

questions' section, if there is one) and decide what further work you need to do on the chapter. In particularly important sections of the book, this will involve reading the chapter a second time and stopping at each heading and * to think about (and to write a summary of) what you have just read.

4. Attempt the 'Source-based questions' section. It will sometimes be sufficient to think through your answers, but additional understanding will often be gained by forcing yourself to write them down.

When you have finished the main chapters of the book, study the 'Further Reading' section and decide what additional reading (if any) you will do on the topic.

This book has been designed to help make your studies both enjoyable and successful. If you can think of ways in which this could have been done more effectively, please write to tell me. In the meantime, I hope that you will gain greatly from your study of History.

Keith Randell

Introduction: Europe and the Great Powers

1 The Franco-Prussian War, 1870–71

In July 1870, the French government threw caution to the winds and blundered into a conflict with Prussia. By declaring war to avenge a slight to her national honour, the French fell into a trap that Bismarck, the Prussian king's chief minister, had carefully laid for them. War against France, the 'traditional enemy', was Bismarck's best chance of persuading the independent south German states to unite with the Prussian-dominated states of north Germany. Bismarck found an issue that could be exploited to provoke France when he secretly pressed the claims of a distant relative of the King of Prussia to the vacant Spanish throne. To Bismarck's dismay, however, the plot misfired and France scored a diplomatic victory by issuing a dignified and restrained protest against the 'Prussian' candidature. But the French government, pushed on by bellicose public opinion, foolishly demanded 'guarantees' from the King of Prussia that the claims of his relatives would never be renewed. In a remarkable display of ingenuity, Bismarck edited the king's factual report of his encounter with the French ambassador to read as a deliberate insult to France. When this version – 'a red rag to the Gallic bull' as Bismarck called it – was published in the press, France's honour could only be satisfied by a declaration of war.

The Franco-Prussian war was a disaster for France. She entered the war without allies and with a badly organised army. Its slow and inefficient mobilisation put her at an immediate disadvantage compared with the Prussian army whose mobility was remarkable. Although some French regiments fought heroically, the bulk of the army was no match for the well-trained, highly disciplined and well-led Prussians and their German allies. The French were not only outnumbered and outgunned. They were also completely outmanoeuvred.

The outcome was decided by two major encounters in the opening stages of the war. At Sedan, in early September, one French army was defeated and surrendered with over 80 000 men as well as the French Emperor. In late October, the main French army of over 150 000 men, which had been encircled for over two months at Metz, capitulated. The war continued for another three months as the Government of National Defence, which replaced the discredited Second Empire, raised new armies to fight the Prussians. Despite a few successes the new armies failed to break the siege of Paris, which had been cut off from the rest of France since mid-September. Paris finally fell in January 1871, after a terrible ordeal.

The peace terms were severe. The victors demanded the cession of Alsace and Lorraine, two provinces with rich iron ore deposits, textile industries and good agricultural land. An indemnity of 5000 million francs was demanded and until it was paid German troops occupied parts of France. A final humiliation was a victory march through Paris.

France's troubles were not over with the ending of the war. Paris, which had suffered severely during the long siege, set itself up as a rival authority to the government and the newly elected Assembly at Versailles. After the proclamation of a 'Commune', a socialist and workers' regime was inaugurated in late March 1871. When the Communards refused to agree to the government's terms, troops took the city by force in late May, amidst scenes of appalling ferocity.

* The Franco-Prussian war had enormous implications for Europe. The unification of Germany was facilitated by the participation of the south German states in a victorious war against France. The King of Prussia was proclaimed German Emperor in the Hall of Mirrors at the palace of Versailles in January 1871. The incorporation of the southern states, including Bavaria and Württemberg (though not the 10 million Germans in Austria), into the new German Empire transformed the political situation in central Europe. Instead of a relatively weak collection of states with powerful neighbours on each side, 'Germany' was now a major power and growing in strength as her economy expanded, assisted by political unity.

The defeat of France marked the end of an era in which she had been regarded as the great military power on the continent, alongside Russia. The success of the Prussian military machine in 1870-71 necessitated a reappraisal of conventional military wisdom. It demonstrated the importance of a competent General Staff, capable of planning military operations and utilising railways effectively for the rapid movement of supplies and deployment of troops. Future wars, it was widely believed, would be wars of movement and of short duration, with a premium on rapid mobilisation. Conscription was also shown to be necessary to provide adequate trained reserves, while the Prussian education system was hailed as contributing to the superiority of her armies over semi-literate French peasant soldiers.

