

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Honors Theses, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Honors Program

Spring 3-12-2021

A Historical Analysis of the Causes of the French and Indian War

Jake Althouse

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/honorstheses>



Part of the [European History Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), [Political Theory Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Althouse, Jake, "A Historical Analysis of the Causes of the French and Indian War" (2021). *Honors Theses, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*. 337.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/honorstheses/337>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses, University of Nebraska-Lincoln by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
University Honors Program Requirements
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

by
Jake Althouse, BA
History and Political Science
College of Arts and Sciences

March 15th, 2021

Faculty Members:
Margaret Huettl, PhD, History
Robert Schub, PhD, Political Science

Abstract

The current study attempted to answer the following research question: what were the causes of the French and Indian War between Great Britain and France in 1754? To do so, the current study researched secondary sources from a historical perspective, political theories regarding the causes of war, and primary sources from individuals involved in the build-up to conflict. Previous research by historians and political scientists have mainly attributed the causes of the French and Indian War to a security dilemma and the spiral theory of war. The current study does not support this assertion. Instead, the current study asserts that because of asymmetric information, the presence of an indivisible issue, and brinkmanship, bargaining failed and conflict began between Great Britain and France. Britain and France both took offensive measures to strengthen their positions in North America and counter their adversaries' movements prior to the start of the French and Indian War. At the same time, the presence of asymmetric information regarding the enemy's resolve and strength due to poor intelligence, an indivisible issue in the Ohio region, and the hard-line stances from politicians on both sides hindered effective negotiations to stop the escalating conflict. As a result, given these pre-existing conditions, negotiations between Britain and France were bound to fail and war between Britain and France was destined to break out in North America.

Key Words: French and Indian War, Colonial History, Political Theory, the Bargaining Theory of War, History, and Political Science

A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR

Introduction

The French and Indian War has long been overlooked by both historians and political scientists. Compared to more famous wars such as World War I or World War II, there is limited scholarship on the French and Indian War, especially in regards to the causes of the war.¹ As a result, the French and Indian War, fought between 1754 and 1763 between the empires of France and Great Britain, remains a relative mystery, despite its importance to the future of North America. However, despite the limited literature on the causes of the French and Indian War, the general consensus asserts the war is best explained by the spiral model of war and peace.² In this framework, the security dilemma leads opposing states to build up their respective security until conflict is unavoidable. Historian and political scientist Richard Smoke first put the French and Indian War in this category when he described the war as a conflict spiral with “no offensive steps made by any player at any time”.³ Political scientists Jack Levy and William Thompson later echoed Smoke’s assertion in their book *Causes of War*: “Another good example of a conflict spiral is the process leading up to the Seven Years’ War between Britain and France in North America”.⁴ Thus, previous literature has primarily attributed the causes of the French and Indian War to the security dilemma and the spiral model of war and peace.

Through an analysis of the history prior to the French and Indian War, the current study will assert that there was no security dilemma prior to conflict, as both Britain and France adopted an offensive mentality and made offensive actions. Since there was no security dilemma prior to conflict between the British and the French, the spiral model of war and peace cannot be

¹ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1978, 209.

² Levy, Jack and William Thompson. *Causes of War*. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 30.

³ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 209.

⁴ Levy, Jack and William Thompson. *Causes of War*. 30.

attributed as a cause of war. Given this departure from previous literature, the current study's findings are crucially important for understanding the history of the French and Indian War, and for potential future analyses of other colonial conflicts. Instead, the current study asserts that because of asymmetric information, the presence of an indivisible issue, and brinkmanship, bargaining failed and conflict began between Great Britain and France. Britain and France both took offensive measures to strengthen their positions in North America and counter their adversaries' movements prior to the start of the French and Indian War. At the same time, the presence of asymmetric information regarding the enemy's resolve and strength due to poor intelligence, an indivisible issue in the Ohio region, and the hard-line stances from politicians on both sides hindered effective negotiations to stop the escalating conflict. As a result, given these pre-existing conditions, negotiations between Britain and France were bound to fail and war between Britain and France was destined to break out in North America.

Sources and Methodology

The current study features three main types of sources to conduct its historical analysis of the causes of the French and Indian War. First, I used secondary sources, mainly from a historical perspective, to provide the necessary context and background information. Second, I focused on primary sources from the time period to provide insight into the individuals who were directly involved in the build-up to conflict. Finally, I selected scholarly articles that focus on political theory in order to craft an argument on why war occurred between the British and the French. Given these sources, the current study is committed to providing a combination of historical and political science scholarship in order to conduct a complete analysis of the causes of war from both perspectives. An interdisciplinary study of the French and Indian War is necessary to provide a complete analysis of the causes of the war, as all perspectives must be

considered in this process. I also acknowledge that I am writing an imperial history and choosing not to focus on the Indigenous peoples whose land the British and French would eventually fight over. Although Indigenous peoples are featured as a part of the historical background information, the central analysis of the current study is written from a European perspective with Indigenous people at the periphery. Finally, the current study has chosen the French and Indian War as its terminology for the conflict because of the focus on North America.⁵ All of the historical background information and analysis is focused on the events and actors in North America, which makes the French and Indian War the most accurate description for the current study.

Historical Background Information: Timeline

In 1752, settlers from Virginia established the first permanent British trading post in the Ohio country.⁶ This marked the first significant measuring point in the build-up to the war, as it marked the first direct territorial dispute between the British and the French in the contentious Ohio country. In response to the British advances, the governor of New France, Marquis Duquesne, ordered French troops into the region to remove the trading post and construct a series of forts on the region's key rivers: the Ohio River and LeBoeuf Creek which led to Lake Erie. To the British, this was a clear escalation, as the construction of four forts was a much larger investment than a trading post. To confirm the French intentions, the British sent a small force of colonial militia led by George Washington to scout the forts under a diplomatic mission. In December of 1753, George Washington described in his journal the significant investment of the French in the Ohio country, writing, "according to the best judgement I could form, there are an hundred exclusive of officers, of which there are many. I also gave orders to the people that were

⁵ Baugh, Daniel. *The Global Seven Years War*. London, Pearson Education Limited, 2011, 2.

⁶ Anderson, Fred. *The War That Made America*. 27.

with me, to take an exact account of the canoes that were hauled up to convey their forces down in the spring, which they did, and told 50 of birch bark and 170 of pine.”⁷ Clearly, the French had decided to make a significant investment in the Ohio country through the construction of forts and deployment of troops into the region.

After George Washington and other British scouts confirmed the construction of the French forts and deployment of French troops, Britain countered the French advance by sending more colonial militia into the region. These troops, led once again by George Washington, were instructed to remove the French from the region and construct a British fort at the forks of the Ohio river.⁸ While on his way to establish the fort, Washington and his troops ran into a small group of French forces at Jumonville’s Glen, and quickly defeated them on May 28th, 1754, marking the first unofficial conflict of the war. This small conflict had major diplomatic repercussions, as within the conflict French ambassador Joseph Coulon de Jumonville was killed. In the eyes of Washington and the British, the French had not publicly revealed themselves to be on a diplomatic mission, as their secrecy and strength made them appear like a war party. In his personal journal, Washington said “that was an escort worthy of a prince serving an ambassador, instead of which it was only a mere French petty officer; spies are not needed by an ambassador, whose dignity is always sacred. If they came with good intentions, why stay for two days five miles away from us without imparting the summons to me, or revealing anything relating to his embassy.”⁹ To the British, the French had initiated the attack, and had not revealed the diplomatic nature of their force at any point prior to the conflict. The French claimed that they had announced their diplomatic mission, which Washington and the British said was an absolute

⁷ Washington, George. “Encounter with the French.” 52-53.

⁸ Anderson, Fred. *The War That Made America*. 47.

⁹ Washington, George. “Skirmish at Jumonville’s Glen, 1754.” *The Seven Years’ War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 56.

falsehood.¹⁰ Thus, the French perceived Washington's actions as offensive and as the initiator, while Washington and the British viewed the French's actions as offensive, making France the initiator. This difference would have major diplomatic repercussions in future bargaining.

After winning the skirmish, Washington retreated to the trading post and constructed Fort Necessity. By doing so, Washington had fully removed French troops from the region in a clear offensive manner. However, the French quickly returned with a larger force with cannon, and overwhelmed Washington's forces at the fort in another clear offensive action.¹¹ The most critical aspect of the conflict at Fort Necessity was not the actual battle, but the surrender document. In a letter published in the *Maryland Gazette*, a British officer with George Washington described the complexity of the surrender document. First, the actual surrender document was poorly written on a wet piece of paper with little light for the British to fully read the document.¹² As a result, the British had little idea of what they were signing within the actual document. Within the document, the French asserted that the British were the aggressor at Jumonville's Glen, and had been responsible for the assassination of a French diplomat. From the British perspective this was simply false, as described in the newspaper: "every officer then present, is willing to declare, there was no such word as assassination mentioned; the terms expressed to us were 'the death of Jumonville'. If it had been mentioned; we could have got it altered".¹³ Clearly, there was a sharp difference in opinion over who was the aggressor in the conflict. The French also included in the surrender document a mandate that the British could not settle in the Ohio country. Once again, the British officer denied this claim in the newspaper, stating, "whereby we obliged ourselves not to attempt an establishment beyond the mountains:

¹⁰ Washington, George. "Skirmish at Jumonville's Glen, 1754." 56.

¹¹ Anderson, Fred. *The War That Made America*. 52.

¹² Maryland Gazette. "Surrender at Fort Necessity, 1754." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 58.

¹³ Maryland Gazette. "Surrender at Fort Necessity, 1754." 58.

this was translated to us: ‘not to attempt buildings or improvements, on the lands of his most Christian majesty.’ This we never intended; but denied that he had any lands there, and therefore thought it needless to dispute that point.”¹⁴ Once again, this shows that the French believed the British were conducting offensive actions by encroaching on French territory, while the British blatantly disagreed with this claim. Since these first initial conflicts were relatively small in nature and occurred mainly between militia forces from the respective colonies neither France nor Britain declared war after news of the conflicts reached Europe. Instead, there was only diplomatic uproar from the French over the death of their diplomat, while the British maintained that they had done nothing wrong. However, it was quite clear to both sides that the conflict was escalating and on the path to war.

Britain was determined to respond to the French victories in the Ohio region after the fallout from the surrender at Fort Necessity. To do so, they sent four regular British regiments led by Major General Edward Braddock to North America. In addition, the British made no effort to conceal these aggressive actions from the French. After finding out about the British troop movements, France immediately responded by deploying nearly eighty companies of infantry.¹⁵ The French response clearly surpassed Britain's initial troop movement, as they sent six regiments of French regulars compared to Britain's four regiments. Once Britain found out about the French counter-response, they ordered the Royal Navy to intercept the French fleet and stop it from reaching North America. On June 8th, 1755, the Royal Navy captured the *Alcide* and the *Lys*, who were carrying ten French companies.¹⁶ Clearly, both sides were intent on defending their colonial empires in North America.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Anderson, Fred. *The War That Made America*. 60.

