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RAISON D'ETAT: RICHELIEU'S GRAND STRATEGY DURING THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR

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Renowned for his fierce intellect, mastery of the dark arts of propaganda, and unshakeable belief in the centralizing virtues of the French monarchy, Cardinal Richelieu's actions as chief minister under Louis XIII from 1624 to 1642 have been heatedly debated by generations of historians, political philosophers, novelists, and biographers. The polarizing figure is best known for three things: his unabashed authoritarianism, his efforts to stiffen the sinews of the French state, and his decision to position France as a counterweight to Habsburg hegemony through a network of alliances with Protestant powers. This article focuses on this last aspect of Richelieu's life and legacy: his conception and practice of great power competition. What philosophy of power and statecraft underpinned the cardinal's approach to counter-hegemonic balancing? To what extent was Richelieu truly successful, and what insights can contemporary security managers derive from his policies and actions? Drawing on both primary and secondary literature, this essay engages in a detailed and interdisciplinary study of Richelieu's grand strategy during the Thirty Years' War.

Introduction

On a cold winter day in 1793, a crowd of French revolutionaries burst into the chapel of the Sorbonne. Streaming toward a large sarcophagus in the center of the apse, the mob laid into the cool marble with their rifle butts, hammering away at the central figure's aquiline features. Howling vandals dragged a desiccated cadaver from the crypt, and a grisly — and most likely apocryphal — tale describes how street urchins were later spotted playing with its severed head.[1] Alexandre Lenoir, an archeologist, waded into the whirlwind of mayhem and — at the price of a bayonet-skewered hand — managed to save one of baroque sculpture's masterpieces from total destruction.[2]

The object of the *sans-culottes'* ire was a man who had been dead for over a century and a half, but who remains to this day a towering symbol of *Ancien Régime* absolutism: Armand Jean du Plessis — better known as Cardinal Richelieu. The clergyman, who served as Louis XIII's chief minister from 1624 to 1642, has long constituted

1 Léon Gabriel Toraude, *Les Tribulations Posthumes de la Tête de Richelieu* (Paris: Vigot Frères, 1928), 6.

2 See Alexandra Stara, *The Museum of French Monuments 1795-1816: Killing Art to Make History* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 52–53.

one of the more polarizing and fascinating figures in the history of Western statecraft. Renowned for his fierce intellect, mastery of the dark arts of propaganda, and unshakeable belief in the centralizing virtues of the French monarchy, Richelieu's actions as chief minister have been debated by generations of historians, political philosophers, novelists, and biographers.[3]

Richelieu is best known for three things: his unabashed authoritarianism, his efforts to stiffen the sinews of the French state, and his decision to position France as a counterweight to Habsburg hegemony through a network of alliances with Protestant powers. It is these aspects of his domestic and international legacy — all of which are frequently viewed as closely intertwined — that have triggered the most controversy. On the one hand, there are the aforementioned critics — those that viewed the cardinal as a devious and shadowy character, the mustachio-twirling villain of *The Three Musketeers* who cloaked his naked ambition and venal appetites under his crimson robes.[4] On the other hand, there has always been an equally strong cohort of Richelieu enthusiasts. For many modern French writers, Louis XIII's chief minister was an early patriot who contributed to the secularization (*laïcisation*) of French foreign policy, and by extension, of French national identity.[5] Eminent German historians have viewed the cleric as a symbol of diplomatic prudence and dexterity, and have compared him in glowing terms to another "white revolutionary," Otto Von Bismarck.[6] Henry Kissinger, a great admirer of the Frenchman, memorably characterized him as "the charting genius of a new concept of centralized statecraft and foreign policy based on the balance of power."[7]

This article focuses on this last aspect of Richelieu's life and legacy: his conception and practice of great power competition. The goal is not to engage in a moral examination of his actions, but rather to debate their overall effectiveness in advancing France's foreign policy interests during the Thirty Years' War. What philosophy of power and statecraft underpinned the cardinal's approach to counter-hegemonic balancing? How did he view France's role in the world and what was his vision of collective security? Finally, what insights can be derived from Richelieu's approach to foreign policy and great power competition? Is Richelieu the embodiment of *prudentia*, or sagacious statecraft, as some have argued? Perhaps most importantly, are the policies and writings of a 17th-century clergyman relevant and worthy of scrutiny by contemporary security managers?[8]

In an effort to answer these questions, the article proceeds in three main parts. The first section will explore the intellectual foundations of Richelieu's foreign policy. The cardinal was a product of early European nationalism, and he — along with other segments of the country's ruling elites — was steeped in a heavily mythicized belief in French exceptionalism. These messianic and nationalist tendencies were buttressed by the development of a sophisticated body of thought on *raison d'état* — or reason of state. *Raison d'état* fused foreign ideological imports, such as Machiavellianism, with neo-stoicism and France's own tradition of divine absolutism. The net result was a philosophy of power tempered by prudence — one which sought to transcend confessional divisions in favor of domestic unity and international strength. Richelieu's vision of foreign policy, and of an "Augustan golden age" in which France would play the arbitral role in a carefully balanced order of nation-states, can thus best be understood as a subtle amalgamation of these two intellectual currents, *raison d'état* and French exceptionalism.

In the second part, the paper examines Richelieu's strategy in action. At the beginning of the chief minister's tenure, it was readily apparent that the kingdom of Louis XIII was in no position

3 For two excellent overviews of how Richelieu has been viewed over the centuries, see Robert Knecht, "Cardinal Richelieu: Hero or Villain?" *History Today* 53, no. 3 (2003): 10-17, https://www.historytoday.com/archive/cardinal-richelieu-hero-or-villain; and Joseph Bergin, "Three Faces of Richelieu: A Historiographical Essay," *French History* 23, no. 4 (2009): 517–36, https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/crp070.

4 For example, see Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris: Folio, 2015 Edition), chap. 2; Victor Hugo, *Marion DeLorme* (Paris: Editions Broché, 2012 Edition); Alfred de Vigny, *Cinq-Mars* (Paris: Folio, 1980 Edition); and Hilaire Belloc, *Richelieu: A Study* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1929).

5 This is the view partially taken, for example, by Etienne Thuau in *Raison d'Etat et Pensée Politique à l'Epoque de Richelieu* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966). On the "Jacobin legend" of Richelieu, which was particularly prevalent in 19th century French historiography, see Marie-Catherine Souleyreau, *Richelieu ou la Quête d'Europe* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008), 11.

6 Jörg Wollenberg, *Richelieu, Staatsräson und Kircheninteresse: Zur Legitimation der Politik des Kardinalpremier* (Bielfeld: Pfeffersche Buchhandlung, 1977).

7 Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (New York: Random House, 2014), 20.

8 As Francis Gavin has noted, "An understanding of the past doesn't just reveal how things relate over time; history can also expose 'horizontal' connections over space and in depth. … Good horizontal historical work can reveal the complex interconnections and trade-offs that permeate most foreign policies." Francis J. Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 14. For a compelling discussion of the importance of historical analysis in the field of security studies, see Hal Brands and William Inboden, "Wisdom Without Tears: Statecraft and the Uses of History," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 3 (2018): 1–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2018.1428797.

to directly challenge Habsburg dominance. Weakened by years of war and religious turmoil, and riven with bitter divisions, France, which only a century earlier was considered the greatest military power in the West, was in a defensive crouch, ill-equipped and reluctant to engage in a transcontinental armed struggle. Its finances were in shambles, its military system in dire need of reform, and its security elites almost irreconcilably disunited in their approach to grand strategy.

For the first decade or so of his tenure as chief minister, Richelieu sought, therefore, to recover France's strategic solvency by strengthening its state apparatus, dampening internecine hatreds, and crushing perceived political threats to the monarchy. In the decades-long competition with the Habsburgs, Richelieu viewed time as a precious strategic commodity, and opted wherever possible for a strategy of exhaustion and harassment — *la guerre couverte* (covert war) — over one of frontal confrontation. He waged war via a complex constellation of proxies, while his most able diplomats were dispatched to foment internal divisions within both Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. Meanwhile, Richelieu's attempts to craft a more flexible and dynamic form of foreign policy ran into fierce opposition from the *dévots* — Catholic zealots who rejected French alliances with Protestant powers, and sought to accommodate Habsburg Spain.

Even as the cardinal sought to prevail in these bitter ideological struggles and establish some modicum of strategic consensus, he also embarked on an ambitious — and only partially successful — effort to enact internal reforms and strengthen France's overall state capacity.[9]

In 1635, drastic changes in the regional configuration of power forced Richelieu to reluctantly transition from *la guerre couverte* to *la guerre ouverte* — or open war. Until his death in 1642, the cardinal found himself in the challenging position of overseeing a war unprecedented in scale, and waged on several fronts, a conflict that drained the state's coffers and placed considerable stress on a public administration still in its adolescence. Increasingly unpopular and ever fearful of falling out of his mercurial monarch's favor, the chief minister's frail constitution finally gave way in 1642. He thus never got to witness the French victory over Spain at the battle of Rocroi only a few months later — a triumph that, in the eyes of many, marked a definitive shift in the European balance of power.[10]

What lessons can be derived from Richelieu's 18 years at the apex of government? In the third and final section, the essay engages in an assessment of the actions undertaken by this complex and remarkable figure. It conducts a postmortem of Richelieu's grand strategy of counter-hegemonic balancing and points to its successes as well as its failures and shortcomings.

The French historian Philippe Ariès once quipped, "Time sticks to the historian's thoughts like soil to a gardener's spade."[11] As the current generation of strategic thinkers grapples with a period marked by geopolitical upheaval and political disunion, Richelieu's era — full of its own ideological tumult and nationalist fracas — provides a particularly rich soil in which to start digging.

Richelieu's Vision

Categorizing or succinctly defining Richelieu's approach to great power competition is no easy task. Unlike other great strategic thinkers such as Clausewitz or Machiavelli, the body of thought bequeathed to us in his voluminous writings does not easily lend itself to systematization.[12] The cardinal was certainly deeply intellectual: He read Greek, Latin, Italian, and Spanish; was a major patron of the arts; and his personal library, which contained proscribed works, including books on Calvinist theology, was considered one of the finest in Europe.[13] Above all, however, he was a statesman and a policy practitioner, less interested in articulating a set of novel theoretical constructs or in pioneering a school of thought than in harnessing knowledge for the purpose of advancing the interests and ideology of the French

9 As one well-known scholar of the period has noted, "the strengthening of the state within its borders he [Richelieu] believed necessary not only to discipline the French and channel their energies into the most profitable pursuits, but also to provide the indispensable material support of hostilities against the Habsburgs." See William Farr Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 302.

10 While there has been a debate among historians over whether the battle of Rocroi truly constituted a "decisive battle," there is no doubt that the French victory over Spain was viewed by both nations' leaderships as something of a turning point in the competition. See, for example, Fernando González de León, *The Road to Rocroi: Class, Culture, and Command in the Spanish Army of Flanders 1567-1659* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2009).

11 Philippe Ariès, *Les Temps de l'Histoire* (Paris: Plon, 1954), 298.

12 This point is made by Etienne Thuau, when commenting on 17th-century French theorists of *raison d'état* more broadly. According to Thuau, this body of thought was too composite in its origins, elastic in its definitions, and action-oriented to constitute what we would now call an "intellectual system." See Etienne Thuau, *Raison d'Etat et Pensée Politique à l'Epoque de Richelieu* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), 411–21.

13 Alfred A. Franklin, *La Sorbonne, Ses Origines, Sa Bibliothèque, Les Débuts de l'Imprimerie à Paris, et la Succession de Richelieu d'Apres les Documents Inédits*, 2nd Ed. (Paris: L. Willem, 1875), 151–71.

state. At a time when European political leaders and counselors were avid consumers of new translations and interpretations of Roman history, Richelieu warned against viewing the works of Tacitus, Cicero, or Seneca as precise instruction manuals for the present, stating, for instance, that

> There is nothing more dangerous for the state than men who want to govern kingdoms on the basis of maxims which they cull from books. When they do this they often destroy them, because the past is not the same as the present, and times, places, and persons change.[14]

Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of Richelieu's career was precisely his struggle to preserve a degree of intellectual (and political) maneuverability by circumventing the strictures that accompanied narrow ideologies, politicized confessional divisions, or overly systematized schools of thought. That said, it is also evident upon further examination that he operated under the clear guidance of an overarching vision — one that is best understood as a deep yearning for order in a dislocated world.

Richelieu was raised in a country rent by confessional divisions, wracked with penury and famine, and haunted by the specter of its own decline.

The cardinal's lifelong battle against what he perceived as the forces of entropy, chaos, and decline — both within France and, on a more macrocosmic level, overseas — can no doubt be partially explained by two factors. First, Richelieu's quest for order cannot be dissociated from his own experiences growing up in war-torn France.[15] Second, the cardinal was a product of a historical context propitious to such thinking: early modern Europe as it transitioned from the late Renaissance to the Baroque era, and an intellectual environment marked by the blossoming of thought on *raison d'état* and a revival of French exceptionalism.

Richelieu was raised in a country rent by confessional divisions, wracked with penury and famine, and haunted by the specter of its own decline. Born in 1585 into the Poitou region's minor nobility, his family's travails provide a vignette of the broader pressures affecting late 16th-century France. As one biographer notes, "Not a year of his [Richelieu's] early life was passed in peace, and the waves of war and plague broke right against the frowning walls of the family castle."[16] Even as a young child, he would have been aware of the disastrous effects of the collapse of royal authority and of the many years of conflict that had pitted French Catholics against their Protestant, Huguenot neighbors.[17] The verdant plains of Poitou — traditionally a major thoroughfare in times of war — remained dotted with gutted buildings and charred crops. The du Plessis lands had been repeatedly despoiled by roving war bands and brigands regularly visited their depredations on local villagers.[18]

This climate of bloody lawlessness extended to Richelieu's own relatives, who had been embroiled in a Shakespearean feud with another local family, the Maussons, who ruled over a small castle about a mile and a half away. Following an ugly dispute over control of a local church, the Maussons butchered Richelieu's uncle, Louis du Plessis. His younger brother — and Richelieu's future father — the 17-year-old François, was serving as a page at the royal court at the time.

14 Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 2nd Ed. (Paris: Perrin, 2017), 185. On the importance attached to the writings of Tacitus and Cicero in 16th- and early 17th-century France, see J.H.M. Salmon, "Cicero and Tacitus in Sixteenth-Century France," *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 2 (1980): 307–31, https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/85.2.307.

15 As one recent academic study of leaders' decision-making notes, early life experiences matter "in part because they form a mental Rolodex that both citizens and leaders turn to when making strategic decisions in the future." See "Introduction," in Michael C. Horowitz, Allan C. Stam, and Cali M. Ellis, *Why Leaders Fight* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For an excellent study of the importance of leaders' individual threat perceptions and personalized belief systems more broadly, see Elizabeth Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

16 Carl J. Burkhardt, *Richelieu: His Rise to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 162.

17 On France's wars of religion and their effects on the French economy and society, see Nicolas Le Roux, *Les Guerres de Religion 1559-1629* (Paris: Editions Belin, 2011).

18 Roland Mousnier, *L'Homme Rouge ou la Vie du Cardinal de Richelieu* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1992), 28.

Upon hearing the news, the teenager returned to his ancestral lands, lay in wait for the Lord of Mausson by a small bridge, and murdered him.[19] This revenge killing was only the beginning of a remarkably successful — and blood-spattered — military career for Richelieu's father, who became one of Henri III's most effective commanders and executioners, personally overseeing the gruesome deaths of a number of declared enemies of the state.[20] Following the king's assassination at the hands of a Catholic fanatic, François du Plessis immediately pledged loyalty to his designated successor, Henri de Navarre, even though the latter had yet to convert to Catholicism. In this, he displayed a form of "supra-confessional" loyalty to the state that, in some ways, foreshadowed that of his son.[21]

Shortly after Henri de Navarre's coronation as Henri IV, his flinty henchman succumbed to fever. Richelieu was only five at the time and for much of the remainder of his youth his mother struggled with mounting debts and exacting circumstances. A sickly child, Richelieu compensated for his physical frailty with a remarkable intellect coupled with a voracious appetite for learning. Once he came of age, his family directed him toward the bishopric of Luçon, which he acquired in 1607, after having received a special papal dispensation for his young age.[22] A decade later, he entered the royal court as a secretary of state, and in 1622 was named cardinal. Two years later, he ascended to the rank of chief minister, and in 1629 he was awarded the title under which we know him today — that of Duke of Richelieu — Richelieu being the small hamlet where the du Plessis tribe had been raised.

A Product of Early French Exceptionalism

From his vantage point at the height of France's royal bureaucracy, the cardinal looked back at the past half-century of chaos, during which five French kings had either died prematurely or been assassinated by religious fanatics and his country had been ravaged by a seemingly endless cycle of war. For men such as Richelieu, these decades of unrest had not only resulted in widespread misery and the weakening of royal authority, they had also turbocharged France's decline on the international stage. Among a certain constituency of French elites — the *politiques* or *bons français* — France's inability to overcome its communal tensions had only redounded to the advantage of its European competitors, who had capitalized on those divisions. These sentiments were laid bare in pamphlets that lamented that lesser European powers had descended on a weakened France like vultures, "extinguishing the torches of their ambition in France's blood, emptying their humors on its bosom, and importing their quarrels to its very altars."[23] If the people of France did not unite, warned such writers, the nation's fate would be a grim one indeed — it would be reduced to "some little monster of a republic, to some canton (...) or some gray league" of disparate parts.[24] And indeed, during the second half of the 16th century, foreign powers had repeatedly interfered in the nation's domestic politics and intervened in its civil wars.

Philip II's Spain, which had an interest in keeping France in a state of civil strife, had been especially meddlesome, supporting and subsidizing the uprising of the Catholic League during the succession crisis that followed Henri III's death in 1589.[25] In short, France in the late 16th century was much like Syria today: a nation crisscrossed with foreign soldiers, mercenaries, and proxies, and a spectacle of almost unremitting misery and desolation, with some modern estimates putting the numbers of casualties at well over a million out

19 This vicious vendetta is memorably described in Eleanor C. Price, *Cardinal De Richelieu* (New York: McBride, Nast and Company, 1912), 5.

20 Roland Mousnier, *L'Homme Rouge*, 24.

21 As Jean-Vincent Blanchard notes, this was somewhat unusual, as many of Henri III's paladins remained reluctant to swear allegiance to their new king prior to his official conversion to Catholicism in 1593. See, Jean-Vincent Blanchard, *Eminence: Cardinal Richelieu and the Rise of France* (New York: Walker Publishing, 2011), 12.

22 Richelieu had initially been on track for a military career, but this training was cut short when one of his elder brothers, Alphonse, refused to take up the bishopric of Luçon as planned, deciding instead to become a Carthusian monk. The responsibility for the bishopric then fell on the shoulders of the younger sibling, Armand.

23 François de Clary, *Philippiques, Contre les Bulles et Autres Pratiques de la Faction d'Espagne* (Tours, 1592). Author's translation of the French.

