

**To what extent can Otto von Bismarck be seen as the main force
behind the unification of Germany?**

Word count: 3996

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Introduction

Otto von Bismarck is usually portrayed as the main force behind Germany's unification. According to this perspective he provoked three successful wars; against Denmark (1864), Austria (1866) and France (1870) which led to the establishment of the German Empire. The question that arises is whether it is possible that Bismarck alone could have had this big historical impact? In an attempt to answer this question, this paper will focus on **“To what extent can Otto von Bismarck be seen as the main force behind the unification of Germany?”**. In order to evaluate his role the chosen timeframe is 1866 to 1871. The first part will present arguments that focus on the initiative of Bismarck in the establishment of the North German federation, the Luxembourg question, and the Hohenzollern Candidature in Spain. The second part will contrast the focus on the individual with Prussian economic development, Prussian industrialization and mass production, and Prussian military reforms and modernization of the Army.

Background

The Prussian constitutional crisis (1858-1862), stemming from the upheaval following the change of monarch, through the resurgence of nationalism and liberalism in the government, combined with the military reform proposals of war minister Von Roon threatening the class structure¹, would serve as the ascendants of Bismarck to power. King Wilhelm appointed Otto von Bismarck as Minister President of Prussia in 1862, who solved the constitutional crisis through adjourning the collecting of the national budget, which the government had refused to sanction in response to the crisis.² The Danish war (1864) erupted when Christian IX claimed Schleswig as part of Denmark, which went against the peace treaty of 1850, and angered German nationalists. Bismarck entered the conflict through the alliance with Austria to prevent her leading a force on the behalf of the German federation. The Austro-Prussian success of the war presented a power shift between the two powers, as Prussia took control over Schleswig and Austria of Holstein.³ The tension derived from the growing Prussian hegemony in the confederation accumulated in the Austro-Prussian war (1866). The war had ensured Prussia's victory which was enriched by the Treaty of Prague, and established Prussia strength in the German confederation.⁴ By 1866 the last events leading up to the unification of Germany occurred; starting with the North German Confederation (1866), followed by the Luxembourg question (1867), and finally the Hohenzollern candidature and the Ems Dispatch (1870).

¹ Morris, T A. 1995. European History, 1848-1945. London: Collins Educational. Page 83f

² Ibid, page 85

³ Ibid, page 88

⁴ Ibid, page 88f

The North German Confederation

The North German confederation became a significant internal policy created by Bismarck, as it laid the foundation for a united Germany, and was completed with the Southern German states merger in 1871. Thus, it becomes the strongest argument of the individual importance of Bismarck. When discussing the North German federation, Bismarck's involvement starts off with his draft in 1866. Bismarck is credited with creating a governmental structure combining the German nation, the various political parties, the Prussian government, the Hohenzollern crown, but also the governments of the lesser German states⁵. Ramage's accounts on the matter centers stability in the nation as Bismarck's main intention, where his main "interest" was "of domestic tranquility"⁶. This enabled Prussia to take the role of leader state in the North German federation. Otto Pflanze adds that at the time of the first draft there was no central executive organ, which extensively means that Bismarck would have performed influence without being involved in the national government⁷, adding on to the idea that Bismarck was in fact the main force behind establishing a structure in which the united Germany could thrive with Prussia as its leader.

A counterargument to the idea of Bismarck solely unifying Germany through the North German Federation, emerges when considering the ambitions of the other German states. The Austro-Prussian war did indeed split up the German federation in two camps, of which Bavaria and other southern states had aligned their sympathies with Austria. B.J Ramage points this out but add that the strong-held belief and dream of a united Germany persisted, and came to favour Bismarck when the southern states finally merged with the North German confederation to

⁵ Pflanze, Otto. "Bismarck's "Realpolitik"." *The Review of Politics* 20, no. 4 (1958): 492-514. Accessed April 7, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1404857> Page 507

⁶ Ramage, B. J. "Prince Bismarck and German Unity." *The Sewanee Review* 7, no. 4 (1899): 444-68. Accessed April 10, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27528067> Page 458