¹⁶ Ibid, 60.

After reaching North America, Braddock and his forces quickly marched to capture Fort Duquesne, the French fort that had been established on the original site of the first British settlement in the Ohio region. However, a mere six miles from the fort, the British forces were ambushed by French troops and their Native American allies.¹⁷ With the element of surprise and the aid of Native American allies, the French quickly defeated General Braddock and his forces, and forced the British back to the thirteen colonies. To make matters worse in regards to the prospects of war, Braddock was killed in the fighting, as detailed by one of his officers: “General Braddock who was in the heat of the action the whole time, was greatly exposed; he had 4 horses shot under him and shot through several parts his clothes; at the latter end of the affair an unlucky shot hit him in the body which occasioned his death in 3 or 4 days afterwards.”¹⁸ After this major battle between French and British regular forces, and the death of a British Major General, war was seemingly inevitable. For many historians, this battle marked the first official battle of the French and Indian War, as British and French regulars were now in open conflict in North America. As historian Fred Anderson put it, “Thus began.. the most widespread war British North America had ever known”.¹⁹

Historical Background Information: Prestige and Economic Motivations

Before delving into an analysis of the political theory behind the causes of the French and Indian War, it is important to understand the historical background information behind the timeline of events. The individual colonies, the geography of the region, the characteristics of the French and British empires, and Native Americans played a crucial role in the build-up to conflict. To begin, both the British and the French saw their colonies as possessions of grave importance for their respective empires. European states viewed colonies across the world as a

¹⁷ British Officer. “Disaster on the Monongahela, 1755.” 60.

¹⁸ Ibid, 62.

¹⁹ Anderson, Fred. *The War That Made America*. 73.

measure of power and prestige, while also providing valuable economic opportunities.²⁰

According to historian William Thompson, these economic opportunities provided incentives to risk conflict. Thompson notes that “the pressure for commercial and colonial gain went beyond a governmental shift toward a foreign policy of naval and imperial mercantilism, especially in Britain. The Seven Years’ War was about not only the wastes of Canada, but also its furs, the fish of Newfoundland, the sugar of the West Indies, and the trade of West Africa and India.”²¹ Simply put, European states were more powerful politically and economically if they had more colonies. As a result, European nations began a massive rush to found, secure, and defend colonies across the globe. The importance of colonies played a key role in the build-up to the French and Indian War, as both the British and French recognized the political, and especially economic, importance of their respective colonies in North America. To conclude, the economic importance and political prestige of colonies played an important role in the looming conflict between Great Britain and France by increasing the stakes of the conflict and deepening the resolve of both countries in bargaining.

Historical Background Information: Geography

Geography shaped the development of the British and French colonies, specifically in regards to economic development and territorial expansion, and ultimately influenced the causes of the French and Indian War. France’s colonies were concentrated in present-day Canada and the Great Lakes region, as well as in present-day Louisiana and on the Mississippi River, while Britain’s colonies were clustered along the Atlantic seaboard from present-day Maine to Georgia. Thus, the French colonies surrounded the British colonies and prevented their westward expansion. From the perspective of French officials, such as the governor of New France Barrin

²⁰ Cave, Alred. *The French and Indian War*. Westport, Greenwood Press, 2004, 6.

²¹ Thompson, William. *Great Power Rivalries*. Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1999, 265.

de la Galissonière, this made the French colonies crucially important to prevent British hegemony in North America. Galissonière observed, “all that precedes sufficiently demonstrates that it is of the utmost importance and of absolute necessity not to omit any means, nor spare any expense to secure Canada, inasmuch as that is the only way to wrest America from the ambition of the English.”²² The British recognized this French advantage prior to conflict and acknowledged France’s strategic advantage of geographically surrounding the British and having inroads further into the continent.²³ As bargaining began between Britain and France, these elements of imperial geography would have a massive impact on the status of the Ohio country as an indivisible issue in the present and the future.

The other major geographical aspect of the French and Indian War emerged in the land between the British and French colonies: the Ohio country. For both the British and the French, the Ohio country was crucially important. Both states viewed the region as the key to colonizing the modern-day states of Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois, controlling the fur trade of the region, and linking the waterways of the Great Lakes region to the Mississippi River and thus the Gulf of Mexico. As a result, the Ohio country became known as the region that “held the key to the entire continent.”²⁴ The French did not view the Ohio country as a place for settlement in the near future, as their sole goal was to keep this region out of British hands and maintain the fastest line of communication between their colonies in Canada and Louisiana.²⁵ The British were much more focused on expanding their colonies on the Atlantic seaboard by pushing new settlers into the Ohio country. The French knew this and used it to recruit Native Americans to their side by warning the Native Americans of the dangers of British settlements

²² Barren De La Galissonière, Roland-Michel. “A French Colonial Official Sizes Up the British, 1751.” *The Seven Years’ War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 33-35.

²³ Shannon, Timothy. *The Seven Years’ War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston, Bedford, 2014, 8.

²⁴ Shannon, Timothy. *The Seven Years’ War in North America*, 9 and 27-28.

²⁵ Anderson, Fred. *The War That Made America*. New York, Penguin Group, 2005, 25.

while emphasizing the importance of French trade. For instance, the governor of New France Barrin de la Galissonnière said to the Shawnee, Delaware, and Haudenosaunee tribes in a letter wooing them to the French side, “I know the English only inspire you with evil sentiments, and, besides, intend through their establishments on the Beautiful [Ohio] River.”²⁶ The Ohio country was critical for westward settlement for the British, and critical for the French to contain the British and maintain communication between Louisiana and Canada. Eventually, the importance of the Ohio country played a divisive role in bargaining between the French and the British prior to the outbreak of conflict. As historian Max Savelle observed, “the Ohio valley was the point of greatest tension, and if that problem could be solved other disputes might be taken up at leisure.”²⁷ The geography of the Ohio country played a critical role in the build-up to the French and Indian War, as the geography of the region made the Ohio country an indivisible issue and led to a breakdown in bargaining between the French and the British.

Historical Background Information: The Colonies

The French colonies in North America prior to the French and Indian War were concentrated in present-day Canada and Louisiana. The colonies in Canada, called New France, were the heart of the French colonial empire in North America as a result of their larger population and greater economic importance. New France had about 55,000 settlers spread out across Canada and the Great Lakes region with its capital in Quebec, providing a relatively weak economic base.²⁸ Despite--or, perhaps, because of--its small population, New France cultivated strong relationships with Native Americans through marriages, trade, and missionaries.²⁹ Given this relatively small presence in North America, French administrators in New France realized

²⁶ Céloron, Pierre-Joseph. “Onontio in the Ohio Country, 1749.” *The Seven Years’ War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 29-32.

²⁷ Savelle, Max. “Diplomatic Preliminaries of the Seven Years’ War in America.” *The Canadian Historical Review* 20 no. 1, (1939): 26.

²⁸ Cave, Alfred. *The French and Indian War*, 6.

²⁹ Shannon, Timothy. *The Seven Years’ War in North America*, 7.

the importance of keeping the British settlers in check. In 1749, the governor of New France, Barrin de la Galissonière prepared to defend the small French colony against the growing British colonies, as he firmly believed in the importance of preventing new British westward settlements to protect the future of New France.³⁰ In addition to expanding trade with Native Americans and recruiting new settlers to the colony, the French prioritized halting British expansion into the Ohio country prior to the French and Indian War.

From the British perspective, the French efforts to hem in their colonies and recruit Native Americans were direct attempts to halt the progress and development of their colonies along the Atlantic seaboard. For the British, westward expansion was crucial to continue the economic development and population growth of their colonies. France's colonies clearly prevented this long-term goal. British colonial official Archibald Kennedy summed up the British perspective in a 1754 report on colonial affairs, writing that "the French are now drawing a line among the borders of our settlements in every province, and building forts to secure the most convenient passes on the lakes, that form the communication; by which they will effectually cut off all intercourse and traffic, between us and the Indians inhabiting the inland countries."³¹ French efforts to secure their own colonial borders hampered British expansion west and represented a direct threat to British interests. At the same time, the British had concerns regarding France's strong relationship with Native American nations. The French favored trade with the Native Americans, rather than pushing for permanent French settlements. When the French and their Native allies attacked rogue British settlements on the frontier, their objective was to destroy British settlements to protect their trading interests.³² For the British,

³⁰ Savelle, Max. "Diplomatic Preliminaries of the Seven Years' War in America." 20.

³¹ Kennedy, Archibald. "A British Colonial Official Sizes Up the French, 1754." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 36-37.

³² Trent, William. "The Fur Trade Turns Violent." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 45.

these French actions threatened their westward expansion by impeding future British settlements. The British viewed the French colonies as restricting the economic and population growth of their own colonies, and as a danger due to their recruitment of Native American allies and encouragement of Native American attacks along the British frontier.

In contrast to the French colonies, the British colonies were larger, more profitable, and of greater economic importance to Great Britain. The thirteen British colonies along the Atlantic seaboard had about 1,600,000 settlers and were one of Great Britain's most important trading partners.³³ Unlike the French, the British were tremendously focused on settlements and growing their colonies' population. As a result, the British looked to expand westward with a focus on trade instead of settlement. When asked by the Delaware, Shawnee, and Mingo nations about the British's plan for the Ohio country, British General Edward Braddock affirmed the British desire for expansion and new settlements in spite of the current settlements of Native Americans. He stated "that the English should inhabit and inherit the land.... On which General Braddock said that no savage should inherit the land."³⁴ The British were much more focused on founding new settlements, while the French were more focused on expanding trade. As a result, the two sides were set up to have conflict over the Ohio country, as Britain and France clearly had different preferences for the future of the region. In the long run, this contributed to a breakdown in bargaining between the two states. In addition, the French were aware of the British desire to colonize the Ohio country, and used it to recruit Native Americans to their side, as shown by a speech made by French officer Pierre-Joseph Céloron to various tribes in 1749: "Undoubtedly you are not aware of the establishments which they propose making thereon, which tend nothing

³³ Cave, Alfred. *The French and Indian War*, 39.

³⁴ Shingas. "A Delaware Chief Explains Why the Indians Went to War, 1755." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 63-64.

short of your total ruin.”³⁵ The British, the French, and the many Native American nations were thus all aware of the purpose of the British colonies: expansion and continued economic growth through westward settlement.

