

Decolonisation

Decolonisation is the undoing of colonialism. Colonialism is a process of a nation establishing and maintaining its dominations of overseas territories. The concept of decolonisation, in particular, applies to the dismantlement of European colonies in Africa and Asia towards the second half of the 20th century.

Read more about decolonisation within the context of the IAS Exam.

What is the scope of Decolonization?

The very core of decolonisation is the right to self-determination as a fundamental right identified by the United Nations, which paves the way for independence along with other methods of decolonization.

The United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization has stated that there is no other alternative for the coloniser but to allow a process of self-determination.

The process of decolonisation may involve nonviolent revolutions or violent revolutionary wars by pro-independence groups. It may be intranational like the Indian Independence Struggle or may involve the intervention of foreign powers as was the case during the liberation of Bulgaria when the Russian Empire intervened to free it from the Ottoman Empire.

Along with these examples, there have been cases of particularly active periods of decolonization during modern times such as the breakup of the Spanish Empire in the 19th century, Abolition of the Ottoman Empire post-World-War I, dismantlement of the British, French, Dutch and Japanese Colonial Empires after World War II and the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War.

What are the methods and stages of decolonisation?

World opinion began favouring the idea of decolonisation following the end of World War I. The League of Nations (Dissolved on April 20, 1946) was the first international body that took a collective effort towards decolonisation. A number of mandates were created for this purpose but these were interpreted as mere redistribution of control over the former colonies to that of other colonial powers at the time, the notable example being German colonies in Africa being divided among France and Britain.

It was the devastation following World War II when the colonial powers on their own accord began taking steps towards decolonisation. As they had other priorities such as rebuilding their

own countries, there was little finance or enthusiasm for military action to hold into overseas territories against their will

Through referendums, the dependent territories have chosen to retain their dependent status as was the case of Gibraltar and French Guiana. Colonial powers have at times favoured decolonisation in order to rid themselves of the financial and military burdens in light of independence movements that grew in the colonies

The final phase of decolonization may concentrate on handing over responsibility for foreign relations, security and soliciting and de jure recognition for the new sovereignty. However even following the recognition of statehood a degree of continuity can be maintained through bilateral treaties between now equal governments, such as military training, mutual protection pacts etc.

Timeline of Decolonisation

The table below gives a brief description of notable decolonisation events that have happened at various points of time in history.

Year	Event
1776	After a year of general insurrection, the 13 colonies of British America declared their independence in 1776. They are formally recognised by Great Britain after signing of the treaty of Paris in 1783
1821	Greece revolts against the Ottoman Empire leading to an insurrection and independence. The Ottoman Empire formally recognises the new state following the treaty of Constantinople
1902	Cuba is granted independence. Guantanamo Bay is granted in perpetuity as a US Naval Base
1916	The independence of Russian Poland as a new kingdom is proclaimed by occupying German and Austro-Hungarian forces. Recognized by Soviet Russia in the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
1919	End of the protectorate over Afghanistan, when the United Kingdom accepts the presence of a Soviet ambassador in Kabul.
1943	Lebanon declares independence, effectively ending the French mandate (previously together with Syria).
1947	The British government leaves India. The

	partition of India leads to the formation of the secular, but Hindu-majority state of India and the Muslim state of Pakistan.
1954	The French enclave of Pondicherry is absorbed into the Union of India
1961	The colonies of Goa, Diu and Daman are liberated by the Indian Armed forces from Portuguese colonial administration
1970	The United Kingdom ends its protectorate over Muscat and Oman.
1982	Canada gains full independence from the British parliament with the Canada Act 1982.
1997	The British overseas territory of Hong Kong is given to the People's Republic of China.
2006	Montenegro achieves independence from Serbia after a referendum.