A Fancy of Prince Bismarck?

Bismarck's Strategic Aims for the Expulsions of 1885

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Abstract

In 1885, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck ordered the expulsion of over 30,000 non-naturalized Poles and Jews from Germany's Prussian provinces. This article explores Bismarck's strategic aims behind his decision to authorize one of the most extreme policies of his career. After examining the current historiographical assertion that the expulsions were a manifestation of antisemitic and anti-Polish clamor within German society, this article investigates Bismarck's strategic aims for the expulsions within the context of domestic politics and international relations. This article argues that these policies actually aimed to harm Bismarck's parliamentary critics and foreign powers threatening the Reich that he had constructed.

Article

> We are told we must leave—leave home and every kind of business for a fancy of Prince Bismarck. It seemed too ridiculous, too mad, too barbarous. But there was no mistake at all. Who is to thwart Prince Bismarck in his *pia desiderata?* Would you believe they have obliged already 35,000 people to leave this province, selling off in a hurry, some larger properties, some their miserable furniture? No one is excepted, neither women nor children.
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> "A Friend of Poland" to *The Times,* November 1885[1]

This letter to *The Times* reveals the degradation and social upheaval that families were forced to endure as a consequence of Otto von Bismarck's order to expel over 30,000 non-naturalized Poles and Jews from the Prussian provinces in 1885. Citizenship in Imperial Germany was based on the principle of *ius sanguinis:* a subject held the citizenship of their parents, primarily through their father. If a foreigner had settled in Germany but had not been granted legal citizenship by the state, their children and grandchildren were also not guaranteed citizenship, even if they were born in Germany. It was left to the state's

[1] Anonymous, "The Expulsion of the Poles from Prussia," *The Times,* November 26, 1885, 18, https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=41&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=16&docId=GALE%7CCS302827898&docType=Letter+to+the+editor&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZTMA-MOD1&prodId=TTDA&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCS302827898&searchId=R2&userGroupName=stand&inPS=true, accessed November 26, 2021.

discretion who received a "certificate of naturalization."[2] The letter to *The Times* shows how arbitrarily the state appeared to expel people based on this citizenship law. People had to leave their homes for "a fancy of Prince Bismarck."

Many onlookers were equally bewildered as to why Bismarck had endorsed this overtly inhumane policy. *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (General Newspaper of Judaism; *AZDJ*), an influential liberal newspaper, described the expulsions as inconsistent with both the interests and legal norms of the state. Deputies in the Landtag too argued that there was no economic sense behind the expulsions, with migratory Russian and Austrian workers a crucial part of the Junker economy.[3]

Historians have attempted to uncover the rationale behind the expulsions. Many who have explored the experiences of minority groups within the Reich, such as Poles and Jews, have concluded that the expulsions were the government's antisemitic and anti-Polish attempt to tackle social and demographic change in Prussia. Dieter Gosewinkel suggests that the expulsions were a way of addressing the state's problem of integrating non-German speakers into Germany, while Jack Wertheimer argues that they were the state's response to the influx of Russian Jews in Germany, who had fled the pogroms triggered by the assassination of Alexander II in 1881.[4]

Often historians have studied the expulsions of 1885 as part of a long-term colonial strategy enacted by the state to "Germanize" the eastern Prussian provinces. Robert Lewis Koehl has argued that they were a planned precursor to the more elaborate Royal Prussian Colonization Commission, which sought to settle western Germans in the Prussian-Polish provinces from 1886-1918.[5] Richard Blanke has contested Koehl's view. He has argued that Bismarck called for the creation of the colonization commission to spite Reichstag deputies because of their fervid reaction against his decision to carry out the expulsions.[6] Whilst Blanke credibly differentiated the expulsions from the colonial policy that followed, like Koehl, he primarily focuses on Prussian-Polish policies post 1885, providing a limited analysis of the expulsions.

There has been a lack of recent scholarship in the English language that gives a detailed, standalone account of the expulsions. Even less work has attempted to cover Bismarck's rationale for endorsing this provocative policy. The most up-to-date biography of Bismarck,

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[2] Anonymous, "Law on Nationality and Citizenship (June 1, 1870)," German History in Documents and Images, http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1830, accessed February 26, 2021.
[3] Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire: The Mass Expulsions in Germany, 1871-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 104, 136.
[4] Peter C. Caldwell, review of *Einbürgern und Ausschliessen: Die Nationalisierung der Staatsangehörigkeit vom Deutschen Bund bis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* [Naturalization and Exclusion: The Nationalization of Citizenship from the German Confederation to the Federal Republic of Germany], by Dieter Gosewinkel. *The Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 2 (June 2003): 453; Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcomed Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 42-47.
[5] Robert Lewis Koehl, "Colonialism inside Germany: 1886-1918," *The Journal of Modern History* 25, no. 3 (September 1953): 260.
[6] Richard Blanke, "Bismarck and the Prussian Polish Policies of 1886," *The Journal of Modern History* 45, no. 2 (June 1973); 215.

