To what extent was World War Two the catalyst or cause of British Decolonisation?

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Did Britain and her colonies truly stand united for “Faith, King and Empire” in 1920, and to what extent was Second World War responsible for the collapse of this vast empire?

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Abstract
This question answered in this extended essay is “Was World War Two the catalyst or the cause of British Decolonisation.” This is achieved by analysing how the war ultimately affected the British Empire. The British presence in Africa is examined, and the motives behind African decolonisation can be attributed directly to the War. In areas such as India, once called the ‘Jewel of the British Empire,’ its movement towards independence had occurred decades before the outbreak of the War, which there acted merely as a Catalyst in this instance. On another front, due to the growing tensions between the Capitalism, represented by the United States, and Communism, represented by the Soviet Union, some colonies had their decolonisation halted as it was feared that the new nation would fall into the USSR’s sphere of influence, this is particularly true in the colony of Malaya. Finally the shear economic damage that was inflicted on Britain meant that the United States, who since the Treaty of Versailles in 1918 had called for “self-determination,” was now the dominant Western Power with the ability to exert huge political pressure on the British. Overall, the final conclusion was that the war damaged Britain so much, that its Empire was forced to break apart and even though some nationalist movements were growing in strength between 1918-1939, a strong Britain would have been able to maintain their presence in these areas and keep hold of its Empire.
**Introduction**

This essay will aim to answer the question was World War Two the Catalyst or the Cause of British Decolonisation. Before the question can be answered, ‘cause’ and ‘catalyst’ need to be defined because in this instance ‘catalyst’ will be when something is inevitable and the war made this event happen sooner, while ‘cause’ is when the war was the factor that was largely responsible for the event happening. This investigation incorporates many primary sources such as original documentation and quotes from key individuals involved at the time\(^1\), while also using many books on the subject of decolonisation.\(^2\)\(^3\) The British Empire itself broke up in 64 countries and it was in these new nations that the Soviet Union, and the USA, competed for influence during the Cold War, which was born out of the ashes of the Second World War. Along with the Cold War, decolonisation was one of the defining features of the mid to late 20th Century and particularly shaped the continent of Africa, being regularly attributed to the political and economic instability experienced on the continent today. The legacy of the British Empire still lives on to this day with the British Prime Minister David Cameron saying “as with so many of the world’s problems, [the British] are responsible for the issue in the first place.”\(^4\) But the fundamental question is not necessarily what the effects of decolonisation are, but rather why it happened in the first place.

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\(^1\) Such as Winston Churchill, who was opposed to the idea of decolonising the Empire; Clement Attlee, who was resigned to the fact that India would become independent and Harold Macmillan, who was forced to accept the “winds of change” blowing through Africa.

\(^2\) For a full list, see the bibliography

\(^3\) Although I have used a large variety of sources, they all agree that the war had a massive impact on Britain and the empire. However the major disagreements that are present between them, is with regard to Africa. The agreement between all of the sources is that the war acted as a catalyst, but ‘why’ it acted as a catalyst is debated. On the one hand, it is argued that Britain and France were simply too weak to maintain their positions as global powers. As a result of this decline in power, decolonisation in Africa would inevitably follow. Therefore it can be said that the British turned their back on their own empire as they were too weak to maintain it and it was becoming more of a financial burden than an economic bloc. However on the flip side; the other key argument expressed in the sources used emphasises how it was the international community that turned its back on the Empires, effectively having Imperialism branding as an ‘out of date’ concept; this is highlighted by the fact that both the USSR and the USA joined forces to condemn the Imperialistic behaviour of Britain and France during the Suez Crisis. This argument greatly takes into account the Cold War and the international pressures exerted on the British Empire, while the previous argument believes it was internal military and economic weaknesses that caused the empires to collapse.

