

MIT Student

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Lebon Peace Fund Proposal

Wars are an incredibly costly affair that should be avoided if at all possible. Derfla Lebon, a wealthy world peace activist, created the Lebon Peace Fund to develop projects that will prevent wars, regardless of the financial cost. Devising such projects requires an understanding of the current international political climate as well as brewing tensions. At the moment, France and Great Britain each have a military and economic reach that is unrivaled by any other state, and as a result, a war between them would be very damaging. Given that I have been transported in a time machine from the year 2018 to the current year 1730, I am aware that if the current political situation continues unhindered, a war between these world powers, called the Seven Years' War, will break out in 26 years. My mission as an advisor to the Lebon Peace fund is to use my knowledge of the Seven Years' War to prevent it from occurring. Although it was explicitly control of the Ohio Valley that the states fight over, the true stakes are supremacy of the world economy, control of North America, and dominance in the sea. Unfortunately, the belief that the Ohio Valley is essential for these goals is not true, but it was perpetuated by actors on both sides of the Atlantic. **Corrupt governors in North America drove Great Britain and France into believing misperceptions, and warmongering individuals in London took advantage of windows of opportunity and vulnerability that arise; as a result, the Lebon Peace Fund should develop multiple, independent, free journalism organizations in North America and a peace party in the British government.**

One of the guiltiest actors in starting the Seven Years' War is Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, whose personal interests in the Ohio Land Company motivated him to mislead London about French aggression. Dinwiddie was a major stockholder in the Ohio Land Company¹, a land-exploitation company that was meant to operate in land that was also claimed by the French. Knowing that London would only support him if they believed the French threat to the Ohio was also a threat to Virginia, Dinwiddie exaggerated the issue. He sparsely mentioned the Ohio Company, emphasized the English rights to the land (based on a highly questionable interpretation of the Treaty of Utrecht²), and exaggerated the French threat in his letters to London and other American governors. Meanwhile, he discussed the use of government resources to advance the Ohio Company's agenda in his letters to other shareholders, clearly demonstrating his misleading intentions. Since in 1753 the British government only had Dinwiddie's letters to consider, they fell into a misperception. They began to have false pessimism about their own ability to defend themselves, and the notion of an overly aggressive France threatening the British colonies was introduced. Upon introduction, states often experience belief perseverance, wherein they are slow to absorb new realities that clash with their existing beliefs³. Furthermore, because Britain and France have been rivals for centuries, they were likely to have separated themselves into cohesive and mutually hostile groups, otherwise known as in-group-out-group-theory⁴. In 1754, London receives two letters that affirm their beliefs: Dinwiddie's detailing Jumonville's death and Washington's defeat at Fort Necessity; and Governor Shirley's incorrect reports that the French were invading Kennebec⁵.

¹ Richard Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation* (Harvard University Press, 1978), 232.

² Patrice Louis-René Higonnet, *The Origins of the Seven Years' War* (The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 61.

³ Robert Jervis, *International Politics: Anarchy, Force, Political Economy, and Decision Making* (TBS The Book Service Ltd, 1984), 518.

⁴ Jervis, *International Politics: Anarchy, Force, Political Economy, and Decision Making*, 521.

⁵ Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation*, 233.

Because these were the only sources of information the Crown had to consider, they were convinced that the French were the aggressors. Dinwiddie's relationship to the Ohio Land Company made him a biased informant to the Crown, and as a result, he misled them into believing they were significantly vulnerable to French attacks.

Another governor who misled their European superiors was the Governor of New France, Duquesne. He reported to the French government that he would reduce costs by eliminating unnecessary outposts. Instead, soon after arriving to Canada, he began developing an army of 2,200 men and proceeded to establish a chain of forts in the Ohio Valley to protect what he claimed to be the lifeline between France's colonies in North America. Fortifying the Ohio territory was seen as highly aggressive by the British, though he and the French did not see it as such. The discrepancy in judgement is a prime example of attribution error, a type of misperception wherein states attribute their own aggressive behavior to their situation but that of another state to their innate disposition⁶. Attribution error is dangerous here because Duquesne was influencing France to believe that he was acting defensively while the English were unjustified in their aggressions. The French government was unable to recognize offensive moves made in their name because they were excessively dependent on the word of Duquesne in their considerations. He also perpetuated an overextended limit of French territory to his officers, who then extended even beyond those boundaries⁷. His actions were contradictory to Paris's desire to limit expenses and avoid conflict with the English, so it seems he had motives other than that of the state. There was some evidence to suggest that Duquesne was involved with the Grande Societe which were a group of fur traders who relied on the Ohio area⁸. Like Governor

⁶ Jervis, *International Politics: Anarchy, Force, Political Economy, and Decision Making*, 521.