⁷ Pflanze, Otto. "Bismarck's "Realpolitik"." *The Review of Politics* 20, no. 4 (1958): 492-514. Accessed April 7, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1404857> Page 508

create a united Germany in 1871⁸. This is further extended by Joseph Becker, who argues that for example Frankfurt was anti-Prussian well into the July-Crisis of 1870, though Becker admits that these countrymen were the first to take up arms in the Ems dispatch conflict. Both historians emphasize that the nationalist view of the German states involved was far greater than their issues with Prussia. Thus, arguably, this common goal was a driving force by itself, which conveniently for Bismarck played into the same ambitions of Prussia, thus Bismarck had initiated German unification through the creation of a political and legislative organ of which other German states would join. It can then be argued that the set-up of the North German federation, initiated by Bismarck, laid the groundwork for the Southern states merger, thus playing into the view of Bismarck as the main force behind the German unification, even though the Southern states ambitions were vital for the unification as well.

The Luxembourg question

The Luxembourg question amplified the conflict between France and Prussia that would essentially lead to the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, and mainly was raised through the tension between Bismarck and Napoleon III. This conflict adds into the view of Bismarck and Napoleon contributing to how events developed. Napoleon III had the intention of buying the Duchy of Luxembourg from the King of the Netherlands, which resulted in German outcry as Luxembourg had been part of the old German federation.⁹ The resolution of the Luxembourg question gave no benefits to Prussia, as Luxembourg in the London conference of 1867 became a neutral sovereign state, and France likewise was not pacified. The only beneficial outcome for Bismarck was the increased anxiety felt by the Southern German states regarding French

⁸ Ramage, B. J. "Prince Bismarck and German Unity." *The Sewanee Review* 7, no. 4 (1899): 444-68. Accessed April 10, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27528067>. Page 458

⁹ "Luxembourg Question | European History [1867]." n.d. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed July 11, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Luxembourg-question-1867>.

ambitions, those in which had posed complex issues involving separatist movements and resentment towards Prussian militarism.¹⁰

The main portrayal of France, represented through Napoleon III, and Prussia, represented by Bismarck himself, has been shaped by many historians disavouring Napoleon III. B.J Ramage emphasizes the French claim on the Duchy of Luxembourg as some compensation driven through rivalry with the increased influence of Prussia; Napoleon III claiming the Duchy of Luxembourg as compensation for the territorial gains of Prussia but also his own failed schemes in Mexico, which was stunted by Bismarck.¹¹ T.A Morris recognizes the causes of the Luxembourg question to stem from a French unease over Prussian ambitions, though maintaining that the idea of Bismarck having “trapped and tricked the French Emperor”, would be incorrect. T.A Morris argues that Bismarck had no problem with France claiming the Duchy of Luxembourg, as he himself viewed this as the fair price for “preserving the stability” of his newly founded North German federation¹². However, opposition was made in order for Bismarck to gain the liberal nationalists support in the Reichstag, which indeed elevated the tensions between France and Prussia. The Luxembourg question seemed to be pushed by Napoleon III mainly due to his own personal ambitions, and was opposed by Bismarck for the sole reason to gain the upperhand in the Reichstag, thus making both reasons personally motivated. By extension, the tensions between the nations was felt by the governments of each nation as well, as B.J Ramage stated, mainly stemming from a French concern of Prussian expansion. However, the main source behind the growing tensions between the nations would be initiated by the actions of Napoleon III, and Bismarck’s opposition, which supports the view of a few individuals' impact on history.

¹⁰ Morris, T A. 1995. *European History, 1848-1945*. London: Collins Educational. Page 413f.

¹¹ Ramage, B. J. "Prince Bismarck and German Unity." *The Sewanee Review* 7, no. 4 (1899): 444-68. Accessed April 10, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27528067> Page 459

¹² Morris, T A. 1995. *European History, 1848-1945*. London: Collins Educational. Page 92