24 de Clary, *Philippiques, Contre les Bulles et Autres Pratiques.*

25 The League had first emerged in 1576 as a grouping of reactionary Catholic nobles in favor of a more oppressive religious policy. Over time, some leaguers had become increasingly radical and hostile to the French crown, welcoming aid from antagonistic foreign powers such as Spain and — in a few noteworthy cases — openly advocating regicide. On the ideology of the Catholic League, see Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Radical Reactionaries: The Political Thought of the French Catholic League* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1975); and Jean-Marie Constant, *La Ligue* (Paris: Fayard, 1996).

of a population about 16 times that size.[26]

The reign of Henri IV, from 1589 to 1610, brought a measure of stability to domestic affairs, with the king proving as skilled at fostering unity as he had been at waging war. The signing of the Edict of Nantes, in 1598, ushered in a period of almost unprecedented religious toleration and a fragile peace returned to the realm. Despite his manifold accomplishments, Henri IV's reign remained fiercely contested by religious extremists on both sides. After miraculously surviving over a dozen assassination attempts, death finally caught up with the "good King Henri" when, in 1610, an unhinged zealot stabbed him to death. His murder constituted something of a unifying trauma for a country weary of the endless spirals of bloodletting and desperate to recover its lost grandeur.[27]

Indeed, while conventional wisdom has long held that the messianic character of French nationalism is essentially a modern phenomenon and a natural outgrowth of the universalism of the French enlightenment and revolution, historians have increasingly demonstrated the extent to which French intellectual elites from the medieval era onward already viewed their country as predestined for continental leadership and as a role model for other European monarchies.[28] This form of pre-modern exceptionalism was structured around three main pillars, or conceptual templates. The first was France's history of imperial glory and martial prowess, with a particular focus on the empire of Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor, and on France's leading role during the Crusades, during which it provided the bulk of expeditionary military power. The early 17th century bore witness to a revival of interest in these myth-shrouded eras of France's past and contemporary texts frequently reprised the medieval papal designation of the French as God's "chosen people," or *peuple élu*.[29] The second was a sense that French dominance was the natural "order of things," due to the nation's size, central position, fertile lands, and demographic heft. (The kingdom of France was the most populous in Europe).[30] And the third pillar was a unique brand of French Catholicism — Gallicanism — that argued against excessive papal interference in domestic matters and was closely tied to France's tradition of divine absolutism.[31] The French monarch, or "most Christian" king, as he was formally known, was revered as a religious figure vested with certain sacred powers and abilities (such as the ability to cure scrofula and other ailments through the power of touch) and as one of God's "lieutenants" on Earth.[32]

All of this was accompanied by a sense of cultural superiority that had become increasingly widespread with the diffusion of vernacular French, which many viewed as the "purest" of European tongues after Latin, and the continued circulation of exceptionalist origin myths, such as that the French were descended from the Trojans.[33] These expressions of civilizational pride occasionally went hand in hand with territorial revisionism, as an increasingly vocal body of French jurists and pamphleteers argued in favor of the "recapture" of French imperial possessions harking back to the

26 For a good overview of the French wars of religion, see Robert Jean Knecht, *The French Religious Wars: 1562-1598* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2002). See also, James B. Woods, "The Impact of the Wars of Religion: A View of France in 1581," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 131–68, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2541435.

27 The French historian Michel Cassan has described how in the wake of the assassination French Protestant and Catholic communities, fearful of another descent into chaos and violence, preemptively renewed their "confessional coexistence pacts" in order to preserve stability. See, Michel Cassan, *La Grande Peur de 1610: Les Français et l'Assassinat de Henri IV* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2010).

28 See the magisterial work of the French historian Colette Beaune in *Naissance de la Nation France* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1985). On late medieval, and early modern manifestations of patriotism more broadly, see Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

29 The French diplomat Jacques Bongars' compilation in 1611 of a number of historic chronicles of the Crusades under the title "Gesta Dei per Francos," (God's Deeds Through the Franks) proved particularly influential in reinvigorating the notion of the French as God's chosen people.

30 See, Myriam Yardeni, *La Conscience Nationale en France Pendant les Guerres de Religion* (Paris: Editions Nauwelaerts, 1971), 32–37. It is worth noting that Richelieu also alludes to France's demographic superiority over Spain as providing it with an edge in any long-term competition. See, for example, Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 268.

31 On Gallicanism as a political ideology, see Jotham Parsons, *The Church in the Republic: Gallicanism and Political Ideology in Renaissance France* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 185–223.

32 As historians such as Marc Bloch have noted, this concept of sacred kingship took root at the intersection of two traditions: the *philosophy* of the French monarchy, which was defended by theorists such as Jean Bodin who viewed the king as the sole guarantor of unity and enforcer of sovereignty over an otherwise divided nation, and the *religion* of the French monarchy, which drew on folk traditions and village mysticism in a predominantly rural and deeply superstitious country. See, Marc Bloch, *Les Rois Thaumaturges: Etude sur le Caractère Surnaturel Attribué à la Puissance Royale, Particulièrement en France et en Angleterre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983 Ed.); and Julian H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Rise of Absolutist Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

33 See, E.C. Caldwell, "The Hundred Years' War and National Identity," in *Inscribing the Hundred Years' War in French and English Cultures*, ed. D.N. Baker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 237–65; and Paul Cohen, "In Search of the Trojan Origins of the French: The Uses of History in the Elevation of the Vernacular in Early Modern France," in *Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alan Shephard and Stephen D. Powell (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 63–81.

era of Charlemagne. In so doing, their revanchist arguments bear a resemblance to those of certain contemporary Chinese nationalists, who argue that the People's Republic of China should hold sway over all territories once controlled by the Ming or Qing dynasties.[34]

This cocktail of wounded nationalism and frustrated exceptionalism was rendered more potent by the rise of foreign adversaries that French elites had long perceived as their natural inferiors. While France had been consumed with internal struggles, the Habsburg powers — with their two dynastic branches in Spain and Austria — had been consolidating their strength. Writers in Paris emitted dark warnings of Madrid's ultimate ambition to establish a "universal monarchy," which would exert uncontested hegemony from Iberia to Bohemia.[35] Spain — which had humiliated France during the Council of Trent and displaced it as Europe's most redoubtable military power — was viewed as the most serious and immediate threat. Portrayed in French writings as a "mongrel," corrupt, and upstart nation, Habsburg Spain had succeeded with the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559 in strong-arming the French monarchy into acknowledging Spanish dominance over much of Italy.[36] This was a source of intense dismay for a whole generation of French nobles, who had been reared on the tales of their ancestors' transalpine exploits. A social caste that had drawn much of its *raison d'être* from the martial luster of foreign ventures feared that it had been trapped in a "post-heroic era." As one soldier-aristocrat wrote at the time, commenting on the signing of the treaty, "In the space of an hour, with a simple gesture with a quill, we were forced to surrender everything, and to tarnish all our glorious past victories with a few drops of ink."[37] At the same time, a growing body of nobles had begun to look at France's religious conflicts with distaste — viewing them as dishonorable, fratricidal, and barbaric — and pined for the "glory days" of foreign wars.[38]

As a member of the minor nobility, and the son of a renowned warrior who had served across confessional lines, Richelieu was a direct product of this melancholic, fin-de-siècle zeitgeist. The sections of his writings that expound on the nature and characteristics of the French people frequently resemble those of an exasperated, yet loving, parent. His works also reflect the intellectual tradition of viewing France as uniquely positioned for European leadership and its people as destined for greatness, provided they ceased to wallow in the mediocrity brought about by internal divisions.[39]

The cardinal was hardly subtle in his suggestion that he was destined for a leading role, with an almost sacred responsibility to inject discipline into France's boisterous society and channel its formidable energy into the recovery of its natural place at the cockpit of European geopolitics. The latter goal would require him to pursue a bold and controversial foreign policy vision — one intellectually grounded in theories of *raison d'état.*

Raison d'Etat and Authoritarianism

Few political theorists have generated quite as much heated controversy as Niccolò Machiavelli.[40] The Machiavellian assertion of a clear and necessary distinction between private morality and state behavior was viewed as a moral affront — or at least a severe intellectual challenge — by many early modern Christian thinkers. And then, of course, there was the whiff of sulfur that came with the mere mention of the Italian humanist's name. His works were placed on the papal index of proscribed books and he had become associated in popular culture with atheism and republicanism. In

34 On China's revisionist instrumentalization of its imperial history, see Howard French, *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017).

35 This hegemonic ambition was most notoriously laid out by the Dominican friar Tommaso Campanella in his 1600 treatise, *A Discourse Touching the Spanish Monarchy: Laying Down Directions and Practices Whereby the King of Spain May Attain a Universal Monarchy.* For a detailed analysis of Spanish writings on universal monarchy, see Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination: Studies in European and Spanish-American Social and Political Theory 1513-1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 37–65.

36 On the strength of anti-Spanish sentiment, which often went hand in hand with a desire for greater French unity, see Alain Tallon, *Conscience Nationale et Sentiment Religieux en France au XVIème Siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), 56–58; and Yardeni, *La Conscience Nationale en France.*

37 Seigneur de Brantôme, *Oeuvres Complètes Tome III* (Paris: Editions Hachette, 2013 Ed.), 615–16. Author's translation from the French.

38 See, Anne-Marie Cocula, "Des Héros Sans Gloire: Les Grands Capitaines des Guerres de Religion Vus par Brantôme," *Nouvelle Revue du XVIème Siècle* 12, no. 1 (1994): 79–90, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25598774; Arlette Jouanna, *Ordre Social, Mythes et Hiérarchies dans la France du XVIème Siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1977); and Nicolas Le Roux, "Honneur et Fidélité: Les Dilemmes de l'Obéissance Nobiliaire au Temps des Troubles de Religion," *Nouvelle Revue du XVIème Siècle* 22, no. 1 (2004): 127–46, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25599006.

39 See for example, Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 268–69.

40 As the German historian Friedrich Meinecke wrote in the 1920s, the Florentine's provocative reflections on ethics and statecraft constituted "a sword which was plunged into the flank of the body politic of Western humanity, causing it to shriek and rear up." See, Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellianism: The Doctrine of Raison d'Etat and Its Place in Modern History* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 49.

early 17th-century France, in particular, there was a radioactive quality to affirming oneself as a disciple of Machiavelli, whose very "Italianness" rendered his ideas suspect.[41] For many political theorists of the early Baroque era, it was safer to simply bypass the works of the controversial Florentine to plumb the ruminations of the sages of the ancient world. Tacitus, in particular, was considered, in the words of Montaigne, to be a veritable "nursery of ethical and political discourses for the use and ornament of those who have status in the management of the world."[42] As one historian notes, 17th-century writers began to contrast Machiavellianism with Tacitism, framing them as "two terms connoting either a pejorative or a positive interpretation of raison d'état principles."[43]

The rise of this particular brand of Tacitism coincided with the growth of the neo-stoic movement, which drew solace from the virtues celebrated by Roman stoics such as Seneca — *constantia*, self-discipline, obedience, and rationality. The spread of neo-stoicism, many have argued, was a natural reaction to decades of violence and disruption.[44] Neo-stoicism was more than just a consolatory credo, however. It was also a philosophy of action that emphasized patriotism and public service.[45] In that sense, it aligned neatly with the goals of many Christian political theorists of the Counter-Reformation, who had set out to prove that it was possible to advance the interests of the state without completely severing ties with the Christian ethical tradition.[46] The flowering of such writings gave birth to a remarkably rich and sophisticated body of thought, one that largely succeeded in its mission to develop a pragmatic, yet religiously inflected, foreign policy ethos. It is through this prism that one should read Richelieu's own writings on statecraft, rather than viewing him simply as the "French Machiavelli," or as the harbinger of a continent-wide secularization of foreign policy.[47] Indeed, in lieu of detaching France's secular interests from its faith-based traditions, Richelieu and the writers and polemicists with whom he surrounded himself sought to combine the two and "endeavored to show that the good of the state coincided with that of the religion."[48]

In this Richelieu and his supporters were greatly aided by France's pre-existing exceptionalist mythos and tradition of divine absolutism. The first provided the kingdom with an ideological predisposition toward strategic autonomy, while the second lent a religious "cover" for actions that might otherwise appear hostile to the interests of the Catholic Church.

French *raison d'état* was deeply intertwined with the nation's tradition of divine absolutism. For Richelieu and his absolutist fellow travelers, monarchy was not only the most effective form of government, it was also the most natural.[49] The French monarch, by virtue of his divine nature, was

41 Following Henri IV's assassination, his wife Marie de Medici had ruled as regent for a decade before her son Louis XIII came of age. She and her Italian adviser Concino Concini were deeply unpopular and had been frequently accused of "Machiavellianism" — i.e., corrupt and devious behavior — by a hostile and xenophobic French populace. See, Henry Heller, *Anti-Italianism in Sixteenth Century France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

42 See, Michel de Montaigne, *Essais Tome 2* (Paris: Folio, 2009 Ed.), 157. Author's translation from the French. On the rise of Tacitism, see Alexandra Gadja, "Tacitus and Political Thought in Early Modern Europe, c.1530-c.1640," in *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*, ed. A.J. Woodman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 253–69.

43 Adrianna E. Bakos, "Qui Nescit Dissimulare, Nescit Regnare: Louis XI and Raison D'Etat During the Reign of Louis XIII," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52, no. 3 (1991): 399–416, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2710044. Slowly but surely, Tacitus came to be viewed less as a diagnostician of the decay of civil liberties under the Roman Principate, and more as the father of prudence, and the "patron of state vigilance." For one such example of Tacitist writing in 17th-century France, see Rodolphe Le Maistre, who famously described Tacitus as the "oracle of princes" in *Le Tibère Français ou les Six Premiers Livres des Annales de Cornelius Tacitus* (Paris: Robert Estienne, 1616).

44 See, Gerhard Oestrich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Leonine Zanta, *La Renaissance du Stoicisme au XVIème Siècle* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018 Edition); and Raymond Lebegue, "La Littérature Française et les Guerres de Religion," *The French Review* 23, no. 3 (1950): 205–13, https://www.jstor.org/stable/381880.

45 Oestrich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, 29. Mark Bannister notes that French neo-stoic writings argued "in favor of a much more active and patriotic response to the onslaughts of fate than would have been advocated by the (classically stoic) ancients." See, Mark Bannister, "Heroic Hierarchies: Classic Models for Panegyrics in Seventeenth-Century France," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 8, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 38–59, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30224156, and Anthony Levi, *French Moralists: The Theory of the Passions 1585-1649* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1964).

46 For an excellent overview of this intellectual current, see Robert Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince: Anti-Machiavellianism or Catholic Statecraft in Early Modern Europe* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990). Granted, the laborious efforts to define precisely which ethical violations were justifiable in service to the state occasionally veered into casuistry. In some instances, theorists clearly struggled to establish neat categories or "guides" of justifiable departures from Christian morality. For some of the more famous efforts at establishing such behavioral guides, see Justus Lipsius, *Six Books on Politics or Civil Doctrine* (Arnhem, 1647); Scipione Ammirato, *Discourses on Cornelius Tacitus* (Florence, 1594); and "Lettre du Seigneur de Silhon a Monsieur l'Eveque de Nantes," in *Recueil de Lettres Nouvelles*, ed. N.Faret (Paris: 1627).

47 Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State*, 44.

48 Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State*, 44.

49 Thinkers such as François de Gravelles argued that the monarchical system of government was "approved by reason, and confirmed by nature," and pointed to the hierarchical structure of various animal societies such as bee hives, which most naturalists believed at the time was centered around a king, rather than a queen, bee. See, François de Gravelles, *Politiques Royales* (Lyon, 1596), 117. Author's translation from the French.

infused with a purer, higher form of reason, which allowed him to pursue a more pragmatic foreign policy at a remove from the unruly passions and parochial concerns of the common man.[50] This view of the king as the metaphysical embodiment of the state is evident throughout the works of Richelieu's closest collaborators, with one of them writing that the king was so divinely "animated by the power of reason," that "the interests of the state" had replaced the "passions of his soul."[51] At the same time, however, the corporeal structure of the state — its territorial integrity, armies, and institutions — remained profoundly mortal. Its defense could only be guaranteed by a small, trusted group of icy-veined custodians mounting an undying — and unforgiving — vigil. Richelieu thus warned that Christian charity could hardly be extended to seditious actors, for while

> man's salvation occurs ultimately in the next world … states have no being after this world. Their salvation is either in the present or nonexistent. Hence the punishments that are necessary to their survival may not be postponed but must be immediate.[52]

Indeed, *raison d'état* was also inherently authoritarian. French *raison d'état* theorists were not just ruthless, they were also elitists, convinced that the *arcana imperii,* or mysteries of state, could only be mastered and entrusted to a select few.[53] Having witnessed mob violence and religious cleansing on a horrific scale over the course of the past century, thinkers such as Richelieu were ever wary of the fickleness of their nation's subjects — ordinary men and women who could fall prey to demagoguery and who, in their minds, were incapable of rising above their petty needs and brutish impulses in order to pursue the greater good.

This paternalistic and imperious view of how a nation's grand strategy should be conducted undergirds the infamous passage in which Richelieu compares the common people to stubborn mules requiring a careful mixture of cajolement and discipline.[54] Richelieu's seeming dismissal of the everyday concerns of the French peasantry went hand in hand with a determination to impose order both at home and abroad — regardless of temporary hardship or foreign opposition.

This single-mindedness was more than just the sign of a merciless operator, however. Although the chief minister was suffused with the pessimism and misanthropy characteristic of authoritarian thinkers, his vision for the future of French and European foreign policy was also strangely optimistic and, some might argue, enlightened for his age.

Balancing and Collective Security

In 1642, only a few weeks before Richelieu's death, a heroic comedy, entitled *Europe*, was performed at the royal court. By all accounts, the production was terrible, with wooden performances and leaden dialogue.[55] Partly ghostwritten by Richelieu on his deathbed, the play was an allegorical representation of the cardinal's foreign policy. It depicted a struggle between the aggressive, wolfish Ibère (Spain) and the brave, noble Françion (France) for the heart of a delicate princess, Europe. Ibère is portrayed as a haughty, insensitive, and controlling suitor. Europe winds up asking Françion to be her protector and begs him to shield her from the lust-filled Spaniard's unwanted attentions. The play has little artistic merit, but as a late-career encapsulation of Richelieu's foreign policy vision, it makes for an interesting read, especially the discussions on the sovereignty of small nation-states, wars of necessity versus wars of choice, and the means by which to attain a lasting peace on the continent. As one analyst notes, the play lays out a vision for a

50 The concept of reason, or what the cardinal sometimes referred to as the "natural light of reason," was at the heart of his political thought. Françoise Hildesheimer notes, for example, that the word "reason" features 173 times in the *Testament Politique*. See, Françoise Hildesheimer, "Le Testament Politique de Richelieu ou le Règne Terrestre de la Raison," *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France* (Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1994): 17-34, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23407693.

51 Jean de Silhon, quoted in F.E. Sutcliffe, *Guez de Balzac et Son Temps: Littérature et Politique* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1959), 231. Author's translation from the French.

52 Armand Jean du Plessis, *Cardinal Duc de Richelieu, Lettres, Instructions Diplomatiques du Cardinal de Richelieu Vol. III* (Paris: Avenel, 1853 Ed.), 665–66. Author's translation from the French.

53 For a seminal discussion of the concept of "mysteries of state" and its ties to absolutist ideology, see Ernst H. Kantorowciz, "Mysteries of State: An Absolutist Concept and Its Late Mediaeval Origins," *Harvard Theological Review* 48, no. 1 (January 1955): 65–91, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1508452.

