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1748-1754
An Uneasy Peace

THE WAR OF THE AUSTRIAN SUCCESSION AND THE
DECLINE OF FRANCO-BRITISH RELATIONS

As the eighteenth century reached its midpoint, the governments of France and Great Britain viewed each other with suspicion. For example, Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle, one of the two British secretaries of state and, after 1754, prime minister, considered the two states as inveterate rivals, if not quite inevitable enemies.[1] Historians generally treat this animosity as one of the few constants during this century of shifting alliances.[2] Indeed, British-French relations between 1688 and 1815 have been described as a "Second Hundred Years' War."[3] On the surface this comparison to the Hundred Years' War of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries seems plausible. Between the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the Battle of Waterloo, Britain and France fought seven wars; hostilities occurred in some 60 of the 127 years. Significant differences, however, existed between this period of frequent conflict and its predecessor. Although what medieval historians call the Hundred Years' War was punctuated by periods of peace, it essentially was a single war with a common cause, the irreconcilable dynastic claims of the English and French ruling houses.

The so-called Second Hundred Years' War was far more complex. Some historians argue it had an underlying cause, colonial rivalry, particularly the battle for supremacy over the balance of power in America.[4] This, however, overstates the importance of American affairs. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the English public and the British Parliament took an increasing interest in the Western Hemisphere,[5] but even at the height of the War of the Austrian Succession (in which Britain participated from 1742 to 1748) elections to the House of Commons were dominated by local issues.[6] Most Frenchmen generally had scant interest in the rich sugar-producing islands of the Caribbean, let alone the

North American mainland, which produced little of any interest to them except tobacco (and, for the better off, furs).[7] The French and British monarchs of the period usually showed a far greater interest in European affairs than in American. This was especially true during the reigns in Britain of George I (1714–27) and George II (1727–60), who were obsessed with the north German electorate of Hanover, which they also ruled. Newcastle may have believed the American balance of power could decisively affect the balance of power in Europe,[8] but in 1755 his French counterpart questioned whether colonial issues were sufficient cause for war.[9]

If not the rivalry to gain colonies, what accounts for the nearly continuous suspicion and frequent hostility between Britain and France? At times Britain feared a French threat to its system of government, as in the 1740s when France supported the restoration of the Stuart dynasty or in the 1790s when Britain feared French revolutionaries. More often, however, the friction between the two powers was based on geopolitical factors, such as rivalry in the Mediterranean or in the Baltic, a region that supplied timber and masts for the navies of both Britain and France. The most serious source of reciprocal concern was the area along France's northern border, the provinces of the southern Netherlands (today's Belgium), which were ruled until 1714 by Spain and thereafter by Austria. These provinces could form a staging area for the invasion of France as they did in both the first and the last decades of the eighteenth century. Conversely this area could provide ports to assemble a flotilla to invade the vulnerable eastern coasts of England and Scotland.[10] When the French threat to the area receded after 1815, other conflicts between France and the United Kingdom were insufficient to cause war.[11] In spite of colonial rivalry that intensified in the late nineteenth century, the two states have not fought a war for almost two centuries. Indeed, outside threats to Belgium eventually turned them into allies.

This area was key to Franco-British relations in the eighteenth century, too. When the southern Netherlands fell under Austrian control, French and British anxieties about the Low Countries receded, and Franco-British relations improved. The Habsburg dynasty of Austria was a traditional enemy of the French monarchy, but it regarded the Austrian Netherlands, isolated from its other possessions in Germany, central Europe, and Italy, as a strategic encumbrance. (The Austrians did attempt briefly to exploit the potential of the ports of the southern Netherlands, but the British prevented it.) Indeed, when France and Austria went to war in 1733 (the War of the Polish Succession), France effectively neutralized the area to avoid antagonizing the Dutch.[12]

