

IMPERIALISM BEFORE WORLD WAR ONE

NEW IMPERIALISM: In History the attempt of European powers to expand around the world is called "*Imperialism*". To differentiate the earlier imperialism from the later one it's a good idea to refer to the previous period (from the 15th century up to the early 19th century) as **colonization** and the later period (the 19th and early 20th century) as **imperialism**. The later period could also be referred to as "*New Imperialism*". This is what Wikipedia writes about this later period:

"In historical contexts, New Imperialism characterizes a period of colonial expansion by European powers, the United States, and Japan during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The period featured an unprecedented pursuit of overseas territorial acquisitions. At the time, states focused on building their empires with new technological advances and developments, making their territory bigger through conquest, and exploiting the resources of the subjugated countries. During the era of New Imperialism, the Western powers (and Japan) individually conquered almost all of Africa and parts of Asia. The new wave of imperialism reflected ongoing rivalries among the great powers, the economic desire for new resources and markets, and a "civilizing mission" ethos. Many of the colonies established during this era gained independence during the era of decolonization that followed World War II. The qualifier "new" is used to differentiate modern imperialism from earlier imperial activity, such as the so-called first wave of European colonization between the 15th and early-19th centuries. In the first wave of colonization, European powers conquered and colonized the Americas and Siberia; they then later established more outposts in Africa and Asia."

REASONS FOR IMPERIALISM (COLONIZATION): In our textbook ("*Years of Change*" by *Wolfson* and *Laver*) you find several motives for the European expansion:

– **European governments were forced to act as a result of actions of individual citizens.**

(Missionaries like David Livingstone; Soldiers like German Karl Peters in East Africa; Scientists and explorers like German Nachtigel in the Camerons; and German Merchants like Lüderitz)

– **Ideological motives.** A strong belief of the superiority of European ideas and culture brought the notion of "*Christianizing and Civilizing*" the natives so they would improve their life

– **Economic gains.** This was one of the most important motives. The colonies were seen as sources of raw materials (some very expensive raw materials) and as markets for European manufacturers

– **A logic extension of the development of monopoly capitalism.** Marxist historians saw imperialism as a logic development of capitalism. This expansionism would lead to war and eventually international revolution

– **Geopolitical motives.** In 1885 basically all boundaries of Europe were settled but Africa offered great gains without risks of conflicts. Therefore it was better to expand on this continent instead of risking a conflict in Europe

– **National prestige.** Easy overseas expansion and victories could win the admiration and respect of the people of the nation (and prevent domestic problems). This was appealing and spread from one nation to other nations...

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE EUROPEAN POWERS: Great Britain saw itself as a "*World Power*". Therefore they should have:

– *Certain freedom of action in foreign powers*

– *Respect from other countries*

– *A powerful Navy so they could maintain their power overseas*

IMPERIALISM BEFORE WORLD WAR ONE

CONTRADICTING IDEAS: Great Britain conducted a foreign policy based on two contradicting ideas:

1. Britain had no interest in European Affairs. It was the overseas possessions that was her focus. That's why she needed such a strong Navy

2. Britain was concerned about Europe. It was necessary with a balance of power in Europe so British interests would not be threatened. Great Britain was a fairly liberal country and therefore often supported claims of national independence of smaller areas inside European empires. The Balkan nationalism therefore won support from Great Britain...

GERMANY AND GREAT BRITAIN: So when Germany was unified and became a strong nation in central Europe with a modern well developed economy Britain was "**alarmed**":

– Britain tried to prevent German rivalry

– Britain promoted their own industries to not fall behind Germany (some copying of Germany like their technical education)

When Wilhelm II and his Ministers proclaimed "**Weltpolitik**" (German "**World Policy**" – German colonization and the increased German naval construction) the British were even more "**alarmed**"!!!

NOTE: It's true that we see an increased rivalry between Great Britain and Germany in economic affairs as well as in military build-up (Naval race) but both nations also relied on the economic trade with each other and other countries in Europe...

IMPERIALISM IN ASIA: I briefly mentioned the foreign countries gains in Asia:

– **Great Britain** had established themselves in Hong Kong, Singapore and India. In the later 19th century they added North Borneo, Sarawak, South Solomon and Gilbert Islands

– **Germany** had gained some islands – parts of New Guinea, the Marshall Islands, the Marianas and the Carolines and part of Samoa

– **France** had established colonial rule the Marquesa and Society Islands (near Tahiti) and in Indo-China (after 1884)

– **Russia** had expanded their territory towards the East and reached the Pacific Ocean in the middle of the 19th Century (Vladivostok)

– **Netherlands** had established themselves early in this region. Indonesia (Sumatra, Java, Celebes and South and Central Borneo) were referred to as Dutch East Indies

– **USA** had a keen interest in the Philippine Islands after the Spanish-American War 1898

– **Japan** emerged as a local power with imperialistic ambitions towards the end of the 19th Century. This interest would lead to confrontations with another nations imperialistic ambitions – Russia

CHINA: The Chinese Empire had been a closed Empire. The only trade approved had been with different European companies in the city of Kanton. In the middle of the 19th Century China was forced to open up. This was a start of a decline that had certain similarities with the Ottoman Empire at the same time in Europe.

