



## 25 Imperialism Examples

By Chris Drew (PhD) / January 7, 2023



**Imperialism is the extension of a country or empire's power and influence through cultural, political, or military force.**

While it often involves wars of aggression, it can also involve to the extension of a country's power and influence through cultural means, such as the spread of a common language or system of beliefs. We call this 'soft power'.



Historically, imperialist nations have also justified their actions by claiming that they are bringing civilization to less developed societies. But in practice, imperialism is typically associated with exploitation and oppression.

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## Imperialism Examples

### 1. The Napoleonic Wars

**Time Period:** 1803-1815

Napoleon sought to expand the French empire by invading other countries. He also tried to install French allies as rulers of other countries. Napoleon managed to conquer most of Europe, but his empire collapsed after his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo.

### 2. Roman Empire

**Time Period:** 753 BC-476 AD

The Roman Empire was one of the largest and most powerful empires in history. It controlled a territory that spanned from the Hardian's Wall [relic boundary](#) in Britain to North Africa and from Spain to the Middle East. The Roman Empire was eventually defeated by internal strife and division as well as barbarian invasions. The last Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustus, was overthrown in 476 AD.

### 3. British Empire

**Time Period:** 1583-1945



The British Empire was one of the largest empires in history and the [global hegemony](#). It controlled a territory that spanned from North America to Africa and from India to Australia. The British Empire was eventually dissolved due to nationalism and decolonization movements in the 20th century.

Its rule over a period of relative stability is often used as evidence for [hegemonic stability theory](#).

The British Empire declined after World War II when the United States rose as the global superpower. However, the Queen is still a symbolic figurehead in many nations around the world, including Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

**Note:** Imperialism is not to be confused with colonialism – see: [imperialism vs colonialism](#)

### 3. The Scramble For Africa

**Time Period:** 1870s-1900

European countries raced to colonize Africa in the late 1800s. This phenomenon was known as the Scramble for Africa. The European powers carved up the continent into spheres of influence, and they competed with each other to control the most territory. The Berlin Conference of 1884 was a key moment in the Scramble for Africa, as it formalized the process of colonization.

### 4. America's Expansion Across The Continent

**Time Period:** 1803-1853



The United States expanded across the continent of North America in the early 19th century. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 was a key moment in America's continental expansion, as it doubled the size of the country. The Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 was another important event in America's westward expansion, which ended with Mexico's relinquishment of Texas and the official drawing of the modern-day [superimposed boundary](#) between Mexico and the USA.

## 5. The Russian Empire

**Time Period:** 1721-1917

The Russian Empire controlled a territory that spanned from Eastern Europe to Siberia and from the Arctic Ocean to the Indian Ocean. They conquered this territory through a series of wars and annexations such as the War of 1812 against Napoleon and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. The empire was eventually dissolved by revolution and civil war in 1917.

## 6. Soviet Russia

**Time Period:** 1922-1991

Soviet Russia was the successor state to the Russian Empire. It controlled a territory that spanned from Eastern Europe to Siberia and from the Arctic Ocean to the Indian Ocean. The Soviets had a large area of influence that they controlled through force and diplomacy. This included countries such as Albania,

Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia.



## 7. US Military Interventionism

**Time Period:** 1898-present

US military interventionism in the Middle East, South-East Asia, and Latin America is often cited as modern-day imperialism. Whereas empires like the Roman Empire aimed to expand their influence through invasion, the US often used diplomacy, coups, and proxy wars, without expanding its official territorial boundaries.

Throughout the 20th Century, the US unsuccessfully tried to impose its control over socialist nations such as Vietnam, Cuba, and Venezuela. In the 21st Century, they invaded Afghanistan and Iraq in an effort to spread their influence and democracy, as well as in retribution for the 9/11 attacks (in the case of Afghanistan).

## 8. Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine

**Time Period:** 2022

For a more recent and specific example of imperialism, we can look to the invasion of Ukraine. This invasion is widely believed to be an attempt by Russia to expand its sphere of influence and [impose its culture](#) on Eastern Europe. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was the first step in this process, followed by an attempt to take Kiev in early 2022.

## 9. William The Conqueror



**Time Period:** 1066

William the Conqueror was the first Norman King of England and a successful expansionist warrior. He conquered the kingdom of England in 1066, after defeating the Anglo-Saxon King Harold II at the Battle of Hastings. William and his Normans brought with them their own distinct culture and language, which eventually replaced the Anglo-Saxon culture in England.

## 10. China's Century Of Humiliation

**Time Period:** 1839-1949

China's Century of Humiliation refers to the period of time when they were dominated and controlled by European powers and Japan. This began with the Opium Wars of 1839-1842, which were fought by China to stop the importation of opium into their country. It continued with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 and the Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1901, and culminated in the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 and the establishment of the puppet government of Wang Jingwei.

## 11. Japanese Imperial Ambitions

**Time Period:** 1868-1945

Japanese imperial ambitions refer to Japan's desire to become a world power and dominate the East Asian region. This began with the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when Emperor Meiji took power and began to modernize Japan. It

continued with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, and World War II. After the war, Japan was occupied by the United States and became a democratic country.



## 12. The Third Reich

**Time Period:** 1933-1945

The Third Reich was a totalitarian [dictatorship](#) in Germany during World War II which had plans to control Europe and Africa. It controlled much of Europe during the war, and was responsible for the genocide of millions of Jews, Romani people, homosexuals, and other minorities. The Third Reich ultimately fell to Allied forces in 1945, and was replaced by the Federal Republic of Germany.

## 13. Phoenician Empire

**Time Period:** 1200-800 BC

The Phoenician Empire was a maritime empire that controlled parts of the Mediterranean region from 1200-800 BC. They were a major maritime and trading power during this time, and their culture heavily influenced the cultures of Greece, Rome, and Carthage. The Phoenicians eventually fell to the Assyrians in 721 BC.