The emergence of a powerful German Empire upset the existing balance of power in Europe. Prussia's defeat of France in 1871 came hard on the heels of her defeat of Austria in 1866. This left Russia as the only other major military power on the continent and even her reputation had suffered a bad blow from her defeat by Britain and France in the Crimean War of 1854-56. But she was able to take advantage of the war in 1870 to denounce the restrictions which had been imposed on her maintaining a navy in the Black Sea. Italy also

See Preface for explanation of * symbol

gained from the war, occupying Rome in 1870, which had hitherto been denied her by the presence of French troops defending the interests of the papacy. The defeat of France in 1870-71, therefore, marked the culmination of a series of changes that created a new system of international relations in Europe, in which Germany was likely to play a dominant role.

2 Germany

From 1815 until the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, the term 'Germany' did not signify a great power, but a loose confederation of 39 states of very variable size. The two most powerful were Austria and Prussia, who were also great powers in their own right. Although Prussia did not begin to challenge Austria's political predominance in Germany until the 1850s, she had, by this time, established an economic ascendancy by means of a customs union (the *Zollverein*).

The German Empire, proclaimed in January 1871, was the product of 'blood and iron', as Bismarck expressed it. Since unification had been brought about through three wars fought by Prussia against Denmark, Austria and France, the new German state was in many important respects modelled on Prussia.

This was most evident in the authoritarian and militaristic nature of the German Empire. Executive power (decision making) belonged to the Kaiser (Emperor) and the Chancellor (chief minister), while other ministers acted as their agents. The Chancellor and the ministers were appointed by the Kaiser and were not answerable to parliament, as opposed to the British system. The Kaiser was also Supreme War Lord, which gave the military chiefs the right of direct access to him, bypassing the ministers.

This authoritarian political structure was given a democratic façade in the form of a *Reichstag* elected by universal suffrage, but it was unable to exercise much control over the government, except in budgetary matters. In practice, however, the Imperial Chancellor was anxious to have the co-operation of the *Reichstag* in passing laws and in order to make governing the newly created state easier. Strenuous efforts were therefore made to secure a pro-government majority from among the parties of the centre and right.

* From 1871 to 1890, Germany was dominated by Bismarck. The old Kaiser, William I, who was already 64 when he had become King of Prussia in 1861, trusted him on most issues and his prestige as the creator of a united Germany was enormous. Bismarck was also an extremely able politician and statesman. After 1890, a lack of co-ordination was evident in German diplomacy, partly because policy-making was shared amongst the new Kaiser (Wilhelm II), the Chancellor and the foreign minister, as well as the military and naval chiefs.

Between 1871 and 1914, Germany became the greatest industrial power in Europe. Unification, creating a single internal market, contributed to her rapid economic expansion, despite temporary recessions. German industrialisation was characterised by the growth of heavy industry (iron and steel) and the emergence of new industries (chemicals and optics), as well as by rapid urbanisation.

* Germany's rapid industrialisation was significant in several ways. By 1900, she had outstripped Britain, previously the leading industrial nation in Europe, and was second in the world only to the United States. The growth of the German economy intensified the competition amongst industrial states for markets and raw materials. This, combined with population growth, increased the pressure for overseas colonies. Within Germany, it generated considerable social tension. The growth of a large industrial working class and an expanding middle class should, perhaps, have resulted in a liberal-democratic regime. Instead, an authoritarian political structure contributed to the continued social dominance of the traditional land-owning Prussian aristocracy (*Junkers*). Some historians have argued that the German government sought to defuse social tension by using foreign policy as a diversionary tactic – success abroad was to distract attention away from internal problems. In the Bismarckian decades, it is said, colonial policy was to serve this purpose – hence the term 'social imperialism'. Under Wilhelm II, overseas policy in general (*Weltpolitik*) was used for the same ends.

Imperial Germany was likely to follow the traditions of Prussian foreign policy, especially under Bismarck's guidance. This implied co-operation with the other conservative powers, Austria-Hungary and Russia. Relations with Russia were reinforced by dynastic links with the Tsars and underpinned, at least for a decade, by economic ties (the exchange of German manufactures for Russian grain) until conflicts over tariffs began. A possible alternative orientation to German foreign policy was on the lines of friendship between the 'Anglo-Saxon' nations, a revival of the old alliance of Protestant powers. There was also a dynastic link between the Prussian royal family and Victorian Britain. This raised a fundamental question that was never properly answered: should Germany regard herself as Britain's partner or rival in world trade and empire?

3 France

French power in Europe was at its height under Napoleon, when France was still the wealthiest and, barring Russia, the most populous nation on the continent. For many years after his defeat in 1815, France continued to be regarded as a threat to the peace of Europe.

This was only partly due to her reputation as a military nation. She was also feared as the home of revolutionary ideas, a view that was reinforced when revolutions broke out in France in 1830 and again in 1848, spreading to other parts of Europe.

