The rise to global predominance of Great Britain during the eighteenth century is a phenomenon of major importance in the development of the modern world. From a small politically insecure island state in 1688, it had, by 1800, developed to be a global power capable of sustaining major wars in Europe and conducting operations in most parts of the world on a scale unmatched by any other European power. Why this happened is a huge question, but clearly one of the steps in the process was the effective mobilisation of financial resources in the service of the state. However, while raising money was vital, it had to be converted by effective administration into real military resources and research over the last twenty years has demonstrated an equally impressive capability by the British state in this domain.

In the final analysis the outcome of state activity in military affairs was determined when those military resources came into violent conflict with those of the enemy. It was during the Seven Years War (1756-1763) that the British state reaped the rewards of changes that had gone on in the complex infrastructures of European states. All military events are capable of explanation ranging from the analysis of macro-factors such as economic and governmental infrastructure, through to micro-factors such as individual decision-making on the field of battle. In between the two, and equally valid as potential explanatory factors, lie a complex range of features such as the composition of the armed forces, their professional capability, the morale of their members and the technology with which they work. The network of factors that translate military resources into effective military power are usually dense and constantly in a state of flux. The focus on networks has already produced valuable studies on financial and administrative developments.

In this paper I intend to look at two aspects of a network – the reciprocal relationship between ideology and operational capability in a plan to attack Canada in 1746: how it emerged from a firm conviction in the efficacy of amphibious warfare in the Americas, how the plan was implemented and what impact its organisation and failure had on that conviction.

Mid-eighteenth century Britain was not a society rich in information about its military capability. The first element in assessing capability is understanding the quantity, quality and disposition of one’s own forces. There was no repository of general current knowledge that developed in the later part of the nineteenth century with the growth of the General Staff systems. It was possible for ministers to have crude understanding of quantity of ships, seamen and soldiers paid for in any given financial year, but the figures were fraught with problems and a rapid move from peace to war uncovered problems that were not exposed in data generated over years for financial purposes. In 1739 the problem of manning the fleet carried over into 1741, having a major impact on planning and operations. In 1770 the mobilisation of the fleet during the Falklands Crisis, exposed a level of decay in the ships that was entirely
unexpected². During a war, the quality of data reaching ministers about the state of ships, their numbers and dispositions was patchy, so that as the war progressed errors gradually accumulated. When a new Board of Admiralty, under the Earl of Winchelsea, took over after the fall of Sir Robert Walpole in February 1741/2, it instructed the Navy Board to provide it with an updated list of the state and dispositions of the King’s ships.

Another element in assessing capability is the ability to judge the quantity, quality and dispositions of potential enemies. Despite a well-developed diplomatic and consular structure, such information was rarely complete and easily disrupted. The stopping of the post from Brest in 1741 closed down all information to London from the British representative in Paris, Andrew Thompson. Diplomatic correspondence was generally good, but that did not stop ministers seeking information at critical times from private letters which arrived on the regular packet boats from Europe.

A third element in assessing capability was knowledge of the local conditions in which the army or navy would operate. The King’s map collection in the chapel of the Tower of London was accumulated during the century as a result of operations, rather than as a resource to inform decision-making before operations³. With respect to other papers, there was a great deal of ambiguity as to whether ‘official’ papers were the property of the Crown or individual ministers. In 1739, when the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, the Duke of Newcastle, was seeking precedent for orders sent to commanders of expeditions to the Americas, he found them not in his office, but among the private papers of the Earl of Sunderland, his predecessor. After using them, Newcastle kept the copies in his private papers. On the whole, the kind of knowledge that was vital for effective assessment of operational capability was understood to lie with individual advisers. In the early stages of the war against Spain, during 1739-40, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Charles Wager, the Admiral of the Fleet, Sir John Norris, and a member of the Board of Trade, Colonel Martin Bladen, played vital roles in planning the expedition to the West Indies. These advisers gained their knowledge by long service and exposure to the problems of the state. Such a process had intrinsic weaknesses. By mid-1742 both Wager and Norris were out of office, leaving a large gap in knowledge and expertise within the Admiralty, that was not closed until 1746.

The impact of this paucity of information and knowledge should not be overstated. Britain had a relatively sophisticated bureaucracy compared to her European rivals. It was extremely capable in raising money, both in taxes and credit, and by effective contracting systems, converting those funds into physical military and naval resources. The British diplomatic service was as effective as any in Europe at the time. Both the bureaucracy and the diplomatic service had been systematised over the preceding one hundred and fifty years. However, the preservation of operational knowledge had not been so effectively systematised, and was to remain a weakness in operational planning for many decades to come.

One of the consequences of this lack of information was that ministers were often only as well informed as the diligent, educated layman, which included many MPs. While it was never contested that the conduct of foreign policy was the prerogative of the monarch, the need to finance that policy by Parliamentary grant, necessitated its discussion and comment within both Houses. MPs were often anxious to have papers
laid before them relating to the conduct of foreign affairs and the ministry equally anxious to limit this, and in the absence of detailed information much debate on both sides of a question revolved around assumptions of principle and fact. Opposition was seldom able to provide detailed factual information to support its case, but neither were ministers able to refute those claims with evidence of their own. In this situation, debate and ideas about military and naval affairs reflected long held assumptions verging on general truths rather than informed decisions about current capability. Although anachronistic, it seems appropriate to use the term ideological to describe the dominant mode of political discourse.