From the French perspective, the growing economic strength and population size of the British colonies directly threatened the future growth and expansion of their own colonies. In 1751, the former governor of New France Barrin de la Galissonière wrote a memoir that provided key insight into the French views of the British colonies. For one, Galissonière acknowledged the strength of the British colonies, which he accurately believed was increasingly daily, and that the colonies were to the British “as dear to [the British] as they are precious.”³⁶ Thus, it is clear that the French recognized the importance of the British colonies to Great Britain. At the same time, the French knew the impact of the British colonies on the future of their own colonies. If New France was to expand territorially and economically, it had to halt the rise of their rivals to the south. Galissonière continued to express his concerns about the expanding British colonies, “[w]hich, if means be not found to prevent it, will soon absorb not only all the Colonies located in the neighboring islands of the Tropic, but even all those of the Continent of America.”³⁷ Clearly, Galissonière was afraid that the rise of the British colonies would destroy the French colonial empire in North America, as France would no longer be able to compete with the growing and expanding British colonies. For this reason, Galissonière asserted that the French must check the British. However, despite his acknowledgement of the British strength, Galissonière believed in France’s ability and the unique geographic position of New France to stop the rise of the British colonies.³⁸ As time went on, this perspective led the

³⁵ Céloron, Pierre-Joseph. “Onontio in the Ohio Country, 1749” 30. .

³⁶ Barren De La Galissonière, Roland-Michel. “A French Colonial Official Sizes Up the British, 1751.” 33.

³⁷ Ibid, 33.

³⁸ Ibid, 33.

French to develop an aggressive and highly resolved mentality in bargaining prior to the outbreak of conflict.

Historical Background Information: Native Americans

Besides the British and the French empires, the third major actor in the build-up to the French and Indian War were Native Americans. Although they were not directly involved in bargaining or negotiations, Native Americans played a crucial role in the events prior to the war. The two major groups involved with the French and the British were the Haudenosaunee in the Great Lakes and New England region, and the Shawnee, Delaware and parts of the Haudenosaunee in the Ohio country. The Haudenosaunee were a powerful Indigenous confederacy made up of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca tribes. Powerful traders, they had established neutrality with the French and the British to continue trading with both sides.³⁹ The Ohio nations included the Delaware, Shawnee, and parts of the Haudenosaunee, and had significantly less contact with the French and the British due to the vastness of the Ohio country and lack of European settlers in the region.⁴⁰ Despite cultural and familial kinship, the Haudenosaunee, Delaware, and Shawnee remained independent nations who respected each others' sovereignty and made independent decisions for the good of their people. However, both groups certainly shared a similar goal: keeping European settlers out of their lands while increasing trade with both the British and the French. For many Native Americans, trade with the British and French was a profitable exercise that allowed them access to European goods in exchange for furs. Due to this trade, the Haudenosaunee, Delaware, and others had built up significant power and influence in the region, and were viewed as important allies to both the British and the French. Historian Timothy Shannon echoes this rising agency and power of the

³⁹ Shannon, Timothy. *The Seven Years' War in North America*, 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

various tribes of the region, as he wrote, “by the early eighteenth century, such Indians were forging new political alliances by taking other native groups into their orbit and using their numbers to augment their own power.”⁴¹ This newfound power made them a crucial player in the build-up to the French and Indian War, as both the British and the French had to factor in the power of Indigenous tribes when calculating their own strength and resolve in bargaining.

Since the arrival of European colonizers, the Haudenosaunee, Delaware, and Shawnee had always used trade with furs to gain access to European goods, such as weapons. As time went on, this trade became essential for the Native Americans, and a necessary requirement for good relations with the French and British. In a speech to French officials, a Haudenosaunee chief echoed this necessity, as he told the French officials that they had “expelled the English from this territory, and to this we heartily agree; but you ought to bring with you traders to furnish us with what we need.”⁴² As the French and British colonies grew, settlers began to venture further and further westward into lands inhabited by Native Americans. For native nations, this expansion was simply unacceptable, and led them to pursue various agreements and treaties with colonial governors to prevent the expansion of European settlers.⁴³ However, as the population of the colonies grew, more and more settlers began to move westward in search of new lands and new economic opportunities. Eventually, it became clear that the colonial authorities had little power or resolve to restrain the expansion of settlers into Native American lands. Thus, the westward expansion of settlers into Native American lands quickly became a dire problem for Native Americans, and they began to threaten conflict against the settlers. These sentiments were expressed by British officials such as Richard Peters, who, when discussing the

⁴¹ Ibid, 9-10.

⁴² Céloron, Pierre-Joseph. “Onontio in the Ohio Country, 1749”, 32.

⁴³ Peters, Richard. “Tensions between Squatters and Indians, 1750.” *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 41.

issue of squatters on the frontier, stated, “That if we did not in this journey entirely remove these people, it would not be in the power of the government to prevent an Indian war.”⁴⁴ The Native Americans simply had little choice but to threaten armed conflict, as the colonial governments failed to prevent the westward expansion of settlers.

As a result of the British focus on permanent settlements and poor relationships with the various tribes of the region, the French had a much easier time recruiting Native American allies. For example, when meeting with the Delaware tribe to discuss the issue of British settlements on Native American lands, British General Edward Braddock insisted that the British had the right to take full control of these lands and refused any help to drive out the French or enemy tribes.⁴⁵ This policy was simply unacceptable to the Delaware, and when they heard this they immediately abandoned the British. While describing the situation, a member of the Delaware tribe wrote “on which Shingas with the other chiefs went away from General Braddock to the people to whom they communicated what had passed between them and Braddock, at which they were very much enraged and a party of them went immediately upon it and joined the French.”⁴⁶ For the British, the inability to recruit Native American allies coupled with the French’s ability to win over Native Americans led to serious concerns amidst colonial administrators. British colonial officer Archibald Kennedy echoed this sentiment in an article analyzing the French colonies in 1754, writing, “if we intend to convince them [the Indians] that we are really in earnest, and that they should fight for us, we must fight along with them, and always to have some of our people to head their parties; the French seldom fail of this method.”⁴⁷ While visiting a French fort in the Ohio country, George Washington described a similar feeling in his personal

⁴⁴ Peters, Richard. “Tensions between Squatters and Indians, 1750.” 43.

⁴⁵ Shingas. “A Delaware Chief Explains Why the Indians Went to War, 1755.” 64.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Kennedy, Archibald. “A British Colonial Official Sizes Up the French, 1754.” 38.

journal, as he described watching the French try to recruit Native American allies away from the British as the following: “I can’t say that ever in my life I suffered so much anxiety as I did in this affair.”⁴⁸ To conclude, the British had serious worries about France’s ability to recruit Native Americans to the French cause, which had a key impact on their perspective of French military strength, especially in the Ohio country, in bargaining prior to the outbreak of conflict.

As conflict escalated between the British and the French, the Native Americans continued to play an important role in the situation as key actors in the escalating offensive actions and brinkmanship game from both states. Native Americans, particularly those allied to the French, began to escalate their attacks along the frontier and against trading posts run by the British. French-allied Native Americans attacked British-allied tribes, and targeted those with especially close relations to the British. In his personal journal, British trader William Trent illustrated this violence when he described the murder of an English-backed chief, as he wrote, “one of them, the old Pianguisha king, called by the English Old Britain, who, for his attached to the English, they boiled and eat him all up.”⁴⁹ In the Battle of Monongahela, the final conflict before war was officially declared, Native American tactics gave the French the decisive victory needed to make war inevitable: “These Indians from their irregular method of fighting by running from one place to another obliged us to wheel from right to left, to desert the guns and then hastily to return and cover them.”⁵⁰ To conclude, Native Americans played a crucial role in the build-up to the French and Indian War by becoming a major source of offensive actions in the brinkmanship game between the French and the British.

⁴⁸ Washington, George. “Encounter with the French.” *The Seven Years’ War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 53.

⁴⁹ Trent, William. “The Fur Trade Turns Violent.” 45.

⁵⁰ British Officer. “Disaster on the Monongahela, 1755.” *The Seven Years’ War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 61.

Political Theory

There are several theories within political science that can be used, in combination with an analysis of the historical background information, to determine the causes of the French and Indian War. As discussed earlier, previous literature has focused primarily on the security dilemma and the spiral method of war and peace to analyze the causes of the French and Indian War. The current study disagrees with this prior assessment of the causes of war. Instead, the current study believes that the causes of the French and Indian War are best viewed through the bargaining theory of war. In this model, asymmetric information with an incentive to misrepresent combined with the presence of an indivisible issue led to a breakdown in bargaining between the French and the British. With the addition of offensive brinkmanship actions by both sides, colonial conflict was inevitable in North America.

Indivisible Issue: The Ohio Country

The bargaining theory of war was established by James Fearon in his 1995 paper *Rationalist Explanations for War*. In this theory, two states bargain between each other in an attempt to avoid war. Various factors, such as the enemy's strength, personal resolve, future power, and the costs of war, impact whether war is declared or if a peaceful agreement is reached.⁵¹ Within the framework of the bargaining theory of war, an indivisible issue can cause a breakdown in bargaining and lead to conflict because neither actor can agree to a compromise over the issue. If there is an indivisible issue in bargaining, a successful bargaining is highly unlikely.⁵² In terms of bargaining, this makes indivisible issues incredibly important, as they make successful bargaining very difficult to achieve since both sides are extremely reluctant to compromise on the issue. In the process of negotiating for a settlement, Britain and France were

⁵¹ Fearon, James. "Rationalist Explanations for War" *International Organization* 49 no.3 (Summer, 1995): 379-414.

⁵² Hassner, Ron. "To Have and To Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility" *Security Studies* 12 no.4 (2003): 33.

faced with an indivisible issue in bargaining: the Ohio region. The current study asserts that the Ohio country's status as an indivisible issue, combined with the presence of asymmetric information, led to a breakdown in bargaining and eventually war between the French and the British in North America.

For an issue to be indivisible, it has to meet three basic criteria, according to Ron Hassner in *To Have and To Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility*. The first is integrity: "The parties must hold that the issue cannot be parceled out or subdivided without significantly diminishing its subjective value."⁵³ To both sides, the Ohio region could not be divided without significantly diminishing its value. For the French, their policy had always been that the region was in the French sphere of interest and that the British had no right to settle there. As historian Richard Smoke explains, "to the French it seemed that the English colonists were beginning to trespass on an area that had long been under French influence."⁵⁴ The French also viewed the region as critical to their interests in expanding their colonial empire in North America, as they believed that the development of New France and Louisiana depended on maintaining the link between the two colonies. If this link was severed through British control of the Ohio country, the French would lose their fastest line of communication between New France and Louisiana, and their trade with Native Americans would drastically suffer. Historian William Nester detailed this French perspective in his novel on the war, as he wrote that "practically, they [the French] could not accept a plan which granted Britain the forks of the Ohio and allowed its traders access to the Ohio River country, thus putting at risk communications between Canada and Louisiana."⁵⁵ French administrators and diplomats were

⁵³ Hassner, Ron. "To Have and To Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility" 13.

⁵⁴ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 197.

