A Territorial Imperative? The Military Revolution, Strategy and Peacemaking in the Thirty Years War

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The later stages of the Thirty Years War, one historian has written, 'were not propitious to large-scale strategic designs . . . Campaigns became forays, [and] battles became encounters void of strategic significance.' These are not, as one might expect, the words of some recent revisionist historian attacking the concept of the ‘Military Revolution’, but of Michael Roberts, the very originator of that term. Even while praising Gustavus Adolphus for his innovations in all aspects of war, Roberts bemoans his ‘territorial’ strategy, sharply limited by logistical concerns, and laments that ‘of Gustav Adolf’s strategic innovations little or nothing was transmitted to his immediate posterity’.1 The ‘revolution’ in strategy under Gustavus, Roberts makes it clear, was both inadequate and temporary.

Roberts’s harsh view of early modern strategy, and of strategy in the latter half of the Thirty Years War in particular, is hardly unique. Already Clausewitz and Delbrück held similar views.2

1 M. Roberts, ‘Gustav Adolf and the Art of War’, in Essays in Swedish History (London, 1967), pp. 72–5. I would like to thank Geoffrey Parker, Robert Stradling, Larry Marvin, Reid Rozen, and Paul Allen, all of whom read and commented on versions of this article. I also owe thanks to two organizations: International Security Studies, headed by Paul Kennedy, whose fellowship gave me time to write the article; and the Vereinigung zur Erforschung der Neueren Geschichte, headed by Konrad Repgen, for permitting me to use as yet unpublished material that they have collected.

2 H. Delbrück, The Dawn of Modern Warfare, vol. iv of History of the Art of War, trans. W.J. Renfroe, Jr (Lincoln, NB, 1985), pp. 293–315, esp. pp. 298–9, 315; C. von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. M. Howard and P. Paret (Princeton, NJ, 1976), pp. 330, 553. Delbrück, with his preference for a war of annihilation over a war of attrition, found the latter (the only type practised in the early modern period in his judgement) ‘hostage to an internal contradiction’ (p. 294), and described Thirty Years War strategy in particular as full of ‘a large number of paradoxes’ (pp. 298–9). Nevertheless, he acknowledged the limitations placed on early modern strategy because of the contemporary social and political structure, and commented that Thirty Years War strategy had not been adequately studied.
historians have debated some aspects of the ‘Military Revolution’ with great fervour – including army size, tactical innovations and classical precedents – but they have been surprisingly unanimous in agreeing that strategy was stagnant to begin with and did not get any better. Martin van Creveld, for example, claims that in the latter part of the Thirty Years War ‘it looked as if military art was about to make a return to the middle ages’ – which, for the military historian, is the ultimate insult. In van Creveld’s estimation, strategy had ‘degenerated into a series of more or less deep cavalry raids against enemy towns’. Gunther Rothenberg writes that warfare was ‘static and indecisive’, and specifically notes that Gustavus ‘could not escape the limitations of his time’ in matters of strategy. David Parrott derides what he describes as ‘attempts . . . to dignify what had degenerated into a struggle almost exclusively concerned with control of territory’. B.H. Liddell Hart says of the Thirty Years War that ‘no campaign during its long course proved decisive’, while Jeremy Black, borrowing from the work of Parrott, claims that ‘in general . . . campaigns were inconclusive’, and calls the fighting of the period ‘inchoate’. Russell Weigley has recently noted ‘the persisting, recalcitrant indecisiveness of war, in spite of the strategists’ search for decision through destructive battle’. Even Parker, who helped revive the notion of a ‘Military Revolution’ with his book on the subject, finds strategic thinking lacking; and Roberts himself felt that strategy both before and after Gustavus was sterile.³

Most of these historians are speaking of strategy in its narrower sense of the planning and execution of military campaigns, but military strategy holds the key to the entire war effort, and hence to the making of peace as well. In the first place, failure at the strategic level tends to negate all the other improvements going on at the tactical level; in other words, armies remained ineffective even at the height of military innovation.⁴ In the second place, several scholars have claimed that statesmen either ignored the peculiar impotence of early modern strategy or reacted to it inappropriately; in either case, the result was longer wars and more destruction than there might have been with a more


⁴ The German experience in the two world wars, in which they were the most successful power on the tactical and operational levels but were defeated because of their complete failure in the area of strategy, is exemplary; see the relevant chapters of A.R. Millett and W. Murray, eds, *Military Effectiveness* (3 vols, Boston, MA, 1988).
effective military. Perhaps the first to argue this position was Isaak Bernays in his article ‘Die Diplomatie um 1500’, published posthumously in 1928 but delivered as a lecture in 1906. Bernays attempted to account for the notoriously unfaithful diplomacy of Machiavelli’s era by showing that statesmen were simply unable to accomplish anything militarily, and hence were driven to break treaties at every opportunity as the only means to a stronger position. Geza Perjés similarly linked military ineffectiveness and diplomacy in his study that sought to explain why wars were long and ineffective in the late seventeenth century, arguing that ‘there was a discrepancy between the political objectives of wars and the only kind of strategy that could be employed in the given circumstances [i.e. attrition]’, and therefore ‘that strategy was no longer able to meet the requirements of politics’. Finally, Russell Weigley claims that in the early modern period ‘strategists focused on [battle] to achieve decision in war . . . [The] whole course of a war might be resolved in a single day . . . Yet the age of battles nevertheless proved to be an age of prolonged, indecisive wars’, and concludes that war was ‘not a worthy instrument of policy but an expression of the bankruptcy of policy’.5

There are as many models for the failure of strategy as there are early modern military historians, but almost all of them rest on the interplay of three overlapping yet distinguishable factors: logistics, fortresses, and lack of central control. Logistical problems are perhaps the most widely cited. Historians often blame them for dominating strategy and keeping armies tied to an ‘umbilical cord’ of magazines and supply trains that prevented the rapid movements necessary for a truly effective offensive. Perjés’s detailed study of the process of supplying an army led him to conclude that

an army was not only a war machine, but an immense milling, baking, foraging and transportation device at the same time, a device with a particular mechanism that operated according to rules all its own. It was very difficult to integrate the self-movements of this mechanism into the framework of requirements arising from the given war situation, into the range of strategy in the strict sense; consequently the co-ordination of the requirements of supply and strategy was only possible with certain concessions made by the latter.6

5 I. Bernays, ‘Die Diplomatie um 1500’, Historische Zeitschrift CXXXVIII (1928), pp. 18–23; G. Perjés, ‘Army Provisioning, Logistics and Strategy in the Second Half of the 17th Century’, Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae XVI (1970), pp. 35–8; Weigley, The Age of Battles, xii, 539. One rare exception to this is Liddell Hart, Strategy, pp. 63, 71, who does claim that objectives were limited in response to limited military means. However, his criticism of the effectiveness of the military itself is as severe as anyone’s.