With the southern Netherlands in the hands of such a distant power (and, furthermore, one without a navy), it threatened neither Britain nor France. It posed no obstacle when in 1716 George I and the duc d'Orléans, regent for the

young king, Louis XV of France (1710–1774, reigning from 1715), chose to become allies, chiefly to provide reciprocal support against dynastic rivals (the exiled Stuarts of Britain and, in France's case, Louis XV's uncle, Philip V of Spain). For the next fifteen years the Franco-British alliance benefited not only the rulers of Britain and France but also the peace of Europe at large. Austria, Russia, and even the relatively small north German state of Prussia had large armies, but their economies were not strong enough for them to fight a major war unaided. Britain and France with their more developed economies briefly became the joint arbiters of Europe. [13] For the dozen years after mid-1721 no major war occurred on the continent, the longest period of peace during the century. Eventually the Franco-British alliance broke down, because Britain withdrew support from France in its continuing rivalry with Austria. [14] Britain remained neutral during the War of the Polish Succession that France and Spain fought against Russia and Austria in 1733–35, but the Franco-British alliance became a dead letter. A war between the two remained unlikely, however, as long as British and French politics were dominated by their peace-loving chief ministers, Robert Walpole and Cardinal André-Hercule Fleury. France and Britain even remained at peace when in 1739 Britain went to war against France's real ally, Spain. France sent a large fleet of observation to the Caribbean the next year, but it returned to France without becoming involved in hostilities. [15] A Franco-British war still seemed inevitable, but a transformation of the European diplomatic scene postponed it.

In October 1740, Charles VI, archduke of Austria and head of the house of Habsburg, died without a male heir. France was pledged to recognize his elder daughter, Maria Theresa, as heir to his possessions in Germany, Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, Italy, and elsewhere, although as a woman she was ineligible for election to succeed him as Holy Roman Emperor. (The election, for life, was by nine rulers or electors within the empire, including George II, elector of Hanover, one of the nine electorates.) Louis XV, however, was faced with a great temptation. The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia had precluded the development of a modern, unified Holy Roman Empire (including not only today's Germany but also Habsburg possessions in what now are southwestern Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Slovenia, Belgium, and part of Croatia). Since then, however, the Habsburgs, while continuing to be elected as Holy Roman Emperors, had greatly strengthened themselves by expanding their possessions to the south and east of the empire. If France dismembered the patrimony of the Habsburgs, it would permanently disable its greatest rival.

Louis XV was too inexperienced and too anxious to rival the successes of his great-grandfather and predecessor, Louis XIV, to be able to resist the temptation. When the new king of Prussia, Frederick II, seized from Maria Theresa the

rich province of Silesia, in what today is southwestern Poland, the temptation became too much for him. Louis disregarded the advice of Fleury, his chief minister and mentor, [16] and sent armies that captured Prague in November 1741 and almost took Vienna. In response, Britain sent an army to the Austrian Netherlands to support Maria Theresa, virtually guaranteeing eventual war with France and driving Walpole from office.[17] Meanwhile, Philip V of Spain, wishing a principality in Italy for his youngest son, Philip, also went to war against Maria Theresa.

Louis XV made a number of miscalculations during his reign, but the attack on Austria probably was the worst. He drastically underestimated Maria Theresa's courage, ability, and popularity. She drew support from her own subjects and from Britain, the United Provinces of the Netherlands (Holland and its six sister provinces), and eventually the Kingdom of Sardinia (most of whose lands were on the Italian mainland). By the end of 1743, French armies had been driven from Austrian territory and back across the Rhine. Deserted by Frederick II of Prussia, Louis XV now faced attack from Austria, supported by contingents of British and Dutch troops. At the end of the year and the beginning of 1744, he made four major decisions that not only expanded the war's scope but undermined for decades to come any hope of restoring good relations with Britain. He elected to enter the war in northern Italy between Spain and the British-supported alliance of Sardinia and Austria, to attempt an invasion of England (before a formal declaration of war), to support the claims of the Stuarts to the British throne, and to invade the Austrian Netherlands. By attacking not only British vital interests but even Britain itself, he revived British fears from the days of Louis XIV that France wished to dominate Europe.