Jonathan Steinberg's *Bismarck: A Life*, surprisingly does not mention the expulsions.[7] Matthew Fitzpatrick's more recent *Purging the Empire* covers the policy in detail but attributes the main motivation behind the expulsions to provincial pressure, giving a limited exploration of Bismarck's own strategic aims for a decision that brought his reputation into question, both domestically and internationally. [8]

This article argues that Bismarck had his own strategic aims in ordering the expulsions of 1885. Firstly, I show that while Bismarck shared German society's antisemitic and anti-Polish tendencies of the time, his views were not pronounced; he primarily constructed representations of these groups through a political lens. I then contextualize Bismarck's decision to order the expulsions within the sphere of domestic politics to show that this policy was partly motivated by political expediency. Lastly, I build upon recent scholarship that has proven that the expulsions were primarily aimed at Poles, as opposed to Jews, to explore the gains Bismarck made in his foreign policy by ostracizing this ethnic group.[9] Overall, this article unearths Bismarck's relationship with his *Reichsfeinde* (enemies of the empire), construed in this era as Germany's cultural and ethnic minorities.[10]

Antisemitism, Anti-Polonism, and Bismarck

The removal of 20,000 Poles and 10,000 Jews has led many historians to portray the expulsions as a manifestation of racist and cultural xenophobia within German society.[11] Edgar Feuchtwanger called it an early example of "ethnic cleansing," while Christopher Clark has argued that there was a readiness to placate "public opinion" that served as the background for the expulsions.[12] Fitzpatrick also believed that the expulsions were caused by pressure from below, arguing that provincial authorities called for the government to remove Jews and Poles who they deemed undesirable.[13] Yet, it is unclear the extent to which Bismarck participated in this racist and cultural hatred of Jews and Poles and whether his aims for carrying out the expulsions were driven by "public opinion."

The essence of German antisemitism in the second half of the nineteenth century was by no means lucid. Shmuel Ettinger has argued that its roots derived from the romantic revival of mystical Catholicism at the turn of the century, resurrecting medieval Christian doctrines that preached a hatred for Judaism.[14] An antisemitic petition presented to Bismarck in April 1881 shows the presence of this "confessional antisemitism" as a force within German society prior to the expulsions. Signed by 250,000 citizens, it called for "Jews to be excluded from all positions of authority" and the immigration of "alien Jews" to be "at least

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[7] Jonathan Steinberg, *Bismarck: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[8] Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire,* 93-142.
[9] Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire,* 123-142. Fitzpatrick has refuted the claim made by Wertheimer that the expulsions were antisemitic in nature, arguing convincingly that Poles were Bismarck's principal target. See also Wertheimer, *Unwelcomed Strangers*, 42-74.
[10] Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Bismarck* (London: Routledge, 2002), 234.
[11] Feuchtwanger, *Bismarck*, 235.
[12] Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947* (London: Penguin, 2006), 585.
[13] Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire,* 93-122.
[14] Shmuel Ettinger, "The Origins of Modern Anti-Semitism," in *The Nazi Holocaust, Part 2: The Origins of the Holocaust,* ed. Michael R. Marrus (Munich: De Gruyter, 1989), 220.

limited."[15] Christian identity was conflated with German identity, arguing that "Germanic ideals of honor, loyalty, and genuine piety" were being displaced by a Jewish "cosmopolitan pseudoideal."[16] The Hohenzollern court chaplain in Berlin, Adolf Stöcker, a notable signatory of the petition, founded the Christlich-Soziale Arbeiterpartei (Christian Social Workers' Party) in 1878.[17] His vision of a Christian renaissance held no place for Judaism within Germany.[18] Stöcker's well-attended speeches proclaimed that "the Reich's capital city was in danger of being de-Christianized and de-Germanized" because of Berlin's prevalent Jewish population.[19] Hence, prior to the expulsions, confessional animosity was a powerful component of German antisemitism.

By the late 1870s, antisemitism was not limited to this traditional Christian Judeophobia, as it began to adopt racial undertones. The atheist Wilhelm Marr founded the Antisemitenliga (League of Antisemites) in 1879, which explicitly vilified Jews based on their culture and race alongside espousing an anti-Christian outlook.[20] This turn towards a racist and cultural antipathy for Jews evolved partly from the literature and academia of the period. A best-selling book, Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben (Debit and Credit)*, contrasted the character of the protagonist Anton Wohlfahrt, an honest and humble German, with the anti-hero, a Polish Jew called Geitzel Itzig, known for his "highest cunning."[21] Similarly, Richard Wagner's essay *What is German?,* published in 1878, argued that German and Jewish characteristics were remarkably different, labelling Jews as exploitative of German "mind and genius."[22] Racial antisemitism was also compounded by the work of Ernst Haeckel, who made the ideas of Social Darwinism—the notion of a struggle between humans for existence—popular in Germany.[23] Thus, prior to the expulsions, antisemitism was a potent force in society, consisting of a traditional confessional animosity alongside a growing cultural and racial antipathy for Jews.

Bismarck was not immune to the antisemitic tendencies prevalent in German society. On more than one occasion, the Chancellor was overheard employing the term Jew in a derogatory manner. He referred to his political rival, the progressive liberal Eduard Lasker

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[15] Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany, Volume III: The Period of Fortification, 1880-1898* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 49; Anonymous, "Anti-Semites' Petition, 1880-1881," German History in Documents and Images, http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1801, accessed February 5, 2021.
[16] Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany,* 49.
[17] Werner Jochmann, "Structures and Functions of German Anti-Semitism 1878-1914," in *Hostages of Modernization, 1: Germany—Great Britain—France,* ed. Herbert A. Strauss (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993), 42.
[18] D. A. Jeremy Telman, "Adolf Stoecker: Anti-Semite with a Christian Mission," *Jewish History* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 99-100.
[19] Adolf Stöcker, qtd. in Telman, "Adolf Stoecker," 97.
[20] Jochmann, "Structures and Functions of German Anti-Semitism 1878-1914," 43.
[21] Gustav Freytag, qtd. in Steinberg, *Bismarck,* 390.
[22] Richard Wagner, "What is German?," German History in Documents and Images, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2543, accessed February 9, 2021.
[23] Richard Weikart, "The Origins of Social Darwinism in Germany, 1859-1895," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54, no. 3 (July 1993): 475-476.