Investigation

The War Caused Decolonisation in African Colonies

It can be argued that the financial strain of fighting the Second World War annihilated the British economy and as a result, the capacity to maintain a large global empire; while simultaneously granting the United States a huge amount of influence over Britain, because of this the war can be seen as the cause of decolonisation. Before the outbreak of the war, Britain had greatly benefited economically because of the Ottawa Conference of 1932, which ensured that trade between colonies and Britain had very low tariffs, while trade with the rest of the world had high tariffs, this policy was known as Imperial Preference (Figure 1). This ensured that the British dominated the colonial economies and reduced the amount of competition from other countries, namely the USA. Pre-WW2 Britain was one of the major economic superpowers that dominated world politics and its currency, the Pound, was one of the most reliable and strongest pre-war currencies available.

However, whereas the pound was pegged at $4 to £1 in 1938⁵, the war had damaged the British economy so much, that the previously strong pound had to be devalued against the dollar to $2.80 to £1 in 1949⁷. But the economy of the United States on the other hand was not weakened by the war and in fact emerged much stronger than the imperialist European economies. This can be demonstrated by the fact that after the war, the Gross National Production of the United States was 50% higher, while Europe’s GNP was 25% lower⁶, this is understandable because a lot of fighting and bombing raids took place in Europe which devastated European, in particular British, industry. The United States, a nation born out of anti-imperialist revolution, was able to dictate the terms of much needed loans that were required not just to rebuild Britain, but also maintain the Empire itself. But due to the growing influence of the USA and the drastically weakened position of Britain, this grip was broken in the Atlantic Charter of 1941, whose forth point stated “trade barriers were to be

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Figure 1 – A poster from 1927, encouraging people to support the policy of Imperial Preference.

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8 Although percentages can often be misleading, this clearly demonstrates that the European Gross National Production was severely damaged after the war while the GNP of the USA greatly benefited.
lowered.”\(^9\)\(^10\) Therefore a major advantage of holding a colony was wiped out once the war was over. To maintain British soldiers throughout the Empire it would have cost $800 million every year which would have consumed about a quarter of Anglo-American Loan that was signed in 1945.\(^11\) The newly elected British Prime Minister Clement Attlee sent the world renowned economist John Maynard Keynes to negotiate the terms of what was expected to be a very generous loan of $5 billion with no interest, however the United States instead offered a loan of $3.75 billion at 2% interest per annum. So dire was Britain’s financial position, they were forced to accept the loan and as David Kynaston argued “[at this point] Britain could no longer afford to enjoy great-power status.”\(^12\)\(^13\) The drastically weakened economic position that the British now found themselves in is emphasised by the fact that rationing, introduced during the war to preserve precious resources, was not fully abolished until 1954 but resulted in the British not being able to fulfil its position as a dominant world power. This transition of power from Britain to the United States is shown by the fact that the Americans had to take over the economic assistance to the pro-Western Greek and Turkish government which was previously provided by the British.\(^14\)

In terms of Africa (Figure 2), the war caused its decolonisation; despite the fact that the British attempted to keep control of Africa, decolonisation essentially forced itself on them. Attlee himself likened African independence to “giving a child of ten a latch key, a bank account and a shotgun,” highlighting how he was not prepared to decolonize everywhere in the Empire. This was a similar view to the one held by Ernest

\[\text{Figure 2 – British African Empire in 1922, shown in pink. Egypt was nominally independent, but remained heavily influenced by Britain.}\]


\(^10\) This was a public document issued by the Allies before the United States had entered the war, so it is expected that it would favour the lowering of trade barriers to justify to the people of the United States that aid to the British would be in America’s interest.\[\text{Figure 2 – Brian Taylor (2005). The Ants of Africa [online]. Available at: http://antbase.org/ants/africa/colonial_africa_map.htm Last accessed: 27}\(^\text{th}\) January 2012]\]


\(^13\) David Kynaston points this out because the British could simply not afford to finance the necessary expenses required to maintain a global empire. However the major limitation of his book is that it focuses entirely on the austerity aspects of Britain, while making very limited attempts to show military weaknesses and the international dimensions associated with decolonisation.

Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary under Attlee, who said, “Our crime is not exploitation, it is neglect.”  

