

**Q: To what extent was Ferdinand II a victim of his own success?**

The Defenestration of Prague on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1618 precipitated one of the most destructive conflicts the world has ever seen, lasting three decades and spilling into theatres across Europe and the world. Combining religious sectarianism with foreign intervention, the lands of the modern-day Czech Republic, Germany and Netherlands became the battlegrounds for victorious armies who marched in the name of the Holy Roman Emperor and those opposed to his designs.<sup>1</sup>

The Thirty Years War raged from that date in 1618 to the peace of Westphalia on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1648 in an almost unbroken series of wars reinvigorated by the intervention of various foreign powers such as the Dutch Republic from 1621, Denmark from 1625-1629, Sweden from 1630-1635 and a joint Franco-Swedish-Dutch coalition from 1635.<sup>2</sup> All the while at the centre of the Thirty Years War was the Catholic Habsburg dynasty, one branch of which ruled over Spain and its Empire, the other over Central Europe in the form of the Habsburg Hereditary Lands in Austria, Bohemia and Hungary. This branch of the Habsburg dynasty more often than not also contained the Holy Roman Emperor, and used the resources extracted from their hereditary lands to profligate their power and influence throughout the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>3</sup> This essay will examine the Holy Roman Emperor at the time of the outbreak of the Thirty Years War, Emperor Ferdinand II, and will assess to what extent he was a victim of his own success.

Ferdinand II was born into the House of Habsburg in Graz, the capital of Styria, Inner Austria, on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1578. Raised and educated by Jesuits from a young age, Ferdinand came to be influenced by their teachings and, upon reaching his majority in 1595 he acceded to rule his inheritance in Styria.<sup>4</sup> Almost immediately, Ferdinand began to suppress and persecute Protestants in Styria in favour of Catholics who were in the minority, as historian Georges Pages notes; “his recklessness in undertaking to convert back to Catholicism a country in which there was no longer more than a handful of Catholics is staggering.”<sup>5</sup> Despite this apparent demonstration of intolerance, and despite tolerance being one of the required characteristics of the Emperors who ruled over such a diverse spread of Christian

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<sup>1</sup> David Maland, *Europe at War 1600-1650* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1980), page 7.

<sup>2</sup> 78, 100 and 148 respectively.

<sup>3</sup> 18.

<sup>4</sup> Georges Pages, *The Thirty Years War 1618-1648* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1970), pages 47-48

<sup>5</sup> 47.

denominations, Ferdinand was selected by his cousin and Emperor Matthias as his successor.<sup>6</sup> Matthias then had to ensure that Ferdinand's succession went ahead in the crowns of Bohemia, Hungary and during the eventual Imperial Election in which Ferdinand's candidature as Holy Roman Emperor would be approved.<sup>7</sup> During the years 1617 and 1618 Matthias sought to facilitate this, by ensuring Ferdinand promised to uphold the Letter of Majesty, an agreement first approved by Matthias' predecessor and brother Rudolf II, which guaranteed the religious rights, freedoms and privileges of the Bohemians.<sup>8</sup> Historian C.V Wedgwood describes the uphill battle Matthias had to fight in order to persuade both the Bohemians and the Habsburgs of the Spanish dynasty, that electing Ferdinand as king of Bohemia and Hungary and then Holy Roman Emperor was the right course of action;

To say the least of it, he [Ferdinand] was hardly a ruler who would inspire confidence in a predominantly Protestant country on edge with anxiety for their privileges. The Spaniards argued, justifiably, that to let Ferdinand stand was to court disaster for the dynasty.<sup>9</sup>

Almost as soon as Ferdinand acquired the approval of the Bohemian Diet for his election as king of Bohemia, he began to make his influence felt; giving additional powers to the King's judges and bringing the press of Prague under Royal censorship.<sup>10 11</sup> Ferdinand had promised to uphold the Letter of Majesty in Bohemia, and this had been a key condition of his election as the King of Bohemia. But Ferdinand had no intention of honouring this promise, and had been absolved of responsibility for his lies to the Bohemians by assurances from his Jesuit confidants that "political necessity did in fact justify a deviation from absolute sincerity."<sup>12</sup>

The Defenestration of Prague has been analysed by historians and rationalised in many different ways.<sup>13 14 15</sup> What is not disputed however was Ferdinand's condemnation of the Bohemians and their Letter of Majesty.<sup>16</sup> He viewed the rebellion of the Bohemians as treasonous, making little effort to compromise and seeking instead; "to fight fire with fire, especially with Spanish fuel."<sup>17</sup> Ferdinand knew he had been elected to the Bohemian

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<sup>6</sup> 47.