⁷ Higonnet, *The Origins of the Seven Years' War*, 66.

⁸ Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation*, 233.

Dinwiddie, he was also relying on in-group-out-group divisions, based off of existing tensions between the two states, to occur. Duquesne was later removed in 1754⁹ because he was unable to reduce expenses, indicating that he was not acting according to Paris's wishes, but by then, the damage in misperception had already been done. The British believed the French were being aggressive by fortifying the Ohio Valley, and the French believed the British to be aggressive after their general, Jumonville, was killed. Although it is not certain that he was motivated by a private business, Duquesne's aggressive actions, which contradicted the peaceful intentions of the French government, suggest that he thought he would be able to mislead Paris into misperceiving the British as the primary aggressors.

Misperceptions would be mitigated if the Lebon Peace Fund were to invest in multiple independent presses, each with a culture of integrity in the colonies. Since Britain and France are both over 2500 miles from their territories in North America, a likely problem would revolve around the evaluation of their governors and government employees in the colonies. In order to discourage the North American actors from engaging in corruption or purposefully misinforming their European superiors, several independent journalism agencies would gather information from various locations in the colonies and release newspaper issues and pamphlets every month, updating both the local populations and those back in Europe of the happenings in North America. The pace of publication would encourage the press to stay up to date on government affairs, which would allow Europe to gain a better understanding of the political climate in the Americas. Although this does not solve this issue of news taking several weeks to arrive in Europe, the pace of the build-up to the Seven Years' War is slow enough that with more regular updates, the governing officials in London and Paris would be better able to judge the situation.

⁹ Higonet, *The Origins of the Seven Years' War*, 67.

If a government representative, such as Duquesne or Dinwiddie, decides to provoke a military conflict with another state to help their private business, their actions would be reported by several news agencies. Once one official has been made an example of, other officials will be discouraged from tampering with the peace. In order to prevent a governor from shutting down the press, numerous printers and supplies would be purchased and placed throughout urban areas in New France and the English colonies, and the Lebon Peace Fund would finance riders to distribute papers to crossroad inns, urban taverns, army camps, and rural estates. The Fund would also pay apprentices to work at the printers, and writers would publish under a pseudonym to protect their identity from the government. With the entire industry spreading news all over the country and writer anonymity, it would be difficult for the governors to stop all information from flowing back to Europe. In addition to preventing malicious actors from using their public position for private interests, these news agencies would reduce the likelihood of attribution error because both states would be able to read the news and understand how the other side perceives their actions, similar to the embassies mentioned earlier. The presence of news agencies that report the wrongdoings of government officials would greatly prevent misperceptions because the states would recognize unsanctioned actions and respond diplomatically. The independent press would serve as a watchdog ensuring that the peaceful policies of the states were being fulfilled and provide more perspectives on the events occurring in North America.

On the other side of the ocean, the war party in London perceived windows of opportunity and vulnerability that led them to pursue war with France. Prime Minister Newcastle and most of his cabinet originally believed that a peaceful negotiation would be the best way to resolve the conflict in North America¹⁰. However, several influential individuals, collectively

¹⁰ Higgonnet, *The Origins of the Seven Years' War*, 71.