54 "All political thinkers agree that if the common people were too comfortable, it would be impossible to hold them to the dictates of their duty (…)They must be compared to mules which, being accustomed to burdens, are spoiled by long rest more than work. But as this work should be more moderate and the burdens on these animals proportionate to their strength, so it is with regard to taxes on the common people. If they are not moderate, even though they might be useful to the public, they would still be unjust." Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 253–54. Author's translation from the French.

55 Léopold Lacour, *Richelieu Dramaturge et Ses Collaborateurs: Les Imbroglios Romanesques, Les Pièces Politiques* (Paris: Ollendorf, 1926), 144–52.

future European defense system that would ensure peace — "but always with France in the driver's seat."[56] One segment, in which Françion describes his willingness to sacrifice his own ambitions to shield Europe from Ibère's predations, is particularly noteworthy:

> The innocent and the weak will find in me the source of their support,
>
> I was born the tutor of all young princes
>
> My strength is what maintains the trembling provinces
>
> Everywhere my allies implore my aid
>
> And it is with reason, Princess, that I run to them,
>
> For fear of otherwise being powerless in my own defense,
>
> At last war is needed, and I am drawn into it
>
> Not by ambition, but by necessity.[57]

This passage captures several key aspects of Richelieu's grand strategy: his desire to position France not only as a counterweight to Spanish dominance but also as a future arbiter of state sovereignty; his conviction that France's foreign policy should be tempered by prudence and not fueled solely by the desire for territorial aggrandizement; and his fixation on his nation's reputation and credibility, particularly among its smaller allies.

One of the unique aspects of the cardinal's vision to achieve a "general peace" was his desire to position France both as one of the scales in the balance and as the "holder of the [said] balance."[58] As the weaker party in the Franco-Habsburg rivalry, the French monarchy hoped smaller states could be incited to buy into a more benign model of European geopolitics, with France promising to act as the guarantor of their "ancient freedoms" and "sovereign rights" and as the enforcer of a continent-wide "public liberty."[59] Naturally, there was an element of cynicism to these pledges as well as to the cardinal's professed desire to landscape the European jungle into a neatly manicured French garden. Richelieu's quest for diplomatic equilibrium, along with his hopes for a durable peace settlement, were undoubtedly driven by an ambition, first and foremost, to recover French primacy. That said, notes William Church, all evidence shows that Richelieu was also quite sincere in his hopes for a more peaceful regional order and that he was "sufficiently astute to realize that a Europe-wide system of sovereign states was the only viable alternative to Habsburg universalism."[60] German historians, such as Fritz Dickmann and Klaus Malettke, have focused on the importance of legalism in Richelieu's thought and diplomatic instructions and have convincingly argued that the clergyman was already thinking of a collective defense system buttressed by international law and shared security guarantees in addition to balance-of-power politics.[61]

Of course, Richelieu was hardly the only European thinker to tout the stability-inducing virtues of a regional power equilibrium.[62] David Sturdy has noted that his tenure also coincided with advances in the field of philosophy (such as Cartesianism), and science (such as the discovery of celestial mechanics), which increasingly viewed the physical universe as an intricate assemblage of multiple, self-regulating states of equilibrium. "By analogy," Sturdy ventures,

56 Edward W. Najam, "'Europe': Richelieu's Blueprint for Unity and Peace," *Studies in Philology* 53, no. 1 (January 1956): 25–34, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4173154.

57 Jean Desmarets, *Europe: Comédie Héroïque* (Paris: Editions LeGras, 1643), Act III, Scene 2. Author's translation from the French.

58 Per Maurseth, "Balance-of-Power Thinking from the Renaissance to the French Revolution," *Journal of Peace Research* 1, no. 2 (1964): 120–36, https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336400100204.

59 See, Jörg Wollenberg, "Richelieu et le Système Européen de Sécurité Collective," *Dix-septième Siècle* 1, no. 210 (2010): 99–112; Gaston Zeller, "Le Principe d'Equilibre dans la Politique Internationale Avant 1789," *Revue Historique* 215, no. 1 (1956): 25–37; and Hermann Weber, "Une Bonne Paix: Richelieu's Foreign Policy and the Peace of Christendom," in *Richelieu and His Age*, ed. Joseph Bergin and Laurence Brockliss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 45–71.

60 Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State*, 297.

61 See, for example, Fritz Dickmann, "Rechtsgedanke und Machtpolitik bei Richelieu. Studien an Neuendeckten Quellen," *Historische Zeitschrift*, no. 196 (1963): 265–319; and Klaus Malettke, "French Foreign Policy and the European States System in the Era of Richelieu and Mazarin," in *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848: Episode or Model in Modern History?* ed. Peter Kruger and Paul W. Schroeder (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2002), 29–45.

62 Other illustrious contemporaries of Richelieu, such as Sir Francis Bacon in England, were arguably equally sophisticated in their discussion of balance-of-power politics. See, in particular, his essay "Of Empire," published in 1612 and expanded in 1625, available online at https://www.bartleby.com/3/1/19.html. As David Hume was to note a century and a half later, statesmen have always operated with such principles in mind, for the "maxim of preserving the balance of power is founded … on common sense and obvious reasoning." David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* Vol.1 (London: T.H. Green, 1882 Ed.), 348–56.

For classically educated nationalists such as Richelieu, it appeared evident that France was in many ways the new Rome and Spain – with its kaleidoscope of ethnicities, dispersed territories, and maritime empire – was Carthage.

> Richelieu thought of a Europe in which smaller, satellite states would orbit larger benevolent protectors, none of which would seek hegemony, but which instead would preserve in Europe a peace and equilibrium corresponding to the harmony of the heavens.[63]

There are also some more easily discernible sources of inspiration drawn from history — despite Richelieu's distaste for warmed-over compilations of ancient aphorisms. Both the chief minister and his most trusted aide, Father Joseph — a wily Capuchin monk who "combined in his own persons the oddly assorted characters of Metternich and Savonarola" — frequently referred to the advent of a new "Augustan golden age" they hoped would dawn on European affairs following the bloody unrest of the Thirty Years' War, much as the reign of Augustus had put an end to the chaos of Rome's civil wars.[64] Neo-stoicism relayed a strongly cyclical view of foreign affairs and baroque *raison d'état* theorists focused intensely on the lessons to be derived from the study of the rise and fall of ancient empires.[65] One of the most eloquent articulations of the era's predilection for applied history was made by the Savoyard Giovanni Botero in his masterpiece *Della Ragion di Stato* (The Reason of State), when he stated that, while one could learn from both the living or the dead, "a much greater field from which to learn is that offered to us by the dead with the histories written by them."[66]

For classically educated nationalists such as Richelieu, it appeared evident that France was in many ways the new Rome and Spain — with its kaleidoscope of ethnicities, dispersed territories, and maritime empire — was Carthage.[67] The challenge was how to effectively implement a strategy that would allow France to buy time, gather its strength, and eventually defeat Spain, much as Rome finally prevailed over its trans-Mediterranean foe after a century of bitter struggle.

Richelieu's Strategy

The Habsburg Challenge and the Art of the Long View

When Richelieu was elevated to the rank of chief minister in 1624, France's strategic position, locked in the heart of a war-torn Europe, appeared — at first glance — rather grim. With the kingdom surrounded on all sides by Habsburg possessions, from the Spanish Netherlands in the north to the Iberian Peninsula in the southwest, the cardinal labored to develop a strategy that would allow France to break out of its constricted geopolitical environment. This strategy was undergirded by three main assumptions.

First, France and its underdeveloped army were not yet ready to engage in direct confrontation with their battle-hardened Spanish counterparts, and a weary, fractious French political establishment was unlikely to support any drawn-out military effort. Time was therefore the recuperating nation's most precious strategic commodity. A strategy of delay and protraction was not only required to muster its martial strength but also to forge the necessary elite consensus. Provided France could continue to buy time and bleed the Habsburgs via a league of well-funded and militarily capable proxies, Richelieu was convinced that France's demographic and economic resources would allow it to eventually gain the upper hand in its protracted competition with Spain. As he had confidently predicted in a letter to his ambassador in Madrid in 1632,

> Nowhere is Spain in a position to resist a concentrated power such as France over a long period, and in the final analysis the outcome of a general war must necessarily be calamitous for our Iberian neighbor.[68]

Second, Richelieu believed that France's geographic predicament — its location at the center of the European chessboard and its seeming state of encirclement — could, in fact, be leveraged to

63 David J. Sturdy, *Richelieu and Mazarin: A Study in Statesmanship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 63.

64 See, Aldous Huxley, *Grey Eminence* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), 108.

65 See, Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince*, 238–39. The ancient historian Polybius, with his focus on *anacylosis* (the life cycles of systems of government), *pragmatiké historia* (political and military history), and the study of historical parallels, was held in especially high esteem. For a recent discussion of the legacy of Polybian thought and its continued relevance, see Iskander Rehman, "Polybius, Applied History, and Grand Strategy in an Interstitial Age," *War on the Rocks*, March 29, 2019, https://warontherocks.com/2019/03/polybius-applied-history-and-grand-strategy-in-an-interstitial-age/.

66 Giovanni Botero, *The Reason of State* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 37.

67 Sycophantic artists often drew analogies between Richelieu and the Roman general Scipio Africanus, whether in works of art or in popular theater productions. See, for example Richelieu protégé Desmarets' play *Scipio*, written while France was at a military low point in its war with Spain. Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, *Scipion: Tragi-Comédie* (Paris: H. Le Gras, 1639); and Jean Puget de la Serre, *Le Portrait de Scipion l'Africain ou l'Image de la Gloire et de la Vertu Représentée au Naturel dans Celle de Monseigneur le Cardinal Duc de Richelieu* (Bordeaux, 1641).

68 Quoted in Carl Jacob Buckhardt, *Richelieu and His Age: Power Politics and the Cardinal's Age* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 110.

its advantage. As one recent study of past rivalries has noted, great powers with extended economic and military interests must frequently grapple with two major challenges: First, they offer many points for enemies to threaten and attack, and second, their capacity to project military strength is eroded the further the contested zone is from the core of their power.[69]

With its dispersed holdings, Spain was heavily reliant on the lines of communication that formed the connective tissue of its sprawling empire — whether by sea, or by land, via the so-called Spanish road that ran from the Netherlands through the Italian peninsula.[70] As Richelieu later gloated in the *Testament Politique*, France's centrality and superior interior lines of communication provided it with the means to sever the various strands of Spain's imperial web:

> The providence of God, who desires to keep everything in balance, has ensured that France, thanks to its geographical position, should separate the states of Spain and weaken them by dividing them.[71]

J.H. Elliott, an eminent scholar of early modern Spain, has shown the extent to which Richelieu's Spanish counterpart and longstanding nemesis, the Count-Duke of Olivares, was aware of the inherent vulnerabilities that came with Spain's sprawling empire.[72] Elliott notes that Richelieu's fears of encirclement were paralleled by Olivares' "obsession with the French threat to the network of international communications on which Spanish power depended. ... What to France was a noose, was to Spain a life-line."[73]

Richelieu did not confine his strategy of great power competition to the continental theater, however. From the very beginning of his time as chief minister he stressed the importance of seapower and resolutely focused on the development of France's naval strength.[74] While prestige undoubtedly played a role in Richelieu's energetic pursuit of seapower, it was not the only motivation. His quest to see France emerge as a full-spectrum great power was also undergirded by an ambition to better compete for access to an increasingly globalized market and a desire to shield France's maritime approaches and seaborne trade from predatory naval action.[75] Threatening some of Spain's most vital maritime resupply lines and further complicating its strategic planning was simply the icing on the cake.[76] The story of Richelieu's stewardship of the French Royal Navy is not one of untrammeled success. His efforts to vault France into the ranks of Europe's greatest oceanic powers were chronically undermined by bureaucratic and logistical travails and the fleet's funding was often neglected in favor of a perpetually resource-starved army.[77] Overall, however, the cardinal's overarching goals were more than met. By 1635, he had succeeded in creating a navy that overshadowed England's and matched that of Spain in the Mediterranean.[78]

Finally, Richelieu knew that France would struggle to prosecute a multifront campaign against the combined military might of the Habsburgs' two dynastic branches. Through dexterous and continuous diplomacy, he therefore sought to forestall the advent of a formalized military alliance

69 James G. Lacey, ed., *Enduring Strategic Rivalries* (Arlington, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2014), 1–16, www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA621612. Kenneth Boulding famously referred to this as the "loss of strength gradient." See, Kenneth Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper, 1962), 244–47. For a broader historical discussion of the risks of "force dispersal" that go hand in hand with overly rapid imperial expansion, see Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power Volume I: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 140–43.

70 For a seminal study of this logistical lifeline, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road: 1567-1659* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

71 Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 406. Author's translation from the French.

72 J.H. Elliott, *Richelieu and Olivares* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

73 Elliott, *Richelieu and Olivares*, 119–20.

74 Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 362.

75 On Richelieu's views on maritime trade and commercial capitalism, see Henri Hauser, *La Pensée et l'Action Economiques du Cardinal Richelieu* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1944).

76 As the statesman was to note in the *Testament Politique*, one of the motivations behind developing France's naval might had been to compel Spain to redirect its finite flows of manpower and resources into the defense of its coastline, thus weakening its capacity to "trouble its neighbors to the same degree as it has done thus far." Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 291. Author's translation of the French. For Richelieu's force-structure goals, which included a fleet of "at least 30 good warships," see "Memoire touchant la Marine, envoyé à M. le Garde des Sceaux, November 18, 1626," in *Papiers de Richelieu*, ed. Pierre Grillon (Paris: Pedone, 1977), I, 531.

77 For an excellent and nuanced examination of the successes and failures of Richelieu's naval endeavors, see Alan James, *The Navy and Government in Early Modern France: 1572-1661* (London: The Royal Historical Society, 2004).

78 James, *The Navy and Government in Early Modern France*, 243. On the broader difficulties faced by countries such as France, which — due to the nature of their geography — have consistently had to balance between both continental and maritime threat perceptions, see James Pritchard, "France: Maritime Empire, Continental Commitment," in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson et al. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 123–45.

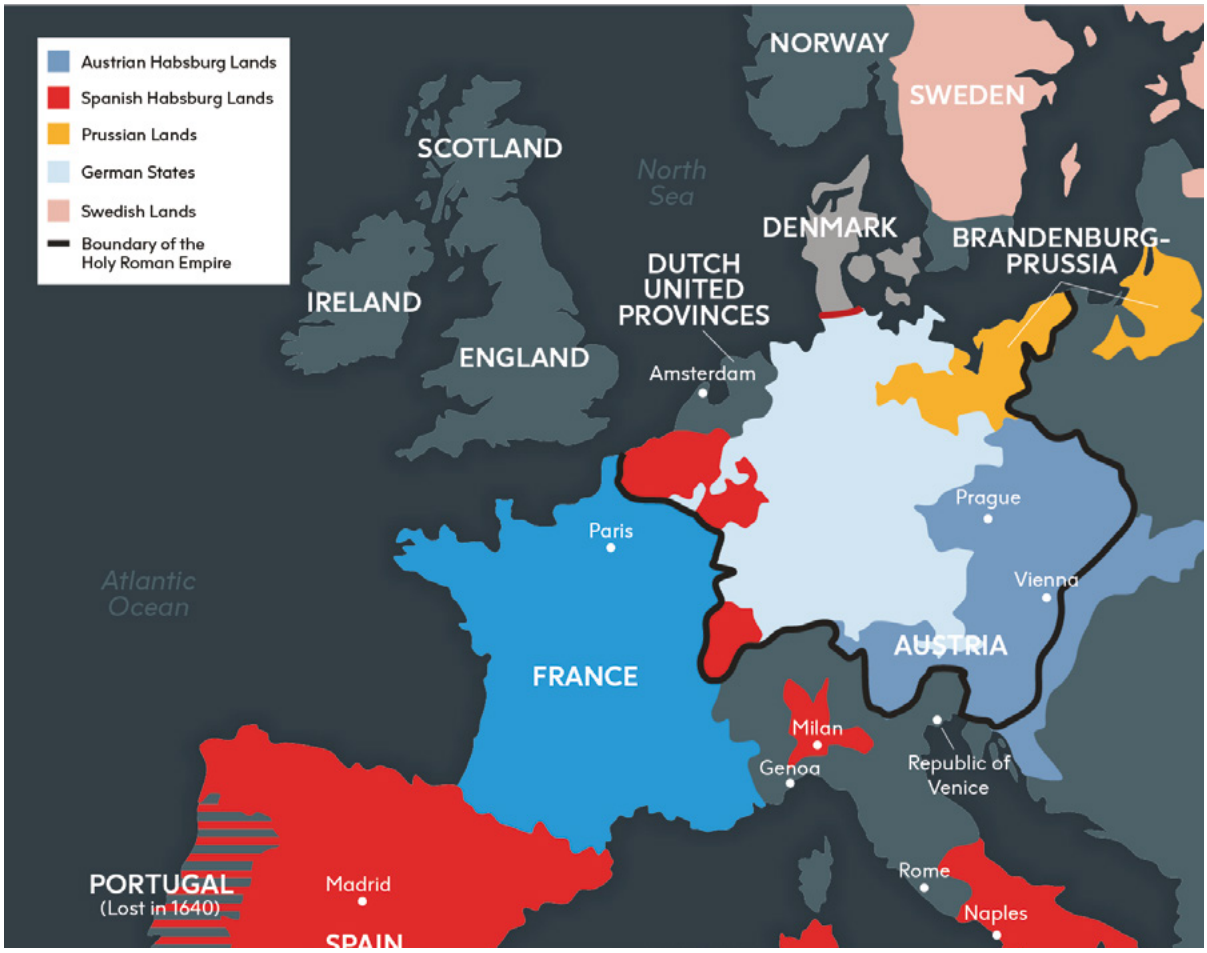

Image 1: Map of Europe During Richelieu's Time as Chief Minister

between Vienna and Madrid. At the same time, Richelieu worked to accentuate internal frictions within both Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, supporting secessionist movements in Portugal and Catalonia, and quietly stoking the resentment of liberty-starved prince-electors in Germany.[79] In this, Richelieu was aided by a formidable coterie of advisers, bureaucratic allies, and diplomatic envoys, who tirelessly crisscrossed the continent and produced exquisitely detailed strategic forecasts. Some of these studies, which engage in a dispassionate, multilevel analysis of the respective competitive advantages and disadvantages of different European powers, apply the same level of analytical rigor that one would expect from the best of contemporary net assessments.[80]

La Guerre Couverte

Many of Richelieu's first actions as chief minister focused on domestic consolidation and on preempting any perceived political threats to the reign of a youthful and unseasoned monarch.

In his earlier incarnation as bishop of Luçon, an area with a heavy Calvinist minority population, Richelieu had displayed a proclivity for toleration. Both in his actions as bishop and in his theological writings, he had repeatedly argued that Protestants

79 The prince-electors, or "electors," were the most powerful rulers of the sprawling patchwork of principalities and ecclesiastical territories that composed the Holy Roman Empire. Together, they belonged to the Council of Electors within the Imperial Diet, or *Reichstag*, and were charged with electing the "King of the Romans," or Holy Roman Emperor.

