

# **A HISTORY OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS**

## **CREATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM (1603 & 1707)**

Following the Norman conquest in 1066, England was dominated by Kings who were often more concerned with their holdings in France. For fully three quarters of the time they were native French-speakers. The Kings of England held Normandy in France. Aquitaine, also in France, was brought to them by marriage. After the Hundred Years War with the French, the English lost all of their possessions in France by 1453, except for Calais which was lost by 1558. By then England, was already building a trans-Atlantic empire when it claimed Newfoundland in 1497.

King Edward I finally conquered Wales in 1282, and made it a principality to be held by the heir to the English throne. In 1536, King Henry VIII of England removed the political institutions that had stigmatized Wales as a conquered country, making it formally part of the Kingdom of England, but the new united Kingdom was still generally known as England, and it was English law which prevailed.

In 1170, the Normans conquered Ireland and added an area on the east coast they called The Pale to the English Crown. It also made it necessary for Ireland to be made a Kingdom in 1541, in personal union with the Kingdom of England, because the lordship of Ireland had been a Papal grant. Henry VIII was proclaimed King of Ireland as well as England and Wales. During the reign of Henry VIII's daughter Elizabeth I (1558-1603), English rule over Ireland was made effective for the first time.

Scotland became an English dependency in 1290. It regained its independence under Robert the Bruce in 1328, although with a border adjusted in favour of England by Edward III in 1334.

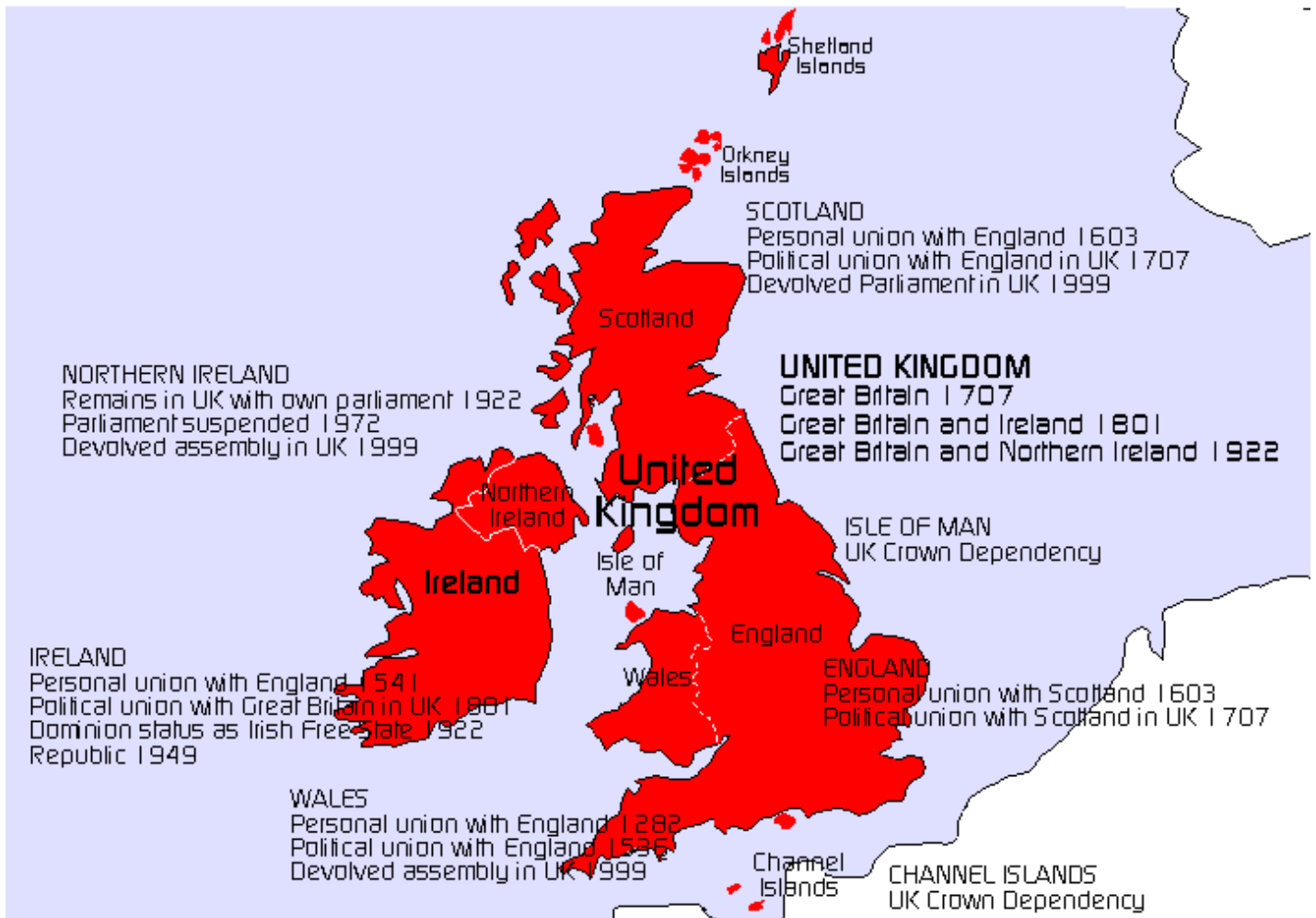
On the death of the childless Elizabeth in 1603 the kingdoms of England and Ireland went to her nephew James Stuart, King of Scotland. In this way the British Isles came under one monarch for the first time. Although James considered himself king of Great Britain (and Ireland), the parliaments of England and Scotland were less enthusiastic about union, and maintained the distinction between the two countries. In 1606, King James created the first Union Flag with the combination of the English cross of St. George with the Scottish St. Andrew saltire.

The Stuart dynasty, Kings of Scotland and England from 1603, always considered themselves Kings of Great Britain. It is thus reasonable to talk of the British Empire from 1603, and it is usual to think of this as the trans-oceanic dependencies of an insular state. However, it is worth remembering that for almost the whole time from 1689 to 1820 the monarchs of Britain also ruled considerable continental territories, just as in the period from 1016 to 1453 when English kings ruled over parts of France such as Normandy and Aquitaine. The trans-oceanic English and later British Empire, began in the first Elizabethan age (1558-1603) in Newfoundland, which had been claimed for the English Crown in 1497 and settled in 1583.

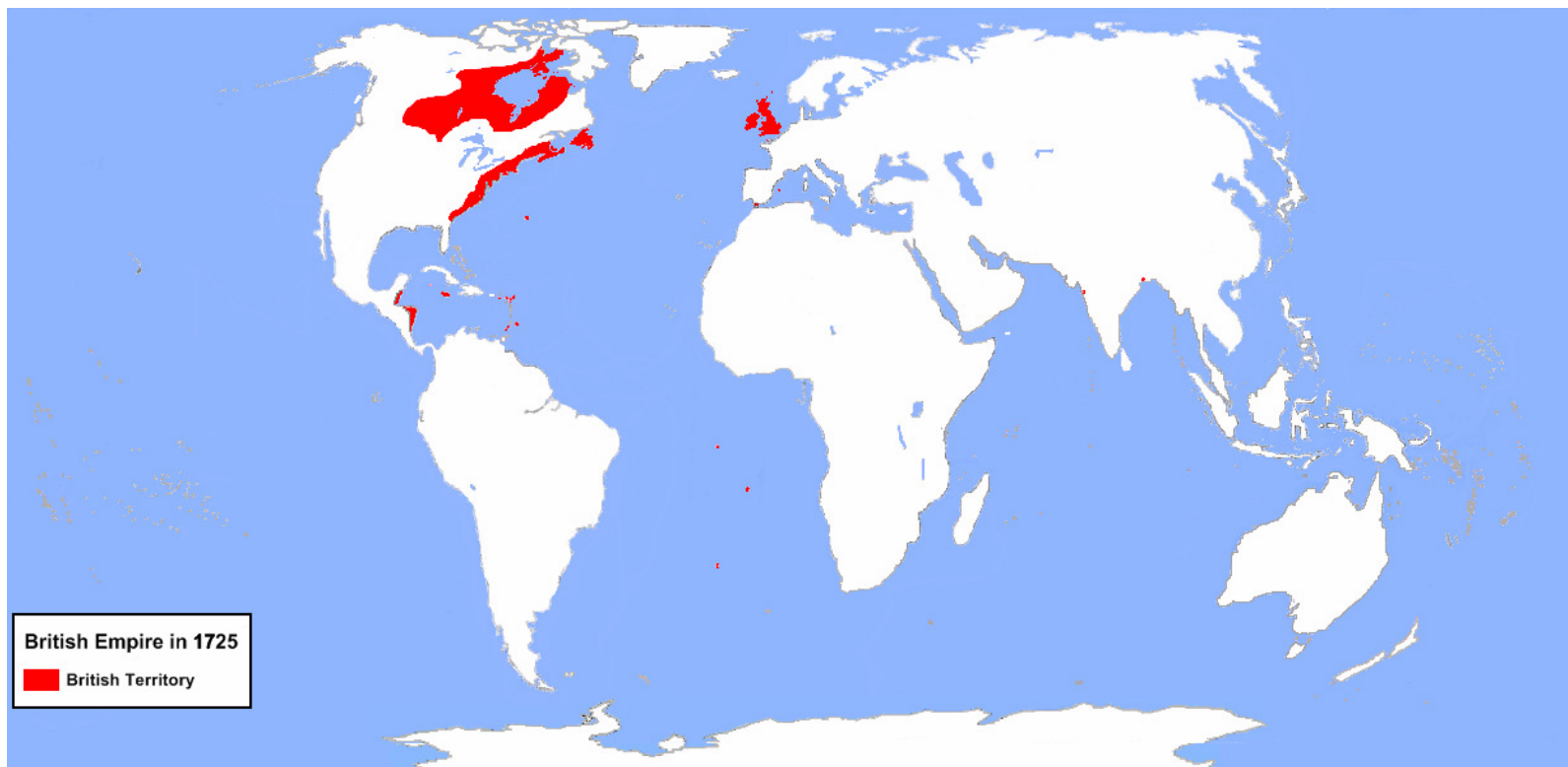
Under financial strain, the Scottish parliament voted itself out of existence in 1707, joining in a union with England, known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

Oddly enough, the Stannaries parliament, elected by Cornishmen, continued to sit until 1752, and was never actually abolished. When Anne died in 1714, the parliament of Great Britain found a new Protestant king in George of Hanover, creating a new personal union with that north German principality, which lasted until 1837, when Queen Victoria became monarch.