Again the French plans largely miscarried. The war in northern Italy was unsuccessful, a storm broke up the attempt to invade England, and Prince Charles Edward Stuart's 1745–46 campaign in Scotland and England was defeated, in part because of the French inability to send him support. [18] Only in the Austrian Netherlands was France successful. Fortunate to find a skilled commander, Maurice, comte de Saxe, an illegitimate son of the elector of Saxony, French armies repeatedly defeated the combined armies of Austria, Britain, and the United Provinces of the Netherlands, captured the Dutch-held border fortresses of the Austrian Netherlands, and even penetrated Dutch territory. In desperation the British and Dutch hired 30,000 troops from Empress Elizabeth of Russia, an Austrian ally. When the Dutch withdrew from the arrangement, the British negotiated with France a preliminary peace agreement at the neutral German city of Aix-la-Chapelle. The Dutch, Austrians, Sardinians, and Spaniards had to accept its terms.

France secured the agreement by promising to evacuate both the Austrian

Netherlands and the small portion of United Provinces of the Netherlands it had occupied. Conquests that would have dazzled even Louis XIV thereby were surrendered. So, too, was the great trading post of Madras in India, which had been captured from the British. In return France regained the fortress of Louisbourg on Isle Royale (Cape Breton Island), which New England militiamen had captured in 1745. In spite of the unequal exchange (unavoidable if peace were to be made), the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle largely accomplished the most important desire of France, which had not aimed at permanent conquests in the Low Countries. Its war effort instead was directed at weakening Austria's position in the balance of power and thereby indirectly improving its own. In this, France was in good part successful, even though Maria Theresa continued to rule much of central Europe and her husband, Francis, was elected Holy Roman Emperor. Prussia, which had already extricated itself from the war for a second time by a separate agreement with Austria, retained Silesia, thereby increasing its prewar population of 2.5 million by nearly half.[19] Because of the reputation of its army, Prussia achieved the great power status it sought even though Frederick ruled less than a third as many subjects as George II, king of England and elector of Hanover, a quarter as many as Maria Theresa, a fifth as many as Empress Elizabeth of Russia, or a seventh as many as Louis XV.[20] With a balance of power established between Austria and Prussia in Germany, France's role as an arbiter in Germany (which it had exercised since the Treaty of Westphalia exactly 100 years earlier) was greatly strengthened and the danger to its eastern provinces reduced. Moreover, before evacuating the Austrian Netherlands, France demolished its principal fortresses, leaving it temporarily defenseless.[21]

Austria's position in Italy also was weakened. Some of the territorial concessions in Italy that it made to gain the Sardinian alliance were kept by Sardinia. Maria Theresa also surrendered the duchy of Parma to Prince (Infante) Philip, half-brother of the new king of Spain, Ferdinand VI, and husband of Louis XV's eldest and favorite daughter, Marie-Louise-Elisabeth. Finally, the Austrian alliance with Britain was wrecked by Britain's rush to make a separate peace. Realizing Britain's limited usefulness in recovering Silesia from Prussia, Maria Theresa in 1750 appointed as her diplomatic representative in Paris Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg, who although reluctant to abandon connections with Britain was the chief advocate of improving relations with France.[22]

Besides weakening Austria, the French had other reasons to congratulate themselves. The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle weakened the restrictions imposed in 1713 upon French fortification of the great privateering port of Dunkirk, thereby restoring some of France's lost sovereignty over one of its own cities. Her allies, such as Spain and Genoa, either made minor gains or recovered their war losses.

6   *An Uneasy Peace*

Superficially France seemed even more powerful than she had been after the successful conclusion of the War of the Polish Succession thirteen years earlier.

Louis XV, however, paid dearly for his victory. The war was much bloodier than the limited conflict of the mid-1730s and cost France almost a billion *livres tournois*, which was equivalent to almost four years of the French royal income (or in contemporary purchasing power to perhaps $10 billion). [23] Thanks to heavy borrowing, the French government paid for the war but had to end its program of gradual debt reduction. Unknowingly, it began the slide that, accelerated by the even more expensive wars of 1755–63 and 1778–83, led it by 1787 to diplomatic paralysis and impending bankruptcy. Politically, too, the French government paid a price in lost prestige; the public, initially glad to see peace return, soon questioned the returning of the Austrian Netherlands and the costs of a war that brought France no direct gains. The general contempt for the peace terms was epitomized by the expression "stupid as the peace." The need for increased taxes to pay for the war also discredited the monarchy. [24] Even diplomatically the victory over Austria was expensive. In several important ways the War of the Austrian Succession weakened France's position in the balance of power.