While a lack of information on current capability was apparent throughout the debates on policy during the first half of the eighteenth century, it is equally clear that, during the Seven Years War, the ideological belief as to how war should be conducted was effectively aligned with the capability of conducting such a war. By 1759 the ideology of maritime war matched the results. From 1756 William Pitt played a vital role in expressing the vision of global war and convincing Parliament at critical periods that it was both feasible and likely to be crowned with success. This ensured that the funds to conduct the war were forthcoming. However, capability requires far more than a full purse. It requires an administration that can convert that money into real military and naval resources, a political, service and administrative leadership that can ensure that the right resources are in the right place at the right time and an army and navy that can apply those forces to defeat whatever is sent against it. The key question is – what had happened to bring these real resources into line with the political vision of the conduct of the war? The expedition to Canada seems to have played at least a small role in this process.

When Britain went to war with Spain in October 1739 it was partly in response to pressure from the political nation at large. By mid-1739, two important factors had converged that made resistance to war politically untenable – that the war was seen as necessary and that it was practicable. The dispute with Spain over British trade in the Caribbean had been rumbling on since 1713. Successive plans to resolve the points at dispute had come to nothing and the Spanish failure to honour the Convention of Prado (March 1738) was seen by many as the final straw. War was the only way of resolving the problem. It was also necessary as it was believed that Spanish disruption of British trade in the region would be fatal to the economy and thus a direct threat to her freedom and power in the world. It was not that Spain was seen as a direct challenge to British commercial and political stability, but that France was feared as growing in power both politically in Europe and economically through the growth of its overseas trade. None of these propositions could be tested in detail, but they gained their authority from long repetition and the fact that they could not be disproved. Subsequent research indicates that Britain stood to loose as much by war through the disruption of trade to Old Spain as it might gain by securing its commerce in the New World, but this was not an argument advanced by contemporaries.

If the war was necessary, it was also practicable. The argument that British naval power was a powerful aspect of the political rhetoric in Britain since the 1690s. The contrast of a war fought at sea, which protected trade, garnered colonial conquests, disrupted the trade and credit of Britain’s enemies, was contrasted with a war in Europe, which expended treasure, brought no direct advantages to British commerce, and did little to threaten enemies like France, whose land forces were a match for a
number of allies. Although employed in party debates during King William’s and Queen Anne’s reigns, neither Whig nor Tories ministries employed exclusively land or sea campaigns in the war against France. However the abrupt withdrawal from the war in 1713, which necessitated abandoning Britain’s European allies, left a bitter legacy of political debate that used the distinction between a maritime war which was in Britain’s interests and a land war which was primarily to the advantage of Britain’s Continental allies. It was a rhetorical difference reinforced in 1714 with the succession of the Elector of Hanover to the Crowns of Great Britain. Despite the passion with which the different strategies were expressed in the period between 1714 and 1739, the evidence to support the either did not go beyond the knowledge that Britain’s army was relatively small compared to potential enemies, while her navy was large and that this intuitively suggested advantage lay with the latter. Both land and sea wars were expensive, and there was no decisive evidence that either one or the other was generally more efficient or effective. However, in the case of Spain, there was strong feeling that she was particularly vulnerable to the effects of seapower. Spain’s West Indian defences were thought to be fairly weak, but she had a great dependence on the silver from the mines of Peru and Mexico. It would be a relatively easy task to take and hold some part of the Spanish empire to pose a permanent threat to the Spanish silver trade, which would guarantee her acquiescence to lawful British trade in the region. When war broke out in October 1739, the assumption held by ministers and public alike was that, aside from a coastal raid on Ferrol, the war would be fought in the West Indies where Britain’s naval advantage would be most effective.

The expedition that was sent to the West Indies in 1740 was a major disappointment. In two years it almost nothing except the capture of the small island of Rattan in the Gulf of Honduras. The mounting of such a large trans-Atlantic expedition was a major organisational challenge, which proved that Britain was capable of undertaking large-scale, long-term offensive operations in the Americas. By the time the remnants of the expeditionary force returned home, the political focus of the war had shifted to Europe. However, even if this had not been the case, it is highly unlikely that any form of enquiry would have seriously examined underlying causes of the failure. Contemporary enquires by parliament or courts martial were more usually concerned with establishing blame or innocence of individuals, rather than the wider questions of operational capability. In practice, contemporaries discussed and explained success or failure not in terms of operational capability, but instead focussed on individual competence, be they ministers, generals or admirals.