as "the little Jew" and, on another occasion, described Jews as "cosmopolitan nomads."[24] Some in the country's political sphere went as far as to label Bismarck as the "father" of antisemitism. In response to a heightened level of antisemitic agitation during the early 1880s—Jewish homes, shops, and synagogues were damaged in the cities of Thorn, Neustettin, and Stolp—the liberal Landtag deputy Eugen Richter chastised Bismarck for encouraging Jewish persecution through his inaction.[25] On the 12th of January 1881, Richter contended that the antisemites began "to cling to the coat-tails of Prince Bismarck" and that they "go right on cuddling up to him and call to him as noisy children surround their father."[26] To an extent, Richter's powerful speech was true. Prior to the 1881 Reichstag elections, Bismarck had confided in his son Wilhelm that the appointment of Stöcker to the chamber was "urgently desirable," describing the antisemitic flagbearer as "an extraordinary, militant, and useful ally."[27]

Yet Bismarck's antisemitic views were not as pronounced as those of many of his antisemitic subordinates. His relationship with his Jewish personal banker and confidant, Gerson von Bleichröder, from 1859 to 1893, is testament to this. In 1872, Bismarck influenced the Kaiser to make Bleichröder the first Prussian Jew to enter the ranks of the nobility, a reflection of Bleichröder's indispensable role in financing the wars of unification and his close relationship with Bismarck.[28] In the early 1880s, when Bismarck was pressured from both sides to show his inclination for antisemitism, Bismarck did not abandon his confidant. He reacted furiously in June 1880 when Stöcker's attacked Bleichröder for amassing a fortune and cheating Christians, and Bismarck subsequently never responded to the antisemitic petition presented to him in April 1881.[29] Hence Bismarck did not fully endorse the impassioned antisemitism prevalent in Germany prior to the expulsions of 1885.

Bismarck's antisemitic views lacked the militancy and the aggressive racial arguments that, by the 1880s, were captivating antisemitic minds. Racial hatred for Jews was particularly prevalent amongst younger generations; committees formed at most German universities urging students to support the antisemitic petition presented to Bismarck in April 1881. The Chancellor was out of touch with this generation; Steinberg has argued that by the 1880s, Bismarck was the "national grandfather," as he failed to keep pace with German culture, never reading the works of Freytag or attending Wagner's operas.[30] Even Stöcker, who subscribed to the traditional Christian Judeophobia and later endorsed the racial argument against Jews to gain support, was twenty years younger than Bismarck.[31] This

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[24] Otto von Bismarck, qtd. in Louis L. Snyder, "Bismarck and the Lasker Resolution, 1884," *The Review of Politics* 29, no. 1 (January 1967): 44; Otto von Bismarck, *Bismarck's Table Talk,* trans. and ed. Charles Lowe (London: H. Grevel and Co., 1895), 199.
[25] Steinberg, *Bismarck,* 398; Pflanze, *The Period of Fortification, 1880-1898,* 51.
[26] Eugen Richter, qtd. in Steinberg, *Bismarck*, 398.
[27] Otto von Bismarck, qtd. in Pflanze, *The Period of Fortification, 1880-1898,* 51.
[28] Fritz Stern, "Gold and Iron: The Collaboration and Friendship of Gerson Bleichröder and Otto von Bismarck," *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 1 (October 1969): 37-44.
[29] Stern, "Gold and Iron," 50; Anonymous, "Anti-Semites' Petition, 1880-1881."
[30] Steinberg, *Bismarck,* 418-419.
[31] Telman, "Adolf Stoecker," 93-108.

suggests that explicitly racist antisemitism was an ideology heralded by a younger generation of which Bismarck, seventy years old in 1885, was not part.

Rather than antisemitism featuring as a primary factor behind Bismarck's conduct as chancellor, his antisemitic views were subordinate to his political expediency. At a family dinner in Varzin, Bismarck outlined his position in response to heightened antisemitic activity in 1881:

> Nothing can be more unfair. I condemn very decidedly the crusade against the Jews, whether on the ground of religion or of race. One might with equal right propose to assail Germans of Polish or French extraction on the ground that they were not Germans. That Jews should prefer to follow a commercial pursuit is simply a matter of taste. It may, indeed, be founded on their exclusion from other callings, but it is certainly no justification to make their greater affluence a ground for those inflammatory remarks which I find so very objectionable, because they provoke the envy and malevolence of the masses. I will never agree to Jews being denied any of the rights which constitutionally are theirs. The mental organisation of the Jews inclines them to criticism, and so one generally finds them in Opposition. I make no distinction, however, between Christian and Jewish opponents to the principles of economic policy which, according to my convictions, I contend for as being useful to my country.[32]

While it is impossible to determine Bismarck's inner thoughts from his public words, the above speech heard by his immediate confidantes was unlikely to hold an ulterior political motive. Bismarck explicitly condemned the "crusade against the Jews," while simultaneously othering the Jews as different from the masses by their "commercial pursuit[s]" and "mental organisation." However, Bismarck concluded that his primary outlook towards the Jewish population was determined by economic policy and what he determined as "useful" to "his country."[33] Notwithstanding that Bismarck viewed the term "Jew" as a derogatory term and often made comments that can only be deemed as antisemitic, his political decision-making was not driven by a fervid hatred for Judaism.