referred to as the war party, interpreted the French attacks as a precursor to a major war and were skeptical of the value of negotiations. Some were staunch imperialists who generally favored war over negotiations and believed in this case that it was better to be aggressive sooner rather than later because England's advantage was fleeting¹¹. In response to a request from Dinwiddie for British troops, Newcastle intended to send money to raise and equip colonial troops, but the Duke of Cumberland, a party member, convinced King George II to send General Braddock with two regiments instead. Sending General Braddock to North America was a turning point, where after both sides were forced to act aggressively and send resources from Europe to the colonies in order to counteract the other's actions. Newcastle agreed to this plan on the condition that the mission remained secret because he did not want the French to have an opportunity to take effective countermeasures, but the war party leaked the mission to the London press because they believed Britain had a window of opportunity¹². One of the flaws with this belief is that the colonies were not as vulnerable as the British believed, as shown by the colonial troops faring much better than Braddock's troops, who were unprepared for the type of fighting and subsequently decimated by the French and Indians.¹³ They also believed their worldwide military advantage was waning because the French were building up their fleet, but the French fleet was still significantly behind. These falsely perceived windows fueled the war movement because the British now believed that, as declining state, it ought to attack early on to have the greatest advantage. Negotiations with the French were also seemingly useless because there was a perceived credible commitment problem¹⁴, in which the French could not be trusted to uphold any peace promises if their power was increasing beyond that of the British. As these beliefs

¹¹ Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation*, 202.

¹² Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation*, 202.

¹³ Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation*, 203.

¹⁴ Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation*, 222.

were spread throughout the English government, it was hard for Newcastle to continue his pursuit of peaceful negotiations. These seemed even less likely to succeed because ministers beneath him who were members of the war party, such as the Undersecretary of the War Party, were circumventing his approval by influencing the king directly¹⁵. Consequently, when it came time to negotiate in 1755, the negotiations were hastily done because both sides wanted to resolve disputes before their power waned and were ill-informed of the intentions of the other from a plethora of misperceptions. In effect, the warmongering individuals in London overpowered the prime minister's peace efforts and exacerbated the misperceptions about British and French relative power.

The influence exerted by the war party was significant enough that even with a free and independent press established in North America to clear up misperceptions, these individuals would have likely still started a war for fear of waning world dominance, so it is therefore necessary for the Lebon Peace Fund to fund a peace party in London. Although it will not be a distinctly separate political party, starting immediately, lobbyists will be paid to convince ministers and cabinet members that peace and peaceful negotiations are in the best interest of the Crown. The Lebon Peace Fund will pay for several London press organizations to pursue a smear campaign that criticizes the growing debts of the Crown and attributes them to warmongering efforts by members of the war party. By reading newspapers and pamphlets, the general public will be made to understand that these debts incurred through unnecessary wars will be paid for through increased taxes, which will paint the war party very unpopular. News would also discuss how the French navy development was not as impressive as government officials had come to believe, which will assure the public and the cabinet members that there is

¹⁵ Higonnet, *The Origins of the Seven Years' War*, 76.

not a window of opportunity. The combination of lobbyists, the public's negative association with the war party, and the news from American press that Dinwiddie was exaggerating the status of the French threat will have several members of Cabinet agreeing with Newcastle that peaceful negotiations with the French ought to be pursued in 1754. Furthermore, several cabinet members who were being advised by individuals from the Lebon Peace Fund or paid through lobbyists will gain influence in the British government, and the peace party will soon begin to instill in King George II the belief that the colonies, with such a sizeable population, should be able to unite and defend themselves against a significantly smaller French threat. Therefore, if the call for Braddock's troops was still made in 1754, the king would not listen to the members of the war party and instead side with Newcastle to simply send money to help raise and enlist colonial troops. The peace party funded by the Lebon Peace Fund would make effective countermeasures against the influence of the war party and reduce the perceptions of windows of opportunity.

With all of that being said, an outbreak of war in the North American colonies seems preventable. In spite of the vague border definitions leftover from the Treaty of Aix-la-Chappelle, English and French skirmishes may only be limited to minor conflicts in the North American conflict if the greater issue of misperception is handed. The free, independent press agencies in North America will prevent corrupt governors from misleading their superiors into believing their colonies are being threatened, and the development of the peace part in London will counteract warmongering politicking for the sake of ensuring worldwide dominance. Both of these projects will be supported by the Lebon Peace Fund. The Lebon Peace Fund is fully committed to helping alleviate these issues by implementing comprehensive reform that will maintain peace between the world powers of Great Britain and France for the next fifty years or

so. For the time being, the British colonies will be allowed to expand and occupy lands further west, and the French will be allowed to use the Ohio River to maintain connections between New France and Louisiana. However, in the end, it seems most likely that the French endeavor of North American dominance will fail because they do not have a sizeable enough population compared to the British. In the future, France will most likely realize this and pull their resources out of the North American continent and invest more into their sugar-producing islands in the Caribbean.

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