



EALING
INDEPENDENT
COLLEGE



The Making of Modern Britain 1951-2007



Foreign Policy 1951-1964



Foreign Policy

Three spheres of influence that sum up British foreign policy:

Commonwealth,

Europe,

America

The Commonwealth/Empire

- Historians disagree about **how** and **why** Britain's empire declined and ended. However, most agree factors like war and changing world economy played a key role in the decline of the British Empire.
- Pre WW1 > one of richest countries in world. Strong finance and industry - everyone owed Britain money! After 4 years of fighting, Britain's wealth was virtually all gone. Most of Britain's debts were with the USA. Britain was greatly weakened by the war.
- Bankrupted by end of WW2. Debts were even greater > needed huge loans and grants from USA. Empire and its peoples played crucial role in Britain's survival and victory in both world wars.
- End of WW2 - most British people felt that rebuilding their own country was more important than holding on to distant lands. At same time, Britain's economy was changing. Trade with Europe and America became more important than its trade with the empire.
- Britain did not lose all links with former colonies. British empire became BRITISH COMMONWEALTH. All former members of empire invited to become members of Commonwealth. Majority did (Ireland didn't and South Africa left Commonwealth later) The Commonwealth was voluntary organisation mainly aimed at promoting friendship and harmony between the nations of the former empire. However, were other benefits such as sporting and cultural links, and special agreements in terms of trade and security.

5 Reasons for the decline of empire

Rise of Superpowers - Britain affected economically, strategically (fall of Singapore) and politically by WW2. USA, USSR and China all took on more important roles and economic miracles that occurred in Japan and Germany impacted upon Britain's economy.

Growth of Independence Movements - Throughout WW2 there were significant developments in the independence movements in India and African territories. Strikes, boycotts, individuals and political protests all moved countries towards independence.

Economic decline - Cost of two world wars and damage caused to British overseas trade took their toll. By 1945 Britain was reliant upon the USA for support.

Change in political opinion in GB - Labour government elected in 1945 focused upon improving conditions in Britain - going on to establish WELFARE STATE. Attlee allowed Indian independence and moved towards African decolonization because British attitudes had changed. The British left some areas because they felt the country was ready to rule itself democratically, for example India.

Reduced strategic role - Britain no longer had financial or military strength to dominate territory within Asia. The British wanted to leave some countries because the area was causing them problems.

The decline...

- By 1951, Britain had to accept that imperial decline was inevitable. WW1 had started decline, WW2 and the emergence of two superpowers sped up the process.
- 1947, Britain had to inform the US that she was close to bankruptcy. Britain had to relinquish its commitments in Greece, Turkey and Palestine. The same year independence was granted to India and Pakistan.
- Illusions > long time to die and political and public opinion was slow to recognise the UK's demise. Nor did they see implications for the future. Britain continued to "punch above it's weight". Delayed British integration in Europe until 1973, when it could easily have happened twenty years earlier as a result of imperial illusions.
- SUEZ that showed British people that Britain was no longer a global superpower.
- Imperial illusions also held back decolonization. Only in Harold Macmillan's WIND OF CHANGE speech in 1960 did people come to terms with losing overseas colonies. Even after 1960, these illusions kept Britain's defence spending high by holding a nuclear deterrent. Also the 'special relationship' with the USA was exaggerated as was Britain's role in the Cold War.
- By 1964 however, most of these myths of British importance had been

Suez - A major turning point?

Yes

Britain faced an economic crisis through their actions - the pound became worth much less on international money markets.

Britain's relationship with other countries was hindered, especially among the Arabs.

Showed for the first time the importance of using nuclear weapons on another country as a threat.

Proved that the UK could not intervene militarily without the support of the United States.

Britain was seen as an unreliable ally in the eyes of the US.

Colonies were given confidence to rebel against British rule - decolonization was speeded up as people realised that Britain was no longer backed up by a strong military force.

Showed that the Commonwealth would not always support Britain.

Suez brought home to the public the extent in which their nation has declined - Britain's self image as an imperial superpower would never be the same again.

Eden lying to parliament (he claimed he did not know about Israel's involvement in Suez) even had an impact as it exacerbated the collapse in deference in Britain.

French support in Britain was harmed by UK withdrawal.

No

Promises had already been made to the Colonies concerning their independence before Suez.

African independence movements had far more impact in decolonization than the Suez crisis.

The Conservatives won the next general election - showed that the Crisis did not have a major impact on the British people.

The "Special Relationship" between the USA and Britain was repaired by JFK and Macmillan.

Pride of the British Empire still remained among politicians and the public.

The Wind of Change

British Politicians originally wanted to manage the transition from Empire to Commonwealth slowly and gradually so that countries learned to govern themselves without help from Britain. However, decolonization was sped up for a number of reasons:

Growth of independence movements in colonies

Britain could not send the army to put down rebellions because of economic decline - two world wars had taken its toll so Britain was relying heavily on the US for money.

This meant that Britain no longer had military or financial strength to dominate other countries.

This links to more people rebelling in the colonies because Britain was now seen as weak, especially after the Suez Crisis.

Investing money in colonies meant that less money was being spent at home.

The USSR and China had began to offer assistance to the colonies - Britain did not want to begin a fight against Russia and China to keep the colonies.

Communist influence.

British Immigration restrictions (1962)

Change in political focus - Attlee's government was more focused on homes and society rather than foreign investments.

Giving colonies independence meant that goodwill between them and Britain remained.

