

The decline of the European powers

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The old European world powers – the United Kingdom and France – had been relegated to the second division. Swiftly defeated in 1940, France had collaborated with Germany under the regime of Marshal Pétain. Thanks to General de Gaulle and his championing of the cause of a Free France, she was able to take a leading position amongst the victors. However, she would henceforth no longer have the influence she had had immediately after the First World War when the Treaty of Versailles was being drawn up. The United Kingdom, whose territory had never been occupied by the enemy, could see despite everything that its Empire was becoming very shaky and that India was impatiently waiting for independence. The war effort had exhausted Great Britain and, despite its victory over Germany, it had run out of material resources.

The growing demand in the colonies for emancipation and independence posed a challenge to the European powers. The many Africans called up to fight in Europe between 1943 and 1945 was a significant factor in this development. Riots broke out in turn in Algeria, Madagascar, India, Vietnam and Indonesia. Almost everywhere, the indigenous peoples confronted the European colonial powers.