These concessions included very limited opportunities for pursuit and the necessity of going into quarters every winter, which gave the losing side a chance to recover. Perjés also noted another point that has been emphasized even more strongly recently: the inability of logistical methods to keep pace with the growth of army size. This idea is further developed in Bernhard Kroener’s detailed study of the French logistical system, in which he found that the need for a more sophisticated system of étapes was first felt in the seventeenth century, when the larger number of troops reduced the number of areas that could serve as supply points.7

The need to get food and ammunition to the troops was one problem; acquiring the supplies in the first place was another. Fortresses, the second general cause of strategic stagnation, played a crucial role in both.8 Strongholds served as depots to which advancing armies were tethered; they could not be left too far in the rear if there was to be any hope of advancing supplies to the troops. On the other hand, fortresses were sallying-points for raids on opposing supply columns, so enemy towns could not be bypassed without considerable risk. But fortresses were also ideal locations for gathering contributions from the surrounding countryside. Because governments did not themselves have the resources to support the massive armies that they put in the field, they became increasingly dependent on these contributions as sources of supplies, and hence on the fortresses that were necessary to secure the contributions.9 This concentration on fortresses, argues David Parrott, was the crucial reason for the growing indecisiveness of warfare. The origin of the difficulty lay in the rapid increase in the number of troops to be fed; as Michael Roberts expressed it, ‘The increased size of armies, the new complexity of their needs, at first confronted the states with problems of supply which they were incapable of solving.’ Parker followed the same reasoning in his book on the subject, writing that ‘strategic thinking had become crushed between the sustained growth in army size and the relative scarcity of money, equipment and food’. The principle, then, is not new; but Parrott has created the most sophisticated model explaining army growth


9 See e.g. H. Salm, *Armeefinanzierung im Dreißigjährigen Krieg: Der Niederländisch-Westfälische Reichskreis 1635–1650*, Schriftenreihe der Vereinigung zur Erforschung der Neueren Geschichte xvi (Münster, 1990), p. 168, in which he shows that over 90% of Imperial military resources received in north-west Germany came from contributions. This total is somewhat overstated because the theatre was not typical, but it is still telling. See also J. Lynn, ‘How War Fed War: The Tax of Violence and Contributions during the Grand Siècle’, *Journal of Modern History* LXV (1993), pp. 286–310.
and contributions as a cause of strategic stagnation (see below for further development of this idea). Other historians have argued that commanders were obsessed with fortresses even beyond their real military value, for example Gaston Zeller, who claims that fortresses served ‘a moral necessity even more than a material one’.

Finally, most historians give some weight to the problem of controlling the war effort in the imperfectly developed early modern state. These problems can be divided into two categories, physical and moral. The structural difficulty of directing military campaigns from a capital city was clearly great. Van Creveld has drawn attention to the massive correspondence generated as a consequence, and to the need to allow commanders considerable leeway to act on their own initiative. He cites ‘the attempt to exercise such long-range supervision’ as ‘a strong brake on operations’, and says that ‘it was one reason why strategy ran into a rut’. Kroener’s study of French logistics exposes the problem brilliantly, showing that the same orders had to be issued repeatedly, and that Le Tellier, the French minister of war, gave up trying to determine the exact march route of armies because every such attempt was foiled by local circumstances. Supply problems also impinged on central control, since armies devoted to finding the war vigorously at the potential cost of their investment – the army. Recently, however, David Parrott has turned this argument on its head, claiming that the French army was actually less effective because it had fewer mercenaries, since, with booty going to the Crown rather than to themselves, non-mercenary officers had no personal stake in victory.

One way to focus a discussion of the disparate views on early modern

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12 G. Zeller, L’Organisation défensive des frontières du nord et de l’est au XVIIe siècle (Paris, 1928), pp. 124–6. Russell Weigley forms an interesting exception here: while most historians are convinced that early modern strategists focused almost exclusively on fortresses, he believes that they put their faith entirely in battles. See esp. The Age of Battles, p. 536.
14 Kroener, Les Routes et les Étapes, pp. 54–5, 55–6, 112.
15 Kroener, Les Routes et les Étapes, pp. 54–5, 55–6, 112.
14 Rothenberg, ‘Maurice of Nassau’, pp. 92–3, is one of the few recent authors who weights this factor heavily. See also A. Corvisier, La France de Louis XIV: ordre intérieur et place en Europe, 3rd edn (Paris, 1990), pp. 90–1.
strategy is to concentrate on a particular period. This article examines
the last decade of the Thirty Years War, a time when, it is almost univer-
sally acknowledged, strategy reached its nadir. Judgements against
Thirty Years War strategy have a tendency to begin with indignation
against the general violence perpetrated on the populace and to move
from there to a critique of strategy in particular. Thus Josef Engel
writes, with a little too much vehemence, that:

the longer the war went, the more it evolved into a general hacking
and stabbing. Despite all the frightening results for those involved,
the war became a scrap over at best tactical advantages, when it did
not simply give vent to the basest instincts of power and the will to
survive it.16

On an only slightly calmer note, Michael Howard describes it as ‘a
period in which warfare seemed to escape from rational control; to
cease indeed to be “war” in the sense of politically-motivated use of
force by generally recognized authorities, and to degenerate instead
into universal, anarchic, and self-perpetuating violence’.17

These vague statements are typical of their subject, for the later the
period of the Thirty Years War, the less its military events have been
studied, and the more prone historians are to characterize the violence
and purposelessness as ‘general’ or ‘universal’ without citing any
details. Typically, Jeremy Black acknowledges that the period has
received little scholarly attention even as he denounces its strategy as
ineffective.18 But although their statements are obviously overgeneral-
ized and overdramatized, Engel and Howard are nevertheless
important because they are in line with other historians of the Thirty
Years War in their critique of strategy, especially in their emphasis on
lack of discipline among soldiers and disloyalty among army com-
mmanders. The key element is the supply situation, which was undeni-
able very poor. Historians repeatedly emphasize that war ‘became its
own goal’;19 in other words, supplying the troops became its own justi-
fication and overshadowed diplomatic concerns. There is usually an
assumption, sometimes stated explicitly, that armies were so busy
searching for food and fodder that they ceased to obey central govern-
ments. Robert O’Connell, for example, writes that ‘armies increasingly
devoid of intelligible political objectives, to say nothing of regular logis-

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16 J. Engel, ‘Von der spätmittelalterlichen respublica christiana zum Mächte-Europa der’
17 M. Howard, War in European History (New York, 1976), p. 37. See also J.C. Allmayer-
Beck and E. Lessing, Die Kaiserliche Kriegsvölker von Maximilian I bis Prinz Eugen 1479–
1718 (Munich, 1978), pp. 119–20, in which they lament that ‘the war had ceased to
be a knightly duel for a long time, instead becoming, the more attritional strategy
came to the fore, an act of mutual blackmail’.
18 Black, A Military Revolution?, pp. 13–14. See also G. Parker, The Thirty Years War
(Boston, MA, 1984), p. 298.
19 A. Kraus, Maximilian I: Bayerns Großer Kurfürst (Graz, 1990), p. 149.
tics, tended to degenerate into traveling mobs living in a symbiotic relationship with the countryside’. The key elements in the pointless, ineffective warfare of the last part of the Thirty Years War were thus (a) a complete breakdown in logistics, leading to (b) a complete loss of control on the part of central governments. Two sophisticated models formed around these factors have been advanced in the past twenty years by Martin van Creveld and David Parrott. Although quite different in many respects, they represent larger trends in the historiography and hence repay closer study.

Van Creveld calls Thirty Years War armies ‘probably the worst supplied in history; marauding bands of armed ruffians, devastating the countryside they crossed.’ Since they drew their provisions from contributions extracted from the populace, ‘lines of communication were of little moment in determining the directions of their movements’. Far from being restrained on a supply tether, he says, armies ‘were forced to keep on the move in order to stay alive’. And because they had no bases, it was ‘strategically impossible to cut seventeenth-century armies off from anything’. But rather than contributing to offensives, according to van Creveld, ‘this kind of warfare did not even make for a sustained and purposeful advance in any well-defined direction’. In his interpretation, then, armies could move virtually at will, but lacked the ability to defend their territorial gains and thereby make cumulative progress. This assessment is similar to that of Clausewitz, who asserted that ‘armies, particularly in the Thirty Years War, moved about sporadically’, and echoes Michael Roberts’s statement about ‘the bland indifference of most generals during the Thirty Years War to any threat to their line of communications’.

