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## Book Review

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# The nation-state against the empire

by D. Stephen Pepper

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### Richelieu and Olivares

by J. H. Elliott

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The 17th century saw a great struggle between the Hapsburg dynasty and the revived French state. The future of Europe was at stake: Either Europe would be based on the nation-state, or it would be dominated by imperial dynasties. This struggle pitted France, under the guidance of Cardinal Richelieu, against Spain directed by the Count-Duke Olivares.

Richelieu was the great Cardinal and first minister of France under Louis XIII. The Count-Duke, the most gifted secular statesman that Spain had produced in the 17th century, occupied the same position under Philip IV.

This short study by the leading academic historian of Hapsburg Spain is of great relevance to our contemporary statesmen, because one can discover in it the critical features of statecraft which determined that Richelieu would win and Olivares would lose. This is not so much because Elliott has set out to teach us these principles. On the contrary, he has managed to obscure them through his academic devotion to detail. But it is clear enough that Richelieu defeated Olivares because the great Cardinal possessed a high degree of decisiveness, what the great Prussian commander Clausewitz termed *Entschlossenheit*.

The book contains another critical lesson for U.S. and Western European policy-makers. If Spain had broken with its Hapsburg connections, it could have easily defeated France. Spain had nearly 300,000 men under arms, twice that of its rival. But Olivares was convinced that he needed the Hapsburg empire. Elliott observes (p. 74), "France, in comparison with the Spanish monarchy, was by the 17th century a relatively compact and unified state . . . the problems of the Spanish Hapsburgs were more akin to those of their Austrian cousins, who were also rulers of disparate kingdoms and provinces, and who would likewise attempt to weld them together into some form of supranational community with

the person of the Emperor as the focus of loyalty."

As Friedrich Schiller has shown in his dramatic poem *Don Carlos* and in his *History of the Thirty Years War*, there is a fundamental conflict between the development of a nation state and the priorities of empire. But Olivares refused to recognize the irreconcilable differences between his role as head of the Spanish government, and the imperial ambitions of the Hapsburgs: "The guiding principle of the Count-Duke's foreign policy was that Madrid and Vienna, the two branches of the House of Austria, 'must never, for any reason, be divided'"

Olivares therefore had to deflect that very sentiment of nascent nationalism that Richelieu harnessed for his victory. In France a rising optimism prevailed, whereas dark pessimism ruled in Spain. One ally of Richelieu wrote, "France has ceased to be the France of yesterday, so sick and decrepit . . . beneath the same faces I see different men, and in the same kingdom another state. The outward appearance remains, but the interior has been renewed. There has been a moral revolution, a transformation of spirit. . . ." Compare this with the comment of one of Olivares' ministerial colleagues: "It is true that we are approaching our end, but in other hands we would have perished sooner."

France's optimism was allied with Richelieu's bold decisiveness. The war between France and Spain broke out in 1635, having been preceded by critical skirmishes in northern Italy in 1627-29, known as the War of the Mantuan Succession. Richelieu won the advantage because he acted more rapidly than his opponent. Elliott comments (p. 96): ". . . the French operation took him [Olivares] and everybody else by surprise. At the end of February 1629 Louis XIII and Richelieu led an army across the Alps, and defeated Charles Emmanuel of Savoy at Susa in the first week of March." Olivares foresaw "total ruin."

"Great affairs,"

matter of a fleeting moment which, if once allowed to pass, would never again return."

Today, Henry Kissinger is the living advocate of Hapsburg politics. He argues that we must have an offensive-defensive alliance with the oligarchy world-wide. We must wait, bide our time because Russia is a "crumbling empire"; we must not act boldly for fear of upsetting the delicate "balance of power"—the

Olivares, a far nobler figure than his modern successor.

But whence will come the policies of Richelieu? When Lyndon LaRouche advises the U.S. President to warn Libya that if it invades Tunisia, we will bomb them into the Stone Age, his proposal falls on deaf ears in official Washington. It is "impractical,"

in a word, it is decisive. But only if the United States dumps the International Monetary Fund, and ceases to play the unworthy role of servant of empire, can its leaders discover precisely that quality of boldness that will ensure victory. That is why this book, despite its academic obfuscations, contains lessons for today.