



[Home](#) > [Gallery](#) > [Case Study](#) > Background

[Search this exhibition](#)

[Print](#)



## CASE STUDY 2 BACKGROUND: THE END OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN AFRICA

- [The end of the British empire in Africa](#)
- [Egypt](#)
- [East, Central and Southern Africa](#)
- [West Africa](#)
- [Links](#)

### ⚙ **The end of the British empire in Africa**

The British empire in Africa was so huge that it is very difficult to describe briefly how it ended! The first part of Britain's African lands to get self-rule was South Africa. This became a self-ruling Dominion in 1910.

For other areas it was a good deal later before they became self-ruling; most became independent states in the decades after the Second World War. During the Second World War Britain's African territories made a major contribution to the war effort. They supplied thousands of troops who fought in Europe and in the Far East. Many of the Africans who served in the army decided that after the war their countries should be independent.

#### **Image 1**



A British poster celebrating the contribution of the King's African Rifles Regiment to the war effort. Many men of this regiment fought in the Far East against the Japanese.  
(PRO ref: INF 13/213/31)

### ⚙ **Egypt**

Egypt became an independent state in 1922. However, British influence in the country remained very strong. Above all, Britain continued to control the Suez Canal, along with France. This annoyed Egyptians, who felt that this valuable asset in their own country should belong to them. In 1956 a new Egyptian nationalist leader called Abdul Nasser decided to take control of the canal. Britain and France invaded Egypt and seized back control of the canal. However, the USA and other nations severely criticised Britain and France and pressured them into pulling out. It was a sign that Britain's days as a great imperial power were over.

### ⚙ **East, Central and Southern Africa**

In East and Central Africa demand for independence from British rule represented a threat to the large number of white African settlers who owned large farms and businesses there. The British government tried to find ways of giving countries like Kenya and Rhodesia independence without creating a situation like the one in South Africa where black Africans were second-class citizens. Equally, they did not want white Africans to become disadvantaged.

African nationalists were frustrated by the slow progress towards independence. In the 1950s Kenya was rocked by the Mau Mau rebellions against British rule. The British resisted the Mau Mau, but eventually it was clear that they had to withdraw from Kenya. In fact by the 1960s the British were ready, even keen, to pull out of most of Africa. Kenya became an independent state in 1963, led by the nationalist leader Jomo Kenyatta. Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland all gained independence between 1960-1968.

### ⚙ **West Africa**

In 1920 a campaign for independence began in West Africa. A number of educated, middle-class West Africans formed the National Congress of British West Africa and sent a petition to the British government asking for greater self-rule. This petition was rejected, but the campaign certainly did not end. By the 1940s there was a strong movement across West Africa that wanted independence. There were campaigns in Nigeria and in the Gold Coast (which would become Ghana). Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Gambia gained independence in the 1960s, but it was Ghana that led the way.

In Ghana the leading figure in the nationalist movement was Dr Kwame Nkrumah. He wrote his first book on the subject 'Towards Colonial Freedom' in 1947. In 1948 he became General Secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention, which campaigned for independence for the Gold Coast. The British were not opposed to the idea of independence for West Africa. However, they were anxious that newly formed states would be stable and democratic. They introduced elections and a Parliament to the region, but they planned to remain in control until the country was ready for independence - in their opinion.

Nkrumah felt his country was ready and campaigned for the British to leave. In 1948 he and the other leaders of the Convention were arrested by the British. Nkrumah was released soon after. In 1949 he formed the Convention People's Party and called for positive action to get the British out. This led to disturbances and he was arrested again. In 1951 elections were held in Ghana and Nkrumah won, even though he was in prison. The British released him and allowed him to form a new government, although the Gold Coast was still part of the British empire.

As leader of the Gold Coast Nkrumah continued to push for the British to leave. In 1956 he was re-elected by his people as leader and this convinced the British to go. The Gold Coast became the independent state of Ghana in 1957. However, British concerns about Nkrumah continued. The country was troubled by rivalries between him and other political leaders. There was an attempted assassination against him in 1962. He declared Ghana a one party state with himself as leader for life in 1964, but was overthrown by officers from his own army two years later. He died in exile in Romania in 1972 and his body was buried in Ghana.

