

The Future of Colonialism

Mesamarat al-Gayb, 26 August 1945

The Allies' own promises, throughout the war, when trial followed trial, disaster followed disaster, and ordeal followed hard upon ordeal...

The Allies' own promises were genuinely magnificent — they guaranteed the world lasting peace, continuous security from aggression, want, fear, and hunger, and stable enjoyment of freedom of opinion, speech, action, and religion.

This same magnificent appeal was pressed home, repeated every single day — no one turned the dial of a radio without hearing it from the announcers, no newspaper was published without it appearing among the polished articles, the ornate essays, the lengthy dispatches — until the naive and the genuinely cultivated alike, and everyone in between, grew genuinely certain these same promises would become established fact, the moment the war laid down its own burdens.

The war did lay down its own burdens, and the leaders of the new world set about laying the very foundations of that new world; minds, hearts, eyes, and ears alike turned toward San Francisco, to witness the dawn of a world of justice, security, and freedom, to breathe in this new breeze filling hearts with contentment, joy, and hope — but they turned back defeated, disillusioned, wretched, and despairing. The foundations of the new world were indeed laid — but they guaranteed people no security from fear, nor from hunger, just as they guaranteed people no enjoyment of freedom, or independence. The new world was built, rather, on the very same foundations the old world was built on: a balance among the strong nations, on the one hand; domination over the weak nations, on the other; and exploitation of the less developed peoples, on a third.

The sun, then, will rise and set upon exactly the same world it once rose and set upon before, changed only slightly, and only on the surface... The number of strong nations has shrunk, down to three, from what was once six or seven; the number of weak nations has grown, varying widely in the degree of their own weakness — some possessing no significant strength whatsoever, some possessing a modest share of it, some with nothing to fear today, but something to fear tomorrow, or the day after, and some with nothing to fear today, nor tomorrow, nor the day after...

As for the peoples once subject to colonial rule, they have remained subject to colonial rule — though matters differ enormously between them. Certain victorious nations did give some thought to reforming their own condition, somewhat, and did speak of preparing a genuinely good future for them, whether near or distant — but were forcefully turned back from doing so, and it was settled, at the San Francisco Conference, that no one had any right to interfere with colonies already held by the victors before the war. The colonies of the defeated nations, by contrast, would be considered separately — that is, their own division among the victors, the manner of their own administration, and the purpose of that same administration would be decided...

It was decided, too, in deference to world public opinion, and in ostensible satisfaction of justice and morality, at the very least on the surface, that colonialism's own fundamental purpose was to lead colonies toward self-governing independence, one day. What matters, though, is that the delegates at San Francisco dispersed without offering the world any real step, near or distant, toward that same comprehensive, complete freedom people had been promised throughout six long years.

The British Empire retains her own old colonies, awaiting whatever might be added to them from among the defeated powers' own possessions; the French Empire retains her own colonies too, with a certain measure of doubt and hesitation over the fate of some of them in the Far East; say the same of Holland and Belgium. The United States looks toward the Far East with a genuinely covetous, ambitious eye, full of real fondness, real fascination, and real sympathy for the downtrodden, and looks toward the Near and Middle East with an eye full of genuine concern for securing commercial and economic interests, backed by great political influence. Russia looks toward the Far East and the Middle East exactly as the United States looks toward them — genuinely loving China, genuinely sympathizing with Iran, and having no real objection to a bit of flirtation with her own neighbour, Turkey. And just as the United States stands the uncontested leader of the entire American continent, so too might it prove fitting for Russia to become the uncontested leader of Eastern and Central Europe, and of the Balkan lands as well. All of this, of course, on the very foundation of justice, security, freedom, and equality among peoples!

And yet a genuinely novel development has appeared in colonial policy, one not without real interest — this same development announced yesterday, Wednesday, by the French government. To understand exactly

what makes this development genuinely interesting, it helps to briefly recall the old picture of colonialism. The contemporary world has known several different varieties of colonialism, the simplest being this pure colonialism in which colonies submit absolutely to the authority of the nations that colonize them — these colonies possessing no right whatsoever to govern themselves, manage their own affairs, or exercise any control over any of their own matters, amounting to nothing but pure exploitation. This kind of colony is common among the well-known colonial empires: England, France, Holland, and Belgium, indeed Spain and Portugal too, all possess colonies exploited along exactly these lines.

There exists, too, another kind of colony, possessing a certain formal appearance of independence in its own internal affairs, sometimes called a "protectorate," sometimes given other names besides — France and England both possess well-known colonies of this kind, enjoying a certain measure of distinct identity, yet scarcely enjoying any real rights at all. The highest ideal the modern world has reached in colonial policy, though, is exactly what the British Empire has achieved with respect to her own self-governing dominions: Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand stand countries fully independent internally, possessing their own complete parliamentary systems, and fully independent externally too, bound only by the Empire's own interests — their own foreign policy being required to remain consistent with the Empire's own foreign policy.

For this very reason, this splendid system arose, requiring consultation between the British government in London and the governments of these self-governing dominions on everything touching world affairs. The bond between Great Britain and these dominions, then, resembles nothing so much as a genuinely close, firm alliance.

His British Majesty is king of each and every one of these dominions, exactly as he is king of the United Kingdom itself.