Europe

- The vision: EEC > closer ties to prevent future conflict e.g. Schuman Plan of 1950 (proposals for a Coal and Steel Community that would integrate French and German heavy industry) > would promote rapid economic reconstruction and bind the two historic enemies together.
- *The open door, 1951-1957*
- The decision not to enter in this period did reflect a national consensus.
Labour Party: suspicious of free-market principles behind the Common Market.
Conservatives wanted trade links with countries like Australia, Canada and New Zealand more than Europe.
- Many people could not get the war out of their heads. We won. Germany were our enemies. The French rolled over and were occupied.
- Leaders were ex-wartime leaders > many still had the perceived idea that Britain was top of the tree.
- The economic advantages of the EEC were disregarded.
- British foreign policy = encourage European integration from sidelines but not get involved. Liked idea of integration, just not for Britain.
- The agreements made at Messina were solidified in the *Treaty of Rome* in January 1957.
- The EEC was born without the UK > Britain not worried. At this time its foreign policy was focused on the Cold War, the Commonwealth and the 'special relationship' with the USA. HOWEVER after Suez, British political attitudes began to shift.

Europe

Locked outside, 1958-1963 - Missed the European Bus?

The fundamental reason why Britain changed its mind about the EEC was ECONOMIC

It realised that the old patterns of trade that had kept Britain at the top of the tree, were no longer as strong nor had they factored in the 'miracle' that was happening in West Germany.

1959 - EFTA (European Free Trade Area) Moderate success.... but not the same as EEC
However, there were FOREIGN POLICY reasons why the British asked to join.

The USA keen to see Britain join for as Britain was a vital link between them and Europe (especially with the Berlin Crisis of 1958) - Britain to act as a 'Trojan Horse' for America
The shift in British prestige was already seen with Suez and decolonization alongside establishment of EFTA.

Terms of Entry a problem! EEC had already developed many procedures e.g. Common Agricultural Policy which Britain could not see itself accepting > Heath tried to negotiate special trade exemptions for

Imperial nations (e.g. Lamb from NZ)

De Gaulle used France's veto to block Britain's application, determined to save EEC from 'les Anglo-Saxons' = political bombshell.

His intervention caused very bad feeling between Britain and France for some considerable time.

Europe - Summary

The EEC:

Set up in 1957 by the treaty of Rome.

Six members originally - France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg.

Main motive was to get a Common Market - a trading system between the countries with very few regulations.

Protectionist against non members - making non-common market goods uncompetitive by denying them entry or placing tariffs on them.

Promoted the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) - poorer areas in the Community were subsidised by a transfer of money from the rich areas.

Motives behind the six countries in joining the EEC

Germany's desire was to re-establish itself as a respectable and acceptable nation after the Nazi's.

France wanted to control Germany.

Benelux countries and Italy saw the opportunity of economic concessions.

Europe - Summary

Britain at first had no interest in joining the EEC. Both the Conservatives and Labour parties agreed that they didn't want a foreign group to have power over Britain. So why did attitudes change?

Compared to all the other countries in the EEC, Britain's economy was doing badly.

The success of EFTA (European Free Trade Association - countries included Austria, Switzerland, Norway, Portugal and Denmark) never matched the success of the EEC.

The Suez Crisis questioned Britain's status in Europe

More Conservative politicians were young and pro-European. They thought it was a good idea to join the EEC.

Why was Britain rejected?

Macmillan had the view that Britain would only join the EEC if the privileges of the Commonwealth and EFTA was satisfied - Britain still wanted to trade with them but being part of the EEC meant that the countries in the Commonwealth and EFTA had to pay premiums.

Some EEC members, such as the French President Charles DeGaulle, believed Britain would not fully commit themselves to Europe because of the Commonwealth. However he had other motives too. He wanted to keep France completely independent to the UK and so thought that Britain in the EEC would take some power over the EEC away from France. He also felt that the US may try to influence the EEC through Britain.

Aftermath:

Britain were humiliated - the rejection showed just how weak Britain had become politically as well as economically.

America

Key world commitments included: 1949 - part of NATO with troops in West Germany, Douglas Hurd argues this was a prop which allowed Britain to 'punch above its weight in the world', 1951 - involved in Cold War, British troops fighting in Korean War as part of UN

- Burgess and Maclean affair (British spies who had given secrets to the Soviets) - 'special relationship' under strain.
- Britain tiring of American pressure to join EEC compounded by the adverse affect the Suez Crisis had on this friendship
- Overall - Britain and US remained close allies in the Cold War
- 1963 Test Ban Treaty (nuclear weapons) showed strength of relations between Wilson and JFK as well as Britain still holding its own at the top table

America

But!

Militarily overstretched - problem for Wilson in 1964

Dependent on US power - shown by dependence on American Polaris submarine weapons system in 1960

'Britain punching above its weight' - Douglas Hurd

By 1964

Rowe argues most significant change in Britain's world role was the Empire and Commonwealth

Key steps in disengaging from colonial responsibility

Independence to: Ghana to Cyprus to Singapore

Commonwealth seemed to be thriving but legacy of imperial past hard to shake off e.g. Falklands, Rhodesia, Hong Kong

Future Policy Study 1960

A true reflection?

**‘Britain had lost an empire
and not yet found a role’ -
Dean Acheson**

**‘Britain had lost an empire
and not yet found a role’ -
Assess the validity of this
statement. (25)**