

Scrutinizing global decolonization efforts

Forum: GA4

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Key terms:

- A. Imperialism:** A system in which a state extends its power directly control territory, resources, and people beyond its borders. (O'Neil, Fields a Share 558)
- B. Colonialism:** An imperialist system in which a country occupies a region outside of its own territory and governs over the land, people and resources in the territory. (O'Neil, Fields a Share 558)
- C. Decolonization:** The opposite process of colonization in which a country becomes independent of the country it has been colonized by. Decolonization can be done in many ways, the most crucial being a former colony gaining political independence and becoming a sovereign country. However, decolonization can also occur as a cultural, social and psychological change, meaning that the former colony for example tries to restore its indigenous culture, social structures and institutions and tries to rid its people and institutions of norms and values established by their colonist country. (decolonization)
- D. Neocolonialism:** The indirect imposing of imperialist influence on independent LDCs (less-developed countries), usually former colonies, by developed countries, on the economies of the LDCs, for example through loans or foreign investment. (O'Neil, Fields a Share 572)

General overview and historical context:

The first country to ever decolonize itself were the United States of America after the War for Independence in 1776. Other colonized nations in Central and South America followed a few decades later, for example Haiti after the Haitian Revolt in 1804. However, most of the decolonization processes began post-World War 2 as European countries no longer had the resources and assets to govern over their colonies alongside the country itself as a result of the war. To name a few examples, the Korean Peninsula was liberated in 1946 and gained independence from Japan, the United States of America relinquished the Philippines in the same year, and India gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1947.

Since the 1950s up until the 1970s, African countries gradually became gaining independence on the colonial power (mainly the United Kingdom and France, but

Belgium, Portugal, Germany, Italy and Spain also controlled parts of the continent) and experienced radical political change. The majority have been gained independence from the countries they have been colonized by peacefully without any major uprisings or violence because in many cases, the countries colonizing African countries understood that they were no longer able to rule over overseas territories of this extent, so they often even welcomed the independence with their former colonies and even established diplomatic relations with them. On the other hand, due to their strategic value for the colonial powers, a few countries such as French Algeria or British Kenya fought for their independence in bloody uprisings and wars. Even after gaining independence, many countries still struggled with internal violence mostly caused by the borders drawn by the colonial powers which mostly did not respect ethnic, cultural and religious differences. This led to many ethnically or religiously motivated conflicts inside the countries, many of which prevail until today, which is for example the case of Nigeria, which still struggles from ethnic conflicts as well as religiously motivated disputes today. (O'Neil, Fields a Share 703-711)

Decolonization efforts started after the Second World War as well, for example Vietnam's War for Independence against France (1945-1954) or the Iranian coup d'état in 1953. In Asia most of the decolonization processes happened violently through long-held struggles against the colonial powers and similarly to Africa often had a violent aftermath even after the country gained independence (for example the First Indo-Pakistani war of 1947, only months after India became independent). Decolonization also did not end peacefully on the Korean peninsula due to the emergence of a communist and Western-democratic government (in terms of ideals), leading to the Korean War in 1950 and the division of the peninsula into two countries, the DPRK and South Korea. Therefore, what is important to mention as a major influence on the decolonization in Asia is the Cold War. The growing influence of the Soviet Union in the region was very concerning to the USA for fear of the USSR to spreading its socialist ideals across the continent and have the newly independent countries as allies. The USA for wanted countries such as Vietnam to be democratic following the Western ideals in order to have access to the rich natural resources in these countries. The Soviet and Chinese communist influences once again cause the division of the country into a communist North Vietnam and a democratic South Vietnam, leading to the Vietnam War in 1955, ultimately ending with the victory of North Vietnam. Alongside having allied states such as Vietnam or the DPRK, the USSR also colonized countries in Central Asia and the Baltic region, who ultimately gained independence without an armed struggle after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. (Decolonization of Asia and Africa, 1945–1960)

Issues involved in decolonization:

A. Violent struggles for independence

As already mentioned in the previous part, decolonization often only occurs after bloody conflicts of the colonies and colonial empires, leaving the newly independent country with major economic, social and political damages.

B. Further internal conflicts and legacy of colonial systems

What also often proves to be a problem caused by the previous drawing out of borders by the colonial powers are ethnic, racial and religious conflicts, which occur for example when certain ethnic or religious groups enjoy greater benefits at the expense of other groups due to them being favored in the colonial times. The mixing of different national, ethnic, religious and cultural groups in one territory (historically for the purposes of making governing more practical for the colonial powers) may also result in further disputes and partitions, such as in the case of India and Pakistan, who got into an armed conflict nearly right after the whole region gained independence from Britain. The legacy of colonialism in the form of various forms of inequality is also still a pressing issue especially in Africa, for example in the Republic of South Africa and Botswana, where the discriminatory legacy of racial and

Republic of South Africa and Botswana, where the discriminatory legacy of racial and ethnic discrimination in the times of Apartheid prevails to this day in areas such as economic inequality and unequal access to resources.