In terms of international relations, however, these fears were not really justified. From 1815 to 1852 France pursued a largely pacific foreign policy, sometimes co-operating with Britain in a sort of 'liberal alliance'. The real challenge to the existing European order came with the reign of Napoleon III (nephew of the great Napoleon) from 1852 to 1870. During this period, Russia was defeated by France and Britain acting in alliance – the 'Crimean Coalition' of 1854. French armies also fought in north Italy in 1859 in the 'war of liberation', directed against Austria – a sign of Napoleon's sympathy for the cause of 'nationality'. For the same reason, France stayed neutral when Prussia fought Austria in 1866, enabling Prussia to unite the north German states under her leadership. In 1870–71, France paid the price for Napoleon's miscalculation in fostering the growth of Prussian power.

France made a rapid recovery from her defeat in the early 1870s and regained her status as a great power. Her reorganised army, now based on universal service, came to be regarded as an effective military force. She also developed a powerful navy although it suffered, at times, from having too many prototypes and not being a homogeneous fleet.

The Franco-Prussian war was fought as a war between equals, in demographic and economic terms. By 1914, however, there was a marked disparity between the two states in both population and industrial strength. France's industrialisation was slower, more spasmodic and less complete than Germany's. This showed most obviously in output of coal, iron and steel but also in the high proportion of her population still engaged in farming. The French rate of population increase was much less than Germany's and lower than that of all the other great powers. Nevertheless, France remained a very wealthy country. Vast amounts of capital were invested abroad, especially in Russia – three times as much as was invested in her overseas empire.

Politically, the contrast between France and Germany was also quite striking. The 1875 Constitution made France into a democratic republic with extensive individual liberties. In contrast to both Germany and Britain, executive power was weak. One result was that short-lived governments had difficulty in keeping control over enthusiasts for imperial expansion, whether they were officials in the Colonial Office or ambitious officers in the colonial army. Another was that frequent changes of government did not make for consistency in policies although, sometimes, a minister retained his post through several such changes.

The influence of the idea of *revanche* (revenge) for the defeat of 1871 on the policies of French governments can easily be exaggerated. Nevertheless, it persisted as an ideal – something that should not be forgotten – for many Frenchmen. Most Republicans, however, were preoccupied with consolidating the new regime on a durable basis against the threats (real or imagined) from Catholic monarchists and aristocratic army officers. What emerged was a conservative republic attentive, for the most part, to the interests of the bourgeoisie and peasantry. By 1900, the French Left (Socialists and Radicals) was largely pacifist and anti-militarist in outlook. On the other hand, a vocal section of the French Right had become very nationalistic and committed to *revanche*. The fact that France had a republican regime did not, of itself, preclude good relations with monarchical states. The tarnished image of the Third Republic, however, resulting from corruption and scandals, did play a part in deterring the Tsar from signing an alliance with France before the mid-1890s.

* In the 1870s, French foreign policy reverted to the tradition of the liberal alliance with Britain. In the following decade, however, colonial rivalries soured Anglo-French relations, especially in Africa. France herself became a great imperial power in this period with extensive colonial possessions in Africa and Asia. The alliance with Russia, signed in 1892–94, became the keystone of French foreign policy and her guarantee of security against an increasingly powerful Germany. In practice, however, the alliance seemed to be anti-British in its direction until 1904, when France reached a colonial agreement with Britain. The entente of 1904 began as not much more than an indication of an amicable relationship, but demonstrations of German hostility towards France between 1905 and 1911 gradually converted it, by 1914, into something approaching a military alliance between France and Britain.

4 Great Britain

Britain was one of the leading great powers in 1815. Her contribution to the defeat of Napoleon included subsidies to her continental allies, Nelson's victories over the French fleet and the Duke of Wellington's successful land campaigns, culminating in the battle of Waterloo. For the next half-century Britain continued to play a prominent role in international affairs, participating in diplomatic conferences through which the powers tried to resolve major problems by negotiation rather than war.

A major influence on British foreign policy was suspicion of Russia's designs on Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, which was regarded as the 'key to India'. This was partly because of its proximity to the overland trade routes to the east and partly because

it was feared that if Russia occupied Constantinople, she would be able to dominate the Near East. British ministers therefore supported the declining Ottoman Empire as a buffer against Russian expansion in the Near East. The Crimean War of 1854–56 was fought mainly to check Russian influence over Turkey. But Britain was disillusioned by the discrepancy between the heavy sacrifices made and the meagre results of the war, and turned against active involvement in European conflicts. This mood, combined with suspicion of Napoleon III's motives, largely explains why Britain was mainly a passive spectator of Bismarck's three wars in the 1860s, even though they profoundly affected the balance of power in Europe.

The recovery of world trade in the 1850s also tended to divert British attention away from Europe towards more distant parts of the world. As the 'first industrial nation', Britain enjoyed many advantages over her continental rivals for several decades, enabling her to expand her trade worldwide.

