PART SIX: GERMAN FOREIGN AND COLONIAL POLICY

12 GERMANY AND EUROPE, 1871–90

As long as William I lived, German foreign policy was conducted by Bismarck alone. Although the quality of German diplomats was of the highest calibre, Bismarck's autocratic temperament in the long run served only to destroy their initiative and consequently his diplomatic system remained 'a one man band' [29 *p. 219*; 119]. The year 1871 marks a natural turning-point in his foreign policy: after three wars in a mere eight years there followed nearly twenty years of unbroken peace. Between 1862 and 1871 Bismarck had created a new Europe and, like Metternich in 1815, he now needed peace to preserve it.

The implications of France's defeat in 1871 were far reaching. Disraeli only slightly exaggerated contemporary fears when he observed that 'the war represents the German revolution . . . a greater event than the French Revolution of the last century' [14 *p. 23*]. The military and diplomatic balance had shifted from Paris to Berlin and it was uncertain whether Bismarck would be able to contain the momentum of German nationalism within the frontiers of 1871. Yet the new Germany was still a 'delicate compromise' [126 *p. 12*] which could be destroyed by a hostile European coalition. Bismarck therefore attempted to do 'everything to stave off the consequences of his own work' [32 *p. 140*] by assuring the great powers that Germany was 'saturated' and had no further territorial ambitions [*Doc. 44*].

THE LEAGUE OF THE THREE EMPERORS

In the immediate post-war years Bismarck was primarily concerned to prolong French isolation. Both the severe terms of the Treaty of Frankfurt and the instability of internal French politics militated against an immediate military and economic revival. In the long term, however, a French recovery was inevitable. The League of the Three Emperors of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia in 1873 is sometimes seen as a premeditated attempt to isolate France [24], but initially it was more the product of mutual Austro-Russian distrust. Anxious to ensure that Vienna did not exploit her increasingly cordial relations with Berlin to Russia's disadvantage in the Balkans, Alexander 'gate-crashed' [29 *p 172*] on Franz Joseph's visit to Germany in September 1872. In the subsequent hastily arranged tripartite talks Bismarck allayed Russia's suspicions and encouraged discussions on the maintenance of the *status quo* in the Balkans.

It was not until the following year, when a series of summits between the three Emperors produced the Agreements of 6 June and 22 October, that the League was finally created. Bismarck rejected plans for a Russo-German military pact and consequently the League remained essentially no more than an 'empty frame' [126 *p. 30*] in which the three powers stressed their desire for peace and agreed on mutual consultation before taking unilateral action in the event of war. Its conservative and anti-revolutionary bias has led to it being interpreted as 'a new Holy Alliance against revolution in all its forms' [134 *p. 25*], but it is more likely that Bismarck valued it chiefly as a means for isolating the French and enabling Germany to avoid making a choice between Russia and Austria. It initiated a policy which in varying degrees he attempted to follow until his resignation.

The League's limitations were first revealed by a sudden crisis with France in 1875. The speed with which the French had paid their indemnity and rebuilt their army alarmed the German government and persuaded Bismarck to resort to some crude sabre-rattling and to inspire a series of threatening articles in the German press. Among these was the notorious leader in the *Berliner Post* entitled 'Is War in Sight?' that suggested that he was about to launch a pre-emptive strike against France. Conscious that both Britain and Italy were equally alarmed, the Tsar visited William to express his concern, while Gorchakov, his Chancellor, demanded from Bismarck explicit assurances of peace. Although the crisis soon abated, Bismarck's miscalculations had enabled France to escape isolation and exposed the essential hollowness of the League of the Three Emperors [126].