# BRITISH ISLES



# THE BRITISH EMPIRE BEFORE THE SEVEN YEARS WAR

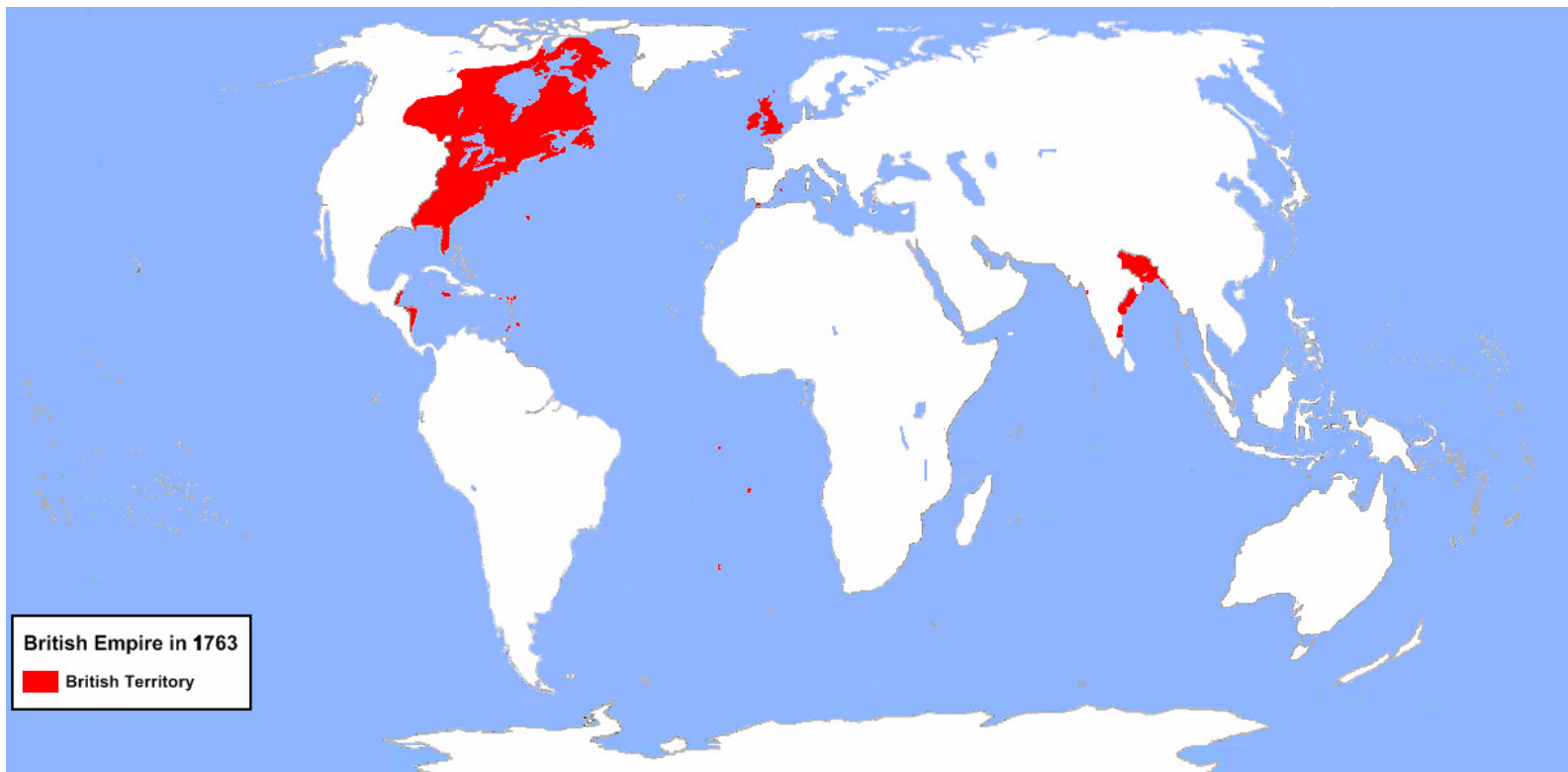


## BEGINNINGS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE (1607 – 1756)

In 1607, the first really successful English colony in North America, was established. The town was named after James, and the colony after his predecessor, the Virgin Queen. The American colonies continued to grow at the expense of other European powers (Jamaica taken from the Spanish in 1655, New York from the Dutch in 1664). Scots had attempted to create a colony in the isthmus of Panama in 1698, known as Darien, but this failed due to disease and lack of funding. Gibraltar had been taken by the English from Spain in 1704 and remains a British territory to the present.

Meanwhile the American colonies on the Atlantic coast continued to expand, and Hudson Bay was settled by fur traders of the Hudson Bay Company. Small scale trading posts in India were established by the East India Company throughout the Seventeenth Century. The great leap forward in Britain's colonial enterprise occurred during the Seven-years war (1756-63) against France and its allies. This conflict was between Britain and Prussia on one side, and France, Austria, Sweden and Russia on the other. The superiority of the British navy led to French defeat in Canada and India, and the occupation of Spanish Havana and Manila. Britain gained all of North America east of the Mississippi, but reserved the unsettled regions for the natives. This restriction was one reason for resentment by the British settlers on the Atlantic coast. In India, the East India Company, backed by British troops, annexed Bengal, one of the most populous provinces of the tottering Mogul Empire.

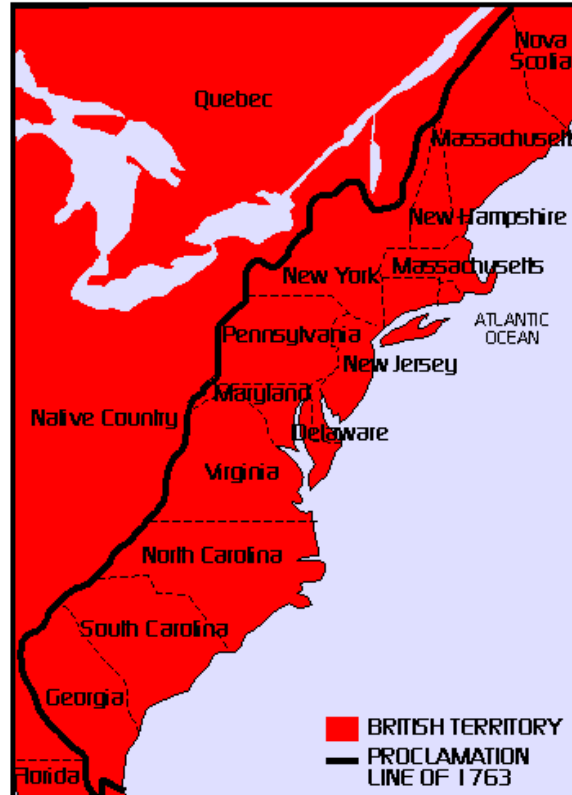
## THE BRITISH EMPIRE AFTER THE SEVEN YEARS WAR



Britain's control of eastern North America lasted less than 20 years. It was felt by the British Government that the Seven Years War had benefited the American colonies by the removal of French power from North America, therefore Americans should help to pay for the costs of maintaining the new expanded empire. The British Government introduced a series of new taxes starting with a Stamp Act. This infuriated Americans as they claimed that they were being taxed without political representation. An

administration insensitive to the rights and desires of the American colonists led to the revolution of 1776 and the Declaration of Independence of the thirteen American colonies as the United States of America. By 1781, a French fleet and a Franco-American army was able to force the surrender of the main British force in North America, and the independence of the United States was recognized in 1783.

## THE THIRTEEN AMERICAN COLONIES



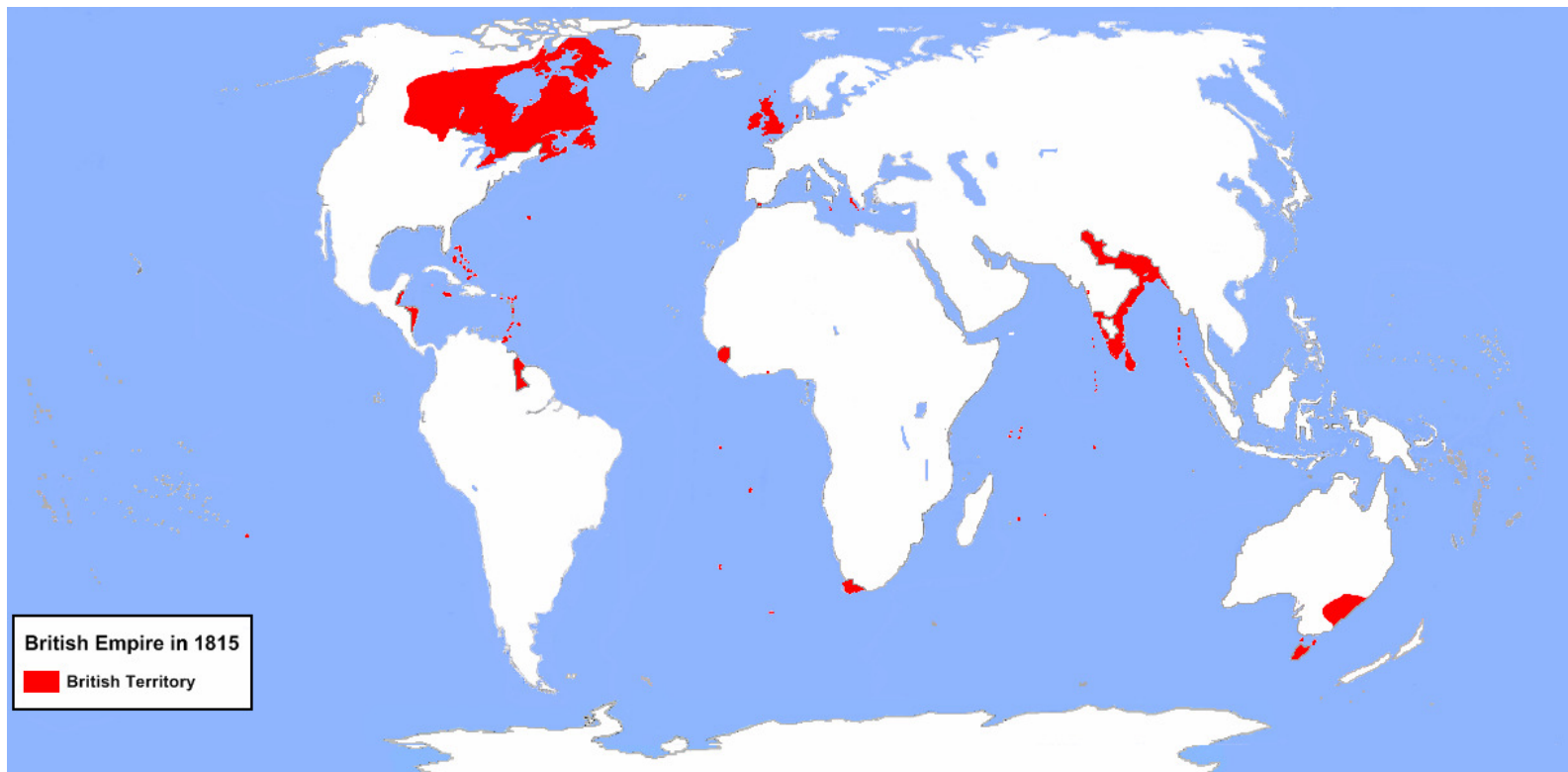
Only Canada and Newfoundland remained British. The former acquired a majority English-speaking population from the influx of loyalists from the United States, and gradually pushed its territories westward. Partly to compensate for the loss of America, a penal colony was founded in Australia in 1788.

By the end of the Napoleonic wars (1797-1815) Britain had gained South Africa and Ceylon from the Dutch, and Hanover had extended its territory in Germany. In India, the East India Company steadily enlarged its territories and sphere of influence. 13,000 British troops failed, however, in an invasion to annex the Spanish territories in Argentina and Uruguay in 1806-7.