⁵⁵ Nester, William. *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607-1755*. Westport, Praeger, 2000, 218.

well aware of this, as seen through the policies of Barrin de la Galissonière, the governor of New France. In 1749, the governor warned “[t]hat breach must be closed and the British forced to remain behind the mountains, because, once located on the upper waters either of the St. Lawrence system or the Mississippi, Great Britain would be able easily to break the line of communication between Canada and Louisiana, and to strike with disastrous results at either one.”⁵⁶ Even if the region was split in half, the French were worried that an influx of British settlers would eventually pour into the French side and render it essentially British. Thus, France did not view the region as divisible, as they feared that any split would result in full British control of the territory and the severing of the crucial link between their colonies.

On the other hand, the British recognized that without the Ohio region, their colonies would never be able to expand westward. Historian Richard Smoke detailed this British perspective and dilemma, as he wrote that “the British found it absurd that New France and Louisiana, sparsely settled even in their own territories and with comparatively poor and slow-growing economies, should try to deny the Ohio region to the energetic, richer, and more ambitious, and vastly more numerous English colonists.”⁵⁷ If the Ohio region was divided, the British felt that their westward settlement would be contained, as the French would simply draw a different line in the sand to prevent British settlements. To the British, they felt that they had the right to control and settle all of the Ohio country, and that full control of the territory was the only way to guarantee the necessary expansion of their ever-growing colonies along the Atlantic seaboard. Thus, both the British and the French agreed on the integrity of the Ohio region and its lessened value if divided.

⁵⁶ Savelle, Max. “Diplomatic Preliminaries of the Seven Years’ War in America.” 20.

⁵⁷ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 198.

The second criteria for an issue to be labeled as indivisible is the boundaries of the territory. According to Hassner, “the parties must mean the same thing when they refer to the issue they are bargaining over.”⁵⁸ Neither side had exactly the same boundaries for the Ohio region, due to the reality of the time period and the lack of accurate and shared maps. However, both Britain and France clearly agreed on what general region was being contested, even if the boundaries were not concrete and clear on a shared map. According to historian Walter Borneman, the French and the British agreed that “between this line of French forts and the crest of the Appalachians 300 to 400 miles to the east, however, was a tremendous expanse of territory drained principally by the Ohio River and its tributaries.”⁵⁹ For both sides, this land was clearly the disputed territory known as the Ohio country, even if there were no exact maps to confirm the exact boundaries.

For the final criteria for an issue to be indivisible, Hassner says the following: “The parties must believe that the issue cannot be substituted for or exchanged for something of equal value.”⁶⁰ This means that neither side could be bought off by side-payments or exchanges of other land for the Ohio country. As mentioned before, both sides realized the importance of the Ohio country and had no intention of dividing or giving up the area. For the French, the region was simply too important for trade and to maintain the link between New France and Louisiana. For the British, the region was simply too important for the future of westward expansion from their colonies along the Atlantic seaboard. As a result, the Ohio country simply could not be exchanged for anything else, even if it meant risking war. Historian Geoffrey Blainey summarized this mentality best in his book *The Causes of War*: “for the English and French governments the colonies were the first priority and peace was second. And if there was conflict

⁵⁸ Hassner, Ron. “To Have and To Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility” 13.

⁵⁹ Borneman, Walter. *The French and Indian War: Deciding the Fate of North America*. New York, Harpers Collins, 2006, 12.

⁶⁰ Hassner, Ron. “To Have and To Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility” 13-14.

between the two priorities, the colonies won and peace lost.”⁶¹ Simply put, no compromise on the Ohio country was possible, which meant that there would be a breakdown in bargaining that could lead to conflict. Even as the conflict escalated, neither side changed their mentality in bargaining. For example, historian William Nester described one British proposal as “essentially an ultimatum to the French to abandon their historic and economic stake throughout the Ohio River valley or else be prepared for war. This the French were unprepared to do. The gap between the two positions appeared unbridgeable. As one French minister put it, ‘War alone can end our differences...If they are determined at London to kindle a war, all we can say to forestall that evil will not prevent it.’”⁶² To conclude, the Ohio country was an indivisible issue and a cause of the French and Indian War, as it clearly contributed to a breakdown in bargaining between the French and the British.

Indivisible Issue: Impact on Future Bargaining

Prior to the outbreak of conflict, the Ohio country’s status as an indivisible issue created further problems in bargaining when analyzing the impact of the region on future bargaining between France and Britain. The basic logic of future bargaining is that any bargain made today will have an impact on bargains in the future. In short, if the Ohio country was divided, it would have a direct impact on the probability of winning a war in the future, which would in turn have a direct impact on future bargaining. Political scientists Thomas Chadeaux and James Fearon’s findings on the impact of indivisible issues on future bargaining provide the core basis for the analysis behind this section and provide strong evidence for the Ohio country’s status as an indivisible issue when viewed through the lens of future bargaining. Essentially, if a bargain is reached on the indivisible issue, then that bargain would have an impact on future bargaining

⁶¹ Blainey, Geoffrey. *The Causes of War*. New York, The Free Press, 1973, 134.

⁶² Nester, William. *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607-1755*. 218-219.

between the French and the British. In some situations, such as the sharing of territory, this can help lead to peace by removing rapid shifts in relative power between two states in the present and in the future. As described by Chadeaux, “by sharing territory – a latent source of power – more or less equally among relevant players, this system avoided rapid shifts in relative power, and equally important, potential future shifts in relative power.”⁶³ At first glance, this may support the idea that an equal division of the Ohio country would be the best mechanism to achieve peace between the French and the British in the short term. However, when analyzing the impact of such a division, it is equally important to take into account the impact of the distribution of benefits on future power.⁶⁴ From this angle, the Ohio country appears to be even more indivisible, as future bargaining would be dramatically impacted by any division. For example, the division of territory, such as the Ohio country, has a direct impact on the probability of winning a war in the future, as detailed by Chadeaux who wrote that “intuitively, this means that issues that affect utility (e.g. territory) also affect the probability of winning a war (a territory can be used for a larger population and hence army, or for a larger production base).”⁶⁵ To summarize, any division of the Ohio country would have a dramatic impact on future bargaining between the French and the British.

When viewing the impact of any division of the Ohio country on future bargaining, it is clear that the Ohio country becomes an even more strategic issue for the French, which makes them more resistant to any division of the territory. If the Ohio country was divided into British and French sections, the British would be able to rapidly grow and fortify their section of the Ohio country because of their larger population size and more accessible resources, while the French would have little ability to match this investment in their section of the Ohio country. The

⁶³ Chadeaux, Thomas. “Bargaining over power: when do shifts in power lead to war?” *International Theory* 3 no. 2 (2011): 238.

⁶⁴ Chadeaux, Thomas. “Bargaining over power: when do shifts in power lead to war?” 241.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

British would then be able to demand more in future bargaining from the French. Chadeaux summarizes this logic when he writes, “because territory is not just directly valuable but can also be used to generate military resources, a deal struck today may affect the terms of deals struck in the future. In particular, conceding territory to another state may allow it to grow stronger militarily and so to demand yet more in the future.”⁶⁶ Clearly, the French would want to avoid any scenario where the British would be able to demand more in the future, and with greater strength in resources and the Ohio country. Simply put, any division of the Ohio country would increase Britain’s military strength, which would have a corresponding impact on how the British would act in future bargaining according to the theory. Fearon illustrates this point when he writes, “this result stems from the fact that with discrete issue resolutions any concession yields a discontinuous change in a state’s future military prospects, which in turn determines how the state fares in future bargaining.”⁶⁷ Simply put, the French would not approve of an increase of Britain’s military strength in North America. As a result, the Ohio country becomes even more of an indivisible issue for the French when you analyze the impact of the region on future bargaining between the British and the French.

Given the Ohio country’s status as a geographical indivisible issue, there are even more implications for its impact on future bargaining. James Fearon specifically discusses this issue in his paper “Bargaining Over Objects That Influence Future Bargaining Power.” In general, Fearon asserts that contested territory can be an indivisible issue when viewed through the lens of future bargaining: “the set of issue resolutions over which the players are bargaining might be effectively discrete rather than continuous. For various technological or political reasons,

⁶⁶ Fearon, James. “Bargaining Over Objects That Influence Future Bargaining Power” (University of Chicago Department of Political Science, 1996), 1.

⁶⁷ Fearon, James. “Bargaining Over Objects That Influence Future Bargaining Power” 14.

contested stretches of territory might be effectively indivisible.”⁶⁸ The Ohio country was a discrete issue in the build-up to the French and Indian War, as it was the central region where conflict was brewing prior to the outbreak of hostilities. As described before, there are plenty of political reasons for why the region was indivisible, which thus makes it indivisible in future bargaining according to Fearon. Fearon even takes it a step further, as he brings in the element of military advantages created by geography: “discontinuities might arise for ‘strategic’ territory, meaning territory that is positioned or shaped in such a way as to confer large military advantages on whoever controls it.”⁶⁹ Given the Ohio region’s position between France’s colonies of New France and Louisiana and directly westward of Britain’s colonies along the Atlantic seaboard, it is clear that the region would confer large military advantages for whoever controls it. As a result, whoever controlled the region would have a massive advantage in future bargaining. Since the French knew that any division would lead to British dominance of the region and thus military advantages, they could simply not afford to agree to any division of the Ohio country. As a result, the Ohio country is clearly an indivisible issue, and even more important when viewed through the lens of future bargaining.

In the short-term, the Ohio country was an indivisible issue for both the British and the French. The French could not allow the British into the Ohio country, for fear of losing the vital connection between their colonies in Louisiana and New France, as well as their lucrative trading connections with Native Americans in the region. For the British, French control of all or any section of the Ohio region would prevent the simplest means of westward expansion for their rapidly growing colonies on the Atlantic seaboard. From the British perspective, this was simply non-negotiable, as the continued economic development and population growth of their colonies

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 16.

depended on westward expansion. Finally, when considering future bargaining, whoever gained the better share would have the upper hand in future bargaining situations. For the French, the impact of future bargaining was even more dramatic, as any division of the Ohio country would likely lead to future British dominance of the region. As a result, the Ohio country was clearly an indivisible issue that led to a breakdown in bargaining prior to conflict. Prominent historians, such as William Thompson and William Nester, have firmly agreed with this assertion regarding the region: “hostilities began over control of the Ohio River basin in 1754”⁷⁰ and “the upper Ohio region...claimed by the Six Nations by conquest, the British colonies by charter, the French crown by discovery, and various American Indian tribes by occupancy. It was the inability of those concerned to resolve their conflicting claims that provoked the French and Indian War.”⁷¹ Based on all of this evidence, the Ohio region’s status as an indivisible issue was a clear cause of the French and Indian War.

