

# End of Empire c.1919–1969

The following topics are covered in this document:

- Why Britain's Empire declined in the twentieth century
- Why demands for Indian independence grew
- How well Britain dealt with the issue of Indian independence
- Why the struggle for independence in Kenya was so bitter

## LEARNING SUMMARY

End of Empire is one of the options for the Studies in Depth on the OCR B specification.

For the Study in Depth, you will need to develop an understanding of the people and problems involved in the decline of the British Empire, through the study of social, economic, political, cultural and religious aspects of this period.

There are a number of key questions and focus points that will form the framework for your Study in Depth. The following information provides a concise response to each key question and can be used as starting point for further study and development. Key words are highlighted in colour to help you.

## Why did Britain's Empire decline in the twentieth century?

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### Q What was the extent of the British Empire after the First World War?

**A** In 1919 the British Empire reached its greatest size as it acquired territory from Germany. It covered large areas of Eastern and Southern Africa, India, numerous Caribbean islands and dominions like Canada and Australia, as well as mandates like Palestine.

### Q What was the extent of the British Empire in 1970?

**A** By 1970, only 5 million people continued to live in the British Empire, 3 million of which lived in Hong Kong.

### Q How important in bringing about independence were factors from within parts of the Empire?

**A** Throughout the Empire there was a **growing sense of nationalism**, spurred on by the world wars. Many countries, like India, had strong internal **independence movements**. They objected to British rule, which saw the foreign and economic affairs of their country being decided in London.

### Q How important in bringing about independence were factors within Britain?

A There was a change in British attitudes as the economic cost of maintaining an empire became apparent. When Labour was elected in 1945, it was the first time a pro-independence party had achieved power in Britain. When Harold Macmillan made his famous **'Wind of Change' speech** in 1960 in South Africa, he was admitting that Britain had to give up its empire.

### Q How important in bringing about independence were other factors?

A The Second World War had made the cost of an empire too much for Britain and marked the end of Britain's status as a great world power. When Britain tried to support the state of Israel against Egypt during the **Suez Crisis** in 1956, the disapproval of the USA and subsequent withdrawal of British forces showed how much had changed. The USA could not and would not support a British Empire.

## Why did demands for Indian independence grow?

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### Q How did Britain rule India after the First World War?

A The **Government of India Act** was passed in 1919. It was intended to give Indians more say in the running of their country. However, it angered many Indian politicians for not going far enough.

### Q How and why did pressures for independence from within India grow?

A The **Amritsar Massacre** in 1919, where British forces fired on an unarmed and unsuspecting crowd until their ammunition ran out, was a catalyst for the independence movement. There was a growing sense of nationalism and reluctance to participate in Britain's wars whilst they had little say about how their country was run.

### Q How important were individuals such as Gandhi and Nehru?

A Under the guidance of **Ghandi**, the **Congress Party** in India led a campaign of mass civil disobedience, in which they refused to participate in anything to do with British rule. Although Ghandi called off the campaign when it seemed set to become violent, it paved the way for future protests. The same tactic of non-violent protest was used again by Ghandi in the **Salt Satyagraha movement** from 1930 to 1934. Ghandi's trusted lieutenant, **Nehru**, campaigned tirelessly for Indian independence, spending a total of nine years in jail for his peaceful protests.

### Q How did Britain react to growing Indian nationalism?

A The British authorities arrested thousands of people, including Ghandi and other loyal followers like Nehru but they failed to repress the movement and it grew in support in India and internationally. The British authorities had no effective way of dealing with the peaceful protests that did not make them look aggressive nor could they argue they were morally right to continue ruling India.

## How well did Britain deal with the issue of Indian independence?

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### Q Why was it decided to partition India?

**A** The Second World War left Britain unable to maintain an empire and the Labour Party election victory in 1945 saw a British government who were keen to grant independence. The issue they foundered on was what to do about the different religious groups, particularly the Hindus and Muslims who traditionally did not get on. Politicians like **Mohammed Ali Jinnah** led the **Muslim League** and wanted a separate homeland for Muslims. The decision was made to split India and the last Viceroy of India, **Lord Mountbatten**, rushed through independence and **partition in 1947**.

### Q Why was there violence between the different religious groups?

**A** The partition process was so quick that millions of Hindus found themselves living in Muslim-dominated Pakistan while millions of Muslims were in Hindu-dominated India. There was great violence as around 15 million people tried to move from one country to the other, which some feel could have been avoided if more time had been taken on the partition process.