During the early 1880s, Poles suffered increasing ostracism within German society. Freidrich Neumann's *Germanisierung oder Polonisierung?* (Germanization or Polonization?), published in 1883, criticized the demographics of Posen, particularly the dominance of the Polish language and Catholic confession.[34] Likewise, Eduard von Hartmann's *Der Rückgang des Deutschtums* (The Decline of Germanness), published in January 1885, urged for the "Germanization of the Poles" to "eliminate Slavdom inside our [German] borders," to ensure that the "history of cultured nations is not to sink markedly."[35] These sentiments manifested in an anti-Polish outlook at the Prussian

[32] Otto von Bismarck, *Bismarck's Table Talk,* 236.
[33] Otto von Bismarck, *Bismarck's Table Talk,* 236.
[34] Friedrich J. Neumann, qtd. in Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire*, 131.
[35] Eduard von Hartmann, qtd. in Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire,* 131-132.

provincial level. Bismarck was presented with numerous reports in early 1885 from Puttkamer and the Prussian Minister of Spiritual, Educational, and Medical Affairs, Gustav von Goßler, detailing provincial concerns about the heavy burden migrant Poles were placing on Prussian provinces. Goßler informed Bismarck of the apparent "catholicizing" of Prussian schools and that Polish children were being educated at the state's expense.[36] This was more a reflection of the Prussian authorities' distaste for Poles than a real demographic concern. The German population of the area was in negligible decline, decreasing from 35.1 percent in 1871 to 33.9 percent in 1890, hardly justifying Goßler's and Puttkamer's anxieties.[37]

Bismarck's personal views on Poles shared a similar vehemence to the views of Neumann and Hartmann, but as Otto Pflanze has argued, Bismarck's outlook towards the Polish cause was primarily "political rather than racial or cultural."[38] As a deputy in the Prussian Landtag in 1848, Bismarck unveiled his primary concern vis-à-vis the Poles as a threat to Prussian national security. He warned that the "Polish element in Posen" had no other goal than the "restoration of an independent Polish state," meaning that the "best sinews of Germany would be severed [Posen, West Prussia, and Ermland]" and "millions of Germans would fall prey to Polish arbitrariness." Bismarck stressed that no matter the compromise made with the Poles, they would be "our sworn enemies" until they had "conquered from us the mouth of the Vistula."[39] His speech was partly a commentary on the Polish uprising in the Grand Duchy of Posen that had followed the wave of revolutionary protests across Europe from 1848-1849.

Though even after the Polish liberal-nationalist revolution was extinguished by the Prussian monarchy in April 1849, Bismarck was consistent in perceiving Prussian Poles as a security threat to Prussia.[40] In 1861, he wrote privately to his sister Malvina: "[F]lay the Poles until they despair of life! I have all sympathy for their position, but if we wish to endure, we can do nothing else but extirpate them."[41] Likewise, in his memoirs, published in 1898, he alluded to "Polish plots against the King and his state" as a factor in embarking on the *Kulturkampf* (culture struggle).[42]

Bismarck's perception of the Poles as a security threat to the German nation was not entirely unfounded. The Poles benefited greatly from Napoleon's occupation of the Germanic states, leading to the creation of the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807, a Polish state in all but name. Though the Duchy followed Napoleon's demise, it left a long-lasting mark on Polish imagination. France became identified as a potential ally for the Polish nationalist

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[36] Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire*, 101-102.
[37] William W. Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 138-139.
[38] Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany, Volume I: The Period of Unification, 1815-1871* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 186.
[39] Otto von Bismarck, qtd. in Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 123-124.
[40] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews,* 109-110.
[41] Otto von Bismarck, qtd. in Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews,* 126.
[42] Otto von Bismarck, *Bismarck, the Man and the Statesman: Being the Reflections and Reminiscences of Otto, Prince von Bismarck,* vol. II (New York: Harper & Bros., 1898), 139-141.

struggle.[43] This was evident during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). The provincial government of Posen received an alarming number of reports detailing Polish support for France and attempts to persuade reservists to desert the army. Bismarck was fully aware of Polish subversion during the war and moved several battalions of Silesian militia to stabilize the province.[44]

Bismarck constructed his views of Poles and Jews upon the immediate political context rather than subscribing to a cultural or racist antipathy. On occasion, the Chancellor was prone to making antisemitic slurs, but he did not adopt the racial views of the growing antisemitic movement during the 1880s. He saw the Prussian Poles as a threat to national security, believing that the coexistence of both a German and a Polish state was impossible. Therefore, it is apparent that Bismarck's aims for carrying out the expulsions in 1885 were not a manifestation of antisemitic and anti-Polish sentiments within "public opinion." To unearth the strategic aims for enacting the expulsions requires examination of Bismarck's position in the realms of domestic politics and foreign policy.

The Expulsions and Bismarck's Political Expediency

Prior to the expulsions of 1885, Bismarck had repeatedly ostracized ethnic minorities for political gain. As part of the *Kulturkampf* in 1871, Bismarck had attempted to break up the Catholic Centre Party, the Reichstag's second largest party, by persecuting Catholics.[45] Bismarck followed a similar tack preceding the 1881 Reichstag elections. While he reacted furiously when Stöcker attacked Bleichröder and Jews who supported the state, he was apathetic to antisemitic attacks on his political enemies, such as the Social Democrats.[46] In both instances, Bismarck had directed his domestic policies based on political opportunism. This precedent calls for the expulsions of 1885 to be assessed with Bismarck's political expediency in mind.