Parrott, by contrast, focuses not on the excessive mobility of the armies but on the lack of it. He also begins his critique of strategy with supply problems, or, as he puts it, ‘the vice of logistical constraints’ and ‘its grip upon the formulation and execution of strategy’. Like van Creveld, Parrott notes that

the central feature of seventeenth-century warfare was the relative ease with which states could raise large numbers of troops, but in circumstances where it proved impossible to match these forces with adequate or reliable administrative mechanisms.

However, Parrott draws the opposite conclusion from van Creveld: far from releasing armies from territorial occupation, the need to secure contributions ‘reduced strategy to a crude concern with territorial occupation or its denial to the enemy’. He perceives an ‘obsession’ with fortresses, which were necessary to secure the territory off which

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armies were fed. Rather than moving around at will, as in van Creveld’s model, armies in Parrott’s model had little mobility. The only way they could avoid disastrous attrition was ‘by not outrunning the supply facilities (however inadequate) established in the frontier provinces, and by imposing the most rigorous constraints upon military action’. And this was when things were going well. As the war progressed, supply and strategy regressed as armies ‘abandoned systematic contributions in favour of direct extortion and a guerre des courses devoid of strategic significance’. ‘While it might be too sweeping to suggest that commanders in the Thirty Years War were entirely uninfluenced by strategic considerations’, he concludes, ‘their freedom to act in accordance with any overall strategy was almost completely curtailed.’

Historians of this school emphasize the territorial nature of wars, and sometimes, for example Roberts, contrast it with a ‘strategy of annihilation’ in conscious reference to Delbrück.

The argument against Thirty Years War strategy, then, may be summed up as follows. Supply problems, which have long been acknowledged as the weak point of the early modern military, were particularly acute for the larger armies of the Thirty Years War. Because of this, armies gave up all other objectives and concentrated exclusively on acquiring enough food to stay in being. In van Creveld’s model, this meant moving around virtually at random in search of unravaged land; in Parrott’s model, it meant remaining virtually immobile to stay within reach of the inadequate depot system. In either case, statesmen and monarchs had little control over the conduct of military operations, and the pursuit of diplomatic goals in a Clausewitzian sense was entirely lost in the 1640s.

This is a compelling picture, although the completely dichotomous views of army mobility held by van Creveld and Parrott are disturbing and suggest a serious problem. It can only be tested, and the conflicting models resolved, by a close investigation of specific military campaigns. Pronouncements on Thirty Years War strategy have a tendency to be depressingly vague, and those on the last half of the war in particular rest almost exclusively, with a few notable exceptions, on general impressions that are clearly not based on a careful study of events. This article will therefore use the French campaigns in Germany from 1644 to 1646 as a basis for evaluating strategy, considering three questions. First, did statesmen set realistic, strategically useful goals for their armies? Second, did the armies pursue the goals set for them? And third, were armies able to achieve their goals to any significant degree? Answering these questions will tell us whether statesmen understood
the military situation, whether they exercised control over their armed forces, and whether hindrances prevented armies from serving as useful instruments of policy.

The French campaigns in Germany from 1644 to 1646 form a particularly appropriate case study for two reasons. First, the campaigns played a crucial role in shaping the settlement at the Peace of Westphalia, and hence provide a direct indication of the link between strategy and diplomacy. Second, the French military effort in the 1640s has recently been singled out for attack from two directions. Military historians, often in the context of critiquing the Military Revolution, have been at the forefront. David Parrott, for example, extends the conclusions of his excellent critique of French military administration under Cardinal Richelieu to the end of the Thirty Years War, and specifically notes that armies in Germany generally ‘produced the most limited results’. Similarly, André Corvisier has compared early modern campaigns to the repetitive and fruitless labour of Sisyphus, and makes particular reference to the French military effort in the Empire in the 1640s. At the same time, diplomatic and political historians have reassessed the French achievement at Westphalia. Finding French gains to have been less substantial than was once thought, they point to the lack of a decisive military victory as the root of French diplomatic weakness. As Orest Ranum explains it, the Habsburgs had, in a sense, ‘been defeated militarily; but the powers that had defeated them were so exhausted by their efforts that they risked losing in negotiations what they had gained in battle’. The French are criticized, therefore, for not achieving results commensurate with their superiority in wealth and population. Jeremy Black, for example, writes: ‘After 1643, it was less a question of French defeats than of a failure to make much progress’, while Andrew Lossky curtly claims that ‘French military efforts in the Thirty Years War brought meager tangible results’. If any strategy was ever prone to failure, then, it would seem to be that of the French in the last part of the Thirty Years War. Therefore, if this investigation shows the French to have been successful, the prevailing

26 O. Ranum, The Fronde: A French Revolution 1648–1652 (New York, 1993), pp. 82–3. Similarly, Kalevi Hosti writes: ‘The war came to an end not because of any great commitment to peace in the abstract or because of decisive military victories and defeats. Rather, the parties exhausted themselves. Their treasuries were depleted, the mercenaries who constituted the bulk of the military forces refused to fight without pay, and since the huge armies and their hordes of camp-followers had to live off the land, inflicting great cruelties among the peasantry, they began to run out of the means of survival’: Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648–1989, Cambridge Studies in International Relations xiv (New York, 1991), p. 29.
interpretation of early modern strategy will have to be completely refashioned.

French Strategy: Structures

If historians looking back over the centuries find armies plodding and ineffective in the 1640s, contemporaries had exactly the opposite impression. Mazarin, the French head of state, certainly felt that war was extremely risky. ‘The prosperity of arms is never continual’, he wrote to his plenipotentiaries early in 1644, perhaps chastened by the recent French disaster at Tuttlingen; and on another occasion he commented that ‘certainty . . . is not at all to be found in the pursuit of war, which is always subject to great changes’. This was particularly true in Germany, where, according to Viscount Turenne (commander of French forces in Germany for the last five years of the war), war was ‘subject to such great revolutions that one makes propositions that appear ridiculous fifteen days later’. Probably this emphasis on insecurity was considerably exaggerated. It is true that fortresses were less common in the Empire than they were in the Low Countries and Italy, and that attacks were correspondingly less secure. With fewer fortresses, there were fewer sieges and more battles; and battles involved considerable chance, especially if one side was surprised. But it is still difficult to agree with the frantic assessment of one French minister that ‘we are running the risk of losing everything in an instant’ by continuing the war in 1646, or to feel that another minister was justified in saying that they had had ‘three great alarms’ in less than six weeks over military matters in July 1646. In point of fact, the French lost only two battles over the last five years of the war, neither of which resulted in any significant loss of territory.

