“The Hammer and Anvil Speech”

Bernhard von Bülow in a speech before the Reichstag (German Parliament), 11 December 1899. Bernhard von Bülow was the German Secretary of State and later served as Chancellor. This is the original text of the speech, translated into English.

“In our nineteenth century, England has increased its colonial empire -- the largest the world has seen since the days of the Romans. Further and further; the French have put down roots in North Africa and East Africa and created for themselves a new empire in the Far East. Russia has begun its mighty course of victory in Asia, leading it to the high plateau of the Pamir [part of Afghanistan] and to the coasts of the Pacific Ocean. Four years ago the Sino-Japanese war, and scarcely one and a half years ago the Spanish-American War have put things further in motion; they've led to great, momentous, and far-reaching decisions. They have shaken old empires, and added new and serious ferment.

The English prime minister said a long time ago that the strong states were getting stronger and stronger and the weak ones weaker and weaker. [...] We don't want to step on the toes of any foreign power, but at the same time we don't want our own feet tramped by any foreign power (“Bravo!”) and we don't intend to be shoved aside by any foreign power, not in political nor in economic terms. (Lively applause.)

It is time, high time, that we [...] make it clear in our own minds what stance we have to take and how we need to prepare ourselves in the face of the processes taking place around us, processes which carry the seeds within them for the restructuring [fundamental change] of power relations for the unforeseeable future. To stand inactively to one side, as we have done so often in the past, either from native modesty (Laughter) or because we were completely absorbed in our own internal arguments or for doctrinaire [inflexible, not adaptable] reasons -- to stand dreamily to one side while other people split up the pie, we cannot and we will not do that. (Applause.)

We cannot stand by for the simple reason that we now have interests in all parts of the world. [...] The rapid growth of our population, the unprecedented blossoming of our industries, the hard work of our merchants, in short the mighty vitality of the German people have woven us into the world economy and pulled us into international politics. If the English speak of a ‘Greater Britain;’ if the French speak of a ‘Nouvelle [new] France;’ if the Russians open up Asia; then we, too, have the right to a greater Germany (Bravo! from the right [conservatives], laughter from the left [liberals]), not in the sense of conquest, but indeed in the sense of peaceful extension of our trade and its infrastructures. We cannot and will not permit that the order of the day passes over the German people.
There is a lot of envy present in the world against us (calls from the left), political envy and economic envy. There are individuals and there are interest groups, and there are movements, and there are perhaps even peoples that believe that the German was easier to have around and that the German was more pleasant for his neighbors in those earlier days, when, in spite of our education and in spite of our culture, foreigners looked down on us in political and economic matters like cavaliers [disapproving or dismissive person] with their noses in the air looking down on the humble tutor. (Very true! - Laughter.)

These times of political faintness and economic and political humility should never return (Lively “Bravo!”). As Friedrich List put it, we don't ever again want to become the 'slaves of humanity.' But we will only be able to keep ourselves at the fore if we realize that there is no welfare [the state of being happy, healthy, successful] for us without power, without a strong army and a strong fleet. (“Very true!” from the right; strong objections from the left).

The means, gentlemen, for a people of almost 60 million -- dwelling in the middle of Europe and, at the same time, stretching its economic antennae out to all sides -- to battle its way through in the struggle for existence without strong armaments [weapons] on land and at sea, have not yet been found. (“Very true!” from the right.)

In the coming century the German people will be a hammer or an anvil.”
Source Evaluation and Questions for the “Hammer and Anvil” Speech

1. ORIGIN: Who delivered this speech, and what do we know about them? When was it delivered? Who was the audience?

2. PURPOSE: What did the speaker trying to communicate to the audience? Why did the speaker write it, and what did he hope to accomplish by delivering this speech?

3. VALUE: With reference to the origin and purpose, how does this speech help us understand what was going on in its place and time, historically? Does the author represent a particular perspective or “side”, within Germany and beyond, and what is that perspective?

4. LIMITATION: With reference to the origin, purpose, and/or value of this speech, what is missing from this speech that could be of use to us as historians? Remember, bias by itself is not a limitation.

5. First, review these three key terms:

   - **Militarism** = glorification of military, weapons, and war.
   - **Nationalism** = intense pride in, and a sense of personal identity with, one's nation.
   - **Imperialism** = a policy or practice by which a country increases its power by gaining control over other areas of the world.

Now, using your Origin-Purpose-Value-Limitation analysis and evidence from the Hammer and Anvil speech itself, answer the following question on the back of this sheet in 1-3 paragraphs (3-5 sentences each): **In what ways does Bernhard von Bülow's speech demonstrate German Militarism, Nationalism, and Imperialism, and what do you think the outcome will be?**