80 See, for example, the *Discours des Princes et Etats de la Chrétienté plus Considérables à la France, Selon les Diverses Qualités et Conditions*, authored by an anonymous member of Richelieu's entourage, and which — in its intellectual subtlety and granular knowledge of the European security environment — seems, according to Meinecke, to almost be describing "the action of a delicate piece of clockwork, and, on the basis of the nature, the strength and relative positioning of its springs, to demonstrate the inevitability and certain quality of its oscillations." Meinecke, *Machiavellianism*, 159. For a good overview of the discipline of net assessment, see Stephen Peter Rosen, "Net Assessment as an Analytical Concept," in *On Not Confusing Ourselves: Essays on National Security in Honor of Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter*, ed. Andrew W. Marshall et al. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 283–300.

should be converted by the power of reason and dialectical discussion, rather than force of arms.[81] As a government official, however, he and other leading members of the royal council took an increasingly hardline approach to the various Huguenot enclaves that dotted French territory. Under the terms of the Edict of Nantes, these communities had been granted a strong degree of autonomy, and, with their fortified cities and independent political assemblies, appeared, in the words of Richelieu, to seek to "share the state" with the French monarch.[82] Fears over the emergence of a parallel political structure, or of a "state within the state" with strong ties to potentially hostile foreign powers, were accompanied by a more diffuse sense of ideological peril. French absolutist thinkers fretted over the subversive appeal and longstanding popularity of Calvinist republicanism, which they perceived as profoundly antipathetic to monarchic government, among the higher echelons of the French nobility.[83] These tensions came to a head in 1627 with the royal siege of the Huguenot port-city of La Rochelle — a massive military undertaking that was led by the king, overseen by the cardinal-minister, and involved the bulk of royal military resources at the time.

Richelieu, whose earlier attempts at preserving peace with the great Huguenot lords had led to his being derisively dubbed the "Cardinal of La Rochelle" by his *dévot* opponents, now showed himself to be methodical and ruthless in his prosecution of the year-long siege. England's decision to dispatch a large amphibious task force in an (unsuccessful) bid to aid its beleaguered co-religionists in La Rochelle had only strengthened the cardinal-minister's determination to forcibly subsume Huguenot communities within the French state. The monarchy's eventual victory over the Huguenot rebels and their great power sponsor precipitated the collapse of Protestant opposition to royal rule and considerably burnished young Louis XIII's martial credentials in the eyes of fellow European leaders. It was succeeded by the Peace of Alais, which erased most of the Huguenots' past political privileges, while continuing, by and large, to accord them freedom of worship. Leading figures of the Huguenot uprising were pardoned or treated with clemency after having sworn fealty to the French king, and some, such as the Duke of Rohan, went on to number among some of France's greatest generals.[84] Subsequently, royal historians took great pains to stress that the king's Protestant subjects had not been punished on account of their religion, but rather because they had chosen the path of armed rebellion and collusion with a foreign power.[85]

Richelieu's suppression of the Huguenot uprising was part of a broader effort to do away with alternative power centers or codes of loyalty within France, carried out via an expansion of the definition of treason or *lèse-majesté*, and a series of policies targeting the French nobility that focused on its capacity to resist royal authority and its distinct strategic sub-culture.[86] In 1626, for example, Richelieu ordered the destruction of all fortresses not situated on the nation's frontiers, regardless of the religious affiliation of their proprietors. That same year, he issued a much-decried edict against dueling. While this measure may seem almost quaint to a modern reader, it was in fact hugely significant.[87] It took direct aim at some of the French nobility's most cherished beliefs, including their hallowed honor code. Richelieu, whose elder brother perished in a duel in 1619, was weary of witnessing promising members of the nation's warrior caste ritually kill one another at an alarming rate.[88]

As historians of the Ancien Régime have noted, these deadly contests fulfilled an important symbolic and social function within a French

81 As one colorful adage went, it was considered "sometimes better to let a child go snotty than to tear off its nose." Quoted in R.J. Knecht, *Richelieu* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 170. On Richelieu's policy of religious toleration during his time as bishop of Luçon, see l'abbé L. Lacroix, *Richelieu à Luçon, Sa Jeunesse, Son Episcopat* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1890), 85–90.

82 See, David Parker, *La Rochelle and the French Monarchy: Conflict and Order in Seventeenth Century France* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980), 15–20.

83 For an excellent overview of the ideological challenge posed by Calvinist republicanism, see Arthur Herman, "The Huguenot Republic and Antirepublicanism in Seventeenth-Century France," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 2 (1992): 249–69, https://www.jstor.org/stable/270987.

84 On the storied career of the Duke of Rohan, see Jack Alden Clarke, *Huguenot Warrior: The Life and Times of Henri de Rohan 1579-1638* (Berlin: Springer Science, 1966).

85 See, Orest Ranum, *Artisans of Glory: Writers and Historical Thought in Seventeenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 183–85.

86 See, Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State*, 179.

87 Richard Herr, "Honor Versus Absolutism: Richelieu's Fight Against Dueling," *Journal of Modern History* 27, no. 3 (1955): 281–85, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1874270.

88 "Duels," he later grumbled, "had become so commonplace in France that the streets of the town were being used as fields of combat, and since the day was not long enough to encompass their madness, men fought one another by star and torch light." Quoted by Burckhardt, *Richelieu and His Age—Volume III: Power Politics and the Cardinal's Death* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971), 57.

nobility still wedded to ideals of Homeric heroism and medieval chivalry.[89] The aristocracy's fighting ethos was undergirded by its members' desire to demonstrate their worth to other members of their social caste and win that most precious of social currencies — *gloire*. Dueling had progressively become like a religion — death in single combat was a "human sacrifice to the god of peer opinion."[90] Richelieu, like many of his contemporaries, was of two minds regarding the French nobility's warrior ethos. He appreciated its age-old emphasis on courage and personal sacrifice, but also criticized its tendency toward erratic emotionalism, along with its vainglorious and self-destructive tendencies.[91] In his later correspondence with French nobles deployed to the front, it is telling that he sometimes advised his soldier-aristocrats to rein in their natural hotheadedness and to behave with "prudence."[92] More than anything, the cardinal-minister wished to redirect the famed *furia francese* and thirst for glory of the nobility so that it served the broader geopolitical ambitions of the French crown rather than merely the competitive impulses of a narrow and fractious social stratum.

As the monarchy cemented control, it also found itself embroiled in a series of foreign policy crises, whose management by Richelieu and his allies spurred fierce domestic controversy. Lashed by gusts of bureaucratic opposition, the chief minister strove to husband France's military resources, bleed its enemies, and buy time. All the while, he sought, with the help of his extensive network of foreign envoys and spies, to maintain as many diplomatic channels as possible and to avert any precipitate escalation to a full-spectrum and system-wide war with a unified Habsburg foe. Richelieu consistently emphasized the importance of prevailing, first and foremost, in the diplomatic arena — at the lavish royal courts and stuffy religious conclaves where the fate of European politics was truly decided. In *Testament Politique*, he opines that the ability to

> negotiate without ceasing, openly or secretly, and everywhere, even if it yields no immediate fruit and the expected one is not yet apparent, is absolutely necessary for the well-being of states.[93]

The Valtellina and Mantuan Succession Crises

The most significant crises during the *guerre couverte* period occurred at the bloody peripheries and messy intersections of each great power's sphere of interest. France and Spain vied for access and influence, probed each other's weaknesses, and worked to dilute each other's ability to maintain alliance structures and project power across the European theater. As the Duke of Rohan later noted, the Franco-Spanish rivalry had become the structuring force across Christendom. The two states formed "the two poles from which stemmed the pressures for war and peace upon other states," with France seeking to play the "counterpoise" to Spanish ambitions, and the princes of Europe "attaching themselves to one or the other according to their interests."[94] This increasingly tense cold war was fundamentally a two-level game — a combination of geopolitical competition and interference in one another's domestic politics — accentuating pre-existing movements of internal unrest with the hope of precipitating an abrupt dislocation of their rival's fragile state structure.

For close to a century, since the early 1500s, France and Spain had jostled for control over the *portes* or gateways that provided staging points into their respective heartlands and over the military corridors that allowed each state to safely siphon funding and troops toward their junior partners and proxies.[95] One such artery was the

89 Pascal Broist et al., *Croiser le Fer: Violence et Culture de l'Epée dans la France Moderne* (Paris: Seyssel, 2002). Commenting on this obsessive focus on peer recognition, David Parrott observes that "the extent to which the (French) nobility in the seventeenth century still accepted and judged one another in terms of a traditional warrior culture should not be underestimated." David Parrott, "Richelieu, the Grands, and the French Army," in *Richelieu and His Age*, ed. Bergin and Brockliss, 146.

90 John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (New York: Perseus Books, 2008), 143.

91 On Richelieu's complex rapport with the value system of the French nobility, see Orest Ranum, "Richelieu and the Great Nobility: Some Aspects of Early Modern Political Motives," *French Historical Studies* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1963): 184–204, https://www.jstor.org/stable/28602.

92 See for instance his letter to the Duke of Hallwin in *Letters of the Cardinal Duke de Richelieu Great Minister of State to Lewis XIII of France Faithfully Translated from the Original*, Vol. II, Letter XXV, June 04, 1635 (London: A. Roper, A. Bosville and T. Leigh, 1698).

93 Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 347. Author's translation from the French. The cardinal could be an exacting taskmaster, demanding a continuous flow of reports from his spies and diplomats and on occasion asking them to fine-tune their behavior in accordance with the personality traits of their foreign interlocutors. Olivares, for example, was known to be of a singularly choleric disposition. Richelieu therefore advised his ambassador to do everything he could to irritate the thin-skinned Spaniard, in the hope that he would accidentally betray his intentions in a fit of anger. This particular ploy is mentioned by Richelieu in his memoirs. See, "Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu Livre XXIII," in *Collection des Mémoires Relatifs à l'Histoire de France Depuis l'Avènement de Henri IV Jusqu'à la Paix de Paris*, ed. M. Petiot (Paris: Foucault, 1823), 222.

94 Henri de Rohan, *De L'Intérêt des Princes et Etats de la Chrétienté* (Paris: 1634), 105–06. Author's translation from the French.

95 John C. Rule, "The Enduring Rivalry of France and Spain 1462-1700," in *Great Power Rivalries*, ed. William R. Thompson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 31–60.

Valtellina (or Val Telline), a valley that snaked through the central Alps, connecting Lombardy with the Spanish Netherlands. The Valtellina had long constituted a territorial flashpoint. Ruled by a league of Swiss Protestant lords, the Grisons, the Valtellina was of critical importance to both France and Spain. For Spain, the winding mountain passes provided one of the main land routes through which it could bolster its military presence in the Spanish Netherlands, and, if the need ever arose, provide the Holy Roman Empire with reinforcements. For Richelieu and his disciples, the prospect of Spanish dominion over the Valtellina was therefore an alarming one, adding to longstanding French fears of encirclement by combined Habsburg forces. Furthermore, were France to find itself suddenly locked out of the Valtellina, it would no longer be able to rapidly supplement the martial efforts of its own traditional allies on the Italian peninsula, such as Venice. The dispute over control of the Valtellina was driven both by concerns over military response times and logistical supply, and by status considerations and alliance politics.

In 1620, Madrid shrewdly sought to capitalize on the momentary chaos triggered by a revolt of the Catholic subjects of the Grisons by erecting a chain of military bases along the Valtellina. Two years later, its garrisons facing expulsion by allied forces of France, Venice, and Savoy, Spain reluctantly agreed to let its soldiers be replaced by papal troops. For Richelieu, however, this settlement remained inadequate, as the Vatican had allowed Spain to continue to use the Valtellina as one of its prime military thoroughfares. A few months after becoming chief minister, Richelieu sought to rebalance the situation by conducting secret negotiations with Savoyard and Swiss allies, catching Spain off guard. A small force of French and Swiss troops flowed into the Valtellina and unceremoniously expelled its papal custodians. Meanwhile, a larger French army joined forces with its Savoyard allies in a protracted siege of Genoa, in a bold attempt to neutralize one of Spain's main bankers and truncate the southern arm of the Spanish road. This last endeavor ultimately proved unsuccessful, with Madrid succeeding in breaking through a French naval interception force in the Mediterranean and relieving Genoa by sea. France and Spain subsequently entered lengthy negotiations, which ultimately led to the signing of the Treaty of Monzon in 1626. The treaty restored control of the Valtellina to the Grisons, while enshrining and protecting the exercise of Catholicism in the valley. All fortifications were levelled and papal troops were once again dispatched to preserve the peace. Most importantly, the treaty granted equal rights of transit to both Spain and France, thus reinstating — at least in the military sphere — the old status quo.[96]

Barely a year later, another crisis flared up in northern Italy. In this case, tensions revolved around the Duke of Mantua's succession. This minor dynastic squabble quickly took on geopolitical significance. The duchy of Mantua and its dependency of Monferrato were fiefs of the Holy Roman Empire, strategically located along the Po river, abutting the Spanish duchy of Milan. Following the death of Duke Vincent II of Mantua in 1627, who had failed to produce a son and heir, the duchy was claimed by his closest male relative, the flamboyant French noble Charles de Nevers. De Nevers, in a typical display of impetuosity, preemptively took possession of the duchy without consulting Vienna, as feudal protocol would have dictated.[97] His actions precipitated the reluctant intervention of Europe's three greatest powers — France, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire — all of which would rather have focused their attention and resources elsewhere.[98] The conflict soon devolved into a slugging match, dragging on for close to four years, and only coming to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Cherasco in 1631.

The troublesome de Nevers was ultimately granted his imperial investiture and the right to rule over his now-ravaged duchy, albeit at the price of territorial concessions. More importantly for Richelieu, the conflict imposed significant financial costs on both Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, strained relations between the two partners, and forced them to divert large numbers of troops

96 The Treaty of Monzon did, however, sour France's relations with its northern Italian allies, such as Venice, as it was discreetly negotiated over their heads. In that sense, one could argue that it constituted something of "an inauspicious beginning" in international affairs. For "inauspicious beginning," see Sturdy, *Richelieu and Mazarin*, 40.

97 On the complex rules governing the resolution of dynastic disputes in the Reichsitalien (the Italian territories falling under the sovereign jurisdiction of the Holy Roman Empire), see Karl O. von Aretin, *Das Reich: Friedensordnung und Europaisches Gleichgewicht, 1648-1806* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 1986), 80–140.

98 The drivers behind each power's decision to intervene and "self-entangle" in the Mantuan succession crisis were multiple and complex. For more on the various drivers and ramifications of the Mantuan crisis, see David Parrott, "A Prince Souverain and the French Crown: Charles de Nevers," in *Royal and Republican Sovereignty in Early Modern Europe. Essays in Honor of Professor Ragnhild Hatton*, ed. G. Gibbs et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 149–88; and R.A. Stradling, "Prelude to Disaster; The Precipitation of the War of Mantuan Succession, 1627-29," *The Historical Journal* 33, no. 4 (December 1990): 769–85, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X00013753.

away from more critical theaters of operation for extended periods.[99] Madrid's decision to intervene on the Italian peninsula negatively affected its military operations in Flanders. Meanwhile, the imperial troops Olivares had been hoping would join his prosecution of the Dutch, and who were also much needed in Germany to stave off the advance of the Swedes, were instead channeled southward, toward Mantua, where they were decimated by plague.[100] Through secretly negotiated clauses, France also gained access to the strategically positioned mountain fortress of Pinerolo in the Piedmont, which it had quietly wrested from Savoy.[101] All in all, therefore — and despite the cost and clear risks associated with France's decision to intervene in support of its belligerent proxy, Richelieu's calculus seemed to have paid off — France weathered the protracted crisis far better than its two main competitors.

The Challenges of Alliance Management

The Mantuan succession crisis also showed, as David Parrott notes, that

> While the rulers of the major powers may have wished to construct their political strategies in the clear light of state interest and international Realpolitik, they were frequently confronted by lesser territories whose juridical status and succession arrangements were often diffuse or ambiguous, and whose rulers were explicitly determined to assert and defend their rights as sovereigns. (...) In circumstances such as the Mantuan crisis, where the grip of the major Italian powers was for various reasons weakened, the initiatives and interests of these lesser states could lead to dramatic destabilization.[102]

Richelieu was well aware of the risks of entanglement and entrapment inherent to asymmetric alliance structures. The unexpected ramifications of the Mantuan succession crisis undoubtedly helped shape some of his more interesting — and still resonant — reflections on the challenges of alliance management. In *Testament Politique*, for instance, the cardinal warns future statesmen "not to embark voluntarily on the founding of a league created for some difficult objective" unless they are sure "they can carry it out alone," should their allies desert them. He argues this is for two reasons:

> The first is based is on the weakness of unions, which are never too secure when headed by central sovereigns. The second consists in the fact that lesser princes are often as careful and diligent in involving great kings in important commitments as they are feeble in aiding them, although they are fully obligated to do so.[103]

Despite these wry observations on the fickleness of security partners, Richelieu put alliance politics at the very center of his grand strategy, seeking to develop, in parallel, two separate German and Italian leagues. The Italian league, with Savoy and Venice at its core, was designed to exert a slow stranglehold over Spanish possessions in Naples and Milan. In Germany, Richelieu sought to stoke the resentment of restive prince-electors, and to further fragment the empire's political mosaic by supporting the establishment of a separate pro-

99 Spain was frustrated by the tardiness of imperial support, whereas the Holy Roman Empire felt uncomfortably pressured into military action. For a good overview of these tensions, see J.H. Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 337–86.

100 The Mantuan War severely strained Spanish financial resources, costing more than 10 million escudos. See Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 458. As J.H. Elliott notes, "Flanders or Italy was an old Spanish dilemma," and Spain clearly lacked the resources to pursue operations in both the Netherlands and Italy simultaneously. See, Elliott, *Richelieu and Olivares*, 101. For a more granular overview of the military costs and tactics of the conflict see Thomas F. Arnold, "Gonzaga Fortifications and the Mantuan Succession Crisis of 1613-1631," *Mediterranean Studies*, no. 4 (1994): 113–30, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41166883.

101 The means by which Richelieu acquired this fortress were particularly devious. Pretending to give it up during the negotiations settling the Mantuan succession, Richelieu ordered a task force of French soldiers concealed in the subterranean levels of the castle to rapidly neutralize the Savoyard garrison as soon as imperial forces left the vicinity. The Savoyards were then discreetly pressured into permanently ceding the fortress to France. See, Gregory Hanlon, *Italy 1636: Cemetery of Armies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 24.

102 David Parrott, "The Mantuan Succession Crisis, 1627–31: A Sovereignty Dispute in Early Modern Europe," *English Historical Review* 112, no. 445 (1997): 65, https://www.jstor.org/stable/578507.

103 Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, chap. IV. These comments resemble, to a certain degree, Carl Von Clausewitz's later observations in *On War* on the inherent fragility of coalitions. For a good overview of Clausewitz's approach to alliances and foreign policy, see Hugh Smith, "The Womb of War: Clausewitz and International Politics," *Review of International Studies* 16, no. 1 (January 1990): 39–58, https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021050011263X.