Given these inflated ideas of the possibilities of military force, it may seem that Perjés was right to note the failure of statesmen to evaluate military affairs and to set proportional diplomatic goals; and, to an extent, this is correct. If Mazarin was capable of believing, as he once wrote, that ‘One single accident of the kind that occurs every day in

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28 Mazarin to Longueville, 19 Aug. 1645, in Lettres du Cardinal Mazarin, ed. A. Chéruel, ii (Paris, 1872), no. 87 (here and subsequently, all references are to the number of the letter rather than the page); Mazarin to plenipotentiaries, 3 Dec. 1643, op. cit. i, no. 344.
military affairs is capable of ruining [the Emperor’s] grandeur forever and putting him in a state from which he will not be able to recover’, he was surely capable of making unrealistic demands.\(^{31}\) No doubt he did so on occasion, especially in regard to Spain; on the whole, however, the instability of the military situation was at least as likely to incline Mazarin to caution as to aggression. In his Weltanschauung, the military was not only a powerful tool but an uncertain one. Since he felt that France was risking as much as it stood to gain, his demands in the Empire were tough but reasonable – the acquisition of Alsace and the fortresses of Breisach and Philippsburg, the exclusion of Lorraine from the treaty, and prohibiting the Emperor from aiding Spain – and did not increase at all after the two most successful French campaigns in 1646 and 1648.

Nor, it must be added, was Mazarin’s view of the military situation unique. Not only his fellow French statesmen but even his generals themselves believed military affairs to be as unstable as he did. It appears that Mazarin and the others were as much a victim of their mindset as they were rational thinkers in this matter, for their views demonstrate precisely that hypersensitivity and feeling of impotence so cleverly sketched out by Robert Mandrou.\(^{32}\) It was not that the French were ignoring empirical observations, but that they allowed their interpretation of events to be influenced unduly by these psychological characteristics.

To his credit, Mazarin formed a strategy consistent with his interpretation of military events as uncertain and constantly changing: an attritional approach aimed at a slow but certain strangulation of the enemy. His orders repeatedly stressed the need to secure winter quarters in the Empire, and he almost certainly would have agreed with Turenne’s assessment that ‘maintaining ourselves powerfully in this territory, [the enemy] must inevitably make peace or succumb’.\(^{33}\) Although a ponderous, almost pedestrian method of attack, this strategy focused on the essential element: occupying the enemy’s territory and thereby removing his means of waging war. Not only was it in accord with Mazarin’s somewhat flawed understanding of events, it was also the only real possibility for a successful offensive. The Weimarians (or Bernardines), a body of soldiers serving with the Armée d’Allemagne, the French army in the Empire, argued this forcefully in a 1643 memorandum: ‘In conclusion, it is necessary to make all possible efforts to

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31 Mazarin to plenipotentiaries, 24 Mar. 1646, APW II B 3, 182, p. 494; see also Mazarin to Longueville, 21 Apr. 1646, op. cit., no. 233.
recross the Rhine and to subsist there, because this will end the war, and all other designs will only serve to continue it.\textsuperscript{34}

Although Mazarin created the basic French strategy in the Empire, he did not try to micro-manage the campaigns. The amount of time it took a letter from the front to reach Paris or vice versa varied depending on the actual military situation, but was almost never less than ten days, which would have made any attempt at close control disastrous.\textsuperscript{35} This does not even take into consideration the occasions when letters were intercepted or messengers killed, which happened with surprising frequency.\textsuperscript{36}

Mazarin recognized the situation, admitting with atypical candour that ‘since I am not on the spot, I could be mistaken in my plans and my hopes’; he therefore left his commanders considerable room for initiative.\textsuperscript{37} Typically his letters contained what amounted to suggestions rather than orders. In recommending that the Duke of Enghien (another commander of French forces in the Empire in 1644 and 1645) besiege Freiburg in August 1644, for example, he added: ‘we nevertheless leave it entirely to you to do what you think is best for the affairs of the King, after having weighed the alternatives carefully’.\textsuperscript{38} And on at least one occasion Mazarin deliberately avoided putting the King’s name on a letter ‘so that you [Enghien] would remain in greater liberty to make your resolutions’.\textsuperscript{39}

Turenne and Enghien therefore undertook major operational decisions, often against Mazarin’s advice. There was the potential that

\textsuperscript{34} CP All. 23, ‘Mémoire touchant l’Allemagne, au tems de Maréchal du Guébriant, 127’. The document also urged crossing the Lech and invading Bavaria, because the Duke of Bavaria was old and loved his duchy and would sooner separate from the Habsburgs than see it ruined. These were the exact lines that Mazarin’s strategy would follow in the ensuing five years.

\textsuperscript{35} It is difficult to determine the exact time that it took letters to travel, but in the 1644 campaign – the one in which Turenne was the closest to Paris – he typically responded to Mazarin’s letters two or three weeks after they were sent (e.g. Turenne to Mazarin, 27 Aug. 1644, CP All. 24, fos. 126–7, and 3 Sept. 1644, fos. 156–8). Even allowing for a delay in the sending of the responses, it is still clear that the time spent in transit was considerable. In one case where the details are known (from the 1648 invasion of Bavaria), a letter from Paris took 18 days to reach Turenne (Turenne to Mazarin, 5 May 1648, CP All. 108, fos. 24v–v).

\textsuperscript{36} Mazarin to Longueville, 6 July 1646, AP W II B 4, 54; Turenne to plenipotentaries, 29 Dec. 1644, CP All. 25, fo. 363. Also Marichal, \textit{Pièces justificatives}, pp. 280–81 (Mazarin–Turenne, 12 July 1646); \textit{op. cit.}, p. 20 (Mazarin–Turenne, 26–30 Aug. 1646).

\textsuperscript{37} Mazarini to Enghien, 21 Aug. 1644, \textit{Lettres ii}, no. 22. Mazarin’s loose control suited his circumstances, but it was not the only alternative available to early modern statesmen. Maximilian of Bavaria, in particular, kept a tight grip on the reins, writing orders nearly every day and sometimes more, and insisting that no major action (such as a decision to engage in battle) be undertaken without his permission.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{39} Mazarin to Enghien, 21 July 1644, \textit{Lettres ii}, no. 4. References to Mazarin leaving decisions to his commanders could be repeated indefinitely; see also Mazarin to Enghien, 21 July 1644, Bibliothèque Mazarine manuscripts (hereafter BM), vol. 2214, 218v–219; Anne to Enghien, 17 Aug. 1644, Archives de Guerre, Correspondance (hereafter AG), vol. 98, no. 69; Le Tellier to Turenne, 27 Apr. 1646, AG99, fos. 199v–201; Mazarin to Turenne, 22 Sept. 1644, \textit{Lettres ii}, 38; Marichal, \textit{Pièces justificatives}, pp. 261, 272, 281.
such initiative at the front could get out of hand, especially with the political tensions existing between Mazarin and his commanders. Turenne in particular was a Protestant and a hawk who wanted to destroy the Emperor, and, if necessary, Bavaria, in contrast to Mazarin’s more conciliatory policies.\footnote{J. Bérenger, *Turenne* (Paris, 1987), p. 231, cites evidence that shows that even the Bavarians thought Turenne was the main obstacle to peace; also p. 265. Turenne’s political opinions are not surprising when one realizes that his mother was William of Orange’s daughter, and his aunt was wife to Friedrich V of the Palatinate, the Winter King.} This led to some problems in 1646, when Turenne’s troops – never very disciplined anyway – did not go out of their way to spare Bavaria, as Mazarin wished. Turenne’s desire to deliver a death-blow to Habsburg power by invading the Hereditary Lands also caused him to be reluctant to leave the Empire after the 1647 truce with Bavaria gave him the opportunity to attack the Spanish Low Countries, and to oppose the peace in 1648, which he felt was too mild.\footnote{Op. cit., p. 265; Turenne, *Mémoires*, pp. 102–3.}

