

Strategic Plan for Bypassing the Stormcloak Crisis

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Many of us have tried to devise a long-term strategy in order to change the position the Mede Empire ended up in after the long years of hardship it endured. After spending several years of slowly trying to analyze the situation, I have come up with a plan that will be the most effective way to deal with the current problems.

Part of this process was just me reading through what the fans have already proposed and I have come to a point when I get really frustrated by the fact that a lot of the ideas consist of two main points:

1. The Septim Empire must completely defeat the Stormcloak Rebellion's military forces thus making them unable to wage war and completely erase the ideological arguments the Stormcloaks use in their anti-imperial agenda. I will address why such thinking is overly positive later.
2. The Stormcloaks and the Empire must reach an agreement and try to oppose the Aldmeri Dominion together.

The problem with these two points is that they are too simple and do not touch upon many important details. How exactly are they going to make a long-term peace when we can clearly see that there are problems between Nords and the Imperial authority? Is the Empire going to legitimize the Stormcloak Kingdom? Will they create a federation? Will the Kingdom retain its current political autonomy? What will happen if the Stormcloak idea does not eradicated? Will the Empire swallow the whole rebellion after the clash with the Dominion?

Autonomy

This theory is based on the following assumptions that are required for it to work. Let's take a look at them:

1. The Stormcloak rebellion is still present. Both factions did not manage to defeat each other and a stalemate occurs.
2. The Empire has not lost territory by the time of TES V.
3. The Aldmeri Dominion has retained its influence as a hegemon in Tamriel.
4. The Aldmeri Dominion is planning to attack the Empire with a land assault somewhere in Cyrodill but in a later period.

The important thing to note is that the Empire already has plans of its own to defeat the Dominion. It is not said, though, whether it will be an offensive or a defensive campaign. Judging by what we see and know from the games, the hard terrain in Valenwood and Elseweyr and the Dominions water control will force the Empire to think defensively and rely on counterattacks.

General Tullius himself said in TES V that the strong legions (or the main force of the Empire, in other words) are located in the South. We can assume this means that they are positioned along the land borders with the Aldmeri Dominion. These borders are Elseweyr and Valenwood which make up the whole southern border of the Empire minus the southern coast near Anvil and the coast near Leyawiin. The Western coast near Anvil seems to be vulnerable due to the big coastline and the Aldmeri advantage at sea. The other Imperial force of which we surely know the location is the one Legion situated in Skyrim.

Next, we should define what we mean by victory for the Empire. Dealing completely with the problem means that the Empire must gain total victory over the Dominion. If it survives, it will still be a strategical enemy to the Empire as it is hard to think of ways for these two countries to coexist peacefully.

We have two major options with many other "smaller" ones.

The first is if the Dominion loses a war against the Empire and its ability to fight effectively while the Empire is not able to take the Summerset Isles. That way the Dominion will continue to exist. In addition, the Empire's ability to get rid of all Aldmeri and rebel forces from Valenwood and Elseweyr seems far-fetched – these lands are mostly jungles and massive forests and attacking them will be extremely hard from a logistical, strategical and tactical points of view. There is a high chance that these lands will stay under Dominion's rule and will remain as strategical Aldmeri forward outposts that can threaten the Empire.

The second option is the total defeat and an end of the Dominion. Here, the Empire might conquer the Summerset Isles or parts of them, or the Dominion might succumb to a Civil war between the factions within after it has been defeated by the Empire. The defeat will act as a catalyst to the already ongoing political processes in the Dominion where the power has been taken by the warlike Thalmor. It is important to consider that there will always be factions in the Summerset Isles which are likely to make a peace. By destroying the Dominion the Empire will get the most of this conflict and will be able to use the resources and manpower of the former Aldmeri-controlled lands to rebuild some of what was lost. The Empire will become the hegemon of Tamriel though it would not directly rule all of it.

Now let's return to the months just after the time of The Elder Scrolls V.

We have the Mede Empire and the Stormcloak rebellion which wants to create a sovereign kingdom in the lands of the province of Skyrim. These two factions have been fighting and have recently made an agreement for peace which ended with the defeat of Alduin by the Dragonborn. If we judge by what we see in the game, they have also reached a stalemate.

The proposal

The Empire has to give autonomy to the province of Skyrim, which will deal with the whole crisis, and there are at least two ways the Empire can choose take to do this.

The first is if the Empire gives the Kingdom of Skyrim rights to govern their own lands but not their foreign policy. The definition of foreign policy will be decided by the rulers of the White-Gold Tower with the help of a council where the ruler of Skyrim will take part. The Mede Empire will become a federation. We can also add that the Empire can give autonomy to the Kingdom of Skyrim but the new Kingdom will be obliged to send forces for the war against the Dominion. The foreign policies will not be so strictly held by the Emperor but in cases of war, the Emperor will have the right to make the top military and political decisions.