<sup>7</sup> Pages (1970), pages 48-49.

<sup>8</sup> 45.

<sup>9</sup> C.V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (London: Pimlico, 1992), page 75.

<sup>10</sup> 77.

<sup>11</sup> Pages (1970), page 49.

<sup>12</sup> Wedgwood (1992), page 76.

<sup>13</sup> Wedgwood (1992), page 80.

<sup>14</sup> Pages (1970), pages 54-56.

<sup>15</sup> Brennan Pursell, *The Winter King* (Burlington-Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2003), page 81.

<sup>16</sup> Pages (1970), page 47.

<sup>17</sup> Pursell (2003), page 47.

monarchy as his forefathers had been; but he also saw the Kingdom of Bohemia as the strategic prize for the Habsburgs which he could not possibly allow to slip from his grasp.<sup>18</sup> Ferdinand thus opposed the Bohemian revolt on constitutional grounds, because the Bohemians had deposed him where, he believed, it was not their right to do so. Any qualms over the legality of the issue, or of the idea that the Bohemians under the Letter of Majesty had the right to depose their sovereign if he mistreated them,<sup>19</sup> were fiercely contested by Ferdinand. But Ferdinand also opposed the revolt because he recognised from the outset that to lose Bohemia would mean a severe loss of prestige for the Austrian Habsburgs, and this was a fact recognised by the Spanish Habsburgs as well.<sup>20</sup>

Ferdinand had great faith in the ability of the Habsburgs to fight and get Bohemia back by force of arms, and thus did not view compromise with the same favour as his elder cousin did.<sup>21</sup> The Onate Treaty between the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs in 1617 had provided Ferdinand with a wealth of confidence where Spanish help was concerned, because it settled the succession crisis within the Holy Roman Empire and removed the Spanish as rivals to the Imperial throne in exchange for some territorial concessions.<sup>22</sup> Historian Brennan Pursell paints this treaty and Ferdinand's behaviour in an almost damning light;

With this unconstitutional arrangement, Ferdinand had established a relationship with Madrid that permitted him to pursue his will in Bohemia. The Treaty was also symptomatic of Ferdinand's tendency to give away what was not his own, a variation of his generosity that would contribute to the disastrous course of events in the years to come.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, Philip III of Spain began preparations for campaigning in Bohemia, even going so far as to cancel his planned crusading campaign in Algeria, stating;

The desperate state of Bohemia and concerns about the rest of Germany has given me a lot to think about, because it is so important to keep the Imperial title within the House of Austria... Although many efforts have been made to find resources to attend to this problem without

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<sup>18</sup> David Sturdy, *Fractured Europe 1600-1721* (Massachusetts-USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), page 29.

<sup>19</sup> Wedgewood (1992), page 77.

<sup>20</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *Europe In Crisis 1598-1648* (Oxford: Fontana Press, 2001), page 119.

<sup>21</sup> Pursell (2003), page 47.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy: a History of the Thirty Years War* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2009), pages 259-260.

<sup>23</sup> Pursell (2003), page 47.

compromising the Algiers venture, my treasury is in such a state that it would be impossible to undertake both enterprises.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore Ferdinand's intention to fight had existed from an early stage, safe in the knowledge that, by holding the majority of the power, it would be a successful course of action. This determination of Ferdinand's encountered an entirely new dimension over the summer of 1619 though, because during that time the rebel Bohemian Diet voted to officially depose Ferdinand as their king and offer the crown to Fredrick V of the Palatine, the Calvinist Elector and leader of the Evangelical Union.<sup>25</sup>