This had an important impact on the way events during the war were viewed and interpreted. What is interesting is that in the bitter political debates over the conduct of the war from the end of 1742 to the outbreak of the Jacobite rebellion in the summer of 1745, the Caribbean failure did not feature as crushing evidence against a maritime war. The Battle of Dettingen (June 1743), on the other hand, which was at least a nominal victory in Germany, was treated as an example of the futility of the continental war. Furthermore, the capture of Louisbourg in June 1745 was greeted with an enthusiasm and became a factor of political importance that far outweighed its military or commercial value. The reaction to the failure of the 1746 expedition is likewise important indicator of political attitudes.
The plan to capture Quebec followed on from the capture of Louisbourg. On 23rd January 1745/6, in the midst of the Jacobite Rebellion, the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, the Duke of Newcastle received a plan to take the city, from the two commanders of the successful Louisbourg operation – the Governor of Massachusetts, William Shirley, and Commodore Peter Warren. He passed this on to the Duke of Bedford, the First Lord of the Admiralty. Bedford and his colleagues, the New Whigs, had come into government at the end of 1744 on the dismissal of Lord Granville. The final struggle between the Old Corps Whigs and Granville saw the latter finally being forced out of government in January 1745/6 as an accommodation was reached at last with Lord Cobham and his Boy Patriots, among whom was counted William Pitt. These New Allies had been committed to a maritime view of war, in distinction to what they saw as Granville’s European/Hanoverian strategy, and part of the price they demanded for supporting the European war was the retention of Louisbourg at the peace.

Bedford may not personally have been that interested in Canada, but he had received a good deal of praise for the navy’s role in the capture of Louisbourg, and a Canadian expedition, offered the possibility of further kudos and reinforcement of his credibility among the New Whigs and New Allies. During the late winter and early spring of 1745/6, the Dutch had been conducting peace negotiations with France on the basis of reciprocal return of conquests. If this should come close to a conclusion it would place the British ministry in an impossible situation. France would not accept peace without the return of Louisbourg, which was politically impossible for the ministry to concede. On the other hand if the Dutch made a separate peace, the likelihood of Britain being able to maintain or recover the Austrian Netherlands was slight. Britain would be unable to make war or peace. In these circumstances the conquest of Canada began to look like an attractive proposition – America would balance French conquests in Flanders and Louisbourg might be retained. Against this was the knowledge that two previous expeditions to Quebec in 1690 and 1711 had ended in ignominious failure. At some point between late January and 24th March, a decision was taken in principle to attack Canada. It was probably in the second week of March as on the 14th Newcastle wrote to the governors of the Northern Colonies to be ready to raise a body of troops if an expedition to Canada was approved. Even at this point it is clear that the experience gained by the planning and organisation of the expedition the recent experience of the West Indian expedition had been absorbed. In the event, the Americans raised in 1740 reached the rendezvous for the expedition at Port Royal Jamaica, before the expeditionary force from Britain, but the delays experienced and the state of the Americans when they arrived left much to be desired. Early warning was essential, and even before the expedition had been set on foot.

Unlike the 1711 expedition, the West Indian operation had been considered by a committee of experts and on 28th March 1746, a committee consisting of Bedford, Field Marshal Wade, attending in his capacity of Lieutenant General of the Ordnance and Lieutenant General James St Clair, formerly Quartermaster General to the army in Flanders, who had been appointed commander of the expedition on the 26th March. The meeting appears to have been well prepared. Before the committee were placed copies of the papers relating to the 1711 expedition. They were confident that Warren’s force at Louisbourg would be enough to deter a French counter-attack and on that assumption they estimated the naval forces required for the operation and the impact any detachment would have upon the defence of home waters. They concluded
the victuals, stores and transports could be assembled within a month. Although it is impossible to be certain, the confidence with which the report was made, suggests that the Admiralty and the Ordnance had gathered information to inform the committee though their respective representatives. The committee concluded that an expeditionary force of 3500 regulars was required, and additional forces must be recruited in North America to augment the existing American regiments at Louisbourg and to create another garrison regiment for the town to release them for service against Quebec. What had taken three months in 1739-1740 had been achieved in one meeting with four days formal notice in 1746.

Newcastle received this report on 31st March and arranged for a meeting of ministers to consider it on 3rd April at the house of the Secretary of State for the Northern Department, the Earl of Harrington. Newcastle and his close confident, Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, were more circumspect. They had been closely involved in the planning of the West Indian expedition and in spite of knowing that King George II approved the operation, that it had the implicit support of the Admiralty, the professional army officers, the Ordnance and Harrington, he asked Hardwicke and his brother, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Henry Pelham, to meet with Harrington to discuss the plan before Bedford arrived for the main meeting on 3rd April. Hardwicke’s correspondence suggests that although they were all willing to accept the report, they suspected that Bedford’s enthusiasm was at least partly caused by his wish to please the New Allies, Cobham and Pitt. The details of the discussion both in the pre-meeting and the main meeting are unknown, but the result was a complete endorsement of the committee’s proposal. The political imperative was clearly significant. The Jacobite Rebellion was dying in the north of Scotland, the Allied army in Flanders was growing again for the next campaign, and the latest news from Italy was good. There was no reason to oppose the expedition and politically, as Newcastle later wrote to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Earl of Chesterfield, ‘Canada and Quebec will keep all things right’.