French and anti-Habsburg Catholic League under the leadership of Bavaria.[104] On occasion, France's policy of political disruption bore fruit. This was evident, for instance, during the Diet of Regensburg in 1630, when Richelieu's agents, led by the wily Father Joseph, succeeded in dealing a major blow to Emperor Ferdinand II's power and prestige by quietly encouraging the elector counts to veto the election of his son as his successor and dismiss one of the Imperial Army's more talented commanders, Albrecht Von Wallenstein. France's overarching goal was to keep the Holy Roman Empire in a state of managed disequilibrium and to buy time — time that could be used to further erode the foundations of Habsburg power in Germany. This cynical policy could be implemented, the sly monk argued in a memorandum to the king, in a relatively straightforward fashion, by simply continuing the centuries-old French tradition of mediation in German affairs.[105]

Weakening the Viennese Habsburgs also provided France with greater latitude to exert control over the lands circling its eastern periphery, in particular the duchy of Lorraine. Lorraine was technically a fiefdom of the Holy Roman Empire, and its leader, the young duke Charles IV, had become a thorn in Richelieu's side. Bright but brash, Charles IV was less adept at balancing France and the Holy Roman Empire than his forebears. He was also far less canny at steering a middle course than, for instance, the dukes of Savoy in Italy, whose adroit manipulation of the Franco-Spanish rivalry forced grudging admiration in both Paris and Madrid.[106] The duke of Lorraine, on the other hand, pursued a lopsided policy that was consistently and aggressively hostile to the interests of the French crown — plotting with its foreign enemies, abetting its insurgencies, and providing a safe haven for the leaders of France's domestic opposition.[107] Over the course of a decade, France engaged in a series of punitive raids and limited encroachments on Lothringian territory, pressuring the contumacious duke into a series of increasingly unequal and humiliating treaties, until, in 1633, Richelieu ordered a full-scale invasion and annexation of Lorraine. Charles IV eventually abdicated and fled overseas and Lothringian lords were forced to swear oaths of loyalty to the French crown.[108]

For close to a century, since the early 1500s, France and Spain had jostled for control over the *portes* or gateways that provided staging points into their respective heartlands...

Most of the time, however, Richelieu's behavior was not classically expansionist, as he did not seek to engage in a rigid linearization of a new, more extensive set of French boundaries. Instead, he wove a web of protectorates along the kingdom's borders, offering to ensure the defense of weaker principalities, fiefdoms, and bishoprics in exchange for transit rights or the stationing of small detachments of French troops in strategically positioned fortresses — often overlooking key segments of the Spanish road. These garrisoned protectorates were viewed by the chief minister as serving a dual function — both as watchtowers and as potential staging areas for future military interventions.[109]

Even as Richelieu pursued his strategy of delay, limited military involvement, and tailored assertiveness within France's near abroad, he also sought to sap Habsburg power from afar, through a policy of indirect or subsidized warfare. This policy of remote-control balancing

104 Most notably via the signing of the secret treaty of Fontainebleau, which lasted from 1631 to 1639, and which stipulated that each party would agree not to attack each other or lend assistance to each other's enemies. On Franco-Bavarian diplomacy during this phase of the Thirty Years' War see Robert Bireley, *Maximilian Von Bayern, Adam Contzen S.J. und die GegenReformation in Deutschland 1624-1635* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975).

105 See, Père Joseph, "Mémoire au Conseil du Roi sur L'Etat des Affaires d'Allemagne, Janvier 1631,» cited in G. Fagniez, "La Mission du Père Joseph à Ratisbonne 1630," *Revue Historique* 27, no. 1 (1885): 38–67.

106 See, Toby Osborne, *Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

107 As Carl J. Burckhardt notes, at one time "every person who was in disfavor with the French government and acted against French interests seemed to be welcome in the neighboring state of Lorraine." See, Burckhardt, *Richelieu and His Age*, 22.

108 Charles IV was later to renege on his abdication but remained the duke in exile until 1661.

109 Richelieu, *Testament Politique,* 239. Author's translation from the French.

was not only financially onerous — involving the disbursement of increasingly large flows of subsidies to France's Protestant proxies — but also diplomatically challenging. French envoys were sent to broker agreements and mediate disputes between France's partners and third parties, such as Sweden and Poland, so that the former could redirect the entirety of its military machine toward the German theater.[110] The sheer heterogeneity of France's many coetaneous alliance structures proved to be a major, sometimes insuperable, challenge. Indeed, managing such a disparate array of security partners with competing territorial and confessional agendas eventually became almost impossible — leading a reluctant Richelieu to privilege the preservation of the alliance with Sweden over that with Bavaria.[111]

Another chronic set of difficulties encountered by Richelieu and his envoys will be familiar to any modern student of security studies: the fact that proxies and/or client states rarely share similar objectives to those of their sponsors, and that, generally speaking, the stronger a proxy is, the less dependent and politically beholden it is to its patron.[112] This was a clear and recurring feature of the France-Sweden relationship during Richelieu's tenure. When France first signed the Treaty of Barwalde with Sweden in 1631, promising one million livres per annum over the course of five years in exchange for Stockholm maintaining a fully equipped army of 30,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry in Germany, Richelieu was enthusiastic. He waxed lyrical about the martial prowess of Gustavus Adolphus, the Swedish king, comparing him to Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great.[113] Following Adolphus' crushing victory over imperial forces at the Battle of Breitenfeld, however, the Swedish warrior-king's relentless advance through a war-torn Germany began to foster French anxieties.[114] His victories — too definitive and complete — ran the risk of completely unraveling France's efforts to portray itself as a neutral arbitrator of state interests and led to a lasting rift with an embittered Maximilian of Bavaria. Richelieu also began to wonder whether Sweden, flush with the fruits of its conquests and no longer in need of French subsidies, might decide to turn its attention against France's cluster of German protectorates. It was not without some relief, therefore, that the cardinal heard the news of the Northern Lion's death at the battle of Lützen in 1632.

Propaganda Wars

Throughout his political life, Richelieu was constantly reminded of both the tenuousness of his position and his own mortality. An unpopular man working for a sickly king, the chief minister was the target of countless foreign plots and elaborate court machinations.[115]

Much of the resentment directed at him stemmed from his domestic policies: his blunt and wide-ranging efforts to centralize power, increase taxation, and rein in the nobility, along with his habit of supplanting old court favorites with his own sprawling networks of clientele.[116] His relatively moderate stance on confessional issues also stirred controversy in some quarters.

The most vivid and substantive debates, however, centered on issues of foreign policy. Richelieu's *dévot* opponents — whether in meetings of the Royal Council or via the clandestine production of vitriolic pamphlets — relentlessly assailed the core aspects of his grand strategy, most notably his alliance with and subsidization of Protestant powers, along with his decision to confront rather than align with Spain, a fellow Catholic nation. Although Richelieu's vision was the one that

110 These particular diplomatic efforts are clearly summarized in B.F. Porshnev, *Muscovy and Sweden in the Thirty Years' War 1630-1635* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4–8.

111 The difficulties and frustrations Richelieu faced in terms of alliance management are superbly laid out in Wollenberg, *Richelieu*, chap. 3.

112 On the timeless challenges inherent to the sponsor-proxy and patron-client relationship, see Chris Loveman, "Assessing the Phenomenon of Proxy Intervention," *Conflict, Security and Development* 2, no. 3 (2002): 29–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800200590618; Walter C. Ladwig III, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counter-Insurgency* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017); and Daniel Byman, "Why States Are Turning to Proxy Intervention," *National Interest*, Aug. 26, 2018, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-states-are-turning-proxy-war-29677.

113 For an excellent overview of the Richelieu-Gustavus Adolphus relationship see Lauritz Weibull, "Gustave-Adolphe et Richelieu," *Revue Historique* 174, no. 2 (1934): 216–29, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40946190.

114 See, Michael Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus 1626-1632* (London: Longmans, Greens and Co., 1958), 467.

115 Surrounded by armed sentinels, and shadowed by a burly bodyguard who accompanied him even into his private chambers, the cardinal lived under the perennial fear that he might be viciously stabbed in his slumber or torn apart by a bomb surreptitiously placed under his carriage seat. At the back of his mind, there was no doubt always the cautionary tale of Concino Concini, the queen mother's former favorite, whose murder Louis XIII had sanctioned in 1617, and whose mangled remains Richelieu had witnessed being borne across the Pont Neuf on a roaring mob's pikes. See Jean-Vincent Blanchard, *Eminence: Cardinal Richelieu and the Rise of France* (New York: Walker and Company, 2011), 82. For a good summary of the events leading up to Concino Concini's brutal murder, see Sharon Kettering, *Power and Reputation at the Court of Louis XIII: The Career of Charles D'Albert, Duc de Luynes 1578-1621* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2008), 63–89.

116 Ranum, "Richelieu and the Great Nobility."

ultimately triumphed, it is worth noting that there were many compelling reasons for distinguished statesmen to oppose his foreign policy.

In a country still reeling from decades of civil strife, many wanted to focus on domestic recovery and reducing the burden of taxation that helped finance France's foreign military ventures and proxies — even if it came at the cost of appeasing Spain.[117] France's hamlets and villages were seething with discontent, and local uprisings — often euphemistically designated as "popular displays of emotion" (*émotions populaires*) — were commonplace.[118] In fretful whispers, perfumed courtiers would share their grisly tales from the dark forested hinterland — of peasants hacking a "tax collector to pieces and dismembering a surgeon whom they mistook for a revenue official."[119] For many who had lived through the Boschian hell of France's religious wars, the fear of being catapulted into yet another cataract of anarchy and bloodletting was ever present.

Furthermore, some argued, why not choose to align with the Habsburgs? Would that not bring about a much-needed peace, advance the cause of international Catholicism, and be preferable to funding the systematic, continent-wide slaughter of co-religionists by foreign heretics? After all, Habsburg blood flowed in Marie de Medici's veins, Anne of Austria was Spanish, and the queen of Spain was Louis XIII's own younger sister, Elizabeth. From some of the gilded chambers of the Louvre, Richelieu's grand schemes thus ran the risk of appearing not only unethical, but also increasingly fratricidal.[120]

It took over six years for the chief minister to quash this fierce internal opposition and it was only after the famous Day of the Dupes in November 1630 — when he dramatically prevailed over both the queen mother and his two main political opponents, the Marillac brothers — that he achieved unvarnished royal support for his agenda. Even after 1630, Richelieu still had to contend with the periodic opposition to his policies and fretted that the spiritual and impressionable Louis XIII might find himself persuaded by a member of his entourage to jettison his Protestant allies.[121]

These struggles over the direction of France's foreign policy were not confined to the corridors of power. Beyond the ornate antechambers and soaring palace walls, the future of French grand strategy was being debated in another wider and more untamed space — in the pages of the political pamphlets and news gazettes that had become a ubiquitous feature of early 17th-century France.[122] Richelieu, like many of his European contemporaries, was acutely aware of the growing power and malleability of public opinion in the era of the printing press, and of the need to shape collective perceptions through targeted, state-directed propaganda efforts. From the earliest days of his tenure as chief minister, he moved decisively to exert control over the political media, appointing his minions to head leading publications such as *Le Mercure François*, France's first yearly newspaper, and the *Gazette,* a weekly publication, and waging a tireless counter-intelligence campaign against clandestine printing activities. Richelieu surrounded himself with a "politico-literary strike force" of some of the nation's most accomplished political theorists and polemicists, who labored to defend France's European grand strategy from a fierce onslaught of *dévot*-inspired critiques.[123]

These critiques, particularly those penned by talented writers such as Matthieu de Morgues —

117 See, Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State*, 202; and George Pages, "Autour du 'Grand Orage'. Richelieu et Marillag: Deux Politiques," *Revue Historique* 179, no. 1 (1937): 63–97, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40945750.

118 See, Roland Mousnier, *Fureurs Paysannes: Les Paysans dans les Révoltes du XVIIème Siècle* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1967); and George Mongredien, *La Journée des Dupes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 35.

119 See, Lauro Martines, *Furies: War in Europe 1450-1700* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 253.

120 This point is made in Mongredien, *La Journée des Dupes*, 34.

121 On these battles for influence, see Julian Swann, *Exile, Imprisonment or Death: The Politics of Disgrace in Bourbon France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 345-346; and Robert Bireley, *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War: Kings, Courts and Confessors* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 190–96.

122 As Jeffrey Sawyer has noted, these political pamphlets were produced at an astonishing rate, with one inventory of the French national library listing close to 3,500 titles from the reign of Louis XIII alone. See, Jeffrey K. Sawyer, *Printed Poison: Pamphlet Propaganda, Faction Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Seventeenth Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1. See also Sharon Kettering, "Political Pamphlets in Early Seventeenth-Century France: The Propaganda War Between Louis XIII and his Mother, 1619–20," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 42, no. 4 (2011): 963–80, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23210619; and Helene Duccini, *Faire Voir, Faire Croire: L'Opinion Publique Sous Louis XIII* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2003).

123 For a classic study of this literary lobby, see Maximin Deloche, *Autour de la Plume de Richelieu* (Paris: Société Française d'Imprimerie et de Librairie, 1920). For "politico-literary strike force," see Marc Fumaroli, "Richelieu Patron of the Arts," in *Richelieu: Art and Power*, ed. Hilliard Todd Goldfarb (Montreal: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2002), 35.

one of Richelieu's more formidable and relentless opponents — were often incisive and compelling.[124] Not only did they consistently assail Richelieu's Protestant alliances as "ungodly," they also sought to depict the chief minister as a grasping and vulpine figure, an "*antichristus purpuratus*," who pursued his grandiose diplomatic schemes despite widespread popular discontent, and who, in contempt of his status as a "prince of the church," worked to methodically undermine the Vatican.

The ideological counteroffensive launched by the *bons politiques* was equally robust, clearly articulated, and often remarkably well-timed. In countless tracts, treatises, and pamphlets, the *politiques* strenuously argued in defense of the cardinal's character, stressing his personal loyalty to the king, as well as the strategic merits of his foreign policy — however disquieting the short-term costs may be. Tugging at their readers' patriotic heartstrings, they stressed the urgency of recovering France's "natural" primacy on the continent and warned of the long-term perils of a premature peace settlement that would confine the French monarchy to a subordinate status. In response to those who advocated an alignment with Madrid, they pointed to Spain's history of interference in French domestic politics and to its perceived duplicity. To trust that such a history of enmity could be reversed, argued one of Richelieu's disciples, was not only naïve, it was also a sign that one had inherited some of the seditious leanings "of a member of the old Catholic league" and had "thus ceased to be French."[125]

Furthermore, argued Richelieu's supporters, one need only look at Spain's crimes against its foreign subjects or against colonized indigenous people in the new world to see the extent of its hypocrisy.[126] The sanctimonious Spaniards, "who held a sword in one hand and a breviary in another," had, according to this counteroffensive, "erected a god of blood and destruction" and pursued their dream of a universal monarchy "under specious pretexts draped in painted crosses and invocations of Jesus."[127] Their wealth, added one noteworthy critique, was tarnished with the misery of the native American peoples whose resources they had brutally exploited.[128] As for France's alliances with Protestant powers, where was it written that "God had expressly declared that he wished for the Spaniards to become the masters of the Dutch," and for Spain to emerge as the unrivalled hegemon in Europe?[129] Emphasizing the importance of credibility and reputation in international politics, the *bons politiques* invoked France's historic role as a security patron in key regions such as the Valtelline and Northern Italy, arguing that, in the case of the Grisons, for instance, "heresy alone did not suffice to deprive them of their sovereignty and of their right to (French) protection and assistance."[130]

These day-to-day propaganda efforts were accompanied by a more ambitious and externally-oriented policy of cultural grandeur, whereby the industrious cleric sought to transform Paris into the artistic and academic capital of Europe — a city which would eventually outshine Madrid, Vienna, and maybe even Rome. He famously created the *Académie Française,* which initially hosted many of the more proficient *politique* theorists, and established the royal press, or *Imprimerie Royale*, in

124 Close to the queen mother, Mathieu de Morgues was initially an ally and collaborator of Richelieu before becoming his most ferocious critic in the years following the Day of the Dupes. On Matthieu de Morgues' career and political thought, see Seung-Hwi Lim, "Mathieu de Morgues, Bon Français ou Bon Catholique?" *Dix-Septième Siècle* 213, no. 4 (January 2001): 655–72, http://dx.doi.org/10.3917/dss.014.0655.

125 Jean de Silhon, *De l'Immortalité de l'Ame* (Paris: 1634).

126 Critiques of the Spanish treatment of native Americans was a leitmotiv in French writings at the time. In the early 17th century, France pursued a more humane (albeit deeply paternalistic) policy of "francization" — or assimilation — in its American colonies, seeking to comingle colonial and native peoples as a means of adding demographic weight to the sparsely populated new French territories. Interestingly, Richelieu was a strong proponent of this relatively enlightened approach. See, for instance, Saliha Belmessous, "Assimilation and Racialism in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century French Colonial Policy," *American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (April 2005): 322–49, http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/531317.

127 Jérémie Ferrier, "Le Catholique d'Etat ou Discours Politique des Alliances du Roi Très Chrétien Contre les Calomnies des Ennemis de son Etat," in *Recueil de Diverses Pièces Pour Servir à l'Histoire*, ed. Paul Hay du Chastelet (Paris: 1635); and Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac, Le Prince (Paris: 1631).

128 Indeed, "if one were to put all the gold on one side, and the blood of the Indians from which it is drawn on the other, the blood would still weigh more than the gold." Ferrier, *Le Catholique d'Etat*.

129 "Discours sur la Légitimité d'une Alliance avec les Hérétiques et les Infidèles," in *Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu, Tome V* (Annexe) (Paris: Edition de la Société de l'Histoire de France, 1921), 283–88. In defense of France's Protestant partnerships, *politique* pamphleteers also drew on biblical precedents such as King David's alliance with the Philistines.

130 Ferrier, *Le Catholique d'Etat*. There is a vibrant debate — and voluminous attendant literature — in contemporary political science on the importance to be attached to the pursuit and/or defense of credibility and reputation in foreign policy. Even a cursory reading of the writings and correspondence of early modern statesmen such as Olivares and Richelieu makes it clear, however, that — at least in their eyes — there was no debate to be had. Indeed, the quest for prestige, credibility, and respect on the international stage verged on the obsessive and was woven into the strategic DNA of 17th-century Europe's highly personalized monarchical powers. For a recent discussion of the abiding importance of reputation in international politics, see Alex Weisiger and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics," *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 473–95, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818314000393.

the Louvre, which turned France into a publishing hub for high-quality books and engravings.[131] Richelieu was particularly intent on nurturing a body of sophisticated legal theorists. These experts could then work to weaponize the rapidly evolving field of international jurisprudence — not only to lend credence to France's territorial pretensions but also to justify French military actions in the eyes of international public opinion.[132] This aspect of Richelieu's diplomacy was to become abundantly evident in May 1635, when France finally formally declared war on Spain.

La Guerre Ouverte

Louis XIII was a traditionalist with a deep attachment to chivalric values and ancient courtly rites. The flamboyant manner in which war was declared on Spain — with a mounted herald delivering the message before the *Hallegate* of Brussels after having been announced by trumpet — was characteristic of the French monarch. For years he had been champing at the bit, urging Richelieu to move from *la guerre couverte* to *la guerre ouverte*. The chief minister had consistently counseled patience, pleading with his sovereign to delay a full declaration of war as long as possible. By the spring of 1635, however, it was clear to Richelieu that this strategy, which had served France so well over the past decade, could no longer continue.