Bismarck was politically isolated prior to the expulsions of 1885. His power as Chancellor and Minister President of Prussia had been secure with the blessing of Kaiser Wilhelm I, but aged eighty-seven and deteriorating in 1884, the Kaiser was no longer a dependable guarantor of Bismarck's power. This threat was heightened by the imminent accession of the liberal-minded Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, who did not see Bismarck as indispensable. Although Friedrich had reassured Bismarck in April 1884 that he would retain his services in his reign, the Crown Prince was also closely associated with Bismarck's political enemies. Friedrich had sent a telegram congratulating Bismarck's Reichstag rival, the Freisinn Party (Free-Thinking Party), on its formation in March 1884.[47] He was also to some extent influenced by his wife, Victoria, who deplored Bismarck,

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[43] Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918,* 2nd ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 64.
[44] Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany, Volume II: The Period of Consolidation, 1871-1880* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 108.
[45] Steinberg, *Bismarck.* 315.
[46] Pflanze, *The Period of Fortification, 1880-1898*, 50-51.
[47] Patricia Kollander, "Constitutionalism or Staatssreich? Bismarck, Crown Prince Frederick William, Crown Princess Victoria and the Succession Crisis of 1880-1885," *European Review of History* 8, no. 2 (July 2010): 191, 196.

opining in a letter to her mother, Queen Victoria of Britain, "that despotism is the essence of his [Bismarck's] being."[48] The journal *Reichsfreund* (Reich Friend) captured this schism in the upper echelons of German politics prior to the expulsions of 1885, stating that "the German heir to the throne refuses to be associated in any way with the Chancellor's present policy as a whole."[49]

Bismarck's power in the Reichstag was also becoming increasingly unstable. The Reichstag elections of the 28th of October 1884 resulted in the maintenance of an anti-Bismarckian block that had been prominent in the Reichstag since 1881. The Freisinnige party won sixty-seven seats, becoming the second largest party in the Reichstag, only subordinate to the Catholic Centre Party. Bismarck's conservative allies had gained thirty-two more seats than they had managed to achieve in the elections of 1881 but were still forty-two seats short of a majority (397 deputies sat in the Reichstag).[50] Therefore, prior to the expulsions, Bismarck occupied a precarious position as chancellor in the German political sphere.

Bismarck's first solution to tackle his marginalization in the Reichstag was to enforce a series of expulsions, albeit on a small scale. In November 1884, he expelled forty-two Russian Jews who had illegally voted for the Progressive Party's leader Heinrich Rickert.[51] This shows a clear link between Bismarck's political misfortunes and his decision to endorse a policy of expulsions. However, the expulsions that began in March 1885 should not be perceived as Bismarck simply targeting the electoral strata that supported the opposition. There is no doubt that Poles and Jews tended to vote for his opponents (Progressive, Center, and Polish parties). However, the electoral law for the Reichstag stipulated that German citizenship was required, making it illegal for foreign Poles and Jews to vote in elections.[52] Granted, some foreigners did vote illegally, but it was unlikely that they were in such a number that would have significantly influenced the electoral result.

Bismarck endorsed a policy of expulsions to create a crisis that would reassert his power and reaffirm his status over the Reichstag. Feuchtwanger argued that Bismarck had little room to maneuver politically at this time, but the "possibility of appealing to German nationalism and directing it against his internal enemies, *Reichsfeinde* [enemies of the empire], remained."[53] On the 26th of March 1885, Bismarck ordered the expulsion of all foreign Poles from the Prussian provinces of East and West Prussia, Posen, and Upper

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[48] Crown Princess Victoria, "German Crown Princess Victoria Criticizes Bismarck's Personal Regime as Dictatorial (1887-89)," German History in Documents and Images, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2842, accessed February 2, 2021.
[49] Kollander, "Constitutionalism or Staatssreich?," 193.
[50] Anonymous, "Elections to the German Riechstag (1871-1890): A Statistical Overview," German History in Documents and Images, https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1850, accessed February 2, 2021.
[51] Eli Nathans, *The Politics of Citizenship in Germany: Ethnicity, Utility and Nationalism* (London: Berg Publishers, 2004), 119.
[52] Anonymous, "Electoral Law for the Reichstag of the North German Confederation (1869)," German History in Document and Images, https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=597, accessed February 2, 2021; Anonymous, "Law on Nationality and Citizenship."
[53] Feuchtwanger, *Bismarck*, 234.

Silesia.[54] This policy was met with hostility in the Reichstag. In November 1885, a coalition of Polish, socialist, centrist, liberalist, Alsatian, Guelph, and Dane deputies demanded an explanation for the expulsions. To reassert his position, Bismarck presented an imperial edict signed by the Kaiser, the Prussian cabinet, and the Bundesrat, denying the Reichstag the prerogative to interfere in the affairs of the Prussian state.[55] Bismarck, who appeared politically isolated after the 1884 election, had rallied support from the institutions where loyalty was still present to meet his political foes in the Reichstag head on.

