Foreign Policies Of France, Pr Essay, Research Paper

Major turmoil involving France, Prussia, and the Hapsburg Empire arose during the 1740 s. Each empire had an integral part in the rise or decline of the other involved nations. Prussia on one hand was seeking to expand into the Hapsburg territories. France seeing an expansion opportunity as well made an alliance with Prussia. The Hapsburg Empire could only hope to maintain the current boundaries of their kingdom and territories. They also thought it was necessary to create alliances to counterpart the ones made by Prussia. When Prussia seized the Austrian Province of Silesia, the Pragmatic Sanction was broken and upset the continental balance of power. These events and others culminated into the War of the Austrian Succession. The confrontation began though, as a result of each involved nation s foreign policy and their effort to achieve goals to further their economic, political, and geographical position. France, Prussia, and the Hapsburgs exhibited this quality as the War of Austrian Succession developed.

The foreign policy of France reflected the situation in Prussia and Austria. France did not want to witness a rising power to the east. Therefore, the dilemma was often to determine which nation, Austria or Prussia, was stronger in there effort to unite part of the land east of France. France then hoped to deter their efforts at unity. Furthermore, the aims of the French foreign policy were to “erode further the Hapsburg positions, by moves in the south against Spain and in the east and north against the vulnerable string of Spanish- Hapsburg and German territories”. (Kennedy 88) France was looking to expand financially and geographically, by gaining resourceful territories while still maintaining their colonies in America. It is because of their pursuits on two continents that they were trying to become the dominate hybrid power. France began to see the emergence of a multipolar system among European countries and realized mastery was not an achievable goal, and that maintaining a recognized power status was more likely. France realized that in order to become a dominate hybrid power, expansion to the east was necessary.

The Prussian foreign policy was similar to that of France. Prussia was looking to gain territory against its eastern competitors. It was also in the interest of Prussia to rise to up to a status of power in the East. During the war, Prussia also had to deal with the financial debt which developed. The Prussians dealt with this debt by utilizing their allies for aid.

Finally, Prussia s opposition, the Hapsburg Empire, focused their goals and policy on maintaining their inheritance of lands. Maria Theresa was constantly trying to keep the lands she controlled somewhat united and under her leadership. During the war she had to deal with the immense debt that her less efficient and decentralized country grew into. Therefore the main Hapsburg goals during the 1740 s were to maintain their territories and manage debt.

France although the largest nation in Europe suffered because its energies had to be diverted between its territories abroad and the home country. Thus, its continental aims diverted attention from its maritime and colonial goals. France could not concentrate on both fronts. If the French were to implore their energies in expansion abroad, they would be forced to deal with the many weaknesses in it s colonies. These weaknesses include “the rigidity of its colonial system, the inferiority of its navy and the very mediocre abilities of most of its statesmen.” (Brinton 409) French rulers did not disregard these aspects but set them aside because they viewed themselves as a land power and promoted expansion and development of the army. This is seen through the French involvement with Prussia as the Prussians seized Silesia. France hoped to gain territory as well. It was because of the eastern frontier that caused them to set goals to the east involving nations such as Austria and Prussia and not so much to the west.

Also, the main problem strategically was that although the French were an immense power defensively, they lacked the power to enact a campaign of conquest. Geographically, France was surrounded by influential and powerful nations such as Britain and Spain. For example “an attack on the southern Netherlands involved grinding campaigns through territory riddled with fortresses and waterways, and provoked a response not merely from the Hapsburg powers themselves but also from the United Provinces and England”. (Kennedy 89)

Furthermore, a campaign into Germany would bring France against multiple coalitions and treaties. This would result in a confrontation between the coalition of the Austrians, the Dutch, the British and the Prussians. Even when France conceded and decided alliance was the best pursuit to the east, opposition from the other German nations and Great Britain was met. Regardless, the alliance between France and Prussia was formed. By this, France would support Prussia in their campaigns against Austria and also the plans against the German state of Hanover (which unfortunately was a British territory and led to British aid to Austria). Also, France hoped for an opportunity to expand to the east, mainly into the Austrian Netherlands.

Financially during the 1740 s, France was looking to recover from debt caused by other wars such as the War of the Spanish Succession and the Nine Years War. French and Dutch commerce had been badly affected by this warring. During the late seventeenth century, Louis XIV s gains in the Franco-Spanish dispute were limited through the Treaty of Aix-la Chapelle. This caused him to seek revenge on the United Provinces, which he thought was the chief obstacle. His goal caused the strengthening of a costly army and navy. This continued through the Nine Years War. The costly expenses involved in campaigning for parts of Eastern Europe created immense debt for the French. When France made an alliance with Prussia, the goals were to pull themselves out of debt through the territories they hoped to gain.