Bargaining Theory of War: Asymmetric Information

Within the bargaining theory of war, James Fearon established that asymmetric information, information that is secret or unknown to one actor in the bargaining framework, with an incentive to misrepresent can be a cause of war.⁷² Essentially, one state has private information about their strength. If their opponent believes that state is weak due to private information, but they are actually strong, war is likely. States have an incentive to misrepresent information because private information “might affect the outcome of war and consequently their relative bargaining power”.⁷³ The presence of this asymmetric information creates uncertainty, over matters such as resolve or military strength, in bargaining between the two states. Thus,

⁷⁰ Thompson, William. *Great Power Rivalries*. Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1999, 266.

⁷¹ Nester, William. *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607-1755*. 29-30.

⁷² Fearon, James. “Rationalist Explanations for War” 390.

⁷³ Levy, Jack and William Thompson. *Causes of War*. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 66.

asymmetric information with an incentive to misrepresent can cause a breakdown in bargaining, and lead to war, when no peaceful settlement can be reached between the two states due to the presence of this uncertainty.

In the 18th century, good intelligence and the ability to transmit that information quickly were non-existent. As a result, the buildup to the French and Indian War was filled with asymmetric information, which prevented the French and the British from even coming close to a successful and peaceful bargain. To begin, Britain had asymmetric information about their strength, as the French had little knowledge about the sheer quantity of men, supplies, and resources that Britain could pull from their colonies.⁷⁴ France knew that the British colonies had more settlers and resources than New France, but they certainly did not fully comprehend the sheer amount of power Britain could extract from its colonies. If the French had known this, they would have likely proposed a reasonable bargain to avoid the costs of war. On the flip side, the French had asymmetric information about their strength as well, as the British failed to realize truly how little resources, manpower, and economic strength New France had.⁷⁵ Instead of proposing a bargain that France would likely accept, Britain bargained like New France was a strong power and offered unrealistic offers that France could never accept. Theoretically, if Britain thought that France was strong, they should have offered France a better offer that France would have likely accepted. However, this did not happen because of the inexperience and poor decision-making of the British diplomats. In addition, if Britain had known about the true weakness of New France, they could have offered a much more feasible offer that France would have likely accepted. Once again, because of their inexperienced diplomatic corps, Britain instead acted as if France would be unwilling to truly negotiate because of their strength. The

⁷⁴ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 229.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 230.

British position was further complicated because despite the fact that New France was relatively weak, France was significantly stronger in the Ohio country, as the French had more troops, resources, and forts in the area compared to the British.⁷⁶ This element made the overall situation even more complicated and added another layer of asymmetric information, as there was a clear difference in France's potential strength overall versus their immediate strength at the time. As a result, even though the French knew about their own weakness in New France, the French refused to accept an agreement that ceded the Ohio country to the British because of their superiority in the territory at the time of negotiations. Clearly, the asymmetric information present regarding strength and resolve complicated bargaining between the French and the British prior to the French and Indian War.

In the build-up to the French and Indian War, the frontier skirmishes between French and British forces did little to resolve the asymmetric information regarding the enemy's strength and resolve. In general, the officers in both armies were badly informed about their opponent's capabilities: little was known about the enemy's proposed actions, troop size, intentions, and resolve.⁷⁷ In the Indigenous-controlled landscape of North America, good information was simply hard to find. Specifically in the Ohio country, there was an incredibly limited colonial presence throughout the region even when compared to the rest of North America. Thus, there was no status quo colonial division in the region, which created a scramble for uncolonized land in a series of inherent offensive actions. Neither the French nor the British government in Europe was well-informed to make crucial decisions, as there were simply relatively few sources of information.⁷⁸ Both Britain and France made little effort to solve instances of asymmetric information, as described by historian Richard Smoke when he wrote, "neither in Paris nor in

⁷⁶ Anderson, Fred. *The War That Made America*. 47.

⁷⁷ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 231.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 232.

London did policy-makers make an effort to bring lower-ranking individuals familiar with the Ohio region back to the capital for consultation.”⁷⁹ Britain and France had no incentives to reveal any asymmetric information about their uncertainties in North America, as it would severely weaken their bargaining power in negotiations. If France revealed that New France had little resources, manpower, and economic strength, Britain would offer a significantly less appealing offer to the French. If the British had revealed their uncertainty about France’s resolve and strength, it would have emboldened the French to demand more concessions in bargaining. As a result, both the British and the French remained uncertain over the other’s strength and resolve in the build-up to the outbreak of the French and Indian War.

The presence of asymmetric information with an incentive to misrepresent can lead to a breakdown in bargaining, which in turn can lead to the outbreak of war. In terms of the actual bargaining, a summary of the negotiations will be provided later in the current study. To summarize, the rampant prevalence of asymmetric information for all actors must be emphasized, as described by historian Timothy Shannon when he wrote, “in all the sources in this chapter, key figures involved in the outbreak of the Seven Years’ War - British, French, and Indian - struggle to act on incomplete information.”⁸⁰ The French and the British were both unaware of the other’s resolve, military strength, and resources. Even the Native Americans were relatively unsure about what colonial power they should side with in the face of asymmetric information.”⁸¹ As a result, neither side had a clear image of the other’s objectives. Historian Timothy Shannon brilliantly described this dilemma when he wrote, “whether making split-second decisions on the battlefield or conceiving strategies after deliberate consideration,

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Shannon, Timothy. *The Seven Years’ War in North America: A Brief History with Documents.*, 51.

⁸¹ Ibid.

none of these actors was able to comprehend fully the motives or objectives of the others.”⁸² The inability to comprehend the other side’s motives or objectives dramatically impacted bargaining, as both the British and French struggled to find a peaceful bargain without knowledge of these two critical aspects. To conclude, when the French and the British attempted to achieve a peaceful bargain to stop the escalating conflict, the presence of asymmetric information with an incentive to misrepresent created uncertainty over the other’s resolve, strength, and objectives, which prevented any real chance at a successful and peaceful bargain.

Breakdown in Bargaining

In addition to the presence of asymmetric information and an indivisible issue in the Ohio country, the realities of 18th century diplomacy also played an important role in the breakdown in bargaining that led to the outbreak of the French and Indian War. To begin, Britain and France were both ruled by monarchs who faced tremendous political pressure to be successful rulers of their nation.⁸³ In Britain, this pressure came from members of Parliament, as members of Parliament could check and hinder King George II if they deemed him unsuccessful. In France, this political pressure came mostly from French nobles, as these nobles could directly threaten the reign of King Louis XV if they disagreed with his policies and decision-making. Success was measured in various ways, such as the size of one’s colonial empire, military success, and relative status compared to one’s rivals. Given their geographic proximity and history, this put Great Britain and France in direct competition with one another. For the French King Louis XV, this led to the adoption of an aggressive mentality to appear strong and powerful. A French official summarized this perspective when he wrote in his journal that ‘his Majesty eagerly wishes for peace... but if he is forced to make war he will fear neither the expense nor the

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Baugh, Daniel. *The Global Seven Years War*, 86.

danger”.⁸⁴ This mentality had a direct impact on the foreign policy of the British, as it forced them to match the French resolve or else appear weak. In addition, most British diplomats believed that France wanted another war, which led them to be even more aggressive in bargaining. Historian Fred Anderson echoes this belief when describing the letters between British diplomats, as he wrote, “he [British diplomat Thomas Pellam Holles] believed that Louis XV and his ministers would not hesitate to start another war with Great Britain if they thought they could gain by it.”⁸⁵ As a result, because of the impact of having a monarchical system of government, both Britain and France acted aggressively in bargaining prior to the French and Indian War, which helped lead to a breakdown in bargaining between the two states.

In North America, the posture of colonial leaders in both the British and French colonies also contributed to the breakdown in bargaining and outbreak of conflict. Both French and British colonial officials were heavily biased towards the war, as they saw a potential victory as a mechanism to increase their own personal wealth and power. Specifically, Governor Duquesne of New France, and Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, who sent George Washington’s forces to scout the French forts that sparked the first conflicts, had personal interests in the Ohio country that led them to advocate for conflict. Duquesne would benefit from an expansion of trade in the region, as he received a portion of taxes as governor, while Dinwiddie owned a part of the Virginia company, the company that established the first British trading post in the Ohio region.⁸⁶ As a result, both colonial governors pushed for war in their reports back to Europe. Both simply saw the opportunity to expand their personal wealth, as in their opinion, a victory for their side in war would lead to a massive increase in profits. Historian Richard Smoke echoes this assertion in his analysis on the causes of the war, as he wrote that “the real importance of the

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Anderson, Fred. *Crucible of War*. New York, Alfred Knope, 2000, 33.

⁸⁶ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 232-235.

Ohio region and the significance of events therein were undoubtedly exaggerated in the reports on which higher-level policy-makers partially based their decisions.”⁸⁷ The mentality and actions of British and French colonial leaders in North America helped lead to a breakdown in bargaining by encouraging war in their reports back to Europe.

Besides the problems of biased government officials and aggressive monarchs, both Britain and France had issues with their diplomatic corps. To begin, both sides had key diplomats suddenly die in the early stages of negotiations in 1754. In London, Prime Minister Henry Pelham, a crucial member of the long-standing Whig government died in March, while in Paris, Foreign Minister François Dominique de Barberie de Saint Contest died in July.⁸⁸ These deaths in the French and British governments led each side to underestimate their opponent. Historian Richard Smoke echoed this assertion in his analysis of the causes of the war, as he wrote that “during 1754 policy-makers in both capitals saw the opposing regime as being disorganized and more than usually engulfed in intragovernmental politics.”⁸⁹ As a result of this mentality, both sides offered aggressive and unrealistic offers in an attempt to take advantage of the supposed weakened enemy. Neither the British nor the French had experienced diplomats who desired peace to replace these key figures in bargaining, which led to aggressive offers and unrealistic proposals that contributed to the breakdown in bargaining.

Within their own diplomatic corps, both countries had further problems that contributed to a breakdown in bargaining. In France, foreign policy and diplomacy under Louis XV was generally viewed as relatively ineffective: “French decision-making in this period, however, was a maze of intrigue, in which secret continental diplomacy by some officials, unknown to others, was also involved. The effect was to complicate and cloud all issues. With no first-rate statesman

⁸⁷ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 233.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

in French councils at this time, it is not surprising that the labyrinthine decision-making process lumbered into an escalation sequence abroad.”⁹⁰ Since the objectives of France’s foreign policy were unclear and there were no first-rate diplomats in the French foreign ministry, the chances of a peaceful settlement were drastically lowered. In Britain, many diplomats favored a more aggressive approach instead of a peaceful settlement: “Although decision-making in London was more rationalized, there was a war party that had a powerful and direct effect on policy.”⁹¹ Since this war party had a powerful influence on foreign policy, it led to a more aggressive mentality from the British in bargaining, and eventually unrealistic offers to the French. In addition, most British diplomats believed that France wanted another war, which led them to be even more aggressive in bargaining: “[the British] believed that Louis XV and his ministers would not hesitate to start another war with Great Britain if they thought they could gain by it.”⁹² Once again, this aggressive mentality created the conditions for unrealistic bargains that France could simply not accept, as war was simply more attractive than giving up all of the Ohio country. All in all, the nature of French and British government officials and diplomats heavily contributed to the breakdown in negotiations that led to the French and Indian War.