The Hohenzollern candidature and the Ems dispatch

The Hohenzollern candidature, and by extension the Ems dispatch, is the strongest argument for Bismarck's involvement in the German unification. After the overthrow of the ruling Bourbons in Spain in 1868 the Spanish throne had remained empty, that is until Prince Leopold von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen got involved. As the Spanish head of state would then be sympathetic to Prussian ambitions, France would be rendered having enemies bordering in both east and south, which put pressure on France.¹³ Wilhelm I of Prussia, head of the Hohenzollern family, at first did not support the candidature due to some possible French hostility being evoked. His position changed with Bismarck's remark on the situation; "It is in Germany's political interest that the house of Hohenzollern should gain in esteem and an exalted position in the world", and thus Leopold had the Prussian consent to continue the candidature. Leopold accepted the candidature in June 1870 with the support of Wilhelm I.¹⁴ The news of Leopold's involvement in the royal affair reached Napoleon III on the 3rd of July, and measures were taken immediately in order to settle this issue, as this posed a threat to French interests. B.J Ramage argues for Napoleon III becoming pressed with his quest of cutting down the Prussian threat to French supremacy in European affairs¹⁵, which now was threatened by the Hohenzollern candidature. What pushed Napoleon towards hostilities between France and Prussia was then his inability to accept that Bismarck (who denied involvement) had not taken part of Hohenzollern candidature, as he was convinced that Prussian ambition was the main motivation of putting Leopold Hohenzollern as candidate for the Spanish crown¹⁶. The involvement of Bismarck in putting the Hohenzollern candidate on the throne, according to Munroe Smith, was vital for the continuation of antagonizing France. Leopold had declined to

¹³ Morris, T A. 1995. *European History, 1848-1945*. London: Collins Educational. Page 414f.

¹⁴ Farmer, Alan, and Andrina Stiles. 2008. *The Unification of Germany, 1815 - 1919*. London Hodder Education. Page 88

¹⁵ Ramage, B. J. "Prince Bismarck and German Unity." *The Sewanee Review* 7, no. 4 (1899): 444-68. Accessed April 10, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27528067> Page 459

¹⁶ Ibid

take part in the candidature 3 times before Bismarck had secured Leopold's involvement with Prussian agents, which established the Hohenzollern candidature.¹⁷ Leonard W. Cowie and Robert Wolfson both agree that Bismarck encouraged the Hohenzollern candidature, though Bismarck had nothing to do with the Spanish originally approaching Leopold.¹⁸

The French diplomat in Berlin assured William I that war would come if Leopold left for Spain to take the crown, in which William decided to disband the Hohenzollern candidature on behalf of Leopold on the 12th of July.¹⁹ As the Hohenzollern candidature was settled, it let France gain the diplomatic honour of disarming the threat of war, through the increased hostilities raised between France and Prussia, which did not favour Bismarck's intentions. When France finally demanded an official renunciation from Wilhelm I, a telegram was sent from Ems to Bismarck the 13th of July, containing a report of that day's events, with the Prussian king's permission to communicate details to the press. In the presence of Bismarck's Chief of General staff Moltke and Minister of war von Roon, certain parts of the telegram were left out, and was published in a Berliner newspaper the morning after.

Bismarck's further involvement is more emphasized in the Ems dispatch, of which himself sought to stir up the threat of war, though he mentioned that "it is important that we should be the ones attacked", in order to gain the support from the Southern states to complete the unification.²⁰ B.J Ramage emphasizes that Bismarck had decided that the moment had arrived and with the help of von Roon and von Moltke he edited the dispatch, such that the French

¹⁷ Munroe, Edmund. 1898. *Bismarck and German Unity, a Historical Outline*, by Munroe Smith ... New York: Macmillan. Page 50

¹⁸ Cowie, Leonard W, and Robert Wolfson. 2001. *Years of Nationalism : European History, 1815-1890*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. Page 252

¹⁹ Farmer, Alan, and Andrina Stiles. 2008. *The Unification of Germany, 1815 - 1919*. London Hodder Education. Page 88