Prussia, France s ally during the War of Austrian Succession sought to expand into Austrian territories by invading and conquering Silesia. Silesia was a valuable province which the Prussians desired and when they obtained it, alliances and war ensued. The reason for invasion of Silesia seemed positive for Prussia. Frederick the Great saw the industrialization possessed by Silesia and the boost it would have on the state s military- economic capacity. That is why it became the goal of the Prussian king. Because Silesia was such a rich and profitable territory, it was very desired. Frederick understood the value it had for his nation and decided to expand Prussia to include Silesia.

One of the important Prussian goals was to achieve a status of becoming a great-power nation. Hohenzollern Prussia was not unlike the rest of the world and it was a main priority. Its territories which were scattered across north Germany consisted largely of sand and swamp and produced little trade. Prussia ranked only twelfth in population in 1715. It s capital, Berlin enjoyed few of the advantages enjoyed by Constantinople, Paris, London and other great capitals. Knowing these, Prussia saw the necessity of expansion and unity in order to improve these aspects and achieve the great-power status. Frederick William (1640- 1688) worked towards improving Prussian weaknesses by encouraging immigration by providing exemption from taxation. His successor Frederick I, built up the army. He doubled the size of the standing army and established factories for gun and uniform manufacturing. It was in 1740 that Prussia believed that these weaknesses (as in trade, population, etc.) were improved and that Prussia was ready to achieve that title of great power nation and take on Austria.

Austrian rulers had never seen such an influential and powerful leader as Frederick the Great. Frederick the Great was the leader that led Prussia into the War of Austrian Succession. The way he conducted political affairs was said to have been done “in true Machiavelleian style, shown through the way he managed his invasion of Silesia”. (Brinton 428) To improve agriculture he imported western crops, drained swamps and opened up farms. He did all of this to promote agriculture. He also prided himself on his religious tolerance. After the Seven Years War, he provide tools, stock and seed to the peasants to repair their ruined farms. It was because of Frederick s ability to harness the full capacity of Prussian ability to the pursuit of victory and of his conduct on the field of battle that Prussia became a recognized power.

Prior to the invasion of Silesia, Hapsburg lands were disunited and turmoil engulfed the territories. Charles VI s (1711- 1740) Hapburg Empire was in a bit of turmoil. Consolidation of Hapsburg territories was not yet evident. Nobles in German Austria, the Czech Bohemia, and Magyar Hungary still kept most of their medieval prerogatives, still controlled grants of taxes and the appointment of officials. Charles VI did not have complete monarchical rule over his territories. This was one reason why unity was not complete and the prospective nation was in turmoil. “The financial and military weakness of the Hapsburg regime was underlined by the fact that when Charles VI died, the exchequer was nearly empty and the pay of the army and of the civil service was more than two years in arrears”. (Brinton 411) The debt of the nation and the nobility keeping the territories disunited caused the Hapsburg lands to catch other nation s eye for invasion of Hapsburg land.

Because of the turmoil in Hapsburg lands, the important goals of the Hapsburg territories were to repay its debt, and stabilize its boundaries so it could compete against nations such as Prussia. The debt it had consumed and the problems for the Hapsburgs of paying for war was immense. Accompanying the financial instability of the Empire was the instability of Hapsburg boundaries. “The awkwardly shaped conglomeration of territories they ruled and the position of other powers in relation to those lands required a nightmarish diplomatic and military juggling act merely to retain inheritance.” (Kennedy 90) Also, because the Hapsburgs devoted most of their energy to enhancing their position in the Balkans, they did not pay enough attention to the opposing rulers. When Prussia seized Silesia, the Hapsburgs had to conduct its foreign and military policies with one eye on Prussian activity. One goal developed involving keeping Prussia in check. Austrian leaders did not want Prussia rising to a status of power. This in turn made Hapsburg diplomacy more complicated. To compete with the rising Prussia, Austria needed to call upon France and Russia for assistance. In order to compete and resist Prussian takeover, Austria needed to unite its territories and improve its economy.

The foreign policy and goals of these nations led to the rise of Prussia and the downfall of France and Austria. This was apparent because in the early 1760 s it was evident that Prussia had become a powerful nation. Frederick had defeated a French and an Austrian army and maintained its goals of gaining Austrian territory and becoming a great-power nation. France witnessed a relative downfall from power. France had to deal with not only the threat of Prussia, but Britain as well. The French did not gain the Southern Netherlands because of a blockade that ensued on ports by the British when take over of that province was near. Furthermore, they did not keep Eastern Europe disunited because Prussia had evolved into a powerful nation. France did not achieve the goals and did not maintain the foreign policy they had set prior to the war. Hapsburg, like France was defeated in many ways. They had failed, to keep Prussia in check and in 1760 Vienna was virtually bankrupt. France and Austria though, do not completely fall out of the picture but are integral in later European events (such as the World Wars). Through Prussia, France and Austria, it is possible to understand the importance and necessity of a strong foreign policy and goals and the effects of a failed one.