In spite of these problems, however, Turenne remained a loyal commander until after the Peace of Westphalia (as did Enghien). Mazarin had the good sense to recognize Turenne’s importance and to caress his ego as much as possible while insisting on the commander’s obedience. In accordance with his *laissez-faire* management style, moreover, Mazarin was tolerant of errors, hardly ever having a harsh word for his generals and never resorting to actual political punishment as Richelieu had.\footnote{Richelieu did not take defeat well and usually placed the blame on his commanders, sometimes going so far as to have them executed; see Parrott, ‘Administration’, pp. 327–31; and J. Chagniot, ‘Éthique et pratique de la “profession des armes” chez les officiers français au XVIIe siècle’, in V. Barrie-Curien, ed., *Guerre et Pouvoir en Europe au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1991), pp. 85–6. It appears that the only incidence of Mazarin being anywhere nearly as harsh was in his trial of De La Mothe-Houdancourt after the incompetent Catalonian campaign of 1644. Even then, the Catalans initiated the complaints: A. Chéruel, *Histoire de France pendant la minorité de Louis XIV*, ii (Paris, 1879), pp. 66–72; and, according to L. André, *Michel Le Tellier et l’organisation de l’armée monarchique* (Paris, 1906), pp. 321–6, it was mostly Le Tellier’s affair anyway; and in 1646, when Harcourt tried to starve out Lérida against Mazarin’s advice and ended up ignominiously retreating, Mazarin did not attempt to punish him. See also Duc d’Aumale, *Histoire des princes de Condé pendant les XVIe et XVIIe siècles* iv (Paris, 1886), p. 314, for an opinion that Mazarin’s treatment of the commander surrendering Freiburg was more lenient than Richelieu’s would have been.} The overall impression is one of a command structure which, though not without friction, still functioned as smoothly as one might have hoped.

Before moving to a brief synopsis of the campaigns themselves, it is worth returning briefly to the question of army mobility and ‘fluid’ versus ‘static’ models. A map can convey some aspects of strategy better than any written description; the way the map is drawn, however, can influence one’s conception of strategic realities in misleading ways. Some maps, such as the map from the *Historischer Atlas von Baden-Württemberg*, show armies crisscrossing the page without apparent reason. Fortresses and terrain, the chief limiting factors in army movement,
are sharply de-emphasized. But the map from Hubert Salm’s *Armeefinanzierung im Dreißigjährigen Krieg* is completely different: the fortresses dominate the landscape, while armies are not even noted. Changes in territorial control are indicated by changing the density of the fortress shading, but the way an army got to the town and besieged it, and what happened to the army defending it, are not shown.43

Each of these types of map lends support to a particular interpretation of strategy: the map that emphasizes army movements suggests that van Creveld was right to speak of there having been no ‘sustained and purposeful advance in any well-defined direction’, while the map that emphasizes fortresses lends support to Parrott’s argument that generals were obsessed with strongholds to the point that they were distracted from real offensive operations. Yet there is a third way: a map that includes army movements, but shows them operating within the limitations of terrain and fortresses that determined their movements (Figure 1).44 Such an ‘integrated’ map helps demonstrate that strategy in the Thirty Years War was not so backward as has hitherto been claimed.

The French Campaigns in Germany, 1644–1646

The war in the western part of the Empire was fought mostly between the French and Bavarians, the latter serving under the overall authority of the Emperor. The main fighting took place in a triangle defined by the Rhine, Main, and Danube rivers, roughly corresponding to the Swabian Circle. The French position was based around Breisach, a strong fortress on the east bank of the Rhine that gave them an invasion route across the river while barring the way into Alsace to the Bavarians. Breisach had been captured by Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar, a mercenary leader fighting for the French, in 1638. When he died the next year, his troops, known as Weimarians, signed a treaty agreeing to stay in French service, but they were henceforth commanded by a Frenchman and served alongside French troops.

From 1639 to 1642, the war along the Rhine was dormant as the French spent much time campaigning with the Swedes to minimal effect.45 After their major victory over the Spanish at Rocroi in May,

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45 The following brief narrative of the French campaigns during 1644, 1645, and 1646 is drawn largely from the account of D. Croxton in ‘Peacemaking in Early Modern Europe: Cardinal Mazarin and the Congress of Westphalia, 1643–1648’ (PhD, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1996). I have referred to primary sources only where they are particularly relevant to the article. The campaigns may also be followed with considerable accuracy in F.W. Barthold, *Geschichte des großen deutschen Krieges vom Tode Gustav Adolfs ab mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Frankreich*, pt. 2, Von der Wahl Ferdinands III. zum römischen König bis zum Schlüsse des westfälischen Friedens’ (Stuttgart, 1843); J. Heilmann, *Kriegsgeschichte von Bayern, Franken, Pfalz und Schwaben von 1506 bis 1651* ii (Munich, 1868); Aumale, *Histoire* iv, and, esp. for 1646, Försvarsstabens Krigshistoriska Avdelning, *Från Femern och Jankow till Westfaliska Freden*.
1643, however, Mazarin had sent substantial reinforcements to the Armée d’Allemagne in the hope of gaining quarters in Swabia. This succeeded for a time, but the French were surprised and routed in November at Tuttlingen by a combined Bavarian, Imperial, and Lorrainer army. The Bavarians could not follow up their victory in the short run because of the approach of winter, but they attacked with renewed strength the next summer and captured the important fortress of Freiburg just outside Breisach (Figure 2). Mazarin countered this thrust by shifting the army covering Champagne, under the Duke of Enghien, to the Upper Rhine. He insisted that the reinforcements were coming only on condition ‘that there is certitude . . . that one can defeat the enemy in his entrenchments, or that he will retire of his own accord from before Freiburg’. 46 Arriving too late to save Freiburg, Enghien had no choice but to deliver a frontal attack on the entrenched Bavarians. Though the French failed to achieve a decisive victory, they inflicted heavy enough losses that the Bavarians retreated.

The French were now faced with a difficult decision. They could try to recapture Freiburg; they could pursue the Bavarian army; they could pause for a while to recover their strength; or they could attempt an offensive in some other theatre. French opinion favoured recapturing Freiburg, while a modern general might think first of destroying the opposing army. Enghien argued, however, that neither option was possible because of supply considerations. 47 Both van Creveld and Parrott score a point here: van Creveld for noting that armies were sometimes forced to move because the food supply in an area had been depleted by their stay there, and Parrott for noting that armies could not stray too far from their bases. But the ultimate French decision would seem to fit into neither of their models, for Enghien marched quickly down the Rhine and captured a whole series of enemy towns, most importantly Philippsburg and Mainz (Figure 1). The Middle Rhine was, by this point in the war, an economic burden. It had been so ravaged by campaigning that it could not even support the garrisons required to defend it, so it would hardly seem to be a case of capturing a territory for the purpose of supporting more troops. 48 Instead, the decision to invade it was based on strategic considerations; in fact, Tur
denne had long been urging its importance for carrying the war into

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46 Mazarin to Turenne, 20 July 1644, BM, v 2214, fos. 217v–218. Pace Aumale (Histoire 309–311), Mazarin was certain of his decision once he took it; there is no evidence that he reconsidered.


Figure 1 An 'integrated' map showing French military operations in the Empire, August–December 1644.
Figure 2 French military operations in the Empire, April–July 1644.
Germany in the future. With the mountains of the Black Forest impeding any advance from Breisach, Philippsburg indeed proved to be a more suitable point for crossing the Rhine, and all future French invasions of the Empire originated there. The long-range French goal of gaining quarters in the Empire was therefore being supported by a short-term advance aimed at strategic gains. Moreover, the failure of the Bavarian offensive and the costly battle of Freiburg had convinced Maximilian, Elector of Bavaria, that the war was not winnable, and he began applying pressure on the Emperor to make concessions at the peace conference.