BERLIN CONFERENCE 1884-85

FASHODA INCIDENT 1898

BERLIN CONFERENCE 1884–85

Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 Meeting at which the major European powers negotiated and formalized claims to territory in Africa; also called the Berlin West Africa Conference.

The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 marked the climax of the European competition for territory in Africa, a process commonly known as the Scramble for Africa. During the 1870s and early 1880s European nations such as Great Britain, France, and Germany began looking to Africa for natural resources for their growing industrial sectors as well as a potential market for the goods these factories produced. As a result, these governments sought to safeguard their commercial interests in Africa and began sending scouts to the continent to secure treaties from indigenous peoples or their supposed representatives. Similarly, Belgium's King Leopold II, who aspired to increase his personal wealth by acquiring African territory, hired agents to lay claim to vast tracts of land in central Africa. To protect Germany's commercial interests, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, who was otherwise uninterested in Africa, felt compelled to stake claims to African land.

Inevitably, the scramble for territory led to conflict among European powers, particularly between the British and French in West Africa; Egypt, the Portuguese, and British in East Africa; and the French and King Leopold II in central Africa. Rivalry between Great Britain and France led Bismarck to intervene, and in late 1884 he called a meeting of European powers in Berlin. In the subsequent meetings, Great Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, and King Leopold II negotiated their claims to African territory, which were then formalized and mapped. During the conference the leaders also agreed to allow free trade among the colonies and established a framework for negotiating future European claims in Africa. Neither the Berlin Conference itself nor the framework for future negotiations provided any say for the peoples of Africa over the partitioning of their homelands.

The Berlin Conference did not initiate European colonization of Africa, but it did legitimate and formalize the process. In addition, it sparked new interest in Africa. Following the close of the conference, European powers expanded their claims in Africa such that by 1900, European states had claimed nearly 90 percent of African territory.

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Source:

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195337709.001.0001/acref-9780195337709-e-0467>

THE FASHODA INCIDENT 1898

INTRODUCTION

By 1890, Europeans had established their claims to all of Africa's coastal land except for Morocco (independent) and Liberia (independent under USA protection). Ethiopia remained independent in the East African interior, as did the two Boer Republics and a few African states in South Africa. The major European powers threatened them all as they continued to stake claims and try to divide up whatever was left of Africa. The biggest remaining prize was the Congo basin, which received special status at the Congress of Berlin as the "*Congo Free State*." It was administered by an international association headed by King Leopold II of Belgium, a country whose neutrality was guaranteed by the 1839 treaty that created it. The other major unclaimed region was in the Upper Nile River Valley (modern Sudan and Uganda).

Attention on those areas was focused by two rival imperial schemes. The British imagined an African empire that stretched from Capetown in the south to Cairo in the north. Even though the creation of German East Africa (modern Tanzania, Burundi & Rwanda) and the Congo Free State seemed to block the way, the idea remained a potent tool for British politicians who wanted to drum up domestic support for imperial expansion. French imperialists had their own dreams of a trans-African empire that reached from Dakar (Senegal) in the west to Djibouti (on the Red Sea) in the east. But the two dreams were incompatible, since they had to cross somewhere. Only one country could expect to get its way, so as long as both continued to seek a trans-African empire, conflict was inevitable.

THE FASHODA INCIDENT

British efforts to reach the Upper Nile Valley began with the expedition to relieve Gordon and his Egyptian garrison at Khartoum in 1885. The effort failed and the Upper Nile Valley remained in a state of rebellion for the next decade. By 1895, all that remained of Egyptian authority in the Upper Nile Valley was a British post on the Red Sea at Suakin and an Egyptian garrison in the province of Equatoria, far to the south near Kenya.

Meanwhile, the French remained angry over the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 and refusal to honor a promise to withdraw once order was restored. In February 1895 a member of the French parliament and leader of the "*pro-colonial*" faction urged his colleagues to approve an advance towards the Nile from its southern end unless the British withdrew. When news of the French interest reached Great Britain, a member of parliament declared a month later that the entire Nile Valley belonged to the British. By the end of the year, the race was on to see which Europeans would be first to claim the Upper Nile Valley.

