

## THE BISMARCKIAN ALLIANCE SYSTEM + GERMAN FOREIGN POLICIES

### 1914 – Two big alliances

1. The Triple Alliance; Germany + Austria-Hungary + Italy
2. The Triple Entente; Great Britain + France + Russia

**Background.** The German Chancellor **Otto von Bismarck** started this alliance system **after he had unified Germany** 1871, through the Franco-Prussian War. The new German state needed **safety** so Bismarck created these new aims:

- **BALANCE OF POWER:** Neutralize any forces which might disrupt the internal harmony of the new state or upset the international balance of power
- **CONTROL THE RELATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND AUSTRIA\_HUNGARY:** Prevent the relation between Austria and Russia to become too close or too strained
- **KEEP FRANCE ISOLATED:** Bismarck was aware of the anger and strong ideas of revenge after France had lost the Franco-Prussian War 1870-71 (and land – Alsace-Lorraine)

**First alliance** in Bismarck's system: ***The Dreikaiserbund (1873)** (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia) A series of bilateral military agreements promising aid to any party attacked by a fourth power but also a way to try to maintain old conservative values in Europe.*

**Second alliance** in Bismarck's system: ***Dual Alliance (1879)** (Germany and Austria-Hungary) A security alliance – directed especially against Russia. Russia was upset because of the decisions made against her at the Congress of Berlin 1878...*

After the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1877 Russia concluded a peace treaty in **San Stefano (March 1878)** that gave her lots of influence in the Balkans. This upset some of the European countries that feared a strong Russian influence in that region. So they (Great Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, etc...) demanded a revision of the treaty. This revision took place at the **Congress of Berlin (Summer 1878)**. The “big powers” of Europe (Great Britain, France, Austria-Hungary...) reduced the Russian influence in the Balkans. Russia was bitter!!! Tsar Alexander II commented that this meeting had been a “*European coalition against Russia under the leadership of Bismarck*”. According to historian Erich Eyck “the Berlin Congress marked the beginning of the end of the Bismarckian system”... **Austria-Hungary also installed themselves as the formal protector of the Bosnia-Herzegovina region** in the Ottoman Empire (against the local populations will). The Dreikaiserbund was falling apart. Germany now had to work up a new foreign policy based on the results of these crises... She choose to befriend Austria-Hungary!

**Third alliance** in Bismarck's system: ***Three Emperors League (1881)** (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia) An attempt to regain some cooperation between the three countries – and to hinder Russia from seeking a new ally - France*

**Fourth alliance** in Bismarck's system: ***The Triple Alliance (1882)** (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy) Italy wanted support from Germany against France in her ambitions in North Africa...* Bismarck had **two main reasons** for this alliance:

1. He wanted to end the longstanding enmity between Italy and Austria-Hungary (since the war 1866). This would make the “southern flank” safe.
2. He also wanted to deprive France of a potential ally

**Fifth alliance** in Bismarck's system: ***The Reinsurance Treaty (1887)** (Germany and Russia) This was a bilateral completely **secret** treaty between Germany and Russia in case of war between Russia and Austria-Hungary...*

### So how successful was Bismarck's foreign policy?

1. France remained diplomatically isolated
2. He formed a solid bloc of German influenced territory in central Europe
3. He kept the diplomatic relations with Russia open

But...

4. Bismarck had taken no measures to train a successor in his complex diplomatic system of checks and balance
5. He had hindered any kind of initiative or independent thoughts in the foreign office and diplomatic staff – he was a “dictator” and very inflexible
6. Bismarck was accused of destroying the continuity of German foreign policy
7. Bismarck had neglected the possibility of an Anglo-German Treaty in 1879. When he tried to offer a military alliance with Britain in 1889 he was met with a cold reception...
8. Germany's restrained diplomacy left several nationalists, army leaders dissatisfied. They wanted a more aggressive policy...
9. Powerful economic pressure groups also wanted more involvement in the overseas activities – to provide more raw materials and find markets for manufactured goods...

**In 1890 Bismarck was sacked and the new men under Wilhelm II took over the foreign policies;**

1890 – 1894: Some parts of Bismarck's system were kept – some changed:

#### ***Bismarck's system:***

**1. Against Weltpolitik.** Caprivi tried to keep Bismarck's focus on Europe – to consolidate Germany's position within Europe!

**Evidence:** Renewal of the Triple Alliance and several economical agreements with Germany's neighbours (bilateral trade treaties). The trade treaties caused protests from the farmers and Junkers. They formed the *Agrarian League* (Bund der Landwirte)

**2. Closer relations with Great Britain.** Caprivi wanted better relations with Great Britain.

**Evidence:** the Anglo-German Treaty 1890 (Zanzibar exchanged for Heligoland)

#### ***Changed policies:***

**1. Anti-Russian foreign policy.** Caprivi was not anti-Russian but several leading personalities within the foreign office was (esp. Friedrich von Holstein).