In 1645, the effort to capture quarters in Swabia dominated French strategy more directly. Turenne favoured beginning the campaign by capturing Frankenthal, a Spanish fort in the Lower Palatinate which had been bypassed the previous year and which was causing great difficulty for supply columns attempting to reach the French army. Mazarin, however, rejected this short-term gain, arguing that it would be a mistake to exhaust the army ‘at the beginning of a campaign, which is the time when the weakness of the enemy seems to give occasion for considerable progress across the Rhine’. Instead, he insisted that Turenne push into Swabia, in part to gain quarters and in part to support the Swedes after their victory at Jankov that March. Turenne pushed the Bavarians back to the Danube and dispersed his troops into quarters, but failed to secure a strong fortress on which to anchor his position. Thus, when the Bavarian forces successfully surprised and routed his army at the battle of Herbsthausen, he was forced to flee northward to the friendly confines of Hesse.

For the second year in a row, Mazarin reinforced the German theatre with Enghien’s army. Aided by a Hessian contingent, the French pushed the Bavarians back to the Danube a second time; Mazarin ordered an attack, and the French won a close battle at the village of Alerheim. Enghien then tried to solidify the French position east of the Rhine by returning to the Neckar river and besieging Heilbronn. However, in a daring move, the Imperials made use of their interior lines to send massive reinforcements to Bavaria. The combined Bavarian–Imperial army forced the French to raise the siege of Heilbronn.

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49 As had Turenne’s predecessor as commander of the Armée d’Allemagne, Guébriant: Aumale, Histoire iv, p. 363; Mazarin to Turenne, 1 Aug. 1644, Lettres xii, no. 8 and n. One of Mazarin’s major reasons for sending Enghien to join Turenne in the first place was the hope that, after checking the Bavarians, the two could turn against the Palatinate: Cherbœuf, Histoire de France i, pp. 299–300, 325–7.


51 Le Tellier to Turenne, 6 Feb. 1645, BN Mf vol. 4200, fos. 9r–10; Mazarin to Turenne, 9 Mar. 1644, CP All. vol. 46, fos. 197–9; Mazarin to Erlach, 16 Apr. 1645, CP All. vol. 46, fo. 325.

52 Mazarin to Enghien, 11 July 1645, Lettres xii, no. 79.
and sent them scurrying back across the Rhine at Philippsburg. Later, Turenne tried to counter-attack, but his German cavalry refused to come out of quarters.

The French therefore had little materially to show for the 1645 campaign, in spite of their dramatic thrusts eastward. Their failure, however, was not the result of aimless wandering in search of supplies. It is true that Turenne had gone into quarters prematurely before the battle of Herbsthausen; however, his advance to that point had been under the direct orders of Mazarin, and its purpose had been in part a response to urgent Swedish requests for a second front to occupy the Bavarians. Enghien’s advance to the Danube, by contrast, was a calculated effort to throw the Bavarians back and give the French time to capture Heilbronn. It had failed above all because of the interior lines enjoyed by the Bavarian and Imperial forces. The inability to seize more than a handful of weak fortresses east of the Rhine doomed the French to being forced to recross it as soon as a stronger army appeared.

In spite of its failures, the 1645 campaign did contribute materially to Mazarin’s diplomatic goals. By showing Maximilian more than ever how vulnerable his quarters, and even his electorate, were to the French, it further convinced him that it was time to compromise at the negotiating table. The Bavarian Elector was instrumental in applying the pressure to get the Emperor to concede Alsace and Breisach before the upcoming campaign. He was deluded, however, in thinking that France would conclude a truce before Swedish territorial demands had also been resolved. It was only this outstanding issue that forced another campaign in 1646.

The 1646 campaign seems at first glance to provide a prime example of insubordination. In order to counter the advantages of interior lines that the Bavarians and Imperials had used so successfully the previous year, the French and Swedes agreed to unite their armies for a common campaign. At the same time, negotiations over Alsace appeared at the point of breakthrough, and Mazarin hoped to avoid another campaign in the Empire. He therefore held Turenne along the Rhine, ready to invade should the talks break down, but ready to turn east and attack Luxembourg should the talks meet with success. As a Protestant, Turenne had no sympathy for Bavaria (unlike some French ministers) and strongly favoured joining the Swedes to crush the enemy. His sudden decampment in late June and march to the Swed-

54 Turenne, Mémoires, pp. 72–6.
56 BN Mf vol. 4173, fos. 226–8; Turenne, Mémoires, pp. 264–70.
ish army in Hesse, then, has appeared to some historians a case of taking policy into his own hands, especially since orders did not arrive from court until some days later.  

The truth, however, is different: Turenne had been fully authorized to begin his march by the French plenipotentiaries in Münster. The problem was the simple result of some letters getting crossed in the mail in the three-way correspondence between Turenne, Mazarin, and the plenipotentiaries; it was not a question of disloyalty or disobedience. The incident, then, tells more about the uncertainties of the early modern postal system than about the faithlessness of army commanders.

Once the French and Swedish armies had joined, they accomplished a stunning manoeuvre by bypassing the Imperial and Bavarian armies in Hesse and blocking their passage over the Main. The enemy had to take a detour through Franconia back to Bavaria, while the French and Swedes raced through Swabia, capturing towns and securing crossings over the Danube. Turenne found Heilbronn, his main objective, too strong, but refused to delay the offensive by a lengthy siege. Instead, he took the smaller, nearby town of Schorndorf and continued south, where he ravaged much of Lower Bavaria. Maximilian, seeing his land ruined, decided he could take no more: he concluded a separate truce with France and Sweden in March 1647, leaving the Emperor to fight alone in the next campaign.

A Territorial Imperative?

Logistics played a prominent role in the campaigns outlined above, and, to a great extent, our awareness of their importance can be traced to two seminal books from the 1970s: first, Geoffrey Parker’s *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659*; and second, Martin van Creveld’s *Supplying War*. Although historians are now much more conscious of the effect of supply on military campaigns, however, logistical concerns nevertheless remain an externality, impinging upon military affairs without somehow being a part of them. Thus, Russell Weigley can write that ‘Gustavus’s strategy of annihilation remained susceptible to the tyranny of military logistics over military strategy’ and that ‘logis-

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58 Longueville to Mazarin, 13 June 1646, *APW* II B 4, no. 7; plenipotentiaries to Mazarin, 14 June 1646, p. 11.
59 Louis XIV to plenipotentiaries, 22 June 1646, *APW* II B 4, p. 23; plenipotentiaries to Brienne, 25 June 1646, no. 28; Marichal, *Pièces justificatives*, p. 273. Mazarin to Turenne, Marichal, *op. cit.*, pp. 288–90; Le Tellier to Turenne, BN Mf vol. 4291, fos. 277–278, prove conclusively that Turenne’s action was authorized, and indeed that Mazarin was more concerned about it occurring too late than too soon.
tics forever bent his strategy’. 60 This, however, makes no more sense than to say that ‘terrain forever bent his strategy’ or ‘the size of the opposing army forever bent his strategy’. Strategy is formed organically within the variables of army size, organization, terrain, command, and supply; the possibilities and constraints they produce form, so to speak, the environment in which strategy grows. It is not possible to separate logistics from the rest and say, ‘This is strategy; that is a constraint,’ True, supply was a particularly strong influence on strategy in the Thirty Years War, more important, perhaps, than any other single factor. It is reasonable to argue, as David Parrott and Bernhard Kroener have done, that states were particularly inept at improving their logistical network; however, this is not in itself a critique of strategy, because strategy only begins where the purely administrative concerns of logistics end. A state’s logistical network is determined by a number of factors, including technology, administration, and available finances. A general or a statesman might be partly responsible for the poor state of his army’s logistics if he also deals with the technical aspects of supply, but, qua strategist, he cannot be blamed for it: he can only respond to it well or poorly.

