Unit 12.1 Decolonisation and Independence

Topic 1: Background – early stages of decolonisation

The History Syllabus (p. 15) poses the question: ‘what are decolonisation and independence?’ In this Unit you will work towards an understanding of how significant events such as wars, nationalist movements and feelings laid the basis for eventual self-determination and independence for colonies in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

Two words are important: decolonisation and independence. You will learn about and explain the causes of the decline of European powers and the recognition of nation-states and sovereignty. You will learn why the United Nations was formed, and about its roles in initiating mandatory status to colonies and supervising European powers to help former colonies towards greater autonomy and independence. You will come to understand the processes involved in gaining independence, the formation of developing nations, and problems faced by ‘third world nations’.

By the end of the term you will be able to:
• Identify and understand events, issues and forces that have shaped your cultural, social, political and economic heritage.
• Demonstrate an understanding of historical concepts and ideologies.
• Describe and explain the origin, development and impact of change on societies and nations.
• Interpret and critique historical evidence and information.
• Apply the historical skills of inquiry, observation, classification, recording and interpreting.

In order to achieve the understanding above, you will:
• Identify and discuss the causes of, and reasons for the decline of, European powers in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.
• Explain the attempts that have been made to achieve cooperative human development at the local, national and international level.
• Outline the development and realisation of nation-states.
• Evaluate the extent to which the new nations recognised and attained their goal of independence.
• Produce case studies that investigate the background, approach and progress of people and countries striving for self-determination and independence.
• Debate or present arguments for and against independence.
Unit 12.1 Decolonisation and Independence

World Colonisation and Imperialism

Changing colonial Powers in the Pacific

Scale 1:100,000,000

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Topic 1: Background – early stages of decolonisation

Colonial Empires

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Empires</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
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Scale

1: 154 000 000

One centimetre on the world maps represents 1540 kilometres on the ground at the equator.

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**World Decolonisation**

- Greece 1821-29
- Serbia 1670
- Bulgaria 1878
- Macedonia 1912-13
- Cyprus 1960
- Malta 1964
- Gibraltar 1969
- The Gambia 1966
- Cape Verde 1975
- Sao Tome & Principe 1975
- St. Helena 1999

**Independence**

Most areas of the world have been colonised at some time. Some countries were annexed and then gained their independence during the same time period. The dates on this map show countries that have been decolonised in the last two hundred and fifty years or so. Most of these countries gained their independence from European colonial powers.

- UN pursuing independence for these places in 1999
- areas absorbed by countries without a UN democratic vote
- countries that have not been colonies in the last 250 years
- international boundaries, 1999

1744 – 1771
1780 – 1794
1845 – 1855
1946 – 1948
1960 – 1979
1980 – 1999

- 1783 American Declaration of Independence
- 1803 Louisiana Purchase
- 1821 Spanish Rule ends in Central America
- 1838 United Provinces of Central America
- 1867 The Dominion of Canada
- 1857 USS Maine purchases Cuba from Spain
- 1858 Louisiana Purchase
- 1884 United Provinces of Central America
- 1898 United Provinces of Central America
- 1905 Treaty annexed by USA
- 1912 United Provinces of Central America
- 1917 Germany declares war on USA
- 1918 Uruguay independent from Brazil
- 1920 UN Charter is adopted
- 1922 India gains independence
- 1925 Panama Canal opened
- 1929 Coal strike in USA
- 1933 Depression begins
- 1945 Fall of Berlin
- 1946 USA acquires the Oregon Territory
- 1948 Fall of Berlin
- 1953 Mexico gains independence
- 1967 Russia sells Alaska to USA

Former republics of the USSR now independent sovereign states, gained independence as follows:
- Armenia 1990
- Azerbaijan 1990
- Belarus 1991
- Estonia 1991
- Georgia 1991
- Kazakhstan 1991
- Kyrgyzstan 1991
- Lithuania 1990
- Latvia 1991
- Turkmenistan 1991
- Ukraine 1991
- Uzbekistan 1991
- Moldova 1991

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**World Decolonisation**

**Scale**

1: 100,000,000

One centimetre on the map represents 1000 kilometres on the ground at the equator.

