Causes and Prevention of War // MIT
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THE ANGLO-FRENCH SEVEN YEARS' WAR, 1756-1763: AN INADVERTENT WAR? AN AVOIDABLE WAR?

I. INADVERTENT WAR: war caused by actions that actors did not expect or desire would cause war. Some believe inadvertent wars never happen, other think they are common. Was the Seven Years' War an inadvertent war? Was it avoidable?

II. BACKGROUND TO WAR

The Seven Years' War was a worldwide Anglo-French battle for empire. Americans call it the French and Indian War but it could be called the first world war. It saw fierce Anglo-French fighting in the Caribbean, South Asia, West Africa, and North America. Britain won but with little enduring gain. Background factors:

A. Mercantilism. Before 1756 the European powers scrambled for gold to pay mercenaries, hence for trade surpluses, hence for empire.

What changes would have prevented war?

> New ways to tax, to increase the state's tax base?
> Better scholarship explaining the economic efficiencies of free trade and the costs of mercantilism (e.g., David Ricardo's 1816 writing outlining the Theory of Comparative Advantage--it arrived too late!)
> Cheaper strategies for national defense (e.g., guerilla war) to replace expensive cash-dependent mercenary war & naval war?

B. The incomplete partition of North America. France had Quebec. Britain had what became the U.S. eastern seaboard. But who owned the Ohio Valley wilderness? This was left undecided by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), which ended the last big war (the War of Austrian Succession, 1739-48).

C. Military facts:
1. Britain and France were the only powers with global military reach.
2. The British navy was twice the strength of the French navy but France had far the stronger army.

D. Economic facts: in 1748 a group of Virginians including Virginia Gov. Robert Dinwiddie form the Ohio Company to colonize and develop the Ohio Valley and to enrich themselves. They obtain a vast land grant of initially 200,000 acres (312.5 square miles, an area 20x16 miles) in the Ohio Valley from the British Crown, with 300,000 more acres to come if they achieve settle 100 families in the territory in 7 years. Total: 500,000 acres, or 781 square miles, an area 20x38 miles. Lots of $$$ on the table for

Dinwiddie & Friends!

E. Chronology:
   1. During 1752-53 France destroyed a British trading post in the Ohio Valley and built two forts of its own there, at Presque Isle and Fort Le Boeuf.
   2. During 1753-54 Britain sent three expeditions to the Ohio Valley to eject the French. All three failed.
      > Fall 1753: A Virginian expedition to Fort Le Boeuf, sent to warn the French to leave the Ohio Valley (and led by George Washington), was ignored and came home.
      > February 1754: Virginians established a fort at the confluence of the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio rivers (now Pittsburgh). The French conquered it, renamed it Fort Duquesne, and expelled the British.
      > May-July 1754: Virginians commanded by George Washington entered the Ohio Valley on a fort-building mission. They learned of the nearby presence of a force of 36 French troops sent into the Valley with a summons to warn any British troops or traders to leave the Valley (same as Washington did at Fort Le Boeuf). Washington's troops ambushed this French force at Jumonville Glen (the first fighting in the war), killing 10 including the French commander, May 28. Washington's force then pulled back and erect Fort Necessity in an effort to establish a defensible position. A larger French and Indian force then arrived and defeated this British force at Fort Necessity. The British surrendered and came home.
   3. In early 1755 Britain sent two army battalions under General Braddock from Britain to America to eject the French from the Ohio Valley. The British claimed Braddock's instructions were purely defensive. The French, who knew Braddock's instructions, thought the Ohio Valley was theirs, hence they saw his expedition as aggressive.
   4. Braddock led his two battalions into the Ohio Valley toward Fort Duquesne, aiming to eject the French. Braddock's force was annihilated and Braddock was killed by the French and Indians at the Battle of the Monongahela, July 9, 1755. A fiasco.
   5. Meanwhile ... In May 1755 France countered by sending six army battalions to America aboard 1/3 of the French battle fleet, stripped of its guns.
   6. In June 1755 Britain's Admiral Boscawen tried to intercept these six French battalions off Newfoundland. It captures only 2 of 18 French ships.
   7. Britain and France halted negotiations and war erupted, May 18, 1756.

F. This was a war of illusions. Four types of misperceptions to look for:
   1. Of one's own conduct. "We are being benign!"
   2. Of the other's conduct and intentions. "They are being

aggressive!"

3. Of the other's likely response to one's own acts. Governments expected their threats to elicit compliance but they evoked defiance. Britain's deployment of Braddock evoked unexpected French counter-escalation (its six-battalion deployment); and this French counter-escalation evoked further British counter-counter-escalation unexpected by France.
4. Of the value of the stakes in dispute. This value was greatly exaggerated by British and French leaders.

What changes would have prevented war??

> Enact British business regulations that forbid conflicts of interest by government officials, including the giving of royal land grants to government officials (Dinwiddie) and/or the acceptance of royal land grants by these officials; and forbidding the giving of land grants in territory disputed with another power?
> Develop a professional British intelligence agency (like today's MI6), to preclude the role of local business people with conflicts of interest (like Dinwiddie and Shirley) in British intelligence-collection?
> Develop of an independent British press with a culture of integrity, to provide transparency into situations like the Ohio Valley conflict of 1753-56, to dampen misperceptions about it?
> Somehow make British officials in London aware of the attitudes of the English colonists: "We will only stick with British rule as long as we face a threat from the French and the Indians!"
> Teach about the spiral model in British and French schools, as a self-denying prophecy.
> Assassinate Dinwiddie?
> Would war have occurred if Britain and France had possessed secure nuclear arsenals?