Fredrick V had long opposed the Habsburg monopoly on the Imperial House on constitutional grounds, claiming that such a position as Emperor was never intended to fall into the status of a de facto inherited right.<sup>26</sup> While Ferdinand was acquiring the votes necessary in the Imperial College in August 1619, the Bohemian Diet had voted to proclaim Fredrick king, and after much hesitation he decided to accept the crown.<sup>27 28</sup> It was not without much due deliberation on Fredrick's part, because he would surely have been made aware of practically every Protestant prince's opposition to his moves to accept the Bohemian crown, which included that of the Evangelical Union of which he was the figurehead.<sup>29 30</sup>

Before long Fredrick's cause in Bohemia came under threat from all sides, and his allies one-by-one abandoned him, providing him with only fractions of the money, men and materials they had promised before.<sup>31</sup> Worst of all for Fredrick, his actions had been seen as a personal betrayal by Ferdinand, who now moved to gather his own allies and strike, not just at Bohemia, but at Fredrick's own lands in the Palatine.<sup>32</sup> But simply striking at the Palatine would be unconstitutional; even Ferdinand was not willing to open the can of worms that was the sovereignty of the Elector's domains.<sup>33</sup> So he compromised; Fredrick's lands would be invaded, but the constitution of the Empire would not be in doubt, because Ferdinand would issue the Imperial Ban against Fredrick, thereby nullifying Fredrick's inheritance, lands and

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<sup>24</sup> Parker (2001), page 119.

<sup>25</sup> Wilson (2009), pages 284-286.

<sup>26</sup> Pursell (2003), page 66.

<sup>27</sup> 50-52 and 76-80.

<sup>28</sup> Parker (2001), page 121.

<sup>29</sup> Sturdy (2002), page 36.

<sup>30</sup> Wedgewood (1992), pages 83-84.

<sup>31</sup> Parker (2001), page 121.

<sup>32</sup> Pursell (2003), page 103.

<sup>33</sup> 103.

title.<sup>34</sup> Ferdinand had to do this not just because he wished to punish Fredrick, but also because he had to pay his allies; Spain, Bavaria and Saxony, and because the family was short on cash.<sup>35</sup> It had in fact been decided as early as 8<sup>th</sup> October 1619, in a private meeting Ferdinand had with Maximilian of Bavaria; that upon the defeat of Fredrick Maximilian would acquire Fredrick's Elector title.<sup>36</sup> The reaction from Ferdinand's allies was one of concern, as the eminent historian Geoffrey Parker notes;

Even Ferdinand's allies felt alarmed. The seven Electorates had been established in perpetuity by the Golden Bull of 1356, which everyone regarded as the fundamental constitution of the Empire.<sup>37</sup>

However Ferdinand pursued this course of action regardless, and exposed his allies' lack of scruples over the matter also when he found the means to bribe their compliance, also with promises of land, as Parker continues;

Nevertheless, Ferdinand won over the Elector of Saxony only by offering to cede Lusatia while Ferdinand's brother-in-law, Sigismund of Poland, promised the Elector of Brandenburg extensive rights over East Prussia in return for compliance. Papal envoys eased the scruples of the Catholic Electors when they pointed out that this would give them a permanent majority of five to two in the Electoral College, instead of four to three.<sup>38</sup>

In his victory, Ferdinand may have believed that the granting of the Elector Palatine lands to Maximilian of Bavaria was a worthy price to pay for the service he'd rendered to his Emperor; Ferdinand simply could not have defeated Fredrick's Bohemia, which collapsed in the Battle of White Mountain on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1620, without the considerable help he received from Bavaria and Saxony, let alone Spain.<sup>39</sup> Following this disaster for Fredrick, the former Palatine Elector began his long exile in the Netherlands, where he would spend the remainder of his days,<sup>40</sup> while Ferdinand II began what were to be the so-called "fat years" of the Habsburgs.<sup>41</sup>

In 1621, while Fredrick V languished in his Hague exile, his troops managed to stumble upon a great find: an Imperial courier carrying a package of secret letters that laid out in

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<sup>34</sup> Pursell (2003), pages 101-103.

<sup>35</sup> Parker (2001), page 129.

<sup>36</sup> Wedgewood (1992), page 99.

<sup>37</sup> Parker (2001), page 128.

<sup>38</sup> 128.

<sup>39</sup> 119-129.

<sup>40</sup> Pursell (2003), page 185.