The need for speed was fully recognised. The committee had concluded that the expeditionary force must be at Quebec by the middle of July to have any hope of success before ice closed the St Lawrence. Anson, at the Admiralty, insisted that the force would have to leave Britain by the Britain by 10th May to meet this deadline – not impossible according to the committee’s initial projections. While the organisation of the expeditionary force and its escort from Britain could organised immediately, almost exactly on the grounds of the operation in 1740, one of the key conditions was the raising of additional forces in North America. This had also been done in 1740, but not without some delays. Newcastle had alerted the governors on 14th March and on 9th April detailed orders were despatched. Lessons had been learned. Raising American troops presented two distinct problems – the recruitment of the soldiers and the provision or arms and uniforms. The decision in 1740 to have the field officers and some company officers appointed from England, and then to limit the number of commissions that the colonial governors could give to local gentlemen, led to the loss of a number of American companies, which would not serve unless they did so under local officers. The decision to send out a uniform pattern and arms from Britain had delayed the regimenting of the American levies until after their arrival in the West Indies. In 1746, it was agreed to allow the governors to fill all the commissions, provide all the arms and uniforms, which would be paid for by the
Within a week the instructions for the entire expeditionary force had been signed and despatched.

While the planning process had been a great success, the assembling of the expeditionary force was to prove more problematic. The Ordnance Board, so often criticised for its inefficiency, had its storeships ready to leave the Thames by the end of April, although late requests for additional stores from St Clair forced the Board to fit out another store ship which was not ready until 6th May. There was a delay in appointing an Agent of Transports, who entered into his task inadequately briefed about the charter parties and without a boat to get around his flock. It was not until the 22nd May that the transports were assembled at Spithead and not until the 15th June that the army was fully embarked. Even then, the stowage of the army’s baggage was incomplete. As the expeditionary force awaited a fair wind, weaknesses in manning the transports became apparent, some transports were found to be not as sound as expected and substantial quantities of victuals had to be condemned. Some transports lost their anchors and drove in on one another, but nevertheless, if the wind turned the expeditionary force was ready to go.

Suddenly, on 27th June St Clair received a despatch from Newcastle. The expedition was not to depart. The troops were to be disembarked. One of the key assumptions was that the French would not mount a counter-offensive at sea that year. The validity of this assumption was suspected almost immediately. Between late April and mid-May the ministry had been disturbed by repeated rumours of the Brest squadron being at sea. With the final defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden only known in London on 26th April, fears of a French invasion were still strong. In Flanders Brussels had fallen during the winter to the French and the assembling of the allied army was slow. The Dutch were showing hesitation to commit themselves to a new campaign in the light of renewed French peace proposals. In Parliament these concerns were turning towards pressure to prevent the ministry from sending troops abroad. The ministry itself was divided on how best to use the forces embarked for Canada. Newcastle feared that if the Dutch pulled out of the war, Cape Breton could not be held, so it might have been better to send the troops to Flanders to encourage the Dutch to keep fighting. Bedford was for continuing with the Canadian enterprise. On 12th June, a vote in the Lords, designed for the very purpose, rejected a motion to prohibit troops from being sent abroad, which Newcastle saw this as a barometer of political opinion which gave the ministry confidence to stay with the expedition. Two days later worrying news arrived that the French fleet which had been at Aix was gone. Over the coming days numerous reports confirming that the French fleet was at sea in force arrived. No additional ships could be provided for the escort, and in the absence of Bedford, who was at Berwick disbanded his volunteer regiment of foot, the ministry cancelled the expedition.

As the situation developed in the next few weeks, the possibility of the French having gone to retake Cape Breton grew. The need to secure this prize led to new instructions being sent on 17th July for the expedition to go to Cape Breton. The expeditionary force might be able to retake Louisbourg in the autumn or at least be in North America to do the job in the spring of 1747. During August two factors began to play on the King’s mind. Anson had conceded to George II on 17th July that naval forces in Europe would be very stretched once the expedition had departed. Doubts about the Dutch continuing in the war continued to raise concerns. At the King’s insistence a
meeting was held on 21st August at Lord Harrington’s house to discuss if the expeditionary force ought to be sent to Flanders to bolster Dutch resolve. The Duke of Cumberland was to go to Flanders and if he could achieve something before winter, this would enable Britain to participate in the negotiations that would go on in the autumn with a stronger hand at the bargaining table. Those present unanimously agreed that it was too late to achieve anything in America to influence the autumn negotiations. On the other hand they were also agreed that to disband the expeditionary force would have a bad effect both domestically and abroad. It would signal the abandonment of the colonial offensive. Instead they agreed that the expeditionary force should be used to raid the French coast in the late summer and be kept together for an early departure to North America in 1747.