Between 1870 and 1914, Britain became the greatest imperial power in the world. With colonial possessions scattered across the globe, hers was 'the empire on which the sun never set'. During these same years, Britain lost her pre-eminence as a manufacturing nation, being overtaken by the USA and Germany. But Britain's reliance on imported food and raw materials, and the need for markets for her manufactured goods, meant that the nation's lifeblood was dependent on the uninterrupted flow of seaborne trade.

* Britain therefore needed to 'rule the waves'. To ensure that the sea lanes remained open to merchant shipping, Britain had to maintain her naval supremacy. The acquisition of coaling stations and naval bases was a necessary aspect of commercial and imperial expansion. Fears that Britain's navy was not adequate for the country's needs led to the Naval Defence Act of 1889, which established the principle of the 'Two Power Standard'. This meant that the Royal Navy was to be as large as the combined fleets of the next two naval powers.

The army played a much less conspicuous role in sustaining Britain's position as a great power. As the only European power that did not introduce conscription after 1871, Britain lacked the mass army of her continental rivals. Furthermore, much of the British army was either deployed in the defence of India or was scattered throughout the rest of the empire. Although the reputation of the British army suffered from the disastrous experience of the Boer War of 1899–1902, her military forces had performed well in colonial campaigns until then.

Britain had a well-established parliamentary system of government, which was democratised by stages in the nineteenth century. The monarch reigned but did not rule – a very different situation from that of imperial Germany. The aristocracy still played a very prominent part in politics and public service, as well as participating in the world

of business, but they shared power and influence with the prosperous middle class. This was a much more open and meritocratic society than Germany's. Serious social problems existed in late nineteenth century Britain and labour unrest became intense at times, but the British political system seemed much better adapted to containing these stresses than its German counterpart. One important difference between the two systems was the simple fact that in Britain, the government of the day had to command a majority in parliament (especially in the House of Commons) to continue in office. Governments therefore took careful note of the views of MPs as well as of the press and the public. MPs tended to be particularly critical of government expenditure (since they and their constituents were taxpayers) which led to attempts to acquire empire 'on the cheap'.

* British foreign policy naturally reflected, in part, her interests as a commercial and imperial nation. Immense importance was attached to safeguarding the route to India so that Suez and the Cape were regarded as areas of strategic concern. The defence of India itself, threatened by Russia's expansion into Central Asia, was also a major anxiety. Since the navy was incapable of sailing up the Khyber Pass, the riposte to a Russian threat to India was to consider sending a fleet into the Black Sea, to threaten Russia's vulnerable southern coastline.

Traditionally, Britain also had been concerned to prevent any one power from dominating the European continent, as shown in the era of Napoleon, but from the mid-1860s to about 1900, the balance of power in Europe was not an important influence on British policy. This was the period of so-called 'Splendid Isolation' when British ministers were glad to be free of 'entangling alliances'. Nevertheless, Britain continued to be involved in European affairs, especially those relating to the Ottoman Empire and the Straits – the strategic waterway linking the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. By the turn of the century, however, many British statesmen were becoming convinced that Britain's resources were overstretched and that she needed allies if she were to maintain her role as a world power.

5 Austria-Hungary

From 1815 to 1848, the Austrian Chancellor, Metternich, exercised great influence in Europe, working closely with Russia and Prussia in an informal conservative alliance opposed to revolutionary movements. In 1854, however, Austria gave diplomatic support to Britain and France in the 'Crimean Coalition' against Russia, a sign that Austria was becoming more concerned about the fate of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans. This trend was accelerated by her territorial losses in north Italy and exclusion from influence in Germany, resulting from her defeat in the 'war of liberation' of 1859 and the Austro-

Prussian war of 1866. In 1867, a new constitution was issued, granting a form of self-government to Hungary.

By 1871, Austria-Hungary was almost an anachronism, a multinational state in an age of growing nationalism, while her status as a great power had been weakened in the course of the unification of Italy and Germany. After 1871, her decline relative to other great powers continued. The economic progress she made was dwarfed by that of other countries, while political problems hampered her development as a modern efficient state. As a result of such weaknesses, she lacked the military power to play a fully independent role in international affairs.

* Austria-Hungary, sometimes called the 'Dual Monarchy', consisted of two separate states. The kingdom of Hungary (then more than twice its present size) had its own government and parliament at Budapest. The rest was 'Austria', consisting of the original Germanic heartland of the Habsburg dynasty and other lands acquired at various times populated by Czechs, Poles, Italians and others. These peoples had their parliament at Vienna, the old capital of the former Austrian Empire. A further complication was the curious system of 'Common Ministers' for the army, foreign policy and for deciding tariff policy. In addition, the consent of both prime ministers was necessary on major issues affecting Austria and Hungary. The Dual Monarchy was a ramshackle empire that was rather inadequately governed with a cumbersome bureaucracy.

