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**MATRIC NUMBER:**17/SMS10/004

**Assignment Title:** Nationalism and Decolonization   
**Course Title:** The Cold War  
**Course Code:** PCS 302

**You are required to read up on the events that engendered decolonization during the Cold War era and the various waves of decolonization that ended European empires in Asia, Africa and Latin America.**

**Write an essay of not less than 500 words as a summary of what you found out from your readings**.

Decolonization is the undoing of [colonialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonialism), the latter being the process whereby a nation establishes and maintains its domination on overseas territories. The concept particularly applies to the dismantlement, during the second half of the 20th century, of the [colonial empires](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_empire) established prior to [World War I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) throughout the world.

Cold War and European decolonization were global processes that largely overlapped in time. Cold War is the “bipolar conflict between the US and the USSR.” European decolonization refers to Europe’s “withdrawing from its formal, territorial claims overseas.” While Cold War was not a primary cause of European decolonization, US’ Cold War strategies and actions did produce a conducive environment for European state’s withdrawal, and U.S. (European allies) suppressed independence movements where there were local militarized Communist groups that might ally with the Soviet Union.

Cold War was not a primary cause of European decolonization, if the two superpowers emerging from WWII stayed friendly, the withdrawal of European imperial powers from their colonies was still likely to happen.

Four primary reasons European powers obtained colonies: asymmetry of military strength between imperial powers and colonies, intra-empire competition, nationalist ideologies and need of markets and raw materials for industrialization.

Result of WWII, three conditions were significantly weakened: lessened asymmetry of military strength between imperial powers and colonies (European states weakened. The spread of technology, guerilla warfare, and anti-axis militarized organizations in the colonies reduced the asymmetry of military power.) Lessened competition among Imperial western European states which had become secondary, subordinate powers to the US. Lastly, war-time mobilization against Nazism and Japanese war-time success in toppling European colonial authorities in Southeast Asia undermine ideologies around Europeans’ racial superiority; and increased nationalistic fervor.

Nevertheless, economic reasons for imperial powers to hold on to colonies intensified. “They need colonies to fund rebuilding effort.” “Nowhere did European empires withdraw willingly.” US’ strategies and actions produced a conducive environment for withdrawal. Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Portugal received massive lending and aid through the Marshall Plan, part of US strategy to contain Soviet’s expansion. Other economic arrangements such as General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT 1947) – enabled phenomenal economic revival and growth in western European states in the two decades after WWII, and gave U.S. the power to persuade them to agree to decolonization. The case of Franco’s Spain was instructive. Spain was not among winning Allies in WWII, and banned from entry into the UN in 1946. In 1950-1953, Spain moved towards becoming an ally of the US: received Marshall Plan loan, entered the UN, gave U.S. the rights to establish military bases. “During the 1950s, Spain experienced some economic growth.” And then in 1956, “Spain terminated its Moroccan protectorate.” Other cases, the European states withdrew after explicit US intervention. “In Syria and Lebanon, French attempts in 1945 to reverse wartime agreements giving independence to the two countries met with nationalist opposition. Under pressure from US, Great Britain, and UN, French troops were withdrawn in 1946.” For Dutch in Indonesia, “once Sukarno had suppressed the communists, Americans pressured the Dutch into a settlement” in 1949.

In Malaya, British suppressed an ethnic Chinese communist revolt between 1948-1955 before agreeing to independence in 1957. In hasty withdrawal of Belgium from Zaire, assassination of Maoist Marxist Prime Minister Lumumba by local rival led to “brutal proxy of the Cold War.” Vietnam was tortuous case of decolonization, where local communists drove out French in 1954, only to face US in 1959-1976. Not all European military suppression of decolonization movements were motivated by Cold War objectives; French in Algeria and British in Kenya motivated by protection of white settlers’ interests.

In summary, Cold War helped facilitate European decolonization, and affected some specific processes of decolonization. United States’ Marshall Plan helped western European states with post-WWII economic reconstruction, thereby relieving them of the need to hold on to their colonies. United States’ diplomacy (e.g. with Spain), intervention (e.g. French in Syria / Lebanon) or support (e.g. French in Vietnam) changed specific processes of decolonization. Cold War was neither a primary cause of the fact of decolonization (many causes had its roots in WWII instead), nor was it the only major factor affecting decolonization processes (e.g. among other factors, presence of white settlers in colonies played important roles too).