<sup>41</sup> Maland (1980), page VI.

embarrassing detail the plans of Ferdinand, the contributions of his allies in the Papacy, and the Habsburg plot for reorganising the Empire after Fredrick's defeat.<sup>42</sup> In light of these documents Fredrick tried to muster support for an anti-Habsburg coalition in Europe against Ferdinand, but the war seemed too distant to those present in the meeting with the Danish King Christian IV, to reach the consensus that military action against Ferdinand was necessary.<sup>43</sup> Christian IV, the maternal uncle of Fredrick's wife Elizabeth, even quizzed Fredrick; "Who advised you to drive out kings and to seize kingdoms? If your counsellors did so, they were scoundrels!"<sup>44</sup> Although Fredrick certainly longed to fight for his domains, as was his obligation as an Elector,<sup>45</sup> Ferdinand's success was, by the New Year of 1621, simply too total to challenge.<sup>46</sup>

In April 1621 the Dutch Republic, having observed the terms of the Twelve Years Truce with Spain, was now back at war with the Spanish Empire.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, this meant that the war prolonged by Fredrick from The Hague at least no longer contained his resources alone, for even though the Dutch Republic entered the war on its own initiative, as a result of the circumstances of the time, Dutch concerns as to the victory of the Habsburgs in the Palatine certainly played a role in convincing them that the resumption of war was the only course of action.<sup>48</sup> The Spanish would now concern themselves primarily with the Dutch, while they had used the Palatine's strategic place in Europe to better threaten the security of the United Provinces in the months leading up to what Count Olivares, the Spanish prime minister, believed would be the resumption of the Spanish-Dutch War.<sup>49</sup> The Spanish Habsburgs' future success in the region, against the Dutch, ran parallel to Ferdinand's own success as his allies overran Bohemia and the Palatine.<sup>50</sup>

This was the high point of Ferdinand's military campaigning in Europe,<sup>51</sup> and his success here provoked the Dutch, also under considerable strain from the Spanish, to seek even more aggressively the formation of a coalition against the Habsburgs, which was beginning to take

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<sup>42</sup> Parker (2001), page 131.

<sup>43</sup> Pursell (2003), page 126.

<sup>44</sup> Parker (2001), page 132.

<sup>45</sup> Pursell (2003), page 149.

<sup>46</sup> Wedgewood (1992), pages 156-160.

<sup>47</sup> Pages (1970), page 87.

<sup>48</sup> Wedgewood (1992), page 137.

<sup>49</sup> Pages (1970), page 88.

<sup>50</sup> Sturdy (2002), page 44.

<sup>51</sup> 45.

shape in 1624.<sup>52</sup> By this stage Ferdinand's success against Bohemia, and his allies' success in overrunning the Palatinate, combined with Spain's success against the Dutch Republic, drew the concern of France, England and Denmark.<sup>53</sup> Between 1620 and 1622 the forces of Maximilian of Bavaria and the King of Spain "had conquered the Palatinate on behalf of Ferdinand II, and expected to be rewarded."<sup>54</sup> Bohemia, where the revolt had precipitated the associated conflicts in the Empire, had been occupied by Ferdinand's forces and was in the process of being 'reformed' by agents of the Habsburgs.<sup>55</sup> C.V. Wedgwood makes a damning judgement of Ferdinand's policies in Bohemia, she writes;

It became increasingly obvious with each day that passed that the Roman Church, which dictated Ferdinand's decisions, would not allow him to restore peace to the Empire. The Emperor seemed resolved to exterminate heresy outside as well as within Bohemia, by continuing and widening the scope of a war which had already brought him much success. Thereafter it was the very existence of Protestantism in the Empire which was at stake.<sup>56</sup>

But the European concern at the success of Ferdinand; of his family and allies; necessitated some action, as was the case with France. While not going so far as declaring war; "alarmed by the Habsburgs' success, early in 1624 Louis XIII opened talks not only with England... but with the Dutch."<sup>57</sup> France lent the Dutch Republic considerable sums of money to defray the costs of fighting a war with blockaded ports,<sup>58</sup> demonstrating that its toleration of Ferdinand's successes would only go so far. France was not the only European power who viewed Ferdinand's success as a threat to their sovereignty though, among the most concerned was Denmark and its King Christian IV, who by early 1625 "believed that he needed to take a firm stand against the Catholic conspiracy that he perceived around him".<sup>59</sup> Certainly, among the many powers of Europe, there was the sense that Ferdinand, between his Palatine campaigns, his re-Catholicisation of Bohemia and his transferral of the Electorate title from Fredrick V to Maximilian of Bavaria, had achieved too much success, and upset the balance

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<sup>52</sup> Parker (2001), pages 134-135.