C. Establishing new political systems

After gaining independence, most former colonies chose to completely rid themselves of the old political systems established during the colonial times and create entirely new institutions. However, this process often involved additional violence as well for example due to the disputes over the regime type and ideology by which the country should be governed, which, as already said above, happened for example in Korea and Vietnam, both resulting in horrid wars. (Decolonization of Asia and Africa, 1945–1960)

The establishing of entirely new political, economic and social system takes a certain amount of time before they become fully institutionalized and functional, which was in many cases the cause of a delay in the development of post-colonial states. The absence of weakly institutionalized state institutions has had various further effects, ranging from rising criminality rates to civil wars and coup d'états (such as in Nigeria, which experienced decades of political instability before establishing the current system in 1999). (O'Neil, Fields a Share 748)

D. Influence of external actors and neocolonialism

As already mentioned in the general overview, the influence of external actors was absolutely crucial to the character of decolonization efforts around the world. The influence of for example the USSR has played a major part in the decolonization of Asia as it caused many of the newly liberated states to turn into communist allies of the Soviet Union, making them dependent on a new country despite being officially independent. This establishment of communist regimes often involved the establishment of dictatorships and totalitarian regimes by leaders supported by the USSR, once again making the inhabitants of such countries lose their freedom. Another area of this problem is the consequence of the delayed development of post-colonial states, because modern-day “empires” such as China or USA saw it as an opportunity to gain influence in the region for example through giving the former colonies loans or investing in their infrastructure and thereby practicing neocolonialism in the former colonies. (Decolonization of Asia and Africa, 1945–1960)

Major parties involved:

A. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland:

The UK has had many colonies around the world who have since gained their independence, but still struggle with the colonial legacies established there by the United Kingdom, such as poorly drawn borders, cultural erasure and ethnic conflicts. (Decolonization of Asia and Africa, 1945–1960)

B. French Republic:

France is in the same situation as the United Kingdom due to its historically great number of overseas territories, many of which are now independent and are still dealing with issues caused by colonization. (Decolonization of Asia and Africa, 1945–1960)

C. United States of America:

Being a former colony as well as a colonizing country, the USA has had quite a complicated role in global decolonization. While it has supported the independence of many countries such as Vietnam which would be a strategic ally if it had turned democratic (the USA would have an ally closer to USSR and China), it had colonized Cuba until the beginning of the 20th century and still possesses many overseas territories such as Puerto Rico or American Samoa. (O'Neil, Fields a Share 248-258)

D. Soviet Union:

The Soviet Union was a major player in the decolonization of Asia as it supported the independence of newly decolonized states as it wanted to spread its communist ideologies across the region as a means of dominating over the USA during the Cold War. Its outreach influenced for example the wars in Korea and Vietnam. The USSR was also a colonizer country itself, occupying Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan and also Baltic nations until 1991 (collapse of the USSR), causing major cultural and linguistic erasure in these regions during these times. (Decolonization of Asia and Africa, 1945–1960)

E. People's Republic of China:

The PRC was another communist player in the Asian decolonization alongside the USSR. It was another country spreading its communist ideals across Asia and aiding communist factions in wars against democratization (Korean and Vietnam war) while also colonizing and conquering Tibet, which is still under Chinese influence as of now and its culture and traditions are being actively erased by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. (O'Neil, Fields a Share 544)

Previous solutions:

A. Trusteeship Council:

The Trusteeship Council was established in 1945 in the UN Charter as one of the six principal organs of the UN and its purpose was to supervise over the 11 so-called trust territories – former mandate countries of the League of Nations – and ensure their transition into autonomy and independence. The last of the 11 to become a fully independent state was Palau in 1994, meaning that the Council's mission has been fulfilled and it currently only exists on paper. (Decolonization)

B. Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples:

This resolution of the UN General Assembly passed in 1960 was a milestone in the global decolonization efforts as it affirmed independence and the right for self-determination for countries and people under colonial rule and called for an end of colonialism. (Decolonization)

Questions to think about:

- Were the former colonies prepared for independence?
- Did formerly colonized countries truly become independent after the end of colonial rule? Or did they only go through a transition between colonialism and neocolonialism?
- How can the successful and peaceful development of post-colonial countries be ensured?
- How can we prevent post-colonial states from becoming dependent of modern-day empires?
- How could internal conflict in post-colonial countries be avoided or resolved?
- How do we deal with the colonial legacy in post-colonial countries?
- How can neocolonial influence in post-colonial countries be reduced?

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