THE EASTERN CRISIS, 1875–78

Bismarck's diplomacy was subjected to a more testing challenge when the very existence of the Turkish Empire in Europe was threatened by a chain of events, beginning in July 1875 with uprisings in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The possible collapse of Turkish power in the Balkans threatened to create a vacuum which both Austria and Russia would

compete to fill. At worst this might lead to Austro-Russian conflict in which the rival powers would each seek a German alliance. At best a conference would be held where again the two powers would compete for German diplomatic support. In both situations Bismarck would be placed in essentially the same dilemma: he would be forced to chose between Vienna and St Petersburg, with the consequence that the unsuccessful power would attribute its defeat to German intervention and so look towards France. Initially Bismarck attempted to reduce the growing tension between Russia and Austria-Hungary, while he avoided giving the Tsar the decisive backing he desired. Despite the brutal crushing of the Bulgarian revolt by Turkish forces and the declaration of war on Turkey by Serbia and Montenegro, Russia and Austria-Hungary were still able to co-operate throughout the summer of 1876. At *Reichstadt* in July they drew up provisional plans for a peaceful partition of the Balkans. However, when Turkey, contrary to expectations, defeated both Serbia and Montenegro, Alexander came under increasing Pan Slav* pressure to intervene. In October he asked the German government bluntly whether it would remain neutral in the event of war with Austria. Bismarck's reply was evasive and infuriated Gorchakov. He reiterated his hope for an Austro-Russian accord and stressed that Germany could ill afford to see either empire permanently weakened [115; 134; 146].

The immediate threat of war abated when the great powers accepted a British proposal in November for an international conference to impose internal reforms on Turkey. When these were rejected by the Sultan in January 1877, Turkey was effectively isolated and, after talks in Budapest, Austria at last agreed in March to Russian intervention at the price of acquiring Bosnia and Herzegovina.

These developments did not prevent Russo-German relations during the winter of 1876–77 deteriorating to a point where the Prussian General Staff professed alarm at Russian troop movements in Poland. Bismarck, concerned by reports of a Russian diplomatic initiative in Paris, attempted both to exploit British suspicion of Russia's Balkan policy by proposing an Anglo-German alliance and to draw closer to Vienna. In November 1876 he told the Austro-Hungarian ambassador that any weakening of the Dual Monarchy 'would be contrary to German interests', and in February 1877, when London rejected an alliance, he added that he was considering a 'permanent organic link' between the two empires [81 *pp. 495 and 443*].

Although the coolness between Berlin and St Petersburg partly reflected the personal animosity between Bismarck and Gorchakov

and the Tsar's irritation that Germany had not proved a more reliable friend, it was also a result of fundamental changes in the social, economic and political structures of the two states. These were causing a growing friction that steadily exacerbated diplomatic differences. As a consequence of the prolonged European depression, Russian industrialists, supported by Pan Slavs amongst the intelligentsia and in the government, were becoming increasingly resentful of German economic penetration. They attempted to counter growing Russian dependence on German finance by urging their government to raise loans in Paris and to protect the Russian home market with high tariffs. The government responded, and in 1877 the German export trade was severely damaged when Russian tariffs were abruptly raised by 50 per cent. This was followed by further increases of 10 per cent in both 1881 and 1884 [131].

Russia invaded Turkey in April 1877, but the Turkish force held out unexpectedly at Plevna and it was not until January 1878 that the Russians at last reached Constantinople. They then proceeded to negotiate a settlement that ignored the Budapest agreements and was consequently repudiated by both London and Vienna. To avoid a European war Bismarck had little option but to propose a congress in Berlin. Bismarck had hoped to deflect Russian hostility away from Austria and Germany towards Britain, but he failed, as his very neutrality and refusal to put pressure on Vienna was 'in essence a decisively anti-Russian act' [146 *p. 248*]. This forced Russia to come to terms with Britain even before the congress met. Although Russia made some very real gains at the congress, the partitioning of Bulgaria, which was interpreted as an attempt to hinder the spread of Russian influence in the Balkans, and the occupation of Cyprus and Bosnia and Herzegovina by Britain and Austria-Hungary respectively, gave rise to the bitter complaint in Russia that the congress had been 'a European coalition against Russia under the leadership of Prince Bismarck' [36 *p. 113*].