This was the origin of the attack upon Lorient in September 1746 and in the event the expedition never did set out for Quebec. What does it tell us about the ideology and organisation of maritime war at this time? In terms of organisation, the British ministerial and administrative systems were generally able to cope with demands of preparing the expedition. The planning was broadly realistic. The size of the expeditionary force was within the bounds of practicability both in terms of finding the troops and preparing their movement to North America. Except in one area, the ability of the administrative departments to deliver the resources required was generally good. The movement to troops to the embarkation points was smooth. The provision of ordnance stores was timely and only upset by late additional demands from St Clair. The victualling seems to have met expectations, although with the usual levels of condemned stores when inspection was made. The main weakness lay in the provision of transports. Despite the experience of 1740 and the constant employment of transports for moving forces to and from Europe since 1741, negotiating the charter party, converting and inspecting the vessels took longer than anticipated. This, combined with the need to wait on winds to move them from the Thames to Spithead, produced a real delay to the expedition of over a month. Whether this was really critical is open to question. Anson certainly believed that the expeditionary force had to leave Britain by 10th May to allow itself time to carry out operations in the St Lawrence, but in the succeeding weeks there is no indication in the correspondence that ministers thought that the window of opportunity had closed. Eighteenth century governments were perfectly capable of building contingencies into their planning for aspects of operations over which they had no control. In 1740 the decision not to make the usual stop at Madeira for wood, water and wine in order to bring the expeditionary force quickly into action with as much surprise as possible reflected the adaptation of methods to the situation. Likewise, expeditions since the 1690s had proved often enough that they were not in control of winds and tides, nor, except in the case of manpower, did they have the power to command resources from the merchant community. Hence, time lags were almost certainly expected and a deadline was something to be aimed for, but not the critical feature of planning.

Another factor over which the ministry had little control at this time was the action of the French fleet. When the assumption that the French would not sally out from the Atlantic ports was proved to be false, the ministry quickly adjusted the expedition. With a heavy commitment in the Mediterranean, ships were simply too scarce to increase the size of the escort, as had been done in the autumn of 1740. The threat posed to Louisbourg meant that the objective had to be changed to a counter-attack on the French expedition to Cape Breton. This sudden violation of expectations is
particularly interesting, because it immediately preceded the establishment of a Western Squadron as a central feature of British naval policy. Although the evidence is inconclusive, it is tempting to think that, given the responsive nature of British planning in other aspects of expeditions, the breakout of d’Anville’s squadron from Brest and the shock it had on planning for the Canadian expedition were critical factors in this major development of the maritime system.

On the whole, therefore, it seems that the British ministry could assume that their domestic military and naval resources and systems measured up to the demands mounting trans-Atlantic amphibious operations. However, this was did not amount to the ability to undertake effective operations in the Americas. Some things were beyond their control, principally the weather which remained a force of uncertainty until the age of effective steam power over one hundred years later. However, the mobilisation of American resources was central to the idea of an effective campaign in Canada. On 19th March Newcastle wrote to Governor William Shirley of Massachusetts telling him to raise land forces in America if he thought they were necessary and offering to appoint him General of Foot if he thought that this would assist. Meanwhile ‘His Majesty will expect with impatience to receive your’s and Admiral Warren’s Opinion upon this point which is of the greatest importance to His Majesty’s service’.

The capture of Louisbourg in July 1745 had been undertaken by seven Massachusetts regiments and one each from New Hampshire and Connecticut, under the overall command of Shirley and Colonel William Pepperell of Massachusetts. The supply network was also locally provided from New England. The Royal Navy on that station, under Admiral Peter Warren, provided the critical role in the defence of the sea communications, the waters around Louisbourg and services to the Americans ashore. The immediate British response to the appraisal of the defensive requirements sent by Shirley and Pepperell was to provide a permanent garrison. Two regular regiments were ordered from Gibraltar and Shirley and Pepperell were ordered to create two complete regiments from their American forces, which were to be incorporated into the British Army. This latter plan reflected the organisation of an earlier American regiment incorporated into the British Army in 1740. The colonels were to be Americans, but the other field officers, half the captains, all the lieutenants and half the ensigns were to be provided from Britain. In 1740 all the captains had been appointed locally. It was then well-known that the captain was the key officer in recruiting Americans. They were willing to serve under local gentlemen, but not under strangers. When in 1740, too few commissions arrived for the local officers, companies disbanded rather than serve under other officers. During the expedition an important change took place. The Americans had served well in the West Indies, but as their officers died, the British commander, Brigadier General Wentworth, promoted old British soldiers, who were serving as lieutenants or in other regiments in their place. He did this in order to discipline them more as regular troops. In 1745, whether the judgement was made that as 9 New England regiments were already raised and that it was only intended to maintain two on the British establishment, the virtue of regular discipline could be allowed to outweigh the preference of local officers is unclear, but is was an ill-judged decision. As Shirley noted to Newcastle in December 1745, it was unlikely the men would agree to serve and with disappointed American officers and discontented men, returning to New England it was doubtful that the new officers from Britain would be able to raise 100 in America.
When orders were despatched to raise the new regiments for the Canadian expedition on 9th April 1746, the organisation was different. These were to be provincial regiments not on the regular establishment and the 1740 model was used. The governors were at liberty to fill up the commissions as they saw fit. The officers and men would be paid by the Crown. Unlike 1740, when the colonial governments were expected to pay for the raising, victualling, clothing, billeting and transporting of the troops to the point of rendezvous with royal forces, the Crown would pay for all necessaries. Arms and clothes were to be provided locally, but St Clair was to pay all reasonable costs. This concession to pay for all the necessaries was vitally important in the colonies. The money supply was a consistent problem and some of public debts incurred for the abortive Canadian expedition of 1711 were still outstanding in 1740. Although the Crown had recognised this, the practicality of ensuring the inward flow of money to pay for the levies was to remain a problem through to the Seven Years War.

