

# Peace Treaties and Truces

## TREATY OF PARIS (1763)

### TREATY AT A GLANCE

#### *Completed*

February 10, 1763, at Paris

#### *Signatories*

Great Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal

#### *Overview*

Together with the TREATY OF HUBERTSBURG, the Treaty of Paris brought to a formal conclusion what many historians call the first world war: the Seven Years' War, which in its North American phase was called the French and Indian War. Signed by the principal combatants, Britain, France, and Spain (in addition to Portugal), the treaty not only brought an interval of peace to Europe, it reshaped the colonial world. France lost to Britain all of its North American possessions, except Louisiana, which it had earlier ceded to Spain; French troops were excluded from Bengal, thereby ending the French imperial drive in India and laying the foundation for British domination of the subcontinent; in Africa, France yielded Senegal to the British. France retained a few colonies: Saint Pierre and Miquelon (in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence); Saint Lucia, St-Domingue (Haiti), Guadeloupe, and Martinique (in the West Indies); and Pondichery and Chandernagor (in India). Spain recovered Cuba and the Philippines, which it had lost in the course of the war, but ceded Florida to Britain.

### Historical Background

The Seven Years' War, which spanned 1756 to 1763, pitted Britain and Prussia against Austria, France, Russia, Saxony, Sweden, and, after 1762, Spain (which jointly ruled Portugal). The war may be viewed, in part, as a continuation of the issues that had ignited the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48): the contest between Prussia and Austria for possession of Silesia and for political dominance in central Europe, and the struggle between Britain and France for military and naval supremacy and for colonial dominance.

The most intense prelude to the war came in North America, where British and French interests had begun sporadic fighting in 1754. In Europe hostilities commenced on August 29, 1756, when Frederick II the Great of Prussia, seeking to preempt an attack from Maria Theresa of Austria and Elizabeth of Russia,

launched a surprise offensive through the electorate of Saxony, a minor Austrian ally. Frederick's strategy was to check Austria and Russia with a quick war, but despite minor victories, Frederick was unable to achieve swift victory and soon found himself embroiled in a desperate struggle that was involving nation after nation. Sweden aligned itself against Prussia, and Frederick's advance into Bohemia led to a Prussian defeat at Kolin in June 1757. Russian forces marched into East Prussia in August, and Austrian troops overran Berlin, occupying it for several days in October. Frederick came back with massive victories at Rossbach on November 5 and at Leuthen the next month, thereby saving his kingdom from conquest. Moreover, these victories bought him the time he needed to orchestrate the major campaigns of the next four years.

The nations aligned against Prussia failed to coordinate their forces adequately. Great Britain provided some finance and maintained an army in northwestern Germany to defend Hanover (a British royal possession) from French attack. Although Frederick won the day at Zorndorf in 1758 and again at Leignitz and Torgau in 1760, the victories were costly, draining his resources and causing a steady decline in his military fortunes. When he met the Russians at Kunersdorf on August 12, 1759, his forces were soundly defeated, and by the end of 1761, the Austrians had moved into Saxony and Silesia, and Russians held Prussian Pomerania.

Although Frederick's position appeared hopeless, he was rescued by the death of the Russian empress Elizabeth in January 1762, for she was succeeded by Peter III, who was a great admirer of Frederick. Peter summarily withdrew from the war, leaving Austria to face Prussia alone. This prompted an Austrian treaty with Prussia, the TREATY OF HUBERTSBURG, on February 15, 1763, which affirmed Prussian sovereignty over Silesia.

During all of this, Britain and France fought the bulk of their war on the soil of their contested colonial possessions, especially those in North America and India. In May 1756, about two years after the outbreak of hostilities on the Virginia frontier, Britain declared war on France. Both sides called upon colonial militias and Indian allies to do much of the fighting, but the British, who had treated the native peoples poorly, had far fewer Indian allies than the French. Moreover, the British regular army officers who had been sent to take charge of the war regarded colonial troops with contempt. Both of these factors contributed to early English defeats at the hands of the brilliant French commander Montcalm. The British fort at Oswego on Lake Ontario fell in 1756, and in 1757 Fort William Henry at the south end of Lake George was taken.

With British colonial fortunes at their nadir, William Pitt (the Elder) became Britain's new prime minister and instituted new policies of increased aid to the American colonies, which included a reformed attitude toward the Indians, as well as colonial troops. At the same time, France was finding it increasingly difficult to support its colonies. The tide of the French and Indian War began to turn in favor of the English in 1758, and 1759 brought victory after victory, culminating in the fall of Quebec to the British September 12–13, 1759. In 1760 Lord Amherst completed the conquest of Canada by taking Montreal, and by the end of the year, the French hegemony in North America had come to an end.

