

Free essay about great britain and empire: lessons to be learned

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In 1900, Great Britain was engaged in the Boer War, a military conflict that had transformed into battles with ragged guerillas -- many of them farmers and rural people. This new style of combat worried British rule because it was formidable and extended what should have been a short conflict into a longer one -- depleting the Treasury and causing concern for Britain's ruling elite, who were concerned that Britain's fighting force was not equipped or trained well enough to handle guerilla warfare.

During the First World War (which Great Britain entered in 1914), Great Britain suffered a great number of casualties in their first encounter with brutal trench warfare, and the use of chemical weapons such as mustard gas, by the Germans. The British loss of life was unprecedented, and had long-term effects on the British citizenry's morale.

Ironically, before the Great War broke out, Britain was engaged in tribal wars on Afghani soil. By the time Great Britain entered World War II in 1939, national debt was staggeringly high, and the British pound was continually devalued by the government in order to pay off its past war debts.

During the early 20th century, Great Britain's political scene and fledgling "democracy" was in disarray. A liberal politician named Gladstone stood against British imperialism and interventionism, but was very much alone in his dissent, as the Labour Party took hold in the House of Commons and Parliament. Thus, there were very distinct factions of political parties that were vying for power. The United States could learn from the poor example set by Great Britain -- as its own political parties also suffer from fractured relations.

Ireland was always a fixture of Great Britain, but gained its independence

through the efforts of its "freedom fighters" -- Sinn Fein -- in 1922. Ireland was such an important domestic issue that it distracted British politicians from focusing on an agenda that included free trade, unions, and alliances with long-time enemies such as Japan, France, and Russia. Ireland fought hard for its independence from Great Britain, using the tactics of guerilla warfare against the British Administration.

Also in 1922, Egypt, which had been a British protectorate was granted formal independence, but continued to be a British client state for the next three decades. British troops remained in Egypt until the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1936, which stated that the troops would eventually withdraw, while continuing to occupy and defend the Suez Canal zone. Iraq soon achieved independence from Britain in 1932. Britain also had troops in Palestine, which put them in the middle of Jewish and Arab relations. The 1917 Balfour Declaration stated that a national home for Jewish people would be set up in Palestine, and Jewish immigration was allowed up to a point, determined by vote. The agreement, however, led to more conflict with the Arabs, who revolted in 1936. As war with Germany became a reality during the 1930s, Britain deemed that supporting the Arab population in the Middle East was more important than the setting aside territory for a Jewish homeland, and shifted to a pro-Arab position, limiting Jewish immigration, ultimately creating a Jewish rebellion.

Meanwhile, British rule of India was laden with tensions, punctuated by the Amritsar Massacre, as well as the Chauri Chaura incident. Also, in 1923, Canada refused to be bound by the Treaty of Lausanne, approved in 1923. Finally, in 1926, the Balfour Declaration was issued by the Imperial

Conference. The Balfour Declaration gave each nation under the British Commonwealth equal status, and it also spelled the end of British rule from afar, as former colonies and dominions could now vote to nullify or pass their own measures, Parliament notwithstanding.

After World War II, Britain was in shambles, and its debt was so enormous that it required an American bailout. In 1956, The Suez Crisis was precipitated by a bad decision on the part of then-Prime Minister Anthony Eden. Under the guise of an Israeli attack, the plan was for Britain and France to re-take the Suez Canal from the Egyptians. The military coup was successful, but ultimately damaged Britain's reputation as pressures by US President Eisenhower, and intervention by the United Nations caused British troops to withdraw, and Eden resigned from office.

Thus, the Empire of Great Britain was on its last legs. Too many wars and overseas interventions caused massive amounts of debt. Its Middle East policies in Palestine and Egypt were disastrous in terms of financial cost and reputation. Civil unrest created by partisan politics and conflicts with the newly-formed Irish Republic created discord at home. Finally, its over-extension of Empire was too much to oversee, and the military costs of doing so were breaking the British economy at home, and causing rifts between the people.

Great Britain made several mistakes with their Empire that took at least two centuries to build. If the United States fails to heed the lessons learned from Great Britain's collapse, it too will face the same destiny.