

Is Decolonization A Consequence Of Second World War

Decolonization for many countries meant granting colonies independence, which led to the eventual end of an empire. Although Second World War, can be seen as a primary consequence for some countries, there were those countries that had more important reasons for decolonisation. The majority of European Empires were affected by war, as they were financially exhausted due to spending a lot of money on the war and some countries were also in political turmoil. However, nationalists and violent independence groups also influenced decisions, which were more important than Second World War for certain countries. Another important factor was public opinion, as years after the war, people wished to see other nations independent. There was also external pressure, particularly from the United States. Three empires worth discussion are: The British, French and Portuguese Empires. The British and French Empires were two of the largest Empires in the twentieth century and thus their process of decolonisation is worth discussion. The significance of the Portuguese Empire is that their process of decolonisation was one of the most violent and they began fairly late, at the middle of the 1970's. Therefore, Second World War, was a factor, but, at times, not the most important factor.

With regards to Britain, de-colonisation occurred primarily due to WW2. According to Douglas, by the end of the war Britain was in a dire economic state. This is hardly surprising as Britain had spent more than £1000 million pounds on India during WW2 and as a consequence had few reserves left. This suggests that in order to ease financial burden they gave India independence. However, Brendon suggests that during the war, there was financial burden on the British Empire. For example, between 1939 and 1945 a £1.4 million grant was given to Kenya to help build houses, hospitals and schools. These financial statistics was going to be a burden in the long term for Britain, especially after the war. Moreover, after WW2, the level of unemployment had increased by 4% in 1946 in Britain. Many men who returned from war were disenchanted, as there was no work for them. This suggests that Britain was financially burdened and they needed to resolve their situation at home.

However, Lawrence suggests that there were more important factors than WW2 in British decolonisation. He suggests that de-colonisation was a result of extreme violence. To some extent, Lawrence's view is valid. For example, in India, Direct Action Day of 1947 led to many deaths and uncontrollable violence between Hindus and Muslims, The Mau Mau in Kenya also killed many British soldiers and the violence of the Suez crisis eventually led to hostilities in commonwealth countries. However, this violence can be seen to be as a result of political instability during WW2, both in Britain

and in her colonies. For example, due to WW2 the British had failed to recognise Jinnah's request for Pakistan, which was only recognised until after the war. Moreover, a reason why the Mau Mau was created was due to the poor sanitation and living standards during WW2 and many Kenyans felt neglected by the British. This suggests that Lawrence's view can be questioned, as it was the tension during the war, which helped to create violence. This violence made the British want to resolve domestic problems and was happy to give independence. Another interpretation to decolonisation is the replacement of Clement Attlee in the place of Winston Churchill, which should not be overlooked in helping to trigger decolonisation. One must remember that Churchill had no thought in offering independence to any colony as he wanted to maintain British superiority. This is in contrast to Attlee, who believed that Britain had no right to an Empire. For example, Attlee sent Mountbatten to India to help India gain independence as quickly as possible. Thus, WW2 was more important than violence because, the political instability was increased due to the war and neglect was felt by people.

Furthermore, Judd suggests, there was pressure from the United States. The United States had encouraged Britain to continue spending on ambitious schemes, but the treasury insisted that due to the War the British had little capital left to do so. Instead, Britain decided to incorporate quasi-colonialism which was their downfall. Firstly, it created long-term economic difficulties in the tropical colonies such as the Tanganyika groundnut scheme, where the British spent £36 million. The 1945 colonial development act was aimed at spending £120 million over ten years on colonies. This is significant because, following the war, the British were financially poor and so it was unwise of them to spend so much money. Churchill declared, 'This will see the ruin of our great legacy.' By this 'legacy' he meant the Empire and this did put further economic pressure on Britain, as she now had a massive debt. Thus, the pressure from America was more important than WW2 because it placed Britain in further financial problems.