0 1000 2100 3200 4320 km

- Jamaica 1962
- Trinidad & Tobago 1962
- Barbados 1966
- Bahamas 1973
- Grenada 1974
- Dominica 1978
- St. Lucia 1979
- St. Vincent & the Grenadines 1979
- St. Christopher-Nevis-Anguilla 1983
- Antigua & Barbuda 1981
- Anguilla 1980
- Bermuda 1999
- British Virgin Islands 1977
- Cayman Islands 1976
- Montserrat 1989
- Pitcairn Islands 1988
- Turks and Caicos Islands 1976
- United States Virgin Islands 1958

The following countries have not become independent, but have been absorbed by other countries without a democratic UN vote: French Guiana, Iran, Java, Tibet, Sikkim, Falkland Islands, Puerto Rico, Gibraltar, and French Polynesia.

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Colonisation and decolonisation are controversial subjects. Historians will continue to debate the heritage of economic development, bitterness, and cultural separation that colonialism has left to the world.

The Papua New Guinea Secondary School Atlas (published by Oxford University Press) is an excellent resource with some detailed maps specifically on world colonisation, imperialism and decolonisation. We have reproduced some of those maps in this book, but if you have copies of the Atlas at hand, please consult it and study the original maps before responding to the questions in Activities 1A and 1B.

**Unit 12.1 Activity 1A: Making use of maps – colonisation and imperialism**

1. Look at the map on p. 121 of the *Papua New Guinea Secondary School Atlas*, ‘World Colonisation and Imperialism’. (This map is reproduced on pp. 2–3 of this book.) Study it carefully to identify areas of the world that have been colonised. Pay particular attention to the insert map, ‘Changing colonial powers in the Pacific’. What do the shading system on this map tell you about colonialism in the Pacific, and how is it different from Africa, for example?

2. What do the arrows on the world map tell you about how most of the colonial powers arrived in the colonised countries?

**Unit 12.1 Activity 1B: Making use of maps – decolonisation**

1. Look at the map on pp. 122–3 of the *Papua New Guinea Secondary School Atlas*, ‘World Decolonisation’. (This map is reproduced on pp. 4–5 of this book.) Discuss the map and compare it with the ‘World Colonisation and Imperialism’ map on pp. 2–3 (original in the Atlas on p. 121).

2. The map shows decolonisation up to 1999. As you read this Unit you will find that more nations have become independent since 1999. Note the box with the heading ‘Decolonisation’ (p. 5 in the Atlas) and predict from your general knowledge how this list may have changed since 1999.

The United States: independence by revolt

In the 1600s, Britain began to take control of different parts of the world and establish trading posts around the globe. This was the beginning of the British Empire. Originally it consisted of Ireland, the North American colonies, and certain colonies in the West Indies.

In North America there were 13 British colonies on the east coast. The residents were mainly descendants of British settlers who had taken over the land and lived as independent farmers. The 13 American colonies were largely self-governing with a governor appointed by King George III of Britain (1738–1820). As the population grew, there was increasing resentment at being ruled from afar. Life was hard but the white residents of the 13 colonies were leading free and independent lives and increasingly they wanted complete independence from British rule.

By the late 1700s, Britain was almost bankrupt. It had accumulated a huge national debt caused by:

- The Seven Years’ War (1756–1763) between Britain and France, who also wanted control of territories in North America.
In the years that followed the Seven Years’ War, British rule in North America was not conducted well; it was characterised by misinformation, muddled thinking and mistaken financial policies. To cope with its debts, Britain adopted new imperial policies. For the first time Britain raised revenue from its American colonies. Britain tightened trading restrictions and imposed firm measures against smuggling (an important source of income for colonial traders). The British put obstacles in the way of trade between the colonies and the West Indies.

These policies created resentment and increased the hard times for large parts of the colonial population. Good relationships which had been shared between Britain and the more powerful settlers in the colonies were upset by the policies. The result was the American War of Independence (1775–83) which resulted in Britain losing her North American colonies.

This map shows the 13 colonies that were established along the eastern seaboard of North America by the 1770s. They stretched from New England to Georgia, spreading for 2300 km down the coast. Their population was growing rapidly. It was doubled every 25 years, from 250,000 in 1700 to 2 million in 1775. About half the population was English; the rest was made up of Irish, Scots, Germans, Dutch, Swedes, and French, as well as many slaves on plantations in the south. In South Carolina, for example, there were three blacks to every white inhabitant.
India – first moves to independence

India was important to Britain and was known as ‘the jewel in the crown’ of the British Empire. In the late 19th century, many Indians who had been educated in Britain became frustrated because they were not allowed to be part of the government of India. In 1885 they set up the Indian National Congress with the aim of campaigning for Indians to take part in government. When Mahatma Gandhi returned from his time in Africa as a lawyer in 1915, he became the Congress’s leader.