This imperial edict undermined the ostensibly powerful Reichstag. The expulsions may have occurred in Prussia, but they were provocative enough to be perceived as a policy concerning the entire German Empire. This drew the opposition in the Reichstag to criticize a policy beyond their jurisdiction. Blanke has argued that Bismarck was surprised at the hostile reaction his expulsion policy received in the Reichstag, but Blanke's analysis does not account for Bismarck's character, as he had united Germany by accurately predicting the reactions of others.[56] It was more likely that Bismarck had expected this reaction and used it to weaken the Reichstag. On the 16th of January 1886, the opposition passed a resolution condemning the expulsions, calling them "unjustified," but this counted for little.[57] It was a far cry from the power that Bismarck's opposition had wielded in impeding his social reforms of the early 1880s.[58] Thus, by presenting the imperial edict, Bismarck had exploited both his dual occupation as Minister President of Prussia and Chancellor to diminish the opposition in the Reichstag to nothing more than onlookers.

Bismarck further undermined the Reichstag by framing the expulsions as part of "the struggle for existence between the two nations [Germany and Poland]," which challenged the Reichstag's constitutional authority as "representatives of the entire people."[59] His speech in the Landtag on the 28th of January 1886 attacked the Reichstag for sympathizing with the Polish cause. He asserted that the Polish population had made "indubitable progress" at the cost of the German population because of the "support given [to] the Poles by the opposition." The opposing deputies were charged with "not wanting to cooperate in the defence of the state" and therefore "they should withdraw from the state."[60] As Blanke has credibly asserted, Bismarck made the expulsions a nationalist question, forcing the opposition to either abandon their convictions or face being labelled unpatriotic.[61]

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[54] Wertheimer, *Unwelcomed Strangers,* 48.
[55] Pflanze, *The Period of Fortification, 1880-1898,* 203-204.
[56] S. William Halperin, "The Origins of the Franco-Prussian War Revisited: Bismarck and the Hohenzollern Candidature for the Spanish Throne," *The Journal of Modern History* 45, no. 1 (March 1973): 83-91.
[57] Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire,* 113.
[58] Pflanze, *The Period of Fortification, 1880-1898,* 42.
[59] Otto von Bismarck, "Speech to the Lower House of the Prussian Parliament, 28th January 1886," Humanities and Social Sciences Online, https://networks.h-net.org/node/35008/pages/60770/bismarck-and-polish-question, , accessed February 5, 2021; Anonymous, "The Constitution of the German Empire (1871)," German History in Document and Images, http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2782, , accessed February 5, 2021.
[60] Bismarck, "Speech to the Lower House of the Prussian Parliament, 28th January 1886."
[61] Blanke, "Bismarck and the Prussian Polish Policies of 1886," 220."

Bismarck's speech in the Landtag was also severely critical of the German constitution. Like the opposing deputies, for Bismarck the constitution served as an "explanation for the progress of the Poles," as it was being exploited by "Polish gentlemen."[62] The Chancellor loathed the constitution. He considered a *Staatssreich* (coup against the constitution) as early as 1881, stating to the Württemberg envoy Baron Mittnacht that the "German princes must consider whether the present parliament is still compatible with the welfare of the Reich."[63] Thus, Bismarck's speech that sought to justify the expulsions of 1885 was a veiled attack under the guise of nationalism against the politicians and institutions that curtailed his power. By framing them as Polish sympathizers, while he was styled as a bastion of the German nation by battling "Polonization," Bismarck was subscribing to what Hugh Seton-Watson has called "official nationalism."[64] Instead of utilizing nationalism for the benefit of the Hohenzollern dynasty, however, Bismarck cultivated nationalism to elevate his own political position.

Therefore, the expulsions were partly an act of political expediency. Bismarck had contended with political isolation in 1884 and endorsed this policy to reaffirm his status within domestic politics. The imperial edict diminished the power of the Reichstag as the opposition had been coaxed to involve themselves in a policy beyond their jurisdiction. This act, alongside framing his enemies as Polish sympathizers, reasserted Bismarck's dominance in the German political sphere. While the expulsions had improved Bismarck's position in domestic politics, it is unclear why he chose to ostracize Poles more than any other minority. This requires an assessment of where the Polish population fit into Bismarck's foreign policy during the 1880s.

The Expulsions and Bismarck's Foreign Policy

Recent historiography has often downplayed the role of foreign policy in Bismarck's decision to carry out the expulsions. Blanke has argued that Bismarck knew such a provocative policy would antagonize Russia and Austria-Hungary, to the detriment of German national security in central Europe.[65] This rests on the premise that the maintenance of cordial relations with Russia and Austria were, in Bismarck's view, the prime conditions for German national security. No doubt this was an objective of Bismarck's foreign policy, but he equally wanted to prevent the outbreak of a war between Russia and Austria-Hungary. The expulsions must be revaluated in this light.