First, the war increased Russia's importance. Empress Elizabeth renewed Russia's alliance with Austria in 1746; two years later, a sizable Russian army (subsidized by Britain) entered Germany en route to the Netherlands. This new prominence posed a threat to French interests in eastern Europe; over the next forty years, concern about Russia was the most common theme in French foreign policy, chiefly because of the nature of its alliance system. France based its security on several different, although interconnected, systems of formal and informal alliances. First, of course, were French alliances with one or more of the four other great powers: Austria, Britain, Prussia, and Russia. France, however, also depended on the support of lesser powers. Some of these were immediate neighbors who formed a buffer along its southern and eastern borders. Spain was the most important of these, but France also maintained close relations with Genoa, Geneva, the Swiss cantons, and a number of German principalities, such as the Palatinate and other small states near the Rhine. France took particular care, however, also to befriend the large but militarily backward powers of eastern Europe: Sweden, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire (which included not only today's Turkey but most of the Balkans). This eastern barrier helped protect France from Austria, Russia, or Prussia by forming a potential second front to draw troops away from the French border. (France attempted to create a similar eastern barrier during the years between the First and Second World Wars.) As the Russian threat to the Swedes, Poles, and Turks increased during the eighteenth century, French anxiety mounted. In 1748 the Russians sought, but

did not obtain, British support for an attack on Sweden.[25] Repeatedly they intervened whenever Poland, an elective monarchy, selected a new king (who served for life). In 1733 they had driven Stanislas Leszczynski, Louis XV's father-in-law, from the Polish throne to which he had recently been elected, and substituted a candidate of their own liking. In the ensuing war they defeated a small French expeditionary force sent to Danzig while they sent 12,000 troops into Bavaria in support of Austria.[26] The most common target of Russian expansionism in the eighteenth century, however, was the Ottoman Empire. In the 1730s the Turks had regained some of the territory taken earlier by Austria; the new Austro-Russian alliance posed a particular threat to them.

Unsurprisingly, French diplomats concentrated in the years immediately after 1748 on forming alliances to contain Russia. Such alliances were contracted with Sweden, Denmark, and Prussia, and were contemplated with Poland and the Ottoman Empire.[27] This policy was in harmony with a personal project of Louis XV, a project he concealed from all but a few French diplomats. In 1745 several important Polish noblemen wrote to the prince de Conti, a distant cousin of Louis and a grandson of a French-born king of Poland who had been driven from his throne in 1697. These Polish magnates feared that their current king, Augustus III, wished to make the throne hereditary, thus costing the nobility its right to elect each king. They hoped that upon Augustus's death Conti would put himself forward as a candidate for the throne in opposition to a son of Augustus.

Informed by Conti of the request, Louis XV was highly supportive. Augustus, however, was also ruler of Saxony, a medium-sized German principality on the border of Prussia, which because of its strategic position was of considerable importance in the current Franco-Austrian war. Louis, moreover, hoped Augustus would be elected Holy Roman Emperor; even after Maria Theresa's husband was elected instead, Augustus was still influential in German politics. Not only was Louis willing to pay him a subsidy, he even agreed to the marriage of his only son, the dauphin Louis-Ferdinand, to Augustus's daughter Maria Josepha.[28] Since it would be disastrous if Augustus discovered that Louis was willing to support a rival to his son for the Polish throne, the French king could not openly assist Conti. He decided, however, to work in secret among the Polish nobility to build support for Conti and so informed his diplomatic representatives in Warsaw and in Dresden, the Saxon capital. Gradually this secret network expanded to bring in others, sometimes ambassadors and sometimes subordinate embassy officials, in order to gather information about Polish or Russian affairs. Informally known as the "Secret du Roi" (the king's secret), this organization as yet posed no threat to the established French diplomatic service, because each in its own way sought to counter Russia's increased strength and influence.[29]