This did not mean an immediate end to the war, however. Except for a handful of "traditional" military engagements, the French and Indian War was largely a guerrilla war, fought more by settlers against Indians

(allied with French or British interests) than by one army against another. Combat continued between the British and the Cherokee Indians in the south until 1761 and between settlers and Indians throughout the Ohio country. In 1762 the Spanish entered the fray against Britain but were rapidly defeated, principally because of British sea power. The exhausted combatants entered into negotiations that produced the Treaty of Paris early in 1763.

## Terms

As historians have frequently pointed out, the Seven Years' War and the French and Indian War grew directly out of earlier conflicts: the War of the League of Augsburg (in North America, King William's War or the War of the Spanish Succession (in North America, Queen Anne's War), and the War of the Austrian Succession (in North America, King George's War). The framers of the Treaty of Paris clearly recognized this; well, and Article 2 of the document sweepingly summarized the treaties resolving these conflicts:

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The Treaties of Westphalia of 1648; those of Madrid between the crowns of Great-Britain and Spain of 1667, and 1670; the treaties of peace of Nimeguen of 1678, and 1679; of Ryswick of 1697; those of peace and of commerce of Utrecht of 1713; that of Baden of 1714; the treaty of the triple alliance of the Hague of 1717; that of the quadruple alliance of London of 1718; the treaty of peace of Vienna of 1738; the definitive treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle of 1748; and that of Madrid, between the crowns of Great-Britain and Spain, of 1750; as well as the treaties between the crowns of Spain and Portugal, of the 13th of February, 1668; of the 6th of February, 1715; and of the 12th of February, 1761; and that of the 11th of April, 1713, between France and Portugal, with the guaranties of Great-Britain; serve as a basis and foundation to the peace, and to the present treaty: and for this purpose, they are all renewed and confirmed in the best form, as well as all the general, which subsisted between the high contracting parties before the war, as if they were inserted here word for word, so that they are to be exactly observed, for the future, in their whole tenor, and religiously executed on all sides, in all their points, which shall not be derogated from by the present treaty, notwithstanding all that may have been stipulated to the contrary by any of the high contracting parties: and all the said parties declare, that they will not suffer any privilege, favor, or indulgence to subsist, contrary to the treaties above confirmed, except what shall have been agreed and stipulated by the present treaty.

Similarly sweeping is the language through which North America east of the Mississippi is apportioned

Great Britain. The contrast between Article 7 of the Treaty of Paris, carving up "virgin land," and, say, the language of the 17th-century TREATY OF THE PYRENEES, apportioning quasi-feudal holdings between France and Spain, is dramatic. In place of the earlier document's many complex, cataloglike recitations of place names and detailing of ancient rights and holdings, the Treaty of Paris provides a single paragraph:

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In order to re-establish peace on solid and durable foundations, and to remove for ever all subject of dispute with regard to the limits of the British and French territories on the continent of America; it is agreed, that, for the future, the confines between the dominions of his Britannick Majesty, and those of his most Christian Majesty, in that part of the world, shall be fixed irrevocably by a line drawn along the middle of the River Mississippi, from its source, to the River Iberville, and from thence, by a line drawn along the middle of this River, and the Lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain, to the sea; and for this purpose, the most Christian King cedes in full right, and guaranties to his Britannick Majesty, the River and Port of the Mobile, and every thing which he possesses, or ought to possess, on the left side of the River Mississippi, except the town of New Orleans, and the island in which it is situated, which shall remain to France; provided that the navigation of the River Mississippi, shall be equally free, as well to the subjects of Great Britain, as to those of France, in its whole breadth and length, from its source to the sea, and expressly that part, which is between the said island of New Orleans, and the right bank of that River, as well as the passage both

in and out of its mouth: It is further stipulated, that the vessels belonging to the subjects of either nation, shall not be stopped, visited, or subjected to the payment of any duty whatsoever. The stipulations, inserted in the IVth article, in favor of the inhabitants of Canada, shall also take place, with regard to the inhabitants of the countries ceded by this article.

While other articles detailed the cessions of Great Britain to France and Spain, it was the starkly simple Article 7 that constituted the heart of the treaty, making it a document that quite literally altered the face of the world.

## Consequences

Few treaties have been so decisive and far reaching. By this single document, Britain acquired all of North America east of the Mississippi River, including Canada and Florida. Yet this proved less a boon to Great Britain than it did to her colonists. With the French and Spanish removed from the frontiers, the Indians were left without foreign support for their resistance to British expansion. As colonists migrated inland, connections with the mother country grew increasingly tenuous, and for their part, even coastal colonials no longer felt as dependent on Britain for defense. Thus, the Treaty of Paris provided some of the conditions under which an increasing number of colonists began to think of independence. The treaty may therefore be read as an opening chord in the prelude to the American Revolution.