Prima facie, the political situation in Eastern Europe was serene prior to the expulsions of 1885. On the 18th of June 1881, the Dreikaiserbund (Three Emperor's League) had been signed between Germany, Austro-Hungary, and Russia. It guaranteed the neutrality of the other two countries if one should find itself embroiled in a war with a fourth power. It also ensured that Russia and Austria-Hungary would remain committed to the terms set out by

[62] Bismarck, "Speech to the Lower House of the Prussian Parliament, 28th January 1886."
[63] Pflanze, *The Period of Fortification, 1880-1898,* 76-77.
[64] Bismarck, "Speech to the Lower House of the Prussian Parliament, 28th January 1886"; Hugh Seton-Watson, qtd. in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism,* 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 86.
[65] Blanke, "Bismarck and the Prussian Polish Policies of 1886," 211-215.

the Treaty of Berlin (1878).[66] Under this treaty, Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Bulgaria was partitioned. The southeastern area, known as Eastern Rumelia, remained a Turkish province, and the remainder became a Russian satellite state under the authority of the Tsar Alexander II's nephew, Alexander von Battenburg.[67] The renewal of the Dreikaiserbund in March 1884 and the meeting of the three emperors—Tsar Alexander III, Emperor Franz Joseph and Kaiser Wilhelm I—at Skierniewice in Russian Poland in September 1884 were further indicators of political harmony.[68] *The Times* reported that there "are ample reasons for feeling that their meeting [at Skierniewice] brings guarantees of peace to Europe."[69]

Upon closer examination, beneath the harmonious façade of Skierniewice, the political situation in Eastern Europe was extremely volatile. As W. N. Medlicott has argued, the Dreikaiserbund had not extinguished tensions between Russia and Austria-Hungary over their competing claims for hegemony in the Balkans.[70] While Austria-Hungary had committed itself to the Dreikaiserbund, it also signed alliances with Serbia (June 1881) and Romania (October 1883), both of which harbored anti-Russian sentiment.[71] Similarly, the Russians had machinations of their own. They attempted to force Battenburg to rescind his commitment to build a railway across Bulgaria that would connect Vienna with Constantinople (stipulated by the Treaty of Berlin) and instead connect the Russian railway network to Constantinople.[72] The growing influence of a pan-Slav clique, which dreamt of a federation of Balkan-Slav nations under Russian guardianship, compounded anti-Austrian tendencies in the Russian court.[73] Alexander III's principal counsellor Konstantin Pobedonostsev, an ardent pan-Slav, was bitterly opposed to the Dreikaiserbund. By 1884, he was attempting to incite discontent among Austria-Hungary's Greek Orthodox Ruthenians to undermine the Habsburg Empire.[74] Thus, the Dreikaiserbund was superficial. The Russian Foreign Minister Nikolay Giers affirmed this at Skierniewice, confiding in a German representative that it was unlikely that the Dreikaiserbund would

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[66] Anonymous, "Three Emperors' Treaty between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia from June 18, 1881," German History in Documents and Images, http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1858, accessed February 13, 2021.
[67] Feuchtwanger, *Bismarck*, 205; George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations 1875-1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 103-104.
[68] Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order,* 79.
[69] Anonymous, "London, Monday, September 15, 1884," *The Times,* September 15, 1884, 9, https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=23&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=5&docId=GALE%7CCS151308079&docType=Editorial&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZTMA-MOD1&prodId=TTDA&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCS151308079&searchId=R3&userGroupName=stand&inPS=true, accessed November 26, 2021.
[70] W. N. Medlicott, "Bismarck and the Three Emperor's Alliance, 1881-87," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (1945): 61-83.
[71] Keith Wilson, *Problems and Possibilities: Exercises in Statesmanship 1814-1918* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003), 109.
[72] Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order*, 109.
[73] J. D. Morison, "Katkov and Panslavism," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 46, no. 107 (July 1968): 428.
[74] Melvin C. Wren, "Pobedonostsev and Russian Influence in the Balkans, 1881-1888," *The Journal of Modern History* 19, no. 2 (June 1947): 132-133.

prevent a future conflict unfolding in the Balkans: "About this one should have no illusions."[75]

Bismarck was fully aware of this prevalent instability in Eastern European affairs and designed his foreign policy to prevent a war breaking out between Russia and Austria-Hungary. He did not expect "mutual friendship and love" to come from the Dreikaiserbund but was an advocate for the treaty so Germany would not be embroiled in a war that would be an "evil like all wars, but without any desirable prize in case of victory."[76] Although Bismarck believed the Balkans were "not worth the healthy bones of a single Pomeranian musketeer," he knew that Germany could not stay neutral in a Russo-Austro-Hungarian war; Germany would become an enemy for both nations.[77] The meeting at Skierniewice in September 1884 was an attempt by Bismarck to mediate between Russia and Austria-Hungary. Initially, Kaiser Wilhelm and Bismarck had not been invited to the meeting, but Bismarck insisted on their presence as he believed that "Kaiser Franz Joseph attaches to the preservation of peace with Russia less importance than we do and might well shape his conduct accordingly."[78] Thus, prior to the expulsions, Bismarck's foreign policy was concerned with preventing war between Austria-Hungary and Russia as much as it was focused on the maintenance of cordial relations between Germany and these two countries.

By 1884, Bismarck believed that hostilities between Russia and Austro-Hungary were bound to intensify. His meeting with Battenburg in the spring of that year shows that Bismarck did not envisage the status quo in Eastern Europe lasting: "In general, I view the entire future existence of Bulgaria as questionable. Someday it will become the object of some sort of a deal among the Great Powers; and sooner or later you will sit peacefully at the fireside and reminisce about the adventures of your stormy youth."[79] Thus, prior to the expulsions of 1885, peace in Eastern Europe was fragile. The Dreikaiserbund may have outwardly shown signs of cooperation in the east, but beneath its symbolism, animosity between Russia and Austria-Hungary prevailed. Bismarck was fully aware of the precarity of peace, with the prospect of a future war between Russia and Austria-Hungary looming. Therefore, Bismarck's aims for the expulsions of 1885 must be evaluated in the context of a likely war in Eastern Europe.