The Habsburgs' resounding victory at the battle of Nördlingen in 1634 — during which a combined force of imperial and Spanish troops decisively routed their Swedish-led Protestant foes — abruptly reconfigured the European balance of power.[133] France's newly imperiled allies — Sweden and the Dutch United Provinces in particular — were increasingly insistent that their great power sponsor commit large-scale military forces to the fray. In the tense months following Nördlingen, the Vatican desperately sought to arrest the slide toward war, even offering to host a peace summit where Madrid and Paris could resolve their disputes through a process of mediated arbitration.

131 As Maxime Préaud notes, Richelieu felt that it "was time to give Paris, and France, publications whose quality of presentation would be up to Antwerp's standards, whether it was typography or book decoration." He even went so far as to encourage the French ambassador to the Hague to engage in industrial espionage by stealing the formula for the typographic ink used in the Netherlands. See, Maxime Préaud, "L'Imprimerie Royale and Cardinal Richelieu," in *Richelieu: Art and Power*, 201.

132 Dickmann, "Rechtsgedanke und Machtpolitik bei Richelieu."

133 As J.H. Elliott notes, the effects of that battle had rippled throughout Europe, and had provided "an impressive reaffirmation of Spanish power at a time when many were beginning to wonder if it had not gone into eclipse." Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares*, 482.

Pope Urban VIII's frantic diplomatic efforts were to no avail, however. Both Richelieu and Olivares had resigned themselves to the inevitability of conflict, and the massive, clunking cogs of their respective nations' military machineries had begun to turn, as thousands of fresh troops were mobilized for war. Decision-makers in Spain — pointing to France's much larger population and advantageous geographical position — became increasingly convinced that any protracted military struggle with France would not redound to their benefit. It was therefore necessary, argued Olivares, to seek an early end to the conflict by striking hard and fast. Military preparations were conducted "in width rather than in breadth."[134] The plan was to overwhelm French defenses on several fronts with the hope that the resolve of its less battle-hardened troops would crumble.[135]

By the spring of 1635, however, it was clear to Richelieu that this strategy, which had served France so well over the past decade, could no longer continue.

These war plans were driven, in part, by Spain's alarm over France's massive military buildup under Richelieu's tenure, which included the cardinal's attempts to create a first-class navy. The development of France's ground forces, however, was far more spectacular and of greater immediate concern to its enemies across the Pyrenees. As the cardinal's network of spies at the Spanish court began to apprise him of Madrid's plans for a series of preemptive military strikes, this buildup accelerated and France fielded an army of unprecedented size on the eve of war.

Throughout the religious wars of the previous half-century, French royal forces rarely exceeded 16,000 men.[136] During the brief periods of peace that followed each flare-up of civil violence, the bulk of these troops were often demobilized. When larger hosts were assembled, they were frequently composed primarily of foreign mercenaries, sometimes reaching up to 70 percent of the total number, rather than troops levied on French soil. In the absence of a well-organized and institutionalized standing army, French kings relied most often on a nucleus of *gens d'ordonnance*, or *gendarmerie*, a small body of heavy cavalry that was the country's only permanently mobilized and fully professional military force — not including a few small garrisons lightly sprinkled across its borders. At its peak, Henri IV's army in 1610 may have numbered up to 55,000 men.[137] In contrast, by the time Louis XIII and Richelieu were mobilizing for war with Spain in 1634, documents show that they were accounting for up to 100,368 soldiers in service.[138] As military preparations continued apace, these numbers steadily grew.[139] French officials diligently recorded numbers of raised troops between 135,000 and 211,000 in the early years of their nation's conflict with Spain, with one scholar estimating that up to 150,000 men may have been under arms in 1635.[140]

Before unleashing his freshly minted legions, however, the French chief minister insisted on getting France's diplomatic house in order. Although the decision to go to war was made as early as April, he waited until France had fully cemented its renewed alliances with both the United Provinces and Sweden before dispatching the herald to Brussels. Following the envoy's

134 R.A. Stradling, *Spain's Struggle for Europe 1598-1668* (London, UK: The Hambledon Press, 1994), 117.

135 Once blades were drawn, the Spanish chief minister insisted, rapidity was of the essence: "Everything must begin at once, for unless they are attacked vigorously, nothing can prevent the French from becoming masters of the world, and without any risks to themselves." Quoted in R.A. Stradling, "Olivares and the Origins of the Franco-Spanish War, 1627-1635," *English Historical Review* 101, no. 398 (1986): 90, https://www.jstor.org/stable/571322.

136 James B. Wood, *The King's Army: Warfare, Soldiers and Society During the Wars of Religion in France 1562-76* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 58–59.

137 John A. Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siècle: The French Army 1610-1715* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 41.

138 Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siècle,* 43.

139 Some contemporary scholars have expressed reservations over the higher figures unconditionally accepted by former generations of historians, with David Parrott noting that due to desertion rates, seasonal recruitment variations, and the general tendency by government ministers to occasionally inflate the paper strength of units, "attempts to fix upon a figure for the size of the (French) army" should be seen as "arbitrary selections of temporary high-points," as early 17th-century armies were "institutions whose size and composition fluctuated continually." See, David Parrott, *Richelieu's Army: War, Government and Society in France, 1624-1642* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 178–79. Nevertheless, even if one takes such expressions of academic caution into account, there is little doubt that although the surge in French troop strength may not have equaled "the extreme estimates of some historians," it still constituted "a quantum leap upward." John A. Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siècle,* 56. For two additional and differing perspectives on French troop numbers, see Sturdy, *Richelieu and Mazarin*, 58; and Wilson, *The Thirty Years War,* 557.

140 Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siècle,* 56.

theatrical declaration, a public diplomacy campaign was launched whereby French propagandists moved to preempt their Spanish counterparts by issuing a series of manifestos clearly geared toward an international as well as a domestic audience, emphasizing the moral legitimacy of France's actions. There is evidence that these carefully coordinated communication efforts were successful in shaping the overall narrative, as Olivares evinced frustration that the cardinal's publicists always seemed to move faster and more efficiently than his own.[141]

The official justification for France's declaration of war was Spain's capture of the town of Trier, a French protectorate, the slaughter of its small French garrison, and the abduction of its archbishop-elector in March 1625. This act of great power aggression, read the herald's declaration, was "against the law of nations" and an "offense against the interests of all princes of Christianity."[142] France once again positioned itself as the guardian of smaller states' interests and the bulwark against Habsburg ambitions of universal monarchy. This time, however, the chief minister's legion of *lettrés* was working to lay the moral underpinnings for a much more direct and overtly militarized French bid for European leadership. Louis XIII issued his own royal communiqué, arguing that while he had patiently tolerated, thus far, the constant "outrages" of Spain's interference in France's domestic affairs, the "Spaniards, by their arms and practices," were now threatening the "very foundations of public liberty" in Europe.[143] Naturally, the view from Madrid was very different. Indeed, for Olivares and his indignant acolytes, France — with its heady ambitions, exceptionalist ethos, litany of grievances, and overall truculence — was the revisionist power and great disruptor of the status quo. From the very get-go, therefore, the conflict was not framed as a mere tussle over territory and resources, but rather as a paradigm-defining battle for leadership legitimacy and shaping the international order.

Significantly, the French monarchy's declaration of war was aimed at only one of the Habsburg branches. Richelieu hoped that Ferdinand II, already consumed with the difficult internal negotiations leading up to the Peace of Prague, would be reluctant to lend imperial military strength to the fight against France. This last-ditch attempt at alliance decoupling, however, proved unsuccessful. After months of prevarication, a reluctant Ferdinand II succumbed to the pressure exerted by the imperial court's pro-Spanish lobby and formally declared war on France in March 1636.[144] Richelieu was now facing the climactic struggle he had often anticipated but always dreaded: a war waged on an unprecedented scale, on multiple fronts, and against the combined might of both dynastic branches of the Habsburgs.

France's military performance at the outset of this war was decidedly mixed. After a promising initial victory over an outnumbered Spanish force at the battle of Aveins, French forces, suffering from hunger and afflicted with typhus, encountered a series of military setbacks. In the summer of 1636, a joint Habsburg force led by Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand (the governor of the Spanish Netherlands and younger brother of King Philip IV) conducted a major counter-attack into French territory. The invading force met unexpectedly feeble resistance as it ravaged Picardy and Champagne and swept through a series of northern forts. The garrisons, untested and unsettled by their enemies' novel use of shrieking mortar bombs, surrendered one after another.[145] The Habsburg army, a large proportion of which was mounted, moved quickly, thrusting ever deeper into French territory, until it had captured the stronghold of La Corbie, along the Somme. Due to the rapid and unexpected nature of the troops' advance, there was no sizable interposing military force in between them and Paris, barely sixty miles away. At the news of the cardinal-infante's blitzkrieg-style incursion into France's fertile northern plains, Richelieu was reportedly plunged into a deep depression. An unnerved Parisian populace directed its seething resentment at the unpopular chief minister and called for his ouster. The shaken cardinal tendered his resignation and nervously awaited his fall from grace. But although the king may have been occasionally frustrated with his adviser, he was astute enough to realize that there was no individual better suited to the position of chief minister, or more dedicated to the

141 Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares*, 482, 490–92.

142 See, Randall Lesaffer, "Defensive Warfare, Prevention and Hegemony. The Justifications for the Franco-Spanish War of 1635 (Part I)," *Journal of the History of International Law* 8, no. 1 (December 2006): 92, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/157180506777834407.

143 See, *Lettre du Roi, Ecrite à Monseigneur le Duc de Mont-Bazon (...) Contenant les Justes Causes que Sa Majesté a Eues de Déclarer la Guerre au Roi D'Espagne* (Paris: 1635). Available online at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k747876.image.

144 According to some accounts, it was Ferdinand II's own, more pro-Spanish son (then the king of Hungary) who finally convinced him to declare war on France. See, Robert S.J. Bireley, *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counterreformation: Emperor Ferdinand II, William Lamormaini, S.J., and the Formation of the Imperial Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 227.

145 See, Jonathan I. Israel, Spain, *The Low Countries and the Struggle for World Supremacy 1585-1713* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1997), 77.

advancement of French prestige and interests.

He therefore crisply rejected Richelieu's offer and the fiery Father Joseph was dispatched to shake his master out of his crippling state of despondency.[146] Meanwhile, Louis XIII — in perhaps his finest hour — initiated a mass recruitment drive. Cantering through the cobbled streets of Paris, the monarch, who had always fancied himself as something of an Arthurian warrior-king, called upon every man capable of bearing arms to join him in expelling the hated foreigners from French territory.

In reality, however, the panic of the French royal court — while understandable — was unjustified. The Habsburg advance had proved remarkably successful, but the cardinal-infante was concerned that his forces' supply lines were overextended and was already planning his withdrawal. The Corbie campaign had proved to "be no more than a short-lived pyrotechnical display."[147] It did succeed, however, in galvanizing French public sentiment and in temporarily uniting royal court factions in support of Richelieu's war efforts. From that point, the Franco-Habsburg conflict slipped into a numbing see-saw of partial gains mitigated by temporary losses, a war of attrition that severely strained the resources, stability, and organizational capacity of the French state.

The challenges associated with coordinating the simultaneous operations of multiple armies over vast distances at a time when communications were both rudimentary and easily subject to delay or disruption were daunting. While military dispatches to Flanders or Italy would take perhaps 12 to 16 days when sent overland from France, they could take almost three months to arrive by sea from Spain. As a result, notes J.H. Elliott, it was "considerably easier to run a war from Paris than from Madrid."[148] Even then, there was inevitably a "lag effect," when it came to issuing precise directives to faraway generals: the distance between Richelieu's chambers and the frontlines was not only spatial — it was also temporal. The cardinal therefore often encouraged commanders to operate under their own initiative and to exercise their own judgment — provided they were not brash — as to when to seize opportunities to push into enemy territory. French generals could be reluctant to do so, however, if only because they feared the cardinal's wrath in the event of failure. Indeed, Richelieu could be a singularly demanding overseer, demanding thick stacks of detailed correspondence on every aspect of the war effort and meting out severe punishment in response to perceived cowardice or military shortcomings.[149]

More broadly, many of the civil-military pathologies affecting French higher command during the Thirty Years' War would be familiar to any student of authoritarian regimes. Most notably, Richelieu's focus on "coup-proofing" meant that the perceived loyalty of a noble would often count more in terms of his military advancement than his battlefield performance. As contemporary scholars in the field of security studies have noted, regimes facing significant internal threats frequently adopt sub-optimal organizational practices, basing their promotion patterns on political loyalty rather than on combat prowess. [150] Richelieu, who, like all of his 17th-century European counterparts, operated at the heart of a complex web of patronage, was consistently torn between his desires to shore up his own power base and to shield his monarch from internal threats, as well as the need to effectively use the very small pool of able generals he had at his disposal.[151] This sometimes resulted in confusing and counterproductive personnel policies, whereby he dismissed or disgraced competent military commanders and promoted mediocre alternatives. On other occasions, however, Richelieu could demonstrate a measure of tolerance and foresight, forgiving a proficient general's past transgressions in favor of advancing the war effort. And at times, the canny clergyman managed to have it both ways, by preemptively absorbing promising commanders within his own networks of clientage, thus ensuring their future loyalty. This was the case, for instance, with the Count of Harcourt,

146 Visiting the dispirited cardinal in his plush bedchambers, the coarse-robed monk exhorted him to action in the service of France, warning him that his present weakness was not only unseemly but also ungodly and would only further "excite the wrath of God and inflame his vengeance." Quoted in Blanchard, *Eminence: Cardinal Richelieu and the Rise of France*, 163.

147 Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares*, 522.

148 Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares*, 506.

149 Parrott, *Richelieu's Army*.

150 See, Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015). See also James T. Quinlavan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 131–65, https://doi.org/10.1162/016228899560202.

151 For a seminal discussion of the politics of patronage, see Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in Seventeenth Century France* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986). The fact that successful state-building often rests on the outcome of complex — and sometimes violent — negotiations between entrenched elites is something that has also been explored in the contemporary security studies literature. See, for example, Jacqueline L. Hazelton, "The 'Heart and Minds' Fallacy: Violence, Coercion, and Success in Counterinsurgency Warfare," *International Security* 42, no. 1 (Summer 2017): 80–113, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00283.

whose military acumen impressed Richelieu, and who was therefore allowed to marry into the chief minister's family despite his middling aristocratic standing.[152] From then on, Harcourt was entrusted with a series of high-level military commands.

The French monarchy's perennial fear of a resurgence of domestic disorder also led it to adopt a more centralized approach to the management of military operations. Whereas most other European powers continued to subcontract the levying and management of military forces to powerful nobles and "military entrepreneurs," the royal administration of Louis XIII insisted on preserving a degree of direct control over its expanding military apparatus.[153] Foreign military entrepreneurs, such as the highly effective Bernard of Saxe-Weimar, could be hired for the prosecution of overseas campaigns, but armies based and recruited on French territory remained strictly answerable to royal authority. A degree of local autonomy and decentralization remained necessary, given the bureaucratic limitations of the early 17th-century French state, and French nobles or bishops could thus continue to raise troops on their own account. The levied soldiers, however, remained under the proprietorship of the French monarchy, which stubbornly refused to take the easier — but in its eyes riskier — path of formalized military delegation. France's rejection of the military entrepreneurship system was accompanied by the expansion of a body of civil servants — the famed *intendants d'armée* — whose role was to act as agents of royal authority, operating alongside French generals and co-supervising their military operations.[154]

The decision to empower and deploy additional numbers of *intendants* was part of a broader move toward greater bureaucratic control over every aspect of the French war effort, from taxation to infrastructure development.[155] The *intendants* were entrusted with a broad set of responsibilities that ranged from investigating corruption and dispensing justice, to managing funds and supervising army expenditure. One should guard oneself, however, from overstating their ability to enact immediate change and override the decisions and policies undertaken by powerful local commanders. As David Parrott notes, the popular perception that Richelieu's *intendants* were "seventeenth-century equivalents of the bolshevik commissars within the Red Army," is in need of revision.[156] Indeed, the relationships between field generals and royal *intendants* were often overshadowed or subsumed within complex pre-existing networks of clientele, and in some cases these culturally entrenched alternative power structures severely diluted the *intendant*'s authority.[157] The general-*intendant* relationship was thus most often characterized by careful negotiation, as royal agents walked an administrative tightrope, making their best efforts to enact centralized directives — which were often somewhat overambitious or outdated — all while remaining mindful of local conditions, power dynamics, and logistical constraints. In some cases, this dual command structure acted as an impediment to military effectiveness, with royal intendants frequently butting heads with the commanders of their assigned military units. In other cases, however, the relationship could prove to be far more harmonious and productive. Military correspondence, after all, flowed in both directions, through a revamped network of dedicated postal relays that aimed to reduce some of the delays in communication. *Intendants* funneled reams of vital information back to the state center, keeping Richelieu and the secretariat of war somewhat better apprised of the manifold challenges plaguing the efforts of their frontline commanders.

Although France, unlike Spain, benefited from interior lines of communication, the distances remained vast and the terrain nearly impassable in many parts of the country, with thick forests, underdeveloped roads, and large, rugged mountainous regions.[158] Problems of transportation and supply were a chronic source of concern, as were those of funding. The colossal costs of fielding such a large military force — one that sometimes included half a dozen armies operating simultaneously — placed a terrible strain on French finances, as well as on the country's internal

152 These dynamics are detailed at length in Parrott, "Richelieu, the Grands, and the French Army," 135–73.

153 See, David Parrott, *The Business of War: Military Enterprise and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

154 See, Douglas Clark Baxter, *Servants of the Sword: French Intendants of the Army 1630-1670* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

155 An excellent overview of the role of the intendants in this centralization process is provided in Richard Bonney, *Political Change in France Under Richelieu and Mazarin: 1624-1661* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1978).

156 Parrott, *Richelieu's Army*, 439.

157 Parrott, *Richelieu's Army*, 434–504.

158 Perhaps the best overview of these challenges is provided in Guy Rowlands, "Moving Mars: The Logistical Geography of Louis XIV's France," *French History* 25, no. 4 (2011): 492–514, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/fh/crr059. Rowlands' article delves into military logistics at a slightly later period, but the difficulties he lays out were arguably even more pronounced during Louis XIII's reign.

stability. Even before the war, in 1630, Richelieu grumblingly queried whether

> There is a kingdom in the world that can regularly pay two or three armies at once ... I would like to be told whether reason does not require that one better fund an army operating on enemy territory against powerful forces against whom it has been tried in combat, and where expenses and incommodities are indeterminate, rather than one that remains within the kingdom out of precaution of the harm that could befall it.[159]

This complaint pointed to one of the core quandaries confronted by the resource-hungry French armies. For the first half-decade or so of *guerre ouverte*, they operated largely on their own soil and thus were deprived of the possibility of engaging in the traditional practice of collecting "contributions" in the form of rapine and punitive payments extracted from enemy territory. When French troops were deployed abroad, particularly across the Rhine, their numbers often began to melt away as soldiers fled the unfamiliar and hostile German landscapes and streamed back to their villages and homesteads. This helps explain why it was deemed preferable to wage war with foreign mercenaries deep within imperial territory, while using national troops for operations in France or within its near abroad. For much of this period, the French monarchy teetered on the edge of financial collapse, staggering from one socio-economic crisis to another and racking up sizable debts to financiers who charged exorbitant rates. On average, funds allocated to defense amounted to 72 percent of government expenditure during Richelieu's ministry.[160] During the years of *guerre ouverte* these expenditures were rendered all the more extravagant by the crown's continued subsidy of the Dutch and Swedes, as well as of the mercenary army of Saxe-Weimar. Unlike his Spanish rival, Richelieu could not rely on the riches from a sprawling network of overseas colonies, nor, for the reasons described above, could he hope to transfer the costs of military operations onto despoiled tracts of enemy territory.