The growing Russian threat was not the war's only unfortunate consequence. France's neglect of Spanish sensibilities during the peace negotiations angered Louis' cousin Ferdinand VI, just as Britain's conduct had angered Maria Theresa. Furthermore the results of the peace agreement made the Family Compact (as the Franco-Spanish alliance was called) less necessary to Spain. Although the Spaniards' gains may not have been worth their long war with Britain, Sardinia, and Austria, they did aid in resolving old issues rather than, as in France's case, creating new problems. First, the peace settlement laid the basis for ending Spain's long Italian rivalry with Austria. By the 1752 Treaty of Aranjuez the two states normalized their relations and so neutralized Italy that for the next forty years it remained at peace. Moreover, the peace settlement imposed such restrictions on the British right to sell slaves and send supplies to Spain's Caribbean colonies that in October 1750 the British government surrendered its remaining rights in exchange for a cash settlement. This eliminated the problem that had led to the British-Spanish war of 1739–48. Although Spain continued to resent the British occupation of Minorca and Gibraltar and British timber cutting in central America, tensions were so reduced that Spain could now balance between Britain and France in hopes of extracting concessions. [30] France thus could no longer count on the large Spanish navy's help in case of a war with Britain.

With the Family Compact largely a dead letter, France became virtually isolated. Except for minor powers like Sweden and Denmark, its only ally was Prussia, which had betrayed France in 1742 and 1745 by making separate peace agreements with Austria and was ready to betray France again. In 1748 Frederick unsuccessfully solicited an alliance with Britain. [31] The war destroyed the freedom of movement France needed to find a more reliable ally. Closer relations with Russia were unthinkable, and an alliance with Austria could be purchased only by helping it regain Silesia and thereby undoing the major accomplishment of the war, the establishment of a balance of power in Germany. Louis-Philogène Brûlart, marquis de Puyzieulx, the moderate and able French foreign minister from 1747 to 1751, wished for better relations with Britain and was a good friend of the Earl of Albemarle, the British ambassador at the French court. [32] Any return to even the nominal alliance of the 1730s was impossible, however. The British public's Francophobia had been fanned by the French attempt to invade England, their support for the Stuarts, and their conquest of the Austrian Netherlands. Furthermore, the capture of Louisbourg intensified its desire for colonial expansion; the British public was greatly disappointed when at Aix-la-Chapelle the government surrendered the fortress. [33]

The Duke of Newcastle overestimated French power and mistakenly saw it as basically hostile to Britain; thus he centered his foreign policy on opposing

France. Newcastle failed, however, to restore the alliances with Austria and the United Provinces of the Netherlands by which he hoped to counter France, so Britain, too, remained isolated.[34] Newcastle feared the French army as much as Louis XV's ministers feared the British navy, and he believed that France planned to encircle British North America, Hanover, and even Britain itself.[35] This sterile and dangerous stalemate made it possible for a colonial skirmish to engender a new war. Although French statesmen would sometimes hope, as had Puyzieulx, for improved relations with Britain, several more wars followed. The most long-standing result of attacking Austria was seventy years of suspicion and conflict with Britain.

THE FRENCH NAVY AND ITS LEGACY OF FAILURE

In case of war with Britain, France would be heavily dependent on its navy. It no longer was the weapon it had been when Louis XIV was at the height of his power a half century earlier. In the early 1690s France had the world's most powerful navy. Louis XIV, engaged in war against a coalition of much of Europe, chose, however, to demobilize his fleet and greatly reduce naval construction in order to concentrate his limited financial resources on the French army.[36] A similar coalition against France was formed during the first years of the eighteenth century in a new war fought over whether Louis' grandson would become king of Spain; again, Louis made the understandable decision to subordinate naval power to the increasingly desperate need to counter the dangers posed by the armies of Austria, Britain, and the Netherlands.[37] Naval construction failed to keep pace with attrition, such as the blow suffered in 1707 when the French Mediterranean fleet was scuttled during an attack on Toulon. (Toulon and the Atlantic ports of Brest and Rochefort were the navy's three major bases.) Most of the ships subsequently were raised, but some ten to fourteen ships of the line (warships of 50 or more cannon, capable of fighting in a line of battle) were subtracted permanently from the navy's rolls.[38] Louis XIV died in the autumn of 1715, soon after the return of peace. By then the French navy consisted of only forty-eight ships of the line, and many of these were ready for retirement. This was fewer than half the number France had possessed twenty years earlier.[39]