The second option is if the Empire gives The Kingdom of Skyrim the right to conduct its own foreign policy and the right to govern itself. The effect of such a thing might be more positive due to the lack of the negative element of having to pay tributes to the Empire. I will not discuss this alternative, because it is not as effective as the first one.

It seems that a federation where the foreign policy is governed by the center in Cyrodill is the better choice. So, how would this bring an end to the civil war?

We must ask ourselves: Who are the Imperials fighting against and what are their enemies' motives to do so. At this point, we see that there is something really important which very few people understand. The Stormcloaks emerged because of purely objective factors, or, in other words, the political situation. These men and their leader have many good arguments defending their right to oppose the Empire. The conflict erupted with the Markarth Incident, but as we all know, its main roots are in the White-Gold Concordat.

This peace treaty (signed by the sovereigns of the Septim Empire and the Aldmeri Dominion) bans the worship of Talos, the creator of the Third Empire of Men, which is worshiped by a big part of the Nords in Skyrim.

Let's imagine we are Nords and we endured the horrors of the Great War. We have lost many of our friends and family members in the war and the economy suffered a big blow. What happens after all of this ended? We are obliged to obey a treaty which is enforced by the same faction we were fighting against some years earlier. And what do they do? They deny us the right to worship the Man-God Talos, the mythical creator of the Septim Empire. The country you fought for denied the worship of its own creator!

Not only this, combine it with the Forsworn separatists and the lack of respect for the Empire in the local people due to its diminishing authority due to the Empire's weak presence in Skyrim. We can see that these men and women have very good arguments and they do not see the Empire as a defender. Some see it as a traitor; some see it as an enemy, considering what we hear in dialogues in TES V.

We should also consider the fact that the Empire is in a really bad shape ever since Jagar Tharn took power by replacing the real emperor. Ulfric and other former Imperial officials might know this and they might think that the Mede Empire will not get through these critical moments. This might explain why the Stormcloak leadership does not want to attach Skyrim to the crumbling Empire.

I would say that these are the most important reasons why this rebellion erupted – it is based on purely objective factors and when they change, the rebellions ideological arguments won't be valid anymore.

Many will say that Ulfric will never take the path of peace but according to what he has already done, he has displayed outstandingly good skills in politics and war. Here is why I make this claim.

Killing the High King was an act of aggression which officially started the Civil War. We rarely think about why Ulfric did this. How did it help his cause? He wants to create a sovereign political entity – Kingdom of Skyrim and nobody will bestow on him the right to create such a kingdom on the territory owned by the Septim Empire. He is not legitimate as a simple jarl. That is why Ulfric had to fight. He was not an important political entity as a jarl of Windhelm so he shows his presence by killing the High-King. After the stalemate and many casualties on both sides he now has a legitimate right to claim the land his armies fought for.

I would say that this is the time when is the right to initiate diplomatic meetings to make peace and create the federation. It is exactly when the stalemate occurred and both factions do not see how they will defeat the enemy with the forces they have. Of course, the Empire is still in a strong position with its larger manpower pool, more money and the best Holds in Skyrim under its control (Markarth – silver mines; Whiterun – central position, trade

hub; Falkreath – connection with Cyrodill; the Stormcloak own Riften – criminals ruling the hold and border with Redoran who are still rebuilding their lands; Winterhold – very little strategical importance because it can be bypassed using ships and going directly to Windhelm, Dawnstar – a good port settlement which is the perfect point for negotiations due to its close proximity to Solitude.

What would this federation achieve?

Judging by the reasons of the rebels, now imagine that the Kingdom of Skyrim has rights to govern its own lands but not its foreign policy and the Empire gives it all peacefully. The first thing they will do is to restore the worship of Talos and when the Aldmeri Dominion says that this is illegitimate, the Empire will have the right to say that it cannot control the internal affairs of Skyrim because it lost the Civil war – the legion in Skyrim will have already been sent away to more crucial spots. They wouldn't even have to lie to the Thalmor as the legion will not be able to influence the province.

What can the Dominion do at this point? There are two options and both of them puts it in a passive position where it has to react.

The first one is the Dominion conducting their offensive earlier when they are not yet ready while the Empire becomes stronger after the forces of Skyrim and the Legion stationed there are now free and can move to a place where they can bolster the forces against the Dominion.

The second one is that the Dominion stays as far away from escalation as possible because of its own future operations not being prepared yet.

In both scenarios, the Aldmeri Dominion can only react and not affect these processes. The Empire shows the Aldmeri that they are no longer the hegemon in Tamriel. It can also make new friends in the former Imperial provinces. This is extremely important, not only because the Dominion will lose some of its confidence but also because that will force them to hurry up with all the preparations and when a state hastily prepares for a war, things never go the way it has planned.