An invasion of Canada by the United States from 1812 to 1814 was defeated, but the fear of another invasion led Canadians to desire more autonomy and security. Rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada in 1837 against what they saw as corrupt and unrepresentative government led to the establishment of responsible self-government for the Canadas in 1840 by Lord Durham.

Meanwhile, in 1801, Ireland joined the United Kingdom, to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, thus encompassing the whole of the British Isles (except for the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, which were, and still are, administered separately). The Irish St. Patrick Saltire was added to the British Union Flag and it took on the design it still has today.

# THE BRITISH EMPIRE AFTER THE NAPOLEONIC WARS



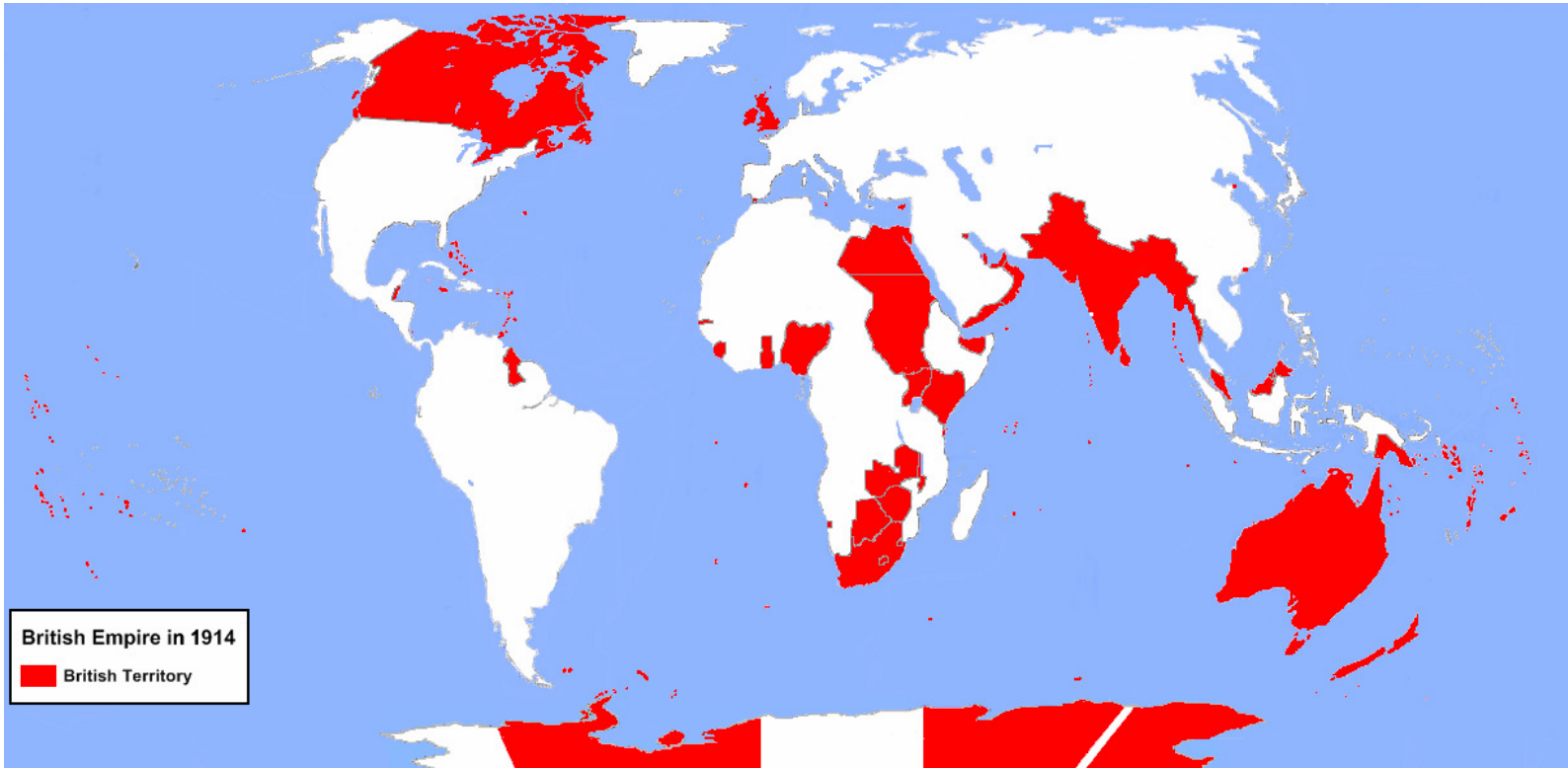
## GROWTH OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE (1815 – 1920)

The British Empire expanded enormously during Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901), as a consequence of the industrial revolution which put Britain first in the world economically. Following the 1857 Indian Mutiny, Britain took control of the whole sub-continent. The last Mogul Emperor was dethroned, and Queen Victoria became Empress of India in 1876. India was ruled in part by a British Viceroy and in part by native rulers in princely states. Singapore was colonized in 1819, and Hong Kong in 1842. A 99-year lease over Hong Kong's New Territories was signed between Britain and China in 1898.

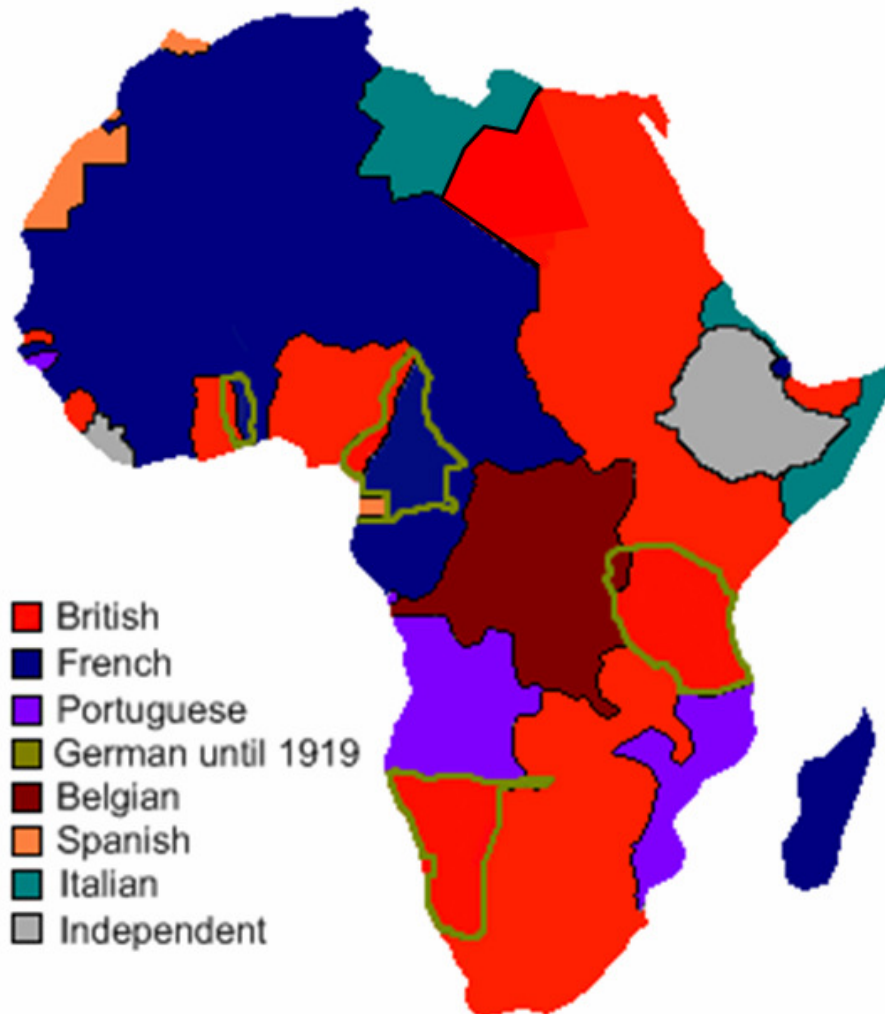
The Crimean War (1853–1856) was fought between Imperial Russia on one side and an alliance of France, the United Kingdom, the Kingdom of Sardinia, and the Ottoman Empire on the other. Britain saw Russian imperial expansion in southwest Asia as a threat to its links with India. Most of the conflict took place on the Crimean Peninsula, with additional actions occurring in western Turkey, and the Baltic Sea region. The war was won by the British and the French and Russia agreed not to establish military bases in the area and to respect the independence of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Aden was annexed by the British in 1837. British expansion in South and East Asia was mostly over by 1886, by which time the focus of attention of the European powers had moved to Africa, with the Berlin Conference of 1884 effectively 'carving up' the continent, on paper at least, between rival powers.

In addition to four west African colonies and Somaliland in the northeast, the British, led by De Beers diamond magnate Cecil Rhodes, pursued a north to south 'Cape to Cairo' corridor across Africa which envisaged a continuous British state in Africa from the Cape of Good Hope at the continent's southern end to Egypt at the north end. This was almost complete by the 1890's except for German East Africa in the middle. The Boer Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State in South Africa were conquered by the British in 1902 and merged with the British colonies of the Cape Colony and Natal into the Union of South Africa in 1910. By 1902, the European carve-up of Africa on the ground was complete, and about a third of the continent's area and about half its population ended up under British rule. Egypt remained nominally part of the Ottoman Empire, but was under British control from 1882 and was formally annexed as a British Protectorate in 1914. German African colonies were taken by the British after the First World War, thus completing the 'Cape to Cairo' corridor.

# THE BRITISH EMPIRE BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR



## PARTITION OF AFRICA



Canada was extended to the Pacific coast in 1871, and all of Australia and New Zealand annexed by 1842 (although it would be generations before the interior of Australia was fully explored, let alone settled). Rebellions in Canada in 1837 and in Australia in 1854 led to colonial self-government. Colonial Conferences of colonial leaders began in London in 1887, becoming Imperial Conferences in 1911 and eventually becoming Commonwealth Conferences after 1944.

Even though the British Empire in South America was very small consisting of only British Guiana (annexed 1807) and the Falkland Islands (annexed 1833) at opposite ends of the continent, Argentina was part of Britain's 'informal empire' which was made up of countries which were not under British rule, but in which Britain maintained a strong economic interest. This was to remain until the Second World War.

In 1908, Britain made large claims to part of Antarctica near the Falkland Islands, now known as the British Antarctic Territory. These claims were expanded later on to include the Australian Antarctic Territory and the Ross Dependency.