THE DUAL ALLIANCE AND THE THREE EMPERORS' ALLIANCE

In the immediate aftermath of the congress Bismarck tried to revive the League of the Three Emperors, but by November it was clear that this was no longer possible. In the winter of 1878–79 he began to work towards an alliance with Austria-Hungary. Historians disagree about his motives. Some argue that Bismarck hoped to pacify Austria-Hungary and to compel 'Russia to adopt a more peaceful

policy' [148 *p. 250*] and that consequently his emphasis on the organic character of the alliance [*Doc. 45*] was merely 'an emotional coating' [32 *p. 209*] for home consumption. On the other hand Langer, who described the alliance as 'the logical completion of German unification begun in the 1860's' [134 *p. 196*], and more recent German historians credit Bismarck with the much more fundamental aim of creating a Central European *bloc* or *Mitteleuropa*. This would both provide 'a sphere of influence for the commercial and political dynamism of the new Reich' [81 *p. 591*] and hold the balance between the emerging giants of Russia in the east and the British Empire in the west [25]. The alliance was also potentially popular within Germany as it appealed to Catholics, National Liberals, Conservatives and the army. At a time of intense political divisions over tariffs, therefore, it can also be seen as a means for creating an internal consensus.

Emperor William remained stubbornly loyal to the Tsar and hostile to the Austrian alliance, but Bismarck's policy was facilitated by the increasing hostility of the Russian government. This was heightened by close Austro-German co-operation on the various technical commissions supervising the execution of the Berlin Treaty and then further by the German tariff of July 1879 which discriminated against Russian grain imports. The German grain tariffs [*Doc. 40*] were a particularly severe blow against the Russian economy. Over the next decade they did much to strengthen anti-German feeling at St Petersburg. Three-quarters of all Russian exports were in corn, most of which went to Germany, and the profits played an important part in financing the industrialisation of Russia. [12; 122].

In August the Tsar crudely attempted to bring Germany to heel by writing directly to William the so-called 'Box on the Ears Letter' in which he bluntly warned him of the consequences to Russo-German relations of Bismarck's policy. Chancellor and Emperor disagreed profoundly in their reaction. For Bismarck, acutely conscious that the pro-German Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Andrassy, was about to resign, it was the signal to accelerate negotiations with Austria. William, on the other hand, visited the Tsar in an attempt to lessen the tension. Fearful that William would surrender abjectly and commit Germany to an alliance with an unstable Russia, Bismarck, in a series of lengthy memoranda at the beginning of September, argued strongly that only an Austrian alliance could stabilise the Balkans, prevent the isolation of Germany, and compel Russia to agree to the re-creation of the Three Emperors' League. In the end it was Bismarck's threatened resignation that finally persuaded William to

sign the Austrian treaty on 7 October. The Dual Alliance was a 'landmark in European history' [36 *p. 114*], but it fell far short of Bismarck's original *bloc* concept and even failed to secure Austro-Hungarian support in the event of war with France. For an initial period of five years it provided that if either power were attacked by Russia, its ally would come to its assistance, but that if either partner were attacked by any other power, then its ally would observe benevolent neutrality [134; 146].

Even while Bismarck was concluding this alliance with Austria, he began to restore Germany's relations with Russia. Alexander, having failed to call Bismarck's bluff, indicated in late September 1879, when he sent Saburov to Berlin, that he desired a *rapprochement* with Germany and would even consider a new tripartite agreement involving Austria. The Saburov mission was a diplomatic victory for Bismarck as it vindicated his belief that Russian policy would become more flexible in response to a definite Austro-German alliance. Little progress could be made, however, until Austria was ready to give up the prospect of a British alliance. When Gladstone won the general election in April 1880 and abandoned Disraeli's hawkish policy in the Balkans, the Austrians agreed to tripartite talks in Berlin in August 1880. Having guaranteed her empire against Russia, Bismarck could now afford to exert pressure on Austria to respond to Russian demands less negatively. In his desire to square the circle he had to mislead the Russians into believing that the Dual Alliance did not entail the automatic defence of Austria-Hungary by Germany in the event of a Russian attack. The Three Emperors' Alliance was concluded initially for three years on 18 June 1881 [*Doc. 46*]. Although it was 'a hard-headed practical agreement' [32 *p. 209*], it was in many ways 'little more than an armistice' [12 *p. 110*] as it did not remove the long-term causes of Austro-Russian rivalry in the Balkans. Austria conceded the eventual reunification of Bulgaria in exchange for the recognition of her right at some future date to annex outright Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russian security was strengthened by the reaffirmation of the closure of the Straits to warships, which effectively put the Black Sea beyond the range of the British navy. Bismarck was, at least temporarily, freed from the fear of a Franco-Russian treaty by the declaration that in the event of war with a fourth great power, the signatory powers would be bound to benevolent neutrality [134; 138; 148].