During the first few years of Louis XV's reign, much of the fleet was decommissioned and not replaced because of the French government's concern with reducing the huge debts inherited from the previous reign.[40] A modest replacement program was instituted during the 1720s, as twenty-five ships of the line were launched between 1720 and 1728.[41] During the next nine years, however, only four ships of the line were launched and one was purchased,[42] as

France concentrated its financial resources on fighting Austria, which had no navy. As tension between Spain and Britain increased and then turned to war, France began a small building program, launching nine ships of the line from 1738 through 1743.[43] On the eve of war with Britain, however, the French navy possessed only thirty-eight ships of the line (with three more in construction).[44] Of these, nine were incapable of service or had to be taken out of service after one or two campaigns. (Spain began the war with about forty ships of the line and finished with about twenty.)[45] In contrast, the British navy had seventy-seven ships of the line in service by the beginning of 1740 (just after initiating hostilities with Spain); during the 1744–48 war with France and Spain, it maintained a strength of eighty to ninety ships of the line.[46] Moreover, even though a veteran naval minister, Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, comte de Maurepas, directed the French navy, its performance was unimpressive.[47]

The war opened with the attempt to invade England discussed earlier. The same storm that damaged the transports assembled at Dunkirk also saved from attack their escort of fifteen ships of the line.[48] Meanwhile in the Mediterranean a fleet of fifteen French and twelve Spanish ships of the line fought thirty-four British ships of the line (including six 50-gun ships, some of which were not in the line of battle). This indecisive battle, fought off the French port of Toulon on 22 February 1744, was embarrassing to the French navy because the Spaniards carried the brunt of the fighting.[49] Subsequently the French navy undertook only one major fleet operation, an unsuccessful attempt in 1746 to recapture Louisbourg which resulted in the loss of three of the ten participating ships of the line and the death of thousands of sailors and troops from a shipboard epidemic.[50] The same year the French fought a naval battle in the Indian Ocean and captured Madras, but the participating ships were from the French East India Company.[51] The French navy provided only token support for Prince Charles Edward Stuart and for Franco-Spanish military operations in Italy. Its major function for most of the war was escorting convoys. For the first three years of the war it generally was successful, but in 1747 the British assembled a substantial fleet in the western approaches to the British Isles, gained control of the Bay of Biscay, and intercepted two major convoys. The warships escorting those convoys sacrificed themselves to give the merchant ships a chance to escape, costing the navy another nine ships of the line.[52]

By the beginning of 1748 French commerce was at the mercy of the British navy and privateers, adding to the pressure on Louis XV to make peace. Frederick II of Prussia mocked the French plight, but the disruption of the French economy, particularly in the Atlantic port cities, was quite serious. It is unlikely, however, that this seriously affected the peace settlement. There was little possibility that France would be allowed to retain its conquests in the Low Countries,

and peace was made largely on the terms France demanded. The war, however, ended with the French navy humiliated and powerless and thousands of its sailors in English prisons.[53]

Structural reasons helped account for the French navy's failure. As during the reign of Louis XIV, the huge expenses of the French army left little money for the navy, whereas Britain, protected by its navy from invasion, did not have to maintain so large an army. By the summer of 1745 Maurepas was already complaining that the navy's credit was exhausted and it could barely pay its bills.[54] As already mentioned, the navy was badly outnumbered by the British, even with the help of the Spaniards. Moreover, it lacked heavy ships for fighting the British in fleet actions, having been built mostly to escort merchant convoys or capture enemy merchant ships; Maurepas and the French government largely had followed the advice of Lieutenant General of the Fleet René Du Guay-Trouin to refrain from building ships large enough to fight the huge 90- and 100-gun ships that usually formed part of the wartime British home and Mediterranean fleets. (During 1742 the navy demolished the *Foudroyant*, 110, while the *Royal-Louis*, 118, accidentally burned during construction.)[55]