This act will affect the White-Gold Concordat which could now be bypassed in Skyrim which will decrease the hostile attitude of the local population for the Empire because not only the war ends, not only does the Empire give them the right to govern their own lands the way they prefer – the way of the Nords, but main reason for this war – the Concordat, has no more authority.

Let us look at the dangers

There are many downsides to this proposal and I will try to share my views on some of them here.

Making the Mede Empire a federation has its own negative short- and long-term consequences.

The biggest concern is if Skyrim becomes politically separated from the Empire. According to the laws of the new federation between the Mede Empire and the Kingdom of Skyrim, the kingdom can run its own internal affairs according to its traditions and the Nordic laws. Only the external affairs will be decided by the ruler in the White-Gold Tower.

But is this really the case? Will the Empire lose its influence in Skyrim or not. We can answer this from different points of view.

1. Political and ideological

The Nord Tiber Septim is still an iconic figure in the lore and traditions of the Nordic society. A big part of the ruling elite in Skyrim is already aligned to the Empire. Both the Empire and the Kingdom will have a common enemy – the Aldmeri Dominion. Plus, we have the already established political and administrative connections from the years before the rebellion.

I also want to point out something about the Nordic traditions and law practiced in Skyrim – that they are already practiced throughout the Holds even when the Civil War is present. This will not lead to more separation.

The last and the most important thing is that, as I said earlier, The Stormcloak rebellion is a political entity created by the circumstances and when they are changed, it will lose its political arguments. Even if Ulfric turns out to be a complete warmonger and a weak High-King, what can he do when the war has already ended and the time for war against the Aldmeri Dominion comes? The Stormcloak cause will simply wither away as time passes. This course of actions for the Empire is better because when the 2nd Great War ends, and if the Dominion is defeated and some remnants of the Stormcloaks continue to rebel, the Imperial authority will have a legitimate reason to call them warmongers and traitors. After the war, the Stormcloaks will have no reason to exist. And combine that with a strengthened warmonger and traitor claim, even more Stormcloak supporters will defect.

Here is how I see it.

It is interesting how the Empire acts against The Stormcloak Kingdom. They send only one legion, which is also not in its full strength and even recruits locally, and they cannot act decisively against the rebellion. We have very little information about reinforcements from the South except a note in Fort Neugrad stating that there were Imperial forces gathering in the Pale Pass but were unable to arrive due to avalanches in the mountain.

There biggest success has been that they caught Ulfric and tried to execute him but we know how that ended.

I think that they know that the Stormcloaks are a temporary threat. Imagine if the Empire sends enough forces to utterly defeat the Stormcloak rebellion in battle at some point before the 2nd Great War. Wouldn't such a victory make the Stormcloaks martyrs who fought a brave battle against overwhelming odds, which has a potential even, strengthen their ideology? A very important part in Nordic tradition is waging war according to this same tradition. The defeat of the Stormcloaks in battle when they are no longer able to fight open battles will only boost their ideology, not eradicate it. Guerilla units will continue to fight and gather more men to their cause and it will be hard for a regular standing army to defeat them. This only prolongs the ideological conflict.

Some notes: The note in Fort Neugrad about an Imperial Force gathering near the Helgen mountain pass does not contain data on the size and strength so we cannot evaluate how it might change the strategic situation. It will surely make it in favor of the Imperials and it can potentially completely change the balance.

Another thing is that the factions that are already a part of the Empire might not agree if the Kingdom of Skyrim is given autonomy. This might show the Empire's weakness. I do not think that this is the case. It is as if the Empire doesn't show it with its lack of successful actions in the last years. A stabilization of Skyrim will even boost the Empire's influence as it will show that it can provide peace and prosperity.

2. Economic influence

Skyrim and Cyrodill already have strong trade connections where they both export or import certain resources. This trade will almost always occur because it is profitable, and to some extent, vital for both the Empire and the province of Skyrim. If we take what we see in TES V as canon, Skyrim is not a province that can sustain itself. It relies heavily on East Empire Trading Company imports. Even the Stormcloaks have allowed them to operate in their territory.

How might the Dominion act in this case?

The Dominion might attack just when the process of creating the federation is still going on which would put the Empire in a precarious situation. As we already stated, we know that the Imperial main force is located in the South. How will the Dominion surprise the Empire, which has already concentrated forces on the borders defending against a possible offensive in Cyrodill? Unfortunately, with the current information we have, we are unable to give an exact answer.

Conclusion

I would say that this is the best path the Mede Empire can take at this moment as it spares a lot of resource and has a potential to completely swallow the Rebellion and unite Cyrodill and Skyrim again.