There is no denying that supply considerations were a vital factor in the making and execution of Mazarin’s strategy; over and over in his letters and instructions he stressed the importance of getting quarters east of the Rhine. 61 To say this, however, is not to say that French strategy was ‘obsessed’ with concern for supplying its armies. Strategic concerns repeatedly overrode purely logistical questions, and the French decision to attack the strategically important Lower Palatinate in 1644 rather than trying to seize quarters in the Black Forest, as they had done the year before, demonstrates that they could choose a purely military objective over an economic one. In the capture of Mainz and Philippsburg, the French gained crucial bridgeheads that permitted further offensive operations in Germany and secured their communications with Hesse. Similarly, Mazarin’s rejection of an attack on Frankenthal in 1645 indicates his ability to bypass lesser but economically advantageous options in favour of applying direct pressure on the enemy.

Even without such evidence of strategic decisions that weighed other factors more heavily than logistics, however, it would still be a mistake to see Mazarin’s strategy as divorced from his diplomatic goals. The decision to concentrate on gaining quarters in enemy territory was itself a strategic decision aimed at overthrowing the enemy’s ability to

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60 Weigley, *The Age of Battles*, pp. 28, 35. This is not to single out Weigley for this error, which is endemic in historiography; e.g. David Eltis writes of the new siege warfare ‘distorting strategy’ in his *The Military Revolution in Sixteenth-century Europe* (New York, 1995), pp. 93–4.

wage war. Clausewitz speaks of attacking the enemy’s ‘centre of gravity’, which could be his army or his capital. But defeating the enemy’s army in the Thirty Years War was of little value in itself, since one would still have to capture his fortresses one at a time; meanwhile, the enemy could rebuild his army. On the other hand, capturing his capital city was even less useful, as the 1632 Swedish occupation of Munich demonstrated. Only by occupying his territory, and thereby denying him the means to support his army, could one hope to defeat the enemy in this period. Both Mazarin and Maximilian were fully aware of this, as demonstrated by their continued emphasis on the importance of Swabian quarters as the key to the war. Mazarin concluded that, by denying Bavaria its quarters in the Swabian circle, he could apply unbearable financial pressure on Maximilian that would force him to meet French demands. And this was exactly what happened. In 1644, 1645, and 1646, each encroachment of the French onto Bavarian territory turned the screws a little tighter on Maximilian, who responded by increasing pressure on the Emperor a little more to make peace. As Maximilian lamented to the Emperor as early as 1644, ‘We have no more quarters. We must hurt France.’ His failure to reverse French progress over the ensuing two years and expel them from his army’s quarters – that is, from its supply base – finally forced him to accept Mazarin’s terms and conclude a separate truce in March 1647.

Tracking French army movements on maps shows that neither van Creveld nor Parrott provides an accurate model of the effect of supply on mobility, for there was no logistical imperative to move or not to move. In 1644, Turenne spent some three months in the vicinity of Breisach without difficulty, while in 1645 the French twice marched all the way to Nördlingen and back. The key factors in the first instance were the presence of the Bavarian army and the imposing mountains of the Black Forest, and in the second instance the open, relatively fortress-free terrain of Swabia. Turenne had supply problems at the beginning of 1645 that contributed indirectly to his defeat at Herbsthausen, but they had more to do with the time of year than with his distance from base, since the grass had not yet grown and there was no wheat to steal. In fact, during Enghien’s march across

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much the same territory later in the year, the Bavarians actually claimed he was getting stronger as he captured supplies in the towns along his way.\textsuperscript{65}

The 1644 campaign demonstrates most clearly that there were something like ‘front lines’, although they were more fluid than our conception of front lines today. Fortresses could be bypassed temporarily, but an army without a strong base could not hope to maintain itself in an area when the inevitable fluctuations of strength turned the balance of forces against it. The French occupation of the towns along the Middle Rhine blocked Bavarian invasion attempts and facilitated linking up with Hesse and Sweden in the coming years. Their failure to push the lines forward again in 1645 is attributable directly to their inability to capture a major fortress, while in 1646 the occupation of Schorndorf, Lauingen, and Rain forced the Bavarians back across the Danube and allowed the French to quarter safely in Swabia.

A study of the French campaigns in Germany in the mid-1640s, therefore, shows a state applying military means deliberately to attain its diplomatic goals. Although logistical concerns certainly shaped strategy, they were only one factor, along with geography, army size, command, discipline, and fortresses. Far from moving at random in search of supplies, the Armée d’Allemagne rarely went anywhere without Mazarin’s express consent, and usually under his orders.

This analysis concentrates, of course, on the highest level of command – that is to say, at the level of the ‘great war’. It is there, in royal palaces and general headquarters, that strategy is made; the story at the local level – that is, of ‘small war’ – on the other hand, might be very different, much more in accord with the picture of random violence pursued for individual gain that Engler and Howard would have us believe. Undoubtedly this was the case in some areas. Konrad Widerhold’s small war out of Hohentwiel in southern Württemberg, an unending series of raids against Bavarian supply columns and surrounding towns, certainly has that aspect.\textsuperscript{66} But Hohentwiel was an exception that was permitted to exist precisely because it was isolated from the main theatres of war. Whether Widerhold captured another Bavarian supply column or raided another town in the Black Forest was of little moment to anyone besides the local inhabitants and the Austrian archdukes; Hohentwiel itself was so isolated that Turenne dismissed it as unworthy of Bavarian attention.\textsuperscript{67} Moreover, as the only remaining stronghold of the absentee Duke of Württemberg,

\textsuperscript{65} Mercy to Maximilian, 17 Apr. 1645, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Kurbayern, Äußeres Archiv vol. 2818, fos. 481–482v.


\textsuperscript{67} Turenne to Mazarin, 3 and 25 June 1644, CP All. vol. 23, fos. 219–20, 236r–v.
Hohentwiel and its commander had a degree of political indepen-
dence unavailable to almost all other fortresses.

The situation in other prominent fortresses in this theatre was far
different. In Breisach, it is true that Erlach successfully resisted Mazari-
in’s repeated attempts to insert a Frenchman alongside him as a mili-
tary authority. But Erlach, who was not a French citizen and whose
relationship with France rested entirely upon the 1639 treaty between
the former army of Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar and the French crown,
nevertheless behaved in most respects like a loyal subject of Louis
XIV.68 He was an efficient administrator, collecting contributions and
in using them to pay French troops, and it was precisely this ability to
help the French war effort that convinced the French to leave him
with such wide authority.69 In Philippsburg, the French had even more
control. Raids from the town raised contributions as far away at Pförz-
heim and Heidelberg, but these benefited the French crown more
than the governor. Moreover, they directly advanced the French goal
of weakening Bavarian authority in the Lower Palatinate, until by 1648
the garrison in Heidelberg began to disintegrate as starving soldiers
deserted to the better-paid French. Maximilian, meanwhile, main-
tained if anything even tighter control over his commanders, from
refusing to permit the raising of extra troops in Heidelberg to counter
French raids in 1646 down to ordering a cut in rations for the garrison
in 1648.70

All this evidence points further to a centrally directed war effort.
Commanders undoubtedly had wide latitude when it came to raising
contributions and paying troops, and they certainly pocketed large
amounts of money both legally and illegally in ways that would shock
a modern army. But the overall authority nevertheless remained firmly
in Munich and Paris; in the Empire, political control of the military
actually increased in the second half of the war.71 Fortress commanders
relied on funds from the central treasury to pay their garrisons, and

68 Erlach himself noted his special status as governor: while all the other governors in
French service owed their position to the crown, it was the crown that owed the
possession of Breisach to Erlach, since he controlled it after the death of Bernhard
and agreed to enter French service: A. von Gonzenbach, Der General Hans Ludwig von
Erlach von Castelen: Ein Lebens- und Charakterbild aus den Zeiten des dreißigjährigen Kriegs
ii (Bern, 1880), pp. 478–9.