The fundamental problem was that of cohesion. There were problems of co-ordinating the policies and resources of the two states as well as the major issue of how to bind the nationalities together. The scale of the problem can be seen from the fact that mobilisation posters had to be printed in 15 separate languages! The Emperor, Franz Joseph, was popular and well-intentioned, but conflicts between the nationalities were endless. Concessions to one group only provoked protests or riots by another, making parliamentary government impossible in Austria. In Hungary the dominant nation, the Magyars, ignored the claims of 'inferior' peoples, such as Slovaks, Croats and Serbs. The intermingling of peoples meant that the nationalities problem was virtually insoluble, but the policy of 'Magyarisation' in Hungary had great significance because it alienated the traditionally loyal Croats as well as the Serbs. The result was a Serbo-Croat alliance within Austria-Hungary that looked beyond the borders of the state to the independent kingdom of Serbia as a means of escape from Magyar oppression. The 'south Slav' problem, as it was called, threatened Austria-Hungary with disintegration.

* By 1871, she regarded the Balkans as a vital sphere of political influence and economic activity. This raised the problem of whether to oppose Russia or co-operate with her in Balkan issues. In 1871, Austrian hopes of an anti-Russian alliance with Germany conflicted

with Bismarck's desire for good relations with Russia. In order to check Russian influence, Austrian policy was directed towards creating client states in the Balkans and propping up the Ottoman Empire. Co-operation with Britain in the 'Eastern Question' was another option that served Austria-Hungary well for a time. The growth of nationalism in the Balkan states, particularly after 1900, raised serious problems for her. The most serious was Serbian hostility, backed by Russia.

6 Russia

Tsarist Russia was a powerful reactionary force in European affairs in the first half of the nineteenth century. She also enjoyed great prestige as a military power after Napoleon's disastrous Moscow campaign in 1812. The 'Holy Alliance' proposed by Alexander I in 1815 (in one of his brief flirtations with liberalism) soon came to be synonymous with repression and the defence of monarchical authority throughout Europe. After the upheavals of 1848, the Tsarist regime – the only sizeable continental state impervious to the revolutionary fever – seemed once again to overshadow Europe, resuming the role of arbiter in the affairs of Germany.

Russia's defeat in the Crimean War of 1854–56 was therefore a shattering blow to the prestige of Tsardom and a source of deep humiliation to Russia, which had important results in both domestic and foreign affairs. Within Russia, it inspired an attempt to modernise the local government, the army and educational system, as well as the abolition of serfdom in 1861. The effect on Russian foreign policy was equally dramatic. From being the defender of the status quo, Russia became a 'revisionist' power – facilitating political changes in Europe in the hope of opportunities to abrogate the deeply-resented Black Sea clauses of the 1856 Treaty. Austria's 'treachery' in siding with the western powers in 1854 was repaid by Russia's neutral stance when Napoleon III, and later Bismarck, declared war on the Austrian Empire in 1859 and 1866. Her opportunity to denounce the 1856 Treaty came during the Franco-Prussian war.

Russia was both a European and an Asiatic power. From the 1860s Russian rule was being extended over Central Asia to the Far East. This mainly affected her relations with Britain because of the threat to India and to Britain's commercial interests in China.

But Russia was a colossus with feet of clay, as her defeat by Japan in the war of 1904–5 demonstrated. Enormous in extent, with a population (in European Russia) in 1910 equal to that of Germany and Austria-Hungary combined, Russia was making great strides towards overcoming her backwardness compared with the other great powers. Rapid industrialisation in the 1890s, yielding the highest

annual rate of increase in industrial production in the world (admittedly from a low base), produced an impressive expansion of heavy industry and of the railway network so that Russia was acquiring many of the trappings of a modern state. But a number of serious weaknesses prevented her from realising her full potential as a great power.

* Firstly, the Russian economy did not generate enough taxable wealth to meet the increasing needs of the state. Russian agriculture remained generally unproductive but grain from the richer regions had to be exported to pay for imported machinery for her industries. Industrialisation was also partly financed by massive foreign loans, but they increased the size of the state debt. If the peacetime army and navy was a heavy burden on the treasury, war itself was a luxury Russia could not afford. The war with Japan virtually bankrupted the state. Secondly, the persistence of widespread social and political discontent weakened the fabric of society and the state. Finally, one reason why such problems were not tackled more successfully was that the government was so incompetent. The Tsars clung to their autocratic powers, insisting on their divine mission, but they were quite incapable of ruling effectively. When a parliament, the *Duma*, was eventually permitted in 1905, it had little power to influence the government. On top of this, the Russian bureaucracy was notoriously corrupt and incompetent.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Russia was not the great military power that her size and resources suggested. Nor was it a coincidence that defeat was followed by revolution in 1905. The arbitrary nature of the Tsarist system of government also contributed directly to the unpredictability of Russian foreign policy, since the Tsar could be persuaded by individuals or groups to abandon the more cautious policies advocated by the foreign ministry.