After the end of World War I, the British allowed some self-government, with regional assemblies of Indians. However, in 1912 Britain refused to grant Dominion status to India so the Congress formally adopted independence as its aim. Gandhi organised civil disobedience campaigns against the British. These were non-violent strikes, boycotts and fasts.

The Indian National Congress was a powerful opponent for Britain. The Congress brought together businessmen and working classes and Hindus of high and low caste in a desire for independence. However, the Congress never succeeded in bridging the gap that separated the country’s Hindu and Sikh majority from its minority Muslim population.

The British met the Indian anti-colonial movement halfway. In 1919–23 Indians were given some concessions towards self-rule. Elected Indian ministers governed together with British administrators. These constitutional reforms, however, were not adopted in areas of India known as the princely states, which had negotiated limited autonomy with Britain.

Under the constitution granted in 1935–37, the British maintained separate voting rolls for the Muslim minority in order to ensure its proportional representation. In 1939
relations between Britain and the Congress Party were tense, but India was clearly headed for independence in some form.

**India’s neighbours**

Ceylon (renamed Sri Lanka in 1972) became separate and self-governing from 1931 and in 1937 the British gave a separate constitution to Burma.

**Africa – early moves to decolonisation**

From the 1800s through the 1900s, every part of the continent of Africa was colonised at least once. The main colonisers were the European powers: Britain, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain. For most of these countries, the size of their African colonies was much larger than the home country. Belgium, for example, controlled the vast area of the Congo. France controlled huge areas of land in the north-west of the continent. Within the British Empire were countries that we know today as Sudan, Botswana, Kenya, Egypt, Nigeria, Zambia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, and others.

During the 20th century the process of decolonisation progressed slowly and gradually it was accepted as inevitable. Study the map of Africa shown on page 4 (‘World Decolonisation’).

In Kenya, for example, the British government refused to grant the 20,000 European settlers in the ‘white highlands’ any kind of direct political power over the majority of tribal blacks. In British West Africa, the change from direct colonial government to self-rule by the black elite had started by 1939. This was because there were no white settlers or Indian merchants (as there were in East Africa) to cause difficulties; however, the process was not always peaceful.

Protests against colonial rule varied. For example, in 1929 women in south-eastern Nigeria launched a revolution against the taxes that the British rulers wanted to impose on them. For one month, the women stood up to the colonial government and protested, not only against the taxation of women, which was against their cultural traditions, but also against individuals known as warrant chiefs who were appointed to rule the people under the supervision of white British officials. Many of these chiefs committed wrongs against women and were corrupt in their administration. The revolt, known as the Women’s War, spread and became violent. To end the protests, soldiers and police were ordered to fire on the women. In all their protests the women were peaceful, never injuring anybody they were protesting against or any of the forces fighting against them, but about 50 women were killed and another 50 injured by the soldiers and police.

Protests against colonial rule became widespread across the continent of Africa in the 20th century. Before World War II, decolonisation failed to progress only in two areas:

- **Northern Rhodesia**, where moves to independence were strongly resisted by powerful mining companies, especially copper mining.
- **Southern Rhodesia**, where white farmer settlers established self-government and privileges over a black majority with no voting power.

**Unit 12.1 Activity 1D: Decolonisation before World War II**

Write a short paragraph that describes decolonisation before World War II.
World War II

The Second World War (1939–45) was a global war in which the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) were defeated by the Allies (Britain and the countries of the British Commonwealth, the Soviet Union and the United States).

War began in Europe and covered most of that continent. Fighting spread to the Mediterranean and North Africa and through the Middle East, South East Asia and the Western Pacific, including Indo-China, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea. An estimated 55 million people lost their lives during the war.

After the war, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as rival superpowers and that sowed the seeds of the Cold War. The post-war period saw extensive redrawing of national frontiers, especially in Europe, but also in other parts of the world. It led to an acceleration of moves towards decolonisation and the granting of independence to former colonial territories.

Decolonisation during and after World War II

Britain, France and Holland (The Netherlands) were weakened by World War II and did not have the strength or wealth needed to keep their colonies. Colonies in Asia were the first to get independence after 1945: India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, and the Philippines.

In the first years after the war it appeared that (except in the case of the Indian subcontinent) decolonisation might come gradually and on terms favourable to the western European colonial nations. However, after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu (in Vietnam) in 1954 and the Suez Crisis (in Egypt) of 1956, decolonisation accelerated.