This shows how Bevin also believed that Africa was not ready for independence. This attitude initially prevented those African colonies from becoming independent as fast as other colonies had, namely Asian ones. However another large problem with Africa was its tribal aspect which prevented a strong nationalist movement from ever developing in the territories prior to the war. Some colonies later developed not necessarily nationalist, but more anti-imperialist movements. This lack of national unity and weaker economic development shows that Africa was not ready for independence before the war, so the war clearly caused their march towards independence. What set African colonies apart for areas such as India or Malaya was the fact that the British still felt that that could keep hold of Africa and that it was still quite firmly under their control. This can be seen through the policies of Clement Attlee’s Labour government who wanted to make the colonies produce more money to help Britain pay its war debts and rebuild itself, so initially, following the war, the British were still committed to their African Empire. This sort of approach was also adopted by the French when they established FIDES, whose goal was to try and economically develop France’s African colonies. Under Attlee, taxes were increased and various projects were implemented such as the Ground Nut Scheme in Tanganyika. They also advanced as self-government was devolved in the 1950s. These reforms were introduced to compensate for the loss of income that would result from decolonisation of more politically advanced colonies. It was not just economic reforms that were introduced, but territories were reorganized, such as the creation of the Central African Federation, which consisted of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. When the French, Germans, Italians, Belgians and Dutch established the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community) and later the EEC (European Economic Community), the British did not initially join, highlighting how they felt more focused on her Empire as an economic bloc rather than Europe. A massive factor in African decolonisation was the failed Suez Crisis in 1956, its failure humiliated the imperial powers and showed their colonies that they were no longer great powers and highlighted to the British government that they were no longer the superpowers they once were. It is no coincidence that this victory of nationalism over imperialism followed a swift European withdrawal from Africa. This coupled with the fact that the colonies were no longer making as much money as from previous years and the prospect of joining a growing European market place just made the declining Empire less desirable.

The Suez Crisis (Figure 3) compounded the idea the beliefs held by anti-imperialist, as this high profile crisis reinforced the idea that imperialism was no longer welcome and that it was an out dated ideology. This realisation caused a British urge to decolonise and

![Figure 3 – The nationalisation of the Anglo-French Suez Canal caused an international crisis.](image)

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*Figure 3 – Artist Unknown (Date Unknown). The Art of Strategic Counterintelligence* [online]. Available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol51no2/map1.JPG Last accessed: 27 January 2012

16 On the other hand the colonial policies of the Labour Government just after the war had the ultimate goal of trying to economically exploit the African colonies in an effort to help pay off the American loans. So although it does come from a high ranking official, it was intended for the general public and therefore justified the British maintaining their presence in Africa. So in effect it could be said that it was Attlee’s government, not Africa, that was not ready to embrace decolonise.

17 The most obvious example of these anti-imperialist movements in Africa would be the Mau Maus of Kenya.


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19 Modern day Tanzania

can be shown by Former Colonial Secretary Iain Macleod who said, “It is said that when I became colonial secretary [in 1959] there was a deliberate speeding up of the movements towards independence. I agree.”\textsuperscript{21} 22 It was 1960, the same year that Macmillan acknowledges the end of the British Empire with his speech that declared “growth of national consciousness is a political fact ... our national policies must take account of it.” Because this quote came from the leader of Britain at the time, it gives a more credible insight into how the government dealt with the ending of the empire but in reality, maintaining colonies were no longer viable and the fact so many of the former African colonies descended into chaos within a few years shows that the new states were not ready for independence so it was more a case of the British wanting to decolonize and wanting to leave Africa.\textsuperscript{23} It is not a coincidence that 1960 was the year that Britain applied to join the European Economic Community showing again the rejection of the empire.\textsuperscript{24}

## The War acted as a Catalyst in an international shift against Imperialism

Even though the war was the cause of decolonisation in Africa, there had been an international shift against imperialism since after World War One, and it was the Second World War that acted as a catalyst in speeding up the anti-imperialism on an International scale. The first example of this international shift can be shown by the way that the Italian colonies were dealt with after the Second World War in comparison to how colonies were dealt with after the First World War. Following the signing of the treaties of Versailles and Sèvres, the German and Ottoman colonies were divided up between the French and British as mandates, but there was no legal obligation to treat them any differently to their own colonies. Therefore they became just the spoils of war under a different name. Any power that was devolved to a ‘Class A’ mandates\textsuperscript{25} came in the form of a Kingdom whose ruler was effectively in the pocket of the respective imperial power. The treatment of these colonies shows the growing ideas of “self-determination” outlined by President Wilson in 1918 (Figure 4).