* The formation of a united Germany in 1871, altering the political situation in Central Europe and creating a powerful neighbour on her western frontier, caused Russia considerable concern. In the Bismarck era (1871–90), Russia was content to work in association or alliance with Germany. The non-renewal of the alliance after Bismarck's fall led to an alliance with France, as a guarantee of security. This was not a very 'close' alliance, however, in that both sides had reservations about supporting the other on some issues and the Russians were tempted to renew their ties with Germany.

Russian policy towards the Ottoman Empire was a curious mixture of practical politics and romanticism. Control of the Straits, linking the Black Sea with the Mediterranean, would safeguard her economic and strategic interests. Unrestricted passage of merchant shipping through the Straits was vital to Russian trade, especially the export of grains from the Black Sea ports. The idea of recovering Constantinople from the Turks, on the other hand, was a dream that had excited the Russian imagination for over a century. However

impracticable, the idea still influenced Russian policy at various times.

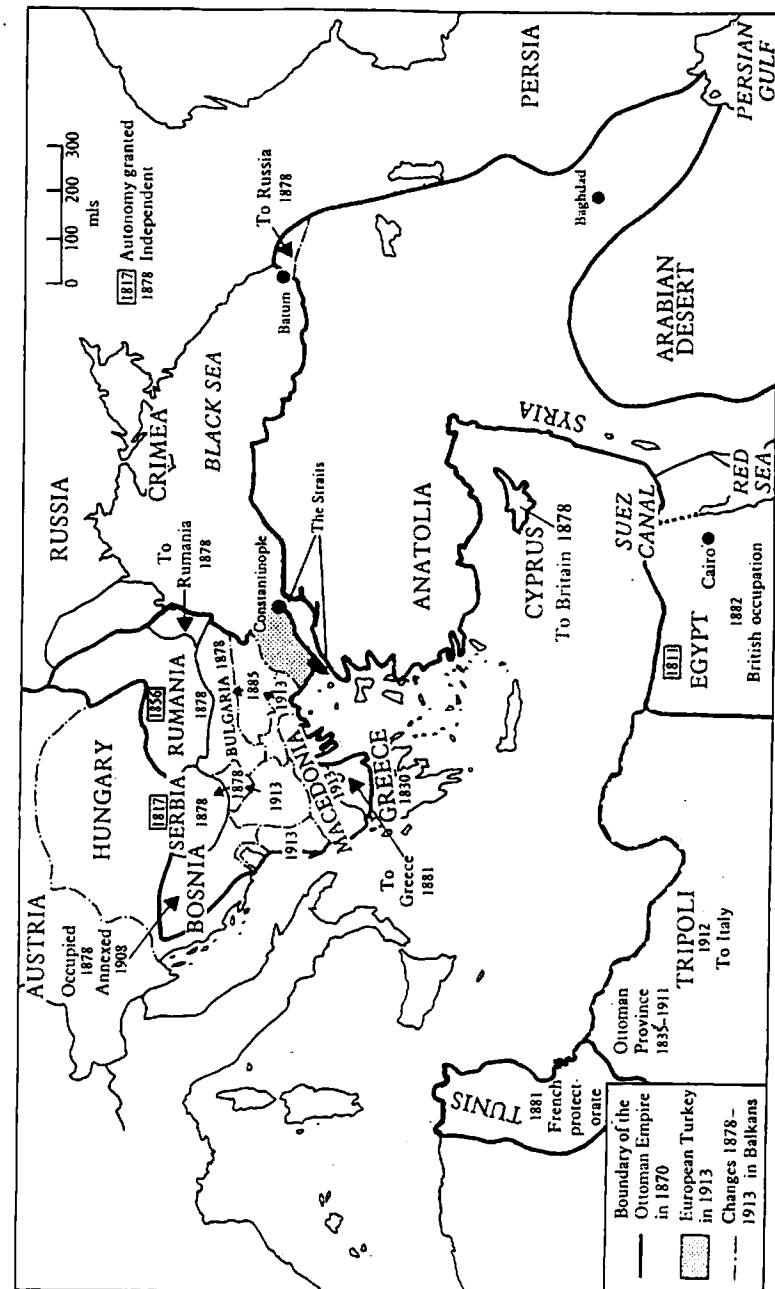
The official policy, pursued by the foreign ministry, was a cautious one, recognising that the 'Eastern Question' was a European question, a matter of concern to all the great powers. Russia would simply try to exploit favourable situations to secure advantages for herself or her protégés in the Balkans. Pan-Slavists, a motley collection of journalists, writers and generals, who believed Russia's 'destiny' lay in the Balkans, accepted no such restraints. They saw Russia's mission as the liberation of the Balkan Christians from Turkish oppression and the creation of independent Slav states under the protection of Mother Russia and the Orthodox Church.

