austria. This would theoretically distract Prussia from wanting to go after Britain because they were close allies during the war and would weaken France who was seen as being a threat. What Britain did not expect, however, was the rapid pace and ease that Prussia won the war. Britain saw Prussia's easy victory and needed to contain Prussia's victory by limiting the resources they got from winning the war. That is why Britain's attitude had shifted after the war.

British policy and opinion has been studied previously both other historians. However, this thesis has helped develop and enhance the interpretation of history by introducing new sources to the knowledge base. Many previous historians have focused more closely on major newspapers in British circulation at the time. However, this study includes many smaller newspapers, who had their own correspondence, who offer a somewhat different slant on the same events.

Each of the main events that occurred during the Franco-Prussian War helped to convey British attitudes and biases toward both France and Prussia. At the onset of the war, the majority of the British populace shared a positive view of Prussian. This is clearly seen in the newspaper and Parliamentary records at the time. This point of view came about for a variety reasons; one

of which being Britain's respect for France as a competent and powerful European nation. Throughout the nineteenth century Britain had been the most dominant force in Europe. Its main priority in foreign affairs was to keep the rest of Europe in balance and at peace to facilitate their dominance over the continent. It could be seen that Britain pursued a view of Prussian preferentialism to try to keep France's power in check. Throughout their history, France and Britain had been struggling against one another over colonies and European disputes. Having Prussia step in and delivering France a major military defeat would stifle the country's progression in Europe. This Prussian bias was also probably due to Britain and France's long history of warfare against one another. Britain had a more natural inclination to side with Prussia due to their history of relative neutrality toward one another. For these reasons, Britain developed this overarching sense of Prussian favoritism over France.

One of the key points in the war that solidified Britain's view of Prussian support came with France's defeat at Metz and Sedan. After the French army's defeat at both of these battles some members of the British populace began to start trying to reason why France was so unsuccessful. Much of the blame for France's defeat was put onto Napoleon III's government. Napoleon III was blamed for having a slipshod system of government that Prussia took full advantage of. Other members of society within Britain began to start questioning why France did not surrender after these two disastrous defeats. They essentially made the argument that France was being foolish, not conceding to Prussia, and that any defeats France suffered from their onwards was entirely their fault. This view helps justify that the British who supported Prussia did not think of France as weak, rather, simply ill prepared for the war due to Napoleon's governmental policies.

Once the war was coming to a close, the majority of British changed their viewpoints of both France and Prussia. Many came to feel empathetic toward France due to their quick defeat. An attempt was made in Parliament to lessen the reparations on the peace treaty and help France maintain good semblance of power after the war. These same British politicians began to develop a fear of Prussia's power and dominance. It was a clear shock for the British to see France fall so quickly and decisively to Prussia. Until then, Prussia had always been a second-rate power in Europe. To have Prussia trounce France that quickly must have unnerved these politicians. In order to maintain peace and balance in Europe, many British supported easing France's losses after the war and only slightly helping Prussia achieve what they wanted out of the war. This quick shift in view for the majority of the British helps to illustrate the fluid dynamic of European diplomacy. Looking at a nation's specific viewpoints at one particular time does not give the complete tale of how one nation viewed another. In fact, many different periods of history need to be analyzed in conjunction to piece together a more comprehensive view of a nation's outlook on foreign policy.

The British view of Prussian support at the beginning of the war and French sympathy at the end stretched across party lines in the nation. An overwhelming majority of newspapers and Parliamentary debates that were referenced in this study follow this line of thinking during the time. It seems extremely unlikely that each of the sources referenced happened to share the same party affiliation. Further support for this view can be seen through Disraeli and Gladstone's stances on the events of the war. Both of these politicians, leaders of their respective political parties at the time, shared a similar support of Prussia and careful considerations toward Prussia after the war. However, the liberal party often conveyed a more cautious attitude toward Prussia

both before and after the war. However, the majority of both parties heavily favored Prussia throughout the war.

It was often the case that many British newspapers were more overly dramatic and pro-Prussian during the war compared to the politicians in Parliament. They were allowed to pursue this line of reporting because they were not responsible for policy and needed to sell as many papers as possible. Because of this, it can be thought that some of the records in the newspapers at this time were overdramatic and may have been an over-exaggeration of how the British public was viewing the events of the war. This is supported when looking at speeches in the parliamentary records. However, British politicians were not necessarily supposed to overly favor one side or another. Politicians were tasked with keeping a level head as being able to interpret a situation from a variety of different angles. Because of this, some politicians may have understated the tone with which they were expressing Prussian or French bias. Due to both of these considerations, one must be careful when analyzing these points of view and not take them solely on face value, but to use them to come to conclusions with this knowledge in mind.

One of the major lessons to be learned from this study is how readily public opinion can change according to contemporary events and how easily this same opinion can shift. This was seen within the war through the majority of the British adopting a more cautionary view of Prussia nearing the close of the conflict. British views of France during the time may have drastically altered if France entered into a conflict with a different European power such as Russia. The majority of the British would most likely have supported France over Russia in that situation due to the more dire threat Russia posed to Britain over their colonies in India. Each power in Europe was simply watching out for itself and attempting to preserve and/or increase its strength within the continent as a whole. Therefore, Britain's viewpoint of France and Prussia

during the war was driven by reactionary policy that was based on recent history between the powers.

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