\textbf{Figure 3} – President Wilson was the driving force behind the idea of “self-determination”

\textbf{Figure 4} – \textit{Photographer unknown (Date Unknown). Woodrow Wilson Picture and Biography} [online]. Available at: http://www.visitingdc.com/president/woodrow-wilson-picture.htm Last accessed: 27\textsuperscript{th} January 2012

\textsuperscript{22} This statement was taken many years after 1959, so it is much more reliable as its purpose would be to inform, rather than persuade the reader because it is a reflection on something that had already happened. Its author was also a very high ranking member of the government so he would have been very privy to the government’s colonial policies.
\textsuperscript{23} This is one disagreements between historians and the sources I used. The majority of them sides with the idea that decolonisation was inevitable before the Suez Crisis, and the brief war merely compound this, showing the world that Imperialism was severely in decline. However, the historian John Lewis Gaddis (author of \textit{The Cold War}) briefly entertains the idea of a British victory over the Egyptians and the effects of Imperialism defeating Nationalism. The fundamental conclusion is that a British victory would have strengthened their hold over Africa and postponed decolonisation. This is because it would highlight their commitment to the empire and reinforce their position as an imperial power. But this scenario would have ignored the involvement USSR and USA, ultimately concluding that a more violent form of decolonisation would most likely have followed. However the effect of the Suez Crisis is somewhat speculated on primarily because of its close chronological proximately to the mass decolonisation of the 1960s.
\textsuperscript{25} This can be seen with the example of Iraq. It was previously a Class A mandate which gained its independence in 1932, but the King was forced to have British advisors and allow the British to maintain a strong military presence in the country.
But, With Italy’s colonies, Libya and Italian East Africa, they were not just given to the British or the French. Libya was however to be administrated by the British, but this mandate stipulated that full independence had to be granted by 1952. 26 As for Italian East Africa, manly comprising of Abyssinia, which was annexed in 1936 by Mussolini, was granted fully independence after the war while Italian Somalia became a Trust Territory which was administrated through an international council, rather than an imperial power. The difference between how colonies were dealt with after each war shows how the ideas of independence started after the First World War, but they were compounded only after World War Two, mostly because the United States was in a much stronger position in 1945 than in 1918.

The Wilsonian diplomatic ideals of 1918 had emerged as political reality by 1945 and were proven by the Suez Crisis. A contrast can be drawn between the 1911 Moroccan Crisis and the 1956 Suez Crisis to demonstrate this point. When the French effectively annex Morocco in 1911 and the only opposition she faced was from Germany, who had the goal of taking over the country as well. The imperialist behaviour received no international condemnation 27 but a mere 45 years later, another act of imperialism turned the entire world against the French and British. The United States, who were by 1956 Britain’s major creditor threatened to cripple the British economy and destroy the value of the pound if Britain did not withdraw from the Suez Canal region 28, she was forced to comply. This does not only show how influential the Americans had become over the British, but as a result of this incident, it forced Prime Minister Eden’s successor Harold Macmillan to realize that holding an Empire is no longer viable and that the British should focus on becoming a European rather than an imperial nation. So although the Suez Crisis showed the British political hierarchy where Britain now lay on the international stage, this humiliating outcome was only made possible because of the effects of the war.

The War Slowed down Decolonisation in Malaya

If the result of the war in Africa was that it caused decolonisation, and in areas such as the Middle East and India it accelerated decolonisation, but rather in the Far East colony of Malaya it actually slowed down decolonisation due to the threat of Communism. Various military weaknesses were shown during the war with the occupation of colonies in South East Asia, not only did this show British imperial weakness; it strengthened nationalist movements within the occupied areas, which in some cases existed long before World War Two. The Japanese defeated the British in South East Asia and took control of Burma, British Borneo Singapore and Mayala which was not liberated until the closing stages of the war. Throughout their occupation which lasted for about three years (1942-45) 29, numerous anti-Japanese resistance movements sprang up and these organisations united the people behind a common enemy and greatly increased the nationalistic feeling among the people. This can be clearly seen in Malaya, which prior to the war was known as the Unfederated States of

