

# SOURCE CRITICISM 1 – GERMAN UNIFICATION

**SOURCE 1:** <https://history.state.gov/countries/issues/german-unification> from the US Office of the Historian. This is how this website presents itself “*The Office of the Historian is staffed by professional historians who are experts in the history of U.S. foreign policy and the Department of State and possess unparalleled research experience in classified and unclassified government records*” (Visited December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 12:50)

The next attempt at German unification, a successful one, was undertaken by Otto von Bismarck, the Prime Minister of Prussia. Bismarck was a proponent of “*smaller*” Germany, not to mention a master at the game of real-politik. German unification was achieved by the force of Prussia, and enforced from the top-down, meaning that it was not an organic movement that was fully supported and spread by the popular classes but instead was a product of Prussian royal policies.

The first war of German unification was the 1862 Danish War, begun over the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. Bismarck allied with Austria to fight the Danes in a war to protect the interests of Holstein, a member of the German Confederation.

The second war of German unification was the 1866 Austro-Prussian War, which settled the question of “*smaller*” versus “*greater*” Germany. This brief war (fought over the course of mere weeks) pitted Prussia and her allies against Austria and other German states. Prussia won and directly annexed some of the German states that had sided with Austria (such as Hanover and Nassau). In an act of leniency, Prussia allowed some of the larger Austrian allies to maintain their independence, such as Baden and Bavaria. In 1867 Bismarck created the North German Confederation, a union of the northern German states under the hegemony of Prussia. Several other German states joined, and the North German Confederation served as a model for the future German Empire.

The third and final act of German unification was the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, orchestrated by Bismarck to draw the western German states into alliance with the North German Confederation. With the French defeat, the German Empire was proclaimed in January 1871 in the Palace at Versailles, France. From this point forward, foreign policy of the German Empire was made in Berlin, with the German Kaiser (who was also the King of Prussia) accrediting ambassadors of foreign nations.

**SOURCE 2:** Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unification\\_of\\_Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unification_of_Germany) (Visited December 1st, 2020 13:30)

Helmuth von Moltke had become chief of the Prussian General Staff in 1857, and Albrecht von Roon would become Prussian Minister of War in 1859.<sup>65</sup> This shuffling of authority within the Prussian military establishment would have important consequences. Von Roon and William (who took an active interest in military structures) began reorganizing the Prussian army, while Moltke redesigned the strategic defense of Prussia by streamlining operational command. Prussian army reforms (especially how to pay for them) caused a constitutional crisis beginning in 1860 because both parliament and William—via his minister of war—wanted control over the military budget. William, crowned King Wilhelm I in 1861, appointed Otto von Bismarck to the position of Minister-President of Prussia in 1862. Bismarck resolved the crisis in favor of the war minister.<sup>66</sup>

The Crimean War of 1854–55 and the Italian War of 1859 disrupted relations among Great Britain, France, Austria, and Russia. In the aftermath of this disarray, the convergence of von Moltke's operational redesign, von Roon and Wilhelm's army restructure, and Bismarck's diplomacy influenced the realignment of the European balance of power. Their combined agendas established Prussia as the leading German power through a combination of foreign diplomatic triumphs—backed up by the possible use of Prussian military might—and an internal conservatism tempered by pragmatism, which came to be known as Realpolitik.<sup>67</sup>

65. Holt, p. 27

66. Ibid, pp. 13–14

67. Blackbourn, pp. 175–179

## Bibliography

Blackbourn, David. *The long nineteenth century: a history of Germany, 1780–1918*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. ISBN 0-19-507672-9

Holt, Alexander W. *The History of Europe from 1862–1914: From the Accession of Bismarck to the Outbreak of the Great War*. New York: MacMillan, 1917. OCLC 300969997

**SOURCE 3:** The last German troops left in occupation of France quitted that country on 16 September 1873, inspiring this John Tenniel cartoon comment in *“Punch Magazine”*. *Punch Magazine* was a British weekly magazine of humor and satire.



- Question 1a:** What according to **SOURCE 2** changed the European balance of power in the 1850-60’s?
- Question 1b:** What is the message about the relations between Germany and France after the last unification war conveyed by **SOURCE 3**.
- Question 2:** With reference to the origin and purpose, assess the value and limitations of **SOURCE 1** for anybody studying the unification of Germany.
- Question 3:** *“Iron and Blood was mentioned in 1861 by Otto von Bismarck as the necessary ingredients in a unification of Germany”*. Discuss this statement using these sources and your own knowledge.