## 14. Greek Empire

**Time Period:** 323-146 BC



The Greek Empire controlled parts of the Mediterranean region from 323-146 BC. They were a major maritime and trading power during this time, and their culture heavily influenced the cultures of Greece and Rome. They are remembered to this day for their early embrace of democracy, philosophy, and civil society. The Greeks eventually fell to the Romans in 146 BC.

## **15. French African Imperialism**

**Time Period:** 1800-1962

French imperialism in Africa began in 1800 with the establishment of a French colony in Senegal. It continued with the conquest of Algeria in 1830, the Scramble for Africa in 1884, and the establishment of French protectorates in most of West and Central Africa. The French Empire in Africa reached its peak during the 1960s, when it controlled all of the continent except for Ethiopia and South Africa. The French Empire ultimately ceded control to African nationalist movements in the 1960s.

## **16. Spanish Empire**

**Time Period:** 1492-1898

The Spanish Empire was a global empire that controlled territories in Europe, the Americas, and Asia. It was established in 1492 with the conquest of Granada, and reached its peak during the Age of Exploration in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was a naval power who sent explorers around the world to seek new lands. The most famous of these Spanish explorers was Christopher Columbus, who was the first European to find the Americas, in 1492.



## 17. Belgian Colonization Of The Congo



**Time Period:** 1885-1960

The Belgian government controlled the Congo as a colony between 1885 and 1960. It was originally held as the private land of Belgian King Leopold II who ruled with a brutal iron fist. Forced labor, malnutrition, and torture led to the deaths of [up to 50%](#) of the population. The land was transferred from the king's private possession to the country of Belgium in 1908, and the Belgian government ultimately withdrew from the Congo in 1960 after a protracted independence struggle.

## 18. Italian Colonization Of Libya

**Time Period:** 1911-1943

Italian imperialism in Libya began in 1911 with the invasion and conquest of the country. It was initially a colony of Italy, and remained under Italian control until 1943 when it was occupied by the German army. The Italians were ultimately defeated by the Allies in 1945, and Libya became an independent country.

## 19. Dutch Empire

**Time Period:** 1595-1962

The Dutch Empire was a global empire that controlled territories in Europe, the Americas, and Asia. For a while, the Netherlands was the most powerful nation in the world thanks to their expansionist policy, the Dutch East India trade company, and strong navy. The Dutch Empire reached its peak in the 17th

century, but began to decline in the 18th century. The Dutch Empire ultimately withdrew from most of its colonies in the early 20th century.



## 20. Portuguese Empire

**Time Period:** 1415-1999

The Portuguese Empire was a global empire that controlled territories in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. It was established in 1415 with the conquest of Ceuta, and reached its peak during the Age of Exploration in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to explore and colonize the Far East, and they played a leading role in the Age of Exploration. The Portuguese Empire ultimately withdrew from most of its colonies in the mid-20th century.

## 21. The Mongol Empire

**Time Period:** 1206-1368

The Mongol Empire was the largest empire in history, stretching from Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean. It was founded by Genghis Khan in 1206 who led the expansion in all directions. The empire restricted the rights of religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Buddhists, who were massacred regularly. The success of this empire was down to their superior military tactics. The military was built on the back of a brutal and well-trained cavalry force. After Khan's death, internal battles between successors raged, and the empire slowly declined.

## 22. Byzantine Empire

Time Period: 395-1453



The Byzantine Empire was the continuation of the Roman Empire in the East after the Western Roman Empire fell. It lasted for over a thousand years, and at its peak controlled territory from Spain to the Middle East. The Byzantine Empire was a Christian empire and was home to some of the most important Christian theologians and writers such as Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom. The empire ultimately fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, who conquered Constantinople (the capital of the Byzantine Empire).

### **23. The Ottoman Empire**

**Time Period:** 1299-1922

The Ottoman Empire was one of the largest and most powerful empires in history. At its peak, it controlled territory from modern-day Austria to the Persian Gulf, and from North Africa to the Balkans. The Ottoman Empire was a Muslim empire and at its height was home to over 25 million Muslims. The Ottomans were a strong military power and conquered many lands through their successful campaigns. The empire ultimately fell in 1922 after being defeated by the Allies in World War I.

### **24. The Neo-Assyrian Empire**

**Time Period:** 911-605 BC

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was the last great Assyrian empire. It was founded by Ashurnasirpal II in 911 BC and reached its peak under Shalmaneser III in the 8th century BC. At its height, the Neo-Assyrian Empire controlled territory from

the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, and from Anatolia to Egypt. The empire ultimately fell to the Babylonians in 605 BC.



## 25. The Age Of Exploration

**Time Period:** 1450-1700

The Age of Exploration was a period of time marked by an increase in global exploration. It began in the 15th century and lasted until the 18th century. During this time, Europeans explored and colonized the world, discovering new continents and establishing new trade routes.

The Age of Exploration was fueled by the rise of European maritime power, the invention of the printing press, and the discovery of new technologies such as the caravel. It was a time of great discovery and expansion and led to the establishment of many of the world's most important [colonial empires](#).

The hangover from this era is still evident in global politics. For example, there remain 14 [constitutional monarchies](#) that were colonized by Britain during the age of exploration and that retain the British monarch as their figurehead.

## Conclusion

Imperialism is the extension of a country or empire's power and influence through cultural, political, or military force. It has occurred throughout human history as one group of people tries to dominate and control others. It is usually justified as a way to civilize nations and bring them into the "modern world."

However, in reality, it usually involves exploitation and oppression. The cost of imperialism is often paid by the people who are colonized, not the colonizers.



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