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Mayala and as a colony it had three major ethnic groups, Malayan, Chinese and Indian. As a result of these different groups, prior to the war there were few incidents and it did not have much of a nationalist movement. But as mentioned above, the Japanese Occupation effectively drove these groups together to from the Mayalan People’s Anti Japanese Army. Once the Japanese were defeated, this nationalist presence still existed. The colony was federated after the war, but the Ethnic Chinese and Indian population were not given equal rights to the Malayans and this created tensions that sparked off a revolt by the Chinese Communists against the British in 1948.

On the other hand, the British did not decolonize in the formally occupied Malaya (Figure 5) as soon as they did in India, countries which were given their independence in 1957 and 1947 respectively, as the British still had a hold on the Malayan economy which exported a lot of tin and rubber. So unlike India, Malaya was still profitable to hold as a colony and the exports produced desperately needed money to pay off war loans, making it worth fighting for. It is also argued by historians that the Cold War played a crucial part in this process because although the Atlantic Charter promised “All People had the right to self-determination,” that did not extend to areas threatened by communism, as laid out in the Truman Doctrine whose main aim was to stop the spread of communism by “support[ing] free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures”. As the revolutionaries were the Malayan Communist Party, the decolonisation had to be pushed back because although Truman pressured European empires for colonial independence, he did not support decolonisation when the new state would likely become communist. But it was not just communism that slowed down the march to independence, because the country would be socially unstable due to the three major ethnic groups on the peninsula. This was only overcome with the defeat of the communists during the Malaya Emergence, reducing the threat of communism and when the Nation Front, a coalition of parties that represent the three main ethnic groups, won the 1956 election by gaining 51 out of the 52 seats available. So these facts show that the war caused decolonisation here, but the ethnic makeup of

34 The major limitations of these quotes are that they were from public documents; they were deliberately worded in a very vague manner in order to persuade a lot of people to support them, for example the “right to self-determination.” It would be supported by anti-imperialist wanting colonies to become independent, but also by imperialist who would have no real obligation to grant self-determination.
35 Burma was given its independence in 1948 mostly because it did not have a strong communist presence so its decolonisation was not delayed.
the colony, the strong British hold on its economy and the Cold War slowed it down considerably. This British and partly American desire to produce stable, communist free countries is a defining feature in the decolonisation in the British decolonisation of Asia and is again demonstrated in Singapore and the colonies in northern Borneo. For Singapore, it was previously a very strategically important base for the British and it gained its independence in 1963 when it joined Malaysia as part of its federation, primarily to ensure their stability as it was seen to be safer if the small city state joined the larger Malaya.

The War Acted as a Catalyst with regard to India

Unlike Malaya, in India (Figure 6) there was very strong nationalist movement long before World War Two and the war just acted as a catalyst for Indian independence. This move towards independence had begun in 1919 with the Government of India Act37, but Indian discontent towards the British had started long before this with the most notable example being the 1857 Rebellion.38 With regards to the Act, it only granted the new provincial governments powers over small policies, but it was the reaction of the Indian people that was important - strikes and protests. This was because many believed that India deserved to become a Dominion due to India’s contribution to the war effort and experience far greater independence. These events highlight the nationalist ambitions present in India at the time. Some protest were brutally disbanded such as in Amritsar where 379 were killed with soldiers opened fire on a crowd of protesters in order to suppress it. Full provincial self-governing was only devolved in the Government of India Act of 1935.39 It was through Gandhi’s policies of nonviolence and non-cooperation which lasted from the 1920 boycott of British until the end of the war that removed British economic interests. This is because these boycotts they were called for effectively encouraged Indian entrepreneurs and business people to replace the boycotted goods with Indian manufactured ones. This boycott of goods was observed may a large segment of the Indian population and was closing the Indian market to British interests. As its economy became less lucrative for the British, the cost of maintaining India as a colony, which was about $500 million by 194540 became less and less