The preservation of the kingdom's newly aggrandized military machine was therefore largely dependent upon a massive expansion of domestic taxation. In this, Richelieu was mostly successful, with some estimates showing that the income of the French crown doubled in real terms over the course of his tenure.[161] Per capita taxation also soared and the country's peasantry — already reeling after a series of harsh winters and poor harvests — was plunged into an even more dire state of poverty. Throughout the war, the country was gripped by a series of rural uprisings, with some — such as the massive *croquant* revolt of 1637 or the rebellion of the *Va-Nu-Pieds* in Normandy in 1639 — requiring the temporary redirection of thousands of French troops away from the frontlines.[162] A careful perusal of Richelieu's writings show that, although he could sometimes appear dismissive of the common folk's plight (and ruthless in the quashing of mass uprisings), he was not as callous or unyielding as some have taken him to be. He frequently expressed concern over the severity of the peasantry's conditions, often granting temporary concessions in an attempt to stave off further unrest.[163] His steely determination to prevail in the competition with the Habsburgs was interwoven with a deeper and more nagging fear: that the French state and people would not withstand the enormous pressures placed upon them, and that if he did not "keep a few steps ahead of financial disaster and uncontrollable social insubordination," the country would slide back into civil war and find itself at the mercy, once again, of the predatory appetites of foreign powers.[164]

In this, he was not aided by the hodgepodge character of France's new army. Many of the troops he had raised over the past decade were relatively unseasoned and the question of whether it was more judicious to concentrate the minority of experienced veterans in distinct "crack" units or to sprinkle them across the force was one that frequently remained unresolved. Most importantly, France's high command drew on a more heterogeneous set of wartime experiences than its Spanish or imperial

159 Quoted in Parrott, *Richelieu's Army,* 95, in the original French. Author's translation.

160 Richard Bonney, "Louis XIII, Richelieu, and the Royal Finances," in *Richelieu and His Age,* ed. Bergin and Brockliss, 106.

161 See, Ronald G. Asch, *The Thirty Years War: The Holy Roman Empire and Europe 1618-1648* (New York: Palgrave, 1997), 172; and Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 558.

162 See, Madeline Foisil, *La Révolte des Nu-Pieds et Les Révoltes Normandes de 1639* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970). These uprisings were often supported by local nobles, who sometimes even put their castles at the disposal of the *croquants*. See, J.H.M. Salmon, "Venality of Office and Popular Sedition in Seventeenth-Century France. A Review of a Controversy," *Past and Present*, no. 37 (1967): 21–43, https://www.jstor.org/stable/650021.

163 See, Victor L. Tapie, *La France de Louis XIII et de Richelieu* (Paris: Flammarion, 1967), 296–332.

164 Thomas Munck, *Seventeenth Century Europe: State, Conflict and Social Order in Europe 1598-1700* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 51.

counterparts.[165] The generals who had remained in France during the Wars of Religion were often unfamiliar with the rapidly evolving mechanics of large-scale, infantry-intensive warfare, having spent decades engaging in shadowy struggles for territorial control or denial and conducting mounted raids against nearby opponents. Others had chosen to pursue military careers in exile, with all the attendant variations in training, tactics, and doctrine. During France's period of civil turmoil, Huguenot lords had often left to fight alongside the Dutch, while Catholic aristocrats had sometimes served under the imperial banner in the Hungarian Marches or alongside co-religionist forces elsewhere on the continent.[166]

The sheer variety of the military lessons gleaned by France's warrior class, both resident and expatriate, during those tumultuous decades could, in some ways, be viewed as a strategic asset. The different terrains and adversaries confronted by Louis XIII's armies in their continent-spanning operations — from the waterlogged plains of the Low Countries to the craggy defiles of Alpine Italy or Switzerland — certainly called for a mixture of strategies and for different forms of force structure. In other instances, however, Richelieu was clearly at pains to find enough commanders with the kind of experience needed for the most important theater of operations — the northeastern frontier. This was not only where Madrid chose to concentrate most of its elite units, it was also where the nature of the terrain (as evidenced during the Habsburg advance to Corbie in 1636) made large-scale enemy encroachments both most likely and difficult to counter. Inevitably, there were fierce debates in Paris over the distribution of finite military resources and the use of the handful of talented generals, as well as over how to prioritize the different military theaters.[167] The northeastern front was often privileged to the detriment of other contested areas, such as Italy or the Valtelline, where — despite Henri de Rohan's consummate military skill — the French expeditionary force eventually dissolved once the slow stream of funding and provisions sputtered to a halt.[168]

Having enumerated the multitudinous difficulties that the Bourbon monarchy had to contend with during this period, it is necessary to stress two facts. First, despite all of these challenges — whether in command and control, logistics, or domestic stability — the French war effort was somehow maintained.[169] Second, perhaps most importantly, France's organizational frailties and deficiencies were hardly unique. Across Europe, chief ministers and private secretaries grappled with a similar set of challenges as the small and overburdened bureaucracies they oversaw groaned under the pressure of resourcing and coordinating protracted military operations waged on an unprecedented scale across multiple theaters.[170] Spain's Count-Duke Olivares was no exception to this rule, and in fact faced some far more serious problems of his own. Like Richelieu, the volcanic Spaniard had to navigate the treacherous world of court politics with its webs of patronage and cronyism. And just like his French nemesis, Olivares groused about the dearth of qualified commanders and the unreliability of his allies, and was often in a wretched mental state, overworked, depressed, and plagued with insomnia. Indeed, he often appeared on the verge of buckling under the mental weight of coordinating a multifront campaign across a far larger and less geographically cohesive space than that confronted by Richelieu.[171] However, whereas his French rival could increasingly rely on the expansion of domestic taxation to offset some of the exorbitant costs of military operations, Olivares remained heavily dependent on the steady flow of wealth — primarily silver — from Spain's overseas colonies.[172] This revenue progressively dwindled as the yield of South American silver mines slowly declined and Spanish treasure fleets

165 Parrott, *Richelieu's Army*, 32–40.

166 Parrott, *Richelieu's Army,* 32–40.

167 An excellent discussion of these debates over theater prioritization is provided in David Parrott, "Richelieu, Mazarin and Italy (1635-59): Statesmanship in Context," in *Secretaries and Statecraft in the Early Modern World*, ed. Paul M. Dover (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 155–76.

168 See, Clarke, *Huguenot Warrior*, 197–215.

169 As Peter Wilson notes, "the French monarchy might have lurched … from one financial crisis to the next, but at least it kept moving forward. The famously centrally appointed intendants, were clearly not impartial agents of royal absolutism as once thought, yet they did ensure money reached the treasury, troops were paid, and warships equipped. French troops remained ill-disciplined, but they did not mutiny like Sweden's German army." See, Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 559.

170 See, J.H. Elliott and L.W.S. Brockliss, eds., *The World of the Favorite* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); and Dover, *Secretaries and Statecraft in the Early Modern World.*

171 Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares*, 286.

172 For a good overview of 17th-century Spain's growing economic fragilities and the decline in the value of transatlantic trade, see Dennis O. Flynn, "Fiscal Crisis and the Decline of Spain (Castile)," *Journal of Economic History* 42, no. 1 (March 1982): 139–47, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050700026991.

found themselves mercilessly hounded across the seven seas by increasingly powerful naval opponents, particularly the Dutch. The latter had made substantial inroads in Brazil and the West Indies and Spain's transatlantic trade routes were now perpetually at risk. Dutch gains in Brazil, and Spain's inability to protect Lisbon's possessions from their encroachments, had the added effect of further aggravating Philip IV's Portuguese subjects, who were already resentful over their heightened levels of financial contribution to the Spanish Empire's collective defense.[173]

Unfortunately for Olivares, the cardinal possessed both an uncanny gift for political survival and a robust counter-intelligence apparatus.

Spain's system of "composite" monarchy, whereby Philip IV ruled from the Castilian heartland over a union of different territories with unique local traditions and varying levels of autonomy, was a constant source of frustration for Olivares — and of competitive advantage for Richelieu.[174] Despite the Spanish chief minister's zeal for internal consolidation, he faced an uphill battle in his campaign to more evenly apportion the cost of the war effort across Spain's non-Castilian dominions. His attempts to reform and expand taxation and his plans for a "union of arms," which proposed the creation of a reserve force of 140,000 men more equitably financed and recruited across Spanish territories, provoked widespread dissatisfaction in Catalonia and Portugal.[175] Richelieu and his agents gleefully kept tabs on the diffusion of such sentiments and cultivated the hope that — galvanized by the pressures of war — they would eventually grow into full-fledged secessionist movements.

Both chief ministers were fully cognizant of the inadequacies of their respective state bureaucracies for the prosecution of such an onerous and large-scale war of attrition. Spain's attempt to force France into a negotiated settlement by delivering a knock-out blow in the early stages of the war had floundered, and, as a result, Olivares now pinned his hopes on Richelieu either being forcibly ousted from power or succumbing to one of his many illnesses. This was a perfectly rational calculation. After all, the French were war-weary and Richelieu was deeply unpopular, was riddled with various ailments from crippling migraines to weeping abscesses, and had an occasionally fraught relationship with his royal patron. Moreover, were he to fall from grace, it was reasonable to assume that he and his accompanying network of *politiques* would be replaced with a power structure far more amenable to Spain's interests and world vision.[176] Unfortunately for Olivares, the cardinal possessed both an uncanny gift for political survival and a robust counter-intelligence apparatus. As the war dragged on with no sign of resolution, the Spanish chief minister became increasingly desperate, covertly sponsoring a number of French schemes to remove the cardinal and feverishly discussing elaborate plots for his assassination.[177] Richelieu, for his part, continued to bet on Spain's eventual dislocation and on its inability to weather the steady onslaughts from a more concentrated and populous country such as France.

In the event, history smiled on the cardinal, who won his strategic wager. On the military front, French armies and proxies finally began to make some progress, making inroads into both Flanders and Imperial German territory. Joint Habsburg military operations became ever rarer as the Holy Roman Empire focused the bulk of its forces against the Swedes. In 1637, the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II died and was replaced by his son, Ferdinand III, a man with a greater appetite for compromise and a new willingness to shed the formalized military alliance with Spain in favor of

173 See, Ronald G. Asch, *The Thirty Years War,* 150.

174 On early modern Spain's system of composite monarchy, see H.G. Koenigsberger, "Monarchies and Parliaments in Early Modern Europe: Dominium Regale or Dominium Politicum et Regale," *Theory and Society* 5, no. 2 (March 1978): 191–217, https://www.jstor.org/stable/656696; and J.H. Elliott, "A Europe of Composite Monarchies," *Past and Present*, no. 137 (November 1992): 48–71, https://www.jstor.org/stable/650851.

175 See, Colin Pendrill, *Spain 1474-1700: The Triumphs and Tribulations of Empire* (Oxford, UK: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2002), 137.

176 See, Stradling, "Olivares and the Origins of the Franco-Spanish War."

177 See, Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares*, 606–07.

conflict resolution.[178] Richelieu's fledgling navy also proved its worth, playing an important ancillary role in support of southward-facing land campaigns and winning a series of small but significant maritime skirmishes in the Mediterranean and along the Spanish coastline.[179] A new generation of talented generals — such as Louis II of Bourbon (later known as Le Grand Condé) and Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne, Viscount of Turenne — came of age, and French forces consolidated their control over Artois and portions of Northern Italy as well as Alsace and Lorraine. A cordon of military outposts was established across the upper Rhine and the southern Roussillon was occupied.[180] Most importantly, in 1640 Spain was finally engulfed by its internal tensions — as Richelieu had predicted — with both Catalonia and Portugal rebelling against their Castilian overlords and allying with France. In Catalonia, the ringleaders of the popular revolt opportunistically invoked ancient treaties from the time of Charlemagne and swore allegiance to Louis XIII, who promptly dispatched troops to garrison his new protectorate. Spain only succeeded in recapturing the renegade province twelve years later in 1652. In the case of Portugal, however, the divorce proved more permanent — after decades of bitter struggle, the Portuguese obtained their full independence in 1668.

These developments almost fatally impeded the Spanish war effort. Cursing the fickleness of his crimson-garbed foe, a broken Olivares lamented the fact that Madrid was now "reduced to a new war inside Spain which is already costing millions, at a time when we already find ourselves in terrible straits."[181] As Sir Richard Lodge later noted, events had

> undergone a startling change since 1636. In that year the Spaniards had been victors on French soil, and their advance had excited a panic in the French capital. In 1640 France was not only secure against invasion, but its frontier had been advanced in the east, in the north, and in the south, and its great rival, Spain, was threatened with imminent dissolution. The connection with the Netherlands was already destroyed, and the French fleet in the Mediterranean made communication with Italy difficult and dangerous. In the peninsula itself two provinces were in open revolt, and one of them seemed likely to become a part of France.[182]

From then on — and although Spain would continue to wage war on its neighbor for almost two more decades — the strategic pendulum began to swing ever more strongly in France's direction. Three years later, in 1643, the French army crushed a large Spanish force at the battle of Rocroi, in northeastern France, earning a spectacular and resounding victory.[183]

Richelieu, however, was no longer there to see it. Exhausted and emaciated, he had finally succumbed to one of his many afflictions a few months prior, on a wintry day in December 1642. In the weeks leading up to Richelieu's death, the king paid his longstanding adviser a final visit. Surrounded by a gaggle of nervous physicians, coughing up blood, and struggling to speak between fits of hacking coughs, the cardinal leaned toward his monarch and engaged in a final defense of his policies.[184] Whispering that he knew his days were numbered, he confided that he could comfort himself with the knowledge that he had left the "kingdom in the highest degree of glory and reputation it has ever been, and all [the king's] enemies cast down and humiliated."[185] Legend has it that a few days later, as he received his final rites, the statesman was asked whether he wished to forgive any of his numerous enemies. The cardinal responded that there was nothing and nobody to forgive. After all, he personally had never had any true enemies — other, of course, than those of the state.[186]

178 See, Lothar Höbelt, *Ferdinand III (1608–1657): Friedenskaiser wider Willen* (Vienna: Aries Verag, 2008).

179 James, *The Navy and Government in Early Modern France,* 77–91.

180 For David Sturdy, by the time Richelieu died, in 1642, it can be stated in "objective terms," that "France's frontiers were more secure than for many decades." See, Sturdy, *Richelieu and Mazarin,* 64.

181 Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares,* 596.

182 Richard Lodge, *The Life of Cardinal Richelieu* (New York: A.L. Burt Company, 1903), 224.

183 Russell Weigley notes that France's victory at Rocroi (which was largely enabled by its much improved cavalry) by "no means signaled the end of its (France's) difficulties in finding an adequate infantry, but this triumph of gendarmes, good fortune, and superior generalship nevertheless began the process of translating France's potential ability to profit from the Thirty Years War into military actuality." See, Russell F. Weigley, *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 42.

184 Most historians believe Richelieu succumbed to pleurisy.

185 Quoted in Jean-Christian Petitfils, *Louis XIII: Tome II* (Paris: Perrin, 2008), chap. XIII.

186 "Je n'ai jamais eu d'autres ennemis que ceux de l'Etat," quoted in G. D'Avenel, *Richelieu et la Monarchie Absolue, Vol. 3* (Paris: Broche, 2011), 89.

Assessing Richelieu's Grand Strategy

The Embodiment of *Prudentia*?

In the introductory chapter to his *Testament Politique,* which he entitled "General Statement of the Royal Program," Richelieu provides a succinct overview of the kingdom's state of affairs when he was elevated to the rank of chief minister in 1624. Addressing himself directly to the king, he delivers a grim diagnosis of France's former fragility in the following terms:

> When Your Majesty resolved to admit me both to your council and to an important place in your confidence for the direction of your affairs, I may say that the Huguenots shared the state with you; that the nobles conducted themselves as if they were not your subjects, and the most powerful governors of the provinces as if they were sovereign in their offices. (...) I may further say that foreign alliances were scorned, private interests being preferred to those of the public, and in a word, the dignity of the royal majesty was so disparaged, and so different from what it should be, because of the misdeeds of those who conducted your affairs, that it was almost impossible to recognize it.[187]

Thereupon, he continues,

> I dared to promise you, with assurance, that you would soon find remedies for the disorders in your state, and that your prudence, your courage, and the benediction of God would give a new aspect to this realm. I promised Your Majesty to employ all my industry and all the authority which it would please you to give me to ruin the Huguenot party, to abase the pride of the nobles, to bring all your subjects back to their duty, and to restore your reputation among foreign nations to the station it ought to occupy. In the broadest outline, Sire, these have been the matters with which Your Majesty's reign has thus far been concluded. I would consider them most happily concluded if they were followed by an era of repose during which you could introduce into your realm a wealth of benefits of all types.[188]

This has generally been viewed as a frank and cogent encapsulation — "a broad outline" in the cardinal's own words — of Richelieu's agenda and his desire to address his country's challenges in a neatly sequential fashion, first, by consolidating the monarchy's domestic power, and, second, by restoring its primacy and reputation abroad. In one of his missives to Father Joseph, he provided a tripartite structure for this combination of internal and external balancing, noting that upon taking office "three things" had "entered his mind":

> First to ruin the Huguenots and render the king absolute in his state; second, to abase the House of Austria [by which he meant the Habsburgs with both their dynastic branches]; and third to discharge the French people of heavy subsidies and taxes.[189]

It is interesting to note that in both cases, he was intent on alleviating the French people's economic suffering once it was clear that France had regained its international position. This once again runs counter to the notion that he was completely insensitive to the plight of common folk. More importantly for the purposes of this study, however, Richelieu's writings indicate that over the course of his 18 years as chief minister his day-to-day policy decisions were being made under a clear, overarching intellectual framework for restoring French grandeur, a set of "action-oriented principles" prioritizing and connecting "threats to an overarching vision of the state's role in the world" — in other words, a grand strategy.[190] At a time when the very notion of grand strategy is viewed with a certain skepticism, with many dismissing the concept as woolly and ethereal, or as an artificial and retrospective reordering of messy policy processes ("randomness parading as design"), Richelieu's experience reminds us that,

187 Richelieu, *Testament Politique,* 40–44.

188 Richelieu, *Testament Politique,* 40–44.

189 Cited in A. Lloyd Moote, *Louis XIII: The Just* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 177.

190 This oft-cited definition of grand strategy (and one of the more workable and succinct) is provided in Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996–97): 3, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539272.

in some cases, statesmen do operate under the guidance of a clear long-term vision.[191]

Naturally, the pursuit of Richelieu's three-part agenda was not as smooth and linear as his self-promotional *Testament Politique*, written in his twilight years, would suggest. As one historian notes, "rather than being a precisely ordered chronological agenda, there was a great deal of moving back and forth."[192] Strategy, as Sir Lawrence Freedman reminds us, is as much a matter of process as of design and this process "evolves through a series of states, each not quite as anticipated or hoped for, requiring a reappraisal and modification of the original strategy."[193] Whether in terms of Richelieu's financial or military initiatives, there was a fair amount of ad-hocism and improvisation. This was due, in large part, to the manifold bureaucratic limitations of the early modern French state — but not only. Decision-making in 17th-century Europe unfolded within a very distinct and elaborate constellation of pre-existing networks of aristocratic clientelism. Richelieu was certainly adept at playing the game of patronage politics, but this relentless flow of intrigue also consumed a lot of his time and energy and rendered a purely rationalized and meritocratic approach to government almost impossible. As we have seen, these socio-cultural constraints also adversely affected France's military performance, most notably in the early years of *la guerre ouverte* with the Habsburgs. Important domestic reforms, such as the prohibition of dueling, were often unevenly applied, suspended, or even abandoned for temporary expediency, particularly if they triggered excessive degrees of aristocratic opposition.