69 For example, Le Tellier favoured Erlach in the latter’s dispute with the Frenchman
d’Oysonville because d’Oysonville spent more money for his weaker garrisons in
Alsace than Erlach did for his garrison in Breisach; Gonzenbach, Erlach ii, p. 421.
See also Le Tellier to Erlach, 11 Oct. 1644, BN Mf vol. 4199, fos. 120–24, Le Tellier
also wrote of Erlach’s loyalty that he was ‘un peu ... difficile à s’accomoder avec
ceux qui commandent avec et sous lui, mais à l’égard de sa fidélité inébranlable et
là où il va du service du Roi, il est tout de même comme une roue qui tourne
toujours sans cesse’; Gozenbach, Erlach ii, pp. 476–7 n.

70 F. Maier, Die bayerische Unterpfalz im Dreißigjährigen Krieg: Besetzung, Verwaltung und
Rekatholisierung der rechtsrheinischen Pfalz durch Bayern 1621 bis 1649 (New York, 1990),

did not undertake offensive operations without permission.72 There was private gain, but no private wars.

The traditional view of military operations in the latter half of the Thirty Years War is right on one point: the degree of indiscipline among the troops. Desertion was high for both armies, and Turenne was frequently berated for the excesses committed by soldiers under his command, especially against Catholics.73 The French were particularly plagued by insubordination, for non-German troops hated to serve in the Empire, and German troops refused to serve anywhere else. It was normal to pay large bounties to get French troops to cross to the east bank of the Rhine, and even then Mazarin considered it lucky to get five soldiers in twelve across.74 German soldiers were a still greater problem: a Protestant force serving under its own officers and bound to France only by treaty, they were of notoriously lax discipline and sometimes flatly refused to obey orders, for example in late 1645 when Turenne could not get them to come out of quarters to counter-attack the Bavarians. Worse still, in 1647 they mutinied and fled to the Swedes, where many of them continued to serve until the end of the war.

In spite of these difficulties, however, indiscipline did not prevent the successful prosecution of French strategy. Desertion and rapacity could create problems, but they were sidelights. The Weimarian mutiny was a much more serious matter, although it is attenuated because of their very special relationship to France: called a ‘soldier republic’ by one historian, they could hardly be expected to manifest the same degree of obedience as other troops that were contracted to the crown either individually or in regiments.75 Even granting the problems caused, however, the fact remains that, on the whole, the Weimarians generally followed orders and carried out French strategy; indeed, they even contributed to it by submitting a memo on how to win the war (see above). The fault, if it is to be assessed, lies not with soldiers fighting for their own individual gain, but with the states that were either unable or unwilling to feed, clothe, and house them sufficiently. As Bernhard Kroener rightly notes, the soldiers were as much victims as victimizers. Moreover, discipline was, like political control,

72 See n. 69 above.
73 E.g. Mazarin to Turenne, 16 July 1645, CP All. 47, fos. 402–3.
74 Le Tellier to Enghien, 6 Sept. 1644, BN Mf vol. 4198, fos. 166–8; Le Tellier to Turenne, 3 Nov. 1644, BN Mf vol. 4199, fos. 136–8; Mazarin to Enghien, 11 July 1645, Lettres ii, no. 79; Mazarin to Turenne, 2 Dec. 1644, op. cit., no. 47. At another time, Mazarin estimated that two-thirds of the troops desert; Mazarin to Turenne, 4 Sept. 1644, BM, vol. 2215, fos. 171r–173v.
If the French military effort was successful, why did it take Mazarin nearly five years to achieve his terms in the Empire? To express the situation in these terms is misleading, as though Mazarin had fixed goals in 1643 which he finally obtained only when the treaty was signed in 1648. In fact Mazarin’s goals, like those of other statesmen, remained flexible until serious negotiating was begun at the beginning of 1646. He had obtained his minimum terms by June and even more than he expected by September of the same year, and the military campaign contributed directly to his success. What kept the French fighting for two more years was not the desire to wrest still more out of the Austrian Habsburgs, but the alliance with Sweden, which prevented France from making a separate peace. Mazarin wisely refused to abandon the Swedes, and hence continued the war until his allies had achieved their terms as well.  

The idea that there was a breach between diplomatic and military strategy in the Thirty Years War, then, cannot be sustained. Part of the reason for the attacks on Thirty Year War strategy results from seeing the campaigns through Napoleonic lenses. This is particularly evident in the emphasis of historians on decisive battles as the weather-vane of critical thinking: where battles were numerous and successful, strategy is considered insightful; where they were rare or ‘indecisive’, strategy is considered stagnant. This reductionist approach, however, is inadequate because it fails to pay attention to the goal of strategy: political victory. Ironically, this is often precisely the criticism that the historians level against early modern strategists. But, as Geoffrey Parker has cogently pointed out, the avoidance of battle by generals ‘proves only that they had a sound grasp of strategic realities’.  

Just as modern critics are disappointed to find few decisive battles in the Thirty Years War, they lament the lack of decisive political victories as well. In their quixotic quest, any offensive not aimed at

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77 See Kroener, ‘Peacemaking’, n. 45.

78 Wijn, Het Krijgswezen, pp. 518–32, and esp. pp. 518–19, 526–27, emphasizes the differences between post- and pre-Napoleonic strategy and the need to judge the latter on its own terms. See also Clausewitz, On War, p. 593 – although he himself does not always avoid the anachronisms that he decries.


‘annihilation’ or *Vernichtung* is considered inadequate. At one point, Parrott goes so far as to criticize the French war effort for failing to impose ‘unconditional surrender’ on Spain.81 This, however, is anachronistic in the extreme. If one’s definition of a successful strategy is one that results in the victorious statesman dictating peace terms from his new residence in the enemy’s capital, then almost every strategy of the early modern period resulted in an abysmal failure.82 But if one’s definition of a successful strategy is one in which a statesman assesses the military balance, devises proportional goals, draws up appropriate military plans, and carries out the plans until his goals are reached – if this is considered a successful strategy, then there are numerous examples of it.83 Not least was Mazarin’s achievement at the Peace of Westphalia, one that demonstrates the harmonious conjunction of strategy and negotiation in his thought and practice.

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81 Roberts, ‘Gustav Adolf’, pp. 59, 61; Parrott, ‘Administration’, p. 20. Black is also susceptible to seeking decisive victories; see n. 79 above. See also the discussion of Delbrück’s position in n. 2 above.

82 And most modern wars, too: as Paul Pillar has pointed out, the most common end to wars is negotiated settlement even in the era of total war: *Negotiating Peace* (Princeton, NJ, 1983), pp. 16–17.

83 Sörensson, *Das Kriegswesen*, is one of the only historians to have drawn this conclusion, and his work, over 60 years old, is now hardly read.