Figure 5 – Map of the British Indian Empire, 1908

nationalist ambitions present in India at the time. Some protest were brutally disbanded such as in Amritsar where 379 were killed with soldiers opened fire on a crowd of protesters in order to suppress it. Full provincial self-governing was only devolved in the Government of India Act of 1935.39 It was through Gandhi’s policies of nonviolence and non-cooperation which lasted from the 1920 boycott of British until the end of the war that removed British economic interests. This is because these boycotts they were called for effectively encouraged Indian entrepreneurs and business people to replace the boycotted goods with Indian manufactured ones. This boycott of goods was observed may a large segment of the Indian population and was closing the Indian market to British interests. As its economy became less lucrative for the British, the cost of maintaining India as a colony, which was about $500 million by 194540 became less and less

Figure 6 – Artist Unknown (1908). The Indian Empire [online]. Available at: http://history.psu.edu/photoArchives/photo_04.php Last accessed: 27th January 2012


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justifiable. This was one of the primary reasons why the French were unwilling to decolonize Algeria, and they only agreed to Algerian independence on the grounds that the French could still exploit Algerian oil.\textsuperscript{41} An example of this desire for independence can be seen in 1942, when Stanford Cripps was sent to India to try and persuade prominent Indian politicians to support the war, thereby encouraging Indians to enlist in the army. In return for their support he promised Dominion status to India after the war, Gandhi rejected it and branded it as an “out dated cheque.” Although Gandhi would have only accepted full independence for India, the desire for independence was very strong in India so only full independence would have been accepted. This is a point returned to again and again by historians and Andrew Marr argued that the Indian people were “frustrated by watering down of plans for more autonomy.”\textsuperscript{42} It was around this time that Gandhi’s ‘Quit India’ campaign started, with the ultimate goal of achieving full Independence for India.\textsuperscript{43} This event highlights how India had reject the prospect of remaining a British colony before the war, but it was the war that strengthened this resolve to become independent, so the war was a catalyst in this situation as it had weakened the British to the point that they were forced to the negotiating table.

The Method of British Imperialism was condemned to fail from the start

The British system of self-governing colonies and autonomous dominions seemed to almost condemn the British Empire to future decolonisation. As a colony developed both social and economically, it would most likely bring with it a sense of nationalism because a more developed colony would gain a national identity and this would be encouraged by installing a regional government. So in effect, this system builds colonies towards independence. However the system used by the British seemed to ultimately have the goal of moving towards some form of imperial federation and it could be argued that the Second World War, and to a certain extent the First World War, merely disrupted this evolution of Empire to Federation, or that the British system itself was always going to end the way it did and that World War Two just accelerated the process. The idea of the British Empire turning into a federation can be seen through the creation of Dominion Realms where these territories ceased to be colonies and became almost independent countries within an Empire. Three major political acts reinforce this idea, firstly the 1926 ‘Balfour Declaration,’ which recognized the Dominions were almost independent but were “united by a common allegiance to the [British] crown.”\textsuperscript{44} Although this does not represent the Empire in its entirety, it shows how before World War Two, it was changing to an Empire with more independent and autonomous colonies, which would resemble a Federation. The second piece of evidence is the 1931 ‘Statue of Westminster’ in which devolved more power to the Dominion governments reinforces the previous idea mentioned. The final piece of evidence is the British Nationality Act of 1948, which acknowledged and granted British citizenship to all people from areas of land part of the British Empire.\textsuperscript{45} Although this act was produced fairly late on in the British Empire’s timeline, it is very significant because it shows the changing of the way that the British viewed themselves in the world. Prior to the Second World War, the idea of the “British Race” was not uncommon and this in itself is