<sup>53</sup> 135.

<sup>54</sup> Sturdy (2002), page 43.

<sup>55</sup> Pages (1970), page 74.

<sup>56</sup> Wedgwood (1992), page 79.

<sup>57</sup> Parker (2001), page 135.

<sup>58</sup> 135.

<sup>59</sup> 136.

of power in Europe in the process.<sup>60</sup> <sup>61</sup> The Savoyard ambassador to Spain wrote to Charles Emmanuel, the Duke of Savoy that;

Your highness should reflect how great are the vicissitudes of this world, for six months ago all the elements seemed to be uniting to bring this monarchy [the Habsburgs] to ruin. Now they seem inclined to favour everything they do, and the winds are wafting them on their way.<sup>62</sup>

The neutrality of England and Denmark which had been invaluable to Ferdinand for more than a decade, had by late 1625 evaporated;<sup>63</sup> and the Danes threatened to intervene directly, as the German Princes of the Lower Saxon Circle pledged their allegiance to the Danish King Christian IV. Christian IV was, as Duke of Holstein, also a prince of the Empire, and a Protestant one at that, so his motives for intervention were religiously motivated on some level,<sup>64</sup> though it was...

...principally to defend their position as German princes in the Empire that Christian and his son sought to oppose the progress of the [Catholic] League's army in the direction of the North Sea and the Elbe.<sup>65</sup>

Ferdinand faced opposition to his newly acquired power in his own domains as well though; in 1623 an uprising had occurred in the East, led by the Prince of Transylvania Bethlen Gabor in protest at Ferdinand's religious policies and harmful taxes.<sup>66</sup> Ferdinand then continued with his plans to crown Maximilian of Bavaria as the Elector of the Palatine in the Regensburg meeting that same year; an act which only served to alienate both Saxony and Brandenburg, not to mention the fact that "the cleavage between Catholic and Protestant princes had been dangerously widened."<sup>67</sup> Then, at a protest meeting held by Saxony and Brandenburg, "there was talk on Saxony's part of forming a new Protestant Union, and of Brandenburg's of an appeal to force."<sup>68</sup> Combined with what was to follow from the Danes, these were the clearest examples of Ferdinand's success sufficiently unnerving his

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<sup>60</sup> Wedgewood (1992), page 192.

<sup>61</sup> Pages (1970), pages 86-89.

<sup>62</sup> Maland (1980), page 105.

<sup>63</sup> 106.

<sup>64</sup> Pages (1970), page 82.

<sup>65</sup> 83.

<sup>66</sup> 97.

<sup>67</sup> Wedgewood (1992), page 163.

<sup>68</sup> 163.



neighbours and neutrals to the point that they plotted against him; but it would not be the last.<sup>69</sup>

The Danish impact on the war did not consist of a string of military successes; quite the opposite in fact;<sup>70</sup> what it did was take the focus away from the Dutch, where “morale... was at its lowest since the murder of William the Silent in 1584.”<sup>71</sup> Following years of Dutch defeats that culminated in the fall of Breda to the Spanish in June 1625, the arrival of new enemies and thus new distractions on the scene for the Habsburgs dramatically altered the dynamics of the war.<sup>72</sup> Geoffrey Parker explains that “direct pressure on the Netherlands diminished”, because “while the Emperor and his German allies concentrated on Denmark, Spain cut back its military spending on the Netherlands.”<sup>73</sup> This breathing space seemed to breathe new life into the Dutch, who, for the first time since the beginning of the Eighty Years War against the Spanish, now had superiority in numbers.<sup>74</sup>