### DOMINION STATUS (1867 – 1948)

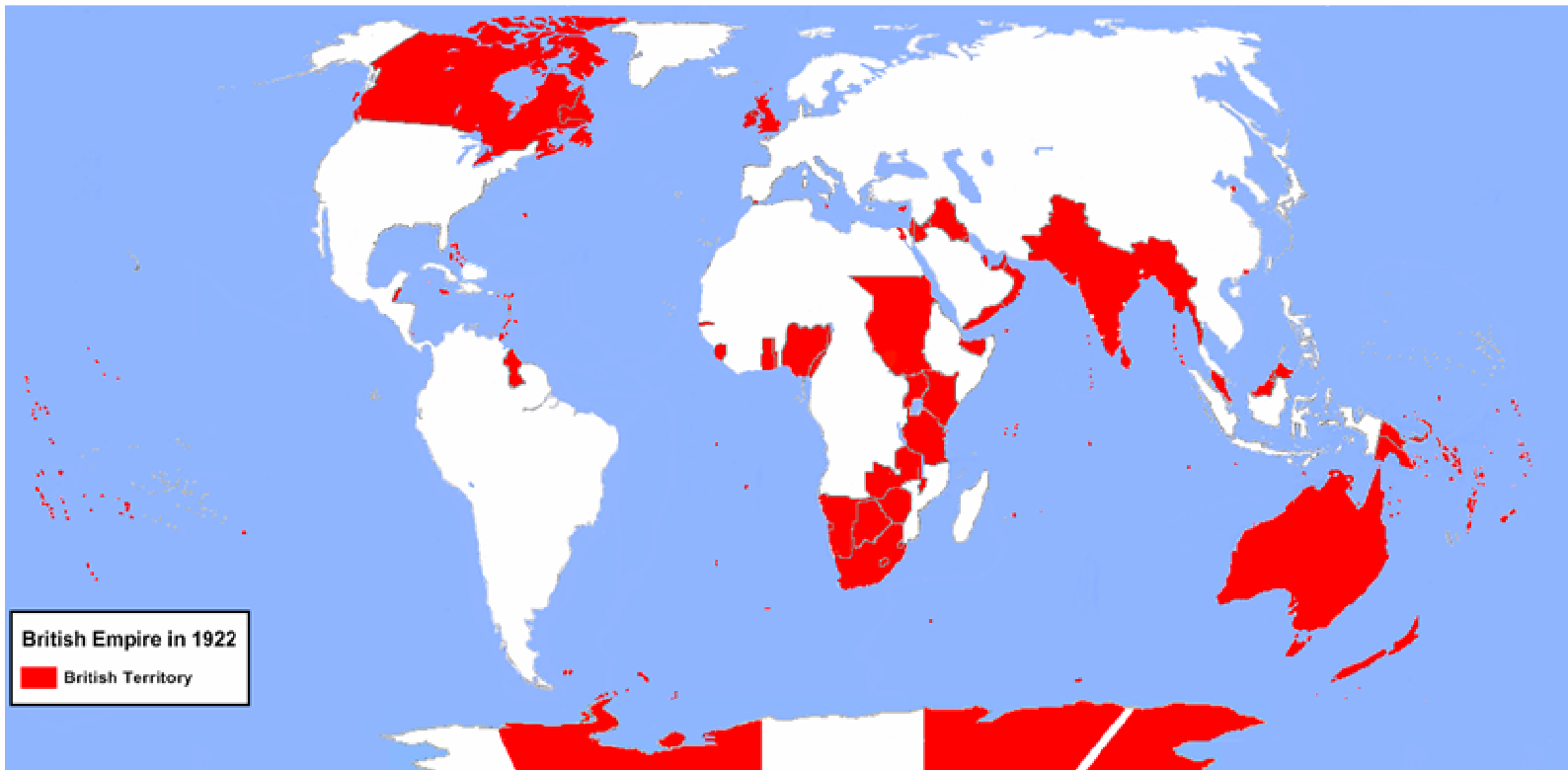
All the colonies of British North America (Canada) attained limited self-governance between 1848 and 1855, after rebellions for responsible government in 1837, except the colony of Vancouver Island. Nova Scotia was the first colony to achieve responsible government in January–February 1848, through the efforts of Joseph Howe, and by the Province of Canada later that year. They were followed by Prince Edward Island in 1851, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland in 1855 under Philip Francis Little. Confederation of the British North American colonies of Canada (subsequently the provinces of Ontario and Quebec), New Brunswick and Nova Scotia into "One Dominion under the Name of Canada", became the first autonomous federation in the British Empire in 1867 with its capital in Ottawa.

The Australian Constitutions Act 1850 established the machinery for the four then existing Australian colonies (namely New South Wales, Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia) to establish Parliaments and responsible government once certain conditions had been met; it also provided for the separation of Victoria from New South Wales and its establishment as a separate colony (which occurred in 1851) with similar capacity to attain self-government. New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania, along with New Zealand, attained responsible government soon after in 1856; self-government for Western Australia was delayed until 1891, mainly because of continuing financial dependence on Britain. Queensland was separated from New South Wales and established as a separate colony in 1859. The Australian colonies were federated into an autonomous dominion in a similar manner to Canada in 1901 with a federal government first located at Melbourne and moved in Canberra in 1927.

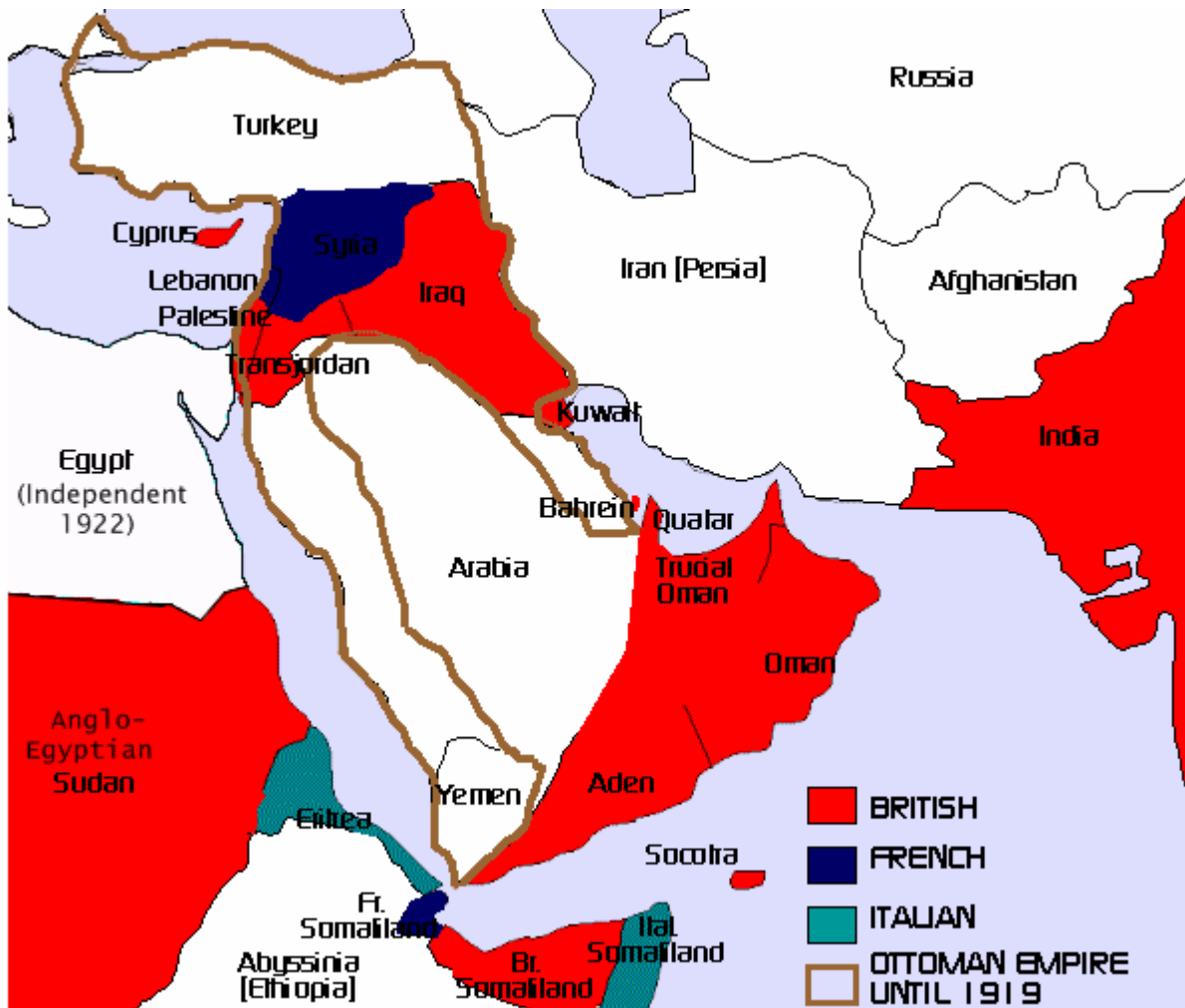
New Zealand became a dominion in 1907. South African colonies became self-governing later, with the Cape Colony being the first in 1872; this was followed by Natal (1893), Transvaal (1906), and the Orange River Colony (1907). The four South African colonies were federated into the autonomous dominion of the Union of South Africa in 1910. Newfoundland (1917) and the Irish Free State (1921) also became autonomous dominions. Dominion status for India became an increasingly pressing issue after the First World War. The establishment of the Irish Free State reduced the United Kingdom to Great Britain and Northern Ireland as the six northern counties of Ireland opted to remain in the United Kingdom, while the other twenty-six separated as the Irish Free State.

It is often said that the British Empire peaked territorially in the 1920s, following World War One (1914-1918), in which it gained most of the German territories in Africa, particularly in East Africa and South-West Africa, and Ottoman provinces, including Palestine and Mesopotamia (Iraq), in the Middle East, by mandates granted by the League of Nations.

# THE BRITISH EMPIRE AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR



## PARTITION OF THE MIDDLE EAST



## THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH (1931 – 1949)

In the Balfour Declaration at the Imperial Conference in 1926, Britain and its Dominions agreed that they were *in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations*. The Dominions (Canada, Newfoundland, Union of South Africa, Irish Free State, Australia and New Zealand) were granted full autonomy by the statute of Westminster in 1931 and referred to as the British Commonwealth. They even gained the right to secede from the Empire, a right which the Irish Free State soon exercised and the Union of South Africa would follow thirty years later. However, the British monarch remained (and still remains today, except for South Africa and Ireland) the monarch of these territories, and it was not until 1947-9 that the dominions established separate citizenships from the UK and were declared fully independent and equal to Britain.

World War Two (1939-45) showed that the dominions (Ireland excluded) were indeed still part of the Empire: in 1939 the Australian prime minister informed his country that Britain had declared war on Germany and that "as a result Australia is also at war", and in 1940 millions of pounds of gold were shipped to Canada in preparation for a possible relocation of the British royal family.

By this reckoning, the Empire reached its greatest extent following that war, in 1945. Most of the Italian territories in Africa were occupied by Britain, as was all of northwest Germany and parts of Austria and Berlin. Huge areas of the Middle East were occupied (or reoccupied) during the war and beyond, to secure oil supplies and seaways, or to remove regimes friendly to the Axis. The British occupied the Italian territory of the Dodecanese Islands in the Mediterranean and wanted to make them into a self-governing territory under the British Crown, but they were transferred to Greece in 1947.

After violence against the British, nominal independence had been given to Egypt in 1922 and then more complete independence in 1936 and in Iraq in 1932. However, both of these countries were reoccupied by the British during World War Two. Iraq was invaded by the United Kingdom in 1941, for fears that the government of Rashid Ali might cut oil supplies to Western nations and because of his strong leanings to Nazi Germany. A military occupation lasted there until 26 October 1947. India had been granted partial autonomy in 1935, but the nationalist movement there wanted complete independence by then.