French de-colonisation can be seen more as a result of violence rather than the effects of WW2, which was not as important. According to Springhall, the National Liberation Front in Algeria waged a huge violent Guerilla campaign in 1954 against French occupation. Indeed, many civilians and French soldiers were murdered, which did lead, Charles De Gaulle to say in a 1962 speech, 'I have understood you'. This may have been an acknowledgement of the violence or French public opinion where the majority of the public wished to see Algeria get independence. Another interpretation could be that perhaps De Gaulle wished to show France as a sympathetic nation and by giving a developing nation like Algeria independence, would have shown, that they had learnt something from their struggles against Vietnam. Another example of violence was in Vietnam, where Lawrence suggests that the Vietnamese did not wish to be a part of the French Empire following WW2. Although this shows that it was WW2 which may have lead to the Vietminh party to revolt, the threat was communism, which had built up from the First World War. Moreover, Ho Chi Minh had been planning to revolt against the French even before Second World War began. It was not until the defeat by the communists at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu that the French gave into Vietminh

concessions of wanting to become an independent state, which shows that violence and not the war was responsible for decolonisation.

The importance of Public Opinion was less important than that of WW2 with regards to French de-colonisation. Ansprenger suggests that it was the hostility of the public which made started de-colonisation. Indeed, in Paris there was a riot where 200 students were injured. This actually was a trigger factor, which made De Gaulle think about giving Algeria independence. Moreover, The Association des Etudiants Africaines was formed immediately after the war, in France. This is significant, as this group was formed after the war due to the lack of freedom for African colonies. A member of the AEA stated, 'colonies have the misfortune to be ruled by the administration.....when they should have independence.' The AEA campaigned for an increase in student welfare and student grants. This is important as they believed that the government was preoccupied with the colonies, when they should have focused on more domestic issues. Furthermore, following the war, 73% of the French public suggested that they did not wish France to have an Empire. There could be many reasons for this. Firstly, the war had created a high level of unemployment within France. Secondly, it was mainly students who revolted against the Empire. For example, the Union Internationale des Etudiants campaigned for decolonisation in 1950.

Gabriel D'abroussier sent a message to the UIE thanking them for their support. 'to the millions of students grouped together in your organization, I send my good wishes for the day of struggle against colonialism.' It is important to note that this struggle was backed by the communists, which is hardly surprising considering the ongoing war in Indo-China. The fact that this group had 'millions of student' support, suggests that after the war, young people may have wished countries to have independence. Many students had seen and heard about the destruction of land during the war, and they did not want a repeat of this destruction and carnage. The only way to prevent this for colonies was to support their effort on independence. Furthermore, these movements had an effect on the government and placed pressure on them. De Gaulle once declared in a meeting, 'the youth may have a point.' This shows that the government was aware of the ongoing desire for the public to give African colonies independence. Therefore, Second World War is more important than public opinion, because although public opinion had an effect on the government and it had growing support, this hostile, anti colonial environment was due to Second World War without which, there may not have been as much support for de-colonisation.

Portuguese de-colonisation felt little impact from Second World War, but rather the effect of losing many soldiers during the colonial war. According to Pinto, the Portuguese Empire was the last Empire to start de-colonisation at the mid 1970's. This shows that the war rarely had an impact on de-colonisation, because it was Portugal's dictatorial regime which led to de-colonisation. For example, the government had shot dead 500 Africans in 1960. It was likely that there would be uproar. Birmingham believes that the Portuguese repression was of greater importance than WW2 because, it led to reduction and squeezing of important Portuguese amenities such as cotton in

Mozambique. Pinto and Birmingham fail to point out that during the 1960's and early 1970's there was a massive colonial war. This is significant as it led to the creation of the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, who led Guerilla campaigns against the Portuguese. There were violent and uncontrollable uprisings within the country, where 4,538 people were killed in 1968, Portugal was in debt and thousands of Portuguese troops were injured. This may suggest that the casualties were building up and in Portugal 65% of the public wanted them to concede their Empire in 1968. The Debt also created high unemployment within Portugal. Moreover, there was violence in Angola. A member of the liberation movement in Angola stated, 'The Portuguese have ruled us like dictators for too long...this is our payback.' The significance of this statement shows that after years of being dictated, the Angolans wanted complete independence. The trigger factor came during 1975, when the Portuguese had suffered many casualties and eventually had to concede their Empire. The commissioner in Angola stated that there were 'thousands upon thousands of casualties.' It had been decided to continue with warfare for almost 15 years, thus violence was more important.

Second World War was a primary consequence for de-colonisation, but there were, at times, more important reasons. Britain was financially exhausted and had pressure from America, whilst violence was rife in their colonies, particularly India and Kenya, which forced them to concede defeat. France had pressure from within the country by students and the public, and the violence which occurred within the colonies also forced them to give independence. Portugal had to fight one of the longest colonial wars in history and eventually their African colonies were set free.