By the mid-1970s only scattered parts of Europe’s colonial territories remained. There were three reasons for this increase in the rate of decolonisation:

- First, the two post-war superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, both took up positions opposed to colonialism. They preferred to use indirect means – ideological, economic, and military – to take over from previous colonial rulers.
- Second, those colonial wars that were being fought by the mass revolutionary movements of the colonial world were expensive and bloody.
- Third, the public of Western Europe was tired of war and eventually refused any further sacrifices of life and money to maintain overseas colonies.

Some colonies were more important to their colonisers than others. In general, colonies that did not possess either concentrated resources or strategic advantages, and that had no European settlers, won easy separation from their colonisers. Elsewhere, armed struggle against colonialism was centred in a few areas.

The end of colonialism did not result in the spread of new, neatly divided nation-states throughout the world and it did not ease rivalry between the great powers. The United States, the USSR and China all assumed that the newly independent nations would follow the ways of governing of their mother countries or move towards antimperialist Soviet or Mao camps. However, many Third World leaders chose socialism or to remain neutral.

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States urged Britain and France to free their empires. But this changed when the United States needed Britain and France as allies in the
Cold War. As a trade-off for their support, the United States supported the Anglo-French resistance to nationalist and communist forces in their colonies.

President Truman’s policy was to provide foreign aid and loans to new nations to prevent them drifting ‘towards poverty, despair, fear and the miseries of mankind which breed unending wars’. President Eisenhower, who followed Truman, cut back on this aid as he felt foreign aid did not always serve US interests.

On the other hand, the Soviets held that new nations would not be truly independent until they freed themselves from economic dependence on their former masters. However, when the Soviets provided assistance to a country they expected political support in international forums in return.

In 1955, a conference was held at Bandung in Indonesia. Representatives from 29 Asian and African countries attended and they proposed the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement. This was a group of Third World countries that was aligned neither to the West nor to the communist countries. This Third World bloc was neutral. The conference condemned colonialism in all its forms. With the aim of promoting world peace and cooperation, several principles were adopted that included mutual respect between nations, territorial sovereignty, non-aggression and non-interference in any country’s internal affairs, peaceful coexistence, and the right to independence.

The Non-Aligned Movement was more formally organised in 1961. By 2012 it had 120 member countries.

**Problems with decolonisation**

The political problems of decolonisation can be serious. In the international community many small states can find it difficult to support themselves economically as a nation and secure their sovereignty. There are also large states that suffer from being put together without a common ethnic base.

The world’s postcolonial areas often have been scenes of long and violent conflicts.

- Some are ethnic conflicts, such as the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70), also known as the Nigerian–Biafran War.
- Some are national–religious, such as the Arab–Israeli conflicts, the civil wars in Cyprus, and the clashes between India and Pakistan.
- Others are political, such as in the confrontation between Communist and Nationalist regimes in the divided Korean Peninsula.
### Decolonisation in Asia during and after World War II

In 1940, Japan announced the idea of setting up the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere for countries in Asia. Initially it was promoted as an idealistic wish to free Asian countries from Western imperialism. It spoke about 'Asia for Asians', but in addition to cultural reasons there were economic factors, such as Japan's need for raw materials like oil and rubber to maintain its manufacturing and its military. In the course of World War II, Japan displaced British, Dutch and French colonial rulers, as well as the Americans in Guam and in the Philippines. The Japanese had to allow some freedom in Burma and Indonesia, both of which had pre-existing local parties capable of creating sovereign states after the war. Although they had a new colonialism policy of their own, the Japanese used anti-colonialism as a political instrument before and during World War II. In doing so, they helped in the process of world decolonisation.

### India

**India during World War II**

In 1942 the Japanese, having overran South-East Asia and captured the great British naval base at Singapore, were advancing through Burma toward India. The British government sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India to talk with Indian leaders and secure Indian support in the war against Japan and Germany. Already one Indian nationalist leader, Subash Bose, had joined the Japanese. With skillful use of *propaganda*, Bose raised an army from Indians taken prisoner by the Japanese to fight with the Japanese to free India from British rule.

In India the Indian nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi believed in non-violent resistance, and that Indians should not fight even to defend their own country. Other members of the Indian National Congress, India's leading nationalist political organisation, did not share Gandhi's view. The leader of Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru, told Sir Stafford that his people would help Britain if Britain granted independence to India.