For Bismarck, the Poles would play a fundamental role in any future war between Austria-Hungary and Russia. He argued in his memoirs that Austria-Hungary's greatest weapon against Russia "is her fostering care of the Polish spirit in Galicia."[80] Bismarck was referring to the favorable patronage that Galician Poles received under the Habsburg Empire, in comparison to the discriminatory policies that the Prussian and Russian states had enforced on their Polish minorities.[81] As A. J. P. Taylor remarked, Galician-Polish aristocrats

[75] Nickolay Giers, qtd. in Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order,* 82.
[76] Otto von Bismarck, qtd. in Feuchtwanger, *Bismarck,* 215.
[77] Otto von Bismarck, qtd. in Feuchtwanger, *Bismarck,* 198; Pflanze, *The Period of Fortification,* 225.
[78] Otto von Bismarck, qtd. in Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order,* 79.
[79] Otto von Bismarck, qtd. in Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order,* 118-119.
[80] Bismarck, *The Man and the Statesman*, 257.
[81] Piotr S. Wandycz, "The Poles in the Habsburg Monarchy," *Austrian History Yearbook* 3, no. 2 (1967): 278.

"remained to the end the most stalwart and reliable supporters of the Habsburgs."[82] Hence, in the eventuality of a war with Russia, the Polish nationalist cause would unreservedly support Austria-Hungary, undermining Russian authority in the swathes of Polish land under Russian control. In comparison, a Polish nationalist uprising would have little impact on Austro-Hungarian security. Bismarck was fully aware of this. He argued that the Habsburgs could incite a Polish revolution in Galicia and would "by no means be weakened by its abandonment" as it was an area "loosely connected with the Austrian monarchy" and had no natural barrier to protect the remaining Habsburg Empire.[83] Thus, Bismarck viewed the Polish nationalist question as a tool that could be utilized by Austria-Hungary to the disadvantage of Russia.

According to Bismarck, a "resuscitation of Poland" under the auspices of Austria-Hungary would have disastrous consequences for Prussia. The predominantly Polish areas of Posen and West Prussia were not separated from the "Old-Prussian provinces" by a natural boundary and therefore "their abandonment by Prussia would be impossible."[84] With Berlin roughly 250 kilometers (155 miles) west of Posen, a Polish nationalist revolution could undermine German security. Bismarck highlighted the extent to which the Poles were a fundamental component of German foreign policy, stating "among the preconditions of an offensive alliance between Germany and Austria the settlement of the future of Poland presents a problem of unusual difficulty."[85] The Prussian-Polish population made Germany's position in foreign affairs untenable.

A strategic aim for the expulsions of 1885 was an attempt to diminish Germany's weakness in the outbreak of a likely war between Russia and Austria-Hungary. Bismarck could not expel the entire Prussian-Polish population, as the constitution of 1871 prevented Poles with German citizenship from being removed from the state. However, he could work within the legal bounds to expel non-naturalized Poles. This would weaken Polish nationalist sentiment in Prussia, thereby reducing the threat of a "resuscitated Poland" at the demand of Austria-Hungary. As this was a preemptive measure in the eventuality of a war between Russia and Austria-Hungary, Bismarck could not admit to this publicly or even privately. The Dreikaiserbund had been portrayed as a personal achievement for Bismarck. He boasted in January 1885 that "we are surrounded by friends in Europe." [86] To publicize the expulsions as a pre-emptive measure against a looming war between Austria-Hungary and Russia would undermine the façade of peace in Eastern Europe that Bismarck had meticulously created.

Conclusion

Bismarck did not order the expulsions because he wanted to placate antisemitic and anti-Polish sentiments within "public opinion." His views on Jews and the Prussian-Polish population were constructed based on the impact that these minorities held within the

[82] A. J. P. Taylor, qtd. in Wandycz, "The Poles in the Habsburg Monarchy," 283.
[83] Bismarck, *The Man and the Statesman,* 258.
[84] Bismarck, *The Man and the Statesman,* 258.
[85] Bismarck, *The Man and the Statesman,* 258.
[86] Feuchtwanger, *Bismarck,* 215; Otto von Bismarck, qtd. in Pflanze, *The Period of Fortification,* 218.

political realm. Bismarck had his own strategic aims for the expulsions, which were Janus-faced. Internally, Bismarck endorsed a policy of expulsions to reassert his power in the German political sphere. Prior to ordering the expulsions, he was politically isolated. The imminent accession of Friedrich Wilhelm threatened Bismarck's future as chancellor and his failure to secure a majority in the Reichstag compounded the precarity of his position.

Bismarck's order for the expulsions was designed to diminish the power of his enemies and elevate himself out of this quagmire. The presentation of an imperial edict robbed the Reichstag of its power to prevent a policy that was considered to affect the whole of Germany. He then styled the expulsions as a question of nationalism, slandering the Reichstag as supporters of the Poles, attacking their authority as an institution for the German nation. Moreover, the expulsions were also an opportunity for Bismarck to diminish the Polish national cause within Prussia. War between Russia and Austria-Hungary was likely, which would have disastrous consequences for Germany. Bismarck believed Austria-Hungary would incite a Polish revolution to undermine Russia, which would also threaten German security. Hence, the expulsions were a preemptive measure to weaken the Prussian-Polish population by removing those without German citizenship. In this instance, neither Poles nor Jews were Bismarck's *Reichsfeinde.* They were minorities that could be ostracized for Bismarck's political advantage against his real *Reichsfeinde*—those who curtailed his power in domestic politics and those who posed an external threat to German security.