For the British their naval victories in 1747 were of great importance. Until then the British public had been disillusioned with their navy's performance, particularly the failure of joint operations with the army.[56] Only the Louisbourg attack was an unqualified success, and it had been undertaken by *American* militia with the help of the British navy. The captures of the two groups of convoy escorts on 3 May and 14 October 1747 demonstrated French vulnerability, restored the navy's confidence, and gave the public two heroes in Vice Admiral George Anson and Rear Admiral Edward Hawke. Already famous for his circumnavigation of the world, Anson greatly influenced the young first lords of the admiralty John Russell, Duke of Bedford (serving from December 1744 to February 1748) and John Montagu, Earl of Sandwich (February 1748 to June 1751) when he served as a member of the Board of Admiralty. In 1751 Anson became first lord himself. The entire British navy now benefited from the innovations he had introduced as a fleet commander.[57] Its deficiencies in the war of 1739–48 were serious enough to stimulate reform, but not so serious as to undermine its self-confidence. Under Anson's leadership it became an even more formidable opponent.

Although the postwar French navy lacked a reformer like Anson, it did benefit from good administration. Maurepas was dismissed in April 1749 after quarreling with his colleagues in the Council of State or Higher Council (*conseil d'état* or *conseil d'en haut*), the king's chief advisory body on security matters.[58] His successor, Antoine-Louis Rouillé, proved a surprisingly able administrator, even though he had no prior experience in naval affairs.[59] Between the begin-

ning of 1749 and the end of 1754, the navy launched thirty-four ships of the line (compared with twenty-six Spanish and fifteen British) and approached its authorized strength of sixty of the line.[60] However, this program was not a threat to Britain. Only the four new 80-gun ships could challenge British 90- and 100-gun ships. (These splendid French ships seem to have been intended chiefly to stiffen convoy escorts.) More importantly, even if all its ships were put into service, the French navy would be only about half the size of the British (and it had little immediate hope of Spanish assistance). Finally, Rouillé's parallel program of replenishing the naval supplies needed by the great ports of Brest, Rochefort, and Toulon, which had made considerable progress, was virtually suspended at the end of 1752 by financial constraints.[61] During the next two years work in the dockyards slowed and the navy's contract to obtain critical naval stores from the Baltic was not renewed. At the beginning of 1755 the fleet faced severe shortages of cannon and naval supplies and was at least two years away from being ready for full mobilization.[62]

By now, Rouillé's responsibility was preventing war rather than directing any naval mobilization. Puyzieulx had to resign as foreign minister in September 1751 for reasons of health. His replacement, François-Dominique de Barberie de Saint-Contest, continued his policies, but died on 24 July 1754.[63] Rouillé replaced him, turning the naval ministry over to Jean-Baptiste de Machault d'Arnouville. As finance minister (controller general of finances) Machault had made himself detested and feared by his attempts to increase royal revenue. He had requested permission to leave this thankless job,[64] but as naval minister he soon was faced with a similar problem, the constraints on expenditures caused by the monarchy's seemingly intractable financial problems.

Meanwhile at the foreign ministry Rouillé quickly earned the reputation of being honest and peaceable but lacking in ability.[65] He had his own intractable problems to face, particularly a dispute with Britain over their competing territorial claims in North America. This dispute led to a war that France wished to avoid, a war for which its navy was unprepared.

FROM COMPETITION TO CRISIS IN NORTH AMERICA

The French colonies in North America, known collectively as New France, differed widely. Most similar to Britain's heavily populated North American colonies was Canada, whose agricultural heartland, containing also the population centers of Quebec, Trois-Rivières, and Montreal, stretched along the St. Lawrence River. Canada, however, also included a vast area to the west and south, the Upper Country (*pays d'en haut*), populated almost entirely by various