A clash between Russia and Austria-Hungary over the Balkans was more or less inevitable, since Russian encouragement of Slav nationalism and her desire to weaken the Ottoman Empire spelt ruin for Austria-Hungary. Britain would also intervene if Russia was seen to have designs on the Straits or Constantinople. A new factor in the 1890s was the growth of German influence in Turkey as part of her economic penetration into the Near East. These conflicting ambitions could best be kept in check by the survival of the Ottoman Empire, 'the great shock-absorber of the European states system'.

7 The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was a great military empire in decline – 'the sick man of Europe', in a well-worn phrase. Only partly European, it was a multi-national empire stretching from the borders of Austria-Hungary and Russia through the Balkans into Asia Minor, Persia and Arabia and through Egypt along the coast of north Africa. By 1870, the Sultan's authority in many parts of his empire was only nominal. Integration of Turks, Slavs and others in European Turkey had never been systematically attempted. The races and religions, Muslim and Christian, simply co-existed, usually in a state of mutual animosity, until grievances provoked uprisings. The revolts might be directed against Muslim landowners or against the Turkish authorities, and were sometimes accompanied by ferocious slaughter on both sides. This in turn usually resulted in some form of intervention by the European great powers.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the 'Eastern Question' – the problems arising from the expectation that, as a British minister expressed it in 1830, 'this clumsy fabric of barbarous power will speedily crumble into pieces from its own inherent causes of decay' – caused a series of crises in international affairs. The decline, or possible disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, carried with it the danger of conflict amongst the great powers. Crises occurred when



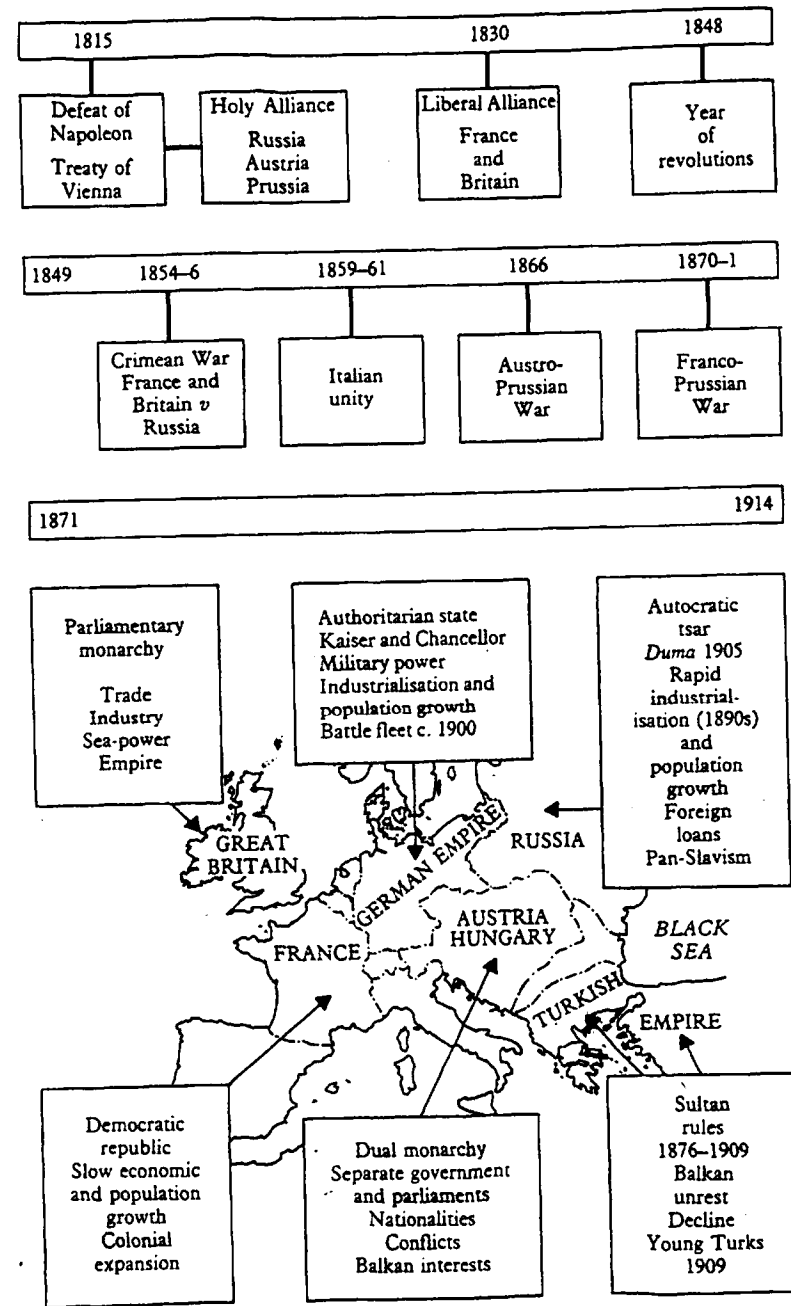
The decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1870-1913

either the interests or the particular areas of concern of one of the powers were infringed by someone else. This could be by one of the other powers or by one of their clients among the Balkan states, or by the Ottoman government itself.