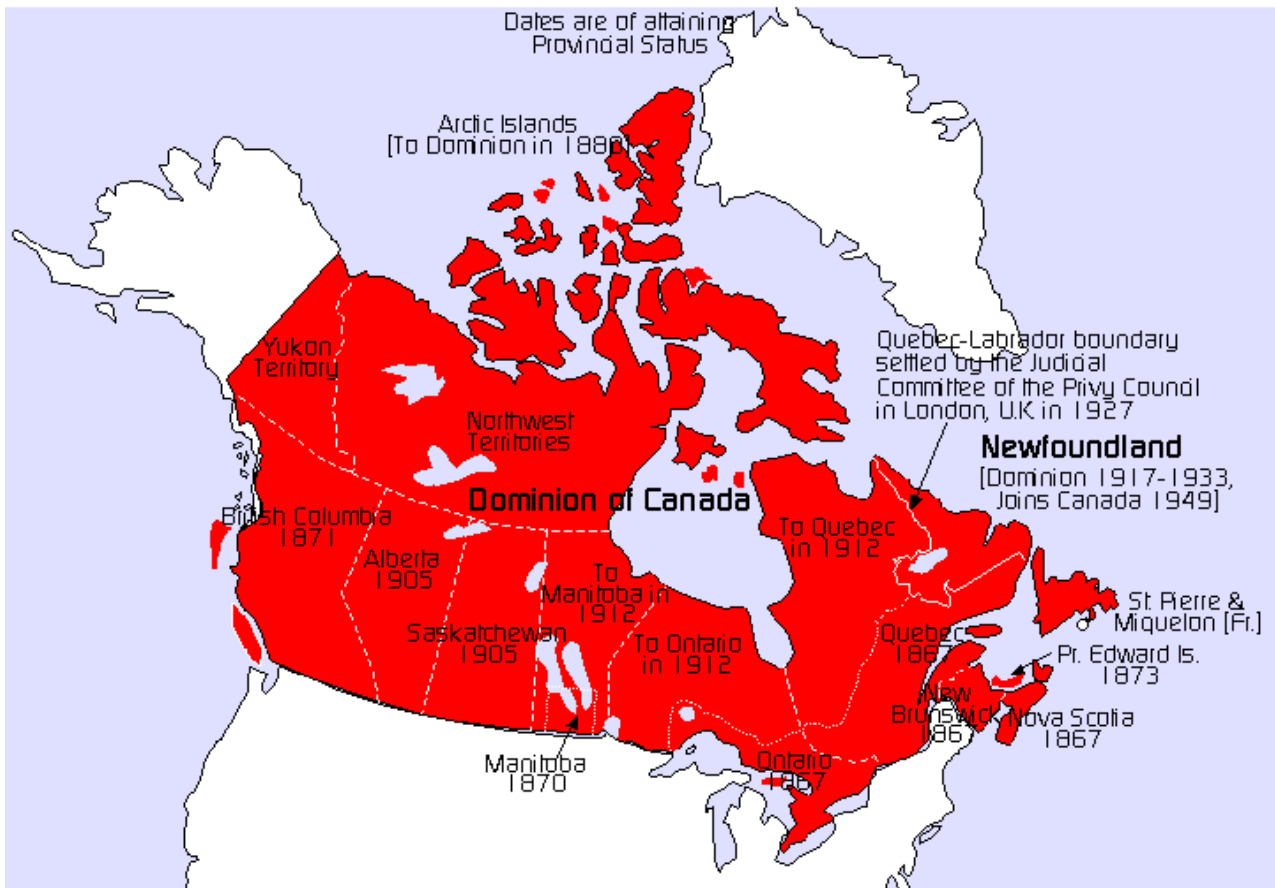
British Empire Games were established in Canada in 1930 and held every four years between the Olympics.

Empire preferential trade was established by an agreement in Ottawa in 1932. This made complete free trade and preference for Empire goods within the British Empire. This made the Empire completely self-sufficient, but hindered trade with other countries. However, against this backdrop of increased democracy and territorial expansion, it must be remembered that the powerhouse and centre of the Empire, Britain, was falling behind other major world powers in industrial performance, and was economically and psychologically exhausted by meeting the brunt of the costs of the First World War, then brought almost to its knees by the destruction and cost of the second.

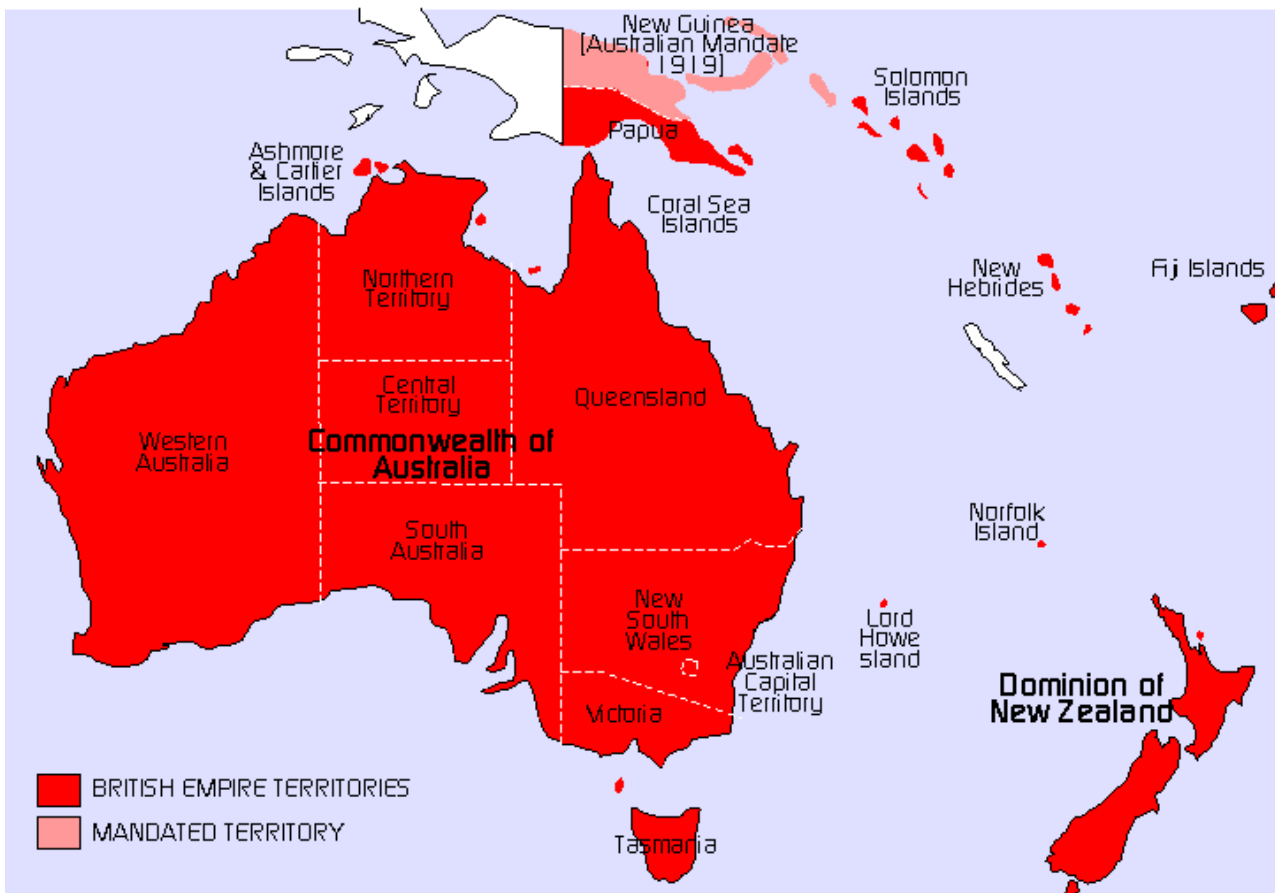
By 1945, the financial means and ideological impetus to keep the empire alive seemed to be missing to a growing section of the British and colonial establishment.

In the 1930's, Egypt had concluded a secession treaty with Britain granting it full independence and nationalists in India were demanding complete independence and secession from the empire. In 1935, Britain gave India its own parliament, but with Britain retaining the final say over it.