While French claims in North America were extensive, based upon the navigation of the Mississippi, the St Lawrence and adjoining waterways, the dependence of French Canada on the St Lawrence as the main artery of its settlements and trade into the interior and the Great Lakes, was a major weakness and determined the plan of attack on Canada since 1690. In that year the English northern colonies combined in an attempt to conquer the French settlements An advance was to be made up the Hudson from New York towards Montreal, while a force from Boston would go up the St Lawrence to attack Quebec. This failed, but the same plan was revived in 1711 in conjunction with a force of British regulars, who were to provide the main force going to attack Quebec. This operation met with shipwreck in the mouth of the St Lawrence and was abandoned, but the plan was revived again in 1746. Troops raised in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Connecticut were to rendezvous with St Clair’s expeditionary army at Louisbourg and proceed up the St Lawrence to Quebec. Troops raised in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland were to rendezvous at Albany, under Colonel William Gooch of Virginia, the colonel of the American regiment which had served in the West Indies. When news arrived of the fleet being in the St Lawrence, they were to march on Montreal. It seems that the ministry understood the conditions in America. Even when despatched to join the regulars, there would not be a repeat of the West Indian situation with the British commander in chief appointing to vacancies. St Clair was to appoint the officer to command the American forces, but the colonels retained the power to appoint to the vacancies of the Americans.

In practice raising the troops proved more difficult than the New England experience of the previous year suggested. Partly this related to inter and intra-colonial politics. While Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Connecticut worked fairly harmoniously in the Louisbourg enterprise, Rhode Island only belatedly contributed 150 men to the expedition and had sent them to join a New Hampshire or Connecticut regiment rather than their larger neighbour at Boston. The friction between Boston and Rhode Island continued during the year, but in response to instructions from London the latter slowly raised 300 more troops for the Canadian expedition. In October they were diverted to Annapolis which it was feared was in danger from a French counter-attack. They set sail in November, but unfortunately some of the vessels were
wrecked on the voyage and about half of the force was drowned. The rest had to be sent to Martha’s Vineyard to recuperate.

The expeditionary army from Albany to Montreal demanded action from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland, none of which until this point had been called upon for action and in which there was less agreement on the necessity of such expeditions. Only in Maryland was the response broadly positive. By the end of July three companies had been raised in that province and were ready to depart for Albany. New York was still suffering from a long-running struggle between the governor, George Clinton, and the Assembly over the prerogative powers of the former. Clinton could only get ‘a trifle in money’ from the Assembly and in response Clinton dissolved it. Clinton sent 10 18lb cannon to Boston and set up a subscription to raise money for supplies for the New England troops, but could not induce the Assembly to vote any funds for the expedition. When the orders arrived for the raising of troops for Canada, the Assembly expressed its loyalty, but in Clinton’s view did precious little to assist. To ease recruitment, Clinton had been instructed to use the four independent companies in the province for the expedition as well as recruiting new levies. He was also to bring out the Six Nations against the French if at all possible. Clinton managed to raise sixteen companies to join the Independent Companies at Albany, but not without some difficulty. Albany refused to raise any men and an act was passed to compel them to do so. Clinton was forced to compromise on the bills for financing the expedition or risk loosing other acts to encourage the expedition. The financial burden on Clinton was exceptional as the rendezvous was in his province at Albany. As the forces from the other provinces arrived, the governors of those provinces declared that their financial responsibility to the levies had now ceased. Colonel Gooch, who was expected to take up command of that force, declined, which meant that Clinton, by virtue of his commission as Captain General of the province of New York, was forced to take both financial and military responsibility for them, but the New York Assembly completely rejected any support for the troops from other provinces.

New Jersey was suffering similar internal problems. Governor Morris had been ill for some time and died on 21st May 1746. Morris left a province in turmoil. Like Clinton he had been in a struggle with the Assembly over powers and government officers of New Jersey had not been paid since September 1744. A dangerous power vacuum had developed and although the Council feared a civil war, the Assembly ‘cheerfully made provision’ for 500 troops. The forces were successful raised and the Assembly continued to vote support for the troops quartered at Albany over the winter of 1746/7.

