

## THE FIRST GLOBAL WAR

**THE** French and Indian War in North America was only a small part of a much larger conflict. Known in Europe as the Seven Years' War it was one of the longest, most widespread, and most important wars in modern history. "Ministers in this country, where every part of the World affects us, in some way or another, should consider the whole Globe," the duke of Newcastle wrote in Britain in 1758, reflecting the international achievements and war aims of the British in the mid-eighteenth century. Two centuries later, Winston Churchill, the former British prime minister, wrote of the Seven Years' War as the first "World War."

In North America, the war was a result of tensions along the frontiers of the British Empire, but in larger part the war resulted from conflicts among the great powers in Europe. It began in the 1750s with what historians have called a "diplomatic revolution." Well-established alliances between Britain and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and between France and Prussia, collapsed, replaced by new alliances that set Britain and Prussia against France and Austria. The instability that these changing alliances produced helped speed the European nations toward war. The one thing that did not change was the continuing rivalry between Britain and France.

The Austrian-British alliance collapsed because Austria suffered a series of significant defeats at the hands of the Prussians. To the British government, these failures suggested that the Austro-Hungarian Empire was now too weak to help Britain balance French power. As a result, Britain sought new partnerships with the rising powers of northern Germany, Austria's enemies. Seeking protection from the power of their former British allies, the Austrians allied with France. Russia, concerned about the Austro-Hungarian Empire's possible dominance in central Europe, allied with Britain and Prussia.

The tensions that these complicated realignments created eventually led to war (just as the complicated alliances in Europe in the early



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twentieth century helped produce World War I). The European part of the war was a result of the continuing conflict between Prussia and Austria and the effect of those wars on the allies of both. The Seven Years' War soon spread across much of the world, engaging not only most of the great powers in Europe, from England to Russia, but also the emerging colonial world—India, West Africa, the Caribbean, and the Philippines—as the powerful British Navy worked to strip France, and eventually Spain, of their valuable colonial holdings.

Like most modern conflicts, the Seven Years' War was a struggle for economic power. Colonial possessions, many European nations believed, were critical to their future wealth, well worth fighting for. The war's outcome affected not only the future of America, but also the distribution of power through much of the world. It destroyed the French navy and much of the French Empire, and it elevated Great Britain to undisputed preeminence among colonial powers—especially when, at the conclusion of the war, India and all of eastern North America fell firmly under English control. The war also reorganized the balance of power in Europe, with Britain now preeminent among the great powers and Prussia (later to become the core of modern Germany) rapidly rising in wealth and military power.

The Seven Years' War was not only one of the first great colonial wars; it was also one of the last great wars of religion. It extended the dominance of Protestantism in Europe. In what is now Canada, the war replaced French with British rule and thus Catholic with Protestant rule. The Vatican, no longer a military power itself, had relied on the great Catholic empires—Spain, France, and Austria-Hungary—as bulwarks of the Vatican's power and influence. The shift of power toward Protestant governments in Europe and North America weakened the Catholic Church and reduced its geopolitical influence.

The conclusion of the Seven Years' War strengthened Britain and Germany and weakened France. But it did not provide any lasting solution to the rivalries among the great colonial powers. In North America, a dozen years after the end of the war, the American Revolution—the origins of which were in many ways a direct result of the Seven Years' War—stripped the British Empire of one of its most important and valuable colonial appendages. By the time the American Revolution came to an end, the French Revolution had sparked another lengthy period of war, culminating in the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century, which once again redrew the map of Europe and, for a while, the world.

## UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, AND EVALUATE

1. How did the Seven Years' War change the balance of power among the nations of Europe? Who gained and who lost in the war?
2. What effect did the war's outcome have on the European colonies in North America?
3. Why is the Seven Years' War described as one of the "most important wars in modern history"?

Seven Years' War that spread through Europe at the same time. It was the climactic event in the long Anglo-French struggle for empire.

## THE GREAT WAR FOR THE EMPIRE

The French and Indian War lasted nearly nine years, and it proceeded in three distinct phases. The first of these phases lasted from the Fort Necessity debacle in 1754 until the expansion of the war to Europe in 1756. It was primarily a local, North American conflict, which the English colonists managed largely on their own.

The British provided modest assistance during this period, but they provided it so ineptly that it had little impact on the struggle. The British fleet failed to prevent the landing of large French reinforcements in Canada; and the newly appointed commander in chief of the British army in America, General Edward Braddock, failed miserably in a major effort in the summer of 1755 to retake the crucial site at the forks of the Ohio River where Washington had lost the battle at Fort Necessity. A French and Indian ambush a few miles from the fort left Braddock dead and what remained of his forces in disarray.

The local colonial forces, meanwhile, were preoccupied with defending themselves against raids on their western settlements by the Indians of the Ohio Valley. Virtually all of the tribes (except the Iroquois) were now allied with the French, having interpreted the defeat of the Virginians at Fort Duquesne as evidence of British weakness. Even the Iroquois, who were nominally allied with the British, remained fearful of antagonizing the French. They engaged in few hostilities and launched no offensive into Canada, even though they had, under heavy English pressure, declared war on the French. By late 1755, many English settlers along the frontier had withdrawn to the east of the Allegheny Mountains to escape the hostilities.

The second phase of the struggle began in 1756, when the governments of France and England formally opened hostilities and a truly international conflict (the Seven Years' War) began. In Europe, the war was marked by a realignment within the complex system of alliances. France allied itself with its former enemy, Austria; England joined France's former ally, Prussia. The fighting now spread to the West Indies, India, and Europe itself. But the principal struggle remained the one in North America, where so far England had suffered nothing but frustration and defeat.

Beginning in 1757, William Pitt, the English secretary of state (and future prime minister), began to transform the war effort in America by bringing it for the first time fully under British control. Pitt himself began planning military strategy for the North American conflict, appointing military commanders, and issuing orders to the colonists. Military recruitment had slowed dramatically in America after the defeat of Braddock. To replenish the army, British commanders began forcibly enlisting colonists (a practice known as "impressment"). Officers also began to seize supplies and equipment from local farmers and