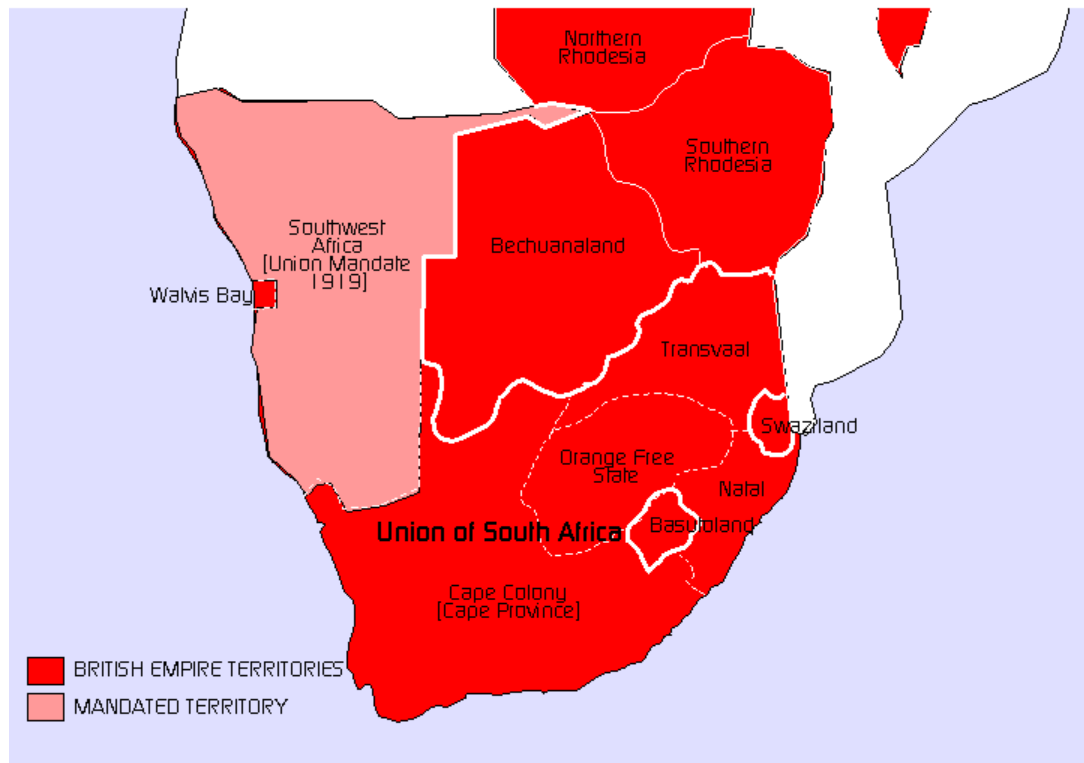
## DOMINION OF CANADA AND NEWFOUNDLAND



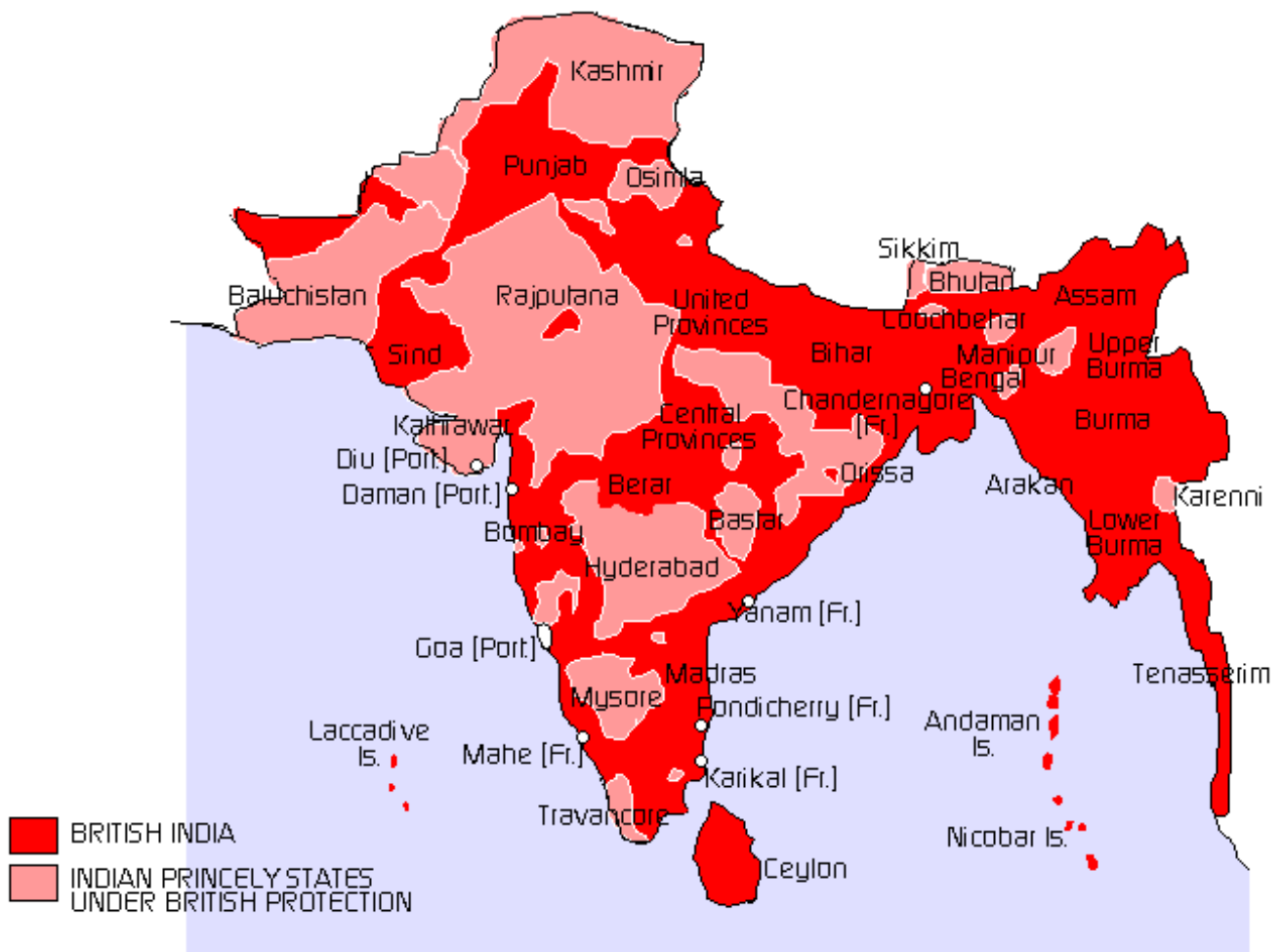
## COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA AND DOMINION OF NEW ZEALAND



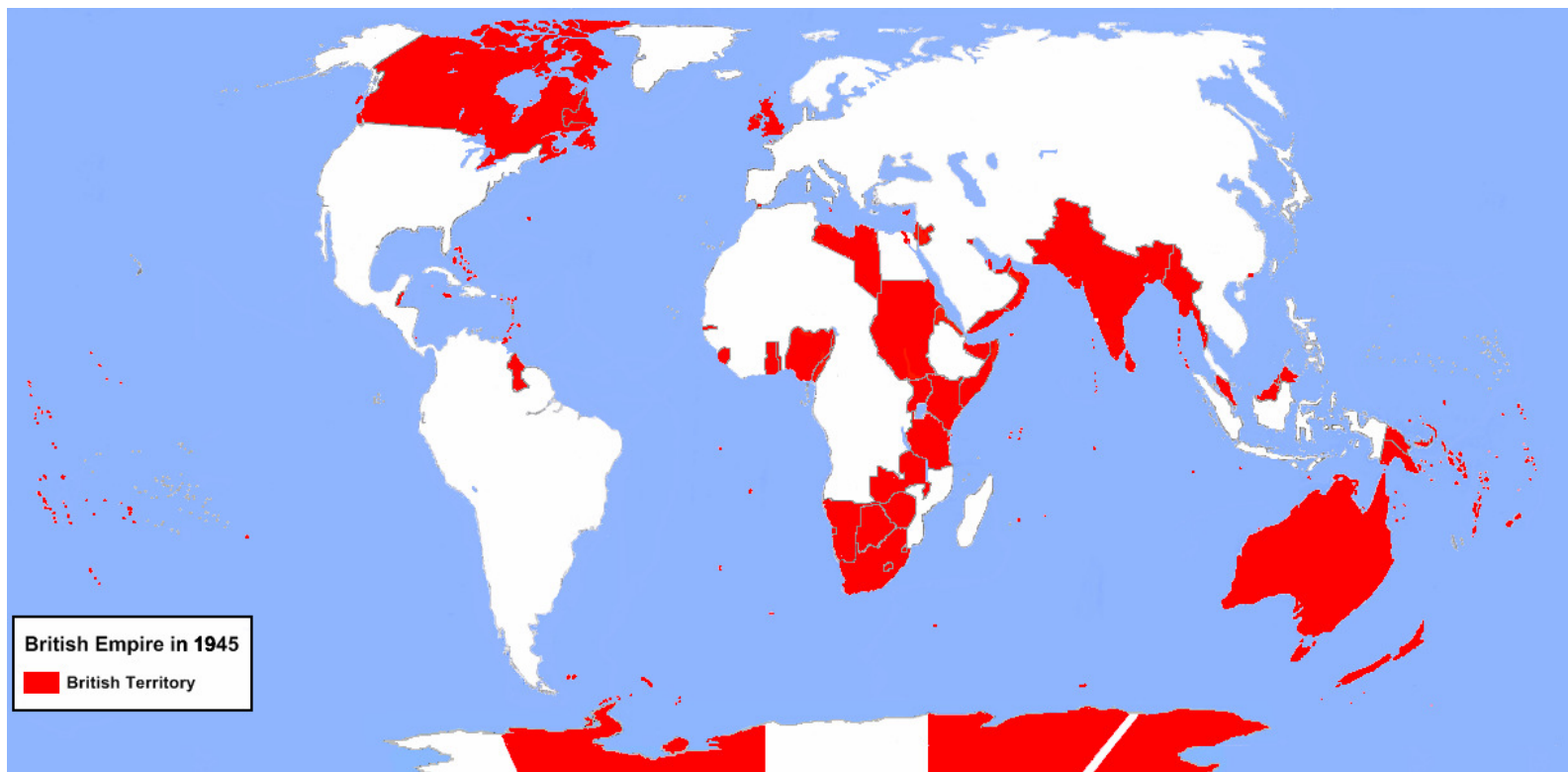
## UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA



## INDIAN EMPIRE



# THE BRITISH EMPIRE AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR



## EMPIRE TO COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS (1947 – 1997)

After years of resentment at British domination, catholic southern Ireland gained independence as a dominion in 1921. Northern Ireland, with a Protestant majority, remained part of the renamed United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Unlike the other dominions, the Irish Free State (Ireland) declared its independence in 1937 and remained neutral in World War Two.

After World War Two, India was demanding complete independence and the election of an anti-imperialist Labour Government in Britain that desired change, helped that cause. In 1947, the British Government recognised all of the Dominions as completely free and equal nations with Britain. In August of that year, the British Indian Empire was granted independence as the two new Dominions of India and Pakistan within the British Commonwealth, retaining the British Monarch as head of state. In 1948, Ceylon became independent as a Dominion. In that same year, Burma gained independence and broke away from the British Commonwealth to become a sovereign republic.

In 1949, the government of India drew up a national constitution and stated that it would like to become a completely independent republic with its own President as head of state. They also desired their own foreign policy as a fully sovereign nation. However, they wished to remain within the Commonwealth. This meant that the British Commonwealth had to change.

The issue of countries with constitutional structures not based on a shared Crown, but who wished to remain members of the Commonwealth, was resolved in **April 1949** at a Commonwealth prime ministers' meeting in London. Under this London Declaration, India agreed that, when it became a republic, in January 1950, it would accept the British Sovereign as a "symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and, as such, Head of the Commonwealth" – a purely symbolic position. However, India would have its own President as its head of state. The other Commonwealth countries in turn recognised India's continuing membership of the association. (At Pakistan's insistence, India was not regarded as an exceptional case and other states would be accorded the same treatment as India.) The title of British Commonwealth was changed to the Commonwealth of Nations to reflect these changes.

The London Declaration is the beginning of the modern Commonwealth of Nations. Following India's precedent, other new member nations became republics, or constitutional monarchies with their own monarchs different from the British. Ireland, however, in 1949, chose to break away from the Commonwealth when it became a republic. Decolonisation all over the world followed in the 1950's and 1960's and a majority of Commonwealth members today are republics with their own Presidents. The Commonwealth continued to evolve over the years and the first non former British Empire country joined in 1995 when Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony, became a member. Cameroon also includes mostly former French territory.

Members of the Commonwealth exchange High Commissioners to each other instead of Ambassadors, recognising the special relationship that they have with each other.

Those members who continued to have the British monarch as head of state would now be called realms instead of dominions. To recognize the new situation, Queen Elizabeth II at her coronation in 1953, adopted separate titles for each of her realms to emphasize their independence, instead of using one title for the whole Commonwealth as had been the case previously.

Withdrawal from the Middle East began with the creation of Israel in the British mandated territory of Palestine in 1948. Newfoundland joined Canada as its tenth province in 1949. In Egypt, Colonel Nasser assumed power as President in 1953 and declared the full independence of Egypt from the United Kingdom on June 18, 1954, after the last British troops left the country, even though it had been officially independent since 1922. Mandates in Africa and the Pacific had become UN Trust Territories in 1946, though these continued to be administered as before until being granted independence with similar colonies in the 1960s. Aborted federations in Central Africa and the West Indies were tried in the 1950's.

The death knell for the empire really came with the Suez crisis of 1956, when Britain, beholden to the US for billions of dollars of war debt, demonstrated its inability to act on the international stage without the support of the newly dominant United States (a dominance built to a large extent on Britain's former wealth). At around the same time, Britain re-evaluated the value and cost of its colonial possessions, and, under pressure from the United States and United Nations, began a process of serious decolonisation all over the world. The rest of British Asia (apart from Hong Kong and Brunei) had gained independence between 1957 and 1971, when the UK abandoned any pretence of being a sea power outside the Atlantic and Mediterranean. British Africa had gained independence between 1956 and 1968, and most British territories in the Caribbean between 1962 and 1983. Almost all of these countries remained as members of the Commonwealth. South Africa left the Commonwealth in 1961 following growing criticism of its policy of apartheid, but returned after the restoration of majority rule in 1994. Rhodesia declared itself unilaterally independent in 1965 as a white-ruled state like South Africa, but was never recognized until it became majority-ruled Zimbabwe in 1980.