The Alliance of the Three Emperors did not lead to a stable Russo-German *détente*. The humiliation of Russia at the Berlin Congress had the effect of 'unbalancing psychologically the designing of

Russian foreign policy' [131 *p. 417*] and of strengthening Pan Slav influence. The young and inexperienced Alexander, who succeeded his father in 1881, received conflicting advice from his pro-German Foreign Minister, Giers, and such Pan Slav ministers as Katkov, Pobedonostev and Dmitri Tolstoy. He reacted to this by attempting to implement both viewpoints simultaneously. Giers was encouraged to seek close diplomatic co-operation with Berlin, while behind his back the nationalists and Pan Slavs in the foreign office and the military high command were permitted to intrigue in the Balkans and mastermind anti-German press campaigns. The increasing anti-German bias to Russian policy became apparent in December 1881 when the ardent Pan Slav Nikolai Obruchev was appointed to the General Staff and the construction of strategic military railways was begun in Russian Poland. In January 1882 Bismarck was particularly annoyed when the popular and charismatic General Skobelev addressed a meeting of Serbian students in Paris and described the Germans as the natural enemies of the Slavs [131].

To preserve the alliance Bismarck had both to deter Pan Slav hostility and encourage Giers at the Russian foreign office. Consequently when Italy, annoyed by the French occupation of Tunis, proposed an alliance with Austria, Bismarck seized on the chance to create a Triple Alliance which indirectly strengthened Austria. Superficially the terms favoured Italy, in that the Central Powers would assist her in the event of a French attack, while in return she would support them militarily only if they were attacked by two other great powers. The real gain for Bismarck, however, was that Austria was freed from the fear of an Italian attack, should war break out with Russia. Austria's position was further consolidated by an alliance with Serbia in June 1882 and with Rumania in 1883, to which Germany also acceded, thereby forming 'a clear defensive alliance against Russia' [146 *p. 277*]. Simultaneously, Bismarck also attempted to mitigate the growing economic tension between Russia and Germany by refusing demands from both *Junkers* and industrialists for further tariff increases. Despite this there were large increases in 1885 and 1887 [*Doc. 40*]. He also used Russian dependence on German capital as an inducement to secure a more co-operative policy and he facilitated the renewal of the Three Emperors' Alliance in March 1884 by persuading Bleichröder and other German financiers to subscribe to Russian loans floated on the Berlin capital market [107; 142].

THE FRANCO-GERMAN ENTENTE

The emergence of a moderate and peaceful bourgeois republic in France by 1877 had enabled Bismarck, contrary to his earlier fears, to concentrate on the 'Eastern Question' without any real danger from French revisionism. Bismarck had every interest in keeping France pacific and as early as 1878 he began to prepare the ground for a Franco-German *entente.** He supported French interests in Rumania, the Near East and North Africa and made no secret of his motives when he told the French ambassador in 1880, 'I want you to turn your eyes from Metz and Strasburg by helping you to find satisfaction elsewhere' [146 *p. 272*]. Bismarck was delighted to see the French 'scatter their energies in new areas while picking up new enemies on the way' [107 *p. 330*]. He encouraged them to take Tunis and exploited their resentment of the British occupation of Egypt in 1882.