* There was no simple solution to the Eastern Question in the period 1871 to 1914. Partition of the Turkish empire would probably result in war because there was little hope of agreement on how to divide it amongst the powers. An alternative was to assist the Balkan states to obtain autonomy (self-government) or even complete independence from Turkey, as Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Rumania had done earlier in the century. This solution was favoured by Russia, but opposed by Austria-Hungary. British governments also doubted the wisdom of weakening Turkey's ability to act as a barrier to Russian expansion into the Balkans or towards Constantinople and the Straits. The only other alternative was to 'prop-up' the Ottoman Empire in order to postpone its collapse, while putting pressure on the Turkish government to introduce reforms to improve the lot of its Christian subjects. This was the policy favoured by the majority of the powers, to which Russia reluctantly adhered at times. The attitudes of the powers, however, were liable to change according to the nature of the crisis. They were not always very consistent either - claiming to support the Ottoman Empire did not stop Britain or Austria-Hungary from acquiring Turkish territory!

In fact, Turkish sovereignty over European Turkey had been steadily eroded for over a century by the great powers, who claimed rights of protection over their co-religionists or special privileges for their resident nationals. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Turkish economy was subjected to increasing exploitation by European commercial groups, backed by their governments, who secured concessions for mining, manufacturing or transport facilities. Furthermore, in 1881, a largely European debt administration was set up to supervise the Turkish finances, following a declaration of bankruptcy.

Widespread resentment amongst the Muslim population at this sort of European interference (which 'westernising' ministers had encouraged) led to a dramatic change in government. Abdul Hamid II re-established his authority as the Sultan (from 1876 to 1909) and re-asserted traditional Muslim values. But with a corrupt and ineffective system of government, the Empire could do little more than fight a rearguard action against both nationalist movements from within and European interference from without. Fear of dismemberment of the Empire was quite strong, for the actions of the great powers did not always match their professed policy of maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Abdul Hamid's attempt to check the interference of the other great powers by encouraging German influence (for example, the Berlin-Baghdad railway) in the 1890s was only a partial success.



Summary - Europe and the Great Powers

John Lowe
Riviera Accord

The 'Young Turk' revolution of 1909 was a desperate attempt to rejuvenate the Empire. By modernising the country and creating a more liberal form of government, modelled on European examples, the Young Turks hoped to persuade the great powers to desist from interference in Turkish affairs. Their claim to be regarded as 'the Japan of the Near East' (a successful modernising Asiatic state) fell on deaf ears. Only a few years after the Young Turks came to power, the Balkan states joined together and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Turkish army. By 1913, European Turkey had been reduced to a mere fraction of its size in 1870. Within a decade, the Ottoman Empire itself had ceased to exist.

Making notes on 'Europe and the Great Powers'

As you read this introductory chapter, you should be aware that sections 2 to 7, on the European powers and Turkey, serve a dual purpose. Firstly, they give a brief summary of developments from 1815 to 1870. Secondly, they present a more analytical treatment of aspects of the domestic situation (political and economic) which influenced the foreign policy of the powers in the period 1871 to 1914, some key points of which are referred to. Try to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each state and note any particular issues or regions which were of concern to them. Consider how far this chapter enables you to answer these questions: What grouping of the European states would produce a 'balance of power' in 1871? Would that grouping require some states to change their traditional alignments? In what ways did the 'balance of power' change between 1871 and 1914? Your notes could be quite brief, as essay questions are not normally asked on the subject matter of this chapter.

The following headings and sub-headings should provide a basic framework:

1. The Franco-Prussian War
- 1.2. The European implications of it
2. Germany
 - 2.1. Bismarck's position 1871-90
 - 2.2. German industrialisation
3. France
 - 3.1. Changes in French foreign policy, 1871-1914
4. Great Britain
 - 4.1. Importance of sea-power
 - 4.2. Trade and strategy
5. Austria-Hungary
 - 5.1. Structure of the Dual Monarchy
 - 5.2. Importance of the Balkans
6. Russia

- 6.1. Financial problems
- 6.2. Reaction to a united Germany
7. The Ottoman Empire
 - 7.1. Solutions to the Eastern Question.