²⁰ *Ibid*, page 89

would find it as an inexcusable insult.²¹ B.J Ramage summarized, claiming that war was inevitable, but that it was Bismarck's actions that initiated the response of France²². Leonard W. Cowie and Robert Wolfson both agree with this statement, as Bismarck's actions added to the sentiments of an already pro-war Paris and would make opposing the declaration of war on Prussia impossible.²³ The view of Bismarck as intending for war with France, and actively taking part of it supports the perspective of Bismarck being a main driving force behind German unification, but also begs the question to what extent his actions cleared the path for war. Alan Farmer and Andrina Stiles reject B.J Ramage's view to some extent; Bismarck had been ready for war with France since 1866, but it had to be viewed as defensive in order to bring the Southern German states' support which would signify the German unification once and for all. Though they continue to emphasise that no evidence of him being ready for war have been brought up, and the extent of his involvement has to stop with the Ems telegrams. France however had been ready to fight since before the Ems telegrams, so to claim Bismarck as the only source of the Franco-Prussian war would be unrealistic.²⁴ Monroe Smith complements this conclusion, also pointing at French dissatisfaction with the Prussian turn of events, assessing that the main cause of the Franco-Prussian war was the dissatisfaction of the French people with the growth of a state-power like Prussia so close to their border²⁵. A secondary cause was outlined to stem from the failure of accumulating territorial gains to compensate for Prussia's increased power, which is echoed in B.J Ramage's interpretation of the events as well. What is strongly believed by said historians is the aggressions of France

²¹ Ramage, B. J. "Prince Bismarck and German Unity." *The Sewanee Review* 7, no. 4 (1899): 444-68. Accessed April 10, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27528067> Page 460

²² Ibid

²³ Cowie, Leonard W, and Robert Wolfson. 2001. *Years of Nationalism : European History, 1815-1890*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. Page 254

²⁴ Farmer, Alan, and Andrina Stiles. 2008. *The Unification of Germany, 1815 - 1919*. London Hodder Education. Page 91

²⁵ Munroe, Edmund. 1898. *Bismarck and German Unity, a Historical Outline, by Munroe Smith ...* New York: Macmillan. Page 47

(mainly stemming from the discontent of the people) being the root of the war, though the involvement of Bismarck is clear in both events.

Conclusion - Bismarck as the main unifier

The relationship between France and an emerging Prussian state is often portrayed as a battle between Bismarck and Napoleon III. Kissinger quite elusively imagined Napoleon as a man doomed for his miscalculations in Luxembourg and the Austro-Prussian war, when he sought compensation this only led to the Franco-Prussian war in which German unification became a reality in 1871²⁶. The view of Napoleon and France as the main actors of what has come to be known as the Franco-Prussian war continues in B.J Ramage's assertion that the dissatisfaction that had been growing in France alongside the expansion of Prussia had "foreshadowed that outburst Pan-Germanism", which Napoleon had worked so hard to diminish²⁷. The view of Napoleon III as the attacker and initiator of the war, though Bismarck had paved the way for these actions, is central to German unification. The main disagreement between the mentioned historians would then be the underlying intentions of Bismarck, as well as how he took advantage and manipulated contemporary politics in his favour. As what can be concluded by the North German federation, the Luxembourg question, Ems dispatch, and Hohenzollern candidature, is that Bismarck was a vital political force in uniting the German Empire, with or without intention.

²⁶ Kissinger, Henry A. "The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck." *Daedalus* 97, no. 3 (1968): 888-924. Accessed April 10, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20023844> Page 920

²⁷ Ramage, B. J. "Prince Bismarck and German Unity." *The Sewanee Review* 7, no. 4 (1899): 444-68. Accessed April 10, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27528067> Page 459

Other causes of the unification

Other arguments outside of political causes for the unification of Germany would be the economic and industrial development of Prussia, and how this extended to the military reforms and successes, especially considering the Franco-Prussian war. When considering this argument, the focus will land on both the industrial and economic developments before the 1860s, but also needs to be evaluated during the time of Bismarck ascending to power, from 1862-1871.

Prussian economic development

The government intervention programmes such as von Motz tax reforms and road building from 1825-1830, P. Beuth reforms in technical education from 1815-1845, but also von Rother's 1846 reconstruction of the Bank of Prussia²⁸, all stabilized the Prussian economy, emphasizing that industrialization and economic development were intertwined. The Zollverein established in 1834, continued to enforce Prussia's economic strength over Austrian and German affairs, and the involvement in heavy industry such as the development of the Krupp factories in Essen and application of new technology from the 1840s, provided the Bismarckian government with artillery and opportunity to go to war. By the 1850s, Prussia had experienced a great capitalistic boom; mainly relying on a new railroad construction programme, mines and factories experiencing high profits, high risk investments being made through the venture of lending institutions, which by 1858 had crumbled down, leading to the crisis in which Bismarck took power.²⁹

²⁸ Morris, T A. 1995. European History, 1848-1945. London: Collins Educational. Page 82

²⁹ Hamerow, Theodore S. 1969. The Social Foundations of German Unification: 1858-1871; Ideas and Institutions. Princeton, Nj Univ. Pr. Page 4f

By the 1860s, the economy continued to increase steadily (seen from pig iron doubling in production and steel growing fivefold in production³⁰) and with that the government surpluses generated from state-owned enterprises, public land, and royal mines, in 1863 and 1864, the expenses of the Danish war were covered.

