

Foreign Policy

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The WAR OF SPANISH SUCCESSION had ended in 1713/1714, and France was practically bankrupt. The early years of Louis XV. reign were decades of peace; France recovered under the administration of CARDINAL FLEURY, whose policy of austerity restored the state treasury, but neglected the navy. In 1733-1735 France victoriously fought the WAR OF POLISH SUCCESSION, establishing the deposed Polish king STANISLAS LESZYNSKI (and father-in-law of Louis XV.) as Duke of LORRAINE. In 1741 to 1748, France entered the WAR OF AUSTRIAN SUCCESSION, which, despite a number of military successes, did not bring any gains for France.

Cardinal Fleury had died in 1743, and Louis XV. personally took over, soon influenced by MADAME POMPADOUR. She caused Louis XV. to give up France's traditional anti-Habsburg policy (the so-called DIPLOMATIC REVOLUTION); in the SEVEN YEARS' WAR (1756-1763) France was an Austrian ally. On paper, the coalition composed by Maria Theresia, uniting Austria, France, Russia and Sweden against Prussia (which was supported by Britain) looked overwhelming; France, after the defeat of SOUBISE's army by Frederick the Great in the BATTLE OF ROSSBACH (1757), concentrated on fighting the English overseas. The war was lost and France had to cede major colonial possessions.

In 1766, Duke Stanislas Leszynski died and the DUCHY OF LORRAINE was annexed by France (connecting the French possessions in the Alsace with the Kingdom), as was the island of CORSICA in 1768, bought from the Republic of Genova.

Early in the 18th century the French Colonial Empire expanded considerably; in 1715 the French established MAURITIUS as the headquarters of their COMPAGNIE DES INDES; the ISLE DE BOURBON (Reunion) was French since 1642. They established factories along the coast of India (Yanaon, Mahe, Pondichery, Chandernagar). JOSEPH-FRANCOIS DUPEIX, Governor-General of the French East India Company (1741-1754), by diplomatic means allied the Indian princes of the Carnatic to France and was able to take MADRAS from the English East India Company in 1746.

India, West Africa, the Caribbean and North America were areas of conflict between the world's two leading maritime powers, England and France; the decisive confrontation took place during the SEVEN YEARS WAR. Here, French General MONTCALM, on the American continent, booked early successes against the British, immortalized in J.F. Cooper's Last of the Mohicans. Yet British reinforcements and the failure of France to send both reinforcements and supplies turned the tide in favour of the British. In 1763, France ceded her possessions in CANADA (retaining only ST. PIERRE ET MIQUELON), SENEGAL, in India it was restricted to the factories of Mahe, Pondichery, Yanaon and Chandernagar. France ceded the LOUISIANE TERRITORY to Spain.

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