III. CAUSES OF THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR

A. Misperceptions. Do these constitute a Jervis spiral?

1. Britain misperceived:

a. **The nature of the status quo** -- "Ohio belongs to us!"
> Virginia Governor Dinwiddie described the Ohio Valley as "British property" in communiques to London (making the French "invaders of British property" in one of his communiques). But Ohio wasn't British--its ownership was undecided.

b. **French conduct**--Britain exaggerated the aggressiveness of French behavior.
> Dinwiddie told London that "the French have invaded East of the Alleghanies!" (but they hadn't), and were preparing a general invasion of North America (but they weren't).
> Massachusetts' Governor Shirley told London "the

French have invaded Massachusetts!" (but they hadn't).
> Dinwiddie wrote London that the French were attacking "the forces of this Dominion" in the Ohio Valley (but these forces were Ohio Company mercenaries, not British government troops). In his dispatches the Ohio Company fort-builders became "our people" and the fort was "our fort," wrongly implying that they were British government personnel and property.

c. **French intentions**--Britain exaggerated French expansionism.
> Dinwiddie told London "the French are planning a general invasion of British North America!" (but they weren't).

d. **British conduct**--Britain underestimated the aggressiveness of its own behavior.
> Dinwiddie failed to report his own fort-building in the Ohio Valley.
> Dinwiddie failed to report his collaboration with Indians fighting against the French in the Ohio Valley.

Consider that misperceptions like these can feed each other, as follows: misperceptions of the status quo --> false belief that another's defensive actions are aggressive --> exaggeration of the other's aggressiveness --> misperception of how the other will react to punishment. Some of this probably happened here.

2. France suffered similar misperceptions, though we know fewer details.
3. Additional beliefs and misperceptions (did some grow from those above?):
   a. Both sides saw the other as very expansionist.
   b. Both sides thought a tough policy would persuade the other side to back down. In fact the other counter-escalated in response.
      i. Britain thought France would not counter Braddock's 2-battalion deployment. But France did counter with 6 battalions.
      ii. France thought Britain would not counter its 6-battalion deployment. But Britain did with Boscawen's naval attack on that deployment.
   c. Both sides were reluctant to negotiate, because:
      i. They thought the other would take their willingness to talk as a sign of weakness.
      ii. They thought concessions would injure their credibility.
      iii. They thought negotiations were pointless, wouldn't succeed.

      However, without talks misperceptions on both sides went undiscovered.

      Were both sides applying the deterrence model to a spiral situation?

What changes would have prevented war? How about using Track II diplomacy--having private citizens who are close to the government unofficially exchange views on solutions?

d. Britain exaggerated the value of the stakes at issue. Britain thought that by beating France it could consolidate control over North America. In fact Britain's victory cost it North America. British victory removed the French threat to Britain's North American colonies. The British colonists felt less reliant on London's protection, hence less willing to tolerate rule from London. Hence they rebelled in 1775-1776. Washington & Co. stuck it to the Redcoats.

B. Non-settlement of disputes: the 1748 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle had gaps.

C. Four windows of opportunity or vulnerability:

a. Britain saw a waning British worldwide military advantage over France. British leaders thought Britain was better prepared for war than France but also saw France building up its fleet.

b. France saw British power growing. The French saw Britain making alliances on the European continent (e.g., with Spain) and expanding into the Ohio Valley.

c. The British deployment of Braddock's 2 battalions to North America in winter 1755 caused France to perceive a tactical window: "We must deploy offsetting forces to North America before a war starts and Britain closes the seas; we can't do it later."

d. The subsequent French 6-battalion deployment to North America on disarmed French warships created dual British windows of opportunity and vulnerability: "We have a fleeting opportunity to destroy a third of the French fleet," and "If we don't strike the French will gain military superiority in North America!"

Note: windows 'c' and 'd' were unwitting results of government decisions.

What changes would have prevented war? Better national security analysis in London and Paris? One of these capitols had to be wrong in seeing a window, as two opposing windows cannot co-exist at the same time. Also, preventive wars rarely look wise in retrospect. Good scholarship might have illuminated these realities, discouraging decisions for war.

E. Competition for control of cumulative resources; also, competition for security.

F. Expectation of a cheap, limited war.

IV. OUTCOME: BRITAIN WINS WAR --> BRITAIN LOSES ITS AMERICAN COLONIES (!)

V. ESCALATION OF THE SEVEN YEARS WAR

British leaders tried to limit the war to North America but failed.

VI. AN INADVERTENT WAR? Historians once explained this war as the product of calculated aggression by great empires. Now many believe it was an inadvertent war. Who is right?

VII. CURRENT PARALLELS: The Russia-NATO conflict over Ukraine, the China vs neighbors conflict over South China Sea, a possible US vs. Clina clash over spheres of influence in North Korea should the North Korean government collapse, ongoing conflict between the Turks, Kurds, Iranians, Russians, Syrian government and US over the carcass of the ISIS state, and the looming Arctic conflict are conflicts over domains where rights are unsettled.

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Spring 2018