

Decolonialism

Timeline of independence

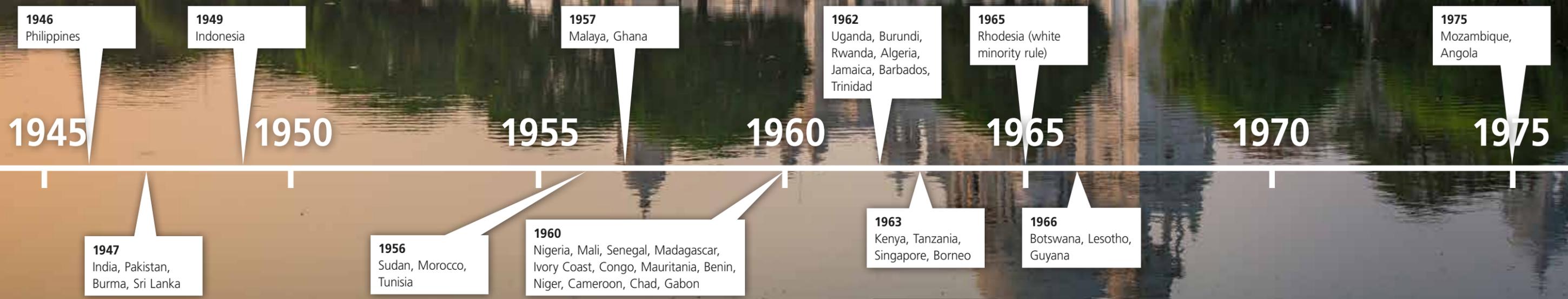
The ending of colonial empires was a long and sometimes bloody process. Although some colonies had either seized independence (the USA, Haiti) or been granted independence (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa) before the Second World War, the main thrust of decolonisation came after the end of that global conflict. The war certainly accelerated the process, either through the destabilising impact of outside powers (for example the Japanese in Asia) or because of the long-term economic problems it caused. European colonial powers simply lacked the resources to sustain global empires and when the decolonisation process started it quickly accelerated.

In 1946 the Philippines secured independence from the USA and the following year India and Pakistan became independent of Britain. In 1949 the Dutch finally realised they had little hope of reasserting control over the Dutch East Indies after the Japanese occupation, and Indonesia became independent.

Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s most African colonies became independent. Some achieved independence with little opposition from the former colonial power but others saw protracted campaigns to secure independence. Particularly bloody were those fought in Algeria against France and Mozambique against Portugal.

The pace of decolonisation slowed notably after 1975, mainly involving small Caribbean territories, but included the return of both Hong Kong (1997) and Macau (1999) to China. Numerous colonies remain, but the appetite for independence seems to have slowed. Voters in Bermuda and New Caledonia have recently rejected independence.

Across the world, former colonies gained their independence in a variety of ways



Victoria Memorial, Kolkata

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