---

## Links

The British Empire

<http://freespace.virgin.net/andrew.randall1/africa.htm>

Useful map-based survey of the British empire in Africa; part of the British empire site



---

[Feedback](#) | [Credits](#) | [Sitemap](#) | [Help](#)

[Glossary](#) | [World Maps](#)

# BRITISH EMPIRE

## The end of the British empire – Ghana

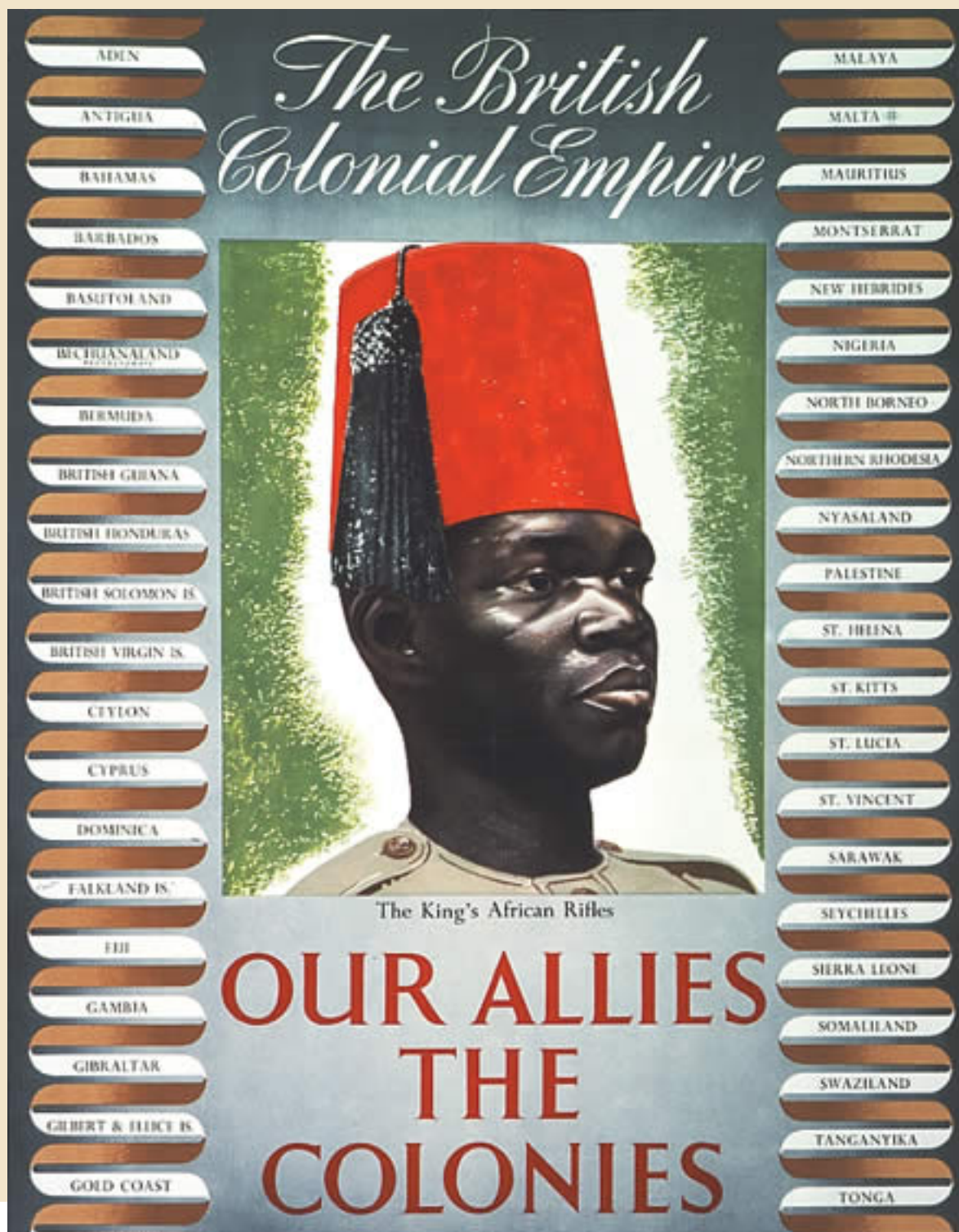


[Transcript](#) | [Print](#) | [Close](#)

### Background source one

A British poster celebrating the contribution of the King's African Rifles Regiment to the war effort. Many men of this regiment fought in the Far East against the Japanese.

(PRO ref: INF 13/213/31)





[Top of page](#) | [Print](#) | [Close](#)