Many felt Gandhi's focus on village reform interfered with the *Purna Swaraj* (or Declaration of the Independence of India) which was promulgated by the Indian National Congress in 1930. Cripps offered Dominion status for India when the war was over, but this was rejected by the Congress.

The problem was made more difficult because the Muslims in India wanted India divided into two countries, one Muslim and the other Hindu. The Muslim leader was Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Gandhi, Nehru and the Hindus wanted to keep India one country.
Jawaharlal Nehru (left) and Muhammad Ali Jinnah after a meeting in 1946. One of the great problems of the decolonisation of India was to ensure the peaceful coexistence of the two largest religious groups: Hindus and Muslims. Eventually this led to the creation of two separate States: India (mainly Hindu) and Pakistan (mainly Muslim). Nehru became the first prime minister of India when it achieved independence in 1947. Jinnah was the founder of Pakistan and served as Pakistan’s first Governor-General when Pakistan also won independence in 1947.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi 1869–1948
- Born at Probandar, Gujarat Western India, 2 October, 1869.
- Married (by arranged marriage) at age 13 to Kasturbai.
- Travelled to London to study law, September 1888.
- Returned to India as a qualified lawyer in 1891.
- In 1893 travelled to South Africa to provide legal assistance for Indians.
- Organised protest campaign against political movement to deprive Indians of the right to vote in the state of Natal.
- Founded the Natal Indian Congress in 1894.
- During the Boer war organised an ambulance corps to assist the British.
- In 1906–1908 organised protest campaign in the Transvaal against the requirement that Indians must always carry a registration certificate.
- Imprisoned in Transvaal for defying taxes and marriage laws that discriminated against Indians.
- Left South Africa to return to India in 1914.
- Launched satyagraha campaign in Champaran district in 1917.
- Recruited soldiers for the British Indian Army.
- Launched satyagraha campaign in response to Rowlatt Bills, 1919.
- Arrested by British in April, 1919.
- In 1920 took up the Khilafat cause as a means of uniting India’s Hindu and Muslim communities.
- Launched new non-cooperation campaign against British rule in 1920.
- Arrested and imprisoned in 1922.
- Released from prison at 1924, in 1930 organised new satyagraha on social issues in India.
- Returned to politics in 1929, in 1930 organised new satyagraha campaign, including salt march, in attempt to force British to grant independence to India.
- Arrested and imprisoned in May 1930.
- Visited London in 1931 to attend second Round Table Conference.
- Arrested and imprisoned again for renewed civil disobedience in January 1932.
- After release from prison, resigned from Congress in 1934 and moved to village of Segaon to concentrate on issues of social and village reform.
- Rejoined Congress in 1937.
- Led Congress in passing the ‘Quit India’ resolution of August 1942.
- Imprisoned from August 1942 to May 1944.
- Death of Kasturbai in 1944.
- Involved in negotiations with British and Muslim League over the form of an independent India.
- Travelled to Bengal province to ease tensions between Hindus and Muslims in late 1946.
- Shifted to New Delhi in late 1947 to try to bring peace between Hindu and Muslim communities.
- Assassinated in New Delhi, 30 January 1948.
After Sir Stafford left India, Gandhi launched a new independence campaign called the ‘Quit India’ campaign. This was supported by Congress. There were widespread strikes and demonstrations. Railway and telephone lines were cut and government buildings were attacked. The British could not afford trouble in India while they were at war with Germany, Italy and Japan. They imprisoned Gandhi and the Congress leaders.

Propaganda is the spread of ideas or statements that are exaggerated, false or over-simplified in order to gain support for a particular idea or leader or political part. It is an important element in politics and warfare. This example is a leaflet created in India during World War II. The bottom half shows Indians turning their weapons on British soldiers, and Winston Churchill, prime minister of Britain, running away. In the top left-hand corner, a caricature of Churchill is stripping Mother India of her wealth; another woman lies dead with the words ‘all but exploited’ written on her. The flags are the British Union Jack and an Indian flag adopted by the Provisional Government of Free India and used during World War II. It shows Indians fighting Indians and the word ‘STOP!’

**Unit 12.1 Activity 1G: Analysing political propaganda**

Study the political propaganda leaflet on this page and answer the following questions, giving reasons for your answers.

1. How does this leaflet fit the definition of ‘propaganda’?
2. How does this propaganda leaflet make its appeal?
3. Would it have been effective in gaining support?
4. How does it promote nationalism?
5. Find other examples of propaganda leaflets and analyse them in a similar way.