How successful was Disraeli’s 2nd Ministry 1874-1880?

Indicative Content: Domestic reforms and foreign and imperial policies of the 1874-1880 ministry (especially the reasons for and impact of reforms), the roles of Disraeli and his colleagues, reasons for defeat in 1880.

Disraeli’s Foreign and Imperial Policy

Aims
- Change from criticism of ‘gunboat diplomacy’ to more positivity about the Empire – by 1870s he talks of it as a ‘pillar’ of Britain
- Regardless of his true feelings, Disraeli was interested in Imperial Policy purely as a means for uniting the Conservative Party, both within Parliament and without – the idea of a strong and powerful policy to protect a strong and powerful nation appealed greatly to the Working Class Vote
- Although he did refer to expansion as an aim in his 1872 Crystal Palace speeches, what he actually said was extremely vague
- However, Disraeli may also have a genuine desire to build empire because he sees it as a civilizing mission (‘white man’s burden’)
- Disraeli is uninterested in the settled, self-governing colonies like Canada and New Zealand, and sees them as a drain
- he is, overall, mainly interested in the more exciting incidents despite his lack of control over them.
- Maintaining the Balance of Power In Europe (particularly containing Russia)
- Maintaining the Prestige of the Empire
- Protection of Trade
- Domestic Electoral Success
- Not necessarily expansionist – despite annexation of Fiji, expansion is not a stated aim

Empress of India Act 1876
- Because of India's vast significance both symbolically and as a trading nation, Disraeli was determined to preserve it as a colony and preserve the routes to it.
- Actions: Disraeli steered the Royal Titles Act through Parliament making Victoria the Empress
- Significance: 1) Demonstrated Britain had every intention of remaining in control of India. 2) By asking the Queen of England the Empress of India as well, it was hoped that Britain could build a much warmer relationship with the Indians rather than just a detached government. 3) It symbolically warned other nations (‘great game’) who supposedly had designs on India. 4) Won Disraeli favour with the Queen, who was very popular for the Ministry.
- Impetus from this change came not from Disraeli but from Victoria herself

The Suez Canal Shares 1875
- Suez Canal had been opened in 1869 and was controlled jointly by France and Khedive Ismail, ruler of Egypt.
- In 1875 because of financial difficulty, Ismael decided to sell his share (7/16 of the total) where there was a high possibility the British would buy them to get better control of an extremely important trade link for Britain (England to India)
- Ismael asked for £4 million pounds for the shares, an amount the French had trouble paying
- Disraeli, hearing of the selling of the shares, was determined to get them and carried his Cabinet quickly and decisively to buy the loans, using his connections to gain a loan from Baron Rothschild (however this came at an exorbitant rate of interest)
- Significance: France was denied an outright control of the Canal, the part ownership of it meant that the British used the Canal far more frequently, and it cut the cost of shipping goods to places like India, Australia. By 1898 the shares were worth £24 million, an excellent investment. Furthermore, it was a very popular move for the ministry.
- Very Disraeli-led – it was he who acted decisively to raise the money for the all-important shares

The Eastern Crisis – Russo-Turkish War, Bulgarian Atrocities, The Congress of Berlin
- Background: Disraeli, concerned with maintaining the Concert of Europe, was very much aware of Russian interest towards parts of the declining Ottoman Empire, and the suspicion felt against the Russians became part of the ‘Eastern Question’. It was hoped that the Eastern Question had been solved following the Treaty of Paris 1856 at the end of the Crimean War, but the Russians revoked the Black Sea Clauses (see Gladstone) and the Turks ignored their promises to treat their Christian citizens fairly – they persecuted and overtaxed them in the Balkans, to the protests of all the main European powers.
- The Bulgarian Atrocities 1876 occurred when the Bosnian Serbs rebelled against Turkish rule (as Balkan and Slav Nationalism had been growing increasingly in the last century). The Russians tried to persuade the Turks to agree to a set of reforms, but the revolt spread to Christian Bulgaria and the Turks allowed irregular soldiers, Bashi-Bazouks to put down the uprising – they did so with great brutality, horrifying much of Europe particularly Russia, who felt that as Slavs they shared a bond with the persecuted Slavs of the Balkans.
- In April 1877 Russia declares war on Turkey in the face of these atrocities, giving Britain assurances that they would not capture Constantinople and would not threaten India or the Suez Canal.
- The war went poorly for the Russians, slow moving through Turkey, but by January 1878 they were within 100 miles of Constantinople – Britain worried that they would not keep their promises (public opinion becomes pro-Turkey)