Today, the only British Overseas Territories large enough to see on world maps are the Falkland Islands and South Georgia in the South Atlantic. Against the trend, Britain fought a short but deadly war in 1982 with Argentina to keep these sparsely inhabited, but loyal, islands. Spain also claims Gibraltar, which is also very loyal to Britain. The remaining British Overseas Territories are either too small to become independent or wish to remain British. The only remaining colony after 1983 with a significant population (5 million), Hong Kong, was peacefully returned to China in 1997 after a 99-year lease on its New Territories had expired.

Although Canada, New Zealand and Australia, plus a number of other nations, still have the British monarch as their head of state, they are no longer referred to as dominions, and had gradually abandoned almost all their formal political ties with Britain by the 1980s, by gaining control over their constitutions.

Canada joined the United States and Mexico in forming the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) in 1988. Australia and New Zealand are pursuing economic links with nearby Asian countries.

Decolonisation was hastened by Britain's turning its back on the Commonwealth in economic matters and entering the European Economic Community (now European Union) in 1973. Empire preferential trade, established in 1932, was abandoned after this as the UK and Commonwealth countries sought increased trade with other markets in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

At the same time, the unity of the United Kingdom is itself in question. Since 1999, Scotland has had its own parliament, for the first time in nearly 300 years, Wales and Northern Ireland have had their own assemblies. Scottish nationalists, however, still push for complete independence. In 2007, Britain claimed about 350 square miles (1000 sq km) of seabed off Antarctica, off Ascension Island in the South Atlantic and off Rockall Island near Scotland for the minerals rights to these areas.

The British Empire was the largest empire in the history of mankind which covered one quarter of the land territory of the world. The Union Jack flew on every continent. Despite its faults, and the unfashionable nature of empires in today's world, the British Empire was arguably the most enlightened in history, often preserving local customs while spreading technology, human rights, the English language, Common Law and Parliamentary Government around the world. Its successor, the Commonwealth of Nations, made up of free and independent states, is a still-growing forum for English-speaking states that emphasises good governance and respect for human rights. Recent economic trends have made its member countries retreat into regional blocs for trade; but a stronger, more united economic Commonwealth of the future can bring together the world's markets and help guarantee the survival of the freedoms and traditions which so many in the Commonwealth hold so dear.

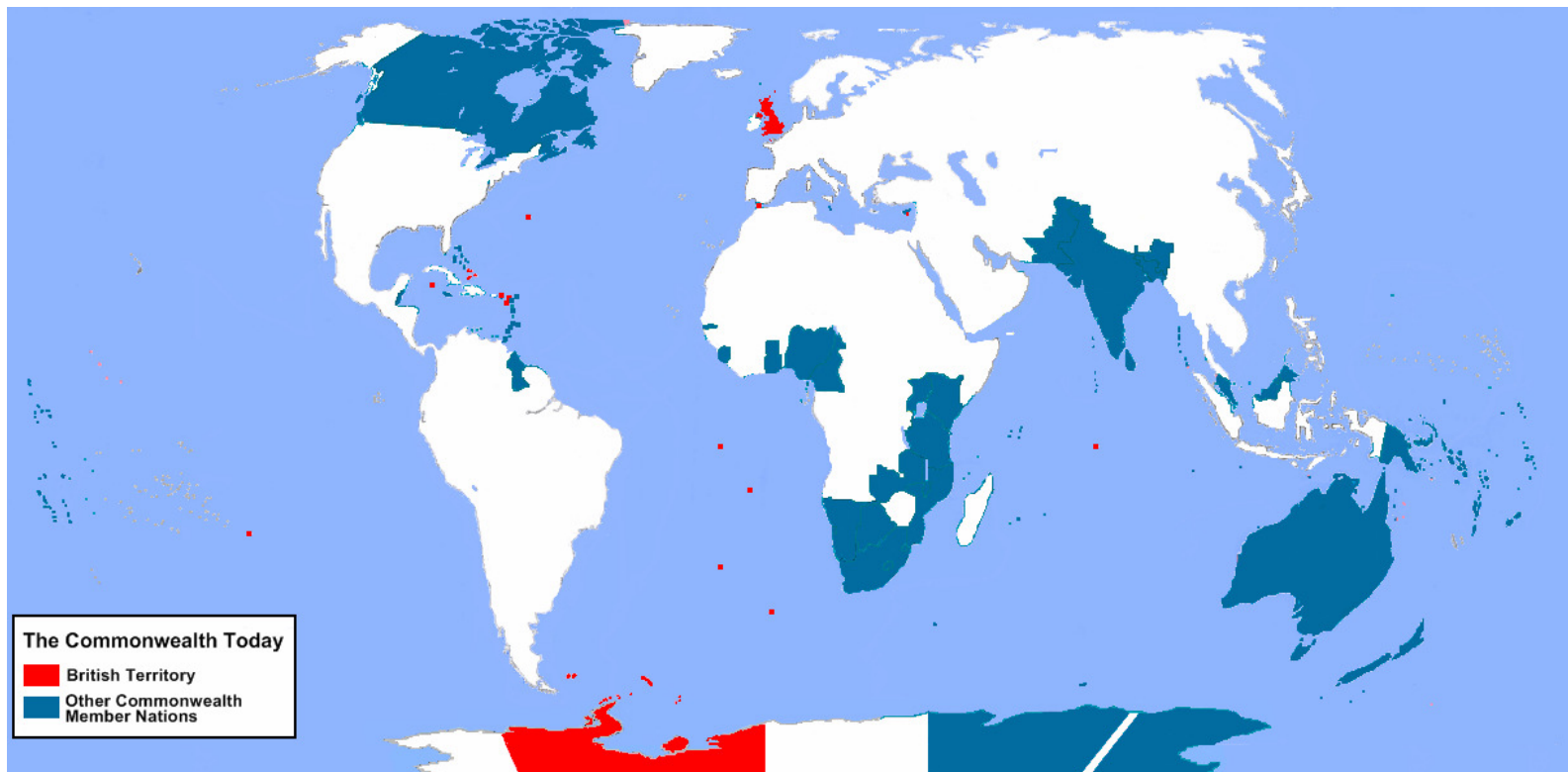
## THE COMMONWEALTH TODAY

Today, there are 53 independent members of the Commonwealth. 16 have Queen Elizabeth II as head of state, including the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and realms in the Caribbean and in the Pacific, 32 are republics and 5 have their own monarchies.

Queen Elizabeth II is sovereign of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but is also sovereign of and represented by a Governor General in these countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Grenada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. Queen Elizabeth II is recognised by all members as Head of the Commonwealth. Some countries have left the Commonwealth and returned to it. South Africa left in 1961 and returned in 1994 after the abolition of apartheid in that country, Pakistan left in 1972 and returned in 1989 and Fiji's membership lapsed after a coup in 1987 but it returned in 1997. In 1995, Mozambique became the first non-former British Empire country to join. Rwanda, a former Belgian territory, has applied to join also

After 1954, the British Empire Games became the Commonwealth Games and continue to be held all over the Commonwealth every four years between the Olympics. A permanent Commonwealth Secretariat was established in 1965 in London with a Secretary General. The Commonwealth has also established educational and aid programmes. Commonwealth heads of government meet every two years to discuss issues that affect the Commonwealth. These meetings began as Colonial and Imperial Conferences that were always held in London. However, since 1973, they have been rotated around the Commonwealth. These meetings are called CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings). Commonwealth finance ministers and parliamentarians also have regular meetings to discuss issues that affect them all.

# THE COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS TODAY



**The Commonwealth of Nations, usually known as the Commonwealth, is a voluntary association of 53 independent sovereign states, most of which are former British colonies, or dependencies of these colonies (the exceptions being the United Kingdom itself and Mozambique).**

No single government in the Commonwealth, British or otherwise, exercises power over the others, as in a political union. Rather, **the relationship is one of an international organisation through which countries with diverse social, political, and economic backgrounds are regarded as equal in status, and co-operate within a framework of common values and goals**, as outlined in the Singapore Declaration. These include the promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance, the rule of law, individual liberty, egalitarianism, free trade, multilateralism, and world peace, and are carried out through multilateral projects and meetings, as well as the quadrennial Commonwealth Games. The symbol of this free association is Queen Elizabeth II, known for this purpose as Head of the Commonwealth. This position, however, does not imbue her with any political or executive power over any Commonwealth member states; the position is purely symbolic, and it is the Commonwealth Secretary-General who is the chief executive of the organization. Each individual member can have its own head of state such as a President or local monarch. Some choose to continue to have the Queen as their sovereign.

Elizabeth II is also the monarch, separately, of sixteen members of the Commonwealth, collectively called the Commonwealth realms and these include the U.K., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Caribbean and Pacific nations. As each realm is an independent kingdom, Elizabeth II, as monarch, holds a distinct title for each, though, by a Prime Ministers' Conference in 1952, all include the style *Head of the Commonwealth* at the end; for example: *Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God, Queen of Australia and of Her other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth*. Beyond the realms, the majority of the members of the Commonwealth have their own, separate heads of state: thirty-two members are republics with an elected President as head of state, and five members have distinct monarchs: the Sultan of Brunei; the King of Lesotho; the Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia; the King of Swaziland; and the King of Tonga.

The three largest Commonwealth economies, as measured in purchasing power parity, are India (\$2.9 trillion), Britain (\$2.1 trillion), and Canada (\$1.3 trillion).

## **Objectives and activities**

The Commonwealth's objectives were first outlined in the 1971 Singapore Declaration, which **committed the Commonwealth to the institution of world peace; promotion of representative democracy and individual liberty; the pursuit of equality and opposition to racism; the fight against poverty, ignorance, and disease; and free trade.** To these were added opposition to discrimination on the basis of gender by the Lusaka Declaration of 1979 (which mostly concerned racism), and environmental sustainability by the Langkawi Declaration of 1989. These objectives were reinforced by the Harare Declaration in 1991.

The Commonwealth's current highest-priority aims are on the **promotion of democracy and development**, as outlined in the 2003 Aso Rock Declaration, which built on those in Singapore and Harare and clarified their terms of reference, stating: "We are committed to democracy, good governance, human rights, gender equality, and a more equitable sharing of the benefits of globalisation." The Commonwealth lists its areas of work as: Democracy, Economics, Education, Gender, Governance, Human Rights, Law, Small States, Sport, Sustainability, and Youth.

The Commonwealth has long been distinctive as an international forum where highly developed economies (such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Singapore, and New Zealand) and many of the world's poorer countries seek to reach agreement by consensus. This aim has sometimes been difficult to achieve, as when disagreements over Rhodesia in the late 1960s and 1970s and over apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s led to a cooling of relations between the United Kingdom and African members.

Through a separate voluntary fund, Commonwealth governments support the Commonwealth Youth Programme, a division of the Secretariat with offices in Gulu (Uganda), Lusaka (Zambia), Chandigarh (India), Georgetown (Guyana) and Honiara (Solomon Islands).

## **Commonwealth Day**

The organisation is celebrated each year on Commonwealth Day, the second Monday in March.