In terms of the actual negotiations, the bargains presented by both the British and the French had little chance of a peaceful settlement. Regardless of who was involved, the lack of actual diplomacy was glaring: “No matter who was involved, the diplomats spent most of their time either endlessly repeating their respective positions or indulging in equally endless rounds of parties.”⁹³ Instead of actually trying to find a solution to the conflict, both sides seemed content to retain their positions and refuse to compromise. As a result, both sides quickly

⁹⁰ Ibid, 234.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Anderson, Fred. *Crucible of War*. 33.

⁹³ Nester, William. *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607-1755*, 179.

developed the mentality that a compromise was never possible, which undoubtedly increased the chances of war in North America. Historian William Netser, when describing the issues in bargaining between the French and the British, wrote that “after the first year of meetings it was obvious to both sides they would remain deadlocked because their respective demands were irreconcilable.”⁹⁴ Clearly, the unwillingness to compromise from both the French and the British helped to contribute to a breakdown in bargaining.

Despite this, there were some attempts at trying to find a peaceful settlement to the territorial disputes in North America. However, as described by French diplomat Antoine Louis Rouilleé in letters to other French diplomats, most of the British offers were simply unrealistic from the French point of view. To begin, the British demand for a neutralization of the Ohio country, as well as access to the Great Lakes, was impossible: “The British demand for the neutralization of Ohio and the use of the Wabash as the western boundary of the neutral zone, he insisted, would jeopardize both those lines of communication between Louisiana and Canada and could never be accepted. As for the navigation of the lakes, one might as well demand the cession of Canada entire, since these lakes lay in the very heart of that province.”⁹⁵ France could simply not afford to lose this vital link between Louisiana and New France. In addition, this agreement would have massive implications for the future, as the French recognized that such an agreement would put the British right on their doorstep in North America. According to historian Max Sevelle, this bargain would put France in an impossible position in the future, as “for France to accede to the British proposals would place England in a position in time of war to seize almost without effort both Canada and Louisiana.”⁹⁶ For the French, there were simply three key issues that they could not compromise on in bargaining with the British: the British

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Savelle, Max. “Diplomatic Preliminaries of the Seven Years’ War in America.” 29-30.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 30.

claims to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, the British claims for access to the Bay of Fundy between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and, most importantly, the British demands for a neutral zone in the Ohio country. None of these claims by the British were deemed as acceptable to the French, as showcased by the writings of Rouillé: “if the British were not willing to modify their demands on those three points, Rouillé considered it useless to negotiate further.”⁹⁷ However, because of their lack of experience, aggressive nature, and desire to showcase strength, the British refused to retract these claims. As a result, because of the continued bad bargains from the British and lack of desire to compromise from the French, a breakdown in bargaining was inevitable.

Asymmetric information and the presence of the Ohio country as an indivisible issue also had an impact on the bargains proposed by the British and the French. The presence of asymmetric information with an incentive to misrepresent sparked an aggressive mentality from both sides in an attempt to appear strong: “The English belligerents demanded what the French moderates could not concede, and the French hard-liners forced responses that the English moderates could not accept. Each side maneuvered for positions of strength that could not be abandoned. Having achieved strength, each side had to use it.”⁹⁸ As a result, both sides offered bad bargains that the other side could not accept, partly because the diplomats involved had no idea what a good bargain would be. Next, the Ohio country’s status as an indivisible issue left each side with little room to compromise. Since France’s territorial claims to the region fundamentally contrasted with Britain’s territorial claims, and vice versa, neither side had the ability for compromise. Historian Max Savelle echoes this assertion in his analysis of the negotiations between the French and the British, as he wrote that “the claims of the two countries

⁹⁷ Ibid, 31.

⁹⁸ Nester, William. *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607-1755*, 210.

were fundamentally opposite of each other, and apparently impossible of conciliation. This became apparent to both sides by the end of 1751, and the history of the commission from that time on is a history of dalliance and futile jockeying for position.”⁹⁹ Instead of working to find a compromise, both sides simply maintained their positions and refused to negotiate. This led to continued futile bargaining with little chance of a peaceful settlement. By the end of the process, it was clear that attempts at bargaining were hindered by asymmetric information and the Ohio country’s status as an indivisible issue, as both issues made bargaining ineffective. Savelle sums up the failure in bargaining excellently in his analysis, as he wrote that “Great Britain and France were now formally at war, after a long series of more or less sincere but uniformly ineffective attempts to avoid it by peaceful means.”¹⁰⁰ To conclude, the combination of asymmetric information, an indivisible issue in the Ohio country, unrealistic bargains, inexperienced and narrow-minded diplomats, and biased government officials led to a breakdown in bargaining between the French and the British, and the outbreak of the French and Indian War in North America.

Brinkmanship: Offensive Actions by Britain and France

In the build-up to the French and Indian War, both Britain and France engaged in offensive actions in an attempt to illustrate their power and resolve to the other. However, this game of brinkmanship failed to reveal private information, and instead amplified the impact of asymmetric information and the indivisible issue in bargaining. The brinkmanship game between Britain and France was dominated by perceived offensive actions by both states. Essentially, brinkmanship is when two states engage in a risk-taking competition to test the other’s resolve and showcase their own resolve. Political scientist Robert Powell describes brinkmanship as

⁹⁹ Savelle, Max. “Diplomatic Preliminaries of the Seven Years’ War in America.” 24.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 35.

essentially a game between states, as he wrote that “a brinkmanship crisis is modeled as a game of sequential bargaining in which each state is uncertain of its adversary's resolve.”¹⁰¹ When both sides have asymmetric information, which was the case in the build-up to the French and Indian War, the dynamic of bargaining remains the same. However, issues in bargaining are amplified by the asymmetric information, as both sides have greater incentive to showcase their resolve and strength to the other. In support of this point, Powell writes that “two-sided incomplete information is a more natural setting and allows for a richer bargaining dynamic.”¹⁰² Within the game of brinkmanship, there are two main possible outcomes. First, one state could back down after being convinced of the other side’s strength and resolve, and a peaceful bargain could be reached. This could occur even if the state with greater resolve backs down. Second, neither state could be convinced by the other side’s strength and resolve, and the risk-taking could continue to escalate until war is imminent. The presence of asymmetric information does not impact either of these two scenarios: “an increase in an adversary’s resolve may make a state more, not less, likely to escalate. Moreover, the state with the greatest resolve may not prevail. Both findings continue to hold with two-sided incomplete information.”¹⁰³ To summarize, brinkmanship explains one mechanism in which states attempt to deal with asymmetric information while highlighting the double-edged sword of those efforts, as brinkmanship makes the payoff to fighting more attractive.

Brinkmanship Prior to the French and Indian War

Prior to the outbreak of the French and Indian War, brinkmanship between the British and the French was dominated by offensive actions from both sides. These actions were both

¹⁰¹ Powell, Robert. “Nuclear Brinkmanship with Two-Sided Incomplete Information.” *The American Political Science Review* 82 no.1, (1988): 155.

¹⁰² Powell, Robert. “Nuclear Brinkmanship with Two-Sided Incomplete Information.”: 155.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

intentionally offensive and perceived to be offensive. Essentially, both the French and the British made intentional offensive actions prior to the outbreak of war. At the same time, each side claimed that their own actions were defensive, while perceiving the other's actions as offensive. These perceptions created the conditions for brinkmanship to dominate the years prior to the war. Given the historical rivalry and long-standing territorial disputes between Britain and France, these perceptions were only amplified. This assertion is backed by political scientist Robert Jervis, who wrote that "a state that is predisposed to see either a specific other state as an adversary, or others in general as a menace, will react more strongly and more quickly than a state that see its environment as benign."¹⁰⁴ By itself, brinkmanship is unlikely to cause enough issues to fully escalate a competition in risk-taking to an all-out war. Certainly, this is possible in some cases. However, in the years prior to the outbreak of the French and Indian War, the game of brinkmanship between the British and the French did not resolve the issues of asymmetric information or the indivisible issue of the Ohio country. Instead, brinkmanship added more fuel to the growing fire without resolving any of the issues of asymmetric information or the indivisible issue of the Ohio country that was preventing a successful and peaceful bargain between the French and the British.

The Impact of Mobilizations

Brinkmanship created the conditions for asymmetric information and an indivisible issue to lead to conflict by making war more attractive through a series of troop mobilizations. In this scenario, mobilizations are a clear form of brinkmanship utilized by both the British and the French. As described by political scientist Branslav Slantchev, mobilizations increase the incentives states have to use force: "military moves, such as arms buildups, troop mobilizations, and deployments to the potential zone of operations, can alter incentives in a crisis by changing

¹⁰⁴ Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma" *World Politics* 30 no.2 (1978): 175.

one's expected payoff from the use of force.”¹⁰⁵ Essentially, states have a higher incentive to use force, and a greater chance of success, when their forces are already mobilized and ready for action. As a result, mobilizations not only increase the incentives to use force, but increase the probability of winning: “mobilization does influence the probability of winning and, through it, the expected utility of war.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, the primary purpose of mobilization is not to incur costs, but instead to increase your chances of winning the conflict. If a state is unprepared for conflict, then that state simply has a lower chance of winning a war than if it is prepared for conflict. Slantchev sums up this point excellently in his paper regarding mobilizations: “one can hardly wage war without preparing for it, and the primary role of mobilization is not to incur costs but rather to prepare for fighting by increasing the chances of victory.”¹⁰⁷ Mobilization not only increases your chances of winning the war, but also has an element of tying hands. In a tying hands situation, one side is signaling to the other their resolve by signaling a commitment to a certain action or future action. By mobilizing troops, states are essentially tying their hands by signaling their readiness for war. Essentially, the mobilization increases the prospects of war by increasing the chances one side wins the war, which is a hands-tying effect as described by Slantchev: “but improving one’s prospects in fighting increases the value of war relative to peace and can therefore have a hands-tying effect.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, it is clear that mobilization in brinkmanship can increase the chances of war by making conflict more attractive to the mobilized side and through a hands-tying effect.

In the build-up to the French and Indian War, both the British and the French underwent a mobilization sequence that increased the chances of conflict. Both sides deployed colonial

¹⁰⁵ Slantchev, Branislav. “Military Coercion in Interstate Crises” *The American Political Science Review* 99 no.4 (2005): 533.