Although Bismarck's colonial policy was primarily motivated by commercial considerations [154], Taylor has argued that the German seizure of African colonies in 1884 was an attempt 'to make herself presentable to France [by] provok[ing] a quarrel with England so that Franco-German friendship should have the solid basis of anglophobia' [158 *p. 18*]. It is argued in the next chapter that co-operation with France was a consequence rather than a cause of Bismarck's colonial policy, as for a brief period he genuinely needed French support against the British. Nevertheless, it did provide him with opportunities to reinforce the general direction of his policy. In August 1884 he negotiated a Franco-German colonial *entente* and then co-operated closely with Paris in preparing the agenda for the Berlin Congo Conference. He surprised the French premier, Jules Ferry, with a proposal for an 'Association' of continental powers as a 'counterweight to English colonial supremacy' [161 *p. 385*]. He may have been momentarily reverting to his concept of a continental *bloc* as a balance to the growing strength of the British Empire and Russia [25]. The *entente* began to weaken as early as February 1885. The defeat of the moderate Republicans in the French elections effectively terminated Franco-German co-operation and led to the appointment as war minister of the strongly anti-German General Boulanger in January 1886.

THE BULGARIAN CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In September 1885 the Eastern Crisis again erupted when Bulgaria united under Prince Alexander of Battenberg. The Tsar now opposed

unification as he feared the pro-British and German tendencies of the prince who had married Princess Victoria, the granddaughter of both Kaiser Wilhelm and Queen Victoria. Initially the unity of the Three Emperors' Alliance was not threatened as Austria and Russia agreed on the necessity of restoring the *status quo*. Then in November 1885 Serbia attacked Bulgaria in an attempt to enforce a new partition, but was decisively beaten at Slivnitza. Russia reacted by exerting renewed pressure on Prince Alexander, which led first to his kidnapping and then to his resignation. This in turn alarmed Austria who announced in November 1886 that a Russian occupation of Bulgaria would be unacceptable [*Doc. 47*]. On the other hand Bismarck, ready in the final resort to tolerate a Russian occupation of Bulgaria, tried to restrain both his allies whom he compared to 'two savage dogs' [30 Vol. 3 *p. 225*] [*Doc. 47*].

Although Bismarck exploited the rise of General Boulanger to fight a general election at a favourable moment, the conjunction of the Bulgarian crisis with the renewed threat from France was potentially dangerous. Bismarck was particularly concerned that this might lead ultimately to a Franco-Russian alliance. He 'manoeuvred desperately' [131 *p. 421*], therefore, to preserve a link with Russia whilst simultaneously strengthening Austria-Hungary. He encouraged Britain, Italy and Austria-Hungary to conclude the first Mediterranean Agreement in February 1887 to contain Russia in the Balkans and at the Straits.

The Tsar refused to renew the Three Emperors' Alliance but agreed to negotiate with Germany alone what became known as the Reinsurance Treaty of 18 June 1887. Bismarck made considerable concessions, secretly acknowledging Russia's right to exert a dominant influence in Bulgaria and agreeing to the closure of the Straits to warships of all foreign powers. However, to maintain the Dual Alliance with Austria-Hungary, he had to consent to a Russian proposal binding both signatories of the Reinsurance Treaty to neutrality in a war fought by the other with a third power, except in the situation where Germany attacked France or Russia attacked Austria. Bismarck had at least lessened the danger of a Franco-Russian alliance, but he had committed Germany to support Russia in Bulgaria in contradiction to Austria-Hungary's wishes, and consequently he ran the risk of encouraging the very war in the Balkans he wished to avert.

The pressure on Bismarck eased when Boulanger was dropped from the French cabinet in May 1887, but the Reinsurance Treaty did not immediately lessen the tension in the Balkans. Russia viewed the

election in July of Prince Ferdinand of Coburg to the Bulgarian throne as an Austrian conspiracy. Throughout the autumn the familiar manifestations of Russian displeasure with Germany were exhibited: there were fresh troop movements on the Polish frontier and constant attacks on Bismarck in the press. Bismarck had initially been sympathetic to Russian protests, but he did not hesitate to use financial pressure to avert a Russian occupation of Bulgaria, even though in the longer term this would strengthen Russian financial ties with France. In November the German government effectively vetoed a loan to Russia when it ordered the *Reichsbank* not to accept Russian bonds as collateral security for loans. This led to a sudden collapse of confidence in Russian credit and a dramatic decline in the value of Russian securities held in Germany [134]. In December Bismarck created a further bulwark against Russia when he successfully persuaded Britain, Austria and Italy to conclude the second Mediterranean Agreement, which aimed to preserve the *status quo* in the Near East.