The Italians got a head start from their Eritrean outpost at Massawa on the Red Sea, but their defeat by the Ethiopians at Adowa in March 1896 ended their attempt. In September 1896, King Leopold, the official leader of the Congo Free State, dispatched a huge column of 5,000 Congolese troops equipped with artillery towards the White Nile River from Stanleyville on the Upper Congo River. They took five months to reach Lake Albert on the White Nile, about five hundred miles from Fashoda, but by then, their soldiers were so angry at their pace and treatment that they mutinied on March 18, 1897. Many of the Belgian officers were killed and the rest were forced to flee.

Meanwhile, the French began to assemble their own expedition. They began by sending Captain Jean-Baptiste Marchand, a veteran of the French conquest of the Soudan, back to West Africa. He recruited a force composed mostly of loyal African troops from Senegal and boarded

a ship for central Africa. On June 20, 1896, he reached Libreville in the colony of Gabon with a force that included eleven French naval officers and 150 Senegalese soldiers.

It took them nearly four months to move about 100 tons of supplies to the navigable portion of the Congo River at the Malebo Pool, and six more months to sail upstream to Bangui by steamboat. From there, they continued for another 450 miles along the Ubangi River and its tributaries, and then overland to the easternmost French post located at Ouango. From there, they dragged their equipment (including a collapsible steel steamboat with a one-ton boiler) overland to the Sué River, a tributary of the Nile. Unfortunately, by the time they reached the Sué, the dry season was underway, and the river was too shallow to float their steamboat. So they made camp and remained there until the following summer when the water became deep enough to continue.

Once they got underway, it took a week to reach the *Sudd*, an enormous swamp that lay between them and the Nile. It took thirteen more days to cross the swamp, which was inhabited by lethal crocodiles, swarms of mosquitos and the Dinka people who warned them not to continue and then harassed them as they advanced. Eventually, Marchand's force reached open water on the White Nile River on June 25 at a point more than 4,000 miles and almost exactly two years from their point of departure on the West African coast. Fifteen days later, they reached Fashoda on July 10, 1898.

Background: Fashoda was founded by the Egyptian army in 1855 as base from which to combat the East African Arab slave trade. It was located on high ground along about a hundred miles of marshy shore line at one of the few places where a boat could unload. The surrounding area, although swampy, was densely populated by Shilluk people, and by the mid-1870s, Fashoda was a bustling market and administrative town. The first Europeans to arrive were a German named Georg Schweinfurth in 1869 and a Russian named Wilhelm Junker in 1876. Junker described it as "*a considerable trading place ... the last outpost of civilization, where travelers plunging into or returning from the wilds of equatorial Africa could procure a few indispensable European wares from the local Greek traders.*" But by the time Marchand arrived, the fort was deserted and in ruins.

While Marchand and his soldiers were waiting for the Sué to rise, a British force led by Lord Kitchener was working its way up the Nile, ostensibly to rescue Italians cut off after the 1896 battle with Ethiopia. Kitchener's force reached Omduran, just north of Khartoum, in September 1898 and defeated a Mahdist army. When he learned of the French presence at Fashoda, he continued upstream by steamboat and arrived at Fashoda on September 19.

Even though the French were there first and had even convinced a local leader to sign a "*treaty of protection*," they were outgunned and too far from home to mount much resistance, while the British had a direct telegraph connection to London that kept Kitchener informed about his government's intentions. On October 24, Marchand accepted an offer from the British to sail with them back to Cairo so he could contact his government and file a report. Along the way he learned that the French government had already sent him an order to evacuate without a battle.

THE DIPLOMATIC RESULTS

The "*Fashoda Incident*" showed that Europeans would avoid open warfare over African territory, something that they failed to avoid a generation later when World War I broke out. In addition, Kitchener's defeat of the Mahdist forces left a power vacuum in the Upper Nile Valley which the British filled with Egyptian troops (plus British officers) by creating the fiction that Egypt was still independent and naming the region "*Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*".

For their part, the French were humiliated by their "*defeat*" at Fashoda, but that had less impact on public opinion than the loss of Alsace and Lorraine to Prussia in 1870. When it came time to form alliances, the French decided that rather than seek revenge against the British for the loss of a remote piece of territory in Africa, they could set aside their disappointment and focus on developing their rather spacious territories in West Africa. The result was the signing of an agreement with the British (the *Entente Cordial* in 1904), and war against Germany in 1914.



Source: <http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/lectures/fashoda.htm>