¹⁰⁶ Slantchev, Branislav. “Military Coercion in Interstate Crises” 533.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 534.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

forces, built new forts and eventually deployed troops from Europe to North America, as described in the historical background information. Each step increased the level of conflict, as more and better troops were moved each time. The key aspect of this brinkmanship is that both sides were intentionally committing offensive actions while perceiving the other side's actions as offensive, and especially in regards to the Ohio country. Since the Ohio region was disputed territory, every action within the territory was seen as an offensive action by both sides. Neither side had a claim to the region originally, as the land had always been traditionally controlled by several different Native American tribes. Because neither Britain nor France originally controlled the territory, both sides viewed any movement by their adversary into the Ohio region as territorial expansion and a change in the status quo. When Britain first built the trading post at the forks of the Ohio river, the French felt that they encroached on France's sphere of influence and acted in an offensive manner. By the same token, when the French sent troops to remove the British from their trading post and fort, the British viewed this as an offensive action. At the same time, both sides knew that their own actions were offensive and intentional. It is worth mentioning that although the building of forts is traditionally seen as a defensive action, especially in regards to sinking costs and tying hands, in this situation the forts were a definite offensive action. When the French and the British built forts in the Ohio region, they were constructing forts in disputed territory that neither side had complete control over. As a result, the building of forts expanded each side's ability to project power into new territory. Thus, the building of forts were clearly perceived as offensive actions by both sides. The construction of forts was also a form of troop mobilization and deployment because they were viewed as projections of power and literally housed the troops. Thus, any new fort increased the probability of winning and the expected utility of war. In short, the construction of forts was seen by the

enemy as an offensive action, despite the fact that building forts was traditionally viewed as a defensive action by both the British and the French in the past. To conclude, the brinkmanship game between the French and British in the years prior to the French and Indian War was filled with intentional offensive actions that were perceived as offensive by the other side, and eventually created the conditions for a breakdown in bargaining.

Finally, it is important to explain why brinkmanship failed to reveal private information regarding the resolve and strength of both Britain and France. This is the original goal of brinkmanship, as if the private information is revealed, then the chances of a peaceful settlement in bargaining dramatically increases. However, brinkmanship did not work prior to the French and Indian War for several reasons. First, the realities of the 18th century meant there was relatively slow information transmission from the colonies to the decision-makers in Europe. As a result, there were still significant sources of asymmetric information, and no one in Europe ever fully comprehended the events occurring in North America. Second, as described earlier, the relatively poor equality of diplomats on both sides generally ignored the signs of credibility and resolve from both sides. Instead of working to find a peaceful solution, the diplomats continued to repeat the same offers and refused to compromise despite the offensive actions of the brinkmanship game occurring in North America. Finally, brinkmanship was unable to fully deal with the indivisible issue of the Ohio country. Given the significance of the region to both sides, it is unlikely that even successful signaling through brinkmanship would have solved this issue. To conclude, the failure to properly signal by the British and the French through brinkmanship helped create the conditions for conflict to begin in the French and Indian War.

Counter-Arguments: Security Dilemma and the Spiral Theory of War

The main counter-argument to the argument presented in the current study is detailed by Richard Smoke in his book *War: Controlling Escalation*. Smoke asserts that the causes of the French and Indian War can be best explained through the spiral theory of war in the framework of a security dilemma. Essentially, his core thesis argued that a security dilemma was present, and that “no offensive steps by any player were made at any time.”¹⁰⁹ The following paragraphs will discuss his argument presented in *War: Controlling Escalation*, a rebuttal to his argument, and several counterfactuals to the current study.

To begin, it is important to describe the security dilemma and spiral theory of war before a discussion of Smoke’s argument. As described by political scientist Robert Jervis, the core of the security dilemma is concentrated on defensive actions by both sides, with uncertainty regarding the other side’s motives and intentions: “the means by which a state tries to increase its security decreases the security of others” and that “one state's gain in security often inadvertently threatens others.”¹¹⁰ In this scenario, when states value security about all other factors, such as Britain and France prior to the French and Indian War, both states are more sensitive to smaller threats while demanding a higher degree of security.¹¹¹ Next, it is important to note the importance of repeated play, especially in historical rivalries such as Britain and France. If one state is predisposed to view the other state as an enemy, it makes their own reactions stronger according to Jervis: “a state that is predisposed to see either a specific state other state as an adversary, or others in general as a menace, will react more strongly and more quickly than a state that see its environment as benign.”¹¹² As this escalation cycle develops, it translates into

¹⁰⁹ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 209.

¹¹⁰ Jervis, Robert. “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma” *World Politics* 30 no.2 (1978): 169-170.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 174.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 175.

the spiral theory of war, as both sides continue to escalate until war is unavoidable due to the pressure to match and exceed the other side's escalation in order to protect yourself. Thus, the security dilemma creates the conditions for the spiral theory of war.

Smoke's central argument rests on the assertion that the security dilemma created a spiral theory of war prior to the French and Indian War with "no offensive steps by any player" at any point.¹¹³ The presence of asymmetric information, the presence of an indivisible issue, and the brinkmanship between Britain and France are not mentioned by Smoke. Instead, the focus is purely on the escalation sequence. Smoke wrote that "the immediate cause was the outbreak of violence in North America and the sequence of escalations that followed."¹¹⁴ As the escalation sequence began, Smoke asserts that both sides hardened their desires to signal their resolve and strength to the other side: "as escalatory steps were taken on each side, for several reasons officials in London and Paris increasingly identified their major national interests with those of their proxies, and their motivation hardened."¹¹⁵ In most situations, this would lead to successful signaling where one side would recognize the strength and resolve of their enemy and attempt to find a peaceful settlement to the conflict. However, Smoke asserts that this simply did not happen, as both sides did not recognize the signaling of the other and continued to escalate instead of finding peace. To this point, Smoke wrote that "the result was that the actions each side took to demonstrate its own resolve did not have a demonstrative effect. Instead they progressively narrowed the other side's expectations about likely futures and transformed its perception of a limited adversary into an implacable enemy."¹¹⁶ Smoke asserts that this cycle of escalations continued until war was unavoidable in North America, unless one side gave up their

¹¹³ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 209.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 197.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 211.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 235.

core objectives since “by this time the direct military consequences of each step were outweighing the symbolic meaning and tilting the in-theater advantage so decisively that thereafter policy-makers could not afford to hold back their responses unless they were ready to abandon their absolute minimum objective.”¹¹⁷ To conclude, Smoke attributes the causes of the French and Indian War to the security dilemma and spiral theory of war.

Rebuttal to Smoke’s Argument

The current study disagrees with Smoke’s assertions on the basis that there was no genuine security dilemma between Great Britain and France, which eliminates the spiral theory of war as a potential explanation for war. In “The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis”, Shiping Tang lays out the central qualifications for a situation to be labeled a security dilemma. First, Tang asserts that a security dilemma can only exist between two defensive realist states, with a “lack of malign intentions on both sides” as the crucial aspect, as a “security dilemma is unintentional in origin: a genuine security dilemma can exist only between two defensive realist states (that is, states that merely want security without intending to threaten the other).”¹¹⁸ As a result, if one actor is clearly threatening the other actor in an offensive manner, there is no security dilemma. Tang asserts this later in his paper, writing that “when one or two states are intentionally threatening each other, there can be no real security dilemma between them.”¹¹⁹ As will be shown, there are countless examples of intentional offensive actions by both Britain and France in the build-up to the French and Indian War. Even if the situation has all other aspects of the security dilemma, the sheer presence of malign intentions and aggressive actions prevent the situation from being a security dilemma, which “leaves a lack of malign intentions as the most critical ingredient for identifying whether a situation is a genuine security dilemma. When one or

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 236.

¹¹⁸ Tang, Shiping. “The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis” *Security Studies*, 18 no.3 (2009): 594-595.

¹¹⁹ Tang, Shiping. “The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis” *Security Studies*, 18 no.3 (2009): 604.

two sides in a situation is malign (that is, intentionally threatening), it is not a genuine security dilemma even if it has all other aspects.”¹²⁰ If this element is ignored, Tang asserts that any analysis of the situation as a security dilemma is flawed and incorrect.

There are countless examples of intentional offensive actions by both the British and the French that, according to Tang’s central assertions, nullify Smoke’s central argument that war began because of the security dilemma and escalation sequence. The central key is not that both sides perceived the other’s actions to be purely offensive and threatening, but that the actions taken by both sides were actually offensive actions. As described earlier, the mobilization of troops, the construction of forts, and the deployment of troops to disputed territories all marked intentional offensive actions prior to the French and Indian War. Both sides launched attacks against each other on the frontier, under the premise of removing troops from their claimed territory. When the British planned these attacks, they were well aware of the offensive implications of their actions. This British mentality is detailed by historian Walter Borneman, who wrote that “there was no declaration of war, and so the British claimed, apparently with straight faces, that these movements were simply designed to expel the French from lands that legitimately belonged to England.”¹²¹ In addition, the French realized these plans for British attacks and discovered the documents outlining the specific actions, meaning that the French were well aware of the offensive nature of the British actions: “the French found not only detailed plans for the attacks against Fort Niagara and Fort Saint Frédéric, but also extensive plans to surprise New France and ‘invade it at a time when, on the faith of the most respectable treaties of peace, it should be safe from any insult.’” When these documents reached Paris, they were a diplomatic bombshell.”¹²² As a result, it was clear that both sides were well-aware of the

¹²⁰ Ibid, 598.

¹²¹ Borneman, Walter. *The French and Indian War: Deciding the Fate of North America*. 42.

¹²² Ibid, 56.

other side's offensive actions, and still made their own intentional offensive actions. From a larger perspective, both sides were convinced that the other had long-term offensive intentions to take over all of North America. This perspective is illustrated through an analysis of the letters between French diplomats by historian Walter Borneman, as he wrote that “the French were equally convinced that it was the English who were plotting to seize the continent solely for their own purposes.”¹²³ Thus, it is clear that the build-up to the French and Indian War was filled with intentional offensive actions, which nullifies the argument of a security dilemma and spiral theory of war by Richard Smoke.

Within his own book, Smoke even acknowledges these offensive actions by both the British and the French, as he wrote that “it was primarily because both the British and the French both saw themselves as protecting interests that were already theirs that they could both believe that they were acting defensively. It then followed logically that the other party must be acting offensively” and that “each side perceived the other's moves as offensive and compellent”.¹²⁴ Despite acknowledging that both sides perceived the other's actions as offensive, Smoke still asserts there is a security dilemma present. However, given the analysis from Shiping Tang, this is clearly not the case. Brinkmanship better explains the situation prior to the French and Indian War, as without a security dilemma there is no reasonable explanation for why war occurred under the spiral theory of war. The spiral theory of war also fails to mention asymmetric information about resolve or strength, as well as the presence of an indivisible issue in the Ohio country. There is also no mention of the reality of 18th century diplomacy and the inexperienced diplomats who continuously offered infeasible offers in negotiations. In support of the current study, these diplomats also believed that the other side was the aggressor, as seen through the

¹²³ Ibid, 28.

¹²⁴ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 208 and 235.