This enabled the Dutch to reclaim much of the land lost in the years 1621-1624, and in 1627, despite reduced military spending the Spanish government of King Philip IV declared bankruptcy.<sup>75</sup> The following year, the Dutch Navy achieved a stunning victory, capturing an American treasure fleet off Cuba worth almost £3 million, and used this wealth to fund one of the largest armies yet seen in the region, a force of 129,000 men.<sup>76</sup> By early 1630, the Dutch had completely turned the tables on the Spanish, and established a base in Pernambuco on the north-eastern corner of Brazil. Meanwhile resources for the army in Flanders plunged and the Spanish defence of the region sagged.<sup>77</sup> Although a signatory of the Hague Alliance between itself, Denmark and England against the Habsburgs’ increase in success and power, the Dutch were the only party to actually achieve a measure of success against their enemies.<sup>78</sup> However, this should not mask the symbolic fact that by late 1625 the Habsburgs and Ferdinand among them were being pulled in too many different directions to maintain all fronts adequately, as the aforementioned success of the Dutch demonstrated. Indeed, as one historian phrased it; “the very success of the Habsburg governments in advancing towards

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<sup>69</sup> Maland (1980), page 97.

<sup>70</sup> Parker (2001), pages 137-138.

<sup>71</sup> Maland (1980), page 98.

<sup>72</sup> Pages (1970), page 98.

<sup>73</sup> Parker (2001), page 138.

<sup>74</sup> 138.

<sup>75</sup> 138.

<sup>76</sup> 139.

<sup>77</sup> 139.

<sup>78</sup> 138.

their goals only increased their number of enemies.”<sup>79</sup> And as the 1620’s drew to a close, it was rumoured that the worst for Ferdinand was yet to come.<sup>80 81</sup>

Despite the success of the Dutch, they remained the only source of opposition upon the peace of Lubeck with Denmark on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1629. Ferdinand had hoped for better peace terms, but his highly successful commander Albrecht von Wallenstein had recommended leniency towards Denmark in the interests of preserving the future peace there, while he was also anxious about mobilising Scandinavian discontent against the overtly triumphant Habsburgs.<sup>82</sup> But Ferdinand by this stage “had a power unequalled since the days of Charles V”<sup>83</sup> and the Edict of Restitution, passed that same year, religiously ostracised the North German states by attempting to impose the same Catholicisation on their lands as had been experienced in Bohemia.<sup>84</sup> Dramatic transfers of land followed the issuing of the Edict, one historian called it;

...a triumph not only for the Counter-Reformation but also for the emperor, since it was he who had issued the Edict without reference to any other authority; declared that its interpretation was a matter reserved exclusively for his own judgement; and empowered his commissioners to enforce their decisions with the aid of the Imperial Army.<sup>85</sup>

Also in 1629, the Calvinist Prince of Transylvania Bethlen Gabor, a consistent problem for Ferdinand, died. Ferdinand, absolutely triumphant, having shattered all his enemies, now concentrated on translating his victory into practical terms, and in fact undermined the successes of the Habsburgs in the process.<sup>86</sup> Also in the year 1629, the Dutch and French had arranged a peace between Sweden and Poland, freeing Swedish attention for what both hoped would pave the way for its intervention in the Empire.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to international affairs, Ferdinand’s actions with respect to his commanders deserves attention as well. Another example of Ferdinand’s success in the late-1620’s can be found in the career of the aforementioned Albrecht von Wallenstein, whose contribution to

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<sup>79</sup> Maland (1980), page 106.

<sup>80</sup> Parker (2001), page 151.

<sup>81</sup> Pages (1970), page 116.

<sup>82</sup> Parker (2001), page 138.

<sup>83</sup> Wedgewood (1992), page 246.

<sup>84</sup> Maland (1980), pages 122-123.

<sup>85</sup> 123.

<sup>86</sup> Parker (2001), page 157.