At the same time, as one of the greatest French historians of the period reminds us, the greatness of certain leaders depends largely "on the quality of their intelligence and their effectiveness in the conditions of their epoch."[194] If one is to adopt this more measured and discriminating mode of evaluation, it hardly seems controversial to state that Richelieu was a singularly talented statesman and that, despite the occasionally inconsistent, incomplete, or spasmodic nature of his individual initiatives, he demonstrated a remarkable "continuity in the realization of his general aims."[195]

The chief minister was the first to recognize that any successful grand strategy must possess a degree of plasticity and that security managers should preserve the ability to adapt to sudden changes in circumstances. As contemporary scholars have noted, grand strategy "exists in a world of flux" and "constant change and adaptation must be its companions if it is to succeed."[196] "At best," suggests one historian, it can provide an "intellectual reference point" for dealing with evolving challenges and "a process by which dedicated policy makers can seek to bring their day-to-day actions into better alignments with their country's enduring interests."[197] Richelieu was perfectly cognizant of these enduring truths and in his writings consistently and eloquently stressed the need to adhere to a political wisdom structured around compromise and adaptability — prudence in the classical sense — when advancing a country's interests. Any quest for policy perfection or moral purity when conducting affairs of state thus ran the risk of backfiring; seeking to adhere to overly formalized rules, theories, or schools of thoughts was profoundly misguided. The best rule when taking important decisions, he quipped, was precisely "to have no general rule."[198] Within large and rambunctious societies, major domestic reforms should be undertaken with care and with an eye both to the limitations of the state to enact immediate change and to the potential for societal unrest that could result from their forcible imposition.

191 For a recent sampling of such skeptical views see Ionet Popescu, *Emergent Strategy and Grand Strategy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); and Simon Riech and Peter Dombrowksi, *The End of Grand Strategy: U.S. Maritime Operations in the Twenty-First Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018). For "randomness parading as design," see Steve Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy: The United States in the Persian Gulf: 1972-2005* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 197. On the importance of certain exceptional individuals in shaping grand strategy, see Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (Spring 2001): 107–46, https://doi.org/10.1162/01622880151091916.

192 Moote, *Louis XIII: The Just*, 178.

193 Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), xi. For an excellent recent overview of the academic literature on grand strategy, see Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 1 (November 2018), http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/868.

194 Victor L. Tapié, "The Legacy of Richelieu," in *The Impact of Absolutism in France: National Experience Under Richelieu, Mazarin, and Louis XIV*, ed. William F. Church (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1969), 59.

195 Burckhardt, *Richelieu and His Age*, 54.

196 Williamson Murray et al., *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy and War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11.

197 Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 190.

198 "La meilleure règle qu'on puisse avoir en ce choix est souvent de n'en avoir point de générale." Quoted in Guy Thuillier, "Maximes d'Etat du Cardinal de Richelieu," *La Revue Administrative* 9, no. 53 (September-October 1956): 482, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40762186.

Thus,

> it is sometimes a matter of prudence to water down remedies to make them more effective; and orders that conform more to reason, because sometimes they are not well suited to the capacities of those called upon to execute them.[199]

In one particularly revealing analogy, Richelieu observed that

> An architect who, by the excellence of his craft, rectifies the defects of an ancient building and who, without demolishing it, restores it to a tolerable symmetry, merits far more praise than the one who ruins it to erect a new and seemingly perfect edifice.[200]

Richelieu's interpretation of the concept of prudence should not be equated, however, with the modern interpretation of the word, i.e., caution and a penchant for ponderousness or watchful inactivity. In some cases, it was certainly necessary to bide one's time, husband one's resources, and build up one's strength. Other situations, however, called for decisive action, and for a measure of boldness and alacrity.[201] The soundness of such actions — and their eventual success — was directly tied to the validity and coherence of France's long-term planning, for,

> experience shows that, if one foresees from far away the designs to be undertaken, one can act with speed when the moment comes to execute them.[202]

The first approach, he claimed, had paid rich dividends during the period of *guerre couverte*, from 1624 to 1635, and the king, he crowed, had "demonstrated a singular prudence," by "occupying all the forces of the enemies of his state with those of his allies," and by putting his hand "on his purse and not on his sword."[203] The second approach had proved necessary after the battle of Nördlingen, when it became clear that France would need to come directly to the aid of its allies "when they no longer appeared capable of surviving alone." France chose to launch a multifront war, thus preempting and confounding Spain's own plans to deliver a knock-out blow. Dissipating their neighbor's strategic attention and resources had played a fundamental role in France's success, noted Richelieu:

> Pursuing such simultaneous attacks in such a variety of places—something that even the Romans and Ottomans never accomplished—would no doubt seem to many people to be of great temerity and imprudence. And yet, while it is proof of your power, it is also strong proof of your judgment, as it was necessary to focus the attention of your enemies in all places so they could be invincible in none.[204]

To what degree are these self-congratulatory statements justified? If one peruses the commentaries of his foreign contemporaries, who often admired and despised him in equal measure, the answer is quite a bit. Shortly after having received news of Richelieu's death, a soon-to-be disgraced Olivares penned a memorandum that directly attributed "the acute situation in which we (Spain) now find ourselves" to the machinations of his hated rival, noting that under the latter's leadership,

> France against all right and reason has attacked us on every front, and has stripped Your Majesty of entire kingdoms in Spain by resorting to hideous treachery, and has provoked such a universal convulsion that the possibility of salvaging even a portion has generally been considered very slight.[205]

Even some of Richelieu's harshest critics have been at pains to deny that the country he diligently served over the course of so many years was

199 Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 141.

200 Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 139.

201 In this, Richelieu was echoing many of the writings of other 17th-century theorists of prudence, and figures such as the Spaniard Baltasar Gracian, who pointed to the Augustan motto *festina lente* — or "make haste slowly" — to later argue that "diligence carries out quickly what intelligence carries out slowly." See, Baltasar Gracian, *The Pocket Oracle and Art of Prudence* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), 53.

202 Quoted in Elliott, *Richelieu and Olivares*, 155. Richelieu also memorably put emphasis on the occasional need for rapid decisiveness in his famous 1629 memorandum to the king, noting that "Men do not create opportunities but are given them; they do not order time but possess only a small part of it, the present, which is but an almost imperceptible point as opposed to the vast extent of the limitless future. To achieve their ends, men must move quickly and in good time; they must make haste among immediate, transitory things." *Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu, Vol. IX* (Paris: Honore Champion, 1929), 20–22.

203 Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 66.

204 Richelieu, *Testament Politique*, 67.

205 Quoted in Elliott, *Richelieu and Olivares*, 154.

territorially larger, institutionally more robust, and militarily more powerful than when he came into office. As Olivares lamented, the cardinal's policies had undoubtedly accelerated the process of Spanish decline.[206] By the mid-1600s, third-party observers, such as the English politician Algernon Sidney, were already writing that

> The vast power of Spain that within these thirty years made the world tremble, is now like a carcass without blood and spirits, so that everyone expects the dissolution of it.[207]

France's subsidization of Spain's many foes had bled Madrid dry, its alliance with Portugal had fractured the Iberian Peninsula, and Richelieu's careful nurturing of his cherished fleet meant that France was now a maritime power to be reckoned with. The chief minister's many initiatives on the cultural front, from the creation of the *Académie Française* to the foundation of the *Imprimerie Royale,* revitalized French soft power and buttressed the aspirational self-image of its elites. Richelieu not only set the stage for future French military dominance, he also — through his various propaganda efforts and promotion of *politique* writings that stressed trans-confessional patriotism and unity — arguably laid the ideational cement for the more modern and missionary form of French nationalism that would erupt in the late 18th century. As international relations theorists have noted, a country's strategic adjustment to evolving geopolitical circumstances is not merely the result of "shifts in the pattern of interests and power," or in the structure of their political institutions, but also hinges upon evolutions in how that country's leaders "visualize their world, their society's mission in that world, and the relationship between military power and political ends."[208] Richelieu's vision for French foreign policy — with France playing a leading and arbitral role in a Europe of pacified nation-states whose relations are more defined by secular than confessional interests — is one that has endured and that, one could argue, endures in the Elysée Palace to this day.

All of this, of course, came at a heavy price, a price disproportionately borne by France's peasantry that suffered year after year of famine and privation. Years of subsidized warfare may have proven more cost-effective in terms of blood and treasure than total war, but it remained onerous and was only made possible by the imposition of crushing levels of taxation. It may well be, as the great 19th-century historian Lord Acton reluctantly posited, that European kingdoms such as France needed to traverse a period of repressive absolutism before attaining the internal coherence within which modern liberalism could flourish.[209] This does not render any of the more brutally authoritarian aspects of the thoughts of 17th-century statesmen such as Richelieu any less distasteful or painful to a modern reader. Some historians have viewed the series of revolts of *La Fronde*, which ravaged France from 1648 to 1653, as a direct result — and backlash against — the more oppressive aspects of Richelieu's absolutist reforms. It is only fair, notes Elliott, to recognize that "The Fronde, as much as the France of Louis XIV, is the legacy of Richelieu."[210]

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Once again, however, France's grand strategy under the reign of Louis XIII — who deserves his own share of credit for his kingdom's reforms and foreign policy triumphs — should be judged in accordance with the characteristics and specificities

206 For Geoffrey Parker, by their continued funding of Spain's Protestant adversaries, in the Low Countries in particular, "It was not the Dutch who destroyed the Spanish Empire, but the French. The Low Countries' Wars resembled a weakening hold which, when long applied, debilitates a wrestler so that he submits more easily to a new attack from a different quarter." Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road*, 221.

207 See, Algernon Sidney, *Court Maxims* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 78.

208 Edward Rhodes, "Constructing Power: Cultural Transformation and Strategic Adjustment in the 1890s," in *The Politics of Strategic Adjustment: Ideas, Institutions, Interests*, ed. Peter Trubowitz et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 29. See also the seminal work, Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

209 Lord Acton, *Essays on Freedom and Power* (Boston, MA: 1949), 58–88.

210 Elliott, *Richelieu and Olivares*, 171.

of the era.[211] At a time when all European rulers brutally repressed their subjects, and the lay, democratic nation-state was not even a glimmer on the historical horizon, would France's peasants "have gained very much by remaining the subjects of a weakened realm," delivered, yet again, to the rapaciousness of feuding warlords and foreign powers?[212] With regard to the practice of French statecraft, in particular, there is little doubt that the achievements of the Louis XIII and Richelieu "duumvirate" were remarkable. Indeed, they appear all the more so when juxtaposed with the unilateral, hubristic, and ultimately self-defeating policies of Louis XIII's successor, Louis XIV.

The Inexorability of Hubris?

As if to emphasize one last time the entangled nature of their complex relationship, Louis XIII followed Richelieu to the grave only a few months after the cardinal's passing. Thereupon followed an extended period during which — Louis XIV not having yet reached maturity — Anne of Austria ruled as regent of France and Cardinal Jules Mazarin served as chief minister. Personally selected by Richelieu as his successor, Mazarin proved to be a wise choice — at least with regard to the conduct of foreign policy.[213] While his heavy-handed approach to domestic affairs may have helped stoke the resentment which eventually led to *La Fronde,* his practice of diplomacy was largely in continuity with Richelieu's and demonstrated a keen sense of prudence along with a shrewd appreciation for the virtues of multilateralism.[214] During the tortuous negotiations leading up to the Peace of Westphalia, Mazarin paid close attention to the interests and views of France's weaker allies and ensured that his country's commitments were respected. In this, he

> demonstrated that alliances between strong and weak players can work best when the former operates as sponsor of the latter rather than treating them as dispensable junior partners.[215]

Unfortunately, this sagacious brand of statecraft did not survive Mazarin's death in 1661. In the years that followed, a young, unfettered and *gloire*-obsessed Louis XIV began to pursue an increasingly reckless and expansionist foreign policy. Drawing on the immense resources of a country at the zenith of its power, the Sun King launched a series of bloody wars of conquest. Over the course of his long reign, he massively increased the size of France's armed forces, heightened internal repression, and — with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 — reprised royal persecution of the Protestant minority. This was not only ruinous to France's civil society and economy, with the mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of Huguenots overseas, but also immensely damaging to its international prestige.[216]

Louis XIV's military expansionism and general disdain for the interests of France's allies resulted in the country's isolation, its eventual bankruptcy, and the formation of a series of European coalitions designed to contest French dominance. The term *raison d'état* was now increasingly associated with French arrogance and assertiveness rather than with prudence and circumspection.[217]

It is no doubt revealing that when the first edition of Richelieu's *Testament Politique* was released, several decades after the statesman's death and at the height of Louis XIV's reign, it was from the press of a French Protestant living in exile in Amsterdam. The posthumous publication of the cardinal's recollections and ruminations was intended to serve a didactic purpose, by highlighting the differences between the more enlightened attitudes toward religious tolerance and foreign policy that had prevailed under his tenure, and the rank chauvinism that had come to characterize the rule of Louis XIV.[218] Foreign commentators

211 Moote, *Louis XIII: The Just*; and Petitfils, *Louis XIII: Tomes I et II* (Paris: Perrin, 2008).

212 Victor L. Tapié, "The Legacy of Richelieu," 55.

213 The loyal Father Joseph, who would have otherwise taken on this position, died in 1638.

214 This does not mean, however, that there were not subtle differences between both men's approaches. For example, Mazarin was more expansionist in Italy, Alsace, and the Netherlands. That being said, there was a broad continuity in both cardinals' policies, particularly with regard to their vision of France's arbitral role and the attention devoted to alliance management. See, Sturdy, *Richelieu and Mazarin*; Geoffrey Treasure, *Mazarin: The Crisis of Absolutism in France* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 233–61; and Charles Derek Croxton, *Peacemaking in Early Modern Europe: Cardinal Mazarin and the Congress of Westphalia, 1643-48* (Selingsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1999).

215 John A. Lynn II, "The Grand Strategy of the Grand Siècle: Learning from the Wars of Louis XIV," in *The Shaping of Grand Strategy*, 51.

216 See, Janine Garrisson, *L'Edit de Nantes et sa Révocation: Histoire d'une Intolérance* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985).

217 One of the more penetrating critiques of Louis XIV's policies was famously provided by the Archbishop Fénelon, who dismissed the cynical instrumentalization of theories of *raison d'état* to abet crudely hegemonic ambitions. See, Fénelon, *Lettre à Louis XIV et Autres Ecrits Politiques* (Paris: Omnia, 2011), 30–35.

218 Joseph Bergin thus notes that "praising Richelieu's skills (prudence, foresight, etc.) could be (…) used to contrast favorably Richelieu's dealings with the Huguenots to the brutal and futile policies of Louis XIV." Bergin, "Three Faces of Richelieu," 523.

expressed their concern and bewilderment over France's sudden strategic metamorphosis, and the same accusations that Richelieu and the *politiques* had once levied at Madrid — of its pretensions of hegemony and universal monarchy — were now directed toward Versailles.[219] John Lynn notes that France's increased disdain for its allies was closely tied to its own ascendancy on the continent, which led Louis XIV to see France as "powerful enough to fight alone if it had to," which, in turn, made him "unwilling to accommodate the interests and outlooks of others."[220]

This raises an important question, notes one historian:

> [A]t what point, theoretically speaking, does an ascending hegemon cross the threshold from being a Westphalian guarantor of a general peace in Christendom to become something else, a predatory monarchia universalis or, perhaps, a would-be "imperial power"?[221]

More broadly, are dominant states condemned to periods of self-defeating hubris? Some contemporary political scientists have suggested, for instance, that American grand strategy is locked in a repeating cycle, oscillating between eras of isolation and international engagement, with periods of damaging unilateralism or more constructive internationalism in between.[222] Is prudence therefore both period-dependent and a function of relative weakness (or the fear of becoming the weaker party)? Was French strategic competence under Richelieu largely a result of such perceptions of weakness? Does primacy and the absence of serious peer competitors systematically breed complacency over time, ultimately leading to hubris?[223] If so, how can a nation either mitigate or preempt such a natural tendency?

Fully answering such complex questions is beyond the remit of this study. One remedial action, however, might be to follow the guidance of early Baroque theorists of statecraft such as Botero, and to pay closer attention both to the lessons of history and to the trials and tribulations of historical statesmen such as Richelieu. Tsar Peter the Great clearly shared this opinion. While riding through the streets of Paris on an official state visit in 1717, he suddenly called his carriage to a clattering halt, and requested to make a stop at the chapel of La Sorbonne. After standing a moment in respectful silence before the great marble sarcophagus, the Russian Tsar is reported to have suddenly exclaimed,

> Great man, if you were alive today, I would shortly give you half my empire on condition you would teach me to govern the other half![224]

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Photo: National Gallery

219 See, David Saunders, "Hegemon History: Pufendorf's Shifting Perspectives on France and French Power," in *War, the State and International Law in Seventeenth Century Europe*, ed. Olaf Asbach and Peter Schröder (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 211–31.

220 Lynn, "The Grand Strategy of the Grand Siècle," 50.

221 Saunders, "Hegemon History," 228.

222 See, for instance, Christopher Hemmer, *American Pendulum: Recurring Debates in U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015). Robert Osgood made a similar observation in the 1980s, when he lamented what he perceived as being a U.S. "pattern of oscillation," which "misled adversaries, unsettled friends, and dissipated national energy in erratic spurts." See, Robert E. Osgood, "American Grand Strategy: Patterns, Problems, and Prescriptions," *Naval War College Review* 36, no. 5 (1983): 5–17.

223 For a recent sampling of such discussions as applied to the American context, see Michael Clarke and Anthony Ricketts, "U.S. Grand Strategy and National Security: The Dilemmas of Primacy, Decline and Denial," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 5 (2017): 479–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2017.1342760; Hal Brands and Eric Edelman, *The Crisis of American Military Primacy and the Search for Strategic Solvency* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2017), https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/avoiding-a-strategy-of-bluff-the-crisis-of-american-military-primacy; and Michael J. Mazarr, "The World Has Passed the Old Grand Strategies By," *War on the Rocks*, Oct. 5, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2016/10/the-world-has-passed-the-old-grand-strategies-by/.

224 Roland Mousnier, "Histoire et Mythe," in *Richelieu,* ed. Antoine Adam et al. (Paris: Hachette, 1972), 246.