This was something that Bismarck himself took credit for³¹. The constitutional conflict of 1862, was also resolved through the success of Bismarck's diplomacy receiving public confidence in the regime, outlining the certainty of Bismarck's influence. The financial luck of the government started to run out by 1866, as the treasury had miscalculated the cost of the Austro-Prussian war, which was saved by the quick defeat of Austria. By 1868 there was an unusually high deficit in the government budget, due to the hostile Parisian attitude's effect on businesses, industry and commerce. However, the transformation of industry and use of the factory system in the 1850s and 60s became the foundation for long-term growth after the Franco-Prussian war.³²

Prussian industrialization and mass production

When specifying what part of industrialization that contributed most to the increased power of Prussia, the state-owned railroads and mass production of modern weapons for the Prussian army would be the most significant. When discussing the Prussian army, the connection between industrialization and military success was significant as the Prussian army led Europe in adapting industrial developments for military purposes. Both the organization and planning of railways, in order to benefit swift transportation of troops, proved to be successful in both

³⁰ Hamerow, Theodore S. 1969. *The Social Foundations of German Unification: 1858-1871; Ideas and Institutions*. Princeton, Nj Univ. Pr. Page 12

³¹ *Ibid*, page 14

³² *Ibid*, p 15f.

1866 and 1870.³³ The production of weapons, after having been of bad quality and high prices previously, had led to the state-owned and state-run rifle factories in the 1850s, which still competed with private multi-product manufacturers.³⁴ With the combination of re-allocating resources from civilian to military purposes while applying mass production techniques, the gun and rifle industry had been spurred by military demand which was now satisfied with mass production techniques.³⁵ The new gun models in the 1860s, such as the Dreyse ‘needle gun’, and effective artillery, paved the way for Prussian success in the Franco-Prussian war.³⁶ By turning to private industry in both the 60s and later the 70s, the Prussian army allowed for industrialization to strengthen their military forces through the application of mass production and mechanical engineering to the production of guns and rifles.³⁷

Prussian military reforms and modernization of the Army

The modernization of the army would be a connection between industrialization and the military policies of Bismarck as the components of German unification. The structure of the military, according to Morris, started transforming in the 1850s, after Helmut von Moltke was appointed chief of staff in 1857.³⁸ By the war of 1862, the Prussian army was superior in comparison to Austria, due to the expertise and professionalism acquired by the officers graduating from the War academy, but also due to Moltke’s own insistence of adapting “modern transport and industrial methods” for military purposes. The railroads constituted these modern transport, and Moltke presented important improvements in order for the transportation of the whole army to be facilitated, which led to troops being transported 6 times

³³ Morris, T A. 1995. *European History, 1848-1945*. London: Collins Educational. Page 81.

³⁴ Förster, Stig and Nagler, Jörg. 1997. *On the Road to Total War : The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Page 249

³⁵ *Ibid*, page 250

³⁶ Morris, T A. 1995. *European History, 1848-1945*. London: Collins Educational. Page 81

³⁷ Förster, Stig and Nagler, Jörg. 1997. *On the Road to Total War : The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861–1871*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Page 262

³⁸ Morris, T A. 1995. *European History, 1848-1945*. London: Collins Educational. Page 81

as fast as before.³⁹ In addition to the railroads, Moltke also proposed to facilitate dense road systems, which was an effect of the industrial revolution, in which the mobilization of troops would be carried out more sufficiently.⁴⁰