Bismarck's complex financial and diplomatic moves restrained the Tsar from overt military action, but for the next two years Russia consistently attempted to undermine Ferdinand and to isolate Bulgaria. Russia also turned to the French money market where, in March 1890, a loan was so oversubscribed that she was able to finance large-scale and threatening military manoeuvres on the German, Austro-Hungarian and Rumanian frontiers [134]. Paradoxically the accession of William II, who listened to the anti-Russian counsels of General Waldersee and the diplomat von Holstein and showed a marked preference for a British alliance, made the tsar more appreciative of Bismarck and anxious to renew the Reinsurance Treaty. Bismarck was ready to extend the treaty indefinitely, but he was dismissed in March 1890 before negotiations could begin. Convinced by Caprivi, Bismarck's successor, that a renewal would alienate Britain and contradict the spirit of the Triple Alliance, William allowed it to lapse in June and 'one of the pivotal agreements' [134 *p. 503*] of Bismarck's alliance system collapsed.

Reacting against Langer's famous encomium that 'no other statesman of (Bismarck's) standing had ever before shown the same great moderation and sound political sense of the possible and the desirable' [134 *pp. 503–4*], more sceptical historians have described his complex and contradictory alliance system as a 'conjuring trick' [146 *p. 278*], castigated it for 'expediency rather than creativity' [36 *p. 102*] and argued that the preservation of peace was in fact more a result of 'the good sense and moderation of others' [148 *p. 254*] than

the inherent consequence of Bismarck's genius. Ultimately Bismarck's alliance system failed because it did not remove the basic causes of international instability. Bismarck had the 'simple and logical' [131 *p. 421*] aims of both preventing an Austro-Russian war and discouraging either power from allying with France against Germany. However, as this involved an assumption of permanent French isolation and of close co-operation between Vienna, St Petersburg and Berlin, it was unsustainable in the long term. There was no guarantee that the multiracial and multilingual Austria-Hungary would not fragment and that Russian expansionism could indefinitely be kept in check. Bismarck therefore had little option but to pursue a 'system of stopgaps' [130]. Bismarck's diplomacy was also becoming unpopular within Germany where economic differences with Russia and a hostile reaction against the anti-German bias of Pan Slav opinion made the doctrine of preventive war against Russia and co-operation with Austria-Hungary increasingly attractive [69].

13 THE CREATION OF THE GERMAN COLONIAL EMPIRE

BISMARCK'S MOTIVES

The haste with which Bismarck in 1884–85 created a colonial empire five times the size of the German *Reich* is one of the most controversial aspects of his chancellorship. Up to that point he had always apparently dismissed colonial acquisitions as an expensive luxury comparable to 'a poverty stricken Polish nobleman providing himself with silks and sables when he needed shirts' [159 *p. 160*].

There have been attempts to resolve the problem, as Taylor does, by arguing that German colonies were 'the accidental by-product of an abortive Franco-German *entente*' [158 *p. 6*], or by casting Bismarck in the role of a crypto-imperialist, who since 1871 had patiently laid his plans for a colonial empire. Mary Townsend, for example, interprets the despatch of German consuls to Africa and the South Seas in the early seventies as evidence of 'cautious preparation and watchful waiting' [159 *p. 62*]. Other historians argue that Bismarck's imperialism was principally motivated by short-term domestic objectives and that he played the colonial card in 1884 'like a magician producing a rabbit from a hat' [36 *p. 167*] to strengthen the appeal of the National Liberals in the autumn elections. It would be rash to deny that there was an element of opportunism in Bismarck's colonial policy. Thanks to the success of the *Kolonialverein** (founded in 1882 to promote colonial acquisitions), and the growing consensus of opinion among leading National Liberals that imperialism would help reunite their party, the prospect of an active colonial policy was a potentially popular election cry. Economically it would also appease the free traders and the strong mercantile interests in Hamburg and Bremen which deeply resented Germany's move to protectionism. Conscious of the apparently imminent accession of the anglophile crown prince, Bismarck may also have favoured imperialism as an issue which could be exploited to produce an immediate quarrel with the British, should there be an attempt to dismiss him in favour of a 'German Gladstone ministry' [24 *p. 274*].