French diplomatic corp's reaction to George Washington's encounter with French forces in the Ohio country. As described by historian William Nester, "Washington's signature on a surrender document naming him Jumonville's murderer was a brilliant propaganda coup for the French. The French printed and distributed the document throughout Europe. The British were clearly the aggressors, trumpeted the French."¹²⁵ Finally, the spiral theory of war fails to acknowledge the importance of colonial empires to the French and the British. For both sides, the colonies were incredibly important measures of power, prestige, and economic strength, and were seen as important enough to fight over. Historian Geoffrey Blainey echoes this perspective in his analysis of the war, as he wrote that "for the English and French governments the colonies were the first priority and peace was second. And if there was conflict between the two priorities, the colonies won and peace lost."¹²⁶ Neither side simply stumbled into an escalatory sequence and ended up fighting because of it. Both the British and the French were fully aware of the stakes of the rising conflict. Despite this, both states escalated their actions in North America in order to increase their chances of winning this crucial fight for the future of their colonial empires.

Additional Counter-Arguments

Two additional counter-arguments or critiques of the current argument could focus on the indivisible issue of the Ohio region and the costs of war. Obviously, war is costly for all parties involved. As a result, in many situations, war is simply not worth the massive costs of engaging in a conflict with another state. However, for both the British and the French, these costs were well worth it to protect and expand their colonial empires. As mentioned earlier, the British and the French favored their colonies over peace, as their colonial empires were simply too crucial for their economic power and status in Europe.¹²⁷ Britain and France both realized that war

¹²⁵ Nester, William. *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607-1755*. 210.

¹²⁶ Blainey, Geoffrey. *The Causes of War*. 134.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

would come with high costs but had determined that the costs were worth it to protect their colonies. Simply put, the future profits and benefits from colonial empires were viewed as being greater than any potential costs of war. In addition, since Britain and France were ruled by monarchs, their government's leaders were insulated from the costs. In France's absolute monarchy, this was especially the case. French diplomat Antoine Louis Rouillé illustrated this French resolve in letters to other French diplomats, as he wrote that "his Majesty eagerly wishes for peace...but if he is forced to make war he will fear neither the expense nor the danger."¹²⁸ Next, the counter-argument for issue indivisibility is the assertion that states can make side-payments or divide the region to avoid the costs of war. In the right situation with the right negotiators, this would have been certainly possible. However, given the state of British and French diplomacy at the time, it was highly unlikely. In addition, both sides placed significant value in controlling all of the Ohio country. The French saw the region as the crucial link between their colonies in New France and Louisiana, while the British saw the region as the only pathway to western expansion for their growing thirteen colonies.¹²⁹ Neither side believed a division of the region was possible, or had an interest in giving up the Ohio country for other territory. Thus, the Ohio country clearly played a negative role in bargaining as an indivisible issue between France and Britain.

Counterfactuals

As in any scenario, there are several counterfactuals that could have led to peace between the British and the French prior to the French and Indian War. Either the French or the British could have revealed their sources of asymmetric information, such as resolve and strength, to create a peaceful settlement that would be more beneficial to both sides. However, the incentive

¹²⁸ Baugh, Daniel. *The Global Seven Years War*, 86.

¹²⁹ Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. 197-198.

to misrepresent resolve or strength in bargaining would realistically be too much for either side, as revealing one's weakness could lead to an unfavorable deal. If both sides were able to resolve the indivisible issue of the Ohio country through side-payments or a division of the territory, peace would have been much more feasible given the importance of the region in bargaining. As discussed before, this would have been highly unlikely given Britain and France's beliefs regarding the importance of the region and its inability to be divided. Finally, if there was more experienced and qualified diplomats from both countries, there certainly would have been more realistic and feasible offers, and a peaceful settlement might have been reached if these diplomats could recognize the signaling from the other side. However, the simple reality was that these diplomats did not exist in either country's diplomatic corps. At the same time, the issues of asymmetric information and an indivisible issue in the Ohio country would have remained, which would have made bargaining extremely difficult even for experienced diplomats. Although there are certainly counterfactuals to the process that led to the French and Indian War, most of them are highly unrealistic given the realities of the situation.

Conclusion

Like most wars in history, the French and Indian War can be attributed to a wide range of different causes. However, through the lens of the bargaining theory of war, the presence of asymmetric information and an indivisible issue directly led to the outbreak of war in North America between the French and the British. The presence of asymmetric information with an incentive to misrepresent, regarding matters such as strength and resolve, left French and British diplomats clueless regarding their opponent's motivations and objectives. Next, the indivisible issue of the Ohio country made the possibility of a peaceful settlement unlikely, as both sides were simply unwilling to compromise on this issue. The lack of experience and quality sources

of information within the French and British diplomatic corps, coupled with the biases of colonial administrators and stubbornness of royal officials, further left negotiators in an impossible position. As a result, when combined with the brinkmanship game featuring escalatory offensive actions from both states, war broke out between Britain and France in North America after a series of unsuccessful negotiations between the two states. In short, in the span of only a few years, a small conflict over a trading post at the forks of the Ohio river between French and British colonial militia had transformed into the first major war between European powers in North America.

There are several lessons that can be taken from the current study to better analyze other colonial conflicts. First, the importance of geography cannot be understated. Many of the key factors in the French and Indian War, from the development of the French and British colonies to the status of the Ohio country as an indivisible issue, stem directly from geography. In order to understand colonial conflicts, it is crucially important to understand the impact of geography on both of the actors involved in the conflict. Next, the value of colonial empires to European states during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries must be emphasized. Throughout the build-up to the French and Indian War, both the British and the French repeatedly ignored the warning signs that conflict was on the horizon, as both sides simply favored their colonies over peace. From the perspective of political theory, this mentality may seem extremely irrational. However, given the massive importance of colonies to European states, the posture of European states such as Britain and France is actually quite logical. In order to better understand other colonial conflicts, this mentality must always be taken into account.

Finally, the importance of indivisible issues in bargaining must be highlighted. In political theory, indivisible issues are often dismissed as irrational and unconvincing, and there is

much debate over whether an indivisible issue can solely prevent a peaceful settlement in bargaining. In the current study's opinion, indivisible issues must always be taken into account and considered in regards to the bargaining theory of war. Throughout the build-up to the French and Indian War, both French and British diplomats emphasized the importance of the Ohio country and repeatedly acknowledged that the region was the major issue in negotiations. In addition, when the indivisible issue is considered through the lens of future bargaining, it is clear that both sides had an even greater incentive to reject any peaceful settlement. When analyzing other colonial conflicts, scholars must consider the impact of indivisible issues, which clearly play a major role in preventing a peaceful settlement between two states.

The current study also believes there are two important lessons that can be taken from the historical analysis of the causes of the French and Indian War, and applied to the present-day and future. First, the importance of clear and concise communication within one's own government and bureaucracy, and with any potential adversary, is a crucial aspect needed for any opportunity of a peaceful settlement. Throughout the build-up to the French and Indian War, communication repeatedly failed within the French and British regimes, and between French and British diplomats in bargaining. Both sides were never on the same page, and both home countries had little idea of what was truly going on in their colonies. In order to increase the chances of a peaceful settlement, countries must emphasize clear and concise communication within their own ranks, and with their adversaries.

Second, all countries should strive to develop and maintain an elite diplomatic corps that has the authority and ability to negotiate with other countries. In the bargaining prior to conflict, Britain and France's diplomatic corps were staffed with inexperienced and under trained diplomats. Because of this, the chances of a peaceful settlement were drastically lowered, and

that is before the issues of asymmetric information, an indivisible issue, and brinkmanship were considered. If a country has an inexperienced, underfunded, and weak diplomatic corps, then their chances of averting conflict with other countries is drastically lowered. In short, one of the central keys to achieving peace throughout the globe in the present-day and in the future is the development and maintenance of properly funded and trained diplomatic corps who have the authority and ability to find peaceful settlements in bargaining, even if there is asymmetric information and an indivisible issue present. Although the French and Indian War occurred over two hundred and fifty years ago, the current study firmly believes that both of these lessons can be applied for the greater good today, and for the maintenance of world peace in the future.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Fred. *Crucible of War*. New York, Alfred Knope, 2000.
- Anderson, Fred. *The War That Made America*. New York, Penguin Group, 2005.
- Barren De La Galissonière, Roland-Michel. "A French Colonial Official Sizes Up the British, 1751." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 33-35.
- Baugh, Daniel. *The Global Seven Years War*. London, Pearson Education Limited, 2011.
- Blainey, Geoffrey. *The Causes of War*. New York, The Free Press, 1973.
- Borneman, Walter. *The French and Indian War: Deciding the Fate of North America*. New York, Harpers Collins, 2006.
- British Officer. "Disaster on the Monongahela, 1755." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 59-62.
- Cave, Alred. *The French and Indian War*. Westport, Greenwood Press, 2004.
- Céloron, Pierre-Joseph. "Onontio in the Ohio Country, 1749." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 29-32.
- Chadefaux, Thomas. "Bargaining over power: when do shifts in power lead to war?" *International Theory* 3 no. 2 (2011): 228-253.
- Fearon, James. "Bargaining Over Objects That Influence Future Bargaining Power" (University of Chicago Department of Political Science, 1996), 1-23.
- Fearon, James. "Rationalist Explanations for War" *International Organization* 49 no.3 (Summer, 1995): 379-414.
- Hassner, Ron. "'To Have and To Hold': Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility" *Security Studies* 12 no.4 (2003): 1-33.
- Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma" *World Politics* 30 no.2 (1978): 167-214.
- Kennedy, Archibald. "A British Colonial Official Sizes Up the French, 1754." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 35-39.
- Levy, Jack and William Thompson. *Causes of War*. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Maryland Gazette. "Surrender at Fort Necessity, 1754." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 57-59.

- Nester, William. *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607-1755*. Westport, Praeger, 2000.
- Peters, Richard. "Tensions between Squatters and Indians, 1750." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 39-43.
- Powell, Robert. "Nuclear Brinkmanship with Two-Sided Incomplete Information." *The American Political Science Review* 82 no.1, (1988): 155-178.
- Savalle, Max. "Diplomatic Preliminaries of the Seven Years' War in America." *The Canadian Historical Review* 20 no. 1, (1939): 17-36.
- Shannon, Timothy. *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston, Bedford, 2014.
- Shingas. "A Delaware Chief Explains Why the Indians Went to War, 1755." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 63-65.
- Slantchev, Branislav. "Military Coercion in Interstate Crises" *The American Political Science Review* 99 no.4 (2005): 533-547.
- Smoke, Richard. *War: Controlling Escalation*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1978.
- Tang, Shiping. "The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis" *Security Studies*, 18 no.3 (2009): 587-623.
- Thompson, William. *Great Power Rivalries*. Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1999.
- Trent, William. "The Fur Trade Turns Violent." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 44-45.
- Washington, George. "Encounter with the French." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 51-54.
- Washington, George. "Skirmish at Jumonville's Glen, 1754." *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History with Documents*. Timothy Shannon, Bedford, 2014, 54-56.