
The Second French Republic and the Second Empire

Louis Napoleon became the president of the Second Republic in December 1848. It was evident that he was not committed to the republic: in May 1849, elections for the Legislative Assembly indicated that the people did not believe in the republic, either. In this election, conservatives and monarchists scored significant gains: republicans and radicals lost power in the assembly. During the three-year life of the Second Republic, Louis Napoleon demonstrated his skills as a gifted politician through the manipulation of the various factions in French politics. He employed a tactic introduced by his uncle, the plebiscite: a simple up-or-down vote on a question of vital interest to the people. Enemies of Napoleon referred to this procedure, fraught with manipulative tactics and propaganda, as Caesarism. His deployment of troops in Italy to rescue and restore Pope Pius IX was condemned by republicans but strongly supported by the monarchists and moderates. As a consequence of French military intervention, a French garrison under General Oudinot was stationed in Rome until the fall of 1870, when it was recalled during the Franco-Prussian War. Like Julius and Augustus Caesar before him, Napoleon III, as he was known, knew that the appearance of religious devotion could help rulers remain in power.

Napoleon initiated a policy that minimized the importance of the Legislative Assembly, capitalized on the developing Napoleonic legend, and courted the support of the army, the Catholic Church, and a range of conservative political groups. The Falloux Law returned control of education to the church. Further, Louis Napoleon was confronted with Article 45 of the constitution, which stipulated that the president was limited to one four-year term; he had no intention of relinquishing power. With the assistance of a core of dedicated supporters, Louis Napoleon arranged for a *coup d'état* on December 1 to 2, 1851. The Second Republic fell and was soon replaced by the Second Empire.

Napoleon drafted a new constitution, which resulted in a highly centralized government centered on himself. He was to have a ten-year term, and power to declare war, to lead the armed forces, to conduct foreign policy, and to initiate and pronounce all laws: the new Legislative Assembly would be

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under the control of the president. On December 2, 1852, he announced that he was Napoleon III, emperor of the French.

The domestic history of the Second Empire is divided into two periods: 1851 to 1860, during which Napoleon III's control was direct and authoritarian, and 1860 to 1870, the decade of the Liberal Empire, during which the regime was liberalized through a series of reforms. During the Second Empire, living conditions in France generally improved. The government instituted agreements and actions that stimulated the movement toward free trade (Cobden-Chevalier Treaty of 1860), improved the economy (through the *Crédit Mobilier* and *Crédit Foncier*, the one for bank notes, the other for mortgages), and conducted major public works programs in French cities with the assistance of such talented leaders as Baron Haussmann, the prefect of the Seine. Even though many artists and scholars (Gustave Flaubert, Victor Hugo, and Jules Michelet) were censored and, on occasion, prosecuted for their work, the artistic and scholarly achievements of the Second Empire were impressive. While Flaubert and Charles-Pierre Baudelaire, and in music, Jacques Offenbach, were most productive during these decades, younger artists, such as Paul Cézanne, Edouard Manet, and Pierre-August Renoir began their careers and were influenced by the culture of the Second Empire. The progressive liberalization of the government during the 1860s resulted in extending the powers of the Legislative Assembly, restricting church control over secondary education, and permitting the development of trade unions. In large part, this liberalization was designed to divert criticism from Napoleon III's unsuccessful foreign policy. French involvement in Algeria, the Crimean War, the process of Italian unification, the establishment of colonial presences in Senegal, Somaliland, and Indo-China (Laos, Cambodia, and Viet Nam), and the ill-fated Mexican adventure (the short-lived rule of Maximilian, Archduke of Austria), resulted in increased criticism of Napoleon III and his authority. Scandals involving the *Crédit Mobilier*, for instance, exposed the thorough corruption of Napoleon's favored elites.

The Second Empire collapsed after the capture of Napoleon III during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). After a regrettable Parisian experience with a communist type of government, the Third French Republic was established: it would survive until 1940.