In Pennsylvania Governor Thomas received the order to raise troops in early June. Thomas got the Assembly to agree to raise a single company of 100 men under John Shannon. Even this small number revived a long-standing quarrel over monetary policy – to fund by taxation or by emission of paper bills of credit. The governor refused the emission of more bills and had to settle for a sum that was inadequate to pay for all necessaries. Governor Thomas was forced to rely on his personal credit to raise money to clothe and arm the troops. Very quickly the public funding ran out and payments to innkeepers for the troops’ subsistence fell into arrears. Thomas arranged further personal credit to pay for the troops to leave Pennsylvania for Albany, fearing that with his credit reaching exhaustion, the troops would soon become mutinous and
plunder the local inhabitants. Shifting the problem to Clinton in New York solved the immediate crisis until the spring, when the victuals provided by Clinton began to run out. A further appeal to the Assembly to provide new supplies fell on deaf ears as the Assembly claimed that if Clinton wanted to keep the troops together he must pay for them.28

In London, the decision not to hold St Clair’s forces in readiness for an early departure to North America in the spring of 1747 did not mean that the enterprise had been abandoned. Events in Europe dominated ministers’ thinking, but the opportunity of gains in Canada were not forgotten. It was only at the end of May that news was sent to the governors that expedition would not be undertaken and orders given to disband the American forces at Louisbourg and Albany.29 This was not in response to a loss of interest in the theatre, but the receipt of a new appreciation of the situation from Shirley and Warren. In October, with the news that the expedition would not come out in 1746, they were ordered to review the forces needed to attack Canada. They concluded that at least 8,000 regulars supported by 22,000 American 18 line of battle ships, 5 frigates, four bombs and fireships would be needed for the task. Warren had arrived in back in Britain to discuss the huge expansion of forces demanded. Warren would not budge on his analysis and the ministers were forced to accept that the plan was now impracticable.30 Attention would now be focussed on securing Cape Breton and Nova Scotia and paying off surplus American troops.

The disbanding of the troops posed problems. The example of the New York Assembly refusing to provide credit for the raising of the troops until Parliament had voted funds to repay them was soon followed by other provinces. The disbanding of the troops was the signal for the clearing of debts. It was not clear whether the troops should have the cost of their provisions stopped from their pay as in the regular army. Clinton, at Albany, decided not to do so, but Shirley did make the stoppages, until the anger of the troops forced him to relent. The question of whether the troops should retain their arms and accoutrements also divided the Albany and Louisbourg camps, which again had to be settled in favour of the soldiers. How the troops were to receive their pay was also undecided. Shirley recommended that the governors raise credit to pay the men until Parliament made good the payments as promised. This could entail further emission of paper money in places like Rhode Island and New Hampshire, which threatened devaluation of the currency or giving the men bills on the Paymaster General which they could either hold until the money arrived from Britain or sell on at a discounted rate to merchants. Shirley strongly advocated the latter, but even then it would take time to gather the money and the discount rate might not be good for the men. Shirley felt that Massachusetts had a strong enough money supply to do it successfully, but the smaller colonies might struggle.

Although the financial weakness of the northern colonies remained a sticking point into the 1750s, some things were learned from this experience of raising and disbanding large forces in North America. The American troops were clearly perceived as being separate from the regular army, under their own officers and appointments determined by the provinces. Delays were minimised by using local sources of arms and clothes, although the effectiveness of the former was questionable as Shirley concluded that a large number of firelocks were so poor at the beginning of the campaign that they were worthless at the end. Aside from this, the critical factor was financial. The British government assumed full responsibility for
financing the provincial regiments, but ensuring the money arrived in North America broke down. As in 1740, a senior officer, in this case St Clair, was supposed to provide bills of exchange and when he did not arrive there was no mechanism to redeem the debts incurred. Ensuring the payments system worked was to be an important factor in the massive expansion of the provincial regiments raised during the Seven Years War. It is impossible to judge how effective these troops would have been but in terms of putting them on foot, the ministry could be sure that the system worked well enough in North America.

Overall, British ministers and public could assume that the colonists of North America were capable of contributing to large scale operations on that Continent. On the other hand, the failure to mount the expedition after all the effort might have suggested that the practicality of such operations in the military conditions of 1746/7 were more doubtful. Two failed British trans-Atlantic expeditions (1740-3, 1746) and one failed French expedition (1746) during the war might have given cause to rethink the attractiveness of such operations. It does not appear to have done so and it is in this that the role of ideology is interesting.

Ideology provides a mind set by which to filter and organise information. One of the most important features of British politics was the institutional deflection of criticism of either monarch or governmental system to the ministers. The accountability of ministers through Parliament produced a debate that was focussed upon personal competence and a broad assumption that events flowed directly from conscious decision-making at the highest level. This was consistent with contemporary attitudes to personal honour and the attributes and role of leadership in society. The failure of the 1740 expedition to the West Indies was variously attributed to Walpole or to Major General Wentworth. The failure of the Canadian expedition was laid at the door of Newcastle. The disaster at Fontenoy in May 1745 was attributed to the actions of General Ingoldsby or the Dutch. The question then becomes; if success or failure could be explained satisfactorily by the decisions of identifiable individuals, how susceptible was ideology to the outcome of military events? Certainly, the shock of crises could have an impact. The disastrous attack on Brest in 1694 silenced the advocates of maritime war for the rest of the Nine Years War. The Jacobite Rebellion of 1745/6 greatly diminished the vigorous press campaign against Hanover and the war in Flanders against France. However, these were not long term effects. In both instances the advocates of maritime war had revived within ten years. The belief that Britain had the capability to achieve significant results in the Americas was tested twice in the war, and the failures of the expeditions of 1740-3 and 1746 produced neither crises, nor suggested that there was anything intrinsically impracticable about such operations. The failure to go to Canada 1746, therefore, posed no challenge to the assumptions of ministers or public. Ministers, senior officers and administrators learned something about the problems of carrying out such operations which remained an option for the future. Ministerial opposition to, or support for, the expedition was not on primarily based on principle but on appreciations of the immediate circumstances of operations – the attitude of the Dutch, the tempo of peace negotiations and the threat from France. One does not see quite the same ideological resilience in the face of bad news from the war in Flanders, where the sluggishness of the Dutch and the obstinacy of the Austrians are constant themes throughout the war. Although there was never the clear ideological divide between Continental and Blue Water policies among ministers that the pamphlet war
suggested, it seems that the ideological underpinning for a European war weakened relative to the maritime war.