## **Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting**

The main decision-making forum of the organisation is the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), where Commonwealth Heads of Government, including (amongst others) Prime Ministers and Presidents, assemble for several days to discuss matters of mutual interest. CHOGM is the successor to the Prime Ministers' Conferences and earlier Imperial Conferences and Colonial Conferences dating back to 1887. There are also regular meetings of finance ministers, law ministers, health ministers, etc. Members in Arrears, as Special Members before them, are not invited to send representatives to either ministerial meetings or CHOGMs.

## **Commonwealth Secretariat**

The Commonwealth Secretariat, established in 1965, is the main intergovernmental agency of the Commonwealth, facilitating consultation and cooperation among member governments and countries. It is responsible to member governments collectively. Based in London, the Secretariat organises Commonwealth summits, meetings of ministers, consultative meetings and technical discussions; it assists policy development and provides policy advice, and facilitates multilateral communication among the member governments. It also provides technical assistance to help governments in the social and economic development of their countries and in support of the Commonwealth's fundamental political values.

The Secretariat is headed by the Commonwealth Secretary-General who is elected by Commonwealth Heads of Government for no more than two four-year terms. The Secretary-General and two Deputy Secretaries-General direct the divisions of the Secretariat. The present Secretary-General is Kamallesh Sharma, from India, who took office on 1 April 2008, succeeding Don McKinnon of New Zealand (2000–2008). The first Secretary-General was Arnold Smith of Canada (1965–75), followed by Sir Shridath Ramphal of Guyana (1975–90).

**Commonwealth Secretariat web site: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)**

### **Commonwealth Games**

A multi-sports championship called the Commonwealth Games is held every four years, in the same year as the Winter Olympic Games. As well as the usual athletic disciplines, the games include sports popular in the Commonwealth such as bowls and netball. For the first time in 2006, disabled athletes took part in the Commonwealth Games

### **Commonwealth of Learning**

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by the Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. COL is helping developing nations improve access to quality education and training.

### **Commonwealth Business Council**

The Commonwealth Business Council (CBC) was formed at the Edinburgh CHOGM in 1997. The aim was to utilise the global network of the Commonwealth more effectively for the promotion of global trade and investment for shared prosperity.

The CBC acts as a bridge for co-operation between business and government, concentrating efforts on these specific areas:

- Enhancing trade
- Facilitating ICT for Development
- Mobilising investment
- Promoting corporate citizenship
- Public Private Partnerships

The CBC has a dedicated team, CBC Technologies, based in London and focused on the international technology and global services industry throughout the Commonwealth.

### **Commonwealth Family**

Commonwealth countries share many links outside government, with over a hundred Commonwealth-wide non-governmental organisations, notably for sport, culture, education and charity. The Association of Commonwealth Universities is an important vehicle for academic links, particularly through scholarships, principally the Commonwealth Scholarship, for students to study in universities in other Commonwealth countries. There are also many non-official associations that bring together individuals who work within the spheres of law and government, such as the Commonwealth Lawyers Association and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

## **Commonwealth Foundation**

The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental organisation, resourced by and reporting to Commonwealth governments, and guided by Commonwealth values and priorities. Its mandate is to strengthen civil society in the achievement of Commonwealth priorities: democracy and good governance, respect for human rights and gender equality, poverty eradication and sustainable, people-centred development, and to promote arts and culture.

The Commonwealth Foundation was established by the Heads of Government in 1965. Membership of the Foundation is open to all members of the Commonwealth and (as of June 2007) stands at 46 governments out of the 53 member countries. Associate Membership, which is open to associated states or overseas territories of member governments, has been granted to Gibraltar. 2005 saw celebrations for the Foundation's 40th Anniversary. The Foundation is headquartered in Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London, and has no other offices. Regular liaison and cooperation between the Secretariat and the Foundation is in place.

The Foundation continues to serve the broad purposes for which it was established as written in the Memorandum of Understanding:

The purposes and areas of interest of the Foundation will be the administration of funds for increasing interchanges between Commonwealth organisations of the skilled or learned professions or skilled auxiliary occupations in order to maintain and improve standards of knowledge, attainment and conduct; and between non-governmental organisations of a voluntary rather than a strictly professional character throughout the Commonwealth. The Foundation's areas of interest will also extend to include culture, information and the media, rural development, social welfare and the handicapped, and the role of women.

### **Membership criteria**

The criteria for membership of the Commonwealth of Nations have developed over time from a series of separate documents. The 1949 London Declaration ended the required allegiance to the British Crown in the old British Commonwealth, allowing republican and indigenous monarchic members on the condition that they recognised the British monarch as the 'Head of the Commonwealth'. In the wake of the wave of decolonisation in the 1960s, these constitutional principles were augmented by political, economic, and social principles. The first of these was set out in 1961, when it was decided that respect for racial equality would be a requisite of membership, leading directly to the withdrawal of South Africa's re-application (which they were required to make under the formula of the London Declaration upon becoming a republic). The fourteen points of the 1971 Singapore Declaration dedicated all members to the principles of world peace, liberty, human rights, equality, and free trade.

These criteria were unenforceable for two decades, until, in 1991, the Harare Declaration was issued, dedicating the leaders to applying the Singapore principles to the completion of decolonisation, the end of the Cold War, and the fall of Apartheid in South Africa. The mechanisms by which these principles would be applied were created, and the manner clarified, by the 1995 Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme, which created the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), which has the power to rule on whether members meet the requirements for membership under the Harare Declaration. Also in 1995, an Inter-Governmental Group was created to finalise and codify the full requirements for membership. Upon reporting in 1997, as adopted under the Edinburgh Declaration, the Inter-Governmental Group ruled that any future members would have to have a direct constitutional link with an existing member.

In addition to this new rule, the former rules were consolidated into a single document. These requirements, which remain the same today. Current membership requirements are:

- accept and comply with the Harare principles (supporting decolonisation).
- be fully sovereign states.
- recognise the monarch of the Commonwealth realms as the Head of the Commonwealth.
- accept the English language as the means of Commonwealth communication.
- respect the wishes of the general population *vis-à-vis* Commonwealth membership.

These requirements are undergoing review, and a report on potential amendment was presented to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2007. New members will not be admitted at the 2007 CHOGM, with 2009 set as the earliest date of entry. A new criteria that has been added is that applicants must have had some constitutional link with an existing member at some time in their history. Membership criteria is constantly under review. It is also being proposed that the position of the Head of the Commonwealth may no longer automatically be the British Monarch, but may move to a rotating headship. Members that still have the Queen as head of state (e.g Canada and Australia) do so by their own choice and can change that at any time.

Rwanda (since 2003), Sudan, Algeria, Madagascar and Yemen have applied to join the Commonwealth, and there was some interest expressed by Israel (being formerly administered by the United Kingdom) and the Palestinian National Authority.

Other eligible applicants could come from any of the remaining inhabited British overseas territories, Crown dependencies, Australian external territories and Associated States of New Zealand if any become fully independent. Many such jurisdictions are already directly represented within the Commonwealth, particularly through the Commonwealth Family.

A delegation led by the current President of Somaliland, Dahir Riyale Kahin, was invited to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Uganda in 2007. Presently, Somaliland's independence is not internationally recognised, but its history as a British protectorate would mean that it would be able to apply for re-entry into the Commonwealth, should it ever achieve international recognition.

As stated above, new members must 'as a general rule' have a direct constitutional link to an existing member. In most cases, the existing member is the United Kingdom, but some have links to other countries, either exclusively or more directly (e.g. Samoa to New Zealand, Papua New Guinea to Australia, and Namibia to South Africa). There is only one member of the present Commonwealth that has never had any constitutional link to the British Empire or a Commonwealth member; Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony, was admitted in 1995 on the back of the triumphal re-admission of South Africa and Mozambique's first democratic elections, held in 1994. Mozambique's entry was controversial, leading to the Edinburgh Declaration and the current membership guidelines. Under current criteria, the United States of America would qualify for membership if it or territories of it were to apply.

## **France**

France secretly considered membership in the 1950s, under the leadership of Prime Minister Guy Mollet. In the context of nationalisation of the Suez Canal, colonial unrest, and increasing tensions between British-backed Jordan and French-backed Israel, Mollet saw a union between Britain and France as a possible solution. A British Government document of the time reported "That the French would welcome a common citizenship arrangement on the Irish basis". The request was turned down by the British prime minister Anthony Eden, along with a request for Commonwealth membership, and a year later France

signed the Treaty of Rome with West Germany and the other founding nations of the Common Market, later to become the EU. Norway has also considered joining the Commonwealth.

## THE FUTURE

In 2009, discussion began on the future of the Commonwealth and how it can increase its relevance in the world. The Commonwealth will continue to change and evolve in the future. Membership criteria will continue to be revised. The next British Monarch does not automatically become Head of the Commonwealth. It has been suggested that a rotating headship from member countries could be introduced. Increasing Commonwealth cooperation and possibly free trade have also been discussed.

Lord Howell of Guildford has proposed a Commonwealth Mark Two Plan. He was Shadow Deputy Leader of the Lords, a former Minister in the governments of Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher, from 1987-1997, and he was chairman of the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee.

Today the Commonwealth contains seven of the most dynamic economies in the world - **India, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada** and the **United Kingdom**. The hi-tech wave is coming from Asia, and from India in particular, which is scheduled by 2025 to have a national product larger than the whole of Western Europe - the jewel indeed in the Commonwealth network of the future. Lord Howell's plan is for the Commonwealth to develop its own foreign policy. It could stretch out and work with other like-minded democracies who, along with many existing members, want to be pro-American but not subservient, and have their own perspective on key world issues, not an American-imposed one. The Commonwealth also allows for small states to be able to speak with a larger voice. **Japan** is one example of a new Commonwealth partner. But so, too, are countries like **Poland, Turkey, Norway**, the three Baltic states of **Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Italy, Thailand** and even some of the democratising Gulf states such as the **United Arab Emirates, Bahrein, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman**.

Put this group together with the existing membership and one would have a kind of Commonwealth Mark Two, a rallying point for the planet's "good guys" and a coalition of real might (**it would contain more than a third of the world's GNP**), size, experience and influence. It would also be a vastly greater source of soft power and influence for Britain - the origin of the whole undertaking - than anything on offer from the European Union, or indeed from the battered United Nations. Even on issues like handling Iran - a matter for the Asian powers and Russia as much as it is for the West (perhaps even more so), a strong and wise voice from this greater Commonwealth would get a better reception than threats of force from Washington, the UN, or the ignored diplomacy of the EU.

If the Commonwealth today were an economic bloc, it would be equal in size to the United States; it would have thirteen of the world's fastest growing economies; it would possess most of the world's leading 'knowledge economies' outside of the US; it would have one third of the world's population; and would represent forty percent of the membership of the World Trade Organisation. If an agreement were achieved and it could bring per capita incomes up to a level comparable with the developed world, the Commonwealth would have an economy valued at over US\$45 trillion – the equivalent of adding the combined GDP's of the European Union with that of NAFTA – then doubling it. For small and developing nations of the Commonwealth, such an initiative is a positive reaction to their calls for "trade, not aid" and a genuine response to such programmes as NEPAD and individual national targets for UN Millennium development goals. Already, Australia has negotiated, or is negotiating, FTA's with New Zealand, Singapore, and Malaysia. New Zealand is doing likewise. Canada, at present, is pursuing similar arrangements with Singapore and the members of CARICOM.