Such essentially opportunist interpretations are rejected by Wehler [161; 162], who describes Bismarck's colonial policy more 'as manipulated social imperialism'. By this he means that Bismarck, in the interests of the traditional social and economic power structures of the Prussian-German state, sought to create a climate of co-operation and through colonial adventures stability within the *Reich* by diverting attention away from divisive domestic problems [*Doc. 6*]. The very comprehensiveness of this view has led to further debate. Kennedy, drawing on a series of detailed studies [153; 155; 160] of Bismarck's colonial policy, argues that the concept of social imperialism, although relevant to the later Wilhelmine period, is not applicable to the eighties. He interprets Bismarck's policy rather as a pragmatic and limited response to pressure on German trade in Africa and the South Seas, and to his determination that Germans 'should not be pushed out of tropical markets where they had been operating for years at a time when industry and trade were already in the doldrums' [154 *p. 139*]. Finally none of these reasons would have been sufficient to persuade Bismarck to join the race for colonies if the international situation had not also been favourable. All the European Great Powers needed the support of Germany during the period 1883–85 and thus were not in a position to object strongly to Bismarck's new colonial policy.

In the early eighties German merchants faced increasing competition in Africa and the Pacific. In New Guinea their interests were threatened by the territorial ambitions of the British Australian colony of Queensland, and the cabinet in London had imperiously rejected a request for setting up a joint commission to review the claims of German merchants on the Fiji islands [*Doc. 48*]. At the same time colonial trading companies in Hamburg and Bremen were pessimistic about their prospects in Africa. In the summer of 1883 Bismarck was so alarmed by reports that an Anglo-French partition of west Africa was imminent that he took the unusual step of consulting the Hamburg chamber of commerce, which confirmed his fears. Bismarck was persuaded in August to drop his lukewarm attitude towards the plans of F. L. Lüderitz, a Bremen tobacco merchant, for setting up a trading station on the south-west African coast at Angra Pequena, and not only to grant him consular protection but also to enquire whether Britain had any claims to the territory. It is possible that Bismarck had already decided on annexation, but he may have been hoping for written confirmation of British indifference so that he would be able to avoid the expense of a formal annexation [160].

It has been observed that 'in their almost incredible bungling born of complacency and arrogance, Lord Granville at the Foreign Office and Lord Derby at the Colonial Office must be regarded as the patron saints of Bismarck's empire' [107 *p. 410*]. In November Bismarck was ambiguously informed that while Britain did not exercise sovereignty over the south-west African coast, she would regard it as an infringement of her 'legitimate rights' [160 *p. 62*] for another power to claim it. In December, when Bismarck sought clarification, he received no answer for six months. His suspicions were further aroused by the activities of local British officials at Cape Town and on the Gold Coast, who were pressing for the annexation of south-west Africa, Togoland and the Cameroons. German traders were also alarmed at the implications for the future of German trade in Central Africa when the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of February 1884 allotted the mouth of the river Congo to Portugal, a power seen as a British satellite in Africa.

THE ANNEXATIONS IN AFRICA AND THE FAR EAST

In the spring of 1884 Bismarck decided to grant formal protection not only to Lüderitz's acquisitions [*Doc. 48*] but also to German trading interests in Togoland, the Cameroons and New Guinea, and he despatched plenipotentiaries to West Africa and the South Pacific to negotiate with the relevant local chieftains. Bismarck's reservations about the cost of colonies had been overcome by a formula devised by von Kusserow, a foreign office official, which by ceding responsibility for the internal administration of the territories to the trading companies themselves, would leave the *Reich* only with responsibility for external protection. The British were informed of the decision to protect Lüderitz in a cryptic note on 24 April, which Taylor interprets as a manoeuvre to goad Britain into opposition [146; 158]. It is more likely to have been a deliberate attempt to mislead London so as to prevent any last minute effort to pre-empt German plans in south-west Africa and elsewhere. In retrospect this secrecy was justified, as the British did in fact send out an official to annex the Cameroons, who, unaware of rival German plans, arrived five days too late [160; 161].