Discussion

Then what was the effect of industrialization and mass production on the emerging unified Germany? Theodore S. Hamerow argues that even when the economy was moving downwards rapid industrialization was on the way, even though the most impressive achievements occurred after the unification of 1871, the foundation built in the 1850s and 1860s would be vital for these achievements, which was corresponding to the time in which Bismarck took power and unified Germany.⁴¹ Stephen J. Lee acknowledges John Maynard Keynes' argument of how these economic and industrial components by the 1850s and 1860s were of great significance in uniting Germany. The extension of railways in the 1850s and the Bessemer process established a chemical industry, and the economic growth of Prussia "pulled the rest of Germany behind it."⁴² Lee continues on this thought by claiming that the economic domination by Prussia of smaller German states was indeed vital for the success of uniting Germany⁴³, which stemmed from a strong economic and industrial position in comparison to the other German states. Finally, Morris acknowledges that the view of Bismarck exploiting the economic advantages of Prussia can be conflicted by historians who recognize that the economic situation of Prussia is of greater importance than the political actions taken by the government at the time⁴⁴, undermining the view that Bismarck united Germany. These

³⁹ Holborn, Hajo. "Moltke's Strategical Concepts." *Military Affairs* 6, no. 3 (1942): 153–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1982846>. Page 160

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Hamerow, Theodore S. 1969. *The Social Foundations of German Unification: 1858-1871; Ideas and Institutions*. Princeton, Nj Univ. Pr. Page 16

⁴² Lee, Stephen J. 2015. *Aspects of European History 1789-1980*. Routledge. Page 87

⁴³ Ibid, page 88

⁴⁴ Morris, T A. 1995. *European History, 1848-1945*. London: Collins Educational. Page 83

historians did argue for the backbone of the economy, the emerging industrialized mass production of guns and rifles, as well as von Moltke's contributions to the military reforms and applications of industrialization being a great factor in the unification of Germany. However, to what extent Bismarck became involved in these? It's already been concluded that Bismarck was a vital political force in the unification of Germany. Did this power extend to industrialization and mass production? As mentioned, Bismarck did take credit for financing the Danish-Prussian war, even if this might be more due to the rapid economic development in the early 50s, which would be beyond Bismarck's influence. Temporary economic stability did occur simultaneously to Bismarck taking power, and as mass production, a feature of industrialization, was by extension developed in regards to military demand, Bismarck did indeed influence the path of Prussian and German industrialization during and after his time, even though the fundamental industrial and economic development continued without regards to his policies. As this perspective emphasizes the bigger societal shifts as important factors in the unification of Germany, it does not completely disregard individuals' importance either, though in this case the role of Moltke and his reconstruction of the military and application of industrial means for swifter transport outshines Bismarck's role in Prussian industrialization.

The various political and diplomatic events from 1866-1871 had then indeed secured what had been intended by Bismarck; a stronger and bigger Prussia. But did he also lay down the foundation for German unification? Whether this was solely because of Bismarckian policies and diplomatic responses, or if the German states had grown ripe for coalition on a social, political, and economic level is both two accounts of how history played out. The more individual view would have seen Prussian state making, and Bismarck in the center of it, as the main power source of German unification. The arguments of historians that emphasize the importance of individuals in regards to the German unification would center around the events

where Bismarck or other significant historical figures influenced these events' turnouts; these being the Luxembourg question, the Hohenzollern candidature and the Ems dispatch, and the North German confederation. In contrast, other historians would argue for the backbone of society fundamentally being shifted; these being longer economic development, social, and of political nature, though Bismarck's credit would still be accounted for.

Conclusion

The traditional view of Bismarck as the force behind German unification has for a long time excluded the context of national development in favour of state crafting. The long term changes ranging from industrial and economic reforms and development, to the military reforms have been depreciated in favour of smaller political events regarding diplomacy, war, and unification. It can be concluded that of the 4 major events from 1866-1871 (the formation of the North German federation, the Luxembourg question, the Hohenzollern candidature and the Ems Dispatch) all of them display that Bismarck was significant to a great extent in Prussia's relationships to the German states and France which resulted in the unification. An alternative view of the unification emphasizes a developing economy and raging industrialization together with the cooperation of important political figures (von Moltke being the most significant) as being the main factors, even though there are still some signs of Bismarck's involvement even in this perspective, but to a lesser extent. To answer the question **“To what extent can Otto von Bismarck be seen as the main force behind the unification of Germany?”**; It can be concluded that Bismarck was indeed a great political force in the unification process, even though other individuals and the greater industrialization of Prussia also contributed to what became the United German Empire.

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