<sup>87</sup> Wedgewood (1992), page 252.

the Habsburg success was second to none.<sup>88</sup> Under Wallenstein, the Habsburgs achieved great successes against the Danes, who as a military genius and loyal citizen had been enriched with the granting of numerous duchies and titles for his service. At one stage Wallenstein had commanded an army over 100,000 men strong, and had crushed all Habsburg opposition, enabling Ferdinand II to perhaps dream bigger than his office as Emperor allowed.<sup>89</sup> The Edict of Restitution would be implemented with the aid of Wallenstein's victorious army, though not at Wallenstein's necessary approval, since he doubted both the legality and need to force a religious conversion on the Protestant lands of the Empire,<sup>90</sup> which was what the Edict's implementation soon descended into.<sup>91</sup> However, the success Wallenstein had achieved by 1630 and the power Ferdinand had accumulated because of these successes appeared to have been too much for Ferdinand's allies to bear, as during a meeting of the Catholic princes in Regensburg in the summer of 1630 in which Ferdinand sought to acquire the right of his son Ferdinand to succeed him, he was forced instead to release Wallenstein from his command, because all who attended feared Wallenstein's power and influence over the Emperor.<sup>92</sup> This dismissal of the most important commander in the Habsburgs' employ on the very eve of Swedish intervention would prove disastrous for Ferdinand in the long run. Wallenstein remarked as he learned of his dismissal;

I have had to make enemies of all the electors and princes, indeed everyone, on the Emperor's account...That I am hated in the Empire has happened simply because I have served the emperor too well, against the wishes of many.<sup>93</sup>

Wallenstein, the man who had made Habsburg success possible for the past five years, was now no longer responsible for the direction of the Habsburg war effort. Such a dismissal could not have come at a worse time for Ferdinand, because the most important intervention of the entire Thirty Years War was due to occur; that of the Swedish Empire, and the Habsburgs now had to do without its most effective and successful commander.

The storm broke for the Habsburgs when attempts were made to besiege Stralsund, a strategically important port on the Baltic, which had only a few months earlier entered into an

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<sup>88</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years War* (London: Routledge, 1984), pages 94-96.

<sup>89</sup> Geoff Mortimer, *Wallenstein: the Enigma of the Thirty Years War* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), page 111.

<sup>90</sup> 113.

<sup>91</sup> 111-114.

<sup>92</sup> Charles W. Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1618-1815* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pages 44-46.

<sup>93</sup> 126.

alliance with Sweden.<sup>94</sup> The Habsburg desire to create a fleet in the Baltic centred on Stralsund, and thus Sweden opposed it fiercely, finally invading the Empire as a consequence.<sup>95</sup> With Sweden firmly against him, Ferdinand then saw the French, who had supplied Sweden with the funds to support their military ventures for some time, develop an alliance with them in 1631.<sup>96</sup> With the Franco-Swedish accord thus in place, Ferdinand now faced his two most dangerous enemies united in their opposition to his success, his advancement in Germany and his religious policies. The defeats Sweden would suffer were offset by French monetary aid, and the two partners began to erode the Habsburg war effort. When the two combined officially with the Dutch in 1635, following the French declaration of war, the writing was on the wall for the Habsburgs. Spain, already drained by its wars in Italy and the Netherlands, would begin its descent into chaos in 1640, while Ferdinand died in 1637, having witnessed so clearly the results his success had brought him. After almost two decades of war his victories had mobilised Europe against him, and this unified opposition would prove his undoing and ultimately lead to the supreme weakening of the Habsburg dynasty.

Ferdinand was the victim of his own success, because with every success came the intervention of an enemy that, although in the beginning merely weakened him, contributed in the end to his overall defeat. Once the Dutch had been allowed to survive following the Danish intervention, their contributions kept the anti-Habsburg cause alive, and Ferdinand's immense success in the late-1620's eventually convinced first, his allies to dismiss his most effective commander Wallenstein, and then Sweden to intervene, backed tacitly by France. This response to Ferdinand's success may not have materialised had he perhaps been more gracious in victory, since one historian noted Ferdinand's style was not compromise, but instead "his response to military success was to exploit it to the full rather than seek reconciliation."<sup>97</sup> But it was this very success that persuaded his three enemies in the Dutch, French and Swedish to cooperate and finally form a coalition against him. This creation and eventual victory of this coalition is the clearest example that, to the powers involved, Ferdinand's success was simply too much to tolerate and that, as the author of this success, he had to be stopped at all costs.

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<sup>94</sup> Wedgewood (1992), page 250.

<sup>95</sup> 253.

<sup>96</sup> 269-270.

<sup>97</sup> Mortimer (2010), page 111.

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