Inter-European Relations (1848-1878)

Since the Napoleonic era, the peace in Europe had been sustained by fears

and memories of the devastation and disruption caused by the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. The primary structure that maintained the peace was the Concert of Europe, a rather loose and ill-defined understanding among the great powers that they would join to resolve problems that threatened the status quo: it was believed that the powers would undertake joint action to prohibit any drastic alteration in the European system or balance of power. The credibility of the Concert of Europe was undermined by the failure of the powers to take action against the revolutions of 1848 in time. Between 1848 and 1878, the peace among the European powers was interrupted by the Crimean War (1854-1856) and challenged by the crisis centered on the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.

The Crimean War

The origins of the Crimean War involved a dispute between two groups of Christians (and their protectors) over privileges in the Holy Land. At this time, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. In 1852, the Turks negotiated an agreement with the French to provide enclaves in the Holy Land to Roman Catholic religious orders: this arrangement appeared to jeopardize already existing agreements that provided access to Greek Orthodox religious orders. Tsar Nicholas, unaware of the impact of his action, ordered Russian troops to occupy the Danubian principalities; his strategy was to withdraw once the Turks agreed to clarify and guarantee the rights of the Greek Orthodox orders. The role of Britain in this developing crisis was critical; Nicholas mistakenly assumed that the prime minister, Lord Aberdeen, would be sympathetic to the Russian policy. Aberdeen, heading a coalition cabinet, sought to use the Concert of Europe to settle the question. However, Lord Palmerston, home secretary, supported the Turks; he was suspicious of Russian intervention in the region. Consequently, misunderstandings about Britain's policy developed. In October 1853, the Turks demanded that Russia withdraw from the occupied principalities; the Russians failed to respond, so the Turks declared war. In February 1854, Nicholas advanced a draft for a settlement of the conflict; the Turks rejected it, and Great Britain and France joined the Ottoman Turks and declared war on Russia.

With the exception of naval encounters in the Gulf of Finland, this war was conducted on the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea. In September 1854, more than fifty thousand British and French troops landed in the Crimea, determined to take the Russian port city of Sebastopol. While this war has been remembered for the work of Florence Nightingale and the

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“Charge of the Light Brigade,” it was a conflict in which there were more casualties from disease and weather than from combat. In December 1854, Austria, with great reluctance, became a cosignatory of the Four Points of Vienna, a statement of British and French war aims. The Four Points specified that (1) Russia should renounce any claims to the occupied principalities, (2) the 1841 Straits Convention, which had declared that no warships were to be allowed in the Straits, would be revised, (3) navigation in the mouth of the Danube River (on the Black Sea) should be internationalized, and (4) Russia should withdraw any claim to having a special protective role for Orthodox residents in the Ottoman Empire. In 1855, Piedmont joined Britain and France in the war. In March 1855, Nicholas I died and was succeeded by Alexander II, who was opposed to continuing the war. In December 1855, the Austrians, under excessive pressure from the British, French, and Piedmontese, sent an ultimatum to Russia in which they threatened to renounce their neutrality. In response, Alexander II indicated that he would accept the Four Points.

Representatives of the belligerents convened in Paris between February and April 1856. The resulting Peace of Paris had the following major provisions: Russia had to acknowledge international commissions that were to regulate maritime traffic on the Danube, recognize Turkish control of the mouth of the Danube, renounce all claims to the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (this later led to the establishment of Romania), agree not to fortify the Aaland Islands, renounce its position as protector of Orthodox residents of the Ottoman Empire, and return all occupied territories to the Turks. The Straits Convention of 1841 was revised through the neutralization of the Black Sea. The Declaration of Paris specified the rules that would regulate commerce during periods of war. Lastly, the signatories recognized and guaranteed the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Russia felt betrayed by Austria, a fact that would lead to the First World War, but Prussia under Bismarck wisely, but cruelly, affected a rapprochement with Russia by helping it to crush the Polish Rebellion of 1863. The special Russo-German friendship would fail only after the fall of Bismarck.