**Evidence:** The Reinsurance Treaty with Russia was not renewed.

**2. Did not pay attention to changes in the balance of power in Europe.** Bismarck was very concerned about the power balance of Europe. Caprivi did not pay the attention to this.

**Evidence:** the renewal of the Triple Alliance 1891 between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy.

**PROBLEMS:** The anti-Russian policies brought Russia closer to France. In 1892 they concluded a treaty – Bismarck's nightmare had come true. Germany was now encircled...

A new influential group was formed – the *Pan-German League* (Alldeutscher Verband). They wanted to unite all people of German racial origin in a single German state (among other things)...

**1. Weltpolitik.** *Germany's aggressive and expansive foreign policy through the acquisition of colonies and the building of a navy from 1894 to 1918, in order to meet the demands from heavy industry for a greater navy and to generate national pride amongst dissatisfied working classes.*

#### **Evidence:**

**The Naval Expansion:** The German Secretary of the Navy Alfred von **Tirpitz** (who also was a member of the “*Navy League*” together with industrialists like Alfred **Krupp**. They wanted to enlarge the German Navy...) and Foreign Minister (in 1900 Chancellor) Bernhard von **Bülow** were the men behind the naval expansion. It was meant to be an assertion of the nation's new status, it was a national weapon free from the influence of the Junkers (important for the middle class), it

was aimed against Great Britain and it provided a new huge outlet for the German industry. The naval expansion was carried out in several steps through navy laws and amendments...

**The Colonial ambitions:** Bismarck was formally reluctant to the acquisition of colonies but he was the Chancellor that gained most of the colonies for Germany. When Caprivi was forced to retire the German colonies in Africa had already been established. On a few other places Germany gained some colonies; **China** – 99-year lease of the port of Kiaochow in 1895 (for trade and navy); **Pacific Islands**; the Carolines and the Marianas were purchased from Spain 1898 and Germany seized the eastern part of the islands of Samoa 1899 (Savaii and Upolu).

**The Berlin-Baghdad Railroad:** This became a prestige project that started under Bismarck (1888). Officially it was the Deutsche bank that financed it. The first part was completed in 1892. In 1898 Kaiser Wilhelm II visited Constantinople. In a speech he referred to himself as the “*protector of 300 million Muslims*” and he called the Berlin-Baghdad Railroad “*my railroad*”... These claims and the German activities around the building of the railroad in the Middle East deepened the strained relations between Germany and Great Britain.

**Why Weltpolitik:**

**1. It reflected the Kaiser’s mentality and personality.** A headstrong and incoherent insistence that Germany should have a say in all major issues...

**2. To help the economical development.** Weltpolitik, especially the naval race, was extremely important for the development of the German heavy industry

**3. To solve internal political problems.** Weltpolitik could unite the national opinion and thereby neutralize disruptive opposition (like critic from SPD)...

*Immanuel Geiss (German historian) concludes: “Weltpolitik came into existence as a read herring of the ruling classes to distract the middle and working classes from social and political problems at home”...*

**Key dates**

1888	<b>The start of the building of the Berlin-Baghdad Railroad</b>
1892	<b>First part of the Berlin-Baghdad Railroad completed</b> Franco-Russian Military Agreement
1894	Franco-Russian Alliance
1895	<b>German lease of the Chinese town Kiaochow (99 years)</b>
1896	<b>The Kruger Telegram</b>
1897/1898	<b>The First Navy Law</b>
1898	<b>German purchased a few Pacific Islands from Spain (Carolines + Marianas)</b> <b>Kaiser Wilhelm II visits Constantinople “my railroad” / “protector of Muslims”</b> First British Approach Fashoda Crisis
1899	<b>Germany seized the eastern part of the islands of Samoa (Savaii and Upolu)</b>
1900	<b>The Second Navy Law</b>
1901	Second British Approach
1904	Entente Cordiale
1905	<b>First Morocco Crisis</b>
1906	<b>The Third Navy Law</b>
1907	Triple Entente
1908	<b>Amendment of the Navy Law</b> <b>The Daily Telegraph Affair</b>
1908/1909	<b>The Bosnian Crisis (the first Blank Cheque)</b>
1911	<b>Second Morocco Crisis</b>
1912	<b>The Potsdam War Council + Increase in ships and men...</b>
1912/1913	First Balkan War
1913	Second Balkan War
<b>1914</b>	<b>WWI breaks starts...</b>