### Q How successful was Mountbatten in his handling of the ending of British rule?

**A** Mountbatten has been praised by some for hastening the independence of India and ensuring that it occurred more quickly than it otherwise might. Others, however, have criticised him for being too swift, feeling that the speed with which independence was achieved led to the violence of partition and that Mountbatten had only wished for British rule to end quickly so that they would not be associated with the violence that might follow.

## Why was the struggle for independence in Kenya so bitter?

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### Q Why did African political movements begin to develop in the period before the Second World War?

**A** Kenya was settled by thousands of **white settlers** in the early 1900s who controlled most of the land, although this land had traditionally belonged to members of the **Kikuyu tribe**. As the white settlers grew rich from farming tea and coffee, thousands of native Africans were forced into the cities looking for work. African independence movements began to develop, especially as the white settlers made it clear that black Africans could expect to have little say in their own country. This pushed more black Africans into radical positions.

### Q What were the causes of the Mau Mau rebellion?

**A** Kenyans fought on behalf of the British Empire in the Second World War, and thought that they would be rewarded at the end of the war with more freedoms. The politician **Jomo Kenyatta** returned to Kenya in 1946 after almost 15 years abroad where he had studied and campaigned for African independence. He was elected president of the **Kenya Africa Union** and began to receive death

threats as he travelled the country calling for independence. Anger at the white settlers, along with the strains of economic poverty led to the **Mau Mau rebellion**, in which armed Kikuyu tribe members attacked white settlers.

### **Q** Why did Britain agree to Kenyan independence?

**A** The Mau Mau rebellion was suppressed with extreme force, and even the use of concentration camps, but many white settlers still decided to leave and people recognised that independence would have to be granted. In 1960 the state of emergency was lifted and in 1961 elections were held to help determine Kenya's constitution. Also in 1961, **Kenyatta was released from prison** where he had been for eight years for allegedly running the Mau Mau rebellion although little evidence of this exists. In 1963, he was elected prime minister of the first **independent Kenyan government**.

# Sample GCSE questions

(a) What territories made up the British Empire after the First World War?

- Large areas of Eastern and Southern Africa
- Numerous Caribbean islands
- Dominions like Canada and Australia
- Mandates like Palestine.

(4)

You would also gain full marks for giving three countries and explaining what their status was.

(b) How important was Ghandi to the independence movement in India?

- The Congress Party with Ghandi's guidance led a campaign of mass civil disobedience in India, in which they refused to participate in anything to do with British rule and gained great national and international attention.
- Ghandi called off the campaign when it seemed set to become violent; it paved the way for future protests and established the principle of peaceful protest, which gave the Indian independence movement the moral high ground.
- The same tactic of non-violent protest was used again by Ghandi in the Salt Satyagraha movement from 1930 to 1934.
- Ghandi was an important figure head for the Indian Independence movement with world wide fame and attention.

(6)

You do not need to come up with six different factors if you are able to give three or four and develop your points.

(c) What was the most important factor in causing the end of the British Empire?

There were many factors that led to the end of the British Empire such as a growing sense of nationalism in many countries of the Empire but the Empire would not have ended without a change of British attitudes. The Empire had become too costly, especially after the Second World War and when Labour took power in 1945, Britain had it's first pro-independence party in government. If they, and the government that followed, hadn't been willing to grant independence it is unlikely the Empire would have ended as it did.

Other factors did prompt the change in British attitudes. Britain was no longer a world power after the Second World War and the Suez Crisis revealed that Britain could not act without the support of the USA. The USA would never support a British Empire. There were many growing independence movements within countries in the Empire like India who did not want decisions about their country to be made in London.

Therefore, while there are many factors that led to the end of the British Empire, all of these factors helped shape the changes to British attitudes. If Britain had not wanted to give up its Empire it is unlikely it could have been made to do so at the time that it did.

(10)

You need to be able to demonstrate that there was more than one factor at work – there will always be a range of reasons or consequences to choose from. Use your conclusion to justify your decision.

# Exam practice questions

**1 (a)** Why were there calls for Indian independence after 1919?

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**(b)** What were the reasons for the Mau Mau rebellion?

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**(c)** How well did Britain handle the partitioning of India after independence?

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*(Model answers can be found in a separate answer document)*