Thus, in conclusion, it might be suggested that, despite heated debates over military policy, the six years of campaigning in Europe and the general lack of success in the amphibious war, Britain’s maritime focus was consolidated in the 1740s. The expedition to Canada demonstrated that the ideology of maritime war was by then highly resistant to failure. It did not stimulate serious political repercussions, nor a reaction in inverse proportion to the enthusiasm that the capture of Cape Breton had caused the year before. The capability of the British state to mount significant trans-Atlantic expeditions was also developing and understood. From the mobilisation of military units to the organisation of American forces, a British expedition could be put on foot in a matter of weeks. It is even possible that it played a role in resolving the key naval weakness of such expeditions - vulnerability to the escape of French squadrons – by stimulating the creation of the Western Squadron. This ideological strength, ability to change and upward drift of capability was to be important as Britain had to absorb four more years of indifferent results of maritime war from 1755 to 1759 before it fruits became self-evident.

1 For an example of how a network of factors might be used, see R. Harding, ‘Trans-Atlantic Operational Capability: State, Resources, and War, 1739-1748’ in Bowen and Gonzalez-Encigo.
4 The term is very slippery and defies uncontested definition. As a working definition here it is only intended to imply that MPs were forced to draw very heavily upon a deep-rooted set of assumptions to explain any given contemporary situations, rather than construct explanations from rich sources current information. It is not intended to mean that MPs were rationalising situations based on hidden or unconscious assumptions. See T. Eagleton, Ideology (Vess, London, 1991); J. Larraín, The Concept of Ideology (Hutchinson, London, 1979); D. Held, Ideology (Open University Press, Buckingham, 1995).
5 TNA, COS/44 (Louisbourg Papers), f. 18, Newcastle to the Governors of the Northern Colonies, 14th March 1745/6
6 TNA, SP 42/98, f. 27.
7 BL, Add Ms 32707 (Newcastle Papers), f. 26, Newcastle to Chesterfield, 6th April 1746.
9 TNA, COS/44 (Louisbourg Papers), f. 18, Newcastle to the Governors of the Northern Colonies, 9th April 1746.
10 TNA, COS/45, (Expedition to Canada), f. 336, Newcastle to Shirley, 19th March 1745/6.
11 TNA, COS/44, (Louisbourg Papers), f. 73, Registry of Commissions in the army under Pepperell. Rhode Island sent three companies of 50 men to join the army after the town had fallen. G.S. Kimball, (ed.), The Correspondence of the Governors of Rhode Island, (Cambridge, 1912), vol. 2, 359, Partridge to Wanton, 22nd May 1745.
12 TNA, COS/45, (Expedition to Canada), f. 320, Newcastle to Shirley, 11th Sept. 1745.
TNA, CO5/45, (Expedition to Canada), f. 346, Newcastle to Governors of New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, 9th April 1746.

TNA, CO5/45, (Expedition to Canada), f. 350, Newcastle to Governors of New York, New Jersey, Maryland and Pennsylvania, 9th April 1746; f. 35, Newcastle to Shirley, 9th April 1746; f. 364, Newcastle to Gooch, 9th April 1746.

TNA, CO 5/45 (Expedition to Canada), f.343, Newcastle to Pepperell, 9th April 1746; C.H. Hamilton, The Correspondence of William Shirley, (Macmillan, New York, 1912) vol. 1, 326, Shirley to Wentworth, 2nd June 1746.


Archives of Maryland, (Baltimore, 1908) vol. 28, 362.


E.B. O’Callaghan, (ed.), Documents relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York (Albany, 1855), vol. 6, 284, Clinton to Newcastle, 18th Nov. 1745.

Ibid., 316, Clinton to the Lords of Trade, 9th Dec. 1746

Ibid., 340, Clinton to Newcastle, 11th May 1747.


Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, (Harrisburg, 1851), vol. 5, 52-53, Thomas to the Assembly, 22nd Aug. 1746; 54-57, Thomas to the Assembly, 15th Oct. 1746; 57, Thomas to the Assembly, 6th January 1746/7; Assembly to Thomas, 12th January 1746/7.

TNA CO 5/45 (Expedition to Canada), ff. 67-76, Shirley and Knowles to Newcastle, 28th Nov. 1747. The total number of Americans raised in 1746 appears to have been about 7000.

TNA, CO 5/45 (Expedition to Canada), ff. 376-386, Newcastle to Shirley, 30th May 1747.