\textsuperscript{42} This is true and can be seen by the way that India was denied Dominion Status, which was granted to Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand; and how only very limited power of autonomy was every devolved to India.
a fairly old concept. Fundamentally this belief was that it was the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon British to colonize the world, a view held very firmly by Cecil Rhodes\textsuperscript{46} \textit{(Figure 7)}, who epitomizes the Victorian Imperialist.\textsuperscript{47} 48 Therefore this act makes the British government’s position official and showing their recognition of the changing world.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{rhodes.jpg}
\caption{Edward Linley Sambourne (1892). \textit{The Rhodes Colossus} [online]. Available at: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-CUx0DFEHkn0/TiGXfSCE9DI/AAAAAAAAAa8/i6FK7xqqAMl/s400/Rhodes.jpg Last accessed: 27\textsuperscript{th} January 2012}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{47} This can also be shown through literature and poetry produced at the time, for example Kipling’s poem entitled “The White Man’s Burden” which glorified Imperialism. The final will of Cecil Rhodes calls for “the extension of British rule throughout the world... [acquiring] so great a power as to render war impossible and promote the best interests of humanity.”

\textsuperscript{48} When the outcome British model of imperialism is compared to the much different French model, it can be seen that both empires collapsed in a very similar way, highlighting how the war caused both models to eventually decolonise. The French take on imperialism had the ultimate goal of creating one large French State that comprises of various different departments in Africa, Asia, South America and France and was referred to as the “nation of 100 million Frenchmen.” The fact that this different way of approaching Imperialism also failed, would imply that it was not the British Imperial system that resulted in the decolonisation of its empire. In turn, this would mean that although these empires were going on different paths, the war caused them to end in the same place with the same outcome. Other comparisons between these contrasting empire can be drawn too, but not between the two countries, rather between their most prized colonies, India for Britain and Algeria for France. Much like their approach to controlling their empires, their approach to controlling these colonies differed greatly. The French had effectively absorbed Algeria into becoming part of France itself, with departments that had representation in the French government in Paris. In India they had more independent system of self-government so by nature these colonies are completely different. But in Algeria the French resisted calls for independence and instead responded with violence and used the military to attempt to keep hold on Algeria, while the British were much more willing to let India become independent and the transitions was relatively peaceful. This would imply that regardless of system of imperialism was implemented; it did not prevent the growth of nationalism and the ultimate goal of independence being achieved. This means that the war did cause decolonisation because these two different empires both ended in the same way.
Conclusion

In conclusion, this investigation sought to answer ‘To what extent was World War Two the catalyst or the cause of British decolonisation?’ It is clear that the war had a huge impact on the Empire and weakened it to the point that its collapse became inevitable; Britain was too weak, both militarily and economically, to maintain an empire. In Africa, decolonisation was undoubtedly caused by the war, while in Asia and the Indian subcontinent, decolonisation was already inevitable so the war acted as catalyst; although a strong Empire that had not been dragged through six years of war could have appeased and potential suppressed these movements, much like what Britain had been doing during before the war. During the Cold War that developed from the ashes of the Second World War, areas with communist rebels saw their desires for independence resisted – in such places such as Malaya, the pace of decolonisation slowed. As decolonisation became inevitable after the war, one major factor affecting when it would happen was the politicians in charge of Britain at the time. Winston Churchill stated in 1941 “I have not become His Majesty’s Chief Minister, to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire,” and was appalled by Attlee’s decision to grant India independence. Attlee, on the other hand, was willing to grant independence to areas such as India and hand over Palestine to the United Nations. Were Churchill to have won the 1945 election, India may not have achieved full independence until maybe the mid-1950s, like Algeria. Harold Macmillan finally recognised that the “winds of change” were blowing through Africa, “whether we like it or not.”

49 But of course this would be expected from Churchill who was a devout imperialist, so he would be fairly bias in favour of the British keeping control of their colonies and their empire.
50 However, an interesting point to consider is whether British imperialism, characterised by colonies and political control of territory, has in fact been replaced by a new form of imperialism which in characterised by economic dominance of a territory.
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Figure 6 – Artist Unknown (1908). The Indian Empire [online]. Available at: http://history.psu.edu/photoArchives/photo_04.php Last accessed: 27th January 2012

Figure 7 – Edward Linley Sambourne (1892). The Rhodes Colossus [online]. Available at: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-CUx0DFEHkn0/TiGXfSCE9DI/AAAAAAAAAa8/i6FK7xqqAMI/s400/Rhodes.jpg Last accessed: 27th January 2012