Bismarck took the obvious step of bringing pressure to bear on the British by exploiting Anglo-French differences in Egypt, and in August 1884 Germany ostentatiously supported France at the international conference on Egyptian finances in London. He also needed French support to counter Anglo-Portuguese policy in the Congo.

When a blunt German refusal to recognise the validity of the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of February 1884 led to the convocation of the Congo Conference in Berlin in December, Bismarck was particularly anxious to secure in advance French co-operation. Ironically, despite his repeated threats to organise a league of neutrals against Britain, a common desire to preserve free trade in the Congo led to an unexpected Anglo-German *rapprochement* and a corresponding weakening of the Franco-German *entente*. Bismarck was satisfied when the powers set up the Congo Free State under Belgian administration and stipulated that its frontiers were to remain open to international commerce.

Bismarck also hoped to strengthen German access to central African markets by negotiating with the Sultan of Zanzibar, who controlled an extensive stretch of the east African coast, a commercial treaty on such favourable terms to the *Reich* that the Sultan would virtually become a client monarch of the *Kaiser*. This essentially diplomatic approach was threatened by the conquistatorial activities of Carl Peters, the eccentric founder of the Society for German Colonization. Attempting to emulate the deeds of his heroes, Warren Hastings and Clive, he penetrated the east African interior and rapidly concluded a series of treaties with the local chiefs by which he secured some 60,000 square miles of land. Rapidly transforming his Colonial Society into a trading company, he was able to persuade Bismarck of the commercial potential of the territory and gain Imperial protection in February 1885. The Sultan's objections to Peters' activities were over come by a naval demonstration, and finally in December a commercial treaty covering the transit of goods through the Sultan's territory was signed [161].

Although Britain disliked Germany's colonial policy, she was distracted by French hostility in Egypt and Russian threats in Asia, and therefore had no choice but to tolerate it. In June 1884 the British cabinet recognised the German *fait accompli* in south-west Africa and in October the protectorates in Togo and the Cameroons. In 1885 Britain abandoned her claims to north-eastern New Guinea and the adjacent islands of New Britain. By the Anglo-German agreement of October 1886 Britain finally recognised the German possessions in east Africa.

BISMARCK'S DISILLUSION WITH THE COLONIES

None of these territories was to prove profitable. Bismarck had hoped to create a colonial empire on the cheap, but having once

intervened, the *Reich* was unable to extricate itself. In Togo and the Cameroons the *Reich* failed to devolve responsibility for internal administration to the local merchants and, where administrative responsibility was handed over to a chartered company, the experiment was short-lived. In 1888 the East African Company provoked the African population into rebellion compelling Bismarck to send troops and partially to suspend its charter. Meanwhile the South-West African Company showed itself so incompetent that its powers were vested in an Imperial Commissioner, and in 1889 the New Guinea Company went bankrupt [156; 159; 161].

It is not surprising that Bismarck rapidly became disillusioned with colonies, as they proved to be a financial and administrative burden rather than a cheap means of guaranteeing a prosperous colonial trade. Apart from an unsuccessful attempt to strengthen the East African Company by acquiring the lease of some important coastal strips from Zanzibar in 1888, Bismarck sanctioned no further expansion. He showed no interest in plans for annexing Uganda and in early 1890 even favoured selling up German commercial interests in Samoa to the Americans. Increasingly he looked towards China and Latin America to provide potential export markets [155; 161].

Bismarck's motives for this *volte face* are unclear. To historians like Taylor believing in the principle of the primacy of foreign policy in modern German history it is the natural consequence of the failure of the French *entente* and of Germany's need for British support during the Bulgarian crisis. The diplomatic situation certainly played some part, but it is probable that he was influenced at least as much by the financial failure of his colonial policy. Hence on pragmatic commercial grounds he became increasingly sceptical of the value of Germany's new colonies.