

Strategy of War, Tactics of Peace

Derek Croxton, *Peacemaking in Early Modern Europe: Cardinal Mazarin and the Congress of Westphalia, 1643-1648*. Selinsgrove [N.J.]: Susquehanna University Press, 1999. 397 pp. \$52.50 US (cl). Notes, bibliography, and index. ISBN 1-57591-017-9.

Review by Michael J. Levin, University of Akron, for H-France, June 2000.

The subject of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) has inspired a vast body of historical literature, much of it devoted to how and why the war was fought. (1) But there has also been a great deal of interest in how the war ended. Historians often refer to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 as a turning point in European history, marking the end of the era of religious warfare and the beginning of the modern "states system" of Europe. The peace conference itself, which lasted five years and involved thousands of diplomats, has also attracted much attention, in part because it generated so much documentary evidence.(2) One of the key questions about this conference is, why did it take so long? Traditionally, the French have been saddled with much of the blame: their demands were too greedy, and their statesmen too incompetent. More specifically, Jules, cardinal de Mazarin (1602-1661), the French first minister from 1643 (after the death of his famous predecessor, Armand Jean, cardinal de Richelieu), has been accused of prolonging the war in the hopes of gaining more territory, or inflicting more damage on his enemies.(3) Among other things, Derek Croxton seeks to reform Mazarin's reputation. He insists that not only did Mazarin know exactly what he was doing, but he also did his best to end the war quickly--if only to better serve the interests of France.

Croxton's work makes a number of contributions to our knowledge of this topic, combining elements of military, diplomatic, and political history. The author shows the interplay of these three forces by focusing on one of France's territorial demands during the peace negotiations, the region of Alsace. Along with the nearby territory of Lorraine, Alsace has been hotly contested between France and Germany for centuries. At the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, Alsace was part of the Holy Roman Empire, but over the course of the war France occupied much of it, and began to think of this area as part of France; as Croxton says, French ministers shifted from thinking of Alsace as "under our protection" to its being "under our obedience" (p. 99). The French plenipotentiaries at the Congress of Westphalia made Alsace one of their chief demands as part of the price of peace. Why Alsace? Croxton asks. What was its strategic importance, and how did it figure into the ultimate diplomatic solution to the war? Croxton's work thus contributes to two current debates in historiography, concerning the nature of peacemaking in Europe, and the development of state building in the early modern period.(4)

Croxton's work is also relevant for another major historiographical debate, the question of the "Military Revolution" in early modern Europe.⁽⁵⁾ As Croxton observes (pp. 21-22), relatively little has been written on the last military campaigns of the Thirty Years' War and how they reflected the changing nature of warfare in this period, a gap which he seeks to fill. Beyond this, however, Croxton focuses on "the role of the ultimate arbiter of power, military force, in shaping French territorial demands" (p. 9). Croxton sets out to describe "the effect of the military campaigns on Mazarin's negotiating position", and specifically how the changing fortunes of battle affected French demands for Alsace and other territories (p. 10). One of his conclusions, about which he himself expresses surprise, is that the fluctuating military situation on German battlefields actually had relatively little effect on what the French delegates asked for at the negotiating table (p. 270). The reason for this, says Croxton, is that Mazarin had a clear, consistent goal in mind, which was to annex key territories on the French-German border. Annexation would provide security against a future invasion by the Austrian Habsburgs, and also increase the power and glory of France.

Mazarin perceived war as a means to an end: he used military pressure to force concessions from his opponents. Military defeats and victories did not change this basic position. On the other hand, Mazarin and his delegates were flexible; their actual demands were not spelled out until 1645, at which time they included the recently conquered (and strategically important) town of Philippsburg (pp. 160-161). Croxton disagrees with historians who think that Mazarin took advantage of Habsburg defeats to increase his demands. Instead, he says, the French were much more influenced by the demands and vagaries of their allies, particularly Sweden. Mazarin tried to coordinate the pace of his negotiations with those of the Swedes, and strove not to alienate Sweden by being too successful; and this as much as anything else is why the peace talks suffered such long delays (pp. 278-280).

One of the real strengths of the book is the insight it provides into the nuts and bolts of the negotiation process. The French plenipotentiaries often disagreed with Mazarin and with each other, and all of the French were continuously exasperated by their problematic allies. Croxton does fine work unravelling the plots and counterplots infesting the Congress. Complex military campaigns are explained with similar clarity, and Croxton does a convincing job of rescuing Mazarin from his detractors.

The book does have a few weaknesses. Croxton goes into great detail about the campaigns of 1645-1646, but glosses over 1647 without explanation.⁽⁶⁾ The text also contains some internal inconsistencies. On p. 203, for example, Croxton says that in 1645 Mazarin believed that a major military campaign was the only way to bend Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, to his will, but a few pages later he says that "Bavaria was doing everything that France could hope for at the beginning of 1646, and the French position was so good that a further campaign could only be harmful" (p. 208).

What had changed? Finally, a good map of the territories in question would have been useful. On the whole, however, this is a strong work, based on solid evidence. No doubt, Mazarin, a stickler for details, would be pleased.

Notes:

1. For a small sampling of this literature, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years' War* (London, 1984; 2nd ed. 1996); C. V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (Gloucester MA, 1969); J. V. Polisensky, *The Thirty Years War*, trans. Robert Evans (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971); Georges Pages, *La Guerre de Trente Ans* (Paris, 1949); Fritz Dickmann, *Der Westfälische Frieden* (2nd ed. Munster, 1965).
- 2) The German scholar Konrad Repgen and his students have been editing a massive collection of documents from the Congress, under the title *Acta Pacis Westphalicae* (3 series, Munster, 1962- , 60 projected volumes). Croxton makes extensive use of this series.
- 3) For example, see Wedgwood, pp. 448-459. Parker observes that a number of German historians of the Thirty Years' War, such as Dickmann, "tend to belittle the role of Mazarin" in the war and the peace negotiations (p. 273, n. 9). For a more positive view of Mazarin, see the recent biography by Geoffrey Treasure, *Mazarin: The Crisis of Absolutism in France* (London and New York, 1995).
- 4) See Richard Bonney, *The European Dynastic States, 1494-1660* (Oxford, 1991), and Andreas Osiander, *The States System of Europe, 1640-1990: Peacemaking and the Conditions of International Stability* (Oxford, 1994). I was a little surprised not to see any references in this book to the work of Joycelyne G. Russell, particularly *Peacemaking in the Renaissance* (London, 1986).
- 5) See Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1996), and Jeremy Black, *A Military Revolution? Military Change and European Society, 1550-1800* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1991).
- 6) Parker writes that during the campaigns of 1647-1648, "France attempted unsuccessfully to delay the end of hostilities, both in the Netherlands and Germany, until she had brought Spain to her knees" (*Thirty Years' War*, p. 179). This would seem to contradict Croxton.

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