The First World War gave rise to the mandate system — but it was a system that never truly succeeded, failing disgracefully in some places, and simply reverting to the old colonial system in others. The new development France has introduced, and announced yesterday, is this: it aims to have every part of the French Empire take part in drafting France's own new constitutional order. The French will elect, this coming October, the members of the Constituent Assembly tasked with drafting the constitution for the Fourth Republic.

It had been expected that membership in this Assembly would remain confined to the French themselves, excluding other peoples of the Empire; it had also been expected the Constituent Assembly would concern itself, alongside France's own particular constitution, with drafting a separate imperial framework defining the relationship between France and her own colonies; it had likewise been expected this same framework would lean somewhat toward greater freedom and tolerance, and be more genuinely shaped by the modern developments the world is now undergoing. But the French took a step not without real audacity, in including parts of the Empire directly in drafting France's own constitution, and in drafting the imperial framework itself as well.

M. Jacquinot, the Minister of Colonies, justified this bold step in the broadcast the radio carried to us yesterday, explaining that the Empire had remained genuinely faithful to France throughout her own ordeal, resisting the Germans, the Italians, and the Japanese, exactly as the French people themselves had resisted them, sending her own sons to fight on battlefields across every corner of the earth, then sending her own sons to Europe to help liberate the French people themselves, helping to drive the Germans from French soil — and, so long as the Empire had shouldered exactly the same duties the French people themselves had shouldered, it was only just that she should share, too, in the very rights the French people themselves enjoy.

The colonies will, accordingly, send their own representatives to the Constituent Assembly, with elections in these colonies varying according to their own respective degree of civilization and development — universal and direct in some, limited and indirect in others. What matters most is that the Empire will be treated exactly as the French themselves are treated, enjoying their own rights, exactly as she has shouldered their own duties. The French have always been genuine innovators, and rarely does an era pass without their devising something genuinely new — this same bold step of theirs is not without real interest. But to what extent can it truly be said that this step will ease the harshness of colonialism, and satisfy the colonies' own aspiration toward freedom and independence?

This is the great problem. The French are genuinely proud of their own national rights, genuinely proud of their own democracy, their own freedom, their own constitutional institutions — but they may well be mistaken, if they imagine everyone shares in this same pride, or shares this same admiration. It stands entirely reasonable that some peoples

might prefer their own modest life, and their own simple sense of belonging, might aspire, instead, to a natural growth genuinely suited to their own inherited traditions, customs, and civilization — preferring all of this to sharing in French national rights. There is no doubt whatsoever that the Arab peoples subject to French authority in North Africa, for instance, prefer their own distinct Arab identity, and their own enjoyment of their own particular independence, and their own development within the bounds of whatever civilization and tradition they have themselves inherited, to becoming some constituent part of the great French homeland.

It is certain that a Moroccan would prefer, a thousand times over, to remain an independent Moroccan, allied with France, or friendly toward her, rather than become a Frenchman, possessing whatever rights and bearing whatever duties the French themselves possess and bear.

The step France has taken is genuinely interesting, without doubt; genuinely bold, without doubt; genuinely good, without doubt — but only on condition the Constituent Assembly completes it properly, and drafts an imperial framework allowing some parts of the Empire to live an independent life, one grounded in alliance and friendship, rather than bound to the rights and duties of French nationality. It seems most likely the Arabs of North Africa, and the peoples of Indochina in the Far East, will accept nothing less than this.

If France genuinely wishes to greet this new world with a measure of calm, one guaranteeing her own resumption of her own glorious life, then it appears she will find herself compelled to proceed, with some of the peoples sharing in the French Empire, exactly as Great Britain proceeds with Canada, Australia, and her own other self-governing dominions.

This concerns France's own particular affairs. There remains, though, another side to the problem of colonialism in the future of this new world: colonialism has become, since the Second World War, one of the very foundations of international balance outside Europe, and the victors' own genuine concern for achieving this same balance has become entirely clear. The United States gained real superiority in the Pacific and the Far East, and Great Britain found herself in need of shoring herself up, with whatever might guarantee a proper balance between herself and her own great American ally — and so British policy toward France changed rapidly, a change visible in King George VI's own letter to

General de Gaulle, on the occasion of Japan's own surrender. No sooner had Great Britain's own posture toward France changed than its own effect appeared in American policy: whereas the French had once clutched their own hearts in fear for Indochina, they now found themselves reassured, taking part in receiving Japan's own surrender, on the one hand, and in organizing the affairs of the Far East, on the other.

Colonial policy thus rests on achieving balance outside Europe among these three victorious powers, exactly as the recovery of Europe itself rests on achieving this same balance. France is exactly what achieves balance between the British and the Russians in Europe, and between the British and the Americans in the Far East — and, if I am not mistaken, Labour will turn to France to achieve balance between the British and the Russians in the Middle East and the Near East too, sharing that same role with Turkey.

The conclusion, then, is this: the future of colonialism in this new world resembles the past of colonialism in the old world — resting on rivalry, and the clash of interests, among the strong, far more than on any genuine regard for the rights of the weak. Weak nations, then, face a choice between exactly two paths: either to become mere plunder, divided up among others, or to labour, strive, suffer, and endure, so as to instil, in the hearts of the strong, some measure of genuine respect — enough to lead them to relinquish some part of their own self-interest, and to take these weaker nations genuinely into account.